

A Reflection on Israel's 40-year Occupation of the Remaining Palestinian Lands

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Forty years ago Muhammad Ali was refusing to be drafted into the U.S. Army to serve in Vietnam, forty years ago, the world's first successful heart transplant was carried out, forty years ago, in six days, the Israeli army conquered and took control of The West Bank, East Jerusalem and The Gaza Strip. Israel held under its control the complete former British mandate of Palestine, Balfour had promised the Jews a national home; they now had an exclusive state at the cost of Palestine and its people.

Today Muhammad Ali is a hero in the eyes of many, today, tens of thousands of heart transplants are performed each year the world over, and today Palestine remains at the mercy of Israel. Even if its foundations were to be built on less than 22% of mandate Palestine, Palestinians were desperate for a homeland of their own; today they hold little but 7% of the territory that is their native soil.

History serves to be a powerful reminder of the ills of our past and a history of injustice, cloaks the Palestinian people. We can escape history only if we reconcile with it, if we readdress our dishonest ways and correct them, if we bring justice to those who have been wronged.

The prospects for escaping history seem far away particularly with the mix of Israel's right wing government, America's right wing government; a Hamas dominated Gaza Strip, the betrayals of Camp David and Oslo, and this enormous wall of separation. But both of us, Palestinians and Israeli's, we have the same tragedy, Israel has a nation built on someone else's land, and that is it. Both nations and both peoples must be acknowledged in order for there to be any kind of peace. Not only tolerance, but co-existence must be stressed in order for Palestinian and Israeli people to know peace, freedom and liberty.

The last time I visited Palestine was in 2005. I saw the unprovoked actions of Israeli soldiers, I saw the unemployment, I saw the fear and the chokehold both economically and politically on these people, I also saw the sheer determination of the Palestinian

people, their hope remaining strong through the senseless brutality of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

What struck me the most about the current situation was the construction of the vast wall that has been referred to as a security barrier, this wall cut off hundreds of Palestinian villages from what is supposed to be a Palestinian state. This wall has been deemed to be contrary to International Law.

Due to my curiosity, which my grandfather later referred to as naivety, I asked my granddad what sort of compensation he received for the land which had been taken beyond the armistice green line of 1949 . . . his answer was nothing, I honestly found it to be incomprehensible that the land which my family survived off, was seen to be worthless enough to be simply taken away yet to be so dear that the Israeli government attained it with such zest, and deemed it to be necessary to create an apartheid wall to block the Palestinian people from stepping onto the lands which they once called home.

Remember These Children has reported that from September 29th, 2000 through to March 27th, 2007, at least 934 Palestinian and 118 Israeli youths were killed in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The message does not hold bias over which side of the conflict these deaths have occurred, but rather the fact that young boys and girls from each side have lost their lives somewhat in vain.

Everyday hundreds of children are born into this conflict; innocent children are forced to live with the implications of a war that they did start nor support, Unfortunately the act of birth does not discriminate and children are being raised to know nothing but this battle, struggling in refugee camps with little but a starving spirit. For those of us living in this prosperous nation, with hope and possibility we have little vision of what it could possibly be like to be living each day in desperation. Can a woman who gives birth to a child in a private hospital in an affluent city of Australia truly know the pain of a woman who gives birth to her child at an Israeli checkpoint, only to watch her child die as she waits pleading to be let through hi-tech gates and road blocks in order to make it to a second class hospital to give her child a chance at life.

But if we have the capacity within us to conceive the possibilities . . .
Imagine having no right to citizenship,
Imagine no access to clean water,
Imagine being a statistic of this unique story,
Imagine being denied free movement,
Imagine climbing hills for days to reach simple services, necessary to live,
Imagine being defenseless to the longest continuous occupation in the world,
Imagine being at the mercy of the Israeli military,
Imagine surviving in grotesque living conditions,
Imagine having no power over your fate,
Imagine the courage it takes to stay alive each day,

The world can not forget these people . . .
Imagine having no nation.