

‘Tenured Radicals’ in Israel: From New Zionism to Political Activism

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INTRODUCTION

The April 2005 decision of the British Association of University Teachers (AUT) to call for an academic boycott of Haifa and Bar Ilan universities created a storm of protest in Israel and abroad. Even more indignation was directed towards the handful of Israeli academics that have supported the boycott. As in 2002, when the call for a boycott was first made, the dismay over the fact that Israeli scholars were instrumental in instigating such an action has led to a chorus of voices demanding the firing of the so-called ‘tenured radicals’.

Others, including many in the press, wondered how professors who are supported by the Israeli taxpayer can use their position to harm the national interest of the country. While such reactions are expected, they fall short of tackling the complex relationship between social science scholarship, academic activism and academic freedoms. Such an analysis, which has inflamed passions in the United States for a better part of the past half century, is long overdue in Israel. At its core is the need to clarify the challenge that the spread of critical theory in the western academy has posed to traditional scholarship in the social sciences and humanities.

THE DIFFUSION OF INTELLECTUAL FASHIONS: POST-ZIONISM AS THE ISRAELI VARIANT OF CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theory, also known as post-modernism, is an umbrella term denoting a loose amalgam of theories that have come to dominate American and European universities in the past half a century. They can be traced to a number of philosophical and epistemic traditions in Europe and the United States. Perhaps the best known is the deconstructionist philosophy of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, who argued that the accepted ‘societal narratives’ reflect the power structure of a given society. The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas enriched this approach by positing that the discursive practices of a society ‘privilege’ the

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'linguistically competent' middle classes at the expense of lower classes, minorities and other 'second class citizens'.

The neo-Marxist approach, as epitomized by Frank Andre Gundar, Henrique Cardozo and Samir Amin, among others, provided a comprehensive critique of market democracy, leading to the birth in the 1970s of the popular *dependencia* (dependency) movement that celebrated Third Worldism and world system theories. Dependencistas argued that the 'peripheral' status of the Third World is a function of colonial and/or capitalist exploitation and called for a more egalitarian global distributive justice. Invoking Habermas' prediction that capitalism was headed toward a crisis of legitimacy, dependency scholars proclaimed that socialism rather than market democracy was the ultimate destiny of humankind.¹

Adopting the essentially economic critique of Samir Amin, Edward Said developed his own highly influential cultural criticism of the West known as Orientalism. In a book by the same name, Said claimed that the West misrepresented Arab societies, depicting them as backward and menacing 'others' in order to justify its colonial conquest. The Oriental construct, it was argued, was manufactured by a long line of European 'orientalist' scholars who projected their own notions onto the Middle East, either out of ignorance or, as one critical Middle East expert put it, 'in the service of colonialism'.²

Critical approaches in international relations (hereafter, IR) evolved into constructivism, which posited that the foreign policy of a country is shaped by deeply seated identity needs and anxieties, including the view of the 'other'. During the Cold War constructivist scholarship promoted the idea that, far from being a menace to the West, the Soviet Union was a bogeyman created by the American military-industrial complex. Similarly, in the 1990s, a prominent Harvard IR scholar argued that militant Islam was a new bogeyman invented by the West to fill the void left by the collapse of communism, a theme that Said endorsed in a revised edition of his book *Covering Islam*.³ Finally, critical scholarship includes an array of gender theories which attempt to deconstruct reality from a feminist perspective, including a feminist critique of IR. Feminist IR scholars contend that foreign policy and international conflicts are driven by a male-dominated, militaristic establishment.

What enabled critical scholars to form these postulates was their assumption about the nature of political reality. Whereas behaviouralist scholarship derives from positivist ontology and postulates the existence of a relatively easily identifiable and measurable social reality, critical academics have adopted a mix of radical structuralism and radical humanism. Ontologically, the former is positivist but follows the Marxist notion that once structures are established, individuals would reproduce them in spite of their 'repressive' characteristics. In this sense, belief in capitalism is a form of 'false consciousness'.⁴ The latter claim is based on

subjective ontology and relies heavily on discerning subjective 'states of consciousness' and 'potentiality' to provide a radical critique of society. By adopting this 'rebellion from method', as one prominent critical radical humanist called it, critical scholars became liberated from the empirically based social inquiry practised by their behaviourally oriented colleagues.

