

Beyond Hunger Strikes: The Palestinian Prisoners' Movement and Everyday Resistance

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Abstract

Studies on prison-based resistance often focus, understandably, on the phenomenon of hunger strikes. However, most collective hunger strikes are preceded and complemented by other types of resistance, including the formation of alternative institutions and various forms of non-cooperation. These everyday acts of resistance, usually unpublicised, form a necessary foundation for the organisation of sustained hunger strikes, and are also ends in themselves in terms of maintaining prisoners' sense of dignity and frustrating the intended order of the prison authority. In this article, I use the Palestinian prisoners' movement as a case study to explore how prisoners' everyday acts of resistance, including the establishment of a 'counterorder' of parallel institutions, the development of a political education system, and day-to-day non-cooperation, are crucial for maintaining a sense of agency, gaining rights, and transforming power relations within, and at times, beyond the prison space. Using Johansson and Vinthagen's (2020, 2016) model of everyday resistance, the research demonstrates how extending the repertoire of prison-based tactics beyond hunger strikes facilitates the subversion of both the spatial and temporal boundaries of the prison to allow for a disruption of the intended power dynamics established by the state.

Introduction

Prisons often function as epicentres of protracted conflict, with states using mass incarceration and arbitrary detention to control dissent, and detainees simultaneously seeking to subvert the prison space to organise and resist (McEvoy 2001, Buntman 2003, Shwaikh 2018). While academic studies and media coverage understandably focus largely on hunger strikes in these contexts (Scanlan, Stoll, & Lumm 2008, Nashif 2008, Shwaikh 2018), hunger strikes represent just one tactic of prison-based resistance. Indeed, hunger strikes are usually preceded and complemented by less conspicuous

but equally influential forms of everyday resistance that establish an organisational foundation for hunger strikes and broader activism.

What does everyday resistance look like in the context of imprisonment in protracted conflict, and what are the impacts? In this article, I use Johansson and Vinthagen's (2020, 2016) model of everyday resistance to demonstrate how extending the repertoire of prison-based tactics beyond hunger strikes builds a foundation that facilitates the subversion of both the spatial and temporal boundaries of the prison to allow for a disruption of the power dynamics established by the state. Specifically, I use the Palestinian prisoners' movement as a case study to explore how prisoners' everyday acts of resistance, including the establishment of a 'counterorder' (Rosenfeld 2004) of parallel institutions, the development of a political education system, and day-to-day non-cooperation, in addition to hunger strikes, became essential for maintaining a sense of agency, gaining rights, and transforming power relations within, and at times, beyond the prisons.

Incarceration is widespread across Palestinian society,¹ 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 2016), including an estimated 500-700 minors every year (DCI 2018). Some detainees have been in prison for decades, while others have been held for days or weeks at a time in detention, and many 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, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. 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.

Crucially, I discuss everyday resistance as intentional tactics distinct from compliance; although compliance may be a veritable strategy for individual prisoners within and beyond the Palestinian context for 'getting by' (Allen 2008), or resisting for survival (Buntman 2003, Bosworth 1996), the tactics discussed here, though relatively restrained, were organised, deliberate, and collectively strategic. It should also be noted that the tactics

¹ My use of the term "Palestinian society" in this context, and my references to "Palestine" throughout the article, refer to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

discussed here were mostly conceived and coordinated by the prisoners themselves, rather than by external factions or political parties. Indeed, especially in the post-Oslo years, prisoners were not only resisting the Israeli prisons, but also what they often perceived as the complacency of their own parties, with prisoners organising 'political strikes' against the Palestinian Authority in 1995, 1998, and 2000. In these ways, prison resistance in Palestine was neither individually automatic nor externally orchestrated, but rather intentionally cultivated and developed by prisoners with activist backgrounds who managed to create opportunities for everyday resistance within the spatial and temporal confines of the prisons.

Using an oral history approach, the article is based on narrative interviews with former Palestinian 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 eight interviews with lawyers and staff members at human rights and prisoners support NGOs. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I relied partially on snowball sampling, but I also intentionally sought out participants who had been imprisoned in different eras and in different prisons, as well as participants from different political parties and geographic areas of Palestine. I also conducted three semi-structured interviews with former members of Israel's security sector; the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), the Israel Prison Service (IPS), and the intelligence branch of the Israeli Police, to better understand how authorities perceived different tactics and when they were most likely to negotiate. I used thematic coding to analyse the interviews, and I include quotes from the most representative interviews in this article, using first names or pseudonyms in most cases for confidentiality purposes. While interviews formed the core of the research, I also reviewed prisoners' letters and diaries in archives at the Nablus Public Library and the Abu Jihad Museum for Prisoner Movement Affairs at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis to confirm and supplement data from the interviews.

The article is organized as follows: First, I draw from civil resistance and social movement literature, especially Johansson and Vinthagen's (2020, 2016) model of everyday resistance, to establish the theoretical framework. Second, I discuss the repertoire of resistance that prisoners employed, including establishing a counterorder, developing a political education curriculum, and engaging in everyday acts of non-cooperation, as well as organizing hunger strikes. Third, I analyse how these strategies subverted traditional power relations, resulting in the affirmation of dignity and the

gradual claiming of rights within the prisons, and the extension of activism beyond the prisons. I conclude by discussing how prisons in protracted conflicts function as epicentres of everyday resistance and anchors for broader activism.

Theoretical Framework

This research situates prison-based resistance in the context of everyday resistance. James Scott (1985) states that, 'Where institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains' (xv;). However, everyday acts of resistance can have a powerful transformative effect when accumulated over time (Norman 2010), in terms of both consciousness development and tactical organization. As Scott writes, 'such kinds of resistance are often the most significant and the most effective over the long run' (1985, xvi). In the context of prisons, however, it is helpful to extend beyond Scott's conceptualization of everyday resistance, which he defines as mostly individual, uncoordinated, and covert. Adnan (2007) for example notes that covert resistance and outward compliance often shift into open dissent or confrontation (even if falling short of outright rebellion or revolution). This understanding of everyday resistance, as gradual and unpublicized but still coordinated and confrontational, is especially useful for the prison context, where everyday resistance is both individual and collective, and while out of the public eye, still directly challenges authorities.

