

Savage Minds Occasional Papers No. 14

Why Anthropologists Should Embrace BDS

By Isaiah Silver

Edited by Alex Golub

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Savage Minds Occasional Papers

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Preface

by Alex Golub

This number of the Savage Minds Occasional Paper Series is unusual for two reasons. First, this is the first SMOPS that is not a reprint of early pieces in the history of anthropology. Secondly, I am not the author of this piece, although the authors have assigned their copyright to me in order to give this piece a Creative Commons license. This piece presents in expanded and revised form material which originally appeared on the Savage Minds blog in June and July 2014. These guest blog entries, composed by two people writing under the pseudonym 'Isaiah Silver', are part of a wider discussion regarding the American Anthropological Association's stance towards Israel. As such, this SMOPS is meant to provide a convenient, downloadable, citeable explanation of their position.

Divestment is an emotional -- even explosive -- topic for many anthropologists, and especially for Jewish anthropologists. To me, the most valuable contribution this SMOPS makes is not in arguing one side of divestment or the other. Rather, its value comes from the fact that it presents a picture -- almost a mini-ethnography -- of Israel that varies greatly from what Jewish American anthropologists such as myself were told about our homeland growing up. Regardless of where one stands on the issue of Israel, I believe that we as anthropologists have a professional obligation to see and know the full reality of life in Israel today, including evidence that contradicts many of our taken-for-granted ideas about that country. Challenging preconceptions in the name of truth is, after all, the fundamental duty of anthropological ethnography. As Jewish American anthropologists, we must work through these issues the ethnography presents. An incurious and uninformed support of Israel does not fulfill Jewish American anthropologists' obligation to anthropology or Israel -- and refusing to engage the issue at all is simply to give up on one's identity altogether.

-R

April 2015 Honolulu

Abbreviations

AAA	American Anthropological Association
ICC	Israel on Campus Coalition
ASA	American Studies Association
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
IAA	Israeli Anthropological Association
NBC	National Broadcasting Corporation
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
UIUC	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America

PREFACE

This paper originally appeared in a slightly modified form on the blog SavageMinds.org. There, we put forward three central claims: that BDS is a sensible response to ongoing Israeli violations of human rights; that endorsing an academic boycott is a moral obligation for scholars in general and anthropologists in particular; and that a BDS resolution would be consistent with past and current AAA statements and policies.

Since then, the situation we document below has only grown more urgent. So, today as then, the academic boycott remains the most sensible, appropriate, and effective tool for addressing Israel's ongoing attacks on academic freedom, misuse of anthropological knowledge, and violations of basic human rights.

What happened in the past year to confirm and fortify our original call for the academic boycott? Two things: Gaza. And Steven Salaita.

When we began working on the boycott series in early June of 2014, we could not have known how timely it would prove to be. As we published these short pieces, Israel launched its fourth military attack on the Gaza Strip in the past eight years. During the 51-days of "Operation Protective Edge," Israel's air assaults and ground invasion killed 2,133 Palestinians, including at least 1,489 civilians (70% of total deaths) along with 500 children (23% of total deaths), [according to the United Nations](#).¹ In addition, over 11,000 Palestinians were injured during the attacks, including at least 3,374 children, 2,088 women, and 410 elderly persons.

As in previous operations, Israel directly targeted civilian infrastructure: [Whole neighborhoods](#) were wiped off the map by Israel's indiscriminate bombing campaigns. 18,000 homes (5% of all Gazan residences) were destroyed or damaged beyond repair, leaving 108,000 people homeless. Israel [bombed Gaza's only remaining power plant](#), causing severe problems for the delivery of basic services, including clean drinking water and waste management. Seventeen of thirty-two hospitals in the narrow strip of land were damaged.

In addition, last summer's attacks escalated the pattern of targeting Palestinian educational infrastructure that we discussed in the original posts. 26 schools were destroyed, while an additional 122 damaged. As it did during the last Gaza War, Israel once again [bombed the Islamic University in Gaza](#), decimating the administration building and campus classrooms. More than seven months later, the continued siege of Gaza is so severe, that [not a single totally destroyed home](#) has been rebuilt. According to Oxfam, due to continuing Israeli restrictions, at the present rate, it will take [over 100 years](#) to rebuild the homes, schools, and hospitals destroyed in Israel's latest attacks.

Within Israel, the war was accompanied by increasing levels of political repression at universities. Both Jewish and Palestinian citizens who dared criticize the massacre of Gazans faced immediate retribution. [Hadassah College](#) withdrew a scholarship from a Palestinian student who spoke up against the war on her personal Facebook page. Several universities sent emails to

¹ 362 persons (17% of total deaths) have yet to be identified.

their entire student body, warning them against engaging in political speech.² And [Hebrew University](#) is currently threatening to expel twelve of its students for participating in a nonviolent demonstration against the attacks on Gaza.

In response to these flagrant violations of academic freedom at Israeli universities, Prof. Amir Hetsroni [wrote an op-ed](#) warning his compatriots that “attempts by Israeli universities to punish students and faculty who protested against the Gaza war were a profound challenge to those, like me, who had opposed the boycott of Israeli academia.” Prof. Hetsroni was [promptly fired](#) from his post in Ariel University³ for expressing even such a mild criticism of state policy.

In the U.S., opponents of the boycott are increasingly adopting similar tactics for suppressing free speech. The AMCHA Initiative published a [blacklist](#) of so-called “anti-Israel” professors, urging students to refuse to register for their classes, even as apologists of Israeli actions falsely accuse BDS supporters of boycotting individuals. These underhanded maneuvers reached a new low this summer, when the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign summarily (and most likely [illegally](#)) fired Prof. Steven Salaita for comments he made on his personal Twitter that were critical of Israel.⁴ In response, [over 6,000 academics](#) have agreed to boycott UIUC, drawing upon a [remarkably similar logic](#) as the one that motivates BDS.

These sorts of shady tactics have started to come to the American Anthropological Association as well. At the 2014 annual meeting of the AAAs, supporters of the boycott – especially graduate students and junior faculty – reported facing harassment and even outright threats from opponents of BDS organized by the Israel on Campus Coalition. These bullying tactics continued after the meeting, as the AMCHA Initiative published an [op-ed](#) encouraging administrators to censor and students to shun a number of prominent anthropologists, merely for voicing their opinions on this important issue. Clearly, the AAA has work to do to defend our ability to hold a sensible debate on this pressing issue.

There are those who prefer that these important conversations not take place. Shortly before the 2014 AAAs, the Israeli Anthropological Association (IAA) - an organization that features not a single Palestinian on its board and that has never publicly criticized the Occupation - released [a statement](#) criticizing the AAAs for even daring to discuss BDS.⁵ They even took the AAA to task

² The one from [Hebrew University](#) flat out stated that “The university is joining the war effort to support its warrior students.”

³ Ariel University is itself located on an illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories by the same name.

⁴ Even our own posts were attacked by apologists of Israeli human rights violations. In the comments section of our posts, we were accused of being “motivated by obsessive hate of Jews,” even though we never once discuss Judaism and happen to be proud Jews ourselves. For a longer rebuttal of the spurious charge that BDS is motivated by anti-Semitism, see: Steven Salaita’s “[Stop the Nonsense: Nobody is Proposing a Boycott of ‘the Jews.’](#)”

⁵ A group of thirty-nine Israeli anthropologists published [a response](#) in opposition to the IAA letter and defending the autonomy of the AAA to decide its own ethical stances

for having more panels discussing Israel than any other country in the Middle East.⁶ Following their lead, a group associated with the Israel on Campus Coalition put forward an anti-BDS resolution at the 2014 AAA business meeting, seeking to prematurely curtail our right to openly debate our response to ongoing Israeli abuses. Apparently, these groups worry that presenting quality anthropological research on Palestine/Israel at the Annual Meeting of the AAA will convince members to support BDS. We couldn't agree more.

