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# Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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## The Role of Young Palestinian People in the Nonviolent “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” Movement

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**Abstract:** Young Palestinian people serve on the frontline of resistance to the Israeli occupation, and the multiple strategies they have used in the past have reflected the varied agendas of different political parties. In recent years, there has been a shift in young people’s interest towards nonviolent resistance as an approach which proves effective at both national and international levels. Young Palestinians who have lost faith in the efficacy of the peace process have, for example, been increasingly engaged in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS). This article examines the move away from violent struggle towards nonviolent resistance by young Palestinian people who have used BDS strategies and tools. It draws on testimonials from young Palestinians living in the diaspora, assesses the internal factors that have pushed young Palestinian people to take this direction, and considers this transformation’s potential impact on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the future.

**Key words:** BDS, Palestinian youth, Conflict transformation, Nonviolent resistance.

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## The Role of Young Palestinian People in the Nonviolent “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” Movement

### Introduction to Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

The history of Arabs boycotting Jewish migrants and merchants can be traced back one hundred years or more, but the call to boycott Israel resurfaced on 9 July 2005, a year after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the wall built by Israel in the West Bank was illegal.<sup>2</sup> Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) located both inside and outside Palestine issued the call to boycott Israeli products, divest from companies that support Israel's occupation of Palestine, and impose sanctions on companies and others profiting from Israel's occupation.<sup>3</sup> The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was born and its proponents called on their counterparts worldwide to pressure their governments to support the BDS movement and hold the State of Israel accountable for its policies against Palestinians. They called for the dismantling of the wall and illegal settlements, the end of the occupation of Arab lands occupied in 1967, and permission for Palestinian refugees to return to their towns and villages in present-day Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Many Palestinians regard the BDS call as a response to the failure of the official negotiations to achieve a just solution. Those negotiations, coordinated by traditional State actors and dominated by elite members of Palestinian society, had been sputtering on and off since 1991. The role of non-State actors and particularly grassroots organizations was vividly clear in the BDS call which made demands for Israel to:

- 1) End Israel's military occupation of Arab lands occupied in 1967, and dismantle the wall separating Israel from the Palestinian territory.
- 2) Recognize the right of Palestinian citizens of Israel to be treated equally with its non-Palestinian citizens.
- 3) Respect, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in United Nations Resolution 194.<sup>5</sup>

The BDS movement provides Palestinians with an alternative path towards achieving their goals in light of Israel's continued confiscation of Palestinian lands, its long-term siege on Gaza, and lack of progress in the negotiations between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israeli leaders. Advocates of BDS argue that the negotiations only offer the possibility of creating a Palestinian State on the 1967 borders while the BDS movement addresses the needs of all Palestinians, not only those who might live in a future Palestinian State. As a movement which is gaining international legitimacy and efficacy, BDS provides Palestinians with an enhanced opportunity to accomplish their strategic goals which involve ending the illegal Israeli occupation and solving the issue of the Palestinian refugees' right of return.

The interest of young Palestinian people in nonviolent resistance as a means of achieving these goals must be examined in the context of the major historical events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically the first Intifada, the second Intifada, and the subsequent period, which has been marked by the internal division between Hamas and Fatah.



### The impact of the two Intifadas on the BDS movement

The first Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993) represented an important milestone because it significantly influenced how the conflict, as well as the relationship between the two sides, evolved and contributed to the formal negotiations which led to the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993.<sup>6</sup> The goals of the first Intifada were to limit economic ties with Israel’s occupation; to confront the Israeli Civil Administration by challenging its military laws; expand Palestinian national institutions so that they could provide services to Palestinians as an alternative to Israeli services; and, most importantly, promote international solidarity with Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).<sup>7</sup>

The most salient feature of the first Intifada, and probably the key factor in its success, was the wide participation by all sectors of Palestinian society, including ordinary people of all ages, both men and women, businesses and trade unions, civil society and local organizations. Palestinians were mobilized as one nation for the first time since the Nakba in 1948 in a fight for their collective liberation.<sup>8</sup> Palestinians living in the oPt began to assume a leading role in confronting the Israeli occupation after having been nearly completely absent from any such roles in the two or three decades before the Intifada broke out. In that intervening period, the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s (PLO’s) leadership in exile had served as the only representative body for Palestinians. The affiliate parties of the PLO, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Fatah, had had their own members operating in the oPt, but most of the resistance activities before the first Intifada were carried out externally by guerrilla groups (*Fedayeen*) which were primarily violent in nature; their members took part in activities such as the hijacking of the Air France plane in Uganda in 1976 and the killing of the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in 1972.<sup>9</sup>

