

Kvetch!

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For **future submissions and letters**, please email: kvetchzine@gmail.com. Or, follow us on Instagram at [@kvetchzine](https://www.instagram.com/kvetchzine) to find out how to submit.

Kvetch is left-wing Jewish zine with the aims of providing an alternative space to mainstream Zionist hegemony for Jewish expression, arts, culture, history; creating alliances between communities; and highlighting struggles for social justice. *Kvetch* acknowledges that the zine is created on occupied Aboriginal land. Sovereignty has never been ceded – this always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Kvetch is an independent zine which is supported by the Jewish Council of Australia.

Edward Neeman

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Ethan Gandler

Imagine you're sitting at the dinner table for Shabbas. Just before tucking into your third slice of challah, you overhear a wisp of conversation. You're not sure who's leading it – your right-wing uncle, your radicalised cousin, your misinformed grandma – it doesn't really matter. What does is the topic of conversation. It is one of those topics you know all too well. It sits like a boulder in your stomach causing you to hold your breath and bite your tongue. It mortifies you. It puts you into a silent rage. But what is more startling, is how casually it is being discussed.

If you speak up, if you complain about what is being said, you know how they will respond. A roll of the eyes, a dismissive “woke” or “lefty”, an implicit (or sometimes explicit) labelling of you as one who breaks the peace.

It is hard not to internalise such a response. You don't want to be the one who brings the drama or makes things awkward. But in truth, this assumption that things were happy and peaceful before you complained is a strategy for silencing dissent. In her essay ‘Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)’, feminist scholar and activist Sara Ahmed describes a similar table and scenario, but instead of ‘kvetch’, she draws upon the “feminist killjoy”. While the road of the killjoy or kvetcher can be a difficult one, Ahmed reminds us that

To be willing to cause unhappiness can also be how we immerse ourselves in collective struggle, as we work with and through others who share our points of alienation.

‘Kvetch’ is not simply a cute Yiddish phrase. While generally understood as “complaining persistently”, in its early meaning ‘kvetch’ meant to squeeze, to push against, to crush. In *Complaint!*, Ahmed also points out that complaints are not simply negative, but “an attempt to address what is wrong, not to cope with something, not to let it happen, not to let it keep happening. You refuse to adjust to what is unjust.” As Zionist consensus dominates forums of Jewish discourse, *Kvetch* is an alternative space for Jewish expression, art and culture that attempts to push against the grain — a forum for complaint about the injustice in the world; about those who remain silent, and about those who silence others in service of injustice. *Kvetch* is our refusal to adjust to what is unjust.

For too long, Jews who are not in lockstep with the Zionist consensus of the Jewish community have been made the targets of ‘adjustment’. They've been hushed, silenced, and intimidated not to speak out in support of Palestine. And yet, we refuse to adjust. In their book *Let This Radicalize You*, Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes write, “When we believe in each other, we are more likely to take risks and to invest ourselves in possibility, even when our own hopes are not fully formed.” Affiliated with the Jewish Council of Australia, *Kvetch* is the product of a growing community and movement that understands the act of kvetching as active, healing and intrinsically tied to tikkun olam (repairing the world). *Kvetch* is our forum for complaint and hope, for sharpening our ideas, and for building our capacity in the struggle for collective liberation.

Eyeless in Gaza

Michael Garbutt

If you see the rubble fields of Gaza
And the flooded tents
and the crowds with pots and pans at aid posts
and you feel nothing—
If you tell me they started it, they're animals,
we had to defend ourselves, they deserve what they got—
If you insist Hamas exaggerates the numbers,
And they don't look starving to you ...
if you believe there was no other way to save the hostages,
If you tell me Israel may not be perfect,
But nowhere is,
and antisemites will always blame us for existing ...

If you hope the protesters will go away
and take their fucking drums and chants with them,
and you're planning a trip to fly the flag on the March of the Living
and visit an old shul in Spain ...
If this is you,
then you're not seeing the rubble fields of Gaza
with bodies rotting underneath.
You're looking at a picture
of your heart.



I wrote this poem out of anger and shame. In one sense, it took only an hour or so to write; in another, it took me years.

For decades, I loved Israel unconditionally. Over time, I learned about the racism, discrimination, the violence, and moral corruption that was blighting the lives of millions of Palestinians. At first, I found justifications and explanations. Eventually, years later, when the gap between love and judgment grew too wide, I turned away and refused to look.

Then came October 7, the hostages, and the murderous Israeli response that followed. I hoped it would all end quickly. One hundred days passed, and it didn't stop. Two hundred days. Three hundred days. A year—and I still remained silent. I watched pro-Palestinian demonstrations from a distance, reading them through the lens of antisemitism. I was ashamed of what Israel was doing and ashamed of my own silence.

In mid-2025 I found the website of the Jewish Council of Australia, and added my name to their public statement in support of a free Palestine. Finally, I was able to speak out. I decided to fast daily, sunrise to sunset, in solidarity with the people of Gaza, and to bear witness by documenting it on Instagram—denouncing Israel's war crimes, illegal occupations, and the violence and injustice suffered by all Palestinians. On the 167th day of my fast, I made an Instagram reel (@jewishfastforjustice), reciting the poem printed here.

A Minor History of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism

Ethan Gandler

Widening cracks

In line with movements like Jewish Voices for Peace and IfNotNow, the revival of a new Jewish left in Australia is also one that is in opposition to a legacy conservatism and Zionism that has dominated the community. For decades, the political architecture of Jewish communal life was built around the premise that support for the state of Israel was fundamental to Jewish identity. But in the wake of Israel's genocide against the Palestinians, the fissures in the Zionist consensus are expanding, and different ideas around what it means to be Jewish in the diaspora are posing a fundamental threat to the community's idea of what it means to be Jewish.

As a way to discredit those of us who challenge the consensus, the Jewish establishment will argue that the resurgent Jewish anti-Zionist left is either politically marginal, or marginally Jewish. Thus, one of the great tasks of anti-Zionist Jews today is to recall the long history and ancestry of Jewish anti-Zionism, socialism, and left-wing ideas. Indeed, the Jewish Council of Australia (JCA) is one of a number of new Jewish organisations that is leading a new anti-racist, and progressive Jewish agenda. Yet few people know that the Jewish Council of Australia is not the first organisation to be called the "Jewish Council" in Australia.

The Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism

The first Jewish Council was a popular left-wing organisation established in early 1942 and it was called the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism (JCCFA). Max Kaiser's book *Jewish Antifascism and the False Promise of Settler Colonialism* documents the JCCFA's history and activity in detail.¹ It had hundreds of members and an extensive committee structure that included special committees of doctors and lawyers and a very active ladies auxiliary committee and youth section. It was, according to historian David Rechter, "in institutional form the broad-based antifascist leftism enjoying considerable vogue both within the Jewish community and in society at large." In the year following its formation, the JCCFA was popular enough for the Victorian Jewish Advisory Board (now known as the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies) to vote to give it "full moral and financial support". Its membership lasted 9 years, and it was frequently tasked with official Jewish community public relations activities.²

As a left-wing organisation opposing antisemitism, it sought to ally the Jewish community with other progressive political forces. It hosted talks that shared progressive ideas, and had connections with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and the trade union movement. When antisemitic leaflets were distributed in workplaces like the General Motors Holden factory, the Council worked with the union to develop policy refuting "the anti-Semitic lies and warn of the menace of anti-Semitism to the workers themselves."³

¹ Kaiser, M 2022, *Jewish Antifascism and the False Promise of Settler Colonialism*. Springer Nature.

² — 2023, *For Australian Jews in the 1940s and 1950s, remembering the Holocaust meant fighting racism and colonialism*, The Conversation.

³ 1952 'Anti-Semitic Pamphlets', *The Australian Jewish Herald* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1935 - 1968),

The JCCFA maintained that the struggle against antisemitism was connected to fighting racism and colonialism more generally. In 1951, the Council became affiliated with the Council for Aboriginal Rights, and regularly sent a delegate to its meetings.⁴ This approach was best summed up in 1947 by Jewish Council activist Norman Rothfield:

“We must attack reaction, no matter whence it comes. Dutch aggression against the Indonesia Republic is our concern, as is also the lynching of negroes [sic] in America, or the maltreatment of Aborigines [sic] in Australia [...] We Jews can only be secure in a secure world. It is a world situation of conflict and strife together with a situation in Australia of intense class conflict which lays the ground for a campaign of anti-Semitic prejudice greater than any previous attacks in this country against a racial or religious minority.”⁵

Much has changed when looking at how the community's leadership understands the sources of antisemitism and racism today.

Citizens of the Whole World and the story of JCCFA member Itzhak Gust

In his book *Citizens of the Whole World: Anti-Zionism and the Cultures of the American Jewish Left*, the Jewish American historian Benjamin Balthaser traces the history of the American Jewish left during the 20th century. Balthaser argues that the rise in the Jewish left is not necessarily something new, but the resurfacing of a Jewish leftist political tradition and history. Balthaser's book title, 'Citizens of the Whole World', is a quote taken from the unpublished novel 'The Volunteer', by Jewish left-wing activist Robert Gessner. Gessner's novel poses 'an extended dialogue between young Jewish socialists from the US and hardened members of the right wing paramilitaries, the Irgun. The American Jewish socialists are quickly disillusioned and finally attempt to flee the country, only to die in the crossfire between Palestinian and Jewish militias.' In a final internal dialogue, the American narrator concludes: "You're an alien in Israel because...you are a citizen of the whole damn stupid world." As Balthaser argues, 'To be a citizen of the whole world – an internationalist – is irreconcilable with Zionism: indeed, Zionism kills him... Zionism is [rendered here] incompatible with the multiethnic democratic culture of the US left, and Zionism is a violation of Jewish ethics of diasporic mobility and an ethic of cohabitation.'⁶

Of course, Gessner's novel was based on real people. Itzhak Gust (1898-1990) was a member of the JCCFA and had a very similar story himself. Born in Poland, he was like the Americans in Gessner's 'The Volunteer': a socialist who had bought into the Zionist dream of a socialist utopia in Palestine. However, in his autobiography *Such was Life*, Gust documents his own disillusionment with the Zionist project, noting how the British 'colonial office which administered this country on behalf of the league of nations pursued a consistent policy of divide and rule'; and that, 'British agents did their best to foment strife between the Arabs and the Jews' because 'a united people were a danger to British rule'.⁷ He reflects: 'if only a way could be found for the Jews and Arabs to live amicably together! But the administration saw to it that this did not happen.' Remarkably, he documents the Zionist agenda of 'capture[ing] the land and work from the Arabs', where the slogan "*kibush avoda*" ("capturing labour", meaning: 'replacing

4 July, p. 5. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article260986264>

⁴ Kaiser, M 2022, p. 188.

⁵ Kaiser, M 2023.

⁶ Balthaser, B 2025, *Citizens of the Whole World*, Verso Books, p. 40.

⁷ Gust, I 2004, *Such was Life: A Jumping Narrative from Radom to Melbourne*, Makor Jewish Community Library, p. 73.

Arab labour by Jewish') was adopted. In practice, this involved collaboration between the Zionist Yishuv leadership and the British administration where Jewish immigration served to maintain the Yishuv's racially divided labor policy. The Yishuv's unprincipled politics influenced Gust's decision to leave Palestine in 1926: 'it became obvious to me, earlier than I expected, that the native population resented our efforts to build a 'national home' for the Jews in the Arab country... Here we were trying to build a just world for ourselves and were dispossessing the local population, robbing them of their land.'⁸

We might read Gust's disillusionment as a testament to his commitment to the very idea behind Balthaser's title: *Citizens of the Whole World*. He could not reconcile the idea of a non-universal understanding of justice in Palestine where Jews were active in dispossessing and exploiting the Indigenous population. In Gessner's terms, Gust felt like an 'alien' in Israel because he recognised himself as 'a citizen of the whole damn stupid world.' After his disillusionment with Zionism, Gust migrated back to Europe in 1926, and then finally to Melbourne in 1928. Fifteen years later, the JCCFA was established in Melbourne with the same commitment to internationalism – a program aligned with antifascism, antiracism, and international worker solidarity.

The politics and activities of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism

The JCCFA recognised that the fight against racism required an active movement with broad support, including the understanding that fighting racism was connected to solidarity and class struggle. As the long-time member of the Council Norman Rothfield put it:

You might say... that anti-Semitism is ignorance and prejudice. You must then ask what are the economic conditions, the conflicts, under which anti-Semites thrive. We must realise that anti-Semitism is only one form of group discrimination. We must search our own community to make quite sure there is no ignorance, which is on a par with anti-Semitism. Can we say — he is only a negro [*sic*], he is only a "goy"? Is there any of that spirit in the community? Let us be sure there isn't. We must realise that anti-Semitism is only one form of group discrimination.⁹

Part of its activities involved distributing leaflets and working with unions to emphasise the importance of combatting antisemitism and fascism. One post-war leaflet wrote, "anti-semitism is a tool of Fascism — If you meet anyone preaching it / Tell him he is playing Hitler's game!"¹⁰

In 1952, the ABC invited the German pianist Walter Giesecking on a tour in Australia. Giesecking was a former collaborator and advocate of the Nazi party. While the Victorian Board of Deputies and other establishment leadership at the time critiqued Jewish protests against Giesecking's visit as "undignified" and encouraging antisemitism, the JCCFA took a different stance, seeking instead to confront fascism's presence directly. Three years prior, Giesecking had already been blocked from the US, in part due to Jewish protestors numbering over 500 who had held placards saying: "Don't patronise Hitler's prodigy" and "Giesecking plays to the tune of six million murdered Jews."¹¹ In the spirit of international and Jewish solidarity, the JCCFA also argued that it was their duty

⁸ Ibid., . 77

⁹ 1947 'Anti-Semitism Now Organised In Australia', *The Australian Jewish Herald* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1935 - 1968), 3 April, p. 5., <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article261381056>

¹⁰ Kaiser, M 2023.