Further, in the prison context, it is crucial to recognise that 'power and resistance are involved in a complex interplay with one another' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2016, 420). On the one hand, prisons represent the epitome of Foucault's (1979) notion of disciplinary power, in which individuals are 'replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised' (201). On the other hand, prisoner resistance underscores the relational nature of that power; as Gordon (2002) notes, 'individuals can resist the mechanisms of control in a world in which power is ubiquitous' (125). In other words, prisons are sites of both control and resistance in which power is constantly being (re)negotiated between prisoners and administrators; thus, everyday acts of resistance, while not as 'spectacular' as riots, protests, or even hunger strikes, are still intentional, coordinated, and confrontational.

Building on this concept of everyday resistance in the context of power relations, I situate this research using Johansson and Vinthagen's

(2020, 2016) framework, which is based on the assumptions that everyday resistance is a practice; it is historically and intersectionally entangled with power; and it is variable in different contexts (Johansson and Vinthagen 2016, 418). They thus propose a framework based on repertoires of everyday resistance, relationships of agents, spatialization, and temporalization of everyday resistance (419). I extend this framework by situating it within the prison context, noting the specific repertoires, power relationships, and spatial and temporal implications of prison-based resistance, especially in protracted conflicts.

However, as Hollander and Einwohner (2004) note, ‘Resistance is defined not only by resister’s perception of their own behaviour, but also by targets and/or others’ recognition of and reaction to this behaviour’ (548). I thus integrate Johansson and Vinthagen’s framework with Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) typology of resistance, identifying three sets of actors: actors (or agents), targets, and observers; or, in the case of prison resistance, prisoners, prison authorities, and external networks, respectively. Focusing primarily on the repertoire dimension, I use the following framework for understanding Palestinian prison-based resistance, and everyday prison-based resistance more broadly:

TACTICS	ACTORS	EFFECTS
Counterorder (including education system)	Prisoners→Prisoners (Agents)	Subverting power dynamics: dignity, organisation, self (rather than state) discipline
Noncompliance	Prisoners→Authorities (Targets)	Gradual rights in prisons
Everyday resistance + hunger strikes	Prisoners→Authorities & External Networks (Observers)	Influencing broader resistance by linking activism to prison issue (Spatial-temporal dimension)

I discuss how prisoners employed a range of tactics, including the establishment of a counterorder (or alternative institutions), the development of a political education curriculum, and everyday acts of noncompliance, in addition to hunger strikes, to maintain their dignity, push for gradual rights, and subvert

the power dynamics in the prisons. Over time in protracted conflicts, the issue of imprisonment and prisoners' activism often extends beyond the immediate prison space to become a salient force in the broader struggle.

Repertoire

Palestinian prisoners employed a range of everyday resistance tactics. Tilly's concept of 'repertoires of contention' (Tilly 2004, McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly 2001), or the set of tools or actions available to a movement in a given context, is helpful for considering the use of different tactics within the prison context. Although repertoires emerge in relation to the opportunities or constraints imposed by the state or authorities, I adopt Johansson and Vinthagen's (2020) view that activists, including prisoners, use decisive, creative innovations (105) that are often proactive and not just reactive. In this section, I focus on key elements of everyday resistance used by prisoners, including the establishment of a counterorder, the development of an educational curriculum, and daily acts of noncompliance, in addition to hunger strikes. Together, these everyday tactics contributed to a sustained repertoire of prison-based activism that helped prisoners maintain a sense of dignity, contributed the gradual realisation of rights, and provided a foundation for hunger strikes and broader advocacy.

Organizing for Resistance:

Establishing the Counterorder

Prisoners' resistance was grounded not in high-profile actions like hunger strikes, but in the development of a structural framework that organized daily life and enabled prisoners to assert agency over their time in prison. As Hafez, a prisoner from 1967 to 1985 recalled, 'We continued organizing and building ourselves, and our life built on this. We forced the Israeli authorities to give us our rights' (interview with author, 2012). Indeed, prison-based acts of resistance, and the gradual implementation of rights, would have been nearly impossible without the highly organized administrative system developed by prisoners in the late 1960s and early 1970s that proved integral to the relative successes of subsequent prison-based activism.

The establishment of alternative institutions, or the *nitham dakhili* ('internal organization'), by prisoners was a form of everyday resistance in itself, and also proved imperative for fostering the unity, discipline, and coordination necessary to organize subsequent actions and strikes.

According to Bartkowski (2015), from a civil resistance perspective, ‘alternative institutions’ or ‘parallel institutions’ can refer to a ‘variety of entities ranging from informal or illegal networks or associations of people... to more formal, semi-official, or legal organizations... The resort to alternative institutions might be instinctive as a result of severe oppression or perceived impenetrability of the system’ (229). Likewise, Stephen Zunes (2015) notes that parallel institutions are essential for ‘fostering social organization,’ undermin[ing] the repressive status quo,’ and ‘form[ing] the basis for a new independent... order’ (109, 117).

In the case of Palestine, Rosenfeld’s (2004) use of the term ‘counterorder’ is particularly useful in conceptualizing the parallel system that prisoners developed, as it enabled them to transform their place in the prison regime from victims to agents. According to Rosenfeld (2011), the counterorder was especially powerful because it encompassed ‘all spheres of the prisoner’s daily life, starting from the material conditions and... fundamental necessities, continuing with education, and culminating in the prisoner’s ongoing participation in political discussion and democratic decision-making’ (7).

