Kesher

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KESHER:
JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH PSYCHOLOGISTS

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Readers,

We present the 5th issue of *Kesher*: Journal of the Association of Jewish Psychologists; the first issue of 2026. The day after this issue went into production - the first day of Hanukah - we all learned of the tragic massacre at the Chabad celebration in Bondi Beach, Australia. Our hearts go out to all the victims, their families and to everyone who survived the carnage. Like the massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, this event and its lingering reverberations will be etched in our collective memory for many years to come. However, for practical reasons, we cannot do this grim milestone justice here and defer that task to issue number six. Still, we'd be remiss if we did not mourn the scale and ferocity of this latest attack on the Jewish community, or honor the heroism of Ahmed al Ahmed, who disarmed one of the gunmen (at considerable risk to his own life) and is recuperating in hospital as of this writing. In the midst of our mourning, we take some solace from the fact that the Global Imams Council promptly and emphatically denounced this and other acts of Islamist terror as something completely contrary to the ethics and the spirit of Islam and fervently hope that others in the Muslim world will now join them in doing so.

Since January 26 is Holocaust Remembrance Day, much of this issue is directly or indirectly Holocaust-themed and touches repeatedly on the role of museums and the impact of Holocaust memorialization on Jewish and non-Jewish communities. There is no shortage of controversy surrounding these issues. For example, in our previous issue Dr. George Halasz, an Australian psychiatrist, and the child of a Holocaust survivor, recalled the vivid and complex feelings and memories provoked by his recent visit to the Museum of Motion Pictures in Hollywood,

which features exhibits chronicling the efforts of Hollywood studio moguls to combat anti-Semitism in America before WWII. His characterization of Hollywood Jews elicited a spirited rebuttal from Dr. Carmella Grynberg in a letter to editor. The issues Dr. Grynberg raised are not merely relevant to the pre-Holocaust era, but to our collective situation post-Oct 7, 2023. I felt that her letter merited a response from both me and Dr. Halasz whose moving (autobiographical) case-study on trauma transmission and filial obligation follows immediately after our respective replies.

Dr. Halasz is followed by Professor Frank Furedi, who laments what he deems to be the abject failure of Holocaust education to deter or contain anti-Semitism in the 21st century. According to Professor Furedi, during the 20th century, Holocaust education and memorialization was robbed of its potency and power because it has been "hijacked" by "moral entrepreneurs" who attempt to universalize its meaning, turning it into an abstract morality play or a therapeutic exercise, accusing Hollywood of complicity in the "Disneyfication" of the Holocaust. He concludes by saying: *"It is time to give Holocaust education a rest. We need to shift our energy from educating the world about the Holocaust and challenge the ideological underpinning of antisemitism. What should really concern us is not so much the victimization of Jewish people by the Nazis as the threat they face in the 21st century. It is necessary to cease hiding behind the denunciation of a universal form of racism and focus on the particularity of antisemitism."*

Furedi's fiery piece is followed by a calm but lively and illuminating interview that Kesher's managing editor, Dan Warner, conducted with Lena Fishman, the Executive Director of the Golda Meir Museum on the campus of the University of Colorado in Denver. Fishman reflects on the Museum's role in preserving historical memory, promoting education and advocacy, and her fascinating experiences in the aftermath of October 7, 2023, when it suddenly became a site for some volatile anti-Israel protests.

Next an article by yours truly, Daniel Burston, which explores the historical and ideological connections between authoritarianism and anti-Semitism on the Right and the Left. Nowadays, Jewish psychologists, psychotherapists and educators are frequently confronted by the anti-Semitism of the Left on the listserves they frequent and their work-a-day environments. That being so, I argue that we need to study Left-wing authoritarianism more intensively and to address it more robustly. But to the surprise and dismay of many, Right-wing anti-Semitism – which never really went away - has reared its ugly head once again, grabbing headlines and creating increasingly bitter divisions in America's Republican Party and in Right-wing parties in Europe and the UK as well, threatening the very fabric of Western democracies.

My reflections on the relationship between authoritarianism and antisemitism are followed by an article by psychiatrist Dr. David Sasso on "the authoritarian turn" in Higher Education, and the compromises Columbia University, Cornell and the University of Virginia have made with the Trump administration in the interests of maintaining federal funding. Sasso argues that while the Federal government's interference in university affairs is unwelcome and potentially harmful in several ways, the Trump administration's requirements are strikingly similar to the policies and practices of these universities themselves prior to Trump's second term in office.

Our final article in this issue is by South African psychologist Dr. Martin Strous, who reports on the events and controversies surrounding a recent screening of *Outsider, Freud* (2025), the latest documentary by acclaimed director Yair Qedar at the 7th Global Mental Health Summit in Cape Town, where Left-wing authoritarianism, intimidation and bullying were vividly on display. He concludes with reflections on the betrayal of South Africa's Jewish Mental Health professionals by saying that

"identity-based exclusion violates professional ethics. Protecting the integrity of mental health work requires rejecting these tactics of discrimination and intimidation."

We conclude this issue of Kesher with a poem by Peter Austin, our Poet in Residence for 2026, two book reviews, and a brief summary of our editorial policies for the benefit of future contributors. We hope you find this issue of Kesher stimulating and worthwhile and look forward to gleaning your thoughts and impressions of it in the not-too-distant future.

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***Kesher*: The Journal for the Association of Jewish Psychologists welcomes contributions that provide thoughtful connection across Jewish psychologists.**

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Art, Poetry, Creative Works

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter from Dr. Carmella Grynberg

In a synchronistic moment, I read George Halasz's thoughts about his L.A. Hollywood museum visit having just listened to one of Prof. Thane Rosenbaum's podcasts, in which he spoke of the history of Jews and Hollywood. In his talk, he described how in 1933 a Nazi ambassador came to Hollywood. This man informed the heads of the Hollywood studios that their ongoing films would be studied by Germany, and that if they offended the Nazis or Hitler in any way, they would not be distributed.

Four of the studios operating at that time were owned by Jews. Moreover, these Jewish heads of studios still spoke with strong European accents, and they had close relatives living in various parts of Europe where persecution of Jews was taking on a vicious new life. None of the Jewish studio heads held their ground. They all acceded to Germany's orders. They never made a film that was critical of Hitler and the Nazis. It was Charlie Chaplin, a non-Jew, who dared make the film T*he Great Dictator*, a film that mocked Hitler.

And now, apart from a few voices, the Jews of Hollywood again stay silent about the atrocities committed on October 7, 2023, and some publicly criticize Israel for committing genocide and creating a famine. At awards ceremonies, some publicly advocate for Gaza and wear red-hand badges. In his podcast, Rosenbaum asks where the most famous Jewish voices, such as Spielberg or Streisand, have been in the last two years. The silence of these people has been deafening.

Such a very small number of Hollywood personalities have spoken up for Israel and Jewish populations being maligned throughout the world. So yes, Jews in early Hollywood suffered antisemitism, but I wonder now if their experience deformed their sense of themselves and shattered their courage. Their behaviours in the 1930s and 40s have taken root in a disturbing way.

Carmella Grynberg
Art Therapist

Editor's Reply

Yes, the silence of many Hollywood Jews is troubling, though in fairness Barbara Streisand, Scarlett Johansson, Sacha Baron Cohen, Natalie Portman, Gal Gadot, Amy Schumer, Jerry Seinfeld, and several others have publicly condemned the October 7 massacre and expressed their support for Israel. And yes, MGM, Fox, and Paramount all had offices and commercial interests in Germany until 1940, the same year Chaplin made *The Great Dictator.* But Jack (Jacob) Warner, head of the Warner Brothers Studio, made *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, an espionage/thriller based on authentic FBI reportage, in 1939—one year before Chaplin's classic comedy/satire. Warner and the film's director, Anatole Litvak, were Jewish, and produced their film despite the emphatic disapproval of the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by Congressman Martin Dies Jr. (D-TX). The Dies Committee was the forerunner to the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) chaired by Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WC). Representative Dies probably shared McCarthy's anti-communist animus and admonished all the studio heads not to make films that were critical of "friendly" foreign powers, which is how he (and many Americans) viewed Nazi Germany at the time. So, the pressure on studio heads to censor anti-Nazi films came from within the American government as well as from Hitler and his minions.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League was founded in 1936 by Otto Katz, a Soviet agent, but was composed chiefly of gentiles, including Dorothy Parker's friends from the Algonquin Round Table. They successfully boycotted Leni Riefenstahl's visit to Hollywood in 1939, then disbanded once the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed. Meanwhile, Hollywood studio heads—who were businessmen, after all—would have avoided getting entangled with Left-leaning intellectuals and artists while Congressman Dies and his committee were scrutinizing their every move. Finally, in 1940, the (isolationist) America First Committee was formed. High-profile figures like Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh—who received medals of honor from Hitler

the previous year—claimed Jews were pushing FDR and America into an unnecessary war, much as Tucker Carlson (and like-minded bigots) are doing today. Producing anti-Nazi films then would only have added fuel to the flames of their isolationist and antisemitic rhetoric.

So, could Hollywood Jews have done better in the lead-up to WWII? Of course. But let's not minimize the complexity of the situation they faced. There were powerful political and commercial forces, foreign and domestic, at play here, and parallels between the past and the present are bound to be somewhat problematic.

Daniel Buston

George Halasz Replies

Response to Dr. Grynberg and Professor Burston: Rewriting the Script of Jewish Visibility

Thank you to Dr. Carmella Grynberg for her poignant letter and to Professor Daniel Burston for his nuanced editorial reply. The Hollywood response to antisemitism, then and now, offers more than historical commentary. It serves as a cultural mirror reflecting with urgency how Jewish trauma, identity, and survival strategies evolve across generations.

Dr. Grynberg's deeply felt critique suggests that the silence of Jewish studio heads in the 1930s, and the muted reactions of many Jewish celebrities after October 7, 2023, are not simply acts of omission. They are intergenerational expressions of fear, learned behaviours from times when visibility carried existential risk.

Yet, as Professor Burston rightly reminds us, we must weigh these silences within their historical and geopolitical contexts: the entanglement of Hollywood's studio heads in U.S. political pressures, rising antisemitism, and commercial vulnerabilities. Today, those forces echo as "cancel culture" and social ostracism.

My *Kesher* article makes a parallel argument. Silence in the face of antisemitism, whether motivated by shame, caution, or survival, is at best a temporary refuge. In the aftermath of October 7, I experienced a resurgence of frozen filial loyalty, hypervigilance, and a retraumatized invisibility. Repair, for me, demanded speech. Speech reclaimed agency.

Today's Jewish artists and public figures inherit an urgent moral opportunity: not just to create dreams, but to bear witness. Not merely to echo trauma, but to reshape its legacy.

Our ancestors often had no choice. Their caution was courage in that context. But in honouring them, we are not bound to repeat their silences. I have chosen to rewrite my family's script, to voice inconvenient truths. It has cost me friendships and colleagues.

But it has restored something deeper: to dare to be visible.

George Halasz

FROM EMBODIED WITNESS TO SELF REGULATION: A SINGLE CASE-STUDY OF HOLOCAUST TRAUMA TRANSMISSION AND FILIAL OBLIGATION

BY GEORGE HALASZ

This paper marks a pivotal transition in my 25-year exploration of Holocaust trauma transmission between survivor parents and their children. As the only child of Alice, a Holocaust survivor, my research identity and personal subjectivity were shaped by our life-long co-dependence.

Only after Alice's death, December 9, 2023, did I begin to grasp the full impact of our unspoken mother-son pact; her over-protection entwined with my compulsive 'duty-of-care'. Her absence necessitated a shift in my research method from co-authored trauma inquiry to triangulated data integrating self-analysis, daily journaling, therapeutic insight, and somatic markers. Autonomic dysregulation, through the lenses of Schore's relational trauma model and Porges' polyvagal theory, linked the neurobiological survival mechanisms to my recovery from Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) symptoms.

This paper traces how my final relational rupture with Alice coming just two months after October 7, created two vectors of a perfect psychological storm, to transform our co-authored case-study into a self-authored narrative. While acknowledging the methodological limits of single-case research, I argue that such approaches can offer clinically valuable insights into inherited trauma, identity fragmentation, and repair in families shaped by survival.

Introduction: Theoretical Background and Research Aims

For 25 years, I stood in relation to my mother, Alice, as a Holocaust survivor's son, co-researcher and primary late-life carer. Our relation was never merely next of kin. Our unique research partnership also complicated a mutual entanglement, co-dependence, forged through an exaggerated sense of filial obligation, years of silence, and the erosive drip of historical trauma that reactivated after October 7.

