

# WOMEN'S PRISON LITERATURE: SILENCED, IN TIMES OF PEACE AND WAR

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## INTRODUCTION

Prison literature is not new but it is rare because it is not easy to write and publish—despite the digital revolution which had intensified in the last decade or so. Some of the best writings written in prison are Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Ngugi waThiong'o's *Detained: A Prisoner's Diary*, and closer to home, Indonesia's Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*.

Many of these writings are written by political prisoners who very often are male authors. Prison literature by women writers is never studied by itself. Recent publications which involve women prisoners include a book edited by Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell Stanford entitled *Women, Writing and Prison: Activists, Scholars and Writers Speak Out*. However, women's prison literature per se has never been studied or discussed as closely as this paper intends to do, partly because it is not easy to get the stories out especially from prisons in Asia. Bureaucracies and the human rights of prisoners are often issues which need to be studied and not taken for granted. This paper will look at writings by women prisoners in Malaysia and compare their struggles with those of the women prisoners in Palestine.

Prison writing is often seen as an act of political resistance. Prison narratives are written by political or social activists across time and geographical boundaries. Very often they are written by men. Bell Gale Chevigny claims that as a genre, it was big in the 1970s but quickly went out of fashion in the 1980s. Anthologies of prison writing are commonly published in cities like London and New York. In Asia, writings by

political prisoners do exist but studies on this genre are rare. In Malaysia, there is no anthology on prison writing (what more writings by female inmates) and the anthology of short stories which the team is working on will be Malaysia's first if it is published this year or next.

Yik Koon The states that studies on Malaysian Prison's rehabilitative programmes show that they are lacking and outdated. Due to the small number of female prisoners in Malaysia (in comparison to Malaysian male prisoners), their presence and their need for proper and apt rehabilitative programmes are not prioritized. Newspaper reports and a complaint from SM Mohamed Idris, President of the Consumers Association of Penang, stressed the importance of rehabilitative programmes which would address mental health issues among inmates ("Prisons: Take Care of their Health," *New Straits Times*, n.p.). The increasing rate of suicides in Malaysian prisons indicate an increasing deterioration of mental health among inmates. As argued by two of the women prison's personnel in charge of the well-being of female inmates, the hardest to do is to change the attitude of the inmates. Any rehabilitative approach must be done gently and prison caretakers must act like teachers in order to bring about change in inmates. They also believe that religious teaching plays an important role in the prison's rehabilitative programmes (Ali Abu Bakar, "Didik Banduan Ban Seorang Guru").

This paper is also the outcome of a research done on a creative writing program with about twenty women prisoners over a period of four months with classes offered once a week (every Friday) for three hours. The class consisted of students of diverse backgrounds in terms of educational level, race/ethnic group, age, religion so we had to be more mindful that any material on religion or morality was not conducted in a preaching mode or with any intention to convert. Classes were done to get the students in touch with their psychological, literary, religious or spiritual awareness in an attempt to understand themselves. None of the students was ever published or had been trained in writing creatively.

As of this writing, we have an anthology of 18 short stories but are not able to publish them as yet due to legal processes that the book has to go through before it is allowed to be published. This paper will analyze some of the 18 short stories to demonstrate how women's prison literature is different from the conventional, free-flowing art of writing

short stories we are so familiar with in our tertiary institutions. In what seems to be a more cautious, controlled way of writing, we must also observe how it liberates and empowers the writers – just as any student of any conventional class of creative writing would feel. Perhaps the difference is that these women came out stronger and more positive towards the end of the creative writing programme for self-empowerment had taken place. Unlike Spivak's subaltern, they had found an outlet to express themselves and the written word is now their vehicle to free themselves from any self-hatred or self-doubt. But like captive women, it is not enough to speak just once, using a voice under such guarded environment where everything is monitored and timed.

