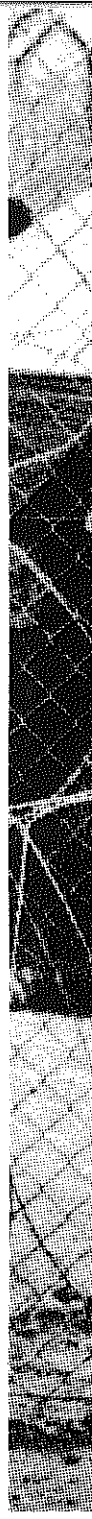
PRISON CULTURE

Countering the Occupation

A "battle of the 'power of the will'
against the 'will of power' "



by **Barbara Harlow**

Early on the morning of 3 October, Riad Malki, a professor of engineering at Birzeit University, was arrested by Israeli military authorities in the Occupied West Bank.

Malki, who was taken from his Ramallah home following a two-hour search of its premises by four Israeli intelligence agents, had been scheduled that day to attend a press conference at East Jerusalem's National Palace Hotel on the "tax war" that had been taking place since 20 September in the West Bank village of Beit Sahour. One hour before the conference, that would have begun to penetrate the communications barrier surrounding the besieged village, was to begin, the Israeli army declared the entire area surrounding the hotel to be a closed military zone, thereby cordoning off public discussion as well as disclosure of the events ravaging the villagers of Beit Sahour. The simultaneous arrest of Dr. Riad Malki served as an additional stratagem in this military cordon designed to interrupt and ultimately foreclose alternative information, its political analysis, and their popular dissemination.

The forcible obstruction of communication, its coercive appropriation and the attempted reformulation of the organizational narrative of the Palestinian resistance has been a crucial and escalating dimension of the Israeli political and military response to the Palestinian intifada since it began on 9 December 1987. It targets as well cooperative efforts between Palestinians and progressive Israelis. Michel Warshawsky, for example, the head of the Alternative Information Center, was recently, following a long trial, sentenced to a non-parole jail term of 20 months and ten months suspended arrest, with a fine of 10,000 NIS (US $5,000). His crimes were providing typesetting services to "illegal organizations" and holding printed material belonging to "illegal organizations." This printed material was a booklet for Palestinian activists that included guidelines of how to resist torture and interrogation by the secret service.

A critical and contested institutional site in this struggle over the control of the communication of information is the Israeli prison apparatus which, during the two decades of occupation, from June 1967, and preceding the intifada, had

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The Ketziot detention camp also known as Ansar 3

housed, for varying periods of incarceration, more than 20,000 Palestinian political detainees. In the first two years of the intifada this number has increased dramatically, with over 40,000 arrests, putting great pressure on the prison facilities themselves and necessitating the opening of new prison camps such as Ansar 3 (Ketziot) in the Negev desert, and detention centers like Dhahriyya, just outside of Hebron, and even using the militarily-closed Palestinian schools as temporary holding stations.

As a penal system, one of whose major targets is identified as the Palestinian people and its resistance to Israeli military occupation (and indeed the prison population in Israel can be largely distinguished as Israeli criminal and Palestinian political prisoners), Israeli prisons function on multiple levels not only to incarcerate individuals, but to destroy the collective and organized Palestinian popular resistance and its networks by isolating and containing alternative information systems through the imposition and attempted enforcement of bureaucratic, disciplinary and "official" channels of information and discursive exchange. From the inaccessible location of Ansar 3 in the Negev desert, to conditions of detention that include holding the prisoner incommunicado, with no contacts with lawyer, Red Cross representatives, or family, for the first 18 days of arrest, to the practice of administrative detention that allows for the holding without charge of a suspected dissident for six months (renewable indefinitely), to the significance of the confession as constituting sufficient evidence in and of itself to convict the detainee, to the practice of torture during interrogation and the use of informers (*asafir*) inside the prison cells as a means of extracting information and undermining prisoner political solidarity, the Israeli prison apparatus is constructed in such a way as to perform the combined functions of both repressive and ideological state apparatuses.

In prison, however, and within the framework of the collective work of political opposition, counter-strategies of communication, instruction, mobilization and organization are exercised and developed as critical weapons in the struggle itself. The theoretical and practical reconstruction of the site of political prison as a "university" for the resistance, a training ground for its cadres, is more than a literary topos or metaphoric embellishment in the writings and "prison culture" of political detainees. This holds true whether in occupied Palestine, South Africa, El Salvador, Northern Ireland or in the United States. Examining the relationship, for example, between the policing system in Britain with its various definitions of criminality and the recent history of legal and cultural constructions of English national identity through and against the laws promulgated with respect to immigration, Paul Gilroy has argued in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* that "new kinds of struggle can be solidified by the very institutions which are deployed to answer their demands and to channel them into fragmented solutions: into separate cases and claims." Similarly, in his reading of "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression,"

Cornel West has described the processes whereby this deployment of what are presented as "structural constraints" are reconstrued through the analytical practices of political engagement as "conjunctural opportunities." The institutional and physical restriction of political detention are thus forcing the outlines of the dichotomizing definitions of a separatist relationship between communication and cultural practices on the one hand and institutionalized state repression on the other. They also establish the discursive grounds for launching a frontal challenge to a dominant history of the state-sponsored suppression of internal and external dissent.

