Fractured Solidarity: Jewish Identity, Isolation, and Justice-Doing in Progressive Social Work

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Abstract

This reflective article explores the complexities of Jewish identity within progressive social work academia, particularly in the context of rising global anti-semitism and political fractures within justice-oriented movements. This reflection navigates tensions between my deep commitments to Jewish history, ethics, and collective responsibility and my dedication to anti-oppression and social justice. Jewish identity is often rendered invisible within progressive spaces, even as Jewish academics experience misrecognition, exclusion and epistemic erasure. At the same time, mainstream Jewish institutions often demand ideological conformity, leaving progressive Jews caught between two worlds. Using reflective praxis and justice-doing, I explore the emotional, political, and ethical complexities of navigating this liminal space. I engage with the concept of "double vision" (Hartsock, 2017) to articulate how marginalisation generates critical insight, offering an analysis of how progressive academia's commitment to anti-oppressive practice can, paradoxically, exclude certain lived experiences. Ultimately, I argue for a more expansive approach to justice that holds space for complexity, contradiction, and relational accountability, resisting the flattening of Jewish identity in progressive movements. This reflection contributes to a broader con-

versation on the limits of solidarity in social work and the possibilities of justice-doing as an ethical response to fractured belonging.

Key words:
Jewish identity, progressive social work, feminist standpoint theory, justice-doing, solidarity and exclusion

Navigating Spaces

I write this article as the sole Jewish academic in my social work department, all of whom are deeply committed to progressive values of justice, equity, and inclusion. Yet, as antisemitism rises globally and fractures deepen both within the left and among Jewish communities, I find myself increasingly positioned at the margins of spaces I once considered home. Within progressive social work, conversations on power, oppression, and marginalisation are foundational (Dalrymple, 2019; Walbam et al., 2021). However, Jewish identity is often unacknowledged, misunderstood, or misrepresented in these discussions, leading to moments of alienation and erasure. At the same time, in mainstream Jewish spaces, my progressive commitments – particularly in relation to Israel and Palestine – place me at odds with dominant communal narratives.

Magid's (2013) concept of post-Judaism helps explain why progressive Jews often struggle to find a place within institutional Jewish life. Magid argues that contemporary Jewish identity is increasingly fragmented, as many Jews, especially those who are secular, cultural, or politically critical of Israel, become estranged from mainstream Jewish institutions. These institutions continue to centre nationalism and religion as primary markers of belonging, making it difficult for those with fluid, critical, or nontraditional Jewish identities to feel fully included. As someone whose Jewish identity is deeply rooted in history, ethics, and a commitment to social justice rather than nationalism or religious observance, I find myself navigating a space between, never fully at home in progressive movements that overlook Jewish identity yet increasingly disconnected from Jewish spaces that promote ideological conformity.

I wonder if this tension leaves many progressive Jewish academics (not only me?) navigating a precarious position. Neither fully belonging in mainstream Jewish communities nor in broader social justice movements.

Working with Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory offers a valuable lens for understanding how lived experience shapes knowledge production and how marginalisation creates critical insight (Collins, 2022; Harding, 1991). Harding (1991) argues that knowledge is always socially situated and that those on the margins of dominant structures often develop epistemic advantages, seeing both the dominant worldview and its exclusions more clearly than those within it. Similarly, Hill Collins (2022) conceptualises the "outsider within" as a standpoint occupied by those who, while embedded in institutions of power, remain marginal within them. As a Jewish academic in progressive social work, I think I am experiencing my own version of this dual positioning. I am deeply engaged in my discipline's ethics of anti-oppression and social justice, yet I also bear witness to the ways these frameworks fail to fully account for the complexities of Jewish identity. This position enables a form of critical consciousness, one that recognises not only the presence of exclusion but also its mechanisms, silences, and contradictions.

