

PALESTINIAN HUNGER STRIKERS IN THE ISRAELI SETTLER-COLONIAL AND CARCERAL SYSTEM: UNITING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE RESISTANCE, LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the interconnection of the resistance practice of hunger striking inside Israeli colonial prisons and forms of solidarity in support of Palestinian political prisoners, both local and transnational. Centered on the settler-colonial and carceral framework, our research examines the Israeli carceral power towards Palestinian society as a whole and, in detail, the use of administrative detention by Israel as one of the most powerful forms of collective punishment. We also look at Israel's medical negligence that directly impacts life and death inside prisons. Based on fieldwork conducted in the West Bank and online interviews between 2022 and 2023, this article explores one of the most extreme forms of resistance used by Palestinian political prisoners, namely hunger strikes both individual and collective, that are supported by local and transnational solidarity. The interaction between resistance practices inside Israeli colonial prisons and diverse levels of solidarity generated outside prisons is a challenging new field of research

to deal with in Palestine Studies, as it looks at the increasing potential of activists' engagement in intersectional and transnational narratives.

KEYWORDS: Administrative Detention, Hunger Strike, Palestine, Israel, Political Prisoners, Settler-Colonialism, International Solidarity

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1967, Palestinian political prisoners have been subjected to cruel physical and psychological violence in Israeli prisons. In response to this, they have gathered support from Palestinian civil society and, simultaneously, from diverse international movements in solidarity with the Palestinian cause along with human rights organisations. From this preliminary background, our main research objective concentrates on the interconnection of struggles inside and outside colonial prisons that have the goal of consolidating the link between internal and external resistance strategies both in the occupied Palestinian territories (occupied territories) and at the transnational level. More precisely, the Palestinian people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem have been facing the full force of settler-colonial and carceral policies of the Israeli government, with the result of seeing thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, detained without charge or trial (Farraj 2023). At present, this interconnection is more crucial than ever, considering the 7th of October of 2023, subsequent events, and their consequences.

The vast majority of contemporary research on Palestinian political prisoners¹ focuses on political practices inside Israeli colonial prisons, primarily hunger strikes, and how they may be considered a pillar of Palestinian struggle and resistance (Abdo 2014; Ajour 2017, 2021; Alim 2020; Baker and Matar 2011; Daka 2011; Hashim and Al-Jamal 2021; Khalidi 2014; Norman, 2020 2022; Rooney 2014; Shwaikh 2018, 2020; Shwaikh and Gould 2023; Zureik, 2016). Scholars have examined diversified everyday forms of resistance² inside the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) by exploring various means of resistance based on the idea of

1 In this article, we decided to use the term 'political prisoners' as we have taken into account people imprisoned for political reasons by the Israeli colonial state. We also agree with the motivations given by other scholars working on the topic, above all by Malaka Shwaikh (2018, footnote n. 5, p. 88).

2 Following the founding theoretical frame of 'everyday resistance' starting mainly with James Scott (1985) and Julie Norman (2010, 2020), in our study we focus on such kinds of resistance spread by Palestinian political prisoners and in particular by hunger strikers who have been supported by local and transnational campaigns for liberation.

*sumud*³: from the counter-order⁴, the education 'system', and acts of non-cooperation to work stoppages, smuggling, prison breaks, protests and, as an extreme measure, hunger strikes. In all these cases, the analysis has centered on forms of resistance coming from within the prisons and stressed ongoing asymmetric power relations in which detainees have confronted both spatial and temporal boundaries. Additionally, these resistance practices have been often reinforced by locals, together with international organisations, in solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners (Shwaikh and Gould 2023).

In this article, we focus on the most radical act of resistance embodied by Palestinian political prisoners, namely collective and individual hunger strikes, also characterised as 'pragmatic forms of resistance' (Shwaikh 2018: 79). It is important to contextualise uses and meanings of hunger strikes as well as consequential political effects in the Palestinian context, as was done in the cases of South Africa (Buntman 2003; Machin 2016; Shah 2022) and Northern Ireland (Aretxaga 1993; Baumann 2010; Healy, 1982; Sweeney 1993). To contribute to the current scholarship, we aim critically to discuss the interaction between hunger strikes experienced within Israeli colonial prisons and forms of solidarity supporting Palestinian hunger strikers in their everyday resistance.

In detail, we argue the current academic and political relevance of exploring and analysing contemporary cases of hunger strikes that have been under the spotlight either by local civil society organisations or by transnational activists together with human rights organisations. This perspective has allowed us to reflect on the importance of entering the dialogue around local and transnational support for Palestinian political prisoners, in terms of being at the core of the historic as well as the current Palestinian cause. Palestinian political prisoners have achieved a critical role in the struggle for national liberation, including all the segments of Palestinian society, from the oPt to the diaspora and within Israel itself.

The article is organised into seven parts. The following section discusses the theoretical framework at the base of our research, namely the relationship between Israeli settler-colonialism and carceral power, and the role of solidarity in this system. The second section explains the methods used, in particular focusing on ethical issues related to the fieldwork. The fourth and fifth sections contextualise the Israeli carceral system from both historical and contemporary perspectives, with a deeper reference to the

3 *Sumud* (the Arabic word for 'steadfastness') is an active form of popular resistance in the face of obstacles imposed by the Israeli settler colonial and carceral state. In other words, it is an active willingness to sacrifice oneself to achieve justice (Meari, 2014; Qumsiyeh, 2011).

