

## **SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES AND POLITICAL ACTION: JUXTAPOSITIONAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TWO CONDEMNING STATEMENTS AGAINST NATIONALIST ENTRY BANS**

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This article analyses two nearly simultaneous statements and their corresponding discourses to learn about their cultural and political ideologies. It juxtaposes the condemnation statement issued by the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to the (second) American 'Muslim Ban,' and the condemnation issued by the Israel Studies Association (AIS) to the Israeli boycott entry ban, in early March 2017. Juxtaposing the two statements highlights their discursive similarities and differences. MESA's statement takes an uncompromising shaming and resistance strategy, proclaiming solidarity with the weak, and avoids describing the condemned society, or claiming to speak for national interests. AIS statement, in comparison, does not explicitly condemn the Israeli ban, and instead of shaming the condemned, uses worried comradeship language, ripe with Zionist ideological suppositions and praises, as well as makes rhetorical claims to membership and authority in shaping 'Israel.' These differences lay bare dominant interests and ideologies that master the two fields.

### **Border controls and the control of boundary**

On 6 March 2017, American president Donald Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13780, commonly referred to as the (amended) Muslim Ban. The order would temporarily restrict entry to the US of individuals from six Middle Eastern predominantly-Muslim nationalities: Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, and was crafted to withstand the successful legal challenges that have blocked its more radical predecessor, EO 13769, before it took effect. The first 'Muslim ban' was issued one week into Trump's presidency, fulfilling his campaign pledge to ban Muslims from entering the US. Later, a temporary-turned-permanent restraining order will be issued against the second EO too, and the White House's attention to Muslim ban initiatives would be put on ice, while government attorneys appeal and defend them (appeals that, as of the time of writing, have not yet concluded). But before the restraining orders have averted or suspended the second EO, the Administration seemed adamant to see the ban actioned. In response, two days after the amended 'Muslim ban' was issued, on 8 March, the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) circulated a 2000 words memo to its members, condemning the EO as discriminatory and damaging to academic institutions, advising them about its prospected implication,

and suggesting ways to cope and prepare.<sup>1</sup> The statement also called for active legal resistance, and two days later, MESA indeed joined a legal challenge to the federal court in Maryland.

On the same day that the amended Muslim Ban was issued in the US, Israeli parliament legislated its own entry ban, introducing Amendment 28 to the Entry to Israel Law (*Book of Laws 2610 2017*, 458), which prevents entry of individuals who have demonstrated substantive public support, or were active in a body publicly supporting, a boycott of Israel, as well as of 'territories under its control.' The law, therefore, sanctions also those who call to boycott of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian (and Syrian) occupied territories, which are illegal according to international law and the international community, and are (or, used to be?) controversial in Israel too. Additionally, the entry prohibition also prevents entry to the West Bank, a Palestinian territory which is subject to a slowly-displacing regime and strict Israeli military rule for the recent 50 years. Like the American ban, the Israeli ban also excludes its own citizens and permanent residents, mainly to mitigate and withhold expected legal challenges, given the engrossing large-scale damage it causes to the rights of many. On 10 March, four days after the legislation, the Association for Israel Studies (AIS), an affiliated MESA member organisation, circulated a 500 words statement to its members, 'expressing its deep concern' of the new Israeli ban.<sup>2</sup>

This article analyses the discourses of both statements, with a twofold mission. First, it asks what interests, ideologies, and discursive situating inform the two fields of academics, as agencies of knowledge-power and as political players, in fostering these public speech acts. It employs an eclectic (mainly Foucauldian (Burman and Parker 2016; Maier and Jäger 2016), cultural (Gavriely-Nuri 2010, 2012) and a mobilised qualitative pragmatic) critical discourse analysis to explore the social meaning of the two nearly-simultaneous condemning statements. I explore what society tell us through and beyond the texts by questioning what is left out of textuality, missed or repressed, thus construing the 'political unconscious' of the texts (Jameson 2007), the desubjectified conditions that foster it, such as contextual epochal ideologies with which it is constructed and read. In this approach, speakers' intentions matter less (and are inaccessible anyway), because it believes that meaning is produced, at least partially, in the process of reading and not in uttering or authoring (e.g. Fish 1982; Eco 1984, 1991; Eco et al. 1992; Jameson 2007). I therefore do not assume that the analysed announcements represent all members of the issuing bodies, rather, that the formality and status of the statements are sufficient to testify for the successful applications (and therefore to the construability) of a dominant discourse within the field.

