

Transnational Feminist Solidarity in Times of Crisis

THE BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS (BDS) MOVEMENT AND JUSTICE IN/FOR PALESTINE

SIMONA SHARONI^a AND RABAB ABDULHADI^b IN CONVERSATION WITH NADJE AL-ALI^c, FELICIA EAVES^d, RONIT LENTIN^e AND DINA SIDDIQI^f

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Transnational feminist politics has long been fraught with challenges and contradictions, especially around the reluctance of feminist activists in the Global North to fully engage with, or account for, the power differentials that structure their own relations with feminist activists in the Global South. These dynamics are particularly noticeable when it comes to crisis situations, which require intervention from the outside. In such circumstances, feminists in the Global North have assumed the role of “saving” their sisters in the Global South (Abu-Lughod 2013). For years, feminists in the Global North have failed to understand why Palestinian women insist on linking their struggles for gender equality to national liberation. As a result, Palestinian women have been at the receiving end of well-intentioned but misguided initiatives, which have disregarded their agency, needs and resilience, and have focused on a narrow understanding of “women’s issues” and critiques of patriarchy and nationalism (Abu Nahleh 2006, 103; Abdulhadi 2009, 13).

Missing from the feminist response to the crisis in Palestine has been recognition of its root causes, namely Israel’s illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, its violation of Palestinian rights and its apartheid-like policies toward the Palestinian people. The political and humanitarian crisis in Palestine has only intensified, making it a permanent issue on the agenda of international women’s gatherings since the early 1970s. Over the past

four decades, feminists in the Global North have persistently tried to address such issues as the plight of Palestinian women political prisoners, or the rise in Palestinian infant and maternal mortality as a result of delays at Israeli military checkpoints (Abdulhadi 2009, 20). These responses, however, had limited success due to pressure from the Israeli government and its US supporters. Feminists in the Global North have yet to take the basic step of holding Israel accountable for perpetrating the violence and injustices that have triggered and continue to feed the mounting crisis.

That said, there are promising signs of an emerging transnational feminist solidarity in response to the political and humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Foremost among these actions is the emergence of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement which can be said to have created a new momentum for a coherent feminist response to the crisis in Palestine. The call for BDS was officially issued in July 2005 by over 175 Palestinian civil society organizations, including many women's groups. Inspired by the achievements of the South African anti-Apartheid movement of the 1980s, the global BDS movement has grown steadily as an expression of solidarity with Palestine among trade unions, religious groups, academic associations and student unions. This year, 2015, marks the tenth anniversary of the BDS call and coincides with a deepening humanitarian crisis for Palestinians, particularly in the wake of the fifty-one-day Israeli assault on Gaza in 2014 (OCHA 2014). Although prominent feminists like Angela Davis and Judith Butler have used their platforms as public intellectuals to endorse BDS, this Conversation outlines an explicitly feminist perspective on BDS.

In November 2014, at the annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, several members of the association crafted a petition presenting a rationale for feminist support of the BDS movement. The group was moved to action in the aftermath of the siege on Gaza a few months earlier and sought to stress the connections between systemic forms of oppression and the transformative potential of collective resistance and solidarity. Their petition invoked the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but also the persistent everyday violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, perpetrated against Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and inside Israel. Even though the leadership of NWSA did not pass an official resolution in support of BDS in November 2014, the case for a feminist endorsement of BDS as both a response to the grave humanitarian crisis in Palestine and as an act of transnational solidarity resonated with the organization's membership. Over 1,000 NWSA members signed the petition.

The following discussion draws upon responses from feminist scholar-activists working in Ireland, England, Bangladesh and the United States to demonstrate the potential of BDS as a transnational feminist response to crisis. Put together, the responses highlight the gendered dimensions of the struggle for survival in Palestine, as well as the urgency with which feminists must react.

