Breaking Cycles of Violence:
Psychohistorical Perspectives on Individual and Collective Healing

An Invitation to the International Psychohistorical Association's 49th Annual Conference

From the IPhA Leadership Team

Abstract

This article introduces the International Psychohistorical Association's 49th Annual Conference (2026), *Breaking Cycles of Violence: Psychohistorical Perspectives on Individual and Collective Healing*. Written from the voice of the IPhA Leadership Team, it outlines the conference theme, key areas of inquiry, and invites proposals that integrate psychological insight with historical understanding to address violence, trauma, and pathways toward healing.

Keywords: *cycles of violence, Mahatma Gandhi, nonviolent communication, psychoanalysis, psychobiography, psychohistory, socio-cultural analysis*

"Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of humankind." — Mahatma Gandhi

The International Psychohistorical Association (IPhA) invites scholars, clinicians, educators, students, and all those interested in the interplay of psyche and history to join us for the **49th Annual IPhA Conference**, to be held **May 29-31, 2026**, **virtually on Zoom**. The theme of the 2026 conference is **"Breaking Cycles of Violence: Psychohistorical Perspectives on Individual and Collective Healing"** (https://psychohistory.us/conference/). In a moment of intensified global crisis — marked by lingering trauma, entrenched conflicts and wars, structural inequalities, and intergenerational wounds — the need for psychohistorical insight has never been greater.

Psychohistory is a transdisciplinary field and method that brings psychological insight into dialogue with historical, cultural, and social analysis. Drawing on psychoanalysis, history, developmental psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, and the humanities, psychohistory seeks to understand how inner worlds shape historical events — and how historical conditions, in turn, shape psychic life. Psychobiography, one of its core methods, examines individual lives in depth, not to reduce history to personality, but to illuminate how

personal experience, trauma, imagination, and moral choice intersect with larger historical forces.

Psychohistory's unique contribution lies in its capacity to illuminate the **deep psychological roots of violence and suffering**, and the **historical conditions that sustain or interrupt cycles of harm**. This year's conference seeks to bring that perspective to bear on some of the most urgent challenges of our time: how we understand the development and persistence of violence; how we recognize and address unresolved trauma; how social divisions fracture communities and psyche alike; and how individuals and cultures find pathways toward resilience, repair, and transformation.

Psychohistory and psychobiography offer tools for understanding violence not only as a political or social phenomenon, but as a deeply human one — rooted in development, relationship, memory, and meaning.

As Mahatma Gandhi observed, *"Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being. It is not a method for the weak, nor a tactic of convenience, but a force which transforms relationships and social life by appealing to what is human in each of us."*

This understanding invites psychohistorical inquiry into how violence becomes embedded in individuals and cultures — and how it might be interrupted through recognition, responsibility, and repair.

Our program is structured around three broad areas of inquiry that reflect this focus:

Understanding Individual and Collective Psychology — Presentations in this strand will engage psychohistory's core commitment to integrating psychological and historical analysis. Topics might include the study of lives and psychobiography, the psychological impacts of AI and technological change, trauma and healing across the lifespan, and the neuropsychological underpinnings of aggression and attachment.

Social Divisions and Identities — Violence is both personal and social. This strand invites submissions that address questions such as: *Why wars?* How do group dynamics like scapegoating, human trafficking, censorship, and ideological rigidity emerge and persist? What are the psychohistorical dynamics of generational divides, migration, and belonging?

Pathways to Healing and Transformation — It is not enough to document violence; psychohistory must also explore **what enables repair, resilience, and transformation**. Presentations in this strand might examine cultural healing, creative resistance, models of non-violent communication, human rights struggles, and women's leadership in changing social orders.

We anticipate a rich array of panels, roundtables, individual presentations, and open discussions that will encourage interdisciplinary exchange and collective reflection. Our plenary sessions and invited presentations will highlight innovative work that bridges psychological insight and historical analysis while remaining attentive to real-world problems of violence, trauma, and healing. The conference is not only a site for intellectual exchange but also for deepening community among psychohistorians around the world.

We call for proposals that engage the conference theme in its broadest sense. Submissions may be traditional academic papers, case studies, psychobiographical analyses, clinical research, historical essays, pedagogical reflections, or creative formats that advance psychohistorical understanding. Presenters are encouraged to articulate how their work connects psychological processes with historical contexts and social structures—in other words, how the past and present interweave to shape human experience and collective life.

The deadline for proposals is **January 10, 2026**. To submit a proposal, please provide a working title, a brief abstract (typically 200–300 words), and a short biographical statement (150 words) outlining your background and connection to the topic. Details for submission are available on the IPhA website: **https://psychohistory.us/conference/**.

The Leadership Team and Conference Committee look forward to receiving your submissions and to another meaningful gathering of psychohistorians dedicated to understanding not only why cycles of violence persist, but also how they can be broken through informed, compassionate, and historically grounded engagement.

Wherever you are and whatever your background, we invite you to join us — to reflect, to challenge, to connect, and to contribute to psychohistory's ongoing conversation about healing, justice, and transformation.

With warm collegiality,
The IPhA Leadership Team

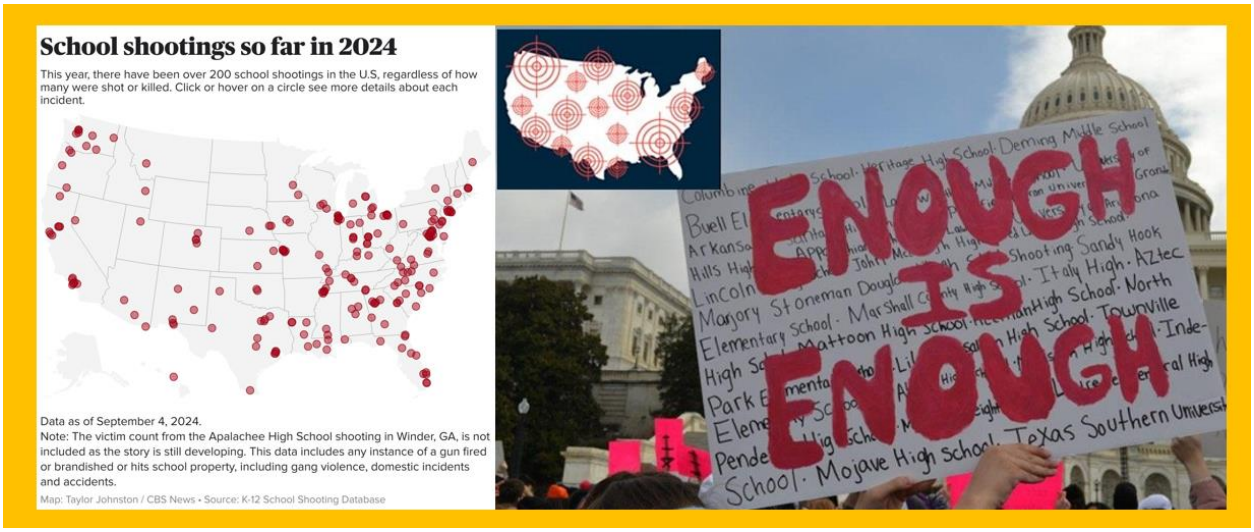
How to Cite This?

International Psychohistorical Association (IPhA) Leadership Team. (2026). Breaking cycles of violence: Psychohistorical perspectives on individual and collective healing — An invitation to the IPhA 49th Annual Conference. *Psychohistory News*, *44*(3/4), 1.

Systematic Failures in Recognizing and Treating Youth Mental Health Crises

Psychohistorical Reflections on a Plenary Presentation by Dr. Nina E. Cerfolio

By Inna Rozentsvit



Abstract

This article offers psychohistorical reflections on research presented by Dr. Nina E. Cerfolio at the 48th Annual Conference of the International Psychohistorical Association, based on her plenary lecture *"Adolescent School Shootings: Confronting Unmet Mental Health Needs."* Drawing on a Stanford University–affiliated analysis of 155 mass shooters, the research reveals that the overwhelming majority of adolescent perpetrators suffered from severe, undiagnosed psychiatric illness, most often psychosis misdiagnosed as attention, mood, or developmental disorders. Through clinical case material and conference discussion, this article explores how intergenerational trauma, parental neglect, shame–rage dynamics, bullying, and systemic failures across mental health, educational, and legal institutions converge to produce catastrophic outcomes. While emphasizing that individuals with mental illness are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence, the analysis identifies a vulnerable subpopulation of isolated youth whose untreated psychosis and social marginalization place them at elevated risk. The article concludes by reflecting on prevention as a psychohistorical task — one that requires attention to adolescent neurodevelopment, relational responsibility, and the enduring power of human connection.

***Keywords**: adolescent violence, bullying, mental health needs, parental failure, psychohistory, psychosis, school shootings, shame-rage, violence prevention*

This article offers a psychohistorical reflection on Dr. Nina E. Cerfolio's plenary presentation at the 2025 International Psychohistorical Association conference, examining adolescent school shootings through the lenses of unmet mental health needs, familial trauma, and systemic failure.

As a plenary address, Dr. Cerfolio's work represents a synthesis of extensive psychiatric, psychoanalytic, and forensic experience, as well as a deeper engagement with the psychic and intergenerational dimensions of adolescent violence. Rather than revisiting the topic at

the level of announcement or overview, the presentation invited sustained reflection on how so many opportunities for recognition, diagnosis, and intervention continue to be missed.

Dr. Cerfolio began by situating adolescent mass shootings within a stark epidemiological reality. Since 2022, firearms have become the leading cause of death among children and adolescents in the United States, a distinction unmatched by other developed nations. For many young people, schools — once imagined as sanctuaries of learning and safety—have become sites of chronic fear, drills, and, in some cases, repeated exposure to mass violence. From a psychohistorical perspective, this transformation reflects a profound rupture in the social meaning of childhood and education, and it raises urgent questions about how contemporary societies respond to severe psychological distress in youth.

The research presented analyzed 155 mass shooters identified through the *Mother Jones* database, with particular attention to 35 survivors and a comparison group of 20 randomly selected cases. One finding emerged with unsettling clarity: 87.5% of the shooters studied showed evidence of severe, undiagnosed psychiatric illness. Among adolescents, psychotic symptoms — including hallucinations, paranoia, and disorganized thinking—were frequently misdiagnosed as attention-deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorder, or depression. This pattern suggests a broader reluctance within mental health systems to diagnose schizophrenia or emerging psychosis in young people; a reluctance shaped in part by stigma and anxiety about labeling.

Dr. Cerfolio emphasized that early recognition and treatment of psychosis significantly improve long-term outcomes. Drawing on long-standing psychiatric teaching — the “rule of thirds” — she reminded the audience that early intervention can stabilize or substantially improve functioning in many individuals who might otherwise deteriorate. From a psychohistorical standpoint, the failure to diagnose is not merely a clinical oversight but a social one, reflecting collective discomfort with severe mental illness and its implications.

A recurring theme throughout the presentation was intergenerational trauma. Many adolescent shooters emerged from families marked by substance abuse, domestic violence, neglect, and unresolved parental trauma. In such environments, parents were often emotionally unavailable, dismissive, or hostile when confronted with their children’s psychological distress. Disturbingly, some adolescents explicitly reported hearing voices commanding them to kill or expressed suicidal ideation, yet these disclosures failed to prompt sustained intervention. Dr. Cerfolio described this pattern as a decimation of the child’s inner world, leaving young people to search for external means — often weapons — to manage overwhelming terror, shame, and helplessness. Psychohistorically, these cases illustrate how trauma reproduces itself across generations not only through abuse and neglect, but through failures of recognition and care.

The clinical material presented offered devastating illustrations of these dynamics. One case involved a nineteen-year-old shooter born with fetal alcohol syndrome who experienced paranoid delusions and command hallucinations urging him to kill. Despite repeated warnings, including school threats, FBI tips, and direct contact with law enforcement, no sustained psychiatric intervention occurred. After legally obtaining a firearm, he carried out an attack that killed seventeen people. When he later reported hearing voices to a detective, his account was dismissed as fabrication, exemplifying society’s difficulty recognizing psychosis even after catastrophe.

Another case, involving the Oxford High School shooting, revealed an even more explicit pattern of parental failure. The adolescent repeatedly requested psychiatric help, reported hallucinations, and produced graphic drawings expressing violent ideation. Yet his parents

dismissed his distress, refused to remove him from school, and had recently purchased him a firearm. This case marked the first time parents were convicted of involuntary manslaughter for their role in a school shooting, establishing a significant legal precedent and underscoring the consequences of parental denial.

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Dr. Cerfolio conceptualized adolescent mass violence as emerging from malignant shame and unprocessed rage. Isolated youth, deprived of meaningful connection, may experience violence as a distorted attempt to reclaim power, recognition, or coherence. In this formulation, violent acts do not reflect strength but represent a desperate effort to escape psychic annihilation. The availability of high-powered weapons transforms inner chaos into irreversible external catastrophe. At the same time, Dr. Cerfolio stressed the importance of avoiding stigmatization: individuals with mental illness are overwhelmingly more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence. The research instead identifies a specific, high-risk subpopulation — isolated adolescents with untreated psychosis, severe trauma histories, and access to weapons.

Amid these grim patterns, the conference discussion also highlighted the preventative power of human connection. The story of Aaron Stark, who was dissuaded from committing a school shooting by a simple act of kindness, illustrated how even brief moments of recognition can interrupt trajectories toward violence. From a psychohistorical perspective, such moments remind us that history is shaped not only by large systems and failures, but also by small relational acts that restore dignity and belonging.

The discussion further prompted reflection on broader social conditions that appear to amplify vulnerability in already fragile adolescents. These included cognitive and emotional overload driven by constant digital stimulation, parental illiteracy regarding adolescent brain development and mental health, bullying across peer, familial, and online contexts, and the bystander phenomenon in which warning signs are witnessed but not acted upon. The absence of sustained education around responsibility, empathy, and relational accountability was also noted. These observations are best understood not as prescriptive solutions, but as psychohistorical reflections on environments in which adolescent distress escalates rather than resolves.

Dr. Cerfolio's plenary presentation offers a sobering lesson for psychohistorians. Adolescent mass shootings are not inexplicable eruptions of evil, but the tragic outcome of layered failures — failures to recognize psychosis, to respond to trauma, to contain shame, and to protect vulnerable youth. At the same time, the research affirms that these outcomes are not inevitable. Early diagnosis, family accountability, school-based mental health screening, and sustained human connection can alter developmental trajectories before violence becomes the only imaginable solution. For psychohistory, the task is not only to document these tragedies, but to illuminate how societies shape — or abandon — their most vulnerable members. In doing so, we are reminded that history turns not only on institutions and policies, but on whether suffering is seen, named, and met with care.

How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Systematic failures in recognizing and treating youth mental health crises: Psychohistorical reflections on a plenary presentation by Dr. Nina E. Cerfolio. *Psychohistory News, 44(3/4),* 2.

Sources of Hope in a Runaway World

Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Resilience and Transformation

(based on a presentation by Jeffrey B. Rubin at the 48th Annual Conference of the IPhA)

By Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

This article reflects on Jeffrey B. Rubin's presentation *"Sources of Hope in a Runaway World,"* delivered at the 48th Annual Conference of the International Psychohistorical Association. Although formally an invited paper, the presentation functioned as a de facto plenary, capturing the ethical and imaginative core of the conference theme, *Imagining Brighter Futures for Our Divided World: What Psychohistory Can Contribute*. Rubin challenged sentimental and defensive notions of optimism, proposing instead a conception of hope grounded in suffering, realism, and sustained human engagement. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, contemplative traditions, dream work, and cultural history, he identified six interrelated sources of authentic hope: the mobilizing power of discontent; the human capacity to awaken from self-deception; positive contagion within communities; utopian imagination; the inexhaustibility of human inventiveness; and love's transformative potential. Conference discussion deepened these themes, emphasizing dialogue across difference, emotional logic beneath ideological conflict, and the necessity of relational "homes" for unbearable affect. Together, the presentation and discussion offered a psychohistorical framework for understanding hope as an active, relational force emerging from engagement with trauma rather than denial of it.

***Keywords**: community, emotional home, emotional logic, hope, imagination, love, political polarization, psychoanalysis, psychohistory, resilience, trauma, utopian thinking*

Jeffrey B. Rubin's presentation *"Sources of Hope in a Runaway World"* offered a searching meditation on how authentic hope might be sustained in an era marked by fear,

demoralization, and widening social division. Rather than reassuring his audience with optimistic predictions, Rubin began from a more unsettling premise: that things may be worse than we believe — and that, paradoxically, there may also be more hope than we know. This tension framed his inquiry into where realistic, durable hope can be found.

Rubin distinguished genuine hope from what he described as brittle or sentimental optimism — a defensive insistence that everything will turn out well regardless of evidence. Such optimism, he suggested, often functions as protection against grief and mourning. By contrast, authentic hope requires the capacity to face despair without being consumed by it. Drawing on decades of psychoanalytic work with individuals who have had to "go through hell before seeing the light," Rubin grounded his reflections in clinical experience as well as historical perspective.

He situated contemporary despair within a longer cultural arc, referencing analyses of American history that trace shifting sources of meaning — from God, to nation, to the self. When the self becomes the primary site of allegiance, Rubin argued, it proves an unstable foundation for meaning, often producing alienation and melancholy rather than fulfillment. This psychohistorical backdrop framed his search for alternative sources of hope that do not depend on denial or ideological certainty.

The first such source Rubin identified was the **power of discontent**. While dissatisfaction can demoralize, it can also mobilize. Drawing on observations of global grassroots movements, he noted how countless ordinary citizens, largely outside the spotlight of mainstream media, are engaged in efforts to protect ecosystems, challenge injustice, and foster community resilience. Discontent, when coupled with imagination and action, can become a generative force rather than a paralyzing one.

A second source of hope lies in the human capacity to **awaken from self-deception**. Psychoanalysis teaches that self-deception is ubiquitous, yet it also demonstrates the remarkable ability of individuals to recognize and relinquish illusions that impoverish their lives. Rubin emphasized that people often pursue what does not truly nourish them — wealth, power, consumption — at great cost to relationships and well-being. The possibility of awakening to these costs, however fragile, represents a powerful opening for change.

Rubin then turned to **positive contagion**, a phenomenon less studied than its destructive counterpart. While fear and hatred spread rapidly, so too can courage, generosity, and ethical commitment. When individuals resist dehumanizing values and live differently, they may inspire others, creating pockets of moral energy that counteract despair. Such contagion does not require mass movements; it often begins in small, local acts of integrity and care.

