

## Remembering the Prisoners of War Camps



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## Remembering the Prisoners of War Camps

## Introduction

The study of the Nakba and its implications for the lives of Palestinians – both those uprooted from the territory that would become Israel, and those who remained, for various reasons, within the boundaries of the Jewish state and became its citizens, is far from complete. As research efforts delve deeper, new aspects come to light that have been previously neglected or misrepresented, and remained concealed from the public for many decades.

Ten years ago, Zochrot hosted Professor Mustafa Kabha and journalist Wadi' 'Awāwdeh for the launch of their book *أسرى بلا حراب: المعتقلون الفلسطينيون والمعتقلات الإسرائيكية الأولى* (Prisoners without Bayonets: The Palestinian Prisoners and the First Israeli Detention Centers, 1948-1949), published in Arabic in Beirut, in 2013. The book described the detaining of thousands of Palestinians who survived the ethnic cleansing and remained within the territory of the State of Israel. To this day, this phenomenon has remained unfamiliar to an organization such as Zochrot, as probably to most of the Israeli and non-Israeli public. Despite the scope of the phenomenon, and although that book added much to our knowledge about it, it remained understudied even after its publication. Based on Dr. Shai Gortler's research, this booklet includes details and documents unknown hitherto, including documents from the Archive of the Red Cross, which was in touch with the prisoners at the time.

Most of the studies about the Nakba, including Zochrot's activities, have focused on the factors and events that (re)produced it, such as the ethnic cleansing, massacres, denial of return, destruction of Palestinian towns and villages, and the Judaization

of space. Very few have been dedicated to the implications of the Nakba, in its first years, for Palestinians who became citizens of the State of Israel.

This study, and recent literature devoted to the years of the Military Government imposed on the survivors of the Nakba by the State of Israel in 1948-1966, indicates that the ongoing Nakba was no less traumatic than the events of 1948. The latter represented the culmination of the Nakba, but by no means its termination.

Zochrot's main task is to narrate the Nakba in Hebrew, for the Jewish-Israeli public. Hence the idea to publish this booklet, in Hebrew, as well as in Arabic and English – to inform the readers about the detention centers built by the nascent state to imprison thousands of Palestinian men for two years, about the treatment they received while in detention, and about the state's policy towards them after their release.

This booklet is based on the few previous studies published about the subject in Arabic and English, as well as on Israeli archival documents. This seminal material, provided in Hebrew, sheds light on one of the least known aspects of the Nakba. Detention is an ongoing aspect of Palestinian lives to this day: it is difficult to find any Palestinian families none of whose members has never been detained or imprisoned. Israelis, on the other hand, usually devote little attention to this aspect, fail to recognize it, and usually assume every detention to be justified and every community or national activism in support of detainees and prisoners to be a crime in its own right. In publishing this booklet, we hope to shed some light on the history of the detention of Palestinians by the State of Israel in the ongoing Nakba, and thereby contribute to greater recognition of this phenomenon.

When we started working on this booklet, we never imagined that at the time of its publication, we would once again witness mass detention centers, but this is the current reality in Palestine. The booklet is being published at the time when the Nakba – ongoing since 1948 – is entering a new stage. Since October 2023, this stage, more lethal than all its predecessors, involves massive killing in Gaza, the uprooting of more than two million people, and starvation. In particular, it involves indiscriminate detentions as well as systematic torturing of Palestinians held in various detention facilities in Israel. These dark days make it even more important, and urgent, to study the injustices of the past and recent present, to enable us to choose a different future.

This booklet is the initiative of Zochrot member Dr. Shai Gortler, and is mainly an adaptation of his academic study. Zochrot is proud to support projects arising from our political community, bridging research and activism.

## Preface

Between 1948 and 1950 around 8,300 Palestinians were incarcerated in make-shift Prisoners of War (POW) camps. These camps did not only hold soldiers and combatants but many Palestinians whose crime was simply to exist. Men “of fighting age,” understood as 15-55 but regularly also young children and seniors, were taken to these camps where they spent 6-18 months, put to work, and for the most part were later expelled. Several names were used for these sites. They were called POW camps even though a majority of Palestinian non-combatants were held in them alongside a small minority of Palestinian combatants and soldiers and officers of regular armies. They were called “Detention centers” to better reflect the fact that the majority of people within them were not combatants (yet, see below Yūsif Sāyigh's preference for the protection that the term Prisoner of War grants). They were called “work camps” because some of them were used for such purposes. One Israeli document even refers to them as “concentration camps.”

