

Why Is Norman Finkelstein Not Allowed to Teach?

David Klein

Background

When I learned in June 2007 that Norman Finkelstein, the respected author and political science professor, had just been denied tenure at DePaul University, I sent a letter of protest in concert with hundreds of other academics around the world to the president of DePaul. I had never met or spoken with Finkelstein, but I knew that he was a leading scholar of the Israel-Palestine conflict. With a PhD from Princeton, he was the author of five books (with a sixth now in progress) published in forty-six foreign editions. At DePaul he was a popular instructor with a loyal student following and teaching evaluations among the highest in the university. He was, and continues to be, a regularly invited speaker at leading universities worldwide.

Recognizing his accomplishments in scholarship and teaching, Finkelstein's colleagues in the political science department had voted overwhelmingly in the spring of 2007 to award him tenure and promotion. This was followed by a unanimous vote in his favor by the college personnel committee. The subsequent reversal by the DePaul administration was made in the face of enormous outside pressure from the Israel lobby, most especially from Alan Dershowitz of the Harvard Law School (Grossman; Menetrez; Holtschneider).

Finkelstein was not denied tenure because of any shortcomings in scholarship or teaching. Noam Chomsky had earlier described Finkelstein's *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* as "a very careful scholarly book" and "the best compendium that now exists of human rights violations in Israel" (Goodman, "Chomsky Accuses" n. pag.). The late Raul Hilberg, widely recognized as the founder of Holocaust studies, said of Finkelstein, "his place in the whole history of writing history is assured," and praised his "acuity of vision and analytical power" (Goodman, "It Takes" n. pag.).

There can be little doubt that Finkelstein was fired because of his criticisms of Israel's human rights violations against the Palestinian people and for his fact-based criticisms of the Israel lobby. Raul Hilberg warned at the time, "I have a sinking feeling about the damage this will do to academic freedom" (Grossman 2). Even the DePaul

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administration tacitly conceded that his firing was politically motivated when it acknowledged Finkelstein as a “prolific scholar and outstanding teacher” in a later legal settlement (Finkelstein, “Joint Statement” n. pag.).

An unstated axiom for U.S. universities is that criticism of Israel by nontenured faculty members is not allowed. Academic freedom protects critics of the national policies of the U.S., France, England, and every other country in the world, save one: Israel. Norman Finkelstein violated this axiom. Had he not been Jewish, Finkelstein would have been vilified successfully as anti-Semitic, and that slur alone would have isolated him from supporters. As it is, his detractors also smear him as a “Holocaust denier,” knowing full well that Finkelstein is the son of two Holocaust survivors and that the remainder of his family died in the Nazi death camps. His first book includes a dedication “to my beloved parents” that ends with “May I never forgive or forget what was done to them” (*The Rise* i).

Building Support

Following an exchange of e-mails, I asked Finkelstein on July 1, 2007, if he had any job prospects. His reply was, “No job prospects. None” (n. pag.). So that same day, I sent an e-mail to the president and the provost of California State University, Northridge (CSUN), where I am a math professor. I wrote, not as a mathematician, but as a faculty member of the university in order to make the case for a unique opportunity. I urged them to consider hiring Finkelstein for a university-wide faculty position, explaining that his presence would catapult CSUN to the front ranks of universities worldwide in his areas of research. Such university-wide faculty appointments at CSUN had previously been offered and resulted in extended visits by outside scholars.

Provost Harry Hellenbrand wrote back indicating that he was interested and was willing to look into it. Through the summer months of 2007, we held informal meetings and colleagues from several departments sent letters to the provost urging him to bring Finkelstein to CSUN.

Hellenbrand agreed to invite Finkelstein for a series of lectures across a five-day visit. Such a visit, we reasoned, might kindle greater interest among faculty and lead to an appointment. The natural location for Finkelstein was the political science department, and Mehran Kamrava, a Middle East expert, professor, and former chair of that department, had already written to the provost and to his own department in support of bringing Finkelstein. Faculty members in other disciplines related to Finkelstein’s areas of expertise also expressed support.