Hartsock's (2017) work on standpoint epistemology further identifies that those experiencing marginalisation develop a "double vision", the ability to see both dominant ideologies and the ways they fail certain communities. This resonates with my experience in progressive academia, where it can feel like real-world antisemitism in Australia is at risk of being dismissed as a secondary or even dubious concern. Where it gets really complex is when there are critiques of Zionism or Israelis, and this can feel like it blurs into forms of exclusion because I don't know how to enter the conversation and worry my silence incriminates me. I feel like this is one of those moments where solidarity often fractures along lines that leave Jewish voices in a precarious space. The concept of double vision helps articulate why Jewish academics like me might perceive and feel these tensions even when they remain invisible to others.

This is precisely where standpoint epistemology becomes so valuable: it allows us to name what is unseen or unacknowledged within dominant justice frameworks, even those explicitly committed to inclusion. From my position, I can see how social work's commitment to anti-oppressive practice can, paradoxically, exclude certain experiences by failing to recognise the specific ways in which Jewish identity is racialised, politicised, and often flattened into a singular narrative. It is not just about identifying exclusion; it is about recognising the conditions that render some exclusions illegible. This, I believe, is one of the most

critical contributions of standpoint theory, it offers a way to see and name these gaps, to make the implicit explicit, and to challenge the limits of dominant discourses that may otherwise present themselves as complete.

Feminist standpoint theory further emphasises that lived experience is not merely anecdotal but a legitimate form of knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). Haraway (2013) critiques the idea of objectivity in knowledge production, arguing instead for "situated knowledges," which recognise that all knowledge is produced from a particular social, historical, and political location. Reflective writing, then, is not simply personal testimony but a methodological and epistemological practice grounded in feminist critique. It foregrounds marginalised voices and challenges dominant knowledge systems.

In this piece, I enact a feminist standpoint by engaging in a feminist reflective praxis to interrogate how progressive academic spaces engage with Jewish identity, how justice-oriented work can be complicated by political fractures, and how the experience of marginalisation can generate insights about the limits of solidarity in social justice work. My standpoint enables me to see not only the moments of exclusion, but also the ways these exclusions remain unseen by those embedded within the dominant epistemic frameworks of progressive academia. This involves reflecting on my own position and choices while recognising that the personal and political are inherently intertwined. I have attempted to gaze inward as much as outward, critically examining not only the structures I critique but also my own role within them. Embracing this reflexivity allows for vulnerability, to acknowledge that I am struggling and to seek ways of making change. It also means integrating my personal narrative into my scholarship, valuing my standpoint and lived experience as a critical source of knowledge (Lloyd et al., 2009). By naming what is unseen, I hope to contribute to a more expansive and self-reflective understanding of justice, one that holds space for complexity rather than flattening it.

Helping to Understand Tensions

Walzer's (2019) framework of thick and thin moral commitments provides a valuable lens for understanding these tensions. *Thick* commitments stem from a person's deep ties to a specific community, shaped by history, culture, and shared experience, while *thin* commitments extend across difference, forming the foundation of universal ethical principles. In progressive academia, my thin commit-

ments to justice, anti-oppression, and solidarity align with my colleagues, yet my thick commitments to Jewish ethical traditions, including *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) and a historical consciousness of oppression, often go unrecognised. At the same time, mainstream Jewish spaces tend to prioritise thick communal bonds, often demanding unwavering loyalty to collective narratives, leaving little room for critical engagement with power and state violence. This dynamic creates a sense of displacement: progressive spaces fail to fully acknowledge Jewish identity as a site of marginalisation, while, in my experience, Jewish communal spaces can be weary of those whose political and ethical commitments grapple with dominant Jewish norms and what feels like the unquestioning impact of Zionism.

Reynolds' (2011) concept of *justice-doing* offers a meaningful framework for navigating these tensions, presenting an alternative to the individualistic notion of resilience as a response to systemic injustice. Rather than emphasising personal endurance, Reynolds focuses on collective ethics and relational responsibility, framing justice-doing as an ongoing practice of care, accountability, and resistance.

