

**Donald Altschiller**

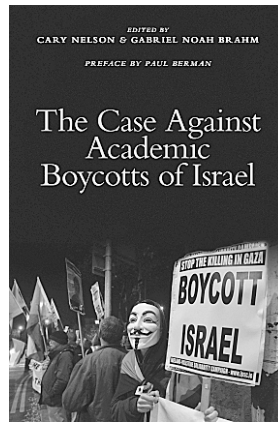
## **The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel**

**Library Journal**

( December 05, 2014; 9780990331605 )

There have been numerous works on the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, which arose during the middle of the 20th century. This anthology, compiled by Nelson (Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) and Brahm (Northern Michigan Univ.) provides a broad overview of recent efforts to expand the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) censure movement against Israel to higher educational institutions, first starting at European universities and now extending to ones within the United States. Written mostly by academic scholars, the essays are diverse, informative, and lucidly presented, covering the philosophical problems of academic boycotts, discussions of contentious debates at some academic associations and a few college campuses, the BDS movement, and the Left and American culture among other topics. Verdict While some readers may want to dismiss this work as partisan because of its title, several contributors have broadened the topic in a crucial way: the importance of supporting academic freedom, lest narrow, single-issue politics irreparably damage the university's mission of encouraging the unfettered exchange of knowledge and ideas. The editors also include pro-BDS documents and websites. Highly recommended for researchers of Israeli history. Donald Altschiller, Boston Univ. Lib. (c) Copyright 2014. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc.

## Worth the Wait



Cary Nelson and Gabriel Brahm's (eds.)  
*The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*  
 (MLA Members for Scholars' Rights, 2015). 552 pp. \$35 paper

Steven K. Baum\*

Let us recall Andrea Lim's anthology *The Case for Sanctions against Israel* (Verso, 2012) justifying a boycott of all things Israeli. That compilation included a wide array of writers—many of them Jewish, such as *Shock Doctrine*'s Naomi Klein, but all holding similar sentiment of anti-Zionist beliefs, and with a closing word by BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti. The book's lead chapter is written by physician activist relative Mustafa Barghouti (his cousin, Intifada leader Marwan Barghouti, was unavailable because he was completing five lifetime sentences for killing Israeli Jews). Mustafa Barghouti's chapter addressed a litany of Israeli military abuses, went on align himself with Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King (probably not the best choices, as both leaders had made past pro-Zionist statements) and ended the chapter with a call to resist the Occupation and its racist, colonial history exploiting the region's resources and people—though they would be the British, not the Israelis.

But no matter. For Dr. Barghouti and BDS supporters, the last millennia of Arab-led pogroms and destruction of the region's Jews is better left unsaid. Instead, all violence toward Jews is justified and minimized, as the reader is asked to put in perspective that "90 percent of the Palestinian struggle has been non-violent" (5). Of course, this man of science does not provide any supporting evidence, since he knows that none exists. BDS

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supporters do not want to hear statistics or trust Western history; they want to listen to the suffering, the good and honest ones not swayed by politics. Forget that some Palestinians—e.g., the Barghoutis—are well to do, well connected and educated, and have benefitted from the system: Omar Barghouti is a PhD candidate at Tel Aviv University.

But the whole family is good at sticking it to the Jews whenever possible, as in Mustafa's 2009 bid to court Christians and de-Judanize Christianity's messiah—"We always remember that Jesus was the first Palestinian who was tortured in this land."

Avoided as well in Lim's anthology and BDS ideology are ANY references to Arab intransigence and intolerance of their dhimmis; Arab identity politics and the problem of creating Palestinian history prior to the 20th century; the incivility of Palestinian violations by Palestinians; Palestinian aggression toward other Arabs; Arab-led retaliatory massacres (e.g., Black September, 1970); United Nations Relief and Works Agency's policy of refugee neglect; the ongoing condemnation and continual sanctioning against Israel in the UN by the 57-nation Islamic States bloc; cultural revisionism and appropriation of Jewish antiquities (e.g., Rachel's Tomb); supremacist ideology, antisemitic legislation, discrimination and massacres (e.g., Hebron, Jaffa, Hadassah Hospital, Hebrew University); Nazi ties to Palestinian muftis; mass anti-Jewish expulsions; denial or refusal of Jewish statehood; textbooks devoid of Israel for Palestinian children; geographic maps citing Israeli cities as Palestinian; major surveys consistently recording the world's highest antisemitism rates, antisemitic media, propaganda, popular songs ("I Hate Israel")—it's a formidable list, and this is not all of it.

BDS and the pro-Palestinian proponents have long benefitted from their relabeling as human rights victims and champions of peace. As victims, concepts such as media savvy, political and propaganda campaigns, or concepts such as Taqiyya (permissible lying to non-believers) are lost on the Western mind. Finally, in 2014, countering voices began to appear: Jed Babbin's *The BDS War Against Israel* (CreateSpace) and Rani Urabi Mustafa's *A Century of Arab Wrongs* (Amazon Digital) These two books were released early in the year and are small and self-published. Babbin's work provides a good general overview of BDS's underbelly, including NGO funding, while Rani Mustafa's book is biographical, documenting his transition from son of a PLO senator to ardent Zionist Palestinian. Both have their place. But anti-BDS advocates were left longing for something more, something more detailed, more comprehensive to counter the toxicity of anti-Zionism on campus.

In *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, Cary Nelson and Gabriel Brahm have compiled a work that is worth the wait and worthy of

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accolades. I predict that this book will become the primary resource and sourcebook on anti-BDS thinking; the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* has nominated it for at least one Best Book award. The scholarship is laudatory, covering the timely topics of “lawfare,” biased media reporting, doctored photos, political Islam, coopted human rights, antisemitism, and the delegitimizing of the Jewish state. The message is clear: while some who join BDS do so with good intentions, accepting the one-sided arguments and cover stories as the truth, the movement organizers and most anti-Zionism foot soldiers continue in the service of a *judenfrei* Middle East.

Niall Carson’s eerie photo of Irish BDS protesters blocking the Israeli embassy speaks the proverbial thousand words. Carson’s photo literally focuses on one protestor wearing a caricature mask of designer John Galliano. Known for au courant fashion, Galliano’s highly publicized antisemitic tirade at a Paris pub became au courant as well, making one wonder what John Galliano’s likeness is doing at a Dublin BDS protest. The short answer is because it works—a message for all John Galliano “wannabes” to join in the effort to fight with those who stand up to global oppression.

Then there is the preface by *New Republic* senior editor Paul Berman. Berman offers a quick overview of boycotts against the Jews beginning with the 1920s blocking of Jewish refugees by Arabs and successive anti-Israeli campaigns. He foreshadows the book’s arguments by providing a brief vignette of boycotters vs. anti-boycotters and their critics.

The book is divided into four main topics, with a fifth as an historical overview: Section I, principles and motives; Section II, analysis of the American Studies Association (ASA) vote; Section III, the co-opting of the progressives; Section IV, Israeli context and history; and finally the overview. The actual boycott resolutions are listed, as are the current online resources both pro and anti-BDS. An introduction by co-editor Cary Nelson, affording a solid overview of BDS, Israel Apartheid Week, and the BDS-allied Students for Justice in Palestine, is also worth the read; recall that the latter is this oxymoronic-titled group whose justice involved beating up a Jewish student at Temple University in September 2014. The reader will appreciate the essays by the book’s co-editors, SPME executive director Asaf Romirowsky, SPME executive director, and Emily Budick, chair of American Studies at Jerusalem University.

University of Chicago law professor Martha Nussbaum’s well-received “Against Academic Boycotts” essay leads Section I, with Russell A. Berman’s strong arguments to follow. They are juxtaposed with the AAUP statement “On Academic Boycotts” reprinted at the top, perhaps serving as a reminder of an association’s ideals.

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Unfortunately, not all associations are equal or remain true to their ideas. Section II attempts to explain how and why the American Studies Association (ASA) voted to boycott and support BDS. The politics of endorsement and exploration of the ASA's ugly underbelly is examined extensively by *Engage* founder David Hirsch, followed by equally impressive critiques from Sharon Ann Musher, Donna Devine, and Michael Bérubé who all make points worth remembering.



*BDS at Toronto's York University, March 2013*

Section III gets to the heart of the BDS involvement and attempts to influence hiring and firing practices of the political pariah—Israeli professors and related Israeli researchers and the journals who would publish them. Along with Cary Nelson's indictment of the Left lies Mitchell Cohen's key essay, "Antisemitism and the Left that Doesn't Learn," reminiscent of Steve Cohen's 1984 classic, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Anti-Semitic*. Nancy Koppleman considers social justice gone amuck and Sam and Carol Edelman offer sound solutions. David Caplan's "Imaginary Jews" analyzes antisemitic tropes, poetry; and literary themes, reminding us that in a time of crisis art cannot be a luxury—and when have Jews resided in an era devoid of antisemitism and crisis?

Part IV seeks to place Israel into context by offering the reader an Israeli perspective ranging in topics from higher education and the Israeli BDS (Ilan Troen), bi-nationalism and transnationalism (Rachel Fish, Shira Wolosky), to Arab-Hebrew identity analysis seen through the eyes of fiction writing (Rachel Harris).

The chapters are all strong, but for my taste, Alan Johnson's concept of intellectual incitement (to hate), Richard Landes's linking of Jihad to the political Left and Christian eschatology, and Ken Marcus's thoughts on the key question "Is the Boycott Movement Antisemitism" are laudable.

Some rearranging requests. MLA voter observations by Michael Kotzin and Jeff Robbins should have merited inclusion in Section II, as their

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story is not dissimilar from the AAUP's or British counterpart Ronnie Fraser. Tammi Rossman-Bejamin has a similar experience, and while bringing her empirical analysis of would-be boycotters is an important contribution, I would have rather read about her struggle against the tidal wave of anti-Zionism at the University of California.

As the quoted excerpt below from the book indicates, Robert Fine's "Speaking in Opposition" presentation at Leeds University in March 2014 is along these lines. Fine begins recalling protest against apartheid in his youth, but rejects any parallels, quickly reminding the audience that:

It is as discriminatory to boycott any academic institutions or any academics on the basis of nationality as it would be to boycott on the basis of race, religion or gender. This would be true not only of Israel but of any other country. . . . A selective academic boycott aimed only at Israeli academic institutions, and not at universities and research institutes belonging to other countries with equally bad or far worse records of human rights abuse, is also discriminatory. . . . We should be able to agree that antisemitism is, like any other racism, something that progressive movements must be against. In my union, UCU, proponents of an academic boycott of Israel always couple their calls with more or less categorical declarations that criticism of Israel is not or not "as such" antisemitic. Supporters of BDS in the States declare categorically that the charge of "antisemitism," when leveled against them or other critics of Israel, is not only mistaken but also raised for dishonest reasons. I have often heard it said—look for example at Alain Badiou's recent polemics on antisemitism—that while antisemitism was a real problem in the past, it is no longer a problem of the present and has now been converted into a mere ideology of Zionism. What I see is a disturbing reluctance on the part of proponents of boycott to take seriously the problem of antisemitism. To reduce concern over antisemitism to a way of censoring critical thought about Israel is insulting to those of us who are concerned about antisemitism and have no wish to censor critical thought. We should surely understand by now that it is racism and antisemitism, not opposition to racism and antisemitism, which constitute the restriction of free speech. . . . as a moral obligation we ought to honor post-MacPherson to take very seriously the fear that the academic boycott encourages antisemitism because its effect is to exclude Jews and only Jews from the global community of academe.

I am not against all boycotts, but I am against an academic boycott linked to a political doctrine that treats Zionism as a dirty word. Zionism is a kind of nationalism. Like other nationalisms it has many faces—at times socialist, emancipatory, in search of refuge from horror; at other times narrow, chauvinistic, exclusive and terroristic. It depends which face we touch. For most Jews, Zionism simply means commitment to the existence of a Jewish state and is compatible with a plurality of political views. . . . What I object to is heaping onto "Zionism" all the wrongs of

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nationalism in general, as if this nationalism were all bad while other nationalisms are off our critical hook. It is deeply regressive to turn “Zionism” into an abstraction—abstracted from history (the Holocaust in Europe), abstracted from politics (conflict over land with Arab countries and Palestinians), and abstracted from society (including the exclusion of most Jews from Middle East and Maghreb societies). It seems to me that there is some line of continuity between the abstraction of “Zionism” today and the abstraction of “the Jews” in the past.

The argument is put forward that Palestinian civil society has called for a blanket boycott of Israeli academic institutions. There is an empirical question concerning how true this is—to the chagrin of BDS, this call is not supported by Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority—but the more fundamental problem is present in the idea that Palestinian civil society is one homogenous bloc with one opinion . . . Israel looks more like David when compared with other state powers. There is something very disturbing in the totalizing images of Zionist power associated with the boycott movement and the innocent vision of peace and harmony that will prevail once this power is broken. Closer to home, this self-same image of Zionist power manifests itself in the repeated refrain of resisting intimidation from advocates of the boycott.

. . . we in Europe must face up to our particular responsibility not to project onto one side or the other all the sins of racism, imperialism, ethnic cleansing and genocide of which Europe itself has been so very guilty. The boycott of Israeli academic institutions is by contrast the tip of a reactive and regressive political turn (465-470).

In conclusion, co-editor Nelson, alongside Rachel Harris and Kenneth Stein, offer their solid overview, “The History of Israel,” which could be subtitled “Everything BDS does not want you to know and keeps you distracted so as not to ask.” At 55 pages, it is the book’s largest chapter. Given the political complexities of the Middle East, it may well be concise for all its length—yet for the reader, it is too much too late. If past is prologue, then a simple solution is to literally make this gem the prologue.

