

IN OUR POWER

U.S. STUDENTS ORGANIZE FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE



NDRA BARRAWS-FRIEDMAN



FOREWORD BY NOURA ERAKAT

CURRENT AFFAIRS

"Nora's book makes critical, inspirational reading... that will undoubtedly strengthen our growing movement for justice in Palestine."

— ALI ABUNIMAH, Author, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*



"[T]he personal histories, philosophies, tactics, and hope expressed by university students and gathered here... show us not just what it is to be an activist, but what it is to be human."

— CRAIG CORRIE, Co-founder, The Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice



"Nora Barrows-Friedman skillfully keeps the voices of students front and center... Their words—passionate, sharp, and inspiring—capture a movement in a historic moment."

— REBECCA VILKOMERSON, Executive Director, Jewish Voice for Peace



In the years following Israel's 2008-9 "Operation Cast Lead" assault on the Palestinians of Gaza, a new kind of student movement emerged on U.S. campuses, in solidarity with Palestinians seeking to fully exercise their human and political rights within their historic homeland. These students have brought national attention to "BDS," the worldwide campaign in support of the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions of Israel until it abides by international law. Nora Barrows-Friedman, journalist and editor for the award-winning *Electronic Intifada*, traveled across the United States in 2013-14 interviewing the young organizers at core of this movement and documenting the rich political legacy these activists have built in the face of considerable opposition.

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Israel and its lobby groups in the United States have identified campuses as the main battleground in their effort to crush criticism and build support for the Zionist apartheid regime that destroys the lives of millions of Palestinians. Students, often opposed by their own cowardly and complicit administrations, have faced this formidable assault with courage, creativity, and determination. Nora Barrows-Friedman's book gives voice to the students on the frontlines. With great empathy and sharp analysis, Nora takes us on a tour of the United States to meet young people who are making history, breaking the silence over Palestine, and working to put Palestine into a much broader struggle against racism and social injustice.

When this battle is won, as I am certain it will be, this book will serve as a record of a vital part of the struggle. But in this urgent moment, Nora's book makes critical, inspirational reading, gathering together a wealth of experience and insights from the real experts—the students doing the work—that will undoubtedly strengthen our growing movement for justice in Palestine.

—ALI ABUNIMAH

Author, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*



Not everyone gets a front row seat to see history in the making, but thanks to Nora Barrow-Friedman's new book *In Our Power*, readers get a compelling view of the rapidly expanding U.S. student movement for Palestinian human rights. Despite fierce opposition, bullying and intimidation, students are strategically changing the U.S. discourse on Palestine and winning support for freedom, justice, and equality. Nora's book gives us portraits of many courageous campus activists, as well as important historical background that puts this special moment of history into context. The collective efforts of the movement detailed in [these] pages generate optimism and promise that truth and justice will prevail.

—JENNIFER BING

American Friends Service Committee, Chicago



Profoundly inspirational, the personal histories, philosophies, tactics, and hope expressed by university students gathered here by Ms. Barrows-Friedman show us not just what it is to be an activist, but what it is to be human. This book should be read by all working on this issue, or simply willing to be informed and inspired by these students, who are, as was my daughter Rachel, organizing for justice in Palestine.

—CRAIG CORRIE

Co-founder, The Rachel Corrie Foundation



While the Palestinians resist the occupation of their land, these students have to fight against the occupation of the American mind, caused by decades of pro-Israeli narratives dominating the media.

Despite the intimidation and delegitimization they encounter when they organize for justice in Palestine, these students carry on, encouraged by the firm belief that history will be on their side. I am hopeful that the next generation of leaders will understand that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are not just the rights of Americans, but also of Palestinians and people elsewhere.

—**NORMA HASHIM**

Viva Palestina Malaysia



Nora Barrows-Friedman skillfully keeps the voices of students front and center in her comprehensive book *In Our Power*. Their words—passionate, sharp, and inspiring—capture a movement in a historic moment.

—**REBECCA VILKOMERSON**

Executive Director, Jewish Voice for Peace

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In Our Power

U.S. Students Organize for
Justice in Palestine

Nora Barrows-Friedman

Foreword by Noura Erakat



Charlottesville, Virginia



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Contents

Foreword by Noura Erakat

Preface

1. Inspired to Act

Interview: Kristian Davis Bailey

2. Building from History

Interview: Rebecca Pierce

3. Creative Tactics

Interview: Shirien Damra

4. The Campus as a Battleground

Interview: Liz Jackson

Interview: Taher Herzallah

Interview: Noor Fawzy

5. Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions: A Growing Movement of Justice

Interview: Yaman Salahi

Interview: Rahim Kurwa

6. Empowering Scholarship

Interview: Tom Pessah

7. Intersecting Struggles and Common Causes

Interview: Danya Mustafa

8. Advice to Student Activists

9. Defining Solidarity

Glossary

Notes

Bibliography

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Foreword

On February 6, 2001, I walked shoulder to shoulder with fellow UC–Berkeley students through Sproul Plaza, the site of several generations of historic student activism. We were mostly silent and transfixed on our destination: Sather Gate, the gateway arch adorned by two smaller arches. We numbered fewer than 30 and carried a single banner that read: “Divest From Apartheid Israel.”

Two of our classmates wore green fatigues, laced boots, and sunglasses. They carried cardboard rifles spray painted black. Another wore a *thawb*, a Palestinian embroidered dress, and accessorized it with a pillow to achieve the appearance of pregnancy. They took their places under the smaller arch on the left and began to re-enact a scene all too familiar to Palestinians: crossing a checkpoint. The quotidian feature of Palestinian life under occupation electrified passersby.

The soldiers shoved the pregnant pedestrian and prevented her from passing. She pleaded with them, she pleaded with the distraught students headed to their sheltered classrooms. Other students who tried to walk through the left-hand arch were similarly harassed. They reacted indignantly but were told that if they were Israeli, they could freely pass through the unfettered arch on the right.

The modest guerrilla theater action drew more attention and participation to the mass of students who sat in the center of Sather Gate. We asked the students to “take a stand and sit with us.” Within an hour, our group of 30 had burgeoned to nearly 300. We ended our demonstration with a call to support divestment and a boisterous thunder-clap.

We did not have a plan for a long-term divestment campaign. We did not even have a plan for the following week. We simply intended to protest affirmatively rather than defensively.

Our efforts preceded the work of a remarkable student generation to come by nearly eight years—or two graduating classes in a university’s life span. Specifically, since Israel’s

devastating onslaught of the Gaza Strip in 2008–9, this generation of student activists has emerged more powerful, more strategic, more savvy, and more prepared. In *In Our Power: U.S. Students Organize for Justice in Palestine*, Nora Barrows-Friedman builds on her own impressive career of bearing witness to injustice to explain the (re-)emergence of this potent force for change.

At Berkeley, we began our efforts during the height of the Second Palestinian Intifada sparked by the collapse of the Camp David Accords and, specifically, by Ariel Sharon's notorious provocation onto the Temple Mount during Friday prayers in late September 2000. The renewed popular uprising marked the first serious rupture in the U.S.-brokered peace process.

Seven years of the Oslo framework had proven disastrous for Palestinians. Oslo's five-year interim plan never expired and the temporary arrangement intended to shepherd gradual change became the new status quo. Sixty-two percent of the West Bank, euphemistically labeled "Area C," remained the site of intense settler-colonization: Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank had more than doubled in population. Palestinian access to water remained dismal and disproportionate. Israel's closure of the Gaza Strip was not eased and its ring of steel around East Jerusalem tightly restricted Palestinian access to the holy city. The creation and further institutionalization of the Palestinian National Authority fragmented the national body politic and the collapse of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's governing Palestinian National Council deprived the PLO of any effective means to rehabilitate itself. A new Palestinian elite entrenched its prerogatives and fed off aid flows that were tautly controlled by Israel.

The worst was yet to come, but the facts on the ground were already clear: the peace process would facilitate rather than end Israel's settler-colonial expansion. Resistance remained vital to Palestinian liberation and survival. Palestinians in the West Bank, within Israel, and in the Gaza Strip led that resistance project through sustained and visceral protest. Palestinian and other solidarity activists abroad

amplified their calls in demonstrations, letters to the editor, articles, essays, witness narratives, guerilla theater, sit-ins, and film screenings. Our work in northern California was part and parcel of this global and organic effort.

In the winter of 2000, members of the recently revived Students for Justice in Palestine–Berkeley, originally established in 1995, met with leaders of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee’s San Francisco chapter. Together they resolved to disrupt the land-for-security narrative articulated and entrenched by the peace process paradigm. Palestinians, they argued, had to go on the offensive and force ardent Zionists to defend Israel’s gross and systematic human rights violations. SJP students, who had been showing films and organizing teach-ins all semester, proposed launching a divestment campaign modeled after those that targeted Apartheid South Africa.

Our mock checkpoint, erected on the same day that, in Israel, Ariel Sharon was democratically elected as prime minister a second time, made headlines and inspired dozens of other university students into action. Students across the country set up mock checkpoints. More importantly they began to explore divestment as a call to action. Media accounts, political analysts, and most observers noted the nascent movement with interest but dismissed it as idealistic and naïve.

At the epicenter of that movement, Berkeley students continued to organize actions meant to shock and awe. We built a refugee camp in the middle of campus. Later, we occupied Wheeler Hall, disrupted classes, evacuated the students, and chained ourselves inside the building—twice! Although we also organized a petition addressing the UC trustees and studied the UC’s endowment, we had no ambitions to feast on fruit within our grasp. We prioritized the spectacle with the aim of radicalizing our audiences and thrusting them into mobilization. The purpose was to avoid inertia. The problem is that we lacked political guidance.

In July 2005, 170 Palestinian civil society organizations changed that situation when they issued the Call to Action for

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). What had hitherto been the wild fancy of a few dedicated students suddenly emerged as a broad, Palestinian-originated call for solidarity. And where we students had made haphazard demands based on their local context, the 2005 Call was unequivocally clear: boycott, divest, and sanction Israel, it said, until it complies with international law and human rights norms by ending the colonization of Arab lands, realizing the right of return of refugees, and ensuring equality for Palestinian citizens of the state.

The 2005 Call did three things instantaneously. First, by adopting a rights-based framework it transcended the political impasse afflicting Palestinian society since, at least, 1993. Second, it identified a Palestinian base with whom solidarity could be expressed. Third, it provided activists with a tangible goal and myriad campaigns to choose from. Together, these inspired new conversations and disrupted the cynical voices that previously asked “What do Palestinians want?” “Who speaks for Palestinians?” and “What can we possibly do?”

