

# Goldsmiths Research Online

*Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO)  
is the institutional research repository for  
Goldsmiths, University of London*

## Citation

Lulu/Ajour, Ashan. 2019. Reclaiming Humanity: The formation of Revolutionary Subjectivity in the Experience of Palestinian Hunger strikers in Israeli Prisons. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London [Thesis]

## Persistent URL

<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/26876/>

## Versions

The version presented here may differ from the published, performed or presented work. Please go to the persistent GRO record above for more information.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Goldsmiths, University of London via the following email address: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk).

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated. For more information, please contact the GRO team: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk)

# **Reclaiming Humanity**

## **The Formation of Revolutionary Subjectivity in the Experience of Palestinian Hunger Strikers in Israeli Prisons**

**Ashjan Najy Ajour**

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D in Sociology

March 2019

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where I have to consulted the work of others this is always clearly stated.

.....

Date:

Ashjan Najy Ajour

## Acknowledgements

This thesis argues that subjectivity is a journey of self-discovery and self-transformation in the trajectory of freedom and reclaiming humanity. I am therefore indebted to the Palestinian freedom fighters who opened up their lives and subjectivities for my exploration of their voyage to the depth of human suffering for the sake of self-determination. I am thankful for their generosity and for the time they gave me, talking about their pains, hurts, loss, pride, love, hope, and victory.

Our deep conversations shaped and produced this research. I am grateful because they not only interacted and connected with me to recount their experiences, but also induced me to live a journey of self-transformation to form and reform my own subjectivity in the process. This journey began with existential questions about subjectivity and revolution and ended with my understanding that revolution is at its heart entangled with humanity. These relationships furnished me with reflections about the cultivation of genuine knowledge. In my engagement with my interviewees, I highlighted the question of empathy and discussed my approach which entails blurring boundaries between knowledge and humanity. The boundaries were disrupted because the research topic required compassion.

This thesis is also about conflict, pain, suffering, risk, and sacrifice for the cause of freedom. There were difficult times when various conflicts in my personal, student and professional life have greatly compromised my ability to continue the work of this project. I'm grateful for my participants who inspired me with their own determination and taught me that 'steadfastness', continuation and constant striving is the meaning of existence, and this carried me through the darkest of times. Nevertheless, producing a PhD is full of ups and downs, contradictions, frustrations, motivations, and losing the direction and finding it again. I learned one must keep going and I am very grateful to all of those who supported me.

I have incurred many debts to many people who contributed to my journey, and their traces can be noticed in my thesis and in me. First, I am deeply indebted to my main supervisor Alberto Toscano, who challenged me and brought the best out of me at the intellectual and human level. I deeply appreciate the generous time and energy he devoted to this project. He made an invaluable contribution to the shaping of my project and I owe him a great intellectual and personal debt. His exceptional support constitutes a model for the kind of committed supervisor I would love to be. I am very thankful for the space and freedom he gave to me for reflection and exploration which made my work with him stimulating, inspiring and enjoyable.

My other supervisor, Mariam Motamedi-Fraser, has been invaluable in the first and final year. I am grateful for her insightful guidance, beautiful words of encouragement and for the lovely and special moments I spent with her and her dog Monk. Thank you, Monk, for the amount of love I received from you during the supervision. This journey wouldn't have been possible without the support, challenge and guidance from my supervisors. I feel fortunate to have worked with two inspiring and committedly engaged scholars and good human beings who have kind hearts. I couldn't imagine having better advisors for this doctorate considering this emotionally demanding topic than Toscano and Motamedi-Fraser. The very nature of the work and my engagement with the interviewees has impacted my relation with them and transformed the traditional relation between supervisors and supervisees. Transcending boundaries were not seen as transgression in this case, but rather an expansion of the space of academic freedom and a humanising of the academic space in the process of producing knowledge.

At the sociology department at Goldsmiths I have the privilege of being part of dynamic research community and I appreciate many colleagues and staff for their support and ideas that inspired my research experience. Thank you to all my lovely peers and office mates at Goldsmiths who share their lives and stories with me and particularly Valentina, Vanessa, Alice, Samah, Sibillie, Vikki, and Dany. A special thanks to Bridget for her care and the friendly supportive environment she always creates for us. Thank you also Marsha Rosengarten and Yasmin Gunaratnam for your insightful feedback in my upgrade which helped me to advance my project, and I thank Nirmal Puwar and Alex Rhys-Taylor, and the NYLON research group who were of vital importance to creating shared spaces of sociological knowledge.

I would like to thank the British Council's Higher Education Scholarship Palestine (HESPAL) for generously funding my study. My sincere gratitude to Merna Kassis for her generosity and continuous support to HESPAL Scholars. In addition, I would like to thank my people at Brizeit University, especially Islah Jad, Rema Hammami, Muder Kasis who continued their support, guidance and love even after I finished my MA degree at the Institute of Women's Studies.

Thanks to Rona Epstein who helped me in the first stages of my PhD in editing my English and for the local Branch of Justice for Palestinians who put me into contact with Bill Kaye. I owe him much gratitude for his immense support and help in editing this thesis. He has been a guiding presence in the last year of my journey. I appreciate his care and the generosity with which he invested his time and effort in this project.

I appreciate a great many people whose friendship has sustained me over the years, and who have strengthened my work through inspiring conversation and dialogues. I can't include all the names because my experience has been incredibly rich in the people I met who offered me deeply touching friendship and warmed my heart whether in the UK, Palestine or world over. Thank you to every single person who came into my life during this period: Tamara Tamimi, Ghinwa Yaghy, Nadia Hajal, Ahmed Qatamish, Amani Sarahna, Neda Heneiti, Zeyad Amer, Adel Samara, Salam Hamden, Anwar Hamed, Jeannie Wright, Leticia Valles, Manal Timraz, Glynis Annette, Cecile Malaspina, Jeannie Wright, Teodora Todorova, Hella Marei.

My deepest gratitude goes to my husband and my partner in life, Ihsan Lulu, whose unwavering support, patience, and sacrifice kept me sane and safe through this journey. I thank you Ihsan for your unconditional love and for everything you have offered. I could not have been able to peruse my doctorate without you.

My children Tala and Kareem are the ones who kept my spirits up. Tala's beautiful smile and Kareem's glowing eyes maintain my belief that we have on this earth what makes life worth living. Their presence in my life has been an incredible reminder that there is a beauty and hope in this world even when it is most difficult to see.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my parents, my father Najy Ajour and my mother Hayat Atallah, who established my internal strength since childhood and urged me to follow my path and achieve my dreams even if it took me a world away from them. Sadly, the price is that they have been deprived of seeing me and their grandchildren over many years due to the occupation and blockade of Gaza. My warm thanks to my brother Reyad Ajour in Chicago, who constantly encouraged me to fight to be myself, and to my wonderful sisters Mawada Ajour in Dubai and Zekra Ajour and Tasaheel Ajour in Gaza, and finally my lovely brother Mohamad who sings for me on Skype one of my favorite songs *El-hob El-Hakiki* (the real love).

This work is dedicated to my city Gaza ... to where I belong ... to the rebellious sea and to the smell of oranges ... Despite the unjust wars and the harsh blows, Gaza is still able to love and resist. Those who will change history are the ones who continue to love despite their pain and wounds because they believe in humanity ... And as Darwish puts it ...

Gaza is not the most beautiful of cities  
Her coast is not bluer than those of other Arab cities.  
Her oranges are not the best in the Mediterranean.

.....

but

.....

the most worthy of love

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the subjectivity of Palestinian hunger strikers as shaped by anti-colonial resistance. Drawing on extensive in-depth interviews and ethnographically-informed methods, it explores the lived experience of former political prisoners who engaged in hunger strike, providing narrative and analytical insights into embodied resistance in the face of the colonial machine. The research explores the revolutionary transformations, practices, and discourses of Palestinian freedom fighters in their confrontation with the Israeli prison system. In the context of revolt against settler-colonial violence, the project traces out the formation of resistant subjectivity through a detailed investigation of the processes, techniques and transformations involved in the hunger strike, with particular attention to the way in which they challenge the Israeli Prison Authority's (IPA)<sup>1</sup> technologies of power, and deals with how prisoners experience and respond to the processes of dispossession exercised on their bodies. The research situates the hunger strike experience in the historical frame of colonized Palestine and in relation to the larger context of the Palestinian struggle and the Palestinian political movement in the post-Oslo period after the decline of the national struggle and the fragmentation of the Palestinian movement.

In order to theorize the specific formation of subjectivity in the Palestinian hunger strike, the thesis draws on Foucault's concept of the technologies of the self, and Fanon's writings on decolonization, emancipatory violence and 'humanity', in conjunction with Badiou's philosophical treatment of the notions of event, subject and fidelity. While critically combining these approaches, it also problematizes them from the vantage point of the Palestinian hunger strike. The methodology draws on qualitative phenomenological research methods as well as sociological approaches to 'storytelling' to do justice to the complexity of the hunger strikers' lived experience.

In conceptualising the subjectivity of hunger striking, the thesis traces its emergence not only in relation to the violence of Israeli colonial practices but also with regard to the counter-violence manifested in the act of prolonged self-starvation. It illuminates the complexity of a form of subjectivation that operates through the instrumentalisation of the body, understood as a means of reclaiming dignity and humanity by risking death and experiencing corporeal pain. The thesis argues that the hunger strikers, in their interaction with the dispossession of the colonial power, invent 'technologies of the self' to transcend the

---

<sup>1</sup> This is also referred to as the Israeli Prison Service (IPS).

colonial and carceral constraints on their freedom. This process of weaponisation of the body creates a capacity for transformation from a submissive 'passive' subject into a 'resistant' subject, in which the collapse of the body is experienced as generating a kind of spiritual strength. The thesis shows that the hunger strike as not only a political strategy for liberation but also entails a kind of limit experience. The thesis sheds light on the singularity of the participants' view of the hunger strike as moving beyond the political into a realm of 'spiritualisation' of struggle which profoundly defines their politics of resistance.

Although theoretically-informed literature on hunger strikes in Northern Ireland and Turkey exists, there is an absence of such literature about hunger strikes in Palestine. The study provides a first step towards filling this gap in the literature on anti-colonial resistance in Palestine by developing an in-depth account of the meanings, dynamics and experience of the Palestinian hunger strikes, while embedding the field research in a theoretical investigation of lived experience and subjectivity. It is the first systematic study of key features of Palestinian hunger strikes and also offers a critical contribution to theories of subjectivity in terms of thinking through the instrumentalisation of the body as a means of reclaiming dignity and humanity.

**The need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>2</sup> Negative Dialectics (Adorno, 1990).

## Dedication

Each flower has a tale to tell, and so does each dignity striker. The journey between white lilies, sunflowers, and daffodils is a manner of symbolically encapsulating the landscapes of my research and their interpretations. Each flower has a connotation deeply rooted in Palestinian culture:

(1) White lilies, expressively articulated in the Palestinian Poet Mahmoud Darwish's *A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies*, symbolize the enduring pain and tragic loss of Palestinian souls; a flower of pure transcendent love that blooms as the souls painfully fight against the chains fettering their freedom and restraining their humanity. Darwish writes: 'I dream of white lilies, streets of song, a house of light/ I need a kind heart, not a bullet/ I need a bright day, not a mad, fascist moment of triumph / I need a child to cherish a day of laughter, not a weapon of war / I came to live for rising suns, not to witness their setting/ He said goodbye and went looking for white lilies/ a bird welcoming the dawn on an olive branch/ He understands things only as he senses and smells them / Homeland for him, he said, is to drink my mother's coffee, to return safely, at nightfall'. From *End of the Night* (Darwish, 1967).

(2) Sunflowers, articulated in the song *Oh Freedom* by Fairuz (a Lebanese singer), symbolize freedom and emancipation; the revolutionary flowers of freedom that fighters aspire to. Fairuz sings: 'We're released, we're set free/ We've got out to the light/ We've got out upon the wind/ We've got out to the sun/ We've got out to the freedom/ Hey freedom you're like a firey flower, a wild child/ Oh freedom / Shout out loudly ...loudly/ Run in the fields merrily.../ Tell freedom that we've come/ Be happy, be happy/ Hey night! Hey love! Hey roads! Hey stones! / Follow us to the wild tree. Change your names if you can/ Change the colour of your eyes if you can/ Hide your freedom in your pockets and escape/ Escape to the light, to the wind, to the sun, to the coldness, to bright and forgotten threshing floors/ Escape escape escape escape'<sup>3</sup>.

(3) Daffodils, also named after the mythological Narcissus, symbolize hunger strikers' subjectivities in their path towards freedom; subjectivities that spring from within and signify rebirth, new beginnings and a longed-for spring. They represent a voyage into their depths to

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgOT\\_SipiiA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgOT_SipiiA)

discover resources of hope and strength to fight against the antinomies of their realities. On daffodils and sunflowers, Darwish writes in his poem *A Viewpoint*: 'The difference between narcissus/ and sunflower/ is a point of view: the first/ stares at his image in water/and says, there is no I but I/ and the second looks/ at the sun and says I am/ what I worship. And at night, difference shrinks/ And interpretation widens' – From *The Butterfly's Burden* (Darwish, 2007).

If this research is to be briefly visualized, it is a journey in the orbit of these three flowers. Narcissus is the strikers' path, the sunflower is the goal and destination, and the white lily is the flower of their souls.

These flowers are dedicated to the research participants who survived cruel battles and carried the resistance of their spirit to achieve their dream of freedom and emancipation. Their heart beats were louder than death.

## Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Hunger Strike Resistance: A Brief History.....	25
Chapter 2: Research in Action: Field-work and Reflection on Challenges.....	45
Chapter 3: Producing Knowledge and Understanding: Subjectivity through Lived Experience.....	68
Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework: Theories of Subjectivity and Subjectivation .....	87
Chapter 5: The Pre-hunger Strike Stage: The Dispossession of Humanity.....	106
Chapter 6: Reclaiming Dispossessed Humanity: The Decision to Hunger Strike .....	120
Chapter 7: The Embodiment of Humanity: Technologies of Self and Resistance in the Stages of the Hunger Strike .....	137
Chapter 8: ‘Strength’, Conflict, and the Body in Pain.....	159
Chapter 9: Self-Determination and the Struggle with Death.....	180
Chapter 10: Strength, Continuity and Steadfastness ( <i>Sumud</i> ) .....	197
Chapter 11: The Meaning of Victory, Sovereignty Over the Body in the Hunger Strikers’ Philosophy of Freedom .....	212
Chapter 12: Conceptualising a Limit-Experience: The Hunger Strike as a Near-Death Event.....	228
Conclusion .....	245
Bibliography .....	254

## Introduction

This thesis originates in the painful stories of Palestinian former hunger strikers, from long hours of listening to their accounts and interpretations. These one-to-one interviews generally occurred a short time after their release from Israeli prisons. The interviews were emotionally demanding for both me and them; this was compounded in my case by my meetings with their families and loved ones, which often took place while the strikes were ongoing. I was party to the family's pain and heartbreak, and my research kept generating unresolved questions about the subjectivities of Palestinians who confronted colonial power with their bodies. Despite my background as a Palestinian and keen awareness of the nature of repression we live under, I could not entirely anticipate the level of violence and human suffering in Israeli prisons<sup>4</sup>.

The political reality of life in Palestine drove me to engage in this research out of a sense of ethical obligation, sympathy and solidarity with the prisoners' cause. I witnessed the hunger strike and its political repercussions before starting my doctorate in 2014. I had noted the absence of academic studies on this phenomenon, and this too compelled me to research a neglected but to my mind critical aspect of the politics of resistance in Palestine. This thesis attempts to correct this neglect of the hunger strike in contemporary Palestine while providing an interpretive framework aimed at conceptualising hunger striking subjectivity. I advance an exploration of the discourse and embodied experience of the hunger strike while also making a contribution to theories of subjectivation by foregrounding the instrumentalisation of the body as a means of reclaiming dignity and humanity. The process of writing this thesis involved constantly revisiting and reliving the phenomenon as recounted by the participants. I struggled to rationalise and intellectualise the prisoners' suffering and pain. The difficulty lay in articulating what they experienced, particularly in light of their repeated claims that language could not adequately express their experiences. Munir Abu Share, one of the research participants, said 'there are things that

---

<sup>4</sup> Approximately 800,000 Palestinians have been arrested since 1967. The total number of political prisoners is 6500 since the beginning of 2018. This number includes 912 administrative detention orders, 1080 children and 133 women, 6 PLC members, 17 journalists. There are 700 sick prisoners, and 27 prisoners from before the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, including the longest-serving prisoners, Kareem and Maher Younis who have been in prison since 1983. See the report published by the Palestinian Prisoners Club and Addameer (31 December 2018) at Palestinian news and info agency: [http://www.wafa.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=6ekVkqa845197589379a6ekVkq](http://www.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=6ekVkqa845197589379a6ekVkq).

are not said but are wept'. In a number of the interviews with hunger strikers and their families many tears did indeed accompany our conversations.

Despite the genuine asset of being an insider researcher,<sup>5</sup> it is a challenge to be able to communicate my world with those outside the Palestinian context. It took time to develop the ability to step back, but in my third year I finally reached that point and began to write up my research. As I did so a further pressure developed to produce a body of work that does justice to the experiences of the hunger strikers and which could not be regarded as simply using their sacrifices for the sake of authoring a doctorate. I sincerely hope, therefore, that this project meets those concerns and it was this sense of obligation which maintained my determination to complete it.

This research is informed by an anti-colonial revolutionary humanism, most compellingly articulated by Frantz Fanon<sup>6</sup>, which is distinct from a liberal humanism centred on the idea of human rights. I learned from my engagement with participants that the hunger strikers' struggle is an existential conflict rather than merely a legal conflict. To frame this thesis in terms of a human rights approach would have made it impossible to incorporate or illuminate the hunger strikers' own views about their struggles for freedom and liberation. Due to the limitation of the thesis, I was not able to address how Palestinian revolutionary subjectivities and politics are undermined and excluded by a liberal discourse that perceives agents of struggle as oppressed victims and, accordingly, asserts that the eradication of oppression is to be sought through the adherence to, and advocacy for, liberal human rights. The political praxis of hunger strikers which confronts the colonial regime breaks with these hegemonic configurations of liberal politics that have worked to hinder Palestinian anti-colonial resistance<sup>7</sup>.

The participants' political formation and commitment to a form of liberation politics takes distance from post-Oslo agreement politics, which are characterised by a neoliberal rationality expressed in a state-building project. They represent a counter-model, one that continues to draw inspiration from global revolutionary movements and figures. Though contemporary Palestinian hunger strikes initially appear as individual acts, my study reveals a form of collective subjectivity driven by the continuation of revolutionary politics. Hunger

---

<sup>5</sup> I discuss my positionality in Chapter 2. I write from a position embodied in the space of settler colonialism and whose life is affected by the Israeli occupation. I'm an insider in the sense of a Palestinian with a commitment to the politics of resistance and decolonization, but not a prisoner, an organized political militant or a hunger striker.

<sup>6</sup> See *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Lee, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> A number of works have criticized the impact of NGOisation and liberalism on the Palestinian struggle (Dana, 2015; Hanafi and Tabar, 2005).

striking, which is about as singular and solitary an act as can be imagined, is in fact seen by the participants as the bearer of renewal of the collective political struggle and a way to maintain Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. They perceive their resistance as the result of a conscious individual decision as well as a representation of the Palestinian collective will.

The research examines how human bodies are used and experienced in anti-colonial resistance and looks at what determines this mode of radical struggle in the Palestinian case; what meanings do freedom fighters provide for their actions, and how do they constitute their subjectivity whilst living such painful experiences as extreme bodily pain and starvation. It also looks at how they attach different meanings and values to the concepts of life and death; how internal (ethical and political) and external (historical, contextual and ideological) factors interact in the processes of their subject-formation; and what the driving forces and motives are that lead to confrontation with, and breaking of, colonial structures of domination. Finally, it looks at how the decolonization processes investing mind, heart and soul feed into empowering Palestinian resistant bodies, and what modes of subjectivity are thereby produced. In other words, to what extent the hunger strike experience remakes the self and what modes of emancipation and transformation are manifested in it. These are some of the questions that my encounters with Palestinian hunger strikers have led me to explore.

### ***Illumination...***

A prison is a house of love, a house of wild desires and mindless jealousies. There passions are comparable in their intensity only to an impassioned devotion to an idea. Although the political criminal imprisoned for an idea, like the common criminal suffers and burns because of sensual deprivation, he burns from his idea as well. Yet the political prisoner has an advantage, however, doubly inflamed. While burning for or in an idea neither banishes nor mitigates other passions, it certainly outshines and outranks them. The political inmate is master of himself to the degree that he is devoted to his idea body and soul. (Milovan Djilas, cited in Segel, 2012: 133)

The above quote from the Yugoslav socialist partisan and dissident Milovan Djilas, with its metaphor of 'burning for an idea', is echoed in former hunger striker Hasan Safadi's interview with me:

Our resistance embodies our humanity... [which] lies in the idea of sacrifice for freedom. It is like the candle that burns and consumes itself for others... It lights the way for the other including you, you write this research so that you can see the road ... For us this is our humanity, to sacrifice for the other. Those who have gone away [the martyrs] did not take anything with them but they just sacrifice the self for the other.

But the exceptional act of hunger striking is revealed, through the interviews, as being more complex than simply an act of self-sacrifice for an idea of liberation. The hunger strikers' discourse around the sacrifice of the body is constructed in relation to the way in which Israeli settler colonialism aims at the elimination of Palestinian existence, both material and immaterial, and thus forms part of a broader trajectory of resistance.

My work doesn't idealise and glorify the act of self-starvation by political prisoners. Rather, it considers the human suffering and predicament of Palestinian political prisoners in the context of their agency over their body, understood as a means for gaining freedom. It reveals both the potential and the limitations of hunger strike resistance in the context of colonised Palestine and sheds light on the participants' own interpretation of their actions and the meaning they accord to them.

The hunger strike in the Palestinian case, in a uniquely brutal space and time, is a struggle for life and humanity. It is motivated by the desire to live, a desire for the rebirth of a confiscated life. Accordingly, hunger striking as a mode of resistance is a sort of 'return to life' in a revolutionary praxis where prisoners turn their bodies into weapons against the violence inflicted by Israelis on both their bodies and their souls.

The hunger strikers creatively explore new forms of subjectivity – new modes of living and thinking. They are not simply the product of a colonial power, but rather constitute themselves through a creative transformation that emphasises the agency of the self in its refusal of the imposition of victimhood. Mazan Natcheh draws an analogy between the Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi, who self-immolated in 2011,<sup>8</sup> and the Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli prisons.

Do you think it is logical that a human burns their body? Why do you think Bouazizi burned himself? Is it reasonable that a man burns his body? Because the pressure is great. He would not have burnt himself unless he felt that the pressure was more than his capacity. He found that burning is easier, burning the self was

---

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed Bouazizi died by self-immolation in 2011 in the street and his death catalysed the revolution in Tunisia which inspired a wider protest in Arab world. See (Ben Khelil et al., 2016; Uzzell, 2012; Pugliese, 2014)

easier than the reality he lived. Let's make a projection to Palestinian contexts. If we apply this to our reality, we find the hunger strike easier than the reality we live in.

However, a major difference between Bouazizi and the hunger strikers is that the hunger strikers are not aiming at death or suicide, but rather at resisting and putting pressure on the colonial power in order to liberate themselves. They use the only weapon that they have, their bodies. Natcheh declared:

Everyone who reads your research should understand that we don't love torturing ourselves. We tried many other means. We didn't reach this point without thought. We boycotted appearing before Israeli courts. We returned our meals in protest. We tried many ways... We even refused to take our medicines when we were sick. When these means did not make any difference, we decided to go on hunger strike.

For them the hunger strike is a death for life. 'I love life, I did not want to die' – this sentiment was repeated by most of the former hunger strikers I interviewed. Mohamad al-Kik:

Who said the hunger strike is a rational act? It is not rational at all, but it is produced through irrational conditions. Therefore, the equation is 'irrational + irrational = rational' ... something irrational was born due to the irrationality of the occupation practices against us. The Israeli crime led me to undertake the illogical thing. Do you think depriving me of my children and devastating my life and my work (as a journalist) is logical? Therefore, my persistence to go on hunger strike is not logical either. Yes, there is no sense of rationality residing in the idea of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. It is not rational to endanger our bodies (there is a probability to lose some of our organs), or to cause suffering to our families and children either during our starvation or perhaps death (as there is a probability to die). However, the irrationality of my hunger strike became a very rational act because I wanted to emancipate myself and achieve my freedom. Freedom is logic. All revolutions which have happened in the world prove that irrationality becomes something natural for emancipation.

In the hunger strikers' view their act is constituted in relation to violence, and the repressive technologies of power inflicted on captive subjects deprive them of normal life. Mohamad al-Kik again: 'By violence, they aim to dispossess us of our humanity. But on the contrary this violence creates our humanity... such humanity might take us to death. However, this risk of death maintains our humanity'.

The research participants describe the severe dispossession imposed on them as turning them into 'living dead' in the Israeli prison system. Ahmed Qatamish expressed this as 'time without time', to describe the phenomenology of captivity and how it confiscates the duration and future of Palestinian detainees. From the standpoint of the hunger strikers then, their action

is an act of restoring humanity. Munir Abu Sharar emphasised the human aspects of political struggle in the hunger strike:

Since the occupation is very inhuman, our response to occupation is very human. We are engaging in a huge human conflict and our humanity necessitates our struggle until the end. The whole experience is human from the moment of my arrest until my hunger strike, and I would even say since the moment of Zionist invasion to our land. We defend the sublime and noble values of our humanity and therefore our struggle is human.

Some of the research participants argue that they are engaged in a form of revolutionary humanity that emerges from the anti-colonial struggle to expose and uncover Israeli occupation practices, particularly the Israeli propaganda which turns Palestinians into “terrorists”. Al-Kik declared: ‘I wanted to show the whole world who the terrorists and racists are, and how our humanity is exploded at the hand of Israeli’s assault and repression’. He describes the humanity that is reborn out of the ‘inhumanity and racism of colonisation’ by emphasising the inhumanity of the occupation:

It is normal when we live under these conditions that we quest for our life and humanity, we quest for our subjectivity. When I live under inhuman conditions, I decide to reject dehumanisation. I want to expose the inhumanity of occupation, and by our resistance our humanity is reborn ... resisting racism and assault is a form of humanity.

The research participants articulate a form of humanism tied to love and sacrifice. Abu Sharar reported that he captured his humanity in this experience. He links this form of humanity with love for his homeland and political cause. Love is conceived by many hunger strikers as the engine of their resistance. As Ayman Hamdan observed:

Love is a powerful weapon for humans to use in resistance. If the human being does not love his homeland, it is difficult for him to resist. If we Palestinians don’t love our land, we will not defend it; if we don’t love our families we will not fight for them. I believe in my cause and I am still insisting on defending my land and my cause ... love inspires our fighting and patience.

Love is associated by the prisoners with hope. As Abu Sharar declared:

If we don’t aspire to hope we don’t need to torture our self with hunger strike. To maintain a hunger strike you live on hope. All our conflict with occupation is built on the hope to end the occupation and ... live in freedom without constraints. Therefore, all our lives are marked with hope.

In sum, this research introduces the participants' interpretation of their experience and illuminates the meanings they give to their embodied resistance. They emphasise the human dimension of their anti-colonial struggle which they regard as not only national-political but also universally human in kind. Accordingly, the thesis is centred on the dispossession of humanity and the hunger strike as process of reclamation. Furthermore, it seeks to elucidate the hunger strikers' own philosophy of freedom and the pivotal role within it of the weaponisation of their bodies.

## **1.Rationale for the research**

My academic background and interest in the question of subjectivity and resistance led me to this doctoral thesis. My MA dissertation 'Representations of Power and Knowledge in the Discourse of Liberal Women's Organizations' focused on the transformation of Palestinian resistance in the post-Oslo period from a feminist perspective. However, that discourse did not represent a case of emancipatory politics and begged the question of what alternative emancipatory political discourses and practices can challenge the dominant liberal discourse. I originally wanted to investigate the revolutionary practices and discourses of Palestinian 'resistance fighters', 'political hunger strikers', and 'martyrdom operators', to examine how they operate as empirical instances of anti-colonial resistance in order to explicate the dynamics of colonial power and anti-colonial counter-power. However, I soon realised that each form of resistance would require a separate treatment to allow detailed analysis. Although there is a substantial body of literature on martyrdom operators/suicide bombers (Abufarha, 2009; Araj, 2008; Asad, 2007; Hage, 2003; Pape, 2005) there is a lack of academic studies on hunger strikes, and in particular on Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli prisons. There are some limited narrative accounts in Arabic about the collective hunger strikes over the history of prisoners' movement, but I have not found any academic study devoted to investigating the lived experience of hunger strikers. I therefore decided to focus exclusively on hunger strikes, particularly given their prominence as a current form of resistance in Palestine. Moreover, whereas the martyrdom operation which appeared in the second intifada could only be studied at second hand, the hunger strike is a continuing event which could be approached through in-depth interviews with the former hunger strikers and their families, and also allows for ethnographically-informed research and the gathering of a wealth of information through the

observation of solidarity activities with striking prisoners, as well as discussions with their lawyers.

Although some individual cases of hunger strike occurred prior to the Oslo agreement to protest administrative detention,<sup>9</sup> they were few, scattered and fragmented, and thus did not form a significant phenomenon. By contrast, the extensive waves of post-2012 hunger strikes associated with protests against administrative detention culminated in a mass hunger strike in 2014 by around 100 administrative detainees out of a total of 700 in Israeli prisons. This had a significant impact on Palestinian society in general and the Palestinian prisoner movement in particular. I wanted to understand the revolutionary transformation that led the Palestinian prisoners to this action. The scale and significance of this phenomenon led me to raise questions about the production of subjectivity it involved; it helped to define a domain of research focused on studying the hunger strike phenomenologically and anthropologically, by attending to the words and experience of the human subjects who lived through this particular form of resistance. The subjectivity of hunger strikers is also examined here with regard to their interrelationship with different partners and adversaries: the Israeli coloniser/jailor, family and loved ones, political parties, and the Palestinian community and cause. My research traces this process of revolutionary becoming which overtakes political subjects and investigates the meaning participants give to this emancipatory process.

The thesis also tries to confront the fact that the hunger strike as an exceptional form of embodied resistance leaves unresolved questions around an 'unrecognisable' limit experience. This is a crucial methodological challenge raised by studying hunger striking subjectivity, which is made explicit by the hunger strikers themselves and which I have sought to do justice to in my research. This territory is now more familiar to me and I have come up with some significant findings, but it is by no means a resolved issue. Further, the research draws a detailed picture of the contemporary Palestinian reality from the vantage point of the hunger strike and explores how Palestinian politics broadly construed are reflected through the

---

<sup>9</sup> Administrative detention is a policy used by the Israeli authorities whereby Palestinian detainees are held without charge or trial for unidentified reasons, as justified by 'secret files'. The detention order is frequently renewed and this process can be continued indefinitely. See *Administrative detention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: A Legal Analysis Report*, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, report published November 2008 and updated July 2010. [https://www.addameer.org/sites/default/files/publications/administrative\\_detention\\_analysis\\_report\\_2016.pdf](https://www.addameer.org/sites/default/files/publications/administrative_detention_analysis_report_2016.pdf) See also *Administrative Detention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory between Law and Practice*, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Right Association report, December 2010. <https://www.oceansofinjustice.com/resource/addameer-administrative-detention-2010.pdf> See also <https://www.addameer.org/sites/default/files/publications/website.pdf>

experiences of human subjects in this form of embodied resistance. Through an engagement with individuals' experiences of hunger strike, the reader learns about significant aspects of Palestinian society and politics, situating these individuals in a collective historical context, revealing important facets of Palestinian life and foregrounding the nature and transformation of collective subjectivity.

There is much controversy, especially among participants in the Palestinian prisoners' movement, about whether the individual hunger strike is an appropriate and rational form of resistance in light of the deterioration of collective resistant actions. Some argue that it is an individualistic act of suicide,<sup>10</sup> others that it is a supremely heroic act especially in the absence of collective resistance. This debate led me to examine what determined the detainees to employ their bodies against the instinct of self-preservation and undergo the harsh experience of enduring months of prolonged self-starvation, by tracing the subjectivation process and focusing on the dynamics of the turning points and leaps that transform and structure that subjectivity. Israeli prisons have been a site of resistance since 1967 and even before (Nashif, 2008) and the hunger strike reflects the intensity of resistance, which entails a process of transformation. Hunger strikers escalate the confrontation into a revolutionary moment aiming to destabilise the structural relation between occupied and occupier.

The hunger strikers struggle for freedom, an end to their detention and the achievement of what they describe as a moment of 'victory'. I examine their concept of victory and situate it within the historical context of Palestinian resistance against colonialism which also includes 'revolutionary events', especially the two Palestinian Intifadas of 1987<sup>11</sup> and 2000<sup>12</sup>. In this way hunger strikes in Israeli prisons can be seen as a kind of captives' intifada. Indeed, in the discourse of Palestinian prisoners, the hunger strike is called 'the captive revolution' and also 'the battle of the empty stomach'. The prisoners choose to transform their bodies into a site of revolution. The body here becomes more than the material body, for the singularity of hunger strike becomes an emblem of Palestinian self-determination and the body of hunger striker a symbol of a communally-shared body politics.

## **2. The historical context of colonised Palestine**

The anti-colonial prison struggle and its captive community can only be understood by

---

<sup>10</sup> For instance, some people affiliated with Hamas voiced their opposition to the hunger strike of Mohamad al-Kik on the grounds that it is *haram* (prohibited) in Islam to hurt the body.

<sup>11</sup> See (Lockman and Beinin, 1989; Nassar and Heacock, 1990; Peretz, 1990; Hiltermann, 1993; Said, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> See (Salih, 2004).

positioning it in the larger context of the Palestinian struggle. The tactic of hunger strikes in Israeli prisons has a long history. The nature of these strikes has changed with the changing historical and political context and the mutations of Palestinian resistance, moving from collective action to improve conditions in Palestinian prisons, to individual lengthy strikes protesting the policy of administrative detention in order to achieve freedom – the latter sometimes coinciding with collective hunger strikes. The ‘political subject’ is understood here as being located within a party, a class, or a national liberation, but may not be in unity with them. Through the specific prism of the hunger strike, in its multiple states, I look into the experience of individuals in relation to their collective movement. This shows a collective dimension of political subjectivity mediated by political organisation, and Palestinian nationhood in general, but also foregrounds many of the stresses, tensions and contradictions between organisations and the individual subjects who belong to them.

Dispossession of their lands and their means of production and livelihood in the *Nakba*<sup>13</sup> of 1948 resulted in the expulsion of more than 750,000 Palestinians and the forcible Zionist takeover of 78 percent of Palestine. Palestinian society was largely destroyed. In 1967, the 22 percent of the remaining parts of Palestine – the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem – were occupied. 1982 witnessed the Israeli bombardment of the Palestinian resistance in Beirut (Ben Khelil et al., 2016; Gelvin and Gelvin, 2005, 2005; Pappé, 2004; Shindler, 2013). Palestinians have been striving to wrest themselves out of structural dispossession and destruction ever since. The generative loss is a primary element in the production of Palestinian collectivity, and the configuration of Palestinian political subjectivity. The subjectivation processes that emerge in hunger strike resistance can be seen as deconstructing and dismantling the structural moment of generative loss in order to create another mode of being, a moment that goes beyond loss and dispossession.

Research participants associate dignity and freedom with their anti-colonial resistance, treating it as an integral part of their humanity. Frantz Fanon<sup>14</sup> uses a similar discourse which argues that the struggle for freedom is to maintain dignity (Fanon, 1967). He argues that colonialism is a dehumanising process and suggests that the creation of humanism lies in the process of decolonial liberation. Fanon argues that liberation occurs at two interconnected levels: at the physical and material level, as an act of resistance to free the land from the coloniser; and at the psychological level to restore dignity and humanity and to free the self

---

<sup>13</sup> See (Masalha, 2012) and (Falah, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> See Nick, Rodrigo, ‘Palestine Through the Lens of Frantz Fanon’ (a 4-part essay) in (*Eutopia institute*, n.d.).

from fear and a sense of inferiority. The accounts of former hunger strikers stress the fact that the dispossession experienced in the Israeli prison system goes beyond the incarceration of the captive body and functions to painfully strip Palestinian detainees of their humanity.

Edward Said's *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Self-Determination, 1969-1994* depicts Palestinians as a people historically afflicted by colonial cruelty who have become vulnerable to loss and injury. Israeli settler colonialism perpetrates an injustice against a people deprived of all rights and turned into 'victims of victims'.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he depicts the Israeli state with its tragic history of genocide and persecution as dispossessing the rights of the people it displaced (Said, 1995). Drawing on Said's understandings of land and exile in *After the Last Sky*, Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano explore the relation between property and the experience of dispossession in their article 'Representing Palestinian Dispossession: Land, Property and Photography in Settler colony' (2016). The article tackles settler colonialism and the centrality of the property concept and offers a critique of the Israeli discriminating laws and judiciary system. From a Marxist and legal perspective, the two authors focus on the dispossession of property and the judiciary system, and compare the settler colonial condition in Palestine with white capitalist settlements like Canada and Australia. The article employs a case study of the Bedouin in the Naqab to investigate the legal discrimination against indigenous people and confiscation of their land by the state of Israel (Bhandar and Toscano, 2017).<sup>16</sup> However, this case doesn't fully represent the dispossessed and expelled Palestinians. The specificity of Zionist settler colonialism is not only a matter of dispossession of property and land but the expulsion of Palestinians from the land, giving rise to the decades-long Palestinian refugee crisis and suffering (Benvenisti et al., 2007; Brynen, 2007; Dumper, 2007; Salih, 2013). The right of return<sup>17</sup> for Palestinian refugees in forced exile is the basic demand for Palestinian historical rights (Weiner, 1997). Palestine for Said is a political and human experience that expresses the emancipatory logic of anti-colonial humanism.

## 2.1 Genealogy of Palestinian resistance and subjectivity

I start with drawing a general map of Palestinian resistance, from the *Nakba*<sup>18</sup> to the present day, by demonstrating how phases and subjectivities of resistance are built into the history of

---

<sup>15</sup> See also (Said, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> See also (Bhandar, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> See Noura Erakat, *Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process*, 2011 (جدلية) and Jadaliyya, n.d.). [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/445/palestinian-refugees-and-the-peace-process\\_caught-](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/445/palestinian-refugees-and-the-peace-process_caught-)

<sup>18</sup> These even form precursors to the 1936-9 Revolt.

resisting settler colonialism (Barakat, 2018; Salamanca et al., 2012; Sayegh, 2012). A particular form of resistant subjectivity arises from each phase and the events that mark the shifts from one to the other:

- Armed resistance (1960-1987): The post-*Nakba* national phase gave rise to *Fedai*, resistance fighter subjectivity and was distinguished by a guerrilla warfare strategy (Sayigh, 2000).
- First Intifada (1987-1993): This marked a fundamental turning point. It began spontaneously, independent of the leadership, and gave birth to the subjectivity of collective popular resistance and mass participation (Lockman and Beinin, 1989; Nassar and Heacock, 1990; Peretz, 1990; Said, 1989).
- Second Intifada (2000-2005): The Oslo agreement of 1993 eventually gave rise to the subjectivity of the martyrdom operator (Baroud, 2006; Salih, 2004).
- Armed struggle in Gaza (2009, 2011, and 2014): Three defensive wars in Gaza produced the subjectivity of the resistance fighter. It was distinguished by a collective guerrilla warfare strategy which seems similar to the strategy of the armed resistance phase in the 60s and 70s. However, the nature of the warfare had changed.
- The current moment of conflict (2012 to 2019) in the West Bank and within Israeli territory: This has witnessed individualised<sup>19</sup> resistant action characterised by lack of systematic coordination, including captive revolution manifested in waves of individual hunger strikes protesting administrative detention. It gave rise to the subjectivity of individual resistant fighters' outside the prison with the uprising's signature weapon being the knife. Inside the prison, the weapon is the body of hunger strikers which is at the core of the case study around which my research is built.

Although there is not only one subjectivity per period, we can identify a dominant mode of subjectivity within each. Accompanying these, there is also the emergence of different forms

---

<sup>19</sup> See my article about individualised Intifadas in *Alkhbar* newspaper (Ajour 2014).  
<https://www.wattan.tv/ar/news/115129.html>

of subjectivity shaped by liberalism, Islamic ideology, NGOs, Marxism, etc. Like any national liberation movement, the Palestinian movement is often divided and even contradictory.

The anti-colonial resistance and the confrontation between colonised and coloniser is manifested in a particularly intense form in the prison struggle. Incarceration is an integral part of the broader system of Israeli colonial repression (Nashif 2008; Alhindi 2000; Qaraqe 2001). My research focuses on the centrality of prison in the overall conflict, given that the prisoner's movement is a core part of the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. The struggle of Palestinians does not end with their imprisonment, but a new stage of steadfastness (*Sumud*) and resistance begins through the practice of the hunger strike. My intent is to understand the historical production of hunger striking subjectivity and what determines its existence in the context of ongoing political fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement.

## 2.2 The Palestinian political movement in the post-Oslo period

With the deterioration of armed resistance as a dominant mode of national struggle in the post-Oslo era, Palestinian fighters resorted to individual acts of resistance which were largely disconnected and unsupported by the various political parties and the wider collective politics. This shift to individual resistance was not only a response to colonial violence but also to the structural violence of the “peace process” era which left the Palestinians without a national resistance project to achieve their rights. It is in this context that the research is grounded. It shows the impact that the Oslo Accords and the Palestinian leadership’s political compromise have had on the possibility of continuing the armed resistance. I read this mode of resistance as stemming from the framework of the Oslo process which legitimated new forms of structural and symbolic violence against the Palestinians. This demonstrates the violence of non-violent politics<sup>20</sup> advocated by the state-building paradigm.<sup>21</sup> The collapse of the Oslo peace process<sup>22</sup> led to the current crises in the Palestinian national movement which is characterised by political deadlock, a paralysis of national institutions, political polarisation and division, and societal fragmentation (Dana, 2017; Ganim, 2009). This era sees the replacement of the political project of resisting the occupation by, *inter alia*, the project of state-building and Palestinian Authority (PA) neoliberal politics, NGOisation and dependent politicised funding, and PA corruption (Dana, 2015; Hanafi and Tabar, 2005).

---

<sup>20</sup> See (Allen, 2002). See also (Pearlman, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> See (Broning, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> See (Rynhold, 2008) and (Roy, 2006).

Joseph Massad's 'The "post-colonial colony": time, space, and bodies in Palestine/Israel' (2006) claims that Israel constituted itself as post-colonial state in order to render its present as a post-colonial era, yet it continues its settler-colonial project. The Oslo agreement aimed to transfer the oppositional relation of Palestinians to Israel but not the conditions of colonialism. Edward Said (2000) argues that the Oslo Accords fail to guarantee the establishment of a sovereign state, the return of refugees, the demolition of all Israeli settlements, the release of political prisoners and the end of checkpoints. As he wrote: 'no negotiations are better than endless concessions that simply prolong the Israeli occupation. Israel is certainly pleased that it can take the credit for having made peace, and at the same time continue the occupation with Palestinian consent' (Said, 2001: 25). In his book *Peace and its Discontents* (2005) he declares that the Oslo Agreement is a 'Palestinian surrender' and a 'Palestinian Versailles'.

Massad's 'Repentant terrorists or settler colonialism revisited: the PLO-Israel agreement in perspective' (2006) argues that the 'land for peace' formula which was the point of departure for peace negotiations was the first major concession of the PLO. Rashid Khalidi accuses the PLO of 'the failure to develop the organs of the PLO into the framework for a full-fledged Palestinian state' (Khalidi, 2007: 175). Yazid Sayigh's *Armed Struggle and the Search for the State* (2000) argues that the armed struggle served as an instrument for state-building and never transformed the military actions into strictly military struggle along the line of Vietnam and Algeria. He makes the point about the predominance of a symbolic and rhetoric dimension of struggle over a strictly military one in the history of the PLO. The PLO's orientation towards state-building thus shaped post-Oslo depoliticization. The Palestinian leadership could never really envisage a straightforward military defeat of Israel and contradictions developed between this statism and the revolutionary rhetoric (Sayigh, 2000). After the decline of the anti-colonial collective struggle and the current dead-end of the Palestinian national movement in the post-Oslo period, the prisoners' movement has witnessed a demoralisation of the collective hunger strike, especially since 2012, and the emergence of the individual hunger strike phenomenon. Issa Qaraqe<sup>23</sup> pointed out that Israel aimed to divide the prisoners and to nourish factional differences and disputes among them, and to a great extent has succeeded in fragmenting the Palestinian political organisations and hindering their ability to organise a collective hunger strike in the prisoners' movement (Qaraqe 2001). This

---

<sup>23</sup> See (in Arabic) Issa Qaraqe, *The Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Jails after Oslo 1993-1999* (Qaraqe, 2001).

led prisoners to resort to individual resistance, including since 2012 waves of individual hunger strikes which also coincided with some collective hunger strikes.

The tradition of hunger strike developed to become the ultimate weapon against the oppressive conditions<sup>24</sup> of political existence in Israeli prisons<sup>25</sup>. This supremely dangerous mode of resistance has led to the death of some prisoners. Their sacrifices are engraved in Palestinian collective memory. Hunger strike martyrs include:

- Abdel Qader Al-Fahim, who died in 1970 during hunger strike in Asqalan prison.
- Rasim Halaweh and Rasim Ali Al-Jafari, who were martyred during the hunger strike in Nafha prison (1980).
- Mahmoud Fritkh, who died during hunger strike in Jnaid prison in 1984.
- Hussein Obaidat, who died hunger strike in 1992 in Asqalan prison.

The first Palestinian hunger strike experience in the Israeli jails took place in Nablus prison in 1968, where the prisoners went on a three-day hunger strike to protest against the Israeli beatings and humiliation. In 1969, a hunger strike took place in Ramle prison that lasted for 11 days. The main reason for hunger strike is oppressive prison conditions. One of the demands of political hunger strike was stop calling the guards ‘Sir’ and to have to put their hands behind their back, and to revoke the humiliating rules of conduct imposed by the prison authorities (Nashif, 2008). Since 1969 and up to the present, Palestinian prisoners have declared hunger strikes multiple times, demanding rights that have been violated by Israeli prisons authorities. In this thesis, I discuss the recent individual and collective hunger strike (2012-2017) which coincides with the mass hunger strikes commenced in Israeli jails in 2012, 2014 and 2017. I contextualise these recent hunger strikes in terms of the Palestinian prisoners’ movement in the post-Oslo period.

#### 2.4 The field work in its historical context

I began my field work interviews in May 2015. In that year the individualised hunger strike was the prominent form of resistance, with waves of hunger strikes having increased from 2012

---

<sup>24</sup> The Palestinian prisoners’ resistance is an ongoing confrontation against these conditions of oppression. See ‘Palestinian Prisoners Under Attack’ (January 2019).

<https://samidoun.net/2019/01/palestinian-prisoners-under-attack-raids-in-of-er-prison-and-prisoners-resistance/>

<sup>25</sup> See documentary by Joanne Barker on political prisoners in Palestine in 2016: <https://vimeo.com/user34967691>

and continuing to develop to this day (March 2019). A few months before I started my research, the collective hunger strike in 2014 was halted without achieving a concrete result, as prisoners could not end the policy of administrative detention. However, prisoners continued to engage in individual hunger strikes and managed in some cases to achieve their release by reaching individual agreements with the IPA. The persistence of the phenomenon of individual hunger strike created the need to return to the field work in 2016 and 2017. During this period there was an ongoing debate in Palestine about the feasibility of this individualised resistance. The individual hunger strike phenomenon from 2012 gradually developed into a collective form, and in 2016 led to a factional hunger strike by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)<sup>26</sup> in solidarity with their member Bilal Deyab. Subsequently, in April 2017, 1500 Palestinian prisoners began an open-ended hunger strike, the ‘dignity hunger strike’, which had organisational support from all political parties. This collective hunger strike is a very important event for my thesis, providing an important counterpoint and extension of my investigation of the hunger strike as an individualised phenomenon. These developments in the field show that regardless of the debate on the feasibility of the phenomenon of hunger strike, these individualised resistances inspired collective struggle, and that the latter always remains a possibility, and shouldn’t be artificially separated from individual hunger strikers.

Each research journey aimed at investigating new dimensions which had emerged with the unfolding of the phenomenon. The first, in 2015, was to cover on a daily basis the second hunger strike of Khader Adnan, who initiated the recent waves of individual hunger strike. In addition, I went to interview former hunger strikers who had been recently released after following in Adnan’s footsteps with the success of his first hunger strike. There were debates about whether Adnan would again achieve his release as in 2012. Some people, including ones I interviewed, expected that this time the Israeli authorities might resort to force-feeding because of Adnan’s insistence on sustaining the hunger strike. In my follow-up of the media coverage of his hunger strike, and from my interviews with his lawyers, it was clear that he was encouraging others to raise the slogan ‘freedom or martyrdom’; his video while in the hospital saying ‘the hunger strike continues until dignity and freedom’ inspired his supporters. He became an exemplary figure of resistance and new hunger strikers from different political parties followed him individually. Meanwhile, the debates in Palestine about the individualised hunger strike revolved around the argument that it was not effective, since it merely resulted

---

<sup>26</sup> PFLP is a Palestinian secular revolutionary socialist organization which combines Arab nationalism with Marxist-Leninist ideology.

in releasing individuals who were simply re-arrested and ultimately failed to change the policy of administrative detention. This led me to examine why this phenomenon kept happening despite the criticism and the unfavourable environment and outcomes; moreover, it prompted me to consider the agency of resistance subjectivity in relation to the structure of colonial domination.

My second trip in 2016 was to follow up the PLFP collective hunger strike in solidarity with the individual hunger strike of Bilal Keyed who had been held in solitary confinement for more than a year in administrative detention after finishing a 14-year sentence. My third trip in 2017 was to investigate the mass hunger strike embarked upon by more than 1500 political prisoners in April and May of that year. This constituted a turning point in the history of the prisoners' movement in the post-Oslo period. It prompted wide-ranging international actions in support of the prisoners. These grew when the Palestinian prisoners' health was worsening and the IPA threatened to force feed the hunger strikers. The participants exposed the fragmentations of the political movements and the decay in post-Oslo institutional structures. In contrast to former hunger strikers from the 60s and 70s, their narrative illuminated a different period with different politics and introduced a different language.

The participants paint a vivid picture of the historical stage they are living through and their narrative exposes details that would not have emerged if we had simply explored the general political situation. In this sense, their stories shape their history and reveal the relationship between individual and collective and the public and the private spheres – between history and story. In addition to interviews with former hunger strikers, the research adopted ethnographically-informed methods to situate the hunger strike within the wider context, in particular by considering how Palestinian society outside the prison responds to the hunger strikes. This took in the level of public support, the debates over individualised resistance, the positions of political organisations and the Palestinian Authority, and the activities and advocacy work of human rights and prisoners' right organisations. In addition, I considered the impact of the international solidarity. By engaging in hunger strike, the striking prisoners brought attention to the harsh conditions they faced. The Israeli state does not want to be embarrassed in front of the international community, and the crux of hunger strike is to appeal for compassion and solidarity for the prisoners' cause through crossing the prison bars and actualising the visibility of the invisible. As Marwan Barghouti, who led the strike in 2017, puts it.

Hunger striking is the most peaceful form of resistance available. It inflicts pain solely on those who participate and on their loved ones, in the hopes that their empty stomachs and their sacrifice will help the message resonate beyond the confines of their dark cells<sup>27</sup>.

I have continually developed and revised my research methods to meet the needs arising in the field. My focus has been on political culture and lived experience. Understanding the subjectivity of resistance required an ethnographically-informed engagement in order to grasp what emerged out of such political praxis, without such a method, it would have been difficult to capture the hunger striking subjectivity in its historical context. This kind of research is a relational experience and involves immersion in the social context. It also positions the research participants within a collective context rather than isolating the individual from their social and historical world, thus hopefully providing rich and holistic insights into peoples' views and actions. As (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), the task is to document the culture, perspectives and practices of people in their settings. I don't directly observe the prisoners practicing the hunger strike in the Israeli prisoners, but I do observe the interaction of Palestinian society in the larger context with the dying prisoners in the Israeli jails. Wacquant notes that 'social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon' enables them 'to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do' (Wacquant, 2003: 5). The nature of my research, concerned as it is with a political praxis linked to deep human suffering, entailed human compassion, empathy and solidarity with hunger strikers and invoked critical notions of inter-subjectivity and relationality. In chapter 2, I reflect on my positionality as an insider researcher embodied in the colonised space and discuss my immersion in the context.

### **3. Conceptualising hunger striking subjectivity**

The research is more an exploration of a specific process of subjectivation and subjective transformation than of political subjectivity per se. It builds on Foucault, Fanon and Badiou's accounts of subjectivation and asks whether the political subject emerging from the Palestinian hunger strikes should be understood as collective or individual, and what processes and techniques are involved in the revolutionary becoming of Palestinian hunger strikers. I established a conceptual framework for my analysis and from this theoretical perspective I

---

<sup>27</sup> Statement published in *New York Times*, 17 April 2017.

developed the arguments of the thesis in the empirical chapters. In conceptualising hunger striking subjectivity, the thesis makes a general contribution to theories of political subjectivity, but its main objective is to contribute to the study of the Palestinian struggle by illuminating a one of its neglected but crucial dimensions and giving voice to the discourse of the hunger strikers and their philosophy of freedom and self-determination.

The investigation of my case study, which takes up the core of thesis, constitutes my key contribution to the study of Palestinian resistance. The thesis also contributes to the contemporary debate on theories of subjectivity, by exploring their capacity to illuminate the phenomenon of hunger striking. I show how theory can operate to illuminate a specific situation of domination. In particular, the case study allows me to critically appropriate Foucault's theory of technologies of the self. It also enables me to develop Fanon's thesis on revolutionary violence, as well as Badiou's account of political subjectivity, centred on his notion of fidelity. Without an empirical investigation, grounded in numerous in-depth interviews and ethnographically-informed field research, I would not be able to capture the phenomenon of hunger strike and the particular modality of resistant subjectivity embodied within it. The research questions explored in this thesis have a philosophical dimension, and some of the issues arising out of my methodology can be seen to present new perspectives on how to think about subjectivity and experience epistemologically. The hunger strike is an exceptional political event and throughout their involvement in it, prisoners constitute themselves as subjects. Subjectivity and experience are interconnected in that it is not so much the individual who has the experience, but rather the subject who is constituted through this experience.<sup>28</sup>

This engagement shapes the hunger strikers' 'revolutionary becoming' through their quest for freedom and emancipation. Their narratives provide powerful and diverse interpretations of their experience and subjectivity, and also incorporate the hunger strikers' self-reflection. The narrative character of this research reflects the way in which I frame the experience to capture the constitution of subjectivity and its transformation in the trajectory of hunger strike in term of stages, turning points, crises, decisions, etc. A methodological approach drawing on 'storytelling' and phenomenological research methods can help to explicate the trajectory of subjectivity formation and make sense of the lived experience of the hunger strike. I embraced a range of multi-dimensional approaches to explore the subjectivity

---

<sup>28</sup> For the distinction between individuals and subjects, see Badiou 2012.

of the hunger strikers. These approaches of storytelling, oral history, and structural analysis amalgamate and inform the data analysis.

I have identified a set of theoretical themes I used and developed in my empirical analysis. These mainly revolve around: subjectivation; technologies of the self; violence; the body and pain; culture/ideology; and the reclamation of humanity. These concepts and areas of inquirt helped me illuminate my argument on conceptualisation of the resistant subjectivity. Reclaiming humanity and dignity by employing the body in resistance is the process that brings these themes together. A discourse of humanity is central to the hunger strikers' claims and experience. The meaning of humanity is associated by them with freedom and dignity. I frame it terms of a process of reclaiming the confiscated humanity resulting from incarceration and dispossession. This is emphasis on dignity is indebted to Fanon's writing on the embodied character of anti-colonial resistance and humanism. As he wrote: 'For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all, dignity' (1967:43).

#### **4. The map of the thesis: chapter summary**

The thesis is structured into twelve chapters. A brief summary of each follows:

##### Chapter 1: Hunger Strike Resistance: A Brief History

This chapter reviews and analyses literature on hunger strike resistance and examines how various social scientists and anthropologists theorised this form of resistance. The review is divided into three main sections: The first on Palestinian hunger strikes in the post-Oslo period; the second on the 1981 hunger strike in Northern Ireland and the 2000-2003 hunger strikes in Turkey; the third explores the question of whether the hunger strike should be considered as an act of violence or non-violence. I conclude by showing how the existing literatures informed my own account and enabled me to draw up my own conceptual and methodological contribution in critical dialogue with them.

##### Chapter 2: The Research in Action: Description of Fieldwork and Reflection on Challenges

The first part of the chapter discusses the three rounds of interviews (2015- 2017) and methods of data collection. The research consisted of eighty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews, and combined ethnographically informed methods and observation of the context. In the second part, I recount my engagement with participants and discuss my positionality as an

embedded and invested researcher. I reflect on my immersion in the colonised space and the way in which this position informs my research and elucidate the manner in which my research processes are informed by feminist and decolonial approaches.

### Chapter 3: Producing Knowledge and Understanding Subjectivity through Lived Experience

This chapter examines my overall epistemological approach. I discuss the methods used to analyse the data phenomenologically and anthropologically and the theory on which my process of knowledge-making is based. My approach was designed to deal with the many aspects of the individual inter-relationship with the self/body, on one hand, and the relationship with the external world, on the other. The nature of the material means that these issues require more of a philosophical reflection than a traditional research method design. It draws upon practices grounded in phenomenological research methods, and explores how subjectivity can be best approached, while also draw on a multi-dimensional approach including storytelling, oral history, and structural analysis.

### Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework: Theories of Subjectivity and Subjectivation

Subjectivity is the concept most central to my research project and this chapter details how the empirical case is situated within a specific epistemological framework. I take a composite approach to Foucault, Fanon and Badiou to develop my theoretical framework about models of subjectivity and, via a reflection on my research on hunger striker subjectivities, show how they relate to each other. Foucault's 'technologies of the self' illuminates hunger striking subjectivation in embodied resistance. Building on Fanon's theories of subjectivation, I developed the concept of the 'zero-mode' of being. Fanon's theorisation of anti-colonial revolutionary violence was applied to the context of hunger strike. Badiou's philosophy of political subject was helpful in understanding certain processes of political subjectivation for the individual and the collective.

*The remaining eight chapters provide a theoretically-informed analysis and interpretation of my interviews with former Palestinian hunger strikers.*

### Chapter 5: Dispossession of Humanity: The Pre-hunger Strike Stage

This chapter explicates how Palestinian political prisoners experience their dispossession and its role in the constitution of their revolutionary subjectivity in the pre-hunger strike stage, which led them to engage in hunger striking. Illuminating the Israeli techniques of power and

the violence of administrative detention as a form of dispossession, it analyses the structure of dispossession which takes three forms; dispossession of love (social bonds and personal relations), of dignity, and of hope (i.e. of a future).

Employing a Fanonian framework, I explain how the hunger strike is a transformative leap from zero mode towards a redemption of one' humanity. This chapter discusses their understanding of their decision as the reclamation of humanity in relation to dispossession and the reclamation of their humanity and dignity. It explores how the decision to hunger strike was made in relation to their understanding of dispossession and reclamation of humanity.

#### Chapter six: Reclaiming Dispossessed Humanity: The Decision to Hunger Strike

This chapter traces out subjectivity-formation attending to the critical moments of arrest and interrogation. It explains the processes and techniques involved in the production of resistant subjectivity. In particular, it addresses this in relation to Israeli technologies of colonial power. The chapter seeks to explain how interactions between Palestinians and the colonial power are vital sites for understanding processes of subjectivity formation, and how they allow us to trace out what I term 'turning points,' decisive moments of self-formation. I investigate the processes of subjectivation that lead the prisoners to resort to a hunger strike following the turning points encountered in the pre-hunger strike period. It shows how hunger strikers move from that decision to the complexities of lived experience during the hunger strike itself. I also trace out the transformation process of becoming an 'active victim' in the emancipatory process where the political prisoners transcend the psychological damage and transform their vulnerable injuries.

#### Chapter 7: The Embodiment of Humanity: Technologies of the Self and Resistance in the Hunger Strike

Subjectivity formation during the hunger strike arises from the protracted battle between the resistant subjects and colonial power. The chapter delineates the techniques of power and resistance between the IPA and political prisoners. This is approached chronologically, from the initial phase of the hunger strike until the end of the strike, which goes through three stages: the initial phase, the peak of the struggle, and the advanced stage which is marked by the negotiations between the prisoners and the IPA. The trajectory of hunger strikes varies according to the decomposition of the starving body, and at each stage the prison authorities change the emphasis of their techniques in order to break the hunger strike whilst the prisoners invent new techniques to sustain the hunger strike. Utilising Foucault's theoretical framework

of technologies of the self, the chapter conceptualises the techniques of resistance developed through the instrumentalisation of the body.

#### Chapter 8: 'Strength', Conflict, and the Body in Pain

Focusing on the conflict within the self to resist starvation, I trace the developing turning points through analysing the intensity and meaning of the lived experience in terms of the resultant bodily pain. I rely here on philosophical reflections about the politics of physical suffering, especially with regard to torture. The conflict with the IPA on the one hand and the body on the other is manifested in the reported experiences of the interviewees. The chapter focuses on their discourses about their strength that emerges which they regard as a 'latent energy/hidden power' supporting their 'steadfastness' and resilience.

#### Chapter 9: Self-Determination and the Struggle with Death

This chapter discusses the conflict and performance in the negotiation; the body-time nexus; the sense of 'strength' and the collapse of the body; and the turning-points of reaching agreement and reconciling with death. It focuses on how hunger strikers live these moments of conflict when death is imminent and investigates subjectivity formation on the border between life and death. In their views, this climactic confrontation is about self-determination through the control over the body and who determines their destiny. I engage with their conception of death as an act of resistance and conclude with the way they understand self-determination through their agency to practice a kind of sovereignty over their body. Negotiations commence when the IPA become certain that the prisoners won't retreat or break and accept that they are willing to sacrifice themselves. The fear of death makes the jailors respond to the prisoners' demands, and makes the prisoners consider the solutions suggested by the prison authorities.

#### Chapter Ten: Strength, Continuity and Steadfastness (*Sumud*)

The sources of strength and steadfastness '*Sumud*' are discussed. The concept of *Sumud* is central to the meanings the hunger strikers give to their endurance and persistence. They relate it to the narrative of a collective Palestinian dream for freedom and self-determination, the sacrifice for a just cause inspired by icons of resistance, and the antagonistic struggle with the coloniser in the challenge of wills. They emphasise their fidelity to the martyrs of Palestine and their faithfulness to the cultural and ethical heritage of resistance which forms the core of their ethics of resistance. I employ here Badiou's concept of fidelity which offers a useful framework for understanding hunger strike subjectivity and illuminating the question of continuity.

### Chapter 11: The Meaning of Victory: Sovereignty Over the Body in the Hunger Strikers' Philosophy of Freedom

I investigate the relationship of body and soul (*rouh*) in the hunger strikers' philosophy of freedom; and the meaning of victory in their conception of *rouh*. The centrality of the meanings produced by the hunger strikers reveals their theory of subjectivity in the limit experience and how they express their subjectivity as a formation of contradictory binaries, body versus soul and body versus mind. In their view, the weakness of the decomposing body is the weapon that gives them immaterial strength. The soul is a third value in addition to the body and mind and signifies the meaning of victory in their resistance. Victory is connected to the dignity of the soul. They don't want to diminish the soul by surrendering despite endangering their physical body.

### Chapter 12: Conceptualising a Limit-Experience: The Hunger Strike as a Near-Death Event

The final chapter illuminates the participants' conceptions of the hunger strike as the experience of a limit and explores their transcendental and spiritual state near death. It records the meanings they give to the dying body and the metaphysical concepts which informs their political practice and subjectivity. The hunger strikers' conceptions of the limit experience as an 'unrecognisable experience' and a journey of self-discovery and transformation entails mystical dimensions and the chapter analyses this and the humanist subjectivation of limit experience which reflects the singularity of the case study.

The last chapter is followed by a brief conclusion.

## Chapter 1: Hunger Strike Resistance: A Brief History

We all make history but not in conditions of our own choosing (Karl Marx)

We have nothing to lose but our bodies. But we have a great world to win  
(Turkish prisoners' statement, 2000)<sup>29</sup>

Our chains will be broken before we are (Marwan Barghouti)<sup>30</sup>

This chapter reviews the literature on the hunger strike, a form of political protest that has occurred across modern history in many parts of the world. It focuses on hunger striking as a means of fighting for prisoners' rights from within a closed coercive system. Each struggle has its own specificity and determinants and gives rise to particular discourses and trajectories.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, militant suffragettes in England practised hunger strikes in British prisons (Purvis, 1995a) and in India Gandhi engaged in several hunger strikes to protest against British rule (Gandhi, 2008). Hunger strikes were undertaken by Irish Republicans in 1917 and 1920 when sixty Irish Republican Army (IRA) members demanded reinstatement of their political status and again in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1973 hunger strike started by Irish convicts at Brixton prison lasted eight months, while in 1981 ten members of the IRA lost their lives from starvation. In Germany, between 1973 and 1975, Ulrike Meinhof and members of the Red Army Fraction (RAF) embarked on several hunger strikes to protest against their prison conditions and solitary confinement; RAF member Holger Meins died in prison in 1974 from starvation (Passmore, 2009). In Spain, 42 members of the Group of Anti-Fascist Resistance (GRAPO) engaged in fasts in 1989 to protest being detained in isolation and in separate prisons. In the following year, a hunger strike by hundreds of political detainees in South Africa was launched to demand the end of indefinite detention and the right to a fair trial.

Hunger strikes in Turkey also have a long history. One of the largest took place at Buca prison in 1996 when twelve prisoners lost their lives; in 2000–1, hundreds of leftists and other

---

<sup>29</sup> A pamphlet issued by political prisoners' movement in Turkey, on 10 October 2000 cited in Bargu 2014, p. 328.

<sup>30</sup> Marwan Barghouti, 'Why we are on hunger strike in Israel's Prisons'. In April 2017, 1500 Palestinian prisoners, led by him, commenced an open-ended hunger strike. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/opinion/palestinian-hunger-strike-prisoners-call-for-justice.html>

prisoners chose death by fasting to protest against their isolation in ‘F-type’, solitary confinement prisons. More than one hundred died, including their non-imprisoned relatives fasting in solidarity. In Guantanamo Bay,<sup>31</sup> the detainees have also used hunger strikes and were being force-fed by the United States since 2002 (Worthington, 2007). In Palestine, there has been a wave of individual hunger strikes since 2012, undertaken mainly by Islamic Jihad prisoners, which then spread to prisoners from all political organisations, from the secular left to those espousing religious ideologies. These strikes were in protest against administrative detention and overlapped with a number of mass collective strikes in 2012, 2014 and 2017.

