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A New Commitment for Palestine

Jonathan Rosenhead, Mazen Masri and Tom Hickey.

In October a sizeable earthquake disrupted the contested terrain of Academic Boycott. Its contours now are becoming almost unrecognisable.

Over 340 UK academics signed up in public and committed to refuse all involvement with Israel's universities. The text of their Commitment, published in a full page advertisement in the Guardian, is below. Since the academic and cultural boycott was launched by representatives of Palestinian civil society in 2004, BRICUP has been actively promoting it. Initially this was seen even by many otherwise progressive UK academics as beyond the pale. But Israel's repeated outrages against international law and common decency, and rising awareness of the complicity of Israel's academic institutions, have been changing the climate. Over the years more and more individual academics have come to practice what has been called a 'silent boycott' – refusing, but without publicity, to enter into research partnerships with Israeli universities, and declining to write references for their appointment and promotion procedures. (At BRICUP we know this because of the many confidential requests for advice that we receive.) Numbers of individuals have over the years publicly announced their support for academic boycott. But this is the first time anywhere in the world that a collective avowal of this policy has been made by hundreds of academics.

The Academic Commitment is completely consistent with BRICUP's policy and purpose, and reflects [PACBI's guidelines](#) for boycott. Members of BRICUP were involved in the organisation of this initiative, as you would expect, but signatories were not asked to affiliate themselves in any way with BRICUP. This is, rather, a free standing initiative.

A Commitment by UK scholars to the rights of Palestinians

As scholars associated with British universities, we are deeply disturbed by Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land, the intolerable human rights violations that it inflicts on all sections of the Palestinian people, and its apparent determination to resist any feasible settlement.

Responding to the appeal from Palestinian civil society, we therefore declare that we will not:

- accept invitations to visit Israeli academic institutions;
- act as referees in any of their processes;
- participate in conferences funded, organised or sponsored by them, or otherwise cooperate with them.

We will, however, continue to work with our Israeli colleagues in their individual capacities.

We will maintain this position until the State of Israel complies with international law, and respects universal principles of human rights.

The initial signatories are drawn from 72 different institutions which cover the whole range of UK's universities. Their disciplinary backgrounds are equally diverse, including Anthropology, Art, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Classics, Cultural Studies, Design History, History, Information Systems, Law, Linguistics, Management Science, Mathematics, Medicine, Music, Pharmacology, Philosophy, Physics, Political Science, Population Studies, Psychology, Translation Studies, Zoology – and many more. Four are Fellows of the Royal Society, five are Fellows of the British Academy, 161 are Professors. But these figures are already out of date. At the time of writing the number of signatories is now, post launch, approaching a thousand.

The impact of the statement was immediate. The organisers, and other signatories, were in great demand for interviews by radio and television stations, as well as newspapers round the world. This unusual breakthrough can almost certainly be attributed in part to the dramatic launch by way of a full page advertisement. But it was also an initiative whose time had come.

Coverage in the UK, where boycott of Israel is normally an almost non-topic, was also unusually good. Substantial articles appeared in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Letters both in favour of and against the boycott flooded in to the papers, especially to *The Guardian*. The advertisement even became an item in its own right on BBC Radio 4 News. One of our signatories debated the Commitment with an Israeli Embassy spokesperson on a BBC Northern Ireland phone-in programme. At first, it had seemed that television was still a no-go area. But on November 14th there was a 15 minute panel discussion on *Sunday Morning Live* on BBC1. The main topic was cultural boycott (JK Rowling, Hilary Mantel *et al.* had just issued their 'dialogue building bridges' anti-boycott manifesto), but one of the academic boycott organisers was invited onto the panel specifically to make the connections.

The *Sunday Morning Live* discussion came just a couple of days after Boris Johnson had made a fool of himself with his extempore jibe in Tel Aviv that boycott was only supported by a few 'lefty, corduroy suit-wearing academics'. A great deal of innocent fun has been had with that remark. However, more significant than its ignorance and cack-handedness (which got him a lot of stick from across the spectrum) is the fact that he made it at all. Boycott, and academic boycott, can no longer simply be ignored.

