

Kesher



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KESHER: JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH PSYCHOLOGISTS



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Dear Readers,

Welcome to issue number six of *Kesher*. Much of our attention in this issue is devoted to developments in Australia following the Bondi Beach massacre of December 14, 2025. Four articles and two book reviews explore the history and contemporary experience of Australian Jewry.

To provide context, it is important to recall that after October 7, 2023, antisemitism rose sharply in Australia, as it did—though to varying degrees—around the world. In Australia, however, the situation has been particularly acute, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty in what had been a confident and thriving Jewish community. The rise in antisemitic hate crimes, demonstrations, and the erosion of institutional norms and protections prompted Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to declare

that “every act of antisemitism is an affront to who we are as Australians” and that such hatred has no place in the country. Yet statements alone are insufficient; without meaningful action, they carry limited weight.

In July 2025, Australia’s Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, Jillian Segal, warned that antisemitism had reached “a tipping point that threatens social harmony, undermines trust in institutions and marginalizes Jewish Australians.” She described antisemitism as both an ancient hatred and a modern, adaptive threat—one that shifts with political conditions, spreads rapidly through digital platforms, and intersects with a range of extremist ideologies. Addressing it, she argued, would require coordinated, strategic responses across sectors, particularly among younger Australians who may be more susceptible to such views.

Segal's proposed framework called for legislative reform, institutional accountability, improved education, and strengthened law enforcement. While these measures pointed in the right direction, they proved insufficient. On December 14, 2025, during a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach, Sajid Akram and his son Naveed opened fire on a crowd, killing fifteen Jewish celebrants and injuring forty-four others. Four explosive devices brought to the scene failed to detonate. Police response was widely perceived as delayed, raising serious concerns about preparedness and protection.

ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack—the first mass killing of Jews in Australian history. In the aftermath, calls intensified for a Royal Commission to investigate antisemitism and its broader social effects. After initial resistance, Prime Minister Albanese announced the formation of such a commission on January 7, 2026, appointing former Chief Justice Virginia Bell to lead it. Its mandate includes investigating the nature and drivers of antisemitism in Australia, examining the circumstances surrounding the Bondi attack, and recommending measures to strengthen public safety and social cohesion.

The decision to convene the Royal Commission was met with mixed reactions. Some critics dismissed it as political capitulation. A widely circulated cartoon in the *Sydney Morning Herald* [SEEN BELOW] depicted supporters of the commission as instruments of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, implying that the initiative reflected foreign influence rather than legitimate



Screen shot of an article and cartoon reproduced in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Sunday, 11, January 2026.

domestic concern. The publication of such imagery in a major national newspaper is itself a troubling indicator of the current climate.

Events in early 2026 reinforced this sense of instability. Adelaide Writer's Week was cancelled after a large number of authors withdrew in protest over the exclusion of novelist Randa Abdel-Fattah, whose public statements on October 7 and related issues were deemed inflammatory by organizers. The controversy, and the hostile responses directed at dissenting voices, further illustrated the polarization and intensity surrounding these issues.

Although the Bondi Beach massacre looms large, this issue of *Kesher* begins with a letter from Rabbi Jason Nevarez, written on behalf of the San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors, protesting the exclusion of Rabbi Hanan Lieberman from a Martin Luther King Day event because of his Zionist views. The letter notes that no other Rabbi was invited to replace him, resulting in no Jewish voices speaking at the event. It is followed by a letter from the South African Association of Jewish Psychologists (SAJMAP) directly related to Australia and the Bondi massacre.

We then have four articles related to Australian Jewry before, during, and after the Bondi massacre. This issue includes an interview with Nicky Jacobs, an Australian psychologist who has long worked to provide culturally informed care within the Jewish community and whose organization played a role in the immediate response to the Bondi attack. Ongoing *Kesher* contributors, Jenni Lee & George Halasz contribute reflections drawn from their direct experience living through these events, offering personal and grounded perspectives.

We also feature a poem by *Kesher's* poet in residence, Peter Austin, written in response to the events at Bondi Beach.

Subsequent contributions address questions of mental health, communal resilience, and cultural context. Articles by Rachel Aspler-Goodman and by Kertzer, Baumol, Margolin, and Alterman examine ways of supporting and restoring psychological well-being through communal and clinical approaches. Essays from Martin Strous and Rona Kaufman explore the meanings and sources of Zionist identity.

Finally, in keeping with this issue's focus, we include two book reviews on Australian Jewish history. Australia was one of the destinations available to Jewish refugees after the Holocaust, and these works explore different aspects of that experience and its legacy.

This and much more can be found in the present issue. As always, we welcome your reflections and invite submissions for future editions of *Kesher*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An Open Letter to Our San Diego Community

From the San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors

As we enter Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend—a sacred moment in our civic calendar dedicated to justice, courage, and moral imagination—we do so carrying deep sadness, disappointment, and anger.

We have recently learned that Rabbi Hanan Leberman of Tifereth Israel Synagogue was disinvited from offering a benediction at the All Peoples Celebration, a major MLK commemoration event hosted by Alliance San Diego. The reason given was his “Zionist views.” When Rabbi Leberman asked whether another rabbi might step in to offer the benediction in his place, that request too was denied. With the exclusion of Rabbi Leberman came the elimination of any Jewish clergy from the All Peoples Celebration.

Over the years, rabbis have been honored with the opportunity to connect the legacy of Dr. King to the Jewish commitment to civil rights and racial and social justice by offering a benediction. There has never been a litmus test for Jewish clergy to speak at this event. To the contrary, inviting rabbis and cantors to be part of this sacred convening felt inclusive and important.

The decision this year to disinvite Rabbi Leberman not only isolates Jewish clergy; it sends a message to the entire San Diego Jewish community—including Jews of Color—that conditions are being placed on our participation in public life, and that our identities must be edited or disavowed to be deemed acceptable. To do so at an event entitled All Peoples Celebration is to suggest that “all” means everyone except Jews—a far cry from the moral courage and collective belonging at the core of Dr. King’s vision of the Beloved Community. It is shocking, and it is wrong.

In the aftermath of the devastating antisemitic firebombing last week of Congregation Beth Israel in Jackson, Mississippi, this decision is particularly painful. In 1967, that same congregation was firebombed by the

KKK because its rabbi at the time was outspoken against racism. The message then, as now, was meant to silence moral voices and push Jews out of the struggle for justice.

And yet history tells a different story.

Jews in San Diego and across the country have stood side by side with the Black community for decades in the fight against racism and xenophobia. Dr. King himself walked with Rabbis Heschel, Eisendrath, and Kelman, giants of social justice in the civil rights movement.

There have been important alliances between the Black and Jewish communities for generations. The common enemy of white supremacy has often sought to pit our communities against one another, but allyship has required understanding our histories, shared values, and experiences, while recognizing discrimination faced by both communities. The work is ongoing, and Dr. King’s legacy includes a warning against the dangers of division and moral litmus tests that fracture coalitions for justice. He understood that liberation movements falter when they begin deciding who is “pure” enough to belong.

To exclude rabbis from an MLK celebration because of their connection to Israel is not only a distortion of Jewish identity—it is a betrayal of Dr. King’s vision.

As President of the San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors, I speak on behalf of a diverse, pluralistic rabbinic community that spans denominations, politics, and perspectives. What unites us is not uniformity of thought, but a shared commitment to justice, dignity, and the sacred worth of every human life. Removing Jewish clergy from a public commemoration of Dr. King fractures that commitment and undermines the very values this weekend is meant to honor.

We cannot and must not allow our inherent connection to Israel—or any single aspect of Jewish identity—to become a litmus test for inclusion in civic and interfaith spaces. When Jews are told they must check part of themselves

at the door to participate, the door is no longer truly open.

We remain committed to partnership, dialogue, and shared struggle for justice. But partnership requires mutual recognition and respect. Silence in moments like this would be a betrayal of our history and our moral responsibility.

This weekend, as speeches are given and songs are sung, we ask our broader community to remember who walked together before—and to ask who is being left outside today.

Justice demands better.
Dr. King's legacy demands better.
And our shared future depends on it.

Rabbi Jason Nevarez
President, San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors
Senior Rabbi, Congregation Beth Israel of San Diego

SAJMAP Condemns Bondi Beach Terrorist Attack and Extends Condolences

The South African Association of Jewish Mental Health, Medical, and Allied Practitioners (SAJMAP) extends its deepest condolences to the Australian Jewish community following the horrific terrorist attack during Hanukkah celebrations in Bondi, Sydney. We are appalled by the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians during a time of religious and communal gathering.

We stand in solidarity with Jewish communities in Australia and across the world in unequivocally condemning terrorism and violence against civilians in all its forms. No community should be subjected to fear, harm, or intimidation when exercising its fundamental rights to religious, cultural, and communal life.

As a professional association of mental health and health care practitioners, guided by ethical obligations to respect human dignity, prevent harm, and promote psychological well-being, SAJMAP recognizes the profound psychological impact of acts of terror on those directly affected, as well as on wider communities who may experience fear, grief, and trauma. Such violence has enduring consequences for both individual and collective well-being. By standing together, we dedicate ourselves to healing, resilience, and the preservation of our proud Jewish traditions.

SAJMAP is committed to upholding professional integrity by challenging antisemitism and dehumanization, including biased or discriminatory narratives about Jews and Israel, within professional and academic spaces. While this moment rightly calls first and foremost for mourning and compassion, it also serves as a sobering reminder that the normalization of incitement and the demonization of a people contribute to environments in which real and devastating human

harm becomes more likely.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of those who were killed or injured. In the Jewish tradition, we say: “May the Omnipresent comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” We acknowledge the pain of the Australian Jewish community and stand with them in grief and solidarity.

The South African Association of Jewish Mental Health, Medical and Allied Practitioners (SAJMAP) brings together Jewish professionals and their allies across mental health, medical, and allied fields. The organization promotes professional integrity, inclusivity, and ethical practice, while advocating for fair and respectful professional environments. SAJMAP also works to challenge antisemitism and biased or anti-Israel rhetoric in professional settings, supporting Jewish professionals in engaging in their fields without discrimination or misrepresentation

AUSTRALIA AFTER BONDI

BY JENNI LEE



Jennifer Lee is a strategist, communicator, and advocate whose career has spanned hospitality, community leadership, and cultural commentary. She grew up within the family's business, the Brighton Savoy, a renowned boutique hotel and event centre in Melbourne, Australia, that stood as a community institution for over 55 years. A proud Jew, Zionist, and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, she strives to bring clarity, courage, and cultural fluency to some of the most urgent debates of our time.

I have been trying to write this for weeks. Not because I don't know what I think, but because I don't know how to hold what I feel long enough to express it coherently. A strange duality has settled in since the Hanukkah massacre at Bondi; an emotional numbness sitting on top of something far more volatile. Rage, yes, but also something colder, more disorienting. Because what changed that day was not the result of an isolated event, but over two years of assaults on the Australian Jewish and Zionist communities.

The Moment It Started

I remember exactly where I was Sunday afternoon, seated on the couch around 5:30 p.m... I was about to get ready for a Hanukkah party. Ordinary. Unremarkable. The kind of evening that fits with the rhythm of life on the Jewish calendar. Then, the messages started. They were fragmented at first. Something was happening in Bondi. Confusion, then escalation. WhatsApp groups were lighting up. Texts. Calls. The familiar chaos of real-time crisis unfolding through a screen. I became completely absorbed, obsessively refreshing, scrolling, piecing together fragments of information while asking myself the same questions over and over again: How is this happening? Where are the police? Where is help? How can this be going on for so long?

And then, something shifts internally. I'm reacting and not reacting. I don't know what to do, what to think, what to say. I am numb, yet I'm not... Not because it doesn't matter. It matters too much. And while some of us already believed that something like this was going to happen, you're still blindsided when it does.

Lighting Candles While Watching Something Break

I'm trying to work out what to do next. We're expected at a Hanukkah party and the host's wife was called away last minute. She'd asked me to give her husband a hand hosting in her absence. What to do? What is the "right" thing to do in a situation like this? We went to support the host, hoping to be with other people, and not to sit alone with whatever was unfolding.

About a dozen of us turned up for the same reasons, unspoken. To hold space and be with each other while the horrors continued to unfold. The room was heavy, phones constantly in hand, scrolling. Conversations were fractured and stilted, no one quite knowing what to say, or how to be. Nevertheless, we lit the first night's Hanukkah candles, chanting the prayers and songs. How surreal it felt, this ritual of continuity, a celebration of light and miracles, while something so dark and chaotic was still unfolding in real-time.

We all had family and friends at the Bondi event, and some were among the murdered and maimed. One victim, Reuven Morrison, was a close friend of our host, Moishe Gordon. In the aftermath, he discovered that Reuven's body was being held in the Sydney coroner's facility before being transported to Melbourne for burial, where his wife, daughter, and grandchildren live. This was a long trip that would take at least a day, prolonging the delay to burial for Morrison. In a later interview with Australia's *The Jewish Independent*, he explained "I was so upset for him, that he was stuck in the refrigerator in the coroners for three days. As Jews, we like to bury on the day of the petirah [death]. When I saw that he was stuck in the coroner's refrigerator, if I could make him comfortable, and save him the 15-hour drive home, I immediately thought: I am going to do it." An amateur pilot, Gordon undertook the complicated responsibility of journeying his dear friend's remains home. This included support from many non-Jews who helped in such tasks as modifying his plane to properly hold a body and clearing certain air spaces for him to travel quickly and safely.

"The whole process was blessed and full of serendipity." Gordon confided to *The Jewish Independent*. "Everything fell into place. What had to be done was through the kindness of so many people, the Chevra Kadisha, the non-Jews in my airport and air traffic control... This was the most bitter flight I ever did, flying a friend home in a body bag. But it was sweet because I knew I was doing my last gift for him as a friend, showing him my love as a friend" (*The Jewish Independent*, 2025)

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What We Do in Crisis

What happened next is another thing I haven't been able to stop thinking about. Within what felt like minutes, hundreds - then thousands - of people were mobilising. Organic crisis management on steroids. Message after message, offer after offer. No hesitation, no confusion, just action. A WhatsApp group – Crucial Volunteering for Sydney – is set up and hundreds of members, instantly join.

And I remember watching in awe from Melbourne and feeling pride, admiration, and then recognition. After all, this is what we do. Jews do not wait for instruction in a crisis. We don't pause to debate. We move.

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This wasn't just a tragedy. It was another seismic shift in conditions of life for Australian Jews.

I spend a lot of time reflecting on this. Along with so many other questions and explorations. How much of this is rooted in our values? How much in our history? How much is something embedded so deeply it no longer feels like a choice? Is it just Torah? Maybe it's also in our DNA now, a kind of karmic legacy. Maybe it's the quiet, inherited understanding that we are responsible for each other because history has taught us – repeatedly - that no one else will be.

And Then the Reality Settled In

In the days that followed, more things became impossible to ignore. This wasn't just a tragedy. It was another seismic shift in conditions of life for Australian Jews. Jewish schools were increasing security yet again. More security and guards at gates but now with firearms. Students were being trained in "situational awareness." Parents were once again instructed to have children cover uniforms on public transportation so they are less identifiable.

Let's pause on that for a moment. Children in Australia are being taught how to assess threat levels on the way to school because they are visibly Jewish. Parents are recruited to protect school entrances. Families are recalibrating how they move through public space. Jews again recalibrating how they move through public spaces, workplaces, social dynamics ...

And what is most shocking is not just that this is happening. It's how quickly it is becoming normalized.

When Fear Becomes Ambient

There is a particular moment in the life of a society when denial becomes more dangerous than the threat itself. For Jewish Australians, that moment did not arrive with a single headline. But Bondi crystallised it, because what followed was not just grief or shock but something more pronounced and destabilising: As we tracked the behaviour of most ordinary (non-Jewish) Australians, we now saw pronounced hesitation, baffling equivocation, and a recalibration of what is sayable and what must now be endured.

And with that came a dawning recognition: We've been here before.

The Permission Structure

Australia has always comforted itself with distance, claiming: "We are not Europe." "We are not the Middle East." "We are remote from the world's ancient hatreds." But what Bondi and everything around it revealed, is something far more unsettling: Antisemitism does not need to be imported. It only needs permission.

Antisemitism in Australia, like elsewhere in the world has been enabled through a combination of institutional hesitancy, inconsistent enforcement of standards, and a growing tolerance for rhetoric that blurs the line between political criticism and hatred. In academic, media, and public discourse, the normalization of language that demonises Jews collectively, or frames Jewish identity as inherently political, has often gone insufficiently challenged, creating an ecosystem where prejudice circulates under the guise of activism or free expression. Social media continues to amplify these dynamics by accelerating the spread of misinformation and outright lies and allowing coordinated harassment to occur with limited accountability. Together, these factors have contributed to an environment where antisemitic attitudes have taken root, become more visible, and in some cases escalate without timely or decisive pushback from the broader system. It was not surprising to find video footage of the Bondi Beach assailants, 50-year-old Sajid Akram and his son, 24-year-old Naveed Akram, attending the October 9, 2023 anti-Israel rally that garnered international attention for its vociferous chanting of “Gas the Jews” (Heller, 2025).

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Politicians and bureaucrats hide behind a manufactured symmetry, refusing to name antisemitism without immediately bundling it with Islamophobia. The rationale is presented as balance or inclusivity, but it functions as a form of moral evasion that dilutes accountability and blurs responsibility. In practice, this rhetorical pairing allows genuine antisemitism to go under-addressed, justified by a cynical instinct to avoid political discomfort rather than to confront a specific and escalating problem with clarity and conviction.

The reluctance to speak plainly is often tied to an electoral calculus, where the fear of alienating particular voting blocs, including segments of Muslim communities and activist networks, appears to outweigh the responsibility to confront Jew-hate directly. The cost of that cowardice signals to perpetrators that their behavior will not be firmly challenged, and it leaves Jewish communities carrying the burden of ambiguity in a moment that calls for fearless, uncompromised leadership that is still mostly absent.

The Inversion of Reality

There is a willingness to explain hostility toward Jews as context, as reaction, as politics, rather than recognising it for what it is, a particular kind of cognitive dissonance that defines this moment. Criticism of antisemitic, antizionist rhetoric, slogans and chants become “silencing.” Accountability becomes “oppression.” Community concerns and fear become something to be interrogated rather than acknowledged. And those who propagate hostility reposition themselves as the victims.

The Institutional Failure

It would be comforting to believe this is a failure of understanding. It’s not. It is a failure of will. Governments, universities, media organisations, cultural institutions—they are not unaware of what is happening. They are constrained by it. Because confronting modern antisemitism requires entering politically uncomfortable territory. It means challenging narratives that are socially fashionable. It means risking backlash from vocal and organised

constituencies. And that comes at a cost.

So, institutions default to safer positions. We see it, for example, when activist rhetoric that denies Jewish safety is still platformed under the guise of debate and free speech. Prominent activists and academics like Australian of the Year Grace Tame, and best-selling author Randa Abdel-Fattah have been unequivocal in their desire to make cultural spaces hostile to Zionists. Ms Abdel-Fattah refuses to appear on panels with Zionists. Grace Tame wishes to “Globalise the Intifada.” They are then publicly lauded in some quarters and rewarded for their stridency in the name of “human rights” and are invited to head up International Women’s Day events and Writers Festivals. It is somewhat comforting to see occasional mainstream rejection of these promoters of hate and terrorism, but the pushback is still in its infancy.



