



For activists and academics — and everyone in between

## Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions

### **AMEWS and the Human Rights Task Force on MESA's Resolution on Dialogue and Discussion on the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel**

At the recent meeting of AMEWS at the MESA conference in Washington, D.C., members of AMEWS discussed the resolution that would be put before MESA members at the upcoming business meeting on November 24th. The resolution under consideration asked members to vote on whether or not a resolution permitting discussion and dialogue on the question of the institutional boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) of Israel should be put to the members. The resolution defined calls for BDS as protected free speech, and

a legitimate form of non-violent political action and endorsed the right of MESA members of all organizations to discuss, debate, endorse or not endorse the BDS campaign. By an overwhelming margin, MESA members at the business meeting voted that this resolution should be put before the members in an on-line voting process that is underway on the MESA website. If the resolution passes, it will become the official policy of MESA.

AMEWS members had their own discussion of the resolution and the pending vote. After a spirited discussion of the resolution before the MESA business meeting, the AMEWS members present voted to support the MESA resolution. One of the points discussed by AMEWS members was the

need for all MESA members to learn more about the boycott in the event that a vote on whether or not MESA should adopt the boycott is put before the members. The AMEWS members at the November meeting also endorsed a suggestion by Sondra Hale that HTRF should play a role in this process. To that end, HTRF is encouraging all AMEWS members to vote on the resolution that was passed by logging in to their MESA account.

One of the issues that arose and deserves more discussion among the members is whether AMEWS should act alone and/ or in conjunction with MESA on issues concerning the boycott. AMEWS members did vote independently as an affiliate organization to support the resolution that would be put to the MESA membership on November 24. So this issue should probably be discussed on the AMEWS list. In the meantime, don't forget to vote on the resolution. Voting closes on February 9.

**Mary Ann Fay, Ph.D.**  
**Acting Chair of the Human Rights Task Force (HTRF) of AMEWS**

**Please vote YES or NO on the resolution passed at the 2014 MESA Members Meeting on Monday, November 24, 2014, in Washington, DC. A yes vote means that you support the resolution becoming association policy. A no vote means that you do not.**

## **MESA and the Discussion of the Academic Boycott of Israel**

Voting on a resolution that would commit MESA to engaging in a discussion of the academic boycott of Israel is now underway – the electronic polls are open until February 9<sup>th</sup> for all MESA members who wish to express their support for, or opposition to, the proposition that MESA as an organization should encourage examination of the pros and cons of the boycott within its ranks.

I want to address a number of questions that have been raised by members of MESA about why and how the organization should engage in discussion of the boycott. I am starting from the premise that the majority of MESA members have good access to information about Israel, its occupation of Palestinian land, the endemic violence and human rights abuses associated with that occupation, and the complete failure of negotiations to move toward any fair resolution of the conflict. We are also alive to the negative impact this conflict has on the wider region: the Israeli occupation is one of the root causes of the ghastly situation in the area today. Most members of MESA care deeply about the distress of the people of the Middle East. We are not more humane or principled as a group than other scholars in North America, but our many ties to the region heighten our awareness, our knowledge, and our personal concern.

How will this concern be served by launching a discussion within MESA about boycott? In light of the turmoil in the region, why would we single out this issue for special attention? Are there risks for MESA as an organization associated with this form of engagement? Is even entertaining the idea of academic boycott anathema to our broader commitment to academic freedom?

Let me attempt to address these questions from my perspective as co-author of the MESA resolution calling for this discussion. I think we do need to have a formal conversation within MESA about the academic boycott of Israel. On one level, it is happening already as many have pointed out –in associated groups, in academic panels and talks, in meetings in hallways, in social media. By formalizing our commitment, as an organization, to engage in this discussion we will be firmly underscoring the right of our members to raise this issue and to take positions without fear of facing negative repercussions. We will be saying that this is a form of protected speech, that we think this conversation should go forward, and that MESA members who choose to talk about boycott have the full backing of their professional association.

There are many other states, of course, that violate human rights and engage in nefarious practices against their citizens and others, and not a few of them make their home in the Middle East.

