

## A Tale of Two Conferences: On Power, Identity, and Academic Freedom

By Mazen Masri

### **Abstract**

This article will examine the extent of the applicability of academic freedom in relation to scholarship on the Israeli-Arab conflict. This will be done by comparing two conferences that took place in the same city at almost the same time, both dealing with issues pertaining to Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East conflict. The article will argue that in reality, academic freedom is relative. The level of protection in fact varies according to the power that interested parties wield and the identities at play, and the vulnerability of scholars is usually a reflection of the current power dynamics in the nonacademic world. This differential applicability of academic freedom is the result of uneven application of academic standards and sometimes the creation of standards that are expected to apply solely to scholarship on the Middle East and the Israeli-Arab conflict that is not “pro-Israel.” This uneven and differential protection may become a threat to academic freedom.

## Introduction

Academic freedom is not a simple concept. While there is general agreement that it is meant to protect researchers and scholars from those in positions of power and authority, the content of academic freedom has never been clear-cut, as it carries many meanings that have developed differently under different historical circumstances and power relations.<sup>1</sup> Its emergence and development were the result of long processes of interaction between people who have power and people who pursue knowledge. It cannot be isolated from historical, political, and social contexts.<sup>2</sup> Edward Said noted that “as we consider these situational or contextual matters, the search for academic freedom . . . becomes more important, more urgent, more requiring of careful and reflective analysis.” Said added that “each community of academics, intellectuals, and students must wrestle with the problem of what academic freedom in that society at that time actually is, and should be.”<sup>3</sup>

Questions of academic freedom around scholarship on the Middle East, especially critical scholarship that aims to challenge mainstream beliefs, come to the fore relatively frequently in North America. This has largely been the situation in the United States, and Canada seems to be steadily catching up with the trend.<sup>4</sup> These questions often emerge in the context of campaigns waged against professors or institutions that are seen to be pro-Palestinian.<sup>5</sup> These campaigns are often orchestrated and carried out by influential organizations, and sometimes individuals,

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Scott, “Academic Freedom as an Ethical Practice,” in *The Future of Academic Freedom*, ed. Louis Menand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 165.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, “Academic Norms, Contemporary Challenges: A Reply to Robert Post on Academic Freedom,” in *Academic Freedom after September 11*, ed. Beshara Doumani (New York: Zone, 2006), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, “Identity, Authority, and Freedom: The Potentate and the Traveler,” in *The Future of Academic Freedom*, ed. Louis Menand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 216.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Sears and Mary-Jo Nadeau, “The Palestine Test: Countering the Silencing Campaign,” *Studies in Political Economy* 85 (2010): 7.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, “‘Taking Back’ Middle East Studies: The Case of Columbia University’s Mealac,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 2 (2005): 70; and “Academic Freedom and the Teaching of Palestine-Israel: The Columbia Case, Part II,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 75.

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with the aim of preventing the publication of a certain book or article,<sup>6</sup> ending the employment of certain academics, or at least disciplining them to deter them from voicing positions critical of Israel.<sup>7</sup> The issue of Palestine has become so entangled with freedom of speech and academic freedom that two Canadian sociologists have coined the term “the Palestine Test” as “a crucial measure of commitment to freedom of expression, social justice, and academic freedom on North American Campuses in the context of a silencing campaign to shut down Palestine solidarity work.”<sup>8</sup>

With this background, this article is an attempt, as Said advised us, to “wrestle with the problem of what academic freedom in [our Canadian or North American] society . . . actually is, and should be.” It is an attempt to assess the impact of power and identity on academic freedom by comparing two academic conferences that took place in the same city at almost the same time, both dealing with issues pertaining to Israel, Palestine, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conference “Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace” (hereafter, Mapping Models conference) took place in June 2009 and was cosponsored by York University and Queen’s University.<sup>9</sup> “Emerging Trends in Anti-Semitism and Campus Discourse” (hereafter, CAFI [Canadian Academic Friends of Israel] conference), cosponsored by the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, took place in March 2009. By comparing these two events, I will argue that academic freedom is relative. A doctrine that

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, “Academic Freedom and Palestine-Israel: The case of *Beyond Chutzpah*,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 2 (2006): 85.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Scott Jaschik, “Input or Intrusion?,” *Insider Higher Ed*, November 12, 2006, available online at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/11/21/disputes>; Alan Finder, “Embattled Barnard Anthropologist Is Awarded Tenure,” *New York Times*, November 3, 2007, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/03/nyregion/03barnard.html>; and “DePaul Rejects Finkelstein,” *Insider Higher Ed*, June 11, 2007, available online at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/06/11/finkelstein>.

<sup>8</sup> Sears and Nadeau, “The Palestine Test.”

<sup>9</sup> I was one of the four organizers of this conference. Most of the information about this conference discussed in this article is from my involvement in the conference, and it can also be supported by documentary evidence (see <http://www.fragilefreedomatorku.ca/contents/>). The information about the CAFI conference is mostly based on secondary materials.

should be applied evenly, in practice, seems to apply less to academics who need it more. I will also argue that the level of protection in reality varies according to the power that interested parties wield and the identities at play, and that the vulnerability of scholars is usually a reflection of the actual power dynamics in the nonacademic world.

Part 1 will include a discussion of some of the theories of academic freedom and a description of the methodology used in this article. Part 2 will briefly describe both conferences to inform part 3 of the article, where I examine the different parameters of comparison. In part 4, I offer generalizations based on the comparison in part 3, focusing mainly on the impact of power on academic freedom.

### **Part 1: Academic Freedom, Power, and Identity**

At academic conferences, researchers get together to discuss their ideas and exchange information. Conferences are not limited to academics only, and on many occasions they include other stakeholders, such as practitioners, advocates, and community groups. The work and ideas discussed at conferences usually reflect the recent trends in scholarship. When focused on a specific question or topic, conferences indicate that this question or topic is an important one in which many people take interest. This in turn helps create or reinforce certain discourses. Because of their discourse-creating/reinforcing potential, conferences could be seen as a more serious challenge to widely held beliefs and therefore can be expected to face more resistance. Comparing the two conferences will allow us to focus on the interplay between academic freedom, power, authority, and identity. This is a case study in how power and identity affect academic freedom.

