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King David awaits apology over antisemitic snub

NICOLA MILTZ

King David High School is waiting for a much-anticipated apology from Roedeane School after days of tense behind-the-scenes discussions. It's believed that severe disciplinary action is to be taken against Roedeane staff members involved.

This comes after Roedeane stood King David up in a scheduled inter-school tennis fixture because the opposing team was Jewish.

At the time of going to press, it was understood that Roedeane was putting the final touches to a statement of apology. "There's a bit of a stalemate although there has been a lot of progress," said Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the general director of the South

African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE). "The ball is now firmly in Roedeane's court.

"Roedeane is busy with an internal investigation to understand better exactly what transpired because there are different versions. King David has asked for a wholehearted, unreserved apology; for the school to own up to what has happened; and to commit to keep politics out of sport. So, we wait and see."

King David Head of School Lorraine Srage told the *SA Jewish Report*, "As head of school, I am deeply concerned by the recent events surrounding the refusal to play a scheduled tennis match due to pressure from a group of parents. There is no place in our schools for any form of antisemitism, discrimination, or disinformation.

"Sport has always served as a powerful bridge between communities. It teaches respect, teamwork, and mutual understanding. Denying children the opportunity to compete based on race or religion is not only deplorable, but a profound missed opportunity to bring young people together in the true spirit of school sport.

"We will always stand firmly in advocating for our learners. They have every right, like all children in South Africa, to participate fully in school activities, free from prejudice or exclusion. We hope for a sincere apology to our school community, and reaffirm our commitment to fostering an environment built on inclusivity, dignity, and respect for all."

of Deputies (SAJBD) condemned the decision as discriminatory, while the SABJE confirmed that the matter was under formal investigation. Urgent talks between the schools were convened under the mediation of the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa.

Roedeane issued two public statements denying antisemitism, but these were marked by contradictions, alternately suggesting the fixture had been postponed, forfeited, or had simply "not proceeded as planned".

This crisis hasn't unfolded entirely in isolation. In recent years, the school has faced public controversy, including a high-profile bullying scandal in 2020, and criticism over links to Ummah Heart madrasa, which has drawn scrutiny over alleged ideological associations.

The school has also been the subject of debate around its anti-racism policies and approach to race and identity. Though none of these issues are directly linked to the tennis-fixture incident, commentators argue that they form part of a broader context in which tensions around ideology, governance, and values have increasingly surfaced.

Education commentator Andrew Wilkinson, who has written critically about Roedeane on several occasions, said the crisis didn't arise in a vacuum.

"This did not happen overnight," Wilkinson said. "In my view, it is the consequence of years of ideological and governance capture." He cautioned, however, against blaming pupils.

"The learners are not responsible," he said. "They are operating within an environment shaped by adults and institutional

This saga began on Tuesday, 3 February, when King David High School's top two tennis teams, accompanied by senior staff and a CSO representative, were taken to Roedeane to play. Their fixture had been confirmed despite earlier warnings of "possible issues".

The girls never stepped onto the court. They were left waiting, and ultimately turned away because they were Jewish.

Roedeane initially claimed that the fixture had been cancelled due to logistical or scheduling challenges. That explanation has since unravelled.

An audio recording revealed that Roedeane's decision was driven by pressure from the school community not to play a Jewish school. Principal Phuti Mogale was heard to refer to the situation as "presenting as a Jewish day school issue".

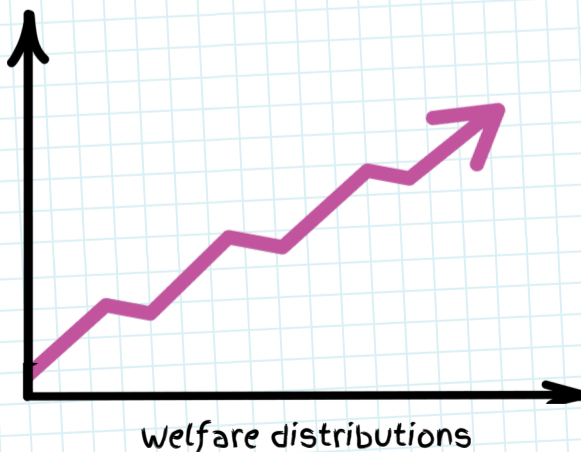
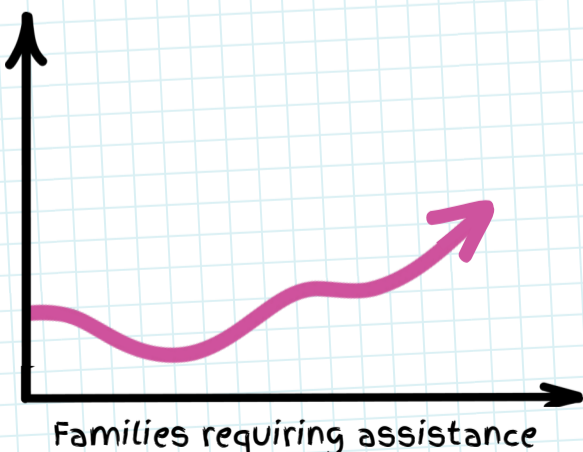
The South African Jewish Board

Continued on page 3

Capturing our history

Photo: Tadas Kazakevičius

Kęstas Pikūnas, who was in South Africa working on a five-part documentary on Litvak Jews, prepares for a shoot with international filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt. See page 8



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One in three American Jews were targeted by an antisemitic incident last year, AJC survey finds

One-third of American Jews reported being the target of an antisemitic incident in 2025, according to a new survey published by the American Jewish Committee (AJC).

The finding marked no change over the previous year, suggesting that American Jews could be settling into a distressing new normal in the aftermath of 7 October 2023.

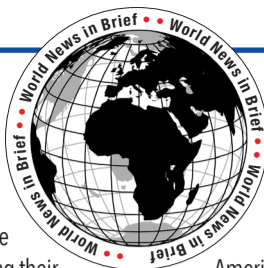
"Things aren't getting markedly better," said Ted Deutch, chief executive of the AJC, in an interview. "I don't think that we can afford to accept it as a baseline. We can't accept that, and America shouldn't accept that."

Surveying 1 222 American Jewish adults from 26 September to 9 October 2025, the AJC found a plateau in several indicators of sentiment.

Overall, 55% of American Jews reported avoiding specific behaviours

in 2025 due to fear of antisemitism, including steering clear of certain events and refraining from wearing or posting things online that would identify them as Jewish.

The finding also marked no change since 2024, when 56% of Jews reported changing their behaviour for fear of antisemitism, but was up from 46% in 2023, and 38% in 2022.



mine, and we have to take this seriously. The broader community has to take this seriously for the benefit, not just of our Jewish community, but for our society and our democracy."

For the first time, the AJC also asked American Jews whether they approved of the way US President Donald Trump was responding to antisemitism in the country.

Roughly two-thirds of respondents said they disapproved of Trump's actions, though views split sharply along partisan lines, with 84% of Jewish Democrats disapproving of Trump's response at least somewhat compared to 9% of Jewish Republicans.

The survey comes as some Jewish leaders have lamented what they have described as the inefficacy of efforts to combat antisemitism.

Last month, at the Second International Conference on Combating Antisemitism in Jerusalem, political theorist Yoram Hazony decried what he described as an "extremely high level of incompetence by the entire antisemitism-industrial complex". Bret Stephens, the right-leaning Jewish New York Times columnist, argued in an address last week that the Jewish community should abandon its efforts to combat antisemitism and instead invest in strengthening Jewish life.



Demonstrators hold US and Israeli flags during a rally in Central Park on 10 March 2024 marking 150 days since hostages were taken in the attack on Israel

This year's respondents were also asked if they felt "less safe" as a result of several high-profile recent antisemitic attacks including the arson attack on Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's home in April; the deadly shooting of two Israeli embassy staffers in Washington, DC, in May; and the firebombing of a demonstration for the Israeli hostages in Boulder, Colorado, in June.

About a quarter of respondents said the attacks had made them feel "a great deal" less safe, while 31% responded "a fair amount", and 32% responded "a little".

Overall, according to the report, two-thirds of respondents said that they believed Jews in the United States were less secure than a year ago.

Deutch said the findings of the group's latest report should serve not only as a warning for Jews, but as a "warning sign of the cracks in the foundation of our society".

"The Jews have always been a canary in the coal

Map of Israeli targets goes up in Tehran as tensions simmer ahead of Netanyahu's White House visit

Iran has erected a map showing Israeli targets for potential strikes in a prominent propaganda spot as another week dawns with uncertainty over whether it will face attack from the US.

The map went up over the weekend in Tehran's Palestine Square, a frequent site for billboards meant to broadcast the Islamic Republic's bravado when it comes to Israel and the US. It includes the words, "You start, we finish!"

It comes as US President Donald Trump continues to weigh military intervention against Iran and as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to visit the White House to press for his demands in

Trump's negotiations with Iran.

"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to meet US President Donald Trump this Wednesday in Washington, and will discuss the negotiations with Iran," Netanyahu's office said on Saturday, 7 February "The Prime Minister believes any negotiations must include limitations on ballistic missiles and a halting of the support for the Iranian axis."

A "will-he-or-won't-he" air has pervaded for weeks as Trump has considered different strategies for dealing with Iran, which has said it would view US and Israeli targets as legitimate if the US strikes to curb its nuclear ambitions, less than a year after the last US attack on Iranian sites, which came during a war between Iran and Israel.

On Friday, 6 February, Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and Middle East advisor, and Steve Witkoff, his Middle East envoy, met directly with Iran's foreign minister in Oman. The foreign minister, Abbas Araqchi, said the talks had got off to a "good start", but that Iran was willing to negotiate only about the nuclear programme, not the missiles that concern Israel.

Trump, too, told reporters that there had been "very good talks" that indicated that Iran was prepared to make more concessions than it had offered in the past. Still, he said, "They know that if they don't make a deal, the consequences are very steep."

The next day, Kushner and Witkoff also visited a US naval carrier that has been moved to the region as part of what Trump has called an "armada" that would enable US military action in the event that Trump decides it's needed.

Netanyahu has moved up his planned White House visit - which will be his fourth since Trump retook office last year - to advocate for Israel's interests in the negotiations. It was at a previous visit, last April, that Trump disclosed for the first time that the US had opened direct talks with Iran. Just more than two months later, Trump joined Israel's campaign against Iran with a bombing attack that came a day after he said he hadn't decided whether to strike.

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Sinai revelation a blueprint for life

Torah Thought

The receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai is the most significant event in human history. Unique among all claims of divine revelation, it wasn't the experience of a single prophet or mystic, but a national encounter witnessed by an estimated two million people. Never before nor since has the Creator of the universe communicated openly and directly with an entire nation. Remarkably, this event isn't central only to Jewish faith, but to this day, is broadly accepted by most of the world's population as having occurred.

Perhaps the purpose and enduring relevance of this extraordinary moment can best be captured through the following story, related by Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus and heard directly from the granddaughter of the Chofetz Chaim, one of the greatest Torah leaders of the modern era.

She recalled that as a young woman of 18 in the early 1920s, she decided to leave her religious upbringing to pursue a university education. Like many young people of her generation, she believed she was entering a new age, an era of enlightenment, scientific discovery,

and technological progress. Before leaving home, she went to bid farewell to her grandfather, the Chofetz Chaim, who was then nearing 90 years of age.

She challenged him respectfully, "Why do you choose to remain in this world of darkness? When will you embrace the new

world of light, knowledge, and progress?"

The Chofetz Chaim listened quietly. Then, with remarkable clarity and foresight, he responded. "Do you remember the airplanes used during World War I?" he asked. "That was the first time planes were used in battle. Soldiers would light sticks of dynamite and throw them from the sky."