¹¹ 1949 'U S puts ban on German pianist; concert cancelled', *The Argus* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957), 26 January, p. 4., <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article22702860>

to continue this antifascist protest, despite the criticism coming from within the Jewish community. When Giesecking arrived at Essendon airport, the JCCFA assembled a protest along with other non-Jewish allies. One placard read: "GO HOME NAZI". In a



(Jewish anti-nazi placard c. 1952)

letter to the *Australian Jewish Herald*, JCCFA member Aaron Mushin argued that the "Jewish masses" across the world would be proud of their protest action, and noted the hypocrisy of Jewish establishment's leadership when "Three years ago, Melbourne Jews were proud of their New York brethren for their courage in taking such action against a collaborator of the Nazis."¹²

Notably, the head of the ABC, C.J. Moses, reacted to the protests, saying they smelled "of communist tactics", and that, "The Second World War was fought to uphold the rights of free men and to rid the world of racial discrimination and intolerance. Now we see these ugly symptoms appearing in Australia; and being demonstrated by a minority of the very people who appealed loudest — and probably with most reason — against German discrimination." The JCCFA's president at the time, Joseph Redapple, responded by saying that Moses' remarks were "palpably stupid and reminiscent of the kind of anti-Semitic outburst made so familiar a decade ago."

Here we can see that the JCCFA actively sought to oppose the creeping normalisation of post-war fascism at the time. This event evidences how the Jewish left was attacked from both sides – on one flank by the Jewish leadership who wanted to 'keep the peace', and on the other by the head of the ABC, who associated the Council with communism and accused it of being discriminatory, attempting a sort of 'reverse-racism' to discredit the JCCFA's protests.

Conclusion

While today's political and historical context is different from that of the JCCFA, we can follow Balthasser's argument to see that the resurgent Jewish left is part of a broader history of left-wing Jewish activity. Indeed, some ancestors of JCA were active in the JCCFA. While legacy Jewish and Zionist organisations want to bury this history, we should know that there is precedence of Jewish political organising that opposed nationalist and right-wing agendas. Indeed, just weeks ago, hundreds of Jewish people and fellow activists stood in solidarity with Palestinians under a broad multicultural tent, opposing the state-sanctioned visit of the Israeli war criminal Isaac Herzog. We can recognise similarities in the JCCFA action in 1952, when members and fellow activists stood together to oppose the visit of the racist and genocidal Nazi pianist Walter Giesecking. And similar resonances emerged again in 2017, when Jewish activists opposed the visit of the war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu. Each of these moments form part of the ever-present, radical Jewish tradition on this continent.

¹² 1952 'LETTERS GIESECKING.', *The Australian Jewish Herald* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1935 - 1968), 28 March, p. 2., <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article260985068>

In a time of genocide

Annie Pflingst

1948 repeated and repeated – villages destroyed and Palestinians again and again displaced, harassed, evicted, violently expelled. 1948 repeated and repeated across the occupied Palestinian West Bank and East Jerusalem. Violence this time by armed messianic settlers rampaging across and into Palestinian living spaces. While the genocide of Gaza continues unabated, in spite of, or maybe even because of, a so-called ceasefire; the end game of 100 years of Zionist settlement of Palestine applying the military hardware supplied by imperial power.

Is there any language that is commensurate with such cruelty and violence? Or is it as it was for Adorno who said “there can be no poetry after Auschwitz”?¹ Is it even permissible to say Gaza and the Holocaust in the same breath, when the Holocaust is weaponised to give authority to the genocide of Gaza and the dismantling of the Palestinian territories – of Jenin, Nablus, East Jerusalem and the Bedouin settlements across the Jordan Valley and in the Naqab, and the erasure, dismantling and renaming of Palestinian territory to build Greater Israel? I reflect on my time there now some years back and I ask, often, how many of the children and babies in the refugee camps I visited are still alive, or have been arrested, threatened, interrogated, and incarcerated under administrative detention?

And then the attack on Bondi – and an immediate seamless equating of this event with the voices and gatherings calling for an end to genocide and a free Palestine. What was my immediate response to the shooting of Jews at a Hannukah festival on Sunday 14th December at Bondi Beach? Frozen, incredulous. Yes, I was horrified as it all played out in snatches of reporting and imagery. And then of course, condolences for those families of the 15 people who were killed by gunshot kicked in and recognition of the terror and fear engendered by this event. And, together with others, sadness for Bondi, especially north Bondi, where I had lived for so many years. I had in a sense, come home. I was, at the same time, aware of the lack of empathy or condolences for the thousands of Palestinians killed by military attacks, starvation and hypothermia across the Gaza Strip. One immediate response was ‘oh, no this will play out against Palestine and Palestinians’, although I understand there is nothing to connect ISIS with Hamas. I listened to our political leaders and thought how ignorant they are – of the history of Palestine and of Zionism, of imperial power and its machinations. And how blind to Australia’s history and continuing practice of genocide against First Nations peoples.

As I watched the service the next day, I was struck by my lack of identification with ‘Jews’; aware of the significant schism between my feminist, secular anti-Zionist Jewishness and the Haredi Judaism of the Chabad Lubavitch (who had organised the Hannukah festival). Not only because of my feminist reading of power, but also

¹ https://www.reddit.com/r/askphilosophy/comments/9vx78t/what_did_theodor_w_adorno_mean_by_there_can_be_no/.

because of clumping all Australian Jews into 'the Australian Jewish' community – no nuance, no recognition of multiple Jewish communities. Did I at that moment 'love the Jewish people'? My reaction made me go to Hannah Arendt who famously (or not) when accused by Gershon Sholem (referring to the Eichmann trial) of not loving the Jewish people, wrote: "How right you are that I have no such love. I have never in my life 'loved' some nation or collective- not the German, French, or American nation, or the working class or whatever else might exist. The fact is that I love only my friends and am quite incapable of any other sort of love."²

So then who do I love, feel compassion for, grieve for, mourn?