Fortunately, these silencing tactics have so far [backfired spectacularly](#). In a historical business meeting at the 2014 AAAs – the largest in recent memory – over 700 anthropologists turned out to overwhelmingly vote against the anti-BDS resolution. Rejecting outside attempts to silence discussion on this issue, the vast majority of the AAA membership clearly feels that it is worth continuing our discussion of how best to formulate a response to ongoing Israeli violations of basic human rights.

Greatly encouraged by the actions of our fellow AAA members, we offer the following paper as a contribution to this debate. As this piece goes to press, over 1,100 anthropologists have [signed a statement](#) opposing ongoing Israeli violations of human rights. As anthropologists continue to learn about the [misuse of archaeology](#) in the service of ongoing occupation, targeted repression of Palestinian academic institutions, and the direct complicity of Israeli universities in these crimes, we are hope that the AAA will take action. We hope that we will have the opportunity to adopt such a boycott resolution at the annual meeting of the AAA in Denver.

Isaiah Silver
April 2015

⁶ Their letter complains that: “An on-line search of “Israel” in the upcoming AAA meeting program yields significantly more items than any other country in the Middle East!” Obviously, academic field sites are not centrally distributed by the AAA nor do we or any other academic association claim that the distribution of researchers ought to be proportionate to a country's population or any other external criteria. We cannot fathom why American anthropological research on Israel should be so bothersome to the IAA.

INTRODUCTION

In the 30 April 2014 edition of *Anthropology News*, the leadership of the American Anthropological Association invited its members to “help the association decide on appropriate courses of action,” amid ongoing Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights. The call came after continuing requests from Palestinian NGOs and academics that the AAA join the growing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction movement that seeks to pressure Israel to end its discriminatory policies.

We are confident that, as AAA members learn about this issue, support for an academic boycott of Israeli institutions will only grow. In following, we will introduce the contours of the debates surrounding BDS, laying out the basic logic behind an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

The Basics: Why the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Exists

In the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, five-million Palestinians live under an illegal military occupation. The Israeli system of occupation affects nearly all aspects of daily life in Palestine, from the ability to move between cities to the ability to get clean drinking water. Israel maintains hundreds of military checkpoints and roadblocks around the West Bank which, along with the siege on Gaza, stifles the Palestinian economy.⁷ These measures also divide families: as the more than five million refugees stemming from the 1948 and 1967 expulsions are denied a right to return. And since 2000, some [8,000 Palestinian children](#) have been detained and prosecuted by the military courts, where they lack the basic rights of due process. Meanwhile, the 1.2 million Palestinians who are also citizens of Israel face widespread racism and must contend with more than [50 different laws](#) that discriminate against them.



⁷ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs under the occupied Palestinian territory maintains an updated list of checkpoints, roadblocks, and barriers in the West Bank on their [website](#).

The U.N. has [repeatedly censured](#) Israel's belligerent military occupation and violation of international human rights. Despite this, Israeli policies continue unabated. Since the 1992 Oslo accords were signed, Israel has doubled its settler population, building over 50,000 new homes in the West Bank. At the same time, the Israeli state destroyed some 15,000 Palestinian homes. Today, over 500,000 Israelis live on illegally occupied Palestinian lands while the Israeli government exerts direct control over 78% of historic Palestine.⁸ This situation is in no small part due to the continued unflinching support of the United States government, which provides more [military aid to Israel](#) than it does to any other country in the world.

Faced with the ongoing failure of the international community to bring about real change, in 2005, [Palestinian civil society organizations](#) called for a boycott of Israeli institutions, divestment from companies complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights, and sanctions against Israel until it ends discriminatory policies towards Palestinians. To date, the call has been endorsed by over 170 Palestinian trade unions, political parties, and NGOs from across the political spectrum. These organizations are united around three common goals:

- Ending the military occupation of Palestinian lands captured in the 1967 war.
- Recognizing the fundamental rights of Palestinian Citizens of Israel and providing them with full equality under the law.
- Recognizing the rights of Palestinian refugees, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

The Palestinian call for boycott is inspired by the non-violent struggle of millions of South Africans against apartheid. As in the South African case, a boycott allows individuals to express moral and political condemnation, especially in the absence of effective government censure. As such, it is an instrument that groups make recourse to when no other means of action are available.

The BDS movement has inspired a diverse range of campaigns from international solidarity activists, including divestment from companies implicated in the occupation, cultural boycotts of Israeli artists on state-sponsored tours, and refusing to partner with those institutions that directly benefit from the occupation.

The question for us as an academic organization is: how will we respond to this call for solidarity?

What is an Academic Boycott?

While the broader call for BDS encompasses a diverse array of actions, an academic boycott represents a more narrowly defined response. Fortunately, in potentially formulating its own response to Palestinian civil society's call, the AAA can build on the hard work already undertaken by other academic associations.

⁸ Visualizing Palestine has synthesized the changes in the population of West Bank settlements and destroyed Palestinian homes in this helpful [graphic](#).

The American Studies Association's (ASA) pathbreaking [2013 boycott resolution](#) – endorsed by a 2-1 margin in an unprecedented vote of the group's full membership – provides an example of how a similar AAA policy could be framed.⁹ It states that the ASA will no longer host representatives of the Israeli government, enter into partnership with Israeli academic institutions, or accept any funds from Israeli sources.

Importantly, the ASA resolution, like the broader BDS movement, does not target scholars on the basis of their nationality. Nor does it affect the behavior of individual members within the AAA. To give a parallel example: like the AAA, the ASA boycotts the Hilton Hotel chain due to its poor labor practices. But neither organization can prevent individual members who do not wish to express solidarity with striking workers from staying at a Hilton hotel on their next vacation. A boycott is a simple and potent way to express our collective disapproval with the hotel chain's violation of basic labor rights.

Coming from an association of academics, the ASA's resolution has been especially effective at highlighting violations of Palestinians' rights to education and academic freedom. Equally importantly, the resolution opens a space for discussing difficult but important topics such as ethnic cleansing, systematic racism, and U.S. support for Israel.

Academic boycotts have been a powerful tool in advocating for the fundamental human rights of Palestinians. We are beginning to see evidence that these boycotts, divestments, and sanctions are beginning to have a direct economic effect on [Israeli businesses](#) and [international corporations](#) that directly profit from the continued violence directed against Palestinians.

More importantly, the success of BDS tactics, including the endorsements by academic associations in the United States and Europe, have fundamentally altered the terms of debate in both Palestine/Israel and abroad. Israel has begun to consider the impact of BDS on its policies, recognizing that, increasingly, its violations of Palestinian human rights comes at a price. In the United States, BDS tactics have brought Israeli violations to the attention of millions of Americans for the first time. Even Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) has noted the efficacy of BDS, warning the close U.S. ally that, because of the success of these campaigns, "Today's status quo absolutely, to a certainty, I promise you 100 percent, cannot be maintained. It's not sustainable. It's illusionary." The movement is a clear instance of the power of ordinary citizens to affect positive change, even when our governments are resistant to it.

WHY AN ACADEMIC BOYCOTT? CONFRONTING ISRAELI ATTACKS ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Opponents of BDS frequently criticize boycotts as a violation of academic freedom. But, in fact, the opposite is true. The policies of both the Israeli state and of its universities constitute an assault on the basic rights to education. These violations affect not only universities in the occupied Palestinian territories, but also those within the 1949 armistice lines. In order to protect

⁹ Although we concentrate here on the resolution passed by the [American Studies Association](#), the [Native American and Indigenous Studies Association](#) and the [Association for Asian American Studies](#) have both also passed BDS resolutions that should be thoroughly studied by the AAAs.

the educational rights of all of the region's inhabitants, we should refuse to cooperate in a system which contributes to the occupation, discriminates against Palestinian students, and punishes political dissent.¹⁰

Assaulting Palestinian Universities

The Israeli army treats Palestinian universities not as centers of knowledge production, but as targets of a sixty-year long military occupation.

