

The BDS Movement and Radical Democracy

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Introduction

On 25 June 2015, the high-profile magazine *Newsweek* reported that Foreign Direct Investment in Israel was nearly 50% lower in 2014 than in 2013. The drop was attributed to “the fallout from the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Operation Protective Edge [of July-August 2014] and international boycotts against the country for alleged violations of international law” (Moore 2015). Research on the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS), nonetheless, is still in its infancy, and opinion is highly divided as to its nature and role. This chapter takes the view that the movement cannot be dismissed as just another form of anti-Semitism. It argues that the BDS movement instead exhibits a number of important similarities to recent radical democracy movements. It is a non-hierarchical and non-doctrinal movement that is networked, decentralized, multitudinous, and trans-local. The movement seeks to address and change political society without aiming to take up an established position of power within political society itself, through inclusionary, direct-action mobilisation rooted in universal rights. The chapter argues that it is precisely these radically democratic features that can help account for the movement’s increasing potency in recent years.

The chapter is based on participant observation in the movement over nearly a decade, and is offered by an academic with a commitment to the movement. Some are bound to discount contributions from those who have stakes in the movement or its suppression as overly interested and politicized; others will maintain a more open-minded position, grasping the complexity of the relationship between politics and scholarship, the problems lurking behind claims to objectivity (Novick 1989), and

understanding that in an unresolved and profoundly polarizing conflict, neutrality and detachment is a difficult stance for any contemporary actor to maintain credibly, or even usefully.

Radical Democracy

New forms of radically democratic theory and activism emerged after the late 1960s in various parts of the world. Theories bearing family resemblances appeared in diverse sites. Jacques Rancière's work on new forms of democratic politics was launched after May 1968 with a critique of Left doctrinalism and authoritarianism (Rancière 2006). In the wake of the military defeat of 1967, Anwar Abd Al-Malek wrote a major criticism of Egypt's military society and the failure of an authoritarian Left to generate popular democracy in the Arab world (Abd Al-Malek 1968). He was joined by others in the region who sought a democratic form of socialism (Bardawil 2010). Elsewhere, a seminal critique of Marxist economism put the struggle for a reformulated hegemony involving radical democracy at the centre of a new normative political theory for the Left (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In a different register, anarchist and autonomist philosophers Hardt and Negri invoked not a working-class seeking to seize the means of production, but a networked multitude capable of creatively generating a revolutionary form of democratic politics (Hardt and Negri 2005). French post-structuralists deepened the idea of networked forms of identity involving multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points through their concept of the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Revivals in anarchist theorizing also regularly placed radically egalitarian and stateless visions at the centre of their **normative theory** (Beasley-Murray 2010; Day 2005; Newman 1990). A number of scholars have sought to theorize deliberative, pre-figurative and participatory forms of democracy (Boggs 1977; Dhaliwal 1996; Della Porta 2013; Dryzek 2000; Motta 2011). Others have put forward notions of activism and direct action that eschew appeals to the state or the use of a vanguard, and enjoin the construction of new forms of social order that bypass state and capital (Holloway 2010; Wainwright 2003).

Since the 1960s, uprisings and movements have exhibited homologies with radically democratic normative theory. People power uprisings, "relatively nonviolent demonstrations in which hundreds of thousands simply showed their disgust, lack of fear,

and unwillingness to cooperate with the old regime in massive demonstrations in urban public spaces” (McAdam and Sewell 2001: 113-15) without disciplined hierarchical organization, and without necessarily proposing an alternative ideological blueprint for state and society, were seen in 1986 in the Philippines, the Occupied Palestinian Territories in 1987-91 (Qumsiyeh 2011), Eastern Europe and China in 1989, in Mexico under the Zapatistas after 1994, in the independence intifada in Lebanon in 2005, and in South East Asia in the 1980s and 1990s (Katsiaficas 2013). A highly-networked and trans-local Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement contributed to the fall of Apartheid in South Africa in 1994. The movement of landless workers in Brazil since 1984 eschewed the use of a Party and has invoked themes of de-centralization, non-hierarchy and consensus; *piquetero* movements of the unemployed in Argentina similarly emphasised themes of autonomy and de-centralization (Chatterton 2005); the term horizontalism (*horizontalidad*) was coined in Argentina to describe the movements that emerged in December 2001, in Argentina, after the economic crisis. This activism was distinctive in its rejection of political programmes and its attempts to create directly democratic and deliberative spaces and new social relationships (Sitrin 2006). The **alter-globalisation** and global justice movements emerging in the 1990s set considerable store by non-hierarchical, consensus-seeking, and participatory decision making processes in opposition to Left doctrinalism and sectarianism (Maeckelbergh 2009). The global spread of demonstrations against the Iraq war of 2003 strongly evoked transnational themes (Tarrow 2006: xiii). Participatory and anarchist elements have been at work in Israeli and Palestinian activism against the separation barrier in Israel/Palestine since 2002 (Beinin 2014). Horizontalism, understood to involve de-centralized and networked organizing, leaderfulness and creativity, and an emphasis on consensus and deliberation, was at work in the Arab uprisings of 2011, especially among urban youth (Aly El-Raggal 2011; Chalcraft 2012). Since 2011, Occupy movements in Spain, Greece, London, New York, Iceland, and more recently protests in Turkey, Brazil and Hong Kong, have also placed considerable weight on horizontalist logics, eschewing vertical and ‘arborescent’ structures (Castells 2012; Graeber 2013).