JOINING THE BDS MOVEMENT

Nadje Al-Ali: I became more actively involved in the BDS movement after the most recent onslaught on Gaza in the summer of 2014. That summer left me feeling utterly angry, frustrated and helpless. Over 2,000 Gazans had been killed and over 10,000 had been wounded, many of them women, children and civilian men (UN Women 2014). Of course the atrocities and injustices had been going on for many years – for decades in fact – but that was the tipping point for me to become more focused and involved in the BDS campaign and not just general pro-Palestine activities. Moreover, as an academic, I was appalled by the complicity of Israeli academic institutions and their failure, at the minimum, to point out the disproportionate violence used by their government and to challenge its genocidal policies. My commitment has been enhanced by the systematic and convincing arguments made by activists in the BDS campaign, as well as the voices within the anti-BDS movement.

Ronit Lentin: Like Nadje, I also joined the BDS movement recently, though my involvement preceded the most recent Gaza massacre in 2014. I joined the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Academics for Palestine after many years as a pro-Palestine activist, writing, speaking, organizing conferences and teaching about Palestine.

Simona Sharoni: Ronit, Nadje also spoke about how her position as an academic shaped her views. Do you see a connection between your academic and activist work? Is that connection important in your motivation to join the BDS cause?

Ronit: Yes, of course. I had worked with Palestinian feminist scholars and co-edited a book with the Palestinian feminist Nahla Abdo on the gendered dimension of Israel's military occupation. A key aspect of my scholarly work and activism continues to be supporting Palestinian resistance and resilience, and also, particularly though not exclusively, on highlighting the resistance work by Palestinian women.

Rabab Abdulhadi: As a Palestinian myself, my relationship to this issue is different than that of Nadje and Ronit. As children growing up under the 1948–67 Jordanian rule, we knew that Palestinians boycotted Ford cars and Coca-Cola because they had factories in Israel. Living in the West Bank, under the Israeli occupation, the boycott principle was all the more tangible to me. I would hear my mother proclaim, “Do we have no dignity? They steal our land, kill and imprison our people, demolish homes and humiliate us every single day. The least that we could do is boycott.”

Simona: Do you have any particular memories about boycott actions?

Rabab: I remember the first time my parents packed the six of us into the car to take us to see the land that belonged to our family before 1948. My parents would fill the car up with gas from Nablus and again from Qalqilya, Jenin or Tulkarem, the nearest points to the 1948–67 border, so as not to patronize Israeli gas stations. My mother would make sandwiches and pack juice, water and coffee in Thermoses so we wouldn't start nagging her to buy Israeli groceries. These childhood experiences reinforced the importance of working for the Palestinian cause, and by 2004, I was among a group of Palestinian scholars who called on our international colleagues to join us in the academic boycott of Israeli universities. During the 2008–09 Israeli war on Gaza, I co-founded the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI). Later, I was part of the team that mobilized at NWSA for the BDS resolution.

Dina Siddiqi: My own memories are rather different. I grew up in Bangladesh in the early 1970s, and this had a huge impact on my political socialization. It was against the backdrop of the non-aligned movement during the Cold War, and the still lingering possibility of justice for formerly colonized peoples in Asia and Africa, that the Palestine issue took on significance for me. My earliest political memory, outside of my immediate national context, is of an encounter at Dhaka airport in the mid-1970s with three young men anxiously milling about, with little luggage but books in their hands. They were Palestinians studying medicine in Bangladesh, and they had just been recalled to Beirut to serve in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Although they seemed uncertain about their future and whether they would be able to return to their studies, I remember their matter-of-fact manner. It was their turn – that's all. As a citizen of a newly liberated country, my heart went out to those young men. I carried their wound for a fleeting moment; I learned about exile and dispossession, citizenship and statelessness, long before I understood Israeli settler colonialism. When the BDS movement emerged, there was no question in my mind, no hesitation: I had to support this cause.

Simona: Our social, political and geographical locations are clearly important here. Unlike Dina and Rabab, I grew up as part of an immigrant Jewish family in Israel. Growing up, I was not aware of the violence and dispossession inflicted by Israel on the Palestinian people. My rude awakening took place during my mandatory military service in the early 1980s. I've been involved in solidarity work with Palestinians since the first intifada in 1987, but after my student Rachel Corrie was crushed to death in Rafah by an Israeli bulldozer in March 2003, I reached the conclusion that we need new strategies to hold the Israeli government and military accountable (Sharoni 2006, 289). Two years later, when Palestinian civil society issued the BDS call, I was more

than ready to endorse it. Like Rabab I was part of the group that worked on the NWSA petition, and also campaigned to pass a resolution in support of BDS at the Peace and Justice Studies Association.