As it has developed over time, the concept of academic freedom is generally understood to include four dimensions: freedom of research and dissemination of its findings, freedom in the

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classroom, freedom of intramural speech, and freedom of extramural speech.<sup>10</sup> The issue of power is at the heart of academic freedom. Academic freedom, as seen by most theorists, is accorded to scholars and researchers at a university or other educational institutions that is dedicated “to promot[ing] inquiry and advanc[ing] the sum of human knowledge.”<sup>11</sup> One of the main justifications for academic freedom is that scholars seeking to advance human knowledge need protection from interference from people who might fear the impact of new ideas. Advancing the sum of human knowledge usually challenges existing deep-rooted, widespread beliefs, and scholars, therefore, should be given freedom to pursue research and publish their findings without the interference of those who would not be in agreement with the creation of the new knowledge or its dissemination. The range of actors who could or do interfere varies according to time and place. Historically, the Catholic Church and other religious authorities were the most opposed to the creation of new knowledge, and they made the greatest efforts to interfere with the freedom to think. Kings, states, governments, and legislators historically sought to interfere with the creation of knowledge they deemed subversive or of which they simply disapproved.<sup>12</sup> In a more modern context, one in which public funding of universities has been falling off, it is the power of corporations, business interests, and private donors that is of increasing concern to academic freedom. In some situations, public opinion may be a potential source of pressure, especially in situations where the public is mobilized by organized groups representing oppositional interests. Similarly, given the power that university administrators have over their faculty members, interference very often comes internally from within a university, such as interference or pressure from university administrators or from the board of governors or trustees. What is common about all of these figures is that they have the

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew W. Finkin and Robert C. Post, *For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>11</sup> AAUP, *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure* (1915).

<sup>12</sup>For a short historical overview of instances of interference with the work and findings of scholars, see Finkin and Post, *For the Common Good*, 11–27.

power and the means to interfere, and sometimes even the authority to do so, whether directly or indirectly. In such cases, it is the concept of academic freedom that shields scholars from political pressures that might otherwise impede research.

The second justification for academic freedom is that university faculty members are professional experts, and that academia is self-regulated by professional standards, namely, those of a “community of scholars” employing “acceptable professional norms.”<sup>13</sup> But, one might ask, are all scholars protected to the same degree? The answer is no, because of tensions that are inherent in the concept of academic freedom. The tensions lie in the conflict between freedom to pursue knowledge and the idea of constraint by “acceptable professional norms” and inclusion in a “disciplinary community.” As Judith Butler explains, professional norms are themselves forms of knowledge that are often challenged. Butler adds that constraining scholarship by strict and instrumental application of those norms, without acknowledging the existing norms as “historically changeable and socially negotiated,”<sup>14</sup> might lead to “forms of censorship that are at once subtle and forceful.”<sup>15</sup> “Norms,” Butler argues, “have origins other than the well-meaning and well-educated judgments of professionals” and they are “wrought not only from cognitive judgments but also from a confluence of historically evolved and changeable institutional and discursive practices.”<sup>16</sup> On the other source of tension, which comes from membership in a “disciplinary community,” Joan Scott notes that “disciplinary communities are hierarchical and with a power dynamic of their own,”<sup>17</sup> and disciplinary politics could be used to exclude critics and guard orthodoxy.

Of course, the level of protection varies from one place to another, and from one period to another. The notion that the need for the protection of academic freedom varies from one

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<sup>13</sup> Finkin and Post, *For the Common Good*, 55–56.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Butler, “Academic Norms,” 120.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Joan W. Scott, “Knowledge, Power and Academic Freedom,” *Social Research* 76, no. 2 (2009): 451.

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discipline to another, and even within the same discipline—according to the prevailing point of view at the time—has been discussed widely.<sup>18</sup> But does academic freedom protect scholars to the same degree even if they adhere to the same “generally accepted standards”? Do scholars in the same area, city, or even university or department enjoy the same degree of academic freedom? Do academics have the same level of protection regardless of their identity and the level of power trying to interfere?

I will attempt to answer these questions by comparing the two conferences mentioned above. Both dealt with issues pertaining to the Israeli-Arab conflict. While the Mapping Models conference focused on the possible solutions and the different possible models of statehood, the CAFI conference focused on Israel and the discourses about the conflict. Although they did not deal with identical issues, they were close in their focus on the different aspects of the Israeli-Arab conflict. This makes comparing the two conferences, the perceptions about them, and the reactions to them, a worthwhile exercise from which we can learn about the ways power and identity impact academic freedom. In comparing the two conferences, I will concentrate on the nature of both events and the goals they aimed to achieve. In the academic context, I will examine and compare the methods used to ensure compliance with academic standards, discussing criteria such as balance and the expertise of the participants. I also will compare the different ways interlocutors reacted to both conferences, and the arguments raised in favor of or against the conferences.

## **Part 2: Overview of Both Conferences**

### *“Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace”*

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, John Dewey, “Academic Freedom,” in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 57.

The idea for the Mapping Models conference came from professors and graduate students in a reading group about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, especially its legal context.<sup>19</sup> Noting the trend among writers, politicians, and scholars to explore new avenues for resolving the conflict, and noting that the choice of the model of statehood adopted (whether two states, one secular or binational state, or anything in between) will have a significant impact on the outstanding issues between Israel and the Palestinians and consequently on the people living in that region and to some degree the whole world, the group noticed that many gaps exist in the literature. Given these gaps, and the growing academic interest in questions of state models in the past few years, the group proceeded to organize a conference “to explore which state models offer promising paths to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, respecting the rights to self-determination of both Israelis/Jews and Palestinians.”<sup>20</sup> The organizers, three law professors and one graduate student,<sup>21</sup> envisioned a conference where a useful scholarly exchange and debate on the topic would take place. Mindful of the sensitivity of the issue, and guided by a desire to trigger a genuine debate, the conference was framed as a question “Israel/Palestine: One State or

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<sup>19</sup> As we will see later in this part, the Mapping Models conference was subject to two inquiries, one by York University, the main sponsor of the conference, and one by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), mainly triggered by outrage at the terms of reference of the first inquiry. (A copy of the York-initiated review can be found at [http://www.yorku.ca/acreview/iacobucci\\_report.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/acreview/iacobucci_report.pdf).) In addition, the story of what happened throughout the planning of the conference and the pressure that was brought to bear by different individuals and interest groups, as well as an assessment of academic freedom issues, have been documented on a website that includes supporting evidence obtained through requests made pursuant to the Ontario Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, and will be the subject of a forthcoming book authored by one of the organizers. (The website can be viewed at <http://www.fragilefreedomatorku.ca/contents/>; see also the forthcoming book by Susan G. Drummond, *Contemplating Israel/Palestine as One State: A Study in Academic Freedom*.) There is, therefore, no need to dwell in detail on many of the events or even the “mysteries” that led up to the conference. The focus of this section will be on issues of academic freedom, and mainly the professional norms, safeguards, and mechanisms used by the conference organizers in order to ensure the event’s high academic quality.

