

Academic boycott as international solidarity

The academic boycott of Israel

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Boycotts are age-old undertakings. Unlike sanctions, which are enforced by governments and sometimes destroy the lives of millions of ordinary people (as in the case of the twelve-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 (for instance, the California grape boycott of the 1970s, or the ongoing worldwide boycott of Nestlé products¹); 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 is 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. In our view, an academic boycott of Israel should form part of a broader boycott and divestment effort involving economic, cultural and sports agendas.

The call for a moratorium on relations with Israeli academic institutions has drawn widespread criticism. Much of this has come from people who are, to some degree, 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.

The call for a specifically academic boycott is based on several premisses. One is that, to date, all but a small number of Israeli academics have remained quiescent in the face of the violent colonial war their government is waging 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 openly criticizing Israeli policies against the Palestinians. A second and related premiss is that educational institutions and their teachers are

principal agents in the shaping of future generations' perceptions of 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 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.

Actions of boycott represent 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 outcry against the violent tactics of resistance to Israeli occupation evolving among 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 whilst understanding that it is a product of despair and desperation that the occupation itself has created.

Some general objections

Objections to the academic boycott of Israel have not been consistent. They have tended to change over time. For instance, at the beginning of the boycott there was a 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 academics never escape politics. In the United States 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 the academy to remain quiet and loyal was effective until the war itself became vastly unpopular. Israeli educational institutions have followed this pattern. In general, states do not support academic freedom or the free flow of ideas in cases that impact on government policies. Through various forms 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.

In the current context, there are numerous examples of the direct involvement of Israeli academia and 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, almost all Israeli academics find themselves actively or passively supporting the occupation by virtue of Israel's policy of universal Jewish conscription. (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.) This is a policy that does not so much democratize the Israeli army as militarize Israeli civilian society. Thus, almost all Israeli academics are military veterans and many will do reserve duty in the 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 the colleges now being established in the settlements. Finally, there is the particularly sinister, documented involvement of Israeli doctors in torture.²

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 histori-

cally stifled that the boycott against Israel has become necessary. The vast majority of coverage in the press, magazines and television news, particularly in the United States, most of the time gives only the Israeli side of the story. To the small extent that this is breaking down, those offering the Palestinian point of view are labelled anti-Semites and supporters of terrorists. 'Intellectual exchanges' have been going on between Israelis and the rest of the world since 1948 but it has made no 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 on Israeli institutions.

One of the earliest tactics to silence and discredit advocates of the boycott has been the 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'.³ It encourages anti-Semitism, even if it does not mean to. This argument is based on *equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism*; it conveniently ignores the mounting crescendo of Jewish voices against Zionist and Israeli colonialist practices. It also ignores the fact that not only was the first call for a moratorium on EU funding for research collaboration with Israeli institutions launched by Jewish scholars in the UK (Professor Steven Rose and others), but also that many of the supporters of the boycott are Jewish, some even Israeli.⁴ Indeed, as many 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.

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 is not translated into a situation where no one will talk to them. Boycott organizers are in constant touch with the few dissenting Israeli academics. In effect, far from discouraging Israeli dissent, the call for a boycott is aimed at encouraging 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.

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

Specific objections

1. 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 reaction against the boycott effort would not be so strenuous; in the USA, the Anti-Defamation League would not be expending time, energy and money to label the academic boycott as a 'hijacking of academic freedom' and there would not be a rush to launch a number of anti-boycott petitions. The outcry 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. Some Israelis have already acknowledged the potential of the boycott. Israeli economist Yoram Gabai is quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (8 August 2002):

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.⁵

The power of national isolation, including academic isolation, has been recently attested to by Frederik de Klerk, the former president of South Africa who initiated the move away from apartheid and towards democracy. 'Suddenly the doors of the universities and libraries [of the world] were closed to our bright students, which stimulated and motivated advocates of change.'⁶

One of the most important achievements of the academic boycott is that it has generated such heated discussion in so many venues (mainstream newspapers, television, student publications, Internet discussion lists) that the negative details of the Zionist enterprise have forced themselves onto the consciousness of many people, both within and outside academia. Thus, even the efforts to discredit those who support the boycott, and to delegitimize the boycott as a strategy of protest, have unintentionally helped provide a 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.

