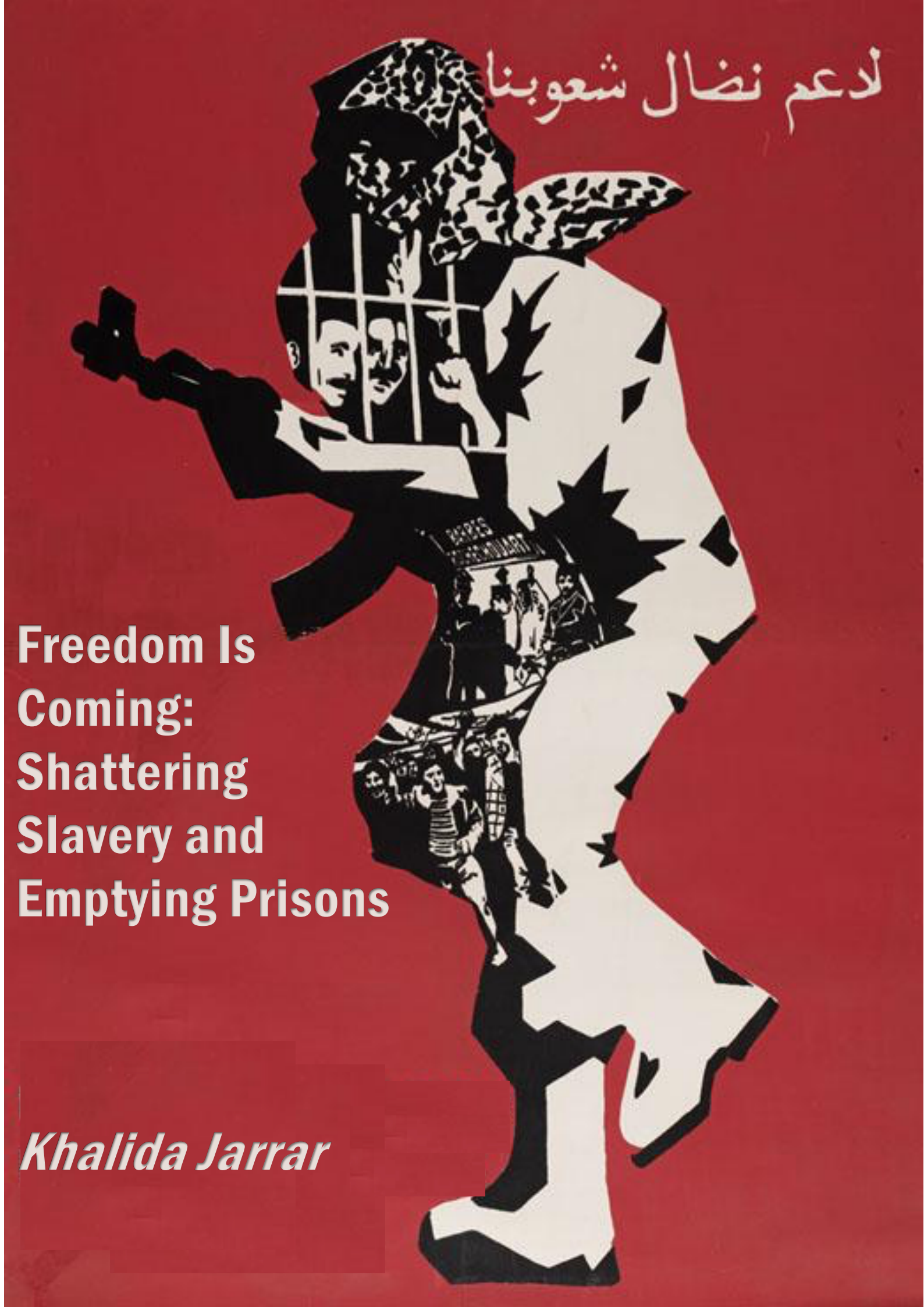




Freedom Is
Coming:
Shattering
Slavery and
Emptying Prisons

Khalida Jarrar

¹² <https://youtu.be/hMIsaSelZCc?si=lkkqeFQJotOu1vhN>

¹³ From Addameer – Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association

Facebook page -Published: October 25,

2021: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0NAE3U9jzxBHNkksPrhBCqc9Ypd5krhPtgmMHy8afst2D9oUqGjjdETxZM6npAMysl&id=100094701442690

¹⁴ Youtube seminar entitled “Abolition and the Liberation of Palestine”, published: November 2, 2023:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9GjTMP9qZs>

This essay by Khalida Jarrar first appeared in Arabic in the winter issue of Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya. In late November/early December, she composed this essay while she also researched and wrote the recent report by the Independent Commission for Human Rights Violations against Male and Female Prisoners during Israel's War of Genocide on Gaza.