MESA members who attempt to expose and critique these abuses may face travel bans, research restrictions, or simply the impossibility of finding a forum for their dissenting views. So why do we single out discussion of the boycott of Israel for special protection? In the academic institutions of North America, critics of Israel have stood out for the price they have paid. We now have a long record of tenure denied, hiring derailed, and accusations hurled at individuals and institutions that raise questions about Israeli policies. The cases of Norman Finkelstein and Steven Salaita are some of the more egregious, but far from isolated events. We need to be forthright in our insistence that MESA members can criticize Israel, and talk about the boycott in particular, with full and explicit MESA support of their right to do so without facing sanctions. MESA has a very respectable track record as a supporter of the freedom of expression and as a critic of attempts to limit speech and academic freedom. This resolution deepens and clarifies that position with explicit reference to the arena where such freedoms are most often being violated as far as MESA members are concerned. It is also important to note that we have been asked specifically, by civil society groups in Palestine, to take up the question of an academic boycott of Israel as support for their non-violent struggle for the recognition of Palestinian rights.

No controversial act is without possible

consequences, and I know that some members of MESA who are critical of current Israeli policies and perhaps even in favor of some form of boycott are hesitant about MESA taking up this issue. They raise reasonable concerns about the appropriateness of MESA as a “non-political” (per its bylaws) organization wading into this territory, and they voice worries that institutional and individual supporters of the organization will retaliate against any MESA engagement with the boycott. To be candid, these are valid issues and they need to be fully aired and explored. Part of the aim of the resolution is to give MESA and its members the time and space needed to exercise due diligence, to seek legal advice, and to amass as much information as possible about the anticipated fallout before proceeding further on our decision about a boycott. It is only by passing the resolution and then having a period of focused discovery that we will get solid answers to these questions.

Finally, there are some members of MESA for whom academic boycott, in any form, is not an issue they think should be broached by academics, who worry about a possible dilution of positions on academic freedom and the muffling of MESA’s voice as a strong defender of those whose academic freedoms are being violated, Palestinians among them. A boycott, some argue, further entails transgressing the academic freedom of Israeli colleagues, and ironically

enough, some of those Israeli colleagues are the strongest critics of the policies of occupation – they need to be seen and heard. In the course of discussing an academic boycott, however, we will also be clarifying the kind of boycott we might wish to implement. The International Academic Boycott of Israel, as promoted by the Palestinian BDS National Committee, offers guidelines for what it characterizes as an institutional boycott, one that eschews the boycotting of any individual based on his or her identity, be it citizenship, race, gender, or religion. MESA members will have ample opportunity to examine the different boycott options. I fully expect Israeli colleagues to be part of this conversation as we continue to talk in the aftermath of the resolution vote.

I cannot see any downside to MESA passing this resolution. It is a call for supporting vulnerable members, for fostering reasoned discussion on an issue of central concern to many of us, and for taking the time and care we need as we engage the issue of the academic boycott of Israel.

**Judith Tucker, Ph.D.**

## **Is This a path Towards Strong Solidarity? An Israeli Feminist Perspective on Academic and Cultural Boycott**

As Israeli scholars writing on feminism, security, and peace, the starting point for discussing academic and cultural boycott is intimately rooted in our personal experiences and understandings of women's everyday realities in Israel and Palestine, and of the way they are determined by a matrix of militarism and masculinity. We believe that BDS is a powerful form of resistance that may balance some of the asymmetries between Israelis and Palestinians. Yet, moving one step forward, we argue that it is necessary for international feminist scholars to take an active role in defining an ethical framework that recognizes both the potential of academic boycott as a non-violent act to support Palestinians, and the necessity of publically engaging with the work done by Israeli feminist academics. Doing so will not only ensure that local women's stories, needs and experiences remain visible, but it may result in alternative narratives about the past, the present and the possibility to create a better future.

### **BDS as solidarity: A just, non-violent and effective tool for mobilization**

The call for support of academic and cultural BDS has gained momentum due to the instrumental

logic of effectiveness. It has been argued that this form of sanctions, which is inherently non-violent, will eventually create enough international pressure to get both the Israeli public and political elites to question the feasibility and possibility of continuing the military control and settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In addition, the BDS movement has also relied heavily on the language of freedom and justice, framing the longstanding Israeli occupation as yet another manifestation of a Zionist colonial regime that has transformed over time into an institutionalized Apartheid system based on national and ethnic discrimination.