Walid al-Fahum is a Palestinian lawyer in Israel and the Occupied Territories and an advocate for Palestinian political detainees. In *These Chains That Must Be Broken,* a collection of writings originally published in newspapers between 1974 and 1977 on the prison situation under Israeli occupation, al-Fahum, who began his legal work in the offices of the Israeli woman lawyer and activist Felicia Langer, recounts an exchange that he had with one of his clients. The two men, from their respective positions, are discussing the unsatisfactory prison conditions and the lawyer comments to the prisoner on the excessive crowding inside the cells. The crowding is so extreme, he says, it is as if the detainees were "packed in like sardines in a can." The prisoner, however, responds, "No, my friend," and when al-Fahum expresses surprise at his answer, the prisoner adds, "we are like matches in a book of matches." Asked to explain, he replies, "Sardines are arranged next to each other in the can with the head of one next to the tail of the other. With a book of matches, the heads of all the matches are facing in the same direction."

Al-Fahum, from outside the prison and despite his own political commitment, sees at first only the physical crowding of the prisoners. The prisoner, inside, discerns instead, through his own participation in it, the active ideological counter-organization of the prison population against the prison system itself. The dominant "communications frame" with its demand for objectivity, neutrality, and distance occludes, often even suppresses, the representation of alternative paradigms of resistance. "Popular insurrection," however, according to Don Pinnock in his study of "culture and communication" in South Africa in the 1980s, "demand[s] acute peripheral vision."

"We organized ourselves collectively because the prison officials wanted us to remain as isolated individuals."

While the dominant autobiographical tradition in western literary history has valorized the personal trajectory, the *Bildung* or socialization of the individual, prison memoirs, and in particular those of political detainees, reformulate that trajectory as a collective and contestatory response to the ascendant forms of social and cultural domination that require privatization, isolation and atomization of the individual-oriented social system. "We organized ourselves collectively," writes Nizam Aboulhejleh in his *Portrait of a Palestinian Prisoner,* "because the prison officials wanted us to remain as isolated individuals." Two Palestinian prison memoirs from the pre-intifada period outline some of the issues at stake in political organization within and against the occupation prisons, forms of organization that served critically to maintain the resistance in a period of disarticulation. One, *Cell Number 7,* is a story of apparent failure, the other, *Cell Number 704,* a history of success, but both are major contributions to a larger strategic narrative.

