



ONE YEAR AFTER OCTOBER 7

Looking at Gaza through the German-Jewish Experience

Gideon Reuveni

On May 8, 1945, as the world celebrated Nazi Germany's defeat, the soon-to-be first Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion, wrote only one line in his diary: "The day of victory – sad very sad." While the most pressing "Jewish question" after liberation was how to rehabilitate survivors of the Holocaust, the question about the fate of Germany also preoccupied Jewish circles. Commentators across the Jewish political spectrum contended that dismantling Germany was essential for establishing peace in Europe. They criticized the Western Allies for their leniency towards Germany, and expressed scepticism that the denazification and re-education of Germans would prevent future atrocities. They argued that appeasement and too much realpolitik would be likely to drag the world towards another disaster.

When Israel was established in 1948, Germany was treated officially as a pariah nation. Ships under a German flag were denied access to Israeli ports. German products were banned, and Israeli passports were stamped with the inscription, "not valid for travel in Germany." Israel, with the backing of the entire Jewish world, regarded itself to be in a state of war with Germany.

Considering the depth of Jewish anti-German sentiment, it is remarkable that less than seven years after the Holocaust, Jews and Germans convened to discuss ways of redressing past wrongs. When the Knesset was required to sanction direct negotiations, early in 1952, the backlash was intense, putting the very principles of Israeli democracy to the test. Menachem Begin, leading the opposition against the German-Jewish negotiations, decried the German payments as "blood money," and accused the Ben-Gurion government of trading Jewish honour for goods and thereby effectively erasing the memory of the Shoah committed by the Germans.

On September 10, 1952, the German and Jewish parties agreed to a reparation settlement which marked the culmination of an unprecedented claim for an unprecedented crime. Notably, Germany did not compensate Jews for losses incurred during the Holocaust. The negotiations explicitly avoided addressing past events. The agreement was instead forward-looking, concentrating on rehabilitation rather than revisiting historical grievances. West Germany provided so-called "global payments" in the form of goods and services to Israel which were aimed at covering the resettlement costs for Jewish refugees who had fled Europe due to Nazi persecution. Furthermore, it pledged to enact new legislation that would allow Holocaust survivors to claim compensation, aiding with their recovery.

Reconciliation was never an explicit goal of the German-Jewish settlement. Yet, the agreement required coordinated actions between Germans and Jews, primarily through economic exchanges that were largely invisible to the public. These activities fostered trust and helped build relationships, inadvertently forming what can be considered an infrastructure of rapprochement—subtle and largely unnoticed, yet foundational to subsequent developments.

Is there a lesson here for Israelis and Palestinians? The predominant narrative has framed the conflict as unsolvable for years, with violence being the primary mode of interaction between the sides. Yet, the German-Jewish settlement stands as testament to the idea that reconciliation is not merely a lofty concept, but also a process grounded in definitive, actionable steps.

In the German-Jewish context, practical steps toward reconstruction and the establishment of co-operative frameworks

involving economic and cultural exchanges laid the groundwork for reconciliation. Similarly, Israel should acknowledge its role in the Palestinian calamity and collaborate with the Palestinians to amend it. The lack of interaction between adversaries can impede progression towards co-ordinated activities and eventual rapprochement. Interaction is crucial to dispel the conviction that a genuine partner for negotiation does not exist on either side. To move forward, it is necessary to adopt forward-looking pragmatism rather than linger on historical grievances.

Indeed, reparations for Palestinians once seemed like a realistic possibility. In the 1950s, while Israel engaged in reparations negotiations with Germany, it also faced the issue of the Palestinian refugee crisis, for which it was largely held responsible. During this time, Israel explored the possibility of negotiating an agreement that would facilitate the resettlement of Palestinian refugees. A notable distinction emerged however, that while the German-Jewish settlement implicitly set an expectation for resettlement without return, Israel's offer to Palestinian refugees explicitly required them to forgo their right of return in exchange for compensation. Ultimately, this plan failed to materialize, initially due to a lack of interest from the Arab side, and subsequently, such proposals lost legitimacy within Israel itself.