The counterorder provided a foundational structure for resistance, as well as a unifying sense of purpose and identity. As Bornstein writes, ‘instead of being isolated, dependent, and obedient, the organized prisoners buil[t] an identity of themselves as men [sic] on the front line of resistance to occupation and at the political center of the struggle’ (Bornstein 2010, 466). As former prisoner Hafez noted, ‘We managed to build a complete organization in the prisons, which fulfilled all the needs of the prisoners inside the jails. We put a “security wall” between ourselves and the Israelis who were aiming to destroy us’ (interview with author, 2012).

Ashkelon Prison² was one of the first sites where prisoners developed the counterorder, by organizing according to political affiliation and instituting an alternative order with an elected administration, education system, financial system, and communications system. However, the system spread quickly within and between other prisons, ironically due in part to prison authorities’ attempts to counter resistance by transferring presumed leaders to different prisons. As former prisoner Mohammed explained:

² Ashkelon Prison started holding Palestinian prisoners in 1970. Located on the Israeli coast just north of Gaza, the prison was geographically difficult for West Bank families to visit, and prisoners were subject to inadequate food, clothing, and medical care (See Aruri 1978 and Tsemel 1977).

When the struggle began between the prisoners and the jailers, the prison administration would come and take 10 or 15 of the leaders of this prison and transfer them to another jail. This was very important, because those leaders had many attributes. First, they had the charisma to be leaders in other prisons. Second, they knew the way to organize the other prisons. Third, they were very educated, and they could have a big influence anywhere they were sent. This is the way [the counterorder] went from Ashkelon, to Beersheva, to Tulkarem, to Nablus, to Jenin, to anywhere (interview with author 2012).

In this way, the counterorder model that emerged in Ashkelon Prison diffused throughout the wider prison network.

The counterorder functioned along two interdependent axes, one 'ideological-political' (commitment to a political organization), and the other 'unionist-political' (commitment to the prisoner population as a whole, especially those in the same cell and wing) (Rosenfeld 2004, 247). The major factions of the broader Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were represented in the counterorder, including Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), and the left-leaning Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and much of the leadership and educational curriculum was organized through party lines. In later years, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, though not part of the PLO, would also contribute to the counterorder through the organization, education and support of their prisoners.

More than ideology, the political organization proved necessary for maintaining discipline and order, as well as for communication with faction leaders outside the prison. It should be noted however that coordination with external factions did not equate to control by those factions; on the contrary, prisoners strategically engaged with political parties for communicating and mobilizing support outside, but mostly maintained their own leadership structures and agency within the prisons. Further, detainees of all backgrounds made efforts to cooperate, creating an interdependent federation of sorts that far surpassed the tenuous unity that existed between factions on the outside at the best of times. While tensions still remained and relations between factions were imperfect, many prisoners noted that they recognized that their collective identity as political prisoners surpassed their identity as members of one faction or party. As Hafez remembered, 'Most

importantly we constructed something united from all the political factions despite the many ideologies. We made these arrangements as a community inside a wall, but it was very ordered' (interview with author, 2012). In some ways, the political factions and the counterorder reinforced each other. As Rosenfeld (2004) notes,

in practice, carrying out the commitment to one's political organization was conditional on the unionist commitment toward the prisoners' collective. The opposite was also true, since the prisoners' counterorder derived its legitimacy from close cooperation between the prison-based branches of the Palestinian organizations (247).

Parallel to the political factions, committees became the central internal organizing feature of the prisons, with prisoners developing an extensive election process for different levels of committees and leadership. Elections within each political faction took place every six months to determine a 15-person leadership committee called the Revolutionary Council, a seven-person Central Committee, and a faction leader. The bi-annual elections ensured a rotation of leadership and an inclusion of multiple voices in the coordination of the counterorder. Once each faction had elected a single representative, these leaders formed yet another committee and served as the negotiators and spokespersons to the prison authorities, and their decisions were respected by the rest of the prisoners. As one former prisoner commented, 'There was a high level of commitment to the rules and laws set by the [Palestinian] leaders of the prison' (interview with author, 2012). The leadership model proved to be essential in maintaining the order and discipline necessary both to struggle for rights through collective resistance and to exercise restraint and negotiate when necessary.

In addition to the central leadership committee, smaller committees were established at the cell and wing levels to coordinate day-to-day affairs and agendas, especially in the areas of academic study, economic/social relations, and communications. The daily schedules were highly regulated, again contributing to the internal discipline that formed the foundation of the prisoners' counterorder (Rosenfeld 2004). As Akram, a prisoner in the early 1980s, noted, '[The prisoners' leadership] laid down how to exploit every moment. Time for eating, time for study, time for discussions, time for cleaning up, time for rest' (Rosenfeld 2004, 238).

Khawla, a female ex-prisoner, explained how the counterorder, replicated in the women's prison, provided a structure to daily life that made the time in prison useful and productive:

We had a daily program. You didn't have empty time. I remember all the time I was rushing to finish everything I had to do. I taught other people. I read books for the girls or women who couldn't read. I wrote the plans for what we would discuss in the session the next day. I listened to the news. We used the time in a very effective way (interview with author, 2014).

Committees were created to deal with day-to-day affairs such as cleaning, apportioning goods and food, and, by the 1980s, kitchen work and radio monitoring. Other committees were responsible for academic studies, political meetings, and representing the prisoners to authorities. As Rosenfeld (2004) explains, 'some of the tasks were allocated by a weekly or monthly rotation, while others were determined according to such criteria as seniority and experience, leadership quality, and personal proficiency' (247). In general, the majority of prisoners did their part, big or small, to support each other and maintain the functioning of the counterorder.

The internal order was further strengthened by the economic and social relations that the prisoners established. As Mohammed recalled:

From the beginning, prisoners decided that everything would be divided equally among them, because some people received visitors, and some received nothing. Those who had visitors received some tea, some cigarettes, fruits, but others had nothing. So the first act [of organizing] was to make equal rations among the prisoners. Whatever entered the prisons was divided equally for all the others (interview with author, 2012).

