

## Captivity, Resistance and Political Consciousness in Walid Daqqa's Prison Literature

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**Abstract:** This article examines the prison literature of the Palestinian intellectual Walid Daqqa who has been serving a life sentence for resistance since 1986 in Israeli prisons. From the depth of his experience he writes about his conceptualization of captivity, colonial violence, the resistance of the Palestinian political prisoners in the Israeli prison system and the construction of Palestinian national imagination in his book *Consciousness Molded: or The Re-Identification of Palestinian Torture* (2010) Published in Arabic and his first young adults novel *The Story of the Oil's Secret (Hikayat Sir al-Zeit)* published in 2018 in Arabic. Daqqa has become a prominent figure in the Palestinian prisoners' movement, He and his work deconstruct the violent structure of colonial prison, forging pathways toward liberation and resistance in that he plays a leading role in terms of praxis and knowledge production. His works narrate the story of Palestinian political captivity and the broader Palestinian historical national narrative reflecting the prison movement which is one of the major sites of the Palestinian national movement. Daqqa's writing is a form of resistance in the Israeli prison system representing intellectual products that come from what he coins 'parallel time'- time in captivity - as opposed to social time lived outside the prison bars.

## Ashjan AJOUR

### Captivity, Resistance and Political Consciousness in Walid Daqqa's prison literature

#### Introduction

This review examines the life and intellectual work of Walid Daqqa and reflects on his production of anti-colonial knowledge in captivity. Daqqa's writings are a form of revolutionary politics and represent intellectual products that come from what he coins a "parallel time" - time in captivity - as opposed to social time lived outside the prison bars. The revolutionary aesthetic of his writing engages culture as a political practice.

Beginning with a biography, works are next analyzed with close reading, and finally a critical reflection of his concept of parallel consciousness.

#### Biography

Walid Daqqa is a Palestinian political prisoner born in 1961 in Baqaa' al-Gharbiyeh in occupied Palestine. He is a leading member of the Palestinian national movement affiliated to The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which he joined in 1983. Detained in 1986 and sentenced to life imprisonment for planning the kidnapping an Israeli soldier as collateral to free Palestinian prisoners, the Israeli authorities have consistently refused to release him in prisoner exchanges.

Whilst in captivity Daqqa obtained his BA and Master's in political science and is currently pursuing his doctorate in philosophy. In 1999 he married Sana Salama, a journalist and translator who works with the Association of Prisoners' Supporters. They had met three years earlier when she had visited the jail. He is only permitted to see her through a glass barrier using the phone. Deprived of hugging his mother on her last visit in 2019 he was also banned from her and his father's funeral. His first daughter, Milad, born in 2020, was conceived through artificial insemination using Daqqa's smuggled sperm.

#### Writings

Daqqa has published a number of works about his life in prison. His writings are smuggled out. His first book "Diaries of Resistance in Jenin Camp 2002" being published in 2004, followed by *Consciousness Molded or The Re-Identification of Palestinian Torture* in 2010. His play "A Parallel Time" staged in Haifa's al-Midan Theater in 2015, prompted efforts by the Israeli state to defund the theatre. "The Story of the Secret of the Oil" (2018) won the Etislatat Award for Arabic Children's Literature in 2018. The launch event was shut down by Israeli minister Aryeh Deri who also attempted to suppress its publication and distribution. Daqqa was subsequently placed in solitary isolation to obstruct his intellectualism and creativity. These two works are written in Arabic and have not been translated into many other language.

#### **Consciousness Molded: or The Re-Identification of Palestinian Torture**

*Consciousness Molded* investigates technologies used by the Israeli Prison Authorities to mold prisoners' consciousness, as well as prisoners' collective resistance and demonstrates how incarceration is an integral part of the broader system of Israeli colonial repression. He writes that Israel has created a system based on the most updated theories of human engineering and social psychology to mold Palestinian consciousness by shattering its collective values. "The occupier derives his ideas, theories and tools of repression from a postmodern civilized reality or as what Bauman terms 'Liquid Modernity'" (Daqqa, *Consciousness Molded* 22). He posits that modern oppression techniques are hidden and masked, being a combination of small, fragmented procedures, which are hard to define separately as tools of torture. The prisoner's body is no longer the direct target: the spirit and the mind are. Such techniques make prisons a replica of the segregated and thoroughly controlled Palestinian lands, and the prisoners become lab mice for the experiments of taming Palestinians and allows the study of the prisoners' lives to reveal a picture of how the Palestinians live in the occupied Palestine (22).