The young men and women who participated in the first Intifada chose a different approach than that of guerrilla attacks and their nonviolent tactics proved to be far more successful than the violence used by the guerrillas. When young Palestinian people appeared in front of the international media with rocks and stones rather than military weapons, they succeeded in disrupting the stereotype associated with those Palestinian groups that adopted violent tactics; thus, they managed to change that stereotype and broaden the range of Palestinian identities on view. They drew the media’s attention to the root causes of the conflict and to the high level of frustration felt by young Palestinian people, many of whom had their lives uprooted or were injured or killed when Israeli troops responded to protests with intense violence.

Throughout the first Intifada, young Palestinian people refrained from getting dragged into the cycle of violence except for rare instances that occurred during the last two years (1991-1993), when their involvement formed part of the leadership’s tactical attempt to enhance its negotiating position. The first Intifada largely operated under the leadership of grassroots organizations and of local committees which were rooted in civil society, and they had different interests to the political parties in exile. Young Palestinian people began to feel that they could exert their own power and influence and take back control over their own political destiny. They believed they could pressure both Israel and the Palestinian leadership to follow the will of the people. Souad Dajani, a Palestinian scholar who specializes in nonviolence, suggests that “the Intifada taught Palestinians that their greatest source of strength lies in the power of the people themselves, in their ability to organize and participate in resistance on a mass scale”.<sup>10</sup>

While the nonviolent nature of the first Intifada brought more legitimacy to the Palestinian struggle, it also strengthened the Palestinian leadership’s negotiating position. Furthermore, it changed the way Israelis perceived the viability of the occupation, since the “terrorist” image associated with Palestinians was challenged and that stereotype could easily be turned around and applied to the brutal occupation itself.<sup>11</sup> Fear was beginning to grow within Israeli



society that the arbitrary and repressive measures used as collective punishment by Israeli authorities against the Palestinians might backfire and lead to a resumption of violent approaches.

Following the first Intifada and the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the role of young Palestinian people in political life in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip changed. Prior to the first Intifada, young people had been the main pillar in establishing Palestine's political parties, but the influence of those parties diminished after the Oslo Agreement was signed. During the second Intifada, young people were mobilized by those parties to go out into the streets and chant and cry for what they were made to believe were "right, patriotic and absolute rights, for the ideas that were invented by party leaders".<sup>12</sup>

The mobilization of young people in service of the PA's agenda, following the failure at Camp David in 2000, reflected a patriarchal relationship between those young people and their political leaders. Young Palestinians were expected to follow the leadership in pursuit of whatever course of action the PA thought might serve its agenda; in other words, they were mobilized to support the peace process in times of peace and to confront the occupation when the peace process failed. This form of political patriarchy had a significant influence on young people's political ideology, as well as on their perception of Israel's occupation and their opinions about internal Palestinian politics.

Those young Palestinian people who had played a substantial role during the first Intifada shifted their struggle onto an existential level. They witnessed Palestinians who had been in exile assuming senior positions within the PA while they themselves, having contributed to the establishment of the PA, were marginalized. As the national struggle for independence became restricted to the PA's negotiators and senior politicians, young people gradually became more involved in the internal party conflict between Fatah and the PLO parties in order to achieve material and political gains. Young people had to focus their energies on pledging their loyalty to political parties and supporting their party's leadership against any opposing political ideologies such as those promoted by Hamas or Islamic Jihad, groups that originally opposed the Oslo peace process.

Young people's participation in political life was limited to their participation as voters in two parliamentary elections in Palestine (in 1996 and 2006), and Fatah was almost guaranteed to win the first election and maintain its dominance within the (PLO) and the PA.<sup>13</sup> This dominance was necessary both in order to secure the pursuit of the political agenda that supports peace with Israel and to control any opposition to it. The PA, under Fatah's leadership, continued to seize power by marginalizing other groups, restricting political pluralism, and using police power to suppress opposition.<sup>14</sup>