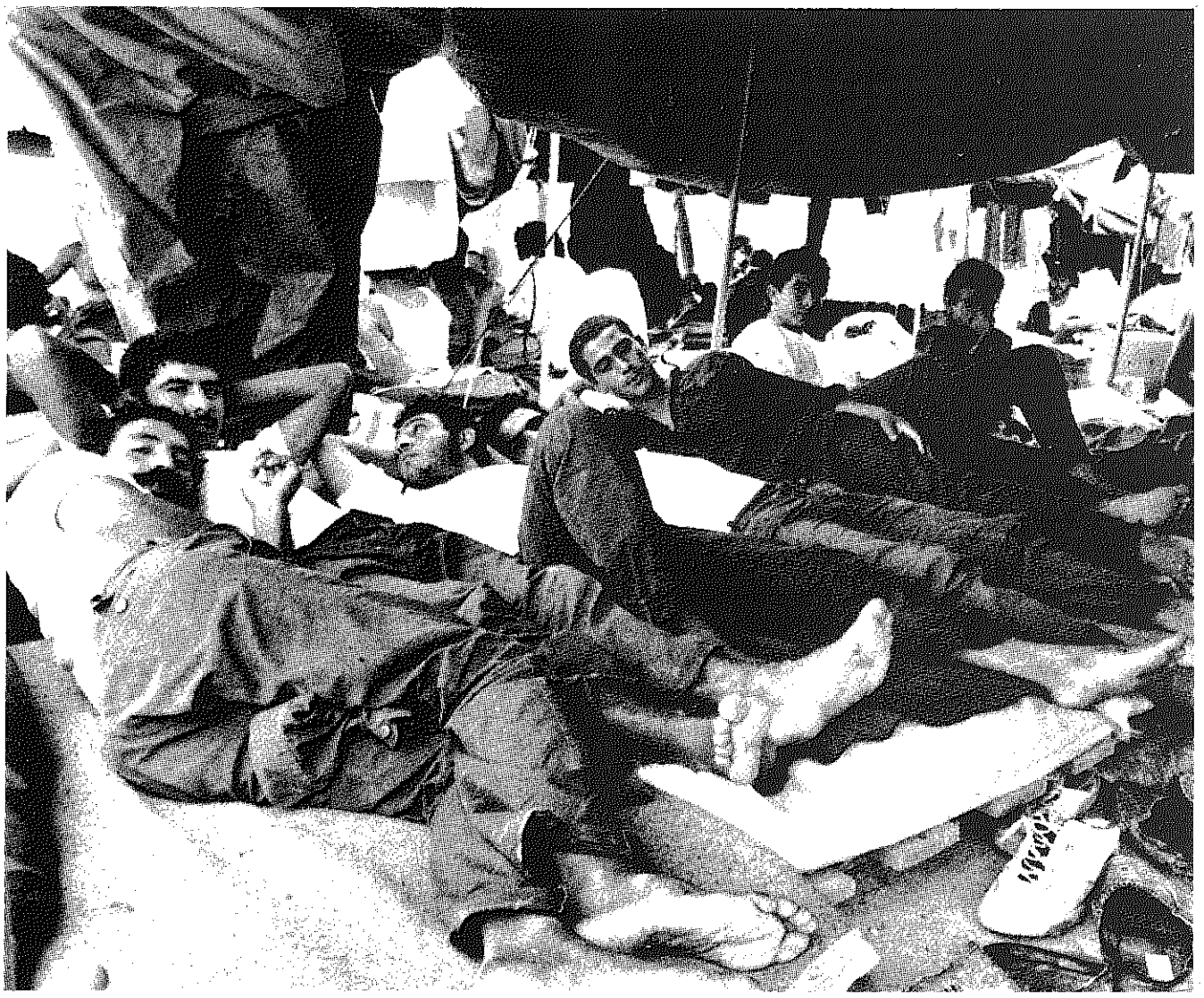
"The rattling of chains reached our ears, and then silence fell on our cell." Fadl Yunis's prison memoir opens with the transfer of himself and a group of his comrades from Asqalan prison to Gaza Central prison. In Asqalan Yunis had been among the organizers of a hunger strike and it was the intention of the prison authorities to undermine the solidarity of the prisoners by removing the "hotheads," or *ru'us hamiya,* the reputed leaders of the prisoners' struggle. But it is only later that Yunis and his fellow transportees understand the nature and full extent of these machinations. When the narrative of *Zinzana raqm 7* (*Cell Number 7*) begins, the prisoners are still in their cell at Asqalan, about to be shackled in preparation for the move. The fetters which bind the prisoners two by two make it difficult for them to move together, to walk in step with each other. The chains of bondage enforced by the prison system are still another manifestation of the regime's effort to undermine the prisoners' own forms of solidarity.

> The gatekeeper fumbled with the heavy prison door and opened it in front of us. Several soldiers led us outside with several others walking behind us. One soldier opened the door of the "busta" (the cell used to transport prisoners) and with difficulty Adnan and Abdallah walked over to it, followed by Hasan and Muhammad. Musa and I tugged our heavy possessions toward the door of the "busta." With his left hand Musa lifted up his belongings and put his foot on the first step; lifting his right foot, he had to yank roughly at mine which I then lifted and placed it next to his, so that he got to the second step. I pulled myself and my belongings up with great difficulty while the sergeant shouted meanly, "Hey … Hey…" It wasn't easy to make my steps match with Musa's…

The lessons of solidarity and collective action that had been learned in Asqalan prison are out of place in Gaza, which was reputed in the prison system at that time

for its lack of prisoner interaction, and Yunis wonders to himself on arrival, "Is this the way they're going to treat us, and will we remain silent like these others are silent?" Adnan, Abdallah, Hasan, Muhammad, Musa and Adel (Yunis's name in the narrative) adopt instead a policy of organization amongst themselves and a strategy of passive resistance in order to secure the minimum comforts they require – such as some fresh air for Musa who suffers from asthma. Even this minor resistance is met by the intransigence of the prison guards and their superiors and two of the prisoners' number are transferred to another cell. The effort to divide the prisoners against themselves is endemic to the prison system, and in Gaza prison it is effected even in the questions put by the interrogators who seek to coerce the prisoners into accounts of themselves that would be consonant with the system's hierarchical and authoritarian narratives. "How many prisoners are in Asqalan?" "About 260." "No, 290. But how many of these would you suppose are hotheads?" Yunis' answer deflates the question: "All the prisoners..."

Paramount among the issues that confront the newly arrived prisoners is the question of whether or not to continue in Gaza prison the strike they had left behind in Asqalan. But what can six of them do alone? Nor can there be a strike if no one has heard about it. Public awareness is required. The focus of *Zinzana raqm 7* is the issue of collective organization, how to develop it and then the struggle to maintain it against the divisive pressures exerted by the prison authorities: separate interrogations, unannounced, for unpredictable reasons, at different times and of varying lengths; nights punctuated by screams of pain from the cell directly above; the use of female wardens to tempt the prisoners into laxity and collaboration; visits from the families who try to convince their sons to be less "troublesome," and, finally, the permission to receive newspapers – so that the prisoners can learn of the Arab defeat in the October 1973 War. While the efforts on the part of the transferees from Asqalan to organize the Gaza inmates ultimately meet with failure, the internal cohesion within their own group and their ability to integrate into that group new prisoners introduced into their cell remains steadfast and effective. But in Asqalan prison too, the strike has failed to achieve any of the prisoners' demands, and the Egyptian prisoners captured in the October War are looking forward to their return home as the result of a prisoner exchange. The Palestinians remain behind; as the guard tells Yunis, "You're not prisoners of war." But in his final words, Yunis reminds him, "I've learned, my friend, that you know now that Palestine costs dear."



