

# Israel: Hebrew University's Faculty of Repressive Science

Friday 22 March 2024, by [NOY Orly](#) (Date first published: 21 March 2024).

"A university that promotes diversity and inclusion is a university that fosters equality." These are among the words used by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, one of the country's top academic institutions, to describe its [purported values](#) and its vision. But the university seemed to have no trouble throwing those values out the window last week when it decided to [suspend](#) Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a prominent legal scholar and a Palestinian citizen of Israel.

The scandalous decision, which was issued without due process, came soon after Shalhoub-Kevorkian's [podcast episode](#) on Makdisi Street, in which she laid out her critical views against Zionism, Israel's assault on Gaza, and the state's dubious record with allegations of events of the war. But the scholar has been under the university's radar for months (and indeed years), including after she signed a petition in late October demanding a ceasefire in Gaza and describing the war as a "genocide." Shalhoub-Kevorkian, the university wrote, ought to "find another academic home that matches her positions."

The suspension certainly empties any meaning from some of the "enlightened" courses it has to offer. Indeed, what can a university, which suspends a senior faculty member without a hearing, teach its students in a class titled "The Supreme Court in a Democratic State"? What can an academic institution, which aligns itself with society's most extreme and hawkish sentiments, teach them about "Liberty, Citizenship, and Gender"? What can an institution which crudely silences and bullies the critical voice of a woman, a lecturer, and a member of a persecuted minority, teach us about "Human Rights, Feminism, and Social Change"?

In a [statement](#) presenting his vision for the academic institution several years ago, the university president, Professor Asher Cohen — who together with the rector, Professor Tamir Sheafer, authorized Shalhoub-Kevorkian's suspension — claimed that the university has been "leading a process of inclusion of the populations that make up Israeli society. We believe in a diverse, pluralistic, and egalitarian campus, where audiences from different backgrounds get to know each other and are introduced to the value of coexistence." These are rich words coming from a man who seems incapable of entertaining critical political voices that differ from his own.

In the same statement, Cohen prides himself on the university's deep responsibility "for Israeli society, and especially Jerusalem." This is the same Jerusalem where half of the city is under occupation, and where over 350,000 Palestinians are oppressed every day, their homes demolished, and their children arbitrarily pulled out of bed and arrested in the dead of night — without any of the heads of Cohen's ivory tower uttering a word about them.

There's much to say about the Palestinian neighborhoods of [Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah](#), both a few hundreds of meters from the Mount Scopus campus, as they face off state-backed settler takeovers of their land and property. But it's especially stark that the Hebrew University [never saw fit](#) to protest the violent oppression taking place in the village of Issawiya, whose houses are clearly visible from the windows of the campus buildings, just a few meters away. Could it be that in the evenings Cohen spends in his office, he doesn't hear the sounds of Israeli police gunfire, which have

long been the village's soundtrack, right under his window?

If only the Hebrew University's great sin (and it is a great sin indeed) was obliviousness. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's suspension joins a long list of political persecutions and militaristic indoctrination promoted by the institution over the years.

After all, this is the same university which, in January 2019, [pandered](#) to an ugly campaign of incitement waged by a right-wing student group against Dr. Carola Hilfrich, falsely claiming that she had reprimanded a student for coming to campus in army uniform. Instead of defending her against the false accusations, the university issued a shameful letter of apology for the "incident." This is the same university that, just a few months later, [chose](#) to essentially turn the campus into a small military camp by hosting courses for the Israeli army's intelligence unit — one in a long line of profitable collaborations with the army — despite the protests of students and lecturers.

This is the same university that, time and again, has harassed and silenced Palestinian student bodies while awarding [academic credits](#) to students who volunteer with the far-right group Im Tirtzu. And this is the same university that, for the past five months, has said nothing of how Israel systematically destroys Gaza's schools and institutions of higher education, shamefully betraying not only their besieged, bombed, and starving colleagues in Gaza, but the principles of academia itself.

In a letter to MK Sharren Haskel explaining their decision, President Cohen and Rector Sheaffer accused Shalhoub-Kevorkian of expressing herself in a "disgraceful, anti-Zionist, and inciting" manner since the start of the war, and deriding her for calling Israel's policies in Gaza a genocide. But she is not alone in doing so. Not only do the Palestinian people and hundreds of millions around the world view the calamity in Gaza as a genocide, but the International Court of Justice, the world's highest tribunal, has itself taken this weighty charge seriously and ruled that it cannot be dismissed out of hand.

It is as if Cohen and Sheaffer were not only surprised to learn that Shalhoub-Kevorkian is Palestinian, but that she is also — heaven forbid! — anti-Zionist. If Zionism were a prerequisite for admission to the university, its leaders should have been obligated to inform every lecturer and student before they entered its gates. It is safe to say that a key reason they do not do so, aside from legal restrictions, is because the Hebrew University benefits from the presence of Palestinians in order for it to present itself to the international academic world as a model of pluralism, liberalism, and inclusion. All the while, it can continue persecuting those Palestinians at home, away from the eyes of the world.

This disgraceful act is already reverberating loudly in global academia and media, branding Hebrew University with the shame that it deserves. Until then, the only course I can find in the university's module that seems appropriate for it to teach students is one offered by the Department of Political Science — Machiavelli, the philosopher of tyrannical rule.

**Orly Noy**

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<https://www.972mag.com/hebrew-university-nadera-shalhoub-kevorkian/>

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**• Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.**

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is a leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists, activists, and thinkers can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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