Indeed, from a Palestinian perspective, this framing not only resonates the historical and ongoing struggle to end the occupation and the quest for self-determination, right of return, equality and dignity, it also opens a possibility for new forms of global solidarity. As such, for those who are frustrated by the lack of progress in bilateral negotiations and the repeated cycles of violence in the region, BDS could be considered as a powerful tool for collective mobilization and individual action.

### **BDS as practice of alienation: Silencing marginal groups in Israel**

However, BDS is not only a signifier of solidarity. Clearly, from a mainstream Israeli – Jewish perspective it is perceived as an

alienating practice that is merely a continuation of the negation of Israel's right to exist, an opinion historically adopted by certain segments of the international community since 1948. Furthermore, the focus of the official BDS call on boycotting Israeli universities and cultural activities has resulted in a paradox since many of those who have been the most vehement critics of the Israeli occupation became automatically grouped and identified as targets for boycott.

From a practical perspective, this aspect of the BDS call has been particularly devastating for scholars who insist on writing about marginal voices within Israeli society and politics. For example, despite the vast, rich and diverse grassroots activities lead by Israeli feminist groups on the civil society level, there is little to zero research or teaching on the matter within Israeli universities. As a result, the average Israeli student will not learn about local histories of women's anti-militarist activism, global feminist peace politics or dialogical practices of conflict resolution, nor will they be able to meet global feminist scholars writing on these matters. In fact, given the conservative backlash and privatization processes in Israel's higher education system, the average Israeli student is more likely to study neo-liberal, neo-conservative and even orientalist versions of politics, international relations, Middle-Eastern

studies and political economy, without ever even knowing that critical theory exists.

### **Makes resistance invisible and Israeli-Palestinian cooperation illegitimate**

A feminist viewpoint can add the notion that this invisibility is intimately connected with the works of patriarchy. Be it a product of masculine dominance within Israeli academic structures that minimizes and silences feminist researchers, or a result of the strict conditions outlined in the official BDS prescription for cooperating with Israeli academic institutions, denying women's access to knowledge about other women's lived experiences, needs and aspirations is a constant mark of control over voice and power.

Hence, for many Israeli-based feminist scholars and activists, boycott is a double-edged sword that cuts in all directions. The most glaring example for the way this mechanism works to silence women could be found in the courageous campaign of one of the most creative Israeli-based feminist groups, the Coalition of Women for Peace (CWP).<sup>1</sup> Back in 2007 CWP founded a research project called 'Who Profits from the Occupation' which has been monitoring and exposing companies and corporations involved in economic and settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>2</sup> Despite of the campaign's expansion and global

success in shaming and raising awareness to the multiple ways in which international corporations are involved in the occupation, the group of Israeli-Jewish feminists who created the project has gradually left the country to reside in Europe and North America. These women's personal stories of injustice, alienation, political persecution and exile remain unknown. They are unknown in Israel because of the label 'traitor'; they are unknown in Palestine because of the label 'Jewish-Israeli'; they are unknown to the world because they are queer women involved in resistance.

As feminist scholars we have the responsibility to make sure that these women and their stories remain visible and comprehensible to diverse publics: Israelis, Palestinians and international scholars. This is a joint research 'project', because it involves different layers of analysis that take into account the complexity of women's existence in Israel-Palestine. Such a perspective must also acknowledge that despite the attempt of both Israeli and Palestinian societies to maintain a strict division between Jewish and Arab communities, local women have been and still need to work together. Exchange of knowledge is critical for promoting strategic gender interests and a better future. These include combating the trafficking of women from the PA into Israel and vice-versa, assisting Israeli and Palestinian women in cross-national marriage and divorce, and working

together against militarization. But it is even more important that feminist scholars actively engage in writing the history of joint Palestinian-Israeli peace and dialogue activities, on all its shortcomings, disappointments and failures. Learning about women's political mobilization in the shadow of the conflict is a valuable tool to recognize processes of resistance, bargaining, identification and alienation; and to deepen our understanding of how gender is linked with the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **BDS and feminism: When gender interests become (once again) secondary to a national struggle**

Feminist intersectionality theory teaches us that gender invariably operates in articulation with other mechanisms of power and domination, and that these multiple intersections produce complex effects. On the one hand, the patriarchal nature of national, class, or ethnic systems typically intensifies the subordination of women at the bottom. Yet due to internal contradictions in the overall power structure, the effects of the interactions between the various components are neither simple nor entirely predictable. For example, Palestinian women generally suffer from a triple oppression. But those who have Israeli citizenship also enjoy some important rights, albeit limited and partial, which necessarily affect their agency and perceived interests.

