

Israelifying Air(ports)

By Mahmoud Zidan

Last Thursday, the Royal Jordanian Airlines satirically tweeted twelve recommendations to its passengers because of the U.S. and U.K.'s respective governments' ban of electronic devices larger than "smart" phones on planes flying to those countries.

The recommendations are as follows:

"1. Read a book. 2. Enjoy a light snack. 3. Say hello to the person next to you. 4. Meditate. 5. Spend an hour deciding what to watch. 6. Appreciate the miracle of flight. 7. Engage in primitive dialogue from the pre-internet era. 8. Reclaim territory on armrest. 9. Pretend tray table is a keyboard. 10. Shop till you drop from the onboard duty free. 11. Analyze the meaning of life. 12. Think of reasons why you don't have a laptop or tablet with you."

I would like to take up the challenge of thinking about the last recommendation.

Many can provide conjectures as to why the American and British authorities made that decision, despite the fact that both administrations refer to Jordan and the other countries to which the ban applies as allies. Some put forth the plausible claim that U.S. airlines put pressure to bear on their government so that they can make more profits.

Others suggest that it was purely a security measure.

The latter seems less plausible, particularly because passengers from the countries in question already go through meticulous security measures that can at times be described as invasive and humiliating before boarding planes.

I think that the reason seems to lie elsewhere: the Israelification of world airports. In other words, the ban was inspired by Israel.

It then behooves one to examine the Israeli prototype: understand its structure and know how it treats its passengers, a large number of whom are Palestinians. An example is in order: Ben Gurion Airport. I will pass over—the pun is intended—the history of its construction, the symbolism of its architectural design, and the person after whom it is named—all of which are crucial issues.

Instead, I will focus on what happens at it. Pursued by the pervasive surveillance at the airport, the “Others” of Israel—Palestinians and pro-Palestinian activists—are all rendered suspects. Racial profiling that targets them is even an acceptable and normative procedure conducted with temerity by airport officials.

According to a 2016 report published by Adalah (the Legal Center for Arab Minority in Israel), Palestinians are consistently discriminated against by the personnel of Israel Airports Authority. Palestinians have to experience strip-searches, interrogation, luggage confiscation, and being escorted to the gate, all of which are practices that infringe on Palestinians’ sense of dignity and privacy and are—ironically enough—in violation of Israeli law, an oxymoronic phrase.

These practices, however, do not only take place at airports located in the state of Israel but also at other airports when Palestinians board planes operated by Israeli carriers such as the notorious El Al, because of which gates become detention centers for Palestinians.

When onboard of the plane, Palestinians are often deprived of the right to have their hand baggage with them due to officials’ earlier confiscation of their belongings. More

often than not, they cannot even use their electronic devices (which they may not be allowed to recover).

The confiscation of baggage, the forcible removal of clothes, lengthy interrogations, and the ban of electronic devices are all instances of and attempts at de-civilizing Palestinians, the transformation of Palestinians into uncivilized people. Now, these practices are predominant, as Israeli paranoia, projection, and siege mentality have become the golden—or rather rusty—standard.

The inspiration for the practice and its rationalization is now clear, which were followed by practical steps.

In June, of 2016, more than 150 officials from the U.S., European and African countries, and Russia were drilled into the measures adopted by the IAA. This coordination is part of a larger coordination effort on the part of the U.S. administration with the state of Israel. In fact, U.S. President Donald Trump was recently clear about his model: “[I]n Israel, they profile. They’ve done unbelievable job, as good as you can do.”

The similarities between the U.S. and Israeli political systems are many, and require further treatment. However, a pattern can be observed. Israelifying Air(ports)

The Royal Jordanian Airlines has not. On the contrary, it has implicitly laid bare the Israelification of airports and has made all of the options of de-Israelification on the table, including sarcasm.

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