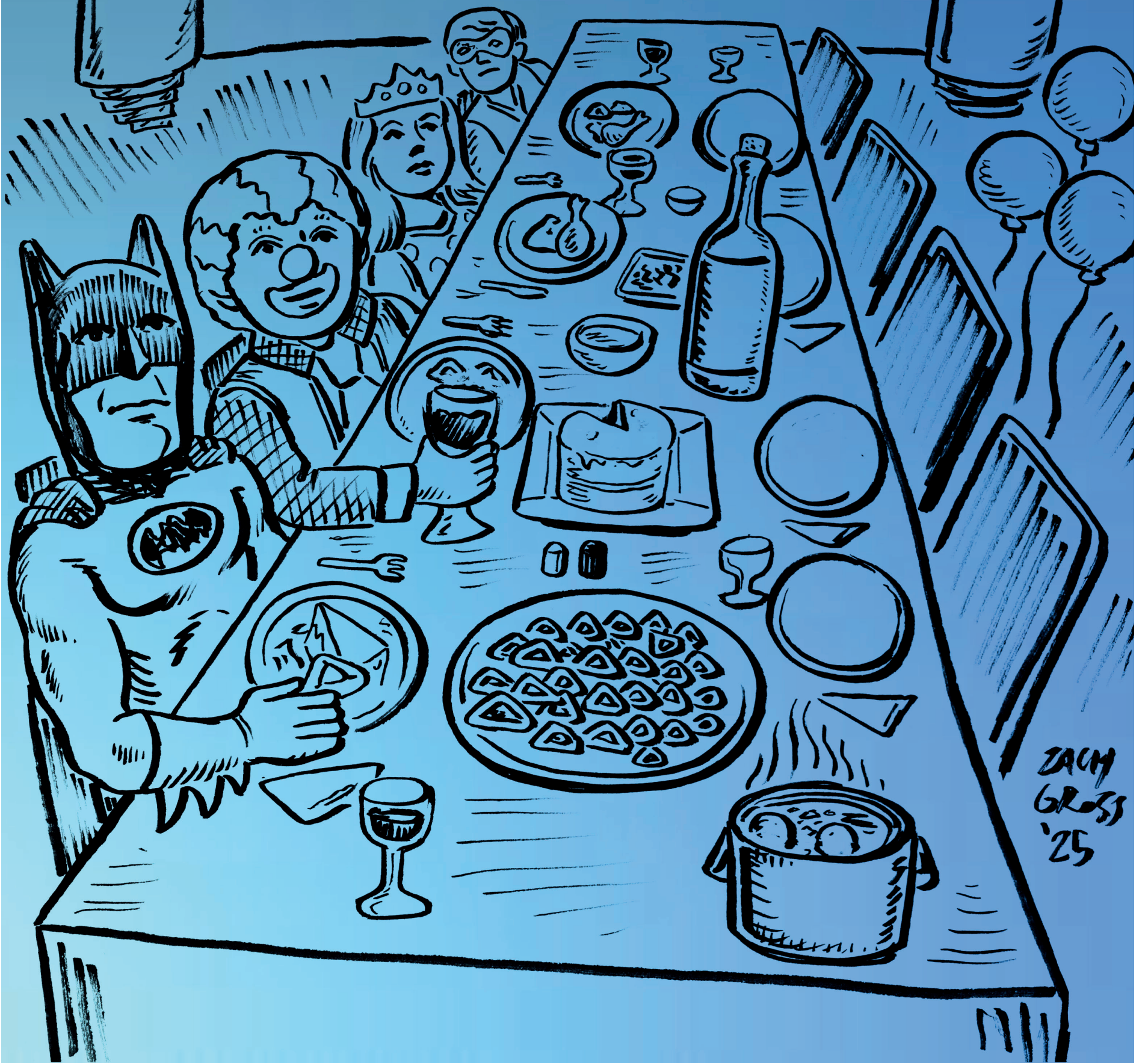


The White and Blue

March 14, 2024



Shaken Identity: The Emotional Toll of the War on Jews in the Diaspora

Eytan Alboher
Staff Writer

For many Jews in the diaspora, October 7 was not just a tragedy in Israel—it was a wake-up call. Overnight, the unspoken sense of belonging in their own communities was shaken, as rising antisemitism, social alienation, and even friendships were put to the test. Being Jewish suddenly became a defining aspect of our identities, whether it be because we embraced this notion ourselves or because others began to perceive us differently. Feeling unwelcome or scared due to our Jewish identities is a consequence of this war that is inescapably real. The conflict didn't just reshape political views—it fundamentally changed how Jews approach their daily lives, relationships, and feelings of security.

Media frequently shared within the Jewish community highlights incidents such as shootings at yeshivas, attacks on Jewish elementary schools, swastikas defacing synagogues, and molotov cocktails being thrown at Jewish establishments. Despite each of these hate crimes happening in Montreal, (some of which on a consistent basis) the news rarely seems to make it out of the Jewish community. While these acts of antisemitism are deeply concerning, sharing personal experiences with those outside the Jewish community can help reveal the support that surrounds us more than we may realize. These attacks represent a small portion of society, and by opening up about our experiences, we can help others better understand our perspective.

To explore how to navigate these challenges, I spoke with multiple individuals. Three of whom will be the basis of this article; a mother named Charlie living in Montreal,

a friend named Andrew who recently made aliyah and enlisted in the IDF, and another friend named Ariel who moved to Montreal from Israel after the start of the war. Each offers unique insights into their coping strategies, sources of support, and how they respond to the current climate.