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

We do not believe that the academic boycott hurts Palestinians and harms collaborative efforts. While in the past there have been minor collaborations between Israeli and Palestinian academic institutions in the Occupied Territories, these have now ceased. This is due to the inevitable estrangement and suspicion that have accompanied the continuing colonization and occupation of the Occupied Territories. Israeli policies forbid the travel of Israeli citizens into the Occupied Territories (except if they are going to and from Israeli 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 the journeys of students and faculty to and from 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, Professor of Linguistics at Tel Aviv University and one of the few Israeli academics to take a public 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.⁷

Even with the increasing 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. 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.

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 well-intentioned, humanitarian

Israeli *individuals* (whose existence we certainly acknowledge) who are allegedly being punished unfairly by the boycott. 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. Taken as individual cases, there is no doubt that such situations result in frustration, inconvenience, the disruption of research and perhaps even careers. But we believe, as Shahid Alam has written, '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.'⁸ 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.



3. 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 example, Dena S. Davis, a law professor at Cleveland State University, wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* 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.'⁹ Unfortunately, it is not only positive ideas that can make a difference. Historically, unimpaired 'intellectual life' and 'exchanges across cultures' have failed to lead to the humanization of Zionist policies. In addition, it is to be noted that those 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 with regard to Palestinian higher education. 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 thirty-five 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.

4. The boycott adherents unfairly single out Israel while ignoring all other military occupations.

What is the basis of the claim that the signatories of the various moratorium and boycott calls are 'picking' on Israel and ignoring the behaviour of the Chinese in Tibet, the Russians in Chechnya, the Americans in Iraq, and so forth? All the signatories have in common is that they consider the struggle against Israeli occupation a high priority. The Israeli-Palestinian crisis remains the most internationalized conflict in today's world, in terms of both the role of the UN and international financial support for Israeli occupation. Because of the international character of the conflict, Zionist agendas clearly influence policy-making in the West. They have import beyond the Occupied Territories and potentially affect the lives of ordinary citizens of most Western nations. This is particularly obvious in the case of the United States, where Zionist lobbies are extremely powerful within both Congress and the media, and the administration of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative advisers see Israel and its aggressive behaviour as a model for their own policies. Numerous examples of how this influence is exerted can be found on the website of the Project for the New American Century.¹⁰

5. 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.

The Israeli army and settlers are in the Occupied Territories to annex 'Judea', 'Samaria' and Gaza. The resulting thirty-five years of land confiscation; of destruction of crops, houses and other Palestinian property; of destroying Palestinian civil society; of the construction of illegal colonies; and of the importation of hundreds of thousands of illegal settlers are not 'acts of self-defence'. On the other hand, one can reasonably define resistance to these actions on the part of the Palestinians as acts of self-defence. The international community, through the actions of the United Nations and the testimony of respected world leaders, has made it clear that Israeli occupation constitutes an ongoing case of severe injustice. Is it not 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 in violence of both the 'colonizer and the colonized'.¹¹ In any case, the boycott represents a non-violent alternative route to oppose a regime which many see as itself terrorist.

Israeli goals in the occupied territories have always aimed at possession and absorption of these lands. However, with the advent of the Sharon government the scale of destruction and brutality has risen to new and shocking levels. The Sharon government was put into power by an overwhelming majority vote of Israelis in the election of February 2001. Sharon received 62 per cent of ballots cast. In the January 2003 election the Israeli public reaffirmed 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 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. There are those who would look to the government of the United States, Israel's ally and patron, to apply the necessary pressure. However, the US government is itself operating under the same delusions as Israel as to the nature of and reasons for the occupation. This leaves us with the non-violent strategy of developing a grassroots, international movement to boycott the institutions of Israeli power at all possible levels: economic, cultural and academic.

