

Last month [20 November 2015], the American Anthropological Association resolved to vote on a boycott of Israeli universities: www.americananthro.org/StayInformed/NewsDetail.aspx?ItemNumber=13213

Having endorsed this resolution by signing the initiating petition anthroboycott.wordpress.com/signatories, I've been asked by "Alex J. Goldstein" (email, 11 December 01h36) to explain my position for *Boston Magazine*.¹ Here is my response.

As a grad student during the mid 80's, I participated in campaigns to divest endowment funds from companies propping up South African Apartheid — a system of land confiscation, labor control and cultural dominance based on the unscientific concept of human "races" (cf. Boas 1940). The Pretorian regime was a settler colonial outpost and indeed holdout shielded by Cold War calculus, which is why Ronald Reagan shoveled military and diplomatic aid to "contra"-style proxy forces in Angola and Mozambique. Not only did my university derive financial benefit from this arrangement, it was also ideologically complicit, for example headlining Samuel Huntington at a gala forum at the Harvard 350th jamboree in the fall of 1986. Professor Huntington's skittish remarks were upended during the question period when his published staunch defense of "praetorian democracy" (1968) was quoted back to him by Damon Silvers, a student of labor sociology speaking truth to power. No one in attendance can forget how Huntington was rendered speechless, gasping for breath to defend the indefensible as the Science Center auditorium spontaneously cleared. (Poor Huntington found his Manichean voice again a few years later.) It's too much to expect a wordless response from Harvard's Professor Dershowitz now, but in most other respects the West Bank and Gaza are remarkably like the former Bantustans, as found by South African observers including Archbishop Desmond Tutu and (briefly) Judge Richard Goldstone.

The present AAA resolution is only partial BDS [cf. <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>], and is still to be voted by the full organization (I'm a lapsed member), but the idea is clear enough. Academics can't match AIPAC's lobbysome grip on the U.S. Congress (Mearsheimer & Walt 2006) and have no clout with the Christian Zionist wing of the Republican Party, but a professional guild can still try to raise the occupation's institutional cost, hearten peaceniks and push back against the assigned role of complacent "Mandarins" (Chomsky 1969) within the neoliberal university. (Salaita's Urbana case was a nice litmus test of the latter point.) Chomsky has dissed BDS as a feelgood symbol (Almeghari 2012), but his thinking may evolve, as unchecked occupation turns the "one-state solution" from pie-in-the-sky to fact-on-the-ground. The failure of 'constructive engagement' with Israel has dawned on anyone paying attention to the cynical cycles of glad-handing followed by hand-wringing in Washington DC. Chomsky rightly rebukes activists who seek personal absolution in mere gestural politics, and many ardent anti-Apartheid campaigners were too slow to recognize the ANC's moulting into neoliberal managers in 1994 (Kasrils 2013), but this time around there's less reticence to admit that the inheritors of "Arafat's derelictions" (Said 2001) have turned "quasi-collaborationist" (Falk 2014). Obviously the Israeli occupation is not the worst human emergency currently on earth, but it's one for which the U.S. has been too responsible for too long, so by Chomsky's own logic (1967) it's a situation where U.S. intellectuals should be ashamed to hide in fake neutrality. Hence the AAA initiative and my support.

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References

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UPDATES

12 March 2016 The frequent objection that boycott stifles dialogue is well answered in these posts:

Alessandrini, A. [2011]. Bad faith at the book festival. 26 February. www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/748/bad-faith-at-the-book-festival.

Reinhart, T. [2003]. Academic boycott: in support of Paris IV. *Borderlands* 2.3. www.borderlands.net.au/vol2no3_2003/reinhart_paris_iv.htm.