In reviewing the literature on hunger strike resistance, I seek to capture how social scientists and anthropologists have analysed and theorised the phenomenon and the forms of subjectivity it elicits, in order to identify both empirical and theoretical gaps that this thesis aims to address. This literature review is divided into three sections. The first introduces the literature on Palestinian hunger strikes in the post-Oslo era (1993 to the present). In particular, it reviews the literature on the employment of human bodies as weapons and explores the differences between, on the one hand, the ‘martyrdom operator’ or ‘suicide bomber’<sup>32</sup> and, on the other, the hunger striker as a mode of self-sacrificing protest and example of ‘necropolitical’<sup>33</sup> resistance. However, academic literature on hunger strikes in Israeli prisons is lacking. The second section of this chapter reviews literature on the 1981 hunger strike in Northern Ireland and the 2000-2003 hunger strikes in Turkey. I have included these bodies of literature grounded in case studies to emphasise the contextual historical analysis of my thesis. Each historical and political context produces different meanings since each struggle has its own specificity and gives rise to particular discourses and trajectories. A qualitative case study design is very useful when trying to gain a comprehensive understanding of a given phenomenon. According to Burns: ‘to qualify as a case study, it must be a bounded system, as an entity in itself’ (Burns, 1997: 364).<sup>34</sup> The third section discusses the arguments of the thesis and its contributions in relation to international literature, and shows the singularity of the case under consideration by exploring the question of whether hunger-strike resistance is a form of violence or non-violence. There is a body of literature on Palestinian political prisoners and the prisoner movement in the Israeli prison system, including some that deal with political subjectivity in addition to the politics of resistance. My research discusses this literature and

---

<sup>31</sup> See Olshansky 2005. See also CSHRA, n.d.

<sup>32</sup>The choice of these terms is a politically-contested question.

<sup>33</sup>Mbembe 2003.

<sup>34</sup> See also (Gilbert, 2008: 36) on case study design.

investigates the hunger strike as a largely neglected dimension of Palestinian resistance contributes to an understanding of hunger strike subjectivity in the context of revolt against colonial power.

## **1.0 The hunger strike in the Palestinian case**

To define the specificity the phenomenon of the prison hunger strike, in which political protesters starve themselves, risking their lives to challenge the prison authority's power, I explore the subjectivity of the martyrdom operator and the hunger striker as examples of 'necropolitical' resistance.

### 1.1 The body as a weapon in Palestinian resistance

In his article 'Necropolitics', Achille Mbembe (2003) takes up the philosophical project of conceptualising the relationship between subjectivity and death as one of the roots of political sovereignty, via Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben's notion of sovereignty as a state of exception. Mbembe discusses two examples of late modern colonial occupation: apartheid in South Africa and the current colonial occupation of Palestine. He uses the example of the 'suicide bomber' to discuss the logics of martyrdom and survival: 'the logic of "martyrdom", the will to die is fused with the willingness to take the enemy with you, that is, with closing the door on the possibility of life for everyone. Although this logic seems contrary to one which wishes to impose death on others while preserving one's own life' (37), Mbembe argues that this is not the case, since while we lose freedom if someone kills us, we may actually gain freedom if we choose to sacrifice our life. 'Death is precisely that from and over which I have power' and may be 'experienced as a release from terror and bondage' (39). In colonised Palestine, the practice of self-sacrifice has been a core strategy of Palestinian resistance (Nashif 2013). Within the discourse of sacrifice and martyrdom, *Fedai* (the one who sacrifices him/herself) has become the icon of Palestinian resistance, symbolising bravery, honour and sacrifice and this thesis illuminates how Palestinian freedom fighters perceive death and how the collective Palestinian experience frames the hunger strikers' construction of the meaning of their action (see Chapters 11 and 12 below).<sup>35</sup>

In 'The Palestinian's Death'<sup>36</sup> (2013), Nashif analyses three forms of subjectivity, distinguished by the type of death resulting from their exercise: the victim, the martyr, and the

---

<sup>35</sup> On Palestinian discourses of martyrdom see *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*. See also (Khalili, 2007). See also (Abdul-Dayyem and Ben-Ze'ev, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Available at [http://www.ahlamshibli.com/essay/esmail\\_nashif\\_the\\_palestinians\\_death.htm](http://www.ahlamshibli.com/essay/esmail_nashif_the_palestinians_death.htm)

martyrdom operator. The subject of this death is the individual Palestinian seeking his or her collective identity. Nashif draws a map of Palestinian deaths presenting the different types of collective killing practised by the settler regime. In his chart of the Palestinian 'platform of death' from the *Nakba* to the present day, he identifies these phases successively and synchronously: the phase of 'shock and seeking', the phase of 'nationalism', and the phase of 'totalitarian principle' (2013:173). Each gave rise to a particular subjectivity of death. The traumatic state which resulted post-*Nakba* in the 1950s, giving birth to a subjectivity of the victim; the nationalist phase (armed resistance of the 1960s), producing the subjectivity of the martyr; and post- Oslo, the 'totalitarian' phase which produced the martyrdom operator. Nashif suggests the martyrdom operator did not target the military and economic representatives of the colonial regime but sought to return the arena of struggle to the bodies of the colonists, the beneficiaries of the settler-colonial regime. The individual body comes to represent the collective body and removes both his or her own body *and* the colonial body from the stage of historical action (180). Nashif's examination of the nature and history of Palestinian death, specifically its function as a standard for the definition of life, specifies the primary characteristic of the colonial regime in Palestine as administering collective Palestinian death with the intent of materialising Palestinian absence, or collective exit, from the stage of modern history. By drawing a historical map of the Palestinian stages of death, Nashif hopes to reach an understanding of what the Palestinian form of life is, in the sense that death serves as a platform for life. But he does not consider hunger striking subjectivity, despite the fact that this mode of resistance falls within the framework of his analysis.

Naser Abufarha's *The Making of a Human Bomb: Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance* (2009) examines anthropologically the aesthetics of martyrdom operations, their cultural representations and that their performance and representations generate. The study provides an anthropological understanding of martyrdom and the violence of martyrdom operations, which have been described as '*amaliyyat fidaiyya*' (self-sacrifice operations) by some Palestinian media. The study seeks to understand their historical, cultural, and political constructions. He argues that the participants taking their own lives in the 'poetics of performance' assert their independence and self-reliance (Abufarha, 2009: 3). With this discourse of self-sacrifice performed alongside violence, death is conceived as a form of life. To die is to live through the iconic image of the martyr within the cultural poetics of resistance.

Some social scientists and anthropologists explain and analyse martyrdom-operator subjectivities from a different perspective. Robert Pape's *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Bombing* (2005) depicts martyrdom operations as calculated decisions that can be

suitably grasped and explained through a rational-choice model. Relying on an empirical study based on 462 bombers who attacked targets worldwide between 1980 and 2003, Pape argues that their primary driver is nationalism and rebellion against occupation, rather than religion and Islamic fundamentalism (Pape, 2005: 4). Pape views martyrdom operations as a strategy for 'weak' actors who have the willingness to die for a national goal. However, if we follow Pape's perspective and read the subjectivity of the martyrdom operator or hunger striker solely as a rational strategy, we miss some crucial dimensions of the phenomenon. Little attention is paid to the 'lived experience' and self-understanding of self-sacrificing participants. To capture their subjectivity requires a multi-dimensional approach addressing the macro as well as the micro level.

Anthropological critiques such as Talal Asad's *On Suicide Bombing* (2007) question Western modern liberal assumptions about suicide bombing. The core of his argument is directed against thinking of terrorism simply in terms of illegal and immoral forms of violence. He questions the West's horror of suicide terrorism: Why does the West express horror at suicide terrorism while warfare is a much greater violation of civilian innocence? What makes terrorism so much less morally justifiable than other attacks executed in a 'just war' (Asad, 2007: 63). **Asad** argues that suicide fighters must be understood within the larger story of their historical conditions and draws upon an article by May Jayyusi,<sup>37</sup> who argues that suicide fighters should be explained in relation to the new forms of political subjectivity formed in the context of resistance to the particular power that circumscribes them. She claims that something new did emerge with Oslo for the general population, something she calls 'an imaginary of freedom'. The failure of Oslo and the humiliation of all Palestinians has resulted in uncontrollable rage. But **Asad** argues that planned suicide bombing is not produced by uncontrollable rage but an act of death that reacts to injustice.

To study subjectivity, I contend that researching concrete case studies of martyrdom operators or hunger strikers should be done with special attention to historical and sociological approaches, in addition to the emphasis on lived experience. The historical and material contexts as revealing the conditions for the emergence of subjectivity is important and enrich our conception of subjectivity. Ghassan Hage's article, 'Comes a time we are all enthusiasm: Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombers' (2003), strongly emphasises socio-political conditions. His main argument is that suicide bombings are undoubtedly a form of social evil,

---

<sup>37</sup> Who in turn draws on Carl Schmitt's idea of the 'the state of exception' via Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*. (Agamben, 1998)

but one that is also to be understood as stemming from the living conditions from which they emanate. Suicide bombing is a phenomenon emanating from within colonised Palestinian society and cannot be explained as an individual psychological aberration but rather as the product of specific social conditions. Hage points out that, to a large degree, the Israeli government, 'as the initiator and founder of horror', shares with the suicide bomber a lack of concern with the humanity of the people murdered in the course of the conflict. This is in line with Asad's argument that suicide terrorism is not substantially different from the brutality of state army attacks; the only difference being that killing by the state is justified by modern liberal law. In a similar vein as Asad, Hage's article is built on questioning the Western assumption which claims that 'nothing ever justifies a suicide bombing' (Hage, 2003: 66–67). He argues that terrorism is not the worst kind of violence compared to the violence that Israel has inflicted on the Palestinians. Suicide bombings in Palestine represent a relatively minimal form of violence, whether judged by the number of deaths they cause or the psychological damage they inflict on people. However, this is arguable, since it clearly has an impact on survivors and the broader population, otherwise it would not have been chosen as a tactic by Hamas and other groups. In this regard, as Hage notes: 'the symbolic violence that shapes our understanding of what constitutes ethically and politically illegitimate violence. Indeed, the fact that terrorist groups never classify themselves as terrorists, instead calling themselves revolutionaries, martyrs, nationalists, or freedom fighters, is an indication of the depth of symbolic violence' (2003: 72–73).

In my own research, I also focus on the social conditions of action and the historical conditions of the acting self. I seek to account for a shift towards the necropolitical, which differs from the modes of armed resistance in the armed national phase of the 1960s and 70s, and the popular resistance of the First Intifada of the 1980s. The Oslo and post-Oslo eras have been defined by the Palestinian leadership's surrender of Palestinian rights, which has helped give birth to different modes of violent resistance and their related subjectivities, namely those of the martyrdom operator and of the lengthy open-ended hunger striker. These forms of necropolitical subjectivity of resistance have been individualised in the post Oslo. In order to develop a socio-political explanation of these phenomena of violent resistance, we have to understand the history of internalised violence structured by Israeli colonialism, since the very existence of Palestinians is perceived as a potential threat to the security and existence of Israel. This necropolitical resistance has brought in its wake a culture of glorification of self-sacrifice

among Palestinians which symbolises the Palestinian collective will in their struggle against colonialism.

### *Martyrdom operator vs. hunger striker*

The martyrdom operator and the hunger striker are modes of self-sacrificing protest that employ human bodies as weapons which, together with significant similarities, manifest important differences. Banu Bargu's *Starve and Immolate* (2014) discusses the categorical separation between the two modalities of self-sacrificing praxis that involve violence for the actor performing these acts: one is entirely self-directed, in what she called 'death fast', an action that represents a *defensive* form of the weaponisation of life; the other is simultaneously directed at others, as in the case of the martyrdom operator, which she refers to as an *offensive* form of the weaponisation of life. Referring to Walter Benjamin's interpretation of violence as 'not a means but a manifestation', she points out that the weaponisation of life is not only the political expression of rage but also the desire for justice. The hunger strike is depicted in some existing literature as a 'self-destructive' struggle, since it contradicts our understanding of the natural compulsion to self-preservation. It is connected to transcendent justice which gives meaning to life and death and animates such violence (Bargu, 2014: 18). However, in contrast to the martyrdom operator, I would argue that the hunger striker in the Palestinian case (but also in contexts other than the Turkish one) does not necessarily aim at death but rather, in most cases, seeks to survive and put pressure on the state. In some respects, hunger strikers can be perceived as akin to resistance fighters in battles, or soldiers in state armies who may well survive. They do not intentionally decide to die but rather to fight. The subject of resistance who undertakes a fast protest does not lose their hope to survive. The IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, for example, wrote: 'All men must have hope and never lose heart. But my hope lies in the ultimate victory for my poor people. Is there any hope greater than that?' (Hennessey, 2013). Alongside with Sands, we will see that the discourse of Palestinian hunger strikers is full of hope and love as they aspire to life and freedom in their political action.

It is difficult to discuss the martyrdom operator without employing the language of violent resistance, since their actions appear as extremely violent compared to other kinds of political behaviour or resistance tactics. The martyrdom operator kills himself/herself in order to kill the other, while the hunger striker appears to direct the violence to his/her self, in order to resist incarceration and the violence of the state. The intensity of the struggle and the confrontation between hunger strikers and prison authorities entails risking one's life. The hunger strike phenomenon is largely 'future-oriented', in the sense that there is a contradiction between the

current existing context and the future that the political prisoners look towards. These two temporalities, the 'now' and the 'future', live inside each other contradictorily, in the sense that the desired future of freedom and emancipation requires the decision to go on hunger strike. The contradictory aspect of the hunger strike resides in the coupling between the desire for life and the probability of death; the prisoners' desire for freedom necessitates using a tool that might lead to death, although death is not intended as such. The hunger strike entails something akin to a slow, prolonged death yet with the possibility of survival if the prisoner's demands are met. In contrast, the martyrdom operation brings immediate death. The power of the hunger strike is in mobilising the public and drawing the attention of society to the problem at hand through the display of human beings dying in the struggle. The duration and timing of the fast – something I will focus on throughout this thesis – allows the prisoners to negotiate their demands from the state power and also allows communication directly with the public, which is not the case with the martyrdom operator.

## 1.2 Captive resistance and political subjectivity

Despite the fact that the Israeli prison is a contested colonial site that aims to dehumanise Palestinians and suppress their political activism and agency, political prisoners have transformed it into a site of anti-colonial resistance that generates and creates resistant subjectivities. Ismail Nashif's *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community* (2008) explores the process that transformed the colonial system into a generative Palestinian site for constructing national, social and cultural identity. Nashif investigates how the Israeli prison was experienced by Palestinian political militants between 1967 and 1993. This exploration was conducted mainly through oral and textual representations of the captivity experience offered by former prisoners themselves. Nashif indicates that from the ethnographic, textual and archival data a narrative emerges that tells the story of Palestinian political captivity and reflects the Palestinian national narrative of the victim who rises to enter history as a hero. It also reflects processes of constructing a community of political captives. This community has come to be one of the major sites of the Palestinian national movement, and, as such, has reshaped the realities of the Palestine-Israel conflict at many levels, thereby challenging both the Palestinian national movement and the Israeli authorities.

In the chapter on the body of the community, Nashif discusses *Cabsulih* and hunger strike as extreme bodily techniques of resistance. *Cabsulih* describes the tactic by which political prisoners used their bodies as carriers of written messages, their bodies thus becoming the most important 'vehicles' for the transfer of knowledge in and out of prisons, carrying

letters, books, articles, poems and military orders among other kinds of information. Yet he does not extensively analyse hunger-strike resistance as compared to *Cabsulih*. He points out that both of these are bodily techniques of resistance, practices that exploit the conditions of existence imposed by the prison authorities. Nashif writes: ‘In the case of *Cabsulih* the colonizer is the lord of surface; the colonized the lord of the depth. By mobilizing the depth into the exterior face of captivity, through communication and through the circulation of the knowledge, the political captives’ community attempts to redefine the surface’ (Nashif, 2008: 85).

This research introduces a detailed analysis of how the hunger strikers are the 'lord' of the immaterial inner depth. Although the body was the central weapon in their technologies of resistance, the critical elements that generate their *Sumud* (steadfastness) are the underlying invisible elements (will, mind and soul). So, in their view the techniques of these inner resources and abilities can't be controlled by the coloniser – for them if the soul and the will don't bend, they are victorious. These immaterial resources are what determined their victory because they think these elements are unbreakable. The notion of *Sumud* is crucial for my own research on hunger-strike resistance, which embodies the ‘battle of wills’ between the prisoner and the jailor. To capture hunger-striker subjectivity, I trace the factors that help the prisoners to continue in their strike despite their starvation and physical suffering. I also elucidate the driving forces behind prisoners’ steadfastness, which enable them to persist and continue the battle to the end. Hence, *Sumud* will allow me to analyse the discourse of resistance and the influence of culture, beliefs and traditions on the subjectivity of hunger strikers. I am interested in investigating what constitutes the steadfastness, and how the discourse of resistance affects subjectivity. Also, I am interested in the extent to which Palestinian culture and tradition, including religion, might play a role in inspiring the act of self-starvation.

Lena Meari's *Sumud: A Philosophy of Confronting Interrogation* (2014) investigates Palestinian-Israeli colonial relations from the perspective of the interrogation-encounter between Palestinian political activists and interrogators from the Israeli security services during the last forty years of Zionist colonisation in Palestine. In the context of interrogation, *Sumud* means ‘not to confess’ or even to recognise the interrogator and the order of power they embody. These prisoners did not recognise the constellation of power that structured the relation between interrogator and interrogated. They continued to bear the torture in order to protect their fellow comrades, political organisations, communities and the Palestinian revolution more broadly. The interrogation encounter is a revealing site for analysing how Palestinians and Israelis have been mutually constituted, and how Palestinians have

simultaneously carved out a form of politics through a cultivation of *Sumud* that breaks with the predicament of the colonial dialectic. Meari presents modes of Palestinian subjectivity and forms of politics enabled by engineering direct confrontation with the colonial power during the interrogation.

Nahla Abdo's *Captive Revolution: Palestinian Women's Anti-Colonial Struggle within the Israeli Prison System* (2014) analyses the stories and discourses of Palestinian women imprisoned within the Israeli prison system through their oral testimonies, and investigates gendered forms of oppression and resistance in these severe conditions. Abdo explains the gendered methods of torture that Israel employs against female Palestinian political detainees and reveals Palestinian women's methods of resistance under Israeli oppression. In threatening Palestinian women sexually and through torture, Israeli forces attempt to silence them into submission and kill their spirit of resistance. Abdo's work is relevant to this research, as I also analyse the experiences of female hunger strikers and investigate how the sexuality of Palestinian women is used as one of the techniques of power in Israeli prisons, where racist and orientalist knowledge and assumptions about Palestinian culture are widely deployed (Abdo, 2014). From a feminist perspective, my study also seeks to capture the constitution of women's subjectivities and agency in relation to colonial and patriarchal power. In the specific conditions of the hunger strike, I consider the ways in which women's bodies become objects of control in the hands of different authorities and how women's bodies become powerful tools of resistance against both colonialism and patriarchy.

## **2.0 Hunger strikes in Northern Ireland (1981) and Turkey (2000 - 2003)**

In the absence of academic literature on hunger strikes in Palestine, I review the literature of two case studies (Northern Ireland 1981 and Turkey 2000-3); the theoretical approaches to these cases have informed my own account and enabled me to develop my conceptual and methodological conclusions.

### 2.1 The 1981 Hunger Strike in Northern Ireland

Hunger strikes have a special place in the history of Republican movements in Northern Ireland. The 1981 hunger strike was in opposition to Britain's policy of criminalising Republican prisoners rather than treating them as soldiers and prisoners of war which they regarded themselves as. Allen Feldman's *Formation of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (1991) was the first study of Republican hunger

strikes to use the term the ‘body as weapon’ in describing how IRA prisoners struck back at the British authorities. One of the hunger strikers reported: ‘from the moment we hit the H-Block we had used our bodies as a protest weapon’ (Feldman, 1991: 179). Feldman explores the political violence in Northern Ireland through the narrative of the body.

This event ... should be viewed as a political technology of the body connected to paramilitary practice both inside and outside the prison. As such the hunger strike must be analyzed within the general framework of the cultural construction of violence in Northern Ireland (1991: 221).

Feldman points out that the hunger strike contributed to the transformation of the Republican movement; he employs a cultural analysis of the 1981 hunger strike as a mode of political representation by the ‘Blanketmen’ and the Republican movement outside the prison. Feldman engages ethnographic methods to substantiate his theoretical claims, emphasising the role of the body as symbolically and materially a significant resource for struggle. He shows how the hunger strike was the outcome of a political-violence construction within the prison. As he concludes: ‘There was no reality outside the various systems and counter systems of representations and objectification that were violently hurled back and forth through the recesses of the prison. The capacity to symbolize and encode a given reality was the basis of political resistance’ (1991: 165).

Chris Yuill’s *The Body as Weapon: Bobby Sands and the Republican Hunger Strikes* (2007) reviews different theoretical analysis of the sociology of the body and its embodiment within violent political conflicts. He starts with Turner’s study (2008), which introduces an understanding of how bodies are experienced phenomenologically and can be active in creating and reproducing social identity. William and Bendelow (1999) see the body not as a passive object, merely receiving the impact of society, but as an active, expressive and mindful form of embodiment that serves not only as an existential basis of culture and self but also of social institutions and society in general. Yuill discusses Feldman and then turns to Shilling (2005) who sees the body as offering a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society. He concludes that the body can be one of the resources for resistance, especially when others are denied or limited, as in the case of the Republican prisoners. The British state’s criminalisation policy transformed prisoners’ bodies from those of soldiers to those of criminals, among other things by forcing them to wear prisoners’ uniforms. Prisoners reframed their bodies as a modality of resistance in order to assert their identity as Republican soldiers rather than criminals. The clothes they were forced to wear were a symbol of the British policy of

oppression. The prisoners refused to wear this uniform and used blankets around their bodies, proceeding to starve themselves to death. Feldman showed that the culminating 1981 hunger strike was the product of long years of the Blanketmen's dirty protest.

Prisoners also covered the walls of their cells with their own excrement. What Feldman refers to as the 'politics of excrement' is a symbolic use of the body's waste products to protest the institutional structures of British colonial oppression and its suppression of the prisoners' bodies. Yuill points out that those using their bodies as weapons destabilise the discourses of modernity to fight the domination by oppressive social structures. The 'dirty protest' is a destabilisation of 'civilised' embodiment. The use of faecal material and the refusal to use the toilets to wash their bodies produces a shift from faecal invisibility to faecal visibility. Prisoners' refusal to adhere to the norms and rules of the prison and their decision to live in cells full of their own bodies' waste products shows how prisoners used their bodily functions politically to resist oppression by the British State. The Republican politics of starvation emphasised a culture of bodily self-denial. Yuill argues that this culture of sacrifice stems from the influence of Catholicism, a strong and lasting characteristic of Irish culture and tradition. In contrast, Feldman perceives the hunger strike as a secular political action rather than a religious one.

The Blanketmen while insisting on a secular interpretation of the Hunger strike, are well aware of the political benefits of the protest sacralization. For them it is 'sacralized' to the extent that the protest can be positioned within an ideology that conflates the direction of Irish history with the ideological evolution of the IRA (1991: 219).

The Catholic practice of self-denial includes a tradition of martyrdom; Feldman analyses various commentators who have described the 1981 hunger strike as an act of religious transcendence associated with figures such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King or the long tradition of Christian martyrdom. The idea of the sacrificed and martyred body could play a symbolic role when oppressed people fight for their national identity and ideals, as traditions and cultural heritage inspire and motivate national struggles.<sup>38</sup> In this context, Bargu indicates that without the metaphysical component it would be difficult to understand the specificity of self-destructive practices as practices of resistance, to comprehend their existential and total nature and, furthermore, to separate them from acts of suicide. However, she emphasises that:

---

<sup>38</sup>Michel Foucault acknowledged the mobilising force of religion on the Iranian revolution which influenced his ideas on 'political spirituality'. See Foucault in (Afary et al., 2005).

Despite the powerful evocation of traditions of martyrdom as antecedent of contemporary political practices of human weapon, recent scholarship has shown religion, while an important role in motivation for some of these actions, is by no means the sole or even the main determinant (Bargu 2014:22).

David Beresford's *Ten Men Dead* provides a narrative account of the 1981 IRA hunger strike. The act of starving to death carried out by IRA soldiers is represented as a conscious decision that does not arise from despair but rather is a conscious act of self-sacrifice. Beresford points out that Sands seems to have totally accepted the fact that he would die<sup>39</sup> and emphasises the hunger strike as possessing a sublime quality, especially when it is taken all the way to death in a sense of self-sacrifice (Beresford, 1997: 38).

Hunger strikes could be seen as a form of political praxis where both emotions and rationality work together and become embodied in action. Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* focuses on the influence of emotions on the body and the way bodies relate with communities, producing social relationships that determine the rhetoric of the nation. Her theory suggests that emotions are social and cultural practices rather than psychological states (Ahmed, 2013). Emotions have affective power and can determine our modes of life. In a sense, they are entrances into the social and material world. The writings of Sands and the Republicans' discourse corroborate Ahmed's contention that emotions are not private but are socially organised and can lead to collective politics and social power. They can even create national identities, for instance in the passionate commitment to Republican ideals embodied by the Blanketmen. In this case, emotions stemmed from rage against British imperialism but could also be grasped in their rationality, in terms of the conscious decision of self-sacrifice for a political cause. Hence, hunger strikers could be seen to live and produce their own 'structure of feeling'<sup>40</sup> and their act of starving can be viewed as a rational action underpinned by emotion. Bobby Sands's writings not only describe his own experience but also aimed at inspiring Irish republicans. Prisoners referred to their bodies as aching, freezing, shrivelling and becoming physically wrecked, showing keen awareness of their bodies and the changes they were undergoing. Beresford writes that: 'Hunger strike is, at least when pursued seriously,

---

<sup>39</sup> In a letter to the IRA Army Council dated 31 January 1981, Marcella Sands writes: 'We accept and in full knowledge of what it may entail, we accept the tragic consequences that most certainly await us and the overshadowing fact that death may not secure a principled settlement, so comrades, we realize the struggle on the outside must also continue. We hope you accept that the struggle in H-Blocks, being part of the overall struggle' (1987: 54).

<sup>40</sup> A concept advanced by Raymond Williams to characterise the culture of a particular historical moment and suggesting a common set of perceptions and values shared by a particular group (Williams, 1977).

a psychological battle which pivots on the anticipation of that “moment of truth”, the immediate prospect of death’ (1987:40). As Bobby Sands wrote:

The body fights back sure enough, but at the end of the day everything returns to the primary consideration, that is, the mind. The mind is the most important. But then where does this proper mentality stem from? Perhaps from one’s desire for freedom. It isn’t certain that that’s where it comes from<sup>41</sup>.

After seventeen days Sands gave up his diary because he no longer had the energy to write owing to the fatigue caused by starving. He ended on a passionate note: ‘They won’t break me because the desire for freedom and the freedom of the Irish people is in my heart. The day will dawn when all the people in Ireland will have the desire for freedom to show. It is then we will see the rising of the moon’ (cited in Beresford 1987: 98).

## 2.2 The Turkish case study: the 2000-3 hunger strike

The 2000-3 hunger strike in Turkey was the longest and most deadly in modern history. The radical organisations that participated in the death fast struggle subscribed to Marxist-Leninist ideology and other streams within radical Marxism. They protested against the government plan to transfer them to ‘F-type’ prisons that were designed to isolate prisoners and deny interaction between them, making it easier for torture to go unnoticed. The strike was also intended to challenge several anti-terrorism policies enacted in 1991 that resulted in thousands of arrests. Under these anti-terrorism laws, political prisoners were classified as terrorists, enabling the government to inflict more specialised discipline and punishment.

Anderson and Menon, in their introduction to *Violence Performed* (Anderson and Menon, 2009), explore the relationship between performance and political violence, in order to understand the performative role of violence in socio-cultural contexts. They point out that the enactment of violence is both spectacular in its cultural impact and embodied in its transaction and effect. Anderson’s *To Lie Down to Death for Days: The Turkish Hunger Strike* (2004) explores the political effects and performative value of this mode of resistance, starting with Feldman’s quote: ‘violence remains the founding language of social representation’. Anderson examines what kind of political subject is produced and how his/her relationship to the state is being redefined. He draws attention to the theatricality of the strike:

---

<sup>41</sup> See Sands 2016, Prison Diary. See also (Whalen, 2007: 85) and (Christ, 2012).

Conceptualizing the prison as a stage implies hunger striking as an embodied cultural practice, whose display before national and international audiences occasion in the re-symbolization of participating subjects.... The hunger strike infused the very notion of resistance with an extreme form of embodied practice, made all the more vivid by the ever-increasing possibility that the practitioners will at some point die (Anderson, 2004: 198).

Anderson's views on the production of political subjects through performance chime with the argument of this thesis, which explores the subject formation and performativity of hunger strikers in the Israeli prison system. In line with Anderson, I seek to understand the performative role of violence in this context of colonial repression and explain how the interactions between Palestinian militants and the colonial power are vital for understanding hunger striking subjectivity. Anderson argues that the prison is a critical site for the production of the integrity of the state and how it asserts its power. He observes: 'The state reproduces itself by enabling the production of political subjects and reinvents it by describing and defining those subject according to dogma of rights' (Anderson, 2004: 818).

The hunger strike can be understood as a complicated reversal of the violence performed on the individual subject by the state, which reframes the question of political subjectivity, staging a challenge to more conventional relationships between state and subject. The performativity of starving is a productive act that entails the potential to remake the subjectivity of the protester and restrict the total power of the state. Following Anderson's arguments, this capacity of subjectivity alternation is potentially 'revolutionary', in that life and living become radically redefined. Bargu's *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (2014) conceptualises self-destructive practices as weaponisation of life tactics in which the body is utilised as the means of political intervention. She argues that this intervention often has a metaphysical element attached to it, one that concerns the meaning of existence. She writes: 'on one hand the body is an intermediary, a means of staging a protest and advances certain specific demands as the political ends of that protest. On the other hand the body is not empty, a mediate vessel to achieve political end' (2014:16).

Bargu builds on Foucauldian perspectives on power relations and the conjoined working of disciplinary and biopolitical discourses and practices. In her engagement with theorists of biopolitics, she argues against certain aspects of Foucault and Agamben, and claims that her study makes a case theoretically and empirically for what she calls 'biosovereignty'. She starts her theorisation by arguing that rather than sovereignty having waned or disappeared, as some interpretations of biopolitics might suggest, it has grown and is enhanced by the increased control and governance of our life. Sovereignty and biopolitics come together in the

assemblage of a biosovereignty that her book traces in the specific case of Turkey. Bargu argues that biosovereignty continues to produce new forms of resistance, contrary to pessimistic accounts of resistance by some theorists of biopolitics, according to whom power penetrates every aspect of life and limits the potential for resistance:

since biopolitics functions by extending control over life itself, the argument goes, then resistance to it must accordingly occur as a response to this control and this level ... when theorists of biopolitics do in fact carve a role of resistance, however, this resistance is based on turning the logic of biopolitics against itself through struggles that demand better conditions of life and greater well-being (2014:26).

Thus, Bargu theorises the self-destructive practices that transform life into a weapon as a specific modality of resistance that she calls ‘necroresistance’ which represents

a form of refusal against simultaneously individualizing and totalizing domination that acts by wrenching the power of life and death away from apparatuses of the modern state in which this power is conventionally vested (2014:27).

Bargu shows the link between self-destructive violence and the power of the state and how fatal corporeal acts of insurgence reveal and perform a response to sovereign power. She also details how ‘death fast resistance’ offers a new way of thinking about human agency and the possibilities and limitations of radical political resistance in prison. She emphasises that the main intention of her work is to cast power and resistance not just in a binary opposition but also as two faces of the same coin. Bargu casts the death-fast struggle as a conjuncture in which processes of the ‘biopoliticization’ of sovereignty meet the ‘necropolitization’ of resistance. *Starve and Immolate* is mainly based on political ethnography. However, it is not solely an ethnographic account since it introduces a high level of theoretical understanding of the politics of life and death and the role of the body within them.

It is not easy to extract the theory of subjectivity in Bargu’s book, but one could argue that she conceives subjectivity principally as a form of resistance. She offers a new way of thinking about human agency and possibilities by exploring ‘death-fast resistance’. Following Bargu’s argument, the self-destructive act prioritises the life of a political cause over the biological existence of its proponents: ‘These acts say, in a sense, it is not worth living life if you are forced to, if you can’t live it according to your political conviction’ (2014:16). She stresses that this approach counters the demonisation of self-destructive acts, as her work aims to enquire what material and political social conditions produce self-inflicted death as a form

of resistance. By contrast with Bargu's study, which focuses more on the theorisation of technologies of power, this research focuses on technologies of resistance which are undertheorised.

### **3.0 Hunger strike: violent or non-violent resistance?**

Hunger strikes highlight the self-sacrificing nature of some forms of political violence and lie in a contested space between violence and non-violence. We might consider the hunger strike as an act of non-violent resistance due to the fact that it is self-directed violence and does not harm other people, in contrast to martyrdom operations. Often, it is associated with symbolic power and is perceived as a weapon for the powerless. However, for Feldman, the hunger strike falls into the larger category of political violence.

The blanketmen viewed the 1981 hunger strike as a military campaign and organized it as such. For them, it was a modality of insurrectionary violence in which they deployed their bodies as weapons. They fully expected a coupling of this act of self-directed violence with mass insurrectionary violence outside the prison. These two forms of violence were seen as semantically and ethically continuous. Thus, despite its surface similarity to the nonviolent and pacifist protest associated with Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the Hunger Strike in the H-Blocks was not a pacifist or religious action (1990: 220).

Bargu (2014) also argues that the 'death fast' struggle is a violent action and this self-destructive technique is different from non-violent political acts performed with the goal of improving prisoners' conditions.

The finality and pain that such violent political practice entailed appeared to far exceed the potential, plausible gains that might have been achieved through a collective struggle that resorted to other, perhaps more ordinary, practical, and customary tactics (2014:7).

She adds that besides struggling for better conditions, the prisoners' protest also serves a symbolic purpose, drawing attention to how the Turkish state governed its prisons. In this way, political prisoners also challenge the violence of the state itself.

Based on my own research, I would claim that these authors, who frame hunger strike as a violent action using the language of self-directed violence and political violence (Feldman 1991) and as the self-destructive technique of the political death-fast (Bargu 2014), reveal only a partial picture of the hunger strike as an instance of political action and subjectivation. By contrast, the patterns I have found in the discourse of Palestinian experience go beyond the

binary of violence and nonviolence. These patterns include the reclamation of humanity; the emphasis on dignity and freedom; the opposition of immaterial strength vs. pain; the foregrounding of will and self-determination; the idea of a victory of the soul; as well as a profound concern with spiritual purity and transcendence, as well as love and hope. This thesis demonstrates that the hunger strike is not only about weaponisation the body as a political strategy but also about the spiritualisation of politics in the limit-experience and about cultivating immaterial strength through the collapse of the body. In other words, we are dealing with a complex political subjectivation that shows the singularity of the Palestinian case but may also contain important theoretical and methodological suggestions for studies of other hunger strikes and related phenomena of political resistance.

The hunger strike as an instance of counter violence aimed at reclaiming a confiscated humanity is not reducible to a form of self-destructive violence. Rather, in Fanon's sense, it can be grasped as a kind of humanising violence in a broader subjective trajectory that sees the hunger strikers striving to reclaim their humanity. The situation of prison repression and administrative detention as a form of dispossession creates the condition for 'revolutionary violence', which for Fanon represents an existential and historical form of violence that has a redemptive and humane character. In his reading of the force-field of violence and counter-violence in the colonial world, Jean Améry writes: 'For Fanon it was a historically justified act and a history-justifying act, creating historical justice and pointing to a future that was directly at hand' (Asad, 2007: 63). According to Améry, revolutionary violence has a different dimension in terms of humanity and history than repressive violence.

Revolutionary violence is the affirmation of the self-realizing human being against the negation, the denial of the human being. Its negativity has a positive charge. Repressive violence blocks the way to the self-realization of the human being; revolutionary violence breaks through that barrier, refers to more than temporal, the historical human future (Améry, 2005: 16).

Thus, according to Améry, the native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into a practice of violence and a plan of freedom. However, he adds that Fanon 'has claimed that revolutionary violence has a redemptive character, but he fails to give us an explanation of why that is' (Améry, 2005: 15). This thesis contributes towards such an explanation in the philosophy of freedom and technologies of the self of the hunger strikers, where I found patterns and original language that transcend and transform the political violence in their humanist subjectivation.

#### **4.0 Individual subjectivity vs. collective subjectivity**

The hunger strike is an experience which involves both individuals inside the prison and the political movement outside: as such, it also reflects the relation between the individual and the collective. Hunger-striker subjectivity is connected to the political community and supported from within armed revolutionary organisations, particularly when the hunger strike is deployed not only to call for individual political rights for prisoners or to improve their confinement conditions; the hunger strike can also be related to the wider national struggle: fighting a colonial power (e.g. in Northern Ireland and Palestine) or repressive state power (e.g. in the Turkish case). By producing collective meanings, the hunger strike breaks the individualisation of prisoners and destabilises the process of isolation and torture behind prison walls.

In the Turkish case, the community of hunger strikers expanded to include not only political prisoners in a number of prisons throughout Turkey, but also activists outside the prison. Anderson argues that the manner in which the strike had been staged across prison walls symbolises the significance of boundaries represented materially and discursively by those walls – as potential producers of political alliance rather than blocks to it. Therefore the prison became a specific site for the contested production of ‘Turkishness’ and a metaphor for the production of state power in Turkey more generally. As a human rights worker wrote: ‘The entire Turkey is like F-Type prisoners’ (2007: 820). In the Irish case, the dead body of Bobby Sands at his funeral, attended by tens of thousands, could be regarded as a symbolic index of the revival of the Irish social body. The duration of a fast allows the prisoner to communicate with the public directly. Sands published poems and letters, highlighting why he engaged in the fast. The emotional narrative of the fast in the prisons then lasted beyond the death of Sands and others. People still celebrate and commemorate their action throughout Ireland. Anderson discusses the declaration of the Turkish hunger strike: ‘Long live death-fast resistance’, situating death as the mode of resistance that can live over an extended period of time. These acts of starvation or death fasts do not necessarily arise from personal despair, psychological pathologies or a religious tradition of martyrdom, but mostly are consciously calculated and politically motivated decisions, envisaged as contributing to the political struggle.

#### **Conclusion**

Reviewing the literature on Northern Ireland and Turkey has informed my own approach to my case study. Using the body in a hunger strike is not the same strategy in all cases; it depends,

for instance, on whether the counter-body/enemy is state violence (e.g. Turkey) or colonialism (as in Northern Ireland and Palestine). The political act can be carried out for different reasons, on the basis of different ideologies (national liberation in Ireland, Marxism-Leninism in Turkey). In Ireland, the national vision of the Republican movement inspired the hunger-strike struggle in prison. This struggle in turn could lead to a transformation in the Republican movement. The specificity of the Turkish hunger strikers was that when prisoners realised that the state would never negotiate their demands, they embarked on a path of self-destruction. A different dynamic, grounded in the specific context, gave rise to different tactics and strategies. My research will explore the specific dynamics of the hunger strike in the Palestinian case, with particular attention to the relation between strategy and subjectivity. This research specifies the place and history of the prison struggle within the broader Palestinian movement and shows the historical and political situation that led to Palestinian prisoners engaging in individual, protracted, and open-ended strikes to protest administrative detention. Reviewing the literature on hunger-strike resistance has enabled me to draw on a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to conceptualise resistant subjectivity in Palestinian hunger strikers. As later chapters will show, my own perspective differs in various respects from the literature I have reviewed, largely because of my effort to do justice to the hunger strikers' own accounts of their lived experience and the way in which aspects of the hunger strikes seem to life exceeds for them the boundaries of thought.

## **Chapter 2: Research in Action: Field-work and Reflection on Challenges**

The methodological framework comprises two chapters. This chapter describes my ethnographic field work and the interviews with the research participants and reflects on the challenges I encountered. The next chapter engages with the set of methodological approaches that inform my data analysis.

I begin this chapter by drawing a detailed picture of my three rounds of field work between 2015 and 2017. These included eighty-five in-depth interviews with five groups of people in Palestine; former prisoners and hunger strikers, lawyers representing prisoners, families of prisoners and ex-prisoners, leaders and activists from the prisoners' rights movement, and representatives of political parties. In the second part, I elucidate the approach that emerged from my encounter with the research participants and reflect on my field work. I then discuss the interviews and the positionality of the researcher as an embodied researcher. I draw on feminist and decolonising authors who developed critical approaches to the research process. I discuss the difficulty of detaching myself from the subject matter given my immersion in the context, participating in solidarity events with the dying prisoners in the Israeli jails before and during my research. This research topic is very sensitive and necessitates empathy, not only in order to gain access to the participants but also from an ethical perspective.

### **1.0 Description of field work and methods of data collection**

I adopted multiple methods of gathering data about hunger strikers during captivity and after their release. The research drew mainly upon interviews with former hunger strikers, which were enriched by ethnographically-informed engagement beyond the prison. Although I could not access the hunger strikers inside the prison, I was able to engage with the Palestinian collective outside. The hunger strikers broke the boundaries between outside and inside by involving the public in support. While the prisoners were on hunger strike, I met with their lawyers, families and political parties, and as a result, after their release, they were prepared to recount their experiences to me. Although I had access to archival material, such as the reports lawyers' visits and the prisoners' affidavits, interviews allowed me to develop insights about the hunger strikers' experience from their own perspective. From these I gathered their views about their level of support from fellow party members and political organisations. I also saw

videos of hunger strikers in hospital on starvation and on this basis was able ask them about the lived experience which enabled us to co-shape the narrative and sometimes my understanding about them, drawn from the information during their hunger strike, was altered through these meetings.

Being in the field over an extended period of time facilitated my involvement and the gathering of data from audio recordings, publications, broadcasts, and flyers. I also accessed source material and data from interviews and other textual and archival materials in addition to published and public narratives and texts produced and shared by prisoners about their own experiences, such as the messages they sent to their loved ones and their wills addressed to the Palestinian people and their families when they approached death<sup>42</sup>. I took part in many political activities that supported the hunger strikers, such as demonstrations and solidarity campaigns, as well as engaging with the tents<sup>43</sup> organised by families and supporters of starving prisoners. I attended media conferences and read local and international news and media covering the hunger strikers. In addition, I collected various visual resources such as posters, photographs, videos and cartoons by different artists.<sup>44</sup>

### **Field work journeys:**

<b>Ethnographic journey/s</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Interviews</b>
First round 2015	May 15 - August 11	37 interviews
Second round 2016	July 26 – August 31	36 interviews
Third round 2017	August 4 -September 8	12 interviews
		<b>Total 85</b>

### **1.1 The first round of field work – 2015**

<sup>42</sup> For an example, see Bilal Kayed’s letter in Chapter 11.

<sup>43</sup> These solidarity tents with banners and photos of striking prisoners were set up in the streets in support of the hunger strikers to mobilise people and raise awareness among the general public.

<sup>44</sup> In particular by Carlos Latuff, a Brazilian cartoonist who produced a number of works in solidarity with the Palestinian hunger strikers.

My field work commenced in the summer of 2015. Khader Adnan had started his second hunger strike on May 6 in protest against his lengthy detention without trial, and as soon as I arrived in Palestine I went to the Prisoners' Club<sup>45</sup> (*Nadi Al-Asir*) which keeps important archives and testimonies of hunger strikers in the legal unit, and where Adnan's lawyer, Mr. Jawad Bolous, the manager of the legal unit, was based. There I met Amani Sarahna, the media coordinator of the legal unit who agreed to assist me. As she observed, there were very few studies about their work with prisoners and specifically the hunger strike, which had recently become the dominant form of resistance in Palestine. During our conversation, she received a phone call from Mr. Bolous reporting the outcome of his visit to Adnan, whose health had deteriorated. I was granted permission to record this phone call and given a copy of the press release she wrote about the lawyer's visit to be distributed to the local media. I subsequently collected all the press releases published about his strike. Ms. Sarahna then organised an interview for me with Adnan's lawyer who I met twice, the first during Adnan's hunger strike and the second after he halted it. I also attended all the press conferences organised by Adnan's lawyer. These were often attended by Adnan's family particularly toward the end of hunger strike when his health became critical.

I also participated in demonstrations in support of Adnan's hunger strike organised by several prisoners' rights organisations and visited his family and conducted interviews with his wife and parents. His 56-day hunger strike ended, after a long process of negotiation, on July 12 with a moment of 'victory' and celebration by the Palestinian people, after his family and activists had held protests demanding his immediate release in front of the Israeli hospital where he hovered between life and death. I was invited to join the protest outside the hospital but could not go because I hold a West Bank ID and therefore needed a permit to enter the land where the hospital is located.<sup>46</sup> Before I left for London I was able to interview him the day after he had been released from Hospital in Nablus, where he had undergone stomach surgery to deal with complications resulting from his starvation. After his release, a large celebration was held in his village, Araba, and in different districts of the West Bank.

### Archival material

---

<sup>45</sup> The Palestinian prisoners Club is a non-governmental organisation that was established in 1993 to support prisoners in Israeli occupation jails.

<sup>46</sup> See my article about his strike, 'Khader Adnan: Pessimistic Mind, Optimistic Will' (Ajour 2015) in *Alkhbar* newspaper.

I collected data and archival materials with the support of human rights organisations focusing on Palestinian prisoners. As a result, I was able to:

- Review resources such as lawyers' reports about hunger strikers' cases and affidavits from prisoners.
- Review media resources, reports, and press releases reporting events during hunger striking (e.g. the media department in the Prisoner Club covers the events and details during the hunger strikes), and the texts produced and shared during their imprisonment.
- Obtain all the names of released political prisoners who had engaged in hunger strikes.

### In-depth interviews

The Prisoner Club, in cooperation with their branches in Hebron, Nablus and Jenin in different districts of the West Bank helped me coordinate most of my interviews. I interviewed 20 released political prisoners in the different districts (including Adnan). The prisoners were affiliated with different political organisations, some had engaged in individual hunger strikes, others in collective ones. In addition, I conducted interviews with 5 lawyers representing prisoners in prison; 8 families of prisoners then currently in custody; and 4 with the leadership of the prisoners' rights movement. In total, then, I conducted 37 interviews. I left for London before Mohamad Alan ended his hunger strike which had lasted for 65 days. I followed it through skype interviews with the legal unit in the Prisoners' Club. When I watched al-Kik's shocking and disturbing video,<sup>47</sup> screaming with the pain of starvation on the 83<sup>rd</sup> day of his strike, I was hoping that I would not have to deal with the tragedy of a death during my research. Since the beginning of individual hunger strikes in 2012, no prisoner had died and all of those who went on strike had been released. But public support for hunger strikers in 2016 had decreased compared with the beginning of the hunger strike phenomenon in 2012. This is because the third Intifada had erupted and Israeli prison authorities now ignored the striking prisoners since the focus was no longer on them but rather outside the prisons.

First round interviews:

---

<sup>47</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfoRQHmT5ho>

Number of interviews	Groups
20	The released former hunger strikers.
5	Lawyers representing prisoners in imprisonment
8	Prisoners' families
4	Interview with Human rights activists and politician works in prisoners' righters
37	total

## **1.2 Second round of field work - 2016**

My second journey was to examine the expansion of individualised hunger strikes into the 'factional' strikes of 2016, namely strikes organised by particular parties and groups. The hunger strikes had moved from collective action to lengthy individual strikes in the post- Oslo period, and now, with the return to these collective actions, I wanted to illuminate the extent to which this form of resistance, which was initially largely disconnected from the support of political parties, inspired the national liberation struggle.

On 13 June 2016, on the completion of his 14-year jail sentence, Bilal Kayed, a militant in the PFLP, was transferred to six-month administrative detention. In protest against this, he launched an open-ended hunger strike. Although it started as an individual action, the solidarity of his PFLP comrades expanded the struggle into a collective one involving the entirety of the organisation inside the prisons, including its leader Ahmed Sadat, the general secretary of the PFLP. In an effort to suppress this action, the Israeli authorities placed Sadat in solitary confinement.

Most of the research participants I interviewed in 2015 were affiliated with Islamic Jihad because the individual hunger strike phenomenon was initiated by prisoners from that organisation. The field work involved a large number of interviews. After I had returned to the UK new prisoners from PFLP, Fateh and Hamas members embarked on individual hunger strikes. Therefore, there was a need to interview these prisoners from different political parties in order to study the relationship with their parties, given that each party has a different position toward individualised resistance. I interviewed seven former hunger strikers - two from Hamas,

two from Islamic Jihad and three from the PFLP. I also needed to cover some gaps in the interviews I had already conducted, so a second interview with the research participants from the first round was required. In particular, I wanted to examine the transformation of subjectivity after a period of time had passed, taking into account that I had met them shortly after their release in 2015 and had thus been unable to study the post-hunger strike stage. A number of those I had interviewed in 2015 had been re-arrested and held in detention. However, Ayman Hamdan was released again a few days before my return to London and so I had the opportunity to conduct a second interview with him as well as four others. Further, I also interviewed six former prisoners from the 1960s and 1970s, arrested before the Oslo agreement. These interviews examined the transformation of the hunger strikes over time from concerted collective actions to lengthy individual strikes.

I conducted seven interviews with families of prisoners, including of those still held in captivity. Some family members criticised the political parties and I saw the children of some hunger strikers in solidarity demonstrations hold banners which said ‘we will not forgive those who could have supported our fathers and did not’. Some prisoners’ wives announced in the media that they would not accept the condolences of political parties if their husbands died in hunger strikes. I also conducted seven interviews with representatives from Hamas, Fateh, Jihad and PFLP with regard to their attitude to the individualised hunger strikers, and conducted four interviews with lawyers representing prisoners, and figures in prisoners’ rights organisations.

Apart from interviews, I participated with PFLP activities in solidarity with the hunger strike of Bilal Kayed and attended the lawyer’s conferences, visited Addameer<sup>48</sup> and the Prisoners’ Club and other prisoners’ right organisations, and participated in the demonstrations which were usually organised in front of the Red Cross and the solidarity tents in *Dwar Asah* square.

Second round interviews:

Number of interviews	Groups
7	released former hunger strikers

---

<sup>48</sup> The Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association was established in 1992 as a Palestinian non-governmental institution to support Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli prisons. It offers legal aid and advocates for prisoners’ rights at the national and international level.

5	second time interviews with same participants I met in the first time
7	prisoners' families
7	representatives of political parties
6	former prisoners arrested before Oslo agreement since 60s and 70s
4	Lawyers representing prisoners in imprisonment
36	Total

### **1.3 Third round of field work – 2017**

The third journey was mainly aimed at studying ‘the dignity and freedom hunger strike’ – the name given to the hunger strike undertaken by around 1500 political prisoners in Israeli jails starting on 17 April and led by the respected Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti of Fatah. That date coincides with the national Palestinian Prisoners’ Day, commemorated since 1974. Prisoners involved in this hunger strike were protesting against the degrading conditions of incarceration, such as humiliation and torture and the prevention of meetings with lawyers. Their demands were based on basic human rights and included the end of the denial of family visits, an end to solitary confinement, the right to access higher education, proper health care and medical treatment and an end to indefinite administrative detention without charge or trial.

Before I went to Palestine, I was in daily contact with members of the Media Committee of the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners' Society. I received their reports and daily updates on the hunger strikes and conducted Skype interviews with some of them. In addition, I followed the local press and social media in Palestine and observed the widespread international solidarity, especially after the escalation of Israeli violent actions against striking prisoners. This includes the freedom and dignity march where thousands of Palestinians gathered at Nelson Mandela Square in Ramallah on May 3 in solidarity with the hunger strikers. In the light of these developments, I investigated the position of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and political parties with regard to the hunger strike.

I visited the prisoners’ rights institutions such as Al-Haq, Addameer and the Prisoners’ Club to collect information, reports and archival material, and collected diaries of former prisoners shared by the Prisoners’ Club. I conducted 9 interviews in August 2017: 2 with

former hunger strikers who had taken part in this hunger strike and who had been recently released; 2 with family members of prominent political prisoners who led the hunger strikers - namely Fadwa Barghouti (Marwan’s Bargouthi’s wife) and Sumaud Sadat (the daughter of the PFLP secretary general); 1 with the mother of former hunger strikers Mahmoud and Mohamad Damra; and 2 with members of the media and communication committee/Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees (CDA) and the Prisoners’ Society which was established to cover the mass hunger strike news.

I also held 4 interviews with former hunger strikers who had embarked on individual hunger strikes during my 2016 field trip and had been released after my return to the UK, namely Bilal Kayed (PFLP) and the brothers Mohamad and Mahmoud Balboul (Fateh). I later met their families and their lawyers. Since he is UK-based I interviewed Mahmoud Al-Sirsik<sup>49</sup> in London on August 3. The hunger strike was still ongoing and I was informed by the Prisoners’ Club that the administrative detainees were planning to go on a new hunger strike in April 2018 but due to time constraints on my dissertation I was unable to follow this up.

Third round of interviews:

Number of interviews	Groups
2	released former hunger strikers who took part in 2017 hunger collective hunger strike
4	prisoners’ families
2	members of the media and communication committee/Commission of Detainees and Ex- Detainees
4	new individual hunger strikers
12	Total

## 2.0 Them and Me: Toward a decolonial humanist approach

Scholarship “that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing (Ruth Behar).

<sup>49</sup><https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/press-release-me-let-me-go/football-falafel-palestinian-footballer-mahmoud-sarsak-prison>

The approach I have taken towards my research falls within the broader intellectual project of decolonising the pursuit of knowledge. As Edward Said reminds us, if knowledge is intertwined with power, knowledge producers such as sociologists must assume responsibility for their practices (Said, 1994; Seidman, 1996). Feminist researchers and decolonising scholars (Gunaratnam, 2003; Haraway, 1988; Smith, 2013) have critically explored the problems of power and reflexivity in the research process. My approach is grounded in this critical epistemological framework alert to power differences. It seeks to negotiate the boundaries of power relations between the researcher and research participants, on the one hand, and institutions of knowledge production, on the other, all the while remaining conscious of the colonised people whose own knowledge has been undermined in the interests of dominant institutions. Research ‘occurs in a set of political and social conditions’ (Smith, 2013: 4) and as researchers we are not isolated, objective and empty vessels, but rather, partial, involved, and relational, especially with regard to power.

### 2.1 Reflexivity and anti-colonial theorising

When a number of the research participants, among them Mazen Natcheh, Khader Adnan and Mohamad al-Kik, first found out that I was doing my research in a British academic institution, they commented that ‘Britain is the source of our tragedy’. I asked whether they were talking about the Balfour declaration, but in fact they were referring to the practice of administrative detention, since it was based on the British Mandate<sup>50</sup> law in Palestine and later adopted by the Israeli occupation.

One benefit of a research approach grounded in critical feminist and decolonial epistemologies is that it can situate and connect the research encounter to a broader historical global system. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues in *Decolonizing Methodology*, theory is a tool, a means to ‘write back’ against the dominant narratives and constructions of history and society: ‘Having been immersed in the Western academy which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorised, indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced’ (Smith, 2013: 30). In the context of dispossession of land and uprooting from their geographical space, the historical narrative of the indigenous and colonised can help prevent their erasure from history and is a crucial aspect

---

<sup>50</sup> On administrative detention in Israeli law, see: [https://www.btselem.org/administrative\\_detention/old/israeli\\_law](https://www.btselem.org/administrative_detention/old/israeli_law)

of the decolonising project. Authors such as Robert C. Young, in his *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West* (Young, 2004) or Janet Abu-Lughod, in her *On the Remaking of History: How to Reinvent the Past* (Kruger and Mariani, 1998), provide critiques of dominant Western histories which have developed alongside colonialism and imperial beliefs about 'the other'. The anti-colonial framework of my research hopefully helps provide a space for colonised people to articulate their counter narrative.

Most of the participants expressed the wish for their stories to be heard. They think that their counter-narrative has been silenced and misrepresented and that the unjust conditions inflicted on them in Israeli jails seek to dehumanise them into passive victims. As Mohamad al-Kik put it: 'Israeli propaganda made us into terrorists, racists and suicidal, and through our stories we want to show who the terrorist is'. Shari Stone-Mediatore, in her book *Reading Across Borders* (2004) argues that storytelling and knowledge of resistance makes room for the power of stories originating in marginalised peoples' experience and, as she puts it, counter-acts 'the disempowerment of people who have been excluded from official knowledge production, for we deny epistemic value from a central means by which such people can take control over their representation' (Stone-Mediatore, 2004: 2).

The participants were very motivated to engage in this research and strongly welcomed being interviewed. Most of them were proud of their hunger strike and aware of the popularity and support they'd achieved. Therefore, they were motivated to talk about their resistance in Israeli prisons and interested to disseminate their stories in the media and research projects. They often spoke publicly about their experience in ways that overlap with my interview material, and, after getting their consent, I chose not to keep them anonymous. The interviewees assume that the research is bearing witness to their suffering and this was a key reason for them agreeing to be interviewed. None of the statements made in their interviews are ones that they wouldn't also announce publicly. However, not being anonymous in a media context is quite different from not being anonymous in a research project which raises issues of research ethics particularly in regard to putting the participants at risk taking into account that the Israeli state can hold Palestinians under administrative detention just for announcing their affiliation with political parties. Despite this, participants gave their consent and expected that their names to be mentioned and their stories made public. Indeed, their expectation of me was that their voices will be heard to expose Israeli practices.

Being embedded in institutions that are implicated in the colonial histories which produced the current context of the research participants requires, in line with Said, to think about how I should assume responsibility and be accountable in my research practice. Hesse-

Biber claims that feminist researchers should practice reflexivity and focus on the relationship between researchers and participants to balance different levels of power and authority. According to her, reflexivity is:

A process by which [researchers] recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location and assumption can influence research, reflexivity is a way for researchers to account for their personal biases and examine the effect that these biases may have on the data produced (Hesse-Biber, 2013: 3).

A reflexive experience in which a specific mode of subjectivity comes into being is conditioned in part by how the subject relates to the other. Our subjectivity is shaped and transformed by research processes and interactions with research subjects. But how do we overcome the dilemmas that arise when the topic of research is one that we are politically, emotionally, and intellectually invested in from the start? Cheater explores our commitment to our dual roles as ‘citizen and intellectual’ and the repercussions of ignoring either of these positions. She highlights the researcher’s conflict between two subjectivities: her own and that of the multiple ‘research subjects’, along with the obligations towards the respondents; this reflection on the problem of subjectivity is crucial to attain critical reflexivity about one’s research and its outcomes (Cheater, 1987: 168–171).

Research is more than the mere extraction of data. It involves a relational experience with interviewees shaped by the stories they tell. But does the way I listen to their stories as a ‘human being’ operate at the same level of listening to them as ‘researcher’? In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Smith’s critique of Western paradigms of research and knowledge from an indigenous and colonised perspective, she states that: ‘Research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (Smith, 2013:1). According to Smith, ‘decolonisation’ is concerned with gaining ‘a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices’. Gunaratnam and Oliviere comment that: ‘Reflexivity involves a critical stance to existing concepts and research methods, recognizing that these are not objective and value free, but are influenced by social context, that they both affect and produce what we know’ (Gunaratnam and Oliviere, 2009: 57). In the name of objectivity and professionalism, we are often removed from human compassion and emotions, not only in politically charged issues but also in those research encounters that appeal to our human empathy.

In her discussion of the role and responsibilities of the scholar and intellectual in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Sara Roy writes:

The issue of objectivity as a utopia for scholarship is not a given despite current protestations to the contrary. The great philosopher Theodor Adorno argued that truth cannot be found in the aggregate but in the subjective, on the individual's consciousness, 'on what could not be regimented in the totally administered society' (Roy, 2007: 55).

She continues with a criticism of neutrality in the critical task of the humanist scholar who writes on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

Neutrality is often a mask for siding with the status quo, while objectivity—pure objectivity at least—does not exist, and claiming it is dishonest. My commitment is to accuracy, to representing the facts to the best of my ability. The commitment, fundamentally, is to be as close to knowledge as possible rather than to truth with a capital 'T' (Roy, 2007: 58).

The stories of hunger stories are testimonies that form part of Palestinian history and contemporary reality. They and I are not talking about 'truth', but about what happened in a specific set of circumstances. I also recount my engagement, performance, and challenges in an attempt to elucidate the features of my approach that underpins the theory and ethics of knowledge embedded in it.

## 2.2 Challenges for the embodied researcher

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation... for interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place (Said1981:154).

The above quote from Said, emphasising that the positionality of the researcher, is significant for any reflection on the process of knowledge production. Feminist epistemologists argue that knowledge is always socially constructed and therefore situated in specific locations (Gunaratnam, 2003; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1990). Most Palestinian researchers find themselves involved in topics related to Palestinian reality, as there is no escape from issues that affect our lives linked to the Israeli occupation. These research topics run toward us before we run to them. I carried out my research fieldwork in Palestine, the place where I belong and where I lived all my life until I moved to the UK in 2014. I have experienced the impact of occupation on my life and loved ones and, as Jaggar argues, it is impossible to assume that

emotion and value will not be present in our research (Jaggar, 1989). The prison as a site of resistance gained my attention for my doctoral thesis. I was not in prison like my research participants, but living under occupation is in many ways to live in an open-air prison. In a militarily colonised space the idea of prison surrounded us. Like prisoners, we are completely restricted in cantons since we don't have freedom of mobility and are denied movement due to closures, checkpoints and a segregation apartheid wall. Before moving to the UK, I lived in Ramallah in West Bank but I am totally separated from my family in Gaza – my place of birth. I can't go to Gaza or Jerusalem or Palestinian lands occupied since 1948, unlike my foreign friends who come to Palestine and have the freedom to reach (and research in) these areas.

We are often impeded from writing about our own communities, unlike external researchers, because of the obstacles facing us as Palestinian scholars. As with most Palestinians, I have been exposed to Israeli occupation practices, ranging from curfews and house invasions to gas inhalation at checkpoints and denial of access to Palestinian cities due to closures. For long years, I have been separated from my family who lived under three cruel wars in Gaza. The Israeli Ministry of Interior rejected travel permits for me and my children, denying them access to their familial roots in Gaza. My children only met my family once in their entire life and therefore haven't developed a close relationship with them. Even when my father went for surgery in a hospital in Jerusalem, I couldn't go to see him, even while he was in a critical condition.

Many Palestinians are denied access to study abroad and I experienced difficulty in returning to the UK after my 2017 field research due to the collective punishment imposed on people born in Gaza by both the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority. I had to involve the British Council, who required my supervisor to write a letter before I could leave Palestine; in order to obtain a visa to attend a conference in Berlin in 2018, I was told that the German visa department wouldn't recognise my Palestinian passport and that I had to apply from Palestine, despite the fact I study in UK.

This geographical segregation creates a feeling of being captive and makes us internalise a sense of confinement. Yet living in an open-air 'prison' is a privilege compared to the hostile environment of the Israeli jails. As Mazin Natcheh, one of the participants said '(if you) don't leave your room for four or five continuous days (you could) experience our feeling', but he added: 'note this is voluntary in your comfortable home, so imagine if you are forcibly held under detention for long years and you don't know when you will be free and you don't know why you are in prison'. In the context of hunger striking I'm trying to imagine being in my room without food or drink, not only for a few days, but for sixty or eighty days like the

hunger strikers. I am both an outsider and insider researcher – outsider, since I have never found myself in the condition of captivity but insider because I am a participant through my informed ethnographic engagement, shared social experience and political solidarity. With reference to this positionality, Said argued: ‘As I wrote, I found myself switching pronouns, from “we” to “you” to “they” to designate Palestinians. As abrupt as these shifts are, I feel they reproduce the way we experience ourselves, the way “you” sense that others look at you” (Said, 1986: 6). Linda Alcoff, in her article ‘The problem of speaking for others’ (Alcoff, 1991), pointed out that there is no such thing as a homogeneous group and there will always be differences and similarities between people. She argued that we are never just one ‘category’ and the Palestinian collective is no exception. This to some extent problematises claiming commonality between researcher and research participants.

Despite my background as a Palestinian I was confronted by things in the process of my research that I hadn’t expected. This often disturbed me deeply and ultimately changed the way I see the world. I have witnessed human intensity, pain and the complexity of extensive resilience, as well as total heartbreak. The research was very painful and emotionally exhausting; while reporting my first-round field visit in 2015 at my first supervision when I returned to the UK, I found myself bursting into tears. I had to be the container of this pain I had absorbed in order to be able to digest it later, but I experienced difficulty in writing up the interviewees’ transcription. My strategy to deal with such intense narratives was to escape from the empirical data. In the beginning I had a tendency to abstraction in my writing. The empirical data is very rich and complex and required resilience to deal with and make sense of it. This required time and the honing of research skills, a challenge compounded for a foreign student such as myself by approaching English as a second language, and not having had access to the same research training as many of my European peers. I reached the point where I was considering a period of interruption to help me cope with all the different pressures and enable me to complete the thesis. I didn’t follow this up the suggestion to seek counselling in order to deal with the emotional toll entails by this work, especially as I don’t see my pain as an individual pain, but rather as connected to the pain of all Palestinians, a collective pain. I needed to address it through writing because it is part of the research process and I took to heart Ruth Behar's comment that anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing (Behar

1996:177) and thus tried to produce a piece of research that is genuine and faithful to people's suffering.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.3 Our interaction in the interviews

The one-to-one interviews were essential to gain insight into the hunger strikers' experience and how they understood their own subjectivity. I met some participants in the prisoners' clubs various branches in the West Bank. Others invited me into their homes and shared their hospitality, or to public spaces such as cafes or restaurants. The research is sensitive, as it looks at an experience of self-determination in the midst of an existential conflict that is a matter of life and death. As such, it entails a high level of intimacy which, in my view, was able to generate human bonds in an interview situation that I endeavoured to treat as a shared space that encouraged genuine dialogue. Trust was built up gradually. In the beginning some participants tried to maintain a distance and did not open up easily. For example, at the beginning of our engagement Munir Abu Sharer was very formal and controlled, and reproduced a standard political discourse about the hunger strike which kept his experience and its suffering at bay. But when I asked him about the human trajectory of his experience,<sup>52</sup> he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said: 'Ashjan, there are things that are not said but are wept'. After a short pause I felt that, whilst I had in a sense stepped into his world I needed to step back. This process is discussed by Les Back in terms of the 'value of returning' to our sites of research to offer greater understanding and proximity (Back, 2007: 35).