Felicia Eaves: I find the way that you talk about “joining” interesting. I have a slightly different take than the rest of you. For me, the BDS cause is not something that I “joined,” nor do I distinguish it as a “movement” in and of itself, or as being separate from or beyond the overall movement for Palestinian human rights. I view BDS as a strategy comprising a set of tactics for change. For instance, in the case of the United States, the ultimate goal is to change the bilateral relationship with Israel – that is, ongoing US complicity in Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands and its Apartheid model of oppression. I joined the steering committee of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation three years prior to the 2005 BDS call. At that time, we were already discussing what a corporate accountability campaign might look like, and how we could challenge the collusion of US corporations with Israel’s occupation and human rights violations. The call for BDS made us begin to think more intentionally about how to employ BDS in our existing work and dovetail that with Palestinian human rights activists’ efforts. So I didn’t “join” the BDS cause per se, but rather, I saw BDS as a natural and logical continuation of my work for Palestinian human rights.

UNDERSTANDING PALESTINE AS A GENDERED CRISIS

Ronit: While many in the international community are aware of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Palestine, few examine the crisis through a gendered lens. For instance, we might say that Palestinian women experience the encroachment of their domestic and private spaces by the Israeli army more acutely with modesty infringed and motherhood interrupted.

Rabab: There are so many examples of how this gendered crisis has affected the lives of Palestinian women over the years. During the first Intifada, Palestinian women activists, including mothers, were imprisoned, brutally interrogated and tortured (including sexual torture). Rape has been used both as a threat and as a weapon of war in Palestine (Thornhill 1992, 28–34). Women activists have also suffered miscarriages as a result of being attacked by tear gas during demonstrations against home demolitions or the Apartheid wall (Abdulhadi 2004, 248).

Nadje: Yes, women and girls are specifically vulnerable in a situation where everyday household survival largely depends on the work of women and girls. Feeding a large family despite extreme food shortages or calming a terrified child can be viewed as acts of resistance. In addition to trauma and lack

of security, women are particularly hard hit by the inadequate access to services such as healthcare, shelter, sanitation and transportation.

Ronit: Of course, all that said, the gender picture is not one of straightforward victimhood. Palestinian women are often depicted as victims of Zionism and its occupation and siege policies, but as we learn from the work of Palestinian feminist scholars, women are also active agents of resistance – an important element that needs reiterating, particularly when images of grieving Palestinian mothers sitting on the ruins of their homes have become iconic emblems of the crisis. Women are also responding to the crisis by participating in weekly protests against the Apartheid wall and the destruction of Bedouin and Palestinian villages (Kuttab 2006, 231–238; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009, 150–186).

Rabab: I must say that I think the fact that a large number of the victims of the summer 2014 attack on Gaza were women and children in itself is insufficient or too superficial to conclude that the crisis was gendered.

Nadje: Absolutely – as we all know, the gender picture is always more complicated. We need to pay attention to the way in which the crisis is affecting men too. Men also suffer in gender-specific ways, as they are unable to fulfill the expected roles of breadwinner and protector of their families.

Rabab: I'd argue that overlooking the toll on male victims and focusing only on women and children is also a deliberate gendered act that dehumanizes Palestinian men. As the July 2014 Israeli military attack intensified, a hateful and dehumanizing Israeli discourse emerged that was gendered and sexualized on one hand, and racist, Islamophobic and orientalist on the other. For example, Mordechai Keder of Bar Ilan University in Israel called for the rape of Palestinian mothers and sisters as a tool to force Palestinians to end their resistance (Shams 2014). In another instance, an Israeli billboard showed Gaza as a woman wearing the hijab, portrayed in a highly sexualized way with her legs exposed. The caption read, "Bibi, this time finish inside! Signed, citizens in favor of a ground assault." *Bibi* is the nickname of Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, and the Hebrew word for "finish." Hence this is a double-entendre that suggests both completing the military mission and sexual climax or ejaculation (Sheen 2014).

