

April 2016

Issue #9 – Freedom/Oppression

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Welcome to the Passover issue of Just Voices, dedicated to the twin notions of freedom and oppression. These concepts underpin social justice struggles worldwide, and underlie the core issues of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society: Israel/Palestine, refugee rights, and justice for Indigenous Australians.

This week also marks 73 years since the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and in the coming month Nakba Day will take place. We are again reminded that global struggles for freedom unite us all, and hopefully the collected pieces in this newsletter will inspire you.

On the Israel/Palestine front, we're updating our campaign Don't Buy Settlement Products, now that the global campaign has had significant traction. It is crucial that illegal occupation of land is not rewarded through our innocent purchases. It's a chance to demonstrate your principles!

Extrajudicial killing in Hebron

The killing of Abdel-Fattah al-Sharif in Hebron, 24 March 2016, was horrifying. The fact that he was already 'neutralized' and was evidently suffering a head wound when an Israeli soldier shot him a second time at virtually point blank, makes this shocking murder an extrajudicial killing. It is yet another cold blooded execution of someone who was posing no danger.

The fact that this event was caught on camera by a volunteer for B'tselem, who then shared it with the world, led the military leadership to condemn the act and declare it to be contrary to the long-standing spirit of the Israeli Defence Forces and its code of purity of arms.

Countless other similar killings and abuses of power take place in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as soldiers of the IDF act not according to a moral code but according to the policy of aggression of the Netanyahu government. A condemnation of this extrajudicial killing and other such violence has yet to be issued by the Jewish bodies here that defend the Israeli military's violence as one borne of necessity. It is, however, of note, that the sergeant who shot al-Sharif has been charged with manslaughter. He is the first IDF soldier in over ten years to be charged with manslaughter for a killing that occurred during field operations.

We support continuing efforts to reveal the truth about the IDF's conduct.

A special thank you goes out to all of our contributors and supporters.

Wishing you a happy festival,

AJDS Editor



The AJDS relies on your support. Remember to renew your membership if you haven't done so in a while, and consider a donation. Go to ajds.org/join/ or write to co@ajds.org.au for details.

Don't Buy Settlement Products campaign update

In Pesach (Passover) 2013 the AJDS launched the Don't Buy Settlement Products campaign. It was successful in garnering support and interaction from the general community and created waves within the broader Jewish community. The JCCV (Jewish Community Council of Victoria), ZFA (Zionist Federation of Australia) and ZCV (Zionist Council of Victoria) all expressed their disapproval in public statements. A motion was moved and approved by majority in the JCCV to condemn the campaign. Yet we've also received much support from the Jewish community both in Melbourne and abroad.

Since its launch, we have continued promoting the campaign and disseminating information, with social media helping us reach a wider audience. In 2015 we committed to our online presence, resulting in the number of followers of our facebook page more than doubling; indicating increased interest for this campaign.

Being launched during the time of Pesach, the festival of freedom, we raised the question of what it means to commemorate and celebrate the Jewish exodus from slavery in Egypt. On our website we stated: "It means that we remember what it means to be imprisoned, to not be able to determine our fate. It means that we remember what it means to be an oppressed and dominated people.

It means that we remember that as we were slaves in Egypt, so too



others are enslaved and oppressed in many countries around the world, and that we must fight alongside them for their freedom."

We asked people to consider these issues and take a stance through purchasing power, to not buy products produced in settlements in the West Bank or the Golan Heights.

Our campaign to not buy settlement products has been one voice in a global campaign, which has questioned the validity of the occupation and brought to light the gross human rights violations that occur in the occupied territories, and has done so through BDS and other methods.

And we have seen these campaigns have an impact. Israeli exports have dropped since 2012 and more and more companies are pulling out of the West Bank. Major companies such as SodaStream, which moved their production facility out of the settlement of Maale Adumim, and the cosmetics label Ahava, which recently announced that they will be moving their manufacturing to within the green line are responding to international pressure.

We have also seen international bodies act against products made in the settlements, such as the EU's move to introduce labelling guidelines of settlement products, and more recently the proposal by the UN for a blacklist of products produced in the settlements. The EU guidelines stated that, "since the Golan Heights and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) are not part of the Israeli territory according to international law, the indication 'product from Israel' is considered to be incorrect and misleading".

Three years later, again during the fitting timing of Pesach, we have given our website a facelift and updated its content. We encourage that in this time of pondering freedom and liberation you consider the impacts of the settlements, of occupation, and of not purchasing settlement products.

The AJDS took a stance on this campaign in order to highlight the detrimental impacts that settlements have on a just and peaceful solution. Settlements violate International human rights law, as well as International laws governing war and occupation. They are positioned by the

architecture of the State in such a way that the capacity for Palestinian self-determination and statehood is obstructed. For example, resources such as land and water are diverted from Palestinians to the settlements.

Settlements are often used as military posts, and residents given arms by the Israeli army, resulting in heightened settler violence towards local Palestinians.

Not buying products from settlements will not work on its own, but it is one small step that

we can take. When we couple the possibility of sharing knowledge about what the settlements mean and what they do, together with the capability to have these difficult conversations about what kind of Israel/Palestine we want to create, we can work together: Palestinians, Israelis, and people throughout the diasporas creating exciting, liberating future.

For more information about why we are targeting settlements and advocating to not buy settlement products visit our website!

dontbuysettlementproducts.org.au

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Further reading, about Sodastream:

<http://972mag.com/the-cynical-exploitation-of-palestinian-workers-in-scarlett-johanssonsodastream-affair/86698/>. About Ahava:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/24438-israeli-cosmetics-company-ahava-to-leave-the-west-bank-following-bds-campaign>. And about the UN black list:

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-approves-blacklist-of-companies-profiting-from-settlements/>

The community fights injustice through the Befriend a Child in Detention project



“It must end,” said Dr June Factor about the detention of children.

Their plight was the motive behind a program started in order to connect with children and families in detention, give them hope, inform people about their deplorable fate and advocate for their release. AJDS co-founder, June Factor also founded Befriend a Child in Detention, and says of Australia’s decision to imprison innocent children, “It seemed to me that on so many levels it was illegal, it was improper and it tarnished whatever reputation we might have as a genuinely humane society... When it comes to children, I think their treatment is particularly outrageous, damaging and virtually life-threatening. As

well, I recognise that children are the government’s weakest link in their policy, because most Australians are not happy to see children imprisoned, so it seemed to me a double reason for focusing on children,” she says.

While the #letthemstay campaign helped some of the children previously held on Nauru or Manus, many more remain in the dehumanizing and intolerable conditions of Australia’s offshore detention centres. “We treat these people harshly to deter others from coming, and this is supposed to stop a lot from drowning. But then why not torture someone very publicly, or bomb one of the boats? Oh no, that would be shocking, but what they are doing now is killing people slowly, killing them mentally and emotionally. To do this to children is just extraordinary,” says Factor.