However, the way Munir looked at me, mentioning my name as if he knew me for a long time, generated a sense of closeness. We both 'stepped back' to reflect on this intimate moment and then returned to our conversation. After this turning point, I felt the rhythm of the dialogue changed and our interaction transformed. These moments, which entail feelings and emotions, connected us on a human level and illustrated the ways that language is inadequate to express the lived experience of the hunger strike. This is a theme of considerable importance to the thesis since this experience is at the limit of conceptualisation in that there are some aspects that are not interpretable. The participants could not rationalise their experience and accordingly developed their own non-material interpretations of it.

---

<sup>51</sup> To deal with this challenge I also tried to articulate some of my research interviews in a free writing semi-fictional form in parallel to my academic work.

<sup>52</sup> I asked them about intimate issues such as how they felt in the moment of release when they saw the happiness of mothers after a long journey of agony, or how they felt about their loved ones' solidarity starvation, and what they wrote in their will to them when they were approaching death.

Through these moments they took control over the narrative which unfolded on their own terms. They had the choice over what to tell and which part of the stories they wished to narrate. Not only Munir Abu Sharar but many other participants were deeply affected by recalling intimate moments with their loved ones. The most heart-breaking interviews were with the mothers of the hunger strikers. I felt terrible when one of them said: ‘I don’t know what shall I tell you – they are dying and we are dying with them’ (interview with the mother of two brothers Mohamad and Mahmoud Balboul, 2016). I felt compelled to stop the interview out of respect for their situation. This happened again in my interviews with Nora Hashlamoun, when she cried during our conversation. In addition, some interviewees asked me to stop recording when they talked about sensitive and private matters, for example on the post-traumatic effects of hunger strike on them and their families and I did not incorporate this information into my account.

The interviews were a space for expressing and constructing subjectivity in a self-reflexive process. Hasan Safadi was surprised at what emerged during our conversations:

Before you came, I was wondering what you will ask me, but see what our conversation brings and how much we speak. I thought you would ask me simple questions about my hunger strike, but look what happened while you were talking with me. I don’t know how all this talking came about. I am wondering about the way I answered you, the same thing was happening with me in the hunger strike. I was surprised at some of my decisions and actions. I did not know how I made them.

Most of the interviewees shared this surprise about the way the interviews went. For example, Abd-Razek Faraj has a reputation as a taciturn person. Yet at the end of his interview, he commented: ‘usually I am very silent. I am surprised I did all this talking today. I interviewed some of the hunger strikers a few months after their release. Some of them had been subjected to long terms of isolation in prison and were hesitant about being interviewed because solitude was one of the social impacts of solitary confinement. For instance, Adel Hiribat told me:

I am sitting now with you naturally but it is possible that after five minutes I will not be able to complete the interview. Sometimes I leave my family and my children to walk in the balcony alone as I feel as if I’m in the prison.

In the end, Hiribat spent more than three hours sharing a rich account of his experience with me. We had met in the prisoners’ club office in Hebron and the interview was terminated because people came to say that they needed to close the office, otherwise we would have

carried on. At the end of the interview, he expressed surprise at the amount of time he was able to spend talking.

Not all interviews produced positive results. In one, for example, there was tension when I was asked to veil and cover my body. This affected our interaction and when I asked the participant certain questions, he responded with irritation: 'I am not a philosopher to answer these questions'. In the second round of interviews in 2016, Hiribat had changed. He was silent. I was surprised, as I had expected to receive another rich account, as in the first interview. I came with new questions, but Hiribat did not have any interest in providing information, particularly about his relationship with his political organisation. He told me that he had isolated himself from his own political party and needed to focus on his family rather than political life. The post-hunger strike period is very important and has particular effects on the interviewees; it is a case of how temporality is crucial to which stories we tell (Gunaratnam and Oliviere, 2009). This takes us back to Back's 'value of returning' (Back, 2007: 35). However, most the participants provided as rich a narrative in the second interview as in the first, and were keen to engage with me again, and I generally received positive feedback from them. For example, Shadi Abu Mali's brother said: 'Ashjan, we did not expect such questions, because you went to the depth by asking existential questions about the meaning of being human, and the meaning of *Al-Watan* (homeland)'. I even developed friendships with a number of the hunger strikers and maintain contact and meet some of them when I visit Palestine. It was particularly special to meet one of the participants who had been in contact with my father before the interview. When I interviewed Mahmoud Sersik, a former football player, he commented 'How could I not know captain Najy Ajour, he is a loved celebrity in Palestine'. My access in this case was enhanced by the fact that my father had been a respected and well-known footballer in Palestine.

#### 2.4 Empathy, dialogue and compassion

Dialogue is a practice of freedom and helps people to become fully human (Freire, 1970: 43).

Because the research topic required compassion the boundaries were disrupted and shifted. However although I am a compassionate insider I am also an outsider. That said, the outsider status linked to my being a doctoral student based in England this might have contributed to their opening up to me, because of the way I was coming in and then going away with their stories. It was difficult for me to keep my distance and detach myself when I dealt with their

suffering. In narrating their stories, I could not set them boundaries and be a passive listener whilst they recalled their pain and sentiments involving traumatic situations. This vulnerability affected the way I interacted and led to a free dialogue, often revealing a rich and complex account from ‘the heart’. As Bilal Deyab put it in a message he sent to me after the interview:

Many people came to interview me and wrote about my hunger strike but I found the interview with you special because I felt my interaction was high due to the way you talked and asked questions. I felt your interest and motivation. Therefore I spoke from heart. Your commitment made the words come from the heart.

Although I prepared semi-structured interview questions I didn’t restrict myself to them. At some point I felt my identity as ‘researcher’ diminishing as we questioned together the mystical aspects of their experience and the limitation of language and rationality to capture it. We talked informally at some points and they got a sense of who I was, as a human being not a researcher. As Freire argues, the dialogue founded upon humility and love can become a horizontal relationship in which mutual trust is the logical consequence (Freire, 1970: 72). My participants expressed how they saw themselves as owners of the research, and pointed out how they wanted the research to convey their counter-story. For instance, after his interview, Salim Badi said he hoped that I would be able to produce a critical study which distances itself from the liberal discourse of human rights which reproduce the image of freedom fighters as victims.

My humanistic approach sought to foreground Said and Fanon's radical humanisms and their legacy of emancipation. As Said comments:

Humanism ... is about transition from one realm, one area of human experience to another. It is also about the practice of identities other than those given by the flag or the national war of the moment (Said, 2004: 80).

Said wants the intellectual to push the boundaries, to reconcile their identity with other identities and other people rather than dominating other cultures. It is a universalisation that does not entail losing historical specificity.<sup>53</sup> Said was both a Palestinian nationalist and someone who always maintained critical distance from national discourse. He works toward

---

<sup>53</sup> See also the treatment of this question in a short chapter on Said in Peter Hallward’s *Absolutely Postcolonial* (Hallward, 2001).

the goal of political liberation, but it is a form of liberation that extends beyond the confines of limited national or cultural goals. This transitional form of universal humanism suggests reconciling differences through the empathetic connection between me and participants which contributes to overcoming the power relation and privilege.

### 2.5 The search for the language of the heart: The feminist decolonising ethnography

The participants' stories raised the problem of language and its limitation. They reported that 'words won't do justice to such experience' (Munir Abu Sharar); I felt that scholarly language often failed to capture the depth of the lived experience. I needed to produce a scholarly knowledge which required a level of critical distance, controlling emotions and bracketing feeling. At the same time, the meanings that emerged in the research are broad, complex, and rich on a human level and the challenge was to convey this richness and depth. This required extending the methodological and theoretical frameworks we normally use, which say little about the heart and intimacy. When the hunger strikers were dying, experiencing their limits, their narrative accounts and their wills and messages frequently conveyed their love for everything – children, mothers, Palestine, the martyrs of Palestine, and the whole world. Fraser and Puwar (2008) address the production of intimacy in research and the way in which it informs the making of knowledge. They discuss the concept of intimacy to challenge the boundaries between creativity and analysis, and this offers insights for the methodological questions that arise from this research. Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (1997) offers a paradigm of intimate research through her practice of a humanist anthropology in fieldwork. Her writing proposes that anthropology lived and written from the heart in an intimate personal voice can give in-depth understanding that a more detached approach cannot. Behar immerses herself in the subjects of her study and became one of them in turn by bringing her personal experience of loss into her research. Her essays emphasise the attachment to those we study; these subjective feelings generate a more humane and sympathetic understanding of the lives of people we observe (Behar, 1997). Ronald J. Pelias's *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic and Daily Life* also suggests the need to write from the heart, and introduces researchers to the vulnerability of emotions and the sensuality of language in a poetic form that can bring us closer to the subject we study. His book invites identification and empathic connection which makes the researcher foster connections and open spaces for free dialogue and healing (Pelias, 2004).

The broader argument is that researchers can yield genuine knowledge if they write from a position of immersive empathy with their participants. This entails some risks and

dangers but we can also affirm the need for an intellectual space in which to experimenting and try new things. This approaching to writing up field-work avoids rationalising pain, in contrast to a reified approach the 'scientific method' which merely rationalises the experience. The latter is like a sharp knife that deals with the very intimate phenomenon of our human existence in order to draw 'objective' and 'neutral' conclusions. 'Writing from the heart' is a critique of the liberal paradigm of thinking which is based on instrumental rationality and the domination of reason. Even some materialist philosophers accept the nature of this colonising operation: 'Science is not to be dragged down to the region of sensibility, but the sensible is to be lifted to the dignity of knowledge', wrote Terry Eagleton (1990:17). But, he adds, rationalist philosophy's approach to sensory experience functions as a form of colonisation – 'the colonisation of reason' (Eagleton,1990: 13–15).

This suggests expanding the framework of thinking and embracing new tools and languages. Kamala Visweswaran's 'Fictions of Feminist Ethnography' (1994) blurs ethnographic and literary genres in her writing about women in India. She devises a new approach to feminist ethnography in these essays by utilising history, fiction, autobiography and biography, deconstruction, and post-colonial discourse. In the process, she reveals the 'fictions in anthropology and the anthropology in fiction' (Visweswaran, 1994). Visweswaran and Behar offer examples for academics who face epistemological and political issues in their research. However, this raises the further question of how fictionalising can overcome the problem of objectivism, in that fiction writers often don't consider themselves to have any particular ethical commitments. In this context, James Clifford and George Marcus's edited collection *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* is a key text in critically approaching the debate<sup>54</sup> around fictionalising anthropology. The book revolves around three themes, which raise important challenges to the abovementioned literature: ethnographic truth, rhetoric in ethnography, and the writing of self. It is related to the narrative turn in anthropology on the basis of seeing ethnographies as texts which use literary devices, and this is a radical move offering a different epistemological and methodological approaches in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

## 2.6 Field-work from a feminist perspective

---

<sup>54</sup> On the use of fiction as a sociological resource see *Fiction and Social reality* (Longo, 2016).

Despite the long history of Palestinian women's resistance and involvement in struggles against colonialism (Abdulhadi, 1998; Jad, 2018; Sabbagh, 1998), some academic studies investigating Palestinian resistance are gender-blind. In this research I have sought to foreground a number of feminist issues. In 2015, when I began my field work, I approached the Ministry of Prisoners requesting lists of prisoners who engaged in hunger strikes since 2012. When I asked for the names and contacts of female hunger strikers, I was told: 'no women tend to be involved in hunger strike. You know it is shaming to carry their bodies when they faint while they are striking'. But I knew very well that there were some women on hunger strike. Hana Shalbi was the second hunger striker directly after Adnan in 2012, and Itaf Ilyan, had engaged in hunger strikes in the 1990s. This view illustrates patriarchal aspects in the resistance which reduces women to a passive and invisible role. Despite Itaf Ilian and Naora Hashlamoun's engagement in the early post Oslo period in the 90s, most Palestinians think that Khader Adnan was the first to initiate the individual hunger strike against administrative detention. However, part of the explanation for his popularity is due to the increased use of social media, the length of his hunger strike (over 60 days - compared to previous strikes which did not exceed 40 days), and because he was successful in gaining his release as a result of his action.

Another example of patriarchal aspects in the resistance occurred during my final field-work trip in August 2017 when I went to the remote village of Arehia in Hebron to meet one of the participants, affiliated to Fateh. This isolated village is almost four hours from Ramallah by car. Despite having been warned by the Prisoners' Club that this was a very 'conservative' village I decided to go because there were a very limited number of prisoners who had been freed since the end of the collective hunger strike in May 2017. I had been welcomed on the phone by the former hunger striker, Anas, whose interview had been coordinated with the help of the Club. However, when I had almost arrived, Anas's father called the taxi driver – who he knew since the interviewee had coordinated with him to collect me from Hebron – and told him that they couldn't meet me for 'private reasons'. I tried phoning him to get the reasons but when he wouldn't answer. I asked the driver to call his father for me who said: 'I told my son he can't do the interview because we do not receive women in our homes'. Although Anas is affiliated to Fatah – a secular movement – the religious and conservative norms are embedded in his political ideology. As a hunger striker he was able to resist the occupier but he couldn't resist the traditional cultural norms and the patriarchal authority of his father and society. This experience echoed a similar occurrence in the interview mentioned earlier when one of the former hunger strikers affiliated with Islamic

Jihad required that I should be veiled and cover my body and hair before the interview. However, these sorts of incidents were the exception. Other participants, even though they belonged to religious political organisations such as Islamic Jihad, were tolerant and open about me being unveiled and accepted me despite our differences and in their discourse, despite their religious background, often appeared to perceive the hunger strike as a secular rather than a religious action.

These occurrences suggest how women's bodies can become an object of control by different authorities – not only colonial authority in captivity but also by internal patriarchal authority. Deploying feminist analysis is crucial in order to shed light on aspects of socio-political transformations and complex layers of resistance. Women can't afford to separate the struggle for social and gender justice from the struggle against colonialism. In general, colonial oppression affects men and women in different ways. According to Gayatri Spivak,<sup>55</sup> women are subjected to a double-colonisation or double-victimisation by both male counterparts and the dominant colonial powers; the Palestinian case is a good example of this. Feminist ideas should be integrated into our understanding of decolonisation; when Palestinian women challenge colonial power by employing their bodies as a weapon in hunger strike gender norms and the meaning of femininity and masculinity are destabilised. Despite this, some Western feminist writings on Palestinian women focus on culture and religion as the main aspect of women's oppression ignoring the colonial aspect. They portray Palestinian women's participation in the national liberation struggle as part-time feminism or a struggle allied with patriarchal culture (Jayawardena, 1986)<sup>56</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described the process of interviewing the former hunger strikers and the ethnographically-informed methods involving observation of the context. I engaged with the hunger strikers' experience not only through in-depth interviews with the participants but also through interaction with their families, analysis of media coverage, and generally by observing the interaction with the hunger strike phenomenon of Palestinian society more broadly. I

---

<sup>55</sup> In (Williams et al., 2015)

<sup>56</sup> In Ajour (2014), I critically analyse how feminist liberal discourses deal with the complicated relation between colonialism, nationalism, and feminism. I focus on the racism of mainstream liberal feminism which ignores the voices of non-white, non-western women (Mohanty, 2003; Shohat, 2001). Feminists such as (Ahmed, 1992) and (Abu-Lughod, 1998) challenge arguments that colonialism contributed positively to women's lives through its modernising effects.

discussed the positionality of the researcher and reflected on my immersion in the colonised space and the way in which this position informs my research process. The sense of being Palestinian that frames my research and approach is influenced by feminist and decolonial theories. The boundaries between researcher and interviewee become blurred in this kind of research, which requires empathy and intimacy. In exploring human suffering, I discussed the limitation of the language and the search for the 'language of the heart' within the framework of a feminist decolonising research.

## **Chapter 3: Producing Knowledge and Understanding: Subjectivity through Lived Experience**

This chapter sets out my methodological and interpretive framework, grounded in phenomenology,<sup>57</sup> and informed by sociological and ethnographic research methods (Christensen et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005), which indicate how experience and subjectivity can be best approached and reveal the structures of meaning immanent in human experience. I explore the relationship between the lived experience of the hunger strike, the oral narrative account and subjectivity, and examine how subjectivity can be handled methodologically to deal with the case study by matching theory, methods and material analysis.

The hunger strikers' oral testimonies are a foundational starting point for explaining and building epistemological knowledge about the subjectivity that was shaped in the political event. The complexity of transforming the narrated experience into knowledge requires reflection on how it is possible to capture others' experiences and think starting from their standpoint – what is the intellectual and ethical practice through which we can transform other people's experiences into a resource for our own knowledge? It raises the question of the extent to which this knowledge reflects the truth of such experiences, and the more radical question, drawn from a poststructuralist<sup>58</sup> perspective, as to whether there is even something called 'experience'.

The concept of experience requires inquiry into the process of subject formation in the lived experience. I discuss the power of storytelling for producing a knowledge of resistance and the subjectivities that emerge in the activity of narration. I focus on how specific authors approach subjectivity through narrative, and in particular Hannah Arendt's, Adriana Cavarero's, and Walter Benjamin's paradigms of storytelling. Whilst Benjamin deals with narrative in a literal sense, Arendt and Cavarero are more pertinent to my argument since they deal more explicitly with narrative and subjectivity as social and political matters. The

---

<sup>57</sup> Phenomenology is an investigation of lived experience and a phenomenological approach consists in the reduction of knowledge and existence down to their basis in phenomena or appearance. Realities are treated as pure 'phenomena'. The phenomenological philosophy was founded by Husserl – see Husserl's *Ideas* (Husserl, 2012) and *Cartesian Meditation: An introduction to Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1977) and "*The crisis of European Science and transcendental phenomenology*" (Husserl, 1970).

<sup>58</sup> Poststructuralism cannot be simply reduced to a set of shared assumptions, a method, a theory, or even a school. It is best referred to as a movement of thought – a complex series of refrains – embodying different forms of critical practice and influenced in its different trajectories through the appropriation of a range of different sources (Peters, 2001: 2).

participants' narrations and verbal representations of their experience allow me to explicate the different models of subjectivity presented by the hunger strikers.

Whilst my research is not reducible to oral history, I have been informed by what this tradition of scholarship tells about the recording of experiences, memories and thoughts through in-depth-interviews (Portelli, 1979); I regard oral history as an illuminating and helpful contribution towards assessing the epistemological status of interview material. Likewise, narrative analysis has helped me to look at the formation of narrative and how it shapes the subjectivity by conducting an in-depth analysis of themes and patterns that has ultimately enabled me to put forward an argument about the structure of resistant subjectivity. In this interpretive paradigm, the phenomenon is explained by the underlying meaning, and the structure has to be discovered and defined in relational terms (Franzosi, 1998; Riessman, 2007). These different approaches overlap in their concerns and, while not being methods that I systematically 'applied', they informed my research practice and helped me to elucidate the multidimensional approach which informed my data analysis and theorising.

## **1.0 The storytelling approach and lived experience**

In this thesis, the hunger striker's narrated experience spans the period from the first imprisonment until their release. Through their narrative I seek to understand their cultural, political and ideological formation and their own reconstruction of their experience and subjectivity. Although they basically recount political events, the interviews are particularly revelatory about the meaning they give to the lived experience. For instance, the physical suffering is not presented a political event as such, but reflects existential and phenomenological<sup>59</sup> aspects of their experience.

The significance of their storytelling is that they reveal unknown and undocumented aspects of known historical events. They cast a new light on unexplored areas of political events through their individual experience. The transformation of the hunger strikers' stories into knowledge is mediated by their actions and in turn they endow their action with meaning. This led me to build my research out of their stories, which show the depth and complexity of an

---

<sup>59</sup> According to (Christensen et al., 2014) the primary objective of phenomenology is to explicate the meaning, structure and essence of lived experience of the individual around specific phenomena. The findings derived from phenomenology are concerned with individuals' perceptions and provide an understanding of a phenomenon as seen through the eyes of those who have experienced it. Moustakas posited that research should focus on the wholeness of experience. Phenomenology aspires to fresh and rich descriptions of a lived phenomenon, and an embodied and experiential meaning (Moustakas, 1994). As Wertz comments: 'Phenomenology is a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy, over the known' (Wertz, 2005: 175).

experience that they perceived as ultimately unrepresentable and uninterpretable in speech. Here lies the 'mystical' aspect linked to limit-experience: there are patterns in their narratives which are not interpretable according to a rationalist model of action. I discuss the way in which they think the experience exceeds words, and how this shows the limitation of a phenomenology limited to the analysis of conscious experience.

### 1.1 The critique of the concept of experience

Feminist standpoint theorists such as Harding (1990) argue that knowledge begins from the lives of people who have struggled against oppression and calls upon her readers to 'think from others' lives' in order to develop a more critical standpoint about the world. She suggests that marginalised groups have a more objective perspective on oppression, because they are not invested in the system (Harding, 1990). This notion has been criticised by poststructuralist feminists such as Donna Haraway, for whom the issue is not about men's experience or knowledge versus women's, but about situated knowledges versus the 'view from nowhere'. As Haraway declares: 'The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular' (Haraway, 1988: 590). She moves on to deconstruct the positivist idea of 'objective' research by positing the ways in which the researcher is inevitably embedded in structures of power and shaped by their social position. Moreover, Haraway, like other poststructuralist feminists, criticises the use of 'women's experience' by questioning where these experiences originate from, and argues that we can't rely on experience to counter the structures of domination because experience itself is formed through a discursive system (Haraway, 1988).

Joan Scott (1991) presents a more radical critique of experience, as she considers it to be nothing other than a theoretical category, a linguistic event and ideological phenomenon that is discursively organised in particular contexts or configurations. She introduces a critique of 'experience' in relation to the constitution of identities, stressing that 'subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among the discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy' (Scott, 1991: 792). Concluding her essay on experience, she calls for the study of the processes of subject production, insisting on the discursive nature of experience and on the politics of its construction. Her critique claims that experience is always mediated by narrative discourses and argues that the narration of historical experience is constructed by ideological mechanisms and that all such narration therefore 'reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems' (1991:798). Narration is thus composed of 'discursive productions of knowledge of the self, not reflections either of external or internal truth' (1991: 795).

This position resonates with Foucault's analysis of different regimes of truth embodying power relations. He examines how truth is constituted through the exercise of power and how subjects are formed by discursive practices that regulate individuals through multiple 'normalising' procedures (Foucault, 1982). This suggests that theories of experience reproduce rather than critique power relations. However, this raises a number of questions: Does narrative mediation of experience prevent experience from being a site of truth and from being a source of epistemological knowledge? Can certain experiences destabilise particular discourses and disrupt discursive practices of power? Can the narration of experiences enrich our understanding of particular social and political phenomena? Lastly, to what extent can the narrative account of a political phenomenon reveal the kind of subjectivities produced by lived experience and narrative? These questions invite me to go beyond post-structuralist critiques of experience and to think about the roles of lived experience and the critical potential of experience as oriented knowledge, as well as the inability of some poststructuralists to register this potential.

### 1.2 Storytelling and the knowledge of resistance

Instead of drawing on Joan Scott's critique of experience, I will call upon a more reflexive dimension of experience narration that escapes those analyses of discourse and subjectivity that radically reject the experience as a discursively constructed phenomenon. Shari Stone-Mediatore's *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance* (2004) introduces the power of stories and seeks a way to engage the narratives of marginalised peoples' experience. She argues that when scholars criticise experience using 'destructive analysis tools', we alienate our work from practical struggles. She writes: 'When we treat experience-based narratives as mere ideological artifacts, we reinforce the disempowerment of people who have been excluded from official knowledge production, for we deny epistemic value from a central means by which such people can take control over their representation' (2004:2). Stone-Mediatore criticises Scott, and the poststructuralist account of experience as a discursive phenomenon, and argues that despite Scott's interests in seeing differently she can't explain the role of experience-oriented writing in helping to confront lived struggles, thus reducing or undermining powerful political narratives. Thus, with reference to marginalised experience, she shows how experience-oriented writing is not necessarily constrained by social and cultural institution, but is a crucial means by which people can resist institutional control over how their identities and histories are represented. The narrated experiences of Palestinians risking their lives through voluntary self-sacrifice in the face of the colonial structure reveals a

way of being that can inform the production of knowledge about the praxis of resistance. Further, using the experience of hunger strikers in a colonised condition can challenge and transform the discourses that construct them as terrorists.

Lived experience can be understood to be something ‘more’ than a reflection of discursive categories and more than a report of ideologically-formed experience. Instead, it can be a creative response to the contradictions of experience. Hunger striker experience reveals new patterns that destabilise hegemonic discourses on resistance in general. For instance, regarding the relationship with the colonial authorities, participants repeatedly stressed the fact that they went through this experience because they aspired to life, in contrast to the dominant Zionist narrative that perceived them as suicidal or terrorists. Some of the hunger strikers suffer dispossession not only from the Israeli authorities but also from their political organisations who hold a negative view of the individual hunger strike. They reported that the oral narrative of the hunger strike experience matters to them because it gives them the space to talk and theorise about their existence. Edward Said, in the article 'Permission to Narrate' (1984), addresses how Palestinians have been denied the right to articulate their lived experience in a counter-hegemonic narrative that can affirm their political rights (Said, 1984). Edward Said also criticises the lack of political commitment within post-structuralist debates and allows for the creativity of subaltern subjects in his discussion of the relationship between power and knowledge: ‘For Said, post-structuralists virtually reject the world and allow no sense of the material worldliness of people who write texts and read them, cutting off the possibility of political action in their theory’ (Ashcroft et al., 2001: 69).

In my analysis of the narrative of hunger strikers I critically problematise some of their storytelling, particularly their self-representation and the way in which they recount their experience to make sense of their suffering. Given the limitation of a poststructuralist approach to the notion of experience, which can blind us to the subjectivity of resistance shaped by the narrative, I draw on a different methodological paradigm that emphasises and recovers the notion of experience, drawing on phenomenology and the approach to storytelling presented by Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin. These perspectives enable me to capture the depth of the hunger strike phenomenon and the complexity of subjectivities produced in that experience.

### 1.3 Storytelling and the appearance of meanings

Arendt provides a rich account of the role of narration in political thinking and develops a storytelling approach to political philosophy in order to understand political phenomena, human action, and agency. In *The Human Condition* (1998) she suggests a reconstruction of

different aspects of human activity and establishes the conditions for political experience. She further argues that the Western philosophical tradition has devalued the world of human action, the *vita activa*<sup>60</sup> (active life), as opposed to the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) (Arendt, 1998). By systematically elaborating the *vita activa*, she wants to restore the significance of political action. Methodologically, I am interested in Arendt's paradigm of storytelling. In *The Human Condition*, she explains how stories respond to the essence of political phenomena.

compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses, the delights of the senses – lead to an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatised and deindividualised, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformation occurs in storytelling (Arendt, 1998: 50).

In this storytelling approach to lived experience we can capture the otherwise silent structure of experience and explore the structures of consciousness, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, senses, sensibilities and meanings, and how these can attain a collective, 'deprivatised' appearance. This approach not only illustrates political phenomena but also points to a rich phenomenological description that can reveal embedded meanings:

No philosophy can compare in intensity and richness of the meaning with a properly narrated story. Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it (Arendt, 1970: 22).

Former hunger strikers' experiences are represented and narrated in common themes and patterns that emerge from their description and interpretation of their embodied actions. These include humanity, dignity, freedom, self-determination, death, life, love, *Sumud* (steadfastness), immaterial strength, latent energy, *Irada* (will), *Yakin* (certainty), *rouh* (soul), and *Intisar* (victory). The meanings of these patterns have a political connotation for Palestinian resistance to Zionist colonisation at the symbolic and collective level. For example, the meaning they give to the body as a 'bridge of return' is related to the Palestinian culture of resistance. They tell and live the experience according to their understanding of politics and culture. The hunger strikers believe that the body was transformed into a tool to produce immaterial strength which supported them in their aim of reclaiming their humanity. Their

---

<sup>60</sup> The 'vita activa' is divided into three sorts of activities: labor, work and action. Arendt addresses the active life and how the three major human activities are incorporated into the public and private realms. The public realm involves politics and interaction between individuals. All interaction within the public realm requires the individual to have attained freedom.

human agency lies in this inventive aspect that would not have been created without their actions and builds upon a sedimented language of resistance and self-determination.

In the *Human Condition*, Arendt connects action most centrally to speech and the interplay between them gives rise self-invention:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth ... its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative (Arendt, 1998: 177).

In this study, the hunger strike is the action, and the participants' storytelling in the in-depth-interviews are the speech through which they convey the meanings they give to their experience using their own unique language. Although some of their words and concepts are mapped onto a Palestinian discourse outside the prisons, the experience also produces its own original meaning. For example, the word *Sumud* (steadfastness) is part of the Palestinian existing narrative of resistance, but the specific meaning of *Sumud* generated by the hunger strikers refers to not breaking the hunger strike; in performing *Sumud* they find the meaning of the *Intisar* (victory), which for them consists in remaining steadfast. Similarly, it is commonly held among them that '*Ataqa Alkamina*' (latent energy), explodes in the confrontation with colonial forces, as does the concept of *Rouh* (soul). Storytelling produces new concepts and knowledge about the experience, and language is the bearer of meaning. The language of the prisoners' narratives is distinctive, reflecting the uniqueness and originality of their lived experience.

Arendt emphasises the power of storytelling 'in revealing the meaning without the committed error of defining it' (1970:22). In my examination of the hunger strikers' experiences, I found difficulties in interpreting this language, suggesting that some patterns of experience might not be interpretable. They themselves acknowledge the hunger strike as an 'unrecognisable experience'. This was especially so with regard to the limit-experience of pain and suffering. So, sometimes the interpretation and hermeneutic would fail the account and the knowledge production.<sup>61</sup> In a manner that resonates with Arendt, Walter Benjamin, in his essay on 'The Storyteller', also pointed out that the storytelling approach allows the appearance of patterns without the error of interpretation, or as he puts it 'the art of the storytelling to keep a

---

<sup>61</sup> This failure of interpretation is in a sense a successful failure in that knowledge-making space arises from lacunae that force a new language to emerge. Ismael Nashif (2012, 2014) discusses the failure of Palestinians to produce a knowledge on their impasse due to the ongoing events of loss since 1984. However, this failure will eventually give rise to a new genuine language out of repetitive loss.

story free from explanation as one reproduces it' (Benjamin, 1968: 89)<sup>62</sup>. Although the stories of the hunger strikers are not 'free from explanation' all the time, this is the case with the uninterpretable patterns of the limit-experience which characteristically do not lend themselves easily to linguistic expression. Action is key here. Without the resistance action, the hunger strikers would not produce a unique original language because the action is transformative and gives rise to a genuine language of its own, albeit one that can recognize a moment of unrepresentability. This proposition was to some extent validated by a number of the participants who commented that the Israeli authorities and jailors were surprised at the language they used during the confrontation with them. For example, Nora Hashlamoun said:

I am not an educated or intellectual person but the tragedy I lived made me say words bigger than them because my cause is a just one. My words bothered them and they asked who taught you those words because I am not educated.

It is also original in the sense that the hunger strikers' discourse contrasts with the hegemonic discourse of liberal human rights that renders them as victims. This shows that not only the land but the language and culture of indigenous people is colonised (Fanon et al., 1967; Salaita, 2016). The Palestinian discourse that was produced by the politics of the post-Oslo era imitates the liberal hegemonic language and has been internalised by liberal Palestinians organisations.

The hunger strike experience is a political action and only through this resistance action are they able to create their own language and discourse expressed in their speech and oral narrative. This connection between deeds and speech conveys the meaning of the experience and shapes the hunger striking resistance subjectivity. It contrasts with the discourse of resistance generated through the wider resistance actions of Palestinians against the occupation. The question remains about the extent to which narrative fails in the face of human suffering of this limit experience. In this respect whilst Arendt determines that political phenomena are inherently story-like, she recognises that creative work is necessary in order to transform political phenomena into a written narrative.

#### 1.4 Storytelling and subjectivity

---

<sup>62</sup> Though it should be noted that Benjamin is referring there to literary story-telling not to storytelling as an oral, social activity.

Storytelling can open different ways of thinking about subjectivity and subject-formation. The participants seem to undergo a limit-experience that is difficult to articulate for most of them. In their narration they look back at the near-death experience and their retrospective understanding of what they went through reveals something about what they think are their hidden capacities and latent energy. They discover a new sense of themselves despite thinking that there is a mystical and non-articulatable aspect of their limit-experience. Through narrative, hunger strikers come to assume their own agency. They also introduce multiple models of political subjectivity as they reflect on their experience. Few of them represent the typical heroic revolutionary subject who is self-possessed and in control of what he or she is doing. There is a moment of agency, but it differs from the model of a fully self-contained and self-possessed rational subject. The majority of the hunger strikers suggest models of revolutionary subjectivity and transformations that are not characterised by full control and self-mastery.

How participants choose their stories to be narrated provides insight into their individual lives and subjectivities (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006). However, the interaction and questions in the interviews also guide them to foreground certain aspects of their experience. Arendt's argument about human plurality is that we are at once unique individuals with capacities for speech and action that we have in common and it is through 'action as speech' that individuals come to disclose their distinctive identity (Arendt, 1998: 179–180). Action would be valueless and meaningless unless there were others to give meaning to it. It requires a public space to be realised. In the case of the hunger strikers, this the wider Palestinian community. Some participants take distance from themselves as individuals and prefer to dwell in the general political discourse of Palestinian resistance, focusing on steadfastness, persistence and confrontation against the occupying authorities. They represent the figure of a firm rational resistant subject who masters their actions and their selves.

The majority of the participants seek to articulate their pain and the hurtful impact of their experience on them and their loved ones. They speak about their vulnerability and suffering in a humble and intimate ways, reveal new configurations of subjectivity grounded in the singular experience of suffering. But some participants try to configure their experience and structure their speech in order to manage their narrative, so that that their self-image corresponds with how they desire to be conceived by others. Adriana Cavarero's *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (2000) draws on feminist philosophy to develop a notion of a 'narratable self' that is constitutively exposed and disclosed to others through the telling of a life story that we in turn desire to hear from others. This desire is central to identity, which

is not given or innate, nor does it reflect an inner self that we control or express, but is rather the outcome of a relational encounter – the narrative. This need to fit the image predetermined by others is a fundamental feature of every narratable self; some of the participants in my research avoided exposing the fragile human self in order better to correspond with the Palestinian national imagination. But most of them, in contrast with this image, spoke about their subjective painful engagement and human suffering.

Judith Butler (1997) in *The Psychic Life of Power* also refers to the relation between the formation of the subject and storytelling or self-narration. The subject tells the tale of its constitution, but in order to tell that tale the subject must already be fully constituted: ‘the narration of how the subject is constituted presupposes that the constitution has already taken place, and thus arrives after the fact’ (Butler, 1997: 11). Viewed from this vantage point, Palestinian prisoners also perform their hunger strike in relation to a public image expected by others. In my analysis, I show that one of their motivations to remain steadfast and not to break the strike is their fear of public image. This also shows the diversity of participants’ positions. Those motivated by the fear of their public image and responsibility toward the Palestinian national collective are different from those motivated by other reasons, such as their love of family and commitment to freedom and dignity. Though there are a few well-known figures among my participants, most criticised the standard image of the Palestinian hero and distance themselves from it. Some of them reported that this image is a burden and a big responsibility and emphasise that they did not engage in this painful experience to become public heroes or gain fame. They criticised those who they regarded as running after fame and the spotlight and regarded them as narcissists.

In the sense developed by Cavarero and Arendt, such narratives of struggle are political because they are relational and invoke a collective subjectivity. But the uniqueness of the self is also disclosed through the self’s action and words, in the narrative of a unique life story which cannot be reduced to general characteristics of subjectivity. The narratable self, writes Cavarero, ‘finds itself, not simply in a conscious exercise of remembering, but in spontaneous narrating structure of memory itself’ (Cavarero, 2000: 42). In this respect, the narratable self has the sense that his or her life story is unique and belongs to him or her alone. Thus, for Cavarero and Arendt the intelligibility of the unique existence emerges through the revelatory story. In the process of the storytelling, subjects come to realise and narrate how they feel or think and expose their thoughts, imagination and perceptions to give meaning to their actions. In this way, they brighten the silent structure of the experience.

### **3.0 Oral history and narrative analysis**

The interviewees were engaged in a work of memory during the interviews, and I recorded their oral narrative and conducted analysis of these stories. I have not produced an oral history, but my research is in dialogue with and informed by oral history as a tradition scholarship. Oral history can give participants the space to recount and reflect on their experience and, in this specific case, articulate their contribution in the Palestinian resistance. It is uniquely suited, on the one hand, to providing a clear understanding of the lived experience and, on the other, to illuminating the historical and political context of that experience, namely the collective subjectivity of Palestinian resistance. An interview process grounded in oral history is one in which, ‘in an interaction with the interviewer ... the respondent actively fashions an identity’ (Abrams, 2016: 33).

#### 3.1 Oral history as a historical narrative and the reliability of memory

Histories told through oral traditions were at one point considered to be quite a radical move as they did not rely solely on archival documents. In his article ‘What makes oral history different’ (1979), Alessandro Portelli challenged the critiques of oral history and argued that orality, narrative form, a focus on the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and the emphasis on subjectivity and memory should be considered strengths rather than weaknesses. He posits that memories lead to theories and that many theories of history are in fact theories of social history as a whole (1979:34) (see also Perks and Thomson, 1998). The significance of orality lays in the rhythm of popular speech and carries implicit meanings and social connotations not reproducible in writing. It reflects the emotional content and attitudes that can be only perceived by listening, not by reading. The traditional objection to oral sources is concerned with reliability – one can’t rely on oral narratives because memory and subjectivity tend to ‘distort’ the facts. But Portelli argues that ‘what makes oral history important and fascinating is precisely the fact that they don’t passively record the facts, but elaborate upon them and create meaning through the labour of memory and the filter of language’.<sup>63</sup>

Portelli regards oral history as not only passively recording the facts of an event but also about its meaning within the life of the teller. He stresses that memory is not a depository of information, but rather an ongoing process of elaboration and reconstruction of meaning. As

---

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expressions\\_portelli.pdf](http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expressions_portelli.pdf)

I show, the dialogic conversation in the interviews with the participants also culminates in the production of original vocabularies. Portelli refers to oral history as remembering rather than memory, telling rather than tale. In this way, we can think of oral sources as something happening in the present, rather than just a testimony of the past. In the case of the hunger strikers, the remembering and telling are influenced by the historical context and also by the cultural and social framework of the memory. In the way of remembering and recalling the stories, memory was operating to structure their stories. I was asking questions about their feelings toward certain moments to understand the impact of dispossession. I focused on the way they feel because feeling can tell us about the inner world of subjectivity.

The event was a current fact in that hunger strikes were current during the interviews of those who had been recently released. They recounted their past hunger strike but also provided interpretations of the present events involving their comrades and the wider context. Narrators reconstruct what is perceivable at the time. They judge their own past experience and their past self by their present political consciousness. The Palestinian hunger strikers still lived a precarious life and feared that administrative detention might confiscate their life again. Oral testimony is never the same twice. This is a characteristic of all oral communication. Portelli indicated that the most precious information may not be something hidden, but may lie instead in how narratives can reveal the full spectrum of subjectivity.

According to Portelli, oral history has no unified subject; it is told from a variety of points of view, and the impartiality of the researcher is replaced by the impartiality of the narrator. Thus, oral history can never be told without taking sides. In *The Death of Luigi Trastelli* (1991) Portelli writes that ‘rather than replacing previous truths with alternative ones ... oral history has made us uncomfortably aware of the elusive quality of historical truth itself’ (Portelli, 1991: viii). This research does not aim to uncover the ‘truth’ of the hunger strike experience, since there is no one objective narrative of what happened, but rather aims to highlight the experience of hunger strikers and give them the space to recount their action and reflect and define their reality that constitutes their subjectivity. As Portelli observes: ‘oral sources are credible but with *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact but rather from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no “false” oral sources’ (1979:37).

The hunger strikers’ memories are also significant in symbolising the entire Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination. The sacrifice of the body for liberation is inextricably linked with the idea of martyrdom and the conception of the martyr as immortal.

Memory then is not a just a passive bank of facts, but an active process of the creation of meaning.

### 3.2 Oral history as a historical narrative: Individual vs. collective

Ultimately oral history is about the historical significance of personal experience, on the one hand, and the personal impact of historical matters, on the other (Portelli, 1979). The core of oral history lies exactly at the point where history breaks into private lives or when private lives are drawn into history. These shifting and elusive boundaries between history and stories make oral history particularly relevant. Personal experience transmits historical information and reflects the historical narrative that inhabits an individual's story.

The result is narratives in which the boundary between what takes place outside the narrator and what happens inside, between what concerns the individual and what concerns the group, may become more elusive than in established written genres, so that personal 'truth' may coincide with shared 'imagination' (Portelli 1979, 35).

In my case study, the relationship between the time when the interviews took place and the historical moment they recounted was discussed in the interviews themselves. I asked the participants questions about the political events happening in the Palestinian context and they opened up to share their personal experiences in relation to their political organisations.

The prisoners, before the hunger strike event as a site of resistance, were in many ways passive victims of subjugation. In that process they are brought into political existence as a consequence of the resistance event that they themselves created. This event of resistance can be transformed into intellectual knowledge thorough the verbal reconstruction of experience. In addition to their oral account, some prisoners produced textual representations of their experience in captivity. For instance, I read the work of some political prisoners I interviewed, such as Ayesha Aysha Odeh, Ahmed Qtamesh, and Waleed Hudali. The difference between them and many other theorists who produce theories around power, resistance, and freedom is that they lived the knowledge they produced. They narrate and theorise their resistant existence and transform it into knowledge, so the experience was transformed into consciousness which in turn lead to other actions.

### 3.3 Oral history, narrative, and subjectivity

Narration is a constitutive relation with others. Paul Ricoeur (1991) discusses how the narrative identity constitutes us. He writes: 'I am stressing the expression "narrative identity" for what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution. This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism' (Ricoeur, 1991b: 32). The activity of storytelling gives rise in the hunger strikers to different models of resistance subjectivity that reflect the uniqueness of their experience existence.

In this research, I am seeking to capture self-transformation in the trajectory of liberation, rather than the general political discourse of confronting the coloniser. However, what the researcher might wish to know may not necessarily coincide with what the narrator wishes to tell. Listening demands respect, and accepting their way of narrating their stories is an ethical practice; I tried not to make explicit my limited interest in their political discourse, but my questions did try to steer participants to explore the territory which some of them wished to avoid. For instance, I asked questions about their intimate relationship with their beloved ones and about their feelings of bodily pain and emotional reaction toward the violent practices of the jailors, so that they could bring out otherwise hidden layers of their subjectivity. I respected their need not to talk about their painful memories, and I believe that they realised this; nevertheless, such an approach makes the resulting text partly the researcher's narrative as well, in that the hunger strikers' stories are edited and composed and compared, and not told to the reader in any direct way.

Language is essential in relation to formation of the subject. Butler's *Excitable Speech: A Politics of performance* (1997) asserts that language can itself hurt us, that words have a wounding power. This is a consequence of our constitutive 'linguistic vulnerability' to the interpretative effects of discourse. This vulnerability belongs to each of us, for we are uniquely vulnerable in different ways to different words (Butler et al., 1997). My interview participants are in many ways inspiring figures because they are not performing the standard imaginary role of national heroes were in a sense 'realistic heroes' whose heroism lies in an intimate experience. As one of them put it, 'Palestinians are only heroes by their experience; (Salem Badi 2015). The participants didn't just speak about their singular experience, they were able to contextualise the experience in the wider Palestinian situation. Their political national commitment did not dissolve their individual subjectivities.

Jackson (2002) considers his work as an anthropological exploration of Arendt's argument that storytelling is not a matter of creating individual or social meaning, but an aspect of the 'subjective-in-between' in which a multiplicity of private and public interests are always

problematically at play (Arendt, 1985). He points out that stories disclose not just ‘who’ we are, but ‘what’ we have in common with others. He refers to Benjamin’s distinction in ‘The Storyteller’ between immediate experiences that have been directly undergone (*Erlebings*) and experiences that have been thought through in ways that render them comprehensible to and shareable with others (*Erfahrung*). Jackson argues that existence is never merely a matter of what I or you say or do but what we say and do *together* (Jackson, 2002: 14). This view is essential in order to reflect on the commonality across the hunger strikers in terms of the way their subjective-in-between moulds their subjectivity as a group.

#### **4.0 Narrative analysis and the immaterial dimensions of experience**

The hunger strikers’ experience and their oral narrative enabled me to delineate a transformative trajectory that sought to identify the structures and patterns of their lived experience. My investigation of subjectivity formation and the structure of subjectivation takes the sequential narrative of the hunger strikers’ as a starting point to draw out through analysis and interpretation the implicit structure of their actions. Roberto Franzosi, in ‘Narrative analysis – or why (and how) sociologists should be interested in narrative’ (1998), discusses ‘doing vs. saying’ and the distinction between the narrative of events and the narrative of words: ‘there is no structural analysis of narrative that doesn’t borrow from an explicit or implicit phenomenology of “doing something”’ (Ricoeur, 1984: 56, cited in (Franzosi, 1998: 523). Like memory, narrative is not a fixed text and depository of information but rather a process and a performance. Catherine Kohler Riessman’s *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (2007) discusses different models of narrative research: thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual narrative analysis. In her discussion of structural analysis, she pointed out that this type of analysis can help in the identification of substantive issues that would otherwise be missed if thematic analysis alone was used: ‘Like thematic analysis, structural approaches are concerned with content, but attention to narrative form adds insights beyond what can be learned from referential meaning alone’ (Riessman, 2007: 77). She emphasises that the structural approach is less familiar thematic approaches and requires some clarification of terms and framing of its history and rationale (2007:78). The term ‘structure’ can refer to genre, to a larger storyline (e.g. episodes), or to linguistic form, and often entails great attention to details of speech in order to understand how narratives are composed.

My research aims to trace subjectivity formation through explaining the processes and transformations involved in the production of resistant subjectivity, particularly in relation to

different interrelationships, mainly with Israeli colonial practices. My research question determined my methodological approach and subsequently shaped the interpretation of narratives. I adopted my approach, drawing interpretive tools from phenomenology, oral history and structural analyses of narrative, because it enabled me to trace the formation of subjectivity. As Riessman puts it, the narrative organised and put together the investigator's strategic aim (2007). In a structural perspective the explicit and obvious is explained by what is implicit and not obvious. It is 'the attempt to uncover the deep structure, unconscious motivations, and underlying causes which account for human actions' (George, 1972: xii). In my research, this structural perspective helps to foreground how subjectivity is being patterned through the categories of 'turning points' and 'transformative jumps/leaps' to trace the transformation of subjectivity. On the methodological level, there are two interrelated lines of analysis. On the one hand, the research is a phenomenological investigation into a 'lived experience', where I rely on the research participants' narratives to understand how they themselves interpret their experience and give meanings to their actions. On the other, I engage in a structural analysis to conceptualise the transformation of subjectivity as a patterned and oriented process. For example, with my unit of analysis 'turning point', I have tried to capture a recurrent feature, emerging from the interviews, that defines the processes and dynamics of subjectivity formation and transformation in the hunger striker. I do not remain solely at the level of actions and narratives but seek to conceptualise the architecture of subjectivity. I don't only describe the appearance of pattern, since description alone is not enough to constitute narrative, but classify and describe my narrative analysis into unities and categories that are elements in a broader structure.

The oral narratives of participants reveal that there are identifiable immaterial patterns that would be missed and neglected if I drew simply on an evidence-based approach. I needed to broaden my methodological tools in order to transcend approaches that only acknowledge visible and concrete features of action, and ignore the invisible and poetic-imaginary tools that contribute to the participants' own ways of knowing. Language can fail in the face of the death experience and human suffering and be unable to capture spiritual pain. My research does not give interpretations of these unknowable aspects but rather illuminates the subjectivation process by using the language of the interviewees. So this methodological approach is also a contribution towards discovering/allocating patterns which trace the subjectivation. These mysteries, poetic features of the narrated experience, were disclosed through metaphors and symbols and sometimes their dreams.

An attention to structure facilitates capturing the effect of what are reported by the participants as unknowable and invisible, if shared, dimensions of their. Turning points are an example of a shared pattern that we can observe in the hunger strikers' actions. They are the outcome of interactions between the technologies of power and the tactics of resistance, which is also to say between the subjective and objective dimensions of their narrative. The subjective is drawn from the participants' recounting of their actions and motivation, as for example tracing the process of transformation from passive to active victim from their narrative, in which the participants focus on dignity and freedom as the two main aspects for their reclamation of humanity. Subjective and objective factors are co-constitutive of turning points and participants, sometimes recognised and explicitly referred to this process. But the subjective factor is decisive and the research participants themselves placed emphasis on it.

The immaterial, subjective, and invisible categories that play such a prominent role in their accounts, such as their belief in a cause, the will, the consciousness, the soul, are experienced as the sources of their strength and constitute a shared abstract pattern in the narrative, which emerges through their interaction with dispossession and violence. For example, they spoke about spiritual purity when they were near death in the last stage of hunger strike and reported that they lived a transcendent state that they could not describe in words. I could not have built my research without dealing with these implicit structures and invisible or 'metaphysical' dimensions.

Despite the uniqueness of the experience of each hunger striker and multiplicity of models of resistance subjectivities, I was able to outline a shared trajectory of subjectivation that drew on all the hunger strikers' stories and which has hopefully done justice to their words and experience. The structure of this trajectory represents the experience of hunger strikers and the journey of subjectivity in their quest for freedom and liberation. I trace their journey as embedded in their stories and illuminate their trajectories of transformation. I take this approach further to address historical aspects that constitute the structure of subjectivity and expand it in line with aspects of Fanon's theorising which incorporates both material and psychological components in the study of subjectivation in struggles for decolonisation.

When narrative, as in the case of the hunger strikers includes emotions or non-rational patterns, particularly those related to hidden or obscure states of pain and spirituality, it is important also to take the contribution of psychoanalysis into consideration. Yasmin Gunaratnam sums up this approach:

My approach to narratives as containing non-rational and involuntary expression in which emotions, particularly those that are painful or difficult, can be hidden or avoided has been informed by psychoanalysis ... ranging from perspectives that seek to uncover the deep order and structure of consciousness (Klein,1975), to those that view the unconscious mind as an emergent and inter-relational process without pre-existing form (Lacan,1973). (Gunaratnam and Oliviere, 2009: 56).

The feelings of dying striking prisoners are intense and their narratives transcends a purely physical understanding of pain. It is not simply a narrative that describes and relates a series of events but a story that uses emotion for particular effect. In presenting and interpreting my own encounter with their narratives, I have sought to make it possible for the reader also to be brought close to the participants' feelings and conflicts in this extreme existential situation.

## **Conclusion**

I have drawn on the abovementioned methodological approaches because they are responsive to the complexity, diversity and singularity of human experience. What I have assembled here is not so much a methodology in the traditional sense, as an interpretive framework that shapes the nature of narrative along with the participants. These three approaches – storytelling, oral history, and narrative analysis – intermingle in my research and inform the data analysis. I take from each elements with which I have shaped the building blocks of my analysis. Each perspective discussed in this chapter can shed light on the others – e.g. poststructuralism problematises standpoint and story-telling problematises poststructuralism; storytelling resulted in the oral narrative I obtained from the interviews I conducted, and the oral narrative informed the structural approach to narrative analysis.

My approach was developed through engaging with the hunger strikers' narrative and evolved over time. I thought that qualitative methods were appropriate to explore lived experience because they provided flexibility and were not predetermined, fixed, and rigid. According to Maxwell, 'to design a qualitative study, you can't just develop or (borrow) a logical strategy in advance and implement it faithfully. You need, to a substantial extent, to construct and reconstruct your research design' (2013: 3). The participants are partners in this methodology, and I utilised qualitative methods to gain an understanding of the meaning of their actions. I questioned their experience and they engaged with my questions. My dominant concerns were understanding subject formation and the trajectory of transformation. How did they reach the decision? How did they and endure the hunger strike and sustain it to the end? What were the tactics of power and resistance? What were the dynamics of negotiations before

the reached agreement and what are the meanings they give to victory after their release? When I discerned the patterns in the narrative, I began to search for methodological tools that could inform my engagement. Approaches that neglect lived experience or the immaterial dimensions of subjectivity would have negated the possibility of uncovering the underlying patterns in the lived experience of the hunger strike, and, more importantly, would have neglected crucial aspects of the participants' own stories and reflections.

## Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework: Theories of Subjectivity and Subjectivation

This research examines the subjectivation process in the formation of the Palestinian hunger strikers and the meanings they give to their embodied resistance. I use aspects of Foucault, Fanon and Badiou's work to develop my theoretical tools and show how these elements of theories of subjectivation relate to each other. Foucault's 'technologies of the self', which refers to practices through which subjectivity constitutes itself (Foucault, 1988a), is a key framework for understanding subjectivation in embodied resistance. Following Foucault, my argument is that power does not constitute subjectivity. Rather, subjectivity is constituted through its interaction with the technologies of power – in my specific case, through the hunger strikers' response to the efforts of the IPA to overcome, confine and constrain resistance as well as the technologies of the self associated with it.

I then employ Fanon's theoretical framework on colonial processes of subjectivation to explore the ways in which the Palestinian political prisoners constitute their revolutionary subjectivity during their hunger strike. In doing this, I transpose Foucault's concept of 'technology of the self' to Fanon. I substantiate the conceptual elements of Fanon's own 'technologies of the self', by analysing the hunger strikers' invention of their own techniques to confront dispossession and protect their humanity from dehumanisation. I use the term 'technologies' in a specific way in my exploration of Fanon's structure and process of subjectivation which revolves around decolonisation, violence, and humanity, to explicate the constitution of the subject that has a collective and political national dimension. I further make use of Fanon's ideas to craft my concept of 'zero mode of being'.

I then look at the way Alain Badiou conceptualises the processes of political subjectivation. I specifically employ Badiou's notion of fidelity. His theory of subjectivation, as a process where an individual enters into a new form of existence by becoming a subject through fidelity to the truth of an event (Badiou, 2002), allows the mapping of significant aspects of the case study. Badiou's theorisation of the new 'subject of truth' also resonates with Fanon's understanding of revolutionary violence as creating 'a new man' through the 'decolonising moment' (Fanon et al., 1967). Fanon and Badiou work with very different philosophical frameworks and Badiou himself, in *The Century*, distances himself from the thematic of the 'new man', and the kind of revolution envisaged by Fanon (Badiou, 2007). However, in the afterword to that book Alberto Toscano makes the link between them, in that

as with Fanon's dialectic of anticolonial subjectivation giving rise to the creation of a new humanity, Badiou's subjectivation is also about radical transformation through revolutionary events. For many, revolution and dialectical politics are the remnants of old ways of political thought, but as Peter Hallward comments, Badiou's philosophy of human action is about 'an "exceptional" realm of singular innovations or truths which persist only through the militant proclamation of those rare individuals and groups who constitute themselves as the subjects of a truth, as the "militants" of their cause' (Badiou, 2002: viii). This is an understanding of subjectivity that strongly resonates with the words of the participants in this study, and with their own philosophy of freedom.

## **1. Foucault's concept of subjectivation: Technologies of the self and resistance**

In Foucault's concept of the 'technology of the self', the notion of 'self' connects directly with the process of subjectivation, that 'process by which one obtains the constitution of a subject, or more exactly, of a subjectivity, which is obviously only one of the given possibilities of organising the self- consciousness' (Foucault, 2009: 87). In his early work, Foucault examined the ways that power constitutes the subject, but he later turned to investigate the constitution of the subject through acting on the self in order to refuse the imposed forms of subjectivity (Foucault, 1988a). The approach developed through the second and third volume of his *History of Sexuality* provide a helpful theoretical framework to explore the subjectivation of hunger strikers and their mode of revolutionary becoming and resistance (Foucault, 1985, 1988a). In his analysis of the techniques of normalisation, Foucault refers to them in terms of 'self-regulation' and 'technologies of power', and the constituted subject can in this regard be seen as a victim of objectification. These technologies of the self are the methods, practices, and techniques by which individuals develop forms of relations with the self and the other. These technologies 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves' (Foucault, 1988a: 18).<sup>64</sup>

Foucault's focus is on operations that permit certain relations and self-perceptions and are less instrumental and more aesthetic than those I am dealing with. Viewed through the

---

<sup>64</sup> There is ample and important secondary literature on Foucault and technologies of the self (Elliott, 2014; Falzon et al., 2013; Kelly, 2013; Mattison et al., 2017).

prism of Foucault's concept, the hunger strikers interviewed in this study can be seen to enact a series of techniques and practices that constitute their subjectivity and modify their existence. Their technologies of the self consists of a series of practices and techniques that allow the hunger strikers to work on themselves by regulating their bodies and thoughts. Employing the body in resistance and transforming bodies into weapons are at the heart of the prisoners' invention of a particular form of subjectivation, through which they transform their otherwise powerless captive bodies into a source of a strength. Most of them reported that after the deterioration of the body, their immaterial strength and hidden force explodes and they become strong in spirit. In the semi-conscious state near death, they perceive the 'soul' as the faculty that leads the battle, not the mind or consciousness. They threaten the state of Israel through means of the possibility of their death. However, the Israeli authorities in turn create new tools of constraint and this leads in turn to the development of further techniques of resistance by the hunger strikers.

Foucault's theory of technology of the self questions the domination of the body by the mind/soul, but the Palestinian hunger strikers show a unique concern with the need to control and discipline the collapsing body. Foucault's technologies were intended for situations in which there is a greater degree of freedom, not brutal colonial prison domination; when he deals with technologies of the self, Foucault talks, for instance, about Greek sexual and bodily practices that are not violent. But, notwithstanding the violence of their situation, the prisoners were able to develop a technology of the self and an 'aesthetic of existence' (Huijer, 1999) in a context of dispossession and unfreedom. Herein lies the uniqueness of this case study, for the prisoners were able to invent their tools of resistance in the repressive space of a prison.

Foucault explains resistance as a creative process (Foucault, 1997: 167) and the hunger strikers manifest their own art of resistance showing that human subjects can be creative agents, not simply 'passive victims' of domination. They were already resistant subjects within the Palestinian struggle in the pre-hunger strike, drawing on their political consciousness and belief in their cause, but they in a sense accelerated their resistance through self-starvation. The very idea that the hunger strikers can create technologies of resistance (related to their body, mind, soul, will) implies that they have the possibility to exist outside the control of power by exercising their own sovereignty over their bodies. In other words, hunger strikers attain the agency of self-formation and self-transformation, moving from the colonial figure of passive victim to an active revolutionary becoming. Through their constant attempt to refuse the operation of power that aims to dehumanise them they found new meanings in their existence and were able to restructure their experience of the self.

Foucault indicates that there is no complete liberation and there will be no pure free subject, as there is no constant level or position of counter-power. However, there is always a space for resistance (Foucault, 1997: 292). During the hunger strike, Israeli tactics of power exercised on the prisoners' bodies involved punitive measures such as solitary confinement, different forms of violence, psychological pressure, prevention of family visitations, denied lawyer visits, etc. In response, hunger strikers developed tools of resistance such as refusing treatment and medical checks. They refused supplements and engaged in water strikes to shorten the hunger strike and weaken their bodies to put pressure on the state.

The conditions of the prison system can be viewed as a form of total domination. It is not governmentality but colonial power in its most violent form that leaves no degree of freedom to the prisoners. However, the prisoners' philosophy of freedom in relation to their conceptions of the soul and body was developed in a practice which was able to generate forms of freedom they seemed most impossible or unlikely. In their view, the dignity and freedom of the 'soul' is what makes them human and this humanity can't be attained without the process of risking the sacrifice of the body, which is transformed into a weapon for their fight for dignity. I thus expand on Foucault's framework to explain the hunger strikers' technology of the self as the method they draw upon to produce something new from their own struggle. The concepts the hunger strikers produce and the meaning they construct in their interactions (including in their relationship with the self) shape their technologies of the self, and vice versa.

Practice and meaning are interrelated aspects of this technology. The hunger strikers developed a dualist model and an idea of *disembodiment* through the separation of body/soul and body/mind; this is their own understanding of subjectivity which they constructed through their practice in order to cope with this extreme situation and achieve the victory of the '*rouh*' (soul). This is in line with Foucault's definition of technology which is concerned with the relationship between the self and its practice. In the extreme situation of the hunger strike their way of being and their perception of subjectivity casts a critical light on the limits of theories of subjectivity that categorically argue against hierarchy and dualism of body/soul and/or body/mind.

The idea of resistance is connected to the aesthetic of self-creation, while the transgressive bodily practices of hunger strikers relates to Foucault's aesthetic sensibility. Foucault saw a possibility for new forms of subjectivity that could be created through strategic and tactical interactions with established power relations. The practice of an aesthetics of the self is nothing other than resistance to the ways in which one is constituted by power. The notion that one's life is to be created as art rather than to be lived in accordance to power is in

itself a kind of resistance. In one of his later works, 'The Subject and Power', Foucault writes: 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are' (2003: 134). This is Foucauldian resistance – to refuse what we are and to re-create the self. Thus, the practice of resistance is directly linked to the practice of self-creation, and the hunger strikers' relation to others like their loved ones, their comrades, and the martyrs of Palestine – in addition to their relation to the ethical political values like sacrifice for a just cause – are crucial to grasping the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of their subjectivity. The presentation of the self and how they want to be seen by others is central to them. They are the symbol of resistance for Palestinian people and they perform this image. The hunger strikers' definition of humanity, which revolves around the value of freedom and dignity, points to the aesthetic, ethical, and political value of these two concepts in relation to how they conceive the self. In the aesthetics of existence, self-experience is not a given but is constituted in relation to power.

## **2.0 From Foucault to Fanon's technologies of the self**

In contrast to Foucault, Fanon never explicitly used the term subjectivation or technology of the self, but he sought to identify the forms of subjectivity at the heart of anti-colonial resistance and decolonisation. I use aspects of Foucault's notion of the self in order to draw out certain Fanonian technologies of the colonised self and its methodological lessons. Foucault talks about the subjectivation processes in terms of power relations, not outright domination as is the case under colonialism. He would arguably see much of colonialism also as a power-relation, as do scholars of colonialism who use Foucault, such as Edward Said (Said, 2003). Hunger strikers' subjectivation in a violent colonial space fits better with the arguments elaborated by Fanon, as anticolonial theorist, than with Foucault's perspective. For Fanon, the colonial condition constitutes the very framework in which he analyses the technologies of the self and the constitution of subject. However, despite the very different registers, there is a fundamental affinity between them. Their common conceptual ground lies in their attention to the process of subjectivation and practices of the self that entail the creation of new forms of subjectivity. Both emphasise the value of this transformative dimension.

### **2.1 Limitation of Foucault's theory of subjectivation**

Fanon's concept of decolonisation can be understood as a form of subjectivation in a colonial context. It is a technology of the revolutionary self through which the colonised subject emancipates the self from colonial domination. The technology lies in the practice of

revolutionary violence, a practice of liberation when all other means to resist repression have failed. Fanon's anti-colonial revolutionary violence is not violence per se but a complex process of subjectivation situated in a distinct colonial context which necessitates counter-violence. These technologies of the self are concerned with self-knowledge and consciousness in order to transform the self and create a new aspect of subjectivity to deal with the violence of coloniser. Using his clinical psychological practice, Fanon employed self-analysis and elaborated a subtle conception of subjectivation in the context of colonial and revolutionary violence. Psychiatry and politics are inextricably linked in his work, and the psychological dimension of oppression is key for Fanon (Bhabha, 1994). His clinical work informs his philosophy and provides the opportunity to observe the effect of French colonialism on subjected Algerians (Bulhan, 1985; Cherki, 2006; Fanon, 2018; Gordon et al., 2015; Khalfa, 2015; Macey, 2000).

Achille Mbembe (2003) finds Foucault's notion of power is insufficient to deal with contemporary forms of domination and violence in non-Western societies. He asks if the notion of 'Biopower': the domain of life over which power has taken control ... [is] sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective' (Mbembe, 2003: 12). Using his notion of 'necropolitics' as a development of Foucault's 'biopower', he discusses Palestine, Africa, and Kosovo as places where a politics of death is played out on the modern stage. But Foucault's illuminating concept of the technology of the self is helpful when stretched and contextualised theoretically and methodologically in colonial conditions. In the case of the hunger strikers the process of subjectivation is historical and situated within the material conditions of colonisation and the case study introduces a unique form of the technology of the self.

## 2.2 Fanon's multidimensional approach

Fanon's theory of the colonial relation starts from the historical and political conditions of colonisation in which his thoughts were shaped. Yet, Fanon's theorisations are not simply contextual or historical but, as Ato Sekyi-Otu's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* recognises, stem from the centrality of 'lived experience'<sup>65</sup> in Fanon's thoughts (Sekyi-Otu, 2009). Macey also notes that Fanon's central concern is with a 'frame of mind' and 'living through a situation

---

<sup>65</sup> Both Fanon and Foucault relate to the legacy of phenomenology. Foucault, in his early works *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *History of Madness* also develops his own concept of experience.

or a being-in-the-world' (Macey, 2000). The phenomenological framework is noticeable in the opening words of the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'The Black Man and Language' (Fanon, 2008). In my analysis of the lived experience of hunger strikers, I build on Fanon's multi-disciplinary approach to investigate the subjectivation of hunger strikers and the constitution their revolutionary subjectivity. His engagement with colonial domination requires him to identify the material, psychological and existential effects of the colonised subject's psyche. In a similar manner my engagement with the political prisoners' hunger strike resistance in the Israeli prison system requires developing a multidimensional approach.

In *The Postcolonial Imagination* (2003), Nigel Gibson claims that Fanon contested the Western liberal humanist view of the subject, arguing that in the colonial situation, the natives are dehumanised by the violence of colonial reality and seem unable to articulate this violence in their own words. In his view, Fanon's humanist project, as evidenced by his engagement with colonial violence, attempts to decolonise Eurocentrism in the direction of humanism and has the aim of getting beyond Manicheanism both in its colonial form and as anticolonial reaction (Gibson, 2003). For Fanon, national consciousness was not the goal but only a basis from which a new humanism could be cultivated. In this regard, Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) recognises the importance of Fanon's project of emancipation as 'a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness' (Said, 1994: 278). He admires Fanon's paradigm of 'new humanism' and acknowledges the visionary and innovative value of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, drawing from it in order to construct his own ideas on humanism, human agency, and emancipation. Said also notes that: 'Throughout *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon wants somehow to bind the European as well as the native together in a new non-adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism' (Said, 1994: 331).

Fanon goes beyond the dominating colonising modes of thoughts inscribed in post-colonial settings to introduces a form of revolutionary humanism. This question of humanism is very relevant to my research in that the hunger strikers spoke of their resistance as an embodiment of their humanity. The experience of hunger strikers suggests a model of reclaiming dispossessed humanity through employing the body; this notion of humanism is at the core of the hunger strikers' political resistant subjectivity.

