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Bet. Oppression and Servility
Testimonies from Inside Egyptian
Prisons

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Testimonies from Inside Egyptian Prisons

Emad Sami

Many researchers have addressed the punitive prison system as a complete societal system, not as an institution within the state's institutions, but rather it was described as a separate community with its own life laws that have been developed to be commensurate with the goals of its existence – reform and rehabilitation of those who violate the law through a comprehensive punitive plan that would qualify them to re-integrate into society once more, according to comments of Hassan al-Sohagy, head of the Egyptian Prisons Authority.

These punitive policies begin with a comprehensive biological, legal, mental, psychological and social examination of incoming prisoners, with a view to classifying them and placing them in appropriate cells due to results of these examinations. After that, the prisoner starts his life in prison based on a punitive plan according to prison regulations to achieve moral discipline as well as social, health and educational care, etc.

Throughout the history of human rights in Egypt, the rights files and all relative issues have focused on the situation of political prisoners, drawing attention to the violations committed against them, in terms of their inhumane living conditions which ultimately lead to premature death in prison. However, many researchers and human rights defenders overlooked addressing the prison system as a punitive authority that has badly affected hundreds of thousands of Egyptians throughout history, whether criminal prisoners (most inmates) or political prisoners, whose numbers increase and decrease according to the policy of the regime.

Based on this research gap, this paper attempts to review the punitive policies in Egyptian prisons and their impact on inmates, through some interviews with a number of prisoners on prison conditions during the past few years, with the aim of drawing a general and largely comprehensive picture of the regime's policies in this regard, as well as their psychological and political effects on prisoners, and the relation between the prisoner (political or criminal) with the punitive authority.

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The paper provides details about the prisoners' life within Egyptian prisons from the early moments of entry into prison and the psychological, mental, physical and spiritual effects of the punitive philosophy on them. The paper also attempts to shed light on the engineering structure of Egyptian prisons, which has a mental impact in one way or another on prisoners.

The paper mainly relies on two main sources, namely:

- 1- Available literature of concern in addition to theories that address the prison as a comprehensive punitive authority, including the concepts of punishment, observation (monitoring), architecture, bio-authority and sadomasochism)
- 2- Stories of people who had been imprisoned in different prisons, including police stations for immediate detention and public and central prisons for long periods of imprisonment to explain - through their narratives - the philosophy of Egyptian prisons.

The paper also reviews some published narratives and testimonies of former prisoners in Egyptian prisons, whether old or new.

The researcher held nine interviews with former political prisoners in eight different Egyptian prisons who had stayed or dealt with criminal prisoners, whether in prison transfer vehicles, family visits, inside wards, or even inside cells.

N.B. All names in testimonies are pseudonyms

The paper includes some structural drawings of Egyptian prison designs from inside the wards.

Although the authorities' philosophy is largely the same for both male and female prisoners, the paper addresses the issue of Egyptian women prisoners, in terms of the authorities' philosophy of dealing with their bodies due to the different biological needs between women's bodies and men's bodies.

The paper is divided into four topics, namely:

First: Entering the Prison World

This topic is subdivided into:

- The start of the journey, getting off the prison transfer vehicle

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- Beginnings of subjugation of prisoners' mind and body
- New incoming prisoners and desecration of the body

Second: Structure of the Prison and the Prisoner

This topic is subdivided into:

- The history of establishment of prisons in Egypt
- Humiliation of the prisoner (cages, low-ceiling cells)
- Fear and observation
- Inside the cell (humiliating the body - prison food)

Third: Transformations of Living in Prison

This topic is subdivided into:

- The body needs in women prisons
- The prisoner-prisoner relations – the seniority system
- Transformations of sexual orientation
- The prisoner's visit – identification and observation seal

Fourth: The Prisoner between Employment and Servility

This topic is subdivided into:

- The employment system inside prisons
- The prisoner as a private servant to administration
- Sadoomasochism between the jailer and the prisoner
- The prisoners' suicide

First: Entering the Prison World

The start of the journey



Source: [LEFT](#)

One of the prisoners, Ibrahim¹, describes how they (a group of both criminal and political prisoners of different ages) were received by the prison administration in Port Said Public Prison, saying: "When we got off the prison vehicle, the climate was very cold and we were received by two rows of informants and non-commissioned police officers with huge bodies, and we had to pass by

walking between them to reach another place. We walked speedily while we were in a state of panic especially the elderly ones, amid insults and beatings (with hands and feet) by informants and non-commissioned police officers. We entered a large iron cage for inspection of our bags and bodies; where we were forced to take off all our clothes except for the boxers, while police informants were pressing on our testicles and looking inside our boxers during inspection to make sure that we had not hidden anything inside. After that, we were left with folded eyes and handcuffed wrists tightened behind our backs in what is known as "back handcuffs", for nearly two hours under falling rains in the cold air of winter, which made our bodies tremble due to both fear and cold. Then, we put on prison clothes after hearing the administration's instructions, warning of any attempt to cause any trouble. And finally, we entered one of the prison wards in preparation for distribution to cells."

