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Israel's Academia Deepens Colonial Control After the Gaza War

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This paper investigates Israeli academia in the post-Gaza war era (2023–25) as a structural actor involved in the production of a security-military discourse that reframes colonial violence and gives it epistemological legitimacy. The paper argues that universities and research centers in Israel are no longer neutral spaces, but rather central sites for reproducing the logic of security within the field of knowledge. They do so by reformulating concepts such as "security", "deterrence", and "conflict management" as dominant interpretive frameworks that focus on efficiency and risk reduction while marginalizing legal and political dimensions and excluding the concept of violence in the colonial context.

The paper relies on the intersection of four main theoretical frameworks: 1) settler colonialism studies that view colonialism as a continuous structure to reshape land, consciousness, and knowledge;¹ 2) securitization approaches that frame political and social issues as existential threats calling for exceptional responses;² 3) a critique of colonial knowledge that assumes that said knowledge is the result of power relations;³ and 4) a critique of the modern university as a link between the production of knowledge and the requirements of power and security within what has been described as "the military-industrial-academic complex".⁴

The study also relies on a critical analysis of discourse by Israeli think tanks such as the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS). It further looks at materials related to academic programs and strategic studies that focus on concepts, language, and naming patterns, and on what is excluded or marginalized, particularly the absence and re-representation of the Palestinian experience within security frameworks. This analysis shows that there is an integration of the militarization of knowledge with the securitization of consciousness in order to control the boundaries of legitimate knowledge. Colonial violence is reformulated in a technical-procedural language that empties it of its political and legal content and turns it into a matter of management and efficiency in such a way that the Palestinian is excluded as a cognitive self and is re-represented as an object of control and management.⁵

Background: Israeli Academia in Its Historical and Political Context

Israel's academic system was not formed as an independent or neutral knowledge space, but rather emerged and developed within a political-colonial context that made knowledge one of the central tools in building the Zionist state and consolidating its narrative.⁶ From the earliest stages, universities and research centers have played a role beyond education and knowledge production to include helping to rewrite history, to formulate national identity, and to produce interpretive frameworks that redefine control over land and indigenous peoples as a matter of "organizing" and "building a state".⁷

Academic fields, particularly history, sociology, and political and security studies, were supported and expanded and produced knowledge that re-encoded the Palestinian Nakba as a "war of independence" and presented the Palestinians as a demographic

problem or security threat. Academia was not just a carrier of the official narrative, but a space through which the national-security consensus was reproduced and established cognitively.⁸

This role has not been limited to the production of knowledge but has also expanded to the organization of the academic field from within, including the position of Palestinian researchers themselves. Recent studies have shown that knowledge production is not only excluding dissenters but is also controlling discourse and defining the boundaries of what is acceptable while pushing Palestinian academics to constantly negotiate between institutional integration and the production of critical or resistant knowledge.⁹

In this context, cases such as those of Ilan Pappé, Teddy Katz, and Oren Yiftachel are used as analytical indicators that reveal that the limits of academic acceptance are set by scientific criteria as well as by the extent to which the knowledge produced fits into the dominant national-security narrative.¹⁰ This is not so much a qualitative shift as it reflects an intense extension of a historical role where knowledge reinterprets violence as an existential necessity and redefines concepts such as "security", "threat", and "defense" within technical-procedural frameworks presented as "neutral" and "professional" knowledge.¹¹

The Militarization of Knowledge

The analytical reading in this section begins with texts issued by Israeli think tanks, in particular INSS, including the works of Amir Lupovici and Assaf Orion, as examples of the literature of security and colonial studies in the context of the Gaza war.¹²

The militarization of knowledge refers to the subordination of its production and function to a security-military logic so that knowledge is no longer a tool for understanding or questioning reality, but rather a means of managing and controlling it. This pattern extends the logic of settler colonialism as a continuous structure that seeks to control land, knowledge, and consciousness together.¹³ In this context, the relationship between the university and the military is not understood as mere conditional cooperation during war, but instead as a structural relationship that is reproduced through research and funding policies and through academic discourses that redirect knowledge toward the service of what is defined as "national security", reshaping the boundaries of legitimate knowledge.¹⁴

Lupovici's 2024 and Orion's 2025 analyses use the concepts of "restoring deterrence" and "continuous threat management", respectively, to justify violence in a technical-procedural language measured by standards of efficiency rather than by standards of justice or international law.¹⁵ The militarization of knowledge is understood not as a deviation imposed by war, but as a structural function performed by academia within the settler-colonial project; knowledge not only accompanies violence, but also contributes to its reproduction and scientific legitimacy.¹⁶

The Securitization of Consciousness

Securitization refers to the process by which collective perception and public knowledge are reshaped within a security discourse that produces a dominant "truth" across the fields of knowledge and academia, rather than only through official politics. Academia, being a symbolic authority, not only produces knowledge, but also contributes to redefining reality and the limits of what is possible in it. In this context, Michel Foucault argues that knowledge is formed within a "system of truth" that produces what is considered legitimate knowledge,¹⁷ while Pierre Bourdieu asserts that language exercises a "symbolic power" that reproduces domination through what appears to be a neutral discourse.¹⁸

This pattern is not limited to concepts, but is manifested in the structure of the discourse itself, where concepts such as deterrence and threat management are presented as cognitive frameworks that regulate the understanding of reality and reframe violence within a security-technical logic that is presented as a necessity for threat management. This extends to the production of a loyal academic discourse that recodes colonial violence in scientific and technical language that claims neutrality, through vocabulary such as "threat management", "operational performance improvement", and "collateral damage reduction". In this context, Eyal Weizman shows that contemporary violence is reintroduced within what he calls "humanitarian violence", in which power is managed through "proportionality calculations".¹⁹

The impact of the securitization of consciousness also extends beyond the Israeli context to the Western academic field, where the Israeli case is reframed within general models of global security.²⁰ In this regard, Joseph Massad explains that the Western discourse on Palestine tends to reframe the issue within cultural or humanitarian categories that weaken its political-colonial reality.²¹ Thus, the securitization of consciousness is not an accidental effect of war, but a deepening of an existing pattern that makes it a symbolic extension of the militarization of knowledge.²²

Practical Examples in Israeli Academic Practices

The following are cases of academic practices that illustrate the mechanisms of the militarization of knowledge and the securitization of consciousness in the post-Gaza war period.

