

Long Live Palestine

Throughout my life, I always get the exact same two responses when I say I am from Palestine. It is always, “Oh my god, do you have family there right now?” with concern in their voice, or “Where is that? I’ve never heard of it.” The very few, who are aware of the situation in Palestine, seem to care only during our conversation, but once the conversation is done, it is out of sight out of mind. Being Palestinian and living in the United States, I had never realized how bad the situation is over there until I went to visit. I never understood why most did not take advantage of the fact that on some Fridays, they open up the checkpoints and let people through more easily to Jerusalem, and other parts of Israel that usually are off limits to everybody with a Palestinian citizenship. I had forgotten the unfortunate treatment and humiliation the Palestinians endured by Israeli soldiers, and the American news channels never saw the importance of reporting on it.

When we first landed in the Tel Aviv airport, I was woken up by the voice of the flight attendant, who sounded way too cheerful after a fourteen hour flight, speaking Hebrew on the intercom. I looked around the plane as everybody was getting up from their seats to search for their carry-on bags, each frantically trying to get out before the person in front of them. I could not help but notice that my family and a family of seven, two rows in front of us, looked to be the only Arabs on the plane. The first thing I saw as I peaked out the window was a gigantic Israeli flag waving in the wind, with no Palestinian flag in sight.

As we finally got off of the plane and were walking through the airport, we walked through the

hall of flags, seen in every international airport. Unfortunately, like in every international airport, there is never a Palestinian flag represented. I looked around, and I knew by the looks we were getting, we were not welcome. I noticed the dirty looks were drawn toward my mom more than us because she wears the hijab. I was quickly overcome with this extreme feeling of anger. These Jewish women with the same scarf on their heads, just wrapped differently, felt it was okay to judge us, forgetting that we are all the same. Some would even grab onto their kids as if we were going to harm them, and give us a glare that still scares me to think about. Everything felt like it was happening in slow motion, and my mind could not process what was happening. We were being looked at like the enemy in our own country. No matter how extreme Islamophobia had been getting in the United States, I had never felt so much racism as I did in those ten seconds. Little did I realize, this was only the beginning.

As we reached the exit, two Israeli soldiers, both tall and barrel chested, with angry eyes, took my family to the side. When they looked at me, their stare made me feel like my face was going to melt. They each carried a machine gun that went across their bodies, with a steady finger that sat on the trigger. They had various questions for us: “Where did you come from?”; “What is the reason for your arrival to Israel?”; “Where is your family?”; “And how long do you plan to stay?”; “Did you bring any weapons or drugs with you?” My mom responded calmly and patiently to all of them, as she was used to the badgering questions they asked.

My mom was then taken into a room and interrogated her for about 30 minutes as we stood outside. I felt very nauseous and uncomfortable because I couldn't stop thinking about how their fingers never left the trigger. We were being treated like the dangerous ones, by the men

with machine guns. We were a family of seven with my mom, four girls, and my two younger brothers. How could we possibly be the dangerous ones? I never thought I would witness being treated like a prisoner in my own country. I remember being so mad at myself for being so scared, but I couldn't help it. I knew we would have to go through this again at every checkpoint we drove through, just because we were Palestinians.

As we pulled up to every checkpoint, we would stop so that the soldiers, each of whom carried a machine gun with their finger on the trigger, could check our passports and decide whether our names were Palestinian or Israeli. Israelis were greeted with a wave and a smile as they were told to keep driving and have a nice day. All Palestinians were told to pull to the side. Then we would be asked, "Are there any weapons or drugs in the vehicle I should know about before I search it?" As always, the answer was no. Then we were told to get out of the vehicle and take all of our bags and phones with us and to make sure to have all passports ready to show inside. We then walked into a small building, it was similar to airport security. First we were told to hand over our phones and passports as they named us one by one and analyzed our visas, they did this because anyone with a Palestinian citizenship was not permitted into Israel. Next, we were questioned for ten minutes with the same routine questions as in the airport. We then walked through a metal detector and sent our bags through a conveyor belt to be checked. Keep in mind, this is only when entering into Israel; going into Palestine nobody checks for anything. The safety of the Palestinians is disregarded. I was very scared because I had heard horror stories of people misunderstanding what the soldiers had told them to do, because of the language barriers, and being shot without a second thought.

These stories make it on the news close to never. The United States does not like to publicize the great support it provides to Israel, especially when it comes to the amount of money taken out of American tax dollars. The United States government would never want to be known as a country that sends billions of American tax dollars each year to a country that has broken multiple international laws while promoting genocide and apartheid in the process. The help Israel has received from the United States is obvious in the eyes of any person when comparing the cities of Palestine to the cities of Israel. The West Bank is extremely overpopulated with poor infrastructure while Israel is thriving with the help of the United States. Thankfully, after my last trip, I was grateful to encounter the growth of Palestine and the happiness that shined from the people.

During my last trip I asked my dad if we were able to go near the borders of Gaza and see how everything is there. He started to explain to me how much he wanted to, but it was just not safe. The Israeli government controls every single thing that goes near Gaza, let alone inside of it. Everytime I think about the people in Gaza and the people of Syria, I get a pain in my heart. I felt so selfish for being so blessed with the life I was given versus looking at the innocent people who did not get a choice if they wanted to be born in a time of genocide. The United States funds a lot of money to the Israeli military, which in turn harms the people of Gaza, rather than help. Life in Gaza and Syria is an absolute nightmare, but nobody seems to care because the mindset nowadays is as long as it doesn't affect me, why should I care? Humanity in this world is slowly becoming a thing of the past, and it is extremely frightening. It is each person for themselves at this point. The saddest part is we expect people to help us when we are in need, but how can we

expect this when we don't do the same?

Describing the thousands of killings of Palestinians that are being ignored is an insult to humanity. Describing the illegally re-written borders and illegal settlements in Palestine is an insult to humanity. Describing the illegal wall built that resembles the Berlin wall is an insult to humanity. Israel would not be able to do as much damage as they have if it was not for a lack of feeling of impunity and without being given impunity for breaking international laws countless times. The western world leaders have chosen to act blind to all that has happened. Many have come out and spoken about the right of Israel to self- defense, yet not a single word about the broken international laws that have harmed thousands of Palestinians. This is an insult to humanity.