



**BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT & SANCTIONS**  
GLOBALIZED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE TO ISRAEL'S SETTLER  
COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID

OMAR BARGHOUTI

The Institute for Palestine Studies-USA is an independent 501(c)3 public charity dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and knowledge production on Palestinian Affairs. IPS-USA raises public awareness, informs policy, and engages with various constituencies on significant issues related to Palestine in the US and in the Middle East. IPS-USA is a sister organization of the larger IPS, founded in 1963 and headquartered in Beirut, Lebanon with an office also in Ramallah, Palestine.

CURRENT ISSUES IN DEPTH is a series from the Institute for Palestine Studies USA, which provides history, background, and analysis on pressing topics and events.

#### **COVER PHOTO**

Cover photo courtesy of Palestine Solidarity Campaign UK.



Copyright © 2020 by the Institute for Palestine Studies

All rights reserved. Published 2020.

Printed in the United States of America

Published by the Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, DC

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Omar Barghouti is a Palestinian human rights defender, cofounder of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinian rights, and corecipient of the Gandhi Peace Award in 2017.

2020 | ISSUE NO. 6

## CURRENT ISSUES IN DEPTH

# BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT & SANCTIONS

GLOBALIZED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE TO ISRAEL'S SETTLER  
COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID

OMAR BARGHOUTI

# INTRODUCTION

IN AN ERA when the cause of Palestine has suffered multiple setbacks, and when the Palestinian national movement is at a low point of disunity and strategic incoherence, it is heartening that an initiative launched by Palestinian civil society has achieved resounding global success in the face of fierce opposition by the Israeli state and its supporters.

Launched in 2005, the BDS movement organized its efforts around the simple tactics of boycott, divestment and sanctions, and with the straightforward goal of justice for Palestinians under occupation, inside Israel, and in exile from their homeland. The movement built on an approach pioneered by victims of the oldest example of European settler-colonialism. These were 19th century Irish farmers who were the first to use the weapon of boycott against their oppressors, in the person of one Captain Charles Boycott, an agent for Lord Erne, their British landlord. Later adopted by militants fighting for Indian independence, for an end to apartheid in South Africa, and for civil rights in the Jim Crow American South, boycott is one of the oldest and most respected non-violent tools wielded by victims of oppression.

Reliance on the time-tested tactic of boycott has been combined with a push for divestment by public funds, universities and other institutions from corporations that are complicit with the occupation and subjugation of Palestinians, and with a call for international sanctions against Israel for its discriminatory policies. This movement has resonated with a global audience that is increasingly attuned to the realities of Israel's coercion of the Palestinians under its control, or whom it ethnically cleansed from their ancestral homeland.

The call for BDS has had a particular impact in the United States and Europe, which historically have functioned as the “metropole” for the settler-colonial project – the last of the modern era – that developed into the state of Israel. As the late Tony Judt, once an ardent Zionist, put it, the Zionist movement “arrived too late,” importing “a characteristically late-nineteenth-century separatist project into a world that has moved on.”<sup>1</sup> Once controversial, his view has become increasingly less so, in large measure thanks to the BDS movement.

While the Israeli model of ethno-religious discrimination based on ethnic cleansing is not consonant with modern liberal values, in recent years this model has drawn renewed energy from an illiberal, chauvinist nationalist and authoritarian wave the world over, symbolized by authoritarian populist leaders like Bolsonaro, Modi, Orban and Trump. This energy has animated Israel's campaign against the BDS movement and other advocates of Palestinian rights.

Centrally directed by Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs, massively resourced, and employing legions of lawyers, PR experts, online trolls, and agents skilled in disinformation, this coordinated global campaign has slandered students, academics and other activists for Palestinian rights in increasingly strident fashion. At the same time, this campaign is behind efforts to outlaw BDS in various American states,

---

1. “Israel: The Alternative,” *The New York Review of Books*, October 23, 2003.

which have so far produced statutes passed in a number of them. When tested in court, however, none of these laws has withstood judicial scrutiny because they are in flagrant violation of First Amendment freedoms.

The call for BDS and other appeals for Palestinian rights have notched impressive victories on college campuses and in churches and unions all over the US in spite of the determined efforts of opponents of equality and justice for the Palestinians. This has led Israel and its allies to employ their ultimate weapon, the smear of anti-Semitism. In the face of an alarming recent surge in anti-Semitic hate crimes, most of which emanate from the far right, instead of focusing on the main purveyors of real, existing Jew-hatred (some of whom they appallingly count as “friends of Israel”), Israel’s partisans have tried to tar advocates for justice for Palestine with the brush of anti-Semitism. They do this while purposely ignoring the explicit opposition of the BDS movement to all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, and the broad support among many liberal and progressive Jews, particularly younger ones, for Palestinian rights and for the principles upheld by the BDS movement.

As part of its Current Issues in Depth series, the Institute for Palestine Studies is pleased to offer its readers the following assessment of the BDS movement by one of its founders and leaders, Omar Barghouti, in the hope of spreading understanding of its aims and achievements. As this essay shows, this movement is rooted in universal principles and non-violent tactics employed by movements against oppression ranging from colonial Ireland to Birmingham, Alabama in the 1950s. For its defense against the McCarthyite attacks by partisans of Israel, it relies on the principle of freedom of speech enshrined in both the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, a principle that has been upheld by American and European courts. This principle offers a guarantee that the message of equal justice for all – Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews – which is the core of the call for BDS will continue to resonate globally.

# **BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT & SANCTIONS: GLOBALIZED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE TO ISRAEL'S SETTLER COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID**

*Omar Barghouti*

# BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT & SANCTIONS: GLOBALIZED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE TO ISRAEL'S SETTLER COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID

## Introduction

ISRAEL'S recent enlistment of the now-departing Trump administration in its war on the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, as revealed in recent media reports,<sup>1</sup> is the latest and, arguably, the strongest, indicator of the BDS movement's impact on Israel's regime of military occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid, and of the failure by Israel and its lobby groups, including Christian Zionists, to crush the movement.<sup>2</sup> But how did this nonviolent movement become such a "strategic" challenge to Israel, given Israel's military and economic strength (sustained by billions of dollars in aid from and favorable trade with the United States, Germany, and other Western countries); its nuclear capabilities; and its impunity?

In 2005, the broadest coalition in Palestinian society, representing a majority of Palestinians in historic Palestine and in the diaspora, launched the BDS movement. It has since become a key part of Palestinian popular resistance and an effective form of international solidarity with the struggle of the indigenous people of Palestine for freedom, justice, and equality.<sup>3</sup> The movement quickly became a target of attack by the Israeli government and its allies in the United States and elsewhere, as they correctly assessed its potential to disrupt Israel's control of the Palestinian narrative. To cite one recent example in which the U.S. government made the link to BDS explicit: In September 2020, the Trump administration notified Kenya that it could forget about a free trade agreement unless it discouraged "politically motivated actions to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel" and eliminated "state-sponsored, unsanctioned foreign boycotts of Israel" as well as "non-tariff barriers on Israeli goods, services, or other commerce imposed on Israel."<sup>4</sup>

This essay explains the inherent strengths of the BDS movement, including its global and intersectional appeal to progressives; its current and potential impact, particularly in transforming the discourse on the Palestinians and Israel; and its leading role in mainstreaming the apartheid analysis of Israel and lawful sanctions

1. "Trump Administration Plans to Release List of BDS Groups," *Jewish News Syndicate*, 9 December 2020, <https://www.jns.org/trump-administration-to-release-list-of-pro-bds-groups/>; Dovid Efulne, "US State Department Planning Expanded Campaign Using 'All Legal and Policy Tools' to Combat 'Antisemitic' BDS Movement Against Israel," *The Algemeiner*, 9 September 2020, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2020/09/09/us-state-department-planning-expanded-campaign-using-all-legal-and-policy-tools-to-combat-antisemitic-bds-movement-against-israel/>.
2. "United Against Apartheid, Colonialism and Occupation: Dignity & Justice for the Palestinian People," BDSmovement.net, 28 November 2008, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/united-against-apartheid-colonialism-and-occupation-dignity-justice-palestinian-people-0>; Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, "How to Make International Law Work for the Palestinians," *Al-Shabaka*, 17 July 2013, <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/how-to-make-international-law-work-for-palestinians/>.
3. "Palestinian Civil Society Calls for BDS," BDSmovement.net, 9 July 2005, <https://bdsmovement.net/call>; Palestinian BDS National Committee, "18 Highlights of BDS Impact in 2018," BDSmovement.net, 3 December 2018, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/18-highlights-bds-impact-2018>; Jonathan Lis and Yarden Skop, "Rivlin: Academic Boycotts Against Israel Are First-Rate Strategic Threat," *Haaretz*, 28 May 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-rivlin-academic-boycotts-first-rate-strategic-threat-1.5367367>.
4. Aggrey Mutambo, "US Tells Kenya to Publicly Support Israel or Forget Free Trade Deal," *The East African*, 21 September 2020, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/us-tells-kenya-to-support-israel-or-forget-free-trade-deal-2304192>.

to end it. It will review strategic BDS actions in the economic, academic, cultural, and sports fields to end international complicity in Israel's regime of oppression; its main challenges; Israel's global "war" waged against it; and why it is seen by most Palestinians and their growing number of supporters worldwide as a globalized Palestinian resistance that significantly contributes to the struggle for the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

## Rationale for a Globalized, Nonviolent Resistance Movement

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," wrote Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>6</sup> "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." This network of mutuality has never been as evident as it is today. Almost every contemporary system of oppression can be maintained only by the conscious complicity of many other systems of oppression, from states to corporations to institutions. Globalized oppression necessitates globalized resistance and solidarity. The BDS movement for Palestinian rights seeks to cut those global links of complicity to Israel's regime of colonial oppression as an essential first step toward securing Palestinian rights under international law.<sup>7</sup>

BDS calls for ending Israel's 1967 occupation; dismantling its institutionalized and legalized system of racial domination and discrimination, which meets the UN definition of apartheid; and upholding the internationally recognized right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes and lands from which they were uprooted and dispossessed since the 1947–1948 ethnic cleansing, or Nakba.<sup>8</sup> These demands address the basic rights of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (approximately 38 percent of the Palestinian people, according to 2019 statistical estimates); Palestinian citizens of Israel (12 percent); and those in exile (50 percent).<sup>9</sup> About two-thirds of Palestinians are refugees,

5. Nathan Thrall, "BDS: How a Controversial, Non-Violent Movement Has Transformed the Palestinian Debate," *The Guardian*, 14 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/14/bds-boycott-divestment-sanctions-movement-transformed-israeli-palestinian-debate>; Ramzy Baroud and Romana Rubeo, "Israel's 72M 'War Chest' to Fight BDS Arrives in Europe," *Aljazeera*, 14 November 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/11/14/israels-72m-war-chest-to-fight-bds-arrives-in-europe/>.
6. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 16 April 1963, University of Pennsylvania, African Studies Center, [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html).
7. "United Against Apartheid, Colonialism and Occupation: Dignity & Justice for the Palestinian People," BDSmovement.net, 28 November 2008, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/united-against-apartheid-colonialism-and-occupation-dignity-justice-palestinian-people-0>; Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, "How to Make International Law Work for the Palestinians," *Al-Shabaka*, 17 July 2013, <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/how-to-make-international-law-work-for-palestinians/>.
8. Alyssa Fisher, "Israeli Nation-State Law Is 'Apartheid,' Says Democratic Congresswoman," *Forward*, 11 October 2018, <https://forward.com/fast-forward/411873/israeli-nation-state-law-is-apartheid-says-democratic-congresswoman/>; United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol. 2187, No. 38544, in force on 1 July 2002, [https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9ae877-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome\\_statute\\_english.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9ae877-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome_statute_english.pdf); "Quick Facts: The Palestinian Nakba," Institute for Middle East Understanding, 13 May 2015, <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>; Human Rights Watch, "Israel, Palestinian Leaders Should Guarantee Right of Return as Part of Comprehensive Refugee Solution," 21 December 2000, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2000/12/21/israel-palestinian-leaders-should-guarantee-right-return-part-comprehensive-refugee>.
9. "Over 13 Million Palestinians in the World by End of 2019," Palestine News Agency, 31 December 2019, <https://menafn.com/1099492551/Over-13-million-Palestinians-in-the-world-by-end-of-2019#:~:text=The%20projected%20number%20of%20Palestinians%20living%20in%20State%20of%20Palestine,and%2066%25%20in%20Gaza%20Strip.>



internally displaced persons, or living in exile.<sup>10</sup>

BDS is rooted in decades of Palestinian popular, nonviolent resistance to settler colonialism and is inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, the U.S. Civil Rights movement, and, to a lesser extent, the Indian and Irish anti-colonial struggles.

Anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, BDS opposes all forms of racism and discrimination, including anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism. One's identity, the movement upholds, should never diminish or restrict one's entitlement to rights. BDS targets complicity, not identity.

## Fostering Solidarity and Ending Complicity

Solidarity with an oppressed community may be motivated by one or more of the following factors: first, a *moral*, yet charitable, abhorrence of injustice anywhere; second, an *ideological* commitment to internationalism, which sees liberation struggles everywhere as contributing to the defeat of imperialism and, in some variations, the march toward socialism; third, a sense of *responsibility* or *obligation* to stand with the oppressed upon recognizing the complicity of one's own state or institution in the oppression at hand; and fourth, an understanding that this "remote" oppression is not only supported by one's own state or institutions but is *intersectional*, or organically connected to domestic oppression.

BDS focuses on the latter two, often intertwined factors: the obligation to stand in solidarity with oppressed people and the understanding that injustice in other geographies is linked to domestic oppression. International struggles against injustice from the last century shed a bright light on the connections of complicity and the prospects for joint liberation. The international movement against apartheid in South Africa, in particular, signaled a radical shift in the very meaning of international solidarity. While Cuban, Algerian, and Palestinian arms and training support for the anti-apartheid resistance continued the anti-imperialist tradition of solidarity by states and revolutionary movements, the African National Congress exhorted Western citizens, trade unions, churches, and mass social movements to complement this traditional solidarity by directly supporting the liberation struggle in South Africa through cutting the lifelines, or the links of mostly Western complicity, that kept the apartheid system alive.

In the United States, revolutionary Black intellectuals have explored the common trajectory of oppression and liberation that tied apartheid with white supremacy and institutionalized anti-Black racism.<sup>11</sup> Solidarity, in this sense, becomes concomitantly an act of fulfilling a moral duty toward the oppressed

---

10. Nadil al-Azza and Lubnah Shomali, "Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 2016–2018," Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/survey2016-2018-eng.pdf>.

11. Robert Trent Vinson, "Up From Slavery and Down with Apartheid! African Americans and Black South Africans Against the Global Color Line," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no.2 (2018): 297–329.

# **“Anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, BDS opposes all forms of racism and discrimination, including anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism.”**

---

“other” and charting a path to emancipation of the oppressed self. Together with Black Lives Matter and the climate and gender<sup>12</sup> justice movements, BDS belongs to an evolving modern paradigm of globalized resistance and solidarity in the face of the rising dangers of far-right tendencies worldwide.

