

UJPO News



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The United Jewish People's Order is a national, nonpartisan, socialist-oriented, secular organization, serving Canada's progressive Jews in individual organizations since 1926 and collectively as the UJPO since 1945.

UJPO News Winter 2025

Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

UJPO's Kick-Off to our 100 Year Anniversary

The United Jewish People's Order / Morris Winchevsky School's
BIG, BEAUTIFUL FUNDRAISER

RISE UP 2

MONDAY
DEC 8
2025

7 PM
— TO —
9 PM
DOORS OPEN
6:30 PM

in Toronto for a rare appearance
Black Ox Orkestar

Trinity St. Paul's United Church, 427 Bloor Street West

Featuring Judy Rebick, Elvira Kurt,
Marching Disorder & special guests!

Dove watermelon illustration by Popolo Press. Graphic Design by Erfan Talebi.

NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

FROM WINNIPEG

By Harriet Zaidman

UJPO/Jews for Social Justice (Winnipeg) has been actively taking part in the rallies, demonstrations and events organized to support the Free Palestine movement. Weekly rallies have ended for now, but we are engaged in programming for Jews with a progressive sentiment to gather and to advance the cause of justice for Palestinians.

The North End Jewish Folk Choir held a successful fundraiser in a backyard house concert on a sunny Sunday, September 28. The choir sang, and the audience of about 40 people was also entertained by four soloists and a lively performance by the Bajer-Koulack Family Band. A photograph is attached.



Jews and Israel: Which Way Forward - Sunday, November 2, Merchants Corner, 1:00. The event was a panel discussion with representatives from:

UJPO/Jews for Social Justice

Independent Jewish Voices

Manitoba Friends of Standing Together

The publisher of jewishpostandnews.ca

Women Wage Peace

We co-sponsored "**Stories, Poems and Prayers for Palestine**" with Manitoba Friends of Standing Together and the Canadian Palestinian Association of Manitoba, IJV and others at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights on October 28. Doors opened at 6:30.

Mira Sucharov talked about "**Research Subjectivity and the Politics of Israel/Palestine**" on October 29 at 12:00 at the Tier Building, University of Manitoba.

Dr. Itay Zutra will talk about **Funny Jews: On Diasporic Humour**. The lecture series began on Sunday, November 16 at 10:30, in person or on Zoom. Cost: \$100 per person, emailed to hdshorr@shaw.ca. See the poster attached at the end of this issue for later dates and details.

We co-sponsored a film screening of **1948: Creation and Catastrophe at Cinematheque** on Tuesday, November 25th.

We will hold a **Chanukah party** on Sunday, December 14 from 2:00-5:00 p.m. at the Robert A. Steen Community Centre. Everyone is welcome. It's a potluck, so bring your best latkes, applesauce, salad or dessert! There will be activities for children, and musical performances, including one by the North End Jewish Folk Choir. The cost is \$10/adult, with children free. Stay tuned for registration and payment information.

We continue to engage with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning in Manitoba about the content of a renewed curriculum about the Holocaust, and with the Department of Justice in regard to the training of provincial prosecutors about anti-semitism and racism.

We welcomed Tami Gadir and Shira Newman to our Executive Board, and we thank Jill Carr for her contributions to the Board in the last year as she leaves. Thanks to Chiaa Hoult for taking on the task of webmaster for our chapter's website, too.

Individual Notes

UJPO/JSJ Winnipeg member Harriet Zaidman will release her new novel, *What Friends Are For*, on November 20 at McNally Robinson Booksellers in Winnipeg at 7:00 CST. If you can't make it in person, join the launch on the McNally YouTube site.

The novel is set in 1983 when Dr. Henry Morgentaler opened a clinic in Winnipeg to provide abortion services for women on demand and outside a hospital setting. When a young teen is assaulted, she has to choose between satisfying the expectations of her anti-abortion mother and best friend and doing what's right for herself.

Editors Note: This novel is reviewed by Harriet Lyons in this issue.

FROM TORONTO

By David Wall

UJPO Toronto has had a very busy summer and fall! Here are just some of the cultural highlights:

Naivelt 100th

In August, UJPO Toronto helped facilitate the hugely successful centennial festival at Camp Naivelt, our summer family retreat. There was a major concert; pavilions situated throughout the campgrounds featured creative engagements with the many decades of Naivelt's storied history; there was a photo exhibition and much more. It was a beautiful celebration, marking a major milestone and looking forward to Camp Naivelt's next 100 years.

Jewish Musicians for Gaza

On September 7, we hosted a sold-out concert featuring young musicians from Toronto and Montreal, dedicated to Gazan solidarity. Thousands of dollars were raised for the Elham Fund, an organization that supplies medical supplies and food to people in the warzone.

