

WHY BOYCOTT ISRAELI UNIVERSITIES?

A RESPONSE
TO BRICUP

Engage

Engage

Why Boycott Israeli Universities? – A Response

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Introduction

This paper is a detailed response to the pamphlet 'Why Boycott Israeli Universities' launched by the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP) on 4 May 2007.

Who are BRICUP?

According to its statement of aims 'BRICUP is an organisation of UK based academics, set up in response to the Palestinian Call for Academic Boycott. Its twin missions are:

- to support Palestinian universities, staff and students.
- to oppose the continued illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands with its concomitant breaches of international conventions of human rights, its refusal to accept UN resolutions or rulings of the International Court, and its persistent suppression of Palestinian academic freedom'. (<http://www.bricup.org.uk/home/statementofaims.html>)

Who are Engage?

'**Engage** was set up in response to the Association of University Teacher's decision to take steps towards an academic and cultural boycott of Israel.'

'**Engage** opposes Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. We are in favour of the foundation of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. We believe that Israel is not an illegitimate state. We are for reconciliation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.'

'**Engage** wants to debate, inform and organise around three themes:

1. Engage opposes the idea of an academic or cultural boycott of Israel.
2. Engage aims to encourage, facilitate and publicise positive links between Israeli, Palestinian, British and global academia. Engage is for closer engagement, not boycotts.
3. Engage stands up against antisemitism in our universities, in our unions and in our students' unions'.

(<http://www.engageonline.org.uk/archives/index.php?id=14>)

BRICUP'S pamphlet and our response

BRICUP's pamphlet is 35 pages long includes a great deal of material broken down under 6 headings:

- I. How did we get here?
- II. Why Israel?
- III. Academic Freedom in Palestine and Israel
- IV. Why Boycott?
- V. Reasons Not to Boycott?
- VI. Moving on

This response summarises BRICUP's main arguments under each of these six headings and answer them.

A further reading list includes a number of articles which cover the arguments in greater depth as well as links to some of the key documents.

I. How did we get here?

The origins of the boycott campaign

A key claim made by BRICUP and the wider international campaign for an academic boycott is that it represents a response to a prior and specific call by Palestinian organisations for a boycott:

'In 2004 a call was issued in occupied Palestine for a boycott of all Israeli academic and cultural institutions'

'More than 50 organisations from across Palestinian civil society have aligned themselves with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI for short)'

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 3)

However as BRICUP's own pamphlet goes on to say the real origins of the campaign actually predate the PACBI call by nearly two years:

'In 2002...a group of UK academics followed by several hundred European academics raised the standard for a "moratorium" on EU and European Science Foundation funding of Israeli cultural and research institutions'

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 4)

In November 2006, Professor Jonathan Rosenhead (who co-authored BRICUP's 'Why Boycott Israeli Universities? Pamphlet) confirmed this:

Certainly some of the key members were involved in the 2002 call for a moratorium on EU and European Science Foundation funding of Israeli cultural and research institutions, itself a reaction to Israel's military reoccupation of the West Bank that year. I think that in the following year BRICUP grew out of that activity. (<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article5995.shtml>)

The actual chronology of events clearly shows that the international academic boycott campaign originated on western campuses in 2002 - and that the key figures in developing the concept of an academic boycott were in fact the members of what was to become BRICUP:

Boycott Campaign Timeline

Apr 2002	EU moratorium letter signed by Steven Rose and 125 others becomes an online petition for a 'European Boycott of Research And Cultural Links With Israel'
Jun 2002	Mona Baker dismisses two Israeli academics from her journals
Apr 2004	Palestinian Academic Call for a Boycott of Israel (PACBI) issued
Oct 2004	BRICUP website created and name begins to be used publically for the activist group advocating a boycott in the UK
Dec 2004	'Resisting Israeli Apartheid: Strategies and Principles' Conference held in London brings together a number of key academic supporters of boycott
Apr 2005	AUT annual council passes motions for a boycott of Bar-Ilan and Haifa and refers back a similar motion for boycott of Hebrew University to executive for further investigation
May 2005	AUT boycott motions reversed by special council
Jul 2005	Palestinian call for general Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel published
Jun 2006	BRICUP publishes 'Why Boycott Israeli Universities' in advance of UCU conference
May 2007	BRICUP publishes 'Why Boycott Israeli Universities' in advance of UCU conference

Thus far from originating in the Occupied Territories in 2004 the boycott campaign clearly began in April 2002 when Steven Rose initiated what became an online 'Call for European Boycott of Research And Cultural Links With Israel'. (<http://web.archive.org/web/20021009224657/www.pjpo.org/appelinst.html>)

While this petition had no discernible impact on EU funding decisions it did result in June 2002 in the dismissal of two Israelis from the editorial boards of two journals owned by UMIST Professor Mona Baker.

It was the media coverage of the Baker case that then brought the campaign to the attention of a much wider audience and led nearly two years later to its adoption by Palestinian organisations in the Occupied Territories. (http://www.pacbi.org/campaign_statement.htm).

The activist group around Rose appears to have started using the name BRICUP itself in October 2004 and in April 2005 members of the committee such as Sue Blackwell were playing a leading role in the AUT boycott motion campaign.

It then appears to be the initial success of the AUT motion and the international publicity it generated that inspired the call for a yet wider Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel that was signed by a number of Palestinian organisations in July 2005.

Thus, far from being an organisation that grew up to support the demands of Palestinians for a boycott, BRICUP (or rather its leading figures) are clearly the originators and primary international advocates of the academic boycott idea.