The **utopian imagination** formed a more ambivalent yet essential source of hope. Rubin acknowledged that utopian projects have repeatedly produced catastrophe, from totalitarian regimes to coercive communal experiments. Yet he resisted the conclusion that utopian thinking should be abandoned altogether. Utopias, he argued, express aspirations that expand the horizons of what seems possible. Even when unrealizable, they challenge the assumption that existing social arrangements are inevitable or eternal. Without such imaginative provocations, societies risk surrendering too easily to the status quo.

Rubin gave concrete form to this idea through his discussion of **dream work**, particularly the experiential dream-group method developed by Montague Ullman. Ullman's approach, which treats dreams as shared human creations rather than expert property, exemplifies a small-scale utopian practice. In these groups, hierarchy recedes, criticism gives way to curiosity, and participants collaborate in exploring meaning. Rubin described such groups as fostering

safety, openness, and mutual transformation — offering an "intimation of utopia" grounded in lived experience rather than ideology.

Another wellspring of hope emerged in Rubin's concept of **inner space** — the capacity to reflect, imagine, and feel independently of external pressures. Inner space allows individuals to resist the hypnotic pull of prevailing narratives and to envision alternatives. It supports empathy across differences and opens the possibility of creative responses to entrenched conflicts. Cultivating inner space, Rubin suggested, is not withdrawal from the world but preparation for wiser engagement with it.

The final and most powerful source of hope Rubin identified was **love**. Love, in its many forms, operates beyond political manipulation and resists total control. Drawing on psychoanalytic trauma theory, he described trauma as an unbearable affect without a relational home. When ordinary assumptions about safety and continuity are shattered — whether through personal catastrophe or collective upheaval — love expressed through witnessing, attunement, and solidarity can provide that missing home. Such relational presence does not erase suffering but makes it bearable, enabling resilience and healing.

The discussion following Rubin's presentation deepened these themes. Participants reflected on how ordinary routines and relationships sustain meaning during extreme historical trauma, how shared rituals can rapidly restore collective morale, and how dialogue across ideological divides requires curiosity about the emotional logic underlying opposing positions. Rather than pathologizing difference, Rubin advocated for a stance of listening that suspends judgment long enough for genuine encounter to occur — a posture familiar to psychoanalytic practice but urgently needed in civic life.

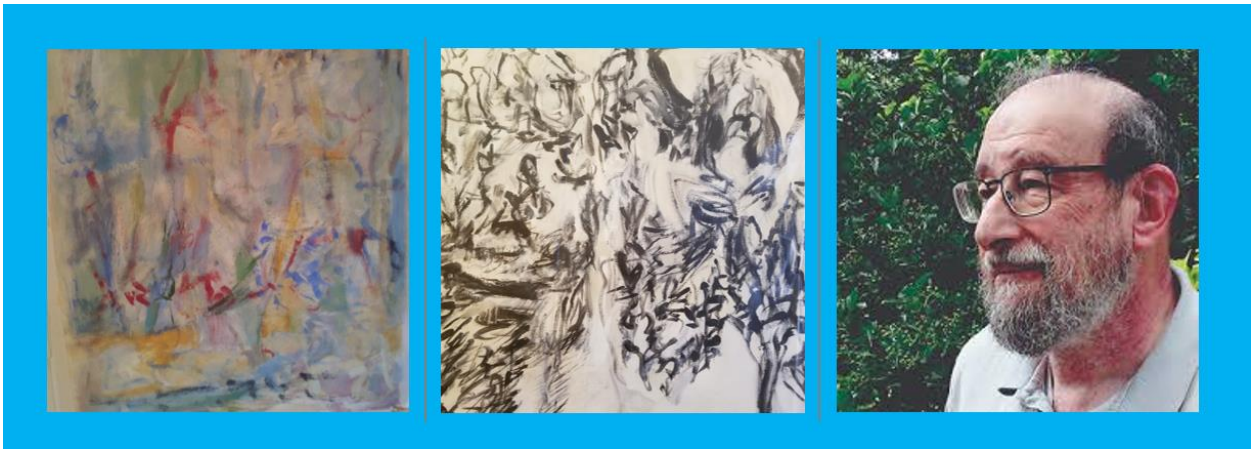
Taken together, Rubin's presentation and the ensuing discussion offered a psychohistorical vision of hope as neither naive optimism nor passive endurance. Hope, in this account, emerges from engagement with suffering, from imagination disciplined by realism, and from sustained commitment to human connection. In a world that often feels unmoored and accelerated beyond control, these sources of hope do not promise easy solutions. They do, however, remind us that the capacities for renewal — ethical, psychological, and relational — remain deeply human and historically consequential.

How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Sources of hope in a runaway world: Psychoanalytic perspectives on resilience and transformation (based on a presentation by Jeffrey B. Rubin at the 48th Annual Conference of the IPhA). *Psychohistory News*, *44(3/4),* 3.

Vanished and Sorely Missed

By Howard F. Stein



Images by Sandra Indig

A Backstory:

In our times, through wars and expulsions, millions of people have been exiled, displaced, have fled for their lives to gates that they hoped would open to welcome and take them in. There are many ways people can be exiled and induced ensuing suffering from a profound sense of loss of place and identity.

This poem is a kind of "documentary" of facets of my life long prior to what felt like eviction from home due to my supposed life-threatening infirmities, and placement in an "assisted living" medical residential facility. Although the focus of the poem is *my life-long relationship with our earth's moon*, and its sudden absence in my new residence, it could also speak to the experiences of millions of people over human history in their uprootedness.

Although for me, "separation anxiety" and nostalgia are part of the story line, I have come to realize that there is an even deeper, existential, sense of loss of connection with Reality itself, the real, natural world. My sense of wholeness-through-relationship to what felt like The Real was broken, shattered. Deep grief and mourning followed this rupture, and has not been fully "worked through," resolved, and left behind — as if these were either possible or desirable.

The sense of Void, and with it, loss of Meaning are wounds that never completely heal. I also realize that idealization and demonization of the past always lurk as tempting ways of "processing" massive change and loss. At their emotional best, though, people can recognize both" good" and "bad" parts of their past.

People find and create new meaning in their lives, but the past and memories (however distorted) are never exorcised. Members of my family and health professionals have urged me to forget it and move on, or at least to relegate it to the past and memory. In old age and chronic illness, who needs the moon anyway! The very condition of exile and expulsion complicates the emotional way of dealing with loss.

Certainly, I have continued with life along time's arrow toward the future, but the sense of loss of something vital, and the emotionally violent circumstances of my move to assisted living, remain keenly felt. I sometimes wonder if others' pressure on me to feel "settled" and

call this “home” is not a way of protecting *themselves* from guilt and shame for having ripped from me a sense of aliveness, which included a connection with the presence of the moon.

In a way, then, both the poem and the backstory are ways of *bearing witness* to the physical and emotional reality of being severed, in a way, from life itself, in the name of protecting me. I wonder whether my poem and the history underlying it might resonate with readers' own life experiences -- which are part of the essence of psychohistorical data and sense-making.

***Keywords**: assisted living, displacement, nostalgia, poetry, psychobiography, psychohistory, separation anxiety, wholeness*

Vanished and Sorely Missed

From childhood I have followed
Every season of the moon,
From first hint of crescent
To swelling and brilliantly full,
Then back again,
Disappearing a day or two,
Reappearing once more
As a wisp in the western sky,
Its cycles and my life entwined.
This moon, a character in my
Story, sextant by which
I have navigated my ship,
Lifeless stone of impact craters
And basaltic plains, yet
Silent companion with whom
I kept carrying on
Continuous conversation.

I am, only in
Relation to my moon —
New moon, faintest crescent,
First quarter, fattening moon,
Full moon, diminishing moon,
Final quarter, renewed moon –
All by which I calibrate
My sense of time, my life.
Its phases, my phases —
Change, rhythm, return —
I seek no “Man in the Moon”
To find myself.

I am old now, live in a small box
Of an apartment
Within an old folks’ home,
Called “assisted living,”
My soul locked away
Far from any

Natural Order of things.

Its cramped walls
Match my worsening vision —
Though there is little
To see from the window
Besides parking lots
Separated by a wide patch of grass,
Blinding spotlights, bright streetlamps,
Assorted buildings, token trees,
With only a slight layer
Of sky above them all,
That offers a glimpse
Of glorious sunsets.

Even with poor eyesight,
Surely, I would recognize
My lifelong friend
Above this clutter...
Too many months
Have passed since
I last saw my moon
In its journey.
I have lost my way
Without my guide.
How can I know where I am,
Even what or who,
If I do not know first
Where my moon is?
If my moon disappears,
I disappear with it.
No paper calendar,
With its lunar phases,
Comforts me.

The old movie,
"*The Incredible Shrinking Man,*" * drifts into my mind —
Though *I* have not changed
In size, I vanish nonetheless.

Grievous doubt —
Sets me now to wonder
Whether there ever was
A moon over these
Nearly eight decades.
Maybe all these years
I orbited around longing.

Maybe the child I was,
And carry everywhere

With me, saw only
A hoped-for moon all along —

Maybe the moon I miss
Never was. Maybe there
Were only narrow,
Tight walls — with windows
Hardly worth looking out.

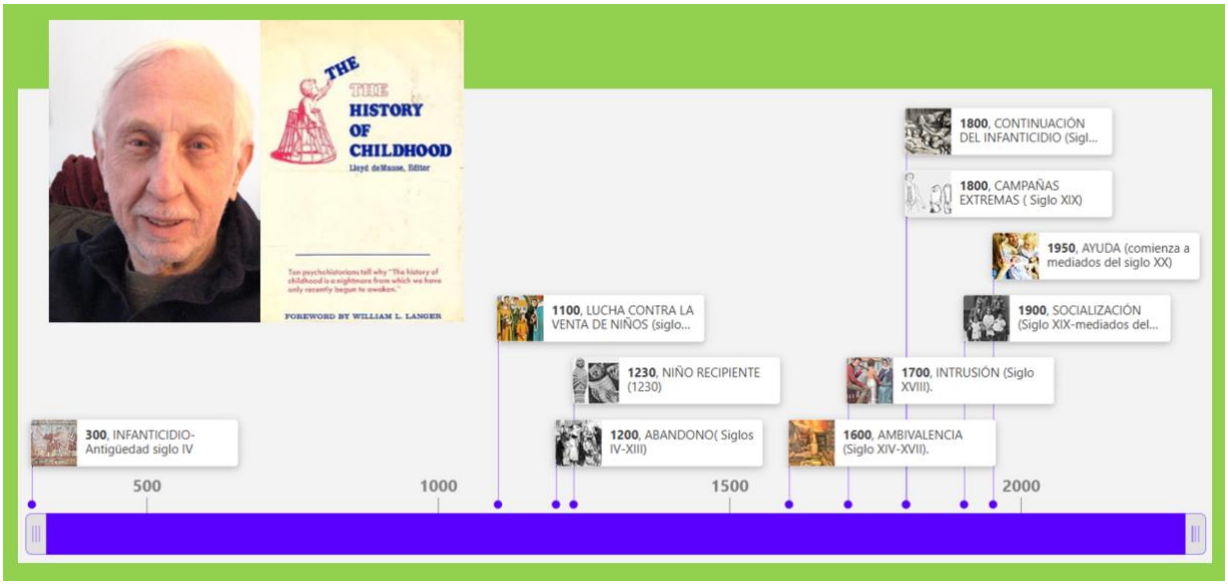
*An American science fiction movie (1957), directed by Jack Arnold, based on the 1956 novel, *The Shrinking Man*, by Richard Matheson.

How to Cite This?

Stein, H. F. (2025). Vanished and sorely missed [poem]. *Psychohistory News, 44(3/4), 4.*

Lloyd deMause's Contributions to Psychohistory: Remembering the Founder of the IPhA

By Paul H. Elovitz



Abstract

This article offers a commemorative and historical account of Lloyd deMause (1931–2020), founder of the International Psychohistorical Association and a central architect of psychohistory as a field. Drawing on personal experience and institutional memory, Paul H. Elovitz traces deMause's intellectual development, theoretical contributions, and extraordinary role in building psychohistorical journals, organizations, and scholarly communities. Particular attention is given to deMause's work on the history of childhood, his formulation of psychogenic theory, and his conviction that psychohistory could serve as a scientific and moral enterprise aimed at reducing violence through improved childrearing. Written in part to orient newer members of the IPhA, the article situates deMause's legacy within the broader evolution of psychohistory as an interdisciplinary endeavor committed to understanding the psychological roots of historical change.

Keywords: childhood history, International Psychohistorical Association (IPhA), Lloyd deMause, memory and legacy, psychogenic theory, psychohistory, trauma and childrearing

Lloyd deMause (1931-2020) was a passionate contributor to psychohistory as an advocate, author, builder of psychohistorical institutions, and scholar. He saw psychohistory as a science, which would better humankind by improving childhood and our understanding of ourselves and the world. He was born in Detroit as the eldest of two sons and educated in an automotive college, following in his father's footsteps as an executive in the car industry. He did his military service during the Korea War as an enlisted man in the army. Afterward, deMause moved to New York City, where he matriculated at Colombia University to receive a liberal arts education. Psychoanalysis opened his eyes to the mistreatment of children, which he knew personally from his father having beaten him with a razor strap and kicked him in the

temple. Lloyd delved into the history of childhood and eventually wrote his pathbreaking "The Evolution of Childhood" (Published in the Lloyd, deMause, ed. *The History of Childhood*, 1974) in which he identified six modes of parent-child relations: Infanticidal, Abandoning, Ambivalent, Intrusive, Socializing, and the Helping Mode (51-54). The essay begins with the dramatic statement, "The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken" (p. 1). It opened the eyes of many therapists and historians to the reality of historical child abuse and the improvements leading toward a more empathetic approach to parenting, which he called the Helping Mode.

Lloyd devoted an incredible amount of time and energy to raising his son Neil in the Helping Mode. His goal was to be almost always present for his son, serving his needs, thus reversing the historical pattern of the child serving the parent for which he had found considerable evidence. (He created a successful publishing business on Broadway in Manhattan and lived close by on Riverside Drive so he could be home for Neil's meals). Lloyd expanded great energy attempting to educate the psychoanalytic community about his findings. When he was not satisfied with the progress he had made in this direction, he decided to build independent psychohistorical organizations. In 1973, he created *The History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*. Because librarians thought it was a children's journal, it was renamed *The Journal of Psychohistory. At its peak its circulation was about 8,000.* In 1975, deMause created the Institute for Psychohistory, holding a three-day psychohistorical seminar at a Manhattan hotel at which this author was present. In 1976, the Institute began bimonthly work-in-progress seminars, which I ran. These lasted until 1982. He also established the Psychohistory Press, where we could publish our books. Whenever there were psychohistorical meetings, deMause thought it important to end each day with group process seminars to avoid acting out the sometimes-explosive emotions generated by the pathbreaking insights being developed.

At the time, there was enormous interest in psychohistory, and Lloyd encouraged the establishment of branches of the Institute in different parts of the country and around the world. Sometimes the branches were a one-person operation, and other times there was a group working together. In New York, deMause, working with colleagues and disciples, generated a variety of new ideas. His psychogenic theory argued that change stems from the human psyche, which is based on the childrearing groups have experienced. Fantasy Analysis was a methodology of determining group feelings that was used extensively by colleagues such as David Beisel and Howard Stein. Other concepts that were developed included the leader as poison container, the fetal origins of history, the poisonous placenta, and alters, which are described in his writings.

Above and beyond all else, Lloyd brought interested colleagues together: we formed a community devoted to developing the paradigm of psychohistory. After an eye-opening three-day Institute of Psychohistory conference held in a Manhattan Hotel in 1975, it was decided to do the same in 1976. In that year, Lloyd conceived of and started the planning for the International Psychohistorical Association (IPA, now IPhA) which began it meetings the following year with Lloyd as president. David Beisel, who also served for close to ten years as editor of *The Journal of Psychohistory*, did most of the actual organizational work in founding it.

While seeing the IPhA as an instrument to develop and spread the psychohistorical paradigm, deMause also used it in the struggle against child abuse and war. In all three of these areas, he was passionate. His advocacy for psychohistory was outstanding. He maintained a worldwide correspondence in his promotion of psychohistory. This was especially effective with German colleagues, who would sometimes travel to the United States to attend annual

meetings. During his son's childhood, he would not travel away from New York City so he could be present as much as possible for his son. Subsequently, he traveled throughout the country, England, and elsewhere to speak for psychohistory. Toward the end of each three-day International Psychohistorical Association conferences, he would host a delightful cocktail party in his apartment overlooking the Hudson River. Lloyd was quick to give out copies of *The Journal of Psychohistory* to newcomers who came to the meetings. He was also ready to mentor colleagues in his scientific approach to our field. As leader, he would encourage associates to develop their ideas. For example, as I held up a copy of Jimmy Carter's *Why Not the Best* in 1976 at our Institute meeting, I stated that Carter is unusually open about himself for a politician, so a psychohistorian should go own to Plains, Georgia, to learn more about him. Lloyd, who was not personally an advocate of psychobiography, said, "Paul, you should go down to Georgia," thus helping me to overcome my resistances and starting me on the road to becoming a presidential psychobiographer.

Subsequently, with Henry Ebel, he edited the book *Jimmy Carter and American Fantasy* (1977). Ebel was an extraordinarily talented, although erratic, scholar who Lloyd featured in *The Journal of Psychohistory*. Because he had trouble holding a teaching job, deMause created the journal *Behavior Today* to provide work for his friend and further the psychohistorical approach. Regrettably, *Behavior Today* had to be discontinued because it was not an economic success, but thanks to another colleague, Mel Goldstein, Ebel found work for himself as an academic administrator at the University of Hartford. In doing research for this essay, I found handwritten evidence of deMause's encouragement on the front page of *Reagan's America* (1984): "To Paul - For His Scholarship and Courage. With Love, Lloyd."

In the course of building psychohistory, Lloyd was in personal analysis, which sometimes led to his sharing aspects of his early life with colleagues who worked closely with him. While he spoke about his relations with his abusive father and his fear of developing Alzheimer's disease that his father was stricken with, he said almost nothing about his mother. One can surmise her influence in that he was cited in Ripley's "Believe It or Not" column as reading as a two-year-old. Also, his youthful training as a concert pianist would seem to be related to his mother since his father was depicted as a hard driving automotive executive. Lloyd began training as a psychoanalyst but left it when he was required to see patients. He wanted to be applying psychoanalysis to Hitler and other historical personages, rather than to psychotherapy patients.

