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REPORT ON ISRAELI-DUTCH ACADEMIC TIES

Independent Expert Committee on Israeli-Dutch Academic Ties

v2 - 25 June 2025

Preface, opening statement and content of the report

1. *The need for an independent expert report on Dutch academic ties with Israel*

What binds all Dutch universities is a commitment to the pursuit and transmission of knowledge and truth. This core task and responsibility, moreover, is further elaborated by the specific values and mission of each university, which also gives each institution its unique characteristics and strengths. A quick glance at the mission statements of some of the largest universities gives us additional insight into how universities in the Netherlands envision their academic mission.

[Radboud University](#), for instance, states: “We focus our attention on taking care of each other and the world around us and we are committed to equal rights for social and cultural minorities.” The [University of Amsterdam](#) insists: “We promote an open and curious attitude. We want to equip students not only with knowledge, but also with the skills to navigate a dynamic world.”. [Utrecht University](#) emphasizes: “We are working towards a better world. [...] We give students the space to develop themselves. In so doing, we make substantial contributions to society, both now and in the future.” The mission of [Erasmus University Rotterdam](#) is to “create positive social impact. We strive to understand contemporary, complex societal challenges and to contribute to their solution through our education and research.” [Maastricht University](#) aspires “to empower students to become active, globally oriented citizens and critical thinkers.” “Connecting, innovative, responsible and free”, are core values at [Leiden University](#). [Delft University of Technology](#)’s mission is to “conduct research at a world-class level” “in a socially responsible manner”.

What this overview tells us, is that Dutch universities have unmistakably chosen to shape their academic task and vision in a way that makes the pursuit of knowledge and truth relevant to society and the major challenges of our times. They envision a university that abandons the ivory tower model and explicitly includes in its mission the responsibility towards science as well as the responsibility towards society, recognizing that the two are not separate. These are also often the words that figure in the variations of formulas that doctoral candidates must say as part of the ceremony of being awarded the legally recognized degree of PhD.

The notion of responsibility is centred on the idea of “response” – how does one relate to the calls one is confronted with, but also, how should one respond to questions about one’s actions, which includes appealing to neutrality or remaining silent. While scholarly and scientific practices encompass various and elaborate ways to achieve scientific responsibility (through different theoretical and methodological paradigms; different protocols to deal with sensitive topics or vulnerable populations), the question of academic responsibility towards society might seem more elusive. Which is even more reason to attend thoroughly to what this responsibility entails, in the light of serious and urgent societal questions and challenges.

Since October 2023, Dutch universities boards have repeatedly been asked by their students and staff, by means of petitions, protests, etc. to acknowledge, assess and address their possible complicity in the ongoing atrocity crimes, including genocide, by the Israeli government in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories more broadly. This poses a major ethical and political challenge in a country where, despite being the host of both ICJ and ICC,

the political establishment, ideologically and materially, supports the Israeli government and its illegal actions (including illegal occupation), notably through trade and the sales of arms and military material. Yet it also poses a particular interpellation of Dutch universities, who have institutional ties with Israeli universities that are complicit in war and war crimes, crimes against humanity among them apartheid, and genocide. In January 2024, the International Court of Justice first formally warned of a plausible genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. The ethical appeal thus also became even more strongly a juridical and legal appeal.

While students and staff at Dutch universities have responded to appeals and have added their voices and actions to global campaigns to stop complicity with genocide from the outset, the anti-genocide protests have intensified, notably through student encampments, from May 2024 onwards. Dutch universities, local and national authorities have first responded to this intensification of anti-genocide protest with repressive measures and extreme police violence on different campuses. Eventually, over the past year universities have been compelled to set up commissions and taskforces, to investigate the topic of academic relations with Israeli universities. Most of these reports have confirmed that Israel is in breach of many human rights and committing atrocity crimes, and for this reason, have recommended that Dutch universities suspend or cut institutional ties.¹

While these initiatives are overall commendable in their intentions, they are also some critical points to note. First, the process through which these commissions were formed was often not transparent: the logic behind the composition of the commissions was often not clear, including to the commission members themselves. It did become apparent that often neither expertise on (settler)colonialism, international law, and atrocity crimes including genocide, nor expertise on Israel/Palestine at large, nor ethics and ethics of research and teaching, were a leading criterion. Second, and relatedly, the commissions were generally asked to evaluate the micro-level cooperations of Dutch universities in individual projects and programs with Israeli universities, without being requested or allowed to examine the larger geo-political or historical context in which Israeli universities are funded, that is them being financially and politically supported by and dependent on a heavily militarised state apparatus that is responsible for atrocity crimes including the violent displacement and starvation of a people under occupation and a plausible genocide.

When facing a plausible genocide, a micro-level approach by individual universities reviewing their individual projects and collaborations is largely insufficient. A structural response is needed, to send a clear and powerful signal, both internally to staff and students at Dutch institutions of higher learning, and externally, to those breaking fundamental human rights and international law, as well as to those being materially harmed on a daily basis in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. Both these points indicate that the work of the commissions was not set up with the academic rigour and vision that is expected from our universities, especially in the light of the magnitude of the ethical and juridical questions and obligations before us. Moreover, despite their conclusions, these reports have not directly led to a systematic suspending or cutting of all institutional ties. Some universities have opted to suspend or cut only the ties with certain projects or cooperations, or to make exemptions for some ties, and consistency and a principled stance were often absent. This has notably been the case between the moment we decided to embark upon this report and the time of its

completion today. Many universities, moreover, have still failed to act upon these reports or have done so only superficially, that is in words rather than actions.

Knowledge comes with responsibility. This involves an obligation for scholarship and science to be transparent, systematic, and rigorous in the pursuit of knowledge. This also implies, at the very least, that university boards do not turn away from expertise and structural analyses, and that they act on the concluding reports of these expert commissions, when they are the result of a solid investigation. The responsibility to knowledge is increasingly crucial in the current political context: amid a global structural attack on knowledge (production), it is imperative that universities keep valuing and defending knowledge and push back against the conflating of knowledge with opinions or feelings and the relativism this entails. Moreover, knowledge involves an obligation to reaffirm the basic shared values and principles of our society – with a bare minimum of upholding international law, human rights, and democratic values, including an ethical imperative to “do no harm”.

In the light of the responsibility of Dutch universities to science and society, and given the limitations of the initiatives taken so far by individual universities to suspend the institutional collaboration with Israeli universities,

We – a group of researchers from different Dutch universities – felt compelled to write an independent report on Dutch academic ties with Israel, and to bring together expertise, primarily from within the Netherlands, but at times from international colleagues.

This report is finalized almost a year after the first ethics reports were commissioned by a Dutch university. When we began working on this report a few months ago at the start of 2025, hardly any Dutch university had followed up the conclusions of their ethics commissions. As we publish this report, a few universities have begun to cut a few institutional ties with Israeli institutions. This is only a fraction of what needs to be done in the face of complicity with genocide.

This report can be read as a whole or separately as chapters. In it, you will find facts, knowledge and references that help substantiate the call to structurally break ties with Israeli universities – which, it bears repeating, does not concern individual collaborations but only institutional ones. We also hope to update it as often as possible and welcome feedback, critique, more knowledge etc.

With regard to our use of the term genocide, as this is an expert report, we use this term as it has been determined by [Holocaust and genocide scholars](#) that it is applicable to the situation in Gaza since at least December 2023. They have stated this is a genocide and that this concept must be used preventatively and not only post-factum, as normatively entailed in the UN Genocide Convention (‘Four Facts about Israel’s Genocide’, n.d.; *The Guardian* 2024; ‘A Textbook Case of Genocide’, n.d.; Goldberg 2024; Jamshidi 2024).

2. *The report's call: all Dutch universities must suspend all institutional collaborations in projects and programs with all Israeli universities*

In the light of the societal responsibility of universities, the seriousness and urgency of stopping the genocide in Gaza, the structural dependence of Israeli universities on the Israeli government, and the necessity of a structural and coordinated action to achieve the strongest and fastest possible result.

This report claims that all Dutch universities must suspend all *institutional* collaborations in projects and programs with all Israeli universities. This does not mean interrupting individual collaborations by and with scholars from those universities.

The main reasons for this claim are analysed in more detail in the different chapters whose content is summarized here below, (and at the beginning of each chapter):

1. [Israeli universities are complicit with the genocide](#) in Gaza by collaborating with the Israeli military and security industry, by not taking institutional positions against the government actions, and by actively silencing of critical voices of students and staff, especially Palestinians inside their own institutions.
2. [A so-called scholasticide and educide has happened](#), with the systematic, intentional destruction of the Palestinian educational system and institutions, including the murder, detention, or harassment of teachers and students, and the erasure of Palestinian intellectual and cultural heritage.
3. [Research raising strong questions about dual military civilian use](#) (forbidden by EU regulations) and violations of human rights is performed by consortia of Israeli and European university through EU funding schemes. Drones, airplane parts, surveillance techniques, interrogation tactics are all topics of research paid by EU money. It is unclear how forthcoming monitoring by the European Commission is to prevent abuse.
4. [Israeli universities doing research in social science and the humanities](#) are also often implicated in dispossession and discrimination against Palestinians, the bolstering of exclusivist claims to the land, the denial of Palestinian rights and narratives, and their exclusion from academic research. This represents an additional reason - the main reasons being presented in chapter 1 - to suspend collaborations with all Israeli universities independently from the topics of their research.
5. [The legal complicity of Dutch universities](#) may arise from institutional cooperation with Israeli universities amid ongoing violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). As both public bodies and private actors, Dutch universities are subject to overlapping obligations under domestic law, international law, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).
6. [Dutch universities should avoid moral complicity with the genocide](#). History shows that humanitarian and political catastrophes are possible due to the silence and inaction of the

many. Dutch universities have a moral responsibility to do as much as possible to stop the genocide.

7. [*Academic freedom is not violated*](#) by the suspension of institutional collaboration with Israeli universities – it is rather upheld by it. Academic freedom is a qualified right based on scholarly expertise and comes with responsibility to both science and society. Collaborating with institutions complicit in human rights abuses and atrocity crimes undermines these responsibilities.
8. [*“Institutional neutrality” is not a good reason for Dutch universities to avoid acting against the genocide*](#). The protection of human rights and prevention of genocide are not controversial political matters over which university boards should remain neutral to allow for a plurality of positions in their community.
9. [*The historical precedent of South Africa*](#) shows that ending institutional collaborations with universities implicated in gross violations of international law and human rights is possible and politically beneficial.

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ⁱ Tilburg <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/organization/advisory-committee-collaborations>
Rotterdam [Adviescommissie Gevoelige Samenwerkingsverbanden \(ACGS\) | Erasmus University Rotterdam](#)
Universiteit van Amsterdam <https://www.uva.nl/en/research/research-environment/third-party-collaborations/conflict-zones-and-human-rights-violations/conflict-zones-and-human-rights-violations.html>
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1. Academic Complicity: Israeli cooperation with the military and security industry

This chapter sketches the different ways in which Israeli institutions of higher learning are deeply complicit with the genocide in Gaza and other human rights violations and racism. It gives a (less than complete) overview of the different cooperations in teaching and research and development of Israeli academic institutions and the military, secret services and military and security industries. It further gives some insights into how critical voices are silenced on campuses.

1. Introduction

As has been shown by many scholars, Israel's society is extremely militarized and civil society and the military are deeply entangled (Sheffer and Barak, 2010; Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari, 1999; Kimmerling, 1993). This militarization is also thoroughly seen in Israeli academia. The military and security services are integral collaborators in university's teaching programs, for example, through special programs for soldiers and other members of the security services. A recent [report](#) written by [New Profile](#), an Israeli NGO working against the militarization of society,¹ notes that there are 'at least 57 military-academic programs for soldiers in regular service and candidates for security service'² within Israeli academia. Financially, between 2019-2022 an amount of more than NIS 270 million was spent for such academic cooperations.³

Such programs are only one of the many ways Israeli academic institutions are complicit in the ongoing genocide and other human rights violations by the Israeli military, secret services and the private security/military industry. A second important way we can see its complicity is in the many research programs that take place within universities and that involve direct partnerships with the military, R&D of the weapon industry or, for example, [archaeological research](#) in occupied territories.⁴

Besides such cooperations, the way academic freedoms are trampled by these institutions is also an important way we can show their complicity. For example, discriminatory rules are used to exclude students. Some institutions require military service in their admission process, or extra credits for admissions in dormitories are given for those who have served in the military and/or are active as reservists. Furthermore, critical scholars, at Israeli academic institutions have been [silenced](#) or even [suspended](#) by their own universities when voicing concerns about Palestinian victims of Israeli (military) violence.⁵ Most of these were Israeli Jews who spoke out, as [Palestinian scholars and students](#) are completely silenced and often don't dare to speak up in fear of reactions they might get and of being suspended for example.⁶ Right-wing NGO's, such as Im Tirzu, are given much leeway to act out their silencing campaigns against any student or staff members who dare to speak out against the genocide. Importantly, much activism that silences critical voices on Israeli campuses come from student groups. For example, the National Union of Israeli Students started a campaign

for [a new law](#) that would require universities to fire all academics who express dissent and objection to the war, including tenured professors.⁷ (See also the interview with Hilla Dayan on this).

In a new [report](#)⁸ [Academia for Equality](#) (2025), reports on a multitude of incidents of silencing on Israeli campuses.⁹ This silencing, the report shows, is structural and comes in different forms. The main practices this report discusses are the following. McCarthyism where right wing students 'rat out' Palestinian classmates on social media. This is done with the support of universities themselves and the Israeli government. Another form is intimidation and disavowal. Here disciplinary action is taken by academic institutions against faculty members who have been critical regarding the genocide in Gaza. The case of Prof. [Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian](#) is one of the most well known in this regard, but definitely not the only one.¹⁰ A third strategy of silencing the report discusses is the depoliticization of the campus. Here, together with practices of intimidation that silence any resistance, political activities are restricted on the campuses. From ceremonies, workshops and protests, organized by both students and faculty, events that are deemed political are severely restricted or even banned by the universities.

In this chapter an overview will be given of the different cooperations, both in teaching and in research and development. Importantly, this is an extensive, but not complete overview. Much information is taken from [websites](#) of groups who have collected this information previously, many by using the work of Wind (2024).¹¹

2. Hebrew University Jerusalem

The campus was built on Mount Scopus and opened in 1925. It expanded into occupied East Jerusalem, resulting in the repression of the Palestinian village of Issawiye. It further has a campus in West Jerusalem (Givat Ram), which was built on the ruins of the Palestinian village Sheikh Badr, whose residents were expelled by the Haganah paramilitary in 1948. After the 1948 war, Mt. Scopus has officially had the status of a [demilitarized](#) enclave.¹² However, it has been repeatedly used for military purposes since then, facilitated by Hebrew University.

In 1948, the Hebrew University developed a typhoid-dysentery bacteria as a biological weapon to poison Palestinian water sources in the context of the biological department at HEMED of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) ([Bachrach 2016](#)).¹³

The National Library in the Hebrew University displays thousands of [books](#) and other items stolen from Palestinians during the war of 1948 into the early 1950s.¹⁴

The Hebrew University offers training programs for Israeli security forces: [Havatzalot](#), an academic elite program designed to train future intelligence officers,¹⁵ and [Gamla](#), a program for Intelligence Corps officers.¹⁶ Hebrew University's [Talpiot](#) program is an elite

program for soldiers trained at the Air Force Command and Leadership School on the Giv'at Ram campus, but also in military bases and security state facilities.¹⁷

The Hebrew University also provides training to the national police and [Shin Bet](#). Finally, its criminology department is a pioneer in 'counterterror policing', producing 'field-proven' strategies violating fundamental rights of Palestinians.¹⁸

The university has publicly [promoted](#) its provision of 'diverse logistics equipment to several military units' since the invasion of Gaza began.^{19,20}

3. Bar Ilan University

The department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University played a role in denying the claims of Palestinian villagers of Susiya to their lands, arguing of the Jewish character of the city.

An excavation supported by Bar-Ilan University was used to legitimize and expand settlements on privately owned Palestinian lands at Khirbet al-Mazra'a (Wind, 2024).

Bar-Ilan University has also been conducting excavations in the occupied West Bank [at different locations](#) (Khirbet Jib'it, Khirbet Marajim, Khirbet Tinah) in the 2020's (Wind, 2024).²¹

The university runs 'hackathons' in collaboration with both [Elbit Systems](#) and the [IDF](#).²²

It has further [participated](#) in joint research with the army, specifically in developing [artificial intelligence](#) for unmanned combat vehicles.²³ and it collaborates [closely](#) with the Shin Bet, the Israel's secret services.²⁴

4. Technion

The Technion was established in 1925 in Haifa. Together with the [Weizmann Institute in Rehovot](#) it was geared to advance the scientific and technological development of Israel.²⁵ These institutions became the military-scientific center of the Israeli state, which later led to the development of the Israeli military industries.

According to Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, the Technion was complicit in ethnic cleansing in the Galilee, a north-central region of Israel largely populated by Palestinians (Pappé, 2013). Academics from the Technion wrote a plan, as published in 2003, which stated that the Jewish 'takeover' of the Galilee was a national priority. Their prospectus began by saying: "It is either them or us. The land problems in the Galilee proved that any territory not taken by Zionist elements is going to be coveted by non-Zionists" (Pappé, 2013: 257). The

Technion has ties with Rafael and [Elbit Systems](#).²⁶ Technion's students and trained engineers developed the D9 remote-controlled bulldozer, which is used for the demolition of Palestinian homes. They also aid in producing an acoustic system, called The Scream, that

uses sonic blasters to suppress Palestinian demonstrations, causing irreversible hearing damage. It is mainly [used to](#) suppress peaceful demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories.²⁷

Furthermore, Rafael and Israeli Aerospace Industries, two of Israel's largest weapons producers, developed out of infrastructure laid by the Weizmann Institute and the Technion (Wind, 2024).

Technion also has programs for soldiers. The [Alonim](#) program is an accelerated BSc to MSc program in data science for soldiers.²⁸ Together with Ben-Gurion University, it offers the [Brakim](#) BSc/MSc program in engineering, training soldiers for R&D in Israel's military (industries).²⁹

It also offers a [program](#) 'Defense Strategy for International Markets', which trains students in promotion of the international trade of Israeli arms.³⁰

As part of the Technion Autonomous Systems Program (TASP), students at the Technion [developed](#) the "Stealth drone" which can fly up to 1850 miles and carry two 1100-pound "smart bombs" and the "dragonfly" drone.³¹

The Technion is furthermore a [sponsor](#) of the Psagot "academic reserve" program.³²

5. Tel Aviv University

Tel Aviv University (TAU) is built on the site of the village of Sheikh Muwannis, which was destroyed in the Nakba in 1948. The last remaining building of the village, the [Green House](#), has been used by TAU as the faculty club building for many years.³³ [Muwannis](#), which was destroyed in the Nakba in 1948. The last remaining building of the village, the Green House, has been used by TAU as the faculty club building for many years.³⁴

Tel Aviv University collaborates with the state and military industry in developing technologies for the Israel military and for international export. TAU organizes workshops and conferences bringing together members of the Israeli military and security agencies and the (inter)national military industry. TAU's Center for Nanoscience and Nanotechnology collaborates with the weapon companies Israel Aerospace Industries and Elbit (Wind, 2024). Finally, Tel Aviv University's venture capital fund TAU Ventures collaborated with the Shin Bet in the Xcelerator program for start-ups (ibid.).

Tel Aviv University runs programs for soldiers, such as [Galim](#) and, since July 2023, the [Erez](#) program training military officers to become elite fighters.³⁵ Soldiers taking part in these programs wear military uniforms and carry weapons on the campus.

The university is playing host to a program named "[Erezim](#)" in collaboration with the Israeli army (e.g. the intelligence brigade), designed to train student soldier in a dual program of math and computer science. They then continue in the military in the cyber domain."³⁶

Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center brings the Israeli Intelligence and academia together on the topic of Middle East Studies and it publishes articles by military officials using classified military information for its studies. The Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies ([INSS](#)) is Israel's leading and most prestigious university-based think tank in the service of the state, on the topic of the state's national security agenda.³⁷

Tel Aviv University has also been involved in excavations in antiquity sites on occupied land, such as in Tel Rumeida next to Hebron in 1984, but also in East Jerusalem's City of David, which was funded by a [pro-settler group](#).³⁸

The academic reserve program in the law department trains lawyers for the Military Advocate General, which engages in whitewashing Israel's war crimes and provides legal justification for the targeting of civilians (Wind, 2024).

6. University of Haifa

The University of Haifa was established in 1972. Part of the campus is built on the Palestinian village of [al-Khureiba](#).³⁹

The University of Haifa has used its urban planning and geography expertise in support of the state's policy of "Judaization", especially in the Galilee by establishing 'mitspim' or lookouts that were instrumental in Jewish expansion (Wind 2024).

The University of Haifa it was the host of the [Havatzalot](#) training program for future intelligence officers before the program transferred to the Hebrew University in 2019.⁴⁰

The university hosts several [military colleges](#),⁴¹ for members from all levels of the IDF's senior command and other security or government agencies.⁴² Its [National Security Studies](#) program is developed with the National Security College of the IDF.⁴³

Via its [Zinman Institute of Archaeology](#), the University of Haifa led archaeological projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

7. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Ben-Gurion University was founded in 1969 in the center of the Negev. One of its goals was to stimulate "Judaization" and the development of the Negev (Wind, 2024).

Ben-Gurion University developed tailored degree programs to attract career soldiers and their families.

The university, together with the Israeli military and the ministry of defense opened 2 elite academic programs for recruits 'as part of preparations for the transfer of IDF technological units to southern Israel'. The programs are named ['lightning' and 'thunder'](#).⁴⁴

The municipality of Be'er Sheva opened the [Gav-Yam Negev high-tech park](#), which is a “joint venture with...the [Ben-Gurion University](#)”⁴⁵ adjacent to the university campus, housing military industries, which offer job opportunities for veterans.⁴⁶ The Israeli military built a technology campus next to the BGU campus aimed at furthering the ties between the military and BGU. The BGU president in 2019 said “I am looking forward to watching the rest of the army’s tech campus grow, and of course to overseeing BGU’s collaboration with the military as the units themselves move south”.⁴⁷

Rafael, is located on the park where it researches advanced autonomous systems. Ben-Gurion University’s commercialization company, [BGN Technologies](#), collaborates with Rafael, Elbit, IAI and Lockheed-Marin.⁴⁸

The university is further home to the [Homeland Security institute](#) which has [partnerships](#)⁴⁹ with both the Ministry of Defense and top Israeli weapons companies, such as Elbit Systems.⁵⁰

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³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://emekshaveh.org/en/>

⁵ See, for example, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/academic-rebuked-for-expressing-sympathy-for-gaza-victims/> and <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ben-gurion-university-suspends-lecturer-who-said-idf-soldiers-are-taught-to-murder/>

⁶ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wOivexMl6dpd6zpVkJ2yaOpOrUj1YxjLA/view>

⁷ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/bkltweova>

⁸ <https://www.academia4equality.com/en/post/new-report-by-academia-for-equality-silencing-in-academia-since-the-start-of-the-war>

⁹ <https://www.academia4equality.com/en>

¹⁰ <https://www.academia4equality.com/en/post/call-for-the-immediate-release-of-prof-nadera-shalhoub-kevorkian-and-the-termination-of-the-investi>

¹¹ Most of the text regarding the cooperations of Israeli institutions is taken from the site:

<https://academiccomplicity.nl/> (the site uses the book by Maya Wind (2024) extensively. Other sites are featured in the notes. Some of this text is lightly edited by author.