Indeed the Palestinian calls for boycott in April 2004 and July 2005 can be seen as attempts to provide an ex-post facto justification for the actions of western activists rather than the other way around.

Where do the Palestinians stand on the boycott?

BRICUP implies that the boycott has widespread if not unanimous support amongst Palestinian academics, but are only able to provide one item of evidence:

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

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 3)

Thus, BRICUP are using a survey which asked staff at one university about their views on the continuation and development of Israeli-Palestinian joint academic projects as evidence for the general position of staff at all 12 Palestinian higher education institutions on an international boycott of Israeli academics by foreign academics.

Al-Quds is far from being a typical Palestinian college as at least in the eyes of the occupying power East Jerusalem has been a part of Israel since 1967, and although many of its Arab residents have rejected Israeli citizenship, academics and students studying are for the most part not subject to the movement and residence restrictions that paralyse colleges in the West Bank.

Al-Quds is also unusual in that irrespective of what some of its staff told the survey in 2004, it does run significant joint projects with Israeli institutions – particularly Hebrew University – and its president Sari Nusseibeh opposes the boycott (<http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=210>) – meaning that in effect international academics are expected to boycott Israeli institutions based on opinions ascribed to staff at an institution who itself do not practice such a boycott and whose leaders actively campaign against it.

Surprisingly, even the president of Birzeit University, Dr Nabeel Kassis, while on a recent visit to Britain was apparently unwilling to publically commit himself to supporting the boycott, even when challenged to do so (<http://www.engageonline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=76>). Thus, while it would be foolish to pretend that an academic boycott does not enjoy wide support in the Occupied Territories, BRICUP can give us no solid evidence as to how widespread that support is and also completely fails to discuss the very real (and at the time of writing, literally murderous) divisions between Hamas, Fatah and other Palestinian groups on this and other issues.

The boycott in Britain

BRICUP's account of the passing and reversal of the 2005 AUT boycott motions is short and gives little detail:

'At a meeting of AUT Council in April 2005, and in response to the PACBI call, motions to boycott two specific Israeli institutions Bar-Ilan and Haifa Universities were proposed and approved'

'A highly organised campaign was immediately launched to have the decisions overturned. A special meeting of Council was summoned within a month at which the boycott motions were reversed'

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, pages 4-5)

The pamphlet goes on to ascribe this failure to a 'whipped up atmosphere of paranoia coupled with threats from Israel of legal action' as well as 'a lack of clarity' in the original motion.

As regards the 'lack of clarity' in BRICUP's current view this seems to have been largely because the AUT motion made specific charges against individual Israeli institutions based on actual evidence (however unreliable some of that evidence actually turned out to be).

In contrast, BRICUP now argues for a blanket boycott applying to:

'all Israeli academic institutions, not selectively (as in the case of the AUT motions) to those whose behaviour is more reprehensible than others'

Thus, BRICUP achieve clarity by moving from an apparently relatively moderate and defensible position (we should boycott those institutions which are directly responsible for violations of academic freedom or Palestinian human rights) to a more extreme one in which all Israeli institutions are guilty by virtue of their being Israeli institutions.

The 'whipped-up atmosphere of paranoia' also rather belittles the thousands of AUT members on both sides of the argument who took part in democratic union meetings and debates between the April and May council meetings.

What sort of boycott do BRICUP support?

BRICUP's pamphlet quotes from the PACBI call:

- 'to refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint participation with Israeli institutions'
- 'to advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israel institutions at the national and international levels'

In practice this means:

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

BRICUP stresses that:

- It is an institutional boycott, and individual academics will be affected only in so far as they are acting on behalf of or as officials or representatives of Israeli academic institutions

BRICUP thus offers UK academics the comforting illusion that they can somehow boycott Israeli institutions without affecting in any way individual Israeli academics – suggesting that while institutions can have international funding withdrawn and conferences and publications damaged by non-participation, none of this will impact on the academics working at those institutions.

In addition, we already know from experience what this institution/individual distinction actually means to BRICUP and its supporters.

As mentioned above, the first (and in a sense only) 'success' of the boycott which actually impacted on any pre-existing Israeli-UK

academic link was the sacking of Miriam Shlesinger and Gideon Toury from the editorial boards of two journals owned by Mona Baker in June 2002.

Baker was to become a founder member of BRICUP in October 2004 and is a leading propagandist for the boycott who continues to share platforms with Steven Rose and other committee members.

Significantly, given the constant stress throughout the pamphlet on the boycott being only directed against institutions and not individuals – and although Shlesinger and Toury clearly did not hold their editorial board posts ex-officio as faculty members of Bar-Ilan and Tel Aviv universities – they were still dismissed by Baker. (Guardian 8 July 2002)

Far from condemning Baker's action as an inappropriate application of the boycott principle to individuals rather than institutions, campaigners rallied to her support and several prominent members of what was later to become BRICUP appear to have worked actively to undermine her university's decision committee of inquiry into the affair. (Guardian 22 November 2002)

This clearly indicates the practical impossibility of distinguishing between academic institutions and the individuals who belong to them – in Baker's eyes the problem with Shlesinger and Toury was not their personal views or actions but the mere fact that they were Israelis - and when challenged, her colleagues in the boycott movement chose to side with her and not the individuals she was victimizing.

It is, therefore still down to BRICUP to identify under what circumstances an individual who teaches at an Israeli institution would not be boycotted.