Israel's practices exceed its security needs and targets the moral infrastructure of resistance. "Since 2004, Israel has implemented a comprehensive and dangerous scientific system that adopts the latest theories in human engineering and group social psychology in order to mold Palestinian consciousness by deconstructing the Palestinian collective national values" (Daqqa, *Consciousness Molded* 29). Daqqa emphasizes that the target is not the body but the soul - a cultural and moral genocide. He contends

that the concept of "Occupation" is no longer sufficient, nor even the term "settler occupation" to describe the comprehensiveness and depth of the situation in Palestine, specifically after the Oslo Agreement (32)

Daqqa emphasizes language is inadequate to convey the torture and suffering experienced in the Israeli prisons: "It is the feeling of helplessness and loss of human dignity when the uncertainty of oppression meets, so it seems that not only the world has abandoned you, but your language has betrayed you from describing your suffering and knowing it, or even saying ah .... (*Consciousness Molded* 19). The prisoner faces two options - to be an object of the jailor or to transform the self into the object of research to redefine this suffering and its reasons, which is not easy. "To be the research subject and the subject of research at the same time means to be the victim of torture and the reporter of torture, the scene and the witness, the details and abstraction together" (19). According to Daqqa the necessity of writing lays in the success or failure of the Israeli plan to mold Palestinian consciousness depending on Palestinians' ability to uncover it: "What is required is clarity, honesty, and scientific research, not an enthusiastic speech praising the prisoners struggles and sacrifices, research that answers the questions that we can raise.....this study does not claim to be scientific research, as it was written in prison where there are no serious sources that can be relied upon, and we rely more on memory" (24).

One of the Israeli technologies used to mold the Palestinian consciousness is described by Daqqa as "the cultural blockade." He analyses the distortion of the captive movement resulting from this. "The prisoner nowadays is no longer a reader and producer of literature as it was in the past, and the cultural sessions and intellectual discussions are no longer the characteristics of the prisoners' elite" (*Consciousness Molded* 79). The only books that are allowed in prison are those of religion and worship, dream interpretation and horoscopes, and a very limited number of novels. Scientific research and specific novels are prohibited under the pretext of being "incitement materials." In this way the intellectual capacity of the incarcerated prisoners is deformed and distorted (80).

Daqqa develops a theoretical framework utilizing both Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007). Foucault's analysis shows the shifts that occurred in Western penal systems during the modern age and how modern power operates to discipline and punish. The focus of control has shifted from bodies to self-identity. Daqqa records how Foucault's panopticon is applied in Israeli prisons as a tool of control and discipline and points out that what Israel has established in terms of isolation and segregation against political prisoners in prison is applied to the larger prison outside of colonized Palestine. (*Consciousness Molded* 33).

Daqqa argues that "Control in the Israeli occupation prisons is no longer direct control through the jailers who were physically present in the prison opening and closing the doors. There was no longer intense daily interaction between the prisoner and the jailor, but rather it was replaced by modern mechanisms and technologies where there are cameras in every corner of the prison for control and surveillance" (71). Naomi Klein shows how the deliberate use of the shock doctrine recreates the society according to the interest of capitalism. She introduced the term "disaster capitalism" which entails the use of catastrophic events to implement privatization. The physical torture of prisoners in the interrogation rooms, the shock doctrine used by Israeli authorities, paralyzes the ability of the captives' resistance to the occupier's administration and will (39). Daqqa uses the hunger strike<sup>1</sup> in 2004 as an example of the shock doctrine used to strike at the moral infrastructure of the prisoners. He sees the hunger strike as a turning point in the prisoners' lives which was exploited by the Israeli prison authorities to establish new policies and procedures designed to break the strike and leave the prisoners in a state of severe shock (*Consciousness Molded* 51). In contrast to Foucault he emphasizes the possibility of resistance in the face of the colonial machine and sheds light on the agency and the resistance subjectivity of the political prisoners. Daqqa confirms that *Sumud* (steadfastness) is possible despite the intensity of technologies of power. He notes: "Shock is not an inevitable fate, and there is a possibility to get out of it and escape from what is planned for countries that fall under the of shock, whether it is a war or a natural disaster" (39).

