

# DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

September 16, 2019 • Issue No. 35



## A Relentless War

Anti-Israel Activism and Anti-Jewish  
Discrimination at Canadian Universities

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I would like to thank my fellow CIJR members Professor Frederick Krantz, Daniel Rickenbacher and Machla Abramovitz who continually give our Editorial group (*Students for a Just Middle East Peace*) invaluable guidance in writing, research and journalism. Working with them has proven to be a gratifying learning experience.  
— Jacques Chitayet

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COVER: McGill University (credit: McGill University)

## EDITORIAL

# THE RELENTLESS WAR AGAINST ISRAEL ON CAMPUS

JACQUES CHITAYAT

These are difficult times for pro-Israel and Jewish students in Canada. It seems as if campuses are hell-bent on silencing Zionist views, as well as on demonizing the State of Israel and anyone speaking in favor of it and, yes, sometimes even Jews themselves. In this issue of *Dateline Middle East*, the student-written articles will first of all showcase the different forms of injustice that Jews regularly face in university. They endure discrimination, antisemitism, and having their opinions regarded as hateful simply for supporting the Jewish State.

BDS groups shun pro-Israeli voices, sometimes even violently, and often express clear antisemitism, leaving Jewish students feeling unsafe. In recent years, Concordia University has become a hotbed of antisemitic and anti-Israel activity. This issue contains articles written by Concordia students who have witnessed this hostility first-hand. [Jonathan Wasserlauf](#) recounts the explosive anti-Netanyahu riots, the extremely disrespectful mock-sukkah once made by BDS activists, and many more similar experiences. He also explains how anti-Israel activists used dishonest tactics, propaganda, and misinformation to sway Concordia's BDS vote in their favor.

However, these articles also demonstrate the resilience with which Jewish students fight back against this ridiculous bias. Concordia student [Laurent Cohen](#) discusses the formation of *Israel On Campus*, created to represent alienated Jewish stu-

dents and to eliminate hatred of Israel. This association, he writes, tries to spread a more positive view of Israel and work against the politicization of the student government, which consistently tries to stifle its activity and progress.

[Ysabella Hazan's](#) open letter is another example of this fight against the unfair treatment of Israel. She voices her concerns about how pro-Palestinian activists have hijacked the term "Zionism" to attach a negative connotation—of colonialism, militarism, and extremism—to it. In response, she argues in favor of a return to the roots of the term: as a movement for the return of the Jewish people to their own roots, to Zion, their ancient homeland. She also explains in her letter how she created *Humans 4 Humanity*, a movement striving to combat the silencing and misrepresentation of Zionism and Jewish activists on campus. Much work needs to be done on campus about this problem, as she writes about how she sustained verbal abuse by simply expressing doubt about whether the BDS movement really helps Palestinians.

These doubts are shared by [Bernard Bohbot](#), who contributes a case study on the BDS movement at McGill University. Although, he writes, its influence is progressively getting weaker, this movement did indeed do some damage, but not exactly as it intended. Instead of trying to convince professors to boycott only Israeli officials, they

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choose to target all students who define themselves as a Zionist and anyone who believes in Israel's right to simply exist. This behavior goes further than politics. It clearly crossed the line of discrimination, when these discriminatory ideas infiltrated the McGill administration. He cites the example of a student who was expelled from the Students' Society of McGill solely because of his support for Israel.

Ariana Kaye, an art history major at McGill, presents another case study, showcasing how anti-Zionism is even creeping into the seemingly unpolitical field of art history. She attended a class where the teacher presented an art stunt criticizing the existence of borders in Israel while making a false equivalency with Europe and the USA. Israel, she explains, is in a state of conflict with its neighbors, unlike the professor's two other examples. Her article then dives deeper into the problems with this representation, explaining how her professor managed to create a hateful and uncomfortable environment for pro-Israeli and Jewish students.

Gilli Cohen, the Vice President of Political Affairs for Hillel McGill, offers a theoretical approach to the anti-Israel situation on campus. By explaining the meaning of totalitarianism as an ideology attempting to control a group of people by determining what it can and cannot say, Gilli Cohen argues that the Israeli-Palestinian issue on campus is taking a totalitarian turn. This article draws comparisons with George Orwell's *1984* and uses some of the book's concepts like "doublethink" to describe the attitudes

seen on campus. Instead of considering all the social, political and religious aspects of the conflict, he writes, teachers and activists draw a caricature of Israel as an evil entity. Similarly, "Palestine" is treated by activists as a simple, unified and essentially good entity, when the reality is much more complex.

In my own article, I shed light on the situation at the University of Montreal, where I witnessed teachers and speakers showing outrageous bias and comparing Israel to apartheid-era South Africa. A known anti-Israel speaker was also regularly invited to give lectures, while Zionist opinions were never given a platform. Even if the political atmosphere there can be considered less inflammatory compared to Concordia and McGill, biases were clearly present:

In Montreal, just as in countless other cities, there is as yet no university to be found where a student could, say, fly an Israeli flag or proclaim that they support Israel without fear of a violent response coming from students, teachers and campus associations. The road to that reality can seem very long and filled with obstacles, and even sometimes impossible to navigate. But, by making our voices heard, we can strive to expose the many biases surrounding Israel and Jews to eventually counter them, as *Dateline Middle East* has, for thirty years now, set out to do. As Elie Wiesel once said, "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."