This article is written mostly to inform new members of the IPhA about our founder. At this year's annual conference in May, I will be presenting a psychobiographical comparison of Robert Jay Lifton and Lloyd deMause.

How to Cite This?

Elovitz, P.H. (2025). Lloyd deMause's contributions to psychohistory: Remembering the founder of the IPhA. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 5.

Robert Jay Lifton's Living Legacy to Psychohistory

By Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

This article reflects on the life and work of Robert Jay Lifton as a foundational figure in psychohistory whose influence extended beyond his published scholarship to the ethical and methodological habits he modeled. Drawing on Lifton's studies of totalism, genocide, nuclearism, and collective trauma, the essay highlights his commitment to empathic yet rigorous inquiry, moral self-scrutiny, and disciplined witnessing. Lifton's legacy is examined not only through his major works but through the institutional spaces and dialogical practices he fostered, including the Wellfleet Group and the Center on Violence and Human Survival. The article argues that Lifton's enduring contribution to psychohistory lies in his insistence that historical understanding must remain grounded in lived experience, ethical responsibility, and openness to revision — especially in an era marked by renewed totalizing narratives and moral disorientation.

Keywords: Center on Violence and Human Survival, humanism, legacy, Lifetime Achievement Award, The Nazi Doctors, psychobiography, psychohistory, Psychohistory Forum, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, Wellfleet Group

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Robert Jay Lifton's passing at ninety-nine this September closed a remarkable life that helped define psychohistory's moral and intellectual core. A psychiatrist, historian, teacher, and persistent moral witness, he expanded the vocabulary through which scholars and clinicians understand how individuals adapt to the unthinkable. His influence endures not only in his twenty-odd books but in the habits of inquiry he modeled: listening carefully, revising fearlessly, and insisting that data — not ideology — guide moral understanding.

From Reform to Reflection

Lifton first entered public consciousness with *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (1961), his study of prisoners and citizens emerging from Maoist re-education. The book transformed the vague Cold-War term "brainwashing" into a clinically and culturally grounded analysis of ideological coercion. His description of "milieu control," "mystical manipulation," and "loaded language" became touchstones for later analyses of cults, extremist movements, and political polarization. Yet Lifton resisted the temptation to frame totalism as a pathology of others. He saw in it a warning about all closed systems — including the intellectual ones that tempt us as scholars.

That insistence on self-scrutiny became a thread through the rest of his career. Whether exploring the psychic aftereffects of the atomic bomb in *Death in Life* (1967) or the medical complicity of *The Nazi Doctors* (1986), Lifton treated each subject as a mirror held up to civilization itself. His interviews revealed how ordinary people — and sometimes the most educated — find ways to sever conscience from competence. To study totalism or genocide, he argued, was to confront our own professional vulnerabilities to moral anesthesia.

Witnessing Without Illusion

For psychohistorians, Lifton's legacy is methodological as much as thematic. He practiced what might be called "empathic empiricism": an investigative stance that joins disciplined observation with moral presence. He interviewed hundreds of survivors of Hiroshima, Holocaust victims and perpetrators, and Vietnam veterans, but he never presented testimony as raw data alone. Each encounter was a dialogue in which meaning slowly emerged through trust, fatigue, and revision. The historian's task, he believed, was not to stand above experience but to enter it without surrendering judgment.

That attitude informed his later reflections on professional ethics. When he accepted the Psychohistory Forum's first Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023, Lifton reminded the audience that psychohistory is a *method of data gathering,* not a fixed creed. True inquiry, he said, demands "rigor, openness, and a willingness to change our minds if the data take us to places we did not expect." His warning against premature closure echoed his lifelong critique of totalist thinking — now redirected inward, toward his own intellectual community.

The Wellfleet Ethos

For nearly five decades Lifton hosted the Wellfleet Group at his Cape Cod home. Scholars such as Erik Erikson, Margaret Mead, Daniel Ellsberg, and Norman Mailer joined yearly discussions that braided psychology, politics, and art. Those gatherings embodied what psychohistory could be at its best: an interdisciplinary commons sustained by moral seriousness and humor in equal measure. Participants recall Lifton's generosity as a listener and his subtle discipline as a moderator. "He allowed you to finish a thought," one member said, "and then quietly asked the question that changed its shape" (Carroll, 2025, para 15).

That same spirit guided his founding of the Center on Violence and Human Survival at John Jay College in the 1980s, where students examined nuclear policy, genocide, and trauma through historical and psychological lenses. Lifton understood that institutions, like individuals, require renewal through dialogue; otherwise, they calcify into the very systems of denial they study.

Conscience in the Nuclear and Digital Ages

Lifton's critique of what he called "nuclearism" remains chillingly relevant. In *Indefensible Weapons* (with Richard Falk, 1982) and *The Genocidal Mentality* (with Eric Markusen, 1990), he argued that the atomic bomb had become a psychological idol — a technological means of seeking immortality. He saw parallels between the scientific rationalizations of nuclear deterrence and the moral logic of Nazi medicine: both depended on professionals who compartmentalized their humanity in the service of a "higher cause." Yet he was no prophet of despair. He believed that awareness itself could heal and that activism was an extension of the survivor mission he first observed among Hiroshima's *hibakusha*.

Late in life, Lifton applied these insights to new forms of catastrophe. *The Climate Swerve* (2017) described an emergent shift in human consciousness as people began to feel planetary vulnerability not abstractly but bodily. His final book, *Surviving Our Catastrophes* (2023), written during the pandemic, extended that reflection to public health and political truth. He

warned that societies overwhelmed by misinformation risk a kind of collective numbing — a "rush of falsehoods" that corrodes moral perception. The antidote, as always, was witnessing: staying open to evidence even when it threatens comforting narratives.

A Jewish Humanism Without Borders

Although Lifton's Jewish heritage shaped his sensitivity to moral catastrophe, he refused to treat Jewish suffering as exceptional. His *Nazi Doctors* interviews made him a central figure in Holocaust studies, yet his purpose was universal. "If doctors could be socialized to killing," he wrote, "the task of civilization is to resocialize humanity to healing" (Lifton, 1989, p. 495). That sentence summarizes not only his view of medicine but of history itself. Healing, for him, meant restoring connection where doubling and denial had severed it.

Lessons for Psychohistorians

What does Lifton leave to psychohistorians today? First, a model of intellectual humility. He never claimed theoretical finality, preferring provisional truths grounded in lived experience. Second, an example of moral courage: he investigated state and professional violence when doing so was politically uncomfortable. And third, a discipline of listening — the capacity to stay with survivors long enough to sense the slow reknitting of meaning after catastrophe. These habits remain essential for anyone studying trauma, ideology, or collective identity.

In an era when totalizing narratives again tempt public life — from digital echo chambers to ideological purity tests — Lifton's work reminds us that psychohistory's task is not only to analyze but to help societies recover their capacity for thought. His method, rooted in empathy and empiricism, invites us to re-humanize history without sentimentalizing it.

Robert Jay Lifton's century of witness stands as a challenge to every generation that follows: to keep gathering data, to keep revising, and above all to keep faith with the fragile but renewable conscience of humankind.

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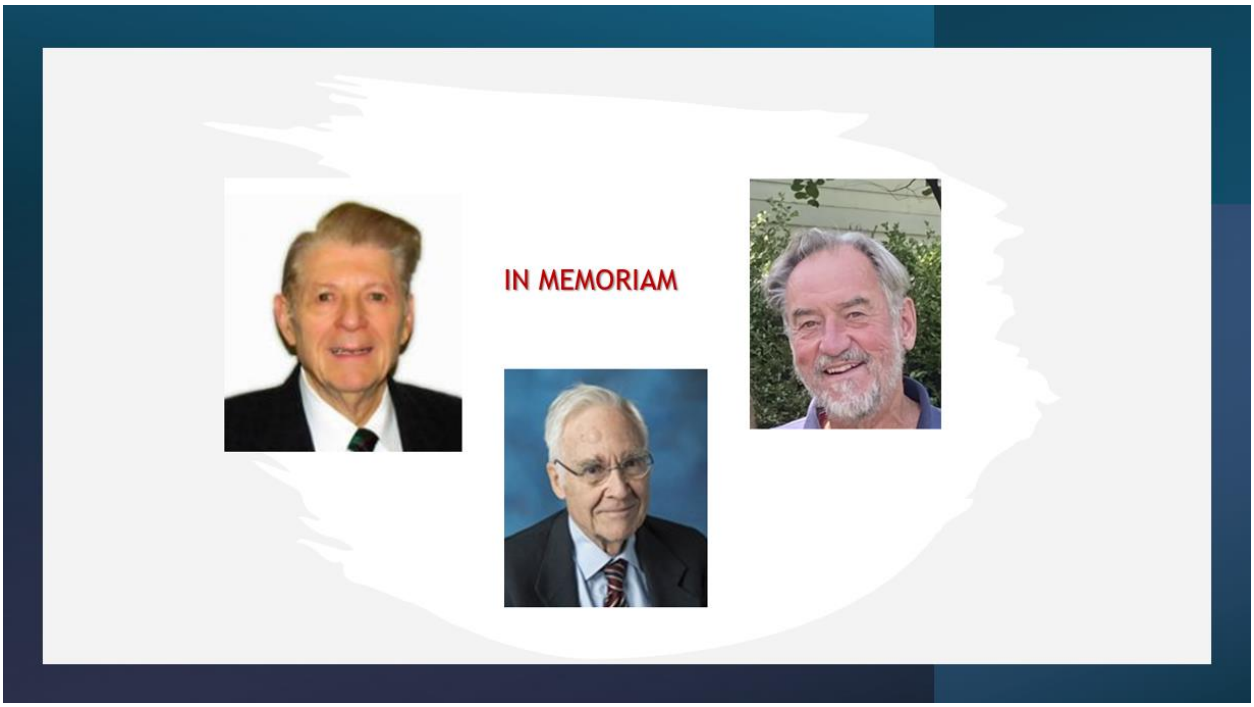
How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Robert Jay Lifton's living legacy to psychohistory. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 6.

Remembering Three Builders of Psychohistory: Barry, Fitzpatrick, and Szaluta

By Paul H. Elovitz



Abstract

Psychohistory and the IPhA have long histories involving a large number of talented and varied colleagues. These three colleagues, whom I recently memorialized in the spring issue of *Clio's Psyche* (Volume 32, No. 2), were very different personalities and contributors. Two of them hold doctoral degrees in history and the third in psychology. Herbert Barry III, the son of a psychiatrist, was from an upper-class New England family, which facilitated his education at an elite private school and then in psychology at Yale and Harvard. Prior to our conferences becoming virtual, Herb attended almost every IPhA meeting and was our first lifetime member, as well as a former president. In a *Clio's Psyche* interview conducted by Bob Lentz, Herb referenced having a four-year-long Freudian analysis and seeing the world through a Freudian lens.

Jacques Szaluta was not privy to the same advantages as Herb. After being a hidden child in Nazi occupied France, Jacques came to America without his surviving parent and was placed in a Hebrew orphanage in Yonkers. The GI Bill enabled him to earn a doctoral degree at Columbia University after he had served his adopted country in Europe as a member of the U.S. Army. He was a member of Lloyd deMause's Institute for Psychohistory's early three-day workshops, then he served as program chairman of the second annual meeting of the IPhA. Regrettably, due to some of the politics of our organization, Jacques stepped away from our group while continuing to write psychohistory and present at the International Society for Political Psychology (ISPP). Fortunately, after decades of trying, I was able to convince him to return to our valuable group. As a consequence of the necessary secrecy and trauma of being a hidden Jewish child in France during the Holocaust, Jacques was prone to keeping much of his life hidden, so it took decades of trying to get him to reveal himself by accepting being a

Psychohistory Forum Featured Scholar in the pages of *Clio's Psyche*.

John "Jack" Fitzpatrick was raised in New York State, then educated in California, where he developed his psychoanalytic and psychohistorical interests under the tutelage of Peter Loewenberg. This was facilitated by his having a long-term mild depression, which did not keep him from playing professional baseball for three years, mostly during his graduate years while earning his doctoral degree in history. He was an early member of the Group for the Use of Psychology in History (GUPH) and a co-editor of its *Newsletter*, which soon became the valuable *Psychohistory Review*. For psychoanalytic training, Jack went to the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, in its heyday. After further developing Menninger's program of applying psychoanalytic insights to business executives and medical professionals, Jack decided to start his own successful consulting business alongside his wife. Consequently, he established his career in the Midwest and never had direct contact with our international group, although he did become a valued member of the Psychohistory Forum.

It is my hope that, by reading the three memorials below, you will develop a greater appreciation of our colleagues who came before you and further your curiosity about the history of psychohistory.

***Keywords**: Group for the Use of Psychology in History (GUPH), Herbert Barry, Holocaust, Jacques Szaluta, John "Jack" Fitzpatrick, memorial, Menninger Foundation, Mensa International, Pétain For and Against: A Survey of the Historical Debate, presidential scholar, psychohistory, Psychohistory Forum, Psychohistory Theory in Practice, Research Group on Presidents and Presidential Candidates, scholarship*

Jacques Szaluta: Psychohistorian and Holocaust Survivor

Abstract: This is the author's tribute to Jacques Szaluta, a European historian and psychohistorian who was a prominent teacher at the Merchant Marine Academy and a hidden child in the Holocaust. He recounts Szaluta's history and work, including his Psychohistory Theory in Practice.

***Keywords**: Holocaust, Jacques Szaluta, memorial, Pétain For and Against: A Survey of the Historical Debate, psychohistory, Psychohistory Forum, Psychohistory Theory in Practice*

Jacques Szaluta (August 22, 1933–October 2024) was a hidden child in the Holocaust, a European historian and psychohistorian, a psychoanalyst, and for many years served as the moderator of the Psychohistory Forum's in-person work-in-progress meetings. After several years of decline, he died in October 2024 after having the great pleasure of seeing his grandchild, David, named for the father Jacques barely knew before he was killed in the Shoah. Professor Szaluta is survived by David's mother, Elizabeth, and a second daughter.

Dr. Szaluta was born to Polish-Jewish parents who met and were living in France when the Nazis invaded it in 1940. His father was rounded up and not heard from again while his mother took him to Vichy, France, using false papers. As the Germans tightened their grip on Vichy, she eventually arranged for him to be smuggled into Switzerland, where he lived with a schoolteacher's family and discovered his love of learning. In a lengthy 1999 *Clio's Psyche* interview, "Jacques Szaluta: Witness to History, Psychohistorian, and Psychoanalyst," conducted mostly by Ken Fuchsman and with me, there is considerable detail on his early life. After the war, his mother chose to remain in France but organized a way for him to come to America to stay with a sister in New York City. Regrettably, her sister soon placed Jacques in a Hebrew orphanage in Yonkers, but he could visit on weekends. After being drafted and

stationed in Germany in the U.S. Army, Jacques decided to become a teacher, a career he thoroughly enjoyed.

Jacques graduated from New York University in 1959 and took his doctorate at Columbia University in 1969, where he was profoundly influenced by the brilliant psychohistorian Rudolph Binion. In 1965, he began teaching history at the Merchant Marine Academy on Long Island, where his distinguished teaching was recognized in 1994. Szaluta retired in 2001 as a full professor emeritus. He remained extremely active at the academy, mentoring other professors and attending sports and other activities. Jacques was also a proud Research Associate of the Psychohistory Forum. He undertook psychoanalytic training and practiced as a psychotherapist for 40 years. Professor Szaluta was a fierce defender of psychohistory, actively fighting against the American Historical Association's downplaying of it.

Among his many publications are *Pétain For and Against: A Survey of the Historical Debate* (Vantage Press 1973), psychohistorical interpretations of movies such as *Jaws*, and a series of articles on Freud's ego ideals. An impressive 35,000 copies of the French edition of his psychohistory book *Psychohistory Theory in Practice* (Peter Lang, 1999) were printed; a colleague recalled seeing it sold in a department store in Paris. The English edition won the prestigious Gradiva Award granted by the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis.

For a man who had suffered terrible losses, Jacques Szaluta found enormous joy in life as a professor, psychohistorian, scholar, and especially with his third wife, Susan, who regrettably died at age 60 in 2011, as well as with his daughter Elizabeth, and his grandson David. ▫

Remembering Herbert Barry III: Research Psychologist and Presidential Scholar

Abstract: This is the editor's tribute to Herbert Barry III, a research psychologist and presidential scholar who was an early member of the Psychohistory Forum and co-creator of the Psychohistory Forum's Research Group on Presidents and Presidential Candidates. He recounts Barry's personality, accomplishments, and his work with him.

***Keywords**: autism, birth order, Herbert Barry, memorial, Mensa International, presidential scholar, psychohistory, Psychohistory Forum, Research Group on Presidents and Presidential Candidates, research psychologist, scholarship*

Herbert Barry (June 6, 1931–January 9, 2025) was a member of the Psychohistory Forum from our earliest days, a devoted scholar of presidents, and much else. He taught pharmacology at the University of Pittsburgh (1963–2001), with an adjunct appointment in anthropology, before becoming emeritus. I asked him to join me in creating the Psychohistory Forum's Research Group on Presidents and Presidential Candidates, and we often presented at various conferences on the same panels. We had to abandon our research project on correlating candidate height with presidential victory due to the unreliability of the evidence (candidates often lied about their height!). Herb, a keen student of presidents since childhood, co-authored an article with me on Bill Clinton and Ross Perot, introducing me to the full importance of birth order, which was quite valuable when I researched the first President Bush. Counting his publications led me to do the same as I worked past my writer's block. On March 23, 2023, Professor Barry was honored with a Psychohistory Forum Lifetime Achievement Award.

Born in New York and raised in Cambridge and Brookline, MA, Herb reported he had no choice but to follow the family tradition of attending St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, before earning a BA in Social Relations from Harvard in 1952 and then a MS and PhD in Experimental Psychology in 1953 and 1957, respectively, at Yale. After teaching psychology at

Yale and the University of Connecticut, he relocated to Pittsburgh, where he spent the rest of his life. He took every opportunity to travel and present papers on a wide variety of subjects, such as Henry George's ideas on taxation. He also wrote extensively, including for the Western Pennsylvania Mensa publication. Before the end of my presidency, I nominated him to become vice president of the International Psychohistorical Association, a position he would later hold when the president resigned due to ill health. Regrettably, he was ill-equipped for this position because he lacked the necessary social skills and secretarial support.

