

The psychological effects of martyrs' bodies' detention on their families

A long journey of suffering: Between an “open grave” and an “ambiguous loss”

- **They execute the martyr, it's painful...**
- **They detain his body, it gets way more painful...**
- **They hand over the body to us, that adds some more pain...**
- **They send us his clothes, it's extremely painful... it's cruel.**

These are the stages of pain that we have to remember during my talk

The lives of families of martyrs whose bodies are detained are “**suspended**” by the fate of their sons and daughters, also their lives are “**frozen**” until the dead bodies are released, so that they may be buried in peace and dignity.

For those families, loss and confusion between probabilities and apprehensions around the destiny of their loved one, put them under a huge responsibility with which they struggle alone.

To give you an idea about detained bodies I will highlight some points:

- In October 2015, the occupation started the policy of detaining bodies in freezers.
- Since 2015 bodies of more than 240 martyrs have been detained, 64 of them are still in the Mortuary freezers.
- More than 253 martyrs still in the 'Cemeteries of Numbers' to this day some them for decades. The cemeteries are made up of mass graves marked with numbers rather than names, and some of the bodies have been there since the 1967 war.
- For your notice my research focused on the detained bodies in freezers.

Between an “open grave” and an “ambiguous loss”

To give you the sense of the paradox families experience I am quoting some of them for you to understand and reflect on this experience:

martyr Abdul Hamid Abu Surur's mother

“My life’s wish is to bury my son”

martyr Mesbah Abu Sobeih’s brother

“Look how far we get, our dream as Palestinians today, is to bury our children”

martyr Bahaa Alyan’s father

“I was born the day I buried Bahaa”

martyr Hassan Manasrah’s father

“The yearning to bury a son is like the birth of a new one”

I am going to show now the **Endless torment, by reading** martyr Mesbah Abu Sobeih’s brother’s testimony:

“First, we do not have a death certificate, and accordingly, the martyr’s son cannot get an identity card, as the Interior Ministry asked him to bring his father, he told them that he was deceased, so they asked him to bring the death certificate, and they are the ones who issue it, and they are holding him... Not issuing the death certificate is also a punishment for the wife, who could not prove that she was a widow in order to obtain her dues. There was also punishment for the children, as they were arrested more than once and for long periods, which prevented the eldest son from continuing his university studies, and arrested the daughter of the martyr for a week, interrogations and arrests for the rest of the family, including the father of the martyr, who is eighty years old, and the administrative detention of the husband of the martyr’s daughter on his wedding day, and closing the house that the martyr’s family used to live in, even though he does not own it.”

So here we understand that: This suffering does not end as long as the grave / wound remains open, and death is suspended, so it is difficult for the martyr’s family not only to grieve and mourn and find closure, but even to start these processes as they should. To give you an idea these are some testimonies expressed by some families:

"There is no time for the families of the martyrs to grieve and mourn. Their concern is to recover the bodies of their martyrs"

"Following-up, chasing and preoccupation with the destiny of the body has stolen my time to feel the loss"

"I am too busy for sadness now. There are things that worry me and I have to deal with –arresting my children, if my son will continue his study, and many other things within the household responsibilities... in addition to all that I am still waiting the body of my husband"

The experience of loss follows a particular sequence for the families of detained bodies:

News / shock / martyrdom

- Families never been prepared for the news of martyrdom, nor the detention of the body.
- The father who becomes the Father of the Martyr suddenly, finds himself entering the battle to recover the body, even before he wakes up from the shock / news of martyrdom, which he may reject and deny at first, without preparation, guidance, or direction for what constitutes a "trauma" for him. His life turns upside down, and he enters into a **state of emergency** where everything is meaningless except for one subject, which is the restoration of the body of his martyr son, who is being held by the Israeli occupation.

To explain I am using the concept of forced story from the Narrative Psychology

- This state of emergency can be read from the perspective of narrative psychology: As it is "like any crisis experienced by a person or society, it is a period of time in which a kind of excluding of the individual from his own story on the one hand and forcing him to adopt a different story."