The Visit

Finkelstein visited CSUN the week of February 11, 2008. In the weeks preceding his arrival, the provost and president were lobbied heavily by Jewish groups, Rabbis, and various individuals to disinvite Finkelstein. He was denounced in the most degrading terms. Shelley Rubin of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) posted a memo to a JDL

blog entitled "Stinky Finky Coming to LA." In it, Finkelstein's e-mail address was provided, and he was described as "a sick, disgusting example of self-hatred" (Rubin n. pag.). Readers were urged to contact CSUN President Jolene Koester to register their indignation. The Pro-Israel advocacy group Stand With Us similarly lobbied the administration against allowing Finkelstein to come, as did the Jewish campus organization Hillel and faculty members and students in the CSUN Jewish Studies Program. A few letters called for the removal of the provost, and some of the letter writers threatened never to make financial donations to CSUN again. Hellenbrand received a small number of death threats from out of state, which he ignored. The chancellor of the twenty-three-campus California State University system also received letters that he forwarded to CSUN.

The provost estimated that he received some two hundred letters from members of Los Angeles Jewish organizations demanding that Finkelstein's invitation to give talks on campus be withdrawn. Finkelstein was accused of denying the Holocaust and working for the destruction of Israel. Many of these letters argued that hosting a presentation by Finkelstein was like shouting "fire" in a movie theater, thereby endangering the youth in attendance.

CSUN's campus newspaper, the *Daily Sundial*, featured an article about Finkelstein in its Tuesday edition, the day of his first talk (Aguilar 1). The article quoted Beth Cohen, interim director of the Jewish Studies Program at CSUN, who stated, "Finkelstein's work on the Holocaust is not regarded highly by other scholars in the field," which of course is directly contradicted by the world's leading experts in the field (1). Similarly, Jody Myers, professor of religious studies and coordinator of the CSUN Jewish Studies Program, chided, "We believe our administration should be following its own stated mission and only invite speakers who meet our high level of scholarship and who exercise academic responsibility," adding, "he isn't a responsible scholar" (1).

The provost responded to anti-Finkelstein lobbyists by offering to invite speakers of their choosing. Hoping to diffuse the situation, he did indeed invite many. However, these offers did little to mollify the naysayers because they were not complaining about a lack of opportunity to present their pro-Israel views. They already had many avenues available for that purpose. Rather, their goal was to prevent students and faculty from hearing Finkelstein, since he might be persuasive. And indeed he was. Several faculty members, including colleagues from the natural sciences, told me that they were positively impressed by Finkelstein's soft-spoken "scientific style," his meticulous attention to facts, and his encouragement to express disagreement during question and answer sessions.

Provost Hellenbrand's introduction to Finkelstein's first of three talks, "Civility and Academic Freedom," excerpted here, directly confronted the arguments for censorship:

America's leading anti-Semite, grand wizard of the KKK, leader of Hitler Youth, David Duke. In the minds of many, Norman Finkelstein has become Hitchcock's Norman Bates. Hysteria and outright manipulation distort his record and thereby divert discussion from his ideas to the

bogey that people imagine. People have written me that inviting a speaker like Norman Finkelstein is like throwing a bomb in a darkened theater; it is like exposing the vulnerable young to inexorable evil. I do not think so. A university should be a well-lit place where intelligent people interrogate each other sharply but civilly. Such conduct is its own protection, our only protection, really, against evil. Have we reached the point where we fear ideas? [. . .] As for yelling "fire" suddenly, surely, we all knew in advance that the speaker was coming. As for trapping people in a theater, who has been forced to stay? As for the dark, well, dialogue is enlightenment. So, I turn the question back to you, sitting here. Are you the flash in the night? [. . .] If our inability to manage lectures and discussions about controversial issues forces us to leave them to the battling hacks on talk radio and the networks, then the university indeed will become a dark theater, occupied by know-nothings who receive their conclusions, prethought and prepackaged, from elsewhere. We will then concentrate on the ice-capades of the intellect, the unthreatening but elegant analysis of what we already agree to as objective, and the airing of voices that sound like us and say what we would say. We will be the poorer for that, though I am sure much more self-righteously content. Here is a chance to show that we are better than that.