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## MY EXPERIENCES WITH ANTI-SEMITISM ON CAMPUS

JONATHAN WASSERLAUF

I am eternally grateful to have attended Concordia University a decade after the infamous Concordia University Netanyahu riots that were carried out by professional rioters and students associated with Concordia's Student Union (CSU). During this riot, students and non-students smashed the university's Hall Building massive front windows. They also spat on a rabbi, kicked a Holocaust survivor in the groin, and assaulted – physically and verbally – hundreds of visitors invited to hear Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speak in the University's downtown Hall Building.

Despite the presence of internal security, Montreal police officers, and private security, the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic mob savaged the University. This violence was particularly troubling for the Jewish community, which felt strongly connected to Concordia University for historical reasons. Jewish students were accepted into Sir George Williams College (so named before integrating with Loyola College to become Concordia in 1974) when McGill University, Montreal's other English-language university, applied quotas on the number of Jewish students admitted.

To this day, the CSU and the broader Concordia student body remain well-versed in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Even though I never received direct violence, I experienced my share of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda and behavior. My experiences, though, as angry as they made me feel, did not dissuade me from speaking out. Instead of melting into the background, these incidences convinced me to stand up proudly for my people and Israel, as well as to pursue peaceful, pro-Israel dialogue whenever possible.

As an undergraduate majoring in Po-



Photo: Concordia University

Concordia University,  
Montreal

litical Science at Concordia, I routinely dealt with professors who spread libelous slanders about Israelis and Israel. I also encountered vile anti-Semitic and anti-Israel images hanging about on campus, as well as near-physical violence, threats, and verbal abuse. My greatest fear was that I would be powerless to respond to the victimization of my Jewish brethren despite fighting with everything I had.

The following incidents represent some of my darkest anti-Israel moments at Concordia University, putting a lie to the claims that universities strive to create diverse and “safe” spaces for all their students. Instead, in this oppressive political and cultural environment, antisemitism – the oldest hatred – has been normalized.

For legal purposes, I won't name those antisemitic professors who were unable to discern fact from fiction and unabashedly spouted their biases and ignorance. Lecturing about torture, one of these intellectual giants asked the class: “What is the only other

country besides the United States of America where torture is legal?” She quickly piped up the answer: Israel, which incited swarms of anti-Israel students to enthusiastically shoot up their hands eagerly awaiting their opportunity to promulgate Palestinian propaganda.

Anti-Semitic and anti-Israel hostilities took a turn for the worse in 2015 during Concordia's Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions elections.<sup>1</sup> Concordia's Israel on Campus and Hillel initiatives were ineffectual in countering the pro-Palestinian apartheid rhetoric prevalent across campus, which equated Israel with apartheid South Africa in the 1980s.

For Jewish and pro-Israel students, the tension was palpable and disconcerting. On-campus students were approached by pro-Palestinian students

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<sup>1</sup> “BDS Raises Tensions at Concordia,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 30, 2015, [montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/bds-event-raises-tensions-on-concordia-campus](http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/bds-event-raises-tensions-on-concordia-campus).

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**“As an undergraduate majoring in Political Science at Concordia, I routinely dealt with professors who spread libelous slanders about Israelis and Israel”**

who deliberately misinformed them regarding historical and contemporary facts about Israel, feeding them anti-Israel propaganda to influence their vote. They succeeded – the pro-BDS ballot passed.

Just when I thought that anti-Semitism at Concordia had hit its peak, the “Sukkah of Death” appeared in the second-floor lobby of the Hall Building, where the infamous riot had taken place a decade earlier. On the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, Palestinian activists assembled a mock *sukkah*; a hut typically adorned with fruits and vegetables. Except their *sukkah* had pictures of dead babies supposedly killed by the Israelis, as well as historical misinformation demonizing

Jews and Zionism. This display was the most extreme and disgraceful example of cultural misappropriation I ever witnessed. More than that, though, it misappropriated Jewish traditions and imagery to perpetuate lies vilifying my people.

The university administration did not intervene in any way. Had any other minority group been targeted in this vile way, one can easily imagine how the university would have reacted.

Is my case isolated? Am I just blowing things out of proportion? I don't believe so. From my experience at Concordia University, and knowledge of the Montreal university scene generally, all Jewish students today are potential targets for the ugly face of anti-Semitism, purveyed by pro-Palestinian members of the student body and so-called “peaceful” Canadian dissidents.

**Jonathan Wasserlauf** is a CIJR Student Intern, Israel advocate, Political Science Major, and founder of King David's Journal.

## **McGILL DAILY PEDDLES IN ANTISEMITISM CLAIMING ZIONISM IS RACISM**

In its September 3 edition to inaugurate the new school year, the McGill Daily produced content claiming that Zionism is a form of racism and a “colonial establishment”.

This is hardly surprising coming from a “newspaper” which officially bans commentary from pro-Zionist voices. As HRC has said previously, the McGill Daily's censorship of pro-Zionist opinions has racist overtones and xenophobic dimensions.

The slur that “Zionism is racism” came in 1975 when the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 3379 slandering Zionism by equating it with racism. Zionism is defined as the Jewish people's national liberation movement, which holds that Jews, like any other nation, are entitled to a homeland and for the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

Jews are the indigenous people of the land of Israel and have lived there, uninterrupted, for over 3,000 years. The Jewish people have a legitimate religious, legal and ancestral claim to the land of Israel. You cannot “occupy” your own land and to present Jews as usurpers denies Jewish rights and Jewish self determination in their historic homeland. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was not a by-product of “colonialism”. In fact, Is-

rael supported the Partition Plan which would have created separate Jewish and Arab states. Sadly, the Arabs rejected the plan and waged war, which caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands who were encouraged by the Arab world to leave the area en masse.

