

In Defence of the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions

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Introductory Comments and a General Defence

Boycotts are age old undertakings. Unlike sanctions, which are enforced by governments and sometimes destroy the lives of millions of people (as in the case of the 12-year sanctions against Iraq), boycotts are most often grassroots means of protest against the policies of governments. They can be undertaken by ordinary people to defend fellow human beings who are oppressed by governments and armies, and they can be deliberately restricted in scope to cause as little damage as possible to the lives of innocent people.

Boycotts have historically been undertaken at many levels: they can be carried out against companies or industries, as in the case of the American California grape boycott of the 1970s, or the ongoing worldwide boycott of Nestle products (http://www.breastfeeding.com/advocacy_boycott.html); and against states (for instance the Jewish initiated boycott of goods from Nazi Germany, or today's evolving boycott of Israeli products and institutions in the face of that country's colonialist occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights). Thus, from a historical point of view, there are plenty of precedents for the tactic of boycott. And, as in the case of South Africa, public pressure

through boycotts can eventually help force governments and organizations such as the United Nations to apply sanctions against a particular regime.

Nonetheless, the boycott against Israel, and in particular that aspect of it directed against academic institutions, has drawn wide spread criticism. Much of this has come from people who are, to one extent or another, partisans of Israel. But some of it has its origins among those who have genuine concerns that innocent Israelis are being unnecessarily hurt, or that the boycott is undermining valued principles such as academic freedom and the free flow of ideas. It is to this latter group that we would like to address the following arguments in the hope of taking up their concerns and, if not putting them to rest, at least putting them in a context that makes understandable the historical trade-offs inevitably involved in this struggle for justice.

First of all, the academic boycott of Israel is one part of a broader boycott and divestment effort which involves economic, cultural and sports agendas. The academic boycott specifically is based on several premises. One is that, to date, all but a small number of Israeli academics remain quiescent in the face of the violent colonial war their government continues to wage in the Occupied Territories. As a group they have had nothing to say about Israeli violations of scores of United Nations resolutions and the transgression of international law in the form of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This includes not only human rights violations of a general nature, but also, specifically, the systematic destruction of Palestinian education and academia. Nor, as a group, have they come to the defence of their very few fellow academics who have been persecuted for publicly criticizing Israeli policies against the Palestinians. A second, and related premise, is that we recognize the important, though often unnoted, fact that educational institutions and their teachers are principal agents in the shaping of perceptions of whole generations as to their country's relations with their neighbours and the world. If, in the midst of extreme practices of oppression such as we have been witnessing in the Occupied Territories, these institutions do not function to analyse and explain the world in a way that promotes justice and reasonable compromise, but rather acquiesce in aggressive colonialist practices, then others may legitimately boycott them.

Second, we would point out that the boycott against Israel has been put forward by its organizers as a *non-violent* way by which non-Israelis the world over can express their concern for what is now *the world's longest post-Second World War occupation* and one of its *bloodiest* and *most ethnically oriented*. There has been a great hue and cry against the violent tactics of resistance to Israeli occupation evolved by the Palestinians. Though the first Intifada started with little more than rock throwing it was condemned in the West as a “dangerous escalation” of the Middle East crisis. It also brought the Palestinians no relief. The Second Intifada is certainly much more violent in its nature and now includes the infamous tactic of suicide bombing. The organizers of the boycott condemn this tactic even while understanding that it is a product of despair and desperation that the occupation itself has created.

We have asked ourselves what we, outside of Israel and the Occupied Territories, can do to put pressure on Israel to end the occupation and thus, at least help, bring about the beginning of the end of this crisis. The boycott is one of our main answers.[\[1\]](#)