To give just one recent example: In the summer of 2014 the Israeli army launched raids on the campuses of [Birzeit University](#), [Al-Quds University](#), and the [Arab-American University](#) in Jenin, causing extensive damage to buildings and facilities in the process. At the same time, the Israeli military also converted [Palestine Ahliya University](#) near Bethlehem into a temporary detention center. Although Israel initially claimed that these disruptive raids were part of a search for three kidnapped Israeli teenagers, subsequent [investigations revealed](#) that Israeli authorities knew from the start that the teens were long dead. To this date, Israel has provided no evidence that its "search" was anything but a cover for the continuing destruction of Palestinian Universities and other educational institutions.

This is by no means a recent development. From 1988-1992, Israel forced Birzeit to shutter its doors entirely. Shorter closures have affected virtually every Palestinian institution of higher learning. Nor are they infrequent. The Israeli army [fires rubber-coated bullets and gas canisters](#) on campus so often, that one English lecturer we know at Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem carries anti-tear gas remedies in her purse every time she goes to teach. While the effects of the gas can be managed, the raids which regularly disrupt her lessons are harder to cope with.

Israeli attacks on universities in the Gaza Strip have been even more destructive than those on peer institutions in the West Bank. In 2009, Israel [bombed the campus](#) of the Islamic University, destroying computer labs, scientific laboratories and the campus library. A subsequent [UN fact finding mission](#) confirmed that "These were civilian, educational buildings and the Mission did not find any information about their use as a military facility or their contribution to a military effort that might have made them a legitimate target in the eyes of the Israeli armed forces." Meanwhile, the siege on Gaza has made it difficult to acquire even the most [basic educational materials](#), such as paper and books. And, thanks to harsh Israeli restrictions on movement, young Gazans face great difficulties in accessing higher education outside of the strip: Israel bars Gazan students from attending universities in the West Bank and has repeatedly prevented them from participating in [Fulbright](#) programs or attending [American universities](#).

¹⁰ Here, we cite some of the most egregious violations of academic freedom, almost all of which occurred in the past five years. In writing this paper, the biggest problem we had was whittling down the numerous examples of Israeli restrictions on the right to education to fit a short narrative form. For more extensive documentation of these abuses, we recommend starting with: "[Academia Undermined: Israeli Restrictions on Foreign National Academics in Palestinian Higher Education Institutions](#)"; Al Rased's 2011-2012 [annual report](#); the Alternative Information Center's [report on the Academic Boycott of Israel](#).

Beyond disrupting student learning, these restrictions on university life make it extremely challenging for [foreign academics](#) to form productive research partnerships with their Palestinian colleagues. In addition to dealing with the uncertainty and restrictions on movement entailed by life under military occupation, arbitrary visa regulations for foreign researchers and draconian import rules interfere with the ability of Palestinian universities to be centers of research. Obtaining permission from the Israeli governments for Visiting Professors to stay at Palestinian Universities for longer than one month is extremely difficult. As a result of these restrictions, as economist [Robert Wade](#) recently reported: “It is widely said among the Palestinian elite that the quality of university education [in the West Bank] is deteriorating.”

Despite these serious violations of academic freedom, Israeli academic institutions have been conspicuously silent on these issues.¹¹ Given the complicity of Israeli academic institutions in the occupation, their silence should surprise no one.

Not innocent bystanders: Israeli Universities and the Occupation

Israeli universities are not innocent bystanders in the occupation of Palestinian territories. They actively participate in it.

Some university campuses are built directly on occupied lands. The recently upgraded Ariel University is built entirely on an illegal settlement. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, founded within the 1949 armistice line, has recently [expanded its campus beyond the Green Line](#). And Herzog College, a smaller academic institution, is located in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc.

Moreover, virtually all Israeli universities collaborate with the Israeli army to develop the weapons used in maintaining the occupation. For instance, both the Technion and Weizmann Institutes have built academic programs in coordination with Israeli weapons manufacturers, including Elbit and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems. Amongst the more notorious results of these close partnerships is the [Caterpillar D9 remote-control bulldozer](#), responsible for destroying thousands of Palestinian homes in the West Bank.

Israeli universities have likewise played a crucial role in developing some of the most heinous military strategies used in the occupied Palestinian territories. Perhaps the best known example is the [Dahiya doctrine](#) – a military strategy “involving the application of disproportionate force and the causing of great damage and destruction to civilian property and infrastructure” – by Tel Aviv University’s Institute of National Security Studies. This military doctrine resulted in widespread civilian deaths and destruction of property in the 2009 and 2014 attacks on Gaza.

Increasingly, Israeli academic institutions are also mobilizing to justify Israeli violations of human rights to the world. During the 2009 Gaza war, the Herzilya’s Interdisciplinary Center and

¹¹ To date, we know of no Israeli university or faculty senate that has passed a resolution condemning the frequent closures of and raids on Palestinian universities. With only a few notable exceptions, Israeli academics have likewise been largely silent on the issue: only 4.5% (n=407) of the 9000 Israeli professors who were asked to sign a [2009 petition](#) in support of academic freedom in the occupied Palestinian territories to do so. This silence is at least partially the result of the atmosphere of intimidation and censorship on college campuses, which we cover below.

Israel's foreign ministry set up a closely-coordinated "[war room](#)" in order to defend Israel's military actions on the internet. Since the war's conclusion, these programs have become more widespread. Today, students at Tel Aviv, Ariel, and Haifa Universities can receive credits for taking [courses in hasbara](#), learning slick social media strategies designed to justify the Israeli military occupation under the guise of "public diplomacy." These same tactics were called upon in [2014](#), when Israel's universities were once again threw their weight behind justifying Israel's attacks on Gaza to the world.

Universities in Israel are thus not simply spaces for learning. They have become the centers where the ideas and weapons that Israel uses in its occupation are developed and disseminated.

Anti-Palestinian Discrimination on Israeli Campuses

Just as they participate in the Israeli state's occupation of Palestinian territories, so too do universities further the state's discrimination against its own minority populations. In fact, within the Green Line, Israeli campuses are on the front lines of a wide-ranging assault on the principles of equality and academic freedom.

Perhaps the most explicit example of university racism in recent years came about in 2009, when the Carmel Academic Center ended its program in accounting because the majority of incoming students would be non-Jewish. [Caught on tape](#), the institute's financial backer explained: "If it is a majority Arab, we can't allow ourselves, because we can't allow ourselves an institution that will be categorized as Arab."

By and large, however, discrimination against Palestinian students operates through structural forms of legalized racism, rather than through such overt means. Israeli laws allow universities to provide preferential admissions and financial-aid support to reservist soldiers. But while conscription is mandatory for Jewish citizens, most Palestinian citizens are exempt from national service.¹²

As a result, discrimination against Palestinian students is institutionalized at every level of university life. Palestinian students are *de facto* excluded from many scholarships and face tougher entry requirements than their reservist classmates. Haifa University even conditions [access to dormitory residence](#) on a student's fulfillment of army service. One particularly stark example of how these policies affect campus life occurred at [Safed College](#), located in the majority-Palestinian Galilee region. In 2012, at the urging of the college president, the student union altered its bylaws to make army service a precondition to serving as student body president. As a result, the 60% of university students who are Palestinian are no longer eligible to run for the office.

