Journeying through Emotions, Advocacy, and Identity during the Carnage



By Yara Alatshan



Several memories remain vivid in my mind. Living near Yasser Arafat's presidential mansion, I recall the tension when the Israeli army invaded our area. The memory of sleeping with my shoes beside my bed, prepared to flee at any moment, is ingrained. Navigating checkpoints to visit my grandparents is another memory that lingers, each checkpoint a reminder of the restrictions placed upon us. The trauma of those times was palpable, fear often overwhelming me, leading to accidents I'd rather forget. The constant presence of checkpoints made me angry at the daily humiliation Palestinians endured. But at that time, I hadn't yet experienced life without checkpoints, without the constant threat of displacement. I didn't comprehend the meaning of freedom of movement.

It wasn't until I pursued my master's degree in the United States that the total weight of my emotions hit me. Suddenly, I understood what quality of life, freedom, and safety meant. And with this understanding came a wave of sadness and anger as I grappled with the reality of the apartheid conditions prevailing in the West Bank, the stripping away of basic human rights.

Moving to Canada six years ago marked a significant chapter in my journey, but the last five months have been a roller coaster of emotions: anger, sadness, and disappointment, as well as a strong sense of responsibility to advocate for justice have consumed me. Witnessing the injustices in Palestine fills me with outrage and sorrow. The selective application of democracy and conditional humanity shown Palestinians has crushed my ideals, leaving me in despair.

As a Palestinian woman, mother, and member of the human race, I refuse to accept the unacceptable. Each day, as I scroll through news updates and social media posts, I am confronted with heartbreaking images and stories of my people enduring suffering. The senseless loss of children's lives, the destruction of schools, and the sight of hungry children lining up for food weigh heavily on my heart. Knowing about women giving birth without anesthesia, lacking basic sanitary supplies during menstruation, and people deprived of food is intolerable. Seeing children forced to grow up amid terrifying violence and families torn apart by tragedy has been more than painful, and it is incumbent upon us as free individuals to stand against injustice and strive for a world where all humans are treated with dignity and respect.

Mixed in with all the anger and sadness I feel, there is also disappointment with Western governments' responses to the current carnage. The glaring gap between professed Western values and actions is disheartening. Witnessing the hypocrisy and double standards on much of the global stage serves as a stark reminder of the injustices faced by Palestinians. This is a genocide in real time, and people see it on the news and social media. How can we be okay with these scenes?



As a Palestinian Canadian, I am driven by a strong sense of responsibility to be a voice for the silenced, to advocate for justice, and to raise awareness about the Palestinian cause. Despite the emotional turmoil, my daily routine is infused with a commitment to advocacy. I scour the news, consume information, and share daily updates about Palestine and Gaza on social media platforms.

In addition to my digital activism, I've taken other less "virtual" steps to advocate for justice. I've written letters to my MP, signed petitions, and engaged in conversations with my community. It's crucial to keep such conversations going, to challenge misconceptions, and to ensure that the voices of Palestinians are heard and amplified.

Furthermore, as a parent raising two boys in the diaspora, I am committed to instilling in them the values of empathy, kindness, and resilience. I try to model for them what it is to stand up for what is right, question the status quo, and work tirelessly to create positive change. They are learning to navigate their identities as Palestinian Canadians, cherishing their heritage and embracing freedom and justice for all.

Moreover, while I value the diverse tapestry of cultures surrounding me in Canada, I cannot fail to recognize and confront the presence of anti-Palestinian racism. As we celebrate our differences, it's equally important to actively combat discrimination and promote inclusivity for all communities, including Palestinians.

In my personal journey advocating for Palestinians in the diaspora, I'm committed to continuing to share Palestinian stories and raise awareness of our voices and narratives. Advocacy efforts within the Palestinian diaspora community at large are essential to amplifying marginalized voices and effecting change on a global scale. Together, we can strive toward a world where the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, are upheld and respected.

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