

# BRICUP Newsletter 83

BRICUP

British Committee for the  
Universities of Palestine

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### **Anthropologists Debate the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions**

In December 2014 the American Anthropological Association (AAA) voted to keep open the conversation about boycotting Israeli academic institutions. Some 700 people gathered at the annual business meeting of the Association, an event that often attracts fewer than a handful. The atmosphere in the room was electric, as anthropologists from across the profession discussed the boycott and the ongoing violations of Palestinian academic freedom and human rights.

In recent months, over 1,000 anthropologists have [signed a boycott pledge](#) to protest Israel's systematic and widespread violations of Palestinian academic freedom and human rights.

Many are speaking and [writing publicly](#) about why they now feel boycott is the best way to address the injustices that have become so systemically entrenched.

Anthropologists campaigning for the boycott elected not to pursue a resolution at this year's AAA meeting in favor of building the broadest possible support among members over the coming months. They sponsored a [series of panels](#) at the conference to raise awareness about the boycott and about human rights violations in Palestine. These panels, some of which attracted audiences of 200-250 people, promoted conversation about the possibility of the AAA passing a resolution to boycott Israeli institutions complicit with the occupation.

Despite this, opponents of the boycott sought to short-circuit the debate by forcing the AAA to take an anti-boycott position now. On the agenda of the business meeting was a [proposed resolution](#) against boycotting Israeli academic institutions. This effort to shut down the boycott discussion backfired spectacularly: members present overwhelmingly voted down the measure, which mustered a mere 52 supporters.

Of the 24 members who spoke, three-quarters opposed the resolution, arguing that it was an attempt to shut down a crucial debate.

After the resolution was presented, Lisa Rofel of UC Santa Cruz reminded members that the discussion about boycotting Israeli academic institutions within AAA has only just begun and should not be shut down.

Rofel also criticized the resolution's false claim that the boycott seeks to harm Israeli scholars. She reminded colleagues that the boycott does not apply to individuals and pointed to the model of the ongoing boycott against the University of

Illinois Urbana-Champaign for the firing of Steven Salaita. Rofel explained, “scholars who were invited to give talks [at UIUC] have cancelled talks and will not do business with the institution. However we have all been encouraged to invite faculty from UIUC to our own campus. That’s what a boycott looks like.”

Under the boycott, Israelis would still be permitted to participate in AAA meetings and publish in its journals. Zareena Grewal of Yale University reminded the audience that the American Studies Association’s support for the boycott did not prevent numerous Israelis from attending that group’s recent annual meeting.

Anthropologists specializing in Israel/Palestine who spoke at the meeting overwhelmingly endorsed the boycott and opposed the resolution. Ilana Feldman of George Washington University said that 25 years of working in Israel/Palestine “gives me the information I need to know that boycott is the right action we need to take to stand in support of Palestinians.”

Several members debunked the myth that a boycott would undermine efforts to change Israel from within. Nancy Scheper-Hughes of UC Berkeley cited recent conversations with Israeli dissidents that persuaded her to reject the resolution. An Israeli graduate student also took to the microphone, arguing that “conversations do not take place in a void, but are embroiled in power structures. Boycott is not ending the conversation but changing the terms of it.”

Other graduate students also spoke out against the resolution, reflecting the widespread support for the boycott in AAA’s newer generation. One said: “I oppose this resolution as a Jew and because during my Passovers growing up, we used to say that our liberation will not be complete until everyone’s is.”

Rema Hammami from Bir Zeit University in Palestine announced that she was “thrilled to finally be at an academic conference where the problems faced by Palestinians have been centrally discussed.” Hammami reminded her American colleagues that the United States is “deeply implicated in enabling Israel’s actions” through military, diplomatic, and financial aid. Hammami also expressed regret that aside from the actions of a few courageous individuals, Israeli academic institutions had shown no solidarity with Palestinian colleagues, even when universities like Bir Zeit were effectively strangled by Israeli army checkpoints.

About a quarter of the speakers at the meeting supported the resolution, often repeating its false claim that the boycott applies to Israeli scholars as individuals. Sergei Kan of Dartmouth College insinuated that support for the boycott is anti-Semitic because it “suggests that AAA has a Jewish problem” – drawing groans from the audience.

AAA members present rejected the resolution by acclamation, with only 52 of the over 700 present voting in support. The room erupted into applause and cheers.

The AAA has appointed a [Task Force](#) to determine what, if any, action the Association should take regarding Israel/Palestine. The Task Force was at the conference interviewing tens of anthropologists with expertise on the area.

Although there are many [efforts to intimidate anthropologists](#) who support the boycott, including efforts that threaten their careers, the staggering defeat of the anti-boycott resolution has helped create a new reality within AAA, one in which boycotting Israeli academic institutions has become a plausible and ever more likely course of action.