This booklet builds on previous work by Salman Abu Sitta, Terry Rempel, Mustafa Kabha, Wādī' 'Awāwdeh, Aaron Klein, and the memoirs of the Palestinian intellectual Yūsif Sāyigh, a prisoner in these camps, written by Rosemary Sāyigh who contributed a new text to this booklet as well. It adds never-before-exposed archival documents from the International Committee of the Red Cross Archive, the Israeli State Archives, and the “IDF and Defense Establishment” Archive and the National Archives (UK).

**Testimony by Yūsif Sāyigh, taken prisoner in Jerusalem (as written by Rosemary Sāyigh)**

"I was taken prisoner of war a few days after the state of Israel was established... We drove on until ultimately we stopped and they opened the doors. Come down! Come down! They guarded us very heavily. It turned out to be a new settlement. Only the foundations of the houses were laid, and the floors had no walls at all. We were made to squat, and put our hands behind our necks. Somebody came who spoke to us in English and said, 'I'm the commander of this camp, and you'll have to obey my orders and the orders of any sergeant or soldier' We have to see what we'll do with you. We consider you saboteurs who have been left behind to carry out sabotage. According to international law, we are allowed to shoot you. But since Israel is a state now, we want to do the right thing. We have to make sure that you are really saboteurs, and under what article of international law you will be shot.' So I said, 'No, we are prisoners of war.' Luckily-I don't know why it occurred to me-a few months before Palestine fell, I looked up some sort of convention-not the Geneva conventions because they were not signed until 1949, but there was some other convention from earlier wars.<sup>1</sup> I knew what the rights and duties of Prisoners of War were. I said again, 'We are prisoners of war.' He said, 'Huh! What kind of prisoners of war are you? A prisoner of war is a soldier; he's in uniform. He has arms, he has a number. You have none of these things. What army are you with?' And we couldn't pretend that we belonged to any army."

[Yūsif Sāyigh, "Prisoner of War: Yūsif Sāyigh, 1948 to 1949," Jerusalem Quarterly 29 (2007): 14-19.]

## Camp 101

Yūsif Sāyigh was held for six weeks in Camp 101 in Jerusalem. Located in Neve Sha'anana, on the grounds where the Israel Museum now stands, Camp 101 was a temporary prisoners of war camp for Palestinians captured in the vicinity of Jerusalem. An International Committee of the Red Cross delegate who visited Camp 101 on June 7, 1948 wrote in his report that the POWs "all regret...to have been imprisoned notwithstanding the fact that they are civilians and not combatants. They complain of insufficient food."

When the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were opened, Sāyigh was transferred to Ijlil.



**Camp 101, 1948**

Photo by Rudolf Jonas

<sup>1</sup> Sāyigh is referring to the 1929 Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

Within The Israel Museum, Paul Klee's Angelus Novus literally overlooks the ruins of the houses of Neve Sha'anani which in the 1948 Nakba housed the first Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, and earlier by the Haganah. Walter Benjamin imagines the painting as The Angel of History whose "face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." A central layer of the Palestinian Nakba, the catastrophe, currently fixes the Angel of History to his place.



## Ijlil (Prisoner of War Camp no. 791)

Ijlil opened in May 26, 1948.<sup>2</sup> The captives were held in make-shift tents and in the houses of the depopulated Palestinian village of Ijlil al-Qibiliyya. The first group of captives were brought to Ijlil from the village Zarnūqa, the second from al-Tantūra, and the third from Jaffa. The massacre of al-Tantūra during May 23, 1948 (as well as other events) might have been a catalysator for establishing the camp. A permanent camp with a capacity of 4,200 was built. Yūsif Sāyigh was transferred to Ijlil in late

<sup>2</sup> Aaron Klein, "The Arab Prisoners in the War of Independence," in *Israel's War of Independence 1948-1949: A Reappraisal*, ed. Alon Kadish (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 2004), 569.

June 1948 and became the prisoners' representative. His documented conversations with the ICRC representative demonstrate the POWs' resilience. The delegate writes: "The Camp Leader stated his wish to remain in close contact with the delegation; his letters to the delegates are not transmitted rapidly enough. The delegates arraigned that he should send them a weekly report on the situation." However, once Palestinian leadership became well-organized, the Israeli authorities would disperse it. Yūsif Sāyigh was transferred to the second permanent camp established, 'Atlit.