“Take a moment to think of Australia’s history,” she continued. “Many of Australia’s well-known families have an ancestor who arrived by jumping off a boat. Then both before and after the Second World War, refugees were accepted into Australia without

much in the way of formal papers – that’s what being a refugee often means. The same for the thousands of Vietnamese we accepted in the 1970s.”

As pointed out in The University of Melbourne’s Graduate Union newsletter in its interview with Factor (21 January 2016), Australia is a signatory to The Declaration of the Rights of a Child (1959): “The General Assembly proclaims this Declaration of the Rights of the Child to the end that he may have a happy childhood and enjoy for his own good and for the good of society the rights and freedoms herein set forth ... and calls upon local authorities and national Governments to recognise these rights and strive for their observance by legislative and other measures ...”. The convention elaborates:

- Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them.

- Children who come into a country as refugees should have the same rights as children who are born in that country.
- Children have the right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities.

Yet these rights are not available to asylum seeker children held in detention.

The 1951 Refugee Convention aimed to identify genuine refugees and outlined their rights as well as the obligations of States towards them. Article 31 states that a refugee has “the right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting state.” Other rights include those of education, freedom of movement, and the right to be issued identity and travel documents. Someone doesn’t qualify as a refugee if they have committed crimes against peace, a war crime, crimes against humanity, etc. The Refugee Convention states that an asylum seeker ought not to be sent back to the country they are fleeing from because of the risk that their rights will be violated – and Australia signed this convention on 22 January, 1952. Australia also has other obligations under other international treaties to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees – regardless of how they arrive. Our own Migration Act, however, allows for the detention of any migrant who arrives without a visa.

“There is no justification of any kind other than political convenience, and there is no justification for the interminable imprisonment of children on the

basis that they have arrived on a boat without a visa”, Factor said.

“What the government does is put asylum seekers on desolate islands, or in detention centres deliberately separated from the surrounding communities, declare that the asylum seekers could be dangerous as well as ‘illegal’, and give people immense power over them without any real scrutiny.” Factor elaborates on the nature of dehumanization, which in this case can be detected in the children’s tendency to identify more with their number. This is how they are referred to in detention, a tactic well known to Jews who have experienced encampment in World War II. Connecting with the children will give them some of the care that they deserve. “Befriending is to be a friend,” says Factor. “We don’t really live well without friends, and to be a friend with a child in detention is a powerful step, both for the befriended and the child.”

“Initially we have focused on getting books to children in detention with letters of greeting. For many people, this has been welcomed as a positive act of support for the children. We have received so many books, from publishers and booksellers and from people across the country, that we’ve put a temporary halt to receiving more books,” she says. After being screened to ensure that the letters do not contain anything potentially harmful, the letters are delivered to detainees.

“There are people for whom the government’s harsh and unjust policy towards asylum seekers is morally suspect, but many are not likely to take part in demonstrations or write letters to

the newspaper. I think we’re providing an avenue for what turns out to be hundreds and hundreds of people who are unhappy and have found through us something that they feel they can do, which clearly is a great yearning,” says Dr Factor. “What we do doesn’t change the situation, it doesn’t free the children, but it does provide them with some comfort in friendship, as well as the pleasures of wonderful children’s books. Ours is a project that influences hearts and minds. What we stand for is a reminder that you can’t sacrifice humans for some supposed greater good. These children and their families have done no wrong, and do not deserve to be treated badly in order to deter future refugees.”

Befriend a Child in Detention has received much public support, especially from schools. Bell Primary in Preston was one such school, which engaged with the project by way of letter writing, picture drawing and donations. “When the child detainees realised there were letters inside the books, there were tears all round. They said that they were not forgotten and that Australians don’t all hate us,” says Factor. “In July we sent four boxes of beautiful new children’s books to the children in the detention centre on Nauru, and every book included a letter – a greeting and encouragement of friendship.

There were also stamped addressed envelopes, in the hope that some asylum seeker children might write back. Some of the

letters and envelopes were from adults and many were from children. We know that a number of people – including 17 children from one school – have received letters from the children detained on Nauru.”

This project changes the way people talk about asylum seekers and forces the public to question their supposedly illegal status. “In the process of all of this, people talk about what they’re doing, and we very much want them to talk about what they’re doing. It changes the conversation – one weekend you might be talking with your friends, and somebody says

that you can’t have all these people coming, and then there’s a discussion, and there’s a new line in it, it’s not just the propaganda,” says Dr Factor. At the end of it all, asylum seekers are people who are in desperate need to flee from danger and a homeland that violates their basic human rights. “We’re part of something important,” says Dr Factor, “we’re one of the waves that will drown this shameful policy, that will end it.”

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For more information, visit befriendachild.com and on Facebook at [/befriendachildindetention/](https://www.facebook.com/befriendachildindetention/)

NUMBERS & LOCATIONS OF CHILDREN IN DETENTION

The Government’s latest statistics as of the 29th of February, 2016.

- 43 Children in Immigration Detention Centres/ APODs
- 3 Children in Perth Immigration Residential Housing
- 10 Children in Sydney Immigration Residential Housing
- 0 Children in Adelaide Immigration Transit Accommodation
- 2 Children in Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation
- 7 Children in Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation
- 50 Children in the Republic of Nauru

Total: 115 children in immigration detention

Being Jewish in Iran

By Linda Briskman

During the summer of August 2014 I entered a Tehran store, where through the window I had observed the vendor wearing a kippah. Despite his minimal English and my imperfect Farsi, he warmed to me as a Jew visiting Iran. His wife was less convinced. She brought out a book of Hebrew writing, which I stumbled over, as it seemed like almost a lifetime since I attended Cheder in Melbourne. To convince her of my authenticity I recited the Shema and then all was well. I treasure the Magen David I purchased from their small shop.

In the ten visits I have made to Iran for academic purposes, I have been curious about its Jewish community, estimated at 20,000.



In August of 2015, I decided it was time to satisfy my yearning, and I visited one of Tehran’s numerous synagogues. There I was informed about the life of Iranian Jews in that city, indistinguishable in many ways from communities throughout the world. I heard of kosher restaurants and butchers, sporting clubs, interfaith gatherings, Hebrew lessons for children, Bar Mitzvahs, Bat Mitzvahs and a Jewish hospital open to all. There are also active Jewish communities in other

parts of Iran. I learned of the good relationships between Jews and other Iranians, echoing what my Iranian Muslim friends tell me: all Abrahamic religions are important in the Islamic state. And there is a Jewish member of parliament, the Majlis, in accordance with constitutional guarantees of representation of the minority

religions of Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Judaism.

Later I was privileged to attend a Friday Shabbat service with around 300 people in a Sephardic shul. As the only foreigner present, I was greeted with buoyant Shabbat Shaloms and with the warmth that all Iranians show in reaching out to strangers in their midst. I could have been anywhere in the world but this was Iran. Men were praying; women were praying and chatting; and children were participating in the service and running about. I joined in timeless and universal prayers that bind us through common heritage. Judaism has been preserved throughout various Persian eras during the 2,700 years of its presence in Iran and, as elsewhere, is both an ancient and living religion.

