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Making Emotional Sense of the Proposed Boycotts against Israeli Academics and Intellectuals - Catherine B. Silver

I- Introduction (1)

This essay explores the signifying discourses used to support the ban on Israeli academics and intellectuals. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding the links between the political and the personal, through an exploration of the emotional basis for supporting the boycott and the power of language in splitting thoughts from affects. We look at this splitting mechanism in the context of the recent attempts to boycott Israeli researchers and academics which were initiated in England in 2002 by two Jewish professors (2), and followed in 2006 with both a proposal by an Irish group of academics and an attempted ban of Israel at this year's International Architectural Biennial in Venice. The boycott attempts have created deep divisions within the left, each camp resorting to attacks, counter-attacks, and mutual condemnations.

The use of the term "left" is of course problematic since there are many groups on the left with differing visions and histories. In this paper the term left will be used as an umbrella term and radical left used to denote those who have publicly supported the boycott. We acknowledge the important contribution of radical thinkers in decoding the complexities of the situation in the Middle East, providing critical assessment of Israeli policies, and re-thinking Israeli history. However, we would like to consider the danger involved in intellectual formulations that polarize the discussion by going beyond criticisms of Israeli policies to challenging the existence of a Jewish State. This essay is an attempt to broaden the dialogue among left-leaning academics and intellectuals deeply concerned about the situation in Israel and the Middle-East.

The 20th and the 21st centuries may turn out to be one of the ugliest and most traumatizing stretches of time in history. Individuals, groups and nations have been deeply affected, if not traumatized--cognitively, mentally and emotionally--by the violence of modern times: World Wars, genocides (Shoah, Armenian, Bosnia, Darfur, etc.), nuclear attacks (Hiroshima and Nagasaki), tribal warfare, global terrorism, group rape, and all kinds of social and family violence (the effects of which have been disproportionately felt by women). The exposure to physical and symbolic violence - direct or indirect - creates the potential for disintegration of individual and collective psyches as well as for trans-generational transmission of traumas. When psychic and/or emotional resilience is so challenged, rhetorical formulations are often substituted for the experience of painful emotions, "delinking" thoughts from their affective content in order to cope with traumatic experiences and memories (Bion 1967).

The intellectual issues raised by the boycott, such as human rights, free speech, the nature of intellectual exchange, and the emergence of new knowledge are worthy of lengthy discussions. However, the substitution of ideology for intellectual discussion and emotional meaning, particularly seductive for academics and intellectuals, is what we explore here. The split between thinking and emotions leaves little room for a language of ambivalence, mutual recognition, and empathy. Instead, such a split allows for the creation of an inflammatory rhetoric, involving terms such as "racist state", "Judeo-nazism", "colonial domination", "imperialism", "ethnic cleansing", and

"apartheid" (3).

Such formulations awaken past traumas and energize affective and bodily memories. The manner in which academics and intellectuals who support the boycott play a role in re-framing and re-drawing the shifting boundaries of language is an issue that we investigate by considering the different discourses expressed in the writings of academics and intellectuals who support the boycott as well as interviews of left-wing Jewish intellectuals regarding their position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (4). There is a distinction to be made between those academics and intellectuals who articulate their pro-boycott positions in published papers and those who signed the boycott or gave informal support to the idea. The published writings provide a fuller view of the arguments made (5), while the content of the interviews provides more personal and emotional information. Both sources of information were essential in our understanding of the emotional roots of support for the boycott.

We are less interested in the content *per se* of the issues debated than in the emotional and cognitive dynamic that underlies the arguments made. They can be identified in the texts and interviews around what we call modes of thinking which carry a combination of "paranoid", "humanistic" and "utopian" features. Paranoid thinking involves language that simultaneously assuages and encourages violence, especially symbolic violence; it has the greatest potential for promoting cycles of mistrust and destructiveness (6). Humanistic thinking encourages a somewhat depoliticized vision based on commonalities among human beings and uses the language of empathy and forgiveness where emotions of guilt and shame play a central role. Utopian thinking refers to political or religious beliefs which are based on a visionary language of geo-political movements that can bridge gaps across national, religious, and social interests.

