

Palestinian Female Prisoners in Israeli Occupation Jails

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The female prisoners' issue has been essential to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For years, Palestinian women and girls have been arrested by the occupation, and have suffered terribly from such experience. Despite that, these women resist the prisons with faith and steadfastness, and continue to fight for their right to resist after their release. This study addresses two main topics: The Israeli measures against the female prisoners, and the female prisoners' role in the struggle and the community.

Topic One: Israeli Measures against Female Prisoners

The occupation forces use all types of physical and psychological torture to break the female prisoners' will, and to force them to confess. Doing so, the occupation violates international laws and disregards all moral standards followed when treating prisoners.

First: Number of Female Prisoners and their Legal Status

Since 1967, the occupation has arrested more than (10,000) Palestinian women⁽¹⁾. In the First Intifada, the number of arrested women reached (3,000) prisoners. Since the beginning of Alaqsa Intifada, official and human rights associations documented about (100,000) arrests, (1,500) of them were women⁽²⁾.

During the second Palestinian Intifada which broke out in 2000, about (1,000) Palestinian women⁽³⁾ were arrested.

From 2009 until the beginning of 2012, arresting women decreased. However, it gradually increased again around the end of 2015 when the Palestinian public erupted and the popular resistance started after the Israeli occupation forces had closed down the gates of Almasjid Alaqsa in July 2017. The number of Palestinian women arrested

⁽¹⁾ **Arrests of Palestinian Women and Girls**, ADDAMEER Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, March 2018.

⁽²⁾ Palestine's Female Prisoners: Humanitarian Crisis in the Occupation's Prisons, Al-Jazeera Net.

⁽³⁾ **Palestinian Prisoners at Israeli Occupation's Jails**, the Palestinian Society Prisoner's Club, Raya Network.

from the beginning of the popular activities until October 2017 reached about (370) women⁽⁴⁾.

In March 2018, Addameer said that the occupation forces were detaining (62) Palestinian women in its jails. (6) of them were children, (9) were injured and (3) were under administrative detention⁽⁵⁾ without charges or trial. The Palestinian female prisoners are tortured physically and psychologically. They are distributed as (35) prisoners in HaSharon Prison, (25) in Damun Prison, one in Ramla Prison, and another whose location Addameer could not identify. These prisons are established in the occupied lands of 1948.

Until December 11, 2019, the number of female prisoners in Israeli jails reached (49) women⁽⁶⁾.

Legal Situation of Female Prisoners:

The principles of the UN General Assembly acknowledge that the struggle of peoples against the occupation is deemed as an ‘international armed conflict’ as clarified in the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The UN called for naming the prisoners who resist the occupation ‘war prisoners’⁽⁷⁾.

However, the absence of a paragraph on the legal situation of female prisoners in Oslo accords resulted in the following:

- 1- The Israeli occupation dealt with the Palestinians in accordance with the agreements signed with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. These agreements were considered bilateral or local, so the Israeli-Palestinian conflict changed from an international conflict to a local one.
- 2- It was assumed that announcing the end of enmity and beginning of the settlement project for exchanged recognition and rejection of the resistance would result in the release of the prisoners. However, the Israeli occupation

⁽⁴⁾ **Palestinian Female Prisoners Arrested in the Israeli Occupation Jails**, WAFA.

⁽⁵⁾ **Administrative Detention**: It is the detention of a person at prison solely or with other administrative prisoners for no more than 6 months, which can be renewed without clear charges or trial. (Al-Batsh, Jihad, **Palestinian Prisoners at Israeli Jails**, (Gaza, Al-Yazji Library and Hussam Association, 2007, 1st ed., p. 21).

⁽⁶⁾ *Ibid*, **Palestinian Prisoners at Israeli Occupation’s Jails**.

⁽⁷⁾ **Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners**, August 12, 194, Article (4), p. 3.

transferred them to prisons inside occupied Palestine in 1948, which contradicts the Third Geneva Convention.

- 3- Israel adhered to its internal legislations and regulations over the International Law when addressing the prisoners' issue⁽⁸⁾.

These results were due to the Palestinians' approval of Oslo accords which were not compliant with the Human Rights issue in the International Law. In fact, the PLO accepted the Israeli terms that described the prisoners as 'terrorists' and 'bloody'⁽⁹⁾.