Members of the local Jewish community embrace at the Bondi Pavillion in memory of the victims of a shooting at Bondi Beach, in Sydney on December 15. Image courtesy of CNN/AFP/Getty Images. Image by Saeed Khan.

We see it when public broadcasters elevate fringe propositions as legitimate discourse. The attempt by Australian Broadcasting Corporation to frame Israeli President Isaac Herzog as a war criminal on his recent visit reflects a deeply irresponsible standard of reporting. It collapses complex geopolitical realities into loaded narratives that presume guilt rather than seek truth. When a public broadcaster adopts language that aligns with accusations instead of evidence, it abandons impartiality in favour of advocacy. It is distortion masquerading as journalism. We see it when flags, slogans and symbols of terrorist groups are proudly displayed publicly on our streets at the all too familiar weekly hate rallies and protests while the police and politicians look on meekly, without censure.

The Marketplace and Its Collapse

We are told this is the marketplace of ideas, and that people are simply debating, contesting, expressing. And that is partly true. But a marketplace requires rules and boundaries that delimit what is acceptable and what is not, what constitutes legitimate argument versus what undermines the conditions for debate itself.

Those boundaries have blurred. When rhetoric that glorifies violence or dehumanizes a community is treated as just another perspective, the marketplace doesn’t become

more open. It becomes distorted. Meanwhile, the public slowly starts noticing, questioning rhetoric that justifies brutality, that intimidates Jewish students, that demands ideological conformity. But when that happens, activists claim they are being silenced. They are not. They are being judged. But none of this matters anymore when the damage has already been done and a new generation of young people, graduating from the universities of their

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... when one group becomes an acceptable target, it doesn’t stay contained. It signals a breakdown in standards, a weakening of the social contract and a shift in what is considered tolerable.

respective social media platforms, are increasingly antisemitic through osmosis.

The Strategic Nature of It All

Antisemitism today is not just prejudice. It is strategic. It operates through narratives, through framing, and through the careful (if often dubious) construction of moral hierarchies. Jews are not always targeted directly or in so many words. We are vilified as Zionists, colonizers and oppressors. These are terms that, in theory at least, should describe political positions, but in practice flatten individuals into symbols of a global grievance. And once you reduce people to symbols, empathy becomes optional. This is how dehumanisation works now. Not only through caricature, but through abstraction.

The Quiet Calculations

For Jewish Australians, the impact is not just fear. It requires a constant process of recalibration, of assessing the situation and second-guessing oneself. Where do I speak? What do I say? How visible do I want to be? Do I wear this?

Do I post that? Do I correct this person - or let it go? These are not dramatic decisions. They are small, but constant and exhausting. And they accumulate.

Why This Matters to Everyone

You don't have to be Jewish to understand why this matters. Because when one group becomes an acceptable target, it doesn't stay contained. It signals a breakdown in standards, a weakening of the social contract and a shift in what is considered tolerable.

History is very clear on this. When antisemitism rises, it is not the end of the problem. It is the beginning of something even more ominous and encompassing.

The Choice Ahead

Every society reaches a point where it has to decide what it is willing to defend; not just in theory, but in practice. We are there now. Do we draw lines or continue to blur them? Do we uphold standards or continually renegotiate them?

Do we confront or continue to manage? Because what happens next will define more than the conditions for Jews. It will define the conditions for everyone.

Silence Isn't Neutral Anymore

I keep coming back to that moment on the couch; watching, waiting, not understanding what was happening but knowing that something had shifted. That feeling hasn't gone away. It's just become clearer. Silence is not neutral anymore. It is a choice. And like every choice, it has consequences. We are not beyond repair. But we are closer to the precipice than many are willing to admit. And whether we move closer to that edge or begin to pull back depends on what we as individuals and as a society are willing to confront now.

Not later. Now.

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REFLECTIONS AFTER BONDI BEACH MASSACRE: RESTORING RUPTURED SAFETY

BY GEORGE HALASZ



I sat mesmerized by the images on TV of two gunmen turning iconic Bondi Beach into the historic site of the Bondi Beach massacre. It was December 14, 2025, the first night of Chanukah.

For an instant, I caught myself doing something that became quietly familiar since October 7, 2023: I scanned my numbed body for signs of danger while reminding myself that, for the moment, I was safe. This was not a thought so much as a nervous reflex.

Since that day, many conversations linked Bondi and Gaza, but Bondi beach in Sydney is not Gaza in southern Israel. Differences, historical, political, cultural and moral, matter. Yet trauma transcends conventional boundaries, it does not ask permission to draw lines of association. Trauma resonates, the resonances that followed Bondi were unmistakable: suddenly, my visceral sense that the psychological membrane separating 'over there' from 'here' had been erased,

For many of the nearly 120,000 Jews in Australia, Bondi did not arrive as a discrete event. It landed in a culture already charged by more than two years of heightened vigilance for antisemitism, of grief and moral disorientation following October 7. What I heard repeatedly, from family, friends, professional consultations and private exchanges, was less panic, rather a quieter disruption: a gradual erosion of confidence in the predictable safety of public spaces, loss of reliability of institutional protection, and the loss of nuanced language to name what was being felt without exaggeration or apology.

What struck me most was the speed with which that eroded sense of safety gave way to vigilance. For many Australians, non-Jews and Jews alike, this massacre carried a particular weight. Bondi was not experienced simply

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For many of the nearly 120,000 Jews in Australia, Bondi did not arrive as a discrete event. It landed in a culture already charged by more than two years of heightened vigilance for antisemitism, of grief and moral disorientation following October 7

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as another episode of public violence; it was metabolized through a public consciousness shaped by the global escalation of antisemitism, fuelled by the ideology of global intifada. The erosion of what had once felt like a settled social contract of public safety was ruptured.

In the years following October 7, I had worked closely with psychiatric colleagues (Spielman et al., 2026; Halasz, 2026), struggling to make psychological sense of the resurgence of antisemitism. In the weeks preceding

the Bondi attack, I was also involved in the production of a documentary involving 10 Israeli mental health professionals, examining what happens when those whose professional role is to provide safety are themselves living under existential threat (Grammenos Dimadis, 2026).

These works-in-progress, pre-Bondi, sensitized me to a recurring pattern: while trauma is ongoing and unresolved, it does not settle into narrative. It remains, to a large extent, lodged in the body, embodied, as hyper-vigilance, the imperative to 'do-do-do', fatigue, irritability, moments of emotional numbing alternating with sudden floods of feeling. Bondi activated precisely these states, but in a distinctly Australian context.

One of the most unsettling aspects of the Bondi aftermath was the speed with which public discourse moved toward abstraction. Motive, ideology, classification of types of racism, hate speech and strict legislation of gun laws, each conversation arrived almost reflexively. This is a familiar defense: intellectualization posing as clarity. But what is often lost in that rush is the psychological cost of premature meaning-making and politicians shunning blame to elude responsibility. For many Jewish Australians, Bondi was not waiting to be explained; it was waiting to be acknowledged.

October 7 forced Jewish communities globally into a new psychological and ethical position: decades after 'never again', the rupture of that enduring promise gave way to our new era: 'after never again'. This became the title of our documentary (Grammenos Dimadis, 2026).

After December 14, we were no longer observers of catastrophe elsewhere, but participants in a destabilized moral world. Bondi intensified that position by collapsing our 'tyranny of distance'. It challenged the implicit belief that Australia's geographic isolation conferred psychological insulation. The shock was not only that violence occurred, but that it occurred in a space coded as quintessentially safe, shared, and iconic.

The question was no longer whether violence could happen here to the Jewish community, but whether Australia had the civic capacity to respond when it did.



The "Anomie Flower" as seen in the documentary *After Never Again*. It represents the soil itself rupturing by the events of October 7 in Israel. The missing flower becomes the testimony of loss from which new meaning now struggles to regrow. Photo courtesy of George Halasz.



Simona Weinstein, Vicki Gordon, Erica Frydenberg, & George Halasz speaking about stress and trauma on therapists in light of the Gaza crisis, and in light of the *After Never Again* documentary. Photo courtesy of George Halasz.

I believe, in this context, it is essential not to collapse these events into one another, even if ideologically linked. October 7 was a mass-casualty atrocity embedded in a geopolitical conflict with historical depth and ongoing consequences. Bondi was experienced as a targeted act of violence specifically against Jews, celebrating the festival of Chanukah. To conflate them would risk erasing specificity. But to ignore their shared characteristics would be equally dishonest. What links these events separated in time and geography is not scale, but the way they fracture trust. Trust was ruptured in institutions mandated to monitor terrorist threats, in civic protection to uphold

safety, and in the assumption that everyday life will remain largely predictable.

During my documentary consultancy for *After Never Again*, I observed repeatedly that communal trauma is less about the ‘event’ itself than about the rupture of safety-assumptions it produces. Safety and trust, once ruptured, cannot be restored by reassurance alone. It requires containment in relational safety, accountability, and long-term commitment to relational repair. And the testing of patience.

What became increasingly clear in the weeks following Bondi was that reassurance by the government had failed. That refusal to listen to the community voice became undeniable. Eventually, the government decided to launch a Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, and the events that led to the Bondi shootings.

However, the cultural shift from political defensiveness to moral listening was not driven primarily by new evidence, rather by mounting social and psychological saturation. Initially led by Josh Frydenberg, former Liberal deputy leader and treasurer, later joined by prominent business leaders, sporting personalities and others. The celebrated Olympian Dawn Fraser even called on the Prime minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, to ‘come down off your high horse’.

Finally, political resistance gave way to acceptance. The Royal Commission that had initially been framed as unnecessary or excessive was suddenly acknowledged as essential. The initial political resistance, framed in procedural or pragmatic terms gave way as it became apparent that something deeper had fractured. In other words, the Royal Commission did not restore safety but merely acknowledged that safety had been ruptured.

The initial refusal to inquire began to feel, to many, like a refusal to listen. Similar in function to Senate hearings in the United States, Royal Commissions function to investigate, but also as a democratic mechanism that seeks clarity and accountability when trust has been shattered. Democracies, like individuals, require such moments of structured self-examination. Without them, reassurance rings hollow.

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The acceptance of a Royal Commission marked a belated recognition that safety is not restored through authority alone, but through the willingness to be scrutinized in the open. How 'open' remains to be seen in the coming months. The concerns were vindicated by mid-March 2026, with the sudden resignation of special advisor to the inquiry, former head of Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) Dennis Richardson, who said he was 'surplus to requirements' of a royal commission.

..... The Commission's report is due on the anniversary of the Bondi massacre: December 14, 2026. A society that cannot examine itself in the aftermath of violence risks compounding harm through silence or procedural minimization.

What is striking in the post-Commission reality was how quickly public language shifted once this need was named. The move from refusal to acceptance signaled a collective recognition that something foundational had been shaken. Clearly, symbolic gestures alone would not suffice. The embodied trauma remains unresolved. This was not about blame; it was about restoring the conditions under which community safety might once again feel credible.

Australian society's broader response to Bondi revealed a complex interplay of both resilience and ruptures. There was genuine communal mourning and an outpouring of solidarity. At the same time, as the protests against visiting Israeli President Isaac Herzog demonstrated, there remained a hesitation to name antisemitism explicitly, a persistent discomfort often justified politically as neutrality. Some even argued that President Herzog's visit could undermine social cohesion and further fuel the already toxic level of antisemitism. Others urged a careful analysis of the impact of the visit, not to misdiagnose the complexity and seek clearer understanding of the role his visit might play in offering solutions.

Psychologically, such hesitation to seek a deeper understanding of complex social ruptures has dire consequences. When communities, or individuals, experiencing threat feel that their reality is being denied, deferred or minimized, the result is not reassurance but isolation of rational thought.

This pattern is well known in trauma work: when acknowledgement lags behind experience, the nervous system fills the gap. People withdraw, polarize, or harden. Leadership in such moments is not demonstrated by premature certainty, but by the capacity to tolerate ambiguity while centering the lived experience of those affected.

For Jewish professionals, clinicians, academics, cultural workers, Bondi sharpened an already difficult double bind. The expectation to remain objective and composed while one's own sense of safety is compromised places an additional, often unspoken, burden. After all, professional identity does not confer immunity. Bondi reminded many of us of this with uncomfortable clarity.

In these past months I found myself returning to questions that have threaded through my work for decades: is

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One of the quieter consequences of Bondi has been exhaustion. Not the acute, dramatic exhaustion of crisis response, but the cumulative fatigue of sustained alertness... This fatigue is not only personal; it is communal. And it has implications for participation, trust, and belonging in the emerging social landscape.

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this 'new' antisemitism really new? (Halasz, 2006), how does inherited trauma interact with post-Bondi's contemporary threat? How do historical memories shape perception without over-determining it? Bondi may not have reactivated, 'triggered', Holocaust memory in any simple or literal way. But it did activate a familiar reaction, hyper-vigilance, a readiness to scan for danger that is both learned and embodied. I do not regard this necessarily as pathology. Quite simply, it is a legacy.

What matters is how societies, and individuals, respond to this legacy. Do we make space for it, or do we pathologize it? Do we keep on listening, or do we reassure prematurely?

In the documentary *After Never Again*, I learned that the most transformative moments occurred not when the therapists of victims and their families offered solutions, but rather when safety was enacted relationally. This 'embodied witnessing' (Halasz, 2026) involved, as one therapist said, "I will walk alongside you". Embodied witnessing, pacing, and allowing silence; these are not merely therapeutic skills. They signal genuine concern, shared humanity.

One of the quieter consequences of Bondi has been exhaustion. Not the acute, dramatic exhaustion of crisis response, but the cumulative fatigue of sustained alertness. I hear many Jewish Australians speak of being "tired of explaining," "tired of calibrating language," "tired of deciding when it is safe to speak." This fatigue is not only personal; it is communal. And it has implications for participation, trust, and belonging in the emerging social landscape.

At the same time, I have witnessed moments of unexpected connection as conversations cut through ideological noise, acts of solidarity that felt grounded rather than performative. I received a number of emails from colleagues just to express their solidarity. These moments matter because they suggest that fracture is not the end of the story. Trauma narrows attention, but it can also clarify values.

As I write this, Bondi has largely receded from the headlines. There is a new Middle East war under way. That, too, now adds to the trauma cycle. Events do fade from public attention long before they fade from our bodies. The challenge, both for Jewish communities and for Australian society more broadly is how to avoid becoming ensnared by escalating tolerance of antisemitism

For those of us working at the intersection of psychology, culture, and community leadership, this moment calls for a particular discipline: to resist both collapse and denial. To hold the distinct events of October 7 and December 14, in relation without flattening them. To speak from personal experience without abandoning objectivity or complexity. Finally, to remember that safety is not restored by declarations, but built by repeated, trustworthy action. Safety is earned over time.

Bondi did not change everything. But it did change something essential in the fabric of Australian life. It reminded

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Bondi did not change everything. But it did change something essential in the fabric of Australian life. It reminded us that the work of safety, psychological, communal, civic, is never finished. It is relational, fragile, and profoundly human. And it asks of us not only analysis and observation, but demands constant and vigilant presence.

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us that the work of safety, psychological, communal, civic, is never finished. It is relational, fragile, and profoundly human. And it asks of us not only analysis and observation, but demands constant and vigilant presence.

I write this to mark an ongoing moment in which Jewish identity, Australian civic life, and global currents of violence are intersecting in ways that demand commitment to care.

If there is a lesson I carry from October 7, to Bondi, and from the intimate witnessing of others' trauma through our documentary work, it is not to close off, but to work at staying present to what has been revealed. That safety

is not a static achievement but a fragile, relational process, one that can be ruptured quickly and repaired only very, very slowly.

In earlier reflections, I have written about safety as something discovered in relationship: in being seen, named, and held long enough for fear to settle into meaning. That remains true here.

What Bondi exposed was not only a breach in security, but a test of whether Australian civic life can sustain the slow, relational work required to repair safety once it has been ruptured.

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THE HYPOCRITES OF ADELAIDE WRITERS' WEEK

BY JULIE SZEGO



If Jewish-Australians, still reeling from the Bondi Hanukkah massacre, were hoping the long antipodean summer would bring some relief from the unrelenting Jew-baiting and harassment of the past two years, reality, yet again, slapped us in the face.

In the post-October 7 era, Jews invariably dominate the news, no matter the season. First, we had the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese fiercely resisting calls for a Royal Commission into anti-Semitism, only to cave in response to public pressure—his dithering and indecision lending fuel to those ready to accuse the “Zionist lobby” of exerting undue influence over Australian politics to stifle “criticism” of Israel.

“Zionists have no right to cultural safety”

This narrative of nefarious Zionist repression finds especially fertile ground in the creative sector, which brings us to the Adelaide Writer's Week fiasco: a summertime thriller, replete with twists, turns and intrigue. A saga that ended on a depressing note for Australian Jews and especially for Jewish women who once felt they belonged to the intellectual left, after big-name local and global authors, including Zadie Smith, Masha Gessen and former New Zealand prime minister, and feminist icon, Jacinta Ardern, effectively rallied in solidarity around Sydney-born, Palestinian-Australian Randa Abdel-Fattah, a writer and academic who insists “Zionists”—who might they be?—have no right to “cultural safety.”



Logo for Feminists Against Antisemitism as seen on their Facebook page.

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**This narrative of nefarious
Zionist repression finds
especially fertile ground in
the creative sector**

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"If you are a Zionist, you have no claim or right to cultural safety. It is the duty of those who oppose racism to ensure that every space Zionists enter is culturally unsafe for them"

- Randa Abdel-Fattah

..... She also openly celebrated October 7, while simultaneously dismissing and minimizing, if not outright denying, the systematic sexual violence perpetrated that day. Israel, she claimed, was "weaponizing rape atrocity propaganda."

Australia's longest-running and most prestigious literary fixture, the AWW is part of the flagship Adelaide Festival of Arts. Its director, Louise Adler, is an antizionist Jew known for courting controversy.

In early 2023, Adler was sharply criticized by the South Australian Premier, Peter Malinauskas, for inviting Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American writer—Adler devoted a whole day's program to hardline Palestinians—who had described Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as "a depraved Zionist" trying to ignite World War III.

Undeterred, Adler scheduled the incendiary Abdel-Fattah to appear at this year's AWW. An author of 14 books for children and young adults, and the recipient of a public funding grant to the tune of A\$870,000 Australian dollars to research "Arab and Muslim-Australian social movements," Abdel-Fattah's reputation precedes her.

She led a children's excursion to the Gaza protest encampment at Sydney University, where she encouraged her charges to chant for "intifada." She changed her Facebook cover photo on 8 October 2023, to an image of a Hamas paraglider in the colors of the Palestinian flag; when pressed on the subject this week, she told Australia's public broadcaster, ABC, that when she chose the image, she had "no idea" about the civilian death toll. The assertion is laughable. In an essay published in Mondoweiss a year after the atrocities, she praised the October 7 attack as a "glimmer of hope... palpable, real and exhilarating."