Consideration of General Objections

Objections to the Academic Boycott of Israel have not been consistent. They have tended to shift over time. For instance, **at the beginning of the boycott there was the call to keep academia, and particularly scientific fields, out of politics.** While as an ideal this may be an admirable goal, in reality the bulk of higher education and its academicians never escape politics. As academics in the United States found during the Vietnam War, various government agencies quickly recruited an array of academic departments and individuals, ranging from chemists to sociologists, to support their war effort. The intimidation and bribery directed at the rest of academia to remain quiet and loyal was effective until the war itself became vastly unpopular. Israeli educational institutions have followed this pattern. As Shahid Alam, Professor of Economics at Northeastern University in Boston, has pointed out, “through their links with the military, the political parties, the media, and the economy, they (Israel’s universities) have helped to construct, sustain, and justify the Apartheid (policies of the occupation)” (<http://www.counterpunch.org/alam0731.html>). In general terms, states do not support academic freedom or the free flow of ideas in cases that impact government policies. Through various means of pressure they attempt to enforce only two alternatives, quiescence or active support. In times of stress, opposition comes to equal disloyalty and threatens academic funding and careers. The academy, then, is not a neutral arena on matters important to government. As Lisa Taraki, Lecturer at Birzeit University on the West Bank, has argued, it can easily become “a haven for many scholars either in the outright service of repressive states, or for those who have rewritten history in defence of colonial projects” (http://www.pjpo.org/letter_taraki.html).

In the current context, there are numerous examples of the direct involvement of Israeli academia and academic-related professions in promoting and sustaining the oppressive measures of the Israeli government and in violations of human rights and of UN Resolutions. In general terms, almost all Israeli academics find themselves actively or passively supporting the occupation by virtue of Israel’s policy of universal Jewish conscription - a policy that does not democratize the Israeli army so much as it militarizes Israeli civilian society.^[2] Thus, almost all Israeli academics are military veterans, and many will do reserve duty in the Occupied Territories. If they wish to resist serving as part of the occupation forces they can do so by joining the Refusnik organizations. Very few choose to do so. More concretely, one can point to the active role taken by Bar-Ilan University in validating courses given by colleges now being established in the settlements. And finally, there is the particularly sinister, documented involvement of Israeli doctors in torture (see “Israeli Medical Association shirks ‘political aspects’ of torture”, Derek Summerfield, *British Medical Journal* 1995; 311:755).

The argument for isolating academia from politics was later augmented with **the assertion that “in the end the best way to resolve issues is to pursue dialogue, not boycotts”.** *But it is precisely because ‘dialogue’ on the Palestinian issue has been historically stifled that the boycott against Israel has become necessary.* For decades the Zionists have had a near monopoly on the information flow in the West concerning the Palestinian situation. One can still see this in the fact that the vast majority of coverage in the press, magazines and TV

news, particularly in the United States, gives, most of the time, only the Israeli side of the story. To the small extent that this is breaking down, those offering the Palestinian point of view are now consistently labelled anti-Semites and supporters of terrorists. *The Zionists themselves thus seek to maintain an environment that discourages dialogue and makes necessary other, more direct and effective tactics*. [3] Moreover, ‘intellectual exchanges’ have been going on between Israelis and the rest of the world since 1948 and with Zionists for longer than that. It has made not a bit of difference to the oppressive and colonialist policies of successive Israeli governments. Under these conditions, ‘dialogue’ is unlikely to achieve anything in the future unless, simultaneously, real pressure is applied from outside.

One of the earliest tactics to silence and discredit advocates of the boycott has been the often used red herring of anti-Semitism. **The boycott of Israel, including the academic boycott, is inherently anti-Semitic**, we are told, “in effect if not in intent” (<http://www3.sympatico.ca/sr.gowans/distractions.html>). It encourages anti-Semitism, even if it does not mean to. This argument is based on *a dishonest equating of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism* and conveniently ignores the mounting crescendo of Jewish voices against Zionist and Israeli colonialist practices. [4] It also ignores the fact that not only was the boycott call started by a Jewish scholar (Professor Steven Rose, Open University, UK), but also that many of the supporters of the boycott are Jewish, some even Israeli. Indeed, as many Jews have argued, it is current Israeli practices and the Zionist colonial project that encourage and feed anti-Semitic discourse, rather than legitimate means of protest against violations of human rights in Israel. Thankfully, the use of anti-Semitism to silence academics who support the boycott has become so discredited that even the Association of University Teachers in Britain has now officially declared its recognition of the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. [5]

Finally, there was the short lived argument that **the issues involved in the conflict between Israel and Palestine are very complex, and a boycott reduces them to overly simplistic duelling camps of good and evil**. This assertion could not be sustained in the light of UN resolutions and widely documented Israeli violations of international law, and is now rarely heard.

We now turn to more serious issues concerning the objectives, scope and potential effectiveness of the boycott.

