OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

MAOR BAKER

The big lie

Earlier this month, Yale's Jewish students, along with Jewish communities around the world, commemorated the horrific terrorist attacks of Oct. 7, 2023. On that day, the terrorist organization Hamas invaded Israel and brutally raped and murdered over 1,200 Jewish, Muslim and Christian people, including babies, children, parents and grandparents.

Our goal for the commemoration was simple: to grieve the loss of life, raise awareness about the horrific attack and stand in solidarity against terrorism. These are apolitical goals that should unite all of us.

Last week, two columns in the Yale Daily News responded to Max Steinberg's op-ed objecting to the display of a protest slogan — "Apartheid didn't start Oct. 7" — on the day of our commemoration. Amine Bit GRD '32 and Ian McCormick '29 misportrayed Steinberg's argument. Each in their own way suggests that Jews deny Palestinians "a day for mourning" or that Palestinians lack "permission to narrate" their experiences. Nowhere in Steinberg's piece do they deny Palestinians' right to grieve or to share their narrative. In fact, Steinberg expresses empathy — as we all should — for Palestinian suffering.

Worse than their misrepresentation of Steinberg, Bit and McCormick use Palestinian suffering as a pretense for demonizing Israel and trafficking in rhetoric that puts Jews everywhere in harm's way.

Bit sarcastically writes that for Jews, the "issue is Hamas, as it seems to always be," while spending half of his article denouncing Israel with statistics from the Hamas-run — and therefore untrustworthy — Gaza Ministry of Health. Hamas' founding charter calls for the annihilation of Israel and Jews. As long as their goal remains, the issue will, in fact, be Hamas. Since seizing Gaza by force in 2007, Hamas has embedded itself among the civilian Gazan population and has built extensive tunnels and terror cells under hospitals and schools. In messages reported by The Wall Street Journal, former Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar called Gaza's civilian casualties "necessary sacrifices" at the cynical altar of turning world opinion against Israel.

McCormick's column is subtler, but he can't hold a condemnation of Hamas for a single paragraph without turning it into an indictment of Israel. He calls Hamas "fully responsible" for Oct. 7, only to shift into a denunciation of Israel: "No longer can we blame the crimes of Israel on Hamas." He signs off with "Free Palestine."

What is most problematic about both of these pieces is the authors' casual use of the word "genocide." Bit uses the term twice as if it is an undisputed fact. McCormick, more cautious, calls whether to label the Gaza war a genocide a "separate concern," then proceeds as though the question had been answered. Neither author pauses to defend or even interrogate the charge, which the United States, Germany, Poland, Canada and the United Kingdom reject.

Journalist Bret Stephens details the "moral obscenity" of the genocide charge in a recent New York Times column. Genocide is the intentional killing of people for who they are. If Israel wanted to kill Palestinians as Palestinians, it would not put its own soldiers in harm's way, requiring them to fight in a dense, urban environment. It would not have given extensive warnings — via millions of flyers, text messages and phone calls — to innocent Palestinians before striking Hamas targets.

As unfounded as the claim of genocide is, what is far more dangerous is the impact of this word. Using it puts Jews everywhere in harm's way. Dara Horn explains that antisemitism is a conspiracy theory rooted in the "big lie" that Jews are "collectively evil" and responsible for society's worst sin of the time. This is precisely how the charge of genocide is functioning today.

Israel is inseparable from Jewish identity. It is an integral part of Jewish history and culture, ever-present in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish liturgy. Half of the Jews in the world live in Israel, and the vast majority of North American Jews believe in its right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state. This means that all Jews, regardless of their politics or positions on Israel, suffer the consequences of anti-Israel defamation. We have seen it in the attacks on our synagogues, in the hateful comments we encounter online, in the murder of dozens of Jews at Bondi Beach and in so many other places.

Once Jews or any Zionists are charged with being "genocidal," hating them becomes righteous. In May 2025, a gunman killed two young Israeli embassy staffers, Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, as they left an event at the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C. The man charged with their murders, Elias Rodriguez, shouted "Free Palestine" and "I did it for Gaza." A manifesto linked to him declared that the "perpetrators and abetters" of genocide had "forfeited their humanity."