Who will dislike the book? The Corey Robins, David Lloyds, David Palumbo-Lius, Barghoutis, approving reviewers of *Mondoweiss* and *The Electronic Intifada*, and so on. Everyone else will find merit hearing anti-BDS arguments for the first time.

The essays in this compilation are both timely and timeless. Perhaps the timelessness has to do with antisemitism’s enduring nature, but there is an *unheimlich* or uncanny quality to them as well—like knowing that I could be writing the same words circa 1930s, from a café in Berlin, and understanding that BDS is the latest but not last incarnation.

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# Peter Eisenstadt

## In **Partners for Progressive Israel & The Jewish Pluralist**

**December 10, 2014**

Review of Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm ed., The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel (Wayne State University Press, 2015)

When the leadership of the American Studies Association (ASA) rammed through a resolution in December 2013 calling for “the boycott of Israeli academic institutions” (with the question of its impact on individual Israeli scholars left murkyly ambiguous) it created a furor. Many other academic organizations have faced, or will soon face, academic boycott resolutions. The tactic has been successful in calling attention to the growing BDS movement, and in shedding light on attitudes towards Israel in the academy. Often the resulting image has not been pretty. Opponents of the academic boycott have put together a remarkable, sprawling volume, The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel, edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm (Wayne State University Press, 2015), with some 25 essays, over 550 pages, that cover the issue from almost every conceivable angle. Anyone remotely interested in the issue should read it.

The ASA boycott is the immediate catalyst for the volume, and perhaps the first essay to read Sharon Ann Musher’s riveting account of the proceedings at the ASA last December; how the organization’s leaders made a mockery of parliamentary procedures to achieve their desired outcome, and how those in opposition to the resolution were hooted at and venomously attacked. When a friend of mine, attending the ASA meeting, gave me a running account of its kangaroo court proceedings, we were both outraged, and the outrage has not diminished.

There are many reasons to oppose an academic boycott of Israel. A nation’s academic institutions should only be boycotted if there evidence of systematic censorship and suppression of academic freedoms, and this certainly is not the case for Israel. Israeli academic institutions are often at the cynosures of vigorous debate about Israel’s past, present, and future. While ignoring all the ways that Israeli academics have challenged reigning



orthodoxies and shibboleths about Israeli-Palestinian relations, the boycott resolutions would make them all into putative collaborators with the worst aspects of Israeli society and the current Israeli government, singling them out in a way no other country's academic are scrutinized, including, of course, academics from the United States.

Many Israeli academics are in the forefront of creative efforts to work collaboratively with Palestinians and Palestinian academics, as a number of contributors to The Case Against Academic Boycotts point out. To the extent there are free speech pressures on Israeli academics, either from the government or influential right-wing organizations, and there sometimes are, the response should be, of course, to vigorously defend the right of Israeli academics to speak their minds, in Israel or anywhere else, and not as the academic boycotter would do, stigmatize the academic enterprise in Israel as illegitimate.

Most of the arguments for an academic boycott are warmed over versions of the same ultra-left rhetoric that has circulated in the academy for decades. Israel is seen as the highest stage of settler colonialism and *prima facie* illegitimate, to be somehow wished away. In one of the volume's most interesting essays, Alan Johnson calls this "reactionary anti-imperialism," as if sloganeering about Israeli fascism and apostrophe's to "the resistance" can somehow negate 140 years of Zionist and Israeli history. And of course, the brunt of the argument and outrage of the academic boycotters is not directed against the reactionaries (who simply don't register) but liberals and liberal Zionists, all those who believe that Israelis and Palestinians, and the two societies they have created, often deeply flawed societies, have no choice but to find a way to live together. The very notion of "liberal Zionism" is viewed as an impossibility, an insult to the Palestinians, and Israel-Palestinian coexistence reduced to a risible oxymoron.

And most of the essays in The Case Against Academic Boycotts are from a liberal Zionist perspective. And the rise of the academic boycott movement is, among other things, an indication of a crisis within liberal Zionism. The belief that many of us have held for decades, that the contradictions of Zionism can be surmounted, that Israel can create a homeland for the Jewish people while recognizing the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinians has never been more in doubt. More and more people have come to the conclusion (a false one, I think) that the two-state solution is dead. Instead, with complementary right and left wing versions of the

argument, many argue that a single unitary state is the only way forward. But if a two state solution is, in the current situation, unlikely, the egalitarian bi-national state boycott supporters want is simply impossible. Any way forward now is hard to see. It is hard not to conclude that from any objective analysis, the prospects for peace have never been bleaker, and the prospects for war, intifada, or some other catastrophe have never been more likely. And this is why, in my opinion, the academic boycott movement is thriving, a search for a quick fix and moral certitude in a situation in which the fixes are slow and nothing is certain.

Many of the essays in the volume are very concerned with the connection of the academic BDS movement with anti-Semitism. I have no doubt that many supporters of an academic boycott can be properly so characterized, and that the movement is making it easier for those harboring anti-Semitic thoughts to come out of the closet and express them more openly—here’s looking at you Steven Salaita, whose now notorious tweets, such as “Zionists: Transforming ‘anti-Semitism’ from something horrible to something honorable since 1948” expressed openly what I fear some supporters of an academic boycott genuinely feel. Everyone should look at the anti-Semitism within the BDS movement, especially in Europe, with the gravest of forebodings. But I am less worried than some of the writers in The Case Against an Academic Boycott of Israel the recrudescence of a new anti-Semitism. For me, the tragedy of the current situation is that most supporters of an academic BDS, are not by any reasonable standard, haters of Jews. The BDS movement is growing, in large part, because of the increasing despair that so many share, that a peaceful, negotiated solution to the Israel-Palestine problem has become impossible.

That is to say, what Israel does or does not do will profoundly shape the future of the academic boycott and BDS movement. It is worth remembering that there was a time, from the 1950s through around 1980, when the Arab boycott of Israel had far more serious economic and political consequences than does the current BDS movement. Israel blunted the old BDS movement by signing peace treaties with former enemies and moving, so it seemed at the time, towards resolving its problems with the Palestinians. And I have no doubt that if the prospects for peace improved, the BDS movement would shrivel, leaving only the fanatics. And if someone like Naftali Bennett, a very plausible candidate for the next prime minister of Israel, gets to implement his plans for the annexation of most of the West Bank and

extinguishing the possibility of Palestinian statehood, it would not take a prophet to predict that the BDS movement will greatly gain in strength.

Here's the nub of the problem, as I see it. Israel, backed by the US, is largely impervious to suggestion or moral suasion (including from the US.) In these circumstances, devising ways to put non-violent pressure on Israel to change its policies is an obvious alternative, and for many a necessity. Non-violence, if we remember our Gandhi and King, is not just marching around with placards, but a way of making the dominant power feel uncomfortable, to make those carrying out its policies uneasy and perhaps question and change their roles. In this, there are a range of tactics from strongly stated disapproval on upwards that can be employed. And boycotts, divestment, and sanctions will inevitably be a part of this conversation. It has begun, on a small scale, with the EU enforcing long standing rules about scientific collaboration with Israel on the West Bank, and the move for Palestinian statehood recognition in the US will bring this to a new level. I, personally, support the Palestinian statehood effort, and I for one find targeted economic boycotts of the West Bank, of the sort that might persuade a company not to relocate or do business in the West Bank, as something that is far more focused than a general ban of contact with Israeli academic institutions, which I see as not a way to go Israel to change its policies (what are Israeli academic institutions going to do, set up shop elsewhere?) but simply a way of punishing and anathemizing Israel. And even in the matter of academic boycotts, there are gray areas. One of the contributors to the collection, Robert Fine, strongly opposes an boycott of Israeli academic institutions, while supporting a boycott of Ariel University in the West Bank, something that I approve.

In his preface to The Case Against an Academic Boycott of Israel Paul Berman argues that those who want "a good boycott and not a bad boycott" will never find what they want. Their search for the perfect nuance is commendable, though I have the feeling that they will never get it right." This can be perhaps expanded to "good pressure on Israel" vs. "bad pressure on Israel" and I agree with Berman that it probably can never be fully and equitably calibrated. But when it comes to balancing a support for the right of Israelis to shape their own future as they choose, and the right of Palestinians to do the same, there is only nuance, uncertainty, miserable choices, and imponderables. The fact that we never will get it quite right does not absolve us from the need to try.

I am not sure how to best advance towards a peace between Israel and Palestine, or even if a two state solution is possible. (If it happens, it was possible; if it doesn't, it wasn't.) But I know how not advance towards peace. And one of those wrong turns is an academic boycott. We must reject the trendy theories of the academic boycotters that "everything is political." Academic organizations do best when the stick to their main task, advancing knowledge. The history of adding extraneous political agendas to academic organizations have at best a mixed record, with many examples of the damage they can cause (during World War I or the McCarthy period, for instance.)

And the sort of "political" that supporters of "everything is political" boycotters avow is typically disinterested and disdainful in politics as it is actually practiced and exists. And what Israelis and Palestinians desperately need to do is to reinvent "the political" as recognizing the reality of the other side, and recognizing that neither side is going anywhere. In any future move towards peace, there will be much pushing and shoving, and some fighting and biting, but above all there will have to be talking. And this is where the profound anti-intellectualism of the academic boycott movement is most apparent. It devalues talk, seeing it as so just palaver, that everything has been said, and everything is known. And it is only by talk (though of course not only by talk), both inside and outside the academy, by Israelis and Palestinians, and their supporters on all sides, that we will all slowly stumble our way forward. And if The Case Against an Academic Boycott of Israel is depressing in exposing the shrill meanness of the academic boycotters, and the lengths to which they will go to achieve their questionable goals, in its profound commitment to free speech and its necessity, in the United States, in Israel, and in Palestine it is hopeful and inspiring.

**David Greenberg**

## **The Campus War over Israel**

**Reprinted from *DEMOCRACY: A JOURNAL OF IDEAS*  
Issue #37, Summer 2015**

No issue on American college campuses today is more toxic and divisive than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For a decade now, “Israeli Apartheid Weeks,” which posit Israel as another South Africa, have featured extreme anti-Zionist events. Guest speakers friendly to Israel have been shouted down and silenced. At UCLA, candidates for student government were asked to pledge not to go on trips abroad sponsored by certain pro-Israel Jewish groups, but were not asked to avoid trips sponsored by pro-Palestinian or other organizations. At Ohio State, the police had to break up a student government meeting days after one undergraduate doused herself in blood (spoofing the “ice bucket challenge”) to protest Israel’s policies. At Temple University, a pro-Israel student was assaulted at a Students for Justice in Palestine leafleting booth.

Almost as regrettably, those who most fervently resist the anti-Israel activists tend to hail from the hard-line pro-Israel right and use Fox News-style rhetoric that inflames the situation. Faculty supporters of Israel, especially if they’re untenured, tread lightly. Belief in a two-state solution—coupled with mandatory denunciations of the occupation of the West Bank—constitutes the outer edge of acceptable opinion. (Taking extreme anti-Israel positions can also be professionally risky.) In the political arena, liberal Zionism is far from dead (contrary to public perception), but in campus debates it’s too often missing or muted.

The intense anti-Israel sentiment on campuses may surprise those who don’t keep up with the academic or Jewish press. When pollsters ask Americans about Israel, the results are what you’d expect: majority support for Israel, a U.S. ally; notable concern about Israel’s use of force during military conflicts like last summer’s Gaza incursion; the wish for the United States to be even-handed in negotiations for a two-state solution; and creeping frustration with Israel since 2009, when Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power as prime minister, a position he first held in the late 1990s.

But the relative stability of American public opinion conceals a worsening polarization in academia—a development to which non-academics should be paying much more attention, as *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm, drives home. As Samuel and Carol Edelman write in one essay in this authoritative volume, campuses lately have been experiencing “a barrage of anti-Israel films, speakers, panels, editorials, and faculty presentations portraying Israel as . . . a racist nation” and often championing a policy of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS) against the state of Israel. Within scholarly professional societies, such as the American Studies Association (ASA) and the Modern Language Association (MLA), activists have mounted campaigns to pass boycotts and related resolutions, including efforts to shun travel to Israeli conferences, bar intellectual

collaborations with Israeli researchers, exclude Israeli academics from scholarly activities, and so on. According to Eric Fingerhut, the former Democratic congressman from Ohio who now heads the national Hillel organization, the last year witnessed “the most organized campaign to demonize Israel and attack pro-Israel students we have ever seen.” Even allowing for fundraising-letter hyperbole, it is hard to disagree.

It can be difficult to know how threatening the BDS movement really is. On one level, it can be dismissed as a fringe crusade. No universities have divested from Israel. The movement’s few victories have been met with immediate and overwhelming condemnation. When a University of California graduate student union endorsed BDS last year, the United Auto Workers, the union’s parent body, rebuffed it. When the ASA announced its own boycott of Israeli universities, college presidents lined up to denounce the move. At one point BDS claimed it got Sabra hummus removed from the Wesleyan University dining halls, but the decision to switch to Cedar’s hummus turned out to have been driven by other factors—sustainability and the fact that Cedar’s is a local brand. After the outcry, the dining halls pledged to stock both brands, ensuring Sabra business in perpetuity, since any change in the contract would now be seen as capitulation to pressure.

In other respects, however, real harm is being done. The first notorious example occurred in Great Britain in 2002, when Mona Baker, an editor of two small journals in the field of translation studies, fired two Israeli academics, Miriam Shlesinger and Gideon Toury, from journals she ran because of their affiliations with Israeli universities. The next year, Andrew Wilkie, an Oxford pathologist, refused to take on a graduate student because he was Israeli. Some boycotters have refused to write external assessment letters—the key element in evaluating the case for a scholar’s tenure—for Israeli academics seeking promotion.

