

# Experiences of Torture, Means of Coping, and Level of Symptoms among Palestinian Political Prisoners

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Israel has occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the June 1967 war, and Palestinian resistance against the Israeli presence on their land has been fierce ever since. The most common and visible acts of resistance are demonstrations by students and school children, sit-ins, and strikes in protest against the occupation and its policies. Sometimes, methods of armed struggle are employed, such as shooting occupation soldiers or Israeli settlers.

Punishment for joining the national resistance is harsh. For instance, a Palestinian arrested for throwing a stone at an Israeli vehicle can expect twenty years imprisonment (Military Order No. 1108), although, to date the military courts have meted out no more than one and one-half years for such an offense.<sup>1</sup> The sentences of Palestinian prisoners are commonly based on an accusation that they are “members of illegal organizations” (meaning the PLO), planning or taking part in sabotage against Israelis, or raising a Palestinian flag. In addition to imprisonment, Israeli authorities use administrative measures to punish and control: town and house arrest, administrative detention, deportation, and house demolition or sealing. In one year, from August 1985 to the end of July 1986, 65 residences were either destroyed or sealed, 145 people were placed under administrative detention, 35 were deported, and 35 restriction orders were imposed in the West Bank area.<sup>2</sup>

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It is impossible to estimate the number of Palestinians from the occupied territories who participate in national resistance whether as prisoners, in political exile, or as fighters. For young people living in conditions of foreign occupation, participation in the national struggle has always been a natural choice, and the Palestinians are no exception. Thus, a rather common fate for a young man and sometimes for a young woman living in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip is to experience detention and the interrogation methods of the occupiers. According to a report by the International Red Cross, there have been some 500,000 detentions or arrests for security reasons.<sup>3</sup> This means that of the one and a half million Palestinian Arabs residing in the occupied territories, a third has been detained by the Israelis in the twenty years of military occupation. Some lawyers' reports have also revealed that every third Palestinian living under Israeli occupation has been detained for security reasons.<sup>4</sup> The number of detained and imprisoned Palestinians from the occupied territories currently† amounts to 4,500, a number identical to that during the period that preceded the mass release of Palestinians following the prisoner exchange deal of 1985. According to data in an International Red Cross report, most of the detainees are in their twenties. They possess at most secondary education, reside in the refugee camps, and are unskilled laborers.<sup>5</sup>

Israeli authorities deny that systematic torture is used in interrogating Palestinian detainees. Some international reports confirm this, stating that torture is not "systematic" but occurs in some cases.<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International has, however, received reports of ill-treatment in the form of testimonies from former detainees, statements from lawyers, and eyewitness accounts.

The frequency and consistency of these reports indicate that some Palestinians from the occupied territories arrested for security reasons and interrogated by the Shin Beth Israeli intelligence services in a number of different detention centers have been hooded, handcuffed, and forced to stand without moving for many hours at a time for several days, and have been exposed while naked to cold showers or cold air ventilators for long periods of time. Detainees have also been deprived of food, sleep, and toilet and medical facilities, and have been subjected to abuse, insults, and threats against themselves and the female members of their families.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, Israel has officially allowed Shin Bet interrogators to use

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†This report was written prior to the uprising.

“psychological pressure and light violence when interrogating those suspected of terrorist acts.”<sup>8</sup> In Israeli terms, most of the Palestinian political detainees are suspected of terrorism. The extent to which methods of torture are used as a means of interrogation and punishment in Israeli prisons is not the main interest here. This paper focuses on the responses of victims exposed to torture or other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

Studies on the impact of the experience of torture on psychological functioning are few. A considerable part of the information available on the psychological consequences of torture comes from research on concentration camp survivors.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, Amnesty International physicians have been urged to collect evidence on the frequency of torture and to study and help victims suffering from the physical and psychological consequences of torture.<sup>10</sup> Foster and Sandler have studied the experiences of torture, modes of coping with detention, and health symptoms of South African detainees.<sup>11</sup> Some studies have been conducted on the psychological suffering of children of political prisoners.<sup>12</sup> Psychological symptoms and mental health problems found among victims of torture are similar to “post-traumatic symptoms.” They typically include symptoms of anxiety, hyperalertness, concentration and memory disturbances, and a tendency to reexperience the traumatic experiences in dreams and thoughts.<sup>13</sup>