### **STIFLED AND FORBIDDEN VOICES**

In one of the literature reviews read, it was pointed out that unless it is memoirs, prisoners would never write about themselves or paint gloomy images in their writings. We found this to be true when we first started. The stories were all happy stories with happy endings. You would not find the voice of the writer in any of these stories. As they went through the other classes in which they were encouraged and trained to be in touch with their inner selves, you would get to listen to the tiniest voice. You would hear stories of same-sex attraction and jealousies, fantasies of being reunited with old boyfriends, remorse for going against one's parents (usually mothers) and a deep appreciation for supportive and loyal spouses. There were also stories of poverty, religious superstitions, betrayals and addictions of all kinds (from drugs to sex to wealth/having lots of money). You would not know whether these were creative writing or real stories until you talked to the writers personally. We were divided on this. Some of us felt that we should keep the research distance so that we could stay objective in our experiment and findings. Others asked if one could detach the human aspect in research projects like this. We were the only ones listening to the woes of these students. We were the only ones trusted. For we gave them the voice. We gave them the pencil. In fact, a student informed us that she had not written for so long that she had forgotten how to hold a pencil. The library had few books and they usually had no time to use it since they had to work.

Fortunately for the four-month program, we had worked with the prison authorities to arrange for library hours or they were given extra time to write outside class hours. The program had given the students time to learn and read literary magazines and this boosted their writing confidence; they produced better quality writing.

For the purpose of this essay, we will examine eight short stories of various themes written by eight women writers. We have categorized the stories into four themes (two samples of each theme) namely, female assertion, drug addiction, remorse, and religious awakening and pride. All stories are written in Malay, the national language of Malaysia.

### IN SEARCH OF THAT FEMALE VOICE, FEMALE IDENTITY

Two stories which fall under this category are “Fitrah” (Human Nature) by Tinta Hani (pseudonym) and “Kau Bukan Untukku” (You Are Not Meant For Me) by Zie Abdul. The first story is about Sarah, a female computer engineer who is so committed to her work that she did not see the need to marry anyone. She calls off her wedding to her fiancé Azrul in the eleventh hour saying she is not ready for any commitment and that her career is always her priority. This is indeed a rare voice. It is not common to adopt an assertive voice when it involves a Muslim woman, marriage and career. What is common is that Muslim Malaysian women would play superwomen, juggling marriage, family and career, and this is often seen as striking the work-life balance. Certainly women who wear many hats know that there is no such thing as work-life balance. The Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg who is a mother of two and an advocate for women leaders admits that there is no such thing as work-life balance—“there’s work, and there’s life, and there’s no balance.” (Bosker, “There’s No Such Thing As Work-Life Balance”). She highlighted that

[w]omen should choose a spouse who will support their ambitions, not only by offering words of encouragement, but by doing half of the work at home, from changing half of the diapers to doing half of the laundry. The most important thing—and I’ve said it a hundred times and I’ll say it a hundred times—if you marry a man, marry the right one.

(Bosker, “There’s No Such Thing As Work-Life Balance”)

This is the line of thought of Tinta Hani in her story “Human Nature”. The title itself is interesting. Tinta Hani hints at how it is part of human nature for women to have the freedom/free will to decide what is best for her. She tells her fiancé that she would be a disobedient wife if she marries him because she knows she cannot play the ideal wife to him and she refuses to be burdened with guilt when Azlan tells her that the wedding cards are about to be printed and that he has waited for two years to marry her.

Sarah continues to devote her life to her career and gets promoted. She feels she is freer not being attached to anyone. However, she does feel the pressure from her society regarding not being married at thirty something but decides not to let it bother her. One day, there is trouble at work and she has to solve it or her company will be fined RM300,000 or the person responsible (Sarah) will go to prison for breaching the Public Service Act. Along the process of resolving the issue, she meets Hamdan and both fall in love. In the words of Sandberg, Hamdan is the right man for Sarah.

As the two become a couple, Sarah continues her commitment to her career. Azlan, a friend of her former fiancé (who has been stalking her) deceives her into following him on the pretext of work. The conman wants to break off Sarah’s relationship with Hamdan saying that it is impossible for her to fall in love with a man so soon. It must have been black magic—that Sarah was charmed by Hamdan. Azlan (seemingly a psychopath) wants Sarah to go through some ritual to wash away Hamdan’s charm. This mix of modernity and old Malay custom (much practiced before the arrival of Islam to Malaysia and is still practised now even by the most educated and most wealthy to retain power and wealth) is also interesting because Tinta Hani portrays Malaysian society as it is. While the country is eager to project itself as a developed and modern country, elements of under development which includes superstition is still rampant. This is shown in the realistic story by Tinta Hani. For someone who has not done any creative writing or studied feminism before, I suspect Tinta Hani relies a lot on the “feminist elements” taught in the Muslim religion which gives women equal rights before Allah in terms of freewill and *taqwa* (piety, devotion to Allah). You can be free and do what you like but you are not free from Allah’s

accountability. Simply put, freedom comes with a sense of responsibility, guided by religion.