Consideration of Specific Objections

Argument 1: Futility. The academic boycott is ineffective, it cannot influence the policies of the Israeli government, and will only harden positions due to resentment over outside pressure.

If the first part of this argument were really true the Zionist response to the boycott effort would not be so strenuous. In the U.S. the prominent, though misnamed, Anti-Defamation League would not be extending time, energy and money to label the academic boycott effort as the “hijacking of academic freedom” and the Zionists in general would not be rushing to launch a number of anti-boycott petitions. The near hysterical outcry coming from Zionists

indicates a high level of insecurity and fear. This fear may come, in part, from the awareness that the academic boycott is not just directed at the humanities and social sciences. It incorporates the hard sciences which feed into Israel's high tech economy. As Martin Haspelmath of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig has pointed out in relation to the boycott, "it can hardly be argued that science is of little interest to governments or societies" (Linguist Discussion List, 10 April, 2003; <http://linguistlist.org/issues14/14-1096.html>).

Some Israelis have already acknowledged the potential of the boycott. Senior Israeli economist Yoram Gabai is quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 August 2002, as saying:

Faster than expected, we will find ourselves in the time warp of (white-dominated) Rhodesia in the 1970s and South Africa in the 1980s: enforced isolation from without and an isolationism from within....The enormous price of isolation will drag us into withdrawing from the (occupied) territories, either in the context of a peace treaty or without one as a unilateral act.[6]

This is not mere speculation on his part. The power of national isolation, including that of academic isolation, was recently acknowledged by Frederik de Klerk, the former President of South Africa who initiated the move away from apartheid and toward democracy:

Isolation played an important role - for example, South Africans are keen sportsmen. Being excluded from international competition such as the Olympic Games had a profound effect. Scientific isolation also played a very important role in mobilizing the academic world towards becoming politically active; suddenly the doors of the universities and libraries were closed to our bright students, which stimulated and motivated advocates of change. But this isolation also had a counter effect for some years because it increased the patriotism in white South Africans, who felt: We will not allow them to dictate to us. (Ha'aretz Supplement in English, 16 May 2003).[7]

As Gabai's prediction and de Klerk's comments suggest, the academic boycott does not work in a vacuum. It is but one component in a broader boycott programme that seeks to put pressure on all aspects of Israeli society. Historically, such a broad approach can be most effective when directed toward democracies, a category to which Israel claims membership. Here individuals can pressure their governments through elections. Unfortunately, and much like white South Africa under apartheid, internally generated Israeli perceptions are so censored and inbred that their ability to understand the consequences of their national policies on the Palestinians is limited. For instance, a majority of Israelis have long believed in the myth of Barak's generous offer (Gallop-Maariv opinion poll, <http://www.gamla.org.il/english/article/2000/july/poll3.html>). As the self-defeating results of the last two Israeli elections point out, a good number of Israelis are literally stuck in a world of their own where positions cannot get any 'harder'. As in the case of South Africa, external pressure is perhaps the only way to move the Israelis to a realization that something is terribly wrong with their outlook and behaviour and that there is a need to change both leadership and direction.

Even if one is skeptical of Israeli claims to democracy, or their ability to break out of their perceptual straitjacket, an international boycott targeting all aspects of Israeli society has strong and beneficial symbolic value. Such a boycott raises international consciousness over inhumane and unjust behaviour, lets ordinary citizens the world over know that there is a way they can get involved and do something to promote human rights and justice, and serves as a warning for other would be oppressors that it is not only reaction by governments that they need to worry about. In the end, economic and cultural isolation has its own dynamic and, as Gabai fears, can wear away at the resolve of those Israeli elites that fancy themselves players on an international level.

One of the most important achievements of the academic boycott is that it has generated such heated discussion in many venues (mainstream newspapers, television, student publications, internet discussion lists, etc.) that the negative details of the Zionist enterprise have inevitably forced themselves onto the consciousness of many people, within and outside academia. Thus, even the Zionist efforts to discredit those who support the boycott, and to de-legitimize the boycott as a strategy of protest, have unintentionally helped provide a superb forum for debating the facts about Palestine and the occupation. If the boycott achieves nothing more than this it will have achieved a great deal.

Argument 2: Misguided - The academic boycott targets the wrong people and hurts Palestinians as well as Israelis. It harms collaborative efforts between Israeli and Palestinian universities.

