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## Cape Board takes Insta influencer to Equality Court

TALI FEINBERG

"I just wish the Iron Dome malfunctions," wrote Cape Town businesswoman Mariam Jakoet-Harris on the social media platform Instagram on 9 December 2023. She is one of four individuals that the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) is taking to the Equality Court on charges of hate speech. Speaking to the SA Jewish Report, Cape SAJBD Executive Director Daniel Bloch says, "To those who continue to post antisemitic statements, their time in court will come, make no mistake of that. This is only the beginning."

Jakoet-Harris was served by the court on 30 October and therefore her case is in the public domain, filed at the High Court of South Africa, Western Cape division. On her Instagram account for her cooking business, Cooked Inc, Jakoet-Harris has made numerous statements to her 37 400 followers that the Cape SAJBD says "could reasonably be construed to demonstrate a clear intention to be harmful, incite harm, and to promote or propagate hate".

For example, in crude language, Jakoet-Harris implied on a post on 30 November 2023 that female hostages were "asking" to be raped by Hamas on 7 October. On 24 November 2023, she created a post describing how her child asked her, "Mama, can't Allah just make them [Jews/Israelis] all extinct?" Also on 30 November 2023, she posted an image of a Star of David being thrown in a rubbish bin.

On 13 November, she engaged in 7 October denial, saying that Hamas couldn't have committed atrocities because Israel chose not to show images of the dead. "Zionists say they cannot show us evidence of the atrocities

[committed by Hamas on 7 October] because it would be disrespectful to the dead," she posted. "But then why do they have Holocaust museums around the world showing us gas chambers, ovens, and piles of naked bodies?"

On 15 December 2023, alongside an image of a Jewish-owned business, she posted, "We boycott [Jews] because the only language they understand is money. The are driven by greed." On 18 December 2023, she stated the blood libel that Israel harvests organs from Palestinians and people around the world. Back in

November 2023, she told her followers not to buy from a local Jewish-owned business because it has "a gentle whiff of genocide".

Even after she was served, Jakoet-Harris continued to make hateful statements. On 4 November, she invited her followers to a cooking course on Middle Eastern food, stating "Before Shitrael [Israel] claims these dishes as their own, let's learn how to preserve the culture, history, and identity of these countries." She called this "a delicious act of resistance", accompanied by inverted red triangles, which are widely recognised as symbolising

terrorist attacks.

The Cape SAJBD says her posts frame Jewish people as "evil, morally corrupt, and wicked". The posts imply that "Jewish people should be exterminated, killed or made extinct; that Jewish people and Jewish women in particular should be raped or otherwise sexually assaulted by Palestinian men; that Jewish people illicitly, by force, and without consent harvest organs; and that Jewish people and their businesses should be boycotted or made to suffer reprisals or revenge for the harm suffered by Palestinians."

The Cape SAJBD also says her posts imply that "people who hold Zionist beliefs should be exterminated, killed, or made extinct; that people who hold Zionist beliefs and their businesses should be boycotted or otherwise made to suffer; and people who hold Zionist beliefs and women in particular should be raped or otherwise sexually assaulted by Palestinian men."

Jakoet-Harris intends to oppose the application. The Cape SAJBD has asked the court that her statements be declared harmful, inciting harm and propagating hate, amounting to hate speech. It also asked that she tender an unconditional apology to the South African Jewish community, that she donate R25 000 to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre, and that she pay the costs of the legal application.

"For the past year, we have witnessed a rise in antisemitism," says Bloch. "The vitriol as well as the incitement to violence taking place outside our schools, shuls, places of business, residences, and community centres as well as online, has reached a breaking point, and we will no longer allow these hate-filled individuals to intimidate and verbally abuse our

Continued on page 3>>

### Help bring them home



The South African Jewish community flocked to hear freed Israeli hostages Noa Argamani and Moran Stella Yanai talk about their experiences and call for the release of all hostages

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

See story on page 10

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# Netanyahu fires Defence Minister Gallant

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, saying he no longer trusted him, a drastic step while Israel is fighting on multiple fronts, faces domestic political turmoil, and is contending with regional and global uncertainty.

The decision, the second time in as many years that Netanyahu has announced Gallant's termination, comes as Iran is threatening to strike Israel in response to a previous round of bombing. It also comes amid a growing investigation into leaks of classified material

from a Netanyahu aide, in which the prime minister's office has denied participating in any leak and suggested that the probe was "arbitrary".

Gallant's firing was announced on Election Day in the United States (US), whose result will determine the next four years of the US-Israel relationship. Gallant was one of the most trusted Israeli government officials in Washington.

In a statement Netanyahu delivered as a video message in Hebrew, he said he could no longer work with Gallant due to irreconcilable differences over the war.

statements and actions that contravened the decisions of the government and the security cabinet.



Former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in June 2024

Gideon Saar, a politician who has vacillated between being Netanyahu's ally and rival, will become the new foreign minister. Protesters took to the streets almost as soon as Netanyahu made

"I have made multiple attempts to resolve these disagreements," the statement read, "but they became increasingly wider. They were also brought to the knowledge of the public in an inappropriate manner, and what's even worse, they have reached the knowledge of the enemy. Our enemies have taken great delight in these disagreements, and have derived much benefit from them."

Netanyahu didn't detail those disagreements, but Gallant differed publicly with Netanyahu on a number of issues, including US-Israel relations; the need for a detailed postwar plan in Gaza; and Netanyahu's efforts to preserve haredi Orthodox men's exemption from the military

draft. Netanyahu said he was replacing Gallant with the foreign minister, Israel Katz.

the announcement. Netanyahu last tried to fire Gallant in March 2023, when the defense minister publicly voiced opposition to the government's effort to weaken the judiciary. Protests forced Netanyahu to reverse that decision.

Gallant is the minister most trusted by the Biden administration as it has become increasingly frustrated with Netanyahu and his conduct of the war in Gaza. Veteran investigative journalist Bob Woodward said recently that Biden feels that "18 of the 19 people who work for Netanyahu are liars". He didn't specify who the 19th person was, though Gallant has been in almost daily contact with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

That relationship is especially sensitive at this moment, when Iran is threatening to counterattack Israel for its retaliatory strikes last month on Iranian military bases. Netanyahu, at Biden's request, held back from striking Iranian oil and nuclear sites.

Netanyahu's firing of Gallant came just minutes after he released a statement saying that there had been a "flood of criminal leaks" from the security cabinet, the Israeli government's top decision-making body on matters of war, while complaining that police were selectively investigating his office.

That investigation, which has dominated Israeli headlines, centres on a staffer in the prime minister's office named Eliezer Feldstein, who is suspected of working with people in the security establishment to leak and alter top-secret documents obtained from Hamas. The leaks of purported information, which were published in *Bild*, a German publication, and in the London-based *Jewish Chronicle*, reinforced Netanyahu's claims at a time when he was reportedly obstructing progress toward a ceasefire deal with Hamas that would have resulted in the group releasing Israeli hostages.

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## Peace and/or quiet

**Rabbi Dovid Wineberg Cape Town**

Everyone deserves some peace and quiet. Right?

A soldier going through intense rehabilitation in Tel Hashomer Hospital, explained to me on Sukkot why Israel is so alone. "Israel is fighting for peace, but the world wants peace and quiet," he said.

His point was that defeating the enemy takes a huge toll, but it leads to enduring peace; ceasefires create the sense of quiet, but have inevitably led to further rounds of war.

If all Jews wanted was "peace and quiet", we could've stayed with Noach, a man whose very name indicates serenity and comfort. But this week, we enter *parshat Lech Lecha*, the story of Abraham, the first Jew. Abraham's life is characterised by struggle and challenges. Wars, dangerous negotiations, childlessness, inner strife, and constant travel.

G-d's first instruction to the first Jew is, "Go forth." Be a wanderer. Be willing to take on new destinations. Get set to challenge the status quo.

Yet, it's precisely to Abraham that Hashem says, "*Venivrechu vecha*" (all will be blessed through you). It may not be a quiet journey but ultimately, you will bring peace and blessing.

A number of years ago, a friend reached out for advice. Should they move their family into a very Jewish area, filled with other young observant families, or move into a nicer suburb but with less Jewish vibrancy?

My response to him was that if he was looking for peace and quiet, then he should move into the more Jewish area, with its host of *minyanim*, *shiurim*, and like-minded people. But, if he and his wife wished to be "children of Abraham" then they could practice "*lech lecha*" – they should go forth and embrace a world where they have to serve as an influence and fight for a more Jewishly vibrant community.



They chose the latter, and although life isn't always as easy for them, their *Yiddishkeit* is vibrant, relevant, and joyful.

This message was driven home to me this Simchat Torah. A group of us spent the *chag* in Sderot. While others were getting set to dance for them, we went to dance with them on the first *yahrzeit* of that terrible day. The *hakafot* at Chabad of Sderot, led by the three generations of the Pizem family, were conducted with typical joyous abandon and went on until 01:00, without let up.

Afterwards, the stories started coming out, and the tears followed. The Pizem family never left Sderot, not even for a day, serving the traumatised locals and the *chayalim* more than 600 tons of food. Just

two days after 7 October, a soldier entered Chabad to get a square meal, and was shocked to see eight-year-old Avraham Pizem feverishly serving food to people in need. After all, women and children had been evacuated – Sderot was still a war zone!

"What are you doing here?" asked the surprised soldier. To which the kid swiftly retorted, "And what are you doing here?"

"I'm a *chayal*, a soldier, so I need to be here," said the fellow.

Avraham Pizem, eight years old, answered simply, "I, too, am a *chayal*. I'm a *shaliach* of the Rebbe, and this is my post."

Forget quiet. Choose *lech lecha* and peace. Your life may not be simple, but it will be for a blessing.

Torah Thought

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# Hezbollah leader's SA SIM cards ring alarm bells

TALI FEINBERG

After Israel captured senior Hezbollah naval operative Imad Amhaz in an unprecedented raid in the early hours of 1 November, Lebanese forces published photographs of 10 SIM cards with foreign numbers, a phone, and foreign passports found in his accommodation.

In the image, at least two Telkom SIM cards and one MTN SIM card are clearly visible, raising questions about Amhaz's ties to South Africa.

"What it proves is that Hezbollah does have a presence here in South Africa," says Dr Hussein Solomon, who has written extensively about terrorist organisations and their global operations. "There have been several incidents where people possessed SIM cards in South Africa which weren't registered according to the Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act [RICA], despite this being mandatory."

Steven Gruz, the head of African governance and diplomacy programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs, says, "This development is extremely concerning as it suggests some South African involvement with this operative. There are already huge concerns about how porous our borders are and how relatively easy it is to acquire South African passports, ID cards, and drivers' licenses fraudulently."

"We have been greylisted for deficient anti-money laundering laws and practices," Gruz says. "We now need visas to go to the United Kingdom due to failure in the security of South African documents. We shouldn't forget the terrorist dubbed the 'White Widow' – Samantha Lewthwaite – had fraudulent South African documents."

Dr Glen Segell, who has written about terrorism in Africa, says the presence of the South African SIM cards "could mean that many services that require a local number would be open to Amhaz – for example South African banking or government services. Clearly, he wanted a South African connection and a South African number. The question is if the number was in his name. As we know, SIM numbers need RICA in South Africa. That requires South African ID [green book or card], passport [local or foreign], or refugee document, and proof of residence."

Another possibility is "maybe people calling him would think he is in South Africa", says Segell. "Companies have international roaming,

so the call would forward to wherever he is. He could also have a South African WhatsApp number. Maybe it was important that people thought he was in South Africa, or associated with it. Maybe it also means that anyone monitoring others [terrorists] in South Africa would think less if the person called a South



South African SIM cards found in the possession of senior Hezbollah naval operative Imad Amhaz

African number. However, if they called a Lebanese number, this would more likely raise suspicions. So, the focus might be to reduce suspicions on others, maybe even from elsewhere in Africa."

Institute for Security Studies Senior Training Co-ordinator Willem Els says, "It's an open secret that South Africa is a haven for terror funding, hence the Financial Action Task Force [FATF] greylisting. The fact that Amhaz was in possession of a South African-registered SIM card serves as proof of South African ties and possible support. If he were able to use the SIM card, it should have been activated with an ID number, address, and so on. That would provide valuable information about who his support structure is back in South Africa."

Ryan Cummings, the director of Signal Risk, which specialises in country risk analysis on the African continent, says, "The presence of a Hezbollah commander in South African territory would not be overly surprising. South Africa has long served as a key transit hub and gateway for transnational extremist organisations who use our borders as a means to plan, finance, and facilitate activities abroad."

"In fact, Hezbollah was deemed to have been

a possible sponsor of the Qibla movement in South Africa, which was said to have assumed a leadership role in the PAGAD [People Against Gangsterism and Drugs] civic movement in the 1990s," says Cummings. "This then resulted in PAGAD shifting its focus from gangsters and drug dealers to include attacks on the country's Jewish community and American commercial interests."

"At this stage, it's difficult to glean specific information regarding what the possession of the MTN and Telkom SIM cards mean for the Hezbollah commander's connections to South Africa," he says. "He may have been able to have acquired the SIM cards both inside and outside of South Africa, given that both telecommunication services are available outside of South African borders."

Says Solomon, "If Amhaz was involved in criminal activities or money laundering in South Africa, it would make it harder for South Africa to get off the FATF grey list, especially in light of South Africa, according to the United Nations, being a financial conduit for Islamic State activities across the African continent."

Els notes that "South Africa is under pressure with the FATF, and the listing may be extended to 2026 as it struggles to meet all the immediate outcomes. They are investigating more than 20 terrorist financing cases at present, and this will place some further pressure on it."