Notes

1. See www.breastfeeding.com/advocacy_boycott.html.
2. See Derek Summerfeld, 'Israeli Medical Association Shirks "Political Aspects" of Torture', *British Medical Journal* 311, 1995, p. 755.
3. www3.sympatico.ca/sr.gowans/distractions.html.
4. See www.pjpo.org for the various calls for an academic moratorium on relations with Israeli institutions.
5. 'Israelis Feel the Boycott Sting: Creeping Sense of Isolation as Culture, Economy Takes Hits', www.sfgate.com/cgi_bin/article.cgi?file=chronile/archive/2002/08/06/mn33709.dtl.
6. *Ha'aretz* supplement in English, 16 May 2003, www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/shart.jhtml?itemno=293793.
7. Z net, 4 February 2003, www.Zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=2961§ionID=22.
8. Shahid Alam, www.pjpo.org/letter_taraki.html.
9. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 18 April 2003, p. B13.
10. www.newamericancentury.org.
11. Shahid Alam, *ibid*.

Not so simple

Reflections on the academic boycott of Israel

Uri Hadar

In the culture in which I was brought up, in the language that mediated this culture, 'boycott' had a distinctly negative connotation. It has usually been associated with a moralistic punishment directed towards an individual or a group that has transgressed a norm without, perhaps, actually breaking the law. Admittedly, boycott was opposed to the bare use of physical power, it acted in the name of morality, but it always anchored itself in a norm. It was, in that precise sense, never on the radical side of culture. In addition, the Hebrew for boycott, *herem*, like its Arabic cousin, *haram*, may associate with a whole range of moral punishments (the Arabic word stresses sanctity), but its verbal form, *lehahrim*, stands explicitly for material dispossession, usually of forbidden goods (the Arabic word connects to this theme by deriving theft and stealing). It thus espouses a morality that is associated with property rights rather than human solidarity.

The instances of boycott that came to my mind in thinking about this commentary were those of Spinoza's excommunication by the Amsterdam Jewish community and his less known immediate predecessor Uriel Acosta, who engraved himself on my teenage memory by carrying my first name, as well as by his ambivalent character and tragic

end. Then there were all kinds of cultural bans of books and people by oppressive or blind regimes. The economic sanction of Iraq by the US-led coalition brought me to the present time frame, but did not score much better for emotional valence. Of course, there was the boycott of South Africa, remarkable for both reason and impact, but I doubt that it changes the general ambience of either the word or the concept. Boycott was still essentially blind and moralistic, but the South Africa episode suffices to make the point that there may be historical conditions that warrant a boycott, unpleasant as it may be. The question is whether the current situation in Israel–Palestine is of such a nature and, if it is, whether the specific form that calls for an academic boycott, in the absence of a wider economic and cultural boycott, is supportable.

It is, to my mind, a cognitive travesty to endeavour to give a complete answer to the general question of which conditions warrant a boycott. It involves a measuring of suffering for which I lack the emotional tools. My perception of the occupation is that the conditions that Israel imposes on millions of Palestinians – with no basic human and civil rights, in extreme economic degradation and with persistent killing of innocent people – justify a boycott. They justify a statement by the civilized world of its utter condemnation of these imperturbable Israeli practices, continuing now for over thirty-five years. Those who will necessarily suffer from the boycott, the Israeli people, have repeatedly and democratically decided to perpetuate the occupation: we have honestly earned whatever consequences may befall us in this respect (although there will be some thousands in the position of innocent bystanders). In addition, the international community has repeatedly asserted that the Israeli occupation violates its norms.