Radically democratic mobilising projects are diverse but exhibit family resemblances. They invoke “[p]refiguration, horizontality, diversity, decentralisation and the network structure” (Maeckelbergh 2009: 145). They aim to prefigure the alternative

orders that they envisage through the forms of action and styles of organizing that they themselves embody. This is the sense in which such movements declare that the movement is the message. These movements are non-doctrinal in that they do not seek to apply an ideological blueprint (classical liberalism, communism, fascism, nationalism or Islamism) – seen as conformist, essentialist, hierarchical, repressive, and undemocratic – and pointless because new political orders do not arise from blueprints in any case, but from the actions of the many. Rather than imposing doctrine, these movements strive to seek out consensus. Their most crucial enemy is not capitalism, globalisation, or discourse as such, but coercive, authoritarian, exclusionary, intersectional and totalizing systems of power, systems that often combine discursive, military, legal-administrative, economic, gendered, or other aspects of domination. They aim to deconstruct dominant arrangements, and bring into being alternative systems of egalitarian (re)production and meaning which go well beyond the reformulation of the sphere of formal politics. The mode of integration and identification is more or less explicitly held not to be that of the traditional collective subject: ‘the people’, ‘the nation’, ‘the proletariat’, the ‘woman’, the ‘Jew’, the ‘Muslim’ and so on. These categories are seen as essentialist and conformist. The ‘we-ness’ of the movement is instead supplied by the notion of a motley multitude in the tradition of Spinoza and Hardt and Negri. The multitude is the ‘living alternative’ that grows within Empire. It “might . . . be conceived as a network: an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common”; it is not like “the people” or “the working class” but “composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations”. Production here is seen as not just being about the working class and must not be conceived purely in economic terms “but more generally as social production – not only the production of material goods but also the production of communications, relationships, and forms of life. The multitude is thus composed potentially of all the diverse figures of social production” (Hardt and Negri 2005: xiii-xv). The ‘we’ is thus a multiplication of singularities, cultivating an ‘ethic of dissensus’ (Ziarek 2001).

Radically democratic movements regularly make use of networked and rhizomic forms of organization, emphatically rejecting sole or charismatic leaders such as a Nasser,

a Khomeini, or a Chavez. Instead, they prefer to unlock the power of the diverse, multi-coloured, and multitudinous subjectivities that make up the movement, eschewing the Party or vanguardist forms, with an emphasis on spontaneity more than on the building up of resources or organizational structures. Such movements are thus leaderless, or better still, leaderful, with many points of creativity and ‘intelligent’ decision. In this sense these movements are 2.0 movements, in the sense that ‘users’ create content rather than passively consuming content provided by others, just as many new media users do in their everyday lives. The rhizome is supposed to work with creativity and personal autonomy, and even pleasure, although procedures, forms of ‘facilitation’, and skills there are aplenty. Instead of policing boundaries, rhizomic organization thinks in terms of multiplying points in a network. Radically democratic movements stress deliberation, not representation, and the de-centralization of decision-making capacity. The idea is that the demos (re-written as the multitude) is not easy to separate from its representatives, and such a separation brings about distortion and ‘speaking for’ and ‘speaking over’ rather than ‘speaking with’. Characteristic organizations are thus General Assemblies, Popular Committees and Coordinating Networks, rather than parties, unions, or established NGOs.

Direct and unmediated action, rather than supplication before the powers-that-be, is a common feature of the strategies and tactics of these movements. In place of persuasion, negotiation and representation comes direct action, civil disobedience, and institutional disruption. In place of the demonstration, seen as ineffective and passive, comes the continuous and defiant occupation of symbolically important public space. In place of complaining to customer services, we find hacktivism (Krapp 2005). In place of demands, one finds ‘misbehaviour’ (Edwards 2014: 213-234), and the do-it-yourself construction of alternatives. Traditional forms of claim-making are seen as problematic, they pre-suppose a failure to problematize existing forms of authority, they may smuggle in statism by authorizing state actors to take charge or to co-opt. Conventional forms of the state, multi-party democracy, constitutions, elections and parliaments are regularly seen as inadequate levers of transformation, corrupted, rigged and controlled by corporate power, international financial institutions, alliances with the US hegemon, and saturated by PR. Rather than seizing the state, the aim is often to bypass it, or make it irrelevant, or re-make it in some basic way.

The BDS Movement

In May 2011, Ehud Barak, an ex-prime minister of Israel, who had also been Chief of General Staff in the Israeli army, spoke to the left-leaning Israeli daily Ha'aretz:

There are some pretty powerful elements in the world that are active in the matter . . . in various organisations of workers, academics, consumers, green parties . . . And this drive boils down to a large movement called BDS, which is what they did with South Africa. It won't happen all at once. It will begin, like an iceberg, to advance on us from all quarters (Ehud Barak, 9 May 2011, interview in Haaretz, cited in Wiles 2013: 222).

