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Why Boycott Israeli Universities?
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I. How we got here

The very thought of an academic boycott touches raw nerves – academic teachers and researchers are rightly sensitive about any restrictions on the free flow of ideas. To propose and campaign for an academic boycott of *Israeli* universities further raises hackles. Israel carries with it the history of the holocaust in which 6 million Jews perished at the hands of the most virulent form of anti-Semitism. Is not the proposal to boycott Israeli universities just another manifestation of that poisonous racism?

This pamphlet will aim to explain

- how this situation has arisen and the nature of the proposed boycott
- why Israel
- the condition of academic freedom in occupied Palestine as contrasted with Israel
- the function of boycotts in general and the arguments for and against this particular boycott
- the way forward.

The boycott call

We, Palestinian academics and intellectuals, call upon our colleagues in the international community to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation, colonization and system of apartheid.

Extract, Palestinian boycott call, 2004

In 2004 a call was issued in occupied Palestine for a boycott of all Israeli academic and cultural institutions. The call, an impressive document, lays out the circumstances that have led to its adoption, and its rationale (www.pacbi.org). We describe the format of the boycott, and give those arguments and the evidence behind it, in the sections which follow.

The boycott call is not some emanation of a fringe or radical minority group in Palestine. More than 50 organisations from across Palestinian civil society have aligned themselves with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI for short). Among them are the Federation of Unions of Palestinian Universities' Professors and Employees (encompassing the unions at the various Palestinian universities), the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, the Palestinian NGO Network (West Bank), the Palestinian Journalists' Federation, the Palestinian Physicians Association, the Palestinian Engineers' Association, the Palestinian League of Artists, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, the Ramallah-al Bireh Chamber of Commerce and Industry and many other community and national-level organisations.

A representative sample survey of 184 academic and administrative staff was carried out in 2004 at Al Quds University in East Jerusalem. The survey largely concentrated on the issue of Israeli-Palestinian joint projects, but showed support between 70 and 75% for a range of academic boycott propositions.

As a result of Israeli policies this support continues to grow. On July 6th 2006 the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched a renewed assault on Gaza in response to the seizure of an Israeli soldier. Six days later, in response to the seizure of two soldiers by Hizbullah, Israel began a wholesale destruction of the infrastructure of the country of Lebanon. On that same day, July 12th, 23 Gaza residents were killed by Israeli forces. (For July as a whole the number of deaths in Gaza was 176.) And it was on July 12th that the Gaza University Teachers' Association issued a statement calling for the development and intensification of the academic and cultural boycott of Israel.

There is also a growing body of support for the boycott call among European academics, including many who are Jewish. In August 2006 the Greek university trade union joined the academic boycott. In September,

more than 50 Irish academics called for a moratorium on European research collaboration with Israeli institutions. International support is particularly strong in South Africa, itself the object of a comparable and long-running boycott which was one of the levers that brought about the end of apartheid.

The PACBI call for an academic and cultural boycott has been followed by a call for a broader policy of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel, already adopted by many individuals and institutions across the world – see Section 4.

Britain and the boycott

It was in 1965 that 496 British academics from 34 universities published an open letter calling for an academic boycott of South Africa, in solidarity with 2 academics served with banning orders by the white supremacist regime and in support of a call for such a boycott by the African National Congress. After a very prolonged campaign, the boycott was adopted as policy by the Association of University Teachers (AUT) in 1988, and remained so until the end of apartheid was assured.

In 2002 Israel's military re-occupation of the West Bank provoked a parallel move. In that year a group of UK academics, followed by several hundred European academics, raised the standard for a 'moratorium' on EU and European Science Foundation funding of Israeli cultural and research institutions, to remain in force until Israel abides by UN resolutions and opens serious peace negotiations with the Palestinians. This proposal was adopted as policy by AUT in 2002 on the recommendation of the AUT Executive. To date the EU and European Science Foundation have not responded to the moratorium call. However, growing numbers of individual academics within the European Research Area feel themselves committed to observing the moratorium.

It was an AUT decision three years later that ignited the debate that now resounds through academic communities in many countries. At a meeting of AUT Council in April 2005, and in response to the PACBI call, motions to boycott two specific Israeli institutions, Bar-Ilan and Haifa Universities,

were proposed and approved. These two universities were targeted because of particular actions they had taken which will be detailed later in this document.

A highly organised campaign was immediately launched to have the decisions overturned. A special meeting of Council was summoned within a month at which the boycott motions were reversed. The Council meeting also decided to set up a Commission to look in depth at AUT policy towards Palestine and Israel¹.

Between the two AUT votes clarity of thought was not helped by a whipped up atmosphere of paranoia coupled with threats from Israel of legal action. However this unsavoury mix would not have achieved its result had it not been for the considerable disquiet which undoubtedly existed among AUT's rank-and-file about a) the concept of a boycott; and b) the notion of targeting Israel in particular. This pamphlet's aim is to address these issues at a more rational level of discourse.

What kind of boycott?

There has undoubtedly been a degree of confusion resulting from the variety of different boycott proposals that have been aired at different times. The crucial point is that the boycott advocated by PACBI, and supported by BRICUP, is an *institutional* boycott.

The central planks of the PACBI call are a request to the academic community

- to refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions
- to advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions.

¹In April 2006 a different motion supporting boycott was debated and passed by NATFHE, representing UK academics at institutions not covered by AUT. Shortly afterwards NATFHE and AUT merged – and at the time of writing the policy of the resulting University and College Union (UCU) on boycott is still to be determined. (And threats of legal action should UCU uphold the boycott are still emanating from the Israeli academic establishment.)

Other elements of the call are to promote divestment from Israel by international academic institutions; to work towards the condemnation of Israeli policies by academic, professional and cultural organisations; and to provide direct support to Palestinian academic and cultural institutions with no condition that there be Israeli counterparts.