The results of widespread discrimination in Israel are evident in [educational outcomes](#): Although over 20% of Israeli citizens are Palestinian, they account for only 9.5% of BA students,

¹² Discrimination on the basis of military service affects areas of life well [beyond the university](#) as well. For this reason, the U.S. State Department has criticized these discriminatory policies: "Citizens who do not perform military service enjoy fewer societal and economic benefits and are sometimes discriminated against in hiring practices."

4.8% of MA students, and 3.2% of PhDs. Only 1% of professors at Israeli universities are Palestinian.

Universities in Israel actively contribute not only to the occupation, but also to Israel's system of legal racism. As the students at Haifa University learned, these discriminatory practices do not stop after admissions.

Silencing Dissent: Restrictions on Students and Professors at Israeli Campuses

For the select Palestinian students who manage to enroll at Israeli universities, the struggle for education continues even after they arrive on campus.

Palestinian students and academics operating within Israeli institutions describe a widespread atmosphere of hostility. To wit, Israeli universities have [canceled speakers](#), banned gatherings, and [arrested peaceful demonstrators](#) against Israeli military operations. They have even [canceled](#) the [screening](#) of award-winning documentaries about the occupation on campus because they were “too political.”

To give just one recent example: In May 2014, Palestinian students at Haifa University requested permission to hold a formal commemoration on campus for the more than 600 Palestinian villages destroyed in the course the *Nakba* (the mass expulsion of Palestinian residents that accompanied Israel's founding). When administrators denied their request, students decided to gather informally without flags or banners. They were not in violation of any university policy.

But even this silent commemoration was [too much for administrators](#). Haifa University organized a raucous dance party on the quad to disrupt the informal gathering. During the event, representatives of the student union taunted those present and police officers were sent in to intimidate and later disperse the Palestinian students

This event is just the latest in a longer pattern of abuses to academic freedom. In recent years, every major Israeli university has engaged in some form of censorship on research and events perceived to be critical to the state — from suppressing commemorations of the Nakba to [censoring human rights curricula](#) and even [banning scholarly works](#) on the occupation.

Violent restrictions on education do not only affect students. Faculty at Israeli institutions also face increasing limits to their research agenda, especially in cases where their research is deemed too critical of the Israeli occupation. To give just a few examples: In 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu [prevented Rivka Feldhay](#) from participating in a German academic conference because of her support for soldiers who refused to serve in the occupied Palestinian territories. Dr. Nadera Shalhoub-Kavorkian, one of the only Palestinian females tenured in any Israeli institution, has been [prevented by the government](#) from speaking at international conferences due to the political nature of her research. The prominent historian Ilan Pappé was forced to leave Israel, after he was [denied promotion](#) at Haifa University for supporting BDS. The world-renowned philosopher Ariela Azoulay was [denied tenure](#) at Bar Ilan University because of her political views. The political scientist Neve Gordon had his job at Ben Gurion University threatened for endorsing BDS. Less established scholars obviously face even greater

obstacles: Theodore Katz had his [M.A. thesis](#), originally approved with highest honors by Haifa University, revoked after the media got wind of its subject: a massacre during the 1948 war. Israeli institutions are a space where research is increasingly being subjected to political litmus tests.

Similar political interference [nearly shut down](#) Ben Gurion University's Department of Government and Politics, after prominent politicians expressed displeasure over the views of some of its professors. In the end, the department narrowly escaped closure, but only after it implemented changes to its curriculum and hired several "state friendly" researchers to mollify their critics.

While it can be hard to quantify this kind of censorship, the proliferation of such stories indicates that this is more than a few isolated incidents: they are evidence of an atmosphere of intimidation towards Palestinians and political dissidents on Israeli campuses.

So Why Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions?

Opponents of the academic boycott like to pretend that BDS supporters target Israeli universities for crimes that are beyond their control. David Rosen, for instance, accused BDS supporters of relying upon a "strange and dangerous theory of vicarious complicity to bolster their arguments." Yet nothing could be further from the truth. As we have shown in this section, Israeli academic institutions are directly complicit in the systematic legal discrimination of the Israeli state. As long as Israeli academic institutions participate in the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, discriminate against Palestinian students, and punish dissenters, they too must be boycotted. As a scholarly association, the AAA has an obligation to support our colleagues who face discrimination and censorship, wherever they may be. Israeli military raids on Palestinian universities, discrimination against Palestinian students, and restrictions on academic research represent grave violations of academic freedom. Israeli universities do not merely remain silent in the face of these acts; they actively perpetuate them, both through their partnerships with the Israeli army and in their censorship of students and professors.

While some individual scholars have bravely denounced the violent and discriminatory policies of the state, Israeli academic institutions remain complicit with both the belligerent military occupation in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza as well as the discriminatory practices within the Green Line. We have been asked by over 170 Palestinian civil society groups to withdraw our support from these institutions. Given the policies of Israeli universities documented in this section, we believe that we must honor this request to endorse the academic boycott. Until such time as the Israeli government respects the principles of human rights and academic freedom at universities in Palestine/Israel, the AAA ought to withdraw support from this discriminatory system.

It is not only academic knowledge in the abstract that plays a role in maintaining the occupation. Our own discipline's archaeological techniques are also being used by the Israeli state as a weapon of war.

DIGGING THE OCCUPATION:
THE COMPLICITY OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION

Recently, the American television network NBC started airing *Dig*, a new archeology drama set in Jerusalem. Normally, we'd be ecstatic to see our fellow archaeologists getting such media fanfare. But there is nothing normal about this venture. Filmed on-site in illegally annexed East Jerusalem, the show is underwritten by a [\\$6.5 million](#) grant from the Israeli government. This means Israel is spending more to film *Dig* than on the yearly education budget for all K-12 Palestinian schools.

Why is the Israeli government, currently in the midst of a [budget crisis](#), throwing millions at NBC to get *Dig* on the air? Because they know that archaeological knowledge remains one of the Israeli state's most powerful weapons. If *Dig* unearths anything, it is that in Israel archeology is neither a neutral nor innocent enterprise. Instead, it has become just one more tool in the occupation of Palestinian lands.

All anthropologists, whether or not they specialize in the sub-field of archaeology, should be especially concerned when our discipline is misused to promote discrimination and occupation. By endorsing Palestinians' call for BDS, the AAA has a unique opportunity to highlight the misappropriation of our scholarly techniques and defend the good name of our profession.

Israeli Archeology's Present and Future: Justifying Land Expropriation and Settlement Expansion

NBC's *Dig* is filmed on location in Silwan, an illegally annexed Palestinian neighborhood situated just outside the Old City of Jerusalem. Since 1967, Silwan has become a keystone of Israeli policies to exert control, expropriate land, and legitimize its occupation of the eastern parts of the city. In this ongoing effort, archeology is the state's handmaiden.¹³

In the 1990s, the state outsourced control of the neighborhood's archaeological sites to Elad, a right-wing settler organization whose [goals](#) include: "settling families in the City of David and developing the site as a Jewish neighborhood."

The way Elad, state officials, and universities collaborate to advance the goal of "unifying Jerusalem" is illustrative of the problematic implementation of archeology in Israel more broadly. As a private entity, Elad has gotten away with using [shady tactics](#), [discriminatory laws](#), and even [outright fraud](#) to expel Palestinian residents of the village and replace them with Jewish settlers. Rather than regulating Elad, as a responsible government watchdog might do, the right-wing settler organization is increasingly gaining control of the state's ministry of antiquity. In October 2014, the Israeli Knesset (parliament) appointed Israel Hasson, a politician with [close ties to Elad](#), as the next director of the Israeli Antiquities Authority. This despite Elad's record of illegal activities.

Elad has taken full advantage of its new-found power to orchestrate the [massive transfer of archaeologically-rich public lands](#) to its jurisdiction. And whereas new Israeli settlement

¹³ In the short times since we first published this section on the blog of SavageMinds.org, the number of settlers in Silwan has [doubled](#).

construction in East Jerusalem almost always elicits international rebuke, land expropriation carried out under the facade of “scientific inquiry” mostly goes unnoticed.