In another testimonial posted on the Ultra Sound² website about Egyptian prison investigations, one of the prisoners said that when the prison transfer vehicle carrying him along with about 30 criminal

¹ Interview with a former prisoner in several Egyptian prisons, including Port Said Prison - between 2014-2017

² Details of inhuman life ... live testimonies from inside Egypt's prisons - Ultra Sound feature - 14 December 2018 - [Link](#)

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and political prisoners arrived at the Gamasa Prison, they were taken out of the vehicle and the informants ordered them to stand in a line with their faces to the wall and say out their names with clear voices – after taking off all their clothes except for the boxers. They were then ordered to move carrying their bags to complete the inspection process and entry procedures to a place called “Al-Irad”³ (or new comers) intended for new prisoners, before they are distributed to the cells.

We conclude from these two testimonies as well as other testimonies on the prisoners’ first steps in



Source: [Mada Masr](#)

Egyptian prisons, that the police abuses during reception of new prisoners, including insulting and beating are carried out systematically; but their severity may increase or decrease depending on the circumstances of the place and the supervising officer. In one of these testimonies, one of the prisoners said that the prisoners transferred from one prison to another as a “disciplinary” measure are treated more severely than new prisoners, that is, when prisoners are transferred from one

prison to another as a punishment or according to specific recommendations from the administration, more difficult and violent measures are taken against them – with the aim of subjecting them to the authority of the new prison. French thinker Gustave Le Bon⁴ describes the mentality of the prisoner,

³ al-Irad: a cell designated for new prisoners, where they remain for a period specified by the head of Investigations, but according to the prison regulations, th period should not exceed 11 days.

⁴ Gustave Le Bon - The Psychology of the Masses - Translated by Hashem Saleh - 1st edition in 1991 - Dar Al-Saqi Beirut - p. 36

saying that the shock makes the prisoner unconsciously join the surrendered masses of prisoners due to fear of the prison administration's cruelty.

Subduing the mind and body

From the very first moments of the new prisoner's entry into prison, he becomes dominated by fear or intimidation of the punitive authority, according to the testimonies we got from some former prisoners.

One of the prisoners, Farouk⁵, describes the first moments of his entry into the Borg El Arab prison in Alexandria, together with dozens of prisoners, saying: "When we got off the prison transfer vehicle, we were met with a barrage of beatings and insults, and soldiers ordered us to sit in a squatting position and wait to hear our names and prison instructions. Among us, there was a man in his forties with amputated legs; he was moving only on his hands, but he did not receive a proper treatment commensurate with his health conditions. He was insulted and beaten even more than us. The scene was saddening when we moved towards the informants for inspection, as he was moving on his hands and holding his handbag by his teeth just like what a dog does when it holds something."

In so doing, the authorities activate the techniques of owning the body, as Dr. Basma Abdel Aziz says in her study of "The Memory of Coercion"⁶, adding that the techniques used to enable a person to enslave, dominate and control another person guarantee spread of terror and surrender in the other person's mind and soul, and depend on the isolation of the victim and deprive it of any power or ability to communicate with the outside world ... and then exposing the victim to sudden and repeated psychological shocks to make the oppressed person realize the extent of the power of the authority that that he has fallen prey to and feel that it is useless to resist; and with passing of time he surrenders and submits to his torturer completely – psychologically, mentally and physically.

