

I'm a potential martyr, too

Orit Arfa's essay on her personal reaction to the Tel Aviv shooting – a horror that somehow felt different

My first thought when I heard about the shooting at the Simta pub on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street that killed two was not: Do I know anyone hurt?

It was not: Will this change my going-out habits in Tel Aviv?

It was not: What can I do to stop this?

It was not: I feel so bad for the victims.

It was this admittedly insensitive thought: Do I really have to post something about it on Facebook now?

For the past few months, since the outbreak of violence, I've just wanted to blank out on these "random" car-rammings and stabbings in Jerusalem (and Gush Etzion, and Ra'anana, and Kiryat Gat, etc.). I've not wanted to interrupt my Facebook feed with status updates of death. I've been longing for my newsfeed to be filled with life.

Yes, my life – my selfish life – the one I've been able to live happily in Tel Aviv, for the most part.

I'd already done all my thinking about such gruesomeness – all that mourning, that raging, that empathy – when the second intifada broke out in 2000 while I was living in Jerusalem. Not a month went by without a massive suicide bombing within a mile or two radius of my apartment on Balfour Street, like the massacres at Sbarro, at Café Hillel, and especially at Moment Café – where I might have died along with my fellow night owls, had I not decided to stay home to watch a movie instead of going out.

I remember avoiding cafés until we started paying that extra "security fee" for a security guard. I remember having to take a cut in my salary since the drop in tourism affected the museum where I worked. I remember how thankful I was to have a car so that I didn't need to rely on a bus. I remember waiting for the government to actually do something rather than encourage us to "hug each other," which is what I recall convicted felon and then-Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert saying on television after one of the attacks.

Back then I eventually went from a starry-eyed, let's-make-peace-with-the-two-state-solution idealist to a rabid pro-settlement warrior who saw the problem not as a territorial one but as a religious one.

Jihad. It's all I could think about. I wrote op-eds, blogs, mass emails and even a political romance novel to share ideas that I felt could shape our culture out of this mess. Back then Facebook didn't exist, so we had to actually form well-developed paragraphs – instead of our "clicking" capabilities – to make a point. I felt, with the power of words, I could make a difference.

Either that, or the power of more people getting killed. It took Hamas's massacre at a Passover Seder at Netanya's Park Hotel for the government to launch Operation Defensive Shield to weed out the



The writer at Tel Aviv's Saron market. (Orit Arfa)

terrorist network in the West Bank.

Apparently, neither my words nor the military operations that have since ensued have helped, at least not in the long term. We're back to bloody square one, and social media and all those solidarity hashtags haven't done much to help.

After months of attempting to ignore the "third intifada" on social media, I felt a duty to dash off a Facebook status about the New Year's shooting that occurred on Tel Aviv's most popular street, where just the night before my friends had partied. Certainly my Facebook friends were wondering if I was safe. They might also have been wondering what a recovering activist like me was thinking. They needed my courage, my strength, my caring to allay their trepidations and anger.

So I clumsily, begrudgingly blurted out: "How how how could someone just take a gun and kill innocent people? How how how? And how come our leaders have done nothing to stop it until now? How how how?"

"Until now?" replied one of my friends. She's right. Our leaders have clearly not done enough to stop these near daily murder sprees, but I had a sense that maybe now the government would take more aggressive action against the perpetrators and would-be jihadists.

This attack was different; it was conducted with an automatic assault rifle, not with the Palestinian poor man's dagger. It occurred in Israel's "bubble," the shining, fashionable metropolis that even *The Hollywood Reporter* recently

called "Hollywood's new billion dollar city." It was carried out by an Arab citizen of Israel, not a "Palestinian" supposedly seeking national liberation. It took the lives of Israel's secular youth – bar-goers – who would have none of this Judaism or Jewish nationalism.

An ultra-Orthodox Jew stabbed in the Old City – that's his fault for looking so Jewish. A settler driving his car on Route 60 – that's his fault for living in contentious territory. A liberal Tel Aviv bar-goer – he must want peace!

This Tel Aviv attack has only reinforced the fact that it doesn't really matter where any of us Jewish Israelis stand on the religious-nationalist spectrum. We are all potential, unwilling martyrs for Israel, against our will. It could be you, your best friend or your local shopkeeper. Government "assurances" that stopping these attacks will "take time" simply means that more Israeli civilians are going to die, that we'll have to be ready to sacrifice our lives, at any moment, for the sake of the state's slow, politically correct, "responsible" fight against Islamic terrorism.

That makes every average Israeli an unwitting, valiant soldier in the war of Islamic totalitarianism against the West, which makes sense, since the jihadists are designing this battle as the "Muslim next door" against the "infidel next door" – everywhere in the world – in part to make just retaliation nearly impossible.

We are playing, to borrow a phrase coined by anti-jihad activist and cartoonist Bosch Fawstin, "Muslim Roulette." Sadly,

ly, we don't know which of our Muslim friends, neighbors or co-workers we can truly trust. A Muslim from east Jerusalem who had worked for Bezeq for years surprised the national telephone company when he got the jihad bug and used the company car to ram into Israelis, killing a rabbi. As far away as San Bernardino, California, a seemingly dedicated, well-adjusted Muslim employee also got that dastardly bug and shot 14 of his co-workers to death.

What I'd really like to post on Facebook are my fantasies of hunting down and publicly hanging the terrorists caught alive along with their fellow aspiring Islamic "martyrs." But then I might as well get off Facebook, considering how many friends I'd lose. I'd really lose a lot on Facebook.

Instead, so many Israel-lovers who know we deserve better, and who believe cool, secular Tel Aviv is relatable to all of their Facebook friends, are posting gushy feelings about how, to echo Olmert, we must "hug each other" and how "terrorism won't defeat us." #JeSuisTelAviv.

No. It should be #JeSuisJerusalem. We are all the Jerusalem of 2000-2002, when I and my fellow Jerusalemites were petrified of walking out on the street, wondering if our day to die was today, except that I'm not as afraid as I was back then. I've gotten good at playing roulette.

In response to the attack, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for implementing law enforcement more vigorously in the Arab sector – which should have been done anyway. What will be the red line for the government to launch, finally, a strategic intellectual and military retaliation to stop these attacks once and for all? How many Jews will have to die and where? And what should the socioeconomic-political-religious profile of the victims be?

My sense was wrong. Even a shooting spree in the "billion dollar city" has not seemed to change the government's routine of feeble, unfocused, unprincipled action. The daily attempts at murder have continued unabated.

So, in the meantime, forgive me if I go back to posting about my travels, my books, my journalism articles, and my mundane annoyances and joys of life. In case you're wondering why I'm even writing this essay when I've claimed to have lost hope in words, it's because it was commissioned.

I'm not about to sacrifice my selfish life when I'm already a potential martyr just by living it every single day in this country, in this city, as best I can, even as I may think twice before sitting in a streetside bar on Dizengoff in the near future.

The writer has been covering Israeli society, politics, culture and lifestyle for over 10 years. She is author of The Settler, a coming-of-age novel set in Tel Aviv following the pullout from Gaza in 2005.