

REVIEW OF Nelson, Cary and Brahm, Gabriel Noah, (eds.) *The Case Against Academic Boycotts of Israel* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2015) 552 pp.

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This comprehensive and well organized volume edited by Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on BDS. The twenty five essays range from an analysis of the philosophical underpinning of the BDS movement to case studies. Section one makes the argument that BDS violates the principles of academic freedom, a concept about which Nelson, a former President of the American Association of University Professors, is well qualified to speak. Kenneth L. Marcus, the President and General Counsel of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law and a foremost legal authority on issues of academic freedom and anti-Semitism, raises the question of whether BDS is a form of anti-Semitism. Samuel M. Edelman and Carol F.S. Edelman emphasize that the BDS drive on campus is a success even if fails. In other words, even if a BDS resolution fails, the debate “educates” students about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since BDS drives generally take place on many prestigious campuses, it is the future graduates of these elite universities who are the target of such “education.” For those who count the number of successful resolutions as a measure of the BDS strength, the Edelman chapter is a cautionary tale of the limits of a numerical analysis. Nelson and other contributors are also rightfully worried about the less measurable but very potent

impact which pro-BDS faculty may have on students. The applied section includes a portfolio of anti-BDS tactics.

The book has two weaknesses. First, it does not analyze the pivotal role of several Israeli scholars who have created a body of work that equates the Israel-Palestine conflict with the apartheid regime in South Africa. As IAM repeatedly demonstrated, the writings of Ben Gurion University professors Oren Yiftachel and Neve Gordon, as well as other Israeli academics, are part of the “academic cannon” that is used to legitimize BDS.

Second, and arguably more importantly, the volume is based on the premise that the BDS discourse on campuses follows the Humboldtian notion that liberal arts are akin to a free market of ideas. As Nelson puts it, “we offer this book as a resource to bring reason, history, and sound information to campuses confronting this BDS agenda.” In reality, nothing could be further from this ideal in much of Middle East studies. It is well known that the discipline has been systemically influenced by Arab and Iranian money which has been used to provide a skewed view of Israel. As for the BDS initiative, it has benefited from equally well funded and coordinated efforts. IAM’s *Academic Forensics* series has provided rigorous empirical evidence to support this claim. Needless to say, BDS activists have used an array of deceitful and backhanded tactics to minimize any sort of free give and take discourse on the issue.

In spite of the two weaknesses, IAM is very pleased to learn that the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv will host Cary Nelson and Gabriel Noah Brahm (see their invitation below), for we have long argued that the academic delegitimization of Israel poses a threat to Israel’s security.