Simona: I share Rabab's critique of the sexist and racist discourse and images that were prevalent in Israel during and in the aftermath of the July 2014 attack on Gaza. As feminists committed to ending violence and injustice, we should pay careful attention to the discourses that perpetuate oppression and legitimize violence. At the same time, the mainstream international media failed to notice that since the 2014 attack, Israel has also heightened

the tension and atmosphere of crisis by detaining Palestinian women leaders, including Khalida Jarrar, a prominent feminist political lawmaker. Jarrar's arrest this year brought the number of Palestinian lawmakers detained in Israeli jails to sixteen and the number of Palestinian women political prisoners to twenty-two. Additionally, an estimated 422 Palestinians are currently classified as administrative detainees, a practice by which Israel can indefinitely detain Palestinians on "secret evidence" without charge (see Abunimah 2015; Samidoun 2015).

BDS AS SOLIDARITY: HISTORICAL AND GLOBAL DIMENSIONS

Felicia: BDS, as we acknowledged earlier, draws from the experience of the South African anti-Apartheid movement. The gendered effects of BDS within that movement, as well as the US Civil Rights Movement, are similar to what we see in the movement for Palestine today. For example, the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56) emphasized black women's roles in particular, in Alabama and throughout the South of the USA, as a key driving force of the southern economy. Because black women domestic workers employed in the homes of white women relied on public transportation, the boycott created much tension and havoc in those white homes. Thus, married white women implored their husbands to bring an end to bus segregation so that black domestic workers could get to work and "normalcy" could be restored to white women's homes. We can see similar power relations in the Palestinian-Israeli context. As a strategy, BDS allows Palestinian women to develop an effective and compelling response to Israel's human rights violations, largely because women around the world make most of the consumer decisions for their homes.

Simona: Especially given this intersectional history of BDS, how can we as feminists challenge attempts to undermine support for BDS that frame it as anti-Israel, anti-Semitic and/or divisive to the feminist movement?

Nadje: Many of the most outspoken pro-BDS feminists in the UK are Jewish, so I have not been confronted with that tension. If anything I find that my Jewish feminist friends, especially those with close ties to Israel, are among the most passionate and outspoken in support of BDS. As someone who grew up in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s with an acute awareness of German citizens' role in the Holocaust, I am extremely sensitive to anti-Semitic undertones and would challenge it in any context. Within the academic and activist circles with which I am familiar, this seems to be the norm: anti-Semitism is not tolerated. Full stop. I think there is only so much convincing we can do to challenge those who accuse the BDS movement of being anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli. I find it is more important *what* we do rather than what we *say*

we do: we need to convince by example, which in many contexts could be the words we use. In terms of the accusation of being anti-Israel, as opposed to being more specifically against the Israeli occupation and the systematic human rights abuses and discrimination against Palestinians, we can counter that by working closely with critical voices from within. There is still much confusion about what BDS means in practice when it comes to individuals as opposed to links with institutions. My personal view is that we should do everything possible to collaborate more and work with Israeli colleagues who are critical of their government's policies towards Palestine.

Ronit: Both the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Academics for Palestine emphasize their rejection of anti-Semitism and racism of any kind. Importantly, accusations of anti-Semitism and being a “self-hating Jew” (a term used to silence Jews who criticize Israel and/or express solidarity with the Palestinian cause) while always there have not seriously surfaced. The fact that I was born Jewish and lived in Israel no doubt influenced my scholarship and involvement with the movement for justice in Palestine.¹ I have written extensively about Israel and the Holocaust from a gender perspective and have emphasized the conceptual link between the Holocaust and the Nakba, for which some Israeli Jewish feminists have attacked me. I do not act in the Palestine solidarity movement “as a Jew” (even though this contributes to the movement’s legitimacy) because working “as a Jew” homogenizes all Jewish people and minimizes the power of the struggle. However, I believe that by framing BDS as a way of supporting Palestinian feminists as well as Israeli-Jewish feminists working with Palestinians on an equal footing, we can go a long way towards countering the accusations of anti-Semitism and being a “self-hating Jew.”

Simona: Ronit, do you think that the endorsement of BDS by the *Women’s Coalition for Peace* in Israel and groups like *Boycott from Within* help clarify that BDS is not a movement designed to target, but rather to support, feminists and peace activists in Israel?