This radical ontology mixed with a firm normative sense of what social relations should be gave critical scholars the right to claim privileged knowledge. As one of them proclaimed, 'a moralist needs no evidence other than his senses to judge something right or wrong, and no elaborate scientific calculus to ascertain what the proper course of action should be'. Or as a leading Israeli critical scholar has put it: 'post-Zionism is a semi-analytical, semi-normative concept, which has challenged all the traditional concepts of Zionism'.⁵

Armed with these tools of critical theory, Israeli critical academics, or post-Zionist scholars, have produced a prodigious amount of scholarship. Probably the best known in this respect is the effort of 'New Historians' to deconstruct the traditional 'Zionist narrative' of the events surrounding the establishment of Israel and the fate of the Palestinian people. Launched by the work of Benny Morris and elaborated upon by Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim and others, 'New Historians' challenge a number of 'myths' in traditional scholarships, including the balance of power 'myth', the 'myth' of a voluntary exodus of Palestinians and the 'myth' of Palestinian intransigence. Briefly stated, the 'New Historians' reject the notion that Israel was the David to the Arab Goliath, they emphasize that Israel colluded with Jordan to carve up Palestinian territory and deny the claim that most Palestinians had fled. On the contrary, they charge the IDF with forcible transfer, helped by intimidation or outright massacres. Critical historians have also laboured hard to dispel the myth of Arab and Palestinian intransigence, noting that it was the Jewish leadership that had dragged its feet in the protracted negotiations. The charges of the 'New Historians' have been met with a furious rebuttal by traditional scholars, most notably Efraim Karsh, who accused them, among other things, of 'creative writing' and of 'systematically falsifying' evidence.⁶

Going beyond the mere debunking of the 'foundational narrative' of the Jewish state, critical scholars like Uri Ram reject the notion that Jews have a legitimate claim to Israel. Drawing upon Said, Ram concluded that the 'Zionist project' is a colonial endeavour, giving the Jews no more rights to settle in Palestine than the British had in India.⁷ The theme of colonial-like dispossession of the indigenous population has been given a further reading in the work of the critical political geographer Oren Yiftachel, who posited that the 'uni-ethnic Zionist theme' has led to a progressive 'Judaizing and de-Arabizing of Israel/Palestine'. Dan Rabinowitz has argued that Palestinians are walled in and subject to a near 'catastrophic incarceration' defined as the inability of the community to take elementary steps towards

'recuperation and regeneration'. Under certain conditions, such communities may face extinction.⁸

'New Sociologists' such as Baruch Kimberling, Ram and Yehuda Shenhav pose a less publicized but equally profound challenge to traditional Israeli sociology. These, and other, critical sociologists made their name by attacking the work of S.N. Eisenstadt and his numerous disciples in the Israeli academy. The 'New Sociologists' argue that Eisenstadt provided the ideological underpinning for the drive of the Ashkenazi elites to 'modernize' (read – assimilate) the Mizrachi Jews to the standard 'Ashkenazi-flavoured' Israeli identity. Shenhav has emerged as the leader of a group of influential Mizrachi scholars who have deconstructed the official Zionist narrative which posits that the Mizrachim were rescued from their oppressive and backward Arab societies. Adapting Said's work on Zionism from the perspective of its victims, this group, which insists on referring to itself as Arab Jews, holds that, like the Palestinians, the Mizrachim are victims of Zionism.

Needless to say, these academic 'Jewish Arabs' view Zionism as a white European movement that was built on the rejection of the Orient and is bent on suppressing the authentic ethnicity of the Mizrachim.⁹ Critical sociologists added a new twist to the long-standing complaint that the Ashkenazi elite exploited and perpetuated the economic deprivation of Jews from Arab countries. According to Ram, the Mizrachim, along with other indigenous people, are victims of the market-driven global economic system that privileges the technological elites.¹⁰

Rounding out this social critique of Israeli society are feminist post-Zionist scholars. Hanna Herzog, a leading feminist authority, argues that Israel is a male-dominated militaristic society which oppresses women. Extending the logic of victimhood embedded in critical theory, feminist scholars claim that Israeli women form yet another category of victims of Zionism/militarism.¹¹

Unlike the 'New Historians', 'New Sociologists' have not been seriously challenged by the Israeli sociological community. Still, some of the more thoughtful among them arrived at a belated realization that, unshackled from the modernizing influence of Israelism, the authentic Mizrachi ethnicity may be a mixed blessing after all. As Baruch Kimberling bemoaned in his new book, the decline in Israeli identity of the founding era had given birth to such unenlightened forms of ethnic expression as support for the nationalist policies of the Israeli right or the Mizrachi-orthodox Shas party. Others though, including Shenhav, invoked the Marxist theme of 'false consciousness' to accuse the Ashkenazi elite of manipulating the Sephardim, who had lived peacefully with their Arab neighbours, into adopting a nationalist belief system that serves the Zionist militaristic state.¹²

A radical critique of Holocaust education in Israel is perhaps the least known aspect of critical scholarship. It was pioneered by the critical historian Norman Finkelstein, who charged that Jews had turned their suffering into a 'holocaust industry' to further the cause of Zionist nationalism in Israel and the Diaspora. The chief Israeli propagator of this view is Idith Zertal, who insists that that the centrality of the Holocaust had created a culture of victimhood and death, fuelling nationalism and extremism.¹³ The critical philosopher Adi Ophir and Uri Ram contend that the March of Living, which sends Israeli youth to Auschwitz and other extermination camps in Poland, fosters zealous nationalism by reinforcing the message that a strong Israel is the only guarantee of Jewish survival.