Cummings thinks that this particular incident's actual impact on the FATF greylisting "would be minimal unless there's evidence

that the individual in question was exploiting South African financial and banking services for terrorism funding or money laundering".

In Solomon's book, *Jihad: A South African Perspective*, published in 2013, he looks at Hezbollah's presence in South Africa, especially in regard to criminal activities and military training. For example, Hezbollah established the Karbala Liberation Front in Johannesburg, which sent money to Hezbollah in Lebanon. As early as 1996, Israel lodged a formal complaint with the South African government regarding the existence of five Hezbollah training camps in South Africa.

"In recent years, there has been growing evidence that South Africa is increasingly playing a key supportive role in global jihad networks – from the provision of safe houses, to the movement of funds, to the provision of identity documents to terrorists, and reports of paramilitary camps providing training to local recruits," wrote Solomon.

Some media reported that Amhaz's family had told them that the 10 SIM cards were collected and maintained by him to "keep in touch with his family in any of the countries he visited".

Several British media outlets surmised that Amhaz was a double agent spying for Israel, and that the operation was a rescue mission, which might explain why Israel left behind items like the SIM cards and foreign passports. Els agrees that "it was an oversight of the Israelis not to gather these items as they would have been a trove of information".

## Cape Board takes Insta influencer to Equality Court

>>Continued from page 1

community. We believe now is the time to enforce our community's rights to be protected from speech that incites violence and promotes hate.

"The Equality Court was established to promote our rights as set out in the Constitution, protecting individuals and communities from hate speech," says Bloch, on why his organisation chose this route. "It's more robust, and matters are resolved more speedily than in other courts. We feel that for these cases, the Equality Court provides the appropriate platform."

Bloch emphasises that the dehumanisation of a community starts with speech and propaganda. "Once a community is dehumanised and 'othered', it becomes easier to spew hate towards them. This can lead to physical violence, and we would like to stop this now. These individuals have crossed the line on more than one occasion, verbally attacked our community, and they continue to do so. We cannot allow antisemitism or any kind of hate speech to go unpunished."

Social media, he says, allows hate to flourish. "This is where we have seen the main increase in antisemitic rhetoric, and social media platforms don't do enough to punish offenders. Therefore, we need to take action. Hate speech and incitement to violence can never be justified or validated. People need to understand that actions have consequences, sometimes even unintended

consequences. Too many people are spreading misinformation, rumours, and lies and posting classic antisemitic tropes.

"We cannot wait until something terrible happens for people to realise that their hate speech may incite violence against the Jewish community," says Bloch. "Ideally, we would like the respondents to see the error of their ways and understand just how offensive and potentially dangerous their comments are."

To the community, he says: "We encourage our community not to share antisemitic posts, as they only exacerbate the situation. By clicking on certain links, you are influencing the algorithms and contributing to the success of these posts. In some cases, individuals make money off clicks and views. So please stop sharing, viewing, and clicking these links."

The SA Jewish Report reached out to Jakoet-Harris for comment. Her attorney, Ashraf Mahomed, responded, "We do not wish to comment on the merits since the matter is sub judice. Suffice to state at this stage, Ms Jakoet-Harris denies that she holds any hatred towards Jews and rejects those who engage in antisemitism or any form of Jew-hatred. Her 'statements' and posts on the genocide that is taking place in Gaza were taken out of context, and she intends addressing this with the SAJBD in due course."

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# Lifman murder leaves void in Cape underworld

NICOLA MILTZ

**M**ark Lifman, 57, a notorious figure long embedded in Cape Town's underworld, has met the same fate he once seemed to defy. Gunned down outside a busy shopping mall in George last Sunday, 3 November, Lifman's murder has intensified intrigue over the murky world of organised crime he was so deeply involved in yet strongly denied being a part of.

Known for his well-built, polished look and well-guarded presence, the man who moved within the depths of the city's criminal landscape is gone, leaving a temporary void in South Africa's shadowy networks and raising questions about who will step in to claim his position, if they haven't already.

His death has reignited fascination in the life he led, a world reminiscent of a sordid mafia movie, with protection rackets, shifting alliances, shadowy dealings, and a cast dominated by villains. He had fancy homes in affluent Fresnaye and Fancourt in George along with flashy cars, a rumoured penchant for good-looking young men, and a sense of privilege. A life with the veneer of glamour but underneath, one filled with unethical choices, criminal activity, and the inevitable consequences that come with living on the edge.

He started out innocently enough, said those close to him, making sweets in his mother's kitchen and displaying early entrepreneurial flare. After a few years, he led a life of high-stakes business with criminal associations, a combination that ultimately caught up with him, said a Johannesburg acquaintance who wished to remain anonymous.

In short, Lifman was well acquainted with the inside of a court room, with numerous appearances over the years for a range of offences. Though frequently labelled a criminal kingpin, a title he neither sought nor accepted, there's no denying that his life was colourful enough to warrant a place in at least three books on crime in South Africa, namely, Jacques Pauw's *The President's Keepers*, Mandy Wiener's *Ministry of Crime An Underworld Explored*; and Caryn Dolley's *The Enforcers – Inside Cape Town's Deadly Nightclub Battles*.

Ryan Cummings, security analyst at Signal Risk, tweeted, "Lots of speculation regarding what implications Mark Lifman's death may have for Cape Town's underworld. In my humble opinion, Lifman's influence had diminished in recent years as he faced many legal embattlements which rendered him a possible liability to his counterparts."

He told the *SA Jewish Report*, "It's important to note that Lifman was never cited as being an actual gang leader nor leading any of the operational side of organised crime. The allegations against him were more centred on alleged illicit money laundering schemes and tax evasion. Consequently, his death shouldn't leave any vacuum which would lead to intensive inter-gang violence which would follow the death of a prominent gang leader per se."

A seasoned entrepreneur, Lifman dabbled in diverse fields – sweets, fashion, taxis, property, horse racing, night clubs, and private security, all industries marked by high-risk and, in his case, frequent controversy. Allegations of criminal involvement were often tied to his security operations and racing interests.

Born and raised in Cape Town, Lifman's business dealings often brought him to Johannesburg. He was seen playing padel at the Discovery Padel Park Sandton and lunching with acquaintances at upmarket venues like Olives & Plates at Embassy Towers or Tashas LXX close by, always accompanied by his bodyguard.

Lifman came from a conventional Jewish family and grew up in Rondebosch with his two sisters before moving closer to Sea Point.

As chronicled in Wiener's book, he attended Sea Point Boys High School, where he was active in sport. According to a distant Cape Town acquaintance, Lifman's late father, Jeffrey, was a businessman, while his mother, Rina, enjoyed playing golf at the King David Mowbray Golf Club and bridge.

It's understood that his parents, who later moved to Bantry Bay, were heartbroken by their son's alleged criminal double life.

At the time of his death, Lifman was out on bail in a murder trial. He was awaiting a court appearance in the Western Cape High Court, where he faced charges with others for the high-profile 2017 murder of Brian Wainstein, an international steroid smuggler wanted by United States authorities. Released on bail,

Lifman was due back in court on Monday, 4 November, the day after he died in a parking lot. Two suspects, Johannes Jacobs and Gert Bezuidenhout, were arrested for Lifman's murder within hours of the shooting. They appeared briefly in the George Magistrate's Court on Tuesday, 5 November, and are expected back again next week.

One source told the *SA Jewish Report* that at least one of the alleged shooters was known to Lifman, and may have worked for the same protection company that Lifman himself helped set up some time ago.

Lifman's former attorney, well-known criminal lawyer William Booth, expressed surprise at the circumstances of Lifman's death, particularly as he had been alone when he was killed. "Mark took his personal safety extremely seriously," Booth told the *SA Jewish Report*. "He was always surrounded by bodyguards, so one wonders why he was alone at the time."

One of Lifman's acquaintances who knew him during his youth in Cape Town, said, "He came across as a regular guy, but you could sense there was a volatile streak. He was friendly, but there was something unpredictable about him." A Johannesburg acquaintance remarked, "He was a likeable guy, charming even, but obviously he was someone you'd never go into business with. People were scared of him. When he spoke, people listened."

Though no longer his lawyer, Booth recalled Lifman as a complex figure, a talented businessman with a gentlemanly demeanour and an eye for opportunity, yet one drawn to high-risk circles. Booth once asked Lifman why he couldn't just be content with being "a good Jewish businessman".

Lifman's sisters, Enid and Gill, declined to comment on the funeral arrangements, confirming only that he didn't practice his faith, and that the family intended to keep his burial arrangements private.



Mark Lifman

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## Israel's 'strong horse' status key to peace

OPINION

DR DAN DIKER



**I**n the Middle East, bluster can be an expression of fear, but it can also reflect the culture of honour and shame present in both political and social interactions. Leaders may use threatening rhetoric to project strength and resolve, both to allies and adversaries. An oscillation between bluster and misleading "moderation" characterise the Iranian regime and its terror proxies' rhetoric.

Israel's 26 October 2024 massive airstrike against Iran neutralised its air defences and decimated other strategic sites across the country. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's muted response noted that "Israel erred in its strategic calculations." He ratcheted up his rhetoric after the damage was assessed, threatening on 2 November that, "The enemies, whether the Zionist regime or the United States of America, will definitely receive a crushing response to what they are doing to Iran and the Iranian nation and to the resistance front."

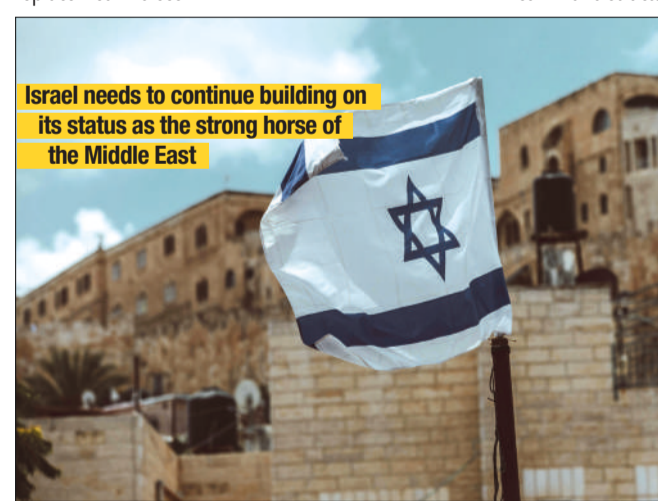
This mix of rhetorical threat and kinetic caution, reflect an awareness of Israel's massive military capabilities. In psychological warfare, Iran projects a strong image to maintain its honour and avoid being perceived as weak by Middle East friends and foes alike.

At the same time, bluster also masks underlying fear and insecurity. In the Middle East, signs of vulnerability will be exploited by enemies and adversaries.

Hamas and Hezbollah leaders have issued hundreds of declarations expressing genocidal intent towards Israel and the Jewish people, as documented by the MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute) watchdog organisation and the mainstream press.

Israel has come to understand Middle Eastern bluster and the lessons of political culture. It has also come to understand something about itself: its renewed status as the Middle East strong horse. In a 2001 interview,

Osama bin Laden said, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse." The strong horse is an ancient Middle Eastern axiom set down in writing by the fourteenth century Arab Muslim historian and political theorist Ibn Khaldun, who assessed that history is a cycle of violence in which strong horses – in Arabic, "al-faras al-asil" – replace weak horses.



"Bin Ladenism isn't drawn from the extremist fringe, but represents the political and social norm," writes Middle East analyst Lee Smith in his 2010 book, *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations*. Smith argues that violent power is central to the politics, society, and culture of the Middle East, and that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict only serves as a distraction from the larger, endemic, and ongoing power struggle in the Arab and Muslim world.

Hamas's 7 October massacre made Israel, by necessity, the Middle East's strong horse against the

Iranian regime, and its terror proxies – Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and various militias in Iraq and Syria – the "weak horses" of their own Shiite fantasy apocalypse.

The Arab world is well aware of the new configuration of power after witnessing the Israel Defense Force's lightning destruction of Hamas and Hezbollah's command structure, leadership, and much of their

weaponry and ammunition stockpiles. Israel's air force decimation of Iran's entire anti-aircraft defences, in three hours, covering 20 separate attacks over the vast Islamic Republic air space, has also not gone unnoticed.

Israel's renewed strong horse status has generated fear and awe across the Arab world. It has also created cognitive dissonance. Arab League members denounced Israel's counterassault against Iran, which contradicts the Saudis' decades-long enmity for its regime neighbours, notwithstanding

recent diplomatic agreements and reports of security co-operation.

This dissonance is expressed by an important Middle Eastern principle of political culture: "Watch what I do, not what I say." The proof of the principle is evident: Abraham Accords diplomats from Bahrain, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have remained in Tel Aviv, as have ambassadors from Jordan and Egypt, as have Israeli ambassadors in those respective Arab countries. In addition, Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, and

Continued on page 13>>



# Prof Madhi's Israel tweets infected by hate

NICOLA MILTZ

Professor Shabir Madhi, the dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), continues to share hateful anti-Israel material on social media. This despite recent criticism from the Jewish community for his persistent endorsement of contentious content.

Madhi's biased online activity on the X platform includes reposts drawing comparisons between the events in Gaza and Nazi Germany and those that glorify Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, the man responsible for orchestrating the 7 October attacks.

He latches on to well-known Israel bashers such as Jeremy Corbyn and Gary Lineker, and many others including Jewish anti-Zionists known to spread hateful content that demonises the only Jewish state. Several of the posts include references to the Holocaust, exaggerations that paint Israel as an aggressor beyond any reasonable scope, and language that delegitimises the entire nation.

"There's a clear line between expressing a political view and adopting a position so extreme, it crosses the boundaries of rational engagement and enters the realm of hate and bigotry," he said.