Me Too—Unless You Are a Jew

On the day itself, for crying out loud, she reshared a post featuring an image of a terrified young woman running from terrorists at the Nova festival that mocked "the indigenous settlers" fleeing their "ancestral land." She added the dehumanizing comment, "What passport should I use today?" It was beyond her to express even fleeting sympathy for the young people butchered in the desert.

Of the women and teenage girls gang-raped and mutilated, she wrote:

"It was always about using the mass rapes claims to whip up genocide fervor... Nobody wishes the mass rape claims were true more than Zionists."

- Randa Abdel-Fattah

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**She led a children's
excursion to the Gaza
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I hardly need to labor, for this audience, the level of malevolence involved in casting doubt on the rape atrocities. Casting doubt in the face of evidence so crushing that even the systemically anti-Israel UN was forced to the belated finding there were “reasonable grounds” to believe that “conflict-related sexual violence—including rape and gang-rape—occurred across multiple locations of Israel and the Gaza periphery.” Casting doubt in the face of what we all saw in Hamas’s own livestream, starting with the gunmen in the back of the pickup truck spitting on Shani Louk’s near-naked, lifeless body.

Unsurprisingly, some on the Adelaide Festival Board, which has oversight of AWW, were nervous about Abdel-Fattah’s inclusion; one member, we’ve since learned, even resigned in protest. Her presence had already made a casualty of last year’s Bendigo Writers’ Festival in regional Victoria, after a university sponsor issued a heavy-handed Code of Conduct in an attempt to muzzle discussion on Gaza—clearly an attempt to muzzle Abdel-Fattah—leading 50 writers to boycott in protest at the “censorship.”

With that walkout, I could sympathize; I’d never sign a Code of Conduct warning me off “divisive and inflammatory” topics. Frankly, it would leave me precious little to talk about. Still—who knew the woke brigade had metamorphosed into free-speech fundamentalists seemingly overnight? I’ll expect an uproar the next time a gender-critical feminist is cancelled.

Then Bondi happened, bringing a vibe shift of sorts. After 15 people were gunned down at a Jewish celebration at one of Australia’s most iconic locations, the Adelaide board, with the strong backing of Malinauskas, rescinded Abdel-Fattah’s invitation from AWW, due to start in February. Given her past statements, the board said, “it would not be culturally sensitive” to platform Abdel-Fattah “so soon after Bondi.”

It was a pathetic, cowardly statement that invoked the fragile feelings of Jews rather than the hard facts about the writer’s pattern of extremist agitation. It also made it easy for Abdel-Fattah to repeat her persistent claim that she was a victim of “anti-Palestinian racism.”

Within days, more than 180 writers had pulled out of AWW, leading the board to implode and Adler to resign as director. She railed on the ABC against what she described as the repressive efforts of the pro-Israel lobby to police debate on Israel, warning that people with “fat chequebooks” were censoring free expression in the arts.

AWW was scrapped in its entirety.

Free Speech as Cover for Hate

Then a new board was appointed and, in an astonishing backflip—presumably executed in the hope of stemming the bleeding—the festival’s new chair, Judy Potter, issued Abdel-Fattah a groveling “unreserved” apology and invited her to take part in next year’s AWW. She is yet to accept. Meanwhile, she is threatening defamation proceedings against Malinauskas for allegedly implying, by way of analogy, that she was “an extremist terrorist sympathizer.” Whatever gave him that idea?

Where to start with the Orwellian inversions in this caper? For we have also since learned that both Abdel-Fattah

and Adler herself successfully prevailed upon the board to cancel a Zoom appearance by Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman because of one allegedly off-color column, in which he compared geopolitics in the Middle East to the animal kingdom.

As I wrote in *The Australian*, “with the stroke of an unctuous press release we’re supposed to believe the suppressors of free speech have turned into its champions.”

And in a perverse reversal of cause-and-effect, we’re supposed to believe that a cheerleader for a racist terror organization and advocate for the exclusion of “Zionists” from Australia’s cultural and intellectual scene, is a victim of racism rather than a disseminator of it.

Where Are the Feminists?

The decision to bar Abdel-Fattah from AWW, explained Kathy Lette, one of the 180 boycotting authors, “sends a divisive and plainly discriminatory message that platforming Australian Palestinians is ‘culturally insensitive.’” As co-author of the 1979 classic, *Puberty Blues*, Lette’s frank description of male sexual violence in the “surfie” subculture changed Australian literature forever. Now here she is pandering to the “resistance by any means necessary” mob.

To be fair, I’m sure—or, at least, I hope—that many of the boycotting writers don’t share Abdel-Fattah’s wish to cancel Israel, however much the Gaza war might have soured sentiment towards the Jewish state. No doubt many pulled out simply because others had pulled out; others might have felt bullied into doing so.

When writer Shokoofeh Azar told *The Guardian* she had refused to join the boycotters because writers’ festivals were one of the few platforms through which Iranian dissidents like her could make their voices heard, she reportedly copped a torrent of online abuse. One commentator said: “You should be killed like the Israelis.”

Again, what to make of a world in which feminists choose to stand with a terror apologist and rape denier, and not with those resisting a regime where women can be killed for showing hair?

“I didn’t want to undermine the festival, that’s not my point,” author Jane Caro, a prominent #MeToo campaigner, told the ABC about her decision to pull out, “my point is trying to live up to my values and my belief about the right of people to express opinions.”

Except “living by one’s values” would surely oblige freedom-loving writers such as Caro to explicitly disavow Abdel-Fattah’s ideas; to make it clear that their decision to withdraw should not be read as endorsing her views. If only for the sake of the Jews grieving their dead—not in a conflict on the other side of the world, but here, on Bondi Beach.

But as far as I know, none of the boycotting writers have made such a statement. Not even after weeks of media reporting on all the hateful things Abdel-Fattah has said and done.

And in their silence, I can’t help but glimpse a rigid worldview in which Jews simply can’t be victims, only

oppressors. Because we've heard this silence from the political left before. It's the same silence we heard after October 7, and it's deafening still.

About the Author:

Julie Szego is an Australian journalist and author who writes regularly for *The Australian* and publishes a Substack newsletter. This piece was originally published on January 22 in the Feminists Against Antisemitism Substack, described as "a space for women to name and challenge antisemitism in feminist spaces."

SIX-MINUTE MASSACRE

BY PETER AUSTIN



The first night of Hanukkah, Archer Park.
After the large menorah had been lighted,
Klezmer music played. In the growing dark,
Boris Gurman and wife Sofia sighted

ISIS logos, on a car that was sitting
Underneath a footbridge. A man leapt out,
Wielding a shotgun. Boris, his teeth gritting,
Charged toward him and, landing a clout

That floored him, kicked him in the ribs and head.
Out with a rifle flew a second man
Who paused to aim and shot the couple dead;
Thus a six-minute massacre began.

When it was done, the death count topped a dozen:
Twelve men, two women and a ten-years lass,
Each one somebody's nephew, niece or cousin,
While forty more lay bleeding on the grass.

Matilda had been named by parents who
Had fled Ukraine in peace and freedom's hope;
Aghast, they'd watched her leave the petting zoo,
Stumble and collapse on the downward slope,

Her life cut short for no credible cause...
The Australian parliament assembled,
Voted to strengthen appropriate laws,
While her parents wordlessly wept and trembled.

Author's note:

*This happened on Dec 14, 2025, at Bondi Beach.
Of the two assailants, Sajid Akram (an Australian
permanent resident) was killed by police. At the time
of this writing, his son Naveed (an Australian citizen)
is on remand in Goulburn Correctional Centre,
awaiting trial for 15 murders and 44 other offences.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH NICKY JACOBS, FOUNDER OF THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH PSYCHOLOGISTS

INTERVIEW BY DAN WARNER



Introduction

Dr. Nicky Jacobs is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Australia's Monash University and a founding member of the Australian Jewish Psychologists (AJP)—yes, another AJP. For more than two decades, Dr. Jacobs has helped build a coalition of volunteer Jewish psychologists prepared to respond to the unique mental health needs of the Jewish community in times of collective trauma. Today, that network includes more than 100 registered clinicians and works alongside other Jewish communal organizations providing security, medical, and social support.

This work took on heightened urgency following the December 14, 2025 antisemitic attack targeting Hanukkah celebrants at Bondi Beach in Sydney. AJP members were among the first responders to the affair with its impact experienced in Melbourne as well. The incident drew international attention and underscored the need for culturally informed trauma response and a deep understanding of the specific experiences of Jewish communities in Australia.

Dr. Jacobs brings both personal and professional insight to this work. Born and raised within Australia's Jewish community, she has conducted research on Jewish educational and community issues and has played a central role in developing Australia's coordinated Jewish psychological response to community trauma.

Dr. Jacobs spoke with *Kesher* Managing Editor Dan Warner about the origins of the Australian Jewish Psychologists, their evolving role within the Jewish community, and the current realities facing Australian Jewry.

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So, Dr. Jacobs, you are actually from Australia but I'm speaking to you while you're in Hong Kong—how did this happen?

Well, I am an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education faculty at Monash University, which in Australia sits a level above Senior Lecturer and below full Professor. Monash is one of Australia's "Group of Eight" universities and consistently ranks among the top universities globally. Founded by Sir John Monash, an Australian Jew, interestingly, who returned from World War I to start this large multi-campus institution—more like a small city than a single university. I completed my PhD in 2004 from Monash, and my research at the time focused on academic achievement within Jewish schools in Melbourne.

Since 2005 my role has changed and currently it involves managing our faculty's relationship with the programs we run in Singapore and Hong Kong. So in addition to teaching, I oversee quality, coordination, and the various issues that arise with those programs.

I typically travel to the region about three times a year, and I've been doing that for more than twenty years now. It's really become a home away from home for me. If I'm not teaching, I usually stay about a week to ten days. On this trip, I came from Singapore and will head back to Australia at the end of the week.

What was your dissertation research? It seems to have been relevant to the Jewish community?

Melbourne had one of the largest Jewish populations of holocaust survivors outside Israel, with many families still experiencing the impact as second and third generation survivors. There are about ten Jewish schools in Melbourne, from kindergarten through secondary school, and they consistently perform at the top academically. My research explored why that was—whether it was something about the schools themselves, the students, or the family environments.

After completing my PhD, I became involved in a collaboration with Tel Aviv University, where we conducted research on bullying, particularly in schools. Since then, much of my research has come through supervising PhD students. One project examined the transmission of trauma into the third generation—particularly relevant given the large number of Holocaust survivor families in Melbourne. More recently, I've also been working on research involving the Rorschach.

This makes me realize, it might be helpful for us to know a bit about your family background. How long has your family been in Australia? What is your family relationship to Australia?

Oh... well how do I tell this story? It's a long one! My father was born in Poland and left when he was two years old. My grandmother was religious and wanted to go to Palestine, so the family moved there. Life was very difficult, and after about four or five years they relocated to Australia. From about age seven or eight, my father grew up in Australia and became very Australian. He came well before World War II. In fact during the war, he was in the Australian airforce.

My mother's story was very different. She was born in Vienna and escaped during the Nazi period. Her family ended up in Trinidad, which is in the West Indies and a British colony. Because they were Austrian, they were classified as enemy aliens and placed in an internment camp. It wasn't anything like a concentration camp, but it was still a difficult experience. My mother later wrote about this period, and I still have her diary from that time.

After the war, they were sponsored by a friend from Vienna who was living in Australia, and that's how my mother came to Melbourne. She met my father at a Jewish dance in St Kilda synagogue..

Interestingly, my husband's family is fifth-generation Australian. They had a very different perspective and didn't necessarily understand the experiences of European Jewish refugees. In fact, many European Jews who arrived after the war were initially seen as foreigners, even within the existing Australian Jewish community.

My mother's family had originally planned to go to America. My grandfather even had tickets, but he had a dream in which his father told him not to wait and to leave immediately. Because they couldn't transfer their funds in time, the only tickets available were to Trinidad. They left on what turned out to be one of the last ships leaving Europe. The rest of the family who stayed behind were killed.

My mother later participated in the Shoah Foundation interviews initiated by Steven Spielberg. Even now, I find it emotional to revisit her story.

So how did you start getting involved in the work of healing trauma in the Jewish community?

The turning point for me came in 1997, during the Maccabiah Bridge disaster in Israel. Several Australians were injured or killed when the bridge collapsed over the Yarkon River. Many children in my own community had friends who were there, and one of the mothers in my daughter's class died. The impact on the community in Melbourne was profound.

When I went to my children's school, I saw psychologists had been brought in, but I felt the response, while well-intentioned, lacked the required cultural understanding. I began thinking about whether secular professionals truly understood the Jewish community, Holocaust survivors, language needs, and cultural sensitivities.

That led me to start a group of psychologists who understood Jewish culture, trauma, and the legacy of the Holocaust, and who could provide services in multiple languages. I spent about a year researching models, but most I found—particularly in the United States—were paid services. My vision was different. I believed that in a safe country like Australia, professionals should give back voluntarily to their community.



The logo for the Australian Jewish Psychologists

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We launched around 2000 or 2001. We're called the Australian Jewish Psychologists—I joke to Beth, we're the other AJP!

We've now been operating for about twenty-five years, and about half of the original committee members are still involved including myself as president. Membership requires being Jewish, being a registered psychologist in Australia, and volunteering time without charging fees. At any given time, we've had around fifty members, all trained annually so we could respond quickly in the event of community trauma.

One of the things that's important to understand about Melbourne is that the Jewish community has a very well-developed infrastructure. Because it's a large and established community, there are multiple organizations that serve different functions, and AJP sits within that broader ecosystem, primarily as the mental health response for community-wide trauma.

In Melbourne, there is an umbrella organization called the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV), which brings together around sixty Jewish organizations. This includes schools, synagogues, cultural groups, social organizations, and many other community bodies. Most Jewish organizations in Melbourne are affiliated with JCCV, which serves as a coordinating body and helps bring the community together.

Another key organization is the Community Security Group (CSG), which is responsible for security across the Jewish community. They work closely with government agencies, including police and intelligence services, and they monitor potential threats, including activity online. Jewish schools, synagogues, and major community institutions all have security measures in place, and CSG plays a central role in coordinating those efforts. In many ways, they function as the frontline response for safety and security concerns within the Jewish community.

There is also Hatzolah, the Jewish volunteer ambulance service. Like similar organizations in other parts of the world, Hatzolah provides rapid emergency medical response and operates alongside mainstream ambulance services. It began as a volunteer effort within the religious community but has grown into a highly organized and professional service, supported by philanthropic funding and widely used across the Jewish community.

In addition, there are social service organizations such as Jewish Care, which provides support for vulnerable individuals, families, and older adults. Facilities such as Jewish nursing homes and community support

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That led me to start a group of psychologists who understood Jewish culture, trauma, and the legacy of the Holocaust, and who could provide services in multiple languages.

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services are part of this broader network, reflecting the community’s emphasis on mutual care and responsibility.

Within this landscape, AJP has carved out a specific role. The organization does not typically provide individual general therapy referrals—those are handled through standard healthcare pathways. Instead, AJP focuses on trauma response and recovery, that is community-wide trauma: events that affect individuals and also large numbers of the community. In those situations, trauma trained AJP members can be mobilized quickly to provide debriefing, psychological support, and consultation.

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In the early years, most of our work involved responding to local community traumas rather than large-scale events.
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Over time, AJP also developed a close working relationship with the Community Security Group. When incidents occur that may require psychological support, referrals can be routed through this system, allowing AJP to respond quickly and in a coordinated way. This integration has helped position AJP as the primary mental health response organization for the Jewish community in Melbourne during times of crisis.

There’s also an app called JEAP, the Jewish Emergency App, that many people in the Jewish community have downloaded onto their phones. The app provides real-time updates, such as alerts if a Jewish person has been attacked in a particular area, along with guidance to be cautious nearby. It also includes direct contact links to key community services. For example, there’s a button that connects you immediately to the Community Security Group (CSG), so if someone is being assaulted or there’s an antisemitic incident, help can be dispatched very quickly. There’s also a direct link to Hatzolah, the Jewish volunteer ambulance service, allowing users to request emergency medical assistance immediately.

In addition to the JEAP app, Jewish Community Crisis Managaement (JCCM) a division of CSG has a website for community emergencies and includes a mental health option. When someone submits a request for psychological support, it comes directly to me through a linked form. From there, I coordinate with our group, which now includes about one hundred registered Jewish psychologists. Depending on the situation, a psychologist will volunteer to respond, or I may reach out directly to someone I think is particularly suited to the case and ask them to follow up. In this way, the website helps connect community members quickly with security, medical, and mental health support through a coordinated system.

Together, these organizations form a comprehensive network—security, medical response, social services, and mental health—reflecting the strength and cohesion of Melbourne’s Jewish community. AJP operates within this broader framework, contributing its expertise in trauma and psychological support when the community faces collective challenges.

What kinds of events prompted response when the organization started?

In the early years, most of our work involved responding to local community traumas rather than large-scale events. These were often smaller incidents but deeply impactful within a close-knit community. For example, there was a religious school camp where a rabbi and his wife were killed in a car accident after dropping off their

children at camp. In a small community, that kind of event affects everyone. We would go to the campsite, conduct debriefings, provide follow-up support, and help families process the trauma.

There were also other incidents, such as a sudden heart attack by a member at a Jewish snooker club, where many community members were present and affected. We would respond to those situations, offering psychological support and debriefing.

In addition to crisis response, we also provided community education—presentations on parenting, mental health, and other topics relevant to Jewish life. When visiting Jewish speakers came to Australia, we often invited them to speak to our community. This was largely how we operated for many years, responding to local needs and building relationships.

At the time, major trauma felt distant. Events like terrorism or war seemed far away, something that happened overseas or in Israel—not in Melbourne. That changed dramatically after October 7.

So the October 7th 2023 attacks marked a turning point?

October 7 marked a profound turning point. The Jewish community in Melbourne has very strong connections to Israel—many Melbourne families have children who have made aliyah, and many Israelis live in Melbourne. When the attacks occurred, people were deeply affected. Some had children serving in Gaza, others had family members in danger, and some lost loved ones, including people who were at the music festival.

The demand for support increased rapidly, and membership in AJP grew quickly as psychologists stepped forward to help. This response reflected a natural reaction to crisis—people wanted to take action and support their community.

AJP operates entirely on a volunteer basis, and most members have full-time jobs, often in private practice. Because we are a not-for-profit with no funding, we limit membership to registered psychologists to ensure professional standards, ethical accountability, and appropriate insurance coverage.

During this period, we also strengthened connections with Israeli organizations, including Hadassah Hospital. We participated in briefings, trainings, and consultations with psychologists in Israel, learning from their experience managing large-scale trauma.

Previously, we had been trained annually by a leading Australian trauma specialist who we brought in for a full workshop. Very decorated, highly esteemed clinician and researcher. While his training had been valuable, after October 7 many members felt that he did not fully understand the specific dynamics of Jewish trauma. He was defensive of political voices in the Australian government who were protective of Hamas, and this

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really turned off many of our members. That led us to seek training from Jewish trauma specialists, including Dr. Shiri Ben-David, Chief Psychologist at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, who provided both in-person and online training for our members.