He paused and then continued. "They will develop machines that will one day reach the moon. They will develop bombs powerful enough to destroy the entire world. We will develop menschen - noble, righteous, holy human beings."

In those few words, the Chofetz Chaim articulated a timeless truth. Technology can make humanity more powerful. Progress can expand our reach beyond imagination. But none of these guarantee moral growth, compassion, or self-restraint.

That is where Torah comes in.

The Torah doesn't compete with technological progress; it gives it direction. G-d gave us the Torah to ensure that the human soul remains dominant over unchecked desire, ego, and the relentless pursuit of power and pleasure. Torah refines character. It challenges us to rise above our lower instincts and to live lives of truth, responsibility, and purpose.

Rabbi Daniel Sackstein Sunny Road Kehilla



At Mount Sinai, the Jewish people accepted the mitzvot, a framework designed to facilitate the difficult inner work required to become better human beings and to uplift the world.

Recommitting ourselves to Torah isn't a retreat into the past. It's a step toward a better future, one defined not only by innovation, but by meaning; not only by progress, but by holiness; and not only by what humanity can achieve, but by who we choose to become.

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Mandela's next flotilla aims to 'bring Israel to its knees'

CLAUDIA GROSS

Mandla Mandela, the grandson of late President Nelson Mandela, promised to "bring Israel to its knees" at the launch of the Global Sumud Flotilla Mission 2026 at the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg last week.

Mandela said the operation was intended to dwarf previous flotilla attempts, with plans for several thousand participants to take part in a coordinated maritime effort involving an estimated 100 vessels. The group is said to include about 1 000 medical workers, alongside engineers and participants presented as "war-crimes investigators". The ships are expected to depart from ports in Spain, Tunisia, and Italy, before moving toward Gaza as a single mobilisation.

Critics say that this so-called "moral statement" confirms that the initiative is primarily a political intervention rather than a humanitarian mission. Jewish communal organisations and political analysts have questioned both the humanitarian necessity of the initiative and the motivation of its most prominent participants.

At the launch, Mandela said that through collective action, "we can isolate apartheid Israel, collapse it, and bring it to its knees", framing the flotilla as part of a broader global mobilisation similar to the anti-apartheid boycott movement.

Trying to garner as much support as possible, Mandela also called on President Cyril Ramaphosa to "implement what was adopted by our national Parliament to expel the Israeli ambassador and close down the embassy".

Adam Charnas, an analyst for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, described the flotilla as "political theatre masquerading as humanitarian relief". He said it "purports to deliver aid that already enters Gaza freely through established channels", and challenges "a blockade rendered moot by the Rafah Crossing's opening".

Charnas referred directly to Mandela and other participants as "attention seeking" activists with "track records of extreme anti-Israel rhetoric". He argued that the mission "prioritises spectacle over substance", and accused its organisers of moral inconsistency for focusing on Gaza while remaining silent about other humanitarian crises.

The flotilla was unlikely to improve conditions for Palestinians or contribute to peace, he said. "Genuine peace requires the unglamorous work of dialogue, compromise, and sustained negotiation, not performative publicity stunts that generate social media engagement while changing nothing on the ground."

In his speech, Mandela invoked his grandfather's legacy, and rejected claims that

Nelson Mandela had been supportive of Israel. "I want to put it on record that my grandfather was a friend to comrade President Yasser Arafat, to Muammar Gaddafi, and to Fidel Castro," he said, describing them as leaders who "stood side by side with him during our darkest days in history".

Organisers of the flotilla, however, describe the blockade as collective punishment, claiming large-scale civilian action is necessary to draw attention to what they describe as Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

Mandela is a staunch supporter of the Boycott,

"thousands of aid trucks carrying food, fuel, and medical supplies continue to enter Gaza through established humanitarian channels".

Marks argued that if helping Palestinians was a genuine priority, activists would be demanding that Hamas disarm and stop embedding its military infrastructure among civilians. She also questioned the focus on Gaza to the exclusion of other conflicts.

"Where are these flotillas for Sudan, where mass atrocities and ethnic slaughter continue?" she asked. Referring to violence in Nigeria and repression in Iran, she described the silence as "deafening". Marks said the flotilla was "virtue signalling dressed up as activism", pointing out that Gaza had become "a fashionable cause" while other conflicts were ignored because they lacked the same political resonance.

Political analyst Terence Corrigan described the flotilla as "simultaneously of no real importance, and dangerous to Israel".

"It's performative," he said, "that's what it's intended to be." "Something like this does nothing of significance to assist the people of Gaza, but it provides the public across the world with a telegenic spectacle and pulls at their heartstrings."

Corrigan said the flotilla was designed to place Israel in a no-win position. "If they get through, it's a propaganda victory. If Israel intervenes, it can be spun as Israel gratuitously punishing Gaza's people." He framed the initiative as part of a broader struggle over perception and legitimacy. "This is meant to drive an emotive narrative. Remember that today, information is a weapon, potentially more powerful than those wielded by any military. It seems to me that this is Israel's greatest vulnerability: loss of support internationally."

Mandela claimed that even if only a portion of the planned number of vessels sailed, supporters would also attempt coordinated entry through neighbouring countries.



Mandla Mandela discusses the 2026 mission for the Global Sumud Flotilla

He repeated his grandfather's oft-quoted line that "our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinian people".

The Global Sumud Flotilla follows earlier attempts to sail toward Gaza. In April 2024, Mandela said he was part of a Freedom Flotilla initiative in Istanbul, Turkey, which "attempted to sail and never got to sail because our flag was withdrawn". He also referenced a "global march to Gaza" in which 4 000 activists travelled to Cairo, but were unable to reach the Rafah border crossing.

Previous flotilla attempts had been intercepted before reaching Gaza. In earlier missions, vessels were stopped by Israeli authorities and redirected, with participants returned to their countries of origin. Claims that some missions carried limited humanitarian cargo have been disputed, with critics arguing that they functioned primarily as political demonstrations. During one previous high-profile mission, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg was widely photographed after being given food by Israeli forces following interception, an image that circulated globally.

At the launch, Mandela also referred to participants being "intercepted and incarcerated with us" during earlier missions. Israeli authorities have previously stated that activists detained during interception operations were processed and deported in accordance with maritime law.

Israel has consistently maintained that its naval blockade of Gaza is a security measure designed to prevent weapons from reaching Hamas. Following previous flotilla attempts, the Israel Defense Forces stated that the blockade was lawful under international law and necessary to prevent the transfer of arms to a group committed to Israel's destruction.

Divestment, Sanctions movement and a former African National Congress member of Parliament. In recent years, he has attended the funeral of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, and visited Tehran in August 2022 to receive an Islamic Human Rights Award, where he met then-Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. During that visit, he expressed support for Palestine and spoke of strengthening ties between South Africa and Iran.

South African Zionist Federation National Spokesperson Rolene Marks described the flotilla as a predictable return to what she called "flotilla theatrics around Gaza".

She said the gestures were "designed far more for cameras than for civilians", noting that

King David awaits apology over antisemitic snub

>>Continued from page 1

leadership. Responsibility should not be simplistically laid at the feet of students, nor solely with the current headmistress."

The SAJBD has been unequivocal in its assessment of the incident.

"What occurred between Roedean School and King David High School constitutes antisemitism," said National Director Wendy Kahn.

"The tennis fixture didn't fall away because of prior school commitments or academic workshops. It fell away because, in the words of Roedean's principal, 'It's presenting itself as a Jewish day school issue'."

King David, she noted, is the largest Jewish day school in the country. Like other faith-based schools, its identity is shaped by the religious, cultural, and historical life of the community it serves.

"Excluding a Jewish day school from a sporting fixture on the basis of religion constitutes an antisemitic act and discrimination on the basis of religion," Kahn said.

"This is how hatred begins – with exclusion, othering, with the message that one's identity makes one unacceptable," she said. "Why are children being taught that their religion makes them unacceptable?"

The SAJBD also called on Roedean to issue an unconditional apology; to invite King David to the fixture that was denied; and to implement an educational programme to ensure that no pupil or institution is excluded on the basis of religious or cultural identity.

"We believe this awful incident can be turned into a learning opportunity for inclusion, fairness, and equal treatment," Kahn said.

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Gift of the Givers' antisemitic video 'medieval'

TALI FEINBERG

Prominent humanitarian organisation Gift of the Givers (GOTG) has targeted Jews and Christians in a TikTok video posted on its social media platforms on 4 February. This follows a long record of the organisation and its founder, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, spouting antisemitic tropes and peddling conspiracy theories about Jews and Israel.

GOTG shared a video made by a South African content creator, Dene Cohen, whose platform, *Delivered by Christ*, has more than 280 000 followers on TikTok and almost 19 000 subscribers on YouTube. In the video, Cohen said, "You cannot be a Christian and support Israel. To use Christianity to support these monsters [Israelis] ... you [Christian Zionists] are an abomination and a heresy to the church."

She stated that "modern-day Zionists" and Jews think Jesus is a "pervert" and a "sinner" who has been condemned to exist in a "pot of hot excrement", which she based on one obscure video. She repeated several times that this was what all Jews believe.

"This is what they're teaching their children in Israel," Cohen stated. "How can you tell me you support Israel when they are not the original Israelites from the Bible? You think these Jews walking around here are Israelites? You think these Jews aiding genocide are Israelites? Please do not support Israel. They are identity thieves."

"If I see any Christian supporting Israel, you are not a Christian," Cohen said. "This is why they are inviting pastors over to Israel. To indoctrinate them with rubbish, and then they lie to the world and say, 'We love our Christian brothers and sisters.' But in Israel, in their schools, in their synagogues, they teach that Jesus was a pervert."

GOTG shared the video with the caption, "You cannot be a Christian and support Israel." The organisation then asked followers to contribute money to its "interventions in Palestine". It also posted a comment on the post saying that GOTG "operates on a philosophy that aligns with justice, equity, and the provision of aid to all, regardless of race, religion, colour, class or political affiliation, focusing on servicing humanity with dignity and impartiality".

An outspoken Christian, Tim Flack, responded to the post saying, "As a Christian and as a South African, I find this video profoundly offensive. It borders on infringing on my rights as a citizen."

He noted that Cohen "doesn't merely express a political view. She declares Christians who support Israel to be an 'abomination' and attempts to police Christian faith. As Christians and as South Africans, we are entitled to ask, does Gift of the Givers stand by this message? Humanitarian work doesn't grant licence to attack religious communities or undermine the rights that protect us all."

On 26 November 2025, GOTG posted a notice on its social media platforms asking its followers to refrain from "hate speech, racism, discrimination, harassment, or any form of incitement to violence". This was after the *SA Jewish Report* wrote about how antisemitism is allowed to proliferate in the comments section of the organisation's online pages. The notice stated that "any individual found engaging in harmful or abusive behaviour will be removed and blocked".

However, GOTG continues to post content targeting South Africans and continues to allow its followers to post abusive and antisemitic comments on its social media platforms. Predictably, these came thick and fast in response to Cohen's video, and they weren't deleted.

David May, a research manager at United States (US) think tank, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, is the co-author of a recent paper titled "Hiding in Plain Sight: A Playbook for Combating Hamas in South Africa", which states that the US Treasury "should investigate the extent to which Gift of the Givers and its leadership, including [Imtiaz] Sooliman, may be acting or purporting to act on behalf of, directly or indirectly, Hamas".

In response to the video, May told the *SA Jewish Report* that GOTG had "frequently ventured into open antisemitism". It's "truly bizarre" that a group that proclaims to support justice, regardless of race, religion, colour, class, or political affiliation "would veer from its mission to promote a video calling for hatred of Jews", May said. If this is what Gift of the Givers feels comfortable promoting via social media, "their private beliefs about Jews are likely even more bigoted", he said.