Anthropologists who are interested in signing the petition in support of the academic boycott and in opposition to the ongoing Israeli violations of Palestinian rights can do so [here](#).

Lori Allen

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## **Should statisticians boycott Israeli universities?**

This contribution is about statistics, but not only about statistics.

It is also, indeed mainly, about the ongoing campaign for an academic and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions, called for by the great mass of Palestinian civil society organisations. The boycott was not called for by the Palestinian Authority - which has very little room for manoeuvre given its dependence on Israel to let it function at all. But then the PA hasn't actually been elected since 2006 (and anyhow many of those elected are in Israeli prisons). Nor for that matter has Mahmoud Abbas been elected President of the state of Palestine since 2005. So this is an alternative universe. In these circumstances the civil society legitimation for the boycott call is pretty good.

This boycott call is relevant to statisticians, since it applies to all academics, and also by extension to non-academics in the UK who might otherwise have dealings with Israeli universities. It is not especially relevant, just bog standard relevant. If there is a good case for boycotting Israeli universities, it applies equally to statisticians.

### Statistical disputation

Most people know that Israel has the 5th (or 4th?) biggest army in the world, despite having a population of only 6 million. This is an army that is not reticent in applying itself - the assault this summer on Gaza, on a trapped population with nowhere to go, is probably still seared in most of our memories. That disparity in military strength, and the willingness to apply it, is only part of the justification for the boycott. I will come back to the general picture in a while. But first, is there a statistical angle?

Back in September/October 2011 there was a discussion on the RadStats email list sparked by some numbers posted that compared Israel and Palestine. The figures were of uneven quality, but uniformly tended to show the former in a poor light. There was discussion on the list in which some contributors concentrated on the lack of statistical rigour. They had some good points - for example, about how to define refugees in order to count them. There were also some not so good points: one message even seemed to suggest that Israel's 1500 large artillery pieces might be balanced off against the Hamas untargetable rockets.

But generally speaking the numbers were good enough, at least to the first significant figure, to permit comparisons. For example Tanks: Israel 3800 Palestine 0. The comparison of dead and wounded on the two sides over the then 63 years since the foundation of Israel were also so formidably skewed that discussing the second significant figure seemed, well, academic. From 2000 to the beginning of this July the number of Palestinian deaths at the hands of the Israeli Defence Force was 6766. The number of Israeli killed by Palestinians in the same period was 1091.

These figures were collected by the highly reputable Israeli NGO Btselem (<http://www.btselem.org/statistics>). Of course since then the figures have been swelled, and the disproportion magnified, by Operation Protective Edge. Btselem is still authenticating its figures, but the BBC ([\[middle-east-28439404\]\(http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28439404\)\) estimated them at more than 2100 Palestinians, and 73 Israelis.](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

### Israeli policies as an integrated system

One thing that is striking about these figures is that the majority, many thousands, of the Palestinian deaths did not occur in set piece assaults. This is a regular almost daily attrition. It is part of the system.

In case I might be misunderstood, this is clearly not a deliberate genocidal policy designed to eliminate the Palestinians one by one. For one thing, it is not even keeping up with the birth rate. The 'system' is more general, and has as its aim the retention under Israeli control of as much of the land of Israel/Palestine as possible with as few Palestinians on it as possible. Since the Palestinians cling to the outmoded view that the land is actually theirs, the Israeli project can only be achieved by denying the Palestinians rights and voice, as well as land and occasionally life. Perhaps there is a view in ruling Israeli circles that if conditions are made bad enough for the Palestinians (eg a blockade of Gaza) they will be willing to go somewhere else.

Israeli apologists adopt a whole range of arguments meant to distract from this unpleasant truth. One line is to say that there never was such a thing as a Palestinian people, so how can they have rights to the land, especially compared with the 2000 year old rights of the Jews (even if they happen to have been largely absent for 1900 of those). And in case there should be any doubt, the Israeli state practices what the Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling called 'politicide' (Baruch Kimmeling, *Politicide: The Real Legacy of Ariel Sharon*, Verso, 2006) – "a gradual but systematic attempt to cause their annihilation as an independent political and social entity".

Politicide. Established ownership rights are removed by legal sleight of hand, Arab place names are eliminated from the map, destroyed Palestinian villages have forests planted over them, manifestations of Palestinian culture are obstructed.... (For quite some time Palestinian artists were arrested for using the colours of the Palestinian flag in their work. "You couldn't paint a poppy" artist Vera Tamari has written "You'd be imprisoned for painting a watermelon".) A concert in 2012 by the Ramallah Orchestra in East Jerusalem organised with the help of the French Consulate was reduced to a string quartet when

Israel denied access to Jerusalem to most of the orchestra members.