<sup>20</sup>The official website of the Mapping Models conference can be accessed at [www.yorku.ca/ipconf](http://www.yorku.ca/ipconf).

<sup>21</sup> For brief biographies of the organizers, see <http://www.yorku.ca/ipconf/organizers.html>.

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Two?” This title was later changed to accommodate the broader range of possible options and models of statehood for discussion.

In order to fulfill the vision of focusing “a scholarly lens on a wide range of issues pertaining to state models and prospects for just and peaceful coexistence,” and in order to meet the goal of intellectual rigor, a number of mechanisms were put into place. First, the conference was organized by a committee of scholars, each an expert in her or his own field, who designed the conference and vetted all of the paper proposals submitted. Confidence in the competence and the expertise of the organizers was reaffirmed by the fact that about ten different units in two universities, York and Queen’s, cosponsored the conference.<sup>22</sup> Second, the conference’s Advisory Committee, comprised of twelve academics and commentators who work in various disciplines and hold a range of opinions on the questions that would be discussed at the conference, vetted most of the paper proposals in a process similar to blind peer review.

The majority of the paper proposals responded to a call for papers disseminated widely, especially to academic institutions and departments that focus on the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This inclusive process was meant to ensure that a multitude of diverse voices would be heard and that researchers working in the area would know about the conference and contribute original pieces.

The conference as a whole—the organizers, the Advisory Committee, the preliminary program, the vision statement, and the proposed outcomes—was also subjected to an external peer review process by one of the main sponsors, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which is the main Canadian governmental granting body for social science research and conferences. All grants by the SSHRC are peer reviewed according to strict criteria, which include the quality of the conference and its contribution to research and scholarship, the significance and timeliness of the conference’s theme, the soundness of the organization and appropriateness of the presenters, the communication and dissemination of

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<sup>22</sup> For a list of institutional sponsors, see <http://www.yorku.ca/ipconf/sponsors.html>.

the proceedings, and the involvement of graduate students.<sup>23</sup> The grant application for the conference was successful, earning a ranking of ninth out of 120 applications with a score of 86.8/100, ten points higher than the average for funded conferences.

Opposition to the Mapping Models conference, both at York University and by external interest groups, was fierce. Internally, the opposition started to build gradually, beginning with individual faculty members, mainly those affiliated with the Centre for Jewish Studies. Soon after the first concerns were voiced, the then dean of the Osgoode Hall Law School also started “making suggestions” because of “concerns.” These suggestions included excluding the Palestinian member of the organizing committee to achieve “better optics” or adding a Zionist to the committee to balance him. The highlight of the interference was when the room booking for the conference was mysteriously cancelled. Three different units at York University that are related to securing the venue gave three different answers explaining why the room booking was cancelled. The dean of the law school started strongly suggesting three pro-Israel keynote speakers in order to achieve balance (sitting politicians known for their unequivocal support for Israel, one of whom had no academic credentials on the topic). This latter request was presented as a condition to provide support to the conference. The dean further suggested that the organizers should get “help” and ask a “senior” scholar to vet the conference program. At one point, a suggestion was raised to turn the conference into a “workshop,” or scale down the conference to avoid “problematic” speakers characterized as polemicists or activists.

The conference took place as planned in June 2009 and was deemed to be a success by most participants. More than fifty papers were presented spanning a number of disciplines and

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<sup>23</sup> The SSHRC’s criteria for assessing academic conferences are available online at [http://www.sshrc.ca/SITE/apply-demande/program\\_descriptions-descriptions\\_de\\_programmes/conferences-colloques-eng.aspx#a1](http://www.sshrc.ca/SITE/apply-demande/program_descriptions-descriptions_de_programmes/conferences-colloques-eng.aspx#a1).

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presenting diverse views.<sup>24</sup> The participants discussed different issues such as the fundamental question of the one-state option, a two-state settlement, or federal and confederate options. Some papers went as far as suggesting that there is no solution to the conflict. Other papers suggested different approaches for analyzing the conflict, such as viewing it through the lens of apartheid, nationalism, or feminism. A number of presentations dealt with the relevance of international law, human rights law, constitutional design, and national self-determination. Questions of economics, religion, gender, national identity, transitional justice, and reconciliation were also discussed. Some papers tried to highlight historical aspects of the conflict and the question of partition. One panel was dedicated to the question of Palestinian refugees and the right of return.

In the aftermath of the conference, and as a result of concerns raised about the violation of academic freedom by the administration of York University, and other bodies, the president of York appointed Frank Iacobucci, a former justice on the Supreme Court of Canada, to review the conference and questions of academic freedom arising from it.<sup>25</sup> The announcement of Iacobucci's terms of reference created some concern for academic freedom, as they focused almost solely on the conduct of the organizers and not on the conduct of the administration. This seemed to single out the conference as odd and extraordinary in its nature, implying that there should be two sets of criteria for conferences; one for "normal," uncontroversial conferences, and another for conferences like Mapping Models.<sup>26</sup> This distinction and the

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<sup>24</sup> The conference program and links to the abstracts of the papers that were presented are available online at <http://www.yorku.ca/ipconf/program.html>. Most of the presentations are available online in audio or video format. See <http://www.yorku.ca/ipconf/videoaudio.html>.

<sup>25</sup> "President Shoukri Announces an Independent Review of Academic Conference," available online at <http://www.yorku.ca/yfile/archive/index.asp?Article=13025>. For a detailed account and analysis of the review, see Drummond, *Contemplating Israel/Palestine*. See also <http://www.fragilefreedomatorku.ca/academic-freedom/administrative-response/who-is-mr-iacobucci-2/>.