The assertions that the academic boycott hurts Palestinians and harms collaborative efforts are factually untrue. While in the past there have been minor collaborations between Israeli and Palestinian academic institutions in the Occupied Territories, these have long since ceased. This is due to Israeli policies that forbid the travel of Israeli citizens into the Occupied Territories (except if they are going to and from colonies illegal under international law) and make it extremely onerous for Palestinians in those regions to enter Israel. If the Israelis claim that these policies have been made necessary by the Palestinian uprising, we answer that the uprising has been made necessary and inevitable by the Israeli occupation and its brutal nature. *Part of that brutal nature has been the employment of tactics designed to prevent Palestinian colleges and universities from functioning in any normal manner* . These tactics include prolonged shut downs, military raids and travel restrictions that impede students and faculty from reaching campuses.

No organized protest or resistance to this consistent and prolonged attack on Palestinian academia has come from Israeli academic groups, colleges or universities . As Tanya Reinhart, a Professor of Linguistics at Tel Aviv University and one of the few Israeli academics to publicly stand against Israeli occupation policies, has observed,

Never in its history did the senate of any Israeli university pass a resolution protesting the frequent closure of Palestinian universities, let alone voice protest over the devastation sowed there during the last uprising. It is not that a motion in that direction failed to gather a majority, there was no such motion anywhere in Israeli academia.[\[8\]](#)

And even with the shocking escalation in the level of atrocities committed by the Israeli army since the beginning of the second intifada, Israeli academia continues to do practically nothing to bring the facts to public attention. Making reference to the boycott, Tim Shallice, Professor at the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, University College, London observes (http://www.pjpo.org/letter_shallice.html),

Are mainstream [academic and] science organizations in Israel sponsoring fact-finding commissions over Jenin? Are they publishing detailed analyses of what has been happening over the last 18 months in the occupied territories? Are they making clear the long-term dangers of colonialist policies? If the answer to these questions is Yes then I was wrong to sign [the boycott statement].

There is something obscenely hypocritical in the fact that many of those individuals and organizations (Israeli or otherwise) which have so vocally attacked the boycott, have not raised their voices against the destruction of Palestinian academia and society in general. [9]

The claim that the boycott “targets the wrong people” is a more complicated one and deserves close consideration. Almost all of the complaints registered against the boycott of Israel, academic or otherwise, put forth examples of humanitarian, well intentioned, Israeli *individuals* (whose existence we certainly acknowledge) who are allegedly being punished unfairly by the boycott (See also discussion of the category of Academic Freedom below). In the case of the academic boycott there are scholars who cannot place publishable material, particularly in European journals, there are Israeli doctors who cannot receive research assistance from abroad, there are individual Israelis who have been asked to leave the boards of scholarly journals, etc. Taken as individual cases, there is no doubt that such situations result in frustration, inconvenience, the disruption of research and perhaps even careers. *Unfortunately this is unavoidable given the broad based nature of the boycott made necessary by the stubborn history of Israeli occupation*. Shahid Alam has put forth this point accurately and succinctly: “I believe it is reasonable and moral to impose temporary and partial limits on the academic freedom of a few Israelis if this can help to restore the fundamental rights of millions of Palestinians” (‘The Academic Boycott of Israel’, <http://www.counterpunch.org/alam0731.html>).

We would like to point out that, to our minds, the most notable cases of the “wrong people” being hurt are those of the relatively few heroic Israeli academics who have put their careers on the line to stand up against the injustice of their country’s colonial policies. For example, there are, among others, Ilan Pappé, a professor of Political Science at Haifa University, and Tanya Reinhart, who we quoted above. Both are strong and vocal supporters of justice for the Palestinians and advocates for political reform in Israel. Here is what Professor Pappé says about the need for a boycott of Israel: “It is a call from *the inside to the outside* to exert economic and cultural pressure on the Jewish state so as to bring home the message that there is a price tag attached to the continuation of the occupation”. The academic boycott makes sense to Pappé as “part of the overall campaign for external pressure”. He continues, “Within such a call, it makes no sense for an activist like myself to call on sanctions or pressure on business, factories, cultural festivals, etc. while demanding immunity for my own peers and sphere of activity – academia” (‘Arguments in Favor of the Boycott’, http://www.newsfromwithin.org/free_articles/pappe.htm). Professor Pappé understands that he may also be hurt by such a boycott, but he recognizes that the sacrifice is necessary given

the horrible situation we now find ourselves in.