Dr. Barry's mixture of wide intellectual interests and an inability to connect with those around him emotionally puzzled me until an expert on autism suggested that he sounded like someone with high-functioning autism. He had a childlike quality that led me and others to be protective of him. When, late in his life, Herb sent me a brief article on his musical interests, I worked doubly hard with him to make it publishable and then to create a special issue on music in which it could be published. Fortunately, I succeeded, and the musical issue was a great success. I am told that Herb was thrilled to receive his published article and showed it to everyone around him. Although he was a lifelong bachelor, Herb had a close relationship with Helene Borke, a warm social work professor, for over two decades. Though they always lived separately, he was deeply depressed when she died, leading to his literally falling asleep as he presented after flying to New York City to deliver his paper on the imminent election. Helene's sister subsequently explained this example of his inability to be in touch with his emotions. Politically, he was a staunch Democrat.

Herbert Barry III was raised to be and was always a productive, helpful, kind, and rather formal gentleman. During his last three or four years, as his health declined and he came to rely increasingly on at home caregivers, he was always respectful and kind to everyone regardless of their status. He loved listening to classical music and continued to submit articles to journals. However, it was quite painful for him to receive rejections, which were increasingly warranted by his cognitive decline. For his last four or five months, he was on hospice care, and ultimately, he took his last breath in a nursing home.

Herbert greatly valued his family in Massachusetts, and fortunately, three of his nieces were with him in his last days. I am grateful to Janet Karper, who oversaw his end-of-life care, for information when his declining hearing made it impossible for us to talk on the phone and for the details of his final years. Herb is missed. ❑

John Fitzpatrick: Early Psychohistorian

Abstract: John "Jack" Fitzpatrick played a significant role in the early history of organized psychohistory before utilizing his historical and psychoanalytic knowledge to become a business consultant. The author provides some information clarifying the early history of a major psychohistorical journal, as well as noting this psychohistorian's love of baseball and years devoted to it.

***Keywords**: baseball, Charles Strozier, Group for the Use of Psychology in History (GUPH), memorial, Menninger Foundation, Patrick Dunn, psychohistory, Psychohistory Review, William Gilmore*

Jack Fitzpatrick (1940–2024) was a co-founder of the *Psychohistory Review* (*PR*). He is an early example of a historian who trained in and practiced psychoanalysis until ultimately deciding to make his career applying his unique historical and psychological knowledge as a business consultant. Born in Plattsburgh, New York, Jack earned his BA from Georgetown University, his MA from UCLA, and his PhD from UCA-Berkeley. Next, at the Menninger's Topeka Psychoanalytic

Institute in Topeka, Kansas, he trained in psychoanalysis and worked there for a number of years. Before he eventually dropped his plan of becoming a university professor, Jack taught at Phillips Exeter Academy, UC-Berkeley, the University of Kansas, and the Topeka Psychoanalytic Institute. As an advocate of the challenging, exciting, interesting, and new field of psychohistory, he threw himself into this endeavor. Besides editing and writing articles for the *PR*, he also wrote a feature called "Teaching Methods," which changed in 1977 to "Teaching Forum."

In 1972, primarily by young historians with or working on PhDs, the Group for the Use of Psychology in History (GUPH) was formed. It sponsored the *Psychohistory Newsletter*, which soon became the *PR*. In reading through the faded mimeographed sheets of the *Newsletter*, it appears that Patrick Dunn initially served as the General Editor, with the talented Jack Fitzpatrick, Bill Gillmore, and Chuck Strozier as co-editors (March and May, 1972 issue). When the *Newsletter* morphed into the *PR*, clearly, Strozier emerged as the editor, with Jack and Bill as co-editors. Sangamon State University, where Strozier taught, provided support and editorial assistance.

The decision to train in Topeka was a life-changing one. Jack would write about this in "The Psychohistorian as Business Consultant" for our special issue, "Dual Training in Psychoanalysis and History, Literature, or Another Academic Discipline (*Clio's Psyche*, September 1997, pp. 48-50). A year of training at the Menninger Clinic led to the receipt of funding and support for a number of years as he trained as an analyst and group and family therapist. Menninger hired him to apply Harry Levinson's approach to teaching human dynamics in the workplace to both medical staff and executives. In 1988, he left Menninger to create a consulting program that applied this knowledge, along with his second wife, Anne Francis.

Baseball was a lifelong love of this talented colleague. For three years, he played in the minor leagues, but when called to the big leagues by the Boston Red Sox, he declined. In his words, it was because "I figured my brain would last longer than my pitching arm." Into his 70s, he continued to play ball, sometimes against players a third of his age. He also coached youth softball teams. He died after a three-year long struggle with cancer. Jack is survived by his wife, Anne Francis, daughters Sarah, Maia, and Caitlin, and three grandsons.

Republication Note

These memorial essays were originally published as peer-reviewed articles in *Clio's Psyche* and are reprinted here with permission. The texts appear exactly as originally published, without editorial revision.

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Elovitz, P. H. (2025). Jacques Szaluta: Psychohistorian and Holocaust survivor [Memorial]. Clio's Psyche, 32(2), 250-252. https://doi.org/10.70763/0c2a1b8eada4803abd90386df241cbf3

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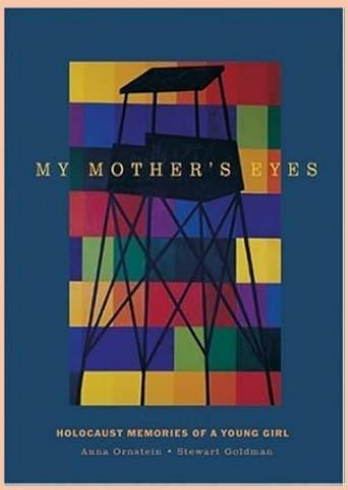
How to Cite This?

Elovitz, P.H. (2025). Remembering three builders of psychohistory: Barry, Fitzpatrick, and Szaluta. Psychohistory News, 44(3/4), 7

Anna Ornstein (1927–2025):
Survival, Empathy, and the Moral Imagination

By Inna Rozentsvit



Abstract

This memorial reflection examines the life and work of **Anna Ornstein**, a Holocaust survivor and psychoanalyst whose clinical and theoretical commitments were deeply shaped by her experiences of radical trauma and survival. Drawing on her history as a teenager deported to Auschwitz and her later contributions to self-psychology, the article explores how lived experiences of dehumanization informed Ornstein's lifelong emphasis on empathy, relational responsibility, and the belief in the human capacity for change. From a psychohistorical perspective, Ornstein's work is understood not as a denial of trauma, but as an ethical response to it — one that insisted on the necessity of human connection as a condition for psychic survival and recovery. Her legacy offers a model of survivor testimony that integrates remembrance with moral imagination, illuminating how personal history can shape theoretical commitments that resonate far beyond the individual life.

***Keywords**: Anna Ornstein, Auschwitz, empathy, Holocaust survival, intergenerational transmission, memorial, moral imagination, psychohistory, responsibility, self-psychology, survivor testimony, trauma*

> *"Our lives are finite, but museums, monuments, books, letters, pictures, and stories told by parents to their children go on living."* — Dr. Anna Ornstein, Holocaust survivor.

Anna Ornstein's life and work pose a quiet but enduring psychohistorical question: how does one survive radical dehumanization without surrendering one's faith in humanity? For Ornstein, a Holocaust survivor deported to Auschwitz at seventeen, the answer did not lie in denial of trauma or retreat into bitterness, but in a lifelong commitment to empathy, responsibility, and the belief that human beings — even the most damaged — retain the capacity for change.

That a survivor of Auschwitz would later devote her professional life to self-psychology, a psychoanalytic orientation grounded in empathic attunement and the repair of the self through human connection, is not self-evident. Some survivors emerged guarded, mistrustful, or understandably skeptical of theories emphasizing relational goodness. Ornstein's path, by contrast, reflects a moral and psychological stance shaped not only by what she endured, but by how she survived.

Her survival was profoundly relational. In Auschwitz, she clung to her mother's hand; they survived, she later wrote, because they had each other. This experience — dependence not as weakness but as lifeline — would later find theoretical articulation in self-psychology's emphasis on the necessity of empathic responsiveness for psychic cohesion. Long before she encountered Heinz Kohut's ideas, Ornstein had lived the reality that the self is sustained through relationship.

Ornstein's work consistently rejected abstraction in the face of trauma. In her clinical writings, she warned against therapists protecting themselves from unbearable affect by resorting to praise, generalization, or premature meaning-making. Such defenses, she argued, replicate the survivor's original abandonment by failing to provide a relational home for terror, grief, and shame. Trauma could be worked through only when another human being was willing to listen without recoil — to stay present when meaning collapses.

This position carries unmistakable psychohistorical weight. Ornstein understood that the Holocaust was not merely a historical catastrophe but a radical assault on the conditions that make psychic life possible: continuity, trust, and the expectation of human responsiveness. Her insistence on empathy was therefore not sentimental; it was ethical. To remain human after Auschwitz required the active reconstruction of relational meaning in a world that had demonstrated its capacity for annihilation.

Her views on parenting and development similarly reflected this stance. Ornstein repeatedly emphasized that a child's sense of self depends on a caregiver's capacity to recognize and affirm emerging vitality. A mother's joyful response to a baby learning to sit up, she famously wrote, is "the glue that holds a child together." Coming from a woman who had witnessed the systematic destruction of children, this assertion carries particular gravity. It is a reminder that psychic survival begins long before ideology, and that neglect — whether familial or societal — has consequences that echo across generations.

Ornstein never denied the persistence of trauma. She did not claim that survival erased loss, nor that recovery meant forgetting. Instead, she modeled a way of living *with* trauma without allowing it to define the totality of one's identity. Her own memoirs, read for years at family Passover seders, testify to a careful balance between remembrance and continuity—between bearing witness and sustaining life.

In later years, Ornstein spoke publicly about the resurgence of antisemitism and the dangers of political scapegoating, drawing explicit connections between contemporary rhetoric and the early stages of Nazi persecution. She did so without hysteria or alarmism, but with the moral clarity of someone who had seen how ordinary citizens become complicit through silence, denial, or rationalization. Her warning was not that history would repeat itself identically, but that the psychological mechanisms enabling cruelty remain available whenever empathy collapses.

From a psychohistorical perspective, Anna Ornstein represents a particular form of survivor legacy: not triumphalist, not embittered, but ethically grounded. Her life challenges the assumption that trauma inevitably breeds hardness. Instead, she demonstrated how survival,

when held within relationship and reflection, can deepen one's commitment to protecting the humanity of others.

At a time when polarization, dehumanization, and moral certainty threaten dialogue, Ornstein's legacy reminds us that empathy is not weakness, and that understanding does not require absolution. Her work stands as a quiet rebuke to both despair and denial, insisting that the labor of seeing the other — fully, painfully, and without illusion — remains the most radical human task.

How to Cite This

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). *Anna Ornstein (1927–2025): Survival, empathy, and the moral imagination. Psychohistory News, 44(3/4),* 8.

Talking Colors, Seeing Words, Hearing Images: Remembering Sandra Indig (1938–2025)

By Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

This memorial essay introduces and honors Sandra Indig (1938–2025), psychotherapist, artist, poet, and longtime member of the International Psychohistorical Association. Through her professional work, artistic practice, and ethical presence, Indig embodied creativity as a mode of psychic survival, integration, and repair. Drawing on her clinical roles, artistic contributions, and selected writings from *Talking Colors: Seeing Words / Hearing Images*, this essay situates her legacy within psychohistory's concern for memory, embodiment, and moral witness, offering both remembrance and encounter for readers who may not have known her.

***Keywords**: creativity, embodiment, integration, Jewish ethics, memory, moral clarity, psychic survival, psychohistory, repair, Talking Colors: Seeing Words / Hearing Images, trauma, tikkun olam, witnessing*

For many members of the International Psychohistorical Association who joined in recent years, Sandra Indig may be unfamiliar by name. This memorial is therefore not only an act of remembrance, but an introduction — through her words, images, and way of being — to a colleague whose life and work embodied creativity as a mode of endurance, integration, and moral presence.

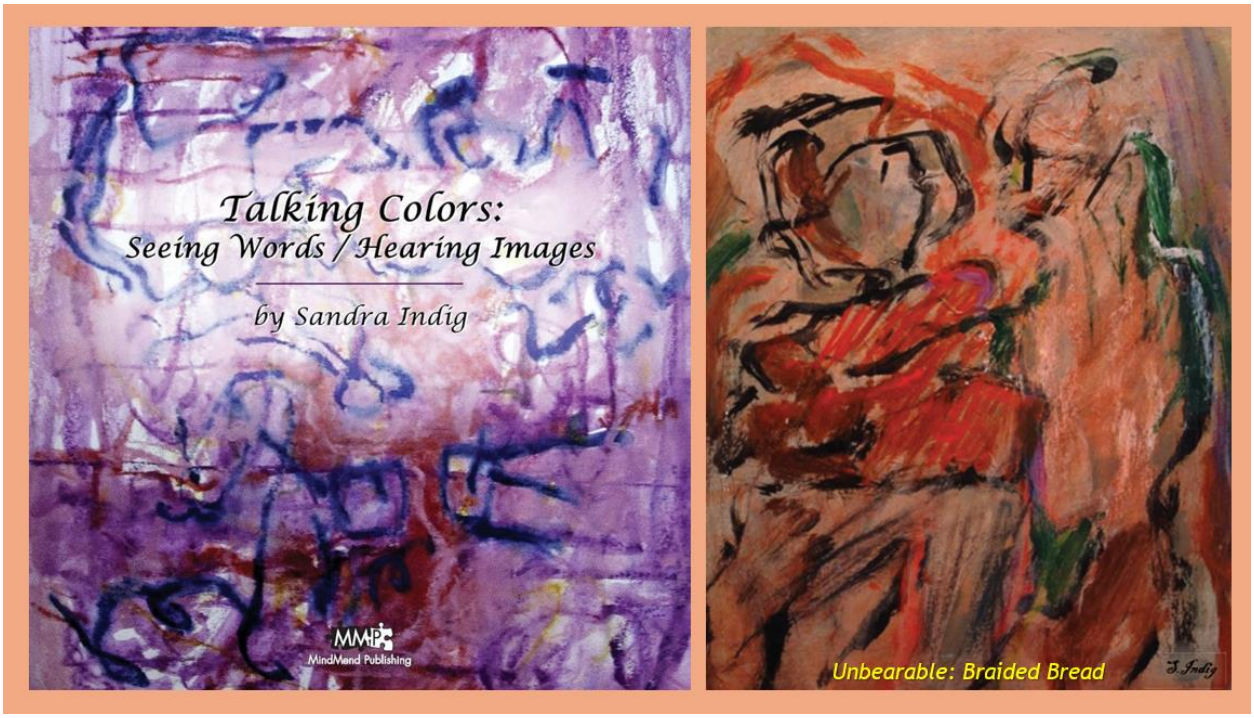
Sandra Indig was a psychotherapist by training, an artist and poet by temperament, and a dancer by necessity. She understood creativity not as a specialization, but as a way of staying alive. Across her clinical, artistic, and communal life, creativity was not an adjunct to healing; it was its very medium.

Professionally, Sandra served as Chair of the Creativity and PsychoNeuroEducation Committee of the New York State Society for Clinical Social Work, where she co-created spaces for clinicians to think, feel, and imagine beyond technical language. She believed that when language becomes too defended or procedural, creativity restores access to meaning. She exhibited her artwork regularly in New York City galleries and art expos, mentored individuals struggling with addiction through creative processes, and remained physically active — dancing well into later life — not as performance, but as continuity.

These pursuits were not parallel tracks. They were expressions of a single orientation toward psychic resilience, coherence, and repair.

Sandra was also an active member of the International Psychohistorical Association. She presented at IPhA conferences — often in collaboration with colleagues — on creativity, transformation, neuroplasticity, and post-traumatic growth. Her artwork appeared on the covers of several issues of *Psychohistory News*, quietly signaling that psychohistory attends not only to documents and interpretations, but to image, affect, and embodiment. Her presence reminded us that history leaves traces not only in archives, but in bodies, perceptions, and the sensory life of memory.

Sandra's artistic work did not illustrate theory; it enacted it. Her images and poems functioned as containers for experience that could not yet be spoken, allowing affect, memory, and bodily knowledge to find form without coercion. Color, for Sandra, was not decorative. It was communicative. Movement was not aesthetic display, but response.



Sandra's book, *Talking Colors: Seeing Words / Hearing Images*, gathers this sensibility with clarity and restraint. The first encounter with the book evokes synesthesia — a cross-talking of senses in which words and images, pain and repair, blend into an integrated whole. Each page functions like an illuminated manuscript, where meaning emerges through proximity rather than explanation.

As I wrote in the Publisher's Preface to *Talking Colors*:

Indig does not take credit for her words and images but insists that they arrive as gifts. Responsibility and authorship are hers, but not the form in which words and images initially appear. Neither her words nor her images are abstractions; they are presentations from a source that cannot be grasped through the mind alone.

Sandra herself described words and images this way:

Words/Images are places to which one goes to live or to die again and again. They unlock associations, connections, and transform the way it was to the way it will be. They create the us-to-be.

In her clinical writing, she spoke with rare honesty about psychic struggle — not as pathology, but as movement:

I have seen eight compulsions… racing toward three gates of hell: shame of exposure, fear of humiliation, and guilt. Each session we mend the roads over which compulsions have traveled. For fifty minutes we race the hellions of hell with words and hope to close their gates.

This was not metaphor for Sandra. It was lived knowledge.

Unbearable: Braided Bread

Sandra Indig

Trampling upon the layered and intertwined objects of life
that are less than and not more than
endangered grasses and straw

Marchers, crowd gatherers, and modern-day roadrunners
pound the land and raise fountains of dust
in overused public spaces
Exuding perspiration and dampening a great
thunderous noise

Coal, gas, oil, poison, and sputum all simmer in steel
furnaces and pulsate like harp strings stretched
across the moaning, end of day, empty, muted sky
Mother and her dark matter are contracting.
Mother, dark matter, contracting.

Misunderstood outcasts in attics and gated communities
reek of centuries old misconceptions,
mismatched, misheard, and misspoken,
and not-like-me are kept behind closed doors

Puppet-like prophets, magicians, sibyls, seers, and
talking heads occupy cobwebbed minds and
resurrect what is best left buried in the slippery,
umber-tinged mud of vaulted tombs

The broken and unbearable among us once swelled
with sacks of great breath and heard buglers herald
the call for Mothers baking early morning,
braided bread.

(in memory of my mothers)

Sandra was deeply generous with her work. She offered her art freely to colleagues and institutions, allowing images to live beyond galleries — in books, conferences, and shared spaces. She contributed illustrations to Howard F. Stein's *Centre and Circumference*, and her art circulated quietly through professional communities as a form of holding rather than display.