Reposting and thereby endorsing social media comments that glorify Sinwar "is abhorrent", Mofsowitz said, "but for this to come from Professor Madhi, a doctor and the head of a medical school, is deeply disturbing."

"The posts, which include Holocaust references, atrocity minimisation, obscene exaggerations, and the dehumanisation of an entire country, are deeply upsetting for the Jewish community," Mofsowitz said. "For a man in this position to cause such hurt to a constituency within his faculty is troubling. Jewish students and academics in this faculty in particular are now faced with serious challenges."

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of historical studies at the University of Cape Town, said, "Professor Madhi's posts are surprisingly vicious for a scientist. But I guess the emotion surrounding the war has got to him. One can understand his exasperation. But he must surely

appreciate that both sides are suffering – and it was Hamas that launched the war. Madhi, of course, has only one side in mind and sees nothing wrong with Hamas. Does he not know that most Arab countries despise Hamas? Where was Madhi when the Egyptians virtually destroyed the Muslim Brotherhood, the progenitors of Hamas? Many level-headed commentators have described the late Sinwar as the head of a 'death cult'.

"If he truly sees Sinwar as a resister not a terrorist, he should stick to his vaccinology which has earned him what I'm sure are justifiable plaudits," Shain said. "But as a scientist, he surely knows that he must wait for results – in this case the legal process – to conclude whether

genocide is or isn't taking place in Gaza. But that won't matter to someone who refers to Israelis as 'the most despicable people in history'. It seems to me that [Madhi] is driven by a simple Jew-hatred. How else can one explain his empathy for such vile comment?"

Dr Martin Strous of the newly formed South African Association of Jewish Mental Health and Allied Practitioners (SAJMAP) said that while there was a case to be made for the role of professionals in supporting human rights issues, reposting inflammatory memes wasn't becoming of the dean of a university faculty.

"It's staggering that an eminent doctor and scientist can

repost memes stating that the number one cause of child death on earth is Israel, not to mention memes that vilify the Israeli prime minister as the 'Hitler of our day', while glorifying Yahya Sinwar as defending his land against the 'most despicable people in history'. Many Jews and members of the Wits community will view Professor Madhi's reposting of such material as highly offensive and as a betrayal of his position of authority."

Strous said SAJMAP was established earlier this year in response to anti-Israel social media content shared by different bodies in the medical profession. The association "is opposed to the misuse of professional bodies to advance any form of ethnic intolerance, including one-sided anti-Israel rhetoric."

Madhi has ignored multiple emails and telephone requests for comment.



Twitter post that was shared by Professor Shabir Madhi

One hateful repost he shared said, "The number one cause of child death on earth is Israel."

Another said, "Israel is a Genociding Holocaust Pedophilic Rapist Sex Trafficking Organ & Land Stealing Child Murdering Terrorist Apartheid Ethno-State That Out Shames The Mother Fucking Nazis & You Western Cucks Bend The Knee For It All."

Madhi, a professor of vaccinology, is well known for his work on two of the first COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials conducted in Africa; and is director of the South African Medical Research Council Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics Research Unit.

He is yet to respond to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD's) demand for an unequivocal apology. This after he reposted a tweet by Bassem Youssef which said, "Yahya Sinwar was a resister, not a terrorist. Yahya Sinwar was defending his land against the most despicable people in history."

The SAJBD said Madhi had exposed his "own deep-seated venomous agenda", and his glorification of Sinwar was "unbefitting of a doctor, especially one responsible for training health professionals, including Jewish students".

Madhi has reposted numerous tweets by United Nations' special rapporteur for Palestinian rights, Francesca Albanese. Albanese has been accused of antisemitism by multiple United States ambassadors and the French and German governments, as well as for comparing Israel to Nazi Germany and stating that Hamas wasn't motivated by antisemitism when it attacked Israel on 7 October.

The nature of these reposts by Madhi, has led many to question the suitability of his position as a leader within a top-class university like Wits, which prides itself on inclusivity and diversity. It raises broader questions about the boundaries between freedom of expression and hate speech, especially in academia.

Danny Mofsowitz, the Gauteng chairperson of the SAJBD, said Madhi had "completely transgressed the line between freedom of expression and wanton bigotry. The opinions shared by the professor are unbefitting of a medical professional, a man of science, or a dean of a university with a diverse student body and faculty."

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## Enough is enough with antisemites

As Israel haters and antisemites rear their ugly heads more and more, we cannot sit back and ignore it. We must take them on in whatever forum works.

So, we salute the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies and its executive director, Daniel Bloch, for taking on antisemites in the Equality Court. This week, we tell of the first of four individuals that the Cape SAJBD is taking to the court on charges of hate speech. There will be more.

We dare not let our haters ride roughshod over our rights. They need to know that it's not acceptable to run Jews and the Jewish state down and make absurd claims against us. Frankly, if they don't like us, that's okay, but they don't get to destroy us publicly without recourse.

The problem is, as we saw during the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide, that the more people dehumanise others publicly, the easier it is to hate and destroy them. In Rwanda before the genocide, the Hutus began calling the country's minority population, the Tutsis, "cockroaches". This became part of Hutu parlance, and apparently it's so much easier to crush "cockroaches" than it is to kill human beings. It was much the same during the Holocaust, as we all know. Jews were denigrated so much, they were seen as sub-human.

How deeply upsetting it is to watch people we have respected for years coming out as Israel haters and antisemites. It's difficult for most of us to absorb because how can you still look up to people in their respective careers if they lambast our people and write or share the most absurd social media posts about us?

As a journalist, I keep being confronted on social and mainstream media by former colleagues whose views are so clearly one-sided and vehemently anti-Israel, there's no middle ground. They don't leave grounds for discussion, even though that would be my first choice.

In this week's newspaper, we write about Professor Shabir Madhi, a respected university professor and expert on vaccines and infectious diseases. He is a learned and highly educated man at the top of his field. He is an educator, and someone whose advice the government and country listened to during the COVID-19 pandemic. We can agree that, like everyone, he's entitled to his opinions.

However, a person held in such high esteem must be cognisant of the damage their views can do if they aren't considered and fair. When such a person comes out against a nation or a community, they can do so much harm because people respect them and their views.

This is why, as a newspaper, we cannot ignore it when Madhi makes statements that are so clearly hateful towards us. I kept hoping that he would come to us and apologise, giving us some valid excuse for his hatefulness. But there was nothing.

Then, we look at Imtiaz Sooliman, a man who so many of us in our community have looked up to for the great work he and Gift of the Givers has done around the world. They truly have gone where angels fear to tread and saved many lives. We cannot take that from him and his organisation. However, his utterances of late against our community and the bank of evidence that appears to be growing about what he has done with money cannot be ignored. We cannot excuse his alleged support of terrorist organisations, nor can we just accept the things he says about our community. We won't do that.

It is, however, deeply concerning and upsetting that someone of his calibre stoops to this level. He is a man whom I would have thought was above discrimination. And so, witnessing what's happening now, is deeply distressing.

I would like to imagine that antisemitism and blatant bias and hatred for Israel is the territory of the ignorant and intrinsically thoughtless. However, that's not the case. If it were, it would translate into those at the helm of the Nazi party being ignorant, and we know that isn't true. They were just evil and full of hate.

This propaganda war is dangerous, as I explained earlier, and it's incumbent on us to keep calling people out or taking the legal route to censuring them. I'm dumbfounded by some of the horrific claims against Israeli soldiers that are made. I know Israel is at war, and there will be cases where it may be found to have done the wrong thing, but the revolting accusations beggar belief. And when it's said or shared by a respected person, it's even worse. And those people know it.

Many of us in this community are in the fortunate position of being able to get information from all sides, with proof positive that the accusations made against Israel aren't true. But most people don't look that far.

How do we deal with it? Simple. We keep telling the truth. We keep calling out those in high places that have stooped to relinquishing reality for what's popular. Therein is the problem. Being anti-Israel is so popular, and standing up against Israel haters is most certainly not something people are flocking to do.

I so understand that feeling of righteousness in standing up for the underdog, and there's no doubt that Israel doesn't look like the underdog, Gaza does. Only, we need to remember we didn't start this war. Also this isn't Israel's war on Gaza. It's Israel taking on Hamas and other terrorist organisations that are determined to destroy the Jewish state and all its people.

We didn't want this war. Hamas broke into Israel and caused the greatest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. That's where it began, and it hasn't ended yet. We still don't have 101 hostages back. They are still languishing in the worst conditions in Gaza at the hands of terrorists.

The numbers of those who seem to feel that it's now open season on Jews is growing, and we cannot allow this to happen. Because of this, I once again say *kol hakavod* to the Cape SAJBD for taking on our haters.

We all must stand up and be counted. Stand up against our haters!

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## SA uses ICJ submission to maximise anti-Israel narrative

OPINION

ANNE HERZBERG



The South African government made a submission at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 28 October in its ongoing case accusing Israel of genocide. A press release issued by the president's office said it had filed a 750-page brief and 4 000 pages of accompanying annexes. This memorial – the technical term for the document – is for the moment secret, and probably won't be revealed until oral hearings take place, perhaps not until 2026. Nevertheless, the statement and media surrounding the move highlight how anti-Israel narratives are created and enforced in the political war against the Jewish state.

Some background on the ICJ is required. The ICJ is a creation of the United Nations (UN), and above all else, is a UN court. It does function the way courts do in a democratic system. Rules of evidence, procedure, and ethical standards aren't well-defined. The ability to challenge evidence in real time isn't possible. The quality and competence among the judges varies widely, and hinges on political factors. Many appointees to the ICJ are academics or politicians who have no prior real-world experience in evidence collection or judging disputes. There's no right to appeal a decision of the court, and few, if any, checks and balances exist to hold this body accountable.

that there is substance to the genocide charges while at the same time, preventing any actual review or testing of the contents of the brief and annexes. By managing the actual publication and press on the filing, South Africa is also able to block any contemporaneous Israeli response or serious media scrutiny of its claims.

In this way, South Africa can continue to attack Israel in the media and advance its false genocide narrative. Indeed, the press release issued by the government repeatedly invoked the political warfare objective behind this entire case. The release completely erases the events of 7 October, including the massacre of more than 1 200 Israelis and the taking of more than 240 hostages. The word "Hamas" appears nowhere in the release, and the role of Iran is similarly absent. That Israel is fighting a seven-front war, defending against attacks on its population centres from Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, is flipped on its head. The fact that Iran and its Islamist terrorist proxies launched a war to carry out their genocidal objectives has been perverted by South Africa into a false narrative that Israel's aim is to depopulate Gaza through mass death and forced displacement.

The government purports to endorse

"peace" in the region, but echoes the Islamist 1948 rhetoric, demonising Israel and claiming that the country since its founding is one of settler-colonialism and apartheid. It's a specious and ahistorical charge used to undermine Israel's legitimacy.

South Africa spuriously accuses Israel of not complying with international obligations, while it's silent as to the ICJ demand that the hostages be immediately and unconditionally released. It freely fraternises with members of Hamas, Russian President Vladimir Putin – an International Criminal Court-indicted war criminal – and the Iranian regime.

If South Africa was really concerned about the lives of Palestinians and the conditions in Gaza, it would investigate how, since 2006, Hamas was allowed

to take over Gaza and turn the entire territory into a fortified military installation. It would seek to find out how the terrorist organisation was allowed to divert billions of dollars in humanitarian aid. It would ask how UN offices, schools, and hospitals were commandeered by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to store heavy weaponry and launch rocket attacks on Israeli cities. It would be curious as to how a tunnel network more extensive than the London Underground system was built to shield Palestinian combatants and hold hostages captive instead of providing shelters for the citizens of Gaza. It would demand to know why UNRWA indoctrinated generations of Palestinian children to antisemitic hatred and violence rather than preparing those children for peace, coexistence, and economic prosperity.

While South Africa's exploitation of the ICJ might gain the country political favour in Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing, it does nothing to promote lasting peace in the region. Its exploitation of international institutions to advance false anti-Israel political narratives not only damages the credibility of those bodies, it damages the trust of South Africa's citizens in its government at home.

• Anne Herzberg is the legal advisor and UN representative of NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research institute.

Photo: South African Government News Facebook page



South Africa's memorial that has been submitted to the International Court of Justice

Most importantly, the court doesn't possess the capability and resources to verify evidence independently in highly fact-intensive situations. And because it's a UN court, it automatically gives deference to UN reports and materials regardless of their provenance or accuracy.

These problems have already been apparent in the earlier proceedings before the court where there was almost exclusive reliance on claims made by UN bodies, most notably UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), without any evaluation of their credibility.

South Africa has capitalised on these due-process gaps and exploited them to maximise their public relations benefit. Indeed, the government launched a media push to coincide with its filing, garnering international coverage of its case and generating dozens of news articles. Announcing that it had filed thousands of pages of "evidence" with the court creates a facade of validity to its claims, and leads to a conclusion that surely there must be at least some truth to the allegations if the government was able to collect such a significant amount of material.

The bulk of this material, however, is almost certainly copies of highly tendentious nongovernmental organisation and UN publications. But because its latest filing is secret, the government can control its narrative



# Humanitarian icon spouts hate speech as allegations swirl

STEVEN GRUZD

Many admire the humanitarian work that the Gift of the Givers Foundation performs in the world's disaster areas, providing relief from floods, earthquakes, and wars. It has built hospitals, schools, and provided water in dire circumstances.

But now its much-decorated founder and director, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, is in hot water for antisemitic comments, captured on video. Allegations have also surfaced that his organisation is supporting terrorists like Hamas, apparently illegally funnelling funding to them under the cover of humanitarian actions. Its website provides no audited accounts nor financial information beyond claiming to have distributed R6 billion in aid to 47 countries in 32 years. There are now calls for Sooliman's invitation to deliver the Helen Suzman Memorial Lecture on 14 November to be rescinded. The Helen Suzman Foundation (HSF) has reconfirmed his participation.