These developments significantly expanded AJP’s role and preparedness for responding to large-scale community trauma.

And I imagine the December 14 attack on Bondi Beach Australia, was even more significant...

If October 7 was a turning point, December 14 was something different entirely—it happened on our home turf. Sydney and Melbourne had never experienced anything like this before, and the response was initially chaotic. Within minutes, I called a committee meeting. Everyone wanted to help, and our members immediately began contacting community organisations offering psychological support). We started by providing debriefings for several organisations, who were under enormous strain managing heightened security and monitoring threats.

Some of our members volunteered to travel from Melbourne to Sydney to assist. However, when they arrived, they found that many organizations were working independently, without a cohesive structure. Everyone was trying to help, but there did not appear to be a coordinated system. Sydney did not have an equivalent organization to ours, and different groups—including government agencies and Jewish organizations—were responding simultaneously but often in silos.

Despite this, we responded wherever we were asked and several requests came from the Bondi community. We also maintained contact with the community, including follow-up visits and participation in the vigil.

This experience highlighted both the strength of the Jewish communal response and the need for better coordination. People stepped forward instinctively to help—something that is deeply embedded in Jewish communal culture—but it also revealed the importance of building a more structured response system.

So you have been making more international connections?

A few years earlier, I discovered an organization in the United States with the same name as ours. I reached out to Beth Rom-Rymer in Washington, and we quickly formed a connection. Through further conversations, we also

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People stepped forward instinctively to help—something that is deeply embedded in Jewish communal culture—but it also revealed the importance of building a more structured response system.
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connected with colleagues in Canada, creating what became an informal global network of Jewish mental health professionals.

After December 14, those connections became invaluable. We received messages from colleagues in the United States and Canada asking how they could help. In some cases, individuals with family members affected by the events reached out through these international

networks, and we were able to connect them with support in Australia. It was remarkable to see how quickly this global collaboration developed.

We also began working with Israeli organizations such as JReady, part of the Jewish Agency, and participated in training with Professor Moshe Farchi, a leading trauma specialist from Israel. He traveled to Sydney shortly after the attack and conducted training sessions for our members, introducing a trauma response model widely used in Israel. We have since incorporated elements of his approach into our work and continued to participate in additional training sessions.

In addition, we joined an international support network established by Tracey Farber, a South African psychologist living in Israel. This group connects mental health professionals across countries, providing peer support and collaboration. Through email and WhatsApp groups, clinicians from Australia, Israel, South Africa, and other regions can share resources and support one another.

These international connections have strengthened our capacity and reinforced the sense that Jewish communities worldwide are working together to respond to shared challenges.

How would you describe the climate now in the Jewish community in Australia?

Right now, the Australian Jewish community is very alert and deeply affected by global events, particularly developments in Israel and the Middle East. The connection between Melbourne's Jewish community and Israel is extremely strong. Many families have children or relatives living in Israel, and many Israelis live in Melbourne. As a result, events overseas are experienced as personal and immediate.

This is a war that had to happen and I hope that it ultimately enables Israel to be safer. At the same time, from my understanding and communication with Israelis, life goes on. When the sirens go off, it's part of their normal

AJP is currently preparing a submission to the Royal Commission. Our focus is on the mental health impact of antisemitism—not only on the Jewish community but also on the psychologists and professionals providing support.

experience—people grow up with that, and it becomes woven into everyday life. For us, though, what has happened recently has felt very abnormal. In Melbourne, we're dealing with a significant rise in antisemitism, and there's a growing sense that we need to be ready to act in a more structured and cohesive way if something happens locally. What occurred in Sydney showed how disjointed things can be when you haven't experienced it before, and we realized that if it had happened in Melbourne, the response would likely have been just as fragmented. As a result, many organizations are now

coming together to build a more coordinated structure so that, if something does happen in Melbourne—which many people anticipate may occur at some point—we'll be better prepared to respond.

And what are your hopes and vision for Australian Jewish Psychologists moving forward?

As a result of these events, AJP is becoming stronger and more organized. Members are highly engaged, attending trainings, and preparing for potential future incidents. There is a strong commitment to being ready to respond in a structured and coordinated way if ... really when needed.

At the same time, the broader context in Australia is evolving. Following recent events, there has been a push for a Royal Commission to investigate the rise in antisemitism and the government's response. A Royal Commission in Australia is a formal federal-level investigation into major issues. After significant pressure from both Jewish and non-Jewish leaders, the government agreed to establish one.

AJP is currently preparing a submission to the Royal Commission. Our focus is on the mental health impact of antisemitism—not only on the Jewish community but also on the psychologists and professionals providing support. We are also developing recommendations for improving responses to future incidents.

In addition, the Australian government has allocated \$14.5 million nationwide to help communities manage antisemitism. This funding will be distributed through Primary Health Networks, government organizations responsible for community health services. AJP has already participated in consultations with government-appointed groups, representing one of seventeen Jewish organizations in Melbourne. These discussions are helping shape how resources will be allocated, and AJP expects to apply for funding to support its work.

Overall, there is a great deal happening at the moment. The focus is on strengthening community resilience, improving coordination, and ensuring that mental health support is available in the face of rising challenges.

How have you seen the reactions and responses from the Australian academic community, especially at Monash?

At a personal level, these events have also shaped my experience within academia. Monash University has one of the largest Jewish student populations in Australia, and I have worked there for more than twenty years. Seeing the encampments emerge across Monash University — a university named in honour of Sir John Monash, one of Australia's most respected Jewish Australians — after October 7 was deeply confronting and profoundly disappointing. Universities are meant to be places where ideas can be debated respectfully, where complexity is acknowledged, and where students of all backgrounds feel safe to learn, question, and belong. Instead, what unfolded on campus often felt divisive, hostile, and emotionally unsafe for many Jewish students and staff.

Despite these challenges, the work continues. There is a strong sense of responsibility to support the community, build structures, and prepare for the future.

And it seems it will continue to be global?

One of the most meaningful developments to emerge from this period has been the strengthening of global connections among Jewish mental health professionals. What began as informal outreach has gradually evolved into a growing international network. Psychologists from Australia, Israel, the United States, Canada, South Africa, and other countries are now sharing resources, consultation, and support.

These connections have developed organically. People reached out following October 7 and subsequent events, asking how they could help, offering consultation, and sharing training opportunities. WhatsApp groups and email lists quickly formed, allowing professionals across continents to exchange ideas and respond to emerging needs in real time.

This global collaboration has been particularly valuable in learning from Israeli clinicians, who have extensive experience working with large-scale trauma. Their approaches, models, and practical strategies have helped inform AJP's response and training efforts. At the same time, professionals in other countries have contributed their own expertise, creating a reciprocal exchange of knowledge.

There is now a growing sense that Jewish mental health professionals worldwide are working together in a coordinated and supportive way. This network continues to evolve, and many participants see it as an important resource for the future.

Looking ahead, the focus remains on preparedness, collaboration, and community resilience. AJP continues to strengthen its internal structure, expand training, and build relationships with partner organizations. The goal is to ensure that when the next crisis occurs—whether local or global—the community will be ready to respond quickly and effectively.

At the same time, there is recognition that this work is ongoing. The challenges facing Jewish communities are unlikely to disappear, and mental health professionals will continue to play a critical role in supporting individuals and communities. The experiences of the past year have underscored the importance of cultural understanding, coordination, and proactive planning.

Despite the difficulties, there is also a sense of purpose. Many psychologists have stepped forward to volunteer their time, support their communities, and build something lasting. In that sense, the response to crisis has also created an opportunity—to strengthen connections, develop new structures, and build resilience for the future.

Ultimately, what has emerged is a deeper recognition of the importance of community. The events of the past year have brought challenges, but they have also brought people together—locally, nationally, and internationally.

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For those involved in AJP, the work continues, grounded in a commitment to support, collaboration, and care. The goal is not only to respond to crises but to build a stronger, more connected community for the future.

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ZIONIST IDENTITY AS SOCIAL IDENTITY: RECOGNITION, INVALIDATION, AND THEORY

BY MARTIN STROUS



Introduction

Zionism is typically considered a political ideology or nationalist movement, but for many Jews it also functions as a lived social identity. When “Zionist” becomes a stigmatizing or morally disqualifying label, individuals may experience identity invalidation. Drawing on concepts from social identity theory and minority stress theory, this article examines how Zionist identification operates as a dimension of social belonging. It uses South African examples to illustrate how Zionist identification as a form of social identity is invalidated publicly and the need to recognize the psychological consequences.

Social psychology has developed frameworks for understanding socially stigmatized identities. Social identity theory, racial identity theory and minority stress theory demonstrate how group belonging becomes psychologically meaningful and how stigma, exclusion, and conditional acceptance shape emotional and behavioral responses. These frameworks emerged because psychological reactions to identity-based marginalization are socially triggered and cannot be adequately understood solely as individual over-sensitivity or isolated discrimination. Yet Zionist identification has received little systematic attention as a lived social identity. This article examines how Zionist identification operates as a dimension of social belonging and explores the psychological consequences when that identity is stigmatized.

The article advances three claims. First, Zionist identification may function psychologically as a salient social identity rather than merely a political ideology. Second, contemporary antizionist discourse often shifts from policy critique to identity invalidation. Third, existing identity frameworks, particularly social identity theory and minority

stress theory, help explain the psychological consequences of such invalidation but require refinement to capture the distinctive features of Zionist identification.

Zionism as a Salient, Lived Identity

Zionism, at its core, affirms the Jewish people's right to self-rule in their historic homeland, rooted in longstanding religious, historical, and symbolic attachment to Zion (Jerusalem). Modern Zionism arose from experiences of exile and diaspora, where periods of flourishing alternated with marginalization, displacement, and persecution. These experiences forged a collective identity rooted in shared memory, enduring ties to the Land of Israel, and a persistent awareness of vulnerability.

A central slogan of the Zionist movement, "to build and be built," links development of an indigenous homeland with collective psychological renewal (Zakim, 2006). Drawing on resonant Hebrew etymology, Zionist thought linked adam to adamah (personhood to soil), symbolically binding human renewal to the land (Zakim, 2006).

Zionist identification is not synonymous with support for any particular government, political party or policy. People can disagree about occupation, security, and minority rights and still experience their Zionism as commitment to Jewish peoplehood and self-determination. Political choice is malleable: one can change one's mind, keep quiet or "agree to disagree." Identities are also dynamic, but probably less readily changeable. For those who identify strongly, the psychological meaning of being "Zionist" may be closer to a salient social identity than to a political outlook.

Existing identity frameworks, including racial identity theory and minority stress theory, offer important tools for understanding contested belonging and stigma. Yet Zionist identification has features not fully captured in those models. Two distinctive features are particularly relevant. First, Zionist identification is often partially concealable, meaning individuals may choose whether to disclose or suppress it in specific environments. Second, Zionist identification reflects a diasporic relationship to sovereignty, in which attachment to Israel as a nation-state is experienced from both within and outside its borders. These and other characteristics (Strous, 2026) suggest the need for a particular tailored account of how Zionist identification operates.

Zionist Identity as Multifaceted and Dynamic

I have proposed a tentative model of Zionist identity (Strous, in process) drawing on multidimensional and developmental approaches in social identity theory, racial identity theory and minority stress theory, consistent with the emphasis in multicultural psychology on complex, context-sensitive identity (Pedersen, 2013). Zionist identity is diverse and can evolve over time. It spans religious and secular Jews, left, and right, Israelis and diaspora communities, people who feel pride and people who feel ambivalence. It sits at the intersection

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of multiple domains, including peoplehood, history, moral meaning, attachment to land, and interpretations of collective vulnerability and sovereignty. Treating “Zionist” as a fixed stereotype risks collapsing the individual into a simplistic or distorted representation. Any meaningful framework must account for this complexity and for the possibility of both continuity and change.

Distinguishing Jewish and Zionist Identity

Jewish and Zionist identification overlap but are not synonymous. Jewish identity encompasses belonging to a people, a religious and cultural tradition, shared practices and a collective historical memory. Zionist identification represents a more specific orientation within that broader framework: the affirmation that Jews, as a people, have the right to collective self-determination in Israel as their ancestral homeland.

Although Jewish and Zionist identities are historically intertwined, they are not identical. Not all Jews identify as Zionist, and any serious account of Zionist identity must allow for both identification and non-identification within Jewish communities. Some Jews reject modern Zionism on theological grounds. Others distance themselves because of moral or political objections to Israeli state policy or to the consequences of its establishment. Although connection to Israel remains a significant dimension of Jewish communal affiliation for many Jews (Jim Joseph Foundation, 2025), not all Jews define themselves as Zionist. When “Zionist” becomes a stigmatizing or morally disqualifying label, it may target a dimension of identity that is central for some Jews and peripheral or rejected by others.

Failing to distinguish Jewish and Zionist identification risks overgeneralizing Jewish experience or minimizing the psychological impact on those for whom Zionist identity is deeply woven into their sense of peoplehood, historical continuity and belonging. Recognizing both overlap and difference between Jewish and Zionist identification allows for a more precise understanding of identity-based harm and diversity within Jewish communal life.

Identity-Based Harm

If Zionist identification can function as a salient, multifaceted social identity, then it follows that threats to that identity may operate psychologically as identity-based harm rather than as ordinary political disagreement. Identity

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theory describes understandable psychological reactions to discrimination that might otherwise be dismissed as personal sensitivity to political disagreement. It asks questions such as: How central is this identity to the person? How safe is it to express? How is the person managing pride, conflict or shame? Is the person concealing aspects of themselves to remain accepted or safe?

Minority stress theory explains that when an identity is socially stigmatized, individuals may experience cumulative stress through discrimination, display

heightened vigilance and experience internal conflict (Meyer, 2003). These dynamics are well documented in marginalized communities and are increasingly evident in current Jewish communal life. Choosing not to wear a Magen David at work, avoiding mention of Israeli family members, or fearing that the label “Zionist” will be interpreted as evidence of moral wrongdoing are concrete examples of how such stress is lived and managed in everyday contexts.

Without a clear model of Zionist identity, identity-related harm is more difficult to name and study. Yet Zionists are frequently being targeted and vilified. To understand these dynamics more precisely, a central distinction must be drawn between political disagreement and identity targeting.

Political disagreement takes the form of statements such as, “I oppose that policy.” It invites debate and presumes the continued legitimacy of the person addressed. Identity targeting communicates something different: “People like you do not belong here,” or “Your participation is conditional on renouncing a core element of who you are.” The first concerns ideas. The second concerns belonging. It is the latter that is most likely to generate psychological stress.

When hostility toward Zionist identity is framed as a moral virtue by those opposed to Israel, exclusion based on identity can be presented as an ethical stance. In such contexts, stress responses by those identifying as Zionist become increasingly likely.

Contemporary antizionist discourse often treats Zionism as uniquely illegitimate in ways not applied to other national or self-determination movements. When “Zionist” functions as a proxy label for “racist,” “colonialist,” or “genocidal” irrespective of an individual’s personal beliefs, the person thus described is not being addressed as a complex individual but as the embodiment of a despised group. The identity invalidation communicates that the individual’s foundational source of meaning and belonging is unacceptable and must be erased.

The word “Zionist” increasingly functions as a pejorative label that constructs Jews as racist or morally illegitimate, often without regard to how individuals define their own Zionism (Hirsh, 2021). A tailored account is needed to distinguish this type of identity targeting from policy critique and to describe its psychological consequences.

These dynamics are not merely theoretical. After October 7, 2023, many Jewish communities reported experiencing silence, blame, exclusion, and denial in interpersonal and institutional settings (Bar-Halpern & Wolfman, 2025). In some spaces, “Zionist” has become a pejorative label used to sort who is morally admissible and who is morally disqualified from participating in social and institutional structures.

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Identity Invalidation: South African Examples

The abstract dynamics described above become more concrete when examined in specific contexts. Recent South African examples illustrate how political disagreement can shift into identity invalidation.

One widely discussed case involved the exclusion of King David School from a scheduled inter-school sports fixture after members of the host school community objected to competing against a Jewish institution perceived to be “Zionist.” The pupils involved were not policymakers or representatives of a state. They were children participating in school sports. Participation in a routine civic activity was restricted because of an attributed social identity. The issue was not policy advocacy but the external attribution of identity. The exclusion operated to mark Jewish children attending a Zionist-affiliated school as outside the boundaries of ordinary civic participation.

A related pattern emerged in a public “Letter of Solidarity with the Roedean Community,” in which a group, South African Jews for a Free Palestine, described Zionism as a hateful ideology. By one member’s own acknowledgment in a separate radio interview, the vast majority of South African Jews identify as Zionist. Framing Zionism as inherently hateful therefore implicates a mainstream dimension of Jewish communal life. In this way, an ideological position is transformed into a character judgment attached to a large segment of an ethnic community.

Individuals are entitled to reject Zionism for themselves. The difficulty arises when rejection is framed in ways that effectively delegitimize most South African Jews who identify as Zionist. When a widely held identity is framed as morally disqualifying, the label functions not merely as critique of state policy but as a characterization of an ethnic group.

Contemporary antizionist discourse often treats Zionism as uniquely illegitimate in ways not applied to other national or self-determination movements. When “Zionist” functions as a proxy label for “racist,” “colonialist,” or “genocidal” irrespective of an individual’s personal beliefs, the person thus described is not being addressed as a complex individual but as the embodiment of a despised group.

Parallel dynamics have also appeared within professional mental health spaces. In 2025, the Johannesburg screening of a documentary on Sigmund Freud by an Israeli director was subjected to attempts at disruption and shutdown. Protestors sought to prevent the event from proceeding and tried to pressure the director to renounce Israel. The film itself explored Freud’s experience of Jewish identity in an antisemitic Europe, yet the event became the target of exclusionary tactics. The issue was not a scholarly debate about psychoanalysis or politics, but whether an Israeli contributor could participate without publicly disavowing imposed narratives (cf. Strous, 2026).

A similar pattern unfolded during preparations for the 7th Global Mental Health Summit in Cape Town. An Israeli academic specializing in multicultural mental health practice was invited to present research aligned with the summit’s aims. Opponents of Israel demanded a public denunciation by the billed presenter of Israeli state actions. Under this pressure, she withdrew from the conference. The controversy did not center on the content of her scholarship but on her national identity. Here again, participation was conditioned not on scholarly merit but on

public disavowal of an identity marker, illustrating conditional belonging in practice.

Across these examples, a common mechanism appears. “Zionist” or “Israeli” functions not simply as a descriptor but as a boundary marker. Belonging becomes conditional when participation in educational and professional spaces is tied to distancing oneself from an attributed Zionist or Israeli identity. Individuals are sorted into those deemed morally admissible and those regarded as disqualified.

These South African cases illustrate how identity invalidation can operate within educational and professional institutions that otherwise espouse inclusion. The concern is not that debate about Israel should be curtailed. Robust disagreement is part of democratic and academic life. Concern arises when disagreement shifts into delegitimization of identity itself and when participation is made dependent on renouncing a core dimension of belonging. Similar patterns have increased worldwide at alarming rates.

