

I commend the Executive Board on seeking to undertake a “mutually respectful exchange”, and to use this debate to explore issues of anthropological and global relevance. If we at AAA can succeed at this, we may be among the first in the world to do so, and can serve as an important model for both academics and activists on this and many issues. This summer’s war in Gaza has made it clear that this is needed more than ever.

Although the Executive Board has made it clear that an academic boycott will not be considered at this point, a boycott has become the focus of the conversation. I oppose an academic boycott, and particularly one that singles out one particular side in a conflict. The reasons for this have been stated clearly elsewhere, but the main points that I find relevant are:

- Such boycotts end up punishing individual scholars, not institutions;
- These scholars are often the very people seeking to understand and address the issues in the region;
- Singling out Israel when other conflicts and human rights issues are ignored implies that there are other underlying reasons for this call to action;
- Singling out Israel demonstrates a lack of understanding of this particular conflict and the larger socio-political dynamics of the region as a whole.

I believe that anthropologists can make an important contribution to the heated and passionate discussions about the Middle East, and about Israel-Palestine in particular. We are one of the only scholarly disciplines who have the tools to problematize the social, religious and political histories of the public discourses on all sides of the debate, and to explore the everyday experiences of those living in the midst of these terrible events.

If we as anthropologists truly want to support greater understanding and catalyze movement towards peace in Israel and Palestine, academic boycotts are the opposite of what we should be doing. AAA should be encouraging academic dialogue, theoretically and methodologically sophisticated scholarship, and curriculum development. Rather than an academic boycott, AAA should spearhead an initiative for greater academic engagement in Israel/Palestine, advocate for more research and scholarship funding, challenge universities to teach more courses and create more faculty lines for those who take on these complex issues.

There are many anthropologists – Israelis, Palestinians, Americans and Europeans - who have done excellent work to help us analyze and understand this region. These scholars have demonstrated tremendous sensitivity and have worked hard to build the trust and neutrality that is necessary in such a polarized and emotionally-laden region. They have done this academic work despite the risk to themselves, their families, and their careers. Their research looks beyond the deep fears, angers, and passions that characterize any discussion of the Middle East; it forces us to challenge our assumptions, helps us to better understand those we might see as “other” – on all sides of the political, cultural and religious spectrums – and provides rare insights into an extremely complicated situation. This is exactly the type of anthropological scholarship that I want to make available to my students. I want to hear more from these researchers, and I want new scholars to tackle these complex questions. I would hate to see us shut down these lines of inquiry through a

boycott of our colleagues and peers. We would achieve nothing by silencing the very voices that are most needed on this complex issue.

We might also consider turning our anthropological lens on ourselves, in order to explore the very questions raised in discussions of an anthropological academic boycott: Why has Israel/Palestine been singled out? Why is the discourse around Israel so different from that about other countries in the region? Why have AAA members chosen to bring this issue to the Executive Board, and not the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or Ukraine?

Anthropological studies of Israel-Palestine, and of the other conflicts spread throughout the entire region, have much to teach us. Rather than boycott those grappling with these issues, we should do everything we can to support and encourage them.

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