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# BDS & Political Theory Critical Exchange.pdf

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## Critical Exchange

# Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) and Political Theory

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Political theorists are unphased by periodic announcements of the death of “Big and Important Ideas.” Hence there has not been much controversy about the persistent assertion – made, in particular, by those on the Left – that revolution, or the revolutionary political project, is dead. Wendy Brown, for example, has made the impossibility of revolutionary aspirations (particularly to socialism) a central theme of her work for the last twenty or more years (see, e.g. Brown, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2015). Likewise, in an important re-reading of *The Black Jacobins*, David Scott (2004) has argued that the revolutionary language and vision of twentieth century anticolonial movements is exhausted. For Brown, revolution is dead because capitalism has won the day and there are no longer any viable or plausible alternatives to liberal democracy. For Scott, revolution is dead because postcolonial regimes are irremediable disasters and offer no concrete, positive alternative to capitalism and the nation-state. For both, modernity is an era of tragedy, characterized by mourning, melancholia, and the loss of hope.

In the teeth of these somber diagnoses, Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana have recently called for a “reinvigoration of solidarity politics” (2018, p. ix). Rejecting the contention that either the liberatory imagination or the revolutionary project is dead, Daulatzai and Rana see an opening in contemporary politics for the creation of what they call, alternatively, the Muslim Left or the Muslim International (Daulatzai, 2012; Daulatzai and Rana, 2015).

Daulatzai and Rana call attention to the exigencies of contemporary global politics – endless imperial warfare and military occupation, obsession with “terrorism,” heightened anxiety regarding the fabricated threat of immigration, and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples and communities – in order to highlight “the global figure of the racialized Muslim as an impossibility and as nonsensical to modern subjecthood” (2018, pp. xvi–xvii). This figure is a condensation of the manifold violences of imperial, settler colonial, and capitalist domination, but also an emancipatory prospect and possibility: “the racialized Muslim is a planetary figure that is neither universalized nor uniform...It is a horizon, a possibility, a potential” that can invigorate a solidarity politics with “an ethical agenda that is anticolonial and anticapitalist,” a politics “of abolition and practices of nonhierarchy” (2018, p. xvii). This radical project “imagines another world in line with struggles for social justice, decolonial liberation, and global solidarity” (2018, p. x).

With Daulatzai and Rana, we reject the contention that modernity has bankrupted the revolutionary project or that its liberatory potential has been exhausted by those modernity conscripts into its work. The revolutionary project remains relevant as both an analysis of contemporary political conditions and an aspirational program for human emancipation. We assert this not simply as scholars, but also as participants in solidarity struggles and peoples’ movements for the abolition of borders, prisons, racism, and war. In these movements, the language, vision, and aspiration for revolutionary liberation remain the baseline of



political justice and the idiom for organizing, a fact that can be neither overlooked nor discounted by any broad-based theorization of “modernity.”

This Critical Exchange was prompted by a roundtable on the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, held at the American Political Science Association’s (APSA) Annual Meeting in Boston in 2018. The BDS movement against Israel is one of the most widespread instances of solidarity politics in the world today. Although its aims are consistent with liberal aspirations, their accomplishment would mean nothing less than a revolutionary remaking of life in Palestine for all who live there, not to mention for Palestinians in the diaspora and Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Like Daulatzai and Rana’s call for a Muslim International, BDS challenges the seemingly settled conclusion in political theory that revolution is neither responsible nor possible as a political praxis.

How does BDS imagine, challenge, and re-frame political theory’s dismissal of radical, emancipatory politics? Each of the contributors to this Critical Exchange will address this question in their own way. Provisionally, however, we want to offer the following reflections on BDS as a form of revolutionary praxis.

It is frequently asserted, by proponents and opponents alike, that BDS is a new tactic in the 70-year-old national liberation struggle of the Palestinians. But BDS may in fact be a new strategy as well. We are thinking, here, of Article 19 of Fatah’s charter, which declares that “armed struggle is a strategy and not a tactic” (Fatah, 1964). The point of the distinction would seem to be that, while a tactic is a tool that can be picked up or set down at will and evaluated only instrumentally, a strategy is essentially implicated in the project one is pursuing. Tactics can change, but a strategy can be surrendered only if the whole project is surrendered as well. And, conversely, the project is contained in the strategy. The armed struggle, for example, creates cadres, creates an infrastructure of supply and of command, trains an officer corps, and fashions a national culture. The armed struggle builds the new Palestinian state. The general staff of the armed struggle is the state-in-waiting of the liberated nation.

How does BDS re-configure strategy in relation to armed struggle? While Palestinians and Arabs have used forms of boycott against the Israeli state since well before BDS, these existed as tactics within other, larger strategies. But if BDS is itself a new strategy, and not just a shift in tactics, we wonder how it furthers the revolutionary Palestinian project. Does BDS inaugurate a new form of emancipatory politics, one that does not serve or seek to attain previously conceived ends? Would the liberation it anticipates materialize in a form other than the post-colonial nation-state envisioned by earlier forms of revolutionary struggle?

The three demands of the BDS movement are:



- (1) an end to the Israeli occupation, dismantlement of the Wall, and an end to the colonization of all Arab lands,
- (2) equal rights for Arab–Palestinian citizens of Israel, and
- (3) fulfillment of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands and homes (BDS, 2005).

Notably, these do not include a demand for a Palestinian state. Indeed, BDS provides no recipe for the institutions that would fulfill its demands. And with good reason: the aspiration to statehood is in some sense anathema to the aspirations to liberation held and nurtured by Palestinians (Dabed, 2017). If BDS has not merely tactical but strategic import, then, it may encode an emancipation struggle different from traditional understandings of national liberation, wherein the state and the nation are brought into alignment. This liberation struggle, the imagination it encodes, and the hope for the future it aspires to build, raise crucial questions for critical political theory. They also reiterate Daulatzai and Rana's call for rethinking emancipatory praxis and solidarity politics in/with/as the Muslim Left.

The contributors to this Critical Exchange reflect on the nature of emancipatory struggle and its relationship with academic boycott and Palestinian liberation. For Kevin Bruyneel, it is impossible to engage in political theorizing without acknowledging and accounting for our own connections to (settler) colonialism and imperialism. The grounds – both literal and philosophical – upon which we write and think may themselves be stolen, and this should inform any theorizing of the political we produce. Dana M. Olwan extends this argument by interpreting academic boycott as a means of addressing the institutional and political hierarchies that inhere in our political and geographical positionality. She encourages us to go forward with academic boycott, despite the many risks of punishment that this speaking out against injustice may entail. Jodi Dean takes aim at the common perception that the question of academic boycott is centrally, or even solely, about academic freedom, arguing instead that questions of solidarity ought to be at the center of our deliberations. Jack Jackson shows that, in the recent history of US constitutional jurisprudence, boycott is understood, properly, as a practice of collective political action, self-government, and dissent, and that BDS ought to be appreciated and undertaken in that spirit. Weaving all of these strands together, Jakeet Singh offers a theory of academic boycott as non-violent resistance that is, simultaneously, a way of dismantling settler colonial states, a practice of solidarity, and an act of individual and collective self-government. Finally, Corey Robin rounds out the Critical Exchange by arguing that, in contrast to many other political issues, academia can make a distinct and incisive contribution to the struggle for justice in Palestine, thus rendering academic boycott work not simply righteous, but also strategically useful. Taken together, this Critical Exchange shows that academic boycott is tied up in the very bases of contemporary political



theory. Activism on this question is not an external imposition on our work as thinkers and scholars but, rather, intrinsic to it. When it comes to questions of freedom and justice, theory and practice come together in the work toward the academic boycott of Israel.

