

Structures of Oppression:

Why McGill and Concordia Universities must sever their links with the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology

A report on the multiple levels of systemic violence and oppression that are committed at, and fostered by the Technion University - Israeli Institute of Technology, and why Concordia and McGill University should sever their links with this institution.

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The Israeli state continues to oppress the Palestinian people through occupation, colonization, forced displacement, and racial discrimination, effectively denying Palestinians the fundamental rights of freedom, equality and self-determination. Despite abundant condemnation of Israel's policies by the United Nations, the international community has failed to bring about Israel's compliance with international law or its respect for basic human rights. To this day, Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people have continued with utter impunity.

Israeli academic institutions are complicit in the continuing occupation and assault on Palestinian society through direct and indirect complicity in Israel's violations of Palestinians' human rights, and international law. Links between Israeli academic institutions and those in other parts of the world, including Canada, therefore serve as a form of normalization, and signal international academic complicity with the human rights abuses committed by Israel and its colluding institutions. Technion - Israel Institute of Technology (henceforth the Technion) is one such Israeli academic institution.

In Montreal, Concordia and McGill have strong bilateral student exchange programs with Technion, joint research projects and collaborative scholarships. For example, Concordia University has links with the Technion through the Goldie and Joe Raymer Fellowship. The Technion is listed as a partner institution in McGill's exchange program, and two positions are allotted for annual student exchange. These programs serve to cover up Israel's policies of institutionalized discrimination, and military occupation, and should be of serious concern to students, faculty and all members of McGill and Concordia's campus communities.

The Technion

Technion is one of two Israeli universities that were created before the founding of the state of Israel. Technion was founded in 1924 in Haifa "by the pre-state Jewish settlement, a part of the effort to prepare for the state to come." According to its website, "Technion graduates comprise the majority of Israeli' educated scientists and engineers, constituting over 70% of the country's founders and managers of high-tech industries." Technion also boasts that "80 percent of Israeli NASDAQ companies are led by Technion graduates" and "74 percent of managers in Israel's electronic industries hold Technion degrees." According to Arnie Ludwick and Gary Goldberg,

the President and Chair of Canadian Technion Society, “Technion-Israel Institute of Technology has the highest percentage of students serving in the [army] reserves – many of whom form both part of the academic elite at Technion and the military elite in the IDF.”

With such a large number of Israel's scientists and engineers graduating from the Technion, strong links to Israeli high tech industries, and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the role of the Technion is coming under increasing scrutiny. More attention must be paid to the military technologies that are being researched, developed and built by members of the Technion, and previous or existing joint projects between the University and Israeli military technology manufacturers. This must include a critical focus on the technologies associated with the Technion and employed by the IDF.

Technion’s Relationship with Elbit Systems Ltd.

The Technion has a history of collaboration with Elbit Systems Ltd., an Israeli company that builds military, surveillance and security equipment. Elbit defines itself as “an international defense electronics company engaged in a wide range of defense-related programs throughout the world” and specifically states that it focuses “on the upgrading of military platforms and developing new technologies for defense, homeland security and commercial aviation applications.”

Technologies and projects that Elbit has created for specific use in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) have been both directly and indirectly designed and developed by Technion. In June 2008, Technion joined Elbit in creating the Visions Systems Research initiative at the University’s Faculty of Electrical Engineering. The program involves tracking eye movement and funding academic research into computer vision and other related fields. Israel Cidon, Technion’s Electrical Engineering Dean, said of the partnership: “We view the establishment of the new research center as a major upward step in our long-term partnership with Elbit Systems and with the Israeli high-tech industry. Facing growing technological challenges and an increasing global competition for innovation, it is essential for us to develop stronger ties and smooth integration between academic and industrial research.”