The UK initiative immediately stimulated a response from across the Irish Sea. Only 7 days after *The Guardian* advertisement appeared a letter was published in *The Irish Times* organised by the cross-border organisation Academics for Palestine. It consisted of the same commitment text, slightly expanded; and under it were the names of 120 Irish academics who had also pledged zero cooperation with Israel's universities. This was a very significantly higher proportion of Irish academic scholars than had been the signatories of the Commitment in UK universities.

The Academic Statement initiative was patiently and carefully put together over the year preceding its launch. The close to £10,000 needed to fund the advertisement was all contributed by the signatories. Three days later, on the Friday that following the appearance of the Commitment, a copycat full-page advertisement was taken out, again in *The Guardian*, by the almost unknown group Jewish Human Rights Watch (JHRW). The advert (crudely copying the format of the original, but of course lacking any, much less 343, signatures) suggested parallels between the Academic Commitment and the Nazi exclusion of Jews from German universities. In other words, the copybook playing of the holocaust/antisemitism card in an attempt to divert attention away from the critical message on Israel's policies; and to substitute instead

criticism of the motives of the messengers, implying that all were either covert antisemites or self-hating Jews. JHRW is evidently able to write a £10K cheque at no notice at all; there is no public information on the source of its funding for this expensive publicity stunt.

An excerpt from the Jewish Human Rights Watch advert

STOP BOYCOTTING JEWISH ACADEMICS!

Message to the Boycotters:

AN ACADEMIC BOYCOTT OF JEWS IS NOT A NEW IDEA

Starting in April 1933, German academics actively colluded in the dismissal of their own Jewish colleagues.... So did the activists of the National Socialist Students' League which, long before the Nazis came to power, organised boycotts of, and disturbances in, lectures given by Jewish academics.

In the light of this background, it is disturbing that 350 British academics would support attempts to boycott all academics in the Jewish state.

This deplorable gesture....goes against the fundamental idea that Universities should be promoting: Learning – free from anti-Semitic boycotts.

Since the Commitment has appeared, hundreds more academics have signed. That was always its purpose. It was never intended as a one-off event but rather as a moral and political commitment by individual scholars for which numerical support would grow. This is now the test. Can we maintain continuous engagement with the issue so as to build the support for the Commitment continually over the immediate period and beyond? The aim is for it to become a live, growing and highly significant component of the international solidarity movement which supports the Palestinian struggle.

There are (at least) seven ways this can be achieved:

- engage in discussions with individual academic colleagues and collaborators with whom we are in contact;
- raise support for the Commitment in those scholarly associations with which we are engaged;
- if our associations or research groups cannot formally support the Commitment for any reason, we can nevertheless secure agreement that information about the Commitment should be circulated to all associated scholars;
- organise meetings to publicise and to discuss the Commitment on our own campuses;
- raise discussion of the Commitment in our own school boards or faculty boards of study, with the ultimate aim (when sufficient support has been built) of doing so at our academic boards;
- put a motion to support the Commitment to our local branches of the UCU; and,
- if there is resistance to formal branch support for the Commitment, get agreement that the text of the Commitment and information about its website and its FAQ page should be circulated locally to all UCU members.

These suggestions for carrying the initiative forward are not alternatives to each other, much less mutually exclusive. Which ones are appropriate, and in which order they should be introduced, is a matter of practicality and of the particular circumstances of each institution.

The first step towards any of these interventions would normally be to discuss with like-minded colleagues which of these types of activity it makes sense to engage in first, and then to seek advice from the Commitment organisers or via BRICUP. Commitment speakers will be available throughout the academic year, and beyond, to address any meetings that are organised, or to explain the Commitment to any organisations that would like more information.

A Historic Night for the American Anthropological Association

[Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Institutions](#)

On 20 November 2015 in Denver, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) endorsed the Palestinian civil society call to boycott Israeli academic institutions by over 88% in the most well-attended business meeting in the association's history. The measure will now be forwarded to the entire membership for a final vote by electronic ballot in the spring.

As heirs to a long tradition of scholarship on colonialism, anthropologists affirm, through this resolution, that the core problem is Israel's maintenance of a settler colonial regime based on Jewish supremacy and Palestinian dispossession backed by the U.S. government. By supporting the boycott, anthropologists are taking a stand for justice through action in solidarity with Palestinians. The AAA is the largest scholarly association yet to endorse the boycott of Israeli academic institutions at an annual meeting. What follows is a detailed account of that historic night and the context that made it possible.

