

I was breastfed war...

While pregnant, my mother witnessed a full-scale invasion of her city. She watched as houses in the village were demolished and soldiers entered homes without warning or permission. I was born during the first Intifada in Palestine; it seethed in the background as I took in my first breath. As I opened my eyes to the world, my mother's tears reflected the clouds of teargas filling the air outside the window as the call to prayer struggled to break through the roaring of the tanks that filled the streets.

A few months earlier, soldiers raided my family's home in the middle of the night. They shattered family pictures hanging on the wall, they broke the radio, they went into the kitchen and destroyed my grandmother's China plates, they took my mother's *Thobe* (dress) out of the closet and stepped on it until it ripped. The soldiers' barks and growls reached me before I was born. As my mother balanced her fear for our lives with her hopes for my future, my life flickered in her womb like a candle in the storm. My mother did all she could to take care of me before I was born, but the Intifada was imprinted on my body like a summer storm scars an open field. My mother's pain and memories of war infused the tissue of my developing heart becoming enmeshed in my soul like a prisoner trapped in a cell. She says that when our city was invaded and the Intifada took over the streets, her body could no longer contain her hopes and fears, and me. She said she could feel the strain of war flowing through her veins as she envisioned the flames of wildfire materialising from the lines in the palms of her hands. I was born prematurely.

As a young boy, I watched school children chanting to end the occupation as they marched through swarm after swarm of stinging rubber bullets. I listened as my mother cried and agonized about passing on the anxiety and pain of the Intifada. I felt her heart beat against my back as she laid next to me when I slept while she softly fretted over whether she had lost her humanity. I realize now that as I grew, so did the grip of the barbed wire on what should have been my childhood.