And of course there are the settlements. All illegal in the view of all governments in the world, even our own and that of the United States. They are illegal because it is a blatant violation of the Geneva conventions for a nation to undertake population movements into a territory occupied by force. Israel has now established 600,000 settlers in Jerusalem and the West Bank, cutting up the territory that could otherwise be a Palestinian state.

There are many other aspects of the system of which the assaults on Gaza are the most dramatic but not perhaps the most shocking manifestation. I have not even touched on the [systematic discrimination against the Palestinians who evaded the ethnic cleansing of 1948](#), and who make up 20% of Israel's own population. The "Separation Wall" which separates Palestinian farmers on the one side from their land on the other. Roadblocks (literally) obstructing Palestinian access to higher education. And so on.

## Impunity and Boycott

What some defenders of Israel say goes like this – OK, there are some things Israel has done that are disturbing. But there are many other countries that have done worse. China suppresses religious freedom, the United States bears prime responsibility for a whole series of aggressive acts (lets just mention Iraq), Uzbekistan's regime maintains itself through the systematic use of barbaric torture. So why pick on Israel? The unspoken, but actually quite often spoken, assumption is that the call to boycott Israel is antisemitism, simple and not very pure.

The first answer to this argument is that while there are indeed sadly many other countries round the world which offend egregiously against human rights, they do not generally (unless they are very big and powerful) get hailed and feted by our very own governments. Many of them indeed face 'punishment' by some or all of the international community for their human rights violations. Right now governmental sanctions against Iran have come close to crippling its economy. Syria has had its foreign assets frozen. Zimbabwe faces embargoes on international loans and on arms imports. Four other African countries have an arms import ban. Israel by contrast gets \$3bn of arms aid from the US every year, plus guaranteed impunity. Israel was actually

reprovisioned with arms by the USA in the middle of Protective Edge. Is suffering from a citizen boycott being 'picked on'? Would its supporters rather have Israel treated in any of these other ways?

The second answer is that in this case, almost uniquely, we have a call for boycott from the victims of the oppressive treatment, the Palestinians. They are not asking for free fly zones, for supply of weapons, for armed Western intervention. They are asking for boycott, specifically including academic and cultural boycott.

## But why academic boycott?

Once again there is more than one answer to this question. The broad brush one is that the call for academic boycott is part of a larger call for BDS, the acronym for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. This also covers consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, investments by pension funds, cultural activities, the charitable status of collections for Israel by the JNF (Jewish National Fund) and so on. This is a non-violent strategy for simultaneously weakening Israel's position while strengthening general awareness of its policies and actions. From this perspective academic boycott needs no subject-specific justification.

There are some people, perhaps mainly academics, who feel it is patently obvious that intellectual activity falls into an entirely different category from all the other transactions covered by boycott. The free flow of ideas ought to be privileged as the highest form of human endeavour on which progress and liberty depend.

This idealisation of what academics actually get up to is striking for its motherhood and apple pie qualities. If only that were so. But in any case it is a defence that somehow misses the arrow. The boycott is an institutional one. There is no request for any of us to desist from talking to, disputing with, collaborating with individual Israeli academics. The fact that they are based at an Israeli institution does not make them liable to boycott. As individuals they would only be targeted if they held senior campus-wide positions at their institution, or were officially representing it at some meeting or conference.

Respecting an institutional boycott, some of the things that I will not do are

- referee job applications or promotion proposals at an Israeli university

- attend conferences held in Israel; and I will campaign against the conferences of my discipline being located there
- referee papers submitted to journals based there
- participate in quality assessments of any unit of an Israeli university
- take part in collaborative ventures in which there is an Israeli university partner
- undertake funded joint research when the project is administratively based at an Israeli university

Of course there are more.

For those who think, all the same, that Israeli universities are unlucky and blameless victims suffering collateral damage on behalf of a system they have no part in - think again.

### **What roles do Israel's universities play?**

Israel's universities are rich, successful, a jewel in Israel's crown. It would be good to think that they are, amid this gloom, centres of enlightenment.

Consider, by comparison, the Palestinian experience of higher education. It is hard for Palestinian citizens of Israel to gain access to higher education, on account of their economic disadvantage, the special treatment Israeli universities give to students who have completed their military training - a category that generally excludes 'Israeli Arabs' - and other institutional obstacles. But it is harder still for Palestinians within the occupied territories to gain that access. Israeli authorities

repeatedly close Palestinian colleges and universities, sometimes for weeks at a time,

place roadblocks in the way of access,

refuse faculty and students permission to travel abroad,

deny foreign academics the right to visit or remain in teaching posts,

bar all exchange between West Bank and Gaza universities,

indirectly starve the Palestinian education system of funds by undermining the local economy and withholding tax revenues they collect on behalf of the occupied territories.

So - how have Israeli universities campaigned against this very real assault on higher education?

