

“Be kind to the stranger among you, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt.”

This Pesach add a little bit extra to your reading of the Haggadah by including some discussion about the people left behind in society, those who are marginalised and whose voice is often unheard. The notion of ‘the other’ – based on our own experience in Egypt – is crucial to the Pesach story, and why we’ve called this supplement, The Other Haggadah.

About This Haggadah Supplement

Each Pesach, we sit and read the Exodus story. “With an outstretched arm, God took you out of Egypt.” We discuss freedom, equality, oppression, and how these ancient themes reverberate through Jewish history in every generation. As the Haggadah says, “In each and every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as though he actually left Egypt.”

The Haggadah reminds us that we were strangers in the Land of Egypt. Its authors understood how easy it would be for us to forget that we had also been “the other”, the stranger.

Today, we see these same things affecting society’s most vulnerable. In response, we’ve put together a range of stories from modern day Israel, relating to women, poverty, Palestinians, and people seeking asylum.

In the name of freedom we struggle against women’s exclusion, with the aim that every woman has the freedom to appear and to express herself in any arena that she chooses. In the name of freedom, we struggle for the rights of minorities, against discrimination and racism, against coercion and against religious intolerance.

All of these stories share something in common: they relate to how we perceive and treat “the other”. Read these stories, share them with your friends and family, bring them to your Seder table.

P.S. If you’re looking for a good haggadah to add this supplement to, here are two we recommend:

- **Stand Up’s New Australian Haggadah**, available at <http://www.haggadah.com.au/>
- **The New American Haggadah**, by Jonathan Safran Foer and Nathan Englander, available at <http://nif.li/newamericanhaggadah>

Refugees and People Seeking Asylum

With war endemic in so many parts of our world, millions of people are fleeing persecution and violence in the hope of establishing new lives for their families in safer countries. It is true in Australia, as well as in Europe, and Israel is no exception.

In recent years many have made the arduous journey from Africa, across the Sinai desert, seeking a safe-haven in Israel. Despite all of Israel's security difficulties, the situation there is far preferable compared to the asylum seekers' home countries such as Sudan or Eritrea.

Their journey is all too familiar to the story of the Jewish people who left Africa and crossed Sinai in search of a better future.

Like all countries grappling with the challenge of handling large waves of people seeking refuge, there are myriad problems associated with this crisis. Israeli authorities need to verify the backgrounds of those arriving to ensure they do not pose a security risk. There are health checks that need to be performed. And of course there is the enormous challenge of providing for the material needs of asylum seekers.

Since 2005 approximately 60,000 asylum seekers have entered Israel. A number of these asylum seekers have since returned home, or settled elsewhere, and approximately 45,000 still remain in the country. Israel has determined that it cannot repatriate a number of these, due to the very real threat that they would face persecution if returned, and has afforded them [group protection](#).

Asylum seekers in Israel are governed by the "[Anti-Infiltration Law](#)", legislation from the 1950s that was originally created to keep Palestinian refugees from trying to return to Israel after the War of Independence. Today, because of this law, they are known as 'infiltrators', which has largely informed the public discourse.

In the past, Prime Minister Netanyahu has [said his government](#) is "dealing with the problem of infiltrators by blocking their entry", while [Miri Regev](#), now a cabinet minister, called them "a cancer in our body."

For years, upon their arrival in Israel, they were picked up in the Negev desert by army patrols and put on buses to South Tel Aviv. This caused enormous anxiety among the local working-class Israeli population, who felt under threat from so many single young African men. Examples of theft and other crimes only served to heighten the fears.



Israel's i24 News interview with Mutasim Ali, director of NIF grantee the African Refugee Development Centre (ARDC) and a leader of his community

Watch this video at
www.theotherhaggadah.org/refugees

To address the problem, Israeli politicians adopted strategies similar to those used in Australia. From 2012, the government passed a law which allowed it to imprison refugees for up to three years in the [Holot detention centre](#). Since that time, different iterations of the [Anti-Infiltration Law](#) have been struck down by the High Court of Justice for contravening Israel's basic laws that protect human dignity and liberty.