The situation was the same in the women's prison. As Khawla summarized,

All the time I felt that I was a part of this community, and that it was not about me as an individual, as a person. Everything is for everyone, the food, the clothes, everything. Only the underwear were for you as a person, everything else was for anyone (interview with author, 2014).

This system of distribution, even among non-socialist political factions in the prison, proved instrumental in maintaining solidarity among prisoners and preventing competition. As Akram noted:

In prison there are several things in private “ownership,” like a towel, a cup, or a blanket. But everything else is held in common: sugar, tea, cigarettes, bread. There was neither competition nor exploitation, not only because there aren’t many things there that can emphasize the differences between people, but mainly because of the importance we ascribed to this aspect (as quoted in Rosenfeld 2004, 248).

The ‘Box Committee,’ or financial committee, was established to distribute prisoners’ finances equally. At the time, prisoners contributed what they could, usually based on donations from families. The committee then bought things like tea, coffee, and cigarettes and distributed them equally to each person, regardless of how much they had paid. As Ahmed, who spent 18 years in prison in the 1970s and 1980s, explained,

Every shekel was for all and returned back to all. In the prison life, even those who were capitalists in their mind, in the prisons they thought that if there was a person who had much more than another, the person who had less will be depressed, so we couldn’t protect every person unless we distributed our benefits, what we had, equally. So it was a very “imaginary” life, not what we would have outside, but in the prison, it was actually very, very good for the life of the prisoners and for the struggle (interview with author, 2012).

Ahmed’s reference to the ‘imaginary’ life inside the prison illustrates how, in some ways, prisoners were able to practice in captivity what their fellow compatriots outside could not. By having less actual freedom, prisoners struggled to carve out more personal freedoms in their daily life through their self-organized resistance. Somewhat ironically, it was precisely because they were living in difficult conditions of confinement that they did these seemingly ideal things that were difficult to execute on the outside.

Prisoners maintained internal relations through a coordinated communication system that operated within prisons, between prisons, and between prisoners and external contacts, including written materials, verbal communication, and ‘signs other than the written and the verbal,

such as knocks, hand gestures, facial expressions' (Nashif 2010, 54). Verbal communication, which was prohibited or restricted in early years, became more common as prisoners' resistance over time allowed for increased interaction between cells and sections, sometimes through direct communication in the prison yard during the daily break (once the right to such interaction was won) and, by the 1980s, between prisoners who worked in prison facilities like the kitchen, library, or the corridors. As one prisoner recounted, 'Each [political] faction would fight to allocate more workers to the corridor and the kitchen... These workers are like the veins in the body' (Nashif 2010, 56).

However, 'the most important vehicle for the transfer of knowledge in and out of the prisons were the *cabsulih* (Nashif 2010, 59), or capsules, tiny rolls of paper folded into a cylindrical shape approximately three to four centimeters long and one centimeter wide, containing political orders and correspondences, as well as books, articles, and poems. The writing in the *cabsulih* was tiny and nearly unreadable to the untrained eye, such that each political faction had certain individuals and sub-committees responsible for decoding the messages. As Nidal remembered,

I learned how to write on very thin paper in small, clear handwriting, so that I managed to write 14 to 15 pages of regular books on one side of one page of the *cabsulih*. If I used both sides, I could fit 30 to 35 pages. Small but clear (interview with author, 2012).

Once rolled, the paper was usually wrapped in plastic, with the edges melted with a lighter to create a seal, after which it could be transported by hiding it under one's tongue, in the rectum, or swallowed. In general, *cabsulih* were hidden in the mouth when being exchanged during family visits while rectal or internal placement were more common for exchanging messages between prisons when prisoners were being moved between facilities or to and from the medical facility. The *bostah*, or the vehicle used to transport prisoners, thus became central to the prisoners' development of an inter-prison postal system of sorts. As Nashif (2010) writes, 'the postal networks of the community cross and trespass upon the... prison system by building parallel, contesting, and sometimes mocking channels of communication on the same... grid of spaces designed to imprison them' (65). The *cabsulih* also enabled the political faction leaders inside and outside the prisons to exchange information, orders and directives, which would prove essential in

coordinating resistance and diffusing activism during peak times of struggle, such as hunger strikes.

Another form of communication among prisoners consisted of sharing news from the outside world, especially with regards to the political climate. While the prison administration ultimately permitted radios in 1985 in response to a hunger strike demand, earlier prisoners relied on smuggled radios for their news access.³ Once the radios were inside the prison, designated ‘news teams’ would listen, record, and disseminate the news to the other prisoners. Nidal remembered his experience as a member of the news team:

We would sit in the corner and put blankets over ourselves and start listening to the news. There were three of us, and we used to write everything... For example, I would start with the first sentence and write the first three or four words of that sentence. The next guy, who is listening to the same news, will start from the fifth word and the other from the next and so on. We used to write all the statements of the PLO and the Arab states and UN officials, political leaders, and Israeli politicians. Then every morning there was a report to be distributed to all prisoners to deliver the news (interview with author, 2012).

According to Nidal, the prison authorities knew that the prisoners had smuggled radios, and would often conduct searches for them, so the prisoners had to hide them carefully, sometimes in the floor or walls, inside mattresses, and later wrapped in plastic or nylon and hidden in the toilet. Radios were also sometimes moved between prisons when prisoners were transported. As Nidal explained, many methods were used, including hiding the radios in boxes of *halwa*, a traditional sweet:

They used to remove the cover of the package, and take off some of the *halwa*, put the radio in nylon inside it, and then put the *halwa* back on the surface. Then with lighters they used to put the plastic wrapping back and burn it slightly so the plastic would melt and match again. It wasn't perfect but it was the way we had available (interview with author, 2012).