The second aim is to open up and exemplify the application of what I would call 'juxtapositional discourse analysis,' a joint analysis of two similar-but-different texts and discourses, as a useful device for illuminating (and presenting) less discernible aspects and choices in one text-discourse, using the other.

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<sup>1</sup> The statement is available at <http://mesana.org/committees/TFCHR/tfchr20170308.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The statement is available at <http://www.aisisraelstudies.org/ais/syllabi.ehtml>.

I start this analysis by juxtaposing the contextual considerations of both bans and acting bodies to appreciate the fields of intervention. Then, approaching the statements as (public) speech acts (Austin 1975 [1962]), as performative actions in the social world, I employ text-led re-contextualising hermeneutics to key fragments of each pronouncement, juxtaposing aspects of one text next to the other to unearth discursive possibilities, limitations, choices and effects in both, albeit mainly in AIS's statement. Finally, I connect the two discursive actions being explored with the broader relationship between Israel Studies and Middle East Studies.

### **Entry bans: The flavour of the day**

Appreciating similarities and differences of the bans to which the two statements react is the first essential task in this contextualisation. Both bans are entry prohibitions introduced by distinguished right-wing governments, riding a local and global (Western?) populist nationalist wave, and justified with an urgent existential necessity to defend the nation. Both bans claim to respond to what they define as new 'threats' – boycott or terrorism, which are two interpretative packages (Gamson 1988; Gamson and Modigliani 1989) that envelope an entire epistemological view of the two phenomena, (which others see, for example, as responses to the systematic threat and damage that the US and Israel continuously pose to human rights, security and peace of others, particularly in the Middle East).

But there are also many differences between the two. The American 'Muslim ban' was decreed by a new and inexperienced executive authority, and was controversial even within the ruling Republican Party. It has also met with instrumental domestic and global criticism, including by academics, as well as with widespread protest, demonstrations, disruptions at airports and appeals to courts. Finally, the ban was invalidated by courts thereafter and before it took effect. Twice. The Israeli ban, on the other hand, was challenged much less, and, as far as I could find, not by any body of Israeli academics. Backed by popular nationalist trends, and years of indoctrinating the boycott movement as the nation's enemy, the ban was initiated, debated and voted for in full legislative process, by the parliament and not the government, who nevertheless endorsed it. It was initiated and supported by members of most parties, including MPs from centralists parties in both the coalition and the opposition, and was voted in favour by a majority of 46 to 28 (The Knesset 2017). The ban received less international attention, saw little to no local resistance, and remains in effect to date.

Another difference is the discriminatory basis for both bans. The American ban discriminates on grounds of nationality, justified by fear of international Islamist terrorism (although oddly disregarding citizens of Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, for example, either of which are believed to fill in larger numbers the rows of al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State than any of the six banned nations). The Israeli prohibition, in comparison, bases its discrimination not on citizenship but on expressed and practiced political action, such as statements (e.g. on Facebook), which, unlike terrorism, are non-violent, and are made by (usually Western) members of the international civil

society. The Israeli ban does not target fundamentalists or nationalists, but usually supporters of peace and human rights campaigns, which are grounded in various Western values of justice, in international law and international consensus. Moreover, many Jewish Zionists support boycotting settlements, and see the new ban not as a defence of Israel, but of the illegitimate settlements.