The 2005 Call was a game changer. While the Washington-sponsored theatrics of the peace process and state-building continued, grassroots activists insisted on framing the conflict as a human rights struggle. They insisted on bringing it back to basics.

The basics, however, have not been uniform or even uniformly understood. The BDS National Committee does not seek to supplant the Palestinian Liberation Organization. It also refrains from articulating a political solution to the conflict. These significant gaps are not the Committee’s responsibility. Still, they have left many issues to question including the in/sufficiency of a human rights framework and the proper scope of BDS campaigns (i.e., whether they should target all of Israel or just the Occupied Territory). These critical questions remain a salient reminder that no popular movement can fill the shoes of a robust political leadership with a strategy.

Despite these outstanding issues, the BDS movement has continued to grow in the United States, and university

campuses continue to be its primary engine. By 2006, the first generation of SJP activism had become almost dormant as a result of natural student turnover as well as quieter conditions on the ground. But Israel's massive onslaught of the besieged Gaza Strip in 2008–9, followed by the fatal attack on civilian aid convoys in 2010, resuscitated the movement and even catapulted it to new heights.

In 2011, representatives of nearly 60 campus-based SJPs converged on Columbia University and inaugurated the National Students for Justice in Palestine. This coalition of U.S.-based SJPs met again in 2012 and 2013. They have also organized themselves regionally. Between 2009 and 2014, 24 campuses launched divestment campaigns and presented resolutions before their student body associations. Four campuses waged these work-intensive campaigns twice in the span of five years! Eleven campuses successfully passed divestment resolutions, not including those campaigns where executive action overturned a successful vote. These successes are doubly impressive considering that they operate on a shoestring budget and with no institutional support.

Fearful of this organic force and finding no financial or political ties to target, various pro-Israel organizations targeted the campuses directly. They poured more than \$8.5 million into counter-campaigns on campuses and exerted significant influence on university administrations to clamp down on these student activities. Rather than defend their students' First Amendment rights, many universities dutifully succumbed. Florida Atlantic University revoked the seat of an elected student senator for her activism. Northeastern University hastily banned its SJP chapter. In the most extreme cases, students endured criminal prosecutions. UC–Irvine watched as the Orange County DA pressed charges against eleven students for protesting a lecture by then Israeli ambassador Michael Oren.

The pro-Israel organizations similarly pressed the highest levels of state and federal office to crush and criminalize BDS efforts and Palestinian activism more broadly. In 2012, the California state assembly passed HR-35 equating criticism of Israel to anti-Semitism and threatened to revoke state funding

and resources for those activities. Following the American Studies Association's (ASA) endorsement of academic boycott, the New York, Florida, Maryland, and Illinois state assemblies proposed legislation to revoke and withhold public funding for any ASA related activities. In collaboration with national pro-Israel organizations, individual students filed Title VI claims with the Department of Justice alleging that SJP activism at UC's Irvine, Berkeley, and Santa Barbara campuses created a "hostile environment" for Jewish students and amounted to "anti-Semitism." SJP activists across the country have reported being contacted and/or followed by the FBI. This troubling list does not even include politicized prosecutions against individual activists, FBI investigations of community organizations, or the campaigns aimed at denying tenure to university professors deemed too critical of Israel.

Rather than confront the activism with fact and counter-narrative, the pro-Israeli establishment has worked long and hard to suppress this important conversation altogether.

Consequently, activists on Palestine in the United States endure criminalization, slander, and marginalization. There is, as yet, no promise of reward for public service, courage, or excellence in leadership for these well-organized students. There are no profiles in *Time* magazine or *Marie Claire* of these extraordinary and ingenious student activists. There are no national human rights coalitions knocking on the doors of the NSJP or its constitutive chapters. There will be no significant funding for the student activities, let alone scholarships for the students. There is no guarantee of gainful employment or professional advancement.

Remarkably, in the face of little support, ample attacks, and great uncertainty, the ranks of SJPs and the number of its active chapters only grow. *In Our Power* begins to explain this phenomenon. Based on nearly 70 interviews with the movement's leaders and activists and interspersed with longer, in-depth conversations, Barrows-Friedman lets the movement speak for itself. In doing so, she captures a unique chapter in the history of Palestinian solidarity activism and enriches this emerging body of literature. *In Our Power* is a historical

document of what has passed and what is likely to come in an unrelenting struggle for freedom.

And in the process of reading this history, we rightfully come to respect and admire a constellation of visionary and resilient students who have made an indelible mark on our history. Their efforts should not be forgotten. This book ensures that they will be remembered, studied, and, when necessary, replicated.

—Noura Erakat
August 27, 2014

Preface

One April morning in 2010, just past five o'clock, more than 100 college students and activists gathered in an enormous circle on University of California–Berkeley's Sproul Plaza. For nearly 10 hours, many had given passionate testimonials on the floor of the student senate, defending a recently passed resolution that called on the University of California to pull its investments in U.S. companies profiting from Israel's occupation of Palestine. Despite their eloquence and the justness of their cause, the resolution had been vetoed, and the veto had been upheld. And so, they gathered in the crisp new dawn on Sproul to comfort each other. Expecting the students to express bitterness, anger, and defeat, instead I witnessed something extraordinary.

One by one, students stepped into the center of the circle and spoke emotionally about their commitment to keep pushing forward, to keep fighting for justice in Palestine. The students were not interested in giving up. More than that, they did not feel defeated, but rather they spoke of victory: through this highly publicized debate, more students and community members had become aware of Israel's policies against Palestinians and the profiting by U.S. corporations off violations of Palestinian rights. Thousands of supporters across the world, including Nobel Laureates, rabbis, scholars, and iconic human rights activists, had sent statements supporting the divestment resolution and the students themselves in the weeks leading up to the vote. Now, each student activist proclaimed that they were changing the discourse on Palestine—with each educational event, with each direct action, with each divestment hearing. I aimed my digital recorder toward the middle of the circle, trying to preserve the moment.

When I drove home afterward through the ubiquitous Bay Area fog, still buzzing from the energy in that circle, I knew that what I had witnessed was significant—a powerful turning point in Palestine solidarity activism. Those UC Berkeley students impressed, moved, and inspired me to assiduously

document the movement, and ultimately to write the book you hold in your hands now.

Three years after that vote, and despite pressure and intimidation by pro-Israel lobby groups and university administrators, students reintroduced a divestment resolution at UC Berkeley. This time, it passed. By May 2014, UC Berkeley was one of five undergraduate campuses within the University of California system to pass—and uphold—divestment resolutions in the student government, while dozens more universities around the country successfully organized divestment hearings, walk-outs, sit-ins, rallies, protests, and creative direct actions.

An important movement led by young college students is taking shape across the United States. In the great tradition of other civil rights and human rights movements, activists are standing up to university administrations and the Israel-aligned political organizations that routinely repress student speech on Palestine. In the face of significant intimidation, students have become powerful organizers in the Palestinian-led boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement. They challenge themselves and each other on the definition of solidarity, and they educate their campuses about one of the most important human rights issues of our time.

This grassroots movement is building from campus to campus, and each year there are more chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine, one of the major Palestine solidarity coalitions. The growth of this student movement underscores that a strong paradigm shift is taking place: Palestine solidarity activism is no longer limited to an isolated pocket of far-left political organizing.

Perhaps it's because Israel's political intransigence and its reputation as a rogue occupier state have turned it into a pariah on the world stage. Perhaps it's because people are seeking out unfettered international news via the Internet and social media as opposed to corporate-controlled media. Or, perhaps it is because civil society has come to recognize that decades of oppression, forced displacement, and apartheid is a universal

issue of justice and human rights. Whatever the constellation of reasons, the conversation about Palestine is changing.

Israel cannot hide its brutal policies behind the tired rhetoric of “security” and victimization any longer—certainly not after its bombing attacks on Lebanon in 2006, or the bombing of Gaza beginning in December 2008, which made international news headlines. Photographs and live video showed the world Israel’s wanton, three-week slaughter of a trapped, mostly unarmed civilian population. And the world noticed.

On that morning in Sproul Plaza, Berkeley students were standing on the very same spot where the Free Speech Movement was born, where students fought for the right to be heard 46 years before. In 1964, the great free speech activist Mario Savio implored his fellow classmates and advocates of freedom of expression to “put your bodies upon the gears and upon the levers” of the systems that silence dissenting voices. Decades later, in that very same plaza, student activists for Palestine stood tall on the shoulders of civil rights giants. They put themselves upon the gears and levers, and echoed the courage and determination of their predecessors.



Between 2004 and 2011, I regularly traveled to Palestine as a reporter, first as a radio broadcaster for the historic Pacifica Network and later as a contributor to independent and international print publications. But my work at home as a staff editor and reporter for the *Electronic Intifada* compelled me to focus on the rapid expansion of student solidarity organizing in California and across the United States.

When Helena Cobban of Just World Books approached me to write this book, she and I were both adamant that it not be yet another analytical, scholarly book written *about* a movement by an outside narrator, but rather a lively, introspective document that heavily incorporates the voices of the students who are involved in the movement at this moment. As a journalist covering Palestine for nearly 12 years, amplifying the voices of the silenced and underrepresented is paramount to me. There are, plainly, far too many activists,

reporters, writers, non-governmental organizations, and scholars who speak *for* the Palestinian people instead of supporting Palestinians so they can speak for themselves. This was the same idea I had for this book; I believe it is important, and more appropriate, that students, especially Palestinian-American students, speak for themselves about their experiences as organizers and human rights defenders.

With that in mind, from April 2013 to January 2014, I traveled as much as I could. In the end, I gathered 63 interviews with students representing 30 different universities—private colleges and community colleges in 22 cities across 11 states. I started by e-mailing about a dozen individual students and organizers in different corners of the country, and told them I was eager to visit and conduct interviews. Responses immediately poured in from activists who were excited to tell their story. Some students I reached out to were hesitant to speak with me, for fear of threatened reprisals by Zionist family members or Islamophobic hate groups, or because of the very real fear of compromising their ability to cross borders into their homeland, as Israel keeps tabs on human rights activists and Palestinian organizers. But for the most part, students conveyed to me that they wanted their voices amplified, they wanted to be included in a document that holds this riveting movement and their accomplishments in a moment in time.