**Ijlil POW Camp  
(present-day  
HaSira  
interchange), 1949**

Album no. 3, IDFA



Ijlil: aerial photo, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1948

Photo no. 2781, IDFA

## 'Atlit (Prisoner of War Camp no. 792)

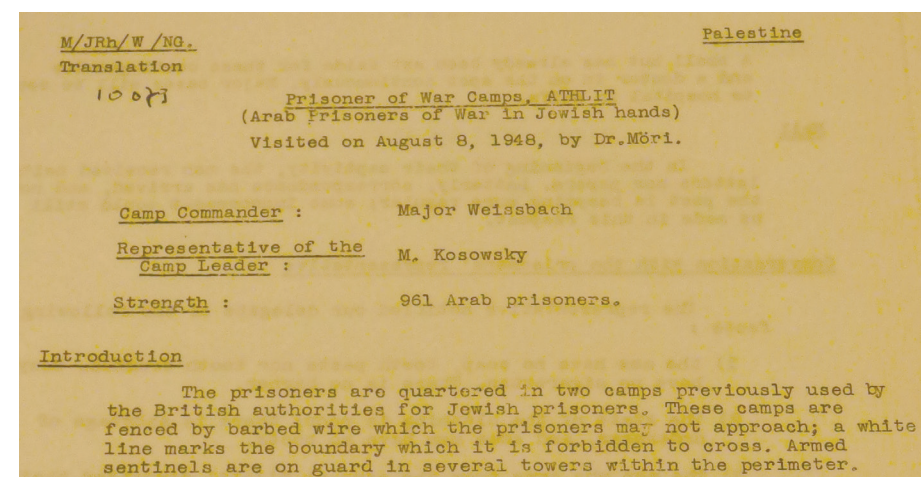
On July 1948, after Ijlil reached its capacity, a second camp was established on the grounds of a British camp that imprisoned illegal Jewish immigrants ("Clearance Camp 'Atlit", est. January 1940). While the British camp had a capacity of 1664 prisoners, the Israeli camp increased the capacity to 2900 POWs.<sup>3</sup>

On the extent of colonial aphasia:

An Israeli museum that commemorates the Jewish illegal immigration of the 1940s stands on part of the grounds of the original camp. The museum does not mention 'Atlit's use as a camp for Palestinian civilians at the end of that decade. Moreover, no one in the research unit of the museum (!), nor its chairperson, heard that 'Atlit was also used as a prisoners of war camp for Palestinians. In fact, despite archival evidence to the contrary, they denied that such a use ever took place even when presented with the ICRC document below.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Yehoshua Caspi, Prisons in Eretz Israel during the British Mandate, page 152.

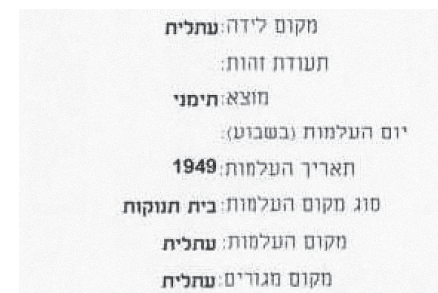
<sup>4</sup> ICRC, Palestine, C SC, 1948-1950. In their article on the camps and the ICRC, Rempel and Abu Sita do not rely on the 1948 visit reports to the camps.



Document from ICRC visit to 'Atlit, August 1948

ICRCA, file C SC, Palestine 1948-50

As with Ijlil and Sarafand, 'Atlit was later used as a Ma'abara for Mizrahi Jews during the 1950s. Ma'abarat 'Atlit was one of the sites mentioned in the reports on the kidnapping of Jewish Yemenite children. In August 1995 Meryam Rada'a wrote to the Cohen-Kedmi Committee about the attempted kidnapping of her son Rahamim, prevented only because of Meryam's vigilant resistance.<sup>5</sup>



Snippet of file regarding the disappearance and return of the baby Rahamim Rada'a. January 3, 1996

ISA, file 9717/14-ג

<sup>5</sup> Rada'a Rahamim, File 272/95, Cohen-Kedmi Committee about the missing Yemenite children that testify themselves or are being testified on. 14/9717-ג, ISA.