Another aspect to consider is the way in which both bans relate to larger epochal ideologies. The American ban manifests the orientalist suppositions of Islamophobia and 'the war on terror,' which do not need much explaining. The Israeli ban feeds from a discourse that cords to a contemporary Zionist claim of a so-called 'new antisemitism,' which professes the outstanding momentum, passion and international support for criticism of Israeli policies, not as evidence for the severity of Israeli actions and their repercussions, or of the weight and centrality of the effects of the conflict on regional and global affairs, or of the opportunity to fix them, but as a manifestation of longstanding biases, hate and discrimination against Jews, especially in comparison to the volume of objections to other, arguably worse oppressions (e.g. Kurds in Turkey, Kashmir, and even more so in non-democracies). Therefore, banning settlement boycotters guards not only the achievements and ongoing efforts of the expansionist Israeli Right but also the monopoly Zionism claims over the politics of Jews.

## **Actors**

A further consideration prior to analysing the texts, is the difference between the actors, the speakers who make an intervention by issuing condemnation statements. MESA, according to the information on its website, is 51 years old, has over 2700 individual members, 60 institutional members, and 39 affiliated organisations. AIS is only 22 years old, has about 400 individual and 8 institutional members, and is itself an affiliated member of larger societies (MESA, for history, political science, and Jewish studies). MESA regularly takes ethical stands, such as through its vocal committee for academic freedom, and its 'task force' on human rights, which are also, by the way, performative functions of the Self. AIS does not; (and this avoidance, or merely lack, of ethical codes deserve its own analysis).

Both AIS and MESA are chartered in the US, but are the most recognised bodies in their field of study globally, and sponsor the leading journals of their respective fields. Yet, this similarity makes the two interventions very different, because MESA's statement reacts to a domestic American policy, whereas AIS reacts to an Israeli development, not to an American one (even though it could have, for example, reacted to American bodies' reactions, or called them to act instead of, or in addition to, the statement, so this choice of where to intervene is significant). Having said that, both public addresses are multivocal and aim at domestic and international audiences at the same time, and, importantly, were both issued in English.<sup>3</sup> This reminds us to note not only the location and identity of the speakers, but also of their audiences they target (e.g. as message to donors?).

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<sup>3</sup> AIS has translated the statement into Hebrew and posted it on its website.

Which finally brings us to the texts; the actions.

### **The said and the unsaid**

To leave room to discuss more substantive issues, I will only mention briefly that both statements refer to the adverse consequences that the bans are believed to have on academia generally, and, in particular, on the ability of their members to conduct academic work. Both statements also hold similar illocutionary forces that make them public speech-acts of different kinds, for example they both make *assertive* acts (Searle 1976) of mentioning the bans, which not only *commit* the speakers to the facticity of the bans, but also *warrant* further attention to them.

#### *MESA's response to the Muslim ban*

MESA's statement 'Memo on Executive Order to Restrict Entry of Individuals from Designated Middle Eastern Countries' is signed by MESA's Task Force on Civil and Human Rights, which lists 13 academics and one lawyer. After an *assertive* speech act of describing the gist of the EO and its damage to academic work, MESA's statement creates space for its intervention, or establishes *eligibility* (Van Leeuwen 2016, 143), a right to be an actor in a discourse. It mentions two grounds: (1-) the EO addresses Middle Eastern subjects, thus 'rationally' enters MESA's 'remit,' and (2-) claiming responsibility for Middle Eastern victims with an empathic language.

#### FRAGMENT 1 (MESA)

The countries singled out by the Executive Order are all within the Middle East as defined by MESA. Their citizens have suffered enormous violence and dispossession, and the Middle East Studies academic community has both a professional and an ethical responsibility to defend their rights.

The statement then conducts a direct public *expressive* speech act of strict and explicit denunciation (with the addition of the grounds for it: its immorality and its damage).<sup>4</sup>

#### FRAGMENT 2 (MESA)

**We** [unclear if MESA or its 'task force'] **condemn this Executive Order, which** [read: because it] **is** [1-] **discriminatory and** [2-] **does damage to academic institutions in the United States.**  
[Emboldened words at source]

Kampf and Katriel (2016) describe condemnations as discursive rituals of publishing disapproval, and as public speech acts of reinforcing a communal commitment to shred values, that also carry a performative

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<sup>4</sup> The prospectus academic adverse effects that MESA highlights and responded to are broader than disciplinary. MESA therefore takes it upon itself, and claims right, to speak for academic interests (where academics have been generally complacent or indifferent).