This book attempts to paint a broad picture of the U.S. student movement for Palestine solidarity, yet I realize that there are many cities and universities that were regrettably left out. For example, I wish that I was able to document first-hand the incredible work that students are doing in cities like New Orleans, Seattle, Olympia, Philadelphia, Tampa, St. Louis, Houston, and Austin—cities that have long and rich histories of solidarity with Palestinians. Perhaps subsequent books, as this movement grows and transforms, will be able to encompass students' stories in these cities, and hopefully they will be written by some of the marvelous student leaders themselves.

As a journalist, I've written or broadcasted short-form news pieces on breaking stories with tight deadlines. But writing

this book allowed me to slow down and create a new relationship with the craft. By devoting nearly a year and a half of my life to this project, I had the luxury of time and space to dive deep into the story and organize important narratives. It has been both an extraordinary honor and a welcome challenge.



I write this as Palestinians in the occupied West Bank continue to rage against the killing of two teenage boys by Israeli soldiers during a Nakba Day protest.¹ Closed circuit video, released by Defence for Children International's Palestine office, clearly showed that the two boys were walking in an open area—posing no threat to the heavily armed Israeli soldiers nearby. The *status quo* dictates that the soldier (or soldiers) who aimed, shot at, and killed the boys will most likely never face charges for these war crimes, nor will the United States reprimand the Israeli government for its willful violations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Thousands of miles away, American students are outraged. They understand that their tuition dollars often directly contribute to Israel's decades-old settler-colonialism and the continued expulsion of the indigenous, dehumanized Palestinian people. Connecting the financial, political, and ethical dots, students are organizing to dismantle the *status quo* on their campuses.

They are also up against enormous opposition. Israel-aligned political groups, many closely connected to the Israeli government itself, have poured millions of dollars into combatting and silencing Palestine solidarity activism, especially on campuses. Employees of Israel advocacy organizations have been sent to campuses campaigning for divestment, tasked with denouncing Palestine activism as “anti-Semitism” (as though Israeli nationalism and Judaism are synonymous). Palestine activists and on-campus solidarity groups have been harassed, slandered, spied on, and threatened with litigation by pro-Israel organizations. Ten students in southern California were even prosecuted and convicted by the

local district attorney's office for nonviolently protesting an Israeli official's speech.

Despite the orchestrated attacks, and without significant funding or resources, students across the United States are continuing to speak out and fight back. This book attempts to illuminate the experiences of those students and understand their motivation to be involved even in the face of intimidation.



The nine different chapters and the 10 stand-alone interviews that follow reveal the rich political legacy these students are building. In Chapters 1 through 3, students explain their personal reasons for joining this movement. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explain the various challenges students—and faculty—face when addressing and analyzing Israel's settler-colonial project, and how the global, nonviolent movement for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel is applied and augmented on college campuses.

The students' perspectives and analysis in the last three chapters inspire me most. [Chapter 7](#) explores the important intersection of different struggles for human rights, equality, and justice—the struggles of occupied and displaced Palestinians and the struggles of marginalized communities in the United States. Chapters 8 and 9 were written around questions I had all of the students answer during our interviews: how do you advise the next generation of activists, and what does solidarity mean to you? In their responses, it was clear to me that students have encouraged each other to carefully analyze their place in this movement and to embrace the different personal experiences each brings to the community.

I chose to include sections of the 63 interviews that conveyed as much nuance, personality, and fresh analysis as possible. It was a monumental task to conduct the interviews and transcribe each one, but it was even more difficult to choose which parts of those interviews would be included; I grew attached to them all. Weaving together short bits of these

interviews with contextual narrative became, for me, the best way to include as many voices in this book as I could.

I decided to title this book *In Our Power* because, as Sarah Aly of Brooklyn College tells us in [Chapter 6](#), it is within the students' power to change the current *status quo*—whether through opening up discussions about Palestine on campus and in the national arena, or pressuring their university administrations to pull investments out of companies that profit from Israel's occupation industry. Students who are part of this movement are acutely aware of both their financial responsibility as tuition-paying and tax-paying members of society, and of their moral and ethical responsibility as the next generation of leaders who seek a just future.

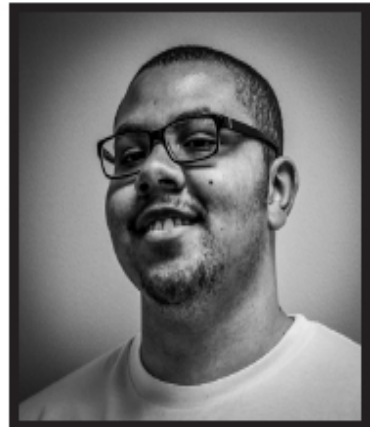
What moves me deeply is how optimistic these students are. Theirs is not a naïve optimism: these young Americans know that they alone will not bring down Israel's occupation, but recognize that they are a part of a global solidarity network supporting Palestinians as they resist oppression. They know they are rapidly changing the discourse on Palestine, and that their tireless pursuit of justice within their own communities will have a wider, lasting effect thousands of miles away. This book helps document an exciting moment in our socio-political history, and it is to the students—in the United States, and those fiercely struggling under occupation in Palestine—that *In Our Power* is dedicated.

1

Inspired to Act

Why does one person sitting at a table have the ability to travel when he wants and not have to plan around permits and roadblocks, and why does another have to wonder what it feels like to be free?

—Kristian Davis Bailey, Stanford University student



First row: Alex Abassi, Hassan Abdinur, Nashiha Alam

Second row: Leila Abdul Razzaq, Max Ajl, Hazim Abdullah

I met Amanda Ghannam, a political science and sociology student at the University of Michigan at Dearborn, at a popular Palestinian sweets café near campus on a bright October morning in 2013. I asked her to tell her story, and she began by explaining that neither she nor her Palestinian parents had ever been to Palestine although all of her grandparents were born there.

“Growing up, you hear about [Palestine],” she said. “There’s that knowledge in the back of your mind, but until you choose to dig

deeper into it, you don't know all the details of course—you just know that the place you come from is not free.”

Ghannam admitted that she didn't know that much about Palestine organizing before she got to college. “I had this impression that there wasn't a whole lot I could do at my age, and maybe not even much I could do in my life, 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. And because it happened to be in Ann Arbor, it was right here, I figured that I'd go. It was a huge eye-opener, and I can honestly say it changed my life in a very real way.”

Here she broke into a wide smile. “I didn't know before I attended the conference that so many people were working so hard,” she said. “It was like a breath of fresh air, meeting all those people who were so committed towards the same goal, and finding out there are concrete actions we can take as American citizens.”

I had e-mailed Ghannam before I visited the Detroit area; regional organizers recommended her to me because of her superb activist credentials. At the café, she shared her conflicted feelings about participating in this book. “I have dreams about Jerusalem,” she said, softly. “I hear all these stories about activists being denied entry, or being harassed at the checkpoints, and I know it would be easier for me because of my American passport, but when I got your e-mail I was very hesitant to put my name on this project.” She told me that her biggest fear is that she'll never get to visit Palestine.

However, Ghannam went on to say, these kinds of public projects help legitimize the work that student activists have been doing. I asked her if she wanted to change her name in this book, in order to protect her identity when she attempts to enter her homeland. “If I change my name in this book to get into Palestine, they win,” she answered. “Zionists have been co-opting and chipping away at Palestinian identity for years. And intimidating people into staying silent about solidarity, activism, and heritage is one way that they continue to chip away at that identity. To speak up without fear is my form of resistance. I can't give up on that.” I was—and remain—moved by Ghannam's courage, and I'm immensely grateful for her decision to be included in this book.



The global struggle for Palestinian rights is growing as tolerance wanes for Israel's policies of occupation, segregation, and

discrimination. And, like many historical battles for human rights, students are at the forefront of this rapidly expanding movement.

Despite branding itself as the region's lone democratic state, or hyping up its glamorous tech industry, or beckoning members of the LGBTQ community to experience the "gay haven" it would like to represent, Israel exposes its deceit when the surface is lightly scratched.

Palestinians were first subjected to Israel's systematic injustices when they were expelled from their homes and land in the late 1940s, as Zionist militias swept through historic Palestine, destroying more than 500 villages and towns and forcing more than 750,000 indigenous Palestinians into dozens of refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Today, Palestinian refugees are the largest population of forcibly displaced persons in the world, totaling more than 7 million. They are not allowed to return to their homes of origin simply because they are not Jewish.

Palestinians inside the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip are forced to live under absolute control by the Israeli government and its occupying military. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, water, education, agriculture, residency, and property ownership rights are systematically refused to Palestinians while illegal Israeli settlement colonies continue to spread across the hillsides and valleys. Israeli settlers—backed by throngs of Israeli police—routinely storm Palestinian homes and evict entire families, throwing their belongings onto the street, and moving into these homes hours later. At least 27,000 Palestinian homes and structures have been demolished in the West Bank including East Jerusalem since 1967, as Israel's plan to Judaize the land continues unabated and unrestrained by various international laws and conventions.

Indigenous Palestinians in Jerusalem are not granted citizenship, but, rather, an Orwellian status as "foreign permanent residents" whose residency rights can be revoked at any time. Israel's illegal wall in the West Bank—condemned by the International Court of Justice in 2004, which recommended it be torn down immediately—cuts deep inside Palestinian land, annexing the settlements on top of the richest water sources and fertile land areas and leaving Palestinian villages, towns and cities separated from one another, from clinics, employment opportunities, schools, and religious centers. The wall and the settlements have chopped the West Bank

into dozens of isolated *bantustans*, only accessible to one another through hundreds of Israeli military checkpoints.

In Gaza, 1.7 million Palestinians—80 percent of them refugees and 60 percent under 18 years old—are subjected to widespread isolation and economic subjugation as Israel controls the land, air and sea boundaries, infrastructure, electricity, and the ability of people to leave and return at the Gaza-Egypt border. Since 2006, Israel has imposed a blockade and siege on Gaza: all imports, including basic medical supplies and construction materials to fix ailing and destroyed infrastructure, are controlled by Israel, and all exports have virtually stopped, completely debilitating Gaza's economy. Gazan fishermen are routinely shot at by Israeli naval forces if they fish more than three nautical miles from the shoreline, and Gazan farmers are fired upon if they venture “too close” to the “no-go zone” along the boundary with Israel, a vague and ever-changing strip encroaching into Palestinian agricultural lands.

Meanwhile, across occupied Palestine, Palestinian children, women, and men are routinely arrested, detained, mass incarcerated, put in administrative detention—indefinite detention without charge or trial—prevented from seeing lawyers or family members while in jail, and tortured and abused by Israeli soldiers and security guards who use American-made equipment and surveillance technology. Indeed, Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world, and its occupation is financed, supported, and fortified by American citizens, politicians, and corporations.