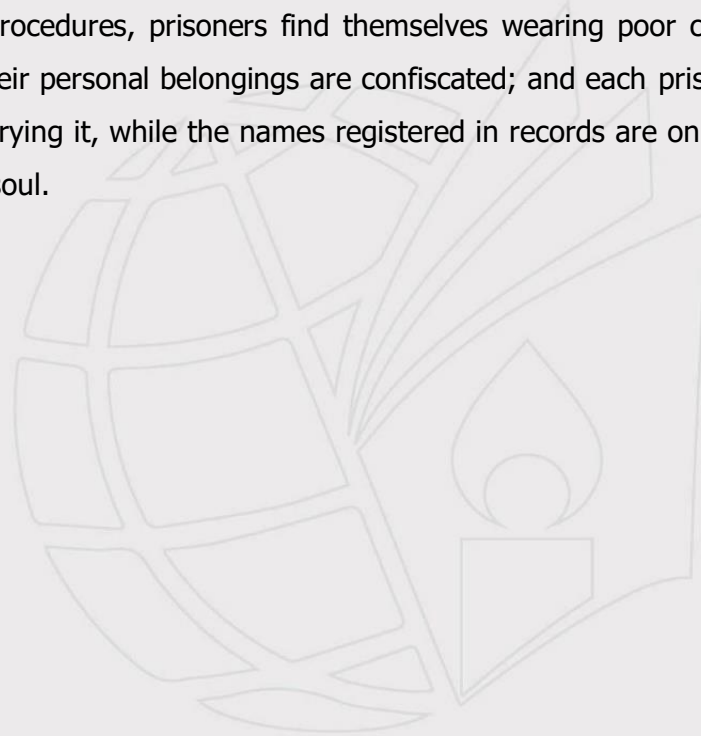
⁵ Interview with a former prisoner in several Egyptian prisons - From 2013 to 2016

⁶ Basma Abdel Aziz - Memory of Coercion - a study on the torture system - 1st edition in 2014 - Al-Tanweer House for Printing and Publishing - Cairo - page 282

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One of the prisoners, Sadiq⁷, describes the early moments when a prisoner enters the prison's gate, saying: "The huge fences, the vast spaces, the complex buildings, the multiple doors, the huge and powerful jailers that receive us without showing any sense of humanity, the large number of files and procedures, the fear of former prisoners and their obedience to the administration's orders before us, the violation of the body, including forced taking off clothes in front of the crowd, the fear of the unknown that awaits me if I object to something – all this and more made me surrender and refrain from seeking any legal right stipulated in the Egyptian Constitution⁸."

After completing all procedures, prisoners find themselves wearing poor clothes; their heads are completely shaved; their personal belongings are confiscated; and each prisoner is given a number and photographed carrying it, while the names registered in records are only to prove existence of the body without the soul.



⁷ Interview with a former prisoner several times in several Egyptian prisons for periods between 2013 - 2015 - 2017

⁸ Prison Division and Treatment - Chapter Two - Seminars on Egyptian Prison Legislation - The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights - [Link](#)

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"Al-Irad" and desecration of the body

Then, the new-comers of prisoners head to a certain building allocated for them with a sign hung on



Source: [Mada Masr](#)

it saying " al-Irad" (revenue, meaning the new incoming prisoners). This building contains several cells, which are only opened for throwing the prison's poor food to prisoners; there is no opening for ventilation and the sun never enters the building as some former prisoners in Abu Zaabal Prison described⁹. The new prisoner is supposed to stay in the cell for several days, up to 11 days, until he is transferred to the prison's normal wards. In this place, the prisoners are forced to defecate while informants and soldiers are watching them to make sure the

content of the stool does not include any banned materials the prisoner may have hidden in his anus, according to the testimony of one of the Tora Prisons Complex prisoners¹⁰ describing what happened to them (about 20 prisoners) there. The punitive authority considers that it has taken possession of the prisoner's body, and therefore, it has the right to see it completely overlooking any right for the prisoner to hide his genitals – which makes the prisoner himself later violate the bodies and genitals of inmates, as Dr. Mostafa Hegazi says in his study "The Humiliated Human"¹¹, addressing the philosophy of demolishing the prisoner's human value, by humiliating him and desecrating his body.

⁹ The testimony of one of the prisoners of Abu Zaabal Prison "al-Irad" - [Link](#)

¹⁰ Op. Cit. - Details of non-human life ... live testimonies from inside Egyptian prisons - Ultra Sound feature - December 14, 2018 - [Link](#)

¹¹ Mostafa Hegazi - The Humiliated Man - 1st edition in 2005 - The Arab Cultural Center - Rabat - Moral and physical humiliation - p. 145

Second: Structure of Prisons – and Prisoners

History of prisons in Egypt

The first Egyptian prisons were established in the late nineteenth century between 1884 to 1912, where 15 prisons¹² were built under British mandate in cooperation with ministers of interior at the time, particularly the prisons of Giza, Assiut and Sohag. Then, several other prisons were later built during in Alexandria, Beheira, Qena, and Cairo.

The rest of the prisons¹³ were later built by the governments of post-July 1952 officers from the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser to Hosni Mubarak, who established the Tora Prison Complex, including the most notorious prison, the Aqrab (Scorpion) Prison¹⁴, which is currently considered the cemetery of the Egyptian opposition since the Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi coup in 2013.

