



Kitap Tanıtımı/ Book Review

Dreaming of Freedom: Palestinian Child Prisoners Speak

Hashim, NormaKuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media Malaysia, 2016.

Reviewed by Yousef M. Aljamal

The book falls into 29 short chapters of interviews with Palestinian child prisoners in Israeli jails, including interviews with five children from the village of Hares in the West Bank, who were sentenced to 15 years in prison over charges of throwing stones at Israeli settlers' cars. The stories included in the book are personal accounts of the experience of released child prisoners in Israeli jails, in which they speak of torture, humiliation and isolation, behind Israeli bars, under claims that these children were involved in throwing stones at the Israeli occupation forces and its settlers.

Norma Hashim, the editor of the book, who also edited the *Prisoners Diaries: Palestinian Voices from the Israeli Gulag* (2013), had the book's Forward written by Professor Richard Falk, American professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University in the United States. Falk speaks of the plight of these child prisoners, noting that what these children go through reflect what the entire Palestinian community goes through. "Horrifying as is the experience of these children, mainly mid-teenagers, the deeper horror is the degree to which the entire community of Palestinians is scarred for life by Israeli brutality."¹

¹ Falk, Richard, Hashim Norma ed. *Dreaming of Freedom: Palestinian Child Prisoners Speak*. Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media Malaysia, 2016, p. 14.

In the book, the children recount their experiences in Israeli jails, of torture, beatings, humiliation and even death following their release, as what happened with Ayman Abbasi from Jerusalem, who the book was dedicated to, who was shot dead by the invading Israeli forces in Jerusalem on 29 November 2015.² Ayman was imprisoned several times — the first when he was just in ninth grade. He was sentenced to 18 more months in prison following placing him under house arrest. Following shooting him during clashes with Israeli soldiers, they even attempted unsuccessfully, to seize his body from the medical centre where he had been taken. Hundreds of Palestinians accompanied Ayman's body to the graveyard in Sweih, carrying flags and chanting for the liberation of Palestine and the release of all detainees.

The book is distinctive in the sense it provides first hand accounts of children, using their own words that would otherwise be untold and less highlighted on Israel's systemic abuse in its prison system.

The suffering of children, is no different from the suffering of the Palestinian people. According to their accounts, they were beaten and assaulted by the Israeli army and its settlers such as the children of Hebron, who are repeatedly harassed by Israeli settlers. While in prison, these children are subject to torture to force them to confess for throwing stones at the Israeli army and settlers.

Assaults

Dreaming of Freedom: Palestinian Child Prisoners Speak in Israeli Jails details the story of 16-year Palestinian boy Yazan Alsharbati, the child of Shuhada Street, who lives in the heart of the conflict zone in Hebron. Alsharbati recounts Israeli settlers' assaults against him while walking home, and how he was arrested despite that he didn't provoke the attack.

In his own words, Alsharbati described his experience at the hands of the occupation and how Palestinians in Hebron live at the mercy of Israeli settlers. "We are subjected to thousands of violations including police dogs and settlers throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at us. They scream at us and beat us."³

² Ibid p.9.

³ Ibid p.30.

Mohammed Al Khawaja, 11, from Ramallah is another child included in the book. He speaks about his arrest and how Israeli soldiers snatched him from his family's house. He describes how he felt that day after the soldiers assaulted him. "I was severely beaten and hit by the soldiers all the way until we reached the village entrance."⁴

Raids at Night

Night arrests are very common and can severely traumatize a child. Palestinian children don't feel secure in their own home anymore, and some start having nightmares.

Yousef al Rishq, 13, was asleep when he was woken up at 4:00 AM by the sound of Israeli soldiers banging on their door. "Without waiting for us to answer, they smashed their way in, and turned the whole place into a complete mess. My family didn't know why they'd come to our house until one of them mentioned my name. I was surprised, but my father was completely shocked. I was just 13."⁵

These Israeli practices aims at breaking the social fabric of Palestinians, by separating them from their families. By subjecting them to torture and imprisonment as a young age, Israel aims to break the will of Palestinian children, where a generation of oppressed Palestinians under occupation would arise, completely adapting life under occupation as a normalcy.

Hope

Ahmad Khalaf, 13, tried to stand up to his captors who tried to scare him. Ahmad and his interrogator yelled at each other, which made his interrogator beats him. "He got a stick and beat me and kicked me, until I felt like I was dead."⁶ Ahmed's pain didn't end. He suffered from pain after he was released from prison due to the torture he was subjected to.

Although the stories are grim, they also display the courage and resilience of Palestinian children who, despite the challenges of living under occupation, do not want to leave their land.

⁴ Ibid p.32.

⁵ Ibid p.108.

⁶ Ibid p.84.

These children still have hope, despite what they have gone through. Explaining how he coped with life in jail, child Muslim Ouda said, “Despite the miserable conditions in the cells, I would still try to draw a bright picture of my future, using my innocent imagination, in which there is no occupation.”⁷

Hashim’s book is the first of its kind and comes at a crucially important time when the issue of Palestinian prisoners in general, and the issue of child prisoners in particular, is in the spotlight.

This book contributes to highlighting very little talked about issue in the Israeli occupation of Palestine. By bringing these stories to reality, the book is a significant contribution to highlighting the lives of Palestinian children under Israel’s military occupation. The torture and imprisonment suffered by these children will leave lasting effects on them. The future of these children with such a reality is message to all concerned bodies that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is creating future young Palestinians who see no sight at the end of the tunnel of the occupation.

⁷ Ibid p.77.