And inside Israel itself, Palestinian citizens of the state are living under dozens of discriminatory laws intended to separate the privileges of the population and favor Israeli Jews over non-Jews in housing, education, land ownership, and social services.

Legendary American prison abolition activist and scholar Angela Davis has linked the systems of mass incarceration in the United States to Israel and beyond. In a speech she gave in London in 2013, Davis admonished the transnational security corporation G4S, which provides services and equipment to Israeli prisons. Davis said:

We've learned about the terrifying universe of torture and imprisonment that is faced by so many Palestinians, but we've also learned about their spirit of resistance, we've learned about their hunger strikes and other forms of resistance that continue to take place behind the walls.

...Racism provides the fuel for the maintenance, reproduction and expansion of the prison industrial complex. And so, if we say, as we do, abolish the prison industrial complex, we should also say abolish apartheid. And end the occupation of Palestine.

When we have, in the States, described the segregation in occupied Palestine, that so clearly mirrors the historical apartheid of racism in the southern United States of America, especially when we talk about this to black people, the response is often ‘why hasn’t anyone told us about this before? Why hasn’t anyone told us about the signs [describing restrictions of movement] in occupied Palestine? And about the segregated express auto-highways? Why hasn’t anyone told us this before?’¹

Shocked and outraged at the injustices against Palestinians half a world away, students in the United States have historically been drawn to solidarity movements for Palestinian rights. Today, that movement is wildly diverse, strategic, and more popular than ever. By relentlessly challenging the dominant narrative and making sustained protest of Israeli policies more mainstream, students are changing the way this country thinks about Israel.

For Palestinian students, some who are third- or fourth-generation refugees, joining Palestine and Arab-centered activism and cultural organizations can be an empowering way to connect with their heritage and the ongoing struggle for their rights. Most families are encouraging of this kind of student activism, but some parents, as students mention in this chapter, are wary that if their children join Palestine solidarity groups, the U.S. government and powerful Zionist organizations could target them for surveillance and harassment.

These are legitimate fears. The U.S. government keeps tabs on citizens who descend from the Middle East, while FBI informants infiltrate mosques and political activism groups around the country. Israel-aligned organizations and Islamophobic groups smear Arab and Muslim activists and label any criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic.

Many students of Palestinian descent are afraid that if they sign their names to statements, or speak out during public events, or participate in projects such as this book, their name could be added to a list that would prevent them from visiting family in Palestine in the future.

Meanwhile, Jewish-American students are becoming more involved in the struggle for Palestinian rights, and can clearly articulate the difference between Zionism and Judaism. Support for Israel among American-Jewish youth is steadily declining, sending Zionist organizations clamoring for new recruits and new opportunities for propaganda.

It is not always easy to become an activist, many students told me. But they say that organizing for Palestinian rights between classes and grueling exams is worth it—that standing up for human rights is an important part of one’s ongoing education as a global citizen.

Personal histories of struggle

In Albuquerque, Jadd Mustafa, a student at Central New Mexico Community College, told me that his involvement in Palestine solidarity activism was catalyzed after he went to visit Palestine in 2005 with his family.

Because his relatives in Palestine have West Bank identification cards, they cannot travel outside of the occupied West Bank unless they have permits from the Israeli authorities to do so. “During the visit, it was made clear how things weren’t the same as far as where we could go as a family—the coastline wasn’t an option, because [my family who live there] had West Bank IDs,” Mustafa said. On a later trip, Mustafa’s father was prevented from traveling to Jerusalem and present-day Israel, “places you should be able to visit because of the religious and cultural significance,” he added, with frustration in his voice.

Amal Ali is a history major at the University of California, Riverside. She is an energetic leader in the campus’s Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) group, and has been deeply involved in the two-year-long push to have the university pull its investments from U.S. companies that profit from Israel’s human rights violations.

Ali’s father’s family was expelled from Palestine during the Nakba in 1948, and her mother’s family was pushed out two decades later during another wave of expulsion following the 1967 War. Her grandparents on both sides fled to Jordan, where both of her parents grew up before coming to the United States for college educations in the 1970s.

Ali said that when her father became involved in the Arab-American community as a university student, they organized demonstrations for Palestinian rights with a passion similar to that of Ali’s generation. “They had rallies; they raised their voices and shook the boat a little bit at their respective campuses. They also were very big on doing things [such as] going through the processes of writing to their congressman and making sure that they contacted their representatives in a way that they couldn’t do in Jordan as displaced citizens,” she said. Ali added that she grew up thinking she

was Jordanian because all of her grandparents lived in Jordan, but said that she knew there was “something different about my identity because my dad took us to these strange rallies where they would chant ‘Free, free Palestine.’”

“At one point I asked, ‘So, Dad we’re Jordanian, right?’ Because somebody at school asked and he said, ‘No. We’re Palestinian.’ And he sat me down in his lap and told me the whole story of our identity and our existence. And at that point I was like, ok, I’ve got to find something out about this. 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].”

Ghassan Hussein is a respiratory therapy graduate from San Joaquin Valley College in southern California. He was born in the West Bank, came to the United States as a child, and then returned to his village, Turmosayya, for middle school and high school. He said that during his high school years in the West Bank, when he was exposed to the violence of Israel’s occupation, he realized that he could bring his personal experiences back to the United States to encourage campus activism:



Columbia SJP mock checkpoint, 2010. (Photo by Andra Mihali)

From stun grenades to tear gas, to rubber bullets [being shot] and almost hitting me, to Israeli harassment in and out of my village, to checkpoints, being banned from traveling, basically being stripped

of basic human needs and human rights—I experienced all of that there. When I left Palestine after high school and came to the U.S. to pursue college, I realized I had to dig deeper and find out more about what was going on. I needed to educate myself more and also start spreading awareness about the situation.

I discovered that hardly anyone was paying attention. Even Arabs from my community—even Palestinians—do not know simple things that are happening in Palestine. And that, to me, was really, really devastating.

It was really an inspiration for me to gather together groups of people, talk to them about what was going on, join organizations which were doing the same work, and contribute. Sometimes, I was the only Palestinian who had lived in Palestine and could speak about that experience.



Columbia SJP mock checkpoint, 2010. (Photo by Andra Mihali)

Some students have had a difficult time navigating their pull toward activism given their families' experiences of governmental repression and racism, and their histories as victims of political violence. Theater arts and Arabic studies major Leila Abdul Razzaq at DePaul University in Chicago told me that her Palestinian father's side of the family—who grew up as refugees in Lebanon—are still wary of her political activism. “My dad's family tried to be really apolitical,” she explained. “When my dad was growing up in Lebanon, there were boy scout-type resistance movements, and they

were never allowed to be a part of it. My grandmother did not want her family to be involved in anything political—my family doesn't talk about politics on the phone.”

“So I don't think that my family in Lebanon knows the extent of the work I'm doing around Palestine,” she continued. “I do know that my dad is often really nervous about it. I was just talking to him on the phone and he was like, ‘don't do it.’ He was telling me that he didn't want me to be a part of this activism movement and said that if I wanted to be political, I should do it through art and not through organizing. Because it makes him nervous.”

Yazeed Ibrahim completed his undergraduate degree at the University of California, Irvine, and his graduate degree in global medicine at the University of Southern California. He connected his own activism on Palestine issues to other human rights struggles:

I'm Palestinian. But my activism is not limited to Palestinian activism. I believe in equality and justice, I believe in respecting human rights and international law. So I'm very active in other causes. I'm active in the Syrian cause; before that, Libya and Egypt. Any struggle for human rights and equality.

But specifically, I think we all have an obligation to the Palestinian cause, because of what's happening there. The crimes that are committed are being committed at our expense. We're funding the occupation at \$3 billion a year from our tax dollars going there. We have a moral responsibility as Americans to stand up against that, because we are contributing to what's happening there.

As university students, we also have a moral obligation to stand up against the investments that our universities are putting into companies that profit from the occupation, from the violations of international law and human rights in Palestine.

Palestinian-American Nadya Tannous is from the San Francisco Bay Area and a graduate of the University of California–Santa Cruz. She was part of the Committee for Justice in Palestine at UC–Santa Cruz, until she graduated in 2013. We met in Berkeley, where she described the anti-Arab racism she faced after 9/11, when she was in fourth grade. Even in the Bay Area, a bastion of progressive values, Tannous experienced people “acting very differently” when compelled by fear. Fellow students would ask her if she knew

Osama Bin Laden or if she was related to Saddam Hussein. “I very quickly had to learn why I was being conflated with these identities,” Tannous remarked. By the time she got to UC–Santa Cruz, she felt emboldened to pursue political activism. She jumped into Palestine organizing with the on-campus Committee for Justice in Palestine, and connected with other student groups of marginalized communities who have also faced repression and racism.

“It was really wonderful to be able to connect with other groups—the Japanese-American student group, MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, the largest Chicano/a student group in the U.S.], Hermanos², the Filipino Student Association, the African/Black Student Alliance, the African Student Union, the Queer Student Union, Sin Barras³—there are so many,” she said.

Returning home

I first met Wael Elasady in 2011 at Portland State University in Oregon. Wael’s involvement with Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights (SUPER) has been inspirational to other student activists on campus. His dedication to expanding the movement in support of Palestinian rights was not only a personal commitment, but also a commitment to a broader anti-imperialist struggle.

Elasady graduated from PSU with a degree in Liberal Studies and Social Science. When I spoke with him for this book in the summer of 2013, he told me his moving personal story of growing up the grandson of Palestinian refugees in Syria and his return visit, in his mid-twenties, to Palestine.

“My grandparents were born in Safad in Palestine, and were forced out in 1948,” he explained. “They moved to Syria, and that’s where I was born and lived until I was six years old. And then I moved to the United States. I was for the most part integrated [into American culture]. I spoke Arabic in the house, I understood I was Palestinian, and my grandparents always read us Palestinian poetry—my grandfather wrote a book of poetry about Palestine.” But, Elasady said, he wasn’t politically active until after 9/11. “I began to think more politically—being Arab in the United States after September 11^t was really hard, and I tried to figure out what the cause of a lot of the racism was, this notion that ‘Arabs are terrorists.’ That led me to study a lot about the Middle East.”