### **The Story of the Oil's Secret: *Hikayat Sir al-Zeit***

*Hikayat Sir al-Zeit* is the first young adult novel by Daqqa and embodies the suffering of the prisoners. Written in *Gilboa* prison in the summer of 2017 it was issued by the Tamer Foundation for Community Education in the summer of 2018. Its protagonist is the child Jude who wishes to visit his detained father, the political prisoner Kameel in *Afula* prison. He is forbidden from visiting him because the permit

<sup>1</sup> On hunger strikes see Ajour, *Reclaiming Humanity*.

to visit his father has been denied by Israeli authority for "security reasons." With childhood determination and the help of his animal friends (the rabbit, the bird, the cat and the dog) Jude determines to find a way to cross Israeli barriers and reach the prison. Their attempt to dig a tunnel under the wall runs into difficulty but is salvaged through utilizing the over fifteen hundred year old tree Umm Romi which the occupation plans to uproot and replant at the entrance to the village of Afula. Umm Romi reveals to Jude that the olives have a secret power which enables the user to disappear from the sight. Umm Romi, is the icon that links the salvation for the Palestinians with Jude's adventure.

Making their way invisibly to the *Alafula* prison where his father is detained, they meet for the first time. After Jude's visit he smuggles other children and animals using the magic oil to the beaches of Haifa and Akka and Tabriyya. In the prison his father Kameel and his fellow detainees watch the news footage of the panic of the Israeli security forces who do not understand how this group managed to achieve this act of "terrorism."

The olive tree "Umm Rumi" is a trope for the experiences of ordeal and salvation in the history of the Palestinian people (Al-Shaikh 2018). The core of the story is the idea of presence and disappearance in the oil's secret. Jude's penetration of the prison to access his father destabilizes the settler colonial control over the space. Amanda Batareseh argues in her forthcoming chapter "Transcending Absence: Radical Imagination in Walid Daqqa's *ḥikayat Sir al-Zeit*" that Daqqa's employment of the unsanctioned presence liberates Jude from settler colonial logics regulating Palestinian presence and absence in space and time: "the positive capacity of imagination is asserted by Jude's first step towards the liberation of future. In his choice to deploy the secret of olives' oil to reveal that which is hidden by Zionist political fantasy rather than conceal the settler colonial tools of dispossession, he advances freedom as fundamental to the realization of a decolonized Palestinian nation" (Batareseh 16).

Al-Sheikh (*The Meanings of Palestine*) regards the Story of the Oil's Secret as a remarkable attempt, in the "language of children" and their imagination, to challenge philosophical concepts: such as secret, freedom, pain, future, knowledge, ignorance, invisibility, manifestation, possible, impossible, and hope and points out that Daqqa writes the story in a standard language interspersed with colloquial language which are not normally used in the Palestinian literature for young people. In this language he embodies the reality of the Zionist occupation without being aesthetic, and he writes about the segregation wall with its brutal details.

### **Daqqa's Parallel Consciousness**

These two works by the political prisoner Walid Daqqa fall within the domain of resistance studies and contribute to the process of decolonial knowledge production. Efforts to decolonize resistance studies need to bring to light the knowledge that is produced by indigenous activists and intellectuals who write from the depth of their experience of resistance. Daqqa's work provides us with a powerful example of anti-colonial knowledge that was produced in captivity, aspiring to freedom and liberation. Colonized people are able to produce tools of resistance to perpetuate free existence, and writing in captivity is one of these. The significance of Daqqa's works is that they enabled him to exercise *Sumud* (steadfastness) and to transform the colonial system into a generative Palestinian site for constructing national consciousness. Ismail Nashif's *Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community* (2008) indicates that the story of Palestinian political captivity reflects the Palestinian national narrative of the victim who rises to enter history as a hero. It also reflects processes of constructing a community of political captives that has come to be one of the major sites of the Palestinian national movement challenging both the Palestinian national movement in the post Oslo era and the Israeli authorities.