Elbit is “one of two main providers of the electronic detection fence,” a key component of Israel’s Wall build in the occupied West Bank- and deemed to violate

international law by the International Court of Justice in July 2004. The company's subsidiaries (Elbit Electro-Optics [El-Op] and Elbit Security Systems [Ortek]) also provide Long Range Reconnaissance and Observation System (LORROS) technologies for certain parts of the Wall, often referred to as the "Apartheid Wall," or the "Annexation Wall" by Palestinian human rights activists. It cuts through and locks in parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is comprised of guarded fences in some parts as well as 8-metre high concrete slabs that dwarf the Berlin Wall in others. Elbit also provides the Israeli army with unmanned aerial and ground vehicles that are routinely used in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Various international bodies have divested from Elbit because of the company's involvement in human rights abuses and violations of international law. In September 2009, for instance, Norway's Finance Ministry announced that it would exclude Elbit Systems Ltd. from its pension-fund portfolio due to ethical issues. "We do not wish to fund companies that so directly contribute to violations of international humanitarian law," Norwegian Finance Minister Kristin Halvorsen was reported as saying. The Ministry stated that because Elbit provides surveillance equipment for the illegal Israeli Wall –technology specifically designed for that purpose, and that purpose alone – the company did not meet the standards laid out in its ethical guidelines for investments.

Since then, the momentum against Elbit and their active role in unethical military practices has been building. Denmark's largest financial institution Danske Bank divested from Elbit for failing to adhere to its Socially Responsible Investment criteria. Sweden's largest pension funds have also divested from Elbit over its involvement in the Wall. In the summer of 2010, Stop the Wall, a Palestinian grassroots campaign that fights for the dismantling of the Wall, launched a campaign called "BUST ELBIT: Stop bankrolling Israeli wars and ghettos." This campaign was created in an attempt to continue the momentum against a corporation that is integral to the system of oppression in Israel: "Elbit offers its experience in ghettoizing and killing Palestinians to repress other people. In 2006 its American subsidiary Kollsman Inc. won a contract to participate in the creation of the US – Mexico border wall, dubbed by activists the 'Wall of Death'4." Students, faculty, and the research done at Technion in collaboration with Elbit actively facilitate the systematic oppression that Israel imposes on the civilian populations in the territories which it occupies or besieges: the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights.

Technion's Relationship with Rafael Advanced Systems Ltd.

Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd. (formerly RAFAEL Armament Development Authority) is a weapons manufacturer owned by the Israeli government and is presently one of the country's biggest military technology manufacturers. The company has maintained a research and project-based relationship with Technion for many years. In 2001, Technion announced a three-year in-house MBA program tailored specifically for Rafael managers. In partnership with Rafael, students and faculty members of the Technion's Faculty of Aerospace Engineering launched a "two-stage research rocket" in May 2006. The Ramtech rocket took five years to build, and was completed by approximately 20 different students under the supervision of Technion Professor Alon Gany and Yitzhak Greenberg from Rafael (also a Technion graduate).

Furthermore, Rafael won the 2009 Frost & Sullivan Global Defense Industry Product of the Year Award for its "advanced hybrid armor protection system - the ASPRO HMT." The ASPRO (Armored Shield Protection) protection systems are in use on the IDF's Merkava Mk 4 Main Battle Tank (MBT), the tank most used by the Israeli army (including in the Occupied Palestinian Territories). In fact, the Merkava tanks have been in use by the IDF since the late 1970s. The use of Rafael protection technologies such as ASPRO will allow the IDF to use Merkava tanks in urban combat and "in patrol roles or other types of low-intensity conflict normally assigned to smaller vehicles." As such, Rafael-built technologies will be used to enable the Israeli army's Merkava tanks to function more effectively in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and effectively reinforce the human rights abuses occurring therein.

It was a Merkava-4 tank that shot the shell that killed 24-year-old Reuters cameraman Fadel Shana on April 16, 2008. Shana, who was filming the Israeli army in Gaza, had been in a well-marked press vehicle moments before the attack occurred. He was filming in the open and had been using a tripod. The IDF's military advocate general Brigadier-General, Avihai Mandelblit, absolved the tank crew and their superiors of any responsibility, instead concluding that "the decision to fire a shell designed to kill concentrations of battlefield infantry at a two-man TV crew was 'reasonable' and 'sound.'" Eight other civilians aged between 12 and 20 were killed in the incident, and at least seven bystanders were also injured.