Although most other countries work to process the refugee claims of people seeking asylum, Israel has continually refused to do so. This [has resulted](#) in Israel recognising fewer asylum seekers as refugees than any other Western country.

The New Israel Fund, along with some of its grantees, including the [Association for Civil Rights in Israel \(ACRI\)](#) and the [Hotline for Refugees and Migrants](#), have been leading the campaign through the courts to improve the circumstances in which the asylum seekers find themselves. The courts have made numerous decisions which help the asylum seekers, including limiting the time they can be forcibly detained. Meanwhile temporary protection visas have been granted to the Sudanese and Eritreans which give them some ability to work.

The Israeli residents of South Tel Aviv remain concerned about the potential rise of crime among the asylum seekers. Whilst there have been instances of criminal activity, [Israel Police data](#) show that crime levels among the asylum seekers are lower than among the general Israeli population. Despite this, tempers flared in 2012 when a demonstration against asylum seekers turned violent, with African shop windows smashed and passers-by attacked.

Numerous right-wing politicians [have sought](#) to inflame the fears and gain support from the concerned residents. Then-President Shimon Peres [implored people](#) to remain calm stating: "Hatred of foreigners contradicts the fundamental principles of Judaism. I am well aware of the difficulties faced by the residents of South Tel Aviv [and other similar areas], but violence is not the solution."

Discussion Questions:

1. What moral responsibility does Israel have, as a nation established in the aftermath of Holocaust, in providing assistance to non-Jewish people in need?
2. How is it possible for Israel to balance the need to assist asylum seekers fleeing war in Africa, with the need to provide security for its own citizens in such a volatile and dangerous region?
3. Given the many economic challenges that Israel faces, is it reasonable to expect Israeli taxpayers to cover the financial burden of thousands of asylum seekers? How can this financial cost be managed in a way that helps both asylum seekers and broader Israeli society?

Agunot: Women Chained To Their Marriages

Central to the Pesach story is the enslavement of the Jewish people, as they were forced to remain in Egypt and work as slaves for the Pharaoh.

Although they are not chained to work as slaves, some Jewish women are bonded to their husbands, unable to get a divorce. These 'agunot' (chained women) are battling for freedom from their husbands in the rabbinical courts. Although the issue of agunot is one that is universal in Judaism, in Israel the problem is exacerbated because of the central control Ultra-Orthodox religious authorities have over personal status issues like marriage, divorce and burial.

While both the lack of [civil marriage](#) and divisions over [burial](#) remain, arguably neither have the devastating effect that the difficulties associating with getting a divorce – and the 'agunot' that sometimes result – has on Israeli society.

The Jewish divorce process can take years, depending on the behaviour of recalcitrant husbands and the rabbinical courts, which believe that the initiation of a divorce must come from the man. During this time the 'chained women' are left vulnerable to their husbands' terms.

In Israel, all cases of marriage and divorce are controlled by the Chief Rabbinate. The Rabbinate's hegemony in this sphere dates back to the earliest days of the state, when David Ben-Gurion negotiated what is known as the '[status quo](#)' with [Orthodox parties](#). Although there has been some [liberalisation](#) in recent years, often thanks to the intervention of the High Court of Justice, the Rabbinate is still an isolating figure to many Israelis, with non-Orthodox streams almost totally unable to receive recognition.



The film "Gett, the Trial of Vivian Amsalem" explores many of these issues. Watch the trailer, and you can also stream the film through the Jewish International Film Festival.

**Watch this trailer, and get a link to the full film, at
www.theotherhaggadah.org/agunot**

One way this is manifested is in the general absence of women in the Rabbinate's staff. In 2008 The Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) sued the rabbinical court administration for only allowing men to apply for the position of legal assistants in the rabbinical court. While the Labor Courts of Israel ruled in favour of CWJ's appeal to disqualify the job tender, the absence of women employees in the rabbinical court remains a major issue.