### 2.3 From psychology to politics and from individual to collective

Fanon applied both a materialist analysis of the colonial word and a psychological analysis of consciousness in dialogue with phenomenological theories (Cherki, 2006; Macey, 2000). At the same time, he realised that both the individual psychic structure and the collective structure

must be grasped in a joint analytical frame. Fanon delved deeply into the psychic life of individuals without isolating them from the collective context, thereby providing a framework for incorporating psychology into the politics of resistance.

Jean Khalifa has investigated Fanon's psychiatric work and how he moved from neuropsychiatric treatments and their limits towards a psychotherapeutical approach, focusing on the impact of social and cultural factors on the development of mental illness.<sup>66</sup> Khalifa argues that Fanon read sociologists and anthropologists to understand the relationship of the individual to society as a whole in that mental illness is determined by the structure of relations in which the individual participates (Khalifa, 2015). Fanon's analysis was never limited to the traumatised individuals he treated in his clinical practice. His own experience was a mixture of interacting with sick individual cases in the clinic and political work with the wider collective. In his examination of the impact of colonisation at the individual level, he realised that both the individual psychic structure and the collective structure must be taken into account.

Fanon argues that revolution transforms people, and colonised people reclaim their humanity by engaging in resistance. His project involves the articulation of the struggle for decolonisation of the individual with the struggle for national consciousness, for in his view the two can't be separated. This paradigm provides me with a very helpful framework to analyse my case study, because it emphasises the importance of historical and political factors in the formation of hunger striking subjectivity as well as its existential and phenomenological dimensions. Both Fanon's patients and the hunger strikers are victims of colonialism. Israeli colonialism deliberately tries to damage the Palestinian political prisoners psychologically by employing advanced forms of the technology of power, but most of the interviewees were able to transcend their psychological damage and transform their injured subjectivity and achieve the dignity of the 'soul' through their technology of resilient self.

### **3.0 Structure of Fanon's decolonial subjectivation and technology of the self**

In my exploration of Fanonian technologies of the self, I conceptualise the zero-mode of being as an existential state produced through colonial violence and dehumanisation. To formulate this concept, I discuss Fanon's theory in the context of the dialectics of liberation and recognition. George Ciccariello-Maher's *Decolonising Dialectics* (2017) excavates Fanon's

---

<sup>66</sup> Bulhan has also pointed out that Fanon maintained a critical posture toward dominant psychology, while invoked some recognised psychoanalytic authorities including Freud and Lacan. But later 'enriched by liberation struggle in Algeria Fanon abandoned these authorities and outlined transformational psychology unobscured by Euro-middle-class bias or solipsism' (Bulhan, 1985:69).

attempts to establish a radical dialectics by illustrating the significance of dialectical philosophy for the decolonisation process. He argues that ‘Fanon’s dialectic sets out the zone of nonbeing which is specific to decolonial thought and serves as a fulcrum of epistemic decolonization’, which makes Fanon a ‘pioneering contributor to a powerfully different approach that might be better understood as “nonrecognition studies”’(Ciccariello-Maher, 2017: 57).

### 3.1 Fanon’s ‘zone of nonbeing’ and the emancipatory role of revolutionary violence.

Starting with Fanon’s thesis about decolonisation and humanity, I trace the structure his understanding of subjectivation by explaining the dialectical process of decolonising the zero mode via revolutionary violence, understood as a technology of the self. This demands discussion of the emancipatory role of revolutionary humanistic violence. I then move to discuss hunger striking subjectivity and explicate what is meant by the transformation process into active victim. The zero-mode as an existential junction sheds light on the decision to hunger strike and reveals that the hunger strikers’ subjectivity is constituted through a transformative jump/leap from the zero mode, which also involves a reflective cultivation of humanity.

Viewed through a Fanonian lens, decolonisation entails the transformation of the self and the invention of a new mode of being, a complete replacement of one form of humanity by another (Fanon et al., 1967: 27). This is a very specific conception of decolonisation, which differs from those political visions which do not take subjectivation into account and are therefore arguably liable to reproduce colonial relations of power despite the façade of sovereignty and independence. The Palestinian case can in this Fanonian light be viewed as a permanent decolonisation, an endless transition, in which the Palestinians are still engaged in resistance and recreate themselves as resistance subjects. The technologies of the hunger strikers, their political subjectivity and the temporality of their resistance differs considerably from the imminent horizon of liberation in, for example, Fanon’s Algeria. This ongoing resistance in Palestine which hasn’t achieved its revolutionary mission includes temporal events that erupt in certain historical moments, such as the first and second Intifada. Thus, in the context of the prisoners’ resistance movement, the hunger strike struggle could be considered a revolutionary event in its own right, as well as a form of captive revolution.

Fanon’s concept of subjectivation reveals the internal dynamics of colonialism and anticolonial resistance and describes the colonised and coloniser as divided ontologically into

‘two different species’, in a Manichaeism where the colonised subject is condemned to nonbeing. Lewis R. Gordon (2015) explains that the zone of nonbeing in a colonial and racist context means a point of total absence. As for the colonised subject, Gordon argues that the relevant approach is not the projection of a classical psychoanalytical frame onto colonial reality, but rather a real encounter with the colonial violence that reduced the colonised into the zone of nonbeing (Gordon, 2015). In his article ‘Through the Hellish Zone of Nonbeing: Thinking through Fanon, Disaster, and the Damned of the Earth’, he shows how revolutionary violence explodes the victim-oppressor equation and creates a new emancipatory self (Gordon, 2007). Fanon calls this the creation of subjectivity humanity, and therefore revolutionary subjectivity coexists and connects to the idea of humanity as a humanistic form of violence. The use of violence as a practice of the self embodies the transformation of the zone of nonbeing.

### 3.2 The dialectics of violence

In the trajectory of Fanon’s understanding of decolonisation, the violent struggle is necessary to explode the colonial world and its Manichean oppositions. This rupture creates the precondition for dialectical motion and is the only option if the colonised are to take control of their history. Nigel Gibson (2003) argues that Fanon translates lived experience of struggle as ‘radical mutation in consciousness’. Without change in consciousness, violence can only lead to barbarism. Fanon warns of barbarity and the tragedy of a political movement built on revenge. He emphasises the human dimension of violence as a liberating force.<sup>67</sup> The logic that Fanon asserts is that violence is the natural state of colonialism in that the latter is maintained through violence. It brings violence into the home and the land of the natives. If the colonised subject does not respond, it is natural for coloniser to continue deploying violence and ultimately create a dehumanised victim. For Fanon, anti-colonial violence as a counter-violence is different from colonial violence. Anti-colonial violence is dialectical because it transforms the colonised and the coloniser. It is the basis of reciprocal recognition.

Hussein Bulhan’s *Frantz Fanon and the psychology of oppression* (1985) sheds light on this reciprocal recognition by discussing the oppressor/oppressed dyad and employing Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. Fanon summarised the master-slave dialectic in his book *Black Skin White Mask*, specifically the chapter on ‘The Negro and Hegel’, in order to analyse the

---

<sup>67</sup> Gibson notes that ‘to recognize the difference between the settler logic and the native’s subjective response turns on fleshing out the meaning of dialectic of revolution in Fanon’s thought’ (Gibson, 2003: 9).

relationship between Whites and Blacks. Many commentators have explored how Fanon extends the master-slave paradigm so that he could apply it to concrete lived experience under slavery and colonialism as well as to the emergence of national consciousness. Ciccariello-Maher traces the development of Fanon's dialectics and argues that his conception of decolonial violence is productive and has a positive aspect, in that it is an essential precondition for the national identity. His claim is that Fanon formulates a decolonial and open-ended master-slave dialectic that radically recasts the dialectical tradition (Ciccariello-Maher, 2017: 53).

In Fanon's theory, consciousness – as embodied in what I've called technologies of the self-determines resistance. The use of decolonial violence embodies a revolutionary moment when the colonised subject becomes conscious that he/she has been made inferior and turned into animal. This creates a dialectical necessity to decolonise the zero mode of being and regain self-worth. Fanon stresses the systemic negation of colonised subjects which forces them to question their existence by asking themselves: who am I? (Fanon et al., 1967). Fanon adopts the notion of alienation to his purpose. In employing revolutionary violence to break the colonial structure and associated alienating material conditions, the colonised also transform their consciousness. The emancipatory role of violence can be understood in a Marxian framework which suggests that only in making a revolution is the change of consciousness cultivated (Marx, 1967: 80). To go beyond the victim position as a colonial construction, the colonised needs to attain a new moment of self-knowledge and produce the ability to explode victimhood and what Fanon' calls Manicheanism. When the colonised subject becomes conscious of the threat to humanity by colonial violence, the possibility of the production of revolutionary subjectivity arises.

In my critical appropriation of Foucault around domination/victimhood and the particular role of the body as instrument, this dialectical passage out of victim status and its relation to humanist revolutionary violence against the body is central. In the technology of the self, consciousness and relation of the self is decisive: only when the colonised attains a new moment of self-knowledge is there an ability to destabilise the colonial structure and explode the master-slave dichotomy. Fanon suggests that the experience of liberation occurs at both psychological and intellectual levels. Self-understanding is inseparable from the quest of emancipation and self-creation. The existence in the zero moment involves the necessity of dialectical transformation to eliminate the risk of becoming a dehumanised victim. It is not a dramatic instantaneous or mechanical rupture, but a complex transformative moment in the process of subjectivation through which humanist revolutionary subjectivity comes to

existence. It can be understood a state of consciousness that gives rise to the revolutionary moment where the colonised subject redeems their colonised humanity.

#### **4.0 Badiou's theory of subjectivation**

Badiou's philosophical framework allows us to see the hunger strike as a singular event. Badiou rejects social-scientific approaches to subjectivity and experience (Hallward, 2004) and, unlike Fanon, rejects phenomenology and its understanding of subjectivity and experience. Building on Badiou's theorisations, the uniqueness of hunger strike lies in the emancipatory process of reclaiming humanity and particularly in two moments within the trajectory of hunger strike. First, the decision to enter the conflict that created the event of resistance; second, the ongoing decision to sustain the hunger striker to the end despite the various conflicts encountered at the brink of death – what I have encapsulated here in the notion of continuity. These two junctures in the trajectory of hunger strike entail a complex subjectivation and self-transformation that constitute revolutionary subjectivity. Fidelity to the event generated the continuity in their struggle and through this allowed individual to enter into the formation of a collective subject.

##### 4.1 Badiou's theory of subject: Faithful subjectivity and fidelity to evental truth.

The radical nature of Badiou's philosophy lies in his continued commitment to praxis and revolution beyond their traditional Marxist variants. He also cuts with those contemporary postmodern perspectives which prohibit any notion of subject and truth. His goal is to restore the notion of truth to philosophy. His paradigm binds the three concepts of event, truth and the subject to the condition of philosophy, and offers a way of illuminating the subjectivity of resistance. Badiou's *Being and Event* lays out his ontology and defines the event as a novelty and rupture that gives rise to a subject (Badiou, 2005a). The new in being occurs under the name of the event and is central to Badiou's theory of practice. Badiou theorises the subject not simply or primarily in terms of the constitution of experience but rather as the local configuration of 'generic procedures' (art, politics, science, love) which provide truths with their support.

Badiou establishes a radical political theory in which politics is a site of transforming the situation into something new. The effects of this theory are presented by Badiou as intra-philosophical, not about analysing or prescribing political practices. In *Subject to truth* (2003) Hallward notes that Badiou engages with a set of questions: How can something entirely new

come into the world? What sort of innovation does it invite? How can the sequences of such innovation be sustained in the face of the world's indifference or resistance? (Hallward, 2003). Badiou applies his methods of inquiry to politics and political events and invites us to see these events differently. He is concerned with the historicity of past truth events, not only with the way the truth event punctures a hole in the knowledge of the existing situation, but more with the way that the ontology of situations can be transformed in terms of the intensity of their appearing (Badiou, 2005b),<sup>68</sup> According to Badiou, the essence of the event is to be undecidable from the standpoint of ontology. Unlike the structured situation, an event belongs to no already existent set. To exist means to belong to a set – the event simply belongs to itself and it collapses the foundation or it is “destabilization of the ordinary universe” (Hallward, 2003: 116). His theory concerns events that aren't reducible to traditional political analysis and knowledge. There must be an encounter, something that can't be calculated, predicted or managed, a break based only on chance. A truth persists only through the militant declaration and transcends existing language. The importance of Badiou's theory lies in his claim that political philosophy and pre-existing structures of knowledge can't capture the truth of events.

The core of Badiou's theory of the subject, and its political relevance, lies in the fact that all truths are in a sense inventions. A truth procedure can begin only with some sort of break with the ordinary situation in which it takes place, what Badiou terms an event. For Badiou it is ethics that helps a truth to persist (Badiou, 2002). Badiou's events are rare, but they signify the possible advent of truth in a situation such that it can be fundamentally changed. Situations can be conceived simply as domains where knowledge and opinions circulate. Yet at the same time, situations are also what contain the possibility for innovation and transformation by way of the fleeting appearance of an event. The situation contains the possibility for an event to emerge from a kind of void. Then it becomes the project for certain unique individuals to see the consequences of the event through to its eventual renovation of a given situation. This process of transformation will be what constitutes the fidelity to the event insofar as it comes to instill a truth in the situation. Thus, Badiou's ethics of truth are constituted by a declaration of fidelity to the events that seize those rare individuals who choose to adhere to the essentially unknown principles of the event. Or, as he puts it: ‘Keep going’ (Badiou, 2001: 79) as he calls a subject to be faithful to the event no matter the cost

---

<sup>68</sup> Badiou employs his category of metapolitics which breaks with traditional political philosophy's approach to political events in order to understand certain processes of political subjectivation. See especially his writings on the Paris Commune and the Chinese Cultural Revolution in *Polemics*.

Events call for fidelity and this gives Badiou the basis he requires for his account of what it means to be a subject, which only emerges at what he calls ‘the junction of an intervention and a rule of faithful connection’ (Badiou, 2005a: 239). Fidelity to the event is more important than the event itself. As Badiou puts it, it is ‘through fidelity that I rise above my existence as a human animal and become the immortal that I am capable of being’ (Badiou, 2001: 46 ). The individual involved in such an event, if they are faithful to what they have glimpsed, can produce a truth that allows a ‘human animal’ to become a subject, since subjectivity is not an inherent human trait but rather a state of becoming, or process. Thus, fidelity to the event constitutes the individual as the subject. As Badiou declares:

A subject is nothing other than an active fidelity to the event of truth. This means that a subject is a militant of truth ... The militant of a truth is not only the political militant working for the emancipation of humanity in its entirety. He or she is also the artist-creator, the scientist who opens up a new theoretical field, or the lover whose world is enchanted (Badiou 2005: xiii).

When a subject is faithful to an event and declares their fidelity, they become a subject of truth: ‘The subject believes that there is a truth, and this belief occurs in the form of knowledge. I term this knowing belief confidence; (Badiou 2005: 399). Subjective experience and subject’s ‘confidence’ is important in realising and naming an eventual truth (2005: 413). On the contrary, ‘[k]nowledge in its encyclopaedic disposition, never encounters anything. It presupposes presentation, and represents it in language via discernment and judgment’ (2005: 416). So, according to Badiou: ‘The truth investigated by the faithful procedures is indescribable in the language of situation’ (2005: 416).

#### 4.2 The hunger strike as an exceptional event and subjectivity

The hunger strike is an exceptional event that breaks with the normal situation in which an individual prisoner hovers on the boundaries of life and death living an existential state of slow death, triggering a process of transformation and self-creation. The exceptionality of hunger strike as an event of reclaiming humanity lies in two moments: first, the decision of confrontation that created the event; and second, the ongoing decision to sustain the hunger strike until freedom is achieved, something best grasped through the notion of continuity. The decision of hunger strike embodies the fidelity to the idea of confrontation and demonstrates an extension to the path of resistance that the prisoners had already chosen before imprisonment. This pre-hunger strike context gives rise to a form of subjectivation that led to

the decision – the creation of the event of the hunger strike. The ongoing decision for continuity in a prolonged act of self-starvation gives rise to an exceptional form of subjectivation in a limit-experience in which subjects exist on the brink of death. The decision of confrontation is not only about entering a conflict and creating an event but also about not breaking, continuing.

The decision to commence a hunger strike and the decision to sustain it to the end constitute the emancipatory process of reclaiming humanity and give rise to the post-hunger strike moment of freedom – what the participants term ‘victory’ and ‘new birth’. The post-hunger strike moment demonstrates the transformation from death to life. The moment of breathing the air of freedom is their rebirth after they escape the death-experience. This moment breaks with the previous context of pain and conflict and is reported by them as suffused with a sense of pride, triumph and happiness. However, they also regard this freedom as not complete as long as they live under occupation. The pre-hunger strike context led the prisoners to break with their situation of dispossession and make the decision to enter this near-death event. This event emerged as a result of the exceptional context of confrontation with the Israeli authorities, one in which the political prisoners employ their body to challenge the status quo of administrative detention and the dehumanising prison conditions. In contrast with Fanon’s understanding of subjectivation, in his transformation which entails the necessity of the dialectic, Badiou thinks the event is unexpected, unpredictable and only a result of chance.

Though the decision to enter it is conscious and deliberate, the hunger strike is an unpredictable event to the extent that it is accompanied by a high possibility of death even though prisoners undertake it because of aspiration to life and freedom. ‘Victory’, as they understand it, is never certain. Their definition of victory is that they triumph as long as they confront and refuse the colonial project of dehumanisation. As far as they are concerned their fidelity to the continuity of resistance is what makes them triumph regardless the outcome. In Badiou’s words, the event gives rise to the ‘existence of inexistence’ (Badiou, 2005). In the hunger strikers’ subjectivation, the event brings what they call their ‘latent energy’ into existence; the agency of the subject lies in giving rise to something new in the process of affirming an event. What the hunger strikers went through cannot be predicted or calculated or even necessarily represented by language. They reported that the human being in this near-death event surprised themselves and discovered latent forces that supported them and transformed the physical pain into spiritual purity and a transcendent state.

The hunger strikers’ determination to maintain a philosophy of ongoing confrontation continued the stance of resistance that they had practiced before their hunger strike and had in turn caused their imprisonment. The necessity of confrontation emerged from their fidelity to

their humanity that was confiscated and dispossessed by technologies of power and therefore their act of resistance is the process of reclaiming humanity. Peter Hallward explains that the event (the uprising, the encounter, the invention) breaks fundamentally with prevailing routine and entails radical transformation through the subject who proclaims it, a truth that is temporary in its occasion but becomes generic in its substance (Hallward 2003:107). The prevailing routine is ordinarily capable of preventing the naming of the void, of the unrepresentable or excluded dimension of given state of affairs; it requires an event (revolution/intifada) to suspend this blockage. Only the militant subjective composition of a truth, in the wake of an event, will expose what had been hidden. In the wake of an event (e.g. Palestinian Intifada in 1987) certain elements belonging to these situations, elements that were not previously counted, come to appear as needing to be counted as belonging to the situation (Hallward 2003:121).

Badiou's understanding of the process of subjectivation involves the transformation of an individual into a subject. As Hallward explains, subjectivation can be described as an occurrence of the void (Hallward 2003:141). For Badiou, the individual is not a subject, and the subject is absent prior to the event. In contrast to this Badiouian understanding, the hunger strikers had a previous subjectivation and an embodied memory of struggle which was in turn embedded in an extended collective history of resistance. In Palestinian resistance, radical and exceptional decisions emerging out of a 'void' are always full of meanings, allegiances, beliefs, ideologies, as are revealed in the accounts provided by interviewees. Before the hunger strike, they already had the fidelity to the idea of resistance and their faithfulness to constant resistance to the occupation is what led them to continue the path of resistance and create the event of the hunger strike.

#### 4.3 The context of hunger strike: The exceptionality in the notion of continuity

The hunger strike is a rare and exceptional event not only due to the decision of confrontation that created the event but also in terms of the idea of continuity and the hunger strikers' refusal to retreat despite the fact that they were dying. This fidelity to the event of resistance is the source of their strength and steadfastness. In this sense Badiou's concept of fidelity is helpful in illuminating the question of continuity. His philosophical articulation of rupture and continuity doesn't precisely exemplify the hunger strikers' own conception of the continuity of their struggle or the specific forms taken by their fidelity. Nevertheless, it does offer a useful paradigm for understanding this resistance. I show that only through fidelity do the individuals become (collective) subjects in this process. The hunger strike is then an extension of the

confrontation against colonial power caused by the rupture of imprisonment and dispossession. It contains the contrast between the predictable decision to continue to the end, and an unpredictable and sudden transformation. The outcome depends solely on the individuals and their own strategies and tools of resistance which result from an accumulation of experiences. In the experience of hunger strikers, 'the fidelity to the event' means safeguarding the experience of resistance and the value of their struggle and its history. For example, Khader Adnan insisted that his second hunger strike was a protection of his achievement in that when he launched the first hunger strike, he established a widespread phenomenon of resistance in the Israeli prisons and waves of hunger strikers followed him. So, the fidelity to the event created the continuity.

The hunger strikers' fidelity to the event of ongoing resistance springs from their belief in a just cause and their faith in the necessity of confrontation. Most of the participants reported that they feel that they are stronger than the Israeli forces at the ethical level because they fight for a just cause. The fidelity to the truth-event takes exceptional effort as hunger strikers encountered conflict about whether to break or to sustain the hunger strike. There are moments of fall and rise in the hunger strikers' internal struggle but the crucial moment in the dialectic of the self is when they decide to continue. In their culture of resistance, the rooted belief in the collective cause is what gives them the strength to continue. Without their willingness to sacrifice the self for their cause they wouldn't remain steadfast and maintain the hunger strike. In Badiou's work, the notion of fidelity belongs to the domain of ethics. In the context of my research, we can say that the hunger strikers' sacrifice for a cause is the core of their ethics of resistance. They stay loyal to the cultural and ethical heritage of resistance and their accounts emphasise their fidelity to the 'martyrs' of Palestine who are their comrades and relatives.

#### 4.4 Individual vs. collective

Badiou's philosophy emphasises subjective commitment. The subject is the collective of those with fidelity to a particular truth. Shared fidelity to the event is the basis for a subjective community or being together with no criteria of inclusion other than fidelity itself. Politics concerns only the collective dimension, the affirmation of an absolutely generic quality - a 'mixed situation' with an individual vehicle but a collective import (Hallward 2001). Since every truth is exceptional, the subject must be firmly distinguished from an ordinary individual. Every faithful subject emerges as the subject of truth. Subjects are not themselves individuals. The individual incorporates himself/herself into a subject. As Hallward writes:

subjectivation is the abrupt conversions of a someone. Although all someone *can* become subjects Badiou, offers no grounds for accepting the moralizing presumption that “every human animal is a subject (Hallward 2003:142-143)

A truth is a matter of conviction. Truth for Badiou involves being true and faithful to something. According to Hallward, what Badiou calls subjectivation describes the experience of, and commitment to, a cause with which one can identify oneself without reserve. The subject participates and declares the event and draws the consequences. The identity of the subject rests entirely, unconditionally on the commitment. I am because I am struggling for a new order. With intervention and fidelity truth is sparked by an event, but bursts into flame only through an endless subjective effort. The truth is constructed bit by bit from the void. As a result, a truth and a subject will indeed be the truth and subject of a particular situation. A subject is something quite distinct from an individual in the ordinary sense. A subject is an individual transfigured by the truth. This transfiguration exceeds an individual self but contributes to the constitution of a true collective subject. From the moment of commitment, the real subject of truth is this new collective “we” subject. ‘Every subject is only an ‘objective’ individual, an ordinary mortal, become “immortal” through his or her affirmation of (transfiguration by) a truth that coheres at a level entirely beyond this mortal objectivity. Truth for Badiou evokes the logic of being true to something, of holding true to a principle, person, or ideal’ (Hallward 2001, X).

## **Conclusion**

Bringing the theories of subjectivity of Foucault, Fanon and Badiou into dialogue with my research material, and with one another, helps to crystalize the arguments of this thesis regarding the transformational trajectory of the formation of hunger striking subjectivity. Their theories help to develop a systematic investigation of the process of subjectivation embodied in hunger strike resistance. My critical appropriation of Foucault's ‘technologies of the self’ illuminates hunger striking subjectivation in embodied resistance, especially the particular role of the body as instrument. Fanon’s theoretical framework is helpful particularly regarding the necessity of revolutionary violence, in this instance directed to the body in self-starvation as the main technology of the self for reclaiming humanity. I crafted my concept of the 'zero-mode' of being in dialogue with Fanon's theorization, whilst Badiou’s theory of subjectivation helps to explicate the hunger strike as an exceptional event. More specifically, his conceptions of fidelity, rupture and continuity provide a useful framework for understanding the Palestinian

resistant subjectivation in which individuals become subjects through being faithful to a truth, or, in the Palestinian political discourse creatively adopted by the hunger strikers, through steadfastness (*Sumud*).

## Chapter 5: The Pre-hunger Strike Stage: The Dispossession of Humanity

They want to dispossess the Palestinians of their human essence. Prison is dispossession of humanity. (Fakhri Barghouti, 2015)

This chapter deals with how Palestinian political prisoners experience their dispossession, and the role of this experience in the constitution of their subjectivity in the pre-hunger strike stage. It also sheds light on Israeli technologies of power and illustrates the violence of administrative detention as a form of dispossession. The hunger strikers describe administrative detention as “a crime against humanity”, since it absolutely dominates their lives and aims at destroying Palestinian resistance by enacting the political and social death<sup>69</sup> of Palestinian prisoners. Detaining individuals for unknown reasons for an unknown duration is an act of suppressing life; Palestinian prisoners refer to their cells as ‘cemeteries for living people’. Colonial violence is not limited to incarcerating and torturing the captive body but extends to the psyche. To shed further light on these phenomena, I will analyse the structure of dispossession as taking three forms: dispossession of hope (i.e. of a future), dispossession of love (social bonds and personal relations), and dispossession of dignity. The main purpose behind the conditions imposed on Palestinians in Israeli prisons is to drain detainees to the point of social death, to produce a mortification of the self (Goffman, 1961). This starts from the moment of arrest, through interrogation, and into isolation. The captive subject is subject to an extreme state of deprivation in which they are physically fully controlled in an institution specifically established for the practice of dispossession.

The chapter also sheds light on the participants' understanding of what constitutes being ‘human’ and what they understand by the notions of humanity and dignity. It explicates their understanding of the hunger striking as a reclamation of humanity in relation to dispossession. I discuss how the hunger strike’s counter-violence makes possible the prisoners’ transformation from what, adapting Fanon's framing of subjectivation, I have theorised as the *zero mode of being* (see Chapter 3).

---

<sup>69</sup> On social death see (Patterson, 1982).

## 1. Administrative detention as a form of dispossession

Through the prison they want to destroy the Palestinian human (Ayman Hamdan, 2015)

The prison is a time without time, it is a killing of the Palestinian human (Ahmed Qatamish 2016)

In prison, I wrote a letter to my family saying “they are trying to turn us into zeros (Adel Samara, 2015)

The account of the former hunger striker Bilal Diayb emphasises how the colonial prison aims at annihilating<sup>70</sup> the idea of resistance and destroying Palestinian political identity.

Prison is a punishment so that the Palestinian would give up his/her goal. The Israeli forces think that if they imprison a Palestinian who has an “idea”, he or she would not transmit the idea during incarceration. Firstly, they punish him for holding an idea and secondly, they think he himself will annihilate the idea when he is released. I mean they think that after Bilal goes home he will live his life as a civilian without his belief in the idea. But the result is completely the opposite. The belief in resistance increases and strengthens after incarceration.

The interviewees all reflect in different ways on their mortification by the Israeli prison system. Goffman (1961) discusses the processes entailed in the mortification of the self in what he describes as the “total institution”, of which the prison is a signal example, in its stripping of the “civilian self” from its connections to the outside world. A barrier is placed between the individual in an institution and the wider world, which requires the individual to break with past roles. Personal possessions with which the inmate has identified him/herself are also removed in order to ensure a break with the past roles. The experience of self-loss thus entails dispossession of personal property, the stripping of element of one’s identity such as clothes and cosmetics, and even the loss of one’s name. The inmates come to the institution with a “presenting culture” derived from their home world and go through a process of “disculturalisation”.

The management of social and political death entails a series of abasements, degradation, humiliation, and profanation of self through which the self is mortified. Goffman writes:

---

<sup>70</sup> (Balibar, 2009, 2015) discusses the idea of extreme violence as a destruction of the very possibility of resistance. See also Elsa Dorlin’s work <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/reviews/individual-reviews/who-is-the-subject-of-violence>. (Jouai, n.d.)

in total institutions these territories of the self are violated; the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiments of self profaned (Goffman, 1961: 32).

This case study goes beyond Goffman in that the situation in Palestine is about *political* identity and its annihilation. The Palestinian prisoner's self is subjected to degrading and humiliating circumstances purposefully designed to undermine any form of political identity. The Israeli state does not want Palestinians to die a physical death in prison. Rather, the systematic aim of prison is political death. In his critique of Israeli policy toward Palestinians, Baruch Kimmerling introduced the term "politicide", which he describes as actions planned to "destroy the political national existence of a whole community of people and thus deny it the possibility of self-determination"(Kimmerling, 2006: 4). The dispossession and mortification is not just aimed at the prisoners but also about depoliticising Palestinian society outside the prison.

The political detainees view administrative detention as an exercise of power to control their future on the basis of secret evidence.<sup>71</sup> Detainees expect to be repeatedly arrested at any time and live unstable and unpredictable precarious lives. Prisoners are not informed of the precise reason for their detention and don't know about their future. Thus, administrative detention is a form of dispossession of hope and future, confiscating detainees' lives and damaging their family relations. Mazen Natche:

Administrative detention is a crime against humanity...The reason for administrative detention is not because detainees are dangerous but because Israel suspects that they might be dangerous, and there is room for them in prison. Administrative detention is not related to resistance fighters who belong to military wings of political parties, this unjust detention targets all people. Imagine, university professors, members of legislative council, activists in charity work are in detention. What does it mean? It is a matter of devastation, not only of the Palestinian resistance and political movement, but the Palestinian social infrastructure in general. It is a matter of destroying social, cultural and educational structure in that Israel occupation evacuates the Palestinian public sphere to destroy Palestinian society in general.

With regard to the arbitrary practice of administrative detention, the research participants emphasise that they feel as if they are "slaves" under the control of Israeli. Moamar Banat:

---

<sup>71</sup> See also Pelley-Sryck, Tamar. 2011. 'The mysteries of Administrative Detention'. In: *Threat: Palestinian political prisoners in Israel*, ed.by Abeer Baker and Anat Mater. London: Pluto Press. See also *Without Trial: Administrative detention of Palestinians by Israel and the Interment of Unlawful Combatants Law*, B'Tselem and Hamakoked report, October 2009.

With the logic of administrative detention, I feel like a slave under the control of the Israeli intelligence officer. Whenever he wants, I am released. It depends on his mood and usually he justifies my arrest because I have a secret file which can't be displayed in public for security reasons.

Administrative detention doubles as a collective punishment of family members and friends. Many Palestinians have been arrested and held under detention on account of their kinship to resistance fighters who were killed or imprisoned or 'wanted' by Israeli security. Administrative detention is also used as a substitute for criminal prosecution when there is insufficient evidence. Adel Hiribat:

I was arrested because unfortunately I was the last one who saw a martyr Mahmoud Hamad - when I was released from the prison he invited me to have coffee with him. I did not know his intentions and the Israelis can't legally prosecute me because I drank coffee with a resistance fighter, so because they don't have enough evidence, they continue to hold me in administrative detention after further cruel interrogation.<sup>72</sup>

In a security-obsessed state like Israel, which is described by Ilan Pappé (Lentin, 2008) as 'the Mukhabarat state' or as a state of exception, every Palestinian is a potential 'security threat'. Butler in *Precarious Life* discusses "indefinite detention" in Guantanamo Bay and indicates that 'deeming' someone as dangerous is sufficient to make them so and justify their incarceration (Butler, 2006: 58–59). This indefinite detention "doesn't signify an exceptional circumstance, but, rather, the means by which the exceptional become established as naturalized norm" (67). But the Israeli regime in Palestine is not just based on normalising the exception. As Nashif (2013, 2015) specifies, it engages in the administration of collective Palestinian death by constituting them objects and non-human. The Israeli state combines governmentality and varieties of necropolitics. For example, Ayman Hamdan was released in 2007 after four years in prison. He had participated in a collective hunger strike in 2004 for nineteen days but was then arrested for the fourth time because of his relationship to his uncle who was assassinated by Israeli forces in 2008.

---

<sup>72</sup> Adel Hiribat was arrested because the political party to which he belongs (Islamic Jihad) claimed responsibility for the attack by Mahmoud Hamad. He was subjected to a series of constitutive detentions over eleven years because Israeli security suspected that he played a role in this attack although no evidence has emerged, even after harsh interrogation. He was also accused of being involved in the political activities of his friend Thaer Hasan, a respected resistance fighter in the military wing of Islamic Jihad.

After I had been released in 2007 I had got married and my uncle, a well-known resistance fighter 'wanted' by Israel for more 15 years was assassinated in 2008. The accusation of my fourth arrest was for participating in my uncle's funeral!

The Israeli occupation confiscates the lives of prisoners and uses a form of kidnapping life since consecutive extensions of detention continue for an unknown time and sometimes reach over 10 years in Israeli custody. Adel Hirbat has been arrested 5 times for a total of 11 years (5 of them consecutive, most in solitary confinement). This detention has had a negative impact on his education, his family and his life in general.

The tragic series of arrests did not give me a chance in life and deprived me of the opportunity to pursue my education. I was first arrested just after I had submitted my application to go to college. Later I went to industrial school and learned carpentry and got married in 1999. However, I had only spent 18 days with my wife before I was arrested again. I was not released until my son was two years old. Forty days later they arrested me again and interrogated me for 151 days. They accused me of serious 'crimes' but as the Israelis could not find any evidence against me I was held under administrative detention for 5 years without trial. I spent 80% of these 5 years in solitary confinement. When I was released 5 years later, my second son was around 5 years old – my wife had become pregnant during forty days between the two arrests. Imagine you get out of prison and find out you have two sons, one of them seven and the other five years old. My wife and I are still not at ease with each other as we haven't spent enough time together. I had only spent a few days with her (18 days and 40 days) between arrests. I had fought hard to marry my wife because her father had rejected our marriage. I had waited four years for her and was determined to marry her but when she finally became my wife I found that I couldn't live safely with her - the person I loved and chose.

## **2.0 Aspects of dispossession**

The detainees are dispossessed of basic existential and affective needs, which include hope and future, love and social bonds, and dignity, whose withdrawal they experienced as devastating.

### 2.1 Dispossession of hope and future

All Palestinian administrative detainees are subjected to six-month administrative detention orders which are issued without trial and renewed arbitrarily ten days before the scheduled release and keep getting renewed for an indefinite duration and for unknown reasons.<sup>73</sup> Some prisoners were released for a few hours, but were rearrested on the same day at checkpoints

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

where their families were waiting for them with rising hope that at any minute they would meet and hug their beloved ones. Detainees and their families live with the uncertainty of not knowing how long they will be deprived of their freedom or exactly why they are being detained. Moayed Shurab:

The Israelis put us under pressure, in the sense that we don't know our future. You don't know when you will be released, you wait and wait and your family waits. Sometimes Palestinian families at the end of detention periods wait at checkpoints hoping that we will be free, but they renew our detention again to an unknown time. Nobody knows when he will be free, nobody.

The violence of incarceration is based on the state's ability to impose social and political death. Some prisoners are promised release but those promises are rarely if ever kept. Despair was transformed by some into challenge and confrontation. It made some detainees engage in a hunger strike to protest against the deceit. Nora Hashlamoun:

On 27th day of my first hunger strike the Israeli officer... promised to release me on March 12. On this day, I waited until 4 o'clock to be released but they ignored me and nobody came. When I went to sleep after this disappointment and despair, one of my inmate friends woke me up to see my children on TV. My children were crying saying we are expecting our mother to be free today but they renewed her administrative detention.

In response Hashlamoun embarked on her second hunger strike. For her, this is 'undefeated despair', in the sense that she persisted in her resistance to challenge the Israelis' manipulation and fight for her freedom.

## 2.2 Dispossession of love and social bonds

The colonial techniques of power which most broke prisoners' hearts were the suffering of their families and loved ones during their arrests and periods of interrogation. Prisoners' wives and children suffered extreme fear and were traumatised because of the aggressive and violent nature of the arrests, as Hamdan reported, and could result in the miscarriage of their babies, as in the case of Mahmoud Shalatwa.

In detention, the prisoners suffer from deprivation of family visits. Hamdan:

The Israelis even prevented my family from visiting me. Once they tore my wife's permit into pieces at the checkpoint and denied her access. The only communication between us was a radio programme titled

‘the prisoner broadcast’. I hugged the radio as if I were hugging my son and my wife. Once I started crying when I listened to her saying ‘your baby is sick’.

Hiribat was also denied family visits. ‘They denied my wife visits. During the five-year period when I was imprisoned I only saw my children 3 times.’ Ahmed Remawi, at 19 the youngest hunger striker (he was arrested one day after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2012, was taken to the same prison as his father. Ironically, in this case prison united separated family members. Since the age of seven Ahmad had only known his father behind the glass divider and he was 12 before he hugged his father without a glass barrier.

When we met, we did not know what to do. We cried, he kissed me and I kissed him. I looked at him and took him between my arms and he did the same.... All the prisoners around us cried and hugged us, even the female Israeli soldier who witnessed our meeting she cried.

Remawi's father, Ishraq, a resistance fighter affiliated to the PFLP, was arrested in 2001 and was serving a 19-year sentence. Both of them participated in a collective hunger strike in 2014 protesting against administrative detention. Although the father is not an administrative detainee he engaged in the strike in solidarity with his son. The prison authority separated them again during the strike. The family had suffered greatly from the detention policies since 2001 - when the father was imprisoned in 2001 the family home was demolished and the entire extended family lived in a tent for one month before moving into a relative's home.

Hashlamoun describes the harsh conditions during family visits due to glass dividers which prohibited her from touching her daughter.

Being in prison is not easy at all, it is extremely difficult especially that I have 6 children and they were rarely allowed to visit me. It was 9 months later when I first saw my daughter who was 2 years old when I was arrested. She used to see me only in pictures. They'd tell me she would kiss the pictures and go smell and kiss my clothes at home. When she visited me I told her that it is prison that puts people apart, I told her it is impossible for me to come to you now because of the Israeli occupation. When the 9 months passed and she came, she only saw me behind glass and talked to me through a phone. She could not touch me. I made her understand it is not my fault and it is not under my control, it is all the Occupation. As soon as she left and was not anymore in my sight, she exploded crying. Her screams filled the prison. When she was in front of me she did not cry, she held her tears inside, her face was red, and she was under immense pressure.

During arrest and interrogation, the IPA forces manipulate the prisoners by using the love of their beloved ones as psychological pressure in order to obtain confessions. The repeated arrests damage the prisoners' relationships with their children, so that the happiness of freedom at the end of their detention is shadowed by bitterness. When some detainees were released from prison between the series of detentions, they found their children had grown up and did not recognise them as parents. Hiribat:

The consequences of the arrest are hard. It affects the family relationships. It had a hard impact on me. There is no strong tie between me and my children until now, when I came out from prison. My son refused to kiss me. His uncles and my father are the people who raised him. I feel he did not recognise me as his father. For him what does it mean to have a father after 5 years. I see my brother's children and how they deal with their father in a different way. I tried to build a relationship with my sons but it did not work as I got imprisoned again after a maximum of 6 months.... The imprisonment doesn't affect only the prisoners but the whole family, the wife and the children and the parents...

The repeated series of arrests does not give the prisoners the opportunity to rebuild the relationship with their children; it damages prisoners' relationships with their beloved ones, causing lasting harm and vulnerability.

### 2.3 Dispossession of dignity

The participants regard the humiliation they suffer as a dispossession of dignity. Their accounts indicate that the motive for the hunger strike was not only to protest against the policy of administrative detention, but also to protest against the humiliation and this dispossession. For example Mazen Natcheh said: 'We went on hunger strike to live a life with dignity - not to die'. Mohamad Alan commented:

If dignity is touched or injured, life becomes meaningless. As for my love of life, I differentiate between the honorable life with dignity, and life with humiliation. Living in humiliation makes life cheap. The human being would give up his life for his dignity. This is the sublime value...

Khader Adnan remarked:

I believe humiliation in itself warrants a hunger strike. The administrative detention was not the only reason of my strike. ... It was the barbarity of my interrogation including humiliation, insults, assaults and beating that was the main reason for my strike, not just the detention order.

In sum, the Palestinian prisoners are aware that Israel's colonial violence aims to assault their humanity through the dispossession of their hope and future, of social bonds and personal relations, and of dignity. Butler and Athanasiou discuss dispossession and present vulnerability as enabling rather than disabling self-determination. In their book, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, they investigate the concept of dispossession and its connections with performativity and protest. The authors suggest that the dispossessed are marked by "injurious and unjust genealogies" (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 99) but dispossession, through the mediation of performativity, can be turned into a tool for protesters and activists. Resistance and bodily assembly are exposures to vulnerability that simultaneously reject the conditions of dispossession. In this respect, the act of refusing dispossession brings a political subject into existence and is an effect of the corporeal exercise of protest. Alongside Butler and Athanasiou, this research explores the vulnerability and suffering produced by dispossession. But the vulnerable victim produced by dispossession becomes a site of resistance in the course of the hunger strike.

Dispossession refers not only to 'losses' but also points towards resistance and self-determination. Having endured dispossession, through their resistance Palestinian political prisoners can partly transcend their psychological damage and transform their injured subjectivity.

Having illustrated the perception and experience structuring the various forms of dispossession that colonial power performs over Palestinian detainees, the chapter continues to illuminate their understanding of humanity and the meaning they give to their action as a means for its reclamation.

### **3.0 Dignity, freedom and the meaning of humanity**

The meaning the research participants give to their humanity, and their efforts to reclaim it, is associated with dignity and freedom from incarceration. As Khader Adnan said 'my motive is freedom, I wanted to be with my children'. Human dignity is linked here to a refusal of dehumanisation in the prison. Adnan used the slogan: 'my dignity is more precious than food' which was widely disseminated in local and international media; other prisoners used it in their letters, sent via their lawyers during their hunger strike, and in interviews, in which they emphasised that it had originated with Adnan.

Mohamad Alan encapsulated the prisoners' view of dignity: 'No doubt the love of life is unsurpassed by the love of dignity. When two loves compete, we must favour one love over

the other. It was obvious that the preference is our love of dignity. Any life far from dignity is not a life'. The participants foreground the word 'dignity' as a key stake of the hunger strike. Sometimes, this takes a poetic and metaphorical quality, as in the statement 'salt and water equals dignity'<sup>74</sup> – 'salt and water' are the only substances the hunger strikers take in during their starvation. Khader Adnan referred to a quote in the Quran: 'from water we created everything alive', so that drinking water during their hunger strike was a trope for 'life' for them. As Itaf Ilian comments:

If I am a prisoner it does not mean I submit or surrender. All the Palestinian hunger strikes embarked on in the 70s were for dignity. The first Palestinian hunger strike in our history was to protest against saying 'Sir' to the jailor. It was a refusal and the prisoners succeeded in erasing that word.

The appellation 'dignity' was used for the mass hunger strike undertaken in August 2017 in protest over prison conditions involving 1500 Palestinian prisoners – 'the dignity hunger strike'. Dignity and freedom are bound together in the participants' discourse, as the two fundamental values that are indispensable for their collective political struggle and anti-colonial resistance. Bilal Deyab:

Any mature human realises that if there is no freedom life has no value. Dignity is an integral part of freedom. No freedom without dignity. If I am colonised and live under occupation, where is my dignity? ... If we surrender and consider that the occupation is a fact that we have to accept, that means there is neither dignity nor freedom.

On the contrary, accepting humiliation would be to descend into a kind of animality. Mohamad Alan:

People conceive their humanity through their life, but humanity is to fight my enemy fiercely. This is true humanity. Life without dignity is animal life. ... Any meaning of humanity that makes the human accept torture and humiliation is a very far from humanity but very close to animality.

---

<sup>74</sup> When I presented my research in SOAS in May 2016 the international audience showed familiarity with this equation, demonstrating its wide dissemination in the international media.

Diyab's account confirms that that he views humanity as practiced through the action of resistance; his decision to strike is a way of revealing his human agency by confronting dispossession with refusal.

My practice of my humanity is to say 'NO'. Any human being who has the seeds of humanity within should make them function to provoke all forms of refusal or acceptance...My hunger strike decision was a protection of my humanity. If I accepted to remain in prison after the renewal of my detention after 14 years I will live broken in prison all my life.... I refuse any thoughts which invite me to surrender.

Mahomoud Sarsik also highlights how hunger strike resistance is an embodiment of humanity:

The humanity in hunger strike resistance lies in the fact that we defend our rights as humans who are deprived of their normal human rights to be treated as human, not as a number inside the prison. So humanity breaking the law of detention which deprived the prisoner of his children ... I refuse injustice whether it is inflicted on me or on any other human being regardless of our cultural differences. Our God creates us as free human beings not to live in prisons. God did not create us to live as slaves. I am a human and it is my right to live free.

The hunger strikers emphasise that their hunger strike is basically a political struggle for emancipation to reclaim their dispossessed humanity. They introduce their definition of humanity which is linked to the concepts of freedom and dignity and render their action in humanistic terms. They regard their anti-colonial struggle as not only for national-political freedom but also for human freedom.

#### **4.0 Hunger strike counter-violence and reclaiming humanity**

The struggle of Palestinians with the Israeli occupation does not end with their imprisonment. Instead, the prison becomes a site of resistance. Nashif's *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community* (Nashif, 2008) deals with the process that transformed the colonial system into a generative site for constructing national, social and cultural identity. As Bilal Diyab put it "the belief in the idea and in resistance increases and strengthens after incarceration". The corporeal act of hunger strike performs a rejection of the colonial regime's attempts to annihilate resistance and political identity – to carry out 'politicide' (Kimmerling, 2006).

The political prisoners resort to their body to decolonise the dispossession that reduces them to a zero-mode of being. According to Fanon, colonialism dehumanises the colonised

subjects to the extent that it turns them into a thing to be destroyed by brute violence. The Palestinian former hunger strikers view the hunger strike as less hard than the effect of incarceration. In this sense the hunger strike becomes a necessity to decolonise dispossession and regain humanity. "The thing that has been colonized becomes human through the anticolonial revolutionary violence" (Fanon et al., 1967: 28). Or, as Munir Abu Sharar's reflected:

I am completely convinced that when I am subjected to injustice and oppression, it is my natural right to rebel. It is axiomatic. The main motive for our resistance is to resist the injustice and reject dehumanisation... Our hunger strike is an intensified expression of rejection of injustice and dehumanisation.

In dialogue with Fanon's framework, I conceptualise the hunger strike as a transformative leap from the zero mode of being to the redemption of humanity. The struggle for freedom through decolonisation becomes a struggle for self-possession and a step towards creating a new form of life and humanity by reclaiming all the things that the coloniser attempted to dispossess (hope, dignity, love/social bonds). The hunger strike was experienced as a last resort for redeeming the prisoners' humanity. With this instrumentalising of the body in the act of self-imposed starvation, prisoners seek to restore agency over their body and demonstrate under extreme circumstances that the colonised subject can exist outside the colonial construction. In their accounts we repeatedly hear how they rejected their colonial construction as 'slaves', 'zeros', and 'living dead' in Israeli prisons. Though their violence is seemingly directed at their own bodies rather than those of the coloniser, the reclamation of humanity by the hunger strikers can be fruitfully connected to Fanon's dialectical conception of violence. In Emmanuel Hansen's useful summary of an argument from *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The violence of the settler, which is the thesis, creates its own antithesis which is the violence of the native, but the native, due to its own sanctions of the colonial regime and the psychological inhibitions created by the regime, visits his violence on himself, that is, on other natives instead of the colonizer. Such a state of affairs continues until "daily life becomes impossible". It is at this time that the native responds to the colonizer's violence with his own violence creating a synthesis and a resolution of the dialectic (Hanson, 1976: 130)

The hunger strikers directed the violence to their bodies to protect the self from dehumanisation. This is not a nihilistic act of self-destruction, but the purposeful employment of revolutionary violence to destabilise the colonial structure.

The counter-violence directed at the self and the body was experienced by the hunger strikers as a necessity<sup>75</sup> in order to undo colonial alienation and reclaim humanity. In the zero mode of being, the colonized subject encounters a moment of consciousness which necessitates opposing dispossession in the face of the risk of dehumanisation. The hunger strikers become conscious of their dispossessed self and the colonial project of dehumanisation. The hunger strikers I interviewed concluded that those whose bodies are subjected to violence can only combat this by exercising greater violence over their bodies as the last resort. Those who are dispossessed by violence turn this violence toward themselves to disrupt the power relation.

Drawing on some of Fanon's theories for the analysis of the interviews, I expand his arguments by distinguishing, for instance, between dispossession and dehumanisation. My expansion of Fanon's theory revolves around the crucial state I call *zero mode of being*, from which the colonised subject makes a transformative jump or leap to create a 'new humanity'. This implicates the transformation processes from colonised subjectivity (and the dehumanised state of being) into revolutionary subjectivity. Fanon pointed out that the colonised is dehumanised by the coloniser, who seeks to reduce them to an animalised condition (1976:32), but the native knows that he is not animal; it is this consciousness of the colonised's humanity which gives rise to decolonisation processes and the creation of a new humanity (1967:33). The *zero mode* as a conceptual tool illuminates the transformative subjectivation from dehumanisation into the reclaiming of humanity. Some hunger strikers reported viewed their condition as one of enslavement. Mohamad Alan:

I felt that the time of slavery has returned. We heard that slaves were bought and sold in Africa. I felt like a slave, as if I were restricted to be bought and sold. The decision from Israeli intelligence regarding our detention made us feel like slaves. Any human being rejects this sort of life of slavery. Why should they control our life? Why should they decide when to imprison and release us? Tell me what is the difference between me and those who are sold and bought in slavery time?

---

<sup>75</sup> In *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (2013), Howard Caygill's philosophical analysis of anti-colonial resistance, he argues that Fanon sees the resistant subject as driven by necessity to counter oppression by actualising the agency to resist: 'Violence draws the militant into a new necessity, subjects them to a new implacable law which is (paradoxically) experienced as a liberation from the old necessity of colonial oppression. Such violence is cathartic but perhaps not strategically effective; it risks leaving severe consequences for the liberated, who may be liberated from the colonial past, but not for a post-colonial future' (Caygill, 2013: 103)

Political hunger strikers experience an awareness of their dispossessed humanity and alienation. This elicits the urge to make a decision either to surrender to dispossession of humanity or oppose it. The zero mode can be understood as an existential crisis which requires transformation to protect the self from the risk of dehumanisation. In the process of subjectivation, Palestinian hunger strikers transform themselves into 'active victims'. Abd-Razek Faraj illuminates this process as follows:

The victim is transformed from an object into a subject, an actor, even if it is through our bodies. The complexity in our experience is that our human suffering and hurts are composite and very complicated.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the way in which the Palestinian prisoners experienced the violence of administrative detention as a specific form of dispossession and elucidated the processes of mortification of Palestinian prisoners into a 'zero-mode of being'. The chapter explains the participants' conceptualisation of dispossession and how the decision to engage in the hunger strike was made in relation to it as a way of reclaiming humanity and dignity. Employing a Fanonian framework on subjectivation, I showed that the hunger strike is a transformative leap from the zero mode in the effort to redeem humanity. The chapter discusses the meaning the hunger strikers give to their struggle interims of humanity and the way in which they understand dispossession.

## **Chapter 6: Reclaiming Dispossessed Humanity: The Decision to Hunger Strike**

My hunger strike decision was a protection of my humanity (Bilal Kayed, interview 2017).

In the previous chapter, I recorded the reported lived experience of the research participants in the pre-hunger stage, which they regarded as dispossessing them of their humanity. I discussed administrative detention as a specific form of dispossession and illustrated its three targets: hope (future), love (social bonds) and dignity. In this chapter, I shall use the interviews with hunger strikers to illuminate and expand on the process by which their interaction with severe forms of dispossession forms a catalytic element of resistance and gives rise to a resistant subjectivity which they regard as the embodiment of the idea of humanity.

The hunger strike manifests the agency of the dispossessed can reclaim over and against their own dispossession. I explain how interactions between the Palestinian prisoners and the colonial power are vital sites for understanding the processes of subjectivity-formation through what I term 'turning points', the decisive moments of self-formation. I illustrate in detail the resistance praxis which results in becoming a resistant subject. I trace the way in which the hunger strikers experience their own process of subjectivation, and how they come to recognise change, discontinuity and transformation. The transformation that they narrate happened in certain critical moments that they retroactively realise as significant changes. All the participants experience themselves as radically transformed, but the nature of this radical transformation takes different guises. In their reflexivity about transformation, they report it as either a gradual accumulative process over time or a radical event.

I discuss the turning points during arrest and interrogation, as well as moments of resistance resulting from the violence of administrative detention. These shed lights on the motives and reasons for the hunger strike decisions as a 'transforming point' in prisoners' resistance journeys. It also examines the emancipatory process of becoming an 'active victim' that the participants went through when they made the decision to hunger strike. Despite the IPA's efforts at dispossession, the Palestinian political prisoners, in the formation of their resistant subjectivity, were able to partially transcend their psychological damage and transform their injured vulnerable self. I use the term 'active victim' to highlight that the detainees were able to decolonise victimhood and constitute themselves as resilient subjects through their act of resistance.

## 1.0 Turning-Points in the Constitution of Resistant Subjectivity

The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places.

(Ernest Hemingway)

The turning point is a notion that suggests a radical transformation taking place in a very brief span of time. In their interviews, all the prisoners reflected on critical moments and changes in their subjectivity. Some retroactively say they became somebody different. In other cases, the prisoners consciously experience turning points during the hunger strike, while for other prisoners the experience of radical subjectivation is something cumulative. So not every change in subjectivity can be described as a turning-point.

I trace the turning points shaping resistant subjectivity in the moment of arrest, the interrogation stage, administrative detention and the renewal of detention.

### 1.1 Turning points in the moment of arrest

Most of the former hunger strikers I interviewed were exposed to numerous forms of violence during arrest and interrogation, which can be understood as techniques for producing submissive subjects. In his first arrest, Ayman Hamdan had a great fear of physical violence when he witnessed Israeli brutality against his brother, but later he moved to 'another moment' and overcame his fear:

The first arrest was on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2002 during the Second Intifada when Israeli forces invaded our home to arrest me and my brother. I will not forget this moment when the Israelis beat up my brother severely and broke his nose ... I was afraid, it was the first time I have experienced the arrest, I was 18 years old and I had great fears ... However, with time, after many arrests, I overcame the fear and completely got used to that situation and I moved from the moment of fear to another moment.

In Hamdan's account, we can register the experience of a gradual cumulative process of change over many arrests, rather than radical transformation occurring in a very brief span of time. He says he is a different subject from what he was before and is highly conscious about the shift that reconstitutes his subjectivity. However, some transformations produced out of the experience of violent interaction with the Israeli authorities are less conscious and don't entail

a high level of reflexivity, and sometimes they are subtle, pervasive and complex in their occurrences.

Hamdan describes his arrest in 2008:

The military officer asked me to give him my ID. As soon as I did, he hit me severely and violently when he read my name. He caught my head with his hands and started beating my head against the wall forcefully. I fell down and felt dizzy, I was about to lose consciousness and they took me outside to my cousin's house for interrogation and to search my house. The Israeli military officer humiliated me and wouldn't stop cursing me during the field interrogation in my home in front of my wife and I cursed him back. My laugh drove him crazy; he asked me angrily, 'Why you are laughing?' I told him that I don't know. Really I don't know why I laughed, it was not intended, and it was not on purpose.

This verbal resistance to humiliation contrast with his first arrest in 2002, when he witnessed his brother's torture by Israeli soldiers. His fear had been negated by the time he himself was subjected to physical torture. Hamdan continued:

The Israeli military officer put my head on the floor under his shoes and directed his M16 gun toward my head in a position to shoot me. At this moment, I laughed. I didn't want to laugh, but I just did. Even now I do not understand the reason why I laughed. However, after these years, I feel the fear barrier is broken inside me. My laugh drove him crazy; he asked me angrily, 'Why you are laughing?'.

The transformation is effected when Hamdan negates the previous condition, 'fear', and produces a new condition, 'breaking the fear'. His laugh is an expression of change and fills the space once taken up by fear. The cracks in the fear barrier shatter and grow into the 'rupture' which embodies the creativity of resistance that destabilises the colonial power. Violence over the body as one of the techniques of power failed here to produce fear and subjugation. Instead it broke the fear, and resistance creatively destabilised power in an innovative and unexpected way. One of the Israeli tools to force confessions from Palestinians during arrest and interrogation is the threat of being killed. Many Palestinians are killed by Israelis during arrest.<sup>76</sup> Sometimes the objective of Israeli arrests is to assassinate Palestinian political activists but sometimes they end up dead unintentionally (Baker and Matar, 2011). Thus, colonial power manifests itself in the randomness of death. Turning points arising from this ritual of colonial power show how subjectivity can be constituted in relation to the moment of death.

Hamdan described his arrest:

---

<sup>76</sup> 217 killed during arrest since 1967. For Statistics see [http://www.palestinebehindbars.org/sh\\_d.htm](http://www.palestinebehindbars.org/sh_d.htm).

He pushed me violently on the floor pulling my hand up so my head was on the floor and he directed the gun towards my head indicating readiness for shooting saying 'Ayman you are dead now'. I replied to him saying 'God and age is one',<sup>77</sup> *Ashadu an la illaha illa allah*,<sup>78</sup>. I was not really afraid any more ... now when I describe and narrate this to you, I don't understand how I uttered this during the situation. I really felt that I was going to be a martyr soon in a moment. I remember 'I said God help you baby you will be born an orphan' ... Then he took me from the floor and caught me between his hands saying 'you Palestinian people are insane, I said you will die' and I replied 'Okay': I told him: 'I have no problem if I die as a martyr.'

Under the threat of death, Hamdan lived these moments as though they were his last. This experience of freedom in the moment of death can be linked to the aesthetics of the self<sup>79</sup> and is grounded in an acceptance of self-sacrifice, which is linked to the possibility of undermining colonial power. What irritates and frustrates the Israeli armed officer is that his failure to create a submissive subject. At that moment the figure of Hamdan is seen as representing all Palestinians. The interaction with colonial violence in such a conflict contributes to shaping Palestinians as resistant subjects. In Hamdan's case, Israeli violence exercised over his body created him as a resistant subject. Colonial power failed to break Hamdan; on the contrary, it broke Hamdan's fear.

The relationship with family members is also crucial in the formation of resistant subjectivity. Imprisonment intentionally punishes the entire family. During the arrest, the violence and abuse against prisoners' families terrifies and traumatises their children and has been known to cause miscarriages for pregnant women due to the brutality of the arrest. Nora Hashlamoun:

I was at home with my 6 children when they invaded the house. They broke the windows. I was holding my little daughter in my arms; she was 2 years old, crying and terrified. I was not planning to take her with me because I knew how difficult it is inside the prison. I handed my daughter to her grandma but she continued crying, she was stretching her little arms towards me as they were dragging me outside, I heard the soldier say to me 'If you are a sister of a real man, take her with you' 'I do not have a heart, I smashed it and put it under *Kundarti* (my shoes)' was my reply to him.

---

<sup>77</sup> 'God is one' is used to emphasize that we don't choose our destiny.

<sup>78</sup> 'I bear witness that there is no Allah but Allah'.

<sup>79</sup> According to Foucault we should look for limit experiences within experimental practices that tear the subject apart from itself in an attempt to reach the point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living (1991).

The phrase 'I do not have a heart, I smashed it and put it under my shoes' suggests that the turning point is associated for Hashlamoun with transcending fear for children. She feels she was able to transcend her 'loving heart' and creates a 'resisting heart' which is full of anger and defiance towards the Israeli soldiers. Confrontation and challenge are key factors driving resistant subjects to create a new facet of their subjectivity and cultivate transformation.

Most of the prisoners had to endure the suffering of their families and loved ones. However, they concealed these feelings from their enemy, knowing that the Israelis would exploit their greatest vulnerability. As Hashlamoun put it: 'They want to focus on my weak points – my kids – they want to manipulate me'. She doesn't show the Israeli officer that she has been destabilised or affected by their manipulation of her role as a mother. Mahmoud Shalatwa gives a similar account:

When I was arrested, I had been married for only a few months; my wife was pregnant but the aggressive and violent nature of my arrest led to her miscarrying our child. She suffered extreme fear and was traumatised when Israeli forces attacked our home so aggressively, and within three days she had miscarried ... In front of the enemy we should not give any reaction, we show that nothing affects us.

This discussion of the concealment of suffering enriches our conception of resistance in relation to the process of dispossession. Concealing suffering and vulnerability is part of the prisoners' repertoire of resistance. They view the aim of project of colonisation as that of creating submissive broken subjects and in their resistance challenge this colonial construction. Despite failed Israeli efforts to exploit the weak points in the moments of confrontation, this tragedy of family suffering has a very deep impact on Palestinian militants. Hamdan recalls the moment of arrest when he was re-arrested for the fourth time:

They knocked on the door and my wife was breast feeding our second baby. I was surprised by this polite arrest, the lack of violence and brutality in this arrest compared with the first one. However, I was shocked by this arrest because I expected more tragic years of administrative detention. My son looked at the masked soldiers deeply for long time and I was afraid when I saw my baby silent, he only moved his hands toward me as if he wanted to take me back from them. It took my child a long time to speak after this incident. At this moment, I was really heartbroken when I saw my father crying, especially because of my two brothers are in prison.

In front of the enemy, prisoners conceal their fear for family. However, the impact of colonial violence on family deeply affects them and makes them feel great fear and sadness for their family. In Hamdan's case, this spans two generations of sons and fathers suffering from

colonial violence. Although Hamdan thinks that he broke the fear of death and of the enemy, nevertheless he felt fear in this moment when he witnessed his child's reaction as a result of this traumatic experience of arrest. What is at stake here is not a total liberation of fear but a different way of experiencing it. Here we see the impact of administrative detention and its consequences for prisoners' families. This 'polite' arrest conceals a high level of violence that not only upset the child but also shocked Hamdan, who did not expect a fourth experience of administrative detention. The violence here is unlike that directed towards Hashlamoun and her children. It is not immediately provocative, but rather manifests itself in the form of the horror of the administrative detention that has unexpectedly abducted Hamdan from his children.

Love of family was often the main driving force pushing many prisoners to go on hunger strike. For both Hamdan and Hashlamoun the motive for hunger strike is that they want to go back to their children. Hamdan recalled how Israeli forces manipulated him by using the love of his wife during the field interrogation at his home:

he interrogated my wife and told her 'your husband will die or he will be imprisoned for long years', she told him: 'nothing will happen except what God wants'. He took us to the bathroom... Inside the bathroom, there were two military officers and 6 soldiers. As soon as I entered the bathroom they put my head in the toilet and flushed it on my head. The beating was so harsh, they cursed with very bad words. Then they put my hand inside the bathtub and beat my hand with their shoes and guns, and then they put my head and did the same thing. I was bleeding. They let my wife see this on purpose while her hands were cuffed ... They were interrogating her while they were torturing me.

Hamdan knows that his wife is aware that the Israelis are manipulating her and make her witness his torture on purpose. The technique of exploiting the love of Hamdan's wife failed and galvanised his wife's resistance. As she recalls:

I don't know how it happened but while they were torturing Ayman Hamdan, I told myself 'okay let them do whatever they want since I don't have any information to confess about the things they are looking for at our home'. When they realised that I didn't care about their threat of bringing a female soldier to strip my clothes from me they stopped and left me alone. Then they took me to the bathroom and made me stand at the door to see how they were torturing Ayman, they put his head inside the toilet bowl and beat him violently on his head, then they flushed the water over his head. When Ayman tried to fight them, they threw him on the floor, beat him with their guns and stamped all over his body. I did not react and although I don't know why I was so calm regarding with all these events going on around me, it may have been because I saw Ayman being so strong and this gave me a strong boost.

Hamdan's resistance informs his wife's resistance, despite the fact that this challenge resulted in intensifying violence against both of them. So, we see that while the prisoners' families are affected by such violence, at the same time it can enable them to build their resistant subjectivity and enhance the love between them. Violence against family members and colonial techniques of manipulating the militants' love was a decisive factor contributing to their will to engage in hunger strike.

## 1.2 The interrogation stage

After his arrest, Hamdan was subject to interrogation and imprisoned for three years under administrative detention without charge or trial. He described the IPA attempts to get him to collaborate:

After a week of this brutal arrest and torture, the Israeli officer.....(said) no problem we will release you if you agree to collaborate with us and tell us about resistance people in your area. I told him that will never happen even in his dreams, it is impossible ... I cursed the state of Israel in front of him for what they did to me and my wife in this brutal arrest. I was afraid that my wife would abort or my baby won't be healthy after what my wife experienced. When I refused to collaborate with them, they kept me in prison for three years under administrative detention. During this arrest from 2008 until 2011 they also arrested my father and all my brothers.

Having refused collaboration with Israeli forces, Hamdan endured prison to protect his fellow comrades, political organisations and the Palestinian resistance. This decisive moment not only broke his fear of spending his life in prison but also contributed to reinforcing his national spirit and building his steadfastness and resistance. By embarking on a hunger strike rather than collaborating with the enemy against the resistance, and becoming a 'spy' for the Occupation, Hamdan chose another path to end his administrative detention.

Israeli forces also employ techniques informed by knowledge of Palestinian culture, including cultural sensibilities regarding sexuality in general and women's sexuality in particular.<sup>80</sup> During interrogation, Israeli forces often manipulate militants by using their female relatives (wife, sister and mother) to put them under pressure to sacrifice the national cause for their cultural values. Khader Adnan's wife Randa, speaking about his interrogation during his second hunger strike, makes this observation:

---

<sup>80</sup> See Mayer, Tamar (ed.). 1994. *Heightened Palestinian nationalism: military occupation, repression, difference and gender. Women and the Israeli Occupation*. London: Routledge.

The interrogation with Khader revolved around insulting me, his mother and also his sister, who lives in Canada. They were insulting me by telling Khader ‘your wife is a bad woman who is unfaithful to you and has children *min al haram* (by other men)’ to provoke and break him. He told me ‘I felt great rage and got very angry about them insulting you in this way’. Therefore, from that moment he announced his hunger strike and ceased talking.