Utilizing the same deconstructionist logic, Ophir and others claim that the trips, and more generally Holocaust education, have been used by successive Israeli governments to legitimate an Israeli 'genocidal' policy toward the Palestinians. As Ophir argued in a recent attack on Benny Morris, whose account of 1948 he considers too moderate, 'genocide hides behind expulsion'. In any event, according to Ophir, much of the Jewish anxiety over anti-Semitism stems from a dark view of the 'other'.¹⁴

Under normal circumstances, academic writings are confined to the universities where battles are fought in professional journals and conferences. However, critical scholarship has been inspired by the socialist theoretician Antonio Gramsci, who posited that the discursive venues of society should be used to challenge the 'hegemonic powers'. While behaviourists believe in a separation of science and politics, critical scholars consider their academic output a legitimate 'agent of struggle'. As Herzog and Shenhav asserted in the aptly named panel 'Production of Sociological Knowledge, Public Engagement and the Quest for Peace and Justice in Palestine/Israel', scholarship should be used for challenging extant norms in order to transform society.¹⁵

SCHOLARSHIP IN THE SERVICE OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM: DELEGITIMIZING ISRAEL AS A WAY OF LIBERATING THE PALESTINIANS

Faithful to their mandate to change society, virtually all critical scholars have turned to political activism aimed at highlighting the illegitimacy of occupying the Palestinian territories. As Ophir put it, they are motivated by the fear that the 'control over the Palestinians' has led to the 'adoption of the political forms of an ethnocentric and racist nation-state'.¹⁶ Many of these scholars are involved with The Campus Speaks Out (*HaKampus Lo'sbotek*), an activist group with branches at the Hebrew and Tel Aviv universities that was reconstituted in 1996 from So far (*Ad Kan*), a movement dating from the time of the first *intifada* of the late 1980s. Others operate outside Campus, which has some 150 faculty members.

About 20 scholars can be considered the *salient* core. Some serve as organizers and others have used their academic writing to further the cause of delegitimizing Israel.¹⁷

Academic activists have utilized a variety of means, including popular writings, public speaking in Israel and abroad, and signed petitions, which are placed as advertisements in local papers and/or posted on the Internet. Among the more current petitions are Israeli Citizens for International Intervention; the Urgent Appeal for International Involvement to Save Palestine; and Stop the Wall Immediately (which is addressed to the United Nations, the Democratic forces and governments, humanitarian organizations and the Jewish communities around the world). Others include an Open Letter to Soldiers and Reservists in Support of Courage to Refuse (military services); the Urgent Warning against the War in Iraq and the Support for the Right to Return of Palestinians to Israel – the Olga Document.¹⁸

The petitions, writings and public speeches have a number of common elements. They claim that Israel is not a true democracy but rather a colonial, militaristic society, and an apartheid state. Ilan Pappé, the most radical of the ‘New Historian’ scholars, known as the ‘Israeli Noam Chomsky’, urged his colleagues to deconstruct the Western image of Israel as the ‘only democracy’ in the Middle East and thus deserving the full support of the international community. To this effect Yiftachel argued that Israel should be considered a dictatorship unless Palestinians outside the Green Line are allowed to vote in elections to the Knesset and Neve Gordon declared that Israel is in the process of becoming a fascist state. Suicide bombings that drove Israeli reprisals are either mentioned in passing or given a novel twist. After his niece was killed in a suicide bombing in 1997, Yoav Peled invited a PLO spokesman to the funeral, where he blamed her death on then Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, a charge that he repeated in the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁹

Much of the evidence for the claim that Israel is a fascist and racist state comes from what members of the group perceived to be the ‘inhuman’ and ‘evil’ treatment of the Palestinians. According to the petitions, and other writings, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have committed atrocities against the Palestinians and are preparing for their transfer and other forms of ethnic cleansing. Indeed, the Urgent Warning against the War in Iraq asserted that, using the ‘fog of war’, Israel may be contemplating ‘a crime against humanity’, namely the expulsion of the Palestinians. Ophir initiated an appeal for an international force to protect the Palestinians.

In turn Pappé gave his support to the notion that the Israeli army committed a massacre in Jenin.²⁰ Even though an international commission found no evidence of such an atrocity, Kimmerling continued to insist that whether there ‘was or was not a massacre in Jenin is only a semantic question’. Lev Grinberg, the head of the Humphrey Institute for Social

Research at Ben Gurion University, maintained that Israel engages in 'symbolic genocide', a charge that he spelled out in a paper published in Belgium.²¹ With only a perfunctory acknowledgement of suicide bombings, most post-Zionists averred that the Israeli reprisals amount to Stage II of 1948, an allusion to the alleged plans to expel all Palestinians. Virtually all group members have asserted that Israel is an apartheid state. According to Yiftachel, the Israeli system of developing apartheid will turn Israel into a racist state. Tanya Reinhart noted that Israel's conduct exceeds the 'crime of South Africa'. Indeed, an internet search linking references to apartheid with many names in the group brings up numerous references.²²

To end this alleged apartheid, the activist group has advocated appeals to domestic audiences and the international community. In the words of Pappé, 'every possible means should be employed in the West' to achieve this goal. For most of the activist scholars, inspiration comes from the successful international movement to end apartheid in South Africa.²³ Attempts to mobilize international pressure involve a large number of strategies – raising consciousness by using media outlets in the United States and Europe; appeals to sympathetic organizations, including the United Nation's Human Rights Commission, human rights NGOs, and international church groups; advocating selective sanctions such as divestment from universities, local authorities and companies which further Israeli occupation. In a new ploy, inspired by the IDF's use of Caterpillar digging equipment in the Occupied Territories, activists urge sympathizers to buy shares in corporations that profit from furthering Israel's occupation as a way of pressuring their boards to stop sales to Israel.