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1A. Interview with Hilla Dayan on Israeli academic complicity

University boards, academics and politicians have been asked and pressured to end their complicity in atrocity crimes, occurring due to their continued institutional cooperation with Israeli universities. As a counterargument, university boards as well as politicians often put forward that the universities are among ‘the few remaining liberal institutions in Israel’, and that remaining ‘in dialogue’ is needed. While there is increasing recognition that continuing cooperation means that Dutch universities are themselves complicit in atrocity crimes, the argument of the ‘liberal’ nature of the Israeli universities still holds in the discourses and actions of many boards and academics. In this interview, Prof. Yolande Jansen for the Expert Committee on Academic Ties with Israel spoke with Dr. Hilla Dayan, Israeli sociologist and co-founder of Academia4Equality Israel. We talked, among others, about how Dr. Dayan analyses the relation between the state and the universities, about academic freedom for Jewish and Palestinian students and academics, and what the claim that the Israeli universities are ‘liberal institutions’ can mean in relation to their large scale and systematic cooperation with the Israeli state and the IDF.

Dr. Hilla Dayan is a Lecturer at Amsterdam University College. In 2024, she was Albert Hirschman Chair at the Institute for Advanced Study IMérA in Marseilles, and a Visiting Fellow at the Remarque Institute at NYU in New York. She is the co-founder of Academia4Equality (A4E) Israel and gate48 NL. Shortly after our interview on 7 May 2025, A4E published an English translation of their recent report that prof. Dayan talks about in the interview: [Silencing, Censorship and Free Speech Violations in Israeli Academia](#).¹

Expert committee: *Thank you for being willing to do this interview with us. It is important for us to be able to evaluate the claim that Israeli universities are ‘liberal institutions’, where voices resisting the Israeli extreme right wing regime, the war and security industry, the IDF, the occupation, apartheid, and other atrocity crimes find a place. How do you see the situation of Israeli universities from the inside, with your experience at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as an activist for A4E, and as a sociologist?*

Hilla Dayan: Well, let me start by telling you about a recent initiative, a proposed bill by the National Student Association in Israel, in the spirit of the *blitz* of antidemocratic legislation of ‘the legal reform.’ They want to see staff fired if they are too critical about the Gaza war, so they want the Knesset to legislate a law to ban ‘support for terrorism in higher education’, just like Erdogan did in Turkey and use this as pretext for dismissals, tenured staff included.

Israeli universities and campuses have a normative role in Israeli society. They *are* liberal institutions, in principle. At the same time they play an active role in normalizing the occupation and now the genocidal war. The universities form part of a normative society where deeply undemocratic processes take place. Regarding Israel, we are speaking about a hybrid regime that is a democratically enabled dictatorship – democracy for Jews, dictatorship for the Palestinians, a longstanding dictatorship. I often analyze this relationship between democracy and dictatorship in one state in terms of a dual state. The prerogative, executive function of the state, uses the services of the normative, rule of law function of the state, while not fully destroying it. Israeli society needs the universities to fulfill a crucial function as part of the

normative state, as part of a functioning economy and to be the 'liberal' face of the state to the outside world and be part of the circuits of global higher education.

But this is not just about the façade of a liberal image. The point is to understand that their normative role is crucial to the maintenance of the occupation. They service the state's system by being part of its supporting apparatus for students who are soldiers and reservists. They provide the army with special programs, they give special treatment to IDF units on campuses and sometimes even construct army bases for soldiers on campuses (Havatzalot program at Hebrew University). They also provide services by the extension of academia as part of the settlement project in the OPT, and of course through military-civilian R&D collaborations in developing security technologies, functioning for and to the benefit of the prerogative state, the Israeli occupation. Some universities and peripheral colleges are also functioning as bastions of 'hasbara', allowing students to do online propaganda work for the state as course credits. All universities are servicing the prerogative state and the occupation by 'fighting BDS', enlisting staff as online soldiers and mobilizing resources for it.

The worst example in my opinion is that the Israeli universities never stopped, even sometimes supported, the extreme right wing, fascist organization *Im Tirtzu*. This organization has already been active for 20 years on campuses in Israel. They have been making blacklists of us, as critical scholars and making sure that their political rivals are kept silent and docile. They have also been successful in destroying people's lives, careers, and terrorizing staff, while educating students to be ultra-nationalist zealots.

This is a well-funded organization that gets support from US donors who are right-wing and the government, so they operate essentially as a privatized militia on campuses whose activities are protected by the norms of academic freedom in a liberal institution, norms that are never applied when it comes to Palestinian students and staff. I personally already know three academics whose lives have been made impossible and who have left academia and/or are living outside Israel due to their activities. Our colleagues there could not fight the sort of 'popular' mobilizations of behalf of students lodged against them, and the institutional response they received when they were attacked was abominable, with management suspending them and throwing them to the dogs. This enabling institutional response by the universities gives them a free hand while repressing their political rivals. It is fulfilling a very important function in the integration of the universities into the arms of the state and the production of political authority and legitimation for the government and the war.

As an answer to these organized intimidation campaigns, and because it was clear that solidarity and organization was necessary to fight these attacks, we established A4E in 2015. We started with 50 people coming together, and grew to a membership of over 1000 members. We document and protest the attacks and do our best to defend our colleagues inside. We just brought out [a report](#) about our findings over the last years.

EC: *At Dutch universities, scholars and students solidary with Palestinians, organisations such as Dutch Scholars for Palestine, and also scholars simply defending human rights, have been demanding from our university boards to end or at least suspend their cooperation with Israeli universities, as well as to make a statement condemning the Gaza genocide, apartheid and occupation. Many of them still didn't do either of those, others only recently did and only partly so. Instead, they talked about the 'conflict between Israel and Hamas' and that we should*

respect each other's different opinions, and referred much to reported feelings of unsafety by some of our students and colleagues. Could you say something about how the Israeli universities have reacted to 7 October and the atrocity crimes in Gaza and other crimes against Palestinians? Do they fulfill a critical function within Israeli society?

HD. No, they don't. In fact, as institutions, they have from the beginning supported the war, with big advertisements boasting their patriotic support for the troops and vowing that they would do anything to accommodate the IDF's needs and demands. They made clear they see themselves as part of the war effort, and this support has not diminished since October 7th. They give normative support to the war, and the unquestionable normative support to the military is overwhelming. No statement has been made by any university on an institutional level condemning the atrocities in Gaza. At the same time universities are continuously trying to repress any criticism and make Palestinians especially vulnerable to disciplinary punishments.

A few months ago, a small group of our members from A4E began to stage a small protest of the genocide on the lawns of Tel Aviv University, inside the campus. They were immediately told to take the protest outside of campus. At the University of Haifa, a group from the movement Standing Together held a silent vigil showing pictures of children in Gaza. The university's response was the banning of the organization and the prohibition to have any activity on campus (a ban that was later retracted due to, among other things, our membership pressure). The public pressure to end the war in general, however, is mounting. It is part of the protest movement to bring back the hostages. So the universities are now seeing a slight push back in public opinion with wider support to end the war. Recently, a group of over 1000 academics signed a petition calling to stop the killing and organizing under a new name "black flag" (in the Israeli context, this is a trope that signified the duty to refuse an illegal command). This [recent interview with Prof. Idan Landau](#) is about these invigorated protest efforts. Most of the black flag members are A4E members. For 10 years we have been able to keep our base on campuses in Israel and help this miniscule minority of real opposition survive the repression and hold on under very difficult conditions so that they can now lead these important protests from within.

EC. *These critical academics in the Israeli universities who do speak out are sometimes also wellknown outside Israel. I am speaking of scholars such as Prof. Amos Goldberg and Dr. Lee Mordechai. What does it mean that they can work at the universities also when they are documenting the occupation and war crimes, or arguing that there is a genocide taking place in Gaza?*

HD. It means a lot. It is their duty as intellectuals to document the crimes and raise their voices. They are all very aware that the existence of critical voices may be interpreted as keeping the façade of universities appearing as liberal institutions. We know that it is used to brush Israel's image abroad. But they must do it, regardless, because it is vital to appeal to the public consciousness right now. And we must support *them*, not their institutions. Many of these critical scholars, like Idan Landau in the interview I shared, actually say it out loud. Even though it is impossible for them to say that they support BDS, they say, please help us by increasing international pressure. We cannot fight this alone, and we won't win it within

without your help. We count on external pressure, they say. They use their freedoms and privileges as Jews, as tenured professors, and as public figures to say that.

Jews have freedoms, yes. This is how this works in an apartheid state that is a dual regime. The fact that the universities are maintained as a quasi-normative space is very necessary for the military and for the whole regime in Israel. Israel is not yet a full-blown dictatorship. The state still needs legitimacy, and the society is still free, free...and supporting the genocide. Especially in the eyes of Israeli-Jewish society, that is protected by this state, there is no reason to doubt that this is a democracy, and that institutions like the universities are pillars of this democracy. And that is the big role that the universities have within the whole system. The universities are vital normative institutions, just like the High Court of Justice in Israel. And just like the HCJ they provide service to the military. The HCJ is upholding the most dictatorial and genocidal policies, including starvation and mass killing. The HCJ that is considered 'sacred' by the defenders of Israeli democracy has been from 1967 onwards, one of the most crucial institutions for the prerogative state and military rule over Palestinians. It continues to serve the prerogative state now, and continues to reject all appeals by human rights organizations, for instance, against the blockade of humanitarian aid and the starvation tactic.

It is also crucial to understand that even if the government wants to, or the universities want to, they cannot silence everyone. Of course they know that these academics, like Goldberg and Mordechai, are one, or two or in any case a very small minority. The institutions are not threatened by the existence of a handful of people that are engaging in criticism, researching the occupation. They are not threatened, but they are certainly also sometimes moving against them, as we saw at the Hebrew University. There, we have witnessed the institutional renunciation of Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian by the University Board. The university literally attacked her work as an academic in public, advertising an ad in the newspaper that she must resign, that she has no place in this 'proud Zionist institution', in their wording. It was one of the most horrific cases of an institutional public lynching of their only Palestinian professor, an internationally accomplished academic. The university signaled this way to all Palestinian staff and students that they do not belong and are unwanted in this 'Zionist institution'.

EC. *Would you also say Goldberg and Mordechai, and other critical voices, are free to reflect on what their work does for the normative legitimization of the regime, which would in fact counter the content of their work?*

HD. Look, I've for instance watched lectures by Amos Goldberg at the Van Leer institute and at HUJI. And each time that he is trying to organize something he's protested, he's a pariah. People are coming to his lectures, and he is shouted at. The events I attended online were systematically disturbed. So these scholars know what they are doing, they know what they are up against. Their student population is also very right wing and ignorant of Palestinian lives, experience, narratives, and the horrors of the occupation. I am speaking of a generation that came of age under Netanyahu's long rule, a long right-wing rule, a generation that is a product of the regime of separation with the separation wall and laws instituting racist formal apartheid. So the scholars are functioning in institutions that are extremely hostile in fact and have to deal with generations that are products of the Israeli school system. This school system has not only deteriorated dramatically in quality by all OECD measures but has also shed

humanistic education with a curriculum rewritten by ministers of education that are settlers and that inserted their messianism, ultra-nationalism, and ideas of Jewish supremacy and have normalized the occupation in every textbook and subject learned at schools. Ultra- and neo-Zionist indoctrination has never been more robust. Of course, we should not forget that Goldberg and Mordechai are very courageous people, but they are the exception, not the rule. Also, they can afford to resist. They are senior staff members, they are males, and they're Jews. Their privileges protect them, and it is great that they use their privileges to speak out. And then still they need to be very courageous to speak out, and to continue to do their work that we all learn and benefit from.

At Haifa university, the vice president is a woman of Palestinian background. She has been complicit in the banning of Standing Together, and silencing protest. Internally, not in public, but in private circles of Palestinian academics and intellectuals, she has been under extremely strong critique for not supporting the Palestinian students at this university. This was especially glaring at Haifa where there are many Palestinian students and more Palestinian staff than in other universities. What students and staff now have is an example that if you want to develop a career and reach higher up in the Israeli university system as a Palestinian you must make yourself a full partner in the kind of oppression we see happening on campuses.

EC. *A last question: How do you think we can support critical scholars and maybe also just young and precarious and/or Palestinian scholars and students best, either before or after ties are cut with the boards and institutions?*

HD. Thank you for this question. The first, and most important thing I want to say about it is that the best support that we can give critical scholars in Israel is to listen to their requests to put more pressure from the outside on the Israeli institutions, on their leadership and indirectly on the Israeli government. The more effective pressure is from the outside, the better their position will be inside. We need more, not less pressure to be able to stop this utter madness. At the same time, of course on the grassroots level, we must continue to support our colleagues and stand in solidarity with those who are struggling inside. That's what we in gate48 and A4E do, so maybe try to learn from us, join our events and solidarity actions, and become part of our global support networks.

I am sometimes a bit disappointed at reactions on internal struggles in Israel that are quick to delegitimise them. I expect a bit more trust and connection, not to be taken as representatives of institutions when we are obviously struggling against them with all the means available to us and sometimes at great personal cost. Also understand that realities on the ground are much more restricted and messy than what we feel from our position here people should do or say; and respect the kind of efforts people are trying to make to speak to their difficult publics inside, and not only to internationals.

The second thing that I think we need to address is that there is a growing intolerance to any kind of collaboration with Israeli individuals. It's understandable but this can sometimes lead to unpleasant or absurd situations. What I expect from international colleagues is to be decent in their communication and engagement. And what I expect from Israeli academics wherever they are, is that they use their privileges and access to global academia, to amplify criticisms, to advance critical studies of our society, and to amplify critical voices and stand with our

Palestinian colleagues. If you are not doing that, then, sorry to say, you earned it to be shunned and boycotted.

I think the situation requires that we be aware of a few things and maintain some basic principles of decency as colleagues and activists. We must be able to follow BDS guidelines. BDS makes a clear distinction between institutions and individuals. If I am organizing an event that deals with the complexities of my society, for instance, a discussion on Mizrahi history, it is not anti-BDS to engage the experts who are based in Israeli academia and who are the leading scholars that can enlighten us about the history of Mizrahim in Israel. It is a matter of principle that academic spaces must be defended as places of exchange of knowledge and democratic spaces. Your ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, race etc. as individual scholar should in principle not matter in such exchanges. Only the kind of expertise you have should matter.

Having said that, let me emphasize again, we ought to continue to demand an institutional response and institutional moratorium on relations with Israeli academia. The institutions need to cut institutional ties, to stop sending students to Israel, to stop funding research through horizon 2020 collaborations, and to stop collaborating with the military and weapons industry. There is nothing more crucial, urgent and necessary for maintaining our academic spaces as democratic spaces than that right now.

¹ <https://www.academia4equality.com/en/post/new-report-by-academia-for-equality-silencing-in-academia-since-the-start-of-the-war>.

1B. Ending academic and financial complicity with apartheid Israel as an ethical obligation: an interview with Omar Barghouti

The global campaign to end complicity with Israeli atrocity crimes, that was initiated in 2004 by the founding of PACBI, and expanded in 2005 through the launch of the BDS movement, has gained increasing momentum over the last two years in the face of Israel's war crimes and genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. In the course of the first months of 2025, increasing numbers of academic and cultural institutions have suspended or severed their cooperation with Israeli universities, and a number of universities and individual researchers have also stated they will not enter into Horizon projects with Israeli institutional partners any longer, until the human rights of Palestinians are respected. Among these universities is the University of Amsterdam. In this interview, we talk with Palestinian human rights defender and researcher Omar Barghouti about the international experiences made with cutting ties in various contexts, the motivations for the academic boycott campaign, and the need to also address the procurement policies of universities. Procurement and investment tend to be less discussed than academic ties in the European context, but they are important, and they regularly form part of the Dutch universities' complicity.

For this interview, Prof. Yolande Jansen for the Expert Committee on Academic Ties with Israel spoke with Omar Barghouti. He is a PhD candidate at the Philosophy Department of the UvA, within the research school ASCA, where he works on a dissertation about 'ethical decolonisation'. He co-founded the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) in 2004 and the Palestinian-led global BDS movement in 2005. He has widely published on Palestine, BDS and related topics in mainstream media outlets and some academic journals. He is a recipient of the 2017 Gandhi Peace Award.

Expert committee: *Thank you for doing this interview with us. We would like to start with a broad question. The BDS movement has always been careful to base the demand to cut ties with Israeli educational institutions, including universities, on their proven complicity. In the face of the enormity of Israel's crimes against Palestinians, but also its war of aggression against Iran, do you consider it still necessary to prove complicity for each university, or should cutting ties be based on more general sanctions against Israel as a state, as legal scholars seem to argue is necessary, similar to the sanctions imposed on Russia after its illegal invasion of Ukraine?*

Omar Barghouti: Anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the BDS movement [categorically opposes all forms of racism](#), including anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish racism. It targets complicity, not identity. Inspired by the boycott movement against apartheid South Africa, the Palestinian-led BDS movement calls for a full boycott of Israel's regime of settler-colonialism, apartheid, military occupation and now genocide. This includes boycotting all complicit Israeli [corporations](#), universities, cultural institutions, among others, and virtually all of them *are* deeply complicit in the regime's crimes against Palestinians. So there is no contradiction between calling for a general boycott of apartheid Israel and maintaining the "complicity, not identity" ethical principle of the movement.

While all Israeli universities have been for decades a pillar in the design, implementation, justification and whitewash of Israel's entire system of colonial oppression against the Indigenous people of Palestine, as Maya Wind has meticulously documented in her book, *Towers of Ivory and Steel*, and though all of them are now [complicit in various ways in Israel's genocide in Gaza](#), an Israeli university can become non-boycottable if it comprehensively and verifiably ends its complicity and publicly recognizes the inalienable rights of the Indigenous Palestinian people as stipulated in international law, particularly the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands and receive reparations. As the BDS [Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel](#) state:

"The institutional boycott of Israeli academic institutions should continue until these institutions fulfill two basic conditions:

- 1) Recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as enshrined in international law (including the three basic rights outlined in the 2005 BDS Call) and
- 2) End all forms of complicity in violating Palestinian rights as stipulated in international law. This complicity includes discriminatory policies and practices as well as diverse roles in planning, implementing and/or justifying Israel's human rights abuses and violations of international law."

EC: *We are in the midst of a wave of BDS pledges by universities, faculties, departments and individual scholars across Europe. But many universities also still haven't ended their cooperative projects with Israeli universities, they haven't even suspended them. Can you give a brief overview of which universities have taken the most effective and good measures, and what they exactly achieved? (And a subquestion: it seems to be very difficult to end current contracts with Horizon. Belgian universities tried but did not succeed. What are your experiences you might want to share, both qua Horizon and also more broadly, about the most successful and broad ways of ending complicity?)*

OB: The list of universities and academic departments that have severed or suspended links with Israeli universities, divested from complicit corporations, or applied other BDS-related measures is quite long and can be [found here](#).

As for Horizon, Israel has received more Horizon funds for its complicit universities on average than any European country, including Germany, France and the Netherlands, according to a [recent Israeli media report](#) titled, "Horizon is the oxygen pipeline, removal could collapse Israeli academia." Colonial Europe's investment in and support for Israel's regime of colonial oppression and apartheid are almost as immense in academia as they are in military trade and overall preferential economic agreements. Yet, since the beginning of its genocide in Gaza, Israel and its universities have seen their share of the Horizon budget decline sharply. Due to the inspiring increase in the number of scholars and even universities across Europe that have refused to participate in any Horizon project involving Israel, Israeli universities are facing what PACBI calls "[exclusion from below](#)."

Israel has received [€1.1 billion](#) in Horizon grant funds between 2021 and 2024, but in 2025, to date, approval rates for Horizon projects with one or more Israeli research partners have [dropped](#) by 68.5%. This enormous decline can be credited to courageous and inspiring student

solidarity mobilizations, including encampments, as well as the years-long campaigning by progressive academics and university staff (including [trade unions](#) in some [cases](#)) heeding calls from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel ([PACBI](#)) and the broader BDS movement. (See as well: <https://bdsmovement.net/news/israel-margins-horizon-academic-boycotts>.)

Here are some prominent examples of European universities that have taken measures towards excluding Israel from Horizon:

- 1) In May 2024, the [ten Belgian universities called](#) for the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement to facilitate excluding Israel from Horizon projects.
- 2) In June 2025, the [University of Amsterdam](#) “decided not to enter into any new Horizon Europe collaborations with Israeli organisations for the time being, pending the results of an EU investigation into compliance with the association agreement with Israel.”
- 3) In May 2024, the [University of Barcelona demanded](#) that the EU exclude complicit Israeli universities from research programs and decided to refuse to participate in events within EU funded research projects involving complicit Israeli institutions until the EU excludes Israel.
- 4) In July 2024, the [University College Cork \(Ireland\) agreed](#) to student encampment demands to divest from companies complicit in Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights and to establish an ethical/human rights framework to govern all partnerships, including in Horizon projects.
- 5) In June 2024, the [University of Valencia \(Spain\) decided](#) to cut ties with complicit Israeli universities and urged the EU to exclude Israel from its research programs, including Horizon.
- 6) In May 2024, the [Free University of Brussels \(VUB\) decided](#) to withdraw from a Horizon project involving two complicit Israeli institutions and to review all Horizon projects with complicit Israeli entities.
- 7) In May 2024, [Ghent University \(Belgium\) committed](#) to cutting ties with all Israeli universities and to leading pressure on the EU to exclude Israel from EU research funding programs including Horizon.

EC: *Questions of procurement have not been taken very seriously by most universities. E.g., some universities still procure their computers at the deeply complicit company Hewlett Packard. Could you say more about how procurement is an ethical issue, and maybe also whether and how the Palestinian campaign is linked to climate action?*

OB: Many institutions, including city councils, universities, cultural spaces, among others, have adopted ethical procurement policies. The climate justice movement is arguably the most influential in mobilizing mass pressure on institutions to do so.

These mobilisations are important for the Palestinian solidarity movement as well, and not just because of the unparalleled ecological damage, or what UN experts call [ecocide](#), that Israel has caused as part of its ongoing genocide in Gaza. It is important to pressure every institution to adopt and enact ethical procurement – and [investment](#) – policies. If a university does not have mandatory rules that prevent it from procuring from or investing in companies that are complicit in grave human rights violations (such as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide), and that prevent it from establishing and maintaining academic ties to complicit institutions, it would take us double the effort to achieve our just, Palestine-specific demands—that is making the institution sever links with complicit Israeli universities and exclude from all procurement companies that are implicated specifically in Israeli crimes against Palestinians.

If in the absence of such a policy we only focus on the urgent demand of ending *existing* contracts, joint projects, and “MOUs” with entities that are complicit in Israel’s crimes and we build up enough people power to make the university budge, this would be great, but we would still need to push the university to enshrine its commitments in *a mandatory and sustainable policy*, that is properly monitored with an inclusive and democratic mechanism, *to prevent future harm*.

Finally, struggling for a robust but *general* [human rights investment screen](#) or an ethical procurement policy is not just ethically compelling; it is strategically compelling too. It always multiplies the potential of building large, intersectional coalitions with movements for racial, economic, gender and climate justice, all of which have an interest in pushing the institution to adopt such a policy. Large coalitions translate to significantly more power, more leverage in negotiations with the powers that be.

EC: *Many universities have set up ethical committees last year, arguing they needed a general framework and policy first before taking a decision regarding Israeli universities. We know you have been involved at many universities for co-thinking about these frameworks, while the decision to at least suspend ties with Israeli universities until those policies came in place was not even taken. Some of these committees came with surprisingly good reports, but few of the advices in these reports were adopted by the University Boards without restrictions. Now, after nearly two years of trying to get universities, as well as companies and governments into movement, how do you evaluate the role of these committees in relation to the final decision making processes at the universities?*

OB: The formation of ethics committees is not a problem, in fact it is desirable, as I’ll explain below. The real problem lies in the *failure of university administrations to at the very least “suspend” their complicit ties* with Israeli universities and with criminal corporations while the ethics committees investigate those ties in a morally-consistent and professional manner with a view to recommending policies that promise to make the institution more ethical, or *less unethical*, perhaps I should say. Mitigating harm to the most affected while an investigation is ongoing is a fundamental ethical – and often legal – principle.