He recounted his desire to visit his ancestral homeland, and in 2007, he joined an international summer camp. The participants traveled all over Palestine by bus, witnessing daily violence at the checkpoints, getting close to Israel's wall that snakes through the West Bank. Routinely, Israeli soldiers hopped on and off the bus, checking passports and visas. Palestinians and others of Arab heritage were racially profiled—they were repeatedly harassed and questioned by Israeli soldiers, while those with American passports and European features were left alone. Elasadly was stuck in the middle, he said—a young man with an Arab name, born in Syria, and holding a U.S. passport. “They didn't know what to do with me.”

Elasadly decided to make two important stops on the trip—one to Safad, to see his family's home, and the other to Dar al-Asad, his father's family's village. Both are inside present-day Israel. In Dar al-Asad, a village of around 15,000 people, Elasadly said he was determined to find living relatives. “I go into a random pizza shop, and I ask if there's any Elasadlys there. And the guy says, ‘Are you joking? There's 15,000 of us!’”

That same day, Elasadly told me he and some friends drove up to Safad, which is a large city in the northern Galilee. After the ethnic cleansing operations in the late 1940s, Safad was renamed “Tzfat” and has since become a Jewish Orthodox city. “All the houses in Safad were still how they looked before the Nakba,” Elasadly said. The Jewish settlers “had just directly moved into the homes. It wasn't like the 500 villages which were bulldozed to the ground and then the new Jewish towns were built on top; it's not like Akka, or Haifa, where Palestinians are still there. This is a city where there are Palestinian homes but no Palestinians.” He and his friends walked around, marveling at the natural beauty of the town.

“Most of the people from Safad fled to Damascus,” Elasadly explained. “And I was in Damascus prior to this trip. Some people I knew there had drawn out a map of the city with all the different houses, marking off who owned the houses, where the different markets were. I smuggled this map in and brought it with me. And I used it to find my grandfather's house.” Elasadly's grandfather's flat was built one floor above his grandmother's parents' house, which had been turned into an art gallery. But someone lived in his grandfather's flat. He peeked through a window and knocked on the door.

“This old woman came out. She had a British accent. And I had a friend who’s Iraqi with me, and she grew up in the UK, so she struck up a conversation with her and asked if we could come in and see the house. The old lady was a little nervous, but let us in.” Elasadly said. “I was able to walk around and take video all over the inside of the house. And then at the end of it, she asked, ‘Are there more of you coming back?’ And I said to myself, ‘I hope so, we’re working on it!’”

This was the first time he had ever seen his ancestral land. But Elasadly said that he felt an important connection that would inform his activism for his entire life. “Here was the fig tree that my grandparents talked about,” he explained. “The tree was still there, all these years later. It was important to go back, because one of the hard parts about being Palestinian and never setting foot in Palestine is that you have a huge attachment to that identity, but you’re also so completely alienated from the geography and the land.”

When he came back to the United States, Elasadly quit his job, enrolled at Portland State University, and helped start SUPER on campus. They began organizing events and educational forums. That same year, the attacks on Gaza known as Operation Cast Lead began. SUPER called for massive protests and, as he said, “figured out how to jump head first into the work.”

Elasadly’s story is not uncommon. Many young people with whom I spoke said they had been compelled to dive deep into solidarity activism after visiting Palestine and witnessing—or experiencing—first-hand the daily struggle of Palestinians under Israel’s decades-old occupation.

Jewish students fight Zionism

Meanwhile, Jewish students involved in Palestine solidarity work continue to fight hard against the entrenched conflation of Judaism and Zionism—and pro-Israel organizations’ conflation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, a well-worn tactic used to distract attention from—and prevent condemnation of—Israel’s human rights violations.

In American culture, many Jewish youth are taught that Israel is a safe haven for Jews and a state that must therefore be protected at all costs against various threats. Many American Jews are led to believe that it was a land that was “empty” of people when, escaping violent pogroms and fascist anti-Semitism in Europe, Jewish immigrants arrived on its shores. If Palestinians are mentioned at all

in this narrative, they are described as indistinct groups of savage, uneducated “Arabs,” unattached to land they did not even know how to cultivate. Jewish immigrants, we are told, “made the desert bloom.” These are racist justifications for the theft of Palestine from its indigenous population, and are not that different from the stories we are told about European colonization of the Americas hundreds of years ago.

In general, American youth are not taught about the Nakba—the ethnic cleansing program by Zionist militias leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel—nor are they informed that such ethnic cleansing continues unabated to this day by the Israeli military and government. Many don’t know that Israel is a military occupier that enforces segregation, Jewish supremacy, and apartheid, until they either get curious on their own or visit Palestine for themselves.

For many young Jewish adults with a Zionist upbringing, the realization that Israel has a different history than that which was taught to them is incredibly upsetting. As Michelle P. says in this chapter, when she saw the racism and poverty and homes demolished by Israel in the occupied West Bank, she had a difficult time reconciling her immense pride in her Jewish heritage with the reality in front of her. Other Jewish students from Zionist backgrounds spoke candidly with me about their political transformations and the struggles many of them still have with their families.

Large campus-based groups such as Hillel—an international Jewish student organization founded in the 1920s in the United States—have become less and less accepting of dissenting opinions within the Jewish community about Israel. However, in late 2013, Jewish students at Swarthmore College founded Open Hillel, an alternative organization that celebrates Jewish life and culture while at the same time making space for a wide spectrum of viewpoints on Israel and Zionism. An Open Hillel chapter opened at Vassar College following Swarthmore’s move. And in February 2014, a group of more than 100 Jewish alumni of the University of California, Berkeley, called on the local Hillel chapter to declare itself an Open Hillel as well. The alumni drafted a letter condemning Hillel International’s restrictions on Jewish students “to a narrow band of acceptable opinions.”

Michelle P. and I met in Portland, Oregon. She grew up in a Zionist household and is deeply involved in the SUPER movement

at PSU, along with Elasad. P., who didn't want to use her full last name because of tensions within her family, said that her mother was born in Israel and everyone on her mother's side lives there now. She said she was told that Israel was a place "for Jews, a place of protection for the Jewish people." She admitted that she didn't question this, explaining, "I was indoctrinated."

While visiting family in Israel in 2010, P. said that relatives would say extremely racist things about Palestinians and other Arabs in casual conversation. The more she heard, the more she wasn't able to shake the feeling that something was "off" about their perspective, and so she decided to secretly visit the West Bank to see for herself what was actually going on.

"I saw demolished homes," P. explained. "I saw the wall, I saw children on the street trying to sell things to make money. Poverty and suffering—the things I didn't see in Tel Aviv." P. said that she was outraged that Israel—and her relatives—connected Jewishness to the occupation of another people. "I love being Jewish," she told me, "and I didn't know how to accept this as being Jewish, and if it was okay to be outraged at this. I didn't know what to make of it. I was living a double life."

In a document titled "Guidelines for Campus Israel Activities," Hillel International states that Hillel "will not partner with, house, or host organizations, groups, or speakers that as a matter of policy or practice:

- Deny the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish and democratic state with secure and recognized borders;
- Delegitimize, demonize, or apply a double standard to Israel;
- Support boycott of, divestment from, or sanctions against the State of Israel;
- Exhibit a pattern of disruptive behavior towards campus events or guest speakers or foster an atmosphere of incivility."⁴

Rejecting Hillel's attempts to restrict campus speech and debate, many Jewish students are reclaiming Jewish spaces at their universities. Many want to become part of groups that are inclusive of lively debate and discussion about Israel and Zionism, instead of being forced to comply with the demands of Hillel International.

She ended up volunteering for a few months in the West Bank. When she returned to Oregon, P. joined SUPER and educated herself even more on the history of Zionism. She said it was traumatizing to unlearn everything she was taught by her family and confront their

racism head-on. “My family actually disowned me,” P. said somberly. “They didn’t know that I was doing activism, but they saw on Facebook that I was friends with Palestinians. They sent out a family newsletter telling everyone that they should stay away from me, that I was anti-Semitic, all these crazy things.”

I asked her what had happened next. “The whole family in Israel stopped talking to me. My mom didn’t really talk to me either; my close aunts distanced themselves. I don’t talk to them, and they don’t talk to me anymore. My immediate family now has accepted it—they don’t talk about my activism. Zionism is very much a part of who my family are.” She acknowledged that her family was easily conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. For a while, she said, they tried to get her to stop her activism and tried to punish her for it through isolation and emotional abuse. But eventually, they left her alone. “I feel a lot more confident being an activist and not caring what my family thinks,” P. said.

Some Jewish-American activists who come to the Palestine issue don’t have a Zionist family background, but rather situate their Jewish identity within a socialist and social justice-oriented community. Sarah Rose Lejeune of Oberlin College is a member of Students for a Free Palestine—a group which was launched in the 1980s, the longest-operating independent Palestine solidarity student organization in the United States—and told me she was part of a Workmen’s Circle community⁵ in Massachusetts as a young child.

“At Workmen’s Circle, I learned about my Jewish identity as being about a history of Jewish oppression and how it gives all Jewish people a lifetime of involvement in social justice and liberation for all people,” Lejeune said. “When I was in seventh grade, we graduated from the program, and my graduation project was a speech and paper on Israel and Palestine. I was so shocked that people who were Jewish were doing all these things in the name of Judaism, that had nothing to do with what I felt being Jewish was.”

Alexi Shalom, a student at Hunter College in New York, told me a similar story. He was in high school when Israel massacred nine activists on a humanitarian aid boat heading to Gaza in 2010. He said he was so upset about it and decided to go to a neighborhood protest, met people he hadn’t met before, and decided he needed to know more about the situation for Palestinians. Shalom had gone to Israel when he was 13 and had questioned what he saw, including Israel’s wall in the West Bank, and what his family and community

told him about Israel. “So I started reading, and I said, okay, this needs to change,” he said.

I asked Shalom how important he thinks it is for Jews in the U.S. to get involved and learn more about Palestine, and challenge the Zionist ideology in this country. “We have a really unique opportunity, specifically as Americans and specifically as Jews,” he said. “Which is, we can physically stop the occupation. We can stop Israel. I think it’s a voice that’s unfortunately not coming out as much, though in recent years, I think more and more you’re seeing my generation—Jewish youth—coming out against it. But it’s a voice I’d like to hear more from, because mostly we hear older Jewish people speak, if they speak at all.”

Shalom said he hasn’t been back to Palestine since that first trip. He said he was moved and shaken by what he had seen, and was angry at the way in which the Israeli-Zionist narrative was overpowering Jewish identity and culture. “They do their best to make you cultivate this sense of belonging, right?” he said. “Because you go, you see Yad Vashem [the Holocaust Memorial], you see the Wailing Wall, and you say, oh my God, this is my history. But then you’re like, okay—but if it needs guns and bombs and tanks to protect our heritage, I’m not interested.”