The boycott call applies to all Israeli academic institutions, not selectively (as in the case of the AUT motions) to those whose behaviour is more reprehensible than others. It is an institutional boycott, and individual academics will be affected only in so far as they are acting on behalf of or as officials or representatives of Israeli academic institutions, or of Israeli higher education at the national level².

For clarity, it is worth stating unambiguously that the types of action which are consistent with the boycott call are

- refusing to participate in conferences, or research or other forms of collaboration sponsored or co-sponsored by Israeli authorities or universities
- working within international academic organisations to oppose them holding conferences in Israel
- opposing institutional-level cooperation with Israeli universities
- opposing the award of grants by the EU or other international agencies to Israeli institutions, and refusing to act in any way (eg as referees) to facilitate such grants
- refusing to serve as referees for publications based at Israeli universities.

² Some confusion on this latter point resulted from a clause in the original PACBI call which stated that academics and intellectuals who opposed Israel's oppressive policies should be exempted from the boycott. (In fact a similar feature had existed in the AUT policy on the boycott of South Africa.). This exemption was doubtless intended to demonstrate an appreciation of those (sadly few) Israeli academics who took public and principled positions despite the massive pressure placed on them. However this clause was clearly inconsistent with the institutional focus of the boycott. In the light of the confusion that this caused, the 'exemption' clause has subsequently been deleted from the Call. See http://www.pacbi.org/press_releases_more.php?id=117_0_4_0_M

II. Why Israel?

It isn't possible in this space to provide a comprehensive account of the Israeli policies that have provoked the call for a boycott. All we can do is sketch in the context, much of which will in any case be familiar to readers. An atrocious record on, for example, human rights does not itself constitute a compelling case for a boycott. However without that record the issue of boycott would not even arise.

Land

Israel has consistently flouted innumerable UN resolutions demanding its withdrawal from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, occupied by force since 1967. (In this context Israel's repetitive citing of UN resolution 1559 as justification for its attack on Lebanon in July 2006 can only be described as *chutzpah*.) It has persisted in the building and expansion of settlements there in direct violation of UN resolutions. 42% of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) is now under the control of settlements. The number of Israelis living in West Bank settlements is 390,000 (contrast the 7000 withdrawn in the 2005 evacuation of Gaza).

Israel is near to completing the 9 metres high, 450km long 'separation wall', cutting deep into the West Bank. It encloses both East Jerusalem, the centre of Palestinian life, and the maximum number of settlements. It takes over the most productive land and water resources – often separating Palestinian villages from the fields which they cultivate. In July 2004 the wall was held to be illegal by the International Court of Justice at The Hague, which called for the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council to consider what action to take against Israel if it did not comply. In February 2006 then acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated the intention to annex the Jordan Valley and major settlement blocs, making the wall the future border of the State of Israel. The result will be to ensure the non-viability and complete dependence

of any eviscerated Palestinian state that might emerge as part of a 'two state' solution to the Arab-Israel crisis.

Human rights

Israel has committed a broad range of human rights violations against Palestinians, extending past murder to the level of war crimes.

House demolitions

From September 2000 to mid-2006 Israel demolished well over 4000 Palestinian homes. Since 1967 the figure is over 12,000. Some destruction has been admitted to be collective punishment, while in other cases security reasons are claimed for the demolitions. According to both Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, Israel's extensive destruction has not been justified by military necessity. Armoured Caterpillar bulldozers are used for the task: it was one of these which crushed Rachel Corrie as she attempted to prevent further demolitions. Among the houses bulldozed by Israel are thousands of Palestinian homes deemed "illegal" - because Israel virtually excludes the grant of building permits to Palestinians. Amnesty notes that the result has been to increase the area available for illegal Jewish settlers.

Dual legal regime

These discriminatory urban planning practices are only one element of the dual legal regime in the Occupied Territories. Pass laws are used to prevent Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza from living in Jerusalem or even visiting it – and then their Jerusalem properties are confiscated as 'abandoned'. It has been reported that since the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem in 1967, not a single new school, public building or medical clinic has been built there for Palestinians. The estimated 260,000 population have only one swimming pool (at the East Jerusalem YMCA) and 2 libraries, compared with 36 public pools and 26 libraries for the 500,000 or so Jewish inhabitants of West Jerusalem and the East Jerusalem settlements.

Military check-points, ethnicised car number plates and *de facto* pass laws are used to arbitrarily impede movement by Palestinians throughout

the Occupied Territories. There are 41 major settler roads totalling 700 kilometres which West Bank Palestinians are not permitted to use, or even to cross. This 'bypass network' fragments Palestinian areas, disrupts the Palestinian society and economy, and prevents the expansion of Palestinian towns and villages. The Palestinian unemployment rate is over 35%, and 60% live below the poverty line. The figures are worse in Gaza.

"I've 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."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Torture and murder

Amnesty reports that from 1967 "the Israeli security services have routinely tortured Palestinian political suspects in the Occupied Territories". The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'Tselem) found that 85% of Palestinians interrogated by Israel's security services were subjected to "methods constituting torture". A decade ago Human Rights Watch put the number of Palestinians tortured or severely ill-treated in the tens of thousands. In 1999 the High Court of Justice ruled that some of the interrogation methods used against Palestinian detainees were illegal. However there are repeated indications (see reports from B'Tselem and Israel's Public Committee Against Torture) that torture continues to be used in a methodical and routine fashion.

What, though, about Palestinian suicide attacks (or rocket attacks) on Israeli citizens? International Humanitarian Law recognizes as combatants those involved in guerrilla resistance under occupation, and also condemns violence against civilians whoever the perpetrators. Thus it condemns both guerrilla attacks on Israeli civilian targets and state violence against Palestinian civilian populations. Yet Western media

and politicians alike consistently single out the former for criticism whilst condoning Israeli actions in the territories they occupy. (It can indeed be argued that it is reasonable to hold states to a higher rather than a lower standard of conduct.) This failure of our institutions to respect the international legislation to which we are signed up is another reason for individual citizens to take those actions available to them – in particular via boycott.