Now could be an opportune moment to reconsider the concept of reparations between Israel and the Palestinians, bringing it back from historical obscurity. Amends for historical injustices do not guarantee reconciliation, nor are they a fail-safe solution to ongoing conflicts. However, the German-Jewish settlement demonstrates that even in situations where dialogue seems impossible, determined efforts towards redress can lay groundwork for a new start. Thus, by learning from the past and committing ourselves to deliberate actions aimed to foster communicative spaces between Israelis and Palestinians, we can move beyond mere expressions of empty hope. We can engage in a process that, over time, may facilitate healing. After the events of October 7, and their aftermath, is there a better choice?

Landecker Digital Memory Lab: Connective Holocaust Commemoration

The Lab has been busy preparing for its official, public launch in November 2024. In April, Prof. Victoria Grace Richardson-Walden co-hosted a symposium 'Preserving History in the Digital Age' at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, and presented a public lecture there entitled: 'How Can We Ensure the Preservation of Holocaust Memory in the Age of Digital Technology?'

In May, Prof. Richardson-Walden introduced the Lab as part of the Alfred Landecker's Foundation stand at Re:Publica festival. The Lab also published the final two recommendation reports of the team's previous project, on digital interventions in Holocaust memory and education. These focused on 'virtual, augmented and mixed reality' and 'computer games' and can be accessed here:

<https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/digitalholocaustmemory/digital-holocaust-memory-and-education-recommendations/>

In June, we welcomed Philippa Murnaghan, Steve Wang, Mel Poluck and Dr Alex Sessa to the Lab, the Faculty of Media, Arts and Humanities and the Weidenfeld Institute. That month, we also welcomed representatives from several national and international funders and policymakers, including Lord Eric Pickles, currently President of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, to a workshop considering more sustainable approaches to funding and policy regarding digital Holocaust memory and education. The event was hosted together with the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme.

New appointment



We are delighted to announce that **Dr Victoria Grace Richardson-Walden** has been promoted to Professor of Digital Memory, Culture and Heritage in the Faculty of Media, Arts and Humanities. She is Director of the Landecker Digital Memory Lab and Deputy Director of the Sussex Weidenfeld Institute of Jewish Studies. We congratulate her on this well-deserved achievement.



Policymakers and funders warming up to talk about sustainable futures for Holocaust memory and education at the University of Sussex, June 2024.

Memory Studies Association (MSA) Conference held at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú in Lima

In July, Dr Kate Marrison, Research Fellow in the Lab hosted a workshop with young ambassadors of the Holocaust Educational Trust on using social media for Holocaust memory and education. Later that month, Dr Marrison attended the annual Memory Studies Association (MSA) Conference in Lima where she hosted a roundtable discussion with colleagues working at Holocaust memory institutions within Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil. Participants from Museo do Holocausto de Curitiba, Museo del Holocausto Buenos Aires, NEPAT and Casa Museo Trude Sojka shared their views on the current landscape of Holocaust memory within Latin America and discussed the opportunities and challenges of incorporating digital innovation into their practice.

The Landecker Digital Memory Lab secured funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Impact Acceleration Account, Higher Education Innovation Fund and the Weidenfeld Institute which enabled them to invite colleagues from Holocaust museums and institutions within Latin America to participate in the event.



From left to right. Gabriela Steinitz, Malú Machuca Rose, Kate Marrison, Mariel Goisen, Bárbara Deoti Silva Rodrigues, Laura Nicoli Kullock and Brenda Ficher.

The Isaacsohn and André Families' Fellows Research Workshop

In September 2024, the Isaacsohn and André Families' Fellows came together for the final research workshop as part of the Sussex Digital Holocaust Education Project. Fellows were joined by Dr Fiona Courage, Curator of the Mass Observation Archive and Prof. Jennifer Purcell, Editor for the Mass-Observation Critical Series.

Since October 2023, the research group have been investigating the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) to attempt to clarify what people in Britain knew about the Holocaust before, during and after the war. During the morning session in the Keep, Fellows shared their individual research findings. In the afternoon, colleagues at the library introduced the University of Sussex Legacy Collection which holds a wide range of documents, pamphlets, reports, and ephemeral items related to the themes of War, Social Movements, Social Welfare, Trade Unions, Popular and Counter Cultures, Gender Studies and Feminism and Political Movements and Parties. In the context of our research enquiry, Fellows explored material from the Second World War including: *Let my people go: some practical proposals*



The Isaacsohn and André Research Fellows at the Keep

for dealing with Hitler's massacre of the Jews by Victor Gollancz and *Falsehoods and facts about the Jews* by Eleanor Rathbone MP, published by Victor Gollancz in 1943 and in 1944 respectively.