The Road to Denver

For three years, Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions has campaigned to educate and mobilize the Association's membership in support of the boycott by organizing numerous panels at AAA annual meetings in Chicago (2013), [Washington, DC](#) (2014), and [Denver](#); publishing over 30 essays and statements by anthropologists in multiple venues, including by Palestinians and Israelis; and gathering [over 1,200 signatures](#) in support of the boycott.

The campaign worked especially hard to explain that the boycott would apply only at the institutional level. Individual Israeli scholars would remain welcome to attend AAA events (including with funding from their home institutions) and publish in its journals, and AAA members would be free to determine whether and how to implement the boycott in their own practice..

In August 2014, the Association’s leadership responded to growing interest in the boycott among members by appointing a [Task Force on AAA Engagement with Israel-Palestine](#). At the Washington annual meeting later that year, an anti-boycott resolution attempting to short-circuit debate was [resoundingly defeated](#). The Task Force proceeded to interview over 120 anthropologists and undertook a research visit to Israel/Palestine. In October 2015, the Task Force issued a [130-page report](#) unanimously recommending that the Association take substantive action on the situation in Israel/Palestine.

In the run-up to the Denver meeting, support for the boycott continued to grow, including endorsements from [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) and [Friends of Sabeel-North America](#). Local chapters of these organizations as well as [Coloradans for Justice in Palestine](#) offered volunteers and logistical assistance, helping dozens of AAA members – many of them graduate students – to canvass in support of the boycott. Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions is especially grateful to our colleagues in the [Association of Black Anthropologists](#) and the [Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists](#) for their solidarity and support. Finally, the campaign received a last-minute boost in the form of an [endorsement](#) from the U.S. Green Party.

Opposition to the boycott coalesced around a group calling itself “Anthropologists for Dialogue in Israel/Palestine,” (ADIP) which consisted of a dialogue wing and a “Tea Party” wing. The first included mostly Israelis describing themselves as “moderate” critics of the occupation who nevertheless reject any substantive action to challenge the status quo. The latter comprised mostly American scholars who were hostile not only to the boycott but to anthropology’s various attempts to confront issues around colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and empire over the past 40 years and openly longed for the discipline’s return to the pre-Civil Rights era. Both factions of ADIP repeatedly invoked with varying degrees of subtlety the spurious charge of anti-semitism to smear the boycott.

As momentum for the boycott grew, ADIP struggled to develop a coherent strategy, alternately attacking and praising the AAA Task Force. ADIP’s vision of dialogue was also exclusivist, as the group did not have even a single Palestinian or Arab member. Indeed, ADIP’s most visible attempt to tokenize a Palestinian was a posthumous one: ADIP leader Dan Rabinowitz [claimed](#) to have been friends with the late Palestinian scholar Edward Said and bizarrely suggested that Said would have opposed the boycott had he been alive today.

As the conference drew near, ADIP became increasingly desperate. It threw money at the problem by paying to be a conference sponsor; putting on a reception; having advertising inserts in conference tote bags, and — to the [ire of many attendees](#) — purchasing a banner ad in the conference’s mobile app. ADIP’s media strategy meanwhile descended into hyperbole: in an [op-ed](#) published in the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, ADIP insinuated that the boycott movement could one day provoke Israel into [launching a nuclear attack](#).

Saying No to the Status Quo

By the time of the annual business meeting on Friday evening, interest and excitement around the boycott reached a critical mass. For three days, dozens of canvassers had been mobilizing members with literature,

buttons, and cookies. Attendance at the vote shattered all previous records. The 1500-seat ballroom reached capacity and overflow seating outside the meeting room had to be quickly procured. The makeup of the crowd — which included many students and people of color — was far more representative of the AAA's overall membership than is often the case in the Association's business meetings.

Before the membership were two resolutions: The first proposed by ADIP was [substantively similar](#) to the anti-boycott resolution defeated in Washington during the previous year's conference, with additional declaratory clauses echoing the U.S. State Department's stances on the long-defunct "peace process." It also included a proposal for the AAA to collect voluntary contributions for a fund to support research and teaching in conflict areas. The second was the [resolution](#) endorsing the Palestinian civil society call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

The ADIP resolution was first on the agenda. The mood in the room was electric. Of the nine members to speak on the measure, seven were opposed. Lisa Rofel from UC Santa Cruz rose first to challenge the resolution as a thinly-disguised vindication of the status quo. Rofel reminded members that dialogue by itself need not lead to justice, and that 22 years of U.S. government-sponsored "dialogue" has led only to more expropriation and colonization of Palestinian land. Nadine Naber from University of Illinois Chicago reminded members of parallels with other struggles for justice: "I would like to ask AAA members, would you have told civil rights activists not to boycott buses and instead dialogue? Would we have told the United Farm Workers not to boycott grapes?"