Since October 7, many have felt a shift in their sense of safety and belonging, with some experiencing or witnessing antisemitism. Interviewees mention that they have experienced some blatant antisemitism, with one of them having been physically attacked downtown for being at a Purim party, and another having antisemitic articles being assigned in their class. However, it's the accumulation of more subtle experiences—like a constant sense of unease, “definitely feeling tension in more urban areas,” and “encountering antisemitism on social media”—that has weighed on them the most.

Social relationships have also been affected. Interviewees are largely surrounded by a Jewish circle. However, the absence of outreach from their non-Jewish friends has felt isolating, deepening their existing connection to the Jewish community. Charlie mentioned a strong pressure to stay engaged with the hostage crisis, noting that this emotional toll makes it hard to keep up with social relationships, as she feels it takes up much of her energy. One interviewee shared that he even blocked two non-Jewish friends after they tried to “educate” him on the crisis—when he responded, they left him on read. However, interviewees mentioned that they received support when they reached out to non-Jewish friends about their negative feelings, and it was only when others approached them that they felt criticized.

Downplaying their Jewish identity was not something any of the

interviewees stood for, but something they all recognized among other Jews. Andrew mentioned, “People feel like it is political to express their identity, so to make their life easier, they hide it more”. On the other hand, other people also noticed a larger expression in Jewish identity: “I think people are fighting back more by wearing a Magen David necklace publicly”. It seems as though the interviewees are conveying that while people are increasingly proud of their Jewish identity, they may feel it's more convenient to conceal it in certain situations.

When talking about their emotions, a huge commonality among younger Jews was feeling for other Jews around them, more than feeling bad about the war itself. One interviewee acknowledged the tragedy but admitted he hasn't had to cope with it much personally, instead finding himself surrounded by others who are more deeply affected.

“While these acts of antisemitism are deeply concerning, sharing personal experiences with those outside the Jewish community can help reveal the support that surrounds us more than we may realize”

Andrew mentioned, “The war made me want to move to Israel, because seeing how much it affected Canada and the people I know gave me a big sense of responsibility and I wanted to come do what I could to help”, emphasizing that his source of anguish from the war had to do more with seeing his friends and families reactions than the actual war.

For Ariel, the emotional burden was tied to his close friends. “Seeing my friend and what he had to go through [having a cousin kidnapped] was a roller coaster,” he shared, describing how his friend's personality shifted from being bright and smiley to withdrawn and serious. “He wouldn't spend time with friends or go on trips because he felt guilty and wanted to wait until the war was over and his cousin was back.” By the time this article was written, Ariel's friend's cousin had been released.

Another one of his friends, Nir, was deployed in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, and the uncertainty of his safety was the hardest part—“not knowing what could happen.” Several of Ariel's other friends were stationed in Gaza even longer, intensifying the stress.

Charlie described feeling helpless, angry, and guilty—wanting to take action but feeling powerless from afar. She says, “I still want to know what happened that day. How did it happen? How were they not prepared? Why has nobody taken responsibility?” Furthermore, worrying about the hostages and the price we have to pay for their return leaves her with feelings of unease and worry.

Despite these challenges, resilience has come from different sources. Some have found strength through the unity of the Jewish community and the support from other communities. One interviewee leaned on friends who offered new perspectives while also trying to stay connected to their faith. Ariel, on the other hand, coped by keeping up with the news without allowing himself to be consumed by it. Unlike many Israelis glued to their screens, he avoided “drowning in the sadness” to stay grounded.

Finally, interviewees all felt some sort of surprise at the world's reaction after October 7. What surprised them most was the double standards and unwillingness of people with opposing views to engage in discussion. One interviewee was shocked by the world's support for Hamas, calling it "absolute insanity," and was disappointed by the widespread claims of genocide based on selective news sources. The tearing down of hostage posters was another moment of disbelief. Another interviewee was pleasantly surprised by the number of non-Jewish friends supporting Israel, noting, "I didn't post about other world issues, so it was heartwarming when non-jews post in support of Israel."

Ariel was surprised by the fact that many Jews outside of Israel only expressed their

outrage after October 7th, since he feels that acts of terror have been going on for a long time and should have always been at the forefront of concern. However, he feels no responsibility to educate others, believing, "At the end of the day, we [Israelis] are alone in this." He sees excessive efforts to prove Israel's case as unnecessary, saying, "The amount of people in the media discussing this is bloated," feeling that neutral observers are overwhelmed with too much information which only makes them tune out to the issue altogether. While he acknowledges conversations are fine, he finds most opposing voices too often turning discussions into arguments.

In the context of educating others, Andrew says: "Personally, I don't feel an obligation—

I mean I am living in Israel. But in the diaspora I think there should be better education about the Jewish and the Muslim community in all schools so people can understand the conflict and the cultures better." A common thread shared by the interviewees was the feeling that going to Israel and/or becoming more directly involved in supporting Israel is a source of strength. They emphasized that when they are in Israel, their feeling of belonging deepens. Alternatively, when outside of Israel, sharing personal experiences face-to-face rather than posting on social media fosters greater empathy, helping others better understand their perspective and creating stronger connections to the people around us.

All interviewees agree that the best ways to cope with the emotional toll of October 7th and its aftermath include staying connected to the community, spending time with friends in person, limiting overexposure to news and social media, and prioritizing self-care.

"Feeling unwelcome or scared due to our Jewish identities is a consequence of this war that is inescapably real"

Jewish students in student government

Boaz Shron Staff Writer

Rochelle, a Jewish former Dawson Student Union representative, had a certain heaviness in her voice when she described her experience in student government.

"It was like social unrest. It felt like when I was in the room, every person in that room vehemently disagreed with my right to exist," She recalled.