Daniel Yakobi, the director of South African Friends of Israel, says GOTG is "hiding behind humanitarian causes. Its real mission is to dehumanise Christians and Jews alike. History shows that theological narratives that strip a people of their covenant, dignity, or purpose create permission for hatred. That isn't just dangerous for Jews, it poisons any society that claims to value coexistence."

We must therefore "challenge teachings that diminish others, and stand firmly for the full humanity of the Jewish people", says Yakobi. "Silence in the face of harmful ideas isn't neutrality, it is complicity."

Rolene Marks, spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), asks, "Since when does a humanitarian organisation get to dictate to Christians how they should practise their faith or who qualifies as a 'real' Christian?" Millions of Christians around the world, Marks says, "support Israel for deeply held spiritual, historical, and moral reasons. Attempting to police Christians while spreading lies about Jews is religious intolerance."

A "high-profile, government-connected" organisation amplifying this material "reflects a serious collapse of neutrality and integrity," Marks says.

This isn't the first time GOTG and its leadership "have crossed the line into extremist messaging, including rhetoric that mirrors Hamas propaganda", she says. Sharing content that "demonises Jews and attempts to drive a wedge between Jewish and Christian communities exposes a clear ideological agenda that raises legitimate questions about the organisation's credibility".

The claims in the video are "demonstrably false and deliberately inflammatory", concludes Marks. "Jewish historical and cultural continuity is supported by overwhelming historical, archaeological, and genetic evidence. Israel remains the only country in the Middle East where Christian communities are legally protected and free to practise their religion."

South African Jewish Board of Deputies consultant David Saks says GOTG provides a platform for propagating "religious bigotry of the most crass and inflammatory kind", more reminiscent of "medieval Europe than our own more enlightened times".

In addition, GOTG promotes the "fake Jews" theory, which "seeks to write the Jewish people out of history by denying them their identity and portraying them as historical frauds", Saks says.

Emeritus Professor of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, Milton Shain, agrees that it's "astonishing" that in the 21st century, GOTG platforms a video that "harks back to ugly medieval Christian-Jewish disputations. One would have thought that crude polemics of this sort had been relegated to the dustbin of history. They are unbecoming of our times."



Networking initiative makes Ugandan Jewish life sustainable

CLAUDIA GROSS

In central Uganda, a Jewish community is confronting a problem that shapes daily life more than theology. Observing Shabbat, keeping kosher, and marking Jewish festivals often collide with employment expectations in a country where Judaism is little known.

Out of these pressures has emerged a self-sustaining community programme that seeks to secure economic stability as a precondition for religious continuity.

For many Ugandan Jews, religious observance carries direct economic consequences. Saturday is a standard working day. Jewish festivals frequently fall midweek. There is little public understanding of Jewish practice, and few employers are willing to accommodate it. Community members say requests for time off are often met with reduced pay or outright refusal.

"You tell your boss you need Saturday off, and they say they will reduce your salary," says Orah Lawrence, a member of the Jewish community in central Uganda. "For Pesach or Sukkot, it's very hard to explain why you need days off in the middle of the week."

These pressures are compounded by structural limitations. There are no kosher supermarkets. Imported kosher goods, including wine for kiddush, are costly. While some community members produce bread, wine, clothing, or agricultural goods locally, many lack capital, equipment, or access to reliable markets.

Against this background, Hoshea Silver Walugembe Magezi, chairperson of the Uganda Jewish Wealth Creation Initiative (UJWeCI), began questioning the long-term reliance on donations and remittances. "Charity is important," he says. "But it should help someone stand up, not keep them seated."

Magezi's thinking took shape in mid-2024 during discussions within national Jewish WhatsApp groups. He describes conversations dominated by financial distress and appeals for external assistance, alongside resistance to farming and small business development. "People were talking as if survival depended on a smartphone and contacts abroad," he says. "But those are not sustainable foundations."

From those discussions emerged a proposal to build an economic support structure that would reduce dependence on donor funding and enable observant Jewish life. The result is UJWeCI, a national initiative with an eight-person directorate, designed to support community members at different economic stages.

The programme doesn't run businesses itself. Instead, it connects participants to professional resources. Some are linked to mentors who offer practical business guidance. Others receive assistance with legal registration, compliance, or market access. For producers who have goods but no buyers, the initiative works to establish local and international markets. "We aren't the mentors and we aren't the lawyers," Magezi says. "Our role is to connect people to the right expertise at the right time."

Magezi brings experience from outside the community. Trained in information technology, he is completing a Master of Business Administration

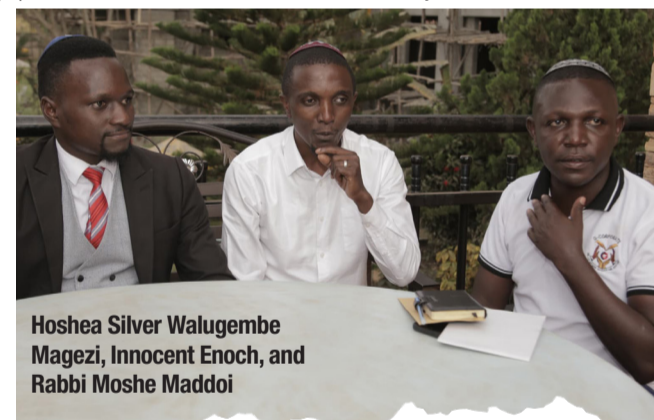
at Makerere University. During his undergraduate studies, he led innovation initiatives that helped students develop business ideas into functioning enterprises. He says those lessons informed the structure of the UJWeCI.

The initiative is also shaped by Uganda's Jewish history. Jewish life in the country dates back to the early 20th century, particularly among the Abayudaya community in the east. That community once had economic stability, but Judaism was banned under the regime of Idi Amin in the 1970s. Observance became illegal, and many Jews abandoned public practice or left the country. "The economic damage was severe," Magezi says. "Even after the ban ended, recovery was slow. That history still affects us."

Today, Uganda's Jewish population remains small and economically uneven. Magezi describes a wide gap between those who are financially secure and those living below the poverty line. The programme aims to narrow that gap by focusing on activities that can generate steady income while accommodating Jewish law.

Agriculture is a priority, as are small-scale manufacturing and services. The initiative also considers religious requirements, such as ensuring that clothing production complies with Jewish law or that food-related enterprises meet kosher standards.

Research has played a central role in shaping the programme. Since August 2024, the directorate has conducted feasibility studies and visited Jewish



communities across Uganda to assess needs and opportunities. The findings informed a framework that is now being presented to communities nationwide.

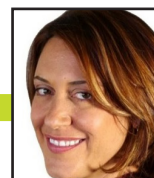
Though the programme originated in central Uganda, it is intended to operate countrywide. Committees include members from different regions, including Mbale, and consultations continue with local leaders. Recent presentations to national Jewish forums have generated interest from communities facing similar challenges.

For Lawrence, the link between economic stability and religious observance is clear. "If people are sustained properly, then we are able to keep Judaism," he says. "If not, it becomes difficult." The initiative is deliberately low-profile. There's no central fundraising campaign and no public figurehead. Magezi describes it as a quiet effort focused on systems rather than personalities.

Success, he says, will be measured by outcomes rather than visibility. "We want people to live as Jews without constant struggle," Lawrence says. "Not by asking for special treatment, but by standing on our own."

In a country where Judaism is often unfamiliar, the programme represents an attempt to secure religious continuity through economic agency. By addressing livelihoods first, the community hopes to create the conditions under which Jewish life can be sustained on its own terms.

Think you can beat the algorithm? Here's how.



PAULA SLRIER

OPINION

Most of us like to believe we are careful, discerning consumers of information. We read widely. We follow people we trust. We check sources. We tell ourselves we're harder to fool than "other people". We think we think for ourselves. But here's the uncomfortable part: mostly, we don't.

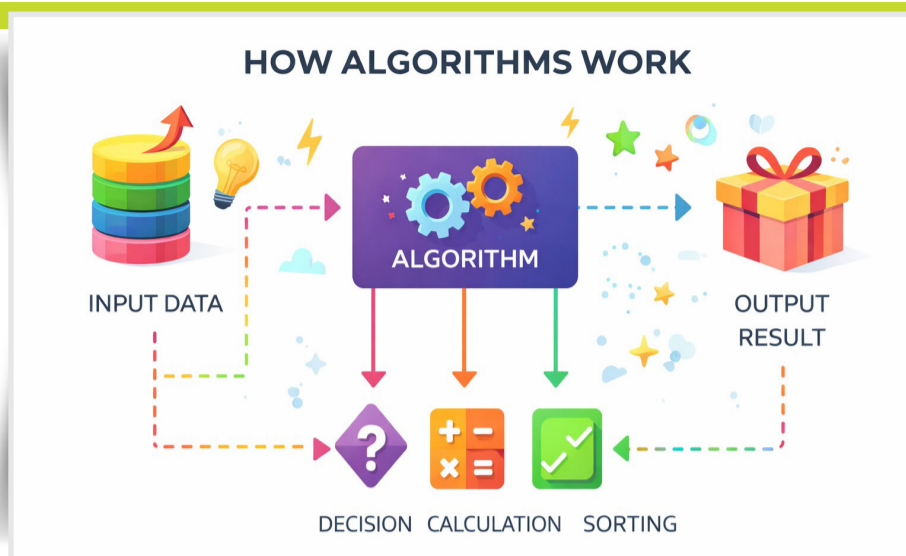
Not because we're stupid or careless, but because the information environment we live in no longer works the way we assume it does.

The algorithm doesn't tell us what to think. It decides what we see, what we don't, and how often we see it, until certain conclusions begin to feel like our own. That isn't a conspiracy theory. It's the business model.

Algorithms aren't neutral librarians. They are optimisation machines. Their job is simple: to keep you engaged. And what keeps people engaged isn't calm explanation or moral complexity. It's emotion. Outrage. Fear. Vindication. The feeling of being absolutely right. If something makes you angry, you share it. If it makes you feel validated, you share it. If it confirms what you already believe, you linger. The algorithm notices – and gives you more of the same. Over time, this creates an illusion of choice: the sense that you've arrived at your worldview through independent thought, when in reality, your information diet has been heavily curated. You're not seeing everything. You're seeing what keeps you reacting.

This matters everywhere. But it matters especially when it comes to Israel and Hamas. Since 7 October 2023, many Jews have asked the same question in disbelief: how can people possibly see this so differently? How can Hamas be minimised, excused, or erased from the story? How can Israel be discussed only as a concept – power, occupation, aggression – without context, history, or human cost? The instinctive answer is often bad faith. Or blind hatred. Sometimes that's true. But very often, something simpler – and more unsettling – is at work. People aren't seeing the same inputs.

Someone scrolling through one feed sees footage of Israeli families shattered by terror, rockets fired from civilian areas, hostages dragged into Gaza. Someone else sees a steady stream of



stop it from working on us. Emotion still does what emotion does.

What does help is a shift in posture. Instead of asking only "Is this true," a better first question is, "Why am I seeing this now?"

Instead of asking, "How can they not understand?" a more useful question is, "What information environment are they living in?"

This doesn't resolve political disagreement. It doesn't magically persuade people acting in bad faith. But it does something quieter and more important: it restores humility. And with humility comes resilience.

Resilience, in this context, doesn't mean being tougher or louder. It means resisting constant emotional hijacking. It means slowing down

civilian suffering in Gaza, stripped of context, stripped of Hamas, framed emotionally and repeatedly until outrage feels inevitable. Both believe they are "well informed". Both feel morally certain. Both feel the other side is unreachable. This is what happens when algorithms reward certainty and punishment of doubt. Nuance performs badly. Complexity travels slowly. Outrage spreads fast. The result isn't just disagreement – it's fragmentation. A breakdown in shared reality. Facts bounce off emotional certainty. Corrections feel like attacks. Explanation sounds like justification. Silence is interpreted as guilt. And crucially, none of us are immune.

