

Suzanne Morrison

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Organising the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement: the case of the ‘We Divest’ campaign

Suzanne Morrison

In this article, I critically analyse the case of the We Divest campaign as an example of a divestment initiative of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement to highlight aspects of how the movement works, particularly through its organisational structure and processes. The campaign targets TIAA-CREF, one of the largest retirement fund providers in the US, to divest funds currently held in a number of companies the campaign has identified as profiting from Israel’s viola-

tions of international law. In examining the case I determine certain organisational characteristics of the movement, i.e. networked, decentralised, grassroots, horizontal and border-crossing. By identifying certain aspects of the movement’s infrastructure through an investigation into the We Divest campaign, I argue that the organisational structure and processes identified in the case study suggest that the movement represents a new and different way of challenging Israel.

Introduction

In early June 2015, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu specifically addressed calls for boycott around the world by reportedly telling ministers at a cabinet meeting

that Israel was preparing an ‘offensive’ to combat them.¹ While Netanyahu has disregarded the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in the past, his statements came amid a flurry of boycott activities such as a push by the European Union to label products originating from Israeli settlements and Palestinian attempts to have Israel suspended from FIFA, the world football association. Given the increasing significance of BDS, I analyse the organisational dynamics of the movement by investigating one of its constituent campaigns, We Divest, which is a divestment initiative of the movement. Divestment campaigns within the BDS movement seek to illuminate issues of ethical and socially responsible investment in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and want to eliminate investments in businesses that contribute to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territory or its violations of Palestinian human rights. According to the movement, the aims of divestment campaigns are two-fold: ‘to curb the profits of Israel’s war and apartheid economy’ and to ‘raise awareness about Israel’s policies’.² The most notable divestments have come from Christian churches, universities, banks and pension funds.

In this article, I critically analyse the case of the We Divest campaign as an example of how the BDS movement works, particularly through its organisational structure and processes. The campaign targets the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF), one of the largest retirement fund providers in the US, to divest funds currently held in a number of companies that the campaign has identified as profiting from Israel’s violations of international law. I have selected the case of We Divest as its significance derives from it being the largest divestment campaign in the US. The campaign is currently endorsed by 71 organisations and is also the largest in terms of groups and organisations that compose the campaign.³ By identifying certain aspects of the movement’s infrastructure through an investigation into the We Divest campaign, I argue that the organisational structure and processes identified in the case study suggest that the movement represents a new and different way of challenging Israel.

In the sections that follow, I first outline the empirical evidence of the case—the background of the target (TIAA-CREF) and of We Divest, the groups involved in the campaign, and the campaign’s organisational dynamics. Next, I lay out an analytical framework for investigating the We Divest campaign in an effort to shed light on the ways that the broader BDS movement is operationalised. As the BDS movement shares

many similarities with other contemporary social movements working on global justice related issues, I draw on literature relating to the organisational dynamics and frames of these movements to identify the structures and processes of the BDS movement. In examining the case, I determine certain organisational characteristics of the movement —i.e. networked, decentralised, grassroots, horizontal and border-crossing. I then show how the BDS movement differs from previous forms of resistance against Israel, thus indicating a new form of transnational activism in the Palestinian struggle.

Background of TIAA-CREF and the We Divest campaign

TIAA-CREF is a predominant supplier of financial services for those in the academic, governmental, medical and cultural sectors. It is considered one of the 100 largest US corporations and is currently ranked 97 in the Fortune 500.⁴ In addition to its size, the financial organisation prides itself on socially responsible investment (SRI). The company says it began responsible investment practices in the 1970s by engaging with companies on social issues. According to its website:

TIAA-CREF was one of the first institutional investors to engage with portfolio companies on social responsibility issues, including automotive safety, pollution control, and apartheid policies in South Africa. We continue to champion responsible investing and strong corporate citizenship.⁵

In 2004, TIAA-CREF began an advertising campaign with the slogan ‘Financial Services for the Greater Good’. The motto was featured prominently on the company’s website and became part of its official logo. It was this slogan that the We Divest campaign initially chose to focus on in pressuring the financial services organisation to live up to its motto by divesting from companies that profit from Israel’s violations of Palestinian human rights and other violations of international law.