I left feeling spiritually nourished and grateful for the experience. A family approached me. 'Come',

they said, 'visit our home to join us for a Shabbat meal'. In their observant home embraced by the warmth of this extended family, I experienced Iranian Jewish traditions, enjoying the combination of Iranian food with Jewish blessings. The allure that is Iran glows with hospitality. It is people that draw me back again and again and this night was a new highpoint, experiencing shared humanity across time, faith, nation and identity.

My visits to Iran are significant in opening my eyes to a world that most Jews in the diaspora have only heard about through negative imagery and words. It's a constant struggle to explain to fellow Australians that Iran is a safe, intellectual, engaged and vibrant society that is in sharp contrast to the relentless propaganda perpetuated against it. Many do not know that Iran comprises a

unique web of minority groups, cultures and religions. This visit to Iran was evocative, occurring within weeks of the sealing of the nuclear accord. Even the doomsday forecasters – right-wing Republicans, Netanyahu and his followers included – could not take the shine off what it means for Iran to be recognised for its international diplomacy and for the scourge of unjust sanctions to be close to an end. Everyone has suffered from sanctions, and now Jews and other minority groups will be able to share with their fellow Iranians in the prosperity and opportunity that we in the sanctioning world take for granted.

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Linda Briskman is Professor of Human Rights at the Swinburne Institute for Social Research.

Australian Muslims Find Support in the Jewish Community

By Sylvie Leber

"I want to add my voice in support of Muslims in our community and around the world. After the Paris attacks and hate this week, I can only imagine the fear Muslims feel that they will be persecuted for the actions of others. As a Jew, my parents taught me that we must stand up against attacks on all communities. Even if an attack isn't against you today, in time attacks on freedom for anyone will hurt everyone ... As long as we stand together and see the good in each other, we can build a better world for

all people."— Mark Zuckerberg, December 2015

Zuckerberg and I may live on "different planets" but I agree with him on this one. Zuckerberg's statement is very much in the tradition of the Jewish value of "welcoming the stranger". We know all too well where state-sanctioned racism can lead to – three of my grandparents were murdered by the Nazis during WWII.

I see many analogies between the way Muslims are currently being treated – the scapegoating of a minority by power hungry political leaders – and how Jews in Germany were viewed in the earliest stages of the Third Reich,

which ultimately lead to the Holocaust of European Jewry.

In 2011, Sandy Joffe, a Jew, was coordinator of the Alma Rd Community House in a part of Melbourne with a large Jewish population, when anti-Muslim groups, in particular the Q Society, mounted an unfounded fear-based campaign to have the centre's Muslim prayer room removed.

The Q Society claim that Muslim prayer is racist and rejects other religions, and that the Islamic faith is separatist and proselytising, and that prayer gatherings may encourage violence. They tar all Muslims as having associations with extremists and imply that because they are Muslims they want Sharia law.

The prayer room in question was used for one hour per week on Friday evenings by the St Kilda Islamic Society. There was, and still is, no mosque anywhere nearby. The users of the prayer room were mostly from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. When I asked Sandy about the response from the Jewish community, she said, “a small group of Orthodox rabbis gave sermons openly supporting the Muslims saying it was an issue of freedom of expression and the right to practice one’s faith unhindered”. Interestingly, she added that “some of the progressive rabbis were scared to publicly approach the topic.”

Ultimately, and encouragingly, the racist campaign led to relatively widespread support for the prayer group, including from the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, the Jewish Christian Muslim Association (JCMA), the Australian Jewish Democratic Society and the B’nai B’rith Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC).

I particularly love the incisive and funny tone taken by Deborah Stone, the then CEO of the ADC: “I don’t know the Muslims who want to use the Alma Road Community House for their prayers. I have no reason to believe they are terrorists, any more than I have reason to expect that the applicants to run the next Italian restaurant will be using it as

a mafia hideout or that the local Catholic school is sheltering a paedophile priest.”

But the Jewish community is renowned for its internal disagreements. In 2015, Galus Australia’s editor, Alex Fein, criticised the current CEO of the ADC, Dvir Abramovich, for his lack of action on anti-Muslim hate. Fein said that three days had passed since “fascists invaded Bendigo to try to terrify Muslims and their friends and the ADC has said nothing. Reclaim Australia has been gathering momentum all year and its connections with racist and fascist groups is obvious with even the most cursory Google search and the ADC has said nothing.”

I know about the importance of interfaith dialogue. Six years ago I worked for the Melbourne-based JCMA. My job was to develop curriculum materials and coordinate an education program called “Open Doors: Schools Visiting Places Of Worship” in which middle-school secondary students would visit a mosque, church and synagogue in one day.

JCMA’s formation was timely in Australia. It had its work cut out responding to the treatment of Muslims after the September 11 attacks in the US. It ran school education programs and created opportunities for interfaith dialogue.

One of the JCMA’s founders, Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, said to me, “Judaism doesn’t believe there is only one way to god. You only have to be a decent human being. No religion has the whole truth and there is much to be learnt from other faiths.”

What is needed is to have people from different faiths sitting together in the same room.

Soon after 9/11, I was at a wedding sitting with a group of Muslim friends and I said, “I think I should convert to Islam”. It was my way of showing solidarity with what we could see coming: a spate of anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia.

They replied, “No Sylvie, we should become Jews!” We had a good laugh.

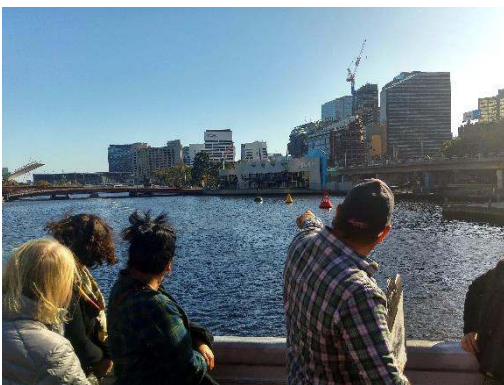
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Sylvie Leber has taught English to Bosnian Muslim refugees, worked for the Jewish Christian Muslim Association, was cross-cultural education coordinator at the Western Region Migrant Resource Centre, is a member of Jews For Refugees, recently spoke at Melbourne’s Palm Sunday Refugee Rally representing the Jewish community and attended the counter-protests against racist anti-Muslim organisations: Reclaim Australia and the United Patriotic Front. She is an artist, writer and volunteers fundraising for the Council of Single Mothers and Their Children.

This article was originally published 11 April 2016 in RightNow.org.au.

Walking the Birrarung: an AIDS Aboriginal Cultural Walk with Dean Stewart

By Keren T Rubinstein



Dean Stewart's guided short walk across Enterprise Park, a bit of the Yarra River – or Birrarung, as it was named originally – and a small patch of bustling Southbank, was all it took to change my perspective on Melbourne's CBD. Dean has been speaking to groups of all ages and backgrounds about his Aboriginal identity and the Indigenous history of Victoria, and he took us across the 150 metres or so of ground, in over two hours. He explained the circumstances which led to the mis-naming of the river, and the devastating consequences of its levelling. There was once a waterfall here, he said, as skaters were doing their tricks nearby. This natural step in the water flow allowed for generations of sustainable and rich communities to thrive here, enjoying freshwater for drinking and saltwater for fishing, in what had been a crucial meeting place for the Indigenous tribes that had lived here, seemingly forever.