The story concludes with a happy ending in which Sarah and Hamdan will marry each other. It is important that throughout the creative writing programme students are in touch with what they believe in (affirming their faith) and remain positive. In another research in which we measure the self-esteem and confidence level of our student prisoners, it is shown that there is a sharp increase in the above and this is confirmed by prison officers who saw positive change in these student prisoners. Everywhere they go, their inmates and officers would refer to them as “the writers”.

The second story “You Are Not Meant For Me” by Zie Abdul has the elements of a thriller. It is also about female assertion but of the other extreme in which the main character, Lisa, continues to stalk and harass her former fiancé. She left him for another man who turned out to be a conman who left her after he had taken all her savings. Alone, Lisa is determined to win back Fairuz (ex fiancé) but by now Fairuz is married and is faithful to his wife. Lisa's evil scheme to break off Fairuz's marriage costs him his life and Lisa is arrested by the police and is imprisoned for eight years. There is remorse at the end of the story.

### **THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY ON DRUG ADDICTION**

There was a clear instruction for students to be imaginative and creative. They were advised to avoid writing about drug addiction because the topic is over-written in Malaysian literature, film and theatre. It was a wrong advice to give because many were there because of drug addiction. The common perspective of the public towards drug addicts is that they are losers and they are looked down upon. This prejudice changes as we listen to our students' stories, how they got hooked on drugs. Often they were deceived by their male family members— husbands or boyfriends— or female friends who went through the same cycle. A very touching story is of an inmate whose husband was clueless of her addiction upon marrying her and he tried to save her but failed. He was so disappointed that he ended up taking drugs himself, saying if she were intent on destroying herself, let him be part of that destruction.

The inmate stopped completely but by then it was too late to save her husband. There is some echo of this self-destructive story in the piece written by Saluna Rejab in “Sesal Dahulu Pendapatan” (“Spilled Milk”). Na is a salesperson for some TV Station and because she works long hours, gets easily tired. Her friend Nana introduces her to a type of drugs for stamina. Unfortunately, they are caught by the police and sent to prison. There is also remorse at the end of the story.

In the second story on drug addiction by Ester entitled “Kerana Dia” (Because of Him), the notion of a female drug addict lured to addiction often by her husband or boyfriend dominates the story. Lin does not know her husband Yusoff is a hardcore drug addict until he is caught doing it. She tries to stop him and domestic violence takes place until Lin goes through two miscarriages out of the blows from her abusive husband. Yusoff later forces Lin to take drugs with him and Lin becomes another addict. One day she falls down and hurts herself badly. She loses their third child. By now Yusoff is remorseful and wants to quit drugs. However, it is a long recovery process for Lin. Both return to religion for comfort and for strength. It ends on a positive note.

The story may sound fairy-tale like because the spiritual approach is used in drug addiction rehabilitation programmes but there are real success stories.

## **GAINING VOICE THROUGH RELIGIOUS EMPOWERMENT**

Spiritual intelligence is often undermined but Danah Zohar, a Harvard-and-MIT-trained philosopher, physicist, management thought leader and author, also a spiritual intelligence expert, argues for a move from material-capital world which is short term to embracing a spiritual-capital world which serves larger and more fundamental human needs. This return to religion as a source of psychological peace and comfort is evident not only in psychology and management but also in literature and other art forms. For most of our prison students, it is their faith that keeps them strong and our programme further enhanced that awareness. Stories like “Please Understand” by K. Yen (a Christian) and “Day of Judgement!” by Ai’ Sayra (a Muslim) affirm our hypothesis that religion is important for the survival of humankind specially those living

under duress. K-Yen's story is about the conversion of Meng Chow (main character) from Buddhism to Christianity. This results in a family crisis when the mother rejects her right to change her religion from Buddhism to Christianity.

This is indeed a very sensitive issue since Malaysia is a multireligious country and there are religious tensions with regard to conversions. Towards the end, Meng Chow remains determined to stay a good Christian and compares other permissive conversions specifically that of other religions converting to the main religion, Islam. Meng Chow prays for divine solution and the story ends on that hopeful note.