Second: Assaults on Female Prisoners

Physical and Psychological Torture

The Palestinian female prisoners are subjected to heavy beating, insults, and humiliation the second they are arrested. When they are moved to the interrogation centers, they get psychologically and physically abused. They are beaten and deprived from sleep for long hours. Their personal needs as women are not taken into account⁽¹⁰⁾.

Bana Shaghri, the Legal Director at the Public Committee against Torture, said that the legal procedures against the Israeli occupation's practices have managed to reduce the amount of usual physical torture carried out against the prisoners. Now, there is always an Israeli female soldier present with the interrogator and the prisoner in the room so the latter would not be left alone. Nevertheless, the Israeli occupation continues to develop its ways of physical and psychological torture⁽¹¹⁾.

Shagri added that female prisoners are deprived from having the personal belongings they need, and because they are naturally bashful, they never even ask close family members for such requirements. How, then, would they ask an Israeli male or female soldier? Therefore, the occupation soldiers never give the prisoners what they need unless they ask for it⁽¹²⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ Qraqi, Eissa, **Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Jails after Oslo 1993-1999**, (Ramallah, Institute of International Studies – Birzeit University, 2001), pp. 187-188.

⁽⁹⁾ Ibid: p. 188

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹¹⁾ **The Ways of Torturing Palestinian Female Prisoners at the Occupation's Jails**, an interview on Palestine Today Channel, June 30, 2013.

⁽¹²⁾ Ibid.

Lina Al-Jarbouni⁽¹³⁾ was not subjected to physical torture. However, she believes that psychological torture is worse. She said, “When the prisoner is left in the cell without being questioned at all for long days, every second that passes is a different question in her head. I stayed in the solitary confinement for one day. No one asked me anything, and no one spoke to me. I stayed in a cell where night and day were the same⁽¹⁴⁾”.

The occupation also arrests one of the prisoner’s relatives to force her to confess. Lina said the occupation arrested her brother, Saeed. When she saw him, she could not bear it. It was severely psychologically stressful⁽¹⁵⁾.

Premeditated Medical Negligence

Rawda Habib, freed prisoner, said that neglecting patients was intentional. She added, “Some prisoners need surgeries like Israa Al-Ja’abees. Others need neurological operations or to stay at a hospital and receive medical care. The conditions of the Meat Wagon ‘also called bosta⁽¹⁶⁾’ are unsuitable for patients. I remember several prisoners who were shot when they were arrested but were not medically treated which caused severe pain and complications⁽¹⁷⁾”.

Deprivation of Rights

Worood Qasim, a freed prisoner from the occupied lands, said that during the Intifada, the prisoners were deprived of their rights, such as watching the news, to

⁽¹³⁾ **Lina Ahmed Saleh Al-Jarbouni:** She was born on January 11, 1974, in Urabat Al-Batoof town in the occupied lands of 1948. She was arrested in 2002 for affiliating with Jihad Movement, and helping resistance fighters from Al-Quds Brigades. She was sentenced 17 years. She served 15 years and was released in 2017. She was called the Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners. (**Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners ‘Lina Al-Jarbouni’ Returns Home Amidst Emotions of Joy and Pain**, Al-Sabah Al-Arabi).

⁽¹⁴⁾ **Special Interview with the Freed Lina Al-Jarbouni Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners**, Al-Mayadeen, April 25, 2017.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁶⁾ **Meat Wagon:** While from the outside it is a clean van, from the inside it is a prison with iron bars. It is divided to four spaces. One big space for prisoners, and three others for one or two individuals per one. They are used to transport female prisoners, or isolated prisoners whom the occupation wants to isolate from other prisoners. (Barakat, Jihad, **Prisoners’ Sufferings in the Meat Wagons: Shocking Details on the Israeli Occupation’s Violations**, the New Arab, April 16, 2019).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Habib, Rawda, **On the Conditions of the Female Prisoners at the Zionist Occupation Jails**, Al-Hadath Post, June 29, 2019.

prevent them from interacting with the world outside⁽¹⁸⁾, and from receiving newspapers and books⁽¹⁹⁾.

