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Law and Order for Whom?

Israel s Two-Pronged Approach to Policing Palestinian Citizens

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By Kylee DiGregorio, senior researcher of the MENA Prison Forum

The detention of Palestinian citizens of Israel garnered rare international attention in recent weeks, prompted by the wave of mass arrests that Israeli police, border police, military reserve brigades, internal security services, and undercover units launched on May 9. As of June 3 when Israeli police announced the campaign's official conclusion these forces had arrested 1,951 Palestinian citizens.

Comprised of two distinct phases, the crackdown began in response to political protest actions that Palestinians *within* Israel's 1948 borders organized in solidarity with Palestinians *outside* them. Initially, Palestinian citizens participated in peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins to protest the impending forced expulsion of thirteen Palestinian families from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem. Protests then grew in the wake of police violence at the site of Jerusalem's Damascus Gate, as well as consecutive raids on Al-Aqsa mosque, in which Israeli security forces fired tear gas, stun grenades, and rubber-coated steel bullets to disperse those who had gathered to worship during the final days of Ramadan. The violent force exacted to extinguish these demonstrations ultimately backfired, and instead galvanized a broader protest movement. Within days, thousands of Palestinian citizens from a wide array of socioeconomic backgrounds and political orientations were engaging in daily marches and vigils throughout the country, including in so-called 'mixed cities' such as Lydd, Haifa, Nazareth, Ramleh, and Yafa.

Yet Israeli forces deployed to suppress the solidarity protests just as swiftly as the 'Palestinian Unity Uprising' had emerged. By May 12, more than 100 Palestinian citizens had been arrested. Two days later, this number exceeded 700, and included 'tens' of children. As of May 23 the end of the crackdown's first phase Israeli forces had detained at least 1,085 Palestinians (though it is probable that a more accurate estimate is approximately 1,395).

Controlling the Narrative

Of course, Israeli officials denied any intention to crush peaceful, legitimate political protest and undermine Palestinian solidarity. Instead, they initially framed the mass arrests as a lawful, proportional response to criminal behavior, citing 'rioting' and 'incitement,' and exploiting 'clashes between Jews and Arabs.' The veracity of this narrative although amplified by Israeli and international media outlets was quickly challenged. Glaring discrepancies in police conduct toward Palestinian as opposed to Jewish citizens likewise discredit the pretext of 'ethnic tensions.' Of those arrested during the first phase of the campaign, between 70 and 90 percent are Palestinian. Likewise, each one of the 116 indictments filed as of May 17 was against a Palestinian.

Addressing this disparity, a spokesperson for the Israeli police claimed that '[t]he majority of incidents were carried out by Arab Israelis who took to the streets and attacked Jewish civilians and police officers.' Yet dozens of videos shared on social media platforms and broadcast on television depict Jewish mobs roaming neighborhoods, wielding sticks and bats while chanting, 'Death to Arabs'; attacking Palestinians in their cars and homes; and brutally beating them in the street, often as police look on or participate in the violence. And when three Jewish Israeli men *were* taken into custody for shooting and killing Mousa Hassouneh in the city of Lydd on May 10, Israel's Minister of Public Security, Amir Ohana, condemned their arrest, calling it 'terrible' and suggesting that the shooters had acted in 'self-defense,' though providing no evidence. (The presiding investigative judge subsequently rejected this claim.) In the same tweet, posted on May 12, the minister went on to urge law enforcement to release the suspects, and stated: 'Law-abiding citizens carrying weapons are a force multiplier in the hands of the authorities, for the immediate neutralization of threat and danger.' Israel's new Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, also called for the suspects' release on May 12, describing their arrest as 'a moral injustice.' All three suspects were indeed released the following day.