Even more important than these individual injustices, BDS has made strides in shifting the nature of the debate in academia, normalizing the notion of Israel as a pariah nation. Student government bodies, which rarely exert real power at universities but can reflect and shape undergraduate thinking, are sponsoring and backing BDS resolutions, most recently at Stanford University, hitherto seen as a bastion of moderation. At UCLA, BDS supporters on a student government council went so far as to question whether a prospective appointee to their judicial board, Rachel Beyda, could govern fairly simply because she belonged to Jewish campus organizations. The line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism has always been fuzzy and debatable, but cases like Beyda’s suggest that the rising anti-Zionism on campuses is eroding longstanding taboos against anti-Semitism. Two Trinity College professors recently found, in a survey of more than 1,000 Jewish college students, that more than half had personally experienced or witnessed anti-Semitism within the past half year. In contrast to Washington, the campus debate now centers not on which steps both antagonists might take to reach peace but on how Israel alone should be sanctioned.

Almost all the energy, too, now resides with BDS supporters. A few years ago, Jon Stewart, explaining why the Tea Party was mobilizing while ordinary Americans were quiescent, quipped that most of us “have lives.” Although a silent majority of students and faculty surely see both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most of them don’t have the time or inclination to organize, or to subsume their studies or scholarship or teaching to activism. Because of this imbalance, there has emerged a small library of BDS advocacy books—by the likes of Omar Barghouti, a Qatari-born academic who

received his Ph.D. at Tel Aviv University, and Judith Butler, primarily known as a scholar of gender theory—but no book-length scholarly criticism of BDS. Until now.

*The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel* grew out of recent fights at the ASA and MLA over BDS-related resolutions. Nelson, a distinguished literary scholar and a former president of the American Association of University Professors, and Brahm, also a professor of literature and theory, have assembled an omnibus of arguments against the academic boycott in particular. The book also includes inquiries into related subjects like academic freedom and the history of Israel, as well as key documents from the ASA and MLA fights. Hefty, endnoted, and at times abstruse, the book is scholarly in tone, with the inevitable shot of polemic here and there. (I've never met Brahm, but I have worked with Nelson in the Alliance for Academic Freedom, a liberal group devoted to promoting academic freedom on campus in relation to this issue, and have sometimes agreed with him, sometimes disagreed. I also read one of the book's essays before publication but don't discuss it in this essay.)

The book encompasses a broad range of opinions, with left-leaning contributors (Michael Bérubé, Martha Nussbaum, Mitchell Cohen) nestled alongside right-leaning ones (Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, Richard Landes). The contributors' differences suggest a raucous seminar more than a manifesto, and the diversity of opinion stands as a refreshing counterpoint to the propagandistic nature of so much literature on both the BDS left and the chauvinistic pro-Israel right. Indeed, the book tackles too many topics to cover here, but as a historian, I found particular value in its historical treatments of the boycott movement—though here, too, contributors offer slightly different interpretations. Paul Berman, in a preface, describes the current movement as part of “the oldest continuous-running boycott in the history of the world,” with its origins in the Arab boycotts of Jewish businesses in the Levant in the decades preceding the birth of Israel in 1948. In this view, the economic war against Israel continued through the longstanding Arab League boycott of Israel; ebbed after the 1978 Camp David Accords (which led Egypt to withdraw from those sanctions) and the 1993 Oslo Accords (after which Jordan and the Palestinian Authority followed suit); and then revived in the wake of the failed Camp David effort of 2000 and the ensuing Second Intifada.

On the other hand, Kenneth Marcus, of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, cautions against viewing BDS as “nothing more than a continuation of its Arab League and Nazi predecessors,” noting discontinuities as well as continuities. He sees these different boycotts as “a repetitive series of incidents that serve the same underlying function.” Still, he explains how in September 2001, not long after the Clinton peace talks collapsed, a conference of NGOs in Durban, South Africa—devoted, ironically, to the subject of racism and intolerance—yielded a call for Israel's “complete and total isolation” from the world community. This call spurred the boycott's revival. Richard Landes suggests that the terrorist attacks of September 11 (which occurred days after the Durban conference) also fueled the new surge. The attacks fed conspiracy theories centered on Jews and, especially after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, shored up far-left worldviews that depicted a militarily aggressive American imperialism rooted in U.S. support for Israel.

This recent history, since Durban, is taken up by several contributors, including Sabah Salih, a scholar of post-colonial literature and thought at Bloomsburg University.

Looking at larger ideological developments, Salih argues that BDS “owes its rise in the West” to an “ideological transformation” on the left, which now imagines that the United States and Israel “are out to impose their hegemony on the world.” This ideology, Salih argues, typified by Edward Said’s influential 1978 tract *Orientalism*, holds that criticism of Arab or Muslim political leaders or political culture—even if it arises organically from within Arab or Muslim societies (such as from the Iraqi dissident Kanan Makiya), even if it is leveled in the name of liberalism and human rights (such as from Christopher Hitchens)—is misguided, because it inevitably amounts to a kind of complicity with Western imperialism. Once under this spell, proponents of this ideology can shrug off arguments that might otherwise disturb their settled understandings. What of the terrible human rights conditions (on speech, religion, women, and gays) in the Arab world, compared to Israel? What of the eliminationist anti-Semitism and terrorism of Hamas and Hezbollah? If one begins with not just sympathy for but active solidarity with the Palestinian cause, these questions become red herrings, distractions from the overriding issue of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. Salih cites Martin Amis, who, returning to England in 2006 after two years abroad, was mortified to see “middle-class white demonstrators waddling around under placards saying, ‘We Are All Hezbollah Now.’” But given the trajectory of recent times, asks Salih, “Why are we not surprised?”

**Yet** the questions don’t go away. The most delicate matter addressed in the book is that of anti-Semitism. BDS opponents sometimes shrink from broaching it, because they’re accused of using the charge scurrilously, to deflect criticism. In my experience, however, the charge is rarely if ever made tactically; rather, it’s born of a genuine and deep fear that anti-Semitism is being normalized—and that calling someone anti-Semitic is now regarded as worse than being anti-Semitic. Nelson and Brahm deal with the subject forthrightly and with nuance.

The relationship of anti-Semitism to BDS might be likened to the relationship of racism to the Tea Party. Most Tea Party members insist they harbor no personal animus toward blacks, and at a conscious level that’s probably true. The same is surely true for many BDS supporters regarding Jews. The pro-BDS “scholars known to me personally,” writes Michael Bérubé, a professor at Penn State, “are people of principle and integrity, many of whom have been persuaded to their current position, in part, by pleas from the Israeli left.” To be sure, Bérubé may not have had in mind someone like the writer Rania Khalek, who, as recounted by Stanford humanities professor Russell Berman, totted up the number of Jews—not Israel supporters, but Jews—writing for *The Nation* (hardly a pro-Israel magazine) in 2013 and judged their influence excessive. But in most cases personal animus toward Jews isn’t the issue. As other contributors to the book point out, there’s much more to understanding anti-Semitism—just as there’s more to racism and sexism—than calling out conscious intentional bigotry.

One latent form of anti-Semitism consists in the witting or unwitting traffic in hoary anti-Jewish tropes. Most of us have no trouble seeing the racist content in a cartoon that fashions President Obama as a monkey, even if the cartoonist swears he didn’t mean to draw on stereotypes of blacks as sub-human. But BDSers are loath to recognize how much their own literature is rife with portraits of Jews as child-murderers (the ancient “blood libel” held that Jews used the blood of Christian children to make matzo); as people prone to using their allegedly outsized power and money for parochial ends



(AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a pro-Israel lobbying group, looms large in the BDS demonology); and even as vermin (“I’ve had a horrible influx of Zio-trolls today. It’s like getting a case of the scabies. They burrow in and you want to rip off your skin,” tweeted Steven Salaita, an Arab-American academic whose candidacy for a tenure-track position at the University of Illinois failed to win approval from the university’s trustees because of his history of extreme and unprofessional anti-Israel rhetoric). This form of anti-Semitism may not always be conscious; it is shaped, as the philosopher Bernard Harrison has written, by a “climate of opinion” that is formed by “a multitude of spoken and written items—books, articles, news items . . . lectures, stories, in-jokes, stray remarks.” Yet when a movement’s rhetoric is so thoroughly suffused with these conceits and assumptions, it is normal that members of a long-persecuted group will discern bigotry between the lines. As Mitchell Cohen, editor emeritus of *Dissent*, writes, “If you are anti-Zionist and not anti-Semitic, then don’t use the categories, allusions, and smug hiss that are all too familiar to any student of prejudice.”

Beyond the realm of stereotypes and attitudes, there is the realm of outcomes. Larry Summers’s oft-quoted formulation that the BDS movement is anti-Semitic “in effect” if not always in intent has rankled the kind of good leftists Bérubé writes about, who don’t consider themselves anti-Jewish. But there’s no getting around the reality that the victims of these boycotts are overwhelmingly Jewish (Palestinians affiliated with Israeli universities, of course, will suffer too). Again, to make an analogy with racism: Most liberals have no trouble seeing that while Republicans who try to tightly regulate voting may not hate blacks, they know that their preferred policies would disenfranchise blacks more than whites. Similarly, the British sociologist David Hirsh points to a UK court decision forestalling the closure of a particular university department because it had a lot of black employees, on the grounds that closing it would disproportionately hurt members of one race. The concept of “racism without racists” is not hard to understand. Yet the fact that a boycott of Israel would, in effect, target Jews seems not to trouble its advocates.

Finally, there is anti-Zionism itself. BDS advocates typically claim that they’re not anti-Semitic, just anti-Zionist. This assertion requires, as my fellow academics would say, some unpacking. Just as the word feminism, which as a simple belief in women’s equality should be easy to endorse yet now to some connotes militancy or radicalism, so the word Zionism, which simply posits the Jewish right to a homeland (and, post-1948, Israel’s right to continue existing), has assumed negative and even demonic overtones in certain circles. This shift in Zionism’s functional meaning is worrisome, because it implies that Israel’s very existence is illegitimate: If Zionism is wrong, then Israel is wrong.

Now, pretty much everyone to the left of Avigdor Lieberman agrees that criticism of Israel isn’t necessarily, or even usually, anti-Semitic. And it’s hardly controversial to assert that Israel’s occupation of the territories, its expansion of its settlements there, and many of the restrictions it imposes on its Arab citizens deserve condemnation. But what about the negation of Israel—not mere criticism of its policies or of the current government, but the belief that it should no longer exist? To deny to the Jewish people (who have always been a nation as much as a religion) a claim to self-determination at least raises the questions of why they alone should lose this fundamental right, and of what lies behind the wish to single them out for this deprivation. It’s perfectly fair to ask

BDSers for answers to these questions. It's also fair to ask if the desire to strip the right of self-determination from the Jewish people might be informed, consciously or unconsciously, by an animus toward Jews or an absorption of longstanding, prevalent anti-Jewish attitudes. Finally, even if we don't ultimately judge the goal of dissolving the state of Israel to be anti-Semitic, it is nonetheless deeply discriminatory. For this reason, write Brahm and the Middle East scholar and activist Asaf Romirowsky, "*the stigma that properly attaches to anti-Semitism should adhere as well to anti-Zionism*" (italics in original).

**Apart** from the question of anti-Semitism, this volume also provides less controversial reasons to oppose an academic boycott of Israel. Several essays take pains to show how the BDSers' claim that the boycotts target only institutions, not individuals, amounts to a distinction without a difference. In practice, any boycott with teeth amounts to a blacklist, which is anathema to all supporters of academic freedom. What Nelson makes clear in one of his essays is that to some BDS supporters, the sacrifice of academic freedom is not a problem. One pro-BDS Harvard undergraduate, Sandra Korn, was naïve enough to write in *The Crimson* that academics should jettison our "obsessive reliance" on academic freedom and instead pursue what she called "academic justice." Whether such "justice" would permit the ostracism of a whole people, or who would determine the nature of that justice, was left unsaid.

Another powerful argument against an academic boycott is that it would foreclose the very channels for fostering the dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis that might promote mutual understanding and ultimately peace. One bright spot in the Middle East in the last two decades has been the number of cultural exchanges, projects involving students from both peoples, and other efforts to surmount the cultural assumptions that produce hostility and distrust. These range from Seeds of Peace, a well-known camp for Israeli, Egyptian, and Palestinian teenagers, to a new Israeli-Palestinian youth soccer league. Unfortunately, these essays reveal that any rapprochement between the warring parties through such programs is inimical to the goals of the BDS movement.

The radical logic of BDS is carefully explored by Emily Budick, professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who points out that unlike professional peace processors, who know that only a token number of Palestinian families dispossessed in 1948 will be able to return to their homes (though others would receive compensation), BDS insists on a complete "right of return" for all Palestinians. Such maximalism would mean the end of Israel as the Jewish homeland. BDS thus shares the position not of Mahmoud Abbas, who opposes BDS and who has conceded the need to compromise on the right of return, but rather of Hamas, which holds all of Israel to be illegitimate. As contributor Nancy Koppelman further notes, for BDS advocates, the thwarting of academic and cultural exchanges is not a regrettable side effect of the boycott but its very purpose. Increased contact between Palestinians and Israelis, especially in a scholarly setting, could encourage mutual understanding, which might mean that more Palestinians would grant legitimacy to Israel's claims to nationhood. It must therefore be avoided.

In the near future, the academic boycott seems unlikely to gain much traction in the United States. But the essays in this book are still an important wake-up call to academics and non-academics alike. Among other things, they make clear that these campaigns have as their purpose something bigger than the boycott itself. They aim not

simply to shift opinion but to delegitimize Israel. That effort is already making headway, especially among college students, younger voters, and people on the left.