Predictably, Elad’s archaeological digs work to further its goals of displacing the occupied village’s Palestinian population and increasing its Jewish character. One of its first projects was the excavation of the [Spring House](#), which meant closing the village springs to Palestinian residents, even as Elad continues to allow Silwan’s new Jewish settlers to bathe in the spring’s cool waters. Since then, Elad continuously expanded the scope of its settler project under the guise of “archaeological fact-finding.” What begin as archaeological projects often ends in the construction of illegal settlement housing for the exclusive use of Jewish Israelis. In the words of [Jawad Siyam](#), a 39-year old resident of Silwan, whose grandmother’s home was among the first to be seized: “The settlers began by taking over homes around the site... Then they were given the main excavation site, and built new homes in the park. And now they are finding new sites, fencing off more land and digging under our houses.”

The most recent project seeks to establish a [seven-story museum](#) on top of an archaeological site at the entrance to the village, despite the damage it will likely cause to ongoing archaeological excavations. Archaeological findings will be used to draw in international tourists, most of whom will [never realize](#) that they are unwittingly contributing with their [feet and wallets](#) to illegal settlement activity in the village.

Here, as in other parts of the occupied West Bank, archaeological excavations serve to create “facts on the grounds,” which end up displacing residents from this occupied Palestinian neighborhoods while opening the door for more settlement growth in East Jerusalem.

Archeology in the Service of Occupation

The close ties between the occupation and archaeology can also affect the ability of academics to carry out their research. When archaeological inquiry and political agendas have come in conflict, the latter have won out. Elad has repeatedly chosen to hide archaeological finds that do not accord with its narrow ideological mission, while at the same time fabricating historical narratives that are not supported by the archaeological record.



Hence, in 2011, when excavations uncovered a Byzantine-era pit, Elad was quick to announce that they had just found the prophet Jeremiah’s pit. This, despite Prof. [Ronny Reich](#) of the Israeli Antiquities Authority calling the claim “nonsense.” Lacking any archaeological evidence, Elad nevertheless proceeded to turn the pit into a [mainstay of their tours](#) of the area. So too the details of the archaeological record: in order

to make “Jeremiah’s Pit” more attractive to tour groups, Elad built up a special events hall on the site, demolishing one of the pit’s walls before it has could be properly excavated.

In other more egregious cases, Elad has gone so far as to [destroy Muslim artifacts](#) and remnants, even recklessly [throwing out Islamic-era skeletons](#). In these cases, the organization appears to value its mission of “developing the site as a Jewish neighborhood” over and above its commitment to a faithful archaeological record. Needless to say, such practices [contravene archeological codes of ethics](#) concerning “equitable partnerships” with indigenous populations, as stipulated by the [World Archeological Congress](#).¹⁴

Israel’s Tunnel-Vision: Burrowing Past Palestinian Homes

Unfortunately, valuable historical information is not the only, or even the most direct casualty, of Elad’s poor archaeological methods. The organization has also pioneered strategies designed to transform archaeology into a weapon of war, furthering the illegal displacement of Palestinians from their homes and villages.

In most parts of the world, the archaeological method of [burrowing horizontal tunnels](#) underground has long been considered invalid. The practice fell into disuse nearly a hundred years ago, when it was replaced by the stratigraphic method of digging using vertical columns. Except for in Israel, where archaeologists are reverting back to the practice of excavating lateral tunnels, in the process causing massive structural damage to densely-populated Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem.

By prioritizing what lies beneath the surface, the scientifically-dubious horizontal tunnel system works to quite literally [undermine Palestinian infrastructure](#). Ground-level subsidence caused by these outdated archaeological methods has become so frequent that nearly every house in Silwan now displays visible cracks. In 2009, the collapse of one tunnel caused a Palestinian girls’ school to give way, [injuring 17 children](#) in the process. Months later, a break in a different section of the same site led to the [collapse of a mosque parking lot](#), leaving behind a large crater. And a similar [cave-in near a kindergarten](#) produced a 4-meter deep pit that has yet to be fully repaired.

Meanwhile, the Jerusalem municipality has declared that sites undermined by the excavations are unsafe, providing them with the perfect excuse for demolishing more Palestinian infrastructure in East Jerusalem. In September, after surveying some of the recently weakened structures in the al-Qirmi neighborhood, the city proceeded to issue [20 new eviction orders](#). In this case, archeology works not only as an ideological tool, but also, in the hands of Elad, as an instrument of dispossession.

When asked about the potential danger posed to Silwan’s residents by the use of tunneling, Elad’s founder freely admitted that the dig will threaten [Palestinian homes](#). As [Yonathan Mizrahi](#), an archaeologist who used to work for the Israeli Antiquities Authority noted: “They want to use

¹⁴ As with many other facets of the occupation, these misuses of archaeology to further the occupation of Palestinian territories is enabled by academics from Tel Aviv and Hebrew University.

archaeology, even bogus archaeology, to provide cover for their political agenda of pushing Silwan's Palestinians out."

The prospects for changing the status quo appears even dimmer now than they did a few short months ago. In October 2014, the [Israeli Antiquities Authority](#) appointed a new director, Israel Hasson, a man known for his longstanding ties to Elad. Instead of reigning in Elad's archaeological abuses in Silwan, Israeli authorities are now working to ensure that Elad's warped application of anthropological knowledge is formally enshrined in state policy and applied across Palestine/Israel.

Silwan: A Microcosm of Israeli Archaeology

Unfortunately, the experience of Silwan is exemplary, rather than exceptional, of the uses and abuses of archaeology by the Israeli state. Many villages in the region have been continuously inhabited for centuries or even millennia and can reasonably be described as sitting atop a site of at least some archaeological significance. Rather than use this to enrich our understanding of the region, however, both the Israeli state and settler groups have cynically used this rich historical legacy to [further the occupation](#). In effect, archaeology has become another military strategy.

This is not a new phenomenon. As the renowned anthropologist [Nadia Abu El-Haj](#) documents in her book, *Facts on the Ground*, archaeological practices were integral to early Zionist efforts to colonize Palestine, even before 1948. The selective and at times unsustainable historical myths that were integral to the fashioning of early Zionist identity continue in the ways Elad (mis)represents the archaeological record. More directly, she also shows how the post-1967 demolition of the Old City's Moroccan Quarter quite literally paved the way for further dispossession dressed-up as archaeological exploration (Chapter 7).

However, in recent years Israel has intensified these long-standing tactics in order to fundamentally remake the landscape of Palestine/Israel in the wake of the failure of the Oslo peace talks.

While Elad's work in Silwan is perhaps the most dramatic example, it is far from unique. From declaring "archaeological zones" that are up to [20-times larger](#) in area than the actual dig site to [demolishing even temporary structures](#), and from [evicting residents](#) to rejecting locally developed alternatives for preservation of sites, archaeological projects are increasingly being used by the Israeli state to violently remake the demographics of the region. As the Israeli archaeological NGO [Emek Shaveh](#) has argued, many of these projects seem to stem "from the desire to create a contiguous Israeli area that will be almost entirely free of Palestinians; the eviction of village residents will ease the future annexation of the area to Israel."

As one might suspect given the region's historical import, Palestine/Israel contains some of the most important archaeological research sites in the world. Unfortunately, these projects are increasingly being driven by political, rather than scientific, demands. The result threatens to tarnish the good name of our discipline and implicate us in the occupation of Palestinian lands.

Will the AAA defend our discipline?