Since no consensus has emerged as to the best way to replicate the South African success, activist scholars have espoused different strategies. For instance, Pappé, Reinhart, Giora, Jablonka and Ram support academic boycotts and other forms of pressure; Gordon and Grinberg have pushed for a war crimes tribunal against IDF officers in the territories and the Air Force chief whom they want to try for targeted assassinations. Giora and Reinhart have also been active in the divestment movement in the United States. Kimmerling who admits that Israeli 'academic institutions are a part and parcel of the oppressive Israeli state that has, among its other acts of foolishness and villainy, committed unforgettable crimes against the Palestinian people' opposes an academic boycott unless it is part of a general boycott on the lines of South Africa. Ophir, clearly exasperated that the 'shadow of anti-Semitism' prevents Europe from taking a more coercive approach towards Israel, mused that 'if things go on as they are' perhaps a NATO style bombing of Israel may be in order.²⁴

In spite of their small number, critical scholars have had a significant impact both in Israel and abroad, of which the AUT boycott has been the most visible example. In order to understand how a relatively small group

of academics can garner such impressive results, a better understanding of their *modus operandi* is required.

INFLUENCE MULTIPLIERS: THE INTERCONNECTED WORLD OF CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND ACTIVISM

In turning their scholarship into a tool of social change, critical scholars have closely followed Gramsci's advice to either build new organizations, or network with existing ones. According to Anat Biletzki, the influence of Campus is largely due to an 'intricate network of crises-crossing contacts' with a host of kin organizations and peace activists in Israel. Indeed, an Internet search of the groups to which the 'New Zionists' have been linked reveals a dense network. Most important are the Israeli NGOs such as *Gush Shalom*, *Be'tzelm*, *Yesh Gvul*, the Committee to Stop the Demolition of Houses in Palestine, the Committee to Stop Torture, Courage to Resist and many others. Some activists play a leading role in the NGOs; Biletzki heads *Be'tzelem*, which has run adverts claiming that even after the Israeli withdrawal, Gaza would remain one huge prison. Grinberg is a spokesman for *Yesh Gvul*, which is closely related to Courage to Refuse.²⁵

Some new groups have been clearly inspired by critical scholarship. For instance, the feminist NGO, New Profile (*Profil Hadash*) – Movement for the Civilization of Israeli Society – carries the unmistakable imprint of Herzog's work and she approvingly described it as a movement for feminist 'post-Zionist awareness' working together to 'transform Israeli society from a militaristic one to a civil one'. New Profile's website pledges to end the occupation, to 'generate a life-preserving egalitarian society' and to encourage female draft resisters. It also urges women to support the international drive for divestment.

Going beyond the confines of Israel, networking with like-minded international groups is perhaps the most important influence multiplier. As one activist explained, networking has replaced 'vertical structures with broad networks working on consensus'. Globalization has produced a new kind of 'citizens of the world' that could be easily mobilized for a cause using what activists call the 'electronic *intifada*'.²⁶

Academic activists who wage this global 'electronic *intifada*' have used a number of tactics. First, they appeal to sympathetic religious and ethnic groups. The call for divestment was answered by the United States Presbyterian Church, whose board promised to divest itself of stock in companies that 'receive one million dollars in profits per year from investment in Israel or that have invested one million dollars or more in Israel'. The United Church for Christ is also scheduled to vote on divestment, and other mainline Christian denominations may follow suit.²⁷

Left-wing Jewish peace groups are equally important in amplifying the message of the critical scholars. Such groups come from the left-wing

spectrum of the American Jewish community and include Voices for Peace, Jews for Justice in the Middle East and numerous others. A local divestment initiative in Somerville, a Boston suburb, featured Hilda Silverman, the head of the now defunct New Jewish Agenda associated with the leftist Deconstructionist movement in America.²⁸ Personal links between US activists and the post-Zionists have resulted in other divestment drives. In one such collaboration Rachel Giora, Tanya Reinhart and Anat Matar helped to launch a divestment initiative in Ann Arbor, Michigan.²⁹

Perhaps the most effective tool in this regard is the extensive network of groups formed by college professors in the United States and Western Europe, where pro-Palestinian sentiment dominates the campuses. Israeli scholars reach out to other academic groups through the mixed Jewish-Palestinian *Ta'ayush* (Living Together) and the Faculty for Israeli Palestinian Peace (FFIPP). The FFIPP is a member of the Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace International (FFIPPI) that boasts some high-profile critical scholars – prior to his death last year Jacques Derrida was a member.