Members of the JDL attended this talk, contributing much counterpoint to both the speaker and the title of his talk. Three of them sat together in the front row, just a few feet from the speaker. They interrupted the provost's introduction, one of them shouting, "Good one, Harry. The Nazi loves you." They hissed and jeered throughout. They aimed cameras at the audience, panning from left to right, focusing their camera lenses on individuals throughout the meeting so as to document those in attendance as a form of intimidation. They issued a steady stream of vitriol at Finkelstein, including: "You're a sick puppy," "Don't call yourself a Jew," and "Holocaust denier!" Finkelstein responded only to the last of these. During the question and answer period, he shot back, "You have to understand, it's a deeply offensive statement to say that I deny the suffering that my parents endured." The JDL did not spare audience members either. One young woman in attendance, a CSUN student wearing a Palestinian scarf, was ordered, "Go hang yourself with your scarf!"

The provost adeptly diffused the situation by speaking to JDL members individually in the hallway outside the presentation room. In one exchange, a JDL member repeatedly accused Finkelstein of being a "Holocaust denier," and Hellenbrand calmly responded each time, "No, he isn't," until the detractor finally asked, "He's not?"

The talk itself had nothing to do with the Middle East (until the question and answer period), and was well received by most in attendance. Finkelstein discussed the limits to which academic freedom ought to apply in general, taking as a point of reference the 1940 decision by the New York State Supreme Court to bar the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell from teaching at the City University of New York because of his criticisms of religion and advocacy of sexual freedom.

The subsequent Finkelstein talks, "The Coming Breakup of American Zionism" and "A Critique of the Walt-Mearsheimer Thesis," included spirited exchanges, but they were for the most part polite and not disrupted. During the question and answer period for the final lecture, Finkelstein was accused of promoting the destruction of Israel by members of the audience, thereby echoing accusations received by the administration in advance of his arrival. He responded by saying the opposite was true: that he would consider the destruction of Israel or any nation an enormous tragedy. He pointed out, by way of contrast, that opinion polls indicate that a large percentage of young American Jews would not feel a sense of loss over the destruction of Israel, a tendency that Finkelstein found appalling.

Letters of Support

After the February lectures, I again asked the provost to bring Finkelstein for a longer stay. Hellenbrand's response was that this might be a possibility, but to make it happen, he "would have to be asked." So we continued to ask Hellenbrand in writing.

Finkelstein's visit generated an outpouring of support, including that of students. Scores of CSUN faculty members wrote, including the chairs of the departments of physics, chemistry, journalism, communication studies, and pan-African studies. The entire department of women's studies signed a joint letter of support. Individual faculty members from diverse departments, ranging from art to engineering, also wrote urging the administration to offer Finkelstein a visiting position.

Several eminent scholars and experts in the field from outside the university were contacted and asked to send letters of recommendation to the president and provost. Brief but illuminating excerpts from some (but not all) of these letters follow. Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor at MIT, wrote:

I understand that Norman Finkelstein is being considered for a position as a university-wide visiting scholar at CSUN, and am writing in that connection. In brief, I think it would be an outstanding appointment at any university [. . .]. As one indication of my own evaluation, I published a very favorable review of his *Image and Reality in the Israel-Palestine Conflict* and recommended it as one of the three best books of the year on political and international affairs, in a year-end survey of opinion by the London *Guardian* [. . .]. In general, his work is recognized to be outstanding in the range of disciplines in which he has published. There is no doubt in my mind that Finkelstein is a person of great intelligence and insight, as well as unusual integrity, and that his work is of remarkably high quality [. . .]. In addition to his books, Finkelstein has produced a series of fine critical and analytic essays on developments in the Middle East, on political theory, and more recently on international law, including reviews of studies by scholars and of court decisions, and important contributions of his own on the politics of the Middle East and international affairs more generally. His work is invariably conducted with scrupulous documentation,

careful research, and thoughtful and judicious evaluation and analysis [. . .]. That he will have outstanding success in teaching and direction of research I have no doubt. He is unusually well-qualified for the position of visiting scholar. It would be a very strong appointment, in my judgment.