There are good reasons for liberals and small-d democrats to fear this development. Most immediately, it will damage the prospects for peace by encouraging extremism on both sides, at an hour when both Israel and the Palestinians desperately need to demonstrate greater flexibility in negotiating. It may also alter the discourse in Washington, and in our public debate generally; the current pragmatic focus on how both sides can make concessions for peace could soon give way to a polarized dynamic, in which neither side allows any merit in the other's position. Netanyahu's cynical pre-election assertion in March that he wouldn't allow a Palestinian state under current conditions—although "clarified" immediately after the election to mean that he still supported a two-state solution, just not at the moment—has already dashed hopes of progress until the next Israeli election. Meanwhile, Obama's unstatesmanlike displays of contempt for Netanyahu have rendered it impossible to envision new peace talks until the next American election as well. At this moment of despair, the academy needs to be generating ideas that point to constructive compromise, not dogmatism.

With BDS gaining strength, the rancor between Netanyahu and Obama—and more generally between the Likud leadership and other Democratic officials—is bad news in another respect, too. Historically, the Democratic Party has been the single best vehicle for upholding a liberalism that embraces Zionism—for preserving a middle ground between the anti-imperial left, which questions Israel's legitimacy altogether, and the illiberal right, in whose company Israel's defenders hope not to have to take refuge. But Obama's newfound rigidity toward Israel suggests a declining concern on his part with those pro-Israel liberals who supported him; seen alongside the increasingly anti-Israel tenor of left-liberal punditry, it makes one wonder how long the Democratic Party will remain committed to liberal Zionism. Here is where the BDS movement may have a long-term effect. Should the demonic picture of Israel now being propagated in the academy continue to be preached without significant rebuttal from liberal leaders, it could, within a generation, change the character of the Democratic Party. If so, the consequences would be baleful, for the party itself and for the elusive but necessary dream of peace in the Middle East.

Kenneth Stern

## The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel

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Cary Nelson and Gabriel Brahm, in less than a year, were able to assemble, edit, index, and bring to press a 500-plus page thoughtful volume of essays, outlining many of the problems with boycotting (some would say blacklisting) Israeli academic institutions (and, as the book convincingly argues, the academics who make up those institutions, Jewish and Arab alike).

The impetuses for the book were the votes in late 2013 by the American Studies Association (and some other small academic groups) to boycott Israeli academic institutions, and the anti-Israel resolution and one-sided pro-boycott panel discussion at the January 2014 meeting of the Modern Language Association. While a growing body of literature endorses an academic boycott (or Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions more broadly), there was no single volume outlining the case against an academic boycott, and Nelson and Brahm were determined to produce one.

Like any volume of essays, some are more valuable than others, but there are exceptional ones here. Stand-out essays include one by Russell Berman, who makes a compelling case that there is no such thing as an “institutional” boycott, because of the ways an individual academic “necessarily depends on the institution;” and by Sharon Ann Musher, who retells the troubling story of the American Studies Association’s endorsement of an academic boycott in powerful detail, showing how at each step pro-boycott proponents

within the ASA chose to limit discussion and derail communications from those opposed to the resolution.

Musher also includes a great quote not adequately reported at the time, demonstrating the rank absurdity of an academic boycott as a means that is supposed to motivate Israel politicians to become more progressive – Catholic University President John Garvey’s description of the ASA vote as “a kind of inept volunteer fire department, aiming to put out the Israeli-Palestinian conflagration by throwing gasoline on the fire. That’s not exactly right. It has decided to pour gas not on the source of the fire, but on bystanders, some of whom are trying to extinguish the flames.” Likewise, in the valuable supporting material at the end of the book, Sari Nusseibeh, then (2006) president of Al Quds University, correctly noted, “If we are to look at Israeli society, it is within the academic community that we’ve had the most progressive pro-peace views and views that have come out in favor of seeing us as equals. If you want to punish any sector, this is the last one to approach.”

The most important essay is Cary Nelson’s thoughtful examination of Judith Butler, and the pro-academic boycott movement for which she is both a leading advocate and guiding intellectual. Nelson deconstructs what he terms Butler’s “idealist fantasy of historical possibility,” in which she presumes that Jewish Israelis would gladly abandon their capacity for national self-expression, and willingly see Israel disappear, in order to effectuate Butler’s view of what a political solution to the conflict might look like (in effect, Jewish sovereignty relinquished, and a majority Arab population in a single state, where the common frame of identity would be shared senses of diaspora). Nelson effectively demonstrates that this is not only magical thinking, but also a formula for perpetual violence (since neither side will abandon its desires for national self-expression without a fight).

As other essays make clear, the point of the exercise of the academic boycott is not necessarily to “win,” or as some of its supporters believe, a vehicle to get Israel to pull out of the West Bank, but rather to reinforce the narrative that Israel is a deformed, illegitimate society that has no right to be treated by the same standards as other nation states (sort of like how classic antisemitism views Jews).

#### ADVERTISEMENT

Ilan Troen’s essays, toward the end of the volume, underscore two important points: 1) that the conflict is wrongly cast by pro-boycotters as a simple one of European colonizers and their victims, rather than as a complex conflict between two peoples, both of whom have indigenous ties to the land and 2) the deep involvement of Palestinian Arabs within the Israeli higher education system, and the damage that would be done to them, and to efforts to increase empathy across the political divide, if an academic boycott were to succeed.

Other important contributions are David Hirsh’s review of the academic boycott efforts in the United Kingdom, and Paul Berman’s thoughtful preface.

The volume is also intriguing because, while politics divide pro- and anti-boycott activists, there are also significant political divisions in the anti-boycott camp, ones that are not directly addressed, but make the volume richer for this diversity.

Many of the essays dance around the question of whether BDS in general, or the proposal of a blacklist of Israeli academics is antisemitic. Whether the “antisemitism” tag fits, in whole or part, is not a necessary question to answer -- academic boycotts are anathema to the educational process regardless. But many essays demonstrate that the principles behind the boycott (such as the PACBI call for boycott based, in part, on objection to Israel’s “Zionist ideology”) are intended by the movement’s leaders as opposition to the Jewish national project, presented as a principled anti-racist stance by those who either see themselves as victims of racism, or as allies to such victims. Alan Johnson, in his contribution, calls this “vindictive one-statism [which] seeks to end Israel by rewinding the film of history and undoing 1948.” Nelson posits, “any solution that involves dismantling the Jewish state is antisemitic in effect and fueled at least obliquely, as Butler seems not to understand, by antisemitic traditions.”

Some of the essays – by anti-boycott activists who have shown little respect for notions of academic freedom – are somewhat troubling. Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, who provides a useful analysis of the disciplines from which most pro-academic boycotters come, is otherwise clearing her throat for advancing a blacklist of those who support the boycott – which she did shortly before the book was released, and for which she was sharply criticized by leading Jewish studies scholars. If teachers are treating students unfairly, they should be criticized for what they do. Presumptions of how a professor acts or may act toward Jewish or pro-Israel students because of his or her political beliefs have no more place in the academy than presumptions, thankfully not so often heard these days, that homosexuals should not be afforded the same opportunities to teach because of fear they might be pedophiles (or, for a more exact parallel, that professors who are fervently pro-Israel might not be fair to a student of Palestinian origin). There is a fundamental distinction – clear to some authors, but not others – between overt discrimination (such as a blacklist of scholars who happen to be women, or Muslim, or Black, or Jewish, or Israeli), and the discussion of ideas, which include not only the articulation of reasons one might be supportive of a boycott, but also engaging in activity to advance those ideas.

Rossman-Benjamin also in effect diminishes academic freedom, by setting up the straw man that it is a “vague” and “malleabl[e] construct,” and then arguing against teaching, political speech, or political action she doesn’t like as items that ought, in her view, to result in legal threats against universities and faculty members.

Ken Marcus, the most serious and consistent of the conservative and right-wing actors who have essays in this volume, provides a detailed and nuanced look at the question of antisemitism in the BDS movement. He is commendably cautious in his language as he isolates four grounds on which to consider this question (which he terms “Intentionality, Tacitness, Memetics, and Jewish Trait”). Yet, troublingly, he sees the antisemitism

question as central, and criticizes those who focus “instead on lower-stake arguments against BDS, such as its hypocrisy, false claims, or violations of academic freedom...if BDS is anti-Semitic, then its damage to academic freedom would be, at least by the standards of value, a matter of secondary importance.”

For Marcus and Rossman-Benjamin and some of the other authors, campus speech which they claim is antisemitic should apparently be beyond the pale. But it would be unfair and unwise to label advocacy of a boycott of Israel as per se antisemitic, and even if it were, it would nonetheless be protected political speech. Campus debates permit speech which some consider sexist (questions about the alleged different abilities of genders to do different things), racist (incantations to the Bell Curve), Islamophobic (questions about the role of Islam in contemporary terrorism), and other difficult and perhaps bigoted inquiries. The answer is not to suppress such speech, but to counter it and to demonstrate, by evidence and argument, the bigotry involved.

Coupled with the troubling notions of suppression and censorship, rather than exposure and censure, are some suggestions – Ms. Rossman-Benjamin’s again in particular – that incantations to “social justice” are in part to blame. She writes that certain “areas of study . . . such as the civil rights movement, feminism, anti-imperialism, and Marxism, which were established to pursue ‘social justice’ for the oppressed by combating the ‘evils’ of the racist, sexist, colonialist, capitalist oppressor . . . makes for the blurring of the lines between scholarship and activism.” There is, of course, a germ of truth in what Rossman-Benjamin writes: some academics are so driven by their politics that they apply and model different standards of critical analysis to ideas with which they agree, than to those which challenge their world view. It is one thing to observe that activists who believe they have justice on their side (as do many pro-Israel proponents too) tend to exhibit zealotry, and that zealotry frequently is a corrosive to critical thinking. It is quite another to suggest that such instincts, whether rooted in fields more concerned with social justice than others or as part of extracurricular interests, are somehow inappropriate for the college campus.

2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and Freedom Summer. Those who are old enough remember well the social activism of students in 1968 globally, and the role students have had in supporting movements to defeat South African Apartheid, to protect abortion rights, to oppose exploitive labor practices and corporate pollution. Social action for social justice is not the problem here, nor is the problem that some social action is linked to discussion in the classroom, or that some occurs on the quad or in the street. Students are better prepared to be contributing citizens if they also have a passion to right wrongs. The problem is that too many of the anti-boycott activists (like too many pro-boycott activists) evidently want to suppress rather than expose those with whom they disagree. Likewise, some boycott opponents suffer from the same myopia they accuse boycott supporters of exhibiting, but in reverse (BDS promoters are too often defense lawyers for Palestinians, arguing away the importance of things like antisemitism written in to the Hamas charter, so as to paint Israel as wrong all the time; many anti-BDS activists are too often defense lawyers for Israel, not even

pausing to consider why the condition of the Palestinians might warrant a caring young person to exhibit some sympathy, or that actions of the Israeli government increasing settlement activity have real consequences, not only for the prospects of peace, but also for ordinary Palestinians).

Certainly, there are some students and professors, eager to right wrongs, who come aboard the BDS bandwagon without much thought, or as political fashion – frequently with empathy for only one side, and blinders about bigotry and double-standards. But the answer to this problem is not to bemoan their activism, but to do precisely what this volume is doing: demonstrate, by facts, that the arguments in favor of boycott are not only faulty and dangerous, but at heart discriminatory and not in the least bit progressive (if one is actually seeking a just solution to the conflict).

Yet, despite these shortcomings of some essays from the right, the essays as a whole are essential reading, for those who want to understand, in detail, why an academic boycotts of Israel is discrimination, pure and simple, and why it threatens not only Israeli academics, and not just Jewish academics in addition, but the academy itself. It is essential reading.

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Jonathan Marks, **Abstain Loudly:**

A review of *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*

**reprinted from *Scholars for Peace in the Middle East*  
and *The Algemeiner* (November 2014)**

In my favorite essay in the superb *Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, Emily Budick speaks to the failure of many academics caught up in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement to live up to two requirements of “moral thinking and action.” The first is “the requirement that each and every one of us investigate the truth and examine for ourselves what constitutes ‘the good.’” The second is “the necessity of placing oneself, and not only the object of one’s criticism, under suspicion.” Even intellectuals can “capitulate to badges and names.” Many of those who support the BDS movement repeat slogans—“Zionism is racism”; “Israel is an apartheid state”—whose meaning they have never seriously considered. Such intellectuals are not rebelling but conforming to a view of Israel that now dominates certain academic fields and subfields.

One need only consider the case of the Association for Asian American Studies which in April 2013 became the first American academic association explicitly to support BDS. The vote, conducted by secret ballot, was unanimous, without a single abstention. More than a year has passed since, and BDS has been much debated. But to my knowledge not one member of the AAAS—not one!—has publicly questioned, much less condemned, the resolution. This astounding lockstep suggests that Budick is right to think that “self-interrogation, and therefore intellectual honesty” is “lacking in many supporters of BDS against Israel.” Indeed, “there are too many folks simply jumping on the nearest bandwagon without bothering to ask where that bandwagon is headed and what it stands for.”

This malady, to which we intellectuals like to think ourselves immune, was noted long ago by Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “a freethinker or philosopher today would have been nothing but a fanatic at the time of the [Holy] League.” Indeed, Rousseau, the victim of a propaganda campaign managed by “enlightenment” thinkers, well knew that progressive intellectuals could come to resemble their enemies in their eagerness to suppress dissent. With his dramatic withdrawal from the intellectual life of Paris, Rousseau indicated that he thought the malady incurable; intellectuals setting out to

live the life of the mind in the midst of society will inevitably, being as vain and selfish as non-intellectuals, give in to the temptation to sacrifice their integrity, whether to the party in power or to the party that hopes to be in power. From this perspective the idea of the university as a socially sanctioned refuge for inquiry is a fantasy.