In an admirable effort to protect the members' privacy, the Association's leadership opted for secret ballots. Unfortunately, attendance greatly exceeded expectations and stretched the capacity of the AAA staff, causing the meeting to run well over its scheduled end time as votes were collected and counted. Despite long exhausting days at the conference and other professional and social commitments, most members in attendance stayed on after the ADIP resolution was defeated by 1173 to 196.

Poison Pills and Poetry

After the defeat, the boycott resolution was put forward to the membership and Ilana Feldman from George Washington University presented it: "As anthropologists we are committed to stand with oppressed peoples. Here we have a historic opportunity to stand with human rights — to put our voice behind this collective movement for justice. Here in the US, we have a particular responsibility.

The aim of the boycott is to reject the status quo and to support academic freedom for all. A great strength of boycott is that it speaks to multiple audiences. It speaks to the Israeli public, telling it that the world is saying no to occupation. It speaks to the American public, telling it that we demand a change, that the status quo is no longer acceptable. It speaks to Palestinian colleagues, saying that we hear them and support their call. Years of scholarly engagement with Israel/Palestine have led us to support the boycott. By supporting this we join the international movement in solidarity with Palestinians."

Sensing that defeat was inevitable, ADIP opted for a scorched earth approach intended to smear the boycott and the AAA membership. Before debate could even start on the resolution, Dan Rabinowitz introduced an

amendment citing the AAA’s “long-standing support of academic freedom and its opposition to measures that foster discrimination on the basis of race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.”

The Rabinowitz amendment was a poison pill. It was crafted to misleadingly cite the AAA’s longstanding opposition to discrimination against individuals in order to portray the boycott of Israeli institutions as an invidious form of “discrimination” on the basis of national origin. Yet, if rejected, critics could then slam boycott supporters for having rejected a proposal masquerading as an anti-racist amendment. Fortunately, members present immediately saw through the charade and the Rabinowitz amendment failed to gain enough votes to even be debated.

With Rabinowitz’s delaying tactics out of the way, debate on the resolution finally commenced. Most speakers vigorously supported the boycott — often speaking from their research and personal experiences — while ADIP’s sclerotic stalwarts continued to recycle standard anti-boycott talking points. The contrast was especially striking between the last two speakers. Sergei Kan from Dartmouth — who in [last year’s meeting accused](#) the AAA of “having a Jewish problem” — blasted colleagues for supporting the boycott and claimed without evidence that young scholars are being coerced into supporting the boycott. The final speaker, Kamran Asdar Ali from UT Austin, deflected Kan’s bombast with a mild joke and proceeded to [quote](#) the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz: “Those who mix the poison of oppression / Will not succeed, today or tomorrow.”

The boycott resolution was then voted on and passed - 1,040 to 136.

Before supporters could celebrate, however, a new resolution appeared from the floor mandating that the AAA provide its publications database to students without charge if they access it using IP addresses in “the Levant.” The proposal’s authors failed to explain how the proposal would function in practice, given the ease with which one can falsify IP addresses. More importantly, the draft resolution completely ignored the fact that under the boycott, any Israeli would still be able to purchase unlimited access to AAA’s publications database at a steeply discounted rate for “Less Developed Countries” of US \$30 per year – the same rate as for Palestinians in the region.

Like the Rabinowitz measure, the draft resolution seemed designed to force members to choose between adopting an ill-conceived surprise proposal without adequate time for deliberation or rejecting it at the risk of appearing to be unreasonable. And once again, the membership recognized the resolution for the gimmick that it was and declined to waste time on it.

Finally, Ellen Oxfeld of Middlebury College proposed a resolution from the floor that would require the AAA to divest from companies profiting from the occupation. It is unclear if there are any such investments at this time, although the AAA leadership has said that the Association has no investments in Israeli companies. While Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions did not sponsor this measure, we support divestment and other economic sanctions in support of Palestinian liberation. The divestment resolution passed but because it was proposed from the floor – as opposed to being proposed in advance of the business meeting – it will be sent to the AAA Executive Board for further consideration.

