

Why boycott Israeli academic institutions? Because they are complicit with the occupation of Palestine

A small number of individual Israeli academics, Jewish and Palestinian, courageously speak out; but at the institutional level Israel universities are heavily complicit in the Israeli occupation.

Israeli universities are key players in military R&D. For example, MAFAT (the R&D Directorate of the Israel Ministry of Defence) is “currently funding 55 projects” at Tel Aviv University (TAU) alone (TAU Review 2008/09: 2).

People are just not aware of. . .how much TAU contributes. . . I myself am awed by the magnitude and scientific creativity of the work being done behind the scenes at TAU that enhances the country’s. . .military edge, President of TAU (TAU Review 2008/09: 4)

Military R&D at Israeli universities directly serves the occupation. For example, at TAU and beyond, geophysicists refine tunnel-detection techniques based on seismic waves for use in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; computer scientists design robots to replace soldiers; organic chemists work on how to identify suspects through sweat residue; zoologists test birds and dogs for military use; experts in microelectronics develop “smart dew” for the covert surveillance of “just about everything”; mechanical engineers work on improving the aerodynamics of surveillance drones, and their colleagues refine technology for long-distance video intelligence gathering (TAU Review 2008/9: 2-11).

The creation of new chemistries is extremely important for the technological superiority of our troops, Dr Michael Gozin of TAU, expert in organic chemistry and explosives (TAU Review 2008/09: 10)

Israeli universities forge extensive, institutionalized links with the army of occupation. For example, most faculty and students are reservists in the IDF, while key position-holders in the army move to the universities and back again: Professor Isaac Ben-Israel, for instance, holds the rank of Major General (Res.) in the Israeli army and is a former director of MAFAT (the R&D Directorate of the Israel Ministry of Defence). He is head of TAU Security Studies Program and the Tel Aviv Workshop for Science, Technology and Security.

Most of the professors in the country’s Middle East departments – the ‘experts on Arabs’ who shape the perceptions of the next generation – are recruited from the army or the security services.--, Daphna Golan (Cook, “‘War-Crimes’ Colonel”, Counterpunch, 9/02/09)

Most universities give special privileges through accelerated degrees to the IDF and security services. For example, students of the National Security College can obtain a master’s degree in political science from Haifa University by taking just two classes a week for one semester. Pilots only have to study for one year to receive a bachelor’s degree at Ben-Gurion University. Shin Bet operatives can earn a BA from Bar-Ilan University in 16 months (Gideon Levy, *Ha’aretz*, 13 February 2009).

Today there is hardly a university [in Israel] that does not offer special courses for officers, pilots and secret agents, Gideon Levy (Ha’aretz, 13 February 2009)

Israeli universities provide extensive scientific and technical training for military and security personnel. For example, TAU's Security Studies programme boasts 170 masters students; TAU takes in 85 students a year in the IDF Academic Reserve Programme (TAU Review 2008/09: 12).

One of our [TAU's] great contributions to defense and national security is in training skilled manpower for these industries, Prof Haim Wolfson, Dean of Exact Sciences, TAU (TAU Review 2008/09: 12)

Israeli universities hire, promote, publish and/or honour those closely tied to the military who advance strategic, legal, or ethical reasons for violating international law or committing human rights abuses. For example, TAU's Institute for National Security Studies published a report before the recent assault on Gaza by Colonel (Res.) Gabriel Siboni arguing that the answer to rockets from places such as Gaza was "a disproportionate strike at the heart of the enemy's weak spot, in which efforts to hurt launch capability are secondary" (Harel, "IDF Plans to use Disproportionate Force", *Ha'aretz*, 5/10/2008). Or, Asa Kasher, professor of professional ethics and philosophy of practice at Tel Aviv University, and military adviser, argues that IDF killing of Palestinian *civilians*, whose lives are said to be less important than those of Israeli *soldiers*, is the responsibility of Palestinian combatants, not the IDF (Margolit and Walzer, "Civilians and Combatants", NYRB, 14 May 2009). Or, IDF Col. Sharvit-Baruch, who "manipulated standard interpretations of international law to expand the scope of army operations to include civilian targets" was hired after the recent massacre in Gaza to teach international law at TAU.

*[Col Sharvit-Baruch writes] devious jurisprudence that permits mass killing Prof Haim Ganz (Cook, "'War-Crimes' Colonel", *Counterpunch*, 9/02/09)*

No Israeli university has condemned the degradation and destruction of Palestinian academia attendant on the occupation. Instead, the universities often act to silence criticism. For example, Teddy Katz was awarded an MA – his thesis scored 97% – in 1999 at Haifa University. His thesis subsequently ignited controversy because it examined the killing of Palestinians in May 1948. Instead of protecting Katz's freedom, the university initiated a highly unorthodox 're-inspection' of his thesis and then withdrew his research degree in 2002, awarding a non-research degree (Amit, "Collapse of Academic Freedom" *Counterpunch*, 11 May 2005). Or, Haifa University called in Special Forces to smash an on-campus demonstration by Arab students over Gaza in January 2009; 12 students were arrested and several more assaulted and injured (National Democratic Assembly Press Release, 12/01/2009).

This is compelling evidence that Israeli universities are deeply complicit in one of the longest-running occupations of our times, and in the systematic violation of international law, and the extensive human rights abuses attendant upon it. That these are educational institutions, which have shown no institutional solidarity with their Palestinian academic counterparts under siege, and which evince pride in their military role, makes the complicity more shocking.

BRICUP believes that it is appropriate for academics around the world to withdraw institutional cooperation from Israeli universities until their complicity ends.

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