Jewish Israeli women enjoy multiple prerogatives, but their ethnic-cum-civil entitlements are also curbed by their gender. Women who reside in the periphery are disproportionately vulnerable to the periodical violent eruptions on the borders, which, cynically enough, are often instigated by shared interests of Israel/Hamas/Hizbulla to test weapons, make symbolic declarations, etc. The BDS discourse strongly discourages complex understandings of women's positioning vis-à-vis the conflict, or the potentially contradictory effects of their locations. It undercuts, once again, the feminist perspective that exposes women's multiple vulnerabilities and the mutual interests of patriarchies on both sides of the border.

### **BDS as anti-solidarity: Deterring collaborations with Israeli feminist scholars and peace activists**

Supporters of an academic and cultural boycott point out the complicity of Israeli academic institutions with the occupation apparatus. This is of course true in the economic sense, and we may add that also intellectually many individuals in the Israeli academia are solidly pro-Israelis. At the same time, Israeli academics do not speak in a single voice. There are numerous scholars who speak out against the occupation, the militarization of civil life, and the political repercussions of Jewish

fundamentalism. These scholars, many of whom are also feminist activists, are gradually isolated and silenced within Israeli academia. BDS, which effectively discourages international scholars from collaborating with them, makes it increasingly difficult for them to forge solidarity abroad as well. The active avoidance of international scholars from engaging Israeli feminist academics does not only render their actions invisible; it also throws into disregard the understanding that a sustainable conflict transformation process cannot be limited to agreements between governments (forced or volitional), but must be grounded in the thick and messy reality of both societies. We do not wish to downplay the immense power imbalance and asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinians. Yet we stress that an international anti-occupation movement that cannot accommodate a complex understanding of the occupying side directly debilitates those with whom it should be working together.

While Israeli occupation is deplorable in our minds and while as Israeli citizens we are committed to resist it and to expose its manifold harms, we argue that an all-out demonization of Israel is ineffective in achieving this goal: It catalyzes extremist nationalism and strengthens the extreme right, which is currently leading the country into ever more frequent and intense cycles of violence. Contrary to BDS contention,



it does not generate a genuine moral conversation among Israelis. If anything, it encourages self-moralizing that silences voices of dissent inside Israel. We caution, likewise, that the idea of forcing Israel to withdraw by bringing it to its knees, through hurting its economy and humiliating it internationally, while understandably enthusing, reinforces the tautological logic of vengeance that has trapped the conflict for decades. As feminists in conflict areas have shown us repeatedly, peace agreements, when reached, are only the beginnings of long and volatile journeys towards conflict *transformation*.

We believe that, keeping in mind the dramatic changes in the region, it is a necessity that local feminist scholars form strong alliances with each other to make sure that women are not being instrumentalized or left behind. Working together for this purpose involves communication, honesty and courage, which is why we cannot afford complete academic boycott.

**Sarai Aharoni, Ph.D.**  
**Hebrew University**

**Amalia Sa'ar, Ph.D.**  
**University of Haifa**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.whoprofits.org/>

## Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: Myths and Realities

At the time of writing, MESA members are asked to vote for [a motion](#) that, if endorsed, would pave the way for a discussion about the BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) campaign against Israel. This article is not a defense of the motion, which I wholeheartedly support, but is a contribution to what I hope will be a sustained discussion over the year about BDS itself.