In this essay our concern is two-fold. We are concerned, first of all, with the aforementioned processes of de-linking whereby the affective dimensions relevant to the situation are not fully acknowledged in the political arguments made. A second concern that pervades this essay is that clichéd, political formulations, detached from specific historical contexts eventually spread to other situations with their own unassimilated fears and political agendas. The emotions stemming from both sources are likely to shape the expression of anger and self-hate, re-directing them toward selected scapegoats: in this case, Jewish communities and the Israeli State. For example, international organization and new forms of decentralized, grass roots social movements have created resistance against racism and globalization while tending to position themselves against the Israeli State and to equate racism with Zionism. Before discussing these modes of thinking, we will explore some of the issues pertaining to language, trauma, and the memories that frame them.

II- The Boycott of Israeli Academics and Intellectuals

I have been puzzled by the willingness of some academics (some friends of mine among them) to support the proposed ban of Israeli academics and equally puzzled by the backlash that it created (Alexander and Bogdanor, eds 2006). The original idea for a boycott to prevent British universities from collaborations with Israeli universities and research scholars started in England with the aim of applying political pressure to the Israeli State regarding the occupied territories. Later the proposed boycott was narrowed down: universities and academics that distanced themselves from official policies and publicly expressed their support for Palestinian political and social demands would not be penalized. The underlying logic was that unless Israeli universities and academics actively recanted or criticized the Israeli State, they were collaborating - a form of guilt by association - and should be subjected to the boycott.

Israeli academics and intellectuals are more likely than any other group to seek change in Israeli civil society and push for a new political agenda. The recent report distributed by Peace Now on the appropriation of Arab lands by the Israeli State is a case in point (*New York Times*, Nov. 21 2006). Why, we ask, would academics in the US, Europe, and Israel support the boycott against Israeli academics and intellectuals who share a desire for change in the Middle East and are willing to challenge existing institutional and political controls? Why would the boycott be directed against soft targets such as academics, intellectuals, and researchers? One could argue that it makes sense to boycott Western corporations and businesses, or to demand that US political leadership put financial pressure on Israel to curtail the spread of settlements in the occupied territories and to remove existing ones. If the aim of the boycott was the withdrawal of Jewish settlements from the West Bank/Gaza, then economic sanctions that targeted

settlers' products would send a clear signal. So why are universities –the traditional, though limited sites for exchange of ideas and cooperation between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs – the target of attack rather than businesses or other public institutions? A psychodynamic interpretation would suggest the presence of a great deal of unresolved narcissistic rage around issues of identification and de-identification with the (m)Other and what it symbolizes.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since the failure of the Oslo Accords (1993) and Yitzhak Rabin's assassination (1995), has created deep divisions and mistrust within the "left". Furthermore, the growing number of attacks on Jewish persons and property in the US, France, Holland and Britain (7), combined with an increase in alienated young Muslim populations and the emergence of a new "intellectual anti-Semitism" among educated elites has expanded such divisions. Some have pointed to a link between pro-boycott and pro-Palestinian support along with an overly anti-Israeli platform in the European media and the revival of forms of traditional anti-Semitic attacks: accusations of blood libel and deicide, condemnations of the Jewish lobby and the widespread distribution of the infamous fraud Protocols of the Elders of Zion in Muslim countries with little or no contact with Jews. Jewish history, with its tales of persecution, pogroms and genocide, comes to be used as ammunition in ethnic and national struggles, spreading anti-nationalist and anti-Semitic feelings across cultures through the anonymity of the internet and other communication technologies. Support for the boycott and uncritical stances toward Palestinian policies have blurred the line between Judaism and Zionism and between Zionism and specific policies of the Israeli State of which many on the left have been critical. The ambiguity of these fuzzy distinctions has re-enforced a dangerous equation between Zionism and racism, one which has been used for political purposes. The equation of Zionism with racism was officially proposed at the United Nation World Conference against Racism in Durhan in 2002!

The boycott indirectly affects programs of cooperation among Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. While these programs may not be directly targeted by the ban on academic institutions, many workers and volunteers in non-profit organizations and pro-peace NGOs have members affiliated with universities (8)? They are laboring to promote human rights, civil rights and human cooperation at the most basic levels, and in doing so they are challenging the status quo. These workers are caught in the reverberations of the boycott's political agenda. The impact of the boycott on these programs is seen as "collateral damage"; some "good people" and their work may be undermined, especially in their ability to raise money, for the sake of a larger struggle for social justice and political transformation in the occupied territories. According to this logic, polarization and antagonism (struggle/revolution) are more politically effective and emotionally rewarding than the dilution of the workings of power relations through discussion, compromise, and collaboration.