Every innocent death is a tragedy. However it is relevant to note that the number of non-combatant Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces since the start of the second Intifada in September 2000 is approximately three times the number of Israeli civilians killed by Palestinians (Figures from B'Tselem website, July 2006). Also the Palestinian population which has sustained these losses is half that of Israel. In effect there is an order of magnitude difference.

These are all relative figures. In absolute terms, consider the number of Palestinian children killed by Israeli security forces over the same period – 723. More than half of these were killed in their own homes, on their way to school, or playing in their neighbourhoods. The equivalent number of child deaths for a country the size of Britain would be over 14,000.

Much of the killing of Palestinian civilians is either deliberate, or the direct result of policy sanctioned at the highest level, eg extra-judicial targeted executions by airborne rocket or bomb attack. When state policies such as these consistently deal out wholesale death among innocent civilians, then those deaths are a direct consequence of the policies. To claim, as Israel does, that these deaths are 'not deliberate' is to play macabre games with the concept of intentionality.

For more detail on Israel's extraordinary regime in the Occupied Territories, read the newspapers, any day. These violations of human rights and indeed human life itself are routinely justified in terms of Israel's security needs. However this argument is largely circular. It is Israel's repressive and violent policies in the illegally occupied territories over the past 40 years which in large measure have provoked the acts which are now used to justify them.

The title of this section is "Why Israel?" There are of course many states with unsavoury records. In a later section we address the arguments of those who say this boycott is 'picking on Israel'. In brief, the extent, severity, the length and world significance of the injustice perpetrated by Israel in the Occupied Territories does merit particular attention. Under these circumstances the question may be turned round: "Why not Israel!?"

III. Academic Freedom in Palestine and Israel

The academic boycott of Israeli universities has been presented by its opponents as an infringement of academic freedom. This section will examine the stark contrasts between the practice of academic freedom in Israel and in the Occupied Territories.

What freedom do Palestinian Universities have?

Under the Geneva Conventions an occupying power has the responsibility for the security and normal life of the residents of the territory of which they have taken control. Here are just a few of the ways in which Israel disrupts the functioning of Palestinian Universities

- Israel collects taxes in the Occupied Territories but provides no funds for Palestinian universities. The devastated Palestinian economy means that many students cannot pay their fees. Universities rely on aid from NGOs and donation of material from overseas. Consequently university infrastructure has become grossly degraded. Students are often without the most basic material support for learning.
- For the years 1987-92 all eleven Palestinian universities were closed down for long periods, Birzeit for a full 4 years. Since then particular universities have suffered individual and repeated closures of days, weeks and months. In 2003 both Hebron University and the Palestine Polytechnic University with 6000 students were closed for 8 months by military order.
- In 1974 the President of Birzeit University was deported by Israel. He was not allowed back into Palestine for 19 years.

- Israeli authorities arbitrarily withhold or fail to renew work permits for foreign faculty members, and also for Palestinians with foreign citizenship. Staff of professorial rank and senior administrative responsibilities have been deported or denied entry when returning from foreign visits.
- International students and foreign staff members are subject to aggressive and humiliating interrogation by Israeli soldiers sometimes resulting in deportation. Foreign researchers are arbitrarily refused entry to the West Bank.
- Since 2000, the Israeli military has prevented all students from Gaza from reaching their studies in the West Bank. Students in mid-course at West Bank universities were unable to return to complete their degrees. The ban prevents young Gaza residents from entering a range of professions which can only be studied in the West Bank.
- Movement restrictions create what are in effect internal borders in the Occupied Territories, as a result of which new students are in practice unable to enrol at any but their most local university.
- Since the summer of 2006 the IDF has brought into force a blanket ban preventing any new students from the Occupied Territories from studying at any Israeli university.
- Soldiers at checkpoints stop individuals from passing, using rules that change arbitrarily. If your ID card shows you are domiciled in East Jerusalem, you may be prevented from travelling to Birzeit outside Ramallah; if from the West Bank, you may not be able to get to Al Quds University in East Jerusalem. Courses are disrupted when lecturers cannot arrive. Students miss lectures.
- The only access to Birzeit University is down the road from Ramallah. This is closed down randomly.
- The illegal wall now makes access from home to schools and universities a practical impossibility for many pupils, students, teachers and professors.

In October 2006 the Presidents of all 11 Palestinian universities issued an unprecedented joint letter. It brought to the attention of members of Global Civil Society and Academia the sudden intensification of movement restrictions which had occurred since the Palestinian elections of January 2006 which was having a devastating effect on both staff and students. In that period thousands of foreign passport holders of both Palestinian and non-Palestinian origin had suddenly been denied entry, re-entry, or continuous residence. Most of those affected are Palestinian born, but were currently holding foreign passports because their IDs had been revoked on one pretext or another – eg while studying or working abroad. Even Trustees of various university boards have been issued final permits and are being told to exit the country. These movement controls, they said, was threatening to empty the Occupied Territories of their educated classes.

Under these conditions academic freedom for Palestinians approaches meaningless-ness. The destruction of infrastructure, civil society, and cultural and intellectual life cannot be separated from the question of academic freedom. The ability of teachers, researchers and students to deliver and access teaching and research cannot be separated from the question of academic freedom. The right to be free from arbitrary detentions and delays, and from the threat of interference from an occupying force backed by the threat of violence cannot be separated from the question of academic freedom. This is to say that academic freedom is essentially linked with other kinds of protections and rights and is ineffective without them.

The UN Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has said “military occupations are an appreciable curb on the human right to education, the most egregious example being the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”.

If ever there was a time for the AAUP to call for an academic boycott, this is it. If not now, then when? How can we discuss academic freedom in the absence of basic human rights?

Professor Sondra Hale, UCLA

How do Israeli universities use their Academic Freedom?

The original AUT boycott motions singled out Haifa and Bar-Ilan Universities for their explicit violations of academic freedom.

