

Binding Academic Freedom with Ideological Bonds

By Samuel M. Edelman

Academic freedom should not be bound by any ideological litmus test, nor should academic freedom be abridged because of prejudice, bigotry, and one-sided narrow vision. Yet, that is exactly what a round table of articles in the latest issue of the *Journal of Academic Freedom* does. With the exception of one article all of the articles, focused on boycotting Israel, are written by proponents of boycotting Israeli academics and institutions of higher learning.

Very little was written about how this boycott of Israelis and Israeli universities was an act of academic freedom except in the most vague and illogical way. In fact if we take the Omar Barghouti article to its logical conclusion then Barghouti, a graduate of Tel Aviv University and an adjunct faculty at Tel Aviv is asking to boycott himself. The irony and illogic of the boycott does not stop with Barghouti. The boycott would deeply affect Israeli Arab-Palestinian students who attend all of Israel's universities and grad schools. The boycott aims to destroy valuable collaboration between Jordan and Israeli academics on a variety of issues, mostly medical, ecological and agricultural dramatically benefitting the people of both nations. Beyond academics, the boycott will destroy the livelihood of Palestinians from the West Bank who flock to Israel for jobs. Finally, if you carry the logic of the boycott out further then the Palestinian National Authorities' massive trade with Israel would have to end, destroying the PNA's tax base and in the end destroying the PNA. So Barghouti, Lloyd, Scott and other supporters of the boycott are asking Americans to be more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves. This is just bad critical thinking and irrational logic at play.

The AAUP guidelines are good guidelines about boycotts. The eight principles embodied in the AAUP 2005 Statement on Academic Boycotts are fair, logical and rational. They ultimately call for unimpeded free expression of ideas. Barghouti, Lloyd, and Scott among a few others want to close off the free expression of ideas by cutting the communication between Israeli academics and their colleagues around the world. How does this foster peace between Israeli's and Palestinians? What are they afraid of? Are they afraid that free and open discussion will overwhelm their one-sided and ideologically biased vision of the world?

Academic freedom is indeed a right. Yet, all rights come with responsibility and we as academics have the responsibility to not use our right of academic freedom to propagandize, to lie, to use fallacies of argument, to substitute our fantasies and myths for what is real and tangible and most important of all to not use our academic freedom to arrest the academic freedom of others. Yet, all of these things are exactly what Barghouti, Lloyd and others supporting the boycott of Israeli academics and institutions are doing.

Why are we asked to boycott Israelis and Israeli institutions when those same institutions support academic freedom like that provided to Barghouti? Palestinian Human Rights Monitor routinely provides examples of the abridgement of academic freedom to Palestinian professors, instructors and students who speak in opposition to the powers that be whether in the West Bank or in Gaza. Just this week hundreds of students and teachers were arrested and tortured by Gazan authorities in an attempt to stop planned anti-Hamas demonstrations scheduled for November 11. Why are we not asked to boycott Palestinian academics and institutions of higher education?

What follows are four additional essays responding to the pro-boycott articles in the Journal of Academic Freedom. These articles are from three distinguished American academics and one distinguished Israeli.

In addition, I commend to you all the following two essays from Prof. Stanley Fish:

- <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/academic-freedom-against-itself-boycotting-israeli-universities/?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/12/opinion/fish-boycotting-israeli-universities-part-two.html>

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