In the early 2010s, Israeli politicians started to take notice of the BDS movement more than in passing. Whether or not the movement was an iceberg capable of holing the Israeli Titanic below the waterline, it was certainly highly de-centralized, with initiatives coming from many quarters and countries. By this time, activists had been at work for almost a decade. With the lack of progress made by the second intifada, the Israeli re-invasion of Jenin in April 2002, and the search for new kinds of politics that could break the impasse of Israeli domination, the failure of the Palestinian Authority, and Islamist armed struggle, a number of Palestinian academics and students, along with half a dozen or so like-minded academics in Britain and France, started to raise the question, in secular and democratic terms, of boycotting the institutions of the Israeli state that were complicit in colonisation and occupation (Morrison 2013, forthcoming). Activists were certainly heavily inspired by, and made constant reference to, what the international BDS movement had achieved in bringing down Apartheid in South Africa in 1994-5 (Wiles 2013). From early calls, discussions, union and associational activity in both Palestine and the UK and to a lesser extent France between 2002 and 2004, well over a hundred Palestinian associations, unions, and committees endorsed a general call for boycotts, divestment and sanctions on Israel in 2005. Over the next decade, academics, consumers, students, church groups, workers, unions, co-operatives, campaign groups, and professional associations from Palestine, the UK, the USA, France and to some extent in other countries as diverse as Spain, Australia, and Pakistan, their ranks swelling in the wake of Israeli military actions in 2006, 2008-9 and 2014, built a movement with thousands of activists against occupation, colonisation and attendant violations of human

rights and international law (Barghouti 2011; Hickey and Marfleet 2010; Morrison 2013). The movement scored some success in provoking debate, and generating boycotts of Israeli academic and cultural institutions, notably by world-famous scientist Stephen Hawking in 2013. It also caused divestment in some cases, such as the major Dutch pension fund, PPGM in January 2014, and a loss of contracts worth billions in Europe for companies such as Veolia whose reputations were tarnished by campaigners because they operated in the Palestinian occupied territories. It has been less successful in changing facts on the ground.

Opinions on the BDS movement are as far apart as those of Harold Brackman, who in a study written for the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, characterizes the BDS movement as a “thinly-veiled, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic “poison pill,” whose goal is the demonization, delegitimization, and ultimate demise of the Jewish State”; a “movement that does not help better the life of a single Palestinian and which is oblivious to major human rights disasters erupting throughout the Middle East and beyond” (Brackman 2013). At the other end of the spectrum is the view of one of chief architects of the movement, the Palestinian Omar Barghouti, who argues that “[t]he global BDS movement for Palestinian rights presents a progressive, anti-racist, sophisticated, sustainable, moral and effective form of civil, non-violent resistance . . . affirming the rights of *all* humans to freedom, equality and dignified living” (Barghouti 2013: 228). This chapter offers some evidence on the nature of the BDS movement by considering various elements of the movement’s mobilising project in turn: its identity, principles, goals, organization, strategies and tactics.

Identity

What is the identity of the BDS movement? There is an obvious sense in which Palestinian nationalism is at play: the boycott speaks in the terms of the rights of Palestinians in the OPT, Palestinian refugees, and Palestinians living in Israel, and speaks a good deal about self-determination. Palestinian flags are to be found at BDS events. Whether or not boycotters declare ‘we are Palestinian nationalists’, there is at least a sense that the act of boycotting is an act of solidarity with a nationalist movement that has not yet found its state.

Palestinian nationalism is not as central to the movement's 'we-ness', however, as might be assumed. If we compare the literature on the boycott to that of the national liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, we find a relative lack of ideational depth or emphasis on the question of nationalism. Very powerful in anti-colonial and Third Worldist nationalist movements of the 'short' twentieth century was the construction of, and membership within, a central, national subjectivity, whether Palestinian, Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, pan-Arab, pan-African or otherwise. The well-known intellectual progenitor of Ba'athist pan-Arabism, Michel Aflaq, for example, enunciated a romantic and heavily acculturated Arab national identity involving 'one Arab nation with an eternal mission' (Aflaq 1977). Vitaly important were the existence of commonalities – a common history, language, spirit, destiny and so on. Ba'athists identified with this powerful, overarching identity, which was supposed to be rooted in long experiences of togetherness, and very much defined the 'we' of the movement. The liberation of the nation as such was freighted during much of the twentieth century with the belief that national emancipation was a guarantor of social rights, economic development, self-determination, social progress, and liberation in a more metaphysical sense. Nationalism takes a different place within the BDS movement: it does not serve by any means such a central function or deep meaning in defining the "we-ness" of the BDS movement.

On the contrary, many BDS supporters would find themselves in some measure of agreement with Gilbert Achcar's strictures against nationalism:

Nationalism is too often . . . a very deadly disease. Superseding nationalism is a precondition for the achievement of real peaceful coexistence between nations (Achcar 2014: 19).