We look forward to participating in and advancing this conversation in political theory and hope also that it will inaugurate, beyond new political-epistemic agendas, a movement to support the academic boycott of Israel within the broader community of scholars and their organisations, large and small, from Foundations of Political Theory to the APSA, from the International Studies Association to the European Consortium for Political Research, and in every other academic association wherein politics is considered to be both the subject of concern and the order of the day.

William Clare Roberts and C. Heike Schotten

## **The BDS movement, political theory, and settler memory**

As political theorists, it is important to place our work and thought in geopolitical and temporal context. Many political theorists live in and do work concerning settler colonial contexts such as the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Israel. Attention to this broader context should motivate rather than dissuade one from being accountable to the local context within which one resides, and the settler colonial dynamics that shape it. Doing so, I argue, provides firmer theoretical footing to then compare and contrast not only these contexts, but also to better place one's work in the context of the history and present of colonialism and imperialism more generally. With this set of commitments in mind, I write this piece from the city in which I reside – Boston, MA – which also happened to be the site of the 2018 APSA conference where the idea of this Critical Exchange first took shape. Thus, as I did to begin my presentation at that 2018 Panel, I want to begin by acknowledging the Mashpee Wampanoag, Aquinnah Wampanoag, Nipmuc, and Massachusetts nations and people whose traditional territory I am on as I write this piece, and their continuing claims to this land. Those of us at the 2018 conference were uninvited guests on this land.

I offer this acknowledgement, admittedly a small gesture, to refuse what I call settler memory, which refers to the way in which a settler colonial society such as the US habitually remembers while disavowing Indigenous people and settler colonialism as persistent shaping forces of our time and place. Settler memory is not a forgetting of Indigenous people, nor of settler colonialism. It is a cycle of disavowal that replays and reproduces settlement on a mnemonic loop, such as in annual celebrations of Thanksgiving and Columbus Day, the use of Indigenous names and symbols in military nomenclature, sports team names, popular culture and US topography. Settler memory habituates settlement as the legitimate





inhabitation of the land by those who no longer consider themselves settlers who took land from Indigenous people who the settlers no longer consider legitimate claimants to the land, if they deem them to exist at all (see Bruyneel, 2020). So, what does this have to do with the BDS movement and political theory?

This is my entry point into this discussion. I am a supporter of BDS but not a scholar of the Palestinian struggle. I am of white settler heritage from the land called Canada, and my areas of focus are American politics, political theory, Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies. It is through my work in Indigenous Studies that led me to BDS/Palestinian solidarity politics. My most direct support in the academic context came through the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association's (NAISA) resolution for the support of the boycott of Israeli academic institutions. While a number of academic associations have had pitched battles over passing such a boycott, NAISA's 2013 resolution passed with little tensions, no controversy, and wide approval. I do not think this is a surprise. In political theory, political activism, and in the classroom, there are important and urgently unacknowledged connections between the history, theory and politics of Indigenous struggles in locales such that which is called the US, and the history, theory and politics of the Palestinian struggle for liberation from Israeli colonization and occupation. I find, at times, a form of settler memory at work even among those supportive of BDS/Palestine, who know but do not acknowledge the settler colonial history and present that defines and shapes the land on which one resides, and how this might lead us to miss opportunities to draw out connections and greater solidarity.

For example, consider the "Birthright" trips to Israel that a non-profit organization provides for free to young people of Jewish heritage to visit Israel for 10 days. These trips have come under famous protest that went viral when a number of the youth participating in it challenged the tour's erasure of Palestine, Palestinian lands, and Palestinian people. Many youth walked off the trip to join an "anti-occupation tour" (Krupkin, 2018). I want us to imagine such a birthright trip here in the US. As noted, this Critical Exchange first began in Boston, so in that spirit maybe this could be a tour of the American birthright in the form of the US founders' revolutionary history. It could be a walking tour of a two-and-a-half-mile trail that one might call, let's say, The Freedom Trail. That's catchy – freedom for some; violence and dispossession for others. The website describes the Freedom Trail as "a unique collection of museums, churches, meeting houses, burying grounds, parks, a ship, and historic markers that tell the story of the American Revolution and beyond," a "world-renowned, signature tourist experience attracting over four million people annually to visit Boston's precious seveneenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century sites" (Freedom Trail Foundation, 2018). What one will not see along the Freedom Trail are markers of the history and present of Indigenous people of this region, of this state called Massachusetts. In short, one could walk out the door of a downtown Boston hotel and in 20 min



find, quite easily, an Indigenous-erasing American birthright tour waiting for you. This is just one example that could be replicated in whatever location one finds oneself across the vast settler colonial geopolitical topography.

My point here is not that tried and true deflection strategy of “whataboutism,” i.e. why focus on Palestine; what about Indigenous people in the US? To the contrary, my point is one of “thisiswhatitisaboutism,” and what this is about is settler colonialism. I think the question we would be wise to ask ourselves as political theorists working in settler colonial states is what can we learn about the Palestinian struggle from the context which we are in right now, and thereby become more engaged with the fact – I deem it a fact – that one cannot grasp the US or any other context built on the dispossession of Indigenous people from their territories without acknowledging settler colonialism. This is the same acknowledgement one would and should make regarding Israel’s colonization and occupation of Palestinian lands. In so doing, we fuel our understanding, acknowledgment, and, I would hope, activism concerning both contexts, and beyond these contexts, too.

As Patrick Wolfe put it, “settler colonizers come to stay” (2006, p. 388). Settler colonialism involves the violent dispossession of a people by conquerors who then stay and carry about the erasure, dehumanization, and further dispossession of the people that reside there/here. Settlement is then naturalized as authentic belonging by means of such political and cultural practices as Birthright trips and Freedom Trails and the perpetuation of myths about being a “nation of immigrants.” These are all examples of the public work of settler memory, and one can surely find many more.

I posit the frame of settler colonialism not in contrast to, but alongside that of, apartheid, as I understand why this analytic is most often deployed to explain the conditions under which Palestinians live. I happen to think, though, that settler colonialism might get to it more precisely, and it can also help us bring our approaches to understanding Palestine back “home,” as it were, to consider to what degree these theoretical interventions need to inform the context within which we reside. There are limits and constraints to utilizing a racial framework such as apartheid for explaining and mobilizing around injustices grounded in land dispossession that are the *sine qua non* of a settler colonial context. Israel is a settler colonial state/society. The US is a settler colonial state/society, as is Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This is not to say that the US and Israeli contexts are the same. It is to say that when I think about what it means to support BDS/Palestinian struggle it should compel me to think about what it means to support the Standing Rock Movement in the US settler context, IdleNoMore in the Canadian one, and the effort to raise awareness about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women across the Americas. As it happens, unsurprisingly, Indigenous and Palestinian activists are way out ahead of left settler academics and activists in this regard. During the Standing Rock Standoff, for example, Palestinians



communicated with the Water Protectors at Standing Rock about how to respond to the types of state violence, including chemical weapons that they were facing, and Palestinian flags were flying noticeably at the Standing Rock encampment (Estes, 2019).