Despising Prisoners: (Cages – Low-ceiling Cells)

In many Egyptian prisons and police stations, there are iron cages in which prisoners or visitors are checked and inspected. Sometimes, visits are made inside these iron cages, or the prisoner remains inside and his visitors just look at him from outside the bars of the cage during the visit. Sometimes, the prisoners are placed inside them when entering or leaving the prison heading to the courts or coming back. One of the prisoners, Fouad, describes his feeling while he was inside the cage¹⁵, saying: "I spent many hours inside the cage. When my parents came for my visit, I was forced to stay in the cage while they were looking at me from outside the cage during the visit. I only tried to touch their fingers through the narrow openings in-between the cage wires. When I enter that cage, I only feel like a locked animal, looking at people from inside the cage and they are looking at it from outside."

The police stations' custody area is always located in the basement in a small cellar including a number of cells, while the administration offices are placed in the upper floor, as a sign of degradation of the

¹² Khalij Online - From Youssef Prison to Karmouz Prison - The Story of the Oldest Egyptian Prison - [Link](#)

¹³ The story and history of the Foreigners' Prison in Cairo - [Link](#)

¹⁴ Scorpion Prison 992 (High Security) - Al Jazeera Documentary - [Link](#)

¹⁵ Interview with a former prisoner in the Port Said Prison

prisoner that contributes along with other repressive measures to his surrender to the punitive authority.

Fear and internal control

The interviews with former prisoners that the researches has made indicate that the engineering structure of prisons is different from one prison to another in terms of space and also in terms of the engineering design of wards and cells, but almost all the interviews¹⁶ agreed that "these solid buildings, multiple high walls and hundreds of watchtowers participated in destroying the prisoners' psyche and led them to lose any hope to get out and live normally outside prison again. One prisoner, Khaled, says, "We are subjected to all kinds of oppression. The food is not good. We sleep on the bare ground over a concrete block. We are only allowed to defecate once a day within 40 minutes, which is basically the time of exercise. If I cannot defecate during this time, I must wait for the next day to try again. We are prompted to urinate in plastic bags and remove it from the cell the next day during the 40 minutes allowed for the bathroom and exercise. The design of the cell does not allow the lowest levels of human life, as they are designed to be an environment for causing physical or mental illnesses and accordingly immature death; those buildings made me always feel intimidated."

Internal control in Egyptian prisons differs according to the authority's classification of prisoners and according to the structure and administration of each prison. The Aqrab (Scorpion) Prison is an example designed to punish and discipline political opponents that the regime is keen to coerce. As for the rest of prisons, particularly the Tora Leman and high security prisons, they are intended for prisoners with severe sentences and criminals in the eyes of the punitive authority, internal control of prisoners is tight. However, the internal control process in Egyptian prisons is not intended to achieve discipline and reform the conduct of prisoners. In his design of the Panopticism¹⁷ Prison, British philosopher Jeremy Bentham secured continuous monitoring and control of prisoners within

¹⁶ Interviews conducted with 9 former prisoners in several Egyptian prisons

¹⁷ From panobticism prisons to collective surveillance techniques - Mada Masr - Mohamed El-Taher's article - [Link](#)

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the general designing of the prison, with the aim of reforming the conduct of prisoners – which is not available in Egyptian prisons, according to the Egyptian architect Ghada Amr¹⁸.

Inside the cell

Many rights defenders seek to urge the legislative authorities in Egypt to apply the Nelson Mandela rules¹⁹, intended “to set out what is generally accepted as being good principles and practice in the treatment of prisoners and prison management,” to enable him to spend his prison term well and qualify him to reform his conduct, in preparation for his integration into society again. Unfortunately, Nelson Mandela's rules are not applied at all in Egyptian prisons.

Humiliation of the body

There is no minimum limit in the Egyptian Prisons Law for prison areas and divisions²⁰, as cells differ



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with respect to area from 2 meters by 2 meters to slightly larger. The law also contains no controls to determine the number of prisoners inside a cell according to its area, which allows the prison administration to determine as it wishes and according to the numbers of prisoners – sometimes the prison administration places more than 8 prisoners in a cell that does not exceed 3 meters and a half in length

¹⁸ 'Prison architecture between the reform machine and the deviation plant' - Basma Abdel Aziz - uraiqat architects website - [Link](#)

¹⁹ The Nelson Mandela Rules - United Nations Website - [Link](#)

²⁰ The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights - Chapter Two - Division and Treatment of Prisoners - From the Egyptian Prison Legislation Series - [Link](#)

in 2 meters in width as the case is in Port Said Public Prison.

