

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a Jewish man in my 60s who has regular contact with a broad slice of Australians through my work as an academic at a tertiary institution. I migrated to Sydney over 30 years ago from South Africa, a country where antisemitism was rife. In my many years here, both working and parenting two daughters, and now as grandparent to a handful of boys, I have been impressed by the relative lack of blatant antisemitism in the country.

A critical thinker, I have never been particularly religious or observant, though i was barmitzvahed and attended synagogue regularly until i was about 18 years old. As a young man I spent four months working on a kibbutz and traveling around Israel, and was shocked at the harsh treatment I saw meted out to non-Jews, especially those of Arabic ethnicity. The blatant discrimination reminded me of Apartheid, the discriminatory political system under which i grew up and which I subsequently rejected. Consequently I have never been a Zionist as such.

I have found Israel's conduct in the last few years both saddening and appalling. The violence they have inflicted on the Palestinians is in my view unforgivable, reminiscent in fact of the treatment meted out to Jews by the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s. The fact that this has provoked outrage and some ignorant antisemitism in Australia is, in my view, sad but understandable.

Judaism and Zionism are not the same thing at all. I am a Jew by birth, by upbringing and by cultural self-identification. I believe core Jewish values include healthy critical thinking, rigorous self-reflection, and a strong moral code that favours kindness and mercy to all. So equating criticism of Zionism and criticism of Israel with anti-semitism strikes me as false. Indeed I believe that every true Jew should criticise any form of nationalism that leads to such bloody and violent actions as those perpetrated by the IOF against the civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. Squashing such rational critical thinking and expression or legislating against it would, in my view, be unjust and repressive.