The AAA has a history of defending the discipline from those who would misuse it for their own ends. Most recently, the American Anthropological Association protested the show *American Diggers*. According to the [letter sent to SpikeTV](#) by the AAA: “The program will undermine critical public support for the protection, preservation, and interpretation of the archaeological record.” In Palestine/Israel, the status of archaeology faces similar threats to its legitimacy. The use of archaeological projects to displace Palestinians, expand settlements, and promote a narrow ideological agenda could turn the pursuit of historical knowledge into another tool of occupation and discrimination.

The AAA has a duty to continue defending the reputation of the discipline. If it can oppose a show like *American Diggers* surely it should also oppose *Dig*, the NBC show underwritten by the Israeli government. Endorsing a united Palestinian civil society’s call for BDS sends a strong message about the cynical misuses of our discipline’s techniques by the Israeli government. But it is also a clear directive to corporations like NBC who would seek to make a quick buck on the dispossession of Palestinian lands. This is one area where the AAA’s voice has a very large impact.

Maintaining the organization’s tradition of defending ethical uses of anthropology is just one of the ways that an academic boycott would uphold the best traditions of the AAA.

EMBRACING OUR BETTER ANGELS: THE HISTORY OF THE AAA AND BDS

As a rule, boycotts are not undertaken lightly. For this kind of tactic to be effective, a number of factors must align, including: the exhaustion of other policy measures and/or the failure of international bodies to take action in defense of human rights; a united call from those whose human rights are being violated to help out in this way; a target that is vulnerable to sanctions and boycotts; and clearly articulated goals.

Given these weighty prerequisites for launching a boycott, it is remarkable just how much precedent exists in the history of the AAA. Our record as an organization is by no means spotless, but overall we should be proud of the way that the AAA has addressed human rights issues around the globe. In this context, condemning Israeli human rights violations is in keeping with our history and mission as an organization.

AAA and Human Rights: a rich legacy of professional ethics and organizational boycotts

The AAA has been consistently supported basic human rights. The professional ethics that guide us in these matters were most clearly laid out in the AAA’s [1999 Statement on Human Rights](#):

Anthropology as a profession is committed to the promotion and protection of the right of people and peoples everywhere to the full realization of their humanity, which is to say their capacity for culture. When any culture or society denies or permits the denial of such opportunity to any of its own members or others, the American Anthropological Association has an ethical responsibility to protest and oppose such deprivation.

With these words in mind, our members have been willing to speak out on a range of critical human rights issues. For instance the AAA has:

- Criticized [South Africa](#), Namibia, and [Burundi](#) for their apartheid policies.
- Condemned violence against civilians in the [former-Yugoslavia](#) and [Pakistan](#).
- Condemned violence against indigenous and/or minority populations in [Chile](#), [Brazil](#), [Peru](#), and [Bulgaria](#).
- Expressed support for the [self-determination](#) of Puerto Ricans.
- Opposed the use of [torture](#).
- Condemned the [Pinochet coup](#) in Chile.
- Condemned the 2010 [Honduran coup d'etat](#).

The AAA has been especially critical of the misuse of anthropological knowledge. In 2007, the Executive Board released a statement criticizing the U.S. Army's [Human Terrain System](#). Amongst other concerns, the board took the program to task for instrumentalizing anthropological knowledge in the service of a military operation. More recently the AAA rebuked television shows such as [American Digger](#) and [Nazi War Diggers](#) for appropriating archeology in ways that violate our professional ethics.

AAA Solidarity: Boycotts in Palestine, the U.S., and Beyond

The AAA has not stopped at words alone. When directly affected groups have called upon us, the AAA has not shied away from taking the necessary actions. In recent years, for example, the AAA has signed onto a number of boycotts called for by directly affected groups. We endorsed the [Hilton hotel workers'](#) call for a boycott in 2004. Likewise, after the 2010 passage of [S.B. 1070 in Arizona](#), the AAA supported immigrants-rights groups by boycotting the state until the repeal of the law. In 1999, at the request of Native American groups, the AAA voted to boycott the State of Illinois until the public university system retired their racist mascot, Chief Illiniwek, in 2007. And since 1995, the AAA will no longer sign contracts with any state or municipality whose laws [discriminate against those in the LGBTQ](#) community. We see this as a positive development, in line with anthropology's best traditions of solidarity.

Time and again, we have stuck to our values, even when doing so posed organizational challenges. In response to union requests to boycott the Hilton, the AAA [broke its contract](#) with the hotel chain to hold its annual meeting at their San Francisco locations in 2004 and 2006, despite the financial strain entailed by this move.

Nor have these actions been limited to the United States. In 2006, the executive board of the AAA voted to endorse the [international boycott of Coca-Cola](#) for not being "sufficiently proactive in protecting workers and their families from intimidation and violence." And nearly thirty-years earlier, in 1975, the AAA voted to cease collaborating in the Fulbright-Chile

program, “based on a current assessment of the state of academic freedom in Chile, which most scholars agree is nonexistent.”

Boycotting Israel’s discriminatory policies, its ongoing violent occupation, and its failure to uphold academic freedom is consistent with our organization’s history and values.

Will We Repeat the Mistakes of Our Past?

While the AAA has a laudable record of honoring worthwhile calls for local and international boycotts, we have also had our share of missteps.

The last time a movement like BDS-Palestine rose to international prominence was during the height of South Africa’s apartheid regime. While the organization did manage to pass a weak resolution at its 1982 meeting to “condemn the continued existence of [apartheid in South Africa](#) and South Africa’s continued support of apartheid in Namibia,” we failed to issue a sufficiently-strong response. Significantly, efforts to pass an organizational boycott against the apartheid-regime were defeated in annual meetings in the 1980s. Bowing to political pressure, the AAA chose to violate its best traditions and missed a historic opportunity to help bring about an end to South African apartheid.

We believe that this was a mistake of immense proportions and one that we ought not repeat. Currently, the AAA’s situation parallels that of the 1980s. In 2003, the AAA general meeting [passed a resolution](#) “in defense of the Palestinian people’s human rights as guaranteed under international law, and support their right to self-determination.” Although the meeting failed to reach quorum and the statement did not become official AAA policy, it is still an important precedent. However, like our 1982 resolution against apartheid, this statement has proven to be of little value. Without undertaking concrete action, the 2003 resolution - like its 1982 predecessor - failed to garner even minimal media attention. In the meantime, Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights have only worsened.

Will we once again produce only vague and ineffectual condemnations? Or will the better angels of our nature win out as we take action to defend the values that our organization stands for? When the history of this period of the AAA is written, will we be proud of the way we championed human rights or embarrassed that we stood idly by?

APPENDIX 1: FAQs ON BDS

Below, we present answer to some of the most frequent questions we received in the course of writing these original posts. As is the case with any important issue, however, space prevents us from being exhaustive. Additional FAQs on BDS that we recommend include:

- [“Yes, but...”](#) A list of rebuttals of common criticisms by Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions
- [FAQs](#) from the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel
- [FAQs](#) from the US Campaign to End the Occupation

- [FAQs](#) from Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel

I. GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT BDS

1. What is BDS? What are the goals of the movement?

BDS is an acronym that stands for, “Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions.” It refers to a 2005 call, endorsed by over 170 Palestinian civil society movements, to use non-violent tactics in order to pressure the Israeli government. The call urges various forms of boycott until Israel meets its obligations under international law by:

1. Ending its occupation of all Palestinian land;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, promoting, and protecting the rights of Palestinian refugees, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

For more on the history of the BDS movement, see the websites of [BDSmovement](#), [USACBI](#), and [PACBI](#). If you’d like a more substantive introduction, we’d also recommend checking out Omar Barghouti’s (2011) book, *[Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights](#)*.