³ Radios were sometimes smuggled by guards, but in the case of Beersheva Prison, the radios were smuggled by Israeli prisoners who were given occasional day-leave passes.

In these ways, prisoners continued to utilize creative means to 'get by' the authorities and maintain the counterorder.

Education

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the counterorder was the education system, through which 'the pedagogy and the revolution [were] interwoven to create a revolutionary Palestinian pedagogical system' (Nashif 2010, 72). Both the political educational content and the learning process itself strengthened the prisoners' counterorder, such that 'reading/writing became the praxis of resistance... not just in and by itself but, more importantly, as part of the community-building process' (Nashif 2010, 74). Likewise, Rosenfeld (2004) writes that the 'the learning process [was] just as interesting as the content of the studies' (256), reflecting a critical pedagogy approach (Freire 1970) that focused on education for informed liberation while challenging prisoners' accepted ideologies.

Integrating process and content, the education system combined independent reading of progressive literature with political discussions and critical debates. As one prisoner explained, 'Love of the homeland became more rooted [in prison] for two reasons: my discussions with other people and my reading' (quoted in Rosenfeld 2004, 256). As former-prisoner Issa explained,

There were intensive educational programs, intellectually and politically, to the level where the prison was considered to be as a school. It was very well organized, so the awareness was really high, continuously. This "school" was teaching the prisoners two things: to commit with the collective decision and to enrich their political and intellectual level in regards to the conflict. Therefore the infrastructure of the prisoners was very, very strong (interview with author, 2012).

Like most aspects of the counterorder, the education curricula were organized by each political faction, though there were also group discussions between members of the different parties to compare ideas and philosophies. In general, each political organization's education program 'devoted a central place to studies of the history of the Palestinian national movement, to their ideologies and to the specific development of the movement, and to discussing their positions on current political questions' (Rosenfeld 2004, 255). As former-prisoner Khawla recalled, in the women's prison, 'We were

members of political parties or organizations, so we taught each other about our principles, our values, our programs in this organization. So it was a kind of re-education for these women' (interview with author, 2014).

Studies also included analyses of other modern 'liberation' movements, such as Algeria and Vietnam, which were compared and contrasted to the Palestinian struggle. Other topics included social theory, especially the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, political theory, history, military strategy, literature, and languages, including Hebrew. General courses that were not politically specific, including language, science, and general history, were usually conducted as open forums, not divided by faction. As Khalil explained,

Most of our activities were in reading and writing. Sitting in small groups with each other, and one person would talk about any situation in the world. We read many many books, politics, economics, literature, diplomacy, socialism, communism, every subject, we read about it. So, the very educated men were giving their experience to their cellmates (interview with author, 2012).

All prisoners were expected to participate in the education program, and it formed a core part of the daily schedule and regimen in the prison. As one former prisoner described,

Through the will and perseverance of the prisoners, prison was transformed into a school, a veritable university offering education in literature, languages, politics, philosophy, history and more. The graduates of this university excelled in various fields. I still remember the words of Bader al-Qawasmah, one of my compatriots whom I met in the old Nablus prison in 1984, who said to me, "before prison I was a porter who could neither read nor write. Now, after 14 years in prison, I write in Arabic, I teach Hebrew, and I translate from English" (Al-Azraq 2009).

Classes were usually held in the morning, while independent study and reading took place in the afternoon and evening. Each day there were typically two classes, or sessions. Older prisoners, who had experience and knowledge about Palestine, would teach the new arrivals by taking a small group of young prisoners to learn about the political history. The history would start

with the early origins of the Zionist movement, then the first World War, the British Mandate, the Zionist movement in Palestine, the Nakba,⁴ and the establishment of Israel, covering the main phases of modern Palestinian history. One of the daily sessions would usually be about Palestine, and the other would be about the political faction, such as Fatah, and its history and ideology. These lessons included the history of the political faction, the early battles, and military operations. As one former prisoner noted,

This was to give you the knowledge about the Fatah movement and its political theory and ideology, and their goals and beliefs, what kind of society they were trying to build, and what methods and tools they used to achieve these goals (interview with author, 2012).

While the different political factions developed their own curricula, some prisoners organized group sessions, in which individuals from different political ideologies would debate and discuss a given theme. In these small group sessions, every two or three days, there was a discussion in the shared cell in which all parties and all prisoners would participate. They would pick one topic; for example, the fragmentation of the PLO, or the state of Fatah at the time. Prisoners from Fatah would present something, then the Popular Front would present their point of view, and there would be general discussion.

As Rosenfeld (2004) notes, the curriculum 'rested for the most part on a reservoir of educated people in the prison' (254), many of whom had attended university in the West Bank or abroad, and others who had become experts in specific areas during their studies in prison. As former prisoner Khalil remembered:

In Beersheva, I was teaching Arabic history because I read a lot of historical books. So I drew maps of every Arabic state, and I would speak about its history for a large group, about 40 prisoners at that time. I was delighted to teach. And I was teaching myself also (interview with author, 2012).

The curriculum also depended in part on the availability of books and written materials. Initially, prisoners had no access to pens or paper, and

⁴ Literally translated as 'the catastrophe,' the Nakba refers to the displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians during the 1948 War.

access to books was limited, rights that were eventually won through strikes and resistance. Even when books were permitted however, they were very few in number, and topics were limited to general culture and religious texts, with any political material prohibited. Classic books on philosophy, literature, and theory were less restricted, and formed the foundations of the early prison libraries through the services of the Red Cross.

