

Therapy for the World Reflections post July 11th

By [Annabel McGoldrick](#), PhD

Therapy for the World is a space for therapists to engage with traumatic and threatening outside events as they resonate in our own and our clients' inner spaces. Whether catastrophic effects of climate change; the dangers and privations brought into our lives by pandemics such as Covid; harms from war and violence including the ongoing Gaza genocide, or insidious menaces such as the spread of Artificial Intelligence and surveillance – we all face the impacts of this global polycrisis through rising fear, hatred and oppression.

These impacts can manifest themselves in family discord and violence, coercive control and domestic abuse. And every day in communities through manifold forms – a list featuring, though by no means confined to bullying, racism and sexism at work; cruelty, hatred, isolation, inequality, poverty and injustice. World events permeate clients' consciousness via media reports focusing on spectacle and rupture. For some, diasporic trauma is involved as populations are seen to suffer in homelands they left, or they face hatred and attacks from the far right in their new lands. There's been a surge of mental health issues with over 1 in 5 adults (20.2%) in England experiencing common conditions such as [anxiety and depression](#).

Often, we as therapists are helping clients to find succour by making sense of their engagement with such factors. Co-constructing narratives they can use to position themselves amid the flow of daily events in ways that enable them to retain or regain a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. But how confident can we be, amid this polycrisis, that such narratives remain convincing, even viable? If there is one strategic, overarching aim of *Therapy for the World*, it is to refresh and renew our own sense-making faculties, the better to survive and thrive in these challenging times, and to help our clients do likewise.

Of course, therapy has no exclusive claim to explain globe-spanning problems, let alone identify solutions. The *Therapy for the World* launch event, scheduled to take place in

London in July, would have convened scholars and practitioners from multiple fields and backgrounds – peacemakers, feminists, environmental scientists and activists – to engage with therapists themselves. In this way, we aspired to begin the work of identifying and assembling components and resources for an engaged therapeutic practice suitable in today's conditions.

This in-person meeting was postponed when it emerged that the inaugural conference of UK Psychologists for Palestine had already been scheduled for the same day¹. It would have felt inappropriate and wrong to have begun by clashing with a welcome initiative clearly appealing to much the same audience. In attending that conference, I made many new likeminded friends and allies for *Therapy for the World* (T4W) including Ron Roberts, whose latest book, *Psychology After Capitalism*, shares our concerns: “It is a world of suspicion, steeped in distrust of governing elites, distraction, and disempowerment, set in a global environment of economic and energy insecurity — a civilisational and climate crisis, conjoined with the aforementioned constellation of the catastrophic.” (Roberts, 2026. pp. 2-3).

Therapy for the World will evolve in other forms in the coming months. To give more of a flavour, here are some brief notes on those who first volunteered for July 11th.

Post traumatic growth

Ashira Darwish was named one of Palestine's most inspirational women by Build Palestine, in 2023. She is a certified EFT therapist, trauma coach, and sound healer, and her healing philosophy is both deeply personal and globally relevant. Ashira is known for her fearless journalism and advocacy. She produced and featured in the film [Where Olive Trees Weep](#) (2024). Ashira's journey into healing began after a life-altering injury in 2012 that left her paralyzed with a severed spinal cord – but she regained mobility through her own spiritual healing journey, which inspired the creation of her trauma transformation methods. She was tortured by Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldiers.

¹ From participants who decided to donate their registration fee instead of a refund, nearly a thousand pounds was still donated to the originally named beneficiaries – two small but important organisations, Dalia and Catharsis, that work with Palestinians.

What resonance there would be, therefore, in bringing Ashira together with **Avigail Abarbanel**! She is a former IDF soldier, through the obligation in Israel for national service. But the experience alerted her to the dehumanisation of Palestinians. She tells her story in the book *Beyond Tribal Loyalties: Personal Stories of Jewish Peace Activists* (2012/18) which I taught to students, studying Peace of Mind, at the University of Sydney. Abarbanel ended up handing back her Israeli citizenship and is now a psychotherapist living in the Highlands of Scotland. She's also a prolific writer and activist challenging Israel's settler-colonialism in Palestine and the ongoing genocide, notably through her [Fully Human](#) series of essays. In these, she iterates the clear boundaries around Israel's unacceptable behaviour:

"Israel is committing the worst crimes and depravities imaginable against a captive people with complete impunity. When Israel's victims resist — and they have no other choice — they are maligned, dehumanised and punished. Those who try to support them are maligned, dehumanised and often punished too".

