

BOYCOTT

EMMANUEL DROR FARJOUN

ABSTRACT. We discuss Israel's policies and support outside pressure.

1. THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT IS LEGITIMATE AND NECESSARY.

Contrary to the vast majority of the members of the academic community in Israel, it is my humble opinion that a boycott actions against Institutional academia in Israel and other non violent forms of pressure on Israel are legitimate, moral and indeed maybe needed at the present time in order to help dislodge Israel from its thirty nine years old stubborn insistence to subdue, rob, and destroy the Palestinian people both in the occupied territories and indeed, to a much lesser extent, in Israel itself.

Words of criticism of Israeli occupation have gushed like a mighty river in the last thirty nine years, to no avail. Words alone, it seems, cannot wean vast layers in the Israeli society and its political leadership from their addiction to robbing and destroying their occupied neighboring people.

Words alone, it seems, will not suffice to mount efficient opposition to starvation of masses of people, to systematic daily murders, to the total disregard of the last election results, to the denial of citizenship and even residence rights, to the massive expulsions, to the total contempt of international law and of commonly accepted basic human rights.

Critical words alone will not stop, so it seems , the total Israeli boycott of Palestinian banks, universities, economic activity, hospitals... the list is long.

Since the dawn of history, 95 percent of the citizens of 95 percent of the nations opposed any boycott waged against their states by others whether on justified grounds or not.

I choose not to belong to these 95 % or more of the Israeli academic community on this matter. It seems however that the small minority in Israel that consider a boycott as a legitimate option is not minute and it is growing.

2. NON-VIOLENCE AND OUTSIDE PRESSURE

My moral support in the legitimacy of the academic boycott as a form of pressure at this time is strongly related to my strong objection to the extremely violent nature of

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some parts of the struggle carried on by Palestinian organizations, violence which has been a direct product of the vastly more murderous and cruel occupation by Israel.

However, it is hard to deny that this violence by the enslaved against the occupation and subjugation has proven itself quite efficient.

It is very doubtful that without this violence, which is often murderous, Israel would have come to the conclusion that it must recognize the PLO, talk to Arafat. Basically, the violence forced Israel to temporarily accept Arafat's hesitant cooperation, and accept almost free Palestinian control of cultivation and constructions in some parts of Areas A and B in a de-facto exchange for the continuation and acceleration of a free colonization of areas C.

Further, this struggle has contributed to the fall of the disgusting racist colonization of 20% of the Gaza strip, by 1500-odd colonist families; colonization bathing in the blood of its neighbors, robbing poor man's skinny sheep, blocking free movement and destroying by its very enslaving existence the living tissue of the Gazan people— 1.5 million strong community, struggling to develop beyond mere subsistence living.

In spite of the efficiency of the violent part of the Palestinian struggle, and in spite the currency given to zero sum games, and the assurance by some fashionable game-theorists, that extreme violence is often the ultimate profit-maximizing strategy, I, together with many others cannot consider it right for myself to support the morality of this form of struggle. For me it is totally unacceptable.

I shall not dwell here on the reasons since I can safely assume that most relevant readers would understand or at least agree to this point.

But in a short slogan, I firmly believe that murderous violence on large scale most often destroys innocent life and corrupts and destroys deep resources of both the oppressor and oppressed. This destruction is unpredictable in its extent and depth and often greatly outbalances the immediate gains sometimes achieved.

Now, since the rivers of critical words alone have not stopped the Israeli destruction/colonization machine, and since resistance via murderous violence destroys more that liberates, people who strongly feel that they cannot take part in this Israeli destruction nor identify with the violent struggle against it, should be willing to consider seriously other, non-violent form of pressure. One example of such pressure is a cultural, economic, and yes also academic boycott of Israel.

3. BOYCOTT IS COMMON AND EFFICIENT

Such pressure can be real and effective, exactly because Israel is very sensitive to such a boycott, exactly because Israel's war of attrition against the Palestinians is based on vast collaboration in the world and in Israel. It also rests on systematic, active, ignorance of the realities in Palestine. Academia is one of the mainstays of this active systematic ignorance. Just try to find the volume of research done in Israeli academia about the thirty nine years old occupation. It is close to zero (compared to the mountains of papers that will be written once the occupation will be over). Of

course, this is universal weakness of academia all over the world. But we should fight it here.