function of the Self, and which are a common way in which human right organisations understand their own work. Condemnations are also part of epideictic rhetoric, the rhetoric of praising the ‘good,’ and disparaging the ‘bad,’ and use blame to mobilise public support, as well as prompt shame or regret of the condemned.<sup>5</sup>

However, MESA’s statement goes beyond a direct *expressive* speech act of condemnation to include direct *directive* speech acts in the form of recommendations to its members, such as how to prepare and mitigate the impact to academic work, and explicitly calls for non-cooperation and disobedience:

#### FRAGMENT 3 (MESA)

We [same ambiguity as in FRAGMENT 2] believe [notice the noncommissiveness] the Order may [further noncommissiveness] violate the immigration framework established by Congress in imposing a blanket ban on entry based on national origin. We call on all branches of the federal government to take every available step to suspend and repeal the Order. We also express our support for relevant legal challenges to the implementation of this Order in line with the ongoing challenges to the previous order, such as those brought by the American Civil Liberties Union.

The above is a passionate mobilisation, an urgent call to arms on all fronts, conveyed with a Churchillian rhetoric of repetition and detailing (‘we call on all branches,’ ‘take every available step,’ ‘suspend and repeal’). A later directive in the statement further calls upon universities to avoid from becoming enforcement agents of the Order, by maintaining ‘firm commitment to the privacy of personal records, including immigration information of students and personnel,’ and advises that ‘campus police’ ‘be directed not to participate in immigration enforcement.’

Finally, beyond the *expressive* support for legal challenge, as I have mentioned earlier, MESA has subsequently joined as plaintiff to a (successful) lawsuit against the EO two days later.

#### *AIS’s response to the boycott ban*

MESA’s strongly worded memo and its explicit language (and actions) stand in contrast to the shorter and conciliatory ‘Statement of the Association for Israel Studies on the “Entry to Israel Law”,’ which was issued two days later, signed by the association’s president alone (but appears online unsigned). It did not take the uncompromising disobedience and non-cooperation approach of MESA, nor applied condemnation as the politics of blame or the mobilisation of shame. Rather, it used a softer, worried language, which, I will argue, assumes the condemned as allies with a joint purpose, and raises doubts about the statement being considered as a condemnation.

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<sup>5</sup> To these I would suggest adding a *performative* force when a speaker has the appropriate authority, status or power outside the speech-act; e.g. UNGA, courts rulings.

I would only mention that MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom has also responded to the Israeli ban with a letter to Israeli government leaders (not analysed here), professing 'to condemn this travel ban in the strongest possible terms.'<sup>6</sup> AIS statement, in comparison, does not explicitly 'condemn,' but uses the performative marker 'views with deep concern.' This *expressive* speech act is a nondeclarative (nobody becomes condemned), but a set displeased expression that ranks lower in the hierarchy of public and diplomatic criticism and disciplining (cf. Kampf and Katriel 2016, 319). Apart from being 'concerned' of potential damage to academic work, the key motivation for making the intervention being described is not the ban's sheer immorality, unconstitutionality or ethical commitment to democracy or subjects, but the impracticality and counterproductivity of achieving the same goals of combating the boycott movement, as comrades. For example:

FRAGMENT 1 (AIS)

We [AIS] are committed to non-discrimination against Israeli academicians and institutions by supporters of BDS [the movement for boycott divestments and sanctions of Israel], and many of us have leadership positions in the struggle against it. This law undermines our ability to continue to do so.<sup>7</sup>

The same implicit comradeship, impracticality and counterproductivity are conveyed here:

FRAGMENT 2 (AIS)

There can be no checkpoint of ideas. Security forces and defenses are essential for deterring actual attacks. But it is fantasy and misleading to think that interrogating academics at the country's gates contributes to national security. Ideas, good and bad, have no borders and can be spread by modern communications and social media.