Rafael technologies were also reportedly used in indiscriminate attacks on civilians during the Israeli offensive into Gaza in December 2008/January 2009.

Spike-MR (medium range) missiles – built by Rafael – were used in attacks launched by unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) that killed at least 29 civilians, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported.

Technion Autonomous Systems Program (TASP)

Technion has developed the Technion Autonomous Systems Program (TASP), an interdisciplinary system that integrates machines with computer technologies. According to a Technion press release, students at the university's Faculty of Computer Engineering have developed Rahfan, "a micro robotic helicopter that navigates, photographs and maneuvers independently" and can be used for special operations, observation and tracking. The helicopter, which weighs 1 kilogram and can stay airborne for 30 to 40 minutes, is controlled by a small computer equipped with a three-dimensional map. When discussing lessons during the 2008/2009 Israeli incursion into Gaza, an Israeli army commander said that this technology would enable the Israeli army "to be able to get real-time data from outside and inside potential hiding places." Apparently the IDF made mini-UAVs a top priority for urban warfare, because they enable troops to get information rapidly about "hidden enemy forces." The Rahfan project is being financed by the Devorah Foundation and the Technion Autonomous Systems Program. Contrary to the way in which they are presented, more often than not, these aerial technologies are used against civilian populations, like in the Operation Cast Lead in which Israeli warplanes bombed the Islamic University in Gaza.

Militarization of the University

As one of Israel's leading technology-based educational institutions, the Technion has maintained close relationships with technological companies in the arms, engineering and computer science industries, both inside Israel and internationally. As exemplified by the Technion's three-year in house MBA program designed for Rafael managers, programs in Israeli academic institutions are often created with the intent of moulding students for future jobs in Israel's military-industrial complex.

The Technion is a partner in the Brakim academic reserve program, "the latest in a series of joint Israel Defense Forces (IDF)/Technion academic initiatives."

Taking place in the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, the Brakim program allows 15 students to complete both their Bachelor's and Master's in Science degrees in four years. "Like other students in the Atuda (academic reserve program), Brakim participants will complete their undergraduate degrees and apply their education during their military service," as stated in the publication Technion Focus. According to a brochure released by the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, the, "Brakim program [was] initiated to meet the request of the IDF to create an elite group of mechanical engineers to become the future R&D leaders in IDF."

According to Uri Yacobi Keller, the author of *The Economy of the Occupation*, the type of support offered through programs like Atidim and Brakim, "whether through scholarships and money transfers, or academic benefits and lenience, is also discriminatory against those who do not conscript to the Israeli army." Keller argues that since Palestinians citizens of Israel are not conscripted to the Israeli army, and "since any preferential treatment of soldiers and ex-soldiers must necessarily be seen as practical discrimination against Palestinians, the Israeli system of higher education is rife with such mistreatment." Ultimately, Keller concludes that, "being an important part of a militarized war-like society in which army service is a fundamental mainstream consensus, Israeli universities and academic institutes tend to provide preferential treatment to current soldiers, ex-soldiers and reserve-soldier students." An Israeli academic institution that, not only places a major amount of its efforts in military technology, but also in promoting student/soldier cooperative programs is therefore deeply implicated in the occupation, racial discrimination and violations of international law committed by the Israeli military.

Institutional Discrimination at Technion & Unequal access to education

Aside from the institution's direct implication in the military, informal discrimination against Palestinian students at Technion is a daily reality. The widespread discrimination largely goes undocumented and very little information and statistics are provided- such as percentages of Palestinian students registered in Technion and other universities.