When a Dutch university, say, is credibly informed, based on nearly irrefutable research by authoritative experts and human rights organizations, that its *Israeli* – as opposed to Russian, say – academic institutional partners are implicated in grave human rights violations and are

complicit in knowingly and persistently providing material support to the state's war crimes, crimes against humanity and now genocide, it must immediately suspend these ties to mitigate harm done to Palestinians while an ethical, transparent, professional investigation is conducted. Continuing business-as-usual until the ethical investigation proves wrongdoing beyond reasonable doubt is beyond a dereliction of ethical and professional duty. It is an act of *conscious complicity compounded with a latent colonial racism that does not value Palestinian lives and livelihoods sufficiently* to consider suspending, at the very least, the harm done to Palestinians due to the university's ongoing relations with Israeli universities.

Regardless, at a time of an ongoing Israeli genocide against Palestinians, some question the wisdom or ethical soundness of mobilizing pressure on universities to first pass an intersectional policy on ethical academic ties, or PEAT. Sometimes, this hesitation may take the form of asking, "Is it ethical to adopt a reformist approach to ending complicity instead of a more revolutionary one?" However, pressure towards the adoption of an ethical policy is not about reform. If it were, we should surely reject it.

In the context of oppression, I understand *reform* to mean improving a system of oppression, making it less harmful, but not *dismantling* it. This is antithetical to the aspirations of the absolute majority of the oppressed in the great majority of situations of oppression who seek to end oppression, not merely improve the conditions of their subjugation. Those who fought the slavery system, colonialism, apartheid, all systems of gender or social discrimination, etc. predominantly strived to *abolish* those systems of oppression, not reform them. As Desmond Tutu famously told the US Congress in the 1980s when it was considering some reform measures for apartheid South Africa, "We do not want our chains to be made more comfortable we want them removed."

In the BDS movement, including PACBI, incrementalism applies to the strategies, not the goals. From its inception, the movement has consistently aimed at dismantling Israel's regime of settler-colonialism and apartheid, its very *structure*, not improve or reform it. This is what the Palestinian consensus aspires and struggles to achieve. But how to get there, the most effective strategy is what is always incremental. Building power can be fast or slow, but it is always incremental.

Expressing rage at the depth of the complicity of an institution in Israel's genocide and expressing grief at the horrific scope of unspeakable, ongoing crimes to which Palestinians are subjected daily are of course legitimate and arguably unavoidable. The question is: how can we most ethically, effectively and strategically channel our rage, our grief, and our frustration at the institution's apathy, racism, colonial dehumanization of Palestinians, etc. to help end the genocide and dismantle the underlying regime of settler-colonial apartheid?

The temporality of the solidarity struggles in contributing to eventual Palestinian liberation must be always considered. The path is not and will not be nice and straight but rather convoluted, full of obstacles, with ups and downs and unpredictable setbacks at times. Patience and an agile yet *principled* strategy, or what PACBI calls *strategic radicalism*, are key to sustaining the struggle. It must be the olive-tree growing tradition and the incessant waves of colonization over thousands of years that have taught the Palestinian people patience,

sumud (steadfastness), resilience, and our ability to self-resurrect when many may dismiss us as “finished.” We need some of that to inspire the solidarity movement as well.

2. *Scholasticide* and *Educide* in Gaza

Scholasticide and *educide* are the systematic, intentional destruction of an educational system and institutions, including the murder, detention, or harassment of teachers and students, and the erasure of intellectual and cultural heritage. *Scholasticide* was first coined by Karma Nabulsi, a Palestinian Professor at Oxford, in the context of Israel's 2008–09 attack on Gaza, and is now widely used to describe the ongoing, intentional obliteration of Palestinian education. *Educide* is often used interchangeably, emphasizing the [mass destruction](#) of educational opportunities as a tool of collective punishment and cultural genocide (Desai, 2024; Soulos, 2024).¹

1. *Historical Context and Pattern of Destruction*

1.1 *Gaza: Repeated and Total Annihilation*

Since the Nakba of 1948, Palestinian education has been systematically targeted by Israeli policies as part of broader settler-colonial and de-development strategies. This long-standing pattern escalated drastically in October 2023, when Israeli military actions led to [the near-total destruction of higher education institutions](#) in Gaza, including the Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, Al-Quds Open University, and Al-Israa University.² Although Al-Israa initially remained standing, it too was completely destroyed in January 2024. [The toll on human life](#) has been devastating, with more than 5,479 students, 261 teachers, and 95 university professors killed, and thousands more injured.³ The broader education sector has also been severely affected, with 85–95% of schools damaged or destroyed, leaving at least 625,000 students without access to formal learning. Satellite imagery and field reports further reveal that many schools were repurposed for military use—including detention and interrogation—prior to their destruction, underscoring the extent of the crisis facing Palestinian education under occupation (Dana and Jarbawi 2017; Gavroche 2023).

1.2 *West Bank: Systematic Repression*

Although the physical destruction in the West Bank has been less severe than in Gaza, Palestinian universities in the region continue to endure systematic repression. These institutions are subject to periodic military raids, forced closures, arbitrary arrests, and stringent restrictions on intellectual freedom and academic exchange. Patterns of intimidation, deprivation of resources, and targeted victimization of student unions and faculty members have been thoroughly documented, highlighting a sustained effort to undermine the academic environment. This repression reflects a [broader strategy](#) aimed at destabilizing Palestinian higher education and limiting spaces for critical thought and collective organization (Odeh and Dibas 2025; Norquist and Collins, 2024).⁴

2. *Beyond Universities: Wrecking of the Entire Knowledge System*

The ongoing destruction in Gaza has extended beyond educational institutions to encompass [public libraries, archives, museums, and heritage sites](#)—key repositories of Palestinian history, identity, and collective memory.⁵ At least 13 public libraries, along with the Central Archives of Gaza, which contained 150 years of historical records, have been destroyed. The

National Museum, home to thousands of rare artifacts, was bombed and reportedly looted. Nearly 200 heritage sites, along with hundreds of mosques and churches, have been damaged or obliterated, contributing to a systematic erasure of cultural continuity. Among the most significant losses are the Church of Saint Porphyrius—the oldest active church in Gaza and one of the oldest in the world, dating back to the 5th century AD—which was struck by an Israeli airstrike in October 2023 while serving as a sanctuary for displaced civilians, killing at least 18 people and causing extensive damage to its historic structure and relics. Similarly, the Great Omari Mosque, the oldest and largest mosque in Gaza City, with origins tracing back approximately 1,400 years to the early Islamic period, was also destroyed. Additionally, the oldest Byzantine mosaic in Jabalia, dating from the 5th to 7th centuries AD and renowned for its intricate geometric designs and animal depictions, was targeted despite its status as one of Gaza’s most important archaeological treasures. These acts of cultural destruction represent not only material losses but also a deliberate assault on Palestinian historical consciousness and identity (Desai, 2024; Soulos, 2024).

3. Methods and Intent: What Makes Scholasticide Distinct?

Unlike incidental destruction typically associated with armed conflict, the targeting of Palestinian education—often referred to as “scholasticide”—is systematic, intentional, and comprehensive. It extends beyond the physical demolition of infrastructure to encompass the killing, imprisonment, and sustained harassment of educators, students, and administrators, alongside the deliberate obstruction of access to educational institutions and international academic collaboration. This multifaceted assault seeks to dismantle the intellectual, cultural, and social foundations of Palestinian society, effectively erasing its historical legacy and foreclosing its future potential. Scholars and United Nations experts increasingly interpret these actions not as collateral damage, but as components of a broader genocidal strategy aimed at the destruction of Palestinian identity and continuity [through the erasure of its knowledge systems and cultural institutions](#) (Desai 2024; Soulos, 2024; Odeh and Dibas, 2025).

4. Scholasticide as an Extension of Zionist Settler-Colonialism

The ongoing destruction of education in Gaza is deeply rooted in the structure and logic of Zionist settler-colonialism. Far from being incidental or collateral damage, this systematic targeting of Palestinian educational institutions is understood as a direct outgrowth of a settler-colonial framework whose central logic is the elimination of Indigenous Palestinian presence in order to establish and maintain permanent settler control. Settler-colonialism, as theorized in academic literature (Wolfe, 2006), is not a singular historical event but an ongoing project marked by the continuous displacement, replacement, and erasure of Indigenous peoples. Within this context, scholasticide serves as both a tactic and a manifestation of a broader colonial strategy that seeks to destroy the capacity of Palestinians to sustain their identity, culture, and political autonomy.

One of the primary manifestations of this logic of elimination is the systematic erasure of Palestinian society through the destruction of its educational and cultural infrastructure. The demolition of universities, schools, libraries, archives, and museums represents not only the obliteration of physical spaces but also the attempted erasure of Palestinian historical

memory and collective identity. Scholars widely interpret these acts as a continuation of the colonial endeavor initiated during the Nakba of 1948, during which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly displaced and their cultural and intellectual legacies were deliberately targeted for destruction or appropriation (Odeh and Dibas 2025; Norquist and Collins, 2024; Dana and Jarbawi 2017).

A critical element of this strategy involves the targeting of Palestine’s educated classes—teachers, students, and intellectuals—through assassination, imprisonment, and forced exile. These actions aim to disrupt the social and intellectual reproduction of Palestinian society, undermining its ability to organize resistance, preserve culture, and rebuild its institutions. As such, the dismantling of educational leadership is not incidental but a core feature of the settler-colonial objective: to prevent future generations from sustaining a collective national identity or asserting political agency.

Moreover, this targeted destruction of education constitutes a form of cultural genocide. As genocide scholars such as Douglas Irvin-Erickson (2016) have emphasized, the original legal and conceptual definition of genocide included not only the physical annihilation of a people but also the erasure of their culture, language, and knowledge systems. Within this framework, scholasticide functions as a mechanism to eliminate Palestinian identity and cultural continuity, rendering the possibilities of return, self-determination, and historical coherence increasingly unattainable.

Importantly, the destruction of education in Gaza is not an aberration but a continuation of a century-long colonial process. The violence and repression directed at Palestinian intellectual life today are consistent with earlier forms of settler-colonial domination that employed both military force and cultural suppression to achieve demographic and territorial goals. UN experts, Palestinian scholars, and academics in settler-colonial and genocide studies have increasingly identified these actions as part of a coordinated campaign of erasure, not as isolated wartime events.

5. Long-Term Consequences for Future Generations

The consequences of this scholasticide for Gaza’s [future generations](#) are profound and far-reaching.⁶ Over 625,000 children have been deprived of access to schooling, and many may never return to formal education. This emerging “lost generation” faces bleak economic prospects, as education is directly correlated with income potential, employment, and social mobility. The long-term deprivation of learning compounds poverty and entrenches structural inequality, further marginalizing Palestinian youth in a globalized economy.

The psychosocial impact is equally severe. Over one million children in Gaza have required trauma-related support due to exposure to violence, displacement, and loss—factors that significantly impair cognitive development, emotional well-being, and learning capacity. The widespread destruction of cultural and educational institutions that anchor community identity threatens not just material infrastructure but also the intangible foundations of Palestinian society: its memory, sense of belonging, and vision for the future. Gender-based violence adds another dimension to this crisis, with girls facing increased risks and reduced likelihood of returning to school, exacerbating existing gender inequalities.

6. *Legal Violations and International Accountability*

The deliberate targeting of Gaza's educational infrastructure constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Such acts contravene the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, which mandate the protection of civilian infrastructure during armed conflict. They also breach the right to education, a fundamental human right articulated in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)⁷ and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).⁸ The destruction of schools and cultural centers operated by UNRWA further violates the legal inviolability of United Nations premises and international conventions safeguarding cultural heritage. When conducted on a systematic and widespread scale, these acts may qualify as war crimes or crimes against humanity under the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#) (ICC).⁹

7. *Voices of Opposition Among Jewish Scholars*

Importantly, the global condemnation of scholasticide includes prominent voices within the Jewish academic community. Scholars such as Avi Shlaim, a historian at the University of Oxford, and Neve Gordon, a noted human rights scholar, have publicly denounced the destruction of Palestinian education and called for accountability. Jewish academics are also active in international coalitions such as [Scholars Against the War on Palestine](#),¹⁰ which advocate for the protection of educational institutions and condemn such acts as violations of international law and universal human values. These voices challenge the instrumentalization of Jewish identity to justify violence and offer critical solidarity grounded in ethical and scholarly commitments.

8. *Conclusion*

The scholasticide and educide unfolding in Gaza are not isolated incidents of wartime destruction but integral components of a broader settler-colonial project aimed at the elimination of Palestinian presence, knowledge, and future. The systematic targeting of education serves both as a means of suppressing resistance and as an end in itself, eradicating the cultural and intellectual foundations of Palestinian society. The consequences—psychosocial, economic, legal, and intergenerational—are severe and enduring. Scholars, legal experts, and international observers increasingly recognize these acts as part of a coordinated strategy of dispossession and annihilation, with urgent implications for justice, accountability, and the future of education in Palestine.

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¹ <https://www.picturingscholasticide.org/>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/scholasticide-continues-israels-ongoing-destruction-gazas-education-system-jeopardizes-entire-generations-future-enar>

⁴ <https://waronwant.org/news-analysis/israels-illegal-settlements-destroy-palestinian-homes-lives-and-rights>

⁵ <https://librarianswithpalestine.org/gaza-report-2024/>

⁶ https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/publications/Palestinian_education_under_attack_in_Gaza.pdf

⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁹ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://scholarsagainstwar.org/>

“Look at what people do, not what they say.”

Interview with Mezna Qato on Scholasticide and Educide

Conservative figures estimate that a least 55,000 have been killed in Gaza. Although in themselves astonishing, these numbers do not include those under the rubbles of their homes presumed dead, delayed deaths of untreated injuries, starvation, thirst, or disease.ⁱ The most sinister development in human history is perhaps the recent trend of soldiers shooting at unarmed and starving groups attempting to reach aid delivery sites. As the saying in Palestine goes, *the living envy those who died quickly by Israeli bombing or execution*. The suffering and injustice is colossal and risks making us feel powerless. In truth, none of these aspects are inevitable. In fact, public institutions actively participate in the continuation of genocide, mainly because of ideological and material interests. These institutions include our academic organisations. Hopefully, the future archivists that will trace the records left behind will not absolve those who did not take sides. In the meantime, for the many who do not trade in abstract theory at the expense of real justice there is much to do. What examples can we share, which experiments should we further develop? And why does education carry such a special place in the social history of Palestine? These questions are often drowned out by the terrifying urgencies of war. In this elaborate interview, Miriyam Aouragh for the Expert Committee on Academic Ties with Israel spoke with Mezna Qato, Director of the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies.

5 June, 2025

Our academics will stand idle—that is, until the dust settles, then they will write books about what should have been. Their rotten institutions will commemorate us after our death. And the vultures, even from our midst, will tour museums glorifying, romanticizing what they once condemned. The vultures will make sculptures out of our flesh.

Mohamed El Kurd, 2024

Expert Committee

Firstly, thank you for giving us this interview, both as a historian of Palestine and expert in the social history of education and as an academic carrying institutional experience with organising and coalition building, this is of tremendous value for us. Before we discuss the current events, you published and are currently completing a book on the history of education for Palestinians.ⁱⁱ I'm interested to know what the broader role of education is for Palestinians. It is well-known that the national exams – the Tawjihi – carries special meaning.

Mezna Qato

First, thank you so much, it is always a pleasure to be in conversation. I would say that the story of education in Palestine is a contradictory story. On the one hand, education became a crucial vehicle - and this is not exceptional to Palestine, but particularly attenuated and acute in Palestine – for social regeneration and crucially so after the Nakba. As peasants and working poor were stripped of their wage labour, stripped of their assets, stripped of their homes, stripped of their livelihoods, first under British colonial rule, then after the Nakba, education became a tool for social mobility. Tawjihi is interesting because of how it came about immediately after the Nakba. In the late 1950s, and under the influence of Nasser, an examination structure that was independent of the older British model came into being. But Tawjihi is also complicated. First, for the first 40 years after the Nakba, only really 60% of Palestinian young people end up taking the Tawjihi. Most of them get streamed out way before that into vocational training. And the vocational training they got was often built upon a quota system by the Gulf market. The Ministry of Transport in Kuwait says we need 500 welders, or the Ministry of Oil says we need people who can work on the rig, et cetera. And then they're trained for that. Not everyone took it, and that's always important to remember because there's this assumption that it's some sort of national story.

I'll tell you a little bit about why that's important. To those 60% who take it, it is an incredibly challenging project because the idea is that your entire life's trajectory is determined by an examination at the end of your 17th year of schooling. It's stressful in itself, and remember, if your education is your social mobility then it's double fold or triple fold challenging. You're sometimes carrying the weight of an entire family on your back. And successful graduation from tawjihi allowed you access to scholarships, access to university education, sometimes funded. You will then be employed in a much better placing than you would otherwise, so you'd go further. Secondly however, for those young people who didn't take Tawjihi, the story of Palestinian education was a story of suffocations. Stasis. Failure. In other words, there's also a kind of cruelty in the story that is repeated all the time, that Palestinians are the most educated Palestinian refugee population in the world. Maybe, I doubt it, but what does that say about those who did not succeed, who did not make it, who did not get that well educated?

EC

This is so interesting and because a key context is that we're talking about a trans-nation-state community due to the high number of refugees outside of historic Palestine caused by the creation of Israel.

MQ

After 1948 Palestinians entered a condition of multi regime control. So different regimes were responsible for their education. Each regime insisted to impose their educational system. One of the important things that the Palestinian Nakba did was it set a template—that is still in practise—wherein the educational system for the Palestinians, and its logic, i.e. host states are responsible for that education of refugees, that host states' was the curriculum that the refugees took, was duplicated elsewhere.

But that was a political decision. It tells refugees they have no right to determine their own curriculum. You have to take the curriculum of the host state; whether the host state gives you a path to citizenship or not. Remember, the whole point of mass education is a constitutive part of consolidating a nation state system. There was never a Palestinian curriculum that said 'you are a Palestinian.' In case of Gaza the Egyptian state told Palestinians in Gaza you are a Palestinian and *we're* going to tell you what it means.

EC

Since the genocide in October 2023, it has become noticeable in the way we speak that Palestine and Gaza are conflated. What is your view on discussions about education through the lens of educide or scholasticide in Gaza?

MQ

I've always been wary of all of the "cides". When sociocide and politicide emerged in the early 2000s for instance by Baruch Kimmerling, the idea was to describe genocidal tendencies without invoking genocide. It becomes a wall between Israel and the condemnation of genocide. I'm wary because it doesn't name the thing and keeps heaping new terms to describe a condition that is part and parcel of genocide – it disaggregates the term and splits it from its legal and political valences. And I think it ended up particularising Palestine in unproductive ways sometimes. I'm not sure what the difference between ecocide and say environmental destruction, or environmental devastation, or even extraction. I think something has changed after Gaza.

EC

Probably it should start with the question does it help clarify something, which is essential for mobilising engagement.

MQ

To the defence of those who do invoke any given "-cide", it wasn't just about coining a new term or stamping a patent on a new concept. I think there was a lot of frustration at the fact that colleagues were not invoking Palestine as part of the stories and studies they conducted. Palestine was always excluded from the story of environmental extraction and devastation, for example. Those scholars were putting their foot down: *no, you should talk about, Palestine. Here, we'll give you another tool by which to invoke it.* There was a sense that if you must invoke Palestine, you must also escalate its use because Palestine is worse, hence "cide". It's not *just* environmental destruction for here's something also about the cide that invokes this cruelty of intention.

But we must prevent that what we end up doing is fighting over the term rather than the condition. For instance, how long did we spend trying to prove that Israel is an apartheid state? We had Israel Apartheid Weeks for over 20 years. We insisted on a term for very valid reasons. It's a legal term. It's a term that is shunned by the then seemingly robust liberal order. We were insisting on the naming of a thing because that gives us leverage to make international legal cases? Well, there's no legal thing condemning scholasticide, but there is one condemning genocide.

EC

The way you distinguish also between the need for clarity, accuracy and avoiding a sense of hopelessness from an affective motive, is very powerful. As you pointed out, there is the contradiction, perhaps of ending up rejecting political universalism of liberation?

MQ

It's a desperation to make Palestine clear. But it also has created this contradictory way of producing less clarity: making Palestine visible but obscuring the condition under which Palestine exists. Scholasticide shows that the clarity has come from the thickness of description. That it makes it distinct from other -cides, I think, especially in Gaza people have described it as scholasticide to describe the systemic targeting of institutions. But I think we start faltering when extending the definition, for example to the West Bank. Yes, Palestinian educational institutions in the West Bank are being targeted actively and in very many ways. But they do not rise to the genocidal in the same way as in Gaza, though of course both geographies – divided by occupation as they are – are inextricable through the bonds of land and peoplehood. All of this is sincere internal critique and not denunciatory, I am part of it but ask what helps, what works? You can say that genocide is multivalent, or that there are slow and acute conditions of genocide. Or there is the spectacular and there is the structural. But I don't know if that's convincing. Even if we risk reproducing geographic/political fragmentation through this hesitation, but it really is at the same time distinct. What we see in Gaza is unprecedented in Palestinian history. To understand the scale of what's happening in Gaza now you would have to go back to the Mongol Empire or to the Crusades. The steps of Jerusalem flowing with blood. That's how Palestinians talk about Gaza. There's nothing in the 20th century, 19th century or 15th century that compares. The sacking of Baghdad is what people talk about. The Crusaders cutting off heads on the steps of Damascus Gate [Jerusalem].

This is the historic monumental scale of destruction. And *genocide* is the reference in the modern liberal order of language to describe that scale. No Palestinian has a problem with *ibade* (Arabic translation of genocide). The (other) cides don't have this sense of scale and weight. But there's a way in which the language of genocide doesn't always work. I find also curious is that there isn't as robust a use of *-cide* for other sectors of social reproduction. Scholasticide has gained far more momentum than the health sector or the labour sector and even the agricultural sector in Gaza. Even ecocide has not been taken up in the same way as scholasticide. If a concept is helping us understand a modality of genocide and mobilise around it, that is excellent. But if it's trying to exceptionalize genocidal practices, or steer them away from the overall charge, I don't know how effective that is politically.

EC

This genocide is facilitated by imperialism, the competition over resources and geopolitical control but at same time it is a settler colonial project, which means it is existentially motivated. The notion elimination includes genocide, but it also is more than that. You are one of the people behind a very important edited collection on for the journal Settler Colonial Studies. It had a groundbreaking impact on Palestine scholarship.ⁱⁱⁱ Can you bring both issues into conversation for us?

MQ

Last year we would hear 'this is an extension of the Nakba. Now it feels this is not an extension. This is an escalation. An acceleration that has leaped into something else. And even genocide sometimes feels inadequate. The Palestinian/Arab term *ibade* is important at the moment. It feels like the last breaths, like someone who is dying, a peoplehood is getting to the end. It's brutal. ... Its "We want to erase the memory of you." Not just kill you. We want to extinguish you, a mass extinction event. Eliminate your past and your future. Eliminate the memory of you. Nobody can be left alive to even tell the story of you.

I've been thinking a lot about Golda Meir saying, "we resent the Palestinians for making us kill their children". People have talked a lot about how to unpack that, and I was also thinking that it's such an extraordinary openness. She's saying we don't care about your children of course but she's also saying we resent you for existing. A priori. You got in the way. You're in the way of our future. How dare you make yourself an obstacle to our future. Your children are an obstacle to our children. Zionism can't work if Palestinians exist.