Academic boycott as well as tourist boycott and economic disinvestments are totally legitimate means of pressure in the present world. They are part of the world realities and common currency of even peaceful relations between nations. It has been used heavily in the last fifty years. The USA has turned it into one its main tools to win concessions and so did Israel: Against Cuba, the Soviet Union, South Africa, states whose crimes are often much smaller, considering their size, than those of Israel's 40 year occupation.

Let us recall: under the occupation almost 4 millions people live with no sovereignty, no state, no citizenship in any state, they do not have even an internationally recognized permanent residence in their own land, or anywhere else. No guaranteed property rights on most of their own land. Even under the Oslo agreement about 50 percent of their land public or private is open to arbitrary confiscation, or simple colonization by a foreign state in whose leadership they have neither representation nor whatsoever control or influence. When a Jerusalem Palestinian resident, for example, leaves the land for a few years, votes or gets elected to the wrong party in a legitimate election, he may lose property, ability to return, rights to marry chosen person with a wrong ID and the right to live near his children, family, friends.

In fact in the eyes of Israeli law and customs, in the moral eyes of Israel public and media, Palestinians in Palestine are legally and morally no more than tolerated slaves, who should be grateful for the very permission to stay where they are. The supreme court has sanctioned time and again their expulsion from their homes, land, property. We were there, watching in amazement, these court deliberations. Often the question in court boiled down to whether the candidates for expulsion were served notice on time or not.

The vast majority of academic people who consider a boycott unacceptable in principle and unjustified in practice turn their eyes away from the fact that Israel has become a criminal state, whose leaders (as the former MP Shulamit Aloni has recently observed in a recent Tel-Aviv demonstration) are war criminals who deserve to serve long prison terms. It is well know that these leaders hold in total contempt in theory and practice the basic international law.

"Since we, the Jews, have suffered so much in the recent and far past", their mechanical response proclaims, "no brutality that we would perpetrate will put our actions on par with crimes of the Goyim, the Other Nations, nor will it compensate us for the losses. Hence, basically, we are exempt from obeying international moral rules, because the world has betrayed us so cruelly in the recent past"

That is their basic criminal logic—widely preached and accepted in Israel. That is the motivation of the Israeli governments propaganda machine for keeping the memory of Nazi Germany alive and well- As an excuse for unending brutality, total obliviousness to the suffering of millions of their Palestinian victims. It is tragic that this logic represents a second success of the Nazis. First they annihilated and destroyed the

European Jewish community and then they got the their own mentality, logic and total moral apathy deeply embedded in many of the survivors of their crimes. This vicious circle is another example of the corruption of both victim and perpetrator of murderous violence to which I have referred to above.

Of course, Israel is not alone in its criminal behavior. Far from it. Just take a look at USA and UK in Iraq, look at Pakistan, Sudan, Russians in Chechnya, France in Africa, again the list is long and disheartening.

But our inability to take on all these criminal states, our inability to boycott the USA and the UK for their war crimes in Iraq where vastly many more people have been murdered by the most modern of weapons, does not mean that it is illegitimate to boycott the smaller sharks like South Africa or Israel who are very sensitive to such pressure. If we cannot address the big sharks, so let us try first to deal with the smaller ones.

For people who oppose the occupation, it is important to consider that if we turn away from any effective outside pressure on Israel now, when it is still sensitive to such pressure, we may hasten the time when Israel will become so strong and stable as to be able withstand any non violent pressure.

At that future time, some will conclude that only violence will be able, if at all, release the victims form Israel's hold, as was done for example during the liberation of slaves in the USA hundred and fifty year ago.

We know that only external pressure will help move the Israeli public toward reconciliation. In the deeply divided Israeli society internal forces in this direction are weak and always hesitate. If external pressure is not exerted beyond rivers of impotent critical words, many Palestinians will continue to conclude that murderous violence is the only tool they have to end their enslavement, their degradation into "temporarily tolerated non-citizen" who can be kicked about at will by a vastly superior foreign power. The efficiency of that violent tool will continue to hide away its deeply corrupting power.

