

A Boycott Built on Bias

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

Two weeks ago I took part in commencement for this year's doctoral candidates at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The ceremony was held in the amphitheater on Mount Scopus, which faces out onto the Dead Sea and the Mountains of Moab. The setting sun framed the graduate students in a reddish-orange glow against a spectacular biblical backdrop. Before I describe the ceremony, though, I have to note that it coincided with the news that Britain's University and College Union had called on its members to consider a boycott of Israeli universities, accusing them of being complicit in Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. Anyway, as the Hebrew U. doctoral candidates each had their names called out and rose to receive their diplomas from the university's leadership, I followed along in the program. The Israeli names rolled by: "Moshe Nahmany, Irit Nowik, Yuval Ofir. But then every so often I heard an Arab name, like Nuha Hijazi or Rifat Azam or Taleb Mokari. Since the program listed everyone's degrees and advisers, I looked them up. Rifat got his doctorate in law. His thesis was about "International Taxation of Electronic Commerce." His adviser was "Prof. D. Gliksberg." Nuha got her doctorate in biochemistry. Her adviser was "Prof. R. Gabizon." Taleb had an asterisk by his name. So I looked at the bottom of the page. It said: "Summa Cum Laude." His chemistry thesis was about "Semiconductor-Metal Interfaces," and his adviser was "Prof. U. Banin." These were Israeli Arab doctoral students - many of them women and one of whom accepted her degree wearing a tight veil over her head. Funny - she could receive her degree wearing a veil from the Hebrew University, but could not do so in France, where the veil is banned in public schools. Arab families cheered unabashedly when their sons and daughters received their Hebrew U. Ph.D. diplomas, just like the Jewish parents. How crazy is this, I thought. Israel's premier university is giving Ph.D.'s to Arab students, two of whom were from East Jerusalem - i.e. the occupied territories - supervised by Jewish Israeli professors, all while some far-left British academics are calling for a boycott of Israeli universities. I tell this story to underscore the obvious : that the reality here is so much more morally complex than the outside meddlers present it. Have no doubt, I have long opposed Israel's post-1967 settlements. They have squandered billions and degraded the Israeli Army by making it an army of occupation to protect the

settlers and their roads. And that web of settlements and roads has carved up the West Bank in an ugly and brutal manner - much uglier than Israel's friends abroad ever admit. Indeed, their silence, particularly American Jewish leaders, enabled the settlement lunacy. But you'd have to be a blind, deaf and dumb visitor to Israel today not to see that the vast majority of Israelis recognize this historic mistake, and they not only approved Ariel Sharon's unilateral uprooting of Israeli settlements in Gaza to help remedy it, but elected Ehud Olmert precisely to do the same in the West Bank. The fact that it is not happening now is hardly Israel's fault alone. The Palestinians are in turmoil. So to single out Israeli universities alone for a punitive boycott is rank anti-Semitism. Let's see, Syria is being investigated by the United Nations for murdering Lebanon's former prime minister, Rafik Hariri. Syrian agents are suspected of killing the finest freedom-loving Lebanese journalists, Gibran Tueni and Samir Kassir. But none of that moves the far left to call for a boycott of Syrian universities. Why? Sudan is engaged in genocide in Darfur. Why no boycott of Sudan? Why? If the far-left academics driving this boycott actually cared about Palestinians they would call on every British university to accept 20 Palestinian students on full scholarships to help them with what they need most - building the skills to run a modern state and economy. And they would call on every British university to dispatch visiting professors to every Palestinian university to help upgrade their academic offerings. And they would challenge every Israeli university that already offers Ph.D.'s to Israeli Arabs to do even more. And they would challenge every Arab university the same way. That's what people who actually care about Palestinians would do. But just singling out Israeli universities for a boycott, in the face of all the other madness in the Middle East - that's what anti-Semites would do.