Yet while young Palestinian leaders were largely being marginalized from any executive positions within the PA, they were being granted these kinds of leadership opportunities within the security forces. Their security roles were quite problematic and often put young people at odds with others in Palestinian society for a number of reasons. Firstly, these young security leaders and officers came to represent the frontline in the work of cooperating with Israel on security. They were responsible, on different occasions, for passing on security information about Palestinian resistance fighters and about groups to which they had previously belonged. Secondly, they were responsible for arresting and sometimes torturing political activists and members of groups, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad (both of which use violent tactics to resist the occupation). Accordingly, the legacy that young people had created through their work in resisting Israel's occupation during the first Intifada was quickly overshadowed; instead they became associated with their role in fueling internal political divisions and power struggles over which party's political agenda best served the national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

When the negotiations at Camp David failed in 2000, the Palestinian leadership mobilized Palestinians, and especially young people, to publicly demonstrate support for its political

position, for the benefit of Israel and the peace sponsors.<sup>15</sup> The eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada after Ariel Sharon's visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque in September 2000 represented a great opportunity for young people to take the lead once again and recall the success they achieved during the first Intifada. It can be argued that the second Intifada lacked the spontaneity of the first. If the PA had achieved any political gains, even partial gains, from the Camp David negotiations, its position in relation to the second Intifada would have been different.<sup>16</sup> Arafat saw an opportunity to take advantage of the Palestinians' anger and channel it in an attempt to put more pressure on Israeli negotiators and the peace process sponsors (particularly the United States). Meanwhile, with the passage of the Interim Period negotiated in the Oslo Agreement, and while the State of Israel continued to change the status quo on the ground by expanding its illegal settlements in the West Bank, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which had originally opposed the peace process, saw the second Intifada as an opportunity to mobilize their supporters in this direction.

### **The second Palestinian Intifada (2000)**

The nonviolent nature of the second Intifada was difficult to maintain given both the internal political discord that existed between the Palestinian political parties about any clear goals for the conflict and the high level of militarization within Palestinian society. The grassroots and civil society organizations that had played a major role in the first Intifada assumed a different role in the second conflict because they were tied to a funding agenda that put limitations on their political involvement.<sup>17</sup> In the absence of their leadership, a few months into the second Intifada, the military wings of most of the Palestinian parties, including Fatah, began to lead the conflict's direction.

It was not difficult to mobilize young Palestinian people to engage in acts of violent resistance, given their experience of the failed peace process and the economic deprivation they had experienced as a result of power being held in the hands of a few PLO political elites.<sup>18</sup> Members of the traditional PLO leadership (often referred to as the old guard) who had previously adopted tactics of violent resistance and had remained in exile during the first Intifada took the lead again and influenced young people to adopt violent means of resistance against Israel. For these reasons, in addition to the political uncertainty that surrounded a final resolution with Israel and the overwhelming despair felt by so many Palestinians, support for violent resistance within Palestinian society increased. By 2002, more than 70 per cent of Palestinians supported violent resistance and believed that a violent approach would help them achieve liberation from Israel's occupation more readily than a strategy based on negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

### **The impact of Hamas' electoral victory in 2006 on the BDS movement**

The internal political division that occurred after Hamas' electoral victory in 2006 influenced how Palestinian young people regarded violent and nonviolent resistance strategies. Hamas views armed resistance as the only strategy that will help to achieve Palestinian liberation,<sup>20</sup> and, following its takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, very strict economic and political embargoes put in place by the international community helped it to tighten its control over the area's political and economic spheres. Young Palestinian people living in the Gaza Strip have been subjected to an unprecedented level of militarization, not only by Hamas but also by other factions. Israel's three major military operations, in 2008, 2012, and 2014, left extensive destruction in the Gaza Strip and further contributed to this militarization process. Additionally, while political and economic uncertainty has had an impact on the whole population, its impact on young people has been particularly devastating and they have experienced one of the world's highest unemployment rates. In 2013, youth unemployment stood at 44 per cent in the Gaza Strip.<sup>21</sup>

The PA in the West Bank, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad, was promoting the idea that its plan to build State institutions



offered the most successful strategy for helping to obtain recognition for a Palestinian State at the United Nations. Meanwhile, the Israeli government continued to confiscate more land in the West Bank and routinely announced the construction of tens of thousands of new housing units. Hundreds of new military checkpoints divided the already-fragmented Palestinian territory, contributing to the deterioration of the Palestinian economy as well as turning Palestinian cities and villages in the West Bank into Bantustans.<sup>22</sup> All of these factors contributed to young people and others in Palestine losing hope that a solution could be found for the conflict in the near future.