- It is a case of being forced to change without having the will to change or the opportunity to prepare for it, and because of this we can call the state of emergency a forced story.
- Forcing here is a type of psychological threat and its result is confusion and loss of balance.

It is important to understand now the **source of strength, and an urgent necessity for those families**

- **Mutual support: to define Martyr's families I am quoting:**
 "One large and strong family, united by pain, soreness, and joint action, and no one in it envisages any personal interest from the other. What comforts us is sitting together and supporting each other."
- **This type of support is consistent with the Palestinian experience of the Women Studies Center, known as the "Women, Occupation and Bereavement Program"** in this program they developed the "Bereaved-to-Bereaved" approach, in order to transform the "bereaved" person from a fragile person to a strong one that is able to create the change, become a leader in the society and provoke change in her community.
- **For families with detained bodies they developed the mutual support informally, they start to visit each other, to give support, and to get the strength from others....**

They are different from others because of Death differences, which we can understand by:

- Uncertainty about the reality of death: "There is still a one percentage possibility, that our son is alive."

- Psychological warfare... "It is too early for mourning house ... Your son is only half martyr."
- "What happened to the body? In the fridge? ... cold or warm? What color did the body take?" what differentiate this death is the kind of fears, and worries families have are different from others it looks irrational, and illogical thoughts, but this is how families of martyrs think. A strong example is Baha's mother who avoided her freezer to take a frozen meat... it reminded her of Baha's body. She said "my son became a thing like this frozen meat"
- "Fear of being kidnapped and possible execution."
- Fear of being abused or stolen. "Naseem was a child, I mean, his health is good, how do you want me to be convinced that they wouldn't steal organs from his body?
- The family's social life differs: "We live in a state of clinical death."
- It is different death because there is no tomb... for martyrs family tomb has its value... normal tomb contrivers the open tomb... it is the place where people go to spiritually talk to their lost one, and to close the mourning circle. The family of Abd Alhameed Abu Sror for example prepared a tomb for him, it is still open till today waiting for the liberation of his body... when his mother feel sorrow or annoyed she goes to the tomb to get her comfort... but seeing the tomb open reminded her of her pain and duties toward her son, burring him and closing the tomb.
- An open grave ... "I envy you, you will hug your son again" ... "It is better for you, at least you have a grave to visit" (this is a discussion between two mothers, one buried her son the other still waiting)

"What do you want me to tell you about Naseem? I miss him all the time, I cry... but not in front of my family or my mother, so she won't cry with me, the most difficult thing is that Naseem does not exist anymore, they kept his body, at least when we have the body, I will visit his grave and pray for him".

- Sister of the child martyr Naseem Abu Rumi

- Negotiations with the occupation ... a psychological crisis ...
"The Israeli conditions are aimed at perpetuating the idea that the martyr has no dignity, and he will be buried at night, without public attendance and farewell."
- The loss here is not only a pending or incomplete loss, but it is often a prolonged and delayed loss, a loss followed by a loss, a shock followed by another,
- In addition to the first loss, martyrdom, There is also the detention of the body, the loss of the opportunity to say goodbye,
- The loss of the destroyed house and the memories it contains,
- The loss of other members of the family through repeated summons and interrogations at the investigation centers of the occupation, and their arrest for various periods, as happened with the brother of the child martyr Hassan Manasrah, and with the sons of the martyr Mesbah Abu Sobeih and his daughter, and the administrative detention of the husband of the martyr's daughter on his wedding day,
- Loss of residence and therefore home,
- Also, the lost family, who are busy recovering the son's body, at the expense of the rest of the family.

- Studies indicate that families that have managed to overcome the ambiguous loss have adopted ideal thinking patterns, and have focused their efforts on moving forward, adjusting family roles, and reintegrating into life ...
- There are two types of ambiguous loss:
 - First: **physically absent, psychologically present: War, kidnapping, ethnic cleansing, disappearance, body detention**
 - Second: **psychologically absent, physically present: Alzheimer's, addiction, severe depression, total preoccupation.**

But what about: “**the peculiarity of the Palestinian situation**”?