One *cause célèbre* at Haifa concerned the suppression of academic dissent. A mature history MA student uncovered evidence of the killing of 200 unarmed Palestinians by an Israeli unit in 1948. His thesis was given an exceptionally high mark by the examiners; but veterans of the unit protested. The university claims that it was uninfluenced by the protest. However the degree was retrospectively suspended, and eventually re-marked as a fail. When the Haifa historian Ilan Pappé defended the student publicly he himself became the target of disciplinary action by the university. It took an international campaign of support to persuade the University to suspend the disciplinary threat.

At Bar-Ilan the case is if anything more extreme. A university with an orthodox Jewish religious foundation, it established a campus, named the College of Judea and Samaria, in the illegal West Bank colony of Ariel. Most of the students live in Israel.

Ariel and the corridor linking it to the Israeli border is a crucial building block in the Israeli government's policy, cutting deep through territory that would be central to a Palestinian state under the Oslo Accords. Palestinians are subject to ongoing confiscation of their land to feed Ariel's expansion.

The College of Judea and Samaria plays a key economic role in the consolidation of this settlement. This is a college³ set up in occupied territory, in a settlement that the UN has said should be dismantled. The Geneva Convention specifically forbids an occupying power from transferring and settling its citizens in occupied territory.

These are among the most overt collusions with the Israeli power structure committed by Israeli Universities. They are not the only ones.

³Following the AUT vote to boycott Bar-Ilan, Prime Minister Sharon pushed through the Israeli cabinet a decision to grant the college independent university status, despite the educational establishment's concerns that due process had not been observed.

For example the august Hebrew University in Jerusalem was able to expand its campus thanks to the confiscation and expropriation by the Israeli government of over 800 acres of Palestinian-owned land in occupied East Jerusalem.

These are institutional transgressions. Many individual academics through their disciplinary expertise are also deeply implicated in the occupation. In particular, prominent members of Israel's academic elite have played a formative role either in developing government policies, or in justifying them. The examples below are only illustrative.

Economics

Professor Robert Aumann (Hebrew University) was joint Nobel Laureate in Economics in 2005 for his work in Game Theory. A veteran member of Professors for a Strong Israel, he opposed the Israeli Gaza disengagement in 2005, and indeed all talk of withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. For this posture he claims the authority of Game Theory – in effect that any display of weakness will only encourage the enemy. He has been assiduous in appearing on Israeli media to advance these views. Quite exceptionally, the award of the Nobel Prize to Aumann produced widespread outrage. A group of Israeli intellectuals, writers, activists, Holocaust survivors and politicians launched a petition for the Prize to be withdrawn, and castigated Aumann as a warmonger. The petition was signed by a thousand academics and intellectuals from 50 countries around the world.

Demography, Geography, Political Science

A continuing and intensifying theme in Israeli policy discussions is the "Arab demographic danger". This holds that there are too many Arabs in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and through differential birth rates the prospects for maintaining a predominantly Jewish Israel are threatened. The Israeli pull-back from Gaza in 2005 was largely motivated by this concern.

The proposed response to this 'demographic problem' is, in effect, a form of ethnic cleansing. The answers are either a) redraw Israel's boundaries to include the maximum number of Jews and exclude the maximum number of Arabs; and/or b) ship as many as possible of

Israel's Arabs out of Israel. The annexation of territory through the construction of the 'separation wall' relates to these aims.

Many Israeli academics have been highlighting this 'problem' and advocating their own solutions. The most publicly prominent of these is Arnon Sofer, Professor of 'Geo-strategy', head of the National Security Studies Centre and until recently head of the Department of Geography at Haifa University. Following a high profile speech a few months earlier, he received a phone call to meet Ariel Sharon on the same night that Sharon was elected Prime Minister in 2001 – and to bring his maps. When he looks at the route of the separation fence, he told the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper, "This is exactly my map". Unless the Arab demographic pressure is relieved, he says (as reported by the Jerusalem Post, 21/5/2004), "if we want to remain alive, we will have to kill and kill and kill. All day, every day. If we don't kill we will cease to exist."

Sofer is not an isolated case. Uzi Arad, ex-Director of Intelligence at the formidable Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, is the organiser of the Herzliya Conferences at which Sofer gave his speech. Arad was foreign policy adviser to the former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and is currently Professor and Head of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center. Arad has argued strongly in the conservative US journal New Republic for the exchange with the Palestine Authority of the 'Little Triangle' containing a quarter of million Arabs. In return, Israel would hold on not only to illegal Jewish settlements but also to unpopulated areas in Judea and Samaria, including the Jordan valley. This would 'increase ethnic homogeneity'.

The idea of land swaps is the special subject of Gideon Biger, Professor of Geography at Tel Aviv University. (He also chaired the Boundary Commission that in December 2005 controversially rejected the request of the desperately overcrowded Arab town of Sakhnin to expand its boundaries to take in undeveloped and unused land.) He was a founder member of the political party Yisrael Beiteinu whose platform (including the expulsion of Arab Israeli citizens to the West Bank) has been widely criticised as racist, and an advisor to its leader Avigdor Lieberman.

At a practical level the academic and political elites in Israel have always been inter-twined. Consider Menahem Milson, Professor of Arabic Literature at the Hebrew University (and eventually Provost of the University). In 1981-2 he was head of a new "civilian administration" within the military government of the West Bank, but with the rank of Lt Colonel. In this role he created the notorious 'Village Leagues', organisations composed of local Palestinian collaborators; closed down Arab newspapers; sacked pro-PLO mayors, etc. In March 1981 he closed down Birzeit University, provoking riots which left seven dead. While he was running the West Bank, another Professor from the Hebrew University was on leave serving as legal advisor to the State of Israel; and a Professor of Political Science was installed as Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Israeli universities are also heavily involved in tailored teaching for the military and security services. One recent example that came under intense scrutiny was a proposal for a fast-track programme at the Hebrew University enabling personnel at Shin Bet (General Security Service - famous for its interrogation methods) to gain a degree in Middle Eastern studies in as little as 16 months. Many classes would be held at a Shin Bet installation and be unavailable to other students. Shin Bet was itself to design the course. Only in the heightened publicity generated by the NATFHE boycott debate was the proposal withdrawn. Other Israeli universities run courses serving the needs of the IDF and security community, notably Haifa (through the National Security Studies Centre) and Bar Ilan.