This turning point shows the deep impact of cultural and gendered humiliation on Khader; it greatly contributed to his hunger strike which started directly after the interrogation. When the Israelis touched on the sensitive point of his identity as a man in an ‘eastern Muslim’ society and attacked his cultural values, especially his wife’s *Sharaf* (female honour), it provoked strong resistance and anger.

By using prisoners’ family members, especially their wives, in interrogation, prison authorities were driven by an Orientalist and anthropological prejudice, according to which the eastern conservative culture would lead militants to break and lead them to sacrifice the national cause for cultural values, especially *Sharaf* (Said et al., 2015) . Adel Hiribat:

I was interrogated for 151 days which put enormous psychological pressure on me. They also imprisoned my wife and my father... they tried to confuse me with some significant signs/objects displayed – I was shown a ring and then questioned if that was my wife’s ring? I also notice that there was a kufiyah hanging up, so for a week I was wondering whether it belonged to my father. They want to put us under pressure by using family members and those we love as no one can bear the thought of his wife or father being interrogated. They do this to obtain a forced confession quickly because they think we won’t accept the suffering of our loved ones and the possibility that they might be tortured during interrogation. I felt that there was a battle of wills between me and them and I felt there is a wish for revenge between me and them. They put me in isolation for nearly two years.

Hiribat sees himself as making a conscious decision – a ‘turning point’ in my terminology – that changed the course of the entire relationship with the coloniser by becoming a resistant subject.

Itaf Ilyan was exposed to physical violence and the threat of rape during her interrogation, and her first hunger strike was a response to this:<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Itaf was isolated in solitary confinement during the 40 days spent in interrogation; she went on hunger strike for 12 days. Itaf embarked on a second hunger strike (of 40 days) to protest against administrative detention. She went on a third hunger strike to protest against the denial of her baby’s visitation in prison and to demand to have her baby stay with her in prison.

In the beginning they just told me you ‘look good and kind and it seems that you will cooperate with us easily, so just tell us the story’. When I refused to cooperate with the interrogators, they started to insult me, using abusive language and cursing my mother and father with dirty abusive words. The interrogator was threatening to rape me. He ripped off *jilbabi* (my dress); at this moment I stared at him and did not utter a word. When I gave him the look he stopped interrogating me and another person came. This one was old. He told me that he would protect me but wanted me to tell the story of the operation I was accused of. I kept silent, he kept trying with me until the morning but I was on ‘speaking strike’. When he gave up, he insulted my mother using abusive words, and then he brutally hit my face with a cup of tea he was holding, which caused serious injuries to my teeth and nose. Throughout the pain of this injury I stayed silent, even though in a normal situation I would have cried or shouted. This is the challenge. I was in front of my enemy, that’s why I did not trust his kindness from the beginning ... The barrier always stays between us and the enemy and therefore I never succumbed to any kindness which might make me go along with my enemy<sup>82</sup>.

In Itaf’s view, her experience exposes the failure of interrogators in their attempt to construct a positive relationship and to generate a form of co-existence and alliance with the colonised. When the interrogators were faced by such a challenge, they subjected Itaf to violence. She says that ‘in a normal situation I would have cried or shouted’ but tolerated the pain and kept silent as she was on speaking and hunger strike and her silence in this crucial moment helped her transcend the pain.

Nora Hashlamoun also reported Israeli physical, verbal and sexual harassment:

They handcuffed me, blindfolded me, and dragged me into their army pick-up. Once the vehicle started moving, the soldiers started assaulting me verbally, physically and sexually. They spat on my face and squeezed their bodies too close to my body. They did everything possible to humiliate me; a woman. I was patient, I resisted. I kept my head held high.

This moment of arrest brought a shift that contributed to the making of Hashlamoun’s resistant subjectivity as a result of interaction with colonial sexual violence. After her arrest and subjection to verbal and physical humiliation, she persisted in resisting and challenging them. She concluded that the reason for her detention lay in her being the sister of a resistance fighter – one of the Israeli techniques of punishing male Palestinian resistance fighters is to threaten them with the torture of their female relatives and expose them to the threat of physical and sexual violence.

---

<sup>82</sup> See Alian, Itaf, 2011. ‘Female Prisoners and the struggle: A personal Testimony’. In *Threat: Palestinian political prisoners in Israel*, ed. by Abeer Baker and Anat Matar. London: Pluto Press.

Although social and cultural values are highly important to Palestinian militants, they manage to overcome their fear of violating such values. They seek to break the fear of damaging their image as a 'man' or a 'woman' in an 'oriental' Palestinian society, knowing that one of the Israeli practices is to confine and constrain them within their gender roles which submit them to certain protocols of domination and regulation. Israeli forces meant to humiliate Hamdan as a 'man' when they asked him and his brother to take off their trousers in front of his wife.

At this moment, they asked my wife to raise her hands and asked me and my brother to take off our trousers. I told them 'let my wife go outside and I will do anything you want'; they said sarcastically 'you are a man ... right!'

Hamdan's wife had also been subjected to violence, including the threat of sexual violence.

I was three months' pregnant and I was thinking during this difficult experience that my son Isa would be born with grey hair or that his legs would be trembling. The Israeli officer hit me against the wall and caught my head between his hands, putting his face right into mine, trying to force me to confess about any materials of Hamdan's connected with his resistance activities. But I told him there were no such things at our home. He said 'your husband will die and this house will be demolished', I told him that nothing will happen except what God wants, the age is one and the god is one. When I told him this, he spat in my face and uttered very dirty insulting words. Then he threatened that they would bring a female soldier to take off my clothes in front of male soldiers. I told him that was no problem for me. I don't know how I become so strong, but I felt very strong at that point.

Violence in this case enabled resistance rather than undermining it. This incident once again exposes the failure of Israeli techniques based on the presumption that Hamdan's wife would protect her 'honour'. It entails a transformation in how morality and honour is perceived.

The sexuality of Palestinian men and women is exploited by Israeli forces,<sup>83</sup> and racist orientalist knowledge about Palestinian culture, along with a racist construct of Palestinian women, are employed in developing oppressive techniques (Abdo, 2014). Mohamad Tbaish, who commenced his hunger strike in solidarity with his brother, narrates his experience of sexual harassment by Israeli interrogators:

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

I was under pressure in interrogation and they practice several means against me: they tortured me, then beat me and subjected me to long hours of *Shabah* (tied to a chair with hands behind back), I had four interrogators at the same time and they practiced several forms of torture: one of them yelled in my face furiously while another one harassed me sexually. I was 16 and a half years old and their objective was to scare me because I am still young and they reminded me that nobody would know what was happening to me in prison. I remember the interrogator put his chair opposite mine and puts his leg in the area between my legs to provoke and excite me sexually. But thank god I was familiar before my arrest about these stories from my brother and from other people who had experienced imprisonment. We knew the Israeli techniques to put us under pressure in order to force us to confess. They thought that Palestinian young people would be easier to put under pressure. However, I was able to transcend this experience.

Tbaish was familiar with Israeli techniques and this knowledge contributed to undermining the effectiveness of the colonial power. The turning point is that he was able to transcend the experience and overcome his fear of the Israelis since he had the capacity to anticipate their techniques of repression.

### 1.3 Administrative detention and renewal of detention

The violence of administrative detention touches the detainee's human identity as 'father' and 'mother'. The consequences of detention on their relationship with their children is a crucial moment that constituted a motive for their hunger strike and led to the militants being able to temporarily suspend their love of their family. I call this temporary suspension of love 'transcending love for love'. This seemingly paradoxical process is extremely complex. Hunger strikers see themselves transcending this love temporarily in order to achieve their freedom and live freely with their beloved ones, despite the fact that they are risking their life. Such love accompanied them during their hunger-strike journey and was the engine of their resistance. They learned that family is the price prisoners pay for an Occupation that confiscates their lives and deprives them of the opportunity to spend their life with their beloved ones. This deprivation of their social bonds was one of the strongest motives which led them to resistance. Hamdan explains and the way the consecutive detentions damage his relation with his children and how he came to his decision:

What drives my decision is my wife's situation, and because I don't want to live the tragedy with my second baby like my older son who did not say the word 'baba'. I expected that they might renew my detention for another 3 years. I calculated my children's ages and I thought of my relationship with my wife and the existing gap between me and them. I wanted to establish something in my life for my children and I didn't want to spend my life in prison. In addition, what drove me is the harsh living situation in

prison. The conditions were suitable for my strike but what delayed me a bit and made me suspend my strike was my father's sickness from leukemia. I did not want to hurt him. So, I stayed six months without striking but when they renewed my administrative detention for another 6 months my father died while I was in prison. I made the decision before my father passed away but when I was informed about my father's death, it was so hard. I started my strike on April 28, 2013.

Similarly, Hashlamoun commented that 'After the court decision to be exiled to Jordan, I told them I am on a hunger strike. My children were the reason behind my hunger strike, I wanted to get out and be with them. I always dreamed of them'. The vulnerability of the research participants, based on their relationships with their beloved ones, provided them with great potential for resistance.

## **2.0 The emancipatory process: From dispossession to 'active victimhood'**

Former hunger strikers reveal the effect of dispossession and the violence of prison conditions, including the policy of administrative detention, on their subjectivity.

Younis Hroub reflects that prison affects the human psyche in general even if the prisoner has a 'culture of resistance.'

Prison is difficult, even if the prisoner has a culture of resistance. The experience of prison touches the human psyche. To hear about prison is different from living in the prison. Prison is a continuous suffering. Outside the prison in Palestine there is suffering from the occupation but suffering in prison is constant. For example, when I was informed that you will make the interview with me I was a bit hesitant.

Adel Hiribat also reveals the damage and after-effect of prison and solitary confinement on him:

There is nothing more difficult than the prison in life. Now I am sitting in the interview and you see me in a normal situation but it is possible in 5 minutes to tell you I will not be able to complete the interview. I might feel throttled. Sometimes I leave my family and my children to walk to the balcony alone. People who were subjected to isolation usually like solitude and loneliness.

Hamdan talked about the traumatic effect of prison on some prisoners:

We don't want to lie to ourselves. Sometimes some of the prisoners develop psychological illnesses due to prison. The solitary confinement means that the humans live in a small cell and even when they go to *fourah* (break), their hands and legs are tied. Prisoners talk with themselves and with walls.

His words resonate with Bilal Kayed's account who reflects that the reason for placing him in solidarity confinement was to destroy his spirit of resistance.

Solitary confinement is one of the most brutal way to destroy the human being. A person in a room (2 meters x one meter), everything is closed and I leave the cell only at most for one hour while my hands and legs are shackled. It is forbidden to speak with anybody. The aim is to destroy the person psychologically and internally, to break and crush us. with the aim to reproduce our consciousness at the intellectual level so that we approach Zionism and reject our people and our country (Zionisation of consciousness). There, I felt that there is a decision by the occupation beyond isolation - to destroy me...

Isolation is seen by them as a brutal means to destroy the prisoners' psyche and the hunger strike is a necessity to protest against the human destruction and victimisation by the prison authorities. Kayed's account shows that he is aware of the Prison Authorities techniques and accordingly he decided to take action by embarking on a hunger strike to destabilise their technologies of power. For him, the aim of the tools used by the colonial power is the 'Zionisation of consciousness'<sup>84</sup> in order to make them give up the idea of resistance and internalise surrender to the occupation. Thus, he believes that maintaining the idea of resistance and ongoing confrontation would resolve the internal psychological problems that are caused by the technologies of the power.

I always maintain the idea that the true education of the revolutionary person is by sustaining the ongoing confrontation alive in the prison. So I used anything to launch a struggle against prison authorities. This gives us a spirit of challenge and a sort of rival. Moreover, the comrades reached a state of readiness and enthusiasm to apply their thoughts and put it in practice. In the education sessions in prison they learn the necessity of confrontation but they activate these theoretical things through the interaction with the occupation, and this is manifested through praxis. In this way, we have inside a harmony between thought and practice because all the concepts we belong to are identical with our practice and this will remove all the internal (psychological) problems.

Kayed explains how the tactics of the resilient self to decolonise victimisation and transform the self into an engaged resistance subject. We can see that, in his view, as long as the political prisoners maintain resistance they won't be broken or defeated. As long as one resists one is not broken:

---

<sup>84</sup> This is not his own concept but circulates in Palestinian political discourse of resistance.

My hunger strike to protest isolation lasted for one week until I communicated with PFLP's comrades who made a deal with prison authority to stop my isolation. When I was taken to the court, they promised to release me after 6 months but I was surprised that after this 6 months of isolation the court said I should remain in prison because I have a security file and I'm a danger to Israel. Then I went on hunger strike again. I discussed the issue with my comrades who persuaded me to break my hunger strike on the basis that they expected that the prison authorities will release me after the end of my sentence in few months. I stopped my hunger strike under 2 conditions; first to be released after a few months, the remaining period of my 14 years' sentence, and second to stop the solitary confinement of a prisoner who was in prison for 16 years and sentenced to 6 life sentences. When I was talking with him through the toilet cabinet while I was in my cell in isolation, I realised that his situation is hard, the solitary confinement caused him some psychological problems. He was talking to himself and he was saying I saw *jinn* (goblin) in the cell.

He thinks the Israeli prison authority wanted to destroy him through his isolation which was one of the strongest forms of dispossession, almost like a dispossession of the mind. Despite this his condition to stop his hunger strike is the release his comrade from isolation. In his small space of an isolated cell, he invents his way of practicing sacrifice and resistance and the tools that the colonial power created were transformed by the prisoners into a site of resistance.

Kayed described the moment of renewing his detention which forced him to make the decision of hunger strike in protest.

In my isolation, I was waiting this day of release after 14 years especially because I spent the last year in solitary confinement and I did not see human beings except the jailors. I did not speak one word in Arabic. I was longing to speak Arabic. On the day of my release, they took me by *Bosta* (military car) to Ofer prison. I was told 'you are released but we need to finish the release procedures'. I was waiting from 8am to 4pm and instead of taking me to the intelligence office the officer told me he will see me before my release day and he had a surprise for me. I assumed the surprise is the usual threat for any freed prisoner as they usually threaten us to bring us back to prison. But I found myself in the military court in Ofer and my lawyer was there. She told me: 'I really don't know what to tell you, but you are sentenced 6-months administrative detention'.

The difference between the first and second strike is that the second one affected his beloved ones.

My mother was waiting for me at the checkpoint with my family and my people from my village. My daughter came especially from Germany and my brother came from Saudi Arabia to see me. My mother had just come out of the suffering of my father's death and was very sick. My basic concern was that my

mother would be shocked with the news and she would be unable to bear that shock...although she raised us to be stubborn.

There was the intention of the prison authority to break him and take revenge. However, the different forms of dispossession that were used to break him (isolation and administrative detention) produced the opposite of what they intended because he was ready for confrontation. He describes the techniques to strengthen himself:

To organise and strengthen myself, I was always encouraging myself by talking to myself: 'Bilal you are almost there and about to finish'. I needed to hear these things from myself. I felt there was a schism/division between 'I' and 'Bilal'. Bilal the symbol that the Israelis wants to break and I am the one who come to help him.

There are two elements informing his decision that the hunger strike is a necessity: the thought of his sick mother and his family who were waiting him in the checkpoint, and his belief in the necessity of ongoing confrontation especially because he is aware that the prion authority aimed to hurt and break him. With regard to the latter he said:

I can't experience or witness injustice and surrender. As long as I have the capacity of confrontation I should resist and this is my nature. I mean I participated with all the hunger strikes whether individual and collective. Despite the fact that I am in a leadership position in the PFLP I left the position to take part with any resistance step. This practice is a translation of an idea which I believe in. This idea is related to the occupation and to my identity and the way in which I want my identity to be. Therefore, as soon as I received the renewal of detention I decided to go on hunger strike.

He regards his resistance as a translation of the idea of resistance he believes in. This idea is related to his understanding of the occupation and dispossession, on the one hand, and his understanding of his political identity that shaped by act of resistance to the occupation, on the other. Conceiving the hunger strike as a 'necessity' when the Israeli forces renewed his detention shows that there are some factors in his consciousness which gives him the strength to engage in this resistance. On his motive to go on hunger strike he said:

The PFLP taught us that the resistance identity always needed to be proven and we can test our resistance identity only in practice ... As Ghassan Kanfani taught us "don't die but only under the rain of bullets" and "don't die before being a concurrent/antagonist". My primary motive was not only the hunger strike but rather my ongoing struggle with the occupation which confirms that my commitment always exists and

I should prove my commitment. ... Changing the reality at a minimal level will be manifested by constant confrontation and antagonism with the occupation. I know returning a meal to protest in a prison would not achieve my freedom in prison but it achieves my moral freedom. It means I am not a submissive and I don't surrender to the occupation and I am still free and say 'No'. Outside the prison, I translated the word 'No' by raising the gun and I translated the 'No' inside the prison by using the prison tools such as hunger and returning meals. The hunger strike was a 'necessity'.

Kayed believes that what helped him to protest dispossession is the PFLP's leftist revolutionary worldview that he was raised on. Outside the prison, he resists the occupation as a resistance fighter and inside the prison he developed his weapons of resistance and sacrifice. The prison as a site of punishment and discipline is turned into a site of confrontation. This willingness to engage in constant confrontation constituted his strength where he was able to exercise and prove his resistance identity through practice, or as he also put it, so that 'my resistance identity did not die inside me'.

The moment of the renewal of the detention affected other research participants in different ways. For example, one of the participants reported that when he received the letter of detention order he could not read it as a result of shock and astonishment. Other detainees had a complete breakdown at this moment.<sup>85</sup> The way in which the Israeli authorities renew their detention is designed to break them psychologically. The former administrative detainees who I interviewed decided to go on hunger strike after they were traumatised as a result of the renewal of their detention. By their decision to hunger strike they transformed their trauma into protest and resilience. In the case of Kayed, he experienced his rooted revolutionary consciousness as protecting him from a nervous breakdown. The source of his strength lies in the depth of his understanding of the idea of resistance, his belief that he should keep resisting in all spaces whether outside or inside the prison. The hunger strike was one form of practicing the idea of resistance and a manifestation of fidelity to resistance. As we saw in Kayed's case, despite the dispossession practiced by colonial authorities using different methods including isolation and administrative detention, he developed ways of resistance to decolonise dispossession. The emancipation aspect lies in the process of subjectivation in which he constituted himself as a resistance subject. As he said in his account, while he can't change the reality of oppression completely, he could achieve his 'moral freedom'. The meaning of moral freedom is not to be broken or dehumanised.

---

<sup>85</sup> In my interview with a representative of the prisoners' rights organisations, they reported that some detainees lost consciousness when they received the renewal of detention order.

The participants do not deny that it damages the psyche but they also recount the technologies of the self they appropriated and developed in order to defend their humanity. They present themselves as neither ‘heroic militants’ nor ‘passive victims’ but rather as a combination of the two, in that in their resistance to dispossession they transform themselves from passive victim into an engaged ‘active victim’. They view themselves as exhibiting resilience and steadfastness in spite of the damage and hurt inflicted on them. The vulnerability of their bodies and psyches is turned into a powerful tool in the face of dispossession for transformation, demonstrating how vulnerability is itself a potential tool for resistance (Butler et al., 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The chapter focused on the resistance of hunger strikers to their dispossession and showed how the interaction of Palestinian prisoners with colonial violence gave rise to turning points that produced shifts in the prisoners’ subjectivity. These turning points give us a grounded understanding of encounters between political prisoners and Israeli forces at particular moments and demonstrate how power and resistance operate to constitute resistant subjectivity. It also sheds light on the motives of the decision to hunger strike as a main ‘transformational point’ in their resistance journey. In the formation of their resistant subjectivity, I traced out the emancipatory process that entails the transformation from dispossessed vulnerable subject into ‘active victim’ where the political prisoners transcend psychological damage and transform their vulnerable injuries into resources of resistance. The practice of hunger is experienced and understood as an embodiment of the prisoners’ humanity, and a continued resistance to dispossession.

## **Chapter 7: The Embodiment of Humanity: Technologies of Self and Resistance in the Stages of the Hunger Strike**

Our struggle at the heart is human, it a clear expression of humanity (Abu-Sharar 2016)

In the previous two chapters, I detailed how the decision to embark on hunger strike was made by prisoners in order to reclaim their dispossessed humanity. In their view, the hunger strike materially embodies their humanity and they regard it as a form of resistance capable of regaining agency over the captive body. In this chapter, I show that the dispossession was not halted by the advent of the hunger strike but continued to be exercised over their starving bodies in order to break their resistance. But, in their view, as long as they struggle with the prison authorities, they will continue to safeguard their humanity. As Bilal Kayed expressed it “the more we raise the intensity of confrontation with occupation, the more we sense our humanity”. In this process the striking prisoners encountered both external and internal conflicts. The main external conflict was with the coloniser as represented by the Israeli Prison Authorities (IPA) as well as the Israeli intelligence services responsible for administrative detention. The internal conflict within their self/body and in their relations with their family and loved ones is of a different quality, and I will address it in the next chapter, which will also consider the interconnectedness between internal and external conflicts during the hunger strike.

Here, I trace the techniques of power the IPA exercised over the striking prisoners and delineate the techniques of resistance employed by the hunger strikers. These are developed through a series of conflicts with the IPA which I will approach chronologically from the initial phase of the hunger strike until its completion. The hunger strike trajectory varies according to the deterioration and decomposition of the starving body, and at each stage the prison authorities change the emphasis of their techniques in order to break the hunger strike.<sup>86</sup> In the first stage, the critical question is whether the prisoners can sustain the hunger strike despite the punitive measures and the strategy of neglect and indifference imposed by the IPA. The latter is aimed at assessing the mental state of each prisoner and the extent to which they are seriously willing to die. The peak of the struggle revolves mainly around the issue of manipulating supplements. The hunger strikers resort to these in order to shorten their

---

<sup>86</sup> For sources on the IPA’s strategy see (Langer, 1975, 1979).

suffering, and the shared orientation towards the avoidance of death leads both sides to negotiate. This is the final stage of the conflict and the techniques used by both IPA and hunger strikers determine the dynamics of the negotiations.

The chapter draws on Foucault's conceptualisation of technologies of the self, which are explored as they emerge during the practice of the hunger strike. These mainly include ways of instrumentalising the body and techniques of resistance such as refusal of medical examinations, refusal of vitamins and supplements, water strikes, etc. The instrumentalisation of the body is key in the hunger strikers' technologies of the self. The starving rebellious body becomes the infrastructure and battleground for the practice of power subjection and resistant subjectivation. I analyse how the hunger strikers interact and respond to the technologies of power, and how this leads them to invent their techniques of resistance. The hunger strikers' technologies need to be understood in terms of the overall process of weaponisation the body, understood as a means of reclaiming dignity and humanity by risking death, whilst the techniques of resistance are the way in which they innovate specific practices in their hunger strike. The techniques are the particular individual practices that are communicated, learned, and taught and the technologies are the broader processes in which these techniques are assembled together and developed.

## **1.0 The external Conflict with the IPA: Techniques of power and resistance**

The techniques of resistance develop across three stages: the initial phase of the hunger strike, the peak of the struggle, and the advanced stage of negotiation and agreement. These include boycotting the Israelis courts, refusal of medical examinations, refusal of vitamins and intake of supplements, water striking and protesting against surveillance cameras. They vary from one hunger striker to another and shape individual trajectories of the struggle. Israeli hospitals are experienced by hunger strikers as spaces of violence and subjection. Amongst their strategies, some hunger strikers launched a speaking strike and refused to talk with Israeli negotiators, while others refused to meet Israeli intelligence officers whilst they were handcuffed or chained.

### 1.1 The initial phase of the hunger strike

In the first phase, usually between the 20<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> day of the strike, before the prisoners are transferred to hospital, they are subjected to punitive measures such as raids on prison cells,

transfers to isolation cells, threats of indefinite detention, bans on family visits, and reduction of money spent in the canteen.<sup>87</sup> Adel Hiribat:

From the beginning, one felt that the jailor wanted to break us. They made us feel that they would not do anything to respond to our demands and we were just tiring ourselves out, that everything we do will be in vain. The jailor ignores us completely and doesn't talk to us or ask why we are on hunger strike until we entered more than 20 to 30 days striking when they started taking information.

These measures were referred to by all the ex-hunger strikers, and included solitary confinement, humiliating strip searches, confiscation of all the prisoner's belongings, prevention of family visits, denial of visits, sleep deprivation, and physical and psychological violence. Moamar Banat:

The first day I announced my hunger strike I was isolated in a cell measuring 2.5m by 1.5m and was watched by two surveillance cameras. It was very cold and the bed was rough and made of stones and the mattress was wet. Although they confiscated everything, even my clothes they kept searching the cell every couple of hours even at midnight. They banned the family and lawyers' visits, made barbeques next to the cell, to put pressure on me thinking that I would break my strike.

Hashlamoun's account reveals some of the Israeli repression techniques applied against female prisoners, which rely on stereotypes about Palestinian culture:

solitary confinement is like the grave. There was no seat in the toilet, it was very dirty and the floor was covered in broken pieces of glass which stuck to my feet ... On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the strike they told me: 'we are going to take you to the hospital' ... the doctor asked me 'have you thought of committing suicide?' I told him 'now I understand the reason for the broken glass on the floor of my cell. You are trying to destroy my reputation ... He was a psychiatrist trying to draw information about my life, so he can write a report stating that I am insane or unstable. I told him 'you are not a doctor but "*Mukhabarat*" (intelligence) ... We Palestinians don't think about committing suicide at all'.

The IPA also used physical torture through beatings and the transfer of prisoners by '*Bosta*' – a military car called a torturer's car by the prisoners. The repeated transfer of hunger strikers is a means of adding pressure by completely ignoring the fatigue and the weak condition of the detainees. Ahmed Remawi:

---

<sup>87</sup> See *Starved of Justice: Palestinians detained without trial by Israel*, Amnesty International, report published on June 2012. See also *Palestinians Hunger Strikes: Get the Facts*, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Right Association, August 2016.

They keep transferring us from a prison to another. I was transferred to three prisons during my hunger strike. The *bosta* is extremely exhausting. Everything is tiring in this car, its sound, its shaking movement, its chair, the black glass windows hurt the eyes. They left us in the *bosta* long hours. The body's position is unbearable, our hands and legs are shackled sometimes for more than 7 hours, without toilet or water. The guards were not able to take me out of the car because I could not stand up as I was dizzy. I fell down after 9 hours without water.<sup>88</sup>

Throughout the transfer, the hunger strikers were subjected to violent beatings and verbal humiliation which resulted in clashes and confrontations with the guards. Hasan Safadi reported that 'during my transfer the guard ... hit and pushed me violently and I fell to the ground ... I was exposed to all kinds of psychological and physical assault and I struggled with the pain of hunger and starvation, and on top of that their abusive insults did not stop'.<sup>89</sup> Raed Abu-Hanoud described Israeli repression as 'dirty' practices.

I was on hunger strike in solitary confinement and then they took off all my clothes, even my underwear and brought their Israeli females from the prison service to watch me while I was completely naked ... Every ten minutes they entered and searched while I was naked.

Abd Al-Jaber Fuqaha:

They exercised over our bodies a set of barbaric methods ... The Naqab experience was different because it was a desert, and hunger strikers were placed 8 hours in the heat of the sun ... in Ofer we suffered severely from bugs ... after sunset, the bugs spread on the cells' walls and on our beds ... in addition to our suffering of starvation, the bugs sucked our blood and the bites caused allergies and swellings on our body.

Exposing striking prisoners to food was another technique used to break the prisoners. The affidavit of Fadi Ghanim affirms that 'the jailers threw food through the door slot and then announced via speakers that a certain prisoner from this room broke the strike'. Mohamad Alan reported 'once ... they brought to my cell *Makluba*<sup>90</sup> and it remained with me the whole night

---

<sup>88</sup> These points are also supported by the affidavits I consulted in the prisoners' club. I accessed some of the prisoners' sworn affidavits which I had collected during my ethnographic work in 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Addameer's report *Aggressions by Special Units of the Israeli Prison Service against Prisoners and Detainees during Transfers and Raids* documented the incessant abuse of Hasan Al-Safadi as punishment for his hunger strike.

<sup>90</sup> A traditional Palestinian dish.

... I realised that it was a psychological war and I had to stay resilient and steadfast. They made barbeque parties beside my cell's windows and the smell of the barbeque invaded my cell'.

Israeli punitive techniques led the hunger strikers to create their techniques of resistance. In the initial stage of the conflict this is more to do with the prisoners' own bodies than with the jailors' actions. Most of prisoners I interviewed emphasised that the beginning 20 to 30 days of hunger strike is the hardest in terms of struggling with starvation. During this conflict, they persist in and sustain their strike by strengthening their will. This is produced through the clash with the IPA. As Hiribat put it: 'They make you understand that the Israel State won't be broken by someone like you. However their behaviour and words give me the determination and pushed me to be more persistent in my resistance'.

The bodies of striking prisoners that were used to resist power were punished, which, as Khader Adnan's account indicates, entailed the irony of punishing a body that has already punished itself.

One of the Israeli military officers came and informed me that I was to be punished by depriving me from family visits. I told him: 'What a contradiction! How can you punish me while I am the one who is punishing myself. So you can't control me'.

In the initial phase then, before the hunger strikers were hospitalised, the punitive and degrading violent measures alongside a strategy of deliberate neglect – combining physical with psychological pressure – are the main tactics to make the prisoners understand that the Israeli state would not be defeated by hunger strikes.

### 1.2 The peak of the hunger strike

After 25 to 30 days the jailors see that the hunger strikers are serious about their decision to continue. Knowing that the prisoners have entered a critical stage of starvation, the prison authorities start to have concerns about the bodies of hunger strikers, and the prisoners are then transferred to hospital for medical examination and treatment. Bilal Diyab:

They are inhuman in their treatment. After 30 days of my strike I was taken by *Nahshoun* (those who are responsible for prisoners' transfer). I was sitting in the wheelchair entering the hospital and they just let my wheel chair roll down on purpose and I fell out. They didn't care about my health and fatigue from starvation.

Khadar Adnan describes their situation in the hospital:

The camera is watching me 24 hours a day; the hospital room is turned into a prison, I'm chained in what is called a 'civilian hospital', my right hand opposite my left leg. I even took my bath while chained. So why am I in a hospital? They should have taken me back to the prison. I told the hospital administration my room is an operational room not a medical room. It is full of jailors and Israeli officers.

In the hospital, the hunger strikers remained continuously shackled by their right hand and left foot to the bed . Even when they went to the bathroom, the prison guard refused to unshackle them. Sometimes they were denied all access to the bathroom, and they were watched by cameras and provoked by the jailors to put them under pressure. Salem Badi:

Once I had a clash with them when they refused to take me to the toilet. I stood up and said I will pee here. When the doctor heard me shouting he made a deal with the jailor that I go to toilet.

Some prisoners reported that the bathroom door remained open and they were denied any privacy.

Most of the sworn affidavits by the former hunger strikers I had consulted from the prisoners' club describe in detail the painful symptoms of the chained body in the hospital bed. Fadi Ghanim stated that from the beginning of the hunger strike they were not allowed to cut their nails or shave their hair and beards. Like in the prison, the Israeli authorities left food near the striking prisoners in the hospital, and deliberately ate in front of them. Irony and sarcasm were used by the striking prisoners to irritate the jailor. Yunis Hroub:

They left the food around me to break me, the guards ate in front of me. I remember an incident when the jailors expected to receive special dinner because they had a Jewish Holiday ... but they were surprised that the food was normal, therefore I was in my turn laughing and teasing them ... then the responsible officer called and I heard him saying 'What is this food you sent us, there is a striking prisoner who is sarcastic about us and is making fun of our food'.

The hunger strikers reported that the things that irritated the jailors most was their continuing high spirits and equanimity.

The techniques employed by the striking prisoners are decisive because they determine the nature of the negotiation process, the length of the strike, and the agreement reached at the end. Some achieved a good result but others could not reach satisfactory agreements in such a short time, due to the efficiency of the IPA's techniques. External factors such as the role of lawyers, solidarity activities and public opinion affected the dynamics of success. Moreover,

the role of the political party with which the strikers were affiliated also played a role in that some political parties didn't support their members and this was used by the IPA to break their resistance.<sup>91</sup>

New techniques of resistance are produced at the peak of the struggle when the prisoner's body gets habituated to starvation, in a sense accepts it. In response to this the prison authorities develop new techniques of oppression. One of these is to prolong the hunger strike through the use of forced feeding and in the process deter new hunger strikes. As Adel Hiribat commented: 'The Israelis allowed us to prolong our strike before they negotiated with us because they thought that the long period of the strike would terrify any prisoner who thinks of engaging in a hunger strike'. The hunger strike is prolonged further by using vitamins and supplements but the hunger strikers want to shorten it by refusing them and thus putting pressure on the IPA.

Momar Banat's account graphically describes how the techniques of resistance operate and how some striking prisoners persuaded the IPA of their willingness to die, leading the two parties to the negotiation point.

After forty days, I began to vomit blood, tough days. I was unable even to drink a little amount of water ... I did not take vitamins because they strengthen the body and prolong the period of the strike and I wanted to put them under pressure and shorten the duration. I wanted either to finish quickly and live or finish quickly and die. I have two options, I did not want to choose the middle solution and compromise because it would have prolonged my path, and this option is exhausting for me and for my family ... Therefore, I ended my hunger strike after only 70 days, and I got an excellent result. There are other hunger strikers who took the longest way and reached over 100 days and achieved less. Those who took the vitamins got weak deals with the Israelis at the end ... [Mine] was one of the best deals and the main reason was that the prison administration was convinced I was not afraid of death.

The hunger strikers invented these techniques linked to their starving body to continue and accelerate its deterioration and decomposition – as Ahmed Remawi put it “If we don't endanger our health and nothing happens to our bodies there would be no pressure on the Israeli side”.

The deliberate acceleration of their bodies' disintegration demonstrates the link between the political temporality of the conflict and negotiation on one hand and the temporality of the body and its decomposition on the other. The hunger strikers use the relation between these temporalities in the sense that the more the body collapses the more they put pressure on the state

---

<sup>91</sup> See my discussion later of the negotiation stage.

to negotiate. However, the IPA succeeded in constraining some of the hunger strikers' techniques of resistance by subjecting them to forced feeding (i.e. forcibly injecting fluids into their stomach). Despite this, a number of prisoners continued their strike which sometimes reached over 100 days. Others accepted supplements as they were sick and had chronic diseases, and therefore their bodies could not tolerate starvation without vitamins and supplements. A number took large amounts of supplements over a long period. For example, Samer Isawai survived a 266-day hunger strike, the longest hunger strike in Palestine during which time he received only liquids with vitamins. Some strikers accepted the supplements in exchange for meeting their demands. For example, Bilal Diyab asked to speak with his family on the phone in exchange for being injected with supplements, particularly because his family had not received any news after he had gone into a coma and suspected that he had died. Khadar Adnan in his first strike also agreed to use the supplements after an 'ethical committee'<sup>92</sup> was formed in exchange for conditions, one of which was to speak with his family.

In Khadar Adnan's first hunger strike he demanded either his freedom or a trial to put an end to his administrative detention. In his second hunger strike he developed new techniques of resistance and completely boycotted the military courts, refusing to recognise them.<sup>93</sup> He asked the lawyers not to defend him either in his absence or presence aiming to destabilise the logic of administrative detention. During the administrative detention the prisoner does not know what the accusation against him or her is. There is a 'secret file' but neither the prisoner nor his lawyer can see it. Therefore, appearing before a military court without knowing the accusation is, in Mohamad Alan's words, 'a piece of theatre'. Alan became experienced and knowledgeable in Israeli techniques of repression, and this knowledge, communicated and learned from one hunger strike to another, helped him to develop and advance his techniques.

'Treat me as a human being and then you can subject me to medical examination', declared Khadar Adnan when he refused to undergo medical examinations while confined in handcuffs. He was removed to the hospital after his health deteriorated and the hospital administration called on an ethical committee to force him to undergo a medical examination when his life became in real danger. Adnan did not permit his lawyer or doctors to visit him unless his chains were removed and after an intervention and communication with the prison authorities the handcuffs were removed. It was these 'tiny victories' that led in the end to their

---

<sup>92</sup> See below the discussion on the role of the "ethical committee" in forced treatment and feeding in Israeli hospitals

<sup>93</sup> Boycotting Israeli law has a very long history in Palestinian resistance. On boycotting Israeli courts see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/prisoners-held-charge-boycott-israeli-courts-180214160954608.html>

freedom. Another example was Yunis Hroub who refused to bathe whilst chained, saying ‘I told the jailors that I will not have my bath while I am chained and if I have diseases you are responsible for that. After four days I got approval to have a bath without chains.’ Since the body was their only weapon or instrument in resistance, the hunger strikers also refused to reveal what was going on in the starving body to the Israeli authorities. Moamar Banat:

I refused the medical check, so they would not know my heart rate during my hunger strike. I don’t want them to know because if they knew that everything was okay in my body they would relax. Since the beginning of my strike they examined me only once but in the advanced stages of the strike I refused. Once the doctor tried to catch my hand to check my pulses but I pulled my hand away ... I told him: ‘You should not force me to do anything’.

Some prisoners stop drinking water in protest against the harsh conditions and sometimes it is used to shorten the hunger strike by increasing the pressure on the IPA. Ahmed Remawi refused water in protest against the painful effects of the handcuffs:

I embarked on a water strike to protest against handcuffs as they hurt me very much ... When I stopped taking the water my health deteriorated seriously to the extent that when the doctors tried to take my blood there was no blood coming out in the needle. I had a severe infection in the kidneys after 40 days of striking and after 50 days I had a problem with my eyes and could not see further than one meter and a half.

Ahmed Remawi protested against the surveillance cameras by going on water strike:

If I moved anywhere the camera was watching me even if I go to the bathroom. We could not sleep or sit or do anything. Once the lawyers came to see us and we requested that they take the camera away because we were not in the prison but rather in the hospital and it should not be allowed in the hospital. They told me ‘We have got the hospital’s agreement’ ... then I used the bottle I used for drinking water and hit the camera. It was broken and fell to pieces ... then they came back and shackled my two hands (before it was one hand). I had embarked on the first water strike because one hand was shackled and now they punished me and shackled two hands because I broke the camera. I told them this time I will die if you don’t free me from the chains. The situation ended when the doctor came to take blood when I was on the water strike and it did not come out and couldn’t take any blood. They removed the chains after 2 days of water striking. After my hunger strike they punished me with solitary confinement for 6 days.

The water strike and refusal of supplements caused critical health problems. In the midst of the battle and confrontation the hunger strikers sometimes were not aware of the side effects of the water strike and refusal of the supplements but after the hunger strike they suffered badly.

A number of hunger strikers reported that some doctors clashed with the Israeli authorities, refusing to implement the inhuman treatment directed at the hunger strikers and working in an ethical way. But in most cases, they acted as tools of Israeli power, failing to manage the hunger strike according to ethical health standards which endangered the life of the hunger strikers and violated their bodily and mental condition. Moamar Banat:

The doctors threatened that if I didn't take the vitamins and supplements they would not give me salt and water. Doctors in the hospital did not treat us as doctors, abiding by medical ethics. They are not doctors but rather *Mukhabarat* (intelligence agents). The responsible doctor in the hospital came and told me 'You must take vitamins otherwise I will not give you water' ... It caused bleeding in my stomach and later I could not even drink the water.

When the health conditions of hunger strikers worsened, the doctors forcibly inserted a tube into their stomachs. In these cases, resistance could not work, especially when the hunger strikers had lost consciousness. Bilal Deyab, who had embarked on a hunger strike with his friend Thaer said:

When we took the supplements, we wasted our time. If we had not taken these liquids we would have saved 2 weeks of our suffering and our family's suffering, but we were deceived. They told us Khader Adnan took these vitamins and didn't break the strike. Even the lawyer told us it is not like the 'insure' (liquid given to strikers), but when we took the glucose liquid we felt that they were happy, it was obvious in their faces, they became relaxed. I told Thaer that I felt my health was better after the liquid and then we decided to refuse it. When we lost consciousness, we were injected by tube and when I woke up, I took it away from my body. Some prisoners, for example Hassan Safdi, were force-fed. He was tied and given the glucose forcibly in Ramleh hospital.

From the 40<sup>th</sup> to the 60<sup>th</sup> day of the strike, after the hunger strikers have insisted on refusing supplements, and when the bodies of the hunger strikers are falling apart and enter the danger zone, the Israeli doctors set up an 'ethical committee' to decide on the urgency of supplement intake. The decision of the ethical committee to forcibly treat the strikers who, with a clear head, unequivocally refused such treatment, is one form of violation of medical ethics and professional health standards (PHR 2013). The ethical committee generally decided, particularly when the hunger strikers fell into a coma, that they should be injected with supplements. While the prisoners were in a coma the doctors could examine and force feed them against their will. At this moment the Israeli authorities no longer worried about the

danger to their health and felt relaxed because the striking prisoners, in a forced coma, could not manage their hunger strike and make any decision either to continue or to break it.

Mohamad al-kik was forcibly given fluids after rejecting the forced treatment ordered by the ethical committee and clashed with the doctors when they injected him. When he lost consciousness, he was force-fed and placed in a forced coma.

On the 60<sup>th</sup> day, I was forcibly exposed to treatment and given fluid. They could do this easily to a prisoner who is chained to his bed, shackled hand and foot for 24 hours. According to Israeli law, doctors can't give me treatment while I am conscious but when I lose my consciousness they have the right to give me treatment. I refused the supplements and medical treatment but the problem was that in the 60<sup>th</sup> day of my hunger strike they chained my free left hand and then the doctor forcibly made the blood test, then they injected me with fluids.

Hiribat also found himself with a needle and a tube in his chained hand when he woke up after he lost his consciousness.

I fainted. When I woke up and found out that I had been injected with mineral, my hands tied, I took it off by my mouth and this caused bleeding. I did so because I swore to God if I went on strike I will not take any vitamins or supplements.

In 2015, the Prisoners' Club expressed its concern about keeping Mohamad Alan in a coma under the effect of drugs (in a press release from 08/16/2015). They considered this to be a violation of Alan's rights and emphasised his right to decide the fate of the hunger strike himself without any influence from any party. Some of the human rights advocates are against forced feeding, even if it is by injecting in the stomach rather than a tube in the mouth. Mohamad al-Kik, Hasan Asfadi, and Mohammed Alan and Adel Hiribat were force-fed and given fluids and this was the main reason for their long strike (over 90 days). This tactic is designed to cause their strike to fail and to put pressure on the hunger strikers in the negotiations.

Even when the IPA constrains the techniques of resistance, using doctors in the name of the 'ethical committee', it does not mean that the conflict has ended. Some striking prisoners dealt with decisions of the ethical committee in a cautious and intelligent way by considering that stopping using the supplements or the water would be dangerous and could severely impact their body and endanger their life. Hence, some of them used minerals or vitamins or

supplements in crucial moments and stopped taking them later when their health improved. This was the case with Banat:

In the beginning my strategy was to refuse anything from the hospital, but when I vomited blood and could not drink even water, then the doctors formed a committee called ‘ethics committee’ that forced the patient to pursue treatment and take liquids and minerals. The doctor was surprised at my wasting body. I asked him about a possible consensus. ‘What I want is to be able to drink water, because without water it looks like I want to commit suicide – if I don’t drink water, I will die in one week. Of course, the result of my strike will not be achieved in one week and my goal is not death but life. I was thinking of anything that would help me to get my result successfully. I asked the doctor how he could help me to drink water and to stop the bleeding. ‘I agreed to have [the supplement] because the cause of the bleeding in my stomach was the deficiency in vitamin K ... I was able to drink the water successfully then I stopped the liquid and continued the remaining 30 days of my hunger strike with only water. I had this treatment only to stop the bleeding and to be able to drink water. Therefore, there was some change in my strategy because I didn’t want to die.

A report published by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)<sup>94</sup> states:

During the hunger strikes, PHR-Israel witnessed various human rights violations, among others, violation of the right to health of hunger striking prisoners and detainees, and violations of medical ethics and of professional health standards. Measures which amounted to medical, ethical and human rights violation endangered the lives of hunger striking prisoners almost to the point of death and prevented prisoners’ access to independent medical advices and consultation. ... There is a strong suspicion that by blatantly violating the rights of the striking detainees to access adequate medical care and by flagrantly ignoring medical ethical standards and professional norms, the IPS [Israeli Prison Service] utilised its medical system to pressure the Palestinian prisoners and detainees on hunger strike causing unnecessary and illegitimate danger to their health and lives (2013: 4 and 23).

### 1.3 The advanced stage: The dynamics of negotiation

The techniques used by both IPA and hunger strikers in the critical stage of the hunger strike determine the dynamics of the negotiations. I analyse the dynamics of the negotiation process and investigates how the resistant subject and the IPA employ their techniques in the struggle to achieve their objectives, both parties acting to avoid defeat and surrender.

At the point when the prisoners’ health seriously declines and enters the danger zone, and the IPA surrenders to the fact that hunger strikers are determined to accept death in order to achieve their freedom, the negotiation process starts. The lawyer Jawad Bolous, who

---

<sup>94</sup> January 2013 “Political, Moral, Medical and Ethical Challenges Encountered while Treating Palestinian Prisoners on Hunger Strike in Israeli Prisons.

mediated between the IPA and hunger strikers, noted during our interview that when ‘the Israeli military officers start asking me about the health situation of the striking prisoners, it means ... they are looking for a solution because they don’t want the death of the strikers. At this point the negotiation starts.’ Neither party wants the other to be seen as the winner, but the hunger strikers regard the mere fact of negotiations as a victory. The desire for freedom, not suicide, makes the prisoner consider the offers of the prison authorities. At the same time, concern about the fall-out from the prisoner's death leads the IPA to consider the prisoners’ demands and change their strategies. Moamar Banat:

In the beginning, they pretend that they didn’t care. The Israeli military officers told me ‘you want to die, I don’t care’. They were testing the pulse but they didn’t speak directly to us. They didn’t want to negotiate ... They meant to show neglect and carelessness about our situation.

The prisoners are also aware of the ethical and material burden of the strike on the Israeli authorities. Adel Hiribat:

The individual strike is very exhausting to the prison authorities in terms of the cost of guards as every hunger striker need 3 to 5 jailors, in addition to security guys. They were unstable and scared that we would escape from the hospital. Security forces spread inside and outside the hospital. We were 5 individuals striking in the hospital and each needed 5 jailors to guard them in their hospital room, and around 30 guards outside the hospital.

Moamar Banat also commented on the IPA's material burden:

they pay 2000 NIS to reserve a bed in a hospital ... 70 days multiplied by 2000 NIS a day. Sometimes we were 3 strikers at the same time. In 2014 it was a collective strike for around 100 striking detainees. Here we are talking about the hospital cost. In addition, they need 3 jailors with us 24-7 in 3 shifts. They need salaries and food, they live in hospital with us and are very tired and unhappy.

Amongst the solutions initially offered by the IPA after the deterioration of the strikers' health is deportation, which is generally rejected. Hasan Safadi: 'They said just choose any country rather than Israel and after 5 hours you will be there. I said: I choose Nablus in Palestine'. Bilal Deyab ‘refused because the exile is so hard and even harder than the hunger strike’. Younis Hroub rejected the offer but achieved a solution in the end:

On the 35<sup>th</sup> day, intelligence officers offered to exile me to Gaza. I told them my family in the West Bank and I don't have any relatives in Gaza, no reason to go there...This was the first suggestion and then between 40 – 45 days when my health deteriorated they spoke with me... and they suggested to free me after I end my detention period – after 6 months.... In 62<sup>nd</sup> day of strike the lawyer visited me and informed me the Israeli offer to finish the remaining period of my detention and go home. I told him this is my demand and I accepted.

However, some prisoners, such as Hana Shalabi and Ayman Shawana, accepted the deportation offer.

When the Israeli authorities insist on their offers during the negotiations and ignore the threat of the hunger strikers' deaths, the hunger strikers begin to question themselves about whether to continue to death or consider the offer. Some continue to insist on their terms whilst others accept the IPA deal. Jawad Bolous, the mediator between the Israeli authorities and hunger strikers, explained how the negotiations operate:

There are two assumptions I work with as a mediator. Regarding the hunger strikers, they love life and do not want to die but they protest for freedom. However, they welcome the martyrdom. As for the Israelis, they prefer them not to die in prison. ... Thus, the common ground between the two parties is that they want to avoid death so there must be a solution that satisfies the two sides and guarantees that the reached agreement does not involve a defeat of one side at the price of other. The role of mediator is to merge the different perspectives and to find common assumptions.

Thus, the lawyer tries to avoid a shameful defeat for one side or the other. The conflict in the negotiation mainly revolves around the form of the agreement and the day of release. In response to the prisoners insisting on their date of release, the IPA tries to make them believe that they don't care about their death. At the end of the negotiations the techniques used in the final stage are similar to those used in the initial stage in which the strategy of neglect was employed to put pressure on the dying prisoners. However, two parties' fear of death, originating in opposed rationales, pushes them to reach an agreement. Every hunger striker has his own specific approach to techniques of resistance and these determine the agreement reached between the two sides. Sometimes the IPA is able to constrain their resistance and force the conflict to a crisis point. For example, Mohamad al-kik ended his strike after 94 days by accepting the same conditions offered by the IPA on the 45<sup>th</sup> day of the strike. When he refused the initial offer, the IPA introduced new techniques to make his strike fail, such as forced feeding from the 60<sup>th</sup> onwards.

The hunger strikers are not the only ones who engaged in their battle. All the parties involved in the conflict become partners in the negotiations, including the hunger strikers'

families, lawyers, jailors, the wider public, political parties, and the media. Although the most decisive factor is the prisoners and their bodies, these partners influence them and the Israeli authorities often use them to put hunger strikers under pressure to negotiate. The jailors are used to confuse and provoke the prisoners, since they are the ones who spend the most time with them. The research participants reported that the IPA transmitted news through the jailors about the situation of their families, especially mothers and wives hunger-striking in solidarity with them, to make them understand that they are causing suffering to their loved ones. Emotional abuse and family exploitation are among the IPA's techniques in the negotiation. Hassan reported that they brought pictures of his mother to influence him emotionally: 'The news about my striking mother make me understand that my mother went on hunger strike and she was dying'. Sometimes families are brought to persuade them to end their strike. Mohamad al-Kik recalled that 'when I asked them to allow my family to visit me, they refused but at some point, they offered to bring my family in the hunger strike as a sort of human manipulation to put pressure on me. I refused because I know it was a psychological war against us'.

Many strikers resist this manipulation by refusing to accept the visits. For example Hasan Safadi:

Before my situation became difficult, they refused my mother's visit but when my health deteriorated they issued 11 permits for my family member but I refused. I said I don't want to see anyone. They were surprised that I didn't even want to see my mother. I said 'I don't have any kinship relation with my mother'.

Diyab denied his relationship with his brother:

After 55 days of my strike they came to threaten me and said we will bring your brother to talk to you - my brother was sentenced to 15 years. I said 'he is not my brother' I don't want to give them any opportunity to make me surrender. I said I will end my strike only if I am released.

Religious figures are also brought in to convince the strikers to stop their strike. Hashlamoun:

They brought me an Imam to talk me and I was told that the strike is forbidden in our religion. I convinced the Imam who came to convince me. I told him God does not accept to live in humiliation and this is the only way to get rid of the inhuman treatment and oppression.

Another way the striking prisoners resist the emotional manipulation is by temporarily transferring the love of their families to their struggle. The suffering of their families increased their determination and feed their resistance. Diyab commented ‘my mother spent two weeks in the hospital and when I knew about this my determination increased more and more. When my mother knew about my victory she was healed and was extremely happy for me achieving my freedom’.

The role of solidarity movements at local and international level also impacted on the negotiations. According to Mohamad al-Kik: ‘Israel negotiated because there were demonstrations across Palestine and sometimes it led to clashes with Israeli forces at military checkpoints’. Bilal Deyab reported that IPA put pressure on the hunger strikers to break their strike before the Nakba Day of Memory (15 May) because they were expecting violent confrontations would take place at the Israeli border. In some cases, the aim of hunger strikers is not only to end the detention but also to achieve personal advantage alongside their political victories. For example, some of them benefited by presenting themselves as heroes who had endured long hunger strikes and some former hunger strikers become famous and popular, which led to criticism by some Palestinians in the post-hunger strike stage. On the other hand, others did not seek fame or gain and chose to remain faithful to their political cause away from the limelight.

## **2.0 Conceptualisation of techniques of resistance and technologies of the self**

### 2.1 Techniques of resistance

In the context of this study, techniques of resistance are understood as the instruments produced through the hunger strikers’ practices which contribute to structuring and transforming their resistant subjectivity. The physical body is the main instrument of resistance and others techniques related to the body are developed through its instrumentalisation. In the hunger strikers’ process of subjectivation, the body is understood as something external but also as something they can’t separate themselves from, making its instrumentalization particularly complex. The body is the only weapon they can use, although it is not sufficient to win their battle. It is a necessary weapon but, in their view, it betrays them in the end. Hence their need to rely on their internal immaterial and spiritual strength. Techniques can be both ‘internal’ and

‘external’. Hunger strikers depend primarily on internal techniques related to the self but also require support from factors outside themselves. Internal techniques can be divided into material ones linked to the physical body (e.g. refusal of supplements, stopping water...etc.) and immaterial techniques related to nonmaterial faculties such as mind, soul and will. The latter revolve around the internal strength required to endure and sustain the hunger strike (e.g. belief in the cause, revolutionary consciousness, ideologies, and affect – love, hope, anger, etc.).

External techniques usually relate to a third party in the conflict other than the prisoners and the IPA (e.g. political parties, family, lawyers, public support, human rights organizations, etc.) which affect the prisoner’s internal techniques. I focus on the subjective internal techniques (material and immaterial) linked to the prisoner’s body and explore how these techniques are produced and enacted in the practice of hunger strike. I also explore the interrelationship between the internal and external techniques and how the external can serve either to strengthen or, on occasion, disrupt the internal.

I use the term ‘instrument’ to represent their practice as something situated outside the self. This corresponds with the hunger strikers’ practice of instrumentalising the body, which can also translate into a kind of disembodiment understood as a technology of resistance. But the body-as-instrument should not be taken as something static or external, but can be considered in terms of categories of political practice like technique or repertoire or recourse that give us a sense of the dynamic character of resistance. Charles Tilly’s work (2003) can be a helpful framework here because it allows us to move from the notion of external instruments to practices that transform with the subject. For example, immaterial techniques can be understood as decisive weapons that allow hunger strikers to master the physical body in this process of subjectivation. They appear as actions of some sort and this is why Foucault talks of techniques or technologies, tactics, since they are practices/actions not objects/things (Foucault, 1988a: 18).

The term instrument, particularly the material instrument such as the body, needs to be thought of as embedded in practices and acts that transforms the subject; a material technique like the refusal of food is a practice or an act of resistance that contributes to the constitution of the hunger strikers’ subjectivity and not just to the confrontation with colonial power.

## 2.2 Techniques of resistance vs. technologies of resistance

I differentiate between techniques and technologies in that the former are the methods enacted by resistant subjects to efficiently use, manage, develop, and recreate the existing techniques

of resistance – for example, the material techniques related to the body that aims to pressure the IPA into initiating negotiations. In this case, the technique relates to how and when to refuse supplements, whereas technologies are concerned with how and when to use and develop the existing techniques or invent a new technique. Hence technologies can be grasped as the creative art of resistance in which the self, in its enactment of its techniques, resembles both the artist and the work of art. This understanding of technologies is closely with Foucault's conceptualisation of the practice of the self in terms of an “art of life” and aesthetic of existence (Thacker, 1993; Huijer, 1999).<sup>95</sup>

In contrast to the IPA, the individual striking prisoners do not have the advantage of a systematic apparatus of power behind them. The prisoners invent and manufacture their techniques of resistance, though they do not do so in isolation. The hunger striker is akin to a factory producing instruments of resistance out of the body and 'soul' during the conflict, tools that are relationally embedded in the national and political collective to which they belong. Prisoners are part of political movements and are aware of other prisoners' strategies; techniques are thus objects of sharing, communication and adaptation. This demonstrates that the hunger strike is a site of collective political subjectivation. In the beginning the techniques are not predetermined or predictable but are created in the face-to-face confrontation with the jailors or Israeli military officers. The hunger strikers then use them systemically in ways that advance their resistance practice.

The participants who embarked on individual hunger strikes emphasised that the individual hunger strike is harder to undertake than the collective. They think that there are objective and subjective conditions that contribute to its success and that not all prisoners have the ability to engage in it. The distinctiveness of the individual hunger strike phenomenon in the political setting after the failure of the Oslo Accord is that they are revolutionary subjects in a wider non-revolutionary context. The prisoners turn to individual resources when collective ones fail. At the beginning of the individual hunger strike, everyone develops their own techniques of resistance but later they generate a collective political dimension. Some hunger strikers had been imprisoned before and had participated in collective hunger strikes and were aware of and used existing techniques, but they created new techniques in response to the Israel authorities' repression and manipulation. For example, Khadar Adnan, who initiated the phenomenon of the protracted individual hunger strike, developed new techniques

---

<sup>95</sup> See chapter 4 for a fuller discussion on Foucault's framework.

in his second hunger strike. The intensification of his resistance was developed to meet the increase of oppression. Using these and other techniques of resistance, such as boycotting the military courts and refusing supplements, he aimed to challenge the IPA's manipulation of the hunger strike. He aimed to create a method of hunger strike that other prisoners could emulate. The process I've just analysed can be nicely captured by Charles Tilly's observation that:

humans develop their personalities and practices through interchanges with other humans, and that the interchanges themselves always involve a degree of negotiation and creativity (Tilly, 2003: 5).

After Adnan's hunger strike in 2012, waves of individual hunger strikes were launched over the next five years. The research participants view Khadar Adnan as successful because he managed his struggle with efficient techniques, motivating them to follow his example. Yonis Hroub said:

We notice that there is a new mode of resistance in the Israeli prisons – the individual hunger strike - invented by Adnan, and we wanted to follow such success ... In his second strike, Khader wanted to continue the revolution that was triggered by his first strike in 2012, and it was in this strike that he succeeded in inventing new techniques.

Contrary to the collective hunger strike, where the leadership committee of the hunger strike guides the striking prisoners, individual hunger strikers struggle with the systematic technologies of power by drawing from techniques developed by prior hunger strikers. These techniques are employed to create a moment of crisis in the conflict in order to reach the negotiation stage and agreement with IPA for their release. The hunger strikers manage and control their battle singularly, but the individual draws on the embodied memory of political practices. They are already resistant subjects; they do not become revolutionary out of nothing. We need to factor in the impact of previous collective processes of subjectivation and political movements, to be sensitive to the importance of historical practices in the constitution and conception of subjectivity. The transformation process which accompanies the ordeal of the hunger strike requires creative techniques. While the context I am dealing with is one of extreme domination, there is also a dynamism involved in the potential for negotiations which influences the technology and techniques. By focusing on their techniques and technologies, we can see how the horizon of emancipation and victory that informs the prisoners' anti-colonial resistance is already present in their practice of resistance.

### 2.3 Technologies of self and practices of resistance

The research participants are able to illuminate how technologies of self operate and how they emerge from a kind of latent energy in the extreme moments of starvation. Mazen Natcheh:

The hunger strike enhanced our self-confidence. We learnt that the human being should trust his abilities and potential even if it is against nature, even if it transgresses nature. Willpower can result in an explosion of the self ... a human being with a strong will can do a lot of things ... Our God has given us a great mind and huge strength. The human being can release this latent energy which comes from the mind. For those who wonder whether it is possible that a human can endure the hardship and tolerate giving up food for 63 days, I say 'yes, it is possible'. Even the greatest genius uses only 7% of their potential ... the energy of the mind distinguishes humans from animals and reveals a tremendous potential. A human being can reveal an energy for creativity and self-discovery.

This reflection shows how research participants see themselves as developing a knowledge about the self which is revealed in extreme moments. This practice of the self does not reveal an authentic self but rather shows the creative transformation of the self. The hunger strikers become resistant subjects as a result of the networks of relationships in their struggle, one of which is the relationship with the self. Natcheh's observation tries to account for what allows the technologies of the resistant self to manage and employ the techniques of resistance at different points in the conflict, for instance by stopping the intake of water to put more pressure on the IPA. The material technique (water strike) is conceived as under the guidance of the immaterial faculty of one's psyche (will). For the hunger strikers, the powerful weapon is the will and in this sense the body is not the only weapon. The critical and decisive techniques in their resistance that gives them the strength are immaterial spiritual faculties (will, soul, mind or consciousness).

Following Foucault, I trace out how technologies of resistance are produced and enacted during the struggle. Grasping the technologies of the resistant self illuminates how specific techniques are created and applied. They are related to how the hunger strikers understand themselves, and how they deal with themselves in order to deal with the other, the coloniser. Technologies are concerned with self-knowledge, which in turn determines the use and management of existing techniques of resistance, as well as the creation of new techniques. For example, the participants are aware of the importance of disembodiment and the

weaponization of the body in their practice and can explain why they construct the binary of body/mind or body/soul as framing their practice of resistance.<sup>96</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter traces out techniques of power and resistance in the hunger strike, viewed as a protracted battle between the resistant subjects and the colonial power. It illustrates the operation of power and resistance in the trajectory of the hunger strike which is registered chronologically in three stages over the life of the conflict. In every stage, techniques of both power and resistance vary and fluctuate according to the decline of the body. Utilising a Foucauldian framework, the chapter examines the nature of the resistant subjectivity that is performed and produced in interrelationships with colonial power and its strategies of repression via technologies of the self associated with resistance. It conceptualises the techniques of resistance as instruments developed through the instrumentalisation of the body.

Hunger strikers produce their own techniques of resistance in each stage of the hunger strike. The aim of these is to disrupt the functioning of the technologies of power and achieve freedom. The techniques employed by the striking prisoners are crucial because they determine the path of the struggle, such as the nature of the negotiation process, the length of the strike, and the agreement reached at the end. The outcome of a hunger strike depends on the interaction with the IPA. Despite their radical resistance, some hunger strikers could not reach the agreements they sought due to the efficiency of the techniques of power. The role of the Palestinian political parties, lawyers, the street and public opinion affected the dynamics of the hunger strike and sometimes the IPA was able to thwart the hunger strikers' techniques by manipulating external factors.

However, repressive power and its intensity often created new techniques of resistance. As Mohamad Alan put it: 'When they subjected us to manipulation and humiliation, the striking human has two options, either surrender and submit or invent new methods to deal with them'. But, in turn, this resistance can lead the IPA to invent new technologies, such as offering the temporary 'suspension' of detention with the aim of prolonging the hunger strike and thus precipitating its end due to the pain and suffering caused. Despite the objective asymmetry of power the hunger strikers feel that they can challenge the state of Israel with their starving bodies, or as they put it, with their 'empty stomachs', and if the Israeli authorities

---

<sup>96</sup> See my discussion of the hunger strikers' 'philosophy of freedom' in Chapter 11.

negotiate with them it is regarded as a ‘victory; by them, even if, as is true in many cases they suffer serious and lasting physical and psychological consequences<sup>97</sup>.

---

<sup>97</sup> For example Mohamad Ataj lost part of his lungs, Khadar Adnan subsequently had 5 operations on his intestines and others suffer from heart or memory problems

## Chapter 8: 'Strength', Conflict, and the Body in Pain

Inner strength won't allow my will to be broken. (Itaf Ilyan 2015)

The previous chapter focused especially on external conflict with the coloniser. This chapter focuses on the body's inner conflicts, pain experienced with regard to families and loved ones, and the relationship between the two. Conflicts with jailers generate great challenges and give rise to turning points. The internal conflict with self and body, and the external one with the IPA, generate new conflicts, for example with the family, especially when the IPA uses the family in negotiations as a form of pressure. The anxiety of the hunger strikers about the damage they cause to themselves through starvation affects their relationships with their families and loved ones. They resist their attachment to their loved ones and in this way mitigate their familial vulnerability to the IPA to weaken their resistance. But family is also an inspiration and source of strength for them, especially the mother figure, with its connection to the idea of the 'motherland'.

Internal and external conflicts interconnect. From the hunger strikers' perspective, their interaction with techniques of power in the external conflict with the IPA leads them to generate the strength and capacities required to resolve the internal conflict. They see that the Israeli state is equipped with material resources, but they, the hunger strikers, possess a kind of immaterial internal strength. The chapter discusses the centrality of this idea of strength (*qua* in Arabic) in their thought and discourse, as it emerges from the various conflicts. This notion of strength is distinguished from physical strength and is an internal force that supports their steadfastness and resilience. It is not a synonym for will or consciousness, but rather brings together all the immaterial faculties of the self, encompassing will, spirit, and consciousness, and relates to what some of the hunger strikers term 'latent energy/hidden power'. I show how they understand strength in terms of their understandings of the body and pain, and how it lends meaning and structure to their action.

Although the body is the principal tool that the hunger strikers use as a weapon in their hunger strike they don't consider it as the decisive factor in attaining their goal. Indeed, they regard it more as an external agent that works against them in that it weakens and, in their words, 'betrays' them. They therefore count on the immaterial strength that develops with the

deterioration of the body. The body that betrays leads them to construct the concept of 'soul',<sup>98</sup> which for them becomes the source of strength, while pain becomes the catalyst for the production of this strength. The body then is a very unusual weapon in that, through its weakness, it is perceived as ultimately betraying them, in league with the coloniser.

### **1.0 The conflict with the body: pain *versus* strength**

In Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, she focuses on physical pain, foregrounds its inexpressibility and analyses the political ramifications of pain in an exploration of embodied experience. Scarry suggests a distinction between psychological and physical pain: 'physical pain – unlike other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language' (Scarry, 1985: 5), whereas '[p]sychological suffering, though often difficult for any one person to express it, does have referential content, is susceptible to overlap objectification, and is so habitually depicted in art' (Scarry, 1985: 11). Scarry introduces her understanding of pain within the body apart from any reference to the outside world. Some scholars problematise such a division, which ignores how pain is subjectively felt and understood, and pain objectively recognised and analysed (Asad, 2003; Jackson, 2011; Meari, 2014). In the experience of the hunger strikers, the physical and psychological are inseparable and felt simultaneously. Pain is a subjective matter and for them and is not determined by questions of physical strength alone but by immaterial strength, that is, the will, spirit and determination.