In recent years, the emergence of a powerful international far-right alliance—encompassing Donald Trump in the United States; Narendra Modi in India; Viktor Orban in Hungary; Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; Rodrigo

Duterte in the Philippines; and Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia—has made clear that resistance to any local regime of racial, economic, social, or national oppression must be not only morally consistent but also global and intersectional.<sup>13</sup> This is necessary on ethical grounds and also as a goal-oriented condition for maximizing chances of success.

## **Mainstreaming Demands for Accountability**

Israel has become a role model for far-right, xenophobic, or authoritarian leaders across the world, causing its popularity to further decline worldwide.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the BDS movement is increasingly being recognized as a significant partner in an international progressive wave fighting for indigenous, racial, economic, gender, social, and climate justice against the forces of fascism, xenophobia, and savage neoliberalism that have produced massive wealth for a relatively small number of individuals, multinational corporations, and banks.<sup>15</sup> If many see Palestinian rights today as the “litmus test for human rights,” as described by John Dugard, a prominent South African jurist and former UN special rapporteur for human rights, support for BDS, whether vocal or discreet, has become, especially in the complicit West, a litmus test for meaningful international solidarity with the Palestinian

- 
12. Elizabeth Redden, “Another Association Backs Israel Boycott,” *Inside Higher Education*, 1 December 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/01/national-womens-studies-association-joins-israel-boycott-movement>.
  13. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–167.
  14. Ishaan Tharoor, “Israel Strengthens Its Ties With the West’s Far Right,” *Washington Post*, 12 December 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/12/12/israel-strengthens-its-ties-with-west-far-right/>; Eva Illouz, “The State of Israel vs. the Jewish People,” *Haaretz*, 19 September 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-MAGAZINE-the-state-of-israel-vs-the-jewish-people-1.6470108>; “Poll: Sharp Drop in World Views of US, UK: Global Poll,” BBC World Service, 4 July 2017, [https://globescan.com/images/images/pressreleases/bbc2017\\_country\\_ratings/BBC2017\\_Country\\_Ratings\\_Poll.pdf](https://globescan.com/images/images/pressreleases/bbc2017_country_ratings/BBC2017_Country_Ratings_Poll.pdf).
  15. Omar Barghouti, “Donald Trump’s Casual Stance on the Two-State Solution Has Got Palestinians Worried,” *Newsweek*, 17 February 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/israel-netanyahu-donald-trump-palestinians-bds-557816>.

liberation struggle,<sup>16</sup> if not for progressive politics in general.

Oppressed communities worldwide increasingly diagnose international complicity in maintaining Israel's systematic injustice as undermining the very legitimacy of the law-based international order, which in turn undermines their own struggles for justice. This is leading to a dramatic shift in understanding Israel's regime of oppression against Palestinians as including apartheid, a crime against humanity under international law, and, crucially, in mainstreaming calls for targeted and lawful sanctions to bring to an end Israel's decades-old violations of Palestinian rights and international law.

Upon visiting the occupied Palestinian territory in 2013, the late African National Congress leader Ahmed Kathrada, who supported BDS, said, "In our short stay here we have seen and heard enough to conclude that apartheid has been reborn here. In its reborn form it is, however, worse than its predecessor."<sup>17</sup>

In a Global South response to a unified Palestinian civil society call for lawful, targeted sanctions to stop Israel's apartheid regime and its planned further de jure annexation of occupied Palestinian territory, seven former presidents of Latin American countries and two former presidents of South Africa, along with hundreds of public officials, parliamentarians, academics, artists, and civil society leaders from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, endorsed sanctions to stop Israel's annexation and apartheid.<sup>18</sup> In September 2020, the deputy secretary-general of the African National Congress of South Africa, together with other leaders in the Global South, endorsed the Palestinian call on the United Nations to investigate Israel's apartheid and to impose lawful sanctions to end it.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the Chilean Senate voted overwhelmingly for sweeping sanctions against Israel if it goes ahead with its formal annexation plans, while the parliaments of Belgium and the Netherlands voted for what was widely understood as sanctions.<sup>20</sup> Even in the United States, twelve Senate Democrats have introduced legislation that would prohibit Israel from using U.S. military aid to annex portions of the West Bank.<sup>21</sup>

---

16. John Dugard, "The Future of International Law: A Human Rights Perspective," lecture, Internationaal Publiekrecht aan de Universiteit Leiden, 20 April 2007, [https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/12401/afscheidsrede\\_dugard.pdf?sequence=1](https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/12401/afscheidsrede_dugard.pdf?sequence=1); "Angela Davis on Black Liberation and Palestinian Solidarity," Democracy Now, 13 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MEN5E8Oe34>.

17. Quoted in Zinzile Mavuso, "Prema Naidoo: Address to the BNF Panel Discussion on Palestine," Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, 5 December 2017, <https://www.kathradafoundation.org/2017/12/05/prema-naidoo-address-to-the-bnf-panel-discussion-on-palestine/>.

18. "Africa, Asia and Latin America United Against Annexation," Global South for Palestine, <https://globalsouthforpalestine.org/>; Al-Haq, "Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Effective Measures by All States to Stop Israel's Illegal Annexation of the Occupied West Bank and Grave Violations of Human Rights," Al-Haq, 21 May 2020, <https://www.alhaq.org/palestinian-human-rights-organizations-council/16890.html>.

19. "Global South Leaders Call on UN to Investigate Israeli Apartheid," BDSmovement.net, 30 September 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/global-south-leaders-call-un-investigate-israeli-apartheid>.

20. "Over Annexation Plan, Chilean Senate Approves Resolution Calling for Review of All Agreements with Israel," *Wafa News Agency*, 1 July 2020, <https://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=1U5d6sa118621735155a1U5d6s>; MEI Staff, "Belgium Calls for Sanctions Against Israel If It Annexes West Bank," Middle East Eye, 26 June 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/belgium-mps-vote-recognise-palestinian-statehood-move-against-israeli-annexation>; Cnaan Lipshitz, "Dutch Parliament Calls for Sanctions on Israel in Case of Annexation, Following Belgium's Lead," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 30 June 2020, <https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/dutch-parliament-calls-for-sanctions-on-israel-in-case-of-annexation-following-belgiums-lead>.

21. Michael Arria, "Senate Dems Introduce Amendment That Would Block Israel From Using U.S. Funds for Annexation," Mondoweiss, 6 July 2020, <https://mondoweiss.net/2020/07/senate-dems-introduce-amendment-that-would-block-israel-from-using-u-s-funds-for-annexation/>.

These measures by governments and political figures may help to partially explain why Israel's extremist government and its allies have intensified their war on BDS, which they have designated since 2013 as a "strategic threat" to Israel's regime of oppression.<sup>22</sup> The impact of BDS campaigning at the municipal and political levels has figured prominently in a recently published authoritative Israeli anti-BDS report that bemoaned the movement's increased "sophistication" and admitted that, despite Israel's massive investment of human and material resources against the BDS movement, it has "largely failed to disrupt the BDS momentum."<sup>23</sup> This echoes a 2017 report issued by two pro-Israel lobby groups, the Anti-Defamation League and Reut, that outlined Israel's failure to stem the "impressive growth" and "significant successes" of the BDS movement.<sup>24</sup>

Still, BDS has an uphill battle ahead against a fanatic and violent Israeli regime. With its far-right allies in ascendance across the globe, Israel feels more powerful and invincible than ever.

## Confronting the Settler-Colonial Logic of Elimination

Israel is determined to complete the Zionist settler-colonial project of erasing (and, at times, appropriating) the past, present, and future of the indigenous people of Palestine—or what Edward Said once called "disappearing" the Palestinians. For decades Israel has perpetrated acts that UN investigators recently concluded "may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity."<sup>25</sup> The bill of particulars includes (but is not limited to) its brutal siege against close to two million Palestinians in Gaza (or what Richard Falk, former UN special rapporteur for human rights, calls a "prelude to genocide"), and its land-grabbing, construction of illegal settlements, and gradual ethnic cleansing in occupied Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and the Naqab (Negev). This is what the ongoing Palestinian Nakba looks like.<sup>26</sup>

Though the paradigm of globalized resistance may apply to all contemporary struggles against injustice, it is most evident in situations of settler colonialism, where the oppressors are not merely interested in subjugating the oppressed or exploiting them and usurping their resources, but in replacing them altogether.

22. Peter Beaumont, "Israel Brands Palestinian-Led Boycott Movement a 'Strategic Threat,'" *The Guardian*, 3 June 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/03/israel-brands-palestinian-boycott-strategic-threat-netanyahu>.

23. Asher Fredman, *The Battle Over BDS: Trends, Lessons & Future Trajectories* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2020), 3.

24. Ali Abunimah, "Leaked Report Highlights Israel Lobby's Failures," *Electronic Intifada*, 28 April 2017, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-incremental-genocide-gaza-ghetto/13562>; Amir Tibon, "Democratic Jewish Senator Feinstein Blasts Israel Over 'Brutal' Land-Grab Law," *Haaretz*, 8 February 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/democratic-jewish-senator-feinstein-blasts-israel-over-brutal-land-grab-law-1.5430428>; United Nations Security Council, "Israel's Settlements Have No Legal Validity, Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law, Security Council Reaffirms," 7853rd meeting, 23 December 2016, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.html>; "UN Human Rights Expert Calls for Urgent Revision of Israeli Housing Policies," *UN News*, 13 February 2012, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/02/403062-un-human-rights-expert-calls-urgent-revision-israeli-housing-policies#.UsZ2iNIW1Bk>; Gref Carlstrom, "Palestinians Testify to 'Ongoing Nakba,'" *Aljazeera*, 15 May 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/05/15/palestinians-testify-to-ongoing-nakba/>; Haidar Eid, "Israel's Policies in Gaza Are Genocidal," *Mondoweiss*, 3 August 2018, <https://mondoweiss.net/2018/08/israels-policies-genocidal/>.

25. Oliver Holmes, "UN Says Israel's Killings at Gaza Protests May Amount to War Crimes," *The Guardian*, 28 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/28/gaza-israel-un-inquiry-killings-protest-war-crimes-army>.

26. Ilan Pappé, "Israel's Incremental Genocide in the Gaza Ghetto," *Electronic Intifada*, 13 July 2014, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-incremental-genocide-gaza-ghetto/13562>; Amir Tibon, "Democratic Jewish Senator Feinstein Blasts Israel Over 'Brutal' Land-Grab Law," *Haaretz*, 8 February 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/democratic-jewish-senator-feinstein-blasts-israel-over-brutal-land-grab-law-1.5430428>; United Nations Security Council, "Israel's Settlements Have No Legal Validity, Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law, Security Council Reaffirms," 7853rd meeting, 23 December 2016, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.html>; "UN Human Rights Expert Calls for Urgent Revision of Israeli Housing Policies," *UN News*, 13 February 2012, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/02/403062-un-human-rights-expert-calls-urgent-revision-israeli-housing-policies#.UsZ2iNIW1Bk>; Gref Carlstrom, "Palestinians Testify to 'Ongoing Nakba,'" *Aljazeera*, 15 May 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/05/15/palestinians-testify-to-ongoing-nakba/>; Haidar Eid, "Israel's Policies in Gaza Are Genocidal," *Mondoweiss*, 3 August 2018, <https://mondoweiss.net/2018/08/israels-policies-genocidal/>.

To varying degrees, the settler-colonial “logic of elimination” of the indigenous population was implemented in the United States, Australia, and Canada. When total elimination is not possible, the colonizers understand that for their project to thrive they must subdue and eventually domesticate the indigenous colonized population, including through isolation.<sup>27</sup>

**“(H)ope that emanates from effective popular resistance, organically coupled with principled international solidarity, is resilient and contagious.”**

---

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor” to achieve this, the South African Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko argued, is through control of “the mind of the oppressed.”<sup>28</sup> From apartheid South Africa to Palestine today, Biko’s insight has proven prescient. When settler colonialists have been unable to annihilate the indigenous, they adopt the strategy of infecting our minds with the fatal virus of despair through dehumanization, isolation, and the violent crushing of any resistance with disproportionate force and premeditated savagery.

The British-enabled Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, which began in earnest in the first quarter of the twentieth century and is ongoing, has persistently sought to colonize not just the land of the indigenous Palestinians but our *minds* as well.

As early as 1923, Zionist leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky wrote with lucid honesty:

Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonized. [...] Zionist colonization must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population—behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from its more recent concrete wall, Israel has constructed its “iron wall” in Palestinian minds in an attempt to reduce us to lesser humans, or what I call relative humans; to isolate us from our natural Arab environment and the rest of the world; and to sear into our consciousness, through sustained hegemonic violence, the imperative of submission to its indomitable power as fate.<sup>30</sup> The most important goal of colonizing the minds of the oppressed is to imprint in them the lethal futility of resisting ongoing colonization.

Consequently, the struggle for Palestinian liberation has always been conditioned

---

27. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no.4 (2006): 387–409.

28. Steve Biko, “I Write What I Like,” in *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

29. Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall,” 1923, <http://en.jabotinsky.org/media/9747/the-iron-wall.pdf>.

30. Omar Barghouti, “Relative Humanity: Identity, Rights, and Ethics: Israel as a Case Study,” *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (October 2006): 1536–43.

upon decolonizing Palestinian minds from the deep-seated powerlessness and hopelessness that may inhibit them, and embarking on a praxis, as Paulo Freire would say, a radical process of hopeful, globalized resistance, transformation, and emancipation.<sup>31</sup> After all, hope that emanates from effective popular resistance, organically coupled with principled international solidarity, is resilient and contagious. Despite decades of ruthless Israeli ethnic cleansing and settler-colonial brutality, enabled mostly by the West, the Palestinians have not given up. We continue to resist oppression and to assert our quest for emancipation, self-determination, and equal rights to all peoples.

This is precisely why Israel has allocated massive human, political, and financial resources—including a dedicated government ministry with a budget of over \$70 million—in its desperate war on BDS.<sup>32</sup> It correctly sees that BDS provides a particularly potent and hopeful form of rooted, anti-racist, intersectional, contemporary, and context-sensitive nonviolent resistance that also strategically and effectively challenges Israel's savagery and criminal impunity.<sup>33</sup>

## Sumud and the Impact of BDS

Israel has perpetrated for decades what UN investigators describe as acts that “may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.”<sup>34</sup> Israeli historian Ilan Pappé uses the phrase “incremental genocide” to refer to Israeli policies on Gaza and its ongoing settlement construction and gradual ethnic cleansing in occupied Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and the Naqab (Negev).<sup>35</sup> Yet most Palestinians remain hopeful, despite all the pain and loss. As Rashid Khalidi puts it, the ultimate goal of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, the erasure of the indigenous Palestinian people, has failed. He writes:

Today, the population of the entire country from the river to the sea is at least half Palestinian, and that proportion is growing. The natives are still there, unified by decades of occupation and colonization since 1967, and they are restless. Those Palestinians who have managed to remain in historical Palestine—in spite of the ceaseless efforts to dispossess them—continue to resist erasure. Outside of Palestine, an equal number remain profoundly attached to their homeland and to the right of return. The Palestinians have not forgotten, they have not gone away, and the memory of Palestine and its

---

31. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2005).