In the end, the anti-boycott focus on individuals just creates a red herring that deflects attention away from the larger, and more important, issue. As Pappe indicates, individual Israelis simply cannot abstract themselves from that larger issue. Israel is their country, Sharon is their Prime Minister, the Occupation is their collective sin. Those, on the outside, who support the boycott, understand present day Israel for what it really is – a society that has institutionalized discriminatory policies, created de facto first, second and third class citizenship categories, and has, for over thirty years now, maintained policies of occupation and colonization that have systematically destroyed Palestinian society. As a consequence, Israeli institutions (and in some cases Israeli individuals) will now themselves become relatively more isolated. If they find this uncomfortable, there is always an escape route: pay heed to Professors Pappe, Rinehart and others who point to the horror Israel is causing and act to change the situation.

Argument 3: Academic Freedom - The boycott violates the principle of academic freedom and as such is unacceptable.

The boycott's impingement on the academic freedom of Israeli scholars has been repeatedly condemned. It has been called "contemptible", "hypocritical", and "an unacceptable breakdown in the norms of intellectual freedom". For simplicity sake, let us work from the recent statement of Dena S. Davis, a law professor at Cleveland State University, published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 18, 2003, p. B13). Davis writes that "Academic boycotts undermine the basic premise of intellectual life that ideas make a difference, and the corollary that intellectual exchanges across cultures can open minds". Unfortunately, there is nothing necessary about the assumption that the "difference" ideas make results in a more humane world or more humane outlooks. Thus, *it is not only positive ideas that can make a difference*. Israeli Zionists (be they politicians, academics, cultural leaders, businessmen, etc., that is, the country's dominant elites), have been interacting with the world outside of Israel since 1948. This sharing of ideas with the outside has made no positive difference in the evolution of Zionist oppression against Palestinians inside or outside of Israel proper. Indeed, it may very well have prolonged and deepened Israeli injustice in this regard. Free communication on the part of Zionists has allowed them to build solid support among American Jews based on racist stereotyping of Arabs generally and Palestinians in particular, as well as the correspondingly gross over-idealization of the Zionist movement and its results. Thus, historically, unimpaired "intellectual life" and "exchanges across cultures" have not only failed to lead to the humanization of Zionism or its policies but have led to the corruption of a powerful segment of American Jewry. In addition, it is to be noted that those very brave Israelis, both academic and non-academic, who have taken a stand against such policies have, for the most part, not done so because they had access to foreign academics or foreigners per se.

This makes problematic the claim that academic freedom somehow operates in a vacuum and, in and of itself, always leads to the good, or the betterment of the world. *Nonetheless, we do agree that its opposite, the obstruction of the "free flow of ideas", ought to be undertaken*

only in severe and extreme circumstances. Unfortunately, that is exactly the situation successive Israeli governments have brought about. Keeping to the realm of academia, proof of the severity of the situation (and the hypocrisy of anti-boycott critics in their failure to face up to it) can be found in the situation of academic life in the Occupied Territories. Here, Israel's illegal occupation *has* destroyed "intellectual life" for the Palestinians. The practice of "exchanging visits" and "talking to each other", such as it has been over the last 35 years, on the part of Israeli academics has not produced the courage or insight to stand up and protest this destruction. Israeli academics should be claiming for the Palestinians the same rights of academic freedom they claim for themselves. Their pointed failure to do so makes them subject to the general boycott of Israel that is now evolving as a consequence of Israeli policies .

Finally, it should be noted that the academic boycott of Israel as presently pursued is not one of uniform practice. It is a decentralized movement that allows for individual interpretations on the part of its adherents. In most cases the boycott is directed against Israeli institutions, including academic institutions. But it may also be that as a consequence of the boycott Israeli academics are now having a harder time publishing outside the country, participating in formal exchanges, sitting on boards and international committees, and the like. *However, this does not translate into a situation where no one will talk to them* . Boycott organizers are in constant touch with the few dissenting Israeli academics such as the two quoted above. And we are in fact anxious to talk to other Israeli academics about what they can do to help end the situation that has brought on the boycott in the first place. In effect, far from discouraging Israeli dissent we are allied to it and encourage Israeli academics to act in solidarity and sympathy with their Palestinian colleagues who suffer much worse isolation due to Israeli occupation. When the occupation is dismantled, the academic boycott will be as well.