Jean Améry's *At The Mind's Limits* (1980) reflects on the torture he underwent in a concentration camp. Amery emphasises that the experience can be defined as a negation of a positive identity and a serious damage. His torture is perceived as a reduction of self to the purely physical with an associated loss of faith in the world. Once lost, this trust in the world can never be regained (Améry, 1980: 40). Torture has an indelible character; whoever is tortured stays tortured. In Bernstein's *Torture and Dignity: An Essay on Moral Injury* (2015), he agrees with Améry's reflection of torture's harm, which, Bernstein terms 'devastation' (Bernstein, 2015: 110). According to Bernstein, torture and rape must be understood not as physical injuries but as moral injuries, forms of devastation that carry a moral quality. Bernstein discusses Amery's comparison between torture and rape to account for the harm of

---

<sup>98</sup> I discuss the relation between body and soul in their philosophy of freedom in Chapter 11.

torture and rape as a moral type of wrong that reduces the self to an identity with the involuntary body. He makes a distinction between ‘the body I have’ (the involuntary body) and ‘the body I am’ (the voluntary body). Though they suffered physical abuse, the hunger strikers were not systematically subjected to torture. They undertook the act of starvation as a form of counter-violence, and were in a sense causing their own pain. But in addition to the hunger strikers’ self-imposed counter-violence, their starving body was subjected to Israeli violence and pressures. This lends the literature on torture and the body in pain its relevance to my study, though the experience and practice of the hunger strikers complicates and adds nuance to the aforementioned accounts, especially in the way the hunger strikers redefined ‘the body one has and the body one is’ through the ways in which they disembody and instrumentalise their bodies as part of their technology of resistance.

In their descriptions and assessments, the hunger strikers redefine the concept of pain and repeatedly stress that there is something stronger than it. They discover a strength that emerges alongside the pain and helps them to overcome it and sustains themselves. They link an unrepresentable pain to a strength that is also in a sense beyond representation. As Abd al-Jaber Fuqaha commented: ‘The spirit and the will are important not the physical issues’. Despite the practice of violence by the IPA nearly all the participants saw themselves as stronger than the Israeli state despite their material military power. Physical symptoms of starvation are to some extent analogous across the hunger strikers, with some variations, but the interaction with the resulting pain and its effect on the psyche vary from one participant to another. Part of this pain stems from anxiety about death, or being unable to sustain the hunger strike because of the collapse of the ‘betraying’ body.

### 1.1 The body in the starvation mode: The internal conflict with the self and bodily needs

The inner conflict is the greatest conflict (Ayman Hamdan 2016)

Kill two birds with one stone ... there remains a dead man and a free man (Sartre, Preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*)

The participants reported that the internal conflict with the self is even harder to undergo than starvation, that the intensity of the struggle brings them near to madness. As Ayman Hamdan said: ‘sometimes one asked oneself how come we don’t lose our minds as a result of the conflict we lived’. Ultimately, they regard victory over the self as more important than victory over the IPA. They live in constant conflict over whether to break or sustain the hunger strike. Mahmoud

Sarsik remarked: 'I am in a struggle with the enemy to defend my right, on the one hand, but if we see the other side it is a fight with the self for steadfastness and patience. ...We are fighting the flesh so that we remain alive and achieve our goal'.

Most of the hunger strikers highlighted that the conflict with the self was most intense in the first days of the hunger strike. Itaf Ilyan commented: 'In the first days of hunger strike I used to have nightmares and I woke up scared and told myself I have to triumph'. She stressed that 'the most important point in our resistance is the internal monologue because it could rise or fall ... if we refuse to fall in our thoughts we stay steadfast'. But resisting bodily desire for food in the first stage of hunger strike creates an internal conflict that has serious psychological repercussions. Ilyan:

In the beginning of my 40 days' hunger strike, I was attacked by dreams. Especially in the first nine days I dreamed only of snakes everywhere and I woke up scared... For nine days, I could not sleep from these scenes but I felt that these are the psyche's fears as if there was an internal terror inside us trying to terrify us away from our decision.

They perceive their triumph over the desire for food as a victory. Moayed Shurab:

It is a battle in itself to deprive ourselves of food. This is in itself a victory regardless of the victory over the occupation. To resist a lust that you struggle with every day is victory. The first day you did not eat and the second day you didn't and the third day, etc. These are successive victories.

The participants developed their own ways of resisting the desire for food. For example, by treating food as religiously prohibited. Thus, when Mahmoud Balboul ended his hunger strike he 'did not like to break it because I felt it is *haram*. I spent six hours convincing myself to eat food because in the hunger strike I had convinced myself that food is prohibited since I did not know the end of the journey'.<sup>99</sup> But, he added: 'There is no human being who survives without food and drink. ... So, when one decided to give up food that means one transgressed the natural thing'. The hunger strikers needed great strength to liberate themselves from their bodily needs. They transformed the influence of hunger and bodily desire into a strength that helped them cope with hunger. This internal conflict was experienced in the first stages of the hunger strike but after about 30 days, their health had sharply deteriorated and bodily pain became the

---

<sup>99</sup> See (Ajour, 2017) The transgressive practices of revolutionary subjectivity <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1558837/>

dominant conflict. The hunger strikers began to see their lives as threatened, that they could die at any moment. Mahmoud Alan:

After 30 days all our daily activities had deteriorated. I couldn't walk, I couldn't go to the toilet or get up from the bed. I didn't have the energy to speak. There was a pressure on the mind and the body. Around the 40<sup>th</sup> day of hunger strike the phenomenon that developed (and is very well known by all hunger strikers) was vomiting of yellow material around 10 times a day and its pain was if we were being stabbed by knives in the stomach. This is the most painful stage because the hunger strikers think they could die at any moment.

This development was mentioned by most of the research participants. Each one describes the acute pain associated with it in different ways. Munir Abu Sharar said: 'My body rejected water and I entered the danger zone, I vomited the yellow material mixed with pieces of my stomach'. Hassan Safadi states: 'when one vomits, it is as if a fiery liquid with different colours comes from the stomach, it is not exactly blood', whilst Bilal Deyab described it 'as if something was walking in my body'. They regarded the body in starvation as exercising an independent power over them.

### 1.2 Fear of body betrayal: body vs. will/spirit

The issue of the betrayal of the body is related to the understanding of the body as an instrument. In their process of disembodiment the hunger strikers try to disengage themselves from something they can't actually separate from, and live with the fact that although their body is their weapon to threaten the Israeli state, at the same time they fear its collapse. In order to counteract this fear, they turned to immaterial forces and relied on the power of will and spirit. The fear of bodily damage or of losing organs was a constant presence among the hunger strikers. Adel Hiribat:

I had problems with my liver and pancreas, and there was a reduction in the enzyme levels. The doctor brought a mirror with him, but I refused to look at myself. He thought that if I saw myself I would make a decision and end my strike ... I was afraid to see myself in the mirror in case this would affect my decision. I saw my body, the flesh disappeared and the body was only muscles eating themselves up.

Abd Al-Jaber Fuqaha believes that:

If one does not have the will one would break the strike ... A guy with us in the hunger strike who had big muscles and beautiful hair wanted to get married. As soon as we started his spirit went down ... He was afraid to damage his muscles and was worried that his hair would fall out as a result of hunger. He could not continue

more than 25 days and stopped because his psychological state was low from the beginning... He was young and he could have endured more than elderly strikers, but his spirit weakened because he was not ready from the start ... the physical issues are not important, the most important thing is the psychological state and the will.

The fear of losing organs generates other conflicts such as with the family, the main party that would be affected if the hunger strikers were to die or be permanently incapacitated. Ayman Hamdan explains how his fear of bodily betrayal and organ failure might ultimately affect his family.

I was asking myself 'what did I do to myself?' and told myself 'God, if I had a problem in my liver or kidney, how would my children care for me instead of me caring for them?'

Fuqaha described how he resisted this fear:

From the beginning I put my family and children aside and tried not to think of them at all, because if we were to keep thinking what would happen to them if we were martyred, or if I kept worrying about what would happen to my body, such as having kidney problems or losing my organs, all of these things would destroy me and I would not succeed.

The hunger strikers try to transcend their internal conflicts with their bodies and families to save their energy and fight the coloniser. The main conflict is with the coloniser, what Hamdan terms a 'biting fingers battle' which reflects the challenges of will. Khader Adnan also used the term 'biting fingers battle' and 'the loser is the one who says "ow"', that is the one who reveals their pain to the other. Hamdan tried to control his pain by disembodiment himself and described the conflict he lived with his body as being in 'a hysterical state that might attack the hunger strikers ... because it's a human body and nobody knows how it functions or how it thinks'.

### 1.2 Pain vs. strength: Pain as a catalyst of strength

Bilal Deyab's account demonstrates the intense struggle with body:

When my tooth was injured, I was surprised to see my hand hitting my tooth against my will. This happened when I was looking at the jailor who was eating in front of me. I realised that my tooth was injured from my own hand. How did my hand hit me and injure my tooth? It is an uncontrollable state. It is against my will. I

was thinking of this state and asked myself ‘is it logical that hunger would cause this? Is it because of hunger? Is it because I am thinking a lot of food?’. When I thought of food, I tried to put my hand in my mouth and wanted to eat my hand. Thinking of food controlled my thoughts. I was putting the towel in my mouth and eating it.

The research participants try to describe and assess their physical pain. Mohamad Balboul reflected that he was ‘a dentist and I know that the hardest pain is the pain of teeth, labour and burns, but the pain of hunger strike is harder than them. The pain is unbearable, I can’t describe it’. Another example came from Bilal Deyab:

Everybody experiences toothache. My tooth loosened and fell out as a result of lacking the calcium but I didn’t feel the pain because the pain in my body was greater than the pain of my tooth.

In his case one pain superseded the other. In contrast, Balboul thinks it was a latent energy that helped him to control his body and thereby the pain of the hunger strike:

My mind is in a good state as long as my body is strong. However, the body is not strong functionally in starvation. The mind is stronger than the body ... I was hoping that my body wouldn’t betray me because there was a store of energy in my body. The body was in extreme fatigue and my soul controlled the body. I was trying hard to make the latent energy in my mind control my body. Therefore, at a certain stage I was able to overcome the pain without pain killers.

For Mohamad, the strength resides in the mind and soul not in the body: “I was convincing myself that I could overcome the pain and I’m strong and the occupation is nothing to me”. Shadi Abu Mali expressed fear of the body’s betrayal but trusted in the immaterial forces, the power of the will and spirit.

We lived hard moments due to the pressures from the prison ... All of this affected us physically. Of course, our spirit was always high from the start. The body would betray but the will and spirit did not change, whether we were weakened or if we fainted, because these are secondary issues.

So, despite the variations of their background and ideologies (Deyab is from Islamic Jihad, Baboul from Fateh, Abu Mali from PFLP), what they share is that all of them spoke of the strength of the will. For them, with the help of latent energy, they operate to control and transform the pain. All of them then recount the struggle with the body and pain as having

different psychological manifestations, but the strength they cultivated enabled them to resist. This strength wouldn't be produced without the clash with the coloniser.

## **2.0 The interlinking of the two conflicts and the production of strength**

In the hunger strikers' view, the clash with the state of Israel strengthens them and helps them to resolve their internal conflicts. Hamdan, who went on individual hunger strike in 2014, reflects on the interconnection of the two conflicts and stresses that the internal conflict is the harder one.

The first main conflict is with the Zionist entity and the jailer and this is much easier than the conflict with the self ... I told myself that if they come to speak with me that means I am *Samed* (steadfast). The more they talk with us the more we increase our persistence to carry on ... a very senior Israeli military officer begs you to stop your strike and I said no way without written agreement. This increases my persistence to triumph and achieve my freedom ... But the internal conflict is more difficult, because you speak with your liver and heart and ask yourself do I want to lose my bodily organ, am I going to lose them? I told myself I might have kidney failure and lose them. The internal conflict is the greatest conflict.

In experiencing hunger, they hunger strikers witness the body eating itself up. In their view, the greatest conflict is the internal conflict with the self because one fears the loss of body organs, but the conflict with the jailor is ultimately easier because it can be resolved through antagonistic interaction. For them the conflict with the jailor increases their steadfastness and supports their resistance.

### 2.1 Turning points in the resolution of inner conflicts

The interaction with the jailor displaces the inner conflict, generating strength (*qua*) and steadfastness (*Sumud*), and giving rise to turning points. These are critical moments that hasten the end of the conflict and create a transformative leap in the struggle. Moayed Shurab:

When I had bleeding on the 57<sup>th</sup> day of my hunger strike I felt desperate ... I was talking with myself as to why I humiliated my body and reached a dead end ... an Israeli officer came to speak to me and it stopped all these thoughts in my mind. I remember on the 57<sup>th</sup> day I was thinking of breaking the hunger strike. Then one Israeli officer provoked us and tried to make fun of us. He said 'who do you think you are? Are you trying to triumph over the state of Israel? If you want to, die go away and die'. There was a bottle of water beside me from which I used to drink water. I said: 'comrades throw these bottles at him'. All of them threw their bottles at him ... and the whole atmosphere changed. I felt as though I was not on

hunger strike. God brought them [the jailers] to us because if they had left us alone another 12 hours we might have broken our hunger strike but when they came and provoked us, the ... challenge helped.

Shurab participated in a collective hunger strike and was surrounded by his comrades which made the internal conflict easier. By contrast, in the individual hunger strike, the internal conflict is more intense since the hunger striker is isolated and alone in the confrontation with IPA. In recounting this incident, Shurab reasserts that the fundamental struggle was with the coloniser, not with the self. The presence of the jailor reminds the prisoners of the goal of the hunger strike, to resist the violence that dispossessed them of their humanity. If the challenge is an element in continuation in their struggle, the presence of coloniser becomes a tool of 'steadfastness'. Nevertheless, the coloniser still impedes and oppresses, and these critical moments in their narratives leave open the possibility of a failure to transform the conflict completely, since doubts and conflict remain. There is 'a moment between victory and break' (Hamdan). Other participants give a similar description as Shurab who describes the internal monologue of break and victory and the ambivalent feelings and questioning of the self when they are alone.

In addition to her internal conflict, Itaf Ilyan entered a new phase of what she regarded as 'psychological war'.

They created this psychological war. After 12 days of my strike, the prison manager came to tell me 'Itaf, nothing breaks us'. She knew well from my former hunger strike that I am obstinate. She told me 'if you want to die, we don't care'. Every couple of days she came to leave these poison words ... I was tied to the bed in the cell and watched by a camera. Sometimes they took even the water. They tried to make me feel weak with nobody there to support me but from inside I felt the strength will grow. The internal strength won't allow my will to break.

In the process of this transformation, Itaf felt her internal strength grow. She saw the jailor becoming weaker in the challenge of wills. As she put it: 'this internal strength lies psychologically in the concept of dignity' – better to die than suffer from humiliation while alive. In Itaf's account, we can trace the critical moment that consolidated her strength, the source of which is her belief in the idea of dignity and freedom.

## 2.2 'Psychological war' with the self and the IPA

The hunger strikers suffered not only physical but also profound psychological pain. Hasan Safadi remarked: 'The bodily fatigue and exhaustion and lack of sleep was one thing, but we

also had a psychological pressure which pressed on us intensely'. Another kind of pressure, terror of sexual assaults by jailors and Israeli civil male prisoners, was described by Nora Hashlamoun:

It was very hard at Aljalama prison ... In this prison, there were civilian male prisoners who attempted to assault me. The Israeli guards would even leave my door open on purpose. I was terrified.

Raed Abu-hanoud, also talked about sexually abusive practices as a form of psychological pressure:

Humiliation is more difficult than physical pain. Imagine when they chained us naked to be watched by female jailors who laughed at us. However, the more they do this, the more I strengthen my spirit. They thought this would devastate us psychologically but it generated the challenge from within. Imagine you are a female hunger striker and three men looking at you while you are naked. What are you going to do? So, this kind pain is other than the physical pain.

Abu-hanoud, thinks that these psychological pressures stir his resistance and, in his words, 'generate the challenge from within'. The production of this strength is helped by the way the hunger strikers views the Israeli jailors, who they regard as having lost their humanity and dignity through their treatment of the hunger strikers. Khader Adnan:

It was the hardest time ... I was vomiting ... for long hours, from night to dawn. When my tears fell, the Israelis thought I was crying as a result of weakness, but the tears fell only from the distress of vomiting against my will ... the jailors who came to shackle me felt disgusted and wore gloves. I felt their inferiority and told myself: 'you are inferior because you treat me like this'. It was disgusting that [my situation] caused disgust to humans who lost their humanity and dignity.

Such small details in the struggle helped to establish the human meaning of the act of resistance and the inhumanity of the other. In Itaf Ilyan's words: 'In front of our beliefs in our goal and our will they are weak'. This clash with the jailors created a turning point, which enabled them to continue their hunger strike with the aim, in Ayman's words, 'not to die but rather to remain steadfast and determined'.

### 2.3 IPA isolation techniques and the inner conflict

The hunger strikers are well aware that the IPA systematically develops their technologies of power based on the knowledge that isolation exacerbates their internal conflict and threatens

their resolve. As Bilal Kayed put it: ‘Israel has experience in oppression ... they have the knowledge of tools to break us’. One of the main punitive measures is solitary confinement. Bilal Kayed:

They made us feel that we are completely isolated and the problem in isolation is that the voices and the contradictions within us get amplified. They isolated us because they think it is easier for us to make mistakes because we are not seen by others, so they expect that in isolation we would break our hunger strike and we are watched by cameras ... They didn’t speak a word with me from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 70<sup>th</sup> day except to tell me that nobody supported me. So, I wished that anybody would speak to me, even to swear at me.

Another aspect of the isolation is the strategy of ignoring the prisoner and causing confusion by giving false information. Kayed again:

They convey some information as though we heard it accidentally in order to affect our spirit. For example, they pretend ... that this person is dying and that Israeli intelligence refused negotiations.

Being aware of the IPA’s techniques supports the hunger strikers’ resilience and helps them to settle the internal conflict. Shurab pointed out that if they had been left alone by the prison authorities, they would have likely broken the hunger strike because the conflict with the self becomes so intense in isolation.

When the human is alone the conflicts come to him, but when the other talks to you it takes you back to the zero point, and the struggle turns to ‘will he triumph over me or I triumph over him?’ I can give up in front of myself and tell myself I wish to break my hunger strike but in front of him there is no way I can give up.

The Palestinians call the isolation cells ‘a prison within a prison’. They reported that some prisoners suffered mental disorders as a result of isolation. However, the clash with the coloniser, as Shurab put it, took them back to the zero point, as they resist giving up in front of the jailors. The conflict with the IPA becomes a catalyst for their resilience.

#### 2.4 Transforming pain and producing strength through confrontation

Mahmoud Shalatwi asserts that the IPA have the material power but the hunger strikers' strength lies in their hunger itself.

Every day we were humiliated by strip searches. Israelis know that we didn't have the energy during hunger strike to defend ourselves, so they beat prisoners on purpose. They beat elderly prisoners in front of us to humiliate us and make us feel weak and helpless to defend them. The Israeli forces have all sources of material strength and weapons, but our strength is our hunger.

He described his response to the IPA violence:

When the IPA forces started beating us, although we didn't have energy in our body, we felt a huge internal energy. God gives us such energy and we say *Allah Akhbar*. We feel huge internal strength within ... I feel they were afraid. All they could have done was to bring more belligerent forces to invade our rooms in prison, to attack and beat our bodies more and more. This was their reaction. They intensified their violence.

Although Shalatwa links this strength to resist with God, hunger strikers are also motivated by their faith in the political cause as well as their responsibility toward comrades. Salah Hamori, who engaged in a PFLP collective hunger strike, narrated what happened when one of his comrades collapsed during their hunger strike:

I quickly ran to inform prisoner administration, asking them to save his life ... I was shocked when the IPA told me 'we won't carry him to prison's clinic, you carry him'. They meant to punish and humiliate us as much as they can ... I am on hunger strike and I didn't have energy to carry my comrade ... the IPA refused that four of us carry his body. They said 'only two of you carry him not more' ... I and my friend carried him. He weighed around 100 to 120 kg and we didn't have energy, but we tried our best. It was exhausting. We carried him 20 meters and stopped and resumed carrying, every 20 metres we stopped. Three Israeli officers and ten Israeli police accompanied and watched us. Every 20 meters we stopped and sometimes every 10 meters. At this moment one of the Israeli police sympathized with us and approached us to help in carrying, but the military officer prevented him saying: 'don't carry'.

In their experience the moment of confrontation with the jailor endowed their starving body with energy. The political ethics embedded in their culture of resistance generate a relationship between pain and the body to deal that allows them to respond to the specific reality of the prison and its physical and psychological violence. Hamori and his comrades did not want to betray their responsibility for their comrade, despite the fact that they didn't have the energy to help him. This relationship between pain and the body determines how resistance subjectivity is cultivated and reveals a form of subjectivity that constantly restructures itself.

### 3.0 The conflict with family and loved ones

Our revenge lies in the laughter of our children'. My son Basil opens the letter he sent me with this sentence by Bobby Sands. (Faraj 2016)<sup>100</sup>

I sent a message to my children to tell them 'if I died I was on my way to you'. (Adnan 2016)

Love is a powerful weapon. (Hamdan 2016)

The internal struggle in relation to families and loved ones emerges as a prominent conflict for nearly all the hunger strikers when their lives are in danger. The IPA exploit the family in the negotiation stage to weaken the striking prisoners and affect their decision to end their struggle. Thus, the concern over family is not only about fears of dying or becoming incapacitated impacting on their loved ones, but also about fears that families may become a tool of the Israeli authorities. The prisoners have to find ways to control these feelings and they use various strategies to transform their relationships with their families and loved ones from a weakness into a source of strength.<sup>101</sup>

Some, such as Ayman Hamdan hide photos of their children to keep weakness at bay:

when I was looking at the photos of my sons Mohamad and Isa I was shaken. I told myself 'so these children would cry if I died'. I weakened and cried. I remembered my wife and I confess ... I was about to weaken and stop my hunger strike. Then I decided to hide the photos and control myself. I did not take the photos out of my bag till the end of my hunger strike.

As with Hamdan, Fuqaha put his feelings for his family aside and prevented himself from thinking of his children, because 'thinking of family and what will happen to our bodies would destroy us and hinder our success ... no doubt at the end a human being is no more than emotions and feelings but in the battle, we should not be like this'. The way in which the hunger

---

<sup>100</sup> After my interview with Faraj, he sent me the link below by email. It is the speech of his son Basil in the graduation ceremony in his university in US while his father was in hunger strike. <http://palestine.assafir.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=2901>  
Also see in English <http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/archives/3100/print>  
<https://www.mecaforpeace.org/news/absence-absence-palestinian-family-endures-and-resists-israeli-occupation>

<sup>101</sup> This theme of transcending love was discussed in chapter 6 when I dealt with the turning points in the constitution of subjectivity.

strikers related to their loved ones differed depending on their ethical and religious outlook. For example, Mohamed al-Kik said that:

During the hard times of the strike I was thinking that the devil reminded me of my children. Imagine the extremity of the human situation we lived. This was the human reaction toward my bodily pain. I reached a point where I wanted to die. The irrationality of occupation created my own irrationality.

His way of bracketing his feelings toward his children is to imagine that the devil is the one who is reminding him of them. The devil is associated with sin, and for him the sin is breaking his will and not sustaining the hunger strike.

In contrast, family was an inspiration which helped Thaer Halahla and Bilal Deyab endure their hunger. Deyab:

I was imprisoned with Thaer and all the time he was speaking about his daughter Dana who was born while he was in prison. *Inshallah*, when he is released his daughter and his family will be his whole life as he dreamed. For me, I was telling him I was dreaming to be among my family. In fact, we both felt the taste of life in the hunger strike.

Yunis Hroub was also motivated to resist through his thoughts about his family:

When I imagined my family's suffering, it increased my determination. Because they were suffering, I thought I must carry on and advance in my strike and no way deteriorate or break because I did not want my suffering and theirs to be in vain.

But all were acutely aware that their families suffered from their hunger strike. Abd Aljaber Fuqaha:

The suffering of hunger strikers' families is greater than that of the hunger strikers themselves. In normal situation, they suffer because we are prisoners in jail, so imagine their feeling while we were on hunger strike. You should meet the family of hunger strikers to know their pain.

When I conducted interviews with hunger strikers' families, I witnessed the agonising time while their loved ones were dying. The mothers and wives of hunger strikes were protesting in solidarity tents and launching hunger strikes to support their loved ones. Fuqaha reported that his wife fasted 62 days when he was on hunger strike. Younis Hroub also emphasised the suffering of his family, who gave up food during his strike.

In spite of the prison bars, a number of them were able to support their families and strengthen them through the messages they sent through lawyers. For example Salem Badi said:

I emotionally connected with my family. I felt guilty because my niece Batoul was doing her exam in high school and my strike affected her. When my lawyer visited, me I told her please write this important message to my family before we speak about my health. Call my sister and tell her the most important thing I care about is Batoul, tell her that your uncle is dying but he always thinks of you and he wants you to study hard and succeed.

### 3.1 Family: from weakness into strength

The experience of each prisoner is unique, and everyone had his or her own way of interacting with and relating to their family. They processed their feeling towards their loved ones and persuaded themselves that they were engaged in this form of resistance to be with their loved ones. Khader Adnan:

I sent a message to my children to tell them 'if I died I was on my way to you'. My resistance was for the sake of my freedom to be with them. If I fell as a martyr I was searching in the path of freedom and my hunger strike was launched to get me back to my work and family. I did not escape from my family. If I escaped, I would not go on hunger strike. My battle is to be with my mother and with my children, to be with my loved ones, so I am not escaping from my responsibility.

Likewise, Mazen Natcheh also emphasized that the Palestinian militants did not like to torture themselves and their families, but the hunger strike was a necessity in order to be with their loved ones. Towards the end of the hunger strike they were able to persuade themselves that they were doing this for the sake of their loved ones and overcame the contradictions of their internal monologue that they believed weakened them at the beginning.

Over time, the family became the motive that inspired their resistance. They transformed the family into strength and the love of family became a weapon. In Hamdan's words: 'Love for family was a crucial issue which helped us to resist more and defend, and it gave us patience. Love is a powerful weapon, one wouldn't know it unless one experiences it'. He continued by reflecting on the vulnerability of his wife, who suffered physically and psychologically during his hunger strike.

The most difficult thing was the vulnerability of our families. I tried to prepare my wife mentally when I made the decision because I felt she was my weapon, but she got tired and was hospitalised during my hunger

strike. She was pregnant and our baby had a problem when he was born. The suffering of occupation has affected our children. They lived the pain with us spontaneously.

Hamdan's account reveals his and his family's vulnerability. Some of the participants did not present a heroic model of resistance, as they stressed that they and their families were traumatised and injured as a result of suffering. Hamdan recalled his conversations with his jailor about their families:

He spoke about his relationship with his family and he was surprised at our love for our families and the way we treated them. The jailor was surprised that Palestinian prisoners had all this love for their wives and children. He told me 'we thought you were a rock and stripped of emotions and feelings'.

Hamdan further commented on the role that the jailor played in strengthening him through the very act of trying to weaken him:

They told us 'think of your family and imagine that you are released but losing your kidneys'. He thought this would weaken me but on the contrary, he was unaware that he was strengthening rather than weakening us. I might even convince him of my cause; some of the jailors were persuaded of our cause.

Yunis felt these emotions were exploited in order to shake their spirit and determination:

A woman [sent by the IPA] visited me during the hunger strike and had a conversation with me. I felt she was playing with my emotional issues – my health and family. She thought I was killing myself. I told her I was doing this because I wanted to go back to my children, and I wanted to live a dignified life with my family. I refused to live in prison under detention. I felt she came specially to shake my spirit.

These interactions gave rise to turning points where the prisoner transformed the love of and vulnerability to their family into strength.

### 3.2 The mother figure and the power of resilience

*I love my life because if I died, I would be embarrassed by my mother's tears*  
(Mahmoud Darwish – mentioned by Bilal Kayed)

*My mother told me "if you break don't come back home" (Kayed 2017)*

Although family in general is a source of conflict, as well as a resource, for the hunger strikers, the relationship with their mothers usually plays a decisive role by their own account in supporting their resistance and contributing to their steadfastness. Each participant thinks of their children and partner differently, but common to all is the mother figure. The children and family were either a source of weakness or strength but by the end of hunger strike all were transformed into a source of strength. In contrast, the mother was always presented as a source of strength and their entire resistance experience was experienced as linked to their mother, especially because of how they associate the idea of *Al-Watan* (homeland) to her. In their perception, Palestine is their mother; conversely, their mother symbolises the idea of Palestine. The mother, who was often employed as a point of weakness by the prison authorities in the negotiation stage, in fact provided them with strength because of this symbolic relationship and became decisive in their hunger strike. Bilal Kayed:

They basically used my mother and kept telling me ‘your mother is very sick and she is dying now, imagine if your mother receives the news of your death. She is the only one who is worried about you’. They used this emotional dimension to affect me. I knew my situation would affect my mother and knew what would happen to her ... I always sing Marciel Khalifa’s song<sup>102</sup>. I told myself: ‘I should be solid and patient and I must not die, not because of me but because of my mother’. I told myself: ‘be aware that your mother should not cry at your death and you should not be defeated’. My fear was that she would have to tell people I broke my hunger strike. Now she told them ‘he was near death’, but she said it proudly. My mother told me ‘if you break don’t come back home’.

This account shows how the mother plays a key role in her son’s steadfastness. They both transcended their emotions for a sublime goal, the political cause. The way the Palestinian mothers raised and educated the Palestinian militants is reported by them as playing a decisive role in their steadfastness. In saying to her son ‘don’t come back home defeated’, Kayed’s mother wanted to burn any bridges of retreat and defeat.

In the first picture below, Bilal Kayed’s mother is protesting while he was on hunger strike. She is holding a poster of her son. Written on it is ‘Bilal knocks the sides of the tanks’. The second picture is from the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign which used the picture of Bilal and his mother.

---

<sup>102</sup> Marcel Khalifa’s song about the figure of the mother can be accessed at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2q\\_gEjpXYE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2q_gEjpXYE)



Bilal Kayed spoke at length about the revolutionary consciousness he developed through his affiliation with the PFLP. However, he emphasised his mother’s role and the way she educated him. He grew up in an environment that revolved around political struggle and revolution. His father was a militant in the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon and Syria and when he came back with his mother to Palestine, she continued his political education. This relationship shaped his identity. As he said: ‘my mother is the one who raised us to be stubborn’. In his explanation of the factors of victory or break in what we could term his dialectics of the self, he mentioned that when he thought his mother was waiting for him it enhanced his steadfastness. The education of Bilal by his mother enhanced the idea of sacrifice for the political cause. As he put it ‘the victory and break is linked with education’.

In Mohamad Alan’s account, the attitude of his mother surprised not only him but also Israeli intelligence:

The occupier wanted to exploit my mother to put pressure on me to stop my strike ... they brought my mother on the 58<sup>th</sup> day of my strike. When she came to the hospital my sight was weak and I could barely see. I was unable to recognise people’s faces and I only saw shadows of those who entered my room. I heard my mother’s voice, but I didn’t see her come in. I knew why they had brought her and I initiated the conversation, asking her: ‘mother, do you accept that I break my hunger strike before I get my rights?’ She said” ‘don’t put any food in your mouth before you get your rights’ ... I was surprised by her position. There were some figures from Israeli intelligence there. I heard their voices in the room, waiting for the moment I would break my strike through the influence of my mother, but they were surprised, asking ‘are you sure she is his mother?’ ‘Is it logical that his mother is asking him not to eat?’ All of them expected that she would influence me; they brought her for this reason. But my mother’s position strengthened me.

This cartoon by Carlos Latuff portrays the role of the mother in this scene recounted by Mohamad Alan.



Although the vulnerability of maternal feelings was transformed into an element of strength in resistance, the Palestinian mothers were deeply affected by the hunger strike of their loved ones, and some of them were hospitalised as a result of their hunger strikes in support of their sons. Bilal Deyab's mother was in the hospital. '*Omi Omi Omi*.<sup>103</sup> She remained two weeks in hospital and this increased my determination. When she heard of my victory, all her suffering went.' The situation of sick mothers in hospitals was also used to manipulate the hunger strikers. Hasan Safadi recounts the internal conflict he encountered when told that his mother was dying by the IPA:

they came to my cell informing me that my mother was dying in hospital. I knew the health situation of my mother who was on hunger strike. My mother takes 23 tablets of medicine. I was thinking and asking myself 'did I do the right or wrong thing?' I evaluated whether my actions were correct or not. I thought of all dimensions. I had caused this suffering for my mother. My hunger strike was torture for her. She did not know my news and thought that I would die at any moment and I did not know her news or any news about my brothers and sisters. All of my family members were tortured by the hunger strike. But regardless of my hunger strike we are already tortured by the occupation.

Safadi also said that his mother was used by the hospital team in the negotiation stage when he lost his sight as a result of starvation.

The deputy of the hospital came ... She told me ... 'you are contributing to ending your mother's life. Stop your hunger strike and go out of prison to speak with her to stop her hunger strike' ... She wanted to convince me to take the Ensure drink. They knew what my mother meant to me.

<sup>103</sup> *Omi* 'my mother' in Arabic.

He resolved these conflicts by transforming his emotions about his mother into strength. A turning point for some hunger strikers was when they persuaded themselves that they went on hunger strike for their mothers' sake. Safidi recalled the moment of his arrest to persuade himself that what he had done is correct and he should continue. He mentioned how his mother and sister were beaten by Israeli soldiers while he was silent to avoid endangering them. This violence directed to his family provoked anger and indignation against the occupation because injuring his mother was the red line for him which they which they transgressed.

The mother intensified the human meaning of *Al-Watan* by linking their homeland with the figure of their mother. In saying this they mean they are on hunger strike for the sake of homeland, that is, their mother. Safadi's definition of homeland was that 'It is our belonging to people we love on this land, *Al-Watan* is my mother'. Salem Badi recounted a story from his childhood which demonstrates how he perceived the role of his mother in educating him about commitment and belonging to Palestine and the Palestinian collectivity:

I remember when I was a 10 year- old child, I went to Hebron by bus with my mother. My mother told me if anybody comes you stand up and give them your seat. From Ramallah to Jerusalem I gave my seat to somebody but from Jerusalem to Hebron I refused to stand up because I was tired. I felt dizzy because I was a child. My mother asked me to stand up, but I refused. When we arrived she punished me. This is the way she raised me. She taught me that I must belong to the collective.

The family was experienced by the hunger strikers as a partner in their battle for freedom. I emphasised the mother figure in my discussion, yet the partners of the striking prisoners also played a decisive role. For example, Khader Adnan's wife was managing the battle of her husband with journalists and lawyers and prisoners' rights institutions. The wife of Mohamad al-Kik, Faiha was a journalist and was advocating for her husband's rights widely at a national and international level. The family plays a greater role than the political parties. In the advanced stages of negotiation, when they approach death, the family was the essential engine which accelerated the conflict to end the struggle.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter focused on the notion of 'strength' that emerges in the hunger strikers' various conflicts and supports their resilience. I showed how they understand 'strength' in terms of their redefinition of the concept of body in pain, and how conceptualise the body not just as a

weapon against the IPA but as an external agent that works against them. The body weakens and, in their words, 'betrays' them; therefore, they feel they need to count on the immaterial strength produced along with the deterioration of human body to get them through their struggle. Although the body is a decisive factor and is used as a tool it is not the only element in the equation. Other sources of strength of an immaterial nature – expressed by the participants as mind, will, spirit/soul – were experienced as key resources in continuing the hunger strike. We could argue that they were impelled to think in this way because of the 'betrayal' of the body. Being subjected to pain instigates these 'hidden powers' that they discover in themselves. This chapter also demonstrated the conflicts generated within the body of the hunger strikers, and their inner struggles in relation to their families and loved ones. It showed the interlinking of these with the struggle against coloniser and explained how the two conflicts connect in the production of 'strength'.

## Chapter 9: Self-Determination and the Struggle with Death

My decision of life or death is in my hands. (Bilal Kayed, 2017)

How awful death is, and how awesome when one chooses the destiny one wants to make.

(Ghassan Kanafani<sup>104</sup>)

In the previous chapters, I discussed the different conflicts encountered during the various stages of hunger strike. In the final stage, that of negotiation, the conflict is primarily over whether the colonial prison system or the hunger strikers decide their ultimate fate. I show that the hunger strikers develop a control over their bodies that can disrupt the operation of the IPA's power. In their view, it is this self-determination over the end of their lives which demonstrates that the power of life and death rests in the hands of those who resist. It also demonstrates the hunger strikers' ability to claim sovereignty over their bodies, as it is developed in a process that gives meaning to their existence.<sup>105</sup> Sacrificing the body is part of a repertoire of contentious practices (Tilly, 2008) that are used in this political action as they instrumentalise the body into a weapon to threaten the Israeli state with their death. The hunger strikers claim that the more the body weakened and approached death, the more they increased their strength in their relationship with the colonial power – in their words “our strength lies in the weakness of physical body”.

The body-time nexus is critical in their struggle. When they reach more than 70 or 80 days it is hard for them to turn back, and they develop the psychological strength to continue. During the negotiation process, the risk of death forces the state to negotiate and in many of the prisoners' view, ‘as long as they negotiated with me I felt I was the stronger party’ (Adel Hribat). In this situation of objective power asymmetry, the strength of the hunger strikers resides in the immaterial rather than the body. The complex amalgam of immaterial strength and the collapse of the body reveals an important dimension of the subjectivity of the hunger strikers. However, their strength is accompanied by intense internal conflict the source of

---

<sup>104</sup> Short story in Arabic entitled ‘Cannon’. (أدب .. غسان كنفاني : قصة قصيرة : المدفع) (n.d.)

<http://www.adab.com/literature/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=83684&r&rc=5>

<sup>105</sup> I use the concept of sovereignty to show the agency of hunger strikers over bodies. In the context of settler colonialism, sovereignty is invoked when colonised people are dispossessed and massacred. Sovereignty served the colonists in negating indigenous territorial rights and humanity while justifying the right of conquest by claims to national superiority (Barker, 2005: 5). There is a large literature on indigenous sovereignty. For an important recent intervention into the debate, see (Coulthard, 2014).

which is their fear of death. Yet simultaneously the hunger strikers develop a willingness to die. They aspire to life and freedom and repeatedly emphasise that they didn't go on hunger strike to die but to live.

My central argument is that although the hunger strikers are engaged in a form of psychological warfare during negotiations, which on the face of it are determined by the coloniser, they still manage to stage a confrontation on their own terms through their refusal to accept the solutions. This destabilises the structure of Israeli power over their bodies. Even when release is guaranteed, the struggle continues in the negotiations over the specific terms of the agreement. The hunger strikers confront the Israeli authorities arguing about the date of release; this is sometimes a matter of few weeks or even days during which they are on the edge of death before an agreement is reached. Some hunger strikers demanded to be released directly after they called off the strike. For them the outcome of the agreement determines the form of 'victory' they wish to achieve. From their perspective, this confrontation on the verge of death is about who determines their fate, and they want to prove that they are the ones who have control over their existence. This moment represents the apex of political struggle between colonised and coloniser, and is at its core an existential conflict for self-determination through sovereignty over the body<sup>106</sup> understood as an instrument of struggle.

The climactic moment in the struggle with death demonstrates 'the battles of wills' before the agreement is reached. It is a specific point at which the strikers decide not to break and insist on 'freedom or martyrdom'. This exemplifies the final decisive round of the conflict and determines the outcome of the battle. In this critical moment, representatives of the IPA – after trying different forms of oppressive and manipulative tools – concede to negotiations when they become certain that the prisoners won't retreat or break and accept that they are willing to sacrifice themselves.

This process is not linear for the hunger strikers and entails ambivalence as they encounter severe internal conflicts around their fear of death, as they question themselves as whether the IPA will let them die or negotiate their release. The hunger strikers' performance at this moment of self-determination reflects the multi-dimensional character of political subjectivity – their fear, ambivalence and heroism in relation to death. They are sometimes driven to accept the Israeli offer at the end. But those that rebel against the offer politicise their possible death as part of their imagining of a broader collective struggle and a just cause. For

---

<sup>106</sup> In the wider context the struggle is about land, power which I am not dealing with, but this this moment of encounter in the hunger strike could be read in terms of its representation of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.

them choosing death means practicing humanity and self-determination. In their predicament, the hunger strikers report experiencing turning points in which they become reconciled to their fear of death and accept it.

Despite the fact that Israeli authorities offer a negotiated resolution, they expose the striking prisoners to the likelihood of death during their starvation by practicing different forms of violence on their bodies, as well as frequently re-arresting them after release.<sup>107</sup> Mbembe's concept of 'necropolitics' (2003) helps us understand the operation of power on Palestinian bodies in the sense that necropolitics is not just 'a right to kill' (Foucault, 1978) but also the right to expose their bodies to the probability of death. For Mbembe, Foucauldian biopower is not sufficient to address contemporary forms of domination (e.g. Palestine, Africa, and Kosovo) since state violence not only subjects the bodies to the disciplinary technologies of power to exercise sovereignty, but also, through the creation of zone of deaths, makes 'living death' an element of the exercise of state sovereignty, especially in colonial contexts: 'The sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule in colonies ... Colonial warfare is the expression of an absolute hostility that sets the conqueror against an absolute enemy' (Mbembe, 2003: 25). Necropolitical power can also take more ambiguous and complex forms, as it does in the context of hunger strike resistance in Palestine. From the standpoint of hunger strikers, this exposure to death at the hands of the Israeli state is a form of revenge and manipulation, aimed at hindering other prisoners from following in the steps of hunger strikers. Death, as we see in the case of hunger strike, is a condition of existence, a tool in the exercise of domination, but also harbours a potential for resistance. Mbembe's concept applies to Israeli power more broadly, in the sense that Israel practices necropolitics in a colonial context. However, this concept is transformed in the case of hunger strike, in which the subjectivity and agency of the hunger strikers and the broader (international) political context seem to force Israel's hand out of the necropolitical schema. The Israeli state is willing to negotiate because, as the hunger strikers themselves observe, Israel doesn't want them to die.

## **1. Performance in the danger stage of advanced negotiation**

The Israeli authorities start to negotiate during the last stages of the hunger strike and both parties use death as the tool, a 'rescue game' to allow both to end the battle. The prisoners use their impending death to put pressure on the State and the Israeli authorities exploit their fear of death. The various conflicts I have already discussed remain in effect and are intensified during this final stage as the striking prisoners think about their families and bodies in the

---

<sup>107</sup> This technique is similar to the 'Cat and Mouse Act', the way in which the British government dealt with suffragette hunger striking. This act allows the release of hunger strikers who were weakened and became at risk of death and then they were rearrested once their health was recovered and the process begins again (Purvis, 1995b)

course of dying. At this point, they are primarily concerned about the model of ‘victory’ they wish to achieve with regard to the IPA. This final stage varies from one hunger striker to another and there are various factors governing it. Some enter this stage after 60 days, others 80; some endure this stage for a long period (e.g. 50 days) but for others it is short and doesn’t exceed 20 days. It depends on the way in which the prisoners manage their battle and the strategies they use with regard to the supplements intake that can prolong or shorten their hunger strike.

After a few weeks on hunger strike the body starts to absorb its own tissue in order to stay alive. After two months there is the risk of death from heart failure (Miller, 2016). In Adel’s words: ‘in the final stage, the body dissolves and the flesh melts, the body can only operate with the help machines and at a certain moment I realised ‘I am a dying human’ and felt the fear and danger, especially when I felt a long period had passed’.

The prominent conflict in this stage is mainly with the Israeli authorities and it is about who will decide the hunger striker’s fate. Adel Hiribat:

In the last days of the strike, we were convinced that we live the final days and hours of our lives and the conflict starts by questioning ourselves: ‘are they going to solve the dilemma or they will leave me to die? And what if they insist on their conditions?’

He continued by describing the dynamics of negotiations:

Negotiations began after eighty days of strike only through the [initiative of] Israeli intelligence. Before this time, they came to me, but they were not serious. They came to check with the doctors and measured my heart rate. In the beginning they proposed a deal to release me after six months and then after three months and I refused both of them. Mr. Jawad, the lawyer who was the mediator between me and the Israelis in our negotiation, came to me ... Five days after his visit, the doctors’ committee decided to give me injections of Potassium salt. He told me: ‘Ok, you refused a deal to be released after 6 months but why 3 months? After 3 months, you will be released and see your children’. At that moment, I remember I spoke tough words ... even if the deal is for [a delay of] one day [until release] I will not accept.

The lawyer’s role is to mediate between two adversaries and reach agreement but sometimes the conflict reaches a crisis point. Some of the prisoners refused to respond to the IPA’s offers and insisted on their demands. Some of them even refused to speak when the lawyers came to talk to them. For example, Bilal Deyab did not speak with the negotiators but only wrote two words on the wall above his head: ‘Freedom or Martyrdom’. Despite their emphatic rejection

of the IPA's offers, they encounter severe internal conflict and moments of doubt about their action. Adel again:

I don't want to die, I love life. I did not think I was the hero in these moments. At some point I asked myself why I do this to myself? I don't want to die. Why I did not stay another five years under administrative detention ... In the beginning, if I had known I would be in this situation and this would happen to me I might have not engaged in this experience, but I heard that Khader Adnan and other young prisoners had succeeded in their hunger strike, and I asked myself: 'why if my comrades had succeeded would I not? Do they have more capacities than me?' ... However, my journey was difficult. During the strike, I did not have regret but there are sceptical moments that usually come and go.

The hunger strikers experienced severe conflict between the desire for life and the fear of death. Although Adel refused to consider the offer, he experienced moments of doubt about his action as he had not anticipated the extent of his difficult journey. He describes his situation at the end of life in the final danger stage of his 101 days, when he tries to remember his children in the course of losing consciousness.

In the final stage, you feel that you are high up on a tree and you need somebody to bring you down. 70 days and I'm at the hospital tied in bed hands cuffed and feet and urine get out through tube metal like elderly people. Sometimes I lose consciousness. In these moments I remember my house and I forget why I am here – I kept my children's pictures. When we had agreement to release me after three months I was dying and I was released in 20/12/2014. On the last day (105 of the strike) they told me we will release you after 6 months. I refused. The lawyer and the Israeli officer tried to convince me saying that you won't bear the remaining days, you are dying. I didn't agree. However, when they left my room I said to myself: 'why didn't I agree to the six months?', and I wanted to call them but I didn't.

Whilst the Israeli officer and the lawyer negotiated with him, he refused the offer, but when he was alone, he questioned himself. But when they returned, he rejected them again.

My voice was hardly coming out. I was talking through my eyes. When they left me after I refused the offer, I was hesitant and asked myself 'shall I agree or not?' and I did not know what I want. I was about to call them and ask them to come back, especially after they reduced the period to 3 months. ... During the negotiation, I felt as long as they negotiate with me I'm the stronger party and the ball is in my court, and when they came to me I insisted. But in the moment, when they left, I thought why did I do that, why did I insist, and was worried and afraid that they would not return.

Though we are dealing here with an extreme or limit situation and not ‘everyday life’, Adel’s behaviour and reflections in the negotiation stage, and the way he interacts with Israeli military offices, can be illuminated in part by Erving Goffman’s theory of performance in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman highlights that the performances we put on are not fake but can be understood as one of the two phases of the self: ‘I’ and ‘me’, the ‘me’ as others see me, and ‘I’ as one sees one’s self. Goffman differentiates between frontstage, where we perform to an audience, and backstage, which he suggests is the true reality of the self. Backstage is an environment in which we feel comfortable and where we act differently to when we are doing a performance: ‘the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably expect no member of the audience will intrude’(Goffman, 1959: 113).

In ‘the frontstage’, facing the Israeli negotiators, Hiribat wanted to prove he was ‘the strongest’, but ‘backstage’, he feels weak. His account shows his vulnerability at the limit, on the edge of life. This vulnerability is intimately associated with resistance and agency in the struggle for self-determination. Judith Butler, in ‘Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance’ (2016) argues that vulnerability can produce resistance. I dealt earlier with the concept of ‘active victim’ and my argument demonstrated the political agency of the subjected prisoners and their transformation into resistant subjects. We can capture the constitution of agency that produced through vulnerability by considering the performance of Hiribat in the negotiation. He tries to manage the impression of the Israeli negotiators in the ‘frontstage’ by rejecting the offer even though when he is on the ‘backstage’ he wants to accept it. He pointed out in our interview that he felt strong when they negotiated with him because he felt able to exercise his control over his life and death and determine his destiny.

The hunger strikers confront not only the colonial machine but death itself. They live between life and death by experiencing ambivalence and then encountering turning points through which they develop their conception of death in the horizon of self-determination. Their technique of self-determination involves transforming death into life as they envisage the hunger strike’s ‘empty stomach’ as a trope for ‘death for life’. The death of the body becomes the tool to threaten the state, and the fear of death by the two antagonistic parties forces them to reach agreement to end the battle. In the midst of the conflict, the presence of the coloniser became a driving force in maintaining the hunger strikers’ resolve to sustain their battle. For the prisoners the outcome agreement defines which party has triumphed. This is very clear in Khader Adnan’s account, in what he calls ‘adversaries biting fingers’.

I insisted to be released on the 12<sup>th</sup>, I swear to God in front of Jawad Bolous (the lawyer) not to change my mind, even though the Israeli decision paper issued by the Israeli senior army leader that said I would be released on the 16<sup>th</sup> was in my hand, but I refused. They accepted my demands at the end and thank God I was released ...These days were not easy at all, and some people were wondering why Khader insisted on 12<sup>th</sup>. They were not persuaded because they did not understand the important thing that without my insistence to be released on the 12<sup>th</sup> we would not have such Palestinian joy in my victory...The Palestinian negotiators should learn from the Palestinian hunger strikers. The last moments are critical and they decide the victory.

In Adnan's eyes his own victory lay in these four days. Adnan didn't want Israel to dictate the form of the victory embedded in the agreement. Moreover, he criticised the Palestinian Authority's performance in the negotiation with Israeli occupation forces. They opposed the negotiations of the striking prisoners, which embody a radical divergence from the Oslo framework. This is why the Palestinian Authority in the eyes of Adnan and other prisoners is characterised by the absence of a real anti-colonial resistance project to reclaim Palestinian rights.

## **2. The body-time nexus: Collapse of the body and strength**

The body-time nexus is a crucial relation within the hunger strike and the production of subjectivity associated with it. Time makes the position of the prisoners stronger not weaker. As a number of the hunger strikers declared: 'our strength lies in the weakness of physical body'. When death is imminent and the body is in the danger zone and seriously deteriorated, it is hard for the striking prisoners to retreat having invested in such a protracted struggle. But also, with this accumulation of time they build the strength that sustains them against a break. In this final stage, the hunger strikers develop strength alongside the decomposition of the body; they think that if the body weakens the conflict will reach a climax and lead to an agreement.

When their bodies are not in danger the Israeli forces are relaxed, so the strikers deliberately endanger their bodies and refuse vitamins and supplements to put pressure on the negotiators. In the early stages of the hunger strike, the Israeli forces offer general solutions, for example to deport the prisoners outside Palestine. In contrast when they enter the danger zone the IPA offer more focused solutions to free them. Therefore, despite the difficulty of not retreating, the strikers think their position becomes stronger after a long time. Adel:

In an advanced stage of strike I thought that if I had only twenty days I would have broken my strike. It is possible to give up on the 20<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> day, but after 80 days it becomes difficult to end my strike. This is what made me continue my strike.

Moayed Shurab also reflected on how the length of time motivated him to carry on:

After 57 days, I had bleeding in my stomach and couldn't move my body. I felt these were my final hours and I would fall as a martyr on the bed while one of my hands was shackled. The lawyer brought me a paper from the high committee of the hunger strike which approved breaking my strike, but I refused because I thought I would betray myself if I stopped, especially after torturing myself for 57 days.

When prisoners enter the critical zone of imminent death, the IPA no longer uses the neglect strategy and the prisoners potentially gain the upper hand. Bilal Deyab:

In the beginning, they showed carelessness and attacked us. They told us "all your efforts will be in vain". But after 55 days we are the stronger and they retreat. In advanced stages, with every day that passed we got stronger and they become weaker. We could sense this in their faces, their speech and shouting.

Although some hunger strikers were very hard on themselves by refusing supplements and water the result was what they considered to be good outcomes in the negotiations, such as their release in the time frame they had insisted on. Their strategy was to weaken their bodies and enter the danger stage in order to develop their psychological strength and gain the upper hand over the IPA. Hasan Safadi:

I feel that they weaken with the wrecking of the body. In the beginning of the hunger strike they treated us with violence. But with the weakening of the body I see their weakness through their shouting, stress and anxiety. They lose control because of their weakness.

However, the hunger strikers are also aware that they will enter the stage where they will lose consciousness and fall into a coma. Hiribat:

In the advanced period of strike the mind at some points doesn't work properly. In 20 days or 30 you're in full awareness, but in the eighties I am not fully conscious ... you are not the human who think correctly, and sometimes forget your family. Because of hunger there is a lack of salts in brain cells and it is not functioning in the normal mode, the mind is unable to distinguish compared to the beginnings. In the last period, I forget and don't concentrate and at some moments I forget why I am here. I fainted.

Some of their behaviour at this late stage is no doubt related to the way in which the starvation affects the operation of the brain. However, their behaviour is also linked to their political consciousness and ideological background as well as their anger against the occupier, and in this final stage the antagonistic challenge with the coloniser becomes prominent. Although they reach 80 days in the hunger strike and their mind is exhausted, they confront the Israeli negotiators about the form and timing of the agreement. Although they faint due to weakness, when they regain consciousness they say ‘no’ to the Israeli negotiator and continue to refuse the offer. In this transformational battle, the anger against the occupier and the dispossession they suffered reinforce their resistance in a decisive phase of their battle on the brink of death.

### **3. Reaching agreement and reconciling with death**

The conflict is marked by multiple decisive moments. These turning points during the advanced stages, when the struggle reaches a moment of crisis, subsequently lead to a transformational leap manifested in the agreement between the two sides. This ends the conflict and leads to the prisoners’ release and freedom. However, the intensity of the conflict sometimes leads to collapse rather than resolution, and the hunger strikers embark on a second hunger strike to protest against the manipulation of the agreement signed by the Israeli authorities.

The prisoners call the point where the battle approaches the end, characterised by the extreme deterioration of their body, the ‘top’ or ‘zero’ point. Mohamad Alan:

the manager of the hospital wrote a report stating that I reached a zero point and he did not take a responsibility of my life and then within 48 hours they gave me a report that I am no longer an administrative detainee and allowed my family to visit me.

This ‘zero point’ represents the transformational leap in the conflict to their freedom and which Hasan Safadi refers to as the ‘top point’.

Nothing was functioning in my body except my tongue and my brain. I lost my sight and could not hear properly ... In the negotiation, they started to compromise and agree on my demands, so I know that I reached the top, then I said ‘No’. They said stop the hunger strike and we will free you. I said ‘No, I want a decision from the high court approved by the high court’.

Safadi knew that he reached this ‘top’ point when the Israelis started a serious negotiation and offered to free him. At this crucial moment, he required agreement from the Israeli high court, because in his first hunger strike the Israeli forces broke the agreement and renewed his detention while he was in recovery. The conflict had reached a crisis moment rather than freedom and release, a moment of collapse, driving him to wage a second hunger strike. Safadi narrates the collapse:

After I called off the hunger strike, while I was in a treatment period, I was surprised with a new detention order for 6 months. It was a big shock ... I was supposed to leave the prison after 12 days according to the agreement. I entered the second hunger strike with an exhausted body. I was extremely tired from the first battle, but determination was double compared to the first hunger strike, because this time there was no way to retreat and a concrete wall pushing me to continue. It took me 92 days. Most of it was in the hospital.

Some prisoners, such as Khader Adnan, engaged in a second hunger strike when they were rearrested. Different factors which accelerate their release depended on the actors involved in the negotiations – including the family, lawyer, jailor, street and public opinion, political party and the media. Kayed’s account shows how time influences the negotiation by linking it to external factors such as the media and popular solidarity which put pressure on the Israel state.

If they came to negotiate with us in the first five days, we would agree. But they came to negotiate after 50 days of suffering and hunger, asking us to break our hunger strike. In that case, the equation is different and therefore we can’t accept any solution because in the first 10 days there is no media or popular support but after 50 days everything is different.

These external factors, involving demonstrations and clashes at Israeli check points, contribute to accelerating negotiations to avoid the death of prisoners. In Hiribat’s case, the jailor came to play a decisive role in the negotiation.

When I rejected the Israeli offer to release me after 3 months, the lawyer Mr. Jawad left, and the military officer was convinced that I would not accept the offer. I told myself ‘what have I done to myself, at the final moments I don’t know what I want’ ... Imagine one of the jailors talked with me in a friendly way about my situation. He told me ‘are you are a crazy man. Why did you refuse to accept a release offer after 3 months? If you break your strike you will not be in prison but in the hospital for treatment and to be healed from starving in order to regain your health’. His talk had a positive impact on me. The lawyer had left only 2 hours before ... He came back with intelligence officers. I did not discuss or bargain ... I did not say 2 months rather than 3. I accepted the offer! Sometimes the person does not know how to think in this critical stage.

However, this was not the case with other participants who emphasised that the prison authorities used the jailor to manipulate the hunger strikers through influencing them to break their hunger strikes. Even in Hiribat's case, he considered that it was not the role of the jailor as such but avoiding death that led him to accept the offer. It was the internal conflict when he started questioning himself. His account stressed the role of unconscious processes in subject formation.

Maybe it depends on the nature of the 'human'. For me, I got used to saying 'No' my whole life. This is my nature. I refuse everything ... In 1995, I went through 43 days of interrogation and there was no confession from my side. In 1999 I went through 73 days of interrogation. In addition to 152 days of interrogation after 4 years detention. What I want to say is I used to say 'NO, NO'. Maybe this is what made me refuse to break my strike ... I understood from my parents that Hiribat is the unique one, he is the naughty one who always makes trouble. They describe me as being wilful, 'strong' despite the fact that I am not strong. I don't see myself as a hero, I see myself as a normal person.

As we can see in this passage, narrative can play an important role in the constitution of the subjectivity of the hunger strikers. Paul Ricoeur, in 'Life in a quest of narrative' argues that narrative identity constitutes us (Ricoeur, 1991a: 32). For Ricoeur, identity can be created in the dynamism of narrative and its implications. He indicates that the narrative is productive of a particular kind of identity, that is, an identity that narrative produces and that could have theoretically been constituted differently, if events had unfolded otherwise and/or been otherwise recounted by the subject. Narration gives Hiribat a possibility to reflecting on his trajectory and to produce self-understanding in the course of telling a story about himself and his actions. Hiribat's rebelliousness in prison enables him to make retrospective sense of his rebelliousness as a child, and vice versa. For Ricoeur, it is the conclusion of the story that lends meaning to the elements that come before it, something which Hiribat's predicament seems to corroborate.

Hiribat gives us an ambivalent model of political subjectivity, which differs significantly from the traditional model of a rational revolutionary subject who is sure about his speech and action. It is striking how Hiribat shows that he is 'in' and 'out' of political subjectivity as he negotiates with himself to be or not to be a heroic resistant subject. This ambiguity and wavering between (collective) political subjectivity and individuality is worth noting. Hiribat's performance in the hunger strike reveals a model of a political subject that at some points relies on individual characteristics regardless of being involved in political organisations. In comparison, other participants' accounts show that they operate within a more

traditional frame of political subjectivity. For example, Kayed, who is affiliated with PFLP, and Khader Adnan, a militant with Islamic Jihad, give us a revolutionary discourse that lacks this sense of ambivalence. Both are leaders in their political organisations, and in their conceptions of death express willingness to sacrifice the self for the cause in a firm rationalising discourse. They focus on political subjectivity and take distance from individual traits or feelings. These multiple modalities of resistant subjectivity demonstrate the variations in how each individual lives through their experience and also indicates differences in how hunger strikers represent that experience depending on their political position, affiliations and activism.

#### 4. Reclaiming control and exercising sovereignty over the body

They can do anything with the material body except the decision of break the strike. We are armed with will, just cause and logical demands. We are stronger than the Israel forces. I have a decision. (Hasan Safadi, 2016)

The prisoners' understanding of self-determination is linked to reclaiming control over their own fate from the prison authorities. This manner of exercising control over the body can be seen as a form of sovereignty, and its transposition by the hunger strikers from the level of the national body politic to that of the experience of individual body in resistance also allows us to employ it as an analytical concept to interpret their experience. The use of the concept has a complex and controversial history, but it can be useful to interpret what the hunger strikers are saying about the meaning of their struggle, notwithstanding the problematic heritage of the term's role in the European tradition of political theory. According to Joanne Barker, it is

impossible to talk about what sovereignty means for indigenous peoples without invoking self-determination. As a consequence, sovereignty has been solidified within indigenous discourses as an inherent right that emanates from historically and politically resonant notions of cultural identity and community affiliation: sovereignty, in the final instance, can be said to consist more of a continued cultural integrity, that of political powers, and to the degree that a nation loses its sense of cultural identity, to that degree it suffers loss of sovereignty. ... Sovereignty is inherent; it comes from within a people of a culture. (Barker, 2005: 20)

The attempt of the prisoners to exercise their sovereignty is situated in relation to the sovereignty of colonial authorities. I utilise the notion to define the agency of the prisoners over the dehumanising practices of colonial power. The prisoners exhibit and perform their sovereignty from within. Although there is no straight analogy between sovereignty over land and body, there is a symbolic relationship which is significant to grasping the hunger strikers' self-understanding.

Taking control as a form of exercising sovereignty is understood by the hunger strikers as the foundational pillar of self-determination and gives meaning to their existence. The core of self-determination is produced through action and the will to materialise this decision. The hunger strike experience begins with the decision to go on hunger strike; it ends with a decision on the edge of death – to decide their fate. Through the ownership of this decision and the power of *Irada* (will) the hunger strikers express their sovereignty. However, this idea of

'ownership' could be problematised in light of the fact that they also treat the sources of their decision and strength as somehow beyond their control. Thus, they are both sovereign and yet not rational self-possessed calculating individuals. The concept of sovereignty then, is thoroughly transformed by thinking through the specificity of their experience and self-understanding.

#### 4.1 The strength of decision and *Irada* (will)

The control one has over the body is dispossessed by incarceration, but the prisoners engaged in the hunger strike experience themselves as making a decision that can determine their destiny: to live or die. As their narratives reveal, this moment emerges in their struggle with death when they reconcile themselves with death and validate the possibility of death through a discourse of martyrdom and sacrifice. In their view, their decision of life or death represents a kind of sovereignty over the body and it is what make them the stronger part in the conflict with the Israeli authorities. Hasan Safadi associates this strength with the 'right' to freedom:

We are stronger because we have the right. I am the owner of a decision ... The more my body weakens the stronger I get. My body was fading away, but my tongue could utter my decision and say NO. There is a will. If people have consensus on a decision to liberate themselves, they will be liberated. If people persist in their decision and decide on freedom, they will achieve it. They will lose but they will liberate themselves and achieve their freedom. If people decide by their soul and body and thoughts, they will be emancipated.

For him, the power of self-determination involves the ownership of a decision to master the dying body and is associated with the hunger strikers' conception of freedom and emancipation. According to Safadi, the right to freedom is the foundation of this strength which informs his capacity and that of other hunger strikers to make a decision. He stresses the people's capacity of emancipation if they have the strength of decision, even though they pay the high price of the fight for freedom.

The decision of freedom at the price of the body defines the moment of self-determination. In this moment of sovereignty, the body exists at the limit, at the edge of death. Self-determination requires strength in relation to the colonial power and, for the hunger strikers, this strength is attained as a result of the deterioration of the body. They also see this strength as reflecting the weakness of the Israeli forces. In this sense both the hunger strikers and Israeli officers are mutually constituted through the hunger strike. Hassan:

We are stronger than the Israel forces. I have a decision, so the weaker my body gets the stronger I become ... [the Israelis] weaken along with the weakening of our bodies. In the beginning, they treated us in a violent way but when our bodies started to fade away they become nervous and shouted. They lost the control because of their weakness but I become stronger. ... We are in a land stolen and raped by Israelis. Is Palestine liberated? No? But by our actions we teach the next generation. In this way we generate the will not by words but by action.... We can't catch *Irada* (*will*) but we see its embodiment on the ground. *Irada* is embodied by actions. When you see a senior Israeli military officer shaken by us, you see *Irada*.

Safadi gives meaning to self-determination, not only for an individual but also at the collective level; he emphasises that it is attained thorough action and practice leading to generating the will. In his view, self-determination and *Irada* are being produced through actions and are not about the decision per se. Rather, they are created through the constant attempt in the struggle and anticolonial resistance action. Safadi shifts the encounter from its singularity to the collective level. For him, *Irada* is a non-corporeal concept, which comes through the weakness of Israeli forces, who were debilitated precisely when the hunger strikers' bodies were fading away and approaching death.

The hunger strikers invent their own techniques to confront the systematic technologies of power directed against them, with the aim of undermining the sovereignty of the Israeli state over the Palestinian prisoners' bodies. To regain sovereignty over the body, the method of the hunger strikers is primarily the power of the will. The hunger strikers all emphasize that the Israeli authorities can control the body but not the decision they owned by virtue of immaterial faculties. The sovereignty nature of this decision is obvious in Safadi's narrative. He thinks that despite the weakness of the body the decision is not only related to the material body but rather is a matter of a moral strength.

The owner of the right is strong, stronger than you can imagine. It is the strength of the decision, a moral strength. Despite the weakness of my starving body I am stronger than the Israeli party. I become the stronger with my persistent decision not to break the strike when they begged me to do so. I will achieve what I want through weakness of the body.

The body is fragile and vulnerable but, Safadi believes, not easily breakable as long as he is the one who controls the decision. However, he expresses his fear of reaching the crucial point of losing consciousness on the edge of death. He fears losing concentration which might led him to speak inappropriate words.

When I felt the coldness of my body and started to lose my consciousness, I tried not to speak to save my energy. I was fearing to say something inappropriate due to the lack of minerals in my head. They can do anything with the material body except the decision of break the strike.

Safadi, wanting to keep the strength that was accumulated by his consistent decision not to break until the end, embodies the power of will that shapes the hunger striking subjectivity. Their practice and attempt to master their own body to regain their sovereignty that was confiscated by the State of Israel through incarceration is experienced by the hunger strikers as the achievement of agency over the structure of colonial power and dispossession.

#### 4.2 Two moments of decision: decision as calculation and decision in action

There are two moments of decision that demonstrate the agency of hunger strikers; the moment of self-determination when the hunger strikers exist near death and when they first make the decision to go on hunger strike. This first decision is a calculated risk and reaches a climax at the end before the hunger strike is called off. This is the moment when they reconcile with death and convince themselves to sacrifice the body for their cause. The first moment is recounted by Moamar Banat who like Hasan Safadi, thinks that the decision is the expression of *irada* (will):

There are a lot of reasons for my hunger strike including the unjust administrative detention, the fact that the Israeli forces control us like slaves, and because I don't know my future or where I am heading in my life - whether I will be in detention 6 months or 5 years like others. So, I was going to an unknown future in the hunger strike but at least when I decide a hunger strike, I know that I'm going to something known even if it the cost is death, but I am the one who decides.