In keeping with Felsen and Frumer's (2024) online forum responses of children of Holocaust survivors as American Jews, similarly I also experienced a sense of internal and external existential threats as an Australian Jew. The periphery of my awareness was framed by dual realities: in the here-and-now my elderly mother was dying while daily I witnessed rising social antisemitic rhetoric and attacks. Both realities exposed my vulnerability as a soon to be orphan of Holocaust survivor parents.

My mother and I were familiar with the dynamics on Holocaust survivor families which formed the essence of our collaborative research (Halasz, 2001, 2002, 2012, 2017). Through our bespoke explorations, I learnt that my mother's over-protective parenting style was organized around her history of surviving the murder of her mother, Esther, and little sister, Zsuzsi, aged 8, in the gas chambers. Her mothering was haunted by a double memorial imperative: A duty to ensure that her embodied trauma would not be repeated by losing her only son; and to preserve her losses, her sacred memory, through her son's awareness.

The year after she became a widow, aged 70, she made the difficult decision to give her living four-hour video testimony to the then Visual History Foundation (1998). That historical archive, founded by Stephen Spielberg in the mid-1990's, now stores over 50,000 survivor testimonies.

As I observed and listened to her story I gradually transformed from just being her son, to become her silent living witness. That confrontation with her past transformed my understanding of later conversations, gestures, fleeting moments of tension in our relationship. I felt mesmerized by a command: You are obliged to remember her story, even if it breaks you.

I tried my best to obey.

But how could I remember, when I realized that each time I viewed her video I was so overwhelmed that my mind simply numbed. At that time while reading Professor Shoshana Felman's (1992) account of a similar impact on her Yale English literature undergraduate class when they viewed videos of survivor's testimonies, I decided to frame my mother's video in a research context. For a full account of how I adapted Alice's video to a split-screen research study.

An image of George Halasz and his mother, Alice, from the Visual History Foundation. Courtesy of the author.

Through our research I learned to listen not only to my mother's words, but to her silences. Later I learnt that I also carried her narrative and its burdens as if they were my own. Mucci's (2019) term, 'embodied witnessing', captures my process where 'the analyst (son) has to have a continuous access and empathic connection to the wounded parts of the other (mother) in the continual regulatory and interpersonal work' (p. 544).

In other words, when I committed myself to become Alice's 'empathic' witness to her dissociated or unsymbolized states through my bodily attunement and regulatory co-presence,

I was unaware that in doing so, I suspended my own subjectivity. Still later, I learnt this suspension of my self-awareness reflected my own dissociative states (Hopenwasser, 2008, 2017) which stretched between my roles as interpreter, researcher, son, and silent, expert witness.

This posthumous paper marks a radical departure from that decades-long rhythm. Not from Alice, but from the idea that my research identity must always serve hers. Now, after October 7, I begin the difficult task of claiming a transitional space from which I speak for myself.

Methodology: From Group Studies to Single Case Triangulation

Previous models of Holocaust trauma transmission often relied on the 'gold standard' research designs, randomized controlled studies that contrast individuals as part of control groups, parsing pathology across demographics (age, gender, socioeconomics, etc.). These studies are vital, but incomplete. They rarely captured the intimate, lived textures of trauma's nuance as it reverberates between parent and child (Beebe et al, 2005, 2020, Lyons-Ruth et al, 1996, 2006, Stern, 1985).

While single-case studies do risk subjective bias and lack generalizability, their strength lies in illuminating micro-level processes often obscured in population-based studies.

My own single-case approach has resisted this group approach as I turned to the 'triangulation' path defined as: a methodology for examining data from diverse sources, to develop a more robust understanding of trauma transmission in Holocaust survivor families.

What's been largely absent in mainstream trauma literature is the perspective of the 'single' offspring, particularly those without siblings to triangulate difficult emotional crisis in the family. In my case, the absence of sibling differentiation intensified the relational fusion between Alice and me. It also left me without external witnesses to help metabolize, and later to symbolize our shared burden.

The 'triangulation' method encouraged me to integrate diverse perspectives and data points. It provided particularly valuable insights to my in-depth exploration of complex emotional states, like C-PTSD (Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017). While in my early career I relied on a single lens to focus on possible psychodynamic processes in trauma transmission, for example, Kestenberg's (1989) 'transposition,' now that view seemed insufficient to capture the full complexity of my current condition.

Therefore my aim shifted from previously seeking a unified interpretation for my distress, to explore links between my complex layered reactions and contradictions to the available neuroscience of Schore's (2001) relational trauma, survival and safety.

Thus, my single-case framework offered a renewed lifeline for survival as much as of scholarship. Every diary entry, dream self-analysis, bodily (somatization) symptom, and emotional rupture also became 'data.' But this data was never abstract. It was lived experience, up close and cellular. I would feel it in my gut, my head, heart, joints and skin, in the increasing levels of insomnia after Alice's death. The nightmares refused to dissolve.

The Pivot: Trauma Reactivation, Loss, and The Perfect Storm

My raw emotions after my mother's death, December 9, merged with my inner turmoil from the traumatic events I witnessed two months before, October 7, 2023, to re-activate (trigger) a profound inner turmoil, my perfect storm: unresolved trauma, loss, political threat and autonomic collapse.

Many supportive psychological sessions finally led to my realization that layers of previously unprocessed stressful life-events did not overwrite, or erase each other, rather they acted to amplify and re-activate previously unprocessed sensations. This culminated in my perfect storm, in layered disconnections between my body and mind. Up till then they remained sealed in my exiled self (Halasz, 2001).

I knew this necessary process of dissociation preserved my survival. Now, those very protective reflexes left me panicked, 'wired', unable to reset my nervous system. I remained unable to rest, sleep, or control outburst of sobbing in grief. Porge's (2022) polyvagal system, designed to regulate stress and danger within tolerable levels, was no longer theoretical. My uncontrolled overactivity had become diagnostic of acute C-PTSD symptoms.

Now, while I was striving to meet daily demands, filling in legal forms, reading coroner's reports, signing probate duty, closing Alice's bank accounts, rewriting my own will, and so on, I nervously tried to keep my growing anxiety and panic at bay. I did not succeed.

I confronted new personal questions: Who was I beyond an echo of Alice's suffering? What did my body's symptoms signal through overwhelming panic, dissociation and oscillation between emotional numbing and outbursts? How could I make sense of it all?

This phase marked the beginning of a renewal: not a break from the past, but an emergence from within it.

Reclaiming Subjectivity: Emergence From the Perfect Storm

Alice as a 17-year old, survived deportation from Budapest to Auschwitz, days later, the murder of her mother and sister, then transferred to Salzwedel and Bergen Belsen concentration camps. Her survival, shaped by privation, deprivation, dislocation, and terror reshaped her personality (Winnicott, 1963). Her maternal caregiving, although deeply loving, by necessity, was tinged with ever present hypervigilance characteristic of a survivor.

As a mother, this made her both over-present, in her words 'over-protective' and, at the same time, emotionally inaccessible. I responded not with rebellion but with alignment. I became a very good son. I attuned myself to her needs, fears, and silences. I become the 'parentified child,' a role in which I learned to parent her needs, anticipate her worries, witness her stresses, and skillfully translate these mirrored lived experiences in our research.

In psychoanalytic terms my unconscious filial loyalty perhaps even blended with 'identification with the silent aggressor' in my polyvagal adaptation to her nervous system's vigilance, curbing my own capacity for rest, spontaneity, and pleasure.

Based on our decades of co-research, through years of intimate conversions, my asking, her telling about trauma, our talking and telling, began to yield another possibility. Now, my lifelong attunement and commitment to Alice while she was alive, also served as a template for me to attune to my own needs. Finally my filial obligation, fully honored, began to transform to self-authoring.

This possibility had lain dormant for years. It stirred during Alice's final four years, overlapping with Covid isolation, when I became her primary carer. This possibility could only crystallize in my mind after she died.

New Embodied Data and Witnessing

Since Alice's passing, I've continued to use my embodied responses as data points: more episodes of insomnia, new whispering tinnitus, mobility disturbances, emotional flattening and numbing. My research now reaches deeper understanding to link these somatic symptoms with psychological distress.

My therapy support team provides a scaffold to inform my new triangulation and pivot points. Together with their valued input, I am constructing a framework based on 'goodness-of-fit.' In other words, I use their relevant observations, 'evidence', to support, refine and enhance my self-awareness.

As I track shifts in my daily sense of safety and levels of social connection, I make links to ventral vagal activation, to also rejoice at positive emotions (laughter, exaltation, smile, enjoyment) as well as negative ones (worry, sadness, rage). This may seem strange unless you consider that the deepest data still often remains non-verbal: debilitating numbness, a recurrent sense of emptiness, and sleep ruptures, all are still there but, thankfully, less frequent.

Here, my single-case method takes its most refined form: the self becomes both the witness and the subject.

The Gift of Trauma Transmission

I wish to be clear: my new phase would be impossible without the first.

The subjectivity I now explore was forged in the crucible of Alice's subjectivity; emerging from our rhythm of co-dependence. Her trauma transmitted not just damage, but depth to pursue and to fulfil my obligation as her embodied witness.

Now I am adding my voice to her inherited hypervigilance.

Our collaboration was not always easy. The costs were many: lack of trust in intimacy, loss of social spontaneity, and a constricted outlook on the possibilities for regulating my lifestyle. But now, as I find a renewal of energy (Stern, 2010) what began as my exiled self becomes scaffold for renewal.

And now, without her physical presence, I find myself curiously more able to feel her influence in ways I never dared, due to filial loyalty while she lived. In grief, I am finding freedom. From silence, I am finding speech. Through

rupture, I am finding my own narrative as her voice guides me with less urgency.

Conclusion: From Co-Researcher to Self-Author

This paper does not end my journey. It marks new possibilities for beginnings. Beginnings made possible by the very partnership that once defined me. I do not leave Alice behind as a memory. I carry her presence as enactments, now reconfigured in my subjectivity with renewed vitality.

I remain her son, still her scribe, but also, now, my own subject.

I remain a less vigilant son, and finally, slowly learning to feel safe while resting.

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WHY DID HOLOCAUST EDUCATION FAIL SO BADLY?

WE ARE PAYING THE PRICE OF TURNING THE HOLOCAUST INTO A UNIVERSAL SYMBOL OF EVIL

BY FRANK FUREDI

Today it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Holocaust education has totally failed to achieve its objective. The normalisation of antisemitism in many parts of the Western world and growing scepticism about the meaning of the Holocaust -especially among the younger generation – speaks to the singular irrelevance of Holocaust education.

As one commentator noted;

> Never has the Holocaust been so earnestly and widely "taught." Yet never has it been so clear that its lessons are unlearned. The cancer of anti-Semitism is spreading, and there is no deadlier symptom[1].

Perversely it seems that the expansion and institutionalisation of Holocaust education have run in parallel with the growth of Holocaust revisionism and antisemitism. Indeed, institutions of higher education have provided a fertile terrain where amnesia about the historical Holocaust has flourished alongside the normalization of antisemitism.

The historical Holocaust has been captured by the entertainment industry which transformed this catastrophic event into a Disneyfied morality play that exploits society's anxiety about victimhood. The unfortunate transformation of the Holocaust into a generic symbol of evil-detached from its antisemitic roots has been encouraged by a variety of moral entrepreneurs who have exploited the moral significance of the Holocaust to promote causes that have nothing to do with this event. Unfortunately, many Holocaust educators have been complicit in universalising this catastrophe to the point that every identity group was encouraged to own a piece of the Holocaust.

It has taken the tragedy of October 7 and the subsequent explosion of antisemitic hatred for supporters of Holocaust educators to begin to acknowledge the total failure of their project.[2] I still remember when I gave a talk to a UK based Holocaust Educational Trust in the early years of this century and raised reservations about its efforts; my audience reacted to my words with horror. Yet, for a very long time virtually every survey highlighted the lack of influence of Holocaust education. In 2004 a poll conducted in nine European countries by the IPSO research institute indicated that 35 per cent of those interviewed stated that Jews should stop playing the role of Holocaust victims. Although the western media usually brands East European Societies—particularly Hungary—for tolerating antisemitism, it is worth noting that none of these nine countries were behind the old Iron Curtain. They were Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and Britain.[3]

Skepticism and even the denial of the Holocaust has grown significantly—and in parallel with the expansion public initiatives designed to memorialise it. A report circulated in January 2017 citing Dr. Nicholas Terry, a history

In 2004 a poll conducted in nine European countries by the IPSO research institute indicated that 35 percent of those interviewed stated that Jews should stop playing the role of Holocaust victims.

lecturer at Exeter University, estimated that there are now thousands of 'low-commitment" Holocaust deniers online.[4] In December 2016 the top hit on Google in response to a search for the question 'Did the Holocaust happen' was a link that claimed that the murder of 6 million Jews was a hoax. It is inconceivable that back in the 1950s or 1960s or the1970s—before the public sacralization of Holocaust memory took off—there would have been such an interest in conspiracy theories that suggested that this act of genocide was a hoax.