<sup>26</sup> The terms of reference of the review were to:

- "review the experience with the planning, organizing and delivery of the "Mapping" conference;

apparently differential treatment of conferences that are seen as controversial begs many questions about academic freedom. The terms of reference also invoked the language of “respect” and “professional responsibility,”<sup>27</sup> vague and highly contested concepts that could be used (and have been used in the past) to restrict academic freedom.<sup>28</sup> “Respect” and “professional responsibility,” usually added to the equally ambiguous and vague concept of “civility,” are indeterminate and open-ended.<sup>29</sup> There is no uniform definition or description for these terms. The question of who will define them and give them concrete content is equally important. Should it be the wider public? Should it be the university community (including the administration, the donors, the nonacademic staff, and the students)? Because of this indeterminacy and ambiguity, the interpretations of these parameters will be highly influenced by, if not subject to, the existing power relations, rendering these standards an easy opening for constraining and limiting academic freedom. In response to the Iacobucci review, and its

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- advise on the responsibilities of faculty members and University administrators in relation to conferences of this type, particularly conferences sponsored by the University;
- and to provide advice on best practices for the successful planning and execution of such events in light of York University policies and procedures pertaining to academic conferences.”

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Finkin and Post, *For the Common Good*, 149–55.

<sup>29</sup> It should be mentioned that the Iacobucci report confirmed the concerns that emanated initially from the terms of reference. Although the report disproportionately focused on “perspectives” about the conference, mostly by people who did not attend, Iacobucci ignored much of the information and the sources brought to his attention, such as the conference website and e-mail exchanges among the senior administration. He did not recommend any further review of or inquiry into the conference because he believed that not much would be achieved by it, especially if the inquiry were “one that would be directed at finding fault on the part of anyone” (57). His recommendations part strongly emphasized concepts such as “civil discourse,” “academic responsibility,” and “respect,” without defining their contents or acknowledging the potential problematic uses that could be made of these concepts. The Osgoode Hall Faculty Association rejected the report and considered it to be “unsound and unreliable.” The Faculty Association saw the report as jeopardizing academic freedom and was concerned by its failure “to consider the troubling conduct of York officials.” The Faculty Association further stated that the process was fundamentally unfair and strongly criticized the fact that the university did not disclose Iacobucci’s solicitor-client relationship with the university. See Osgoode Hall Faculty Association to York’s Chair of Senate, April 26, 2010, available online at <http://www.fragilefreedomatorku.ca/wp-content/uploads/file/OHFA%20LETTER%20TO%20SENATE.pdf>.

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potential implications for academic freedom, the Canadian Association of University Teachers launched its own inquiry, focused mainly on issues of interference in academic freedom.<sup>30</sup>

*“Emerging Trends in Anti-Semitism and Campus Discourse”*

This CAFI conference, which took place on March 8 and 9, 2009, was organized by the Canadian Academic Friends of Israel, an organization that subsequently changed its name to Canadian Academics for Peace in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> The founding conference of this organization, it was a partnership between CAFI and the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, making it a University of Toronto—sponsored event. It took place on the University of Toronto campus, and the university’s logo was on all of the publications.

CAFI, self-identifies as

[a]n organization of individuals from Canadian post-secondary institutions who support Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and who wish to protect civil and scholarly discourse as it pertains to the State of Israel on university and college campuses across Canada. . . . CAFI proactively supports the existence of Israel and the aspiration to peace with its neighbours, as espoused in Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Our members share a common belief that Israel is a cornerstone of Jewish civilization, a de jure member of the international community of states, and they support Israel’s right to maintain a Jewish character and to foster close ties with its supporters throughout the world.<sup>32</sup>

The same mission statement describes CAFI’s goals as combating attempts to criminalize the State of Israel and thereby also criminalize and silence those who may in any way support

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<sup>30</sup> “CAUT Calls for Submissions to Newly Created Academic Freedom Inquiry into York/Queen’s Conference on Israel and Palestine,” available online at [http://www.caut.ca/news\\_details.asp?nid=1370&page=490](http://www.caut.ca/news_details.asp?nid=1370&page=490).

<sup>31</sup> <http://academicsforpeace.ca>.

<sup>32</sup> CAFI’s Mission, “Emerging Trends in Anti-Semitism and Campus Discourse,” conference booklet.

Israel. Our [CAFI's] members also oppose the educational malpractice that results from abuse of podium by academics. This includes creating adversarial classroom atmospheres by faculty teaching about/against Israel which go beyond academic consideration of the very complex issues facing the Middle East. Within an otherwise wide range of tolerance, CAFI rejects and seeks to combat anti-Semitism, denial of the Holocaust, and denial of the right of Israel to Statehood.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the actions that CAFI's "Mission" specifies include bringing Israeli speakers to Canadian campuses to speak in all disciplines, promoting academic and collaborative research with Israeli academics, bringing Israeli guest speakers to speak in class, supporting Jewish organizations on campus, countering anti-Israel comments "in scholarly articles, campus newspapers, list servers, blogs, email groups, media and/or private communications," "using Israeli or Jewish examples in class to normalize the image of Israel," and working with university administrations to promote "civil discourse through the enforcement of Codes of Conduct." It is easy to conclude from this statement that this is not necessarily a scholarly organization but rather a political advocacy organization comprised of academics. As opposed to scholarly associations such as the Israel Studies Association for example, which self-identifies as "an international scholarly society devoted to the academic and professional study of Israel,"<sup>34</sup> CAFI is mainly focused on providing political support for Israel and promoting Israel's standing in the academy. The fact that members have to agree to Israel's definition as a Jewish state and some of the values in its Declaration of Independence further attests to this fact. CAFI also shares the same address, phone number, and staff person with the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA), and the same address with the Canada Israel Committee (CIC), which are two of the country's main Israel lobbying organizations. Given all of these

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Association for Israel Studies, <http://www.reg.co.il/ais/about.ehtml>.

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indications, one might even go as far as characterizing CAFI as the academic arm of the pro-Israel lobby.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout the mission (of CAFI), the goals and the actions, one could easily identify the trend of focusing on the themes of civility, respect, opposition to “educational malpractice,” “abuse of the podium” and the “criminalization of Israel.” These themes and similar ones are in line with what other pro-Israel organizations advocate for,<sup>36</sup> all of which have one thing in common: they are very vague and ambiguous to an extent that is a threat to academic freedom.

