
Leaving, Again.

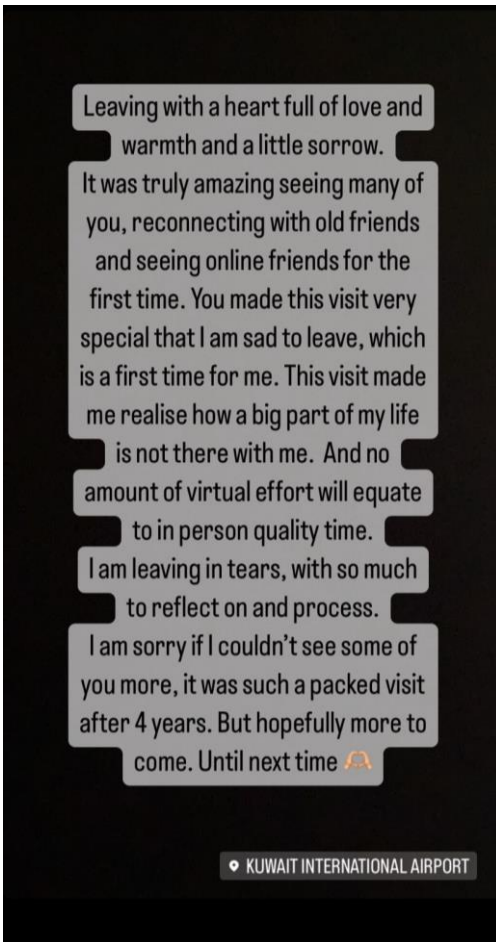
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Abstract

This short reflection with a photo is based on an emotional moment I had during my last visit to Kuwait, where I was born a third-generation stateless person, and later emigrated from to Canada, where I currently reside. It is an expression of the emotional and social manifestations of living between two countries and experiencing the loss of time with family and friends. It is an expression of the yearning for social connections that I left behind. It is also an attempt to reconcile with the experiences of forced migration and distance, which are not always successful.

Keywords

forced migration, statelessness, emigration, family, community, transnationalism



A Post on my Instagram Story—January 3, 2024.

I was sitting by the gate, ready to board my flight from Kuwait to Toronto, when I suddenly burst into tears. I've been living in Canada for years now, on and off between here and Kuwait, where I was born a third-generation stateless person, and years later, forced to emigrate from, when my family and I were denied our right to belong, and our historical relationship to the land, by being deprived of nationality. After years of living between the two countries, I finally settled in Canada when I realized I don't have long term security in Kuwait, including a career potential. Although I say I settled here, often telling others that Canada is my permanent home now, I've never felt this to be the truth, not deep down, anyways. Yet, at the same time, I can't say that I can "return" home to Kuwait, either. Despite

having ongoing social and emotional ties to the country, such as through my family and friends, I don't have a future there. Not one I can imagine at least. I belong to a marginalized community that faces systematic oppression. And no matter how many degrees I hold now, I don't have a chance to build the career I aspire to have in Kuwait. So, I remain here for now, but a big part of me is missing.

I used to visit Kuwait annually, but when COVID-19 hit, it interrupted these frequent visits. Until recently, it's been four years since my last trip. But I stayed connected with my family and friends virtually, through WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Zoom. When I finally went back this winter, I was filled with overwhelming emotions. It had been too long, and I felt as though things had changed. Part of this change was also in me. I am not the same person I was when I left, and neither are family and friends I left behind. When they said that migration is a one-way road, they meant that we never return to who we were at the first point of departure, even when we do physically return. But being away for such a long time created a gap that I am still trying to understand. At first, I didn't mind being so far away. In fact, I used to love it. It gave me the space to learn more about myself and explore the larger world. I thought I was okay with the distance for the longest time. But now I've learned how much I've been craving the warmth of close connections, the in-person quality time, the long night chats, the morning coffees, the brunches by the beach, and the hugs. I've learned that my distance from Kuwait meant missing out on making core memories with loved ones. The kind of memories that shape who you are and your relationship with others. Sweet and tangible. Like candy stuck between your teeth. I've lost so much time that can never be regained.

I know now that the reason I was glued to my phone every day, was because I wanted to stay connected, and to not be forgotten, because distance can do that. I have already felt so many friendships fade away because of the distance, and now I find myself trying to hold on to those who I have left behind. Yes, I made new friends

virtually. And I even had the chance to meet them in person this winter. And it was beautiful. But now, after leaving, again, I am more aware than ever of how the distance creeps into my relationships. This time, I was very sad to leave.

I wasn't ready to go. Not this time. I didn't get enough time with my loved ones. I was there for a month, but it felt so much shorter than that. I tried to squeeze in all the meetings I could. Squeeze out all the love I craved, to give and receive, to pack entire worlds into the short period of time I was home. But the love was much bigger than the time I had; it couldn't fit. I had to leave eventually, again, with a big part of my life staying behind without me, carrying fragments of it in my heart. A big part of my life is now away from me. And no matter what I do to stay connected, it's not the same. I know that now. That no matter what I choose, no matter where I choose to live, I cannot have it all. I will always be giving up something wherever I go. Oh, the luxury to have it all...

Acknowledgments

To friends and family who have kept me afloat all these years by staying virtually connected. Your love is a gift I cherish, and it is the reason I look forward to every visit. No matter the distance.

Author Biography

Areej Alshammiry (she/her) is a Vanier doctoral fellow in Sociology at York University, Toronto, Canada. She is also a community-based researcher at the Centre for Community Based Research, a member in the Interim Core Group of the Global Movement Against Statelessness, and a graduate affiliate at the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University. Her research explores state violence and statelessness. She examines the coloniality of human rights and international law. Specifically, she looks at how colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and racial ontologies/epistemologies inform our understanding of sovereignty, rights, membership, and land. She is interested in anti/de-colonial epistemologies and alternative human rights models and social/political/economic organizations, particularly those inspired by indigenous / nomadic / southern / pluriversal paradigms, and how they inform social justice movements around the world. She is currently exploring hows 'stateless' people reckon with statist and international regimes of rights and membership and its politics of recognition, and how they access justice. She situates her inquiry within subaltern struggles against colonial modernity. Her work is informed by social justice and community-oriented goals and action. She has years of experience working as an interdisciplinary researcher and a grass-roots activist, and much of her thinking is informed by the interconnections between scholarship and activism, as well as her own experience of statelessness and forced migration.