Khaled Abou El Fadl, professor of law at UCLA, wrote:

I have read every book that Professor Finkelstein published, and I attended the lectures he delivered at CSUN, and also the lectures he delivered this past year at UCLA. To describe Professor Finkelstein as a towering intellectual figure—masterful, brilliant, meticulously methodical, precise, eloquent, and exceedingly gracious and polite—does not begin to describe him as a writer and lecturer [. . .]. Professor Finkelstein's entire categorical paradigm is that he honors the memory of the Holocaust to such an extent that he rejects any effort to politicize, or to opportunistically capitalize on its painful memory. Indeed he is explicitly critical of any effort to deny human suffering, or to in any way render human suffering subservient or secondary to any functional political considerations. It is no surprise that Professor Finkelstein's list of admirers constitutes a virtual hall of scholarly fame; he is very highly regarded not just by the most accomplished intellectuals in the United States but around the world. I cannot possibly emphasize the extent to which the fact that Professor Finkelstein is not occupying a post in an academic institution in the United States is a national embarrassment, and is a fundamental and quintessential breakdown of our scholastic ideals [. . .]. Professor Finkelstein's presence will not just accrue to the substantial benefit of CSUN, but will also deeply enrich the intellectual environment of Southern California and all its schools.

Professor Irene Gendzier of Boston University wrote:

I write in support of this remarkable scholar and intellectual who is a committed believer in what the university represents and, to judge by his teaching record, is an exceptional teacher [. . .]. His vilification in recent months for spurious reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of his work, has served to expose the grave limits of academic freedom in the United States, particularly where the study of the Middle East is concerned [. . .]. Prof. Finkelstein is an internationally recognized scholar who has won exceptional acclaim for studies he has published on crucial aspects of modern European as well as Middle Eastern history. I refer to his studies of the Holocaust and Israeli policy in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. His work in these areas has been marked by a critical level of erudition, a scrupulous documentation, and a persistent moral integrity. In exposing the exploitation of the Holocaust, and in documenting the origins of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians before, during, and after the creation of the state, he has addressed questions of history, memory and responsibility, and above all, of

justice. The results form an essential body of knowledge for those seeking to understand the origins and persistence of the Israel-Palestine conflict, a subject of overwhelming importance in the United States and, indeed, in the world today.

Sara Roy, senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, wrote:

I, like Norman, am a child of Holocaust survivors engaged in research on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Because of our shared background I feel that I can speak about him from a position others cannot [. . .]. Norman's scholarship is exceptional both for its brilliance and rigor. In the fields of Middle Eastern studies and political science his work is considered seminal and there is no doubt that both disciplines would be intellectually weaker without it. Norman's power and value, however, do not emanate only from his scholarship but from his character. His life's work, shaped largely but not entirely by his experience as a child of survivors has been and continues to be informed by a profound concern with human dignity and the danger of dehumanization. Unlike many in the academy, including some of his most vociferous detractors, Norman has always remained faithful to his principles even when such consistency demanded great personal and professional sacrifice.

Avi Shlaim, professor of international relations at the University of Oxford, wrote:

Dr Finkelstein's work straddles political theory, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and American policy towards the Middle East. His work in this field is immensely thorough, original, and penetrating. There are many scholars in the United States working on this area, but Dr. Finkelstein stands out as one of the most able, most erudite, and most critical. His articles all display a number of admirable qualities: intellectual vigour, intellectual integrity, a capacity to get to the heart of the matter, and a tendency to subject the conventional wisdom to searching scrutiny [. . .]. I recommend him very strongly and without any reservations for a tenured position in any American university.