That is, until the 'cultural tsunami' hit – that is what he called it, as he indicated the mast of the Polly Woodside, barely visible among the towering skyscrapers and infrastructure. But back in the first days of the Gold Rush, that horizon would have been filled with countless masts, as far as the eye could see. As they watched the ships approach, locals would have known, in that moment, that things would never be the same again.

We saw the single patch of rock that still remained of the original river bank; we imagined the countless bare feet that would have stepped on it, the diverse and complete lives that were destroyed to give way to everything that stands here today. That patch of original rock, by the way, sits right beneath a bridge and is surrounded by litter and random graffiti, unmarked in the way one might expect.

We walked on the grass strip at the edge of the Southbank promenade, one behind the other, following our guide, in one line that snaked across to the far side. It felt at first like an odd performance, with onlookers possibly wondering what we were on about. But quickly it seemed quite sensible, and comforting, to be part of our small group. Why did we walk like this? Dean asked. So as not to scare away all the animals, possibly hiding in the scrub. That is how people here once knew to conduct themselves in respect to their surroundings. To make minimal impact; to live in harmony with one another.

The colonization of Australia is happening right now, he concluded, as we stood by the only cluster of indigenous flora at Southbank, by the foyer of the Shell building, or some such. This is a private garden, only for the employees, as a security guard once explained to Dean upon escorting him back to the main thoroughfare. And yet, everything around us, even though very little of it could be said to be indigenous, is all derived from our earth. Even the fabric of the Shell building, and the plastic sunglasses I was wearing.

Reconciliation, he said, is also about making peace with that reality, and respecting the ground on which we walk, collectively, as one.

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To find out more about upcoming AJDS events go to ajds.org.au/events

On the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Marek Edelman

By Arnold Zable

On this day, April 19, 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising broke out, ushering in an extraordinary battle for freedom and dignity. We gather tonight, as we always do on this date, to honour those who took part in this, and many other uprisings during this period, and those who escaped to the forests and continued the struggle as partisans. On this night we recall many forms of resistance – including cultural resistance – the underground ghetto theatres, schools, the children who stole out via the sewers and returned with food for the starving and arms for the resistance... and the simple acts, those who stayed with their elderly family members, at the risk and often the cost of their own lives, to provide comfort and protection... On this day I also recall the most remarkable man I have met – Marek Edelman – one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, who also fought in the Polish uprising a year later and who remained in Poland post-war to become a legendary fighter for freedom and social justice, a revered member of Solidarity and an innovative cardiologist. Here is an article I wrote about him, and our meeting in Warsaw in 2006—published in *The Age* after his death in 2010. At one point, when I asked him why he remained in

Poland whilst so many others left, he replied:

"Why should I have left?... Is it any better anywhere else? All countries face the challenge of protecting human rights and opposing racism. The fight for democratic rights and social justice has to be fought here as elsewhere." Edelman was emphatic. His life had been "one consistent, unbroken thread" that stretched from his youth as a pre-war member of the Bund and through his struggles against the Nazis and the postwar Stalinists.

Yes – we have our own battles against racism here in Australia – we have that in mind too as we honour the memory of those who were prepared to risk all for freedom and dignity on this day in April 1943.

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“The one who stayed”

The Age, April 16, 2010

Arnold Zable

Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, is the most remarkable man I have met. We conversed in a Warsaw apartment in September 2006. For many of his former comrades, Edelman was an enigma. There are survivors in Melbourne who were with him in the city of Lodz in 1948, the night before they left for the Polish border to escape to the West. In postwar Poland, Edelman became revered as an

innovative cardiologist and stalwart of the Solidarity movement that finally toppled the communist dictatorship in 1989. But his former comrades could not understand why he did not escape with them. He remained a mystery and became known as the one who stayed behind.

Like Edelman, my parents were pre-war members of the Bund, the Jewish labour movement that commanded a mass following in Poland in the inter-war years. For Edelman, whose father died when he was young and whose mother died when he was 14, the Bund was family. Formed in Vilna in 1897, in response to mass impoverishment and anti-Semitism, the party's focus shifted to Poland after the Bolshevik revolution. Its democratic ideals and love of Yiddish culture would sit easily alongside contemporary ideals of multiculturalism but had no place in totalitarian Russia.

All but annihilated in the Holocaust, the remnants of the Bund regrouped in far-flung Jewish communities, among them Melbourne. In the 1950s and '60s, the community would assemble on the evening of April 19 at the Kadimah Hall in Lygon Street, North Carlton, opposite the Melbourne General Cemetery.

At those memorial evenings, and on weekly Sunday afternoon meetings of the Bund youth group, we came to know the details of the uprising. At its height, there were up to half a million Jews crowded into the five square miles of the

Warsaw ghetto. By April 1943, the population had been reduced to just over 60,000 through deportations, disease and starvation. Beginning in July 1942, inmates were transported to the Treblinka death camp where they were killed in gas chambers.

Edelman was a co-founder of the Jewish Fighting Organisation, a coalition that united members of the Bund, left-wing Zionists, communists and others under the leadership of 24-year-old Mordechai Anielewicz. The resistance was formed as a response to mass murder. Its aim was to disrupt the deportations and to make a final stand. The young fighters had no illusions about their chances but reasoned it was better to inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy, and to choose their own way of dying.



Figure Marek Edelman

Early morning, on April 19, 1943, the first day of Passover, a German force of more than 2000 men, with SS and police units, entered the ghetto to begin the final liquidation. The walls were surrounded with armed guards and

more security forces were on standby. The streets were deserted. The inmates had retreated into hiding. The force was met by gunfire from the rooftops and windows, and a barrage of Molotov cocktails. The Germans retreated in panic.

There were, according to Edelman, just 220 ghetto fighters armed with a limited arsenal of pistols, home-made grenades, a few automatic weapons and rifles. The fierce battles continued for weeks. The buildings were razed street by street, and burnt to the ground to flush out the fighters. The ghetto ceased to exist on May 16. All that remained were piles of charred rubble.

On those Sunday afternoons in Carlton, we heard tales of extraordinary feats. We were in awe of the fighters, among them children who had smuggled in dynamite and pistols through the sewers. We were haunted by images of young men and women dashing through the flames, jumping from burning buildings, swallowing cyanide rather than fall into the hands of the enemy.

We heard tales of the teenage commander Dovid Hokhberg, who, when cornered in a bunker with his battalion and several hundred civilians, blocked a narrow opening with his own body, allowing the others to escape before his bullet-riddled corpse could be dragged clear. And of Mikhal Klepfish, the young engineer who set up a secret factory manufacturing Molotov cocktails and who, on the second day of the revolt, threw his body against a machinegun, allowing his comrades to escape from their besieged attic. We learnt of the exploits of teenage fighter Yurek

Blones, who held off a Nazi attack single-handedly and continued shooting as he led his battalion to the surest escape route, the sewers.