That there was similar weaponry utilized by the Israeli and US police forces is not a coincidence. Police forces in these contexts directly learn from one another because they are in analogous roles as settler colonial forces who suppress, control, marginalize, and incarcerate the dispossessed peoples whose lands the settler nation and state claim as their own.

Here are some final thoughts with concern for theory and teaching. As to theory, we have an opportunity to bring settler colonial and Indigenous theoretical perspectives into our work to a more substantive degree. To refuse settler memory about the history of colonial genocide and dispossession means taking the next step to acknowledge its contemporary reproduction and pertinence to our grasp of the settler colonial contexts within which we reside and that of Israel. To begin, as an example from the US context, consider the famous border wall about which we have heard far too much since the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency. The US and Israel share border policing methods, and President Trump has directly referenced Israel's border wall approach as the model for his vision on the southern US border. This is because border walls – their materiality and their imaginary – are not only xenophobic efforts to demonize and keep out racialized others; they are also persistent reassertions of settler colonial claims to bound and rule over land seized through dispossession and maintained through occupation. Through this political lens, we can see in the US context the logic behind The Red Nation Collective's political slogan of #NoBanOnStolenLand, which combines support for migrating peoples in their humanity with a rejection of the idea that the US has the legitimate authority to decide who does and does not reside here. This is but one example of a well-known US policy that can be theorized in a more expansive way, one which also opens up the possibilities for coalitional activism and theorization of decolonial politics in the US and Israel contexts.

In teaching, be it teaching "Indigenous people's history of the United States" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) or Palestinian people's history, here is a simple and powerful thing to do. Show students one map of the history of dispossession over time, be it Israeli dispossession and settling upon Palestinian land or US dispossession and settling upon Indigenous land. These maps almost mirror each other in their path. When teaching about the US, one can ask students what might US/Indigenous history tell us about that of Israel/Palestine, or vice versa, what might Israeli/Palestinian history tell us about US/Indigenous history (Salaita, 2016)? Are the similarities merely coincidental, or might one foster the other; might US settler colonialism have paved the way/provided the model for Israeli settler colonialism? If so, might opposition to the former be part of a politics of resistance to the latter? This is a question for our students. It is also a question for us, as scholars, and, as



the case may be, as activists. One response to this question is for the APSA and its members to take seriously Indigenous people's political claims and interrogate the persistent structures of settler colonialism in the US, and other settler contexts such as Israel. A start (but by no means the end) in this regard should involve every conference engaging in substantial land acknowledgements that attend to the history and the present status and claims of the Indigenous peoples of the region (Reese and Mendoza, 2019). A second response is for the APSA to pass a resolution in support of a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. As a next step to that end, I endorse the passage of the following resolution by the Foundations of Political Theory section of APSA: "Be it resolved that the Foundations of Political Theory section endorses and will honor the call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions" (unpublished document).

Kevin Bruyneel

## Feminist political solidarity and the BDS movement

In *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (2016), scholar and activist Steven Salaita formulates a theory and praxis for decolonization founded on the recognition of the interconnections between struggles for justice in seemingly disparate geopolitical and historical sites. Salaita's poignant work engages the radical activist and scholarly politics that animate mutual liberatory struggles from North America to Palestine in a way that is highly attuned to the "practices and possibilities of decolonization" (p. 7). By developing a critique that moves beyond a comparative approach to Native struggles against imbricated forms of settler colonialism, Salaita provides a deep and materially situated analysis invested in the pursuit of decolonial futures. For more than a decade and at a deep personal, intellectual, and material cost, Salaita has exemplified in his scholarship what it means for many Arabs and Palestinians in the US and Canada to think through imbricated dispossessions and the mutual liberation of Native and Palestinian peoples. His work maps out in integral ways genealogies and paths for forming solidarities that are responsive to the needs and demands of Indigenous people transnationally.

Like Salaita, I emphasize the importance of engaging a politics of solidarity that begins with the interrogation of positionality, contextualizing how my work as a Palestinian feminist engages the politics of solidarity between Palestinian people and Native people in the settler colonial states of the US and Canada. In doing so, I do not intend to suggest that a mapping of our place in relation to settler colonialism and the settler colonial societies in which we live and work provides an alibi or absolves us of complicity in these complicated historical and ongoing processes (Patel, 2016). Rather, this is an exercise in thinking through the logics, processes, and actions that lead to the enactment of forms of solidarity that are



imperative for radical decolonization. I began my work for justice in Palestine as an activist in the Canadian academy, participating in student-led activist groups like Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights. These groups were committed to working for the liberation of Palestine, raising awareness about Palestinian struggles against Israeli occupation by invoking the praxis and practices of transnational solidarity and utilizing the discourse of human rights.

In many ways, our collective activism in these groups was pedagogical; it was meant to challenge limited understandings of Israeli occupation or “the conflict,” and rupture dominant narratives about Palestinians. We thus set up talks, invited speakers, and raised funds and resources to bring to our campuses people whose views were routinely excluded from mainstream discourses on Palestine in the Canadian academy in particular, and in Canada in general. The overall aim of this activism was to humanize Palestinians, that is, to make the struggle Palestinian national struggle relatable to Canadians by raising awareness about the human rights violations of living under occupation. It was solidarity activism that, in the wake of continued Israeli aggressions – including multiple wars on Gaza, the establishment of apartheid walls, the ongoing theft of lands and natural resources, and the incessant degradation of Palestinian life – helped shed light on what was slowly being recognized as the logics of death-making undergirding the past and the ongoing settler colonial practices of the Israeli state.

This activism preceded the Palestinian, civil-society-led call for BDS issued in 2005. It was activism that drew from and built on decades of Arab, Arab Canadian, Arab American, Native, Black, and people of color activism that had challenged imperialism, war, and racism and pushed people to make necessary connections with one another across gendered, racial, and classed differences in both local and transnational contexts (Naber, 2016). Our work, which was largely based within in the Canadian academy, culminated with the endorsement of the Palestinian-led BDS call in recognition of the right of Palestinian people to a dignified life, one that is free from colonial violence on all occupied Indigenous lands. Like other people engaged in work for justice in Palestine who are located in North American academic contexts, we understood the political work of solidarity against settler colonial formations to be simultaneously indispensable and risky.

In her article on the indivisibility of justice and the politics of feminism and Palestine, Nada Elia reminds us that speaking out against Zionism and in support of Palestine requires “courage that few have” and that it “comes with harsh consequences, as evidenced by the vicious personal and professional attacks on organizers for Palestinian rights” (2017, p. 57). Support for Palestine, as demonstrated by decades of legal targeting of activists and scholars and the recent and ongoing legal targeting of activist scholars like Rabab Abdulhadi, remains a scary, uncomfortable, and perilous endeavor. The consequences of calling for justice in Palestine can include smear campaigns, attacks on professional and personal integrity, and accusations of support for terrorism against even secured



and protected members of academia (Mitchell, 2018). One need look only as far as the censorial, intimidating website of Canary Mission to view warped descriptions of the labor of colleagues and mentors, activist-scholars, and public figures whose names and reputations have been tarnished for their positions against human rights violations by the Israeli state. As David Palumbo-Liu notes, organizations such as Canary Mission thrive on creating a “sense of intense anxiety and fear” that forecloses people’s political engagement with Palestine “by any means possible” (2018a).