And so, it continues. A recent survey has shown that one in nine young Germans has not heard of the Holocaust. A quarter cannot name a single concentration camp, death camp or ghetto. It also showed that 'nearly half of American adults could not identify any killing sites of the Holocaust'.[5]

A poll carried out by *The Economist* and YouGov in 2023 made for equally disturbing reading. It showed that more than a fifth of young Americans, aged between 18 and 29, agreed with the statement that 'the Holocaust is a myth', while a further 30% neither agreed nor disagreed. That means that less than half of young Americans firmly believe the Holocaust actually happened.

The growth of historical amnesia is worrying enough. But of even greater concern is the way in which the meaning of the Holocaust has been distorted and inverted by our cultural and political elites, and weaponized by anti-Israel zealots. Indeed, Auschwitz itself—a death camp designed for the genocide of the Jews—is fast being turned into something else: an all-purpose symbol of human cruelty. It is becoming Disneyfied, transformed into a gruesome theme park for those looking for an off the shelf moral message.

The regrettable sacralization of the Holocaust

A variety of moral entrepreneurs have sought to opportunistically harness the moral significance of the Holocaust to support their campaigns. Governments throughout the West followed suit and used Holocaust remembrance as a medium for establishing their moral authority. Consequently, during the last two decades of the 20th century the Holocaust emerged as a constantly used symbol of evil used by moral entrepreneurs.

One of the consequences of the sacralisation of the Holocaust was that it became torn from its historical context and turned into a preachy morality play that could be opportunistically used to assist the cause of forging a shared European memory. A former European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan Quinn justified the teaching of the Holocaust on the ground that it was a 'good way to have future generations understand the importance of fundamental rights, which are one of the central pillars of 'European' citizenship.' [5] Her exhortation to adopt the Holocaust as a useful teaching aid, illustrates the instrumental and

. . . the meaning of the Holocaust has been distorted and inverted by our cultural and political elites, and weaponized by anti-Israel zealots.

fundamentally social engineering use to which its memory was put.

Consequently often, the remembrance of the Holocaust has little to do with a genuine act of grieving or remembering. Instead, it often works as an official ritual that allows sanctimonious politicians and public figures to put their superior moral virtues on public display.

One of the consequences of the sacralisation of the Holocaust was that it became torn from its historical context and turned into a preachy morality play that could be opportunistically used to assist the cause of forging a shared European memory.

The belated transformation of the Holocaust into a transcendental sacred value in Western Europe was not so much an act of sincere atonement but an attempt to manage the moral malaise affecting society. The absence of moral clarity, which has led to so much conflict over values has created a demand for symbols and rituals that confer a measure of coherence on the social order. In a world where society finds it difficult to clearly differentiate between right and wrong it is important that some kind of line is drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Without a moral grammar to express ideas about right and wrong ethical guidance often has a forced and artificial character. For institutions like the EU and various governments the sacralisation of the Holocaust has served as an important resource for supporting its moral authority.

The sacralisation of the Holocaust has also provided society with a powerful taboo. Not being against the Holocaust is probably the most ritualised and institutionalised taboo operating in western societies. Numerous countries now have laws against Holocaust denial. In some countries the denial of the Holocaust is a crime, that in some cases carries a prison term of up to ten years. Preaching about the horrors of the Holocaust helps society avoid working out its own moral view of the world. Its transformation into a universal symbol of evil has helped promote the simplistic moral formula: to be against it is good and to be for it is evil. It is worth noting that these laws have proved to be singularly ineffective. Arguably they have contributed to the creation of a climate of skepticism regarding the historical Holocaust.

The Holocaust has become one of the most overused metaphors for evil in contemporary times. Animal rights activists in Canada refer to a Holocaust of seal. Anti-abortion campaigners in the United States have denounced the Holocaust of foetuses. In Australia there is talk about the Holocaust against Aborigines. Then there is the African-American Holocaust, the Serbian Holocaust, the Bosnian Holocaust or the Rwandan Holocaust. The label Holocaust can be appropriated to attack just about any target. Thus, everything from the erosion of bio-diversity to a loss of jobs can be denounced as a 'Holocaust'. Moral entrepreneurs constantly embrace the Holocaust to lend legitimacy to their enterprise. They also insist that anyone who questions their version of events should be treated in a manner that is similar to those who deny the real Holocaust. The expansion of the usage of the Holocaust metaphor has the unintended consequence of gradually diminishing its moral impact.

Preaching about the horrors of the Holocaust helps society avoid working out its own moral view of the world.

The demand that we 'learn the lessons of the Holocaust' has become a regular refrain that is adopted to promote a bewildering variety of causes. Frequently, warnings about a particular problem or threat are concluded with the assertion of 'it is just like the Holocaust' or 'just like

The label Holocaust can be appropriated to attack just about any target. Thus, everything from the erosion of bio-diversity to a loss of jobs can be denounced as a 'Holocaust'.

the Nazis' or 'it may lead to a Holocaust.' Such statements offer a claim for moral authority and can be deployed in the most unlikely of circumstances. When the Australian feminist Germaine Greer walked out of Celebrity Big Brother House in January 2005, she attacked her housemates for refusing to support her defiant stand against the "fascist" bullying of Big Brother. 'Persecution is what happens, holocausts are what happens when good people do nothing,' she lectured the public.[7]

Greer's thruway remarks exemplified a widespread tendency to instrumentalise the sense of sincere guilt and horror that images of the Holocaust can provoke. Unfortunately, this rhetorical strategy often led to the cynical manoeuvre of guilt tripping.

As Jonathan Tobin explained, the moral authority of the Holocaust was promoted through a narrative that 'sought to make its lessons palatable to non-Jews by universalizing its lessons.'[8] Unfortunately, the social engineering project of universalizing the lessons of the Holocaust detached the Shoah from its historical context. Its connection to antisemitism became increasingly minimized, which meant that any form of violent conflict could be branded as a Holocaust.

The Holocaust has been ripped out of its historical context. So much so that its historical meaning has now been thoroughly inverted by assorted anti-Israel activists. After Hamas's pogrom on 7 October 2023, 'pro-Palestine' protesters quickly characterised Israel's self-defence as Nazi-like aggression. On their marches, they waved placards featuring a Star of David inside a swastika. They compared Israel's siege of Gaza to Nazi concentration camps. They cast Israeli soldiers fighting to defend their nation as Nazi stormtroopers. In the most grotesque inversion of all, they cast the Hamas terrorists responsible for the atrocities of 7 October in the role of the Holocaust's Jewish victims.

Today the war in Gaza is often equated with Auschwitz itself. In May 2024, pro-Palestine demonstrators went so far as to disrupt an Auschwitz remembrance march with a 'Stop Genocide' protest. According to Maung Zarni, a supposed genocide expert, Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza is a 'repeat of Auschwitz', and a 'collective white imperialist man's genocide.'

This willful warping of the historical record is breathtaking. If Gaza is the new Auschwitz, then where are the packed trains transporting their 'passengers' to their death? Where are the deadly gas chambers? Where is the routine violation of the corpses of the dead? Anti-Israel zealots are not merely robbing the Holocaust of its horrific reality, they are also hollowing out its moral significance.

Holocaust inversion is rife among the anti-Israel crowd. As Lesley Klaff explained, it involves both 'an inversion of reality,' casting Israelis "as the 'new' Nazis and the

Its connection to antisemitism became increasingly minimized, which meant that any form of violent conflict could be branded as a Holocaust.

Palestinians as the 'new' Jews', and an 'inversion of morality', in which the 'Holocaust is presented as a moral lesson for, or even a moral indictment of, 'the Jews.'" An instrument of guilt tripping.

Advocates of Holocaust education promoted remembrance as a form of emotional healing or moral instruction. In this way educators displaced understanding with feeling.

Over two decades ago I argued in my book *Therapy Culture* (2004) that the main accomplishment of Holocaust education and the formal schemes designed to memorialize the Holocaust was to turn a genuine inquiry in to this catastrophe in to a moral ritual. One important reason why Holocaust education had such little impact was because it was underpinned by a therapeutic imperative that overlooked the demands of detached historical analysis. Advocates of Holocaust education promoted remembrance as a form of emotional healing or moral instruction. In this way educators displaced understanding with feeling. As I noted in *Therapy Culture*:

"Holocaust education has become less about history and more about the cultivation of emotional literacy."

We need to shift our energy from educating the world about the Holocaust and challenge the ideological underpinning of antisemitism.

Regrettably, the Holocaust also became the target of moral inflation, which led to its loss of meaning. Moral inflation—the hackneyed overuse of the Holocaust as a universal moral benchmark—served to empty its remembrance of genuine meaning. When so many social problems are framed through the narrative of the Holocaust it becomes stripped of its historical and moral depth.

It is time to give Holocaust education a rest. We need to shift our energy from educating the world about the Holocaust and challenge the ideological underpinning of antisemitism. What should really concern us is not so much the victimization of Jewish people by the Nazis as the threat they face in the 21st century. It is necessary to cease hiding behind the denunciation of a universal form of racism and focus on the particularity of antisemitism. Unless we radically transform our response to the threat posed by the new, 21st century barbarism we will continue to fail to grasp the real lessons of the historical Holocaust.

Frank Furedi's Substack goes out to thousands of subscribers in over 70 countries.

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INTERVIEW WITH LENA FISHMAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE GOLDA MEIR HOUSE IN DENVER COLORADO

BY DAN WARNER

During the recent American Psychological Association convention in Denver, Colorado, members of the Association of Jewish Psychologists board were invited to tour something many visitors to the city don't even know exists: a house once lived in by the iconic Israeli leader Golda Meir (1898–1978). The visit offered more than a glimpse into Meir's formative years. It became a window into the challenges of preserving her legacy in today's climate.

The museum's Executive Director, Lena Fishman, spoke candidly about both the historical importance of Meir's time in Denver and the harrowing antisemitism and political hostility she and her staff have faced since October 7, 2023. The tensions surrounding this modest museum—situated on a college campus—have far exceeded anything one might expect in a museum director's job description. Yet Fishman has faced these challenges with remarkable grace, courage, and moral clarity, offering lessons relevant to all of us engaged in education and community building.

In early October 2025, on the eve of the first anniversary of the October 7 attacks, Kesher Managing Editor Dan Warner met with Fishman over Zoom to record the following interview.

Dan Warner: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us at *Kesher*. I know you've put a lot of energy into revitalizing the Golda Meir House, and I'd love to learn how you came to this work. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing in Denver, and how your early experiences shaped your connection to Jewish history and community life?

Lena Fishman: That's a great question, and very fitting for how I ended up in this job. I was born in Denver, which is rare since most people here are transplants. But Denver and Colorado have a rich Jewish history, and my roots connect to Golda's story. My great-grandparents came here in the late 1800s or early 1900s. At the time there was a tuberculosis outbreak, and they lived on the Lower East Side in New York after immigrating from Eastern Europe. One of them had a brother who caught tuberculosis, so they bought three train tickets to Denver. Sadly,

the brother passed away before the train left, but the tickets were non-refundable, and since they were poor immigrants, they decided to use them anyway. They came to Denver; and that's why I'm here today! My father was born here too, in Denver's original West Side Jewish neighborhood. That's also where Golda lived when she came here. I grew up here, graduated from Denver Jewish Day School back when it was Rocky Mountain Hebrew Academy, and later spent a gap year in Israel. After college and graduate school I returned to start the first special-education program at Denver Jewish Day School, which eventually led to a career in education policy at the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

An image of the Golda Meir House Museum on the Aurora Campus in Denver Colorado. Image courtesy of Len Fishman.

While I was at the Attorney General's office, the Chief of Staff a Jewish woman named Leora Joseph moved to a new role at the Auraria Campus downtown. That campus houses three colleges, and also the small house where Golda Meir once lived. On her first day Leora was touring the campus: the gym, the library, the physics lab, the student center… and someone mentioned, 'Oh, and here's the Golda Meir House.' She couldn't believe it—Golda Meir's house, right here, sitting dark and forgotten. This was the summer of 2021, just as the world was emerging from COVID. She realized immediately that people needed to know about it. Given my background in education and program development, she recruited me to become the Executive Director. That was about four years ago, and since then I've been working to bring this story to life. We've been transforming the house into a museum and sharing it with the world. Leora Joseph doesn't work on campus anymore, but she's still a friend and serves on the Golda Advisory Board.