Edelman was a leading figure in the pantheon, reputed to have led his fighters in a red sweater and brandishing two pistols. As commander of the Bund battalion in the brush-makers' factory district, he was admired as a calm and calculating strategist who valued human life.

"We fought to protect the people in the ghetto, to extend their life by a day or two or five," he once said.

The ghetto uprising became a part of my childhood dreaming. It was one of the reasons I journeyed to Poland in 1986 to explore the Polish towns and villages my parents were raised in, and to reflect upon the fate of my murdered grandparents and their families. At the time the Soviet-controlled dictatorship was still in power but facing growing resistance from the Solidarity movement. Edelman's name came up in almost every conversation I had with Solidarity activists. I learnt he had been jailed when martial law was imposed on December 13, 1981. The following year he was kept under house arrest. He was admired for his resolve and daring, and referred to as the moral conscience of Poland.

Twenty years later, in the autumn of 2006, I returned with my 12-year-old son to show him the towns and villages of his forebears. We spent our first few nights in Dom Literatury, the House of Literature, located in the old quarters of Warsaw. The fourth floor served as a hotel for writers, while the others were given over

to literary groups, among them the Polish Centre of International PEN. As a result I was able to meet the vice-president, Adam Pomorska.

Again, Edelman's name came up in conversation. In recent years he had defended Roma Gypsies whose camps were destroyed by the police. He had expressed solidarity with multicultural Sarajevo in the 1990s when the city was under siege, and participated in the 1989 talks that led to the introduction of a democratic system in Poland. At 87, he was still working as a cardiologist in Lodz, still active in human rights.

Edelman was due in Warsaw to be honoured as one of the founders of KOR, the workers' defence group formed in response to government repression in 1976, and a precursor to Solidarity. Would I like to meet him? I was elated.

Two weeks later I was ushered into the living room of a Warsaw apartment by Edelman's assistant and close friend, Paula Sawicka, president of Open Republic, the Polish association against xenophobia and anti-Semitism. As forewarned, Marek Edelman was a crusty old warrior, wary of sentiment. He warmed when we conversed in Yiddish, a language that evokes a sense of fraternity and intimacy. We were connected as members of the Bund family. He inquired after his two former comrades still alive in Melbourne, Pinche Wiener and Avram Zeleznikow, who had been with him on the night before they escaped Poland. Yes, he did get drunk with Pinche that night, he confirmed. Edelman was known to be a connoisseur of cognac.

When our conversation turned to the uprising, Edelman was forthright. "Anyone can learn how to shoot," he said. "Far more important than the number of fighters was their spirit. The uprising began in the first days of occupation, and intensified when the ghetto was set up. The Bund organised underground schools and theatres, social welfare groups, public kitchens."

He singled out Bund activists who taught children songs in the ghetto tenements and courtyards. He reiterated what he had once written: "In all of the filth that lay about, the hunger, the humiliation and waste of every kind of human feeling, in spite of everything, we managed to give these children a little joy, a little bit of a cheerful life. For a few hours daily, they lived a normal life as if the war, the ghetto, and all the rest didn't exist."

Edelman extended his understanding of resistance to the parents who tried desperately to buoy their children's spirits, and those who chose to accompany loved ones to the death camps. It was far more difficult to go to your death in Auschwitz and Treblinka, he said, than to die with a gun in hand.



Nowolipie Street in Warsaw during the uprising.

He had escaped the burning ghetto on May 10, 1943, with the help of members of the Polish resistance, waiting 48 hours in a sewer 71

centimetres high, where the water reached to his lips. He moved about hiding places in Warsaw and fought in the ill-fated Polish uprising against Nazi occupation in August 1944. The Red Army had advanced to the outskirts of the city but stood by and waited until the fierce battles were over and the city levelled.

"We had no illusions about the Stalinists," said Edelman. By 1948, the Polish communists had ruthlessly consolidated their power, establishing a de facto single-party dictatorship and creating a satellite state of the Soviet Union, despite mass opposition. This was the final straw for Edelman's comrades. There could be no viable future for the Bund in postwar Poland.

Yet Edelman stayed even after his wife, Alina Margolis, a nurse in the Warsaw ghetto, finally left Poland in 1968 after anti-Semitic purges instigated by the government. A paediatrician, she settled in Paris with their two children and became active in the human rights group Doctors Without Borders. So why did he remain in Poland, I asked.

"Why should I have left?" Edelman retorted. "Is it any better anywhere else? All countries face the challenge of protecting human rights and opposing racism. The fight for democratic rights and social justice has to be fought here as elsewhere." Edelman was emphatic. His life had been "one consistent, unbroken thread" that stretched from his youth as a pre-war member of the Bund and through his struggles against the Nazis and the postwar Stalinists.

With the fall of the Polish communist regime in 1989, his main goal had been realised. With

each passing year the democratic culture was more deeply rooted. "Poland is now another world," he said. "The people have finally put an end to dictatorship and occupation." His struggle had borne fruit, although he was pessimistic about the recent rise of the nationalist right in Europe.

On further reflection, he quietly echoed remarks he had made before. He had remained in Poland because "someone had to stay here with all those who perished. You don't leave and abandon the memory of them." In many interviews and writings, Edelman continued to document the deeds and names of fighters. Each year on the anniversary of the uprising, he would lay flowers at Warsaw's monument to the ghetto heroes.

The Edelman I met was a hardened activist without illusions. A wry

sceptic and an acute observer of character, he valued most his work as a cardiologist. Better to heal than to kill, he said. The young ghetto fighters had taken up arms because there was no other way. He was wary of nationalism and retained a dim view of humanity. "People have to be educated — from kindergarten on — against hatred," he said.

On April 19, 2009, confined to a wheelchair, Edelman laid the flowers for the final time, and called for tolerance. He died on October 2, aged 90, in the apartment where I had met him — "at home, among friends, among his close people", said Paula Sawicka. Several thousand mourners, including the president of Poland, attended his state funeral. Edelman's coffin was draped with the Bund banner. A

band played klezmer-style arrangements of jazz standards as the procession made its way past key sites of the former ghetto to the Warsaw Jewish cemetery, where a choir sang the Bund anthem by the graveside.

On Monday in Melbourne, the Bund community will again gather and light the six candles. We will recall the feats of the ghetto fighters and recite the works of its poets. We will honour the 6 million who perished, and recall the victims of contemporary genocides, from Armenia to Rwanda. And six months after his passing, we will pay tribute to Marek Edelman, a legendary leader of the Warsaw uprising, a healer and lifelong fighter against injustice. The one who stayed behind.