Rochelle, who requested that we do not use her real name, resigned from the DSU after only two weeks in office. She says that the Union's antisemitic environment made staying on feel unsafe. "There was a lot of talk about hatred of Israel and things in the news" among Union representatives, Rochelle mentioned.

"I would just shut my brain off when I was in shared office spaces."

Student unions are one of the universal aspects of CÉGEP and university student life. But

Jewish students often find them hostile to their needs and concerns, particularly when it comes to Israel. Elías Manevich, a two-time candidate for Arts Representative at the Students' Society of McGill University, has run into similar problems when dealing with the SSMU.

According to Manevich, the antisemitism situation "got worse at the student government level because, unlike last year, this year we had people in the government that were actively trying to worsen our lives on campus, to narrow the definition of antisemitism. I decided, along with a good friend Justice Bongiovanni, that we're not standing for this. We're going to make a change." While Manevich was not elected, Bongiovanni was, thanks in part to enthusiastic support from McGill's Jewish community. Manevich sees Jewish and allied participation in student government as one of many ways for Jews to make an impact on campus. "The issues that we experience come in many forms,"

Manevich noted. "One of them is through the student government, and the way we can give ourselves a voice there is to run, to seek office."

Rochelle sees other methods of Jewish advocacy as being more effective. For example, being an executive at a Jewish student group gives us an advocating presence at the governmental level that can get more done than being the only Jewish voice in a student union. For her, there was also the issue of tokenization.

"People would always say, 'It's so great that there's Jewish representation in the Dawson Student Union.' My colleagues would always say this to me, but it felt disingenuous. It felt like they were saying that so they could say 'The DSU isn't antisemitic; we have a Jew in the Union,'" Rochelle recounted.

"In that case, maybe it's better not to [be a part of student government], because then they can use you as token representation."

But can being in student

government have a positive impact that counterbalances this consideration? According to Manevich, that all depends on your expectations. "Making an impact can mean a lot of things. You know, over this current term in SSMU, among the people who were elected last year: none of the [representatives] that are friendly to us, that are supportive of us, that are understanding of us, are Jewish, not a single one. Yet, by talking to them, by explaining the issues that we're seeing on campus, explaining how [antisemitism] hurts us as students, we've gotten their support, and they've stood by us."

Being a strong Jewish advocate within student government may not be enough to change their policies, but it can create new allies in people who are willing to listen.

Let's leave the impact question open for now. If you do feel that running for student government



is the best way for you to advocate for the Jewish community, the key is to drum up support within that same community.

At Dawson, "Voter turnout is usually so low, and the Jewish community will show up to vote for you- usually that's literally all it takes for you to get elected," Rochelle advises. At the same time, we are only a portion of the electorate.

It's important for your platform to be appealing to students who have other priorities in mind when they get to the ballot box. According to Manevich, your ability to get elected "depends on how much you can actually motivate people to vote based on other issues," especially in a large body like McGill. Holding office "is difficult, but it's doable."

Jewish involvement in student unions is important; universities and CÉGEPs need to hear our voices at the governmental level. It is equally important for Jewish students who run for elected office to know what they're getting themselves into. Rochelle was unaware of the extent of the problem.

"[Being Jewish in student government] depends on people's tolerance for harassment, for feeling unsafe in rooms. I didn't have a tolerance for it."

"Being a strong Jewish advocate within student government may not be enough to change their policies, but it can create new allies in people who are willing to listen."

"Who Could Ever Live That Way?":

How Vampire Weekend Struggle

with Faith

Ezra Grossman

Contributor

As tragedies mount and others continue to turn against us, it's harder than ever to maintain faith that God has our back. This doubt has plagued the Jews for ages; in the Torah, the nation of Israel continually complains that Hashem has forsaken them, even after being saved again and again, due to a lack of immediate certainty that they'll overcome their next obstacle. Take the sin of the spies, wherein 10 individuals convince a nation of approximately three million that the land of Cana'an is unconquerable. They wail and moan that they were better off in Egypt, leaving no faith in a God who brought them forth from that very land only a few years prior. We can criticize

their short-sightedness, but also understand their mindset- when the odds seem insurmountable, things seem bleak until the obstacle is actually overcome. Nowadays, in an era when miracles seem fewer and further between, the global Jewish community grapples with this key tenet of Judaism: when God seems invisible, how can I keep believing?

This question is echoed by singer-songwriter Ezra Koenig of indie band Vampire Weekend. Far less edgy and slightly less pretentious than their name suggests, Koenig and Co. produce songs with a vast range of musical styles and lyrical themes. But on their 5-minute epic titled 'Ya Hey', the frontman faces this same dilemma. Speaking to God himself, Ezra reminds him that he's losing his followers in this world, as "Zion doesn't love you / And Babylon don't love you" equates the Jewish community's disillusionment

to its enemies' nonbelief. Koenig, like most Jews, seeks to break this barrier: "In the dark of this place / There's the glow of your face." In the bleakest moments, God is more appealing than ever. While his presence isn't fully there, the 'glow' remains, a figurative ray of hope that the rest of God's image will appear next.

However, even this may not be enough for Koenig. In the song's bizarre chorus, the singer has a back-and-forth conversation with a distorted, chipmunk-pitched voice which does not respond coherently. As he calls out "through the fire and the flames", the response is a garbled "yah hey", repeated in different tones but never more clearly. The response initially seems like gibberish, but upon inspection, the words 'yah hey' resemble the classic Christian transliteration of Hashem's proper name in the Torah, 'Yahweh'. God is saying his name for Koenig to hear, but he can't fully

connect with the delivery. His confusion turns to frustration, as he demands "You won't even say your name / Only, 'I am that I am' / But who could ever live that way?" Koenig, searching for answers in a sea of unknowing, cannot even get reassurance that a higher power is present, even being denied His name. After all, if God's there for him, why can't he get a straight answer to the world's most basic question?