EC

So when we talk about scholasticide in reference to the destruction of education in Palestine, is it another chapter of the same larger story or do you think we should distinguish between both planes - erasure of a people, destruction of education - of thinking. Do we regard one as the extension of the other? Taking this relationality further, can we understand the destruction of education in Gaza as part of the destruction of academic freedom where it enables censorship about Palestine or the violent removal of students' protest encampments, or the repealing of funding for universities that don't comply hard enough. In other words, how do we understand the possible links between the destruction of education across the wider (Global North/Palestine) differences.

MQ

What has been most compelling and interesting to me is that the defence and the invocation of scholasticide in Gaza has opened up a new terrain of defence for the university. I mean, yes there are far too many words spilled on "68", but I regard it as an abiding understanding that it forged people's identities in a particular way. For Palestine, if you kill these universities, you kill the mechanisms by which peoplehood is forged, protected, defended, articulated, debated, deliberated. There is a good reason why scholars pay attention to Birzeit University or Al Najah university elections, partly because they become barometers of public opinion. But I think also precisely because under conditions of censorship and occupation, these zones become places for politics. Sacrosanct almost. Their violations matter. When the police were allowed by the President of Columbia to enter the campus, it was a big deal. Think of *al-haram* [sacred, inviolable], how we describe the *al-haram* of the *jami'a* [university] in the same way as *al-haram* of Mecca in Arabic. They are sanctuaries.

There is a psychic, spiritual cosmology to understanding a place like that. That's why they're targeted. Defending the universities is defending the sanctity of these institutions. It is the place where you show to yourself and each other why life matters. And convinces you what

life is worth, what it is *for*. That's what universities are. It is where politics matures for many young people, and their sense of the world beyond their own small place in it, comes into view. And they have to deal with it.

And that's also why I support the Emergency Committee for universities in Gaza because it's led by the three major public universities that represent 85% of students. These universities were destroyed because they were crucial to the Palestinian Commons.

EC

You mentioned that the Palestinian archive is being erased. This seems a practical way to achieve that in high tempo.^{iv} Were these public institutes the first ones that were also bombed?

MQ

Yes. And these are the ones that were bombed SPECTACULARLY. They had to make an example out of the Islamic University of Gaza. The first president of a university in Gaza to be assassinated was the IUG president. He was killed in a targeted assassination.

EC

This really helps me understand the value and meaning of education, and why it's so despised. Is this also why Palestine is deliberately cut off by Israel? You wrote that by now nearly all libraries have been destroyed, and that this is not a new phenomenon but a cruel one nonetheless.^v Last January the American Historical Association had a vote to call what's happening in Gaza Scholasticide. It was overwhelmingly supported. You tweeted something that went viral, in part because it's shocking, can you describe what this meant.

MQ

I called a scholar that I know in Gaza, just wanted to let him know about this. And he messaged me back. "Oh, well, that's great. Good. Say hello from me and give my salutes. Send my regards to the 428 colleagues....". He is the last surviving historian in Gaza. I tweeted this and it went viral because it is such a shocking realisation. It's startling. Palestinians, especially Palestinians in Gaza, have been so removed from humanity I really think people forgot there could be historians and scholars and scholarship there. Really good work, in fact.

EC

Many academic students and staff who are at presently organising solidarity initiatives are led by a desire for general ethical conduct. It is the overall pull of morality – echoed in the plea against their opponents to be on 'the right side of history' – but the notion of institutional accountability is just as important. In a way our employers implicate us in terrible human rights abuses and complicity against international law. This rejection is manifested through the way that solidarity initiatives come together in workplace related demands.

MQ

It's about creating a pariah of a state that deserves to be isolated. And it's about embodying the kind of political pressure that we want our states to do; we compensate for the fact that our states are not doing it. King's College, the college I'm part of at CU divested. But interestingly, at Cambridge 'neutrality' wasn't the fight. In the post-Trump era, the idea of divesting from the arms industry was more controversial than divesting from occupied territories, whether Palestinian or Ukrainian. Any entity that occupies territory, because the international law is clear. The question of neutrality is gone. It was gone with Ukraine. For Palestine campaigning it was also leveraging the experience of Europe in the last 10 years vis-a-vis Ukraine. And to remind them, 'look, the story of Ukraine is the story elsewhere', and so transfer some of that sympathy and solidarity to another place. And if you [the institution being petitioned] cannot, are incapable, then they really have to think about why.

There are many ways to poke holes in the posture and facade of nuance and objectivity that are not even about Palestine, but about their positions on everything else in the world. Neutrality itself is an ideological project. I am indifferent to it as an argument, at the scale of its mediocrity. It's low-grade, boring thinking that shouldn't be entertained as anything other than this. I tell them you will only get more frustration, more protests. You are shooting yourself in the foot. You're radicalising your student population when not engaging with them. They're going to keep occupying and disrupting your graduations and you're going to get more frustrated. And you don't understand that the only way to go through is to take seriously what young people are saying and what your colleagues are saying.

EC

It is exhilarating to see many more universities crossing over and decided to cut ties. Firstly, as someone involved at Cambridge University as well as across a number of national and international campaigns through key academic Associations, how did you experience this? And secondly, how do you deconstruct this difficult but evolving process, where it feels as if a critical mass – build from those who took the first beatings yet insisted, those who stood firm despite the hardships and slowly managed to break down the walls of passivity - has now normalised what was initially considered impossible?

MQ

Divestment is crucial, perhaps more important than anything else that a scholar can do in their institution. Divestment is so important because it's not just even about divestment from Israel. It is divestment from arms. Whether you believe in defence or not, or in militaries or not, whether you are pacifist or otherwise. Put that to the side for a moment. The business of the university should not be entwined with the business of military defence. First, for its impact on research, how it hinders academic freedom by pressuring scientists and other scholars to lean their work in one direction. Second, as shareholders in defense industries, universities cannot effectively stand apart from the profit motive for war. Third, and I hope I don't sound too much like a liberal here, but it is profoundly immoral for a university whose mission is teaching and research to be bound up in any way with an industry not just uncommitted to those values, but actively seeks to accelerate and improve the destruction of them elsewhere.

University management keeps saying that it's financially impossible because the educational institution is attached to private equity firms or hedge funds. But remember, a lot of these hedge fund companies were capable of divesting from fossil fuels. So, they're capable of divesting from arms.

EC

Would you say that at Kings College Cambridge University, people are getting used to it, that in a few years people will look back and think what was the drama, and can you share some of the processes?

MQ

I think there was a feeling that it was an opportunity that will not come back for years, so it's now or never. And this is not only for Palestine, it became bigger. It is a divestment from the arms industry and any institution/company that profits above 10% from doing business with states that occupy territories. Whatever that amount may be, divestment might just amount to a paltry sum, but divestment symbolic power too. It took a year of organising to get there. Did you know that the definition of the arms industry that was mobilised was the Church of England? We're not being radical here.

EC

How will you look back at this later, you think? What have you learned? What will stay with you the most when it comes to interactions with people around you; colleagues, allies, students, what surprised you or will you take with you?

MQ

It affirmed for me something that I'd learned throughout my life, which is look at what people do, not what they say. There are the people you condemn for not speaking up, but then you learn that: they were the ones pushing behind the scenes. And then there are the ones who mobilise large social media platforms for discursive battles. Important though those battles might be, they often value the word more than the deed and are often nowhere to be found in their own sites of power. Students see that distinction, but whatever the disappointments in the dissonances between the two it is a disappointment that is built on a false premise, which is that speech equals action, and in concrete, organisational ways, it does not.

ⁱ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-many-palestinians-has-israels-gaza-offensive-killed-2025-01-15/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/233607>

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^{iv} <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oFE2snnmDYo>

^v <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/middle-east/2024/08/mezna-qato-without-our-libraries-and-universities-how-will-we-tell-the-story-of-gaza>

3. The direct contribution of European research funding to Israeli state violence and war

Among the Israeli academic projects funded by the EU, many, totalling tens of millions of Euros directly fund research that raises strong questions about dual military civilian use (forbidden by EU regulations) and violations of human rights. Drones, airplane parts, surveillance techniques, interrogation tactics are all topics of research paid by EU money. Israeli universities, but also military-industrial complex companies and the Israeli government are among the beneficiaries of these grants. It is unclear how forthcoming the monitoring by the European Commission is to prevent abuse. This is yet another, very direct aspect of the complicities that are intrinsic to having research ties with Israel.

1. Introduction

The link between Israel and the European academic community is a major source of legitimation and prestige for Israel but is also worth several billions Euros (€2.6 billions since 2007). The participation of Israel in the European research frameworks (currently named Horizon Europe) is a key pillar of the EU-Israel Association agreement. We illustrate in other contributions in this report why these ties in general have represented direct complicity in Israel's war crimes and currently genocide. Yet, some of these European funds end up supporting the occupation and the genocide in an even more direct way, as they immediately generate technologies that are used by the Israeli state and army for the repression and the killing of Palestinian people: most importantly, new weapons and surveillance technology. In many cases, the recipients of this money are either directly the Israeli state, or companies that are part of the Israeli military-industrial complex.

The very existence of these lines of financing is not only immoral but is likely to breach even the lax current European laws and regulations on the matter. European (and national) institutions have been so far almost completely ineffective in enforcing these rules, one more way in which their complicity with the Israeli regime manifests itself.

In this contribution, we give an overview of the applicable rules regulating European research funding. We then look at some examples of projects involving Israeli entities where compliance with these rules is, to put it mildly, dubious, and the risk is great that the peaceful character of Horizon Europe are violated. Last, we discuss the supervisory framework that should make sure these rules are respected, how effective that is (or not) and the significance of these findings is for the ties between EU and Israel.

2. The juridical framework

The basis for all partnerships between the EU and Israel is the [Association Treaty](#)¹ that entered in force in June 2000. Art. 2 of this treaty stipulates that "Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement." These clauses are termed 'essential element clause', and they are often included in EU association agreements, as they form the very basis of consent of the parties to the rest of the agreed provisions. Such clauses are in line with the EU treaties obligations the EU has to uphold in its external action (including art. 21 TFEU).

Israel has enjoyed “Associated Country” status in the European Research Frameworks since 1996, (and regularly [renewed since then](#)²), but that association has been subsumed under the association agreement (art.40) and it is therefore subject to the aforementioned art. 2. In addition to the provisions of the Association Treaty, Horizon Europe activities have to comply with a number of other obligations. For example the “Model Grant Agreement”, that beneficiary institutions sign at the time the subsidy is granted, includes in its Art. 14 specific provisions on Ethics: “The action must be carried out in line with the highest ethical standards and the applicable EU, international and national law on ethical principles.” and Values: “The beneficiaries must commit to and ensure the respect of basic EU values (such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities).”

In fact, among the reasons for termination of a grant agreement the Model Grant Agreement mentions (art.31.2.1) : “serious breach of obligations under this Agreement or during its award (including improper implementation of the action, non-compliance with the call conditions, submission of false information, failure to provide required information, breach of ethics or security rules (if applicable)”.

As an associated country, Israel enters Horizon Europe with the same rights and duties as EU member states. In particular, activities in associated countries must be legal (for example in terms of privacy, environmental laws) in at least one EU member states. Furthermore, specific additional norms apply to Israel, for example, the prohibition for any activity taking place in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Imseis, 2014). It is interesting to notice that already in 2014, when the EU issued this prescription, this was taken by the Israeli government as a norm potentially jeopardizing the country’s participation in the [Horizon framework](#)³, highlighting how intertwined the occupation is with the Israeli research system.

2.1 Dual Use

The Horizon Europe program explicitly prohibits funding of research whose results have both civilian and military applications. This limit is crucial to ensure that European research funds focuses on peaceful objectives, contributing to increased societal wellbeing. Limitations on military-oriented research have been the object of incensed debate in European institutions, since the early 2000s (Edler and James, 2005), with the European Commission consistently favoring including military-oriented research in the EU Framework Programmes. The staunch opposition of the European Parliament, the European Council, and other stakeholders has so far [derailed all attempts by the Commission in this sense](#)⁴, but new attempts, potentially more dangerous given the current climate in international relationship, [are under way](#)⁵.

An argument by the Commission is that the separation between civilian and military research [represents a missed opportunity and engenders duplication of effort](#)⁶. As we will see below, there are several cases of European funded research projects where not only dual-use, but the prevalently military intended applications seem, if not ascertained, highly likely. While the European Commission political positions may make them a rather reluctant enforcer of the norm, the prohibition of dual use is still the “law of the land”, determined by the most democratically representative institutions of the Union, the Parliament and the Council, so it

has to be enforced. This has even more important repercussions when it comes to projects involving a state involved in illegal occupation, war crimes and genocide, such as Israel.

3. Drones, planes and artificial intelligence between “collaboration on security” and the war in Gaza

One element further blurring the dual-use line between “civilian” and “military” applications is the fact that research collaboration on “homeland security” is explicitly allowed in the Horizon framework. Drone (unmanned aerial vehicle) technology is one field in which Israeli companies and academic institutions have been especially successful in obtaining European funds. Typically, the stated applications for the funded technologies are in the realm of homeland security, for example (in order of increasing repressive character) disaster response, search and rescue operations, crowd management.

Israeli drone technology is considered to be cutting edge, and European states have been eager to import it for [military](#)⁷ as well as “civilian”⁸⁹ uses. An example of that is the use of Israeli drones by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, therefore helping illegal pushbacks and other human right violations that Europe perpetrates against immigrants in the Mediterranean (an application that, ironically, would be completely permissible under the Horizon Europe dual-use rules). It is not surprising then, given the European Commission political ideas that Israeli drone companies are very much welcome in European research consortia. As the conservative German historian Michael Wolffsohn put it [“Germany is more dependent on Israel's weapons than Israel is on German weapons. Israel's missiles and drones protect Germany and Europe, and without Israel, Germany's terror prevention or IT advances would be virtually non-existent.”](#)¹⁰. Yet, there are cases where collaboration between the European Research Framework is most likely helping the genocide campaign on Gaza, in ways that are not only immoral, but fly in the face of European regulations.

A report by Informationsstelle Militarisation (IMI) and [Statewatch](#)¹¹ highlights several of these projects: take for example [RespondDrone](#)¹² a project including Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), a major defense contractor, together with, among others, the French Thales (another military/industrial giant), and the Spanish startup Alpha Unmanned Systems. The purpose of the project is to develop a platform for the coordinated usages of squads of drones, allegedly for civilian applications. However, as the IMI/StateWatch report states “the potential dual-use applications are obvious. For example, under the scenario of rescue operations, sensor systems to locate and track people (also autonomously) were tested; and under the scenario of forest fires, models were developed to calculate the best location for dropping water on a fire.”¹³. Interestingly, the Israeli ministry of defense is also a beneficiary of EU funds for this project.

In the case of projects where Israeli tech startups are involved, the link to military applications is even easier to follow. An example is the AUTOFLY¹⁴ project, led by Israeli AI startup [Sightec](#)¹⁴. The AI technology developed in this project enables drones to fly in areas in which GPS is not available and is commercialized by Sightec as the Navsight product, advertised on their website with the slogan [“Fly Your Drones Anywhere Jam-Proof & GPS-Free”](#)¹⁵. AUTOFLY states as the main application “home deliveries”, yet one

has to wonder how often GPS jamming is an actual issue for e-commerce firms. The Sighttec website also reports as an application “aerospace & defence” and it is hard not to speculate that that is their main source of revenue. GPS independent drone navigation has also been developed with EU funds by another Israeli startup, [Xtend](#)¹⁶, which is not shy about dedicating “[100% of their efforts to partnership with the IDF](#)”¹⁷ in the ongoing war.

Besides drone technology, IAI has also been busy developing new material for airplane manufacturing with [EU funds](#)¹⁸. The pattern should be familiar by now: the stated application is for civilian airplanes, but the use for military airplanes is immediate.

4. Homeland security, police tech and training, and risks for human rights

The Horizon framework funds, under calls like “Secure societies - Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens” research on police methodology and technology. This is the case of [ROXANNE](#)¹⁹ a project (2019-2022) for “speech technologies to identify criminals” with the Israeli Ministry of National Security as one partner. This is the Ministry that controls the Israeli police and is responsible for actively carrying out the oppression of Palestinian in pre-1967 Israel and in the occupied Territories. In this case, there is very little information on how the rights of people at the receiving end of the “research activities” were safeguarded (once again, activities in a EU project must comply with EU law, in this case EU Privacy law first and foremost), or whether activities or even data from activities in the Occupied Territories were involved (which would be a specific violation of EU law and Horizon rules). This is not the only Horizon project in this vein, we can mention here also POLIICE (2022-2025), where the Israeli consultancy LiberEU is one of the main beneficiaries, aimed at developing novel IT and AI technology for police interception. The same questions about this kind of activities taking place in Israel apply here as well.

As is the case for weapon technology, Israeli police methods are attractive for European states precisely because they are “battle tested”, as grim as that may sound. European police forces (as well as those of other Western countries) are eager to learn from their Israeli colleagues, known for their effectiveness and muscular approach. Respect for human rights is less of a concern. In 2015, Horizon program funded the “harmonization of interrogation tactics” across Israeli and EU polices in the project [LAW TRAIN](#)²⁰, including practices that amount to torture and human rights violation. The ensuing outcry and the recognition of the actual character of the project caused the Portuguese government to withdraw from it.

5. The European Commission: an unwilling, ineffective enforcer?

On 4 March 2025, EU Commissioner for Research Zaharieva stated: “Any research and innovation activities carried out under Horizon Europe1 must have an exclusive focus on civil applications. During the execution of project financed via Horizon Europe grant agreements, all beneficiaries must ensure that the activities under the action comply with this horizontal rule. The Commission is [closely monitoring the correct implementation of grant agreements signed under Horizon Europe](#).”²¹

Yet, the examples that we gave here generate at least reasonable doubt about the efficacy of that monitoring. Many more projects could be mentioned here.

As we mentioned above, a Horizon project is essentially a contract between the European Commission and the beneficiaries. These latter must, at multiple moments during a project, produce a self-assessment about ethics compliance. It is the European Commission's responsibility to verify those self-assessments, sometimes relying on external experts.

As we mentioned above, dual-use infringements are very difficult to evaluate and ascertain: in the end, any technology, even the most basic may be relevant to military applications. Also, the Commission makes the point that they can only scrutinize the applications of a project's results during the lifetime of the project itself, which may be realistic, albeit suboptimal, given the limited manpower in EU offices.

Yet, as we have seen above there are cases in which, given the applicants' main business interests and the topic of the project, the suspicion that the technology developed in a project has a primary immediate military application is warranted, essentially as soon as the project begins. In Israel's case, the further risk is that those technologies end up being used in Gaza and in the West Bank, making Horizon a direct funder of oppression and genocide.

Similarly, it is unclear how the provision that no Horizon-funded activity may be carried out in the occupied territories is monitored: it is not just about activities per se but also about use of data collected in those territories. Are data from drones flying in Gaza used to train computer vision algorithms? Are the personal data of Palestinian citizens being used? A cynic may see that as yet another way to "battle test" technologies, to us it is against everything EU and European research should stand for.

The Commission refuses to see the peculiarity of the Israeli case. Again Zaharieva: "However, the actions or behavior of the State of Israel cannot be considered automatically attributable to its entities participating in Horizon Europe grants"²².

Yet, for third-party states, there are very clear "red flags" that the Commission recognizes as demanding increased scrutiny (for example for export-related matters)²³. These red flags do not apply within the EU member states (that are of course considered to be trustworthy as far as human rights go). Non-member countries associated to Horizon Europe seem to live in an uncertain legal limbo in this respect, as many of those red flags are definitely raised by the projects we mentioned (and others), yet no special scrutiny seems to be needed, according to the Commission.

6. Is getting rid of projects at risk of dual use enough?

Some universities have advocated a case-by-case approach to cutting the ties with Israel: get rid of the "dangerous" ones, hold on to the "innocent ones", maybe on cancer research or Hegel's philosophy. The cases that we reviewed here may be seen as reinforcing this idea, after all, it is easy to differentiate between IAI and a department of Mathematics. We demonstrated here that the ambiguity between civilian and military applications is cunningly used towards a political end by a part of the EU leadership. In this context, the participation of Israel and its military-industrial complex does two things: on the one hand, it provides a continuum in which to hide war applications, providing plausible deniability and relying on monitoring instruments that are better suited for scientific research on less consequential topics. But it also gives these

activities the prestige of being part of the research output of one of the biggest powers in knowledge production, the EU. Given the current stance of the EU leadership, we therefore believe that direct funding of Israeli war crimes is an inevitable consequence of Israeli participation in the Horizon programmes.

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3A. Interview with Shir Hever on military complicity

What follows is an interview with Dr. Shir Hever, political economist, leading expert on Israeli arms trade and security sector, and coordinator of the military embargo campaign for the Boycott National Committee in Germany.

Expert Committee (EC): *Dr. Hever, what is in your opinion the role of tech startups in Israeli's occupation and war crime operations?*

Shir Ever (SE): Israel boasts a high rate of investment in R&D compared to the GDP (both by the private sector and by the government), because much of the research is in weapons development. Startups by definition begin by developing a product before starting to generate revenue, and the “products” developed by military and security startups are the tools by which Israel maintains its illegal occupation and the war crimes in the OPT. There are countless examples from innovations in small arms to facial recognition software, from incarceration and riot gear to digital surveillance. Almost all of the startups in the security sector specify on their own websites how they recruit graduates of Israeli military, police and intelligence units as management, directors, engineers and developers.

The technologies of oppression are tested by Israel's armed forces as part of the occupation. The startups then proceed to promote the technologies as “battle proven.” The military and other Israeli security organizations even provide footage, interviews and recommendations to the startups in order to assist them in marketing their products to external customers and generating income.

EC: *What is the relevance of Israeli arms imports into Europe? Why are they so sought after?*

SE: Israel is the world's largest per-capita arms exporter. Europe remains an essential and indispensable market for Israel, a sustaining force of the Israeli economy, but most importantly, it sustains Israel's war machine. Israel's former commander of the airforce Eliezer Novik said in an interview in 2023 that the sale of the Arrow3 system to Germany for 4 billion Euros saved Israel's arms industry from a crisis, and made it possible to arm the Israeli soldiers with more weapons.

Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Israeli arms companies celebrated the upcoming bonanza of arms sales. Indeed, with Europe ReArm projects and spending, European countries are using fear to overlook the fact that military trade with Israel is illegal. Any act of trade (selling, buying or transiting) violates international law, and also lends legitimacy to Israel's arms industry and opens new markets for Israeli arms.

Israel is testing its weapons on Palestinians is branding its weapons as “battle-proven.” The choice in certain European states to buy these weapons is therefore a political decision – to import Israel's own policies of oppression (Islamophobia, Xenophobia, racial profiling, invasive surveillance) into Europe. It is no coincidence that Frontex, for example, relies on Israeli drones by Elbit Systems in order to impose a lethal policy of border control which denies assistance to refugee boats in imminent risk of sinking.

EC: *What are the links between Israeli academic institutions and military tech startups and big business?*

SE: Israel's academic institutions maintain deep ties with military companies. Israel's large arms companies fund research at Israeli universities and offer scholarships to students who conduct research of value to them. Tech startups operate under the umbrella of these arms companies which hold fairs, conferences and facilitate joint research. Israel's largest arms company Elbit Systems has a policy of mergers and acquisitions – it nurtures military startups and then buys them if they seem promising.

In 2014 Israel's state comptroller issued a warning that the Israeli Ministry of Defense fails to register patents for military technology which is developed by soldiers in military service. The apparent lack of good governance is in fact part of an intentional policy: to encourage soldiers to capitalize on these ideas and develop them into products within the framework of startups. A special unit in the military is dedicated to military innovation: Talpiot. This unit operates from within the campus of the Hebrew University, which doubles as a military base. Thus the university serves as fertile ground for military startups.

