



Preface by Richard A. Falk / Foreword by Cynthia McKinney

# We Will Not Be Silenced

*The Academic Repression of Israel's Critics*

Edited by William I Robinson & Maryam S Griffin



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The Academic Repression  
of Israel's Critics

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# Introduction: Academic Repression on US University Campuses

*William I. Robinson and Maryam S. Griffin*

A storm is raging on college and university campuses across the United States.

A worldwide campaign in support of the Palestinian freedom struggle has taken off in recent years, spurred on in this age of global digital media by omnipresent images of Israeli brutality against the Palestinians and the everyday humiliations of its occupation of Palestinian lands, now in its fifth decade. As awareness has grown over Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights and of international law, as well as US government and transnational corporate complicity in these violations, so too has the movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Ground zero for this movement in the United States is college and university campuses. Some 25 years after the fall of apartheid in South Africa, the movement to end apartheid and settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine has spread among a new generation of campus activists. The issue has inflamed passions and engulfed students, faculty, administrators, and even government officials in conflicts over free speech and academic freedom.

At the core of these conflicts is the attempt by what we will call here the Israel lobby to intimidate those on and off campus who have the courage to take a stand for Palestinian freedom. As the veil is lifting and the tide of public opinion begins to turn with increased awareness of the occupation, Israeli war crimes, and US complicity, the lobby has drastically stepped up its campaigns to silence and repress those who have spoken out for Palestinian freedom. It has systematically targeted persecution scholars, academics, and students who speak out on campuses and in our communities against Israeli policies and for Palestinian rights. Scholars have been turned away for jobs, denied tenure and promotion, rejected for funding, expelled from institutions, maligned and vilified. Student organizations have faced harassment and sanctions. Individual students

have been threatened with expulsion. Some have even been criminally investigated and prosecuted.

The lobby consists of a network of individuals and organizations aligned with the Israeli government that actively works to stifle any criticism of Israel or US support for it and to silence any mention of Palestinian rights. We use the term lobby despite certain limitations; there is no ideal term to describe this network of loosely coordinated, overlapping, and interlocked advocacy groups, some of whose leaders have held high-level positions in the US government and occupy key positions in think tanks, universities, media outlets, political parties, and civil society organizations.

As with other lobbies that seek to influence the US political system and policy, both domestic and foreign, the Israel lobby seeks to shape a US policy toward Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East in a way favorable to the Israeli state's objectives. However, what distinguishes the Israel lobby from others is the breadth and depth of its influence over policy toward Israel and toward the Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as the resources and pressure that it brings to bear on those who criticize Israel or come out in public support for Palestinian freedom, as we will discuss in more detail below and as the testimonials in this anthology bear out. It is important to note in this regard that the lobby is not united by religion or ethnicity but rather by its political agenda and its determination to ostracize, censor, and punish anyone who criticizes Israel or advocates for the Palestinians.

There is a considerable literature on the Israel lobby in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the landmark study among these is *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, published in 2007 by political scientists John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard University. "It is difficult to talk about the lobby's influence on American foreign policy, at least in the mainstream media in the United States, without being accused of anti-Semitism or labeled a self-hating Jew," wrote Mearsheimer and Walt. "It is just as difficult to criticize Israeli policies or question US support for Israel in polite company. America's generous and unconditional support for Israel is rarely questioned, because groups in the lobby use their power to make sure that public discourse echoes its strategic and moral arguments for the special relationship [between Israel and the United States]." They went on to observe:

The lobby rewards or punishes politicians largely through an ability to guide the flow of campaign contributions. Organizations in the lobby also put pressure on the executive branch through a number of mechanisms, including working through government officials who are sympathetic to their views. Equally important, the lobby has gone to considerable lengths to shape public discourse about Israel by putting pressure on the media and academia and by establishing a tangible presence in influential foreign policy think tanks. Efforts to shape public perceptions often include charging critics of Israel with anti-Semitism, a tactic designed to discredit and marginalize anyone who challenges the current relationship [of steadfast US government support for Israel].<sup>2</sup>

As if intentionally to lend credence to one of the book's claims, upon publication of their study, Israel advocacy organizations promptly labeled Mearsheimer and Walt "anti-Semitic."<sup>3</sup>

Mearsheimer and Walt identified as key organizations in the lobby the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the American Jewish Congress, the Zionist Organization of America, the Israel Policy Forum, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, Americans for a Safe Israel, Hadassah, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, the Middle East Forum, and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, among others, as well as at least three dozen pro-Israel Political Action Committees, or PACs, organizations notorious in the money-driven US political system for raising and spending money to elect or defeat candidates in national, state, and local elections. While a number of these organizations are active in campaigns to silence and repress critics of Israel on US college and university campuses, there is a second tier of several dozen organizations that liaise with the major Washington-based lobby groups and that have formed a tightly-knit network, the "Israel on Campus Coalition."