I am not sure if Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm would own up to it, but the book they have co-edited reads to me not only as a critique of the boycott Israel movement in academia, but also as a hopeful defense of the possibility of scholarship. Scholarship need not eventuate in non-partisanship—most of the essayists in the volume are advocates of a two state solution—but scholars insist that opinion be informed, both by the facts of the matter, insofar as we can ascertain them, and by the strongest arguments to be offered for rival interpretations of those facts. Perhaps above all, scholars as scholars withhold judgment when they are not confident they know what they are talking about. In this spirit, Nelson and Brahm offer not only the essays, but also a history of Israel, and a selection of resources, including pro-BDS resources like the Electronic Intifada and Jewish Voice for Peace, for readers seeking to understand better what all the fuss is about. One of Nelson's own contributions, a patient, charitable, extended analysis of Judith Butler's anti-Zionism, is a model of engaging what one's own opponents hold up as their strongest arguments.

Because I cannot hope to do justice to the 25 essays included in *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, I will follow one thread, which leads through most of them, the thread I have already identified, via Budick, as the tension between the BDS movement and self-interrogation. In the first of four sections of the book, the essayists consider the trouble with academic boycotts in general, referencing but not focusing single mindedly on the Israel boycott. Russell Berman, in "Scholars Against Scholarship," argues that academic boycotts introduce a "political litmus test into the scholarly world," demanding that scholars ritually denounce the boycott's object in order to be welcomed into the community. Writing of the American Studies Association's recent decision to boycott Israel, Berman observes that the boycott necessarily entails "restriction on the free flow of ideas." Although the ASA's leaders have denied up and down that they intend this restriction, a cursory reading of the resolution they passed, included in the volume, indicates that those who dare to utter a defense of Israel will have, as far as ASA is concerned, identified themselves as supporters of "racism," "discrimination," and "xenophobia." To demonize Israel and its supporters

in this way is not only to absolve oneself of responsibility for listening to their arguments but also to applaud those who wish to shun Israeli scholars quite beyond the shunning the ASA boycott specifically calls for. The ASA in effect “appeals to its members to do whatever it likes to the demonized enemy.” With the notable exception of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, those who think they are fighting demons are not inclined toward self-criticism.

The second section uses the ASA boycott as a kind of case study. Sharon Musher’s shocking essay in that part, “The Closing of the American Studies Association’s Mind,” underscores the determination of pro-BDS academics to avoid the investigation into the truth that Budick identifies as a requirement of moral thinking and action and that remains the only widely accepted justification for the existence of universities. In the period leading up to the vote on the BDS resolution, the ASA leadership refused to “circulate or post . . . letters or any material that conveyed alternative perspectives,” including one letter signed by eight former presidents of the association. That refusal had nothing to do with a wish on the leadership’s part to remain neutral. Indeed, more than half of the voting members of ASA’s National Council had previously endorsed the boycott, and leaders unapologetically used their power to make sure the resolution passed, in spite of the valiant efforts of Musher and her allies. “All of the ASA’s official correspondence preemptively supported the boycott and included links to works that supported it.” The leadership posted “only pro-boycott news and links” on its homepage.

The atmosphere at the 2013 meeting at which the resolution was discussed was no better. At a “town hall” on Israel and Palestine, presided over by boycott supporters, mild opposition was met with “snaps, hisses, and boos.” One questioner who had the temerity to bring up her experience with anti-Semitism was told by a panelist to “take it to the therapist.” Although Musher portrays the debate over the resolution as a contest that the good guys may have won had they been permitted fully to present their arguments, I suspect the ASA would have voted for the resolution anyway. Indeed, Musher herself says that a number of senior scholars recruited to oppose the resolution had left or never joined the ASA because, their own left or liberal politics notwithstanding, they found the ASA too politicized. For that reason, we cannot necessarily attribute the bullying tactics of the pro-boycott forces to desperation or the closeness of the contest; it is at least equally plausible that their attempts to humiliate and silence the opposition reflect their view—do they convey it to their students?—of how academic discourse

ought to work.

The third and longest section concerns the place of the BDS movement on the left. In a political atmosphere in which Zionism is routinely treated as a right wing phenomenon, it is refreshing to see people like Alan Johnson, a member of the editorial board of *Dissent*, turn the tables on anti-Zionism, a species of what he calls “reactionary anti-imperialism.” Anti-Zionist ideology reduces “the complexity of the post cold-war world to a single great contest—“Imperialism” against “the resistance.”” According to this Manichean view, adopted by “many on the left,” Israel, whatever its virtues, cannot be forgiven for being allied with the West. More strikingly, Islamist movements, whatever their vices, can be embraced by the left so long as they oppose Israel and the West. That is how Judith Butler came to describe the “eliminationist antisemites of Hamas and Hezbollah” as “social movements that are progressive, that are on the Left, that are part of a global Left.” To manage this almost unbelievable feat, Butler and others on her side are compelled resolutely to avoid any recognition that Israel has legitimate security concerns, that it is anything other than a settler state akin in motivation and power to the British Empire, that anyone other than Israel is responsible for ongoing violence in the Middle East, and that there is such a thing as Arab and Palestinian antisemitism that cannot be understood as a reaction to Israeli aggression. Johnson is one of several essayists prepared to risk the charge of right-wingism and Islamophobia to save the left from doing on a large scale what the ASA has done on a small scale, namely embracing an illiberal, perhaps anti-Semitic, doctrine that can thrive only by trading the pursuit of the truth for the repetition of slogans.

One of those slogans, that Israel is an apartheid state, should not survive contact with the fourth section which, as Cary Nelson puts it in the book’s introduction, “challenges readers to consider what they should know about Israel before taking either a pro- or anti-boycott position.” Shira Wolosky’s “Teaching in Transnational Israel” describes Wolosky’s experience teaching in Israel universities, which provide “a rare place and time in which students from different backgrounds are together in a common endeavor, that of learning and earning a degree.” In Wolosky’s feminist theory course at Hebrew University, “women with covered hair and without covered hair, Muslim and Jewish, Christian and many other sorts of transnational Israelis” develop critical perspectives on their communities of origin and discover “the norms of other communities in which other students are members in ways that are both critical and respectful.” Only in a left defined by

the BDS movement, could Wolosky, who is not alone among the essayists in thinking that “Israel must withdraw from the West Bank,” risk being written out of the left and accused of pinkwashing for teaching feminism at Hebrew University, while Judith Butler, who has welcomed Hamas to the global left, remains a leftist and feminist heroine.

Wolosky’s course is just one illustration of the way in which the Manichean view of the BDS movement is out of tune with Israeli reality. Ilan Troen showcases cooperation between Israel and Palestinian universities, and Rachel S. Harris explores an emerging Arab-Israeli literature that refuses both Zionist and Palestinian nationalism in favor of a hybrid identity that takes into account the “complexities of contemporary Israel.” While scholars and teachers typically seek to acknowledge such complexities, supporters of BDS are reduced to discounting them or, still worse, proposing that cooperative projects and attempts to find a third way between Zionism and Arab nationalism are betrayals because they set back the effort to delegitimize Israel.

It is hard to know what impact a book like *The Case Against Academic Boycotts* will have. I said before that scholars as scholars withhold judgment when they are not confident they know what they are talking about. But in the present, heated atmosphere, in which a relatively small number of anti-Zionist students and faculty members are opposed by a still smaller number of students and faculty members, often but not always Zionists, onlookers who do not bother to inform themselves are likely to come away with the idea that Zionism is one suspect extreme in a quarrel between extremists. To prevent this consequence, scholars with no special interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be persuaded not simply to reserve judgment but to abstain, if they must abstain, loudly. That is, they must come to understand that it is important to speak publicly against attempts to commit schools and scholarly associations to causes neither students nor faculty can claim to know much about.

The premise on which such public speech would rest, that when we don’t know, we should inquire, is, of course, the premise on which the scholarly enterprise, whether it is practiced by natural scientists or philosophers, rests. Nelson and Brahm’s project supposes what Rousseau seems to deny, that intellectuals, whatever their susceptibility to the vanity, fear, and indolence to which everyone is susceptible, will in the end, when they understand what is at stake, defend their fragile enterprise against those who see ideas only as

means to political ends. I think that Nelson and Brahm are right but that their success depends on reaching an audience—especially the scientists who have a stake in these debates but are usually left out of them—beyond the audience their collection is most likely to find. That will require a retail politics at colleges and universities, and within scholarly associations, that will be difficult and time consuming. But I know of no better guide than this book to the kinds of arguments one needs to make, or of any more heartening example of the diversity of voices and talents that can be drawn to the effort.

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## Elizabeth Redden, IS BDS ANTI-SEMITIC?

reprinted from *Inside Higher Education* (November 3, 2014)

Is the academic boycott against Israel anti-Semitic?

Variations of that question come up again and again in a new book of essays, *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm (Wayne State University Press). In his introduction, Nelson, the Jubilee Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences and professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, pulls no punches, writing of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel that all who join it “are effectively promoting the dissolution of the Jewish state whether or not that is their intention.”

The book's 500-plus pages cover a lot of (contested) ground, with essays exploring the nexus between the boycott and the political left, the range of BDS-related activity on American campuses, and examples of Israeli-Palestinian collaboration in higher education, among other topics. The book does not include any essays from supporters of academic boycotts. It reprints the American Association of University Professors statement opposing academic boycotts, in general, “[i]n view of the association's long-standing commitment to the free exchange of ideas,” and includes a whole range of essays examining the boycott in light of the Israel context, in particular. A section is devoted to analyses and reflections on the American Studies Association's December vote to endorse the academic boycott of Israel. Another section consists of a 55-page history of Israel, authored by Nelson, Rachel S. Harris and Kenneth W. Stein.

Essayists examine a range of issues, including the distinction BDS advocates make between boycotting individuals versus institutions of higher education and the use or misuse of the analogy to the boycott movement against apartheid South Africa, but arguably no issue is as loaded as that of the BDS

movement and its relationship with anti-Semitism. Nelson writes in his introduction that supporters of the BDS movement have largely deflected questions of anti-Semitism by complaining that Israel's defenders dismiss all criticism of Israeli government policy as anti-Semitic -- a response that Nelson characterizes as a red herring.

"Many of the contributors here have criticized Israeli government policy themselves and recommended basic changes in it," writes Nelson, the former president of the AAUP. "That, however, leaves unanswered a series of more vexing questions: Does anti-Semitism help explain why Israel is singled out for especially severe international criticism when other states have much worse human rights records? Does anti-Semitism help underwrite demands that Israel literally be eliminated as a Jewish state and be absorbed into a larger Arab-dominated nation? Is the BDS movement as a whole contaminated by clearly anti-Semitic statements by some of its advocates? Are idealistic BDS advocates responsible for unintended anti-Semitic political and social consequences of the movement?"

"At issue, we should emphasize, is not whether individual BDS advocates are anti-Semitic, though some surely are, but whether the history of anti-Semitic discourse informs BDS reasoning even if supporters are unaware of that," Nelson writes.

Pertinent to this question are the specifics of the BDS platform, which, opponents point out, doesn't limit itself to calling for an end of the occupation of the West Bank but rather goes much further to demand the right of Palestinian refugees from 1948 to return to their homes -- a demand that Israel's advocates argue would result in an Arab-dominated country and the end of Israel as a Jewish state. While Omar Barghouti, a key BDS activist, has emphasized in his writings that the movement is "neutral" on the issue of a one-state versus a two-state political solution, some of BDS's leading thinkers (including Barghouti and the philosopher Judith Butler) have personally



advocated for a one-state solution that Nelson argues would be disastrous and even deadly for a minority Jewish population.

In his essay, "The Problem with Judith Butler" (who is among the BDS movement's most prominent proponents in American academe), Nelson argues that any solution that involves dissolving the Jewish state is "anti-Semitic in effect" and fueled, "at least obliquely," by an anti-Semitic legacy that views Jews as "secondary or expendable."

"Criticism that pressures Israel to improve its laws and practices, that helps Israel see its way toward a negotiated solution, that would lead to withdrawal from the West Bank -- while reaffirming Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state within secure borders -- is not anti-Semitic," Nelson writes. "Claims that Israel has no right to exist as a Jewish state, that it was an illegitimate colonialist enterprise from the outset, are indeed anti-Semitic in effect."

Butler preemptively addressed allegations such as these in her 2012 book, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (Columbia University Press), in which she offers a critique of political Zionism informed by Jewish writers and traditions. "More often than not in the United States, when the question is posed, 'are you a Zionist?' the meaning is. 'Do you believe in Israel's right to exist?'" she writes. "The question always presupposes that we assume the existing form of the state provides legitimate grounds for its own existence. But if one argues that the current grounds for its existence as well as the existing formation of the state may not be legitimate, that is taken to be a genocidal position. So a political discussion on what constitutes the legitimating grounds for any state in that region is immediately silenced because to ask after the question of legitimacy (without knowing in advance how it will be answered) is taken not as an essential reflective moment for any democratic polity but rather as a dissimulation with to see a given population annihilated. Obviously, no thoughtful discussion about legitimacy can take place under such conditions."

Butler, the Maxine Elliot Professor in Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, writes of the “founding contradiction” of the Israeli state in the wake of World War II in that the needs of one group of refugees (Jews) were addressed by creating a whole new group of refugees (Palestinians). “This founding contradiction is covered over by the causal argument that not only leads from the Nazi genocide to the founding of the State of Israel, but takes it at least two steps further, claiming (a) that the founding of the state on those grounds, and not others, was legitimate and (b) that any efforts to criticize the Israeli state for its policies of expulsion, occupation, and land confiscation amount to ‘delegitimation’ that threatens to reverse the course of history and expose the Jewish people to genocidal violence. These arguments have been made ex post facto in order to legitimate a state apparatus and a militarized colonial occupation, to build a sense of nationalist entitlement, and to rename all acts of military aggression as necessary self-defense.”