The themes of the conference, and the topics discussed were also similar to the goals and the mission. In the words of the organizers,

This two-day founding conference serves as CAFI’s introduction as an organization and occurs at a particular critical time in light of the recent strong resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe and North America. In the wake of the Gaza War, Canadian students and faculty have witnessed increasingly virulent attacks against Israel and its supporters, often progressing into full blown anti-Semitism. The Ontario branch of Canada’s largest union, CUPE Ontario, has launched a resolution aimed at boycotting Israeli academics and academic institutions. This is in addition to a plethora of resolutions being put forward in students’ unions and other campus groups singling out and demonizing Israel. It is important for students and faculty to stand together against this resurgent anti-Semitism and in support of free and fair academic discourse and the maintenance of a safe environment in which to teach and learn.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This notion is reinforced by the fact that one sheet in the conference kit directed participants to send their receipts to a CIJA worker in order to get reimbursed. “Subsidy Information,” on file with author.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, *Academic Rights and Academic Responsibilities: A New Approach*, a publication of Israeli on Campus Coalition, 2007, available online at [http://www.israelcc.org/NR/rdonlyres/46A1605D-F83B-459D-A59B-82803CB5198D/0/academic\\_rights\\_responsibilities.pdf](http://www.israelcc.org/NR/rdonlyres/46A1605D-F83B-459D-A59B-82803CB5198D/0/academic_rights_responsibilities.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Welcome from the Organizing Committee, “Emerging Trends in Anti-Semitism and Campus Discourse,” conference booklet, 1.

According to the conference program, a broad range of speakers spoke or participated as chairs or discussants. These included many representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Fair Play Campaign Group, the Canadian Jewish Congress, and the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. Another speaker was the executive director of NGO Monitor, a professor of political science at Bar Ilan University who has published a number of articles attacking the Mapping Models conference.<sup>38</sup> Also addressing the conference were a Canadian member of Parliament, a Canadian senator, a former cabinet minister, the Israeli ambassador to Canada, and a member of the British House of Lords.<sup>39</sup> University administrators were prominent at the conference, including a senior administrator at York University who played an important role in putting pressure on the organizers of the Mapping Models conference. The conference kit included many reports, articles, and materials by NGOs such as NGO Monitor and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, both well-known right-wing Israeli organizations.<sup>40</sup>

The conference got almost no media attention despite promotion by the organizers.<sup>41</sup> It was mentioned in an article in the Canadian Jewish News<sup>42</sup> and was also mentioned in an article about the repression of pro-Palestinian students at the University of Toronto.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald Steinberg, "York's Farce of a Conference," *National Post*, June 9, 2009, available online at <http://spme.net/cgi-bin/articles.cgi?ID=5577>.

<sup>39</sup> "Agenda, CAFI Conference: Emerging Trends in Anti-Semitism and Campus Discourse," on file with author.

<sup>40</sup> For criticism of NGO Monitor, see John Richardson, "Why Is This Good Man Getting Hung Out to Dry?," *Esquire*, October 13, 2009, available online at <http://www.esquire.com/the-side/richardson-report/marc-garlasco-nazi-controversy-101309>; see also Jean Hardisty and Elizabeth Furdon, "Policing Civil Society: NGO Watch," *From the Public Eye* 18, no.1 (2004), available online at [http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v18n1/hardisty\\_ngo.html](http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v18n1/hardisty_ngo.html).

<sup>41</sup> CAFI issued a press release about the conference three days before it took place; available online at <http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/March2009/05/c5898.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Sheri Shefa, "Tale of Mideast Jews Can Ease Campus Tension: Prof," *Canadian Jewish News*, March 19, 2009, available online at [http://www.cjnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=16496&Itemid=101](http://www.cjnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16496&Itemid=101).

### **Part 3: Academic Freedom: Academic Rigor, Professional Standards, and Political Pressure**

#### *Academic Standards: Balance versus Peer Review*

Much of the criticism of the Mapping Models conference focused on the issue of “balance.” “Balance” was used by York administrators and critics with academic backgrounds even though some academics had concerns with the very mention and discussion of the one-state model. York University’s administration, for example, pushed for more “balance” by saying that the number of conference presenters who supported the one-state model was larger than the number who supported the two-state model. This abstract notion of balance is vague and problematic as acknowledged by the literature on academic freedom.<sup>44</sup> The vagueness of the concept could be easily manipulated by external groups and administrators, who could reduce it to a head count of “who supports what” with complete disregard for the goals of the academic exercise and the context of the discussions. Following the same logic of these critics, at every conference on racism there should be participants who present the point of view of the Ku Klux Klan, and at every conference on political economy supporters of a market economy and supporters of a historical materialism approach should be represented in equal numbers. For this reason, a 2007 report of a subcommittee of Committee A on Academic Freedom and

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<sup>43</sup> Liisa Schofield, “Exposed: University of Toronto Suppresses Pro-Palestinian Activism,” *rabble.ca*, February 18, 2009, available online at <http://www.rabble.ca/news/exposed-university-toronto-suppressed-pro-palestinian-activism>.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Judith Butler, “Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom,” *Radical Philosophy* 135 (January/February 2006): 8; Finkin and Post, *For the Common Good*, 100–104; and David Hollinger, “What Does It Mean to Be ‘Balanced’ in Academia?,” *History News Network*, May 28, 2005, available online at <http://hnn.us/articles/10194.html>.

Tenure of the AAUP stated that “the very idea of balance and neutrality, stated in the abstract, is close to incoherent.”<sup>45</sup>

On this point, the prevailing opinion seems to be that balance, taken in its simple understanding of having an equal number of people arguing in favor of and against a specific idea, in and of itself, is not a requirement or a condition for rigorous scholarship. The test on the issue of balance is the relevance to the issue discussed: whether the discussion would be deficient if a certain point of view were not raised or brought into consideration. In the words of David Hollinger, “To be balanced is simply to do an academic project professionally. To be imbalanced is to leave out of account something that the academic norms of evidence and reasoning in the interest of truth require you to take into account.”<sup>46</sup> Since balance cannot be taken in its abstract form, or understood as neutrality or impartiality devoid of particular contexts in specific disciplines, the AUPP puts forward a coherent idea of balance that rejects the simplistic abstract understanding. The AUPP proposes understanding balance “as a standard whose content must be determined within a specific field of relevant disciplinary knowledge.”<sup>47</sup>

Hollinger observes that the issue of “balance” seems to emerge mostly in situations where “the complaining party . . . has lost the argument within that community, and is trying to unseat a leadership which has won an argument fair and square by the community’s rules. The complaining party appeals to a larger constituency—sometimes even the public as a whole, and their elected political representatives—claiming that the community in question has been biased, and has unfairly discredited ideas that deserve more respect.”<sup>48</sup> Hollinger’s analysis fits the situation here: the fact that the number of academics exploring or discussing the one-state

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<sup>45</sup> *Freedom in the Classroom*, report of a subcommittee of Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, American Association of University Professors (2007), available online at <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/comm/rep/A/class.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Hollinger, “What Does It Mean to Be ‘Balanced’?”