4. Cooperation in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Assessment procedures installed by universities often focus on joint research with military or dual use applications. This chapter shows the way research in the social sciences and humanities is implicated in dispossession and discrimination against Palestinians, the bolstering of exclusivist claims to the land, the denial of Palestinian rights and narratives, and their exclusion from academic research. To illustrate this, the chapter draws on examples from archaeology and modern history. Research practices in both fields reproduce deep inequalities in access to sources (e.g. by excavating in the Occupied Territories or by barring access to vital archival records). Furthermore, As in other situations of colonialism, apartheid, or severe racial oppression, research in the Humanities and Social Sciences cannot be considered ‘innocent’ or ‘neutral’. More than the hard sciences, these fields of research deliver the ideological underpinnings for and trains the cadres of state repression.

1. Social sciences and humanities projects: beyond the scope of assessment?

The debate on cooperation with Israeli institutions focuses mostly on research with military, security or dual use purposes. For example, in response to the demand by students and staff to disclose ties to Israeli institutions during the first encampment the board of the University of Amsterdam issued a [statement](#) underlining that

“the UvA will under no circumstances contribute to warfare in any way, and we also don't intend to participate in exchanges in the field of military-related education. As far as we can assess, our current collaborations meet these criteria, and new collaborations are assessed by the Third-Party Collaboration Committee.”¹

The statement continued to list nine individual EU-funded projects across the sciences and humanities in which UvA researchers cooperated with Israeli universities or companies. While the first project on that list, a collaboration with Technion in the area of the prevention of home-made explosives in terrorist attacks, clearly also can serve military purposes, the listed collaborations in the social sciences and humanities are seemingly less controversial. These include:

- States' Practice of Human Rights Justification: a study in civil society engagement and human rights through the lens of gender and intersectionality
- Mobility justice for all: framing safer, healthier, and happier streets
- Machine learning for Sciences and Humanities.

Rather than assessing individual projects, this chapter focuses on the ways in which social science and humanities research in Israel is implicated in a continuing state of oppression and gross human rights violations. This makes cooperation in the social sciences and humanities controversial, even if the topics of individual projects do not relate to sensitive themes such as the occupation, military policies or Palestinian rights. The chapter presents three arguments against institutional cooperation with Israeli Humanities and Social Sciences faculties.

1. Historically and presently, research practices in the humanities and social sciences have been shaped by dispossession of and discrimination against Palestinians, by the occupation and by the apartheid policies of the Israeli state.

2. The Israeli infrastructure of research excludes Palestinians from participating on equal footing in research in the humanities and social sciences, especially when their research touches upon Palestinian history and rights.
3. While Israeli humanities and social science faculties and research institutes might encourage open and critical research in many areas, such openness does not extend to the vital areas of the exclusivist Jewish claim on the land of Israel, the Zionist ideological underpinnings of the state, or the acknowledgement of the 1948 Nakba and subsequent waves of expulsion of the Indigenous population.

These three points can be illustrated well in reference to developments in the fields of archaeology and modern history.

2. Occupation archaeology

From the foundation of the state, Israeli archaeology has always been deeply politicized. Special grounds for this are the strong connections between Biblical accounts of Ancient Israel, the historical continuity of Jewish or Arabic presence on the land, and present-day territorial claims (Abu El-Haj 2001; Hallote and Joffe 2002). The landscape and infrastructure of archaeological research was changed fundamentally with the start of the occupation in 1967. A detailed report by Israeli researchers published in 2009 lists 6000 locations of archaeological research in the occupied West Bank alone. During the decade 1978-1987, according to the researchers “about 15% of Israeli research-oriented excavations were being conducted in the territories, and up to a third of Israel’s Ph.D. candidates were engaged in research based on material from the occupied territories” (Greenberg and Keinan 2009: 6).

Although the Oslo Accords opened up some room for Palestinian-led excavations within the West Bank, these efforts were always obstructed by territorial fragmentation, the need to obtain permission from the Occupying forces, and the structural violence suffered by the population. With the Second Intifada, possibilities for Palestinian archaeological research even within Palestinian-controlled territories dwindled. The far-right turn in Israeli politics has strengthened the ideological drive behind excavations in the Occupied Territories, which are viewed as illegal by international scholars, making it impossible to find funding for such projects outside Israel, or publish results in international journals. In an August 2022 editorial, Haaretz spoke of “occupation archaeology”, arguing that “Archaeology has become a tool to push Palestinians off land and establish the narrative about the Jewish right to the land.” The newspaper lists participation in excavations in the occupied West Bank by Bar-Ilan University, Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University, the University of Haifa and, unsurprisingly given its status as settler university, Ariel University (also see Wind 2025: 20-24).

3. History as erasure

Like ancient history and archaeology, the field of modern history is an ideological minefield due to its potential to challenge official claims about the nature of the Zionist movement and its relations to the European colonial powers, the foundation of the State of Israel, and the fate of the Indigenous Palestinian population during the 1948 Nakba and beyond. Again, contestation already starts at the point of the most basic research requirements and infrastructure. The Israeli NGO Akevot has documented that while the Israeli Archives Law is relatively liberal and sets strict terms when government documents must be made available to the public, the practice of archiving and making

accessible state documents is extremely restrictive. In a [2017 data sheet](#), the NGO noted that “of the roughly 14.8 million files kept by the Israel State Archives and the IDF & Defense Establishment Archives, no more than 191,204 are accessible for public consultation, the equivalent of 1.29%.”² State intervention to keep archival records outside the public purview is especially intense for [documents pertaining to the Nakba](#), the key event in 20th century Palestinian history.³

Despite such censorship and restrictions on research, a minority of critical historians and sociologists have used those documents available to present an alternative vision of Israel's past that centrally includes the Palestinian Nakba. These New Historians and New Sociologists have faced an enormous backlash from mainstream scholars that goes well beyond the confines of ‘normal’ academic debate, including both systematic questioning of their scientific integrity as well as their loyalty to Israel. As one recent article by an author sympathetic to the critics of the New Historians summarizes: “the most noticeable impact of the Critical Historians lay not in uncovering and discussing ambivalent moments in Israeli history, but in polarizing Israeli society, leading the debate to a point in which nearly any criticism of Israeli history or politics came to be associated with post- or anti-Zionism. Soon, questions of political affinity and vision occupied the center stage, instead of historical and academic argumentation.” (Coman 2018: 119) Given the stifling academic climate in Israel, most of the well-known New Historians chose to leave Israeli academia and accepted teaching positions abroad. Meanwhile, it is significant that Palestinian voices within the Israeli academic landscape are almost completely absent from the debate on the foundation of the Israeli state and the Nakba.

While archeology in Israel is heavily used to cement claims on the ancient roots of current Jewish land-claims, the dominant version of the modern history of Zionism, the state of Israel and its relation to the Palestinians and the Arab world helps to solidify a strong societal hegemony for the idea of the exclusively Jewish nature of the state and its right to use abysmal force in “self-defense” against the native Palestinian population. Israeli school books reproduce this dominant vision to the point of erasing Palestinian history and culture (Nurit Peled-Elhanan 2012). The controversial “Nation-State Law” introduced by the Knesset in 2018 further enshrines this exclusivist notion of the Israeli state, which as the new historians have shown has been built into the “Iron Wall” approach that militant Zionists have followed from the 1920s.

4. Legitimizing Apartheid

As in other situations of colonialism, apartheid, or severe oppression on the basis of racialization, research in the Humanities and Social Sciences can never be considered ‘innocent’ or ‘neutral’. More than the hard sciences, these fields of research deliver the ideological underpinnings and train a substantial segment of the cadres of state repression. While it is true that the Humanities and Social Sciences can contribute to oppressive ideologies or practices in liberal democracies as well, the realities of Israeli apartheid and the illegal occupation form severely aggravating conditions that must be taken into account when considering the purpose and functioning of academic institutions. In the case of apartheid South Africa the function of the university in reproducing the ideological preconditions of White rule, for example as part of the work of white protestant theologians, was considered a major reason to sever academic ties (Wels 2014).

Oppositional voices are present within Israeli academia, even though their position in Israeli universities and society more broadly is often one of isolation and marginalization. In April 2024 the arrest of the leading Palestinian legal scholar Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, with collusion of her employer, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, showcased how small the margins for opposition within Israeli universities has become, especially for scholars with a Palestinian background. As

prominent dissident Israeli academics working within Israel and elsewhere have stressed, the combination of ending institutional cooperation with building long-term scholarly relationships with Palestinian and Israeli opponents of occupation and apartheid can be an important factor in combatting this isolation and marginalization. It must be noted that these arguments explicitly do not exclude cooperation with individual Israeli scholars, especially those who actively oppose the above-mentioned state of affairs. In fact, as this report repeatedly argues, such individual ties can and should be encouraged while formal ties are being cut.

In a context of extreme inequality and human rights violations, where the state has an important role in granting or barring access to research opportunities and infrastructures, where research is manipulated and used to support where voices of Palestinians are routinely silenced, and where universities play a key role in educating the cadres of apartheid, it is an illusion that Dutch universities can maintain formal cooperation in the humanities and social sciences without making themselves complicit to the continuation of a situation of severe oppression.

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¹ <https://www.uva.nl/shared-content/uva/en/news/news/2024/05/our-collaborations-with-israeli-organisations.html>

² <https://www.akevot.org.il/en/publications-2/#section/1/1/3>

³ <https://www.akevot.org.il/en/publications-2/#section/1/1/0>

5. Legal Complicity of Dutch Universities in Institutional Cooperation with Israeli Universities

In this chapter, we describe the clearly discernible legal identity of the Dutch university, both as a *public* entity of the Dutch state, and as a domestic and international business (a *private* actor) (section 1). Each of these distinct and overlapping identities attracts distinct and overlapping applicable law(s) that describe different obligations and responsibilities as a public *and* private actor (section 2).

1. The legal personality of the Dutch university

Dutch universities are recognised as legal entities with full legal capacity in the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act ([WHW](#))[i]; whose identity as such and public purpose are elaborated clearly in the Act [ii]. Furthermore, their internal governance (which includes a legal obligation [iii] to report annually to the Dutch government via the Minister under a protocol clearly elaborated in the [Dutch Civil Code](#))[iv], activities and funding are heavily regulated by the Minister[v]. The governance, legal compliance and the quality of Dutch universities are the defined responsibility of the [Dutch Inspectorate](#) of Education of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science[vi]. The nature of the university as a public entity (for the ‘openbare’ universities) is further reinforced by a recent note of the [Inspectorate](#) (at 17)[vii], clearly referring to Dutch (public) universities as possessing ‘specifieker gezegd, publiekrechtelijke rechtspersoonlijkheid, omdat ze bij wet zijn ingesteld om overheidstaken uit te voeren. Ze zijn daarmee ook bestuursorgaan in de zin van de Algemene wet bestuursrecht (AWB)’[viii] and, as such, are subject to the WHW, AWB and the general principles of administrative law. Their qualification has been confirmed also by the Tax Agency (Belastingdienst) in a ‘[Standpunt](#)’[ix] publication, whereby the Agency insisted on the nature of (public) universities as public entities tasked with performing public tasks. Their status under [Dutch law](#) is of ‘Public-law independent administrative bodies’[x]. This means that they operate independently of direct ministerial order, albeit within the confines of the law.

Significantly, the exact status of Dutch universities is also relevant under international law. Given the international character of their cooperation with Israeli academic institutions, activities conducted within such partnerships may, on various grounds, engage the international responsibility of the Netherlands. This includes potential breaches of the obligation not to render aid and assistance to the illegal situation(s) created by Israel (Advisory Opinion ICJ 19 July 2024, see below), ensure respect for international humanitarian law, Common Article 1 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, as well as the potential violation of the obligation to prevent genocide (Article 1, 1948 Genocide Convention).

Based on the assessment above, an argument could be made from an international law perspective that (at least public) Dutch universities are organs of the Dutch state pursuant to Article 4 ARSIWA [xi]. Yet, their regulatory and institutional autonomy from the state structural apparatus as granted by law suggests - though does not definitively establish - that their (international) wrongful conduct may not be automatically attributable to the Netherlands. However, attribution might materialize under the conditions of Art. 5 ARSIWA, whereby Dutch (both public and *bijzondere*) universities might qualify as entities ‘empowered

by the law of that State to exercise elements of the governmental authority' [xii] (see section 2.1).

Last but not least, Dutch universities also operate as KVK (Kamer van Koophandel, Chamber of Commerce) Dutch-registered entities, constituting a significant and [influential purchaser and provider of goods and services](#) [xiii] relating to education and research in the Netherlands. In addition, they also function as [significant employers](#) [xiv] whose employment conditions are heavily regulated, at the national and local levels [xv].

Thus, for reasons including legal recognition, lines of reporting and institutional responsibility, we consider Dutch universities to constitute recognisable (public and private) legal entities under the responsibility of the Dutch state, whose (international wrongful) actions might be attributable to the Netherlands if they fall in the scope of the exercise of 'governmental authority'.

2. Relevant legal frameworks

In this section, we identify and briefly describe the most relevant applicable legal frameworks and jurisprudence to ascertaining the risks of human rights and humanitarian law violations by Dutch universities from their institutional collaborations with Israeli universities [xvi]. These frameworks stem from the identities of Dutch universities first, as public entities, and second, as businesses (and thus, private actors who contract independently of the state). As hybrid public-private legal entities, Dutch universities thus incur discernible responsibilities both as public actors and as private actors, as we outline clearly in the following sections.

2.1 Responsibilities as entities empowered to exercise elements of governmental authority

The recent [Advisory Opinion](#) of the International Court of Justice (19th July 2024) (AO-ICJ) [xvii] highlighted that 'third states' have several obligations, including (i) not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT); (ii) not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by Israel's illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; (iii) to ensure that any impediment resulting from the illegal presence of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the exercise of the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination is brought to an end; that (iv) all the States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention have the obligation (...) to ensure compliance by Israel with international humanitarian law as embodied in that Convention (Longobardo 2025; Hernández, Wessel 2025; Law for Palestine 2025; Wilde 2024; Al Tamimi 2024). Importantly, States also have an obligation to prevent (and punish) genocide and – evidently – not to be complicit with it (Tams 2024; Pietropaoli 2024; Ben-Naftali 2009) [xviii]. In this context, a discrete array of university actions might fall within the scope of these obligations, and become relevant when assessing institutional ties with Israeli universities and knowledge entities.

Since Dutch universities might qualify as entities empowered by law to exercise elements of governmental authority pursuant to Art. 5 ARSIWA, their conduct may attract the international responsibility of the Netherlands as long as Dutch universities operate within such governmental functions. The exercise of governmental capacity potentially linked to

unlawful conduct might be identified for example in the following activities: [issuing diplomas](#) [xix] in the context of joint education programs with universities that are directly (and possibly, indirectly) involved in the atrocities occurring in Palestine in a way that aids or assists Israel in committing its violations or fails to prevent genocide (d'Argent 2025); (executive) decisions related to [knowledge security](#) (KS) [xx], an area of both deep political sensitivity and legal and regulatory governance by the Dutch government and the EU, currently under increasing monitoring and control by the state, especially regarding (sensitive) technology and dual-use research output [xxi]. This is particularly relevant when such output is produced in collaboration with foreign partners. All forms of transfer of sensitive and dual-use research are subject to export controls (including sanctions regimes). The 2022 [National Guidelines on Knowledge Security](#) [xxii] reaffirm the institutional autonomy of knowledge institutions and the importance of self-regulation. Yet, they are also clear in stating that '(...) However, knowledge security also affects our country's national security. The protection of national security is one of the core duties of the government. For this reason, an active role is reserved for the Dutch central government (...) The central government is working with the knowledge sector to provide scope for action that will help knowledge institutions (...) These efforts involve providing information and advice, exchanging ideas and facilitating. They also entail setting frameworks as needed for purposes of national security, in addition to monitoring compliance with these frameworks' (at 11) including where the Government does not consider self-regulation sufficient (at 26). It is noteworthy that involvement of knowledge institutions with the military is considered an element in threat assessment: accordingly, the Guidelines include a reminder that 'State actors use a variety of methods to acquire knowledge and technology that they can use for military purposes or for objectives that are not consistent with our fundamental values' (at 5). As long as Dutch universities' actions fall within the scope of governmental authority as seen above (e.g. joint diplomas, KS decisions over dual-use technology research), we interpret the obligations on Dutch universities to have several consequences, including suspension or cessation of any jointly-organised research, education and mobility activities with Israeli universities pending a thorough independent review and analysis of Dutch-Israeli university relations to ensure activities comply with the ICJ AO of 19 July 2024, so as not to trigger the international responsibility of the Netherlands [xxiii].

2.2 (International) criminal and civil legal complicity

Universities, like corporations, can be implicated in (international) criminal and civil accountability frameworks when their actions - or inactions - contribute to serious human rights abuses. Drawing from international criminal law standards (Hajdin 2024), typically complicity does not require direct participation in the crime, nor sharing the intent of the principal perpetrator; rather, criminal responsibility may arise if a university (i) is aware that their assistance or involvement is contributing to the principal wrongdoing ('knowledge of (foreseeable) harmful effects', Pietropaoli 2024:15); it (ii) undertakes activities (or omissions) that provide substantial assistance that facilitates the commission of the crime or raises the risk thereof (iii) before, after or during the crime. This assistance can take various forms. For a university, this might materialise when entering or engaging in institutional partnerships with entities credibly implicated in violations of international or domestic human rights law and international humanitarian law, through activities such as providing research knowledge, technologies, funding, or infrastructure that supports harmful practices. An area of particular

attention for criminal complicity of universities in the context of violations of human rights and humanitarian law are collaborations and co-development of, for example, drone technology, AI and data, or aerospace technology, linked to military use (some of these described in van Tets et al. 2025) [xxiv]. Yet other type of activities, such as training programs [xxv], might equally constitute sufficient contribution for the purposes of complicity. Short of directly contributing to a crime or benefitting from it, silent or tacit complicity might also be established, especially in the context of ‘neutral business assistance’ (Hajdin, 2024: 383). While more difficult to prove, as noted by Pietropaoli (2024: 20), continued business operations may give rise to complicity, particularly where there remains a close connection to the event and the relevant entity fails to distance itself from the crime. The ICTY in the [Furundžija](#) judgment noted that in certain circumstances, mere presence may suffice for these purposes: ‘(i)t may be inferred from this case [the Synagogue case] that an approving spectator who is held in such respect by the other perpetrators that his presence encourages them in their conduct, may be guilty of complicity in a crime against humanity.’ This reflects a growing recognition that failing to exercise influence, where one has the capacity to do so, can carry legal (and moral) liability (Pietropaoli 2024: 21). This is particularly relevant for university cooperation.

Corporate criminal liability for international crimes arises where the domestic legal order permits the prosecution of legal entities and some national courts have pursued such cases under laws incorporating various international criminal law standards. In this context, a comparable framework of liability may be applicable in the Netherlands. It is increasingly difficult to deny that Dutch universities are aware that their cooperation with Israeli institutions – whether through ‘research output’ (e.g. development of dual-use technology) or tacit bystanding – might facilitate the perpetration of serious crimes and the perpetuation of the apartheid regime and occupation. In an earlier investigation related to the OPT, the Dutch public prosecutor has clarified that ‘Persons and legal entities within the Dutch jurisdiction are required not in any way to be involved in, or contribute to, possible violations of the Geneva Conventions or other rules of International Humanitarian Law. They are also required to take the decisions of authoritative international bodies and judicial institutions like the International Court of Justice (...) extremely serious. The Dutch Government also expressed this position during the discussions and in the letters of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs in November 2006 and September 2007’ [xxvii]. A landmark case illustrating the principle contained in the quote above is that of [Frans van Anraat](#) [xxviii]. He was convicted as an accessory to war crimes for supplying chemicals to the Hussein regime, knowing they could be used to produce poisonous gas against civilians. Van Anraat’s conduct was deemed as ‘deliberate contribution’ to the offences by the Hoge Raad (Pietropaoli 2024: 16) [xxix]. It should also be added that – as pointed out in the [Law for Palestine Report](#) (2025:46), ‘(i)t is anticipated that ad hoc accountability mechanisms will be established for the case of Palestine, like those during the UN Public Hearings on Transnational Corporations in Apartheid South Africa.’

Beyond criminal liability, universities may face civil accountability under domestic legal systems, especially if their activities cross borders and contribute to human rights harms elsewhere. Countries such as the Netherlands have increasingly allowed litigation for extraterritorial corporate complicity in human rights violations. Collaborating with institutions or governments credibly accused of international crimes linked to international

atrocities could expose universities to future litigation lawsuits or complaints, especially where recognised institutional practices such as inadequate institutional policy guidance, implementation and monitoring on risky activities are deemed to give rise to harm. Furthermore, the legal landscape in the context of civil liability is quickly evolving. The most relevant development is the EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive ([CSDDD](#)) [xxx], now undergoing a process of transposition in the Netherlands, not yet complete. The implementing [Dutch legislative proposal](#) (November 2024) [xxxi], articulates the requirement of companies to exercise proper risk-based due diligence in the areas of human rights. Importantly, anyone can submit a substantiated notification to the Dutch Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) if there is objective reason to believe that a company is non-compliant with the legislation [xxxii]. Both the CSDDD and the Dutch legislative proposal rely on and expand on the broader business and human rights normative framework (see next section). As many Dutch universities meet the applicability threshold of the CSDDD now and in the near and longer-term future, the development of transparent and effective institutional policies and guidelines is essential to ensure they meet their evolving Dutch legal obligations. Finally, also non-judicial mechanisms play a role: complaints may be brought under frameworks like the [OECD Guidelines through National Contact Points](#) [xxxiii], targeting universities that contribute to rights violations through global partnerships or investments.

2.3 (Corporate) Responsibility as private actors

This section describes the relevant and applicable normative frameworks for private actors under the field of business and human rights, legally articulated via the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#) [xxxiv]. As discussed in Section 1, universities can be considered both public and private legal actors. In particular, universities can be considered 'business entities' within the scope and definition of the UNGPs [xxxv], and are subjects bearing a responsibility to respect human rights, which exists over and above compliance with domestic and international law [xxxvi]. Dutch universities' institutional ties with Israeli universities raise questions about risk of involvement in human rights violations under the UNGPs. The Guiding Principles require companies to '(a) Avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities, and address such impacts when they occur; and (b) seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they have not contributed to those impacts' (Principle 13). In essence, the UNGPs articulate an involvement framework of three categories of conduct that trigger corporate responsibility: 'cause', 'contribute', and 'directly linked to' [xxxvii] along the spectrum of what has been defined as 'transactional proximity' (Azarova, 2018: 202) to the harm. We speculatively examine each category as follows:

- Cause: A university directly causes a human rights impact through its own education and research activities. For example, if a university directly co-develops weapons used in human rights abuses, military technology or strategies (such as surveillance) employed in the occupation or genocidal acts, it would be causing such impact. Yet non-military research might also be relevant in this category, for example the development of transport technology utilized to connect Israel proper with the OPT or surveillance technologies to engage in data collection from the OPT.

- **Contribute:** A university contributes to a human rights impact, either directly or through an outside entity. This could include funding or providing resources to projects that support human rights violations. For instance, cooperating in a research project involving companies building settlements in the OPT, or providing financial support to knowledge institutions running a project grounded in the unauthorized extraction of data from the Palestinian population. The financing/contribution does not need to be *conditio sine qua non* for ‘contribute’ to materialize.
- **Directly Linked To:** A university is ‘directly linked to’ human rights impacts if its operations, products, or services are connected to human rights abuses through its ‘business relationships’. This connection can occur even if the university itself does not directly cause or contribute to the violations. This category is particularly relevant for Dutch universities cooperating with Israeli institutions that may be complicit in human rights and humanitarian law abuses. Examples might include: partnering with Israeli universities located in illegally occupied Palestinian territories; collaborating with institutions that develop legal doctrines justifying human rights and humanitarian violations and/or oppressive public order techniques; or engaging with research entities executing archaeological excavation in the OPT.