## Yūsif Sāyigh, prisoner of war, May 1948 to spring 1949

Written by Rosemary Sāyigh for this Zochrot booklet

The story of Yūsif's imprisonment in 1948 was probably part of our first meeting in Iraq. I was there to teach at the Queen Aliya College for girls; he was looking for economists as part of his job at the Economic Research Institute at the American University of Beirut. We met accidentally through a mutual friend, and he invited me out to supper. We talked until 3 o'clock in the morning.

Yūsif was imprisoned because he refused to leave Jerusalem on May 15, 1948, when the state of Israel was declared, though he knew that staying would lead to his capture. Conditions in the prison camps were bad, especially at the beginning: "We slept without food or water, in the open, on the bare ground." Nothing but tea made from used leaves; later, a hundred grams of bread per day. No sanitary arrangements. Less than three litres of water a day drinking, washing, and cleaning utensils. Winter conditions were particularly hard: the tents leaked and often collapsed on the prisoners. Yūsif began to suffer severe back pain. This was the beginning of the slipped disc that so often incapacitated him later.

The Israelis often threatened to shoot the prisoners as saboteurs: Yūsif always insisted that they were prisoners of war and thus legally protected. Once a camp officer shot between his legs because of his insistence on prisoners' rights. But the eventual visit of a Red Cross official to the camp strengthened this claim.

Despite the climate of fear, as Yūsif told it there were positive elements too. He was voted *homme de confiance* because he knew the Geneva Conventions and stood up for prisoners' rights. He reported the illegal shooting of an escaped prisoner to the Red Cross. Believing in a 'second round', he wrote notes on the Israeli lines of defence on pieces of cloth, and sewed them into his underclothes. When the prisoners were released, "they searched us very thoroughly, body searches. But cloth doesn't crackle like paper so I got them out".

Sāyigh Yūsif, Yūsif Sāyigh: Arab Economist, Palestinian Patriot, ed. Rosemary Sāyigh (University of Cairo Press, 2015).

## Sarafand (Camp no. 793) and Tel Litvinski (Camp no. 794)

The Israeli authorities decided to use the POWs as cheap labor and established two camps for these purposes. Sarafand (today within Tzerifin military base) had a capacity of 1800 and Tel Litvinski (today within Tel HaShomer military base) had a capacity of 1000. Sarafand Camp took over a previous British detention camp that was erected during the 1936-39 uprising for "persons detained under the Emergency Regulations."<sup>6</sup> The prisoners were forced to work in fields, as mechanics, clearing stones of demolished Palestinian houses, and more. While POWs who did not work received 400 grams of bread daily, working prisoners received 700 grams, as well as 70 mil and 6 cigarettes daily. The Israeli authorities used the Hebrew words that mean live-stock enclosures to describe these camps: Michlaot 'avoda (מכלאות עבודה, see snippet of the camp commander signature stamp below)

Sarafand, due its function as a forced-labor camp, was the last camp to close.



Stamp of 793 POW Camp Commander:  
"Michlaot 'avoda.", January 10, 1949

ISA, file 308/23 -ג

<sup>6</sup> Saunders, A., Palestine Prison Service, March 21, 1938, Social Services Penal and Prison Matters Prisons Reorganization Palestine, National Archives (UK), page 4.



# Umm Khālid

## (Prisoner of War Camp no. 795)

Yūsif Sāyigh was transferred to Umm Khālid on November 13, 1948. Umm Khālid was a Palestinian village west of Tūl Karm, where Natanya is now. Umm Khālid Camp was a hybrid between the more established camps and the temporary ones, such as the Fort of Acre, and was mostly used as a labor camp. In a visit on September 22, 1948, the ICRC delegate thus described the living conditions of Umm Khālid: "The men are quartered in groups of 20 to 30 in an old, half demolished Arab village, now surrounded by barbed wire. The premises are badly lit and damp. Each man has a mattress and one blanket." Umm Khālid held 200 POWs in this visit.



**Interview with Dr. Adnan Yahya (born 1930, Tantura)  
by Dr. Shai Gortler, 25.2.2024  
Conducted in English, edited for clarity**

**Picture: Adnan Yahya, circa 1948**

AY: I was in Umm Khalid, and then Ijlil. First Umm Khalid, then Ijlil.

SG: For how long?

AY: About one year.

SG: What were the prison conditions? How was the Food?

AY: The food was very very bad. It was not good. We had to work and sometimes they gave us good food, sometimes not good. I was 17 years old and I had to work every day with other men.

SG: What kind of work?