In 2002, Palestinian civil society launched a call for citizens around the world to boycott and divest from Israel until it recognizes Palestinian human rights, namely: an end to the occupation and siege of Arab lands; respect for the right of return of Palestinian refugees; and equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel. In 2004, Palestinian academics and intellectuals launched the [Palestinian Campaign for the Cultural and Academic Boycott](#). The campaign was endorsed by Palestinian academic, cultural and other organizations, including the Federation of Unions of Palestinians Universities' Professors and Employees, which is the representative organization for higher education staff in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Since then, the campaign has become a global movement. [The number of countries](#) where there are campaigns to support BDS continues to increase yearly and

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**Resolution for Consideration at the 2014 Annual Business Meeting**  
**Middle East Studies Association (MESA)**

Whereas, Members of various academic associations in North America have sought to organize forums for discussion and debate of the 2005 Palestinian civil society call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel; and

Whereas, A number of academic associations have held membership votes on whether to endorse the BDS call; and

Whereas, We acknowledge that members of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) have differing views on the necessity or productivity of such actions; and

Whereas, Individual scholars and academic associations organizing, participating in, or commenting on such discussions, debates, and votes have been subjected to efforts to silence and/or punish them; now, therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the MESA membership **Affirms** that calls for institutional boycott, divestment, and/or sanctions are protected free speech and legitimate forms of non-violent political action; and

**Affirms** the right of MESA members to engage in open and transparent discussion of the boycott of Israeli academic institutions in the context of the Annual Meeting and other forums; and

**Affirms** the right of the memberships of all organizations to discuss, debate, and endorse or not endorse the BDS campaign; and

**Deplores** the measures of intimidation directed against the American Studies Association, the Association for Asian American Studies, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, among other associations, and some of their individual members, as we MESA members uphold the principles of free speech that protect the expression of such views and actions; and

**Strongly urges** MESA program committees to organize discussions at MESA annual meetings, and the MESA Board of Directors to create opportunities over the course of the year that provide platforms for a sustained discussion of the academic boycott and foster careful consideration of an appropriate position for MESA to assume.

**COMMENT: SUAD JOSEPH**  
**MESA ONLINE FORUM JANUARY 2015**

As a former MESA president, I am motivated by a sense of responsibility toward MESA and by a sense a commitment to individuals and organizations that make up the academic landscape of Middle East studies. Especially, I am moved by a deep belief in the power of speech, the necessity of dialogue, and the recognition that, for those of us in ME studies, MESA is the prime institutional site within which to carry out critical conversations. It is for this reason that I support the current resolution and urge our members to do so.

This resolution does not endorse the international campaign for BDS against Israel. Nor does the resolution argue the pros/cons of BDS. The resolution is rather simple: it affirms the rights of organizations and individuals to discuss BDS and it invites MESA to organize fora so that our membership can engage with each other in this important conversation.

This current resolution explicitly acknowledges a range of views toward BDS among the membership of MESA. Equally important, the resolution categorically condemns the intimidation, harassment, and persecution of scholars and academic associations that have either sought to discuss/debate BDS or endorse it themselves. MESA is a diverse collection of scholars with different views about BDS. Hopefully all our members would agree that the attempts to silence or discredit individuals and organizations that choose to endorse BDS is a violation of freedom of speech and academic freedom. A failure to pass this resolution is in effect a failure to support that freedom of speech which we, as academics and citizens, cherish as essential to our scholarly pursuits and our lives as citizens, nationally and globally. If I may repeat myself: a vote on the resolution is not a vote for or against BDS. It is a vote for the right of individuals and organizations to discuss, debate, and endorse or not endorse BDS if they so choose. The fact that a resolution about freedom of speech about BDS has to be debated highlights the tragic state of free speech. This resolution seeks to remedy this.

For our members who are concerned about MESA becoming a forum for the debate about BDS – such a debate has long been a part of MESA meetings and membership conversations. This resolution recognizes that fact, creates a transparent and inclusive forum for that conversation, and protects the rights of those that would seek to participate in that forum.

I support this resolution because I believe in MESA – I believe that MESA is our intellectual home, the site for our conversations with each other. There are no people with whom I would want to have this conversation more than the members of MESA. There is no organization more deeply informed about the Middle East, more deeply committed to the Middle East and, more deeply respectful of our intellectual traditions as scholars of the Middle East than MESA. We owe it to ourselves as scholars of this region to which we are devoting our academic lives, to have this conversation with our respected colleagues who cherish both MESA and the Middle East region. I urge you all to vote yes on this resolution which supports those who engage in dialogue about BDS and supports our desire, as MESA members, to have this conversation with each other.