The origins of the so-called Palestinian-Arab “Naqba” were caused by a war of annihilation launched against the nascent Israeli state by neighbouring Arab armies. It was in 1948 that the Arabs refused to establish a state side-by-side with the Jewish one.

In 1991, the UN General Assembly repealed the odious “Zionism is racism” resolution. This smear is a deliberate effort to delegitimize the Jewish right to a national homeland and to undermine the nationalist movement of the Jewish people.

Importantly, the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Association)'s definition of antisemitism asserts that “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour” is antisemitism.

Shame on the McGill Daily for peddling in antisemitism by claiming that Zionism is a form of racism. Please share HonestReporting Canada's article to name and shame the McGill Daily.

*(Honest Reporting Canada, September 3, 2019)*

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## POLITICAL BIAS AND TENSION AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

LAURENT COHEN

For fifteen years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained a rigorous point of contention at Montreal's Concordia University, igniting passions on both sides. Like many campuses across North America, Concordia is highly politicized and a hub for discussions about free speech and censorship, especially as regards the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

When Hillel Concordia arranged for the then former Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu to speak on campus in 2002, tensions rose to a new height. An anti-Ne-



Photo: The Canadian Press/Ryan Remiorz

Anti-Israel Riots at Concordia in 2002

**"From consistently favoring anti-Israel clubs to supporting resolutions that stifle pro-Israel activity, no attempt is made by the Union to facilitate equal representation of both sides of the conflict."**

anyahu student protest quickly turned into a riot. Rioters overran Concordia's Hall building, and smashed its windows, resulting in the speech's cancellation. The group responsible, Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR), viewed this as a victory for their side. They were correct. The school penalized the students who organized the riot but lifted their suspension shortly afterward.

Emboldened, the Student Union banned Hillel Concordia from campus for handing out IDF enlistment

forms, a move that was strongly condemned and for which the Student Union was sued in court. Despite that, the union upheld its decision to ban Hillel Concordia. This anti-Israel bias continued into

2004 when student protests also prevented another former Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, from speaking on campus.

The attitudes of the Student Union have not changed since 2002. In 2014, the Concordia Student Union (CSU) passed a resolution supporting the controversial Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The movement, which started in 2005, unabashedly calls for a complete boycott of all Israeli products, whether or not manufactured in the "occupied territories,"

as well as for the destruction of the Jewish state.

The pro-Israel community at Concordia has not taken this lying down. They formed an organization called Israel on Campus to represent alienated Jewish students. The club's goal was to eliminate the disproportionate focus on and condemnation of Israel at the university and to disseminate pro-Israel information and messaging. Today, our goals remain the same.

Still, numerous hurdles remain. After passing the pro-BDS resolution, the Student Union didn't stop there. The anti-Israel body tried adopting additional measures to enforce the BDS policy, which would greatly hinder the ability of Hillel and Israel on Campus Concordia's efforts to respond and curtail their presence on campus.

With every ensuing student election, the politicization of the stu-

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dent government and its support for BDS remain hot topics. From consistently favoring anti-Israel clubs to supporting resolutions that stifle pro-Israel activity, no attempt is made by the Union to facilitate equal representation of both sides of the conflict. While pro-Israel representation in student government might be an overly ambitious goal, one can imagine a Student Union that abstains from participating in political disputes. This goal isn't as unrealistic as it appears. Recent elections voted in groups of students whose purpose was to wipe the Student Union clean of political bias. It's a step forward; but will their promises be

upheld? For student government bias to be genuinely alleviated, new leaders who support these values must be continuously elected.

Given the ongoing dynamics of the conflict, bias and censorship will no doubt continue to be of concern for pro-Israeli students on campus.

**Laurent Cohen** is going into his final year of his Bachelor of Commerce in Finance at Concordia University. He is the President of Israel on Campus: Concordia, Canada Campus Liaison for StandWithUs, and is heavily involved with Jewish and pro-Israel life on campus.

## AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL ACTIVISTS: ANTI-ISRAEL SENTIMENT IS NOT PRO-PALESTINIAN

YSABELLA HAZAN

To My Fellow Activists,

Thank you for relentlessly standing up for the rights of minorities and marginalized groups. As a Jew, I realized that such silence only aids the perpetrator. My Jewish identity propelled me to create, *Humans 4 Humanity (H4H)*, a youth-led grassroots movement based on *Tikkun Olam*. H4H's purpose is to help achieve social justice through activism and volunteering.

This H4H movement seeks to unite all youth, regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity. H4H addresses the erasure and silencing of Jewish activists on campus, where Zionism is systematically misrepresented and attacked. "Progressive" circles encourage all Jews to reject a fundamental aspect of our identity and ignore the fact that the overwhelming majority of Jews are Zionists. Likewise, many social justice advocates immorally discredit or water down the Zionist character of Jewish identity, whether intended or not.

Anti-Israel activists rebranded the term Zionism, marking it with negative connotations. As pro-Israel activists, it is our responsibility to take back its real meaning. Zionism represents the Jewish right to self-determination in our ancestral and indigenous homeland. Jews are an ethnoreligious group forcibly displaced from Israel who have yearned to return ever since. However, it is, of course, crucial not to conflate Zionism with unwavering support for any current Israel policy. That said, how can one be progressive and re-



Photo: U.S. Embassy Jerusalem

### Gay Pride Parade 2012 in Jerusalem

ject indigenous rights? Zionism is the first successful indigenous movement - a persecuted people returning home.