Of the many analysable elements in the latter citation, three interrelated effects will now be teased out. First, the text volunteers a concurring with the concernment of 'security' and 'defenses.' This is *an addition* from which we can deduce that, at least in the way the author imagines the reader imagining the author, a shared perspective about 'security' is not taken for granted, and therefore needs such affirming. Security, in Israeli/Zionist discourse, is a collective symbol, a packed story known to all members, which provides the repertoire of images from which a picture of reality is constructed (Maier and Jäger 2016, 123). The very mentioning of security and defence, over narrating the statement in other

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<sup>6</sup> The letter is available at <https://mesana.org/pdf/Israel20170310.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ilan Troen, AIS president, also told Israeli daily *Haaretz* about a motion in MESA to boycott Israel, and asked rhetorically: 'How can the Israeli government expect us to fight an organization that promotes BDS when it is imposing censorship on us?' (Maltz 2017; my emphasis)

ways, is a loyalty declaration to the broader Zionist-defence narrative. Expressing empathy to (Israeli) security is ideological (discursive), as well as a device of *eligibility* to further act in this discourse.

As an ideology, the 'security and defence' frame forces various decontextualising omissions. For example, of how Israeli security forces control Palestinians, whose security, and indeed existence, as well as adverse effects from the very ban being discussed, are being altogether forgotten. This separation and forgettery of Palestinians from a supposedly Israeli matter (and sometimes from suppositions of Israel studies too) denies the symbiotic reality of Israelis and Palestinians (Portugali 1993) that explains the boycott, the ban, the borders, and the settlements in the first place. The Palestinians (including Israeli citizens), are the most notable unmentioned ghosts in the ban, its motivations, effects, and responses.

Second, the expression 'checkpoint for ideas' is a key metaphor. It reinforces the same image of border control and security, with words from the same field: security, defenses, attacks, borders. At the same time, it elicits one of the most emblematic and recognised counterinsurgency means deployed to control the Palestinians: the checkpoint. The image thus betrays how the discourse that constitutes the author(s) (and the imagined reader(s)) is aware of the oppression, but sets it aside as irrelevant, absented. With this avoidance, the boycott and the securified discussion about it are being removed from the insurgency apparatus of which they are part.

Third, a key message in this passage is that the 'ideological vetting' that the ban would introduce will not be fit for purpose (given the borderless movement of abstract ideas in the time of globalised synchronic media). Saying that something is unfit for purpose does not necessarily, and necessarily does not, challenge the purpose itself. Arguably, this *implies* that the purpose is not flawed. Indeed, as we saw in FRAGMENT 1 (AIS), the purpose of fighting BDS is not being challenged at all, but is shared.

Sharing the cause is further manifested, albeit, again, without explication or commitment, in the following amplification of a voice of an [alleged?] anonymous AIS member.

#### FRAGMENT 3 (AIS)

There are also personal consequences. As one of our members wrote: "I am a staunch opponent of BDS, but I have signed a petition favoring boycott of products from the West Bank settlements. Will I, who lived in Israel for 12 years, was Chair of a department at an Israeli university, served in the army, and have defended Israel in numerous public fora, be allowed to enter the next time I want to visit my daughter there?" Similarly, non-Israelis may not be able to participate in family affairs because of their views.

The fact that the quote of an AIS member is delivered without name, identity, platform, place or time, and still does not disturb the message, stems from its nature as an *impersonal* message, despite the preceding framing of it as a '*personal implication*.' The message is about the effects on *modes of subjectivity* by the law being discussed. The quote itself is

rich with symbolic markers of Zionist-securitist ethos: living in Israel, contributing to its knowledge and prestige (as well as being 'personally' recognised with status), serving in its military, and propagating its interests abroad (which uses another 'defence' marker that signals a Zionist view of Israel's need to propagate as a result of coming under attack). These markers are used for grounding *eligibility*, and are therefore being concurred with, and reproduced. Yet, none of these is personal. They are all political. Ideological. Zionist.