The danger isn't that people believe false things. It's that we become deeply confident about what feels true to us without realising how narrow and emotionally engineered our information stream has become. For Jewish communities – including here in South Africa – this creates a double pressure. On the one side, there is a genuine sense of being besieged by hostile or distorted narratives. On the other, a temptation to retreat into informational safe spaces that feel comforting and affirming. Neither response is wrong. But neither restores control. Because simply knowing that algorithms exist doesn't neutralise their power. Being aware that outrage spreads doesn't

before sharing. Reading past the headline. Not letting the most extreme content set the emotional temperature of your day. It means deliberately widening your inputs – even when that's uncomfortable. And recognising when you're being pushed to react rather than think. Because when algorithms decide what rises to the top of our feeds, they don't just influence opinions. They shape emotional weather: what feels urgent, what feels threatening, what feels obvious. Once emotion is primed, reason often follows obediently behind.

The real challenge for communities that value education, debate, and moral clarity isn't simply to "counter misinformation". It's to rebuild the habit of independent judgement in an environment designed to erode it. That takes discipline. It takes restraint. And it starts with acknowledging something difficult: none of us are as autonomous in our thinking as we would like to believe. In an age of engineered perception, discernment isn't a personality trait. It's a practice – one that has to be actively defended.

• Paula Slrier is a veteran journalist and foreign correspondent who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa and Europe. She writes on media, geopolitics and information warfare.



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South African Jewish Report

A sorry tale

Sorry seems to be the hardest word, as Elton John sang in the song of that name. It's so true, because saying sorry requires humility, vulnerability, and a willingness to accept responsibility for having done something wrong.

This week, we have witnessed Roede School's leadership making excuses, blatantly lying, and covering up the fact that it chose not to play King David's top girls' teams in tennis because it didn't want to play against a Jewish school. But it went as far as letting the King David High School teams come to the school in expectation of playing, only to be turned away.

The whole saga just leaves a really bad taste in our mouth. Now, we understand that antisemitism exists, but if that's who you are, own up to it and deal with what comes your way. Don't make up stories. Don't hire a public relations company to make what you did sound and look better, ignoring the facts. Own it or simply apologise, because you know it was wrong.

Either way, be true to yourselves, especially when you are a school that was once built on strong morals and ethics. But even more important is the fact that as an educational institution, you are setting an example to young, inquiring minds who will take what you – the adults and those meant to be role models setting the standards for pupils – do and internalise it into their lives and the way they behave in future.

So, if you set an example that racism of any kind is acceptable, that's what you are teaching your children. If you give your children the power to say, "I won't play with those children because they are different" and get away with it, then you are teaching your children that prejudice and racism is acceptable in this world.

I believe that goes against everything we want our children to learn and become. I, for one, believe in debate and discussion, and I want my children to challenge norms. I want them to question. That's what we are taught as Jews. We question. We don't just accept everything.

However, I don't accept lying, cheating, and any form of racism. And an educational institution in this country, which understands the devastating reality of racism, should know better.

If I was a parent at a school where racism was acceptable from either the school itself, the pupils, or the parents, I would not want my children educated there. It's simple: teach children that racism or othering of people is acceptable, and you are breeding a society of racists.

Like many who have been interested in this story, I keep going back to the conversation with Lorraine Srage, in which the principal of Roede admitted that she was under pressure from the parent body not to play against a Jewish school. However, it was what she said next that was most telling. "At the moment," she said, "it's presenting as a Jewish day school issue", and she went on to say that it could get bigger than that.

That's the reality. Racism begets racism. What starts out as a "Jewish issue" becomes something far bigger than that. Racism cannot be allowed to fester in our schools. Surely we have learnt our lesson, or is racism against Jews acceptable?

This is, as the Roede principal herself clearly understood in the discussion, how hatred begins. Exclude one person/group/community with the message that their identity makes them unacceptable, and you start a racial epidemic that will grow. It might spread to other schools, or it might just grow wings and include people of mixed race, people of different genders, and so on ...

This is what Roede is teaching its pupils by allowing for the exclusion of King David tennis players.

The reality is that instead of denying the undeniable, rather than making up alternative stories to fit, Roede simply needs to apologise publicly. If it thought that it had done the right thing, it wouldn't have needed to make up stories. It would have told the truth. It wouldn't have needed to obfuscate. It would have called its opposition to Jews what it is.

But it didn't, and still hasn't accepted responsibility.

I know when I've done something I'm not proud of and know is wrong, there are always two options. In all honesty, apology is hard. I get it. It's never easy to eat humble pie and admit for whatever reason, that I was wrong.

There's always the bad option of blaming someone else or lying. The best option is always to tell the truth and own up to what we did – right or wrong. Honesty is the best policy!

Perhaps it's true that nobody wants to admit publicly to have made an antisemitic decision. However, the truth has a way of coming out. And no matter how tough it is to apologise, it's always the better option. Own up to it, apologise, take the flack or punishment that comes with it, and move forward.

As educators, teaching your children to take responsibility for what they have done wrong is the best lesson you can teach. By doing that, you build leaders, people who can be vulnerable and honest. You create a better South Africa, and become better educators in the process.

The alternative is too awful to contemplate. I really hope Roede recognises this, does the right thing, and we can all put this ugly experience behind us and move on to playing a game of equality tennis.

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Joburg needs a force of nature. We have it.

OPINION

DANIEL SCHAY



Johannesburg has been here before. Hopeful moments. Promising candidates. Talk of change. And then coalition chaos, institutional sabotage, and a slow slide back into dysfunction. So, when people ask why this time is different, their scepticism is understandable.

But this time really is different. And not for the reasons the analysts are talking about.

Ghost mayors

A colleague of mine recently told me a story that explains why. He was sitting in a restaurant in Linksfield, having lunch with his wife. He glanced across the room, and noticed someone familiar. A former mayor of Johannesburg. Sitting quietly. No reaction from the room. No acknowledgement. No-one even noticing.

Then, he realised who the former mayor was sitting with. Another former mayor of Johannesburg.

Two people who had held the highest office in our economic heartland, sitting in a packed restaurant, completely anonymous. No recognition. No engagement. No sense that anyone even knew – or cared – who they were. They were ghosts in the city they used to run.

This anonymity wasn't peaceful; it was diagnostic. It tells you everything about the nature of their tenure. These were the puppet mayors of the coalition era – minority party proxies installed to facilitate looting, not leadership. They hadn't arrested the decline; they had accelerated it. They had signed the deals that broke the city, yet they had left no footprint on its soul. They were safe to eat in peace because, to the residents of Johannesburg, they were never truly in charge. They were just the guys holding the seat warm while the city was stripped bare.

Force of nature

Now contrast that with what I experienced walking through Kensington with Helen Zille last week.



We were walking up a road that is physically falling apart – gaping pits, sewage streams, the decay residents have learned to accept because they've been given no alternative. And people were sticking their heads out of car windows shouting, "Viva DA!" Residents came out of their houses just to see her. To talk to her. To engage. There was no rally. No stage. No introduction. We weren't selling anything. We were just walking.

The same thing played out in Dobsonville, Soweto – hardly traditional Democratic Alliance turf. The plan was a simple walk through a mall. Zille didn't make it past the first few metres. She was swamped. People wanted photos. They wanted to talk. One photographer stopped a paid family shoot just to photograph her instead.

That isn't choreography. It isn't branding. It's instinct. And it tells you the most important thing about this election: we are moving from people who hold office to a person who carries authority.

Governing and winning aren't the same skill. Johannesburg has had mayors who could technically read a council agenda but couldn't make a resident feel heard. Zille stops traffic. That matters. It matters because to fix a city this broken, you need more than a manager. You need a mandate. You need a leader who can walk into a room, or a street, and command the space. The residents of Soweto and Kensington weren't reacting to a politician; they were reacting to the possibility that someone finally had the strength to stop the rot.

Bureaucratic wall and the culture of "no"

There's another reason this difference matters, and it's one we don't talk about enough. Johannesburg suffers from institutional sabotage. Previous mayors, even well-intentioned ones, were often outmanoeuvred by captured officials who knew how to kick the can down the road.

There's a "deep state" of inertia in this city. It's a culture of malicious compliance where officials nod at political instructions, agree to the timeline, and then bury the execution in red tape. They know how to reword reports to ensure nothing happens. They know how to "send it back for signature" until the politician loses interest or loses office. They rely on their political heads being too busy, too distracted, or too inexperienced to check the fine print.

That doesn't work on Helen Zille.

She lives and breathes the fine print. She reads past the bureaucratic language. She understands incentives. She recognises a delay tactic for what it is. You cannot slow-walk Zille. You cannot hide the file. She knows the Municipal Systems Act as well as they do. She knows the disciplinary codes better than they do.

Her autobiography is titled *Not Without a Fight*. That isn't just a title; it's a governance style. In a city where dysfunction thrives on ambiguity and avoidance, having a mayor who cannot be fooled is a structural reform in itself. She transforms the mayoralty from a ceremonial oversight role into an executive command post.

Escaping the coalition trap

We also need to be honest about the trauma of the past few years. The city has been paralysed not just by corruption, but by the fragility of its politics. We have lived through the era of the "one-seat kingmaker", where tiny parties with no mandate hold the entire city hostage, demanding positions and perks in exchange for passing a budget.

This instability trickles down. Why would an official sign a controversial contract or take a tough stance on corruption if the mayor might change next week? Why would an investor put money into the CBD if the coalition government is one argument away from collapse?

Zille changes the calculus. This campaign isn't aiming for a fragile 50% plus one coalition of chaos. It's aiming for a stable majority or a dominant coalition anchor. Governing not by permission, but by mandate. A strong mayor, backed by a strong council, changes the psychology of the entire city. It signals to officials, investors, and residents that the direction is set for five years, not five minutes.

The mathematics of belief

This election is also far more straightforward than people think. There's a persistent myth that the DA needs massive African National Congress (ANC) voter defections to win Johannesburg. It doesn't.

The DA doesn't need ANC voters to turn out in their millions and vote blue. It needs its own voters – the traditional DA base that has drifted into apathy, emigration, or semigration – to simply come back. That alone wins the election.

The "stay-away vote" is the biggest political party in the suburbs. These are people who checked out because they stopped believing that voting changed anything. They stopped believing that the city was salvageable.

But the fact that polling shows that ANC voters are increasingly comfortable with Zille? That's the upside. That's the margin. But the core requirement is simpler: belief.

It requires that the residents who have given up look at this moment and realise that this is the last, best chance to turn the ship around.

The choice

You don't have to like Zille. You don't have to like the DA. You don't have to agree with every tweet or every statement ever made. This election is not a popularity contest. It's a rescue mission.

It's a question of whether you believe in Johannesburg. If you believe this city can work. If you believe it deserves competent, decisive leadership. If you believe it should be governed with confidence rather than managed decline.

We don't need another mayor who can eat lunch anonymously in Linksfield while the city burns. We don't need another nice person who gets rolled by the unions and the "tenderpreneurs". We don't need another coalition manager who spends more time negotiating with minor parties than fixing potholes.

We need a mayor who can't walk down a street in Soweto without being stopped by residents who know that she is the only one who will actually get the job done. We need a force of nature.

That's the difference. And that's why this time, it works.

• Daniel Schay is a member of the city council of Johannesburg, serving as the DA Shadow MMC of Development Planning and Ward Councillor for Ward 72.

Herzog's visit brings unity, fury, and antisemitism reckoning



DR VIC ALHADEFF

OPINION

To borrow the opening line of Charles Dickens' historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, this week has been both the best of times and the worst of times for Australia's Jewish community.