There is also little knowledge about the sociopsychological resources and processes which in practice may “protect” torture victims. The literature provides impressionistic evidence that there is a positive relationship between an individual’s ideological commitment and his/her psychological endurance during torture and his/her ability to recover from it.<sup>14</sup>

Characteristics such as sadism, low self-esteem, and obedience and submission to authority have been used to explain the behavior of a torturer. The phenomenon of torture cannot, however, be understood from the individual psychological point of view. However cruel the actions of individual torturers may be, the torture itself has a rationale: isolation, humiliation, psychological pressure, and physical pain are means to obtain information, to break down the prisoner, to destroy a victim’s sense of self-esteem, and to intimidate those close to him or her. These means are used, as a rule, as an integral part of the government’s security policy. The Israeli treatment of Palestinians engaged in resistance activities, for instance, is aimed at punishing the suspect, as well as acquiring information about Palestinian political and military organization, obtaining a confession as primary evidence against the accused, and warning and frightening others from further political activity.

It is characteristic of the psychosocial situation of torture that the torturer seldom feels guilt for his/her deeds. The use of torture is generally defended on the grounds of expediency: the authorities are obliged to defeat terrorists, who have put innocent lives at risk and endanger state security. For an interrogator working for a state that requires torture to help suppress political opposition or, as in the Israeli case, to overcome the enemy, the work of torturing is regarded as a patriotic duty and is carried out just like any other job. Feelings of shame and guilt belong to the victims rather than the torturers.<sup>15</sup> For a victim, torture is a calculated assault on his/her mind, body, and human dignity. The degrading and humiliating acts leave a deep imprint on the victim, feelings of shame being but one feature.

This study seeks to describe the psychological process initiated by exposure to torture in a group of Palestinian political ex-prisoners. The occurrence of physical and psychological torture and sexual abuse‡ during the interrogation and imprisonment will be assessed. The study further inquires about the coping resources and actual coping modes that the Palestinian political prisoners employed in order to protect their dignity in the face of prison hardships. The occurrence of the “torture syndrome” among Palestinian ex-prisoners and factors related to the level of symptoms, such as the age of the prisoner, duration of imprisonment, exposure to torture, and coping modes, will be analyzed. For a number of the symptoms, the Palestinian study group is compared with three groups: male Palestinian students, female Palestinians, and South American political prisoners.

## *Method*

*Subject.* A follow-up study on the mental health of Palestinian women and children living in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip was conducted in autumn 1985.<sup>16</sup> During the visits to the Palestinian families, forty former prisoners were asked to fill in a questionnaire written in Arabic. A group of 91 male university students and 174 women living in the occupied territories was used as a comparison group for the frequency of some symptoms.

The political prisoners studied were young; most of them (N = 26) were less than thirty years of age. Only six of the forty ex-prisoners were married, and four had children. Most of them were imprisoned when they were between the ages of 17 and 20, and thus their opportunity to pursue higher

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‡The term sexual abuse, as it is used here, refers to molestation, rape, or attempts to rape the prisoner or a female family member, as well as the hitting of sexual organs. See table 2 below.

Table 1: Age of the subjects and duration of imprisonment.

Age	Duration of imprisonment			
	N	(%)	N	(%)
<20 years	4	(10)	1-12 months	14 (35)
21-30	26	(65)	13-24 months	6 (15)
31-40	6	(15)	25-36 months	3 (7.5)
>40 years	4	(10)	37-48 months	5 (12.5)
			5-9 years	6 (15)
			>10 years	6 (15)

education was minimal. Unemployment was high in the sample: about half were without work. Half of the men lived in refugee camps, ten in towns, and ten in rural villages. A third of the group had been detained for less than a year, and a third for more than five years. The sample included ten "administrative detainees," who were imprisoned without charge or trial by military authorities, using administrative (as opposed to judicial) procedures. An administrative detainee can be held up to six months, with the option of indefinite six-month renewals (Military Order No. 378).