This account has been able only to point to some highlights of the stance adopted and the activities undertaken by Israeli Universities and their staffs which further Israeli government policy. At the level of everyday experience we also have the refusal of any of the universities to recognise the democratically elected Union of Arab Students, and routine discrimination against Arab students, eg in access to facilities. The academic freedom of Israel has generated illegal, racist and oppressive behaviour by Israeli universities; complicity in its government's expansionist and oppressive policies; and in response

to the suffering imposed on the Occupied Territories and the violation of Palestinian academic freedom - deafening silence.

"The occupation is not just the domain of the government, army and security organizations. Everything is tainted: institutions of justice and law, the physicians who remain silent while medical treatment is prevented in the territories And also the university lecturers who do nothing for their imprisoned colleagues in the territories, but conduct special study programs for the security forces. If all these boycotted the occupation, there would be no need for an international boycott."

Gideon Levy, Haaretz, 4th June 2006

IV. Why Boycott?

Boycotts have an honourable history, both as a weapon of the weak, and as a non-violent alternative to more forceful action. It was Captain Charles Boycott's tyrannous regime as a grasping English land agent in County Mayo, Ireland in the 1880s that provoked his employees to deprive him and his family of all assistance. In the process they gave this form of collective action a human name. However the history of boycotts long antedates Boycott.

Not all boycotts achieve their objectives, but the roll-call of success is considerable. One celebrated boycott was the refusal of Britain's colonial settlers in North America to buy products on which the Townshend Act of 1767 had imposed taxes. Within 3 years the reduction in sales led to its repeal. Except in the case of tea – which resulted in the Boston Tea Party. Gandhi's March to the Sea in the 1930s was a boycott of commercial salt in protest against the imposition of tax. The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 ended the segregation of that city's buses, and started much else besides. The UK boycott of South Africa, and especially the sporting boycott, were instrumental in fostering a climate in which the confidence of that country's anti-apartheid regime began to falter.

The essence of a boycott is the shared decision, by those who if acting individually would have no power, to provide a compelling moral or practical argument against the continuation of deplorable practices. They mutually commit to withhold from engaging in certain activities that provide support to the perpetrator of the targeted practices. It is of the essence that the boycotter also loses, which gives this form of pressure an unusual moral force.

The issue here has been presented in abstract terms. However the translation to the specifics of Israel's grip on the Occupied Territories is straight-forward.

Boycott as a tactic

Broadly, the strong do not need to boycott. Boycott is a non-violent tactic of those who do not have the power to impose a preferred solution, or even to gain entry to meaningful negotiations. It impacts the situation in more than one way:

- refusal to cooperate with the boycotted group weakens that group, degrading its quality of life and reducing its capacity to sustain the actions against which the boycott has been called.
- the boycotted community feels the wind of outside disapproval, and internal opposition is encouraged
- those who suffer the direct impact of the practices that have provoked the boycott will be heartened by the knowledge that their oppression is gaining outside recognition
- the act of boycotting provides reminders embedded in daily life and work which keep the issue alive for the individual boycotter
- the campaign for a boycott provides a rallying point through which like-minded individuals can mobilise.

Boycotts then are a combination of symbolic protest, material intervention, and political action.

There would be no need or call for a boycott were other more normal channels for resolving disputes and grievances to be open. That these channels are unavailable is patently clear in the case of Israel's occupation of Palestine. The peace process has been comatose at best for years; Israel repeatedly justifies non-negotiation by refusing to accept as a valid partner for peace talks whoever the Palestinians may elect; and the American veto (frequently supported by the UK government) prevents the UN Security Council from any enforcement activity, no matter how egregious Israel's violations of UN resolutions may be.

"In some cases it might be correct to boycott, and in others it might be unwise and dangerous. In still other cases another weapon of political struggle might be preferred. A demonstration, a protest march, a strike, or civil disobedience might be resorted to, all depending on the actual conditions at the given time."

Nelson Mandela,
No Easy Walk to Freedom

The decision to boycott involves a political calculation. Its elements are the availability of other more effective means of influencing the situation; the strengths and weaknesses of the potential boycott target; and the potential for mobilising support behind a boycott. It would be foolish to engage in what will undoubtedly be a lengthy and at times bitter struggle without assessing the likelihood of success.

We may use South Africa as an example of a case where boycott had a valuable role to play. The South African apartheid regime possessed force overwhelmingly superior to that which internal opposition or neighbouring states could deploy. Yet there was a wider public disquiet internationally about the nature of the regime, which could be mobilised to pressure other countries and institutions to withdraw support from the Pretoria government and South African economy. The boycott was specifically requested by the African National Congress. And despite the bluster there was a basic insecurity among white South Africans about the long-term viability of their internationally isolated position. (The parallels with Israel do not need to be drawn out.)

In the South African case, the specific culture of its white population made the sporting boycott a uniquely effective tactic in driving home their isolation. In Israel it is the quite disproportionate contribution that Israel makes in many areas of research that favours the academic boycott as a way of tilting the internal Israeli debate back towards dialogue and away from repression. The hysterical Israeli reaction to the AUT's and then NATFHE's pro-boycott vote is supporting evidence for the potential effectiveness of this tactic.

Not just boycott

Boycott alone will not produce the reversals of policy needed for Israel to eliminate the extraordinary panoply of oppressive controls through which it administers the Occupied Territories.