4 The counter-order is a regime of self-governing committees that help Palestinian political prisoners navigate the IPS through collective support, training, education and discipline (Norman, 2021; Rosenfeld, 2004).

tool of administrative detention and the use of hunger strikes as a tool of resistance. The sixth section presents the core of the research and analyses local and transnational solidarity with the Palestinian political prisoners and specifically with hunger strikers, with evidence from emblematic case-studies. Finally, the last section contributes to the contemporary debate on the importance of interconnecting heterogeneous struggles on both sides of colonial prisons that advocate for the Palestinian cause by means of intersectional and transnational perspectives.

The Carceral System, Settler-Colonialism and Solidarity: Inter-connecting Frames

To explore forms of resistance both from within and outside Israeli colonial prisons through local and transnational solidarity networks, it is necessary to dive into the everyday reality of the Palestinian people and how Israeli authorities assert control over their bodies and daily lives. This control has generated several forms of violence that have structured the settler-colonial project itself. In this reality, prisons are a critical example of this violence by carrying on practices of subjugation and domination.

In perpetuating ongoing asymmetrical power relations between the colonised and the coloniser, and with the goal of eliminating the indigenous population (Elkins and Pedersen, 2005; Pearson 2001; Russell 2001; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 1999, 2006), settler-colonialism aims to transform territorial boundaries and develop new demographic and socio-political structures. As observed in historical and comparative studies, from South Africa to New Zealand, Canada to Palestine, the United States of America to Algeria (Abu-Lughod and Abu-Laban 1974; Dunbar-Ortiz 2021; Mansfield 1991; Lewis 1995; Pappé 2005; Veracini 2006), settler-colonial systems have fragmented geographies, populations, cultures, and also narratives.

Through this lens of analysis, mass incarceration has fostered structural violence towards the indigenous population in order to perpetuate the logic of elimination on the one hand, and to discourage the indigenous resistance movement, in particular the youth, on the other. As discussed in comparable cases of settler-colonialism, especially by current scholarship with a focus on the US and Canada (Chartrand 2019; Landertinger 2015; Lindskoog 2022), the relationship between the settler-colonial status and the penal system is particularly clear when dealing with the indigenous population and even more with the most marginalised segments of these communities. This perspective shows how incarceration cannot be considered just in terms of a justice frame, but more in relation to socio-political structures.

The earliest Zionist settlers arrived in historic Palestine at the end of the 19th century, and since then, the native Arab Palestinians have

been struggling with ongoing land dispossession and ethnic cleansing (Greenstein 1995; Morris 2004; Khalidi 2006; Morgensen 2011; Pappé 2006; Wolfe 2016). As a result, these ongoing strategies have generated repercussions in other societal domains, like the prison system, as shown in the case of the Palestinian political prisoners incarcerated in the Israeli colonial prisons where eliminationist policies have been employed. For this reason, it is essential to take into account the concept of a prison boundary as 'a material manifestation of the multitude of physical and symbolic connections that make up the contested, fluid border between being either 'inside' or 'outside' prison and general society' (Turner, 2016, p. 2). This paradigm can help in understanding the situation of the Palestinians who live in such a larger prison boundary perpetually, and especially how the prisoner/non-prisoner divide, along with the inside/outside boundary, creates a constant uncertainty in the everyday life of people in Palestine.

On this, Lena Meari (2022) also states that Israeli colonial prisons are intrinsically linked to the Zionist settler-colonial project as they replicate its eliminationist goal while trying to end Palestinian anti-colonial resistance. Furthermore, according to Veracini, the continuous control of the body is one of the major obsessions of the settler-colonial projects that comes from recognising its own limits (Veracini 2006: 167). This is also the reason why Israel's carceral violence aims at removing Palestinians through mechanisms of gradual elimination, as happens in relation with hunger strikers.

More specifically, it means that collective punishments condemn Palestinians to a life that is absent of freedom and liberty, even if outside the material conditions of the IPS, in what has been called 'graduated incarceration' (Smith 2011). This happens through a continuous process of structural dispossession that cannot be singled out as an event. Israel's settler-colonial and carceral state practices affect the daily experience of Palestinians to identify the different sorts of micro-geographies of occupation enacted by the Israel state (Smith 2011: 318). Consequently, by looking into these micro-geographies, it is possible to recognise that the experience of prison has '(...) burned a notion of incarceration into Palestinian collective identity' (ibid.).

As we will discuss more in detail while analysing the interviews with former hunger strikers, the Israeli carceral system has extended its power beyond prisons and has consequences in the daily punishment and control of the Palestinians, including house arrests, administrative detentions, deportations, and house demolitions. All these tactics are part of this perpetual fluid border between being either 'inside' or 'outside' prison and the everyday life of Palestinian society (Turner 2016: 2).

On the other hand, prisons also represent sites of resistance, agency and challenge to these structures of elimination and dispossession. In this way,

resistance can be interpreted as a response aiming at ‘(. . .) productive goals, not just to limit or prevent an imposition of power, but to appropriate and produce power’, despite the difficult conditions inside prisons as they are, inherently, repressive (Buntman 2019: 230). More specifically, in the case of Palestinian political prisoners who have decided to embark on hunger strikes, this has been even more relevant as they have been capable of confronting Israel’s repressive and eliminationist policies by means of their own bodies (Meari 2022). In other words, Palestinian political prisoners have been able to transform the IPS and Israel’s carceral power from a place of control to a place of struggle, resistance and reclaimed agency.