One senses a neo-Marxist rhetoric underpinning such political logic, an analysis based on the idea of struggle for justice and equality in which radical thinkers, left wing academics, Israeli Arabs, and their Palestinian brethren will awaken and feel bound together in a shared political struggle against the racist/imperialist Jewish State. For the supporters of the boycott this logic is as much a politically motivated punishing tactic as it is a way of creating solidarity. The sense of belonging to a political-social movement that cuts across national, cultural, and religious differences seems to echo the original Marxist formula "Workers of the world unite". Such a vision provides a magnet for disenfranchised radical intellectuals, especially after the Algerian War, the Vietnam War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Out of the emotional emptiness that was left behind new geo-political landscapes emerged around decentralized social movements, grass roots organizations, and non-governmental structures with local agendas such as the World Social Forum.

Many of the arguments presented in support of the boycott were of a polemical nature, comparing Israeli practices to apartheid in South Africa, seeing the Israeli state as a colonial/imperialist power, or defining the Israeli army as a Judeo-Nazi machine. Polemics like these rely on concepts such as nationalism/national identity, state terrorism, victimizers/victimized, Zionism/anti-Zionism, imperialism, and a racist Jewish State. The arguments made illustrate two general forms of political activism. "Indirect principled activism" is based on abstract political principles that provide strong ground for identification with some ideology (moral or political) with little concrete engagement and/or personal responsibility. "Direct principled activism", on the other hand, is based on similar ideological positioning combined with the expressions of personal responsibilities and direct involvement in promoting them. We suggest that these forms of political activism fill-in for emotional needs for the logical consistency, feelings of security, and narcissistic gratification that assuage unconscious guilt and shame around collective traumas, although in different ways.

The goal of the proposed boycotts was not to present a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Israeli and Palestinian people in the current conflict. In fact, an unanticipated consequence of the proposed boycotts has been to make it more difficult to support joint efforts of Jewish- and Arab-Israeli academics and intellectuals, indirectly destabilizing the complex links between State institutions and Israeli civil society. Joining the interests of radical intellectual Palestinians with radical Israeli academics, this strategy puts political pressure on the Israeli State by enlisting the support of large numbers of friendly left-wing academics in England and Europe. The choice of universities and academics as targets strikes a fertile psychological terrain by unconsciously connecting past collective traumas in European/American history with current struggles in the Middle East. The members of the American and European "left" in search of meaningful political causes and without much knowledge of the situation on the ground were easy targets. Indeed, many of the academics that we interviewed were poorly informed of the situation in the Middle East and unaware of the role of universities, volunteers and NGOs in fighting for social and political change.

The emotional impact of the boycott spread widely through the disembodied, free-floating expression of a toxic mix of aggression and longing that interacts with traumatic memories of hurt and humiliation inside and outside of Israel, among Jews and non-Jews alike. It mobilized emotional and libidinal energies through rhetorical formulations that were felt as legitimate, politically correct, and morally sound, illustrating what Julia Kristeva has called a form of "political perversion".

I identify as political perversion a coherent structure determined by an ideal (this ideal was theoretical for us; perhaps it has been moral for others), which nevertheless uses the abjections of a reality, one that is neglected or even foreclosed, on behalf of libidinal or sublimated gratifications. (*My Memory Hyperbole*, 1984)

What Kristeva is suggesting in this quote is that often the endorsement of a coherent mental structure (ideology) based on either a theoretical or moral basis is a way to gratify libidinal needs and to cope with the anxiety of unresolved collective memories under the guise of political or moral principles.

III- Trauma, Language and Memories

Individual traumas influence people's affective life and political views as adults. Similarly, individuals who have not directly or personally experienced violence have nonetheless internalized the memories of horrors that groups and nations have inflicted on one another across centuries. They are still faced with the inadequacy, passivity, collaboration, and betrayal of older parents/generations. The radical left, because of its own involvement with past liberation struggles, might be more sensitive to the emotional pressures of remembering, but also more likely to act-out repressed feelings of shame and guilt for past actions.