Just hours after Bennett and Ohana pressed for these individuals' release, a Jewish mob physically assaulted Said Mousa, a Palestinian resident of Ramleh, in what has been described as an 'attempted lynching.' The attack, which took place in the Tel Aviv suburb of Bat Yam, was captured on live television. Footage of the violence clearly shows a crowd of people dragging Mousa out of his car and beating him until he lay motionless. He was left in the street until police and emergency services arrived at the scene fifteen minutes later. This incident, which left Mousa in serious condition, further illustrates what can only be characterized as discriminatory policing. *Haaretz* points out that it is possible to identify more than 20 people out of the dozens who are documented on video actively taking part in the attack. Yet as of May 26 two weeks after it occurred only six individuals had been arrested, and just three charged. A source affiliated with the police said that they 'aren't rushing to make arrests without enough evidence.' Rather, he added, '[w]e need to see with whom these people spoke beforehand, to see if they planned it or were from the street.' *The Times of Israel* reported that other individuals appearing in the video had 'been identified, though not questioned.'

The leniency with which authorities treated Jewish Israelis even those known to have incited and coordinated violence gradually became a subject of international scrutiny, compelling Israeli authorities to revise their official narrative. Thus, on May 24, the arrest campaign entered its second phase. With the approval of Public Security Minister Ohana and Police Commissioner Yaakov (Kobi) Shabtai, Israeli police announced their intent to arrest an additional 500 individuals, against whom cases had reportedly been prepared. The launch of

operation 'Law and Order' elicited a palpable shift in discourse, whereby previous commentary on 'inter-communal violence' waned, replaced by a new emphasis on 'criminal gangs' and illicit weapons possession and trade. The stated targets of the operation changed accordingly. Israeli police and media alluded less to those fomenting 'hate rallies and social chaos,' and instead began focusing on 'criminal elements in the Arab sector.' The latter is a reference to organized crime syndicates that now operate in Palestinian communities across Israel, in spite of sustained grassroots initiatives and due in large part to longstanding police negligence.

The Means and Ends of Political Repression

Irrespective of its professed and fickle motivations, May's arrest campaign has been widely exposed as a brazen crackdown on lawful dissent. Mohammad Barakeh, Chairman of The High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel (the highest representative body of Palestinian citizens), denounced it as an operation 'of intimidation and terror against the Arab public to exclude it and justify [its] repression and persecution.' Similarly, Dr. Hassan Jabareen, General Director of Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, asserted that the mass arrests were designed 'to intimidate and to exact revenge on Palestinian citizens of Israel for their political positions and activities.'

Yet though the campaign's objective is evident and broadly acknowledged, the means employed to achieve it are more nuanced, deep-seated, and arguably, more sinister. Even so, these tactics are discernible in the language that the Israel Police force itself invoked. Indeed, the two 'targets' that authorities identified most pointedly over the course of the campaign's two phases 'rioters' in the first and 'criminal gangs' in the second reflect the modes of manipulation and exploitation on which the police have long capitalized. These particular 'suspect categories' in turn reveal law enforcement's two-pronged approach to policing Palestinian citizens.

The first approach which authorities adopted in the initial weeks of the crackdown is what Rina Rosenberg has called 'collective criminalization.' The second highlighted by operation 'Law and Order' amounts to willful police negligence vis-à-vis so-called 'Arab on Arab crime.'

Collective Criminalization: Portraying Protesters as 'Rioters' and Conflating Demonstrations with 'Incitement'

The collective criminalization of Palestinians stretches back to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, which ushered in an 18-year period of military rule that applied exclusively to 'Arab citizens.' However, its more recent iteration can be traced at least to October 2000, when state institutions undertook to quell the Palestinian solidarity demonstrations that surfaced and spread in the early days of the Second Intifada. Those who participated, as Rosenberg indicates, were regarded as a 'criminal collective,' given that Palestinian political protest 'was defined as a criminal legal problem.' This conceptualization thus promoted the manipulation and distortion of the law and its interpretation. Although the solidarity actions witnessed in 2000 assumed many forms the majority peaceful Rosenberg examines how Israeli authorities treated each one as an 'insurgency' that, taken together, constituted 'a unified threat to the state.'

Proving effective, this tactic was once again applied in May. Law enforcement personnel

collectively criminalized Palestinian protesters under the blanket accusation of 'rioting,' and systematically conflated demonstrations with ethnic hatred and 'anarchy.' Meanwhile, government officials reinforced these claims by consistently framing the protests as a national security issue and an existential threat. One such instance occurred on May 13, during a meeting convened between then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Border Police officers recently deployed to the central city of Lydd. Aiming to 'justify' the administrative detention of Palestinian citizens, Netanyahu warned the officers of 'nationalist elements who are breaking the law, in fact, disturbing the framework of the State of Israel.' At another point in his speech, the former prime minister insisted that Jewish Israelis 'have no bigger threat now than these pogroms, and we have no choice but to restore law and order via determined use of force.'