In this study, it is also critical to understand the role of transnational solidarity in working alongside indigenous struggles. In this way, solidarity initiatives have expanded and been strengthened by linking diverse contexts characterised by similar realities of oppression and violence (Bailey 2015; Erakat and Hill 2019; Naber 2017; Sato and Moser 2022). Among these initiatives, it has been relevant that the debate led by abolitionist scholars and activists in the United States that have mainly focused on the status of incarcerated people and the increasing militarisation of society, and have comparatively discussed the Israeli reality (Davis, 2016; Gilmore, 2008; Hallward 2020). In the core of our analysis, we examine the current struggle led by Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli colonial prisons as one of the most relevant activists involved in such transnational solidarity, as in dialogue with the increasing academic and political interest in this topic.

Data and Research Methods

This article is mainly based on the outcomes of our fieldwork, with the aim of locating the voices and perspectives of our participants at the core of our analysis. Between September 2022 and August 2023, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews both in the field (mainly in the Ramallah area) and online with former Palestinian political prisoners and representatives of the foremost Palestinian human rights organisations in support of political prisoners based in the West Bank, namely, Addameer⁵, Prisoners’ Society Club⁶ and the Commission of

5 Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association is a Palestinian non-governmental, civil institution that works to support Palestinian political prisoners jailed in Israeli and Palestinian prisons. For more information, see: <https://www.addameer.org/>

6 The Palestinian Prisoners Society is a local non-governmental organisation that aims to serve Palestinian political prisoners and their families by providing legal support for Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli courts and support to the families of Palestinian political prisoners in aspects such as health and education. Additionally, it works to raise awareness about Israeli violations committed against political prisoners both on the domestic and international levels.

Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs⁷. We started contacting the most well-known former political prisoners, and then through a snowball sampling, we were able to meet and collect other stories by taking into account the different realities experienced, political parties they are affiliated with, geographic areas as well as social backgrounds they come from.

In parallel, we decided to follow leading Palestinian and international human rights organisations that are currently fighting for the liberation of several Palestinian political prisoners on hunger strike, either held without being charged or with serious health problems. In addition to the above-mentioned Palestinian human rights organisations in support of political prisoners, we also considered the role of the most recognised Palestinian human rights non-governmental organisation, Al-Haq⁸, together with Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the UN at the global level, to cover both the Palestinian and the transnational viewpoints on the topic. We were able to collect up-to-date information and, at the same time, to interact with activists, human rights lawyers and scholars to identify the various aspects to be taken into account during our research.

Overall, we questioned our positionality in terms of being white researchers in solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Accessing the field and creating trusting relationships to identify key themes with our participants and their families, have represented the main challenges we experienced (Bhopal and Deuchar 2015; Soedirgo and Glas 2020). We have always been aware of the importance of considering the ethical questions produced in this context and the complex dynamics that can be structured between the interviewee and the researcher(s) in such cases of violation of human rights. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees wanted to use their full names, regardless of confidentiality issues, as they considered this option as one of the most powerful forms of resistance they have to share in their ongoing struggle publicly and internationally. For this reason, it was even more important to share with them our research objectives and receive their feedback while conducting the study itself.

The Relationship between Administrative Detention and Hunger Strikes

As we have examined in the theoretical framework, Palestinians have been constrained in their everyday life by Israel's settler-colonial and carceral

7 The Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs is an organisation belonging to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that looks out for the welfare and well-being of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails and their families. It provides legal, social, and financial support.

8 Al-Haq is an independent Palestinian non-governmental human rights organisation based in Ramallah, West Bank. It was established in 1979 to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law in the oPt. For more information, see: <https://www.alhaq.org/>

power, and more specifically, the IPS. Even if not all Palestinians actually experience the physical reality of being incarcerated, they are constantly restrained in their freedom, choices, opportunities and lives.

Most of the Palestinians, most of the families in Palestine, got to try prison even if for one day, one hour. You can endlessly count how many people, you know, experience prison, in terms of psychological prison or physical prison. (Nabil Al-Rae⁹, authors' online interview, 19 May 2023)

This quote brings to light how this fluid inside-outside border (Turner 2016) impacts Palestinians' lives as there is constant uncertainty about when one might be subject to detention. Imprisonments, particularly administrative detention, can happen at any moment. Muhammad Al-Qeeq¹⁰ for instance, was in his home while, during the night, Israeli occupation forces detained him:

They detained me from my house. In the night, Israeli forces attacked my home, broke my door with their weapons. With illegal actions, they put my hand on the wall and push me, forcibly, in front of my baby girl and wife. They confiscated some devices like laptops, mobiles and they told me "Muhammad, you are under arrest". I said, "why?", because you have military actions against Israeli settlers". I said "no" and he told me "it's not this place to make conversation. You must go to the investigation center." They blindfolded me and handcuffed my hands. They led me to a military vehicle in front of our building and transferred me to Beit El. This settlement is built on our land in the north of Al-Bireh and Ramallah. After ten hours, they let me be handcuffed and blindfolded. After that they transferred me to Al-Moscobiyyeh investigation in Jerusalem. (Muhammad Al-Qeeq, authors' interview, Ramallah, 13 September 2022)

As it has been stressed also by another interviewee, former Palestinian political prisoner and hunger striker, Salah Hammouri¹¹, the use of administrative detention is directed at the whole Palestinian society, not only some of its members:

I think that the main goal of this massive use of administrative detention is the destruction of the Palestinian society. It's the destruction of human

9 Nabil Al-Rae, a Palestinian actor, writer, creative director and researcher, worked in the Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp for thirteen years. He was first arrested at the age of seven and was again arrested and held for 40 days in solitary confinement years later, where he embarked on his first and only individual hunger strike.