The Israeli colonial state attempts to erase Palestinian national consciousness; however, Waleed Daqqa emerges as an example of "parallel consciousness." Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh<sup>2</sup> suggests that Walid Daqqa's writing expresses "a history of individual hope and collective disappointment" (2018). "His concept of "parallel consciousness" started to emerge as a valuable tool to interrogate the political realities that led to the tragic prostration of Palestinian national foundations from "armed struggle" to a "struggle against arms..... Living such realities, according to Daqqa and his fellow captives, wasn't only an ontological experience, it was also a philosophical reality of living in the "parallel time" – a concept coined by Daqqa to depict life in prison juxtaposed to "social time" experienced on the "outside." This concept appears in three literary forms written between 2005 and 2014. The Letter in Parallel Time (2005) and the lyrical play *The Story of Parallel Time* (2011), both written in Gilboa Prison, and the theatrical play *The Story of the Forgotten in the Parallel Time* (2014), were written in Hadarim Prison and produced in cooperation with Al-Maidan Theater in Haifa. All were warmly welcomed by the

<sup>2</sup> See also Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh "Walid Daqqa: Philosophy in Captivity"; Al-Shaikh, "The Parallel Human."

Palestinians but caused huge controversy and state animosity by Israelis (Al-Shaikh 2021). For Daqqa, the Palestinians will continue to fight and struggle, so that the Palestinian indigenous existence is not drowned out by the consciousness molding plans and visions of the settler colonizer. Daqqa their vision when he concludes his book *Consciousness Molded* by recording the ambition of the former Israeli prison director, Jacob Janot in his speech in the yards of Gilboa prison in 2006 by concluding "I assure you that you will be confident that I will make the prisoners raise the Israeli flag and sing "Hatikva."

The Story of the Oil's Secret is a continuation and intensification, of the theses of "parallel consciousness," which is the intellectual project that he is working on from inside the prison. In a recording at the book launch he reveals that his motivation for writing it was not creativity, but rather steadfastness. "My motive in writing The Oil's Secret Tale was not creative writing but rather *Sumud* in captivity, for *Sumud* was not possible throughout these long years, without liberating my mind from its prison cell, little by little. As much as I yearn for liberation from prison, I yearn for 'liberating' prison from myself" (*Hikayat Sir Al-Zeit*). He continues:

What hurt me the most is that I lived in captivity the grandfather, the son and the grandson, and I felt that there was a scenario repeating itself, as if the prison was an inheritance that the sons and grandchildren inherit from the grandparents. That is why I wanted Jude in the story of the secret of oil to break the norm, find his way outside the paths that lead to prison, and think about the future differently from what our generations thought. I wanted to unleash the imagination of these generations so that they would be freed from the scenarios that were prepared for us, so we prepared them to them, and entire generations and people entered inside the bars.

Daqqa's intellectual writing is a political act and an everyday form of resistance in the Israeli prison system. He writes with a revolutionary aesthetic from the darkness and injustice of prison. For him culture is a political practice. For him, parallel time is parallel to the national awareness that the Palestinian Authority desecrated in the Oslo project. His revolutionary writings take distance of the popular politics of hope in the heavy presence of helpless official Palestinian politics. Al-sheik (2018) writes about the transformative distance in Daqqa's experience that turns the prison tunnel into a horizon that is the most effective tool that resists the time of captivity, and revolts against the tools of dismissal of prisoners' imagination by the prison institution. 'Because freedom is not imagination, but rather a decision made by writing and carried out by reading, they resort to the revolutionary aesthetic, which does not stop making hope'. The loss of freedom which Daqqa described as "the disease of the age", is transformed through the act of writing about the freedom by the captive who lost it.

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