Conclusion

Zionism has political implications, but for many Jews it also functions as a lived social identity grounded in peoplehood, history, and belonging. When “Zionist” becomes a stigmatizing or morally disqualifying label, the issue is not only political disagreement but identity invalidation.

These social and psychological pressures do not necessarily lead to disengagement or identity loss for all Zionists. For many, the pressures instead sharpen awareness of what is at stake in maintaining a coherent sense of belonging, remaining fully Jewish and fully part of the societies in which they live, despite demands to fragment or renounce aspects of that identity.

Developing a clearer account of Zionist identification would allow the psychological consequences of identity-based harm to be examined with the same seriousness that is afforded to other stigmatized identities. Recognizing the distinction between political disagreement and identity targeting of a salient social identity is not only conceptually necessary, but also important for maintaining genuinely inclusive professional and civic spaces. Failing to make this distinction risks legitimizing identity-based exclusion under the guise of ethics, thereby undermining the very principles of inclusion that such spaces are meant to uphold.

These dynamics intersect with longstanding patterns of antisemitism. When a widely held dimension of Jewish identity is recast as morally suspect, Jews may find themselves having to disavow aspects of their belonging to remain socially or professionally included. Contemporary expressions often do not present themselves as hostility toward Jews as such, but as opposition to “Zionists.” Exclusion can then be enacted while still being framed as ethical conduct. In practice, this distinction collapses when Jews experience Zionism as part of their identity. What is presented as principled opposition to Israel may, in effect, function as a contemporary pathway through which antisemitism is expressed and normalized.

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NEVER AGAIN: GENDERED VIOLENCE AND THE ZIONIST PROMISE

BY RONA KAUFMAN



The modern Zionist movement is commonly explained in political, religious, or nationalist terms. Less frequently examined is the role that gendered violence against Jewish women played in shaping Jewish collective consciousness and motivating the desire for self-determination. Throughout centuries of diasporic existence, Jewish communities endured discrimination, expulsion, and massacre, but among the most psychologically devastating experiences were attacks in which Jewish women and girls were subjected to sexual violence during pogroms and communal assaults.¹ These violations were experienced not only as individual crimes but as threats to the continuity, dignity, and survival of the Jewish people. This article explores how recurring sexual and gendered violence contributed to the appeal of political Zionism as a movement promising protection, sovereignty, and the end of Jewish defenselessness.² It argues that the Zionist commitment embodied in the phrase "Never Again" includes an implicit covenant that Jewish women would never again be violated with impunity.³ The events of October 7, 2023, in which Jewish civilians were subjected to mass violence including sexual assault, tested that covenant and revived deeply rooted historical memories. Drawing on historical accounts of diaspora life, pogrom violence, and the development of Zionist thought, this article examines the psychological significance of gendered violence in the formation of Jewish political identity.

Jewish Diaspora: Sovereignty, Exile, and Vulnerability

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 marked a profound transformation in Jewish history.⁴ For the first

1 Irina Astashkevich, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in Pogroms of 1917 to 1921* (Karel Berkhoff et al. eds., 2018).

2 This article is a re-write and summary of my law review article, *Never Again: Zionism and the Jewess*. Rona Kaufman, *Never Again: Zionism and the Jewess*, 19 FIU L. Rev 737 (2025).

3 Astashkevich, *supra* note 1.

4 Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Anthony Berris trans., Brandeis Univ. Press 2014) (2012)

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...recurring sexual and gendered violence contributed to the appeal of political Zionism as a movement promising protection, sovereignty, and the end of Jewish defenselessness.

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Jewish women and girls during attacks on Jewish communities.

time in nearly two thousand years, Jews possessed political sovereignty in their ancestral homeland⁵ and the ability to defend themselves as a nation. Yet these explanations alone do not fully capture the emotional and psychological forces that made the Zionist project so compelling. For generations of Jews living in exile, the absence of self-rule was experienced not only as political subordination but as a condition of physical vulnerability—most acutely in the repeated violation of

The Jewish people trace their origins to the ancient Israelites, indigenous to the land of Israel, who formed a nation bound by shared ancestry, history, religion, and land more than three thousand years ago.⁶ The Hebrew Bible recounts their settlement in the land, the establishment of a kingdom under David and Solomon, and the centrality of Jerusalem as the capital. This period of sovereignty was relatively brief: conquests by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires led to destruction and exile, beginning what became known as the diaspora. After a period of rebuilding, Roman domination produced further dispersal and after the Roman suppression of Jewish revolts in the first and second centuries CE, large numbers of Jews were expelled or enslaved, forcing Jews across the Roman Mediterranean.

For nearly two millennia, Jewish life was largely lived outside the land of Israel, across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.⁷ In many places Jews were denied citizenship, restricted in the professions they could pursue, and barred from owning land.⁸ They depended on the tolerance of rulers who could revoke protection at any time. When attacks occurred, Jews often had no means of defending themselves and little expectation that authorities would intervene—reinforcing a perception that life in exile was inherently insecure, shaping the way Jews understood their place in the world.

Among the many forms of persecution endured, attacks on Jewish women and girls had a particularly profound impact. During violent assaults on Jewish communities, women were subjected to sexual violence, humiliation, and torture—experienced not merely as individual crimes but as assaults on the entire community. Jewish women occupied a doubly vulnerable position, marginalized both as Jews and as women, and during pogroms they frequently suffered the most extreme violations.⁹ These experiences haunted Jewish communities for generations and contributed to a growing belief that life without the ability to defend oneself was untenable, ultimately helping to fuel the Zionist movement.

5 G.A. Res. 181 (II), at 131 (Nov. 29, 1947).

6 Mika Ahuvia, Judaism, Jewish History, and anti-Jewish Prejudice: An Overview, Univ. of Wash. Stroum Ctr. for Jewish Stud., <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/who-are-jews-jewish-history-origins-antisemitism/>.

7 Paul Mendes-Flohr & Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (3d ed. 1980); Reeva Spector Simon et al., *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times* (Colum. Univ. Press 2003).

8 See generally Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (1991); Bari Weiss, *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*, 37 (2019).

9 Elissa Bemporad, *The Female Dimension of Pogrom Violence, 1917-1921*, in *Pogroms: A Documentary History* 150–51 (Eugene M. Avrutin & Elissa Bemporad eds. 2021).

Jewish women occupied a doubly vulnerable position, marginalized both as Jews and as women, and during pogroms they frequently suffered the most extreme violations.

Pogroms, Blood Libels, and Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence

The term *pogrom*, derived from a Russian word meaning to wreak havoc or demolish violently, describes violent assaults carried out by local populations against Jewish communities, sometimes with the encouragement or tacit approval of authorities, and frequently accompanied

by looting, murder, and sexual violence.¹⁰ These attacks were often triggered by blood libels—false accusations that portrayed Jews as responsible for ritually murdering Christian children, poisoning wells, spreading disease, or conspiring against governments. Such libels were spread during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, outbreaks of plague, and numerous other periods to incite violence against Jewish communities.

The historical record documents pogroms across Europe and the Middle East for nearly two thousand years. In 38 CE Alexandria, Egyptians burned down synagogues, destroyed Jewish homes, and beat, burned, and dragged Jews through the streets.¹¹ During the Middle Ages, pogroms accompanied the Crusades, leaving entire communities destroyed. In England, riots between 1189 and 1190 resulted in massacres in London, York, and other cities.¹² In Baghdad, Jewish quarters were attacked and residents murdered.¹³

The Black Death in the fourteenth century produced one of the most widespread waves of anti-Jewish violence in European history. As plague devastated populations, Jews were accused of poisoning wells. In Strasbourg, hundreds were burned alive; entire communities elsewhere were driven out or destroyed.¹⁴ The seventeenth-century Cossack attacks on Jewish communities in Eastern Europe proved especially devastating: thousands were killed, towns were destroyed, and survivors were subjected to torture, forced conversion, and expulsion.¹⁵ By the nineteenth century, large Jewish populations lived under Russian rule, and pogroms became more frequent and more brutal—often involving organized groups, including soldiers and militias, with perpetrators rarely punished.¹⁶

Violence against Jews was not limited to Europe. In 1929, the Jews of Hebron were attacked by their Arab neighbors; men, women, and children were murdered, and survivors forced to flee.¹⁷ In 1941, Jews in Baghdad were subjected to the *Farhud*, a violent pogrom in which homes were looted, people killed, and women assaulted.¹⁸ Popular Arab songs afterward reportedly celebrated the violence, melodizing that it would occur every day.¹⁹ These events reinforced the perception that Jewish vulnerability was not confined to one region but was a defining feature of diaspora life itself.

10 Eugene M. Avrutin & Elissa Bemporad, *Pogroms: A Documentary History* (2021).

11 Pieter W. van der Horst, *The First Pogrom: Alexandria 38 CE*, 10 *Eur. Rev.* 469, 471 (2002).

12 Seth Eislund, *The Pogroms of 1189 and 1190*, Historic UK, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Pogroms-1189-1190/>.

13 Lyn Julius, *The Hamas Massacre is Part of the Tradition of Arab Pogroms*, *Jewish Chron.* (Oct. 19, 2023).

14 Amanda Foreman, *In Epidemics, Leaders Play a Crucial Role*, *Wall St. J.* (Mar. 8, 2018).

15 Herman Rosenthal, *Cossacks' Uprising*, *Jewish Encyc.*, <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4685-cossacks-uprising>.

16 Rona Kaufman, *Never Again: Zionism and the Jewess*, 19 *FIU L. Rev.* 752-57 (2025).

17 Yarden Schwartz, *October 7 Happened Before, in Hebron*, *Tablet Mag.* (Nov. 7, 2023).

18 Lyn Julius, *The Hamas Massacre is Part of the Tradition of Arab Pogroms*, *Jewish Chron.* (Oct. 19, 2023).

19 *Id.*

Sexual Violence and the Jewess: Gendered Trauma in the Age of Pogrom

Among the many forms of violence endured by Jewish communities, sexual violence against women and girls occupied a particularly devastating place in collective memory. Rape was not incidental to pogrom violence but, in many periods, a deliberate and recurring component of it.²⁰ Historian Elissa Bemporad explains that "the progressive intensification of violence was accompanied by an ensuing rise in the number of rapes."²¹ During the civil wars and nationalist conflicts that swept Eastern Europe after the First World War, rape became systematic: nationalist militias, former imperial soldiers, and irregular forces targeted Jewish communities.²² Sexual assault functioned as both plunder and punishment—when communities had little property left to steal, the bodies of Jewish women became objects of violence.²³

Scholarly estimates suggest that sexual violence occurred in the majority of pogroms during this period. Drawing on extensive primary sources, historian Dr. Irina Astashkevich concluded that "the mass rape of Jewish women occurred in at least two-thirds of pogroms and often involved the majority of the Jewish female population"—with cautious estimates suggesting that "tens if not hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian Jewish women were victims of sexual violence and many more Jewish men and women witnessed it."²⁴ Many of these rapes were gang assaults carried out publicly or in the presence of family members, combining sexual brutality with humiliation.

These were gang rapes, involving for the most part three to four rapists. There were cases of up to ten to twelve rapists per woman. Cases of individual rape, involving one person, were extremely rare. Often several girls were raped simultaneously in the same house: one group would rape one girl in one room, another group raped another one in the next room, and so on. The victims' cries and screams came from all sides and merged into a unified chorus.²⁵

Scholarly estimates suggest that sexual violence occurred in the majority of pogroms during this period.

This testimony, drawn from the State Archive of the Russian Federation, illustrates both the organized character of these assaults and their deliberate use as a tool of communal terror.

The psychological consequences of such violence were immense and multi-layered. For individual survivors,

trauma included physical injury, venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy, shame, despair, and long-lasting emotional

20 Elissa Bemporad, *The Female Dimension of Pogrom Violence, 1917-1921*, in *POGROMS: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY 150-51* (Eugene M. Avrutin & Elissa Bemporad eds. 2021).

21 Id.

22 Id.

23 Id.

24 Astashkevich, *supra* note 1, at xii-xiii.

25 Bemporad, *supra* note 9, at 162-63.

devastation.²⁶ Yet the trauma extended beyond the victims themselves. Pogrom rape was structured to deliberately humiliate Jewish men and destroy the social fabric of the community. Men were sometimes forced to witness the assault of wives, daughters, or sisters—beaten or restrained while the violence occurred—in order to demonstrate their inability to protect their families and to degrade the entire community through them.

The symbolic meaning of these assaults was amplified by Jewish matrilineal tradition: because Jewish identity is transmitted through the mother, the violation of Jewish women carried implications for the future of the Jewish people. Pogrom violence sometimes targeted pregnant women, and historical accounts describe acts deliberately aimed at the reproductive capacity of the community.²⁷ Contemporary observers and later historians have described this pattern as genocidal in intent—assaulting the social and psychological foundations of Jewish communal life.

Literature from the period captured this anguish in enduring terms. The poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, writing in the aftermath of the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, described both the violation of women and the shame of men who had failed to defend them:²⁸

Descend then, to the cellars of the town, / There where the virginal daughters of thy folk were fouled, / Where seven heathen flung a woman down, / The daughter in the presence of her mother, / The mother in the presence of her daughter, / Before slaughter, during slaughter, and after slaughter! / Note also do not fail to note, / In that dark corner, and behind that cask / Crouched husbands, bridegrooms, brothers, peering from the cracks, / Watching the sacred bodies struggling underneath / The bestial breath, / Stifled in filth, and swallowing their blood!²⁹

For many readers, Bialik's poem became a symbol of the humiliation that diaspora life had imposed upon the Jewish people. As one historian has observed, the Kishinev pogrom illustrated for many Jews "the stereotypes of feminized Jewish males hopelessly softened by the humiliation of the Diaspora."³⁰ The poem's power lay precisely in its exposure of the gendered dimension of collective shame: the man who could not protect his family became the emblem of Jewish powerlessness in exile.

Pogrom rape thus did more than inflict suffering on individuals; it created a collective trauma that reshaped Jewish perceptions of security, masculinity, and survival. As Bemporad documents, fear of sexual violence also became a concrete driver of migration: "rape (and the fear thereof) had a devastating impact on Jewish demography. It promoted the rush for internal and external migration, as relocation from the place of trauma

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26 Astashkevich, *supra* note 1, at 124–25.

27 Bemporad, *supra* note 9, 150–51; Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918–1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust* (2021).

28 Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *The City of Slaughter*, in *The Complete Poetic Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik* 129–43 (Israel Efros, ed., 1948).

29 *Id.*

30 Matt Lebovic, *How a Small Pogrom in Russia Changed the Course of History*, *Times of Isr.* (Apr. 9, 2018).

became a plausible way to prevent further sexual assault."³¹ Survivor testimony confirms this pattern. As one medical witness recorded: "Even now, the victims' emotional state is extremely dismal. They are trying to leave the places tied to terrible memories."³²

From Trauma to Sovereignty: Gendered Violence and the Appeal of Zionism

The rise of political Zionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is often explained as a response to nationalism and antisemitism.³³ These factors were central, but they do not fully account for the emotional urgency that led many Jews to conclude that diaspora life had become intolerable. The repeated experience of pogrom violence—particularly violence that targeted women and families—contributed to a psychological shift. For many, the desire for sovereignty was not only ideological but deeply personal, rooted in the conviction that without the ability to defend themselves, Jews would remain permanently exposed to humiliation and destruction.

As Theodor Herzl explained in his foundational Zionist manifesto, "the present situation of the Jews is in many places unendurable, and aggravated day by day."³⁴ The Kishinev pogrom of 1903 had a particularly galvanizing effect on the movement. In its aftermath, Zionist leader Max Nordau declared: "The name of Kishinev [is] written with letters of blood and fire . . . Zionism is the only way to lead our miserable brethren in Russia and elsewhere out of their present hell."³⁵ The pogrom had made plain that the largest Jewish population on earth could not subsist safely under the tsar's dominion, and that the key to the Jewish future lay in the ancient past: the Jewish homeland.

Gendered violence played a specific and documented role in driving emigration to Palestine. For Golda Meir, the childhood fear of pogrom "was to serve as a formative experience for her. The sense of being part of a weak and vulnerable Jewish minority facing the threat of violence from its powerful gentile neighbors remained with her throughout her life."³⁶ This experience was widely shared. Scholars have concluded that the majority of Jews who fled to Israel did so in response to "push" factors—above all, the physical dangers of diaspora life, including pogroms.³⁷

Women who survived pogroms often sought to escape their homes and the places of their traumatic memories.

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31 Bemporad, *supra* note 9, at 152.

32 Bemporad, *supra* note 9 at 164-65 (citing State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. R-1339, op. 1, d. 438, ll. 81-82 ob) (Eugenia Tietz-Sokolskaya trans.).

33 Zionism: A Definition of Zionism, Jewish Virtual Libr., <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/a-definition-of-zionism>.

34 Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* 97 (Sylvie d'Avigdor and Jacob De Haas trans., M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung 1896).

35 Andrew Porwancher, *A 1903 Pogrom Sparked Calls for a Jewish State – to Prevent Attacks like This One*, Wash. Post (Oct. 14, 2023).

36 Anita Shapira, *Golda: Femininity and Feminism*, in *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise* 303, 303 (Shulamit Reinharz & Mark A. Raider eds., 2005).

37 Joseph Glass, *American Jewish Women and Palestine: Their Immigration (1989–1939)*, in *Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel: Life History, Politics, and Culture* 63–64 (1975).

As professor Andrew Porwancher explains: "[t]o Jews who had endured pogroms like Kishinev, the promise of Israel was nothing less than the promise of Jewish survival. Bodies mutilated, children slain, women violated—Jewish statehood was supposed to ensure that the descendants of survivors, from Kishinev to Auschwitz, would never endure those same evils."³⁸

The young women who made *Aliyah* in the early twentieth century also carried a specifically feminist dimension to their aspirations. They "shared the dream of their male comrades: they would create a new egalitarian society in a Jewish homeland, reclaimed through their labor. To this they added still another dimension—the full emancipation of women."³⁹ Zionism thus offered not only physical protection but a vision of gender equality that diaspora life under patriarchal host societies had foreclosed.

Pogroms in the Middle East similarly prompted Jews to emigrate to Israel. In the decade following the *Farhud*, almost all 135,000 Jews living in Iraq emigrated to Israel.⁴⁰ The pattern held across the region: wherever Jewish communities experienced pogrom-like violence, the Zionist promise of sovereignty and self-defense became compelling.

Never Again and the Meaning of October 7

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 created more than a political reality; it created an expectation. The phrase "Never Again" came to express the belief that the Jewish people would never again live in a world in which their lives, their homes, and their families could be destroyed without the ability to defend themselves. Implicit within this commitment was a more specific and deeply felt promise: that Jewish women would not again be subjected to the forms of sexual violence that

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The reaction to October 7 illustrates how deeply the memory of diaspora vulnerability continues to influence Jewish perceptions of security and danger.

had accompanied so many diaspora pogroms. This promise became part of the emotional bond between the Jewish people and their state, shaping expectations about what sovereignty was meant to achieve.