The supposedly personal element in the quote is the individualised inability to visit family, or better, merely the doubt about, or the prospect of risk to, the usual guarantee that visiting family in Israel enjoys; (which is also unlikely in the described case). I read the attention to these limitations of movement and family dis-unification as complementary to longstanding and ongoing Israeli policies, whereby inability to visit family, travel, or travel abroad due to 'dangerous' political views or actions, are measures so casually applied to Palestinians that they can and are being ignored. Seen from this perspective, vocalising a concern about disallowing a *Zionist* father to visit his *Israeli* daughter (who might still be able to visit him abroad, unlike many Palestinians) is a meaningful choice that stages an outrage of an imaginary scenario, where the rights of a devoted Zionist might be affected adversely, as if he was a Palestinian. This priority is, again, not personal, but impersonal, political and discursive.

#### *The better, Western legacy*

AIS's statement's closing opens with a return to balancing the shared comradeship against the boycott with the American perception of freedom of speech, that results in AIS's disapproval of the ban.

#### FRAGMENT 4 (AIS)

Our American members and the American public [note the distancing from the speaker, which avoids a position, but is still an act] accept that advocating for a boycott -- however strongly we object to BDS -- is an exercise of free speech, and punishing or threatening to punish someone for that is a violation of rights.

Israel must not become an isolated entity open only to those who ascribe to official policy. Israel has endured economic and cultural boycotts and produced a vibrant economy and culture, and has maintained an animated public sphere with lively debate. Such a self-imposed quarantine can surely only diminish this fundamental prerequisite to democratic discourse.

This law is not only an encumbrance to academics, it is a danger to the vitality of Israeli life. It serves to isolate Israel more effectively than any of the BDS activities have been able to achieve.

The above closing is conspicuously offering generous praises or cajolery to a society which is allegedly being condemned (e.g. 'vibrant economy and culture,' 'animated public sphere with lively debate,'). It also includes many assumptions in the same vein. For example, it warns of danger to 'the vitality of Israeli life,' thus assuming Israeli life has

‘vitality.’ ‘Nonvital life’ would have been ambiguous at the least, had the above not been a likely anaphoric reference to ‘[Israel is] a vibrant economy and culture... an animated public sphere with lively debate.’ Such celebratory descriptions of Israel are ideological too. They relate to national ethos with uncritical praise that overlooks, for example, global and local economic investments and exploitations (e.g. American funding, multinational and military industries, appropriating Palestinian natural resources, and ripping the benefits of unaccounted-for Palestinian workforce in undesired industries; Hever 2010; Niv 2010), or nondemocratic dimensions (e.g. who can vote, or has legitimacy to join a government). In addition, the extent to which Israel [read: Jewish Israeli collective] has a functioning public debate has deteriorated rapidly in the recent 10-20 years, and is debatable (see: The Israel Democracy Institute’s *Israeli Democracy Indices* of the recent 15 years; the 26<sup>th</sup> issue of *Israel Studies Review* (2011); Reporters Without Borders’ *2017 World Press Freedom Index*; and Freedom House’s *Freedom of the Press 2017*).

Such praises interlock with a particular normative idea of Israel, a heart wish or an instruction written in an imperative form that tells Israelis (curiously in English) what to do, using a *directive* warning rhetoric: ‘Israel must not become [undemocratic].’ The utterance’s disagentified disallowing makes claims to the speakers’ right to prohibit (i.e. command) or warn. The definitive claim is different to, say, ‘we would wish to see,’ or ‘recommend,’ in its demand for authoritative and participatory rights, such as those often used in polemics. The speakers assume active part of a society and a political entity that they study and/or condemn, in a tone particularly discordant for an American or international body of scholars. You may disagree with this, however, we should still ask, why is it there? What does ‘*must not*’ do? Why this phrasing? And what meanings it gains in the ways in which it is read?

A possible direction for answering these might lie in academic, Zionist and orientalist assumptions, such as those being made in the mobilisation of ‘academic freedom,’ a construction reproduced and utilised in both MESA’s and AIS’s statements., even regardless of the statements or the matters at issue, applying a critical hermeneutic of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970) to ‘academic freedom,’ the convention and conviction that -- for academic agents and agencies to conduct ‘impartial’ inquires of the ‘truth’ it is essential to provide them with a protected degree of political freedom -- we should notice a delineation of a boundary of inclusion and exclusion to these rights. Academics conveniently claim for themselves immunity to political threats, and the corollary to this is that the rest of society deserve less political freedom. In this way, ‘academic freedom’ is a cultural hegemonic ideology, dressed as the interest of the general society (Gramsci 1971). While convincing and essential, as well as instrumental for seizing and expending rights generally, academic freedom is also a means for framing the interest and values of a ruling few, in this case the few ruling knowledge, as the interests of all, in the name of will to truth, which, as Nietzsche (2010 [1886]) highlights, is ultimately will to power.