Yiddish Art and Anti-Fascism

On September 14, UJPO joined forces with Rad Yiddish and the Yiddish Book Center for a lively walking tour of Toronto's Spadina Avenue, uncovering the hidden histories and vibrant legacies of the city's Yiddish-speaking activists. A week later, the conversation continued with a hands-on collage workshop, where participants transformed copies of historic pamphlets, protest signs, broadsides, bulletins, musical scores, and more—drawn from the UJPO archives and beyond—into new works of art celebrating our radical Yiddish heritage.

High Holidays

Sold-out observances were held in Toronto, featuring music, poetry and guest speakers. This year, our theme for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was "Destruction and Creation." In these terrible days, we confront several

contradicting realities, many of which can be distilled into the fundamental concepts of creation and destruction. We asked, *how do we dive deep into what it means to be living at such an extreme time, what injustices, just comfortable enough to us, are preventing the creation of a new and liberated world?*

HONOURABLE MENTSHN

Marching Disorder & Elissa Hermolin

Two Recipients of our 2025 Ben Shek Award

Nomination: Marching Disorder

By: Sarena Sairan, David Wall, Shayle Kilroy

We are proud to nominate **Marching Disorder** for the Ben Shek Social Justice Award. This remarkable collective has become a beacon of hope and inspiration at rallies and protests across Toronto, embodying the spirit of social justice through music, joy, and solidarity.

At many demonstrations throughout this past year and prior, Marching Disorder brings people together. Not only through rhythm and song, but through a shared commitment to justice, equity, and collective action. Their music uplifts spirits, strengthens movements, and reminds us that activism can be both powerful and joyful.

Comprised of members from **MWS families and beyond**, Marching Disorder reflects the values that guide our community: inclusion, creativity, courage, culture, music and the pursuit of progressive Jewish values aligned to our social justice priorities. They have become an integral part of the activist landscape in our city and are a gift to every cause they support and a testament to the power of art as a vehicle for change.

Marching Disorder exemplifies the principles at the heart of UJPO's mission and the legacy of Ben Shek. They use their talents and voices to inspire hope, foster solidarity, and call for justice through collective action. We wholeheartedly recommend them for this year's Ben Shek Social Justice Award.

Nomination: Elissa Hermolin

By Hannah Blazer, Ester Reiter & Maxine Hermolin

WHAT'S IN ORDER

Get Well

Barbara Blaser

Condolences

We send our condolences to Alejandro Paz and his family for the recent loss of his mother, Myriam Bayerthal.

By Sarena Sairan

♦

GETTING TO KNOW OUR UJPO MEMBERS

An Interview with Maddy Wintermute

By Sam Blatt



SB: Since when have you been a member of UJPO (Toronto)?

MW: My entire life (and when I was in the womb)!

We would like to honour Elissa Hermolin with this year's Social Justice award. We couldn't decide so this year there will be two honourees.

Elissa, as many of you may know was literally born into our organization. Elissa epitomizes 'fun kemp tsu Shule... fun Shule tsu kemp'. She spent summers at Camp Naivelt, attended the Winchevsky Shule and then became a teacher, passing on to others her knowledge of what secular progressive Yiddishkayt means. Elissa also led MWS Youth Groups including guiding the development of workshops for presentation at CSJO (Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations) conferences. From growing up at Naivelt to leading children's summer activities there, Elissa has been a consistent participant in our UJPO/Naivelt community and has always been there to help in whatever needs doing.

She generously took on the work of chairing our Naivelt 100th Planning Committee which culminated in a grand celebration in August 2025. Elissa contributed an incredible amount of time, effort and organizational seykhel [intelligence] in pulling together the many different strands of our wonderful and memorable anniversary weekend. We have Elissa to thank for many of the details that made that weekend a success – overseeing the sub-committees, mapping out the complex programming, ordering the tent shading us for the concerts, the chairs we sat on, the food truck and snack bar to feed us, the security and first aid responders to name a few. And when you see us parading around in our Naivelt anniversary hats, shirts, sweatshirts, remember without Elissa organizing ordering and distributing all the “merch”, where would we be?

For Elissa, Social Justice is not just talk – it's in the often unacknowledged and not very glamorous work of doing.

A Sheynem Dank Elissa for your exceptional work

♦

SB: What brought you to UJPO? Family history in UJPO, friends bringing you in, activity in related areas such as housing, labour, grass-roots politics...other?

MW: My family has been a part of UJPO for four generations now, with my great bubby and zaidy joining early on. My family has continued to be very involved both in UJPO and in other work related to housing and labour rights, community organizing, Yiddishkeit, and grassroots activism.

SB: In which boards and/or committees are you active?

MW: None, currently! I know I have a lifetime ahead of me to be guilting onto various committees, so I planned to take it easy in my 20s.

SB: What is your life outside UJPO, (that you are willing to share..)?