The events of October 7, 2023 tested that covenant in the most direct way possible. During the attacks on Israeli communities, civilians were murdered, homes were destroyed, and men, women, and children were subjected to acts of sexual violence that recalled the pattern of pogrom brutality.⁴¹ Nobel Prize-winning novelist Herta Müller captured the historical resonance immediately: "This massacre has the pattern of annihilation through pogroms, a pattern that the Jews have known for centuries. That is why the whole country has been traumatized, because the founding of the state of Israel was intended to protect against such pogroms. And until October 7, it was believed to be protected."⁴²

38 Porwancher, *supra* note 35.

39 Joseph Glass, *supra* note 37, at 74.

40 Carole Basri, *The Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: An Examination of Legal Rights – A Case Study of the Human Rights Violations of Iraqi Jews*, 26 *Fordham Int'l L.J.* 656, 662 (2003).

41 Anna Schecter, *Their Bodies Tell Their Stories. They're not Alive to Speak for Themselves*, NBC News (Dec. 6, 2023).

42 Herta Müller, *Address at the October 7 Forum of 'Jewish Culture in Sweden' in Stockholm: Herta Müller – Open Letter* (May 25, 2024).

Survivor Sophie Berzon MacKie, a mother who sheltered her children for twenty hours in the family's safe room, articulated why October 7 felt qualitatively different from earlier historical tragedies:

The most brutal, sadistic, inhuman, murderous attack was made on a peaceful civilian population . . . where people were murdered in their homes . . . babies, the elderly, mothers. Another 200 are kidnapped, also children among them, without their parents. And now, in many ways, what we went through is very similar to the Holocaust, but much worse, because it happened in our land, in our homes. We weren't like guests in someone else's country. This is our country.⁴³

Another survivor, Tamar Mor Sela, drew the connection to the Kishinev pogrom explicitly: "This is a historic story like the Kishinev Pogrom. This cannot be our reality now."⁴⁴ Both testimonies reveal a psychological dynamic that transcends immediate grief: the violation of the Zionist covenant—the promise that Jews would no longer be defenseless in their own homeland.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich acknowledged the rupture directly: "We failed to implement the unwritten contract, the first of its kind between a state and its citizens. A contract that was written in blood and is now stained with blood."⁴⁵ The psychological impact of this acknowledgment reached beyond political accountability. It revived a memory of communal shame—the shame described by Bialik of men unable to protect their families—that had been integral to the Zionist motivation for statehood.

The reaction to October 7 illustrates how deeply the memory of diaspora vulnerability continues to influence Jewish perceptions of security and danger. When violence occurs that resembles earlier pogrom experiences, it reactivates fears rooted in a much longer history. The centrality of gendered violence in these reactions is particularly significant: because the violation of Jewish women during pogroms carried such symbolic weight, reports of sexual assault during the October 7 attacks resonated with historical memories that extend far beyond the present. For many Jews, these acts were experienced as evidence that the conditions of exile had not been entirely overcome—that the covenant of "Never Again" had been tested, and found wanting.

Conclusion

The history of the Jewish people in the diaspora is marked by recurring cycles of discrimination, expulsion, and violence. Among the most traumatic elements of this history were the attacks in which Jewish women were subjected to sexual violence during pogroms. These violations were experienced not only as personal tragedies but as assaults on the dignity, continuity, and survival of the Jewish people—contributing over time to a collective sense that life without sovereignty meant living in a condition of permanent vulnerability.

Political Zionism cannot be understood solely as a response to nationalism or antisemitism. It was also shaped by the psychological impact of centuries in which Jewish communities lacked the ability to defend themselves. The

43 Max Raskin, 'I Understood My Life Is Going to End': A Mother Describes 20 Hours in a Safe Room, *The Free Press* (Oct. 25, 2023).

44 Tomar Mor Sela, *After the euphoria of returning home, we are struggling to take root again*, *Times of Isr.* (June 15, 2024).

45 Ari Rabinovitch et al., *Israel's Leaders Failed to Protect Citizens, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich Says*, *Reuters* (Oct. 15, 2023).

desire for self-determination was fueled by the conviction that only sovereignty could prevent the repetition of humiliations and atrocities that had marked diaspora life. The establishment of the State of Israel represented the fulfillment of that aspiration—and the beginning of a new understanding of Jewish existence in which protection would no longer depend on the goodwill of others.

The phrase "Never Again" captures this transformation. Implicit within this commitment is the promise that Jewish women will not again be subjected to the forms of violence that accompanied so many attacks on diaspora communities. This promise became part of the emotional bond between the Jewish people and their state.

The attacks of October 7, 2023 demonstrated that historical trauma continues to shape Jewish experience in the present. The violence directed at civilians, and especially the reports of sexual assault, revived memories reaching back through centuries of exile. For many, the events felt like a return to a world Zionism was meant to leave behind. The intensity of that reaction reflects the depth of the psychological legacy left by generations of vulnerability—and the enduring power of the covenant that the State of Israel was created to fulfill.

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DOR L'DOR: AN INTERGENERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR BRAIN HEALTH, RESILIENCE, AND CLINICAL RESPONSIBILITY

BY RACHEL Z. GOODMAN, PH.D.



Dor L'Dor as a Preventative and Developmental Model

Neuroscience research on brain health and cognitive reserve has converged on several modifiable protective factors across the lifespan: sustained social connection, lifelong learning, meaning and purpose, rest and stress regulation, active roles and responsibility, and continuity of identity. These factors reduce vulnerability to cognitive decline, buffer the effects of chronic stress, and support emotional and psychological resilience.

What is striking is that these same elements are deeply embedded in Jewish life—not as optional wellness practices, but as normative, communal, and intergenerational obligations. Jewish tradition did not evolve as a response to modern neuroscience, yet its structures reflect a sophisticated understanding of what human beings require to remain psychologically and cognitively intact across adversity.

Dor L'Dor reframes brain health as neither an individual achievement nor a late-life intervention. Instead, it is developmental and preventative, shaped through daily practices, relationships, and values long before illness, trauma, or decline emerge. From this perspective, resilience is not heroic or exceptional; it is habitual, cultivated through repetition, rhythm, and responsibility over time.

Six Interrelated Pillars of the Dor L'Dor Model

The Dor L'Dor model rests on six interrelated components of Jewish life. While each can be examined individually, they function most powerfully as an integrated system.

Kehilla: Community and Belonging

Robust social connection is among the strongest protective factors for brain health and psychological wellbeing across the lifespan. Sustained engagement supports memory, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and identity coherence. It also buffers stress and mitigates isolation—risks to which both patients and clinicians are increasingly vulnerable.

Kehilla, the Jewish commitment to communal life, embeds individuals within structures of belonging and mutual responsibility. Jewish practice assumes that people live, mourn, celebrate, and heal in relationship. From a clinical perspective, Kehilla functions as an external holding environment—one that distributes care and meaning beyond the individual psyche.

For Jewish psychologists, this has implications not only for how we understand our patients' protective factors, but for how we ourselves remain sustained. Communities that offer genuine roles, predictable rhythms of gathering, and adaptive inclusion across the lifespan provide containment that individual coping strategies cannot replicate.

Torah: Lifelong Learning and Cognitive Engagement

Lifelong intellectual engagement is a central contributor to cognitive reserve. Learning activates distributed neural networks and strengthens the brain's capacity to adapt over time. Importantly, the greatest protective effects are seen in cultures that embed learning across the entire lifespan.

Torah study models precisely this posture. It is dialogical, questioning, and intentionally unfinished. Disagreement is preserved rather than resolved, cultivating cognitive flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity—capacities that are also foundational to clinical work. The mitzvah of Talmud Torah and the practice of kovea ittim (establishing a consistent study schedule) establish learning as a sustained, intentional commitment.

Kehilla, the Jewish commitment to communal life, embeds individuals within structures of belonging and mutual responsibility.

Robust social connection is among the strongest protective factors for brain health and psychological wellbeing across the lifespan.

For clinicians, Torah offers a parallel to reflective practice and supervision: a disciplined engagement with complexity that resists certainty and invites multiple perspectives. Teaching, mentoring, and learning Dor L'Dor also reinforce cognitive engagement for older adults, whose role as transmitters remains neurologically and psychologically protective.

Neshama: Meaning, Purpose, and Inner Life

A strong sense of meaning and purpose is associated with better cognitive outcomes, emotional resilience, and reduced vulnerability to stress-related decline. Meaning supports motivation, identity continuity, and regulation in the face of adversity.

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Neshama—the animating inner life—grounds Jewish practice in moral purpose and spiritual identity. Jewish life repeatedly asks not only what we do, but why and how. Blessings, ethical obligations, and ritual all function as micro-practices of meaning-making.

For Jewish psychologists, attention to neshama is essential in both clinical and professional life. Meaning protects against burnout and moral injury, particularly in helping professions where suffering is a constant presence. When meaning erodes, technique alone cannot sustain us.

Shabbat: Rest, Rhythm, and Regulation

Chronic stress and sleep disruption accelerate cognitive aging and undermine emotional regulation. Predictable rhythms of rest allow the nervous system to recover and support memory consolidation and psychological stability.

Shabbat introduces a non-negotiable rhythm of rest, not as self-care, but as collective ethical practice. It asserts that human worth is not contingent on productivity. Shabbat also protects relational time—shared meals, conversation, singing, and presence—experiences that engage multiple brain systems and remain accessible even as other capacities change.

For clinicians working in cultures of overwork and urgency, Shabbat offers a countercultural model of containment. Its rhythm provides a template for boundaries, recovery, and the preservation of personhood.

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Chessed: Obligation, Care, and Responsibility

Prosocial engagement and meaningful roles are associated with better cognitive and health outcomes in later life. Responsibility sustains motivation, identity, and engagement, while buffering loneliness and stress.

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Chessed in Jewish life is framed not as optional kindness, but as obligation. Caregiving, visiting the sick, and providing for those in need are structured responsibilities embedded in communal systems.

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supports dignity and psychological vitality. For caregivers and clinicians, sustainable structures of responsibility matter as much as compassion.

Mesorah: Intergenerational Transmission

Identity continuity across the lifespan predicts resilience and wellbeing. Storytelling, ritual, and teaching externalize identity, allowing it to persist even when individual memory or function changes. Research also suggests that both trauma and protective practices can have intergenerational effects.

Mesorah is the intentional transmission of values, practices, and meaning across generations. It integrates all the preceding elements, ensuring that learning, rhythm, responsibility, and connection do not disappear with any single life.

For Jewish psychologists, Mesorah raises professional questions: What are we transmitting—to patients, trainees, supervisees, and our own families? What values, stances, and ways of holding suffering are passed Dor L’Dor through our work?

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Chessed in Jewish life is framed not as optional kindness, but as obligation. Caregiving, visiting the sick, and providing for those in need are structured responsibilities embedded in communal systems. This distinction matters clinically: obligation distributes care and protects against the volatility of empathy-driven burnout.

For aging individuals or those facing illness, remaining contributors—rather than only recipients of care—

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Shabbat introduces a non-negotiable rhythm of rest, not as self-care, but as collective ethical practice. It asserts that human worth is not contingent on productivity.

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Clinical and Professional Implications

An older Jewish man in his late seventies was referred for therapy following the death of his spouse and increasing forgetfulness that had begun to alarm his adult children. Neuropsychological screening suggested mild cognitive impairment, but what brought him to treatment was not memory per se—it was disorientation of identity. He spoke of feeling “useless,” having lost his role at home and having quietly stopped attending synagogue because

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Mesorah is the intentional transmission of values, practices, and meaning across generations. It integrates all the preceding elements, ensuring that learning, rhythm, responsibility, and connection do not disappear with any single life.

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he could no longer follow the pace of services.

Intervention focused not on remediation of memory deficits, but on re-anchoring identity and role. With support, he resumed synagogue attendance in a modified way, sitting near familiar faces and re-engaging through communal singing and predictable ritual rather than text-heavy prayer. He began teaching his grandchildren family stories and melodies he remembered effortlessly, even when recent events were difficult to track. Over time, mood improved, anxiety

decreased, and family relationships strengthened. Cognitive decline did not reverse—but dignity, purpose, and connection were restored. This shift illustrates Dor L'Dor in practice: when identity and meaning are externalized and shared, the self can be sustained even as individual capacities change.

How might our clinical formulations shift if we consistently asked not only “What is declining?” but also “What remains—and how can it be shared Dor L'Dor?”

Dor L'Dor invites Jewish psychologists to think beyond symptom reduction toward identity, continuity, and collective responsibility. In clinical settings, it encourages attention to cultural and ritual resources that may sustain patients facing trauma, illness, or cognitive change. In professional life, it asks us to consider how supervision, mentorship, and institutional culture function as vehicles of transmission.

At a time when many clinicians are themselves navigating grief, threat, and exhaustion, Dor L'Dor reframes resilience as something we inherit and cultivate together. It reminds us that what protects brains also protects people—and professions.

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PSYCHEDELIC COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN THE WAKE OF THE OCTOBER 7TH ATTACKS IN ISRAEL

BY ADRIANA KERTZER, PINCHAS “PINNI” BAUMOL, MADISON MARGOLIN, HADAS ALTERMAN

In an unprecedented ground invasion that began on the morning of October 7, 2023, during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, Hamas terrorists entered Israel and murdered over 1,200 civilians, kidnapping 240 more to Gaza. This massacre—and the glee with which Hamas committed and publicized the murder, torture, and rape of civilians including women, children, and the elderly—is unprecedented in modern-day warfare. It also represents the single deadliest day for Jews in modern history since the Holocaust. At the time of this writing, 120 civilians remain in captivity (Reuters, 2024). By the end of 2023, Hamas had fired at least 12,000 rockets into Israel, as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) continued their counter-offensive in Gaza aimed at eliminating Hamas leaders, members, weapons, and infrastructure (Gavrielov, 2023).

The massacre that unfolded was a devastating intrusion on the euphoria synonymous with rave culture. Terrorists killed, raped, tortured, injured, and traumatized rave attendees at the Nova Festival in the south of Israel, where a significant majority of more than 3,000 attendees were under the influence of substances that distort perception, delay responses, and heighten emotional sensitivity.¹ This fact adds an important dimension to how we consider the needs of the survivors and the place this attack now holds in psychedelic history as the worst “trip” known to history.²

Little news coverage has been dedicated to the fact that the massacre at the Supernova Sukkot Gathering (now more commonly known as the Nova Festival) was not only the largest terror attack in Israel’s history, and the worst Israeli civilian massacre ever, it was also the largest psychedelics-related act of violence or massacre at a music festival in history (Gifford, 2023; Ghermezian, 2024).

The Nova Festival was an open-air psytrance music festival near kibbutz Re'im organized by the Tribe of Nova together with the Brazilian psytrance festival group Universo Paralello (Supernova, 2023).³ It was scheduled to coincide with the final day of the Jewish holidays of Sukkot and Simchat Torah. The rave was billed as a celebration of “friends, love and infinite freedom” but as the sun rose on October 7th, amid the pulsing beats and vibrant atmosphere of the open-air rave, Hamas invaded (Morris et al., 2023). Sunrise was also the moment at which many rave participants had just begun to experience the full psychoactive effects of the psychedelic substances they had taken. At the same moment, Hamas invaded the festival premises and began shooting at participants, chasing

1 There were actually three gatherings in the south of Israel where the attacks took place: Nova Festival (3,882 people attended, 364 murdered, 44 kidnapped (5 returned)), PsyDuck Rave (100 people attended, 17 murdered), and Midburn preparatory weekend (120 people attended, 1 murdered) (Tadmor, N., 2024), for purposes of this article referred to collectively as the Nova Festival, the largest of the attacks, which has received more news coverage.

2 One question that exceeds the scope of this article but hopefully will be addressed in the near future is whether the way trauma was imprinted on the survivors was exacerbated by the use of these substances at the time of the attack. It is also worth exploring whether the rapid response to survivors’ needs translated into a reduction of harm.

3 The Israeli rave scene (aka “nature parties,” “psytrance,” or “trance” subcultures) has evolved since its inception in the late 1980s into a dynamic cultural force, marked by distinctive values, rituals, and, notably, substance use patterns (including common use of hallucinogenic substances), attracting attention from researchers (Bonny-Noach, H. et al., 2023).

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The rapid and sophisticated response to the needs of the Nova Festival victims was possible due to a confluence of factors which, when considered in combination, are unique to Israel.

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them down in the surrounding fields, raping them, kidnapping them, and killing them (Gettleman et al., 2023; Rubin, 2023; Tabachnick, 2023; Gillet et al., 2023). Festival goers were under the acute effects of drugs like 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) as they fled for their lives.

The attack on the Nova Festival resulted in 364 civilians killed, at least 40 hostages taken, and many more assaulted and injured (*The Times of Israel*, 2023). It also led to a significant number of festival goers arriving at the emergency room still under the influence of psychedelics, presenting medical teams with additional mental health needs. In the United States psychedelic community's only published account of the Nova massacre to date, author Mary-Elizabeth Gifford described the reaction of Dr. Roy Salomon who was among the first to be notified about the hundreds of patients who were arriving "tripping and distraught":

"When I saw that request for two helpers I said, well there were over 3,000 kids at this festival, we don't just need two people to get over to an emergency room—we're going to need hundreds of people to help," said Salomon, who has received training by MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) to provide MDMA-assisted psychotherapy during clinical trials. He said he reached out to the leaders of SafeZone and SafeShore, organizations that provide psychedelic harm reduction services. "I called two of my friends who are leaders of the harm reduction groups here who actually go to festivals." It was immediately clear that clinicians and mental health practitioners were needed, and that it was essential "they understand psychedelics and trauma." (Gifford, 2023)

It quickly became clear to those tending to survivors of the attack that care had to reflect the reality that participants had consumed psychedelics and that their trauma might be exacerbated as a result.

This article offers an overview of therapeutic initiatives that have become beacons of hope in the aftermath of the Nova Festival tragedy. The projects summarized

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Progressive attitudes towards harm reduction in the Israeli mental health community and a track record of advocacy meant there was expertise to draw on in a time of crisis.

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herein extend beyond conventional harm reduction—a term that refers to a range of intentional practices to lessen the negative consequences associated with drug use—and therapeutic practices. These projects encompass broader types of psychological aid, resource dissemination, opportunities for expressive integration, and physical places that foster a sense of solidarity. The rapid and sophisticated response to the needs of the Nova Festival victims was possible due to a confluence of factors which, when considered in combination, are unique to Israel. First, there is psychedelic-assisted therapy in Israel using ketamine, esketamine, and cannabis, and Israel has been one of the clinical trial sites for psilocybin and MDMA. This means that the country has a significant number of mental health professionals trained in psychedelic-assisted therapy. Second, the Israeli rave scene dates back to the 1980s and is now considered a mainstream aspect of the country's contemporary society. The psytrance "tribes" are community oriented and have developed a robust harm reduction infrastructure staffed by harm reductionists

that have an understanding of substance use patterns among the psytrance community (Shapira et al., 2023).⁴ Third, for the past decade, Israeli harm reduction volunteers have paved the path in addressing issues of substance use, rave culture, and mental health, from the dance floor to the parliament and academic circles. Progressive attitudes towards harm reduction in the Israeli mental health community and a track record of advocacy meant there was expertise to draw on in a time of crisis.⁵ Lastly, virtual communities that predated the October 7 attacks and technology allowed Israelis to rapidly mobilize in response to the rave attacks.