Dan Warner: When did you first learn about Golda Meir's connection to Denver?

Lena Fishman: Honestly, not until I took this job! Most people don't know this chapter of her life, even here. It's a small part of her story, but an incredibly formative one.

Golda was born in 1898 in what's now Kyiv, then part of Russia. Her early life was shaped by poverty, pogroms, and antisemitism. The family emigrated to Milwaukee around 1906. At 14 she finished junior high and told her parents she wanted to attend high school and become a teacher. They objected. A women who taught couldn't marry, you see, so Golda ran away from home! She boarded a train to Denver in 1913, arriving at Union Station, just a few miles from where I'm sitting now. She came because her older sister Sheyna lived here. Sheyna had contracted tuberculosis in Chicago and moved to Denver for treatment, recovered, and married. Her home on the west side became a hub of the early Jewish community. In that kitchen, Sheyna and her husband Shamai hosted nightly gatherings where workers, socialists, Zionists, women's-rights advocates gathered, and argued ideas deep into the night. Fourteen-year-old Golda begged to sit in, offering to wash

She couldn't believe it—Golda Meir's house, right here, sitting dark and forgotten.

teacups just to listen. She later wrote, 'It was in Denver where my real education began.' Those conversations shaped her entire worldview: belief in women's equality, workers' rights, and the dream of a Jewish homeland. She stayed less than two years, left after a quarrel with her sister, but returned to Milwaukee transformed. One of the men at those gatherings, Morris Meyerson, actually did become her husband. But, as always, their life together unfolded on Golda's terms.

We had hundreds of protestors right outside Golda's house. They blared megaphones, brandished hateful signs and chants, beat drums. It was very scary.

Dan Warner: Are there parts of Golda's story that especially resonate with you?

Lena Fishman: Absolutely. Golda was a mother of two children, and later a grandmother and even great-grandmother. She had to balance leadership and motherhood in a time when that seemed impossible. Some called her a 'bad mother,' but hearing her grandchildren speak, it's clear she was loving and inspiring. Her daughter even worked with her: in 1948, when Israel declared statehood, Golda became the first Israeli ambassador to the Soviet Union, and her daughter joined her delegation. As a working mother myself, I think about that balance all the time; wanting to be with my children but also feeling called to lead and build. Golda's story helps me make peace with that tension.

Dan Warner: Running a museum often involves both education and advocacy. What challenges have you faced in telling Golda's story here?

Lena Fishman: The first two years of the museum were joyful—school groups, visitors of every background. Golda's story resonates with anyone who's faced displacement or prejudice. Then came October 7, 2023. The attacks in Israel changed everything—especially on college campuses. Ours became a flashpoint for anti-Israel protest. Suddenly our work was no longer just history—it was defense, education, and solidarity. We connected with Jewish students and faculty, offered support, and began teaching about antisemitism past and present. Starting that October, we faced protests almost weekly outside Golda's teenage home. The noise, the anger—it was frightening. But it also clarified our mission: to create light in response to darkness.

Dan Warner: Are there any key moments that have happened over the last few years that come to mind?

Lena Fishman: There were a lot of bad moments. We had hundreds of protestors right outside Golda's house. They blared megaphones, brandished hateful signs and chants, beat drums. It was very scary. But the campus police were wonderful. They were incredibly supportive and kind, checking in on us, caring about our safety, and I'm so grateful. They handled everything calmly and professionally.

At first I was the one filing reports—sending photos and documentation to campus officials—but after a while, other people started doing it. Students, staff, even community members began complaining on our behalf about the disruption and intimidation. That helped the administration realize this wasn't just our problem; it affected the whole campus, and things began to change.

Most [protestors] were white American students, and there was no way to talk to them. Anytime you tried, they would shout in your face, shut you down, and not listen.

Dan Warner: Do you know why such fury was focused on you and this little museum?

Lena: Fishman: It really was rather a bizarre coincidence: This type of anti-Israel protest is happening on college campuses. And, by weird coincidence, there happens to be the Golda Meir House Museum sitting on this campus. In the 1980s the house was slated for demolition, and a number of politicians worked together to save it. Eventually, it gets lifted off its foundation and moved a couple miles to this campus that was newly built by the state of Colorado. It's a terrific story, but it's bizarre that there's this Golda Meir House Museum in the middle of a college campus in downtown Denver.

Because college campuses are the location of these protests, and because this campus happens to have a museum dedicated to the fourth prime minister and a founder of the State of Israel, it becomes a target for protest. When protests happen on this campus, they happen right in front of the museum; if they're marching through campus, they make sure to march by the museum. When protests happen throughout Denver—city council, state government—our little Golda museum became a hangout spot for protestors. They'd email each other: "Before we go to the mayor's office, let's meet up at the Golda Museum," or "After we protest the city council meeting, let's meet up at the Golda Museum." It's an inspirational place, and I guess for bad actors as well. We became an important landmark used by the protest movement—college kids and community members meeting in front of our place regularly.

Dan Warner: Did you ever get to dialogue with the protestors?

Lena Fishman: We tried, but you can't actually dialogue with them. One of the larger protests in the very beginning—probably toward the end of October 2023—had a few students who actually did have Palestinian roots. I was able to dialogue with them. They were very smart, and they listened. I don't think we agreed with each other, but they let me talk. That was maybe ten minutes. I invited them to come back to the museum to learn more. I didn't hear from them again.

But most protestors were not connected in that way. Most were white American students, and there was no way to talk to them. Anytime you tried, they would shout in your face, shut you down, and not listen. Our security teams that helped us through these moments over two years—and still now—asked us not to engage. The smartest thing to prevent violence or escalation was not to engage. It was impossible to engage without it becoming dangerous.

Dan Warner: So how do you engage younger generations—Jewish and not?

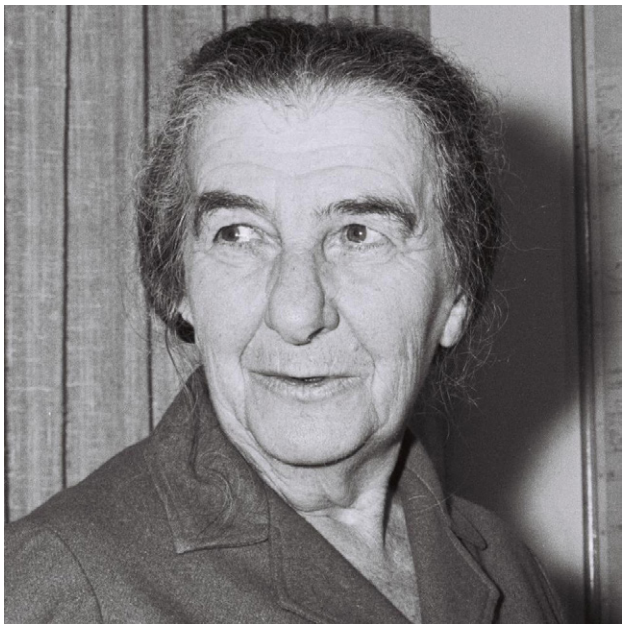
Lena Fishman: We asked, 'What would Golda do?' She'd choose dialogue over disruption, growth over destruction. That's what led to the idea of the Golda Meir Peace Garden—a space where people could plant and grow together, bringing light and cooperation instead of noise and division.

The garden grew from that vision. It's symbolic on many levels: people from all backgrounds working side by side, creating instead of destroying, bringing light where there was darkness. It's also dedicated to Golda Meir's great-great-nephew, the great-great-grandson of her sister Sheyna—the same sister whose Denver kitchen inspired Golda. He was a young Israeli soldier killed on October 7, 2023, at Kibbutz Kfar Aza. In Israel, he was a beautiful, very heroic 22-, or, you know, young kid who was in an elite unit in the Israeli army. He was not officially called up when all of this horrible invasion starts happening in the early hours of October 7th into southern Israel. He's not officially called up, but he goes with his unit on their own to a kibbutz called Kfar Aza. And he and his friends do save a number of people on that kibbutz. But they are sadly murdered while they are doing that.

We asked, 'What would Golda do?' She'd choose dialogue over disruption, growth over destruction.

I was fortunate, honored, to visit that kibbutz and to meet his family. Just a little more than a month ago, at the end of August, the Golda Museum flew his family out to visit. It was this remarkable visit where they've experienced this unbearable loss of their beautiful son. But they come to Denver and visit their great-grandmother's house in Denver, where their great aunt was inspired to become the fourth prime minister and founder of their country that they're so, so proud of their son, this beautiful Hadzar, gave his life for. It's an unbelievable moment that I don't even really have the words to describe—how meaningful it was for them to be there.

The city of Denver, many different Jewish groups, came together for a groundbreaking ceremony for this garden. It was this magical moment of healing, in direct contrast to the moments we had experienced two years before.



Golda Meir, Courtesy of Wiki Media (on the web at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golda_Meir_%28cropped%29.jpg).

We invited his family to Denver this past August. They visited their ancestor's home, the place where Golda first dreamed of a Jewish homeland. Standing there with them was indescribable—past and present connected through tragedy and hope. The entire Denver Jewish community came together for the groundbreaking of the Peace Garden, which now honors his life and legacy. It was a moment of profound healing—a link between Denver and Israel, between history and the present, between darkness and light.

And this is really where we are taking the Center now. We're doing a number of educational programs because we are on a college campus. In some ways, it was heartbreaking. This protest movement is on almost every campus, in other places in the world too, and no other places have this unique museum. At any moment, protesters could have knocked on the door and said, "Hey, tell me more about what's going on in here," but they never did. They didn't take advantage of it.

I did not feel supported. Jewish students did not feel supported. That went on for a long time.

We are reaching out to students across the campus who are willing to listen, creating educational circles. We have this garden; we're bringing students together to work in it, to talk, and to listen. We're reaching out specifically to political science classes, history classes, and women's leadership seminars—bringing together students willing to be in a vulnerable place with people they might not agree with, but who are willing to listen. Our goal is to help people have dialogue about difficult topics, but being able to disagree civilly.

Dan Warner: How has engaging other parts of the universities been going?

Lena Fishman: It's been challenging. Just speaking in my personal capacity: The leadership of the three schools and the leadership of the Auraria campus—the Colorado state agency I work for—were mainly silent for a long time. I did not feel supported. Jewish students did not feel supported. That went on for a long time.

The police department was extremely supportive and wonderful—our campus has its own police department—so there was a small part of leadership that was supportive. As I and others spoke out, the three schools and the Auraria campus started trying to do better and to be more supportive.

At first there was total silence. I didn't hear from anyone I directly work for or anyone in leadership. If 200 people were protesting your office, you'd expect your boss to call and say, "Hey, are you okay? Is there anything you need?" Nothing—total silence. We expect to work in a safe environment, not just physically but emotionally. I felt the police kept me physically safe, but certainly not emotionally.

Things did start to turn. I spoke publicly at a program the ADL had. People on the boards of the schools heard me speak and started calling administrations and leadership. Then changes began: they started helping support Hillel on campus, working with them; Denver foundations connected with administrations and worked with them to fund programs about antisemitism. Good things started happening for the schools. They're taking steps to be supportive. I don't think they've done enough, but they're doing more than they used to, and they're aware of it. It's somewhat better.

Everything she did, she did because she felt it would be best for the Jewish people and for the world; it was never about what would be good for her. She's different from most politicians today.

Dan Warner: If Golda saw the museum today, what do you think she'd say?

Lena Fishman: We recently hosted her great-nephew, and I've had her grandson here a few years ago. They are very taken by it; it's special when we have family members. Golda wasn't about telling her story or making it about herself. We think she's amazing—and human; nobody's perfect. She had a sense of humor about herself: "I would go to the beauty parlor, but it wouldn't help."

Everything she did, she did because she felt it would be best for the Jewish people and for the world; it was never

about what would be good for her. She's different from most politicians today. She took responsibility when things went wrong and didn't make it about herself. I don't think she would necessarily love a museum about her—there are no museums about her in Israel. Ben-Gurion has at least two; many other prime ministers have museums. Some might say that's because she was a woman, but I think her family would say she didn't want one. She didn't need a museum about herself.

I do think she would be very proud of the work we do, the programs we've put together, and the education we're doing—and the way that, like her, we are standing up for freedom and for democracy and against antisemitism. We're continuing her lifelong work; she would be proud of that.