Former prisoner Fouad²¹ describes his experience during his stay in more than a year in Port Said Prison, saying: "The ward is very narrow. It is composed of three floors. There are more than thirty cells and a public water closet in each floor with only 8 toilets. The cell is very narrow; there were 8 people living in an area of approximately 3 meters long and 2 meters wide. There are 5 sleeping hanging bed for the use of five people and the rest (3) sleep on the floor. The dungeon is not clean and crammed with cockroaches, and it is forbidden to enter any insecticide. Cockroaches used to walk over us day and night until we got used to them. There were no toilet inside the cell, so we used to urinate in plastic bags and throw them next day. As for the excretion process, we used to do it once every 24 hours during the time period designated for exercise for 40 minutes only, where the prison administration from eight a.m. starts to open 4 cells together from for 40 minutes, followed by four new cells after prisoners of the first four cells return to their cells, and so on until all the cells are finished in the afternoon. This means that 32 prisoners use only 8 toilets during a period of 40 minutes to defecate, shower and wash clothes; and in many times, the water was cut off during that period. When you cannot defecate during this time, you must wait until the next day to try again. However, the elderly people among us cannot bear it, therefore, they used to defecate in plastic bags which remain in the cell until the next day, making the cell smell extremely terrible and unbearable, but due to the health condition of the elderly inmates, we had to accept that. Every day, I suffered body humiliation because of the bad food, digestion and excretion."

Prison food

The level of quality, hygiene and good cooking of meals varies according to the Egyptian prison list from one prison to another, but for the most part, the quality of food in all Egyptian prisons is very poor²². This applies to the food served to prisoners in general. However, the situation is worse for political prisoners, as they are allowed only very small quantities of low-quality food according to high-level orders from security authorities, as it is the case with the inmates of the high-security Aqrab (Scorpion) Prison, and elsewhere. However, it is generally observed that the amount of food

²¹ Interview with a former prisoner in the Port Said Prison

²² Prisoner's Meal - Is it similar to a middle-class meal or its garbage? - correspondents.org - [Link](#)

distributed in relation to the number of prisoners is little and insufficient, and therefore, most political and criminal prisoners mainly depend on visits of relatives to supply them with food. The food distributed include bread, beans, lentils, cheese, halva, jam, eggs -once or twice a week- meat -once a week- vegetables -cooked twice a week). But the popular types served regularly in meals is bread, cheese, halva, beans, and lentils, which are known to Egyptians in general as a haven for the poor – and this explains why the prison administration chooses these types of food as the regular menu of prisoners. The punitive authority in Egypt systematically violates the most basic human rights of the prisoner as well as the Egyptian Law No. 691 of 1998²³ which stipulates that prisoners' meals correspond to the meals of the Egyptian middle-income family in terms of type and quantity for each prisoner.

Third: Transformations of living in prison

The special body needs in women's prisons

The punitive authority's view of the female prisoner in Egypt is not different from that of the male prisoner, despite the different needs of the woman's body from those of the man's body, such as the physical changes that take place during the "menstrual cycle", which calls for continuous cleaning and special care, as well as nursing (breastfeeding) mothers among female prisoners, and so on. However, the authority in Egypt does not take great care of this, but it also works to subject the woman's body to the poor prison conditions it provides, regardless of her special physical and psychological needs, which are different from men.

²³ Ministry of Interior, Decision No. 691 of 1998 "on the treatment and living of prisoners", March 7, 1998, the Egyptian Gazette, No. 76, April 2, 1998 - [Link](#)

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In the latest report issued by the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, titled "Forgotten in Qanater"²⁴ - a



Source: Egyptian Front for Human Rights

Look at the Rights of Detainees in Qanater Prison", which illustrates the extremely bad conditions of women prisoners, from the moment of getting off the prison transfer vehicle until they are placed in the prison wards, including what they suffer of intense inspection, abuse and lack of personal hygiene.

Upon arrival, women prisoners are taken to closed rooms, where they are forced to take off their clothes completely in front of the prison inspectors and those who help

them from the old criminal inmates. According to the testimonies of women prisoners, searching their body is extremely humiliating, as they are subjected to sexual harassment²⁵, abusing and insulting, using sexual words in a kind of verbal harassment of newcomers. This procedure is not limited to female political prisoners, but also it includes all women prisoners upon entering the prison, where they are systematically subjected to this humiliating treatment; as the prison administration considers that the bodies of prisoners have become their own property and uses them as a means of subjecting female prisoners to the prison regulations.