John Trumbour, research director of the Labor and Worklife Program, Harvard Law School, wrote:

Norman Finkelstein has undoubtedly been one of the most provocative thinkers on these sensitive subjects, and he challenges all of us to raise the quality of our work. Even when I have had a different point of view, he has pushed me to be a better intellectual by his relentless pursuit of logic, reason, and evidence [. . .]. As Research Director of a major program at Harvard Law School, I am well aware that Norman Finkelstein has generated hostility from one of HLS's most famous faculty members, the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law Alan Dershowitz. And

yet, I can testify that Norman Finkelstein conducted himself with great dignity the various times he has spoken at Harvard. He always allows his opponents plenty of opportunity to criticize him [. . .]. Finkelstein's works have been translated into many languages around the world. I have received my share of communications from overseas scholars who have expressed disappointment with U.S. universities for timidity when it comes to welcoming such a major voice of intellectual engagement and dissent.

Presidential Veto

During the last week of February 2008, a retired faculty member inspired by Finkelstein's lectures offered \$30,000 toward an endowed chair at CSUN for Finkelstein. He indicated that he might be willing to offer an even larger figure. The provost declined the e-mail offer on the grounds that university regulations prevented the creation of an endowed chair for any specific individual. Curiously, the administration showed no interest in meeting with this erstwhile donor to discuss alternate ways in which he might contribute toward bringing Finkelstein to CSUN, or even toward more general university projects.

Despite compelling letters of recommendation, and substantial faculty lobbying, we faced a formidable barrier in March. We were told by the administration that because of faculty union regulations, the university could no longer hire any university-wide visiting scholars. Instead, all hires would have to originate from academic departments. This broadly anti-intellectual restriction put a freeze on potential future visitors with interdisciplinary interests, and it appeared to undo our effort to bring Finkelstein to CSUN. (The political science department seemed to want to have nothing to do with him. Mehran Kamrava had accepted an academic position in December at another university, and none of the remaining political science faculty members at CSUN even attended Finkelstein's talks.)

However, our effort was resuscitated during the final week of April, when the chair of journalism asked the provost to bring Finkelstein as a visiting professor to his department. This was a good fit. Finkelstein would make an excellent resource for faculty members interested in the important area of Middle East affairs. He was also more than capable of directing research projects for students, and contributing seminars, lectures, and class visits for a range of courses. To proceed, the journalism chair was instructed by the provost to make a formal request to his college dean, which he did. He submitted the necessary paperwork, but from May to mid-June, almost nothing happened. Many of us had worked for much of the preceding year to bring Finkelstein to CSUN, and we were anxiously waiting for the formal offer to go out.

The coup de grâce came from the campus president, but it came discreetly. The provost informed me on June 26, 2008, that the president had made a policy decision not to award visiting positions, even when they originate within a department. That policy decision put an end to our project. It was a sharp departure from past practice and an extraordinary bow to the Israel lobby, as the university had hosted

departmental visiting professors in recent years. Anticipating a possible presidential veto, I had sent a previous e-mail on June 19, 2008, to President Koester that included this paragraph:

The stifling of academic discussion and criticism of Israel has reached such absurd proportions that the phalanx of orthodoxy is beginning to crack. CSUN has a chance to play a positive role in this regard, and at the same time to catapult itself up to the first rank among universities worldwide in Dr. Finkelstein's areas of expertise. As you know, the CSUN Journalism Department has requested that Dr. Finkelstein be invited to come to CSUN as a visiting professor starting spring semester. Please allow that invitation to move forward. Thank you for reading this.

The following reply on behalf of the president came June 23, also before I learned the final decision:

Dear Dr. Klein:

Thank you for your e-mail below. The President asked me to respond on her behalf.

As you know, the President is not directly involved in the hiring of faculty. Such appointments fall under the purview of Academic Affairs. We noticed you have copied both the Provost and the College Dean; I'm sure they appreciate your comments.