Progressives' selective empathy and support for indigenous rights are concerning, as indicated by the anti-Semitic ban on Jewish symbols in the *Dyke's March*, and the rejection of Jews in other progressive spaces. While H4H is a significant initiative, it is alarming that the need for it was

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there. Jewish voices should not be silenced, given that Zionism is an integral part of the Jewish self, and that, contrary to lies promulgated by progressives and others, this doesn't deny Palestinian rights. Activists are presented with the misleading narrative that equates hate of Israel as pro-Palestinian. Enough is enough.

As activists, we are constantly confronted with alternate "facts;" for instance, the erroneous characterization of Zionism. Due to a lack of nuance. North American campuses face an epidemic of racism towards Jews,

**"The Antisemitic BDS movement (...) encourages the delegitimization of Jews and Jewish identity. We must not fall prey to attempts to paint the Arab - Israeli conflict as one-sided. Such manipulations exploit Palestinian suffering to slander unjustly the State of Israel, while in fact generating zero justice for Palestinians."**

strategically veiled as "social justice." Subsequently, the State of Israel is demonized in order to spew hatred against Jews and division among students. The antisemitic BDS movement is the primary outlet on campus for these activities. It encourages the delegitimization of Jews and Jewish identity. We must not fall prey to its attempts to paint the Arab - Israeli conflict as one-sided. Such manipulation exploits Palestinian suffering to unjustly slander the State of Israel, while in fact generating zero justice for Palestinians.

Case in point: Earlier this semester I was shut down by a professor and panelists for defending Palestinians at a "Pro-Palestinian" BDS event. The panelists celebrated the closure of the Israeli company SodaStream. When the question period came round, I respectfully asked how they could deem this a success when Pepsi-Cola bought SodaStream for millions of dollars while Palestinians lost their jobs. Besides, such factories employed Palestinians and Israelis alike, a step towards peace.

They responded by screaming at me and by repeating their talking points. Following the event, students insulted me, waving fingers in my face. BDS seeks to eradicate Israel rather than help Palestinians. Otherwise, why are the movement's leaders and their proponents uncomfortably silent when it comes to condemning the corrupt P.A. Palestinian leadership or Hamas, a terrorist organization in Gaza responsible for misappropriating humanitarian funds for terror purposes?

Despite their negative impact on Jews, anti-Israel activists frame their aggressive attacks as a "free speech" issue. But expressing hate towards a minority group is not free speech, which should be evident to administrators and students alike. The administration views hate-filled rhetoric directed at other minorities very differently. Still, this hatred towards Jews offers authentic activists an opportunity to stand up against all forms of racism. Unfortunately, the not-so-subtle racism directed towards Jews has been normalized in the current campus climate and rebranded as Palestinian "activism."

Rather than encouraging me in my Jewish activism, faculty members told me to allocate my time better and to focus on my career, instead. No faculty member ever suggested that H4H stop leading initiatives such as campaigning for Save a Child's Heart or volunteering with special needs youth, as examples. Time allocated towards Jewish activism is not valued: therefore, it is up to us to redefine the narrative. The narrative that anti-Israel sentiment is synonymous with being pro-Palestinian, which in turn is self-evidently "good," is a dangerous lie, and perniciously promotes the idea that Zionism is a "bad word."

As activists, we must never "go with the flow," regardless of the strength of the current. As activists, we must continuously challenge the anti-Israel narratives glaring from headlines. Placing the blame for the conflict solely on Israel is not conducive to peace; quite the opposite! The Jewish nation-state, Israel, is the cultural fusion of a diasporic people, which suffered from persecutions through generations. The Jews are the epitome of an oppressed people, which "intersectionality" claims to represent, and Israel promises to fulfill their hopes for a secure existence.

That said, let us be nuanced and knowledgeable in our criticism of Israel, referring, instead, to specific policies with which we might disagree. Modern anti-semitism has morphed into the hatred of Israel and



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anti-Israel "activism." Jewish students on campuses today are faced with defending every parcel of their inner being and identity. It is time we invest in peace. BDS' underlying goal, which is to delegitimize and then eliminate the State of Israel, doesn't have Palestinian interests at heart. Before hopping on the anti-Israel bandwagon, remember that it takes two to tango: persistently singling out the State of Israel, regardless of its sincere attempts at brokering peace, is counterproductive to genuine peace efforts. Let us, then, join forces to achieve a truly peaceful future.

Sincerely,

Ysabella, a sister to all and one among many Jewish activists silenced far too often.

**Ysabella Hazan** is 19 years old and going into her first year of Law School at the University of Ottawa. She is the President of Humans 4 Humanity and deeply involved in Jewish activism as a Hasbara Fellow as well as serving on the Board of the annual Montreal Israel Rally. Ysabella is the student Chair for the CJPAC link and the CIJA-Hillel Cegep fellowship.

## LE MOUVEMENT BDS DISCRIMINE-T-IL LES ÉTUDIANTS JUIFS?

BERNARD BOHBOT

La fièvre BDS semble s'être quelque peu estompée. Elle n'a pas eu l'effet escompté sur Israël, dont l'économie n'a jamais été si forte. Cependant, et c'est important de le souligner, les conséquences psychologiques de BDS sont réelles, dans les campus universitaires surtout, où ses succès sont indéniables.