Jarrar is a researcher at Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights at Birzeit University. She is a Palestinian feminist human rights activist and advocate, and a former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Her current research project examines the class and gender dimensions of the Palestinian prisoners' movement and their implications on national liberation in Palestine.

¹ Statement by the Union of Teachers and Employees, Birzeit University. October 11, 2023

² Outcome report issued by prisoners' organizations for 2022: The occupation arrested 7,000 Palestinians. From Addameer – Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association Facebook page-Published: 1-1-2023: <https://www.addameer.org/ar/media/4966>

³ YouTube, {Yahya} Sinwar's speech on December 12, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZILNabgfn0>

⁴ Youtube, military spokesperson for the Qassam Brigades speech on October 28, 2023: <https://youtu.be/80UIV012Ffk?si=svuDpnBDiGzvX91a>

⁵ Aljazeera coverage of Yahya Sinwar's speech on October 29, 2023: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdHuJ0aQw00&t=4s>

⁶ Sharif Kanaaneh, "Studies in Culture, Heritage and Identity", Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights. Ramallah: Nadia publishing house, 2011.

⁷ From Addameer – Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association Facebook page -Published: November 3, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/AddameerArabic/posts/pfbid02WSe7pwCd6VsqsikeNLTKSwKXipZCAqT6bQVggRcDdxCALReHLK651P8c8g6KJVyl>

⁸ From the Palestinian Prisoners' Club facebook page published November 6, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/ppsmo.p/posts/pfbid0iSXcXZGi6crfzcFtNGpU51e8hYvegMYLWe1zhGb4grKhnj2QqZer4ujnhNJQSyuXI>

⁹ In addition to information provided by Hassan Abadi, some of these details I was able to gather through research published in the report: "Violations against Male and Female Prisoners during Israel's War of Genocide on Gaza," The Independent Commission for Human Rights (Ramallah, 2023).

¹⁰ From Hassan Abadi's Facebook page published: October 21, 2023: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0m8G8yKtE7fCtEmNYqM8Rtda8BzT9hpfW2RNcBsNqfAhVaz2zJkVcpVvc2c14Bxc4l&id=100011776991297

¹¹ From Hassan Abadi's Facebook page published: November 6, 2023: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0NAE3U9jzxBHNkksPrhBCqc9Ypd5krhPtgmMHy8afst2D9oUqGjjdETxZM6npAMysl&id=100094701442690

In conversation and constant engagement with Palestinian women prisoners (current and former), Jarrar's research centers women's voices in an effort to forge a boldly feminist methodology grounded in a Palestinian political and scholarly practice committed to abolition. This essay is a part of her overall intellectual focus on understanding and explaining "abolition," as a Palestinian and international intellectual and political practice.

In the early morning hours of the 26th of December 2023, the Israeli military broke into her home in al Bira/Ramallah and kidnapped her, arresting her again in order to silence her. As of writing, she remains detained in Israeli prisons without charge and without explanation. This is her fifth arrest in the course of her political and scholarly career and she has spent over 64 months in Israeli prisons. The Israeli prisoner authorities have often used the non/charge of "administrative detention" against Jarrar, as they have for thousands of Palestinians, keeping Palestinians under detention and indefinite captivity without trial and without charges. Jarrar is once again confined in Damon Prison located near Haifa in occupied Palestine, but her work will not stop and her voice will not be silenced by the brutality of settler colonial violence in Palestine.

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Freedom Is Coming: Shattering Slavery and Emptying Prisons

“The year 2023 will go down in history as the year in which the oppressed in Palestine stood courageously in the face of colonial fascism, and cried out in defense of their homes, their humanity and their lives.” ¹

For over a century, Zionist settler colonialism has continuously committed crimes of genocide against Palestinians. The Zionist project was founded on the concept of annihilating the Palestinian people and

settler-colonial slavery imposed on them for over one hundred years.