- Every child killed by AI directed drones in Gaza;
- Every baby frozen to death in a water logged tent in a Gazan winter;
- Every Bedouin family displaced from their dwelling in the Jordan Valley;
- Every family whose house is demolished in the refugee camps of the West Bank;
- Every young man killed by the IOF whose body is not returned to the family for burial;
- The 15 people killed and many more injured during a Hannukah festival at Bondi Beach, and their families, friends and community.

Above all love for freedom and justice.

And then the equating of Free Palestine with the Bondi shootings became inevitably framed as hate speech and the object of legislation. Nothing more said in the public space, about the intention, if known, of the men responsible for the shooting at Bondi. And though neo-Nazis have been taken up through this new anti-Semitism hate speech policing, restrictions on the public calls for an end to genocide and in support of Palestinian rights are in the sightlines of the state's framing of hate speech.

And all the while, newborn babies and toddlers die of hypothermia in freezing water-logged tents in Gaza – a new phrase enters the lexicon - 'wet tent syndrome'.³

I weep.

² David Hoffman July 8 2021; *To Love or Not to Love the Jewish People?*
<https://honeyfoundationforisrael.org/insights/to-love-or-not-to-love-the-jewish-people/>
³ Michael Feldon January 26 2025; *'Wet tent syndrome' is killing Gaza's infants*. <https://www.972mag.com/gaza-wet-tent-syndrome/>

A series of allegorical paintings about the Golem.

In my paintings, the golem image, drawn from an early twentieth-century cinema version of the legend, is a visual metaphor for the Israeli state, invented to protect Jews but that runs amok, endangering all. The paintings also include images denoting Palestinian resistance, Palestinian victims of the IDF and Israeli soldiers taking selfies in Gaza's ruins.

In ***The Golem Returns*** the Altnueschul Synagogue in Prague, site of many golem myths, is depicted.

The golden calf in both ***The Golden Chain*** and ***The Albatross***, and the golden tank in ***The Adoration of the Golden Tank***, allude to the cult of the militarised Israeli state that bedevils Israeli and Australian Jewry. The golden calf image also denotes the false-consciousness of political Zionism and its failure to realise a state consistent with Jewish values.

In ***The Golden Chain*** the golden chain that links the golem to the golden calf represents the golden chain of Jewish fellow-feeling (*di goldene keyt* in Yiddish), the now much abused literary and cultural metaphor, used to shame and stigmatise speech and actions by Jews who publicly oppose Israel's unconscionable conduct.

Concentration camp imagery in ***The Golem Returns*** and ***The Albatross*** alludes to the instrumentalisation of Holocaust memory that perpetuates fear of historical antisemitism and deflects from better understandings of the crises flowing from contemporary Israel and Palestine.

The red heifer in ***The Red Heifer*** and ***The Albatross*** represents the destructive role that religious Zionist fanaticism now plays in Israel.



Martin Munz



The Albatross 2025 Oil on canvas 93 x 67cms



The Golem Returns 2019 Oil on canvas 63 x 84cms

The Golden Chain 2024 Oil on canvas 61 x 76cms





The Red Heifer 2024 Oil on canvas 20 x 30cms

The Adoration of the Golden Tank 2026 Oil on board 46 x 61cms



After the Genocide

Les Rosenblatt

So, how do we now still stand in midst of this new bloody war?

Today is bunker-busted by Nobel's explosive heirs,
Who've played with fire until the planet's burned,
But no words unspurned, still useful, now
Remain to speak of what we've learned.

No words remain, to hold, contain,
Our yet once more repeated 'shock and awe',
But Munch-howling pain bespeaks the seizures,
The spasms in our clotted social brain,
Defective in officially-intended 'appreciation',
While deflected from all apprehension
Of the monstrous threat of nuclear rain.

But still, some billions of our fellows,
For whom the family of language feels as kin,
Sustain within themselves the living brightness,
Of their love of life, their vibrant care,
Mysteriously committed to each other,
Attention paid, and needful of tomorrow,
Deep beneath their skin.

Which hope allows our efforts,
Hard as they may be,
To rouse what strength we still retain
To persist, persist, persist, again.

Mihu Yehudi?

Amy Bachrach

A friend of mine asked me as we sat in front of the beach shacks at Dendy, if I found it hard being around her Jewish friends because of the tensions around antisemitism and Zionism. “Yes,” I told her. She seemed genuinely sad.

Talking later with my husband Simon about it, he articulated what I wished I’d said. “The problem is that we have to listen to their views” because they exhale them like cigarette smoke, “and we can’t speak our minds without being called antisemites.” That’s it in a nutshell.

Credentialling: Am I a real Jew?

It is tragic that almost every Jew who speaks publicly or writes letters to the editor, opinion pieces or articles in a way that criticises Israel, has to credential themselves as having been through death camps or being the child of someone who has, as if this devastating experience is some kind of membership card or badge of honour. And if it’s not the Holocaust, it’s whether you’ve lived in Israel, have relatives there or visit there regularly.

I can’t credential myself in any of those ways. I come from Eastern European stock who migrated to the US at the turn of the 20th century and I don’t know of any even distant relatives who lived or died during the Shoah. I haven’t been to Israel since I spent a month on a kibbutz in 1980 because my boyfriend had family there. While growing up, I knew *an* Israeli and his daughter, didn’t know anyone else who had been to Israel, and I knew *one* Holocaust survivor.

New York is a very different place. I grew up on the Upper Left Side of Manhattan, a “pink diaper baby” (i.e., the daughter of a “red diaper baby” - a daughter of a Communist). I was surrounded by socialist Jews, Jews in the tradition of Rabbi AJ Heschel who walked at the side of Dr Martin Luther King during the March on Washington. Jews like Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman who were murdered along with Black activist James Chaney during Freedom Summer 1964 were in the ether. I, and many other Jews like me, went to Oberlin College which was the first to admit Black students and was a stop on the slave underground railroad. Good Jews fought for economic justice and were union organisers, activists, community organisers. I cut my teeth in Jewish communities who were empowered and worked to help others empower themselves. That was the oxygen I breathed.

The Holocaust + Israel = Jew

In 1994, I attended a *Yom Kippur* service with my girlfriend and heard a sermon of lesbian rabbi, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum. She said that American Jews know more about the Holocaust than they know about the civilisation that the Holocaust destroyed. I was stunned to hear from someone else, for the first time, this truth about my own experience. My mother, who raised me with no Jewish traditions, believed Israel could do no wrong. We Jews need Israel because of the Holocaust. But what did she know about Jewish Europe? *Fiddler on the Roof*.

My experience in Melbourne has been a shock. Here, I have encountered a community steeped in Holocaust trauma and deeply connected with the thriving power of the State of Israel. These are the centrepieces of Jewish life over and above religion or culture. The irony is that the establishment Jewish community is more committed to identification with the Holocaust and the role of being victims. It cannot fathom that Jews -- and Israel -- are powerful. To do so relinquishes some coveted place in international relations.