Yet this pervasive misrepresentation was not only used as a discursive tool; it extended to formal charges, as well. Janan Abdu, an attorney with the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, has described how the accusations that police presented following arrests routinely deviated from detainees' actual actions. 'T[he police] would arrest a person, interrogate them over a certain issue, and the next day bring them to court and suddenly accuse them of something else,' she explains. 'All of a sudden the same person who went out to the street to protect his property is accused of racism and incitement.'

By generalizing all forms of protest as 'rioting,' and by falsely equating demonstrators to perpetrators of mob violence, Israeli authorities have both figuratively and literally (linguistically and legally) outlawed political expression and peaceful assembly. By extension, state officials have also criminalized all Palestinian citizens who seek to exercise these fundamental rights and freedoms.

Collective criminalization thus does not recognize any distinction 'between legitimate solidarity and violence,' as Adalah's Director, Dr. Jabareen emphasized in a 2015 interview. Reflecting on the state's lethal response to the largely non-violent solidarity demonstrations of October 2000, he noted that 'the determining factor' dictating police conduct is not the substantive details of any given act or situation, but rather whether the individual concerned is 'Jewish or Palestinian.' 'The problem,' Dr. Jabareen observed, 'isn't Arab protesters. The problem is that the Israeli public sees them as an enemy against which force must be used.'

Indeed, collective criminalization which is, by definition, identity-based and, therefore, discriminatory is, as history attests, often accompanied by state-sanctioned violence and impunity.

Examining 'The Events' of May 2021 through the Lens of October 2000

Many parallels can be drawn between 'the events' of October 2000 and those of May 2021. First and foremost, both were sparked as a result of Palestinian political protest, in which citizens inside the Green Line expressed their support for Palestinians in Occupied Palestinian Territory. Likewise, each of these 'moments' of open, unequivocal solidarity was met with repressive violence, wielded by government forces.

State-Sanctioned Police Brutality and Unlawful Use of Force

In the days preceding the Second Intifada, thousands of Palestinian citizens across the country

took to the streets to protest Israel's use of lethal force against demonstrators in occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, as well as the violence meted out by Israeli riot police in the course of Ariel Sharon's infamous visit to al-Haram al-Sharif/the Temple Mount compound. In response, thousands of Israeli police officers were deployed in and around Palestinian communities, including Arrabe, Kufr Kanna, Sakhnin, and Umm al-Fahm. According to Israel's Ministry of Justice, Israeli police arrested 660 Palestinian citizens between September 28 and October 30, 2000. However, in a desperate bid to quash the demonstrations, these forces went further. Per the orders of their commanding officers, they shot at unarmed protesters using live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets, and tear gas, often aiming at the head or chest. In the span of one week, Israeli police shot dead 12 unarmed Palestinian citizens as well as one resident of Gaza and injured more than 1,000 others.

The Or Commission, which conducted an investigation into the police violence, concluded in September 2003 that 'the police reaction was excessive since there was no real danger that required a lethal response.' The 'causes' of such abusive policing, the Commission determined, were instead rooted in the government's 'neglectful and discriminatory' treatment of Palestinian citizens. Indeed, in what has become a landmark document, the Or Commission directly attributes the police brutality to the Israeli state, which 'did not do enough to create equality for its Arab citizens.' Presenting its recommendations, the Commission thus emphasized the government's obligation to 'wipe out [this] stain of discrimination , in all its various forms and expressions.' To this end, Israeli authorities were called upon to 'root out' anti-Palestinian prejudice among the police. If 'the events' of October 2000 were not to be repeated, the Or Commission cautioned, then it was essential that the government instill among law enforcement personnel 'the understanding that the Arab community as a whole is not their enemy, and that it should not be treated as an enemy.'