Motivated by connections

Students across the board testified that Palestine activism work coincides with other anti-racist and social justice organizing. Moreover, the chance to link different struggles is often what pushes students to join the Palestine solidarity movement.

When Angelica Becerra, a PhD student at the University of California, Los Angeles, and a member of the Chicana community, realized what was happening to Palestinians, she “devoured” history books and made stark connections between the struggles of her community and those halfway around the world. “I began to see how Palestinian human rights were being violated and how members of the Chicana/o community were also experiencing this in the form of increased militarization and racist policies such as [the passed anti-immigrant bill] SB1070 in Arizona. For me, the struggle of the Palestinian people began to connect with that of my own family and community,” she said.

Nineteen-year-old Hazim Abdullah, an Atlanta-born French and African-American Studies major at Northwestern University in Chicago, told me that his interest in politics was almost nonexistent

until late in high school, when a friend told him about the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In college, he said he found support and community within the Palestine solidarity movement.

“I came in [to Northwestern] as a freshman, and I was looking to get involved politically, but I didn’t know what I wanted to do. So I looked at the College Democrats, and I looked at the Political Union, but I found a place with Students for Justice in Palestine. And I approached them at the activities fair at the beginning of the year, and I had that fulfillment of doing something very tangible, very important, very real.”

Many students with whom I spoke said that Israel’s attacks on Gaza in December 2008–January 2009—dubbed “Operation Cast Lead”—were a turning point for their involvement in activism. More than 1,400 Palestinians, including approximately 300 children, were killed during the three-week military assault.

The borders were sealed by Israel and Egypt as weapons, including 2,000-pound bombs, missiles, white phosphorus, and metal shrapnel were used indiscriminately. United Nations Special Rapporteur Richard Falk called the attacks a “war crime of the greatest magnitude under international law.”⁶

Ryan Branagan is an Irish-American student and activist at Boston’s Northeastern University. At Northeastern, outside right-wing Zionist organizations have placed overwhelming pressure on a malleable university administration to curb Palestine activism and stifle debate on campus.

Branagan said that he actually started out being right wing and pro-Israel himself; he was interested in joining the U.S. military and going to Iraq as an occupation soldier. “I started reading and trying to educate myself. During this process, a few months in, Israel started bombing Gaza in Operation Cast Lead,” he told me. “And I read news reports of the casualties and listened to *Democracy Now!* and it shook me to the core. Since that point on, I haven’t looked back. I knew while I was developing my political ideas that this issue was going to be what I would commit myself to for the foreseeable future.”

Alex Abbasi is a Palestinian-American graduate student in theology at Harvard University’s Divinity School. He was raised by a working-class single mother in Los Angeles. “There are a lot of things I saw from a very young age,” Abbasi said. “Different types of violence, whether it’s being a first-hand witness to things like rape or sexual violence, or the damaging effects of alcoholism in my family and with those very close to me. I think I really came to see the brokenness of this world. And my mission has become to heal a broken world.” Abbasi added that in terms of Palestine, a major

motivating factor that brought him to activism took place during a delegation he organized as an undergraduate student at Loyola Marymount in southern California. The trip was designed for a multi-faith delegation from the university to travel to Palestine in the summer of 2012.

“It was a spirituality and social justice-based trip,” he noted. “But unfortunately, when we arrived, I was denied entry [at the Tel Aviv airport] and sent back home. Many people who enter the border, whether at the West Bank or from the Mediterranean, they know that people with Arab or Muslim backgrounds are automatically pulled in for questioning.”

After a day and a half of detention and interrogation, Abbasi was deemed a “security threat” and denied entry. “I spent time in a prison cell for another seven hours before being sent back home to Los Angeles,” he said. “Everyone else in the group got in. And although I did feel powerless and it was very dehumanizing in that moment, I did think it was good. Because it allowed our group to see the reality of the situation as soon as we got there. It really set the tone. And if you think that’s crazy, that’s nothing compared to what the indigenous Palestinian people go through.”

The delegation participants saw the wall and the checkpoints, Abbasi said. “They saw Palestinians get beat in the head with machine guns. So to say the least, it was a very powerful trip, and it only motivated us more to work towards justice for Palestine. And when we came back to school the next year, that’s when we started organizing and founded an SJP. The rest is continuing history.”



Interview: Kristian Davis Bailey

Kristian Davis Bailey had just come back from his first trip to Palestine when we met on his college campus during the 2013 National SJP Conference. At Stanford University, Bailey had quickly become a pivotal leading member of Students for Palestinian Equal Rights—now SJP—and dedicated a significant amount of his time to Stanford’s divestment campaign earlier in the year.



Inspired by the self-organizing of the Black community in Detroit, Bailey was eager to move to that city and work directly with community organizers after graduation. He has a contagious, passionate activist spirit. I asked him to tell me how he became politicized and why the Palestine issue resonated with him so strongly.

Palestine is one of the issues that actually politicized me. I didn't know anything about it before February 2012, when Stanford alumnus Fadi Quran was arrested in the West Bank during a protest, but there was video of him being pepper-sprayed in the face, being pushed without any physical provocation to the soldiers, and then hauled off into a van.

I happened to be writing for the school newspaper at the time, so I started to use Twitter and Facebook to get more information. And that turned into four stories for the *Stanford Daily* following his detention. But when I interviewed him—

when he got out—about his experiences, that was my intro to Palestine 101: issues of indefinite detention, tear gas, pepper spray being made in the same country where he got his education. And that's when I began to think about things a little more systemically.

There's more beyond Palestine—this happened around the time when Trayvon Martin was murdered, and I just had thoughts and feelings about the status of Black people in the United States. So it was a combination of things.

Talk about how you're diving deeper into these parallels, the intersections between different struggles, especially as an African-American man in this society. What resonates with you about the Palestinian struggle for liberation?

I've been thinking about this recently, because people ask me this a lot. During those four or five days when we didn't know where Fadi was, or what happened to him, I was just so concerned—I developed a deep investment in how he was doing and in supporting all these people who were concerned about him and the larger struggle. That's where it stuck.

This was even before he told me about taking classes with Clayborne Carson, who's a Martin Luther King Jr. scholar on campus, or about how he draws connections between the American civil rights movement and his own liberation movement.

A couple of months ago, I would have said, 'Oh, it's about all of these issues that we look at—militarism and capitalism and racism—they all converge onto Palestine.' But having been there this past summer, it's just—these are other people who are living in a situation where they're not being treated like people, and regardless of all the bigger systemic issues around it, this is one issue that I'm choosing to devote my attention and energy to.

Talk about your trip. What compelled you to go, and what were your first impressions?

What really compelled me to go was being on campus where some people are interested in hearing or talking about Palestine, but it tends to become a discussion about facts and

figures and debates over history, all of these things. And I thought that by going and meeting people and understanding their personal stories and histories, and sharing those, that makes for a more compelling way of getting people to empathize with their struggle and their liberation movement.

That's really why I wanted to go to Palestine. I still haven't processed or decompressed from the experience, because I started school three days after I came back, but it was just really weird—most things there are so explicitly and visibly wrong. Just standing next to a 24-foot wall that divides a community from its neighbors, or the same community from itself, or that requires college students to go an hour out of their way to go through a checkpoint just to go to the other side of the wall, or seeing things like the water towers that are on top of almost every Palestinian house that are virtually nonexistent on settlement houses, because Israeli settlers get their water 24/7, and Palestinians have their water cut off.

And just to see how normalized violence was in the family—to go and speak with people doing resistance work in their various towns or cities, and to hear them talk about the time when a relative got injured or killed, how children were playing around like it was no big deal.

I don't understand it. The longer I was there, the more I asked what is the rest of the United States not understanding about this? It's very clear cut that one group is experiencing an immense amount of repression that's being bolstered by our government.

You were there for five weeks. What were some of the conversations you were having—maybe with yourself—about what you were seeing and how this further informs your scholarly work and research, and what you want to do with this experience in your life going forward?

I don't have a direct answer for that right now. But I can say that one of the conversations that touched me the most was sitting over dinner with a friend of a friend who had been to Palestine a year before I had, having a very good conversation, like between brothers. Towards the end, he said, 'Sometimes I wake up and I wonder what it feels like to be free.' This was

after he told me that he saw the Mediterranean Sea for the first time when he was 23. And that his mother and sister still haven't seen it, because they don't have permits to go through '48 (shorthand for pre-1948 Palestine, the land which is known as present-day Israel).

That just really hit home for me. Again, this is an issue of rights and all these things, but it's also like, why does one person sitting at a table have the ability to travel when he wants, and not have to plan around permits and roadblocks and all these things, and why does another have to wonder what it feels like to be free?

The whole experience, actually, put me in a weird place. On the one hand, I understand why solidarity visits are important, but on the other hand, it felt weird for me to suddenly jump in and then have the ability to leave.

School started days after you returned from Palestine, and you jumped into organizing for the National SJP Conference. The tagline of this conference is "From Margins to Center," and the discussions at this conference are centered around interconnected struggles and the organizational efforts that are taking place around the United States. There's so much more emphasis right now on the intersection between so many struggles, with Palestine being one of them. Talk about what it was like to plan this conference.

It's been inspiring and exciting. To take a step back, during our divestment campaign in the Spring of 2013, there was a certain point when we started receiving statements from Nobel Peace laureates, and from Pink Floyd's Roger Waters, and we realized that we were having conversations on a global level, we really have a chance to make an impact on the struggle for justice around the world with what we're doing right now.

And it was this blissful moment—we weren't sleeping, we were so busy, not going to class even, but it was a really euphoric period. It was what we read about, and now we had the chance to do it ourselves. And the preparation for this conference had much less of that euphoria, but in my mind, there's that sense of 'Ok, here we are, and we're somewhere between having just started and on our way to being a national

movement.’ And that’s also pretty exciting. It might not feel like it right now, but we are making some form of a step or a footprint, leaving some DNA on the grand scale for the struggle for justice.

What did you learn and gain out of the divestment process?

I think that’s when we got a hint at the level of support that we have as a student group, that our campaign has, and that the issue of Palestine [has]—even though it doesn’t always feel or seem apparent.