The FFIPPI is part of the International Network for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East, an archipelago-like conglomerate of groups who have been critical of Israel. One of the more radical is the Committee for Peace and Justice in Palestine organized by an Ohio State University philosophy professor, Joseph Levine. As a result of their activity, some 40 divestment initiatives have begun on American campuses to date. In fact, the divestment drive in the US was launched by Francis A. Boyle, a law professor at the University of Illinois in November 2000 and enthusiastically embraced by Richard A. Falk from Princeton, a long-time critic of US policy and a leading member of the human rights and anti-globalization NGO movement. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who led the fight against apartheid in South Africa also heartily endorsed the divestment movement.

It is virtually impossible to map the links between the groups and individuals that the FFIPP might have reached through the FFIPPI and the larger 'peace and justice in Palestine' Internet community. For instance, a Harvard professor active in the divestment movement sponsored an Arab senior who was found to be a fund raiser for the Holy Land Foundation. The US State Department and Justice Department accused the Foundation of raising money for Palestinian terrorist organizations.³⁰

This extensive university-based pro-Palestinian advocacy network has also provided post-Zionists with an academic platform. For instance, Berkeley University has invited Oren Yiftachel and Neve Gordon to serve as visiting professors. Michael Nagler, the head of Berkeley's Peace and Conflict Studies Institute, has long been sympathetic to the Campus activists and signed some of their petitions. Gordon, a graduate of Notre

Dame University, has been associated with its leftist The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace which strongly opposed the war in Iraq.³¹

Of course, the most successful case of networking involves the AUT's decision (overturned in May 2005), to boycott Haifa and Bar Ilan universities. In 1999, Haifa University graduate student, Theodore (Teddy) Katz, a long-time peace activist, submitted a thesis which claimed that Israeli forces had committed a massacre during military operations in Tantura, an Arab village outside Haifa in 1948. Veterans of the Alexandroni Brigade who fought in Tantura sued Katz for libel, forcing the university to appoint a committee to review the thesis. Ilan Pappé became involved and, after a dispute with the university authorities, whom he accused of trying to 'expel me because of the position I have taken in the Katz affair', in 2002 he decided to publicize his case abroad. Pappé networked with a group of sympathetic British academics, including the biology professor Steven Rose, a co-founder of the British Society for Social Responsibility. The Society had routinely castigated science for 'legitimizing bourgeois ideology'.³²

Rose and his wife Hilary organized a petition signed by some 125 academics, including Pappé, Reinhart, Giora, Eve Jablonka, and a handful of other Israeli scholars. The letter, published in the *Guardian* on 6 April, 2002, reflected the view of the activist group that Israel is not a true democracy although 'many national and European cultural institutions', including the European Union, regard it as European for 'the purpose of awarding grants and contracts'.

The letter urged a moratorium on dealing with Israeli universities in order to force Israel to negotiate for peace. Only some 40 British academics out of the more than 40,000 members of the AUT supported the original boycott, but the petition attracted international attention among the anti-globalization and anti-American scholarly contingent. John Docker, a professor associated with the Australian National University, who famously referred to the 11 September 2001 attacks as the 'ultimate aestheticization of politics', was an early supporter.³³

Pappé has also worked through Mona Baker, an Egyptian academic at Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) and Sue Blackwell, an English professor at Birmingham University, a veteran pro-Palestinian activist and a self-described anti-Zionist, and her colleagues Shereen Benjamin, Gargi Bhattacharyya, the then executive secretary of the AUT who pushed for a boycott resolution in 2003. Jewish groups in Great Britain accused Blackwell of promoting Palestinian terrorism and Nazi themes on her website, with one former AUT member describing the pro-boycott lobby as anti-Israeli and even anti-Semitic.³⁴ Although the petition drive failed, boycott sentiments spread in a variety of ways. The editor of *Political Geography* refused to accept a paper co-authored by Oren Yiftachel and Baker fired two Israeli academics from the advisory board of

two journals she edits, including Miriam Schlesinger, a well known Israeli peace activist.³⁵ Even though some of the core Israeli activists might have developed doubts about the wisdom of the boycott – an issue hotly debated in activist circles for a number of years – the Palestinian groups that *Ta'ayush* and FFIPP networked with became major players in the boycott initiative.