I have left a blank line. No staff association, no council of a university, no committee of University Presidents has ever made any public statement to say "This is a real violation of academic freedom. It should stop".

Let's look at another part of the universities' balance sheet. The Hebrew University has built on 800 acres of land expropriated from its Palestinian owners. Tel Aviv University is built over the site of the demolished Palestinian village of Sheikh Muwanis. That same university headlined its Annual Review for Winter 2008/9 with the proud assertion that it had 50 ongoing research projects for the Israeli military. Yes, and that same university in July 2014, with slaughter and destruction gathering pace in Gaza, sent a letter to staff saying TAU 'embraces and strengthens the hands of the security forces', and threatening disciplinary action against staff and students voicing criticism on social media.

Perhaps the concentration on one university seems unfair. The picture could indeed be replicated with differences of detail for the Technion, Hebrew University, Haifa University... For example virtually all universities in Israel run special courses tailored for Israel's internal security service Shin Beth or for other branches of the security services. And it is standard to offer advantages such as preferential entry or accelerated progress to IDF veterans.

It this goes to reinforce what should perhaps have been obvious: that when a military occupation has continued for 47 years, the 2 elements (Israel before 1967, and the territory seized then) have in essential senses become one unit. It is not just that Israel has permeated the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Occupation has also penetrated everywhere within Israel.

### **Organising for the boycott**

For a number of years the academic boycott was hotly disputed within our union UCU.

Increasingly there has come to be a settled view, so that the issue is no longer an active one at Annual Congresses. The union's policy is to ask its members to consider carefully their academic links with Israel. UCU cannot instruct its



members to boycott - and it should not anyhow. But the sentiment in favour of boycott is palpable.

Recent developments in the United States have opened up a new set of possibilities. Over the winter of 2013/4 a string of academic associations passed resolutions in support of academic boycott. The largest of these was the American Studies Association, with about 4000 members. It went through a very thorough process, lasting more than a year, of discussion, formation of a working party to draft a motion, and discussion of that motion at its annual conference, where the session to do this attracted over 700 members. Finally it went to a postal ballot, where the vote supported academic boycott by more than two to one.

Is there scope for such a process in the UK? There are clusters of activity of this kind now being generated in a range of disciplines here. Could statistics be one of them? Maybe that is something that could be discussed further by Radical Statistics.

### In conclusion

In Summer 2013 the scientist Stephen Hawking withdrew from Israel's Presidential Conference convened by President Shimon Peres. Here's what he said in his message of withdrawal:

***I accepted the invitation to the Presidential Conference with the intention that this would not only allow me to express my opinions on the prospects for a Peace Settlement but also because it would allow me to lecture on the West Bank. However I have received a number of emails from Palestinian academics. They are unanimous that I should respect the boycott. In view of this, I must withdraw from the conference. Had I attended, I would have stated my opinion that the policy of the present Israeli government is likely to lead to disaster.***

Jonathan Rosenhead

*This article was written for the Radical Statistics Newsletter, and appeared in Issue 111 (2014), pp56-61. The issue is not yet online but will be in the future. The link to the Newsletter is <http://www.radstats.org.uk/journal>. Information on the Radical Statistics Group can be found at <http://www.radstats.org.uk/>*

## The right of return

This iconic photograph encapsulates the iniquity of the denial of a right of return for Ghada Karmi, who was born in Jerusalem, contrasted with the unwanted right of "return" to Israel for Elen Siegel, an American Jew.



Take 2. No change!



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## Renounce Birthright

I started [Renounce Birthright](#) a few years ago along with two other young, anti-Zionist Jews. Since its launch, the project has primarily consisted of a website that calls on our peers to renounce their "right" to the free, 10-day trip tour of Israel. The site provides some original analysis about the trips as well as links to other journalists and scholars who have written about them; compiles books, films, articles and other resources about the occupation more generally; and draws links between the ongoing colonization of Palestine and the ongoing colonization of North America.

My interest in mobilizing young Jews around Birthright is personal. I was raised in a "liberal" Zionist family and attended a synagogue that taught me the usual colonialist myths ("we made the desert bloom," etc.). It wasn't until college that I started thinking critically about Israeli

history and referring to what's happening in Gaza and the West Bank as an occupation. And it wasn't until my mid-twenties, when a dear friend of mine told me she was considering attending an LGBT Birthright trip, that I was forced to actually articulate why opposing Birthright (and organizing against it) felt so important.