Randy Reynaldo
Executive Assistant to the President

After learning the president's policy decision not to hire visiting professors, effectively vetoing Finkelstein's appointment, I sent another message on June 27 to the president:

Dear President Koester,

I understand from Provost Hellenbrand that you have just made a policy decision not to hire visiting faculty at CSUN, even if a request to do so originates at the department level. This decision was made just as the administrative process to bring Dr. Finkelstein to CSUN as a visiting scholar was nearing completion. I would like to ask you if I understand correctly that CSUN will, from this point on, not permit the hiring of any visiting faculty to any department. I would also appreciate it if you would confirm that this decision was not a form of censorship on your part to prevent criticisms of Israel's human rights record from our campus. If I misunderstood your policy decision, I apologize. Thank you for clarifying.

Sincerely,
David Klein
Professor of Mathematics

Her reply dated July 1 put an end to the exchange:

Dear David:

I understand the Provost has explained to you the university's practices regarding the appointment of visiting professors.

If you have further questions or wish additional clarification, I encourage you to direct your concerns about these practices to the Provost.

Jolene

President Koester's note above may be compared to the penultimate sentence in the June 8, 2007, letter of denial of tenure and promotion to Norman Finkelstein from Rev. Dennis Holtschneider, president of DePaul University. President Holtschneider wrote:

If you wish to discuss this decision, you are free to speak with the Provost, Helmut P. Epp.¹

Academic Freedom and the Israel Lobby

Academic freedom, as an abstract principle, is universally applauded by university administrators. Any American university president, with occasion to talk about it, will exalt Galileo and decry Pope Urban VIII for sentencing the astronomer to house arrest. Yet, presidents and their subordinates move easily to the other side of the fence when confronted with the closely analogous cases involving Norman Finkelstein and other scholars critical of U.S. Middle East policy.

Finkelstein is only one of many targets of academic censorship, and the presidents of DePaul University and CSUN are far from alone in heeding the ideological directives of the Israel lobby. A high mark in subservience was achieved by Fr. Dennis Dease, president of the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota, when he withdrew an invitation to Archbishop Desmond Tutu to speak at his university. The episode was reported in a series of articles starting in October 2007 (Snyders; Jaschik; Shelman; Furst).

In April 2007, members of the Justice and Peace Studies Program at St. Thomas succeeded in booking the Nobel laureate for a campus speaking engagement for the following spring. But the Zionist Organization of America opposed the invitation, and Julie Swiler, a spokeswoman for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, informed the university that, "[i]n a 2002 speech in Boston, [Tutu] made some comments that were especially hurtful" (Snyders n. pag.). In that speech, Tutu criticized Israel for human rights violations against Palestinians. After consultation with members of the Jewish community, President Dease announced that Tutu would not be allowed to speak on campus.

Following the president's decision, Cris Toffolo, the chair of the Justice and Peace Studies Program at St. Thomas, sent Tutu a letter

informing him of the administration's decision and expressing disagreement with it. When they also received a copy, St. Thomas administrators removed her as chair of the program.

Dease was denounced by faculty and students within the university and became the focus of international criticism. A National Book Award-winning poet, Lucille Clifton, canceled her visit to St. Thomas in protest. Even more alarming, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, sent a letter to Dease in which he wrote:

While Archbishop Tutu is not a friend of Israel, we do not believe he is an anti-Semite. As you rightly point out in your letter, his words have often stung the Jewish community. However, while he may at times have crossed the line, we believe that he should have been permitted to speak on your campus. (n. pag.)

Contradictory directives from leading Jewish organizations put President Dease in an awkward position. He reversed his decision and reinvited Tutu to the university. However, Tutu made his acceptance of the offer conditional on Toffolo's reinstatement as chair of the Justice and Peace Studies Program at St. Thomas. But while Tutu, a world-renowned peace activist, may have been too prominent a target, Toffolo was not. The administration did not reinstate her as chair, and true to his word, Tutu declined the second invitation.

Although Toffolo was already tenured and was not stripped of her rank of associate professor, her treatment by St. Thomas, to some degree, parallels DePaul University's treatment of Mehrene Larudee. Larudee was nineteen days shy of becoming the director of DePaul's International Studies Program when she learned she had been denied tenure, despite unanimous decisions in her favor by faculty committees and her dean. Her firing in 2007 was widely perceived as retribution for her public support of Norman Finkelstein.