The October 7 attacks prompted an unprecedented mobilization of activations that range from harm reduction efforts providing crucial support, information, and safe spaces for survivors; community safe spaces and artistic projects, both physical and virtual, to facilitate healing, share resources, and commemorate the victims; and psychedelic-assisted therapy initiatives. While the terrorist attack on the Nova Festival cast a profound shadow over Israeli society and global Jewry, the activations described below were driven by a collective sense of resilience and may in the future inform how the larger psychedelic community discusses the risks of psychedelic use, the role of harm reduction, and psychedelic culture.

I. Harm Reduction Activations

To meet the immediate needs of the survivors of the Nova Festival attack, the Israeli psytrance community quickly began to mobilize resources.⁶ Harm reduction volunteers from within the rave community became instrumental in providing support. The harm reduction community is guided by the principles of the global rave culture—peace, love, unity, and respect—and rallied to support survivors, hostages, and the families of victims. Volunteers embodying these values have played a pivotal role in the treatment of survivors, offering solace, creating memorials to honor the lives lost, offering resource dissemination, and fostering a sense of solidarity. The range of responses highlighted the resilience ingrained in the community, transcending the traditional boundaries of harm reduction.

Anashim Tovim

Among the notable groups responding to the October 7th tragedy was Anashim Tovim (“Good People”), which served as the harm reduction team at the Nova Festival. Anashim Tovim is run by Maayan Shenkar and Moshe Elad, both of whom survived the attack. Their on-the-ground experience offers poignant insight into the challenges faced and the compassion exhibited in such dire moments. Operating in the midst of chaos, Anashim Tovim navigated the intersection of harm reduction principles and immediate crisis response. The crew’s efforts extended

4 The Israeli psytrance culture, known for its outdoor rave events, has cultivated a unique fusion of music, spirituality, and community. A research study by Bonny-Noach et al. (2023), conducted through a cross-sectional online survey of 1,206 participants, highlighted the prevalence of illicit substances such as cannabis, LSD, MDMA, mushrooms/psilocybin, ketamine, and cocaine at Israeli nature rave parties. Contrary to global trends observed in studies from Australia and New York, Israeli rave attendees exhibited distinctive substance use patterns, notably the dominance of hallucinogenic substances, particularly LSD and mushrooms/psilocybin. This shift in perception and usage of psychedelics underscores the need for nuanced harm reduction strategies tailored to the specific substances prevalent in the Israeli context.

5 Harm reduction attitudes within the Israeli rave scene are complex, with a recent study (Bonny-Noach et al., 2023) revealing higher positive attitudes but challenges in implementation. The discourse around harm reduction, particularly concerning substances like MDMA and LSD, is relatively new in Israel. The negative perception of law enforcement further complicates harm reduction efforts, necessitating a nuanced approach to reconcile community values with safety measures.

6 Harm reduction in Israel includes several distinct projects based mostly in the psychedelic scene, led by Anashim Tovim, Safe Shore, and the Israeli Burning Man community. Other harm reduction initiatives include Yizhar, a needle exchange pilot program, and opiate management programs (Bonny-Noach, 2019).

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Operating in the midst of chaos, Anashim Tovim navigated the intersection of harm reduction principles and immediate crisis response. The crew's efforts extended beyond traditional harm reduction protocols, engaging with survivors, providing emotional support, and facilitating access to essential resources.

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Anashim Tovim was initiated by ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel, Israel's leading nonprofit organization, founded in 1982 and dedicated to treating and transforming the lives of troubled and at-risk youth (ELEM, 2024). Anashim Tovim volunteers identify young people in crisis due to psychoactive substances at popular events like raves and then stay with the individual to provide psychological aid and support (Bonny-Noach, 2019).

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Anashim Tovim's safe space at the Nova Festival and two vans were destroyed, and three of their nine-person team members were killed during the attack, representing the first harm reductionists killed doing their job (Y. Polizer, CEO of IsraAID, personal communication, February 19, 2024). As such, their own trauma made it harder for them to mobilize in the aftermath of the attack as quickly as other organizations. But after a 6-month break, Anashim Tovim returned to work both in the field (conducting training courses and running on average two safe zones at parties each month since March 2024) and through advocacy work with the Knesset's drug committee.

SafeHeart

Israeli mental health providers and harm reduction organization volunteers created the SafeHeart initiative to support the survivors of the Nova Festival massacre. Within hours of the attack, SafeHeart was established by eight therapists to support Nova survivors in need of mental and emotional assistance. After posting a request for psychedelic-informed therapists on Facebook on October 7th and launching a website on October 8th, SafeHeart mobilized a nation-wide network of clinical providers within days of the attack. During the project's first week, over 1,200 inquiries were addressed by therapists, safe space leaders, and harm reduction specialists, bringing together expertise in psychedelic harm reduction, trauma work, and clinical practice on an emergency scale (SafeHeart newsletter, May 6, 2024).

For the following month, SafeHeart coordinated with the Israeli Ministry of Health to ensure expanded mental health coverage for survivors. As SafeHeart's head of psychedelic education, Nir Tadmor, M.Sc., a certified transpersonal psychotherapist, described it in an interview in early 2024, "I had to translate the need for a mass psychedelic-informed trauma response by trained practitioners to the government-run healthcare system" (personal communication, February 13, 2024). The effort was successful, and SafeHeart is now recognized by the Israeli Ministry of Health and the National Social Security Service (*Bituach Leumi*) as an official mental health services provider for the survivors of the Nova Festival attack and as an official member of the Israeli Trauma Coalition as a National Resilience Center. Because of SafeHeart's official recognition, it is able to offer therapy to survivors free of charge, with therapists compensated at the rate of \$100 per session.

By October 14th, SafeHeart had established a network of over 260 clinicians, all volunteers with advanced degrees and clinical licenses, to provide therapy in Israel. (They also have a team of psychiatrists providing consultations and pharmacological treatments as needed.) According to Tadmor, not all of these therapists have formal psychedelic-assisted training. The initiative has, as of May 6, 2024, provided 5,200 hours of psychotherapy and psychiatric consultation for more than 2,500 survivors (SafeHeart newsletter, May 6, 2024). They've placed 750 survivors in long-term psychotherapy, coordinated seven group therapy retreats for more than 250 survivors, and recruited 820 survivors to join their in-depth research project with the University of Haifa, under the supervision of Professor Roy Salomon, head of the Lab of Consciousness and Self in the Department of Cognitive Sciences, and Professor Roe Admon of the Stress & Psychopathology Research Laboratory. In collaboration with SafeHeart, Salomon and Admon began a large-scale study examining the impact of acute trauma under the influence of psychedelics in the peritraumatic and long-term periods. The project used behavioral, cognitive, physiological, and neural (fMRI) measurements of the participants—all of whom are Nova survivors—to better understand clinical trajectories and mechanisms of trauma experienced while under psychedelics (Elliman, 2024).

On its website, SafeHeart (n.d.) defines itself as an “emergency mental health project that is operated by a network of psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, psychotherapists and licensed clinical supervisors, who all have experience working with severe trauma and the field of psychedelic harm reduction.” While SafeHeart offers its services to all survivors of the Nova Festival massacre, one of its strengths is supporting rave attendees who were under the influence of psychedelics and therefore had intensified experiences. Their protocol is to match each survivor with a therapist who provides at least 24 individual therapy sessions. The treatments are provided by licensed and vetted clinicians who specialize in treating trauma and reducing risks related to consumption of psychedelics. It has also created a community that offers the opportunity for mutual support, alongside dedicated group therapy for the family members of survivors.⁷

Safe Spaces

Immediately after October 7, physical spaces were created and specifically designed to give Nova survivors a place to come together to grieve, connect, and receive support in a trauma-informed setting. These “safe spaces,” such as Adama Tova and Kfar Izun, served as centers for survivors to meet, connect, integrate their personal stories, and receive various treatments such as psychotherapy, massage, breathwork, and music therapy.⁸ Many musicians, artists, members of the Nova Festival production crew, and therapists volunteered at these initiatives, which remained available for survivors for months after the attacks.

Merhav Marpeh is an emergency mental health complex established in Rishpon by Dr. Lia Naor to provide immediate care for the thousands traumatized by the attacks at the Nova Festival. The initiative mobilized

7 SafeHeart partnered with Brothers in Yoga (BY) and Maccabiah World Union (MWU) on retreats hosted in glamping tents set up at Kfar Maccabiah within weeks of the October 7th attacks. MWU is the world's largest Jewish sports and education organization, reaching 450,000 people in over 70 countries across six continents. BY is an organization launched in 2022 to help Israeli veterans in search of healing for war trauma. BY began operating at Maccabi alongside SafeHeart to help rave victims, then shifted their work to focus on soldiers with PTSD. BY's work focuses on a critical point (pre-PTSD) to reduce the risk of survivors and veterans suffering lingering PTSD. The campus mobilized quickly to provide retreat facilities to organizations working with victims from the attack on music festivals, displaced Israelis, and later soldiers cycling out of the reserves. MWU CEO Amir Gissin and BY founder Netta Margalith discussed how this war is perhaps the first to see mental health as a concern since day one (personal communication, interview February 21, 2024).

8 Adama Tova English page [website]: <https://www.adamatova.org/englishpageadamatovaen>
Izun English [website]: <https://www.izun.org.il/izun-english/>

dozens of therapists—psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, psychotherapists and certified clinical instructors—to create a “healing space” within days of the attack. Dr. Naor stressed that the efforts were not meant as a full course of treatment, but rather to offer an “immediate and integrative response to trauma” (Koplewitz, 2023). Merhav Marpeh provides a holistic, integrative, community approach to trauma treatment that ranges from psychotherapy to yoga.

IsraAID’s Secret Forrest Retreat

IsraAID is an international non-governmental humanitarian aid organization based in Israel, founded in 2001, that traditionally works in emergency and long-term development settings in more than 60 countries around the world (IsraAID, n.d.). However, after the October 7 attacks it applied its expertise to Israel’s needs (Y. Polizer, CEO, personal communication, February 19, 2024). One of its activities became the training of local mental health specialists on emergency-specific psychosocial support, so they can best meet the urgent needs of affected people from Israel’s south. IsraAID also funded and ran retreats at Secret Forrest near Paphos in Cyprus for survivors of the Nova attack (Secret Forrest, n.d.). Secret Forrest, a kosher farm-to-table retreat facility at the site of an old village owned by Israeli Yoni Kahana, offered IsraAID the location for free to help survivors heal (S. May, press officer, personal communication, July 30, 2024). Two thousand individuals signed up to attend the retreats and 1,090 eventually participated, ending each day with a party in which they were the DJs. IsraAID staffed the retreats with therapists that had experience with trauma (experts in different modalities) and emphasized the creation of a support network for the survivors given that the rave and Tribe of Nova communities are diffuse and the community could aid in the healing process.

II. Community & Artistic Activations

Israel’s creative community members, ranging from artists, gallerists, musicians, and DJs, acted swiftly to create or adapt activations to honor the events of October 7 and support survivors. A few examples include the following:

Neve Schechter Gallery

Established in 2015, the Schechter Gallery in Tel Aviv serves as a vital bridge between the profound realm of Judaism’s knowledge and the transformative power of artistic expression (Neve Schechter, n.d.). The exhibit *Mycelium* by Sharon Glazberg opened coincidentally the same week of the attacks and explored the relationship between art and its audience by using mycelia, the network of fungal hyphae usually found underground (Glazberg, 2024). This installation bridged the concepts of art and medicine, fostering relationships between humans and fungi that are akin to the patient-therapist or provider-nourishment connection. *Mycelium* transformed the gallery into a nurturing environment, with edible and medicinal mushrooms growing from wooden structures designed to resemble treatment beds (Dayan, 2023). Glazberg conducted sessions focused on therapy, healing, art, and ritual in the gallery alongside professionals spanning various fields such as psychotherapy, creativity, mind-body-spirit connections, philosophy, art, and music. During the first weeks of the war, the gallery provided the public free access to a team of therapists ready to treat primary and secondary trauma (Bar Yerushalmi, director & curator, personal communications, October 2023-February 2024).

Nova 6.29

The Nova Festival founders—Omri Sassi, Yoni Feingold, Ofir Amir, and Yagil Rimoni—organized a memorial exhibit curated by Reut Feingold that premiered in Tel Aviv and has since begun to tour internationally. Nova 6.29 opened to the public at the Expo Tel Aviv International Convention Center on December 7, 2023, and was named for the exact hour on October 7 that Hamas' attacks began (Kershner, 2023). Its goal was to memorialize the nearly 380 people who lost their lives during the attack by showcasing items salvaged from the festival. The display includes video footage of people dancing in their last moments, WhatsApp exchanges capturing the fear and terror of the attendees, portraits of those who never made it home, and many items such as shoes and burnt-out cars. Israeli President Isaac Herzog attended the opening and described it as “a hallowed space” (Kershner, 2023). All proceeds from the exhibit go towards assistance for Nova Festival survivors coordinated by the Tribe of Nova Foundation. The Nova Festival founders, together with U.S. partners then brought this large-scale installation to New York and Los Angeles “with the objective to create a powerful, educational, and emotional exhibit that allows others to bear witness to the horrors of what occurred on that day at The Nova Music Festival” (Nova Exhibition, n.d.).

Music-Related Activations

In addition to healing spaces and emergency mental health activations, a number of DJs, community leaders, and musicians have also taken it upon themselves to host events in honor of the Nova Festival survivors, helping to cultivate healing environments and raise money for support. For example, during an evening in Jerusalem, DJ Yaakov Babani (founder of Tribal Events) played ambient electronic music while musician Yosef Wildes led meditation and breathwork. The artist Merchav Mugen (Hebrew for “safe space”) has created a YouTube series featuring multidisciplinary artists and creators who gathered for recordings at Kitsch Studios in Tel Aviv. “Out of the terrible pain,” wrote Mugen in the text related to the first video in the series, “we searched for a way to express what cannot be expressed in words, and to offer comfort and hope through what connects us all: Israeli culture” (Mugen, n.d.). Ecstatic Dance Israel hosted a fundraising campaign and has adjusted the programming of the organization's nine centers to accommodate survivors and their sensitivities. The Tribe of Nova has been holding commemorative performances and fundraisers for victims of the attack who were injured (rehabilitation services, psychological treatments, and professional aid) and for the families of those killed, kidnapped, or deemed missing. The funds raised by the Tribe of Nova are also used to provide emotional and financial support for the individuals working at the Nova Festival who have been financially, physically, or emotionally impacted. Other popular musicians including DJ Freedom Fighters and DJ Inor Roni Kogno have been involved in commemorative events to honor and raise money for the survivors of October 7. Even the Israeli jazz community, distinct from the DJ scene, has stepped up to organize an online jazz festival to create unity and support PTSD prevention and treatment among survivors.

Various music and psychedelic arts parties have been happening all over Israel with the goal of bringing together survivors of the Nova Festival, building solidarity and uplifting the community. As described by one such party goer via WhatsApp to an acquaintance:

We went to a wedding hall that has been transformed into a place of gathering and healing for survivors of the Nova party, from which 364 beautiful souls were murdered by Hamas terrorists, so many people were injured and dozens kidnapped and taken into captivity. Last night there were hundreds of young

Israelis there. There was food, music, stations for different kinds of healing treatments and a stage on which musicians performed and spoke. On the far wall of the hall it said in English in blue lights, “We will dance again.” (personal communication)

III. Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy Activations

In addition to initial harm reduction and expressions of artistic solidarity, more formal psychedelic-assisted therapeutic activations have been implemented in response to the trauma of October 7th.

MAPS Israel

MAPS Israel is an affiliate of the Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) drug development company now known as Lykos Therapeutics. MAPS Israel operated clinical trials of MDMA for PTSD and is now fundraising for a new initiative named Healing October 7 that would treat or prevent post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in survivors of the October 7 attacks (MAPS Israel, 2023). Healing October 7 would consist of two components: therapeutic programs aiming to prevent PTSD, as well as MDMA group therapy for survivors and soldiers with PTSD.⁹ The initiative would be a breakthrough, multi-site group MDMA-assisted psychotherapy study that would include various patient groups.¹⁰ The goal of this study is to provide 15 weeks of group and individual therapy for the survivors inside five major hospitals in Israel. Group therapy was chosen for its ability to foster collective healing (leveraging shared experiences from a collective trauma) and for being cost-efficient. MAPS Israel’s research aims to pioneer effective large-scale trauma treatment in group settings (K. Tzarfaty, CEO & Co-Founder of MAPS Israel, personal communication, April 18, 2024, and August 13, 2024).

Access Center for Psychedelic Therapy

Access Center for Psychedelic Therapy (ACPT) is an Israeli nonprofit organization founded by Pinchas Baumol¹¹ and

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⁹ The PTSD prevention initiative includes three non-psychedelic components: psychotherapy for residents of Kibbutzim Sufa, Ein Hashlosha, Re'im, and the city of Sderot (including Kitot Konenut); psychotherapy program for 40 Eilat residents who survived the Nova Festival; and programs for young residents (ages 20 to 35) of “otef aza” (the area enveloping Gaza) out of the Marpeh Yami farm in Eilat. These programs are working independently now, and MAPS Israel supports some with consultation (K. Tzarfaty, CEO & Co-Founder of MAPS Israel, personal communication, July 31, 2024 and August 13, 2024).

¹⁰ The various patient groups would include 400 survivors suffering from moderate to severe PTSD as a result of the October 7th attack in Israel (in partnership with Sheba Medical Center and Lev Hasharon Mental Health Center), survivors of the southern Israel massacre (in partnership with Be'er Sheva Hospital), and soldiers who have developed PTSD (in partnership with Sheba and HaEmek Medical Center) (Tzarfaty, personal communication, July 31, 2024 and August 13, 2024).

¹¹ Pinchas Baumol is one of the authors of this article.

Shaun Lacob in 2022 dedicated to increasing access to safe and legal psychedelic therapy options (ACPT, 2023). Immediately after the attack, ACPT reached out to trauma and ketamine experts around the world, as ketamine is the only legal psychedelic currently available for use in Israel (other substances are only available within the context of clinical trials or are illegal). ACPT created a protocol for treating acute stress disorder (ASD) within days of the attack. The protocol has been disseminated amongst Israeli mental health professionals who are using it to treat ASD among survivors and first responders who were on site at Nova Festival and other initial attacks.

Clinic in Lev Hasharon Hospital

Lev Hasharon Mental Health Center (LHMHC) started a public integrative-psychedelic clinic in response to the immediate need for psychiatric and psychological treatment that recognizes the special needs of those who were traumatized during their escape from the October 7 terror attack while under the influence of psychedelic substances. This clinic drew on information and volunteer support from harm reductionists and psychedelic therapists. LHMHC mobilized quickly and started treating survivors within days of the attack, recruiting them from support networks and initiatives dedicated to victims of the attack to the Nova Festival. This was done in tandem with the work LHMHC has done to offer psychological and psychiatric aid to refugees from settlements surrounding the Gaza Strip.