3 May 2016 With engaging self-awareness, Norman Finkelstein defends his non-endorsement of BDS in this interview: mondoweiss.net/2016/04/norman-finkelstein-on-sanders-the-first-intifada-bds-and-ten-years-of-unemployment. Consider his arguments:

- (i) Palestinian civil society is weak and coopted—in his words, "an illusion".
- (ii) BDS serves as a convenient Satan for Israeli public relations: "It became the new pretext for Israel to play victim. ... The irony is, while Netanyahu wails that BDS wants to delegitimize Israel, in fact he is manipulating BDS to delegitimize principled criticism of the occupation and settlements."
- (iii) BDS somehow enables the tendentious conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Jewish ethnocentrism, shifting attention away from human rights and towards ideological casuistry. "[W]henver you talk about human rights, Israel wants to talk about anti-Semitism. ... The difference between Zionism and Apartheid—which clearly became a term of opprobrium—is that there was never a quarrel about what Apartheid signified. Everyone understood it meant separate and effectively unequal development. ... But Zionism doesn't have a clear-cut definition, that's why both Chomsky and Netanyahu can call themselves Zionists. It's just a distraction, which is why Israel loves to talk about it."
- (iv) BDS is ego-trip rhetorical adornment for "tenured radicals" like "Perry Anderson... the leading Bolshevik in UCLA's faculty cafeteria".

Point (i) may be true or exaggerated, but either way it's not compelling so long as external solidarity could still help a strong civil rights movement to develop under the occupation. Finkelstein says "the situation is hopeless, for now", but that could be defeatist. He rightly insists—as also noted in my own statement above—that solidarity easily derails into exoticist romanticism, but the only antidote is engaged understanding, which is no less incumbent on BDS than it was for anti-Apartheid campaigners. But it's illogical to make a vibrant Palestinian civil society a precondition for any action. Complaints (ii) and (iii) are properly directed at occupation apologists not

1. In retrospect, the journo bait was probably disingenuous, cf. theintercept.com/2017/09/06/how-right-wing-extremists-stalk-dox-and-harass-their-enemies.

BDS supporters. As a tactic, BDS brings comparisons of Zionism with Apartheid, Jim Crow etc. into focus. So if Zionism *qua* theology is too nebulous to discuss intelligently, why not talk about occupation and settler-colonialism? Those terms finesse the exceptionalist red herring and reflect back on the North American experience in a way that Finkelstein would appreciate. But the distinction is tangential. Few if any settler colonial projects have been theology-free, for reasons familiar to Max Weber, so quibbling over the most appropriate label for the source of Palestinian grievance is another distraction. As to tenure (iv), Finkelstein was unfairly denied his own at DePaul by Professor Dershowitz's "frenetic and relentless campaign" (Howard 2007), but it's no news that tenure is a racket, or that living well is the best revenge. Thanks to The Dersh, there's one less Perry Anderson to kick around! On a more serious note: Finkelstein observes that the occupation faces "the obstacle, which thus far remains insuperable, of lacking international legitimacy. The international community still does not accept the settlements or the occupation". How is BDS irrelevant to this important fact?

Howard, J. [2007]. Harvard Law professor seeks to block tenure for adversary at DePaul U. *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53.32, 13 April. [Firewall.]

2 September 2016 The Movement for Black Lives endorses BDS:

policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest citing inter alia bdsmovement.net and www.blackpalestiniansolidarity.com

5 January 2017 Jeffrey Sacks (complitforlang.ucr.edu/people/faculty/bio.html?page=sacks.html), translator of Mahmoud Darwish (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Darwish), critiques MLA president Tony Appiah's boilerplate deflection of (president.mla.hcommons.org/2016/11/02/taking-issue-taking-stock) yet another Northamerican academic referendum on BDS:

www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/25811/an-open-letter-to-kwame-anthony-appiah-president-o

This ballot may reveal whether echt postmodernists can 'sublate' (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aufheben) their trademark ironic detachment from tangible political engagements—a consequential matter for tenurati and wannabes alike.