Unfortunately, Israeli authorities did not heed this call. On June 1, 2021, nearly 18 years after the publication of the *Or Commission Report*, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues reiterated its findings. Responding to May's 'attacks on Israel's Palestinian minority,' Special Rapporteur Fernand de Varennes condemned the 'disproportional use of force by law enforcement officials during protests.' He also stated that discriminatory policing and police misconduct had 'led to some of the worst cases of violence against Palestinian citizens of Israel.'

According to Adalah, 30 to 40 percent of those arrested between May 9 23 required medical treatment due to the extreme violence Israeli forces employed in the course of crowd dispersal , arrest, transport, and detention. Police and personnel from other security units fired live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets, stun grenades, tear gas, and skunk water into crowds of demonstrators. Though bystanders were also targeted. On May 12, police shot 17-year-old Mohammad Kiwan in the head as he sat in a car with his friends near the northern town of Umm al-Fahm. He succumbed to his injuries on May 19. While making arrests, Israeli forces beat protesters with batons and rifle butts, kicked them, knelt on their heads and necks, and slammed their heads against the ground, walls, and vehicles. As a result, detainees sustained fractures in the hands, feet, back, and neck, as well as injuries to the face and head, including eye hemorrhage.

Multiple lawyers volunteering to defend those arrested have described how physical assaults and psychological abuse continued inside police stations and interrogation centers. According to Lawyers for Defending the Uprising Detainees, some of the most brutal violence has been

perpetrated by officers from Yasam the Special Patrol Unit of the Israeli police, which is tasked with riot and crowd control. Members of Mista'aravim (Musta'ribeen in Arabic) an undercover counter-terrorism unit whose agents pose as Palestinians have also been implicated in attacks, including against children. In sworn affidavits, individuals taken to the police station in Nazareth recounted how agents from Mista'aravim and other special operations forces threatened, intimidated, and beat them until the floor of the interrogation room was covered in blood. Adalah, which is providing counsel to these detainees, stated in a formal complaint that the abuse 'amounts to torture and ill-treatment.'

On May 16, the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel issued an unprecedented statement imploring the international community to protect Palestinian citizens 'from violent attacks and human rights violations by both state and private actors.' The High Follow-Up Committee also called on nations to urge Israel 'to take immediate steps to protect [Palestinian citizens] and to stop the violence against them.'

Politically Ensured Impunity

A court has reportedly ordered an investigation into several cases of police brutality a decision spurred by photos depicting severely bruised individuals upon their release from Israeli custody. Adalah has noted that other detainees even appeared in court bearing 'visible signs of abuse and violence, including stitches on their head, facial swelling, scratches, and extensive bruising.' It is, nonetheless, highly improbable that this investigation will prove transparent or impartial much less deliver accountability considering that it will be conducted by the police's own internal investigations unit. Known by its Hebrew acronym 'Mahash,' this is the same unit that found 'no grounds' to submit a single indictment for the police killing of 13 unarmed Palestinian demonstrators in October 2000.

Indeed, throughout the course of the latest crackdown, Israeli police and security forces were consistently emboldened by government officials. On May 13, Defense Minister Benny Gantz stressed the need for 'a massive response by forces on the ground.' Remarks that implicitly encouraged the use of violence were also accompanied by explicit assurances of legal immunity. Netanyahu is on record telling police officers: 'We hear talk of apprehension over [future] commissions of inquiry, investigations, inspections we will give you all the tools to protect yourself and the citizens of Israel. You have our full backing, do not be afraid.'

The words of the former prime minister echo those uttered by former Prime Minister Ehud Barak on the evening of October 1, 2000 hours after police had killed four Palestinian citizens. Addressing then-Minister of Public Security, Shlomo Ben-Ami, and police commanders, Barak vowed that they had 'the green light for any action necessary to bring about the rule of law, to preserve public order and to secure freedom of movement for the citizens of the state.' And in fact, this 'green light' was verily upheld. Former Attorney General Menachem Mazuz closed all of the case files on the killings in January 2008. In spite of the Or Commission's incriminating conclusions, and contrary to its recommendations, not a single police officer, commander, or public official was indicted, let alone convicted.