On 5 October 2024, Sooliman shared a platform under a banner proclaiming, "We are all Hamas" with known Islamist extremists. He said, "Every time we protested, the Zionists were too clever. They were arrogant, acting with impunity, put fear into you. They put fear into corporate corporations, into universities, into communities, into governments, into political parties, into associations. They run the world with fear. They control the world with money. And every time you say something, they terrify you and they say it's antisemitic. But I've got a message for them. Find a new narrative, this one is dull, boring, and stupid."

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of historical studies at the University of Cape Town, an expert on antisemitism said, "Dr Imtiaz Sooliman crosses the line that separates anti-Zionism from antisemitism. Zionists are characterised in an ugly, uncompromising, and conspiratorial way. Although the 'J-word' is studiously avoided, the tropes employed by Sooliman betray a classic anti-Jewish mindset, informed by fantasy, which

is often the hallmark of antisemitism. His allusions are deeply troubling. Sooliman will, of course, deny the charge, but his apparent worldview and his resort to fantasy surely raises questions. The generalisations he makes, and the resonance of his charges with well-worn anti-Jewish tropes are disturbing to say the least. Such language is invariably informed by Jew-hatred. Replace the word 'Zionist' with 'Jew' in Sooliman's diatribe, and we have *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. And we all know what that means."

On 7 October 2024, Sooliman said, "I don't follow international law or human law. I follow Koranic law. I'm a Muslim. I don't need any permission from anybody in the world to tell me what to do. I break the laws all the time. I follow Islamic law, and Islamic law overrides any other law. My law is very clear to me. Allah himself has instructed me. I don't need men to tell me what to do. I don't follow them." He has previously called Israel a "terrorist, apartheid, genocidal state".

These issues were brought to light on 23 October through an open letter to the HSF executive director by Lawrence Nowosenetz, a South-African-born Tel Aviv attorney who served as the Pretoria chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

Nowosenetz alleges that Sooliman founded the South African branch of the Muslim Brotherhood's Al-Aqsa Foundation in 1991, dedicated to obliterating Israel. This foundation belongs to the Union of Good, run by the radical jihadi Sheik Yusuf Al-Qaradawi.

Nowosenetz said that the HSF should call on Sooliman to be transparent about Gift of the Givers' finances, and criticise his disdain for the law. Their operations are now on the radar of organisations following illicit financial flows.

According to Shaun Sacks, senior researcher at Israel's NGO Monitor, "Dr Imtiaz Sooliman ... has acknowledged past connections and even donations to the radical Al-Aqsa Foundation and the Union of Good, blacklisted by the United States Treasury in 2008 for allegedly financing Hamas. Although Sooliman and Gift of the Givers have

demonstrated humanitarian intentions, they have operated in areas with significant terrorist and corrupt elements, including Gaza – with Hamas – and Syria. Sooliman's public remarks downplaying international law, coupled with the lack of published audits or donor disclosures, raise serious concerns about the organisation's activities."

The issue has sparked public reaction. On 27 October, the HSF said it couldn't determine the merits of the allegations, but believed Sooliman's assurances that they were baseless. It said the HSF opposed antisemitism unequivocally, and that the lecture would proceed.

According to *News24*, Sooliman said he wasn't upset by the allegations, and long knew he would be targeted for his strong support for the Palestinians. He claimed he could account for all money received and expended. He challenged his critics to file charges against him through law enforcement agencies and banks.

Next, former Democratic Alliance leader Tony Leon wrote on *News24* that though Suzman would likely not have disinvited Sooliman, she would have called him out for his bigotry.

This led to an article by former HSF Director Nicole Fritz in *Daily Maverick*. She pointed out that too many people – all men – publicly presume to know what Suzman would have thought or said. "That's why," Fritz said, "the legacy foundations of South Africa, peculiar creatures that they are, cannot and should not be attempts at resurrecting or substituting for the person whose legacy they are meant to honour. They cannot be a kind of Ouija board. They can only try as best they can to uphold that legacy, defend the principles that were core to that person's life, and look to emulate their best example."

She doesn't deal with the allegations about Sooliman. In a WhatsApp conversation with the *SA Jewish Report*,

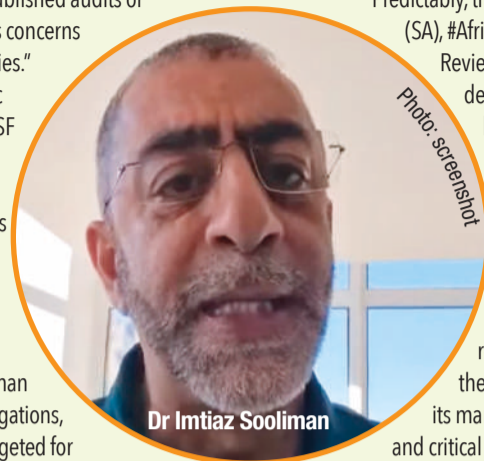
she said, "I understand Dr Sooliman's comments to traffic in antisemitic tropes. I understand Mr Nowosenetz's letter to Naseema Fakir, rather than the board, to be sourced in anti-Muslim and sexist prejudice."

Predictably, the Muslim Judicial Council (SA), #Africa4Palestine, and Media Review Network weighed in to defend Sooliman and criticise his dastardly "Zionist" critics for "malicious and defamatory" attacks. Former HSF Director RW Johnson called for the lecture to be cancelled.

A former HSF official who requested anonymity said the organisation had made its mark with excellent research and critical public litigation, "but then things went their own way. It's messy there, to put it mildly. It has had a too-rapid turnover of chief executives and chairpersons, and faced a series of crises of its own making. They have taken the foundation in another direction, saying they are 'reimagining' the HSF. Sooliman's outburst is very, very troubling. To hide behind the 'Zionist fig-leaf' is actually not good enough. Many donors may not want to support something like this. And you can't just do good without oversight and accountability."

The questions linger. Will we ever know if tender procedures were followed to distribute the copious funds given to Gift of the Givers by the South African government? How was Sooliman able to operate so freely in territories controlled by Islamists? Where has all the money come from, and gone to?

The *SA Jewish Report* approached Sooliman for an interview or comment. His only response was to say that "All these matters have already been covered extensively in the mainstream media" and referred us to other publications and media agencies.



Dr Imtiaz Sooliman

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# Israel support sways vote of US expats in SA

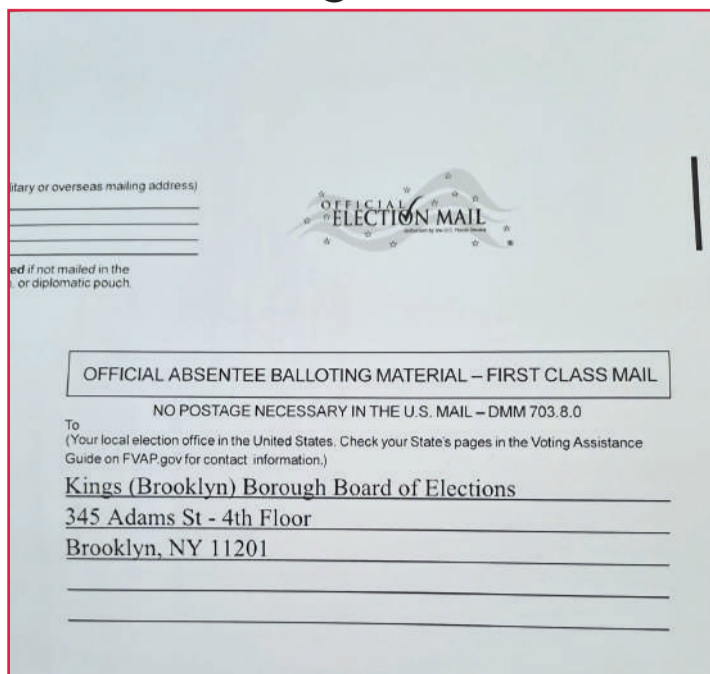
LEE TANKLE

For many Jewish American citizens living in South Africa, the choice of who to vote for in the 5 November presidential elections was based on how that person would deal with Israel.

For Rabbi Levi Silman, born in the United States (US), but living in Cape Town for the past 18 years, voting never seemed to be of the utmost importance. However, with the state of US politics combined with the war in Israel, Silman felt it important to cast his ballot this year. “The issues are more important, especially with Israel at war. It’s an important time to make a difference, and try to see what we can do to help,” he said.

Mark Stein, the chief executive of Adam International Group, said that though he had experienced many elections since 1960, he believed this one was the most pivotal. “It was vital to vote as we are in extremely dangerous and volatile times,” he said. “I believe when America is weak, its enemies pounce, as shown by many foreign wars in progress in the world. A vote for change ushers in a new golden era.”

Similarly, Antony Seeff, a 41-year-old entrepreneur in the health-technology industry, said that even though he had been a US citizen for the past three elections, he believed this year was different. He felt a “strong responsibility to make my voice heard, particularly given the significant influence that the US president and



Rabbi Levi Silman's absentee ballot

administration have on Israel”.

“If I were living in America, I would weigh up various domestic, fiscal, and social issues,” Seeff said. “However, as a Jew living abroad, my primary concern was Israel.”

A Johannesburg mother, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of being attacked for her political views, said she felt a compulsion to vote in these elections which she hadn’t felt during the past two. “The US is in a bit of a mess right now, so I wanted to be able to put in my two cents,”

she said. “I was voting for my conscience.

“Trump is better for Israel. He moved the US embassy to Jerusalem, and has worked with a lot of Jewish advisors. He said he wants to help combat antisemitism, and I think the Democrats have done a shocking job of it,” she said.

“The current administration has been terrible at combating antisemitism. A lot of hate has been spewed, and Biden has done absolutely nothing about it.

“I don’t like Trump, but he has done and said so many good things for Israel and the Jewish people. Right now, with the state of the world, he’s the better choice,” she said.

Said Stein, “Donald Trump’s presidency was marked by significant societal shifts, and I appreciate his unconventional approach to governance and his willingness to challenge established norms. Trump’s presidency brought economic growth, with low unemployment rates and major tax cuts. Also, Trump demonstrated support

for Israel and the Jewish community through various policies, including recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. For generations, presidents promised to move the embassy but reneged. Trump cut funding to the Palestinian Authority. He also withdrew from Obama’s Iranian nuclear deal. His administration also took a strong stance against antisemitism.

“Even though it’s so far away, it’s still the same adrenalised experience I had when I voted in the US,” Stein said.

Said Seeff, “It was straightforward but more involved than I had anticipated. First, I had to register by sending a “wet signature” to the New York City Board of Elections. After that, I received my mail-in ballot via email. Though some states allow online submission, New York, where I’m registered, required me to print the forms, complete them, and deliver them to the US consulate on Sandton Drive. I was also able to mail them directly should I have chosen to do so.”

Silman agreed that the voting process was tedious and there was a lot more paperwork than he had initially anticipated. “You had to register online, then they sent you a form to fill out and you had to send in that form, and then you had to print out a ballot and send in the ballot. So it’s not just clicking a button.”

He hopes this election “brings a greater sense of stability, not only in the US but in the world as a whole, and the world can be a safer place”.

## Feeling blue, seeing red over politics

ELKA COHEN

South Africans living in the United States (US) described a mixture of exhaustion over the US’s divisive politics and concern about their presidential candidates’ support for Israel as they took to the polls on 5 November.

Emma Gordon Blass (54) has been a US resident since 2000. She grew up in Johannesburg, and now lives in the swing state of North Carolina. She cast her ballot a week prior to election day, taking advantage of the early in-person voting sites to avoid the time-consuming inconvenience on voting day.

“If you think about US politics and its two enormous parties amassed against each other, the image that comes to mind is a war-time battlefield where everyone seeks safety in a tribe, and the least safe place is the middle ground,” she said. “Ironically, that’s where most people I know are; somewhere in the middle.”

Almost everyone Blass spoke to agreed that they just want the election to be over. They’re sick and tired of talking politics. “Even my rabbi nodded unusually enthusiastically when I said to him that politics has become an arena for the exercise of the *yetzer hara* [evil inclination], and what we do with it is mainly *chet* [sin],” she said.

“I know few South Africans here or back home who aren’t extremely jaded about politics, but we fear giving up on the left-progressive enthusiasm of our youth because we grew up in the sin of apartheid, and we want to have nothing to do with right-wing, racist anything. Now, with Elon Musk as the most famous and vilified ex-South African in the news spotlight, we find ourselves again having to double-down on our never-racist protestations, back to explaining and justifying ourselves like we did in the 80s.

“As Jewish people, we have the added quandary that most Israelis would like us to vote Republican, even though both parties claim steadfast support for Israel. American Jews,

ex-South Africans included, are afraid to show their support publicly for Israel because of potential retaliation and ostracism. We talk about being the new Maranos! All in all, I find the question of who to align with politically fraught, and the whole idea of ‘the personal is political’ has produced too much doubt and handwringing. For the first time in my life, I see the merits of trying to be apolitical, although clearly, this political junky is having a hard time staying on the wagon!”

“In California, we lean blue, especially in Los Angeles,” said Daniel Seeff (36), a technology entrepreneur who left South Africa 18 years ago to study at the University of Central Florida, and never came back home.

“My kids go to a Jewish school, and with everything happening in Israel this

past year, there’s a stronger Republican presence.