It is ludicrous to think that Jews “should be over” the Holocaust. The question is whether we should rehearse that history and give it primacy in our definition of ourselves.

Intra-antisemitism in Goldstein’s 2025 Federal Election

But this is what I encountered as part of Zoe Daniel’s campaigns and term in office. In 2021, I joined the effort, begun by Voices of Goldstein, to unseat the current Liberal MP, Tim Wilson, representing Goldstein. “Voices” had formed as part of the Community Independence movement to find an independent candidate, and selected Zoe Daniel.

The dominant Jewish communities of Goldstein and the neighbouring electorate of Macnamara hated Zoe Daniel as soon as word got out about the open letter “Do Better on Palestine”.¹

In 2021, Shin Bet and the IDF bombed the Al Jawhara tower in Gaza where Al Jazeera, the Associated Press and other media organisations had offices. Hundreds of Australian journalists and others signed that letter which might have been acceptable except that further down, it condemned Israel as an apartheid regime and endorsed BDS. To much of the Melbourne Jewish community, that was antisemitism.

The letter tore through the Jewish community like wildfire. Zoe volunteers were spat at, and the Jews among us shamed and called self-hating Jews and kapos. Some mainstream Jewish organisations called upon Zoe to remove her name from the

¹ <https://dobetteronpalestine.com/open-letter-from-australian-journalists-media-workers-writers-and-commentators-%ef%bf%bc/>

letter if she wanted to engage with the local Jewish community. She refused to remove it, saying that journalists should not be targeted as they are “the last eyes and ears of the world.”

The massacre of October 7th, a catastrophe in and of itself, dropped a proverbial bomb on Zoe’s term and re-election campaign. Zoe bent over backwards to serve the Jewish community. When the Jewish creatives’ WhatsApp group was doxxed, Zoe got the Attorney General to pass a law banning doxxing. She facilitated extra funds for security to all Goldstein shuls and schools. She hosted a Jewish roundtable. To bolster social cohesion she sponsored a workshop of Courage to Care to teach members of the community how to be upstanders against antisemitism and all forms of discrimination.

But therein lies the problem. As we’ve since seen with the Segal recommendations and demand for a Royal Commission, antisemitism must hold pride of place in the discrimination stakes. Israel’s destruction of Gaza and the Palestinian people cannot be considered a genocide because *‘you wanna see a genocide? I’ll show you a genocide’*.

And when it came time for the election, none of what Zoe had done for the local Jewish community mattered. What mattered was October 7th. It became a one-issue election and that issue was Israel.

Tim Wilson and third party groups weaponised the massacre to stoke hatred by Jews highly protective of Israel toward other Jews who opposed Israel’s genocide in Gaza and pogroms against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Tim Wilson won by 175 votes. For legal reasons I cannot say more here, but I urge you to read further detail in submission and testimony² given at the hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters hearing.

The recent visit by Israel’s President Isaac Herzog was ostensibly to comfort “the Jewish community” following the Bondi massacre. Many of us protested that visit because it does not comfort us to be visited by the Head of a State committing genocide.

It raises the perennial question: *mi hu Yehudi - Who is a Jew?*

²

[https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=0f62cd9e-0361-41ba-b516-](https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=0f62cd9e-0361-41ba-b516-5763f273d7b1&subId=780116)

5763f273d7b1&subId=780116

What's in a name?

Zoe Safia Kenny

There's always been a strange fact about my life which I've found tricky to reconcile: that I was born in Israel but, because I moved to Australia as a toddler, I have no memories of it. It left me with a question mark where a big part of my identity was supposed to be.

The way my parents spoke about Israel created a sense of nostalgia. When I was born, they were living in northern Israel in a small village called Rosh Pina. I heard many stories about it: the rocky landscape and twisted olive trees, the nearby river valley covered in wildflowers in spring, and the crumbling stone buildings. In the 70s, Rosh Pina had become a kind of artists' settlement, attracting people from all over Israel and even the world. My parents ended up there too, looking for a simpler way of life, close to nature and traditional living. My mother from nearby Tel Aviv and my father from faraway Melbourne.

They also told stories about the interesting and eccentric characters they lived amongst. Many were like themselves, but there were also stories about the local 'Arabs'. My father, an architect and builder, had worked alongside them and would talk about their skills. My mother held onto treasured pieces of embroidered material she said had been stitched by people known as 'Bedouins'. Rosh Pina, its landscape, buildings, and people, took on an almost mythical quality.

But the stories were not enough to cement my own connection. There were phone calls from family and one memorable visit, but day to day, the language, cultural, and religious ties were virtually non-existent. Growing up, that absence became an unresolved question. What was that place all about? How did it relate to me? As I got older, I would tell people where I was born and feel, briefly, that it made me interesting. But when I couldn't say much beyond the bare fact, it quickly turned into something closer to embarrassment.

I wondered who I would have been if I had grown up there. I remember my grandfather saying that being born in Israel made you a 'Sabra', like the native cactus fruit, "prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside." I associated that identity with the military. My mother's siblings had completed their compulsory service, and the photos I saw of them, fit, tanned, independent, made them seem adventurous. Those were qualities I wanted too. I felt that maybe, if I had grown up there, I might have been like that.

Adding to the sense that a part of who I was hadn't been lived out was the knowledge that I had initially been given a different name. Safia, of Arabic origin, had been changed to Zoe a few weeks after I was born. I had always assumed it had been a passing thought, never official. But years later, after finishing high school and planning a trip back to Israel, my original name surfaced again.

I discovered that my Australian citizenship certificate still reflected my Israeli birth certificate, meaning I was officially 'Safia Kenny'. To get a passport, I had to formally

change my name. I decided to keep Safia as my middle name, as a way of holding onto something that might otherwise have quietly faded away.

At that time, I still held a romanticised view of Israel. I knew there was a 'conflict with the Arabs', but little more. After my visit, and later studying history at university, I began to understand what had happened. I learned about the Nakba and saw photographs of families carrying their belongings and children away from their villages into an uncertain future. These were not isolated incidents, but a mass expulsion of more than 700,000 people.

I learned about the destruction that followed: more than 400 villages flattened or absorbed into the new Israeli state. Alongside the physical destruction, a more insidious process unfolded, the erasure of memory and identity, as Arabic names were replaced with Hebrew ones.

I realised something about the village my parents had lived in: it had another name. Before Rosh Pina, there had been Jaouneh, a small Palestinian village, largely destroyed, its population displaced. I began to see that my parents' presence there may not have been as light-hearted as it once seemed. The stone houses described as 'abandoned' had once been family homes. The 'Arabs' my parents spoke about were Palestinians, perhaps even former residents. It felt like a spell breaking. The faint pride I once felt about being from somewhere exotic gave way to a growing sense of horror.