1. Recharacterizing Genocide in the Discourse of "Conflict Management"

The academic-security discourse after the Gaza war reveals the use of concepts such as "conflict management", "restoring deterrence", and "minimizing collateral damage" not only as descriptive tools, but as epistemological frameworks that redefine violence as a procedural matter measured by standards of competence rather than by standards of justice or accountability.²³ In this context, concepts such as "terrorism" and "self-defense" are reformulated within frameworks that predetermine the location of the actors and the limits of legitimacy.²⁴

This is evident in studies by INSS, in which Amir Lupovici presents the war as part of the "restoration of deterrence", stressing that "every round of fighting is understood as part of a cumulative deterrence operation".²⁵ This approach also intersects with Ephraim Inbar's argument that restoring deterrence requires "imposing a very high price" on Hamas,²⁶ and Orion's analysis of war as an ongoing process of escalation and management of the conflict.²⁷ This reveals the transition of violence from being an object of political accountability to a technical tool for managing a threat.

2. The Absence of the Palestinian and Transformation into a "Security Variable"

Israeli academic and security texts re-represent the Palestinian as a "source of threat" or a "factor of instability" instead of as a historical-political actor.²⁸ In some INSS reports, concepts such as "threat management" and "border stability" are used as frameworks for analyzing the Palestinian reality, placing it within the logic of risk management rather than political interpretation. This intersects with Maher al-Sharif's characterization of the new Israeli security doctrine that treats the Palestinian space as an area of containment and prevention of the formation of "hotbeds".²⁹

Academic texts also use analytical models to study "Palestinian behavior" and "escalation" patterns, without including the Palestinians' colonial context or historical experience, transforming them from political subjects to objects of measurement and prediction. This intersects with Joseph Massad's argument about the tendency of cognitive discourse to reframe the Palestinian issue within categories that weaken its political dimension.³⁰ Sonia Boulos points out that Israeli academia plays a pivotal role in producing knowledge that contributes to justifying various forms of violence against Palestinians.³¹

3. Academia as an Internal Control Space

Academic discourse is not only outwardly directed but impacts the organization of the academic field itself. After the war, there were signs of narrowing the margins of criticism and tying academic legitimacy to adherence to the security-national consensus.³² This is reflected in the interactions related to the Nadera Chalhoub-Kevorkian case, in which her positions have been framed as deviating from the boundaries of academic acceptance.³³

This is at odds with what Scholars at Risk reports have documented about practices such as dismissal, job loss, or expulsion from university as violations of academic freedom.³⁴ The study by Maha Sabbah-Karkabi and Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder also shows that the wartime academic space is subject to censorship mechanisms that produce a hierarchy between what can be said and what cannot, in practice imposing forms of self-censorship.³⁵ Youssef Taha's study shows that universities have become spaces for surveillance through obedience committees and prosecuting students and threatening them with dismissal.³⁶

Academics not only produce a discourse that is secure, but also reorganize the conditions for its production, by determining who is entitled to speak, what is considered legitimate knowledge, and what is excluded from it.

Cognitive Resistance in the Face of the Militarization of Knowledge

The analysis of the militarization of knowledge and the securitization of consciousness is not limited to dismantling the mechanisms of the loyal academic discourse, but also opens up a question about the potential to resist them. If academia contributes to the reproduction of cognitive dominance by redefining concepts, excluding actors, and refining the boundaries of legitimacy,³⁷ resistance begins with questioning the claim of knowledge neutrality and exposing the conditions for its production in unequal power relations.³⁸

In this context, cognitive resistance is understood as a set of critical practices that seek to dismantle the dominant structure and restore the position of marginalized actors, especially Palestinians, as producers of knowledge and not objects of it. It also aims to rethink who has the right to interpret and what is considered legitimate knowledge, in light of the mechanisms of control and silencing that reproduce the boundaries of "what can be said" and "what cannot be said" within the academic field.³⁹

In contrast to academic discourse that excludes the Palestinian as an epistemological subject, epistemological resistance seeks to re-examine the Palestinian experience as a source of knowledge, not just a material for analysis.⁴⁰ It also requires accountability of the same conditions of academic production, including publication standards and recognition mechanisms that may allow exclusion, even within fields that claim to be neutral.⁴¹ Accordingly, the cognitive resistance does not appear as an external imposition, but as a direct analytical exercise that confirms that the struggle over Palestine is not limited to land and power, but extends to knowledge itself, and to the right of producing it and giving it meaning.⁴²

Conclusion

This paper shows that Israeli academia reproduces the militarization of knowledge and the securitization of consciousness through language, concepts, and the limits of legitimate discourse. Israeli academia is not content with keeping pace with security policies, but also contributes to reformulating them cognitively, by redescribing colonial violence in a technical-procedural language that empties it of its political and legal dimensions.

The paper also reveals that the absence of the Palestinians does not appear as accidental but rather as part of a cognitive structure that sees them through a security lens, redefines what is considered legitimate knowledge, and excludes what is not. This trajectory does not represent a new transformation so much as it reflects an intensification of the historical role that academia has played in service of the settler-colonial project.

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