

(D)IDN'T WE SAY (N)EVER (A)GAIN

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I remember the drives. Past sprawling suburbs with huge white-cement houses and decorative shrubbery. Then a couple of kilometres onward, slums, houses stacked on top of another with the precariousness of a game of Jenga. The call of the Muezzin flowing like a river through the narrow streets.

When they talk about apartheid, I think of those drives. Of the Arab cities not allowed to expand, forced to turn inwards, to self destruct through sheer density. Of the Israeli cities, engorged, gluttonous, ever proliferating.

My dad was a soldier during the first intifada. His memories are- teenagers posing as virile young machos, a drug addict who was their most hardworking comrade, breaking into the houses of Palestinians in the dead of night, walking around stolen land wielding shiny guns, and most overwhelmingly - a friend dead in battle. He would wake up years later, drenched in sweat, nightmares all the more horrible because they were simply memories, resurfaced and magnified.

So my parents left. Left so my dad wouldn't have to be forced to fight scared and innocent enemies, while sleeping or awake. They left the promised land, where years before my holocaust-surviving grandparents had sought asylum. But I don't like to dwell on the past, because too often it is used to justify the present. When all that really matters is the future.

My parents say there is no future for Israel. It is a land sick on its own evil, righteousness, desperation, and tragedy. Like the American Dream turned out to be a conspiracy, so the Zionist state falls and breaks into a million glittering shards.

I've been listening a lot lately to *Blowin' In the Wind*, asking myself those same insistent, inescapable questions. When will we stop seeing ourselves as *a people*, and instead simply as people? People with no more right to land than the earthworms that borrow into the mud and the blossoms that burst through the soil. When will we stop being so blinded by hatred and prejudice that we are repeating the same evils our ancestors fled from? When will we look past our own calamities and see the devastation we are inflicting on the people who should be our brothers and sisters, our neighbours, our friends?

I am old enough to know there is nothing simple about this. But I am young enough to believe it can be.

I think a lot about the story I have the right to tell. I have grown up in the safety, the peace, the relative utopia of Aotearoa. I am not being bombed, my neighbourhood streets reduced to rubble. I am not starving and watching my family starve. I don't have a stolen family member, who is either dead, alive or being tortured, yet I have no way of knowing. I can't tell these stories. I can't shed tears of self-pity. But I can sob for the country we could have had, the country lost the day my race took it from another.

God was the first collective punisher. He sent the 10 plagues of Egypt that we recite every passover. As if the rivers turning to blood, the parasite infestations, the thunderstorms, the darkness, the death of every first born son, is justified because one person wouldn't allow us freedom.

Now we burn houses, we bomb the sick, we starve the elderly. We complain when people make us answer for our governments' crimes against humanity. Yet we're fine with making children answer to a gun for no other reason except that they were born into another race.

I will finish high school this year. I will go to university, get a job, and raise kids. I will call my kids non-Israeli names. I will watch as my sweet, good-hearted cousins join the IDF. I will bear witness to terrorism, to genocide, to apartheid, to collective punishment.

I will be thankful every day that my parents left when they did. And I will always remember those drives, that visual testament to a country on the verge of collapse. Because no state can sustain such atrocities, and so I will watch as the land of milk and honey runs red with blood, and first-born sons die villain's deaths, gun in hand, trembling and frightened.