These lyrics directly allude to parasha Shemot, wherein Moses is introduced to Hashem through the burning bush, serving as the metaphorical fire and flames.

"Despite his best efforts to see the history of the Jews' continued redemption by Yahweh, he can still only see Yah Hey"

Although Moses does become the only prophet to speak with God ‘face to face’, his initial interaction is shrouded in secrecy. Here, too, God reveals his name as ‘אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה’, or ‘I am that I am’, with instructions to tell the Jews that his name is merely ‘אֶהְיֶה’, or ‘I am’. Not only does Moses get stuck with a nickname, the nation of theoretical believers get only half of what he does. Moses is dissatisfied with this answer, and despite Hashem using his real name frequently afterwards, Moses continues to doubt both the Jew’s belief and his own ability to act as God’s messenger. Since his first impression of God is unclear, it takes the entire subsequent series of plagues, miracles and the Exodus to convince both the people and Moses that God’s power is to be trusted. Even so, both parties have bouts of unfaithfulness throughout their journey to the future land of Israel, with both being excluded from the final destination due to their doubts- Moses hitting the rock and the nation trusting the evil spies.

Koenig sees his ancestors’ doubts and seeks to play his hand differently: “And I can’t help but feel / That I’ve made some mistake / But I let it go / Yah hey.” He doesn’t want to repeat the loss of faith that has plagued his nation for thousands of years, but still finds it difficult to make that change, as he reminds the listener with those final two words. Despite his best efforts to see the history of the Jews’ continued redemption by Yahweh, he can still only see Yah Hey. But he finishes the chorus- and the song- by calling out “Yah Hay / Ut Deo” himself, with the latter lyrics roughly translating to ‘as a God’ from Latin. Even if God himself gives a confusing answer, Koenig grabs onto it anyway, seeking to connect with what still seems impossible for him to understand. ‘Yahweh, as a God’- it may not be exactly what he requested, but he’ll make it work. The angelic backing vocals as he finishes the song hammer the message home, as if the heavens are indeed open for someone reaching for God however they can.

The Jewish people have both radically unified and split over the past few years. While communities from all different backgrounds are connecting to overcome adversity, individuals are feeling more lost than ever. I invite those struggling with faith to join Vampire Weekend in putting the big picture aside for a minute. Come to terms with the difficulties rather than letting them further beat you down. Once that’s done, you can come to terms with a ‘Yah Hey’ even if your endgame is ‘Yahweh’.

**“When God
seems invisible,
how can I keep
believing?”**

The logo for the band Vampire Weekend, featuring the band's name in a white, elegant, cursive script against a solid black rectangular background.

Friendships

Sara Hamaoui

In-the-Aretz Correspondant

Today's article is going to be a bit different than usual. This article is an ode to friendships. Specifically, the unexpected, yet lifesaving friendships.

When I made aliyah, it was alone. Of course, I have some family here who have been an incredible support system for me, but in terms of friends I was practically alone. A few of the girls from my seminary had made aliyah a couple of years ago, but they were all at very different stages of life than me. Nobody else was doing sherut leumi, and so I went into my apartment and my job alone. Essentially, I began this next phase of life with nobody but myself.

After only a few months, I can safely say that I have made lifelong friendships with people unlike anyone I have ever met before. I live in an apartment with 5 other lone bnot sherut from all over the world. Honestly, if I had met them under any other circumstance, I don't think that any of us would have become friends. They are not the type of people that I am normally drawn to, and yet they are some of my strongest friendships because of the situation that we have been put in.

All of us made aliyah by ourselves, and we are just searching for a family and community. Seeing as we are lacking that right now, we found it in each other. The girls that I live with have become a sort of family to me.

When I come home from a hard day, I know that they are waiting for me. When I run out of milk, there they are with a full carton. If there's ever an issue in the apartment, we know that we can discuss it like adults, because we depend on each other.

With these girls, it doesn't matter what we have in common, or where we came from. Found family is special, and we have found it here. Nothing makes people closer than shared experiences.

On the other side of that, the girls at my work are a different kind of support system for me. As a bat sherut, I've been placed in a job where I work with only Israelis. At first it was hard. There were the cultural differences, a language barrier, and countless other things that made it hard for us to interact. But then, after a few weeks, we started to notice just how alike we all are.

Sherut leumi has so many different opportunities that everyone has the choice to do something that they really, genuinely want to do. That means that you end up working with very like-minded people. I work on a farm, which means that everyone there has a strong passion for nature and cultivating the land. Our core values align perfectly, and that manifests in many different, interesting ways, yet it means that we have one point of connection. Through that connection, we started bridging the cultural gap, and they began to teach me.

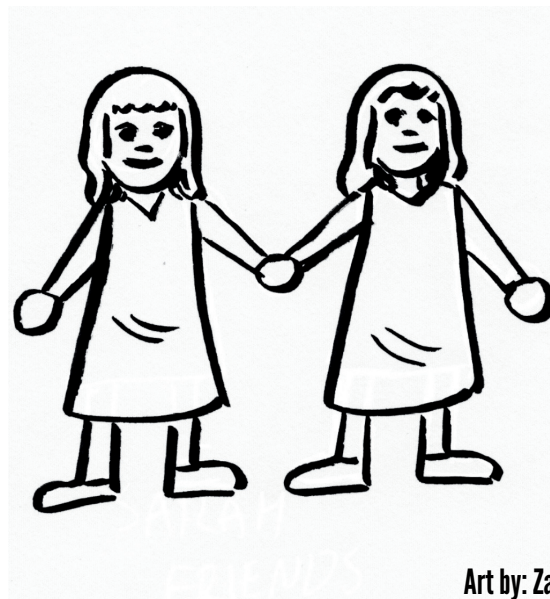
"Sara, in order to really be Israeli, you have to do this", became the most commonly used phrase at work. They made it their mission to help me integrate, teaching me Hebrew whenever possible and showing me intricacies of their culture that I never would have been exposed to otherwise. It is because of them and them alone that my transition to Israeli life has been as smooth as it has. Every single day they tell me how proud they are of me, and how impressive it is that I picked up and left everything I have ever known in pursuit of a higher purpose. They inspire me to keep going and keep working on myself and my future here. They are my biggest supporters. Israelis are in awe of people who make aliyah, and having them behind me is all the push that I need to never give up.