Taking an early lead, Omar Barghouti and Lisa Taraki established the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. Writing in the *Guardian*, Barghouti and Taraki stated that there is a 'clear analogy between Israel's apartheid regime and South Africa'.³⁶ The Palestinian Campaign was part of a larger Palestinian Non-Government Organization Network (PNGO), which the NGO Monitor accused of having links to extreme Palestinian groups that routinely defame Israel. Some of the PNGO affiliates, networking with the Palestinian human rights groups that have been linked to *Ta'ayush*, led the anti-Israeli drive during the United Nations anti-racism and human rights conference in Durban in 2001.³⁷

The Roses followed up with the British Committee for Universities in Palestine and other university-affiliated groups like Liverpool Friends of Palestine, offered a tape of Pappé's lecture at UMIST for sale. In the run-up to the April 2005 vote, London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), long a bastion of critical scholarship, organized a conference on *Resisting Israeli Apartheid: Strategies and Principles*, in which the Roses, Mona Baker, Barghouti, Taraki and Pappé participated.³⁸

As noted, the AUT decision was supported by some Israeli academics, notably Pappé, Reinhart and Ram, who wrote that Israel brought the boycott on itself because of the occupation. Kimmerling argued that, under the circumstances, the boycott would silence the only foes of Israeli apartheid, but added that he would support a total boycott along the lines of South Africa. Ophir felt that the boycott divided the academic community, but a general boycott would be in order. Other activists wanted to limit the boycott to Bar Ilan University because of its ties to Ariel College. Many of these post-Zionists also protested outside Ariel College after the Israeli government decided to turn it into a fully fledged university.³⁹

While the AUT decision is a dramatic illustration of the effectiveness of networking, the Israeli activists had other influence multipliers at their disposal. In particular, the Internet has amplified the message of critical scholars in ways that Gramsci could not have fathomed. Many of the scholars noted above, including Gordon, Ophir, Ram, and Kimmerling contribute to online magazines like *CounterPunch*, *Zmagazine*, *Dissent*, *borderlands*, and other radical publications.

The writings and petitions of the group are posted on countless other sites. For instance, Kimmerling and Shenhav's appeal to 'break the silence'

over the treatment of Yasser Arafat in Ramallah was approvingly reproduced on the website of the United States Communist Party. Gordon's critique of inequalities in Israel has been picked up by the Anti-Globalization Forum, a network of groups that fight against American capitalism and which promote a dependencia-like equitable distribution of world resources. Allan C. Brownfeld, the spokesman of the strongly anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, publishes articles about Post-Zionist scholars in the rabidly anti-Israel *Washington Report on the Middle East*. The writing of Tanya Reinhart is carried by the leftist *Tikkun* magazine of Michael Lerner. Lerner has extensive ties with Bay area activists and Berkeley academics like Nagler, who participated in *Tikkun's* spiritual conference. Internet-posted university teach-ins frequently host Israeli scholars. Interestingly, a recent teach-in at the University of Michigan against American imperialism featured Teddy Katz, whose case was the ostensible cause of the boycott decision. Sue Blackwell and other pro-Palestinian activists adopted the claim of Israeli academics that, even after an Israeli withdrawal, the Palestinian territory would remain one large prison, and this theme dominated a large rally in London in May 2005.⁴⁰

One of the ironies of all this is that neo-Nazi sites regularly quote Israeli scholars who accuse Israel of Nazi-like behaviour. The case of Professor Moshe Zimmerman from the Hebrew University, who occasionally signs the Campus petitions, is perhaps the most notorious. Zimmerman, who has a record of comparing aspects of IDF behaviour to Nazi Germany, has been recently sued by a group of settlers whose children he had compared to the Hitler Youth.⁴¹ Zimmerman's popularity among the neo-Nazis is illustrative of another phenomenon which serves as an influence multiplier of post-Zionist scholarship.

In the politically sensitive public discourse in the United States, Israelis and Jews provide convenient substitutes for those who do not want to be charged with anti-Semitism. In Germany those, like the former MK Yael Dayan, who compare Israeli treatment of Palestinians to Nazi rule in Europe, are in wide demand. To quote one observer, these individuals 'serve as mouthpieces for views others want to express'.⁴² The huge popularity of Noam Chomsky, the reigning radical critic of Israel, is undoubtedly related to the fact that, as a Jew, he cannot be accused of anti-Semitism. Although Chomsky and other outspoken critics of Israel are routinely labelled by other Jews as 'self-haters' such a charge does not carry the same resonance as anti-Semitism.

This is not a new phenomenon. Some 20 years ago, the Presbyterian Church in the United States invited Haifa University professor of psychology Benjamin Beit Hallahmi to spend a Sabbatical in order to write a book about Israel's military links to the then apartheid regime in South Africa.⁴³ Among the current favourites are Israeli critical scholars

who support divestment. Indeed, according to Reinhart and two of her colleagues, activists in the United States invited her to join the Ann Arbor initiative to undermine the much publicized comment of Harvard president Lawrence H. Sumner that divestment is 'anti-Semitic'.⁴⁴

The activities of this small group, and the influence multipliers that magnify their message, have presented Israel with problems ranging from the embarrassing to the potentially dangerous. For instance, Diaspora Jews have argued for years that comparisons between the IDF and the Nazis have fanned the flames of anti-Semitism. Alexander Brenner, a Jewish leader from Berlin, complained that Zimmerman's comparisons make it hard for German Jews to fight the neo-Nazis.⁴⁵ The NGO Monitor reported that during a recent session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), referred to Israel's war crimes, its ethnic cleaning policy, and the Jenin massacre 'in language virtually taken from Reinhart and Pappé [and] ... declared that apartheid practiced against the Palestinian people is worse than the former South African one'.