Many interpreted the lack of a trial as confirmation that the Palestinian minority was, in the words of journalist Amjad Iraqi, still viewed 'not as citizens to be protected, but as an enemy population to be suppressed.' According to civil and minority rights attorney Fady Khoury, this outcome also reaffirmed a systemic disregard for Palestinian lives.

Laying the Groundwork for Operation 'Law and Order': Non-Policing in 'the Arab Sector' Since October 2000

This disregard is not only exhibited through the state-sanctioned brutality and impunity that are intrinsic to collective criminalization, however. As activists and lawyers have long contended, official apathy and underlying discrimination also inform Israel's second approach to policing: that of deliberate negligence and criminal complicity within the country's so-called 'Arab sector,' also disparagingly referred to as 'Tel Aviv's backyard.'

It is often noted that the Israeli state, since its creation, has treated the Palestinians who remained as 'the enemy within.' This perception only intensified after October 2000 and the Second Intifada. Thus, in the decades since, successive governments have come to consider Palestinian citizens solely through the prism of national security. Officials, in turn, engage with the collective Palestinian population only to the extent that it is perceived to pose a threat to narrowly defined interests. And law enforcement authorities, for their part, actively combat crime only insofar as it endangers Jewish Israelis.

What emerges from this mode of relating is a binary approach to policing that is bifurcated on the basis of a crime's political salience. This two-pronged strategy is reflected in the latest data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, which indicate that the rate of conviction among Palestinian citizens is considerably higher for political as opposed to personal (i.e., apolitical) offenses, despite skyrocketing murder rates in Palestinian communities. According to the Bureau, Palestinian citizens make up approximately 45 percent of convictions for 'offenses against a person's life,' and 34 percent of convictions for 'offenses of bodily harm.' Yet when we consider 'offenses against the state,' we find that Palestinian citizens constitute more than 79 percent of total convictions.

These figures illustrate clearly then that Palestinians are far more likely to be convicted of 'political' crimes such as stone throwing than they are to be convicted of apolitical 'life-threatening crimes' such as homicide and manslaughter (involving a Palestinian victim).

The binary approach that law enforcement officials administer in the policing of Palestinian citizens therefore parallels a dichotomy between political offenses and criminal offenses. If we think of collective criminalization as the excessive (i.e., abusive) policing of legitimate political protest, then 'non-policing' is the insufficient (i.e., negligent) policing of actual crime.

The policy of non-policing is employed within Palestinian cities and villages, in which police observe 'intra-Arab' crime, though do little to hold perpetrators to account or curb violent offenses. Though this approach perhaps seems counter-intuitive, attorney and community organizer Rasool Saada explains that the police *do* intervene in Palestinian neighborhoods, but only in response to circumstances that have the potential to compromise state security, such as 'violence between Arabs and Jews, demonstrations, and [home] demolitions.' Otherwise, police turn a blind eye. 'As far as they are concerned,' Saada continues, 'the Arabs can kill each other.'

This callous indifference to so-called 'Arab on Arab violence' is borne out in persistently disproportionate homicide rates. Comprising approximately 20 percent of Israel's population, Palestinians have invariably constituted more than half of criminal deaths in the country over the last several years. According to the Knesset Research and Information Center, the murder

rate between 2014 and mid-2017 remained roughly five times higher among the 'non-Jewish population.' In 2018, Palestinian citizens accounted for 61 percent of the total number of murder and manslaughter victims, with 71 people killed throughout the year. This number increased to 89 in 2019, representing 65 percent of victims the highest rate recorded since data collection began.

Just as disturbing are the significant disparities in crime clearance rates, which again correlate irrefutably to the identity of the victim. Roughly 65 percent of homicide cases in 'the Jewish sector' between 2014 and mid-2017 had been solved as of February 8, 2018 the date on which the Knesset Research and Information Center published its findings. The remaining cases, the Center notes, were either still under police investigation or with the State Attorney's office. By contrast, only 50 percent of homicide cases in 'the non-Jewish sector' had been solved throughout the same period. This divergence widened markedly in 2018, the first year for which the Israel Police published homicide case data. While authorities filed indictments against perpetrators in more than 71 percent of the murders committed in 'the Jewish sector,' these authorities filed indictments for just 43 percent of murders committed in 'the Arab sector.' In other words, a murder perpetrated in 2018 was more than three times *less* likely to result in an indictment if the victim was a Palestinian citizen.

