

The only real *RadStats* news is that the working group which was established by decision of the Annual General Meeting of Radical Statistics in York in February 2016 has finally managed to generate a Proposal that is being put to the up-coming ISI meeting in Marrakesh to support the Palestinian call for Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions against Israeli University Institutions (not individuals). What was sent to the ISI is included in the following pages.

Editors

Proposal for discussion at the Marrakesh meeting of the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics

Zones of war, military occupation etc., and the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics (2010): Proposal with respect to Israel/Palestine

This is a paper requesting the Board to consider the ethical issues for statisticians which are associated with Israel and the Palestinian call for academic boycott.

Preamble

In situations of war, military occupation, and entrenched conflict, it is particularly important that individuals and professions should be conscious of their ethical obligations. The ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics (2010) was prepared for situations such as this.

The Declaration acknowledges the conflicts that statisticians may face from “Employers, Clients and Funders”, and states that they should “not (be) influenced by pressure from politicians or funders”. In times of tension, statisticians may also feel pressure from other social actors (for example pressure groups operating through the media, or from civil society), not only from politicians and funders.

The lamentable situation in Israel/Palestine has remained unresolved for decades. One factor now potentially destabilising the balance, or imbalance, of forces between the two sides is the mounting worldwide pressure for “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions”, including an academic boycott of Israeli state institutions. This is broadly similar, though different in detail, to that which was applied to apartheid South Africa.

Palestinian Call for Academic Boycott

The call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel dates back to 2004. The following year 170 Palestinian unions, professional associations, and other civil society bodies [called](#) for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) as a form of non-violent pressure on Israel. This followed decades of attempts to end the Israeli military occupation which has now existed for over half a century with little effective action from the international community to hold Israel to account.

The aims of BDS are that Israel should:

- end its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantle the Wall

- recognise the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- recognise, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties or receive compensation as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

These are also the aims of academic boycott. It should be emphasised that, unlike the South African equivalent, the academic boycott of Israel is purely institutional. It has no direct impact on individual academics in their teaching, research, attendance at conferences etc (though indirect effects may be felt through impacts on the institutions at which they work). Support for the boycott is expressed for example by refusing to

- participate in conferences held at Israeli universities
- take part in funded collaborations where there is an Israeli partner
- provide references for Israeli universities' appointment and promotion procedures

More information on the academic boycott are at <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108>

Some details of Israeli universities which explain the call for boycott and the support it receives from prominent academics including Professor Stephen Hawking, are given in "Israeli universities and the case for boycott", below (Appendix 1)..

Relevance to the international statistical profession

The ISI's [Ethical Principles](#) state:

- "Findings [of statisticians] should be communicated for the benefit of the widest possible community, yet attempt to ensure no harm to any population group." And
- "In collaborating with colleagues and others in the same or other disciplines, it is necessary and important to ensure that the ethical principles of all participants are clear, understood, respected, and reflected in the undertaking."

We therefore call upon the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics to establish an independent working-group to receive submissions, examine and report back on ethical dimensions of the Palestinian call for an academic boycott of Israeli government and university institutions, and in particular on:

- Israeli statistical policy and practice in so far as they affect Palestinians wherever they may be
- Israeli policy and practice as they relate to the spirit and wording of the ISI Declaration, particularly the requirements that statisticians should “respect the communities where data is collected and guard against harm coming to them by misuse of the results” and “protect subjects, individually and collectively ... against potentially harmful effects of participating”
- Israeli professional practice going beyond those identified in the ISI Declaration in relation to entrenched conflict situations
- the professional values of “Independence, objectivity and transparency”, as stated in the ISI Declaration

The process applied by the American Anthropological Association, is suggested as a possible model for the ISI to build on. This is summarised in Appendix. II

Origins of this proposal

This proposal stems from a working group which was established by decision of the Annual General Meeting of Radical Statistics in York in February 2016

(signed)

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APPENDIX 1: Israeli universities and the case for boycott

Israeli universities are not ivory towers isolated from the activities of the state. A [Human Rights Watch study](#) revealed institutionalized racial discrimination against Palestinians by universities, and indeed throughout Israel’s education system. And the universities maintain a uniquely close relationship with the Israeli military. Tel Aviv University, for example, has developed dozens of weapon systems, as well as the “Dahiya doctrine” of disproportionate force employed by the Israeli military in its operations against both Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.

Universities also continue to play a key role in planning, implementing and justifying Israel's occupation and apartheid policies, Demographers have problematised the higher Palestinian birth rate as a demographic danger or even a 'demographic time bomb'. It was geographers who proposed and developed the 'Separation Wall'. There are many more [examples](#).

The boycott campaign has achieved considerable impact, and is still growing in strength Thousands of academics in the UK, Ireland, Italy, South Africa, US and Brazil have signed national pledges to boycott Israeli academic institutions. National bodies promoting academic boycott of Israel exist in most European countries as well as in the US, Canada, India and indeed on every continent.

The most prominent individual adherent to the boycott was Professor Stephen Hawking, who publicly withdrew his agreement to attend a conference in Israel. In the United States a considerable number of professional associations have adopted academic boycott, most notably the American Studies Association. In 2016 the American Anthropological Association rejected boycott – but by a margin of only 39 out of 4500 votes. The AAA is nevertheless taking a number of other steps recommended by its task force which [reported](#) on the situation of Palestinian anthropologists and archaeologists arising from Israeli actions and policies.

It is appropriate, perhaps even incumbent, on the statistical profession to consider whether its current practice is adequate to deal appropriately with the very challenging situations which entrenched conflicts such as that in Israel/Palestine throw up. In these circumstances simply falling back on the notion that 'we are apolitical' is less than adequate. There is no politically neutral stance available between boycott and no boycott. Opting for 'no boycott' when those on the disadvantaged end of a power relationship have asked for one, and when it is their main strategy and hope for ending their oppression, is to take the side of the powerful. The deep involvement of Israeli universities in the oppression of the Palestinians suggests that statisticians ought to consider whether it is ethical to collaborate with such institutions.

APPENDIX 2: Summary of process applied by the American Anthropological Association (AAA)

The AAA established a Task Force to:

- enumerate the issues embedded in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine that directly concern the Association;
- develop principles to be used to assess whether the AAA has an interest in taking a stand on these issues;
- provide such an assessment; and
- on the basis of that assessment, make recommendations to the Executive Board about actions the AAA could undertake

See <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/151001-AAA-Task-Force-Israel-Palestine.pdf> for the full Report.