MW: Right now, I'm in my first semester of a Master's degree in Urban Planning at U of T. I finished my undergraduate degree and moved back to Toronto from Montreal a few years ago, when I spent some time working at a food security nonprofit in Toronto. I ended up deciding to leave and I've spent the last couple of years travelling: backpacking through Europe, living and work-trading on a Jewish farm in Connecticut, living out on Vancouver Island, and travelling to the West Bank, where I was doing protective presence work with Palestinian farmers during their olive harvest last year. I have just recently moved back and am excited to stay in one place for a little bit and settle in during school! I loved getting to move around, learning a lot of different skills, working with my hands, growing food, and experiencing so many different cities and places, which is a lot of what excites me about urban planning.

SB: Are you able to bring your non-UJPO activities and skills into a close relationship with your UJPO activities?

MW: I would say so. I have spent a lot of time doing community organizing work and being in lots of other communal environments - living in a farmhouse with dozens of people and making group decisions, working in community arts settings, being part of many different Jewish collectives. When I returned home from the West Bank last year, I was able to give several talks about the time I spent there, and to share photos and stories with

family and friends. I was lucky to give one talk in Toronto to a largely UJPO-related audience, and another during a Bagel Brunch at Camp Naivelt. It felt really special to get to bring a big and formative life experience back to a community I love and care for, and to have so many UJPO people support me in that experience. I also hope to do my Master's thesis research next year — in part about Naivelt and the UJPO, looking at different aspects of what sustains a community over time, creates and strengthens community spaces, and what we can learn about designing spaces for the future by engaging more closely with what has worked in the past. I feel like the values and politics of UJPO really seep into everything I do as a young person out in the world.

SB: Are other members of your family involved in or members of UJPO?

MW: Well, all of them! Blazer happens to be my middle name instead of my last name, so sometimes I'm not lumped in with the whole clan, but it's in there. I'm lucky to show up to UJPO events and to Camp Naivelt and automatically get to see almost all of my relatives.

SB: Have there been any changes in UJPO since you joined, that you would like to mention?

MW: In recent years, of course, a lot has happened in the Jewish community, and UJPO has really been keeping pace in responding to political events and engaging with lots of other organizations doing similar lefty work. It feels like there's been a bit of a renaissance among young people because of this — I now have non-Jewish friends who know what UJPO is because they see the organization on social media and at events, which wasn't really the case when I was younger. It also seems to me that there is growing diversity in the religious/spiritual affiliation of folks who are coming to UJPO events and involving themselves in the work. I think it's a wonderful thing to have these many different kinds of Judaism come together under one umbrella and to learn from people with different upbringings than I had here, though I am my father's daughter, and I hope UJPO still retains its secular roots and programming going forward. Overall, it's been very cool to see UJPO's public presence grow and to have a more solid standing in the Toronto Jewish community, though I hope that people who are coming for the politics will stick around for the Yiddishkeit, music, cultural events,

idiosyncrasies, and sense of real community that we have to offer.

SB: Are there changes you would like to see over the coming years?

MW: I don't know that I can think of any that others aren't already on the ball about. We have such a great team of people these days who are committing so much time, care, and energy to sustaining and improving so many aspects of our work – I am really in awe every time I go to an event and see how thoughtful each component is, from the messaging to the content to the finishing touches, and I know there is so much behind the scenes and extra volunteer labour contributing to all of this that I'm not even seeing. I really trust our community members to make decisions and guide us in the right direction.

SB: How do you see yourself contributing to the health of the organization?

MW: I think it's a very cool thing to have so many generations of a family/community involved in one organization, and I am lucky to feel that a lot of this institutional and generational knowledge has been passed down to me and to my sisters and cousins. I think my role in the long term, thinking ahead to the next generation of leadership, will largely be to have grown up so immersed in the organization, knowing and retelling its history, seeing its evolution up close, introducing new members, and feeling the level of investment that I do in its continuity.

SB: Last and not least – a book and/or movie and/or play you recommend.

MW: I take after my bubby in her love for Barbra Streisand, and "Funny Girl" is my favourite movie of all time. I have to imagine most among us have seen it, but as the weather gets colder it is well worth cozying up and rewatching one of these nights!

POETRY & SONG

Belief

Maya Pindyck

Submitted by Harriet Lyons

In the Spring of 2024, the Laurel Review published a special issue entitled *Breaking the Glass: A Contemporary Jewish Poetry Anthology*, edited by Daniel Biegelson, John Gallaher, and Luke Rolfes. The volume is truly a treasure trove of masterful verse, on subjects as diverse as Jewish identity, antisemitism, family histories, American politics, Israel, memories of the Holocaust, and Jewish poetry itself. By clicking [here](#), readers can access the entire issue and treat themselves to a truly enriching and stimulating experience but first let us share a poem from the collection that captures a moment of what Isabella Hammad called "recognition," seeing another in such a way as to question previously unchallenged certainties.