AY: Cleaning the rooms and toilets of the soldiers and growing vegetables. We always had soldiers watching us.

SG: At Umm Khalid, did you sleep in a tent or in Umm Khalid's houses?

AY: In the village, many people in one room. Every day we had to take our clothes off and undress before the chief. He would come carrying a stick. He kicked us and we had to take our clothes off every morning. I don't know why. In Ijlil we were in tents outside. There were many Egyptian soldiers with us.

SG: What happened if someone refused to work?

AY: Yeah, they brought machine guns and told him "you have to work or we kill you." One day, although I was young, I was 17, 18 years old but because I spoke English, Arabic, and Hebrew, one day came a soldier and he called me and said "you are thieves, you stole my pocket change. If you don't bring it now, I will kill 3 of you." I was very angry and went to his gun and put his gun on my chest and said "if you want to kill somebody then kill me. They are not thieves. They don't have your pocket change." Then other soldiers came and took him away. It was very bad treatment.

SG: Did you have books to read?

AY: No [laughs]. To read? We had nothing. Only to work.

SG: In the end, how did it happen that you were deported?

AY: in Jerusalem, at the armistice lines, they brought us in buses and they gave us to the Jordanian army. We went and we didn't know what to do. Some men went to the street and begged to get some money. I was lucky because an uncle of mine waited for me and took me to Nablus. My uncle was a lawyer in Nablus and I stayed with him a few weeks. After that I went to Damascus.

SG: Do you remember the date you were deported in?

AY: It was 1949, I don't know.

SG: Would you have liked to stay in Palestine? If it was up to you? Would you not leave?

AY: Of course, Palestine is my home. Tantura is my home. And Haifa, we had two houses. One house in Haifa and one house in Tantura, in the village.

SG: In which neighborhood in Haifa?

AY: In...near the lycée...I don't remember, I can't remember. You see I am now 93 years old and I can't remember everything. I have to think and think... Abbas Street!

\*\*\*

I was in Tel Aviv also, and I was in the South of Palestine to work. They took us in trucks. I was in the street in Tel Aviv and one day I met a good friend of mine. A Jew. We worked together in the municipality in Haifa. During vacations I worked and helped at the municipality in Haifa. And I knew a good friend of mine. His name was Ezra Salame. And I didn't know where he is now. He was a very very good friend. He met me as I was in Tel Aviv on a truck and he came and looked and said "you are Adnan! What are you doing here!?" I said "I am your prisoner" and he was in uniform. He said he was going to Egypt. For the army. He was a very very good friend. He was from Iraq and he spoke Arabic also. I speak a bit of Hebrew. [says in Hebrew:] I speak Hebrew but not well.

SG: It has been many years.

AY: Yes, many years.



**Residents of the city of Acre moving towards Qala' prison after the fall of the city to Israeli forces on May 17, 1948**

*Before the Diaspora,*  
p. 239. (also in  
"Prisoner of War:  
Yūsif Sāyigh, 1948 to  
1949," p. 18)

## Expulsion

Yūsif Sāyigh chose to stay in the Greek Colony and did not take refuge in the old city of Jerusalem because he wanted to stay in his own neighborhood. Nevertheless, against his own volition, he was forced to join the other 770,000 Palestinians deported in the 1948 war. From Umm Khālid, he was expelled to Jordan in March 1949.

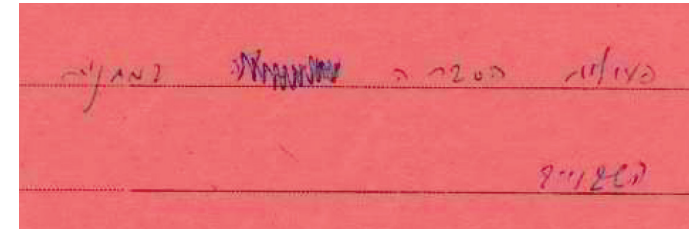
While Zionist depictions of 1948 include two contradicting narratives, that all Palestinians fled and that the deportations happened in the heat of battle, the 1948 POW camps add further evidence that this was not the case. First, around 8,300 Palestinians were held in this manner and arrested by the Zionist and then Israeli forces. Second, 78% of these were expelled beyond Israel's borders and prevented from returning. The Israeli summary of the camps, presented in a magnificent album held at the IDF Archive, stated that 6736 POWs were deported and 1619 POWs were allowed to stay. If the percentage of Palestinians expelled from Historic Palestine in 1948 is around 83%, even under calm conditions the percentage of 78% remains in close proximity. Within the group of 1,619 of people that were allowed to stay 771 were from the city of Nazareth. As with the rest of the country, Muslim Palestinians were expelled in higher numbers than Christian Palestinians. Subhi Bilāl and Rujūb al-Nazler were two of the four Palestinians allowed to stay and released to the town of al-Majdal.<sup>7</sup> We can imagine that they were probably deported when the entire city population was expelled to the Gaza Strip, again under calmer conditions and not during the war, in 1951.