Ronit: Absolutely. I also think that it is important to critique the work of some Israeli and Jewish feminists who support liberal feminism and who believe that through working “on” Palestinian women they advance an equality agenda. The aims of BDS and of the academic and cultural boycott of Israel are clear. While dialogue with radical Israeli colleagues who share our aims is welcome, it is crucial to persuade Israeli and Jewish colleagues who worry that BDS would harm Israeli individuals that BDS is targeted at the state and its institutions, not individuals. To colleagues who believe BDS is “divisive” and does not allow room for Israelis to develop their identities, I would say that by participating and supporting the Israeli settler-colony, their very identities, even if they criticize their government, become tarnished.

Rabab: I think that it is crucial to understand the interconnectedness of anti-oppression struggles. It is clear that Jewish anti-Zionist women have a particular investment in supporting BDS and challenging Israel for what it does in the name of all Jews. The Zionist movement has historically tried to muddy the waters between Jews, Judaism, Zionism and Israel as if they were all one and the same. The Palestinian movement has historically insisted on being very vigilant and uncompromising about the distinction between Zionism and Judaism (Abdulhadi 2012). I (and many others) believe that it is absolutely necessary to reject the practice of lumping all Jews in the same boat, and instead we insist on an understanding of the diversity of Jewish lives, experience and beliefs. On the other hand, we need to challenge Zionist feminism whose *raison d'être* is to defend Israel under the guise of not singling out Israel or the need for “objectivity” in our academic work by not addressing “political” issues. To them, I say that claims of objectivity do no more than reinforce and reproduce the status quo that normalizes everyday oppression so it is seen as ordinary and “business-as-usual.”

Simona: Rabab reminds us that an analysis of multiple oppressions needs to be not only comprehensive in not tolerating exceptionalism, but also nuanced in rejecting attempts to conflate Zionism and Judaism. The crisis in Palestine forces feminists to use the analysis of multiple oppressions that is at the heart of feminist intersectionality to determine where we stand in relation to the violence and oppression inflicted on Palestinians. Do we ignore it, justify it or condemn it? Jewish feminists, including Israeli-Jewish feminists like Ronit and myself, have expressed solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and strongly criticize the abuse of anti-Semitic charges to silence any attempt to hold Israel accountable. It is imperative that we challenge the defensive reaction to BDS vocalized by some Jewish feminists: for far too long they held some kind of veto power in the global women's movement. For example, the prominent Egyptian feminist Nawal Saadawi recalled in an interview with Rabab how Bella Abzug and Betty Freidan used their status to impose a veto on discussions of Palestine, especially at the Nairobi UN Women's Conference in 1985 (Abdulhadi 1998, 661). There is strength in numbers: the more feminists that speak up and vocalize their support for justice in Palestine, the more difficult it is to silence or falsely accuse us of anti-Semitism.

A TRANSNATIONAL, ANTI-IMPERIALIST, INTERSECTIONAL, *FEMINIST* RESPONSE TO CRISIS

Simona: In times of crisis, distinctions are often made between victims and perpetrators. In this case, however, since 1948 Israeli officials have blamed their own aggressions on Palestinian provocations. The international

community, for its part, has been unable to hold Israel accountable due to US protection. The BDS movement represents an attempt to hold the Israeli government and military accountable for their actions and demand justice for victims. Feminists who support BDS have realized that there is a serious contradiction between Zionism and feminism and resolved to hold Israel accountable for denying basic rights to Palestinians (both inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories) for more than half a century. Transnational feminist solidarity has always been focused on the needs of the oppressed, linking an analysis of gender inequalities with other forms of oppression and violence. It is this rationale that has led many feminists to endorse BDS.

Nadje: Yes, I completely agree. It is far easier to conceptualize – and even to teach – transnational feminist politics and solidarity, but it is tricky to put it into practice. Theoretically, most feminists would agree that we need to think about gendered inequalities in an intersectional manner, identifying and challenging the specific configurations of power and inequalities that circumscribe women's and men's lives. In practice, however, certain power relations – patriarchy, capitalism, racism, heteronormativity – might be better understood and more widely acknowledged than others. Yet, colonialism, imperialism and Zionism are also key configurations of power that intersect to severely impact upon Palestinian women's lives. It is our responsibility as transnational feminists to challenge simplistic and flawed explanations that would peg “Muslim culture” as the key determinant of Palestinian women's experiences of oppression. We need to listen to Palestinian women's rights activists and feminist academics. At the same time, I would argue that gender equality for Israeli Jewish women is also impossible without a challenge to Israel's settler colonial structures and policies.