This rejection of a strong form of nationalism chimes with much of the movement. Even in the articles, statements, and exhortations put out by Omar Barghouti, there is a clear downplaying of the idea of a signing up to a Palestinian nation. This might be viewed as the mere instrumental usage of an existing metropolitan ennui with nationalism; or it might, and probably should, be taken more seriously. The BDS movement encapsulates a more active form of participation than the idea of 'solidarity with' implies. It is not that pre-existing unions, NGOs, parties, churches, and so on now declare solidarity with an externalised Palestinian nationalism. It is instead that they incorporate

the principles enunciated by the boycott, in regards to human rights, international law, global justice and so on, into their own internal functioning. While it is true that such a rejection of nationalism is amenable to long-standing Left traditions, the fact is that class is not central to the identity of the movement, which although containing socialists, anti-capitalists and alter-globalisation activists, is not built around a working class identity.

Adherents to the BDS movement are from highly diverse ethnic, religious, national, and class backgrounds. They include Muslims, Jews, and Christians, Israelis, British, French, Indians, Egyptians, Americans and so on. They are racially and ethnically mixed. There are wealthy, male celebrities such as Elvis Costello and white, pensioners living in cul-de-sacs in the suburbs of Sheffield. There are those who do self-identify as working-class, as well as those on low incomes who do not, or those who would see themselves as middle or even upper class, as well as those with high incomes and status. Boycotters maintain a motley patchwork of different forms of social identity – from Pakistan to Los Angeles. This does not mean that the movement is integrated as a mosaic: we note that the movement is not composed of lesser, unitary identities, unlike the nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s. There are no ‘toiling masses’ described as having specific components: workers, peasants, students, fighters, women – with their respective organizations and unions. Instead, the networked form of integration does not rely on an aggregate of essentialized identities. BDS “relies on the voluntary participation of people at all levels of society, regardless of their national or ethnic identities, and without geographical limitations” (Falk 2013: 87). The BDS movement, however, does not enunciate very explicitly a ‘we-ness’ that would encapsulate all these differences. It does not explicitly state ‘we are a multitude’ – although in many respects the resemblances with the multitude are many.

Principles

What does the BDS movement stand for? What are the principles that define the cause? The lead note in the language of the BDS movement is that the Palestinians are human beings whose basic rights have been violated and on whom dispossession has been practiced.

The pre-figurative idea, to my knowledge, is not especially developed – the self-conscious claim that the very mode of organizing pre-figures the alternative society that the movement wishes to construct. The movement is more outward-looking and goal-focused, one might argue. Nonetheless, there are claims that what the BDS movement does is democracy in action. Indeed, BDS supporters at the Fourth National BDS Conference, held in Bethlehem on 8 June 2013, made exactly this claim. The networked form of the BDS movement allows a rare space for democratic forms of organizing and participation and can open up such spaces in Palestine and perhaps beyond. There are clearly those that see non-violence in this light; a non-violent movement is inherently a democratic form that generates deliberative space, and pre-figures a desirable society. Non-violence is elevated to a principle, and not just a tactic.

Barghouti insists that the BDS movement adopts a rights-based approach. The idea is that boycotters are those who support Palestinian rights: the right of return (referring above all to the Palestinians in the diaspora), the right of freedom from occupation (referring above all to Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem), and the right to civil equality (referring above all to Palestinian citizens of Israel). The rights invoked by the BDS movement are closely identified with universal rights – self-determination, freedom, and equality – which do not belong only to Palestinians or Arabs. They are supposed to be inalienable rights to which anyone would sign up. They are thus capable of being linked to other struggles (Barghouti 2013: 218). These rights are not seen as the special property of one or other category of citizens, or nationals, Muslims or Jews, civilized or backward, proletarian or bourgeoisie.. On the Israeli-Palestinian stage, it is Jewish-Israelis that enjoy them as a matter of course, and Palestinian-Arabs who should now obtain them, having been deprived of them. This vision is not seen as a zero-sum game.

The insistence on international law and human rights is very much part of the discourse of the movement, especially its Palestinian sections. Substantial intellectual labour and practical activism around the Israeli court system has gone into this question, involving thinkers, activists and legal scholars (Nasreer Aruri, Raja Shehadeh, and Richard Falk are some of the names involved). Falk traces a genealogy of these Palestinian rights since the First World War. In the Balfour declaration, he writes, it was “clearly understood that nothing should be done which may prejudice the civil and

religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities”. The responsibility for this protection was then transferred to the United Nations in 1948. Neither Britain nor the UN upheld these rights (Pappé 2013: 134). This approach, which characterizes aspects of the BDS movement, is in stark contrast to the dismissal of UN resolutions that characterized the PLO during the period of the *thawra* from 1968-1982

Arguably, nationalism serves more as a principle than as an identity. It is invoked less for its own sake, and less as an identity and community that must be constituted, and more in order to establish the importance of and warrant for rights. Likewise, the movement does not adopt an ideological blueprint or programme for the transformation of society, neither liberal capitalism, Islamism, socialism nor fascism. Rights are not derived from ideology, but are inalienable. The implicit model of emancipation is rather distinct: neither to constitute an unrealised national community, or instantiate an unrealised ideology, but to establish, through action rooted in civil society but directed at political society, the conditions of existence for the flourishing of diverse subjectivities – considered as factors in the (re)production of the social as a whole.