She addresses directly the claims put forward to justify Israel's oppressive behaviour: "A central part of Israel's fraudulent framing is the pretence of victimhood. Jews as a group were victims historically. But Israel was never a victim... Israel is protected and enabled. Its victims are abandoned to suffering and erasure." (Abarbanel, 2026). Now she considers the prospect that Israel's outward expanding war machine is driving the state to [implode](#).

Risks of Palestinian activism

As Avigail documents (2012/18), being a Palestinian solidarity activist comes at a great personal and professional cost. Her mother, now deceased, entirely rejected her after Abarbanel publicly spoke out for Palestinian human rights and she was rejected from several Jewish groups and conferences.

This is a toll well-documented by another T4W speaker, **Tarek Younis**, a Psychologist and Racial Justice Researcher, through his report, [‘The Violence of Liberal Racism: What Palestine Reveals About British Mental Health Care’](#). He reveals how mental healthcare in the UK is political. In interviews with 30 NHS mental health practitioners and trainees, who self-censored or were disciplined for Palestine solidarity, Younis

demonstrates how Palestine is explicitly exiled beyond the boundaries of acceptable liberal politics in British mental health.

Disciplinary measures enforce this erasure, underwriting Palestine's association with terrorism and antisemitism. As a result, staff, students and service users self-censor their solidarity out of fear. If they do speak out, they employ a myriad of "safety strategies" to shield themselves from allegations of antisemitism and terrorism.

This analysis is embodied in the experience of several other speakers, who – in our upside down world - have also been sanctioned, disciplined, even arrested, for speaking out to oppose Gaza genocide and protect starving children. **Alison O'Connor is a writer, trainer**, therapist and activist with 30 years' experience in arts, health and community. Alison was arrested under the Terrorism Act in 2025 for supporting Palestine Action. Her book, *Moral Injury on the Frontline: A guide to sustaining ourselves in challenging times* will be published by Routledge in 2027. Moral injury involves a profound sense of broken trust in ourselves, our leaders, governments and institutions to act in just and morally 'good' ways. "Moral injury involves profound loss. Loss of innocence, loss of meaning, loss of trust in the world as a just place." (2027, in press). In the book O'Connor argues that the aim of moral repair and recovery is "to integrate new meaning and emerge with deeper understanding." An aim shared by T4W.

Tamara Abood is a humanistic psychotherapist with a thriving private practice in London. She is an outspoken critic of Israel and its genocide of the Palestinian people and has faced concerted efforts to sabotage her life as a psychotherapist as a result of her activism. Tamara is still awaiting the outcome of a disciplinary process by the BACP.

Prior to re-training as a therapist, Tamara had a successful career in television, working as an Executive Producer at a number of leading TV companies as well as a Commissioning Editor in News and Current Affairs at Channel Four.

Abood was going to tell participants how she stood by every word she said on social media in challenging Zionism in support of human rights. Because truth matters, we are

living in Orwellian times. I too am facing a complaint² from a Zionist client for telling them about *Breaking the Silence*, an event ³ for therapists to discuss the Gaza genocide. In it, Dr Gabor Maté shared why as a holocaust survivor he now speaks out against the colonialism of Israel and Zionism. I explained to the client how Maté frames healing as an ongoing, relational process rather than a linear endpoint. He outlines 6 As of healing as: Authenticity, Agency, Anger, Acceptance, and Advocacy & Activism. They capture how personal integrity, choice, emotional signals, reality-testing, and social engagement all interact to support meaningful change.