In addition to calling for the return of Palestinian refugees, the BDS platform calls on Israel to end the occupation of territories gained in the 1967 war, to dismantle the wall separating Israel from the West Bank, and to accord full equality to Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel.

"The reason why the Global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement includes among its goals the rights of Palestinians dispossessed in 1948 as well as the damaged rights of Palestinian Israelis is that it is not possible to restrict the problem of Palestinian subjugation to the occupation alone," Butler writes. "If we do so, we agree not only to forget the claims of 1948, bury the right to return, but also accept forms of unjust majority discrimination within the present borders of Israel. We fail to see the structural link between the Zionist demand for demographic advantage and the multivalent forms of dispossession that affect Palestinians who have been forced to become diasporic, those who live with partial rights within the borders and those who live under occupation in the West

Bank or in the open-air prison of Gaza or other refugee camps in the region.”

In *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Haymarket Books, 2011), Barghouti writes of what he describes as the “ ‘delegitimization’ scare tactic.” “Indeed, BDS strives to delegitimize Israel’s settler-colonial oppression, apartheid, and ongoing ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian people, just as the South Africa boycott was aimed at delegitimizing apartheid there. In no other boycott against any state has the preposterous claim been made that this nonviolent tactic is intended to end the very physical existence of the target state,” he writes.

“The ‘delegitimization’ scare tactic further failed to impress any reasonable person because its most far-reaching -- and entirely unsubstantiated -- claim against BDS is that the movement aims to ‘supersede the Zionist model with a [single] state that is based on the ‘one person, one vote’ principle’ -- hardly the most evil or disquieting accusation for anyone even vaguely interested in democracy!”

“As to the anti-Semitism charge,” Barghouti writes elsewhere in the book, “it is patently misplaced and is clearly being used as a tool of intellectual intimidation. It is hardly worth reiterating that the Palestinian BDS Call does not target Jews, or even Israelis qua Jews; the call is strictly directed against Israel as a colonial and apartheid power that violates Palestinian rights and international law.”

The question of whether Israel rightly qualifies as a colonial and apartheid state is a deeply disputed one that won’t be resolved here. But a theme that emerges throughout the new book *Against Academic Boycotts* is a conviction that some who have embraced BDS have signed onto a movement that is more radical than they realize.

“I do not doubt that many people support the BDS [movement] out of genuine sympathy for the suffering of Palestinians,

which is no fantasy,” writes Emily Budick, the Ann and Joseph Edelman Professor of American Studies and director of the Center for Literary Studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. “And I am sure there are those among the BDS supporters who, like members of the organization itself, believe exactly what the BDS is calling for, which is destruction of the State of Israel as a nation and as a Jewish homeland. But I also suspect that there are many others who do not wish the extinction of Israel, either through its outright absorption into a new unitary state (Barghouti’s position) or its de facto dissolution into an Israel in which there is a Palestinian majority.”

In his contribution to the collection, an essay entitled “Is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement Anti-Semitic?” Kenneth L. Marcus situates the BDS movement within the history of prior anti-Israel and anti-Jewish boycotts and concludes that BDS is anti-Semitic, “as its predecessors were, because some of its proponents act out of conscious hostility to the Jewish people; others act from unconscious or tacit disdain for Jews; and still others operate out of a climate of opinion that contains elements that are hostile to Jews and serve as the conduits through whom anti-Jewish tropes and memes are communicated; while all of them work to sustain a movement that attacks the commitment to Israel that is central to the identity of the Jewish people as a whole.”

Marcus, the president and general counsel of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, an organization that bills itself as conducting “research, education, and advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses,” goes on to say that this does not imply that “all or even most” of BDS’s proponents are anti-Semitic. He concludes that indeed some do not have discriminatory or prejudicial motives.

“Nevertheless,” he writes, “it ought to give them pause to realize that, for whatever reasons, they are participating in a boycott that has deeply unsavory roots and ramifications. It is not coincidental that the world’s only Jewish state is subjected

to greater scrutiny and pressure than most of the world's other nations. Nor is it coincidental that current efforts to boycott the Jewish State resemble the nearly constant efforts that have been made to boycott Jewish businesses since well before Israel's establishment."

Sanford R. Silverburg (Catawba College, Salisbury, NC)

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(February/March 2015)

Nelson, Cary and Gabriel Noah Brahm (eds.).  
*The Case against Academic Boycotts of Israel*.  
Chicago and New York: MLA Members for Scholar's Rights  
distributed by Wayne State University Press, 2015.  
549 pp. \$33.02. (9780990331605).

Probably the newest form of anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and an anti-Israel activist statement is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement. The ideological profile is clearly Left-of-Center and the primary theme, at least expressed, is the perceived oppressed state of Palestinian Arabs in the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict and to a lesser extent discrimination of Israeli Arabs. To counter the charges leveled by the BDS, largely on college and university campuses internationally, is this collection of 25 essays, supplemented by an expanded introduction. The collection is divided into six sections: how does one oppose a boycott; examining the minority within the American Studies Association, the humanities group that engineered BDS; how BDS fits within American culture; Israel as a target; a brief historical treatment of Israel, and a subject expose of BDS.

An online listing of related resources augments the collection of essays. The issues confronted are ethical, historical, and political as they are connected to BDS and provide the substance for anyone in a position to oppose a BDS spokesperson. This is a useful tool for individuals and groups that have Israel's interests in mind and have the opportunity to raise an objection to BDS.

**Gerald Sorin**

**Academic boycott: free speech or sordid vilification of Israel?**

Reprinted from ***HAARETZ***  
March 20, 2015

*The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement is increasing its grip on U.S. campuses, especially in post-secondary education. A definitive new anthology sees it as outright discrimination.*

*"The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel,"* edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm, MLA Members for Scholars' Rights, 549 pages, \$34.99

All states commit crimes, but only one state is pronounced immoral and fatally flawed. And only that one – the whole world over – is subject to cultural and academic boycotts: Israel. A case against an academic boycott of Israel might seem so easy to make that we'd hardly need more than a paragraph or two in which to do it. So why publish a 550-page book, including 25 essays by leading scholars and journalists, accompanied by 30 pages of documents? A good question without an obvious answer, until we discover in this impressive anthology that the American Studies Association (ASA) is not the only academic organization to have recently passed resolutions supporting the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS).

Preceded by several historically misleading and morally suspect paragraphs beginning with "Whereas," the BDS resolutions passed by the ASA, the Association for Asian-American Studies, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (The Modern Language Association defeated a resolution, but sadly not without a battle) call on Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders, end its occupation and "colonization" of all Arab lands, and respect the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in United Nations Resolution 194.

Nowhere in its literature or discussion does BDS make mention of the fact that 194 goes back to 1948, and was conditional on the Arabs/Palestinians' agreement to live in peace with its neighbors. Nor is there any indication that the resolution was vetoed by all the Arab states party to the 1948 conflict.

Moreover, as Emily Budick (“When a Boycott is not ‘Moral Action’...”) argues in agreement with more than a dozen other contributing writers to “The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel,” the implementation of Resolution 194 would be nothing less than the dissolution of the State of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. It would also involve the deconstruction of a fully constituted nation that was established by an international vote in the UN and where 8 million people – including almost 1.7 million Israeli Arabs – now reside.

Many essays in this volume – substantial, well-reasoned and scholarly – suggest the BDS resolutions will fail (even if more may be coming) in so far as they will not stop U.S. universities and academic associations in any significant number from interacting with Israeli scholars and institutions of higher education. Also, there is no chance at all that boycotts by themselves, whatever their number, will move Israel to withdraw from the territories or to agree to the unqualified “right of return” for Palestinian refugees and their descendants. No people living within the borders of a sovereign state would surrender its national identity without massive resistance. And who would coerce the Israelis to do so – the UN, NATO, the European Union or the United States? And with what – an embargo enforced by a flotilla of mighty naval vessels?

### **‘Something always sticks’**

While the resolutions have no teeth, they certainly have repercussions and it would be wrong to ignore them. In their brilliantly constructed essay “When Failure Succeeds...,” professors Samuel and Carol Edelman show explicitly what several other essays strongly imply: BDS arguments made by a committed, persistent and aggressively vocal minority, employing what Sabah Salih (“Islam, BDS, and the West”) calls the “tyranny of unverifiable claims,” can create in the minds of many a context for the delegitimization and demonization of Israel.

The Edelmanns point to Julius Streicher, the master of anti-Semitic invective and propaganda in prewar Germany, who said, even as he lost all the libel



cases brought against him, “Something always sticks.” According to the Edelmans, who cite credible test results, this mudslinging tactic is most effective among “at-risk” groups such as young men and women pursuing post-secondary education.

The BDS Movement’s call for academic boycotts is especially dangerous because it directly impacts students and scholars on college campuses. Indeed, a new combined study from the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law and Trinity College found that anti-Semitism is on the rise in U.S. institutions of higher education. It is hard to imagine this has nothing to do with the fact that a large number of teachers who attended meetings of their professional organizations in 2013 voted there for resolutions that included some variation of the following: “Whereas there is no substantive academic freedom for Palestinian students and scholars under Israeli occupation, and Israeli institutions of higher learning are a party to Israeli state policies that violate human rights and negatively impact the working conditions of Palestinian scholars and students, [the association] endorses and will honor the call of ‘Palestinian civil society’ for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.”

If you are scratching your head about the promotion of an academic boycott to end an academic boycott, you will want to read philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s supremely logical piece, “Against Academic Boycotts,” in which she distinguishes boycotts that are never defensible within the academy from: censure; organized public condemnation; helping the harmed; and vigilance on behalf of the truth – all of which are more ethical and efficacious than what amount to “blacklists.”

You will learn much, too, about how little the BDS Movement knows about the realities of academic freedom in Israel from Ilan Troen’s essays “The Campaign to Boycott Israeli Universities” and “The Israeli-Palestinian Relationship in Higher Education.” In both pieces, the Israeli professor astutely examines historical and ideological sources relevant to boycotts, as well as evidence gathered from his experience in the field. These contributions, along with the nuanced essays by other Israeli academics teaching in mixed Arab-Israeli classrooms, demonstrate, in contradistinction to BDS resolutions, that there is substantial academic freedom for students and scholars – resident and visiting – who teach, lecture or participate in seminars and workshops in the West Bank and in Israel proper.

Valuable material supporting Troen's arguments can be found in the documents at the end of the book, including a statement by Palestinian Prof. Sari Nusseibeh, who in 2006, as president of Al-Quds University, correctly noted, "If we look at Israeli society, it is within the academic community that we've had the most progressive pro-peace views and views that have come out in favor of seeing [Palestinians and Israelis] as equals. If you want to punish any sector, this is the last one to approach."

One begins to wonder what the academic boycott movement is really all about. The answers advanced here are varied and sometimes in disagreement; but almost all contributors see BDS as a deeply sordid attempt to vilify the Jewish state.

### **The hijacked left**

Most of the presentations in "The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel" concentrate on the current situation in U.S. post-secondary education, including its ancillary academic associations – arenas populated by a disproportionate number of left-leaning professors. And as Baruch College's Prof. Mitchell Cohen complains in "Anti-Semitism and the Left that Never Learns," the designation "left" has been "hijacked" by those who disingenuously self-exonerate by insisting that they are anti-Zionist but not anti-Semitic.



Omar Barghouti: studies at Tel Aviv University while advocating an academic boycott of Israel.  
Screenshot from YouTube

One can, of course, make this theoretical distinction, but it is hard to credit coming from those who insinuate that Israel is an “alien implant,” remonstrate against the enormous political and economic power of “the Jewish Lobby,” and blame “Zionists” for an astonishingly long and apparently endless list of dastardly deeds. At the same time, these members of what they call the “global progressive left” believe there is nothing that Hamas – whose 1988 charter calls for the extinction of Israel – can do that can’t be blamed “in the final analysis” on Israel.

The hijacked left is led intellectually by Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, who opts for a “one-state solution” or two states, each with a Palestinian majority made up in the main of returning refugees. What happens to the inevitable Jewish-Israeli minority seems to be none of his concern.

Barghouti is described persuasively in several essays as someone who castigates, but completely fails to understand academic freedom. He sees it only as part of a “liberal hegemony” that constrains the moral obligations of scholars to respond to situations of serious violations of human rights. For him, academic freedom is merely a cultural fetish, one to be casually disregarded when necessary to achieve social justice. Ironically, even as Barghouti campaigns actively for a worldwide academic boycott of Israel, he is studying at Tel Aviv University in pursuit of a PhD. In response to a petition urging his expulsion, signed by 184,000 people, the university, citing the principle of academic freedom, refused to act against Barghouti.

Another outspoken advocate and intellectual guru for the pro-academic boycott movement is Judith Butler, currently a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and a member of the advisory board of Jewish Voice for Peace. In perhaps the most important essay in the book, Cary Nelson deconstructs what he calls Butler’s “idealist fantasy of historical possibility.” Butler seems to believe that Jewish Israelis would willingly give up their right to national self-expression in order to effectuate a nonviolent political solution to the festering, century-old problem of Jewish-Arab relations.



Judith Butler, a leading advocate of the academic boycott of Israel. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

Not only is this magical thinking, it is also a recipe for the endless and uninterrupted violence Butler claims to be against. Neither Palestinians nor Jewish Israelis will relinquish their nationalism without a fight. Moreover, though she says she has been quoted “out of context,” Butler has described violence-prone Hamas and Hezbollah as “social movements that are progressive” and “part of the global left.”