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Lena Fishman is the Executive Director of the Golda Meir House in Denver Colorado. They love when people come to visit, and they also do virtual tours: PowerPoint slide shows for synagogue groups and other educational programs for groups not in Denver. Please find them on the web if interested.

ANTISEMITISM, ANTI-ZIONISM AND LEFT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM

BY DANIEL BURSTON

Following Donald Trump's election on November 8, 2016, many email list-serves that link psychologists and psychotherapists online were inundated with cries of anguish, perplexity, anger and despair. I subscribed to three such listserves—one psychoanalytic, one Jungian and one humanistic—and was struck by the fact that the questions and comments posted on these sites were surprisingly similar despite the disparate orientations of participants. One recurrent question (across the board) was: "What role should clinicians play in times of social and political crisis?" Another was: "How can we best facilitate a psychological understanding of the patient's (conscious and unconscious) response to events?" Along similar lines: "How do we address the anxiety of patients who belong to (racial, religious or sexual) minorities who feel menaced by Trump's rhetoric?" And a similar, but more revealing question was: "How do I address my patients' election-related anxiety and/or depression analytically, when I myself am convinced that Trump's victory is a catastrophe?"

Another question that popped up frequently was: "How can we bring our clinical community's special (psychoanalytic, Jungian or humanistic) gifts and perspectives to bear on the more widespread social malaise that spawned the Trump Presidency?" And finally, "What are our responsibilities as citizens and therapists and how do we disentangle and/or reconcile the two?" Despite their palpable urgency, neither of these questions nor the replies they elicited surprised me, really. Given the circumstances, they were precisely what one would expect psychotherapists to ask themselves and their colleagues. But another question that roiled the waters was "What explains Trump's unquestionable appeal to so many Americans?"

There was no single, simple explanation on offer. Apart from the likelihood of Russian interference in American elections cited by America's intelligence community, pollsters, pundits, and public intellectuals cited the abject failure of neo-liberal economic policies and the continuing fallout from globalization, the Democratic party's abandonment of the working class, the decline of the middle class, the revolt of rural and small town America against the big cities (and their elites), the failure of the American educational system, and the dwindling white

An anti-Zionist poster stating that Zionism is racism and racism is fascism. Photo taken by Khane Rokhl Barazani. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti-Zionist_poster.jpg

majority's fear that power is slipping away from them.

There was probably a measure of truth in all these explanations, most of which showed up in these email exchanges. But one thing that astonished me as I scrolled through all this angry and despairing online chatter was the absence of any reference to another potent factor that propelled Trump's election to office, namely, authoritarianism. Social psychologist Bob Altemeyer had warned about the dangers of an authoritarian takeover for decades, (Altemeyer, 1996) but very few clinicians—psychologists, psychiatrists or psychoanalysts— considered it a relevant consideration at this time. Though many have forgotten this by now, there actually was considerable resistance to the idea that authoritarianism was a major factor in Trump's election among the commentariat and clinicians alike.

Social psychologists were more realistic on this score. For example, Dan McAdams of Northwestern University wrote that:

> During and after World War II, psychologists conceived of the authoritarian personality as a pattern of attitudes and values revolving around adherence to society's traditional norms, submission to authorities who personify or reinforce those norms, and antipathy – to the point of hatred and aggression – toward those who either challenge in-group norms or lie outside their orbit. Among white Americans, high scores on measures of authoritarianism today tend to be associated with prejudice against a wide range of "out-groups", including homosexuals, African Americans, immigrants, and Muslims. Authoritarianism is also associated with suspiciousness of the humanities and the arts, and with cognitive rigidity, militaristic sentiments, and Christian fundamentalism. (McAdams, 2016)

While McAdams was quite justified in calling attention to this issue, his origin story was subtly (if inadvertently) misleading. Research on authoritarianism really began in the late 1920s among (Left-leaning) Jewish psychoanalysts in Vienna and Weimar who were trying to fathom the mystery of Hitler's growing appeal. One of them, Wilhelm Reich, published a book entitled *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* in 1933, the year Hitler seized power, and was forced to flee Germany. Reich's younger colleague, Erich Fromm, fled Germany that same year, but published several important articles on this issue in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* during the mid-1930s before *Escape from Freedom*, his first English-language book, a study in the psychology of Nazism, appeared in 1941.

...one thing that astonished me as I scrolled through all this angry and despairing online chatter was the absence of any reference to another potent factor that propelled Trump's election to office, namely, authoritarianism.

Furthermore, it is instructive to note here that McAdams' description of Right-wing authoritarians is accurate

as far as it goes, but he neglects to mention the "out group" most feared and vilified by the intellectual progeny of the Nazi movement, namely Jews. To be honest, I find this omission to be quite odd. Why? Because Theodor Adorno and his co-authors demonstrated very high correlations between antisemitism and authoritarianism in *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, 1950). And in the introduction to this book, considered a classic in social psychology, Max Horkheimer wrote: "The present inquiry into the nature of the potentially fascistic individual began with anti-Semitism in the focus of attention."

In fairness to McAdams, he was not alone here. If you sample the recent literature on authoritarianism, it appears that the relationship between authoritarianism and antisemitism, which was central to the concerns of Adorno et al. have now become peripheral concerns—almost an after-thought in many cases. The reason for this shift of perspective? American society was still fiercely antisemitic in the 1940s, when Horkheimer, Adorno and Löwenthal commenced their studies. Open and emphatic expressions of antisemitic sentiments and beliefs abated considerably in America in the 1960s and for several decades afterwards, only to come roaring back the 21st century. Now that it is prevalent once more, shouldn't we have another look?

In any case, odd as it sounds, it was only toward the end of Trump's first term that the idea that authoritarianism played a significant role in his rise to power gained traction in the media, thanks in part to a book entitled *Authoritarian Nightmare: Trump and His Followers*, published in 2020. In that book, former White House Counsel John Dean and Canadian social psychologist Bob Altemeyer offered Americans an in-depth study of Trump voters. Their findings demonstrated very high correlations between authoritarianism, on the one hand, and racist, sexist, fundamentalist and xenophobic attitudes, on the other. Indeed, echoing Dan McAdams, they said that nothing else predicts the presence of these noxious attitudes in the population at large as surely as a Ring-Wing Authoritarian (RWA) personality profile.

This time psychologists, political scientists and media pundits took notice. When Trump ran for office the second time, even some Republican critics of his were using this term to describe Trump's leadership style. Meanwhile, during Trump's first term, we were also alerted to the growing authoritarianism of the Left; many of us, it seems, for the very first time. Sadly, this problem surfaced on numerous email chains and on several APA listserves, where antizionist rhetoric with antisemitic overtones became distressingly commonplace. But though most of us gave it very little thought until then, the fact remains that there has always been antisemitism on the Left, which is why August Bebel called antisemitism "the socialism of fools" (Matgamna, 2024; Johnson and Spencer, 2024). That said, this new version is not the old-fashioned, Stalinist variety, which dwelt on the margins of progressive movements and causes in the United States after WWII. Oh yes, it still claims to be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. But the new Left-wing authoritarianism focuses chiefly on issues of race and gender, rather than class, and aligns itself with Islamist movements. Furthermore, it adopts the terminology of fashionable French thinkers whose postmodern mystique dazzled and disfigured the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s. And rather than dwelling on the margins, it has gone mainstream—first in academia, then in the broader culture (Burston, 2020; Jacoby, 2025).

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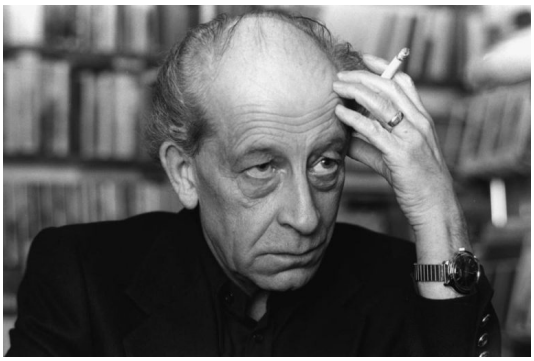

Author Jean Améry. Downloaded from the web page: https://therevealer.org/totem-and-tattoo-is-forgiveness-an-act-of-the-will-or-of-the-body/

The specifically antizionist aspect of Left-authoritarianism took root in Europe before landing on American shores. For example, Jean Améry, a Holocaust survivor, wrote an essay entitled "The New Antisemitism" in 1976. In it he said:

> . . . the troubles in the Middle East have given rise to terrifyingly simplistic notions. Today's unabashedly bashful antisemite is in luck. The existence of the state of Israel. . . provides him with convenient arguments. Have the Jews in Palestine not expelled people, the Arab Palestinians from its ancestral land? More importantly yet, are they not in the Palestinian territories, which they acquired by military means, a brutal occupying power comparable to the Nazis . . .? Are the Israelis not an outpost of global imperialism? . . . Is the struggle against Israel not part and parcel of the laudable progressive cause, as were the national liberation movements of the Algerians or the Indonesian peoples? And is one not justified in being apprehensive about the Jews in general, given that, avowedly or not, they will ultimately always side with the tyrannical state of Israel? One can call out "Strike the Zionist dead, make the Near East red!" and, while doing so, conceal, indeed, indignantly reject the insinuation that a further battle cry reverberates within this one: the Nazi's unambiguous "Perish Judah!" (Amery, 2023, p.51)

Later in the same essay Améry continued:

> How the Soviets treat their Jewish citizens is well known the world over. Like the Nazis before them, they imagine that each and every Jew is embroiled in a Zionist-imperialist world conspiracy. The New Left operating outside the Soviet sphere of influence, insofar as it is genuinely independent of the Soviet (of which I am not entirely convinced), shares the Soviet perception, though it does articulate it in a more refined manner . . . One should bear in mind that European terrorists are frequently trained in the use of Soviet weapons in Palestinian settlements euphemistically called "refugee camps" and that anti-Zionist kidnappers regularly find refuge in Soviet aligned Arab countries when their work is done. They are united in refusing, time and again, to profess their antisemitism, and I am perfectly willing to concede that they do not recognize their antisemitic sentiments as such. (Amery, 2023, p.53)

...sadly, the same is true in many Left-wing movements today, where denouncing Israel and Zionism as racist or genocidal is a non-negotiable precondition for belonging and participating in "inclusive" Left-wing spaces!

Much as they foreshadow contemporary controversies, Améry's reflections on antisemitic antizionism were addressed specifically to the European Left. After all, during the mid-1970's, the American Left was not yet uniformly antizionist. Indeed, many activists and advocates of progressive movements—Michael Harrington, Bayard Rustin, John Lewis among others—were sympathetic to Israel, and mindful of the fact that Soviet "Zionology" was merely a pretext for the persecution of Soviet Jews, as Izabella Tabarovsky has demonstrated so clearly (Cf,

...the abusive and discriminatory exchanges experienced by Jewish psychologists on listserves since Trump's first term of office have resulted in many psychologists, many with decades of experience, leaving the American Psychological Association in disgust and dismay.

Tabarovsky, 2024). So were many feminist authors. But by the early 80s, many on the Left were persuaded by the relentless barrage of Soviet propaganda, which drew deeply on the antisemitic sentiments that were prevalent in pre-revolutionary Russia, and spawned that filthy, slanderous fabrication *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Bronner, 2002; Tabarovky, 2024).

There is a striking irony here. To avoid unwanted scrutiny and persecution, to be considered a "good Jew" in the Soviet Union—a brutal, authoritarian Left-wing regime—one had to disparage and repudiate Zionism and Israel; the more vehemently, the better. Refusing to do so would only bring you trouble. And sadly, the same is true in many Left-wing movements today, where denouncing Israel and Zionism as racist or genocidal is a non-negotiable precondition for belonging and participating in "inclusive" Left-wing spaces! (Thanks, but no thanks.)

How prevalent is authoritarianism on the Left today? Frankly, I don't really know, nor does anyone else, I suspect. Unlike Right wing authoritarianism, which has been studied intensively since the end of WWII, Left-wing authoritarianism has not been studied sufficiently, so while we all have our opinions on that score, no doubt, there is very little reliable data to back them up yet. Besides, on reflection, there is no stable consensus on what constitutes "the Left", or how we ought to define the term "Left wing" anymore. Some conservative pundits and social scientists—who really should know better—use the terms "liberal" and "Left-wing" interchangeably; a thoughtless but widespread confusion of tongues (e.g. Conway, 2017). On the other hand, many scholars claim that several ideas and practices widely regarded as "progressive" or "woke" actually represent an abandonment or betrayal of the Left-wing's historic commitments to universalist and/or Enlightenment values, and the project of general human emancipation (e.g. Gandesha, 2022; Neiman, 2023; Burston & Jacobsen, 2025).