I don't think I can properly put into words how much it has shaped me to make Israeli friends

so soon after getting off the plane. I was thrown into the deep end and not only did they catch me, but they taught me to swim. Now I know that if we ever part ways, I will be okay, because they helped me create a foundation for myself here.

For as long as I live, I will be grateful for the people that I met at the beginning of my aliyah. Both my roommates and my co-bnot sherut have become integral in my experience here, and I truly consider myself to be one of the luckiest people in the world to have met them.

If anyone is scared of going anywhere alone, just remember this; when you choose the place that you want to live or work or go to school, you are choosing which world you want to enter into. And whichever world you choose will have people who, at one point, made the same choice as you. That will bond you more than anything else will, and you will never be alone as long as you follow what truly brings you passion and fulfillment.



Art by: Zach Grosss

This coming week we celebrate Purim, a joyous Jewish Holiday, during which a fast is scheduled, followed the next day with the reading of the Book of Esther (also known as Megilat Esther). The story heads back to the 5th century BCE, under the Persian Empire, which was the most powerful of that time, encompassing over 127 provinces from India to Nubia. Despite being a joyful holiday, Purim commemorates the survival of the Jews from Haman. Ahasuerus, the Persian King, had decreed his approval of Haman's plan to exterminate all Jews across the Empire.

As a child, I loved this story because, despite the tragic beginning, I already knew the happy ending. I was inspired by Esther, a simple woman who risked her life multiple times and hid her Jewish identity until the right moment to reveal it and save her people. I was inspired by Mordecai, who refused to bend in front of Haman and kept his values while being a good man for Persian society. I misunderstood the hate of Haman towards Jews and the King's ease with which he allowed such a horrific decree. Growing up, I wondered whether the Book of Esther was a story or History. Now that I am a University student who just started an undergraduate program a few months before the attack on October 7th, that question doesn't matter anymore. The challenges and worries faced by Purim's protagonists repeatedly occurred throughout Jewish history's dimmest moments.

As a Jew who grew up in the diaspora all her life, being Jewish was a point of pride. Nevertheless, it was not shared by others. Like many others, I learned to be respectful, be a good person, and do my best to contribute positively to society. Since primary school, I have had a single dream: enter McGill University, this elite anglophone academic institution that represents the path to knowledge and discovery; to join a community of curiosity driven individuals. I persisted in that dream throughout my Cegep studies, worked hard, and got accepted into McGill. When I received the invitation for Initiation Week, also known as Frosh, I jumped at the opportunity, believing I would finally

What Does It Take to Be a Hero? Thoughts of a Diaspora Jew

Sasha Bouskila

Contributor

connect with the McGill community. I made friends, so many, in fact, that notifications for friend requests wouldn't stop. In modern terms, "I felt in". My life seemed perfect, and I was adding McGill stickers wherever I could, proud of the institution I was now a part of. Then, everything changed. On October 7th, I was present at the synagogue for another joyful Jewish holiday when I heard the news that Israeli citizens had been massacred. Up until then, Israel had been attacked so many times that we were uncertain how bad it really was. It was only at the end of the holiday that we opened our phones to learn about the horrible news, the massacres, the hostages, and the innocent victims. Community and friends were certain the whole world would accuse and denounce the horrific acts of that day. Deep inside, I believed with confidence that McGill University and any Western institution would condemn these acts of terror and stop the repeated pro-Palestinian protests on campus and across Montreal. None of that happened. Mostly, what we did get was silence. Silence from institutions. Silence against violent demonstrations. At most, a whisper of condolences at organized vigils for those lost on October 7th. A painful journey towards redefining my dream, reconnecting to my identity, and rejoining the Jewish global community began.

What was the breaking point?

After repeated violent protests, such as the spilling of red paint all over the Desautel Business Building windows, I had reached my breaking

point of no return. It was on February 13th, 2025. In class, I sat next to a window and couldn't stop staring in shock at the red blood-colored paint. I couldn't focus as my thoughts collided in my head as to why and how society had reached that point of validated violence. Suddenly, a peer argued that this event stood unweighted compared to Israel's perpetrating genocide against Palestinians. I was in dismay and couldn't hold it anymore. That day, in front of four pro-Palestinian white Quebecois and French ladies, I asked them to elaborate on why supporting Palestine meant that one also had to be completely against Israel. Why did it have to be black or white, and in this case, Palestinians or Israelis? We debated the subject for an hour and a half, and I realized that we referenced the same events but through different lenses. For instance, their statement that Israel was the instigator of October 7th, that the beeper attack was a war crime, and that Israel had murdered important Arab leaders to control the Middle East better. As arguments and replies stacked, we dived into the more profound sense of all that masquerade. A lady expressed her concern for Palestinians holding no chance against Israel as it was a state stolen and controlled by Jews, the richest people in the world. Indeed, to ensure international control, Jews were everywhere and remained close to

the United States. At that moment, I stopped to take a breath. That argument was blatantly antisemitic, and all four looked at me, completely unaware or maybe unbothered by the matter. I finally asked them: "Let's say that Israel goes to the Palestinians; where would you put Jews and ensure their safety?". They replied, "You know, not everyone gets to be satisfied." At that moment, I knew what they meant and that any further conversation was unnecessary.