32. “Israeli Government OKs \$72 Million Anti-BDS Project,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 29 December 2017, <https://www.jta.org/2017/12/29/israel/israeli-government-oks-72-million-anti-bds-project>.

33. Uri Blau, “Dead Palestinian Babies and Bombed Mosques—IDF Fashion 2009,” *Haaretz*, 19 March 2009, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5090720>; Toi Staff, “Clip Shows Far-Right Wedding-Goers Celebrating Duma Killings,” *Times of Israel*, 23 December 2015, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/clip-shows-far-right-wedding-goers-celebrating-dawabsha-killings/>; Hilo Glazer, “42 Knees in One Day’: Israeli Snipers Open Up About Shooting Gaza Protesters,” *Haaretz*, 6 March 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-42-knees-in-one-day-israeli-snipers-open-up-about-shooting-gaza-protesters-1.8632555>.

34. Holmes, “UN Says Israel’s Killings at Gaza Protests May Amount to War Crimes.”

35. Pappé, “Israel’s Incremental Genocide in the Gaza Ghetto”; Tibon, “Democratic Jewish Senator Feinstein Blasts Israel Over ‘Brutal’ Land-Grab Law”; United Nations Security Council, “Israel’s Settlements Have No Legal Validity, Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law, Security Council Reaffirms”; UN News, “UN Human Rights Expert Calls for Urgent Revision of Israeli Housing Policies”; Carlstrom, “Palestinians Testify to ‘Ongoing Nakba.’”



dismemberment has not been effaced. Indeed, wider international audiences are increasingly aware of these realities.<sup>36</sup>

Together with maintaining a Palestinian physical presence in Palestine, BDS today is a major form of Palestinian popular resistance and the most effective form of international solidarity with their struggle for inalienable rights.

Effective BDS campaigns have compelled conglomerates like Veolia, Orange, and CRH to end their involvement in Israeli operations that violate Palestinian human rights. The world's largest security firm, G4S, has suffered what the *Financial Times* called "reputational damage," due to BDS campaigning in several countries, ending most of its involvement in illegal Israeli business in settlements, military checkpoints, and the prison system, where Palestinians, including children, are systematically subjected to torture and ill treatment.<sup>37</sup>

Sovereign funds in Norway, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and elsewhere have divested from Israeli or international companies and banks that are involved in Israel's occupation.<sup>38</sup>

Mainstream churches in South Africa have endorsed BDS, while major churches in the United States, including the Presbyterian Church and the United Methodist Church, have divested from U.S. companies or Israeli banks for their involvement in Israel's violations of Palestinian rights.<sup>39</sup>

---

36. Rashid Khalidi, "The Palestinians Have Not Forgotten, They Have Not Gone Away," *The Nation*, 10 May 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/after-the-nakba-the-persistence-of-palestine/>.

37. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "BDS Marks Another Victory as Veolia Sells Off All Israeli Operations," [BDSmovement.net](https://bdsmovement.net/news/bds-marks-another-victory-veolia-sells-all-israeli-operations/), 1 September 2015, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/bds-marks-another-victory-veolia-sells-all-israeli-operations/>; Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Orange Drops Israel Affiliate Following Inspiring BDS Campaign," [BDSmovement.net](https://bdsmovement.net/news/orange-drops-israel-affiliate-following-inspiring-bds-campaign/), 7 January 2016, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/orange-drops-israel-affiliate-following-inspiring-bds-campaign/>; Gill Plimmer and Nathalie Thomas, "G4S Shares Plunge as Cost of UK Asylum Service Hits Profits," *Financial Times*, 9 March 2016, [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/72789bbe-e5cf-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6.html?siteedition=intl&\\_i\\_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2F%2Fpercent2F0%2F72789bbe-e5cf-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6.html&classification=conditional\\_standard&ciab=barrier-app#axzz42RtbnhB2](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/72789bbe-e5cf-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6.html?siteedition=intl&_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2F%2Fpercent2F0%2F72789bbe-e5cf-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6.html&classification=conditional_standard&ciab=barrier-app#axzz42RtbnhB2); Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Global Security Company G4S Deepens Ties with Israeli Apartheid. Boycott G4S!" [BDSmovement.net](https://bdsmovement.net/news/global-security-company-g4s-deepens-ties-israeli-apartheid-boycott-g4s/), 27 July 2017, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/global-security-company-g4s-deepens-ties-israeli-apartheid-boycott-g4s/>; Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Under BDS Pressure, G4S Ends Most Illegal Business with Israel," [BDSmovement.net](https://bdsmovement.net/news/under-bds-pressure-g4s-ends-most-illegal-business-israel/), 2 December 2016, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/under-bds-pressure-g4s-ends-most-illegal-business-israel/>; Yara Hawari, "The Systematic Torture of Palestinians in Israeli Detention," *Al-Shabaka*, 28 November 2019, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/the-systematic-torture-of-palestinians-in-israeli-detention/>.

38. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Norwegian Government Pension Fund Excludes More Israeli Companies," [BDSmovement.net](https://bdsmovement.net/news/norwegian-government-pension-fund-excludes-more-israeli-companies/), 23 August 2010, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/norwegian-government-pension-fund-excludes-more-israeli-companies/>; Ali Abunimah, "Luxembourg Pension Fund Dumps 9 Israeli Firms Over Settlements," [BDSmovement.net](https://bdsmovement.net/news/luxembourg-pension-fund-dumps-9-israeli-firms-over-settlements/), 25 February 2014, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/luxembourg-pension-fund-dumps-9-israeli-firms-over-settlements/>; Adri Nieuwhof, "Biggest Dutch Pension Fund Dumps Israeli Banks," *Electronic Intifada*, 6 July 2020, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/adri-nieuwhof/biggest-dutch-pension-fund-dumps-israeli-banks/>; Dan Goldberg, "New Zealand Gov't Fund Divests From Israeli Firms Over Settlement Construction," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 16 December 2012, <https://www.jta.org/2012/12/16/global/new-zealand-govt-fund-divests-from-israeli-firms-over-settlement-construction>.

39. Anglican Church of Southern Africa, "Anglican Church in Southern Africa Synod Adopts Anti-Israel Pro-BDS resolutions," *Anglican Ink*, 27 September 2019, <https://anglican.ink/2019/09/27/anglican-church-in-southern-africa-synod-adopts-anti-israel-pro-bds-resolutions/>; "US BDS Victories," US Campaign for Palestinian Human Rights, June 2019, <https://uscpr.org/campaign/bds/bdswins/#1499799109159-8f9e0458-b327>; "Press Release: United Methodists for Kairos Response Welcomes Pension Fund Exclusion and Divestment of Israeli Banks," [Kairosresponse.org](https://www.kairosresponse.org/pr_umc_divests_israeli_banks_jan2016.html), 7 January 2016, [https://www.kairosresponse.org/pr\\_umc\\_divests\\_israeli\\_banks\\_jan2016.html](https://www.kairosresponse.org/pr_umc_divests_israeli_banks_jan2016.html).

The city of Dublin in 2018 became the first European capital to adopt BDS, while dozens of other cities and hundreds of cultural institutions and public spaces across Europe have declared themselves Israeli Apartheid Free Zones.<sup>40</sup>

BDS has broadened its support base by winning the endorsement of major international trade union federations, including the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU), the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT) federation in Brazil, and Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the United Kingdom, among many others.<sup>41</sup>

These and other successful BDS campaigns are why Israel has allocated massive human, political, and financial resources in its war on BDS. It correctly sees that BDS provides a particularly potent and hopeful form of rooted, anti-racist, intersectional, contemporary, and context-sensitive nonviolent resistance that is also strategically effective in exposing and challenging Israel's savagery and criminal impunity.<sup>42</sup>

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a concept developed by Black feminists in the United States, is fast becoming an indispensable component of effective justice struggles of oppressed communities.

Part of the strength of the BDS movement lies in its intersectional networks with other justice movements, especially in the United States and Europe.<sup>43</sup> Global, strategic, intersectional, and mutual solidarity with struggles against oppression has become even more essential for building any strong *local* resistance movement.

Based on its inclusive and progressive principles, the BDS movement has established and nourished bonds of mutual solidarity with movements defending the rights of refugees, immigrants, Blacks, women, workers, indigenous nations, LGBTQI communities, and ethnic and religious minorities. A growing number of anti-colonial Jewish-Israeli BDS supporters play a significant role in exposing Israel's

---

40. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Dublin Becomes First European Capital to Endorse BDS for Palestinian Rights & Drops Hewlett Packard for Its Complicity in Israeli Apartheid," BDSmovement.net, 11 April 2018, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/dublin-becomes-first-european-capital-endorse-bds-palestinian-rights-drops-hewlett-packard-its>; Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Apartheid Free Zones," BDSmovement.net, <https://bds-movement.net/apartheid-free-zones>.

41. COSATU, "COSATU Endorses the Palestinian Call to Impose an Immediate, Comprehensive Military Embargo on Israel," BDSmovement.net, 8 July 2011, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/cosat-endorse-palestinian-call-impose-immediate-comprehensive-military-embargo-israel>; "Largest Brazilian Trade Union Backs Boycott," BDSmovement.net, 7 February 2011, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/largest-brazilian-trade-union-backs-boycott>; Trade Unions Congress, "UK Trades Union Congress Votes for Ending Arms Trade with Israel, and Ending Corporate Complicity," BDSmovement.net, 12 September 2019, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/uk-trades-union-congress-votes-ending-arms-trade-israel-and-ending-corporate-complicity>; "Trade Union Solidarity," BDSmovement.net, <https://bdsmovement.net/trade-union-solidarity>.

42. Blau, "Dead Palestinian Babies and Bombed Mosques—IDF Fashion 2009"; Staff, "Clip Shows Far-Right Wedding-Goers Celebrating Duma Killings"; Glazer, "'42 Knees in One Day': Israeli Snipers Open up About Shooting Gaza Protesters."

43. David Bernstein, "BDS and the Rising Danger of 'Intersectionality,'" *Forward*, 4 January 2016, <https://outline.com/adNnRN>.



regime of oppression and advocating for its isolation.<sup>44</sup>

The largest farmers' union in India, with sixteen million members, adopted BDS because of its strong sense of internationalism, rooted in India's once historic role as a leading supporter of liberation movements, and an equally strong commitment to resisting the corporate takeover of the Indian agriculture sector by Israeli and other corporate criminals.<sup>45</sup> In 2015, a Black for Palestine statement endorsed BDS and the call to boycott G4S, the world's largest security firm, which was complicit in Israel's imprisonment of Palestinians on political grounds, because it was also complicit in the private incarceration system in the United States, which disproportionately targets young Black and brown men.<sup>46</sup>

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), the largest Palestinian coalition that leads the global BDS movement, was among the first movements to stand in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in its struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Its 2016 statement said:

The BNC supports the restoration of all lands guaranteed by treaty to the Standing Rock Sioux and all other indigenous nations. As indigenous Palestinians, we pledge to stand in solidarity with indigenous peoples around the world, including in Turtle Island, in their struggles for justice, self-determination, restoration of rights and respect for their heritage.<sup>47</sup>

As an indigenous people, Palestinians recognize the connection between the imperialist role that the United States plays worldwide and domestic U.S. racist oppression of indigenous people, Blacks, and other communities of color.<sup>48</sup> Successive U.S. administrations have sponsored or supported dictatorships, far-right regimes, death squads, and other tools of repression to maintain the hegemony of multinationals and large banks over the Global South and perpetuate their pillage and exploitation. Martin Luther King Jr. connected the "three evils" of racism, poverty, and militarism with the Vietnam War, and Malcolm X argued that for the Black-led struggle for justice in the United States to flourish, it must be "tied in with

---

44. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "From Standing Rock to Occupied Jerusalem: We Resist Desecration of Our Burial Sites and Colonizing Our Indigenous Lands," BDSmovement.net, 9 September 2016, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/standing-rock-occupied-jerusalem-we-resist-desecration-our-burial-sites-and-colonizing-our>; Palestinian BDS National Committee, "The Peaceful BDS Movement Will Prevail Over the Far Right Trump-Netanyahu Alliance," BDSmovement.net, 19 November 2020, <https://www.bdsmovement.net/news/no-eurovision-pinkwashing-more-60-lgbtq-groups-call-boycott-song-contest-israel>; "Palestinians, Jews, Citizens of Israel, Join the Palestinian Call for a BDS Campaign Against Israel," *Boycott!*, <http://boycottisrael.info/>; Omar Barghouti, "Lighting a Torch Within: Anti-Colonial Israeli Support for BDS," Verso Books blog, 23 November 2012, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1185-omar-barghouti-lighting-a-torch-within-anti-colonial-israeli-support-for-bds>.

45. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "16 Million-Strong Organization in India Joins the BDS Movement," BDSmovement.net, 23 October 2017, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/16-million-strong-organization-india-joins-bds-movement>.

46. Kristian Davis Bailey and Khury Petersen-Smith, "1,000 Black Activists, Artists, Scholars, Demand Justice For Palestine," *Ebony*, 18 August 2015, <https://www.ebony.com/news/1000-black-activists-artists-and-scholars-demand-justice-for-palestine-403/>.

47. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "From Standing Rock to Occupied Jerusalem: We Resist Desecration of Our Burial Sites and Colonizing Our Indigenous Lands."

48. Noam Chomsky, "Modern-Day American Imperialism: Middle East and Beyond," lecture, Boston University, 24 April 2008, <https://chomsky.info/20080424/>.

the overall international struggle.”<sup>49</sup> In view of these connections, the Movement for Black Lives in the United States is uniquely placed to lead a global struggle for justice in all its forms, given its role in resisting empire from the inside. Fighting militarization, systemic racism, and brutal policing domestically is deeply connected with ending, or at least curtailing, U.S. empire abroad.

To Palestinians and many other oppressed communities around the world, Black Lives Matter is significant in a profound way. Not only is the struggle for Black liberation inherently important to humanity, it is also intertwined with global struggles for freedom, justice, and equal rights, including the Palestinian struggle against Israel’s regime of oppression. Other than being Israel’s partner in crime, the U.S. establishment shares historical and ideological connections with Israel: both settler-colonial regimes are based on the perceived supremacy of the colonizers and the dehumanization of the colonized.

Reflecting this intersectional analysis, the BNC issued a statement last May in solidarity with the Black-led uprisings for justice following the police murder of George Floyd:

The growing protests by “the unheard” against police brutality in the U.S. are fundamentally an uprising against an entire system of racist exploitation and oppression, exacerbated and nakedly exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and its disproportionate toll on African Americans. This system is organically connected to the crimes perpetrated by U.S. imperialism against peoples of color worldwide and rooted in the violent, racist and colonial foundation of the U.S.