Political formulations have the power to spread ideas/ideologies that re-enforce the splits between language and meaning, between thoughts and emotions. Often, they are the expression of unconscious mental forces. To use Jonathan Lear's formulation:

Any conscious thoughts will typically be embedded in a wealth of associations which will endow that thought with meanings which are at once unconscious and idiosyncratic. We do not fully understand the meaning of any conscious thought until we understand the myriad ways in which thought is functioning as a "covering" for unconscious mental forces. (1998)

As we know from the lives of children of Holocaust survivors, guilt and shame run across generations; but these feelings are also transmitted across groups and cultures through complex processes of identification and de-identification in which perpetrators, victims and passive observers become interchangeable within an unconscious dance of repeated traumas (Kane 2005). While the use of rhetorical arguments in support of the boycott energizes individuals who feel that they are undoing past wrongs and/or upholding ethical values, they are doing so by binding together repressed memories and the guilt-laden anxiety that they generate. The willingness to protest unjust, unethical, and racist situations is commendable and part of a strong tradition of the left (Mendelsohn 1997). However, the boycott's discourse relies primarily on a punishing mentality directed inward—self-hate (Sibony 2003, Mamet 2006) — as well as the projection of anger on the very people and institutions most likely to work for

change. This mentality, in part, reflects the failure of the radical left in the last decades to uphold their political ideals as well as their inability to affect political outcomes, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

As Freud (1920) stated, acting-out is a substitute for conscious remembering. From a psychodynamic perspective, the organizing, supporting, and signing of the boycott can be interpreted as a form of "acting-out" of repressed traumatic memories that become projected onto new situations. Many of our interviewees knew little about the culture, language, or history of Israelis and even less about the Palestinian people. With limited knowledge of the socio-historical contexts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict many individuals who signed the boycott could readily project their feelings of empathy and sense of moral obligation unto an idealized Other.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict brings out forgotten and unresolved trans-generational social traumas on all sides of the struggle. The need for emotional security and the search for legitimacy play a role in shaping an individual's responses to political events through the use of biographical memory that can hide, deny, distort, or redefine anxiety-provoking situations, transforming them into moral issues and endowing one with feelings of goodness and righteousness (Person 2006). Internalized guilt can be overwhelming and distort one's perception of self and the Other, an experience especially strong among Jews due to their history of persecution and survival.

The psychic mechanisms described above need to be understood at the collective level, keeping in mind the possible discrepancy between collective and individual feelings in the way the past is remembered, altered, or forgotten. Collective memories of violence are expressed through public memorials, monuments, and social rituals. However, an acknowledgment of collective responsibility may not free individuals from a sense of hopelessness, guilt, or moral responsibility. Language is used to give meaning to action but can also be used to separate meaning from affects, becoming a filter between unacceptable feelings and logical thinking. Collective memorialization can be used to avoid personal responsibility while providing a safe space to re-experience unprocessed feelings of collective guilt. It is the fusion of aggressivity and longing that makes these political formulations both seductive and potentially dangerous.

The mechanisms of condensation and displacement assuage internalized anguish, guilt, and shame by simultaneously objectifying past violence through public memorials and social rituals while keeping memory traces encoded in affective but unprocessed and toxic emotional states (Salecl, 1998). Government-sponsored memoralizations in Israel are often experienced by the radical left as a form of manipulation that reflects official Zionist ideology and represents a politization of history as with the commercialization of the Holocaust. Moreover, the collective manifestations of grief and mourning are felt to be forms of selective remembering that, for example, leave out the memory of the Naqba, an Arabic word for the forced displacement/ Diaspora of Palestinians during 1947-1949 war (Segev 1986, Kimmerling and Migdal 2003).

Creating a bridge between individual memories and collective recognition of past guilt and responsibility is difficult because the split between feelings and cognition persists when framed by ideology. Our interviewees did not spontaneously make such a link. If anything, there was a de-identification with and distancing from public mourning and commemorations. Public remembering of past victims of violence and genocides does not necessarily translate into feelings of individual responsibility or empathy nor does it ensure supporting victims such as Palestinian people. As one interviewee reported "True Zionist ideology includes the recognition of collective rights including those of the Palestinian people; yet collective remembering can also be a way to avoid personal responsibility". The mind tries to neutralize fears and negative affects, bypassing the more personal and intimate work of grief and mourning and supporting social causes that help exonerate, repair or undo internalized guilt and shame.

Academics and intellectuals play a special role as witnesses and bear great responsibility for their ability to frame debates that can either restrain or encourage violence, especially symbolic violence (Chomsky 1967). For example, defining the Israeli-Palestinian situation in terms of past colonial struggles, apartheid, or a racist state provides a framework to promote what Eva Sedgwick (2003) calls a "hermeneutic of suspicion" in which paranoid fears are used by both sides to organize their political visions around the performativity of words. This performativity refers to mechanisms by which the language of meaning is overwhelmed by the rush of words that express unacceptable thoughts and aggressive feelings. Casting Israeli academics and intellectuals as aggressors and/or partners to a

"racist Jewish State" exemplifies a rhetorical-paranoid device that poisons empathy, limits compassion, and distorts reality on both sides.