The day finished with a group dinner to celebrate this cohort of Fellows and formally to mark the end of phase two of the Sussex Digital Holocaust Education Project. This research is currently being prepared for a special collection on the topic of Mass Observation and the Holocaust, edited by project lead, Dr Kate Marrison.

Holocaust Memorial Day at Sussex 'For a Better Future'

Our annual Holocaust Memorial Day event will take place at the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts on the University of Sussex campus on **Wednesday 5 February 2025**, from 2pm to 5.15pm.

In the programme, we will hear testimony from our guest speakers, Holocaust Survivors, **George Summerfield and Peter Summerfield BEM.**

Born in Berlin in 1933 to a civil servant father and dressmaker mother, George and Peter witnessed the escalating persecution of Jews, including the burning of their synagogue on Kristallnacht. After years of unsuccessful attempts to emigrate, help from their building's caretaker enabled a last-minute escape. The Summerfield brothers fled Germany as Jewish refugees, four days before the outbreak of World War II. Many of their family members were left behind and murdered.

Their story will be followed by a question-and-answer session chaired by **Professor Gideon Reuveni.**

This will be followed by the showing of an Israeli French animated short film entitled: **'Letter to a Pig.'**

Following the film screening, **Tal Kantor**, who wrote and directed the film, will be in discussion with **Professor Victoria Grace Richardson-Walden** and **Lital Henig**, Isaacsohn and André Visiting Fellow, Weidenfeld Institute.

We are most grateful to The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) who are generously supporting this event.

Book your free place:

<https://alumni.sussex.ac.uk/hmd-booking?erid=18200065&trid=7dc4e7d0-0726-4595-9061-699c133b8570>

New Publications

Gideon Reuveni

Emma Zoha, Daniel Mahla (eds.), *Impossible love: Jewish relationships and the Holocaust*, Journal special issues in: *Jewish Culture and History*, 25, 3, (2024)

“Über die Notwendigkeit und Möglichkeit der Versöhnung,” in: Gisela Dachs (eds.), *Jüdischer Almanach: 7. Oktober Stimmen aus Israel* (Berlin: Surkamp Verlag, 2024), 190-200

Katrin Steffen

East German-Jewish Space in Berlin: Jewish Heritage Societies (Heimatvereine) and their diasporic milieu in the 1930s; *Jewish Culture and History*, 25(2), 2024, pp. 288–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2024.2342603>

Chronologie des Scheiterns. Das Dokumentenwerk zur Judenverfolgung der Wiener Library und des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte (gemeinsam mit Andrea Löw), in: *Zeitzeugen, Zeitgenossen, Zeitgeschichte. Die frühe NS-Forschung am Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, hg. von Frank Bajohr und Magnus Brechtken, Göttingen 2024, S. 193-219

Award

Prof. Katrin Steffen has been appointed a member of the committee of the British and Irish Association for Jewish Studies (BIAJS).

Forthcoming events

‘Displacement, Forced Migration and Reparation: Comparisons and Controversies,’

University of Sussex,
12-13 December 2024

Throughout history, expulsions and forced migrations have been recurring phenomena. However, it was in the twentieth century that these practices evolved into state-sponsored methods of domination, affecting people worldwide. In a globalized system of nation-states, political power was often seen as dependent on population homogenization, while ethnic or religious conflicts were frequently framed in biological terms. This led to radical disruptions of the social and cultural fabric of communities. As a result of these social engineering projects, unprecedented large-scale, state-organized violence occurred, including forced repatriation, ethnic cleansing, expulsion, and genocide.