Ainsi, BDS ne se contente pas de convaincre étudiants et professeurs de refuser de collaborer avec leurs collègues israéliens. Les organisations étudiantes liées à ce mouvement s'en prennent également à tous ceux qui se définissent comme « sionistes » ce qui inclut bien sûr les associations étudiantes juives. Des incidents très troublants ont eu lieu ces dernières années sur les campus universitaires que l'on peut qualifier sans prendre de risque de discriminatoires. Voici quelques cas d'écoles qui permettent de s'apercevoir que malgré son échec, la campagne de nuisance du mouvement BDS fait des dommages réels, et ce, pas forcément



là où s'y attend le plus. Cet article se concentre uniquement sur les événements qui ont eu lieu au Québec au cours des dernières années, au sein d'une seule et même institution : la très

prestigieuse université McGill.

L'historien britannique Dave Rich rappelle que dans les années 70 et 80, la *National Union of Students* (NUS) noy-

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**“Le climat est devenu toxique pour les étudiants juifs qui se voient exclus de la vie étudiante si, d’aventure, ils osent affirmer que l’État d’Israël a le droit d’exister (...) Il est temps de répondre de manière musclée à cette exclusion des étudiants juifs de la vie universitaire.”**

autée par l’extrême-gauche, a mené une véritable chasse aux sorcières dont le but était de fermer les associations juives en raison de leur soutien pour l’existence de l’État d’Israël. Nous assistons aujourd’hui au même phénomène, ici au Canada. En 2017, un étudiant juif de l’université McGill, Noah Lew, qui s’était représenté pour siéger une nouvelle fois au Conseil étudiant de l’université, s’est vu montrer la porte car il s’était impliqué auparavant au sein de différentes associations juives liées à Israël.<sup>1</sup> Pire encore, une enquête interne a conclu que Lew n’était pas victime d’antisémitisme et que c’est simplement

en raison de son implication politique qu’il fut démis de ses fonctions.<sup>2</sup> Mais ce n’est pas tout. En 2016, l’organisation *Canadian Friends of Peace Now*, qui milite contre la présence israélienne en Cisjordanie, a approché le journal étudiant de l’université, le *McGill Daily*, pour couvrir la venue d’un journaliste juif américain de gauche très en vue, J.J. Goldberg, qui a lui-même travaillé pour ce journal lorsqu’il fut étudiant dans les années 60. Évidemment, Goldberg était là pour dénoncer la politique du gouvernement Netanyahu et parler d’un mouvement qui prend de l’ampleur,

Ces quelques anecdotes qui ont eu lieu au sein d’une seule et même institution montréalaise démontrent à quel point le climat est devenu toxique pour les étudiants juifs qui se voient exclus de la vie étudiante si, d’aventure, ils osent affirmer que l’État d’Israël a le droit d’exister. Évidemment, certains continueront à garder la tête dans le sable, mais un tel comportement envers n’importe quelle autre minorité serait qualifié de discriminatoire. Il est temps de répondre de manière musclée à cette exclusion des étudiants juifs de la vie universitaire.



Photo: Remy Gabaldon/ATP

celui des généraux israéliens qui appuient la création d’un État palestinien. Initialement, le journal avait accepté de couvrir l’événement. Mais après avoir découvert que *Canadian Friends of Peace Now* se réclamait du sionisme, le journal a non seulement choisi de boycotter la conférence mais aussi de bannir tout article pro-sioniste au sein de ses pages.<sup>3</sup>

**Bernard Bohbot** is a history Ph.D. student at UQAM. He studies the tortuous relations between the Jews and the Left. While he still identifies with the Zionist left, he refuses to put all the blame for the absence of peace in the Middle East on Israel. This is probably the reason why he feels politically homeless.

<sup>1</sup> Shoshana Kranish, “McGill Students Claim Forced out of Student Govt. Due to Antisemitism,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 29, 2017, [www.jpost.com/Diaspora/McGill-students-claim-forced-out-of-student-govt-due-to-antisemitism-508717](http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/McGill-students-claim-forced-out-of-student-govt-due-to-antisemitism-508717).

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Harvey, “McGill Report Disputes Allegations of Anti-Semitism at Fall GA,” *The McGill Tribune*, February 13, 2018, [www.mcgilltribune.com/news/mcgill-report-disputes-allegations-anti-semitism-fall-ga-21318/](http://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/mcgill-report-disputes-allegations-anti-semitism-fall-ga-21318/).

<sup>3</sup> Janice Arnold, “Outrage after

McGill Daily Confirms Ban of Zionist Opinion,” *The Canadian Jewish News*, November 10, 2016, [www.cjnews.com/news/canada/outrage-mcgill-daily-confirms-ban-zionist-opinion](http://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/outrage-mcgill-daily-confirms-ban-zionist-opinion).

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## BETWEEN HATRED OF ISRAEL AND ART: A GREEN LINE

ARIANA KAYE

In June of 2004, Belgian performance artist Francis Alys punched a hole in the top of a can of an Israeli brand of paint called Nirlat Green. He then walked out onto the streets and grassy areas of Israel's Green Line, spilling 58 liters of paint to draw a 24 kilometers-long line.