II. Why Israel?

The second section of BRICUP's pamphlet makes a number of general statements about the illegal occupation of the West Bank and the daily violations of human rights that occur within the Occupied Territories.

Engage does not radically disagree with the overall picture painted of illegal settlements, land confiscations, house demolitions, the building of the Israeli security fence and its effects, the operation of a dual legal regime and the use of 'torture and murder' by the Israeli security forces – all of which have been exhaustively documented by amongst others the Israeli Human Rights monitoring group B'Tselem. (<http://www.btselem.org>)

However, in common with the Israeli left and the international community Engage wishes to see a peaceful settlement along the lines of the Oslo Agreement.

BRICUP's pamphlet, on the other hand, seems careful to avoid any discussion of negotiated solutions, and while it does quote the PACBI call for a boycott, significantly omits its preamble:

Israel's colonial oppression of the Palestinian people, which is based on Zionist ideology, comprises the following:

- Denial of its responsibility for the Nakba - in particular the waves of ethnic cleansing and dispossession that created the Palestinian refugee problem - and therefore refusal to accept the inalienable rights of the refugees and displaced stipulated in and protected by international law;
- Military occupation and colonization of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza since 1967, in violation of international law and UN resolutions;
- The entrenched system of racial discrimination and segregation against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which resembles the defunct apartheid system in South Africa; (http://www.pacbi.org/campaign_statement.htm)

Thus, the PACBI call for boycott which BRICUP asks us to support begins with an attack on ‘colonial’ zionist ideology and an unqualified assertion of the right of return – which is generally agreed to be the most fundamental stumbling bloc in the peace process, meaning as it does the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state.

However, none of this PACBI material is quoted by BRICUP - presumably in the hope of maximizing support from moderate critics of Israel who still believe in the possibility of a negotiated two-state solution.

This apparent moderation is however then promptly jettisoned in an attempt to ‘contextualise’ the use of indiscriminate suicide bombings and rocket attacks to kill Israeli citizens:

‘What though, about Palestinian suicide attacks (or rocket attacks) on Israeli citizens? International Humanitarian Law recognizes as combatants those involved in guerilla resistance under occupation, and also condemns violence against civilians whoever the perpetrators. Thus it condemns both guerilla attacks on Israeli civilian targets and state violence against Palestinian civilian populations. Yet Western media and politicians alike consistently single out the former for criticism whilst condoning Israeli actions in the territories they occupy’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, pages 9-10)

Thus, rather than take this opportunity to unequivocally condemn attacks against Israeli civilians by the ‘resistance’, BRICUP changes the subject to attack the Western media and political establishments for their ‘consistent’ support of Israel – a support which apparently does not preclude the media’s broadcasting and publication of countless programmes and articles criticising Israel, the issuing of numerous critical statements by Western governments and the massive long-term funding of Palestinian organisations and institutions by the EU and other international bodies.

III. Academic freedom in Israel and Palestine

This section contains two arguments: academic freedom in the Occupied Territories is being daily attacked by Israel; and the academic freedom enjoyed by Israeli institutions is used by them to support the occupation and oppressive, racist and murderous policies.

The situation in the occupied territories

While the BRICUP account of the conditions under which academic institutions operate in the Occupied Territories is mostly lacking in verifiable details such as names and dates, clearly the situation is intolerable.

Nevertheless, the BRICUP account again includes significant omissions and gross over-simplifications:

The first over-simplification is the charge:

‘Israel collects taxes in the Occupied Territories but provides no funds for Palestinian universities’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 12)

In the thirteen years since the implementation of the Oslo Accords (in 1994) the great majority (around 98%) of Palestinians in the West Bank have lived in areas ceded to the Palestinian Authority (PA) that controls – at least after a fashion – every Arab settlement of any size and every institution of higher education. (The one exception being al-Quds which is in the part of Jerusalem unilaterally annexed by Israel after 1967 and thus incidentally does benefit from Israeli funding).

In these areas most direct and indirect taxes were and still are collected by the PA which has sole responsibility for providing education.

Since 1994 the only tax which is still collected by Israel within PA-run areas is the property tax, which under the Accords was then remitted back to the PA (http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/tp_annex5.htm).

As even before the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, taxes covered only a fraction of the PA budget. In effect higher education like other public services in the Occupied Territories was largely funded by subsidies from Israel, the US, EU, UN and various other governments and NGOs and by tuition fees (which in 2000 represented 86% of Palestinian university revenues).

Even the breakdown of the peace process did not fundamentally affect these funding transfers and it was only the election victory of Hamas in January 2006 and its refusal to either recognise Israel's right to existence or the validity of the agreements that created the PA that led to Israel and western governments stopping the flow of funds.

Thus, while it may be technically true that at this moment Israel collects some taxes from Palestinians in the West Bank (but not in Gaza) which are not spent on higher education, this is primarily because of the impasse created by the refusal of Hamas to recognise either Israel or the Oslo Agreements - which were the legal basis for remitting the taxes back to the PA in the first place.

The other charges against Israel that relate directly to academic institutions in the Occupied Territories are rather more substantial and can be summarised under three main headings:

- The general harassment of teachers and students by the application of residency, work permit and travel restrictions including forcible deportation and routine denial of rights to travel and study
- Direct closure of academic institutions by Israeli military or security forces
- The 'destruction of infrastructure, civil society and cultural and intellectual life' which 'cannot be separated from the question of academic freedom'

The array of movement and residency restrictions which make it impossible to work and study normally in the Occupied Territories are indeed indefensible.