▲ Ketziot detainees in the Negev desert

Like Fadl Yunis, a member of Fatah within the PLO arrested in 1970 for carrying out operations inside Israel and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment spent in various Israeli prisons, Jabril Rajoub came to know in the Nafha and Jnaid prisons the diverse features of the Israeli prison regime. Rajoub's prison memoir *Zinzana raqm 704 (Cell Number 704)* recounts too a narrative of struggle and collective organization. Although the political and cultural conclusions remain much the same in *Cell Number 7* and *Cell Number 704,* Rajoub's narrative, which relates events a decade later, comes to a different ending from that of *Zinzana raqm 7.* According to Samih Kana'an, another inhabitant of cell number 704 who wrote the preface to Rajoub's account, "'Jnaid' and its struggle framed a turning point, a very specific leap forward in all the preceding tactics of the struggle." *Zinzana raqm 704* tells the story of the "battle of Jnaid" in 1984 and the 33-day hunger strike in Nafha prison begun on 14 July 1980 that provided important lessons and precedents for the prisoners' organization in Jnaid. The chronology of hunger strikes (*idrab al-ta'am*) has acquired a conscious historical significance in the Palestinian narrative of Israeli prisons. Their succession and development articulates the progressive evolution of the resistance being formed inside the prison. For Rajoub, furthermore, as for the other political detainees, the "struggles and resistance of the prisoners of the Palestinian revolution inside the prisons is the natural extension of the struggle of our revolution and our people." His narrative proper begins accordingly with the beginning of the Palestinian resistance: "With the outbreak of the Palestinian revolution on 1 January 1965, led by the Fatah movement..."

Zinzana raqm 704 describes the transformation, through the hunger strike, of a collection of individual prisoners into a collective front challenging the sway of the prison system. The successes achieved by the prisoners' movement are due, according to Rajoub, not to any humanitarian consciousness on the part of the prison authorities but to the organized resistance of the prisoners. The Jnaid strike must itself be understood as continuous with the previous strikes in Asqalan and Nafha prisons, and each of these are seen as an active part of the larger history of the Palestinian resistance. Two prisoners, Ali Jaafari and Rasem Halaweh, were added to the list of martyrs of the resistance when they died from forced feeding dur-

ing the Nafha strike and, in the end, twenty-six prisoners were transferred. Meanwhile Nafha had become known as the "address of the prisoners' movement," the "academy for revolutionaries."

Jnaid, to which the detainees were later transferred, gave "new meaning to the words 'modern deluxe.'" Jnaid prison, opened in Nablus on 7 June 1984 to relieve the overcrowding in other prisons, was designed to house eventually as many as 1000 political and common law detainees. Most of its prisoners at the time were under 40 and serving sentences of more than ten years. The hunger strike, begun on 23 September, was a protest against the "modern deluxe" conditions provided to the prisoners by this new facility: overcrowding, deprivation of exercise, lack of medical services, poor food, use of gas to control the cells, physical punishment, lack of religious worship, and isolation from the outside and social contact. The organization of the hunger strike involved the organization of the prisoners and the prison itself. A central committee was formed and a working paper issued. The strike committee inside the prison further reflected the dynamics of the resistance organization outside and consisted of three members from al-Fatah, one from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and one from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Saiqa, however, refused to participate. Indeed, the internal structure and workings of the prisoners' movement, while it maintains its organizational connections with the configurations of the different factions of the PLO outside, is importantly conditioned by the fact of the prison regime and the need to confront its authority collectively. As Fadl Yunis had already described his own experience with a fellow prisoner from a different faction: "He was from Popular Front General Command and I was from Fatah, but we were members of one revolution." The Jnaid strike that ensued was to be, according to Rajoub, a "battle of the 'power of the will' against the 'will of power.'"

The isolation that a decade earlier had confined the resistance activity of Fadl Yunis and his comrades in cell number 7 in Gaza prison is transformed in Jnaid in 1984 into an extensive and effective network, drawing on the now developed history of hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners and penetrating both inside the prison and across prison walls. Participating in the strike were 678 prisoners who succeeded in mobilizing support through letters, lawyers and news agencies, not only in the town of Nablus, but throughout the Occupied Territories, in Israel and abroad, and enjoining solidarity strikes in Hebron, Nafha, Asqalan and Ramla prisons.