For those of us who worked closely with her, Sandra was also a collaborator and a friend. We presented together across international psychoanalytic, psychohistorical, and interdisciplinary forums — on creativity, neuroplasticity, transgenerational trauma, and post-traumatic growth. She brought steadiness rather than certainty, curiosity rather than performance. She listened carefully, remained open to difference, and stayed present even in moments of difficulty.

Sandra's moral commitments were consistent and unperformed. She supported Jewish causes and Jewish colleagues not as ideology, but as memory and responsibility. Her understanding of trauma — personal, collective, and historical — was never abstract. It lived in her art, her body, and her relationships.

In her later years, as she faced illness and fear, Sandra did not retreat from life. She remained engaged, creative, and responsive — never relinquishing movement, connection, or meaning. To witness this was to understand her work not as theory, but as lived practice.

A Darker Side of Gray

Sandra Indig

I cannot face you if you don't seek my eyes.
Toothless omens, shattered shards of crockery,
fired clay sinks into mingled waters,
The artificial blue with the not quite white
join without contraction ... or exhalation
rhythms of familiar cadences silence sound carried by labored breath.

Crunching the roar and drone of fossil-fueled engines,
Four-way traffic of persons displaced in their own land;
travelers of the tar-topped road and burning gravel.

Withered spirits shrink dreams and bend backs.
Permeable silhouettes,
faceless warriors carry black gold
revealing the darker side of gray.

Comment on divisiveness,
division for gain,
and dirty dealings centuries old,
address the question,
“How much is enough?”

(tribute to Simon Wiesenthal)

Sandra Indig’s legacy does not reside in monuments or institutional titles. It lives in colors that still speak, in words that still listen, and in images that continue to hold what history so often fractures.

For those who did not know her, this essay offers an encounter.
For those who did, a continuation.

May her memory be for a blessing.

How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Talking colors, seeing words, hearing images: Remembering Sandra Indig. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 9.

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Women's Voices in Psychohistory and Psychoanalysis: Supportive Labor, Structural Forgetting, and the Work of Recovery

Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

This editorial reflection introduces the Spring 2025 special issue of *Clio's Psyche*, *Women's Voices in Psychohistory and Psychoanalysis: Different, Distinct, Marginalized, or Forgotten*. The article examines why women's contributions to psychoanalysis and psychohistory have so often been experienced as absent, arguing that this absence reflects not only exclusion but the systematic absorption and anonymization of women's supportive, relational, and meaning-sustaining labor. Situating the special issue within a psychohistorical framework, the article highlights how women's intellectual work frequently entered the field through clinical practice, mentorship, institutional caretaking, and integration rather than through canonical authorship. By naming both the women whose work is explicitly examined in the issue and the broader historical patterns articulated in the Call for Papers, the article frames the Spring 2025 issue as both recovery and diagnosis — illuminating how disciplines remember, forget, and assign value to different forms of knowledge.

Keywords: canon formation, *Clio's Psyche*, gender and knowledge, intellectual lineage, misrecognition, psychoanalysis, psychohistory, relational labor, women's voices

Women's voices in psychoanalysis and psychohistory have long been experienced as absent — an absence shaped not only by exclusion, but by the systematic absorption and anonymization of women's intellectual, relational, and meaning-sustaining labor. This felt absence formed the conceptual and editorial impetus for the Spring 2025 special issue of *Clio's Psyche*,

Women's Voices in Psychohistory and Psychoanalysis: Different, Distinct, Marginalized, or Forgotten. Rather than asking only *who* was omitted, the issue asks a more difficult psychohistorical question: *how does forgetting happen* in disciplines that depend so deeply on relational and integrative work?

From a psychohistorical perspective, the absence of women's voices does not indicate a lack of contribution. It reflects structural patterns through which women's work was historically embedded in supportive roles — *clinical attunement, teaching, supervision, translation, institutional caretaking, and the holding of emotional and symbolic continuity* — while remaining largely unnamed, uncited, or relegated to footnotes. These functions were developmentally foundational and evolutionarily adaptive, yet poorly aligned with disciplinary models that privileged abstraction, individual authorship, and authoritative voice.

The Spring 2025 *Clio's Psyche* issue approaches this dynamic through both focused case studies and broader structural reflection. At its core is a symposium, *Women's Voices in Psychohistory: Erased or Forgotten*, which examines how women's contributions have been historically misrecognized even when they shaped the conceptual and ethical foundations of the field. My own lead essay, together with responses by Tom Ferraro, Susanne Bleiberg Seperson, Dorothea Leicher, and Juhani Ihanus, frames the problem as one of structural forgetting rather than simple omission, emphasizing how women's *relational and meaning-making labor* was absorbed into psychohistorical discourse without durable attribution.

Several articles in the issue return to women whose theoretical originality has been variously marginalized, contested, or reframed. Two contributions focus on Sabina Spielrein, restoring her status as an original thinker whose integration of biology, affect, and symbolic transformation anticipated later psychoanalytic developments. Rather than treating her as a biographical adjunct to male figures, these essays re-establish her as a theorist in her own right, while also illustrating the mechanisms by which her work was displaced within psychoanalytic lineage.

Other contributions examine women who are firmly canonical yet remain psychohistorically instructive. Essays on Karen Horney explore her challenge to biologically reductive and patriarchal models of femininity, highlighting her emphasis on culture, self-realization, and relational context. Work on Melanie Klein, whose influence is unquestioned, uses her theories of envy and aggression to examine psychohistorical dynamics rather than to argue for recovery. A reflective essay on Marion Milner revisits creativity, inhibition, and subjective freedom, underscoring how even recognized women's work has often been read as "personal" or aesthetic rather than as central theory.

The issue deliberately moves beyond individual figures to examine broader domains in which women's voices have been marginalized. Essays on women's psychological condition, women in literature and media, psychobiography, and contemporary feminist tensions demonstrate how women's experiences and intellectual labor continue to be filtered through frameworks that diminish relational, ethical, and affective knowledge. Of particular note are contributions addressing the paradoxical exclusion of Jewish women from some modern feminist spaces, reminding readers that erasure operates not only historically but also in the present.

The Call for Papers that preceded the Spring 2025 issue provides an important psychohistorical backdrop. It named a wide array of women — ranging from early psychoanalytic pioneers to later clinicians and theorists — not to create a counter-canon, but to expose the sheer scale of women's intellectual presence and the difficulty disciplines have in holding it. The gap between that expansive historical field and the narrower set of women

typically remembered illustrates the very process of selective transmission that the issue seeks to interrogate.

Read as a whole, the Spring 2025 *Clio's Psyche* issue is neither commemorative nor corrective in a narrow sense. It is diagnostic. It reveals how psychoanalysis and psychohistory have been shaped by labor that was essential precisely because it was *supportive, integrative, and sustaining* — and therefore easiest to take for granted. Women's voices were not silent; they were structurally quieted by the very roles that allowed intellectual and institutional life to function.

From a psychohistorical standpoint, recovery without recognition is insufficient. Naming women's contributions requires confronting the values that have governed what counts as theory, authorship, and historical significance. In this sense, the Spring 2025 special issue does more than restore voices: it exposes the emotional and cultural conditions that made forgetting possible, and it challenges the field to reconsider how knowledge is produced, sustained, and remembered.

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How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Women's voices in psychohistory and psychoanalysis: Supportive labor, structural forgetting, and the work of recovery. *Psychohistory News*, *44*(3/4), 10.

Incubating the Future: Neuroplasticity, Meaning, and the Adaptive Mind

A Reflection on a Neuropsychoanalytic Symposium

By Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

This essay reflects on the symposium *Incubating the Future: Early Development, Neuroplasticity, and the Adaptive Mind*, presented at the 2025 Neuropsychoanalytic Association Congress. The symposium brought together three complementary perspectives on psychological adaptation: Functional PsychoNeuroBiology™ as a framework for neurodevelopmental change, post-traumatic growth as a lens on mature emotional development, and an integrated East–West approach to cultivating an integrated mind. Rather than treating trauma or early adversity as determinative, the presentations emphasized ongoing neuroplasticity, relational engagement, and meaning-making as foundations for growth across the lifespan. The essay situates the symposium within broader neuropsychoanalytic and psychohistorical conversations about development, adaptation, and the conditions that foster individual and collective transformation.

Keywords: *adaptive brain, adversity, brain-mind dyad, East-West integration, developmental approach, Functional PsychoNeuroBiology™, neurobiology, neuroplasticity, post-traumatic growth (PTG), psychohistory, self-directed neuroplasticity, Triune Brain phenomenon, vulnerability*

In recent years, conversations about trauma, development, and healing have increasingly converged across disciplines that once spoke past one another. Neuroscience, psychoanalysis, trauma studies, and contemplative traditions are now finding shared language around plasticity, integration, and meaning-making. This convergence was vividly on display at a symposium presented at the 2025 Neuropsychoanalytic Association Congress, where three distinct perspectives met around a shared question: **how does the mind adapt — and how can that adaptability be actively supported across the lifespan?**

The symposium, *Incubating the Future: Early Development, Neuroplasticity, and the Adaptive Mind*, was not conceived as a set of parallel talks, but as a dialogue among complementary ways of understanding change. While the presenters approached adaptation from different vantage points, the atmosphere was notably engaged and affectively alive. What united the panel was a shared refusal to treat early adversity, trauma, or neurodevelopmental vulnerability as determinative endpoints.

My own presentation introduced **Functional PsychoNeuroBiology™**, a transdisciplinary framework integrating neuroscience, psychoanalysis, developmental theory, and lived experience. The focus was on the **mechanisms of change** — how neuroplastic processes remain available across the lifespan, and how therapeutic relationships, reflective attention, and meaning-making can actively support developmental progress rather than merely compensate for damage. From this perspective, early development is not a closed chapter but an ongoing substrate for reorganization, integration, and growth. Psychotherapy becomes not simply interpretive, but participatory: a living context in which new patterns of regulation and connection can take shape.

Victoria Grinman's presentation extended this developmental view through the lens of **post-traumatic growth (PTG)**, not as an aspirational slogan but as a clinically grounded process. Distinguishing growth from resilience or recovery, she explored how mature emotional development can emerge *through* trauma rather than in spite of it. Growth, in this formulation, is neither automatic nor linear; it depends on sustained relational engagement, reflective processing, and the gradual transformation of meaning. Her contribution emphasized that adaptation involves not only regulation, but the reworking of identity, values, and emotional depth.

Jeffrey Rubin's presentation brought a different, but resonant, emphasis by drawing on an integrated **East–West psychoanalytic and contemplative perspective**. Focusing on the cultivation of awareness rather than interpretation alone, he explored how practices rooted in mindfulness and introspection can foster an **integrated mind** — one capable of holding contradiction, affective complexity, and self-reflection without fragmentation. His work highlighted how attention itself becomes a vehicle of change, allowing insight and embodiment to converge rather than compete.

What gave the symposium its particular intensity was not merely the content of the presentations, but the way these perspectives spoke to one another. Neurobiological mechanisms, post-traumatic growth, and contemplative integration were not treated as competing explanations, but as **interlocking dimensions of adaptation**. Across all three talks ran a shared conviction: that psychological change is not about fixing what is broken, but about **engaging capacities that remain alive**, even after disruption.

Taken together, the three presentations articulated a shared model of **self-directed neuroplasticity**. Early relational experience shapes neural architecture, but does not fix it; trauma can disrupt development, but may also catalyze growth through meaning-making; and embodied awareness offers a direct pathway for engaging change as it unfolds. What emerged was not a sequence of techniques, but a coherent developmental logic: that adaptation becomes possible when neurobiology, relationship, and reflective awareness are brought into dialogue.

Seen through a psychohistorical lens, this stance has implications beyond the consulting room. It invites reflection on how individuals and cultures alike transmit trauma, meaning, and possibility across generations. At a time marked by collective stress, developmental strain, and social fragmentation, the symposium offered more than clinical insight. It articulated a

way of thinking about the future — one grounded in neuroplasticity, relational depth, and the human capacity for integration.

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Author(s)' Bio(s):

Victoria Grinman, PhD, is a psychotherapist, educator, speaker, and mentor to clinicians, specializing in post-traumatic growth, relational wellness, and trauma integration. With nearly two decades of experience supporting individuals and families across life stages, she is known for her integrative, human-centered approach to healing and transformation.

Dr. Grinman is the author of a chapter in *The Routledge International Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth*, where she explores the lived experiences and perceptions of PTG in parents of young adults diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Her clinical work and research focus on the long-view journey of growth after adversity — one that honors meaning-making, cultural context, and the neuroplastic potential of the human brain. She is passionate about helping clinicians recognize PTG as a lens for practice that transcends modality and deepens therapeutic presence. Contact: victoria@victoriagrinman.com.

Inna Rozentsvit, M.D., PhD, is a neurologist, neurorehabilitation and neurodiversity specialist, and psychoanalytically trained clinician whose work bridges neuroscience, psychoanalysis, and psychohistory. She is Founder and Executive Director of Neurorecovery Solutions, a nonprofit supporting neurologically impaired and neurodiverse individuals and their families through education, advocacy, and neuro-coaching.

Dr. Rozentsvit serves as Programs Director at the Object Relations Institute for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, Associate Director of the Psychohistory Forum, Co-Leader of its Psychobiography Research and Publication Group, and Associate Editor of *Clio's Psyche*. Her work focuses on neuroplasticity, early development, therapeutic relationships, and the transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience, integrating clinical insight with psychohistorical analysis.

Jeffrey B. Rubin, PhD, is a psychoanalyst, psychotherapist, teacher, and author in private practice in New York City and North Salem, NY. He teaches at the Object Relations Institute, the American Institute for Psychoanalysis, and the C. G. Jung Institute of New York, and has lectured widely at psychoanalytic institutes, meditation and yoga centers, and academic institutions in the U.S. and abroad.

Dr. Rubin is the author of eight books, including *Psychotherapy Case Studies: Escaping the Prison You Didn't Know You Were in* and *Meditative Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis: Pathways to Healing and Transformation*. His pioneering work integrating Eastern and Western healing traditions — particularly psychoanalysis, Buddhism, and meditation — was featured in *The New York Times Magazine* under the term "Enlightenment Therapy." He advocates for a pluralistic and integrative psychoanalysis informed by history, literature, art, and anthropology. More information: www.drjeffreyrubin.com. Contact: jeffreyrubinphd@gmail.com.

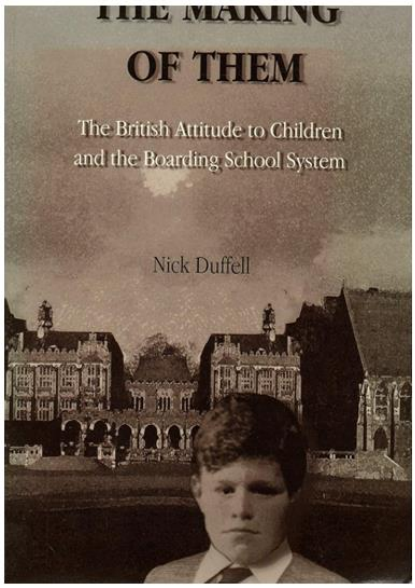
How to Cite This?

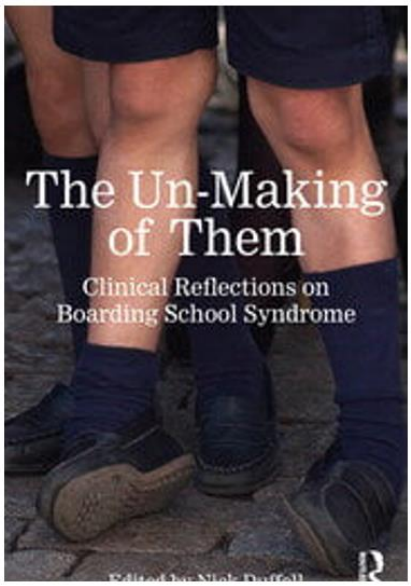
Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Incubating the Future: Neuroplasticity, Meaning, and the Adaptive Mind. A Reflection on a Neuropsychoanalytic Symposium. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 11.

The Un-Making of Them: Boarding School Trauma, Survival, and the Psychohistory of Institutional Childhood

(A reflection on Nick Duffell's edited volume)

By Inna Rozentsvit





Abstract

This article offers a psychohistorical reflection on *The Un-Making of Them*, a new edited volume by Nick Duffell that examines the long-term psychological impact of boarding school experiences. Rather than reviewing the book chapter by chapter, the essay situates the volume at the center of a broader inquiry into institutional childhood, attachment rupture, and delayed trauma. Drawing on clinical insights, historical contexts, and examples ranging from elite education to wartime evacuations and colonial boarding systems, the article explores how boarding schools have functioned both as sites of survival and sources of enduring psychological cost. The discussion highlights the adaptive strategies children develop under conditions of separation, the later emergence of emotional and relational difficulties, and the ethical implications for societies that normalize such arrangements. The essay argues that Duffell's collection represents a critical contribution to understanding how institutional practices shape individual lives and collective histories.

Keywords: *attachment rupture, boarding school syndrome, developmental trauma, institutional childhood, parent-child relationship, psychohistory, psychological trauma, relational trauma, transgenerational trauma, The Un-Making of Them*

The publication of *The Un-Making of Them*, edited by Nick Duffell, marks an important moment in the long and uneasy history of boarding schools. This collection does not simply add another clinical text to the literature; it brings into sharper focus a phenomenon that has often remained unspoken, misrecognized, or rationalized as necessary sacrifice. The book stands at the center of a widening conversation about what happens to children who are

raised within institutions — sometimes for protection, sometimes for privilege, sometimes for social engineering — and how those experiences echo across lives, families, and societies.

Boarding schools have never been a single thing. For some children, particularly during periods of war or social collapse, they functioned as refuges. Several defenders of boarding schools have described their own experiences in wartime Europe — living in monasteries or rural institutions during the bombing of major cities — as containing, even "mothering," environments that offered safety when families could not. In such contexts, separation was not elective but existential, a condition of survival rather than ideology. To deny these realities would be to flatten history.

And yet, as Duffell's edited volume makes clear, for many others boarding schools constituted a profound developmental rupture. Early and prolonged separation from caregivers, emotional neglect masked as discipline, institutional silencing, and exposure to peer abuse were not anomalies but structural features of certain systems. What *The Un-Making of Them* demonstrates with clinical depth is that the psychological fallout from such experiences is often delayed, emerging decades later in difficulties with intimacy, affect regulation, identity, and meaning. Survival, the contributors remind us, is not the same as integration.