However, it does need to be pointed out that between 1994 and 2000 under the Oslo Accords, Palestinians from the Occupied Territories had far greater (although a long way from un-restricted) freedom to move around, live, study and work within Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

It was therefore the initiation of the 2000 al-Aqsa Intifada which led to the current regime of restrictions and repression as part of a classic low-intensity war, between what BRICUP describes as 'guerillas' and the Israeli security forces.

Israeli responses to Palestinian actions may indeed be disproportionate and amount to collective punishment, but the only solution to the long list of problems listed by BRICUP is the resumption of the peace process and a negotiated settlement.

BRICUP however, evidently has no interest in such a solution and instead appears to offer uncritical support to the most radical groups fighting for the complete elimination of Israel.

As regards direct closure of academic institutions, it is interesting that many of BRICUP's examples come from the first 1987-1992 Intifada during which Israel was still directly administering the territory in which Palestinian universities were sited.

Post-1994 the Oslo Accords have actually made it rather difficult for Israel to act directly to close Palestinian universities within PA-administered areas and thus there have been only two cases of closures on security grounds – the latest of which ended in 2003.

Again the problem is not the occupation - which operated between 1994 and 2000 without closing universities or engaging in systematic harassment of academics - but the breakdown of the peace process and the only logical solution is its resumption.

The more general charge that the destruction of infrastructure, civil society and intellectual and cultural life themselves represent an attack on academic freedom is so general as to be unanswerable.

However, what is clear is that while many of its staff are currently unpaid and it works under appalling conditions, the Palestinians still do have the infrastructure of a higher education system running 12 universities and over a dozen public and private colleges enrolling about 70,000 students or 2% of the population.

Similarly, although from 2000 there has been considerable damage to the infrastructure of the Occupied Territories as a result of Israeli actions, in all probability far more damage has been done by the withdrawal of American and European subsidies to the PA since the January 2006 election and it is ultimately the inability of the Hamas government to pay its teachers and doctors that is creating a real

social catastrophe which boycotting Israeli academics will do nothing to alleviate.

Israeli academic collusion

The second central plank of the BRICUP pamphlet is the argument that not only does Israel oppress Palestinians and deny them academic freedom but that Israeli academics are **directly** responsible for occupation policies at both an institutional and individual level and therefore deserve to be boycotted.

While the charge is clearly a general one that is meant to apply to all Israeli academics (apart from the tiny fraction that BRICUP consider to be part of their struggle), they do supply us with eleven specific charges which are supposed to prove the existence of a much wider state of collusion.

Charge 1 – The persecution of Ilan Pappé

‘One cause celebre at Haifa concerned the suppression of academic dissent. A mature history MA student uncovered evidence of the killing of 200 unarmed Palestinians by an Israeli unit in 1948. His thesis was given an exceptionally high mark by the examiners; but veterans of the unit protested...the degree was retroactively suspended, and eventually re-marked as a fail. When the Haifa Historian Ilan Pappé defended the student publicly he himself became the target of a disciplinary action by the university’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 15)

This is, of course, the same case that was a subject of the 2005 AUT motion and the pamphlet gives no new evidence to challenge the decision of union council delegates in May 2005 to believe Haifa’s account of events and rescind the boycott motion.

In fact, far from being routinely suppressed, evidence of Israeli atrocities in the 1948 war have been documented by Israeli scholars in numerous books and articles (including a number by Pappé himself) and have been the subject of passionate debate in the Israeli media.

Teddy Katz's MA was therefore challenged not because Haifa wished to suppress evidence of ethnic cleansing but because he was accused by his interviewees of seriously and systematically misquoting them in his thesis and after a full comparison of the thesis to the original source material this complaint was upheld by the university.

As for Pappe, no actual disciplinary action was taken against him by Haifa where he continued to teach and has indeed recently published a book on Ethnic Cleansing.

Charge 2 – Bar-Ilan and The College of Judea and Samaria

'Bar-Ilan...established a campus, named the college of Judea and Samaria, in the illegal West Bank colony of Ariel'

'This is a college set-up in occupied territory in a settlement that the UN has said should be dismantled'

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 15)

Again this charge was first made during the 2005 AUT boycott debate and in summary is that Bar-Ilan created a satellite college to serve the illegal Israeli settlement of Ariel in the West Bank.

While this was rightly characterised at the time as the 'academic element of Sharon's plan to annexe part or whole of the West Bank' (<http://www.engageonline.org.uk/archives/index.php?id=16>) there is still some inconsistency in singling out a college at Ariel as illegitimate when BRICUP's current maximalist position is that all Israeli universities deserve to be boycotted and that therefore those sited in illegal settlements are no worse than those within Israel's pre-1967 borders.

This stance effectively makes it impossible to engage effectively with individual Israeli institutions, to hold them accountable for their specific actions and put them under pressure to change.

Charge 3 – Hebrew University’s land-grab

‘Hebrew University in Jerusalem was able to expand its campus thanks to the confiscation and expropriation by the Israeli government of over 800 acres of Palestinian land in occupied East Jerusalem’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 16)

This is yet another warmed over motion from the 2005 AUT boycott campaign – and one which was referred back by council for investigation to the AUT executive which after establishing the facts of the case with Hebrew took no further action. (<http://www.engageonline.org.uk/archives/index.php?id=46>)

The original 2005 motion was in fact quite specific, referring to a named Arab family who were in dispute over part of a 10-acre new dormitory development but who subsequently reached an amicable settlement with Hebrew, the allegation in BRICUP’s pamphlet is far wider in scope – 800 acres being a very significant tract of land in any densely-populated urban setting (as a point of comparison Leeds University’s two main campuses use just 314 acres, while Keele which has the largest integrated single campus in the UK covers 614 acres).