The rising prevalence of violent crime inside Palestinian towns then is not some inevitable by-product of 'Arab culture,' as many government officials routinely argue; rather, it is in part the logical, even predictable, consequence of non-policing. As former police officers and investigators have patently affirmed, the murder rate continues to increase among the Palestinian population largely because exhaustive investigations are not conducted, perpetrators are not apprehended, and thus the law is not enforced.

This lawlessness, according to former senior security official Dr. Doron Matza, is by design. 'The state has never intended to close the gaps' in violence, he says. So '[t]here is little interest in eliminating crime.' Of course, as long as this crime remains confined within the borders and boundaries of Palestinian communities.

Contained violence, put simply, advances the Israeli government's broader political agenda. On one hand, it acts to fragment Palestinian society. In this sense, crime serves the same function as political detention: 'to divert energy,' as Abir Kopty writes, and 'to drain the [solidarity and resistance] movement of momentum.' When this doesn't work, however, crime is exploited as a mechanism of control, and should the political climate require as a pretext to conduct arbitrary crackdowns such as that launched in May.

From this perspective, it becomes apparent that the policy of non-policing is not merely a pattern of passive negligence, but rather an active, deliberate strategy. As writer and political activist Majd Kayyal recounted last October, there was 'no other historical moment since the Nakba that united Palestinians in the way that the start of the Second Intifada did.' Crime, however, proved to be an asset on which the Israeli government would rely to restore and 'consolidate its system of division.' Thus, throughout the early 2000s, as the state worked to eradicate organized crime inside Jewish quarters, authorities enabled it to relocate to, and flourish in, Palestinian cities and towns. Retired Chief Superintendent Michel Haddad, for example, has detailed the ways in which the police have 'indulged' criminals, providing them with legal protection and tacitly funneling arms to their syndicates in exchange for security intelligence.

This 'collaboration' continues today. It is widely understood that law enforcement officials do not arrest known members of criminal organizations, according to Dr. Walid Haddad, a criminologist who served for 15 years as a national inspector in Israel's Ministry of Public Security. Even if these individuals are identified and their weapons located, Dr. Haddad stated this past February, they are not apprehended 'because these criminals provide the police with information.' Such collusion, he added, directly facilitates the proliferation of illegal weapons weapons that have been used to kill an average of 73 Palestinian citizens each year since 2000.

Some 400,000 unlicensed (i.e., illegal) firearms were in circulation throughout Israel as of 2013, the majority of which concentrated in Palestinian communities. In 2016, then-Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan ceded that 70 percent of these weapons approximately 280,000 could be traced back to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). This rate allegedly rises to 90 percent when speaking specifically about the illicit arms in 'the northern part' of Israel.

Even if one assumes that the IDF is not knowingly complicit in weapons smuggling, it would be absurd to believe that authorities are powerless to stem the theft of firearms from army bases. It is equally absurd to believe that law enforcement officials lack the capacity to locate and confiscate these weapons.

But why are authorities interested in perpetuating this situation? As Fida Tabony, a veteran activist and member of the Committee to Combat Violence in the northern city of Nazareth, asserts: 'Violence makes [Palestinian citizens] weaker [I]t distances us from the central issues as we get bogged down by everyday threats to our existence, by trying to survive.'

Violence and organized crime also provide an ostensibly valid guise under which police can conduct mass arrests when it becomes politically expedient to do so. Thus, at critical inflection points, such as the ongoing Unity Intifada, authorities capitalize on the criminality that is otherwise permitted if not encouraged to thrive in Palestinian neighborhoods.

Operation 'Law and Order' is a case in point. The purported target of the 10-day campaign namely 'violent gangs' possessing illegal weapons is the product of two decades of non-policing. This irony of course was not lost on Palestinian leaders and activists. 'All of a sudden, the police have woken up and want to carry out a law-and-order operation,' Knesset Member (MK) Aida Touma-Sliman responded following its announcement. Speaking to *The New York Times*, Ms. Touma-Sliman added, 'we've been pleading for years for them to take action where were they [then]?'