From a psychohistorical perspective, boarding schools occupy a revealing position at the intersection of child development, social values, and institutional power. In elite contexts, they have functioned as mechanisms of class reproduction, shaping emotional restraint, loyalty to hierarchy, and the capacity to endure separation as virtues. In colonial and assimilationist settings — most starkly in the forced boarding of Indigenous children — they served as tools of identity erasure, severing children from language, culture, and kinship in the name of "civilization." Across these settings, the child's inner world was subordinated to institutional aims, whether those aims were framed as moral, educational, or national.

The psychohistorical cost of such arrangements becomes visible when we attend to development rather than outcomes alone. Children adapt. They always do. But adaptation under conditions of chronic separation and emotional deprivation often requires defensive organization: premature independence, emotional numbing, splitting, dissociation, or hyper-compliance. These strategies may serve survival in childhood and even success in adulthood, yet they frequently exact a later price. Duffell's volume is especially powerful in illuminating how many ex-boarders enter therapy not with clear memories of trauma, but with a pervasive sense of disconnection, difficulty trusting care, or an inability to feel fully alive in relationships.

The book's attention to gender further deepens this picture. Several chapters address the historically neglected experiences of girls in boarding schools, including exposure to sexual abuse in co-educational settings and the particular silencing of female distress within institutional cultures. These accounts complicate earlier narratives that focused primarily on male emotional suppression, revealing how different forms of adaptation were demanded of boys and girls, and how these adaptations later shape adult relational patterns.

The question, then, is not whether boarding schools are inherently traumatic, but what developmental demands they impose — and at what cost. Oliver Sacks' life offers a poignant illustration of this complexity. Sent to boarding school by physician parents during wartime Britain, Sacks survived the experience and went on to a remarkably generative career. Yet some of his interviews also testify to enduring emotional pain, and his brother's psychotic break reminds us that siblings exposed to similar conditions may diverge dramatically in outcome. Psychohistory teaches us to resist simple causal claims while remaining attentive to patterns of risk and vulnerability.

What makes *The Un-Making of Them* especially significant is its refusal to reduce boarding school trauma to a single diagnostic entity. Instead, it presents a mosaic of clinical encounters, theoretical perspectives, and therapeutic approaches, including advances from attachment theory, trauma studies, and neuroscience. The contributors — many of whom are themselves ex-boarders — write with a combination of rigor and moral seriousness that avoids both polemic and nostalgia. In doing so, they challenge therapists, educators, and societies alike to reconsider what has long been normalized under the guise of privilege or necessity.

For psychohistory, this volume raises a broader ethical question: what kinds of childhood suffering do societies tolerate, excuse, or even valorize in the service of social order? And how do those decisions shape not only individual psyches, but collective values, leadership styles, and intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience? Boarding schools, in their many forms, offer a stark lens through which to examine how institutional arrangements leave psychological traces long after their rationales have faded.

Duffell's edited collection does not close this conversation; it opens it. By bringing clinical insight into dialogue with historical awareness, *The Un-Making of Them* invites us to listen more carefully to the lives shaped within institutional walls — and to ask, with renewed seriousness, what it truly means to raise children in the name of survival, progress, or success.

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How to Cite This?

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The Psychohistory of Selective Empathy

Feminist Silence, Moral Splitting, and the Aftermath of October 7

By Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

The atrocities committed against Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023 — including acts of sexual violence against women — constituted not only a political and humanitarian catastrophe but also a moral rupture that exposed deep fractures within contemporary social movements. While documentation of these crimes has since been established through survivor testimony, journalistic investigation, and official reports, the responses of many feminist organizations and leaders were uneven, delayed, or marked by silence. Building on prior peer-reviewed documentation of these events and their reception, this article offers a psychohistorical analysis of what is termed *selective empathy*: a pattern in which moral recognition and compassion are extended conditionally, shaped by ideological alignment rather than universal ethical commitments. Drawing on psychohistorical and psychoanalytic concepts such as moral splitting, group idealization, and failures of reality-testing, the essay examines how selective empathy emerges, why Jewish women became particularly vulnerable to erasure after October 7, and what such failures reveal about the psychological foundations — and fragilities — of contemporary moral movements.

***Keywords**: antisemitism, compassion, conditional compassion, empathy, feminism, Israeli women, moral splitting, October 7 pogrom, psychohistory, selective empathy, sexual violence, splitting*

The mass violence of October 7 did not unfold in a moral vacuum. Alongside the shock and grief generated by the attacks themselves, a second rupture emerged in the weeks that followed: the striking absence, minimization, or deflection of acknowledgment from many feminist institutions and leaders regarding the sexual violence committed against Israeli women. For those who had long understood feminism as a universal ethical commitment to women's bodily integrity and dignity, this silence was not merely disappointing — it was disorienting.

A detailed documentation of the sexual violence committed during the October 7 pogrom, together with an analysis of feminist organizational responses and the evidentiary record drawn from primary reports and investigative journalism, was presented in my earlier peer-reviewed article published in *Clio's Psyche* (Spring 2025). The present essay does not revisit that documentation in full. Instead, it builds upon it to examine a broader psychohistorical question: *what psychological and moral mechanisms allow such silences to occur, and to be defended, within movements grounded in claims of justice and care?*

From Silence to Structure

In earlier writing, feminist nonresponse to October 7 was described as a moral silence—a failure to speak when speech was ethically required. Here, that silence is understood not as an isolated lapse, but as a manifestation of a deeper and more structured phenomenon: selective empathy.

Selective empathy refers to a patterned narrowing of moral concern in which compassion is distributed selectively rather than universally. Unlike ordinary empathic failure, selective empathy is organized, rationalized, and often expressed in moral language. It does not reflect an absence of feeling, but a regulated allocation of feeling, shaped by ideological loyalty and group identity.

Moral Splitting and Ideological Loyalty

Psychohistory has long attended to the ways groups manage moral anxiety through splitting—dividing the world into those whose suffering demands recognition and those whose suffering is rendered ambiguous, minimized, or invisible. In the aftermath of October 7, this mechanism became evident in feminist discourse that framed acknowledgment of Israeli women's suffering as politically compromising, distracting, or morally suspect.

Within such frameworks, empathy becomes conditional. Women who fit an approved ideological narrative are mourned; those who complicate that narrative are quietly excluded. This is not a failure of information. It is a failure of attachment — an inability to hold the reality of another's suffering when it threatens group coherence or moral self-image.

Jewish Women and the Burden of Invisibility

The exclusion of Jewish women from feminist empathy after October 7 did not arise in a historical vacuum. Psychohistorically, Jewish suffering has often occupied an unstable moral position: hyper-visible when it serves symbolic purposes, and erased when it disrupts dominant narratives. Jewish women, in particular, have repeatedly found their experiences relegated to footnotes—acknowledged abstractly, if at all, while their concrete suffering is reframed, doubted, or subordinated to broader ideological claims.

Selective empathy intersects here with antisemitism not only as prejudice, but as a structural moral failure. When Jewish women's bodies become politically inconvenient, their humanity becomes implicitly negotiable. What is lost is not only recognition of harm, but the ethical premise that women's suffering should be met with care regardless of political context.

The Cost of Conditional Compassion

From a psychohistorical perspective, selective empathy exacts a cost not only from those who are excluded, but from the movements that practice it. When empathy is subordinated to ideology, moral authority erodes. Movements lose their capacity for self-critique, their sensitivity to suffering that does not fit preexisting categories, and ultimately their credibility as ethical actors.

When ideology takes precedence over lived reality, moral reasoning gives way to doctrinal consistency. Evidence is no longer evaluated on its merits, but filtered through preexisting commitments; common sense is displaced by narrative loyalty. In such conditions, reality-testing collapses—not because facts are unavailable, but because acknowledging them would threaten the coherence of the ideological frame. The result is not merely political disagreement, but a failure of ethical judgment, in which the very causes a movement claims to uphold become subordinated to the preservation of belief.

History offers repeated examples of such collapses: moments when universalist ideals fracture under the pressure of loyalty, fear, or moral absolutism. October 7 stands as one such diagnostic moment — a test not only of political positions, but of the psychological foundations of solidarity itself.

Toward an Ethics Beyond Alignment

Psychohistory reminds us that moral life is not sustained by ideology alone. It depends on the capacity to recognize suffering even when doing so disrupts identity, narrative, or belonging. An ethics rooted in attachment rather than alignment insists that empathy is not a reward for ideological correctness, but a response to human vulnerability.

If feminist movements are to retain their ethical force, they must confront the psychohistorical dynamics that made selective empathy possible. This requires more than statements or delayed acknowledgments. It demands a sustained examination of how moral boundaries are drawn, defended, and enforced — and of who is left outside them when ideology takes precedence over care.

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How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). The psychohistory of selective empathy: Feminist silence, moral splitting, and the aftermath of October 7. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 13.

Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza

By David Lotto

Abstract

This article engages psychohistorically and ethically with contemporary debates about Israel, antisemitism, and the war in Gaza. Drawing on historical analysis, personal Jewish identity, and psychohistorical interpretation, the author responds to recent claims concerning Israeli history and moral responsibility. The article unfolds in three parts: a critical discussion of selected historical narratives about Israel; a psychohistorical reflection interweaving the author's experience of Jewish identity with events preceding and following October 7, 2023; and an ethical examination of the moral claims and dilemmas raised by the war in Gaza. Together, these sections explore how history, identity, and moral reasoning intersect under conditions of collective trauma and political polarization.

***Keywords**: antisemitism, ethical responsibility, Gaza war, Jewish identity, moral injury, Nakba, October 7, 2023, psychohistory*

Author's Note

This article is in response to Inna Rozentsvit's article on antisemitism and the history of Israel. The title is taken from Peter Beinart's recent book. The article unfolds in three parts: the first addresses aspects of Israeli history discussed in that article; the second offers a psychohistorical reflection interweaving the author's experience of Jewish identity with events before and after October 7, 2023; and the third examines the ethical questions raised by the war in Gaza.

Part I

Much of the historical description in the article is accurate, with some exceptions, but in many cases, there is much importance about this history that is left out. In the context of this brief piece there is insufficient space to address each of the events of the wars and the failed peace process attempts that are covered in the article. Rather, I will select a few of what I consider to be significant aspects of this history.

The first of these is about Zionism. The article says “Zionism, at its core, represents the Jewish people’s movement for self-determination in their ancestral homeland.” There is a great deal of literature that deals with the extent to which Israel is an ancestral homeland for the present-day Jewish people. The history of the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea from before around 800 B.C.E. is full of question marks. The main, and in many situations, the only source about this history is the Old Testament. It is accepted in Jewish historical scholarship that the Bible is not a historical document. There is some evidence from non-biblical sources – Egyptian records and some archaeological finds that support some biblical accounts as being historically accurate; but they are few. [see Wikipedia entry “Ancient History of Israel and Judah”] One central part of the claim that Israel is an ancestral home is the biblical account of Saul, David, and Solomon with the existence of a nation with Jerusalem as its capital. There is one archaeological inscription which mentions the “kingdom of David” but otherwise there is virtually no corroboration of any of the biblical account from any other source. [see Wikipedia entry “David”], particularly the last 2 sections, “Historicity” and “Archaeological Findings”]

In 2009 is Israeli historian Shlomo Sand wrote a book titled *The Invention of the Jewish People*. The book was on the best seller list in Israel for 19 weeks and has been translated from the Hebrew into 40 languages. Sand makes two crucial points which are not seriously disputed. The first is that Jews who fled Israel in 70 C. E. after the destruction of the second Temple and those that fled after the unsuccessful Bar Kokhba revolt in 132 were a small percentage of the population of Judea. Most of the people were farmers, peasants who were tied to the land and weren’t going anywhere. The Romans, whenever and wherever they conquered, were happy to leave the peasants to cultivate the land - if they pay their taxes.

One of the ironies here is that when Mohammed’s armies conquered the area in 636 C.E., most of the remaining Jews converted to Islam and most likely are the ancestors of present-day Palestinian Arabs. Incidentally, they converted, along with the many others who converted to the new religion, not because they would be killed if they didn’t but because they would have to pay substantial taxes if they didn’t and none if they did. [Sand, 2009, pp. 178-180]

The second undisputed point he makes is that from the time of the Hasmoneans, around 140 BCE until 70 C. E. Judaism was an actively proselytizing religion and there were many converts who had no previous connection to the land of Israel. [Sand, 2009, pp. 155-172]

Also, there is no genetic data that supports the conclusion that most or even many Jewish people today are genetically related descendants of the people of Judea. The entire field of genetic studies of Jewish people is exceedingly complex and there are few solid conclusions that can be drawn [Weitzman, 2017, pp. 317-328]

The second issue I will address is the accuracy of describing Israel as a colonial project. While it is true that it does not fit the pattern of European colonial projects such as what the British did in India and much of Africa, it does fit the pattern of the settler colonialism of North America and Australia. As in these situations, the colonists of the Yishuv displaced the indigenous inhabitants.

It is true that there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the region, but it has been a very small one. In 1880 at the start of the Yishuv there were approximately 25,000 Jews in Palestine, slightly less than 4% of the population. From the 1880s until the founding of the state there was some Jewish purchase of land from Arab owners but before 1948 it was a very small amount. [Levit, 2020, pp. 145-148]

Regarding the revival of Hebrew, the language spoken by the Jewish people of Judeo during the Roman occupation at the start of the Diaspora was Aramaic, not Hebrew.

The final historical issue I will discuss concerns the events at the time of the creation of the state of Israel; the UN partition of 1947, the War of Independence, and the Nakba. The account in the article makes two statements that are problematic. The first is that the 1947 – 1949 war was initiated by the bordering Arabs states of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon, along with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The second is about the 700 to 800,000 Palestinians that left their homes.

There is a huge amount of literature on this history. The Wikipedia entry ["1948 Arab-Israeli War"] runs over 100 pages and has 264 citations. I will present an account that relies on evidence that is largely noncontroversial. In November 1947 British Mandate for Palestine was partitioned into Jewish and Arab sections by the UN. The area was under British military control. British troops did not leave until Israeli Independence Day in May of 1948. Starting just after the partition date there was low intensity fighting between local Palestinian Arab and Jewish militias. In April 1948 the Haganah (the main Jewish militia) launched plan Dalet in which somewhere between 400 and 531 Arab villages were destroyed. It also involved emptying 11 urban neighborhoods of their Arab residents. The Haganah took complete control of the previously majority Arab cities and towns of Tiberius, Haifa, Safed, Jaffa, and Acre. [see Wikipedia, "Operation Dalet"] This was before any Arab armies were involved. The Palestinian Arabs had only a few poorly armed militias. The Haganah had a significant military advantage.

Although the British were in nominal control they essentially stepped aside, particularly during operation Dalet. On May 14, when the British troops finally left, regular army troops from Transjordan, Egypt, and Syria entered the territory of Mandatory Palestine. They made initial gains but were rapidly repelled.

From May 14 until the first truce on June 11, there were many hard-fought battles fought chiefly between the IDF and the Egyptian and Arab Legion troops of the Transjordanian army. There was particularly intense fighting around Jerusalem.

Although the terms of the truce called for a military freeze, both sides used the time between June 11 and July 8, when the war resumed, to build up their military capabilities. The Israelis were much more effective. The size of the IDF went from 35,000 to 65,000 because of mandatory conscription and volunteer fighters from abroad. They received massive amounts of weaponry, mostly from Czechoslovakia, paid for by the 50 million dollars Golda Meir raised in 1948 from the North American Jewish community. [see Jewish Women's Archive, "Golda Meir speech raises $50 million for Haganah"]

In the 10-day period from July 8 to the 18th, the Israeli Armed Forces went on the offensive. They captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Arab cities of Lydda (now Lod) and Ramle. The entire Arab population of these two towns, some 50 to 70,000 were violently expelled. They also made territorial gains in the Galilee.

There was then a second truce from July 18 through October 15. Starting on the 15th the IDF launched further offences in the North and the South as well as destroying any remaining Arab resistance within the borders of mandatory Palestine, both Jewish and Arab. [All of the above is in the "1948 Arab-Israeli War" entry in Wikipedia].

In the 1980s a group of Israeli scholars who came to be known as the new historians gained access to newly declassified Israeli documents. The documents show that Ben Gurion and the labor Zionist leadership clearly indicated that their goal was to establish a majority population Jewish state which required the removal of non-Jewish Palestinians. In 1987 one of these scholars, Simha Flapan, wrote the book: *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities,* which covers this material.

Another of the new historians Baruch Kimmerling wrote the book *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*. To quote: "About 350 Arab villages were "abandoned" and 3.25 million dunam of rural land was confiscated. All Jewish

entities and private individuals including the Jewish National Fund and the World Zionist Organization bought only about 7% of the total land in Palestine. All the rest was taken by Sword." [Kimmerling (2008) preface]

In 1987, Benny Morris, the most well-known of the new historians wrote: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: 1947 – 1949*. His contention is that between 600 and 760,000 Palestinians, 60% of the population fled their homes to escape Israeli military assaults. The book describes in detail brutalities involving about two dozen massacres, executions, and rapes committed by Israelis during this period.

A final note on the 850,000 Jews who were expelled from Arab countries which the article contends happened simultaneously with the Nakba. Not quite, the expulsions of Jews who had lived amicably with their Arab neighbors for many centuries in Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Yemen were expelled in a paroxysm of retaliatory rage when the news of the atrocities and expulsions of the Nakba, became known. [see Wikipedia, "Jewish Exodus from the Moslem World"]

Part II

What follows is an excerpt from a much-revised paper, first given in 2017 for a panel at the IPhA conference on "The Recent Rise in Antisemitism." Much of what it speaks of is still relevant, even more so today after the events of the last 19 plus months.

I would like to start with some personal history concerning my relation to Judaism. I was born in 1946, two years before the creation of the state of Israel. According ancestry.com I am a 100% Ashkenazi Jew. I grew up in Manhattan and the Bronx. My parents belonged to a Conservative synagogue but rarely attended other than for the high holidays. We celebrated Chanukah and always had large family Seders.

I went to Hebrew school three times a week, twice after school and on Sunday morning, from when I was seven until a year and a half after my Bar Mitzvah. I was the valedictorian of my Hebrew high school class. I was active in the Conservative youth group, United Synagogue Youth (USY), and served as president of the Bronx-Manhattan region of USY during my senior year of high school. Then it was off to Brandeis University for four years.

