

## Talking Freely About The Real Israel

By New Matilda on February 19, 2013

International Affairs

The "Prisoner X" episode brings to the fore some of the classic dilemmas of Jewish existence in the modern world: universalist versus particularistic values; their status as insiders or outsiders; and cross-border loyalties as opposed to particular citizenship.

The great German sociologist George Simmel wrote an essay in 1908 called "The Stranger" about classes of people such as traders (often Jews) in Europe, who were simultaneously insiders and outsiders in the societies in which they lived. I think that this observation is perhaps an apt one to describe the life of the Jewish community in Australia today. Loyal to a religiously and politically redemptive version of Zionism, the land of Israel is somewhere where they assume they will never be treated as strangers. Israel is seen as an insider insurance policy for a perceived outsider status.

On the Israel question the insider/outsider issue becomes problematic. There is a widespread view of being under siege. The media, and the Fairfax press in particular, is called "anti-Semitic". The Israel lobby and its parliamentary supporters such as Michael Danby do not hold back in their [condemnation](#) of those who they consider to be hostile.

World Vision and Ausaid are accused of being supporters of terrorism, along with the Zionist New Israel Fund, a [more moderate organisation](#), by right-wing rabble-rousers. The SBS broadcast of the series [The Promise](#) was the subject of a furious complaint campaign by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry who saw it as anti-Israel propaganda. Then there is endemic controversy over Boycott Sanctions and Divestment strategies.

At an internal community level, not covered in the mainstream press, police were most recently called to prevent the most minor of protests in Melbourne against the Jewish National Fund, the icon of fundraising for Israel. The Jewish National Fund discriminates against non-Jews in Israel, and also supports the forced relocation of Bedouin in the Beersheba area for Jews-only housing.

A tiny, entirely lawful and peaceful leafleting protest outside the headquarters of the Jewish community in Melbourne was organised for 3 February to draw attention to fundraising by the Jewish National Fund. We made it clear that we thought there were alternate charities that supported human rights in Israel. That tiny Sunday morning protest brought out the mysterious Community Security Group and three police vehicles. Fortunately, the police had no issue at all with our protest, though people were forbidden from

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taking the contaminating leaflets inside the building. Outsider views may cause problems for insiders.

Onto the current Prisoner X scandal. Details are still coming thick and fast.

Eighteen months ago I [wrote this response](#) to the postings of a young Australian who had joined the Israeli army on Galusaustralis, an online Jewish magazine:

”When we have young people in Australia being indoctrinated about a ‘greater Israel’ in which Palestinians have no place or are a nuisance, and such people join the Israeli military they are in grave danger of becoming ethical and moral abusers or worse. The excuse cannot be made that we do not know about such matters or they are irrelevant for young people who make aliyah [migrate to Israel].

[...]

”The fact is that the Occupation has been with us for over 40 years now and I find it hard to believe that any young Jewish person is unaware that the Occupation is not benign. Choices can be made. Many Israelis choose not to serve in the Occupied Territories by either refusing service there, or undertaking alternate forms of conscription. The same choices are available to Australians who commit themselves to a life in Israel.”

I was pilloried for suggesting this problem, and now, another local who served in the Australian army has opened up [another discussion](#) with reference to Ben Zygier.

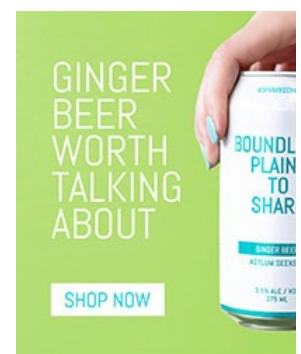
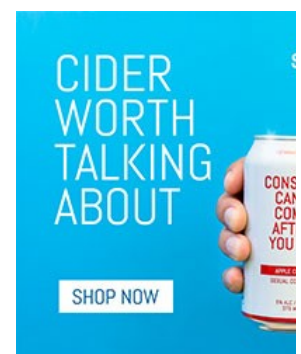
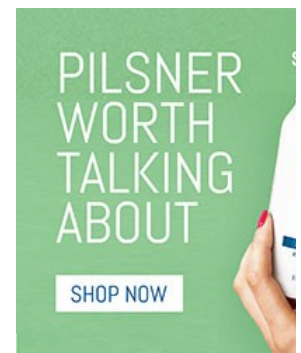
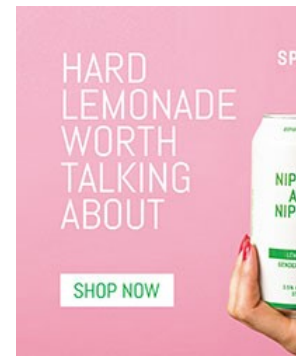
The Prisoner X scandal has shocked many Jews almost certainly because it flies in the face of their status as “insiders” to Israel. Of the few establishment figures who have said anything about the scandal so far, one has accused a number of us at playing at spies and cops and robbers, and being amateur mavens. Should we stay quiet and let the “community leadership” handle the situation? Can truth be so damaging?

No. If it was not for the free press in Australia, and the press in Israel, trying to escape the muzzle of the constant claim of security, this death in custody would have gone unnoticed.

I hope that increasing numbers of Australian Jews realize that there are alternate forms of connection to their brethren which do not require such an insider/outsider status or attachment to the dangerous ethnocentric nationalism played out by the Israeli state.

If they care about Jewish life in Israel, they can stand tall and support human rights activists in Israel. They should listen to people like Melbourne-born Rabbi Yehiel Grenimann, a Zionist, but active in the Occupied Territories for [Rabbis for Human Rights](#) about the abuse conducted by Israel against Palestinians in the name of “security” as it goes down the road to an apartheid state. They can also support full and equal citizenship so that Israel becomes a state of all its peoples, recognises Palestinian rights and not just a state of the Jews which privileges one group of people over another.

They can say that the “Right of Return” for Jews, but not Palestinians is an affront to human rights



principles and that Palestinians have been wronged. We should be able to talk about all these things freely, as do progressives in Israel itself. The Israeli colonialist fantasy is over. Prisoner X is only the tip of a much bigger iceberg that can't be ignored.

*This article is the author's own view and does not necessarily represent the position of the AJDS.*

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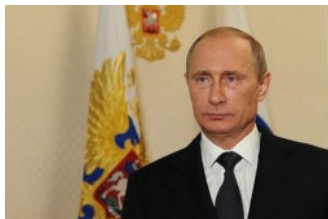
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