Amnon Vidan, the head of Amnesty International Israel and an activist with Courage to Refuse, led the effort to have the term 'war crimes' inserted into Amnesty International's annual report.⁴⁶ BADIL, which, according to the NGO Monitor, leads a 'subversive Palestinian campaign for the "right of return"' has used the Olga Document, which was signed by a number of activists like Bilezki, Ophir, Shenhav, Ram and Yiftachel, in its European conferences.⁴⁷ These, and other, charges were then adopted to denounce Israel during the UN-sponsored Durban Conference in 2001.

Divestment initiatives in universities and communities have strained the resources of Israeli consulates across the United States and complicated efforts of Jewish groups to fight it. According to one news report, the Israeli government is worried that the Caterpillar Corporation may succumb to divestment pressures, especially as the pro-Palestinian activist Rachel Corrie, who was crushed by a Caterpillar bulldozer in Gaza, has become a symbol of resistance for the critics of Israel.⁴⁸ Although the AUT boycott was overturned, the Israeli government established a special task force headed by Benjamin Netanyahu to deflect future actions of the boycott lobby

As noted, over the years frustrated Israeli politicians and some media outlets have called upon the universities to fire or censure their 'tenured radicals'. Both the Justice Ministry and Foreign Ministry have sought to explore whether charges of sedition could be brought against some activists. Others have appealed to the sense of patriotism and civic duty of critical scholars, only to be told that it is a sense of duty that compels them to speak out in the first place. As the current turmoil over the AUT vote indicates, there is no easy solution to the problem. To clarify the issue, an

analysis of some lessons from the United States, which has been embroiled in scholarly activism for decades, is helpful.

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE RESPONSE TO CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN AMERICA: LESSONS FOR ISRAEL?

As noted earlier, post-Zionist scholars are the intellectual disciples of their American counterparts. Many studied in the United States, including Tanya Reinhart who was a graduate student of Chomsky and is the leader of the 'Chomskites' in Israel. This should come as no surprise since in the past few decades critical scholarship has become dominant in the humanities and social science departments of colleges in the United States. The most current survey of college professors reveals that three-quarters of faculty members describe themselves as liberal. In elite institutions this number reaches 87%. This percentage is even higher in English literature, political science and sociology departments. The overall figures represent a 20% increase from the first comprehensive survey of academics taken more than two decades ago. According to the survey, conservative views are an impediment to faculty advancement, especially in the more prestigious colleges.⁴⁹

This ideological bias in academia has had a significant impact on the structure of academic opportunity, most notably publishing. Because of peer review, many journals and elite academic presses have come to reflect critical perspectives. For instance, during the Cold War, the revisionist paradigm in Sovietology, which viewed the Soviet Union as a progressively pluralizing country with a viable economy, virtually crowded out the older totalitarian perspective associated with Zbigniew Brzezinski and the eminent Harvard historian Richard Pipes. Pipes, who argued that communism was coercive, corrupt, brittle and destined to collapse – a view also held by the Reagan administration – was boycotted by prestigious university presses. The preference for revisionist scholarship was so prevalent that Oxford University Press published a book by a leading Sovietologist denying the mass killings of the Stalinist era. Two years later, perestroika revealed the true extent of the communist atrocities, estimated today at more than 20 million.⁵⁰

Critical scholars have virtually monopolized Middle East studies and its professional organization, MESA. In his trenchant analysis, *Ivory Towers on Sand*, Martin Kramer noted that Middle Eastern studies have reflected an extreme critique of Israel and scholarship which mixes polemics, ideology and activism. For instance, Edward Said was a member of the Palestinian National Council and Rashid Khalidi, who inherited Said's mantle at Columbia University, served as a spokesman for the PLO.⁵¹ Critical scholarship is also served by a large network of presses such as Verso and Zed Books, which describes its goal as changing 'oppressive

structures and dominant ideologies around the world'. Among others, the press offers titles in support of Chomsky's thesis that America is a 'terrorist' and 'rogue' state.⁵² Zed's *Challenge of Post Zionism* with chapters by Ram, Pappe, Herzog and other post-Zionists was highly acclaimed by critical scholars everywhere. John Docker, the Australian boycott supporter, called it a 'fine collection of essays'.⁵³

The MESA paradigm is so prevalent that more mainstream university presses have taken to publishing Israeli post-Zionists. The Berkeley-based California University Press leads the way, followed by Columbia University Press, whose Middle East department was recently accused of excessive politicization, and Michigan University Press. Cambridge University Press, which published books denying the resurgence of radical Islam, has become a serious outlet for Israeli critical research, adding Pappe and Zertal to its roster of authors.⁵⁴