2. Why must refugee rights be a part of the BDS call?

BDS is a rights-based movement. It emphasizes the human rights principles upon which any solution must be based. Between 1948 and 1967, over a million Palestinians were expelled from their homes. According to the most recent estimates, they and their descendants now comprise the largest (and longest) refugee crisis in the world, leaving more than five million stateless Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA. The United Nations has repeatedly reaffirmed the right of these individuals to return to their homes, including in: UNGA 194 (1948), UNSC 236 (1967), and UNGA 169 (1980). These fundamental rights, which are legally-enshrined, must be respected as part of any just settlement.

Moreover, it is not the role for us as anthropologists to dictate the terms of Palestinians’ struggle for freedom. Just like we would never lecture our ethnographic informants about how best to lead their lives, we should likewise refrain from trying to control from afar the terms of Palestinian liberation. Our role should be to support those who would struggle to attain their own basic rights and freedoms in any way we can. We have been presented with a reasonable, effective, and non-violent platform for realizing Palestinians’ human rights. The question before us is whether we will endorse or reject that call.

For more information on Palestinian refugees, we recommend [this report](#) from the Palestinian NGO Badil, as well as this thoughtful [collection of articles](#) on the right of return from the Israeli NGO Zochrot.

3. But does this mean that an academic boycott resolution implicitly endorses a one-state solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict?

No. BDS does not take any position on what the ultimate political outcome of the Palestine/Israel conflict ought to be, only that the three principals named above be respected. Some

individuals and groups within the movement endorse a specific solution – one, two, or no states – while others do not.

What unites these diverse political groups is the belief that respecting the basic human rights of all people who live in the land is a necessary precondition to any final outcome. As Omar Barghouti puts it in his book, [BDS: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights](#):

While individual BDS activists and advocates may support diverse political solutions, the BDS movement as such does not adopt any specific formula and steers away from the one-state-versus-two-states debate, focusing instead on universal rights and international law, which constitute the solid foundation of the Palestinian consensus around the campaign.

In other words, at stake here is the broad human rights principles that must underlie any just end to the conflict. The AAA resolution should follow the lead of the BDS movement in endorsing a rights-based approach. And so no, a resolution would not constitute an endorsement of any specific policy or political outcome.

For more on this issue, we recommend these two short-but-to-the-point articles by Ali Abunimah: “[Finkelstein, BDS and the destruction of Israel](#)” and “[Why do Zionists falsely claim that the BDS movement opposes the two-state solution?](#)”

4. Can an academic boycott really work?

It has in the past. South African leaders from Nelson Mandela to Desmond Tutu have cited the international boycott of South Africa as a contribution to ending apartheid. Moreover, we have strong evidence that, despite still being in its infancy, the BDS movement has already altered the conversation in significant ways, both in the United States and in Palestine-Israel. [U.S. officials](#) have repeatedly cited BDS as placing significant pressure on Israel to end its occupation. Likewise, Israeli officials are starting to realize that their policies come at an increasingly significant cost. And Palestinian non-violence movements finally are receiving a modicum of support from the international community.

II FREQUENT CRITICISMS OF BDS

5. Is BDS anti-Semitic?

No.

BDS targets Israeli institutions in response to Israeli human rights violations. It does not target Jewish individuals or institutions in any way, shape, or form. The only way that BDS could be considered anti-Semitic is by falsely equating Judaism and the state of Israel (and in the process erasing or ignoring the great and growing number of Jews who oppose Israeli policies and/or endorse BDS).

The BDS movement emerges out of a strong anti-racist analysis. This has been reaffirmed by many of the leaders of BDS movement in their statement: “[The Struggle for Palestinian rights is incompatible with any form of racism or bigotry.](#)” It is further affirmed in the preamble to the [ASA’s boycott resolution](#) which states that it emerges out of the “struggle against all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, discrimination, and xenophobia, and to solidarity with

aggrieved peoples in the United States and in the world.” As an anti-racist movement, BDS rejects any form of bigotry, including anti-Jewish racism.

6. Does endorsing BDS encourage violence towards Israelis?

The BDS movement is committed to non-violent action. For decades, Palestinian resistance movements have been criticized for adopting violent tactics. BDS represents a rejection of violent tactics, building instead a movement grounded in the principles of non-violent resistance. If we can’t stand up for that, then we are in real trouble.

7. But won’t a boycott of Israeli academic institutions still affect individual scholars?

It is remarkable just how many arguments against BDS are not really arguments against *this* boycott, so much as arguments against *any* boycott. BDS is a tactic, not a goal. And like all other boycotts in the entire history of non-violent movements, a boycott is a blunt instrument. It is conceivable, for instance, that the Montgomery bus boycott may have harmed some bus drivers who did not individually support Jim Crow laws. Likewise, the AAA boycott of Hilton hotels may harm a few branch managers who personally believe in workers’ rights. Similarly, it is entirely possible that a boycott of Israeli academic institutions may cause occasional hardship for certain Israeli scholars. Unfortunately, in the absence of effective action, individual opposition to oppressive policies does nothing to change their institution’s complicity in ongoing rights violations. Realizing this, a number of Israeli academics and activists have endorsed BDS as an effective strategy for amplifying their personal opposition to the policies of their universities and government. (As we discuss above, many of them were subsequently forced to leave Israel for expressing their political views). BDS seeks to encourage, amplify, and support those few critical voices from within the Israeli academy.

A boycott is not a tactic to be undertaken lightly. It is a last resort to be used only when all other measures have been exhausted. Moreover, the BDS movement deserves great credit for going out of its way to minimize the potential harm to individual scholars. BDS targets institutions that are complicit in Israel’s discriminatory policies. Individual scholars are still free to research, collaborate with American scholars, and attend our conferences, so long as they do so as individuals and not as representatives of their institutions.

8. But wouldn’t BDS harm Palestinians too?

Like supporters of South African apartheid – who used the [exact same line](#) – this argument is most often put forward by those who oppose taking any action against Israel’s occupation and discriminatory policies. BDS is the tactic that a united Palestinian civil society has settled upon. We trust a united Palestinian civil society to be able to weigh the costs and benefits of this action better than any foreign anthropologist or commentator.

III. WHY ISRAEL?

9. Why “single out” Israel?

This is another argument that is not actually against *this* boycott, so much as it is about *all* boycotts. If you have ever participated in a boycott – and if you are a member of the AAA, then

you are participating in several – then you have “singled out” a target. That’s how boycotts work: by selecting a target that is violating somebody’s rights, understanding that they are vulnerable to external pressure, and bringing that pressure to bear.

10. Are you saying that Israel is the worst human rights violator in the world? What about the human rights situation in country X?

We are not in the business of ranking human rights violations around the world, nor should we be. In this short paper, we have documented more than enough human rights violations for the AAA to endorse the united Palestinian civil society call to boycott Israel. Moreover, this issue is particularly relevant to an American scholarly association like the AAA, since the United States gives more foreign aid to Israel – \$3 billion a year – than to any other nation. Finally, the AAA should address this issue because of the ways Israel misuses archaeological knowledge in the service of the occupation.

Boycotts are not a comparative tool, nor should they be. The AAA did not examine the record of every hotel chain or beverage provider before signing onto the Hilton or Coca-Cola boycotts. Cesar Chavez did not examine every agricultural product in supermarkets before asking us to boycott grapes. When we are called to adopt a boycott, we should ask if it is effective and warranted, and not be cowed into inaction by the dead-end game of comparing and ranking suffering.

Endorsing this boycott neither obligates nor prevents us from taking appropriate action to address any other issue. If someone would like to argue that another issue also deserves our attention and action – whether in the form of a boycott or any other policy – we will listen with open ears. In the meantime, all we ask is that we approach this boycott with the same criteria and attitudes that we would any other proposed boycott.

