

**Letter to the AAA from the Israeli Anthropological Association dated 28.8.2014
with annotations by Dr Uri Davis (highlighted in italics and coloured in red)**

The Israeli Anthropological Association (IAA) and its members

(With the exception of four of its members).

believe that the AAA's possible endorsement of boycotting Israeli academic institutions is a moral insult to our integrity, to the integrity of AAA members as individuals and as anthropologists, and to the integrity of the AAA as an institution.

Quite the contrary:

Given that Israel is an apartheid state, possibly the last remaining apartheid state that is a member of the UN General Assembly after the demise of apartheid legislation in the Republic of South Africa and its replacement with a Liberal-Democratic Constitution in 1996 in the wake of the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic elections in 1994 – given the above, unless the AAA's endorses boycotting Israeli academic institutions (including the Israeli Anthropological Association, of which I am a member) its moral integrity, the integrity of AAA members as individuals and as anthropologists, and the integrity of the AAA as an institution will be seriously compromised. (In this connection, see my Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within, Zed Books, London, 2003, notably Chapters (1) & (3).)

Academic boycotts cut against the grain of the academic enterprise and the free exchange of ideas. Such a resolution would be a slippery slope undermining the very principles upon which the AAA and anthropology are built. The association has made political statements in the past, but boycotting a country and universities is unprecedented. AAA boycotts of American cities and states extended to holding annual meetings there, not to boycotting academic institutions affiliated with these states. Punishing scholars in Israel (or, say, in Arizona) for the acts of their governments is not only meaningless, ineffectual, and often counterproductive, it is first and foremost a breach of academic freedom and freedom of speech.

I have yet to see the draft of the AAA resolutions in question. But I would like to assume that the said draft properly refers to the boycott, divestment and sanctions against apartheid Israel and Israeli institutions – and does not refer to individuals.

No less important, the call for considering a boycott of Israeli institutions is misleading – to the point of dishonesty – in providing an apologetic attempt to separate Israeli institutions from individual anthropologists. Almost all Israeli anthropologists are employed in institutions that are funded by the state. Despite claims to the contrary and despite explanations that a boycott is merely a symbolic/political act against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, a boycott would stigmatize and cause concrete harm to these individuals whatever their political opinions. These consequences and the underlying currents of the boycott need to be brought to the light of day, not camouflaged with legalistic distinctions. Nor should they be disguised with polite phrasings. A boycott will turn the AAA into a hostile environment for these individuals, some of whom have been members of the AAA for years.

I would hope that it is precisely the intention of the of the AAA (assuming it passes by majority vote the draft resolution in question) to cause concrete hardship to the majority of Israeli anthropologists that are employed in institutions that are funded by the apartheid state of Israel in order that such individuals (probably the majority) as have not come out in public against apartheid Israel criminal violations of the values of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, the standards of International Law, and all UN Resolutions on the question of Palestine; endorse relevant BOYCOTT From Within (<http://boycottisrael.info>) statements such as: "Citizens of Israel Charge Israel with Genocide"; and generally attempted as far as is in their capacity to let public opinion be aware that they call for the same corrective BDS measures that were clearly instrumental in the process of transforming apartheid Republic of South Africa into a Republic governed by a Liberal-Democratic constitution be applies against apartheid Israel.

Boycotting Israeli anthropologists does not make moral sense. Israeli anthropologists – like others around the world – are not accountable for their governments' decisions.

See above.

The academic boycott movement (e.g., as expressed in the recent ASA debate) claims that Israeli academics are “furnishing the ideological justification and technical means for the...Occupation to continue.” This serious misreading of Israeli academia reveals a true disconnect from knowledge of the situation on the ground, a kind of armchair anthropology that doesn't resonate with our discipline. If American and other anthropologists are concerned about a political reality far from their shores, why not contact some "locals" – among who are many members of the AAA – to learn more about the situation? They might be surprised to learn about the range of activities and research projects in which we are involved and about our opinions regarding boycotting academia. Israeli universities and scholars are in fact the source of much vocal criticism, research, and public efforts to change the local political reality.