In the aftermath of such events, the issue of redress inevitably arises. While reparations have the potential to play a crucial role in transforming violent situations into peaceful ones, they are often not provided, leaving victims of severe human rights violations and serious breaches of international humanitarian law without compensation. Against this backdrop, this workshop brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to explore reparations as a policy instrument for societies that have experienced violent uprooting and forced migration. Our effort stems from a recognition of the need for more comprehensive, evidence-based, and comparative research on a subject that could be vital for reconciliation and maintaining peace during periods of transition. The keynote address will be delivered by Megan Bradley (McGill University) on “Citizenship, Alienage, and Irreparable Loss: New Frontiers in Redressing Displacement.” The workshop is jointly organised by the Weidenfeld Institute of Jewish Studies in partnership with the Jacob Robinson Institute for the History of Individual and Collective Rights at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This collaboration is part of an ongoing effort to create a platform for discussing issues related to the redress of historical injustices.

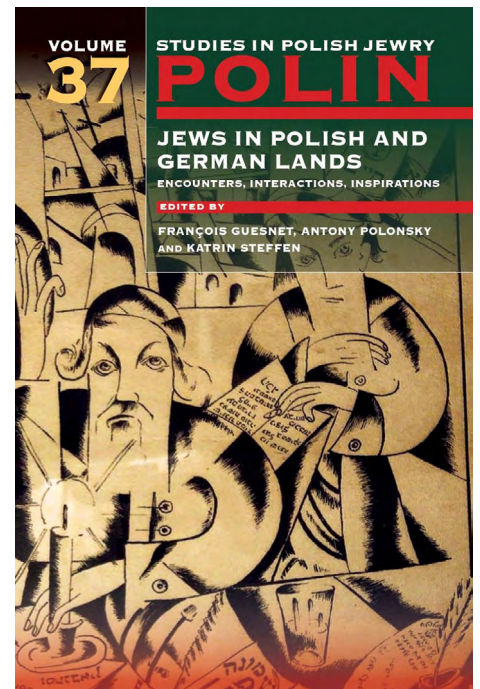
‘Dress Rehearsal: Violence and Persecution against Jews from Eastern Europe on the Brink of War’

Prof. Katrin Steffen, DAAD professor of European and Jewish History and Culture at the Weidenfeld Institute has been awarded a grant of 6,800 euro from the European Association for Jewish Studies to organise a conference on: “Dress Rehearsal: Violence and Persecution against Jews from Eastern Europe on the Brink of War.” The conference will take place in spring 2025 and will be organised with Dr Alina Bothe from the Selma Stern Centre for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg. The conference will gather European scholars to discuss specific measures, persecution, and violence against Eastern European-Jews in Germany.

The aim of the workshop is to work out the significance of the persecution of Jews from Eastern Europe, even before the German invasion of Poland, as a specific history and to place it in the context of the development of National Socialist persecution and extermination policies. The analysis and discussion will consider the prehistory of this possible “dress rehearsal” and trace trans-European ideological entanglements. The trans-European dimension will be dealt with in a panel that addresses connections to the UK, namely Eastern European-British history and the history of the Kindertransport from Poland.

‘Jews in Polish and German Lands: Encounters, Interactions, Inspirations’

An online conference will take place on 12 February 2025 on the occasion of the book launch of *Polin 37* (Studies in Polish Jewry): “Jews in Polish and German Lands: Encounters, Interactions, Inspirations,” edited by Katrin Steffen (University of Sussex) together with Francois Guesnet (UCL and Antony Polonsky of Brandeis University). The book is published by the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization and Liverpool University Press. The conference will deal with Polish-German-Jewish entanglements in the 19th century, the Holocaust, and the post-war period. Historians have tended to regard Polish-Jewish history and German-Jewish history, from the Middle Ages to the present, as playing out solely within national boundaries, thereby ignoring the interactions that have in practice shaped Jewish cultural life. Geographical proximity



has meant that Jews from both countries have been linked through kinship ties as well as sharing economic, cultural, and linguistic realities. The complexity of this relationship and its consequences have been only partially reflected in scholarship. This volume takes a different approach, shifting the focus away from the nationally distinct to investigate mutual influences and interactions instead. Moving beyond the traditional paradigms that characterize Polish Jewry as ‘authentic’ and German Jewry as ‘modernizing’, it challenges the sharp historiographic division between these two communities and develops a nuanced understanding of modern European Jewish history.

If readers would like to participate, please send an email to: k.steffen@sussex.ac.uk

For further information about the Weidenfeld Institute/Centre for German-Jewish Studies and joining the Friends please contact:

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