Maya Pindyck, the author of the poem, was raised by secular Jewish parents in Massachusetts, where she was born in 1978, and Tel Aviv, where she received much of her early education. She attended college and graduate school in the US, receiving a master's degree in fine arts, and a PhD in English literature. She works in both poetry and visual art and is Director of Writing and a professor of liberal arts at the Moore College of Art and Design. She has won many awards and has published poems in both Hebrew and English.

Maya Pindyck

Belief

My country lies to me.

It tells me what I love is national belonging and not its native bird's singing,

how our throats throttle when speaking the words
mustard and friend—

the sea's salt & memory.

Once, I believed my country,

thinking the children dead by its hands an unfortunate necessity

for the preservation of our bodies.

I don't believe my country anymore.

I believe only the mint leaves boiled by my enemies who wait for the waters to brown in clear glasses, and who crack open pistachios, tossing their shells.

I believe only the pita's heat warming our mouths, our soft chewing.

I believe only the Arab man who rushes to extinguish the fire someone lit to the synagogue across the street.

I believe only the Jew dressed in white who names himself a Bride to Peace, giving flowers to all the people on the road until his hands empty of flowers—

I believe the women sewing a long cloth to cradle their dead.

I believe the Lyft driver who, when I name my country, says

Don't worry, I don't hate you

and recites his phone number for the next time I fly to Tel Aviv and wish to see Ramallah.

I don't believe the story that for my house to stand yours had to fall—and that I'll have no home if not an expansion swallowing my neighbor's land.

My country insists I'll always be a slave

to trauma—wields the piles of braids & suitcases as rationale for brutality in the name of nationality

rather than proof that any one of us at any moment could—

Scrolling FaceBook I see an old classmate's new profile pic sliced by a graphic of my country's flag

announcing where she stands

and I think of her children asleep in their beds, the running water & electricity they will wake to

secure in the fact of their freedom—and the flowers,

all the flowers bombed and still rising from slits to seep the tea and bake the bread and stand in disbelief—

I believe only the poet who writes the words her people won't hear.

I believe in the blood rushing between our ears.

♦

A LITTLE NOSH

Persian Bean Soup

By Harriet Zaidman

Good soup takes time, but good soup is worth waiting for - a smooth, hearty brew made flavourful by turmeric, mint and lemon. Three varieties of beans as well as lentils make the texture and taste pleasurable. As with most soups, change it according to your own tastes. This

recipe is adapted from a Persian Noodle Soup called Ash Reshtesh, found on [The Delicious Crescent](#). That version calls for the addition of noodles, which would make the soup even more substantial. Whichever way you make it, you'll have a meal-in-one, nourishing and delicious.

This and other delicious recipes can be found on my website, North End Nosh: northendnosh.weebly.com

Time: 2 hours

Serves: 6

Ingredients

- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 onions or combination of onions and leeks
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 2 tablespoons dried mint or 6 tablespoons fresh mint, basil or herb of your choice
- 1 - 1 1/2 cups cooked or canned chickpeas
- 1 - 1 1/2 cups cooked or canned kidney beans
- 1 - 1 1/2 cups cooked or canned white beans
- 6 cups water or beef stock, adjusted as needed
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 cup green lentils
- 2 cups packed spinach, or arugula, whole or chopped
- 1 cup fresh parsley, chopped or 1/2 cup dried
- 1 tablespoon all purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice, adjusted as needed
- 1 cup sour cream, yogurt, crème fraiche or kashk (optional)
- More sautéed onion for garnishing the soup (optional)

Method

Heat the oil in a large soup pot and sauté the onions/leeks over medium-low heat until they're soft and golden brown, which may take about 20 to 25 minutes. Add the minced garlic after 10 minutes of sautéing the onions. Don't stint on this stage - the onions need time to become nice and jammy.

Turn off the heat and stir in the turmeric. Do not let it burn.

Remove 1/3 of the onion/turmeric mixture and combine it with the dried mint while it's still hot. Set aside to use as a garnish for the finished soup.

Let the rest of the onion/turmeric mixture cool and stir 1/2 of it into the sour cream. Chill the sour cream mixture until the soup is ready.

Add all the beans and chickpeas, water or stock, salt and pepper to the rest of the onions in the pot and bring it to a boil.

Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for about 45 to 60 minutes or more until the beans are very soft. Then add the lentils and cook another 15 minutes.

Next add all the spinach and parsley. Stir and let it simmer for about 15-30 minutes until it reaches a soft, mushy and thick soup consistency. Add more water or stock as needed.

In a small bowl, combine a few tablespoons of soup and the flour, whisking well to make sure there are no lumps. Stir this back into the simmering soup.

Tip: Alternatively, skip the flour/water and blend a very small portion of the soup with an immersion blender, then add it back to give the soup a creamy consistency.

Stir the lemon juice into the soup according to your taste.