16 March 2017 Writing at the invitation of the U.N. Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia, Richard Falk (www.princeton.edu/faculty-research/faculty/rfalk) and Virginia Tilley (cola.siu.edu/politicalscience/faculty-staff/faculty/political-science/tilley.php) find "that Israel maintains a regime of apartheid in its exercise of control over the Palestinian people"—see these archived links:

web.archive.org/web/20170316014234/https://www.unescwa.org/publications/israeli-practices-palestinian-people-apartheid-occupation

web.archive.org/web/20170316054753/https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/israeli-practices-palestinian-people-apartheid-occupation-english.pdf

19 March 2017 U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has intervened to quash the aforementioned Falk-Tilley report, causing the chair of ESCWA, Under-Secretary General Rima Khalaf, to resign in protest:

web.archive.org/web/20170317182651/http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-un-israel-report-resignation-idUKKBN16O253

www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/26224/text-of-resignation-letter-by-escwa-executive-secr

22 March 2017 Four of Israel's twelve prime ministers since 1948, including David Ben-Gurion, have invoked apartheid as a logical consequence of the prolonged occupation of Palestine:

theintercept.com/2017/03/22/top-israelis-have-warned-of-apartheid-so-why-the-outrage-at-a-un-report

14 October 2017 Ilan Pappé (socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iais/staff/pappe), historian of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, is interviewed about BDS, Apartheid and the democratization of the "knowledge commons":

Is the U.S. left truly anti-Zionist?; an interview with Ilan Pappé about his new book co-authored with Noam Chomsky titled *On Palestine*. Khalil Bendib, 20 May 2015 www.statushour.com/ilan-pappe.html

Activism and political organising in academia; a conversation with Ilan Pappé. Carol Que, 11 October 2017 www.opendemocracy.net/ilan-pappe-carol-que/activism-and-political-organising-in-academia-conversation-with-ilan-pappe

23 October 2017 Avi Shlaim (users.ox.ac.uk/~ssj0005), "there is no hope for the Palestinians to bring about the end of occupation through the support of western governments or the UN, the only hope that the Palestinians have is through BDS":

www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/27251/quick-thoughts-avi-shlaim-on-israel-s-new-historia

19 July 2018 The apartheid project ratchets up another notch:

www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-passed-arabs-segregation-protests-benjamin-netanyahu-a8454196.html

14 August 2018 Dr. Kobi Snitz (www.weizmann.ac.il/neurobiology/worg/lab.html) "It's true that this conflict is not special in how bad the violations are. What is special is how much the liberal west actively supports them."

www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/14/bds-boycott-divestment-sanctions-movement-transformed-israeli-palestinian-debate

3 January 2019 "...Goldstone was harassed by the Jewish community in South Africa. He was to have been effectively barred from his grandson's *bar mitzva*, a prohibition later rescinded. He was dropped from the board of governors of the Hebrew University. And his family – especially his daughter Nicole, who is described in Terris's book as "an ardent Zionist" – found themselves shunned too. ...Along with accusations that he had acted like a Nazi collaborator in excoriating the Jews of Israel, an Israeli press campaign began..."

www.independent.co.uk/voices/israel-gaza-war-judge-richard-goldstone-palestinian-conflict-a8709211.html

13 June 2020 "More than 400 Jewish and Israel studies academics have signed a statement denouncing potential Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank as "apartheid" and saying it would be a "crime against humanity" according to international statutes."

web.archive.org/web/20200613113405/https://www.timesofisrael.com/400-jewish-studies-scholars-denounce-annexation-as-a-crime-against-humanity
www.annexation.site

12 January 2021 "A regime that uses laws, practices and organized violence to cement the supremacy of one group over another is an apartheid regime. Israeli apartheid, which promotes the supremacy of Jews over Palestinians, was not born in one day or of a single speech. It is a process that has gradually grown more institutionalized and explicit, with mechanisms introduced over time in law and practice to promote Jewish supremacy. These accumulated measures, their pervasiveness in legislation and political practice, and the public and judicial support they receive – all form the basis for our conclusion that the bar for labeling the Israeli regime as apartheid has been met."

web.archive.org/web/20210119132202/https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid

24 February 2021 Israelis employed in British unis "call on all academic senates to reject the IHRA document" with its tendentious definition of antisemitism: "Surely, it should be legitimate, not least in a university setting, to debate whether Israel, as a self-proclaimed Jewish State, is 'a racist endeavour,' or a 'democratic nation'. ...No state should be shielded from such legitimate scholarly discussion."

www.israeliacademicsuk.org/the-letter

30 April 2021 "About 6.8 million Jewish Israelis and 6.8 million Palestinians live today between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River... Across these areas and in most aspects of life, Israeli authorities... have dispossessed, confined, forcibly separated, and

subjugated Palestinians by virtue of their identity to varying degrees of intensity. In certain areas, as described in this report, these deprivations are so severe that they amount to the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.”

www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution

21 May 2021 Middle East Section, American Anthropological Association: “...Israel’s policies of closure, land confiscation, house demolitions and dispossession of Palestinians, unlawful arrest, injury and killing of Palestinian civilians have continued unabated since AAA last took up this issue. We call on our colleagues in their classrooms, universities and beyond to: reject the “two-sides” narrative that erases power hierarchies; recognize the framework of apartheid as applicable to describe Israel’s systematic repression of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and within Israel’s 1948 boundaries; recognize that Israel’s violent repression often constitutes crimes against humanity; reject the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism which has been used by Israel’s supporters to suppress legitimate criticism of Israel. [FN] An alternative is presented by the Independent Jewish Voice of Canada that defines antisemitism *and* does not suppress criticism of Israel: www.ijvc.ca/declaration.”

mes.americananthro.org/mes-statement-on-palestine-updated-5-19-21

3 June 2021 per Adv. Michael Sfard, June 2020: “Is the crime of apartheid being committed in the West Bank? ...The following are the elements of the crime as developed to date: (a) the existence of two racial groups (per the broad definition of ‘racial group’ in international law, primarily in International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination - ICERD); (b) the act forms part of a systematic or widespread attack on a civilian population; (c) the context of a regime in which one group dominates another group (or groups) and systematically oppresses its members; (d) the commission of one or more of the acts listed in Articles 2(a)-2(f) of the Apartheid Convention or Article 7(1) of the Rome Statute; (e) commission of the acts for the purpose of establishing and maintaining the aforesaid context; (f) the mental element of awareness by the party committing the acts of the presence of the aforesaid elements. ... The crime of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank because, in this context of a regime of domination and oppression of one national group by another, the Israeli authorities implement policies and practices that constitute inhuman acts as the term is defined in international law: Denial of rights from a national group, denial of resources from one group and their transfer to another, denial of development to Palestinians and at the same time, encouraged development for Israelis, physical and legal separation between the two groups and the institution of a different legal system for each of them. ... That is not all. ... Continued creeping legal annexation, let alone official annexation of a particular part of the West Bank through legislation that would apply Israeli law and administration there, is an amalgamation of the regimes. This could mean strengthening the argument, which already is being heard, that the crime of Apartheid is not committed only in the West Bank. That the Israeli regime in its entirety is an apartheid regime. That Israel is an Apartheid state.”

www.yesh-din.org/en/the-occupation-of-the-west-bank-and-the-crime-of-apartheid-legal-opinion