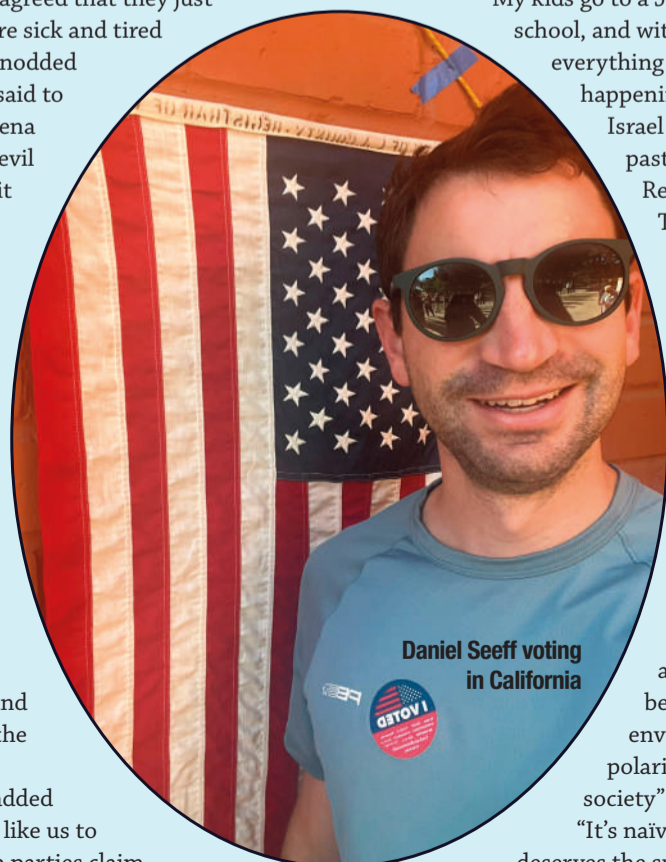
This mix has caused some tension among my friends who have different political views. Personally, I’m excited the elections are over so we can move on and hopefully have fewer arguments.”

An ex-Capetonian businessman and entrepreneur who left South Africa back in 1986 requested anonymity, he said, because of “the toxic environment and the polarisation of American society”.

“It’s naïve to believe that Trump deserves the support of American Jewry based on his potential support of Israel,” the



Emma Gordon Blass and husband Joel Blass after voting in North Carolina



businessman said. “He hasn’t proven any level of support, other than to say that if the Democrats win, it’s the Jews of America’s fault. He has also never walked back his support of neo-Nazis, calling them ‘fine people’.

“As a Jewish, ex-South African emigrant to the US, I will be supporting the Harris-Walz team for their rational, sane, and tested economic policies, their support of the Obamacare medical policies, their support of women’s healthcare and overall women’s rights, and their continued support of Israel.”

Emma Mirkin (36), and her husband, Gary (36), live in what she describes as “very liberal” Seattle. Although both were unable to vote in this election as they are still waiting for their US citizenship, Gary, who works in logistics, said, “As a South African Jew with the context of having lived in a country that has an aggressive anti-Israel stance, my perspective on the election is unique among other Jews living in the US.

“The risk of a presidential candidate who is not 100% for Israel or has even the slightest question mark regarding Israel, is concerning,” Gary said. “I have seen many left-leaning Jewish friends really struggle to come to terms with the fact that their socially preferred candidate is in fact not the preferred candidate for Israel.”





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# 'Every second felt like our last,' say ex-hostages

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

"We have enough faith to survive in any situation that will come to us," freed Israeli hostage Moran Stella Yanai told South Africans at a talk with her and rescued hostage Noa Argamani this week.

"I want you to think of all of the hostages as strong, to trust that those that are still inside will have the same miracle that I had," she told the packed audience at Sandton Shul on 3 November.

The evening formed part of a joint initiative between the Jewish National Fund and The Base Shul community to bring freed hostages and their families to South Africa for respite, and to ensure that their stories reach South African Jewish audiences.

Yanai said it was through faith that she found the strength to endure sometimes unimaginable suffering and return to her beloved parents, siblings, and animals. "In my head, my whole family were hostages, like many other families in Israel today," she said.

Yanai realised her dream of setting up a mobile jewellery store at the Nova festival on 6 October 2023. Yet, she was soon thrown into a nightmare as the barrage of rockets began early the next morning. "I had to run for five hours, five hours that I'm denying in my head, five hours that I'm hearing all the artillery I know of," she said.

She escaped death multiple times that day by refusing to hide in places where those who did were ultimately killed. "I know it's twisted to say the word 'saved' in this situation, but I was saved so many times that day, and I had to see the miracles," she said. She escaped capture twice by pretending to be an Arab.

Yet, the third time, she was captured and driven into Gaza. "One terrorist ripped off all my jewellery. When he cut off the bracelets from my left hand, he accidentally carved the first letter of G-d's name on my hand. I took a journey to the unknown, to surrender, to believe that something was guarding me."

During her time in captivity, Yanai was moved to seven houses. "I lost 12% of my body weight," she said. "I had severe lice. I lost half of my hearing. I had many injuries, many infections. I had three fractures in my leg. But that's nothing compared to what we had to go through there."

As a survival strategy, Yanai found herself entertaining the terrorists, doing whatever they wanted for food, water, information, and medicine. "One night, I said something wrong, and in a fraction of a moment, I had a gun pointed to my head. He didn't shoot, but he threatened me every single day. In Gaza, we just had moments. If you survive a moment, you should say thank you for that. I said thank you so many times."

Yanai reached breaking point multiple times, but ultimately surrendered to G-d's choice. "I told Him: 'I'm okay with it, dead or alive, because I know you protected me. I promise you to share this belief in any place that I can find.'"

The first time Yanai was told she'd be released, she was dragged back into Gaza at the last minute. But, four days later, she went home, despite not being on any list. "Nobody knows why, but I got to cross that border between Gaza and Israel," she said.

"Please don't kill us." Noa Argamani's call to Hamas terrorists as they kidnapped her on 7 October were heard around the world. "Just more than a year ago, I was a quiet young woman from Be'er



Moran Stella Yanai speaking at Sandton Shul

Sheva and nobody knew my name," she said. "I'm just a software engineering student who loves to travel the world, to celebrate life, and go to parties."

It was at a party that she met her boyfriend, Avinatan Or, who remains a hostage. "There was something special about him. He had self confidence that no-one else had."

After hours of fleeing and hiding, Argamani was famously dragged onto a motorcycle and separated from Or. "That was the last time I saw him. After just minutes, I was suddenly in the middle of Gaza. In captivity, I asked about Avinatan everywhere." Argamani's first thought was for her mother, Liora, who was battling cancer. "I had to see

her again," she said. Argamani lived in fear every day. "I didn't want the guard suddenly to lose control and kill us. All the terrorists were armed with many weapons. One mistake, and the entire situation could turn upside down. Every second felt like the last second of your life." Argamani was initially held with two little girls, Hila Rotem, 12, and Emily Hand, eight, in a tiny room without windows. "I had to be brave, not just for myself, but also for them, to act like everything was going to be okay. But of course, you're terrified. I had a high fever and no medicine, and was able to shower only twice a month. We lost our humanity there."

When on 8 June, Israeli soldiers came to rescue her, she understood she was safe only when she saw the Star of David on their uniforms. "Coming home was the happiest day of my life. It's everything I thought about for every second, every day,

for 246 days. Even today, there are moments I cannot believe that I'm safe," she said.

"Standing here today is a miracle made possible by those incredible soldiers including Arnon Zamora, who gave his life to save mine. My mother's last wish before she passed away was to see me again, and we both got our wishes."



Noa Argamani at Sandton Shul

Yet, Argamani said that without Or, she's not yet free. "I'll wait for Avinatan," she said. "I'll wait for the day I can feel whole again. There are still 101 hostages just like him, 101 families in this nightmare every day. There's not a moment to spare."

## Perfect match: brother crosses continents to donate kidney

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

After undergoing dialysis for a year and a half, South African born Israeli David Skolni knew a kidney transplant would be the only way to restore his health and quality of life. So, his brother, Raymond Schkolne, travelled from Cape Town to Petah Tikvah to make the ultimate donation.

Two small boys, pictured in 1961, are holding hands. David is two, Raymond four. Fast-forward 63 years, and they're in a similar pose, only this time they're wearing matching hospital gowns. "My son put these two pictures together. It's a powerful expression of the story," Skolni said.

They may spell their surnames differently, with Skolni using his 1982 move to Israel as an opportunity to spell Schkolne phonetically, but the brothers are now more strongly connected than ever. "Raymond was always my caring, big brother. We always had a good relationship," Skolni said.

He said his kidney issues started when he was 17 and living in South Africa. "I went into the navy as there was compulsory service back then, and through regular medical checks, they discovered that I had microscopic blood in my urine." Ultimately diagnosed with glomerulonephritis, a general term referring to several kidney diseases, Skolni still played sport and essentially continued to function normally.

Yet, at about the age of 50, he began developing high blood pressure, causing his kidney function to deteriorate steadily. Skolni was regularly monitored until March 2023, when he went into kidney failure. He was forced to go onto lifesaving but debilitating and time-consuming dialysis treatments three times a week, but soon realised that he couldn't be on dialysis forever.

So he began the lengthy process of becoming eligible to join the list of kidney transplant candidates. He also put a call out on Facebook asking if anyone would be willing to donate a kidney as only one healthy kidney is needed to live a normal life. Though family members are obvious donors, Skolni's daughter also has microscopic blood in her urine, and his son was emotionally stretched caring for his mother, Skolni's ex-wife, who has cancer.

"My brother, Raymond, was dealing with a medical issue so he couldn't be a candidate at that stage," Skolni said. Yet, a few months ago, Schkolne underwent a procedure and his health was restored. After getting the all-clear, he decided to put himself up as a possible donor.

"Raymond started the process of getting tests done in Cape Town through Groote Schuur Hospital, and he passed all of them." He then needed to come to Israel to do the second round of tests at Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikvah where Skolni was being treated, and he passed those too. Beilinson is known as Israel's number one hospital for transplants, particularly for kidneys, Skolni said.

Scholne, who in fact lived in Israel for five years after he got married, was originally told that he would have to return to South Africa after doing the tests. He would then need to come back for the operation if declared a viable candidate. "But Raymond was insistent

with the hospital staff," Skolni recalled. "He said, 'This is a time of war. I want the whole process to be done in one go, with as short a gap as possible between the tests and the operation.' He was a real *nudnik* about it, but it worked."

The brothers underwent their operations on 20 October, and are now both recovering, which is a much quicker process for the donor than the recipient. Schkolne and his wife, Sheryl, are due to return to Cape Town in mid-November, after spending almost two months in Israel. "With all the rockets going off, it's not an easy time at all here," Skolni said. Yet considering the positive outcome, he thinks the couple will look back on their journey as a meaningful period in their lives.

At this stage, the transplant was successful, Skolni said. "It's a long journey, but the most important part is over. Now I just have to be monitored, keep taking the medication, and hopefully slowly get stronger. When you get a kidney from someone, the body identifies it as a foreign body and fights it. So, I need to take medication every day for the rest of my life, which essentially suppresses the immune system so that the body

doesn't reject the kidney. I have to be very careful, there are certain restrictions, and a long recovery, but it's a price worth paying to enable me to live a relatively normal life without the need for dialysis."

Skolni said that aside from coming to Israel in a time of war which was a considerable ask, the fact that his brother volunteered to donate his kidney is massive. "He's a compassionate person," he said. "It didn't surprise me that he stepped up. If you had asked him, he would say it was a natural decision. He underplays his role."

Though Skolni believes his brother did the right thing as families should ideally help each other in such circumstances, he's aware that this isn't always the case. "He's a hero for doing it, because not everybody would. It has had a major impact on his life. But I didn't ever say to him, 'No, Raymond, I don't want you to donate. I don't think you should.' From the minute he said he would be happy to do it, I said, 'Thank you very much, I'll take it.' Hopefully

in a month or two, he would have fully recovered and he can lead a full, healthy life," Skolni said.

Fighting back tears, Skolni said his brother was named for their aunt, Ray, who tragically died in a car accident as a teenager. "Sixty-seven years after Raymond was born, he has so lived up to his name by giving a new life, a shining and bright ray of light and hope to his younger brother."



David Skolni and Raymond Schkolne - Then and now



# Dan's Tribe finds those lost to addiction

ELKA COHEN

**W**hen you know you have a drink or drug problem, it's probably difficult to admit it and seek help. To do that is to accept that you have a problem, which nobody wants to do, says Brett Saevitzon, a recovering addict who describes himself as a "grateful alcoholic".

Because of this, Saevitzon and a group of recovering Jewish addicts have created a space for people in the in-between stages when they recognise they can't go on like they have been, but don't know how to move forward.

They call their group Dan's Tribe because Dan was the last of the 12 tribes of Israel which walked through the desert at the back, picking up the lost and found, the ones considered "excess baggage", those who had nowhere to go. Saevitzon said that the Lubavitcher Rebbe spoke a lot about Dan's Tribe being the tribe of outreach, bringing back those who had lost their way, so the name seemed fitting.

When you have 50 guests at your home for *yom tov*, and the only way you know to get through it is to keep topping up until you can't stand anymore, you know somewhere that this isn't okay. You also know you need help when you go out to watch the rugby and drink so much, you don't know how you got home or when. These are just a few of the scenarios of people who may not know they are alcoholics or drug addicts but know that this behaviour isn't okay.

Dan's Tribe offers a "a soft, welcome landing" for anyone seeking comfort and connection. It's a cushioned refuge from judgement, isolation, and stigma, Saevitzon says.

"We offer a human face of connection and support, from one Jewish addict to another. We



The support and guidance from Dan's Tribe is helping people in the community to overcome their addictions

understand the denial, shame, anger, and guilt associated with being an addict. We know the disruption and destruction that addiction can cause families. And our community is suffering."

The mission of Dan's Tribe is to welcome other Jewish addicts into the fold of recovery, he said.