### **THE PRISON IS THE UNIVERSITY OF LIFE**

Several entries we received for our anthology of prison literature show how the writers finally graduated from lessons of life. Their presence in the prison has given them much time to think about their past lives and what went wrong. Two stories in particular reflect this. They could have not voiced this had they not the time and space for themselves to reflect and consider past events. The stories are about daughters' attachment to either their father or mother and how their love or hatred for that parent figure changes their life. An untitled story by Anuska is about the conscience of a young woman named Aida, reflecting on her father's self-sacrifice to see her through university despite their poverty. She finally makes it to her graduation day and vows to help her family out of poverty. This is touching if one knows the background of the writer. In real life, it is she who sacrifices her freedom for her family especially her father who is always drunk but non-abusive. She was asked if she ever felt angry towards her father of whom she had only good things to say. He is a loving father and she has accepted him for who he is. She knows that the father tries very hard to kick off his addiction to alcohol but being poor and living far away from the centre, it is not easy. Through the creative writing programme, the writer is able to express her feelings and stand on her family crisis. She feels her sacrifices are well-justified so that her younger siblings could have a better life (her story is that she and her siblings were framed by another member of her family and they were all arrested for drugs. Her siblings



were much younger so if she admitted to the charge, her siblings would be released and would be able to go to school). This reality (as claimed by the writer) is hinted at in the story, how there is a need to be grateful and to sacrifice for the family.

The second story, "Waiting" by Feti Mus, is about a single child who rebels against her mother's second marriage because she feels abandoned by her. She takes drugs and steals from her stepfather which ends with her being thrown out of the house. Her mother Hanifa looks for her for six years before finally receiving a letter from Hazira (her daughter) writing from prison, seeking forgiveness for not being a good daughter. The story ends with the mother praying for the well-being of her daughter. She waits for her daughter's return from prison.

The following section consists of Palestinian women prisoners' writings. Images of war in Palestine often involve women and children. However, their voices are silenced. While it is true that a picture can say many things, it is also important to understand something about war, that women suffer the most as they lose their family members through acts of violence often committed by men.

#### **UNVEILING THE SILENT VOICES OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN PRISONERS IN *THE PRISONERS' DIARIES: PALESTINIAN VOICES FROM THE ISRAELI GULAG***

Imagine one day someone comes into your house seeking shelter and you gladly welcome him. But later on he makes himself the owner of your house. You are living in your own house but your movements are restricted. You do not possess the freedom to express your thoughts, have limited access to food and drink, and are even unable to find your own food because you are allowed to move around in a limited space only. In addition, you receive violent treatment from him on a regular basis for decades. When you try to seek shelter in hospitals or worship houses, these are also destroyed by that person. Worse, your child or wife who has done nothing wrong is suddenly kidnapped and then killed. The mentioned events did not happen in a day, a week or a month but for decades. That is basically the easiest description of the current experience undergone by the Palestinians.

This paper will not focus on the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, rather, it will highlight the effect of the conflict on the Palestinians,

specifically on their writing activity and the issues they raise as portrayed in *The Prisoners' Diaries: Palestinian Voices from the Israeli Gulag* by Norma Hashim. Out of the 22 stories in this autobiography, only four are written by women and these selected four will be examined for the purpose of this paper.

Since writing and publication began, censorship or control of what could be written and published had been put into place. Those which fall in this category are works that are explicitly erotic or of vicious themes, works which promote radical thoughts, works which are too liberal or works which merely go in contradiction to the existing state of affairs. This autobiographical collection had gone through a thorny path before it was published. Although Norma mentioned that the hardship that the book went through to be published was due to its 'lack of commercial value', but it is believed to be more than that. In "*Prisoners' Diaries* in discussion with Norma Hashim," Norma mentions that the moment she received the interview collection from the Chairman of The Centre for Political and Development Studies (CPDS) of the freed Israeli Gulag prisoners, she knew that he had tried to get it compiled and published, to make their voices heard, but nothing happened.