**Suad Joseph**

**MESA President 2011**  
**Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Women and Gender Studies**  
**Faculty Advisor to the Chancellor**  
**University of California, Davis**

currently includes the US, Canada, UK, Ireland, France, Italy, South Africa, India, and Pakistan.

BDS can take several forms but of particular interest to members of AMEWS is the call to boycott Israeli academic institutions.

Unsurprisingly, supporters of Israel have been very vocal in condemning the academic boycott, often resorting to its mischaracterization.

Foremost, they have claimed that the boycott is racist. In response, it is essential to emphasize that the academic boycott does not target Israelis as individuals but rather Israeli institutions and their official representatives. Moreover, it is not a call to boycott Israel indefinitely but until it ends its systematic violations of international law.

A number of other arguments have been put forward to delegitimize BDS, often by people who claim to support Palestinian rights or peace in Israel/Palestine. Here I attempt to debunk those myths and explain why BDS in general, including the academic boycott, is a legitimate means of ensuring justice in Israel/Palestine—without which, there will never be true peace.

### **Myth #1: BDS prevents dialogue and is therefore contrary to peace-making**

BDS represents a radical departure from traditional, liberal peace-making paradigms, based on dialogue and cooperation. BDS has emerged *because of the failure* of the liberal peace-building paradigm embodied in the Oslo

peace process. More than 20 years of the Oslo process has not ended Israel's occupation and annexation of Palestinian land (and has even enabled more land grabs) and not achieved a just solution for Palestinian refugees, let alone ended violent conflict in Israel/Palestine.

BDS recognizes that a large part of that failure has been the result of the disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians as well as the failure of the Oslo process to recognize Palestinian rights granted through international law and rights conventions. Israel, either with US complicity or active participation, has forced the Palestinians to negotiate and trade their human rights in the name of 'peace'. Meanwhile, the international community has failed, time and again, [to hold Israel to account](#) for its numerous violations of [international law](#), which include [land confiscation](#), [settlement building](#), [home demolitions](#), [blockade and siege](#), [detentions without trial](#), [torture and war crimes](#).

The Palestinian Authority has been repeatedly pressured by [the US](#) and the [EU](#) not to seek membership of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in order to protect Israel from accountability. Whilst the ICC accepted in January 2015 to investigate war crimes in Palestinian territories, this has come at a huge price for Palestinians in the OPT, with Israel suspending the transfer of more than \$100 million of Palestinian tax revenues and the US threatening to suspend aid.

Against this back-drop, BDS represents a new

paradigm for peace, opening up new spaces of dialogue based on rights and justice.

### **Myth #2: BDS unfairly targets Israeli universities, who are at the forefront of supporting peace**

Any efforts by Israeli universities to support peace are overshadowed by their complicity in Israel's decades-long occupation and violation of Palestinian rights. Universities are involved in research and development of weapons technology that is used to enforce Israel's colonial policies against Palestinians. [For example](#), Technion University has developed a remote-controlled 'D9' bulldozer used by the Israeli military to demolish Palestinian homes; Bar Ilan University has participated in joint research with the Israeli army to develop artificial intelligence for unmanned combat vehicles that have been used in Israel's various assaults against the Gaza Strip; private weapons technology firms, such as Elbit, are involved in co-advising Israeli PhD students studying in science and engineering and the [Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya](#) was responsible for developing the 'Dahiya Doctrine', or doctrine of disproportionate force, which was used in the 2014 war on Gaza. Israeli universities are also involved in [military training](#).

[Several major Israeli universities](#) publicly expressed their support for the IDF during 'Operation Protective Edge', whilst punishing

opposition to the war on university campuses.

In general, Israeli universities offer [free tuition](#) and other academic benefits to Israelis who serve in the IDF, which necessarily discriminates against Palestinian citizens of Israel who are not conscripted to the army.

Whilst there are courageous individuals in Israeli universities that oppose Israel's colonial policies, they are in a minority, often [intimidated and censored for their opinions](#), and their opposition has not led to a change in the policies of their institutions. Far from isolating those individuals, BDS is in solidarity with them.