Going back to the demand "emptying the prisons," which in practice has been transformed from an imaginary possibility prior to October 7th to a reality. This transformation suggests that the imaginary possibilities of breaking forms of prison subjugation are real and tangible. This can be achieved through dismantling the oppressive colonial system that created it, of which "prisons" are one of its tools. This could be accomplished by eliminating all causes of repression and oppression, not only in colonized Palestine but also in brutal patriarchal colonial capitalist countries around the world. Dismantling colonial and settler servitude is a crucial stage for humanity and for those who have suffered from its effects for decades, and who continue to reject and resist it till this day.

conference held by the group "Critical Resistance" entitled "Abolition and Liberation of Palestine," emphasized the need for liberation and abolition in Palestine. The activist and former political prisoner Angela Davis stated, "There is nothing for Palestinians but action. There is global solidarity with Palestinians, a struggle for justice and for changing the reality. Gaza represents a model of colonial violence, and Israel and America each represent a model of the capitalist military system based on a military ideology and war. How can we work on breaking the chains of enslavement in support of the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom? Gaza is an 'open air prison,' caused by global capitalism. Israel is part of the global military power. The Palestinian model has taught us that breaking the chains of enslavement can only occur by dismantling the imperialist capitalist system that produced and continues to sustain it. Therefore, we, the activists, shall unite and work together for the freedom of Palestine."¹⁴ This is a reminder of a shared historical struggle that brings us back to a rooted alliance in the face of global struggle against racism and imperialism.

Palestine, and Gaza in particular, has been symbolic to the world as a paradigm in which colonial capitalism has developed its brutal oppressive tools, and attempts to annihilate an entire people; a people who yearn for freedom and for breaking the chains of

developed its colonial tools of violence as a structural piece of its colonial project framework. It adopted multiple forms of barbarism and neo-colonial fascism that also seek to silence the voices of those who rise up, forcing them into silence in the face of its mechanisms of destruction.

The "prison system" has been one of the oppressive tools utilized throughout history, worldwide, and in Palestine. From the British colonial mandate to the Zionist colonization of Palestine, colonialism employed the same system practiced previously by many colonial powers around the world against nations and national liberation movements. This same prison system is still in practice, intellectually and in implementation, continuing to develop and escalate in oppression, tyranny, and persecution. Violence has become "rationalized" by legalizing colonial violence through military orders and the colonial judicial system, thus normalizing arrests and imprisonment over the course of the colonial era.

Statistics from Addameer – Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association - indicate that approximately one million Palestinians have been subjected to arrest, detention, or interrogation. According to the Prisoners' Club, there have been over 17,000 recorded Palestinian female prisoners since 1967 until today. In 2022, the Commission of Prisoners' Affairs recorded over 50,000 cases of

children arrested and approximately 372 martyrs' bodies have still not been returned from prisons and detention centers.²

This article is not aimed at focusing on the details of the history of prison system but rather to highlight the implications of imprisonment, incarceration, injustice, and the desire for liberation from within its confinements. It touches on the core of what freedom means to the Palestinian people. In this context, Zionist settler occupation transformed all of Gaza into a large prison for over 17 years, marked by siege, killing, destruction, elimination, and starvation, among other crimes that are difficult to describe in our modern world. This is only a snapshot of the bigger picture, which is the revolution of prisoners who long for their freedom and to break through the bars of their prison cells.

Prisoners in solitary cell confinement, otherwise known as the siege of Gaza, have rebelled, marking a new stage of liberation in the context of the Palestinians' struggle for freedom. One of the demands of this stage has been the liberation of male and female prisoners. This is not new, as the history of Palestinian prisoner struggles has seen different forms of self-liberation through attempts to escape from prisons such as Al-Ramla, Shatta, and Ashkelon (in 1964, 1967, 1974, respectively).

Basque prisoners, will go on a hunger strike on Friday, October 27, 2023."¹³

Palestine has once again united the world of activists, both men and women, against all forms of the global genocidal capitalist war against the poor. This time, they are targeting the poor in Gaza in the same way they have historically targeted the poor worldwide. White supremacy has risen once again, carrying out acts of genocide, just as it did against Indigenous peoples in the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. The history of colonialism is a dark history marked by numerous crimes, including genocide. Perhaps colonial powers have historically failed to realize, or perhaps their sense of superiority prevents this realization, that their brutal methods of killing, genocide, and destruction against those aspiring to freedom and dignity, will be met with the uprising of the impoverished and oppressed, not just in Palestine, but the world over.

The current international solidarity with Palestine represents a qualitative milestone in re-establishing the international dimension in the struggle of the oppressed and colonized peoples against all forms of colonial capitalist oppression. It also signifies the global fight against all forms of imperial military domination. It is evident that the class struggle against all forms of slavery can only be eradicated through its complete destruction as an institution and a system. For example, on November 1, 2023, a

in the Palestinian National Movement, have been arrested for fighting for Palestine in countries such as the United States, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and others. Moreover, several international and Arab activists have been imprisoned for many years in imperialist colonial prisons in France and the United States due to their involvement in the Palestinian liberation movement. People such as Carlos from Venezuela, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, a Lebanese citizen who has been imprisoned for 40 years in French prisons, and others like Ghassan al-Ashi, Shakir Abu Bakr, and Abdul Qadir Mishal who are detained in the United States.

