

# There Is More to Us

By Hasheemah H. Afaneh



was sitting in the back seat of my family's green van and staring out the window when I heard my parents discuss our moving to Palestine. Needless to say, my eyes widened at the thought of moving and leaving all my friends behind.

"But why?" I had asked furiously, my eyes welling up.

With his eyes still on the road, my father responded, "So you and your brothers can see our home and learn Arabic. You'll meet lots of family members, and you'll make friends in no time."

*But we already had enough family here. We went to Sunday school and learned Arabic for six hours. I loved my friends here. AND we had seen our home before. Wasn't that enough?*

"Remember the fun you had the last time we were there? You didn't want to leave!" My mother added, turning to look at me.

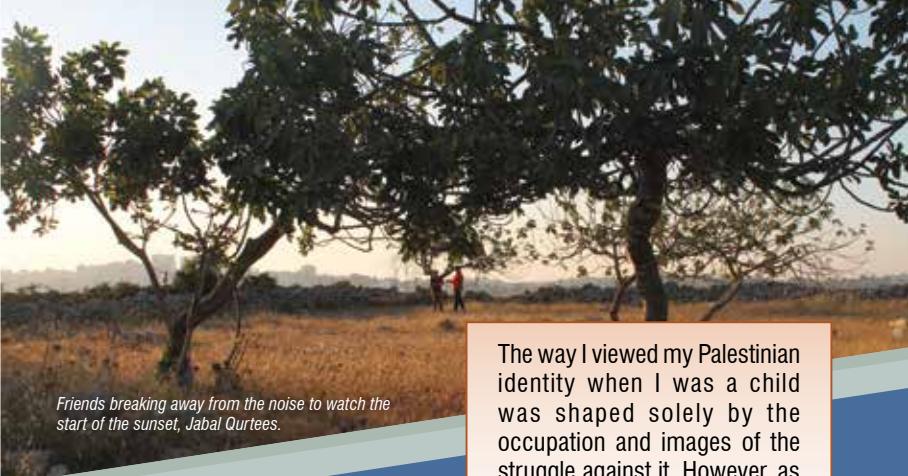
"You see? This time you'll just be going there for a longer time, so you'll have all the fun you want."

"Just a year," my mother added, to falsely reassure me.

"You'll get to know our country and who we are," my father said.

I remained silent for the remainder of the ride with the anger only a ten-year-old can conjure up. *What more is there to know about us?*

Both my mother and father were raised in Palestine in the pre-Oslo period. The image that I had of Palestine and of who we are as Palestinians was a result of that reality and of the fact that I lived halfway across the world. The farmer wearing a *kuffiyeh*, the elderly



*Friends breaking away from the noise to watch the start of the sunset, Jabal Qurtees.*

woman in a traditional *thobe* with a key around her neck, and the child with a rock in hand were the themes that ran through my mind at the thought of Palestine. These three themes are associated with the Israeli occupation – with the need and the will to fight it.

However, there was more to know and learn about us, as my father told me.

There is a man who holds a few golden coffee cups and a pot filled with Arabic coffee as he stands in the street and clinks them, calling out, "Coffee, coffee!" to all the early risers.

At around the same time, there is the sound of shops slowly opening, their doors squeaking in the quiet of the morning, bidding the passers-by a good day.

The passers-by – teachers, students, and workers – walk (or drive) hurriedly to catch an early taxi before they are late. Some try to get to the various Israeli checkpoints as quickly as possible, before traffic ensues.

The way I viewed my Palestinian identity when I was a child was shaped solely by the occupation and images of the struggle against it. However, as I grow into a young adult, my understanding of Palestinian identity goes deeper, being influenced by my surroundings in this society.



*Photo by Elias Halabi.*

There are the mothers who organize the mess their children made and go off to the market to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

There are the children who wait to come back home to fly their kites or ride their bicycles a few more times before the winter comes.

There are the teenagers who stroll around the city eating ice cream.



*Two children at the Kite Festival coordinated by artist Raed Quraan this past summer, Jabal Qurtees.*

There are the young adults, refugee or not, who have dreams bigger than the places they are in.

There are the old women in traditional *thobes* who sit outside their homes or on their verandas gossiping like young girls.

There is the *debka* music and the voice of old men, who were sitting outside a barbershop earlier in the day, singing traditional songs during *sahjat* and evening parties that fill the summer nights.

There is the breeze combined with the sound of olives dropping to the ground from branches of rustling leaves, indicating that they should soon be picked. The olive trees are found almost everywhere, and at a certain time each year, family, friends, and farmers go to their designated groves and pick the olives, whilst having breakfast out in the fields and gardens.

Before that, though, grapes begin to fall off the grapevines. They, too, are picked, along with the grape leaves, fresh off the vines from around the gardens of different households. They aren't found in glass jars with yellow lids in a Pakistani-owned supermarket as they are back in the States.

This is what challenges the false claims that "Palestinians do not exist." These people are Palestinians, along with the martyrs, prisoners, refugees, and the exiled. All these sectors of society play a role into the making of Palestinian identity. Even those in the diaspora have a role in the identity of Palestinians. The similarity between one Palestinian and another is the struggle against the Israeli occupation, but it is the differences that ensure the existence of a Palestine with Palestinians after the Israeli occupation.

If I lived halfway across the world and had children, I would bring them to Palestine, and I would tell them exactly what my father told me. "You'll get to know our country and who we are" because we are so much more than Israel and the world make us out to be.

*Hasheemah H. Afaneh, born in one place and raised in two, is studying nutrition and dietetics at Birzeit University. Apart from food and health, her passion lies in words. She writes poetry, short stories, and descriptive essays, some of which have been published in Sixteen Minutes to Palestine, Riwayya, Cigale Literary Magazine, and Beyond Compromise. She has been blogging for three years at norestrictionsonwords.wordpress.com.*



*Photo by Ahed Izhiman.*