In the absence of any further details as to where these 800-acres are, who owned them, how they were expropriated and when they were acquired by Hebrew one can only assume that BRICUP are here referring to the whole of its Mount Scopus campus.

However, the nucleus of this site was originally purchased under the Ottoman Empire in 1914 and served as the site for Hebrew University throughout the British Mandate period (1917-48) before being cut off and abandoned in the 1948 war.

In 1948-67 Mount Scopus was a UN-supervised demilitarized zone, in which Hebrew retained its legal rights to the property even though it was unable to use the campus.

While the site has indeed expanded piecemeal by purchase since 1967 and it is not inconceivable that some of the land acquired may have at some point been expropriated from Palestinian landowners,

there is no evidence that such a large tract of East Jerusalem has been recently expropriated from its proper owners and handed over to Hebrew University.

Again, the issue here appears to be not anything that Hebrew University has specifically done, but rather its fundamental right to exist, even though it has owned a campus in Jerusalem since before the outbreak of the First World War and is one of the oldest universities in the Middle East.

Charge 4 - Robert Aumann and Professors for a Strong Israel

‘Professor Robert Aumann (Hebrew University) was joint Nobel Laureate in 2005...A veteran member of Professors for a Strong Israel he opposed the Israeli Gaza disengagement in 2005 and indeed all talk of withdrawal from the Occupied Territories...He has been assiduous in appearing on Israeli media to advance these views’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 16)

The charge therefore is that a famous Nobel-prize winning economist has unacceptable political views (views which incidentally put him in sharp opposition to the current policy consensus in Israel) and forcibly expresses them in public.

Of course many academics in the UK also hold controversial views – including membership of organisations such as the BNP and Migration Watch - although as yet nobody appears to have demanded that all UK universities should be boycotted because of this.

The simple fact is that Israel is a democracy with freedom of speech and an unusually opinionated and politically active class of tenured academics which include not just Professor Aumann but also supporters of the Palestinian cause such as Ilan Pappé.

Charge 5 – Arnon Soffer and the Demographic Problem

‘A continuing and intensifying theme in Israeli policy discussions is the “Arab demographic danger”. This holds that there are too many Arabs in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and through differential birth rates the prospects for maintaining a predominantly Jewish Israel are threatened’

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

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 17)

On the face of it Sofer (more commonly spelt ‘Soffer’) is a rather more substantial case than Aumann – an academic who boasts of his direct influence on government policy.

Nevertheless having established that Soffer is indeed the leading authority on population demographics in Israel it is hardly surprising that the government should consult him on what are ultimately demographic questions.

The full Jerusalem Post interview which featured the words ‘kill, kill and kill’ clearly indicates that rather than justifying ethnic cleansing as a solution Soffer believes that only a comprehensive redrawing of borders can prevent a continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict well into the next century.

Again this may not be a very palatable position but the political views of one academic is hardly adequate reason to boycott a whole nation.

Charge 6 – Uzi Arad and the Little Triangle

‘Uzi Arad ex-Director of Intelligence at the formidable Israeli intelligence agency Mossad is the organiser of the Herzliya Conferences at which Sofer gave his speech. Arad was foreign policy adviser to the former Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, and is currently Professor and Head of the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center.

Arad has argued strongly in the conservative US journal *New Republic* for the exchange with the Palestine Authority of the 'Little Triangle' containing a quarter of a million Arabs. In return Israel would hold on not only to illegal Jewish settlements but also to unpopulated areas in Judea and Samaria including the Jordan valley

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 17)

Again an actual reading of the offending article (<http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=20051128&s=arad112805>) shows that it is somewhat less extreme than BRICUP presents it to be.

Arad's article is in fact a broad overview of land-swap proposals advanced by others and the Little Triangle swap is in fact neither Arad's own idea (it was actually advanced by Gideon Biger in 1996) nor central to his own proposals - as he accepts the strong possibility that in fact Arabs living within Israel's pre-1967 borders might actually prefer to remain second-class citizens of Israel rather than first-class citizens of an independent Palestinian state.

Arad also makes it completely clear that he is talking not about any unilaterally imposed border changes, but of a negotiated multilateral final status agreement 'trading land for peace' (the title of his *New Republic* article) and which would ideally involve land exchanges with Egypt as well as the Palestinian Authority.

In this respect his position is actually not that dissimilar to that of Yossi Beilin, the head of the left-wing Meretz party and architect both of the Oslo peace process and of the abortive Geneva Accord who at one point offered to exchange the Little Triangle with the Gush Etzion settlement.

Thus BRICUP's criticisms of Arad, reflect both considerable ignorance of Israeli politics and their deep-seated refusal to consider any plausible negotiated settlement.

Charge 7 – Gideon Biger and Yisrael Beiteinu

'The idea of land swaps is the special subject of Gideon Biger, Professor of Geography at Tel Aviv University (he also chaired the Boundary commission that in December 2005 controversially rejected the request

of the desperately overcrowded Arab town of Sakhnin to expand its boundaries to take in undeveloped and unused land.) He was a founder member of the political party Yisrael Beiteinu whose platform (including the expulsion of Arab Israeli citizens to the West Bank) has been widely criticised as racist, and an advisor to its leader Avigdor Lieberman'

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 17)

In reality Biger's position was originally not that dissimilar from Soffer's and Arad's – the exchange of land within Israel's pre-1967 borders inhabited by Arabs for land in the West Bank, which thanks to illegal settlements are now colonized by Jews, with the aim of producing two relatively stable states.