Conclusion

The Israeli psytrance scene, marked by its dynamic evolution, has faced a defining moment in the wake of the October 7th massacre. The tragedy prompted a profound shift in the discourse around harm reduction, emphasizing the need for community-driven initiatives grounded in the community's own values of peace, love, unity, and respect. The different responses showcase the transformative potential of harm reduction beyond substance use, serving as a vital instrument of communal healing and resilience. As the Israeli rave scene navigates the complexities of recovery, the synthesis of cultural values, harm reduction principles, and community solidarity emerges as a beacon of hope amidst the shadows of tragedy.

The October 7th massacre at the Nova Festival serves as a poignant backdrop to the ongoing discourse on harm reduction within the Israeli psytrance community. The challenges faced by harm reduction teams during this tragedy are intrinsically linked to the broader patterns of substance use and attitudes identified in recent studies. In navigating the complexities of harm reduction within the Israeli psytrance subculture, it is imperative to weave together insights from recent studies. The substance use patterns, harm reduction attitudes, and law enforcement dynamics elucidated in these studies provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities in harm reduction efforts.

By and large, the Jewish psychedelic community has been supportive of the global efforts to address the trauma of October 7, while the greater mainstream psychedelic community has been largely quiet. The trauma of October 7 has had a ripple effect around the world, affecting not only Israelis but also the global Jewish community, now facing the surge in anti-Semitism that began with celebrations of the October 7 massacre. Many Jews are feeling insecure, unsafe, or activated, and to address this, communities across America and elsewhere are holding healing psychedelic ceremonies, song and prayer circles, vigils, and community discussions.

The global Jewish psychedelic community is diverse in levels of observance, Jewish practice, politics, and demographics. The community ranges from those who are holding space in ceremony, over Shabbat or other holidays, to those who are less involved in practicing Judaism but relate to psychedelics through secular culture and nonetheless bring their Jewish identities with them to their entheogenic work. A large portion of the Jewish psychedelic community relates to this topic via prayer and song circles (sometimes absent substances), integration gatherings, online courses and workshops, WhatsApp chat groups, and in person community.¹²

There are also companies that sponsor events and projects focused on Jewish psychedelia.¹³ Indeed, the conversation in the larger psychedelic Jewish community has been shifting toward a heavily trauma-informed focus—even before October 7—and now that lens has come into even greater relevance and need. Questions of inherited trauma, especially regarding the Holocaust, as well as the somatic expressions of trauma in the body, and the way in which global narratives affect the collective Jewish body and soul, are now begging for answers and resolution as Jews around the world grapple with the aftermath of the deadliest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust.

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The attacks on people attending a psychedelic music festival brought out a range of responses from international psychedelic and harm reduction organizations. Some were explicit in their condemnation of the attacks and organized fundraisers. For example, the Colorado-based Center for Medicinal Mindfulness founded by Daniel McQueen and Psychedelic Sitters School started a GoFundMe page to help fund support for survivors of the Supernova Sukkot Gathering attack. A volunteer with the German harm reduction team Eclipse donated funds to Anashim Tovim.¹⁴ The psytrance festivals Apsara (Hungary) and Universo Paralello (the Brazilian festival entity that co-organized the festival) condemned the attacks through posts on Instagram and Facebook. MAPS did not specifically acknowledge the Nova Festival massacre, nor its psychedelic relevance, but it did issue a statement highlighting the organization's work in Israel and the need for continued healing for Israelis and Palestinians. However, large international psytrance festivals popular among Israeli ravers (e.g., Boom and Ozora), as well as major American harm reduction organizations (e.g., Zendo and Fireside) have not issued public statements as of this writing, potentially contributing to the sense of isolation and vulnerability experienced by the victims and the volunteers who have helped them.

12 Leading organizations include the nonprofit Shefa: Jewish Psychedelic Support (Bay Area, www.shefaflow.org/); the Jewish Psychedelic Summit (virtual, www.jewishpsychedelicssummit.org), an online conference that brought together various speakers on May 2-3, 2021 and had an in-person gathering during the Psychedelic Science conference convened by MAPS in Denver in June 2024; Darkhei Rephuh (New York, <https://rephuh.wordpress.com>), a nonprofit that hosts events and Shabbatons; Casa Somati (upstate New York, <https://www.instagram.com/casasomati>), a private home that hosts Jewish prayer circles and other events; and JewWhoTokes, an Instagram account founded in 2016 that profiles Jewish individuals who partake and/or work in the psychedelic and cannabis industries, which since the October 7 attacks has been hosting weekly pre-Shabbat calls and in-person events. Co-author Madison Margolin is one of the founders of the Jewish Psychedelic Summit, and Adriana Kertzer is the founder of JewWhoTokes.

13 For-profit entities that have supported the Jewish psychedelic ecosystem include Plant Medicine Law Group, Nushama, DoubleBlind, and Ayin Press. Adriana Kertzer is the founder of Plant Medicine Law Group, and Madison Margolin was a co-founder of DoubleBlind and a contributor to Ayin Press.

14 This individual reached out to Pinni Baumol through mutual contacts inquiring how he could provide support after the attacks.

The speed with which Israeli society mobilized to address the needs presented by the October 7 attacks is astonishing.¹⁵ Treating the people who were on psychedelics at the Nova Festival with appropriate care meant that individuals from the Israeli harm reduction community and rave scene had to teach mental health professionals and the government how to deal with persons in altered states—and the potential exacerbated harm the attacks had on these individuals.

The history of psychedelic use among Jews in Israel and the diaspora is a rich one, as is a culture of early adoption, cultural exploration, and affinity with mental health education, presumably facilitating the swift, innovative, and multifaceted response. It is our hope that the mobilization described here will influence the larger conversation unfolding around the world about humans' desire to alter consciousness through psychedelics, the wisdom cultivated in the psychedelic underground, and the particular forms of trauma that can be experienced by individuals when they are on substances that are consumed in order to facilitate wonder, human connection, exploration, and delight.

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Adriana Kertzer is a NY-based Brazilian-Texan Jewish activist, psychedelic lawyer, and cultural producer. She is co-founder of Plant Medicine Law Group, a law firm specialized in psychedelic infrastructure, and the Jewish Healing Society, an organization committed to fostering a supportive environment for Jews in psychedelic medicine and science, born out of her Instagram account, JewWhoTokes. JWT began as a collection of profiles on Jewish individuals involved in the psychedelic and cannabis industries. After the October 7 attacks, it became a community for Jews confronting antisemitism in these industries or needing community. Adriana sits on the board of advisors of the Shine Collective, a nonprofit dedicated to addressing abuse in the psychedelic industry.

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¹⁵ The fact that civil society came together after months of intense political protests related to the judicial reform measures led by Prime Minister Netanyahu, and mobilized largely without government support, merits credit.

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of any organizations with which they are associated.

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BOOK REVIEWS

We Are Here: Talking with Australia's Oldest Holocaust Survivors

by Fiona Harari. Scribe, 2018. Victoria.

Reviewed by Dan Warner

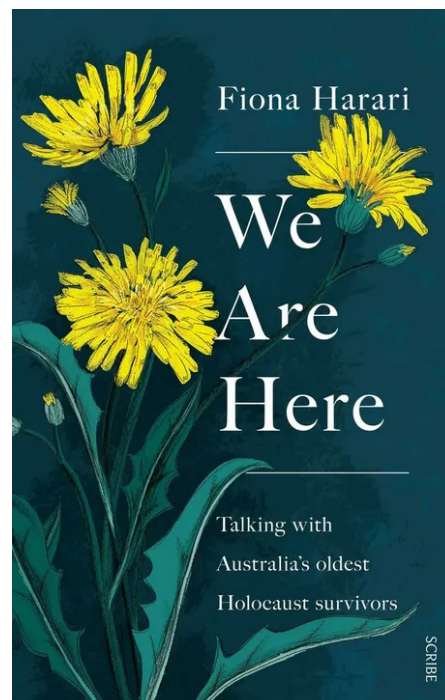
There is a well that looms behind many conversations among Jews about the past—about chaos, deportations, pogroms, and camps that shaped the lives of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors. These memories often remain just beneath the surface, rarely accessed directly, yet quietly shaping identity and meaning. My father and I recently punctured this well while sorting through old family albums together. We came across photographs of distant relatives, including one with numbers tattooed on her forearm, and another of a family apartment in Berlin seized in the 1930s. We paused, looked at one another, and wept. We had not learned anything new from these images, but we touched that well of impossible loss and trauma that hangs over so many Jewish families.

Fiona Harari taps into this well in *We Are Here: Talking with Australia's Oldest Holocaust Survivors*. Her project is deceptively simple: she interviews Holocaust survivors who emigrated to Australia. Yet the stories that emerge are varied, textured, and psychologically complex. Harari's participants come primarily from Eastern Europe, but they represent a wide range of experiences—men and women, individuals whose stories were previously known, and others who had rarely spoken publicly about their experiences. Even one non-Jewish survivor is included, broadening the perspective further.

Many of the stories share a familiar arc: liberation followed by the daunting task of rebuilding a life. Survivors often recall the moment of liberation—Russian or British soldiers entering camps and announcing freedom—followed by an initial sense of bliss. Yet this moment quickly gave way to an abyss: how to rebuild after experiencing inhumanity so profound it resists language. As Harari writes, "Some headed for homes that no longer existed, or into hastily erected displaced-person camps from where they slowly found other places to live." Australia initially limited Jewish immigration to just 3,000 survivors—lower than prewar quotas—but gradually became more accommodating. By 1961, approximately 27,000 Jewish survivors had migrated to Australia.

One of the most haunting stories comes from Annetta Able and her twin sister, Stephanie Heller, who survived as subjects of Josef Mengele's grotesque twin experiments. Their survival came at the cost of repeated medical procedures, injections, transfusions, and forced labor. Their existence, as Harari describes, became "a macabre mix of work and tests," including loading naked corpses onto trucks and undergoing repeated examinations to confirm their identical twin status. After the war, like many survivors, they embarked on a journey across continents before eventually settling in Australia—a destination rarely planned, but ultimately accepted.

These Australian immigration narratives differ in important ways from the familiar American immigrant story. In





A Jewish cemetery in Prague. Many Jews who came to Australia after WWII were of Polish decent. Photo by Ed Warner.

American mythology, immigrants often arrive to a land of opportunity and welcome—captured memorably in *An American Tail*, where Jewish mice sing, “There are no cats in America!” Harari’s interviews suggest something different. Many survivors describe a relatively indifferent reception from established Australian Jewish communities. There were no welcoming committees at the harbor, no structured support services. Instead, survivors were treated as part of a broader influx of displaced persons—approximately 170,000 non-Jewish migrants also entered Australia after World War II—and were largely left to rebuild independently. The result is a tone that is neither celebratory nor bitter. Australia offered safety, but not necessarily belonging.

Another compelling figure in Harari’s book is Josef Hellen, whose life story reads like a Hollywood epic. Hellen survived Auschwitz, escaped a death march, and later built a vast real estate empire. His survival strategies included “organizing”—the camp slang for stealing necessary resources—and, in one dramatic account, using knife-throwing skills learned in childhood to fend off pursuers after his escape. Yet despite his later success, Hellen remains haunted. During a later trip to Berlin, he became obsessed with finding an SS guard who had once beaten

him. Unable to locate the man, Hellen expressed regret: “I made a mistake... I should have known his name and memorized it.” His story illustrates that survival and success do not necessarily resolve trauma.

Across these interviews, Harari presents a range of responses to catastrophe: revenge, success, forgetting, religious renewal, atheism, rebuilding families, or withdrawing emotionally. There is no single narrative of survival. Instead, we see individuals reconstructing meaning in profoundly different ways.

Harari also reminds us that these voices are disappearing. “The people interviewed in this book are part of an increasingly rare demographic: survivors of Nazism who have adult memories of the Holocaust.” This reality became even more poignant following the Bondi Beach massacre, in which 87-year-old Holocaust survivor Alex Kleytman was killed while shielding his wife. Even decades after surviving one catastrophe, Kleytman died protecting loved ones from another act of violence.

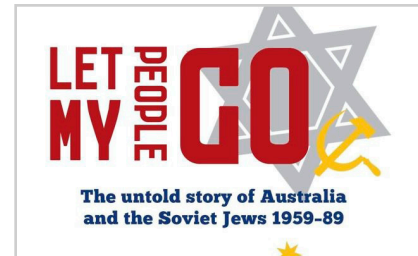
Harari’s book thus does more than document history. It allows readers to access that well of memory—painful, complex, and deeply human. These stories remind us not only of suffering, but also of resilience, adaptation, and the enduring impulse to rebuild. In listening to these survivors, we are reminded why these stories matter—and why, as the title suggests, *we are here*.

Let My People Go: The untold story of Australia and the Soviet Jews 1959-89.

by Sam Lipski and Suzanne D. Rutland

Gefen Publishing House, 2015

Reviewed by Lawrence Glanz, Ph.D.



At 9:45 on October 27, 2018 I was walking with some friends in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh. We were three blocks away from the Tree of Life synagogue when we were stopped by police and told to keep away. We witnessed officers, guns drawn, running toward the Shul which was holding its Shabbat services. The worst had happened that morning, and it resonated throughout the country and the world. Afterwards many of us feared it would not be the last mass murder directed at Jewish gatherings, and the massacre at Bondi beach outside of Sydney Australia was a terrible echo of that catastrophe.

We get very little news from Australia, let alone news of Australia Jewry, but the reality is that there is a thriving Jewish community, mostly centered in Melbourne and Sydney, numbering about 120,000. It is the eighth largest Jewish community outside of Israel. The first Jews arrived in 1788 as convicts, mostly petty criminals from Great Britain, which used Australia as a penal colony. Jewish presence has been continuous since that time. They were not unwelcome, but antisemitism has always been present in the country to a degree.

Following the war, the USSR saw the tyranny of the Stalinist era and the cold war, which continued until the fall of the Soviet Union. During that time circumstances for Jews worsened. Stalin saw Jewish intellectuals, scientists, and artists as threats to the state, and instituted discriminatory laws and policies. Jews became increasingly isolated, arrested, and murdered.

In 1948 the State of Israel was created, in large measure as a refuge for a Jewish population devastated by the Holocaust, and in the USSR there arose a yearning for asylum in the new state. It is estimated that there were three million Jews in the USSR and many of them opposed the state and wanted to emigrate. These “refuseniks” sought and gained much international attention, as they struggled against oppressive rule. The decades between 1959 and 1989 saw this movement reach its peak, and it is this time frame covered by Sam Lipski and Suzanne D. Rutland.

Lipski is a prominent Australian journalist and Rutland is a distinguished professor of Hebrew and Biblical Studies at the University of Sydney, noted for her writings on the history of Australia’s Jewish community. Their expertise and familiarity with the community led them to collaborate on this critical era in Jewish history with special emphasis on the role that Australia played in the refusenik movement. Lipski took the lead in the writing, consulting along the way with Rutland, who provided guidance on the structure of the narrative.

The Australian government is a parliamentary one, and the book, *Let My People Go*, delves into the personalities and actions of that body, and its effects on international affairs. It also describes the conflicts and internal politics involved by the more influential members of parliament and other prominent figures of the time. Although Australia was and is not a big power like the USA, Lipski and Rutland depict its ability to move the larger nations and the sustained efforts it made over several decades on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

One example of this influence is cited in a 1962 effort by the Minister of External Affairs (equivalent to our State Department). A devoted advocate of human rights and opponent of Communism, he led an initiative to criticize the USSR's oppressive behavior to the General Assembly of the United Nations, one of the first nations to bring attention to the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union to the world body. There was opposition to doing so, with some stating that the Arab community might object, or that President Kennedy's delicate negotiations regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis might be jeopardized. Yet the Minister and his associates prevailed, despite the fact that they had not previously consulted Washington.

As one commentator put it:

Australia's succinct and marvelous United Nations intervention was of great value and significance. It was unprecedented in that this was the first time that the problem of Soviet Jewry was discussed at the UN at an official governmental level. It was valued on two counts: It helped to make the Soviets more aware than ever before of the concern felt in the west about Soviet Jews; it impressed other UN delegates with the seriousness of the question... so that the door has been opened for further and more systematic efforts by the UN.

The authors detail controversy that followed from this bold initiative. Australia's parliament was divided in its positions toward Israel and the USSR. While many were enraged and determined to expose the cruelty of the Soviet government, others were more cautious and favored a less aggressive approach, fearing a backlash or other unpredictable consequences. And there were still other voices, less concerned with Jews than with Palestine and with the long-term benefits or liabilities to Australia of favoritism to Jewish interests. In reading these sections one can only infer that Australia's Parliament was reflecting the various sentiments of the people they represented.

The Soviet Union was not about to stand for critics of its policies without retorting, and it had friends around the world and in Australia on the Left, and in Communist cells and political parties. They denied the presence of antisemitism as a government policy and sought to suppress publications and activists who would turn public opinion against them. The authors chronicle the struggle to fashion Soviet antisemitism as a human rights struggle, and to bring to light the atrocities taking place in the USSR. Australian Jews themselves were divided, with some groups in denial, or even aligned with communist ideology. Some of these groups claimed reports of antisemitism were exaggerated or "over-zealous," this despite evidence that Stalin had ordered the murder of many Jewish writers and cultural leaders between 1948 and 1952.

Yet there was support for the USSR and communism, and a number of spokesmen pointed out that Moscow recognized Jews as a legitimate national minority. One such prominent figure is quoted by the authors calling for "quiet diplomacy" rather than public protests and political action. There was often strong debate for many years before a more militant policy was adopted in the early 1970's. Public protests inside and outside the Soviet Union could not be held back, and many of these took place in Australia's Jewish community.

After the Six Day war in 1967, the Refusenik movement grew exponentially, spurred on by the Israeli victory and the growing respect for Israel as a nation of fighters, making up for the victimization of the Nazi era. International support for the Refuseniks grew as well, and pressure on the Soviet Union increased. This was seen as a threat

by the Soviets. If they were to accede to the wishes of this minority, which other minority would follow? By 1970 more than 80,000 Soviet Jews had applied to leave for Israel, but only a few hundred were granted exit visas.

In August of 1970, as described by the authors, Australia joined in the growing international protest. A public rally held at the Sydney Town Hall attracted a sellout crowd of 3000 people.

The rally called on the Australian government to step up its protests against Moscow. While Parliament was generally sympathetic, there was concern for backlash from the Soviet Government which might disrupt trade and commercial prospects between the nations. Disrupting the internal affairs of another country was seen as presenting a danger of retaliation.

Momentum of the Refusenik movement could not be stopped, though it required the application of sustained international pressure including the consistent efforts of the Australian Jewish community and its government, all of which are documented thoroughly in this 273 page book.

Ultimately, over a million Jews emigrated from Russia, most to Israel, but some to Australia. The reader can learn the names and personalities of the activists both in and out of the government, and it is a lesson in social psychology and political science. My main criticism of this book is that the first author, though a good journalist, admits that he was also an activist and a close friend of several influential figures he chronicles, thus possibly compromising his objectivity. All the same his attention to detail and the extensive index support this volume to reflect a great effort and a good deal of passion. For some readers this may be more information than they would like; for others it is a fascinating look at a community and a nation, during an era of turmoil.