Harvard University has also disinvited speakers for their criticisms of Israel. J. Lorand Matory, a professor of anthropology and of African and African American studies at Harvard, describes three such incidents. In 2002,

Harvard's Department of English invited Tom Paulin—Oxford professor and one of the finest living British poets—to speak, but promptly disinvited him after then-University President Lawrence H. Summers expressed disapproval of Paulin's criticisms of Israel. Though the Department later voted to reverse the disinvitation, Paulin has never come to campus. (n. pag.)

Also disinvited was Norman Finkelstein in 2005, who was previously invited to speak at the campus bookstore. In 2007, Rutgers biologist Robert L. Trivers was invited to speak in honor of his receipt of the prestigious Crafoord Prize in biosciences from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. But just hours before his scheduled speech, the invitation was abruptly rescinded. His erstwhile campus host said that he was ordered to do so by someone he would not name. "Also according to Trivers, Jeffrey Epstein later admitted ordering the

cancellation and said that he had done so under pressure from Alan Dershowitz. Epstein, a legal client of Dershowitz, had donated the funds used to establish [the Program for Evolutionary Dynamics] which, according to other sources, depends for its future effectiveness on further funding from him" (Matory n. pag.). Thus, at Harvard (and elsewhere), free speech by critics of Israel is for sale and campus administrators protect it up to the level of its cash value.

Even faculty members who meticulously avoid publicity are not immune from attack if their scholarship deviates from a Zionist-approved agenda. A case in point is the ordeal of Nadia Abu El-Haj, an anthropologist at Barnard College. Hundreds of alumni funneled their potential for monetary donations into the service of censorship, demanding in 2007 that the assistant professor not receive tenure. Nearly two thousand people signed a petition to the campus president demanding her expulsion. Abu El-Haj was guilty of writing a book entitled *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* that "looked at the role of archaeology in what was essentially a political project: the Biblical validation for Jewish claims in what is now Israel" (Kramer 50). She was eventually awarded tenure, but not before receiving hate mail in bulk, being the target of denunciations, and enduring mischaracterizations of her statements and beliefs. As with Finkelstein, the principal (but baseless) argument was that tenure should be denied on account of low quality of scholarship. The actual ideological motivations would have been less effective on account of the need of university administrators to at least pantomime support for the academic freedom for their professors. In this rare instance, the presidents of Barnard and Columbia deserve mild praise for not caving in to the mob.

Noam Chomsky informed me by e-mail of this example of intimidation:

In the 1980s I was invited to a major [U.S.] university for a week of lectures on philosophy, and of course added many other talks and meetings, in those days mostly on Central America. A tenured professor (who taught part time at Tel Aviv) invited me to give a talk on the Middle East. The next day I got a call from campus police asking if I would agree to have uniformed police with me the entire time I was on campus. I refused, but was accompanied by undercover armed police the whole time—walking from the faculty club to a phil[osophy] seminar, for example. After I left there was a huge campaign of vilification, and an effort to remove tenure from the prof who invited me. (n. pag.)

Tenure protected that professor, but it did not protect Sami Al-Arian, an associate professor of computer science at the University of South Florida. He was suspended by the campus president and eventually fired after FOX News commentator Bill O'Reilly accused him of having terrorist connections two weeks after the 9/11 attack. A December 19, 2001, statement by University of South Florida President Judy Genshaft followed the rhetorical norms of administrators faced with contentious post-9/11 academic freedom cases such as Al-Arian's:

Academic freedom is revered at USF [. . .] we respect the right of faculty to express their personal views on controversial subjects, with the understanding that it must be clear they are speaking for themselves and not for the University. In this case, I have recognized my great responsibility to fully consider both the welfare of the University Community and Dr. Al-Arian's rights of expression. (n. pag.)