As articulated on our website, the rationale for opposing Birthright is threefold:

1. The notion of a "birthright" is racist and colonialist: By attending Birthright (even if it's just for the free trip), you are willfully taking advantage of your racial privilege. This trip only exists because it ties into the racial ideology at the core of Israeli national identity – that your body and presence is highly desirable, while Palestinians' bodies are not. There are no justifications for taking of your racial privilege (e.g. "I wouldn't be able to afford it otherwise") when doing so sustains systemic and institutionalized oppression.
2. Participating in Birthright = participating in occupation: Birthright is not a "neutral" institution, nor do its trips have a "neutral" impact on the occupation. Even if you sit silently on the bus for the duration of the trip, your physical presence there will make you individually complicit in sustaining the occupation. You'll also be a participant in a project designed to ensure our generation's political and financial support for Israel.
3. Birthright distracts us from developing alternative means of expressing our Jewish diasporic identity: Birthright has convinced us all that our Jewish diasporic identities need to be linked to Israel. They don't. Let's develop alternative means of expressing our Jewish identities.

But from my perspective, opposing Birthright is not merely a moral imperative – it's also a necessary strategic move. Birthright trips are perhaps the primary means by which young diasporic Jews are indoctrinated into the logic of Zionism; (from my perspective) they exist to primarily produce subsequent generations of AIPAC donors, not to promote aliyah. They are also a discrete and easily intelligible example of how colonialist discourse operates in the context of Israel/Palestine. Just the name - "Birthright" - allows to frame the conversation around already understood and accepted signifiers of colonialism

(e.g. racial privilege, "manifest destiny," etc.). Analyzing Birthright trips along this axis enables us to enter the conversation from a position that refutes normalization, one that situates the relationship of the colonized to the colonizer at the center rather than at the margins. Of course, any Birthright organizing must be done alongside the BDS campaign and be grounded in goals/aims set by Palestinians. My aspiration is that Renounce Birthright will serve as an entry point for young Jews - in other words, providing a political analysis that ultimately drives young Jews to engage in broader campaigning against Israeli apartheid.

For now, my primary aim for the site is that it will be utilized by young Jews considering signing up for the trip or for those who have already attended. I hope to eventually use the site to launch anti-Birthright campaigns across the diaspora, but thus far we've faced various problems in getting local efforts off the ground. Part of the issue is the way in which Birthright trips are organized - e.g. people sign up online, or through their universities, so building networks of resistance requires us to set up parallel outreach online or in-person. One way to go about that might be to produce pamphlets about Birthright so that Palestine societies can counter-flier when Birthright sets up tables on campuses. Those are the sorts of next steps I hope to take in 2015 - creating literature for distribution and establishing relationships with possible partners on campuses (or even in synagogues) across North America and Britain.

I'd also really like to compile Palestinian perspectives on Birthright - what the trips mean to Palestinians emotionally, analyses of their political purpose, etc. Please spread the word about that. I think it's crucial that Jews in the diaspora who are considering attending the trips hear from Palestinians about why renouncing their "Birthright" is so important.

We can use all the help we can get. So if you have ideas about how we can disseminate our message, link up to existing Palestine organizing networks, or reach out to Jewish young people, please don't hesitate to reach out. And we would absolutely love any and all feedback on the site, the ideas, etc. Thanks!

Aviva Stahl

## Shattering the Academic Boycott of Israel Taboo

2014 was simultaneously a terribly painful and remarkably hopeful year for the Palestinian people.

Israel's massacre in Gaza during the summer was its worst to date against Palestinians under its occupation. Its barbaric siege and systematic denial of basic needs to the 1.8 million Palestinians in the world's largest prison camp, the Gaza Strip, has been described as "incremental genocide" by the prominent Israeli historian Ilan Pappé and as collective punishment and a war crime by leading human rights organizations around the world.

Israel's ethnic cleansing and state-enabled fanatic settlers' violence against the indigenous Palestinian communities in Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and the Naqab (Negev) have reached an unprecedented intensity and criminality.

Israel's parliament has shed any mask of supposed democracy, revealing the true nature Israel's regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid like never before.

Yet, the BDS movement grew exponentially in 2014, and its growth in the academic field was no exception!

Here are some highlights of the academic boycott of Israel developments in 2014:

**January:** A BDS panel at the Modern Language Association was [received](#) by Israel and its lobby groups as another sign of the growth of BDS in mainstream academic circles in the U.S.

**February:** The New York Times Editorial Board [condemned](#) attempts in the New York Legislature to pass a bill that would bar state financing for academic groups that support the boycott of Israeli universities.

Dozens of leading Irish academics signed a [pledge](#) honoring the academic boycott of Israel until Palestinian rights are respected.

**March:** University of Massachusetts Boston faculty and staff sign a [statement](#) endorsing the academic boycott of Israel.

People's Books Co-op [votes](#) to join the BDS movement against Israel, instituting a consumer, cultural and academic boycott of the Israeli state.

Dundee University students [adopt](#) BDS-related motions by an overwhelming majority--72.6 percent of those who participated in the vote supported the motion.