²⁴ Forgotten in Qanater - A look at violations of the rights of female prisoners in Qanater Prison for women - Egyptian Front for Human Rights - [Link](#)

²⁵ Op. Cit. – Sexual violations - page 28

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During her menstrual cycle, some woman prisoners cannot afford buying sanitary pads that are



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available in the prison canteen at exorbitant prices, as the prison administration does not provide these pads for free. The report states that many female criminal prisoners do not use such sanitary simply because they cannot afford to buy them, which causes spread of diseases and deterioration of health conditions, according to another report²⁶ by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, that Egyptian legislation is void of any indication to women prisoners' rights during the menstrual cycle and her special physical needs during it.

Seniority system

Inmates who have stayed in prison for a longer time than others enjoy various merits of their seniority, as a result of experience in identifying the place and the relations they have established with non-commissioned police officers, informants, and sometimes with prison officers.

Among those prisoners, there is someone known as a "cell nobetci"²⁷ or head of cell, where royalties are paid to him from weaker prisoners for protecting them, as he is responsible for preserving the cell system, resolving problems, monitoring prisoners, and communicating with the prison administration regarding all the details of the prisoners' living in prison. Therefore, the head of the cell lives a better life than other inmates as he is allowed to help administration in prison work, lives

²⁶ Menstrual cycle in prisons - The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights - [Link](#)

²⁷ What you do not know about criminal prisoners in Egyptian prisons - Hamid Sharett article - Al-Jazeera online - [Link](#)

in the best place inside the cell, eats the best food, and enjoys many privileges²⁸ that are not allowed to the rest of the prisoners.

Transformations of sexual orientation

With the passing of time, prisoners become accustomed to desecrating and violating the sanctity of each other's bodies as a result of the authorities' desecration of their bodies from the early moments of entering the prison during inspection and even in punishment and discipline parties that always occur in public and in secret, leading to prevalence of the phenomenon transformation of sexual orientations among prisoners.

One of the prisoners, Mahmoud²⁹, says: "I have noticed several cases of those persons, only five people in a ward containing more than 700 political prisoners, which means that its percentage does not exceed 1%, and it is not related to morals at all, but it is like a disease that affects prisoners inside the prison. It was only a kind of harassing the body, but I never saw a complete sexual assault. However, the five persons that committed sexual harassment were politely advised and warned by decent elderly inmates.

Omar Hadhiq, an Egyptian poet who spent two years in prison, reported a similar story to the al-Safeer al-Arabi magazine³⁰. Also, Egyptian novelist Sun'a Allah Ibrahim wrote in his diaries, "Days of al-Wahat", about the prevalence of hand-masturbation among prisoners as a result of not being allowed to practice sex normally for a long time. Even worse than this is the spread of transformation of prisoners' sexual orientation, as some of them with the passing of time become homosexuals, as Sun'a Allah Ibrahim³¹ also narrates in his book "Honor"³² about homosexual relations between prisoners as well as the cases of physical violence that sometimes leads to sexual rape as a result of the inmates' sexual poverty.

²⁸ Al-Masryoun breaks prison codes - Al-Masryoun newspaper - [Link](#)

²⁹ Interview with a former prisoner in a prison, "refused to mention the prison's name" for 3 years

³⁰ Gay Prisoner - Omar Hazeq – al-Safeer al-Arabi Magazine - [Link](#)

³¹ Sun' Allah, Ibrahim – al-Wahat Diaries - Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi - Cairo - P. 106

³² Sun' Allah, Ibrahim – Honor - Dar Al-Hilal Foundation - Al-Hilal novels - No. 579 - pp. 535-536-537

Prisoner's visits

According to the prison regulations³³, it is estimated that prisoners who are still under investigation receive visits on a weekly basis, prisoners imprisonment sentences are allowed visits every 15 days, and those sentenced to death every 30 days. The form of the visit is determined based on the structural design of the prison and the supervising officer who determines when the visit begins and when it ends, without adhering to the visit's legal duration according to prison regulations, but rather depending on his personal assessment of the matter.

According to our interviews³⁴ with former prisoners, inmates are lined up on the ground in worn out clothes, with traces of exhaustion; and they may stay like this for hours in the hot sun of summer or in the bitter cold of winter until the prisoners' families are allowed to enter for visiting them after going through the inspection measures. Before allowing visits to start, the officer in charge starts to stamp prisoners with the word "prisoner" (under investigation - convicted) on the right wrist, corresponding to the stamp of "visitor" on the visitor's wrist.