After subsequent hunger strikes, prisoners were allowed to receive a limited number of books from the outside, though all books were still checked by the prison administration, and books on Palestine or politics were still prohibited. These materials thus had to be smuggled in through other means, usually through prisoners instructing families to rebind the books. Family members would change the covers of the books and put non-political photos inside the books, such as those of famous singers or celebrities, so that a censor seeing the images would be led to believe the books were non-political in nature. Sometimes the first several pages of text were replaced by content about food, movies, or other popular culture, with the political text hidden within or interspersed throughout. At other times, books were hand-written out and transported via *capsulih*. As former prisoner Ahmed recalled:

We copied the books to send from one jail to another. For example, books that might be allowed in Beersheva Prison were not allowed in Ramallah Prison, so for the most important books especially, we copied the books by hand in very small letters and rolled it like a *capsulih* and our families swallowed it and sent it to other jails, or we did that when we were transferred from one jail to another (interview with author, 2012).

In this way, the education system depended largely on the organization of other parts of the counterorder, and on the support of external contacts.

As Rosenfeld (2004) writes,

Studies also relied upon study booklets that were written, edited, and updated by those responsible for the different courses. Distributed regularly among the prisoners in spite of systematic efforts by the prison authorities to confiscate the material, the books were copied in small, dense writing... that could be readily folded up and hidden (254-255).

These 'copybooks,' or slim notebooks, served as textbooks of a sort, summarizing complex, theoretical texts in physically compact and conceptually comprehensive formats, and were also transported between prisons. As Khalil explained:

We wrote them in handbooks, then one of us would put cigarette ashes in a glass of tea and swallow it, so he'd feel sick and feverish, and we'd call the administration and say he needs a doctor. Then when they transferred him to the hospital, he took the book with him and gave it to another prisoner from Nablus or Ramallah prison who was also in the hospital. In that way we distributed many handbooks to different jails (interview with author, 2012).

In later years, after several hunger strikes, prisoners gained the right to have prison libraries, which further facilitated the educational curriculum as well as independent learning. As Khaled, who was first imprisoned in 1982, recalled,

Through a long struggle, the prisoners' movement was able to win and maintain the right to a library... Every day, the prisoner holding the position of "librarian" would pass through the different cells and sections, and prisoners would exchange the book they had just finished for the one they were about to begin. The librarian carried the "library book," a record of the books available in the library, and a list of the books each prisoner had requested (Al-Azraq 2009).

Khaled remembered how prisoners 'raced for the writings of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Jorge Amado, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Hanna Mina, Nazim Hikmet, and many others.' He also noted the prisoners would sometimes write out entire books with pen and paper to make more copies available, especially for books that were in high demand, such as Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*⁵ and Naji Alloush's *The Palestinian National Movement*.

⁵ Originally published in 1962, *Men in the Sun* tells the story of three Palestinian refugees from Lebanon who seek passage to Kuwait to find work, but die on the way when the truck smuggling them encounters various delays and checkpoints. The book was controversial for its subtle criticism of Arab states' corruption, passivity, and treatment of Palestinian refugees.

The education program, and later the library system, facilitated prisoners' individual well-being by enabling them to engage in intellectual pursuits and critical thinking. Moreover, the education system both reinforced and relied upon other collective elements of the counterorder for its success, including the communication system, the notion of social equality, and the adherence to discipline. In turn, the knowledge gained through the curriculum, and perhaps more importantly, through the interactive learning processes, provided prisoners with the foundations for engaging in more direct forms of resistance.

Everyday Acts of Non-Cooperation

While hunger strikes perhaps represent the peak of prison-based resistance, nearly all long-term hunger strikes were preceded by other individual and collective actions, including refusal to work at assigned jobs, refusal to acknowledge prison guards, refusal to comply with counting and searching protocols, refusal of family or lawyer visits, refusal to shower or shave, refusal to leave the cell, and refusal of meals. These actions directly challenged the prison administration and forced some changes in policy by making the established system difficult to manage, or ultimately, unworkable.

Actions were typically organized in response to specific policies. As Nidal explained:

Many things actually came, not through hunger strikes, but through direct challenging of the administration. For example, the strip-searching. They used to make prisoners take off their clothes in front of each other to search them, just to humiliate them. They knew there was nothing inside [their body cavities]. So the prisoners decided to challenge that. We said, okay, we won't take off our clothes, even if the guards hit us, or we are punished in the isolation cells, or maybe punished by prevention from family visits. The prisoners were ready to take this risk and challenge that policy (interview with author, 2012).

Similar actions included refusing to stand for the prisoner counts that took place three times a day, and refusing to address the guards as 'my lord' or 'my master,' as required in the early days in some prisons, including Ashkelon (Hafez, interview with author, 2012).

These gradual actions served several purposes. Primarily, they aimed to challenge specific policies, such as the strip searches or counting protocol.

They were also useful however in sending a message to the prison authorities that the prisoners were willing to struggle and resist. As Nidal noted,

These kinds of steps were taken to reject specific measures and to say to the prison administration that we are strong and we are ready to struggle against you. You have to stop this kind of searching, or humiliating people, or doing these violations (interview with author, 2012).

Finally, these types of actions served as a sort of practice or training for the 'last resort' option of the extended hunger strike. Resistance in general gave practice in discipline and organization, while temporary refusal of meals specifically helped prepare prisoners physically and mentally for prolonged hunger strikes. As Nidal comments:

It was a continuous process. So on the one hand, these steps, to refuse one meal or to refuse for one day or two days is just to send a message that we are refusing this and we are ready to struggle. On the other hand, it was a kind of preparation for the prisoners, knowing that we were going to do bigger and better things, but we had to do something at that moment. It was for me a kind of training. . . . It gave you the sense of a longer hunger strike, how it would be, and whether we were ready to do that or not (interview with author, 2012).

Hunger Strikes

States are obligated under international law⁶ to maintain the health of prisoners (Lines 2008). Hunger strikes thus intentionally aim to push the prison administration, or the state government, to the point that they can no longer ensure prisoners' health, thus making internal prison administration difficult while simultaneously risking international shaming and condemnation, creating a classic dilemma action (Sørensen and Martin 2014). Furthermore, in protracted conflict situations, states recognize that

⁶ Even if the state does not recognize prisoners as Prisoners of War (POWs) covered by the third Geneva Convention, minimum standards of treatment for all prisoners were articulated in the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (1957), and have also been upheld in human rights case law (see *Kudla v. Poland*, § 94, European Court of Human Rights, 2000).

the death of a prisoner could galvanize the local population's support for prisoners and spark renewed activism, resistance, or violence (Vick 2013), ultimately backfiring (Martin 2007) on the state.

