

Opinion | Israeli Universities Cannot Teach U.S. Jews the First Thing About Human Rights and Liberty

Sunday 5 May 2024, by [LEVY Gideon](#) (Date first published: 2 May 2024).

Here's another record for hypocrisy and lack of self-awareness: Israel's university presidents published a letter saying they are troubled by the displays of violence, anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment on campuses in the United States, and have undertaken to help Jews and Israelis to be admitted to universities here. In other words: come to Ariel University. On this stolen land, in the heart of apartheid district, you'll study civics, human rights and liberty. In Ariel, like in any Israeli university, you'll see what freedom and equality are. Here you'll also find shelter for the persecuted Jews in America, in the safest place in the world for Jews: Ariel.

Ariel University in the settlement of Ariel, in the West Bank. Credit: Moti Milrod

Dear presidents, people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. If you meant to offer shelter to the Jewish academics in the United States - you don't have much to offer. The [stormiest day on the Columbia campus](#) is safer for Jews than on the way to Hebrew University. Every Arab student feels less comfortable in your universities than the Jewish students do in Columbia. One may also doubt the imminence of the danger at Columbia.

"As a Jewish Israeli student I feel no fear or threat to my personal safety," wrote Noa Orbach, a student at Columbia University, in Haaretz Hebrew edition on April 26. Israel likes to [exaggerate the dangers lying in wait for Jews](#) in the world and to wallow in them. This leads to aliyah, and that's good for the fable of Israel as a refuge. Not that there's no anti-Semitism in the world, but if everything is anti-Semitism, then Israel is off the hook.

A little modesty won't harm you either, presidents. Your academies can envy what is now taking place on campuses in the United States. That's what a campus with civic awareness and political involvement looks like. That's what a lively, active, rebellious campus looks like, in contrast to the ideological cemeteries on Israel's gloomy, dull campuses. True, the anti-Israel protest spilled here and there into anti-Semitism and violence, even if less than what is described in Haaretz. But when it comes to a choice between an indifferent, satiated, sleepy campus and a turbulent, caring, radical one, the second is more promising.

You can only dream here of militant faculty and students like in the United States. Only they can ensure the next generation. In the wasteland of Israeli campuses no social or political promise will grow.

The [students in America are demonstrating](#) involvement and caring, even if their protests become tumultuous and lose control. There's no chance of demonstrations against a war in a distant

continent breaking out in an Israeli university. On a good day protest will break out here over the cost of tuition, or over the conditions of reservist students. On an even better day a handful of Israeli Palestinian students will stand at the university gates, silently marking Nakba day, with dozens of armed policemen surrounding them.

The university heads are also hiding the witch hunt in their institutions, which has become more intense since the war started. A few days after its eruption, the [Haifa University student union](#) already announced it would act to suspend students who dared to express support for the Palestinians. "Freedom of expression, in our opinion, is dwarfed at this time," they wrote. That's how the McCarthyism started in academia, culminating in the suspension and arrest of Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian. The spirit of the time, of which academia is an important part, in which an Israeli engineer is fired because he [cited Quran verses in the social media](#) (Haaretz, April 30), is troubling the university presidents less than what is happening in America.

The [protest in the U.S.](#) should concern Israel. Part of it was turned into hate against Israel and a call to wipe it out. As always, we must go to the root of the matter. The students in America have seen much more horrors of the awful war in Gaza than their complacent Israeli colleagues. If it hadn't been for the war, or the occupation and the apartheid, this protest wouldn't have broken out.

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P.S.

• HAARETZ. May 2, 2024:
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-05-02/ty-article-opinion/.premium/israeli-universities-cannot-t-each-u-s-jews-the-first-thing-about-human-rights-and-liberty/0000018f-3592-d444-ab9f-f59f6c9b0000>