Then there's Israel. Throughout my years in Hebrew school, we were given the conventional story of the people with no land settling in a land with no people; pioneer farmers making the desert bloom, granting Arab citizens living in Israel full civil rights and equal treatment under the law; planting trees; providing a haven for Jews from wherever they came; upholding the best of Jewish values, which included the tenets of a left-leaning labor Zionism; and desiring nothing but peace with the neighboring Arab states.

I also remember being told about those weird Jewish fanatics who thought they should occupy the West Bank, Judea, and Samaria, because God had promised it to them.

Regarding the 1948 War of Independence, we were told that peace-loving Israel was pounced upon by the surrounding Arab nations and that most of the Palestinians who fled did so under instruction from Arab radio stations urging them to leave and not to worry because they'd be returning shortly when their armies crushed Israel. I, of course, believed. I was a loyal supporter.

In late May of 1967, I bought a seat on a plane chartered by Brandeis University students bound for Tel Aviv to help however we could in the imminent war, which was over before the plane was due to depart. Following the military victory in 1967, along with acquiring nuclear weapons, to use the biblical metaphor, Israel was transformed from David into Goliath. I too was proud of the military prowess shown by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) in 1967. I understood and sympathized with the presumed identity transformation of Israelis into being "new Jews" — no longer the old Jews who were led like sheep to the slaughter in the Holocaust, but the tough, strong, and smart Jewish/Israeli warrior.

However, since 1967, I have watched as my beloved nation has been transformed into a Right-wing militaristic country operating under a tribal morality in which the good is defined as what's good for the Jews, and the welfare of others is given no, or at least much less, consideration. I watched the rise of the Gush Eminem, Meir Kahane, and Russian immigrants being given financial incentives to settle in the West Bank. I also saw the transformation of the formerly fringe elements of the Right becoming a majority with the rise of Likud; the ascendance of leaders like Begin, Shamir, Sharon, and Netanyahu; the harsh and brutal responses to the first and second intifadas; the five wars against Lebanon, including the Sabra and Shatila massacres; the repressive measures directed at the Palestinians on the West Bank and more so in Gaza; and the horrifying image of Israelis watching from a hilltop on their kibbutz cheering each time a bomb from an Israeli warplane exploded in Gaza. [https://www.theguardian.com. Israelis gather on hillsides to watch and cheer as military ...]

Part of the Hagadah story retold every year at Passover is that when the angels started to celebrate when Pharoah's army was drowned in the Red Sea, God admonished them for taking joy in the destruction of his creation.

Israel has violated internationally accepted legal standards about the conduct of war and the human rights of individuals who are under their jurisdiction. The Israeli government has participated in and bears responsibility for the killing and injuring of civilians under their control both during military campaigns and police actions in Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza. They have used collective punishments; tortured during interrogation; have detained numerous individuals without due process; engaged in extra-judicial killings; and in 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, made a credible threat to use nuclear weapons on civilian populations. [www.upi.com › Defense-News › 2002/09/16]

The list of violations of international human rights laws on the part of the government of Israel include unlawful killing, forced displacements, abusive detention such as torture, closure of Gaza and restrictions of movement in the West Bank, and allowing settlements in occupied territory

None of these things are consistent with the Jewish values and ethics that I learned about, and which were always central to my Jewish identity

It's not possible to deny that Israel is responsible for numerous atrocities and much brutality. Now for the various yes, buts: Yes, but many other regimes and nations throughout the world do the same kinds of things, and some are even worse, and they get much less attention than Israel's bad behavior. To which I reply yes, but this in no way excuses, justifies, or lessens the responsibility for what Israel has done and is doing. Also, crucially, Jews and others who support Israel have the possibility of changing Israeli policies in ways in which they don't with respect to the other nations and regimes that perpetrate atrocities. Then there is the yes, but Israel faces an existential threat, to which I reply, no it doesn't. Israel is more like Goliath than David; remember the nuclear weapons, which Israel has and her threatening enemies don't.

Jewish Ethics

From the commandment in the Torah, told and retold every year at the Seder: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:21); the obligation to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18); the precept that "Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger as for the home-born" (Leviticus 24:22) to the collective wisdom expressed in the moral principles of the Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) which places "show kindness to others" at the head of the list of ethical principles, Jewish ethics has always been one of compassion toward others. In Hillel's words: "That which is hateful to you do not do to your fellow: this is the entire Torah, the rest is the explanation, go now and learn it." [www.goodreads.com › quotes › 767629-that-which-isQuote by Rabbi Hillel: "That which is hateful to you, do not]

For more than 3,000 years Jewish ethics, as all the world's great codes of ethics, both religious and secular, have been universal, not tribal. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The same principles, specifying what is moral and what is not, apply equally to you and me; to friends as well as strangers; to Jews and Gentiles. It is just as wrong for me to do harm to another as it is for them to do harm to me. It is just as wrong for Israelis to kill Palestinian children as it is for Palestinians to kill Israeli children. To speak of crimes and hatred of others toward Israel and say nothing of the crimes and hatred of the Israelis toward Palestinians is not what is required of those who adhere to universal ethics. On Yom Kippur, Jews are required to look to their own sins, not to those of others.

Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun* magazine, wrote an article in response to the Israeli invasion of Gaza published in the August 4, 2014, edition of *Tikkun* titled "*Mourning for a Judaism Being Murdered by Israel*." [www.tikkun.org]

He speaks of idolatry and reminds us that we Jews have been known to have engaged in this behavior, and in a place not that far from Gaza. At Mount Sinai when Moses returned to his people with the tablets of the Law, he found them worshiping a golden calf. Today, shamefully, many treat the state of Israel as a golden calf, an object of worship. Israel is a nation among other nations whose actions should be judged by the same criteria as we apply to others; Israel is a nation capable of doing good and evil. It is not a divine entity that must be given unconditional support, loyalty, and reverence, but a country with a complicated political landscape that is currently governed by a Right-wing government which, at times, behaves in ways that should make no Jew proud.

Judaism also has a long and honorable tradition of being self-critical when the situation warrants it. The prophets were not blindly loyal to the state of Judea. When they saw the people behaving badly, they spoke truth to power. They did not say: "we disapprove but let us not speak of the wrongdoing of the people lest we give aid and comfort to our enemies who seek to destroy us." So, I say that, as Jews, we have an obligation to speak out against the government of the state of Israel when it engages in behavior worthy of condemnation; to speak for the values of a compassionate Judaism that does not oppress, abuse, and take the land of others, and that does not bow down in adoration to the glitter of the military prowess of the IDF.

So, what does this have to do with anti-Semitism? There is a huge literature on this subject with many accounts of the long and brutal history of what the Jewish people have endured, the many things Jews have been accused of and characterized as, and much theorizing about what motivates it. The first thing I would say regarding the recent increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Western Europe and North America is that, when viewed in the context of the 3,500-year history of the violent oppression, and exploitation of Jewish people at the hands of others, what is happening now pales by comparison.

Is Being Anti-Israel Anti-Semitic?

Deborah Lipstadt, among others, has a clear position that criticizing some of the policies and actions of Israel is not anti-Semitic in and of itself but becomes anti-Semitic when responsibility for objectionable policies and actions on the part of the state of Israel is placed on the "Jews." However, there is a problem here. If non-Israeli Jews fully support the policies and actions of the state of Israel or refrain from criticizing its criminal policies and actions, they are complicit in these policies and actions. If loyalty to and support of the state of Israel, irrespective of who's holding government power and what policies they are pursuing, is central to one's identity as a Jew, then any criticism of Israel is, in fact, anti-Semitic — that is, it applies to all Jews who identify with and are loyal to the state of Israel and not just Israelis.

So, it seems a bit on the hypocritical side to encourage loyalty and identification with Israel as being central to one's Jewish identity and then claim that those opposing the policies of the state of Israel are motivated by anti-Semitism, namely that they hate all Jews, not just Right-

wing Israelis. But if virtually all Jews support the state of Israel, then critics who attack Israel are attacking all Jews, making them anti-Semitic — a self-created circularity. On top of which, to remain loyal and supportive to a corrupt Right-wing regime that has been and continues to be a party to war crimes, human rights violations, the application of collective punishment, and excessive use of force to say nothing of promoting a highly militaristic country, does not present Judaism in a positive light. Currently, most American Jewish organizations continue to say little or nothing about Israel's atrocious behavior.

My contention is that much of the alleged campus activity that is being called anti-Semitic is in fact primarily directed against the policies of the government of Israel. These activities would include things such as supporting the boycott, divestment, and sanctions organization (BDS) disinvestment from Israeli linked enterprises by University investment funds; accusing Jewish individuals and organizations that support the government of Israel of being racist; describing Israel as an apartheid state or of engaging in settler colonialism or ethnic cleansing; or accusing Zionism of being an ideology that supports the oppression of Palestinians.

Israel is currently ruled by a corrupt militaristic Right-wing government that anyone interested in upholding Jewish values should be doing everything in their power to fight against. From the perspective of the Judaism that I know and its values that I love, I have no choice but to oppose the shameful policies pursued by the current regime in Israel. It should be Jews, and there are many, who are actively opposing Israeli policies, as well as leading the opposition to those policies and actions that are contrary to the values of Judaism.

Part III

In this last part I would like to address the events in Gaza since the start of the Israeli response to the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas. It is not seriously disputed by anyone, with the possible exception of IDF spokespersons, that since October 8, 2023, up to and including the present (May 22, 2025) Israeli Armed Forces have committed atrocities killing large numbers of children, women, medical personnel, aid workers, and journalists all of whom were civilian noncombatants. These are war crimes and/or violations of established international law. The forceful removal, intentional starvation, and injuring and killing civilians who are being used as human shields by enemy fighters, are all war crimes outlawed by international law. [Wikipedia entry "Casualties of the Gaza War" cites massive amounts of evidence from multiple sources, last updated May 14, 2025. There are 386 source citations].

Here's an example from May 20, 2025, of some of the many atrocities being committed. Over the past several days, the Israeli military has launched a massive offensive, Operation Gideon's Chariots, with near-continuous airstrikes, a ground invasion, and a full-spectrum blockade on food, fuel, and medicine that has brought hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation. Strikes on the Musa Bin Nusair School in Gaza City, killed at least 13 people, including children who burned to death. In Beit Lahia, Israeli troops are besieging the Indonesian hospital, opening fire on doctors and patients inside with tanks and snipers. A strike on a home in Deir al-Balah killed at least 12. At least 15 were killed in the bombing of a gas station in the Nuseirat refugee camp in. Air strikes in Khan Younis killed at least 10.

I continue to be dumbfounded by the large-scale minimizing of what has been going on in Gaza for the last 19 months on the part of major American Jewish organizations: the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Zionist Movement (AZM), the American Jewish World Service (AJWS), and the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), the Antidefamation League (ADL), and mainstream religious organizations among many others. They and their supporters are fixated on the October 7th Hamas atrocities, anti-Semitism, and deflecting or trying to silence harsh criticism of Israel. Many of these organization as well as individuals have come to see criticism of Israeli actions as synonymous with or in

the service of destroying Israel, which for some shades over into thinking that there is a danger of a new holocaust.

I do not see how anyone who identifies as being Jewish, particularly considering Judaism's well-known position that the actions of any Jew, good or bad, impact the entire Jewish community; can not feel a profound sense of shame about what the IDF has been doing in Gaza in their name.

There is a Yiddish word, Shanda, usually translated as shame or disgrace. The actions of the IDF in Gaza are a major Shanda on the Jewish people.

There is no moral ambiguity here. It is not complicated. It is wrong to kill women and children, irrespective of what has been done to you previously.

It is hard for me to see how any person who takes seriously what it means to be a Jew can respond to the current events with anything less than a full-throated condemnation of what the IDF is doing in Gaza. We should be advocating for a cease-fire as well as for an end to United States military shipments to Israel which are being used to perpetrate atrocities and commit war crimes. There are such Jewish organizations and individuals, Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) is probably the most active group in the United States. *Jewish Currents*, the periodical edited by Peter Beinart, is a good source for a progressive Jewish point of view on these issues.

Additionally, even if there are increasing numbers of anti-Semitic incidents in North America and Europe there is the danger of what has lately come to be called the weaponization of anti-Semitism. This refers to focusing on anti-Semitism as a way of both minimizing paying attention to what is happening in Gaza and deflecting criticisms of Israeli actions. Jews are the victims of anti-Semitism, but the people of Gaza are victims of Israelis military actions. Seeing Jews as victims makes it harder to see how they can be victimizers too. Considering what is happening in Gaza, speaking of anti-Semitism serves to distract from the suffering of Palestinians.

Anti-Semitism is not going to go away anytime in the foreseeable future. It may always be with us. However, I think the most effective action American and European Jews can take in the service of curbing the current rise of anti-Semitism is to speak out against the abhorrent policies of the state of Israel.

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How to Cite This?

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Israel and Genocide

By Brian D'Agostino

Abstract

This article examines claims that Israel's conduct in Gaza constitutes genocide by engaging the legal definition established in the 1948 Genocide Convention. Drawing on recent journalism, public statements by Israeli leaders, and the work of genocide scholars, including Holocaust historian Omer Bartov, the author argues that specific policies and actions in Gaza may meet criteria for genocidal intent under international law. The article invites psychohistorians to engage critically and ethically with this contested and deeply painful issue.

***Keywords**: Gaza war, genocide, Genocide Convention, international law, Israel, moral responsibility, psychohistory*

As we all know from numerous press reports, Israel is starving the civilian population of Gaza, which is largely children. The Netanyahu government has reduced the food distribution sites in Gaza from 400 to 4, creating a grotesque "Hunger Games" situation of starving people scrambling over one another for a piece of bread. (Ask yourself what historical intergenerational trauma this policy could be re-enacting.)

In addition, in the nearly two years since the horrific and evil events of 7 October 2023, Israel has essentially bombed Gaza back to the Stone Age. In both public and expert opinion, more and more people are describing these policies as genocide. Others say that, however reprehensible, these policies should not be called genocide because the analogy with the Nazi Holocaust that this term suggests is both false and anti-Semitic. This argument seems to assume that "genocide," on the model of the Final Solution, is any largely successful effort to murder every member of a religious or ethnically defined group.

In an effort to shed light on these questions, I read about the Genocide Convention, which provides the authoritative definition of genocide under international law. According to this

1948 treaty, genocide is any of five acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group:

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

In the case of Gaza, it would appear that primarily (b) and (c) are the forms that genocide is taking (committed with the genocidal intent indicated), including starvation and the systematic destruction of Gaza's infrastructure. Apropos this, Holocaust historian Omer Bartov recently published an Op Ed in the New York Times, "I'm a Genocide Scholar. I Know It When I See It," followed by an interview in the Times responding to his critics (also included in the above link). Bartov wrote: "I believe the goal was — and remains today — to force the population to leave the Strip altogether or, considering that it has nowhere to go, to debilitate the enclave through bombings and severe deprivation of food, clean water, sanitation and medical aid to such an extent that it is impossible for Palestinians in Gaza to maintain or reconstitute their existence as a group."

As just one of many examples of genocidal intent expressed by Israel's leaders, Bartov cites Nissim Vaturi, deputy speaker of the Israeli Parliament, who said on X that Israel's task must be "erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of the earth." Bartov concluded back in May 2024 that Israel was committing genocide, and he cites a number of other genocide scholars who have since come to that conclusion. I believe his article and interview constitute as good a starting point as any for a needed discussion in the psychohistory community of this urgent and painful topic.

Author's Bio:

Brian D'Agostino, PhD, is an interdisciplinary social scientist and educator. He is the author of peer-reviewed research in political psychology, numerous other publications in popular and academic venues, and of The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements can Restore Democracy in America (Praeger, 2012). Dr. D'Agostino was a past president of the International Psychohistorical Association and is currently editor of Disarmament Times. Visit his website at: bdagostino.com.

How to Cite It?

D'Agostino, B. (2025). Israel and genocide. *Psychohistory News*, *44*(3/4), 15.

Israel in Gaza: Genocide or Not Genocide?
A Report on Both Sides of the Controversy

By Ken Fuchsman

Abstract

This article examines the charge that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza by situating the claim within the historical, legal, and scholarly definitions of genocide. Drawing on the United Nations Genocide Convention and major typologies developed by genocide scholars, the author outlines the criteria required to establish genocidal intent and action. The article then presents a range of contemporary perspectives, including statements by United Nations officials, human rights organizations, legal scholars, public intellectuals, Israeli critics, and defenders of Israel. Rather than advocating a single conclusion, the article offers a structured comparison of competing interpretations, with the aim of clarifying the conceptual boundaries of genocide and encouraging informed evaluation of a highly contested moral and political claim.

***Keywords**: Gaza, genocide typologies, Genocide, Holocaust, international law, Israel, moral injury, political violence, psychohistory, United Nations Genocide Convention*

The word genocide has been back in the news again recently. This time in relation to what is happening in Gaza. Before taking up recent considerations, some historical and scholarly background is advisable.

In the middle of the twentieth century, as we all know, an advanced industrial nation sought to eliminate a targeted religious group. The Nazi Holocaust exterminated between five and six million Jews. Yet the horror of this campaign did not curtail the frequency of genocides. Between the 1960s and early 2000s, 19 additional of these eliminative enterprises took place. British philosopher P.M.S. Hacker characterized genocide as a twentieth century specialty. Diplomat Samantha Power labeled this as the age of genocides.

The word was first applied in World War II by researcher Raphael Lemkin. In 1948, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defined the term. It declared that genocide is “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” by killing group members, causing serious bodily or mental harm to group members, inflicting condition to bring about the group’s physical destruction, in whole or in part, seeking to prevent births in the group, and forcibly transferring the group’s children to another group (United Nations, 1948). Genocide became a crime in 1951. Then, in 2002, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court found that persecution or extermination of a group is legally considered as a crime against humanity (Rome Statute of International Criminal Court, 2002). By 2022, 153 nations had ratified or acceded to the 1948 Convention (UN, 2022, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml).

Historian Ben Kiernan in 2023 observed three components within the UN 1948 Convention: intent to destroy, the acts of genocide themselves, and that genocide was aimed at national, ethnical, racial and religious groups (Kiernan, 2023, p. 6). These three elements then can be seen as guides as to what should and should not be considered genocide and gives direction as to how to prove that the activities were genocidal or not.

In the 1948 UN Convention, the intent to destroy applies only to national, ethnical, racial, or religious groups. Therefore, an attempt to kill all poker players, individuals in specific occupations such as agriculture, members of a particular political party, or a specific social class would not qualify as being genocidal. Political killing was actually included in the first draft of the Convention, but Soviet, British, and Latin American objections led to its being deleted.

