

BRICUP Newsletter 72

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BRICUP

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Universities of Palestine

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American Studies Association Members Endorse the Academic Boycott of Israel

The members of the American Studies Association have endorsed the Association's participation in a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. The vote was in response to the ASA National Council's announcement on December 4 that it supported the academic boycott: 1252 members voted and this is the largest number of participants in the organization's history; 66.05% endorsed the resolution; 30.5% voters voted against; 3.43% abstained. This unprecedented action ensured a democratic process: see the Council statement at the note below and the collection of supporting documents that are available on the ASA website.

The ASA National Council has stated that "The resolution is in solidarity with scholars and students deprived of their academic freedom and it aspires to

enlarge that freedom for all, including Palestinians. The ASA's endorsement of the academic boycott emerges from the context of US military and other support for Israel; Israel's violation of international law and UN resolutions; the documented impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian scholars and students; the extent to which Israeli institutions of higher education are a party to state policies that violate human rights; and finally, the support of such a resolution by a majority of ASA members."

The ASA National Council continues by expressing its "thanks all who took seriously the task of debating and discussing the resolution. As the nation's oldest and largest association devoted to the interdisciplinary study of American culture and history, the Association's mission includes the ongoing study and discussion of pressing issues faced by the US and the world. As part of that process and in keeping with the ASA's commitment to academic freedom, we are thus pleased to announce plans to bring Israeli and Palestinian academics to the 2014 national convention in Los Angeles. Editor

Note: [ASA Council statement on the boycott resolution](#)

The PACBI Column

Academic Boycott of Israel in 2013: A Tipping Point

In mid December 2013 the American Studies Association endorsed an academic boycott of Israel [see item 1 above]: 66 percent of the ASA membership voted in favour of this resolution following a referendum organized by the ASA National Council. Independently but simultaneously, the Native American and Indigenous Studies

Association [announced](#) its elected council's unanimous support for the academic boycott of Israel.

These and a number of other developments this year in the global struggle for Palestinian rights lead to the conclusion that the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement may be reaching a tipping point, particularly in the academic and cultural sphere.

Even before this sweeping victory for the ASA boycott resolution, many had hailed the ASA National Council's unanimous [endorsement](#) of the academic boycott of Israel as an exemplary expression of effective international solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom, justice and equality. "[Warmly saluting](#)" the ASA boycott, the largest federation of Palestinian academic unions said Palestinian academics were "deeply moved and inspired" by what it considered to be "a concrete contribution to ending [Israel's] regime of [occupation, settler colonialism and apartheid](#) against the Palestinian people."

If boycott, at the most fundamental level, constitutes "withdrawing ... cooperation from an evil system," as Martin Luther King, Jr. taught us in another context, BDS fundamentally calls on all people of conscience and their institutions to fulfil their profound moral obligation to desist from complicity in Israel's system of oppression against the Palestinian people. To understand why the ASA boycott has attracted considerably more than its fair share of attacks from the Israeli establishment, Israel lobby groups in the U.S. and its apologists, one must examine the wider context, the trend of BDS [growth](#) worldwide.

The BDS movement set an impressive number of precedents in 2013. Weeks ago, in [a letter of support](#) to the ASA, the University of Hawaii Ethnic Studies department became the first academic department in the west to support the academic boycott of Israel. In April, the Association for Asian-American Studies [endorsed](#) the academic boycott — the first professional academic association in the United States to do so. Around the same time, the Teachers' Union of Ireland unanimously [called on](#) its members to "cease all cultural and academic collaboration" with the "apartheid state of Israel," and the Federation of French-Speaking Belgian Students (FEF),

representing 100,000 members, [adopted](#) "a freeze of all academic partnerships with Israeli academic institutions."

These and many other BDS developments have led to an explosion of interest in [scrutinizing and criticizing Israel's regime](#) of oppression of the Palestinian people, or at least aspects of it. This has caused a heightened sense of alarm in the Israeli establishment as well as unprecedented debate there, to the degree that Secretary of State John Kerry [reportedly](#) said that Israeli leaders are terrified of the fast-growing BDS movement as much as they are scared of Iran's rising influence in the region.

Indeed, the behaviour of Israeli universities and their deep, decades-old [complicity](#) in Israel's occupation and denial of basic Palestinian rights have been a key driving force behind the proliferation of academic boycott initiatives and union resolutions all over the world. ASA National Council member Sunaina Maira, a key organizer in the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, makes a compelling [point](#) that has largely been missing in the coverage of the ASA boycott. Most academics were moved into supporting the academic boycott of Israel by learning "what Palestinian scholars and students go through on a daily basis just to get to school, as they navigate these checkpoints ... the many conditions that obstruct their access to education" and searching for a "civil society response."