The genocidal destruction of native American nations, the pillage of their wealth and resources, and the savage enslavement of millions of Africans constitute the most profound pillars of what became the U.S. The deeply-seated white supremacist ideology that has guided and attempted to whitewash these crimes is still alive, albeit in different forms. This exclusionary ideology is encouraged by the flagrantly racist Trump White House and an insidious, less-audaciously racist liberal establishment that rhetorically condemns racism, even spews some empty promises, yet consistently fails to act on reparations, racial and economic justice, and ending the horrific system of criminalization and mass incarceration of Black Americans.<sup>50</sup>

In a webinar recently organized by the BDS movement, titled “Global Uprising: Black and Indigenous Resistance Against Racism and Settler Colonialism,” Nick Estes, Native American scholar, activist, and cofounder of the Red Nation, observed:

---

49. Martin Luther King Jr., Address to the Hungry Club Forum, 10 May 1967, reproduced in *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/martin-luther-king-hungry-club-forum/552533/>; Malcolm X quoted in Russell Rickford, “Malcolm X and Anti-Imperialist Thought,” *Black Perspectives*, 24 February 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/malcolm-x-and-anti-imperialist-thought/>.

50. Palestinian BDS National Committee, “We Can’t Breathe Until We’re Free! Palestinians Stand in Solidarity With Black Americans,” *BDSmovement.net*, 30 May 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/we-cant-breathe-until-we-are-free-palestinians-stand-solidarity-with-black-americans>.

This is an incredible moment in time. ... The indigenous movement, the Black movement, the Palestinian movement have seen levels of solidarity, because primarily of Black Lives Matter ... that we haven't seen in the past. The Lakota people have drawn on the Palestinian example for our pathway to recognize indigenous human rights at the United Nations; that connection existed, but it existed alongside the anti-apartheid struggle. So, even our history to this moment ... is deeply connected.<sup>51</sup>

Israel's birth as a violent settler-colony is now flaunted as a model for white supremacists around the world. Richard Spencer, a leader of the "alt-right," for example, has defended the white supremacist movement's racist nationalism as "a sort of white Zionism."<sup>52</sup> This unmistakable allusion to Israel's exclusionary foundations, as a state that privileges Jewish settlers over the indigenous Palestinian population and that treats African asylum seekers as a "cancer," further exposes Zionism as a supremacist movement and elucidates the often-observed contradiction between Zionism and liberal ideals.<sup>53</sup>

As this contradiction becomes more visible, support for holding Israel to account is growing among Jewish Americans and the broader U.S. public. Already, in 2014, a poll by the "moderate" Israel lobby J Street, which conditions support for political candidates on their opposition to BDS,<sup>54</sup> showed that 46 percent of non-Orthodox Jewish-American men under 40 support a full boycott of Israel to end its occupation.<sup>55</sup>

## Ethical Consistency vs. Strategic Impact

Upholding the rights of all Palestinians as stipulated by international law and adhering to a morally consistent, inclusive, intersectional, anti-racist struggle, however, is not sufficient to achieve the movement's objectives: freedom, justice, and equality.<sup>56</sup> Simultaneously, therefore, BDS organizes strategic, context-sensitive, winnable, gradual, and sustainable campaigns to advance the struggle to attain those objectives. In other words, BDS strives to maintain a golden balance between ethical consistency and strategic impact.

Social justice advocates and human rights defenders often face the dilemma of whether to prioritize ethical principles over goal-oriented efficacy in their campaigns. While there may be in many cases a trade-off between the two, they are not mutually exclusive, and opting for one to the exclusion of the other can be

51. "Global Uprising: Webinar with Michael Bennett, Pele Bennett, Joy Lehuanani Enomoto and Nick Estes," BDSmovement.net, 1 July 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/global-uprising>.

52. Omri Boehm, "Liberal Zionism in the Age of Trump," *New York Times*, 20 December 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/20/opinion/liberal-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump.html>.

53. *Times of Israel* Staff, "52% of Israeli Jews Agree: African Migrants Are 'a Cancer,'" *Times of Israel*, 7 June 2012, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/most-israeli-jews-agree-africans-are-a-cancer/>.

54. J Street, "Myths and Facts: Our Endorsed Candidates," [jstreet.org](https://jstreet.org/about-us/myths-facts-about-j-street/our-endorsed-candidates/#.X3cFR2gzY2w), <https://jstreet.org/about-us/myths-facts-about-j-street/our-endorsed-candidates/#.X3cFR2gzY2w>.

55. J Street, "J Street National," [jstreet.org](https://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2014-jstreet-national-election-night-crosstabs.pdf), 4 November 2014, 105, <https://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2014-jstreet-national-election-night-crosstabs.pdf>. Following this shocking result, J Street removed the question on support for boycotting Israel from its 2016 and 2018 polls of Jewish American opinion.

56. Much of the material in this section draws on my blog post "Israel in the Trump Era," 29 January 2018, posted by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/omar-barghouti-israel-trump-era/>.

**“We continue to resist oppression and to assert our quest for emancipation, self-determination, and equal rights to all peoples.”**

---

detrimental to any social movement.

If we set our objectives too high to meet our utmost ethical and political standards, we would undoubtedly condemn our struggle to ineffectiveness and, in some cases, turn ourselves into “fatalistic addicts of marginalization.”<sup>57</sup> We would lose sight of the real objectives we had set out to achieve, of the policy changes we had hoped to realize, and

would become delusional, celebrating every noise we make in our comfortable “revolutionary” bubble as if it were the roar of an inevitable victory.

On the other hand, if our objectives are designed to conveniently respond only to the pragmatic requirements of current circumstances, without much consideration for our principles and long-term goals, we risk cooptation by hegemonic forces of oppression. While basking in the limelight of the recognition bestowed on those deemed “moderate” and “responsible” enough to be granted a low seat at their high table, we will have disconnected from our roots of struggle and our vision for a just, dignified future. We would settle, in effect, for the more “comfortable chains,” as Archbishop Desmond Tutu would say, while convincing ourselves that we shall break the chains altogether at some indefinite future date.

Being revolutionary is not about raising the most radical slogans that are not implementable and that therefore have little chance of contributing to effective processes aimed at ending the reality of oppression. What is truly revolutionary, and ethical, is raising a slogan that is principled and morally consistent and yet conducive to on-the-ground action that can lead to real justice and emancipation.

BDS has adhered to its founding and evolving progressive, anti-racist principles, and adopted context-sensitive and goal-oriented strategies to grow its support base and impact in many fields, including the cultural and academic boycott spheres.

## **Cultural Boycott**

In 2010, when a prominent South African opera crossed the Palestinian cultural boycott picket line and performed in Tel Aviv, South African anti-apartheid icon Desmond Tutu wrote:

Just as we said during apartheid that it was inappropriate for international artists to perform in South Africa in a society founded on discriminatory laws and racial exclusivity, so it would be wrong for Cape Town Opera to perform in Israel.<sup>58</sup>

---

57. The term “fatalistic addicts of marginalization” is inspired by a talk given by Sarah Schulman at a conference of the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights.

58. “Tutu Urges Cape Town Opera to Call off Israel Tour,” *Sunday Times*, 26 October 2010, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2010-10-26-tutu-urges-cape-town-opera-to-call-off-israel-tour/>.

Cultural boycott initiatives against Israel, which come in response to the 2004 call by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) and to the 2005 Palestinian civil society-initiated BDS Call, more often than not cite the boycott of apartheid South Africa as a key reference.<sup>59</sup>

This reference is neither coincidental nor rhetorical. It stems from the many similarities between the two cases of colonial oppression, and it aims to highlight the effectiveness and moral unassailability of using the boycott in the cultural sphere to resist a persistent oppressive order that enjoys impunity and ample complicity from the powers-that-be around the world and to increase the isolation of oppressive regimes, like Israel.

Despite its undisputed growth, the cultural boycott aspect of BDS has been among the most controversial and fiercely debated.

## Boycotts and Freedom of Expression

The most persistent objection to the cultural and academic boycott, the supposedly “inherent” contradiction between the boycott and freedom of expression and of exchange, is based on an incorrect premise—that Palestinians are calling for ostracizing *individual* Israeli academics, writers, and artists. PACBI and the BDS movement at large have never done so. The 2004 PACBI call, the guidelines for the international boycott of Israel, and all PACBI documents and speeches on record have consistently called on international artists, academics, and institutions to observe a boycott of all Israeli academic and cultural *institutions* (including formal bands and orchestras), not individuals. The PACBI guidelines state:

Anchored in precepts of international law and universal human rights, the BDS movement, including PACBI, rejects on principle boycotts of individuals based on their identity (such as citizenship, race, gender, or religion) or opinion. *Mere affiliation of Israeli cultural workers to an Israeli cultural institution is therefore not grounds for applying the boycott.* If, however, an individual is *representing* the state of Israel or a complicit Israeli institution, or is commissioned/recruited to participate in Israel’s efforts to “rebrand” itself, then her/his activities are subject to the institutional boycott the BDS movement is calling for.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike the South African academic and cultural boycott, which was a “blanket” boycott that targeted everyone and everything South African, the Palestinian boycott targets institutions only, because of their entrenched complicity in planning, justifying, whitewashing, or otherwise perpetuating Israel’s violations of international law and Palestinian rights.

---

59. “Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel,” BDSmovement.net, [www.bdsmovement.net/pacbi](http://www.bdsmovement.net/pacbi). Material in this section draws on Omar Barghouti, “The Cultural Boycott: Israel vs. South Africa,” [hyperallergic.com](http://hyperallergic.com), 9 June 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/212014/the-cultural-boycott-israel-vs-south-africa> percentE2 percent80 percentA8/.

60. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, “PACBI Guidelines for the International Cultural Boycott of Israel,” BDSmovement.net, 16 July 2014, <https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/cultural-boycott-guidelines>.

BDS has never targeted individual Israeli artists or academics per se, not because they tend to be more progressive or opposed to injustice than the rest of society, as is often mistakenly assumed or falsely argued, but because the movement is opposed *on principle* to political testing and blacklisting.<sup>61</sup> The BDS movement has consistently refrained from using McCarthyite tools in resisting Israel's regime of oppression, despite, or because of, the Israeli lobby groups' persistent resorting to the "new McCarthyism," one that uses unconditional allegiance to Israel as the litmus test of loyalty.<sup>62</sup>

In 1984, Enuga S. Reddy, director of the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, responded to similar criticism that the cultural boycott of South Africa infringed upon freedom of expression:

It is rather strange, to say the least, that the South African regime which denies all freedoms ... to the African majority ... should become a defender of the freedom of artists and sportsmen of the world. We have a list of people who have performed in South Africa because of ignorance of the situation or the lure of money or unconcern over racism. They need to be persuaded to stop entertaining apartheid, to stop profiting from apartheid money and to stop serving the propaganda purposes of the apartheid regime.<sup>63</sup>

That was two decades after the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement first issued a declaration signed by twenty-eight Irish playwrights who committed in 1964 not to permit their work to be performed before segregated audiences in South Africa.<sup>64</sup> The American Committee on Africa, following the lead of prominent British and Irish arts associations, sponsored in 1965 a historic declaration against South African apartheid, signed by more than sixty cultural figures.

Then, in December 1980, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a special resolution on the cultural—and academic—boycott of South Africa in December 1980, almost two decades after civil society unions and associations in Britain, Ireland, and, later, the United States, adopted such a boycott.<sup>65</sup> That decision also heeded consistent appeals by Black organizations in South Africa, which effectively censured several foreign entertainers who violated the boycott.

Those who once endorsed or even struggled to implement that *blanket* academic or cultural boycott against apartheid South Africa and are now hesitant to support a *targeted institutional* boycott of Israel are hard-pressed to explain this peculiar inconsistency.

61. AdExchanger, "No More Inflammatory Jargon: Change Blacklist to Blocklist," [ad exchanger.com](https://www.adexchanger.com/data-driven-thinking/no-more-inflammatory-jargon-change-blacklist-to-blocklist/), 9 July 2020, <https://www.adexchanger.com/data-driven-thinking/no-more-inflammatory-jargon-change-blacklist-to-blocklist/>.

62. Omar Barghouti, "The BDS Movement Explained," *Daily News*, 25 February 2013, <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/boycott-israel-article-1.1271226>.

63. "International Sanctions on South Africa," Weebly.com, <https://44157170.weebly.com/international-sanctions.html>.

64. Fintan O'Toole, "Why the Cultural Boycott of Israel Is a Blunt and Backward Instrument," *Irish Times*, 19 May 2012, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio-web/why-the-cultural-boycott-of-israel-is-a-blunt-and-backward-instrument-1.522293>.

65. "South Africa's Academic and Cultural Boycott," South African History Online, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-africas-academic-and-cultural-boycott>.



Some BDS critics argue that art is above, or at least should transcend, political division, unifying people in their “common humanity.” This argument ignores the political content, the power disparity, and the ethical responsibility associated with artistic expression, particularly in situations of sustained oppression. It also ignores, it seems, that the proverbial masters and slaves hardly share anything in common, least of all any notion of humanity.

## Brand Israel

One of the main objectives of the academic and cultural boycott of Israel is exposing the deep complicity of Israel’s academic and cultural institutions in Israel’s regime of oppression, thus revealing the true “brand” of Israel.

The Israeli government launched its so-called Brand Israel campaign in 2005, apparently in response to the 2004 PACBI call and the initial traction it had gained in the United Kingdom and beyond.<sup>66</sup> This branding campaign focused on improving Israel’s image abroad “by downplaying religion and avoiding any discussion of the conflict with the Palestinians” and by spinning it as “relevant and modern.”<sup>67</sup> Upon the launch of this branding campaign, a former deputy director general of the Israeli foreign ministry, Nissim Ben-Shitrit, said, “We are seeing culture as a hasbara [propaganda] tool of the first rank, and I do not differentiate between hasbara and culture.”<sup>68</sup>

After the Israeli war of aggression against the besieged Gaza Strip in 2009, Israel’s image further dipped, prompting the government to throw more money into the Brand Israel campaign. A top Israeli foreign ministry official told the *New York Times* at the time, “We will send well-known novelists and writers overseas, theater companies, exhibits. This way you show Israel’s prettier face.”<sup>69</sup> A little-known component of the Israeli government’s Brand Israel effort is a *contract* that obliges Israeli artists and writers, as “service providers” who receive state funding, to conform to and, indeed, promote state policies. It effectively buys the artists’ and writers’ consciences, making a mockery of the “freedom of expression” mantra.

This contract was revealed in a *Haaretz* article, instructively titled “Putting out a Contract on Art,” by an award-winning Israeli writer, explaining the organic partnership between the state and the complacent and complicit intelligentsia. The contract contained the following clauses:

The service provider undertakes to act faithfully, responsibly and tirelessly to provide the Ministry with the highest professional services. The service provider is aware that the purpose of ordering services from him is to promote the policy interests of the State of Israel via culture and art, including

---

66. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, “Association of University Teachers to Boycott Israeli Institutions,” *Electronic Intifada*, 22 April 2005, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/association-university-teachers-boycott-israeli-institutions/456>; Nathaniel Popper, “Israel Aims to Improve Its Public Image,” *Forward*, 14 October 2005, <https://forward.com/news/2070/israel-aims-to-improve-its-public-image/>.