10 Muhammad Al-Qeeq is a Palestinian journalist and has been in and out of prison since childhood. He participated in three hunger strikes. Two individual hunger strikes to regain his freedom from administrative detention and one collective hunger strike in support of one of the most famous Palestinian political prisoners, Marwan Barghouti.

11 Salah Hammouri is a Palestinian-French human rights lawyer for Addameer. He has experienced several arrests and, more recently, he was illegally deported from Palestine to France, accused of breach of allegiance to the state of Israel after being detained in administrative detention for eight months.

beings and also the destruction of the old Palestinian society. We have many examples, people may spend 14, 15 years in administrative detention. So, they are arrested for two years, three years, then they are liberated for 3 months, 4 months and then re-arrested for years in administrative detention. It is one of the materials of the collective punishment used against Palestinians. It is used to affect all Palestinian society: teachers, students, doctors, researchers, human right defenders, former prisoners, it is used against everybody. (Salah Hammouri, authors' online interview, 28 February 2023)

In examining the increasing use of administrative detentions¹² on the one hand and the practice of hunger strikes on the other, we aim to demonstrate that for Palestinian political prisoners detained under administrative detention, hunger striking (specifically by individuals) has been considered by our interviewees as the most effective form of resistance. The administrative detention policy has allowed the Israeli occupation forces to detain Palestinians indefinitely for three, four or six-months terms that can be renewed indefinitely, on the basis of secret information without charging them or allowing them to stand trial. For Addameer (2016), this not only impacts the detainee's families and represents a collective punishment of Palestinian civil society, but it may also amount to psychological torture. According to B'Tselem (2023)¹³, this form of extreme carceral power has led to the incarceration of thousands of Palestinians for prolonged periods (including women, children and the elderly), and this clearly has had impacts on Palestinian society as a whole.

Basil Farraj¹⁴ has highlighted the arbitrariness of administrative detention:

This means that Israeli authorities can detain anyone at any time without having to go through legal channels and that, of course, it begins from the collective punishment aspect, but then it tries to create fear in an entire population. The families, the prisoners' family, those around them, the entire Palestinian society actually and it is one of the policies that the Israel state relies upon to dismantle this kind of notion of collective belonging

12 According to Addameer (2023) and B'Tselem (2023), the number of administrative detainees is the highest since the Second Intifada, with 1132 Palestinians being detained (Addameer, 2023).

13 B'Tselem — The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories — is an independent, non-partisan Israeli organisation that documents, researches and publishes statistics, testimonies, video footage, position papers and reports on human rights violations committed by Israel in the oPt. For more information, see: <https://www.btselem.org/>

14 Basil Farraj is an Assistant Professor at Birzeit University and his research focuses on political prisoners, carceral violence, and prisoners' confrontation practices against carceral regimes.

for civil rights, for justice. (Basil Farraj, authors' online interview, 10 April 2023)

Although, according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, administrative detention can be used only 'for imperative reasons of security' (article 78), the way through which Israeli occupation forces have used administrative detention as a collective punishment against Palestinians is illegal. Human rights organisations, including Addameer (2018) and Amnesty International (2012), along with the United Nations, have corroborated this. The latter has expressed and called several times, through its Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the occupied territories, for Israel to end this practice. Most recently, after the death of the Palestinian political prisoner Khader Adnan¹⁵, the current UN Special Rapporteur, Francesca Albanese, stated as follows:

We cannot separate Israel's carceral policies from the colonial nature of its occupation, intended to control and subjugate all Palestinians in the territory Israel wants to control (...). The systematic practice of administrative detention is tantamount to a war crime of wilfully depriving protected persons of the rights of fair and regular trial. (Francesca Albanese, 3 May 2023)

Although UN assessments might help to understand the illegality of administrative detention in the oPt, on the other hand the reality on the ground goes in the opposite direction and shows an increase in the use of these detentions. Speaking to Thaer Shreteh, Head of Communications in the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, he questioned:

When will the international community start taking action to end this policy and stop this crime? The Palestinian prisoners in general have suffered a lot from this policy and they are still suffering nowadays and they have paid a big price because of this policy which is ongoing and affecting, targeting Palestinian prisoners to this day. And if we monitor and look at the past ten years of how many individuals went on hunger strike against the administrative detention we can see that these hunger strikes expose the violations and the inhumanity the Israeli occupation forces are using to target Palestinian prisoners. (Thaer Shreteh, Ramallah, 12 September 2022)

The story behind each detainee is critical to understand why Palestinian political prisoners embark on hunger strikes to reclaim their agency in the struggle against Israel's carceral power. The collective punishment that administrative detention as a policy imposes on Palestinian society and on each Palestinian, its dehumanisation along with dispossession

¹⁵ Khader Adnan is a martyred Palestinian political prisoner who was arrested throughout his life 11 times, the majority in administrative detention, having spent nine years in Israeli jails. Throughout this time, he embarked on five hunger strikes. His last hunger strike led him to his death in May 2023.

of dignity, love, hope and their future (Ajour 2021), has pushed prisoners to resort to hunger strikes in several cases. This has been also defined as the weaponisation of their lives (Bargu 2014), aiming at simultaneously resisting Israel's necropolitical discipline (El-Haj 2010), and their systematised and progressive dehumanisation (Césaire 1955; Fanon 2004) within Israel's carceral power.