Adjust the consistency, salt, lemon juice and other seasonings to taste.

Ladle the soup into bowls and top with dollops of the sour cream and onion-mint mixture. Optionally, top with more onions as a garnish.

You can freeze this soup in freezer safe containers. Thaw and reheat, adding water or stock to adjust the consistency. ♦

BOOK REVIEW

The World After Gaza

Review of "The World After Gaza" by Pankaj Mishra, New York: Penguin Books, 306 pp., 2025

By Andrew Lyons

Elsewhere in this issue of UJPO News Paul Weinberg discusses an IJV book group in Hamilton on Palestinian themes that had some unexpected and welcome Palestinian participants. Harriet Lyons and I are members of an online book group co-chaired by Marilyn Tate and Yvette Matyas, that contains UJPO members, and community activists from Toronto and further afield – we have one member from Peretz in Vancouver. We're discussing books on Israel/Palestine and the current crisis in Western democracies. This month (November) we discussed Pankaj Mishra's *The World After Gaza*. Most participants in our group found the book stimulating, if demanding.

Like many writers born in non-Western countries and like so many on the Left, Mishra does not shirk from condemning settler colonialism in Israel, and he is uncompromising in his reaction to the genocide after October 7th (the book was published in February this year). One of his central arguments is that the Gaza genocide is the latest manifestation of a pattern of ethnic cleansing/genocide perpetrated by agents of white supremacy. He notes that the Holocaust, enormous in scale and directed against a European rather than a colonial population, deployed methods and ideologies that had appeared elsewhere first.

What makes Mishra's book unique is his unusual perspective, inasmuch as he has no personal stake in the conflict. He grew up in a Hindu nationalist household and as an adolescent was an admirer of Moshe Dayan, whose picture adorned his bedroom wall. Later he changed his mind, and a visit to Israel and Palestine in 2008 convinced him that Israel had chosen the wrong path. Mishra married into the British aristocracy. His father-in-law, Sir Ferdinand Mount, was head of the policy unit at 10, Downing St. during Thatcher's first term, and subsequently edited *The Times Literary Supplement*. His wife is also a cousin of Charles Cameron. His mother-in-law is a member of the Pakenham family, which included the eccentric and brilliant left-winger Frank Pakenham, Lord Longford. His reading includes not only classic works of

postcolonial criticism but also many Jewish writers of all political persuasions.

As an erstwhile supporter of Israel Mishra is unusually sensitive to the role antisemitism played in its creation and in subsequent years. He records the failure of the British and Americans to relax immigration quotas and admit refugees from Hitler (the Kindertransport was an exception), the very simple fact that 200,000 displaced survivors of the Shoah emigrated to Israel, not necessarily because they wanted to, but because nobody else wanted to have them, and they had languished in DP camps. The chapter on Germany is particularly interesting. Mishra notes that few Germans were tried for their participation in the Shoah, and that a regime that still was staffed by Nazi civil servants was willing to provide reparations to Israel. One of them was Adenauer's senior aide, Hans Globke (p. 160). I checked out Globke on Wikipedia — he was responsible for the Nazi law that made Jewish males adopt the name *Israel*, and Jewish women, the name *Sara*, as their middle names. For nearly three-quarters of a century, Germany has been supplying reparations to Israel, and it has supplied arms that have facilitated the current genocide.

Antisemitism was a reason that Jews never felt quite at home anywhere, always looking at themselves the way they thought others might see them. Zionism was one reaction to active persecution. Early Zionists like Herzl and Nordau envisioned themselves as co-existing with Palestinians, but as civilizing colonizers, not as cultural equals. Another early Zionist, Asher Ginsburg, pen name Ahad Ha'am, deplored the aggressive and ethnocentric attitudes of early settlers and other Zionists. However, the revisionist Zionists, led by Jabotinsky, who emerged a few years after the Balfour Declaration, favoured a program of ethnic cleansing from the very outset. Jabotinsky's followers included Begin, Shamir and Benzion Netanyahu, father of Benjamin. From the very beginning of the settlement process there was an attempt to build a "muscular" culture that would contrast with the supposed victim culture of the ghettos. This form of machismo became more pronounced after the Shoah. The new Israel would distance itself from Hitler's victims, some of whom were supposedly herded like sheep on to the trains to the death camps. Begin's Irgun forces perpetrated the Deir Yassin massacre in league with members of Lehi (the Stern Gang, which included Yitzhak Shamir). We might note that Lehi also perpetrated the assassinations of Lord Moyne and Folke Bernadotte and were responsible for the massacre in the King David Hotel.