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An excerpt from *In the Shadows of Memory*, Edited by Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein and David Slucki (2016)

The following excerpt is taken from *In the Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation*, a multi-disciplinary study of the third generation of Holocaust survival, that is, the grandchildren of those who emerged from the camps and ghettos to produce new families and lives elsewhere, but were redefined by trauma. This book presents scholarly research from different fields of inquiry, including literary studies, sociology, history and psychology, alongside autobiographical accounts by individuals from the last cohort, as it were. As the last generation to have lived among

survivors, these individuals grapple with a unique set of questions. Jordy and Ben Silverstein, a historian and Indigenous Studies scholar respectively, discuss belonging and exile, solidarity, and memory.

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“A Politics of the Third Generation: Two Siblings Converse”

By Ben Silverstein and Jordana Silverstein

Introduction

For many members of the third generation, the (post)memory of the Holocaust – those memories of our grandparents' experiences that we carry – stands as an ethical call. For Marianne Hirsch this comprises 'an ethical relation to the oppressed or persecuted: as I

can “remember” my [grand]parents' memories, I can also “remember” the suffering of others'.¹

Locating the universal in the particular, and exploring the tensions between these perspectives, seems to us to be critical to the development of a broader politics of being third generation descendants of survivors.

We wanted to discuss these issues, to explore the conflicts, politics and identities to which we find ourselves led as members of the third generation. In the conversation that follows, we raise questions about belonging, solidarity and memory as we relate to the Holocaust and the many shadows it casts. We hope that in doing so we point to the open-endedness of the conversations

produced by being of this third generation, the Jewish grandchildren of survivors of the Holocaust.

Belonging after the Holocaust

Jordana Silverstein: A question I keep coming back to, when I think about my relationship to my Holocaust-surviving grandparents and to the lives (I imagine) they lived, is to ponder how they felt they fitted-in where they lived. And then I find myself pondering how those feelings have been passed on to us. So, a good place for us to jump into this conversation – a conversation that I think we, like many other members of the third generation, have been having for a long time – might be for me to ask: where do you feel you belong? Is being an exile part of the Jewish condition?

Ben Silverstein: Let's begin with the second question you've posed. In some ways, I think an exilic sensibility is central to the way we are Jewish. But Jewish exile is, I think, more a sense of a story we tell of ourselves than a migratory state. Because, really, our lives are not defined by being out of place. We become in place. We are transformed by movement, we change to adapt, and we change in unexpected ways. So, even if we are exiles, we can never 'go back' and, I suspect, we wouldn't want to.

I'm not interested in exile inasmuch as it leads us to a story of origin, of looking for a Jewish essence that we can recall as Jewishness changes into what we are today; an archetype against which we can only be measured and found lacking. A people has no

invariable essence. What interests me, instead, are stories of production. How did we come to be the way we are? In looking to the past we look not for the real we have lost, but to approach a tradition with an unpredictably dynamic history.

To be in exile is to be out of place, and as migrants or the children of migrants I don't think that is what we are. We have been made by the experience of living in Melbourne, of living as Jews in Melbourne. But this is accompanied by a continued awareness – one that comes from being, in some sense, marginal, but also from being definitively non-Indigenous to the land we live on – that I am not from here.



The 1949 travel documents of the authors' grandparents. From the top: Zosia (Sophie) Stawski and Vovek (Wolf) Stawski.

However secure we may be here where we write, we reproduce that exilic sensibility. But the question was also *where* do you feel you belong? It is curious that belonging is so often tied to place, implying a sense that to be exiled – to be cast out of a place – is to belong no longer. Isn't one of the lessons of Jewish diasporism that one can belong in a way not

circumscribed by space? And you ask where I *feel* I belong, suggesting an interest in belonging as sensation, rather than as an objective state. I want to ask you about the affective elements of this Jewish condition. How does this feeling manifest?

JS: It interests me that you bring up this question of place: there's nothing in the question I asked that inherently (only) refers to place. I think I unconsciously formulated it that way, hoping to ask a question about Poland/Europe/Melbourne, but also about a relationship to belonging to being Jewish, or belonging to being a descendant of Holocaust survivors, or belonging to this idea of the third generation.

I think the question of belonging is one which is necessarily raised by the Holocaust, and by the effects of the Holocaust for those who went through it: displacement, being made into a refugee, becoming a citizen again in another place. The emotions which would accompany being produced as non-citizen and then as citizen are, for those of us who have not undergone this experience, impossible to imagine.² So in that way – materially, discursively, emotionally – there is no sense in which I am an exile. It's not entirely precise to equate the loss of citizenship with being an exile, but I think the parallels are there.

[paragraph continues]

Notes:

1. M. Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14, 1 (2001), pp.10–11.
2. Jean Améry makes this point in a more expansive sense in his *At the Mind's Limits* (Bloomington,

IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), p.93.

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Taken from Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein and David Slucki (eds), *In*

the Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation, London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2016 (pages 231-233)

The book can be purchased from the publisher, bookdepository.com and amazon.com.

Removing the Guernsey

By Veronica Sherman

Not long ago I was asked to go into my daughter's school to talk about Jewish Festivals. In order to give some context, I asked the class 3 children if they could find Israel on a globe for me. They searched and searched but no matter how much they tried they couldn't find it. I explained that even though Israel is so often on the news it's a much smaller country than we realise. In fact, three whole Israels would fit into Tasmania. I went on to explain that the reason Israel is in the news so much is that there are two different people groups who both think that the holiest site in Israel belongs to them and this has led to years and years of fighting.

Now, I have lived in Australia long enough to know that as soon as you mention the Middle East conflict people's eyes start glazing over. I needed to tweak my wording in order to keep having the children's attention. I asked them to imagine the MCG. To picture it in this tiny place that is way smaller than Tassie. They were all nodding. I then asked them to imagine that the MCG could only belong to one footy club. The children gasped.

"Only one?"

I asked them to imagine that there were two footy clubs that both felt that the MCG only belonged to them. Their eyes lit up. They got it. I had used an analogy that they could relate to. Footy in

Melbourne is what religion is in other parts of the world.

As someone who has lived in Australia for twenty years now but is still completely ignorant about AFL I feel very distant from what actually takes place on the field. I don't see footy colours as such, unless of course I'm on a train on the weekend and surrounded by a crowd of people all wearing the same coloured scarf. To me footy players are all the same, just a sweaty bunch of guys chasing after a ball and attempting to kick it between some poles. For footy fans it's a whole other reality. It's all about what colour their guernsey is. Their team is out there battling for them. It's taken me a long time to get used to someone commenting on the Monday morning that "they won" on the weekend. As if they were out there on the muddy field alongside the players.

However, if we were to remove the guernsey, the item that identifies which team the player belongs to, what we have left is a guy who loves to be out on the footy field kicking a ball. Without their coloured tops the players no longer belong to opposing teams but are united as men with a similar passion.

It's the same for the rest of us. Once we remove the 'guernseys' that separate us from each other, we realise that we have a lot more in common. And it's in this space of looking across to someone that we once saw as an

opposition and instead seeing what we have in common, that compassion is birthed.



From left: Alan Kurdi, Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan.

This analogy stretches much further than AFL players without their tops on. We've seen it in the past few months since Alan Kurdi washed up on the beach. There was something about his small body alone on the beach that made the general public finally connect with the story of innocent people fleeing Syria. His face hidden in the sand made him look like he could be anyone's son. Our prejudices instantly gone as our hearts broke for a dead little boy.