67. Popper, “Israel Aims to Improve Its Public Image.”

68. Yuval Ben-Ami, “About Face,” *Haaretz*, 19 September 2005, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4875039>.

69. Ethan Bonner, “After Gaza, Israel Grapples With Crisis of Isolation,” *New York Times*, 19 March 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html>.

contributing to creating a positive image for Israel.

The service provider will not present himself as an agent, emissary and/or representative of the Ministry.<sup>70</sup>

Another argument often raised to counter the case for a cultural boycott of Israel is that such a boycott, since it entails refusing to show art works in Israel, may actually hurt the state's victims, the Palestinians, more than it would hurt Israel itself, because it would compound their already dire isolation. Interestingly, U.S. filmmaker Jonathan Demme, who cofounded with Martin Scorsese Filmmakers United Against Apartheid to protest the racist regime in South Africa in the 1980s, was asked whether denying American movies to all South African audiences would punish Blacks as well as the white regime. He replied:

We believe the answer is "no." Leaders of the (opposition) African National Congress have said they fervently want a boycott. ... As far as denying the consciousness-raising among whites that American films could provide, the consensus is that it will take more than one movie or group of movies to raise the consciousness of the white rulers.<sup>71</sup>

Israeli cultural, as well as academic, institutions will claim that the boycott infringes upon their freedom and punishes artists and academics who are the most "progressive" and opposed to "the occupation" in Israeli society. This argument, aside from being quite disingenuous, is intended to deflect attention from three basic facts: first, that the boycott was called for because Israel was denying Palestinians their basic rights, including academic and cultural rights; second, that the Palestinian academic and cultural boycott of Israel targets institutions, not individuals; and third, that those institutions, far from being more progressive than the Israeli public, are a main pillar of the Israeli structure of colonial and apartheid oppression.

The oppressed lose nothing when people of conscience boycott institutions that are complicit in the system of oppression; instead, they gain enormously from the ultimate weakening of this complicity, which an effective and sustained boycott leads to.

BDS fundamentally calls on all people of conscience and their institutions to fulfill their profound moral obligation to desist from complicity in Israel's system of oppression against the Palestinian people. Artists and other cultural figures are no exception.

Understanding this ethical obligation, the majority of celebrities, especially younger ones, who do care about universal human rights usually have turned down lucrative offers to play in Tel Aviv when they realize that, regardless of their intentions, their performances there will invariably be manipulated to artwash Israel's regime of military rule and injustice.

---

70. Yitzhak Laor, "Putting out a Contract on Art," *Haaretz*, 24 July 2008, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5006580>.

71. "US Jews to Hollywood Stars: Boycott Israel Celebration!" *Jews sans frontières* blog, 12 September 2008, <http://jewssansfrontieres.blogspot.com/2008/09/us-jews-to-hollywood-stars-boycott.html>.



The cultural boycott of Israel is growing steadily, with thousands of artist endorsements.<sup>72</sup> In March 2020, more than 130 mostly LGBTQIA+ filmmakers and film artists pledged to boycott TLVFest, Tel Aviv's government-sponsored LGBT film festival, in solidarity with the Palestinian LGBTQIA+ community.<sup>73</sup> In 2019, despite Israel's much-hyped propaganda around its hosting of the massive European song contest, Eurovision, and its anticipation of up to 50,000 tourists flooding Tel Aviv, less than 5,000 tourists made the trip. The well-planned BDS campaign "against Eurovision in apartheid Tel Aviv" went viral, attracting support from more than 150,000 Europeans and others who signed petitions urging a boycott of the contest. Hundreds of leading artists lent their support, including former Eurovision contestants and one winner, and well over 100 LGBTQI+ organizations and centers joined the calls, rejecting Israel's exposed pinkwashing strategy.<sup>74</sup>

Even in Hollywood, following BDS appeals, none of the twenty-six Oscar nominees in 2016 accepted junkets, worth \$55,000 apiece, offered by the Israeli government. BDS partners in the United States, like Jewish Voice for Peace, played a key role in that exceptionally successful campaign that received extensive coverage in the entertainment media and beyond.<sup>75</sup>

A year later, in 2017, six out of eleven National Football League players, including Michael Bennett, turned down a similar Israeli junket.<sup>76</sup> In a touching letter published by *The Nation*, Bennett wrote, "Like 1968 Olympian John Carlos always says, 'There is no partial commitment to justice. You are either in or you're out.' Well, I'm in."<sup>77</sup>

Also in 2017, the famous New Zealand artist Lorde joined the boycott by canceling a scheduled performance in Tel Aviv, becoming the most prominent and courageous artist of her generation to respect the Palestinian boycott picket line. Many other artists have quietly declined lucrative Israeli invitations, exercising

72. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, "Artists' Pledges for Palestinian Rights," BDS-movement.net, 3 July 2020, <https://bds-movement.net/cultural-boycott-pledges>.

73. Alex Ritman, "100-Plus LGBTQ Filmmakers to Boycott Israeli Festival (Exclusive)," *Hollywood Reporter*, 3 February 2020, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/80-lgbtq-filmmakers-boycott-israeli-film-festival-1282029>.

74. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, "And the Winner of Eurovision in Apartheid Tel Aviv Is ..." BDSmovement.net, 18 May 2019, <https://bds-movement.net/eurovision-winner>; For a tally of petition signers, see <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1b2UZRYSm1cZqblxHvz9Dcu15hf5PIMZRW2ldCKMaF8/>; "We, French Artists, Denounce Eurovision 2019 in Israel," Agence Media Palestine France blog, 10 May 2019, <http://www.agencemediapalestine.fr/blog/2019/05/10/we-french-artists-denounce-eurovision-2019-in-israel/>; Ben Beaumont-Thomas, "British Cultural Figures Urge BBC to Boycott Eurovision in Israel," *The Guardian*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/jan/29/british-cultural-figures-urge-bbc-to-boycott-eurovision-in-israel>; "Boycott Eurovision Song Contest hosted by Israel," *The Guardian*, 7 September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/sep/07/boycott-eurovision-song-contest-hosted-by-israel>; Pinkwatcher, "Boycott Eurovision in Israel and Tel Aviv Pridel!" <http://www.pinkwatchingisrael.com>, 28 January 2019, <http://www.pinkwatchingisrael.com/portfolio/boycott-eurovision-in-israel-and-tel-aviv-pridel/>; "Say No to Pinkwashing," BDSmovement.net, <https://bds-movement.net/pinkwashing>.

75. Itay Stern, "And the Oscar Goes To ... BDS? Hollywood Stars Snub Israel Swag Bag Visit," *Haaretz*, 25 February 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.773274>; Robert Tait, "Hollywood Stars Urged to Reject Free Oscar Goodie Bag Trip to Israel," *Telegraph*, 24 February 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/12172463/Hollywood-stars-urged-to-reject-free-Oscar-goodie-bag-trip-to-Israel.html>; "New Controversy Over Oscar Swag Bag" (video), CNN.com, 27 February 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2016/02/27/oscar-swag-bag-israel-liebermann-pkg.cnn>.

76. "More Than Half of NFL Players Booked for Israel PR Trip Withdraw," *The Guardian*, 15 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/feb/15/nfl-players-israel-trip-michael-bennett>.

77. Dave Zirin, "Why Michael Bennett Walked Away From the NFL's Israel Delegation," *The Nation*, 13 February 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/why-michael-bennett-walked-away-from-the-nfls-israel-delegation/>.

## Part of the strength of the BDS movement lies in its intersectional networks with other justice movements, especially in the United States and Europe.”

---

what the BDS movement terms a “silent boycott,” arguably the dominant form of heeding the BDS cultural boycott call, and it is growing impressively. In 2015, the iconic U.S. R&B singer Lauryn Hill canceled her scheduled performance in Israel, after appeals from Palestinian, Israeli, and international BDS activists. Earlier that year, almost a thousand cultural figures in Britain signed a pledge in support of the cultural boycott of Israel, following similar initiatives in Montreal (Canada), Ireland, and South Africa.<sup>78</sup>

Israel’s response to its growing isolation in the cultural field was to intensify the Brand Israel campaign and to create front organizations to spread its propaganda and dissuade artists from heeding BDS calls. One such organization, Creative Community for Peace (CCFP), presents itself as an entertainment industry organization, and lobbies artists to perform in Israel, while concealing that it is actually a front group for StandWithUs (SWU), a long-established right-wing, anti-Palestinian, pro-Israeli settler lobby group with ties to Israel’s far-right government.<sup>79</sup>

The trend of isolation is steady and growing. Already in 2010, a music industry insider warned that the “winds could be shifting” against Israel. He admitted that in a few months he had approached more than fifteen performing artists with proposals to give concerts in Israel but “none had agreed,” despite “extreme, big numbers” in fees.<sup>80</sup>

## Academic Boycott

Academic associations and dozens of student governments at Stanford, UCLA, Berkeley, and many other U.S., Canadian, and U.K. universities have voted in the last few years for various BDS measures, including divestment from companies

78. Yousef Munayyer, “Thank You, Lorde, for Standing Up for Palestinian Human Rights,” *Forward*, 26 December 2017, <https://forward.com/opinion/390845/thank-you-lorde-for-standing-up-for-palestinian-human-rights/>; “Lauryn Hill Cancels Israel Concert, Citing Inability to Perform in Ramallah,” NBC News, 5 May 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/r-b-star-lauryn-hill-cancels-israel-concert-over-ramallah-n353756>; Ran Boker and Ami Friedman, “Lauryn Hill Cancels Israel Show Following BDS Pressure,” *YnetNews*, 5 May 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4653468,00.html>; “500 Artists Against Israeli Apartheid,” BDSmovement.net, 26 February 2010, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/500-artists-against-israeli-apartheid>; Jillian Steinhauer, “Nearly 1,000 UK Artists Commit to Cultural Boycott of Israel,” *hyperallergic*.com, 17 February 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/183208/nearly-1000-uk-artists-commit-to-cultural-boycott-of-israel/>; “Irish Artists’ Pledge to Boycott Israel,” Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, September 2020, <https://www.ipsc.ie/cultural-boycott/ipsc-irish-artists-pledge-to-boycott-israel>; “South African Artists Against Apartheid: A Declaration,” South African Artists Against Apartheid, <https://www.southafricanartistsagainstapartheid.com/2010/11/declaration.html>.

79. “Fictitious Business Name Statement,” form, <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/IEA-Fict-Name-Statement-2016.pdf>; Nathan Guttman, “Stand With Us Draws Line on Israel,” *Forward*, 27 November 2011, <https://forward.com/news/146821/standwithus-draws-line-on-israel/>.

80. Nathan Guttman, “Boycott Targets Stars from Elvis to Elton,” *Forward*, 19 May 2010, <https://forward.com/news/128185/boycott-targets-stars-from-elvis-to-elton/>.

involved in Israel's occupation.<sup>81</sup> Students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Columbia University (with 61 percent support) both passed historic resolutions calling for divestment from Israel.<sup>82</sup>

Few forms of pressure have triggered as much alarm in Israel's establishment as the growing divestment movement on Western college campuses and the rapidly growing support for a comprehensive academic and cultural boycott of Israel and its complicit institutions. In parallel, many individual academics around the world have joined the widespread *silent* academic boycott of Israel—that is, the unannounced, yet very effective, shunning of academic visits to and relations with complicit Israeli universities.

Former Israeli Mossad chief Shabtai Shavit admits that BDS has become a “critical” challenge to Israel's system of injustice. “We are losing the fight for support for Israel in the academic world,” he writes. “An increasing number of Jewish students are turning away from Israel. The global BDS movement ... has grown, and quite a few Jews are members.”<sup>83</sup>

Israel realizes that an effective academic boycott would irreversibly hurt the “Brand Israel” and feed the calls for economic boycotts and, eventually, sanctions.<sup>84</sup> Israel's academic institutions, after all, are a pillar of Israel's regime of oppression, playing a major role in planning, implementing, justifying, and whitewashing Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people.

The complicity of Israeli universities takes many forms, from developing weapon systems and military doctrines used in the perpetration of Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity, to systematically providing the military-intelligence establishment with indispensable research—on archaeology, demography, geography, hydrology, and psychology, among other disciplines—to tolerating and often rewarding racist speech, theories, and “scientific” research. It also includes institutionalizing discrimination against Palestinian Arab citizens, among them scholars and students; suppressing Israeli academic research on Zionism and the Nakba; and the construction of campus facilities and dormitories in the occupied

---

81. Part of this section is drawn from Omar Barghouti, “Boycott, Academic Freedom, and the Moral Responsibility to Uphold Human Rights,” *Journal of Academic Freedom* 4 (2013); Olivia Exstrum, “Northwestern Poses Transparency Challenges as Students Move Forward with Divestment,” *Daily Northwestern*, 24 February 2015, <http://dailynorthwestern.com/2015/02/24/campus/northwestern-poses-transparency-challenges-as-students-move-forward-with-divestment/>.

82. “US BDS Victories,” US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, June 2019, <https://uscpr.org/usbdsvictories/>; PalYouthMvmt (@palyouthmvmt), “On Sep 23, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign student gov voted 22-11-7 to pass a BDS resolution titled ‘Human Rights Violations in University Investments + Police Forces’ to divest from companies that fund the American/Israeli military, prisons, police forces + ICE,” Twitter, 29 September 2020, 4:09 p.m., [https://twitter.com/palyouthmvmt/status/1311050380982267906?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1311050380982267906%7Ctwgr%5Eshare\\_3&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fmondoweiss.net%2F2020%2F09%2Fstudents-at-two-universities-just-voted-to-divest-from-israel%2F](https://twitter.com/palyouthmvmt/status/1311050380982267906?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1311050380982267906%7Ctwgr%5Eshare_3&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fmondoweiss.net%2F2020%2F09%2Fstudents-at-two-universities-just-voted-to-divest-from-israel%2F); Hannah Dreyfus, “Columbia Students Pass University's First-Ever Israel Boycott Referendum,” *Times of Israel*, 30 September 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/columbia-students-pass-universitys-first-ever-israel-boycott-referendum/>.

83. Shabtai Shavit, “Former Mossad Chief: For the First Time, I Fear for the Future of Zionism,” *Haaretz*, 23 November 2014, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-blindness-folly-cause-for-concern-1.5333876>.