*Procedure.* The list of methods of torture includes physical and psychological ill-treatment and sexual abuse. The content of different methods of torture that are used in Israeli military prisons was obtained from an Amnesty International report,<sup>17</sup> from lawyers defending Palestinian political prisoners,<sup>18</sup> testimonies from former detainees,<sup>19</sup> and other studies.<sup>20</sup> The male subjects were asked whether they had been exposed to ill-treatment: 1) never; 2) sometimes; 3) very often; and whether it had taken place during: a) the interrogation or b) imprisonment. For cluster variables, means of methods used 1) in interrogation and 2) during detention were separately assessed. Separate cluster variables accounted for physical, psychological, and sexual methods of torture (see table 2).

A scale of 25 symptoms included psychosomatic, behavioral, and affective symptoms, and changes in mental function as well as physical damage. They were drawn from the category of "post-traumatic stress disorders" measuring consequences of torture or any man-made stress.<sup>21</sup> The subjects were asked whether they had suffered from symptoms during the last few months: 1) never; 2) infrequently; 3) frequently; or 4) almost always.

Means of coping with hardships were gauged by open questions: "Please mention the things that helped you to withstand the hardships during the interrogation and detention;" and "What did you actually do when things were too harsh in order to withstand the treatment you received?" The

Table 2: Occurrence of physical and psychological torture and sexual abuse during interrogation and imprisonment among Palestinian and South American political prisoners.

	During interrogation N=40	During imprisonment N=40	South American N=41
<b>Physical Torture</b>			
Beating with hand or kicking with feet	100%	60%	100%
Beating with gun butts	65	20	80
Beating with truncheon or whip	77	52	61
Jumping on the body	72	32	—
Electric torture	27	7	66
Cold water torture	78	23	36
Application of burning cigarettes	48	12	12
Application of boiling water or chemicals	35	22	12
Physical injury (breaking bones)	43	25	27
Hanging by the hands	70	25	—
Forcing to stand in the sun for extended periods	62	47	—
Other means of torture (bright light, dripping water on head, etc.)	48	12	29
Deprivation of or minimal quantities of food	95	70	39
Deprivation of or minimal quantities of drink	78	32	36
<b>Psychological Torture</b>			
Solitary confinement	95	75	—
Humiliation directed against detainee's nationality	95	65	—
Humiliation directed against detainee's religion	67	52	—
Abuse and threats directed against detainee	92	52	78
Abuse and threats directed against members of detainee's family	68	30	32
Confronting detainee with false accusations	100	35	85
Falsification of confessions concerning detainee by others	70	22	—
Falsification of confessions by extracting them under torture	60	12	—
Threatening to inject material which causes sterility	67	33	—
Suggesting to make deals to release detainee if he agrees to confess to his own or friends' guilt	82	36	—
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>			
Hitting the sexual organs	80	27	—
Sexual molestation (stripping, touching sexual organs, etc.)	78	35	34
Rape or attempts to rape	23	7	15
Attempting or threatening rape of wife or sister	65	38	—

Note: For comparison with the South American sample, the percentages of the occurrence of torture of the Palestinian prisoners refer to the percent that gave "sometimes" or "often" as answers.

answers to open questions were categorized according to the content of the responses.