For progressive Jewish academics, this might mean not only bearing witness to exclusion within our fields but also actively fostering spaces for critical dialogue, ethical reflection, and solidarity, ones that do not require assimilation into dominant narratives. Justice-doing, in this sense, is about holding complexity: remaining true to progressive values while also insisting on the inclusion of Jewish perspectives, rejecting the false choice between communal belonging and ethical action.

Reynolds draws on John Keats' concept of *negative capability* to highlight an essential capacity in social justice work: the ability to remain present and engaged in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity. Instead of rushing to quick conclusions, negative capability calls for tolerating discomfort, recognising that ethical practice requires holding space for contradictions, tensions, and struggles. While this is not new to social work, it reinforces the importance of making room for the ethical dilemmas inherent in justice work rather than seeking premature resolution.

This framework also helps me understand why I have found solidarity with my queer colleagues; even as broader progressive spaces have struggled to fully acknowledge Jewish identity. Just as queer communities have long built their

own networks of care and resistance in response to marginalisation, our shared experiences of misrecognition and exclusion have fostered a form of relational justice-doing between us. We offer each other affirmation, understanding, and ethical solidarity, even when mainstream movements fail to do so. In this way, justice-doing is not only about large-scale systemic change but also about how we show up for one another in moments of erasure, isolation, and struggle.

Bringing Some Things Together

Reflexivity is a core principle of feminist standpoint theory, not as an individual exercise in self-awareness but as a practice of justice-oriented critique (Harding, 1991). In writing this piece, I engage in critical reflection to highlight the ways progressive social work struggles to fully incorporate Jewish identity into its frameworks of power and oppression. My goal is not to position Jewish identity as uniquely marginalised but to illuminate how certain exclusions become normalised even within spaces that have an overt commitment to equity and justice. For example, I have had the experience of speaking out informally and formally within social work academic spaces about how I am feeling, how I am tired, how I feel grief, and how I am struggling with acknowledging Netanyahu's genocidal practices (United Nations General Assembly, 2024; University Network for Human Rights, 2024) at the same time as fearing for the global psyche of Jews. In the main, this has been met by silence. That is, lack of a response. By framing my reflection through feminist standpoint theory, Walzer's (2019) moral argumentation, and Reynolds' justice-doing, I argue that progressive Jewish academics who feel like I do – and others who navigate similar contradictions – can develop a reflective framework that sustains ethical commitments without erasing complexity.

This article, then, is not simply a personal account but an epistemological and ethical inquiry into the fractures within progressive social work and social justice more broadly. By centring lived experience as a valid form of knowledge and engaging with justice-doing as an active practice, I am trying to explore the tensions of being a progressive Jewish academic in a time of deep political and social division. In the sections that follow, I examine the specific ways these tensions manifest in my academic life, the implications for justice-oriented practice, and the possibilities for forging solidarities that do not demand the erasure of difference. Through this process, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how marginalisation operates within progressive spaces and how we

might cultivate justice-doing practices that sustain both individuals and movements in times of fracture.

Reflective Lenses: Key Tensions and Isolation in My Experience

I work in a terrific team of social work academics committed to anti-oppressive, critical social work and the ongoing work of decolonizing our pedagogy, research, and ways of communicating. As social workers, we are bound by a Code of Ethics (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2020) that is underpinned by social justice, human rights, and professional integrity. Our role is to enable socially just practice and critical thinking that supports societal transformation, particularly for those who are excluded, marginalised, and navigating systemic injustice. At its core, our profession seeks to shape the world around individuals, rather than demanding that individuals change to fit into a problematic sociopolitical and economic system.

These commitments are reflected in our teaching content and team discussions, which frequently engage with issues of politics, justice, and human rights. There is deep concern for the atrocities in Gaza, which I share. The university and social work discipline are genuinely invested in cultural responsiveness, a commitment I wholeheartedly support and engage in.