Several scholars have described what they have found to be the various categories of genocide. These evaluations can help ascertain what qualifies as genocide and what does not. In South African sociologist Leo Kuper's assessment of genocidal types that first there "may be religious authority for genocide" (Kuper, 1981, p. 12). Second, he also maintains that the "relationship between colonizer and colonized … may be conducive to genocidal massacre" (Kuper, 1981, p. 16, Yale University Press). Third, he mentions the "genocidal potentialities … of ideologies." Here, he includes the Germans under Hitler, Stalin in the U.S.S.R, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (Kuper, 1981, p. 17).

A few years later, sociologist Helen Fein, in 1984, listed four ways to categorize genocide. *Developmental* is the first. It is developmental in the sense that it occurs when a colonizing force encounters the natives of a region. Next for Fein is *despotic*. These are related to the authority of the leader, and in the 20th century, these often occur in new states. Third is *retributive* genocide. This transpires when two peoples whether nations, ethnic groups, tribes. races or religious collectives "are locked into an ethnically stratified order where a dominant group is the governing class." The fourth type of genocide for Fein is *ideological* genocide. Here, the "victims" are "outside the sanctioned universe of obligation." This form can be characteristic of "totalitarian ideologies" where peoples or classes are elevated or denigrated (Fein, 1984, pp. 8-18, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Toward_The_Understanding_And_Prevention/0Z7BDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=toward+the+understanding+and+prevention+of+genocide&printsec=frontcover).

Government Professor Roger W. Smith in 1987 listed *five types of genocide*: **(1)** Retributive Genocide. To him it derives "from the dehumanization that has been fastened to the victims before they are attacked." **(2)** Institutional Genocide. In ancient and medieval life, instead of ruling a conquered territory, the alternative was just to devastate it. Genocide here was not an end but an outgrowth of other practices. **(3)** Utilitarian Genocide, here the goal was to gain the land of the opponent, and genocide resulted. Smith says this occurred in the conquest of Native Americans. **(4)** Monopolistic Genocide. This is part of the aim of the monopolization of power. Genocide is a move to consolidate more than share or compete for control. **(5)** Ideological Genocide. This aims for a kind of salvation by eliminating what is impure. Smith asserts, "ideology under modern conditions tends towards holocaust" (Smith, 1987, pp. 24- 27).

The last typology of genocides to be considered has been jointly developed by historian Frank Chalk and sociologist Kurt Jonassohn. Their *four typologies*: **(1)** Eliminate a threat that is real or imagined **(2)** spread terror among enemies **(3)** accumulate wealth **(4)** implementing an ideology, theory, or belief (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990, p. 29).

Summarizing through these sixteen genocidal types, I came up with the following types.

Religious, as in the Crusades or in the Old Testament directive from the Lord to wipe out certain enemies of the Jews.

Political domination, which can include utilitarian and institutional genocide, and also destruction of an opponent as with Rome in Carthage and Ginnghis Khan's murderous campaigns. It can also encompass an aspect of the colonizer and colonist.

Wealth accumulation – this includes another aspect of colonizer over colonists, as well as other methods of political domination for economic benefits.

Ideology – to fulfill a transformative goal by eliminating enemies of the state, as in the Holocaust, Mao's cultural revolution, and the Cambodian genocide.

Ethnic/tribal rivalries – this would include Bosnia, Rwanda, and others.

This analysis can help clarify if something qualifies or does not quality as genocide. Now we can move in this supposed age of genocides to the allegations that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, and then various responses to these assessments. These accusations have come from a variety of quarters. They have resulted in much controversy and disagreement.

The United Nations Human Rights Council in the person of Special Reporter, Francesca Albanese, on March 26,2024 found that "following nearly six months of unrelenting Israeli assault on occupied Gaza, it is my solemn duty to report on the worst of what humanity is capable of, and to present my findings," she said. "There are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide … has been met." Albanese continued: "Specifically, Israel has committed three acts of genocide with the requisite intent: causing seriously serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent birth within the group." She added, "the genocide in Gaza is the most extreme stage of a long-standing settler colonial process of erasure of the native Palestinians" (United Nations, 3/26/2024, https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147976).

A few months later the University Network for Human Rights, a consortium of human rights centers at colleges across the planet, reported (in May, 2024), that "Israel has committed genocidal acts, namely killing, seriously harming, and inflicting conditions of life calculated, and intended to, bring about the physical destruction of Palestinians in Gaza" (Boston University, 6/5/2024, https://www.bu.edu/articles/2024/is-israel-committing-genocide-in-gaza/).

On December 5, 2024, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Agnes Callamard, said, "Amnesty International's report demonstrates that Israel has carried out acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention, with the specific intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza. These acts include killings, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction. Month after month, Israel has treated Palestinians in Gaza as a subhuman group unworthy of human rights and dignity, demonstrating its intent to physically destroy them" (https://amnesty.ca/gazagenocide).

These reports and others did not receive universal agreement. Harvard University psychologist and public intellectual Steven Pinker, on July 31, 2024 said that "there's a huge difference between people getting killed in the course of a war designed to achieve other objectives and people being targeted for murder in order to murder those people as a group or as a lot of individuals... The application of the word genocide to refer to tens of thousands of war deaths is, I mean, I think it is a kind of blood libel. It's trying to import the moral approbation that we associate with genocide to the designated enemy, in this case, Israel … it is a blood libel in the sense that as an accusation of deliberate murder, it is ill-founded … it's still

different from deliberately murdering as many people as possible. And we know there have been genocides. No, I think it really is a terrible blood libel and a sign of how people's moralizing in the service of demonizing and dichotomizing, dividing the world into good and evil, can flatten their ability to analyze and think clearly" (David Warde, 7/31/2024, https://www.humanisticallyspeaking.org/post/humanist-philosopher-steven-pinker-describes-gaza-genocide-accusation-as-ill-founded).

Another Harvard University public intellectual, attorney Alan Dershowitz, on July 15, 2025, said that the determinations that Israel is committing genocide is an "accusation" that "is false as a matter of fact, morality, logic and law — and a dangerous distortion of history that amounts to Holocaust denial. It trivializes the powerful term 'genocide' and applies it to nearly every war fought by democracies during the last century, especially those directed against terrorism and other forms of modern asymmetrical warfare. By doing so, it encourages terrorism and emboldens terrorists who use civilian human shields to force their enemies into making tragic and deadly choices. Most distressingly, it makes genocide a meaningless epithet to be invoked promiscuously by those opposed to particular wars or nations (Dershowitz, 7/15/2025, New York Post, https://nypost.com/2025/07/15/opinion/why-gaza-genocide-claims-equal-holocaust-denial/).

A week later, on July 22, 2025, the American Jewish Committee gave five specific reasons why what was transpiring in Gaza was not genocide. The are: "**1.** 'Genocide' refers to the physical destruction of an entire group in whole or in part that has been targeted on the basis of its identity. This is not Israel's objective in Gaza. **2.** Is Genocide Happening in Gaza? No. Israel is responding to a genocidal attack by Hamas. **3.** Israel's actions reflect its desire to spare Palestinian civilians from harm, not to deliberately harm them. **4.** Hamas' actions are designed to cause harm to Palestinian civilians and blame Israel. **5.** The "facts" of the genocide charge don't add up" (American Jewish Congress, 7/22/2025, https://www.ajc.org/news/5-reasons-why-the-events-in-gaza-are-not-genocide).

Earlier, on February 13, 2025, The Anti-Defamation League responded to the accusations against Israel. They wrote, "in the aftermath of Israel's war against Hamas following the October 7, 2023, attack, Israel is often accused of committing 'genocide,' 'acts of genocide' or of having 'genocidal intent' against the Palestinians. Genocide is a very specific crime with legal elements requiring *intent and action* that are difficult to meet, and in no way do Israeli policies and actions reach this legal threshold. Rather, the sensationalist use of the term genocide in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not only inaccurate and misleading, but it unfairly serves to demonize the State of Israel and to diminish recognized acts of genocide… While one may condemn particular Israeli policies or actions with regard to Palestinians, the fact remains that in no way has Israel engaged in any action with the intent to exterminate, in whole or in part, the Palestinian people" (Anti-Defamation League, 2/13/2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/allegation-israel-commits-genocide).

Beginning in mid-July 2025, others with Israeli roots became more prone to affirm that Israel was committing genocide. One of these was Omer Bartov, a professor of Holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University. He wrote, "My inescapable conclusion has become that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people. Having grown up in a Zionist home, lived the first half of my life in Israel, served in the I.D.F. as a soldier and officer and spent most of my career researching and writing on war crimes and the Holocaust, this was a painful conclusion to reach, and one that I resisted as long as I could. But I have been teaching classes on genocide for a quarter of a century. I can recognize one when I see one. This is not just my conclusion. A growing number of experts in genocide studies and

international law have concluded that Israel's actions in Gaza can only be defined as genocide." Dr. Bartov then refers to the United Nations determination and Francesca Albanese which has been cited above. He goes on, "The crime of genocide was defined in 1948 by the United Nations as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." In determining what constitutes genocide, therefore, we must both establish intent and show that it is being carried out. In Israel's case, that intent has been publicly expressed by numerous officials and leaders. But intent can also be derived from a pattern of operations on the ground, and this pattern became clear by May 2024 — and has since become ever clearer — as the I.D.F. has systematically destroyed the Gaza Strip" (Bartov, 7/15/2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/15/opinion/israel-gaza-holocaust-genocide-palestinians.html).

In late July, two Israeli rights groups each released reports on whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. B'Tselem's account takes up 88 pages, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel report is 65 pages. To B'Tselem, "An examination of Israel's policy in the Gaza Strip and its horrific outcomes, together with statements by senior Israeli politicians and military commanders about the goals of the attack, leads us to the unequivocal conclusion that Israel is taking coordinated action to intentionally destroy Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip." The Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHRI) said that "The evidence shows a deliberate and systematic dismantling of Gaza's health and life-sustaining systems – through targeted attacks on hospitals, obstruction of medical aid and evacuations, and the killing and detention of healthcare personnel" Dr Guy Shalev, executive director of PHRI, said: "Silence in the face of genocide is not an option. We want to stress: confronting genocide is not only the responsibility of legal and political institutions. Confronting it demands urgent action from the global health community" (Emir Nader, 7/28/2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c776xkvz6vno).

David Grossman is often considered Israel's leading living novelist. In 2018, he was given the Israel Prize for Literature, the country's top prize in this category. He also lost a son in an earlier Israeli conflict. In an August 1, 2025, interview Grossman said, "For many years, I refused to use that term: 'genocide' … but now, after the images I have seen and after talking to people who were there, I can't help using it." He uses the word "with immense pain and with a broken heart. But now, after the images I have seen and after talking to people who were there, I can't help using it." Grossman says, "This word is an avalanche: Once you say it, it just gets bigger, like an avalanche. And it adds even more destruction and suffering" (The Times of Israel, 8/1/2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israeli-literary-giant-david-grossman-labels-gaza-war-a-genocide-with-a-broken-heart/).

The purpose of my article is to present what genocide may and may not be, then to report on various perspectives on what Israel is doing in Gaza, and then both sides on whether or not it counts as genocide. I initially give examples of organizations that consider what happens in Gaza as an Israeli genocide. Then I present four accounts that dismiss the allegation against Israel, followed by four examples of those who do think genocide is being practiced. As this is a highly controversial subject. My intent is to present a factual account of various sides of the issue. My hope is that this will lead some readers to look further into what facts and perspective are entailed in this important subject.

How to Cite This?

Fuchsman, K. (2025). Israel in Gaza: Genocide or not genocide? A report on both sides of the controversy. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 16.

Editorial Response: Psychohistorical Clarifications on Violence, Proportion, and Moral Injury after October 7

In Response to "Perspectives and Positions" on Israel, Gaza, and Genocide Claims

By Inna Rozentsvit

Abstract

This editorial response offers a psychohistorical analysis of recent articles addressing Israel, Gaza, and genocide claims following the October 7, 2023, attacks. It examines the psychological mechanisms of selective empathy, moral splitting, and ideological distortion that shape contemporary interpretations of violence and trauma. Grounded in historical proportion and psychohistorical theory, the article clarifies distinctions between genocide, war, and moral injury, and addresses the misuse of symbolic narratives such as the Nakba. The response argues for a disciplined psychohistorical approach that resists moral absolutism while remaining anchored in documented reality and ethical responsibility.

Keywords

antisemitism; genocide narratives; moral injury; Nakba; October 7; psychohistory; selective empathy; trauma; violence

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The articles presented in this issue under *Perspectives and Positions* reflect sincere, divergent attempts to grapple with one of the most emotionally charged and morally destabilizing conflicts of our time. The International Psychohistorical Association has long upheld the value of open inquiry, pluralism, and the examination of contested narratives. At the same time, psychohistory carries a responsibility not only to host perspectives, but to examine how historical facts, psychological processes, and moral reasoning become distorted under conditions of collective trauma.

This editorial response is offered in that spirit.

October 7, 2023, marked the largest mass killing of Jewish civilians since the Holocaust. Over 1,200 Israelis — primarily civilians — were murdered in a single day through coordinated attacks involving torture, rape, mutilation, burning, and kidnapping. These acts were not incidental to military engagement; they were the explicit objective. Documented footage — much of it recorded by the perpetrators themselves — confirms the intentional targeting of civilians, including women, children, and the elderly.

The attacks themselves were marked by sexualized violence, mutilation, and ritualized cruelty, accompanied by public celebration and extensive documentation by perpetrators and civilian participants alike. The filming and dissemination of these acts transformed violence into performance, signaling not only an intent to kill but to humiliate, terrorize, and symbolically dominate. Such practices reflect a regression to pre-modern modes of violence in which cruelty becomes communicative, identity-affirming, and morally inverted.

A defining feature of the October 7 attacks was the mass abduction of civilians. Hostage-taking extended the violence beyond the initial assault, transforming it into a prolonged psychological weapon. Many captives were held for weeks or months under conditions of deprivation, without access to medical care or international humanitarian oversight. This sustained captivity compounded the original trauma and produced an enduring moral injury for families, communities, and the wider public.

From a psychohistorical perspective, the combination of mass murder, prolonged captivity, and ritualized cruelty constitutes a **collective trauma of existential magnitude**, not only for Israelis, but for Jews globally. When measured proportionally to population size, Israel's civilian losses on October 7 exceed by more than tenfold the per-capita civilian loss experienced by the United States on September 11, 2001. This proportional reality matters, not as a competition of suffering, but as a grounding point for moral reasoning.

Violence, Proportion, and the Misuse of the Genocide Frame

The term *genocide* carries a precise legal and historical meaning. It refers to the intentional destruction of a people *as such*. In psychohistorical discourse, however, the term is often stripped of its specificity and repurposed as a symbolic weapon—used to express outrage, moral disgust, or political identification rather than historical accuracy.

Israel's military response to October 7 must be evaluated within the framework of **asymmetric warfare**, in which a state actor confronts a non-state organization that embeds military infrastructure within civilian populations, including schools, hospitals, and religious institutions. Civilian casualties in such contexts are tragic and morally consequential, but they are not, by definition, evidence of genocidal intent.

The distinction between **war crimes**, **moral injury**, and **genocide** is not semantic hair-splitting. Collapsing these categories undermines the capacity for ethical judgment and fuels moral absolutism — an all-or-nothing stance that forecloses reflection, nuance, and historical responsibility.

Selective Empathy and Moral Splitting

One of the most striking psychohistorical phenomena following October 7 has been the emergence of **selective empathy** — the capacity to mourn one population while erasing or minimizing the suffering of another. In many public and academic spaces, outrage over Palestinian civilian deaths was immediate and absolute, while acknowledgment of Israeli trauma was delayed, conditional, or absent altogether.

This pattern reflects a classic mechanism of **moral splitting**, in which one group is assigned the role of absolute victim and another the role of absolute perpetrator. Such splitting is not

evidence of moral clarity, but of psychological defense under conditions of overwhelming affect.

From a psychohistorical standpoint, selective empathy often signals the intrusion of **ideological identification** over attachment-based ethics. When political identity supersedes relational reality, compassion becomes conditional, and moral reasoning collapses into slogan and symbol.

Historical Amnesia and the Nakba Narrative

Several contributions in this section reference the *Nakba* as a foundational trauma comparable to genocide. This framing requires clarification. The events surrounding the 1948 Arab–Israeli war involved displacement and suffering, but they occurred within the context of a regional war initiated by neighboring Arab states following the United Nations partition plan—one accepted by Jewish leadership and rejected by Arab leadership.

The Nakba narrative has since evolved into a **mythic structure of eternal victimhood**, often detached from historical causality, internal political decisions, and parallel population displacements throughout the Middle East during the same period. To equate Nakba with genocide is not only historically inaccurate; it constitutes a psychohistorical distortion that transforms political defeat into sacred trauma and assigns inherited guilt across generations.

Such narratives function psychologically to externalize responsibility and to sanctify grievance, foreclosing paths toward reconciliation.

Moral Injury and the Aftermath of October 7

Moral injury arises when individuals or groups experience a rupture between their ethical expectations and lived reality. For Israelis and Jews worldwide, October 7 shattered the assumption that historical memory of Jewish vulnerability would protect against its repetition—or at minimum, against its denial.

The rapid inversion of victim and perpetrator narratives following the attacks has compounded this injury. Accusations of genocide levied within days—before Israel had launched a full military response — suggest that moral conclusions were pre-formed, awaiting only a triggering event.

From a psychohistorical perspective, such reactions reflect **preexisting fantasy structures** rather than evidence-based analysis. They reveal how deeply entrenched symbolic frameworks can override empirical reality when ideological commitments are threatened.

Toward Psychohistorical Responsibility

Psychohistory does not ask for unanimity. It asks for honesty, proportion, and psychological insight. It asks that we distinguish between grief and accusation, between outrage and analysis, between solidarity and moral erasure.

The articles in this section contribute to an important conversation. This editorial response seeks not to silence them, but to situate them within a psychohistorical framework that resists simplification, honors historical specificity, and recognizes the psychological costs of moral collapse.

In moments of collective trauma, the task of psychohistory is not to choose sides—but to illuminate how sides are chosen, why empathy narrows, and how moral reasoning becomes distorted under the pressure of fear, loss, and inherited narratives.

Only through such inquiry can psychohistory remain faithful to its foundational aim: understanding the emotional forces that shape history, rather than reenacting them.

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How to Cite This?

Rozentsvit, I. (2025). Editorial response: Psychohistorical clarifications on violence, proportion, and moral injury after October 7. *Psychohistory News, 44*(3/4), 17.