Complementing the call for an academic and cultural boycott is a wider call, adopted in July 2005, for a policy of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) directed at Israel. (For more information, see *Boycott Divestment Sanctions*, Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2006.) It is supported by more than 170 organisations representing Palestinian refugees, Palestinians under occupation, and Palestinian citizens of Israel. It calls on international civil society organisations and people of conscience throughout the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era.

This call is already being answered. In Britain the vote by the General Synod of the Church of England in February 2006 to recommend disposing of its £2.5m holdings in US firm Caterpillar is one high-profile move. Other divestment decisions have been made, especially by religious groups and trades unions, in the US, Canada and elsewhere.

The cultural boycott is also making strong progress, provoked particularly in mid-2006 by Israel's assault on Lebanon. In August 2006 the governing body for the Greek film industry withdrew all Greek films from that autumn's Haifa Film Festival. In the same month the Edinburgh Festival cancelled sponsorship from the Israeli Embassy in London, and returned its cheque. Sixty Palestinian film-makers joined the call for a cultural boycott, and within the month the number had risen to over 100. Both film-director Ken Loach and writer/artist John Berger have made public statements of support for this boycott.

The academic boycott must be seen against this larger background. It is one element in a broader campaign to alert world opinion to the realities of Israeli policies and practices, and to exert pressure for change within Israel.

V. Reasons not to Boycott

Many arguments have been raised against the academic boycott. In this section we will go through the main ones and disentangle fact from myth and innuendo.

Boycott = new McCarthyism?

Claim: The academic boycott would mean applying a test of political correctness to Israeli academics. Foreign academics would then only collaborate with those who 'passed'.

Reality: The boycott is aimed at institutions, not individuals. It applies to individual academics only in so far as they are acting on behalf of or as officials or representatives of Israeli academic institutions, or of Israeli higher education at the national level. There are no exclusion clauses, hence no tests of individual 'correctness'.

In any case, McCarthy's attack on communists and radicals in the US was backed by the authority and power of the State. Boycott is an act of solidarity which rests fundamentally on the power of moral persuasion.

Why Pick on Israel?

Claim: Many countries in the world have repressive governments. One does not have to look far from Israel to find undemocratic regimes where torture is routine. China has an appalling record on human rights. Many people would say that the United States does far more damage to life and freedom round the world than Israel ever could. Why aren't boycotters targeting them?

Reality: There are many oppressive regimes in the world. We might hope that all of them would be universally condemned. But inevitably, everyone singles out those issues that particularly concern them. Indeed to have any effect, it is necessary to be selective. Does anyone say to those who

campaign against the military autocrats in Rangoon, or the governments complicit in the murder of trades unionists in Latin America, or regimes involved in institutionalised torture in Central Asia, "why single out Burma/ Colombia/Khazakstan?" And of course many who feel strongly about Israeli policies have also participated in mobilisation against the policies of other repressive or overweening governments.

There are undoubtedly situations in which boycott is infeasible or inappropriate. Does that mean that it should not be used in those other cases where it can be effective? To say that there are worse cases than Israel does not imply that Israel should be immune from criticism and censure until all other wrongs have been righted (ie for ever).

There are indeed good reasons for treating Israel as a special case. Israel always presents itself as special. It constantly reaffirms and therefore invites evaluation in terms of the highest moral standards, liberal values (beacon of) etc. In these ways Israel singles itself out.

Israel is special also in that it controls religious sites of central importance to three world religions. Israel is special as it continues to be a settler-state in the 21st century – a state which contrary to countless UN resolutions still illegally occupies lands which others had cultivated for centuries.

The US government certainly finds Israel to be special - special enough to give it currently approaching \$3 billion in direct foreign aid, and in some years up to 1/3rd of its total foreign aid budget. (The formidable Israel Lobby in Washington – see Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006 – helps ensure that politicians seen as anti-Israel don't get re-elected.) Israel is again special in being the only nuclear power in the Middle East, yet somehow immune to intrusive UN inspections or the sort of US pressure exerted on Iran.

In general the double standards that operate in international affairs are those which favour Israel, rather than the reverse. The boycott is a tactical pressure, appropriate to the circumstances of Israel, to secure change in its policies on Occupied Territories.

Isn't the Boycott just anti-Semitism in action?

Claim: Isn't the reason for picking on Israel in this selective way just another manifestation of anti-Semitism?

Reality: The boycott isn't picking on Israel, as explained above. Nor is it a boycott of Jews – indeed many prominent supporters of the boycott are Jewish. The claim confuses Israel – a state; and Jews – a religious or ethnic group. Not all Jews are Israelis. Equally not all Israelis are Jewish – over 20% of the 6 million population of Israel excluding the Occupied Territories are not. Nor is the boycott aimed at Israelis (Jewish or otherwise) working outside Israel.

Anti-Semitism is a form of racism. It is a long-standing and world-wide phenomenon, a deeply-held negative fantasy about the character of Jews as Jews. It undoubtedly exists among some members of left political groups, as it does on the right. Anti-Semitism needs no particular facts to sustain itself. However without doubt the objective evidence of Israeli greed for land and the mistreatment of Palestinians in both the Occupied Territories and in Israel itself will work as its recruiting sergeant.

The reflex response made by 'friends' of Israel against those who criticise Israel is to accuse them of anti-Semitism. This is a facile attempt to avoid the substance of the criticism by impugning the motives of the critics. Moral blackmail of this sort attempts to short-circuit debate; it certainly cheapens its proponents.

"[The negative] perception of Israel is a major factor in the recent resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe and in the rest of the world. In this sense, Zionism today is the real enemy of the Jews"

Avi Shlaim 4 February 2005, Electronic Intifada⁴

⁴ electronicintifada.net/v2/article3599.shtml

Isn't Israel quite different from South Africa?

Claim: Academic boycotts may very occasionally be justified, as in the case of apartheid, but Israel's case is quite different from that of South Africa.