While I was still at university, the Second Intifada began and the conflict flooded the news. For the first time, I had the historical lens to understand what was unfolding. It was clear to me that Palestinians had legitimate historical grievances and lived under immense hardship. Those realisations, and the daily images of violence, drew me into activism for a time and shaped my worldview.

Now, with the devastation in Gaza and war spreading across the Middle East, the conflict has again moved to the centre of global and Australian politics, especially in the wake of the antisemitic attack in Bondi.

But even before that, there was a sense that the space was shrinking. Criticism of Israel has felt harder to voice. Palestinian symbols and slogans feel more charged. And now there are real legal consequences for saying the 'wrong' thing. I've found myself hesitating, even as entire neighbourhoods in Gaza lie in rubble and tens of thousands have been killed. It feels like another crossroads in my life. Instead of changing documents, it is about whether I speak up about what I believe to be true.

For a long time, I thought of erasure as something distant or historical. I think about my original name, and how it was quietly replaced. I think about Jaouneh being forgotten and renamed Rosh Pina. About how the original stories of people and places can be overwritten.

And now, in Australia, I see how the space for dissent can be slowly eroded. How silence doesn't arrive suddenly, but settles in gradually, through pressure, caution, and the quiet rewriting of what is acceptable.

And now we have a choice: whether we adapt to that, or choose to resist it.

Wrapped

Janet Kossy

My series 'Wrapped' was made for a 2019 group show, STILL/RAGE. I was struck by the similarity between a traditional Jewish man wrapping himself in a prayer shawl and parents swaddling a newborn baby. It made me think about questions related to protection, safety, comfort, and belonging—and also tradition, education, and meaning; as well as colour, beauty, and reverence. Looking at Chagall, the ancient masculine rituals of tallit and tefillin, and the vulnerability of the very young—and of us all—led me to double-edged thoughts about identity, religion, nationalism, and human psychology.

Here's what I wrote then—pre-COVID, pre-Oct 7, pre-Gaza genocide, pre-second Trump term, pre-Bondi:

"In these times, what do we want for ourselves and for those we care about? The daily headlines of our most sober and respected media read like the apocalyptic ravings of the deranged roadside prophets of previous times. But here I am, weirdly fortunate—still—to live a life of privilege and plenty. So what comes next, how do I approach the last decades of this life?

My optimistic and rational response is thoughtful, carefully considered political activism. But there's another more desperate primal response that involves huddling, hiding, obliterating and wrapping—maybe seeking what is familiar, known, sensual, lazy and comfortable.



I've encased the figures in these paintings in bulky layers of rich colour and comfort. Some are ensconced in symbols of ritual, belief and belonging, and there's also plenty of random detritus. But this is the 21st Century so inevitably—inside—they remain hopelessly uneasy and inadequate."

As I look at them again in 2026, the images feel even more poignant. The originals are richly colourful, but the sombre depth is intensified with the transfer to black and white for printing.

Janet Kossy is active in Sydney Friends of Standing Together. <https://jankossy.wixsite.com/janetkossyart>



Wrapped 1 (After Chagall) (opposite)



Wrapped 5 (Wrapped in Kandinsky)



There is no limit to the violence that can be perpetrated in the name of “peace”

Natalia Spivakova

In Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974), an endurance art performance, the audience was given free rein to do to her as they wished with 72 objects that included thorns, a gun, scissors, and a knife amongst others while she stood still. As time went on the acts became more violent and by the time six hours had passed the artist endured thorns on her stomach, cuts to her throat, her clothes ripped. The performance ceasing only when a loaded gun was pointed at her head. The purpose was to see how far the public will go, drunk on power, without repercussions. To see what happens when the worst impulses are unleashed without consequence. Similarly, what happens to a society when there are no limits to the violence you unleash? Specifically, what happens to a collective psyche when granted moral and legal impunity in the name of 'our values': the ostensibly universal

There is
no limit
to the peace
that needs to be
destroyed
in the name
of “order”

*

'Judeo-Christian' ideals that have come to stand in for Western liberal democracy.

We are witnessing in real time Israel's own journey into the *heart of darkness*, where, as the dying Kurtz proclaimed, lies only “the horror, the horror.” As Israeli Opposition leader Yair Lapid observed months ago, “we are not on the brink of the abyss; we are in the abyss”¹; a journey from which Israel may not be able to extricate itself back from, morally. At each atrocity, when we think to ourselves that the violence has crossed a line; *this, this, will finally stop the war, surely*. And then another even more horrific act furthers us along the journey into this abyss. We thought, “*this must be it*”, months ago, when international aid workers were killed by drones.² Or even when the Israeli army killed Israelis waving white flags³. *This must be the red line; this must be it* we thought to ourselves. Or when Israel bombed a mosque⁴ full of praying people, sheltering from bombs. Or bombed an orphanage⁵. Surely, “*this will be it*”, after the world watched a young man sheltering in a hospital burn alive.⁶ Or when a Downs Syndrome man was attacked by an army dog,⁷ and left to die from his injuries.

Yet as the charges of war crimes pile up, without any sanctions or consequences, it becomes more apparent that there is no limit to the violence unleashed in the name of 'our values' or 'safety'. Maybe some world leaders send Israel a limp, impotent letter every few months saying, 'please stop', only to then donate more arms.⁸ Facing no real diplomatic pressure or consequences, Israel does this because it can.

¹ Lapid: “We are in the abyss”, Times of Israel

² IDF kills aid workers unloading food supplies, Sydney Morning Herald, Apr. 2024

³ Israeli army kills own hostages waving white flags, ABC News, Dec. 2023

⁴ Israeli strike on school/mosque sheltering civilians, CNN, Aug. 2024

⁵ Israel strikes Gaza orphanage, New York Times, Oct. 2024

⁶ Young Palestinian man burns alive in air strike, ABC News, Oct. 2024

⁷ Down syndrome man mauled by army dog and left to die, BBC

⁸ Biden approves THAAD missile defence system for Israel, Washington Post, Oct. 2024

If a country can violate international law endlessly with impunity, what does that do to a national psyche? If your actions are not bound by cause and effect and there are no consequences, like in *Rhythm O*, the barriers holding one's civility in place can just crumble. You are free to do the most brutal things, unleashing the worst impulses, under the guise of 'our values'. You are not bound by guilt, civility, or shame.