A motion calling on the Students' Union of the National University of Galway (Ireland) to actively participate in the BDS movement [passes](#) by an almost 2 to 1 margin (1,954 to 1,054 votes) during a student referendum.

**April:** the student senate at the University of California at Riverside [vote](#) to support a resolution sponsored by Students for Justice in Palestine calling on the university to pull its investments from US companies profiting from Israel's occupation.

Graduate students at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque [pass](#) a resolution which calls for the divestment from companies profiting from human rights violations in occupied Palestine and at the US-Mexico border.

**May:** Philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs and actor and activist Danny Glover [sign](#) a statement supporting the Palestinian call for the cultural and academic boycott of Israel.

In the UK, the National Union of Students (NUS) Black Students' Conference [adopts](#) a motion in support of BDS. The Black Students campaign "[represents](#) the largest constituency of Black students in Europe and students of African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean descent, at a local and national level on all issues affecting Black students."

In the autonomous region of Catalonia in the Spanish State, a campaign for academic boycott [attracts](#) the backing of over 800 academics, students and university staff. In addition, activists [forced](#) the Secretariat for Universities and Research in Catalonia to examine the campaigner's proposals aimed at ensuring the new deals for academic collaboration with Israel do not benefit institutions and companies that participate in Israel's occupation.

In California, the student government of the University of California at Santa Cruz [passes](#) a divestment resolution against companies involved in the Israeli occupation, the fifth of nine campuses of the UC system to do so.

In Chicago, students at DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the US, [pass](#) a divestment resolution despite conditions of fear and intimidation from Zionist groups. Students voted (54% to 46%) in favor of a referendum



calling for divestment from companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Caterpillar for their complicity in Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian human rights.

In Connecticut, Wesleyan University students [vote](#) to support divestment from companies profiting from Israeli military occupation in Palestine.

In Florida, the University of South Florida chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine [gathers](#) an unprecedented 10,000 signatures for a petition calling for divestment. The petition is the largest student petition in Florida history.

**June:** An Israeli government-sponsored conference in occupied Jerusalem [prioritizes](#) fighting BDS as a strategic threat and threatens academics that are critical of Israel with "professional humiliation."

**July:** In what was hailed as a victory for the global boycott of Israel campaign, the Federal Court of Australia [dismisses](#) a case waged by an Israeli-based NGO to find Sydney academic Jake Lynch in breach of the country's anti-racism laws.

The African Literature Association ([ALA](#)) "endorses and will honor the call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. It is also resolved that the ALA supports the protected rights of students and scholars everywhere to engage in research and public speaking about Israel-Palestine and in support of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement."

The Critical Ethnic Studies Association in the US [endorses](#) the academic boycott of Israel.

The Student Association (VCASA) of the Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne University, Australia) unanimously [votes](#) to become part of the BDS movement.

US librarians, archivists and information workers, stressing their "ethical obligation to speak out in the face of injustice," [call](#) on their peers "to boycott and divest from companies profiting from Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestine."

**August:** The national executive committee of the National Union of Students (UK), which represents 7 million students, [adopts](#) BDS.

1,200 University professors and researchers in Spain [demand](#) breaking academic ties with Israel.

A [letter](#), signed by 327 Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants

of survivors, sponsored by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network and published as an ad in the New York Times, condemned Israel's "massacre" in Gaza and called for a full boycott of Israel, including of its academic institutions.

A large group of employees, faculty members, PhD students and researchers of the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), in The Hague, including 7 Prince Claus prize holders, [call](#) on the Dutch government to "officially implement boycott, divestment and sanctions against the State of Israel."

Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University [calls](#) on "all scholars of the world, all women's organizations, all who fight for freedom and justice to take a clear stand against this racist state's continuous war crimes, genocidal acts, and violent rape culture. ...Stand by resistance to the occupation, joining the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) of these "academic institutions" ....

More than 250 philosophers and political theorists [call](#) for a boycott of Israel.

Over 100 Middle East Studies scholars and librarians [call](#) for the academic boycott of Israel.

**September:** African National Congress (ANC) members and leaders should not travel to Israel as the party is in solidarity with the people of Palestine, ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe [states](#), calling for a "cultural, academic and education boycott of Israel, including travel bans for members and leaders of the ANC, the alliance, members of Cabinet, Members of Parliament and government officials."

**October:** More than 1,000 anthropologists from around the world [call](#) for an academic boycott of Israel.

Several dozen Jewish Studies professors from universities and colleges in the United States and Canada [condemn](#) right-wing Zionist group's program of spying on students and academics that are critical of Israel.

The Indian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (InCACBI) [campaign](#) to cut ties of the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi with Israel.

New York Times best-selling author Junot Díaz, who received a Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and won the prestigious MacArthur "Genius Grant," [endorses](#) the United States Campaign for

the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI).