<sup>47</sup> *Freedom in the Classroom*.”

<sup>48</sup> Hollinger, “What Does It Mean to Be ‘Balanced’?”

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model is on the rise,<sup>49</sup> and the fact that balance is usually invoked by opponents of this model when no similar demand was made regarding others discussing two-state model, shows how the concept of “balance” is often invoked instrumentally. Simplistic balance, therefore, does not necessarily constitute an acceptable professional standard in and of itself, and yet it was deemed acceptable to use it as a standard to discredit the Mapping Models conference, presumably because it gave an equal stage to ideas not necessarily supportive of Israel.

Even though “balance” is not an adequate standard to evaluate academic work, it would be useful, for the sake of comparison, to see what happens when the standard of “balance,” as understood and invoked by the critics of the Mapping Models conference (some of whom participated in the CAFI conference) is applied to the CAFI conference. The CAFI conference included only one Jordanian and no Palestinians out of nineteen speakers.<sup>50</sup> Most of the speakers were either Jewish or Israeli, and it seems that all of them agreed on a set of principles embodied in the mission of the organization that the conference intended to launch. No critical or alternative positions were presented. It would be hard to argue that the conference was “balanced” according to the simplistic understanding of balance invoked against the Mapping Models conference. Even according to Hollinger’s understanding of balance, the CAFI conference did not bring into account voices that assert that opposition to Zionism does not constitute anti-Semitism, nor did it bring into consideration the view that criticism of Israeli policies, or even of Israel’s definition as a Jewish state, does not constitute an attack on the Jewish people. It also ignores the plurality of voices among the Jewish communities in Canada

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Leila Farsakh, “Time for a Bi-national State,” *Le Monde diplomatique* (March 2007), available online at <http://mondediplo.com/2007/03/07binational>. See also Dmitry Reider, “Who’s Afraid of a One-State Solution?,” *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2010, available online at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/31/whos\\_afraid\\_of\\_a\\_one\\_state\\_solution?page=0,1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/31/whos_afraid_of_a_one_state_solution?page=0,1).

<sup>50</sup> One of the speakers, Mohammad Wattad, belongs to the Arab minority in Israel and would normally be considered Palestinian by most Palestinians, but it seems that he does not self-identify as such. See his blog, <http://mswattad.blogspot.com>. Since he does not see himself as a Palestinian, I do not wish to impose this identity on him.

and elsewhere. While one may agree or disagree with any or all of those positions, any analysis of anti-Semitism and the definition and context of anti-Semitism would be lacking without such a discussion.<sup>51</sup>

While simplistic balance is not usually seen as an adequate professional standard, peer review is considered the main mechanism to guarantee excellence in academic research, and it is usually seen as the standard for judging academic work. This is not to say that any piece of scholarship or publication lacks merit just because it did not undergo peer review. The idea and process of peer review are not immune from political considerations and contain internal contradictions, as Joan Scott and Judith Butler have shown. In addition, some of the best works in science were not peer reviewed, and other works by Noble Prize winners that proved to be very important and influential were rejected by reviewers.<sup>52</sup> Still, it is universally accepted as the standard for judging academic work, and assessment of an academic project usually takes peer review into consideration. As I noted above, this mechanism was adhered to in the organizing of the Mapping Models conference on three levels: the peer review by the Organizing Committee, peer review by the Advisory Committee, and peer review of the whole project by the SSHRC as part of the grant-application process. In addition, the conference was sponsored by about ten units from the two universities, including two research offices. In contrast, although the organizing committee of the CAFI conference is comprised of academics, the conference's main sponsor, and the organization that the conference was meant to launch, is essentially a political organization with the main goal of promoting a foreign state. Still, none of the critics who took the Mapping Models conference to task for dealing with an issue that has strong political implications found it fit to apply the same standards to the CAFI conference.

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<sup>51</sup> For literature on the issue of the "new anti-Semitism," see, for example, Norman Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Brian Klug, "The Myth of the New Anti-Semitism," *Nation*, January 15, 2004, available online at <http://www.thenation.com/article/myth-new-anti-semitism>.

<sup>52</sup> See "Editorial: Coping with Peer Rejection," *Nature* 425 (October 16, 2003): 645.

*The Debate over Credentials: Scholars versus Polemicists and Activists*

The debates over who is allowed to speak about a certain topic, and who is an expert qualified to speak, play out very clearly in the case of the two conferences. Very often, attacks and criticism focus on the identity of the individuals making certain arguments rather than on the argument itself. People are often discredited as polemicists, radicals, and doctrinaires, instead of tackling the ideas they present. In the case of the Mapping Models conference, the York administration took issue with the fact that some of the participants are “activists, NGO workers and polemicists” and were alarmed by the number of graduate students presenting (although the involvement of graduate students as organizers and participants was encouraged by the SSHRC guidelines).<sup>53</sup> According to this logic, only professors can present at conferences, and formal credentials are more important than the merits of the ideas and scholarship presented. The fallacy of this idea notwithstanding, the York administration ignored the fact that all the presenters were either academics, graduate students, professionals with proven competence in their field, or analysts, writers, or commentators with an impressive record of publications on the topic. Disregarding such categories of contributors is not only methodologically baseless, it also seems to be contrary to the emerging trend of including professionals, practitioners, and other stakeholders in academic discussions. The York administration did not seem to feel that only academics should speak at conferences when it demanded that a sitting politician be a keynote speaker just because he is a supporter of Israel. One possible explanation for the York administration’s position against including “activists, NGO workers and polemicists” could be that many of these people presented ideas that the administration considered problematic. It is possibly the ideas presented that the York

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<sup>53</sup> See “Fragile Freedom @ York U,” May 2009, available online at <http://www.fragilefreedomatorku.ca/academic-freedom/field-notes/may-2009/>.

administration was alarmed by, not the identity of the people as nonacademics, since other nonacademics with “acceptable” ideas were proposed by the administration.