The “peace process” paradigm adopted by the PA under Fatah’s leadership and the “violent resistance” paradigm adopted by Hamas created further painful realities for young Palestinian people, who were portrayed in the media once again as “terrorists” while, behind the stereotype, they were suffering from political and economic deprivation. Young people demonstrated their anger and despair at their leaders on several occasions, and they used strategies including marches to urge their leaders to end the political split between the West Bank and Gaza and to focus the national agenda on more serious issues, such as Jerusalem, settlements, and the freeing of political prisoners.<sup>23</sup>

An increasing number of Palestinian young people now believe it is important to reclaim the initiative for national liberation from their leaders, and this view is evidenced by the growth of popular resistance groups in the West Bank that have mobilized against the construction of the separation wall in protests such as the frequent confrontations around Bil’in village. Although very few successes have been achieved on the ground, young people have managed to gain wider support and solidarity for their cause both within Palestine and on the global stage. They have succeeded in utilizing new media as a nonviolent form of resistance, and a growing number of young Palestinians are also writing and sharing their personal stories about living under Israeli occupation. For example, the short story collection *Gaza Writes Back* (2014)<sup>24</sup> and *Gaza Unsilenced* (2015)<sup>25</sup> – a collection of detailed accounts, poetry, and other writings about young people’s experiences surviving Israel’s military assaults – bring together the work of young Palestinian people in Gaza. Young people have begun to explore new and creative means of bringing attention to their fight against Israel’s occupation.

### **Expanding the BDS movement beyond Palestine – young people’s testimonials**

The BDS movement is very active in North America and Europe where young Palestinian people living in the diaspora play a major role in expanding public awareness. Many young people get involved in the BDS movement as a way of reclaiming their Palestinian identity, and the movement also gives them a way to play a role in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict after years of exclusion by the PA.

The role of diasporic Palestinians in the BDS movement takes several forms. Firstly, young Palestinians in the West are able to raise awareness and educate the public about the occupation, especially since some of them grew up in Palestine or have spent some time visiting their families in the oPt. Secondly, they engage directly in the BDS movement’s efforts against Israel by working with organizations in their local communities, such as churches, student unions, and academic bodies. Thirdly, they are able to lead their own independent BDS efforts by undertaking tasks such as organizing conferences or leading campaigns that call on people to adopt the BDS call.

Speaking at the Sabeel Conference of Palestinian Christian in North America,<sup>26</sup> Rami Khoury, a Palestinian-Lebanese researcher, noted the change in the roles being played by Palestinians abroad when he commented that “The growing BDS movement pressures the US government. The third Palestinian generation in exile is involved in BDS and rights action. The first generation went to work; the second generation went to education and the third generation will go into action”.<sup>27</sup>



Many Palestinians began a journey to explore their roots and identity through direct engagement with the Palestinian cause while in exile. Amal Ali, interviewed by Barrows-Friedman in her book *In Our Power: US Students Organize for Justice in Palestine*,<sup>28</sup> says that

At one point, I asked, "So, Dad we're Jordanian, right?" Because someone at school asked, and he said, "No, we're Palestinian." And he sat me in his lap and told me the whole story of our identity and our existence.... So using whatever limited internet [access] I had at the time, I tried to do my homework, tried to figure out what I could read at the grand old age of eight years old. So those are the very early beginnings [of my interest in activism].<sup>29</sup>

Ali, a student at the University of California Riverside and a member of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), engages in pro-Palestine activism as a way to reclaim a national identity that was scattered in exile "until I attended the National Students for Justice in Palestine conference in 2012, which I happened to hear about by chance over Twitter or something... It was a huge eye-opener and I can honestly say it changed my life in a very real way".<sup>30</sup> Learning about the occupation of Palestine and how to take constructive action to end it influenced Ali's decision to become involved in "a two-year long push to have the university pull its investment from US companies that profit from Israel's human rights violations".<sup>31</sup> Ghassan Hussein, who lived in Palestine until he graduated from high school, tells a similar story: "I realized I had to dig deeper and find out more about what was going on [in Palestine]. I needed to educate myself more and also start spreading awareness about the situation".<sup>32</sup>

Ali Abunimah, author of *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*,<sup>33</sup> believes that Palestinians are winning the battle between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel activists in the United States. After examining a number of US campuses, he concluded that they are experiencing an increasing level of solidarity with Palestine. The importance he ascribes to activism around young people is evident in his claim that "If we lose campuses, we lose the US".<sup>34</sup> The David Project,<sup>35</sup> which focuses on pro-Israeli campus activism, has, Abunimah notes, claimed that many US campuses have gained "financial support from Arab autocrats"<sup>36</sup> and can therefore be understood to be dangerous for Israel's interests. Abunimah's views on the growing Palestinian solidarity movement on US campuses are also shared by Israeli officials, such as Ehud Barak.<sup>37</sup> In the section that follows, this article allows Palestinian students in the United States to explain their BDS activism and why they became involved in BDS in their own words.