There are different designs for the visit halls, including closed cages, and those that allow the prisoner to stay inside and his family look at him from outside, while informants and non-commissioned police officers sneak through prisoners and their families as a matter of hidden surveillance until the visit ends with ringing a bell, blowing a beep, or just shouting out by the prison administration.

The humiliating procedures followed during execution of visits in Egyptian prisons come within the framework of subjugation exercised by the authority, where the visit is viewed as a grant from the prison administration, and not a legal right according to the Constitution.

³³ Prison Legislation - Chapter Six - Visiting and Communication - The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights - [Link](#)

³⁴ The interviews are 9 interviews with previous prisoners with 8 Egyptian prisons, including those who were imprisoned in more than one prison

Fourth: The prisoner between employment and servility:

The prison system

The interviews we conducted with former prisoners revealed that political prisoners are not allowed to work during their imprisonment, but the tasks assigned to some of them are limited to assisting the prison authorities in the management of prisoners' affairs inside wards, including visits, trial sessions and others. As for the manual work as stipulated in the Egyptian prison law is restricted to criminal prisoners.

These prisoners work from approximately 7:00 a.m. until midday, when it is time to close all prison wards, in contravention of the stipulated minimum work hours from 6 to 8 hours per day³⁵. The prison work varies between helping in the kitchen for preparation of huge quantities of food for thousands of prisoners every day, the oven for baking bread on a daily basis, washing large numbers of kitchen pots used for cooking the daily meals in addition to other crafts. Also, some lucky prisoners, often known as the "bourgeois class", stay in the prison library upon recommendations from the prison officials.

In terms of wages, the financial regulations stipulate payment of LE 7 as a daily wage for a working prisoner, provided that only half of the wage, i.e. LE 3.5, be paid at once, and the other half at his exit from prison. However, the daily wage of an Egyptian worker below the extreme poverty line in a recent report of the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics is about LE 18³⁶, which means that the daily wage of a working prisoner is almost 5 times lower than that of the Egyptian citizen that lives in extreme poverty, amid the extremely high prices of the prison canteen. In addition, there is no guarantee for the working prisoner to receive his daily wage, because the officer in charge is the only one who decides whether these wages are to be paid or denied.

³⁵ Episodes on Egyptian Prison Legislation - Chapter Four - Prisoners' Employment and Remuneration - The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights - [Link](#)

³⁶ Income and Expenditure Report (2017-2018) - Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.

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Therefore, the prisoner lacks the minimum rights to work within the penal system, including a fair wage, legal treatment, and an authority to submit his grievances over injustices. Rather, the authority itself codifies all of this according to its vision in clear violation of the Constitution.

The prisoner as a personal servant

Furthermore, the officials of the penal authority use some prisoners as their personal servants. One of the prisoners, Farid³⁷, says: "The prisoners who work in the kitchen prepare breakfast and serve food for officers, non-commissioned officers, and informants, and then wash the empty plates, glasses, and other utensils after they finish eating or drinking." In addition to exploiting and degrading prisoners, the authorities aim to adapt, subdue and control them.

Sadomasochist jailer and prisoner

Before entering the prison, inmates never thought that they would not be allowed to speak and that he would be forced to take off all his clothes and stand naked while others look at him, sit in a squatting position with folded eyes for hours, be exposed to the dirtiest insults and curses, and much more violations and abuses for years without being able to object or even speak. Hence, the prisoner's mind reaches the concept of being humiliated and completely desecrated as a human being.

And with more coexistence with the Egyptian prison system, which transformed the life of the prisoner into a naked life, void of any humanity in front of an authority that used the finest details to subjugate prisoners or as Foucault called it the bio-politics or the bio-power³⁸, leading to formation of a new body and possibly a new person adapting to the new life that the authority chose to turn the relationship between the jailer and the prisoner into a sadomasochistic relationship, according to Giorgio Agamben³⁹, the Italian philosopher that is best known for his work investigating the concepts of the state of exception.

³⁷ Farid is a former prisoner for 4 years - [Refusal to mention the prison's name]

³⁸ Michel Foucault - History of Sexuality - The will of gratitude - Translated by Muhammad Hisham - 20114 edition - East Africa - Morocco - page 116

³⁹ Giorgio Agamben - The Sovereign Authority and Naked Life - Translated by Abdul Aziz Al-Ayyadi - al-jamal Publications - Baghdad - P.177

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The punitive authority depends in convincing its member on slogans of preserving the security of the homeland, its system and safety of society. It also uses the rhetoric of 'forces of evil and terrorism' as a scarecrow to justify the severe treatment of political opponents in Egyptian prisons, which the late Polish Baumann⁴⁰ called 'dehumanization for achievement of the bureaucratic goal of preserving the existing regime – introduced in parallel as preservation of security, progress and renaissance – which explains the sadism of members of the punitive authority within the prison walls only in dealing with prisoners, due to the existence of several factors provided to them by the punitive authority system.