84. Popper, “Israel Aims to Improve Its Public Image.”

Palestinian territory, as Hebrew University has done in East Jerusalem, for instance.<sup>85</sup>

Ariel University, located in the illegal Israeli settlement of the same name that was built on stolen Palestinian land, is another example of academic complicity. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israeli settlements and the transfer of Israeli settlers to occupied territory constitute a war crime. An independent campaign, No Ariel Ties, initiated by authoritative Palestinian bodies and supported by prominent academics worldwide, has called for nonrecognition of Ariel University and for ending all institutional ties with it. After pressure from the campaign, the scientific journal *Molecules* canceled a special issue with a guest editor from Ariel University, who insisted on falsely listing the university's address as "Ariel, Israel," refusing to correct it to the occupied Palestinian territory.<sup>86</sup>

## Entrenched Complicity

During the Israeli assault on Gaza in 2014, which led to the murder of hundreds of Palestinian children, Israeli academic institutions issued official statements declaring support for the massacre, promising faculty and student reserve soldiers actively involved in war crimes in Gaza various perks and privileges to show appreciation for their contribution to the state's "security."<sup>87</sup>

Examples of academic complicity in Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people abound. Here I list only a few of the most glaring. Technion prides itself on developing many of the weapon systems, particularly drone technologies, which were employed by the Israeli forces in their bloodbaths in Gaza. Tel Aviv University (TAU) has designed dozens of weapons used by the Israeli occupation forces. The Institute for National Security Studies also takes credit for the development of the so-called Dahiya Doctrine, or doctrine of disproportionate force, that is adopted by the Israeli army and which calls for "the destruction of the national [civilian] infrastructure, and intense suffering among the [civilian] population," as a means of defeating an otherwise "impossible" to defeat non-statal resistance. Moreover, TAU's leading philosopher, Asa Kasher, has co-authored with an army general an "ethical"

---

85. The Youth Empowerment Project: The Academic Watch, "Annual Summary Report, 2011–2012," November 2012, [https://usacbi.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Academic%20Watch\\_%20report1.pdf](https://usacbi.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Academic%20Watch_%20report1.pdf); Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel, "Campaign to Boycott the Oral History Conference at Hebrew University of Jerusalem," 1 December 2013, <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2293>; Yarden Zur, "Survey: Half of Arabs in Israeli Universities Suffer Racism," *Haaretz*, 4 July 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-survey-half-of-arabs-in-israeli-universities-suffer-racism-1.5491861>.

86. "Ariel Settlement Fact Sheet," B'Tselem, 17 July 2012, [https://www.btselem.org/settlements/20100830\\_facts\\_on\\_the\\_settlement\\_of\\_ariel](https://www.btselem.org/settlements/20100830_facts_on_the_settlement_of_ariel); "Practice Relating to Rule 130. Transfer of Own Civilian Population into Occupied Territory," IHL Database, [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2\\_rul\\_rule130](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_rul_rule130); No Academic Business As Usual With Ariel University, "Authoritative Palestinian Academic Bodies Call for Non-Recognition of and No Ties With Ariel University," 29 November 2018, <https://noarielties.org/no-academic-business-as-usual-with-ariel-university-and-all-other-israeli-academic-institutions-illegally-built-on-occupied-palestinian-land/>; No Academic Business As Usual With Ariel University, "Scientific Journal Refuses Normalization of Illegal Israeli Settlement-Based Ariel University," 28 September 2020, <https://noarielties.org/2020/09/28/scientific-journal-refuses-normalization-of-illegal-israeli-settlement-based-ariel-university/>.

87. Ali Abunimah, "Israeli Universities Lend Support to Gaza Massacre," Electronic Intifada, 25 July 2014, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israeli-universities-lend-support-gaza-massacre>; Mairav Zonszein, "Israel Killed More Palestinians in 2014 Than in Any Other Year Since 1967," *The Guardian*, 27 March 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/27/israel-kills-more-palestinians-2014-than-any-other-year-since-1967>; "BIU to Provide Scholarships for Called-Up Soldiers," *Israel National News*, 30 July 2014, [http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/Flash.aspx/300185#.U9nyo\\_mSyS8](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/Flash.aspx/300185#.U9nyo_mSyS8).

code of conduct for the Israeli army that justifies killing a large number of civilians when targeting resistance fighters.<sup>88</sup>

But universities in many Western countries, particularly the United States, are also involved with their respective military establishments, so what makes the complicity of Israeli academic institutions more worthy of censure and boycott? Israeli experts provide a decisive answer to this. Prominent TAU professor Abraham Katzir writes: “Each one of us is both an Israeli citizen and working in these [military] fields.” Academia and the army, writes Katzir, are “helping one another—something which doesn’t happen [elsewhere]; I’ve been in the U.S. and Europe, and there there is a disconnect between the [academic] workshops and the army; they hate the army! [With us], I think that we succeed by virtue of the fact that we help one another so much.” Haim Russo, CEO of Israeli drone manufacturer Elbit, went further, crediting academia with “standing behind this whole vast [Israeli military] industry.”<sup>89</sup>

In what PACBI describes as “a new low, even by the already dismal Israeli academic institutions’ ethical standards,” renowned Israeli academic Mordechai Kedar of Bar-Ilan University urged raping the wives, sisters, and mothers of Palestinian militants to deter them.<sup>90</sup>

Organically connected to cheering the murder of Palestinian civilians in Gaza is the atmosphere of militarization, repression, and intimidation that has prevailed in Israeli universities, where administrations joined the Israeli police and Shin Bet in clamping down on dissent by students and faculty peacefully protesting the war of aggression on Gaza.<sup>91</sup>

## Academic Freedom

The BDS movement upholds the universal right to academic freedom and therefore calls for the boycott of institutions, not individuals. PACBI subscribes to the UN definition of academic freedom, which prohibits the infringement on the academic freedom of others as well as discrimination and repression.<sup>92</sup>

---

88. “The Dahiya Doctrine and Israel’s Use of Disproportionate Force,” Institute for Middle East Understanding, 7 December 2012, <http://imeu.org/article/the-dahiya-doctrine-and-israels-use-of-disproportionate-force>; Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, “Do Not Undermine The Palestinian Struggle,” *Outlook: The Fully Loaded Magazine*, 30 April 2010, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/do-not-undermine-the-palestinian-struggle/265281>; Amos Harel, “The Philosopher Who Gave the IDF Moral Justification in Gaza,” *Haaretz*, 5 February 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/the-philosopher-who-gave-the-idf-moral-justification-in-gaza-1.269527>; Stop the Wall, “European Funding for Israeli Actors That Are Complicit With Violations of International Law Must Not Be Allowed to Continue,” May 2011, <https://stophthewall.org/>.

89. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, “Do Not Undermine the Palestinian Struggle,” *Outlook India*, 30 April 2010, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/do-not-undermine-the-palestinian-struggle/265281>.

90. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, “Israeli universities deeply Involved in Gaza Massacre: Academic Boycott Now!” BDSmovement.net, 3 August 2014, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/israeli-universities-deeply-involved-gaza-massacre-academic-boycott-now-1>; Gianluca Mezzofiore, “Israeli Professor: Rape Hamas Militants’ Mothers and Sisters to Deter Terrorist Attacks,” *International Business Times*, 1 August 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/israeli-professor-rape-hamas-militants-mothers-sisters-deter-terrorist-attacks-1457836>.

91. Ali Abunimah, “Israeli Universities Lend Support to Gaza Massacre,” Electronic Intifada, 25 July 2014, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israeli-universities-lend-support-gaza-massacre>.

92. United Nations, Economic and Social Council, “Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 21st Session, 15 November–3 December 1999, <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slQ6QSmIBEDzFEovLCuW%2bKyH%2bnXprasyMzd2e8mx4cYID1VMUKXaG3Jw9bomilKKS84HB8c9nIHQ9mUemvt0Fbz%2f0SS7kENyDv%5f2bYPWAXmW47K5jTga59puHtt3NZr>.

## **The BDS movement upholds the universal right to academic freedom and therefore calls for the boycott of institutions, not individuals.”**

---

Anchored in precepts of international law and universal human rights, PACBI rejects, on principle, any McCarthyite-type political tests or boycotts of individuals based on their opinion or identity (such as citizenship, race, gender, or religion). If, however, an individual is representing the state of Israel or a complicit Israeli institution (such as a dean, rector, or president), or is commissioned/recruited to participate in Israel’s efforts to “rebrand” itself,

then her/his activities are subject to the institutional boycott the BDS movement is calling for.<sup>93</sup> The “boycott conflicts with academic freedom” argument also confuses academic *privileges* with academic freedom, and fails, accordingly, to grasp that an institutional academic boycott would harm perks and privileges, not rights.<sup>94</sup>

Some critics may argue that BDS contravenes academic freedom because it cannot but hurt individual academics if it is to be effective at all. This argument is problematic on many levels. By ignoring the real, systematic Israeli suppression of Palestinian academic freedom and focusing solely on the hypothetical infringement on Israeli academic freedom that the boycott allegedly would entail, this argument is racist.

The academic boycott of Israel called for by Palestinian civil society is related to Israel’s relentless and deliberate attack on Palestinian education, which some have termed *scholasticide* and which goes back to the 1948 Nakba. An Israeli researcher’s dissertation, for instance, reveals that during and immediately after the Nakba, tens of thousands of books, stolen from Palestinian homes, schools, and libraries in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Safad, and elsewhere, were plundered or destroyed by Zionist—and later Israeli—militias.<sup>95</sup>

In the first few weeks of the first Palestinian Intifada (1987–1993), Israel shut down all Palestinian universities (some, like Birzeit, for several consecutive years), and then it closed all 1,194 Palestinian schools in the occupied West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza.<sup>96</sup> Next came the kindergartens. Eventually, every educational institution in the occupied Palestinian territory was forcibly closed. This prompted Palestinians to build an “illegal network” of underground

---

93. Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, “PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel,” BDSmovement.net, 9 July 2014, <https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/academic-boycott-guidelines>.

94. Omar Barghouti, “A Tipping Point?” *Inside Higher Ed*, 3 January 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/01/03/essay-growth-support-boycott-israeli-universities>.

95. Ben Schott, “Scholasticide,” *New York Times*, 14 January 2009, [http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/scholasticide/?\\_r=0](http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/scholasticide/?_r=0); “Researcher: Israel Destroyed Palestinian Books,” *ynetnews.com*, 28 January 2010, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3841252,00.html>; Gish Amit, “Salvage or Plunder? Israel’s ‘Collection’ of Private Palestinian Libraries in West Jerusalem,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no.4 (2011): 6–23.

96. “Israelis Kill 3 in Occupied Lands,” *Lawrence Journal*, 30 December 1988, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=2199&cdat=19881230&id=kUlyAAAAIBAJ&csjd=HeYFAAAAIBAJ&pg=3400,6780177>; Daniel Williams, “Major Palestinian University to Reopen,” 21 April 1992, *Los Angeles Times*, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-04-21-mn-598-story.html>.



schools.

Palestinian scholars and students are methodically denied their basic rights, including academic freedom, and are often subjected to imprisonment, denial of freedom of movement, even violent attacks on themselves or their institutions, including the bombing of a Palestinian university in Gaza in 2014.<sup>97</sup>

Palestinian citizens of Israel have also suffered for decades from the structural racism that pervades the Israeli educational system. According to Human Rights Watch:

Discrimination at every level of the [Israeli] education system winnows out a progressively larger proportion of Palestinian Arab children as they progress through the school system—or channels those who persevere away from the opportunities of higher education. The hurdles Palestinian Arab students face from kindergarten to university function like a series of sieves with sequentially finer holes.

In the past, many supported a much more sweeping academic boycott against apartheid South Africa's universities and individual academics, yet today they are reluctant to support a strictly institutional boycott of Israeli academic institutions complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights. They can and should be called out for their hypocrisy.

## Failure of Israel's Anti-BDS War

In response to the impressive growth of support for Palestinian rights in recent years, particularly through BDS, Israel has since 2014 waged a global war on the BDS movement, including extensive propaganda, legal warfare, and espionage.<sup>99</sup> In 2016, Gilad Erdan, then Israel's minister of strategic affairs, a ministry that specializes in fighting the BDS movement globally, established a "tarnishing unit" to smear Palestinian, Israeli, and international human rights defenders in the BDS movement. Another Israeli minister has publicly threatened BDS activists (including myself) with "targeted civil assassination," drawing condemnation from Amnesty International.<sup>100</sup>

---

97. Riham Barghouti, "The Struggle for an Equal Right to Academic Freedom," U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, <http://www.usacbi.org/2011/06/barghouti-struggle-equal-right/>; Rami Meghari, "Israel Attacks My University—with Bombs and Lies," *Electronic Intifada*, 4 August 2014, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israel-attacks-my-university-bombs-and-lies/13697>.

98. Human Rights Watch, "Second Class: Discrimination against Palestinian Arab Children in Israel's Schools," September 2001, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/israel2>.

99. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Israel's Legal Warfare on BDS Fosters Repression and McCarthyism Across the World," *BDSmovement.net*, 17 March 2016, <https://bdsmovement.net/2016/israels-legal-warfare-on-bds-fosters-repression-13825>; Barak David, "Netanyahu Convenes Ministers to Discuss Growing Israel Economic Boycott Threats," *Haaretz*, 9 February 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.573273>; Alex Kane, "Israel Commandeers UN for Anti-BDS Pep Rally," *Mondoweiss*, 1 June 2016, <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/06/israel-commandeers-un-for-anti-bds-pep-rally/>; "Legislation," *Palestine Legal*, <http://palestinelegal.org/righttoboycott>; Daniel Estrin, "Covertly, Israel Prepares to Fight Boycott Activists Online," *Sun Sentinel*, 17 February 2016, <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/florida-jewish-journal/jj-covertly-israel-prepares-to-fight-boycott-activists-online-20160217-story.html>.

100. Amir Oren, "Israel Setting Up 'Dirty Tricks' Unit to Find, Spread Dirt on BDS Groups," *Haaretz*, 19 June 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.725684>; Mairav Zonszein, "In Israel, BDS Is Winning," 972 Mag, 28 March 2016, <http://972mag.com/in-israel-bds-is-winning/118198/>; "Israeli Government Must Cease Intimidation of Human Rights Defenders, Protect Them from Attacks," *Amnesty*, 12 April 2016, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/israeli-government-must-cease-intimidation-of-human-rights-defenders-protect-them-from-attacks/>.

Just last year, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution, H.Res. 246, targeting the BDS movement. This resolution, which fundamentally mischaracterizes the movement's goals, is only the latest attempt by Israel's supporters in Congress to demonize and suppress support for BDS and Palestinian rights. H.Res. 246 is a sweeping condemnation of Americans who advocate for Palestinian rights using BDS tactics. It reinforces other unconstitutional anti-boycott measures, including those passed by twenty-eight state legislatures, that are reminiscent of "McCarthy era tactics," according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).<sup>101</sup> It also exacerbates the oppressive atmosphere that Palestinians and their supporters have faced during the Trump administration, which has publicly smeared members of Congress who speak out in support of Palestinian freedom.<sup>102</sup>

In response to H.Res. 246 and similarly repressive legislative measures, House member Ilhan Omar, joined by Rashida Tlaib, civil rights icon John Lewis, and twelve other cosponsors, introduced H.Res. 496, which defends "the right to participate in boycotts in pursuit of civil and human rights at home and abroad, as protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution."<sup>103</sup> The resilient, yet slowly eroding, staunch support in Congress for Israel, regardless of what it does to the Palestinians, reflects a great disconnect with U.S. public opinion, which is finally shifting on Palestinian rights and even on BDS.