Hunger Strikes as an Overall Resistance Practice

In this section, we want to give space to former Palestinian political prisoners who underwent hunger strikes to examine the relevance of this practice in the Palestinian national struggle. As described in the previous section and based on what our interviewees have shared with us, it is evident that all the Palestinians are under collective punishment, and there is almost no Palestinian that has not had a family member arrested. To contrast this, Palestinian political prisoners have been able to use diverse mechanisms of resistance to not only reclaim their agency, dignity and humanity, but also to: (i) transform the prison space from one of control to one of education, resistance, and organising; (ii) expand their resistance beyond the spatial and temporal constraints of the prison; (iii) to overcome ideological, social and economic differences; and (iv) to make imprisonment a vital issue among Palestinian society and the resistance and liberation movement (Ajour 2021; Farraj 2023; Norman 2020; Shwaikh 2018, 2020; Shwaikh and Gould 2023). Regarding this, Basil Farraj has highlighted:

In reality, what the prisoners say when they undergo a hunger strike or a boycott of military courts is that this Israeli judicial apparatus does not deliver justice. It functions on the basis of discriminating between Palestinian prisoners and, of course, Jewish citizens of the state, but also the entire administrative detention mechanism rests in the hands of the Israeli security agency. So, it is not justice. They attempt to produce this facade of a judicial process, of a legal process, but the reality of this process has nothing to do with justice, it is absolutely arbitrary. (Basil Farraj, online authors' interview, 10 April 2023)

This reveals how Israeli carceral policies have led Palestinian political prisoners to put their own lives in jeopardy for freedom, for dignity and for their humanity. In particular, individual hunger strikes are intrinsically linked to the collective resistance, as explained by most of our interviewees:

We have to realise that our struggle is about existence. This occupation does not want us to exist in every sense, in every way. I did an individual hunger strike. It was a point that I wanted to make for the occupation forces that they can control you. They can arrest you. They can put you in prison.

They can kill you. They can do anything, but they cannot control your will.
(Nabil Al-Raei, authors' online interview, 19 May 2023)

However, it is critical to understand that although both are linked to the collective resistance of the Palestinian society, individual and collective hunger strikes often have different goals. As Muhammad Al-Qeeq explained, by individual hunger strikes the goal is freedom from administrative detention, while in collective hunger strikes it is often linked to demands for better conditions inside the IPS.

Individual hunger strike is against administrative detention. You need freedom in this case. But the collective hunger strikes you need to improve your life inside jail. (Muhammad Al-Qeeq, authors' interview, Ramallah, 13 September 2022)

On this, Salah Hammouri also gave us his view on the two different but interlinked practices:

There is a big difference between individual and the collective hunger strikes. To organise a collective hunger strike, we need to coordinate between prisons and outside of prisons. It takes time the preparation to make the list of demands, to organize the committee who will command the strike. The individual, most of the individual hunger strikers are the persons who are in administrative detention. So, the collective hunger strikes it is about demands from prisoners to have better conditions of detention inside the prisons. (Salah Hammouri, authors' online interview, 11 April 2023)

In any case, this is not always the rule. There are collective hunger strikes that demand the end of the practice of administrative detention; as there are individual hunger strikes in solidarity with other political prisoners experiencing a particular situation¹⁶. Consequently, this explains why the Palestinian society has been historically so strongly connected to the Palestinian political prisoners' movement and, in particular, to hunger strikers, as:

A hunger strike is a lot of effort not only for the prisoners but also for the communities surrounding them. So, each hunger strike, whether it is collective or individual, will need protest, solidarity actions, communication, coordination, media, etc. So, hunger strikers will need a lot of support and solidarity from within the prison and outside the prison. (Malaka Shwaikh¹⁷, authors' online interview, 21 May 2023)

¹⁶ In the end of July 2023, the co-founder of the Freedom Theatre, Zakaria Zubeidi, began an individual hunger strike in solidarity with two Palestinian female political prisoners inside the IPS. For more information: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CvPIm12tsvn/>

¹⁷ Malaka Shwaikh is an Associate Lecturer in Peace and Conflict Studies in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews.

This support is critical if we consider that the use of hunger strikes, both collective and individual, usually is not a one-time event. According to our interviewees, they have embarked either on individual or collective hunger strikes more than once throughout their forced incarceration. Physically and mentally, this specific form of resistance is so demanding that it is important to understand that there are Palestinian political prisoners, such as the elderly and chronically-ill, who cannot use their own bodies to resist Israel's carceral power.

In terms of the success of hunger strikes, Shwaikh (2023) and Farraj (2022) have claimed the evaluation of success or effectiveness while discussing individual hunger strike accomplishments might be problematic if success is only measured by the meeting of the demands of the Palestinian political prisoners by Israeli officials. Additionally, individual hunger strikes have brought administrative detention and its impact on Palestinian civil society to the forefront of the public debate within Israeli society also.

Overall, hunger striking has been interpreted as an influential form of resistance in such a context of deep asymmetric power relations, and this has also been the main reason for creating a strong support and interaction between local and transnational networks of solidarity, as will be explored in the next section.