The We Divest campaign is a divestment initiative of the BDS movement that was initiated in 2010 by Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a Jewish-American peace and justice organisation. That year, activists delivered a petition to the company that was signed by over 250 TIAA-CREF participants and supporters that included professors, doctors, authors, rabbis and others. The overall aim of the We Divest campaign, as set out in its initial petition, is to pressure TIAA-CREF to divest from companies that profit

from Israel's violations of Palestinian rights. The petition described how several companies that TIAA-CREF invests in are involved in activities related to Israel's separation wall or its Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, and identified businesses that TIAA-CREF should divest from based on these activities. The original petition listed five companies: Caterpillar, Veolia, Northrop Grumman, Elbit and Motorola.⁶

The campaign argues that investments in these companies 'implicate the retirement fund in Israel's systematic violation of Palestinian rights'.⁷

Although the campaign was initiated by JVP, it is now a coalition-based initiative. The main groups that comprise the coalition form the national Co-ordinating Committee (CC). The CC includes JVP, mentioned above, Adalah-NY (a New York-based Palestine solidarity group), the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation (a coalition organisation that includes more than 400 Palestine solidarity groups in the US), the US Palestinian Community Network (a network of diaspora Palestinians with several chapters around the US), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, a Quaker organisation active in the US and internationally) and Grassroots International (an international organisation that supports sustainable development and global justice projects in over 20 countries). The We Divest Campaign is also currently endorsed by over 70 groups and organisations, mostly in the US. These organisations include (but are not limited to) local BDS groups in the US, a number of university-based Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapters, several Christian-related organisations, a number of Jewish-American peace and justice groups, and the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC).

While the campaign does not emanate from Israel/Palestine, it is endorsed by the Palestinian BNC. The BNC is comprised of 27 members (coalitions) and describes itself as 'the Palestinian coordinating body' for the BDS movement.⁸ The national committee has formally signed up to the We Divest campaign and the BNC Secretariat published an official statement in support of the campaign on 4 October 2010.⁹ The BNC Secretariat urged 'all groups working on [BDS] campaigns in the US, especially on university campuses, to endorse this campaign and join it, whenever possible, to amplify its reach and impact across the US'.¹⁰ This shows that co-ordination and net-working across borders between Palestinians and solidarity activists is an ongoing interactive process that plays an instrumental role in the structure and processes of the movement.

The groups involved in the We Divest Campaign in particular, and the BDS movement more generally, have become so for various, although similar, reasons. According to the We Divest campaign:

BDS is a form of economic activism which is premised on the idea that violations of Palestinians' rights result not only from Israeli government policies and actions, but also from corporate and institutional policies and actions that support and sustain Israel's occupation and violations of human rights and international law.¹¹

In another statement on its website, the group states that the various BDS campaigns around the world are connected with each other through 'their common goal of ending corporate and institutional complicity' with Israel's violations of human rights and other forms of international law.¹²

The campaign has chosen to focus on TIAA-CREF for a number of reasons. The campaign argues that TIAA-CREF prides itself on its commitment to SRI, yet it invests in companies that violate human rights standards and international law. The We Divest campaign therefore claims that it wants to hold the company accountable to its stated interest in pursuing SRI, and that it is more likely to bend to pressure when the demands come from TIAA-CREF clients or participant institutions than from the general public. Because of the financial services organisation's involvement in ethical investment, they are likely to be more susceptible to pressure than corporations that have no inclination in pursuing SRI.¹³

The size of the financial organisation also appears to be a major consideration for the campaign. TIAA-CREF has clients throughout the US, especially within most universities and colleges, and the company has offices in 60 US cities. According to the campaign, '[TIAA-CREF's] divestment from the Israeli occupation would send a powerful signal to other companies violating international laws by abetting the occupation'.¹⁴ In addition, the size and geographic span of the corporation makes possible a national We Divest campaign that is networked through the development and collaboration of local community-based campaigns. Similar to most initiatives of the BDS movement, the We Divest campaign is decentralised in that activists organise the campaign at the local level.

