

On Boycott, Divesment and Sanctions and the Decolonization of the Palestinian Mind

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Protesters in Cape Town called on the South African government to boycott, divest and sanction Israel. (Photo: Nurah Tape, Palestine Chronicle)

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Eid

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's mind of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it." Frantz Fanon

There are no two equal sides to "the conflict!" Genocidal Israel, on the one hand, is a settler-colonial society practicing racial discrimination, systematic ethnic cleansing, and *Genocide*. We, the oppressed Palestinians, on the other hand, represent the colonized party that has the internationally sanctioned right to resist. We are no neighbors; neighbors are usually equal in rights and duties, respecting neighborly rights.

Does this illustrate the nature of the relationship between the Israeli occupiers of Palestine and the Palestinians, who suffer from a multi-tiered system of oppression practiced by the Israeli "neighbor," driven by deeply racist ideology?

In this light, we should ask: was the French colonizer a generous neighbor to the Arab Algerian? Did the white settlers in South Africa during the Apartheid regime exercise "neighborly rights" toward the Black African population? And did the white racists in the American South show "generosity" toward their African-descended neighbors, the former slaves?

In the Apartheid Republic of South Africa, the white master made what he considered "generous concessions" when he permitted the establishment of racial Bantustans – segregated, Black-only areas that were established on 12% of South Africa's land for the African population to live on. These Bantustans had sham Black leaders chosen by the white master to mediate with him to improve the lives of the African population. These leaders were proud of their service to the white master and desperately sought his favor.

The same experience was repeated in India and Algeria, and many other countries that suffered the scourge of colonialism, particularly settler colonialism. Even in Palestine, we had the so-called “Peace Bands” in the 1930s who collaborated with the British colonizer.

Identification with the master and tireless efforts by oppressed and colonized people to gain the master’s approval take different forms. Often, there is a state of denial, sometimes accompanied by persistent attempts to highlight the “human” aspect of the relationship between the two “neighbors!”

However, the worst cases of identification occur when the slave believes that he has become “free” and, as a result, resorts to repressive methods against the rest of the slaves. These methods are even similar to those used by the master. All of this results from the master targeting the slave’s mind with the aim of completely subjugating him. The terms “house negro” and/or “Uncle Tom” were coined to express this state.

Thus, Palestinians exist in a state of continuous engagement with the multiple forms of oppression practiced by Israel. The most dangerous of these is the battle to mould the collective Palestinian consciousness into a “liberation project”, one that does not view improving the conditions of oppression and repression as any form of freedom. Palestinian resistance is based on an anti-colonial project that considers the decolonization of the mind a necessary prelude to the liberation of the land and the people.

It views complete equality among human beings as the antithesis of the Zionist project, just as equality between all South Africans was the antithesis of the white Apartheid system there. At the height of Apartheid repression in the mid-1980s, who could have imagined that Nelson Mandela would emerge from Apartheid prisons in 1990? Which of the hated Bantustan presidents, the Uncle Toms of South Africa, expected that Mandela would become president even for whites, and that the Bantustans would be consigned to the dustbin of history?

Before the American civil rights and anti-racism leader Martin Luther King was assassinated in the late 1960s, he had said that he had a dream—a dream based on liberating the mind and creating a form of “Black Consciousness,” a term used by the founder of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, activist Steve Biko, who was assassinated by white interrogators in that country in 1977. This dream brought the first Black president to the pinnacle of power in South Africa.

In the Palestinian case, a critical review is needed of the climate created by the 1993 Oslo normalization agreements —according to the definition of normalization agreed upon by all active political forces and the overwhelming majority of Palestinian civil society sectors. This critical review is a basic precondition for decolonization. The normalization brought about by Oslo misrepresents the situation – a state of conflict between an oppressive, colonial, Israeli settler and an oppressed, colonized Palestinian. Instead, it misrepresents the occupation of Palestine as one where “two equal parties” are fighting over “disputed” lands.

During the 1993 Oslo talks, Palestinians were told that “dialogue” and “negotiations” through an American mediator would ultimately lead to a “just solution,” and that “both parties” had to “fight terrorism” to achieve “peace” that guaranteed “Israel’s security.” Consequently, the Palestinian side is now represented as one that must “break the psychological barriers” and remove the “hatred” that it cultivates through “hateful” and “anti-Semitic” education and curricula! All that “hate” culminated in October 7 attack, ignoring the fact that the ongoing genocide has been enabled by 77

years of unprecedented violence and a rhetoric of racial, religious, and civilizational superiority that bolsters a sense of righteousness, and that genocidal Israel is a settler-colony run by an ideology of racial hierarchy.