This effort took Alys two full days to achieve. The Green Line takes its name from the color pen that Dayan used in 1948 to demarcate the borders of newly born Israel. Alys is neither an Israeli nor a Palestinian, nor is he an activist for either Israelis or Palestinians. Art historian Mark Godfrey praised Alys for ridiculing (by mimicry) the "arbitrariness of Dayan's border and [for resuscitating] its memory."<sup>1</sup> In one cleverly articulated sentence, Godfrey



Photo: Francis Alys, The Green Line (via <http://www.antiatlantis.net/francis-alyis-the-green-line-en/>)

**"The presentation suggested that one group of nations is entitled to their borders and has every right to control them, while others, including Israel, have no such right. (...) The art class created an environment of hate and discomfort for pro-Israeli and Jewish students."**

transformed Alys' gesture into a political statement. Godfrey then criticized Israel's need for a border, strongly suggesting that it is a capricious exercise.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," *October* 120 (April 1, 2007): 145

Alys' performance piece was presented to a class of McGill undergraduate students studying art history, as an example of artwork that expresses the unfair nature of borders and highlights the problem of global migration. As an art history major at McGill University, I was deeply disturbed by this performance piece, as well as its in-

class presentation. The work was grouped with other works of art dealing with the migrant crisis in Europe and the United States. This grouping created a false equivalency between Europe and Israel/Palestine. Europe is not in a state of conflict with its neighbors, while Israel is.

Moreover, there is an underlying double standard. The presentation suggested that one group of nations is entitled to their borders and has every right to control them, while others, including Israel, have no such right. By presenting a false image of Israel's political realities without any attempt to explore and understand the complex history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the art

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class created an environment of hate and discomfort for pro-Israeli and Jewish students.

The foundation of this thinking can be found in postmodern philosophy. In her essay *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler debates the role of borders in the assembly of people. She asserts that borders create separation between nations that, in turn, result in inclusion and exclusion practices, dictating to some that they belong within a defined geographical area and to others that they do not. Butler brings Israel as an example. The Jewish state, she writes, keeps strict border conditions to emphasize the inherent Jewishness of the State of Israel. "... the state of Israel seeks to secure its claim [to the land] to represent Jewishness," she writes.<sup>2</sup>

She continues, "This precarious and corporeal being is responsible for the life of the other, which means that no matter how much one fears for one's own life, preserving the life of the other is paramount. **If only the Israeli army felt this way!** [my emphasis]"<sup>3</sup> Butler implies that Israeli citizens should willfully surrender their lives for Palestinians and that the Israel Defense Forces exhibit no ethical obligation towards the Palestinians.

That 1.5 million Israeli Arabs living within the state have equal rights, serve in public office, and are fully integrated members of Israeli society is not relevant, as according to

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

Butler borders are the real problem. She insists that borderless cohabitation between the Palestinians and Israelis is possible and necessary to establish peace between the two groups.

Had Butler visited Israel during the summer of 2018, one would wish she might have understood why open borders at this time (or at any time) make no sense. In the summer of 2018, during their annual "March of the Return," Palestinians tried flooding Israel's borders, voic-

**"Butler and Godfrey choose to ignore decades of violence and physical trauma that marked the interactions between Israelis and Palestinians. This unrelenting violence and hatred necessitate a separation between the two peoples' nation-states."**

ing their intention to kill and wound as many people as possible.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, Israel's military has an entire unit dedicated to aiding and maintaining the wellbeing of the Palestinian people, called the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). The unit's job is to supply first aid, help with infrastructure, as well as resolve civil disputes. Those caring for Palestinians injured during events such as the "March of the Return" are Israelis. Claiming that

<sup>4</sup> David Horovitz, "Just in Case Anybody Forgot What Hamas's 'March of Return' Is Really All About," *Times of Israel*, March 31, 2018, [www.timesofisrael.com/just-in-case-anybody-forgot-what-hamass-march-of-return-is-really-all-about/](http://www.timesofisrael.com/just-in-case-anybody-forgot-what-hamass-march-of-return-is-really-all-about/).

Israel behaves unethically toward the Palestinian people is fiction. Butler and Godfrey choose to ignore decades of violence and physical trauma that marked the interactions between Israelis and Palestinians. This unrelenting violence and hatred necessitate a separation between the two peoples' nation-states.

Performance art that maintains a specific political perspective should be presented alongside

works with different perspectives, especially as regards Israel/Palestine. Mona Hatoum's *Interior Landscape*, 2008 or Israeli artist Adi Nes' photography, are significant examples of such works. Providing this balance will help students understand the political context in which Israel/Palestinian artists work, as well as acquire a sense of the nature of these artists' personal conflicts, sense of belonging, and identity.

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## DECONSTRUCTING THE TOTALITARIAN FRAMEWORK BEHIND ANTI-ISRAEL IDEOLOGY AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY

GILLI COHEN

Throughout my studies at McGill, I have encountered a specific totalitarian ideological approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This approach is conducted with a particularly anti-Israel tone and resides in several levels of McGill academic life. When using the term “totalitarian,” it must be understood that I do not regard all criticism of Israel, or protesting on behalf of the Palestinian cause, to be totalitarian. Rather, totalitarianism must be looked at as an ideological attempt to control a general population and prevent it from speaking and acting in a manner that runs counter to the socially acceptable anti-Israel framework.