In Israel, there is a separate and unequal education system for the state's indigenous Palestinian minority. Palestinians in Israel are treated as second-class citizens in every vital aspect of life, including education. In a 2001 study of Israel's

institutional discrimination against Palestinians in the education system, Human Rights Watch states:

“The hurdles Palestinian Arab students face from kindergarten to university function like a series of sieves with sequentially finer holes. At each stage, the education system filters out a higher proportion of Palestinian Arab students than Jewish students. And Israel’s courts have yet to use ... laws or more general principles of equality to protect Palestinian Arab children from discrimination in education.”

Palestinian schools in Israel lack the basic facilities needed for education. The curriculum is structured in a manner that serves the State’s goal of socializing Palestinian students for self-estrangement, as it contains little if any information about Palestinian history and culture. This curriculum aims to erase any historical memory and promotes the official policy line of divide and rule. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics less than 50% of Palestinian high school students in Israel have a Bagrut (high school diploma), and under 35% have a sufficient Bagrut grade to enter higher education. In addition, Palestinian students’ average score in the psychometric examination (which determines acceptance to universities in Israel) is around 470, while for Jewish students it is 560. Finally, while Palestinians constitute 20% of the citizens of Israel, they comprise only 9.5% of BA students. Less than 5% reach their MA degrees, only 3.2% achieve a Ph.D., and approximately only 1% of university staff is Arab.

These statistics provide evidence of an entrenched system of discrimination and the persistence of institutional racism against Palestinian Israelis in the academic realm. More recently, Israeli universities changed the criteria of acceptance to various faculties, further limiting the enrollment of Arab students. These changes of criteria form impediments to the Palestinian population living in Israel and serve, as one president of an Israeli college said, “to prevent large numbers of undesirable [i.e. Arab] students” from attending prestigious faculties such as medicine and natural sciences. At Technion, there are age restrictions for those applying to medical school, for instance, which limit the entry only to candidates over twenty years of age. This is designed to make Palestinian students literally wait for their Jewish-Israeli counterparts to finish the mandatory army service to start college at the same age.

Furthermore, under the pretext of not serving in the army, racist discrimination is widely practiced against Palestinian citizens of Israel by granting military specific scholarships, as well as in the provision of housing at the universities’ residential halls.

This is particularly grave as the universities are located in Jewish towns and Palestinian students face many obstacles and hardships in finding appropriate housing due to prevailing prejudices and anti-Arab sentiments in Israeli society.

Although the Technion claims to protect freedom of speech, Arab students are prevented from practicing their basic rights of expression and forming an Arab students union, for the Freedom of Speech right is limited to those who support the Israeli state project. Throughout the last several years there was not even a single event by any Palestinian student movement within the Technion. However, the students' general union, which claims to be apolitical and ostensibly represents all students, regularly holds political Zionist events. They do not plan any programs for the Palestinian students, and usually oppose any attempt to organize such activities.

For instance, in 2009, the student union produced a poster supporting the IDF invasion of Gaza, which was widely condemned by the UN and the leading legal experts and human rights organizations. In addition, they arranged a counter-protest against the demonstration of the Palestinian students on the Gaza atrocities, which took place outside the Technion. After this particular demonstration ended, the union's official demonstration continued within the territory of Technion. It was no surprise when those who held the non-approved demonstration were not arrested or brought to a discipline committee as would have happened to pro-Palestinian spontaneous protesters.

A similar incident occurred in 2010 during a protest - approved by the police- against the IDF's assault on the Gaza-bound Freedom Flotilla and as a call to release its hostages. The protest ended with the arrest of 10 Palestinian students, although the Zionist right-wing counter protest was much larger and unapproved.

Technion also overtly discriminates against Jewish Israeli students who dissent, and decide to speak out against Israeli violations of international law and human rights. Uri Yacobi Keller explains that "in 2009, a graduation ceremony for M.A. students at the Technion University concluded, like many official ceremonies in Israel, with the singing of Hatikva, the national anthem. M.A. graduate and activist Eyal Rosenberg, unlike the rest of the students, remained sitting during the singing of the anthem. He subsequently received an official letter from the Dean of the university, denouncing him and warning him not to attend the next ceremony."