In such a framework Israelis become the victimizers, the Israeli State a racist state engaged in "ethnic cleansing", and Israeli society an ally and puppet of Western powers, especially the United States. We are not referring here to the much-needed criticism of specific Israeli policies, whether Labor or Likud; rather, we are describing arguments that indirectly question the legitimacy of the Jewish State. Such arguments raise the specter of a new anti-Semitism coming from educated elites, specifically those in Europe and Arab countries (Lappin 2003). While this kind of anti-Semitism among educated elites exists, it is wrong to apply it to the supporters of the boycott. Several interviewees felt angry at being branded disloyal, self-hating, and even anti-Semitic, escalating the mutual re-enforcement of paranoid fears and accusations.

The use of the concept of victimhood is an example of the performativity of words that touch upon individual and collective memories. In the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the victimizers/victimized dynamic constantly reverses itself. The Jews who were the victims of the murderous Nazi machine have become the victimizers in the eyes of those supporting the boycott. They argue that despite the power of the State, Israelis continue to define themselves as the "ultimate victim", thus leading to the use of preemptive military strikes rather than political negotiation or restraint toward the "real victims"(Ginach 2006, Sibony 2003). While this argument makes psychological sense in understanding the Israeli psyche, the framing of the debate around victimhood creates a battleground, a competition for recognition of the most victimized subjects that leads to further polarization and the internalization of hatred.

The splitting of symbolic language from affects gives rise to processes of idealization. This in turn promotes a "circuit of depersonalization" (Bollas 1992) that creates a distance from reality, while encouraging visions and fantasies of a different and better future. The distancing from social traumas and their collective memorialization reshapes, but does not reduce, the power of personal feelings. This process allows for either the displacement of feelings onto rhetorical political discourses or provides ground for empathy. The latter can only occur when the feelings of loss, guilt, and responsibility are re-experienced in emotionally safe places by relinquishing the need to master, protect, and dominate (Brennan 2000).

IV- Pro-Boycott Arguments and Modes of Thinking

The ideas presented previously are now used to organize the content of texts and interviewees around different modes of thinking: paranoid, humanistic, and utopian. These modes of thinking are not rigidly separated in an individual's mind; although one usually becomes the organizing principle in a given discourse, they often overlap. For heuristic purposes and clarity we will discuss them separately.

Paranoid Thinking

Paranoid thinking is an imperative framing of an idea within a rigid system of anticipation, what Eva Sedgwick (2003) has called a "hermeneutic of suspicion" as we previously noted. It suggests the suppression and selective scanning of ideas combined with the repression of aggressive tendencies that provide a defensive armor organized around formulaic thoughts and feelings. Paranoid thinking as a form of privileged knowledge in modernity is anticipatory and totalizing. This kind of thinking is based on a theory of circular negative effects anchored in fear and suspicion that blocks positive affects from emerging, engendering a cycle of mistrust and preventive action.

In paranoid thinking the expression of emotions takes the form of pseudo-feelings, a masquerade of sorts that hides deeper emotions. Such a mode of thinking allows little room for ambivalence, an emotional state that recognizes opposite and simultaneous feelings of love and hate, idealization and negativity toward a single object or institution -- for example, the (m)other or the Jewish State. Unlike splitting which reduces anxiety around a rigid mind set, ambivalence creates anxiety and openness, generating a transitional space that can allow room for experimentation and creative thinking (Winnicott 1965). Rigid thinking, pseudo-feelings, and the avoidance of ambivalence are likely to produce an emotionally seductive discourse with political slogans. This mode of thinking is especially widespread in situations of cultural and religious conflicts, as is the case in the Middle East, where personal traumas on both side are repeated, relived, and re-enforced within the context of what Ian Buruma has called the institutionalized "paranoiac tyranny" of the Israeli political machine.

The focus on victimhood, as discussed previously, is grounded in paranoid thinking. Paranoid fears of evil capitalistic forces and brutal Nazi-like methods of domination were given as reasons for supporting the boycott. Israelis, for historical reasons, experience their victimhood as sacred. Even when behaving as victimizer, they feel that ultimately they have always been and still are the victims. The supporters of the boycott argue that by thinking that they have no choice but to protect themselves, Israelis end up victimizing the Other and, in so doing, inadvertently participate in their own victimization. But, when the Israeli State is cast as the prime victimizer of Palestinians, supporters of the boycott hold Israel to higher ethical standards and moral codes. The existence of asymmetrical power relations between the Israeli State and the Palestinians people cannot be denied. However, it is the politicization of the debate around victimhood and the demonization of the victimizers through language that entices support for the boycott by distorting reality.