"We're not seeking to reinvent the wheel of recovery or take over from professional organisations like AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] or NA [Narcotics Anonymous]. We're simply the open arms and familiar faces of welcome to encourage and support those who wish to take

steps to seek recovery and point them in the right direction," Saevitzon says.

A 50-year-old with Dan's Tribe says he got involved "to help people just like me. I knew I had a problem with alcohol 27 years ago. I was 23, but because of fear, embarrassment, and constant denial, I never asked for help. I didn't know how, and I didn't know where. Had there been a group of *Yids* back then to find this vital connection to assist me in getting me out of my denial and to find the help that I so badly needed, it probably would've saved me 27 years dragging myself through the lonely pain of addiction." He asked not to be identified.

"Anonymity is of the highest priority," says Saevitzon, "We know that shame and guilt causes reluctance to reach out, and we understand better than anyone else the weight that judgement carries. The group is still in its infancy, but has big dreams of growing into becoming the first stand-alone Jewish organisation with the primary focus on combatting addiction in the Jewish community."

Started last year, Dan's Tribe is growing naturally, spreading its arms a little wider around more and more of the affluent members of our community in Johannesburg.

"There's a lot of us suffering. It's Jews helping Jews, addicts helping addicts, with the single objective of ensuring that no Jewish soul is left behind," says another anonymous member of Dan's Tribe.

Based on Jewish principles and guided by the 12-step recovery programme, Dan's Tribe works with various Jewish organisations to bring

collective healing and wisdom.

A 39-year-old mother, recovering alcoholic, and member of Dan's Tribe says, "Being in recovery isn't always seen as brave. After all, addiction is shrouded in judgement. But if you think you have a problem, then you probably do, and facing it is one of the bravest first steps you can take.

"We're not a nanny organisation here to tell people what to do. We're also not here to demonise alcohol, rather to point out the potential dangers and warning signs," she says. "You will never be considered an alcoholic at the age of 14, 15, or 16, but alcoholism is a progressive disease, the dangers of which need to be highlighted. Unfortunately, there's a growing trend of inappropriate and uneducated allowances by parents who normalise, enable, and encourage underage drinking."

The purpose of Dan's Tribe is to offer a *heimishe* environment to help bring people back to Yiddishkeit, to do *teshuva*, and ultimately to get over their affliction of addiction.

Dan's Tribe is a celebration of the solution to addiction through Jewish connection, Saevitzon says. All it requires is a call to a member to meet for a coffee or a chat on the phone. It's also open to anyone who needs to unburden their concerns for a spouse or family member.

Regardless of your social standing, age, gender, or drug of choice, Dan's Tribe offers a safe space that says to every Jew, "We understand you, we care about you, and we're here to hold your hand and support you on the road to becoming the best version of yourself. We will love you until you learn to love yourself again," he says.

• To contact Dan's Tribe, WhatsApp 076 422 8601.

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# Reunion takes friends back on journey of a lifetime

LEE TANKLE

A young South African woman, Laurain Cohen and an Australian man, Bill Atkinson, met and travelled in Europe together 57 years ago, and then went their own way, losing touch. Over the years, they both regretted not maintaining their friendship.

In June this year, Atkinson reached out to the *SA Jewish Report* Facebook page for help in trying to find her because he knew she was Jewish, and thought it was a good place to start.



Laurain Romm (née Cohen) and Bill Atkinson reunited after 57 years

The 20 June post read, "In 1966, I travelled around Europe with a South African girl named Laurain Cohen. Late in 1967, I stayed with her and her family for three months in Hillbrow. Her parents owned a hardware shop, and she had a sister named Myrna who lived in London. I'm visiting South Africa later this year with my wife, Gayle, and would love to have a catch-up with Laurain. Can anyone help so that I might make a connection?"

Within a few hours of the post going up, the son-in-law of Cohen, whose married name is Romm,

spotted the post and was convinced he knew who was described in the post. Aylit Romm Lurie, Romm's eldest daughter, messaged Atkinson to explain who she was. She went on to say, "I know who you are very well because my mom has spoken about your trip forever and ever."

This led to the reunion in Johannesburg on 24 October of Romm and Atkinson, who met when they were 23 and are now 80.

"I looked at him, and he looked at me, and we just hugged," said Romm, "It was as if no time had passed between us. We said we would have recognised each other anywhere. We both look the same, bar a few crinkles."

Romm said she felt countless emotions when Atkinson visited her home after finding each other again.

"It's so much harder to find a woman than a man because of the change of name," Romm told the *SA Jewish Report*. "He didn't know what my married name was, and then he thought to Google Jewish

newspapers to try and find me."

Romm never forgot Atkinson, and had told her children so many stories about the "amazing European adventure" that she had had as a young woman. Because of this, her children were almost as excited to meet Atkinson as she was.

"Bill had become a legend in our house," said Romm. "I had tried to find him myself a while ago, but that ultimately came to nothing. I would also ask my sister who often travels to Australia to see if she could find him in a phone book or something, but it

was to no avail."

Romm still has a photograph of Atkinson cutting her hair on her mantelpiece, which has been there for more than 50 years.



**WHEN ATKINSON VISITED ROMM, SHE SAID SHE WAS FILLED WITH PRIDE THAT SHE WAS ABLE TO PROVE TO HIM THAT THEIR TRIP WAS SUCH A SPECIAL PART OF HER LIFE.**

She recalled how she was 23 years old when she travelled to visit her sister in England. While there, she really wanted to take a trip throughout Europe, but had no way to do it. She went to South Africa House in London and saw a message on the notice board that two young Australian guys were looking for people to join them on their caravan trip through Europe, and she took a chance.

The two guys were Atkinson and Barry Komiskiey. The three spent 10 months together, visiting Europe and the Middle East. Atkinson and Romm went on to travel the British Isles together for another three months, developing a close bond. "It was the trip of a lifetime," said Romm. "I don't think many girls have done what I did, but it was amazing."

Atkinson and Romm still have the same mementoes from their trip. When Atkinson visited Romm, she said she was filled with pride that she was able to prove to him that their trip was such a special part of her life.

Romm told the *SA Jewish Report* that when the trip was over, she returned to her family in Johannesburg, and Atkinson followed her and used her parents' home as a base while he travelled South Africa before returning to Brisbane.

They then lost touch, got married, and went on to

have multiple children and grandchildren. Romm said she thought she would never see her friend again, and was so excited that they were able to make contact and rekindle their friendship.

Atkinson recently also sought out and found Komiskiey in Australia, and has put Romm in touch with him too.



Laurain Romm (née Cohen) and Bill Atkinson in 1966

After Romm and Atkinson's reunion, they felt like they had insufficient time together and weren't able to catch up fully with each other as they would have liked to. "It left me a little bit empty because I had a dinner party for them, and I had my children and a few friends there. I was so busy being a host that I never got to speak to him properly," said Romm.

However, she was grateful for the little bit of time together, and for being able to rekindle their friendship even if there was little chance of them being able to meet up again.

# Chance meeting changes life of Holocaust survivor's daughter

LEE TANKLE

While award-winning writer Gina Roitman was trying to help other daughters of Holocaust survivors to deal with their trauma, she found solace and understanding in meeting the daughter of a woman from her own mother's past.

In August 2020, Tammy Lerner approached Roitman, also a biographer, writing coach, and daughter of a Holocaust survivor, after attending a webinar discussing midwives in displaced persons (DP) camps. Lerner realised there were similarities in their histories. Roitman told an audience at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 31 October that this interaction with Lerner "would change my life and put a new perspective on the story I now tell".

Roitman had been holding memoir workshops for daughters of Holocaust survivors where they could share their stories and find catharsis, and it was through this that Lerner heard about her and contacted her. "Tammy's email delivered the opportunity to uncover a long-lost piece of my history, the incredible trials of my mother's life," Roitman said.

She said that she and Lerner had actually met briefly before on a trip to Israel when Roitman was 18, but neither was very interested in finding out more about their parents' history. "That trip was decades before I realised how many questions I had failed to ask. Tammy's email delivered the opportunity to uncover a piece of my history."

Following the email, Roitman and Lerner were able to piece together the parts of their stories they had gleaned throughout their lives, and both emerged with a larger story of how their families had survived the horrors of the Holocaust.

They worked out that their mothers had both been living in Czerniów in southeast Poland, and both were newly married before the war began. Roitman said her mother, her mother's first husband, and Lerner's mother and father and another couple had been best friends before the war. When the Nazis invaded Poland, the three couples decided to flee to Soviet-occupied Poland, but weren't able to settle there.

"The Soviets forced Jews and other undesirables onto trains and transported them east along the route of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The three couples were separated and dropped off at different locations. During those terrible war years, there was no way to maintain contact," Roitman said.

Her own mother never revealed where she landed up, only

that it was somewhere in Central Asia, where the winters were freezing and the summers boiling. "When it was asked where she had been between 1941 and 1944, all she could offer was a question mark," said Roitman.

Roitman's mother gave birth to a son, Yitzchak, just after losing her first husband to malaria. Yitzchak died of starvation when he was only three years old.

Lerner's parents were deported to labour camps, and when the war was over, they went around the camps looking for Polish Jews in the hope of finding their friends from before the war.

"This is where Tammy told me that they found my mother, emaciated," said Roitman, "They nursed her back to health, and in 1945, took her with them to their home town, Czerniów, 20km northeast of Auschwitz. My mother was hoping to find at least one of her five sisters, only to learn that they and her parents were dead."

Roitman said that her mother and Lerner's parents ended up in the Pocking-Waldstadt DP camp governed by the Americans. While there, Roitman's parents would meet, and she would be born in a hospital near the camp in January 1948.

Both families would separate again, emigrating to different countries – Roitman and her family to Canada, and Lerner's to Israel.

Roitman told how her childhood had been filled with stories from her mother's past and her best friends, but up until reconnecting with Lerner, "there were always only stories. There was one more gift Tammy offered me, a photo of the three friends taken in 1933 when my mother was 20 years old. She is smiling and warm, something that no photo of her

younger self ever revealed in all those photographs she carried from Poland to Canada."

Roitman told her mother's story and the story of her birth in Passau in her 2013 documentary, *My Mother, The Nazi Midwife and Me*.

"Every year, on my birthday, mama woke me with the account of how she had saved my life by ensuring I wasn't born in the DP camp but in a proper hospital in the nearby town of Passau, the town, incidentally, where Hitler spent his formative years," said Roitman. "The reason I was born in Passau was because she had heard rumours about babies dying from a murderous midwife."

In 2006, Roitman went on a mission to Passau to find out more about the tale her mother had been telling for 28 years. "On this trip, I learned that my mother's story was true. She wasn't the paranoid Holocaust survivor I had always thought. There had been too many baby deaths. A murderous midwife who, after the war, was still intent on ridding the world of Jews by killing newborns. She would press on the baby's fontanelle, that soft spot in the skull, which caused death within a week, and traumatised mothers who blamed themselves. The camp, under the jurisdiction of the American Army, was eventually forced to acknowledge that there was a disproportionate number of deaths. They exhumed the bodies of the 52 babies. All had died in the same way."

Roitman said being able to tell her and her mother's story enabled her to connect with many other children of survivors, and made her feel like no-one was alone in this world.

She said, "From Washington DC to Phoenix, Arizona, and on to Johannesburg, South Africa, then to me in Saint-Colombia, Quebec, there are lines stretched around the world and gathered in stories that have been interred for decades."



Gina Roitman



# Beautiful Creatures makes comeback for new generation

Many of our children grew up listening to *Beautiful Creatures*. Now, Gallo Records and Paul Choritz, Alan Glass, and Ed Jordan – the *Beautiful Creatures* team – are relaunching the catalogue of songs 20 years after its first release. We speak to **Paul Choritz** about it.

## What inspired *Beautiful Creatures* when you first launched it?

*Beautiful Creatures* came about in the early 2000s. Alan Glass had young children, and wasn't enjoying the music available for his children to listen to at that time. To him, it all sounded banal and simplistic. Ed Jordan and Alan knew each other from drama school at the University of the Witwatersrand, and met to discuss the idea of creating music that would be listened to by parents with their children, music that both parents and children could enjoy.

## How did you make it happen?

Alan and Ed started writing songs. Once they had six songs, they booked a studio, session musicians, and singers, and recorded a demo. Alan knew that I was in the music industry, and arranged for the three of us to meet. He gave me the demo, and I loved what I heard. The three of us then set up our own record label. This was totally unique, as it was unknown for artists to have a stake in the record label that represented them. We completed the first album, and launched it.

## Who wrote the songs, produced it, did the "taste tests", and so on?

All the *Beautiful Creatures* songs were written by Alan and Ed. Initially, Alan wrote lyrics and Ed wrote music, but they soon started collaborating fully and both contributed to music and lyrics.

Production of the albums was a collaborative effort between Ed, Alan, and myself. Ed had extensive experience working on his own albums, and is a genius in the studio. We booked Neill Solomon studios, and over the years, we recorded all the albums there. Ed and Alan performed on the albums as well as a host of South African singing and acting talent, and a children's choir made up of family and friend's children including Alan's daughter, Ruby, who was four years old when we recorded the first album.

## What was the initial reaction to the songs, and what followed?

The initial reaction was exceptional, locally and abroad. When we released the first album, we literally couldn't keep up with the demand. On the back of the positive response, I managed to get the CD into hundreds of retail stores. We were stocked in CD stores, book shops, baby stores, curio shops, and airport stores.

The albums earned gold and platinum



Paul Choritz, Ed Jordan, and Alan Glass winning the Naledi Theatre Award for Best Musical or Play for Children in 2011

certification.

We received thousands of emails from fans all over the world. Some of the best feedback included things like, "I dropped my kids at school, and carried on listening all the way to work."

## How did you respond to the popularity?

We kept writing more albums, and focused on developing the brand. We released seven CDs in total, published a range of books, and produced a stage show.