What we see is glee: soldiers brazenly showing themselves committing war crimes⁹ without a care for who sees. Livestreaming themselves trying on lingerie¹⁰ of women who are either killed or displaced. Or proudly blowing up buildings whilst dancing or smoking. Cheering on a revenge fantasy, an IDF run Telegram channel¹¹ 'to raise morale' for the Israeli public boasts, "we are exterminating the roaches...exterminating the Hamas rats....Share this beauty", whilst posting videos¹² of a vehicle running over the body of a Palestinian. In some scenes shared on WhatsApp, prisoners are draped in Israeli flags and forced to sing "Am Yisrael Chai". There have been protests against arrests made for soldiers raping prisoners in detention centres – a debate was aired on national television¹³ whether there should be any consequences for the soldiers' actions. Emboldened by this cultural permissiveness, two podcast hosts openly proclaimed¹⁴ that if there was a button to completely erase all of Gaza, most Israelis would press it. Who are these people?

There is
no limit
to the brutality
that is
served
in the name
of "our values"

*

Like a bully who has never known consequences, and like a child whose parents coddled and never disciplined them, this fosters an arrogance, a resistance to critique. It is clear that in broadcasting their atrocities to the world, they do not care. Palestinians then become an afterthought, as the preoccupation is rather with the *entitlement to not have any limits* to committing violence, in the name of 'safety' or 'our values'. Any challenge to limit this free reign simply amounts to charges of antisemitism.

Perhaps we should then ask: what shall happen after Zionism? And what will happen to the soldiers committing these acts? Will they just fly to India¹⁵ to seek nirvana on the Hummus trail,¹⁶ obliterating their minds with enough hash and psytrance to forget that they chose to destroy lives? In a single democratic state, how will Palestinians interact with Jewish Israelis and coexist with these people, after Israel loses? For Jews, a collective distortion of reality requires a collective reckoning- a form of *tikkun olam*, a Jewish notion of repairing the world. And whilst some Israelis may think that dehumanising others is the path of victory, they are only dehumanising themselves.

⁹ Al Jazeera investigation into IDF war crimes in Gaza, Oct. 2024

¹⁰ IDF soldiers filmed trying on Gazan women's lingerie, Times of Israel

¹¹ Israeli army admits staff ran graphic Gaza Telegram channel, Haaretz, Feb. 2024

¹² IDF Telegram channel spreads graphic incitement videos, Haaretz, Dec. 2023

¹³ Israeli TV debate on whether soldiers should face consequences for raping detainees, YouTube

¹⁴ Israeli podcasters joke about erasing Gaza entirely, Middle East Monitor, Sep. 2024

¹⁵ Israeli-run cafe in India bars local customers, India.com

¹⁶ The "Hummus Trail" – Israeli backpackers in India, YouTube

* Images in this piece are attributed to Shumon Basar

Welcoming the Stranger – Sylvie Leber

A Pesach Story

Since the early 70s the Australian government's treatment of refugees ranks as one of the worst in the world.

Following the Holocaust, it was the racist Australian government that placed quotas on Jewish refugees seeking asylum here. Today, it's Palestinians, Iranians, and other Muslim refugees fleeing Israeli and US violent attacks who are blocked from seeking asylum.

Shaped by our own history of persecution, expulsion, and refuge, our Jewish community in Australia has a responsibility to speak out.

This year, when we have Seder gatherings for Pesach and retell the story of the Jews' liberation from slavery in Egypt, we are not merely performing an ancient ritual, we must remain committed to justice itself.

As I said in my speech almost ten years ago, the words of Ha Lachma remind us: "Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come and celebrate Pesach with us. This year we are here; next year may we all be free."

Here is the speech I delivered in 2017 at a community Seder in West Footscray:

During WWII, my mother's family were helped by people smugglers to escape from Paris to Lyon, in the Free French zone, providing them with false names and papers. If it wasn't for people smugglers I would not have been born and standing here today.

I'm a Jew who is proud of my ancestral East European Ashkenazi heritage. I'm also an atheist (until someone can prove to me that God exists), anti-Zionist, a feminist, and an anti-racism and refugee activist. This can also be explained by the revolutionary Yiddishist, Bundist ancestry on my father's side and that I went to Skif, its youth group.

Apart from what I learnt at Jewish religious instruction at St Kilda Park Primary from Rabbi Koadlow, I have little knowledge about the Torah and the story of the Jews' Exodus from Egypt.

From my bit of reading it is not at all certain that Jews were enslaved there, but the mass exodus nevertheless may have been due to persecution. It's quite possible that the Pharaoh did order all Jewish first-born males to be killed. There is a great bit about the two midwives, Puah and Shiphrah, who were ordered to organise this killing and who duped the Pharaoh into believing that because Jewish women were like strong, wild beasts, they gave birth to their children before the midwives could get to them. They cleverly played on his prejudices.

Jews have been refugees too many times throughout history. I've read that since the Middle Ages Jews have been expelled from over 120 towns and countries, mostly in Christian Europe. Very often they escaped to Muslim countries. One example of Muslims looking after Jews was during WWII when the king of Morocco refused to accept the stripping of Jews' human rights by the collaborationist Vichy colonial authorities there.

From my understanding of the Jewish religion, justice, looking after the weak, and welcoming the stranger is an imperative that is not about sacrificing to God, but about being a decent human being.

In Melbourne — on March 31, 2002 — Jews for Refugees held its first public event: a 700-strong rally during Passover (Pesach) outside Maribyrnong Detention Centre. A car pool and cavalcade led by Yids on Wheels — a Jewish biker group — travelled to the demonstration from the Glen Eira Town Hall in Caulfield.

The rally was publicised at the vast majority of synagogues on the previous Shabbes. Speakers at the event represented the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, rabbis, community and women's groups, Holocaust survivors, and Jewish students and youth, among others.

Describing how difficult it was to come to Australia as a refugee, even a legal one, Holocaust survivor Helen Light pointed out that her parents would have broken any law to escape Europe.

The vigil paraded with matzot, recalling the escape from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. The event concluded with an ancient song, Ha Lachma, one line of which states, "This year we are still in bonds; next year we all will be free." Finally, blasts from the ancient Jewish instrument, the shofar, or ram's horn — which, according to tradition, brought Jericho's walls tumbling down — were sounded. Its sounding is a call for the Jewish community to stand up for justice.

Shock, Grief, and the Politics of Bondi

Vanessa Barolsky

As the 2025 Bondi attack was unfolding, I was at a garden party for a relative's wedding anniversary. It was a lovely event. The Melbourne weather held, and a gentle sun cut through the wind. Many years of love and connection were evoked in the speeches and easy banter among the guests. Although several of my relatives were there, I am not really part of this community, but I enjoyed being part of its warmth for the afternoon.

Most of the guests were Jewish and deeply embedded in Melbourne's south-east suburbs, where an infrastructure of Jewish schools, religious institutions, and community networks supports a way of life deeply rooted in place and profoundly tied to the state of Israel. These ties had frayed in my own family over the past two years. Like many Jews, I have relatives in Israel. When the October 7 attack by Hamas happened, I watched the violence with dismay, relief that no one I knew had been hurt, and dread at the response that I knew, but could not yet imagine, would be visited on Palestinians.