Targeting TIAA-CREF is also significant because many of the companies designated for divestment are chosen as targets for other BDS campaigns. Campaigns against

Veolia, for example, are widespread in the US and other countries. In Sweden, BDS activists in the group Diakonia and other groups pressured the Stockholm Community Council, which subsequently announced in early 2009 that it would not renew its contract with Veolia worth US\$ 4.5 billion. Veolia had operated the subway for Stockholm County for the previous ten years.¹⁵ At the same time in the West Midlands in the UK, BDS activists launched the ‘Sandwell Bin Veolia Campaign’ against Veolia’s bid for a waste improvement plan. The Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council later announced that it would not consider Veolia for the contract, which was worth US\$ 1.5 billion.¹⁶ In Ireland, activists called on city councils to adopt a motion refusing to renew contracts with Veolia—and, to date, Sligo County, Galway City and Dublin City have agreed.¹⁷ That same year, the French ‘Faisons dérailler Veolia’ campaign successfully fought Veolia’s bid for an urban transport network in Bordeaux, a contract worth US\$ 1 billion.¹⁸

The year after the launch of the campaign in 2010, nearly 20 TIAA-CREF participants submitted a shareholder resolution asking the financial services organisation to divest from companies that profit from Israel’s occupation. TIAA-CREF requested permission from the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to exclude the shareholder resolution from its annual meeting, which the federal regulator allowed.¹⁹ In June 2011, the We Divest campaign held a national call-in day in which activists contacted TIAA-CREF to denounce investments held in companies that profit from Israel’s occupation and voice their dissatisfaction at the withholding of the shareholder’s resolution regarding these investments.²⁰ Those that participated were then asked to take their message to social media sites by posting a status on Facebook stating ‘just told @ttaa-cref they can’t silence Occupation’ or tweeting ‘just told @tc_talks they can’t silence Occupation #ttaa-cref #wedivest_callday’. The group also provided an image stating ‘Why is TIAA-CREF censoring you?’ that supporters could use for their Facebook profile picture.²¹

The following month, We Divest organised a flashmob in New York’s Times Square to draw attention to the shareholder resolution being ignored by TIAA-CREF and the companies involved in Israel’s occupation. Dressed in the professional attire of TIAA-CREF investors, a group of activists sang and danced to the tune of the Village People’s YMCA with substituted lyrics.²² On 19 July, protests were held outside the TIAA-CREF annual meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, along with demonstrations

in cities across the US. Activists held signs, handed out flyers, encouraged passers-by to sign the We Divest petition and tweeted throughout the day using the hashtag #tcdinvest.²³ Shareholders and proxies also raised the issue of divestment within the annual meeting. Following the demonstrations in 2011, the TIAA-CREF shareholder meeting would be the occasion for a national day of action each year.

In general, the We Divest campaign argues that it '[...] organises retirement fund recipients to exercise their rights as shareholders and pressure TIAA-CREF [...]'.²⁴ As the target of the campaign is TIAA-CREF, not its clients, the campaign does not ask clients to move their retirement funds. Rather the campaign wants to educate and mobilise TIAA-CREF participants at the local level for a national campaign against the funds' investments in companies that are involved in Israel's activities in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). This is operationalised at the national and local levels in a number of ways.

At the national level, work is organised by the Co-ordinating Committee (CC), whose members are described above, and working groups. The CC meets in person twice a year to strategise the campaign and, according to the We Divest campaign, the CC utilises 'consensus-based decision making'.²⁵ The working groups comprise members of the CC and their supporters, and include local organising, campus organising, socially responsible investment, shareholder activism, outreach, and media.