November 20 was a historic day for the Association, affirming the finest anti-colonial, anti-racist traditions within the discipline of anthropology. It was also a major step forward in exposing U.S. audiences to the

contradictions between Zionism and progressive principles and added another voice in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

Anthropologists for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions thanks our local and national partners, as well as the various AAA sections, for their solidarity and support. We applaud the heroic endurance of AAA members who stayed to vote on the resolution despite the opposition's attempts to delay, derail, and distract. We will continue to work to educate the entire membership of the AAA on the situation in Palestine/Israel, as we work towards ratifying this historic resolution on the Association's annual Spring Ballot.

Universities, Arms Trade and the Israeli military

Greg Dropkin

Suppose you found out that your local University had extensive research projects involving arms companies, some of which themselves supply the Israeli military. Would this be an issue for students and staff?

In Liverpool, we've opened the door with a booklet, "Get Your Bombs Off Our Lawn" [<http://www.labournet.net/other/1510/livarmsall.pdf>]. The University is involved in research on combat drones under NATO auspices, receives funding directly from the Atomic Weapons Establishment (Aldermaston), and collaborates with companies involved in every major sector of the Israeli military.

You do not need to be at a University to ask questions, but what happens then will depend on people on site and their organisations. Even if the authorities are tight-lipped, you can ask publicly:

- Does academic freedom include the freedom to view and consider University finances?
- Should the University be able to hide the implications of its own research or the involvement of its partners in human rights abuses and war crimes?
- Is it in the best interests of students and staff that University research contracts are so heavily tilted towards the arms industry?
- How does the University cater for science and engineering students who do not wish to have any involvement with the military in general or with arming Israel in particular?
- Which ethical processes and guidance/legal documents are used in establishing policy development in relation to military related/funded research?
- Who decides which funding strands and collaborations are legitimate to pursue?
- What efforts have staff made to develop projects without military involvement, or to seek alternative funding using the same skills and academic and technical expertise?
- How can students influence what they are being taught if they do not know about their tutor's and department's links with the arms industry?
- Who benefits from those close links with the arms industry?

If you want to try this, a few people could quickly unravel the local facts by comparing public information sources. The University website may trumpet industrial collaboration and describe specific research projects. You can skim some of the research publications. The Research Excellence Framework will summarise ongoing local work. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) has a searchable database, as does CORDIS for EU funding. Campaign Against Arms Trade has a wealth of material on companies and UK military export licence applications. The Liverpool booklet, with online references, includes background on many of the companies you may encounter and the data sources to search.

Liverpool

At least 17 major arms firms have direct or indirect involvement at Liverpool: AgustaWestland (Finmeccanica), Airbus, BAE Systems, Caterpillar, Ferranti Technologies (Elbit), GE Aviation, Hewlett-Packard, Honeywell, IBM, Magellan, National Instruments, Qinetiq, Rolls-Royce, Siemens, Teledyne, the UK Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), and DSTL, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, an agency of the Ministry of Defence. Many of these also do civil work, but all are involved in arms.

Of these, companies arming Israel include BAE, GE-Aviation and Rolls-Royce, all supplying F-16 jet fighter components. AgustaWestland supplies components for Apache attack helicopters. Ferranti Technologies is 100% owned by Israeli drone firm Elbit Systems. Caterpillar supplies militarized bulldozers and a track system for Merkava tanks. Teledyne supplies the tank engines. BAE's 100% subsidiary Rokar (in Israel) supplies artillery shells and F-16 components. Hewlett-Packard provides the Israeli military and prison service with computers, and biometric surveillance at checkpoints along the Apartheid Wall.

Arms-related research may be directly commissioned by the Ministry of Defence. It may be a partnership with arms companies like BAE. It may appear to be a civilian project, whose technology can be adapted for military use - AgustaWestland research at Liverpool will be applied to all models, civil and military. The University also co-funds PhD bursaries with arms firms.

The companies are proud of their working relationships. AgustaWestland proclaims that the Centre of Excellence in Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), flight mechanics and simulation - provides “opportunities for professors and creative students to dedicate research to specific ‘live’ projects, which in turn benefits the company.”

