

As cases of false imprisonment multiply

Mahmoud Khalil asks: “What does my detention by ICE say about America?”

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In an op-ed column published Thursday in the *Washington Post*, Mahmoud Khalil, the imprisoned Columbia graduate student and legal US resident, posed the question, “What does my detention by ICE say about America?” Since March 8, Khalil has been in the custody of the immigration Gestapo and is facing deportation for the thought-crime of opposing the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

As of April 6, ICE reported holding 47,928 people in their facilities. Nearly half of those imprisoned, like Khalil—46.4 percent—have no criminal record. Over 12,000 are imprisoned in detention facilities in Texas, the state with the most detainees. Khalil is currently being held in Louisiana, the state with the second-most imprisoned, at over 7,000.

In the article, Khalil recounted his and others’ conditions inside the facility and reasserted the egalitarian principles that have guided him and millions of others protesting the 18-month mass murder campaign in Gaza.

He wrote:

It’s 3 a.m., as I lie sleepless on a bunk bed in Jena, Louisiana, far from my wife, Noor, who will give birth to our baby in two weeks. The sound of rain hitting the metal roof masks the snoring of 70 men tossing and turning on hard mats in this detention facility run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Which ones are dreaming about reuniting with their families? Which ones are having nightmares about becoming the Trump administration’s next “administrative error”?

On Friday, I sat in a courtroom as an immigration judge determined that the government could deport me despite my status as a legal permanent resident and despite that the government’s claims against me were baseless—much of their “evidence” lifted directly from sensationalized tabloids. The decision won’t result in immediate deportation—aspects of my case are pending in other courts.

While the Trump administration, Republicans and Democrats, such as Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, have accused Khalil of spreading “antisemitism” for opposing mass murder by the state of Israel, Khalil noted:

During Friday’s hearing, the government asserted on behalf of Secretary of State Marco Rubio that my beliefs, statements and associations compromise its “compelling” foreign policy interests.

Like the thousands of students that I advocated with at Columbia—including Muslim, Jewish and Christian friends—I believe in the innate equality of all human beings. I believe in human dignity. I believe in the right of my people to look at the blue sky and not fear an impending missile.

Why should protesting Israel’s indiscriminate killing of thousands of innocent Palestinians result in the erosion of my constitutional rights?

Khalil recounted the incarceration of thousands of Japanese-American citizens under the Alien Enemies Act during the administration of Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. Their incarceration he wrote,

... is a reminder that rhetoric of justice and freedom obscures the reality that, all too often, America has been a democracy of convenience. Rights are granted to those who align with power. For the poor, for people of color, for those who resist injustice, rights are but words written on water. The right to free speech when it comes to Palestine has always been exceptionally weak. Even so, the crackdown on universities and students reveals just how afraid the White House is of the idea of Palestine’s freedom entering the mainstream. Why else would Trump officials not only attempt to deport me but also intentionally mislead the public about who I am and what I stand for?

He concluded:

I pick up my copy of Viktor Frankl’s “Man’s Search for Meaning.” I feel ashamed to compare my conditions in ICE detention with Nazi concentration camps, yet, some aspects of Frankl’s experience resonate: not knowing what fate awaits me; seeing resignation and defeat in my fellow detainees. Frankl wrote from the lens of a psychologist. I wonder whether Hussam Abu Safiya, a renowned hospital director who was abducted in Gaza by Israeli occupying forces on Dec. 27 and, according to his lawyer from the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, has endured beatings, electric shocks and solitary confinement, will write about his ordeal from a medical perspective.

It’s almost 4 a.m. Thunder crashes. A few rows away, one man hugs a bottle of hot water in a sock for warmth. His prayer mat serves as a blanket, and his head rests on his shoes. A detainee

who was praying all night finally lies down. He was caught crossing the border with his pregnant wife and has never seen his baby, now 9 months old. I try to convince myself that this will not be my fate, though Friday's ruling makes that possibility more real than I want to admit.

I write this letter as the sun rises, hoping that the suspension of my rights will raise alarm bells that yours are already in jeopardy. I hope it will inspire your outrage that the most basic human instinct, to protest shameless massacre, is being repressed by obscure laws, racist propaganda and a state terrified of an awakened public. I hope this writing will startle you into understanding that a democracy for some—a democracy of convenience—is no democracy at all. I hope it will shake you into acting before it is too late.

Khalil is one of hundreds of students, and thousands of people, that have been abducted and held in overcrowded immigration detention centers in the first 90 days of the Trump administration.

Tufts student Rümeysa Öztürk subjected to “unsanitary, unsafe, and inhumane” conditions

In a court hearing held Monday, Tufts University PhD student Rümeysa Öztürk, another student kidnapped by ICE for thought crimes, described the “unsanitary, unsafe, and inhumane” conditions she and others have been suffering.