The near-total exclusion of women from the religious authority is particularly difficult for agunot as it leaves them at the mercy of a system that not only provides poor structures for their freedom but one which also discriminates against them. With civil divorce remaining impossible for the foreseeable future for Israelis, the agunot issue is compounded by the Rabbinate's homogeneous scheme and the lack of choice that all Israelis face.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did David Ben-Gurion negotiate what is known as the 'status quo' with Orthodox parties? How has this decision impacted on the trajectory of Israeli history?
2. When there is no separation between 'Church and State', as in Israel, what are some of the likely outcomes?
3. Do you know any Israeli couples who have left Israel to get married? What impact has it had on their identities as Jews?

Public Housing

As we read about the Exodus from Egypt, we learn that the Israelites slept in tents as they wandered through the desert. The tent, or the family home, was as crucial to their survival as was the manna provided by God.

Today, ensuring that every family can afford a roof over its head is just as crucial. Yet in Israel, 37% of families who rent are forced to pay over 40% of their income towards that rent – a figure eclipsed only by Greece and Spain among the world’s industrialised economies. This leads to significant financial stress with many other ramifications for families.

Meet Hagit

Hagit is a young Jewish mother of 5 from Be’er Sheva. Her monthly income of 3,500 shekels (A\$1,300) needs to support a family of seven, placing her within Israel’s lowest income band and under the official poverty line.

Making ends meet is a daily struggle for Hagit. During her pregnancies she had to forgo certain medical tests that were not covered by the public health service. All her children suffer from either slow development or anaemia.

Hagit and her family should qualify for public housing. Yet for years she has been stuck in limbo, forced to pay high private market rents.

Hagit is not alone. Due to chronic under-investment by successive Israeli governments since the 1970s, by 2014 there were approximately 2,500 families on the public housing waiting list, with a further 30,000 recent olim also meeting the eligibility criteria. People are forced to wait up to a decade to gain access to affordable public housing.

In this video, Shatil director Ronit Heyd discusses Shatil’s efforts to improve access to public housing in Israel.

The Forum for Public Housing

In attempt to address this chronic shortage, Shatil, the social action arm of the New Israel Fund, established the “Forum for Public Housing”. The Forum comprises 10 civil society organisations dedicated to social equality.

The first step was establishing cross-party links within the Knesset. By bringing together representatives of “Yisrael Beitienu”, representing Russian olim, together with “Shas” and “Kulanu”, representing Sephardi and Mizrachi Israelis, the Forum succeeded in preventing the government from repealing the 1998 Public Housing Law.



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Watch this video at
www.theotherhaggadah.org/housing

This law enabled long-term public housing residents to buy their homes at subsidized rates, and should have re-invested the proceeds into additional public housing stock. However, over the years some 2.7 billion shekels from these sales had gone into general government coffers and were not re-invested into building additional public housing. Hence the chronic shortages.

While some argue that there must be less investment in social services because of the relatively high amount the state spends on defence and security, this is untrue. Rather, the choice has been made between improving life for those living in West Bank settlements, and choosing to under-invest in the rest of Israel. Over the last few decades, much-needed investment in social services inside Israel has instead been diverted, not to protect Israelis, but to subsidise settlers in the West Bank. For example, while 3,700 shekels are spent each year to educate a child in Dimona, in the Negev, 24,500 shekels is spent on a child in the settlement in Har Hevron. On average, the state spends around 50% more on an individual living in a settlement than it does in a development town.

Thanks to pressure from the Forum and its Knesset allies, the government agreed to not repeal the law and to build an additional 700 public housing units.

Hagit has now moved into a public housing unit in Be'er Sheva and is much better placed to look after the health and nutritional needs of her family. Though this is undeniably a victory, there is still a long way to go to further reduce the backlog of Israelis waiting for access to public housing.