We are coming up to the one-year anniversary of another story that reinforces this concept of compassion. I suspect that for most of the population the initial response to Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran was one of disgust. Relief that these two trouble makers had been caught before the heroin they were smuggling got through our Australian borders. They were part of the industry that destroys thousands of young lives and we have nothing but contempt for them. However, as their story has unfolded over the years we have evolved along with them. So many of us have gone from indifference to their fate and landed in a place

of compassion. Many of us have been surprised at our tender feelings towards these two men. Of course the change has happened as we have learned more about them as people. The heroin smuggler 'guernsey' has been removed and instead we have heard about their kindness to their fellow inmates and we know that they had a lot more to contribute despite being locked up in a Bali prison. Time has allowed our perception to change and we found ourselves cheering for Andrew and Myuran from the sidelines, hoping that their lives would be spared.

In the case of Alan Kurdi, Chan and Myuran we have the media to thank in helping us in the process to reach a place of compassion. But how far can we take this analogy into our own private life? Is it possible for us to stretch it into

areas that never see the public eye? For those of us who are divorced, can we 'remove the guernsey' and no longer see an antagonist but instead the other parent of our child who also wants what's best for them? What would happen if we were able to do that in our work places and schools? Imagine if we were able to come from a place of compassion because we focused on what we have in common and not what separates us.

I'd like to think that a whole bunch of people actively trying to come from a place of compassion could make a tremendous difference. I know that I won't find an answer to what happens in the Middle East, that innocent children will keep dying because of wars and that over time I will forget the names of Andrew and Myuran. However, I do know that when I

choose compassion instead of judgement, it makes me see and feel things from a different perspective and it makes my corner of the world a softer place to be.

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Send your own story in to *Just Voices* at any time by emailing editor@ajds.org.au



Adam Goodes sporting his Sydney Swans guernsey.

Jews For Refugees

By Bonnie Gelman and Sylvie Leber

Jews for Refugees is a Jewish campaign group actively involved in trying to do something for refugees and asylum seekers.

Jews For Refugees aims to challenge mandatory detention and offshore processing and build solidarity between Jews and asylum seekers.

We:

- write letters to the media
- attend demonstrations and marches
- meet with politicians and talk at political meetings

- share meals with refugees and asylum seekers
- attend medical and other appointments as supporters / advocates
- give driving lessons
- visit those in detention centres
- belong to other groups which also support refugees and asylum seekers
- donate money and collect material aid

We work towards humane refugee policies and an end to off and onshore detention of asylum seekers.

We wonder why there aren't thousands of Jews For Refugees - given our past.

Nearly 14 years ago, on Passover, Jews For Refugees gathered publicly to protest. The Green Left Weekly reported:

“MELBOURNE — On March 31, Jews for Refugees held its first public event — a 700-strong rally during the Festival of Passover, Pesach — outside Maribyrnong detention centre. A car pool and cavalcade led by Yids on Wheels — a Jewish biker group — travelled to the demonstration from the Glen Eira Town Hall in Caulfield.

The rally was publicised at the vast majority of synagogues on Shabbat HaGadol (March 23). Speakers at

the event represented the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, Rabbinate, community and women's groups, holocaust survivors and Jewish students and youth, among others.

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

The vigil paraded with matzot, which is symbolic food eaten at Passover, recalling the escape from the slavery of Egypt more than 3000 years ago. The event concluded with an ancient song, Ha Lachma, one line of which states, "This year we are still in bonds; next year we all will be free". Finally, blasts from the ancient Jewish instrument, the Shofar or ram's horn, that brought Jericho's walls tumbling down were sounded. Its sounding is a call for the Jewish community to stand up for justice."

Jews For Refugees' support for the mostly Muslim refugees in



Jewish representatives at the Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees in Sydney.

Photo: Judy Pincus. Found on <http://www.jewishnews.net.au/rallyin-g-for-refugees/52926>

detention was noted by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. In "Australian Jews Planning to Protest on Behalf of Muslim Asylum Seekers" (15 March, 2002), it said:

"During Passover, more than 500 Jewish protesters plan to march at a Melbourne refugee detention centre to support asylum seekers — most of whom are Muslims.

Holding matzah instead of banners, the protesters plan to demonstrate at Melbourne's Maribyrnong Detention Centre chanting two songs from the Haggadah: 'Ha Lachma Anya,' or 'This is the Bread of Affliction,' and 'Avadim Hayinu,' or "Once We Were Slaves.'

There are approximately 90 refugees, including six children, in Maribyrnong.

Jews for Refugees was established by education consultant David Zyngier, 51, whose parents came to Australia in 1949 without documents, seeking asylum from war-torn Europe.

Zyngier's mother survived the Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps. His father joined the partisans to fight the Germans.

'Jews were interned and vilified when they arrived in Australia after the war,' Zyngier said. The religion of refugees 'should be of no concern. This is a humanitarian problem. Who can forget the

shiploads of Jewish refugees who were turned away during World War II?' Australia incarcerates asylum seekers in closed detention centres that are heavily guarded and surrounded by barbed-wire fences.

The asylum seekers, mostly from the Middle East and Afghanistan, make their way to Australia via Indonesia, where they pay as much as \$8,000 to smugglers to transport them in rickety old boats, some of which have sunk, claiming many lives. Many asylum seekers have no papers.

They are detained for up to three years in Australia while their claims for refugee status are evaluated."

Jews for Refugees also marched in Sydney's recent Palm Sunday while Sylbie Leber delivered a powerful speech at the Melbourne march. You can hear that speech by visiting the AJDS facebook page.

Sources:

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/25603>

<http://www.jta.org/2002/03/15/archive/australian-jews-planning-to-protest-on-behalf-of-muslim-asylum-seekers>

To join Jews For Refugees contact co@ajds.org.au.



Send your short piece, poem or photo to editor@ajds.org.au

Refugee-Run School in Indonesia a Model for Governments to Emulate

By Dr. Sally Clark and Carly Copolov, Swinburne University

A school set up by asylum seekers and refugees in the West Java town Cisarua, Indonesia, is an initiative that Australian and Indonesian governments should model and support.

In August 2014, refugees from Afghanistan in transit in Indonesia established the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC) to provide education for their children.

Asylum seekers and refugee children in Indonesia, one of the key transit states for refugees waiting to be resettled in Australia and other countries, have no access to regular schooling during the long wait for resettlement.

The school in Cisarua has received no official funding from any government body. It relies on donations from civil society in Indonesia and Australia to continue its work.

Life in transit

Recent UNHCR figures show Indonesia is hosting more than 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers. It is conservatively estimated that more than 2,000 are unaccompanied minors.

The average waiting period from registration to the first interview with the UNHCR is between eight and 20 months on average. Only once a person is found to be a refugee will the search for a resettlement place begin. During this time, asylum seekers and

refugees are also denied the right to work.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. Asylum seekers are tolerated by the government but never accepted. People found to be refugees have no prospect of permanent resettlement in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, children in Australia's offshore detention centres for asylum seekers face challenges at local schools and long-term risks of mental and physical harm.