Opponents

If the BDS movement’s de facto mode of identification is multitudinous, and if it stands for basic and inalienable rights – then what is it against? Who are its opponents, systemic or otherwise, and what does it see as the obstacles to its progress?

The movement does not say: we are those who hate, fear, or harbour prejudices or wariness about Jews. It invariably claims that Zionism is completely distinct from Judaism. Barghouti insists on the “crucial distinction between Israel and Jews worldwide, which rejects the racist claim that Israel or Zionism represents all Jews” (Barghouti 2013: 224). The British Employment Tribunal’s March 2013 judgement in the case of Fraser v UCU (the University and College Union) to the effect that Zionist political beliefs are not the same as Jewishness as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 was an important moment for the BDS campaign in the UK, as it gave legal backing to their position distinguishing sharply Jewishness from Zionism (BRICUP 2013). Anti-Semitism as a discourse, a set of clichés, a form of racism or cultural essentialism, a

sentiment or an ideology plays no meaningful role in the BDS movement. Those who levy the charge of anti-Semitism either use simple misrepresentation, or rely on notions of sub-conscious influences, hidden motives, or coded language, or argue that the anti-Semitism is an effect, but not an intention (Butler 2003). Such claims are notoriously difficult to falsify or verify. Rather like propaganda against Jews, such as that carried on by Hamas especially in its earliest pronouncements, claims of this kind are resistant to rational procedures of proof because they rely on the attribution of hidden motives and dark subterranean forces.

The BDS movement is characterized by its rejection of communalism. Unlike other parties to the conflict, it is acutely opposed to the neo-Orientalist idea of a Judeo-Christian West opposed to an irrational and hostile Arab and Islamic East; it does not endorse the nativism of Hamas, with its opposition to “Jews and Crusaders”; it vigorously opposes ethnocentric forms of Zionism, which assert with state-backing that the Jews are a congenitally constituted racially and ethnically marked group apart and thus have a peculiar destiny to live together in a single state in which Jews are dominant.

We obtain a stronger sense of what the movement is against by considering the World Conference against Racism, held in Durban in 2001. There, occupation was equated with racism and apartheid, and a call went out for the international community to sanction Israel with the intention of bringing about an end to these illegal practices, and “ensuring compliance with international law” (Sourani 2013: 66). The opponent here is thus conceived less as a military practice of direct domination and violence (occupation) but as ‘racism’ and ‘apartheid’. It is interesting to note that the opponent here is precisely the opposite of the multitudinous form of collective identification. In so far as Durban-like statements in regard to apartheid and racism, not to mention actions, are to be found aplenty in the BDS movement, the opposition is to totalizing, permanently fixed, and essentialized forms of identity.

There is a powerful echo here of Laclau and Mouffe’s programme as set out in the 1980s in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The real enemy in this work is totalizing and closed forms of identity, any attempt to represent the social as an invariant and finally-fixed totality. The radically democratic struggle for

hegemony that Laclau and Mouffe endorse is a struggle for open and non-totalizing and non-essentialist forms of collective integration and representation.

The target for the BDS movement is not a race or an ethnicity – the Jews, Crusaders, Christians, infidels and so on. The target here differs markedly, for example, from the enemies perceived by Hamas. **But nor is the opponent simply a totalizing mode of representation alone.** The enemy is instead a system of oppression that organizes rights according to ethnic and religious privilege. The implication is that the enemy is not even Israel as such. To say so is an important imprecision. The BDS movement opposes violations and seeks to instate rights.

The BDS movement often identifies Zionism as a racist settler colonial project – as a form of Apartheid (Bakan and Abu-Laban 2010; Glaser 2003; Piterberg 2008; Yiftachel 2006, 2009). The enemy is not above all capitalism – although corporate profits are involved; the enemy is not an imperialism of exploitation, although militarism and US foreign policy is hardly a friend; the movement is focused on Zionism itself, its racialism and its violations of law and rights. Hence we find Barghouti defining BDS as

a global struggle for Palestinian freedom, justice and self-determination against a powerful, ruthless system of oppression that enjoys impunity and that is intent on making a self-fulfilling prophecy of the utterly racist, myth-laden, foundational Zionist dictum of ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ (Barghouti 2013: 218).

The central component of the oppression in the above quotation is racism and how it is put into practice: impunity is not the source of oppression itself. Barghouti elaborates what this racism actually involves – i.e. a system and not simply a set of misguided attitudes: it involves an Apartheid system “of bestowing rights and privileges according to ethnic and religious identity” which “fits the UN definition of the term [apartheid] as enshrined in the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid and in the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court” (Barghouti 2013: 219).

Pappé identifies the source of oppression in similar terms. He writes that the problem in

Israel was not a particular policy or a specific government. There was a principled problem rooted deeply in the ideological infrastructure that fed Israeli decisions on Palestine and the Palestinians ever since 1948 – an ideology, which elsewhere I described as a hybrid dogma that fuses together colonialism and romantic nationalism (Pappé 2013: 126).