George Orwell, one of the first intellectuals to write about totalitarianism, used the word to denote specific governments. These governments require strict adherence to a specific national ideology, leaving individuals unable to question the status quo as their thoughts are synthesized for them by the state.<sup>1</sup> Although this anti-Israel ideology is advanced by a government, it still plays a totalitarian role in so far as its ideological principles favor dogma over facts. To understand the totalitarian undertones of the anti-Israel voice I have encountered on campus, separate aspects of this movement will be deconstructed: Its marketing campaign on campus, its constant appeal to identity politics and, finally, its underlying anti-Semitism.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a multi-faceted issue with several variables at play, including historical conditions, geopolitical implications, and religious convictions. However, when it comes to the anti-Israel voice on campus, all critical analysis is thrown out the window, giving way to a demonization of Israel as the root of all evil. During the McGill Israeli Apartheid week, amongst a sea of posters and Palestinian flags, two words could be heard across the campus's lower field: “Free Palestine.” But there is no singular, legal entity called “Palestine.” Additionally, those calling themselves Palestinians live in separate geographical locations, and are governed by two distinct political entities – the West Bank by the Palestinian Authority and Gaza by Hamas, both of which are authoritarian regimes,



Lenin with comrades at a May Day rally in Red Square, May 1919

and neither of which are “free.” Moreover, when anti-Israel activists shout “Free Palestine,” they do not refer to the West Bank and Gaza, but to all of Israel.

The propagation of the slogan “Free Palestine” resembles the totalitarian practice of “doublethink,” as explored by Orwell in his novel 1984.<sup>2</sup> Doublethink is a propaganda tactic used to bend the truth by misinforming a population through outright falsified statements. This kind of double-speak is used to denote Israel as an evil, racist state. Loaded words such as “apartheid” and “genocide” are bandied about as irrefutable fact. But for Israel, nothing can be further from the truth. There are no “discriminatory” laws within Israel: all Israeli citizens are equal before the law under its constitutional and legal framework. And the bulk of Palestinians in the disputed territories, after the 1993-5 Oslo Accords, are in fact self-governing. Calling Israel an apartheid state, without significant factual backup, is an example of doublespeak in action.

Unquestionably, the rules governing university discourse are weighed heavily against the Jewish state: They determine who can and who cannot speak on the subject; what

<sup>1</sup> George M. Enteen, “George Orwell and The Theory of Totalitarianism,” *The Journal of General Education* 36, no. 3 (1984): 206–15.

<sup>2</sup> Erika Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair or Faith in the “Spirit of Man?”* (McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 1992), 117–36.

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constitutes “good,” and what constitutes “evil”; and even what linguistic terms are permissible. As well, distinct political issues are reduced to a single word, such as “occupation,” and “genocide,” with no regard for fact or dissenting opinions.

Additionally, identity politics laces most debates and discourse. For instance, I attended a conference on African politics, where I was warned by my peers and a teaching assistant that I must tread carefully when voicing an opinion because I am a white male. It did not matter how informed I was on the subject. Even though I received an “A” on my exams and assignments, my white identity disqualified me from speaking authoritatively on any issue pertaining to Africa.

**“Unquestionably, the rules governing university discourse are weighed heavily against the Jewish state: They determine who can and who cannot speak on the subject; what constitutes ‘good,’ and what constitutes ‘evil’; and even what linguistic terms are permissible.”**

For instance, when I suggested that it would be more beneficial for nations such as Somalia to conduct economic trade with Israel and the United States, as they have much more disposable income than the Middle Eastern countries with which Somalia had begun to align, I was severely criticized, solely because of my identity, not my analysis. Similarly, critics prevent Jews from commenting on the Palestinian issue, which empowers Palestinians to frame their narrative any way they want, without external challenges. They deny Jews the same right – why?

**“When it comes to the anti-Israel voice on campus, all critical analysis is thrown out the window, giving way to a demonization of Israel as the root of all evil.”**

I consider this instance to be the exact opposite of what the academic environment ought to resemble. If, as a student, you are unable to question the opinions of your peers, then where is academia heading? This attack on critical thinking through the imposition of dogmatic stances on political issues clearly demonstrates the totalitarian approach universities are endorsing.

To complete my analysis regarding the totalitarian undertones of the anti-Israel ideology on campus, I will ad-

Lew, an advocate for Israel and the Jewish community, was voted off of the council because of his Zionist convictions. He and two other Jewish members of the Board were additionally criticized for bringing about “layers of corruption,” drawing upon a clearly antisemitic trope.<sup>4</sup> The SSMU was never taken to task for these actions.

The anti-Israel bloc is effectively broadcasting its ideology throughout the student population to gain political support and sympathy through a deliberately untruthful narrative. Individuals who want to talk against these ideals are either silenced or threatened with violence. The analysis provided above should be used as a model for deconstructing the façade which holds the anti-Israel framework in place, and as a reminder that dogma must not be trusted but rather scrutinized with the truth.

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dress the problem of anti-Semitism. Prior to my first year at McGill, Igor Sadikov, a former student politician, posted on Twitter “punch a Zionist today.”<sup>3</sup> Igor still sits at general assembly meetings conducted by the SSMU (Student Society of McGill University) and is one amongst many individuals who voted in favor of the forced resignation of Noah Lew, a former Board member of the SSMU.

<sup>3</sup> “‘Punch a Zionist’ Tweet by McGill Student Politician Prompts Concern for Campus Safety,” *CBC*, February 10, 2017, [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/punch-a-zionist-mcgill-student-politics-1.3975773](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/punch-a-zionist-mcgill-student-politics-1.3975773).

<sup>4</sup> “Student Says Anti-Semitism Still an Issue in McGill Student Government,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 9, 2018, [montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/student-says-anti-semitism-still-an-issue-in-mcgill-student-government](http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/student-says-anti-semitism-still-an-issue-in-mcgill-student-government).