Returning from this, or with this, to the analysed text, it is now time to observe the way in which ‘academic freedom’ is being mobilised in AIS’s statement.

## FRAGMENT 5 (AIS)

While we hold to diverse views on Israeli history, politics and culture, we all uphold a free and unfettered exchange of ideas in the best traditions of academic freedom as practiced in enlightened and democratic societies.

First, the last seven words make a clause that is, *prima facie*, redundant. So why is it here? Of the many ways to describe or support academic freedom, why mention ‘democratic societies’, and even more so, ‘enlightened’?

It is worth mentioning, at this point, that, like AIS’s statement, MESA’s letter to Israeli government (the one not analysed here) also mentions *academic freedom* and *democracy* together, writing that the Israeli ban ‘violates the principles of freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and academic freedom that ought to be protected in a country that wishes to be recognized as a democracy.’ AIS’ and MESA’s statements share the assumption that Israel [read: Israeli-Jews] wish to be (recognised as) more than a flawed democracy (although findings of *Israeli Democracy Indices* suggest that most Israeli Jews are in fact more comfortable with remaining an impaired democracy, to avoid the responsibilities and restrictions that come with improving it). The assumed desire for recognition as a full democracy in MESA’s letter is an addition that is specifically tailored to Israel, and it is phrased in a way that puts the responsibility on proving its worthiness of the title on Israel, thus voicing and reproducing doubts about its democratic character.

AIS’s ‘enlightened societies’ is different for three reasons. First, because the addition of ‘enlightened’ does something more to the message. ‘Enlightened societies’ alludes to a darkness that only some have stepped out of. It is a binary or linear division of light versus darkness, and a metaphor that situates moral superiority and modernity. In this way, it connotes the modernisation theory.

Second, ‘enlightened’ has the specific history of Zionist colonialist cultural ideals of bringing light onto the nations, and Western modernity into Palestine (Hirsch 2009). Furthermore, ‘enlightened societies’ taps into, or is perhaps informed by, an Israeli-Hebrew concept of a state or a society that is ‘*metukenet*,’ which literally means repaired, corrected, rectified, or improved (Even Shushan 1961a; Chaueka 1997), but in the context of society or state is a phrase that also signifies orderly and properly functioning (Chaueka 1997), or being civilised (Morfix 2017).<sup>8</sup> However, ‘enlightened society’ is in no way a cultural code for Israel(iness), rather, it is an opposition emblem of complaining about how improper, dysfunctional, improvised or uncivilised Israeli culture and state are. This self-criticism is at the same time a self-waiver naturalisation of the state of affairs (‘that’s how we are’), where a

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<sup>8</sup> *Metukenent* might also be a popular etymology of *mutkenet*: set, installed, adjusted, properly built, affixed (Even Shushan 1961b); or *teken* ([having good] standard); which both use the same root as *metukenet*. A creative cultural translation could be a *tikkun*-ised [society or state].

*metukenet* state/society would generally refer (intuitively, without mentioning it) to, or would be exemplified with, Western European nations. Therefore, the reference of propriety packs a specific Zionist orientalist desire to a (fantasied) modern and Western society and state, which is particularly common among certain Israeli-Jewish social classes and circles. AIS's statement is nuanced and taps into that ambition, which is a more specific application, or tail, of the modernisation theory and of orientalist concepts of progress, as well as part of the Zionist effort to link Jews and Israel to the West (Shohat 2010; Raz-Krakotzkin 2001; Khazzoom 2003). Or, as the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has put it (and was caught on open microphone telling his east European EU counterparts): 'We are part of the European culture... Europe ends in Israel. East of Israel, there is no more Europe.'<sup>9</sup>

The way 'enlightened' is packed here enforces assumptions of that superior club.