As Mario Hector wrote from death row in a Jamaican prison, "the free flow of letters is crucial to the intelligent and calculated struggle for life on the Row." For Hector, however, a "criminal prisoner" imprisoned for a murder that he did not commit, the emergence from a private grievance to a politicized resistance came gradually, until "during daily discussions through the ventilators with these brothers, the need for an organized struggle group in the prison to keep the struggle alive and unify the prisoners' common objectives under an organized system of struggle arose." The prisoners' struggle, is necessarily a collective one and as such transgresses the barriers and definitions described by the state and its social orders. The political threat posed by that struggle to the state is the success of an alternative social organization and popular communications systems that would challenge the dominant historical narrative.

Jabril Rajoub's narrative is structured then by the three consequential stages to the Jnaid hunger strike: first, preparation for the strike; second, the strike itself; and then, consolidation of the organization. The Jnaid hunger strike, begun on 23 September 1984, ended twelve days later, on 4 October, with the capitulation of the prison authorities to some of the prisoners' demands. And although the system later refused to follow through on many of the promises and agreements made to the hunger strikers, the prisoners' movement had emerged decisively as a powerful counter-organization to the prison system itself. Rajoub was released from prison in the May 1985 prisoner exchange, only to be redetained without charge in November of that same year (the fate of many of the exchanged prisoners who chose to remain in Israel or the Occupied Territories) and held in solitary confinement. His new hunger strike there again elicited widespread support and the Campaign to Free Jabril Rajoub that was formed at the time eventually became the Committee Confronting the Iron Fist. Rajoub, as it would happen, was also among the first deportees to be forcibly removed by the military authorities from the Occupied Territories over the border to southern Lebanon in the early months of the intifada.

"We will teach

them a lesson.

We will break

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even if we have to

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for two months."

The prisoner exchanges in 1983 and 1985 between the state of Israel and "intermediaries" for the PLO released several thousand Palestinian political detainees from Israeli prisons and detention centres. The prisoners, many of whom were permitted to return to their homes and thus to remain within the Occupied Territories (although subjected to persistent harassment, rearrest and even assassination), brought with them their "prison culture": strategies of resistance elaborated, not only organizationally, but culturally as well, in memoirs, poetry, drawings and stories of organized cultural opposition against a state system of political detention. Political literature flourished again, now "beyond the walls." A new corpus, a genre defined less by formal criteria than by historical circumstances and political exigencies, was constituting itself. The prisoner exchanges, however, had the further effect of decapitating the leadership and dismantling the resistance inside the prison – a consequence that may help to explain why these prisoner exchanges were managed in the first place. Palestinian political detainees inside Israeli prisons had been remaking the resistance within the walls, a resistance that was in turn mobilizing the popula-

tion outside in support of its hunger strikes, work stoppages and protest actions demanding improved conditions, if not release. But as Ehud Ya'ari goes so far as to argue in the article, "Israel's Prison Academies," "The uprising's Unified National Command [known to Palestinians as the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU)], which has steered the intifada by means of periodic handbills, is constructed along the same lines as the special committees formed by the Palestinian security [sic] prisoners."