Discussion Questions:

1. When Israel was established, it provided a strong safety net for its poorer citizens. However, as in many Western countries, this has been eroded through economic reforms. What could Israel do to ensure that the disadvantaged have better access to state resources and support?
2. So much of Israeli politics – and conversations in Diaspora communities – revolves around the issues of peace and security. How can Israel re-focus on other important issues, such as public housing and health? Are there any issues that should be ‘off-limits’ to Jews in the Diaspora?
3. Over the last couple of decades, the Israeli government has prioritised investments in housing in West Bank settlements, rather than in peripheral communities in the Negev, or Galilee. Do you think settlements, some of which may be evacuated under an eventual agreement with the Palestinians, should receive priority government assistance, or this should only be reserved for communities inside the Green Line?

Israel's Bedouin Citizens

The Israelites' exodus from Egypt, and the forty years of wandering in the desert that followed, occupy a crucial place in the Jewish people's collective memory. There are parallels between our experience leaving Egypt – nomadic, wandering through the desert, but with a clear collective identity – and the lives of Israel's 230,000 Bedouin citizens. There are also similarities between the socio-economic and political status of the Bedouin in Israel and that of remote Indigenous communities in Australia.

The oldest Bedouin community in Israel can be traced to the 11th century, long before the arrival of the Ottomans. The government of Mandatory Palestine [set the population](#) of Negev Bedouin at 90,000. After the events of 1948, only around 11,000 remained. Today, most Bedouin identify as Palestinians; indeed, many of their family members who left during the War of Independence today live in Gaza, Egypt, the West Bank and Jordan as Palestinian refugees.

In this video, the director of Shatil's Be'er Sheva office, Sultan Abu Obaid, discusses the two main challenges facing Israel's Bedouin communities.

During that time, many Jewish settlements and townships took over the most fertile agricultural land previously used by Bedouin communities. The process of 'making the desert bloom', a policy inspired by David Ben-Gurion's wish to settle the Negev with Jews, continues to this day, with the Bedouin villages of [Umm al-Hiran](#) and Atir currently in the process of [being replaced](#) by the new Jewish town of Hiran.

Today, Bedouin communities are among Israel's most disadvantaged, with poor health and education outcomes, high unemployment and poverty. While there has been significant progress in recent years, only 1-in-5 Bedouin-Israelis [graduate](#) from high school, compared to 1-in-3 in the wider Arab community, and 1-in-2 Jewish-Israelis. More than 66% of Bedouin live in [poverty](#) – in unrecognised villages the number exceeds 80% – compared with around 25% in the general population. The [infant mortality rate](#) in the Bedouin community is as high as five times that of the general population.

These issues are similar, in many ways, to those that certain Australians face. Many of [the gaps](#) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – with regard to high school completion, [health outcomes](#), and life expectancy – are mirrored in Bedouin society.

The other major issue Bedouin face is with native title and land ownership, which remains largely unresolved, and is a constant cause of conflict with the Israeli government.



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www.theotherhaggadah.org/bedouin

For almost 60 years, successive Israeli governments have sought to unify Bedouin life into just a few towns and villages, which they claim will allow an easier provision of services to residents. Bedouin, however, claim that this is just a ploy to remove them from their traditional lands, and that the services provided in these large towns are substandard, especially when compared to Jewish towns in the area.

While some Bedouin towns and villages in the Negev operate like any other, many are not recognised by the Israeli government, and suffer deeply as a result. They are often not connected to the electricity grid or water mains, and they have no sewage or waste disposal services. Around a half of Bedouin live in these 'unrecognised villages'.

As the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." Bedouin residents, particularly those in unrecognised villages, face housing insecurity – with town planning mechanisms totally unable to cope with the number of residents, permits rarely issued, and [house demolitions](#) a near-constant threat.

Discussion Questions:

1. What responsibility does Israel have to improve the living standards for the Bedouin communities?
2. What similarities can you see between Israel's Bedouin citizens and Indigenous communities in Australia?
3. The Australian Jewish community has a long history of activism campaigning for the rights of Indigenous Australians. Given the similarities between the two communities, what can we do to raise the profile of the Bedouin issue in our community?