McGill and Concordia's Relationship to the Technion

The links that tie Concordia and McGill to Technion cut across a broad spectrum of academic ties, joint research projects and collaborative scholarships. Concordia University shares explicit links with Technion, particularly through the Goldie and Joe Raymer Fellowship. The fellowship was initiated in 2001 and allows alternating yearlong visits for students between Concordia and Technion by covering flight, tuition and living expenses. Concordia's website declares the intention of this fellowship as "support [ing] the promotion of academic collaboration, student exchange programs and research internships between the two institutions"

At McGill, Technion is listed as a partner institution in its exchange program, and two positions are allotted for annual student exchange. In summer 2008, McGill's Principal Heather Monroe-Blum "led an academic delegation from McGill that met with Professor Moishe Eizenberg, Executive Vice President of Research [at the Technion]... and then visited the campus the following morning with the Canadian President's group." According to the September 2008 edition of Technionews, the newsletter of the Canadian Technion Society, "The purpose of these visits was to increase the familiarity of Canadian academics with the global competitiveness of the Israeli universities, with a view to fostering closer academic ties, joint research projects and collaborative scholarship." It is also significant to note that McGill's relationship to the Technion exists within a broader context of the University's involvement in military research.

Concordia and McGill Universities' bilateral cooperation agreements with the Technion normalize and help reinforce the standing of an academic institution that directly, and indirectly perpetuates the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people. The Technion's direct and indirect support for the IDF, and perpetuation of a discriminatory system in Israel demonstrate a particular interpretation of higher education and its role in society. A perspective in which separate sectors of the state are not critically analyzed, but are merged in such a way that the lines between the ethics of academia and the interests of private businesses contracted by the military are blurred. As such, the bilateral institutional relationship that both Concordia and McGill University have with Technion raise important questions as to whether these affiliated institutions share a similar vision of higher education and its role in society.

Conclusion

The examples demonstrated in this report illustrate the strong ties between the Technion and the Israeli military, the Israeli military-industrial complex, and Israel's grave violations of international law and Palestinian rights. This research highlights the Technion's involvement in the development of deadly military technologies – with full knowledge about their use in committing violations of international law – and its denial of Palestinian citizens of Israel the same access to education as other Jewish students. It also makes clear how the Technion is complicit in the violations of international law and human rights abuses committed by the Israeli military against Palestinians by providing new military technologies to weapons manufacturers.

In the struggle for justice and an end to Israel's systematic oppression, an international movement led by Palestinian civil society has called for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel “until it complies with international law and universal principles of human rights”.

Concordia and McGill University should not be allowed to maintain programs with a University that is complicit in violations of human rights and international law. Inspired by a desire for freedom, equality and self-determination for individuals and communities around the world, we demand that Concordia and McGill Universities sever their institutional links with Technion and we affirm our commitment to work towards achieving this goal.