The reality now, however, indicates that what decades of negotiations between the two unequal parties brought Palestinians to is the following situation: either accept the dictates of the US and Israel, or do not. The first option demands that the Palestinian side (the slave) recognize the “legitimacy” of the multi-tiered system of military occupation, Apartheid, Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, and the Jewishness of Israel, in exchange for an ethnic enclave with diminished sovereignty—and all Bantustans are like that by their nature—over parts of the West Bank.

This amounts to collective suicide by the Palestinians and a final blow in the liquidation of the entire Palestinian issue.

The second option, of rejecting the American “mediation”, will lead to victim-blaming, as usual, and thus expose Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to a fierce, frightening attack (“hell” in the words of American president Donald Trump) that will be among the worst that Palestinians have ever experienced, beyond the ongoing Genocide we are going through right now!

All this comes within the context of the climate created by the “neighbor” mentality, whereby improving the conditions of oppression is considered the best we can get so much so that the Israeli and American governments, with the consent of Arab governments, want to appoint Palestinian Judernat and Kapos to help in the administration of the Gaza death camp!

Hence, decolonizing the Palestinian mind is of the utmost importance. This is precisely what the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement in general, and the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) in particular, seek to achieve: to continue what Edward Said, Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, Naji al-Ali, and many other critical thinkers before them began, in literary and critical works that transcended limited ideological constraints.

These works are an extension of the liberation and popular struggle waged by the Palestinian people over the past century and draw on the lessons learned from the struggles of peoples who have suffered similar forms of settler colonial oppression.

Here, it is necessary to point out the unprecedented achievements of the campaigns, which express the free Palestinian mind leading the international boycott movement with effective methods that have achieved breakthroughs and leaps that have surprised Israel, even America, and, of course, those who advocate for “good neighborliness.” Just a few years ago, criticizing Israel in the United States was considered taboo, and now it has become almost mainstream even amongst members of the Democratic Party and congressmen.

BDS, which is not based on the rhetoric of charity, benevolence, or improving conditions of oppression, is what prompts so many artists and cultural figures to take a stand against the crimes committed by genocidal Israel. As Avraham Burg, former Speaker of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and former Chairman of the Jewish Agency (an organization encouraging Jewish people to immigrate to Israel), had warned long before October 7, 2023, that the most important aspect of BDS was that global public pressure was beginning to influence governments.

These governments had begun to take practical steps against Israel, making sanctions against Israel inevitable. Indeed now, after 1.5 years of a horrific genocide, the Zionist regime finds itself in an unprecedented state of isolation.

Palestinians can only invest in these creative efforts to bridge the enormous imbalance of power between Israel, which allegedly possesses one of the most powerful armies in the world, armed with massive destructive weapons—and the Palestinian people, who possess the supreme moral force only in their favor. This, however, necessitates the intervention of global popular forces with a humane conscience, the same kind of solidarity forces who intervened on behalf of the oppressed Black people in South Africa and worked under their guidance to isolate the Apartheid regime.

Just as the international boycott campaign is based on exerting the utmost popular pressure on governments, it is more appropriate for Palestinian popular forces to exert greater pressure on the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority to halt all blatant normalization practices that undermine the BDS achievements.

In distinguished American director Quentin Tarantino's 2012 film about slavery in the United States, "Django," a Black slave appears, one who oversees the work of a white master with extraordinary dedication to obtain his favor. This slave works to uncover any conspiracy he senses being hatched against the master and/or any attempt to free other slaves working on cotton plantations.

The "most amazing" aspect of the film is the accusations leveled against the "ungrateful" slaves, and that the best they can strive for is to improve their living conditions. However, the Black hero, a slave who frees his mind, expresses the dream of the slave and has no other choice but to clash with the white master to free his wife.

Similarly, BDS is merely an act of decolonization, a direct confrontation with Apartheid Israel, one that does not believe in a truce, whether short or long-term. BDS and the free Palestinian mind do not believe that that improving the current conditions of oppression, especially those established by Israeli genocide in Gaza—such as allowing 50 grams of cement, 3 boxes of cancer medication, and 5 bottles of baby formula through the prison gates—justifies exchanging kisses and broad smiles with war criminals.

BDS, in other words, is an ongoing act of Palestinian resistance that will continue, and grow in strength and influence, for as long as military occupation, racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, and Israeli GENOCIDE persist.

Period!