At the local level, the campaign is organised in various ways. 'Context sensitivity'—the notion that local people 'know best how to apply BDS most effectively in their particular circumstances [...]' is a priority of the BDS movement, and this is evident in the organisational dynamics of the We Divest campaign.²⁶ The campaign touts that it is 'flexible' and that there are numerous ways that activists can participate in the campaign.²⁷ One of the main forms of organising at the local level is by reaching out to TIAA-CREF clients in that area, educating them about the retirement fund's investments in particular companies that the campaign has identified, and persuading them to take action in various ways. This could be as minimal as signing the TIAA-CREF petition available on the We Divest website or meeting with a representative of the financial services organisation at a local office to discuss investment concerns. Another activity at the local level is raising educational awareness of the issues: TIAA-CREF investments in companies that profit from Israeli activities in the oPt, the BDS movement and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict overall. In doing this, activists hope to

influence the discourse on the conflict, garner support for the movement and mobilise participants.

The Boston chapter of JVP is an example of one group organising at the local level, and supports the national We Divest campaign in a variety of ways. For instance, it organises a local protest on the national day of action, usually in front of a TIAA-CREF local office. Last year, the group organised a flashmob as part of its protest of the retirement fund. In the video, a group of approximately 20 activists donning black T-shirts with the We Divest logo sang and danced to the tune of Taylor Swift's song, 'Trouble' with alternative lyrics. The video was later uploaded to YouTube and the group's website. In addition to participating in the national day of action, JVP Boston states that it also conducts research on SRI, mobilises TIAA-CREF participants and client institutions, and collaborates with local branches of AFSC, Grassroots International and SJP to strengthen the We Divest campaign in the Boston area.

In 2013, TIAA-CREF removed Caterpillar from its Social Choice Fund, a divestment worth US\$ 72 million. This occurred when the company was removed from Morgan Stanley Capital International Environmental, Social and Governance (MSCI ESG) indexes that TIAA-CREF uses in determining which companies are suitable for investment among their social choice products. MSCI said the company's status had been downgraded for a number of reasons, including environmental concerns, employee safety issues, a plant closure in Canada and 'an ongoing controversy associated with use of the company's equipment in the occupied Palestinian territories'.²⁸ TIAA-CREF attempted to avoid publicising the issue by saying 'the only reason that (Caterpillar) came off our list was because it came off MSCI's index'.²⁹ However, this disregards the larger context in which the company was initially removed from the indexes that includes the company's association with the Israeli military and the use of its products in the oPt.

Directly inserting the BDS movement into the ideas and concepts of global justice, Rabbi Alissa Wise, the Director of campaigns at JVP and National Co-ordinator of the We Divest Campaign, stated in response to TIAA-CREF's divestment from Caterpillar: 'We're glad to see the socially responsible investment community appears to be recognizing this and is starting to take appropriate action'.³⁰ Rebecca Vilkomerson, the JVP spokesperson, also stated that because of activism of this nature there is a 'consensus in the human rights community' on Caterpillar's violations of Palestinian rights.³¹

Analysing the case of the We Divest campaign

In this study I draw on a range of literature for analysing the case of the We Divest campaign in order to identify aspects of the larger movement's organisational dynamics. While the BDS movement comprises many campaigns, of which not all are organised as We Divest, the campaign is a significant part of the movement and has notable support. Literature on contemporary transnational activism, specifically the organisational dynamics of groups and organisations associated with anti-globalisation and/or global justice, is useful for identifying structures and processes of the We Divest campaign and the BDS movement. In addition, my analysis draws on the framing literature within social movement theory to identify main themes and ideas in BDS campaigns. In doing so, I want to argue that elucidating features of the movement's broader dynamics (networked, decentralised, border-crossing, etc.) are important because it signals a new and different approach to challenging Israel.

The literature on the organisational dynamics of the global justice movement (also often referred to as the anti- or alter-globalisation movement), that has proliferated since the 1990s, is useful for understanding how the BDS movement works because of the organisational parallels evident in mobilising around issues other than Palestine.³²

According to Mario Diani, many contemporary social movements can be described as 'networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity'.³³ Classifying the BDS movement in this manner emphasises its networked nature and is useful in conceptualising how the movement is structured and organised.