The veneer of legitimacy that the weapons-centric rhetoric lent to the operation quickly collapsed. As per official statements, the 'Law and Order' campaign launched on May 24 aimed to arrest some 500 individuals identified within a pre-existing 'bank of targets,' including 'senior' members of crime syndicates against whom authorities had cases previously prepared. Yet the majority of the more than 300 Palestinian citizens arrested as of May 27 were subsequently released without charge due to lack of evidence. The High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel reported that, in fact, only 10 to 20 percent of those detained were arrested for belonging to a criminal organization, illegal weapons possession, arms trafficking, physical assault, or arson or other forms of property damage. The remaining 80 to 90 percent of those arrested were taken into custody for insulting or assaulting a police officer,

disturbing an officer in the line of duty, or 'taking part in an illegal gathering.'

The language of 'law and order' was therefore invoked as a cover. Israeli police leveraged real crime as a pretense to carry out arbitrary arrests, staging an extensive operation designed not to apprehend crime bosses and arms traffickers, but rather to silence students, political activists, and community organizers. According to Adalah, court transcripts clearly indicate that officers executing the operation had been commanded to arrest Palestinian citizens in order to 'intimidate' them as well as to 'demonstrate [police] presence and power.' Collective punishment was thus touted as the restoration of 'rule of law.'

Ultimately then, the non-policing of real crime and the abusive policing of legitimate protest function as two means in service of the same end: Palestinian division. Crime and criminalization are thus utilized as tools, through which the Israeli state seeks to not only weaken, but also to de-legitimize and de-politicize Palestinian solidarity.

Challenging the Narrative

The mainstream traditional media coverage of May's sweeping arrests can be attributed in large part to the cognitive dissonance they sow in the dominant 'western' collective consciousness that continues to identify Israel as a democracy. Systematically depriving Palestinian people of their liberty has not, in its own right, been deemed 'newsworthy' one need only consider the hundreds of Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank who are being detained indefinitely without charge or trial, or the more than 2 million Palestinians who have lived for 15 years under a total air, land, and sea blockade in Gaza, long designated 'the world's largest open-air prison.' Indeed, Israeli authorities have for decades legalized, institutionalized, and enforced what historian Rashid Khalidi has called 'a carceral project' defined by the chronic violation of Palestinians' rights to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention and liberty of movement in Occupied Palestinian Territory. And, for decades, Israeli authorities have perpetuated and expanded this carceral project with overwhelming silence from the gatekeepers of the conventional global media landscape. May's campaign inside the Green Line, by contrast, was treated as 'exceptional' in part because the Palestinians being unlawfully apprehended were this time holders of Israeli citizenship Palestinians whom government officials routinely differentiate (and de-Palestinize) as 'Arab Israelis' or 'non-Jews.'

Yet the flagrant abuse of power demonstrated by Israeli forces inside Israel's 'mixed cities' and 'Arab townships' although egregious is not random or atypical. Rather, it is the latest manifestation of a perennial, albeit overlooked, phenomenon of systemic police brutality, criminal negligence, and impunity endemic within but, of course, confined to Palestinian communities.

The last two months have witnessed renewed, and heightened, scrutiny of the language and narrative that prevails in traditional western, and particularly American, media vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine. Critical light is also once again being cast on the prejudicial measures enacted by social media platforms, including the inconsistent implementation of content moderation policies that effectively censor Palestinian voices. As pressure mounts on the news and digital technology industries to stop 'obfuscating Israel's oppression of Palestinians,' coverage of Israel's oppression of Palestinian citizens must not be exempt. This means documenting and reporting on discriminatory and abusive policing without the euphemism

and erasure that have functioned to sanitize and whitewash the daily injustices to which one-fifth of Israel's population and citizenry is subjected. This reportage, for example, requires that media outlets situate May's arrest operation in its proper historical context. Only then will coverage and analysis cease to merely reiterate the Israeli government's official narrative and instead ask meaningful and imperative questions, such as: 'Law and order for whom?'