The ‘directly linked to’ category is critical in assessing the implications of university partnerships, for a fundamental reason: it captures the broader structural context in which Israeli universities, individually and as a sector, are **systemically** complicit in human rights abuses. A narrow focus on the human rights impact of individual collaborative projects risks obscuring the systemic and institutional complicity of Israeli knowledge institutions in grave violations, including apartheid, occupation, and other international crimes. For example, a seemingly benign research collaboration on early cancer detection with an Israeli university medical centre may, in isolation, appear unobjectionable. However, if that institution structurally discriminates against Palestinian patients, it actively sustains an unlawful regime of racial domination and exclusion. The ‘directly linked to’ category helps make sense of this context, avoiding a fragmented, project-based analysis that risks otherwise legitimizing an oppressive system. It demands a shift from isolated evaluations to systemic scrutiny [xxxviii].

A. Human rights due diligence relevant for conflict-affected areas

Companies are expected to implement their responsibility to respect human rights through conducting a due diligence process: identifying risks, addressing harms, tracking performance, engaging stakeholders, and providing remedies where needed. A recent report of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights indicates that a heightened due diligence process is necessary [in conflict-affected areas](#) [xxxix]. In this case, additional consequences attach to engaging in activities with Israeli universities operating in what is now recognised as a conflict zone, where war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and severe violations human rights are taking place. As ‘(b)usinesses are not neutral actors; their presence is not without impact. Even if business does not take a side in the conflict, the impact of their operations will necessarily influence conflict dynamics,’ (para 43) a conflict-sensitive approach based on a ‘a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context and acting to minimize negative impacts’ is advised (para 44). Thus, for Dutch universities collaborating with Israeli universities, their heightened due diligence process should incorporate tools from atrocity prevention and conflict prevention to augment their

existing due diligence frameworks. This involves – firstly, undertaking a conflict analysis that identifies the root causes of tensions and potential triggers of the conflict; second, mapping the main actors to the conflict, as well as affected stakeholders and other parties, with particular attention to human rights defenders [xl]; and thirdly, ‘anticipate the ways in which the businesses’ own operations, products or services impact upon existing social tensions and relationships between the various groups, and/or create new tensions or conflicts’ (para 48). Note that the Working Group draws attention to the differentiated impact of violence on women and girls, noting that conflict exacerbates gender-based discrimination (paras 62-63). It also recommends companies to develop conflict-sensitive operational-level grievance mechanisms and commit to active engagement with local communities and groups in conflict and post-conflict settings (para 108).

Currently, it is not common practice within Dutch universities to have an institution-wide Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) policy or a strategy that integrates human rights across its main areas of activity. Across the typical range of activities where Dutch and Israeli universities collaborate (research and knowledge generation, teaching, mobility and knowledge exchange), the authors are not aware of the existence of explicit policies that require screening or assessment for human rights and other dimensions as part of project or programme exploration, development or idea generation stages. Other universities – like the [University of Gent](#) (Brems 2019) [xli] – do have one currently in place ([Mazzoleni 2025](#)) [xlii], demonstrating the existence of what might be considered [institutional good practice](#) within the university sector [xliii].

B. Leverage and Remedial Action: Possibilities and Limits

Where universities suspect their activities are causing or contributing to harm, they are expected to cease or prevent their contribution, mitigate any further impact and cooperate in the remediation of the harm. Prevention and mitigation are evidently also relevant for universities directly linked to human rights adverse impacts through their partners [xliv]. In particular, they should exercise leverage to ‘effect change’ (Macchi et al. 2019: 11). Leverage refers to a university’s ability to influence its partners to respect human rights and mitigate adverse impacts. Leverage strategies available to Dutch universities might include:

- Institutional relationship-building with Palestinian universities, to create more equitable and just institutional collaboration alternatives;
- Collaborative engagement with political leadership, international organizations, authoritative NGOs, and civil society bodies to collectively pressure for rights-respecting conduct by Israeli universities;
- Conditional cooperation, such as requiring institutional partners to explicitly reject ongoing human rights violations and to sever ties with military or other entities credibly involved in international human rights violations and atrocity crimes;

However, in contexts such as Israel’s prolonged and unlawful occupation of the Palestinian territories and the recent escalation of atrocity crimes and human rights violations, effective leverage may be unattainable. As recently observed, ‘systemic and structural violations, policies and practices have survived multiple administrations, parties and governing bodies’ (Law for Palestine, 2025: 43). In such a setting, attempts to influence or change the university

partner may prove futile. Consequently, when institutions have the knowledge of risk of severe impacts of their partnerships, and can disengage, the continued maintenance of those partnerships may result in transiting from the 'directly linked to' category to the 'contributing' one, with the remedial responsibilities that ensue. Under these conditions, responsible disengagement becomes a legal and moral necessity [xliv]. In effect, partnerships with institutions structurally involved in human rights abuses may be considered inhibited *ab initio*, rendered impermissible from the outset due to their inherent and foreseeable risks and the 'immitigability of the harm' (Azarova, 2018: 195). Note that divestment from businesses and entities implicated in violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the OPT and against Palestinians is not a new or recent development. As Azarova (2018: 201) notes, over a decade ago, the Netherlands introduced a 'discouragement policy' aimed at engaging with relevant companies and alerting them to the legal risks of involvement in activities within the OPT that may breach international law. That same year, for instance, the Stichting Pensioenfonds Zorg en Welzijn [divested from five Israeli banks](#) due to their involvement in the construction and maintenance of settlements [xlvi]. Thus, disengagement might become the most reliable course of action to avoid contributing to or being directly linked with human rights harms. Criteria for disengagement should include (Macchi et al., 2019:26):

- Severity of violations: the graver and more systemic the abuse, the stronger the obligation to withdraw;
- Lack of leverage: if the university has no realistic means to influence its partner's conduct, disengagement is warranted;
- Predictability of harm: if harm is foreseeable and structural, the duty to disengage is strengthened.

Disengagement should be a structured process: assessing human rights risks, clearly communicating the rationale for severance to all parties, meaningfully consulting and involving the relevant stakeholders (both own staff and the partners'), drafting an implementation protocol, and formally suspending or terminating the partnership [xlvii].

C. Relevance (and centrality) of a preventative and precautionary approach:

By adhering to a preventative and precautionary approach in conducting their human rights due diligence, universities can proactively – instead of reactively – manage risks by taking positive steps to prevent and mitigate potential harm, thereby exercising leverage over their partners. In particular, the precautionary aspect of this approach holds that when an action or policy carries a suspected risk of causing serious harm, the burden of proof to demonstrate that it is not harmful lies with those undertaking the action. In the context of university cooperation with Israeli knowledge institutions implicated in human rights violations, this entails:

- Risk assessment: a thorough evaluation of potential human rights harms linked to the partnership;
- Precautionary measures: adopting safeguards, including conditional cooperation or disengagement, where there is reasonable suspicion of contributing or being directly linked to harm;

- Reversal of the burden of proof: the partner institution must demonstrate that it is not complicit in human rights abuses. If it fails to do so, continued cooperation is indefensible.

By centering this approach, universities can ensure they act with due diligence, uphold their legal and ethical obligations, and avoid reinforcing or legitimizing unlawful regimes through their institutional relationships. Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates that international human rights and humanitarian law constitute the normative foundation for all legal responsibilities – and potential liabilities – arising from university cooperation. Any evaluation of such partnerships must be grounded in this legal framework, which serves as the primary anchor. All other considerations, including reputational or strategic interests, are secondary and must be assessed in light of their alignment with human rights and humanitarian law obligations.

3. Human rights due diligence and impact assessment for Dutch universities' institutional collaborations with Israeli universities – ways forward

For Dutch universities, the UNGPs clearly describe how companies can put the responsibility to protect human rights into practice. These activities include:

- A statement of their policy commitment to respect human rights that is embedded throughout the organisation;
- Human rights due diligence process(es);
- Processes to provide or enable remedy to those harmed, in the event that the company causes or contributes to a negative impact. (UNGP 15).

We recommend that Dutch universities undertake a dedicated conflict-sensitive human rights due diligence exercise on their relations with Israeli universities (Airey 2024:15) [xlvi]. Albeit not excluding legal liability per se, human rights due diligence is a way for companies to proactively manage potential and actual adverse human rights impacts with which they are directly or indirectly involved, and demonstrate that they are doing so. It consists of four components:

- Identifying and assessing actual or potential adverse human rights impacts that the company may cause or contribute to through its own activities, or which may be directly linked to its operations, products or services by its business relationships;
- Integrating findings from impact assessments across relevant company processes and taking appropriate action according to its involvement in the impact;
- Tracking the effectiveness of measures and processes to address adverse human rights impacts in order to know if they are working;
- Communicating on how impacts are being addressed and showing stakeholders – in particular affected stakeholders – that there are adequate policies and processes in place [xlix].

The UN Working Group note that:

'[P]revention of adverse impacts on people is the main purpose of human rights due diligence. It concerns risks to people, not risks to business. It should be ongoing, as the risks to human rights may change over time; and be informed by meaningful stakeholder engagement, in particular with affected stakeholders, human rights defenders, trade unions and grassroots organizations. Risks to human rights defenders and other critical voices need to be considered' [1].

To inaugurate and progress this HRDD process, we propose that Dutch universities undertake a comprehensive Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) of their relations with Israeli universities. Given their recognition as a discrete exercise in human rights due diligence, a HRIA offers a structured approach that can [li]:

- Identify adverse human rights impacts, including understanding these from the perspectives of impacted rights-holders such as academics, students and community members.
- Determine measures to address any adverse human rights impacts identified (through prevention, mitigation and remediation, or disengagement).
- Facilitate dialogue between the university, rights-holders and other relevant parties, in particular human rights actors.
- Facilitate capacity building and learning for Dutch university stakeholders, rights-holders and others involved in the impact assessment, including through raising awareness of respective rights and responsibilities.
- Enhance the accountability of Dutch universities through documenting the impacts that have been identified and the actions taken to address them.
- Build partnerships between Dutch universities and other stakeholders to address human rights impacts, including through developing joint actions to address cumulative impacts or legacy issues; and
- Identify learning that might inform Dutch universities' human rights due diligence practices with regard to other projects or activities.

Thus, through information and learning from a once-off HRIA, Dutch universities may develop a thoughtful, informed longer-term institutional approach to Human Rights Due Diligence in their relations with Israeli universities. We believe that this two-step approach and process will result in a credible, lasting and effective instrument, one that is bespoke to the size, reputation, activities and relationships of Dutch universities.

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[i] <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0005682/2025-01-01> "(L)egal entities with full legal capacity", Article 1.9, also Article 1.8.2, Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek (WHW), Annex a, h and j. (Translations of the authors). 'Bijzondere' universities (Annex WHW, letter b) are also recognized as legal entities, yet not as having public law subjectivity (e.g. Tilburg and Radboud/Nijmegen are private foundations). Most provisions in the WHW extend to 'bijzondere' universities, with the possibilities of deviating in terms of organization and administration (Chapter 9 WHW), see also Verwarring in veelvoud. De juridische organisatie van instellingen voor hoger onderwijs. June 2023, p. 16, <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2023/06/13/verwarring-in-veelvoud-de-juridische-organisatie-van-instellingen-voor-hoger-onderwijs>.

[ii] Article 1.22; Article 1.3.1: "(Universities) provide initial training in scientific education, conduct scientific research, provide training for scientific researchers or technological designers, and transfer knowledge *for the benefit of society*." (Italics of the authors).

[iii] Chapter 9 of the Act.

[iv] https://wetten-overheid-nl.translate.google/BWBR0003045/2025-01-01/?_x_tr_sl=nl&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc#Boek2_Titeldeel9_Afdeling8_Artikel392 Identified in Article 2.9. Reporting as Article 392 of Book 2 of the Civil Code (A2.9.1).

[v] Articles 2.5-2.8; The relevant Minister is the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, as per Article 1.1. of the WHW.

[vi] <https://english.onderwijsinspectie.nl/inspection> See "Summary profile of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education" The Inspectorate monitors the compliance of prospective and existing higher education institutions with laws and regulations pertaining to the education sector, the lawful and efficient use of funding, and the quality of the higher education system as a whole (including the accreditation system).

[vii] <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2023/06/13/verwarring-in-veelvoud-de-juridische-organisatie-van-instellingen-voor-hoger-onderwijs>

[viii] "(...) more specifically, public-law legal personality, because they are established by law to perform government tasks. They are therefore also administrative bodies within the meaning of the General Administrative Law Act." (translation by the authors).

[ix] <https://kennisgroepen.belastingdienst.nl/publicaties/kg05220225-openbare-universiteit-openbaar-lichaam-artikel-15-eerste-lid-onderdeel-c-wbr/> Belastingdienst KG:052:2022:5 Openbare universiteit, openbaar lichaam, artikel 15 lid 1, onderdeel c WBR.

[x] <https://www.inspectie-oe.nl/toezichtvelden/overheidsinformatie/geinspecteerde-instellingen/publiekrechtelijke-zelfstandige-bestuursorganen>.

[xi] Draft articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, (with commentaries) Yearbook of the International Law Commission, 2001, vol. II, Part Two. This approach has been adopted, for example, by colleagues at the University of Antwerp, who have evaluated their institution as functioning as an organ of the Belgian state. Gamze Erdem Türkelli et al., Breaches of obligations arising from peremptory norms of international law: Consequences for institutional cooperation with universities in Israel, updated version 18 June 2025, <https://medialibrary.uantwerpen.be/files/7154/0961f696-b017-4904-b4a1-22d7b5e6c149.pdf>.

[xii] The framework under art. 5 ARSIWA might also extend to 'bijzondere' universities and other knowledge institutions to the extent that they perform elements of governmental authority.

[xiii] <https://www.rathenau.nl/en/werking-van-het-wetenschapssysteem/total-investment-research-and-innovation-2020-2026>. Expenditure of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on R&D was estimated to increase from EUR 4.4 billion to EUR 5.0 billion (+12%) over the period 2020-2022, according to the national budget. Rathenau Instituut, Total Investment in Research and Innovation 2020-2026 Facts and Figures, (undated) at 3.

[xiv] Universiteiten van Nederland (UvN)'s website lists a figure of 61 thousand employees, with over 340,000 students, <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/en/who-we-are>. Rathenau Instituut estimates that the share of scientific personnel of university staff is 59%, <https://www.rathenau.nl/en/science-figures/personnel/university-staff/scientific-and-support-staff-university-and-discipline>.

[xv] See iterations of the Collective Labour Agreement.

[xvi] For purposes of brevity, this does not include *all* relevant and applicable legal instruments. Decisions on those deemed most relevant are based on (i) recent and evolving jurisprudence from international judicial bodies, and authoritative legal opinion from legal experts in international, regional and domestic law, and (ii) evolving contextual legal and governance instruments on human rights obligations of public and private actors, and their governance by States.

[xvii] <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-adv-01-00-en.pdf>. The Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 on the Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem is an authoritative judicial pronouncement on the legal obligations that arise from the UN Charter, key decisions of the UN Security Council, relevant international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and the law of state responsibility as it relates to occupied Palestine. The obligations laid out in these bodies of law are binding upon states and are recognised as a matter of customary international law.

[xviii] As specified by Ben-Naftali, 'The prohibition on genocide is a jus cogens norm. The peremptory nature of the norm attached to the obligation to prevent, for otherwise the normative status of the prohibition - and its legal implications - would be rendered meaningless. Indeed, the obligation to prevent has further been recognized as an obligation erga omnes, which places on states a positive duty and is violated by omission', at 36.

[xix] <https://www.lesoir.be/648867/article/2025-01-16/les-universites-belges-sont-elles-debitrices-des-obligations-internationales-de>.

[xx] <https://english.loketkennisveiligheid.nl/knowledge-security>.

[xxi] Dual use refers to research that has civilian societal purpose but that can also have military application and, as such, a negative impact if intended by a 'bad actor'. For this report, we focus on the production and export of dual use products and technology that have both civilian and military applications. Knowledge security governance is now regulated at EU and national levels, and includes strict measures for export control. See Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1700 of 15 September 2021 on internal compliance programmes for controls of research involving dual-use items under Regulation (EU) 2021/821 of the European Parliament and of the Council setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items (OJ L 338 23.09.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/1700/oj>).

[xxii] National knowledge security guidelines. Secure international collaboration, 2022. <https://english.loketkennisveiligheid.nl/documents/2022/04/07/national-knowledge-security-guidelines>.

[xxiii] It is worth noting that a recent report on the consequences of the ICJ AO of July 2024 for the European Union has indicated that 'The EU is under a duty to review such programmes [*i.e. research funding*, insert of the authors] for compliance with the EU's international legal obligations and, as a potential precautionary measure, might suspend disbursements pending review. Such precaution might be warranted to ensure the exclusion from EU-funded projects of entities engaged in activities that are in violation of the obligations identified by the Court in its 2024 Advisory Opinion. (...)A suspension of all Horizon funding for Israel cannot be excluded as the outcome of any such review process, and may also be justified as a precautionary measure, given the gravity of violations of international law established by the ICJ and as part of the general obligations binding on the EU and its Member States in accordance with paragraph 279 of the Advisory Opinion' (at 50). Gleider Hernández, Ramses A. Wessel, Expert Legal Opinion on the Implications for the European Union of the July 2024 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion regarding the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 19 June 2025, https://groenlinkspvda.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Hernandez-Wessel_Expert-Legal-Opinion-on-ICJ-AO-19-July-2024-and-the-EU.pdf. The report has been presented and published just a few days before a document was allegedly leaked from the European External Action Service. The latter would state that '(t)here are indications that Israel would be in breach of its human rights obligations under article 2 of the EU-Israel association agreement.' <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2025/jun/20/eu-israel-human-rights-obligations-gaza-document>.

[xxiv] Van Tets et al. have shown the extensive and problematic research partnerships of many Dutch universities with Israeli universities and other institutions in multiple areas with (potential) military relevance. Some of these were concluded after the 7th of October 2023. van Tets et al., Negen Nederlandse universiteiten doen gezamenlijk onderzoek met defensie-industrie van Israël, Follow the Money, 5 June

2025, <https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/onderzoek-nederlandse-universiteiten-met-israelische-defensiebedrijven>. See also Ties of Eindhoven University of Technology with the Israeli industry and Academia "Where academia meets arms consortia", 14 May 2025, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6231c0ab39d6533832f5c4fe/t/6825c911cc59b46c57496384/1747306772748/TU_E_ties.pdf and the chapter on military complicity in this Report.

[xxv] An example is the research project Glocter, on the training of new researchers in counterterrorism, which involves Leiden University, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101119985>. Active participation of Reichman University (as one of the partners) seems suspended, as reported by van Tets et al. supra at xxiv.

[xxvi] International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Furundžija (Trial Chamber, IT-95-17/1 - T), 10 December 1998, para 207, <https://www.icty.org/en/cases/judgement-list#1998>.

[xxvii] Correspondence from the National Public Prosecutor's Office, 13th May, 2013, https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/alhaq_files/images/stories/Brief_Landelijk_Parket_13-05-2013_ENG_a_Sj_crona_Van_Stigt_Advocaten.pdf.

[xxviii] <https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/details?id=ECLI:NL:RBSGR:2005:AX6406>, District Court of The Hague, Criminal Law Section, 23 December 2005, ECLI:NL:RBSGR:2005:AX6406.

[xxix] <https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/details?id=ECLI:NL:HR:2009:BG4822>, Dutch Supreme Court, 30 June 2009, ECLI:NL:HR:2009:BG4822.

[xxx] <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1760/oj>. Effective from 25 July 2024, the CSDDD promotes sustainable and responsible corporate practices by mandating that certain companies identify and address adverse impacts on human rights and the environment throughout their operations and value chains, both within and beyond the EU. Member States are required to transpose the directive into national law by 26 July 2026. The CSDDD applies to certain large EU companies, with over 1,000 employees and €450m turnover. The UvN notes that currently, the fourteen Dutch universities have over 61 thousand employees, with the total income of Dutch universities reaching €9.2 billion in 2022 (Rathenau Instituut). Several universities have well over 1000 employees (University of Amsterdam, for example, has over 6,000 employees).

[xxxi] <https://www.internetconsultatie.nl/wivo/b1>. This is known as the 'Wet international verantwoord ondernemen' or International Responsible Entrepreneurship Law.

[xxxii] Dutch tort rules are not amended by the proposal (except for a prolonged limitation period). This means that civil law claims based on the CSDDD must be brought based on the existing open norms of Dutch tort law (Section 6:162 DCC). For a tort claim, all requirements for civil liability under Section 6:162 DCC must be met.

[xxxiii] <https://www.oecdguidelines.nl/ncp>

[xxxiv] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Business/A-HRC-17-31_AEV.pdf. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework (A/HRC/17/31).

[xxxv] Ibid. As indicated in the introduction of the UNGPs document, 'These Guiding Principles apply to all States and to all business enterprises, both transnational and others, regardless of their size, sector, location, ownership and structure.' https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf

[xxxvi] Promotion and Protection of all Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development. Clarifying the Concepts of "Sphere of influence" and "Complicity" Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises, John Ruggie, A/HRC/8/16, 15 May 2008.

[xxxvii] This involvement framework is also used in the legal methodology applied for inclusion of businesses in the 'Database of all business enterprises involved in the activities detailed in paragraph 96 of the report of the independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem', Human Rights Council (HRC), A/HRC/57/21, 2 August 2024.

[xxxviii] Seemingly in line with this reasoning, Erasmus University Rotterdam has for example suspended institutional collaborations with the relevant institutions *tout court*, with the exception of consortia, for which collaborations is allowed insofar as Israeli universities are in a different work package <https://www.eur.nl/nieuws/eur-bevriest-instellingsbrede-samenwerkingen-bar-ilan-university-hebrew-university-jerusalem-en>.

[xxxix] UNGA, Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises Business, human rights and conflict-affected regions: towards heightened action, A/75/212, 21st July, 2020.

[xl] Defined as ‘individuals or groups that, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights.’ *Ibid*, para 47. By this definition, the activities of many academics and students lend towards them being identified as human rights defenders.

[xli] <https://www.ugent.be/en/ghentuniv/mission/human-rights#:~:text=Ghent%20University%20does%20not%20cooperate,indirectly%20to%20human%20rights%20violations>. See on this Eva Brems et al., Universities as Human Rights Actors (January 4, 2019). Forthcoming, Journal of Human Rights Practice, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3310367>.

[xlii] See on this also Carlo Mazzoleni, Universities’ Human Rights Responsibilities: Implications for International Agreements, in Business and Human Rights Journal Blog, 26 February 2025 <https://bhrj.blog/2025/02/26/universities-human-rights-responsibilities-implications-for-international-agreements/>

[xliii] https://vlir.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/01-_2019_Human-rights-assessment-at-the-Flemish-universities.pdf Note that in 2018, the Flemish Interuniversity Council has issued sector-wide (non-binding) recommendations for Flemish universities on implementing human rights assessments. See VLIR, Recommendations for implementing a human rights assessment at the Flemish universities (2018).

[xliv] Human Rights Council, supra n. xxxvii ,at 6.

[xlv] See the chapter on moral complicity in this Report.

[xlvi] <https://rightsforum.org/pensioenfondspzw-haalt-vijf-israelische-banken-van-uitsluitingslijst/>. In the meantime, the Pension Fund has also ended its investments in Israeli listed companies.

[xlvii] Erdem Türkelli et al, supra n. xi, at 21 explore in detail the potential avenues for suspension or termination of the cooperation and mobility (contractual) arrangements with Israeli Universities.

[xlviii] https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5035107. This section relies heavily on Siobhan Airey, COMPASS Framework for Dutch Universities to review their institutional ties with Israeli Universities based on Human Rights Due Diligence, 10 April 2024.

[xlix] Adapted from UNGA, Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, A/73/163, 16th July 2018, paragraph 10.