Drones

Three NATO programmes have had input from the CFD lab. AVT-113 involved computations on a complete fighter aircraft (F-16XL). The research group included NASA, Boeing, BAE SYSTEMS, the German Aerospace Centre (DLR), along with Liverpool. AVT-161 concerned “static and dynamic stability and control characteristics of military vehicles”, including Unmanned Combat Air Vehicles (UCAV), i.e.

combat drones. A Liverpool PhD student won a NATO research award. AVT-201 is an ongoing NATO programme, concerning the design ofUCAV using a prototype military drone, known as SACCON (Stability and Control Configuration), originally designed by EADS-Military Air Systems (EADS is now called Airbus). A simulated image of the SACCON drone appears on the booklet cover, alongside missiles dropped from a jet fighter.

Another CFD project, FlexFlight, involves Airbus UK, BAE Systems, DSTL, QinetiQ, and is sponsored by the EPSRC. Flexible aircraft can be designed for long-endurance unmanned operations. One model studied at Liverpool was developed at DSTL by the Aircraft Structures Lead within the Air and Weapons Systems Department.

The Centre for Autonomous Systems Technology (CAST) studies programmable robots acting autonomously without human intervention. It operates through the Virtual Engineering Centre (VEC) with inputs from the depts of Computer Science, Electrical Engineering & Electronics, Engineering, Law, Philosophy, and Psychology. The VEC is a University partnership with the government Science and Technology Facilities Council, BAE Systems, Morson Projects, and the North West Aerospace Alliance. Morson “supply exceptional personnel across military and civilian projects...” The North West Aerospace Alliance includes dozens of arms companies and military component suppliers.

One strand of CAST research involved software applications and sensor integration for managing autonomous systems for unmanned vehicles. Another CAST theme refers to “more autonomous vehicles for both civil and military search and surveillance applications.” Projects include Ship-Board Launch and Recovery of an Unmanned Autonomous Air System. Another CAST project, UAV Certification, asks “once systems can make their own decisions then how can we be sure that such autonomous systems will do what we require and will act safely and legally?”, unintended irony given BAE's involvement.

The Computer Science department undertakes research into Market Based Control of Complex Computational Systems, in partnership with BAE Systems, Hewlett-Packard, BT and IBM. It explains “The project aimed to adapt ideas from economics to the design and management of complex distributed computer systems, such as those used in fleets of self-guided aircraft...”

The interdisciplinary Institute for Risk and Uncertainty has an unspecified industrial collaboration with the Ural Works of Civil Aviation, a Russian company one of whose drones was shot down over Ukraine in May. It uses an Israel Aerospace Industry design.

Nukes

The Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) poured £236,346 into the University of Liverpool in 2010, £36,293 in 2011, and £69,992 in the first six months of 2012. We don't know why. But the Structural Dynamics Research Group within the Centre for Engineering Dynamics has conducted research into the AWE-MACE, carried out jointly by engineering staff in Liverpool, Tehran, and at Aldermaston. The MACE

is an unclassified structure having joints representative of those in a nuclear warhead. The research was funded by the EPSRC and published with permission of the Ministry of Defence and AWE-Aldermaston.

Money

Back in 2008 the University disclosed investments including BAE Systems £1,629,450, Rolls Royce £283,670, and the VT Group £2,022,443, along with minor holdings in 6 giant US arms firms. Most shares in BAE and Rolls Royce were held through the pension fund for non-academic staff. Funds flow in from the EPSRC, whose peer review college includes 37 BAE employees. EPSRC grants worth over £30 million (not all for Liverpool), involve the University with arms companies. A further 17 EU collaborative projects worth £131m including unidentified non-EU funds, again with Liverpool receiving only a portion, involve arms companies, sometimes with explicit military applications.

Campaigning

We launched the booklet in October with a public meeting addressed by David Wearing (CAAT), Sarah Ali (a student from Gaza), myself, and David Hookes (Scientists for Global Responsibility). The UCU branch is supportive, and students have just won a vote for the Guild to adopt a BDS policy – a long battle in its own right. [<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/europe/22364-university-of-liverpool-students-vote-for-bds>]

Science does not need to serve the military. Engineers can do other things with their skills. If enough students and staff do not wish their institution to be a research unit for and an investor in the arms industry, an open informed debate including strategies for arms conversion is a good beginning. The Liverpool booklet's conclusion outlines some ideas for alternative research into climate change and sustainable agriculture.