Again, it is helpful to see what happens if we apply to the CAFI conference the same rules invoked against the Mapping Models conference regarding the identity of the presenters and the topics discussed. The CAFI conference was attended by a large number of politicians, including foreign politicians and official representatives of states. The NGO presence was also significant, both in terms of speakers and literature distributed as part of the conference materials. The heavy participation of nonacademics and politicians was never used to discredit the CAFI conference. One could thus conclude that the insistence on formal credentials does not really stem from an insistence on academic rigor but rather is used tactically to serve political objectives and possibly as a form of censorship.

### *Mechanisms of Silencing: Forbidden Ideas, Forbidden People*

In the Middle Ages, curiosity alone was enough grounds for accusation of heresy.<sup>54</sup> This idea seems to have survived until today. The reaction from many groups, mainly Israel lobby groups, indicated that for them the very mention of the idea of a single state is a taboo. It is a forbidden idea that no one should discuss, and those who support it are forbidden people who should not be allowed to speak. Groups such as the Jewish Defense League (JDL), B’nai B’rith Canada, and the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy were very vocal in opposing the conference, the mere mention of the one-state option, and the inclusion of some presenters “recognizable for their roles as organizers and outspoken proponents of ‘Israel apartheid week’ and the Israel boycott movement.”<sup>55</sup> Surprisingly, a similar approach was also advocated by

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<sup>54</sup> Finkin and Post, *For the Common Good*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> “‘York University Conference Questioning Israel’s Right to Exist an Exercise in Anti-Zionist Propaganda,’ Says B’nai B’rith Canada,” press release, May 22 2009, available online at <http://www.bnaibrith.ca/prdisplay.php?id=1500>. CIJA Statement on Upcoming York University

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some faculty members based at York University. One academic, for example, withdrew his participation because of “inclusion of five papers of unequivocal Israel bashers in the neo-colonialist and apartheid language mode.”<sup>56</sup> Another faculty member objected to the conference on the ground that the conference “is basically a political conference with an agenda that strikes me as naïve, and that may bring only more controversy and dissention.”<sup>57</sup>

The theme of “forbidden ideas and forbidden people” continues at the government level. The lobbying by the external pressure groups, mainly the JDL and B’nai B’rith, seemed to attain a measure of success when they convinced the Conservative minister of science and technology, Gary Goodyear, to ask the SSHRC (for which his ministry is responsible) to conduct a second peer review for the grant that the conference won. The request was made on the grounds that the conference included participants who were not listed in the initial proposal<sup>58</sup> and was accompanied by a threat to withhold increases in the funding for the SSHRC.<sup>59</sup> Heeding the minister’s request, the SSHRC asked the conference organizers to report, according to the postaward procedures, whether any changes in the planning of the conference took place, and whether these changes were major or minor. This kind of interference in an SSHRC-funded conference was so serious that the Canadian Association of University Teachers called for Goodyear’s resignation.<sup>60</sup>

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Conference, May 12, 2009, available online at <http://www.cicweb.ca/scene/2009/05/cija-statement-on-upcoming-york-university-conference/>.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.fragilefreedomatorku.ca/academic-freedom/off-campus/organized-groups/>

<sup>57</sup> Osgoode faculty member, e-mail to dean, October 2, 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Anne McIlroy, “Goodyear Questions Mideast Forum Funds: Science Minister Draws Ire of Academics for Intervening on Controversial Conference,” *Globe and Mail*, June 10, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> CAUT, “Minister Goodyear’s Office Threatens Federal Budget Funding for SSHRC According to Email Obtained through ATIP Request,” September 28, 2009, available online at <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=826>.

<sup>60</sup> See “Minister Goodyear’s Office Threatens Federal Budget Funding for SSHRC According to Email Obtained through ATIP Request,” September 28, 2009, available online at <http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/September2009/28/c9428.html>.

#### **Part 4: Academic Freedom and Power: Between Academia and Politics**

Based on the comparison between the two conferences discussed in this article, one can observe that in reality, academic freedom is relative. In practice, academic freedom, which promises protection to all academics, seems to apply less to those who need it more. The level of protection in fact varies according to the power that interested parties wield and the identities at play. The vulnerability of scholars is usually a reflection of the current power dynamics in the nonacademic world.

The comparison between the two conferences is a case in point. It is almost undisputable that Israel is accepted as part of the Western club of democratic states.<sup>61</sup> It is often celebrated as a vibrant democracy with impressive economic, cultural, and scientific achievements. Most recently, it was accepted as a member in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which considers itself an organization of states that are committed to democracy and market economy.<sup>62</sup> In Canada, Israel's standing and influence is not merely an issue of foreign policy. The close relationship between the Israeli and Canadian governments since 2004 has implications on the local level. This could be easily seen in the recent decisions of the Canadian government to cut funding of organizations critical of Israel, like the Canadian Arab Federation<sup>63</sup> and Kairos,<sup>64</sup> or in the fact that the two main parties in Canada criticize and try to

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, José María Aznar, "Support Israel: If it Goes Down, We All Go Down," *Times* (London), June 17, 2010, also available online at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article2559280.ece>; see also "Prime Minister's Speech for Israel's 60th Anniversary," website of the Prime Minister of Canada, May 8, 2009, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=2097>.

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/57/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_201185\\_45159737\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/57/0,3343,en_2649_201185_45159737_1_1_1_1,00.html).

<sup>63</sup> "Kenney Says Some Canadian Arab Groups Express Hatred toward Jews," CBC News, February 17, 2009; available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/02/17/kenney-racism.html>

<sup>64</sup> Les Whittington, "'Anti-Semitic' Charge Angers Aid Group," *Toronto Star*, December 18, 2009, available online at <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/740510---anti-semitic-charge-angers-aid-group>.

ban a series of lectures on campus called "Israeli Apartheid Week."<sup>65</sup> Recently, there were discussions about legally narrowing down the permissible margin of criticism of Israel by outlawing certain types of speech.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, one can easily see the anti-Palestinian policy that the government of Canada has pursued, whether in terms of its votes in the UN General Assembly since 2004,<sup>67</sup> its votes at the Human Rights Council,<sup>68</sup> or its position against participation in the World Conference against Racism.<sup>69</sup> This was also coupled by attempts to cut some funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency,<sup>70</sup> Palestinian human rights organizations, research institutes, and other NGOs.<sup>71</sup> Although often criticized by other states, different organs of the United Nations, and other human rights organizations because of its policies toward the Palestinians, on the official political level, Israel is a powerful party, both locally and in the international arena.

