



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

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Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli
Principal and Vice-Chancellor
University of Glasgow

By email: principal@glasgow.ac.uk

1 November 2022

Dear Professor Muscatelli,

We write to express our deep concern about the University of Glasgow's treatment of Ms. Jane Jackman, a postgraduate researcher whose article on the University's *eSharp* postgraduate research journal was tagged with a caveat undermining its scholarly quality. The article was alleged to promote 'an unfounded theory about the State of Israel' and not to have met the journal's scholarly standards. We have reason to believe these actions both violate Ms. Jackman's academic freedom, are potentially libelous, and damage the academic peer review process.

Founded in 1973, the British Society for Middle East Studies (BRISMES) is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. It is committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in the UK and globally.

In May 2021, following a complaint by an external party, the editorial team of *eSharp*, a postgraduate research journal based at the University of Glasgow, issued an apology for an article that had been published in 2017, entitled, "Advocating Occupation: Outsourcing Zionist Propaganda in the UK" by Ms. Jane Jackman, then a postgraduate researcher. The editorial team's apology accused Ms Jackman of promoting an antisemitic trope and alleged that the article did not meet the standards of scholarship expected by the journal. Following a petition from a large number of academics, the University amended the apology to state that the article promoted "[an unfounded theory about the State of Israel](#)." This charge was posted as an editorial preface to the article without providing any evidence whatsoever, while the Editors still maintained that the article fell short of the scholarly standards expected by the journal.

This sequence of events raises two sets of issues we invite the University to explain: first, a question of process, academic judgement and academic freedom, and second, a question pertaining to potential libel that could have detrimental consequences on Ms. Jackman's career trajectory and the duty of care by the journal's editorial team and by the University towards an Early Career Researcher.

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Concerning the integrity of the peer review process, having been published, we assume the article underwent a valid peer review process and was deemed to meet *eSharp*'s academic standards. If the peer review process was properly followed, then there is no legitimate basis for the Editorial Team to first accept and then override and discredit this process and undermine the article's scholarly credentials. This is clear in the stated guidelines for the University's [peer review and editorial process](#).

Thus, two possibilities appear: either *eSharp* Editors were deeply remiss in the original peer review process, or that process was sound. If the peer review process was found to be severely wanting, then the proper action for the journal would have been to withdraw the article entirely. The fact that this was not done suggests that the process was sound. Comprising several experts in scholarly areas related to the article's topic, BRISMES Council members who read Ms. Jackman's article could not find evidence for any of the accusations and statements written in the editorial preface.

Conversely, if the peer review process was indeed sound, then the Editorial team's and the University's intervention appear arbitrary and – contrary to their statement – not driven by scholarly considerations. By inserting an editorial preface that questions the integrity of the article and its author the university arbitrarily undermines the results of the peer-review process. By so doing both the University and the *eSharp* Editorial team not only undermine the journal's scholarly credibility, but also academic freedom, particularly research freedom.

The second set of issues raised by Ms Jackman's case concern the journal's and the University's actions. These constitute potential libel and failure to uphold a duty of care towards an Early Career Researcher which can potentially lead to damaging effects on the scholar's reputation and have a detrimental impact on her career trajectory – all as a result of unfounded accusations and statements concerning Ms. Jackman's research.

The allegations that Ms. Jackman's article fails to live up to scholarly standards are serious enough – and in themselves warrant a full and transparent explanation from those who level it – but the allegation of presenting or promoting antisemitic views is particularly grave.

In this respect, we note that the author appears to have been denied the right to respond to allegations *before* the journal's and the University's decisions were taken. Secondly, the continued presence of the editorial caveat undermines the scholarly credentials of Ms. Jackman's article – particularly combined with the seriousness of the allegations of antisemitism – and in so doing may well constitute and produce significant reputational harm to the article's author. On the evidence, it seems difficult not to conclude that the handling of this issue has resulted in multiple egregious violations of academic freedom and in the dereliction of the journal's and the University's duty of care towards an Early Career Researcher.

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Such egregious failures in process, principle and outcome by both the University and the journal could understandably be construed as efforts to discourage scholarship critical of policies or actions of Israeli government by tarnishing them with allegations or implications of antisemitism for which there are neither grounds nor avenues of redress.

The University has a twin duty in law to both investigate any complaints of antisemitism and any other form of racism, discrimination or harassment, and to uphold academic freedom and freedom of expression, including the presentation of controversial and unpopular points of view. Moreover, this should be done in line with clearly published procedures and transparent processes such that speakers, researchers, staff members and students feel confident that they can develop their research, test ideas and express opinions without the risk of being subject to unfounded accusations or arbitrary procedures that could damage their professional reputation and career trajectory.

We therefore call on the University to immediately remove the editorial preface to Ms. Jackman's article and to apologise to her for the harm that it has caused. Furthermore, we urge the University to immediately review its current procedures for dealing with complaints and safeguarding academic freedom and freedom of expression.

We look forward hearing from you by November 14, 2022.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice-President, BRISMES

On behalf of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

CC.

Ms. Jane Jackman

Dr David Duncan, Chief Operating Officer, University of Glasgow