Mishra notes (p.160) that Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt were both signatories to a letter to the *New York*

Times in 1948, condemning the Deir Yassin massacre and the significant failure, then and subsequently, of Israel's less extreme leaders to confront Israel's far right, who claimed to be guardians of a new democracy, but were in fact terrorists and fascists (note that Jabotinsky had been an ally of Mussolini in the early 1930s). Instead, Israel has become progressively more extreme over the years. The situation worsened after the victory in the Six Day War. Shortly thereafter the settlement movement began. After the 1973 War, sentiments hardened, and the Israeli government built an alliance with South Africa, whose leader Vorster had ardently supported Nazi Germany. Mishra sees the election of Begin as significant. Since 1977, Likud has dominated Israeli politics, except for the Oslo period of the 1990s. The Lebanese incursion and the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, with which Israel was complicit, registered Israel's loss of scruples regarding mass slaughter.

Mishra enlarges on an argument that is contained in Rashid Khalidi's masterful work, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*. It was indeed foreshadowed by an essay, "The Superior Virtues of the Oppressed" by Bertrand Russell in *The Nation* in 1937. Russell argues that there is no intrinsic virtue in suffering, in being oppressed, abused and impoverished. If virtue were the product of oppression, that would surely be a good argument for its continuance. In fact, oppression can coarsen some of its victims. Mishra argues that movements that begin as struggles against oppression often develop into regimes of extreme nationalism, and notes that in both Israel and India, some decades after independence, a fascistic religious nationalism has supplanted an earlier, more secular manifestation.

In Mishra's opinion, centuries of antisemitism, culminating in the Holocaust, has had an understandably traumatic effect on Jewish people, and it has fostered the combination of paranoia and machismo characteristic of the Israeli far right. These tendencies that dominate contemporary Zionist thought in Israel and the diaspora were deplored by many influential Jewish thinkers. Mishra discusses some of the Jewish thinkers who have criticized Zionism, including some who never accepted it and others who questioned it, repulsed by its excesses. The critics included Einstein, Hannah Arendt and Martin Buber who supported the idea of a national home where Jews and Arabs would be equal citizens. Jean Améry, an Austrian survivor of Auschwitz, was a passionate Zionist. Shortly before his suicide in 1978 Améry, who had survived Nazi torture, was horrified to read of the torture of imprisoned Palestinians by Israelis. Subsequently, Primo Levi, another Auschwitz survivor, criticized the Israeli action in Lebanon by the Begin government. In the United States, the rupture between

Jewish intellectuals who had supported Civil Rights, and African Americans, who increasingly supported Palestinians as comrades in the struggle against white supremacy, was one of the reasons for the move to neoconservatism by writers like Saul Bellow. There were some who resisted that trend, one of whom, Alfred Kazin was particularly critical of the “cult” of Elie Wiesel as a “Jesus of the Holocaust.”

The weaponization of the Holocaust from the time of the Eichmann trial to the present plays a significant role in Mishra’s book, but he does at least ground it in the post-traumatic stress that was produced by centuries of persecution culminating in the Shoah. I have always been suspicious of Finkelstein’s argument that the supposed absence of focus on the Holocaust during the first 15 years after the fall of the Nazis indicated that it was not the central concern of Jews everywhere. It was constantly in my parents’ mind and in the minds of their family and friends in England during the 1950s when I was growing up. Antisemitism in Britain and Germany was an obsession, and the long arguments about German rearmament were also arguments about Holocaust memory. One should note that Mishra neither condemns nor praises the Hamas assault on October 7th, 2023. Implicitly, he indicates that it was excessive, albeit there were no babies with severed heads. The issue for him is that the most extreme government in Israeli history behaved in the most extreme, genocidal way after the Hamas incursion.

Although he favourably views demonstrations supporting Palestine in North America and Europe, Mishra fears that the future of both Palestinians and Israelis in the “Promised Land” is most uncertain. We live in “a decrepit world.” Furthermore, “the arc of the moral universe does not bend towards justice.” His pessimism may be realistic. Mishra’s readers are not granted the choice of a happy ending, as some members of our reading group noted with some sadness.

♦

BOOK REVIEW

"What Friends Are For" by Harriet Zaidman

Wandering Fox, an imprint of Heritage House Publishing, Ltd., 248 pp., 2025

By Harriet Lyons

Harriet Zaidman, a member of our editorial board, author of the beloved column “A Little Nosh,” and a widely published author of children’s literature, has published a new book. *What Friends Are For* is a historical novel aimed at teens, mature tweens, and young adults. Set in Winnipeg in 1983, it deals with the controversy surrounding the opening of Dr. Henry Morgentaler’s clinic in that city, through the experience of Leesa, a fifteen-year-old girl who moves from demonstrating against the upcoming clinic to becoming one of its first clients.