Female prisoners' hands are usually tied with plastic, their eyes are covered, and they are taken to an unknown destination. Ruba Al-Khatib, from Salfit in the West Bank, suffered from the same conditions during her arrest near Beit Iba checkpoint. Ruba was arrested, filmed by the soldiers, degraded, deprived from drinking water, and delayed from entering the bathroom. One of the soldiers wanted to strip her Hijab, but she resisted him. Then, she was interrogated for three hours until she was sent to a cold smelly cell⁽²⁰⁾.

Strip Search

The female prisoners are stripped and searched in the cells, and before going to the court. They are searched completely unclothed. During the search, they are accompanied by two female jailors. The main purpose is to humiliate the prisoners. Some female prisoners ask their attorneys to get them a verdict, no matter how long, just to stop being searched unclothed⁽²¹⁾.

Shireen Abu Emara, who spent 6 years in the occupation's jails, said that she still relives the horrible memories when she was forced by the jailor to strip and squat. She pointed that the female prisoners always fight to prevent such measure from being carried out. In fact, in 2004, the prisoners started a hunger strike for 11 days to stop it, but it was useless⁽²²⁾.

Abu Emara also added that the occupation forces search the female prisoners while unclothed on the way from and to the court, or while being transported from one prison to another. The female prisoners spend days feeling anxious before being taken

⁽¹⁸⁾ **Palestinian Prisoner Tells the Story of Prisoners' Sufferings at Occupation's Jails**, 48 Program, Al-Ghad TV, May 2, 2016.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Ibid: **Special Interview with Lina Al-Jarbouni Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners**.

⁽²⁰⁾ Ba'lousha, Ikhlas, **Israeli Violations of Palestinian Prisoners' Rights**, Waed Captive and Liberators Society, 2007, pp. 2-3.

⁽²¹⁾ Ibid: **Special Interview with Lina Al-Jarbouni Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners**.

⁽²²⁾ **Forcing Palestinian Female Prisoners to Unclothe for Search**, Donia Al-Qatan, September 17, 2009.

to the court. They get afraid of being searched unclothed before and after going to the court. They are always under psychological stress⁽²³⁾.

This unclothing policy is also implemented when the prisoners' families visit them. The prisoners' families from the Gaza Strip have to leave at dawn in buses which are provided by the Red Cross. Then, they are searched unclothed. The families are forced to accept such procedure because they are deprived from visiting their children for years⁽²⁴⁾.

Imprisoned with Female Israeli Criminals

The freed prisoner Ahlam Al-Tamimi⁽²⁵⁾ was a strong fighter from the moment she was imprisoned because she was not given any rights. The occupation described her as an instigator, so she was isolated from her fellow prisoners. She was transferred to the Israeli crime department where prisoners are charged for murder, drugs and prostitution. Describing that period of time, Ahlam said, "The Israeli prisoners would pass by my door, spit at me and pour water and urine on me. I stayed on a hunger strike for 17 days. I lost weight, my vision got weaker, and I was infected with a skin disease because of the mattress on which other prisoners had slept. Not until other male and female prisoners started a solidarity strike did my issue get resolved⁽²⁶⁾".

After the strike, she was spared from the solitary confinement and was returned to the prisoners' department. However, she was banned from having more than one cellmate with her, from going to the meetings, from distributing the food, from participating in the dialogue committee with the prison's leadership, and from having family visits⁽²⁷⁾.

⁽²³⁾ Ibid.

⁽²⁴⁾ Ahmed, Eman, **Protest in Gaza against 'Strip Search' for Prisoners' Families**, Al-Ain News, July 8, 2019.

⁽²⁵⁾ Ahlam was born on October 20, 1980 in Zarqa in Jordan. She left Jordan with her family after finishing her high school and returned to the occupied lands where she joined the faculty of Media in Birzeit University. She worked in the field of media, and became a TV presenter at Bethlehem TV. She hosted 'Al-Istiqlal' (Independence) Program where she focused on highlighting the Israeli occupation's practices against the Palestinians. (Yassin and others, Abdulqader, **Women of Palestine Battling Life**, Cairo, Shorouk International Bookshop, 1st ed., 2012, p. 187).