But his recent association with Yisrael Beiteinu associates him with a party which while it is potentially willing to discuss giving up far more territory to the Palestinians than any other party of the left or right, does so as part of a racist discourse in which creating a homogenous Jewish state outweighs all historical and religious considerations and where the consent of the populations exchanged is not considered a deal breaker.

In any case, by taking a maximalist position and asking us to boycott all Israeli academics, BRICUP makes it irrelevant whether they are supporters of the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu or the left-wing Meretz.

Charge 8 – Menachem Milson

'At a practical level the academic and political elites in Israel have always been inter-twined. Consider Menachem Milson, Professor of Arabic Literature at Hebrew University (and eventually Provost of the University). In 1981-2 he was head of a new "civilian administration" within the military government of the West Bank but with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In this role he created the notorious 'Village Leagues', organisations composed of local Palestinian collaborators; closed down Arab newspapers; sacked pro-PLO mayors etc. In March 1981 he closed down Birzeit University provoking riots which left seven dead'

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 18)

While this account of Milson's career could be challenged on several points of history, what is more important is that having found just four

Israeli academics who are in some sense politically active today, to find a fifth academic villain BRICUP has to turn the clock back twenty-five years to 1981-2 and the activities of Menahem Milson as Civil Administrator.

The simple fact is that Israel like the United States and unlike the UK maintains something of a revolving door between the worlds of politics and academia and it is not unusual for senior academics to spend time in government – or for Israeli politicians, generals and bureaucrats to become successful academics after retirement. This is after all a country which offered its presidency to Albert Einstein and where few cabinets have not had at least one minister from an academic background (the current cabinet includes at least two: Yuli Tamir and Daniel Friedmann).

Given this, Israeli universities are no more collectively responsible for the crimes of their former professors than for instance American academia is for the activities of Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeleine Albright or Condoleezza Rice.

Charge 9 – Hebrew's Shin Bet course

Israeli universities are also heavily involved in tailored teaching for the military and security services. One recent example that came under intense scrutiny was a proposal for a fast-track programme at Shin Bet (General Security Service – famous for its interrogation methods) to gain a degree in Middle Eastern studies in as little as 16 months many classes would be held at a Shin Bet installation and be unavailable to other students. Shin Bet itself was to design the course. Only in the heightened publicity generated by the NATFHE boycott debate was the proposal withdrawn’
(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 18)

Other than the absurd suggestion that academics in Israel make decisions based on debates at NATFHE conferences, the major omission in this account is that it was the supposedly supine and collaborationist academics at Hebrew and other Israeli universities who protested against this idea, initiated a debate in the mass media about the proper relationship between academia and the security services and effectively got the proposal shelved as inappropriate.

In comparison, in the UK we have seen a huge expansion of precisely the sort of courses tailored to the needs of the military and arms trade which BRICUP accuse Israeli universities of running with no debate or criticism whatsoever from British academics.

As an example the Open University in January 2007 won preferred-bidder status for a huge PFI programme which effectively privatises much of the army and RAF's training, and which already runs specialised courses for the armed services officers at the Defence College of Management and Technology and tailored general degree courses for RAF personnel.

No fewer than four of BRICUP's thirteen committee members work for the OU – but as yet there has been next to no debate about the propriety of these contacts or of any other aspect of the rapidly growing UK military-academic complex in either any academic forum, the mass media or even the left-wing press.

The contrast with the prompt, principled and effective action taken by Hebrew University academics against the Shin Bet course could not be more instructive.

Charge 10 – other tailored IDF courses

‘Other Israeli universities run courses serving the needs of the IDF and security community, notably Haifa (through the National Security Studies Centre) and Bar Ilan’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 18)

Rather than providing courses specifically tailored to the needs of the military, Israeli universities usually provide access to standard academic courses for serving officers.

This reflects the peculiarities of IDF officer recruitment – whereas in the UK and other NATO countries officers are either recruited from university graduates or trained by dedicated military academies, IDF officers are selected from the general pool of 18-year old conscripts and traditionally could serve for decades and reach senior rank without receiving any higher education at all.

However, with the ever-increasing technological and administrative

complexity of the armed forces and the increasing difficulty of retaining professional officers, the IDF was forced in the nineties to offer all its regular officers two-and-a-half years of university education taken as one or more sabbaticals.

Unlike in the UK where courses at a number of universities are genuinely tailored to provide serving and future armed services officers with skills that are directly relevant to their duties, in Israel such courses are usually the same as those offered to ordinary students – that is to say an officer could study history or theology or Spanish literature and is under no particular pressure to take a course that is relevant to his military career.

Given that IDF officers also generally either take early retirement or transfer to the reserves at a considerably younger age than officers in other armed forces, in reality most such courses are more likely to be chosen for their relevance to a post-army second career.

In fact it is for this reason that the Shin Bet course at Hebrew was considered a step too far by many Israeli academics, as while it is not unusual for universities to bend their admission and attendance rules to reflect the needs of IDF students, what was being discussed with Hebrew was a course which was off-campus and would not be open to non-officers.