## Results

*Experience of torture.* The occurrence of exposure to torture and ill-treatment during interrogation and imprisonment is presented in table 2. As expected, ill-treatment was more common during interrogation than during imprisonment because the aim of interrogation in most cases was to gain information about Palestinian resistance and to obtain a confession. Beatings (100 percent) and cold water torture (78 percent) were commonly experienced by Palestinian detainees during interrogation. Starvation or minimal food (95 percent) and deprivation of drink (78 percent) were also frequently reported. Psychological methods of torture were also often applied; only 5 percent of the studied ex-prisoners were spared solitary confinement, and only 10 percent had not faced abuse and threats during interrogation directed either at themselves or at their families. False accusations during interrogation were familiar to all prisoners studied. Furthermore, 70 percent had been exposed to false confessions, which were said to be given by comrades, and 82 percent were offered bribes to agree to falsify their own confession or incriminate a friend. Of the detainees, 60 percent disclosed that false confessions were extorted by means of torture. Sexual abuse was also frequently experienced, such as by hitting the sexual organs (80 percent) or sexual molestation (78 percent).

A comparison of the tortures experienced by Palestinian and South American prisoners shows that the beating of political detainees was equally common in both groups. Cold water torture, sexual molestation, and deprivation of food and drink were more commonly experienced by the Palestinian detainees under Israeli interrogation than by the South American detainees. The use of electric torture was more common among the South American prisoners interviewed by Allodi and Cowgill.<sup>22</sup>

*Description of means of torture.* The interviewed ex-prisoners described the different methods of torture they had experienced. Many of them mentioned hanging by the hands, which ex-prisoners called "crucifying," cold water showers, and systematic beating, especially of the sexual organs. Furthermore, inserting objects into the rectum, using tear gas or poison against detainees, and hooding were often recollected. The following examples may reveal the traumatic nature of such treatment:

They put you on a chair, and in a regular manner one soldier hits you on the ear, and the other slaps you on the face. And they keep asking questions that don't need any answers. You easily lose your balance.

One of the interrogators was keen on beating my testicles time and again, as a result of which I fainted more than eight times.

Once, more than five interrogators showed me to a small room, my hands were tied and my eyes blindfolded. They rushed in and suddenly began beating me without asking any questions for five hours running. I was severely beaten with sticks and a hammer on the sensitive spots of my body till I lost consciousness.

I was tied up to a pole for a long period without sleep.

I was hung naked from the ceiling, tied up by the hands or legs, or simultaneously by hands and legs, time and again.

In January 1976 I was left for twenty one days in the peak of winter with only light clothes and a thin blanket at night, and subjected to a daily practice of splashing with cold water, teargassing, and being beaten all over the body.

I was ordered, after they had beaten me up, to sit naked on a hot electrical stove. After that I was subjected to a cold shower, then a hot one and so on.

The Palestinian ex-prisoners often mentioned psychological torture, but hardly ever described their experiences. The reason for that silence may be the fact that, for example, threats of rape or humiliation directed towards female members of the family are deeply disturbing experiences because of the moral norms in Palestinian society. The following reports by an ex-prisoner show the nature of psychological torture:

Once they made me stand naked on a table surrounded by investigators for more than two hours.

For me, the humiliating thing was to be compelled to eat and sleep in a terrible smelling toilet for an extended period.

A terrible experience was the attempt by the soldiers to rape the sister and wife of a fellow prisoner before his eyes.

Torturing my comrades in front of me by beating them harshly on every part of their bodies.

I was left in solitary confinement for eighteen days; they sprayed cold water on me, but I was not allowed to bath or clean myself.

The worst experience for me were the nightly assaults of my family at home, and the beating up and terrorizing of my children.

*Coping resources.* The ability to cope was assessed by inquiring from the Palestinian ex-prisoners about what helped them to withstand the hardship they experienced and their actual responses to the hardships.