A complete commercial and economic boycott would be very effective in bringing Israel into line with these international norms. Israel's economy is all but dependent on external economies, especially that of the USA, and Israeli public opinion would probably not allow a serious regression of material living conditions. Alas, in the crucial discourse of American politics, the idea of a ban on trade with Israel is inconceivable. It is, of course, doubtful that mainstream American political thinking will ever view the Israeli occupation in ways that could lead to a general boycott. According to some, the occupation is essentially a testing ground for strategies of regional domination that the USA is interested in developing, rather than ending. Therefore, as far as one can see, the boycott enterprise can only hope to disseminate a moral message, express a moral distaste with Israeli occupation, rather than be physically effective. I believe it is against this background that the academic boycott needs to be considered.

The first question that arises here is, why single out Israeli universities as the target of a boycott? After all, the most obvious targets for a moral condemnation are those institutions that are more directly involved with the machinery of Israeli oppression of Palestinians: the army, the forces of internal security, governmental ministries, and so on. However, since the call for a boycott comes from academic and arts circles, it cannot be effectively exercised against governmental institutions. They (we) have few dealings with those institutions and such boycotting would be void of practical delivery. Generally, it makes sense to promote those forms of action that best realize the potential of the international academy to have an impact. But even this principle has to target institutions that can be seen to connect with the Israeli machinery of oppression. It makes no sense to earmark for boycotting Israeli hospitals or social services, for example. So, here we face the crucial question regarding the academic boycott: can Israeli universities be seen to be tied up with the oppressive Israeli machinery with sufficient clarity to warrant the call for a boycott? The answer to this is not simple.

Academic morality

The army has its obvious links with academia. First, almost every university has a department or an institute of strategic studies, where detailed research is conducted into

diverse military matters, much of which is used by the army. However, strategic studies and military history are recognized and legitimate academic disciplines and it requires some extra arguments to condemn these enterprises. Of course, if one could show that the army influences the directions of research in these programmes, directly or indirectly, that would be very pertinent to our object here, but I am not aware of any study that has taken up this case in any detail. Second, some academic research is funded by the Ministry of Defence. I do not know the extent of this and have a feeling that it is much more extensive than what we can readily see. Again, I think that the investigation of this matter is an important undertaking, but I am not aware of it having been done. Still, consider the research I know of, say into the mechanisms and epidemiology of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Is its funding by the Ministry of Defence ethically problematic? Should conscientious researchers refuse such funding? Or is it only research that is more directly related to military operational capacity that should be condemned or boycotted, and then irrespective of how it is funded? Third, it is important here to consider more generally the role that academia plays in the militarization of Israeli culture. Consider the extent to which high-ranking military people are in decision-making positions with regard to higher education, and therefore have the ability to promote those who are dear to them. Compared to national and municipal politics, as well as to business and industry, which is saturated by high-ranking officers (perhaps with the exclusion of the banking and legal sectors), the universities are effectively officer-free. This probably does not result from a determination on the part of academia to remain free of military influence, but still, few other establishments that channel power in Israel are as free of military influence as are the universities. This point is not self-evident and does not originate only in career structures. Currently, the government is pursuing a very aggressive programme of restructuring university management. The running proposals are that all appointments from the level of dean upwards would be totally controlled by governing bodies that have a clear majority of non-academic personnel (say, civil servants). If successful – which they may well be – these changes will open up universities to an unprecedented level of influence by politicians and the military (whose long-term impact is frightening).

In Israel, like everywhere else, the academy provides considerable professional support for governmental institutions, especially legal, educational, diplomatic and economic institutions (incidentally, again, the Ministry of Defence is virtually professor-free). While I doubt that in Israel the level of engagement of academic personnel in governmental projects exceeds what is considered normal in the industrialized world, this involvement may nevertheless provide the ultimate argument in favour of the academic boycott. Universities are an inherent part of a state's power structure and as such the evils of the state's policies, in turn, project back onto them. The only way in which academics can steer clear of such projection is by actively resisting the evils of state power. To me this is a basic principle of academic morality, if there is such a thing. Academics have considerable benefits from their share in state power: a fine working environment, a reasonable and secure income, privileged pension schemes, tenure, privileged access to the media, and so on. The only way in which they can extricate themselves from the evils of state power is actively to resist it. But does Israeli academia take on this imperative? Again, the answer is not simple.