While Israel celebrates its enormous influence in the United States, it is missing the growing undercurrent of resentment and apprehension that its McCarthyite tactics are creating.<sup>104</sup> A University of Maryland poll published earlier this year, for instance, revealed that 72 percent of all Americans (80 percent of Democrats) were against anti-BDS laws because they infringe on freedom of speech. Among those who have heard of BDS, 42 percent of Americans (77 percent of Democrats) supported the statement that "BDS is a legitimate, peaceful way of opposing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Inspired by the South-African anti-apartheid movement, BDS urges action to pressure Israel to comply with

101. "H.Res.246—Opposing Efforts to Delegitimize the State of Israel and the Global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement targeting Israel," 116th Congress, 2019–2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116th-congress/house-resolution/246/text>. H.Res. 246 also includes a specific smear against this author that has been pushed by Israel lobby groups like AIPAC by quoting a single, out-of-context sentence from a talk in 2013. The same false assertion is repeated in a similar Senate resolution, S. Res. 120; Omar Barghouti, "Why Americans Should Support BDS," *The Nation*, 26 August 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/bds-house-resolution-trump-squad-omar-aocl/>; "Backdoor Legislative Efforts Show Lawmakers' True Intent: Silencing Advocacy for Palestinian Rights," *Palestine Legal*, 12 July 2019, <https://palestinelegal.org/news/2019/7/12/backdoor-legislative-efforts-silencing-palestinian-rights/>; "ACLU Statement on S. 170, the Combating BDS Act," ACLU, 10 October 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/aclu-statement-s-170-combating-bds-act>; "ACLU Comment on Senate Passage of S.1 and Combating BDS Act," 5 February 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-comment-senate-passage-s1-and-combating-bds-act?redirect=news/aclu-comment-senate-passage-s1-and-combating-bds-act>.

102. Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "It would show great weakness if Israel allowed Rep. Omar and Rep.Tlaib to visit. They hate Israel & all Jewish people, & there is nothing that can be said or done to change their minds. Minnesota and Michigan will have a hard time putting them back in office. They are a disgrace!" Twitter, 15 August 2019, 8:57 a.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1162000480681287683>.

103. Ilhan Omar, "Text—H.Res.496—116th Congress (2019–2020): Affirming that all Americans have the right to participate in boycotts in pursuit of civil and human rights at home and abroad, as protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution," <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116th-congress/house-resolution/496/text>.

104. Michael Arria, "Israel's New US Ambassador Took Credit for States Passing Anti-BDS Laws," *Mondoweiss*, 12 May 2020, <https://mondoweiss.net/2020/05/israels-new-us-ambassador-took-credit-for-states-passing-anti-bds-laws/>; Ali Abunimah, "Israel 'Quietly' Pushed for Anti-BDS Legislation in US, UK," *Electronic Intifada*, 24 February 2016, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/israel-quietly-pushed-anti-bds-legislation-us-uk>.



international law. Opposing Israeli policy does not equal antisemitism.”<sup>105</sup> An earlier poll in 2018, also by the University of Maryland, showed that 40 percent of Americans (56 percent of Democrats) support imposing sanctions or more serious measures on Israel to stop the expansion of its illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.<sup>106</sup>

Reflecting this swelling grassroots support for holding Israel to account over its crimes against the Palestinian people, more ranking politicians, including key former Democratic presidential nominees, are now ready to advocate for leveraging U.S. aid to Israel to bring about its (at least partial) compliance with international law.

For instance, a recent letter in Congress drafted by Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), and Betty McCollum (D-MN) and endorsed by others, including Sen. Bernie Sanders, warns that Israel’s formal annexation of more occupied Palestinian territory would “lay the groundwork for Israel becoming an apartheid state.”<sup>107</sup> It reiterated the fact that annexation is prohibited by Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and is “a prohibited act of aggression under Article 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of which Israel is a party.” It also referred to Israel’s already existing settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as “a war crime under Article 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court because Israel, as the Occupying Power, is prohibited from transferring, either directly or indirectly, parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” The letter concluded with a stark threat that is rare in Congress when it comes to Israel:

Should the Israeli government move forward with the planned annexation with this administration’s acquiescence, we will work to ensure non-recognition as well as pursue conditions on the \$3.8 billion in U.S. military funding to Israel, including human rights conditions and withholding funds for the off-shore procurement of Israeli weapons equal to or exceeding the amount the Israeli government spends annually to fund settlements, as well as the policies and practices that sustain and enable them.

The substantial shift in U.S. public opinion and the beginning of a shift in the media and among policymakers are due to several factors, including many years of hard work by Palestine solidarity activists in progressive circles, the growth of the BDS movement’s impact in the liberal mainstream, and what one may call the Trump effect. Trump’s reference to Israel’s military occupation and apartheid policies as an inspiration for his wall with Mexico, anti-Muslim ban, racial profiling, mass surveillance projects, and other anti-democratic measures has effectively

---

105. Shibley Telhami, “What Do Americans Think of the BDS Movement, Aimed at Israel? And Does It Matter for the US Election?” Brookings Institution, 8 January 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/01/08/what-do-americans-think-of-the-bds-movement-aimed-at-israel/>.

106. Shibley Telhami, “Americans Are Increasingly Critical of Israel,” Brookings Institution, 12 December 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/12/12/americans-are-increasingly-critical-of-israel/>.

107. Jacob Kornbluh, “Four Progressive Congresswomen Circulate Letter Threatening to Condition Aid to Israel Over Annexation,” *Jewish Insider*, 29 June 2020, <https://jewishinsider.com/2020/06/four-progressive-congresswomen-circulate-letter-threatening-to-condition-aid-to-israel-over-annexation/?fbclid=IwAR0fj74xRWwrAKc12WlgD2wQPRORTDJaJyKCjH18Mc41JhEjgoaKf0xnfU8>.

**“The resilient, yet slowly eroding, staunch support in Congress for Israel, regardless of what it does to the Palestinians, reflects a great disconnect with U.S. public opinion, which is finally shifting on Palestinian rights and even on BDS.”**

---

a recent extensive survey by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a right-wing Israel lobby, “up to 25%” of liberal Jewish Americans are “intensely critical of Israel and Zionism itself, including attitudes that Zionism may be a colonial and/or racist, apartheid movement as practiced in Israel today.”<sup>108</sup> A recent survey conducted by the more liberal Israel lobby group, J Street, and published in November 2020 shows that 22 percent of Jewish Americans under the age of 40 support a full boycott of Israel.<sup>109</sup>

Even supporting a nonracial democracy and equal rights for all in a unitary state and questioning the right of Israel to remain an exclusionary “Jewish state” that denies the indigenous Palestinians their UN-stipulated rights have become far more mainstream in the United States. According to the previously mentioned 2018 Brookings Institution poll, for instance, 64 percent of all Americans “support a single democratic state in which Arabs and Jews are equal even if that means Israel would no longer be a politically Jewish state.”<sup>110</sup>

For the record, the BDS movement “does not advocate for a particular solution to the conflict and does not call for either a ‘one state solution’ or a ‘two state solution.’ Instead, BDS focuses on the realization of basic rights and the implementation of international law.”<sup>111</sup> The United Nations has characterized these rights as “inalienable rights of the Palestinian people,” emphasizing that “full respect for and realization of” these rights “are indispensable for the solution of

made it easier for a large portion of the U.S. public that rejects these policies to criticize Israel and even call for sanctions against it.

Progressive Jewish groups have played an important role in this overall shift in U.S. public opinion, undermining the weaponized use of false anti-Semitism charges by Israel and its lobby groups to muzzle criticism of Israel and legitimizing calls for imposing sanctions. The dramatic flux in liberal Jewish Americans’ views of Israel, particularly the younger generation, and their growing support for Palestinian rights, including using BDS tactics, are particularly noteworthy. According to

---

108. Irwin J. Mansdorf, “American Jewry in Transition? How Attitudes Toward Israel May Be Shifting,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 21 July 2020, <https://jcpa.org/article/american-jewry-in-transition-how-attitudes-toward-israel-may-be-shifting/>.

109. Philip Weiss, “A Biden Presidency Would Bring Huge Pressure on Liberal Zionists from Pro-BDS Jews,” Mondoweiss, 5 November 2020, <https://mondoweiss.net/2020/11/a-biden-presidency-would-bring-huge-pressure-on-liberal-zionists-from-pro-bds-jews/>.

110. Talhami, “Americans Are Increasingly Critical of Israel.”

111. “FAQs: Section 1. Understanding BDS,” BDSmovement.net, <https://bdsmovement.net/faqs#collapse16233>.

the question of Palestine.”<sup>112</sup> As such, the BDS movement promotes accountability to international obligations that must be respected in any political solution that is conducive to a just and lasting peace.

In response to Israel’s legal warfare, or lawfare, on BDS in Congress as well as many U.S. state legislatures, the legal advocacy group Palestine Legal, supported by the Center for Constitutional Rights and the National Lawyers Guild, stepped up its defense of the right to advocate for BDS on free speech grounds. The ACLU has played a decisive role in exposing the unconstitutionality of Israel’s lawfare against BDS. As a result, several federal courts have already frozen the respective anti-BDS legislation of the states of Kansas, Texas, and Arizona, citing their incompatibility with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>113</sup>

In a major blow to Israel’s lawfare, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled unanimously a few months ago that the French highest court’s 2015 criminal conviction of BDS activists advocating nonviolent boycotts of Israeli goods violated Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights. In effect, the court ruled that calling for boycotting Israel to end its decades-long grave violations of Palestinian rights does not constitute incitement to discrimination, hate, or anti-Jewish bigotry.<sup>114</sup>

## Weaponized “New Anti-Semitism”

Israel has had a difficult time convincing anyone beyond its loyal lobby groups and anti-Palestinian partners that BDS is “anti-Semitic,” mainly because of the movement’s consistent, categorical, and public rejection of racism, including anti-Jewish bigotry, and because of the significant Jewish support worldwide for the movement. BDS is today supported by a fast-rising number of Jewish millennials, who can no longer reconcile their liberal values with what Zionism and Israel stand for today.<sup>115</sup> Support for BDS is also growing among prominent Jewish academics, writers, filmmakers, philosophers, and human rights defenders.

---

112. United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, “The Right of Return of the Palestinian People,” 1 November 1978, <https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/805C-731452035912852569D1005C1201>.

113. ACLU, “ACLU Letter to the Senate Opposing Israel Anti-Boycott Act,” 17 July 2017, <https://www.aclu.org/letter/aclu-letter-senate-opposing-israel-anti-boycott-act>; Brian Haus and Kate Ruane, “In Congress, a Threat to Americans’ First Amendment Right to Boycott,” 28 January 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/congress-threat-americans-first-amendment-right-boycott>; ACLU, “In First, Judge Blocks Kansas Law Aimed at Boycotts of Israel,” 30 January 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/first-judge-blocks-kansas-law-aimed-boycotts-israel>; ACLU, “Third Federal Court Blocks Anti-BDS Law as Unconstitutional,” 25 April 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/third-federal-court-blocks-anti-bds-law-unconstitutional>; ACLU, “Federal Court Blocks Arizona Law Aimed at Anti-Israel Boycotts,” 27 September 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/federal-court-blocks-arizona-law-aimed-anti-israel-boycotts>.

114. European Court of Human Rights, “Affaire Baldassi et Autres c. France,” [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng/%7B%22itemid%22:\[%22001-202756%22\]%7D](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng/%7B%22itemid%22:[%22001-202756%22]%7D); Palestinian BDS National Committee, “European Court of Human Rights Deals Major Blow to Israel’s War on Palestine Solidarity,” BDSmovement.net, 11 June 2020, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/european-court-human-rights-deals-major-blow-israel%E2%80%99s-war-palestine-solidarity>.

115. This section is partially based on Omar Barghouti, “Two Degrees of Separation: Israel, the Palestinians and the Fraudulent Use of Antisemitism,” in Jewish Voice for Peace, *On Antisemitism, Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017); See also Moshe Machover, Barry Trachtenberg, and Kyle Stanton, “Current Issues In Depth: Zionism, Israel, and Anti-Semitism: Dangerous Conflation,” (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2019), <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1650164>; For Jewish millennial voting patterns, see <https://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2014-jstreet-national-election-night-crosstabs.pdf>.

With the failure of its lawfare strategy's goal of criminalizing BDS or squashing it, Israel and its lobby groups have aggressively promoted a new, revisionist definition of anti-Semitism that aims "to shield Israel from being held accountable to universal standards of human rights and international law," as stated by more than forty progressive Jewish organizations worldwide in 2018.<sup>116</sup>

Claiming that boycotting Israel is intrinsically anti-Semitic is not only baseless propaganda; it absurdly equates Israel with "all Jews." This is as bigoted as claiming that boycotting a self-defined Islamic state like Saudi Arabia, say, over its legalized discrimination against women or its war crimes in Yemen would necessarily be Islamophobic.<sup>117</sup>

In May 2019, more than 240 Jewish and Israeli scholars, many of whom are distinguished academics specializing in anti-Semitism, Jewish history, and the history of the Holocaust, issued a statement condemning a German Bundestag resolution that smears the BDS movement for Palestinian rights as anti-Semitic. Crucially, their statement accuses the German resolution of doing nothing to "advance the urgent fight against anti-Semitism." The statement says:

[W]e all reject the deceitful allegation that BDS as such is anti-Semitic and maintain that boycotts are a legitimate and non-violent tool of resistance. We, leading researchers of anti-Semitism included, assert that one should be considered an anti-Semite according to the content and the context of one's words and deeds—whether they come from BDS supporters or not. Regrettably, the adopted motion ignores the explicit opposition of the BDS movement to "all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism."

The BDS movement seeks to influence the policies of the government of a state that is responsible for the ongoing occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people. Such policies cannot be immune to criticism. In this context, it should also be noted that many Jewish and Israeli individuals and groups either support BDS explicitly, or defend the right to support it. We consider it inappropriate and offensive when German governmental and parliamentary institutions label them anti-Semitic.<sup>118</sup>

One day before the Bundestag resolution was passed, the German government released a study pointing out that 90 percent of the anti-Semitic—and other racist/xenophobic—attacks in Germany come from the far right. A 2020 report by the

---

116. Ruth English, "Israeli Minister: Criticizing Israel Is the New Antisemitism," *Washington Post*, 4 May 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/04/israeli-minister-criticizing-israel-is-the-new-antisemitism/>; "First-Ever: 40+ Jewish Groups Worldwide Oppose Equating Antisemitism With Criticism of Israel," *Jewish Voice for Peace*, 17 July 2018, <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/first-ever-40-jewish-groups-worldwide-oppose-equating-antisemitism-with-criticism-of-israel/>.

117. "BDS Isn't Anti-Semitic, Says Gideon Levy. Listen to Our Podcast, While It's Still Legal," *Haaretz*, 16 December 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/podcasts/bds-isn-t-anti-semitic-says-gideon-levy-1.6746868>; Omar Barghouti, "Why Israel Fears the Boycott," *New York Times*, 31 January 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/01/opinion/sunday/why-the-boycott-movement-scares-israel.html?mcubz=2>.

118. "Call by 240 Jewish and Israeli Scholars to German Government on BDS and Anti-Semitism," 3 June 2019, <https://www.scribd.com/document/412475185/Call-by-240-Jewish-and-Israeli-scholars-to-German-government-on-BDS-and-Anti-Semitism>.