It is important to note that the source of oppression Pappé identifies here is not capitalism or imperialism, but a form of discursive closure: a deeply rooted ‘ideological infrastructure’; a ‘hybrid dogma’. The problem, for Pappé, then, is that over time there was a weakening of the opposition, as fewer and fewer Israelis were willing to question this “ideological infrastructure” (Pappé 2013: 126). This infrastructure had a whole apparatus of power at its disposal: “a state that was willing, using the most lethal weapons at hand, to crush any resistance to its control and rule over what used to be historical Palestine” (Pappé 2013: 126). Again, the opponent is depicted as a form of discursive closure; not an abstracted one, but one stitched into a system of domination secured by state and military direct domination by one set of persons over another. Direct domination, therefore, is not completely displaced as the figure of oppression. The form of dispossession invoked, nonetheless, clearly has cultural dimensions. Israeli state-sponsored cultural forms are seen by cultural boycotters as privileged sites enjoyed only by and through the erasure of Palestinian history, culture and national existence. The cultural boycott announces, as the Palestinian performance-poet and War on Want activist Rafeef Ziadah stresses, that there is a fundamental and iniquitous inequality at work where Zionist culture develops its own narratives and sense of Self while Palestinian culture is denigrated, fragmented and stifled through Israeli-Zionist access to the media as well as through physical and economic choke-holds on Palestinian communication and expression (Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2012).

Objectives

What are the goals of the movement? The BDS movement is not defined by the idea that it is through the establishment of a state congruent with the nation that the Palestinians will be emancipated. The notion of a Palestinian state tends to imply in the current conjuncture a two-state solution. The downfall of the Oslo Process, however, for

many activists, Palestinian and non-Palestinian, has broken the idea of the two-state solution. It is said that the two-state solution has been tried, and it has failed. For Edward Said, who presciently opposed Oslo from the outset, it was bound so to do (Said 1993). Morrison's doctoral research in particular is finding that the failure of Oslo to be central among the reasons for mobilisation offered by Palestinian protagonists of the BDS movement (Morrison forthcoming): these figures see it as an alternative to both the corruption and statism of Fatah and the essentialism and communalism of Hamas. Many among the ranks of the BDS movement are one-staters. In other words, they believe that the only way to end genuinely the forms of oppression in Israel-Palestine is to create one democratic state, a result of a civil rights struggle by Arab-Palestinians, who seem to be on the way to becoming a demographic majority in the territories controlled by Israel. This is a contested area, but official statistics show, for example, that at the end of 2014, there were more Palestinian-Arabs living between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river (6,270,668) than there were Jews (6,219,200) (Central Bureau of Statistics [Israel] 2015; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2015).¹We note here that emancipation is not achieved through the consummation of the nation, but through federal or bi-national arrangements, or those in which sovereignty is de-territorialized (Nimni 2003, 2005). Others in the movement, sensitive to the problems of majoritarian ethnic democracy, consider consociational arrangements, or are undecided on the contours of the final settlement – beyond insisting on fundamental Palestinian rights.

Just as among horizontalist movements, the goal is not the imposition of a new collective or ideological blueprint. It is the achievement of basic inalienable rights, and the dismantling of forms of racism, apartheid that are actualized in forms of occupation, colonisation and spectacular violence and humiliation visited by the Israeli state on the bodies of rightless Palestinians – and the continuous violations of international law and human rights that are attendant on this intersectional violence, siege, massacre, and closure. Unlike some of the Occupy movements of recent times, the goals of BDS

¹ The Israeli CBS estimates that the de jure population of Israel, in what it calls Jewish and non-Jewish localities (i.e. everywhere from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river including Golan), included 6,219,200 Jews at the end of 2014. It records that the Palestinian-Arab population, excluding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but including pre-1967 Israel, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, stood then at 1,720,300 Arabs. The Palestinian CBS records 4,550,368 Arab-Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. These figures, which are not definitive for a number of reasons including measurement issues, are used to give the estimates above.

nonetheless are concrete and specifiable. The movement calls for an end to occupation, Apartheid, colonisation, and discrimination. The call remains in existence until Israel “fully complies with its obligations under international law” (Barghouti 2013: 218).