[l] Summary of the Report of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights to the General Assembly, October 2018 (A/73/163)- Corporate human rights due diligence: emerging practices, challenges and ways forward. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/73/163>

[li] Adapted from Danish Institute for Human Rights, Welcome and Introduction. Human Rights Impact Assessment Guidance and Toolbox, (DIHR: 2020), at 10, https://www.humanrights.dk/files/media/document/DIHR%20HRIA%20Toolbox_Welcome_and_Introduction_ENG_2020.pdf

6. Moral Complicity

One major reason for ending institutional collaborations with Israeli universities is to prevent or discontinue moral complicity of Dutch universities with the ongoing genocide, as well as with other atrocity crimes. In this chapter we explain the relevance of the concept of moral complicity in assessing cooperations (section 1) and why it applies to all institutional collaborations of Dutch universities with Israeli universities (section 2).

1. Moral complicity is a relevant criterion for assessing cooperation with third parties

1.1 Ending collaborations as a necessary precautionary step to avoid complicity with humanitarian and political catastrophes

While there are strict criteria needed to prove *legal* complicity to a crime, for example a direct causal link or active contribution to a wrong or harm, the criteria for *moral* complicity are less clear-cut. To different degrees moral complicity may arise from: looking away, remaining willfully ignorant (*'wir haben es nicht gewusst'* or agnotology), not resisting, not ending 'minor' involvement, making profit. That is, even the risk of being complicit is sufficient to be obligated to take action, to avoid supporting the said catastrophe in the least. Apart from the obligation not to contribute to the catastrophe, there is also a stronger obligation to act in such a way that may help prevent the catastrophe. In this context, accepting the *status quo* and not taking actions (omission) also constitutes complicity. This fact is often captured in the adage, 'silence is violence'. In other words, with regard to moral complicity with very serious crimes, a strong precautionary approach must be applied.

An even stronger approach regarding the avoidance of complicity in mass atrocity crimes has been integrated in international humanitarian law. Under the Genocide Convention, States have two obligations: first, the explicit duty to *actively prevent* genocide with all possible means; second, the obligation not to be complicit in acts of genocide. While different (*Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*, ICJ, 2007, para 432), these two obligations reflect the need to proactively avoid any link with genocidal acts. In the same vein, also non-state actors including universities are subject to international humanitarian and international criminal law standards and shall carefully assess whether their activities are linked to, or risk being complicit with, serious crimes. So here the legal and moral dimensions of complicity converge (see as well chapter 5 of this report).

The importance of a precautionary and even preventative approach to complicity in relation to mass atrocities crucially depends on the extremely high stakes: crimes against humanity such as Apartheid and persecution, and genocide. In such cases, The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention states: "It is far better to err in favor of too much prevention than too little or none at all" ("Four Facts about Israel's Genocide," 2025).

Two additional reasons in support of a precautionary principle are:

- a) The role of “bystanders” in making political and humanitarian catastrophes possible and
- b) Phenomena of the ‘diffusion of responsibility’ facilitating political and humanitarian catastrophes

1.2 The role of bystanders in political and humanitarian catastrophes

As extensively documented in the literature on genocide and political catastrophes (Arendt 2006; 1973; 2007; Bauman 2001), atrocity crimes including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide are possible due to the presence of large groups of people that do not explicitly support nor fight against the perpetrators (or support the victims), but that look away, remain willfully ignorant, profit but just ‘a little bit’, etc. The recent film *The Zone of Interest* has been analysed as a study of the different layers and degrees of complicity of “bystanders”. It portrays the lives of those who were not directly responsible for the Holocaust, but who stood by, facilitated, knew but did not resist or also profited from the genocide. The film suggests that this portrait is also an allegory of how complicity can work more generally. It has also been explicitly connected by the makers of the film to the genocide in Gaza. In the words of philosopher Nitzan Lebovic, ‘key events in the story follow the logic of entanglement or entwinement with power, as complicit parties avoid, suppress, or disregard the crimes committed outside their windows, or beyond their walls.’

1.3 The risk of the diffusion of responsibility

Another recurring theme in the literature on genocide and political catastrophes is that of the diffusion of responsibility (Arendt 1987; 2006). When responsibility is diffused across a large group of actors, each individual actor may have a relatively low causal contribution to the outcome and may therefore minimize their role and responsibility. Research on dehumanization shows how the result is always cumulative and each actor bears responsibility for their contribution and yet will diminish or deny it (Topolski 2013). This may hide from view that such contributions are jointly enabling the catastrophe to take place: think of climate disaster and ecological unravelling as another example of this similar mechanism (van de Poel et al. 2012) which is also empowered by hyper-individualism in liberal democracies.

Given the dramatic aggregate effect of individual actions or omissions, it is crucial that: a) each individual actor takes seriously their share of moral responsibility to prevent or at least not support the commission of the crime or wrong; b) individuals coordinate to ensure that their collective actions have a stronger impact than their individual actions.

Anticipating our upcoming argument, if we followed our reasoning about moral complicity, universities should not only individually cut their ties but also coordinate to ensure that they all do so, so as to create a greater causal and symbolic impact.

2. Dutch universities must end complicity with the genocide

Based on the moral background presented in section 1 above, in this section 2 we present and defend the complicity-based argument for ending all institutional cooperation with Israeli universities.

2.1 The argument

The argument goes as follows:

1. [Israeli universities are complicit in atrocity crimes perpetrated by the Israeli government](#)
2. Dutch universities, by creating or maintaining institutional cooperation with Israeli universities, risk being morally complicit with those crimes
3. Dutch universities must end all institutional cooperation with Israeli universities to avoid any risk of complicity and realise the maximum effort to end the genocide

2.2 Objections and replies

Objection to 1: It has been argued that Israeli universities are not complicit in atrocity crimes. The Israeli government is solely responsible for those.

Reply: As we argued above in relation to political and moral catastrophes such as Apartheid and genocide, moral complicity does not require active involvement in mass atrocity crimes: not acting against them, or not helping to prevent them, is enough. While some Israeli universities are surely also actively contributing to the atrocities by providing material and intellectual support to the police and military operations of the government (see chapter one), the bystander dimension is even more obvious; they all have shown a discouraging inability to oppose to the atrocity crimes against Palestinians. A genocide requires the support – by commission and by omission to oppose - of many institutional actors. Israeli universities, *as institutional actors*, have become some of these supporters¹.

The point of this argument is thus not to blame individual choices of managers and researchers of Israeli universities. The problem is political and structural. Because of widespread fear and intimidation people will not always be free to decide how to act, or at least will be severely limited in their choices. This is not only the case for individual persons. Institutions with responsibilities to their workers etc. can also become complicit because they do not have the means to resist pressures by the criminal state. This is why outside pressure can be so important and has also been asked for by many Israeli scholars. Unfortunately, the history of the last decades shows that

¹ A separate and thorny issue is to what extent individual researchers working for complicit Israeli universities, including those individuals who are against the government, can and should be also considered complicit, for not leaving the university and therefore (unwillingly) supporting them. Herlinde Pauer-Studer (2018) has offered a general moral argument that might be used to support this claim. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this document, whose focus is on the responsibility Dutch universities to stop institutional collaboration with Israeli universities.

a change from within Israeli academia is very unlikely to happen, so external institutional pressure by the international academia is crucial. (See also chapter 1.1, interview Hilla Dayan).

Objection to 2: A second objection is that Dutch universities, by cooperating with Israeli universities, are not complicit with crimes and, in any case, they should rather help Israeli universities to oppose the government rather than weaken them.

Reply: Based on the general analysis of moral complicity in the context of genocide and political catastrophes, we insist that it is crucial that academic institutions, when they want to cooperate with institutions in the context of mass atrocity crimes, take the responsibility to work from an ethical, due diligence framework that takes the risk of becoming complicit themselves utterly seriously. Given the risk of a genocide, the urgency of taking immediate action to prevent complicity with it, and the inability of Israeli universities to effectively oppose the government's action, the only responsible and effective line of action is ending cooperation with Israeli universities.

Objection to 3: A third objection goes as follows: 'Rather than taking a blanket decision about all universities and projects, each project should be evaluated for their own merits, by testing them through a human rights framework. If the project is then found sound, it's okay to have a contract with a university that is itself complicit through its management or through other projects.'

Reply: Once more, political catastrophes and genocide are only possible when large numbers of people as well as institutional actors support what's happening without themselves being the direct perpetrators, that is by indirect collaboration or omission. We mentioned the dramatic role of aggregation of individual (in)action for the possibility of mass atrocity crimes to take place. Moreover, given the current political situation and the very reduced ability of researchers to oppose the government policies and actions, any support to Israeli universities may indirectly constitute a complicity with the government crimes and legitimize a systemic and structural context of atrocities. This is why we argue that universities should not only individually cut the ties with Israeli universities and projects that are directly supporting or involved in the crimes, but also coordinate to ensure that *all* Dutch and also European universities end *all* institutional collaboration with all Israeli universities, to create the maximum causal and symbolic impact. This implies active involvement in ending Israel's participation in the Horizon programme. This does not apply to individual collaborations by and with researchers from Israeli universities, realised outside of institutional frameworks, projects or programs.

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7. Debating academic freedom on Palestine/Israel

Cutting institutional ties with Israeli universities does not violate academic freedom, as often claimed, but upholds it. Academic freedom is a qualified right based on scholarly expertise and comes with responsibility to both science and society. Collaborating with institutions complicit in human rights abuses and atrocity crimes contradicts these responsibilities. It also harms the academic freedom of scholars at Palestinian institutions as it contributes to violations of their human rights, such as the right to life and freedom of movement, that are preconditions for the enactment of academic freedom.

1. *Academic freedom: issues to address*¹

University administrators often argue that cutting ties with their Israeli counterparts is a threat to academic freedom. It would allegedly harm both the academic freedom of their own staff and students and that of those at Israeli universities. This argument is problematic because it conflates a call to cut *institutional* ties with a boycott of *individual* scholars. Those in favour of cutting ties argue for ending collaborations at an institutional level. Such a suspension of institutional collaboration does not infringe on the academic freedom of individual scholars.² On the contrary. Doing so can support academic freedom, particularly for Palestinian scholars. This will be discussed further below.

While there is no international agreement as to what academic freedom entails, it usually includes institutional self-governance, the freedom to teach and do research, to discuss and to publish and to critique the institution (see UNESCO 1997).³ These freedoms are signified and regulated differently in different temporal and locational contexts.⁴ In the Netherlands academic freedom is not a constitutional right, it is only very briefly mentioned in article 1.6 of the national Higher Education Law of 1993 (Van Lunteren 2020: 89).⁵

What matters most is what academic freedom means in concrete situations, how it is enacted. To better understand the relationship between the exercise of academic freedom and cutting institutional ties, two main issues are addressed. First, the need to take seriously that academic freedom is a qualified right based on expertise that also entails responsibilities, both towards science and society. Secondly, for discussions on academic freedom both negative freedom, being free from coercion, and positive freedom, the ability to act, matter. This includes the preconditions for the enactment of academic freedom and raises the question of whose academic freedom is at stake.

2. *Academic freedom: expertise and responsibility*

There are major distinctions between freedom of expression and academic freedom. Whereas freedom of expression is a universal human right, that mainly pertains to the relationship of individuals vis-à-vis the state (some would also extend it horizontally), academic freedom is a qualified right.⁶ Whereas the former is a right of all and does not require a particular quality of speech, academic freedom requires an adherence to academic standards common in a particular scholarly field.⁷ Only those with recognized expertise can claim the right of academic freedom.

This means that references to academic freedom cannot be used to argue that academic institutions need to provide a platform for 'all existing views'. When in [their letter in Trouw](#) (8 June 2024) the rectors of Dutch universities stated that there are 'countless ways' of interpreting 'the conflict in Gaza', this is typically an argument about freedom of expression.⁸ In discussions about academic freedom, we need to question the scholarly substance of such views. Some of these views will be more solidly grounded in scholarly evidence and argumentation than others, and some may be wrong. University administrators have, however, been more concerned with channelling emotions in debates about Israel/Palestine than with scholarly substance.⁹

An appeal to expertise should not be read as leaving no space for dissenting scholarly views and positions; on the contrary, an openness to critique is central to the academy (Scott 2024). But such a critique needs to be based on scholarly argumentation, including the arguments of those who have hitherto been excluded from knowledge production. In medicine, feminist researchers have drawn attention to the gendered nature of mainstream medical knowledge production. Criticizing existing scholarship with new evidence and insights they pointed, for instance, to the need to develop gender-specific prescriptions of medication and protocols for the recognition of heart failure.

In the field of Israel/Palestine studies, we witness something similar with scholarship about the establishment of the state of Israel. While in conventional (colonial) scholarship the effects of the Zionist project for the local population were overlooked, Palestinian scholars in the 1960s developed the concept of settler-colonialism as an analytical framework to analyse the *nakba* (the catastrophe, Sayigh 1965). This remained a marginalized position in academia until other critical scholars, such as French historian Maxime Rodinson (1973), and the new historians in Israel in the 1980s started to challenge the dominant narrative.¹⁰ By the 2010s, settler colonial studies had become a growing field of study with its own academic journals that started to include Israel/Palestine as a case study (Salamanca et al 2012). As a result of the latest war on Gaza (the facts on the ground), the concept of settler colonialism has become widely recognized as a valid scholarly paradigm in academia (Burawoy 2025).

Academic freedom does not only require expertise, but is also a right that comes with responsibilities. When PhD students in the Netherlands receive their doctorate, the rector admonishes them to never forget the responsibilities they now bear 'towards science and society'. This does not only refer to the responsibility to do research with integrity, that is not to engage in fraudulent acts (plagiarize, fabricate, and falsify data) or in questionable research practices. It also entails the responsibility of scholars for people, society and the environment (KNAW 2021).¹¹

Such responsibility does not stop at the national borders.¹² Because of earlier scandals such as the active collaboration of universities with Huawei (2020) that posed serious risks for the Uyghur population of China, universities have started to develop protocols for institutional collaboration, including the collaboration with third parties. It is evident that institutional collaboration with counterpart universities that are complicit in serious human rights violations, including atrocity crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide), cannot be reconciled with the academic institutions' responsibilities towards society that come with academic freedom.

3. Whose academic freedom matters?

Concerns about cutting institutional ties are often expressed in the language of academic freedom. Our academic institutions, by and large, focus on how such cutting would harm the academic freedom of (critical) Israeli scholars, sometimes accompanied by the claim that Israeli institutions are strong defenders of academic freedom or enjoy a large degree of autonomy, allowing them to adopt a critical stance towards the actions of the Israeli government.¹³

However, critical Israeli scholars, such as those of the Academy for Equality, strongly criticize the [lack of academic freedom in Israel](#) (see for examples also Wind 2024: 113ff; Landy, Lentin and McCarthy 2020).¹⁴ Scholars whose work focuses on the dispossession, marginalization, and forced displacement of the Palestinian population have had their academic freedom violated. Critical Jewish-Israeli scholars, such as Ilan Pappé, Neve Gordon, and Ariella Azoulay, have felt the need to leave the country, while Palestinian scholars, such as Nadera Shelhoub-Kevorkian, have become particularly targeted. There is, moreover, no evidence that Israeli universities have taken up a critical position towards the Israeli government. On the contrary (see chapter on complicity).

Next to this, in Europe and the Anglophone world, Palestine has always been a sensitive issue with academic institutions themselves taking part in silencing their staff and students. Critical pro-Palestinian scholars have been sanctioned and events they organized have been cancelled.¹⁵ This has especially been the case in the USA (with the strong presence of AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and in Germany (where support of Israel is considered a *raison of state*).¹⁶ Not surprisingly, in standard works on academic freedom, references to the censure and cancellation of pro-Palestinian scholarship are plentiful (Gordon 2023; Bilgrami and Cole 2013).¹⁷

Also in the Netherlands we have witnessed how activities that include 'Palestine' have become the object of censure.¹⁸ A large number of panels and seminars have been cancelled. In some cases this was because administrators decided that the moderator was not sufficiently neutral or because activities or speakers were deemed too one-sided or unbalanced. Neutrality functions here as short-hand for taking up a mainstream position, that is not recognized as a position; moreover, 'neutrality' (as moderator) is not a matter of demographics or positionality, but a professional practice. Next to this, arguments about the need for 'bothsidesism' are rarely used in other cases. When panels are organized about the Russian invasion in Ukraine, there are no requirement to include a more pro-Russian speaker, when panels are organized about racism, there are no complaints that speakers present anti-racist views. More generally, at events where speakers only express mainstream positions, there is no institutional demand to include more critical perspectives.¹⁹

In the case of recent discussions about academic freedom in Israel/Palestine a particular argument has rapidly gained currency, that conflates security, social safety and discomfort. Often security functions as a catch-all term to cancel events. Yet it remains unclear what these references to security entail. Institutional transparency is sorely lacking, and it remained unclear whether it refers, for instance, to the physical safety of organizers and participants or

to feelings of unsafety because of the topic of discussion. In the case of the latter it fails to distinguish between feeling unsafe because of legitimate concerns about harassment (such as bullying, intimidation and racism) on the one hand, and the sense of discomfort one may experience when critical scholarship challenges commonly held mainstream positions, such as when the term settler-colonialism becomes more widely used.²⁰

Such arguments do not only risk to restrict and harm scholarly debate, they also produce a particular bias. University boards have time and again highlighted their concerns about 'Jewish and Israeli students and staff' feeling unsafe.²¹ Such a divide between Jewish and non-Jewish students and staff turns political contestations about Israel/Palestine into a matter of ethno-religious and national belonging. This negates the presence and concerns of Jewish and Israeli staff and students who are active participants in pro-Palestinian events and activities (as well as of non-Jewish staff and students who are strongly opposed to these). It also indicates that administrators care about the feelings of certain categories of students and staff and not about others, such as those with close connections to Palestine.

But what is most striking in discussions about cutting institutional ties with Israeli institutions complicit in atrocity crimes and violations of academic freedom, is the complete disregard for the academic freedom of Palestinian scholars.

Academic freedom entails both negative freedom, the absence of coercion, the right not to be prevented from doing something (being 'free from'), and positive freedom, the ability to do something, the capacity to act (being 'free to'), which includes the preconditions for the enactment of academic freedom.²² In the case of the latter, it is evident that other freedoms (human rights) are preconditions for the ability to exercise of the right of academic freedom (Butler 2006: AAUP 2024).²³ These include, first of all the right to life, liberty, security of person and freedom of arbitrary detention, as well as such fundamental rights as the freedom of expression, association and movement. The [Israeli military has killed](#) over 100 Palestinian academics, including three university presidents and nine deans.²⁴ It has destroyed the whole educational infrastructure in Gaza, including all universities with many university staff and students imprisoned.²⁵ Also, such Israeli collective punishments of the Palestinian educational sector have a far longer history than the current war on Gaza, including routine restrictions on travel to universities and to conferences abroad, harassment of students at military checkpoints, and incursion of the Israeli military into university campuses on the West Bank.²⁶ With the right to education as an internationally recognized human right, these systematic, sustained and large-scale Israeli attacks on the educational sector are not only a violation of academic freedom, but may also constitute war crimes.

Universities' instrumentalization of academic freedom to avoid the cutting or suspension of institutional ties with Israeli universities complicit in war crimes contributes to making the exercise of academic freedom for Palestinians next to impossible.

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¹ This text is largely based on the chapter on academic freedom in Moors (under review) manuscript on The struggle for the future of ethnography.

² Najjar Kapelan (2015) argues that such an expansive understanding of academic freedom can best be considered as a claim to academic entitlement rather than to academic freedom. See also the 2024 revised statement on academic boycotts of the American Association of University Professors, AAUP.

<https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-academic-boycotts>

³ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000113234>

⁴ See Calhoun (2009), Gordon 2022 focuses on shifts in the US, Van Berkel and Van Bruggen (2020) trace developments of academic freedom in the Netherlands.

⁵ A recent EU-report concluded that academic freedom in the Netherlands was insufficiently protected by law (EU Report 2023: 129).

⁶ De Baets (2020) provides an extensive overview of the relevant differences. See also Bracke

⁷ This does not mean that academic freedom is separate from freedom of expression or human rights more generally. To defend the one is to defend the other. Violations of academic freedom are also violations of the freedom of expression (see further Butler 2022).

⁸ <https://www.universiteitvannederland.nl/actueel/nieuws/ingezonden-brief-rectores-magnifici-in-trouw> For a critical response see <https://www.trouw.nl/opinie/opinie-rectoren-laten-moedige-collega-s-in-de-kou-staan-bewust~bb182745/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>

⁹ A positive exception was the institutional support provided by the research school ASCA at the University of Amsterdam for the self-organised teach-ins by staff, <https://asca.uva.nl/programme/seminars/israel-palestine/israel-palestine.html>

¹⁰ See Wind (2024: 119ff) for the very different resulting political positions of these new historians.

¹¹ The problem with the latter is, as Radder (2022) has argued, that this is exceedingly vague, and requires a more substantial engagement with how such a responsibility is exercised in practice, for instance, with reference to human rights.

¹² See also Butler (2022) who argues for the transnational nature of academic freedom, which in the end derives its legitimacy from how it serves the common good.

¹³ The former argument was for example made in the rectors' letter of 2024; the latter by the director of the KNAW, <https://www.knaw.nl/en/news/reflection-marileen-dogterom-academys-role-times-geopolitical-conflict>

¹⁴ <https://www.972mag.com/israeli-academia-crackdown-palestinian-students/>

¹⁵ For a source prior to the latest war on Gaza, see Landy, Lentin and McCarthy (2020).

¹⁶ For Germany's 'special responsibility' vis-à-vis Israel, which means that the only place for Germany is on the side of Israel, see, <https://www.dw.com/en/israel-and-germanys-reason-of-state-its-complicated/a-67094861>. For how 'reason of state' has turned into unconditional solidarity with the state of Israel and the erasure of Palestinians since October 7, 2023, see Younes and Al-Tahir (2024). Highly respected foreign scholars such as Achille Mbembe and Ghassan Hage have also been disinvited.

¹⁷ There is a long list of publications focusing on the violation of academic freedom of scholars critical of Israel, see Tatour 2024; Landy, Lentin and McCarthy 2020; Wind 2024; Deeb and Winegar 2024; Gould 2023; Salaita 2015. See also <https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/journal-academic-freedom/volume-4>

¹⁸ See the report produced by the European Legal Support Center, <https://elsc.support/resources/the-attempt-to-chill-palestinian-rights-advocacy-in-the-netherlands>

¹⁹ The increased concerns of institutions with reputation management, especially in the eyes of the power that be, has turned substantial discussions about Israel/Palestine into a problem for administrators. It resembles the gap between shifts in public opinion towards a more critical position of Israel, and state policy making.

²⁰ <https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2023/10/27/it-is-okay-to-feel-uncomfortable-when-talking-about-horrific-events/> See also Schulman (2017), Bracke (2024), and Anderson (2025).

²¹ This has also become part of government policy making with the installation of a Task Force for Combating Antisemitism. This Task Force does not include those with expertise about Israel/Palestine or antisemitism. It also does not include critical Jewish voices, and its mission itself is a threat to academic freedom, see <https://www.trouw.nl/opinie/opinie-taskforce-tegen-antisemitisme-kan-alleen-maar-schade-aanrichten~bc827e42/> For a well-grounded critique about its US counterpart see Beinart (2025).

²² See Isaiah Berlin's essay (1958) on these two notions of liberty. Commonly recognized preconditions are some level of stable funding and secure employment.