Shimon Amir of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote to Ben Gurion's Adviser for Minority Affairs Yehoshua Palmon on May 11, 1949 that the Jordanian government refuses to accept the 744 POWs remaining in Sarafand because these POWs have relatives in Israel.<sup>8</sup> In other words, had the Jordanian government been willing to accept these POWs, they too would have been expelled despite their wishes to remain with their families. The same document specifies that the Egyptian government, in contrast, expressed its willingness to receive 450 POWs of the final group remaining in Sarafand.

<sup>7</sup> Arab matters advisor 17108/1 לְגַן prisoners release (general).

<sup>8</sup> Shimon Amir, The Fate of the Arab POWs in Camp Sarafand, May 11, 1949. Arab POWs, 2406/8-צח, ISA.

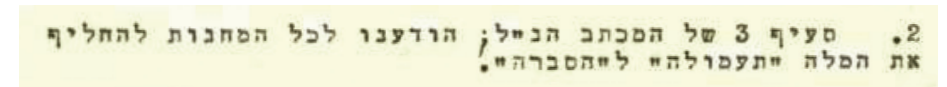
## A laboratory for Israelization



The word “propaganda” erased in the file name “Hasbara and Propaganda Activities in the POW Camps.”

ISA, file 308/24-ג

The word “propaganda” erased in the file name “Hasbara and Propaganda Activities in the POW Camps”



“We notified the camps to replace the word ‘propaganda’ with the word ‘hasbara.’”, January 30, 1949

ISA, file 308/24-ג

A common way to view POW camps is as not much more than hangers that simply house prisoners as objects until the time comes when they are no longer a threat. Against this view of the prisoner as object, the Israeli POW camps demonstrate that such camps are also sites for subject formation. From their onset, the POW camps were conducted according to principles of propaganda meant to affect the behavior, identity, and sense of self of the POWs and to use the camps as laboratories for the effectiveness of Israeli propaganda. In the early days of 1948, the word “propaganda” was still used unabashedly. It was only later that the camp commanders were ordered “to change the word ‘propaganda’ (*ta’amula*) with the word ‘hasbara.’” The goals were two pronged: to demonstrate the humane attitude of the Zionist project and to establish Israel as a fact in the minds of the Palestinians. Note that this “Israelization”

process does not mean that Palestinians were meant to become equal citizens in the post-war State of Israel— The Israeli security services objected, for example, that the Hebrew language be taught to the POWs.<sup>9</sup> The Israelization process was of a different nature. Palestinians expelled and those who remained were expected to internalize Israeli superiority as an established fact. In addition, the Israeli authorities used the camps as laboratories for testing the efficiency of their Israelization tactics as to those Palestinians who would be granted citizenship.

מטרת התעמולה היא להגביר את נאמנותם של המעוינים לממלכה  
ואת הלמתם עם המצב, אגבם צריכה התעמולה להסתיר מן הקרים, אבל  
גילוייה של מחצית האמת אינה מקרה.

**“The goal of propaganda is to augment the minorities’ loyalty to the government and their coming to terms with the situation. While our propaganda should avoid lies, revealing only half the truth is not a lie.”, December 8, 1948**

ISA, file 1322/52-ג

Representatives of the Middle East Department of the Israeli Foreign Ministry demonstrated this use of the POW camps as testing grounds for propaganda. They sent five-hundred copies of two “propaganda booklets” and asked the camps’ administrators to report on the POWs’ reception of the ideas in the booklets as a way to improve Israeli propaganda strategies. “We would ask that you inform us on the impression they make and whether they are willingly read and by the many,” they wrote. The same requests were received and followed through regarding the propaganda newspapers *Haqīqat al-Amr* and *al-Yawm* and the Arabic radio channels in the Israeli radio. In March 1949, the “minority ministry” thanked the camp commander of Sarafand for his “Hasbara report” that “would be useful for the institutions that lead the hasbara efforts for our Arab minorities.”<sup>10</sup> As to *Haqīqat al-Amr*, the camp commander wrote back to say that “the POWs’ response is negative, the newspaper does not seem to