As the BDS movement is a relatively unresearched topic in scholarly literature, it is critical to first identify the movement's organisational structure and processes to form a basis for understanding how the movement works. In analysing the We Divest campaign, my intention is to contribute to a more nuanced analysis of these dynamics. With respect to the literature relating to organisational aspects of transnational activism, it is important to highlight that the BDS movement shares similarities with other movements related to transnational activism linked to global justice more generally. For, as Jeffrey Juris writes, '[d]ecentralised, flexible, local/global activist networks constitute the dominant organisational forms within global justice movements [...]'.³⁴

This reflects the structure of organising in the BDS movement as illustrated through an investigation into the We Divest campaign.

A significant component of the BDS movement, We Divest is a decentralised campaign made up of grassroots networks that use political tactics (BDS) to pressure Israel to abide by international law and respect Palestinian rights. In particular, the We Divest campaign embodies characteristics of horizontal and vertical organising. According to the campaign, ‘We Divest is a national campaign with global reach, but its strength comes from local organising’.³⁵ Vertically, the structure of the campaign is national in that it is a coalition-based organisation of co-ordinating members from around the US, with priorities and strategies largely set at the national level through the Co-ordinating Committee.

Despite the national structure of the We Divest campaign, the initiative is largely decentralised and horizontal in that it is comprised of community-based campaigns across the country. Local groups determine how their campaigns are organised. They decide the goals of the local campaign (e.g. a faculty statement), and how to make it relevant within the larger We Divest campaign and BDS movement. These groups form a web of activity that, taken together, encompasses a national campaign to pressure TIAA-CREF to divest from companies that profit from supporting Israel’s policies and practices that violate Palestinian rights.

Information and co-ordination between the national CC and local groups occurs through networks using various means of communication such as email, electronic mailing lists, Facebook, Twitter and the We Divest website. The We Divest website is a central channel for spreading information about the campaign; it is the location where groups can endorse the campaign and supporters can sign the petition asking TIAA-CREF to divest from companies that violate human rights principles and international law. It contains the most updated information on the campaign and also highlights the successes of other BDS campaigns that have similar corporate targets. The national campaign provides resources and toolkits for starting local campaigns and facilitates ‘opportunities to network between campaigners’.³⁶ The website also has a widget that activists can use to find groups with We Divest related campaigns in their area.³⁷

The way that much of the We Divest campaign and the BDS movement in general is organised—by coalition-building, consensus-based decision-making, a decentralised national campaign through a network of local community-based groups, and the use

of internet-based tools for communicating and co-ordinating—parallels how groups working on other causes are organised. These structures and processes are seen in various movements such as Via Campesina, the 15-M movement or Indignados and Occupy Wall Street. Identifying these organisational structures and processes of the BDS movement is important because it indicates certain organisational trends among many groups working on a range of issues surrounding global justice.

The theoretical concept of ‘collective action frames’ within the social movement literature is also useful for understanding how the BDS movement works, as movements are mobilised partly through the ideas they advocate. ‘Frames’ are ways of thinking of and interpreting events or occurrences in life. According to Robert Benford and David Snow, collective action frames are ‘intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists’.³⁸ Activists use reoccurring themes and ideas to convey messages about their cause, hoping to frame the way people think about and understand an issue. Thus, participants in social movements actively construct alternative ways of interpreting and comprehending a particular issue, problem or solution.

Similar to other social movements, BDS activists frame their campaigns around particular themes to construct an alternative way of seeing and thinking about Israel/Palestine. Reorienting the conceptual focus of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict around specific points, such as Palestinian rights or corporate complicity in Israel’s occupation, challenges dominant and existing frames of the conflict that stress Israel’s securitisation. Framing the movement through these lenses is important in constructing a way of thinking of Israel/Palestine that challenges the status quo while also indicating how the movement understands itself. In this way, the ‘strategic framing’ of the BDS movement through its reoccurring themes unites and orientates the movement thereby setting a conceptual programme for collective action.