Middle East Centres and women studies programmes in elite universities provide visiting opportunities for Israeli critical scholars, beyond what their rather modest academic output would have normally warranted.⁵⁵ The United States Institute for Peace is another venue which showcases critical scholars. Zertal was made a visiting fellow and Ram was invited to participate in a roundtable on 'Globalization and the Arab-Israeli conflict'.⁵⁶ This affinity for critical scholarship prompted President George W. Bush to appoint Daniel Pipes, an outspoken opponent of campus extremism, to the board of directors of the Institute in 2003. Even the Association for Israel Studies (AIS), partially supported by Jewish grants, has featured a disproportionate number of critical scholars, either as officers, board members, keynote speakers, recipients of book awards, or subjects of plenary panels.⁵⁷

With few opportunities to penetrate an academic system dominated by left-wing theorists, American conservatives and neo-conservatives have decided to bypass it, creating a parallel system of scholarship. For instance, the Hoover Institute was tasked with balancing the liberalism of Stanford University, while the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) in Philadelphia played the same role with regard to the University of Pennsylvania. These independent centres of scholarship and think-tanks have provided employment opportunities for conservative and neo-conservative scholars as well as acting as outlets for academic and policy publications, such as the highly respected *Orbis* journal.

Daniel Pipes, the head of the Middle East Forum, which originated in the FPRI, has been one of the very few to sound an early alarm about the dangers of fundamentalist revival and terrorism.⁵⁸ Over time, these and other alternative venues, alongside more established publications such as *Commentary*, have challenged the dominance of critical scholarship and provided the intellectual underpinning for the neo-conservative paradigm in American foreign policy.

Like other American influences, independent centres have been spreading in Israel, including the Shalem Centre, the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, and the Jerusalem Summit. Shalem's Yoram Hazoni and its periodical *Azure* have produced work that countered the 'New Historians' and challenged their efforts to rewrite Israeli history textbooks.⁵⁹ Modelled on the American Campus Watch, the Israel Academia Monitor has begun reporting on the writings of post-Zionists. However, this relatively modest effort has failed, so far, to provide the sort of intellectual pluralism that neo-conservatism has introduced into the American public discourse. Israel lacks the media network that has provided neo-conservative public intellectuals and scholars with a highly effective platform. On the contrary, Israeli journalists often quote critical scholars because of their alleged expertise. For instance, a recent article in the leading Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* listed Ophir as a critic of the March of the Living without revealing to the readers his role as an activist who accuses the government of 'genocidal tendencies toward the Palestinians'.⁶⁰

The failure of mainstream academics to challenge their critical colleagues enhances their legitimacy. For instance, in spite of ample empirical evidence that the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi gap has declined significantly, the claims of Shenhav and other 'Jewish Arabs' have never been seriously debated. Part of the problem stems from the fact that the behavioural scholars are reluctant to mix politics with scholarship, and many believe that a public discussion would attract even more attention to what they consider a marginal fringe. The Van Leer Institute under the leadership of Shimshon Zelniker has provided an additional measure of public respectability to post-Zionists. Many of them were named fellows of the Institute which has hosted conferences where strategies for combating Israel's 'apartheid state' are discussed. Van Leer is also a co-publisher of *Theory and Criticism*, the flagship journal of critical scholars, co-founded by Ophir. The journal is a purveyor of so much criticism of Israel and Zionism that the editor of *Azure* described the volume devoted to Israel's 50th anniversary as the 'gloom and doom' report.⁶¹

The fact that many post-Zionists hold senior academic positions makes it easier for them to invoke the mantle of academic respectability. Anat Bilezki is the head of the philosophy department at Tel Aviv University, and Hanna Herzog and Yehuda Shenhav have served in this capacity in the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Tel Aviv. Pappé, a senior lecturer at Haifa University, is normally described as a leading professor of political science. In a country where independent centres and think-tanks are not the norm, and where universities are seen as the sole repositories of scholarly legitimacy, an academic post is a real advantage. Kimmerling, a senior professor in the prestigious department of sociology at the Hebrew University, dismissed Campus Watch as a 'pseudo academic think tank'.⁶²

Still, legitimacy confirmed by a university setting and buttressed by elite university presses cannot guarantee good scholarship. Just as the collapse of communism disgraced revisionist Sovietologists, the 11 September 2001 attacks discredited many leading Middle East specialists, including a long list of MESA presidents who had either ignored the revival of fundamentalist Islam or declared that it was a pluralistic harbinger of Muslim democracy. Many top Middle East experts vilified Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes for writing about resurgent Islam and mocked terrorist experts like Steven Emerson as 'terrorologists'.⁶³ Opponents of the war in Iraq and the neo-conservative paradigm that drove it mobilized almost the entire community of international relations experts. Using academic venues and paid advertisements in the press, IR professors and their Middle East studies colleagues warned that the war would lead to the eruption of the 'Arab street', to a civil war in Iraq and a 'second Vietnam'. Although the situation in Iraq is not stable, none of these predictions have come true and if the democratizing dynamics created by the war in Iraq continue to spread, they may yet undermine Israel's critical scholars. Until such a time, a more comprehensive discussion on the linkage between scholarship, activism and academic freedom is needed.

NOTES

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