The story moves through many of the life experiences that drive women to terminate their pregnancies, as well as the arguments and alternative solutions proposed by those who wish to forbid abortions. Leesa, the daughter of a police officer and a Right to Life picketer, who has never been on a date, is raped at a party by an older boy, and finds herself pregnant. She does not feel free to confide in her strict parents, and, initially, in her best friend, whose anti-abortion sentiments are deeper than Leesa’s own. The plot of the novel is skillfully constructed to introduce the reader to many of the obstacles and dilemmas experienced by girls and women faced by unwanted pregnancies, and it does so without succumbing to didacticism. The boy, predictably, disowns any responsibility. When Leesa finally confides in her friend, she is referred to one of the deceptive pregnancy crisis centres that exist to dissuade women from having abortions under the guise of offering help.

In Leesa’s case, they conceal the results of her pregnancy test till it is almost too late to have an abortion (no drugstore pregnancy tests in 1983). To receive a legal abortion would require convincing a hospital committee that she would commit suicide if forced to carry the pregnancy to term, which would make it difficult to maintain her privacy, as her mother is a part time employee at the hospital. She tries to develop enthusiasm for becoming a mother, but, as a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, finds the prospect overwhelming. Meanwhile, the controversy over Morgentaler’s clinic leads to discussions among her friends and family that disclose facts that have been concealed or ignored. These facts include the near death of Leesa’s paternal grandmother after undergoing a backstreet abortion necessitated by extreme poverty, a revelation that adds to Leesa’s mother’s growing doubts about her opposition to accessible legal abortion. The rebellious older sister of

Leesa's friend Jenny reveals that their parents' marriage was caused by an unplanned pregnancy, and that their father has long been humiliatingly unfaithful to their mother. Jenny is finally able to support her friend, though her own opposition to abortion remains strong. Together, she and her sister drive Jenny to the clinic, and help her escape when the premises are raided while she is recovering from her procedure.

There is much for the intended audience to identify with, talk about, and think about in this story. The language is very much on that audience's level, but the narrative is followed by a history of abortion in Winnipeg and Canada as a whole, with an extensive bibliography, making the book useful for a wider readership, including parents, teachers, and students who might be interested in further research. This book is useful, readable, and highly recommended.

For buying options, including ebooks, direct order from publisher, and suggested independent bookstores, go to:

https://heritagehouse.ca/products/what-friends-are-for?_pos=1&_psq=wha&_ss=e&_v=1.0

♦

INTERNATIONAL

My Book Club and Its Focus on Palestinian Writings and Issues

By Paul Weinberg

About four or five middle-aged women of Palestinian background showed up at my door here on an early evening. They all came from either Mississauga, Oakville or Burlington. I had never met them before.

My visitors had heard through the grapevine (i.e. online via by the anti-Zionist Independent Jewish Voices) that politically sympathetic Jews were meeting at a local book club at my address to discuss the popular and authoritative historical work by Palestinian American author, Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*.

It so happened that these Palestinian Canadian women were also discussing the same book by Khalidi in their own separate book club made up of people of Palestinian and Jordanian backgrounds. Of course, they were welcome to join our IJV Hamilton chapter discussion which was sparsely attended.

Since then, this group of Palestinian Canadian women have become regulars in a separate and more active book club discussion that Independent Jewish Voices conducts online across the country on Zoom every few months. It is a gathering which I help organize that includes Jews, non-Jews and now Palestinians.

One of the Palestinian Canadian women who came to my house is Layla. "I'm Palestinian born in Kuwait. I lived in Lebanon as a child until the civil war and then returned with my family to Kuwait. I only lived in Jordan in my adult life but always visited during the summer holidays."

Layla and her friends continue to be active in the two separate book clubs. Their first book club started in 2018.

"In the Jordanian-Palestinian book club I've found a deep sense of belonging and camaraderie. We bond over our shared histories, stories, and challenges stemming from our homeland in Palestine. As a lifelong, avid reader, discussing books with fellow enthusiasts has always been a cherished activity for me. This club not only indulges my passion for literature but also opens our discussions to a rich tapestry of opinions and insights about the books we explore, which often leads to thought-provoking conversations and deeper understanding," she stated.

Meanwhile, Layla appreciates that not all Jews are hostile to Palestinians or are hardline Zionists. But she says she had never personally engaged with Jews who support the Palestinian rights struggle and are critical of Zionism. It was a bit of an eye opener for her to meet us.

"Meeting individuals [at IJV] who are not only pro-Palestine but actively seek to educate themselves through literature by Palestinian authors has been incredibly refreshing. Their commitment to understanding our plight fosters an atmosphere of empathy and solidarity that I found so heartwarming," Layla stated.

Layla and the other Palestinian women joined the IJV book club before the Hamas attack of Oct. 7, which was followed by a relentless Israel military onslaught,

resulting in genocide and starvation in Gaza and displacement and ethnic cleansing in West Bank.

She and the other Palestinian Canadian women in the book club have continued with the IJV book club as a way of maintaining their sanity in face of the ongoing horror in the Middle East.

“The discussions following our readings are often infused with heartfelt sentiments and nuanced ideas that restored my faith in humanity during these difficult times,” Layla explained.