The conceptual frames that activists deploy for the purposes of collective action in the We Divest campaign are parallel to the frames that other BDS initiatives adopt. The first is that of human rights and other forms of international law in constructing a basis and justification for action. These themes were written into the original petition to TIAA-CREF organised by JVP in 2010, and were further reinforced in We Divest statements as shown in the campaign’s rationale for BDS quoted earlier. Both shareholder resolutions submitted to TIAA-CREF on behalf of We Divest investors

significantly emphasised these themes throughout the short proposals. These ideas are also prevalent in the work of all members on the We Divest national Co-ordinating Committee and in many of the endorsing organisations of the campaign.

Another frame identified in the We Divest campaign, and the BDS movement more generally, is that of corporate complicity with Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights. Activists in the movement want to draw attention to and target corporations that assist Israel in these endeavours, thereby exposing an underlying system of support and maintenance for Israel's colonisation and occupation. By creating bad press through negative associations with Israel's actions, these campaigns hope that individuals and institutions will divest from companies that are engaged in these activities.

Similar to its organisational structure and processes, there is an overlap in collective action frames between the BDS movement and other transnational movements. The We Divest campaign embraces ideas of global justice by focusing on issues of socially responsible investment, corporate complicity, international law and principles of human rights, which corresponds and resonates with activists working on issues other than Palestine-related activism. Palestinian author and activist, Ramzy Baroud, therefore posits that: 'BDS has opened up whole new ground for the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and human rights which is based on universally recognised principles'.³⁹ As these crosscutting themes have proliferated, particularly through the development of anti-globalisation and global justice movements from the late 1990s onward, the priorities of the We Divest campaign have interconnecting linkages with ideas that are promoted on a wide range of issues and in other struggles across the globe. From sweatshop labour to climate change, corporations are susceptible to public scrutiny of profit making at the expense of human rights and environmental considerations, among others. Identifying these characteristics of the movement is important because it indicates a new and innovative way of opposing Israel.

The use of the boycott tactic, however, is not new. The Palestinian struggle has repeatedly used boycotts, non-cooperation and anti-normalisation strategies to refuse to engage with the colonial authorities. A portion of these activities are considered 'everyday resistance'—routine acts of non-acceptance or compliance, such as refusing to apply to the colonial authorities for permission to travel, or continuing to work or go to school in difficult conditions. These tactics were collectively demonstrated during the al-Quds uprising in the 1920s, the 1936 revolt, the First Intifada that began in

1987 and the Second Intifada that started in 2000.⁴⁰ In addition to the use of these tactics by Palestinians, the Arab states initiated boycotts of the Jewish Yishuv before the state of Israel was created, and formalised an Arab League boycott after 1948.⁴¹ The current Arab League boycott is insignificant as its regulations are non-binding on member states. As such, a number of countries have formal peace treaties with Israel and/or diplomatic relations, or do not apply the boycott.

Other strategies and tactics employed for challenging Israel have largely been organised through Palestinian political factions. Factions associated with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and those outside its structure (e.g. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, etc.) have been organisationally integral to directing and executing resistance against Israel. Each political faction, and the PLO as a broader umbrella organisation for many of the factions, has its own organisational structure and processes, though generally most factions have favoured hierarchical and centralised forms of organising, and endorsed 'charismatic' leadership.⁴²

By the 1970s, Palestinians had organised volunteer-based committees, clubs, groups, associations, unions, etc. These include organised associations in local communities for workers, women, students, journalists, etc. and these have been critical in mobilising the population in the Palestinian struggle. Some of these civil society organisations are connected to the political factions, although not all. During the First Intifada, these groups were considered part of the Palestinian national liberation movement and 'formed the popular base of the first intifada'.⁴³ During that time these groups provided social welfare to the people and an infrastructure for participation.⁴⁴ Although Palestinian civil society has gone through transformations over time, many groups and organisations still provide some organisational structure for opposing Israel.