Nobody, especially radical left-wing academics and intellectuals wants to be on the side of victimizers having to confront unmetabolized feelings and past experiences of their own. This political construction of a struggle between victimizers and victimized, colonizers and colonized, is analyzed by Albert Memmi (1965), a Tunisian Jewish writer and critic of colonialism. According to Memmi, the avoidance of polarization and the repetition and reversal of past trauma demands that the relationship between victimizers and victimized be addressed through critical thinking and reflexivity on both sides. Empathy for the actual suffering endured by the Palestinian people can be understood, but when coupled with the projection of blame and the displacement of anger onto anyone supporting the Israeli State and civil society, the possibility for change becomes limited. Among radical Israelis, the shifting of empathy from the in-group "we-ness schema" to the outer group "underdog schema" is best understood through the lens of paranoid thinking, one in which identification with the victim becomes more meaningful and less emotionally dangerous than an identification with the powerful in-group (Govrin 2006). It is often easier to empathize with a phantasized Other who is ethnically, religiously, or socially different, ensuring enough emotional control and secured boundaries.

The punitive logic of the boycott is based on the power of words and images that touch on emotions with a wide if not universal appeal that bind. It is encoded in a certain amount of narcissist enjoyment for making the (m)Other suffer, and creating a never-ending loop of deadly fratricidal competition. This punishing mentality based on abstract moral principles separates individual responsibilities from everyday ethics. To use Michael Eigen's phrasing: "Its morality is an empty, moralistic, tyrannical assertion of its own superiority and privilege" (2001). The threats that spur paranoid thinking are real; however the danger comes from the distortion of reality that ultimately dehumanizes, demonizes, and depersonalizes the individuals involved on all sides. Ironically, it is that very dehumanization of the Palestinian people that the supporters of the boycott are fighting against and that they unconsciously re-create by supporting reified words and stereotypical images. This paranoid/punitive logic is corrosive because it blends feelings of goodness, morality, and self-righteousness with aggressive needs. As discussed previously, by tapping into hidden guilt and shame for past traumas, this punishing logic can spread symbolic violence and prompt a renewed fear of anti-Semitism by questioning the legitimacy of Israeli policies.

Humanistic Thinking

Interviewees who presented humanistic arguments empathized with the shared humanity and common suffering across groups and cultures. The humanistic logic in support of the boycott gave less weight to purely political arguments around capitalist domination and imperialism. Humanistic thinking was based on the ability to empathize with the Other and with the stranger within oneself. The acquisition of a sense of alterity, i.e., the acceptance of responsibility toward an Other as a part of an ethical subjectivity, becomes the focus (Levinas 1990). Identification with Palestinian people through empathy, even compassion, is based on past and present shared suffering. One interviewee suggested including memorial days for both people as a form of healing. The interviewees who expressed such ideas believed that humanistic thinking had the healing power to re-connect human beings across religious, social, and political barriers as long as the Israelis acknowledge (and repent for) the infliction of past and present suffering. This framework implies that remembering become a joint process using biographical memories of trauma to undo past wounds, and share responsibilities.

There is an insistence on minimizing the purely ideological aspect of the support of the Palestinian struggle in favor of seeing Palestinian people as equal human beings. While the analysis of victimhood is still present, reflecting the

reality of the power relations between Israelis and Palestinians, it has a different meaning: Both groups are equally identified as victims of history and social destructiveness. While oppositional feelings toward the State were still present among interviewees holding these views, what counted most was the ability to repair the injustices and emotional damages done by Israelis to the Palestinians and according to this position, such a reparation can only occur when those in power – The Israeli State -- begin to recognize the Palestinians as humans rather than as enemies. One interviewee, for example, explained that "[s/he] wanted to repair the damage done to the Palestinian people rather than criticize either the Israeli governing elites or the Palestinian Authority".