Again this is in stark contrast to the UK where academics from the Open University, Kings and Cranfield run no fewer than 250 highly specialised courses for 11,000 service and Ministry of Defence personnel per year (a number which will be hugely expanded when the OU takes over responsibility for a much wider range of army and RAF training) at UK Defence Academy sites without generating any criticism or discussion whatsoever.

Charge 11 – Discrimination against Israeli-Arabs

‘At the level of everyday experience we also have the refusal of any of the universities to recognise the democratically elected Union of Arab Students and routine discrimination against Arab students e.g. in access to facilities’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 18)

This is pretty much all the 35-page pamphlet has to say about the position of Arabs studying in Israeli universities.

The refusal to recognise the Union of Arab Students rather misses the point about what student unions are – no Israeli university has more than 20% of its students coming from the Arab community and in general are no more interested in recognising multiple feuding student unions organised on strict ethnic and political lines than any UK university would be.

Nevertheless the UAS is not banned and is able to actively organise and hold meetings at Israeli universities just like any other student group.

As regards routine discrimination against Israeli Arab students this deserves far more discussion – certainly Arabs are far less well-represented in Israel's universities than their 20% share of the population suggests they should be and are similarly under-represented amongst faculty.

The question which BRICUP fails to even ask is why this should be.

Even critics do not generally accuse Israeli universities of operating directly discriminatory admission policies. The real issue would appear to be deficiencies in the secondary education facilities provided for Israeli Arabs which are clearly under-funded and not optimally organised to produce successful candidates to universities.

But addressing this inequality in access to higher education within Israel is only meaningful if one accepts the fundamental legitimacy of the Israeli state and the need to make it more just and equal – and for BRICUP this is clearly not a priority.

IV. Why Boycott?

BRICUP's discussion of the history of boycotts as a tactic is simplistic at best.

Having established at the outset that the boycott is a tactic of the weak and powerless with a long and honourable history, there is no

discussion of the use of boycotts for racist and communalist ends which do not fit that narrative.

As an example there is no discussion of the very widespread anti-Semitic boycotts by catholic and nationalist groups in Eastern Europe before the second world war, or the commercial boycotts launched against Indian or Chinese minorities in several post-colonial states in Africa and Asia.

There is also no serious discussion of the two major international boycott campaigns of recent history – those against apartheid South Africa or the Soviet Union after the invasion of Afghanistan.

While South Africa is invoked as an example of a successful boycott, no distinction is made between the various different economic, cultural and academic boycott campaigns which of course varied widely in their completeness and impact from country to country and even in BRICUP's account it is not the academic boycott that is seen as a decisive factor in changing the views of white South Africans but the sporting boycott.

V. Reasons not to Boycott

None of the eight arguments against boycotts can be regarded as a fair representation of the views of BRICUP's opponents.

'Boycotts=McCarthyism?'

BRICUP's first problem is their dogmatic insistence that boycotts can only be an act of solidarity by the oppressed against the powerful and can never be initiated by the forces of oppression.

In this manichean view of the world, boycotts cannot be McCarthyism because although it was directed against individuals McCarthyism was 'backed by the authority and power of the state' (which is highly questionable historically, given McCarthy actually cast himself as a fearless tribune of the people exposing treachery in the highest circles of the state).

Finally, BRICUP falls back on the ‘against institutions not individuals’ argument which of course ignores the fact that McCarthy’s campaigns were also ostensibly directed against institutions (the Communist Party of the USA and its real and imagined front organisations) rather than individuals, but that it was still individuals who suffered the consequences of the witch-hunt.

‘Why Pick on Israel?’

This section is highly revealing of the fundamental world view of the authors, for whom it is axiomatically not Darfur or Chechnya or North Korea that provide the most obvious counter-examples but the United States which ‘does far more damage to life and freedom round the world than Israel ever could’.

However, the United States being too much of a challenge even for BRICUP, we are left with a series of arguments as to why Israel is so special that we must boycott even though we know there are worse regimes elsewhere in the world:

‘Israel always presents itself as special. It constantly reaffirms and therefore invites evaluation in terms of the highest moral standards, liberal values (beacon of) etc’

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

‘The US government certainly find Israel to be special – special enough to give it currently approaching \$3 billion in direct foreign aid, and in some years up to 1/3rd of its total foreign aid budget. (The formidable Israel Lobby in Washington – see Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006 – helps to ensure politicians seen as anti-Israel don’t get re-elected)’

(Why Boycott Israeli Universities, page 25)

Overall BRICUP offers an almost consumerist politics, where with the market so obviously overcrowded with suitable objects for condemnation and the busy academic having so little time, it is perfectly justifiable for him to select his favoured causes on the grounds of personal preference rather than upon any objective criteria of how oppressive and genocidal a state is.

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

BRICUP's arguments here are entirely predictable, making the standard distinction between the state of Israel and Jews, citing the 'many' boycotters who are Jews themselves – and finally blaming Israel's 'greed for land' and mistreatment of Palestinians for providing anti-Semitism's best recruiting sergeant.

'Isn't Israel quite different from South Africa?'

Here BRICUP can barely even be bothered to construct a strawman argument, preferring instead to unfavourably compare Israel to South Africa on the apparent grounds that there are a lot more Israelis than Afrikaners and that the Israelis are much better at killing children.

'Aren't academics the Palestinians' best Israeli friends?'