4. WE WORK IN ISRAEL

Supporting the right of the world at large to boycott Israel does not mean or imply that Israelis who consider such a boycott justified, should stop working in academia and leave the country. Far from it. by such a logic any Cuban who opposes Castro should leave Cuba and the five million- odd Palestinians are morally obliged to leave the country. We live here, and want to stay here. We too have learned to enjoy life in the shadows of violence and we are deeply committed and perhaps addicted to this place. As I said, before, other places are no less criminal than this one. Often more so. We have no other place to go too. We have no other option but to oppose the occupation and its daily horrors here, in Israel/Palestine. We should work here and moreover do our best to try to advance research and teaching for people who live here around us.

It is moreover Israel who is presently engaged in systematic boycott, not Palestinians-boycott of many aspects of Palestinian life, including academic life. For 39 years Israel has prevented Palestinians from developing freely on their land, from studying freely in their and Israeli academic institutions.

5. ACADEMIA, OCCUPATION AND APARTHEID

The fact that Israeli policies are not decided by the universities is not relevant here. The pressure is directed against Israel at large at one of its few sensitive spots: Academia.

But still, while we are at it let us recall that Israeli academia has collaborated for 39 long years with the occupation and with discrimination of Palestinian and Israeli Arabs. The Hebrew university whose main campus sits in the midst of Arab neighborhoods offers no general course teaching in Arabic to the hundred of thousands of education-hungry people.

Hebrew University's castle-like campus blocks away the Arab community from using its services. This is done in the name of security, of course. Try to count the number of Arab faculty at the HU, you may need no more than one handicapped hand. It prides itself in accepting almost freely Arab students from Israel itself. But this is far from enough.

Here are few very concrete somewhat trivial examples of policies of the HU: A large part of the Hebrew University Mount Scopus campus is built on Arab land, appropriated by the State after 1967, and given to the university. In his capacity as the president of the high military court, a full professor in the HU Faculty of Law sentenced to 4 month of imprisonment of a student of the HU, Yonatan Ben-Artzi, for refusing to serve in the army - on top of eighteen months in prison.

The Arab Israeli citizens, comprising 20 percent of all citizens, are grossly under-represented in the faculty body of the Israeli universities. No affirmative action programs exist to remedy the discrepancy. None of the Israeli universities offers degree programs in Arabic, the second official language of the state. Nor do they protest systematic harassment of Palestinian students and faculty in the Occupied Territories the closures around the university towns, the abuse at the checkpoints, the denial of permits to access the universities, the military attacks on students. Over the years, the Israeli academia has provided special programs for the military. HU has been considering seriously providing special accelerated degree programs for the Shabak, the infamous Israeli General Security Services, which for years have been terrorizing Palestinians. As I write these words, and after the call for a boycott action by a British teacher organization has been announced, the University dropped these plans. Is it too much to assume that the pressure of the boycott had something to do with this backing-off??

6. HAVE NO FEAR.

In truth the Israeli academia has no reason to fear the boycott. If the boycott will catch on, it will push our officers to improve the universities' image and our ways—the universities will be going out of their way to prove that they are OK, just as happened in the civil right struggle in the USA, South Africa and elsewhere, struggles that included boycotts of all kinds. If it will be even partially effective, any hint of real success will hasten the end of the regime of slavery and occupation against four million people. Then the universities will throw away the Shabbak, will stop being a venue for military education, dismantle their centers of education-for-efficient -destruction that go under the name of strategic studies of various kind, open many general courses in Arabic, hire Palestinians and Israeli Arabs as teachers. In fact, boycott may shorten the way to co-existence and prosperity, in the spirit of mutual respect and equality of the two nations living on this land.

Emmanuel Farjoun, HU, 28.5.06

EMMANUEL D. FARJOUN, DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS, HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM,
GIVAT RAM, JERUSALEM 91904, ISRAEL

E-mail address: farjoun@math.huji.ac.il