The body of the martyr here is not stacked somewhere with hundreds of other corpses with no features, not submerged in a totally unknown or drawn in ocean, and not absent in dark basements or in secret underground basements that may be exposed at any time, but they are preserved and detained by the occupying power, without any regard for the dignity and the sanctity of the deceased, and in a clear defiance of all international laws and customary conventions, related to it, in terms of punishment and humiliation of the martyr and his family.

In the families of the martyrs whose bodies are detained, the ambiguous loss of the first type is clearly present, as the psychological presence of the martyr remains in control of the scene, while the body is absent in the freezers of the occupation.

The ambiguous loss of the second type may be present simultaneously, as the caregiver's full concern with how to recover the body of his life partner, his daughter, or his brother places him, in a way that he does not know, in a bubble that separates him from his surroundings, his responsibilities and his previous life, and he sees only his concern with this issue of loss, he became physically present but psychologically

absent, from the perspective of those whom he supports and takes care of. However, the first type of ambiguous loss is the strongest and most common.

- The condition of the body upon receipt is a source of deep pain, due to freezing under temperatures of up to minus 40 degrees Celsius for long periods, the body is deformed and its features change, the relatives are unable to kiss him, and they suffer in saying goodbye, carrying him and depositing his body in the grave without it getting hurt.
- Indeed, a martyr's hand fell off, in Qalandia camp, in the attempt to make the body fit to enter his final resting place ...
- As if all the pain accompanying the ambiguous loss is nothing more than one stage of pain in our Palestinian case ...

Psychological interventions:

- Psychological interventions to go through the loss phase must involve practical steps to recover the body and be involved in the issue of body's detention as a whole, which gives the individual a meaning to fight for, and an opportunity for a new victory.
- Psychological intervention should open the door to talk about how each member of the family understood the event, his contradictory feelings about it, and his perceptions about what the family should do later, so that legitimacy is given to all feelings and ideas, and greater legitimacy is given to the difference of perceptions and feelings of each family member, and the need to be accepted by the rest of the family.
- Work to express pain and loss in a safe space, and start work on reorganizing family roles.

It is advisable to modify some known models of intervention with grief and loss so that they are more sensitive to the peculiarity of the Palestinian situation

One of the models that could be developed is the two-track model of bereavement:

- First: The effect of loss on the overall performance: The performance in all biological, psychological and social aspects.
- Second: Reorganizing the relationship with the deceased: The ongoing and distinguished relationship with the deceased

To conclude I discussed today a type of many collective punishments that the Israeli occupation use with Palestinian. These are:

Siege, confiscation, settlements, water theft, power cut, curfew, work permit prevention, restrictions on freedom of movement and worship, closure, invasions, building permit blocking, demolition, trees uprooting, apartheid wall, barriers, inspection, raids, arrests, withdrawal of identities, denial of residency, forced deportation / displacement, piracy of tax funds, detention of goods and mail, killing and assassinations and detention of the bodies of martyrs ... etc.

All are collective punishments aimed at:

- * **Not only the domination and consolidation of the occupation, but the aim of subjugation and humiliation.**
- * **Preoccupation with basic needs.**
- * **Monitoring and self-monitoring with the aim of controlling as well.**

The transition to a state of learned helplessness.

- Ultimately, these collective punishments are intended to lead the Palestinian person to feel that he is not responsible for his destiny and that nothing can be done:
- Rejecting this feeling and not recognizing it may be one of the motives, if not the motive, behind the Palestinian youth's recent revolt since 2015.
- From here we can say that the aim of collective punishments is not only to demolish stone and burn trees, but also to demolish and destroy human beings, and to destroy the Palestinian self as an active entity and transform it into a state of helplessness, without aim and without meaning,
- According to Existential Psychology, "a person cannot be comfortable and perform his normal life functions if he cannot find meaning and purpose for his life."

I will leave you with this quotation from the Father of Martyrs Baha' Elian he said "we never had one day rest, we never slept without nightmares, or crying, we tried to appear for media strong and steadfast, but in reality we were in deep pain... we felt contentment when we buried Baha, he gained address we can visit"