The complicity of Israeli universities in human rights violations takes many forms, from systematically providing the military-intelligence establishment with indispensable research — on demography, geography, hydrology, and psychology, among other disciplines — to tolerating and often rewarding racist speech, theories and "scientific" research. It also includes [institutionalizing discrimination](#) against Palestinian Arab citizens, among them scholars and [students](#); suppressing Israeli academic research on Zionism and the Nakba (the forced dispossession and eviction of Palestinian Arabs during the creation of the State of Israel); and the construction of campus facilities and dormitories in the occupied Palestinian territory, as [Hebrew University](#) has done in East Jerusalem, for instance.

In the first few weeks of the first Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993), Israel shut down all Palestinian

universities, some, like [Birzeit](#), for several consecutive years, and then it [closed all 1,194 Palestinian schools](#) in the occupied West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. Next came the kindergartens, until every educational institution in the occupied Palestinian territories was forcibly closed. This prompted Palestinians to build an “illegal network” of underground schools. Palestinian scholars and students are methodically denied their basic rights, [including academic freedom](#), and are often subjected to imprisonment, denial of freedom of movement, even violent attacks on themselves or their [institutions](#). If exercising the right to academic freedom is conditioned upon respecting other human rights and securing what Butler [calls](#) the “material conditions for exercising those rights,” then clearly it is the academic freedom of Palestinian academics and students that is severely hindered, due to the occupation and policies of racial discrimination, and that must be defended.

So when the ASA unequivocally” [defends](#) academic freedom and argues that the boycott actually “helps to extend it,” it means that it is not only contributing to restoring academic freedom for those most deprived of it, but that it is also promoting unhindered, rational debate in the U.S. and beyond about Israel’s occupation that stands behind this denial of rights.

Some academics and lobbyists have vociferously attacked the ASA, and indeed the entire academic boycott of Israel, as undermining academic freedom, usually without specifying whose academic freedom they are taking about. None of them, clearly, had Palestinian academics in mind. Regardless, their critiques have failed to explain how the institutional boycott that the PACBI and its global partners uphold would in fact infringe upon academic freedom. In a desperate attempt to prove this supposed infringement despite ample evidence to the [contrary](#), some have resorted to intellectual dishonesty by making the false claim that the Palestinian boycott targets and aims to isolate Israeli academics, completely distorting the fact that it explicitly and consistently targets Israeli institutions.

If the Palestinian-led academic boycott of Israel succeeds in isolating Israeli institutions, Israeli academics are likely to lose their privileges and perks, but certainly not their academic freedom. To understand the difference, one must reference internationally accepted definitions of the latter.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UNESCO) [defines](#) academic freedom as including “the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfil their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the state or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction.” Nothing in the PACBI boycott conflicts with any of this.

Regardless, [according to the UN](#), academic freedom itself, like any other right, is not an absolute right. The “enjoyment of academic freedom,” according to the UNESCO, comes with the basic “obligations” to ensure that contrary views are discussed fairly and “to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds.” This rights-obligations equation is a general underlying principle of international law in the realm of human rights. When scholars neglect or altogether abandon such obligations, they can no longer claim what they perceive as their inherent entitlement to this freedom.

Those who are still reluctant, on principle, to support a boycott that expressly targets Israel's academic institutions while having in the past endorsed, or even struggled to implement, a much more sweeping academic boycott against apartheid South Africa’s academics and universities are hard pressed to explain this peculiar inconsistency. Unlike the South African “blanket” boycott of academics and institutions, [the PACBI call](#) explicitly targets Israeli academic institutions because of their complicity, to varying degrees, in planning, implementing, justifying or whitewashing aspects of Israel’s occupation, racial discrimination and denial of refugee rights.

As Omar Barghouti explains, the “[Stephen Hawking effect](#)” – the entrenchment of BDS in the international academic mainstream – may well be a prelude to crossing a qualitative threshold. International scholars, and a fair number of conscientious Israeli scholars as well, are increasingly conscious that they carry a moral obligation to stand up for justice and equal rights everywhere and to refrain from lending their names to be used by an oppressive regime to cover up injustice and human rights violations. The ASA

boycott of Israel will be remembered for many years to come as a crucial catalyst in this emancipatory process of reclaiming rights for all who are denied them.

PACBI

This editorial is based on [Omar Barghouti's article in Inside Higher Education](#)

'Israel Singled Out.....True or False?