Palestinians have also established popular committees, which were organised in the villages during the First Intifada to co-ordinate resistance against Israel. The committees were comprised of villagers from a variety of backgrounds and played an important role in organising the uprising locally. Though largely dormant during the Oslo process, the popular committees re-emerged during the Second Intifada. In particular, popular committees were set up in the West Bank areas of Budrous, Biddu, Bil'in, South Bethlehem and the South Hebron Hills, where weekly demonstrations have been held against Israel's construction of the wall that often detracts from the Green Line and confiscates huge swathes of Palestinian land to make way for its path. Popular

committees during the Second Intifada also spoke to the media, occasionally pursued legal cases in Israeli courts and encouraged the boycott of Israeli products. The demonstrations organised by the popular committees were attended by Palestinians and international solidarity groups.

Similar to Palestinian resistance, solidarity activism with Palestinians has taken on various forms and has changed throughout the struggle. After Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, the PLO, with its strategy of guerrilla insurgency to liberate the homeland, was supported by other national liberation struggles at the time. During the First Intifada, many international solidarity activists were involved in activities designed to raise awareness of the situation of the Palestinians and their struggle for self-determination. In the first decade of the Oslo process, activists participated in many programmes and projects that brought Israelis and Palestinians together to forge 'people-to-people' relationships, but these were largely unsuccessful. During the Second Intifada, international activists began solidarity activities in the oPt in groups such as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), Campagne Internationale de Protection du Peuple Palestinien (CIPPP), International Women's Peace Service (IWPS), Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) and the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) among others.

Comparing these ways of organising and campaigning—through everyday resistance, the state-based Arab boycott, political factions, popular committees and international solidarity activism—with the scope and frames of BDS activism, indicates a new form of transnational activism in the Palestinian struggle. The We Divest campaign specifically, and the BDS movement more generally, does not have a formal top-down, centralised command structure from Palestine or anywhere else. Palestinians in the Diaspora do play important roles in BDS campaigns outside of Palestine, just as Palestinians are active in the broader movement in various locations.⁴⁵ But what is meant here is that campaigns outside of Palestine are not directed from any particular faction or organisation inside Palestine. There is flexibility within the movement and a large degree of autonomy in local campaigns. These local campaigns largely determine for themselves their targets, tactics, sub-tactics, and how much they co-ordinate with other Palestine solidarity groups or the BNC. No other period in Palestinian history has witnessed such fluid structures and processes on a transnational level for organising in the Palestinian struggle.

This is not to suggest, however, that Palestine has not been ‘internationalised’ or engaged in transnational activism in the past. Particularly in the 1960s–1970s, Palestinian guerrillas positioned themselves among third world liberation movements. According to Paul Chamberlin: ‘As they tapped into the transnational culture of Third World liberation, Palestinian fighters became adept at traversing the revolutionary networks of the Cold War international system and became a cause célèbre for progressive movements around the world’.⁴⁶ During this time, Palestinian guerrillas connected ideas and tactics from various places such as Algeria, Vietnam and Cuba, and stressed that their liberation was one front in the global anti-imperialist struggle.⁴⁷

Hence, while local organising and the use of transnational networks in opposing Israel has undoubtable historic roots, the BDS movement—that of a decentralised, grassroots, network-based border-crossing social movement centred on political tactics of BDS—is historically unique in the Palestinian struggle. Its structure and processes show how the movement is a novel way of challenging Israel. In this new form of transnational activism, Israel’s power is confronted across the globe in various venues by a range of individuals (retirees, students, faith-based activists, etc.).

In the case of We Divest, it is a national campaign that is organised through the activities of We Divest campaigns in local communities throughout the US. It is the combination of these grassroots campaigns and the networks they form with each other that constitute the national campaign. The We Divest campaign is also part of the broader BDS movement, but is a US-specific campaign as TIAA-CREF only provides services to US customers. Targets of the BDS movement are selected based on a connection to the state of Israel’s contentious policies and practices towards the Palestinians, thereby situating the movement in places often geographically far away from the Middle East. Through its networked, decentralised, grassroots, horizontal and border-crossing structure and processes, the BDS movement represents a new way of challenging Israel that attempts to pressure the state from various sectors and locations around the world.