Most of the ex-prisoners mentioned more than one factor that helped them to withstand hardships. The answers show the psychological importance of ideological involvement in facing stress. Twenty-three of the ex-prisoners mentioned the just cause of the Palestinian struggle as a resource that helped them to withstand the hardships. Ten mentioned loyalty toward their own people, patriotism and a feeling of pride, and defiance as resources. Seven prisoners said that they felt they were sharing the fate of the whole nation, and considered detention to be natural in the life of Palestinians under military occupation. Resources mentioned by five to six ex-prisoners were: anticipation of the acts of the enemy, knowledge about the investigation methods, one's own will power, psychological preparation, and consciousness of one's choice in matters of political commitment. A feeling of international and national solidarity, support by one's fellow prisoners, and an affiliation with one's family were also factors that helped prisoners to withstand hardships:

I felt that I was imprisoned for a just cause, and I was proud of my nationality. This helped me to exercise patience and hope.

In conditions of occupation you expect to be exposed to investigation and you are prepared to land in jail some day, even for no apparent reason.

Confidence that I was detained because I defend my people; and when you realize your just cause, you become an integral part of it.

First, my belief in my cause and love for my native land. Second, strong willpower as the first and foremost factor. With willpower nothing can break you. Support by the young men inside the prison gives you great support.

My experience is that the Israelis are vicious enemies who will be more tenacious if we display weakness. To stand your ground is to defy them and belittle their methods.

The shared feeling that all of us within prison walls are exposed to the same injustice and that the cause for which we were imprisoned is a just one. Our morale is high because our struggle is not only for borders; it is an ideological struggle, not only for the Palestinian people, but for all oppressed nations and revolutionary movements in Arab countries and throughout the world.

The most important factor which helped me withstand physical and psychological torture was my awareness that many people were imprisoned before me and could stand their ground in front of the investigators. If others were ready to struggle for justice and even accept martyrdom outside prison, why should I not be defiant inside prison? The presence of other comrades lifted my morale.

I kept my hope in the future; I knew that confession is treason. Furthermore, I had the feeling that my family needs me. I felt also that if I confessed, the interrogator would be victorious; if I did not, he is defeated and I gain the victory.

*Coping modes.* What did the prisoners actually do when hardships were overwhelming? Most of the actual coping strategies were collective in nature. In only a few cases were individual or intrapsychic modes of coping mentioned.

Seventeen of the ex-prisoners said that they had gone on hunger strikes as a means of coping when facing overwhelming hardships. Ten prisoners mentioned participating in other protest activities and international solidarity work.

We stood like men in the face of difficulties, sometimes hunger strikes were the only means available to tackle our problems.

I never undertook individual action; our confrontation with a harsh situation was collective. We acted through a strict organization and proclaimed hunger strikes with the help of our people. We achieved considerable success in this way. Once, in an intolerable situation I was obliged to resist force with force, and I hit one of the worst guards, for which I was tried.

We protested and threatened mutiny and proclaimed hunger strikes. All this was done collectively, not individually. I personally immunized myself against the many social diseases that are normally endemic in prisons. These were the most important factors that helped me endure my long term of captivity.

Organizing and participating in the social and cultural life in prison, asking for help and support from fellow prisoners, and affiliation with the group were mentioned in ten cases as means of coping.

You can't do much inside prison. You get accustomed to jail, especially when you meet many people there with the same sorrows and ideas, and who confront the same problems. Then you get involved with a small community which absorbs you, and you become secluded from the thinking of the outside world.

I stood my ground, was patient, and encouraged the younger prisoners. It was important to teach them not to display weakness in front of the enemy and deprive the enemy of his enjoyment of a victory.

Studying served as a means of coping with hardships by keeping the prisoners' minds active and creative. Studying helped the prisoners to make sense of why they had come to be victims of imprisonment and torture. Prisoners also consciously fought against depression; they took care to get sufficient sleep and stay clean; they concentrated on reading and were conscious of affiliations with people to whom they were close.

I convinced myself that I could handle all the painful and terrible treatment, because I have to be strong to the end. I used to think all the time about my people, and especially about people I love. That is how I could stand it.

I remembered my mother telling me not to fear them but to stand firm. I recalled that confession is treason, while standing one's ground is heroism. I prayed to God.

I was always thinking of new methods to challenge the prison management's ruthless methods of oppression. Sometimes I spent my time reading a book.