In Palestine, hunger strikes have been used since the early days of incarceration and have continued to the time of writing, with over thirty documented hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners.⁷ Hunger strikes have resulted in a gradual realization of rights and improvement of conditions, ranging from improved food and better bathing conditions; to access to books, writing materials, and eventually radios and televisions; to establishing negotiation policies between prisoners and the prison administration. The first reported Palestinian hunger strike took place in Ramle prison in 1968, but the primary organizing site for early hunger strikes was Ashkelon Prison, notably the same site credited with the emergence of the counterorder. At Ashkelon, an initial one-week hunger strike in 1970 was followed by a larger strike in 1973 that lasted for 24 days, and then by an open (across multiple prisons) strike beginning in December 1976 that lasted 45 days initially, and was extended for another 20 days in February 1977.

The 1973 strike was particularly noteworthy in terms of its accomplishments. The strike lasted for three weeks and ended with a meeting between the Ministry of Police (now the Ministry of Public Security) and the prison leaders. This meeting, or negotiation, resulted in the replacement of the commanding officer of the prison, improved food quality, permission to congregate in the yard, and permission for the Red Cross to bring books to prisoners. As one prisoner commented, 'One can say that the uprising brought about a complete change in the conditions of Ashkelon prison' (Rosenfeld 2004, 244).

The 1976 Ashkelon strike produced even greater gains, going beyond improved material conditions to the realization of further rights and the establishment of an elected representative prisoners' body, which would prove essential in negotiating rights with the prison administrators moving forward. The demands included bringing in books, pencils, and pens; rejection of working in the factories inside the prisons; allowing prisoners to determine rules inside the cells for themselves; rejection of having to say 'sir' to the guards; and recognizing the political factions that were created inside the prison by the leadership. However, as one former prisoner emphasized,

⁷ For a helpful timeline of Palestinian hunger strikes, see Zena Tahhan, "A Timeline of Palestinian mass hunger strikes in Israel."

‘the primary achievement of the strike was that the prison administration was forced to negotiate with this body that represented the prisoners. This was the beginning of reshaping the relationship between the jailers and the prisoners’ (interview with author, 2014). Indeed, the recognition of a representative prisoners’ body that could speak directly with the prison authorities was crucial in establishing a new dynamic by which prisoners could negotiate policies and conditions directly, often averting other strikes.

While not all strikes were successful, the combination of inside and outside pressure on the prison system resulted in notable improvement of conditions and extensions of rights. The specific demands of the hunger strikes varied over time and between prisons. They were typically written in a statement and communicated to the prison administration by an elected representative. It should be noted however that, in contrast to later individual strikes undertaken after the second intifada, the demands of earlier hunger strikes concentrated on improving conditions in prison, rather than focusing on individual or collective release. As Nidal noted, in the early strikes, ‘the demands were very simple. We’re talking about more blankets, improvements in the food, allowing prisoners to communicate while they are in the yard, allowing them to write letters to their families, bringing pens, papers, pencils, books, those small things’ (interview with author, 2012). Other early demands included the cessation of beatings, reducing crowdedness in cells, permitting prisoners to cook their own food, and permitting the elected prisoner representative to negotiate directly with the prison administration (Nashif 2010, 51-52).

Despite the constraints of the prison context, prisoners managed to develop a repertoire of resistance to maintain a sense of dignity, push for rights, and subvert the presumed power relations of the prison. Tactics varied depending on the particular prison and the external conflict dynamics. In general though, prisoners relied largely on everyday acts of resistance, supplemented by hunger strikes at key points in the struggle for rights.

Discussion: Power, Rights, and Spatial-Temporal Extensions of Resistance

Prisoners’ diverse repertoire of tactics, rooted in everyday actions, allowed them to transform the prison space from one of control, as intended by the state, to one of resistance. The multi-dimensional nature of the repertoire made it possible for prisoners to direct their activism towards different

'targets' with different effects, including self-empowerment (by focusing on self-discipline and organisation), the realisation of gradual rights (through noncompliance with prison authorities), and the extension of activism beyond the spatial and temporal constraints of the prison via hunger strikes and cumulative resistance.

First, by focusing on themselves as agents, prisoners were able to transform the power relations in the prison, mainly through the development of the counterorder and the education system. The counterorder served a logistical function by enabling prisoners to organise their lives around a daily routine, and by coordinating elements of day-to-day life like finances and communication. Further, with its clandestine elections and rotating leadership system, the counterorder created an alternative institution that regulated prisoners' lives, taking that role away from the sole discretion of the prison authorities, as well as asserting prisoners' independence from external factional leadership. Indeed, the internal leadership structure enabled by the counterorder allowed prisoners to develop and coordinate their own resistance in the prisons, rather than take directives from political party elites,⁸ and the rotating nature of the leadership ensured that no single faction leader could wield too much influence. Moreover, the counterorder provided a sense of individual and collective ownership of the time and space in the prison, giving prisoners a sense of purpose and dignity, as well as self-discipline and organisation for engaging in more confrontational acts of resistance.