Another vexing problem is that some social scientists deny that Left-wing authoritarianism even exists in the first place! In *The Authoritarian Specter*, Bob Altemeyer, a leading authority, famously remarked that Left-wing authoritarianism is "the Loch Ness monster of political psychology", i.e. a rumor without substance, an imaginary entity that vanishes under close scrutiny. As a result of the preceding two problems, there is a third one alluded to previously, namely, a scarcity of empirical data on the subject. This has created a vicious circle in which the lack of data to support, refine or correct any inferences or hypotheses about Left-wing authoritarianism prompts many academics and social scientists to denounce efforts to elucidate Left-wing authoritarianism as being politically Right-wing, or Right-wing adjacent. The stigma and reputational damage that accrues in academic circles if you are foolish enough to address this issue dampens down efforts to generate better instruments to measure the phenomenon. As a result, we have mountains of useful data on Right-wing authoritarianism, but hardly anything at all on the Left-wing varieties. While some scales that purport to measure Left-wing authoritarianism show some promise (Cf, Costello, 2021) they haven't been scrutinized or road tested sufficiently to inspire much confidence yet. Clearly, more work needs to be done. The whole field is in its infancy, and it remains to be seen whether it will ever reach maturity, given the adverse conditions it currently faces in the academy. Meanwhile, the tendency among Left-leaning scholars and social scientists to shy away from this area of research for fear of reputational damage, while perfectly understandable in younger scholars, is extremely problematic because it leaves the field

open to researchers who lack historical depth and perspective, and who may indeed have a Right-wing axe to grind.

Still, despite the absence of robust studies on Left wing authoritarianism, there is little doubt that it has increased appreciably in recent decades (Hirsh, 2018), and that Jews now are faced with two potent adversaries in the political arena; Right and Left-wing authoritarians. As their ideas and attitudes become more prevalent and acceptable in mainstream discourse—thanks to the internet, social media, and corporate greed and indifference—Jewish psychologists should take heed. Perhaps, with more effort and co-operation between clinicians and social psychologists, we can remedy the absence of data on this score and elucidate the psychological roots of antisemitism on the Left more convincingly going forward. There never was a greater need.

Meanwhile, the abusive and discriminatory exchanges experienced by Jewish psychologists on listserves since Trump's first term of office have resulted in many psychologists, many with decades of experience, leaving the American Psychological Association in disgust and dismay. Moreover, many psychology professors now report a dramatic drop in the number of Jewish students who apply for their Doctoral and Psy.D. programs in psychology (Deutch, 2024). There are diffuse but powerful social forces making these environments for practice and learning profoundly inhospitable for Jews. We need to track these trends carefully and find ways to address them soon if we Jews want to continue having a voice and an impact on the field—something the AJP is committed to doing.

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IDEOLOGICAL COERCION CUTS BOTH WAYS

WHEN INTERNAL CONTROLS BECOME EXTERNAL THREATS

BY DAVID A. SASSO, MD, MPH

In March 2025, after months of campus protests that received national attention, Columbia University faced a blunt ultimatum from the current administration: comply with a set of sweeping ideological and security demands or lose more than $400 million in federal funding. Columbia agreed, adopting a package of reforms redefining hate speech and antisemitism, restructuring an academic department, restricting masked protests, and empowering an "independent monitor" to oversee the changes (1).

Columbia's decision was widely described as a capitulation to authoritarian overreach (2). Even if one supports some of the specific policies—universities, of course, should enforce their own rules, and protecting Jewish faculty and students should not be controversial—the mechanism of their imposition and enforcement matters. The administration used coercive pressure to force ideological compliance from an academic institution.

By late summer, Columbia's agreement had become a template. Harvard's refusal to accept similar federal demands led to a freeze on more than $2.2 billion in research funding and a protracted legal fight (3). Cornell, the University of Virginia, and several public systems entered negotiations tying compliance reviews, hiring practices, DEI structures, and campus security to federal oversight. What began as an isolated confrontation had, within months, become a national method.

What is striking, especially for those of us trained to recognize dynamics of control and coercion—whether within an individual's mind, a dyadic relationship, or in institutional culture—is how familiar the underlying architecture is. The administration did not invent this playbook. In many ways, it simply picked up one already in use and turned it around on its creators.

For years, universities have built elaborate mechanisms to police belief. Aspiring faculty have been required to submit "diversity statements" that often affirm institutional orthodoxy rather than personal conviction or intellectual rigor. Similarly, research proposals have had to justify their "equity impact" alongside their methodology regardless of the field or inquiry. At Stanford, the "Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative" (4) (eventually rescinded after public backlash (5)) discouraged the use of ordinary academic terms such as "blind review," "seminal," and even "American." Across campuses, well-meaning comments interpreted as microaggressions triggered investigations, disciplinary processes, or public shaming (6). Meanwhile, protests that crossed into intimidation or glorification of violence were excused under an increasingly elastic rubric of "context" and "complexity" (7,8). The result was a culture where moral authority was wielded bureaucratically and compliance became a condition of belonging.

So, when the President of the United States issued a nine-point ideological demand to Columbia, the university acquiesced. Is this evidence of authoritarianism? Yes. Is it surprising? Not at all.

It is the same architecture: compelled statements, sanctioned expression, and reeducation structures. The main difference is that the new requirements are by executive decree and not faculty committee. All it took was someone else walking in and saying, "Hey, I can use this playbook too."

A Stanford University web page for an initiative to change language and terminology. Captured from the web page https://www.capstan.be/stanford-universitys-initiative-to-replace-racist-and-harmful-terminology-backfires/ on 12/12/2025.

The argument presented here is not meant to imply that the motives, aims, or moral valence of university initiatives and federal policymakers are equivalent. And the danger of executive coercion is categorically higher because it carries state power, not just institutional bureaucracy. The point is instead a structural one: once universities normalize compelled belief internally, external actors find it easier to use the same mechanism.

To be clear, universities must enforce their own codes of conduct. Antisemitism deserves direct and unequivocal condemnation, and Jewish students and faculty deserve safety. But the danger lies in the mechanism itself. When speech, hiring, or research must conform to an ideological checklist—whether that checklist comes from a DEI office or from the federal government—academic freedom becomes contingent. And once that door is opened, the only question is who is holding the clipboard.

As mental health clinicians, we are trained to attend to process, not just content. Coercion does not change its nature depending on who wields it. Whether it is a university enforcing ideological purity through bureaucratic means or a presidential administration enforcing it through federal power, the psychological structure is the same. Institutions that normalize compelled belief internally should not be surprised when those same tools are turned against them externally.

Psychologically, moral coercion rarely announces itself as clearly as did this administration's demands. It begins as benevolent aspiration, crystallizes into bureaucratic expectation, and eventually insidiously ossifies into an enforcement regime. In clinical work, we watch this trajectory unfold inside individuals: anxieties about safety or belonging lead to conformity; conformity leads to rigidity; rigidity invites the use of power to sustain it and keep the anxiety at bay. The self-policed orthodoxy that universities experienced internally became the template for what was later imposed externally.

Jewish communities find themselves in a uniquely precarious position in this dynamic. Universities that once viewed DEI as a moral corrective often failed to recognise how Jewish identity and Zionism were collapsing into categories of "dominant" or "oppressor," making Jews newly vulnerable inside systems that claimed to protect minorities. At the same time, heavy-handed federal interventions framed as protecting Jews risk instrumentalizing Jewish safety for partisan purposes. Both forms of coercion misread Jewish experience. Both reduce Jewish students and faculty to symbols rather than subjects. And both illustrate how quickly moral concern can be co-opted by systems hungry for ideological conformity.

As clinicians, we also have to recognise how these institutional dynamics shape the psychological environment in which our patients live. Coercive cultures, whether masquerading as enforcers of moral clarity or as instruments of national security, produce chronic hypervigilance, dependence, and erosion of trust. Students, faculty, and staff caught between competing ideological authorities are forced into defensive postures that mimic the very mechanisms we treat in therapy: splitting, projection, and acting out. When the broader culture normalizes coercion from any direction, it places additional strain on vulnerable individuals and communities, including the patients who walk into our offices each day.

The authoritarian turn in both academic institutions and the government should concern us not primarily because of who issues the demands, but because ideological coercion cuts both ways. Universities all across the country are finding out the hard way: police belief, police speech, and sooner or later, someone else will police yours.

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EXCLUSION, INTIMIDATION AND COERCION: SILENCING VOICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN MENTAL HEALTH SPACES

BY MARTIN STROUS

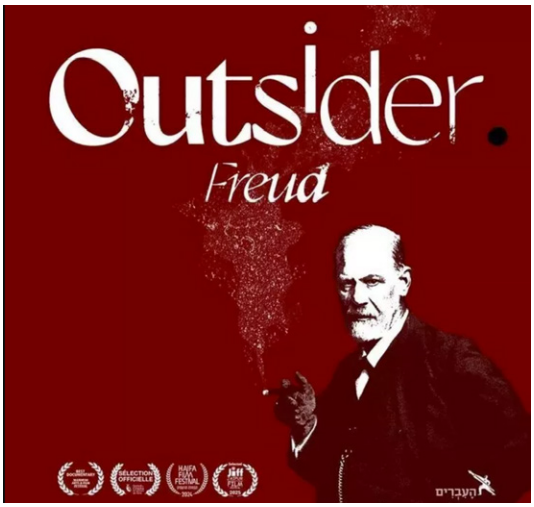
Introduction

Mental health disciplines depend upon an ethos of openness, reflective engagement and respect for human complexity. These principles extend beyond the therapy room to broader professional environments in which scholarship, training and intercultural dialogue take place. Yet, Israeli mental health professionals have increasingly been targeted in South African and international conferences and workshops.

There is a growing pattern in South Africa in which Israeli scholars and cultural contributors are subjected to exclusion, intimidation and coercion. This essay examines two recent South African incidents: (a) the attempted disruption of a documentary on Sigmund Freud and a planned discussion with its Israeli producer, and (b) the coerced withdrawal of Dr. Galia Moran from the Global Mental Health Summit. These cases reflect a broader trend in academic and mental health environments where ideological intimidation threatens constitutional rights and professional ethics.

Outsider, Freud

In September 2025, a group of South African psychoanalysts hosted a screening of *Outsider, Freud* (2025), the latest documentary by acclaimed director Yair Qedar. Widely praised internationally, the film explores Sigmund Freud's intellectual and personal world. Using a blend of animation, dream-like imagery and commentary from



Poster for Freud, Outsider by Yair Qedar.

prominent psychoanalysts, it traces how his experience of being Jewish in an increasingly antisemitic Vienna during Hitler's ascent shaped Freud's theoretical contributions and private life. The film highlights Freud's enduring impact while reflecting on his Jewish identity and the broader experience of being an outsider.

Each South African screening of the documentary concluded with a dialogue between a leading, South African psychoanalytic academic and the film's Israeli director. However, one screening was subject to intimidatory tactics by the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which attempted to shut the event down, block attendees from entering the venue and disrupt the screening itself.

Despite the film director's long-standing support for Palestinian rights and his reputation as a peace activist, protestors misrepresented photographs of Qedar at an anti-Netanyahu rally to assert that he supported the Israeli government. The protestors also attempted to pressure him to label Israeli military action in Gaza as genocide. The irony is stark: a film exploring the dynamics of exclusion became the target of efforts to silence its contributors.

To appreciate the gravity of such behavior, it is necessary to place it in historical context. Observing attempts in 2025 to silence a film producer because of his Israeli identity evokes a chilling echo of history. When the Nazis took power in 1933, their assault on Jewish intellectual life was ruthless. Freud, who was Jewish and the founder of psychoanalysis, embodied what the regime condemned as "degenerate" and alien to German society. His books were burned, his thinking vilified and he was driven into exile. Although today's incidents differ in scale, tactics designed to prevent Israelis from speaking, regardless of their political orientation or academic standing, constitute an assault on free thought, open inquiry and human dignity. The underlying aim, the delegitimization and silencing of Israeli contributors, reveals a disturbing continuity of exclusionary logic.