One need not be an expert in the structures and tenets of the North American academy to understand the immense demands and pressures placed on academics to be silent, to postpone critique, to *not risk* employment prospects, career opportunities, and job security by speaking for and on behalf of Palestinians. Writing about the cost of speaking truth in the North American academic military complex, Henry Giroux states, “In some cases, the risk of connecting what they teach to the imperative to expand the capacities of students to be both critical and socially engaged may cost academics their jobs, especially when they make visible the workings of power, injustice, human misery, and the alterable nature of the social order” (2009). Here it is important to acknowledge that attacks on supporters of Palestinian rights and the organizations to which they belong, while ubiquitous, systematically target Black, Indigenous, and people of color in the academy. They also specifically target structurally vulnerable faculty such as untenured, sessional and adjunct academics. In short, neo-conservative and pro-Israeli efforts to limit free speech purposely mark scholars who have traditionally been excluded from, marginalized within, or locked out of the US settler academy. As the firing of Marc Lamont Hill from CNN and the attacks on his academic position at Temple University make blatantly clear: speaking out against Israeli settler colonialism for Black, Native and Palestinian scholars and those of minoritized racial and socio-economic backgrounds is both risky and costly (Palumbo-Liu, 2018b).

I return to the consequences of taking risks not in an effort to re-center an anxious and intimidated academic self but to posit in the endorsement of the Palestinian call for BDS the possibility of the exact opposite. What are the risks, dangers, and power of an aware, conscientious, and courageous academic stance that refuses to divide the pursuit of justice from the pursuit of knowledge? What intellectual, social, and political transformations are rendered possible when academics and the organizations we belong to resolutely oppose both the tactics and techniques that seek to silence critics of the State of Israel *and* openly register our opposition to the cruelties of occupation, injustice, and war at home and abroad? What happens when we connect the structuring logics of settler colonialism and racism over here with those that operate over there, in Palestine, by endorsing Indigenous calls for support and solidarity? In 2015, the National Women’s Studies Association, my primary academic home organization, voted to endorse the BDS call (National Women’s Studies Association, 2015). The



endorsement thus linked support for BDS with both the politics of intellectual and public responsibility and the feminist commitment for social global transformation. The success of the campaign was in large part due to the tireless efforts of organizations like Feminists for Justice in/for Palestine (FJP) who successfully shifted the dominant feminist discourse on Israel/Palestine in deeply complex and highly significant ways. Members of this campaign articulated how support for Palestine is a feminist issue that brings to light the intersections of multiple sites of gendered, racial, classed, and sexual oppression (Sharoni *et al.*, 2015; Tadiar, 2012). They did this through organizing sessions, writing letters, lobbying the organization, and engaging with both junior and senior members in field-shifting conversations. Through their collective efforts, they were able to make the connections between feminism and Palestine demonstrably and unquestionably visible. While these successes did not happen overnight, what they rendered clear were the immense possibilities of taking political, intellectual, and scholarly risks in support of justice in Palestine. NWSA's support for the BDS movement transformed our organization in dramatic and inspiring ways: it challenged the organization's membership to rethink its feminist priorities and commitments and to recalibrate its feminist scholarship, pedagogy, and activism so that they become more accountable to the imbrications of oppression and the indivisibilities of justice transnationally. Enacting this solidarity requires ongoing work that is never comfortable, easy or without risk. It is work that has already started to take place in the Foundations of Political Theory Section of APSA with ongoing efforts to support the BDS movement. Like other academic organizations, APSA – and the field of Political Science at large – will be transformed by such mobilizations for transnational justice and investments in collective decolonial futurities.

Dana M. Olwan

## BDS and international solidarity

Discussion around the BDS against Israel Movement – BDS – is largely centered in universities. Therefore, it is no surprise that the debate about BDS usually takes the form of a debate about the boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions, and that this question is generally presented as a matter of academic freedom. BDS critics and supporters alike argue on this terrain. I want to resist this tendency, and argue that academic freedom is too confining a frame for evaluating what is actually a tactic within a larger international solidarity movement. The call to boycott Israeli academic and cultural institutions both exceeds any claim to academic freedom and challenges the view of the university that underpins academic freedom claims. BDS must be understood within broader international anti-imperialist and anti-racist political movements. It should be approached, then, in terms of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and,





further, with all struggles against occupation, incarceration, dispossession, settler colonialism, and imperialism. The traditional emphasis on academic freedom assumes that what is at stake is having a discussion. The emphasis on solidarity assumes, instead, that what is at stake is having a future.

I will begin by unpacking some of the themes of the traditional discussion of BDS centered on academic freedom. I want to draw out the underlying sense of the normative and institutional context of BDS, the implicit assumptions embedded in framing BDS as a question of academic freedom. I will then turn to solidarity. Unlike academic freedom, which frames normative reflections within journalism and the academy, solidarity frames and grows out of acts of political collaboration and support. I will, therefore, attend to the actions and reflections of political activists, on the ground in Ferguson, MO and Detroit, MI, Gaza and Ofer Prison.

The boycott of Israeli academic institutions has been widely criticized as offensive to academic freedom. These arguments, generally, fall into one of three broad lines of critique. First, academic boycott is said to restrict the freedom of academic association. Here, the focus is on the harms academic boycott imposes on students and other researchers, both inside Israel and throughout the world, in the form of lost opportunities for study. Second, academic boycott is said to undermine the possibility of dialogue and mutual understanding by restricting the free exchange of ideas. The emphasis here is less on the damage to individual scholars and students and more on the risk to the realm of knowledge and inquiry more broadly. Finally, academic boycott is criticized for instituting a political litmus test for participation in the academy, and BDS is accused of politicizing academic inquiry. In this vein, one BDS critic claims that the “terrible toll” of a hundred years of conflict in Palestine “should command intellectual analysis not political advocacy” (Divine, 2019).

BDS supporters have responded to each of these objections, however. In response to the first line of criticism, BDS supporters point out that normal academic relations with Israeli universities also close down opportunities for students and researchers – namely, for the Palestinian students and researchers who are shut out of the academic world by the Israeli occupation. Palestinian scholars and students have no academic freedom. Their rights of movement and association, to work and to study, are curtailed. Their schools, conferences, and universities are shut down. They are denied opportunities to travel. In short, the concern about missed opportunities for study is really only a concern for North Americans and Europeans who want to go to Israel, and for Israeli universities seeking collaborations. Since the academic boycott only targets Israeli institutions, not individuals, BDS does not deny individual Israeli scholars the opportunity to study and collaborate abroad. Moreover, within the North American context, at least, it is opposition to BDS that is the real threat to academic freedom. BDS supporters in academia – students and scholars alike – encounter harassment and intimidation from organizations like the Canary Mission. They lose their jobs (Steven Salaita)





and their platforms (Marc Lamont Hill) because of pressure from alumni donors and because of manufactured media outrage. They are barred from the academy in the first place by anti-BDS legislation, on the books in 27 states.

Given this context, and in response to the second line of criticism, BDS supporters have argued that the academic boycott of Israel, far from undermining dialogue, has broken through a longstanding barrier surrounding the public discussion of Israel. The boycott movement has enlarged the space for thinking, and enlarged the realm of permissible inquiry, by broadening our understanding of the ways in which occupation, incarceration, colonialism, enclosure, and militarism operate according to similar patterns in seemingly different contexts. As Sunaina Maira (2012) has argued most forcefully, “boycotting Israel is taking a stand against the exceptionalism of Israel in the U.S. academy and public sphere,” an exceptionalism that has long manifested itself in “censorship and silencing” of investigation and debate.