### **Myth #3: BDS is a violation of free expression and academic freedom**

BDS does not prevent academics employed by Israeli universities from attending international conferences, publishing their research or meeting with colleagues from institutions in other parts of the world. The BDS [guidelines](#) request that we do not allow Israeli academic institutions to operate as 'business as usual' whilst they continue to be complicit with their government's systematic violation of Palestinian rights. Specifically, we are asked to respect the following:

- not attending conferences hosted by Israeli institutions and/or funded by the State of Israel;
- not giving lectures at Israeli institutions;

- not conducting joint research with Israeli institutions;
- not sponsoring student visits to Israeli institutions;
- not reviewing academic grant proposals for Israeli grant-giving bodies;
- not reviewing articles for academic journals based in Israeli institutions.
- The only individuals targeted by BDS are those acting in an official capacity as representatives of academic institutions or academics acting as representatives of the State of Israel.

Meanwhile, it is opponents of BDS that are trying to shut down free expression by intimidating those who support it or even by preventing discussion of BDS. In 2011, Israel banned its citizens from calling for boycotts of Israeli goods, services, or organizations.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that Israel's colonial policies are a significant obstacle to Palestinian academic freedoms and rights to education. Since 1967, Israel has periodically shut down Palestinian universities for months on end and targeted them in military operations. During Israel's 2014 war on Gaza, [educational facilities in the Gaza Strip were bombed and several West Bank universities were raided](#) by the Israeli authorities, causing damage to and destruction of university property. Because of Israel's 10-year

blockade of the Gaza Strip, Palestinian students there have been prevented from travelling to West Bank universities and vice versa. Palestinian academics and students in Gaza have limited opportunities to travel internationally for education or conferences because they can only exit through the Rafah crossing, which is only open for limited periods, and have difficulties obtaining visas for onward travel. Palestinians in the West Bank are obliged to travel overland to Jordan to catch an international flight, adding a further day to travel plans and '48 and Jerusalemite Palestinians face [humiliating](#) 'security' procedures at Ben Gurion airport. Unsurprisingly, it is unusual to meet Palestinian academics at international conferences, including the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting.

#### **Myth #4: BDS unfairly targets Israel**

Some claim that Israel is being unfairly targeted when there are many more egregious violators of human rights in the world. Israel has already been singled out by the levels of international impunity that it enjoys, unlike other violators of human rights. It is also singled out by the US to receive hundreds of billions of dollars in aid, whilst the EU has included Israel as the only non-European country eligible to apply for academic and scientific funding from the EU's Horizon 2020 program.

Some also claim that the Palestinian Authority and

Hamas are also violating Palestinian human rights. Unlike Israel, Hamas *has* been punished by Western governments through their boycott of the Hamas government and their complicity in Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. Rights violations by the PA are part of its role in policing Israel's occupation (otherwise known as 'security cooperation'). Under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, bears primary responsibility for human rights violations in the OPT.

#### **Myth #5: Boycotts and sanctions do not work**

On the contrary, civil society boycotts, such as the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 and the anti-South African apartheid movement of the 1980s, have a history of bringing huge [moral pressure to bear](#) on governments and other organizations to address unjust situations. The global BDS movement not only pressures Israel but other governments that enable Israel to continue its unlawful behavior, not least amongst them, the United States. In addition, the boycott is also

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tactical because of the huge degree of internationalization of Israeli academic institutions.

Finally, we are morally obliged to respect the call to boycott Israel because it emanates from the victims of Israeli violations. As Desmond Tutu has famously said, 'If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor'. As a feminist, I side with the oppressed against the oppressor. If civil societies in any other part of the world called for a boycott of institutions complicit in their oppression, including my own, I would equally consider their call.

**Nicola Pratt, Ph.D.**

The *AMEWS E-Bulletin* welcomes and strongly encourages member feedback on the BDS issue, as well as any of the arguments presented by this month's contributors. Feedback will be published in the March issue of the *E-Bulletin* and must be submitted by 23 February, 2015 to Angie Abdelmonem at [angie.abdelmonem@asu.edu](mailto:angie.abdelmonem@asu.edu)