Conclusion

In this article, I have investigated the We Divest campaign as an example of a divestment initiative of the BDS movement in order to demonstrate how the

movement is organised. As the movement is comprised of BDS campaigns around the world, there is a need to examine these campaigns to understand how the transnational movement works. Specifically, I have contextualised the background of TIAA-CREF and the We Divest campaign, the groups involved in We Divest and the organisational dynamics of the campaign. In examining the We Divest campaign case study, a number of characteristics of the BDS movement have been illuminated, particularly, its organisational structure, processes and frames. This specific divestment initiative of the BDS movement reveals the workings of the movement more generally, and indicates how a portion of contemporary activism surrounding Palestine is being organised.

In identifying aspects of the movement's dynamics, and in comparison with other forms of resistance, I have argued that the BDS movement represents a new and different way of challenging Israel. The movement's campaigns can be conducted anywhere in the world, and while the main target of the movement is the state of Israel, the campaigns also target companies that activists believe are complicit in Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights. Because the movement is a largely decentralised, horizontal, grassroots network of Palestinians and solidarity activists across borders it makes the movement infinitely expandable. The We Divest campaign thus illustrates aspects of the larger BDS movement in which it exists, and indicates that the movement is a new form of transnational activism in the Palestinian struggle.

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Endnotes

1. Barak Ravid, 'Netanyahu: Israel Preparing "Offensive" to Combat Boycott Calls'. *Haaretz*, 7 June 2015. Available at: http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.660003#article_comments [Accessed 23 June 2015].
2. BNC, 'Palestinian BDS'; BDS Movement, 'Divestment'.
3. A list of the endorsing organisations is available on the campaign's website at: <https://wedivest.org/endorsing-orgs> [Accessed 12 December 2013].
4. Fortune 500, n.d. 'TIAA-CREF'. Available at: <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2013/snapshots/10606.html> [Accessed 12 December 2013].

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6. According to the campaign's petition, Caterpillar supplies armoured bulldozers used in the destruction of Palestinian homes and uprooting of Palestinian orchards. Veolia operates a landfill in the West Bank for Jewish-only settlement garbage and previously took part in a light rail system that connects illegal Israeli settlements with Jerusalem. Northrop Grumman supplies parts for Apache heli-copters and F-16s that are used against civilians in the Gaza Strip, and Elbit provides surveillance equipment for Israel's wall. Motorola provides surveillance equipment used in Israeli settlements, checkpoints and bases in the West Bank, and provides communication systems for the Israeli Defense Force and Israeli settlers. See We Divest, 'Tell TIAA-CREF'.
7. We Divest, 'Why TIAA-CREF'.
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18. Ibid.
19. We Divest, 'TIAA-CREF Censors their Investors'.
20. We Divest, 'Call TIAA-CREF Today!'.
21. Ibid.
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32. For example, see Della Porta, *The Global Justice Movement*; Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*; Smith and Johnston, *Globalizing Resistance*.
33. Diani, 'The Concept of Social Movement', 3.
34. Juris, 'Networked Social Movements', 349.
35. We Divest, 'Organize Locally'. Available at: <https://wedivest.org/p/231/local#.UwyPPmSxhg> [Accessed 12 December 2013].
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Benford and Snow, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance', 198.
39. Baroud, 'Palestine's Global Battle'.
40. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*.
41. Feiler, *From Boycott to Economic Cooperation*, 32.
42. For general information on the organisational structures and processes of the factions and PLO see: Amos II, *Palestinian Resistance*; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*; Giacaman, 'Political Representation and Armed Struggle'. Quandt has argued that historically, cultural conceptions of leadership and the fragmenting of Palestinian society after 1948 have led to decentralisation and a strong sense of individualism in terms of leaders. See Quandt et al., *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism*, 80–81. On charismatic leadership see: Brynen, 'The Neopatrimonial Dimension'; and Jarbawi and Pearlman, 'Struggle in a Post-Charisma Transition'.
43. Hilal, 'Civil Society in Palestine'.
44. King, 'Palestinian Civil Resistance', 134–135.
45. See Ziadah, 'Sixty Years of Nakba'.
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47. Ibid., Chap. 1; and Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, Chap. 8.

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