In other slippery pronouncements, as Russell Berman shows in “The Boycott as an Infringement on Academic Culture,” Butler – in order to “prove” she is not against academic freedom – makes an egregiously false distinction between boycotting educational institutions, which is legitimate in her eyes, and boycotting individual scholars, which is not. Since professors and researchers necessarily depend on their institutions for funding, there is no distinction of the type Butler claims.

### **Is winning the goal?**

As other essays, as well as pro-BDS books, anthologies and websites mentioned in this volume make clear, the goal of the academic boycott is not necessarily to “win” or get Israel to pull out of the West Bank, or even to protect the rights of Palestinians. It is, as Thomas Abowd – BDS supporter and professor at Tufts University – puts it in a 2014 essay, to reject Israel’s “ongoing 65-year theft of Palestinian land.” The strongly implied and often explicit message is that BDS wants to bolster the irresponsible and dangerous narrative that, since at least as early as 1948, Israel has been stealing all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, and that the Jewish state is a malevolent country with no standing and no right to

be treated equally in the world of nation-states. This sounds like classic anti-Semitism.

Perhaps “The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel” won’t help those defending an anti-boycott stance in the face of professors and students critical of Israel who shout slogans and rely on distorted history. However, the book is essential for those who want to understand in some detail why an academic boycott of Israel is outright discrimination, and why it threatens not only Israeli professors and scholars, but the very reason for universities and the idea of free speech itself.

*Gerald Sorin is distinguished professor of American and Jewish Studies at SUNY New Paltz. His most recent book is "Howard Fast: Life and Literature in the Left Lane."*

## *Escape from the City of Brass*

Mark S. Wagner

*The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel.* Edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm. Chicago: MLA Members for Scholars Rights, 2014. Pp. 552.

While reviewing the *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, I received an invitation to sign a “letter calling on scholars and librarians within Middle East studies to boycott Israeli academic institutions.” I was aware that the BDS movement had recently gained adherents among scholars affiliated with the American Studies Association, the Native American Studies Association, the Asian American Studies Association, and the African Literature Association, and with impressionable college students, frontal lobes as yet not fully formed.

In line with Charles Issawi’s dictum that “in any dispute the intensity of feeling is inverse to the value of the issues at stake,” I had, until that moment, assumed that those, experts in Asian-American literature, for example, who were most comfortable issuing calls to ostracize others had the least to lose by cutting ties with Israeli academia. Indeed, in her empirically based contribution to this volume, Tammi Rossmann-Benjamin shows that a professor of Ethnic Studies working within an English department is statistically most likely to advocate a boycott of Israeli academia. The same also seemed to be the academics capable of mustering the self-importance one would need to issue one’s own foreign policy statements on various issues as well as the self-delusion to imagine that decision-makers would care.

However, scrolling through the names of the now more than 400 signatories of the Middle East studies letter, where ostracizing Israeli academia would be significantly more difficult to implement, I saw many people with whom I have interacted on a professional level over the years, people whose commitment to pure research, for lack of a better term, presumably outweighs their political views in importance, and even a few friends.

I was left with a certain bewilderment at how intelligent people professing high ethical standards would become proponents of a poorly conceived, punitive, and almost comically hypocritical program aimed to harm the careers of *other academics*. (Here I would like to be perfectly clear that I regard the idea

of an economic boycott aimed at exerting political pressure and a cultural/academic boycott as different in kind.) Perhaps it is the same sense one would have watching the spread of an illness whose mode of transmission is well known but whose victims inexplicably ignore all common sense precautions. This sentiment constitutes a central thread in the essays that make up *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*. Indeed, many essays (Bérubé, Brahm, Divine, Musher, Nelson) seek to document for posterity the manner in which BDS fever spread through idyllic college campuses, large universities, and scholarly associations having only the most tenuous connections to the world of Israeli academia.

*The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel* contains twenty-five essays that possess considerable variety, along with resources and reproductions of relevant documents. The book will be most useful to college students who feel that they lack the appropriate background knowledge to cut through the rhetorical and emotional excess surrounding these issues and confidently make contributions. Academics themselves will certainly choose their own path through the essays, depending upon their interests.

The invitation to boycott I received also took me back to my graduate student days in Middle Eastern Studies from the late '90s to mid-aughts, which at times resembled nothing so much as waking up after a night of hard drinking to find that I had inadvertently joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

There is the signature of my professor from "Problems and Methods in Middle Eastern Studies," where we learned that even though Edward Said's synthesis of Foucault, through which all knowledge is political, and Gramsci, who posits a life raft for those with sufficiently radical views, did not *work* in any meaningful sense, saying as much was simply not polite. There is one of my classmates, the head of our local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, my department's unofficial social club. Once the Second Intifada began in 2000, they organized vigils in the park for the martyrs from Deir Yassin (1948) to Jenin (2000).

Once I was helping a student—one of our Islamists, bless her heart—through the intricacies of a classical Arabic text. She abruptly excused herself, donned a makeshift cardboard tank with Stars of David on the sides, and headed out to join a protest. In our department the intellectual atmosphere surrounding the breakdown of peace talks was charged with giddy anticipation—if not happiness per se—a sense of relief at the line between good and evil having become suddenly clear and recognizable once again.

The essayists in *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel* grapple with the question of when, exactly, the Left's disillusionment with Israel as a progressive commitment took hold and became hostility instead, for it certainly was not in 1948. Was it already in 1967, when David became Goliath through catastrophic victory? Or 1973, when a much less decisive victory received the imprimatur of Richard Nixon? Intifada II? The Durban Conference (2000)?

September 11 (2001)? Lebanon (2006), Gaza “Cast Lead” (2008–9), Gaza “Pillar of Defense” (2012), or Gaza “Protective Edge” (2014)?

Days after September 11, I sat and wrote my dissertation qualifying exams in the office of a senior professor. I had been studying for that test for years and made an effort to set aside reality long enough to do a good job. But as I tried to connect topics ranging from early Islamic literature to the redaction of the *1001 Nights*, the office phone rang and rang. On the other line was another signatory of the letter, who insisted—despite my protests that I was in the middle of something not necessarily important in the grand scheme of things but important to me—that I take down a message urging the professor whose office it was to swift political activism. “We have to get the message out now,” I jotted down, quite sure that the person who called had no idea that I had no idea what the “message” was, much less how he had achieved such a level of certainty when most people were reeling.

In the contributions of Johnson, Koppelman, Nelson, and Salim, it is clear that the “message,” a hermeneutic key to the vagaries of the Middle East, is the tired Third Worldist /campist division of the world into forces of good and evil, the demonology of what Cohen calls “the Left that doesn’t learn.” More astonishing than the basic premise that Israel is an outpost of U.S. imperialism is the conclusion that *necessarily* follows: Hamas and Hezbollah are on the Global Left, as academic mega-celebrity Judith Butler famously concluded. The Hamas fighters of Gaza are invisible, both visually *and conceptually*, replaced by the theoretical stand-in that ought logically to be there.

More remarkable still, the nonviolent strategy crafted by Palestinian NGOs, foremost among them the “United and Islamic Forces in Palestine,” a group comprising Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PFLP, and so on, through the advocacy of the assembled academics, becomes equivalent to the claims of Justice itself. Indeed, it seems the millennia of human political experiment finally reach their apotheosis here where political claims and ideals of virtue become one. Would that Israeli scholars acceded to every demand these organizations, and, presumably, Justice itself, has made, and endeavored to make their own government’s position *identical* to the position of its enemies. Several contributors to the book emphasize that the academic boycott is coupled to apocalyptic demands for the return of all Palestinian refugees and their descendants—the most serious sticking point in years of negotiations—and the end (yes, an end!) to discrimination against Palestinians holding Israeli citizenship, presumably by Israel at long last drafting and ratifying a constitution.

Like Cambridge dons whose Leninism rendered invisible Stalin’s descent into murderous paranoia and even Soviet tanks in Hungary, this message requires those who follow it to ignore certain fairly obvious things. Pascal Bruckner has illuminated such issues with much greater depth and style. Yet here Alan Johnson’s essay is crucial for focusing more narrowly on BDS and Anti-Zionist Ideology



(AZI). Both the enthusiasm on the Left for Israel in the 1945–67 period and the Communist betrayal of the Jews are left intentionally unexamined, purged from both the Politburo and the narrative.

All variety within Zionism must be simplified to the point where major Jewish thinkers of the Left like Arendt, Kafka, Levinas, and even Ahad Ha-‘Am, who held reservations about political Zionist ideology and goals, become anti-Zionists—a veritable *canon alter-Juive* ostensibly offering a genealogy for the work of Butler et al. (See Middle East historian and boycott enthusiast Jens Hansen’s tendentious readings of Kafka and Arendt.) Just as Jewish binationalists (the Brit Shalom group, on which see Fish’s essay) sought to de-fang the Arab resistance to the Jewish domination of Palestine, today’s one-staters aim to anesthetize Jews who might object to radical redistribution of the state’s resources among Palestinians throughout the world, a process that is very difficult to imagine occurring in a nonviolent manner. Yet the former are perversely pressed into the service of the latter.

They are blind to the fact that following the destruction of European Jewry these Jewish thinkers bracketed their reservations to address what might be done to save what Trotsky’s biographer Isaac Deutscher—himself an anti-Zionist before the war—described as “a man jumping from a burning building.” Recent research suggests that notwithstanding Zionism’s prestige in that most ideological of times after the war, few Jews immigrated to Israel for ideological reasons. They went because no place else would take them other than “that shitty little country,” in the immortal words of a French diplomat.

It is a message that, in its postcolonial guise, prizes and brings to the fore cultural admixture and hybridity, but simply will not see it in Israel. Several essays shed light on this aspect of academic and cultural life in Israel: Yohanan Ratosh’s avant-garde Canaanite movement (Fish); Palestinian-Israeli novelists who write in Hebrew (Harris); Israeli-Palestinian academic cooperation (Troen); Palestinian students in Israeli university classrooms (Wolosky).

The concept of class struggle, which now stands mute, though still imposing, in the middle of anti-imperialist, postcolonial circles, represents yet another thing not to be seen. In his biting appraisal of Said’s oeuvre, Marxist thinker Aijaz Ahmad famously observed the manner in which the postcolonial paradigm gave the intellectuals from the developing world’s capitalist elites, newly planted in Western universities, “documentary proof that they had always been oppressed,” by conveniently excluding class from existence. Now, in the midst of the deepest economic malaise since the Great Depression, those willing and able to pay full tuition at the great universities of the United States and Europe increasingly belong to this group as well. At least their investments will allow them four years of angelic status before these “sons of the upper bourgeoisie,” as Party leader Georges Marchais wrote of the 1968 student protesters, “forget their

revolutionary flame in order to manage daddy's firm and exploit workers there." Needless to say, many of the '68 stalwarts went on to become professors, deans, and other middle managers at colleges and universities.

Here are intellectuals for whom expressions of solidarity with Third World revolutionary violence constitute an indulgence after a rich meal, "revolution in a velvet-lined cigar box," as SDS leader Carl Oglesby said of the cultural Marxism of Gramsci and the Frankfurt School. Moreover, such action, so slow in coming, is directed against the Israeli Left, already enervated, emaciated, and limping. In the words of Catholic University president John Garvey, the boycotters of Israeli academia "[have] decided to pour gas not on the source of the fire but on bystanders, some of whom are trying to extinguish the flames." Like a Marie Antoinette of critical theory, Judith Butler suggests that if Israeli scholars want to present papers abroad, they ought to pay their own way rather than accept institutional funds tainted by the Occupation. How many public lectures must she give to make the annual salary of the average Israeli academic? Three? Two? Perhaps only one now that she has parted ways with Zionism.

Here too are signatories with identifiably Jewish names—names that give no hint as to the depth and breadth of their attachment to Judaism in any of its forms, religious or otherwise. Are memories of a Reform Jewish parent in the mid-century Midwest *commensurate* to a person who risks jail by refusing to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces? Or is the former betting with the money of the latter? Do the former's bona fides in "committed scholarship for Palestine" atone for adolescent expressions of Zionism? How can we be sure?

Not long after the phone call that interrupted my exam-taking in September, 2001, our department held a "teach-in" and I served as a docent, ferrying audience questions to the faculty panel on index cards. There, one professor spoke of the plight of the poor in rural Egypt, another of American-aided Israeli crimes against Palestinians. We heard about the "McCarthyite" tactics of the Jewish Lobby in its attempts to muzzle radical professors. It was not clear to me—nor has it become clear with the passage of time—what any of this had to do with the nineteen bourgeois, mainly Saudi hijackers who had turned the World Trade Center into a charnel house. I suspect it was even less clear to the laypeople in the audience, a few of whom had lost their children there. During the U.S. invasion of Iraq, al-Jazeera ran around the clock in the department amphitheater, as if its Qatari producers had clambered aboard Said's life raft. Another signatory simply abandoned teaching when that war broke out, instead showing photos of civilian casualties and haranguing students on the evils of the American empire. Here are two professors who, faced, at our last professional convention, with the unenviable job of making sense of the slaughter in Syria, ingeniously (and quite improbably) attributed it to Assad's American-inspired neoliberal economic reforms and the pervasive influence of Israel.

In the *1001 Nights* tale of the City of Brass, a group of adventurers discover a magic city at the edge of the world, full of perils and festooned with poems affirming the “*ubi sunt* motif,” the idea that every person with power will be reduced to nothingness. Only when they realize that the fearsome queen of the City is dead, merely a corpse made to look alive by the city’s last living denizens, do they escape their dangerous self-deception.

There among the signatories of the letter is my classmate, whose keen Jewdar enabled him to find Zionism in the most unlikely individuals, even one who is a reliable signatory of letters such as these, and a soldier in the ranks of committed scholarship on Palestine. (Similarly, Norman Finkelstein, arguably the only academic victim of the fabled Jewish Lobby, has now been exposed by some as a Zionist stooge.) I had wondered what happened to this sharp-eyed sentry of ideological purity, and here he is—ensconced in a university with tenure!