Argument 4: Inconsistency - The boycott adherents unfairly single out Israel while ignoring all other military occupations in places such as Tibet, Chechnya, etc.

How do those who claim that we are 'picking' on Israel know that we also ignore the behaviour of the Chinese in Tibet, Russians in Chechnya, etc.? We are generally not one issue people and many of us do support well intentioned efforts to isolate other oppressive regimes beyond that of Israel. However, for a good number of those who support this boycott the struggle against Israeli occupation is a high priority. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, many of us, Jews, Muslims, Christians and non-denominational Americans, Europeans and Arabs, feel a special affinity for the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. We all have emotional, cultural or religious ties to the Holy Land, even the non-religious among us. What the Zionists seem not to understand is that the place their mythology makes special for them is also special to a lot of other folks based on other interpretations of the same myth and other forms of oral and written traditions as well.

Second, one can argue that just because other nations behave badly does not let the Israelis off the hook. After all, the Israelis now have the dubious distinction of running the longest post-WWII occupation in the world. There is no reason why we, as a movement, should not

start with the problem that has persisted longest and then work backwards.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis can be seen as more important for citizens of the Western nations than other contemporary crises and examples of oppression. This is because Zionist influence (that is Israeli influence) spreads far beyond its own immediate area of dominion, and now widely influences many key domestic agendas in the West. In other words, unlike the Chinese, Russians and other oppressive regimes, the Israelis and their supporters directly influence the policy makers of our own countries. Thus their actions have import beyond the Occupied Territories and directly affect the lives of ordinary citizens in most Western nations. This is particularly obvious in the case of the United States, where Zionist lobbies are extremely powerful with both Congress and the media, and where the administration of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative advisers sees Israel and its aggressive behaviour as a model for their own policies.^[10] Numerous examples of how this influence is exerted can be found on the web site of the [Project for the New American Century](#).

Argument 5: Giving Comfort to Terrorists- The boycott of Israel ignores the (alleged) facts that (A) the Israeli army is in the Occupied Territories as an act of self-defence against suicide bombers and other terrorists and (B) boycott efforts only encourage and lend comfort to these terrorists.

(A) We who support the boycott do not see how inaccurate historical arguments amount to anything other than additional red herrings that seek to distract attention from main issues. The Israeli army and settlers are in the Occupied Territories to **possess** 'Judea', 'Samaria' and Gaza.

The resulting thirty five years of land confiscation, destruction of crops, houses and other Palestinian property, the destruction of Palestinian civil society, the construction of illegal colonies, and the importation of 100,000s of illegal settlers **are not 'acts of self-defense'**. On the other hand, one can reasonably define resistance to these actions on the part of the Palestinians (whether one happens to approve of any particular tactic or not) as in fact acts of self-defence. The international community, through the actions of the United Nations and the testimony of respected world leaders, has made it quite clear that Israeli occupation constitutes an on-going case of severe injustice. To cite but one example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a man who certainly knows injustice when he sees it, recently declared:

I have been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about.

He goes on to condemn the general dispossession of the Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line (*The Guardian* , April 29, 2003) .

(B) The charge that boycott efforts encourage or lend comfort to terrorists is entirely ad hoc. How do those who make these claims know that they are true? In fact, it is quite possible that, as Shahid Alam has suggested, the boycott, functioning as a manifestation of “world conscience”, can “mitigate the Palestinian’s deep despair” and hopefully lead to a reduction of violence on the part of both the “colonizer and the colonized” (<http://www.counterpunch.org/alam0731.html>). In any case, it bears repeating that the boycott represents a non-violent alternative route to oppose a regime which many of us see as itself terrorist.