In a shocking and deeply disturbing expose of the inner workings of this Coalition (see Chapter 1 of this anthology) University of California professors Goldberg and Makdisi document how the lobby monitors campus political life and mounts coordinated campaigns of harassment and repression against their designated targets, employing "character assassinations, selective misquotation, the willful distortion of the record, the fabrication of falsehoods, and an utter disregard for

the truth.” The targets of such censorship campaigns, as they show and as become clear in the 14 testimonials we publish here, are students and faculty who criticize Israel or support Palestinian freedom in and out of the classroom, but also university administrators and local and state politicians. Administrators are pressured and sometimes even blackmailed with a cutoff of financial donations by wealthy pro-Zionist donors to censor and discipline the offending party, while politicians are lobbied to apply pressure on university officials – although it must be observed that pro-Zionist academics, administrators, and politicians are often themselves a part of these campaigns.

Meanwhile, in the years since Mearsheimer and Walt’s landmark study was published, several new books, articles, and reports have appeared on the battles raging in the United States and worldwide in support of Palestinian freedom and on the lobby and its repressive activities. In 2015, the New York-based legal advocacy organization, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and Palestine Legal, a non-profit organization that is, according to their website, “dedicated to protecting the civil and constitutional rights of people in the US who speak out for Palestinian freedom,” published a seminal report, *The Palestine Exception to Free Speech*, documenting the “chilling and censoring of Palestine advocacy in the United States.”<sup>4</sup> In that same year, Jewish Voice for Peace, a faith-based Jewish organization that calls for an end to Israeli occupation and apartheid and supports the boycott of Israel (see below), published its own report, *Stifling Dissent: How Israel’s Defenders Use False Charges of Anti-Semitism to Limit the Debate Over Israel on Campus*.<sup>5</sup> In addition, several scholarly studies and conferences have in recent years addressed the censorship and repression that targets supporters of Palestinian rights in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond these reports, books, and public fora, there are many important studies on Palestine for those interested in the historical and political background.<sup>7</sup> Rather than duplicate what is already available, this book seeks to provide a special window, through *first-hand testimonial accounts*, into how the Israel lobby has worked on US campuses to suppress free speech and academic freedom. These testimonials tell the story of academics, scholars, and students who have been victim to the repression of the Israel lobby in the United States. Some of these cases of persecution have been aired publicly – in the press and social media – while other cases have gone poorly publicized, if at all, often as a result

of an intentional blackout. Academics who become targets of the lobby's aggressive tactics are affected unevenly. This makes it difficult for certain kinds of stories to get attention even in the absence of a media blackout because it may be difficult for targeted individuals to come forward without fear of reprisals. As we shall see in these testimonials, the tactics of Israel advocacy organizations vary, from calls for outright institutional sanction to more subtle aggressions that nonetheless have a cumulative effect of creating a hostile work environment or career-long stress. Even the exact same tactics take different tolls depending on the status of the targeted individual. Instructors with precarious appointments such as single term lecturers and graduate students are far more vulnerable than tenured faculty, as are individual students over student groups that may draw on collective resources. The impacts of persecutions are similarly felt differentially across race, gender, and other social categories, with Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, and other racially or ethnically oppressed groups – and especially women from these groups – often placed in particularly vulnerable situations, so that fight-back can often place additional pressures on those that are already the most overburdened.

As this tide turns, many of those whose stories are here told have been able to triumph over academic repression, in both direct and indirect ways. Others, however, have yet to be granted redress for the persecution they have suffered. We want this edited collection to be a beacon of inspiration that scholars and students who face such persecution are not alone and that, with collective struggle linked to the larger community, we can beat back repression on our campuses; that even if there are risks in speaking out, academic freedom and justice can triumph.

### **Zionism and Palestine**

Why has the Palestinian struggle against colonialism and apartheid inflamed such conflict and passionate emotion, and also generated widespread fear of speaking out among those who believe in freedom, justice, and self-determination? After all, there was not the same level of fear in the United States among those who spoke out against apartheid in South Africa decades earlier. The intimidation experienced by supporters of justice for Palestinians results in part from the way the political issue has been deeply misunderstood by a significant portion of the US and international public. Popular misperceptions over the nature

of this conflict are, in large part, a deliberate outcome of the narrative that has been propagated for seven decades by the Zionist movement – a narrative that has enjoyed the explicit approval of and recitation by the US government alongside its steadfast political, military, and economic support for Israel. The Zionist narrative, however, has come under increasing challenge as the international public has become more aware of the colonial nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict and global movements in solidarity with Palestinians have proliferated.