I urge our community to avoid using rhetoric and harmful tropes like "genocide." They have helped fuel the massive rise in antisemitism since Oct. 7.

We should talk as a community about Jewish and Palestinian suffering and about how best to ensure that both peoples can live in safety, security and dignity. That will only happen if more of us engage in these conversations with curiosity, humility and respect.

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GUEST COLUMNISTS

DEBORAH COEN AND ALESSANDRO GOMEZ

No academic values without procedure

Our campus freedoms as faculty and students continue to shrink as shared governance drifts further from democratic ideals. At Yale, faculty committees, both elected and appointed, are merely "advisory" and student referendums are ignored. As Yale instructors and researchers, we feel compelled to raise an uncomfortable question: is the quality of Yale's education and research output being adversely affected as a result?

Data suggests it is.

A May 2026 survey of faculty by Yale's chapter of the American Association of University Professors indicates that 35.6% of Yale faculty are significantly concerned about facing disciplinary actions or other consequences from Yale in response to teaching controversial topics. Last year, Yale cited budgetary constrictions as justification for the termination of instructional faculty contracts; the administration refuses to release the exact number of people who lost their jobs or how much money was saved as a result. The lack of transparency about this decision-making process exacerbated conditions in which instructional faculty with and without long-term contracts feel especially vulnerable to retaliation disguised as budgetary necessity.

Likewise, faculty across the University face immense challenges to their research and teaching in the face of funding cuts, limited bridge funding options and an ever-changing landscape of federal regulations designed to restrict long-standing international collaborations and limit the number of international students, teachers and researchers.

While federal funding cuts and international restrictions are beyond Yale's control, there are measures that Yale can and should take to ensure that our teaching and research are resistant to these pressures. Doing so will require more than statements of principles: we need contractually protected policies and procedures, and we need shared governance.

Recognizing that effective learning depends on support for intellectual risk-taking in any political climate, Yale's faculty, students and alumni have repeatedly asked the administration to institute robust safeguards for academic freedom. These calls have been deflected into a structure of faculty committees handpicked by the administration to produce reports and recommendations that are then only selectively adopted; the Committee on Trust in Higher Education is one example. Chosen by President McInnis, the committee consisted of ten tenured faculty and one postdoctoral associate who wrote and unanimously endorsed the nationally publicized Report of the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education. Based on that report, McInnis quickly and drastically narrowed the University's mission statement without a campus-wide referendum. Yet Yale's faculty as a whole did not endorse this report or elect the members of that committee.

At NYU and Stanford, by contrast, faculty are able to elect representatives to a university-wide senate, which then forms committees that are empowered to make decisions about research policy and to review faculty grievances. Meanwhile, the administration has yet to consider the recommendation from the Trust Committee to strengthen faculty governance through a University-wide senate.

Does Yale truly operate according to "shared governance," as the Report of the Committee on Trust in Higher Education describes it? We think not.

The future of academic freedom at Yale currently rests with another advisory committee, appointed last spring by Provost Strobel to "[develop] a clear, forward-looking statement that articulates the principles that guide the academic freedom of Yale faculty." This is a welcome move and we appreciate our colleagues' committed service to this vital project. Yet their directive, which is to update our principles, does not offer a corrective to Yale's diminishing commitment to shared governance. Nor does it empower the committee to procedurally protect the vulnerabilities of our teaching and research that have been exposed in recent years.

We note with similar concern that the composition and function of committees like these, tasked with broad, ideological assessments of higher education, has changed drastically over the years. The Academic Freedom Committee, like the Trust Committee, includes no instructional faculty — faculty on limited-term contracts — no untenured faculty and no students, even though these groups are the most vulnerable to weak academic freedom protections. By contrast, the committee appointed in 1974 to author the Woodward Report included two undergraduates and three graduate students.