This humanistic ethic based around "feeling the pain of the Other" and a desire to repair (*tikkun olam*, in Hebrew) was often divorced from larger geo-political issues such as discussions of Arab nationalism, religious fanaticism, or global terrorism. This humanistic philosophy was not applied to the in-group and did not lead to empathy with Jewish suffering (except for the victims of terrorist attacks), a suffering that was seen as self inflicted. Paradoxically, several of the interviewees who defined themselves as "humanist" had little knowledge of Arab culture, ideas, language, or Muslim religion. The compassion and humanity expressed in this discourse is certainly vitally important and should be acknowledged. However, cultural, religious, and ethnic gaps are not so easily bridged and attempts to universalize suffering and de-emphasize larger political structures limit the impact of this mode of thinking. The supporters who stressed this angle saw themselves in grandiose terms as "the servants of goodness fighting powerful evil forces" (Govrin 2006). By romanticizing the struggle between Israelis (bad) and Palestinians (good) these compassionate supporters can mislead and even endanger inexperienced individuals, especially non-Israelis, willing to fight for human rights issues not understanding the complex socio-political situation.

Utopian Thinking

Another mode of thinking expressed in our interviews, albeit a minority position, was framed around arguments for a new vision of a bi-national state, one in which the present Jewish State would give way to a single, democratic, non-religious state. Jews and Arabs alike would share equally in all its features, including the right of return. Such a vision claims to continue an early Zionist tradition of the 1930s and 1940s (Buber/*Brit Shalom*). Interviewees who held this position argued that such a bi-national state would avoid the contradictions between national identity and the values of fairness, equality, and justice so deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. It embraces the views of a tradition - exemplified by the religious scholar Yehoshua Leibovitz - which states that Jews should not be in the position of being oppressors. A truly democratic State, however, would quickly make Jews a minority within traditionally hostile environments in the Middle East. Using this vision of a democratic, bi-national state, the supporters of the boycott are not only rejecting Government policies, whether Labor or Likud, but also challenging directly the existence of a Zionist State as the only way to maintain a Jewish identity. Rather, they seek to promote a secular, multi-ethnic, post-Zionist constitution with guarantee of equal rights for all groups (Nimni 2003)

Locating themselves within a post-modern tradition, their thinking is attached to a strong rejection of Western - especially American - capitalist values and a reactionary modernism that supports concepts such as national identity and national boundaries (Rose 2005). In this framework, Israel becomes an "anachronism" by defending and insisting on maintaining their separate territorial integrity and ethnic solidarity. The post-Zionist vision of the future in which Jews might again become a minority does not have the support of either a majority of Israelis or Palestinians, although some key intellectual thinkers like Edward Said (2003) and Tony Judt (2003) have been supporters of the idea. Because it touches so deeply on issues of Jewish identity and territoriality, this position has brought about the strongest reactions among supporters of Israel who brand its supporters as anti-Zionist. This utopian vision of the future with its sense of historical drama appeals to the visionary hopes of Jewish and Arab radical intellectuals and provides them with a shared psychological terrain of mutual recognition and support as part of an anti-capitalistic, anti-globalization perspective, away from the controls and limitations of traditional national states, party systems, and state controlled institutions. This utopian mentality is guided by a universalizing ideology that leaves little room for particularistic group needs. Social science research has shown the near impossibility of having nationalistic groups of equal size coexisting in harmony; for example, the disasters in Iraq, Lebanon, and the former Yugoslavia. Despite such failures, the delusional ideals of universalizing unity are emotionally enticing and politically useful in promoting solidarity through out the world.

V- Conclusion

How do personal memories become politicized? In order to understand the emotional roots of radical academics and intellectuals who support the boycott it is important to distinguish between the organizers and the rank and file. Many of the Europeans and Americans who support the boycott are convinced that they are doing "good"; they believe they are actively engaged in changing a situation that in their view is unjust and wrong. Their position of support for the boycott provides narcissistic gratification and a sense of legitimacy as active agents of change in a world increasingly wracked with violence. By taking a pro-active position on issues so easily identifiable with past liberation struggles, academics have been seduced by a political agenda through which they could express hidden feelings of shame and guilt for past actions, inactions, and/or indifference to the suffering of others trying to cope with their own pain and powerlessness in the search for emotional closure.

However, there is a darker side to this story especially as it relates to the impact of the ideas formulated by promoters of the boycott and their increased visibility in a globalized world. Support for the boycott, if it pressured the State of Israel and compelled it to a more equal and fair vision of the future, could be celebrated. However, there is more at stake in the boycott than criticizing Israeli policies. Under the guise of reasonableness and fairness, radical academics and intellectuals are challenging, directly or indirectly, the existence of a Jewish State. By tapping into people's fears of modernization in developing countries and repressed collective traumas in the Western world, the boycott provides ammunition for greater misunderstanding and paranoia. Its message - heard by groups and countries engaged in their own ethnic/religious struggles - encourages a clash between Western and Islamic visions, fuels militant Islamists propaganda, and ultimately damages any potential collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians.