A national campaign, identifying local collaboration with the arms trade and discussing alternatives, could become a new front for effective solidarity with Palestine.

Gaza, a New Meaning for *Minimal* Architecture

Salem Al Qudwa, Oxford Brookes University



The term 'minimalism' is used to describe a trend in design and architecture where the subject is reduced to its necessary elements. In the Gaza Strip, Palestine there exists another meaning to minimalism that has to do with the reduction of life to a minimum. For example, the access to fuel, electricity and other basic needs is not free but restricted by Israel - whose control of Gaza's theoretical borders is absolute - to levels falling far below the area's normal requirements [1]. The corrosion of these essential resources is worsened by the density of life in Gaza, where the population has been residing in the most densely populated stretch of land in the world

The main concern of the people in Gaza has been to build a shelter whose shape and form is the most economical. Out of necessity and for reasons of economy, buildings in the Gaza Strip have tended to be minimised to the bare essentials. People build individual homes for all sorts of reasons, but mainly because they want to build something tailored to their family's unique requirements. Single and extended family houses are scattered throughout the Strip and aligned to the outer perimeter of Gaza. With a slap of living spaces, raised on pilotis, and a flat roof, they look like local variations of the modernistic villa. It was indeed the influence of early modernism that first arrived in the region via the occupied Palestinian territories, reaching its zenith in the 1930s that filtered through to the Strip via Palestinian construction workers, to almost become the new vernacular [2].

The lack of urban and regional planning and management of constructed properties in the Gaza Strip is a critical issue. Building licenses are granted liberally, existing land use regulations are often ignored, and the Strip lacks experience of planning in general. At the same time the population is increasing while the available land is decreasing. Forms and spatial relationships are dictated by lifestyle and the needs of the occupants rather than the wilful composition of a designer, if there is a designer at all! The architect until the late 1980s was not the only designer and the building process could pass even without the architect's signature. Building without architects is a common practice (Fig. 1). Good and low skilled workers are used to maintain the quality of buildings, while almost all poor houses go without plastering their walls neither outside nor inside.

The geometry of buildings is dictated by the materials available for construction and the topography of the landscape. To build in the most efficient way, materials have to be put together according to their inherent properties, which include the size and shape of the materials and components. This gives an order to the architecture that is not based on conceptual ideas, but on logic and rationale [3]. Architecture is about making order in space. However, order and rhythm in the Gaza Strip do not determine the quality of work, although they are not easily discernible.

In spite of buildings being traditionally constructed with few trades and local knowledge; buildings are no less poetic than any orderly planning process. Construction methods in most of the local buildings are kept simple and minimal because skills are not technologically advanced. Each individual building deviates little from the rational arrangement and construction, both of which result from the local climate, materials, skills and knowledge. Another consideration is the client's budget which mandated architects to work with local builders and determined the main building component: concrete masonry units being the only popular material with which the workers had experience.

With small plans, work had employed poured concrete and concrete masonry units as some of their principal building blocks. Blocks are then coated with a lime plaster wash to protect against humidity and are arranged with apertures that provide screening and filter daylight into the interior spaces. Responding to the limitations of the local workforce, plans employ simple materials and construction techniques, with no interest in innovating with material but in using everyday materials in different ways.

People in the Gaza Strip have constantly been in the band of political instability. An ordinary citizen looked upon art only in terms of its utility (Fig. 2), and it was thus no accident that period primarily saw the development of applied arts. On the other hand, residential buildings in the Strip may look like disorganized groups of crowded grey concrete boxes. But when you start to look beneath their outer layers and begin to examine what's going on underneath you will find all sorts of complex and human life-support systems at work in those dwellings, in which the prominent note is resourcefulness, not hopelessness [4].



Figure 2: Similar to those grid formats of minimalist artist Carl Andre, a local arranged bricks at a particular manner.

For example, ordinary Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip prepare traditional flat bread for their families using wheat flour they got from humanitarian aid agencies. Baking bread at home saves hundreds of shekels on groceries every year. Fresh-baked bread is prepared every day in some houses. Similar to the basics of minimal art, women lay dough of clean circular surfaces and repeat the pieces of dough in rows and columns.



Figure 3: Dough circles repeated in rows and columns inside a poor local house, the Gaza strip.