German government shows that this has risen to 93 percent.<sup>119</sup> Those 93 percent come from the voter pool of the patently anti-Semitic, far-right party, Alternative für Deutschland, which has proposed an even more anti-democratic resolution, completely outlawing the BDS movement.

Daniel Blatman, the chief historian of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum, was even more blunt in his critique of the German resolution. He wrote:

That is how a country where anti-Semitism was a political tool that contributed to the rise of the Nazis' murderous enterprise became a country that promotes distortion of anti-Semitism as a tool to facilitate the political persecution of a nonviolent [BDS] movement that fights the occupation, the oppression of the Palestinians and the war crimes Israel perpetrates in the territories.<sup>120</sup>

Most recently, more than 377 scholars and artists from more than thirty countries signed a pledge opposing litmus tests and political interference by institutions, municipalities, and public officials in Germany aimed at silencing advocates for Palestinian rights under international law.<sup>121</sup> The signatories have committed not to serve on juries or prize committees or in academic consultations in Germany whenever there are “convincing indicators that their decisions may be subject to ideological or political interference or litmus tests.”

Israel has for decades abused the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and fabricated charges of anti-Semitism that ignore the very real, growing, and increasingly murderous anti-Jewish racism, especially in Western countries, to establish a doctrine of exceptionalism. This is not only to justify and normalize the Zionist ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinians and the settler-colonial project in Palestine, but also to shield Israel's regime of occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid from accountability before international law. With this exceptionalism, Israel has become a state above the law, placed “on a pedestal,” as Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu once said, above all other states.<sup>122</sup>

Over the last decade, Israel has steadily shifted to the far right, and its colonization and apartheid policies against Palestinians have grown more violent and criminal, effectively dropping the already torn mask of “democracy” and “liberalism,” relatively shaking its “pedestal” and eroding its exceptionalism. In 1967, prominent Jewish-American writer I. F. Stone predicted this fate:

Israel is creating a kind of moral schizophrenia in world Jewry. In the

---

119. Christopher F. Schuetz, “Anti-Semitic Crime Rises in Germany, and Far Right Is Blamed,” *New York Times*, 14 May 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/14/world/europe/anti-semitic-crime-germany.html>; David Rising, “Anti-Semitic Crime Rises in Germany, Most From Far Right,” Associated Press, 27 May 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/d60fc5e3e03d1318c85c5e396a3c1715>.

120. Daniel Blatman, “Maybe, When it Comes to Antisemitism, No ‘Different Germany’ Exists,” *Haaretz*, 3 July 2019.

121. “Opposing Political Litmus Tests: Scholars and Cultural Figures Stand Against Silencing of Advocates for Palestinian Rights in Germany,” <https://nopoliticallitmustests.wordpress.com/signatories-pledge-opposing-political-litmus-tests-in-germany/>; “Opposing Political Litmus Tests: Pledge Opposing Ideological or Political Interference and Litmus Tests in Germany,” <https://nopoliticallitmustests.wordpress.com/pledge-opposing-ideological-or-political-interference-and-litmus-tests-in-germany/>.

122. Desmond Tutu, “Apartheid in the Holy Land,” *The Guardian*, 28 April 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/29/comment>.

outside world the welfare of Jewry depends on the maintenance of secular, non-racial, pluralistic societies. In Israel, Jewry finds itself defending a society in which mixed marriages cannot be legalized, in which the ideal is racial and exclusionist.<sup>123</sup>

Failing to counter the growth of the BDS movement worldwide or to mitigate its growing impact in effecting divestment decisions by some of the world's largest pension and sovereign funds, on campuses, in churches, among artists, and trade unions, Israel resorted to its weapon of choice—bullying dissenters, opponents of its grave human rights violations, and people of conscience who stand in solidarity with Palestinian rights by labeling them “anti-Semites.” The formula is simple: to maintain Israel's impunity and exceptionalism, those who dare to question either must be bullied into silence, and there is no better “silencer” than the epithet of anti-Semitism.

This fraudulent “new anti-Semitism” dogma that Israel is promoting presents a substantial danger to people of conscience everywhere who advocate for Palestinian rights, including those of the Jewish faith, as it seeks to delegitimize and silence human rights campaigning against Israel's system of injustice or even its specific policies. Since there is nothing Jewish about Israel's regime of occupation, siege, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid, there is nothing inherently anti-Jewish, then, about a nonviolent, morally consistent human rights struggle to end this system of oppression.<sup>124</sup>

Conflating opposition to the state of Israel with anti-Semitism is also perilous to Jewish communities the world over because it dilutes the notion of anti-Jewish racism beyond recognition and, arguably, nourishes real anti-Jewish bigotry by indirectly implicating Jewish communities at large in Israel's egregious crimes against the Palestinians and others. Zionism, after all, has always thrived on actual anti-Semitism; in fact, during the rise of Nazi anti-Jewish legislation in Germany in the 1930s, the Zionist movement at the time viewed such legislation as a victory against what it viewed as the worst enemy of Zionism—assimilation.<sup>125</sup>

And more recently, in the Israeli media in February 2019, the Israeli government hosted the prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary “who have been accused of being anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic.” Defending this Israeli partnership with anti-Semitic leaders, Likud member of parliament Anat Berko said, “They might be anti-Semites, but they're on our side.”<sup>126</sup>

The Israeli government and prominent figures associated with it have often trafficked in anti-Semitic tropes without shame. To promote Eurovision in Tel Aviv, for example, the Israeli government produced a promotional video that contained

---

123. I. F. Stone, “Holy War,” *New York Review of Books*, 3 August 1967, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1967/08/03/holy-war/>.

124. Gideon Levy, “Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians, or, Democratic Israel at Work,” *Haaretz*, 11 May 2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/ethnic-cleansing-of-palestinians-or-democratic-israel-at-work-1.361196>.

125. Eli Aminov, “The Mutual Dependency of Zionism and Anti-Semitism,” *AlterNet*, 28 May 2016, <http://www.alternet.org/grayzone-project/mutual-dependency-zionism-and-antisemitism>.

126. Eitan Nechin, “Netanyahu Now Endorses Jewish Fascism,” *Haaretz*, 21 February 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/premium-u-s-jews-netanyahu-has-now-endorsed-jewish-fascism-cut-your-ties-with-him-now-1.6957970>.



blatant anti-Semitic content (describing Jews as “greedy”) and has yet to remove that video or apologize for it.<sup>127</sup>

In 2017, Yair Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister’s son and a rising young leader on the right, posted an indisputably anti-Semitic cartoon attacking Jewish American philanthropist George Soros. No apology or retraction has yet been issued by the younger Netanyahu. On the contrary, according to a Swiss magazine, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s close advisers admitted to hatching the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory against Soros that Hungary’s xenophobic Prime Minister Viktor Orban later adopted.<sup>128</sup>

Despite the massive investment in the war on BDS, Israel’s anti-BDS strategy appears to be failing, as some major Israeli and Israel lobby groups have lately admitted. Since 2016, and in a major setback for Israel’s legal war on BDS, the European Union, the governments of Sweden, Ireland, and Netherlands, as well as leading international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and the ACLU, have all defended the right to boycott Israel as freedom of speech.<sup>129</sup>

## Conclusion: Do No Harm

The BDS movement upholds solidarity with the oppressed at its most fundamental level. This entails working to cut links of complicity with the oppressor—in other words, and at the most basic level, to do no harm. Identifying responsibility and insisting on accountability are the most crucial phases of solidarity. When Palestinians call for boycotting an institution or divesting from a multinational corporation that is implicated in Israel’s violations of our human rights, they are calling for what Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. formulated, in his last speech in 1968, as “withdrawing ... cooperation with an evil system.”<sup>130</sup> Doing so is hardly charitable, let alone heroic. It is a profound moral obligation.

In the U.S. context, solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for human and political rights means first and foremost ending the unparalleled U.S. complicity in maintaining and entrenching Israel’s regime of occupation and apartheid.

127. Allison Kaplan Sommer, “Greedy Jews, Occupation, and ‘Lovely Bitches’: Israel’s Eurovision Video Pushes Limits and Draws Fire,” *Haaretz*, 10 May 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/eurovision/.premium-greedy-jews-and-occupation-israel-s-eurovision-video-pushes-limits-and-draws-fire-1.7221691>.

128. “Soros and Reptilians Controlling the World: Yair Netanyahu Posts Meme Rife With Anti-Semitic Themes,” *Haaretz*, 9 September 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/yair-netanyahu-posts-meme-rife-with-anti-semitic-themes-1.5449468>; Hannes Grassegger, “The Unbelievable Story of the Plot Against George Soros,” *Buzzfeed News*, 20 January 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/hnsgrassegger/george-soros-conspiracy-finkelstein-birnbaum-orban-netanyahu>.

129. “EU Backs the Right to Boycott Israel: Mogherini Cites Freedom of Speech,” *EUBulletin*, 1 November 2016, <http://www.eubulletin.com/6222-eu-backs-the-right-to-boycott-israel-mogherini-cites-freedom-of-speech.html>; Palestinian BDS National Committee, “Irish and Dutch Governments Join Sweden in Speaking Out for Right to Call for BDS,” *BDSmovement.net*, 28 May 2016, <https://bdsmovement.net/2016/irish-dutch-join-sweden-right-to-boycott-14143/>; “Israeli Government Must Cease Intimidation of Human Rights Defenders, Protect Them From Attacks,” *Amnesty*, 12 April 2016, <http://amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/israeli-government-must-cess-intimidation-of-human-rights-defenders-protect-them-from-attacks/>; “Press Release: FIDH Supports the Right to Participate in and Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions,” 20 July 2016, International Federation for Human Rights, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/north-africa-middle-east/israel-palestine/fidh-supports-the-right-to-participate-in-and-call-for-boycott>; ACLU of New York, “Legislative Memo: In Opposition of Prohibiting Politically Motivated Boycotts,” <http://www.nyclu.org/content/opposition-of-prohibiting-politically-motivated-boycotts>.

130. Louis Menand, “When Martin Luther King Jr. Became a Leader,” *New Yorker*, 4 April 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/when-martin-luther-king-jr-became-a-leader>.

Minimally, this entails pressuring the U.S. government to heed Amnesty International's call to stop its military funding for the Israeli government, which amounts to \$3.8–\$4.5 billion; to allow the UN and international courts to hold Israel to account for its war crimes and crimes against humanity like every other pariah state; and to ban the products of all companies that are complicit in Israel's settlement enterprise and included in the about-to-be-published UN Human Rights Council list.<sup>131</sup>

It includes student and faculty pressure on universities to end all links, especially joint military and “security” research with complicit Israeli universities, and cultural boycott campaigns to convince cultural institutions, writers and artists to stop artwashing Israel's human rights violations.<sup>132</sup>

It includes campaigning in city councils, churches, and universities, among others, to adopt ethical procurement and investment guidelines that exclude companies implicated in human rights violations in the U.K., Palestine, and elsewhere around the world.<sup>133</sup>

But why should an average person in the West today stand in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for rights at a time when her own country may be suffering from increased unemployment, poverty, systemic racism, and deteriorating health care, education, and infrastructure, especially given the Covid-19 crisis?

One answer that focuses on the *responsibility* dimension of solidarity is provided by former South African anti-apartheid leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”<sup>134</sup> If you are a citizen of a relatively democratic society, like the United States, that is complicit in Israeli war crimes against Palestinians, in Saudi and Emirati massacres in Yemen, in death squads in Latin America, or in other grave human rights violations, your “neutrality” amounts to accepting this complicity and, in effect, siding with the oppressor. Your solidarity, then, even at the basic level of working toward cutting the criminal ties of your state, as well as corporations or institutions that are based in it, becomes a moral duty.

At a higher level of solidarity, beyond responsibility toward the oppressed other, the common ground of resistance to globalized oppression is thus recognized and nourished.

---

131. “Israel: Arms Embargo Needed as Military Unlawfully Kills and Maims Gaza Protesters,” Amnesty, 27 April 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/israel-arms-embargo-needed-as-military-unlawfully-kills-and-maims-gaza-protesters/>; Salil Shetty, “States Must Ban Israeli Settlement Products to Help End Half a Century of Violations,” Amnesty, 7 June 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/states-must-ban-israeli-settlement-products-to-help-end-half-a-century-of-violations-against-palestinians/>; The Conversation, “Tracking Businesses in Israeli Settlements,” *US New & World Report*, 31 July 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2018-07-31/why-the-un-is-tracking-companies-operating-in-israeli-settlements>.

132. Omar Barghouti, “Radiohead Is Art-Washing Israeli Apartheid,” *Aljazeera*, 31 July 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/radiohead-art-washing-israeli-apartheid-170730113743323.html>.

133. Samuel Osborne, “Government Acted Unlawfully by Restricting ‘Ethical’ Boycotts of Israel, High Court Rules,” *Independent*, 22 June 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/government-acted-unlawfully-israeli-pension-funds-investment-boycott-restrictions-high-court-a7803146.html>; “Quakers Will Not Profit From the Occupation of Palestine,” Quakers in Britain, 19 November 2018, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-will-not-profit-from-the-occupation-of-palestine>.

134. Desmond Tutu quoted in Gary Younge, “The Secrets of a Peacemaker,” *The Guardian*, 23 May 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/23/interview-desmond-tutu>.



The complicity of a U.S. corporation, like Hewlett-Packard or Caterpillar, in Israel's serious violations of Palestinian human rights triggers a compelling responsibility for U.S. citizens to act in solidarity with Palestinians beyond the call of duty of altruistic internationalism that prevailed in the 1960s against the genocidal U.S. war in Vietnam. Uncovering the involvement of these same companies in the exploitation and oppression of workers, communities of color, and others in the United States, however, takes this solidarity from the realm of responsibility toward the "other" to exploring the imperative of joint struggles against a common enemy. Solidarity thus morphs from an outward act of giving into an integral component of inward-looking struggles as well.

Tied in a single garment of destiny, as King says, oppressors are more united than ever, and oppressions are more intersectional than ever. It is high time to explore the intersectionality of contemporary, globalized resistances. Divided, they fail; united, they prevail, or at least they maximize their chances of success.

# BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT & SANCTIONS

## GLOBALIZED PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE TO ISRAEL'S SETTLER COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID

OMAR BARGHOUTI

AS PART OF ITS CURRENT ISSUES IN DEPTH SERIES, the Institute for Palestine Studies is pleased to offer its readers this assessment of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement by one of its founders and leaders, Omar Barghouti, in the hope of spreading understanding of its aims and achievements. As this essay shows, the BDS movement is rooted in universal principles and non-violent tactics employed by movements against oppression ranging from colonial Ireland to Birmingham, Alabama in the 1950s. For its defense against the McCarthyite attacks by partisans of Israel, it relies on the principle of freedom of speech enshrined in both the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, a principle that has been upheld by American and European courts. This principle offers a guarantee that the message of equal justice for all – Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews – which is the core of the call for BDS will continue to resonate globally.

## CURRENT ISSUES IN DEPTH

 مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية  
Institute for Palestine Studies

3501 M Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007  
[www.palestine-studies.org](http://www.palestine-studies.org)