Historical situations are full of ambiguities, suffering, and reversals. Academics and intellectuals should remember that racism and anti-Semitism are forms of delusion about oneself including absurd and unjust aggressions toward the Other (Memmi 1950). Allowing ambivalence and critical thinking to be expressed, with gray areas of emotional nuances and historical relativism, may be painful but it embraces a more complicated reality. It opposes extreme positions based on ideological, moral, or historical grounds and creates open spaces for discussion where thinking and affect can be re-linked. Support for the proposed boycotts could be seen as an incidental episode within the larger picture of the conflict between the Israeli State and the Palestinian people. Yet, the waves of emotionally loaded clichéd arguments in support of the boycott are not benign, since they operate unconsciously to affect traumatized individuals and social psyches into patterns of repetition and reversal of ideological mystification on both sides (Zizek 2002).

Equally important, the arguments made in support of the boycott narrow the existing social and emotional spaces for the collaboration between Israelis (Arab and Jewish) and Palestinians. It strangles the hope for a fair two-state solution by de-legitimizing Israeli government actions and limiting the functioning of civil society. The great majority of academics see the proposed boycotts as an attack against Jewish identity, survival, and the right to a homeland as well as a strike against the mission of universities to promote open intellectual exchanges. As academics and intellectuals we feel it is important to challenge the ideas behind the boycott while being cautious not to get caught ourselves in a circle of mutual attacks. We prefer using a language of nourishment that can bridge the gap between cognition and feelings in ways that make connectedness and empathy possible. As the Palestinian writer Elias Khoury pointed out in his book *Gate of the Sun*, Palestinian privation and Israeli cruelty should not be used in rounds of mutual despair and accusation. The talk given by David Grossman (2006) for the anniversary of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination is a deep and touching example of language that can heal.

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Notes:

(1) This project was started with Dr. Claudine Attias-Donfut with whom I collaborated in the collection of the interview data. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the European Sociological Association meetings in 2005 in Torun (Poland).

(2) For a history of the boycott waged by the British University Teachers' Union see David Hirsh in The Guardian's Comment Is Free.

(3) The political storm and protest stirred by Jimmy Carter new book: *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid* is an example of how a loaded word can distort history and polarize an on-going political debate.

(4) Our analysis is based on in-depth interviews done in 2004-2005 with 20 intellectuals and academics in the US, France and Israel. A comparable questionnaire was created to assess attitudes regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict including the boycott. Most of the interviews were taped recorded and transcribed. We are aware that there also were differences among American, French and Israeli academics that we interviewed, but for the purpose of this paper we are focusing primarily on what we see are the commonalities among them.

(5) Among the texts that were used to analyze pro-boycott arguments were selections from Noam Chomsky's writings; articles published in *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*, Cockburn and St. Clair, eds. (2003) for example articles by Tanya Reinhart, Ilan Pape, Avi Schlain, Yehuda Shenhav; selected articles in Warschawski and Sibony (2003), *A contre Coeur. Les voix dissidentes en Israel*; Jaqueline Rose *The question of Zion* (2005), , Norman Finkelstein *Beyond Chutzpah* (2005). They provided an overview of the different ideological positions regarding the boycott.

(6) We are not using paranoia as clinical diagnosis nor in a pathologizing way. We are discussing paranoia as a mode of thinking, as way to define the self in the modern world following the work of David Shapiro (1965) and Michael Foucault (1988).

(7) Denis MacShane is the author of a British parliamentary report that finds that many British citizens who are Jewish face unacceptable intimidation and assault connected with the demonization in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which is on sale in shops in London. The full report of the House of Common can be seen at www. Engageonline.org.uk (9/14/06).

(8) Among them are some of the non-profit, volunteer organizations: B'Tzelem is a non-governmental organization that monitors human rights violations in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. It is staffed with Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis. Ta'ayoush is comprised of young Jewish and Arabs students who organize humanitarian activities for needy Palestinians and organize political protests. Rabbis for Human Rights www.rhr.org.il. Machsom Watch www.Machsomwatch.org.il . Israeli reservists (Yesh Gvu)l and pilots who have refused to serve in the first Lebanese war and in the West Bank. For a fuller description see Warschawski and Sibony eds, (2003).

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