However, I am the only Jewish person in my team. This reality is often invisible, even within a group so attuned to social justice and cultural awareness. When my colleagues express shock about what they learn in cultural responsiveness sessions and their excitement about shifts in understanding, I feel a profound sense of isolation. Part of this is because my lens has always been different – as a Jewish person whose family carries a Holocaust history, my awareness of systemic violence, displacement, and survival has been lifelong. I have always known how oppression operates, how it is justified, how it is sustained. I have also grown up in a society and work at an institution where the Christian calendar dictates the work year, a fact that is rarely acknowledged in conversations about cultural inclusion. I live in a predominantly Anglo-centric landscape, particularly at work.

I suspect that for many on my team, their exposure to Jewish identity is limited to the idea of Jewishness as a religious or Zionist identity, rather than as a complex, diverse cultural and historical experience. As a cultural and humanistic Jew – someone who had a bat mitzvah, has raised two children with strong Jew-

ish identities, but does not practice religiously – I often feel unseen in how Jewishness is framed within progressive social work. My ways of thinking and doing are profoundly shaped by what I consider a *triple identity*: a Jewish, Australian, and feminist perspective. Yet, making this visible requires significant emotional and psychological labor. It means continuously reminding my colleagues that my "aha" moments are not necessarily the same as theirs.

There is also an underlying tension that I feel: because I have white skin, I am often perceived as *the same* as my non-Jewish colleagues, yet inside, I do not feel the same. This dissonance is shaped by my life experiences, my family and community history, the adaptations I have had to make to fit into an Anglo-centred society, and the reality that Jewish identity is often misunderstood as being purely religious rather than also cultural, ethnic, and historical.

Adding to this complexity is my own evolving relationship with Israel and Palestine. I have long believed in the importance of a Jewish homeland as a safeguard against persecution, but I also cannot reconcile this belief with the reality of Israeli state violence against Palestinians. This has been ongoing for decades, but the current moment has forced a deeper reckoning. I need and want to question my old relationship to Zionism because of the decades of injustice against Palestinians. I do not support the Israeli government's actions, and I feel the need to *preface* any discussion of Jewish identity with this disclaimer, out of fear that, in progressive spaces, I will be misrecognised as unwaveringly Zionist. This constant pre-emptive positioning is exhausting – it feels as though my identity must always be *explained*, contextualised, and defended in ways that others are not.

At the same time, the events of October 7th and the rising antisemitism in Melbourne, Sydney, and beyond – including Elon Musk's public alignment with far-right, antisemitic figures – have deeply affected me. I feel vulnerable. I feel exhausted. And I want this to be *recognised* by my colleagues who are otherwise so deeply committed to cultural responsiveness, awareness, and solidarity. I want to be able to affirm my support for Palestinian liberation while also receiving affirmation that my own fears, grief, and sense of isolation are real. In my personal and social life, I am surrounded by Jews like me – progressive, critical, anti-racist – but at work, I often feel alone.

Feminist standpoint theory helps articulate this sense of exclusion by demonstrating how different social locations shape knowledge and experience (Collins, 2022; Harding, 1991). My perspective as a progressive Jewish academic

reveals a gap in my team's understanding of marginalisation – not in malice, but in *unseeing*. My whiteness is seen, but my Jewishness is not. My progressivism is seen, but the ways I am set apart within it are not. In the next section, I explore how this feeling of marginalisation is mirrored within Jewish communities themselves, where progressive Jews increasingly find themselves isolated from mainstream Jewish spaces.

Navigating Fractures in the Jewish Community

If I feel isolated in progressive academia, I feel equally displaced within mainstream Jewish communities. As a progressive, anti-racist, and feminist Jewish woman, I do not align with the dominant political voices within Jewish institutions, which tend to centre Zionist perspectives and conservative political stances. While I understand the historical and existential reasons why many Jews see Israel as a non-negotiable necessity, I cannot align myself with the uncritical support of a state engaged in prolonged occupation and systemic violence. This divergence is not new, but the current political climate has made it *impossible* to navigate Jewish communal spaces without confronting it at every turn.