Organization

What modes of organization and coordination are involved in the BDS movement? The BDS movement does not entirely self-identify as horizontalist. To my knowledge, activists do not continuously make heavy play of their status as ‘horizontalists’ in opposition to other activists seen as ‘verticalists’: contrarywise, such talk was certainly present in Occupy Wall Street, for example (Graeber 2013: 3-54; Maeckelbergh 2009: 39-66). Nonetheless, some of the conflicts that have played themselves out within the movement have to do with this distinction. The prescriptive, ideological, and hierarchical mode of organizing has come into some conflict with BDS networks. In the UK, for example, the relationship between the BDS movement and political parties such as the Socialist Workers Party and the trade unions has occasionally been difficult to negotiate. Boycotters have resisted vigorously the idea that they are being used as a pawn or taken over by those with pre-conceived ideas to programme and party. These relationships – between existing parties and the BDS movement – have worked productively only when they are constituted as equal nodes in a larger network. As Marfleet’s chapter in this volume emphasizes, unions, parties, and workers’ organizations have played an important role in the progress of the BDS movement as a whole. The relationship between the BDS movement and some of the established political factions, authorities, and parties in the OPT has also had points of conflict and of productive coordination. The BDS movement has always been sufficiently distinct from Fatah, the PLO, Hamas not to mention the Palestinian Authority. At the Fourth National BDS Conference, 8 June 2013, Bethlehem, for example, by far the stormiest session pitted Dr. Taisir Khaled, member of PLO Executive Committee and Dr. Jawad Naji, Palestinian Minister of the National Economy against BDS supporters who had little time for the failures of the established political parties and the authorities to deliver on basic Palestinian rights.

There is no admissions process to the BDS movement, and no central authority. One does not join the BDS movement like one joined the Palestinian Communist Party in

earlier parts of the century (Budeiri 2010). One cannot be expelled in any formal or official sense from the movement. There are no formal membership criteria or dues to be paid, or formally established hierarchical processes. This style of organizing therefore has rhizomic characteristics. There are places of intersection to be sure: conferences, leading networks such as the Boycott Israel Network (BIN) or the Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott Initiative (PACBI), significant academics or intellectuals such as an Ilan Pappé, and particular organizations such as BRICUP in the United Kingdom; there are membership organizations and specific campaigns; and there are numerous overlaps with church groups, trade unions, some political parties, student groups and NGOs; these should not be underestimated. But it is hard to counter the thesis that the boycott movement is in organizational terms an open-ended network that continually adds new nodes and connections that spread in de-centralized ways. Nonetheless, joining BDS is not a free for all. There are plenty of guidelines as to how to act, how to position oneself, and how to cope with the deluge of charges and polemics that inevitably follow the decision to openly declare boycott.

The de-centralized form is clearly evident in the rise of the movement, which did not start from a vanguardist organization, or a state-based initiative. The movement emerged from many streams in diverse global locations: the call in 2002 for a moratorium on EU funding by academics Hilary and Steven Rose in the UK, initiatives from among Palestinian academics in Birzeit and Al-Quds Universities around the same time in the OPT, the Durban conference of 2001, the global justice movement in the US, to the beginnings of divestment campaigns in churches, and the actions of student groups and trade unions in diverse locales. The movement emerged gradually, trans-locally, and according to no pre-conceived plan, and came with various false starts and modifications, including for example, over the developing line after 2004 on the fact that the academic boycott was of institutions and not of individual Israeli academics.

The leaderless / leaderful formula should not be pushed too far. The movement remains in many ways under the more or less flexible direction of the Palestinian coordinating networks. This gives a certain direction to the movement as implied in its fundamental goals, while allowing for the differences that emerge over tactics and strategies in different national contexts. As Falk states, “it is important for non-Palestinian supporters to accept that its [the BDS movements’] direction and political

approach should always remain under the direction of its Palestinian organisers” (Falk 2013: 87). Clearly some forms of leadership remain. Even highly-networked and seemingly horizontal activism, as Nunes has recently argued, involves leadership, strategic interventions, structure, coordination, mobilisation, and well-defined ends (Nunes 2014: 41-3).

Strategy and Tactics

How is the boycott movement to achieve its goals? Implementing a broad, global campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions is supposed to strike at and undermine the system of oppressive rights violations at which the movement takes aim. The idea is to do so not through armed struggle, nor simply through debate and negotiation, or through a difficult-to-sustain and highly costly mass uprising, these means are held to have failed, but through the powers of institutional disruption that the movement mobilises. BDS is supposed to weaken the structure of colonisation and occupation through ostracism, economic divestment and ultimately state-based sanctions.

Boycotts, enacting ostracism, aim to undermine legitimacy and weaken oppressive institutions. When business-as-usual is withdrawn, debates about the rights and wrongs of boycott, and the forms of complicity of the institutions boycotted, are far harder to ignore than when such debates are not backed with action. But the boycott is not only about legitimacy. Moral opprobrium does not have an entirely clear record on stopping atrocities – as cases from Chechnya to Iraq confirm. Boycott is centrally about weakening the capacities of complicit institutional and state-based forms. “Since convincing a colonial power to heed moral pleas for justice is, at best, delusional” writes Barghouti, “many now understand the need to ‘besiege’ Israel through boycotts, raising the price of its oppression and thus *compelling* it to comply with international law” (Barghouti 2013: 220). Non-cooperation is in principle replicable across many domains of social life, and suited to diverse, de-centralized, and direct-action initiatives. It is a many-headed tactic that can minimize direct conflict between elements of the movement and more powerful and centralized organizations. Resistant elements have some protection because they are numerous and dispersed. This many-headed-ness was an

important factor in the capacities of the civil rights movement in the US in the 1960s (Akuno 2013: 48).