To that end, Yale AAUP — the only body capable of representing faculty of all ranks from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering and Applied Sciences Senate and the professional schools — has published the results of its study of the structural changes necessary to undergird "principles" of academic freedom; it has moreover identified three mechanisms essential to protecting the freedoms of learning and research:

"First, there must be a committee elected by the full faculty, rather than appointed by the provost, that hears complaints about violations of academic freedom.

Second, all faculty, regardless of rank or length of appointment, must be entitled to appeal to this committee if their complaints are judged to relate to academic freedom.

And third, a judgment of pertinence should be made by elected representatives of the faculty, not by the administration."

These proposed policy and procedure changes offer us an opportunity to exercise a critical form of shared governance that has the potential to protect our university from external attempts to dictate what and how we should research and teach.

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STAFF COLUMNIST

CAMILO SALGAR

Uniting Yale's Latin American community

On my arrival to Yale as an international student from Latin America, I almost immediately went to La Casa Cultural, seeking to find the Latin American community I so missed from home. Yet it surprised me to realize that in La Casa, mostly English, not Spanish, was spoken.

The Latin American community at Yale is mostly constituted by Latin Americans who have been born and/or raised in the U.S. Though about 12% of the recent 2030 class was Hispanic/Latin American, only a handful of those were international students. It makes sense, therefore, that English often proves to be the most welcoming language for community events. Nevertheless, for international students, the default language can complicate active engagement.

Subtleties like language and background fragment Latin Americans into subgroups, leading to a lack of umbrella communities that encompass the ample Latin American diaspora.

Latin American international students and those born or raised in the U.S. have essentially different backgrounds, but they both contribute vital perspectives on what it means to be Latin American. At first glance, one may think that the Latin American that was born and raised in Latin America somehow represents the Latin American identity more closely than the Latin American born and raised in the U.S. However, that assumption fails to acknowledge the diffused essence of the Latin American identity, and that a significant part of it lies beyond a country's borders.

Indeed, the Latin American identity, even within Latin American countries, is fundamentally fragmentary. Jaime Garzón, a Colombian political figure who crafted thought-provoking sketches, effectively satirized the lack of a unified identity. In a provocative discourse given in 1997 in Cali, he says, and I translate, that "In Colombia there are no Colombians." Following this statement, Garzón makes the case that social inequality and the significant cultural variation across regions makes talking about a unified Colombian identity close to absurd. These intra-national differences permeate all of Latin America, and a similar argument can be mapped onto countries other than Colombia.

Significant Latin American immigration to other continents, especially to the U.S., makes it a serious mistake to limit the Latin American story to a country's borders. As Gabriel García Márquez argued in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech in 1982, "the country that could be formed of all the exiles and forced emigrants of Latin America would have a population larger than that of Norway," and therefore there "has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable." How can one understand a group identity when its corresponding group of people is dispersed throughout continents for as many reasons as you can fathom? Failing to encompass this reality will make any picture of Latin America incomplete.

Leaving aside the large-scale issue, at Yale, the first step towards bridging across Latinx and international Latin American subgroups, is to create spaces that explicitly foster interactions across these disparate communities. The challenges are endless: default language, event type and community outreach are all components. Nevertheless, managing the discrepancies between subgroups under the umbrella of Latin American identity is a challenge worth confronting. We must foster diverse communities that better encompass what it means to be Latin American. This claim is not directed at La Casa, an institution that establishes itself to be home to Latine history and culture. It is more so directed towards Latin American organizations affiliated or not affiliated to La Casa, that should strive towards tethering the fragmentary Latin American community together.

While there are concrete events that celebrate Latine heritage, there are no events that explicitly attempt to unite the Latinx community and the Latinos who are international students. International students who feel disconnected to the Latino community at large struggle to return to it. We must now act upon this fragmentation and foster spaces that bring Latinos together.

This semester I am serving as vice president of Club Colombia, an organization affiliated with La Casa, and I want it to be clear that I do not speak on behalf of the club or La Casa, but of my own opinion on what the Latin American community should aim towards at Yale.

CAMILO SALGAR *is a sophomore in Davenport College studying applied math and philosophy. His column focuses on voicing an international student's perspective on University affairs. He can be reached at camilo.salgar@yale.edu.*