



Never Again Means Never Again For Anyone

written by Maura Finkelstein
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I am not a scholar of Palestine. While I've spent time in the region and written about the occupation, this is not part of my scholarly ethnographic work. However, I am an anti-Zionist Jew who has spent almost three decades speaking out against the occupation. This is what I bring to this space.

Right now, we all have to figure out what our humanity is worth. For American Jews, this is particularly complicated. Can we stay silent in the midst of a genocide, carried out in our name, with our tax dollars? I hope not. But the silencing of our words and actions, carried out by the Israeli-controlled Zionist



propaganda machine, is well organized and devastatingly powerful. Speaking out against Israeli occupation has always been framed as anti-Semitism. Now, that tactic is being used to carry out a large-scale genocidal attack on Gazan civilians. Somehow, saying no to this monster of war has been twisted into support of the Hamas attacks on Israeli and American civilians on October 7th. If we try to contextualize the past few weeks within decades of occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and war, we are threatened, harassed, attacked, called anti-Semitic. The fear of such accusations is powerful. It is a weapon. It silences and silence can be deadly. But right now, our silence will cause thousands, if not millions, of people to die. On the one hand, we are powerless in this geopolitical nightmare, as US interests override basic humanity. On the other hand, our voice is more important than ever. We must use it.

Like many American Jews, I grew up in a world of contradictions. Like many Americans Jews, my religious education involved the repetition of violent words, images, and film footage, a demand that I carry the trauma of my grandparent's generation. For the most part, my family (like most American Jews) was untouched by the Holocaust. And yet, from kindergarten on, I was forced to bear witness, over and over and over again, to the devastation of that time, those events. I was told I was a victim. It was the only real identity I was allowed to have.

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By centering the Holocaust in my Jewish education, I was also told that I had to center Israel. I do not remember when the Israeli flags were first hung from the walls of the Synagogue I grew up attending, but suddenly, in the mid-90s, they were everywhere. For Bar and Bat Mitzvah gifts, friends and relatives planted trees in Israel through a campaign carried out through the Jewish National Fund (JNF) - a project framed as "helping the desert grow" while masking a violent



international act of erasure. Deciduous trees planted over razed Palestinian villages and olive groves.

Most American Jews grow up hearing that if we aren't vigilant, the Holocaust will happen again. "Never forget," we are told. We are forced to see, over and over, the emaciated bodies of concentration camp victims, we read and sit through hundreds of iterations of Anne Frank's autobiography, we walk through the halls of Holocaust museums and are told, "This is who you are," are told, "You are a victim," are told, "You are vulnerable. Never forget." What does that do to us as American Jews? We are currently watching this play out in Gaza.

For Jews in America, this repetition of "Never Forget" allows for our religious identities to be transformed into political affiliations: "We stand with Israel." This identity is so powerfully rooted in genocide that most American Jews have been unable to see outside the walls of their own generational trauma and, therefore, unable to see [Israel as the anti-Semitic project it is](#). The United States and Europe will never have to truly confront their own anti-Semitism as long as Israel is held up and celebrated as the one place Jews can feel safe. This safety is a mirage and this trauma is blinding - it allows us to center our own pain while blindly participating in the ongoing genocide of Palestinian people. "Never forget" has become a chant of complicity. "Never forget" allows American Jews to ignore all other forms of suffering by reproducing the suffering of past generations.

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If we are currently silent as a genocide in Gaza is carried out in our name, then we have failed to see the real message beneath this blanket of manipulation and propaganda. "Never forget" should be a call to action. "Never forget" should force all Jews to acknowledge how easy it is to dehumanize an entire population. "Never forget" should remind us that genocide is constantly occurring as the world watches. "Never forget" should turn all Jews into activists on behalf of the Palestinian people. Instead, "Never forget" has turned us into the perpetrators. By rooting our identity in the Holocaust, we continue to reproduce generational



trauma. And in reproducing this generational trauma, we give ourselves permission to participate in genocide as a way of pretending to protect ourselves from the past. We have never given ourselves permission to heal. We have never liberated ourselves from the cycle of abuse. And so we simply continue to roll beneath the waves.

Throughout the week of October 16th, [Jewish Voices for Peace](#) and [If Not Now](#), two anti-Zionist Jewish groups invested in peace and anti-occupation work around Palestine and Israel, staged a series of actions and rallies across the United States. On Wednesday, October 18th, I went to Washington DC for the rally on the Mall. We gathered at noon and sat in the sun, which illuminated the Palestinian Flags framing the capitol building. There were food trucks and signs reading “Never Again Means Never Again For Anyone.” There were Jews and Palestinians and everyone in between. There were people wearing kippah and keffiyeh and hijab. There were babies and dogs and young punks and grandmothers. We screamed “Never Again means Never Again for Anyone!” This is the legacy we should be bringing into the current moment. For people speaking out against the genocide in Gaza, there will surely be consequences. We may lose friends and family, our jobs, our safety. But we must ask ourselves, can we live with our silence? I hope the answer is no.