Öztürk was abducted by immigration thugs on March 25 as she was leaving her apartment to attend *Iftar*, the fast-breaking evening meal during Ramadan. In the court filing, she described being surrounded by the agents who refused to identify themselves until after they had placed her in handcuffs, “I thought they were people who had doxxed me and I was afraid for my safety.”

Once she was placed into an unmarked black SUV, Öztürk said the agents refused to tell her why she was arrested or allow her to speak to an attorney. She questioned the agents if she was actually safe. One ICE agent replied, “We are not monsters. We do what the government tells us.”

In what can only be described as torture, Öztürk wrote that after she was kidnapped, and after fasting for over 13 hours, the agents refused to provide her a meal or allow her to purchase her own food. The cruel Gestapo only provided her two packets of crackers and some water, which Öztürk did not eat because she feared it was poisoned.

Öztürk wrote that after being kidnapped from Somerville, Massachusetts, she was taken to a detention facility in Vermont where she was interrogated by four agents, alone in a cell. They asked if the Fulbright scholar was “a member of a terrorist organization.”

Öztürk wrote, “It was an isolated place with four men and it was terrifying.”

Following her interrogation, the next day Öztürk was flown to Atlanta where she had the first of several asthma attacks. The first attack persisted even after the use of her inhaler, yet agents refused to provide her medication to treat it. She wrote the agents told her she would have access to medication at her “last destination.”

Once she arrived in Louisiana, Öztürk said she was placed in a staging facility for hours without access to food or water. She said she and others were placed in a “cage-like vehicle and could not communicate with the officers detaining us.”

Upon arrival at the South Louisiana ICE Processing Center, Öztürk said

she had another asthma attack. She wrote that she was forced to wait for 15 minutes before agents decided to take her to a medical center. Upon arrival at the center, Öztürk said a nurse removed her headscarf without her permission and only provided her a few Ibuprofen pills.

Öztürk wrote that she has since had two additional asthma attacks while imprisoned at the facility. “I fear that my asthma is not being adequately treated and it will not be adequately treated while I remain in ICE custody,” she wrote in her statement. “The air is full of fumes from cleaning supplies and is damp which triggers my asthma.”

On Thursday, an immigration judge denied Öztürk's request for bond, leaving her imprisoned.

Georgia-born US resident imprisoned by ICE despite committing no crime, providing court proof of citizenship

In addition to students, immigrants and legal residents, ICE is also imprisoning US citizens, born in America, who have not committed any crimes.

On Thursday, *Florida Phoenix* reported that 20-year-old Juan Carlos Lopez-Gomez, a US citizen born in Georgia, was being held in a Florida jail in ICE custody, even after family members and lawyers provided a court-certified, watermarked birth certificate and Social Security card demonstrating his citizenship.

Lopez-Gomez was born in and is a resident of Grady County, Georgia, just across the state line from Tallahassee, Florida, the state capital. He was arrested earlier this week during a traffic stop; he was the passenger in a vehicle that police allege was going 13 miles over the 65-miles-per-hour speed limit. Despite Lopez-Gomez presenting the Florida trooper his Georgia state ID, the cop wrote in his report that the young man was in the country illegally.

Lopez-Gomez was imprisoned in the Leon County jail after being charged under Florida's Senate Bill 4-C, a recent anti-immigrant bill signed into law by fascist Governor Ron DeSantis. The bill makes it a state crime, up to a felony, for certain immigrants to enter Florida. On April 4, a federal court blocked the law from going into effect, ruling that it was likely unconstitutional.

This ruling, however, did not prevent Florida police from arresting and charging Lopez-Gomez with a misdemeanor crime for “illegally” entering the state of Florida as an “unauthorized alien.”

During Thursday's court hearing, the *Florida Phoenix* reported that Leon County Judge LaShawn Riggins examined Lopez-Gomez's birth certificate carefully, and stated, “In looking at it, and feeling it, and holding it up to the light, the court can clearly see the watermark to show that this is indeed an authentic document.”

After viewing the birth certificate and Lopez-Gomez's Social Security card, Judge Riggins said she found no probable cause for the charge but lacked the jurisdiction to release Lopez-Gomez because ICE requested the jail hold him. “This court does not have any jurisdiction other than what I've already done,” Riggins said.

Speaking to a *Florida Phoenix* reporter after the hearing, Sebastiana Gomez-Perez, the mother of Juan Carlos, said, “He hasn't committed a crime for them to hold him, that's what I don't understand. I'm feeling bad because my daughters are asking me how their brother is. It hurts because I can't do anything for their brother.”

While it appeared Juan was going to spend at least 48 hours in jail, ICE, fearing that his continued imprisonment could catalyze mass opposition against not only the agency, but the entire deportation apparatus, dropped its immigration hold, allowing the young man to be released Thursday evening.



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