The creation of Israel as an ethnically exclusive “Jewish state” was part of the new wave of European colonialism that swept Africa, the Middle East, and Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same moment that the peoples of those regions achieved decolonization and freedom in the post-World War II era, Palestine was being recolonized and remains one of the last vestiges worldwide of that late nineteenth and early twentieth century wave of European settler colonialism. It was in the context of European overseas colonial empires that the Zionist movement emerged in the late nineteenth century as a particular blend of colonialism and the racial nationalisms that swept Europe. Racial nationalism called for the creation of “ethnically pure” nations in the West and deployed racial supremacist ideologies to justify these colonial projects. Examples of the ideology of settler colonialism bolstered by racial nationalism included Manifest Destiny in the United States, which provided a convenient rationale for US Western expansion, the seizure of Mexican and Indian territories, and, later on, the invasion and colonization of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines, and the South Pacific islands. Ironically, as Jewish-American scholar Norman Finkelstein has shown in his historical research, the Nazi call for a “racially pure Aryan” Germany sprung from the same ideological well of racial nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Zionism called for the establishment of an “ethnically pure” Jewish state, although, to this day, the Zionist movement involves a confused and contradictory discourse that conflates religion, nationality, and ethnicity.

Early Zionists were drawn from the European Jewish middle class and intelligentsia who called for the emigration of Jews from their various homelands and resettlement in a new Jewish state. Zionist leaders lobbied European colonial powers to support such a state in exchange for Zionist support for colonization and imperial design. The father of Zionism, the Austrian Theodor Herzl, first approached the German Kaiser, and then the Russian Czar, and later the Pope for an imperial

alliance with his movement, before successfully lobbying the British to support the creation of Israel as a British colonial outpost. “England, with her possessions in Asia should be most interested in Zionism for the shortest route to India by way of Palestine,” he said. “England’s great politicians were the first to recognize the need for colonial expansion ... and so I must believe that here in England the idea of Zionism, which is a colonial idea, should be easily and quickly understood.”<sup>9</sup> Most Jewish people in Europe at the time paid little attention to Zionism, preferring to fight anti-Semitism in their own countries or to immigrate to the United States.

The rise of power of the Nazis and the horrific holocaust that ensued, however, led to a massive increase of European Jewish migration to Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s. The British had taken over Palestine as a colonial protectorate with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the close of World War I. Under British colonial auspices, and with critical US support, the United Nations – which at the time had no African or Asian member states, not to mention that the Palestinians themselves were never even consulted – approved in 1947 a Partition Plan. The Plan called for granting 55 percent of historic Palestine to the Jewish settlers, who, at the time, comprised 35 percent of the residential population and owned 6 percent of the land, and the remaining 45 percent of land for an independent Arab state. The Zionists proceeded to create Israel through a military campaign of terrorism and ethnic cleansing – what Israel calls its “war of independence” – that involved the massacre of thousands of Palestinians, the permanent destruction of over 400 Palestinian villages, and the uprooting and expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland.<sup>10</sup>

When this war came to a close in 1948, the newly established State of Israel controlled nearly 80 percent of historic Palestine. The remaining 20 percent was seized by Israel following the 1967 Israeli invasion of the West Bank, the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. These lands have come to be known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPT, and the portion of them that has not been directly annexed by Israel remains under a 49-year (and counting) military occupation. Since 1948, Palestinians have endured ongoing ethnic cleansing, colonization, racial discrimination, and military occupation, in violation of international law and despite repeated condemnation by the international community, including the United Nations (UN) and human rights organizations.

The official Zionist narrative portrays Israel as a democratic and heroic underdog facing hostile Arabs. It claims that granting Jewish immigrants their own state to the exclusion of Palestinians was just compensation for historic anti-Semitism in Europe and as well is God's will – a land promised 4,000 years ago, as stated in the Old Testament, to Jewish people. It has been Israel's leading Jewish historians themselves who in recent years have researched government and military archives that have been declassified to draft what is known in Israel as the "new historiography." This historical research belies the official narrative and demonstrates how Israel was founded on the calculated and cynical ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

Today, Israel is an international outlaw state and an apartheid state. The UN General Assembly has continuously ratified every year since its approval in 1948 UN Resolution 194, which establishes the right of all those Palestinians expelled in 1948 to return to their homes and to receive compensation. And UN Resolution 242, approved in 1967 and continuously ratified by the international community each year since then, declares Israel's occupation of the OPT illegal and calls for Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders. Israel is also in violation of other articles of the UN Charter and several dozen resolutions of the UN Security Council, the Geneva Conventions, the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, international humanitarian law, and International Court of Justice advisory opinions. It has been repeatedly condemned by every major international human rights organization for the ongoing denial of Palestinian rights, for committing numerous war crimes, for illegal detentions, torture, extra-judicial killings, forced relocation and exile, among other violations.