For months, she also made attempts to send the compilation to a few publishers but failed to raise their interest since the book was what she termed as "having no commercial point of view". However, she points out that this book is important and must be published no matter what because outsiders – the non-Palestinians – hardly know the real situation in Palestine. There was a lack of awareness among outsiders regarding this issue that has been going on for decades. It is eminent for the book to be put on the shelves of bookstores and address the West (Hashim, "*Prisoners' Diaries* in discussion with Norma Hashim"). Norma finally decided to self-publish this book in Malaysia in January 2013. Once it was published, it received positive feedback from reviewers which are recorded in the book itself. Richard Falk wrote a lengthy review of *The Prisoners' Diaries* in his blog. He says, although these 22 stories were not written by professionals, "the sentiments communicated have an exceptional kind of articulacy as a result from their authenticity and passion" (Falk, "Reading Palestinian Prisoners' Diaries", richardfalk.wordpress.com). Lauren Booth, an English broadcaster,

journalist and pro-Palestinian activist, asserts that this autobiography has left her in tears almost immediately. She adds that this “first hand testimony by survivors of Israeli detention centres and isolation cells makes it a crucial work” ([theprisonersdiaries.blogspot.com](http://theprisonersdiaries.blogspot.com)).

Rima Najar Merriman writes that Palestinian writers meet routine challenges just like all other Palestinians since its fragmentation in 1948. What makes them different from ordinary Palestinians is that they possess an influential and unique voice. Although they want to stress issues such as displacement, exile, alienation from the world and also endurance, which are all closely related to Israel occupying their land, they could not do so freely. They often use allegory and insert a combination of fact and fiction to avoid censorship. This explains the emergence of a few renowned contemporary writers such as Mahmoud Shukair, Suhar Khalifa, Suad Amiri and Raja Shahadah. The sense of lack of freedom has an impact on their literature. It prevents them from producing other creative and literary types of writing. They have no choice in the matter.

As of 16 April 2015, 20 Palestinians journalists are reported to be held in Israeli jails. Mahmoud Moussa Issa of *Sawt al-Haq wa al-Huriyya* newspaper has been held since 1994. The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) intensified their war game by committing various alarming violations against Palestinian journalists and photographers who were on duty. As reported by the Palestinian Center for Development & Media Freedoms (MADA), in the early 10 days of October 2015 alone, the IOF had committed around 39 violations using all kinds of bullets against Palestinian media. Censorship does not apply to writing alone but also to mass media. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, has ordered the Ministry of Communication to shut down a recently established Arabic language television station, Palestine 48, that broadcast for Palestinian citizens of Israel even before it began broadcasting in June (Strickland, “Netanyahu Orders Shutdown TV Channel Palestinian Israel”). It is already hard for the established writers in Palestine to get their works out in the public, let alone the real life experience of ex-prisoners of the Israeli Gulag. The real question is, why was this book hard to publish? Why was it subjected to censorship? Various factors are pointed out. Is it because of the authors’ citizenship,

position as political prisoners, as women, or is it because of the issues they raised?

In the selected stories by women writers, their shared issues are mostly related to faith, occupier's violence, longing for reunion with their family and for martyrdom, as well as hope. In "Tortured Memories" by Sana'a Shihada, she begins her narrative by informing readers that faith through prayer was the only thing that kept her going through the painful prison experience. She also claims God has inspired her to read verses from the Holy Quran and eased her worry when she was threatened by Israeli jailers. This implies her strong faith in God. Wafa Albis in "A Martyr" also proved her strong faith when she answered a journalist who tried to trick her into proving she was a suicide bomber. Faith in her story is not only a pillar that gives her strength to continue her life. It is also Albi's belief that Islamic teaching prohibits suicide due to problems in human relationships but may be allowed in the case of someone who has lost her home and seen children murdered. Kahera Als'adi in "The Day My Children Were Scattered" expressed the issue of faith in a different manner. At the end of her story, she complains to Allah about the injustice of the oppressors after she was separated from her sons. In Islam, having faith means total submission to Him. Als'adi's action in some way shows faith differently. Although this does not picture her level of faith, readers could see that it was shaken as an effect of separation from her beloved children.

During her detention, she was imprisoned in a room which does not have any window and light except from a disturbing yellow light bulb that brightened and then dimmed intermittently. Shihada states explicitly that the treatment she received in prison was the same as that of the male prisoners. She was chained for hours on a chair which prevented her from sleeping and was assaulted by questions and threats which caused extreme headaches. There was one point in which the Israeli militia threatened to evict her parents from their house through a phone call made in front of her during the interrogation. She heard the bulldozers' sound and her parents' voices asking her not to confess.