My thick commitments (Walzer, 2019) – those deeply tied to my identity and history – are Jewish. I carry a historical consciousness of persecution, of survival, of the importance of communal bonds. But my thin commitments (Walzer, 2019) – those that extend beyond my community and shape my ethical stance – demand solidarity with all oppressed people, including Palestinians. Within mainstream Jewish spaces, however, thick commitments are often expected to override thin ones, meaning that to be fully accepted in Jewish communal life, I would have to set aside my criticisms of the Israeli government, of Zionism, my concerns about occupation, and my desire to centre Palestinian voices. This is a line I cannot cross.

At the same time, my presence in progressive spaces means I often feel compelled to *downplay* my thick commitments, lest I be misrecognized as a Zionist apologist. This creates an impossible bind: in mainstream Jewish communities, my politics make me suspect; in progressive spaces, my Jewish identity does the same. Magid (2013) refers to this as the post-Jewish condition, arguing that many contemporary Jews – especially those who do not fit neatly into religious or nationalist categories – exist in a liminal space, disconnected from traditional Jew-

ish structures but not fully embraced by broader social movements. This mirrors my experience of existing between worlds, belonging to neither fully.

This sense of *in-betweenness* is compounded by rising antisemitism. Progressive spaces are often quick to condemn antisemitism when it comes from the far-right, but less willing to recognise its presence when it emerges or is ignored or even dismissed from within leftist movements. In my living experience, at this point in time, the increasing general, societal antisemitic violence is also not mentioned voluntarily at work. And this silence hurts. As Wisel (1986) alerted us: "I swore never to be silent whenever, wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation…Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim".

Meanwhile, mainstream Jewish communities centre antisemitism *above all else*, often reducing Jewish identity to persecution and using it as a justification for unwavering support of Israel. In both cases, the complexity of Jewish identity – its plurality, its contradictions, its diversity – is erased.

Reynolds' (2011) framework of justice-doing offers a way to navigate this tension. Justice-doing demands that we remain ethically committed to liberation without requiring purity or perfect alignment. It insists on relational accountability, rather than political litmus tests, as the basis for solidarity. For me, this means continuing to speak out about Palestinian human rights, even when it makes me unwelcome in some Jewish spaces. It also means insisting that antisemitism be recognised in progressive spaces, even when it is inconvenient or uncomfortable for those around me. And it means making peace with the fact that I will likely always exist at the margins of both communities.

Being a progressive Jewish academic in this moment means holding contradictions, discomfort, and grief. But it also means continuing to bear witness – to oppression in all its forms, to the fractures within our own movements, and to the necessity of justice-doing as an active, ethical practice.

Moving Forward: A Framework for Reflective Practice

There is an inherent tension in the way I hold my commitments – to my Jewish identity, to the history of my people, to the responsibility I feel to ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten, and to my unwavering belief in social justice and solidarity. These are not separate or competing commitments, but they do sometimes feel as though they pull me in different directions. My *thick* commitments – the deep, embodied sense of belonging to Jewish history, community, and sur-

vival – bind me to a collective memory of suffering and resilience, to an awareness that history turns on the small decisions of individuals to remember, to resist, to remain. But my *thin* commitments are equally vital: my belief that no one is free until everyone is free, that liberation is entangled, that Palestinian liberation is tied to Jewish liberation just as queer liberation is tied to straight liberation. As long as one group suffers, we all suffer.

At times, these tensions feel unresolvable. But rather than trying to reconcile them neatly, I am beginning to see the importance of sitting with the discomfort, of recognising that the contradictions I experience are not personal failings, but the reality of living in a fractured world with fractured solidarities. This is a bold claim to make to myself. It is not easy to fully believe it is not about my own personal failings. Perhaps part of the work of justice is not erasing contradictions but consciously holding and recognising them. This is a common critical deconstruction process for social workers so in many ways this could be seen as a collective parallel process for social workers.