⁽²⁶⁾ Al-Zaeem, Ibrahim, **the Islamic Women Movement – Hamas**, (London, E-books, 2019, 1st ed.), p. 142.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ibid: p. 142.

Child Delivery in Prisons

In the past ten years, several Palestinian women gave birth while in Israeli prisons. The conditions were unhealthy and unsuitable: the parents or husbands were not allowed to be present during the delivery, and the babies were imprisoned with their mothers. The children were deprived of the simplest rights. The necessary milk and food were always delayed, and their toys were confiscated.⁽²⁸⁾

Samar Sbeih, from Gaza, is an activist in the Islamic Bloc. After three months from moving to Tulkarm, she was arrested on September 29, 2005. At that time, she was pregnant, and was interrogated at Al-Muskubiya Prison in Al-Quds. (66) days later, she was transferred to HaSharon where she was sentenced for 2 years and a half. On the day of delivering the baby (April 30, 2006) she was transported by the prison's vehicle. Her hands and feet were cuffed and female soldiers were with her at the operation room⁽²⁹⁾.

Samar said, "I delivered my baby Baraa in C-section at Meir Medical Center in Kefar Sava. The conditions were disastrous. I gave birth under heavy security measures. My husband, who was detained at Negev prison, and other family members were not permitted to attend the delivery. Baraa stayed in prison with me for a year and 8 months. He did not have only one mother. He had 100 moms; all the female prisoners at HaSharon Prison were his mothers as well⁽³⁰⁾."

In addition, Fatima Al-Ziq gave birth to Yusuf in prison. She was beaten and deprived of medical care. She described that day saying, "I was tied to the hospital bed, so I asked to return to the prison. The Red Cross was there at the time, so I asked to be uncuffed during delivery. I had been bleeding for four hours, and the doctor tried to kill me. The delivery conditions were difficult, but –alhamdulillah- I gave birth in January 2008. Then, I was immediately cuffed"⁽³¹⁾.

⁽²⁸⁾ Ibid: **Palestinian Prisoners at Israeli Occupation's Jails.**

⁽²⁹⁾ Ibid: Al-Zaeem, pp. 134-135.

⁽³⁰⁾ Ibid.

⁽³¹⁾ Khansawat Program, **Special Episode with Freed Prisoner Fatima Al-Ziq**, Al-Quds TV, November 21, 2019.

Topic Two: Role of Female Prisoners in the Struggle and Community

Despite the harsh arrest procedures, the female prisoners fight the occupation fiercely through remaining together and carrying out strikes resulting in the failure of any plans by the Israeli Administration of Prisons.

First: Female Prisoners' Struggle at Jails

Female Prisoners Mutual Support

Together, the female prisoners stand by each other in the face of all harsh circumstances, and try to relieve one another. For example, when a new prisoner comes, it is very difficult for her, especially if she is a minor. However, the other prisoners take her side, relieve her and try to organize things for her⁽³²⁾.

Lina Al-Jarbouni was supposed to be liberated in the Shalit Prisoner Exchange in 2011. She says, "I had a strong belief that I was not liberated in the Exchange deal for a reason. Ever since 2015-2016, a number of minor girls (about 32⁽³³⁾) were imprisoned". Al-Jarbouni was like a mother to them; they even called her 'Mother Lina'⁽³⁴⁾.

Strikes and Protests

From the beginning of the arrests, the female prisoners carried out different protests and hunger strikes to improve their imprisonment conditions. They went on an open hunger strike in 1984. It lasted for 18 days. In 1992, they went on a hunger strike for 15 days, in 1996 for 18 days, and in 1998 for 10 days. They also protested against several issues. They demanded being separated from criminal prisoners, having better life conditions, receiving better food and treatment, and getting books, radios and newspapers⁽³⁵⁾.

⁽³²⁾ **Occupation Releases Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners Lina Al-Jarbouni**, report on Al-Jazeera Channel, April 16, 2016.

⁽³³⁾ **Al-Jarbouni Tells her Experience at the Israeli Jails**, Ro'ya News, April 28, 2017.

⁽³⁴⁾ Ibid: **Special Interview with Lina Al-Jarbouni Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners**.

⁽³⁵⁾ Abu El-Heija, Ibrahim, **the Forgotten in the Zionist Prisons**, (Cairo, Arab Media Center, 2004), p. 243.