7th Global Mental Health Summit

An almost identical dynamic of exclusion and attempted coercion emerged during preparations for the 7th Global Mental Health Summit in Cape Town. Galia Moran, an Israeli academic specialising in multicultural mental health practice, had been invited to present on peer-led, community-based approaches that promote empowerment and inclusion. Her scholarship aligned directly with the summit's aims. Yet her participation was met with an organised campaign of opposition. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign, supported by Professor Ashraf Kagee of Stellenbosch University, mobilised a protest. Kagee, a psychologist, insisted that Moran publicly denounce what he termed genocide in Gaza, colonial violence and intergenerational trauma attributed to Israeli actions. Under this pressure, Moran withdrew from the summit.

Despite the film director's long-standing support for Palestinian rights and his reputation as a peace activist, protestors misrepresented photographs of Qedar at an anti-Netanyahu rally to assert that he supported the Israeli government.

The South African Constitution affirms that individuals belonging to cultural, religious or linguistic communities have the right to practise their culture, exercise their religion, use their language or join associations reflecting those identities. By urging that Moran be barred, Kagee undermined these constitutional protections as they would apply to her in South Africa. He also denied summit participants the opportunity to hear her scholarship and form their own views. There is no indication that he considered whether attendees wished to engage with her presentation.

Bullying, Coercion and Ideological Closure

Attempts to impose ideological conformity through bullying constitute a form of coercive control that contradicts the aims of mental health disciplines. As multicultural mental health literature consistently demonstrates, wellbeing depends on respect for identity, freedom of thought and expression, and reflective engagement. The tactics used against Israeli contributors reflect the opposite: stigmatization, identity-based exclusion, group pressure and silencing.

While the contexts differ vastly in severity, the underlying mechanism of pressuring Israeli scholars to issue public "confessions" at professional events evokes the logic of the Salem witch trials and the Spanish Inquisition, where individuals were compelled to endorse an imposed ideology under threat of humiliation, punishment or banishment. In each instance, the objective was not dialogue or truth-seeking but the enforcement of a predetermined narrative. The insistence that Israeli academics characterise the conflict in Gaza as "genocide," irrespective of their own analyses or ethical convictions, mirrors the coerced declarations historically extracted through intimidation and moral compulsion. The pattern is unmistakable. Accusation substitutes for evidence, and refusal to issue a forced confession is weaponised to legitimise the accusers' ideological agenda.

For Jewish and Israeli practitioners, these dynamics foster an atmosphere of conditional belonging. When professional participation becomes contingent on disavowing identity or endorsing imposed narratives, academic ethics and fundamental principles of human rights are violated.

Safeguarding the mental health field demands a principled refusal to permit such bullying, coercion and exclusion. Silencing contributors on the basis of identity violates constitutional and professional norms and reproduces coercive dynamics. Mental health practice requires environments that honour complexity, encourage honest engagement and respect diverse identities. When individuals are excluded, intimidated or compelled to adopt predetermined political positions, the field devolves into rigid, adversarial patterns that undermine human wellbeing.

The Betrayal of Jewish Mental Health Practitioners

Many Jewish psychologists in South Africa played roles in confronting the ethical failures of professional psychology during apartheid. At a time when much of the profession remained silent, they questioned how psychology was being used to legitimise racial inequality and advocated for a socially responsible discipline that served all South Africans.

Today, as in many countries, South African Jewish psychologists committed to ethical and socially engaged practice often feel alienated by narratives asserting that Israel is committing genocide. In spaces where they once felt confident opposing apartheid, many Jewish mental health practitioners now feel betrayed by radical elements that engage in Holocaust inversion.

Conclusion

The mental health professions cannot claim a commitment to dignity, inclusion and cultural sensitivity while tolerating practices that silence, shame or exclude individuals on the basis of identity. The targeting of Israeli contributors is not an isolated aberration but a warning signal of how easily professional spaces can drift into ideological closure and coercive dynamics. Legitimate criticism of Israeli policies is part of democratic debate, but identity-based exclusion violates professional ethics. Protecting the integrity of mental health work requires rejecting these tactics of discrimination and intimidation.

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HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR LIVIU LIBRESCU

BY PETER AUSTIN

At Virginia Tech, on April 16, 2007, Seung-Hoi Cho went on a shooting rampage. Librescu, a Holocaust survivor, held his classroom door shut while his students leapt through windows. He was shot five times. In the Talmud, it is said, "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire."

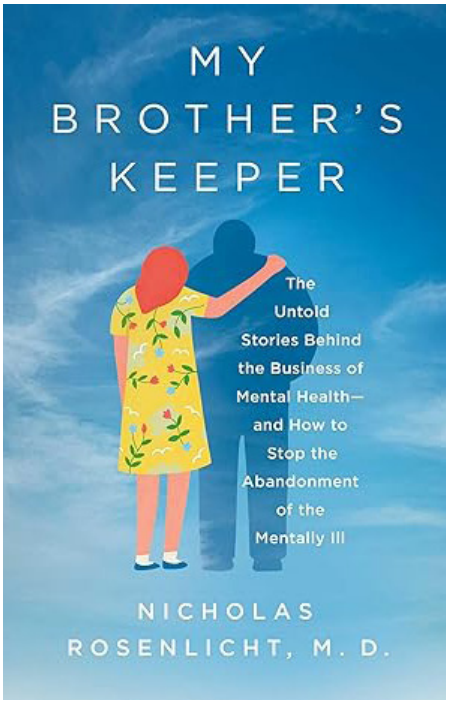
On Holocaust Memorial Day,
In Eilat, Haifa, Tel Aviv,
The sunset siren-sound cries, 'Stay
Your doings – bow – be silent – grieve.'
From Galilee to Olivet
Is heard its ghostly swell and swoop:
'Remember, lest the world forget;
Be wary, lest the foe regroup…!'

Is it for this that he endures
The ghetto, as a ten years boy,
The shame of secret Yom Kippurs,
The catcalls of the crowd-brave goy?...

He died a death from Grand Guignol –
His fingers round the doorknob furled,
His blood upon the chalk-white wall –
But, saving twenty, saved the world.

BOOK REVIEWS

My Brother's Keeper: The Untold Stories Behind the Business of Mental Health and How to Stop the Abandonment of the mentally Ill
by Nicholas Rosenlicht, M.D., 2024; Pegasus Books, Ltd.



Reviewed by Larry Glanz

I am fortunate in my practice to have a full-time person who interacts with insurance companies. She works in the office adjacent to mine, and on occasion I can hear her yelling into the phone. If not for her expertise and persistence, I would be spending countless hours dealing with a variety of arcane rules and bureaucrats to get paid for my services.

My practice employs several therapists, and all must be credentialed with several insurance providers. Each insurance company has its own rules and criteria for acceptance. Some are generous and open the door to new providers, while others take months, sometimes only to reject an applicant, and this at a time when there is a shortage of mental health providers. When I hire a new therapist, the delays in credentialing can cost me an employee, who can't wait the necessary interval to begin work.

A few years ago, a suicidal patient of mine entered an inpatient unit. His limited insurance allowed him only a brief stay, and upon his discharge he took his life. It was my saddest and angriest day as a psychologist.

I found the book I am reviewing at my local library. The title shouted out to me, and perhaps it does the same to you. It sometimes seems the system in which we work is so haphazard and chaotic, that it throws sand in the gears of our efforts to provide for the mentally ill, on occasion with disastrous results, as I have learned to my chagrin. Nicholas Rosenlicht certainly thinks so, and his detailed and angry book lays it all out. I found his critique articulate and comprehensive … although his solutions somewhat pie in the sky.

Rosenlicht is a clinical professor at the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. He has more than forty years of clinical research, administrative and teaching experience, so he has been through it all. He methodically dismantles our current mental health care delivery system and spares no one in the process. While reading the book, I kept nodding my head and muttering under my breath.

It is all too familiar: The history of diagnosis and treatment of the mentally ill has been influenced not only by scientific investigation, but by cultural, political, and ideological factors. Ignorance and stigma have played a major role, along with well intentioned but problematic efforts to cope with the range of problems and patients who comprise the one in five individuals with a mental illness. Trends such as the introduction of new medicine,

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dehospitlization, the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960's, and the idealism and failure of the community mental health system have all contributed to our current state of affairs. All these issues and more are covered in Rosenlicht's book.

In his introduction, Rosenlicht notes: "Once the envy of the world, our health care system is consistently rated last among developed nations in measures of quality, outcomes, and accessibility. In terms of cost, it's in a league of its own, double that of other developed countries. But the most shameful aspect of our last-place healthcare system is its treatment of mental illness. In 2022 we lost roughly 300,000 people to suicide, excessive alcohol use, and overdose. Suicide is now the second most common cause of death in ten-to twenty-four year olds in this country."

The author expresses even more frustration over the lack of advancement in treatment: "During the latter half of the twentieth century and early part of the twenty first, there have been no major breakthroughs in our understanding of these brain diseases, nor major advancements in their pharmacological or psychotherapeutic treatments." Despite the many new approaches to psychotherapy he notes that "...these advances have produced only limited improvement in outcomes with the possible exception of insomnia and some anxiety disorders."

His biggest critique is for those in most need: "America's most vulnerable, the seriously mentally ill, have moved from relatively safe state asylums to our streets, jails and prisons. In fact in the 'land of the free' more patients with mental illness are in jails and prisons than in hospitals."

Where does the fault lie? Responsibility is widespread, but it rests most heavily on our for-profit healthcare system, which, he argues, "is working exactly as it was designed to. In fact, it is working quite well for some healthcare corporations and investors. It's just not working that well for most people, especially the chronically ill and, most of all, those with mental illness." He adds that "framing healthcare as a business or consumer issue helps us avoid painful decisions about who gets care by reducing the sense of obligation to help those without means."

These words certainly rang true for me. As a newly minted Ph.D., my first job was in primary prevention at a mental health center, when optimism was high. Money for this role, that involved community outreach, did not last. Political winds shifted and idealism gave way to an eternal search for adequate funding.

Rosenlicht is nothing if not methodical in his critique. His chapter titles begin with "A Little History: How and Why We Made This Mess," and proceed with a chapter on the impact of our health care and mental health care systems on patients and families, followed by an exploration of the business models and the practices of psychiatry and psychotherapy. He concludes with one chapter titled: "Why We Maintain This Crazy System," and a final chapter called "Reform 101: How We Can Fix Our Healthcare Mess."

Regarding impacts, the author details a number of issues including privacy, access, and the rights of patients. He cites data and includes relevant examples. For instance, he describes a patient with typically well controlled bipolar disorder who experienced a flare that entangled him with law enforcement. Instead of receiving care, he was jailed, isolated and racially discriminated against, with disastrous results. He laments that so many similar situations of this

nature occur, and that access to quality care has become increasingly rare and costly.

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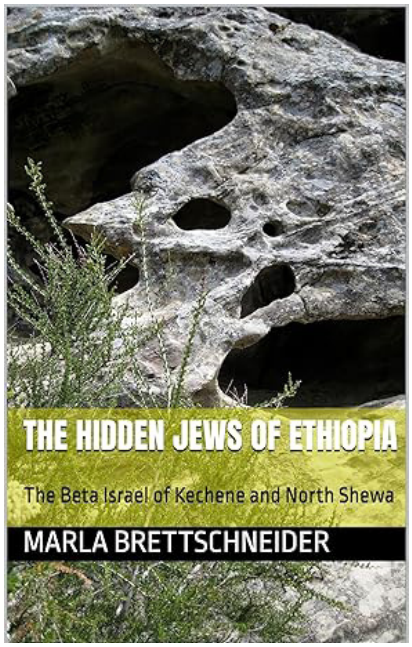
It is clear that the author has held administrative positions. In his chapters on business models, he describes the constraints and restrictions encountered on an everyday basis. Insurance regulations, restrictive covenants, arcane billing practices, and legal problems plague the industry. Claim denials are built into the system, he asserts, and mental health providers are reimbursed at lower rates than most other health care providers. He even objects to the term "client" as creating the possibility of putting mentally ill patients into a less worthy category and thus entitling them to more restrictive care. Though the laws on parity have been on the books, they have yet to be achieved, and are often disregarded. he asserts.

In his closing chapters, Rosenlicht explores the many incentives maintaining the system, despite its shortcomings. One has only to follow the money to see who is profiting. The cadre of lobbyists and corporate bigwigs hold sway: "...the healthcare industry us the single largest source of lobbying funds given to elected officials of any industry in the country."

The author's final comments on reforming the system were not really new, and I had hoped for something more original, given his extensive critiques. He promotes the concept of universal or single payer healthcare, as a better approach, and he explores various models from other countries. He refutes critics who worry about "socialized medicine" as un-American, arguing that healthcare should be a right available to all, the same as having a fire department. He sees the costs of doing this as providing a much greater benefit than our present system, and believes our current system hurt's the mentally ill especially hard.