I have been thinking a lot about hope in moments when solidarity feels distant. Not hope as a passive belief that things will improve, but **hope as a verb, as something we do** – as getting in there, taking action, working with others, even when the outcome is uncertain. Hope is in the attempt, in the decision to remain engaged despite exhaustion, despite isolation. In this sense, hope is not just about envisioning a better world but about acting in ways that make it more possible, however imperfectly. hooks (2003) in writing about pedagogy, (so apt for this reflection from within academia), describes hope as a form of resistance, an ethic that insists on transformation despite all evidence to the contrary. This has been so helpful/hopeful, and I hold onto that.

At the same time, I am mindful of Munanjahli and South Sea Islander woman Chelsea Watego's (2021) "Fuck Hope", in which she critiques the concept of hope in the context of systemic racism and oppression. Watego argues that hope is often weaponised against Indigenous people, serving as a tool to pacify them and encourage endurance through injustice rather than demanding structural change. Instead, she asserts that self-determination (sovereignty) resists reliance on the promise of future change, advocating for refusal and protest in the present. Her account of hope is radical, and like hooks (2003), I believe it argues activity, action and resistance.

And yet, hope is difficult when I feel alone. The people who have shown up

for me in this moment, who understand what it means to live with contradiction and misrecognition, are my queer colleagues. They, too, know what it is to feel unseen, to have their existence questioned or conditional, to be part of a movement that sometimes forgets them. Their solidarity has reminded me that I am not entirely alone, that I do not have to make myself smaller or quieter to fit into a space that does not yet know how to hold me.

In navigating the complexities of identity, I have found that queer folk often possess a profound understanding of existing within and beyond the traditional gender binary. Their survival has necessitated a nuanced engagement with the spaces between, rejecting rigid dichotomies and embracing the fluidity of identity. This adaptability fosters communities that thrive in these complex, in-between spaces. As McCann and Monaghan (2019) discuss, queer theory challenges fixed identities and embraces the multiplicity of experiences, highlighting the importance of intersectionality and the rejection of binary thinking.

History is also significant for queer folk, much like it is for Jewish communities. Understanding the struggles and triumphs of those who came before provides context and strength for contemporary challenges. McCann and Monaghan (2019) emphasise the value of engaging with queer histories to inform present and future activism. This really emphasises that liberation is an ongoing, relational process.

Through this lens, I recognise that the solidarity extended to me by my queer colleagues is grounded in a shared experience of navigating otherness and a commitment to collective liberation. Their example teaches me that embracing complexity and rejecting simplistic binaries can lead to more inclusive and supportive communities, where people are not compelled to diminish themselves to fit into predefined spaces.

I am struggling with how to bear witness to my own experience of marginalisation while also maintaining the energy to bear witness to others. How do I stay present for others when I feel depleted? In social work, we are taught that our ethical responsibility is to show up for those experiencing oppression (AASW, 2020). And I want to. But I also recognise that if I do not acknowledge my own exhaustion, I risk withdrawing entirely. Silence has felt safer. And yet, the more I hold back, the more disconnected I feel, from my team, from my purpose, from my ability to contribute meaningfully to our shared work. I do not want to lose

interest in my work or in the people I work alongside. But if I continue to suppress my experiences, I fear that is exactly what will happen.

This piece of writing is part of my attempt to process these difficult feelings. It is an act of reflection, but also an act of resistance against the silence that has kept me stuck. Speaking up feels risky. I fear the visibility it might bring me. I fear being misunderstood. And if I am honest, I fear taking up too much space. However, I also know that not speaking at all comes at a cost. If I stay silent, if I do not name the ways I have felt erased, my isolation will only deepen, and with it, my ability to remain present in my work will fade. Perhaps speaking – naming – is a way to prevent that.

Justice-Doing to Stay Connected to Purpose

Reynolds (2011) offers a critical alternative to the idea of *resilience*, which often places the burden of survival on the individual, as though the solution to oppression is simply to withstand it. Justice-doing, in contrast, shifts the focus away from enduring and toward collective ethical action. Justice-doing reminds us that we are not meant to navigate injustice alone, that the work of solidarity is not a solitary act but a shared and collective responsibility. It is not about enduring harm silently, but about insisting on relationships and structures that do not perpetuate harm.