One particular incident involving this person sticks in my memory. In an email s/he pilloried a fellow grad student for having the temerity to suggest that opposition to ethnic nationalism does not in itself explain why all of its excesses must be laid at the doorstep of Zionism, calling this line of questioning “a sure-fire way NOT to get a job after graduation.” Others were willing to support the offender’s position in private but would not say so in public for the same reason, so the offender dropped out.

The myth of the professor conducting research, unfettered by political or social considerations—indeed—enwrapped in the warm embrace of academic freedom, emerging from solitude only to fire up bright young neurons and speak her conscience, is regrettably common and is, moreover, encouraged by the profession itself. In reality, one finds in academia as many careerists keen on fitting in with prevailing professional cultures as in any other job.

There is the signature of our watchdog’s doctoral advisor, who organized a successful campaign to discourage one of the best universities in America from hiring a job candidate who was too sympathetic to America (*sic*). That brave soul now teaches in a country where contact with Israeli academics is *forbidden by law*.

There is the senior professor who interviewed me a few years ago for a job at a great university. My CV contains ample evidence of my complicity in Israeli academia—knowledge of Hebrew secondary sources, conferences, and so on. But I am reassured to know that only now, after the second Israel–Gaza war, would this person allow their political convictions to influence their professional decisions.

There is someone who is included in a grant proposal I wrote. Will s/he still want to work on the project after reading this piece? Over here is someone who is reviewing my new book. *Gulp*. Hopefully this piece will be published after that one.

Here are department chairs, their own junior (untenured) colleagues, their graduate students, and even some of the vulnerable adjuncts who make up the

bulk of America's teaching faculty, extended networks of patronage, publication, grants, admissions, and hiring laid bare.

And then there are my friends. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, signatory Vijay Prashad argued that academics should boycott Israeli academia because "only 407 [Israeli faculty] signed [a petition on behalf of Palestinian faculty]." In the statement I was asked to sign, the number of good Israelis had dwindled to "several dozen."

In the Torah, Abraham argues with God over His plan to destroy Sodom: "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:20). According to the deal worked out by God and Abraham, even ten righteous people would have meant calling off the operation. In the Jewish mystical tradition, the sage Shimon Bar Yohai caught wind of a new plan of God's to purify the earth of sinners. In the mode of Abraham, he convinced the avenging angels that even if sinful humanity encompassed but one righteous person (perhaps the rabbi himself) they ought to abandon their plan. (I presume this discussion's applicability to intellectual responses to Gaza is not lost on my readers. One need not adopt Hamas's agenda to want to do something—anything—for the innocent Gazans killed, maimed, and further radicalized in the last war.)

I suspect that my friends reasoned that because the campaign is non-violent, their signature represented a mainly symbolic gesture of support for a long-oppressed people. Yet nonviolence is not necessarily victimless. Essays by Berman and Hirsch are well worth reading in this regard. The latter describes the situation in Great Britain, where the academic culture has gone significantly further into the BDS morass. Here on the list of signatories is Mona Baker, the British academic who dismissed two Israelis from journals she edited. Their anti-Occupation credentials were not enough to outweigh their Israeli citizenship.

Here on the list of signatories is the director of a Federal Title VI Middle East Center. Where it had always been easy to discriminate against an applicant by claiming s/he "would not be a good *fit* for us," without ever creating an actionable paper trail, what will happen when members of an admissions, hiring, or grant-giving committee were already on the record as actively promoting the ostracism of one nationality from academe? Calls for academic boycott of Israel will no doubt create new problems for university attorneys and HR staff at both public and private institutions.

In the preface to *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, Paul Berman introduces a useful distinction between the "gentle critic" who seeks to dissuade the boycotter via the Socratic method and the "ferocious critic" who sees the boycott as a moralistic fig leaf, barely hiding sinister motives. Among such motives, anti-Semitism looms large (see Brahm, Landes, Marcus). The decision to brand someone an anti-Semite, like the charge of racism, leaves no exit. It is a conversation stopper, but there are times when conversations go too far. Having invoked

Abraham and the Sodomites, I join the ranks of gentle critics. I think it unlikely that my friends harbor an irrational hatred of Jews. Perhaps in the spectacle of Jews oppressing others there is some of the *schadenfreude* (see Landes)—the ephemeral exemption from racism many white Americans felt when one of Al Sharpton's *causes célèbre* was unmasked as a fraud.

Yet it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is something uniquely wrong with the Jews when it is us (and not South Asians, Turks, and so on) who are made to collectively bear the punishment for post–World War II ethnic nationalisms and are instead offered (such generosity!) our familiar role on the Left as homeless cosmopolitans or, worse still, assigned the role of scapegoat without whose sacrifice the advancement of humanity cannot occur. This point is another thread that binds together most, if not all, of the contributions.

This is precisely where the moral hypocrisy of the academic boycotters becomes intolerable. Social psychologist C. D. Batson describes a mercantile world filled with Hobbesian actors who want others to believe that they have high moral ideals but who, when faced with acting on those ideals, will readily contravene them when no one else is looking. Thus they reap the benefits of appearing trustworthy and virtuous without having to make the sacrifices that come with acting in such a manner. In his experiments, upwards of 80 percent of subjects, faced with allotting the possibility of either reward or a dull, unrewarding task to themselves and another, unseen—indeed, non-existent—person, assigned themselves the rewarding task, even after having been reminded of the concept of fairness and having made a coin toss. Thus for a person to distribute goods in a zero-sum system among themselves (and, one might add, members of their social networks), all the while striving to appear moral in the eyes of others, is arguably part of human nature. While the zero-sum situation is perhaps extreme, these days, resources in the humanities and social sciences are scarce indeed.

Among the boycotters the moral hypocrisy is richly layered. Among *bien pensant* academics in Europe and the United States, opposition to Israel is utterly unremarkable, but they present it as a brave, even dangerous, stance in light of Israel's support in the wider society (at least in the United States). Liberal defenders of Enlightenment concepts—human rights, academic freedom, even civility itself—so carefully autopsied and buried in university seminars, are conjured back into existence when members of the collective feel threatened. For them, every victory is a victory and every loss is a victory too. (Edelman's essay offers that their tactics are simply part of a broad strategy of decreasing support for Israel among students. Recent reports of a generation gap in such attitudes may support this contention.) Here is a nonviolent campaign given its very appeal by the romantic and transgressive thrill of revolutionary Third Worldist violence. At first blush it looks like a risky yet principled bet, but they do not make it with their own money and instead transfer the risk to others (on real bravery, see Budick's essay).

If realizing the boycotters' ambitious goals nonviolently proved impossible and the spoils of the Jewish State needed to be divvied up by the refugees and their descendants, would this vanguard of progressivism lobby for visas for the Jewish survivors, find them housing in Berkeley, Morningside Heights, or the West Village? Why should they when they deserve what they have coming?

Unless a person lives up to his own standards in every single instance or simply holds no standards whatsoever, the charge of hypocrisy seems something of a cop-out. In Poland, Rabbi Yisrael Hopsztajn (d. 1814), a miracle-working Hasidic *Rebbe*, was a frail man who lived on little. He was "nothing but skin and bones," and his disciples covered him with blankets and carried him about. Once he asked a wealthy Hasid: "What do *you* eat every day?" and the rich man said: "Very little. My needs are simple. Bread, salt, and water are enough for me." Instead of complimenting him the Rabbi reproved him.

Your way is not the good way. You should eat fattened chickens and drink wine.  
For if you eat well you will give bread to the poor. But if your menu consists of  
dry bread, you will begrudge the poor even stones.

This story struck Martin Buber, the German-Jewish philosopher, ambivalent Zionist, member of the *Brit Shalom* binationalist group, and one of the founders of the Hebrew University, as being a particularly profound one. In it, the *Rebbe* confronts a moral hypocrite. Rather than pointing out the rich man's vanity, he takes it as a given that a human being will most likely act to advance his own self-interest. To satisfy that self-interest while at the same time offering genuine help to the nameless, abstract other posited by Batson's psychological experiment, or by a progressive ideology that calls for a villain is a difficult task that requires honesty, personal sacrifice, and genuine courage without bravado or self-congratulation. It also requires the awareness, which developed in the visitors to the doomed City of Brass, that every regnant idea eventually dies and one must be especially circumspect around those who have a vested interest in concealing its death.

Gila Wertheimer

Review of *THE CASE AGAINST ACADEMIC BOYCOTTS OF ISRAEL*

Reprinted from *THE CHICAGO JEWISH STAR*  
October 2015, pp. 5, 8.

Recent years have seen increased activity on college campuses by the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Part of that initiative has been the attempt, adopted by some academic groups to boycott Israeli institutions of higher education, and sometimes scholars associated with them.

Last year at its Chicago meeting, the prestigious Modern Language Association (MLA) also took up a boycott resolution (*JEWISH STAR*, June 13, 2014).

“There is only one country, Israel, that is the object of an international effort to boycott its universities,” writes

Cary Nelson in his Introduction to a welcome collection of essays on *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm (Wayne State University Press, MLA Members for Scholars’ Rights, 549 pp., \$34.99 pb).

Nelson and Brahm both spoke against the MLA boycott vote at its Chicago meeting (*JEWISH STAR*, Jan. 24, 2014).

In more than two dozen essays by fellow academics (Nelson is at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Brahm is at Northern Michigan University), the editors intend the collection to be “a resource to bring reason, history, and sound information to campuses confronting this BDS agenda.”

So it is not a “how-to” compendium but rather an educational compilation to examine (and thereby understand) various aspects of boycotts in general, and BDS in particular.

Themes addressed include academic freedom, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, the history of the boycott movement, along with a section devoted to the American Studies Association’s 2013 adoption of a boycott resolution.

Adding to the collection’s educational value is an instructive section offering “A Concise History of Israel,” an essay of some 50 pages by Cary Nelson, Rachel S. Harris, and Kenneth W. Stein.

There is, too, the wordings of some of the boycott resolutions, and a list of online resources.

This is anything but a quick read. Its academic approach can be abstruse and oddly dispassionate, especially given the emotion material.

However, for those who believe in the value and power of education and of the ability of knowledge to combat ignorance, it is an invaluable collection.

Ben-Dror Yemini

Review of *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*

Reprinted from *Ynet News*

December 28, 2014

The Institute for National Security Studies held a conference this week that dealt with the boycott movement against Israel. The conference was held to mark the publication of *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel*, a collection of essays edited by Prof. Cary Nelson and Prof. Gabriel Noah Brahm. I thought I knew a lot about the boycott. I was wrong.

With the phenomenon of the boycott becoming far more widespread in the United States, with entire university faculties becoming anti-Israel propaganda departments, with lies and manipulations being aired and spread in the name of "free academic speech," it's good to know there's a distinguished line of academics who have enlisted to expose the folly and oppose the herd.

Anti-Zionism, Nelson explains, just like the demand for equality or opposition to racism, has become a distinct hallmark of the left in Europe, as well as progressive forces in the US. There's a problem here of course, because anti-Zionism, in essence, is not a struggle in support of Palestinian rights, but a struggle instead against Jewish rights.

Anti-Zionism is not a struggle against this or the other injustice caused by Zionism (every national liberation movement has caused injustice), but a struggle whose sole purpose is to create a much greater injustice – the denial of the right to self-determination of one of the world's peoples.

Anti-Zionism is the "politically correct" version of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism slanders Jews as individuals; anti-Zionism slanders Jews as a collective. In no uncertain terms, anti-Zionism is racism. But it is racism that is becoming legitimate for one reason only: It's directed against Jews, despite the fact that Jews are among the leaders of the anti-Zionist campaign.

The book includes a wide range of essays that expose the biases, the distortions and the manipulations of the supporters of the boycott. Prof. Ilan Troen offers a fascinating review of the history of the boycott. Prof. Martha



Nussbaum, highly regarded in the United States in the field of the field of philosophy of justice, writes in part about a well-known figure, Joseph Bove, a folk hero in France, an anti-globalist and anti-Zionist, who arrived in Ramallah in 2002 to show solidarity with the Palestinians who were busy with a murderous intifada against the Jews. That same year saw the shocking massacre of Muslims in the city of Ahmedabad, as part of a long series of clashes and pogroms in the state of Gujarat in India.

Why, asks Nussbaum, did none of those human rights advocates go to the place where a massacre took place? The answer isn't a mystery. Massacres or genocide aren't their concern; they weren't then and they aren't now. After all, it takes the global Jihad just a few months to murder many more people than the number of victims claimed by Israel's decades-long control over the territories. After all, the protests against the genocide in Darfur were nothing compared to the festival we are witnessing against Israel, which has never perpetrated anything even close to genocide. But these things are of no interest to the anti-Zionist herd. Its struggle is not against injustice; it's against Israel.

In another fascinating essay, Nelson tackles the delusions of one the idols of the anti-Israeli left, Judith Butler. Most of the book's essayists belong to the liberal camp. In Israeli terms, they're considered leftists. Many of them are known human rights activists.

They are not bound by consensus vis-à-vis Israeli policy. They are bound by the profound understanding that the purpose of the boycott is not to affect a change in Israeli policy. The purpose is not an economic or academic boycott either. The purpose is the negation of Israel's right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people. All the leaders of the boycott, and most of their prominent supporters, declare so explicitly.

The book, therefore, is important from two aspects: First, it presents the full extent of the problem – the boycott campaign is becoming more and more of a serious threat to Israel. And second, the fact that important and high-profile academics have banded together against the boycott clearly indicates that on an intellectual level too, we haven't yet lost hope.