I recommend this book despite its relatively weak concluding chapter, especially for readers interested in the deeper complexities and structural problems of our healthcare system, and for anyone considering speaking out about them. It offers ample material to strengthen your arguments, and if your experience mirrors mine, you will find yourself nodding in recognition as you read.

The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia: The Beta Israel of Kechene and North Shewa
by Marla Brettschneider and Malka Shabtay, Edwin Mellen Press, 2022



Reviewed by Geoffrey Hughes

Introduction

Ethiopian Jews have become more familiar to the outside world since several waves of Aliyah, Israeli immigration, in the 1980s and 1990s. The Beta Israel (called historically, and often pejoratively, the Falasha) traditionally lived in Ethiopia's northwest, in the Amhara region and across the regional border in Tigray. Particularly since Operation Solomon in 1991, some 90% of Ethiopian Jews now live in Israel.

The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia focuses on a related but much less well-known group. Known to Christian Ethiopians as Bal Ej (translating roughly as "craftsmen"), they are also a marginalized and frequently persecuted craft group, living in the rural North Shewa zone in central Ethiopia and the Kechene enclave on the northern outskirts of Addis Ababa. Unlike the Beta Israel of the northwest, their Jewish practices have historically been covert, and self-identification as Jewish is still contested. A new endonym (insider name) "Semien Shewa Beta Israel"—Jews of North Shewa—has been proposed, and is used in the book but is not universal in practice.

For this book Marla Brettschneider, an American academic, and Malka Shabtay, an Israeli anthropologist, brought together a spectrum of contributors and cultural informants based in Ethiopia. The book compiles local interviews and essays on topics from traditional history and ritual practices to outside prejudice and recent identity debates. *The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia* is thus distinctive not only for exposing a set of hidden traditions but also for its focus on the voices from inside the group.

Jewish History in Ethiopia

Judaism's role in Ethiopia is complex, and its history may be strikingly different in many ways from its arc in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Cushitic languages Awngi and Qimant are spoken by the traditionally non-Christian minorities of the northwest, distinguished from dominant Semitic, and traditionally Christian, languages—Amhara, Tigrinya and the Christian scriptural language Ge'ez. Among the Cushitic minority, there has traditionally been a spectrum from Judaism to a "Hebraic paganism" described by twentieth-century anthropologists.

It is likely that Judaism had a broader cultural influence in Ethiopia than in the classical Euro-Mediterranean world. The Jews of Rome and Persia were largely urbanized and self-defining, remaining distinct religiously, linguistically and ethnically. Reconstruction in Ethiopia, based on current practices and the historical record, suggests that Jewish beliefs and practices diffused to much broader rural and tribal groups.

The Semitic-speaking kingdom of Aksum converted officially to Christianity in the fourth century, and its language, Ge'ez, remains the Christian scriptural language of Ethiopia. Judaism persisted outside the center of the kingdom, however, and traditional history records Aksum being destroyed by the Jewish queen Gudit in the tenth century. Through the Middle Ages, the Beta Israel alternated between skirmishing independence from and restive infeudination to Christian Ethiopia. Since the 1400s they were increasingly incorporated into the centralizing kingdom as a marginalized—frequently persecuted or forcedly converted—craft group.

Bal Ej in most phases of life have not historically considered themselves Jewish. They nevertheless practice traditions that are recognizable to outsiders: a Saturday Sabbath, ritual purification, post-partum seclusion, shiva and kashrut.

The Bal Ej may have split from the Beta Israel of Amhara as early as the 1500s, moving southeast to settle in North Shewa. While Beta Israel were persectured in Amhara as well, they remained a more territorially distinct group—the secrecy of Bal Ej practice may date to their migration and new social role as a dispersed rural minority. Bal Ej oral history describes a religious massacre under the emperor and Catholic convert Za Dengel in 1603 or 1604. Internal traditions also name the Bal Ej as the artisans who made the implements for clearing North Shewa's forests under its eighteenth-century consolidating Christian rulers.

The founder of modern Ethiopia, Menelik II, hailed from Shewa but shifted power southward into Oromia by creating Addis Ababa as a permanent capital in 1887. The urban Bal Ej presence in Addis dates back close to its founding, when Bal Ej moved there as artisans instrumental in its development.

Ethiopia urbanized significantly in the twentieth century, with a massive increase in secondary industry. This may be a secondary source of the Bal Ej's current low status. In the rural Ethiopia of 1900, craft and fabrication were looked down on, but were specialized niches and vital supplements to farming. As Ethiopia has urbanized, these occupations have spread to all groups in the society, eroding the preserve of the Bal Ej without bridging their outsider status.

Cultural Traditions

Bal Ej in most phases of life have not historically considered themselves Jewish. They nevertheless practice traditions that are recognizable to outsiders: a Saturday Sabbath, ritual purification, post-partum seclusion, shiva and kashrut.

Elders, however, take on a much more distinctive identity after menopause and retiring from work. The Bal Ej typically retire to a *gedam* (plural *gedamoch*), translated as "monastery". Tradition names 44 of these institutions hidden in cave complexes in rural North Shewa, six of which continue to function, with parallel urban community centers (*mofer betoch*) in the Bal Ej area of Addis. Because the locations themselves are secret, Jewish customs are more explicit in these monasteries: members practice complete segregation by sex, animal practice, menstrual seclusion, and seclusion until death for specific diseases.

The traditions of the Bal Ej in particular, and to some extent Ethiopian Jews as a whole, have been largely isolated from Euro-Mediterranean Jewry for perhaps two millennia. Surveying Bal Ej traditions, Brettschneider and her collaborators see them as a basal stratum of Judaism, un-influenced by the innovations and elaborations of the Talmud and Midrash. *Korbanot*, animal sacrifice, for example, has been practiced only symbolically by mainstream Judaism since the destruction of the Second Temple. The authors urge recognition and protection for the Bal Ej by both Ethiopia and Israel particularly because of archaic survivals such as *korbanot* and unique practices like the *gedam*.

Persecution

Outsider prejudices also define the Bal Ej as a distinct social group. They are stigmatized and shunned by Christian Ethiopians, reinforced through ascription of both witchcraft and crucifixion-guilt. The mechanism of witchcraft is *buda*, the evil eye, which is believed to bring cursed luck and psychological (sometimes physical as well) illness. *Buda* are believed to be were-hyenas, who stalk the countryside at night to suck children's blood.

This witchcraft belief is supplemented by the widespread Ethiopian Christian tradition that the Jews were the "killers of Christ" and thus continue to have communal blame for his crucifixion.

These outsider beliefs play out in three levels of hostile encounter. It is believed that the evil eye can be disrupted by surprise, and so groups of children will follow a North Shewa Beta Israel shouting "Buda! Buda!" to break the concentration that causes the evil eye. More negative is the diagnosis of physical or psychological symptoms by an exorcist as witchery, and the divination of the culprit, often a North Shewa Beta Israel. The "witch" may then be captured and tormented until they "confess" and renounce their witchery. Ethiopian officials often hold these beliefs as well, leading to a third level of hostility, in which crimes of prejudice are dismissed by the official's semi-serious statement that the North Shewa Beta Isarel deserved the crime because of their were-hyena behavior.

An Emic Perspective

Social scientists have distinguished between etic and emic viewpoints: an etic perspective provides an outsider's analysis, while an emic perspective represents the culture as insiders understand it. An insider may experience a ritual as dissolving tension in their community; an outsider may see undercurrents of conflict emphasized in the same ritual. The terms were introduced in anthropology in the 1950s, but fell into disuse with the postmodern turn of the 1980s. Following Foucault (via Said) and Derrida (via Spivak), anthropology sought lived experience, while grappling with the power dynamic inherent in an anthropologist-writer re-presenting others. A more popular, romantic tradition of "voice" evolved, hoping to resolve this contradiction through the transcription of what subects said, and wished said about them.

The traditions of the Bal Ej in particular, and to some extent Ethiopian Jews as a whole, have been largely isolated from Euro-Mediterranean Jewry for perhaps two millennia.

The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia falls strongly into this tradition. The collaborators that Brettschneider and Shabtay bring together are all members of the Bal Ej community: internal historians, activists, *gedam* members. It records a key time for the Bal Ej, when its members debate self-identification as Jews. The book is not just a witness to but is also instrumental in this debate, revealing and emphasizing the Jewish nature of the Bal Ej traditions not only to anglophone and Israeli readers but to the Bal Ej themselves.

This internality is one of the book's strengths—but also leads to its weaknesses. Because the intentions of community insiders are prioritized, helpful contextual data such as maps are often lacking. This is striking in the use of the term North Shewa Beta Israel throughout, which is promoted by the younger generation's self-definition as Jewish and possible consideration for Aliyah, but which the book describes ongoing debates where elders actually prefer the exonym (outsider name) Bal Ej to help integrate with and rise in Ethiopian society.

Similarly, several contributors reiterate the common dismissal of *buda* and related witchcraft beliefs. While these ideas can be harmful to the Bal Ej, they are also part of a longstanding supernatural framework found throughout the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and East Africa. An emic account helps us understand how such beliefs operate within the community's own cultural logic. But an etic perspective is equally important: rather than rejecting the supernatural outright, we must consider how these beliefs are used by outsiders to define, stigmatize, and marginalize the Bal Ej. Understanding both frames—how the beliefs make sense internally and how they are deployed externally—offers a clearer picture of the social forces shaping the group's vulnerability.

The richest etic supplement to the book would be an examination of the commonalities and blurred boundaries between Bal Ej and other traditions—Christianity and pagan practices—and how this relates to Ethiopia's unique Jewish belief stratum. For instance, the authors record a song celebrating the "Goddess of the Sabbath." Earlier anthropologists believed that Ethiopian pagan-Hebraic folk practices deified the Sabbath much more literally than the Shabbat Hamalka of Europe. If true for the Bal Ej, we would better understand their relation not only to Judaism but to Ethiopia's complex fabric. The book instead takes—and does acknowledge—the more traditional Judaism / non-Judaism binary lens of Europe, focusing on credentials for recognized minority status and Aliyah consideration. One potential lesson of this intriguing book, about a fascinating and little-known group, is the insight available by focusing not only inwardly on our own traditions, but dealing clear-sightedly with the role in a wider society, with its hierarchy and intolerance but also blurred boundaries, cultural communication and interdependence.

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Originally trained as an anthropologist, Geoffrey Hughes practices architecture internationally including Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. He currently resides in the Bay Area.

KESHER EDITORIAL POLICIES

(1) Our main mission is to celebrate and explore the various dimensions of Jewish life, thought, spirituality and art – which all contribute to the formation and enhancement of Jewish identity - in ways that are meaningful and instructive for mental health professionals. But while our primary focus is on the mental health professions, we welcome submissions from and about people in other disciplines (and from people of other faiths) provided that they address the psychological relevance of the artistic product or intellectual position that is under discussion.

(2) Antisemitism poses a real and growing threat to Jewish communities all around the world. We therefore wish to promote greater awareness of the prevalence of antisemitism both in and beyond the mental health professions, i.e. in the academy, our schools, the media and society at large. Submissions that address the historical and psychological roots and the social/political ramifications of contemporary antisemitism anywhere in the world today are welcome provided they are not merely polemical but grounded in sound scholarship.

(3) Submissions to Kesher can take the form of research papers, essays, book, play or movie reviews, poetry, the visual and graphic arts. Once their suitability for review has been established, scientific and research papers will receive anonymous review from three members of our editorial board who have relevant knowledge and expertise, although the Editor in Chief has the final decision whether any piece is published or not. Essays, book or movie reviews and artistic productions only require scrutiny from the Editor in Chief or the managing editor and one member of Kesher's editorial board before they are accepted.

(4) Kesher's Editorial Board will consist of (approximately) 12 psychologists with relevant knowledge and expertise in various sub-disciplines (i.e. clinical and counseling psychology, developmental psychology, social, organizational, school and educational psychology, political psychology, etc.) and different aspects of Jewish life and culture (languages, liturgy, music and dance, literature, art, philosophy).

(5) All Kesher submissions must be 5,000 words or less in length. (Longer submissions, if accepted, will be edited down to size.) They must be in 12 point Times New Roman font and double spaced. (Accompanying images, graphs and/or weblinks welcome, and are not included in this total.)

(6) We are not averse to controversy, but contributors must maintain a civil and respectful tone and keep their submissions free from unwarranted and offensive language. In these dark times, we can – and must – agree to disagree politely on subjects that may polarize and provoke different constituencies within the Jewish community if we are to work together effectively to explore and enhance Jewish identity and combat antisemitism.