The paramount issue for the community this week has been the four-day visit of Israeli President Isaac Herzog and his wife, Michal. It brought out thousands of Jews to hear him, salute him, stand with him, and acknowledge his support – headlined by an extraordinary turn-out of 7 000 people at an event in Sydney on 9 February. But it also brought out thousands of members of the wider community who participated in angry street protests and marches in cities across the country, with thousands of police officers in attendance, violence breaking out in various places, and multiple arrests made as protesters defied the law.

It elicited unsuccessful 11th-hour court actions to have Herzog arrested as soon as he set foot in Australia and to have restrictions on public protests overturned, as well as full-page newspaper advertisements by a miniscule but stridently anti-Zionist Jewish group, describing Herzog as “an alleged war criminal” and shouting “Jews say no!” Speakers at protest rallies described the president variously as a “war criminal”; “inciter of genocide”; “fascist”; “terrorist”; and “murderer”.

Random newspaper headlines this week included, “I'm Jewish – but I take no comfort from Herzog being here”; “‘Genocide’ attacks on Herzog expose accusers' hypocrisy”;

“Protests beg question if Herzog's visit was wise”; “Protesters defy police”; and “Herzog visit turns ugly”.

Invited to Australia by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in the wake of the worst terrorist attack in Australian history – the massacre of 15 people celebrating the first night of Chanukah on

14 December 2025 – Herzog and his entourage arrived in Sydney on Monday, 9 February, and headed almost immediately to Bondi Beach, the site of the shootings. Herzog made it clear that his visit was intended to bring relations between Australia and Israel “back on track”.



President Isaac and Michal Herzog pay their respects to those who fell in the Bondi Beach massacre

With police helicopters buzzing overhead, snipers visible on nearby buildings, and massive security in attendance, Herzog laid a wreath and two stones at the Bondi Pavilion, brought from Jerusalem. And standing metres from where two terrorists killed 15 people and wounded 40 more, he met the family members of some of those who were directly impacted by the tragedy.

“One thing has become clear,” he said. “Hatred that starts with the Jews never ends with the Jews. This is why the rise in antisemitism around the world is a global emergency, and we must all act to fight it.”

While thousands of protesters took to the streets in cities across the nation, yelling “Globalise the intifada” and “From the river to the sea”, the president addressed 7 000 members of the Sydney Jewish community at a particularly moving event,

emphasising that just as Australian Jews had rushed to support Israel in the wake of the massacre of 7 October 2023, it was singularly appropriate that he did the same in the wake of the Bondi massacre.

Pointing out that he and Michal, had visited more than 1 500 families impacted by 7 October, he said he had to “look them in the eye”. Similarly, they had come to Australia “to show up” for the Australian Jewish community in its trauma.

Expressing frustration that more wasn't done to combat antisemitism in Australia in the two years following 7 October, he said: “Your Jewish identities became targets in Australia, just as you watched a massacre unfold in Israel.

“The hatred that triggered the shooting in Bondi is the very same age-old plague of antisemitism endured by our parents and grandparents. The horrors in Israel empowered jihadi extremism to rear its ugly head here, the country that welcomed thousands and thousands of survivors of the Holocaust, refugees of pogroms, Jews re-emerging behind the Iron Curtain. This is what it means to globalise the intifada.

“We all recall the sickening chants outside the Opera House; the firebombing of Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne; the boycotts and threats; the colleagues who turned their backs on their Jewish and Israeli associates; the attacks on college campuses; the escalating rhetoric and shrieking silence. That was the prelude to Bondi,” Herzog said.

Speaking after Herzog, New South Wales Premier Chris Minns said, “The murderous ideology of antisemitism is a test of every society, and it's one that weighs heavily on me. We have to be able to say openly and clearly and without excuse or reservation that we failed that national test of human decency on 14 December at Bondi. Things must change in our state and our country.”

Herzog is the third Israeli head of state to visit Australia, in the wake of his father, President Chaim Herzog, 40 years ago, and President Reuven Rivlin.

• South African expat, Dr Vic Alhadeff was editor of a Jewish newspaper in South Africa before emigrating to Australia, where he became chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

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A global journey to trace the Litvak story

CLAUDIA GROSS

What connects a former judge in Johannesburg; a business leader in Latin America; and an artist in Israel, all in their 80s? According to Lithuanian filmmaker Kęstas Pikūnas, the answer lies in a shared heritage shaped by learning, resilience, and a distinct way of seeing the world.

His upcoming documentary series, *Origins*, sets out to trace that heritage through the lives of 100 Litvaks living across the globe.

Pikūnas has spent nearly a decade immersed in the history of Lithuanian Jewry. About five or six years ago, he published a book on the Litvaks, which was previously covered by the *SA Jewish Report*. "After the book was printed and published, I decided that it covered only a small percentage of what I wanted to talk about," he said. The documentary grew out of that realisation.

Filming for *Origins* has taken place over almost three years and entirely outside Lithuania. Pikūnas and his non-Jewish production team have met 92 people so far, and expect to complete filming with 100 participants by the end of their South African leg. The subjects live across five continents, including Latin America, the United States, much of Europe, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Israel, and South Africa.

South Africa occupies a distinctive place in the project. Pikūnas said that wherever the team filmed, they encountered Jews with South African roots. "South Africa will be quite an important part of this story," he said, pointing out that the country became one of the final filming destinations after earlier plans were delayed. He described the local community as exceptional, and said the team was happy that South Africa formed the closing chapter of production.

Rather than focusing on institutions or historical chronology, *Origins* centres on people. The documentary brings together Litvaks from fields including business, science, culture, the arts, and education. A central aim is to record the voices of the so-called "silent generation". These are men and women now in their 80s and 90s whose stories are at risk of being lost. While the average age of participants is about 70, many are significantly older.

The project will eventually take several forms. The core is a five-episode documentary series, supported by 100 short films dedicated to each individual participant. Photography also plays a major role. A documentary photographer has travelled with the team from the outset, producing digital and film photo essays as well as large format portraits of every subject. By the end of filming, the team will have accumulated close to 500 hours of footage.

Selecting participants was an intensive process. Pikūnas described it as like assembling a puzzle. In the early stages, there was scepticism that such an ambitious project could even begin, let alone be completed. Over time, research, personal outreach, and recommendations helped shape the final group. In South Africa, community member Howard Sackstein played a key role in making introductions. Once the team had interviewed 20 or 30 people, word of mouth became the primary source of new participants.

Pikūnas emphasised that the project was entirely independent. "This documentary and all of our work is independent. It's not commissioned by a government or any institution. This is solely driven by ourselves as a team," he said. What began as a passion project has remained so throughout its development, something he regards as



Photo: Tadas Kazakevičius

Kęstas Pikūnas setting up a shot

essential to its integrity.

Through years of conversations, patterns began to emerge. Pikūnas said one of the most striking aspects was identifying what connects Litvaks across geography and profession. He spoke about shared values and what some describe as a Litvak way of

life. Themes that recur throughout the series include identity, resilience, and creativity.

While Lithuania is central to the story, *Origins* doesn't confine itself to modern borders. Pikūnas said the documentary focuses on the broader Pale of Settlement, the area where Lithuanian Jews lived

historically. Many participants trace their ancestry to regions now part of Latvia, Poland, or Belarus, yet share a common cultural heritage.

However, the process was not without challenges. Pikūnas acknowledged that some people were initially wary of a non-Jewish team documenting Jewish lives, occasionally questioning whether the project was commissioned by a government or external body. More practically, arranging in-depth interviews proved demanding. The team's approach avoids formal question-and-answer formats, instead prioritising extended conversations that can last more than three hours.

"We prefer to spend time with the person. We just have a conversation," Pikūnas said. He said that few people feel immediately comfortable when a group arrives with cameras and equipment, and building trust was essential. The logistical demands were also considerable, with four people travelling continuously, managing costs, equipment, accommodation, and tight schedules.

Beyond logistics, the emotional weight of

the stories required care. The documentary deals with deeply personal and often sensitive experiences, making continuity and cohesion within the team vital. Pikūnas described the challenge of keeping the process moving as the most difficult aspect, but also the most rewarding. Working together from day one created a shared understanding of purpose.

As *Origins* enters post production, Pikūnas said the editing phase was the most complex stage of all. The task now is to shape hundreds of hours of material into a coherent narrative that honours each individual story while revealing the larger patterns that connect them.

For South African audiences, the documentary offers recognition and reflection. It situates local Litvak stories within a global context, showing how a shared heritage has taken root in diverse environments while retaining a distinctive character. Through 100 lives, *Origins* seeks to preserve a collective memory before it fades, capturing voices that still have much to teach.

Duo get into the spirit of making SA's only kosher gin

LEE TANKLE

What began as an engineering experiment for two young chemical engineers has grown into one of Johannesburg's most distinctive craft distilleries that is now officially producing the only locally made kosher gin.

Gabriel Fine and Aaron Pieterse, both 25, made it happen because of their curiosity about how to create tasty spirits. And it was extremely important to them, especially Fine, to get their kosher certification, which they received this week. Fine wanted to ensure that his brand was accessible to his community.

"We didn't have the capital to start this thing on our own," said Fine. "To the people supporting us, it was important for it to be kosher. I'm Jewish. Aaron's not, although he has been connected to much of the community for some time. And so, being able to serve my community was important. A lot of my family network is Jewish and couldn't enjoy the products because they weren't kosher. We also found out that there aren't any kosher gins made in South Africa, so that was exciting for us, an exciting gap and opportunity. It was an easy decision."

Getting the product certified by the Beth Din was a lengthy process because they had to ensure that every single ingredient that went into the gin is kosher.

Their company, Primal Spirits, is based at Victoria Yards in Lorentzville, Johannesburg, where they have a full grain-to-glass operation.

The duo applied precision, problem-solving, and creativity to build a distillery rooted in local ingredients and the community. As Primal continues to gain traction, Fine reflects on the unlikely journey from tinkering to enterprise, and on the values that shaped it along the way.

Fine and Pieterse first met in 2019 in the first year of their chemical engineering degree at the University of Cape Town, and have been best friends ever since. When they took a class in second year about distilling, it sparked an idea that it could be something they could pursue.

"I don't know if it was all the partying we were doing at the time or actually just the dream, but we walked out of that block of lectures on distillation and said that one day, we would have to own a distillery or an alcohol brand," said Pieterse.

After both graduated and started their careers, with Pieterse working for Sasol and Fine going to London to pursue his Master's degree, the idea of being able to work together never fully went away. It was early last year that the dream started to become a reality when the previous owners of Primal put the distillery up for sale.

"I think part of the feeling was that Aaron was at Sasol, which is hard enough being stuck in Secunda in a plant. I was in London, which I loved, but it's also hard, feeling homesick, and having your loved ones at home," said Fine, "And then this opportunity presented itself, which we had both considered, but didn't think was possible. So we decided to give it a go. It was impromptu, a case of 'if not now, then when'. You know, we're young."

And so, in January 2025, Fine returned to Johannesburg, and Pieterse left his corporate job at Sasol to take over Primal Spirits Distillery, turning their shared interest in distillation into a full-time venture.

Their engineering background is a major asset to the business as they are able to understand the fermentation and distillation process on a deeper level.

"The first thing we're trained to do is optimise. So we took over Primal in April last year, but Primal has actually been around since 2019. So, there was already infrastructure in place and recipes. After the first three to four months, we had already made drastic changes," said Pieterse.

Said Fine, "Approaching distillation has been interesting. Our brand is a grain-to-glass brand. A lot of gin manufacturers will buy alcohol and then distil it into gin. We start with grain. So, actually, 50% of our process isn't distilling, it's fermenting. A lot of our optimisation and work has been on that side because

it's expensive, but it makes for a great product. The distilling is harder to tweak because the principle is constant. But making sure that as we tweak our recipes, our product stays as good as possible, has probably been our biggest focus."

"What set us apart was being able to control every step of the process – truly from grain to glass," said Pieterse.