On October 27, 2023, twenty Basque political prisoners declared a hunger strike under the slogan "Hunger Strike for Dignity" in solidarity with Palestine. They expressed their support in a signed message from inside Basque prisons, stating: "Both Palestinian men and women have endured decades of suffering as a result of the violence inflicted by the Zionist occupation. They have been forcefully expelled from their homes, their cities and villages destroyed, and have been subjected to imprisonment, torture, rape, and murder. The recent atrocities and massacres in Gaza, committed by the terrorist Zionist state, are a clear example of this policy of genocide. In solidarity with the Palestinian people and in defense of the legitimate rights of individuals and the oppressed, the undersigned

As recently as 2021, the now famous attempt to break out of Gilboa Prison is remembered as the Freedom Tunnel Escape on September 6th, marking a critical moment in recent history. However, the slogan of "liberation of prisoners" evolved after October 07, 2023 into one of "emptying the prisons" of those who have long been imprisoned as well as children, women, administrative detainees and the sick. In other words, all prisoners. This demand was made after the captivity of around 250 Zionist soldiers and army officers on the morning of October 7, 2023.

While the enormity of this demand is unprecedented, the idea of this is not new as it is a continuation of prisoner exchange deals throughout various stages of the Palestinian struggle, which resulted in the liberation of thousands of Palestinians, the most recent being the "Shalit Deal" in 2011. However, more recent attempts to negotiate an exchange deal after 2014 failed, even though four Zionist soldiers were held captive by the resistance in Gaza. These attempts included negotiations over those re-arrested after the "Shalit Deal," prisoners arrested prior to the Oslo Accords, women, children, the sick, and the bodies of martyrs that are still being held.

In his speech on December 14, 2022, commemorating the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Resistance Movement -

Hamas - in Gaza, [Yahya] Sinwar stated: "We are giving the occupation an ultimatum to complete a prisoner exchange deal; it is now or never, otherwise we will find another way to liberate our prisoners."³

It seems that historical watershed took place on October 7, 2023. The demand evolved from a limited prisoner swap deal to one of "emptying the prisons" as Abu Ubaida (the military spokesperson for the Qassam Brigades) announced on October 28, 2023. In his statement, he said: "The large number of captives we are holding will be the price for emptying [Israeli] prisons of all our prisoners."⁴ This was immediately followed by another declaration from Yahya Sinwar, on the same day, who announced that the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) would agree to an "all for all" exchange deal, or the release of all Palestinian prisoners in the occupation's prisons, in exchange for all captives held by the resistance.⁵

At the time of writing this article, the initial stages of "emptying the prisons" began with the release of women and children. The resistance movement insisted on liberating all female prisoners and the majority of children held captive. The exchange, thus far, has taken place in seven stages, and has led to the liberation of 240 prisoners, including those under the age of 19, and 71 out of the 87 females currently held in Israeli prisons. This number, however, does

us. But we defy them; our morale is high, and we are not worried. Our dignity is above everything."¹⁰

Lama Khater, a political prisoner detained since October 26, 2023, reported being strip searched, threatened with rape, and deportation to Gaza along with her family by Israeli intelligence officers at the Etzion Detention Centre - according to Abadi's visit on November 5, 2023 to the Damon Prison.¹¹ On November 29, Lama Khater was part of the sixth day of the prisoner exchange. She told the media that approximately 10 female prisoners from Gaza, who were arrested days before the temporary ceasefire, had their head scarfs removed, their hands and feet bound, their eyes blindfolded, and were dressed in prisoners of war uniforms.¹²

This is how prison guards reacted to Palestinian prisoners and the demand of "emptying the prisons." The conduct of the guards was, in essence, part of their retaliatory attempts to break the will and morale of prisoners. It is the nature of a colonizer's role, whether the warden is male or female, to see themselves as superior, oppressive, and arrogant, and to believe that they can crush the dignity of prisoners.