Ronit: Definitely. Transnational feminist solidarity means solidarity with the oppressed, and with oppressed women in particular. Although I have lived and worked in Ireland since 1969, I feel an added duty to support Palestinian feminists as an Israeli citizen – but, importantly, not through speaking *for* them.

Simona: How can feminists practice solidarity with Palestinian women without speaking for them?

Ronit: As feminists located in the Global North, it is important to avoid discourses of “empowerment” and “giving voice.” Instead we should be making space for Palestinian feminists to speak for themselves. Centering the work of Palestinian and other feminists from the Global South in our teaching and research is crucial for transnational feminism. On a slightly different note, we also need to recognize that the modern state frequently co-opts equality discourse for their purposes. The Israeli state deploys discourses of gender equality and gay and lesbian rights to promote its self-styled image as the

Middle East's only democracy; I work transnationally with other BDS supporters and Palestinian feminists to expose what we call the Israeli state's "equality bluff." Finally, it is important to stress that BDS is aimed not only at the occupation of Palestinian territory but rather at Zionism as a whole. My personal aim is to work toward one secular democratic state in historic Palestine. "End the occupation," though it was for a long time a potent slogan of the women's peace movement in Israel, is no longer sufficient.

Simona: I agree with Ronit that endorsing a liberal feminist anti-occupation discourse is no longer enough, especially when advocated by Jewish feminists who are not willing to examine critically their own power and privilege and their relationship with Zionism and the Jewish state.

Dina: The issues of power and privilege, and the complexity of feminist discourse and the ways in which it is used and abused, has some striking similarities with my activism within the anti-Apartheid movement during the 1980s. Those of us who were women of color from the Global South knew from experience that an interrogation of US nationalist exceptionalism, and the related disavowal of capitalist imperialism, was fundamental to our feminist politics. We learned as activists how liberal feminist analyses systematically occluded the interconnectedness of oppressions and erased the mutual entanglements of our histories (slavery and colonialism, imperialism and capitalism) and our presents. We learned how important it was to chip away at such an exclusionary feminism that privileged gender as the only axis of inequality. Surely transnational feminist solidarity at this juncture too must help to dismantle the structures that keep some women safe at the expense of other women's lives, life-worlds and basic humanity.

Rabab: For me, the answer to this question depends on how we define feminism. If we follow what I call colonial feminist frameworks, then BDS as a tool of solidarity with the Palestinian people and their just struggle for self-determination has nothing to do with feminism. On the other hand, if we follow the teachings of Martin Luther King, which affirm that one cannot struggle for justice for one group and deny it to others, then we must see feminism as a comprehensive framework that acknowledges what King calls the *indivisibility of justice*. That is, justice is holistic. BDS could indeed be an excellent example for a feminism that is rooted in justice and equality for all.

Simona: I agree with Rabab's point about the need to define feminism in relation to BDS, and I also share Nadje's view that BDS is an example of feminist solidarity praxis. BDS provides a strategy, a coherent discourse and radical platform for feminist praxis. Moreover, the BDS movement has provided feminists and other activists in Palestine, Israel and worldwide with a clear vision and manifold opportunities to mobilize the international community to confront Israeli Apartheid and to join the struggle to bring about a just

and lasting resolution of the conflict (Abunimah 2011; Tadiar 2012; Elia 2014).

Felicia: Simona has just touched upon a really important point. I think the real feminist value of BDS lies in how it has allowed for women all over the world to share in the strategy for supporting Palestinian women and the people of Palestine in their ongoing struggle for self-determination.

Simona: Some well-intentioned feminists have engaged in solidarity with Palestinians but with a very limited focus on women or on queers. What is your perspective on this issue Rabab, as a Palestinian feminist involved in these struggles?