“It’s invigorating to feel validated and understood, sharing experiences and thoughts about our struggles. My Palestinian and Jordanian friends who join these discussions echo this sentiment,” Layla continued.

The women make it a priority to read every book chosen for discussion by the IJV book club and then participate in the discussion.

“With each meeting, I leave feeling more hopeful and grateful for the connections forged and the understanding fostered. This journey through literature is not just about reading; it’s about creating bridges of understanding, compassion, and support that transcend boundaries and enrich our collective identity,” she added.

My impression is that the presence of Palestinian Canadian woman in the IJV book club has enriched the IJV book club and broadened the perspective for the rest of us.

We discuss a range of novels, memoirs and collections of essays by diasporic Jews, Israelis and Palestinians. Attracting the greatest interest in terms of personal attendance on zoom was *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* by the German-American, Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt. That was a few years ago.

More recently Pankaj Mishra’s book length essay, *The World After Gaza* garnered considerable interest, because the Indian writer tackles how the intolerant Hindu nationalist right-wing government in his country is influenced by Zionism.

Of course, it is the Palestinian writers who most engage us in the national IJV book club because of what is happening now in Palestine.

Here are some sample titles that I particularly like. Except for *The Parisian*, all have been

discussed in the IJV book club. They are either translated or originally written in English and are easily available.

Her First Palestinian and Other Stories by Saeed Teebi is a collection of compelling short stories of Palestinians in the diaspora by the Palestinian Canadian lawyer and writer.

The Parisian is a novel by British Palestinian writer Isabella Hammad. It depicts a young Arab man trying to find his personal footing amidst nationalist fervour in British ruled Palestine following the first World War and prior to the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel and the Nakba. We discussed at IJV another novel by Hammad, *Enter Ghost* which underwhelmed us. Here, I am suggesting her far superior novel, *The Parisian* which we have not discussed.

Palestinian Walks: Forays Into a Vanishing Landscape, is a non-fiction memoir by the Ramallah based lawyer and writer, Raja Shehadeh. Published in 2007, this text is one of a series of insightful books of political and personal exploration by the author who is also the founder of the Al Haq human rights organization.

Against the Loveless World is a novel by the fiery Palestinian American writer and public figure, Susan Abulhawa. Here we read about a Palestinian woman who is stuck in an Israeli solitary confinement prison after going through abandonment, sexual exploitation and becoming a refugee.

Stranger In My Own Land: Palestine, Israel and One Family’s Story of Home by Ramallah based author Fida Jiryis recounts the true-life story of personal and family exile in Lebanon and Cyprus, followed by a return home to Israel a year after the 1993 Oslo Accords that were designed to settle the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians -- but instead helped to reinforce and deepen the occupation and restrictions of their human rights. Jiryis is the daughter of high-profile Palestinian author and activist Sabri Jiryis, who for some time lived in exile in Beirut, advising Yasser Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization prior to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which put an end to its presence in that country.

Finally, there are two ways to fully appreciate the humanity of an oppressed people like the Palestinians whose voices are rarely heard in our mass media. It is accomplished first by reading some of their best authors and then secondly by personally meeting a few of them while they live as exiles here in Canada.

Layla is a pseudonym for one of the Palestinian women who came to my house. Because of potential online harassment I am keeping her name confidential.

UJOP invites you to
A Lecture Series by Dr. Itay Zutra, IL Peretz Folk School Yiddish
Teaching Fellow at the University of Manitoba

Funny Jews: On Diasporic Humour

This lecture series will argue that Jews became funny only when they distanced themselves from God and left the Promised Land to live a defenseless yet rewarding life in the diaspora. We will examine and laugh from Jewish diasporic humor spanning from the biblical book of Ester, Yiddish jokes, the king of Jewish American comedy Mel Brooks, and end with Itzik Manger's ultimate diasporic parody of Jewish messianic aspirations- The Book of Paradise. This lecture series will argue that Jews became funny only when they distanced themselves from God and left the Promised Land to live a defenseless yet rewarding life in the diaspora. We will examine and laugh from Jewish diasporic humor spanning from the biblical book of Ester, Yiddish jokes, the king of Jewish American comedy Mel Brooks, and end with Itzik Manger's ultimate diasporic parody of Jewish messianic aspirations- The Book of Paradise.

November 16, Lecture 1: "A Mentsh Trakht un Got Lakht": The Book of Esther
December 14, Lecture 2: Yiddish Jokes
January 18, Lecture 3: "They Are Darker Than Us": Mel Brooks "Blazing Saddles"
March 8, Lecture 4: "Troubles in Paradise": Itzik Manger "The Book of Paradise"

In person:
825 Lanark Street, Winnipeg
10:30 a.m.

Or on Zoom

Cost: \$100 E-transfer to hshorr@shaw.ca

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Lecture Series coordinated by UJPO Winnipeg.

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