**November:** A high profile delegation of South African academics, former anti-apartheid leaders, educators and activists after a visit to the occupied Palestinian territory [call](#) for BDS against Israel.

The Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA), a bi-national professional association, including peace and justice scholars, activists, and educators in the United States and Canada, [joins](#) the BDS movement.

A huge win for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual conference in Washington: Participating members [vote](#) overwhelmingly, by a majority of 265 against 79, to adopt a draft resolution defending their right to boycott Israeli academic institutions.

**December:** Despite a [costly](#) anti-BDS campaign, divestment organizers at UCLA [celebrate](#) a milestone victory for social justice with the passage of "A Resolution to Divest from Corporations Engaged in Violence against Palestinians." The resolution passed by an 8-2-2 margin. It was sponsored by 15 student organizations and endorsed by an additional 17, making for 32 total student groups in support of divestment. UCLA's vote marks the 6th student government out of 9 at the University of California campuses to have taken a majority vote in support of divestment from corporations that violate Palestinian human rights.

University of California graduate student-workers [ratify](#) UAW 2865's resolution to join the Palestinian-led BDS movement, setting a historic precedent. The landslide, [65%-35%](#), vote is the first time that the membership of any major union body in the US has taken a stand against more than six decades of complicity by U.S. governments, universities and top labor officials in Israeli apartheid.

Members of the American Anthropological Association overwhelmingly [defeat](#) a resolution opposing the academic boycott of Israel, proposed by Zionist groups. Out of 700 AAA members attending the session, only 52 supported the anti-BDS vote.

PACBI

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## **University of California Student Workers Achieve Landslide BDS Vote as the First Labor Union in the USA: a report from the USA**

December 4, 2014 marked a decisive victory for justice in Palestine. The labor union representing 13,000 student workers of the University of California, the United Auto Workers (UAW) local 2865, voted to call on the UC system and UAW international, to divest from companies supporting and profiting from the Israeli colonization of Palestine. It also called on the US government to end military aid to Israel. Sixty-five percent of voting members voted to pass divestment and sanctions; while fifty-three percent pledged not to "take part in any research, conferences, events, exchange programs, or other activities that are sponsored by Israeli universities complicit in the occupation of Palestine and the settler-colonial policies of the state of Israel," until such a time that these universities take steps to end complicity with dispossession, occupation, and apartheid in Palestine.

The vote follows several years of monumental student divestment victories at six out of the nine UC campuses; efforts that ultimately set an alternative political climate for how Palestine is taken up amongst the new generation of student organizers on University campuses in the US. These efforts were largely led by various chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) as well as the growing academic boycott initiatives supported by the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI). In the last two years alone, major US academic associations have voted to adhere to the academic boycott including the Association of Asian American Studies, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association and the American Studies Association.

While BDS campaigns have grown across the globe and have particularly taken off in the US in more recent years, the significance of the UAW 2865 victory deserves special attention. It offers Palestinians of the global Diaspora, Palestine solidarity activists and labor organizers new ways to imagine how we might achieve more sound wins while also maintain justice-centered principles, practices and politics as we cultivate our strategies.

On July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the Joint Council of UAW 2865 released a statement in solidarity with Palestine declaring their full support for Boycott,

Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) and announced that they were preparing for a full membership vote to take place in the upcoming academic year. This letter came as a response to calls from Palestinian trade unions, students, civil society and transnational Palestinian communities to join BDS efforts as a tangible way of standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for liberation. The urgency of UAW 2865's response was undoubtedly fueled by this past summer's devastating assault on the Gaza Strip which by that time had stolen nearly 1,100 lives and destroyed, for the third time, nearly all of Gaza's infrastructure and countless homes.

The letter drafted by UAW 2865 leadership set it apart from other BDS initiatives because it placed Palestinian suffering within the historical continuum that commenced with the catastrophe of 1948, displacing nearly 750,000 Palestinians, who until today are denied their right to return to their homeland. The Joint Council accounted for *all* of the Palestinian population: those in the occupied territories, in 1948 Palestine, living in refugee camps across the Arab world, and in exile transnationally. Additionally, the Joint Council recognized the importance of situating Palestine within its transnational scope and accounted for how the Palestinian struggle is intimately connected to the struggles of Third World peoples, people of color, indigenous populations, laborers, women, queer communities and others. Most importantly, the Joint Council acknowledged that the catastrophe that befell Palestine is one of settler-colonialism and drew stark parallels to US society, stating, "**As we stand in solidarity with Palestinian self-determination, we also recognize that here in the United States we have our own systems of structural racism and settler colonialism to resist and dismantle.**" Last, the Joint Council emphasized the important historical role and mandate that labor unions have and must play today in matters of social justice, freedom and equity.