## Why do you believe it resonated with kids and adults?

The fact that families could listen to the CDs together was a big attraction. Adults and kids resonated to the music's local content and African sounds and rhythms. We also made a point of never talking down to our audience.

## What's unique about *Beautiful Creatures*?

Unlike a lot of other children's music, we didn't compromise on production values. We used phenomenal musicians and singers. We treated the production of the albums the same way one would an adult contemporary album. For each album, we spent a month in studio perfecting the product.

## Has *Beautiful Creatures* had an impact on your life and that of Alan and Ed and the others involved? If so, how?

*Beautiful Creatures* impacted all our lives and many others for the better. Years after our first release, parents, and children – who are now adults with their own children – come up to us to say how the albums were part of their childhood and their family road trips. We also like to believe that in our own

way, we contributed to education around issues like anti-poaching, conservation, anti-litter, and literacy.

Our *Beautiful Me* album helped address

social issues that kids often grapple with. We also like to believe that *Beautiful Creatures* forms part of our personal legacies.

## Which were your most popular songs and animals, and why do you believe that was?

Imvubu the Happiest Hippo, Lucas the Lazy Lion, and Harry the Hungry Hadedu were the most popular. Imvubu had a trade mark happy hippo dance; Lucas was interactive; and Harry resonated with all South Africans who wake up to the unique sound of the Hadedu.

## What does your daughter think about *Beautiful Creatures*? What does she love best?

Leeya used to be a big fan of *Beautiful Creatures*, and loved Bumpytail the Ragged Tooth Shark the most. The fact that the song is sung by Cito from Wonderboom, whom she is so fond of, might have influenced this. She's now more into Eminem.

## Until the relaunch, were people still buying the series of CDs?

We were selling a small number of tracks online, but no physical CDs.

## Why did you relaunch it?

The catalogue was gathering dust, and required a fresh approach. I contacted a friend at Gallo Music to see if they were interested in partnering with us, and they were. We are fortunate to be partnering with Gallo, the largest and oldest independent record label in South Africa. Together with the team from Gallo, we're giving *Beautiful Creatures* a new lease on life.

## Are there any changes in the relaunched edition? If so, what are they?

All the artwork has been refreshed so that it aligns with the kids of today. We have also remastered all the tracks.

## Is there a chance for a new CD? If so, how would it be different now?

In 2008, Ed and Alan wrote an album that we never recorded. Its working title was *Beautiful Safari*, and perhaps one day, we'll release it. We would release it digitally, and would obviously not print up physical CDs.



## Israel's 'strong horse' status key to peace

>>Continued from page 4

Bahrain opened their air space, and even assisted Israel during Iranian regime missile and killer drone attacks on it in April and October 2024.

Israel's strong horse status is a key to winning peace and moderation in the Middle East, but is misunderstood in the West. The Biden administration urged and demanded that Israel refrain from attacking Hamas in Rafah and northern Gaza, and controlling the Philadelphi Corridor. Yet, Israel has done the opposite, reasserting its strong horse status opposite a weakened adversary. Israel's attacks on Iran, America's nightmare scenario, has changed the strategic balance, enhancing Israel's profile in the Middle East.

Victory cannot be achieved against radical Islamic terrorism using the principles and methods of compromise, ceasefire, diplomacy, and territorial concession appropriate to democratic states. In the Middle East compromise signals weakness, and ceasefire – "*hudna*" – is a cessation of hostilities to rearm and resupply. Territorial concession is the fate of the vanquished.

Israel's strong horse status is a reversal of past missteps that proved lethal. When Israel applied Western rules, such as its unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, it invited four years of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas suicide bombings, murder, and mayhem, costing thousands

of lives. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah referred to Israel as "weaker than a spider's web" following Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Arafat and his Fatah and PLO colleagues were encouraged by Israel's overnight retreat from Lebanon, observing that for Hezbollah and the Palestinians alike, "resistance" – meaning terror – was an effective weapon against Israel. The withdrawal was a prelude to the Palestinian "Al-Aqsa intifada" that resulted in more than 1 000 Israelis killed and thousands more wounded. The unilateral territorial concession of Gaza in 2005 led to five Hamas wars, climaxing in the 7 October "Al-Aqsa Flood" of Hamas atrocities. The massacre of 7 October proved conclusively that "goodwill diplomacy" and territorial compromise opposite *jihad*, as demanded by the United States and Europe, was a strategic disaster and existential threat to Israel.

Having paid an enormously high human price, Israel has embodied the lesson of the strong horse in a chaotic, unstable, and unforgiving Middle East. Israel's evolving self-awareness as an indigenous ethnic minority understands today that, as Smith notes, "He who punishes enemies and rewards friends, forbids evil, and enjoins good, is entitled to rule. There's no alternative, not yet anyway, to the strong horse."

• Dr Dan Diker is the president of the Jerusalem Centre for Security and Foreign Affairs.

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# Parow's Jewish dynasty keeps vibrant history alive

**Richard Mendelsohn** has recently launched his book, *The Jews of Parow. The History of a South African Community* as a part of a three-pronged project to celebrate its Jewish history. We speak to him about the book.

## What drew you to research and write this book?

Parow was a small Jewish suburban community founded in the early twentieth century on the unfashionable "northern" edge of Cape Town. It never numbered much more than a hundred families, and ceased to exist in 1993 when its synagogue was deconsecrated. Yet, despite its small size and its disappearance more than three decades ago, it has had a remarkable afterlife thanks to the generosity and vision of one of its leading early family clans, the Kaplans and Kushlicks, who together founded international steel company Cape Gate.

Jewish life, in the face-to-face intimacy of a small Jewish community. Cheder-going is one of our most commonly recalled memories, with afternoons spent in the company of "moreh", our irascible but highly effective teacher, Rabbi Benjamin Lipshitz, and "geveret", his gentle wife, Nechama Lipshitz, the niece of the great Rav Kook.

## Tell us a little about the controversial rabbi.

Described by a former cheder pupil, as "the most misunderstood rabbi of his times", Lipshitz, who had both a yeshiva and a Hebrew University education, served the Parow community for three-and-half decades from 1930 onwards. Lipshitz's longevity, despite

## Were there Jews in significant positions in the town?

Jews, including my grandfather, were elected to the village management board in Parow's early decades, and when Parow became a municipality in 1939, Dr Jack Karpas was elected to the council. During the war, Karpas, a highly respected and popular figure, became the mayor of Parow, the first and only Jew to serve in this office.



Rabbi Benjamin Lipshitz

At the same time, he led the Jewish community, overseeing the building of its new synagogue. After he went on aliya in 1951, he played a major role in Israeli medicine as deputy director of Hadassah, deeply engaged in the formation of its new hospital in Jerusalem.

## Mendel Kaplan and his family were from Parow. Can you tell us a bit about their place in the town and their interaction with it since the Jewish community left in 1993?

Kaplan, a philanthropist and international Jewish leader, had deep roots in Parow, of which he was immensely proud. His grandparents, Isaac and Rachel Bloch, were pioneering shopkeepers in Parow in the first decades of the twentieth century; and Parow's early *minyans* were held in their home behind their main road store. Their daughter, Jessie, married Ike Kaplan, who together with his brother, Solly, and his friend and future-brother-in-law, Solly Kushlick, set up Cape Gate in Parow in 1929 in a garage they rented for £6 per month.

From these humble Parow origins, the family business grew over time into an international steel company. After the closure of the Parow synagogue in 1993, Kaplan, who had had his Barmitzvah in Parow, arranged for the shipment of the Parow shul's furniture, seats, bimah, and pulpit, to the newly constructed Shivtei Israel Synagogue in Ra'anana in Israel. One of the Parow shul's Torahs followed soon after. The interior of the synagogue has now been refurbished by the Kaplan and Kushlick families to commemorate the anniversaries of the foundations of their South African and Israeli businesses.

## Is there anything Jewish in Parow today or any obvious traces of the community's past?

Little remains today of the once thriving Jewish Parow except two buildings. The Talmud Torah, opened in 1957, was acquired by the municipality and served for a while as a now defunct Parow museum. The attractive shul, opened to great fanfare in 1951, was similarly acquired by the Parow municipality in 1993. It subsequently fell on hard times, deteriorating physically as it stood vacant for years. Incongruously, it was eventually leased by the council to a private enthusiast who set up a Whale Museum. The present use of the now renovated building is as a storage facility for the law enforcement department of the City of Cape Town.

## What research did you do for the book?

The Parow Project occupied a research team centred at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town for more than two years. A group of postgraduate research students together with myself scoured archival records together with the Jewish press. Researchers working at the Deeds Office in Cape Town located every property transaction involving Jewish buyers or sellers since the start of Parow in the early twentieth century until its decline in the late century. In addition, I conducted more than 60 lengthy interviews with people who had grown up or had worked in Parow.

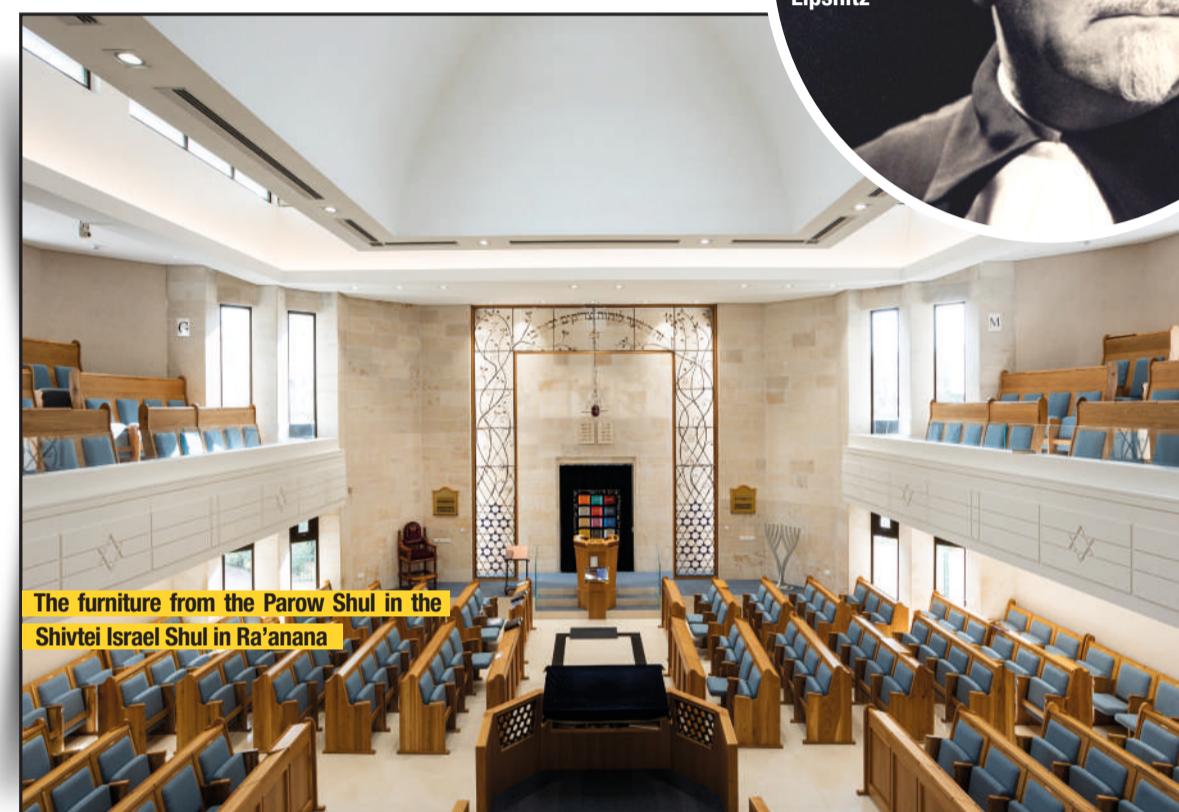
## What's the relationship between the Parow Jewish community and the Cape Town and other Jewish communities?

Parow was intimately connected with the neighbouring Jewish communities of Cape Town's northern suburbs – Goodwood, Bellville, and Durbanville. The Jews of these communities shared a passion with Jewish communities throughout South Africa for Zionism.

## Who is the book aimed at?

The intention is to provide a lively and accessible account of Jewish life in a small but representative South African Jewish community in the twentieth century. The book goes beyond congregational history, and attempts a broader and more comprehensive social history of a Jewish community. It's also an exercise in collective biography, with brief accounts of the many individual and family stories that together constituted communal life. It's aimed at all those interested in the history of South African Jewry.

- The Jews of Parow. The History of a South African Community is available at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town and at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre.



The furniture from the Parow Shul in the Shivtei Israel Shul in Ra'anana

The Parow Project was conceived by Oren Kaplan, the grandson of one of its principal founders, to commemorate in 2024 the 95th anniversary of the establishment of Cape Gate in Parow in 1929. The triple outcomes of this multi-year project were:

- A richly illustrated book, *The Jews of Parow. The History of a South African Community*, authored by myself, a former head of the history department at the University of Cape Town.
- An exciting and innovative exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town, titled *Echoes of Parow. The Story of a South African Jewish Community*.
- A comprehensive and voluminous website, *The Jews of Parow*, housing the mountain of material discovered by the Parow Project research team.

## What's your history in Parow?

I grew up in Parow in the 1950s and 1960s, the heyday of the Parow Jewish community. Like the Kaplan family, I have deep roots in Parow since my grandfather was an early leader of the community during the interwar years. My late mother was born and grew up in Parow in those years, and returned to Parow at the beginning of the 1950s, where she and my father, a general practitioner, remained until 1995, and were among the last Jews to leave. The excitement of this project was writing about people I knew and about a communal life I had experienced. Returning to Parow all these years later is a nostalgic but mildly melancholic experience. Voortrekker Road, the Parow main road, once alive with Jewish commerce, is now seedy and neglected, a site of urban decay.