Why share about my university experience and why here?

Jews have reached greatness after experiencing painful journeys in profound darkness, solitude, and despair. The Book of Esther, regardless of whether it truly happened, represents an allegory to many repeated moments in Jewish History of resilience and heroism embodied by 'nobody' people. The tragic events occurring in Israel seep into the lives of diaspora Jews who live through every day with a painful heart and barely hearing whispers of support from others.

Why is Purim celebrated as a joyful holiday when it commemorates the attempted extermination of the Jews?

This contradiction reflects the Jewish power of resilience in hard times and our undefeated hearts holding onto hope. Theodore Herzl, an incredibly well-reputed Polish journalist and a legend in Vienna, started to dream of a Jewish Land, the State of Israel, in 1897. This dream was a reaction to the humiliating military degradation of the French Lieutenant Colonel Dreyfus in 1895. Dreyfus served his homeland and considered himself French before being Jewish. I imagine that those who untruthfully accused him of being a spy and a traitor reminded him that he was Jewish before being French. When the diaspora Jew slowly forgets his roots, others tend to ensure a brutal awakening.

Through my painful journey of a shattered dream, I reconnected with my roots and seemed not to be the only one. How many have

made Aliyah, joined an Israeli cause, joined a Jewish club, and decided to wear a symbol despite others' high likelihood of rejecting them? I am one of all these students and all these employees who chose to act as the nobody heroes in the story of Purim. I am part of the nobody people, and together we have become a strong "somebody." The darkest times reveal the greatness of our people, as each stands as a hero in their daily lives. When we tend to forget, others will ensure that we remember.

This week, despite the Book of Esther having been read countless times, this year it will sound different. It is a story of hope, strength, resilience, unity, perseverance, and identity. If a child asks me whether the story of Purim and its protagonists existed, I finally find an answer. I don't know whether the protagonists who lived in the 5th century BCE existed. Still, throughout Jewish History, there have been a Haman and an Ahasuerus, but there have also been an Esther and a Mordecai.

Then, gazing at the stars in the sky and the warmth of happiness swallows our concerns, the child will observe this community of nobody people becoming one and with a glass in hand exclaim with joy, "L'Chaim!" – "To Life!"

**"The darkest times
reveal the greatness
of our people, as each
stands as a hero in
their daily lives"**

Yom Kippur With Costumes

Emmanuel Sorek

Dvar Torah Editor

Last week, we read the Torah portion detailing the garments of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) for his service in the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Each article of clothing, along with its specific components, served a distinct purpose. One such element was the golden bells woven into the hem of the High Priest's robe. These bells announced his presence before approaching G-d, just as one would not approach a king unannounced.

Similarly, a key turning point in the Purim story revolves around Esther's bravery in approaching King Achashverosh uninvited. At that time, even the queen faced the death penalty for such a transgression. Yet Esther defied this norm in her effort to dismantle Haman's plot and save the Jewish people.

Interestingly, there is one day in the year when the Kohen Gadol did not wear the golden bells or his usual colourful attire—Yom Kippur. Instead, he donned a pure white garment.

Given that the bells served to announce the High Priest's approach to G-d, it seems curious that they would be omitted on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, when the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies, coming into the closest proximity with G-d. Wouldn't that be the most appropriate time to announce his presence?

**"Hashem is in our
midst so on
Purim, we shed
the conventions
of daily life even
further"**

Rabeinu Bachaye explains that the exceptional spiritual state of the Jewish people on Yom Kippur allows the Kohen Gadol to forgo the formalities of the bells. In our own lives, this concept makes sense—close friends do not need to shake hands each time they meet, and family members

do not need to ask permission for basic things like taking food from the refrigerator. There is an unspoken understanding that these formalities are unnecessary between those with a close bond. Similarly, on Yom Kippur, G-d is inviting us into His innermost sanctuary, leaving the door open, so to speak, for us to enter without formality.

The Arizal famously teaches that the holiness of Yom Hakipurim is Ki (like) Purim. Meaning the holiness of Purim is similar to or perhaps greater than Yom Kippur. Hashem is in our midst so on Purim, we shed the conventions of daily life even further. We dress in costumes, drink more than usual, and exchange gifts of food. If Esther had not "broken the rules," the Jewish people may have faced catastrophe. By celebrating Purim in a festive, informal manner, we emulate Esther's courage and accept Hashem's invitation to draw ourselves closer to Him through joy, laughter, and togetherness.

Purim Sameach!



Art by: Zach Grosss

The Impact of Zionist Youth Movements on Israel's Success -- Past and Present

Valeria Montes Rabinovich
Contributor

The beginning of the 20th century brought many changes to the Jewish community worldwide. After the first Zionist Congress took place in 1897, the Zionist movement started gaining more traction until Israel eventually gained its independence in 1948.

But let us turn back a few years before that. An especially important part of the revival of modern-day *Eretz Yisrael* as the Jewish homeland were the *aliyot* that happened from 1882 up until 1948. The people who came to Israel, mostly from Eastern Europe, were the pioneers who founded the *kibbutzim* movement and eventually the modern Israel cities like Tel Aviv-Yafo. "But who exactly were those people?" you might be wondering. Well, I am glad you asked, because they have a lot more in common with us, modern-day Jewish youth than you might imagine.