Making the decision is difficult, since it entails an enormous responsibility. The decision involves a challenge and they assume they have the capacity of translating it into action. However, this moment of making the decision entails a conflict between survival and freedom. Moayed:

I have health problems in my heart muscle, and I know the hunger strike is not an easy issue. There are two conflicting interests: the first is the interest of my body and my family, the other a belief that I would not achieve my freedom without this way. When the Israeli military leader informed me that after the modification of administrative detention law for the fourth time in 2002, he has the full authority to renew my administrative detention for 60 months, and that it might be renewed again and again, I told myself I

would go this way and engage in a hunger strike. I know I will suffer but this is the only way to breathe freedom.

There is a serious dilemma in their risk. They are trapped, their life is confiscated by administrative detention. The prison is an awful reality, a mortification of the self. But they have hope otherwise they will not go for hunger strike. The decision to control the body is to free it not hurt it. Employing their body is a hard decision since they don't want to commit suicide, but it is perceived by them as the only option. The prison is a destruction of their life and their relations with the people they love, so although the hunger strike is a battle, they enter into it encouraged by the fact that some hunger strikers have managed to seize their freedom in this way. They decide to engage in this form of non-violent resistance at the cost of the flesh. As Yunis Hroub said: 'This is a nonviolent form of resistance which hurts nobody but the self. So, I choose my desire of freedom even if the cost is my flesh'. Between these two moments of decision there is the ongoing process of self-determination and reclaiming humanity. For each moment that they live in starvation they live in serious conflict with body, mind and soul, a conflict about whether to continue or to break.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the conflict during the stage of negotiation and the way in which the hunger strikers wage a confrontation on the edge of death. It illuminates their inner struggle with their decision not to break and how it is affected by the weakness of their body. The conflict reaches a crisis point when they refuse the Israeli offer because they want to prove that they are the ones who determine their destiny. However, although the IPA tries to avoid their death, it exposes their bodies to death. Despite their bodies being subjected to multiple forms of violence their struggle for self-determination is experienced by them as demonstrating that they still have control over their body. Their conception of death shows how it can become a means to threaten the Israeli state and is linked to the Palestinian collective self-determination. Even though the Israeli state still retains power over life and death, from their perspective this ultimately lays in the hands of those who resist. At the core, the hunger strike is an existential struggle for self-determination.

## Chapter 10: Strength, Continuity and Steadfastness (*Sumud*)

The will means I continue and keep going with determination to the end. (Moamar Banat 2015)

Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. (Antonio Gramsci)

The practice of the hunger strike exemplifies the Palestinian prisoners' striving for self-determination in the face of colonial oppression. As I showed in Chapter 8, the notion of 'strength' appeared in all the different conflicts the hunger strikers encountered and helped them to endure the battle. In that of the body they cultivated counter-strength to fight pain and most of them claimed that they discovered a 'latent energy' that helped them endure. The more the body deteriorated the more they cultivated the strength to achieve self-determination. This strength is perceived as deriving from different sources. Some relate it to revolutionary consciousness and ideological political convictions or religious beliefs, whilst others link it to a metaphysical power or latent energy. This chapter traces the sources of this strength and the generation of steadfastness (*Sumud*). The concept of *Sumud* is central to the Palestinian resistance narrative and the meaning the hunger strikers give to it ranges across endurance, perseverance, and persistence.<sup>108</sup> These meanings of *Sumud* support them and contribute to constituting their 'revolutionary becoming', to achieve their self-determination, and in many cases help are perceived as precipitating the prison authority's decision finally to negotiate.

This chapter is thus particularly concerned with the question of continuity. The generation of the actions and attitudes associated with *Sumud* is about a crucial temporal moment when the hunger strikers decide to continue and not to break. To illuminate this politicised temporality in their process of subjectivation, I begin the chapter by discussing the notion of continuity and the dialectic of the self, in order to clarify the moment in their internal conflict when the hunger strikers resolve their contradiction and decide to persist with the strike. I then discuss the factor of time (*Zaman*) in the question of continuity and show how the hunger strikers conceptualise time, as well as the strategies they invent to manage it.

This is followed by elucidating the resources of strength they draw upon to establish a continuity in relation to collective subjectivity and the generation of *Sumud*. I investigate the

---

<sup>108</sup>The notion of *Sumud* originally emerged in Palestinian politics in the context of interrogation. It is associated with Palestinian resistance. See *Falsafat Al-Muwajaha Wara' Al-Qudban* (Philosophy of Confrontation behind Bars). Unknown author, publisher, or year published. (Arabic). This is one of the important Palestinian texts on *Sumud* produced in the seventies and eighties outlining the philosophy of *Sumud* during interrogation. The original title was 'The Theory of *Sumud*'. See also Ayesha Odeh's *Ahlam Fi Alhureya* (Dream of Freedom), 2007. She talks about her *Sumud* in interrogation in 1960.

influence of resistance culture, beliefs and ideologies on subjectivity and analyse ethical and political driving forces, as well as the discourse of sacrifice for a cause. The sources of strength largely spring from the narrative of a collective Palestinian dream for freedom and self-determination, the sacrifice for a just cause inspired by icons of resistance, and the antagonistic struggle with the coloniser in the challenge of wills. They entail a form of emancipatory politics<sup>109</sup> that enables the striking prisoners to sustain their hunger strike. In their political discourse, they stress their fidelity to the martyrs of Palestine and their faithfulness to the cultural and ethical heritage of resistance that forms the core of their ethics.

The last section of the chapter employs Badiou's concept of fidelity to illuminate the question of continuity, which offers a useful angle for understanding hunger strike subjectivity. Drawing on Badiou's framework of subjectivation, I postulate that it is only through fidelity that the individuals become subjects in this process – collective subjects. I show that revolutionary political consciousness is what supports them in sustaining the hunger strike; without their willingness to sacrifice their life for their cause they wouldn't remain steadfast and maintain the hunger strike. The notion of fidelity belongs to the domain of ethics, more precisely to the ethics of politics, and Badiou's ethics are constituted by fidelity to the events that make those rare individuals political subjects possible. Fidelity is the process through which the hunger strikers generate the continuity and sustain their struggle.

## **1. Continuity and the dialectic of the self: Victory vs. Break**

The participants pointed out that there is a fine line between breaking or sustaining the hunger strike and this critical moment in the dialectic of the self is the turning point when they decide to continue. I am interested to explore the factors that support and motivate the hunger strikers in sustaining their resistance and the meaning they give to continuity. Continuity for them means victory, break means defeat. In a very short video<sup>110</sup> of Khader Adnan, lasting only a few seconds, taken when he was striking in the hospital, he reiterates: 'the strike continues, the strike continues, the strike continues until freedom and dignity'. It was disseminated widely on

---

<sup>109</sup> This emancipatory politics can be understood through the lens of the hunger strikers' philosophy of freedom and self-determination. Badiou's *Philosophy for Militants* (2012) investigates the enigmatic relationship between philosophy and politics and emphasises that philosophy and other thought-practices must be able to be at the service of politics and cannot or should not dictate to political activists and militants what is to be done. For Badiou, philosophy can't play the hegemonic role over politics because philosophy is always conditioned by existing forms of politics. Philosophy is incapable of producing events or truths on its own; this relation between philosophy and politics builds critically on the Marxist view of the unity/fusion of theory and practice, developing it in a new direction (Badiou, 2012).

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRpizpjXNCw>

social media, and inspired striking prisoners coming after him, as well as being celebrated by Palestinians in their support of the hunger strike.

The conflicts within the self undergone by many hunger strikers were articulated by Bilal Kayed as follows:

Honestly it is a very hard time when a human being experiences hunger and it is difficult to describe this because there is no translation or language tools that can describe the pain, since in each moment in the hunger strike we are in negotiations with the self. There was something becoming bigger inside us that enhanced both the victory and the breaking. One was speaking with oneself: 'enough, break the hunger the strike', at the same time one told oneself 'I have to carry on'. This contradiction and conflict remained with us over the hunger strike and did not stop for one moment. Its fall and rise depend both on one's spirit and the conditions. For example, when I receive news that my mother is waiting for me and my freedom, this enhances the idea of steadfastness inside me, and when I think that nobody cares about me, this enhances the idea of break. The victory and the break are linked to our education. If we are educated and grow up on surrender, believe me, we won't be steadfast for even two days of hunger strike.

Victory and break: these two words condense the dialectic of the self in the struggle. All the former hunger strikers reported that they experienced this moment of whether to break the hunger strike or continue it until they achieve their 'victory'. For them, continuity means victory, break means defeat. Additionally, Bilal emphasised the role of external conditions in feeding his steadfastness. He articulates the negotiation with the self in the conflict and depicts the strength that was growing within throughout the conflict. The dynamics of the contradiction (the rise and fall) play an important role in defining continuity and how the hunger strikers explain to themselves their will to carry on in the battle. The crucial moment in the dialectic of the self is the turning point when they decide not to break and carry on in their starvation. This moment of resolution is described by Moayad Shurab:

The human being in the hunger strike encounters various conflicts, but there is one moment when one needs to decide: either we have a cause to fight for it and are the owners of the right in our struggle for a just cause, or we think 'it is my own body and why am I starving myself and sacrificing my body'?

Shurab juxtaposes cause and right, on the one hand, and the body and material interests, on the other. This contrast also serves to motivate the hunger strike. The meanings the hunger strikers give to their struggle are related to their education, ideology, background and context, which in turn impact on the difference between breaking the hunger strike and sustaining it, as Shurab spells out:

There is a fine line between breaking the hunger strike and remaining in it. We might see food and think that we would eat, or we might see a person in the prison saying how are you comrades and hope your spirits are high. Then we would forget the [inner] dialogue and conflict within ourselves at that moment.

## **2. The temporality of resistance: The battle of *Zaman* (time)**

Most of the participants emphasised that time plays a crucial role in generating the local and international solidarity movement to put pressure on the Israeli state to negotiate an end the hunger strike. Mohamad al-Kik:

When I was approaching the 60 days, I discovered the growing solidarity with my hunger strike, both locally and internationally, and this deterred me from retreating ... I was surprised when the lawyer told me about mass support. All the people stand with me and this made me keep on fighting and spurred my resistance.

The relation between individual prisoners inside the prison and the political movements outside shifts our attention to boundaries – whether spatial, temporal, or otherwise – highlighting the role of external factors in the battle, such as prisoners’ popular movements in general and local and international solidarity. From the hunger strikers’ vantage point, popular support and solidarity is the lung from which the strikers breathe. In their practice of resistance their political imagination embraces the community of Palestinian nationhood, and the international community and ‘all the revolutionaries of the world’.

But maintaining the strike is hard on the strikers and they employ several strategies in order to continue. As Shurab put it ‘we would lose the battle if we can’t manage the time’.

The duration of the hunger strike can itself serve as a stimulus of steadfastness. Banat:

If I wanted to break my hunger strike it would mean that I would lose all the days I spent, and I would not benefit and what I have done would be in vain. So, it will be hunger without a result. If I went on hunger strike for one day and I called off my strike that is fine, but if I went on hunger strike 2 days or 10 days or 20 days? How about 60 days? How about 70 day? All these days would be in vain.

In the temporality of the battle, they emphasise that their battle is the present moment and what they aspire to achieve in the future resides in their present success – their ability to control themselves and not break. Shurab:

I was repeating this sentence: 'it is foolish to leave the existing in search of what is absent'. So, I don't care about tomorrow. When I was in the strike, I told myself we finished today and this in itself is a victory and I was repeating this sentence to my comrades. I just follow this rule. I have a culture that tomorrow is for the future, but my battle is the present moment which is fundamental for *Sumud* (steadfastness). So, this is what helps the human being to progress. Just work on the present moment and carry on and this victory will bring victory.

In this sense, the success of the future is available in the time of the present. This view of time resonates with Walter Benjamin's concept of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with elements of Messianic Time. Historicism according to Benjamin, "contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moment of history" (Benjamin, 1968: 263). He further writes: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its casts its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation"(Benjamin, 1999: 463). 'The time of the now' and temporality is key for hunger strikers as it opens future possibilities. For them, the steadfastness in the present moment is a form of victory. This is their own way of dealing with the time. They think that victory is attained through enduring the present moment with the aim of the accumulation of time. The time of now is a manifestation of keeping going that exhibits the idea of continuity and the constant attempt.

Ayman explained their philosophy of time in relation to the coloniser and depicts the hunger strike as a battle around time in the equation of victory or defeat:

The battle is long and we learned how to manage it and remain steadfast because they treat with us based on *Zaman* (time) and we also deal with them based on time to strengthen our steadfastness. For example, they wanted us to know that they don't care about our death to see who will be steadfast, I or them. I don't give them a chance to break me. Sometimes, the line between defeat and victory is a matter of a few moments between my decision to stay enduring and patient or to rush away.

The messages hunger strikes sent to their families to ease their anxiety always mention that "victory is one hour of patience". It reveals a strategy of time to achieve victory. As Salem Badi commented "between me and victory are moments, so imagine if I did not endure and remain patient and persistent". Shurab explained how they managed time and supported each other in the collective hunger strike.

The hunger strike is a process of building. We used to encourage the comrades by saying today is 18 days of the strike so now we crossed the 2004 hunger strike, and today is 28 days of hunger strike so we crossed the 2012 hunger strike, so we see these days accumulating to achieve the goal.

After accumulating long days, it becomes difficult to break off as they think that if they stopped the strike after such a long journey of agony, they would betray themselves. As Shurab said “I would betray myself if I stopped because I tortured myself for 57 days”.

Badi developed other strategies around time to support his comrades:

There was a hunger striker who was about to stop his hunger strike but I tried to play a game with him until he reached 56 days ... I said let's agree on a time (one week) that you commit not to break. He said one week is a lot so let's say 5 days. When the one week ended I said give me 2 more days. I tried to encourage him by different means other than religion because I am not convinced that I will strengthen them by religious ideology. I said: 'the hunger strike will be a memory, don't let yourself be defeated, you are a hero'.

But managing time for the individual is more difficult than when engaged in collective action where they can support each other. Shurab: 'the individual strike is hard because all the pressure that is distributed among 150 or 200 hunger strikers is centred on one person who is supposed to have the capacity and energy to endure. It is really a bone-crushing battle'.

The hunger strikers constantly fear giving up. Banat:

Death is in front of me, but I keep walking toward it. What makes me continue is that you did not want to fail. The most difficult is the decision, but once you start the journey you have to continue to the end even though there is a probability of death.

This fear motivates the hunger strikers to construct a kind of psychological wall to prevent them from retreating. As Safadi expressed it there was 'no way to turn back. There is a concrete wall built after each step we walked, so no way can we go back'. The metaphor of constructing a concrete wall after each step shows how the time factor is crucial in preventing a retreat.

The presence of fear in the hunger strike is a reminder of vulnerability and evidence that all the hunger strikers experienced moments of weakness that led them to draw on inner sources of strength in order to continue. The way in which some of them describe these moments reflect the ambivalence of resistance subjectivity constituted in this experience, by contrast with the stereotype of heroic revolutionary subject. However, this weakness also reveals their strength, as they embrace their responsibility to prevent defeat as part of broader resistance movement.

Hasan Safadi:

The fear of return from the battle is more difficult than continuing the battle. The fear that occupied us was not about continuing but rather about turning back. Because I accumulated long days there was no way to go back. ... Defeat always causes disasters and victory brings achievement.

Mohamad Sarsik thinks that the essence of this strength is steadfastness when the body deteriorates.

The more I lose 1kg of my body, the more this gives me *Sumud*, patience and challenge because it is a battle we decide to wage. So there is no place for defeat and no way to break because if you break you will break all the prisoners after you.

His account shows that the fear of defeat is interconnected with the collective project of liberation from the occupation. Most of the interviewees reported their fear of the unknown, since the hunger strike is a path to the unknown, but the fear of turning back is greater, as defeat means a return to imprisonment and humiliation. As Yunis Hroub stated: 'Failure means prison, humiliation, break and defeat'.

### **3. The collective cause as a source of strength and continuity**

The hunger strikers' experience much of their strength as springing from their fidelity to the collective cause and the political consciousness associated with it. In their discourse, the cause of liberation from Israeli colonialism is constructed as an immaterial source of strength. Participants believe that there is a 'latent energy (or strength)' within them, associated with the ideas of collective Palestinian freedom and self-determination. The subjectivation process precipitates the upsurge of this energy in the constitution of the revolutionary becoming of the hunger strikers. Shurab told the following story about one of his comrades.

Mahmoud Shalatwa<sup>111</sup> went on hunger strike with us in the mass hunger strike in 2014. He spent 36 months of administrative detention and is the dean of administrative detainees. Can you believe that he was able to jump off the bed while he was in the 56th day of hunger strike? I swear to God it was as if he had eaten a full meal. Can you imagine this?

---

<sup>111</sup> Shalatwa went on hunger strike in 2014 to protest administrative detention, despite the fact he received release orders to be freed from the prison. This was his way of showing solidarity with his comrades. When he announced his hunger strike, the IPA threatened they would cancel his release order and re-arrest him for a long period of time (interview 2015).

Reflecting on his own struggle, he drew the following conclusion:

The experience of hunger strike made me conclude that the human being has a latent energy or superpower. Some people can derive and produce this hidden internal energy from inside and others can't.

Shurab's reflection is crucial since it traces the dynamic of subject formation from within and shows how resistance is conceived as passing from latency to presence in the process of subjectivation and struggle.

### 3.1 The antagonistic relation with the coloniser in the 'clash of wills'

Many of the hunger strikers' accounts register their enthusiasm about having the opportunity to drain the source of Israeli colonial power. Although they shackled and confined, they believe that they can win what they refer to as the 'battle of wills', or, as Khader Adnan described it *Ad-Alasabe*, which translates as 'adversaries biting each other's fingers'.<sup>112</sup>

The one who first says *ah* is the loser. In the last phase of the hunger strike, if we agree to their suggestions in the negotiation process, we are the losers. For instance, they wanted to release me on 16<sup>th</sup> of June but I insisted on my demand to be released on 12<sup>th</sup> and my insistence is the thing that creates Palestinian joy. If I agree to the 16<sup>th</sup> that means I surrender to the occupation's will and they don't recognise Palestinian resistance. They want to say we can give a favour to Gaza and stop the war and not that the resistance prevailed over Israel.

Adnan emphasised that his victory lay in achieving the process of negotiations between him and the Israeli forces and criticised the Palestinian leadership's performance in the general negotiation called the 'peace process' with the Israeli occupation: 'The Palestinian negotiator who surrenders our rights should learn not to give up and surrender Palestinian rights'. By contrast, he posits the hunger strike as a counter-model of negotiation that manifests Palestinian self-determination through sovereignty over the body. This shifts the hunger strike from the site of a singular encounter to the symbolic collective level.

The metaphor of battle was used by most of the interviewees, who describe the hunger strike as a clash of wills between the colonised and coloniser. Banat:

---

<sup>112</sup> See also my discussion of this in Chapter 8 above.

The hunger strike is a battle, a clash of wills with the enemy. We compete with the Israeli forces. For example, in sport, there is a standing position where I compete with someone who faces me to see who can remain determined enough to sustain that stance. In this standing position, the trainer wants to teach us how to strengthen our body's muscles, there are big pressure on the legs to strengthen this area of the body. It is the same in the hunger strike: we feel pain, tiredness and fatigue but we want to continue to see who can continue and win. Yes, there is the body's pain, but it is enjoyable because there is a challenge and you want to know who is the strongest. The hunger strike is pain and pleasure at the same time ... I was teasing the Israelis security officer and three jailers around me. I told them: 'now you are supposed to spend the vacation with your family and enjoy your life, but you spend it here at the hospital busy with my hunger strike'.

Banat gives a description of hunger strike encompassing two contradictory components, pain and pleasure, the bodily pain accompanied by pleasure at the discomfort of the jailors.

I felt great pain in my heart, my heart ached, severe pain to the extent that when I went to sleep I say *Ashadu an la illaha illa allah* because I felt my heart would stop at any moment and I might not wake up alive.... ... In general, the challenge is really joy. The enjoyment lies in the fact that the Israeli jailer suffers in front of my eyes ... I am the one who is chained to the bed with hands and legs cuffed and can't move. Even if I want to go to the toilet, I need permission which might take half an hour and sometimes is not granted. The Israeli jailor controls even the toilet. However, he also suffers like me. I made him suffer. My strike confused and exhausted the Israeli forces.

Ayman Hamdan even regarded the hunger strike as 'a beautiful experience':

The hunger strike is one of the most beautiful experience in my life. Yes, it is painful and hard and it tired the heart but the lovely thing is that we see that this huge entity (Israel) weakened in front of our eyes.

Regardless of political formation or ideological affiliation, the participants share an antagonistic relation with the oppressor. Through this relationship they transform their suffering and anger into strength to fight. They are also united by conceiving the hunger strike as a 'battle of wills'. Indeed, as we saw above, some even regarded it as a competition of sorts, and even drew feelings of joy deriving from taking time away from the prison guards. For Yunis:

The pleasure is at the end when we achieved the target goal. With achieving the result at the end, we feel like the winner in a race who only feels pleasure when he wins, the joy in the victory. The prisoner competes with the jailor in this race. The jailer bets on something and I bet on something. There was a sweet feeling in this confrontation in the sense that I was winning.

He calls the pleasure in the relation ‘the joy of victory’. But he also derives pleasure in the confrontation during the struggle. This antagonistic relationship between the adversaries not only contributes to the continuity of the hunger strikes but prepares the ground for some of the participants, such as Khader Adnan, Mohamad al-Kik, Mohamad Alan, and Bilal Deyab to go on hunger strike for a second time.

### 3.2 The collective dream of freedom and self-determination

The hunger strike is also seen by the participants as a symbol of the collective dream of the Palestinians for freedom. Abd Alazek:

Since the beginning of the hunger strike the confrontation encountered .... is an embodiment of our struggle, is literally a picture of the Palestinian people’s struggle longing for freedom and liberation from the occupier. This struggle takes different forms whether inside the prison or outside, in the cells and interrogation or behind the prison bars.

Through their practice of hunger strike, the prisoners raise their hopes of achieving their dream of freedom. In Abd Alazek's words ‘hope remains with the human until death because we die if we lose the hope’, a sentiment which echoes Mahmoud Darwish’s poem ‘*Under Siege*’, which captures a sense of hope in the face of confinement and colonisation.

This dream of living a free life is experienced and imagined as an unknown path, carrying the risk of death. It is a price the hunger strikers are willing to pay. Moyad Shurab:

No one can predict how he or she will return from the hunger strike. For me, I decided I will not return without achieving my victory. But I didn’t know if I would return or if I would be a martyr. So, one has to walk down the path of the unknown. I took my self and the jailor to the unknown.

The ‘unknown path’ also entails the risk of sacrificing the body for the dream of freedom. Bilal Deyab commented: ‘Everything about the hunger strike is a dream ... I did not stop thinking at all and therefore my mind tired me ... while I am on my way to the unknown path, I see myself closer to martyrdom ... when I look at the jailors’ faces, I feel stronger and keep dreaming of my future. I drew the picture of my future. I dreamed that I will eat food again and will be free and get married’.

The ability to continue the hunger strike is also informed by the public image and collective responsibility, and this underscores that the resistant subject is always a relational subject. The

hunger strikers know that the Palestinian masses see them as symbols of resistance, and this served as a stimulus for steadfastness. Salem Badi:

Our social and political presence plays a role ... people know that I am strong so I can't weaken and break. This is stimulating us. All the political factions who went with me on hunger strike see me a model so there is no way I can weaken and retreat.

### 3.3 Political consciousness: Sacrifice for a just cause and icons of resistance

The strength of political consciousness is identified by the hunger strikers as one of the main sources of resistance. It is manifested by their commitment to local icons as well as international revolutionary figures. Bilal strengthened his will by recalling his comrade Khader Adnan who achieved his freedom after his hunger strike: 'all I want is to strengthen my will and I keep remembering and putting in my mind that my comrade Khader Adnan was released and achieved his freedom'.

Salem Badi commented:

I am nothing in front of Sadat as a model of resistance ... I am willing to sacrifice for Palestine, but this sacrifice is not committing suicide. I love life. Naji al-Ali's cartoon shows that one plants the 'I' and harvests the 'we'. This is our cause and we lived a cruel experience and it is our responsibility to defend our cause - our existence.... I am not living to eat and drink. This is not a life. I would commit suicide if I didn't believe in a cause. I have a cause which I love and I live to defend it. I was not worried about sacrificing my body in front of the sacrifices of the Palestinian people. The memory of *Shuhad* (martyrs) passed through my mind in my hunger strike. I remembered when the Israeli authority handed over the bodies of the martyrs Imad and Adel Awadallah who were buried in Al-Shuhda cemetery in Al-Beriah.

In this passage, Salem Badi powerfully expresses their relationality to the Palestinian collectivity and the way in which it embraced the memory of martyrs. He sees his sacrifice as part of the collective sacrifices and an extension of their broader political struggle.

The Palestinian hunger strikers see themselves as an extension of the broader political struggle at the global level. Badi's subjectivity is inspired not only by the Palestinian martyrs but also by international revolutionary figures. He showed me the photo of his martyr friend on his mobile and said 'This is my friend the martyr Khaeld Bakeer who I consider my teacher'. He then connected his friend to the Czech journalist and resistance fighter Julius Fucik<sup>113</sup>, an

---

<sup>113</sup> The depth of Badi's Marxist revolutionary culture was evident in his knowledge about leftist literatures, and in his quotes mentioned Fucik's *Notes from the Gallows*, his prison writings from 1942-43, which narrate his

inspiring figure for the Palestinian Marxist left. Since Badi adheres to a Marxist revolutionary ideology, he gives us a universal discourse of revolution which entails an intensive affective relationality to comrades at large, either locally or globally.

Many other participants who like Badi are affiliated with PFLP mentioned Fucik<sup>114</sup> and other leftist revolutionary figures such as Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and the IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands.

This shows how the consciousness of resistant subject embraces the revolutionary heritage of what they call *Ahrar Al-Alam* (the revolutionaries of the world). The way in which this gives meaning to their struggle depends on their political background. The participants affiliated with the PFLP invoked international icons more than those affiliated to religious ideologies such as Hamas and Jihad. However, the commonality across all the hunger strikers, whether from leftist or religious organisations, is the political cause of anti-colonial resistance and the inspiration of exemplary figures, in particular those who initiated hunger strikes and succeeded in achieving their freedom. For example, Moayed Shurab, who is affiliated to Hamas, said:

I had a photo of Samer Issawi and Khader Adnan. Despite their [different] ideologies the image of both Adnan and Issawi occupied my mind.<sup>115</sup> I remembered that they had not compromised. Samer refused to be deported to any place and insisted after a long journey of suffering to return to Al-Izaria [prison] in Jerusalem. I ascribe to religious ideology, but I am inspired by the image of *Munadlin* (strugglers) regardless of their ideological background. I am inspired by how they manage the battle alone and their moment of victory. The moment of victory strengthens me. Invoking a successful model of resistance strengthens us.

Despite Adnan's affiliation to Islamic Jihad he was an exemplary figure for hunger strikers from different political parties, whether from leftist secular ideologies or from the Islamic movement like Hamas, the political competitor to Jihad amongst the Islamists. Although Shurab ascribes to religious ideology, he was able to bracket it for the political cause which united all the political prisoners. He draws inspiration from the image of freedom fighters regardless of the ideological background, whether leftist or religious. Acknowledging the limits of the revolutionary icons, it is difficult to minimise differences in politics and strategy. Although some of them transcended religious ideologies for a collective cause, religious belief

---

imprisonment, torture and hopes for a communist future (Fucik and Sillen, 2017). Fucik was hanged by the Nazis in September 1943.

<sup>114</sup> See *Butulat fi aqbiyat al-tahqiq (Heroism in the Interrogation Gallows)*. Unknown author, publisher, year published. (Arabic).

<sup>115</sup> Samer Issawi is a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

also plays a role in feeding their resistance. As we saw earlier, some participants think that God gives them the strength to cope with their hunger strike, though as Abd Al-Jaber Fuqaha who is affiliated with Hamas pointed out ‘religion could strengthen us, but it is not enough’. What is common among all hunger strikers, regardless of their ideological backgrounds, is the oppression they suffer and the antagonistic conflict with the occupation, the reason of their imprisonment. What particularly strengthens them is the moment of victory after waging an exceptional battle individually against an armed and aggressive state.

#### **4. Fidelity as continuity**

One way to approach the nexus of continuity and subjectivity theoretically is through the notion of fidelity. Political consciousness as a source of strength supporting the continuation of hunger strike resonates with Alain Badiou’s concept of fidelity. Badiou’s philosophy offers a framework of analysis for capturing the political subjectivity of resistance in the case of the hunger strikers. He suggests that the notion of ‘fidelity’ to the truth-event, understood as a rupture in what a given situation treats as possible, is more important than the event itself. Through fidelity, human ‘individuals’ can become collective political ‘subjects’, or as Badiou puts it, one rises above existence as a human animal and ‘becomes the immortal that one is capable of being’ (Badiou, 2001: 46–49).

Badiou's ethics of truth are constituted by a declaration of fidelity to the rare events that seize individuals. The basic principle of Badiou’s ethics is formulated as ‘keep going’ (79-80) and is rooted in the idea that fidelity to the truth-event takes exceptional effort. In their fidelity to their struggle, the hunger strikers provide a striking instance of Badiou’s ‘keep going’, especially in the way that the imperative to continue helps them to resist any attempt of manipulation and achieve a collective form of subjectivity. The participants shift the singular encounter of the hunger strike onto a collective level by emphasising that the prison authorities confront not only the individual but also the Palestinian collectivity as embodied in the hunger striking subjectivity. This is brought out with particular force by Shadi Mali:

We hadn’t engaged in hunger strikes merely to protest the administrative detention, but the strike is an extension of the history of agony that our people had been suffering from the long history of unjust occupation until now. The oppression that I lived is experienced by all Palestinian people, by my mother and my neighbours in the refugee camp I live in. The fact that I live in a refugee camp is a history of occupation and oppression.

Mali continues by explaining that belief strengthens the will to continue even if martyrdom is the price.

It is a matter of conviction and will. As long as I am convinced and I practice my belief, that means my will won't betray me even if I might reach the martyrdom moment like what happened with my comrade Munir, but I would have retreated.

Abd Al-Jaber Fuqaha also stresses the necessity of the belief and convictions to prevent breaking:

If we don't have the belief it would be hard to go on hunger strike because if I am persuaded that they would not respond to my demand what would be the point of going on hunger strike? I should have the conviction and confidence. I should believe that I will triumph. We have the belief that we will achieve the goal. If you did not have the belief you would not have been able to continue and would return half way broken.

Fuqaha associated the essence of that belief with the idea of sacrifice for a cause and martyrdom understood on a collective level. The hunger strikers regard death as an act of resistance and an achievement for the sake of a just cause. For them, it is 'a death for life'. Their fidelity to the collective cause and Palestinian self-determination springs from their belief in a just cause and their faith in the necessity of confrontation and ongoing resistance to the Israeli occupation. But this is accompanied by intense conflict with the self in the ordeal of starvation. There are moments of fall and rise in their inner struggle, but the crucial moment in the dialectic of the self is when they decide to continue. This moment of resolving that internal conflict is crucial to understanding the formation of subjectivity in the hunger strike. Their faith in and commitment to their cause was experienced by the hunger strikers as allowing them to rise above all conflicts and support their steadfastness. In Badiou's words, a 'leap of faith' is what informs the refusal to break the strike.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter elucidated the sources of strength and the generation of continuity and steadfastness which supported the hunger strikers in sustaining their hunger strike. This strength subtended what we could term their revolutionary becoming in a process of subjectivation through what some of the hunger strikers refer to as the 'latent energy' residing immaterially within their subjectivity. The antagonistic relationship in the clash of wills with

the IPA was experienced as activating this latent energy, creating a rupture and bringing a revolutionary subjectivity into existence. The dream of freedom and revolutionary collective consciousness are viewed as among the key sources of strength allowing the hunger strikers to sustain their struggle. The generation of steadfastness is produced in the temporality of the battle and reinforces this strength. *Sumud* is about this crucial moment when the hunger strikers decide not to break and is related to the time factor, the fear of retreat and defeat, and the public image and collective responsibility of the hunger strikers. The sources of strength are fundamentally about the production of subjectivity in the transformational process of revolutionary becoming, whilst the incentives of steadfastness emerge in the temporality of the battle to reinforce this strength – a dynamic that can be helpfully illuminated through Alain Badiou’s notion of fidelity.

## Chapter 11: The Meaning of Victory: Sovereignty Over the Body in the Hunger Strikers' Philosophy of Freedom

Bodies fall, but not the idea. (Ghassan Kanafani)

There is a place for all at the Rendezvous of Victory. (Aimé Césaire)

You are not defeated as long as you are resisting. (Mahdi Amel)

Sculpture of the victory sign made in solidarity with the Palestinian hunger strikers in 2017 by a Lebanese supporter. The fork is no longer a utensil but transformed into a symbol of victory which is emblematic of the victory of the soul (*rouh*) over the body. They believe that their strategy of disembodiment is the hunger strikers' technology of resistance.



Fig 1

This chapter seeks to capture the hunger strikers' theory of subjectivity as it emerges through their praxis. The hunger strikers constitute themselves as political subjects and their hunger strike offers a powerful illustration of how the body may be experienced and used as a political instrument. I explore the way in which the hunger strikers conceptualise the relationship between body and mind and the 'strength' of consciousness in their philosophy of freedom. I also investigate their different interpretations of 'victory'. The participants give 'victory' a meaning related to the collective Palestinian idea of resistance, in which bodies are seen to succumb while ideas survive. This meaning necessitates risking the body in the process of reclaiming their humanity, and affirming self-determination against the domination of colonial power. The striking prisoners see 'victory' in achieving their freedom after reaching agreement

with the prison authorities and calling off the hunger strike. It is the technologies of the self, developed through the hunger strike itself, that make such a 'victory' possible, by disrupting the sovereignty of Israeli authorities over the hunger strikers' bodies.

Employing Foucault's concept of the 'technologies of the self' (1990) helps to analyse the effect of the hunger strikers' practices on their bodies and 'souls', and how they allow them to transform themselves and exercise sovereignty over their existence. The technologies employed by the hunger strikers operate through the duality they create between the physical body and the immaterial mind and *rouh* (soul); they require instrumentalising their bodies by transforming them into 'weapons'. This is how the hunger strikers express their subjectivity as a formation comprising seemingly contradictory binaries. Their logic of the hunger strike is reflexively built upon the contradiction between the weakness of the physical body and the immaterial strength of the mind and soul. The latter are experienced as emerging out of the collapse of the body and, as the previous chapter detailed, are what allow them to continue their hunger strike.

### **1. The body as 'bridge of return'**

Bilal Kayed's message on his 70<sup>th</sup> day of hunger strike articulates the hunger strikers' conception of victory in relation to the meanings they give to their bodies, minds and souls on the one hand, and to the Palestinian collectivity and the 'revolutionaries of the world', on the other. Kayed's words exemplify key features of the conception of subjectivity in the discourse of the Palestinian hunger strikers and the meanings they give to the soul, mind, and body in the context of the hunger strike as an extreme situation. In their accounts of their practice and experience, hunger strikers tend to separate body from mind, but also mind from the soul; in Kayed's words, 'the body disappeared, the mind was gone, but the soul was sufficient for me'. After 70 or so days of strike, striking prisoners live in a semi-conscious state, the body collapses and wastes away, but what remains for them is the *rouh*, which in Kayed's view is sufficient for achieving victory.

‘For our steadfast Palestinian people... For those who are determined on victory for *Alhaq* (right), *Alwatan* (homeland), pride and dignity ... In the seventy days of battle of honour, steadfastness and challenge, we are fighting together for the victory of proud Palestine, for our proud resistance movement and for every revolutionary involved in the project of liberation the land. My words are present with you, in your honourable support and solidarity. In these hours, the body disappeared, the mind was gone but the soul was sufficient for me. The soul remains steadfast and decisive in its decision; no force in the world can make it retreat: victory or victory. Victory is soon if God wants – so raise victory sign always and forever. My mother, my people, I am faithful to the covenant. I am victorious by you and with you. Let’s make our bodies almighty honourable bridges to be stepped on by all rebels and revolutionaries. The sublime is our goal and hoping that *Shahada* (martyrdom) might wash away our failures and sins to raise up this country. A new stage of struggle has begun which must be victorious only when we keep its banner faithfully, so do not drop the banner. We come back to resist, not to compromise as uttered by the martyr Abu Ali Mustafa. His memory is present with us, inevitably victorious. Your comrade Bilal Deyab 23/08/2016. Barzellan Hospital, Asqalan

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
 يا جواهر شعبنا الأبي الصامد...  
 يا الذي رفضنا إلا أن ينتصروا للوطن والعز والإباء...  
 في يوم السبعين معكم الإباء والعمود والتعدي التي تخوضكم  
 معاً إنتصاراً للسلطان الأبيبة والمركبة المظالمية وإنتصاراً لكل  
 نائر في مشروع تحرير الأرضي.  
 أنتم بكلماتي الماخزة بكم في دقائق السرف والمرية لكي أكون في  
 سلماتي هذه قد غيب الجسد وأذهب العقل لكن الروح التي  
 تكنتني ما زالت صامدة وما زالت على قمرها الذي لا يتكف لأني  
 قوة في العالم أن تشبهه إما النصر أو المصير فالنصر قريب  
 بلذنه الله فارضوا علامات النصر دائماً وأبدياً...  
 وأنا يا أبي على العهد ديا شعبي الأبي ولن تنزلي يا أبي  
 علامة النصر إلا أنا منتصراً بكم وكم معاً لكي تكون أجدادنا  
 جهور عز ليدوسوا العرابين والنازيين.  
 فالعلا مرادنا والشهادة فيك عمل لنؤبنا وتناعننا عن رفعة  
 هذا الوطن. وقد بدأت مرحلة جديدة من مراحل الضال الذي  
 لا بد أن ينصر عندما ننافظ على لوائه بأمانة فلا تقطوا  
 الراية وعدنا لنناقدم لا لننادم كما قال الشير أبو علي مصطفى  
 وذكره جاهره بيننا.  
 و حتماً لننتصرون  
 أخوكم  
 المنسبر بلال كايد  
 2016/8/23  
 مستشفى برزلاي  
 مدينة عسقلان  
 صورة الأسم بلال كايد  
 الصفحة الرسمية

Fig. 2

Kayed uses the concept of soul, even though he is affiliated to the Marxist PFLP. This begs the question of the conception of death within a Marxist ideology; Kayed's reference to *Shahada* (martyrdom) raises the further question about how this limit-experience reconfigures Marxism into a vehicle for political spiritualisation. Most of the participants, from religious and non-religious affiliations, use the concept of *rouh*. However, those whose political formation draws from leftist Marxist ideologies focus more on the strength of the mind and revolutionary consciousness. But, as we have seen, at a critical point of starvation, when the body collapses, even these hunger strikers perceive themselves as no longer relying on the mind as a source of strength, because the mind ‘has gone’ (in Kayed's words). Most of them express their fear of the 'betrayal of body' in the advanced stage of starvation, which affects their ability to stay consistent and make rational decisions. In order to cope with this extreme situation, they creatively appropriate the concept of *rouh*, from which they feel themselves able to derive strength and power. In the beginning, they used the body and mind, but in the final stage they believe that they transcend the physical body and rely on the *rouh*. In line with the

body's betrayal that they had anticipated and feared from the start, the body failed. The only thing they think remains is the *rouh*. In Kayed's expression: 'The soul remains steadfast'.

The meaning of victory in the eyes of the hunger strikers is linked to the dignity of the soul, as embodied in their liberation and the end of their detention, and this is the ultimate goal of their hunger strike. As Yunis Hroub put it: 'if the prisoner is released with his soul, it means he is released with victory'. This suggests that the 'soul' is understood by the hunger strikers as the essence of their experience. From their standpoint, the ultimate reason for undertaking their battle is to protect the dignity of the soul, which has been systematically targeted by the coloniser. Continuing the process analysed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, in which the development of the modern prison system shifted the principal target of control from the body to the soul, the participants think that the Israeli authorities aim at reforming their soul through their bodies (Foucault, 1977). Their technologies of the soul are produced and lived through what Foucault (2005) called 'political spirituality'<sup>116</sup> (Afary et al., 2005). The discourse of hunger strikers around the willingness to sacrifice the body for a revolutionary cause and the existential commitment to martyrdom represents the political spirituality which asserts their political agency. The struggle for victory for a political cause is transformed in the hunger strike movement into a spiritual experience, a form of faith. Thus, Marxist martyrdom, as practiced by PFLP-affiliated militants, can be seen to represent a form of 'secular spirituality'<sup>117</sup>.

Kayed's image of the body, as the 'almighty honourable bridge to be stepped on by all rebels and revolutionaries', is a metaphor used by most of the hunger strikers. In their political grammar, the connotation of the body as a 'bridge' signifies the value of sacrifice for achieving freedom. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1996) reminds us, bodies create meanings. Butler (1988) discusses Merleau-Ponty's accounts of bodily experience, which defines the body as 'an historical idea' rather than 'a natural species' and is understood as embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities (Butler, 1988: 403). Palestinian bodies have inherent meanings given to the body in Palestinian political culture and this cultural symbolism of the body is an extension of the participants' political thoughts around the idea of martyrdom and the feasibility of resistance that is linked to the wider Palestinian discourse of anti-colonial resistance.

---

<sup>116</sup> See also a text by Christian Jambet in the collection *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* (Armstrong, 1992).

<sup>117</sup> On Marxist spirituality, see Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Boer, 2009).

For hunger strikers, there is agency of the body that for them inhabits cultural and political meanings which shape their corporeal experience as an act of resistance. The body is regarded as an instrument for liberation and is conceptualised as part of the collective culture of anti-colonial resistance. In their system of meaning, the bridge is a path and a method of resistance. This discourse shapes their consciousness in that they don't see the martyr's body as an object of loss but rather as a vector of freedom and self-determination. The martyrs of resistance are regarded as attaining a form of immortality, through the return of their *rouh*. The metaphor of body as 'a bridge of return' is part of the discourse most of the political organisations regardless of the ideological background in their party literature, communiqués, and everyday speech.

The sacrifice of the body is constructed by the hunger strikers as symbolically reproducing collective subjectivity and national identity. This discourse of anti-colonial resistance in the broader Palestinian context invites the question of whether the sacrifice of the body is the only way for liberation and self-determination. This can be partly answered in relation to the way in which Israeli settler-colonialism aims at the elimination of Palestinian existence, both material and immaterial (or symbolic), and thus of the trajectory of resistance (Hanafi, 2013; Kimmerling, 2006; Wolfe, 1994). 'The return' is the term used in Palestinian political discourse to refer to the return of refugees expelled from their land in the *Nakba* of 1948. In the massive non-violent protest in Gaza, known as the 'Great March of Return' in May 14, 2018<sup>118</sup> demanding the right of return for Palestinian refugees, Israeli forces killed over 60 Palestinians and injured 2,700. These 'marches of return' began in March 2018 on 'Land Day' protesting the blockade imposed in Gaza.

---

<sup>118</sup> Reference to a news item about this <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/14/israel-palestine-defiance-death-gaza-jerusalem-suffers-horrific-day-of-violence-for-four-years>

This artwork titled 'The Return of the Soul', was made by Jane Frere to depict the dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948. The return signifies the return of the refugees expelled from their lands. The Gazans, in memory of the Nakba, performed conditions of expulsion and the possibilities of return.



Fig 3

The strategic usefulness for the participants of the metaphor of the body as a bridge in the course of a hunger strike translates into a broader politics. The bodies were sacrificed to serve as the infrastructure of the idea of the soul, i.e. with their death, their spirit (the immortal martyr) is imagined as infusing the will of the living to continue resistance. The body turns into an instrument, a bridge, for the return of the soul and negatively symbolises the latter's immortality. In the conception of sacrifice, the body wasted away but the soul remains. In this logic, freedom is for the soul, not the body. The body here is a crucial vehicle of protest which creatively contributes to political resistance and serves as a political agent. The strategic role of the body in the instrumentalisation process works as a successful strategy in the antagonistic conflict with the Israelis and it also works as a key component in a spiritualisation of the politics of resistance.

## **2. The relationship of body and mind and the role of political consciousness**

The human is a cause. (Kanafani)

The hunger strikers' understanding of the relationship between body and mind is expressed through their struggle with the materiality of the body, experienced in terms of physical pain and desire for food. They argue that the source of their strength lies in their mind and political consciousness, which strengthen their will to cope with the pain of starvation. Salim Badi:

I am sure you know Pavlov's experiment with the dog. When he gives food to his dog, he rings a bell. He repeats this procedure, so the dog associates the food with the bell. One time he rang the bell but he did not bring food to the dog so what happened with the dog? The dog's salivation dropped, and this is something purely physiological related to the body. This is exactly what happened with us in the hunger strike, but the difference is that we have a cause. The imprisonment was a real hurt to our humanity.

For Badi, the difference between him and the dog in Pavlov's experiment is that the Palestinian hunger strikers have a 'cause', which is the main reason for their ability to endure starvation and physical pain. Furthermore, Badi associates his very existence as a human with the cause. He and the dog are creatures, but what differentiates the hunger strikers from Pavlov's dog is not just the mind, but adhering to a cause. In this sense, Badi provides a third dimension for the definition of the human – not the creature who is equal to an animal, nor the human who has a mind that distinguishes us from animals, but rather the human as the one who has a cause.

Badi is affiliated with the PFLP and this is part of their political discourse and of Palestinian politics more broadly and their commitment to the collective cause is experienced by the hunger strikers as their source of strength.

Munir Abu-Sharar's account resonates with Badi's argument. He too stresses that the hunger strikers' belief in their cause and their political consciousness were the main sources of strength that helped them to struggle with their body and resist bodily desires:

the definition of human is the one who controls their instincts. Human beings have a mind and this is what differentiates us from animals. The human will is very strong, and is not equated with instinct. The instinct is nothing against the will. I do not put my will in the place of my instinct ... what strengthens my will and steadfastness is the consciousness and my conviction that I made a conscious decision and that I have a cause and I would die for this cause.

In the hierarchy that implicitly governs their system of meaning, the hunger strikers' put the human will over instinct and bodily desires. Abu-Sharar stresses that the difference between humans and animals lies in our ability to control our instincts and desires through the mind. This is in line with Badi when he differentiates the hunger strikers from Pavlov's dogs through their commitment to the cause. However, Munir Abu-Sharar adds a new dimension, that of 'consciousness'. It forms part of a bundle of concepts – instinct, human will, mind, cause and consciousness – which are interconnected and work together to form the meaning of being human for the hunger strikers. They experience their set of beliefs as grounded in their political

consciousness and interpret their commitment to the cause as varying depending of the level of that consciousness.

The research participants know that the body will reach a point of collapse after a long time of starvation and fear the ‘betrayal of the body’. Bilal Kayed theorised about the relationship between body and mind:

The body mediated between defence and attack in the hunger strike. We turned our body into a tool, and I came to know that what moved and controlled my body is my mind. All the time over my hunger strike I was afraid of the idea that my body would betray me, and I wouldn’t be able to witness the victory moment. The occupation knows that our body is the concrete material that they work on to break our consciousness. So, the occupation, on the one hand, crushed the body and left it to time, hunger and exhaustion and all of this is reflected on the consciousness. And I want, on the other hand, to protect and maintain my consciousness so that my body would not collapse. I was aware that my body is the site of work between me and the occupation. So, the issue is would this body triumph and prove that it is united with the consciousness or not?

The hunger strikers appear to identify three elements in their definition of being human: the human is a creature similar to the animal; the human has a mind which controls their instincts and desires and entails a basic level of consciousness; and the human has a cause associated with a high level of consciousness. It is this third element, which they see as allowing them to risk their life. They present themselves as completely embodied and absorbed in the cause and their consciousness as shaped by it. In this way, they regain their agency and sovereignty over the body and confiscate the strength from the prison authorities to control the body. Although Kayed was concerned about the possibility of bodily collapse, he was not afraid of the betrayal of his consciousness, and thus breaking the body became more difficult because of the way it is experienced as being united with consciousness.

I have the suspicion that my body would collapse, and I would drop my weapon and I could not continue because I know I might die at any moment and would lose my capacity. I had this obsession ... After 25 days, I lived in a state of expectation that in any moment I might go up or down. So, we need the resistance legacy we grow up on and not only to rely on the will but also to rely on our education.

The will is not sufficient in the eyes of hunger strikers like Kayed, as they need an anchor, a solid base, to support them. It is their consciousness and belief in the cause which plays this role for them, or in Kayed’s words ‘the ‘resistance legacy’ and ‘education’ associated with the PFLP’s revolutionary ideology. The concepts of will and consciousness are not separated but

work together in their technologies of the self, reflecting the set of practices or beliefs and perceptions about the self and the broader frame that gives meaning to their experience.

The level of consciousness varies from one hunger striker to the other and Kayed's testimony doesn't represent all the hunger strikers. The strength of consciousness plays a decisive role in the way the hunger strikers express their struggle with their bodies. Some of them were afraid of the break of consciousness in the battle. The importance of consciousness and commitment to the cause are particularly articulated by former hunger strikers affiliated with the PFLP. This is because of their political education and mobilisation and how they trained to be political subjects in the PFLP. They were trained to sacrifice for a collective cause, as in Naji Al-Ali's cartoon which was mentioned by Badi, in which the 'we' harvests the 'I'. Their understanding of political subjectivity is shaped by their political education and the cultural resistance legacy that embraced the revolutionary heritage of what they call *Ahrar Alalam*. They think their solid revolutionary consciousness is shaped as a result of holding that leftist ideology which they believe supports their resistance. Abd-Razek Faraj

The decision of hunger strike was very hard because we are aware of its consequences. The hunger strike is a very cruel experience. The human uses his own body and it's as if the body collaborates with the jailor and both of them conspire against us. On the one hand, the jailor tries to break the hunger strike by all means and on the other the body and its biological needs count. So the will is one party and the body and the jailor the other. The human fights through his will and mind because he took a conscious decision. The mind and the will fight because the body would weaken, dissolve, and fade away.

Kayed and Faraj share the fear of the betrayal of the body, but Faraj's formulation of his conception of the role of the body is different from Kayed, since in his case he feels that 'the body collaborates with the jailor' and he is thus involved in a fight against both. He constructs this binary between the body and mind to cope with this fear and with the cruelty of the experience. This fear remains with the participants for the duration of the hunger strike and plays a crucial role in their internal conflict.

### **3. The relationship of *rouh* (soul) and *jasad* (body) in the hunger strikers' philosophy of freedom**

The discourse of hunger strikers communicates a dynamic relationship between body and soul. They create a hierarchy between soul and body, *rouh* and *jasad*, and prioritise the soul. According to them, the body is employed as an instrument in resistance to protect the soul.

Directing violence to their bodies through self-starvation was seen as the only option left to protest against the coloniser's project of dehumanisation. By employing their bodies, they fought for their dignity and freedom and refused humiliation. with a rational calculation that they might die or damage the body in the process. Mohamad al-Kik:

In the definition of all revolutions, cultures, and religions there was not something called the 'body' apart from the *rouh*. If one would choose between harming either the body or the soul all revolutions said: one must choose to harm the body, not the soul ... If the body perishes, it will be the bridge of return. Therefore, in religion, God says 'those who died in the cause of God are not dead, but alive'. Yes, the body is the cost, it is sacrificed for the sake of soul. In all revolutions, even leftist revolutions, they basically respect the soul, even if the body has gone away ... Soul always is respected ... My battle was very serious and dangerous. It was harmful to my body and to the Israeli occupation as well, but it was reviving and refreshing to my soul. I had a natural reaction which was in line with moral law, international law, and divine law. If I was subjected to soul harm I must revolt even if the cost is the body ... In this battle I was going for freedom ... going to the soul without the flesh. *Shahada* (martyrdom) is attained without the body.

Here the soul and body are envisaged as in conflict but also in terms of a very dynamic relationship. The soul conquers the body and according to al-Kik the body has to be smashed because his soul was hurt. The soul is the priority because it is connected to dignity and refusing humiliation. The body is the price. The way hunger strikers conceive the soul and body in their system of meaning by giving the soul hierarchical superiority is partly drawn from religion. However, some other participants with Marxist political backgrounds also used the notion of the soul as we saw in the messages of Bilal Kayed at the beginning of this chapter. As mentioned previously, participants who are affiliated with groups shaped by religious ideologies used the concept of soul more than the leftists who put emphasis on revolutionary consciousness. But al-Kik also invokes the global revolutionary heritage to validate his conviction that the soul is the priority. He conceives the battle as harmful for his body as well as to the Israeli occupation, but also reviving and refreshing for his soul. He posits the contradiction between the material body and the occupation on one side opposed to the soul on the other. He links the body and occupation because the body betrays the prisoners when it collapses and the occupation practises violence on starving bodies. The hunger strikers acknowledge the body but at the same time, in order to cope and live with a hunger strike they were led to think of soul and body in hierarchy. This hierarchy is part of their political and religious culture and is used as a strategic demand of this particular struggle. The relationship

of soul and body is linked to their concept of freedom and *Shahada* (Martyrdom). Mohamad al-Kik:

Even if my body was sacrificed I wanted my freedom ...when I felt my soul is touched and hurt I smashed my body despite my love of body and its needs. Everybody loves life, who of us does not love life? Who does not love to eat or to be with his woman and practise his own desires?... Food is a pleasure for me I enjoy eating but when I went on hunger strike ... my pleasure became refusing food.

Freedom is here linked to the soul not the body. They believe that the soul remains if the body dies and therefore use the metaphor of the body as “the bridge of return” in that the soul of martyrs is immortal and inspires the Palestinian collective to carry on resistance.

Some participants acknowledge the body even though the priority is for the soul, but others did not care about the body at all. For Moamar Banat the body is nothing, since he thinks the fight for freedom and dignity is for the sake of moral not material issues. He emphasises that the main conflict is with the coloniser not the body.

My thoughts were different from hunger strikers who were hoping their bodies would help them in the hunger strike. Of course, everybody fears death. It is their right to fear death, therefore they took supplements because they don't want to die. For me, the body was nothing. I did not care about the body. I conceive things in different way. Things are purely moral issues for me. It is my freedom and my dignity, and I would sacrifice myself for these moral things. I consider the battle is mainly between me and the Israeli authorities – not with my body.

Banat introduces a conception of freedom which completely negates and denies the material for the sake of the moral. He relies on this notion of morality and gives us a very firm heroic discourse of a political subject which differs from others such as Mohamed al-Kik who acknowledge the body but reach a moment in which it becomes a necessity to smash the body in order to redeem the soul.

Hasan Safadi also presents a moral discourse of freedom and dignity as opposed to the material body and its needs. He links his individual freedom with the Palestinian collective's unachieved freedom under occupation.

I did not hurt my body. I wanted to emancipate my body, the same as how I emancipated myself. The motive is the freedom, the annihilated freedom in Palestine. When there is freedom there is no oppression and assault ... By hunger striking, I did something that was not normal. I transgressed ‘the normal’ because at a certain moment I reached this alternative: freedom and dignity or food and drink. The hunger strike is better than the

reality I was living in. In the hunger strike, I was on the abyss of death but as the *Hadith* said ‘Verily, deeds are only with intentions. Verily, every person will have only what they intended’. My intention was not to die but to defend myself and my people and my home land.

So, we can see that the exercise of power practiced over their bodies develops a positive notion of power which gives rise to emancipation not suicide. Safadi underscores the intention not to die but to defend his people, the self, and homeland, while relying on *Hadith*. This use of religious sayings and texts within the prisoners’ political-spiritual practice helps them to develop coping strategies in exceptional circumstances.

*Shahada* (martyrdom) is important for them, but it is not sufficient. The hunger strikers have differences about how they see martyrdom, even between those who adhere to a religious ideology. Whereas Bilal Deyab argued that the martyrdom discourse is ‘not enough’ others, such as Mohamad Alan, place greater emphasis on religious ideology rather than the political cause – Alan recounts how he tolerated the body's hurt for God's sake and *Alwatan* (homeland). Overall, they focus on their dream of freedom to live an honorable life with their loved ones, not on a death discourse of sacrificing the body in a form of necro-resistance, and this is what gives them the strength to develop a willingness to sacrifice it in a calculated risk. This is brought out by Mazen Natcheh:

The hunger strike is a calculated risk. On the one hand, if I succeed, I would free myself. If I died, I will die anyway one day. Besides, they are killing me. I am dying every day in prison. If I died, the administrative detention file will be closed and there are others – many – who will live after my death. We thought of all the possibilities ... In life, there is no battle without wounds. The risk is big, and the victory is big. In the collective hunger strike, there were counseling sessions for the prisoners. We explained to them that we were going to a battle. We explained that they must take a great amount of water before they start the hunger strike. We told them that we embarked on a hunger strike to live an honorable life, not to die, but if death happened, we die. Who said I was on hunger strike to injure my kidney or my stomach? Rather, I went on strike to live a good life. However, all the prisoners expected injuries – there were no other means.

They expect injuries as the price of victory. There will be some loss. This implies a productive notion of power in which there is a battle for life not for death, though death is one of the possibilities. To cope with this is they have to have hope. Without it, in their view, they will not go for hunger strike. Banat presents what he calls ‘*Yakin*’ – a belief and certainty of achieving freedom and victory.

I expected the worst in the hunger strike. I expected everything bad would happen to my body. I told myself I had to put the body aside. My freedom is not related to my body. It is not related to my leg or my hand or my nose or my eye or my heart. It is related to me 'I'. Freedom and dignity and victory are moral issues which are not linked to the body. All our thoughts and practice are because we are struggling for moral things rather than material ones. I did not give any value to the material things, but I valued the moral things because they are the fundamental issues for us. ... If I am free but injured after the hunger strike, I don't care. It is expected. I thought about it when I made the decision ... Ok, something bad was expected, but at the same time I had the *Yakin* (certainty) that I will achieve a good result without any harm to the body ... I had *Yakin* and I don't know how I have it. It is from God. *Yakin* is trust, the force of *Yakin* it is not from me. It is not exactly the *Irada* because the 'will' means that I keep continuing to complete the way with determination to the end but I am certain that I will be released and achieve my victory ... *Yakin* is a complete belief in the result.

Moamar Banat deals with the struggle of body with the help of *Yakin*, a theological term which he believes enables a coping strategy to endure the hunger strike. He doesn't know from where this originates and claims it is from the God, and the use of these metaphysical beliefs helps him develop strategies to 'transcend' the physical body and foreground the 'soul'. This takes us back to the beginning of the chapter, and Kayed's message, written on the 70<sup>th</sup> day of his hunger strike, that what remains is the soul.

#### **4.The meaning of victory in the conception of soul**

The hunger strikers express their agency through a sense of ownership over their decision and an affirmation of the willpower embodied in their resistance action. In Kayed's message, we see that the decision is central in achieving the victory: 'The soul remains steadfast and resolute in its decision; no force in the world can make it retreat: victory or victory'. So, the soul is constructed as the entity that maintains decision through steadfastness. There is only one option – that of victory. Retreat and withdrawal are not options. The synonym of 'victory or victory' is 'victory or martyrdom', the two words used repeatedly in their discourse, especially in negotiations or their messages to the public. In this relationship, they view the weakening body as supporting the soul and therefore the distinction they pose between body and soul is not always as clear as they suggest, but this separation is the way they express the relation between them. Mohamad and Mahmoud Al-Balboul sent a message to their mother:

My beloved mother, the body is fatigued and exhausted but the soul remains fighting deriving patience from your tears. We die standing and our *Irada* won't kneel. This is what we have inherited from the martyr

Ahmed<sup>119</sup> Al-Balboul. My beloved mother, we are fighting in this battle to be with you.... This battle is the tax of honour and dignity. We will remain the sons of the martyr Ahmed Al-Balboul – please be strong and do not worry about us. We are fighting with our souls. Please forgive us for everything and pray for our victory. Victory or victory.

When Balboul used the phrase ‘the battle is the tax of honour and dignity’, what he meant is that the material body is sacrificed for these moral notions. They fight and achieve victory with the soul which is connected to human dignity. Yunis Hroub also refers to this:

If the prisoner is released with his soul, it means he is released with victory. If one surrenders to suffering and to psychological pressures imposed by the occupation the destruction and defeat will stay inside. If the prisoner does not surrender it is different ... When I went on the hunger strike, I was not in a rush. I did not know anything about the hunger strike. Death was an option, but during the hunger strike the issue of death was resolved. I wanted to reach the result whatever the price. In any case, I am ideologically a victor. If there is no retreat or withdrawal ... (then) all options I consider *intisar* (victory).

So, the soul is not defeated if the prisoner remains steadfast and doesn't surrender. The definition they give for dignity is to remain steadfast and not to break. Mohamad Balboul:

Dignity is the respect of our enemy of our action. They fear us and study their words before they speak with us. Dignity is not to give up my position and the decision I made and to live freely regardless of the circumstances and not to break the prisoners’ movement after me or break my mother.

The prisoners keep their dignity and are released with what they perceive as a dignified soul if they maintain the hunger strike without retreat. Victory lies not only the result but in the steadfastness in relation to all the violence practiced on their bodies. *Intisar* is *Sumud*. Mohamad Balboul thinks all the systematic methods of power are disrupted by their *Sumud*.

I did not feel the power of this state (Israel). Our experience was about our victory over them through our *Sumud*. I didn’t engage in dialogue with them unless was going home. They tried all their methods but this was my condition, to be freed. They had all the systematic methods but they were destroyed before it affected us.

This level of *Sumud* is nourished by the love of mother and his martyr father who inspired him. There is difference between the message of Bilal Kayed and Mohamed Balboul. Both of them

---

<sup>119</sup> Their father, who was assassinated by the Israeli forces when they were children.

focus on the soul and the mother, but since Bilal Kayed is a member of the PFLP, he addresses not only his mother but embraces the imagined political community of the Palestinians. In contrast, Mohamad Balboul focuses on familial relations. He believes that he was on administrative detention as a punishment for being a son of a martyr father. He focuses on the familial relation, the loss of his father and the love of his mother. He only addresses his mother in his message. Balboul doesn't have a quest for heroism. He said: 'I don't want to be a hero but to be with my mother'. Although some of hunger strikers focus more on the Palestinian political collective discourse whilst others focus more on their families, depending on their political activism and their position in their political affiliation, their individual freedom is not separated from collective freedom.

## **Conclusion**

Victory for the hunger strikers is attained in the process of practicing a unique kind of sovereignty through certain technologies of the self they develop in the course of the hunger strike. This sovereignty reveals a contradiction between the weakness of the body and the strength of the soul, which was gained through strategies of separation. From their standpoint, this weakness of the wasting body and its vulnerability as a weapon threatens the colonial power. In addition to the body and mind, the soul is a third value that signifies meaning in their resistance. Victory is linked to the dignity of the soul. If the prisoners are released with the soul intact they are, in their own eyes, released with victory. Despite the risk of losing or damaging the physical body they don't want to diminish the soul by surrendering.

For them, the Palestinian soul is inextricably connected to the idea of resistance and dignity. Bodies die but the soul remains immortal. The body and soul are in a contested relationship. The dignity and freedom of the soul can't be attained without the violence against the body. The body becomes a burden on the soul, so the hunger strikers destroy it. The body is not just a burden that has to be 'smashed' for the dignity of the soul but also a tool of resistance. It is transformed into a weapon and the Israeli state fears its death. The body's inherent meaning for them is that it offers a path for the return. Freedom for the revolutionary lays through the path and following this is where they feel they are free, even though they don't know if the end is death. Hunger strikers use the Israeli fear of their death. But the main fear for the colonial power are their ideas not the body, because it makes the existence of Israel difficult and insecure. They fear resistance as well as the international embarrassment of the slow death of the hunger strikers.

The conception of soul helps the hunger strikers to endure starvation and pain. The soul for them is the source of strength and does not derive exclusively from religious concepts. For them dignity resides in the soul, not the body. Their ideas about the relation between body and soul involves a bundle of concepts including dignity, freedom, sacrifice, life, and love. These are preserved at the cost of the body and are held not only during their hunger strike, but before and after as they are inherent in their legacy of resistance. The freedom they aspire to is not a metaphysical dream but materially achieved when they are released; but this freedom is seen as an incomplete freedom, for under occupation their individual freedom is part of the struggle for collective freedom – ‘our bodies are bridges’.

The hunger strike is practiced singularly but it is not individual. The successful conclusion of a hunger strike is a collective victory connected with the collective cause. It is practiced by many since Khadar Adnan’s strike in 2012, and is now part of the collective struggle. The strength of these individuals comes from the collective cause. The strikers stress that the singular hunger strike was commenced because there were no other means. They are revolting against detention for several reasons; for themselves, their families, the cause of Palestine, the collective martyrs. They are not all driven by the same motives, but all of these factors are there. Some focus on their political collective discourse, others on the family, but in all cases their individual freedom is expressed and experienced as part of a collective freedom. The hunger strikers all communicate an aspiration to a life away from occupation and detention. It is a revolutionary vision and the most salient words in their discourse (death, life, sacrifice, dignity, freedom) reflect their conception of the soul. They call their struggle ‘the battle of the empty stomach’, as a result of which they have to rely on the *rouh*.

This photo depicts the victory sign.

Written in Arabic is:

*‘the stomach is a tool of resistance’.*



Fig 4<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup> This image is widely used, for example by prisoners’ rights organizations’ posters.

## **Chapter 12: Conceptualising a Limit-Experience: The Hunger Strike as a Near-Death Event**

I must have been dreaming. What had happened to me is unreal. (Adel Hiribat, 2015)

Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream? (Edgar Allen Poe)

This chapter sheds lights on the participants' conceptions of the hunger strike as the experience of a limit and examines how this structures their actions. I begin by discussing their sense of the hunger strike as an 'unrecognisable experience'. This is followed by my analysis of the transcendental state reported in their accounts, particularly with regard to pain versus spiritual strength. This dimension of transcendence and the subjectivation of the limit experience is a singular feature of the case study and was expressed by most of the participants when they reflected back on their existence near death. They view the hunger strike as not only a political strategy for liberation but also a journey of self-discovery and transformation encompassing a 'mystical' dimension which is not only beyond their capacity of representation but is also inaccessible to the Israeli authorities, who employ a very different interpretive 'scientific' model. I engage with the hunger strikers' conception of death as an act of resistance to show how their faith in their cause supports their steadfastness and helps them rise above the pain to attain what they perceive as a state of spirituality.

The chapter further analyses the metaphysical concepts they construct or adapt, and how this informs their political practice and subjectivity. It reflects on what meanings they give to the dying body when it is superseded by nonmaterial notions such as will, soul, latent energy, hidden power, God, etc. Most of them, whether from secular leftist or religious parties, said that the 'latent energy' from which they derived their strength was mysterious and they related it to other metaphysical or hidden sources that helped them endure the pain. Even the participants affiliated with leftist organisations, who spoke more about political consciousness, in the last stage, when death become imminent, increasingly saw themselves as relying on the 'soul' – as I already noted in the previous chapter. But they were unable to give a clear interpretation of how this power operated and spoke of being surprised at the explosion of latent energy within them and at their capacity to endure the pain of starvation.