Reality: The similarities between apartheid South Africa and present day Israel and the Occupied Territories are almost uncanny. Identity cards incorporate a racial identity marker. Together with domicile control (especially in East Jerusalem) they constitute an equivalent of South Africa's Pass Law system. The effect of the South African Group Areas Act is achieved by land seizure and the selective refusal of construction permits. Education systems are separate and unequal.

Development of settlements (contrary to repeated UN resolutions) and the web of military roads divides the Occupied Territories into the equivalent of South Africa's non-viable Bantustans. There is covert, but sometimes open, racism – open for example when Cabinet Ministers and MPs advocate the forcible expulsion of Arabs from Israel. Palestinians are routinely harassed and humiliated at checkpoints. Significantly the 9 metre-high wall already dividing many Palestinians from their fields is widely known in Israel as Gader ha-Hafrada, or 'separation fence'. Separation in English, Hafrada in Hebrew, or *Apartheid* in Afrikaans.

There are of course differences. For example Israel doesn't have the enforced social apartheid of South Africa – it operates instead by the systematic exclusion of Palestinians from land, access, resources. Another difference is that the population Israel subjects to direct discrimination is of comparable size to its own, rather than a great majority as in South Africa. (However the 5 million Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan... are also victims.) Another is the scale of carnage – in the South African township riots of the 1980's 312 children were killed. In Israel since September 2000 over 700 children have been killed by Israeli forces.

But broadly the structural similarities in the situations of Israel and apartheid South Africa are profound. Israel too has provoked hostility in neighbouring countries; its internal policies have generated increasing

and wide-spread international criticism; there has been a call from representative organisations of the oppressed for international boycott, divestment and sanctions; and attempting to sustain domination by force of arms can scarcely be a secure option over the long-term.

Many prominent South Africans have emphasised these parallels and expressed their support for an academic boycott of Israel. They include Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Professor Dennis Brutus (central to the sporting boycott of South Africa) and Ronnie Kasrils (ex- ANC freedom fighter and Minister for Intelligence in the South African Government).

Aren't academics the Palestinians' best Israeli friends?

Claim: Many of those Israelis most critical of their country's policies towards the Occupied Territories are academics. What sense does it make to target them by a boycott?

Reality: There are indeed courageous Israeli academics who raise their voices clearly against repressive and discriminatory Israeli government policies. But they are painfully few. Ilan Pappé is a distinguished historian at Haifa University who has been outspoken on the occupation. He has estimated those who have actively opposed Israel's institutionalised restrictions on Palestinian education and research as less than 100. This is out of more than 5000 senior academic staff (Statistical Abstract of Israel). That no university has officially adopted a critical position is not perhaps surprising. But neither has there been any single motion passed by an Israeli university senate in defence of Palestinian academic freedom. Nor by any academic professional association or trade union. And this despite the deliberate degradation of the Palestinian universities and educational system, already described.

There is no absence of critical debate on these issues in, for example, the Israeli press. In many countries universities and their teachers are centres of dissenting thought. In Israel they have been quiescent.

There are some signs of movement. In September 2006 more than 250 Israeli university and college teachers submitted a petition to the Prime

Minister and Defense Minister asking for the ban on students from Gaza studying on the West Bank to be removed. This extraordinary surfacing of dissent followed closely on Israel's disastrous assault on Lebanon the previous month. The pressure from a growing boycott movement will provide support to such principled opposition.

Shouldn't we be talking, not boycotting?

Claim: Even if Israeli university staff and institutions have not opposed the continued occupation of Palestine and the repressive policies in force there, surely it is better to keep talking to them, to build bridges, rather than have them retreat into their laager.

Reality: This is a curious argument. None of the boycotters wants to stop talking to Israeli academics. We are always happy to talk, to debate, to discuss with Israeli colleagues and do so at all opportunities. What we do not want is business as usual – that is to give Israeli academics, and through them the Israeli public, the impression that whatever they do in the Occupied Territories has no consequences for them.

This particular claim has an Alice through the Looking Glass quality. In reality it is those proposing the boycott who are active in dialogue wherever and whenever possible. It is Israeli universities and opponents of the boycott who attempt to silence critics rather than debate with them. Consider these two examples, both stimulated by the AUT boycott votes.

(i) In January 2006 Bar-Ilan University organised an international conference on Academic Freedom and the Politics of Boycotts. Not one speaker in favour of boycotts was invited or scheduled.

(ii) The American Association of University Professors invited 22 academics from a wide range of countries to a meeting to be held in Bellagio, Italy in February 2006. Its purpose was to discuss a reasoned paper *On Academic Boycotts* produced in November 2005 by an AAUP committee. The paper came down against the use of boycotts. However the invitees

included a minority who were known supporters of the boycott of Israeli universities. An intense campaign by the Israel lobby pressurised the Foundations funding the Bellagio meeting, and AAUP was forced to cancel it. The US-based group Scholars for Peace in the Middle East even boasted publicly of the role of their organisation, together with UK's ENGAGE and the International Board on Academic Freedom of Bar-Ilan University, in achieving this result. When the AAUP wanted to publish the papers that had been submitted for the meeting, the anti-boycotters refused their permission, so their papers are missing from the collection (*Academe*, 2006)

Many of the same people who are saying 'build bridges' (in order to head off a boycott) are intent on knocking them down should any serious discussion of boycotts or Israeli policies be threatened.

How can academics justify obstructing knowledge?

Claim: The highest value of academics is free communication of information and ideas – in fact, academic freedom. To set up roadblocks to association, collaboration and discussion violates utterly this principle.

Reality: The ideal of the universality of scientific and scholarly discourse is both important and attractive to academics. However even conscientious opponents of boycotts in general (Blakemore, Dawkins, Noble, Yudkin, *Nature*, 2003) recognise that no principle can be an inviolable imperative, since there is always the possibility of conflict with other principles.

The widely-held default position in the practice of academic work is the avoidance of any discrimination on grounds of citizenship, religion, politics, race, colour, language, age or sex. Only exceptional circumstances, such as the violation of other at least equally important principles, could justify its breach.