Divestment is supposed to strike at the economic bases of occupation and colonisation. It hits companies and investments profiting from occupation or settlement, whether because they situate their production and capital in occupied territory, or whether they export products from occupied territory, or whether they profit from the arms, transport infrastructure, and heavy-equipment that the occupation requires to function. The strategy does not require that businessmen become moral. It simply requires that they see reputational risks through their association with Israeli human rights violations. Veolia, because of its activities in the Occupied Territories, has already lost billions of dollars in contracts and tenders (Hever 2013: 120). Where business competition is global, and where capital and production can be moved, and where even small risks can influence commercial decision-making, the strategy should not be dismissed as entirely unrealistic.

These pressures are expected to be more effective because they are less polarizing than armed struggle, while giving moderates among Israeli-Jews, Jews living outside Israel, and other relevant parties the chance to push for and bring about civil rights for Palestinians and new political arrangements. It is not necessarily to be expected that Zionist-Jews will be convinced in the short-term of the morality of the cause, but they may increasingly take account of the institutional costs of failing to compromise, and seek new arrangements. Dividing opponents, the boycott tactic is supposed to be inclusive, mobilising, and to unite supporters from a wide variety of backgrounds. Inclusionary mobilisation was important in the use of boycott and non-cooperation in the movement for Indian independence (Purkayastha and Kidwai 2013: 34), as well as in the BDS movement that contributed to the fall of Apartheid in South Africa (Kasrils 2013: 29-30). Inclusiveness is particularly important in the Palestinian case because Palestinian civil society alone, still less Palestinian labour, on which the Israeli economy does not depend, does not have the capacity to institutionally disrupt the Israeli economy: this lesson was learnt during the first intifada, when Israel depended far more on Palestinian labour than now. This fact makes all the more important a movement strategy that goes well beyond labour withdrawal, and harnesses forms of non-cooperation and ostracism at the level of global civil society.

BDS has been activated to some extent amid the failure of inter-state diplomacy: it “is a mechanism used by individuals when their States fail them” (Sourani 2013: 61). The failure of political society certainly has provided reasons for mobilisation. For example, the well-known film director Ken Loach and others write that “[g]iven the failure of international law, and the impunity of the Israeli state, we believe there is no alternative but for ordinary citizens to try their best to fill the breach” (Loach et al 2013: 154). The signal is very strongly that civil society must take direct action to protect Palestinian rights. On the other hand, the movement does not, in the manner of some contemporary state-eschewing movements, shy away from the attempt to draw in the state through the application of sanctions stemming from pressure from civil society. It is not therefore an anti-statist movement, even if it does not seek political power, or specify political arrangements. If it is radically democratic, it is not so in any straightforwardly anarchist sense, but in the sense of a movement that aims to change political society while retaining at least one foot in civil society, to change the world without taking power.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the BDS movement should not be dismissed as anti-Semitic. It can more appropriately be compared with recent radically democratic movements. In terms of the movement’s “subject-ness”, its identities, principles, goals, and styles of organization, this chapter argues that the movement is highly diverse and multitudinous, rooted in universal rights, opposed to fixed and totalizing forms of ascriptive privilege, and organized in networked, decentralized and non-hierarchical ways. Strikingly, the movement deploys nationalism less to establish the truth and emancipation of a pre-existing and richly elaborated national identity, and more to provide a warrant for universal rights. I have also provided evidence for the view that the asymmetric strategies and tactics of the movement, in a search for the desired institutional disruption, are based around inclusion, diversity, trans-locality, many-headed-ness, direct action, and the idea of changing the world without taking power. This last feature refers to the important, directly democratic idea that movements can stay rooted in civil society while changing the contours of political

society, without becoming just another established actor in political society itself. The key features of the movement's mobilising project, both in terms of 'subject-ness' and in terms of strategy, therefore, bear a number of similarities to the characteristics of radical democracy movements. It is worth adding that the institutional and systemic targets of the BDS movement, which has invariably been driven forward by civil society actors, stands in strong contrast with boycotts that historically targeted Jews or particular categories of people on a religious or racialized basis, and which were often, but not always, led by the state or established institutions.

The radically democratic features of the movement can help explain its appeal among progressive constituencies in the alter-globalization and global justice movements. If we consider the internal morphology of the movement's mobilising project, moreover, as this chapter has endeavoured to do, we can add that a key strength of the movement is its internal cohesion. Identities, principles and styles of organization based around universal rights, networks and the multitude cohere at a fundamental level with an inclusionary, civil society based, and many-headed strategy for change. Only through a multitudinous we-ness frame, and through networked forms of organization, can the movement hope to be as inclusive as it needs to be to acquire wide adherence and the requisite asymmetric leverage.. Movement principles and identities, therefore, cohere with a particular kind of trans-national asymmetric strategy. Just as importantly, horizontal networks are not just a means to an end, but invested by movement adherents with moral value in themselves. The idea of the motley multitude, moreover, is not just seen as a value in itself, but also a strategically viable way to achieve change. In this way, the movement weaves together instrumental-rational logics with value-rational logics, a powerful form of internal cohesion which can help account for its agency and capacity on the contemporary scene..

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