And a third difference to MESA's letter, is that, while appealing to same assumption about Israel's wish to be recognised as a democracy, AIS does not demand that Israel 'proves worthy' of the title, but has already evaluated its public sphere positively earlier.

### **Concluding discussion**

Israel is a contested and controversial object (Rafael and Peres 2005; Pappé 2014), and Israel studies is a new, and at times contested and controversial field, which has a disharmonious and complex historical relationship with Middle East studies. Israel studies has gained material and discursive academic presence in parallel to the Israel boycott movement gaining momentum, at the end of the previous century. Prof Ilan Troen, AIS president and a founding editor of *Israel Studies*, told Israeli daily *Haaretz*: 'Jewish donors around the United States mobilised at the time to set up Israel studies departments and create chairs in Israel studies aimed at counteracting growing anti-Israel bias on American university campuses' (Maltz 2017). To be more specific, Israel studies was made possible by American philanthropists who were particularly concerned with the 'absence of Israel's viewpoint,' or the 'anti-Israeli bias' in American Middle East studies departments.<sup>10</sup> They have linked the study of Israel with Jewish studies, rather than with the Middle East, by 'facilitating' chairs and visiting lectureships (for Jewish Israeli scholars), which often incorporated a public service or an outreach mission in their appointments too (Shenkar 2012, 11, 15, 22–25, 55, 177; Jacobson 2005). Various scholars, especially in Middle Eastern studies and anthropology, have critically noted the systematic, instrumental, and not rarely violent interventions of Zionist bodies, groups and individuals in American academia, particularly with regards to studying or discussing the Middle East and Israel/Palestine issues (Beinin 2004; Lockman 2004, 253–59, 2005; Deeb and Winegar 2016;

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.802143>

<sup>10</sup> It is also noteworthy that many Israeli Middle East studies scholars complain about an anti-Israeli prejudice in MESA, and that as a field they exclude Israel from the teaching and study of the Middle East (Clyne, forthcoming; Eyal 2006).

Clyne forthcoming), accompanied by an informal atmosphere that Deeb and Winegar describe as ‘compulsory Zionism.’

The statements I analysed here are interventions from opposite direction, of academics on (inter-)national politics. Both exemplify the often-denied or underappreciated fact that academia and academics are first and foremost interested political actors in society, as manufacturers of truths and status (Bourdieu 1993), as a class practice, and as a constructed social institution that functions, inter alia, as an ‘industry’ of qualifications, (Collins 1979; Slaughter and Rhoades 2010), which is interested materialistically and otherwise. Any boundary work between academics and other specialities (Gieryn 1983), as well as the dissociation of academia from society and politics, are constructions that must be met with suspicion, asking, what does this scientified nonpartisanism lends itself to, how do academics use their space and power (in this case, of specialist bodies outside university) for political interested action, and how do these discursive contacts mutually shape discursive boundaries?

The juxtapositional analysis above employed this suspicion in reading and deconstructing two textual actions of similar type (condemnation statements) issued almost simultaneously by two scholarly societies, speaking in real time against a nation state’s travel ban, for both academic and general interests. Juxtaposing the two statements has allowed us to discern more clearly the choices not taken in each. MESA did not speak on behalf of national interests, nor has it described the condemned state or society. Rather, it practices uncompromising shaming, proclaiming solidarity with the weak, calling for action, and actively resisting. AIS statement was not directly, if at all, condemnatory, as it did not take part in publicly isolating and shaming. Rather, it issued an anti-isolating warning (e.g. warns of ‘a self-imposed quarantine’), that attempts to mobilise through befriending, cajolery, showing loyalty and comradeship, sharing praxis, and ideological suppositions, and (perhaps self-serving or heart wish) narratives about what Israel is, that simultaneously makes claims to membership and authority in shaping ‘Israel,’ with conciliatory ‘advising’ and ‘worried’ language. Where Israeli academics were overall complicit and/or indifferent to the ban, as well as to many other undemocratic legislations, AIS remains a loyal soldier believer, perhaps demoralised at times, but who still wants what is best for Israel.

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