Rabab: To engage in feminist solidarity, in my view, should not mean that we stand in solidarity only with Palestinian women or queers as separate groups. The main Palestinian queer organization, AlQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, has already rejected some western queer tendencies toward solidarity aimed only at Palestinian queers. In 2014, Haneen Maikey, AlQaws co-founder and executive director, basically told western queer groups, "We don't want your solidarity if you only support us. You need to be in solidarity with all our people." Some feminist analysis also expresses an essentialist solidarity with women only, or sympathizes with the victimization of women and children but not those women's men (Abdulahadi 2005, 155–156; Mikdashi 2014). A truly transnational feminist response does not have a hierarchy of the marginalized. A transnational feminist solidarity must not seek to "save" Palestinian women and/or queers from their Palestinian communities (Abu-Lughod 2013; Maikey 2014), nor should it support Palestinian women and queers only as victims but then refuse to work with them when they exercise their agency.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

The Association for Middle East Women's Studies (AMEWS) dedicated its February 2015 e-bulletin to the BDS movement. The issue included multiple positions on BDS while remaining critical of the settler and occupation policies of the Israeli state. One of the articles featured in the e-bulletin is by two Israeli-Jewish feminists, Sarai Aharoni and Amalia Saar, who point out that an academic boycott would be "devastating" for certain Israeli academics who may well be some of the strongest critics of policies of occupation (2015, 9). They argue that such a boycott would be a "double-edged sword" that serves to encourage "self-moralizing that silences voices of dissent inside Israel" (Aharoni and Saar 2015, 9), ultimately undermining collaborations with feminist scholars and peace activists in Israel. However, the contributors

to this Conversation are in agreement with Nicola Pratt, the author of another article in the same e-bulletin, who argues that BDS targets academic institutions that have been complicit with Israel's repression of Palestinians, not individual scholars who have supported Palestinians' struggle for self-determination. Indeed, "far from isolating those individuals, BDS is in solidarity with them" (Pratt 2015, 13).

Our discussions about a transnational, anti-imperialist, intersectional, *feminist* response to crisis are relevant to this debate. We endorse all aspects of BDS, including the academic and cultural boycott, because Israel's cultural institutions and higher education system are deeply implicated in the state's violence. For instance, Tel Aviv University was partially built on the lands of the Palestinian village of Sheikh Muwanis (Zochrot 2003). More recently, the same institution granted presidential scholarships to 850 Israeli soldiers who had participated in the 2014 attack on Gaza (IMEMC 2015). Those who view feminism as a theoretical framework and a movement grounded in an analysis of and resistance to multiple forms of oppression should have no problem endorsing BDS, especially in the aftermath of the devastation wrought by the July 2014 assault on Gaza by Israeli forces. Supporting BDS is an opportunity to address the root causes of Palestinians' oppression as we center our intersectional analysis on the links between interlocking systems of domination, and foreground the transnational movements that are determined to dismantle them. By historicizing and contextualizing BDS as a strategy of transnational feminist solidarity we seek not only to legitimize the movement to which we belong but also to highlight the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead.

The inclusion of our conversation in this special issue on gender and crisis allows us to make explicit the fact that the situation in Palestine meets all the criteria of an acute crisis – in its humanitarian dimension and in its persistence since 1948. The response of the international community to the Palestinian call for BDS represents a radical departure from earlier approaches to crisis intervention. As the BDS movement gathers momentum and draws on the historic achievements of its South African counterpart, governments and international organizations, like the European Union and the United Nations, will no longer be able to ignore Israel's Apartheid. As a long-overdue response to a persistent crisis, the global BDS movement has mobilized support for Palestinian resilience and resistance. Feminist interpretations of BDS have a transformative potential. Far from a mere exercise in intellectual luxury, this transnational feminist conversation is a call to action, inviting feminists to consider BDS as an urgent act of solidarity, designed to advance a just and lasting solution to the ongoing crisis in Palestine. By insisting on intervening on the side of justice in the face of mounting evidence of Israel's violent onslaughts, feminists who endorse BDS can send a message to Palestinians that we refuse to be complicit in perpetuating their oppression, reassuring them that the whole world is watching and they are not alone in their struggle for freedom and justice in/for Palestine.

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Note

- 1 As Israel is a Jewish state by definition, being “Jewish” is not simply a religion in the Israeli context: it is also a form of identity and identification.

Notes on Contributors

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