Conclusion

Israeli goals in the occupied territories have always aimed at possession and absorption of these lands. Israeli behaviour, colonialist and oppressive, follows from this fact. One can verify this for oneself by going to any of the human rights organizations that document Israeli policy in the territories, including Israeli organizations, and simply trace the actions of the occupier from 1967 onward. However, with the advent of the Sharon government the scale of destruction and brutality has risen to new and shocking levels. As Ilan Pappé has observed, under Ariel Sharon occupation has become “a horror story of abuse and callousnessThe trend is for worse to come, with a sense of an Israeli government that feels it has a ‘green light’ from the U.S. to do whatever it wishes in the occupied territories” (‘ Arguments in Favor of the Boycott’, <http://www.solidarite-palestine.org/cbi000.html>).

The Sharon government was put into power by an overwhelming majority vote of Israelis in the election of February 2001. Sharon received 62% of ballots cast. In the January 2003 election the Israeli public reconfirmed their allegiance to Sharon, his Likud party, and allied right wing parties, by once more putting these forces in command of the government. What this electoral history indicates is that the majority of Israelis are either unwilling or unable to understand the real origins of their own insecurity and the nature of the occupation.

It is under these circumstances that outside pressure becomes the only viable way of encouraging change in Israel. Under normal circumstances one would look to the government of the United States, Israel’s ally and patron, to apply the necessary pressure. However, we all know that the U.S. is itself operating under the same delusions as Israel as to the nature of and reasons for the occupation. The prospect of changing the perceptions of the U.S. Congress on this issue is even less likely than dislodging Sharon from leadership in Israel.

This leaves us with the strategy of a grassroots, international movement to boycott Israel at all possible levels: economic, cultural and academic. We are proud of this effort and convinced of its necessity and just nature. And, as this detailed article attests, we are willing to defend it against all who would question its validity or the motives of its participants.

Mona Baker and Lawrence Davidson
May 2003

Notes

[1] Most if not all individuals involved in the boycott are also actively engaged in various other forms of protest and awareness-raising activities, ranging from applying pressure on their political representatives, to speaking about the Middle East conflict at public venues, to participating in peaceful rallies and marches, and - perhaps most importantly - maintaining dialogue with peace activists within Israel and the Occupied Territories and extending to them and to the beleaguered Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza the moral support and solidarity that they so desperately need.

[2] With the exception of the Ultra Orthodox, all able bodied Israeli Jews are subject to military service. Indeed, there appears to be a de facto requirement that all non-Ultra Orthodox Israeli Jews must have served in the military just to be hired in most professions! It is an unwritten way of filtering out non-Jews from the professional job market.

[3] In 2003 alone American Zionist groups launched their own targeted boycotts of the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Los Angeles Times*, because they believe these newspapers give too much attention to the Palestinians.

[4] For a very small sample of such voices, see <http://www.jewsagainstzionism.com/>, <http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>, <http://www.jewishpeacethread.com/>, <http://www.jfjfp.org/>, <http://www.newprofile.org/english/index.html>, <http://www.jewsagainsttheoccupation.org/>

[5] Motion no. 56: Witch hunts (passed at the AUT Summer Council in Scarborough, May 2003): "Council deplors the witch-hunting of colleagues, including AUT members, who are participating in the academic boycott of Israel. Council recognizes that anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism, and resolves to give all possible support to members of AUT who are unjustly accused of anti-Semitism because of their political opposition to Israeli government policy."

[6] 'Israelis Feel The Boycott Sting: Creeping Sense of Isolation as Culture, Economy takes hits'; (http://www.sfgate.com/cgi_bin/article.cgi?file=chronicle/archive/2002/08/06/mn33709.dtl).

[7] *Ha'aretz* Supplement in English, 16 May 2003.
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=293793/>
http://www.monabaker.com/pMachine/more.php?id=843_0_1_0_M

[8] *Znet*, February 4, 2003.
http://www.Zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=2961&SectionID=22.

[9] "No one has of course mentioned anything about Palestinian freedom of inquiry and the sanctity of the Palestinian academy in this raging debate. What I have to say about this is particularly relevant to Israeli academics, since the vast majority of them have been carrying on their business as usual for the past 35 years oblivious to what is happening to their Palestinian counterparts, not to mention to the Palestinian nation as a whole" (Lisa Taraki, Lecturer at Birzeit University in the West Bank; http://www.pjpo.org/letter_taraki.html).

[10] This position is convincingly argued by Melani McAlister in her book *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East 1945 - 2000* (University of California Press, 2001). See also '[The Weird Men behind George Bush](#)', by Michael Lind.