<sup>9</sup> Veisbach M. Your Letter 325/171/1/n. September 29, 1948.308/24-1 Hasbara Activities in the POW Camps, ISA.

them to be reliable...Please pass on this opinion to the editors of *Haqīqat al-Amr*, we believe the name should be changed and the material diversified. We should give the Arabs the feeling that it is a completely new newspaper.”<sup>11</sup> The same department asked to construct loud speakers in the camps not only to perform hasbara on the POWs but also so that “the POWs’ reactions will serve to measure the efficiency of our Hasbara.” Thus, the craft of starting the “mental process: from Palestine to Israel,” as one document states, was already underway in this early stage.<sup>12</sup>

כאמור, מיעוטם של השבויים בלבד הם בעלי השכלה וראויים לספול  
אינדיבידואלי. הרוב הסכריע אינו מעונין בהסברה כל שהיא, אינו קורא  
עיתונים ואינו מקשיב הוטר קראאה, רובם ככולם כפריים המצפים לשחרורם.  
החלק המשכיל מקשיב בניטוס לכל הסברה, אך לעיניהם הורבן הכפרים והערבים  
הערביים. הם מלאי טרירות על גורלם כעם וכפרטים, ותאז זו שטוח לחשוב  
כי דוקא הם ידעו להסביר כרצוננו את המעון הסבר בצד הערבי. אין ספק כי  
כולם יטרידו לרעה ויסתו בכל הודמנות נגדנו. ההסברה הסדבה ביותר היא  
ההתנהגות האנושית האישית עם השבויים; ההתנהגות זו יש בה כדי להמתיק את  
הטרירות ולהשאיר בלב השבוי את הרושם שהקצין והחיל היהודים הם למרות  
הכל אנושיים, וברוח זאת הם גם יסבירו את הוטר בארצות ערב.  
נקודה חשובה שניה היא הרגשת העוצמה הישראלית. אין ספק כי יותר  
משהם מושפעים מן הקדמה הישראלית הם מושפעים מהרגשת הכח הישראלי, ואלה  
מכיוניהם שפכו בכבישים וראו פלוגות צבא, חיל ים וחיל אויר, הושפעו  
ושוכנעו כי אכן היהודים חזקים וישראל היא עובדה.

**“The educated segment listens politely to the hasbara but they have the destruction of the Arab villages and cities in front of their eyes.”, February 1949**

ISA, file308/23-ג

<sup>10</sup> M. Piamante, “monthly Hasbara report POW Camp 793,” March 2, 1949, Hasbara Activities in POW Camps, 308\24-1, ISA.

<sup>11</sup> Atilt Camp Commander, Your Letter no. 171/325/29.9.1948 ,n/1, Arab POWs, 2565/10-ח, ISA.

<sup>12</sup> M. Piamante, “Protocol of Second Meeting for the Coordination of Propaganda amongst the Minorities and the Arab Prisoners of War in Israeli Hands,” December 8, 1948, Propaganda and Broadcasting, 1322/52-1, ISA.

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Kabha and 'Awāwdeh's book, *Prisoners without Bayonets*, sheds light on an important chapter in the history of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel that has been largely neglected by historians both Israeli and Palestinian. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only Arabic book devoted entirely to the detention centers. It is based on research dedicated to the detention of thousands of Palestinian men during the 1948 war, framing it as yet another episode of the Nakba.

The centers served as a practice of oppression, revenge and control vis-à-vis the Palestinians who had survived the massive displacement of 1948. In addition, the book demonstrates how the Israeli authorities tried to exploit the prisoners' yearning for freedom to achieve their ethnopolitical objective of cleansing: the detention centers were used as yet another mechanism for deporting Palestinians. The authorities negotiated with the prisoners on a "deal" of release for prison in return for exile. In fact, Israel turned its Palestinian prisoners into hostages, trying to elicit their "consent" for voluntary transfer.

The authors relied on both primary and secondary sources. They perused Israeli documents from archives such as the Red Cross Archive and the IDF Archive, which they found to be still concealing relevant documents. They also interviewed dozens of prisoners who were still alive at the time the 2013 book was written, and reviewed photographs and documents from the witnesses' private archives. Kabha and 'Awāwdeh concluded that their interviewees found it psychologically difficult to reexperience their past, having carried the sense of humiliation and trauma for decades without treatment.