In all the stories, the writers mention the mistreatment they received from Israeli jailers. However, Albis' description reflects the most tragic events of all. Injured parts of her body were struck with the jailers' iron

stick for 15 minutes, causing excruciating pain and bleeding. She was also tied Guantanamo-style, was hit repeatedly until she lost consciousness. She was moved to different prisons a few times. Criminal jailers also threatened to rape her. She received not only physical torture but also psychological and medical torture. Sometimes, they played with the room's temperature and lighting. If she took a nap, they poured water on her face. They would rush into her cell, tie her hands to the small window and search her belonging dozens of times each day. The Israeli also attempted to prove that she suffered a psychological disorder but this never prospered. During the three months of interrogation, she was not allowed to shower, comb her hair, or change her clothes. The jailers even prevented her from using the toilet. They also tortured her by putting her with criminal female Israeli prisoners who tried to disgust her by going half-naked, staying up until dawn, disco dancing and watching pornographic channels. The Israeli criminal prisoners even planned to choke her with the TV cable. There was one time they knew she kept cats secretly in her cell and the cats made her happy. They took the cats, killed them and threw them in the trash.

Events described in the stories are definitely a breach of personal rights and on a larger scale, the treatment is politically incorrect. In international agreements and U.S. law, the use of torture and other inhumane, merciless and undignified handling, uninformed detention and imprisonment, as well as communal punishment are absolutely prohibited. Since 1967, Israel has committed numerous war crimes which had caused hardships and destruction to Palestinians. The annual Country Reports by the United Nations Security Council and the U.S. State Department acknowledged that Israel has demonstrated a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights (Lynd, "International Human Rights Law: Violations by Israel and the Problem of Enforcement," 9). The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits any form of torture in Article 32 (ICRC, n.d.). Obviously, the descriptions given by these political prisoners and Israeli actions contradict this. Unfortunately, this is not the only Palestinian space and rights breached by the Israelis.

All four stories clearly express longing for different subjects. There is longing for their children, husband, mother, and even for martyrdom.

Writers play different roles as mother, wife, daughter, and believer. While in prison, Shihada occasionally closed her eyes and dreamed of being next to her mother at the al-Aqsa Mosque where they used to worship. The physical separation almost made her forget her the voice of her mother, her mother whom she loved dearly. Sarahna, on the other hand, gained strength from her daughters who are still alive, staying with her mother and mother-in-law. The only way for her to stay in touch with them was by drawing their pictures with her own fingers. She was detained in the same prison as her husband yet a wall separates them, which led her to yearn for him as well. Als'adi's situation was worse because she and her husband were captured together, leaving her two sons and two daughters without a guardian. She learned that her sons were sent to the orphanage while her daughters' fate was still unknown. Although these mothers were confined in small cells and separated from their beloved children, they never forgot them. As stated by Germaine Greer, "The condition of motherhood is never over, never forgotten. Once a woman has a child her capacity for suffering widens and deepens beyond anything she could have imagined" (207). Albis is a different case. She wishes for martyrdom. She justifies this suicide as something holy in Islam and is permitted for those who have lost their homeland and seen children killed.

All of them express hope towards the end of their narration except for Als'adi, who ended with a complaint towards God. Shihada received news that her family had succeeded in preventing the demolition order by going to the Zionist courts. She foresees hope for her fellow Palestinians and Muslims after that. Sarahna also communicates her hope for reunion with her husband after she was released from prison during the prisoners' exchange. She declares that she could face all sorts of harassment performed by the occupier. Albis, full of hope, still seeks for martyrdom as she has promised to herself.

In conclusion, all women prisoners featured in this paper have lives, histories and individualities of their own. Where the Malaysian women prisoners are concerned, the space given in the 4-month creative writing programme had given them an outlet to express themselves as women, exploring that female space as daughter, mother, wife, fiancée or a member of a community involved in the public space. The ability to

travel from prison cells to a world with all sorts of despair and hope is indeed something remarkable. The creative writing programme helped these women get in touch with their inner selves and their conscience. Their vow to be better people is lucid in their writings. Similarly, the selected women writers from *The Prisoners' Diaries* have individually and collectively shared their concerns during their detention. On the surface, the issues raised are very simple and non-threatening as if it is in fiction form. But since it is a biography and a real depiction of their experience, it becomes hard for their writing to be published. It is hard for their writing to reach people in the outside world. Not only is their physical space limited, but the fact that their stories cannot be published also proves that the Israeli occupation has limited their freedom of expression as well. However, the fact that this book was eventually published (although self-published) gives us hope that Palestinian women prisoners would continue to fight to be heard no matter how long it takes.

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