For me, this means resisting the instinct to retreat inward. It means finding ways to stay engaged, even when I feel invisible. It means asking for recognition, not because I want to be centred, but because solidarity must extend in all directions. It also means making space for rest – not as a retreat from justice, but as a necessary practice that allows me to continue the work. And I am so tired, I don't want to feel guilty about resting. And, I do not want to be *resilient* in the face of isolation; I want to change the conditions that make isolation feel inevitable.

In practical terms, justice-doing means:

- Speaking up when Jewish identity is flattened or erased in progressive spaces.
- Continuing to engage in solidarity work while making space for my own experiences of marginalisation.
- Building and deepening relationships with those who understand the complexity of holding multiple commitments.

- Practicing hope as action, continuing to push for justice, even when it feels futile, because the work itself matters.

hooks (2014) wrote that "to be truly visionary, we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (p. 110). I want to hold onto that. My concrete reality is that I feel unseen, exhausted, caught in tensions I did not create. My hope – the *doing* of hope – is in the possibility that speaking up, engaging, and staying in the conversation will open space for something different. It might also help facilitate ongoing human connection.

This is how I move forward. Not with certainty, but with the belief that justice-doing is an active, ongoing commitment. That solidarity is something we must insist upon, even in fractured times. That I can hold my Jewishness and my progressive values together, without apology, and trust that others will learn how to hold them too.

Conclusion: Purpose, Ethics, and Hope

The purpose of this piece has been to reflect on and bear witness to my experience as a Jewish academic in progressive social work – an experience shaped by both deep connection and profound isolation. Through this reflection, I have articulated the complexities of navigating this identity in justice-oriented spaces and to consider a framework for others who find themselves caught between communities, struggling to hold multiple commitments in a world that often demands singular allegiances.

This has not been an easy reflection to write. It has required me to name feelings I have not spoken publicly about in academic spaces – feelings of exhaustion, grief, fear of misrecognition, and the weight of carrying a history that is both deeply personal and profoundly collective. I have had to sit with the discomfort of acknowledging that my sense of self, so tightly bound to Jewish identity and the responsibility to ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten and does not happen again, sometimes feels in conflict with my equally unwavering commitment to social justice and solidarity. This reflection has reaffirmed for me, that these commitments are not contradictions. They are the tensions of justice itself. To be committed to justice is to hold complexity, to refuse simplifications that erase or flatten identities, to conceptualise liberation as interconnected even when the pathways to it seem unclear.

Justice-doing, as Reynolds (2011) reminds us, is not about perfection. It is not about having all the answers or aligning ourselves with a flawless ideological position. It is about being present – in our relationships, in our institutions, in our communities – fully aware of the contradictions and difficulties yet committed to engaging with them rather than retreating from them. Justice-doing is not something we arrive at; it is an ongoing practice, a collective responsibility that requires standing with others even when we ourselves feel uncertain, and to extend that same solidarity to ourselves when we feel unseen.

This is where hope lies – not in guarantees of change or certainty of outcome, but in the act of trying. Hope then, for me, is a verb. It is something we *do*, even when solidarity feels fractured, even when exhaustion sets in. Hope is in the decision to speak when silence feels safer. It is in the choice to remain present in justice work, even when we feel unseen within it. It is in the insistence that social justice movements can – and must – make space for complexity, for multiple truths, for commitments that are thick and thin, bound by history and shaped by ethical responsibility.

If I have learned anything from writing this, it is that silence will not serve me. That withdrawal will not protect me. That the fear of misrecognition should not take precedence over the necessity of naming what I feel needs to be named. And so, I move forward with the belief that speaking, even in discomfort, is itself an act of justice-doing. That the work of solidarity is not about fitting neatly into spaces but about expanding them. That my role as a Jewish academic in progressive social work is not to choose between my identities but to insist that they belong together.

This is the work. This is the practice. And this is the hope.

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