Pro-Israeli supporters routinely raise the accusation of double standards against critics claiming that Israel is singled out unfairly for BDS when other regimes with allegedly more blood on their hands and a worse human rights record get away with it. A brief analysis of so many examples of boycotts, sanctions and arms embargoes enforced by the Western Axis powers and the UN since 1945 provides overwhelming evidence that the reverse is true. In fact Israel does indeed get treated unfairly in comparison but entirely in their favour through their proxy vote on the Security Council and total unquestioning support from Congress and US puppets such as the UK. Whilst Congressional support reflects Representative and Senator concern for their own electoral survival whatever they may believe privately (and reveal off the record), the fact that the USA routinely vetoes any and every UN resolution critical of Israel (43 times so far, more than all other countries have used their veto on all other issues) is an index of their total support for Israel right or wrong, even when it is clearly not in the strategic interests of the USA. Not only do these Western Axis powers protect Israel from BDS, worse still they are complicit in war crimes such as the investigative consensus reported after the Cast Lead assault on Gaza in 2008/9. Forget not that the Ceasefire Resolution 1860 was blocked in the Security Council by the US thus allowing IDF ground forces to move in on the back of the massive three day aerial bombardment. Even when it was eventually passed on the 6th January, the US abstained. This protective shield is infinitely more powerful than the slings and arrows directed at Israel comprising current calls for boycott from tiny organisations such as PACBI, BRICUP, the American Studies Association (ASA), the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association

(NAISA) and the Asian American Studies Association (AAAS).

The honest question we should all be asking is, "How the hell does Israel get away with it?" not "why pick on poor little Israel?" After all, various permutations of BDS have been enforced on numerous states including Communist China (entry to UN blocked for decades), Russia (Moscow Olympics), South Africa, Rhodesia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Yemen, Belarus, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, UK (Suez War 1956), Portugal, Burma, Serbia, Gaza, Palestine, Chile....and counting. Some were effective, some honourable, others totally dishonourable when they were set up merely to protect Western Axis power interests in for example Cuba or Nicaragua, corporate and neoliberal interests as in Allende's Chile, or had devastating effects on innocent civilian populations as in Palestine and Iraq. Given Israel's blatant denial of human rights to Palestinians, a near half century of military occupation and the ensuing apartheid regime, then surely, if we truly believe in non-violent resistance to such crimes, BDS is fully justified against this militarised ethnocracy masquerading as a democracy. How else can we uphold international law and prevent a global slide into barbarism?

Colin Green, Emeritus Professor of Surgery, University College, London.

Haifa University refuses to award an honorary doctorate to Yisrael Aumann.

Aumann is a Nobel laureate, a world-famous expert on game theory, but he is also a prominent Zionist and his statements against Arabs are well-known: during the media frenzy that was sparked by his receipt of a Nobel prize Aumann took every opportunity to publicise his beliefs. In an interview in *Maariv* in July 2010, Aumann said, "The most logical thing is that there should be a Jewish state and an Arab state. A Jewish state where Jews live, and an Arab state where Arabs live. ... You take all the Arab settlements and connect them by a web of roads and railways. The same thing with the Jewish settlements. Here are your two states, without moving anyone from his place." Regarding mixed cities in which Arabs and Jews live, Aumann said, "Maybe to put up fences, I don't know. It's something to learn."

As an explanation of its decision [1] Haifa University has stated that Aumann's political views are not in line with the University's values, and although bestowing the degree on Aumann might not be tantamount to expressing support for his opinions, it would nevertheless express tolerance of statements that should, instead, be condemned.

This is an interesting decision but what does it signify? Arab students make up roughly 30% of the student body at Haifa but it would be an error to think that Haifa University is a model of tolerance and racial equality – quite the reverse. Recall the treatment of Teddy Katz, the graduate student whose story is told by Ilan Pappé [3]. “Teddy Katz stumbled upon the massacre [at *Tantura*] while doing his MA dissertation for Haifa University. When this became public the University retroactively disqualified his thesis”. More recently the University decided to remove the Arabic text from its official logo and was prevented from doing so only by strong protests. And last year an Arab student was instructed not to speak in Arabic in a University building [4]. The student said “We never imagined that racism will be that obvious at the Haifa University; we got accustomed to certain racist situations [...] but this incident is just outrageous. We are being denied our native language.” This leopard has not changed its spots.

Editor

Notes

- 1] <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/yisrael-aumann-nobel-laureate-boycott-haifa-university.html#ixzz2pXNhfDe5>
- 2] [interview with Israeli daily Maariv](#)
- 3] The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine by Ilan Pappé. Pub. Oneworld Publications, Oxford, (2006) page 136.
- 4] <http://www.imemc.org/article/64998>

Notices

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk

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Please note that we do have a “Letters to the Editor” facility. We urge you to use it. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of the campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month's newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible. Letters and comments should also be sent to newsletter@bricup.org.uk

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