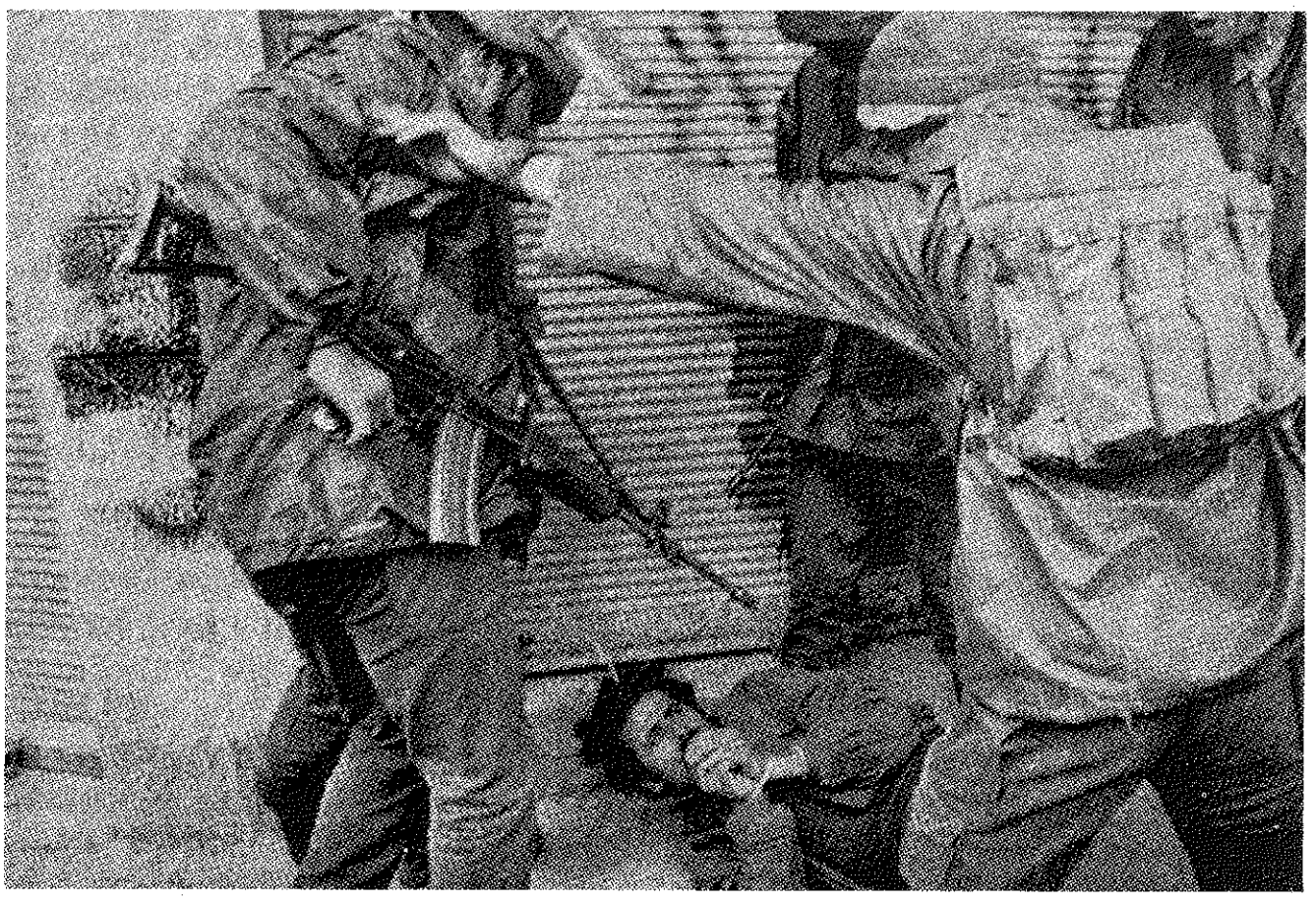
Palestinian universities and schools in the Occupied Territories have, since December 1987, been militarily closed more often than they have been open. Indeed, in order to accommodate the massive numbers of detained protesters since the beginning of the intifada, the Israeli occupation authorities have for certain periods used the closed schools as makeshift prison centers. The threat that prisons and universities pose to the state if not properly policed or effectively disciplined is told, for example, in a short story, published in May 1989, by the Israeli Matt Nesvisky. "The Game's Up" relates a Navy frogman attack on a boat moored in international waters off the coast of Israel. None of the commandos involved in the operation know what they will find there. "Military intelligence hasn't determined if it's drug-smuggling, gun-running, white-slavery or terrorism. But we do know gambling is a front for something big and our job is to find it. Any more questions? Okay, men, after me – and good luck." The attack is carried through successfully and the ship's gamblers are "herded into the central lounge." But there is still the locked door below deck. This is then opened with plastic explosives and the Israeli frogmen confront there 40 West Bank pupils and their teacher. "' I suspected as much!' Bar-Barian snorted. 'A clandestine matriculation class! In the name of the Civil Administration, I hereby arrest you for illegal education.'"

With the Palestinian schools and universities militarily closed, despite international accords recognizing education as a basic human right, and with many of the schools transformed into prisons, the task of the education of Palestinian youth was assumed, in significant part, by the popular committees. This "popular education," or *al-ta'alim al-sha'abi,* which included not only the basic skills necessary to pass the *tawjihi,* or Jordanian secondary school leaving examination, but a Palestinian nationalist content as well, was itself declared by the Israeli government to be "illegal education" and the teachers and students who were discovered and caught promulgating and practicing it were in their turn arrested and detained. The educators were seen to constitute a serious danger to the sway of Israeli dominion. In Ramallah, for example, according to a report published in the "irregular" journal *Finus* in July 1989, there were over 600 students enrolled in these popular education schools, and in the nearby village of Birzeit, 150 students and pupils had completed eight months of schooling, "a clear indication of the intifadist determination to continue and to realize the potentials of the intifada to transform the very life of the mass of the people."

Critical to the grounded development of the intifada and its persistent continuation, even escalation, have been the emergent infrastructural and social organizational networks of which popular education is a part. These networks are established at various levels, from the coordinating direction of the the UNLU (with its equal representation of all factions from within the PLO, Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Communist Party, and including a representative of the Islamic movement), to the "popular committees" created at the local and grassroots level in towns, villages, neighbourhoods and refugee camps to facilitate the distribution of health care, agricultural production, education and labor activities.

Instrumental in the constructive interaction of these several political and social arrangements have been the communications networks that include the transmissions between the Occupied Territories and the organizations in the international community. Among these the most distinguished is perhaps that of the *bayanat,* or communiques in leaflet form disseminated regularly, every ten days to two weeks, by the UNLU. These contain reports on general developments in the different aspects of the intifada, political analyses, solidarity messages, and specific instructions for general strike days, planned actions, etc. As a critical archive in their own right, these *bayanat* represent the political and strategic intersection, as a communications weapon, of "form" and "content." Even as they issue, and are reproduced and passed from hand to hand, circulating in tactically determined ways that challenge the officially sanctioned channels of communication, they chronicle the theoretical and political development of the intifada as a resistance struggle. According to Yusuf Mustafa, in his study of the *bayanat* in *Finus,* "A Reading of Specific and General Goals and Slogans of the Intifada":

> In the course of its continued development the intifada has sharpened the specific slogans that the masses of the Palestinian people aim to achieve and that are expressed in the announcements of the Unified National Leadership. These slogans reflect the concerns of the different factions and strata of the people and the fact that they are not limited to one group or another gives them their comprehensive character. Their reflection of different grievances is expressed in such political slogans as "End the Emergency Regulations," and "Withdrawal of the Army from the Occupied Territories," or economic slogans such as "Stop the Payment of



▲ Israeli troops in occupied Gaza

"No taxation without representation."