"From fermentation to distillation, there are multiple stages that all require care and precision. It drew heavily on what we had studied at university, particularly in chemical engineering and biotechnology, and validated our ability to build something entirely from scratch."

Pieterse is thrilled with the kosher certification as it ensures that a certain market will be able to appreciate their product. "We spend a lot of time and effort in doing all of these wonderful things and being able to showcase it to people or gain interest from it is certainly something that we've been excited to do," he said.

Though Primal focuses on gin, the team has plans to expand into other spirits, including vodka and tequila. "We've already developed a vodka, although it's not on shelves yet, and tequila definitely interests us," said Fine. "Gin wasn't the original plan, but it's incredibly competitive and challenging, which appealed to us as engineers. Working with botanicals and ethanol has given us a deep understanding of how alcohol behaves, and it's been a great spirit to learn through."



Gabriel Fine and Aaron Pieterse at their distillery

Letters

TU B'SHVAT ABOUT SEEING THE WOOD FOR THE TREES

Howard Feldman's tongue-in-cheek dismissal of Tu B'Shvat as "the least Jewish of all the festivals" (*SA Jewish Report*, 5 February 2026) was an amusing read – particularly his claim that it's "as Jewish as Greta Thunberg isn't".

Technically, he's right that it doesn't come with cheesecake like Shavuot; suffering like Yom Kippur; or existential threats to Jewish existence like Pesach. But to suggest that Tu B'Shvat lacks deep roots in Jewish life is to ignore centuries of Jewish legal, spiritual, and cultural tradition.

Tu B'Shvat originated in the Mishnah as the original Jewish tax year-end, the day dedicated to calculating tithes, produce, and who owes what to whom. If anything screams "authentically Jewish", it's a festival built around accounting.

By the 16th century, the kabbalists of Safed had developed the Tu B'Shvat seder, a mystical ritual with its own haggadah, four cups of wine, and symbolic fruits representing different spiritual worlds. The seder became a tool for *tikkun* (spiritual repair) using the act of eating fruit in a specific order to elevate the soul and draw closer to the divine. Only the Jewish people could take a tax deadline

and turn it into a catered spiritual experience, even if they went a little overboard on the dried fruit.

Then came modern Zionism, which reinvented Tu B'Shvat yet again as a celebration of environmental stewardship and national renewal. The festival became about literally rebuilding the land of Israel, tree by tree, investing in a future we might never see, planting saplings for generations yet to come.

At the Jewish National Fund (JNF), we're proud to be custodians of that heritage, not just because we went big for Tu B'Shvat this year with our family day market and school seed-collection campaign, but because this festival embodies something essential about the Jewish spirit: the audacity to believe in tomorrow.

Tu B'Shvat may not come with a shofar, a megillah, or even a good kugel, but it has something far more powerful: the chance to build instead of *kvetch*.

And if planting trees, investing in the future, and doing *tikkun olam* isn't the most Jewish response, then what is? – Michael Kransdorff, JNF chairperson, Johannesburg

Wrong office, right note, cantor strikes again

LEE TANKLE

Many people wouldn't think that being at the wrong licensing department or on the wrong flight was the ideal location for an operatic performance. However, for Johannesburg *chazan* (cantor) and singer Adam Davis, it was the ideal place.



Adam Davis at Home Affairs

In a video posted by Davis to his Facebook account on 23 January and later shared to Good Things Guy, he walked into the wrong licensing department to collect his licence. Upon realising that he was in the wrong place, he looked around at the frustrated faces around him, and thought it would be the best time to bring some entertainment to their day.

"I saw a lot of people sitting on metal seats, and everyone seemed a bit bored. I felt the tension, and I knew that, in a moment, I

could paint some sort of joy and fun," he said.

Davis said very little thought went into the performance, and he really didn't plan it, but as soon as he set his mind to it, he just started to sing to everyone in the room.

"It's absolutely awesome because it's such a crazy thing to do. You know, who am I to impose on everyone's day-to-day life?" he said. "But it's that kind of faith that I know with no uncertainty that it's going to be cool. Initially, people looked at me when I said I was going to sing like I was nuts, and then, when they saw that, thank G-d, I've got a trained voice, they were open to it. They will catch up with each other and go back and tell their friends and family. It will add something special to their day."

After performing at the licensing department, Davis realised that he was a "serial spontaneous performer" as it wasn't the first time that he had burst into operatic song in a space filled with frustrated people. In fact, on a FlySafair flight to Gqeberha last year, Davis sang a song of apology after he had to get off the plane as a panic attack came on.

"I told them I had to get off the flight, and they said I couldn't, and I said I have panic attacks, I need to get off," he said. "Eventually, they let me off, and they had to reverse the whole plane and go refuel, and I felt terrible about it and once again, I guess I saw everyone's frustration. I would have been frustrated too."

He said he felt so apologetic that he was causing the delay, he got up and said, "I'm sorry that I'm causing this, and to say thank you or sorry, I'm going to sing you a song."

When he stopped singing, the plane started to applaud, except for one individual. "There was only one guy who had his fingers in his ears as I was singing, but the rest of the flight was appreciative, they clapped and everything. It was fun."

Davis has loved singing since he was a teenager, and finds any way to sing in daily life, whether as the *chazan* at different shuls around Johannesburg or in the most random places.

In 2016, Davis first went viral after he started singing at the Mugg & Bean in Norwood Mall after seeing the frustration and boredom of people waiting for their food.

He does it because he loves music and wants to share its joy with those around him. "Music is central, it always has been," he said. "I always see everything else as secondary, even though I'm involved in business and software development. But it's always been my happy place. I know I can make the most contribution to society through music."

"I love the aspect of uplifting people," Davis said. "I mean, sure, you can just sing along, or you can really connect with the words and watch your *davening* and look at people and smile at them and get them into it. It's a way of connection and upliftment, and for me, you know, I don't like just sitting in the crowd at shul. Of course, the *davening* is nice, but I'm happiest when leading the service."

Former Idols star promises church's support for Israel

LEE TANKLE

He was the first winner of Idols SA and became a local star, but today Pastor Heinz Winckler is outspoken about his commitment to the state of Israel and the fight against antisemitism.

Winckler was in Israel from 2 to 6 February representing local voices at the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) Envision Conference.

The ICEJ Envision Conference is an annual Christian leadership event hosted by the ICEJ, a Jerusalem-based Christian Zionist organisation that supports Israel and connects Christians worldwide with the people and country.

Winckler told the *SA Jewish Report* that since the 7 October 2023 massacre, he and his church, the Lovekey Church in Somerset West, have been praying every week for the people of Israel and those who are affected by antisemitism. So, when he was invited to attend this year's conference in February, he jumped at the chance.

"I believed it would be an opportunity for me to meet likeminded people, leaders, and scholars who also stand firmly about what the scriptures say about Israel, about the relationship between the Christian church and Israel," Winckler said. "And it was great to see that the things that I already believed and understood to be true were confirmed. The fact that different scholars, theologians, and church leaders from around the world all stood behind the truth was encouraging and inspiring."

The theme of this year's conference was "Israel and Your Church", which focused on understanding the relationship between the Christian church and Israel. "To me, this means that it's important to understand that G-d has a plan for the nation of Israel and the Jewish people, and he has a plan for his church, and those plans will, in the end, come together," Winckler said.

The conference brought together seasoned Christian pastors from Israel and around the world to offer guidance for churches and communities navigating times of turmoil and crisis, while also providing in-depth briefings from Israeli experts on the country's security and political landscape.

Winckler and other participants engaged with senior Israeli officials at the Knesset and Foreign Ministry, toured northern and southern border areas most affected by the war, and met Israelis whose lives have been directly impacted by the conflict. One of the issues they discussed, Winckler said, was antisemitism within the church, and that when members of the church said they stood with Israel, there was an element of what he called "healthy Zionism".

"It's not that we agree with every decision the [Israeli] government makes, it's not about that. It's about Israel, which G-d decided was his nation, and the Jewish people around the world, and that G-d made a sovereign decision that these are my people. So, it's super-problematic for people who call themselves Christians to have an antisemitic attitude, and what makes it worse is that people are indoctrinated from a very young age to believe that."

He said he resonated with Ramin Parsa, an Iranian-born Christian pastor and

evangelist who previously lived as a Muslim and converted to Christianity after hearing the gospel, who now lives in Israel.

He was astonished to hear Parsa talk about the extent of the indoctrination that occurs in Iran and many other Muslim nations, where children are taught in school to hate Jews, Israel, and America. "They are taught that if you kill a Jew, you will be rewarded. You are a hero," Winckler said.

"This is just scary. But the same extreme spirit exists in some people who hate Jews for being Jewish. And this is a massive problem. I sat there in sad disbelief hearing what was happening in the world and thinking that this shouldn't be happening in the church."

One of the most pivotal parts of the conference was a trip south to Kibbutz Be'eri and the site of the Nova festival.

"It was tough emotionally to see and try to imagine what it must have been like," he said. "To see the destruction is overwhelming. It was moving to see the faces of all 364 people who died on that day, and how they have planted trees to represent each life. It's heart-wrenching. When you hear people's testimonies and stories about the level of evil perpetuated on that day, on top of the murders, you can't imagine that human beings can do that to other human beings. The level of evil and hatred that it must take for that to happen is just overwhelming."



Pastor Heinz Winckler at the site of the Nova festival attack

Though it was difficult to observe the damage done on that day, he believes it was important to do so, so that he could tell people "because I know that part of the narrative globally is to try and downplay it or deny that it happened".

Winckler said that back in South Africa, he intends to share what he learnt in support of the importance of Israel.

"What really had an impact on me was the understanding that the church cannot separate itself from its connection to Israel, and that there's no place of any kind for antisemitism within us," said Winckler.

"On a basic human rights level, antisemitism is racism, it's hatred and discrimination against a people, and it's simply wrong. But on a Christian level, it goes even further. We're taught to love our neighbour and even to love our enemy, so even if someone views Israel as an enemy, they are still called to love."

"There's no escaping the responsibility for Christians to have the right attitude towards Israel and the Jewish people. Though we cannot control the brokenness or misinformation outside the church, we can pray for truth to be revealed and for the protection of Israel and the Jewish people, and that's what we will continue to do."

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Why Holocaust films are a hard sell post-7 October

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

With films like *Nuremberg* explicitly tackling the Holocaust and the trial that followed, and Oscar contender *Marty Supreme* reflecting on post-Holocaust Jewish pride, it's clear that it remains a compelling topic for filmmakers.

But in a post-7 October 2023 world characterised by a surge in antisemitism, many view such movies through a different lens.

"The Holocaust is the definitive human disaster of our era, and it's unimaginably tragic and unimaginably the consequence of human evil. So, there will always be fascination with it," said Gus Silber, a journalist, editor, speechwriter, and author.

But it's almost beyond our ability to comprehend, which is why film often breaks it down into smaller, relatable human stories, he said.

The Holocaust also allows movies to explore the theme of triumph over adversity, said Justin Cohen, a Cape Town-based filmmaker. This is the case with *Marty Supreme*, where the title character, a Jewish ping-pong star played by Timothée Chalamet, says, "Just look at me. I'm here. I'm on top. I'm the ultimate product of Hitler's defeat."

One of the reasons why it's challenging for filmmakers to take on such stories is because they are often so open to interpretation. "You can tell a Holocaust story which is very specifically about the Holocaust, but people will read into it their own stories, prejudices, and understanding of human evil," Silber said.

This was the case with the controversial but critically acclaimed movie, *The Zone of Interest*, which

follows a Nazi who lives with his family next door to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The film premiered shortly before 7 October 2023, and offered an original take on the Holocaust, with sounds from the neighbouring camp illuminating the horrors within. Yet, many saw the movie as a metaphor for the war in Gaza, despite it being made before it broke out.