The vote in respect of the heinous letter to the AAA from the IAA signed by the current President of the IAA, Professor Emeritus Harvey E Goldberg reads as follows:

Of the 69 members of the IAA, 40 voted "In favour" (10 of whom are members of the AAA); 4 "Against" (2 of whom are members of the AAA); 1 "Abstain".

Most Israeli anthropologists oppose Israel's occupation of Palestinian land since the 1967 war, and support Israel's withdrawal and a two-state solution. They consistently criticize their government's short-sightedness in negotiating with the Palestinians and for restricting the participation of Palestinian academics in the academic enterprise. Many have been activists for the rights of Palestinians – Israeli citizens and in the territories – for years.

But only 4 voted against sending this heinous letter in their name!

But Israeli anthropologists also grasp complexity.

At core the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is anything but complex:

As of the early years of the 20th century a settler-colonial movement known as political-Zionism invaded the country of Palestine, namely, the territory mandated to His Britannic Majesty by the Council of the League of Nations in September 1922 (otherwise known as "Historic Palestine"). The said invasion culminated in the 1948-49 war against the resistance of the indigenous people of Palestine, the Palestinian-Arab people (supported to a degree by troops mobilized by some League of Arab States governments and by Arab volunteers). Under the cover of the said war and Israeli army perpetrated the crime-against-humanity of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, reducing the main body of the Palestinian people to the misery of stateless refugee existence. (See Ilan Pappé, The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2006).

And thus the continuing conflict, punctuated by succession of Israeli war-crimes and crimes-against-humanity, the cruelty of which has become increasingly visible to world political and professional view, including the view of the AAA – hence the AAA long-delayed and most welcomed possible endorsement of boycotting Israeli academic institutions.

The IAA has yet to support the resolution of the conflict based on of the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the standards of International Law, and all UN Resolutions on the question of Palestine, including the implementation of all 1948 Palestine refugee families to return to all parts of historical Palestine.

Many don't accept the political ramifications of viewing Israel as solely responsible for our predicament. Nor do they believe Israelis can single-handedly achieve a much aspired-for peace in an entangled geopolitical context just because it is their moral ideal. Many are also critical of the role of Palestinian and Arab leaders. All deplore the loss of human life that is one consequence of the absence of a viable solution to the ongoing conflict.

How nice ...

An on-line search of 'Israel' in the upcoming AAA meeting program yields significantly more items than any other country in the Middle East! As asked in several replies to the initial AN announcement we also wonder: Why Israel/Palestine has become the AAA's central concern and the target of a possible boycott?

Because , after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, the first democratic elections in 1994 and the demise of apartheid legislation in the Republic of South Africa and its replacement with a Liberal-Democratic Constitution in 1996 Israel is possibly the last remaining apartheid state that is a member of the UN General Assembly.

It is hardly necessary to produce a litany of places around the world where people suffer harshly because of conflict and unequal power, or where past exploitation, slavery, or even genocide still reverberate. So, again, why select Israel?

Apartheid Israel ought to be singled out NOT because it is not possible to "produce a litany of places around the world where people suffer harshly because of conflict and unequal power, or where past exploitation, slavery, or even genocide still reverberate"; NOT because the AAA as an institution is implicitly "anti-Jewish"; AND DEFINITELY NOT because the promoters of the resolution in question are implicitly "anti-Semitic" – RATHER, as pointed above, because , after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, the first democratic elections in 1994 and the demise of apartheid legislation in the Republic of South Africa and its replacement with a Liberal-Democratic Constitution in 1996 Israel is possibly the last remaining apartheid state that is a member of the UN General Assembly.

Asides from the moral questions, what would a boycott do? In an email exchange among Israeli anthropologists, one suggested that Israeli academics might use the threat of a boycott to push the current Israeli government toward compromise with the Palestinian leadership. This seems to be the goal of a potential AAA boycott, the logic being such: We (Americans) boycott Israeli academic institutions expecting that this will cause the current Israeli government to change course.