Many (though, of course, not all) of the people who came to Israel before its independence in the first *aliyot* (especially the Second Aliyah) were young people with strong ideals who belonged to the many Zionist youth movements that had been founded in Europe in the years prior. Although these movements varied in political ideologies, with some being

more oriented towards socialism and others more towards conservatism, they had the common goal of reviving the land of Israel and reestablishing there a Jewish homeland through the ideals of hard agricultural labour. The members of these youth groups were responsible for having started many of the original *kibbutzim* that still exist today.

Now, although these movements are not often mentioned in the North American Jewish community, many of them are also active today, and most are even active in Israel. This fact leads us to two important reflections:

The first one, is the fact that Zionist youth movements are not (and have never really been) a big part of the North American Jewish landscape. It has been suggested that this is because they were substituted with youth movements that just emphasized Judaism plain and simple, without mixing in politics. But the reason for this is, in my opinion, that Jews in North America mostly felt safe and stable in their countries and, while mostly supporting the idea of a Jewish homeland, didn't believe it necessary to actively advocate for it as a plan B in case things went wrong (because they thought they wouldn't go wrong).

Unfortunately, we have now seen that things here are not as blissful as our great-grandparents might have once thought.

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The second thing we can explore from that statement is to think about what message we can derive from the fact that movements which advocate for the existence of Israel are active in an already established Israel. Could there be a lesson for us there? I believe so.

At a glance, it seems weird to think that there are movements that advocate for the existence of a country that already exists and has for almost 80 years, in that same country. But recent events have shown us the importance of this kind of activism. After the events of October 7 and the subsequent resurfacing of antisemitism, many call into question Israel's legitimacy and its rights not just to defend itself, but to merely exist.

We have also seen that Canada and the U.S. are not the safe heavens for our community that we once thought they were, emphasizing the importance of North American Jews; we must involve ourselves not only in religious

and cultural movements, but in Zionist ones as well, even if it's not what our communities have traditionally emphasized. It is also important to note that we have now seen that when it comes to advocating for Israel, we must not rely on others outside of our community.

It is up to us to continue to defend the existence of a country, which – while it is not going anywhere – needs our support to continue flourishing.



Uncovering Unchecked Antisemitism at the University of Waterloo

Emmy Rubin
Editor-in-Chief

During the early summer months of 2024, a plague of pro-Palestinian encampments ravaged the grounds of many North American universities. In Canada, encampments were reported on assiduously, especially those taking place on prestigious campuses such as the University of Toronto and McGill University. However, one of the longest and most noxi-

ous encampments occurring on academic Canadian grounds was largely ignored: the two-month-long encampment at the University of Waterloo.

Beginning on May 13, 2024, the pro-Palestinian encampment on the University of Waterloo's green space next to the Graduate House (which the protestors dubbed the "Gaza House") was more than just a foul-smelling, profane erection—it was a monument to the systemic antisemitism permeating every aspect of campus life. While it has become common to hear stories of Jewish and Zionist students being harassed from the tents of encampments—being spat on, yelled at, physically assaulted, etc.—at the University of Waterloo, encampment-born antisemitic harassment reached alarming levels. What differentiates the harassment faced by the Jewish community at the University of Waterloo from other Canadian campuses is its uncanny similarity to the type of antisemitism generated in the years leading up to the Holocaust. One example of this antisemitism was posters emblazoned with the words "Imperialist-Zionism slithers through borders" above an image of a black snake, its mouth agape to display its Israeli-missile teeth, strewn across campus. The snake, once a staple of antisemitic propaganda in the early twentieth century, was now being repurposed by the organizers and participants of the University of Waterloo encampment to illustrate their hatred of Zionists on campus. If one looked closely, one could make out Stars of David in the snake's eyes and dollar signs on its tail. But if most Jews are

Zionists, and a Jew is a snake, and so is a Zionist—can you spot the antisemitism?

Like the more well-known encampments occurring across the country at that time, the University of Waterloo anti-Israel agitators also enjoyed a day of blockading buildings. On June 18, 2024, participants of the encampment occupied Needles Hall, where a Board of Governors meeting was to take place. Not only were staff prevented from attending the meeting and faculty from accessing their rooms and offices, but University of Waterloo students, including several Jewish ones, were unable to take their midterms. The question that arose in the minds of the Jewish community at the University of Waterloo after Jewish students were barred from accessing education, antisemitic posters were plastered across campus, and Jewish individuals, including a Chabad Rabbi, were harassed in broad daylight was: why is nobody doing anything?

Then, on June 24, 2024, the University of Waterloo issued a lawsuit for \$1.5 million against the main organizers and participants of the encampment. The 28-page document written by the university's legal counsel detailed every instance of disruption caused by the encampment, all the damage

done to campus property, and the lengths the university had gone to throughout the duration of the encampment in an attempt to reach an amicable understanding—each attempt rejected with more violence and incitement. However, what the Jewish community at the University of Waterloo could not help but notice when reading through



the lawsuit was the lack of accountability the plaintiffs would face for their acts of antisemitism. Even more appalling was the complete absence of any mention of the antisemitism perpetrated by members of the encampment.

While the looming \$1.5 million penalty stipulated by the university's lawsuit achieved its goal of dismantling the encam-

pment on July 7, 2024, that's where the success ended. Immediately after the tents of the encampment were packed up and the grounds were vacated, instead of condemning key players such as Nicholas Sarweh and Amir Hamadache for their acts of violence over the preceding two-month period, the University of Waterloo dropped the lawsuit entirely—washing away the \$1.5 million and any memory of their discomfort with the antisemitic activities taking place on their own campus. The pro-Palestinian protestors, for their part, recognized the debacle as a victory rather than the loss it was meant to be, writing in their end-of-encampment Instagram post: "Our encampment has always been a tactic, one of many at our disposal to achieve our demands. The strategy for achieving our demands must be multipronged and adaptable to the conditions at hand."