In this context, it is worth noting that targeting through arrests has obviously not been limited to Palestinians under colonial occupation in Palestine. Dozens of activists and supporters, as well as fighters

in the Damon prison were sprayed with tear gas and beaten on three different occasions since October 7.⁹ The first instance occurred on the same day that the female prisoners expressed joy at the prospect of their imminent release from prison. The rooms were sprayed with tear gas, and the prisoners were isolated and prevented from going out into the prison yard or accessing bathing areas outside their cells. Additionally, Marah Bakir, representative of the female prisoners, was transferred to solitary confinement in the Jalameh Prison. The second incident took place on October 19, when the prisoners' cells were sprayed with teargas and water. Four prisoners were severely beaten, cells were violently searched, family and personal pictures were torn, and their belongings confiscated. The third incident occurred on the morning of October 30, as part of a systematic and retaliatory policy against the female prisoners.

Within this context, prisoner Fatima Amarna, held at the Damon Prison since September 4, 2023, stated during a visit with her lawyer - Hassan Abadi - on the morning of October 30, 2023: "The morning inspection was strict. They took the pots, the dishwashing soap, sugar, and lentils. There is overcrowding in the prison and collective isolation inside the cells, in addition to the sadism of the guards. They have cracked down on us several times with teargas. They are afraid of us and try to humiliate

not include the female prisoners from Gaza who were arrested during the war (the exact number of prisoners captured during the war remains unclear due Israeli violations of nearly every rule of war in international law regarding prisoners and captives).

The ongoing quest to liberate prisoners is in tandem with the Palestinians' constant and multifaceted struggle against colonialism. Hence, the slogan "emptying the prisons" is derived from and a core component in the Palestinian struggle through various stages in its history.

At the beginning of the 1936 Revolt, Palestinian women would use encoded songs to send messages to prisoners, signifying that the revolutionaries were coming to liberate them and would specify a date so the prisoners would be ready. Through these songs, information was exchanged by altering the lyrics in a way that allowed prisoners to understand the message without the colonial forces interfering or intercepting it. Such as it was in the famous encoded song: "O' those ascending the mountain heights" where they would add and repeat the letter "lam" (L) at the end of words. This is noticeable in this song created at the beginning of the 1936 revolution as a means of conveying messages to the revolutionaries.⁶ That is, the history of prisons must read within the framework of the history of resistance, historically and in the present moment.

Moreover, Palestinian resistance is part and parcel of the complicated social dynamics of the Palestinian people.

As it was in the past, as it is in the present, the "Al-Aqsa Flood" on October 7, 2023, has been associated with two central causes: prisoners and Jerusalem. The slogan related to prisoners developed into the slogan "emptying the prisons" which also reflected the crazed and oppressive measures used by the Zionist colonial occupier in terms of the intense use of capacity and imprisonment as a violent tool of power and control. So, how did this slogan reflect the behavior of the brutal Zionist colonial occupier? Simply put, this has mean more intense genocidal acts in Gaza and in Palestine as well as more and increasingly brutal forms of retaliation against political prisoners.

Since October 7, 2023, Zionist occupation forces have arrested more than 3,500 male and female prisoners. This number does not include those arrested from the Gazan border or those who are from Gaza but work inside the occupied territories.⁷ The arrests were accompanied by retaliatory and brutal measures, including beatings, house demolitions, and even killings. Among those who lost their lives was Mahmoud Daraghma, a political prisoner who was killed on 23/10/2023 - one week after his arrest - at the Majiddo prison. Political prisoner Arafat Hamdan from Beit Sira was killed on

October 24, 2023, in Ofer Prison, just two days after his arrest. On November 6, 2023, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club reported that Majed Ahmad Zaqoul, a worker from Gaza, was killed in Ofer Prison, in addition to another worker whose name remains unknown who was killed at the "Anatot" detention centre.⁸ Furthermore, on November 13, 2023, Abdul Rahman Ahmed Mura'i, 33, a political prisoner from Qarawat Bani Hassan was killed in Megiddo Prison. According to the Commission of Prisoner Affairs, political prisoner Thaer Sameeh Abu Asab, 38, from Qalqiliya, was killed on November 18, 2023. He had been detained since May 27, 2005, in the Negev Prison.

Inside prisons, retaliatory Zionist policies were evident in the violent measures employed, reflecting a latent mentality of revenge. All prisoners, both male and female, were isolated in cells that were denied everyday basic necessities. Occupation forces left nothing but a blanket and a change of clothes for each prisoner. Additionally, the prisoners were subjected to physical assaults, and sprayed with teargas in several prison blocs.

Of course, the Damon Prison, located atop Mount Carmel where Palestinian female prisoners are held, was not exempt from these measures. Before the exchanges began in late November, the number of female prisoners in Damon reached 87, up from 38 prisoners prior to the war on Gaza. Female prisoners