Taxes," and other demanded goals, that call to "Close the Prisons" or that are connected to the educational institutions and the holy sites, etc. This is what brings the people to mobilize around these slogans and to struggle, even in the face of death, for their realization. The concerns of all the factions are clearly emphasized in these slogans without ever forgetting the general goal. That general goal, however, was not altogether clear or pronounced in the first days of the intifada, but varied according to the points of view on the correctness of what was proposed by the general slogan. The slogans articulating demands, however, are the goals around which the different points of view encounter the national forces and all the factions of the Palestinian people.

Mustafa's reading of selected *bayanat* begins from the early days of the intifada and examines the evolving critical relationship formulated in these texts between the levels of the general and the specific and their strategic importance in establishing and maintaining the Palestinian struggle as a collective enterprise.

The effective and systematic use on the part of the intifada of alternative communications structures to reorganize the popular social formations and collective strategies of resistance has in turn elicited from the Israeli occupation authorities a series of attempts, both discursive and coercive, to penetrate and intercept the networks of the emergent counter-discourse. Such attempts have included, for example, the use of an isolated Palestinian editorialist, a "monologist" whose writings in the pages of the right-wing Israeli newspaper *Maariv* are analysed and sharply critiqued by Afif Salim in his *Finus* article, "Those Who Have Fallen into Cooperating with Zionist Propaganda," as the calculated manipulations by the authorities of a self-constructed and individualized "native informant" in order to contradict the collective project of the intifada. Similarly, as Salim Tamart has described in a forthcoming article, "Eyeless in Judea," the Israeli government has, in its now infamous "leaflet war," sought to appropriate and deflect the intifada's concerted counter-hegemonic means of communication through the production and distribution of counterfeit leaflets that, even while imitating, at times anticipating by having intercepted preliminary transmissions of the proposed communiques between the Occupied Territories and the PLO in Tunis, the style and format of the UNLU's authentic *bayanat,* seek to countermand and abort the directives and goals of the intifada and insinuate factional dissension and sectarian contradictions into the organized objectives of the popular mass uprising.

This effort on the part of Israel both to penetrate and to capture the uprising's popular communications and cultural system, appropriating thereby its networks and deforming its political discourse and its operational messages, also functions through the military occupation's creation of extended militias of collaborators. These collaborators, as many as 5000 according to the *New York Times,* are drafted, armed and paid by the Israeli Shin Bet, and have in recent months been the target of organized reprisals from the Palestinian populace, some spontaneous but most coordinated by the uprising's leadership. The collaborators are used by the secret police to gain substantial information about the plans and projects of the uprising as well as to identify members of its leadership. According to a report in *News from Within,* published by the Alternative Information Center, "Without the collaborators, the 'wanted lists' [of leaders] would not have existed and there would have been no meaning to the army's 'initiated actions.'" While the many reprisals, including assassination, against the collaborators have been much publicized and self-righteously condemned by the US media and administration spokespersons in particular as evidence of the internal disintegration of the uprising, *News from Within* goes on to argue the contrary, that "killing is the last step in a long line of efforts to convince the collaborators to sever their connections. The aim is to bring the collaborators back from their bad ways. First, the suspect is warned. Then they are beaten or their property is damaged. Sometimes the family is approached with the suggestion that one of its heads take the responsibility of improving the collaborator's behavior. Only when there is no other choice do they kill." And according to an Israeli journalist from *Ha'aretz,* Ron Kislev, "With every assassination, the flow of information that streams to our security forces dwindles" (13 September 1989).

Especially significant in Israel's formation of these marauding bands of collaborators is the conscription, through threats, bribes, physical coercion and promises of early release, of informers (or *asafir,* as they are called) from amongst the Palestinian detainees inside the prisons. Such conscription ultimately designates two levels of operation: first, to interrupt the organized clandestine dissemination of political education within the prisons, and second, to create a fractious "ally" within the ranks of the uprising "outside."