Liberatory Mental Health initiatives

In response, to the rising sanctions against therapists activists the Palestine Global Mental Health Network is now launching a Liberatory Mental Health initiative: “an international professional body for those committed to a liberatory practice... that refuses to hold the clinical and the political apart, and that stays answerable to the conditions our patients actually live in”.

It was inspiring to hear similar liberatory voices, such as those in the Therapists for Social Change seminars and at the UK Psychologists for Palestine recent event, where Ron Roberts, Dr Aneez Pervaz each described witnessing institutional silence in UK, along with academic erasure of Palestine. Muslim psychologist Yahya Delair: “Our clients do not live in a vacuum, and neither do we. Mental health is not neutral. It is shaped by poverty, racism, colonisation, war, and intergenerational trauma. As Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) warned, ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’ So when bombs fall on Gaza, as well as Lebanon and Iran when humanitarian aid is blocked, when children are buried beneath rubble, and we say nothing, we are complicit in the gap between our values and our actions.”

Climate change

² So far this complaint from a client in Australia, has been dismissed by the Australian EMDR Association and currently being considered by the UK EMDR Association which could ultimately result in disciplinary hearing.

³ Breaking the Silence, trauma therapists talk about Palestine. November 30th, 2025
<https://emdrinsight.com/therapy-for-the-world/>

Jungian psychotherapist **Judith Anderson** sees the link between the case study of cruelty and dehumanisation in Palestine with climate change and a lack of care for the non-human living world. She would have told T4W about the devastating mental health impact of climate change. “In the UK each degree of increase in mean temperature above 18°C was associated with a 3.8% and 5.0% rise in suicide and violent suicide respectively” (Page, Hajat and Kovats, 2007 in Anderson 2024, p29). Domestic Violence escalates too: with a 1°C increase in the annual mean temperature there’s a 4.5% increase in Intimate Partner Violence. For patients with psychosis, dementia and substance misuse there’s an increased risk of death during hot weather.

One link between speakers, worthy of further discussion is the framing, by media and politicians of activists as ‘criminals and terrorists’ as seen by the rise in arrests of climate change and Palestinian activists, including T4W speaker **Alison O’Connor**. A report by Queen Mary University of London and Defend Our Juries documents 286 instances where climate or Palestine activists received prison sentences or were held on remand since 2019. In 256 verified cases, there was a combined total of 136 years of imprisonment recorded. These findings raise serious concerns about the legal system’s treatment of activists and the potential erosion of democratic principles (Zaidel, 2026).

Although not one of the speakers for July, it’s worth quoting **Timothy Morton**, philosopher and Professor of English at Rice University, argues that humans must abandon the idea that ‘Nature’ is separate from civilization. “We are all full of grief. We have gaslit ourselves into a dissociative state in relationship with other beings. We have been running from ourselves for over 50 years in denial about the way we are affecting the world and ourselves.” (2024, p53).

Finally, **Ivan Campbell**, having spent nearly 30 years working in international conflict resolution for [Saferworld](#), in countries as varied as Burundi and Georgia, Somalia and Myanmar. Campbell’s story of peacebuilder to psychotherapist brought him to assist on workshops for asylum seekers. These therapeutic spaces, in a beautiful natural environment at Ammerdown, showed encouraging signs rippling out, from friendships to work experiences and community connections. However, he fears that political forces overshadow their good therapeutic work: “the news agenda has once again been

dominated by anti-migrant rhetoric from all of the main political parties, while regular protests are held outside hotels for asylum seekers in many parts of the country, and increasing numbers of violent assaults are being reported against people of colour accused or assumed of being 'illegal migrants'. Since writing this in 2025, the far right is on the rise, burning homes of black workers in Belfast. Campbell reminds us that, "the need to listen to the stories of 'others' has never been greater".

Danger of global pandemics

Remember how we, and our clients were deeply impacted by covid-19. Some felt depressed and trapped in the house through endless lockdowns or grieving the loss of loved ones to the virus. There were over 7.1 million official reported deaths but the true death toll is estimated to be approximately 15 million based on World Health Organization figures.