I took to personal study. I usually sat with other comrades talking about our affairs within the prison walls and about the circumstances under which our people live inside and outside Palestine. When we were wronged by the prison management, we firmly protested and stood up against it.

In a few cases, the prisoners applied intrapsychic coping modes such as praying and daydreaming or denying the outside world:

I shut my eyes and thought: why did we, as a nation, come to this grievous situation? Quite often I took comfort in some past beautiful reminiscences. Sometimes I thought about the creator and if it was true that he knows about everything that takes place on earth.

I usually resorted to sleep as a means of escaping from painful reality. Sometimes I resorted to reading or creating an imaginary world in which to live, or taking a cold shower.

*Frequency of symptoms.* To illustrate the relative frequency of symptoms in the group of ex-prisoners, some symptoms were compared with experiences of a group of Palestinian male students from the West Bank, a sample of Palestinian women living in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip,<sup>23</sup> and a group of South American political prisoners.<sup>24</sup>

No differences in symptoms were discovered between the prison and the student group. Only loss of weight was more frequent among the ex-

Table 3: Symptoms among I) Palestinian ex-prisoners, II) Palestinian male students, III) Palestinian women, and IV) South American prisoners<sup>§</sup>

	I N=40 %	II N=91 %	III N=174 %	IV** N=41 %
<b>Psychological</b>				
Paralyzing and strong fear	55			29
Strong dizziness and spells of fainting	17	12	53	63
Increased nervousness and restlessness	53	40	80	80
Depressive and sad feelings	50		70	
Difficulties in sleeping	53	43	70	68
Nightmares	40	31	64	34
<b>Behavioral changes</b>				
Thoughts of suicide	7			
Suicide attempts				10
Withdrawal and avoiding association with people	28			
An inclination towards violent conduct	50			32
Difficulties in controlling emotions	47			
Sex dysfunction	33			12
<b>Mental function</b>				
Spells of confusion	39			12
Confusion and disturbance of memory	54			29
Difficulties in concentration and attention	22			32
<b>Physical damage</b>				
Scars, burns on the body	56			51
Fractures (broken bones)	26			19
Deafness	10			12
Deterioration of hearing	10			
Blindness	18			
Deterioration of sight	51			
Weight loss	59	32	56	24
Skin diseases	31			
Need for medical operation	34			
Other illnesses	55			

<sup>§</sup>The scale for symptoms in the three Palestinian groups ranged from 1 to 4: “never,” “infrequently,” “frequently,” and “almost always,” while the symptoms of the South American ex-prisoners are reported on a dichotomic scale. For the comparison, the values of “frequently” and “almost always” are included.

\*\*Symptoms after torture among South American prisoners were presented in numbers (Allodi & Gowgill, 1982); for this comparison their occurrence is shown in percentages.

prisoners than the students. Among the three Palestinian groups living in the occupied territories, the women expressed a higher level of symptoms than both the male samples.

Physical injuries, such as scars, fractures, or deafness, were about as common among both Palestinian and South American ex-prisoners. Paralyzing fears, spells of confusion, memory disturbances, sexual dysfunction, and loss of weight were more common among the Palestinian ex-prisoners, while dizziness and fainting spells, increased nervousness, and depressive feelings were more frequent among South American ex-prisoners.

*Level of symptoms according to age of detainee, duration of detention, and exposure to torture.* The relationships between age, duration, experiences of torture, and symptoms were assessed by means of analysis of variance. The older men (>24) were more often exposed to torture, especially sexual abuse, than the younger men. No difference was found in the number and severity of symptoms between young and older ex-prisoners. There was a natural association between duration of detention and the number of torture experiences, but no relationship between duration and the level of symptoms. There were no associations between the physical and sexual methods of torture and the level of symptoms. Significant association was found only between exposure to psychological torture and symptoms. The symptoms were more severe among those exposed to many, than among those exposed to few, psychological means of torture.