Prisoners' suicide

Some Egyptian prisoners may view that the reason for their unhappiness is that they are still alive; and therefore, they think that getting rid of life by suicide may be a kind of silent resistance in protest against their suffering, or attempt to escape from the tyranny that they cannot resist and at the same time cannot surrender to. In this context, there have been reports about failed suicide attempts by dozens of political detainees because of the arbitrary detention conditions they endure, which have already led to the immature death of dozens of them in prison due to spread of diseases amid deliberate medical negligence by the prison administration. This led some political prisoners to think of getting rid of their lives instead of waiting for slow death.

⁴⁰ Zigmont Baumann - Modernity and the Holocaust - Translated by Haggag Abu Gabr - Dina Ramadan - Orbits for printing and publishing - Cairo - Dehumanizing bureaucratic goals - p. 185

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In its report last December titled “Without Accountability”⁴¹, the Committee for Justice organization



Source: [LEFT](#)

monitored deaths in Egyptian detention centers, estimating the number of deaths in Egyptian detention facilities over six years from July 2013 to November 2019 at 958 cases. The causes of death varied between medical negligence, physical torture, suicide and poor living conditions. The death rate of criminal prisoners was one and a half times higher than the political prisoners in terms of the death toll, with death of 678 prisoners, by 70.77% of the total deaths in prison,

while the organization estimated deaths among political prisoners at 280 cases, by 29.33% of the total deaths in Egyptian prisons. Suicide ranked third in terms of the cause death, with 65 cases after medical negligence and physical torture, with 677 and 136 cases respectively.

As for deaths in prison due to torture that ranked second in causes of death with 136 cases, including both criminal and political prisoners. In addition to the practice of torture by the punitive authority to extract confessions from political prisoners, it has become clear through documented statistics that practice of torture that leads to death is also part of a sadistic treatment of the prisoner’s body, whatever the reason for his detention is. Although the report did not mention how many female inmates died in prison, some women prisoners said that they witnessed suicide attempts in prison. In this context, a former female prisoner⁴² narrates about women prisoners that were suffering from depression that led them to attempting to cut their arteries or slaughter themselves by using sharp razors or hanging themselves by ropes they had made from bed covers .

⁴¹ “Without Accountability” Report for deaths in Egyptian detention centers - 10 December - Committee for Justice - [Link](#)

⁴² Testimony on Facebook from a former prisoner - [Link](#) - For more testimonies, see also - The oldest prisoner in Egypt - witness to suicides - video - dmc channel - [Link](#)

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A prisoner⁴³ who was responsible for one of the wards says: "There are various types of suicide in men's wards, including cutting arteries using sharp razors or tools, by hanging, or even by jumping from a high place if available."

And recently, the Egyptian-American prisoner Mostafa Qassem died in Tora Prison, Cairo, who was exposed to bad treatment and deliberate medical negligence from the prison administration, as he was suffering from many diseases, including diabetes and heart problems. Three months before his death, Qassem staged a hunger strike which made his health condition even worse and led his immature death⁴⁴.

Here, a question arises: Does the punitive authority (the prisons institution) in Egypt hide what it is doing against prisoners from Egyptians?

From a legal standpoint, the authorities enact laws to guarantee the rights of prisoners, but the fact is that they do not apply them. What is even worse is that Egypt has been living in a state of absence of law over the last six years, specifically since Sisi took office.

Although Egyptian drama⁴⁵ reflects some of the conditions of Egyptian prisons and highlights the ugly side of prisons in general, it conceals much of the reality mentioned in this report.

However, another question arises about the philosophy of Egyptian drama in highlighting some of the violations prevailing Egyptian prisons, and whether what has been presented in drama so far was only a message from authorities to instill some perceptions in the minds of the Egyptian public.

⁴³ A former prisoner in an Egyptian prison for 3 years – (refusal to mention the name of the prison)

⁴⁴ For Immediate Release: The Passing of Mustafa Kassem - [The Freedom Initiative](#)

⁴⁵ The Egyptian drama, through a few films, highlighted the situation of political detainees in the era of Abdel Nasser