

Public Narrative
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Hello, my name is Maya and I am Israeli.

For some time now it has become increasingly difficult for me to say these three simple words.

While others carry their carry their nationality in pride, hang their flags in their rooms and sing their national anthem in a loud voice, I whisper - I am an Israeli.

Everyday I open the news and watch in horror and despair how fear, racism and hate consume my country. I see another stabbing, another death. Another house demolished. I cry with with the Palestinian mother who lost her child and jump every time my own mother texts me - I write to her is everything alright? is everybody safe?

How can I live in a country that occupies another people? That sees its muslim Arab minority (20%of its population) as second class citizens and that views African refugees that have gone through terrible atrocities and now seek shelter as a burden and a threat?

To live in such a society has become increasingly intolerable to me but I must also admit that it is no less difficult to make my home elsewhere.

I grew up in Tel Aviv its on it beaches where I first learned how to swim. Its there where I kissed my first boyfriend, where I rented my first apartment....Its where my family lives, where I speak Hebrew, its where I eat hummus and drink Arak and laugh with my friends.

Like all of you I have no other country, no where else to go. My nationality, my culture is in my blood it shapes - the way, I talk, the way I act, the way I dream.

So what do I do? How do I resolve my love/ hate relationship with my country? Standing here in Montreal it seems so easy to just leave my troubles far away, across the Mediterranean, and begin a new chapter in my life. Its true, I will never feel 100% percent Canadian, and I will probably never learn to love the cold winters, but at the same time I will be able to provide my future children a safer and better life.

But still I struggle. I know that like me 40% of young Israelis are willing to leave their homeland and build there lives elsewhere. 40% percent - imagine that! What will be left of my country if my generation just gives up, packs their bags and leave?

I have had a lot of time to think about this for the past year. **And while attempting to figure out** very personal questions like who I am and where should I live, **I realized**

that the solution for me and others like me does not lie in renouncing Israel, but rather working together to reimagine what Israeli can mean.

This is what drove me to become a social worker and activist in the first place, the desire to create an inclusive Israel that embraces its multicultural and multiethnic character. A democratic country that is not based on ethnicity but rather on a shared humanity.

Im not saying this is going to be easy. But you know what? I have not abandoned my hope.

I see schools where Jewish, Muslim, and Christian children play and study together. I see Palestinians and Israelis who have lost family members in this terrible conflict marching hand in hand in non violent demonstrations.

It is this hope, this glimpse of what my country can look like, that keeps me going. And it is this optimism, that ultimately drives me to return to my country.

There will be good days and others not so good, and there may be times where I will even question my decision. But deep inside I know that I do not have the privilege to look away because I AM Israeli.

Thank you.