## What was it like to grow up there?

The post-war decades were a halcyon time. Like the many I interviewed for the project, I have happy memories of a safe and warm

chronic conflict with the community, usually because of his robust and sometimes physical "old-world" teaching methods, was a mark of often grudging respect for a man of considerable accomplishment. He's a fascinating case study of the South African rabbinate of his times.

## What makes Parow unique compared to other SA towns with significant Jewish communities?

Parow's waxing and waning through the course of the twentieth century mirrors the broader trajectory of South African Jewry, its growth and recession. The community's social, business, and religious life is reflective of South African Jewish life at large. Jews in Parow practiced – or failed to practice – their religion, earned their livelihoods, and socialised together, as they did elsewhere.

## What was the relationship like between the Jews in Parow and the Afrikaner communities?

For much of the twentieth century, Parow was a predominantly Afrikaner town. While Jews experienced antisemitism in the first half of the twentieth century as they did elsewhere in South Africa, this had abated by the 1950s, the heyday of the Parow Jewish community. The many interviews I conducted with those who grew up in Parow during this era reflect the relative absence of overt expressions of antisemitism in their childhoods. Politically, the Jews of Parow, with singular exceptions, kept their heads below the parapet in an Afrikaner Nationalist-dominated neighbourhood.

### Sunday 10 November

- Second Innings hosts a talk by the Community Security Organisation. Time: 10:00. Cost: R50 (R20 members). Contact: 082 561 3228

- New Beginnings hosts a talk by Linda Katz. Time: 10:00. Donation: R50. Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za

### Monday 11 November

- The Chevrah Kadisha launches its Domestic Carer + training course starting from Monday 11 November. Contact: rimonpvtcare@jhbchev.co.za or 063 592 5343

### Wednesday 13 November

- Second Innings hosts the screening of

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* featuring Dame Maggie Smith. Time: 09:30. Cost R130. Contact: 082 561 3228

- The Jewish Learning Institute hosts a talk on *Decisions of Fate: Your Jewish Compass for Navigating Questions of Medical Ethics*. Time: 19:30. Contact: www.myJLI.org.za or jli@chabad.org.za

### Sunday 24 November

- The Jewish Women's Benevolent Society hosts its R30 book sale. Time: 09:00 to 14:00. Contact: 011 485 5232



## CAP ensures a spooky but safe Halloween for children

From 26 October to 3 November 2024, By partnering with local communities, CAP officers and security company CAP were able to provide

took a proactive approach to ensuring the safety of children trick or treating in various Johannesburg neighbourhoods. The suburbs included Linksfield North, Saxonwold, Benmore Gardens, Bryanston, Orchards, Devonshire Park, Savoy, and Waverley.



a secure environment for these children, who were able to enjoy the festivities without fear,

### CAP officers and local community members taking part in Halloween festivities



interacting with CAP's dedicated tactical officers and staff. The event was marked by a festive atmosphere, filled with candy, laughter, and community spirit.



# Nothing like chocolate cake flavoured with nostalgia



**INNER VOICE**  
Howard Feldman

It started with glace cherries. Or more accurately, when our hosts thanked us for the cake that we didn't send them. It was an old-fashioned chocolate number, neatly iced and punctuated by four red nipples. Confusion followed when it was determined that the gift might have been received in error on Friday afternoon at the chaotic time when the doorbell is known to ring, when there's little opportunity to chat, and when gifts are delivered.

Ownership not fully determined, it seemed a pity to let something fresh go to waste. And so, not since somewhere in the early 1990s, I bit into the sickly-sweet cherry on top prize that I would have fought for as a child. As the squish of the texture burst to full flavour, I was transported back to birthday parties, to cupcakes – called cookies back then – to mock crayfish, trifle, and a time long past.

The concept of heritage foods has become increasingly more important. It refers to traditional foods and recipes that have been passed down through generations within a culture, region, or family. These dishes are deeply tied to cultural identity, history, and customs, often reflecting local ingredients, preparation methods, and the influence of specific historical events or social practices. For example, South African heritage foods might include dishes like bobotie, biltong, and chakalaka, and Jewish heritage foods include challah, gefilte fish, and matzo ball soup, with variations depending on Ashkenazi or Sephardic backgrounds.

Heritage foods are important because they keep culinary not only cultural traditions alive, help maintain cultural connections, but also family history. So that "Granny's jam biscuits", although probably lifted directly from Myrna Rosen, still take on a heavenly quality long after granny has baked her last tray. And especially because granny wasn't the innocent old matriarch she pretended to be and lied

about the provenance of the "family" jam biscuits.

The graveyard of dated foods is significant. For some, it might be Koo stewed peaches, teiglach, glace cherries, cola tonic and lemonade, and chopped herring, while for others it might be p'tcha, which is a stomach churning, nausea inducing traditional Eastern European Jewish dish made from simmering calf's feet with onions, garlic, and spices until the broth becomes rich and gelatinous and then allowing it to set into a jelly. It's recommended to take 4mg of Zofran before preparation, and 4mg immediately after consumption.

South Africans living abroad will attest to the power of nostalgic food. Mrs Balls Chutney, South African Cadbury chocolates, biltong, and Rooibos tea are oft sought items for those who want a taste of back-in-the-day, and many will agree that no matter how long they live in a country, they still can't get used to the taste of a specific item (normally chocolate).

Whereas foods like mock crayfish and p'tcha are unlikely to make a revival, trifle and "hundreds and thousands" sprinkles might. Where glace cherries are unlikely to be in high demand from our children and grandchildren, there's a good chance that in 40 years' time, they will bump into a "homeless cake-pop" and be reminded of the fried sushi that they would eat back then.

I'm unlikely to find out who sent the chocolate cake to our hosts. But I do want to thank them for providing me with memories of my parents, my grandparents, and of a childhood past. It might or might not be true that nostalgia is heroin for adults, but it's unequivocal that the cherry on top isn't what is used to be.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Illiberal behaviour

In 2017, responding to pressure from anti-Israel advocates to cancel a concert in Israel, Radiohead's frontman, Thom Yorke, expressed frustration that artists he respected had questioned his band's ability to make informed moral choices.

Yorke said there were a lot of artists who didn't agree with the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) coalition, and that it was upsetting that rather than seek engagement, detractors chose to smear him and the band in public forums.

I mention Yorke specifically because last week, he walked off stage in Melbourne after being heckled by an anti-Israel protester, and similar protests targeted Australian singer Nick Cave's recent concert in Scotland. Although Cave doesn't have upcoming shows in Israel, he stated in an interview that it's "difficult" to "punish ordinary people because of the acts of their government". Both Yorke and Cave aren't vocally pro-Israel, they simply disagree with the tenets of cultural boycott.

In South Africa, we aren't immune to the type of illiberal behaviour that has come to define the spaces that should be the most open to free thought and expression. In September, academic Ivor Chipkin, the director of African Global Dialogue, took the bold step to host a conference titled "Narrative Conditions Towards Peace in the Middle East". Chipkin has previously publicly stated his disagreement with the South African case at the International Court of Justice, and as such, the BDS movement launched a smear campaign which ultimately led to the non-participation of a number of attendees as well as the shocking decision by Constitution Hill to rescind its hosting of the event. Chipkin criticised the BDS response, stating that it revealed an "authoritarian political culture" undermining democracy under the guise of protecting it.

The limitations placed on Jewish voices within South Africa continue. This week, Jewish poet Professor Elisa Galgut was removed from The Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Collective, which claimed that it was due to her defence of

**ABOVE BOARD**  
Karen Milner



Zionism rather than her Jewish identity. The bizarre thing about this statement is that Galgut has never publicly declared her views on Israel. Deplatforming a Jewish poet by replacing the word "Jew" with "Zionist" because she has failed to meet some ideological purity test, one she didn't know she was being subjected to, is really just antisemitism in its latest guise.

The restriction on pro-Israel expression extends globally. In March, Pushkin House and the University of London asked Russian-Israeli author Dina Rubina to clarify her stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict after receiving critical messages. Rubina cancelled her event – not allowing herself to be cancelled – noting that academia had become "the main nursery of the most disgusting and rabid antisemitism, hiding behind so-called 'criticism of Israel!'"

The knee-jerk reaction of the anti-Zionist lobby to silence any potential dissenting voices has created an environment of fear and anxiety and promoted illiberal behaviour, the type of which is synonymous with the most authoritarian governments. Last month, author Sally Rooney joined a growing number of writers refusing to allow their books to be translated into Hebrew. It's hard to imagine a more active step to close down the open transfer of ideas.

In fact, in response to this type of boycott and the news last week that 1 000 writers and publishers plan to boycott Israeli cultural institutions, Israeli author Fania Oz-Salzberger commented that her father, the late celebrated writer and peace activist, Amos Oz, would have been "sad, disgusted, but proud" to be included in the boycott. Oz-Salzberger, who was an attendee at the Chipkin conference, said that though her father cared deeply for Palestinians, he would have reminded the "virtue signallers" of their historical and political ignorance.

*This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies*



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# SA dance team brings Jewish talent to championship

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Four Jewish dancers are part of the multicultural South African dance team that professional choreographer Debbie Rakusin is taking to the International Dance Organization (IDO) World Championships in Poland, taking place on 25 November.

Rakusin says the fact that the team includes Jewish dancers and herself as the team manager is “unbelievable” and “unheard of”.

“The odd Jewish dancer here and there has won Protea colours, but it’s unusual to have four Jewish people getting Protea colours in South Africa,” she says.

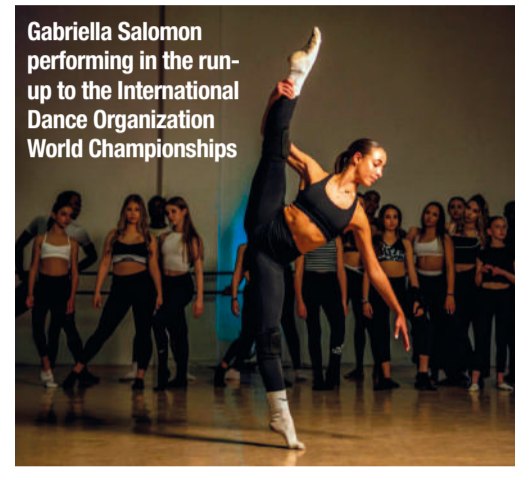
King David Linksfield students Jordan Brill, Sami Levin, Gabriella Salomon, and Addy Joffe all received Protea colours for dancing last month as they will be representing South Africa at the championships.

“It felt incredibly rewarding receiving Protea colours,” says Salomon, a 14-year-old Grade 8 student, the number one in the country in both jazz dance and contemporary dance for her age group.

Rakusin formed a collaborative team of dancers from different backgrounds and studios through High Performance Dance Education, a programme directed by her to uplift dancers in South Africa.

“This co-lab team competed in two regional competitions and one national competition to qualify for the world championships and be eligible for colours,”

she says. Levin, a 14-year-old Grade 8 student who has received Proteas colours for the third year in a row, says the past year has been full of qualifying competitions. “Each competition helps you improve on your performance. Many hours of training and sacrificing school and other activities contribute to the preparation.”



**Gabriella Salomon performing in the run-up to the International Dance Organization World Championships**

Brill, a 16-year-old Grade 10 student, says, “I’ve worked so much harder and trained so much more than I did last year in preparation for the IDO World Championships in De Panne, Belgium.”

Salomon, who started dancing at the age of 14, says, “It requires enormous physical strength as well as mental

preparation.” Having put out an advert looking for dancers to join a collaboration group and be exposed to top teachers and choreographers, Rakusin has managed to put together a truly South African team.

Rakusin and the team’s captain, who recently came away with 17 medals from the Hip Hop & Popping Championships in Macedonia, brought in an international choreographer from Serbia in January.

“Who knows what our chances are,” Rakusin says. “The dancers in the international market are incredible. They have been exposed to a lot more. It’s easy for them to travel in Europe, whereas, for us on the tip of Africa, there’s no travel, certainly for the majority of our dancers of colour.”

Winning a title at the championships is the biggest accolade you can get, Rakusin says. “Your country’s anthem gets played. The dancers cry, and go on their hands and knees. It’s incredible how they react.”

Brill, who will be competing in seven dances including three solos in classical ballet, jazz dance, and modern, is no stranger to medals. With a dance training that started when she was two, Brill came home with five medals, including three golds, from the JCC (Jewish Community Center) Maccabi Games in Fort Lauderdale in the United States earlier this year.

Brill and Joffe, a 16-year-old Grade 10 student, have

danced with singers such as John Legend and Seal in corporate events.

Joffe, who has been dancing since the age of three, won three golds and one bronze medal at the JCC Maccabi games last year, and will be competing in two group dances at the championships – a jazz dance and a contemporary dance piece. “I’ll also be doing a ballet classical solo and a ballet repertoire solo,” she says.

Joffe’s biggest highlight is “being able to grow, learn, improve, and most importantly, have fun doing what I love the most”.

Levin, who started dancing at the age of six, has attained vice-world champion status for ballet repertoire four times at international competitions such as the Dance World Cup. “I received a scholarship to a summer intensive programme at Steps On Broadway Academy for next year in New York,” she says.

“I’ve travelled internationally to do shows before, not to enter a competition,” Rakusin says, commenting on 45 years in the dancing business. “So receiving colours at my age was incredible.”

She hopes her championship-bound dancers will follow in the footsteps or do even better than previous South African championship dancers such as Tyla-Mae de Wet, who came in the top 10 in the modern and contemporary dance solos junior category, won by Slovenian Maksim Mali, at the 2023 IDO World Championships.

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