This provides the basis, finally, for BDS supporters to respond to the third criticism: that academic boycott imposes a political litmus test on scholarship. To this, BDS proponents respond that there was already a litmus test: don’t speak of Palestine, ignore the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. In short, BDS doesn’t install a litmus test: it inscribes a cut that reveals the test that was already in place. The existence of political litmus tests in academia is nothing new – think of the long tradition of McCarthyism in the academy, for example, including the attempt to get Angela Davis fired from UCLA for being a communist. It has done incredible damage to lives and careers. And it always proceeds from the injunction that certain political stances are incompatible with, even destructive of, inquiry.

Taken together, these responses to the critical evocation of academic freedom push us, I think, to attend to our assumptions about the terrain of discussion or the space of conflict. We can consider these assumptions in terms of three dimensions of institutionality: (1) academia as a material and infrastructural institution (this includes, for example, the role of race and class in structuring opportunities to study); (2) research as a discursive and conceptual institution (this includes, for example, the epistemological exclusions that enable the space of thought); and (3) knowledge production as a normative institution (this includes, for example, the goals and expectations that underpin academic work). These three dimensions of institutionality are, of course, interconnected and mutually implicated. I will focus on the third, for now, because it illuminates the antagonism between two different understandings of the academy and academic work, an antagonism that is obscured by the term “academic freedom.”

On one version of knowledge production, that of BDS critics, the normative guidepost for academic work is that of a neutral, depoliticized space of observation. The other version of knowledge production, articulated by the response of BDS supporters, is of academic work as necessarily and irreducibly political, created, determined, and ruptured by political forces, battles, choices. Institutions of



knowledge production are political, divided, conflictual. Inquiry is politically directed and politically salient. There is no zero ground of neutrality, in which we might set all our differences aside and ask after the mere facts of the matter. This conception of interested inquiry is as true to the natural sciences as it is to political science, as no one can doubt in an era of climate change. It has also been a long-standing feature of feminist, labor, queer, and anti-racist academic work, work that recognizes advocacy as indispensable to its very possibility of existence, without thereby reducing academic work to advocacy. When BDS supporters respond to critics, their response makes explicit that the terrain of academic inquiry is political. That this is so means that people have to take a side. The question isn't just "do you understand?" It's "what do you stand for?" What possibilities for understanding do your political stands open up, and what do they foreclose? But once these questions are openly articulated, the frame of academic freedom, which has structured the debate, is revealed to be inadequate to adjudicate the debate.

This leads, then, to solidarity. As an array of academics and activists have emphasized for some time now, BDS is a platform in a new international solidarity politics (see Olwan, and Roberts and Schotten in this Critical Exchange). In a context where the stereotype is of a Left utterly fragmented by identity politics, BDS is functioning as a platform through which different struggles are articulated together. It is reinvigorating radical internationalism, and organizing processes for identifying and challenging racist and imperialist violence. Slogans heard in the streets – "From Ferguson to Palestine, Occupation is a Crime" and "From Palestine to Mexico, Border Walls Have Got to Go" – give voice to a grassroots movement that has been gathering speed over the last half decade.

In this regard, it is worth recalling some of the different delegations from the US that have gone to Palestine in recent years. In June of 2011, 11 Indigenous and women of color feminists, including Angela Davis, went to Palestine and, upon their return, endorsed BDS in a joint statement (Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 2011). Six months later, another group of US-based academics went on an investigative trip to Palestine, organized by the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. They published a dossier reflecting on their experience in "Periscope," the *Social Text* blog. Robin D. G. Kelly, one member of the delegation, concluded that, "we are not advocating on behalf of Palestinians, but [are] partners with Palestinians for the right to self-determination. And the leadership comes from the Palestinian people. So we're supporting that movement, and recognizing that what's happening there is not exceptional, but rather part of a larger global process of late colonialism and neoliberalism, and that what happens in Palestine is going to have an impact on the rest of the world" (quoted in Maira, 2018, p. 64).

These delegations presaged the #Ferguson2Palestine connections that emerged in 2014. Israel's brutal attack on Gaza that summer coincided with the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri. As Kristian Davis Bailey has emphasized, there is a much



longer tradition of revolutionary alliance between Black and Palestinian radicals, one going back at least to the period of the 1967 war (Johnson, 2015). But in the summer of 2014, Palestinians began tweeting messages of support to protesters in Ferguson, including advice on dealing with tear gas. Ferguson protesters responded with messages that include Palestinian flags. This exchange gave rise to collective statements of support on both ends, and to more research on the materialities of oppression and carceral violence. This research unearthed and highlighted shared Israeli and US police training, including work publicized by Angela Davis and others on the transnational security corporation G4S – the third largest private corporation in the world – which “participates directly and blatantly in the maintenance and reproduction of repressive apparatuses in Palestine”, but also provides security services for prisons and schools, for Israeli checkpoints and the US–Mexico border. These acts of connection and solidarity have given rise to further connections and further discoveries of points of shared struggle, including around water rights in Detroit and Flint, Michigan, and in Palestine.

Participating in a “Roundtable on Anti-Blackness and Black-Palestinian Solidarity” (2015), published in *Jadaliyya* and moderated by Noura Erakat, Jared Sexton claimed that “the challenge is to understand a solidarity that seems to persist, in principle and in practice, despite problems of asymmetry or even antagonism; a solidarity that does not simply join the struggle, but exceeds it from within.” This seems to me to name a task that is scholarly and political in equal measure, and one that goes far beyond the situation of its enunciation.

Just last August, imprisoned Palestinians of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine wrote a letter expressing their solidarity with prisoners in the US who were participating in the national prison strike. Among their efforts to articulate and underscore the bases of their solidarity, they wrote:

The boycott campaign that is part of your strike also emphasizes the critical role of boycott in confronting exploitation and oppression. While our circumstances and lives may vary greatly from one another in many ways, we too face economic exploitation through a “canteen” system that seeks to profit from our imprisonment as Palestinians. We know that prison profiteers in the United States also profit from prison canteens, phone calls and other purchases, and we salute your campaign of boycott. This is the same reason why we call on people around the world to join the BDS movement against Israel. We cannot and must not be the consumers of those who profit from our misery and oppression. (Cutter, 2018)

Prisoners removed from one another’s situations by an ocean and a sea, by national and legal boundaries, can recognize bases of solidarity, and attempt to activate those. They can assert that “we know that your victory will also be a victory for Palestine,” even though, in any simple, material sense, their interests surely do not overlap.



This expression of solidarity is not an in-group seeking to protect its collective interest, or some redistributive equilibrium, against outsiders – which is the sense often given to “solidarity” in political science research (e.g. Banting and Kymlicka, 2017). Rather, it is an active assertion that “it is through struggle and confrontation that true freedom can be realized” (Cutter, 2018), and that taking a stand *for* this freedom is the necessary condition of its enunciation, much less its achievement. This true freedom, which can only be pursued through struggle in common, through a radical solidarity, far exceeds academic freedom, which, from this perspective, looks like the horizon of a crabbed, narrow sort of “solidarity,” an in-group protecting its privileges.

Instead of hemming ourselves in by keeping within the frame of academic freedom, I am arguing that we should strive instead to extend the sort of radical solidarity shown by these prisoners. At stake is not merely our ability to have a discussion amongst ourselves, but the meaning of that discussion, and the possibility of having a future in which the discussion is not merely among us. Therefore, I call upon all political theorists, and all political scientists, to join the academic boycott of Israel, and to insist that our professional organizations do the same, and, in particular, I endorse the passage of the following resolution by the Foundations of Political Theory section of APSA: “Be it resolved that the Foundations of Political Theory section endorses and will honor the call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions” (unpublished document).