As far as I am aware, the object of BDS, including(hopefully) the IAA's, is, inter alia,) to cause concrete hardship to the majority of Israeli anthropologists that are employed in institutions that are funded by the apartheid state of Israel in order that such individuals (probably the majority) as have not come out in public against apartheid Israel criminal violations of the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the standards of International Law, and all UN Resolutions on the question of Palestine; endorse relevant

BOYCOTT From Within (<http://boycottisrael.info>) statements such as: "Citizens of Israel Charge Israel with Genocide"; and generally attempted as far as is in their capacity to let public opinion be aware that they call for the same corrective BDS measures that were clearly instrumental in the process of transforming apartheid Republic of South Africa into a Republic governed by a Liberal-Democratic constitution be applies against apartheid Israel.

If this were likely to be the chain of events, perhaps many Israeli anthropologists might themselves support a boycott. In reality, however, such a step is unlikely to end this conflict. A boycott, we argue, is politically speculative, unwise, and destructive. It would play into the hands of those within and outside Israel who wish to perpetuate and even exacerbate the current situation. A boycott will do nothing on the political level and, if anything, would weaken an important enclave of liberal thought in Israel. Indeed, as we write, many academics are engaged in a struggle against those forces within Israeli society that seek to erode universities as a vital meeting place for the exchange of critical ideas.

This was not the case in respect of international anti-apartheid mobilization against the apartheid Republic of South Africa, and this is definitely of the case in respect of international BDS mobilization against apartheid Israel.

The format of the debate over a possible boycott is also important. Most concretely we wish to call attention to how the engagement with a possible academic boycott of Israeli universities has been structured in the forthcoming AAA annual meeting. The initial AN announcement states that the aim is "exploring how to make dialogue work," and promises "a space for presentation of multiple perspectives." There is little evidence, however, that such a balance has been achieved. Most sessions that deal with the topic – several are Invited Sessions on Wednesday and Thursday – emphasize the plight and disappointment of Palestinians leading to a *raison d'être* for a boycott. The "Member's Forum" (Thursday), purports to be an "open forum," but implements restricted rules of communication. Thus, "Names of members who wish to speak will be selected at random," and those members will have two minutes (!) at the mike. Surveying the program clearly suggests that organizational procedures have been seized upon to "give the mike" to a selected list of participants who favor a boycott initiative, and to minimize participation of anthropologists knowledgeable about or affiliated with Israeli universities. While dialogue is the declared aim of this program, the line-up of only one session critiquing the idea of boycott, with four-five providing a basis for supporting it – and with no communication between the opposing presenters – constitutes more of a stage for expressing pre-conceived one-sided positions than providing "roundtable" discussions for give-and take. Rather than allowing for a "focused conversation in which opposing views can be expressed and complexities can be acknowledged and understood," these arrangements block communication, and they certainly fail to form a viable democratic process or a serious academic conversation.

This is nonsense!

Academia is one of the few arenas in which meaningful exchange can take place, and anthropology is one of the unique enterprises through which the taken for granted can be challenged and rethought. In adopting a boycott, however, the AAA would be rendering impossible any discussion, exchange of views, dialogue, informal meetings, and opportunities for scholarly cooperation across a political divide.

This is again nonsense.

The boycott is directed against apartheid Israel institutions NOT against individuals. As this exchange of views illustrates, in adopting a boycott, however, the AAA would in no way be rendering impossible any discussion, exchange of views, dialogue, informal meetings, and opportunities for scholarly cooperation across a political divide.

Castigating Israeli anthropologists in no way will be an influence for change, peace, or justice. Instead of boycotts and blunt divisive moves that create discriminatory lines of distinction between morally-stigmatized and morally-sanitized members, we urge the AAA to continue to provide a safe, democratic and creative meeting place: a haven in which a diverse array of scholars may freely present their questions, ethnographies and views, and learn – bottom-up – about the complex socio-political realities of allies and adversaries in Palestine/Israel. Together we should seek new ways to facilitate and deepen a constructive dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

This too is nonsense!

Kindly re-read all of my comments above.