> We will teach them a lesson. We will break Beit Sahour, even if we have to impose a curfew for two months.
>
> Yitzhak Shamir,
> Israeli Defense Minister

> No taxation without representation.
>
> Beit Sahour residents

The example of the small town of Beit Sahour, just outside of Bethlehem and with a population of approximately 12,000, mostly Christian inhabitants, that was besieged by the Israeli army for six weeks, ostensibly to enforce the collection of unpaid taxes, recapitulates in large the lesson of "prison culture" as a strategy for countering the occupation. According to Don Pinnock, writing about the 1980s South African context, "Popular communications systems – those means by which information and symbols are communicated – also transmit social *patterns* and are, themselves, a social relationship." The permanent curfew and the cordoning off of the town of Beit Sahour imposed by Israeli occupation authorities attempted to

interrupt those "popular communication systems" and the "social pattern" and "social relationships" that they transmit, both internally and in connection to an outside world. The statement distributed by the IDF to the inhabitants of Beit Sahour following one month of military siege and unyielding popular resistance evidences this intent. On the one hand, the military sought to interrupt the collective program of the town:

> There are quite a number of residents who are worried about the future, and they want to stop this kind of confrontation that brings them nothing but harm. However, a group of irresponsible individuals incite the inhabitants to break the law, in addition to certain elements from outside Beit Sahour who wish to gain opportunities for political profit from what is happening in the town.

By restricting access to the area, on the other hand, the authorities attempted to cut off not only food but external communications as well. The statement went on:

> The attention given by the mass media to what is going on in the town will soon disappear and the town itself will no longer have its name in the news headlines, just as the attention to events in the territories has decreased and no longer excites the world media.

Indeed, when one elderly woman whose house was being ransacked by soldiers suffered what was later diagnosed as "stress-related heart blockage," a soldier ripped the telephone cord from the wall in order to prevent the woman's daughter-in-law from calling a doctor.

For over a month, Israeli soldiers accompanied tax collectors through the town of Beit Sahour, confiscating the personal property of its residents to be sold as tax payment at auction in Tel Aviv. An estimated three million dollars worth of property was pillaged from the town by the military, well in excess of the taxes owed. A report by al-Haq, a legal aid service in Ramallah, to the state signatories of the Fourth Geneva Convention expressed grave concern at the human and civil rights violations being perpetrated in Beit Sahour. The report emphasized especially: arbitrary assessments, the militarization of tax collection, confiscation of third party assets, confiscation of identity cards, and the isolation of the area. The tactic of the "confiscation of third party assets" was, it would seem, designed in particular to disrupt the internal social organization and property relations of the town. According to testimony by the victims collected by the Arab Studies Society in East Jerusalem, when there was nothing in a house deemed valuable enough to confiscate, the soldiers insisted that it was not the "right house." According to the witness report of Habib Hanna Habib Kheir, for example:

> When the soldiers and taxmen entered my house, they seized my identity card, and checked my name against the list they were carrying. They did not find my name, but they found my father's name. They claimed that my father owned a restaurant in the city. They asked me to show them my father's house so I got into the jeep with them. We arrived at my father's house and entered. There, they did not find anything worth confiscating. So they told me this was not my father's house, although I protested that it was indeed the house. They told me that they knew my father's house, so I told them if they knew it, they could go there.

Similarly, if the person being questioned by the soldiers was discovered by them not to owe any taxes, the money in that person's possession was declared to belong to another person who did owe it. This too is reported by Habib Kheir:

> When they searched one of the rooms, they found 10,000 shekels (US $5,000) in one of the drawers and confiscated it. When they found that there were no legal reasons for confiscating the money, they claimed that the money belonged to my neighbor Elias Salsa. I denied that and told them that the money belonged to me and that they had taken the house allowance and asked how I was going to live after they confiscated the money. The officer said that they were going to investigate the matter and see. I was taken to the camp again and there I was given a receipt under the name of Elias Salsa.

While the Israeli military and tax authorities were thus systematically refusing to acknowledge, and thereby admitting their recognition of, the existing property, social structures and history of the town of Beit Sahour, the inhabitants were themselves transforming, under the occupation's institutional pressure, the traditionally separate social patterns into a strategy of collective resistance. For the Israeli government, it was not simply taxes that were at stake and had to be collected, but the exemplary history of resistance being written in Beit Sahour, a counter-history that needed to be intercepted. In the words of Yitzhak Rabin, "We will teach them a lesson. We will break Beit Sahour, even if we have to impose a curfew for two months." But according to the inhabitants of Beit Sahour, "They can come again. They can come a hundred times. We will not pay a single cent." In other words, "No taxation without representation."

Palestinian prison culture, both inside and outside the prison walls, is designing even now the liberatory possibilities of that representation. ◆

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INTIFADA INDEX

Number of Palestinians detained during the first six months of the uprising: **8,362**

Number of Palestinians imprisoned in Ketziot tent-prison in the Negev desert: **2,722**

Prison sentence imposed on Israeli soldier for killing a Palestinian resident of Gaza by firing nearly a dozen bullets into his stomach at point-blank range: **1 year**

Prison sentence imposed on Palestinian youth for throwing stones at passing cars: **2 years**

Sentences imposed on four Palestinians for throwing stones at passing cars: **8-10 years**

Sentences served by Israeli soldiers Ya'ir Nisimi and Dror Cohen for using a bulldozer to bury Palestinian Arabs alive: **2½ months**

From Middle East Report, *September-October 1988*