### Why young Palestinians join BDS

Leila Abdelrazzaq led the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) group at DePaul University in Chicago where a divestment proposal passed in May 2014 in favour of divesting from four Israeli companies. Adeeba Mabrouk, a Palestinian student at DePaul University, joined many other Palestinian and non-Palestinian activists to convince fellow students to vote in favour of the bill: "We educated the campus about BDS and on human rights violations that these companies help fund and profit off of. I think it's most important to educate the public on what BDS is and what they can do to help".<sup>38</sup>

Shirien Damra was actively engaged in establishing an SJP chapter in Chicago and was instrumental in the 2011 DePaul University campaign to boycott Sabra hummus.<sup>39</sup> More recently, she participated in the national SJP conference in Boston at Tufts University. Damra explains that her initial aspirations for Students for Justice in Palestine have been exceeded: "So, we got together, started emailing each other, had conference calls, and it started growing from there.... It really is kind of shocking to me still to see how much it [SJP] has grown".<sup>40</sup> Damra, and many other Palestinians living in the diaspora, have travelled to Palestine and experienced the occupation first-hand. Their travel solidifies their involvement in the BDS movement back in the US. For instance, on her return from her visit, Damra organized a campaign against Sabra hummus, an Israeli product produced in the illegal West Bank settlements, which she observed when she travelled to Palestine. She also took note of



the fact that Hewlett-Packard runs the IT system at Israel’s checkpoints which racially profiles Palestinians.

Ahlam Muhtaseb, an academic working with several pro-Palestinian groups including Al-Awda,<sup>41</sup> the Palestine Right to Return Coalition, and the Hewlett-Packard Boycott campaign, believes that the BDS movement has achieved many successes. Historically, Muhtaseb argues, Palestinians in the diaspora had been politically marginalized and “under-represented [in the pro-Palestine movement] or not represented at all”.<sup>42</sup> When “white males from the US represent our cause, sometimes issues at the core of the Palestinian cause are either twisted or watered down for Americans”.<sup>43</sup> Muhtaseb believes that Palestinians in the US know more about Palestine and the impacts of the Israeli occupation, so they should be leading the movement and delivering the message to the American audience.<sup>44</sup>

Ramah Kudaimi, a staff member at the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation,<sup>45</sup> believes that Palestinians living in the diaspora are playing a major role in changing mainstream narratives about Palestine by sharing their stories in exile, after previously having been denied access to mainstream media:

For so long [the] U.S. media has been dominated by Israeli propaganda, with little attention paid to facts or Palestinian narratives. This is changing, and a big reason for this change is Palestinians organizing to tell their own stories and connect with other communities in the struggle to build relationships centered around fighting for freedom and justice for all oppressed people.<sup>46</sup>

Andrew Dalack, an active participant in the “National Students for Justice in Palestine” movement in the US, explains that, when the BDS movement was first launched by representatives of Palestine’s civil society in 2005, it was “very much on the fringe of American society. Today, it has become an acronym with which everyone is familiar and it receives widespread mainstream support and attention”.<sup>47</sup> Dalack highlights the specific risks that Palestinians in the diaspora must confront when they support the BDS movement, over and above what other actors might face. He notes that a Palestinian may be the target of reprisal by pro-Israel groups and even governmental authorities:

The only question is the extent to which Palestinians in the diaspora feel comfortable putting their support behind BDS given the antagonistic political climate, especially in the United States. The stakes are much higher for Palestinians who support BDS and other pro-Palestine actions than they are for allies from other communities, and Palestinians sometimes feel anxious about the legal and social implications of publicly mobilizing around BDS.<sup>48</sup>