For many Jews, including my family, October 7, 2023, was a moment of tribal certainty — an existential rupture that clarified boundaries and demanded a response that would eclipse the original attack. I understood it instead as the terrible endpoint of decades of repression, dehumanisation and political failure. That interpretation placed me irrevocably in the camp of the traitor: a 'kapo', a Nazi collaborator, the worst epithet that Jews reserve for one another.

I drove home and turned on the radio. News began filtering in that a terrorist attack had just taken place in Bondi. Exhausted but unable to sleep, I sat up until the early hours flipping between news channels, trying to make sense of the killings and watching replays of a man tackling and disarming one of the attackers, later revealed to be Syrian migrant Ahmed al-Ahmed. I fell asleep and wept when I woke to hear that several more people had died overnight.

In the hours after the Bondi attack, before the dead had even been named, the machinery of political opportunism roared into life. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu weighed in, blaming Australia's weak Prime Minister and berating the country for its recent recognition of Palestine. Jillian Segal, Antisemitism Envoy and well-known Israel lobbyist, added her voice. It was the 300,000-strong anti-genocide march over the Sydney Harbour Bridge, along with the Palestinian solidarity movement, that was the source of the antisemitic hatred ravaging the 'lucky country'. The major Jewish legacy institutions reiterated similar sentiments. Everyone had their talking points ready. The messaging was seamless. The mainstream media largely swallowed the feed whole.

The fact that the killers were aligned with ISIS, an organisation violently opposed to Palestinian nationalism, that the murders were not committed by or on behalf of Palestinians, was a small detail that was not going to get in the way of a good narrative. And it didn't.

Forty-eight hours later, I received a screenshot from a close relative. It showed a photograph of me in a social media post holding a banner calling for sanctions against Israel with the title: 'Globalise the Intifada'. My relative had circled the title and pointed an arrow at me.

I had not written the caption, but that did not matter. I was being held responsible, symbolically and psychologically, for an ISIS-inspired terror attack planned long before October 7. I felt dizzy, sick with disorientation and shock. A New York Times article written in the hours after the massacre, misleadingly titled 'Bondi Beach is what "Globalize the Intifada" looks like', had gone viral, landing in my lap.¹ My explanation that *intifada* means

¹ Bret Stephens, 'The Bondi Beach Shooting Is What "Globalize the Intifada" Looks Like,' The New York Times (online)

'uprising' in Arabic was lost in a sea of hot invective. An international network of political exploitation was inexorably unfolding, far more powerful than any imagined 'global intifada'.

I have been here before. I wrote a PhD on the 'radical problem of understanding' posed by political violence in South Africa and the appropriation of violated bodies for 'mutable', and often cynically formulated, 'truths' in contexts of violence.

All extreme violence poses a profound challenge to meaning. However, political elites often have answers ready in advance. Shocking violence creates radical opportunities to realise political agendas thwarted in more normative times, as Naomi Klein explored in her book *The Shock Doctrine*.² Less than a month after the Bondi attack, the Prime Minister introduced a bill to combat 'Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism' that attempted to impose a range of sweeping restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and migration in the name of opposing antisemitism.

Antisemitism is real. The Bondi massacre is devastating evidence. But the accelerating hostility towards Jews internationally is undoubtedly linked to the conflation of Jewish identity with Zionism and the escalating atrocities of the Israeli state. Those who name this conflation are not antisemitic; they are describing a material reality that endangers Jews worldwide. People mobilised globally in support of Palestine because of the genocide that Israel has committed over the past two years, attested to by numerous genocide scholars, human rights organisations and the UN.³

As a result, the comfortable certainties of middle-class Jewish life in Australia have been shaken. Anger towards Israel has meant many Jews face questions, sometimes hostile and unfair, about their presumed support for Israeli violence. Political mobilisation in support of Palestine means that Jews encounter Keffiyehs and other symbols of Palestinian identity in their daily lives. These are experienced as an existential threat that seeks to erase Jewish peoplehood and identity. It is a zero-sum structure: Palestinians should not, do not, exist — literally and metaphorically.

Zionism operates here not only as a political project but as a psychic defence structure. Post-Holocaust Jewish identity has been constructed in profoundly self-justifying terms: no guilt, no responsibility, no mistakes, no agency can be acknowledged. We are the perfect victims of an eternal hatred — antisemitism, unique in its evil, incomparable to all other racisms. Zionism, in this sense, functions as a moral shield against accountability. Conflated with Jewish identity, it is mobilised to refuse agency while executing a profoundly aggressive project of supremacy.

These tropes of victimhood are hardwired into our psyches, born of genuine intergenerational trauma passed on through epigenetics, silences around family lost in the Holocaust, and the loud, crass exploitation of history. It is a wound never properly attended to, kept raw and festering as a constant reminder of the world's malfeasance and our permanent precarity, no matter the material reality of our lives. But we now have an antidote to this precarity, a homeland that will deliver redemption, a safe resting place, our paradise on Earth. The more the reality diverges from the imagined paradise, the more tightly many Jews hold onto this vision. It is a structure clasped close in times of uncertainty, like the warm embrace of an Israeli flag wrapped around one's shoulders at a vigil for the Bondi dead.

² Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

³ [3] International Association of Genocide Scholars, Resolution on the Situation in Gaza (The Hague: IAGS, 2025); Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Genocide Convention (Geneva: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025), UN doc. A/HRC/60/CRP.3; Francesca Albanese, 'Gaza Genocide: A Collective Crime' – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967 (New York: United Nations General Assembly, 2025), UN doc. A/80/492; B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights–Israel, Israel's Genocide in Gaza: Israeli Human Rights Organizations' Findings (Jerusalem: B'Tselem/PHRI, 2025); Amnesty International, 'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza (London: Amnesty International, 2024); Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 'Statement on why we call the Israeli attack on Gaza genocide', 29 December 2023.

A flourishing of Jewish groups

As the genocide in Gaza has continued and ethnic cleansing and violence accelerates in the West Bank, more and more Jews are turning away from legacy Jewish organisations for community.

These Jews are making their own organisations.

They are founded in anti-racist values, supporting peace, justice, and human rights for all, and are acting in solidarity with Palestinian people.

Australian Jews for Human Rights

Jewish Council of Australia @

Daykeat Morgenthau @

Jewish Voices of Hope Brisbane @

Jews for a Free Palestine

Jews for Palestine (UK) @

Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney @

Tzedek Collective @

Jews Against the Occupation 48 @

Jewish Collective Canberra @

Jews Against Genocide @

Jews for Justice

Loud Jew Collective @

Jewish Advocates for Understanding Antisemitism @