Among the few available secondary sources, the authors relied on a book by former prisoner 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Anān, an Egyptian squadron commander. Indeed, real prisoners of war from Arab countries were also detained in those centers but are not the focus of this book. In addition, the book by Hanna Ibrāhīm based on the memoirs of Adv. Hanna Naqqāra of Haifa, another former prisoner, was another source based on a personal experience. Finally, Kabha and 'Awāwdeh relied on interviews conducted by Israeli researcher Aharon Klien with prison guards. While they also sought to interview guards, they were refused.

The book is made up of two sections and an appendix of photographs and documents. In the first section, made up of four subsections, you can find background material on

the phenomenon and its political context, the policy of detention, the prisoners and guards, and the conditions in the centers. The first section includes two subsections: one of oral testimonies collected in 2005-11, and another listing the names of more than 500 Palestinian prisoners. Obviously, this is a partial list, based on interviews conducted by the authors and documents they managed to trace.

Regarding the process of detention, according to the authors, men aged 15-65 were caught in extensive "search-and-detain" operations in the Palestinian towns and villages which became part of the State of Israel. Sometimes the detainees were located based on lists. There was emphasis on detaining political activists in the Palestinian national movements, participants in the Arab Revolt of 1936-39, members of paramilitary organizations active in the 1940s such as al-Najjāda and al-Futuwwa, and those "suspected of hostile activity against Jews". Some of the detentions were carried in the course of planned displacements of certain villages.

Most of the information about the phenomenon under study refers to detentions carried out after the formal establishment of the State of Israel. There is little information about detentions in the multiple Palestinian communities occupied before May 14, 1948. Following statehood, there were several motives or pretexts for detaining the thousands of Palestinian men considered by Israel as "prisoners of war", despite the fact that nearly all of them were civilians: security fears, demographic considerations, exploiting the Arab workforce to build the infrastructures of the nascent state, a demonstration of power to deter, subjugate, and control the Palestinian survivors of the Nakba - considered a potential threat - and simply revenge. In most detention centers, the prisoners were tortured and mistreated in various ways to shock and awe them. Indeed, as a result of this intimidation, some of them have not dared to talk about their detention experience for sixty years.

The authors clarify that the use of the euphemism "prisoners of war" was designed to facilitate their deportation, and indeed, many were deported after the large wave of displacements in 1948.

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## Conclusion:

### Sumūd without, sumūd within

In conclusion, it is important to remember that both aspects of the Israeli POW camps, physical expulsion and the attempt of subject formation, were resisted by Palestinians. In May 1949, for example, some of the seven-hundred and forty-four prisoners who remained in Camp Sarafand went on hunger strike to resist the attempt of expelling them to Jordan (that refused to accept them).<sup>13</sup> While most scholarly depictions of Palestinian collective hunger strikes begin in 1967, this hunger strike suggests that researchers should look at 1948 instead.

The intellectual and political prisoner Walid Daqqa, who died due to medical neglect and abuse under Israeli custody as this booklet was sent to print, conceptualized prisoners' resistance. Daqqa described the "sumūd within" as prisoners' ability to cling to their own subjectivity despite of the prison authorities' attempts to change who they are.<sup>14</sup> This process was already evident in 1948 when a representative of the Israeli Foreign Office offered the leadership of the prisoners his help in "organizing the cultural life of the camp."<sup>15</sup> the prisoners' representative Yūsif Sāyigh objected and reminded the speaker of "the difference between cultural activity and propaganda." Already in 1948, Palestinian prisoners resisted both expulsion and Israeli attempts of subject formation.

<sup>13</sup> Shimon Amir, The Fate of the Arab POWs in Camp Sarafand, May 11, 1949. Arab POWs, 2406/8-זח, ISA.

<sup>14</sup> Shai Gortler, "The Sumud within: Walid Daka's Abolitionist Decolonization," *Contemporary Political Theory* 21, no. 4 (2022): 499-521.

<sup>15</sup> M. Piamante, "Protocol of Second Meeting for the Coordination of Propaganda amongst the Minorities and the Arab Prisoners of War in Israeli Hands," December 8, 1948, Propaganda and Broadcasting, 1322/52-ז, ISA.



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