

# Will Israeli Academia Speak Out Against the Army's Actions in Gaza? No Way

Tuesday 19 March 2024, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 18 March 2024).

**Beyond the fact that as a journalist I never sign petitions, I have no positive expectations of Israeli academic institutions, so I didn't sign a protest letter against the suspension of a Hebrew University professor**

*An IDF reservist at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, earlier this year. Credit: Olivier Fitoussi*

Hebrew University's official position is that Israel isn't committing genocide against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. This could be inferred from its announcement last week that it had suspended Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian - wording that somehow made its way into a letter from the university's president, Prof. Asher Cohen, and its rector, Prof. Tamir Sheafer, to MK Sharren Haskel of Benny Gantz's National Unity Party.

Let's set aside the definition of genocide. Alumni, students and staff [at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#) are active participants in the war. The dynasty of jurists the university has produced has played a role in providing the legal umbrella protecting the army.

Does the university have a position on the killing by airstrikes and shelling [of more than 12,000 Palestinian children in Gaza over the past five months?](#) Has it published an official position on the famine there? Does it have anything to say about the horrific plan to once again transport a million and a half hungry, exhausted, traumatized and bereaved people and cram them in yet another narrow space in order to continue the [army's land "maneuver" in Rafah?](#)

I did a Google search and found no such official position. Do senior university officials, like the rest of the country, only watch and read the Israeli media, not knowing (that is, not wanting to know) the facts? Or do they doubt the reports from anyone who isn't the IDF spokesman? Do they think it's not the university's role to express a position?

Hebrew-language Google did remind me that, according to the university, "the terrible massacre committed by Hamas on October 7 against Jews, just for being Jews, falls under the definition of genocide." This is what Cohen and Sheafer wrote to Shalhoub-Kevorkian on October 29, responding to her statement that Israel was already committing genocide.

Since they are senior officials at this esteemed academic institution, and to the best of my knowledge nothing has been published qualifying their statement, one can only conclude that this is the university's official position, even though it was already well established that the murdered, wounded and abducted included not only Jews but also Palestinian citizens of Israel and foreign workers.

Israel's weakness on that terrible day stemmed from the synergies between military might,

arrogance and the belittling of both female soldiers' warnings and Palestinian capabilities and protests. All this came at a time when the state was focusing on accelerating its settlement enterprise in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem). That's why armed Hamas fighters and civilians from Gaza, experienced in the Israeli oppression and seeking revenge, could break through the walls and fences surrounding their mass prison. Excluding this attack from the context of Israel's occupation insults your intelligence, your understanding of history and the social-analysis skills that an institution of higher learning should be instilling in its students.

And yes, for the Palestinians the occupation began in 1948, the reason that 75 to 80 percent of Gazans are refugees or descendants of refugees. Some of them fled only a few miles from their homes, fearing the war (as is now being done by Israeli residents of the Galilee and the northwestern Negev). Israel didn't allow those Palestinians to return home; others were forcibly expelled from their homes.

[As a former history student at this university, I should be hurt by the university's stance](#), but I'm not. I don't think the abilities of academic institutions are loftier than of any other institution (media outlets, health clinics, bus companies) when it comes to breaking loose from the ultranationalist justification of the institutionalized military and bureaucratic violence that Israel employs against the Palestinians just for being Palestinians, the people we systematically deprive of their rights in this land.



*Amira Hass*

Israel is a sovereign state and a military, economic and technological power. Portraying Hamas' attack, in all its aspects - a sophisticated and humiliating military assault, and an orgy of murder, mutilation and abuse of soldiers and civilians - as genocide minimizes and distorts the genocides of the indigenous peoples by colonialist movements and regimes in the Americas, Africa and Australia, and of the Armenians in Turkey, and of the Jewish people in Europe and North Africa.

As a daughter of survivors of the Nazis' murder industry, the university's position on October 7, and its failure to take a position on the slaying of children in Gaza, should offend me. But it doesn't, since I don't expect the representatives of an Israeli institution of higher learning to consider my feelings any more than right-wing rapper the Shadow, right-wing group Im Tirtzu or Benjamin Netanyahu do.

On the contrary. Precisely as a student in the university's history department and a daughter of survivors of the cattle cars leading to the death camps, I am aware of the chilling power of ultranationalist organizations that craft supremacist theories aiming to protect colonialist plunder and the excessive rights assumed by a chosen people. I have no illusions about the courage of academic institutions that depend on state budgets. I also have no expectations that they will display intellectual awareness of their earthly privileges.

Hebrew University alumni protested against Shalhoub-Kevorkian's suspension, and not just because

of the violation of academic freedom. They stressed that the silencing of the outcry against genocide makes the university an accomplice to the crime. Beyond the fact that as a journalist I never sign petitions, my lack of any positive expectations of academic institutions was the main reason I didn't add my name to their letter.

**Amira Hass**

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**P.S.**

• Haaretz. Mar 18, 2024:

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-03-18/ty-article-opinion/.premium/will-israeli-academia-speak-out-against-the-armys-actions-in-gaza-no-way/0000018e-4d97-dc34-a18e-ff9f21fc0000>