Its controversy heightened when it was named Best International Feature Film at the 2024 Academy Awards. In his acceptance speech, the film's Jewish director, Jonathan Glazer, suggested that the Holocaust was being "hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people".

Cohen said that with so much antisemitism and anti-Zionist sentiment today, the motivation of filmmakers themselves must be questioned. "Unfortunately, within the film industry at large, there are so many left leaning political voices that, if anything, give cover for antisemitism," he said.

Cohen suggests that examining the Holocaust may be a more "acceptable" way of exploring antisemitism on film than using current events.

"We're saying that we're never going to let it happen again, but we aren't actually addressing the elephant in the room – that there are lots of people who would love for it to happen again," he said.

That's not to say that Holocaust

films aren't important. With podcasters like Joe Rogan hosting historical revisionists, they're more vital than ever. "But my concern is this current antisemitic festering isn't addressed by bringing up examples of it in the past. I want something that's going to tackle what's happening now. Yet, it doesn't seem like we're getting anything like that at the

moment," Cohen said.

What's more, even though Hollywood still seems to have an appetite for Holocaust movies, it doesn't mean that there isn't significant pushback for those looking to explore such stories. This was even the case for A-list Jewish actress Scarlett Johansson when making her directorial debut in *Eleanor the Great*, which examines Holocaust-survivor trauma and was released last year. One of the film's financiers reportedly backed out because Johansson refused to remove Holocaust elements from the

movie, elements which underpin the plot.

"I would think anyone who wants to do a movie that has any kind of Holocaust theme now has to contend with what Johansson had to tackle, which is people saying, 'Let's rather not do this'," said Silber. "Or they have to find a way to tell individual stories that can be simultaneously universal and touch viewers on a personal level."

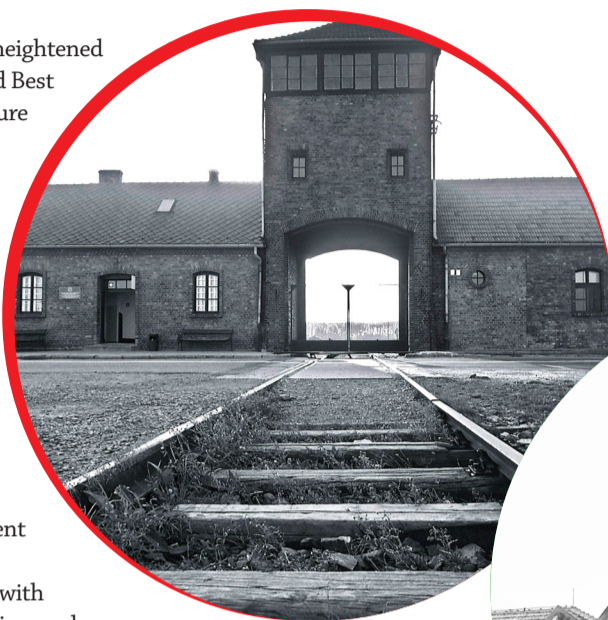
In the South African context, say local Jewish filmmakers, even pitching movies with Jewish characters is resisted. For example, when Cohen initially pitched his film *Free State* to sales companies,

Cohen's latest film, *The Home*, is a documentary about Jewish old-aged home Highlands House. "There have also been murmurings about whether the subject matter hurts the film in the current context," he said. "Why are Jews in South Africa who are octogenarians at the end of their life somehow responsible for Israel's foreign policy on the other side of the world?"

Jordy Sank, an award-winning South African director, screenwriter, and producer known for his feature documentary, *I Am Here*, which tells the story of Holocaust survivor Ella Blumenthal, has had a similar experience. "I've got a bunch of other Jewish-themed content that I'm trying to produce. It's not Holocaust-related at all, but some of it is very pro Jewish. And I'm finding it difficult to get these projects funded. No-one's really interested, especially now, in hearing any Jewish perspective on anything."

Sank commends Hollywood filmmakers for getting movies like *Nuremberg* made in this political climate. Yet he stresses the importance of doing so, especially as the number of living survivors is rapidly diminishing.

"When I created *I Am Here*, it was almost like making a time capsule where a survivor can engage with the younger generation, people who will never hear a firsthand account from a Holocaust survivor. Holocaust films make you think critically about what happened. The empathy that film can unlock in an audience is also unique to that art form. That's the importance of bringing it back into the *zeitgeist*, especially now."



Restitution of Nazi-looted art a blurred picture

CLAUDIA GROSS

For decades after World War II, Europe tried to move on. Collaboration was minimised, silence became habitual, and questions about stolen

Jewish property were postponed or ignored.

Yet thousands of artworks taken during the Nazi occupation hadn't vanished. They passed quietly through borders, markets, and museums, carrying histories that few were willing to confront. In *Looted: Nazi Art Plundered from Jewish Families in France*, historian Peter Elliott returns to those unresolved legacies and asks what justice looks like when time itself becomes an obstacle.

Elliott's book, recently discussed in a webinar hosted by the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre and the Jacob Gitlin Library, examines the wartime and postwar fate of four French Jewish families whose art collections were confiscated under Nazi and Vichy rule. "I decided to tell the story from the point of view of the art collectors,"

Elliott said. "That was the missing perspective in the story of looted art."

The families he focuses on weren't marginal figures. Many originated in Alsace-Lorraine and moved to France after 1870, where they became prominent

industrialists, financiers, and entrepreneurs. Their businesses made a significant contribution to French economic and cultural life, and their art collections reflected a deep engagement with French modernism. "As well as being a story of looted art, it's a story of four families who made a significant contribution to France," Elliott said.

By the time Germany occupied France in 1940, antisemitism had already been sharpened by economic crisis and political instability. Jewish business owners were dismissed from their own companies, properties were seized, and art looting became embedded in law. "Art looting was a fundamental part of Nazi dehumanisation," Elliott told his audience.

Confiscated artworks were funnelled through the Jeu de Paume museum in Paris, which became the central depot for looted art. There, the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, or ERR, oversaw a meticulous bureaucratic process. "Each painting was photographed, catalogued,

and entered into a card index," Elliott said. "This was bureaucratic looting."

Central to the book is the family behind the Paris department store Galeries Lafayette, founded by Théophile Bader and later run by his sons-in-law, Max Heilbronn and Raoul Meyer. Their story anchors the book because their collection was looted in what Elliott describes as "absolutely copybook German ERR fashion".

From the Galeries Lafayette family alone, 26 paintings were taken. Each was assigned an inventory number, measured, and photographed. Ironically, this administrative precision later worked against restitution. Where measurements were incorrect or photographs missing, claims failed. "It's very difficult to identify a painting if you don't have a photograph," Elliott said, "and particularly if you don't have dimensions."

Elliott's research draws extensively on the archives created by the looters themselves, including German photographic records and French diplomatic files. Though the evidence has long existed, he noted that access has changed dramatically since the mid-1990s. "The internet and access to digital data have enormously improved our ability to know about looted art and indeed to find it," he said.

One key resource is a centralised database known as the ERR Project, which consolidates looting records by collector. "The starting point for me in each case was to go through that database with a fine-tooth comb," Elliott said, and then to build each family's story by cross-referencing fragments of information scattered across archives.

Despite these advances, recovery has been inconsistent and often deeply frustrating. Many paintings resurfaced decades later in private collections or museums, having passed through multiple owners. Legal outcomes frequently turned on technicalities. "The

law courts are just about the worst venue to try to resolve issues like this," Elliott said.

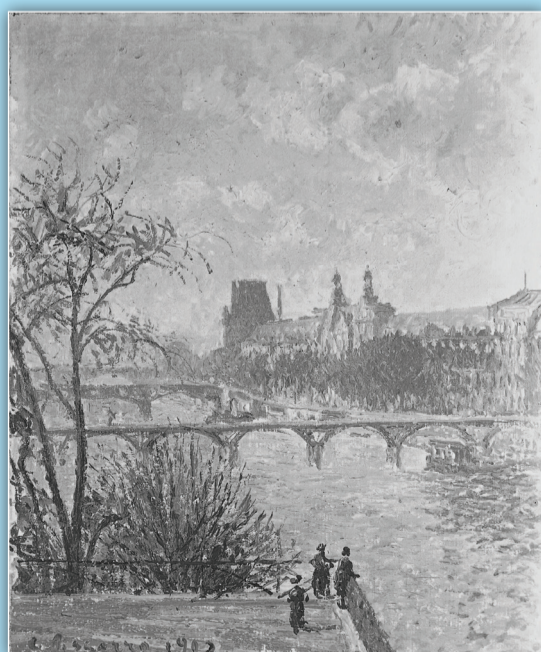
In several cases examined in the book, families with clear evidence of wartime theft lost claims because collectors asserted good-faith purchase or because too much time had passed. Elliott is careful not to flatten these cases into simple moral binaries. "You can't just make a general sweeping rule," he said. "You've got, on the one hand, a painting that was clearly looted, and on the other, someone who held it for decades believing they bought it in good faith."

Rather than offering easy solutions, Elliott argues for transparency and historical acknowledgement. In cases where ownership cannot be resolved, he believes museums should make the history visible. "Wherever it is held, it must be labelled with the history in relation to the looting," he said. "I want to see the history commemorated."

The book also traces how memory and responsibility passed to the next generation. In several cases, it was children or adopted descendants who pursued claims long after survivors had died. One such claimant described her efforts as "a duty to remember", a phrase Elliott quotes to underline how restitution is often about memory rather than material recovery.

After three years immersed in the subject, Elliott says the project has reshaped his relationship with art. "I've turned into a huge enthusiast of French modernist art," he said. "You get to know these collections so well that your focus changes."

Looted isn't simply an account of stolen masterpieces. It's a study of belonging, dispossession, and the long afterlife of persecution. By restoring individual families to the centre of the story, Elliott challenges readers to consider what remains unresolved when history is allowed to fade into silence.



Max Heilbronn's painting by Pissarro, the *Seine riverbanks*, Bundesarchiv. B323-861-1, looted and only restituted in 2017

Jewish duo wins global acclaim

LEE TANKLE

Local Jewish duo Breindy and Matt Klawansky were honoured with two awards at the World Entertainment Awards in Los Angeles on 31 January, taking home Best Duo and Best Traditional Global Song for their song *Yedid*.

What began as a deeply rooted musical expression of tradition has now found global resonance. The international recognition highlights the enduring power of Jewish music on the world stage.

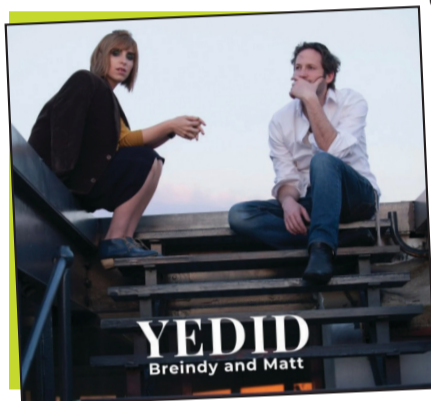
"It's always nice to see Hebrew music and South Africans being recognised. It's inspiring to see your name alongside musicians you admire," said Breindy.

The duo submitted their work for nomination last year, and in November, they heard that they had been nominated for Best Duo, as well as Best Traditional Global Song for *Yedid*. Breindy said it was special to have *Yedid* win this award, as the song has a deep connection not only to emotions, but to her spirituality.

Breindy said winning Best Duo signified the dedication they have to each other, not only in terms of their work but in terms of family.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without him, and he wouldn't be where he is without me," she said. "I don't do any of the production side, so I really love working with him. We have the same vision. We love collaborating with other artists, but our music is very much comprised of both of us. I'll be singing and composing, but

Matt's production adds a whole new dimension to the music. So, it's nice to see us as the best duo. I wouldn't be able to do it without Matt on many levels. But obviously, finding the time to make music is challenging



when you have kids."