Second, prisoners were able to improve conditions and gain some rights through everyday resistance to the prison authorities (as targets) in the form of noncompliance. Prisoners engaged in a sort of 'radical pragmatism' (Norman 2020), by employing actions that aimed to wear down the prison guards over time, essentially by challenging the authorities to respond with sustained discipline beyond their capacity. Hunger strikes, which were 'illegal' and

⁸ As several prisoners noted, while political factions in the prisons were separated in later years, they mostly overcame the corruption and deep divisions that plagued external political parties especially in the post-Oslo period. For example, the Prisoners Document of 2006, signed by prisoners representing the four largest Palestinian political factions (Marwan Barghouti of Fatah, Sheikh Abdel Khaliq al-Natsche of Hamas, Sheikh Bassam al-Saadi of Islamic Jihad, and Abdel Rahim Malouh of the PFLP), was one of the first calls for a national unity government, and also laid out parameters for a two-state solution.

carried their own punishments, likewise aimed to make the prison operation itself unworkable, thus forcing concessions. Like the counterorder, everyday non-cooperation also had a psychological element by showing the prison administration (and affirming to the prisoners) that they had agency and were willing to resist. Indeed, everyday resistance was not only about actions, but about mindset, asserting agency in contrast to the intended prison aims of compliance and obedience. While some prisoners still adopted compliance as their primary coping mechanism, especially in the years after the Oslo Accords and the second intifada, the collective nature of the counterorder in the early decades made everyday resistance, or at least solidarity, an accepted and welcome norm for most prisoners. The internal solidarity, especially in the early years, combined with counterorder rules limiting communication with guards outside of elected prisoner spokespersons, also helped prisoners resist prison administration and police intelligence attempts to recruit informers from amongst the prisoner population.

Finally, by sustaining everyday resistance over time, and coupling it with hunger strikes, prisoners were able to make imprisonment itself a key issue in the conflict and even influence external mobilisation. In this way, prisoners' resistance extended beyond the spatial constraints of the prison by rippling out to political factions, communities, and local and international solidarity networks (observers). According to Foucault (1980), 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (252); this especially applies to prisons where, as Johansson and Vinthagen (2015) note, 'the concept of panopticism as a model for disciplinary power shows the link between spatial orderings and discipline' (125). However, prisoners were able to subvert the prison space from one of control to one of education, resistance, and organising, mainly through everyday acts of resistance. Further, they were able to propel their activism beyond the prison walls, largely through the solidarity campaigns that emerged alongside hunger strikes, but also by linking the issue of imprisonment to the broader liberation movement.

Likewise, the concept of prison inherently involves state control over prisoners' time. However, while constrained by their sentences, prisoners were able to transcend the temporal constraints through their activism. As Johansson and Vinthagen (2015) state, 'Temporalization of everyday resistance may be about creating and embodying a different or alternative conception of and relation to time than the dominant one' (130). Indeed, prisoners used everyday resistance to subvert time in several ways. First, as indicated above, the counterorder, and the education programme in

particular, enabled prisoners to take control of their daily schedules and gave their days a sense of order and purpose, rather than having their time being controlled solely by prison authorities. Second, in terms of everyday resistance, prisoners' actions cumulated over time, such that everyday actions taken by early prisoners influenced both the conditions and the activism of later prisoners, enabling resistance to extend beyond temporal constraints as well. Finally, some prisoners saw their resistance as a link to the longer timeline of Palestinian resistance. For example, Walid Dakka, a Palestinian prisoner, described prison as a 'parallel time,' writing, 'We in the parallel time... are a part of a history. History is known as something in the past, over and done with, but we are the continuing past that is never ending.'⁹ For Dakka, prisoners represented the history of resistance in Palestine and they saw themselves as maintaining that tradition, even as external mobilisation waned. In these ways, prisoners situated their everyday resistance in a broader spectrum of time that extended both backwards and forwards and was not constrained to their sentences.

These dynamics extend beyond the Palestine case study as well. In other post-empirical protracted conflicts, such as South Africa and Northern Ireland, prisoners similarly subverted prison spaces and made imprisonment itself a central issue in the wider struggles. Rather than retreating to the margins, prisoners took back prison spaces as loci of resistance, forcing both state authorities and their own external parties to engage with them seriously as central political actors. This subversion of the prison space was not automatic however; as with the Palestine case study, prisoners exerted the most influence on both authorities and their own factions when they combined pragmatism and radicalism through multi-level strategies such as establishing counterorders for self-education and organising; using everyday noncompliance to challenge prison administrators; and occasionally, engaging in hunger strikes to exert boomerang pressure from solidarity networks on state authorities (Norman 2020).

⁹ Letter from prisoner Walid Dakka, addressed to 'My dear brother, Abu Omar' on the first day of his twentieth year in prison, 25 March 2005.

Conclusion: Everyday Resistance and Subversion of Prisons in Protracted Conflicts

In protracted conflicts, states use mass incarceration and detention to control the opposition and quell dissent. But prisoners have been intentional about utilising prisons as spaces of resistance, thus subverting the intended power dynamic. As this article demonstrates, prison-based resistance, though most publicly manifest in hunger strikes, relies primarily on everyday actions that are out of the public eye. In Palestine, as in similar conflicts, these included establishing counterorders, or parallel institutions, for self-governance, which gave prisoners a sense of control, purpose, and dignity; and developing political education curricula, which provided prisoners with a foundation for critical thought and collective organising. Everyday actions also included daily acts of non-cooperation or noncompliance, which challenged prison authorities over time, often leading to a gradual realisation of rights. Rights and conditions were further improved by negotiations forced by hunger strikes, which aimed to make the prison administration unworkable for authorities and presented them with dilemma actions, while also attracting external attention and pressure.

In these ways, prisoners were able to challenge the power construct of the prisons and make the carceral space one of ongoing resistance and organising rather than one of control and discipline from the state. Further, prison-based resistance made the issues of imprisonment and detention central in broader conflict dynamics over time, situating prisons as an anchor for external activism. Thus, prison-based resistance extended beyond the spatial and temporal confines of the prisons to have a much more wide-reaching effect. Indeed, both within and beyond the Palestine case study, the repertoire of everyday prison-based tactics, including but not limited to hunger strikes, facilitates the subversion of the prison space and the disruption of intended power dynamics.

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