This power dynamic replicates itself on the academic level, and the different ways the two conferences were perceived, assessed, and dealt with by various interlocutors. As I have described, the CAFI conference, despite its strong political advocacy component, barely got any attention or public scrutiny. In contrast, despite the strength of the Mapping Models conference,

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<sup>65</sup>Haroon Siddiqui, "Parties United in Posturing on 'Apartheid Week,'" *Toronto Star*, March 7, 2010, available online at <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/775842--siddiqui-parties-united-in-posturing-on-apartheid-week>.

<sup>66</sup> See the discussions at the Canadian Parliamentary Commission to Combat Anti-Semitism, available online at [www.cpcca.ca](http://www.cpcca.ca).

<sup>67</sup> To check Canada's record on votes at the UN General Assembly, see the website of the Canada Israel Committee, <http://www.cicweb.ca/voteatun/>.

<sup>68</sup> Bruce Champion-Smith and Les Whittington, "Canada Votes Alone for Israel," *Toronto Star*, January 13, 2009, available online at <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/569872>.

<sup>69</sup> Richard J. Brennan, "PM's Jewish Pitch Hits a New Low, Critics Say," *Toronto Star*, November 19, 2009, available online at <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/727885--pm-s-jewish-pitch-hits-a-new-low-critics-say>.

<sup>70</sup> Lee Berthiaume, "Outcry Erupts as Canada Starts to Move Away from Palestinian Refugee Agency," *Embassy*, January 20, 2010, available online at <http://www.embassymag.ca/page/view/outcry-01-20-2010>.

<sup>71</sup>Haroon Siddiqui, "How the Harperites Ambushed the Rights Agency," *Toronto Star*, January 31, 2010, available online at <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/757981--how-the-harperites-ambushed-the-rights-agency>.

and the use of peer review on a number of levels to ensure the quality of scholarship, the conference was held to a higher level of scrutiny by York University, the pro-Israel lobby groups, the SSHRC, and the Canadian government. This level of scrutiny went far beyond the usual level of scrutiny for academic conferences, and it was mostly spearheaded by figures whose mission *is* to protect academic freedom, such as the York University administration. The standards used to examine conferences or scholarship that deal with issues related to Israel or the Israeli-Arab conflict, and that are not evidently pro-Israel, are more strict and rigorous than the standards applied to conferences or scholarship in general, or conferences and scholarship deemed to be supportive of Israel and Israeli positions. In fact, some standards such as “balance” were only invoked against the Mapping Models conference because it was not seen as pro-Israel. Similarly, restricting participation to academics only or restricting and controlling the topics for discussion was called for in the case of that conference only. When the levels and standards of scrutiny for both conferences are compared, one can hardly escape the conclusion that the power dynamics on the political level are replicated on the academic level: the standards of scrutiny are uneven, depending on the political power wielded in favor of or against the academic project.

The issue here is not the mere application of scholarly standards and the demand that these academic activities adhere to those standards. On the contrary, academic standards are essential to ensuring excellence and rigor in research. The issue is the uneven application of these academic standards, and sometimes the creation of standards that are expected to apply solely to scholarship on the Middle East and on the Israeli-Arab conflict that is not “pro-Israel.” This uneven application is the result of interference and pressure from bodies and figures that academic freedom is meant to protect scholars from. The result of this uneven application of standards and uneven protection of academic freedom is that researchers will have to engage in extensive self-censorship or even avoid writing in the area altogether. This self-censorship or avoidance of critical engagement with certain questions—habits of mind that Said deemed to be

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most reprehensible and corrupting par excellence<sup>72</sup>— will limit the margins of what is seen as “permissible ideas” for discussion, precluding from discussion many important and difficult issues. Controlling the margins of what are considered “permissible ideas” will also affect what is considered the “center” in terms of ideas, discourse, and scholarship. A shift in the margin will consequently shift the “center” to the side that wields more power, essentially contributing to the consolidation and perpetuation of existing power dynamics and the ideas and beliefs promoted by the powerful side. This stands in complete contrast with the *raison d’être* of academic freedom, that is, allowing freedom of research, publication, and teaching in order to advance knowledge unfettered by power or authority. Thus, like power, the uneven and differential application of professional norms becomes a threat and a restriction on academic freedom.

## Epilogue

Said urged careful and reflective analysis of what academic freedom in a society is, and should be. The “is” is demonstrated by the comparative analysis provided above, which shows that the status of academic freedom in Canada and North America in general is very fragile when it comes to dealing with the question of Palestine, and when the ideas provided challenge existing power relations. It also shows that sometimes even the standards of scrutiny used are differential and biased in favor of power and the powerful political ideology. Reflective analysis in the search for academic freedom highlights the inherent relation between academic freedom and power, and the importance of protection against power. The relation seems to be inversely proportionate, the greater the power wielded and the pressure to interfere, the lesser the protection. Since the essence of academic freedom is to protect scholarship from the interference of power and authority, perhaps it would be useful to conceive of the “should” for academic freedom as providing protection that is directly proportionate to the threat, as seen in its

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<sup>72</sup> Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 100–101.

political and social reality, and not on an abstract level. John Dewey observed that social sciences and humanities need more protection than other disciplines because they are “bound up more closely with deep-rooted prejudice and intense emotional reaction.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly, thinking about academic freedom and its limits in a way that is cognizant of and sensitive to the power relations and the potential threats may increase the protection and enhance academic freedom.

While the Mapping Models conference did take place as planned, this happened after resistance to tremendous pressure faced by the organizers. In essence it was a triumph for academic freedom since the pressure and the attacks did not derail or change the content of the conference. This was despite—not because of—the body that was expected to protect it, namely, the university administration. The success also came at a considerable cost, and after taking risks that many others would not be willing to take and even consider responsible. An approach that takes into consideration the power relations and the potential threats would significantly reduce the costs and the risks of protecting researchers and the integrity of research. Attacks on academic freedom and attempts at interference will always exist, as the academy is part of a broader social and political world with diverse interests and power dynamics. Academic freedom does not stop such attacks; it is merely the shield against them. But for the shield to be effective, it must be as strong as the potential force it would shield us from.

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*Mazen Masri is currently a PhD candidate at Osgoode Hall Law School where his current research includes Israeli constitutional law and international law. Masri is a lawyer and has worked in the legal field in both Israel and the West Bank, where he served as legal advisor to the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).*

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<sup>73</sup> John Dewey, “Academic Freedom,” 58.