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## Walking in Palestinian Shoes

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Many times, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict deserves lengthy and deep analyses. There are historical, cultural, political and religious considerations that need to be picked apart before reaching some sort of theory as to why this tiny slice of earth is so tormented.

Then there are those times when a simple glance at the obvious is enough to clarify the complete injustice of the Israeli occupation. This is not even about the more significant issues such as political assassinations, home demolitions, prisoners or military operations that claim scores of lives. No, this is about everyday matters, most often taken for granted, which when one takes a moment to contemplate, show just how sinister a military occupation can be.

Take an innocuous trip to the coastal town of Herzeliya. One of the more ritzy areas in Israel, the main mall in the town center is picture perfect. Not only is the actual structure aesthetically appealing, but the spacious piazza onto which the mall opens is breathtaking, overlooking the equally picturesque port, lined with sailboats, motorboats and luxurious yachts.

Still, over and above the obvious affluence, something else is even more striking. Carefree Israelis stroll along the boardwalk, iced coffee in hand, while children run freely around them in circles. This is hardly the picture portrayed in Western and Israeli media about the Israeli people's daily lives. Israel has succeeded in conjuring up one specific image in the collective minds of most of the world's peoples: the Israelis live in terror, afraid to walk into malls, cinemas, onto buses or across crowded intersections for fear that a militant Palestinian terrorist – probably one with a green and white headband with Islamic scrawling – will detonate a powerful bomb in their midst.

Quite the contrary, this is completely undetectable in the shopping mall in Herzeliya. Not a single Israeli soldier could be found in sight, not one machine gun slung across the chests of belligerent Jewish settlers. No, these Israelis were hardly living in fear. On the contrary, there was not one policeman either, pulling people over at random, demanding ID cards or permits from their chosen targets. It also goes without saying that none of these shoppers had to endure the humiliation of crossing a checkpoint before reaching their sunny destination.

Switch frames now, to the Qalandiya checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem, which by the way, was completely nonexistent six years ago. Today it is an elaborate maze of terminals, iron turnstiles, glassed-in Israeli soldiers, fluttering Israeli flags and hoards of Palestinians waiting to get to the other side.

The concept of a military checkpoint in the midst of occupied territory is inherently racist, given that it discriminates between the occupied and the occupier and knocks down the occupied population to second and third class citizens solely because of their nationality. This particular checkpoint takes this racism up one more notch. Only Palestinian Jerusalemites and Palestinians with Israeli issued permits [in addition to the odd foreigner] are allowed to cross the checkpoint, barring the majority of other Palestinians bearing West Bank IDs from reaching their most revered city. Even among this small group, discriminatory measures have been put into place.

Once passengers reach the crossing by bus, those between 12 and 60 years of age are allowed to stay on the bus through the lengthy Israeli inspection. The others are made to get down and walk through the checkpoint where their IDs are checked and personal belongings run through an X-ray machine before boarding the same bus on the other side.

Even here, Israel manages to further dissect the “privileged” Palestinians allowed across. Only the elderly and mothers with children with a Jerusalem ID can stay on the bus when crossing the checkpoint. If a mother with young children is carrying a West Bank ID [albeit with an Israeli permit] she is not “worthy” of staying on the bus. She too must get down, no matter how small her babies are, and walk through the iron turnstile so a young soldier, not much older than her own child, can inspect her papers and make sure she is not a “threat to the security of Israel.”

Anyone living outside the surreal box known as Palestine would be appalled by the absurdity and blatant injustice of such a situation. Logically, it seems unfathomable that anyone would accept such human and civil rights abuses on an everyday basis. The Palestinians however, have fallen into a treacherous pitfall where the more they are oppressed the more they seem to tolerate injustices. We have grown so accustomed to an Israeli military presence on our land, checkpoints, the permit system and daily harassment by Israel’s military establishment that

crossing a checkpoint with all of the hassles this entails has become no more than a nagging inconvenience.

The truth is, the racist system put in place for Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem, is far from a mere inconvenience. It is outrageous; an atrocity against humanity and one that Israel is allowed to pull off with impunity because it has so artfully molded an image of victimization around the Israeli people.

One only has to go to Herzeliya, Tel Aviv or Eilat to realize just how great this injustice is. Israelis seem to go into fits of rage if there is a traffic jam or the line at the grocery store is not moving fast enough. Most people in the world are like this. A backed up traffic jam in downtown New York would elicit a similar response. But the Palestinians wait patiently at the window and hold up their ID's obediently to the soldier inside, not because the situation suits them but because this has become more of a survival tactic than anything else. One slip up and they could be pulled aside, made to wait for hours or worse, arrested for some cockamamie reason like talking back or refusing to pull up their shirt to check for explosive belts underneath.

The problem is that Israel is extremely influential in western circles and has convinced the world that this labyrinth of checkpoints and bypass roads is necessary to ensure its citizens' security and safety. If the average Palestinian is inconvenienced in the mix, this is just an unfortunate byproduct. The truth is that not only do these checkpoints, roads and of course, the separation wall, swallow up kilometers of Palestinian land – hence the true intent of Israel's actions – they are the manifestation of extremely racist policies that should be viewed in this light, not as an unfortunate consequence.

Perhaps all it would take is one day in Herzeliya, west Jerusalem or Tel Aviv - one day where average Israelis would have to cross checkpoints, apply for permits only to be rejected time and again, or wait for hours at a military barricade while their cars, papers and bodies are searched. All it would take is one day for Israelis to live in Palestinian shoes, to experience the demolition of their home, the assassination of their son or the imprisonment of their daughter, for them – and maybe the world along with them – to realize that this is no way to treat another people.

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