In 1996, the female prisoners were very heroic when they demanded all female prisoners to be paroled instead of only few upon Taba Agreement, or else they would stay in prison. In 1997, their demands were met and all prisoners were released⁽³⁶⁾.

Education

Lina Al-Jabrouni said that the occupation takes such measures against the prisoners so that if they are released, they leave with psychological disorders. However, the prisons were turned into universities⁽³⁷⁾. Some of the prisoners were illiterate when they were first arrested, but they learned how to read and write, and some even finished high school⁽³⁸⁾.

The occupation's measures were in line with its desire to keep the prisoners uneducated and depressed. The occupation prevented the arrested students (high school, university or postgraduate ones) from completing their education. Despite that, the prisoners won after many strikes. They managed to enjoy the right to finish high school. They also managed to turn the prisons into studying halls where they would meet and learn different things. Some prisoners finished their graduate or postgraduate studies, some memorized the Quran, and others became artists; they learned to write verse and prose. Others even mastered languages, mostly English and Hebrew⁽³⁹⁾.

Second: Role of Female Prisoners in Serving the Community

Samar Sbeih was freed on December 17, 2007. She and her son moved past that difficult time of her life. She now works at the Community College, and at Waed Society, the only woman there, where she continues to support all Palestinian prisoners. She always participates in the events related to the prisoners and the programs which introduce the lives and conditions of the prisoners⁽⁴⁰⁾.

As for Ahlam Al-Tamimi, she helped a lot of girls wear hijab, and convinced others to play an influential role in the society; especially after getting engaged to her

⁽³⁶⁾ Ibid: p. 244.

⁽³⁷⁾ Ibid: **Al-Jarbouni Tells her Experience at the Israeli Jails.**

⁽³⁸⁾ Ibid: **Special Interview with the Freed Lina Al-Jarbouni Mayor of Palestinian Female Prisoners.**

⁽³⁹⁾ Firwana, Abdunnasser, **Palestinian Prisoners: Sufferings and Hopes**, (Cairo, the Arab League, 2015), p. 305.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Ibid, Al-Zaeem, **Islamic Women Movement – Hamas**, pp. 145-146.

cousin Nizar Al-Tamimi in prison. She was a role model, a media figure who could mobilize the public opinion towards the issue of the prisoners. She stayed in contact with the prisoners' families, which reinforced the prisoners⁽⁴¹⁾ and gave them hope.

Areej Mustafa Orouq, from Jenin, was arrested in 2003 near Huwwara Checkpoint, and was freed in 2007. During her imprisonment, she suffered severely. However, after her liberation she continued her BA studies and majored in Arts at An-Najah University. She was then in a car accident and stayed in a comma for two months. When she woke up from her comma, she insisted on finishing her studies. She graduated in 2010 and studied MA in Planning and Political Development⁽⁴²⁾.

Areej opened a store for women clothing where Palestinian designs were embroidered on the clothes. She also worked on recreating a cell in cooperation with Jenin Municipality that reflected the types of torture the occupation does to the male and female prisoners⁽⁴³⁾.

Urouq mentioned that she was well-supported by her family after she was freed. She moved on with her life, became involved in the society, and participated in different initiatives to share her experience as an ex-prisoner⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Finally, Mona Qaadán, also a freed prisoner, said, "I did not surrender. I became a manager at a kindergarten. Currently, I am working as the head of Al-Baraa for Muslim Girls Society in Jenin. The Society focuses on orphaned children, and teaching the Quran, its memorization and recitation. I will live on waiting for my partner and love Ibrahim Ighbariya⁽⁴⁵⁾".

After winning her freedom, Al-Jarbouni wants to continue her education, receive a Diploma in education, and help defend the rights of the Palestinian prisoners at the occupation's jails⁽⁴⁶⁾.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Ibid: pp. 146-147.

⁽⁴²⁾ The freed prisoner Areej Orouq, Palestine TV, December 28, 2019.

⁽⁴³⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ **Freed Prisoner Mona Qaadán**, Laha TV, May 30, 2011.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ "My Joy Is Incomplete", says Palestinian Female, ANADOLU AGENCY, 22 Apr 2017

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