Solidarity from the Local to the Transnational Level

In this core section, we analyse the role and the development of solidarity with and support for the Palestinian hunger strikers that has created the conditions to call for a stricter linkage between local and transnational activism. We argue the necessity of considering the interconnection of local and transnational levels as a key component of the Palestinian ongoing resistance, both within and outside colonial prisons. In this direction, Basil Farraj stated the preliminary importance of starting from local solidarity campaigns:

They are central to the Palestinian identity, the Palestinian struggle, the Palestinian resistance and the entire Palestinian civil society. I think that since the beginning of Israel's violent establishment that they have been central to the Palestinian discourse. That is why we see the way Palestinian streets react with certain hunger strikes, collective or individual. They have a particular centrality in the Palestinian political struggle – the Palestinian political prisoners – and that is because there is still the sense of a unified struggle that takes place, to an extent, inside prisons and that the Palestinian prisoners movement, along with the martyrs, is the one still resisting occupation in a way. And they form part of the imaginary of potential freedom but also of the way Palestinians imagine liberation and imagine their struggle. (Basil Farraj, online authors' interview, 10 April 2023)

Referring to relevant examples of local solidarity, the case of Nasser Abu Hmeid shows how Palestinian civil society has strongly supported political prisoners on the ground. This specific case focuses mainly on the Israeli medical negligence inside the IPS that can be described as a weapon against Palestinian political prisoners. Nasser Abu Hmeid and his family were refugees in 1948 and he was born in Al-Amari Refugee Camp in Ramallah. Abu Hmeid, like many other political prisoners, experienced several arrests throughout his life. The first, at the age of eleven years old, was followed by others in 1987, 1990, and 1996 (Addameer 2022). Then, he was detained again in 2002 and sentenced to seven life sentences. In 2021, while in the IPS, Abu Hmeid was diagnosed with a tumour in his leg. Although he underwent surgery, the doctors informed the Israeli authorities that he would need to do chemotherapy treatment. Israeli authorities ignored this and the cancer gradually spread across his body, and his condition continued to deteriorate until his death in December 2022 due to medical negligence from the Israeli authorities.

This case highlights Israel's medical negligence as another form of carceral power as, according to Addameer (2022), from 1967 to 2022 there have been 74 Palestinian political prisoners who died as a result of medical negligence. Such realities bring to light Israel's carceral power and impunity that continues to control Palestinians' lives and deaths, in what Mbembe called 'necropower' (2003). Abu Hmeid's body has not been returned to his family since Palestinian bodies are used as bargaining chips to secure the release of captured Israeli soldiers. By doing this, Israel has continued to violate the Geneva Convention (article 130) stating the dead must be buried honourably and according to the rites of the religion to which they belonged.

For Abu Hmeid's case, Palestinian civil society led a targeted campaign and increased efforts to release him. In September 2022, during our fieldwork, two solidarity protests across Ramallah and Al-Bireh brought together Palestinians of various ages from different places to demand Abu Hmeid's freedom so he could die accompanied by his family, and further demonstrations across the West Bank, Gaza Strip and in front of Ramla prison took place (where Abu Hmeid was held). This type of support and solidarity from Palestinian civil society aimed at pressuring the Israeli authorities to release Palestinian political prisoners or, at least, reach an agreement with them. In the case of Abu Hmeid, the goal would have been his release considering his health conditions. However, in other cases, the solidarity and pressure from local and transnational actions have led the Israeli government to reach a date of release with a particular political prisoner going through a hunger strike or to improve the conditions inside the IPS.

The support from the Palestinian society shown with Abu Hmeid is far from being unique, as demonstrated also by the reality of other political prisoners, such as Muhammad Al-Qeeq, who had received strong support from Palestinian civil society during his hunger strike. Specifically, in his case, Palestinian civil society support also included Palestinian citizens of Israel, who started their demonstrations in front of the Israeli hospital in Afula where he was taken on the 35th/36th day of his hunger strike. As he recalled with us:

I heard some voices from outside the room shouting “Free Muhammad Al-Qeeq, free!”. At the same time, the jailor came with weapons. They were on high alert. Increased the deployment around my room. These people outside were Jewish activists. After that, they spoke together and said, “We have problems outside the room. All the Palestinians in the Green Line make a protest against administrative detention (. . .). When the protest happened outside the hospital, they panicked. (Muhammad Al-Qeeq, authors’ interview, Ramallah, 13 September 2022)

His individual hunger strike and solidarity demonstrations ultimately led to his release from administrative detention and, together with Abu Hmeid’s case, demonstrate: (i) the relevance of local struggles for Palestinian political prisoners, (ii) the positive impact this support has had on the everyday lives of hunger strikers in Israeli prisons and (iii) the role of Palestinian civil society, including Palestinian citizens of Israel, that has advocated for Palestinian political prisoners in spite of their own political affiliations (as we have been able to interview former political prisoners from different parties like Fatah, Hamas, PFLP and Islamic Jihad).

Moving from the national to the transnational level, we consider Salah Hammouri’s struggle as one of the most well-known recent cases that has received international support from Amnesty International, Frontline Defenders and the International Federation for Human Rights, among others. As introduced earlier, Hammouri was illegally deported to France in December 2022, following his administrative detention. During our interview, Hammouri talked about the profound impact Israel’s settler-colonial and carceral state’s unrestrained power has had on his life, and as a consequence on Palestinian civil society overall. The order issued by the Israeli occupation authorities banning him from entering the West Bank for eighteen months impaired his ability to complete his academic degree at Al-Quds University, delaying him from concluding his practical training to become a lawyer (Addameer 2022). Despite this, and being deported to and living in France, Hammouri has often reclaimed his agency through different mechanisms of resistance, including hunger strikes and boycotts of the Israeli military courts, while always considering the importance of the interconnection between local and transnational solidarity towards Palestinian political prisoners:

I think one of the most important things for people who are doing hunger strikes is the solidarity with them in Palestine and outside of Palestine, because when we begin the battle with the Israelis in prison, the occupied forces in prison, we are fighting with our convictions and our stomachs only (...) So it's very important, and the support is very important, for these hunger strikers during hunger strike, and there has to be massive support for them. (Salah Hammouri, authors' online interview, 11 April 2023)

On the transnational level, Amnesty International has called upon Israel's violation of international law regarding Palestinian political prisoners and, in Hammouri's case, it has expressed that this was even more serious due to his status as a human rights activist and worker. Since 2017, Amnesty International has continuously published reports about Hammouri's specific situation. As in December 2022, the Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Heba Morayef, stated:

Salah Hammouri has already spent nine months in administrative detention without charge or trial this year, in retaliation for his tireless campaigning for an end to Israel's apartheid against Palestinians. These latest plans are not only a shameless attempt to hinder Salah's human rights work, they are also an expression of the Israeli authorities' chilling long-term policy aim of reducing the number of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. (Amnesty International, 2022a)

These words not only highlight the peculiarity of Salah's case, but also mention Israel's apartheid regime against Palestinians, which is considered a 'crime against humanity' (Amnesty International, 2022a), and the ongoing de-Arabization of Jerusalem. Expanding on this, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Diana Eltahawy, affirmed that:

The deportation of Salah Hammouri demonstrates the Israeli authorities' utter disdain for international law, and illustrates the discriminatory laws and policies which form the heart of the apartheid system. Salah Hammouri's plight over the past year is one that no Jewish Israeli will ever be subjected to: he was deported and stripped of his residency status under a law which was tailor-made to enable the expulsion of Palestinians (...) It bears repeating: deporting Salah – who did not face a single charge – was simply the final act in the campaign by Israeli authorities to punish him for his human rights work, and, sends a chilling message on the sinister intent of the Israeli authorities to reduce the number of Palestinians in Jerusalem. (Amnesty International, 2022b)

Also, Human Rights Watch launched a joint statement named 'Justice for Salah' (2022a), by calling for the ending of his administrative detention, for allowing his wife to visit him and pressuring the French President Emmanuel Macron to show France's respect of human rights. In parallel,

within the international institutional arena, the United Nations released the following statement in December 2022:

Such unilateral, arbitrary measures taken by Israeli authorities in retaliation against Mr. Hammouri as a human rights defender, violate every principle and the very spirit of international law (. . .) These measures set an extremely dangerous precedent for all Palestinians in Jerusalem. The international community must not remain silent and quietly watch this umpteenth violation" that, according to them, can constitute a war crime (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2022).

These examples of mobilisations across different contexts evidence how it has been possible to build up a solid network of transnational support that has been developed both by international activists and institutions. As a result, based on our fieldwork and reflecting on the relevance of local and transnational support for Palestinian political prisoners, we argue the importance of the interaction between spaces of activism and solidarity that have started from within Israeli colonial prisons and have later expanded their activities beyond prison walls. This means to focus on the potential created by hunger strikes and the way through which these processes which build solidarity represent a fundamental basis for developing campaigns together with other liberation struggles outside the prison system. On the other hand, international solidarity has needed to concentrate not only on hunger strikes, but on a broader approach including political prisoners in general. The increasing awareness about the potential of international solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners has become essential for developing effective campaigns on the ground.

These ongoing struggles have always been related to the Palestinian national liberation movement, though with their own facets and political parties' internal divisions. With special attention to building solidarity initiatives, both at the local and transnational level and within the 'trialectic negotiation strategy' between prisoners, state authorities and external networks (Norman 2022), it is evident that the choice of undertaking a hunger strike (either collective or individual) has consequences in the support each specific case receives by public opinion, both local and international.

In this way, media attention has also brought about results of these strikes and inspired solidarity both inside prisons with mass participation by other political prisoners and outside, locally and transnationally. As Muhammad Al-Qeeq mentioned during our conversation, the importance of media has been fundamental in particular in connection with transnational solidarity:

They have concerns about solidarity inside Israel. The Palestinian people inside Israel made protests, made some things against Israel discrimination.

(...) They have concerns about embassies and words. Can you imagine the Palestinian activists who made 4 or 5 protests in New York and Washington to support Palestinian political prisoners, especially hunger strikes? (Muhammad Al-Qeeq, authors' interview, Ramallah, 13 September 2022)

As we have analysed in several cases, acts of resistance have gained worldwide attention due to the efforts of Palestinian human rights organisations working within international organisations and institutions in order to denounce the severe impacts suffered by Palestinian political prisoners and their families. Despite this, Israel has not altered its policies in any significant way. In fact, Benjamin Netanyahu's most recent government has already announced stricter penalties for Palestinian political prisoners¹⁸.

In the past few years, Palestinian political prisoners have also called for mass acts of civil disobedience through which they have been able to promote a full-scale boycott against the intensification of Israeli punishment policies across several prisons. Also referred by our interviewees as the 'hunger strike of freedom', 'revolution for freedom' or 'battle of the empty stomach', this collective response led by Palestinian and international human rights organisations has sustained transnational campaigns that have shaped wide-scale mobilisations both online through several social media platforms and offline in street demonstrations in cities across the world, such as in Vancouver, Montreal, Copenhagen, New York, Houston, Washington or London. In particular, these campaigns demonstrated solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners in administrative detention and often going through hunger strikes¹⁹. Either from a local or transnational perspective, they have contributed to the *sumud* of the Palestinian political prisoners, as Malaka Shwaikh recognised:

It is very central, it's very important. It keeps them connected with the action they are doing, thinking of course that it's going to have an impact hopefully because of that pressure from outside, or that kind of support and solidarity from outside that has the possibility of increasing some pressure on

18 News outlets such as Al Jazeera, WAFA News Agency, and +972 Magazine have reported daily changes inside the IPS, as an immediate result of Netanyahu's most recent government. The most restrictive measures, such as transfers of senior Palestinian political prisoners to eliminate their influence, increase in solitary confinement, bans on family visits, have been reinforced.