Jodi Dean

## **BDS, political theory, and US constitutional law**

A fair amount of attention has been devoted to thinking about the BDS campaign against Israel in light of similar campaigns against Apartheid South Africa in the latter half of the 20th century. Indeed, the 2005 call for BDS from a constellation of civil society organizations in Palestine explicitly drew the parallel: “inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid and in the spirit of international solidarity ... [w]e, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era” (BDS, 2005). This has been a productive frame. However, I want to shift our attention from South Africa to the American South and US Constitutional law to think about the politics of boycotts.

Boycotts served as a vital tool in the US civil rights struggle, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. championed them as a primary tactic in the fight against Jim Crow: “Along with the march as a weapon for change in our nonviolent arsenal must be listed the boycott. Basic to the philosophy of nonviolence is a refusal to cooperate



with evil” (King, 1986, p. 60). And it was in the crucible of that freedom movement that the modern constitutional contours of the right to boycott took shape in the US. Broadly speaking, the right to engage in political boycotts is protected by the First Amendment. Of course, saying that something is protected by the First Amendment carries no obvious normative or political position (a proposition perhaps more clearly visible today given recent transformations in the Court’s First Amendment jurisprudence), but I will try to defend this particular strand of case law or, at the very least, take some political lessons from it.

Put succinctly: the law of political boycotts affirms collective political action, self-government, and dissent. Cutting against neoliberal hyper-individualism, the law conceptualizes political boycotts in much the same way, as Jodi Dean argues above, that we should approach BDS: “in terms of solidarity.” Boycotts do not limit freedom; they enhance it and thus remind us that political freedom carries within it a collective dimension: a boycott of a state by an academic association is an associational right. BDS exercises this essential right of political life.

Now to the law. The landmark decision in this area is the case of *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.*, a case that emerged from a boycott of white merchants in Claiborne County, Mississippi, in the late 1960s. Importantly, the Supreme Court in this case properly understood and defended the *collective* dimension of the right in question by realizing that hyper-individualism can be the undoing of politics. The Court also highlighted the political/constitutional ends of the boycott in thinking about the boycott as constitutionally protected means. As well, the Court’s opinion in *NAACP v. Claiborne* – along with a recent district court opinion that reaffirmed *Claiborne* in the context of an anti-BDS law in Kansas – illustrates the necessity of placing dissent at the heart of the First Amendment, and in particular a view of the First Amendment developed most fully by constitutional theorist Steven Shiffrin. To unpack this a bit more, I want to summarize the facts and holdings in both *NAACP v. Claiborne* and *Koontz v. Watson*, the federal district court case from Kansas.

In *NAACP v. Claiborne*, African-American citizens in Mississippi presented town officials with nineteen demands for racial equality and integration. Rebuffed by the officials, several hundred residents at a local NAACP meeting voted to launch a boycott of white-owned businesses until the demands were met. The boycott lasted several years and included picketing, speeches, marches, and multiple forms of discipline within the black community to enforce the boycott. At one event Charles Evers, head of the local NAACP, said “if we catch any of you going into any of them racist stores, we’re gonna break your damn neck” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 902). Organizers also deployed “store watchers” to see who in the community broke the boycott, and those who did faced social ostracism – for example, having their names read out in church on Sundays. White merchants sued the NAACP and numerous activists for damages and won in Mississippi courts. The US Supreme Court took the case and reversed.



In reversing the Mississippi Supreme Court, the US Supreme Court not only upheld the right to boycott on First Amendment grounds, but also articulated a theory of democratic action and dissent. The Court placed great value on the collective dimensions of a boycott. Here is Justice Stevens, writing for the Court: “black citizens banded together and expressed their dissatisfaction with a social structure,” a practice “deeply rooted in American political processes” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 908). Critically, the Court observed that “by collective effort individuals can make their views known, when, individually their voices would be faint or lost” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 917). Here the figure of the lone dissenter in First Amendment mythology and some quarters of liberal political theory is supplemented by collective voice and action: the individual is ineffectual when alone. Or, in First Amendment terminology: free speech requires free assembly. As the Court put it, “speech, assembly, association, and petition, ‘though not identical are inseparable’ ” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 911).

The Supreme Court also drew a distinction between economic boycotts designed to stifle economic competition and political boycotts designed to defend fundamental constitutional rights. The latter constitutes more than “self-expression”; it is, the Court said, “the essence of self-government” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 913). Moreover the boycott in Mississippi sought to “vindicate the rights of equality and freedom that lie at the heart of the Fourteenth Amendment” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 914). The boycotters “challenged a political and economic system that had denied them the basic rights of dignity and equality” (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 917). As such, the Court placed a much higher burden on laws that crippled, chilled, or punished this type of First Amendment activity.

Confronted with the rise of the BDS campaign for the “basic rights of dignity and equality” of Palestinians (I don’t think anyone would suggest “parochial economic interests” are driving BDS), a concerted effort to punish and silence supporters of BDS has emerged in the US. As part of this effort, several states have passed or have considered passing anti-boycott laws. As example, in 2017 the State of Kansas passed a law requiring “all persons entering into a contract with the state to certify they are not engaged in a boycott of Israel” (*Koontz v. Watson*, 2018, 283 F. Supp. 3d D. Kan 1007). The plaintiff in the case refused to sign the certification as they were boycotting Israeli businesses in keeping with their understanding of the Mennonite Church’s call “to boycott products associated with Israel’s occupation of Palestine” (they were a member of the church). In issuing a preliminary injunction against the law, the federal district court looked to the principles established in *Claiborne* and held that “the same analysis applies to the Kansas law.” Here is the district court: the plaintiff and “others participating in this boycott of Israel seek to amplify their voices to influence change, as did the boycotters in *Claiborne*” (*Koontz v. Watson*, 2018, 283 F. Supp. 3d D. Kan 1007).



The Court even said this was an easier case because of the lack of legal complications that arose with the enforcement efforts by boycott activists in Mississippi. Here, by contrast, no one sought to impose community discipline to compel compliance with the boycott. The Court further held that the legislative history revealed that the state's interest was primarily to "undermine the message of those participating in a boycott of Israel," and ruled that this was either "viewpoint discrimination against the opinion that Israel mistreats Palestinians or subject matter discrimination on the topic of Israel" and held that both are constitutionally "impermissible" (*Koontz v. Watson*, 2018, 283 F. Supp. 3d D. Kan 1007).

I want to turn now to an argument put forth by the State of Kansas to explain why the anti-boycott law was in the public interest. Kansas said: "enforcing the Kansas Law is in the public interest because the Kansas Law passed the Kansas House 99-13 and the Kansas Senate 36-3" (*Koontz v. Watson*, 2018, 283 F. Supp. 3d D. Kan 1007). The judge rightly dismissed this claim, but it reveals something more, and something other than what Kansas wanted. In the US, those supporting BDS against Israel confront bipartisan efforts to silence our collective voice. Far from buttressing the claims of Kansas, those lopsided majorities in each chamber of the Kansas legislature should highlight the necessity of constitutional protections precisely because the BDS movement in the US is aimed at that bipartisan consensus. As everyone knows (and as the American Studies Association's endorsement in 2013 of the academic boycott emphasized), the "United States plays a significant role in enabling the Israeli occupation of Palestine" (American Studies Association, 2013). Notwithstanding a slowly emerging split between the base of the Democratic Party and its leadership on this issue, Congress just last year passed the *United States-Israel Security Authorization Act of 2018* which began a ten-year commitment to distribute \$38 billion in military aid to Israel (U.S. Senate, 2018). In the US Senate this legislation had 72 co-sponsors, including liberal luminaries such as Senators Elizabeth Warren, Ron Wyden, Tammy Baldwin, and Sherrod Brown.