Freedom of Movement for Palestinians

Pesach is the Festival of Freedom, when we commemorate the Israelites achieving liberty following centuries of slavery. At the core of Pesach is the Exodus, the physical movement of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, through the parted waters of the Red Sea, into freedom.

Today, Israel restricts the [freedom of movement](#) of many Palestinians living under its control in the West Bank. While there are times that such restrictions on movement are necessary for security reasons, there are also clear cases where preventing the free movement of people harms Israel's security, and its moral standing.

Shuhada Street in Hebron is one such example.



In these videos from NIF grantee Breaking the Silence, IDF soldiers give testimonies of their experiences working at checkpoints in the West Bank.

Watch these videos at www.theotherhaggadah.org/movement

Hebron is unique among the cities and towns of the West Bank, as it is the only one with Israeli settlements located in the heart of the city, surrounded by a large Palestinian population. Jewish connections to Hebron are ancient, with the Ma'arat Hamachpela ("Cave of the Machpela") – the burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah – located there. There had always been a strong Jewish presence in the city, until Arab rioters in 1929 massacred 69 Jews and the rest of the community was evacuated for their own safety. Following the Six-Day War in 1967, Hebron was the first place Jews returned to in the West Bank.

Despite ancient Jewish ties to Hebron, the current settlers residing in the heart of the city represent some of the most extreme anti-Palestinian elements in Israel. In total, around [600 settlers](#) live in the middle of Hebron, surrounded by more than 160,000 Palestinians. People such as Baruch Marzel, a far-right activist who was a senior member of the banned political party Kach, resides in Hebron and is known to harass and provoke local Palestinian residents.

During the Second Intifada, violence erupted in Hebron between the small enclaves of Israeli settlers and the large Palestinian population surrounding them. In order to ensure the protection of the small and relatively isolated settlements, the Israeli government emptied approximately 20% of Hebron of its Palestinian residents. For over 10 years, this large section of Hebron remains a ghost town – disconnected from the rest of the thriving city by military checkpoints.

A major thoroughfare, which used to be bustling with shops, [Shuhada Street](#), is now devoid of all Palestinian life. Only a small handful of Israeli settlers can use the street in order to gain access to their homes. Shuhada Street has come to symbolise the restrictions on Palestinian movement, restrictions which in this case serve the interests of a tiny handful of the most extreme Israelis, without having any security benefits for the rest of Israel. It could be argued that the closure of Shuhada Street actually diminishes security in the rest of Israel, as it allows hard-core settlers like Baruch Marzel free access to continue his provocations, further inciting Palestinian hatred towards all Israelis irrespective of where they live.

When Israel restricts Palestinian freedom of movement into Israel's major population centres, there may be security reasons for such closures. However the restriction of movement in a place like Shuhada Street does nothing to boost security in places like Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, and only serves to exacerbate tensions between the two peoples.

Discussion Questions:

1. There are two sets of laws for residents in Hebron: one for Jews who live under Israeli law (where they are afforded the basic rights of Israel's democratic system) and one for non-Jews who live under military law (where many basic rights are not protected). What does this situation mean for the residents?
2. What responsibility do Israelis have towards the welfare and rights of Palestinians living under Israeli control in the West Bank?
3. Many of Israel's former senior security staff (as we saw in [The Gatekeepers](#), and in presentations in Australia by [Col. Shaul Arieli](#)) consider the status quo to be detrimental to Israel's security, and yet the political process has stagnated. What do you think it will take for Israelis and Palestinians to move forward towards a two-state reality?

www.TheOtherHaggadah.org

This project is brought to you by the New Israel Fund Australia. It was written by Eli Oshorov and Elysheva Elsass, with assistance from Liam Getreu, Ilona Lee, Dani Miller and Ilana Snyder. Thanks also to Joel Lazar for his assistance with translation.

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