Yedid, their latest release, is a delicate and haunting interpretation of *Yedid Nefesh*, a devotional poem written by a 16th-century Kabbalist. Recorded between Johannesburg and Poland, the track features piano, played by Hanna Green, a Jewish mom and musical director at Yeshiva College; cello by Polish cellist Maciej Lacny; and electric guitar. This unusual combination creates a warm, ethereal soundscape that supports the raw and tender vocal performance at its centre.

"It's humbling to see the song *Yedid*, which is the Friday night prayer as well as Saturday after Shabbos, being recognised," Breindy said. "Obviously the words aren't mine, but it's nice to see such old words from a 16th-century Kabbalist text being reimagined and then recognised at an award ceremony."

Although they weren't at the awards ceremony in Los Angeles on 31 January, they still felt the same excitement as it was a culmination of their work over many years.

Breindy said that she started working on *Yedid* many years ago as she always wanted to sing to the words of *Yedid Nefesh*, but the production of the song took a lot

of time and collaboration. The song's emotional pull is underscored by its shifting tempo, moving from a slow, haunting verse into a more expansive chorus. It begins with a solo piano before the cello gently enters, with subtle touches of electric guitar layered in. Musically, one of the defining choices was to record *Yedid* without a click track, a decision that made the mixing and editing process more complex but preserved the song's natural ebb and flow.

"After all the effort, time, and money that we put into the music, not that you do it for the awards, but it inspires you to make more, and it just gives you the stamp that what you're doing is on the same level as people out there globally," she said.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Roedean rumpus no storm in a tennis court

The furore around the King David versus Roedean girls' tennis match revealed so much about the nature of modern

antisemitism, our experience of it, and our responsibilities as community members, leaders, parents, and students to tackle and confront it.

King David has endured a painful history of overt antisemitism. Hitler salutes. Swastikas. Our students have faced these acts of intimidation and bigotry repeatedly during sports events over the years. So, what made this incident different?

The answer lies in who the perpetrator was.

In previous cases, the offenders were isolated individual students acting against the stated values of their schools. However reprehensible, these incidents could be attributed to an overzealous rugby player or an ill-informed teenager who was subsequently disciplined by a school. These moments, awful as they were, created opportunities for engagement and restorative justice. King David has worked alongside other schools to guide young offenders toward understanding and accountability.

This situation is fundamentally different. This time, the offender is the institution itself.

From public conversation between the two schools' principals, one thing was unmistakably clear: the scheduled tennis fixture didn't fall away because of prior school commitments or academic workshops. It fell away because, in the words of Roedean's principal, "It's presenting itself as a Jewish day school issue."

When a school, not a rogue student, refuses to play a tennis match against a Jewish school, there's no explaining it away as anything other than institutional antisemitism. Roedean refused to play King David because it's a Jewish school. That's discrimination based on religion.

What followed was even more troubling. Rather than acknowledge the incident, Roedean doubled down, asserting that the story was false. The

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



implication was clear: the Jews were lying. This prompted a wave of online accusations that we were falsifying facts and "crying antisemitism".

The shameful justification that the boycott was supported because it was opposed to Zionism shows either malice or ignorance. Zionism is defined as the right of Jews to a homeland, based on legal, religious, and historical foundations. A right taken for granted by all other nation states including most of the Arab world. Further, there's absolutely no call to humiliate South African children based on conflict happening thousands of miles away.

A small number of media personalities were among those criticising our community and denying the very possibility that we could be discriminated against. It's also noteworthy that a group of Jewish anti-Zionists jumped on the bandwagon, once again proving that they themselves have no concept of the difference between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

But here's what needs to be said: Jewish students were excluded from a sporting event because they attend a Jewish school. Parents objected to their daughters competing against Jewish girls. The school administration facilitated that exclusion. These are documented facts. Calling this antisemitic isn't hyperbole. It's accuracy.

Yet amid this darkness, we have witnessed remarkable support. Voices from across South African society: educators; community leaders; Roedean alumni; parents; and concerned citizens from within our community and outside, have stood with us, recognising that what happened crosses a line that our history has taught us never to cross again. This solidarity reminds us that we aren't alone in defending the principles our Constitution guarantees: equality and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of religion, belief, or culture.

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

The love that a lifetime brings

Unless I'm reading the transcript at a Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa hearing, I can barely remember what I said on air this morning. And yet, today, 35 years to the day from our wedding, I remember with irritating clarity what I said in my wedding speech.

I went mock-biblical as a theme, and spoke of the time we met that fateful December. "And it came to pass in the summer of their days," I said, "that the families journeyed southward to a place where the wind did blow and blow, and they called the place Muizenberg." I spoke of how the meeting was engineered, and even acknowledged that as a family, we stood "head and shoulders below the rest".

And then I sang. Badly. But it was the gesture that counted. Along with the words from Randy Crawford's *Almaz*, the line that truly captured it for me, "The love that innocence brings."

Indeed, we were young. The bride 19 and the groom 22. Unusual back then for a couple religious, but not from the haredi world. Yet we were blessed with parents who understood the value of marriage and relationships, and who gave us the chance to build a home while we were still studying and becoming ourselves.

When you're 19 and 22 you don't know enough to be properly afraid. You have no idea what groceries cost, how often geysers burst, or how quickly children can turn a lounge into a crime scene. You have not yet discovered that "we need to talk" is never about the thing you think it's about. You think love is mostly a feeling, and you assume communication means saying the words "I hear you" at the correct moments.

Innocence doesn't mean stupidity. It means you still believe the best about each other. It means that you interpret your spouse's tone generously. It means you assume a misunderstanding is just that, not evidence of some deep character flaw that requires a four-part series and a therapist with good lighting.

Over 35 years, you learn that love isn't a single song. It's a playlist, and some tracks are better than others. There are seasons of romance, seasons of routine, seasons of chaos, and the occasional season where you

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



wonder if the person you married has been replaced by someone who cleans kitchen surfaces as a form of protest.

And yet, and this is where I find myself unexpectedly sentimental, the longer you're married, the more you understand what that line was really saying.

"The love that innocence brings" isn't only about being young. It's about keeping a kind of innocence alive. Not naïveté, we've had too much life for that; but innocence as a choice: the choice to give your spouse the benefit of the doubt; the choice not to keep score; the choice to remember that the person in front of you isn't the sum of the last argument but the sum of a shared life.

It's the innocence of remembering how it started. Two families in Muizenberg. A bit of wind. A bit of destiny. A bit of orchestration. And two kids who believed that love could carry a lifetime, without having any real evidence other than the fact that it felt true.

The evidence, it turns out, comes later. It comes in the ordinary days. In making tea. In sitting through the same story again because it matters to the person telling it. It comes in the shared private language that couples develop; the looks, the shorthand, the single raised eyebrow that can say, "Please rescue me from this conversation," or "Howard, if you mention this in public, you will be sleeping with Gatsby in the car."

So, yes, I remember my wedding speech. Not because it was brilliant. It wasn't. I sang, which should really have resulted in an annulment on aesthetic grounds alone. I remember it because it captured something we didn't yet know how to articulate: that innocence is a kind of strength. It's the courage to commit before you understand the price, and then to keep paying it willingly.

Thirty-five years later, I'm still grateful we were young enough to be innocent. And wise enough – or lucky enough – to choose each other anyway.

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Adam Bacher weighs SA20 success against cricket's sadness

LUKE ALFRED



Over the past 30 years, I've interviewed Adam Bacher at least five or six times. Since leaving his playing days behind, he's relaxed, becoming more thoughtful, which means I seldom depart without an insight or some human nugget, whether it be on cricket or life itself.

Bacher once told me, for example, that he realised after he'd left the game that he was "selfish" as a player. He said it with a mild note of self-admonition, which has stayed with me ever since.

International sportsmen – Bacher played 19 Tests for South Africa – are by nature selfish because ambition narrows their focus. Admitting to that selfishness, however, is a different matter entirely. I always felt that Bacher was more human – and more admirable – for being able to admit to something that didn't flatter him.

Other than interviewing him as a player – if I remember correctly, the first time I interviewed him was for the *Sunday Independent* in 1996 – I've interviewed him as a thoughtful observer of the game and a possible independent board member for Cricket South Africa (CSA). With his intimate knowledge of international cricket combined with his commercial savvy, he could have brought wisdom to the CSA board but didn't get the position. Read into that what you will.

More recently, I've interviewed him as a fan and a watcher of family talent. In my latest interview he

enthusied, for example, about young Jarren Bacher, his nephew. The Bishops-educated mystery spinner was called up by the Joburg Super Kings in the latter stages of the recently-completed SA20 but, unfortunately, didn't get a game.

On the subject of the SA20, the fourth edition of which was completed in incredible fashion on 25 January at Newlands, as the Sunrisers Eastern Cape marched to their third title in four years, Bacher can only glow. "John Perlman was saying on Radio 702 recently that he was in the crowd at the Wanderers, and he realised that no-one left the ground unhappy," says Bacher. "That's wonderful in a way. The format is just right for families and great for South African cricket and its profile. I think you have to respect that."

It wasn't always thus. There were two failed attempts before the SA20, Haroon Lograt's T20 Global League, as well as the short-lived Mzansi Super League. Given that one never left the runway and the other nosedived after two years, it looked for a period as though South Africa would never be able to generate a plausible rival to the Indian Premier League and Australia's Big Bash.

"I clearly remember being on the golf course. It was

December 2022 and we'd been pulverised in a Test series in Australia, losing the second Test by an innings, and people were walking away from the game," says Bacher. "The mood was so terrible that you didn't even want to talk about cricket."

"And, then, suddenly, the SA20 comes along – it must have been the tournament's first edition shortly after – and it was like cricket received a vitamin B12 shot. Incredible."

While Bacher enthuses over the SA20, he's not blind to its shortcomings. He says, for example, that he finds it "difficult to remember games" because they come so thick and fast. On a more general note, he adds that as far as international cricket as a whole is concerned, "relevance had become a huge issue".

"Striking some sort of balance between business and competition, if you like, is now one of the major talking points in international cricket."

Bacher is often gentle in his opinions rather than doctrinaire or absolute. As far as the recently-completed Ashes is concerned, however, he strikes an uncharacteristic note. "It was dreadful," he says, "a huge disservice to cricket – I almost don't know what to say

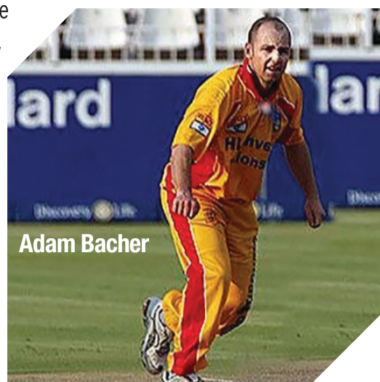
about it, having Test matches over in two days. England are absolutely determined to play it the way they see it, it's just as if they aren't answerable to anyone anymore. The Ashes were just a terrible, terrible advert for the game."

In the same way that I was struck by Bacher's use of the word "selfish" many years ago, I noted his use of the word "sad" several times in our latest interview. Like a slower ball in an over of pace, so the word was slipped into conversation, sometimes knowingly but sometimes – I thought – unwittingly.

I didn't ask about it in the interview itself but Bacher's sadness, I think, comes generally from a game that appears to have run commercially out of control. Cricket is now a sport where the "Big Three" – India, England, and Australia – play five Test series, while South Africa plays no more than two Test series, partly because CSA hasn't prioritised the five-day game. Sometimes they don't even manage to do that.

"I find it incredibly strange that we're playing no Test cricket this summer," he says. "Test cricket is where your captains come from. It's a special form of the game. Where do you find captains from in situations like the one we find ourselves in now?"

• Luke Alfred was a sports journalist for decades, and was *Sunday Times* sports editor and senior cricket writer. He has also written three books on cricket.



Adam Bacher

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