### *Moral Issue*

The study of the experience of torture and psychological responses to it is very sensitive for two reasons. First, even if the Palestinian men are out of prison, they are by no means free to express their feelings or tell about their experiences while still living under Israeli military occupation. Many of the interviewees were still under house or town arrest, which meant that they could not leave their homes and that they had to report regularly to the Israeli military governor. The interviewees told me about their constant fear of being sent back to prison, which came out in the form of dreams and attacks of panic.

In the political conditions of foreign occupation, any expression of national sentiment constituted a risk to personal security. In this study, for instance, some answers indicating a strong identification with Palestinian national aims could have been considered a crime by the Israelis and would have led to re-incarceration. Therefore, it was not possible to carry out a thorough assessment of ideological commitment to the national struggle as

a coping mode. Many other questions, including demographic data, were excluded in order to ensure the anonymity of ex-prisoners. No names or identifying socioeconomic questions were asked for security reasons.

Second, a moral problem arose at the result-reporting stage. Psychological studies should not provide material that may enable the interrogators to develop more effective methods of torturing and breaking down a prisoner's resistance. There is no doubt that methods of torture are becoming more sophisticated and scientific, and behavioral sciences have contributed to this.

Beating, stretching, burning, starving, and isolation have long been within the repertoire of torturers. The experiences of different methods of torture among the Palestinians correspond to those of other political prisoners.<sup>25</sup> In recent years, the use of electric shocks and loud sounds have become common.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Palestinian political prisoners, too, interrogators have often employed methods based on psychological knowledge, such as sensory deprivation, false confessions, humiliation, and the threat of degrading acts.

Political history may explain why modern, psychological, and scientific means of torture—so-called interrogation methods—are needed and developed. First, it seems the old methods were not “effective” enough. Experiences in Vietnam, South Africa, and the Philippines show that strong military powers have not managed to suppress national resistance or liberation movements either by means of individual torture or by collective oppression. Second, the popularity of psychological methods of torture may be related to the fact that they do not leave physical marks as evidence of torture. This is important to regimes who care about world opinion or to governments like that of Israel, whose foreign aid from the U.S. is linked to the proviso that human rights will not be violated.<sup>27</sup>

Representatives of the International Red Cross in Israel pay at least one visit to every Palestinian detainee during detention. They also look into the living conditions in prisons where Palestinians from the territories are held. However, owing to an agreement with the Israeli government, the organization's opinion on conditions in these prisons is given only to the parties involved and thus is not published.

### *Collective Coping*

The ex-prisoners coped with prison hardships by employing goal-oriented, political, and collective acts. The resources that helped the prisoners to withstand their experiences included confidence in the just

cause of the Palestinian struggle, feelings of national pride and patriotism, and affiliation with the group. The most frequently mentioned single act of coping was a hunger strike.

The first mass hunger strike by Palestinian political prisoners took place in 1976–77 at Ashkelon prison. The strike, a protest against poor conditions, lasted forty-five days and claimed the life of one of the prisoners. It is seen as an important turning point in the history of prison rights. The psychological impact of the strike was remarkable in that it encouraged Palestinian prisoners to employ collective acts of coping. In March 1987, the demands of Palestinian political prisoners on hunger strike included a list of twenty issues—such as stopping physical torture, intimidation, and humiliation—and a demand that an independent investigation be set up to supervise this. The prisoners' families and human rights organizations in the area supported the prisoners' struggle by organizing sit-ins and other campaigns.<sup>28</sup>

The analysis of the coping responses of the Palestinian political prisoners showed that the context in which a person faces torture and ill-treatment determines the psychological responses to it. When the source of stress is political in nature, psychological coping modes derive their strength from the political reality. In the case of Palestinians, the coping resources were ideological and nationalist in nature. The relatively moderate level of psychological symptoms among ex-prisoners as compared with a group of Palestinian students could be interpreted as the result of successful coping. This study thus confirms the importance of ideological preparation and commitment and group support in psychological recovery from torture.



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