The natural light coming through the aluminium frame of windows in each empty room “actual space” of the house and their metallic protection show another sign of this simplicity, order and abstraction attitude (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: Horizontal and vertical lines, a typical aluminium window vs. a painting, homage to Mondrian.

Aesthetics of the raw material, the relationship of objects to actual space, the effects of natural light on street volumes, and producing highly reduced arrangements are available within the visual context in Gaza. The objects, frequently reduced to very simple geometric shapes, were industrially produced, thus removing the artist's personal signature from the work. The works were also characterised by serial arrangements of a number of shapes in small and medium dimensions. Freestanding objects; such as metallic tubes and wooden stacks can be seen laid at the streets of the Gaza Strip with their circular and rectangular ends being repeated in lines horizontally and vertically. Wooden pallets, stacks of plywood, rusty tubes, all this concentration on the formal aspects of the composition led to a close link with the sculptural works of minimal art. While watching the blacksmith at his workshop working metal with a hammer and anvil, and the carpenter working at his carpentry, one can see that they are making pieces of sculpture, keeping it



simple, and keeping it cheap and affordable.

Figure 5: Static minimalistic objects at the streets of Gaza.

Other static minimalistic objects are stacks of construction materials in the streets of the Gaza Strip, stacks of wood and cement bricks in a unit-bar version, concrete exterior walls (Fig. 5). Many of these works convey a concept of minimal art in which the pictorial elements no longer have any meaning beyond their own selves. Aesthetic strategies such as symmetry and repetition could be seen and minimal art objects are distributed throughout the streets of the Gaza Strip.

On a larger scale, where there are many buildings together, type is minimised as forms are repeated across the site. For larger buildings, which have a natural tendency to be more complex than smaller buildings, it may be necessary to reduce complexity through repetition [3]. Thousands of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip live in moderate dwellings or poor shelters that have gradually become permanent settlements.

The overcrowded residential buildings are equipped with cement blocks for internal and external walls and flat slabs concrete roofing. A generic form or type can be repeated to accommodate a complex dwelling brief. In this way the number of different forms and buildings types is minimised. The same can be said for the repetitive use of building products and components in construction which come together to form a simple whole.

Buildings emerge as responses to their surroundings, not to think of the work as objects but to engage with the context rather than just making forms. This approach is evident in the plan of residential buildings in the Gaza Strip, which took cues from the existing structure of the plot. An unthinking, uncritical attitude towards construction had developed, which can be described as a "culture of laziness". This could be an analysis of the current situation in the Strip and the form or grey boxes making process (Fig. 6). Hence styles and tastes vary through the ages; the sensibility of a particular structure may be grandeur, simplicity, or whimsy. There is no contemporary architecture; there are buildings with no particular architectural identity or style, yet basic in geometry, simple and grey.



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Figure 6: Repetitive use of building products and components in the Strip.

Architectural abstraction can be easily seen at the streets of the Strip. Also the grey colour of concrete could be noticed while moving through the city roads and neighbourhoods. And while "grey" might be the first image that comes to mind when we think of concrete, this can add an element of style and aesthetic to buildings with raw beauty.

In the Gaza Strip, Palestine, minimalist architecture is not an alternative paradigm, but is a consequence for the current situation with regard to material resources, building techniques and the form-making process. The majority of buildings in the Strip are simple with architecture of a minimal appearance, without any additives or decoration; but it is also minimised in its geometric form, composition and method of construction.



As beauty is in everything, especially in still life, and inspiration comes from simple everyday things. The researcher had taken many pictures which are rich in concrete aesthetics and dimensions of good quality. Such works offer a glimpse into our lives as a never-satisfied aesthete. Even it is a way for others to travel to those areas of the Strip (Fig. 7).

Figure 7: A powerful dichotomy of the imagery and the simple things surroundings in the actual space. Palestinians in Gaza should seek the essence and simplicity by rediscovering the valuable qualities of simple and humble materials.

What the author hopes is to be able to continue developing this trend in a fresh and regional architectural style that motivates people to bring their traditional construction methods; with the touch of being rustic, into a contemporary modern architecture. Believing that architecture; if we use it wisely, has the potential to contribute in a significant scale to the development of the Gaza Strip's economic independence and facilitate a process of self-discovery and identification in architecture and culture.

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