As events keep unfolding, it seems that the anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian agitators at the University of Waterloo are holding true to their word. Although they no longer have an encampment, they are slowly but surely making their way into WUSA, the University of Waterloo's student government. Entire teams of candidates, such as 'Team Horizon,' are filled with former participants of the encampment, basing their entire campaign on their stance on Israel. As of now, there is only one Jewish student in WUSA.

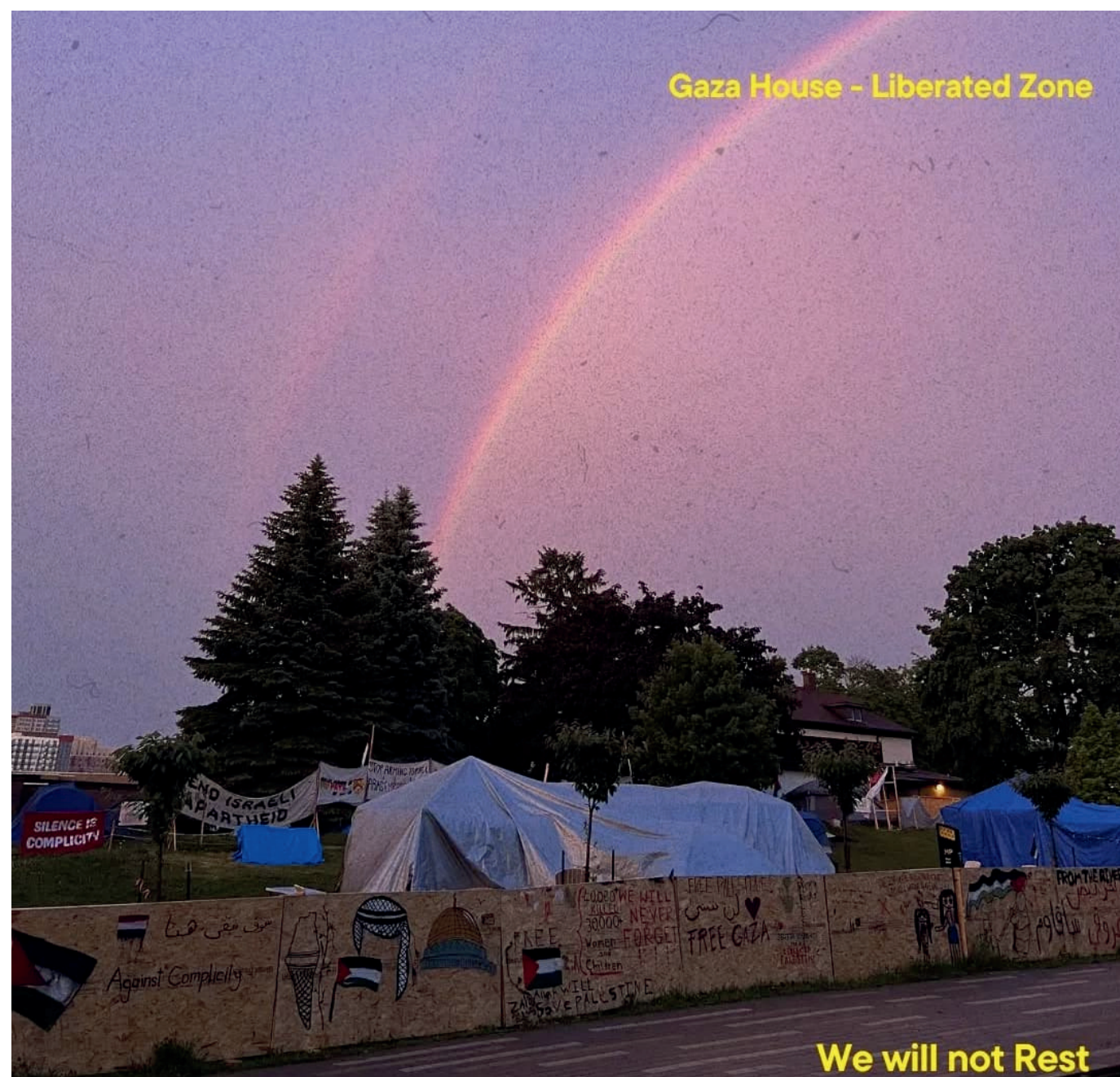
The Jewish community at the University of Waterloo, feeling robbed of the justice they expected from the university's lawsuit, attempted to put together their own. However, as soon as the anti-Israel community caught wind of what was happening, they

immediately began doxxing every individual they suspected of being involved.

When asked how Jewish students are planning on fighting against the injustice of the lawsuit's dismissal and the lingering antisemitism at the University of Waterloo, the overwhelming response is a desire to "stand up." "During the encampment," one student said, "there was no Hillel or AVI on campus in terms of advocacy. But there was always soup." While the Jewish students at the University of Waterloo lacked the resources to fight against antisemitism in the same way as schools such as UBC, U of T, or McGill, they had a growing community.

Many students acknowledge that the entire ordeal of the encampment and its aftermath was "bittersweet." The antisemitism that made them feel unsafe on campus also made them seek safety within their own community, causing attendance at Shabbat dinners to reach 130—drastically more Jewish students than had been active before. Even though the pro-Palestinian mob at the University of Waterloo won their battle against the university, the Jewish students aren't giving up—they're just getting started.

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via @occupyuwaterloo



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