The limit experience of hunger strike poses a number of theoretical and methodological questions around the subjectivation of the hunger strikers. The interviewees see the hunger strike as a journey beyond their imagination or description which incorporates a mystical quality of self-knowledge. As Mazen Natcheh said ‘the lesson learned out of this extraordinary experience is that we don’t understand the human self and we know little about our own bodies’. For them, what they went through is unrecognisable and literally unspeakable and can only be lived and felt. Phenomenological research methods are helpful in exploring human subjectivity in terms of what individuals are really feeling and experiencing, but there are some aspects of the experience that arguably cannot be captured phenomenologically. Martin Jay (1995) discusses Foucault’s distinction between the phenomenologist’s version of experience and that of another tradition that tries, through experience, to reach a point of life that lies as close as possible to the limit of living. For Foucault, experience has the task of ‘tearing’ the subject from itself, what he terms a ‘limit experience’ because it transgresses the limits of coherent subjectivity (Jay, 1995: 158); this is the ‘point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit of extreme’ (Foucault and Trombadori, n.d.: 31)

On the basis of the participants reflections on their own experience, we could say that the ‘transcendental’ aspect of hunger strike exceeds phenomenological analysis or description. The interview material raises the theoretical and methodological challenge of articulating near-death events and the kinds of subjectivity constituted through them. Resistant subjects undergoing this near-death experience embody a form of subjectivation whose significance lies in non-conceptualised features. We can draw inspiration here from Mariam Motamedi-Fraser’s ‘Once Upon a Problem’, which questions the capacity of sociology to explain and theorise experience, and raises the question of what the implications would be if the aim of sociology was not only to theorise and explain experience but also, sometimes, to be an ‘informed provocation’ of experience? (Motamedi-Fraser, 2012). Without reducing the near-death event to analysis and rationalisation, the dilemma lies in finding a methodological and theoretical framework that does not betray the nature of this near-death event which transcends ordinary language and presentation, as well as traditional forms of knowledge and analysis.

## **1. ‘Unrecognisable experience’: The hunger strikers’ conceptions of limit-experience**

The participants often spoke of the hunger strike in terms of an ‘unrecognisable experience’. They speculate about their experience and call it into questions. The shared view among them is that reaching the near-death stage of the strike led them to generate unanswered questions about themselves, and about the nature of reality. Adel, who went on individual hunger strike for 105 days, thinks that what he went through is ultimately an unreal and unimaginable experience:

honestly, when this experience comes to my mind, I can't believe I spent this long period on hunger strike. When I remember my experience, I don't believe I went through this experience. It is a dream. Sometimes I say what I experienced is unreal! Is it reasonable I spent 105 days starving? Is it real?

Moayed Shurab, who went on 64 days of collective hunger strike protesting administrative detention in 2014, describes the hunger strike as an ‘unrecognisable experience’:

The hunger strike is an unrecognisable experience, it is an experience beyond the imagination. It is difficult for any human being to recognise it. When I remember that we were in the hospital shackled and tied in beds, our hands and legs cuffed for 35 days and only when we needed the toilet, did the jailer unshackle us and sometimes did not, I honestly think that we were not real! I can't bear to sit in a chair for a few hours as I feel I need to move, so how could I have spent all this period shackled in the hospital? Can any human being endure this experience? Now I don't blame people who question and suspect whether humans can endure starvation for long. I mean if I myself, the person who experienced it, questioned if it is really true ... Is it reasonable? I don't know, maybe God gave patience and strength of human, maybe it is something about the capacity of a human being.

The powerful questions they generated in their speculations demonstrate the difficulty and complexity of the limit-experience that they could neither rationalise nor represent. For them hunger strikes maybe easy to discuss and refer to but the human suffering embodied within them is unspeakable and unrepresentable. As Adel Hiribat commented:

the word ‘hunger striker’ is easy to pronounce. Now Khader Adnan is on hunger strike but I am the one who feels with Khader not you. I feel what he is living and experiencing now and the other things he thinks of because I have experienced his situation. I did not expect that this experience would be so cruel and painful ... We are talking about 105 days. It is easy to talk about the hunger strike in terms of language.

The hunger strike participants regarded it as a ‘dream’ because they couldn't find a language to interpret the limit experience. For Adel, only those who experienced the hunger strike can

understand the big difference between action and words and the experience reveals non-linguistic and unspeakable aspects that go beyond language. As this experience of this inexpressibility is still conveyed through words, we can draw here on Mariam Motamedi-Fraser's argument in her *Word: Beyond Language, Beyond* that words are not only about language but rather convey a range of bodily, sensory, effective and non-conscious relations, and that consider words solely in terms language has limiting epistemological and methodological implications (Motamedi-Fraser, 2015).

The intense prolonged time of hunger strike involving the decomposition of the body takes the participants to a point beyond which they were unable to express their subjective experience. Due to their inability to describe the difficulty of what they had undergone during 'the death experience' as they put it, they had to regard it as a 'dream'. This conceptualisation of the hunger strike problematises the way in which we can understand their experience. In saying the hunger strike is a 'dream' and 'we were not real', they expose our inability fully to recognise a limit-experience that transcends our rationalisation in terms of its intensity and seems to require thinking in terms more related to mysticism than social science. However, despite the difficulty of interpreting the lived experience of the hunger strike, the rich meanings and original language the hunger strikers use in describing their action creates new patterns shared among the participants, which shape their political grammar and are open to scholarly analysis and reflection. These include the concept of 'latent energy', the explosion of 'immaterial strength' and the specific idea of *Rouh* (soul) which comes into existence in a form of newness and creativity directly linked to the hunger strike.

## **2.The transcendental near-death state**

The hunger strikes reported that they live a 'spiritual purity' as the weakness of the body allows the hunger striker to exist in a transcendental state, signified by the idea of *rouh*. The physical body was wasting away but the soul lived in a state of a spiritual purity. Mohamad Balboul:

I reached this stage because I have a just cause and I accepted the results. I had a pure state of mind. I was satisfied completely. I wanted to see my father. It was an unbelievable spiritual state ... If I felt hungry I dreamed that my parent took me to a restaurant. I lived this as if it were a truth because when I woke up, I felt full and un-hungry.

Some of the participants said that in the final stages of hunger strike a high state of spirituality had been attained. Hasan Safadi explained the origins of the *rouh*:

In pre-Islam, there is something called *Rahbana* (the monastic). When a monastic person went far to the top of a mountain and left all material things behind him, his body became weak and his food was little. But when we speak with him of spiritual things his spirits are high because he thinks of who created the universe, who created the sky, the land and mountains. His body is weak but his *rouh* is high. The body become meagre but the *rouh* is high and transcendent.

Balboul links this state of being with the just cause that gives him security and satisfaction. He reported that if he died he would be happy to meet his father, the martyr.<sup>121</sup> The injustice of captivity and the hardship of starvation underlie the resort to spirituality. Because of the crisis in their material context they resort to spirituality, by transcending the material body which from their perspective is mortal, as opposed to the immortal *rouh*. Turning to the soul lets them rise above their bodies. They cope with the hunger strike in their attempt to take control of their dying body and practice their sovereignty. Beyond a certain point they could not describe the pain that was associated with a hidden power that was perceived mysterious, unrecognisable and beyond representation.

Itaf Ilyan reflected on the transformation process from ‘normal’ pain to a mode of being that goes beyond pain.

The state of contemplation we lived made us dive into the depth of the self and here lies the process of change. It is not the pain but our diving into the depth to a state that goes beyond pain. It is not easy to reach this mode of being because sometimes we respond to pain with quick reactions. But contemplating pain allows me to extract the points of strength from within.

We see in accounts such as Ilyan’s that the pain the hunger strikers experienced is a crucial component of their spirituality and, moreover, that in the subjectivation of the limit experience they transform pain into something spiritual – in Ilyan’s terms, ‘a state that goes beyond pain’, which can be accessed through ‘contemplation’. Munir Abu Sharar was unable to describe the pain he was in during the latter part of his hunger strike as by then he was hallucinating:

---

<sup>121</sup> ‘We will remain the sons of the martyr’. This what Mohamad and Mahmoud Al-Balboul wrote in the message they sent to their mother. They stress the fact they derive strength in their hunger strike from their father, Ahmed Al-Balboul, who is regarded as a martyr. The image of their father's assassination by the Israeli forces remains in their memory and this motivates them to continue their strike.

I can't express the amount of pain and suffering I had felt. I was living in hysteria. Can you imagine that you would get dizzy and faint while you are sleeping? So, death became your fainted. In my life, I reconciled with death. But I didn't reconcile with sickness and pain.

Bilal Kayed contrasted the pain in interrogation, where prisoners were subjected to torture and psychological pressure, with the pain of hunger strike.

The hunger strike is much more difficult. In the interrogation, they might ask about certain information, but one can be intelligent and cunning in replying. But in the hunger strike there is no emotional intelligence to play instead of pain. We can be intelligent but at the end one surrenders to one only plain fact which is pain, and in this case the human had two options – whether to have patience with pain or not. So, the hunger striker transformed into a Christ who received all the blows and at the same time these blows were your source of strength.

Although as the quotes above show it is experienced very differently, for all the hunger strikers pain is the catalyst of spiritual strength, and in this sense Bilal thinks that the hunger striker is transformed into a kind of Christ. The symbolic figure of Christ as a martyr is significant and relates to the hunger strikers' ideologies and symbolic systems. Bilal's discourse links Muslim and Christian traditions of thinking about martyrdom in terms of the relation between religious will, bodily pain and resistance. Although Bilal is affiliated with a leftist party, he adheres to a martyrdom discourse similar to participants affiliated with religious parties. The Palestinian hunger strikers are fighting against colonial oppression in a context where they have access to these religious and political traditions that inform the meaning they give to body, death, and pain. The way they give meaning to their experience is from a specific set of embedded and meaning-forming cultural and political traditions. Each expressed this strength and its source in a different way. For example, Khader Adnan thought that he connected spiritually with God who transformed the water into sustenance.

The body weakened and deteriorated and its strength weakened as many things in the body didn't function well, but thank God the mental capacity remained undamaged. It is important that we connected with God because there was great power that protected us. When I say God transformed the water we drank into food and drink I mean that I lived 54 days on water because God made water a great thing. Even though water is transparent it contains great secrets.

Ayman Hamdan said that he didn't know the source of this strength but related it to metaphysical sources and called it 'hidden power'.

In the hunger strike one feels like a small child but there was hidden power from God helping us. I thought a lot of my family in my solitude ... I don't know how we resisted and remained steadfast, but I felt the strength from God. How come we endured and had the patience? How come we did not become insane while we are on hunger strike for more than 100 days? One asked oneself how come we did not lose our minds, because we were talking to ourselves more than 24 hours a day.

Hamdan reported that he was about to lose his mind as a result of the internal conflict. The hidden power protected him and helped him to endure the conflict. He was surprised that that he remained steadfast for more than one hundred days. He was surprised by this 'hidden power' and unclear about how it operated.

The interview excerpts communicate some of the meanings the hunger strikers give to the material body and the metaphysical notions that inform their practice and subjectivity. For them it is about the limits of the strength of the material body which is superseded by nonmaterial faculties or entities such as consciousness will, soul, God. Most of the participants reflected that they couldn't adequately capture some dimensions of their experience and what they lived was deeper than the representation of the experience in speech. According to the interviewees' own reflection on their storytelling, meanings are greater in the experience. Ahmed Remawi made a similar comment pointing out that the meaning in the experience is greater than what can be possibly recalled. This sheds some light on the limits of the phenomenological method. Analysis and awareness of lived experience is at the centre of phenomenology, but despite the rich meanings extracted by the participants from the hunger striker, they are not explicitly conscious of some of the patterns emerging from their limit experience. They mention the mystical aspects of the experience that they could not represent in words, and those aspects of their inner life that they could not explain.

### **3.The journey of self-discovery and the mystical quality of self-knowledge**

Most of the interviewees commented that hidden capabilities exploded into existence during the encounter with the IPA at decisive moments of the conflict. These hidden capabilities were manifested in a form of creativity and a mode of self-knowledge and self-discovery. Mazen Natcheh:

In this experience, one discovers his own self, one learns about his will, both moral and material. Regarding the material, I was on hunger strike and I resisted the body and its material needs. In addition, I resisted the temptations of the prison authority and destroyed them.

This discovery confirms their views about transforming the latent energy into resistance action and can therefore also be approached as a creation, an invention, as well as a radical transformation and reveals their capacity for resistance at the limit. This discovery of the will also enhances the hunger strikers' self-confidence. Natcheh:

We discovered ... capabilities that are hidden inside us. The hunger strike enhanced our self-confidence. We learnt that the human should trust his abilities and potential even if it is against nature, even if it transgresses nature.

Some of the hunger strikers understand themselves as transgressing nature by resisting both the desire for food and their bodily needs, on the one hand, and the prison authority's efforts to break them, on the other. They view what the Israeli prison authorities try to do as the manipulation of the 'natural' drive for self-preservation. Most of the hunger strikers emphasised steadfastness of the will and contextualised it within the Palestinian discourse of *Sumud*. Natcheh:

Willpower can result in an explosion of the self. In the normal situation I can't carry 100kg but if I insist on carrying them I can. ... if anyone saw a car fall on a person, he or she can't lift it, but in a certain moment one can lift it despite the fact that he can't carry it. It is a matter of determination, will and decision.

Most of them also speak about self-discovery and knowledge and the confidence they cultivated by discovering their will and capacity in the experience. Moamar Banat:

Every human imagine that he knows his own capacity, but only the experience emphasises self-knowledge, moreover the experience strengthens the heart ... so one shouldn't be afraid, one should just take risks for anything. This requires toughening the heart.... the confidence lies in the strength of the heart. In my view, this experience creates self-confidence. It makes us go beyond negative traits to positive ones, in the experience you try to make new things out of yourself.

Their experience led to transformation and the cultivation of strength. Abd-aljaber Fuqaha:

Now I feel my strength, I feel I am a human with strength, and if one has strength, will and high spirit, he can challenge and encounter any battle. This gives us motivation to act. There is no tough battle like the hunger strike. ... It led to comprehensive self-change. The one who experience it feels he or she can engage on any battle without fear or borders. When a human feels *Sumud* (steadfastness) and such strength, he believes that he can achieve anything ... after one engages in 60 days, the human would go through major

change. My hunger strike affected the body. Now I have visual impairment and my hair fell ... the experience is the test and it reveals the human. Some people were not able to do it but we should not give up. This experience taught us that we can achieve our goals.

The participants think speak of the hunger strike as a journey of self-discovery and self-knowledge and reported that there is an almost mystical sense of knowing the human self that characterises their experience of it. Mazen Natcheh:

The most important lesson during the hunger strike is that we realise too little about our own bodies from the time we were born until the day we die – you, I, and everyone don't understand the human self.

According to their narrative, the intensity of limit experience not only exploded the latent energy that lay within but also generated unresolved questions about the resistant subjectivity and the complex process of subjectivation undergone in this exceptional experience. Their interaction with the intense amount of violence undergone by their starving bodies draws out the latent energy that helped them to rise above the pain. Their accounts of their experience convey the idea of a psychological strength that sustains them, allowing them to transcend pain and prevent it from controlling them. They have unresolved questions on the mystical aspect of this strength and its transformation, and they constantly link what they faced in their experience to the Israeli state and the intensity of the violence of the colonial machines that operates on their bodies and souls. They confront a sophisticated set of advanced technologies of power that systematically dispossessed them. But despite that, they also express the fact that they have their own power and strength, which erupted in a confrontation that disrupted Israeli technologies of power.

Abd-Aljaber Fuqaha thinks that the Israeli authorities also face difficulties in understanding this exceptional case of the hunger strike, despite the research they have access to about the starving body.

Some physicians in the hospital have direct contact with Israeli security forces because they subjected us to medical investigation. They are researching our case to understand the hunger strike in detail. They wanted to study us so that they know how to deal with us in the future ... They study our daily movement, they register every movement in this file, how many times we go to toilet, what happened to our bodies, etc. These cases of hunger strikers are strange for them and they can't understand them because each human being is different from the other, and therefore they can't conduct a comprehensive study about the effect of starvation on our bodies due to the differences of each individual. Some of us were able to remain steadfast and others couldn't.

The participants believe that the Israeli state uses their hunger strike experience to develop its scientific capacity both for medical research and for developing its techniques of repression. For example Moayad Shurab said:

I met a doctor who was responsible of the hunger strike medical file. While I was helping her in translation she told me 'I work on scientific research and it is our honor that we are Israel number one in medical studies on the case of the hunger strike. We became a respected medical reference in scientific research' ... So, she benefited from us as a doctor by collecting information about us. She told me that she was going to attend a meeting in the hospital with a team of doctors to do a presentation aimed at explaining the case of hunger strike. So, we became a field of experiments for them ... all the changes on our bodies are all recorded on daily basis. We were watched by cameras and every motion is documented and recorded through reports, blood tests, etc.

The lawyer Jawad Bolous emphasised that the Israeli authorities studied the differences between the hunger strikers. He reflects on Israeli strategies.

The negotiation with each prisoner varies depending on the psychology and the mental state of each prisoner. From my experience with the Israeli security nowadays they use the psychological war. I assume that the Israeli security had evaluated the psychology of each prisoner. They have classification of hunger strikers and their reactions. They benefited from the previous experiences and built accumulated knowledge. It is difficult to generalise about Palestinian hunger strikers. From my experience in my negotiation I knew them well. Sometimes I tell the Israelis that this one is very stubborn and determined on his position so don't try to impose anything on him. He is very determined on his demands and it is difficult to compromise.

According to the hunger strikers not only are these scientific researches aimed at developing tools to control the starving bodies, but their tools of resistance are constrained during the hunger strike with the help of the Israeli doctors - as I discussed in Chapter 7. They criticised the fact that in the name of the 'ethical committee' the hunger strikers are subjected to forced treatment and feeding in Israeli hospitals. From the perspective of research participants, the mystical quality of self-knowledge of the individual in the hunger strike hinders the Israeli doctors. The explanation the participants give for such difficulty resides in the differences between individuals in terms of their *Sumud* (steadfastness), as well as the qualities of their soul, will and resilience. This difference is fundamental to the understanding of hunger strikers' experience and the formation of their subjectivity. From the standpoint of the hunger strikers,

Israeli biopolitics failed to control them or gain real insight into the hunger strike despite their interpretive model of scientific research.

Mohamad Balbul views the Israeli authorities as ultimately powerless, since their methods of control had not affected him.

I heard the Israeli negotiators speak to each other: 'it seems he will surrender because he is tired' (I was in intensive care). When I heard them, I laughed even though I had lost my sight. I told one of them: 'you don't know us yet. Death might be the most beautiful thing because it makes me meet my father'" This silenced him and he did not continue the dialogue. He said: 'no point speaking to him'.

The Israeli negotiators regard the Palestinian hunger strikers as *majaneen* (insane). Balbul reported that 'a doctor who worked in the prison said "these two brothers are *majaneen*. I haven't seen anything like their strike". Some prisoners also from Fateh think that our strike was an insanity and the prison authorities failed to deal with us', while Ayman Hamdan observed: 'in general they think the Palestinian are crazy'. The steadfastness of the two brothers was seen by them as a 'victory' but by the Israeli authorities as insanity. This level of *Sumud* was nourished in their eyes by the love of their mother and the memory of their martyr father.

In the death zone, the hunger strikers report living a unique form of spirituality. This transformation of pain into spirituality was enhanced by their belief in and fidelity to the cause. Each participant focused on their own belief in order to overcome the pain. One focused on his father (the martyr) whilst others on their political ideologies and revolutionary consciousness. But they shared the willingness to die for a cause. As they surrender to the fact that they are now dying, they also persuade themselves of the impossibility of retreat. The striking prisoners persuaded themselves that they had accepted death even though they aspired to life and freedom.

#### **4.The hunger strikers' conception of death as an act of resistance**

Although the hunger strikers share some common ideas about the concept of death, they conceive death in different ways. Some of them think that when the body dies there is another life for the soul. They try to overcome their fear of death by constructing an idea of life after death. Their discourses around death see it as an act of resistance and they persuade themselves that their death is 'a death for life' as they develop their willingness for martyrdom. This stems from both religious and non-religious perspectives, as some of the leftist participants also use martyrdom in their accounts. In the discourse of Palestinian prisoners we find the idea of death

as interlocked with an aspiration for life. Although death for life, for a collective just cause, is the shared motivation among participants their conception of death varies depending in their ideological background. Those adhering to a religious ideology believe that there is a life after death, whilst those who belong to a leftist ideology think there is no life after death and have a revolutionary conception of death in relation to the coloniser revolving around their humanity and self-determination.

In my conversation with Mohamad al-Kik, I asked him about the shocking video, disseminated on social media, of when he was near death in a critical condition, shouting about the pain of starvation. He said:

I had not imagined that I had violent cramps. I had not imagined that my hands were moving away from me like the foetus to the belly of mother, the violent movement of my legs. I was calling death to come. I reconciled with death. I went on hunger strike to be with my wife and children, but the occupier blocked my way. Sorry, I am not a slave. I refused my detention. It is not a life to be in prison, it is death, and I refused death. The empty stomach that entails death is a life and our hunger strike is a culture of life.

The empty stomach is a trope for 'death for life' in the discourse of Palestinian hunger strikers. A number of participants said that they are the 'living dead' in prison and the hunger strike was a path to life since the conditions of the prisons had reduced them to a merely biological existence. For them, dying in prison resisting the occupation is an honourable death. Hassan Safadi:

Anything is easier than prison, easier than confining our freedom. People could die in an accident. Death is not easy, but dying in prison is honourable. Confining freedom is equal to death. From the beginning, we decide freedom not death or committing suicide. So the hunger strike is one of the methods that gave us a chance for life – to prove that we walk in the path of life, not death.

They link their individual death with the collective death of the Palestinian people caused by the occupier. Mohamad al-Kik:

In my relation with death I was aspiring an alternative life because the occupation forced me as a Palestinian to live a terrified life. The occupation pressured me, destroyed my life, killed our children, burned newborns, imprisoned us by checkpoints. So, it is not a life, and while people are dying in Gaza and Jerusalem the international society talks about 'peace'. If I die in Israeli prisons all the world will know that we are dying in the racist Israeli prisons ... It is a message for the world. My death is nothing compared to the death of the

burnt newborn child. My death is an expression of what Israel practices against us. Our death is a culture of life. Yes, to die is to live, a culture for life.

In Nora Hashlamoun's account, she reconciled with death and asked to be covered by a Palestinian flag at her funeral:

I thought about death. I told the Imam and the lawyers if I die cover me with the Palestinian flag. Yes, I thought of my children, but I started my strike because I want to be with them. I wanted to end the tragedy of administrative detention which made me go round in a circle. My words bothered them. They asked who taught me those words because I am not educated. They searched our library during the arrests. I am not an educated or intellectual person, but the tragedy I lived made me say words bigger than them because my cause is a just one.

Hashlamoun stressed her just cause, and the tragedy she lived in detention is what inspired her to become an articulate person in her interaction with the Israeli forces. PFLP affiliated Bilal Kayed, in contrast, offered a sophisticated philosophical reflection on how he conceives choosing his death in hunger strike as a practice of humanity and self-determination.

I don't consider death something fearful. With death I consider my mission completed. For others, death is fearful because they see death as a transition to another world including account and punishment. For me, after I died, there is nothing. I will die anyway, and my death might affect the others around me. So, I must choose my death. My humanity requires choosing my death in the same manner as choosing my life. The sublime level of practicing my humanity is to choose my death. Most people choose their humanity through choosing life, but they could not reach the sublime level of *Shuhda* (martyrs). I did not mean 'martyrs' from a religious lens, rather choosing death as a practice of humanity. I am glad I felt that my decision of life or death is in my hand.

His discourse reflects emancipatory politics as he links choosing death to the 'martyrs' who choose their death for a cause. Although he adheres to a Marxist ideology, he still uses the term *Shuhda*. Yet, he points out that this term is not to be understood from a religious perspective. This shows the theologisation of leftist politics as a strategy in the political struggle. Self-sacrifice for a political cause is an ideological strategy rather than necessarily a religious one. This form of relation with death in the experience of the Palestinian hunger strike show that death is not an annihilation, in that the *Shaheed* (Martyr) is seen as immortal – even for those for whom after death there is nothing. Kayed articulates a humanistic philosophy of death that

affirms human agency and freedom – as he puts it ‘my decision of life or death in my hand’. This decision of choosing death is an act of self-determination in controlling his destiny.

Kayed elaborated his views about death in relation to the colonial power. He thinks that the Israeli state is afraid of the way they choose life and death.

I told Shabak [Israeli Intelligence] my goal is life and any revolutionary in the world doesn't aim to die but at the same time isn't afraid of death. From my history in the prison, they were persuaded that I am not afraid of death, but they are afraid of the way I choose my life and death, because my death would be a disaster for them. I told them: ‘you imprisoned me because my life is dangerous to Israeli security, but I will prove to you that my death is also a danger because my comrades will take revenge after I die. So, it is better for you that I live than I die’.

From his account we can see why Israel tries to avoid the death of prisoners and offer solutions in the negotiation when they near death. For Bilal Kayed, self-determining his death would be a ‘disaster’ for Israel and cause much greater harm to the occupier because it would stir up resistance. From this he formulates an idea of death that is equivalent to resistance. He links his death not only with the Palestinian collective locally but also with every honourable and humane person on a global level. Kayed not only displays the agency of choosing in the struggle for self-determination, but conceives death in its relation to the broader collective outside the prison both on a national and an international level. This high sense of collectivity and relationality was underlined in Israeli prisons. According to Kayed, the Israeli forces were surprised at the way he conceives death in such a collective way: ‘They tried to grow inside us the selfishness and individualism. They told me “think of yourself. You defended a lot of people and went on hunger strike for them but they don't care for you”’. Khader also explains why Israel doesn't want them to die.

I embarked a hunger strike because I want my life, but if I died the occupation is responsible for my death. It is a killing, not by fire and bullets, but in front of all the world after 65 days and this martyrdom in hunger strike is different from any other martyrdom. Therefore, the occupation doesn't want us to die in this way and now the occupation feels that they have a hunger strike crises in prisons and are seeking to impose forced feeding.

They both emphasise how the Palestinian hunger strikers use their bodies as weapons since the Israelis don't want them to die so as to avoid an international scandal with consequences both inside and outside the prison.

## **Conclusion: Transcendence, limit-experience, subjectivation**

Capturing the experience of transcendence in the hunger strike demands considering the moment when the striking prisoners felt they had become ready to die for their goal. In the last stage of the hunger strike a number of participants emphasised that they sense their humanity and subjectivity intensely. Munir Abu Sharar reported: ‘I touched my humanity in this suffering. I felt I was practicing my humanity with all the love in this universe ... through loving my mother, my homeland, my cause and through sacrifice’; Bilal Deyab said: ‘In this experience I touched myself. I felt the meaning of life. I felt I am in another world. This experience transformed me completely, my thoughts changed. It is the hardest experience at all levels’. This transcendence and sublimation of the soul in the process of reclaiming their humanity represents a form of humanist subjectivation taking place over their prolonged and intense struggle. It exemplifies the production of a transcendent state that can’t be rationalised as it lies beyond representation. They reported that their sense of humanity was associated with such a ‘spiritual’ sensation. These spiritual tools linked to soul/mind/will feed the prisoners’ determination, perseverance, endurance, hope, and passion for freedom. They emerge from what are imagined by the prisoners as the internal forces of the human – from a metaphysics of the soul.

Sacrificing their life for freedom is linked for the hunger strikers to their philosophy of freedom and dignity which gives its particular meaning to the notion of humanism that transpires from many of their accounts. Spiritual and mental purity is associated with their deprivation of bodily needs for sublime goals; this is articulated in comments such as ‘our dignity and freedom is most important than food’. This process of subjectivation can be understood as a journey of self-transformation. Some participants were surprised by their potentials and capacities. Mohamad Balboul, a dentist, reported that his mind functioned more efficiently in the hunger strike, and he was surprised that he was able to review all the medicine books and remembered the medical cases he cured. His brother also reported that he learnt Hebrew from the jailors during the hunger strike. This state of mental and spiritual purity is a subjective issue that they could not fully describe in words. The complexity of this trajectory entails a mystical aspect concentrated in a near-death event which gives birth to something new, that is, the rise of latent energy and inner immaterial strength. In their reconciliation with death, some of the hunger strikers expressed the fact that they lived a strange internal satisfaction with themselves. They said this reconciliation came from the justice of their cause.

Over the extended event of the hunger strike, the striking prisoners were transcending various conflicts, and this was experienced by them as taking them to a higher stage of sublimation. Through reconciling with death and accepting self-sacrifice they reached the climax and turning point of the conflict, leading to the end of hunger strike. They emancipated themselves from the pain by tracing a new path to transcendence. The experience of self became about the soul and was reached through liberation from the bodily needs and desires - for food and even showers. Transcendence describes a different form of transformation that could not happen unless they reconciled with death through pain and suffering, something that is not present for all participants. In this zone of being, at the edge of death, some hunger strikers report approaching the 'second life' after hunger strike – or, as they sometimes expressed it in their accounts: “we saw the death’. Some of them reported that when they fell into a coma it was as if they died and lived again, and others said that they saw their martyr friends and loved ones.

The act of sustaining self-starvation until freedom or death is regarded as insane and irrational by Israeli jailors and negotiators. Some participants reported that the Israeli doctors conducted scientific and medical research on them about how they endured the hunger strike. Nevertheless, they think the Israeli authorities face difficulties in understanding their exceptional case, despite the research they have access to about the starving body. In the participants' accounts, they think that that the systematic technologies of power are destroyed and destabilised before their will is broken, and the Israeli's inability to understand the human in a hunger strike is due to the mystical state they reach near death. The exceptionality of hunger strike as a battle representing the climax of confrontation between colonised and coloniser is doubled when they develop they reconciliation with death. The hunger strikers reported that pain was associated with spiritual feeling in particular moments of the hunger strike. Their sense of victory came from this spiritual strength which was perceived by them as the most decisive factor.

Their description of an immaterial force means that they experienced and understood the strike as a state of transcendence. It is the latent energy that allowed the shift from pain into transcendence, a transformation that some described as akin to flying. They believed that there was something immaterial stronger than the weakness of the body that was fading away – ‘the body was completely collapsing and quivering but inside us something stronger’. Sustaining the hunger strike gave birth to this state at the end. In their discourse, transcendence has something unrecognizable about it. Ordinary language struggles to articulate the state the hunger strikers went through in this extraordinary event. The hunger strike as an exceptional

event embraces something mystical, debatable and questionable to most of us and the hunger strikers' emancipatory and revolutionary politics, in its faithfulness to truth of a near-death event or limit-experience can be seen as contradicting a rationalist conception of politics in which nothing lies beyond representation or interpretation.

Hunger strike entails a metaphysical component and the question I would like to pose is this: How can concrete materialist rationalist methodologies research the spiritual meanings and spaces of freedom that abide within the resistant subjects who cross the borders of their physical structure?

## Conclusion

*The detention room lasts not forever,  
Nor yet the links of chains.  
Nero died, Rome did not:  
With her very eyes she fights.  
And seeds from a withered ear  
With wheat shall fill the valley.<sup>122</sup>*

This thesis has traced the process of subjectivity-formation in a context of colonial domination. As I illustrated, the colonial prison has been instituted by the settler regime, the Israeli State, as a pivotal institution whose aim is not only to punish Palestinian political prisoners but also to eradicate the prisoners' political activism, subjugate their resistance and annihilate their political identity. For many Palestinians, however, prison is not the 'end' of their political activism but often the beginning of a form of counter-violence directed against the self in order to expose and confront the colonial violence inflicted on prisoners and on Palestinian society more broadly.

In light of the gaps in the literature on the meanings of 'subjectivity' and 'revolution' in Palestine, particularly the absence of studies that address the case of hunger strikers, I have tried to approach the hunger strike as a vital site for conceptualising a form of political subjectivity that emerges from a singular kind of revolutionary practice: one that launches a hope for eventual freedom and embodies a particular effort to precipitate decolonisation and usher in emancipation.

The structure of dispossession in the Israeli prison system led the hunger strikers to risk their lives and endanger their bodies. The human intensity of this phenomenon compelled me to look at the hunger strike as a vital indicator to understand Palestinian subjectivity in general. Subjectivity is a core concept for this thesis, and hunger striking subjectivity is shaped through a web of interrelationships with the colonial power and its repressive techniques within the Israeli prison system. Although the antagonistic relationship with the coloniser – represented here by the Israeli Prison Authorities (IPA) – is critical to the constitution of hunger striking subjectivity, other relations also have decisive effect on it. These are the relations to the self

---

<sup>122</sup> Ngugi chose the above lines from Mahmoud Darwish's pome 'About a Man' as an epigram for his *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir* (Thiong'o, 2018).

and the body, on the one hand, and to Palestinian collectives (family, party, nation), on the other. The hunger strikers' stories were constructed from these multiple relationships: the occupation and colonising authorities, the national movement and political parties, the family and loved ones, the Palestinian imaginative community in general, and the international communities and what they termed it *Ahrar Alam* “the revolutionaries of the world”.

The thesis deals, in particular, with structures of dispossession and subjectivation, and how dispossession can give rise to a subjective transformation, in particular to hunger strike subjectivity as a protest against the dispossessive character of administrative detention. The research showed how the body is employed in anti-colonial resistance in the Israel/Palestine context and it works as a site of subjectivity-production in hunger strikes. It also explored the meanings prisoners gave to their actions and pain by focusing on their inner existential conflict while tracing the trajectory of their confrontation from the initial stage of the strike until the peak of the conflict, marked by the negotiation process between prisoners and the IPA. During the hunger strike, the prisoners reported undergoing profound transformations and witnessing the emergence of an 'immaterial strength' along with the deterioration of their bodies. The tension between life and death, surrender or victory, grew inside them and produced new facets of their subjectivity. In particular, the hunger strikers' narratives focused on the existence of what I have termed a 'turning point', where they transcended the physical pain. Despite the sudden and unpredictable transformations they underwent, a deliberate decision to continue was also something they all experienced and discussed. The struggle itself is a process of continuing the decision not to surrender.

The Foucauldian concept of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1989) was essential for illuminating the processes of subjectivation. The technologies of the self associated with resistance are the practices through which subjects shape their own bodies and souls to constitute their subjectivity. The 'weaponisation of the body' is the main technology of hunger strikers. In my appropriation of Foucault's technologies of the self, I have employed his concept in the different context of anti-colonial resistance. The particular relation to the body evidenced by the hunger strikers, which entails instrumentalization and a kind of disembodiment, departs significantly from the way Foucault talks about technologies of the self in the context of ancient Greek sexuality, but I believe this critical transposition of Foucault's framework can illuminate an important aspect of the hunger strikes' process of subjectivation.

Utilising a Fanonian framework, the case study suggests that the violence directed against the body is not destructive but revolutionary, that it is envisaged by the hunger strikers

as incorporating a redemptive and humane element, and is best understood in terms of the logic of protesting dispossession and reclaiming a confiscated humanity. Though Fanon deals with anticolonial violence in a colonial situation he doesn't deal with specific case of hunger striking which concerns endangering the body as a form of antagonistic conflict in confrontation against the coloniser. I therefore found it necessary to expand his conception of revolutionary violence to deal with the specificities of my case study. A similar critical appropriation of theories of political subjectivity was carried out with relation to Badiou, where I adopted his conception of fidelity to understand the importance of continuity in the hunger striker, while stressing that, unlike in Badiou's theory the subjects of the Palestinian hunger striker don't come after a rupture in the status quo, but rather generate an 'event' through their decisions and actions.

#### Technologies of bodily instrumentalisation: counter-violence to reclaim humanity

The hunger strikers constituted their subjectivity through the practices and techniques of resistance they produced in the course of their struggle. Whilst the Israeli state invents technologies of power, the hunger strikers, in their interaction with the dispossession of the colonial power, invent their technologies of the self, while drawing on the rich repertoire of Palestinian resistance. In the process of instrumentalisation of body, the hunger strikers produce, use and manage their technologies of the self, not only to resist dispossession but also to subjugate and discipline their own bodies in their response to Israeli technologies of power. The body itself is turned into a weapon. The hunger strikers were able to generate these technologies of resistance despite their limited degree of freedom. In resisting power, the hunger strikers create forms of subjectivation that entail a capacity for transformation from submissive passive individuals into resistant subject. In this creative mode of subjectivation, they transform their powerless captive bodies into a source of a strength. The hunger strikers reported that they cultivated strength through the collapse of the body. The thesis illuminates this paradox of an immaterial strength that is generated alongside the collapse of the material body in a near-death situation. It reveals how the political strategy embodied in this complex form of 'weaponisation' also entails a spiritualisation of politics in the limit-experience of the hunger strike.

In the discourse of hunger strikers, the material body and immaterial faculties (mind, soul, will) appear in a dualist guise. In their weaponisation of the body, the binaries the hunger strikers create between the physical and nonphysical – as we repeatedly encounter them in their narratives – are not completely a matter of static disconnection between two poles. Rather, they embody a dynamic relationship, in which the prisoners prioritise the mind and soul at the price

of the body, and this is what enables them to cope with the extreme situation. The hunger strikers emphasise the fact that the Israeli prison authorities subject the body to all forms of violence in order to annihilate their political consciousness. This resonates closely with Fanon, who noted that the 'emphasis is on the body, which is broken in the hope that the national consciousness will disintegrate. The individual is "knocked" into shape' (1967: 215-216). In his discussion of his clinical cases, Fanon highlights that coloniser imagines that it is possible to transform the colonial subject into a docile individual through corporeal discipline.

In my conceptualisation of hunger striking technology, I link this duality of body/mind and body/soul with disciplinary power and the way in which the Israeli prison system of surveillance and control operates against the bodies, mind and souls of the prisoners. Timothy Mitchell, in a chapter of his *Colonising Egypt*, entitled 'After We Have Captured their Bodies' (Mitchell, 1991) illuminates how the colonial power functions to create this separation between mind and body. Foucault's work on technologies of power in prison, which became a starting point for analysing modern practices of punishment in prisons, also argues that the modern prison system shifts the focus of domination from bodies to souls (Foucault, 1977). The technologies of power work upon the body and mind in the formation of the prisoners' mind and train them to becoming accustomed to regulation by methods of control to be shaped as submissive colonised subjects. My argument is that the hunger strikers turned the technique of separation employed by the colonial power into a technique of resistance. As a number of the interviewees put it 'they imprisoned us because they want to annihilate the idea'. For the hunger strikers the immaterial dimension of political beliefs, culture, and morality was something distinct from the materiality of the conflict. They are aware that the battle is over the mind and the soul and therefore they seek to strengthen the soul and the idea at the price of the body. The political prisoners who are powerless and dispossessed of humanity used the paradigm of separation, first imposed upon them by the colonial power, to restructure the relation between colonised and coloniser. This antagonistic appropriation of the Israeli paradigm of separation between bodies and minds shows that how hunger strikers are able to exercise their agency and confiscate the Israelis' technologies of power. The hunger strikers show that they can control their bodies in order to disrupt and restructure the colonial power relation.

My discussion of the relationship between body-mind and body-soul is drawn from the hunger strikers' own accounts and seeks to reveal their philosophy of freedom, which informs their moral and political grammar and their practices of meaning-making. In their extreme or limit situation, they develop a theory of subjectivity that can be seen to turn them into 'dualist' political subjects, by contrast to contemporary theorists of political subjectivity such as

Foucault and Butler. Their technology of resistance produced this duality as a reflection of the Palestinian collective body. The way they conceive the body as ‘a bridge of return’ reflects the meaning of the body in the Palestinian landscape; here ‘bridge’ symbolises both a path and method.

This thesis seeks to expand upon Fanon’s reflections on violence by exploring argument the redemptive character of hunger striker counter-violence. The logic of hunger strike as a last resort shows the inability to find other adequate methods of resistance and also highlights the intensity of the antagonistic conflict between the colonised and coloniser. The research participants emphasise the extent to which colonial violence reduces them to objects and what I have termed *zero modes of being* (see Chapter 5) through processes of dispossession that confiscate their humanity. They see the revolutionary violence embodied in their resistance as a re-humanising force and an act of reclaiming their dispossessed humanity. As Améry put it: ‘Revolutionary violence is eminently humane’ (Améry 2005). In this way, colonised people break with empty time colonialism has imposed, to make their own history (Fanon 1967, Améry 2002). The hunger strike shows the failure of the colonial power to be total and absolute. The hunger strikers’ accounts show how they rejected the colonial construction of Palestinian prisoners as ‘slaves’, ‘zeros’, and ‘living dead’. Fanon emphasised that risk of life is a precondition for liberation and freedom. The Palestinian prisoners resisted their dispossession by risking their life and turning their bodies into tools of resistance.

Although in their resistance they rely on their political consciousness and mental capacity for deliberation, when they come near-death the hunger strikers say they depended on the ‘soul’ rather than the mind. They have faith in the concept of soul and spiritualise their resistance. For them the body as a weapon is a technology of resistance to protect the ‘soul’. In their view they are not left passive victims since the soul has not been reformed, destroyed or reduced by Israeli forces. My investigation of the subjectivity of Palestinian hunger strikers argues against Foucault’s main idea in his *Discipline and Punish* and provides a productive notion of human agency, since the soul is not reformed in this context, but rather becomes a fulcrum of resistance in a context of colonial domination. The hunger strikers reported that they fought for their freedom and for the dignity of the soul to regain their agency over their bodies from the colonising Israelis authorities. For them the control over their own bodies is an embodiment of their humanity and they waged their struggle for its reclamation.

Political subjectivity: From the individual to the collective subject

I investigated the hunger strikers' subjectivity within the context of the broader national struggle and provided insights into their experiences in relation to it. The participants emphasise that the hunger strike is a means to achieve their goal of impacting on Israeli authorities and public opinion and on Palestinian resistance in general. The body here exceeds the individual body and becomes a collective body of struggle and a communally-shared 'body politic'. The thesis illuminated the meanings prisoners gave to their 'victory' by situating hunger strike resistance in its historical context of resisting colonialism in Palestine. I drew attention to prisoners' discourses and how they articulated the relation between subjective and objective conditions.

The influence of culture, belief and ideology are important in subjectivity formation. The research analysed ethical and political driving forces that inform the steadfastness of hunger strikers. Fidelity to the cause and the ethics of resistance are key elements of their discourse, which links it to the tradition of collective revolutionary consciousness in Palestine. The research explored the meanings already embedded in the Palestinian culture of resistance that informed the hunger-strikers' actions. For example, in this culture of resistance, 'martyrs are immortal,' and are to be commemorated and glorified. This discourse of martyrdom and the idea of the 'martyr' inspired and motivated the political struggle of the hunger strikers. I also looked into the role of religion in the hunger strike. The research participants perceived the act of hunger striking as political and national rather than religious.

In presenting his views on the concept of the subject in 'Philosophy and the Idea of Communism' (2012), Badiou points out that the political subject is a collective subject.

Yes, when s/he touches the real infinite. But I'm leery of the phrase "the individual becomes a subject." I prefer to say: "the individual becomes incorporated into a subject," because it's not always, and most of the time it's not even, an individual who becomes a subject. The political subject, for example, is a collective subject, not an individual (Badiou and Engelmann, 2015: 17–18).

My research shows that the hunger strikers' cause has a collective dimension and represents the national struggle against settler-colonialism. Through their individual hunger strike they overcome the crisis in the current historical phase of the Palestinian national movement, as manifested by the failure to achieve its liberation objectives. Asad Ghanem's *Palestinian Politics after Arafat: A Failed National Movement* (2010) argues that 'the Palestinian national movement reached a dead end and came close to disintegration at the beginning of the present century. In the post Arafat period, in particular in 2006, internal and external processes ripened

in the Palestinian national movement, which provide clear evidence of its failure and made it a “failed national movement” (Ganim, 2009: 18). In this context of failure, the hunger strikers transcend the crisis in the political organisations and relate to the broader Palestinian collectivity, creating a tension between the two projects: the liberating revolutionary project represented by the individual hunger strikers on the one hand, and the failed Oslo project represented by the official Palestinian leadership and political parties on the other. Uniquely, amongst the political groups, the PFLP supported the hunger strikers entering into a collective struggle. This demonstrates how the individual hunger strike could revive the collective struggle.

The exceptionality of hunger strikers lies in their fidelity to the idea of ongoing confrontation that they had already practiced before imprisonment and which was the reason for their detention. Some prisoners didn't interact with the event of imprisonment with the same level of confrontation. The hunger strikers instead generated a state of confrontation within Israeli their exception action affected the collective and raised questions about the deterioration of political movement, showing how individuals can precipitate collective resistance. The hunger strikes were a source of collective inspiration, precipitating solidarity movements at local and international level. Though the hunger striker is an individual practice, those who engaged in hunger strike belong to political parties. They are unique individuals who take the lead and revive the struggle in light of the decline of collective struggle. In the weakness of the political movement, they are the pulse that emphasises that Palestinians exist and still possess the latent energy of resistance which is at the symbolic core of Palestinian collectivity. The hunger strikers' freedom is connected to the Palestinian collective freedom and struggle for self-determination. They are resistance fighters who struggle for freedom and they only become subjects when they have a fidelity to a collective cause. As Badiou says, ‘(it is) through fidelity that I rise above my existence as a human animal and become the immortal that I am capable of being’ (Badiou 2011: 46-49).

Despite the uniqueness of each hunger striker and the differences among them, the commonality in their discourse lies in the fact that they were subjected to the same processes of dispossession by the colonial machine – namely the policy of administrative detention – and this was the very reason that led all of them to engage in this radical act of resistance. The decision to reclaim their humanity is shared in the way they all decided to confront the colonial authorities in order to create their own form of sovereignty and self-determination. As such they don't speak in an individual voice but rather in a collective one that is constituted by their inter-subjectivity – as evidenced by the way in which hunger strikers also refer to one another

throughout their narratives – suggesting the collective voice need not be *one* but simply many-in-communication. From their singular encounter with colonial power, they constitute an intersubjective political consciousness of Palestinian self-determination at the collective level.

### Methodological challenges

In the early chapters of the thesis, I illuminated the methodological approach related to my in-depth-interviewing with the former hunger strikers and ethnographically-informed engagement with the social and political context of the hunger strikes. My involvement in the phenomenon under investigation prior to commencing my research informed my study. While preparing my doctoral research proposal in 2013, I witnessed the hunger strike of political prisoners in Israeli detention who accelerated their resistance particularly after 2012 following the hunger strike of Khader Adnan. They engaged in open-ended hunger strike which resulted in some of them, such as Khader Adnan, Samer Elisawi and others, being released after reaching an agreement with prison authorities, giving me an opportunity to meet them.

These contemporary hunger strikes represented an exceptional praxis that gives rise to revolutionary subjectivity in a Palestinian context marked by the impasse of the national movement. The research participants regard their sacrifice as a symbol of collective struggle engendering resistance and precipitating the struggle that had deteriorated and declined after Oslo agreement. This isolated action in which individuals starve their bodies in the confines of Israeli prison cells ends up being transformed into an experience in which the collective revolutionary subjectivity is reborn.

Methodologically, this research which explores human suffering with all its tragic, ethical and even aesthetic aspects, reconciles contradictory aspects of life and death and hopefully offers some innovative approaches to thinking about ways of knowing when it comes to social and political ‘limit-experiences’ and the role of knowledge in relation to difficult, even extreme subject matter. Despite the power of the storytelling approach I have sought to employ, the experience of the limit exceeds representation, as the case study shows by introducing the unique features of the states of transcendence and spiritual pain that the hunger strikes report as crucial dimensions of their subjectivation. In exploring human suffering, I showed the limitation of language and the search for a ‘language of the heart’ within the framework of feminist decolonising ethnography (Behar, 1997; Visweswaran, 1994). My engagement in this topic necessitated sympathy and intimacy, and the boundaries between the researcher/participant’ relationship, solidarity and friendship were sometimes blurred. This process involves empathy, building human relation and revealing the self of the researcher. It

takes distance from the rationalist approach, which can be regarded in part as a 'colonisation of reason' (Eagleton 1999). I have tried to advocate for a more nuanced scholarship to capture experience in a form of writing that gives space to the sensory, emotional and affective relation which is an integral part of knowledge-making, and is especially significant in a case such as the hunger strike, in which participants repeatedly pointed to the limitations of thought and language in capturing their lived experience. The research suggests the possibility of expanding materialist methodologies and creating new methodological and theoretical tools that help us study a phenomenon such as the hunger strike, which entails a spiritual and metaphysical component. I would like to conclude by posing this question: How can rationalist and materialist methodologies research the spiritual meanings and spaces of freedom that abide within those resistant subjects who cross the borders of their physical structure?

‘The new is the longing for the new, not the new itself: That is what everything new suffers from.’ (Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*)

## Bibliography

- Abdo N (2014) *Captive Revolution: Palestinian Women's Anti-Colonial Struggle within the Israeli Prison System*. London: Pluto Press.
- Abdul-Dayyem M and Ben-Ze'ev E (2019) The shahid as a Palestinian icon: negotiating meanings. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 0(0): 1–19.
- Abdulhadi R (1998) The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges. *Gender and Society* 12(6): 649–673.
- Abrams L (2016) *Oral History Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Abufarha N (2009) *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Abu-Lughod L (1998) *Remaking Women : Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Adorno T (1990) *Negative Dialectics*. London: Routledge.
- Afary J, Anderson KB and Foucault M (2005) *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Agamben G (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Ahmed L (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press.
- Ahmed S (2013) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge.
- Ajour A (2017) The Transgressive practices of Revolutionary Subjectivity: The Hunger Strike in Occupied Palestine (2012-2016). *Tropos* 4(1). Available at: <http://ojs.lib.ucl.ac.uk/index.php/tps/article/view/1742> (accessed 20 November 2018).
- Alcoff L (1991) The Problem of Speaking for Others. *Cultural Critique* (20): 5–32.
- Allen, L (2002) 'Palestinians Debate "Polite" Resistance to Occupation. MERIP 225 (Winter 2002). Available at: <https://merip.org/2002/12/palestinians-debate-polite-resistance-to-occupation/> (accessed 4 March 2019).
- Améry J (1980) *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Améry J (2005) The birth of man from the spirit of violence: Frantz Fanon the revolutionary. *Wasafiri* 20(44): 13–18.
- Anderson P (2004) 'To lie down to death for days'. *Cultural Studies* 18(6): 816–846.

- Anderson P and Menon J (2009) *Violence Performed: Local Roots and Global Routes of Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Araj B (2008) Harsh State Repression as a Cause of Suicide Bombing: The Case of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31(4): 284–303.
- Arendt H (1970) *Men in Dark Times*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Arendt H (1998) *The Human Condition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Armstrong TJ (ed.) (1992) *Michel Foucault, Philosopher: Essays*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Asad T (2003) *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Asad T (2007) *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ashcroft B and Ahluwalia P (2001) *Edward Said*. London: Routledge.
- Back L (2007) *The Art of Listening*. Oxford: Berg.
- Badiou A (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London: Verso.
- Badiou A (2005a) *Being and Event*. London: Continuum.
- Badiou A (2005b) *Metapolitics*. London: Verso.
- Badiou A (2007) *The Century*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Badiou A (2012) *Philosophy for Militants*. London: Verso.
- Badiou A and Engelmann P (2015) *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism: Alain Badiou in Conversation with Peter Engelmann*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Baker A and Matar A (eds) (2011) *Threat: Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israel*. London: Pluto Press.
- Balibar É (2009) Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Anthropology. *differences* 20(2–3): 9–35.
- Balibar É (2015) *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Barakat R (2018) Writing/righting Palestine studies: settler colonialism, indigenous sovereignty and resisting the ghost(s) of history. *Settler Colonial Studies* 8(3): 349–363.
- Bargu B (2014) *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Barker J (ed.) (2005) *Sovereignty Matters : Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Baroud R (2006) *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle*. London: Pluto Press.
- Behar R (1997) *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ben Khelil M, Gharbaoui M, Farhani F, et al. (2016) Impact of the Tunisian Revolution on homicide and suicide rates in Tunisia. *International Journal of Public Health* 61(9): 995–1002.
- Benjamin W (1968) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Benjamin W (1999) *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Benvenisti E, Gans C and Hanafi S (eds) (2007) *Israel and the Palestinian Refugees*. Beiträge zum ausländischen öffentlichen Recht und Völkerrecht. Berlin Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag.
- Beresford D (1997) *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Bernstein JM (2015) *Torture and Dignity: An Essay on Moral Injury*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bhabha H (1994) Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition. In: Williams P and Chrisman L (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 112–124.
- Bhandar B (2018) *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bhandar B and Toscano A (2017) Representing Palestinian dispossession: land, property, and photography in the settler colony. *Settler Colonial Studies* 7(1): 1–18.
- Boer R (2009) *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Broning M (2011) *The Politics of Change in Palestine: State-Building and Non-Violent Resistance*. London: Pluto Press.
- Brynen R (2007) *Palestinian Refugees: Challenges of Repatriation and Development*. London: I.B.Tauris.
- Bulhan HA (1985) *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*. New York: Springer US.
- Burns RB (1997) *Introduction to Research Methods*. Boston: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Butler J (1988) Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal* 40(4): 519.

- Butler J (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Butler J (2006) *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Butler J and Athanasiou A (2013) *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. London: Wiley.
- Butler J (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. London: Routledge.
- Butler J, Gambetti Z and Sabsay L (eds) (2016) *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cavarero A (2000) *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*. London: Routledge.
- Caygill H (2013) *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Cheater AP (1987) The anthropologist as citizen: the diffracted self? *Anthropology at home*: 164–179.
- Cherki A (2006) *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Chriost DMG (2012) *Jailtacht: The Irish Language, Symbolic Power and Political Violence in Northern Ireland, 1972-2008*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Christensen LB, Johnson RB and Turner LA (2014) *Research Methods, Design, and Analysis*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Ciccariello-Maher G (2017) *Decolonizing Dialectics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Clifford J and Marcus GE (eds) (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coulthard GS (2014) *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dana T (2015) The symbiosis between Palestinian 'Fayyadism' and Israeli 'economic peace': the political economy of capitalist peace in the context of colonisation. *Conflict, Security & Development* 15(5): 455–477.
- Dana T (2017) The prolonged decay of the Palestinian National Movement. *National Identities* 0(0): 1–17. DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2017.1343813.
- Darwish M (2007) *The Butterfly's Burden: Poems*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press.
- Dumper M (2007) *The Future for Palestinian Refugees: Toward Equity and Peace*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Eagleton T (1990) *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Elliott A (2014) *Concepts of the Self*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Eutopia institute* (n.d.) Palestine through the lens of Frantz Fanon (part 1). Available at: <http://www.eutopiainstitute.org/2016/05/palestine-through-the-lens-of-frantz-fanon-part-1/> (accessed 4 March 2019).
- Falah G (1996) The 1948 Israeli-Palestinian War and its Aftermath: The Transformation and De-Signification of Palestine's Cultural Landscape. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86(2): 256–285.
- Falzon C, O'Leary T and Sawicki J (eds) (2013) *A Companion to Foucault*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fanon F (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fanon F (2018) *Alienation and Freedom*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Fanon F (1967) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.
- Feldman A (1991) *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault M (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.
- Foucault M (1978) *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault M (1982) The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry* 8(4): 777–795.
- Foucault M (1985) *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault M (1988a) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault M (1988b) *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault M (1997) *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. New York: New Press.
- Foucault M and Trombadori D (1991) *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Franzosi R (1998) Narrative Analysis-Or Why (And How) Sociologists Should be Interested in Narrative. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 517–554.
- Fraser M and Puwar N (2008) Introduction: Intimacy in research. *History of the Human Sciences* 21(4): 1–16.
- Freire P (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Fucik J and Sillen S (2017) *Notes from the Gallows*. Arcole Publishing.
- Gandhi R (2008) *Gandhi: The Man, His People, and the Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Ganim A (2009) *Palestinian Politics after Arafat a Failed National Movement*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gelvin JL and Gelvin P of HJL (2005) *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- George RTD (1972) *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*. Garden City: Anchor Books.
- Gibson N (2003) *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*. Oxford: Wiley.
- Gilbert N (ed.) (2008) *Researching Social Life*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goffman E (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Gordon L (2007) Through the Hellish Zone of Nonbeing: Thinking through Fanon, Disaster, and the Damned of the Earth. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 5(3). Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol5/iss3/3>.
- Gordon L (2015) *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Gunaratnam Y (2003) *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power*. SAGE Publications.
- Gunaratnam Y and Oliviere D (2009) *Narrative and Stories in Health Care: Illness, Dying, and Bereavement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hage G (2003) 'Comes a Time We Are All Enthusiasm': Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombers in Times of Exigophobia. *Public Culture* 15(1): 65–89.
- Hallward P (2001) *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hallward P (2003) *Badiou: A Subject To Truth*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press.
- Hallward P (ed.) (2004) *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*. London: Continuum.
- Hammersley M and Atkinson P (1995) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hanafi S (2013) Explaining spacio-cide in the Palestinian territory: Colonization, separation, and state of exception. *Current Sociology* 61(2): 190–205.
- Hanafi S and Tabar L (2005) *The Emergence of a Palestinian Globalized Elite*. Jerusalem/Ramallah: Institute of Jerusalem Studies & Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy.

- Hanson E (1976) Freedom and Revolution in the thought of Frantz Fanon. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 7(1). Available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/96q7k8h6> (accessed 20 February 2019).
- Haraway D (1988) Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575–599.
- Harding S (1990) Starting Thought from Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity. *Journal of Social Philosophy* 21(2–3): 140–149.
- Hennessey T (2013) *Hunger Strike: Margaret Thatcher's Battle With the IRA, 1980-1981*. Sallins: Irish Academic Press.
- Hesse-Biber SN (2013) *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. London: Sage.
- Hesse-Biber SN and Leavy P (2006) *The Practice of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Hiltermann J.R. (1993) *Behind the Intifada*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Huijer M (1999) The aesthetics of existence in the work of Michel Foucault. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25(2): 61–85.
- Husserl E (1970) *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl E (1977) *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Husserl E (2012) *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson JE (2011) Pain. In: *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 370–387.
- Jackson M (2002) *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Jad I (2018) *Palestinian Women's Activism: Nationalism, Secularism, Islamism*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Jaggar AM (1989) Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. *Inquiry* 32(2): 151–176.
- Jay M (1995) The Limits of Limit-Experience: Bataille and Foucault. *Constellations* 2(2): 155–174.
- Jayawardena K (1986) *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Zed Books.
- Jouai E (2018) Who is the subject of violence?, *Radical Philosophy* 2.03. Available at: <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/reviews/individual-reviews/who-is-the-subject-of-violence> (accessed 8 March 2019).

- Kanafani G (2000) *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Kelly MGE (2009) *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge.
- Kelly MGE (2013) Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of the Self. In: *A Companion to Foucault*. Oxford: Wiley, pp. 510–525..
- Khalifa J (2015) Fanon and Psychiatry. *Nottingham French Studies* 54(1): 52–71.
- Khalidi R (2007) *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Khalili L (2007) *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kimmerling B (2006) *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians*. London: Verso.
- Kruger B and Mariani P (1998) *Remaking History*. New York: New Press.
- Langer F (1975) *Israel and the Occupied Territories: With My Own Eyes, 1967-73 Pt. 1*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Langer F (1979) *These Are My Brothers : Israel & the Occupied Territories, Part II*. London : Ithaca. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/30724484> (accessed 16 October 2018).
- Lee CJ (2015) *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Lentin R (2008) *Thinking Palestine*. London: Zed Books.
- Lockman Z and Beinin J (1989) *Intifada : The Palestinian Uprising against Israeli Occupation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Longo M (2016) *Fiction and Social Reality: Literature and Narrative as Sociological Resources*. London: Routledge.
- Macey D (2000) *Frantz Fanon: A Life*. London: Granta Books.
- Marx K (1967) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. New York: International Publishers Company.
- Masalha N (2012) *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London: Zed.
- Mattison L, Ardoin P, Gontarski SE, et al. (2017) *Understanding Foucault, Understanding Modernism*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Mbembe A (2003) Necropolitics. *Public Culture* 15(1): 11–40.
- Meari L (2014) Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113(3): 547–578.

- Merleau-Ponty M (1996) *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Miller I (2016) *A History of Force Feeding: Hunger Strikes, Prisons and Medical Ethics, 1909–1974*. New York: Springer International Publishing.
- Mitchell T (1991) *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mohanty CT (2003) *Feminism Without Borders*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Motamedi-Fraser M (2012) Once upon a Problem. *The Sociological Review* 60(1): 84–107.
- Motamedi-Fraser M (2015) *Word: Beyond Language, Beyond Image*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Moustakas C (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- Nashif E (2008) *Palestinian political prisoners: Identity and community*. London: Routledge.
- Nashif E (2011) Towards a Materialist Reading of Political Imprisonment in Palestine. In *Threat: Political Prisoners in Israel*, A Baker and A Matar (eds.). London: Pluto Press.
- Nashif E (2013) The Palestinian's Death. In A Shibli, *Phantom Home*. Barcelona / Paris: MACBA/ Jeu De Paume.
- Nassar JR and Heacock R (1990) *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*. New York: Praeger.
- Pape R (2005) *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Scribe Publications.
- Pappe I (2004) *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Passmore L (2009) The art of hunger : self-starvation in the Red Army Faction. *German History* 27(1): 32–59.
- Patterson O (1982) *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pearlman W (2011) *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pelias RJ (2004) *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic and Daily Life*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Peretz D (1990) *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Perks R and Thomson A (1998) *The Oral History Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Peters MA (2001) *Poststructuralism, Marxism, and Neoliberalism: Between Theory and Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Portelli A (1991) *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany: SUNY Press.

- Pugliese J (2014) Permanent Revolution: Mohamed Bouazizi's Incendiary Ethics of Revolt. *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 10(3): 408–420. DOI: 10.1177/1743872112448339.
- Purvis J (1995a) The prison experiences of the suffragettes in Edwardian Britain. *Women's History Review* 4(1): 103–133. DOI: 10.1080/09612029500200073.
- Purvis J (1995b) The prison experiences of the suffragettes in Edwardian Britain. *Women's History Review* 4(1): 103–133. DOI: 10.1080/09612029500200073.
- Ricoeur P (1991a) Life in Quest of Narrative. In: Wood D (ed.) *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. Routledge, pp. 20–33.
- Ricoeur P (1991b) Narrative Identity. *Philosophy Today* 35(1): 73–81.
- Riessman CK (2007) *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. SAGE Publications.
- Roy S (2006) *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. London: Pluto Press.
- Roy S (2007) Humanism, Scholarship, and Politics: Writing on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36(2): 54–65.
- Rynhold J (2008) *The Failure of the Oslo Process: Inherently Flawed or Flawed Implementation?* Ramat Gan, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), Bar-Ilan University. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/168262705> (accessed 4 March 2019).
- Sabbagh S (ed.) (1998) *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Said E (1979) Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims. *Social Text* (1): 7–58.
- Said E (1984) Permission to Narrate. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13(3): 27–48.
- Said E (1986) *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. Pantheon Books.
- Said E (1989) Intifada and Independence. *Social Text* (22): 23–39.
- Said E (1994) *Culture and Imperialism*. New Ed edition. London: Vintage.
- Said E (1995) *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994*. New York: Vintage.
- Said E (2001) *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*. New York: Vintage.
- Said E (2003) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Said E (2004) *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Said PME, Meari DL and Pratt DN (eds) (2015) *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World*. London: Zed Books.

- Salaita S (2016) *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Salamanca OJ, Qato M, Rabie K, et al. (2012) Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine. *Settler Colonial Studies* 2(1): 1–8.
- Salih R (2013) From Bare Lives to Political Agents: Palestinian Refugees as Avant-Garde. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32(2): 66–91.
- Salih SA (2004) The Second Intifada: The Literature of Testimony: Review Article. Shehadeh R, Barghouti M, Soueif A, et al. (eds) *Middle East Journal* 58(3): 495–500. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4330036> (accessed 4 March 2019).
- Sayegh F (2012) Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965). *Settler Colonial Studies* 2(1): 206–225.
- Sayigh Y (2000) *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scarry E (1985) *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scott JW (1991) The Evidence of Experience. *Critical Inquiry* 17(4): 773–797.
- Segel HB (2012) *The Walls Behind the Curtain: East European Prison Literature, 1945-1990*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Seidman S (1996) Empire and Knowledge: More Troubles, New Opportunities for Sociology. *Contemporary Sociology* 25(3): 313–316.
- Sekyi-Otu A (2009) *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shindler C (2013) *A History of Modern Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shohat E (2001) *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Smith PLT (2013) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed.
- Stone-Mediatore S (2004) *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance*. New York: Palgrave.
- Thiong'o N wa (2018) *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir*. Random House.
- Tilly C (2008) *Contentious Performances*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Uzzell J (2012) Biopolitics of the Self-Immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi. *E-International Relations*. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2012/11/07/biopolitics-of-the-self-immolation-of-mohamed-bouazizi/> (accessed 4 March 2019).

- Visweswaran K (1994) *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wacquant L (2003) Ethnografeast: A Progress Report on the Practice and Promise of Ethnography. *Ethnography* 4(1): 5–14.
- Weiner J (1997) The Palestinian Refugees' "Right to Return" and the Peace Process. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 20(1): 1. Available at: <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/iclr/vol20/iss1/2>.
- Wertz FJ (2005) Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52(2): 167–177.
- Whalen L (2007) *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing: Writing and Resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Williams P, Chrisman L and Chrisman L (eds) (2015) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Williams R (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfe P (1994) Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* (36): 93–152.
- Worthington A (2007) *The Guantanamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison*. London: Pluto Press.
- Young RJC (2004) *White Mythologies*. 2 edition. London: Routledge.
- المدفع (n.d.). Available at: <http://www.adab.com/literature/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=83684&r&rc=5> (accessed 22 November 2018).
- جدلية J- and Jadaliyya (n.d.) Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process: Caught between Israeli Xenophobia and Palestinian Political Expediency. Available at: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23612> (accessed 4 March 2019).

## Reports

*Administrative detention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: A Legal Analysis Report*, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, report published November 2008 and updated July 2010.

*Administrative Detention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory between Law and Practice*, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Right Association report, December 2010

*Without Trial: Administrative detention of Palestinians by Israel and the Interment of Unlawful Combatants law*, B'Tselem and Hamakoked report, October 2009

Olshansky, B and Gitani G. (2005) *The Guantanamo Prisoner Hunger strikers and Protests: 2002-2005*. A special report by the centre of Constitutional Rights.