1 February 2022 “The continuing forced displacement of a majority of Palestinians from their land and property in 1947-49 and subsequently in 1967; the forced deportations, forcible transfers and arbitrary restrictions on their freedom of movement; the denial of nationality and the right of return; the racialized and discriminatory dispossession of their lands and property; and the subsequent discriminatory allocation of and access to national resources (including land, housing and water) combine to hinder Palestinians’ current enjoyment of their rights, including to access to livelihood, employment, healthcare, food security, water and sanitation, and education opportunities. They ensure that Palestinians cannot as individuals or communities enjoy a status equal to that of Jewish Israelis in Israel, the OPT and other situations where Israel exercises control over Palestinians’ enjoyment of their rights, particularly the right of return. [...] The racial discrimination against and segregation of Palestinians is the result of deliberate government policy. The regular violations of Palestinians’ rights are not accidental repetitions of offences, but part of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination. [...] Israel’s system of institutionalized segregation and discrimination against Palestinians, as a racial group, in all areas under its control amounts to a system of apartheid, and a serious violation of Israel’s human rights obligations. Almost all of Israel’s civilian administration and military authorities, as well as governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, are involved in the enforcement of a system of apartheid against Palestinians across Israel and the OPT and against Palestinian refugees and their descendants outside the territory. The intention to maintain this system has been explicitly declared by successive Israeli political leaders, emphasizing the overarching objective of maintaining Jewish Israeli domination by excluding, segregating and expelling Palestinians. The intention was clearly crystallized in the 2018 nation state law, which constitutionally enshrined racial discrimination against non-Jewish people in Israel and the OPT. Senior civilian and military officials have also issued numerous public statements and directives over the years that reveal, maintain and enforce the institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination of Palestinians, being fully aware of, and therefore fully responsible for, the atrocious consequences the regime has for the lives of the Palestinian population.”

www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/MDE1551412022ENGLISH.pdf

web.archive.org/web/20220201153907/https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/

21 September 2022 per avv. Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur to UNGA: “As an occupier, Israel has no sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territory. [...] The profound illegality of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory emanates from the intentional unlawful displacement of its native (and refugee) Palestinian inhabitants, coupled with alteration of the legal status, geographical nature and demographic composition of the occupied territory through fragmentation of land, seizure and exploitation of natural resources, impairment of Palestinian economic development, through and for a (growing) colonist minority. [...] The violations described in the present report expose the nature of the Israeli occupation: that of an intentionally acquisitive, segregationist and repressive regime designed to prevent the realization of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.”

web.archive.org/web/20231011053413/https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/A.77.356_210922.pdf

23 February 2023 Generative Linguists in the Old World (glowlinguistics.org) has rescinded (61y, 52n, 57 nonvoting) the plan to hold the 47th (2024) colloquium in two public universities in Israel. The proposal had been agreed in 2021 (26y, 13n), notwithstanding political harrassment of international visitors, as inflicted on Chomsky in May 2010, then on 16 January 2023 the “broader GLOW community” decided (132y, 88n, 193 nonvoting) to revisit the issue. For this success, BDS must ‘thank’ the overtly “theocratic” and “annexationist” government installed on 29 December 2022 (www.nytimes.com/2022/12/29/world/middleeast/israel-netanyahu-government-swearing-in.html).

web.archive.org/web/20230104190138/https://ucloud.univie.ac.at/index.php/s/4z69ilqSoRzparG/download?path=%2F&files=2022-05-17_AgainsGlowInIsrael-letter.pdf

9 June 2023 per avv. Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur to UNGA: “The incarceration of Palestinians is only one element of a larger carceral landscape, extending beyond prison as a paradigm of governance of the occupied territory and confinement of its population. [...] By shifting from ‘the security of the occupying power’ to ‘the security of the occupation itself’, Israel has disguised ‘security’ as the permanent control over the territory it occupies and tries to annex.”

web.archive.org/web/20230917114304/https://www.obchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrbcouncil/sessions-regular/session53/advance-versions/A_HRC_53_59_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf

24 July 2023 “The American Anthropological Association (AAA) membership has voted to endorse a resolution to boycott Israeli academic institutions.” [Text of the resolution linked below.]

web.archive.org/web/20230725013044/https://americananthro.org/news/aaa-membership-endorses-academic-boycott-resolution

web.archive.org/web/20230609103457/https://americananthro.org/wp-content/uploads/ReferendumOnProposedResolutionToBoycottIsraeliAcademicInstitutions.pdf



Israeli demonstrators carry placards during a demonstration condemning the shooting of Iyad Hallak, a disabled Palestinian man who was shot dead by Israeli police after they mistakenly thought he was armed with a pistol, in Jerusalem on May 30, 2020.

Photo by Ahmad GHARABLI, AFP