Having asserted that it is not practical to distinguish between good and bad academics and institutions and that all must be boycotted equally, this has to be justified by a claim that 'courageous Israeli academics' are 'painfully few' and have in fact been precisely estimated by Ilan Pappé as numbering no more than 100 out of some 5,000 of his fellows.

Pappé's mathematics seem rather dubious given the sheer number of academics who have supported oppositional causes. To give just one recent example; by November 2006 some 358 Israeli academics had signed a petition supporting Israelis who refused to serve in the Occupied Territories – a very serious thing in Israel where refusal to serve has significant consequences.

While academic administrations of Israeli universities are not all above criticism the pamphlet also ignores protests made at an institutional level by rectors, of policies such as the Summer 2006 ban on students from the Occupied Territories attending Israeli universities.

There is also no discussion of the various groups within Israel which actively campaign for peace, for withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and for equality and human rights including

Gush Shalom (The Peace Bloc), *B'Tselem* (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), *Yesh G'vul* (an organisation of soldiers who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories) and *HaKampus Lo Shotek* (the Campus Speaks Out), all of which have significant academic support.

Obviously, to recognise the contribution made by such groups would raise the question of where they stand on the boycott and force BRICUP to recognise that very few Israeli academics other than Ilan Pape and (perhaps) his 100 courageous academics support it - and that many radical activists such as Professor Baruch Kimmerling who led the campaign against the Shin Bet course have argued strongly against boycotts.

There is also the problem that B'Tselem in particular takes human rights so seriously that it also monitors and criticises violations by Palestinians against both Israelis and other Palestinians – a degree of even-handedness that BRICUP presumably find excessive.

‘Shouldn’t we be talking, not boycotting?’

In BRICUP’s view we should not because ‘business as usual’ just gives Israeli academics the impression that whatever ‘they’ do in the Occupied Territories has no consequences for them.

This is a rather extraordinary argument suggesting as it does that for Israeli academics, a non-invitation to a conference or being sacked from the editorial board of an obscure journal represents a far more significant level of consequence than living in a perpetual state of low-intensity warfare in which there is a high probability that they will have to serve themselves and in which they and their institutions are regarded as legitimate targets.

BRICUP also allege that in fact their opponents have no desire to talk, citing a Bar-Ilan conference on academic boycotts which invited no boycotters as well the alleged cancellation of the Bellagio AAUP conference under pressure from Engage.

This does beg the questions of firstly, why a boycotter would want to attend a conference at an Israeli university when the PACBI call

tells them specifically that they are to attend no such conferences? And secondly, of how many anti-boycott speakers were invited to the Resisting Israeli Apartheid: Strategies and Principles held at SOAS in December 2004 and which was largely organised by BRICUP members.

How can academics justify obstructing knowledge?

BRICUP actually do have some difficulty with this one and resort to an 'only in exceptional circumstances such as South Africa and Israel' – which would in fact be rather stronger if they'd not already half-accepted that Israel was not in fact the prime locus of evil in the world and that choosing to boycott Israel rather than China or Sudan or the United States was effectively a consumer preference rather than a moral imperative based upon a rational calculation of the degree and extent of the oppression involved.

Why not just help Palestinian universities?

In BRICUP's view there is no contradiction between helping Palestinian universities and boycotting Israeli ones – we should do both.

This raises two questions: what about Palestinian universities (notably al-Quds) which have significant research links with Israeli institutions and would therefore suffer from a boycott, and secondly what precisely can we do to help Palestinian universities?

As noted in the pamphlet itself, foreign academics are already routinely denied access to the West Bank by Israeli authorities and it is very difficult to see why a boycott should make them any more permissive.

As regards the single most pressing problem facing Palestinian academics today – the inability of the Palestinian Authority and university administrations to pay them properly without western and Israeli subsidies - the only practical solution would be to exert pressure on Hamas to recognise Israel's right to exist and the validity of the Oslo Agreements – which would immediately unblock foreign funding and allow something resembling normal academic life to resume.

Needless to say this is probably not on BRICUP's agenda.

VI. Moving on

BRICUP conclude with a rather low-key statement that there is in fact little real value in passing paper resolutions and that their real objective is to recruit dedicated activists to campaign for the widest possible boycott.

The picture of an active boycott campaign run by 'dedicated activists' is not pretty. It will give voice to anti-semitism and it will create anti-semitism. Regardless of the motives of its leadership a widespread boycott campaign will play into and amplify the anti-semitic trope which seeks to exclude Jews. That is at the core of anti-semitism – the removal of the Jew from positions of influence and the removal of Jews from public life. Engage wants to stop such a movement emerging and instead oppose the injustice and inequality in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Further Reading

Neither BRICUP's pamphlet nor our response can do more than touch on the arguments about Israel, Palestine and boycotts:

Pro-boycott websites

Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

BRICUP

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Electronic Intifada

Arguments against the boycott

Engage

Michael Yudkin: Should academics boycott Israel? (Democratiya, Spring 2007)

Sari Nusseibeh Statement

Ronnie Fraser The Academic Boycott of Israel: Why Britain?

Israeli organisations campaigning for peace and human rights

Peace Now

B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

Gush Shalom - the Israeli Peace Bloc

Gisha – Centre for the Legal Protection of Freedom of Movement

Other useful links and documents

Oslo Accords, UN resolutions etc

Union motions and other documents relating to the academic boycott campaign

Israel and the Apartheid analogy

Higher Education in Israel background

Higher Education in Occupied Territories - background Palestinian Higher Education Financing Strategy – (PNA and World Bank 2002)