In the months following the release of the letter, UAW 2865 provided fact sheets, held educational forums across UC campuses, and maintained an open process in which its membership could actively discuss, and debate the issues in order to make informed decisions on voting day. This grassroots character of the campaign was possible because of UAW 2865's democratization structure which encouraged participation by rank and file membership, a structure widely lacking among most labor unions across the US.

Several other factors set this initiative apart from other BDS campaigns in the US. The UAW 2865 initiative is the first to simultaneously call for all three components of BDS: boycott, divestment *and* sanctions, thereby making it a comprehensive strategy with limited contradictions or inconsistencies. By expanding a more justice-centered framework of solidarity, such as accounting for the multiplicity of the Palestinian population, the organic relationships between Palestinians and other oppressed communities and the historical context that explains for injustice today, UAW 2865 also expanded its strategies. The overwhelming win of the UAW 2865 campaign proved that monumental victories are possible when maintaining strong, clear, justice-centered and consistent political goals, a collective community working diligently to achieve them and ambitious strategies that set the bar high. While many Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activists have wished to have a stronger political approach to BDS, we are often persuaded that a more limited political framework and strategy might be more successful. UAW 2865's campaign proved the exact opposite. The challenges encumbered in solidarity work for Palestine is not resolvable by a flattening of Palestinian political voices and needs, a liquidation of the Palestinian experience, struggle and national aspirations. In fact, Palestine solidarity circuits stand a chance to produce more effective and successful campaigns if they are to expand political framework, discourse, strategies, sectors and communities they engage with.

Secondly, because of our tripartite role as students, academics and laborers, this campaign is the first initiative to highlight intersections between all three sectors. Therefore it allowed for a re-conceptualization of how growing movements are in fact intersectional and popular and that various sectors can and should be held accountable to one another. An influx of letters of support were sent to the UAW 2865 leadership and made public, including an internal membership letter from Jewish supporters of BDS as well as a feminist and Queer letter of support. Additionally, two dozen local community based organizations signed a letter of support and a broader Jewish community letter, with over one thousand signatories, was sent in support of the UAW 2865 vote on BDS. However, it was letters that poured in from members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and SJP's West Coast regional collective, Labor for Palestine as well as other labor movements and a widely circulated faculty letter of support that highlighted the direct

intersections of students, academics and labor community organizing.

Third, as the first labor union in the US to officially divest and endorse the academic boycott, UAW created new opportunities for stronger labor union solidarity with Palestine. Labor for Palestine commended the UAW 2865 for taking up the matter and allowing for a full membership vote by stating, “This historic moment is the first time that the membership of any major union body in the United States will have a chance to vote on more than six decades of complicity by their government, university and top labor officials in Israeli apartheid.” While, UAW 2865 is the first labor union to allow for a full membership vote, the political climate was also shaped by the unparalleled victory that took place in the “Block the Boat” campaign in which members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 refused to handle Israeli Zim Line cargo. The success Oakland’s Block the Boat initiative sparked actions at ports from LA all the way to Florida. As a member of the union’s BDS caucus noted, “The success of Oakland’s [Block the Boat](#) makes clear the centrality of organized labor to the global movement for Palestinian freedom. This, and the upcoming UAW 2865 vote on BDS, signal a sea change in [US labor’s willingness to be complicit in apartheid and ethnic cleansing.](#)”

Lastly, as a Palestinian having been involved in various BDS and Palestine solidarity circuits, it was a rare experience that our community’s needs, voices and calls for solidarity were not undermined, forgotten or silenced. I have worked for several years with the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM), a transnational body of young Palestinians who have come together to revitalize our role in the liberation of our homeland. We believe in full justice and liberation and therefore never exceptionalize or prioritize our struggle above the struggles of countless other peoples’ fighting for justice in the world. It has helped all of us realize that justice is indivisible and hence we must remain mindful that our efforts to challenge racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, and all other structures of power and oppression is not in fact the most we can do, but the least we can do, and is our duty as students, laborers, academics and citizens of the world. Being a part of the grassroots effort to stand on the right side of history and to end my own complicity, as a UC student and laborer, in the occupation of my homeland and dispossession of my people has been a privilege. But most

importantly, to watch UAW 2865 leadership and rank and file members display transparent, democratic, thoughtful and principled qualities in the pursuit of social justice, despite efforts from opposition to scare or bully them into silence, has been the most rewarding experience of it all. Their tireless efforts to fight for labor rights, undocumented student rights, gender-neutral bathrooms and to stand for justice from Oakland to LA, Ferguson to Ayotzinapa all the way to Palestine, is what makes them the unique community of social justice thinkers and workers that I am proud to be a part of.

Loubna Qutami

**Note:** Loubna Qutami is a Ph.D. student in Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Riverside and a rank and file member of UAW 2865; also a member of the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM)..

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## 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](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)

## Letters to the Editor

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](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)

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