Education for refugees

The issue of education of refugees children has recently been put into the international spotlight by education activist Malala Yousafzai. The Nobel laureate sought US\$1.4 billion to provide education for Syrian child refugees.



A child refugee at the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre. Author provided

In Australia, a loose coalition of teachers has also been protesting under the hashtag #EducationNotDetention and #TeachersForRefugees on the

back of the High Court ruling on the legality of offshore detention.

Even before these campaigns, asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia had already been working to create an environment where their children could receive an education.

The Cisarua school provides education for 80 students. It has also restored a sense of purpose and dignity to refugees who are living a vulnerable and precarious life in transit.

CRLC has 14 permanent teaching staff comprised entirely of refugees and revolving volunteers from around the world.

The students follow a classic curriculum that includes maths, English, art and science. They also learn about healthy living, mutual respect and equality.

The school provides activities for adults too. In the evening, adults can take English classes. The school also started a local football league for men and women to keep people physically active.

Refugees participate in football matches with local Indonesians. The school regularly hosts international visitors. All guests participate in the classrooms and stay with the teaching staff.

Using social media, the school has formed global partnerships and disseminates first-hand experiences of what life is like for people seeking asylum.

School's impact on refugees

The impact the centre has had on its students is undeniable. Nine-year-old Fatima Karimi says:

I do remember the day when I first heard about the school.

My home was close to the school and my mother told me I will also go to school soon. On the first day I made two friends. Now I have many friends and some of them are my best friends. Since I came to the school I feel really good. After school hours sometimes I go to my friends' houses and play with them. It was something I was missing since we fled from our country.

The school has also brought solace to adult refugees who volunteer as teachers. One of the young teachers, who was asked to fill a vacancy left by a leading teacher

who was resettled in Australia, says:

When I am teaching the kids, I forget that we are living a difficult life as refugees. Being a refugee, I never thought that I will ever be able to be a teacher, to meet different people and gain invaluable experience.

Recently, a Pozible crowd-funding campaign that set out to raise A\$25,000 raised enough to ensure the school's continued operations for the next three years.

While governments continue to spend billions of dollars to prevent asylum seeker coming by

boat from transit countries, it seems that a much wiser investment would be programs such as this.

The school makes life in transit more bearable for asylum seekers. Aside from the educational benefit for children and the sense of purpose in refugees, facilitating refugees to run schools for their children may reduce the push factors that drive them to risk their lives on a perilous journey by boat.

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This article was originally published 7 March 2016 in theconversation.com.

Visiting asylum seekers in detention: a discussion with three visitors

What's your background?

Sounds like the beginning of a joke: A librarian, a therapist and a textile designer walk into a detention centre... Our background is homo sapiens.

To which detention centres have you been going and for how long?

There are two centres in Melbourne, Maribyrnong and Broadmeadows. We have been visiting for two and a half years, two years and six months respectively.

Librarian: I began visiting Maribyrnong for work and continued as a citizen. Both centres are set in the midst of leafy suburban life, we pass them on the way to buy hummus or on school drives.

Had you ever thought about asylum seekers before, and why did you start visiting regularly?

Therapist: I've had ongoing relationships with refugees settled in Australia from a volunteer project in which I was involved in 2009 (Palestinian Iraqi refugees from camps along Syrian Iraqi borders resettled in Australia).

Librarian: I hadn't really considered the idea prior to working in the centre.

Designer: I was a virtual online supporter for a long time (due to over work commitments), and only transitioned to physical visitor last year on Christmas day, which was a public holiday.

What's the detention centre like?

Horrible!

Librarian: A prison for honest people.

Therapist: A horrible place, like a jail with high security, procedures and process. There are moments of humane interaction with certain Serco staff that soften the harshness of the experience.

Designer: Surprisingly aesthetic in the public spaces, and mostly civil polite interactions with the security guards with heavy undertones of passive aggressive communication. It feels like visiting a zoo without being able to see the back rooms, the cruelty and dehumanization.

Can you describe the visit?

Therapist: Meeting the detainees has been an incredible, wonderful experience, filled with love and exchanges of positive energy. Sharing stories about life in other countries, eating together and learning about culture. It is grounding for us all. These connections remain with us wherever we go, whether back in the lockup room or on the quiet drive home. It is also sad, as they

can't visit us. This is a reminder that I am a free person. At the start I felt guilt, but now I feel lucky that I was born in a particular place/time.

Librarian: The visits and relationships have changed my life completely. Freedom is not just an idea. I appreciate mine and the privilege that comes with it, both good and bad. Meeting with the asylum seekers expands my knowledge, my idea of culture, and of different backgrounds. It also led to experimenting with a different kind of love, free from norms and convention. Love crosses boundaries of age, status, ethnicity, language, culture and gender. These bonds develop into vital ties, they become family. There can be family without blood connection, there can be love without sex and with people you've known for only a short time.

Designer: Awkward at first, wasn't sure who was inside and who is visiting (look for the bright wrist band). Not sure what to ask or say. It's what I imagine speed dating to be like, randomly bumping into strangers and making small talk. With time it has morphed into deep interwoven links between people who share common interests, humour and chemistry. Leaving at the end of the visit is a sad ritual of deep sorrow and love. I feel elated in the build up to the visit, calm during the visit and tumultuously empty on the long drive home.

What do they need? What can people do?

Therapist: To see that the community cares and supports them. That's why I go. We need more love and acceptance and less judgement. Donating money helps directly. It has paid for clothes, shoes, and even TVs for

the detainees. Definitely signing petitions and going to demonstrations. If you want to help, cook for us (we bring food inside) and have conversations about the kind of compassionate country of which we want to be citizens.

Librarian: Join the visits, campaign with locals, raise the debate and don't think it's in the too hard basket, its actually very simple.

Designer: Visit the asylum seekers. It will change your life into one that you could never imagine. Looking deeply into the eyes of another shifts the most fundamental ideas you hold inside. Touching those who have been marginalised and locked up brings you back to life. It is powerful and so rewarding.

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Write to us to find out how to join an upcoming visit to a detention centre.



*Annual General Meeting of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society,
21 February 2016 #letthemstay*

Upcoming AJDS events, open to the public:

24 April – AJDS Seder

12 May – What’s Happening on the Ground in Israel/Palestine? An Info Night

26 May – AJDS Reading Group

Visit ajds.org.au/events/ for more details

Join the AJDS Reading Group and Potluck

Open to members and friends, this is a safe and open forum to meet and share ideas about selected short readings.

In our first meeting we got to know one another as we shared ideas about A. B. Yehoshua’s “Facing the Forests” from 1963. Thank you for an inspiring chat!

In our next meeting we’ll talk about Anzia Yezierska’s “The Fat of the Land” from 1919.

Join by emailing editor@ajds.org.au



JUST VOICES #9 – FREEDOM/OPPRESSION

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