Thus, BDS, in the American context and in the words of *NAACP v. Claiborne*, is "more than self-expression; it is the essence of self-government" (*NAACP v. Claiborne*, 1982, 458 U.S. 886 at 913). And the supermajorities currently in power in government do not negate this point: they underline it. For dissent is surely a necessity for self-government even as dissent extends to practices and actions not immediately tethered to an electoral campaign. I am drawn back to a claim on the First Amendment put forth by Steven Shiffrin: "If we must have a 'central meaning' of the First Amendment, we should recognize that the dissenters – those who attack existing customs, habits, traditions, and authorities – stand at the center





of the First Amendment and not at its periphery” (Shiffrin, 1999, p. 10). What *Claiborne* reminds us is that dissent suffers in isolation, an isolation BDS seeks to overcome.

Jack Jackson

## Power, settler colonialism, and the role of external actors

The man [*sic*] who acts nonviolently insists upon acting out his *own* will, refuses to act out another’s – but in this way, only, exerts force upon the other, not tearing him away from himself but tearing from him only that which is not properly his own, the strength which has been loaned to him by all those who have been giving him obedience. (Deming, 1971, p. 206)

Theories of nonviolent resistance are often more interesting for the insights they provide on power and resistance than on violence and nonviolence themselves. In this passage from her influential 1968 essay “On Revolution and Equilibrium,” anti-war feminist author and activist Barbara Deming articulates a point about power that is central to many theories of nonviolent resistance. Power, it is argued, should not be thought of as a substance that is possessed by the powerful and that travels from the top down as they exercise it on their subjects, but should instead be understood as a capacity that derives from the obedience and cooperation of many individuals and groups, and that therefore flows from the bottom up. Cooperation is not owed to the powerful; it is lent to them. Moreover, as Deming argues, the withdrawal of cooperation is first and foremost an attempt to act out of one’s own will rather than to obstruct or interfere with the will of another.

These basic insights from the theory and practice of nonviolent resistance are important to recall in relation to the campaign for BDS against Israel, not only because they have had a direct influence on it, but also because they are important to remember at a time when many are attempting to criminalize BDS. In such a moment, when its opponents are trying to suggest that BDS victimizes and interferes with the freedom of others, it is important to recall that participation in BDS is in fact a matter of acting according to your own will, and of withdrawing your cooperation from institutions that are not entitled to it. Theories of nonviolent resistance remind us, alongside Jack Jackson’s contribution to this Critical Exchange, that the right to participate in BDS is not only a matter of free expression and association, but is quite fundamentally about the right to govern yourself. Indeed, participating in a boycott does not even involve the withdrawal of obedience per se, in the way that an act of civil disobedience would, but only the withdrawal of various forms of cooperation – unless and until the boycott is itself criminalized, of course.





But revisiting theories of nonviolent resistance, and in particular their distinctive understandings of power, can also help us begin to see another, less recognized dimension of BDS: its specific importance in relation to the fact that Israel is a settler colonial project (see Bruyneel and Olwan in this Critical Exchange). I want to use my short space in this Critical Exchange to suggest that BDS takes on a particular significance because it is a form of resistance to settler colonialism.

In his prominent theory of nonviolent action, which has itself had some influence within the BDS campaign (Thrall, 2018), political scientist Gene Sharp (1973) famously argues that a regime's "power capacity" is closely tied to the degree of cooperation it receives from three key groups: its general population, the agents and functionaries of the regime, and foreign governments and peoples. Without the cooperation of these three groups, a regime has no capacity to function, and therefore can have no power. While many who have utilized Sharp's theory in other contexts have focused on the first two groups, the focus of BDS is squarely on the third, as it primarily seeks to mobilize the (non)cooperation of governments and peoples outside of Israel.

It is my contention that there is something quite crucial about this third group, and the power it wields, in settler colonial contexts, based on the fact that the first two groups may be less likely than in other types of regimes to withdraw their cooperation from it. To understand why this might be the case, it is important to begin with what Patrick Wolfe (2006) calls settler colonialism's "logic of elimination." According to Wolfe, settler colonialism's primary motive is to secure access to and control over land, but standing in the way are the Indigenous peoples of that land. A logic of elimination of the Native, manifest in a wide variety of material and ideological-cultural processes, therefore becomes foundational to the structures of settler colonial governance as it seeks to carry out its double task of destroying, displacing, and/or assimilating Native societies, as well as of constructing, consolidating, and expanding the new settler society.

Why do these features of settler colonialism suggest that it may be less likely for those inside the settler state – its general population and its agents and functionaries – to withdraw their cooperation from the regime, thereby undermining two of its main founts of power? First, and most obviously, a significant portion of the general population of the settler state, as well as the agents and functionaries of the regime, are themselves settlers. As such, they will likely be highly invested in, and dependent upon, the material structures of the settler state/society, and deeply imbued with the attendant mythologies that rationalize and legitimize the settler project. Both their material self-interest and their self-understandings will, in a wide variety of ways, be pitted against addressing the various manifestations of the structural logic of elimination at the heart of the settler project. Moreover, because the processes of elimination of the Native population(s) are so foundational, these processes are more likely to be regarded by settlers as necessary and in keeping with the needs of their state/society, and less likely to be regarded as the kind of



departure from the norms and ideals of the regime that would warrant the withdrawal of their cooperation from their leaders and institutions.

Second, and conversely, the colonized Native populations on this territory whose dispossession, persecution, and immense suffering are precisely what is being challenged here are themselves a severely marginalized portion of the general population, with highly constrained capacities to sap power from the settler regime. It is their lands that are continuously targeted for occupation and settlement, and their bodies, identities, and societies that are targeted for elimination. As such, they are often geographically displaced and/or contained, their livelihoods and ways of life are often disrupted, and their numbers are often significantly reduced. In short, they likely experience high levels of precarity, violence, and destitution, and low levels of power, territory, and well-being. Of course, the colonized are constantly resisting and withdrawing their cooperation from the settler regime, but this ongoing resistance is often ignored, co-opted, or used by the settler regime as justification for the continuation and intensification of its processes of elimination.

For these reasons, I am suggesting that the third source of power – the cooperation of external governments and peoples – may be particularly important in settler colonial contexts as a site and source of resistance. But all of this raises a final question: why is the mass withdrawal of power/cooperation appropriate here in the first place, as opposed to, say, more conventional forms of appeal, demand, and/or influence on a regime to modify its actions? While the withdrawal of cooperation and power can of course be used as an effective tactic in many different political contexts and for many different ends, again I think there may be a specific reason for its applicability as a form of resistance to settler colonialism.