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## THE TACIT ANTI-ISRAEL BIAS ON CAMPUS

JACQUES CHITAYAT

Any student enrolled in a Montreal university might quickly encounter displays of pure or Israel-related anti-semitism. Bashing Israel and spreading outrageous lies about the country, let alone about all Jews by BDS groups and individual students, is an unfortunate reality. Ideally, this should concern every student wanting to fight discrimination.

I just completed a Bachelor's degree in Political Science at the University of Montreal. I was lucky to attend a university where, compared to McGill and Concordia, the Israeli-Palestinian issue was not as inflammatory. Instead, at the U of M, there were no violent anti-Israel protests such as the ones at Concordia, and the university did not approve any BDS legislation. On the contrary, the administration's relationship with Israel remains strong. Last year, the University of Montreal sent a delegation to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Netanya Academic College, IDC Herzliya, and the Knesset. The delegation was comprised of, among others, the Dean of the Faculty of Law, the Director of International Affairs and the Associate Vice-Rector to the French language. Their goal was to strengthen the development of French in Israel and to encourage shared research in law and medicine. The situation is less optimal at McGill University. A few years ago, one student, expelled from the Students' Society of McGill University claimed that this was because of his Jewish-sounding name. The consensus in the Jewish student community at the time was that antisemitism was, indeed, the reason behind the Society's decision.



Photo: Université de Montréal

Anti-Israel attitudes I witnessed did not come from university administrators, but rather from the young teachers and guest speakers. Unfortunately, they, unlike deans and rectors, directly interact with students. What they choose to teach or say will considerably influence students' attitudes. For example, I attended an international relations course where the class was required to view and comment on one of four preselected documentaries about different world issues. Following the viewing, we were to discuss the film with its respective director. I could not resist choosing the movie about the Israel-Palestinian conflict. I wanted to see how this university-approved documentary would present the conflict, as well as students' perceptions of Israel. I was pessimistic as regards both issues: Unfortunately, my pes-

simism was justified.

The documentary's director Robi Damelin was the spokesperson for Israeli Palestinian Bereaved Families for Reconciliation and Peace, a social organization that connects Israeli and Palestinian families, which had lost a family member due to the conflict. The organization's goal, she claimed, is to support honest dialogue and reconciliation between the two sides. At the time, I didn't know that the organization's real agenda was much less benign than it appeared. NGO Monitor, an Israel-based organization that investigates NGOs working in Israel, determined that it promotes "a highly biased view of the conflict based on the Palestinian narrative, and draws an immoral equivalence between terror victims and terrorists. While [this NGO] advocates for "reconciliation,"

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**"I wanted to see how this university-approved documentary would present the conflict, as well as students' perceptions of Israel. I was pessimistic as regards both issues: Unfortunately, my pessimism was justified."**

"dialogue," and "knowledge of the other," it exploits the grief of families and the language of peace to promote a highly divisive, contentious, and narrow personal agenda."

Robi Damelin is also a well-known anti-Israel activist. According to NGO Monitor, she regularly travels to the US "on behalf of the organization, promoting views that place sole blame for the continuation of the conflict on Israel." Moreover, "[She] regularly utilizes emotive language to elicit sympathy from her audience; refers to Hamas terrorism and Israeli self-defense as a 'cycle of violence,' thereby, presenting a distorted view of the conflict." I later learned that she and her organization are invited to visit the university annually. This bothers me. There are many esteemed think tanks based in Israel that present a realistic view of Israel, but which are never invited to attend. On the rare occasion when organizations and individuals are invited to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian issue, only anti-Israel activists are welcomed. There could not be more obvious signs of bias than this among the institutional ranks of the university.

Robi Damelin's film is a case in point. The documentary portrayed Israel in an incredibly biased and unrealistic manner. She cherry-picked specific examples that distorted the reality of the conflict. Soon into the documentary, it was evident which way the wind was blowing. According to Damelin, Israel is a belligerent regional bully, as well as an apartheid state comparable to 1980s-era South Africa. The State of Israel, the film implied, was solely responsible for the suffering on both sides. The documentarist interviewed only the most far-right settlers whose views are not representative of most citizens. Still, it was their perspectives and opinions that affected the students most, as was apparent during the discussion that followed the viewing of the film. Palestinians, on the other hand, were presented as a group of oppressed and defenseless people. That their political leadership repeatedly rejected peace and continues to engage in terrorism and in-

discriminate violence against Israel, let alone that it pays terrorists to kill, wasn't even hinted at.

Discussions between the students and director that took place afterward centered on the Israeli settlers, whom the film demonized. As well, students expressed astonishment that Israel, as her documentary implied, regularly carries out so-called "overtly discriminatory and violent practices against Palestinians." What upset me most was Damelin's condescension towards Jews. She claimed that Jews are quick to call every criticism of Israel anti-Semitic, thus, stripping the word of its weight and meaning.

In classroom discussions, a tacit agreement exists between students and professors that Israel is a colonialist, racist, apartheid state, and not one that strives to reach peace with Palestinians. I've often tried – whether at Hillel or elsewhere on campus – to combat these false perceptions through discussions with students and teachers. But, there is still much work to do.

More infuriating still is that these biases stem not only from prejudiced students and Palestinian activists but from the institutional ranks of universities even when relations between the top echelons of the university and the State of Israel are excellent. Universities, as beacons of enlightenment, teach critical analytical skills. Or so we are told. For the time being, though, ideological leanings and partisanship persist in its teachings, especially when it comes to Israel. As elsewhere in the world, Canada and Montreal schools are no exception.

**"On the rare occasion when organizations and individuals are invited to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian issue, only anti-Israel activists are welcomed."**

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