This was evidenced, for instance, when Northeastern University suspended a student group that distributed mock eviction notices on campus to raise awareness about Israel’s home demolition policy in the occupied West Bank, although university officials later reversed their decision after public criticism from community and legal groups.<sup>49</sup> Nerdeen Kiswani claimed she was assaulted by police when she queued to register for an event at her university that was reserved exclusively for people with Jewish birthright. She later said that “(b)eing the only visibly Muslim woman in the arena with a scarf apparently warranted the assault”.<sup>50</sup>

### **The role of young North American Palestinians in the BDS movement**

Huda El-Haj of the SJP chapter at the University of Houston stresses the role that Palestinians in the US have played in creating awareness about the BDS movement. She asserts that their “role in the West [involves] much more than creating awareness and battling ignorance”,<sup>51</sup> and she highlights in particular the role that student campaigns are capable of playing: “they are able to attain votes from their student governments to divest from products funding the occupation. While in some cases, this movement may only prove to be symbolic, it gets students talking about it and examining how a collection of individual decisions can create a



large impact in the long run”.<sup>52</sup> According to El-Haj, this also “gets us to start contacting our local companies. Many sell products such as dates that are harvested in illegal settlements. We can educate our local communities to avoid these products in their business and personal decisions”.<sup>53</sup>

Noor Fawzy founded the SJP chapter at Florida Atlantic University. While many students drew a lot of their passion and strength from Fawzy’s early guidance and groundwork, she noted the difficulties that her group still faces on campus:

When students organized a mock “eviction notices” action on campus [to mimic the eviction notices that Israel issues to Palestinian families before demolishing their homes in the West Bank], that’s when members started to feel discrimination and antipathy from the university administration. The repression SJP members have faced on campus has a lot to do with the very hostile, anti-Palestinian community in which they live.<sup>54</sup>

Following the eviction notices action on campus, the Jewish group Hillel issued a statement jointly with the university administration which condemned the action, explained that approval should not have been given for it, and stated that the university was going to work with Hillel in the future to ensure that such an incident does not occur again.<sup>55</sup>

Boycotting Israeli products is one strategy that Palestinians who live in the diaspora can use to support Palestinian rights and put pressure on the State of Israel. Salma Awad from Washington State claims that she “stay(s) involved with the BDS movement by boycotting products that are listed”.<sup>56</sup> Awad explains that

young people are more exposed to what’s happening and are more in touch with social media. A lot of Palestinian activism is taking place on college campuses and thus young students are being exposed to what’s happening there. Speaking from personal experience, when I give lectures on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, I always speak to either high-school-level students or college students. The younger age group is the group more in the learning environment and I think that plays a big role as well.<sup>57</sup>

Not all BDS campaigns in the West have been focused on college campuses. Sandra Tamari, a member of the US Palestinian Community Network, sits on the steering committee of the St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee which proposed a divestment bill against the French company Veolia over its role in the colonization of the West Bank. Tamari explains how the campaign succeeded in convincing the city council to divest from the company:

We formed an alliance with other groups that hated Veolia, like city water workers and environmental groups. During the course of the campaign, we educated these progressive allies about Veolia’s role in the oppression of the Palestinians. Even now that we have ended our campaign and won a major victory against Veolia in St. Louis, these allies cooperate with us on Palestinians’ issues and understand our positions.<sup>58</sup>

She highlights the importance of Palestinian voices in securing the campaign’s success: “It was Palestinian stories at the public hearing about Veolia that city lawmakers remember. Black lawmakers were especially moved by stories of bus segregation”.<sup>59</sup>

### **Young Palestinian people and BDS in Europe**

Along with their counterparts in the US, young Palestinian people in the UK, Canada, and other parts of the world are engaged in nonviolent resistance focused on BDS. Emily Haimeed, a member of the Palestine Society at the London School of Economics, describes her participation in BDS initiatives:

I attended the “Confronting Israeli Apartheid” BDS conference in Sheffield [England] a few weeks ago and there were over 100 committed BDS student activists. We were taught workshops on BDS by Rafeef Ziadeh (Palestinian poet), Michael Deas (European



coordinator of BDS), and many others on how to go about [organizing] corporate, academic boycotts etc. at our universities. I was amazed to see how many students from so many different universities had already passed BDS resolutions on campus, and how many were working on or planning to do so in the future.<sup>60</sup>

Haimeed highlights the institutional resistance that pro-Palestinian activists face on campus: "The resistance within institutions, especially universities, happens when Jewish and Israeli societies mobilize to block BDS movements, and call on universities not to support BDS".<sup>61</sup> Haimeed points out that