Many forms of resistance (perhaps inevitably) appeal to, and in doing so (perhaps inadvertently) reaffirm and reinforce, the power of the very authorities and institutions being resisted. One of the specific difficulties involved in challenging a settler colonial regime is that the injustices it perpetrates are being resisted at the same time that its authority to offer redress and restitution is itself being called into question. The very power that is responsible for the injustice, and is therefore in a position to rectify it, is fundamentally premised upon the structural logic of elimination from which the injustice arises. As such, resistance to settler colonialism must try to challenge currently constituted forms of authority without stabilizing and reinforcing that authority. Fighting against the settler colonial regime, and imagining what might come after it, requires holding open the possibility of – and creating the structural conditions for – a deep reconfiguration of power relations and a robust reconstitution of just relations of co-existence. In order to do so, it may well be more appropriate to focus on draining the power capacity of the settler regime rather than try to correct or influence how it exercises its power. One way this can be pursued is by building transnational relations of solidarity between the colonized and external actors who withdraw their cooperation from the settler state/society.



For these reasons, among many others, BDS deserves our support. As political scientists and theorists, it is important that we call for the APSA, the International Studies Association, and the other academic associations in which we participate to join a number of other professional academic associations in supporting BDS, including the academic boycott of complicit Israeli academic institutions. Returning to the Deming quotation with which I began, it is crucial at this juncture, when even the re-direction of our own voluntary relations of cooperation is being criminalized or otherwise penalized, that we remind ourselves that Israel is not entitled to our cooperation. Any power that we lend it is neither necessary nor owed, which also applies to the settler colonies in which many of us reside.

Jakeet Singh

## The strategic case for the academic boycott of Israel

It is odd there is so much fuss around BDS, particularly the idea of a cultural or academic boycott. Not politically odd – the taboo around the subject of Israel still remains, even in the academy and other parts of the culture industry – but normatively odd. After all, cultural figures and academic institutions participate in boycotts of discriminatory states all the time, without anyone in these sectors raising an eyebrow. After North Carolina passed its notorious transgender bathroom bill in 2016, which required individuals to use only those bathrooms designated for the gender they were assigned at birth, many artists – from Itzhak Perlman to Bruce Springsteen to Pearl Jam – announced, to much acclaim, that they were boycotting the state. The state government of California currently prohibits the faculty it employs from using state funds to travel to ten states that discriminate against LGBT people. During the very same week that the Chancellor of CUNY, where I teach, was denouncing the boycott of Israel, his attorneys were announcing that no CUNY professor would be allowed to use state funds to travel to North Carolina or Mississippi (Jenkins, 2016; Robin, 2016). All of this, again, without hardly any protest – indeed, in many cases, with a great deal of support. If one discriminatory law or policy by a state can initiate another state's prohibition of travel to that first state – or the refusal of individuals and collectives to do the same – it hardly requires much normative work to show that the package of discriminatory laws and policies, institutions and practices, that constitute the apartheid State of Israel provide the grounds for a boycott of that state (for a list of such laws in the State of Israel, see Adalah, 2016). And lest we think the term apartheid is being applied unfairly to the State of Israel – on the ground that the occupation is only temporary and contingent – we should remember that when South African apartheid was as old as the Israeli occupation is today, it had been dead for 6 years.



Because the normative case for an academic and cultural boycott of the State of Israel is so easy to make, building as it does on already accepted practices, I'd like to focus on the strategic argument for an academic boycott. In particular, I want to argue that academics and other campus actors have a surprisingly important, and admittedly counterintuitive, role to play in this effort. This argument cuts, I hope, against both the tendency among academics to overstate our contributions to the world and the usual deflationary response to that tendency, which is to mock the self-importance of academia.

Here I am going to avail myself of the comparison to the campaign against South African apartheid, which I think is useful but for the exact opposite reason that it is usually invoked. As soon as BDS became a topic in this country, its defenders made reference to the cultural boycott of South Africa (White, 2015). Detractors of BDS followed suit, claiming that the cultural boycott played little role, in the end, in bringing down apartheid. What that debate misses is how differently placed the geo-strategic and cultural issues are in the two cases.

In the case of South Africa, there was a widespread revulsion against apartheid. Thanks to the black freedom struggle in the US, there was a clear sense that racial autocracies were illegitimate. What South Africa had going for it was its strategic role in the Cold War. If one reads the defenses of South Africa at the time, few members of the establishment argued for the apartheid regime on positive moral grounds. The main argument was that it was a bulwark against communism. The main proponents of that argument were security analysts and a small minority of Republicans. In 1986, no Democrat and surprisingly few Republicans voted against the sanctions bill, which passed, over Ronald Reagan's veto, with large bipartisan majorities.

The situation today is the reverse. After 9/11, when opposition of Israel was considered to be the ultimate taboo, some of the very first and most forceful criticism came from the security sector. Influential analysts, like the CIA officer Robert Baer, made the case that Israel was a strategic liability in the war on terror (Docherty, 2002). The most important book to break open the conversation about Israel came from two mainstream IR scholars in political science: John Mearsheimer at the University of Chicago and Steven Walt at Harvard (2008). On the political front, conversely, we have seen, at least until quite recently, overwhelming support for the State of Israel among elected officials in both parties. Likewise, on the cultural front, while there are some openings, the consensus among leaders of the culture industry – from university presidents to editors to influential writers and scholars – is that Israel, whatever its flaws, is a state to be continuously engaged with, through study abroad programs, inter-university consortiums, cultural exchanges, and so on.

And here is where BDS – particularly, the academic boycott – comes in. The primary work opponents of the State of Israel have to undertake is cultural and



ideological: challenging Israel's status of unquestioned legitimacy. Israel is one policy area where what we do on campus actually matters.

There's the obvious connection between university campuses and the media: many younger journalists are fresh out of college and take with them what they learned on campuses. There's the connection between campuses and the new social movements – Black Lives Matter, democratic socialism – that are producing a new generation of activists, who, for the first time in recent memory, seem positioned to influence political debate. That is something we are already seeing with the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party, where Israel is no longer a taboo topic, even among a few politicians, including Sanders and members of Congress like Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar. There is also the connection between campuses and the Jewish community, where we see an increasing generational divide over Israel, some of which is generated by what Jewish students learn on campus.

But most important, there is what the Israeli government says. In a lengthy piece on BDS last year in the *Guardian*, author Nathan Thrall, one of the most informed journalists writing on Israel and Palestine today, quotes Yossi Kuperwasser, who until recently ran the Israeli government's campaign against BDS. Kuperwasser rightly notes that the real threat of BDS is not economic or narrowly strategic: for all the high-profile campaigns around Soda Stream and other products, Israel's trade and diplomatic ties with other countries – particularly, India, China, and several African states – have increased. But as Kuperwasser says: "The core issue is not whether they are going to boycott us or not boycott us. The core issue is whether they are going to be successful in implanting in the international discourse that Israel is illegitimate as a Jewish state." That's why Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in 2009, listed three fundamental threats against Israel: Iran's nuclear program, the rockets and missiles launched from Gaza or Lebanon, and "delegitimization" (Thrall, 2018).

When it comes to questions of legitimacy and illegitimacy, all cultural workers have a role to play, academics included. The choice is simple: either continue to allow our institutions to paint (and prop up) the State of Israel with a patina of legitimacy it does not deserve or push our institutions to do the necessary work of delegitimizing an apartheid state. That is why I firmly support BDS and – more specifically for us as political theorists and political scientists – the call for the APSA, the International Studies Association, and the other academic associations to which we belong, to launch a boycott of the State of Israel, and for members of the association to work toward that end.

Corey Robin

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