A qualified boycott

Let me start with an illustration of academic contribution to the evils of Israeli occupation that is probably the most baffling of which I am aware. It is so saturated with paradoxes that even its description is conceptually taxing. It features a well-known Israeli philosopher, a logician by training and reputation, who was, and for all I know still is, against the Israeli occupation. Yet he has been pivotal in writing the ultimate

text that serves to render military practices morally kosher, a text known as the army's ethical code. In promoting and popularizing the ethical code, he gives soldiers advice (in various media) on when it is and when it is not ethical to open fire on human targets. He develops semi-philosophical arguments in favour of targeted killings of Palestinians and tries to formalize the ethically affordable level of injury to innocent bystanders. Here a lack of active resistance to state power is, to my mind, taken to its limits and beyond. Space limitations do not allow me to cite more examples here, so let me just formulate the following cautious statement: Israeli campuses have so far been remarkably quiet, not only with regard to the occupation, the violation of civil rights in the territories, the economic and human degradation of Palestinians, and so on, but also regarding the persistent undermining of Palestinian higher education. This is particularly poignant considering that the Roses' petition in support of the academic boycott has stirred hundreds of Israeli academics to write angry letters to their colleagues and sign a counter-petition on the pretext that the boycott violates academic freedom... So marked was the absence of an academic voice against the occupation, that the drive to mobilize academics towards such activities called itself 'The Campus is Not Silent'. Not that there is no activity on the campuses; in fact there is quite a lot of it – meetings, demonstrations, petitions, lectures and debates – but it remains within the confines of a small margin. The majority of faculty and students have no idea about these activities and many have not heard of 'The Campus is Not Silent'. Silence, it seems, can take its own subversive measures.

Yet, viewed from the angle of those anti-occupation activities that take place on a day-to-day basis in Israel – marginal as they may be – academics play a central role in them. They take leading positions in such organizations as Checkpoint Watch, Ta'ayush, Betsalem, and others. And, perhaps most remarkably, they offer the widest and most consistent support for the most radical resistance movement in the Jewish community, namely the refusal of military service in the Occupied Territories. A couple of years ago, about three hundred and fifty faculty members signed the letter in support of selective objection (facing the call for legal action against them by the Minister of Education). This level of support is far from being state shattering, but it is also far from leaving the task of resistance to a numbered few, as these numbered few sometimes hasten to claim. Many departmental sectors in Israeli universities – notably, in my perception, those of philosophy, linguistics, mathematics (!), history, psychology, various arts and cultural studies – breed a considerable level of anti-occupation activism. Again, none of this is terribly remarkable, but it suffices to make me feel that I cannot support an academic boycott that is not qualified in a serious manner. Qualified in the sense that it is (1) well-researched and argued (as suggested above), (2) selective and targets those sectors of the academy that are most directly connected with either Israeli state power or symbols of that power (high-tech research comes to mind), and (3) responsive to and able to make allowances for anti-occupation activity within or by the academy. Only a call for an academic boycott that would be detailed in this manner stands a chance, to my mind, of circumventing the inherent blindnesses of boycotting.

Finally, I wish to note the special considerations that face the Israeli activist in publicly supporting the academic boycott. Many of her fellow activists will be especially sensitive and resistant to this idea. When the first FFIPP conference against the occupation (see www.ffipp.org) proposed discussing the academic boycott (academically), this sufficed to stir an angry reaction from within the circles of 'The Campus is Not Silent'. Some colleagues decided not to attend the conference. Public support for the boycott will alienate many fellow activists and put obstacles in the way of anti-occupation activities. In these times, when demonstrators against the separation wall are being shot at with live ammunition by Israeli soldiers, the Israeli activist must ask herself whether the academic boycott enterprise is of such a high priority as to risk the weakening of other crucial and urgent activities.