In 2009, 15 years after the fall of South African apartheid, the South African Human Sciences Research Council sent a high level international delegation to the OPT to investigate the charge of Israeli practices of colonialism and apartheid as defined by international law.<sup>11</sup> Regarding colonialism, the report found that Israel's policy is demonstrably to fragment the West Bank and annex part of it permanently to Israel using Jewish-only residential colonies, which is the hallmark of settler colonialism. Israel, the report observed, has appropriated land and water in the OPT, merged the Palestinian economy with its own, and imposed a system of domination over Palestinians to ensure their subjugation

to these measures. Regarding apartheid, it found that Israel's laws and policies in the OPT fit the definition of apartheid in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Israeli law conveys privileges to Jewish settlers and disadvantages Palestinians in the same territory on the basis of their respective identities, which function as racialized identities (Jews and Palestinians) in the sense provided by international law. In sum, the report observed that Israel's policies are a corollary to five of the six "inhumane acts" listed by the Convention. It concluded that: the three pillars of apartheid in South Africa are all practiced by Israel in the OPT. These include demarcating the population into distinct racial groups and according superior rights, privileges, and services to one; segregating the population into different geographic areas allocated by law to different racial groups; and imposing a "matrix of draconian 'security' laws and policies" to suppress any opposition to the regime and reinforce the system of racial domination.

Racism and discrimination are actually built into Israel's legal and institutional structure. In fact, according to the State of Israel there is no such thing as an Israeli nationality because, according to the Israeli High Court, "there is no Israeli nation separate from the Jewish people,"<sup>12</sup> defined as Jewish people residing in Israel and the OPT as well as those living anywhere in the world, whether or not they have ever been to Israel or have any connection whatsoever to the country. Such a system, *by definition*, excludes Palestinians from the nation of their birth and their ancestors.

In the OPT, there is one legal and administrative system – Israeli civil law – applied to the Jewish settler population, which number now about 750,000, and another – military law – applied to the Palestinian population. Inside Israel itself, Palestinians (the latter make up 20 percent of the population) are subject to institutional discrimination.<sup>13</sup> "In defining itself as the Jewish state," observes Saree Makdisi,

Israel establishes a major distinction between what it calls "nationality" and what it calls "citizenship"; and it is the only state that explicitly identifies itself not as the state of its actual citizens, but rather as the state of a people, most of whom have no connection to it, let alone any intention of ever living there.

This distinction between “citizenship” and “nationality,” he notes “has proven rhetorically useful to Israel; it can declare that it treats all its citizens equally, for example, because most forms of discrimination in the state are not established on the basis of citizenship as such, but rather on the basis of nationality.”<sup>14</sup>

### US Support for Israeli Colonialism and Apartheid

The outrage over such a blatantly racist system, the atrocities of Israeli colonialism, military occupation, and apartheid has shocked the sense of social justice and equality of a growing number of people among the international public, ourselves included, and spurred them into solidarity with the Palestinian freedom struggle. Yet the Israel lobby in the United States and around the world routinely condemns this solidarity as “anti-Semitism.” This is no less ludicrous a claim than it would be to characterize criticism of human rights violations in Egypt, Syria, or Iran as “anti-Muslim” or condemnations of apartheid in South Africa as “anti-White.” It is as well a claim that, in the view of renowned Jewish-American scholar and Israel critic Norman Finkelstein, intentionally manipulates the Nazi holocaust experience and Jewish suffering.<sup>15</sup>

If such a claim for the informed observer is a fairly obvious attempt to delegitimize opposition to Israeli apartheid and support for Palestinian rights – and to rationalize intimidation and repression by the lobby – it has nonetheless gained traction as a result of the support it has enjoyed from none other than the US State Department. The State Department revised its definition of anti-Semitism earlier this century to include the so-called “three Ds”: “*demonizing Israel*,” a category that includes “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis” and “blaming Israel for all inter-religious or political tension”; *double standard* for Israel, which involves “applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded by any other democratic nation” and “multilateral organizations focusing on Israel only for peace or human rights investigations”; *delegitimizing Israel*, which includes “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and denying Israel the right to exist.”<sup>16</sup>

This definition has many flaws, which stem from the conflation of state, religion, and ethnicity, as we have already observed, so that criticizing a