I was studying in Cape Town when this was happening, but I saw a video of people lined up across the courtyard, up two flights of stairs, all the way to the senate room, holding signs that said “We love you Palestine.” Apparently there were 75 students who showed up for this, and this was just days after we were doubting whether the allied groups that signed our petition would speak on our behalf at the senate meeting. So to see the largest and most diverse turnout any senate topic has had...that taught us that we have the potential to have that type of support when we mobilize, but we need to figure out the best way.... We shouldn’t be surprised when that many people show up. We should expect it. They’re committed because of x, y, or z.

But on a more strategy-type level, we need to be better. We went into it saying that we definitely had seven senators who would vote in favor of the divestment resolution, because they were endorsed by the Students of Color Coalition, and all except one member of that coalition supported our campaign. We weren’t really thinking about the back alley politics that were probably going on on the other side. We didn’t have any contacts within the senate who would be honest with us, and give us a heads-up on anything.

So I think the biggest lesson in terms of campus politics is figuring out from the inside how to guarantee that support.

How important is it to identify the intersection of Palestine with other liberation struggles?

I think it’s really important. My other lens into a lot of this was just personal experiences, being both Black and gay—I guess

that's how I identify. And understanding the need to address other forms of oppression within a struggle. That's why I like the queer liberation framework more than the gay rights framework, because it gets at the need to also address misogyny and patriarchy and structural class oppression. And on this issue, it becomes really clear when you have the same company building a wall along Mexico and the wall in Palestine that there's no separation in that regard.

Listening to the opening plenary at this conference, it was exciting to hear the level of collaboration that anti-colonialist movements were having in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. When I was in Detroit, people would say, 'Make sure that when you go to Palestine, tell the people we're thinking of you, we support you.' Just to know that there are people who are experiencing certain things, who are struggling against certain things, but we recognize each other and can help out if and when we can. I think that's really important.

You're not struggling alone, or in isolated pockets.

It definitely feels that way. It's something I wish more people understood.

What does Palestine solidarity mean to you?

Based on what I've heard at this conference, I personally think our work as a student group needs to think about Palestinians as a whole. Because we do get stuck in thinking about Palestine as separated places—the West Bank, Gaza, and Palestinians in '48. We also think about refugees as a different issue because they're in Syria or Lebanon or Jordan, what do they have to do with anything? So figuring out work that does address the needs of the entire diaspora community and also being more unafraid and unapologetic about our work is what I think is necessary.



Building From History

If we are able to endure where previous iterations of this struggle have waned, it is only because of the brilliant legacy they have left us, and in whose shadow we still stand.

—National Students for Justice in Palestine, 2013



First row: Nadine Aly, Lina Bearat, Sarah Aly

Second row: Angelica Becerra, Ryan Branagan, Amal Ali

Over tea at a busy campus coffee shop, Hoda Mitwally explained, “There’s a tremendous responsibility to be a part of this movement.” A sharp, driven law student at the City University of New York, she sat down with me at Stanford University during the third annual Students for Justice in Palestine National Conference in 2013. “It’s one that amazingly has sustained itself in ways that other movements have fizzled out. The antiwar movement fizzled out very quickly, for example.”

Mitwally said that she was catapulted into the Palestine solidarity movement after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 2006. “For a very long time, SJP [Students for Justice in Palestine] was

a largely West Coast thing,” she said. “However, there have always been Palestine solidarity groups and SJPs scattered around the East Coast, just not united under the umbrella of SJP.” She added that assembling more East Coast-based Palestine solidarity groups as part of the national SJP structure during the last several years has given new activists access to a common political framework, making it a lot easier to organize individual campaigns.

This building upon foundational structures is essential, Mitwally said, and is just the latest stage of evolution in a long, rich history of U.S.-based activism for Palestinian rights. Indeed, many members of older iterations of Palestine solidarity campaigns have lent their resources and support to the new generation of activists. Mitwally explained, “In the time between the period they were organizing and the period in which my generation is organizing, there has been a lot that has happened—the BDS call¹ came out, which really has shifted a lot of the work and has solidified it in a way.”

She added that there is a critical need to reattach historical context to the current movement; in order to understand the presence and motivations of today’s student movement for Palestine solidarity, we must begin at the strong, century-old roots that have built it. “I think that institutional memory is something that we’re all severely lacking across the board. Even though some of us are in touch with our movement elders, not all of us are and not all of us know what came before.”

Generational legacy

“Palestine organizing has existed longer than we all can remember,” scholar, activist, and organizer Mezna Qato said to a rapt audience of hundreds of college students. Her radiant smile was visible to even those—like myself—sitting in the very last row in the packed auditorium.

During her presentation at Stanford, which launched the 2013 SJP conference, Qato outlined the work of Palestinian intellectuals and community leaders in the United States that began well before the Nakba. Illuminating the rich generational legacy of Palestine activism, especially on college campuses,

Qato said there had historically been “no separation” between local community organizing and Palestine solidarity work.

In the early part of the 20th century, Palestinians in the United States began organizing against Zionist designs on Palestine. As San Francisco State University professor Rabab Abdulhadi has explained, Palestinians “began immigrating to the U.S. around the turn of the century and more so in the 1930s and ’40s as the combination of colonial British rule and Zionist immigration made their lives unbearable.”² Medical students and physicians originally from the city of Jaffa, the “Bride of the Sea” and the jewel of Palestine on the Mediterranean coastline, established the Palestine Anti-Zionism Society in 1917 (which then became the Palestine National League in 1920, which was finally changed to the Arab National League).

One week after the Balfour Declaration was announced in November 1917—in which British foreign secretary Lord Balfour promised the European Zionists a national Jewish home in Palestine—hundreds of activists with the Palestine Anti-Zionism Society, along with the Ramallah Young Men’s Society, a local organization, poured into the streets of Brooklyn in protest.³

In 1921, the Palestine National League published an important booklet called *The Case against Zionism*, which opposed Zionist nationalist aspirations of an exclusivist state only for Jewish people. The booklet featured analyses by an array of writers, scholars, religious leaders, and Jewish historians who opposed political Zionist ideology.

The organization’s president, a physician named Fuad Shatara, spoke before the U.S. Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs about the Balfour Declaration and its impact on Palestinians in April 1922. Shatara would later correspond with Albert Einstein regarding his analysis of political Zionism and the imminent threat it posed to indigenous Palestinians. The iconic scientist was opposed to the creation of a Jewish national state, and was part of a large group of non-Zionist Jewish intellectuals who publicly condemned the massacres of Palestinians carried out by Zionist militias in the late 1940s.⁴

American students and scholars were heavily involved in the directives of these organizations, challenging American politicians who had supported the Balfour Declaration and seeking out alliances with other marginalized communities around the country.

U.S.-based Zionist organizations, too, were busy pushing their agenda in American political echelons, which already favored

white European colonization of the “savage” Arab Middle East. “Getting Congress and Americans generally to ignore the democratic rights of an alleged ‘backward, poor, and ignorant’ majority and to assign those rights to a minuscule Western minority who shared their Judeo-Christian heritage was an easy success for the American Zionists,” writes professor Lawrence Davidson.⁵ “Ignoring native rights had been a sine qua non of the Western imperialist expansion that had been going on since the 1870s, and it fed the assumption that the natives did not know what was good for them,” he adds.

The fact that groups such as the Zionist Organization of America, Davidson argues, “had encouraged American Jewry to petition, campaign, and pressure their local politicians to support the cause made Palestine and Zionism a domestic political issue long before the Holocaust. As a result, during the Palestinian Arab uprising of 1929 and the rebellion of 1936–39, congressional statements unanimously backed the Zionists and castigated the Palestinians as savages.”⁶

Aching to find community and political alliance in the United States against this backdrop of antipathy toward Arab peoples, Palestinian immigrants self-organized to form other groups such as the Ramallah Federation⁷ and the Organization of Arab Students. Included in this list is possibly the most well-known of Palestinian student organizations, the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS), which was founded in 1959 and later incorporated into the Palestine Liberation Organization. (GUPS generally collapsed in the 1990s, but one last active GUPS chapter remains at San Francisco State University.)

During the 1960s, in oppositional response to the Vietnam War, nuclear threats, racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and political violence, university students in North America, Europe, and Latin America placed themselves at the forefront of various protest movements. Political organizing within disparate community chapters shifted onto the college campus, and universities became the centers of activism around which the young generation organized and led movements that would change the course of history.

Palestine liberation organizing was very much a part of the anti-establishment, antiwar counterculture of the 1960s. Qato

noted that GUPS members and members of other Palestinian political and community organizations joined the labor movement, women's unions, and the Black Liberation Movement in the United States. "They were looking around, and seeing what was needed," she said.

Qato's co-presenter, Loubna Qatami of the U.S.-based Palestinian Youth Movement, expanded on this history, and reminded the audience of the hard-won battle of the 1968 student strike at nearby San Francisco State University. The strike was to demand relevant education representing all communities within the student body and the establishment of the first ethnic studies department in the United States. Student protests lasted months, and the strikers endured an intransigent university administration, violent beatings by police, and repeated arrests.

But they won. And because of hard work by African-American students, Latino students, Asian-American students, First Nations students, and Arab-American students, the Ethnic Studies Department was created at SF State in 1969, as others were established across the United States.

Forty years later, as universities have become beholden to profit-driven motives and cooperation with governmental agencies, students are fighting to preserve human rights-based activism as well as ethnic studies departments across the United States. However, access to higher education for poor people and people of color is rapidly evaporating as tuition prices—even for "public" universities—skyrocket.

Expanding coalitions, 1960s–1990s

Several Palestine-centered intellectual organizations, such as the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, which was founded in 1967, held annual conventions and published numerous papers on the situation in Palestine and the United States' close relationship with Israel. Similarly, the Organization of Arab Students sought to raise awareness and forge alliances with diaspora Arab students around the world.

Solidarity organizations involving Palestinians and non-Palestinian allies coalesced as well. In 1981, after the United Nations declared November 29th to be the annual day of international solidarity with the Palestinian people—the

anniversary of the declaration of the partition of Palestine in 1947 —radical activists in the United States established the November 29th Committee for Palestine.