[t]here are so many dedicated Palestinian students involved in BDS, for them it is their biggest hope of reaching a solution. Many enthusiastic and inspiring Palestinians are active in the BDS movement. Palestinians like Rafeef Ziadeh, who is very active in the BDS movement, are important because, without Palestinian support, BDS would not have as much legitimacy. Activists should try not to do things that the Palestinians themselves do not call for, but BDS seems to be something that many Palestinians in the diaspora believe in and advocate for.<sup>62</sup>

The BDS movement in Canada, unlike that in the US and the UK, has very little support. This may be due to the small number of Palestinians living in Canada compared to the US, as well as to the existence of Canada's powerful Zionist lobby and strong ties with Israel, which weaken support for the BDS movement. Reem Skiek, a Palestinian-Canadian, stresses that Palestinians in Canada are aware of the BDS call, although they are not actively engaged in it,<sup>63</sup> and she argues that "more work needs to be done, and many more dedicated volunteers are required to continue the work".<sup>64</sup>

Andrew Dalack believes that Palestinians living in the diaspora have been instrumental in the BDS movement. He argues that

The Palestinian diaspora plays a strong role in helping to mainstream the BDS movement. The Palestinian diaspora in the U.S. and Europe are a diverse group who have reached prominence in a variety of fields: medical, legal, academic, business, etc. Therefore, Palestinians in the diaspora are in a unique position to leverage their social clout and credibility to bring BDS into the mainstream, into their offices, neighborhoods, and diverse social circles.<sup>65</sup>

### Conclusion

Young Palestinian people have been actively involved in nonviolent resistance since the formation of the BDS movement in 2005. Over the years of the conflict, young Palestinian people have used multiple strategies to end the Israeli occupation under the umbrella of various Palestinian political parties. Most notably, following the beginning of the Second Palestinian Intifada, young Palestinians played a major role in political factions which resorted to armed resistance. Yet, with no light at the end of the tunnel and with the collapse of peace talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel and the failure of the two-state solution, more young Palestinians, including those in the diaspora, have become actively engaged in the growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel.

The interviews cited here make clear that many of the young Palestinians in the diaspora who had lost faith in the peace process have identified BDS an effective tactic for pressuring Israel, and the BDS movement has provided an alternative way for young Palestinians to become politically engaged in the cause. For many young people, BDS has provided them with a platform that has enabled them to challenge the previous order in which elite members of Palestinian society controlled the political spectrum. BDS has also provided them with an opportunity to reconcile their identity and look for their roots after long years living abroad.

This transformation may potentially shape the future trajectory of the conflict. The new approach based on the use of nonviolent resistance focuses on boycotts, divestment



motions, and calls for the imposition of sanctions on Israel, and, according to BDS advocates, it will lead to the ending of the military occupation of lands occupied in 1967; it is also designed to ensure that Palestinians who hold Israeli passports will be treated as the equals of their Jewish counterparts and that Palestinian refugees will be allowed to return to their homes in present-day Israel.

Yet, this approach faces some challenges, most notably the legal warfare waged by Israel and its supporters across the world against the BDS movement. The continuing support for a two-state solution by major powers presents yet another obstacle, and, although the BDS movement is officially supported by political parties, it still lacks the support of large sectors of young people in Palestine.

The movement has achieved major successes in the last few years, with the French company Veolia announcing its decision to end its contract with its Israeli partner G4S by the end of 2016. Sodastream and AHAVA decided to relocate their West Bank factories to avoid BDS. Companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Elbit Systems, and Mekorot have suffered considerable losses estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars. The more the movement gains momentum and achieves successes, the more young Palestinian people, inside and outside Palestine, will be engaged in the BDS movement in the near future. Israel is making efforts to stop the movement through, for example, its application of an effective travel ban on its co-founder Omar Al-Barghouti; however, these kinds of steps are only likely to push more young Palestinians to join the BDS movement.