IV. THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC ASSOCIATIONS

11. Does a boycott harm academic freedom?

No. The academic boycott targets institutions only, not individuals. The academic boycott does not prevent Israeli scholars from speaking, writing, or publishing what they wish. Nor does it prevent individual scholars from attending our conferences, participating in our association, or receiving our prizes, so long as they do so as individual scholars and not as representatives of their institutions. It targets those institutions for their complicity in Israel’s occupation and in its discriminatory policies towards Palestinian citizens and subjects.

The boycott demands that academic freedom be extended to all people who inhabit Palestine and Israel. It states that we will withdraw our support from Israeli academic institutions because they systematically discriminate against Palestinian students. It says that we will not participate in a university system that is enabling the occupation of Palestinian lands. And it says that we will not contribute to an Israeli regime that conducts regular military raids and imposes closures upon Palestinian universities. In other words, one key demand of the academic boycott is that

they respect the academic freedom and rights to education of all people under their sovereignty. The text of the [Association for Asian American Studies boycott resolution](#) does a particularly good job of highlighting this aspect.

12. The AAA is a diverse association. Is it right to force all of our members to abide by BDS?

This is yet another argument that is not about *this* boycott so much as it is about *all* boycotts that the AAA may adopt. The AAA cannot force its members to do anything. As an association, we boycott Coca-Cola for not having been “sufficiently proactive in protecting workers and their families from intimidation and violence” in Colombia. If you do not wish to abide by this boycott, the AAA does not control, condemn, or punish you for your beverage preferences. Adopting BDS makes a statement about what we, as a community of anthropologists, believe in. Like any community, we are a diverse group with differing opinions. That should not stop us from taking action when it is warranted and supported by a majority of the membership.

13. Would endorsing BDS hurt our membership?

The AAA should endorse BDS because it is the right thing to do, just like we stuck to our principles when we boycotted San Francisco hotels, despite the financial strain that this caused our association.

Nonetheless, we take great encouragement from the fact that other scholarly groups have been rewarded for doing the right thing. Most recently, the [ASA’s membership actually increased](#), following their decision to endorse BDS. According to their subsequent [press release](#): “The ASA has also collected more membership revenue in the three months following the boycott resolution than in any other three-month period over the past quarter-century and its ongoing “[Stand with the ASA](#)” grassroots fundraising campaign has exceeded the association’s expectations thus far.” We hope that the AAA will be similarly rewarded should it choose to follow its conscience.

APPENDIX 2: STATEMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS FOR THE BOYCOTT OF ISRAELI ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The following statement is being circulated by Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions and has been signed by nearly 1,000 anthropologists as of this writing. To add your name to the statement, visit their [website](#) or email anthroboycott@gmail.com. Anonymous signing is possible for those in precarious employment situations who and/or may be worried about the increasing threat of reprisals from BDS-opponents.

We, the undersigned anthropologists, are circulating this petition to voice our opposition to the ongoing Israeli violations of Palestinian rights, including the Israeli military occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem, and to boycott Israeli academic institutions that are complicit in these violations.

The recent military assault on the Gaza Strip by Israel is only the latest reminder that the world's governments and mainstream media do not hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law. As a community of scholars who study problems of power, oppression, and cultural hegemony, we have a moral responsibility to speak out and demand accountability from Israel and our own governments. Acting in solidarity with Palestinian civil society continues a disciplinary tradition of support for anticolonial and human rights struggles, itself an important departure from anthropology's historical complicity with colonialism. As laid out in the American Anthropological Association (AAA)'s 1999 [Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights](#), "Anthropology as a profession is committed to the promotion and protection of the right of people and peoples everywhere to the full realization of their humanity... When any culture or society denies or permits the denial of such opportunity to any of its own members or others, the AAA has an ethical responsibility to protest and oppose such deprivation."

Israel has maintained an illegal siege on the Gaza Strip for seven years, severely restricting the movement of people and goods in and out of the territory. Palestinians are also being dispossessed of their lands and livelihoods throughout the West Bank, where Israel's separation barrier curtails Palestinian freedom of movement and education. These and other ongoing violations will continue unless people around the world act where their governments have failed.

As employees in institutions of higher learning, we have a particular responsibility to oppose Israel's widespread and systematic violations of the right to higher education of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line. In recent months, Israeli forces have raided Al Quds University in Jerusalem, the Arab American University in Jenin, and Birzeit University near Ramallah. In this summer's assault, Israeli aerial bombardment destroyed much of the Islamic University of Gaza. More generally, the Israeli state discriminates against Palestinian students in Israeli universities and it isolates Palestinian academia by, among other tactics, [preventing](#) foreign academics from visiting Palestinian institutions in Gaza and the West Bank. We are also alarmed by the long history of confiscations of Palestinian archives and the destruction of libraries and research centers.

Israeli academic institutions are [complicit](#) with the occupation and oppression of Palestinians. Tel Aviv University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Bar Ilan University, Haifa University, Technion, and Ben Gurion University have publicly declared their unconditional support for the Israeli military. Furthermore, there are [intimate connections](#) between Israeli academic institutions and the military, security, and political establishments in Israel. To take but one example: Tel Aviv University is directly implicated, through its Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), in developing the Dahiya Doctrine, adopted by the Israeli military in its assaults on Lebanon in 2006 and on Gaza this summer. The [Dahiya Doctrine](#)

advocates the extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure and “intense suffering” among the civilian population as an “effective” means to subdue any resistance.

As anthropologists, we feel compelled to join academics around the world who support the Palestinian call to boycott Israeli academic institutions. This call is part of a long-standing appeal by Palestinian civil society organizations for the comprehensive implementation of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS) of Israel, and is supported by the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUPE).

In responding to the Palestinian call, we seek to practice what the AAA calls an “engaged anthropology” that is “committed to supporting social change efforts that arise from the interaction between community goals and anthropological research.” Anthropological research has illuminated the destructive effects of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian society. And the Palestinian community has called for an academic boycott of Israel as a necessary step to ensuring Palestinian rights, including the right to education.

In accordance with these stated principles in support of rights and justice, anthropologists both independently and through the AAA have taken strong stances on a number of issues: apartheid in South Africa, Namibia, and Burundi; violence against civilians in the former Yugoslavia and Pakistan; violence against indigenous and minority populations in Chile, Brazil, and Bulgaria; the use of torture; the Pinochet coup in Chile; and the misuse of anthropological knowledge in the U.S. Army’s [Human Terrain System](#). As an organization, the AAA has also participated in boycotts on several occasions: of the Fulbright-Chile program in 1975; of the State of Illinois in 1999; of the Hilton hotel chain in 2004; of [Coca-Cola](#) in 2006; and of the [State of Arizona](#) in 2010.

Boycotting Israeli academic institutions is very much in concert with these previous actions. Our decision now to sign on as individuals to the academic boycott represents a concrete and consequential assertion of our commitment as anthropologists to the struggle of the Palestinian people.

Following in the footsteps of the growing number of US academic associations that have endorsed boycott resolutions, we call on our anthropologist colleagues to boycott Israeli academic institutions. Given that decades of interaction, cooperation and collaboration with Israeli institutions have not produced mutual understanding or stopped the military occupation and its violations, we believe that this boycott is the only non-violent form of pressure that could persuade Israelis to call for – and act for – meaningful change that could lead to a just peace. Palestinians must be free to attend universities, in Palestine and internationally, in security. They must have a flourishing, inclusive, well-rounded educational experience. They must be free to meet and learn from scholars from all over the world.

We pledge not to collaborate on projects and events involving Israeli academic institutions, not to teach at or to attend conferences and other events at such institutions, and not to publish in academic journals based in Israel. We call for doing so until such time as these institutions end their complicity in violating Palestinian rights as stipulated in international law, and respect the full rights of Palestinians by calling on Israel to:

1. End its siege of Gaza, its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967, and dismantle the settlements and the walls;
2. Recognize the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel and the stateless Negev Bedouins to full equality; and
3. Respect, protect, and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned