

The Security of Insecurity

By Muna Nassar



"The end of suffering does not justify the suffering."

Jonathan Safran Foer

By definition, security is the state of being protected or safe from harm. In moral terms, security is a given. Security is the norm and anything negating the norm would be considered a state of abnormality and utter sacrilege. Security has become the right of every human being. In a not-so-perfect world and in the not-so-well-lit place called Palestine, security is not a natural right, it is one that is fought over.

A proper definition of security must be sculpted into existence through one's imagination, much the same as an artist creates a sculpture from imagination. It is neither real nor evident. A writer brings

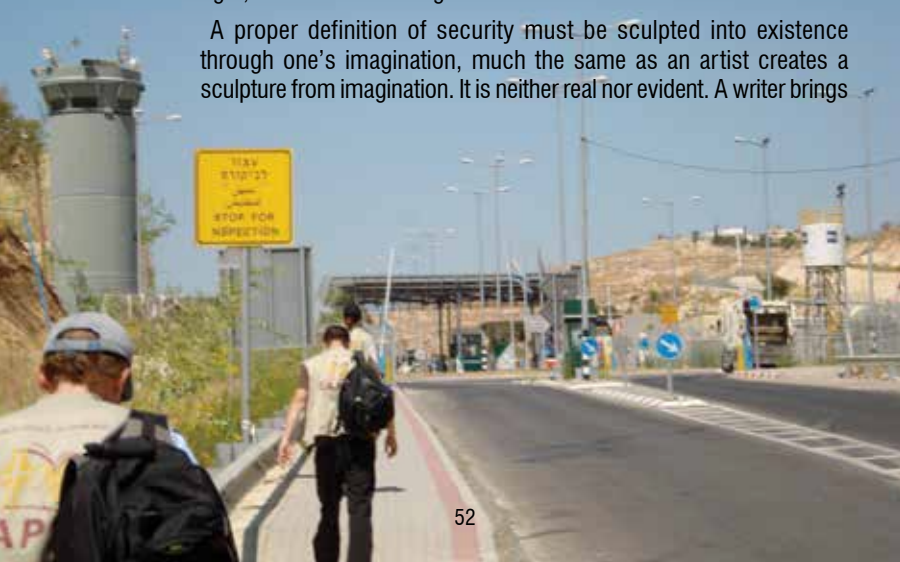
a character to life through brilliant writing. The greatest works of art have emerged from the artists' imagination and creativity.

I will write about security by describing the lack of it, since I was never able to experience security firsthand while living in Palestine. I will describe the state of living without the privilege of security, without the feeling of being physically and psychologically secure and safe. To live in Palestine is to live in a state of insecurity, void of any feeling of freedom or being safe from harm.

I live in a place where, in the name of security, my security is taken away from me. Palestine is my homeland, and it has been occupied by Israel for the past 67 years. I was born into occupied Palestine, and till now, I am still trying to learn how to cope with that reality. I cannot even imagine a state in which there are no walls, checkpoints, or restrictions on the right of movement between different parts of Palestine. When I was growing up I used to hear my grandmother and uncles talk about the "good old days" when they were able to go to Gaza in their own cars. About the times they were able to go to Amman to visit their relatives and come back the very same day, and the Sundays spent in Jaffa at the beach. Whenever I heard their stories of this

golden age, I would wonder about and try to imagine the world they lived in, a world where the need to implement "security measures" didn't exist. A world in which a permit wasn't needed in order to be able to go to Jaffa or Haifa. The mind was free and people were born free from restrictions and chains.

During the summer of 2013, I traveled to Europe and, for the first time, was able to really grasp the meaning of living freely. I was excited to be able to visit various countries in the European Union just with the Schengen visa. I was going from the Czech Republic to Austria. Before leaving Prague, I made sure that I had everything I needed, including the passport, since I assumed it would obviously be needed at the borders. I was struck to realize a passport isn't really necessary to be able to go from one country to another. The shock was so real that I started to remember every step that we Palestinians have to go through when exiting or entering our country. The painful stages of going from one checkpoint to another, of showing one's green ID and then showing one's permit and finally one's passport. I started to compare the level of security between the two places. In a region of 28 countries, 28 separate entities, 28 different bodies, no proof of identity was required at the borders. I was even more astonished



to experience the respect given to a person there instead of the humiliation that some people face in other parts of the world and in other contexts: the treatment of a Palestinian at a checkpoint; the physical search that Palestinians endure at the hands of 18-year-old brazen, ignorant soldiers. And all for “security reasons.”

To live in Palestine is to live in a state of “unknowing,” in a state of uncertainty that is created by the lack of physical and psychological security. Anything can happen at any minute to jeopardize our well-being, our future, and our inner peace. In Palestine, we don’t suffer from natural catastrophes. Unnatural catastrophes, however, have been an integral part of our history. We expect the unexpected and know that our peace of mind is constantly at risk.

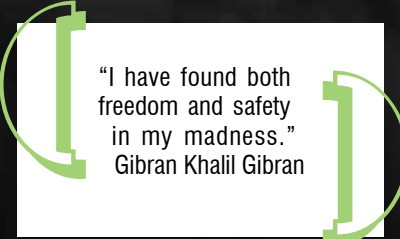
I have always been engaged in tugs of war: to buy or not to buy; to sleep in or wake up and be productive; or – the biggest of them all – to fear or not to fear. In mathematics, two variables are proportional if a change in one is always accompanied by a change in the other. And so it is in reality. The relationship between physical and mental security is proportional: whenever a change occurs to physical security, psychological security also changes. When one’s existence is dominated by a lack of physical security, psychological turmoil surfaces. Therefore, whenever physical change happens, we know that it’s only the tip of the iceberg. It’s only a matter of time before the iceberg in its entirety emerges on the horizon. The iceberg is real whether we choose to recognize it or not, whether we choose to deal with it or not. Such is the case with peace of mind. We know that the iceberg is there, but we can only see the surface. If we delve deep, though, we can actually unfold layers and layers of fears and insecurities that often take away our peace of mind.

Peace usually comes from security and stillness. Peace of mind is a state of mental and emotional calmness,

happiness, and freedom. In Palestine, we collect peace by sifting through the abnormalities we suffer each day. For me peace comes as a result of a fast-moving world, a world in which we never stand still. However, it’s by going through the storm that we actually learn to stand in the calm. For me, peace comes in a variety of shapes and shades. Therefore, from the abnormal comes the normal, and from an ever-changing world comes a world that is still. To live in Palestine means to live constantly in fear: in fear of losing our lives, our normality, and our stillness. Our peace of mind resembles the Trojan horse that smoothly enters our lives but soon enough gives way to insecurities. This temporary peace of mind is just a painkiller that numbs the feeling for a little while, until the fears and insecurities start kicking in again. This peace of mind is the sun on a cloudy day that must be enjoyed while it lasts. But we know that the sun won’t last. Clouds will overshadow it, bringing gloomy and grey skies again.

To live in Palestine is to live with a madman whose thoughts, logic, and next moves are unknown. Nonetheless, experiencing the madness enables us to extract the hidden element called peace of mind. All my life I have known that living is not easy, and I have been disappointed by that fact. However, to be seduced by a message of comfort, ease, and rest would be my downfall. In Palestine, we must remain as unimpressed as possible. To live under the illusion that we would ever be given physical and psychological security on a golden plate would lead us astray, into a world where the blind lead the blind.

Muna Nassar is a freelance translator, writer, and enthusiastic bookworm. She spends her free time reading, enjoying classical music, and dreaming of a better future. She is involved in the cultural domain in Bethlehem, has worked in the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP), and is currently working with Kairos Palestine.



“I have found both freedom and safety in my madness.”
Gibran Khalil Gibran