Moving past the fanfare, the point of Genshaft's memorandum was this: "I have instructed our Office of Academic Affairs to notify Dr. Al-Arian of the University's intent to terminate his employment" (n. pag.). No proof of guilt of anything, real or imagined, was offered, and academic freedom was tossed out the window.

Two years later in 2003, the Bush administration filed 17 trumped-up charges against Al-Arian. After years of imprisonment, and in spite of the government's best legal efforts, he was fully acquitted of 8 of the charges; the jury deadlocked on the rest, voting for acquittal by 10-2. The verdict was a major defeat for the Bush administration, but Al-Arian's brutal treatment by his university, and especially the government, can only be regarded as a successful assault on First Amendment rights for Middle East activists and scholars.

By way of contrast, university administrations see no problem in retaining professors like John Yoo, Henry Kissinger, and many others who in a more just world might be tried for war crimes, or even crimes against humanity. In such cases the principle of academic freedom is steadfastly upheld by campus presidents.

The Future

What accounts for the lack of courage and principle by those who preside over the academy when it comes to the Middle East? Clearly, it is the influence of the Israel lobby, a small but powerful right-wing group that purports to speak for all Jews, and yet persecutes those Jews who dare to criticize the policies of Israel.

The crackdown on dissent obediently carried out by American university presidents exposes "the grave limits of academic freedom in the United States," as cited earlier by Professor Gendzier. And it is not merely individual professors like Norman Finkelstein who pay the price for censorship. The quality and stature of U.S. universities as a whole is compromised by the political Lysenkoism that muzzles critics of Israel. Perhaps, lowering the stature of American universities through censorship and the consequent upending of the lives of "heretical" scholars is a price that university presidents are willing to pay in order to appease the lobby, but there may be other unintended consequences to stifling the debate about Israel.

The Israel lobby succeeds in stifling criticisms of Israel by labeling critics as anti-Semites. In the case of Jewish critics, the labels include "self-hating Jew," "Holocaust denier," and worse. According to this propaganda, Jews who raise serious criticisms of Israel for the mistreatment of Palestinians, Jews such as Norman Finkelstein, Noam Chomsky, Sara Roy, and many others are, in short, "Bad Jews." It is left to the "Good Jews" to neutralize such criticisms of Israel by tarring

critics with these labels, thereby ending their employment, blocking speaking engagements, or generally attempting to destroy their credibility with the public—and with university presidents. In this taxonomy, the “Good Jews” are those who claim to speak for Jews collectively.

The Israel-Palestine conflict is fundamentally about land. Throughout its history the land area of Israel has expanded, while the land area for Palestinians has contracted. If Israeli expansionism in pursuit of a Greater Israel is ultimately to succeed, it will be necessary to impose negative growth on the Palestinian population over an extended period, either through exodus or gradual genocide. Consistent with this purpose, Israel has inflicted misery through humiliation, the wholesale use of torture, demolition of homes, deprivation of water, power, and food, and through direct assassinations and indiscriminate attacks.

It is no longer possible to hide the darker side of Israeli policy, and mainstream voices have expressed concerns. John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephan Walt of Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government raised doubts about the value of the U.S.-Israel alliance in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Former President and Nobel Laureate Jimmy Carter also pressed forward moral questions about Israel’s behavior in *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. Predictably, all three authors were denounced by the Israel lobby, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to marginalize all of Israel’s critics.

As the realities of the Israel-Palestine conflict enter public discourse with increasing weight, what will be the perception toward Jews by the rest of the population? If the Israel lobby’s “Good Jews” continue to represent all Jews, and “Good Jews” defend Israel’s every action all the while working to suspend academic freedom in universities, what ultimately will be the consequences?

A far more enlightened path would be for universities to permit open discourse about the Middle East. Excluding Norman Finkelstein and others like him from America’s universities is misguided in the extreme.

Notes

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¹ A copy of the Holtschneider letter is posted on the official Web site of Norman G. Finkelstein at <http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/pdf/tenure-denial/Finkelstein,Norman06.08.2007.pdf>.

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