19 Solidarity groups, such as Samidoun — Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network, Palestine Solidarity UK, Palestinian Youth Movement or Addameer, among others, often organise these demonstrations. Lately, they have been focusing on the case of Walid Daqqah, who, after 37 years of incarceration, is now suffering from rare cancer and has been repeatedly denied release while subjected to systematic Israeli medical neglect. For more information on these groups: <https://palestiniayouthmovement.com/>, <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/>, <https://www.addameer.org/> and <https://samidoun.net/>

the Israeli authorities to achieve their demands. (Malaka Shwaikh, authors' online interview, 21 May 2023)

According to this and observing the increasing role of Palestinian digital activism in recent years (Aouragh 2014; Taha 2020; Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014), the importance of transforming heterogeneous struggles into transnational and intersectional solidarity initiatives that include campaigns in support of Palestinian political prisoners as a significant segment of Palestinian society subjugated by oppressive power asymmetries and restrictive colonial policies has become evident. In this way, in the context of interpreting transnational solidarity by combining local and global protests (Featherstone 2012; Massey 2008), the Palestinian case of political prisoners demonstrates the capability of expanding local support towards experiences of collaboration among diverse resistance actors also coming from other similar backgrounds, such as settler-colonial and militarised ones like the United States (Davis 2016).

Conclusion

Since 1948 Palestinians have had to bear the burden of being targeted by Israeli carceral practices. The Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1967 increased this burden even more. Since then, Israeli occupation forces have arrested more than 800,000 Palestinians, meaning 20% of the total Palestinian population in the occupied territories (Khalidi 2014: 5; Norman 2020: 41). In such a context, the case of Israeli carceral policies in targeting the Palestinians and dehumanising them has clearly demonstrated the main consequences of these continuous interwoven structures of oppression, both inside and outside prisons.

In a time of intensification of violence after the 7th of October 2023, the incarceration of an increasing number of Palestinians represents the continuation of settler invasion of indigenous territories and the dispossession of the indigenous population. Israel's backlash against Palestinian civil society has consisted of ongoing collective punishments mainly through daily raids in villages and cities throughout the West Bank and indiscriminate forms of mass incarceration of men, women and children. According to Addammer, Prisoners' Society Club, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, most of the Palestinians that have been detained since the 7th of October 2023 are in administrative detention. By looking at the status quo, it is possible to understand that what we have examined throughout this article in terms of a perpetual fluid border between being either 'inside' or 'outside' prisons has allowed the reality of the colonial carceral system to become more

entrenched than ever across the entire occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. This is particularly crucial when we examine the relationship between the current increasing use of administrative detention and its consequent result in a growing number of political prisoners choosing to go on individual and collective hunger strikes.

In dialogue with the current literature on Palestinian hunger strikes in the Israeli settler-colonial and carceral system (Ajour 2017; 2021; Norman 2020; 2022; Shwaikh 2018; 2022; Shwaikh and Gould 2023), we argue that these political prisoners have been able to unite and promote intersected narratives that are part of the contemporary decolonial movement. As we consider Israeli colonial prisons also as a 'site of resistance' (Abdo, 2014; Buntman, 2019), this article reflects on the contemporary role of hunger strikers within the Palestinian question, and their dedication to spreading their struggle from a local to a transnational level.

As we have highlighted, Palestinians, even outside the IPS, continue to live in a perpetual boundary that condemns them to a life where freedom is, at the moment, more a hope than a tangible reality. Nevertheless, the *sumud* of the Palestinian political prisoners has not ceased to exist, as well highlighted by the hunger strikers we interviewed. In this direction, *sumud* has also been reinforced by transnational solidarity initiatives and practices that have been developed in the everyday struggles towards Palestinian freedom. As in diverse historical contexts through the construction of 'potential circuits connecting movements in various parts of the world, and specifically, in the US, Turkey, and occupied Palestine' (Davis, 2016), transnational solidarity has mainly intersected the fight against racism and settler-colonialism by creating alternative possibilities for a new future. Indeed, this is also the main goal of the ongoing struggle and everyday resistance of most Palestinian hunger strikers. Such global support has made clear the enormous potential of forging transnational solidarity able to impact Israeli policies, and, in parallel, to consolidate the collective and united struggle of the whole Palestinian people. This can be seen through the examples we have analysed in more depth as with Muhammad Al-Qeeq, Abu Hmeid, Nabil Al-Raei and, especially, Salah Hammouri, but also from all the other Palestinian former political prisoners we have interviewed throughout these last two years.

Finally, in such an historic moment, it is critical deeply to emphasise that Palestinian political prisoners have always represented a core actor in the national struggle for self-determination. Hunger strikers, either individual or collective, have played a crucial role in demanding their own freedom along with freedom for all Palestinians. As we have analysed this topic as a thread from inside to outside prisons, from local struggles within the oPt to transnational solidarity, this article aspires to

contribute to the current academic debate by demonstrating the potential of Palestinian political prisoners, and in particular hunger strikers, in defining intersectional and transnational efforts to counter the status quo in the Israeli settler-colonial and carceral state.

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