

## Talei Si'ilata

*The Shouting Valley* is a timely and necessary interrogation of the global and local implications of migration and movement through the experiences of those who are restricted from exercising these freedoms.

This is certainly true of artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Language Gulf in the Shouting Valley* (2013); a beautiful and poignant depiction of how humans innovatively overcome and circumnavigate borders for the purpose of maintaining connections, even if these connections are as fleeting as the echoing of voices across a valley.

Prior to the Six Day War of 1967 which outlined new borders between Syria and Israel, ten years earlier the Israeli Government had already designated the Druze as a distinct ethnic community at the request of its communal leaders. They have since recognized the Druze as Arabic-speaking citizens of Israel, who serve in the Israel Defence Forces and have even attained top positions in Israeli politics and public service.

The four Druze villages in the Israeli-annexed portion of the Golan Heights, unlike the majority of the Druze community in Israel have been, until recently, historically resistant to accepting Israeli citizenship despite it being offered to them. Whatever their reasons for not accepting, Israel remains willing to provide the Druze (who were not recognized as a religious community before the establishment of the State of Israel) with the same rights that all Israelis have.

Despite the political tensions and complications that are rife in the Golan Heights, the right of the Druze communities there to choose whether or not they wish to partake of this, is one that should be respected - and is. Israel's provisions, regardless of how enthusiastically they are accepted or not, demonstrates their understanding of the basic human right to exercise choice, and the human right of all peoples to celebrate and practice their unique cultural identity, irrespective of where they choose to reside.<sup>1</sup>

What implications would such an understanding have in Aotearoa? Migration, whether we like it or not, is embedded in our history. Aotearoa's indigenous people or tāngata whenua still recall the ancient migration journeys of their earliest ancestors from East Polynesia, and far from speaking about them as distant or fleeting memories, Māori stand on the unassailable truth of these accounts, so that when stating their pepeha, always mention the specific waka hourua that their tūpuna arrived on.

If we ourselves can arrive at the conclusion that migration has in large part shaped our human history, it is imperative now more than ever, that we ask ourselves if we are demonstrating our understanding of the right of migrants to maintain and celebrate their culture, language and ethnicity here in Aotearoa. Running parallel to this is the simultaneous responsibility of

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is the author's account of the Israeli view of Israeli-Druze relations.

migrants to have an understanding and appreciation of the unique rights of indigenous peoples and the distinctive relationship they have to the land within which they are living.

At its core *The Shouting Valley* explores the relationship between the state/government and the people, first asking who our people are, or more importantly whom we are excluding. In the context of Aotearoa, we must ask our government first to acknowledge our indigenous people, secondly to recognize all those who choose to reside in Aotearoa as *our* people, and finally to make sure that we are not precluding *our* people, including our migrants from the freedom of culturally being.