Notes

- 1 US State Department annual reports on human rights have consistently condemned Israel's "institutional, legal and societal discrimination" against its Arab-Palestinian citizens. See, for example, the 2009 Report: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136070.htm>
- 2 The other University is Hebrew University, founded in 1918.
- 3 Uri Jacobi Keller, "The Economy of the Occupation," The Alternative Information Center, October 2009, 6.
- 4 "Fast Facts", Technion University Website.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The Scope, Newsletter of the Canadian Technion Society, Summer 2006.
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- 8 "Elbit establishes Vision Systems Research Center," Department of Electrical Engineering, Technion University.
- 9 Focus, Technion magazine, November 2008, 11.
- 10 "Elbit Systems," Who Profits? (www.whoprofits.org)
- 11 "Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – Advisory Opinion," International Court of Justice, July 9, 2004.
- 12 "Elbit Systems," Who Profits? (www.whoprofits.org)
- 13 <http://www.stopthewall.org/downloads/pdf/Wall-fc-En.pdf>
- 14 "Elbit Systems," Who Profits? (www.whoprofits.org)
- 15 Elisabeth Adams, "Norway's Pension Fund Drops Israel's Elbit," The Wall Street Journal, September 3, 2009.
- 16 <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/632>
- 17 <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=172146>
- 18 <http://stopthewall.org/worldwideactivism/2352.shtml>
- 19 "Technion MBA Program Delivered In-House to 40 Rafael managers," Technion University press release, January 7, 2001.
- 20 "Technion Successfully Launches Unique Rocket Built by Students Over Last Five Years," Technion University press release, May 16, 2006.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 "RAFAEL's ASPRO HMT Armor Wins 'Global Defense Industry Product of the Year Award' by Frost & Sullivan," Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd. press release, July 13, 2009.
- 23 Christopher F. Foss, "ASPRO family brings protection together for armoured fighting vehicles," August 7, 2008. You can see the Merkava tank being used by the IDF during the Second Intifada in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip: http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=f4c_1267933388&c=1
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- 25 Sandra Erwin, "Israel's main battle tanks adapted for urban combat, low-intensity conflict," National Defense, July 1, 2004.
- 26 Robert Mahoney, "Israeli army decision endangers journalists in Gaza," Committee to Protect Journalists, August 14, 2008.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 "Precisely Wrong – Gaza Civilians Killed by Israeli Drone-Launched Missiles," Human Rights Watch, June 30, 2009, 11.

- 29 “Precisely Wrong – Gaza Civilians Killed by Israeli Drone-Launched Missiles,” Human Rights Watch, June 30, 2009, 4.
- 30 “Technion Students and Researchers Build “Rahfan” – A Micro Robotic Helicopter that Navigates, Photographs and Maneuvers Independently,” Technion University press release, December 3, 2009.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/4014767/All-out-war-declares-Israel-as-it-pounds-Hamas-in-Gaza.html>
- 36 “Technion MBA Program Delivered In-House to 40 Rafael managers,” Technion University press release, January 7, 2001.
- 37 Ruth Ebenstein, “Lighting Strikes,” Technion Focus, 2009.
- 38 Ruth Ebenstein, “Lighting Strikes,” Technion Focus, 2009.
- 39 Industrial Affiliates Program – Extending and enhancing the cooperation between the Industry and the Faculty, Israel Institute of Technology, 5.
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- 41 Ibid, 15.
- 42 Uri Yacobi Keller, “The Economy of the Occupation,” The Alternative Information Center, October 2009, 12.
- 43 Human Rights Watch, Second Class: Discrimination Against Palestinian Arab Children in Israel’s Schools, September 2001. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/israel2>
- 44 Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2010 “Students in Universities, In Academic Colleges of Education Among Persons Aged 18-39, by sex, age, population group and degree”
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- 46 <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/docs/m02046.doc>
- 47 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwaYcluhvkw&feature=fvw>
<http://www.panet.co.il/online/articles/1/2/S-300987,1,2.html>
- 48 <http://www.electronicintifada.net/downloads/pdf/091214-academic-boycott.pdf>
- 49 <http://www.encs.concordia.ca/news-and-events/entry.php?a=2010/05/concordia-connection-at-israeli-aerospace-institute.php>
- 50 http://international.concordia.ca//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=125&Itemid=165
- 51 <http://www.cdntech.org/manage/pdf/newsletter%202008%5B1%5D.pdf>
- 52 In the 2006-2007 year, McGill received \$225,969.00 of military funding for research. According to Demilitarize McGill- a student group that opposes military research on campus- several programs at the University have contributed to the development of thermobaric weapons used by the United States military. “In recent years, thermobaric explosives have been used for the bombing of tunnels in Afghanistan and for demolishing houses during urban warfare in Iraq.”
<http://www.antirecruitment.info/files/Military%20research%20in%20universities%20%20Operation%20Objection.pdf>
<http://demilitarizemcgill.wordpress.com/military-research/>
- 53 For more information visit <http://www.bdsmovement.net>