Alison O'Connor would have shared, with T4W participants, the sense of moral injury experienced by NHS frontline staff. O'Connor documented their widespread sense betrayal by those in authority: "from insufficient provision of PPE, inadequate support for staff, rapidly changing and contradictory guidelines, and the revelation that some government staff were partying and breaking their own rules." In conversations for her book, "several professionals described this as a collective amnesia, a surreal experience of returning to 'business as usual' ... The toll of such silencing is beginning to be understood. A quarter of GPs know a colleague who has died by suicide, and 68% of social care workers reported in a UNISON survey that their mental health declined while working through the pandemic. 96.4% of doctors surveyed by the BMA stated that the pandemic had exacerbated the risk of moral distress (BMA, 2021)" (O'Connor, 2027).

The likelihood of another pandemic is a near certainty, with scientists estimating a 27% to 38% chance of a COVID-scale outbreak occurring in the next decade, "we are living in the midst of a period of immense international instability, a temporal wasteland of post-pandemic, climate, and nuclear fear, declining western hegemony, subject to the incessant rituals of bureaucratic and digital terror, authoritarianism, and information control." (Roberts, 2026. p3).

Artificial intelligence (AI)

Many of our clients (including my own) either work in Artificial Intelligence or are terrified of being replaced by it. More worrying is asking whether AI leads to human extinction, or to what extent AI misuse and integration will disrupt society? As therapists we face the threat of being replaced by chatbots and AI where would-be clients risk sidestepping the deep, uncomfortable work of real therapy. Elizabeth Cotton in her recent book *UberTherapy: The New Business of Mental Health*, offers a roadmap for preserving the legacies of real therapy in the digital world, and will be invited to future T4W conversations.

My commitment to *Therapy for the World*: is steadfast and determined to express my healthy anger at the thread of inequality and injustice that links the experiences and perspectives of these distinguished contributors. A root cause of ecological breakdown is capitalism, a system that, it could be argued, alienates our best interests of the individual and the collective in favour of those of the corporation. My commitment is to keep naming this as an authentic therapist, a writer with agency and an activist with a call for you to join me on retreat in a beautiful natural setting, as therapists to listen, to heal, to share. I've also joined a trade union ([Psychotherapy and Counselling Union](#)), to collectively express my political voice. To develop T4W podcast. Write a book. And continue this conversation. I agree too with O'Connor, "Systemic change is the reparative action we need... to build healthier communities where our humanity is recognised and our moral integrity protected". Do join me in continuing to talk about *Therapy for the World*.

Book References

Abarbanel, Avigail 2012/18 2nd edition. *Beyond Tribal Loyalties: Personal Stories of Jewish Peace Activists*. Cambridge Scholars.

Anderson, Judith, Staunton, Tree, O'Gorman, Jenny & Caroline Hickman (eds) 2024 *Being a Therapist in a Time of Climate Breakdown*. Routledge.

Campbell, Ivan (in press) *We need to understand their story; they need to understand ours*. Fisher Simon and Julia Samuels (eds).

Cotton, Elizabeth 2025, *UberTherapy: The New Business of Mental Health*. Bristol University Press.

Darwish, Ashira (2024) *Where Olive Trees Weep*. Science and None Duality.

Maté, Gabor & Daniel (2022) *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, illness, and healing in a toxic culture*. Penguin.

Morton, Timothy (2024) Talking about climate agony, trauma, activism. In Anderson, Judith et al (eds) *Being a Therapist in a Time of Climate Breakdown*. Routledge. pp 53-59.

Pervez, Aneesa. (2025). *Witnessing silence: The Palestinian genocide, institutional complicity, and the politics of knowledge*. Globalisation, Societies and Education.

O'Connor, Alison (2027) *Moral Injury on the Frontline: A guide to sustaining ourselves in morally challenging contexts*. Routledge. In press.

Roberts, Ron & Itten Theodor (2026) *Psychology After Capitalism: Reflections on War, Tyranny, and Artificial Intelligence*. iff Books an imprint of Collective Ink Ltd.,