### Notes

1. Both authors have made equal contributions to this article.
2. Abdulminem Hassan, Qarar Majlis Altaoun Alkhaliji w Maseer Moqataet Israel [Decision of Gulf Cooperation Council and Future of Gulf Boycott of Israel].
3. Palestinian BDS National Committee, "Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS", <http://BDSmovement.net/call> (Accessed 20 May 2016).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Intifada is the Arabic word for uprising and it is commonly used in Palestine to refer to the 1987, 2000, and 2015 uprisings against the Israeli occupation.
7. Alimi, "The Israeli Political Arena", 433-453.
8. Nakba is the Arabic word for "catastrophe" that Palestinians use to describe what happened to them following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.
9. Steelman, "International Terrorism Vis-a-Vis Air-Hijacking", 85; Klein, Aaron J., *Striking Back*.
10. Dajani, Souad, *Eyes Without Country*, cited in Stephan, "People Power in the Holy Land", 9.
11. Ibid.
12. Ahmad, "Young Palestinian People: Between Patriarchy and Politics", 18 September 2013, <http://icsr.info/2013/09/palestinian-youth-between-patriarchy-and-politics/> (Accessed 20 May 2016).
13. PLO refers to the Palestinian Liberation Organization which was founded in 1964 to liberate Palestine. PA refers to the Palestinian Authority, which was founded in the West Bank and Gaza following an agreement, known as the Oslo Accords, between the PLO and Israel in 1993.
14. Ahmad, "Young Palestinian People", 18 September 2013, <http://icsr.info/2013/09/palestinian-youth-between-patriarchy-and-politics/> (Accessed 20 May 2016).
15. Helmick, Raymond G., *Negotiating Outside the Law*.
16. Weiner, "Wye River Memorandum", 1.
17. Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza*.
18. Brynen, Rex, "The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation", 31-43.
19. Shikaki, "Palestinians Divided".
20. Abu-Amr, "Hamas", 5-19.
21. Balousha, "Young Palestinian People", 5 March 2013, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/Palestinian-youth-unemployment.html#> (Accessed 20 May 2016).
22. Halper, Jeff, *An Israeli in Palestine*.
23. Jerusalem represents one of the final status quo issues in the Palestinian-Israeli talks. It is the holiest city for the Jewish faith and the third holiest city in Islam. Israel claims it is the eternal capital of Israel and Palestinians claim it to be their future capital city. The ongoing Palestinian uprising is named after the city in honour of its status.
24. Alareer, Refaat (ed.), *Gaza Writes Back*.



25. Alareer, Refaat et al. (eds.), *Gaza Unsilenced*.
26. Friends of Sabeel – North America (FOSNA) is dedicated to the support of Sabeel, an ecumenical liberation theology movement founded by Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. See <http://www.fosna.org/> (Accessed 19 August 2017).
27. Khoury, Rami, "Palestinian Diaspora and the BDS".
28. Barrows-Friedman, Nora, *In Our Power*, 10.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 58.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 14.
33. Abunimah, "Future of BDS".
34. Ibid.
35. The David Project is a pro-Israel advocacy project that promotes support for Israel on US campuses. See <http://www.davidproject.org/> (Accessed 19 August 2017).
36. Abunimah, Ali, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*, p. 55.
37. Weitz, "Former PM Barak: Netanyahu Leading Israel to Disaster".
38. Mabrouk, Adeeba, email interview with author, 19 November 2014.
39. Barrows-Friedman, Nora, *In Our Power*, 15.
40. Ibid.
41. Al-Awda, <http://al-awda.org/> (Accessed 22 August 2017).
42. Muhtaseb, Ahlam, email interview with author, 11 November 2014.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. See US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, [endtheoccupation.org](http://endtheoccupation.org) (Accessed 22 August 2017).
46. Kudaimi, Ramah, email interview with author, 12 November 2014.
47. Dalack, Andrew, email interview with author, 21 November 2014.
48. Ibid.
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50. Rosenberg, Eli, "Palestinian-American Woman Claims She Was Assaulted Because of Her Faith", *Daily News - New York*, 21 October 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/brooklyn/palestinian-american-college-student-claims-assaulted-nets-game-article-1.1982604> (Accessed 20 May 2016).
51. El-Haj, Huda, email interview with author, 14 November 2014.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Barrows-Friedman, Nora, *In Our Power*, 105.



55. Ibid.
56. Awad, Salma, email interview with author, 6 November 2014.
57. Ibid.
58. Tamari, Sandra, email interview with author, 8 November 2014.
59. Ibid.
60. Haimeed, Emily, email interview with author, 8 November 2014.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Skiek, Reem, email interview with author, 13 November 2014.
64. Ibid.
65. Dalack, Andrew, email interview with author, 21 November 2014.



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