But exceptional circumstances do occur. The AUT for many years right through to its merger into UCU in 2006 made use of the boycott weapon (euphemistically called 'grey-listing') against offending higher

education institutions. The long-running academic boycott of South Africa was widely seen as justified both outside and within that country. As recently as 1998, all Serbian universities were suspended from CRE, the Association of European Universities.

The exceptional Israeli circumstances have already been outlined in the second and third sections of this pamphlet. They consist of systematic violations of international law, human rights and academic freedom in the Occupied Territories.

Why not just help Palestinian universities?

Claim: Surely if academics are concerned about what is happening to Palestinian Universities, the right course of action is to give them material help.

Reality: Our BRICUP boycott campaign is not just about the Palestinian Universities, but is provoked by the multiple assaults on human rights and international law perpetrated routinely and continuously by the Israeli government especially in the Occupied Territories. In any case it is not 'help Palestinian Universities or boycott Israeli ones'. There is no contradiction. We should *both* work to help Palestinian universities *and* to boycott Israeli ones.

VI. Moving On

Defenders of Israel's immoral and illegal policies towards both the Occupied Territories and its neighbours have advanced a range of arguments against the boycott of Israeli universities. As we have shown above, these claims fail on grounds of *ad hominem* character, factual error, selective vision, failures of elementary logic, self-serving priorities etc. We believe that the debate on this issue should be based on facts, logic and ethics. That is what this pamphlet has attempted to do.

Israel's assault on Lebanon in July-August 2006 is the latest evidence that its aggressive territorial policies based on local military superiority are a danger to the region and to world peace. It should concern us all, wherever we live. Israel's continued occupation of Palestine and the nature of its internal regime there are an affront both to legality and to morality.

Israel's sensitivity to the potential momentum of the movement for boycott, disinvestments and sanctions is so far demonstrated only in the convulsive efforts of its supporters to counter each new advance. However this very sensitivity indicates the potential of this entirely non-violent form of political action.

The academic boycott, especially in the United Kingdom, is at the forefront of this movement. The boycott issue will need to be re-debated and re-established in the new University and College Union. However, paper victories at union conferences are less important than the decisions of individual academics. That is, it is the intended readers of this pamphlet who will determine the impact that this boycott will have. An academic boycott is both a personal and a collective act made in solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues whose academic freedom is currently denied.

Already, distinguished UK academics are not only joining the boycott, but are publicising their refusal of invitations to collaborate with Israeli institutions. Let us hope that these examples, and the others which will

follow, will help to re-invigorate Israel's academic community – so that it will gain the courage and conviction to speak out against its government's policies.

We invite you to join and support BRICUP in our campaign. To do so, or to help finance our work by donations, contact us directly by email (info@bricup.org.uk) or by writing to BM BRICUP, London WC1N 3XX.

Further Reading

i) Articles etc directly supporting facts and arguments in this pamphlet

C Blakemore, R Dawkins, D Noble and M Yudkin (2003). "Is a scientific boycott ever justified?" *Nature*, Jan 23, 2003

J Butler, 'Israel/Palestine and the paradoxes of academic freedom' *Radical Philosophy* 135, Jan/Feb 2006

C McGreal 'Worlds apart', *The Guardian*, 7 February 2006 [on Israel-South Africa parallels]

N Masalha 'Academic Freedom and the Bar-Ilan Conference: An Open Letter to a Palestinian Colleague' January 25, 2006. Posted on http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=A120_0_1_0_M

J Mearsheimer and S Walt 'The Israel Lobby' *London Review of Books* 23 March 2006

H Rose and S Rose 'The Academic and Cultural Boycott' *Palestine News*, August 2006

L Taraki 'Confront the colluders in Israel's academy', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 23 June 2006

V Tilley, 'The case for boycotting Israel, Boycott now', <http://www.counterpunch.org/tilley08052006.html>

Academe (Sept-Oct 2006) Academic Boycotts Conference Papers – papers from the American Association of University Professors Bellagio Conference, especially papers by Omar Barghouti, Lisa Taraki, Sondra Hale and Hilary Rose. Available at <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsresearch/academe/2006/SO/AcademicBoycottConferencePapers/>

Boycott Divestment Sanctions: the non-violent response to Israeli apartheid and occupation, Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2006.

Palestine News (periodical)

Many key articles directly tracing the history of and arguments for the boycott can be found on BRICUP's website, www.bricup.org.uk

ii) Books supplying relevant background

N. Masalha *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (2000)

I. Pappé *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006)

E. Said *The Question of Palestine* (1979)

T. Reinhart *Israel/Palestine – how to end the war of 1948* (2005)

iii) Websites for general information

www.bricup.org.uk	website of British Committee for Universities of Palestine
www.pacbi.org	Palestinian call for academic and cultural boycott
www.btselem.org	human rights in the occupied territories
www.right2edu.birzeit.edu	obstacles to freedom of education in Palestine
www.stop-the-wall.org	opposition to the 'separation wall'
www.badiil.org	Palestinian residency and refugee rights
www.icahd.org	Israeli Campaign Against House Demolitions
www.palestinecampaign.org	Palestine Solidarity Campaign
www.gisha.org	Center for the Legal Protection of Freedom of Movement
www.sue.be/pal	site with links to articles, opinion pieces and campaigning sites on Palestine and Israel, especially on the academic boycott

iv) Websites for specific information

www.electronicintifada.net/bytopic/219.shtml	(casualty statistics)
www.plands.org/atlas/index.htm	(reconstruction of <i>The Atlas of Palestine 1948</i>)
www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/ipresscom/ipress2004/ipresscom2004-2_summary_mwp_20040709.htm	(International Court of Justice ruling on the separation wall)
www.palestinecampaign.org/pdf/settlements.pdf	(illegality of <i>Israel's settlements</i>)
www.palestinecampaign.org/pdf/apartheid_wall.pdf	(<i>the separation wall</i>)