²³ AAUP, 2024, Statement on academic boycotts, <https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-academic-boycotts>

²⁴ <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6108/Israel-kills-dozens-of-academics,-destroys-every-university-in-the-Gaza-Strip>

<https://mesana.org/advocacy/letters-from-the-board/2024/09/12/mesa-board-joint-letter-with-caf-condemning-the-decimation-of-the-education-sector-in-gaza>

²⁵ Karma al-Nablusi coined the term scholasticide during the 2008-9 war on Gaza, which refers to the decimation of schools, libraries, museums, archives, publishing houses, cultural centres, bookstores, and archives, see also https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/01/14/what-scholasticide?utm_source=chatgpt.com <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>

²⁶ <https://fobzu.org/education-in-palestine/>

8. “Institutional neutrality” is not a good reason to continue the cooperation with Israeli universities

The institutional neutrality¹ of universities is often invoked against the request to end cooperation with Israeli universities. Neutrality is interpreted as requiring the university boards to "not take political sides" and protecting a safe space for political disagreement in the university. We claim that the protection of human rights and specifically the prevention of a genocide is not a controversial political matter over which disagreement must be protected, but rather a grounding principle and a moral obligation of Dutch universities as public institutions bound by international human rights legal frameworks and local ethical standards and codes. Also, ending institutional academic cooperations allows space for continuing legitimate individual cooperations with Israeli scholars and, far from representing a dangerous political slippery slope for universities, will set an example for universities to live by their moral and legal responsibilities in future circumstances.

1. Introduction

A common but *not valid* argument against cutting ties goes as follows:

- As a matter of principle, the University is an academic organisation with a public function, that must remain institutional neutral; cutting ties would be a (controversial) political action in contrast with its neutrality.
- At the practical level, neutrality is necessary to avoid that: scholars within the university who do not identify with the position taken by the governing body feel unwelcome or unsafe at the university; and
- university governing bodies are constantly dragged in the "political debates of the day" thereby losing their capacity to fulfil their mission of producing (fundamental) knowledge

However, in this chapter we claim that:

1. The protection of human rights is not a controversial political matter, but a grounding principle of liberal-democratic states and universities. Universities have an obligation to live by the values they endorse in their codes of conduct and mission statements and to comply with the general legal frameworks they are bound to, which require them to not contribute to gross violations of human rights
2. Dutch universities simply cannot claim non-intervention in the Israel-Palestinian issue in the name of neutrality. Dutch university boards have already signed economic and strategic agreements with Israeli universities. Whatever their original intentions and rationales – these agreements have de facto put Dutch universities on the side of the Israeli government and their genocidal actions.
3. Ending institutional collaboration does not mean ending any collaboration. Israeli researchers and students in Dutch universities, and researchers in Israeli universities have no reason to feel unsafe or unwelcome to foster *individual* collaborations with Dutch scholars. Universities must communicate that clearly.
4. Cutting ties may indeed have the effect of encouraging future requests to university governing bodies to take similar actions concerning other governments in the future. This is a desirable outcome, and not practically incompatible with the university mission (see point 1 above).

2. Background: the Kalven report and the neutrality of universities in liberal countries

The idea of the university's neutrality was iconically stated in the so-called Kalven report drafted at the University of Chicago in 1967 as "a statement on the University's role in political and social action". The report states that the university is "home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic", which means that university "cannot take collective actions on the issues of the day", and as a collective, which arguably means in the statements and actions of its governing bodies, should "maintain independence from political fashion, passions, and pressures". When a university takes collective action "it does so at the price of censoring any minority who do not agree with the view adopted" (Kalven 1967).

The idea endorsed by the Kalven report closely follow the more general idea of neutrality of public institutions in the liberal-democratic tradition. Neutrality is the request to public powers to not favor (or disfavor) one of the many legitimate "doctrines" (conceptions of the goods, political views, lifestyles, religions etc.) present in the public space. Neutrality is not an "intrinsic" value, but is rather instrumental to the promotion of other values, namely the plurality of visions and the effective freedom of individuals to pursue lifestyles grounded in different morals, beliefs, religions etc. (Raz 1982).

In this chapter, we argue that correctly interpreted, the idea of university's neutrality does not provide any good argument against the end of cooperation with Israeli universities. It rather supports such a policy. The following sections elaborate.

3. Human rights are not a controversial political matter, but a basic moral and legal principle endorsed by Dutch universities

Liberal-democratic states have their fundamental norms and principles embedded in their constitutions and other general normative documents like international treaties and declarations. State powers are not meant to be neutral in relation to these general norms and principles, and they are rather responsible for their enforcement and respect. As seen, neutrality is an instrumental value, whose ultimate goals is freedom and pluralism. Similarly, universities as organizations fulfilling a public function are bound by international declarations and principles and, in addition to them, have their own codes of conducts and mission statements, which usually reflect and endorse them.

Neutrality is meant to protect the freedom of conflicting actions and opinions *within those frameworks*, not those that are unequivocally against them. Universities, for instance, do not accept in their community racist language, discriminatory behaviour, hate speech and the like (Barghouti 2013).

In fact, neutrality does not prevent the State powers or the university governing bodies from intervening in the social and political life of the community - something practically impossible and not desirable. It requires them to be intervene only to protect and enforce the fundamental and shared normative grounds, such as those expressed in their basic mission statements, norms and codes.

The action of cutting ties is therefore totally justifiable and even obligatory as it is grounded in the demand for respect of the fundamental principles of international law and the declaration of human

rights, as well as individual mission statements and codes of conduct, which are guiding and binding norms and principles for the Dutch state and universities.

4. Dutch universities are currently not neutral on the Palestine-Israel issue and are in fact on the side of the Israeli government.

The institutional neutrality of the university governing bodies is often framed in a very limited and misleading way - as the abstention from making public statements or taking explicit public positions on politically sensitive debates. However, university governing bodies do politics in many other ways and are in practice far from institutional neutral. University governing bodies must and in fact constantly make strategic choices about research agendas, partnerships, collaborations, policies and investments, and these have big societal and political implications. Suffice it to look at how the strategic choices of the boards of technical universities impact social and political life by favoring certain scientific and technological developments (nuclear energy, Artificial Intelligence, renewable energies etc.).

Statements about neutrality cannot be made in abstraction from historical considerations as if they were happening at an ideal zero time. When previous interventions have not been neutral, a policy of non-intervention will reinforce the non-neutral effects of past policies.

Dutch universities have in the past supported Israeli universities materially and economically e.g. by allowing Israeli universities in the EU projects (while the Palestinian people rights were already systematically violated). The claim that universities should not intervene in the Palestine-Israel issue now is therefore hypocritical and misleading. Whatever their original intentions and rationales, existing agreements and collaborations *de facto* put Dutch universities on the side of the Israeli government and their genocidal actions. If anything, institutional neutrality now requires ending collaborations with Israeli institutions to correct the political effects of previous agreements.

5. Israeli scholars in Dutch universities, and scholars in Israeli universities have no reason to feel unsafe or unwelcome

Another recurring concern about cutting ties is that this may make feel Israeli scholars in Dutch universities and scholars in Israeli universities unsafe and unwelcome to keep or foster individual collaborations with Dutch universities.

But people will not have reasons to feel unsafe or unwelcome if the cutting ties is done and communicated in a proper way by the university governing bodies, that is an action to prevent further institutional collaboration with organizations because of them supporting a government in violation of human rights, not as an act against any individual, group, or nationality.

To be sure, this is not to deny the suffering of Israeli people following the Hamas' lead attacks on October 7th and other losses they have suffered in the last decades; and that cutting ties - no matter how legitimate or obligatory it is and how clearly its justification will be communicated by university governing bodies - will make some Israeli people and those who sympathize with their suffering uncomfortable.

However, “uncomfortable” is not “unsafe” (Handmaker 2023; Bracke 2024) and any appeal to neutrality or non-intervention to prevent discomfort among Israeli scholars and those who

sympathize with their suffering would be hypocritical and irresponsible. In fact, not intervening and maintaining the current unacceptable status quo of collaboration with Israeli universities also has a major impact in the academic community. It keeps and reinforces the unjust burden of unsafety and marginalization on the shoulders of Palestinian scholars and those who recognize and empathize with their suffering.

6. Ending cooperation with Israeli universities may encourage future requests to take similar actions with other governments. This is a desirable outcome and universities must prepare themselves.

Another argument of the Kalven report for the university neutrality was that university governing bodies should refrain "from political fashion, passions, and pressures" as this would distract them from their core business, i.e. (fundamental) research (Kalven Committee 1967). However, gross violation of human rights and a genocide like the one happening in Gaza are not just "political fashion", and they rather demand the university institutional intervention.

Indeed, such interventions may set an example and a precedent and be used as a reference for future requests of interventions, in the same way in which the story of South Africa has become to some extent a precedent for the request of cutting ties. Far from being a dangerous "slippery slope", this is a desirable consequence. And taking measure to live up to their ethical and legal obligations to protect human rights it is not practically incompatible with its research mission, though it will probably require that universities equip themselves with new bodies and procedures to assess such policies on a more regular and systematic basis.

Rather than refusing to take their responsibility for the protection of human rights in Palestine and elsewhere, in the name of a false political neutrality, universities should rather start equipping themselves with the knowledge, resources and structures to recognize this responsibility and address the challenges and take the actions that they demand.

Many Dutch universities ([Radboud](#)², [EUR](#)³, [Tilburg](#)⁴, [UvA](#)⁵) have established *ad hoc* committees to assess sensitive collaborations. This is one step in the right direction.

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¹ In preparation of this chapter, the authors have greatly benefitted from some conversations with Prof. Corrado Del Bò, an expert on the philosophy of political neutrality. Authors remain fully responsible for the chapter's final content.

² <https://www.ru.nl/en/staff/internal-projects/partnerships-advisory-committee>

³ <https://www.eur.nl/en/about-university/collaboration/advisory-committee-sensitive-collaborations-acsc>

⁴ <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/organization/advisory-committee-collaborations>

⁵ <https://www.uva.nl/en/research/research-environment/third-party-collaborations/conflict-zones-and-human-rights-violations/conflict-zones-and-human-rights-violations.html>

9. Comparing the Global Movements Against Apartheid in South Africa and Palestine

Many human rights organizations have compared conditions under which Palestinians live with Apartheid in South Africa. To what extent does the comparison also apply to the anti-Apartheid struggles in South-Africa and Palestine, in particular in relation to the tactic of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)? This essay holds that in many respects South Africa's experience has commonalities with Palestine, and discussing both struggles, including the use of BDS as a legal mobilization tactic, can be instructive. The chapter looks at this from four dimensions: 1. The legal and empirical character of apartheid; 2. The question of self-determination; 3. The problem of fragmentation; and 4. BDS as a global, rights-based struggle.

1. *Some comparisons between South Africa and Palestine anti-apartheid movements*

Palestinians like black South Africans, have been fighting a struggle for self-determination for as long as they have experienced foreign domination, settler-colonialism and apartheid (Posel 1991). In the case of South Africa, this all started when Jan van Riebeeck landed in the "Cape of Good Hope" on 6 April 1652. Van Riebeeck's efforts to set-up a colonial trading post was followed by the arrival of British, Portuguese, Huguenot and other foreign settler-colonial groups, many of whom (the Huguenot in particular) had experienced persecution themselves. For Palestinians, which comprise indigenous Jews, Christians, Muslims and other faiths, they have experienced settler-colonial domination for hundreds of years (and much earlier than that with the Roman and Byzantine empires). The more recent experiences of colonisation include the Ottoman Empire (from 1516, following their 1516 victory over the Mamluks); British Colonisation (following their capture of the Levant in 1917), which was ultimately formalised in the context of the League of Nations Mandate system and Zionist-led colonisation (from the 1920s onwards) that ultimately manifested in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and was extended in 1967 through Israel's conquering and occupation of further territories, including the Golan, West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem (Kattan 2009).

So where can one make plausible comparisons between anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa and Palestine, beyond their histories of settler-colonialism? This chapter discusses four examples.

1.1 The legal and empirical character of apartheid

As John Dugard, a South African law professor very conscious of his own white privileges wrote, finding a moral compass involves approaching accountability for atrocity crimes, including apartheid in different ways (Dugard 2018: 207). One approach is legal, which encompasses both the mental element of intention, as well as specific, inhumane criminal acts 'committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime'. The other approach is empirical, whereby atrocity crimes are more than international law definitions, and one can explain relations between different people / ethnic groups, living in the same territory. According to Jeffrey Barnes (2019) this involves an interrogation of what constitutes race, what is the role of settler-colonialism as a historical force, how spatial segregation occurs by race and ethnicity and what have been the responses to this at the local level (by both Municipalities and civil society organizations).

Fragmentation of Palestine became the basis for which Amnesty International (2022), [B'Tselem](#) (2021) and others have deemed to be a regime of legal apartheid, while in South Africa the apartheid regime has been well-documented, including (1991). Empirically-speaking, both systems of apartheid have applied several layers of racial(ized) discrimination, affecting one's access to equal / equitable education, health care, jobs and livelihoods as well as access to justice and even the right to marry. Legally-speaking, this regime of apartheid is maintained by the persistent refusal of the government, and Israel's judicial system, to recognise Israeli nationality (Schechla 1993; 2004).

In both Palestine and South Africa there has also, of course, been considerable resistance to apartheid, mainly by way of peaceful means, and in particular citizen-led boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns, alongside a coherent set of other transnational strategies and tactics.

1.2 *Self-determination*

While the struggle for liberation in both situations has been occurring as long as groups have experienced foreign domination, self-determination became a core principle of international law during the post-War consensus. Accordingly, Israeli Jews and Palestinians, as well as a small group of white-nationalist South Africans and the majority of black South African liberation groups alike have located their claims in relation to self-determination. Yet, in each case, the claim has been accompanied by fundamentally different narratives. For Palestinians and black South Africans, it has been a universalist narrative based on equal rights; for Israeli Jews and right-wing Afrikaner nationalists, it has been an exclusivist narrative based on ethno-religious supremacy.

In South-Africa many of those who fought apartheid were inspired by the work of Steve Biko, who often reminded his white liberal colleagues that this was not primarily *their* self-determination struggle. Biko's important message was that the experience of a black person in South Africa was avowedly not the same as a white person. Such a critique was difficult to swallow for many white, especially liberal anti-apartheid activists unable to grasp black perspectives, just as it has been difficult for many Israeli liberal activists to recognise the perspective of Palestinians. In both cases, it has involved [an inability to listen](#) (Handmaker 2018).

1.3 *Fragmentation*

In both Palestine and in South Africa there was also considerable fragmentation. The Zionist-apartheid regime in Tel Aviv and the white-minority apartheid regime in Pretoria divided the land, forcibly removing Palestinian and Black South Africans to ever smaller, and disjointed spaces, and grabbing the most attractive, profitable and/or arable land for themselves. Political systems were also divided; in South Africa there were Indian, Coloured and "Native" forms of governance, all subservient to Pretoria. In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories governance has been a combination of civilian rule (for Jewish Israelis, including for settler-colonists in the occupied Palestinian territories); attenuated civilian rule, albeit with far less rights and institutional discrimination of the minority Palestinians with Israeli citizenship; Palestinian civilian rule (though still subject to the discretion of the Israeli military) in the nominally-independent Area A and Area B and military rule for Palestinians living under full Israeli rule in Area C.

Calls for a divided South Africa, or at best a Confederacy, gained momentum in South Africa in the early 1990s. White nationalists who demanded an *Afrikaaner Volksstaat* formed the so-called *Freedom Alliance* with authoritarian Black leaders in the nominally-independent Bantustans

(effectively African labour reserves) of Ciskei, Kwa Zulu and Bophuthatswana. Meanwhile, the Oslo Process of the early 1990s created the so-called two-state solution, which created fragmented and discriminatory regimes of governance.

In South Africa, the ANC prevailed over the demands for fragmentation by the Freedom Alliance and the Republic eliminated all apartheid-era political boundaries, although socio-economic apartheid, and even numerous legal continuities were maintained to a significant extent, even after the country's first democratic elections in 1994; this is despite a negotiated interim constitution that recognised equal rights for all (Modiri 2018).

In Israel-Palestine, where no constitution exists, although nominal statehood was accorded by the Oslo Process in the form of a so-called *two-state solution*, Israel has asserted its domination through the 2018 Nation-State Law, shored up its Jewish-only illegal settlements and settler-colonial infrastructure, annexed East Jerusalem and enforced the closure and blockade of Gaza. A deeply fragmented, two-state solution has remained the domination policy-framework of most states, including states that recognise the State of Palestine, although this official stance has, pragmatically-speaking, become an illusion (Shlaim 2021).

1.4 *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)*

The call for BDS by Palestinian civil society representatives is explicitly tied to South Africa's earlier, and very successful anti-apartheid campaigns where BDS was a core strategy. As the [Palestinian Call](#) (BNC 2005) asserts:

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era.

Veteran South African anti-apartheid campaigners Bangani Ngeleza and Ghadija Vallie (2011) have succinctly explained the reasons for, and the impact of South Africa's campaign of BDS:

In the absence of overt leadership from any political formation, it was the people themselves, as represented by civil society formations, who carried the torch of liberation and pushed for social justice in all spheres of life during the 1980s. This era in South Africa saw ordinary people take the struggle into their own hands. In the end, it was this democratization of the struggle for social justice that made the continuation of apartheid policies unsustainable. This movement effectively made it impossible for the minority regime to govern over the oppressed majority. Furthermore, by linking the internal struggle to the activities of South African activists in exile, the growing coalition of civil society movements contributed immensely to the stimulation of international solidarity action, including the growth of the international anti-apartheid movement and the spread of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. It was a combination of these factors that made the struggle for social justice in South Africa broad-based and democratic in character, accelerating the demise of apartheid.

The Palestinian call for BDS has similar justifications. In 2005, after Israel not only failed to recognise the elections in Palestine, but actively blockaded Gaza and tightened their grip on the West Bank

with the construction of an illegal wall, Palestinians were faced with few, credible domestic legal remedies. Also faced with the lack of credible leadership, Palestinians mobilized international law through BDS in order to advocate for a socially progressive agenda. The BDS movement initially took the form of a Call by a broad-based Palestinian civil-society collective, including political parties, trade unions and professional associations.

The Call emphasized that measures 'should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law' (BNC 2005). This Call has been accompanied by three clear demands, each of which is thoroughly grounded in international legal norms.

The first demand in the 2005 Call was that Israel '(ends) its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantles the Wall' that Israel illegally constructed in 2002. This demand was affirmed a year earlier by the International Court of Justice (ICJ 2004) in an Advisory Opinion that declared Palestinian claims of self-determination, including opposition to the Wall and settlements, were grounded in international human rights and humanitarian law. This demand of the BDS Call has been further reaffirmed by a second advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ 2024), which not only declared Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories to be unlawful but called for their dismantling.

The second demand in the 2005 Call was that Israel 'recogniz(es) the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality', a demand fully-supported by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and many other sources of international law.

The final demand of the 2005 BDS Call was that Israel commit to 'respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194'. The latter refers to especially Article 11 of a UN (1949) General Assembly Resolution that attempted to end Israel's war with neighbouring countries. Resolution 194 has been a cornerstone of Palestinian self-determination referred to by the UN on more than 100 occasions and derived from multiple sources of international law that form the basis of both collective and individual claims (Handmaker 2011).

2. *BDS is a global, rights-based struggle*

Omar Barghouti has characterised BDS as a 'global struggle for Palestinian rights'. Barghouti developed what he terms the 'South African strategy for Palestine' beyond Israel's policy in relation to the occupied Palestinian territories and in relation to Palestinian refugees, providing several examples of institutionalised racism and apartheid against Palestinian citizens of Israel as well (Barghouti 2011: 69-74; Handmaker 2015).

Picking up on Barghouti's characterisation of BDS as a rights-based, global struggle, Michiel Bot has asserted that the Palestinians'

conception of the global is not an abstraction. On the contrary, this global struggle takes place on, and forges connections between many concrete stages for political action: local, national, European, United Nations, but also the level of multinational corporations (Veolia, HP, Airbnb, etc). These connections prominently include transnational connections between

local activists. Thus, the question how law might facilitate politics across the boundaries of the nation-state is particularly urgent.

In other words, BDS is both a legally-legitimate and ethically consistent response to atrocity crimes, including – though not limited to – the crime of apartheid, a crime against humanity. If one hesitates in seeing these comparisons between South Africa and Palestine, then this is likely the consequence of a self-indulgent tendency that often accompany solidarity. Gloria Wekker (2016) has explained how this self-indulgence reflects not merely levels of white (male) privilege, but of white (male) *innocence*.

Beyond these individual struggles, as a society, and as an academic community, we need to revisit our collective cultural archive, not only as spaces for solidarity action and praxis, but as anti-racist and anti-imperial spaces.

This acknowledgement, both as an ethical imperative and as community praxis, is something that celebrated, and now emeritus law professor John Dugard recognized after considerable reflection. Dugard (2018, 2023) was closely involved with drafting the 1973 *Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*. And yet, despite his strong human rights credentials, he also experienced the consequences of the global boycott of South African academic institutions during the 1970s and 80s when he was working at South African universities by being disinvited from conferences and publications. In 2019, [Dugard was asked](#) to provide a legal opinion for the ELSC (2019) on a case in the Netherlands on the right to boycott. He responded as follows:

As a lawyer concerned about human rights and the inequalities of apartheid, and as a liberal who believes that the pen and the voice are mightier than AK – 47, I fully endorse the core mission of the BDS movement to carry out nonviolent campaigns of boycotts, divestment and sanctions as a means to compel Israel to comply with its human rights and international humanitarian law obligations in occupied Palestine and to respect the right to self-determination of the Palestinian People, including the right to return of the refugees. In this regard, the BDS acts in accordance with the international law's obligations of non-recognition and non-assistance of the unlawful occupation of the Palestinian territory. Therefore, by taking inspiration from the South African Anti-apartheid Movement and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, BDS practices can be considered fully legitimate.

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About us

The Expert Committee on Israeli-Dutch Academic Ties is a group of prominent scholars affiliated to Dutch universities who came together on their own accord to assess the links between Dutch and Israeli Academic Institutions, especially in light of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The Expert Committee was formed at the start of 2025, to work alongside the ethical committees on international cooperations formed by individual Dutch universities. After five months of intensive joint work, the committee published the expert report presented on this website. The report provides an overview of the ethical, legal, practical and historical reasons why **all Dutch universities must suspend all *institutional* collaborations in projects and programs with all Israeli universities.**

The members of the expert committee chose to write their own report, separate from the work of the ethical committees of Dutch universities, for three reasons:

- i) *Lack of transparency* about the process by which the ethical committees of several of the universities came about, and how University Boards intended to implement these committees' recommendations;
- ii) *Imbalanced composition of the ethical committees*, most of which did not include experts in international law, genocide, or Palestine and Israel;
- iii) *Limited mandate of the ethical committees*, focusing their work on a case-by-case assessment of individual projects and student exchange programs, rather than the assessment of institutional collaborations between Dutch and Israeli universities as such.

The Expert Committee on Israeli-Dutch Academic Ties acknowledges that despite these limitations imposed on them, the ethical committees installed by Dutch Universities have done important work in highlighting the unethical nature of individual projects and student exchanges they assessed, leading most Dutch universities to sever or freeze ties to their Israeli counterparts. The report published here provides intellectually grounded arguments and brings together evidence and resources to now extend the assessment beyond the level of individual cooperations. The committee calls on the boards of Dutch universities to take the logical follow-up step to suspend all institutional ties with Israeli universities.

On the expert report

Work on the report of the Expert Committee on Israeli-Dutch Academic Ties took place between early January and late June 2025. The members of the committee came together on their own accord, and worked on the report alongside their regular academic duties. They did not receive payment from any source for their work on this report, rather considering this work part of their societal duties as scholars that work on topics related to ethics, genocide, Palestine/Israel, colonialism, and as academics who work in a context where cooperation with Israeli institutions forces them to reflect on the risk of complicity with atrocity crimes.

The members of the committee come from a large variety of fields and are connected to different universities across the Netherlands. To express the collective nature of the work on this report, chapters are not assigned to individual authors. The members of the committee collectively bear responsibility for the content of the report as a whole.

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