SJP at UCLA Whiteboard Campaign. (Photo by Omar Zahzah)

Working in conjunction with activists “who will work with other people not engaged full-time with the Middle East,” the committee’s executive member Hilton Obenzinger said in a 1987 interview that the organization’s goal was to “make the issue of Palestine and U.S. intervention [in the Middle East] legitimate for political debate in this country.” Respectful of Palestinian agency, Obenzinger added that “as an organization that takes the perspective of supporting Palestinian self-determination, we cannot be put in the position of pushing the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] to take one stand or another. I don’t think anyone in the peace and solidarity movement in the US

actually wants to go around telling liberation movements what their policies ought to be.”⁸

Other political groups led by Palestinians in exile were established and flourished within working-class communities across the country. In 1986, just before the breakout of the first intifada,⁹ the Union of Palestinian Women Associations of North America (UPWA) was established in Chicago in an effort to represent Palestinian women living in exile in the United States. In addition to supporting the Palestinian struggle in Palestine during the first intifada, UPWA was an outspoken opponent of the first U.S. war against Iraq in 1990–91. Throughout the 1990s, according to library records at the University of Illinois at Chicago, UPWA “supported campaigns for the release of women political prisoners in Palestine and advocated a variety of causes related to the welfare of women,” including campaigning for the legal right to abortion, domestic violence education, and aid to Palestinian families. Asserting that “Palestinian women are part of the global women’s movement,” the UPWA built strong alliances with women’s organizations in both the United States and Palestine.¹⁰

Two groups affiliated with the UPWA, the Arab-American Action Network in Chicago (established in 1972) and the Arab Women’s Committee, became rising forces for community activism and Palestinian leftist organizing especially in the Midwest—the region with the largest concentration of Arab communities in the United States.

On college campuses, Palestinian students from working-class first-generation or second-generation immigrant backgrounds organized at community colleges and four-year colleges such as the University of Illinois at Chicago, Kent State University, and Youngstown State University in Ohio. These campuses hosted energetic and tenacious GUPS chapters in the 1980s, as activists blended their Palestine organizing with local trade union organizing and the broader labor movement. Palestinian activists in the 1980s also joined anti-apartheid South Africa movements, making the obvious link between racism and supremacist ideologies in white-ruled South Africa and Zionist Israeli policies.

Writing in *Jacobin* magazine, Charlotte Kates explains the intrinsic connection between the Palestinian community in exile in the United States and the Palestinian liberation movement in the preceding decades:

In an environment in which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was broadly recognized within the community as a legitimate representative, its political organizations and unions found voice among Palestinians in exile. From Fateh to the Popular Front [for the Liberation of Palestine] to the Democratic Front [for the Liberation of Palestine] and beyond, support for a multiplicity of parties was a part of daily life for those in exile.

In the US, Palestinian leftists won national elections in the General Union of Palestinian Students, at that time an organization of thousands, which represented Palestinian students around the world as one of the PLO's representative unions. Financial support from the exiled was also valuable, providing funds for the creation of hospitals, schools, and mass political mobilizations.¹¹

Today, the immense power of the U.S. Palestinian Community Network (USPCN) has helped to empower and unify diaspora Palestinians in the United States. USPCN works, it says, to “affirm the right of Palestinians in the *shatat* (exile) to participate fully in shaping our joint destiny.” Formed in 2008 after the Palestinian Popular Conference in Chicago, USPCN provides an essential link between Palestinian communities in the United States, in Palestine, and across the wider diaspora. USPCN works with college students to strengthen and engage with other campus organizers strategizing for Palestinian rights.

American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), another important, independent national organization that works closely with students across the country, was established by Palestinians in the United States with a more religious orientation. AMP seeks to educate the American public about Palestinian culture, heritage, and the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

Oslo's impact on Palestine organizing

As Kates writes in her *Jacobin* article, Palestinian activists in the United States have also been under surveillance and government harassment due to their organizing and connections to Palestinian political parties.¹²

For instance, activists affiliated with political groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a secular Marxist-Leninist Palestinian party, have been monitored and threatened with deportation by the U.S. government—“most notably in the case of the Los Angeles 8, when seven Palestinians and one Kenyan faced deportation proceedings in 1987 for organizing events and distributing PFLP magazines. The campaign for their acquittal found widespread support—a signal of the strength of the Palestinian left, given that such work was an expected and prominent expression of community politics.”¹³

Years of serial arrests and assassinations by Israel of Palestinian political leaders during the first intifada strained the PLO and diaspora political organizations immensely. But with the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993,¹⁴ there was a renewed surge in efforts to undermine Palestinian political organizing and political groups. Oslo, as many Palestinian liberation activists, scholars, and analysts have explained, represented a dangerous capitulation by the Palestinian leadership to Israeli and U.S. demands while Palestinian rights—including the right of return for Palestinian refugees—remained trampled.

Under the terms of the Oslo Accords, Israel was allowed to continue its brutal military occupation and was given stratified “administrative” control over the West Bank and Gaza. Meanwhile, the newly created Palestinian Authority leapt at Israeli-, European-, and American-designed economic development programs touted as a way to stimulate the Palestinian economy. In practice, however, such programs rapidly stripped Palestinian infrastructure and undermined aspirations for real liberation.¹⁵ In the years that followed Oslo, Israeli settlement building exploded across occupied Palestinian land, tripling the number of Israeli settlers inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem in particular, in contravention to international law.

In terms of organizing, Oslo's impact on Palestinian political parties and committees was tremendous. The United States placed political parties which had opposed the Oslo Accords on lists of "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," thereby making it a federal offense for Palestinians in exile in the United States to provide "material support" to such parties or to be linked to them in any way.¹⁶

"One of Oslo's legacies was the attempt to politically erase most of the Palestinian people," Ali Abunimah wrote in the *Electronic Intifada* 20 years after the Oslo Accords were signed. "While all the focus was on the West Bank and Gaza, the refugees in exile, especially in the camps of Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, were reduced to a 'humanitarian issue.' Palestinians in present-day Israel were forgotten altogether, dismissed as an 'internal Israeli matter.'"¹⁷

But, Abunimah noted, "Today, Palestinians in the diaspora who were only born around the time of Oslo, are leading the struggle on campuses in North America and around the world, in the face of fierce attempts at repression by Zionist organizations."

In addition to the Los Angeles 8, and especially after the so-called "war on terror" was instituted under the George W. Bush administration, Palestinian organizers, solidarity activists, and humanitarian aid organizations were subjected to invasive surveillance, sweeping arrests, raids by the FBI, criminal prosecution, and lengthy prison sentences.

In 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the draconian Patriot Act was signed into law, broadening and emboldening the material support law. One of the first acts of business the Bush administration undertook after signing the Patriot Act was to aggressively pursue the Palestinian leaders of the largest Muslim charity in the United States, the Holy Land Foundation, a charity which had provided humanitarian relief not just to Palestinian refugees, but to countless victims of natural disasters in this country.

The Bush administration shut down the organization and accused the Holy Land Foundation's five leaders of material support to Hamas through contributions to charitable distributors in Palestine, called *zakat* committees. These same *zakat* committees also received financial aid from the Red Cross and U.S. government agencies, including USAID (United States Agency for International Development). Moreover, no evidence was presented that could have directly tied a penny of Holy Land Foundation's aid to "terror" groups in Palestine. The case ended

in a mistrial in 2007, with not one juror returning a guilty conviction on any of the 197 counts.

Nevertheless, the U.S. government yearned to make an example of the Holy Land Foundation's leadership and a retrial was held. In what the Center for Constitutional Rights called an "unprecedented holding,"¹⁸ the court allowed an anonymous witness to testify against the defense. This testimony against the Holy Land Foundation was given by an anonymous Israeli agent and was in clear violation of the Sixth Amendment, which allows the accused to confront their accuser. The U.S. government eventually convicted the five men, issuing jail sentences ranging from 15 to 65 years. One juror would later tell reporters he thought the government's case against the Holy Land Five was "strung together with macaroni noodles."¹⁹

Criminalization of Palestinian and Muslim organizing intensified, as the FBI launched a zealous wave of surveillance operations against religious leaders, students, activists, and professors. The U.S. government was intent on eroding civil liberties in pursuit of its project of "national security," as it waged war and occupation against Arab and Muslim peoples across the world.

Dr. Sami Al-Arian, a longtime civil rights activist, political analyst, and professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa, was arrested and charged with being a leader of the North American branch of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in 2003. The charge followed more than nine years of secret surveillance by the federal authorities of his family's phone calls. He was put in prison—without trial, evidence, or conviction—for five-and-a-half years, part of that in solitary confinement. Two years later, in a trial that lasted nearly six months, jurors failed to return a single guilty verdict that would convict him, citing a lack of evidence.²⁰ However, despite no conviction, Al-Arian remained in prison for three more years, and upon his release in 2008, was immediately sentenced to house arrest. In late June 2014, a federal court dismissed all charges against Al-Arian, finally closing the books on what the family's attorney, Jonathan Turley, called the "highly abusive incarceration of Dr. Al-Arian."²¹

The arrests and draconian sentencing of the Holy Land Five and Al-Arian shook the Palestinian and Muslim organizing

community, including student activists, to the core. Students became increasingly fearful of speaking out and participating in activism around Palestine issues, knowing that the U.S. government was actively targeting Arab and Muslim human rights organizers. But there was more intimidation to come.

In 2010, the FBI raided homes and offices of antiwar and solidarity activists in the Midwest, and delivered subpoenas to 23 organizers to appear before a federal grand jury. The government said that the raids and subpoenas were part of an investigation into “material support” of foreign terrorist organizations, but it did not arrest or charge anyone.²² As of June 2014, the U.S. government had not moved on the grand jury or acted upon its initial threats of criminalization, but also had not closed the investigation, suggesting that the case remains open four years later. However, in February 2014, the government’s documents for the case were unsealed due to legal action undertaken by activists involved in antiwar and solidarity organizations with the peoples of Palestine and Colombia. The unsealed documents revealed that the police had installed an undercover agent to join two of the organizations in which some of the subpoenaed activists were members. In a statement, the ad-hoc Committee to Stop FBI Repression explained:

The documents demonstrate a callous disregard for free speech and the right to associate. They in effect criminalize those of us who oppose US wars, and stand in solidarity with the oppressed. From Palestine to Colombia, people want to be free from the domination of Washington. We have said this publicly on thousands of occasions and will continue to do so.²³

Chicago activists were once again the targets of U.S. governmental attack when agents raided the home of longtime Palestinian activist and community organizer Ramea Odeh of the Arab-American Action Network and the Arab Women’s Committee in October 2013. Charged by the U.S. government with immigration fraud, Odeh faced imprisonment and deportation in what many activists say was an act of political repression.

The indictment alleged that 66-year-old Odeh failed to disclose her conviction and imprisonment by an Israeli military

court in 1969 on her citizenship application. A statement by a coalition of civil rights and legal organizations pointed out that Odeh's arrest came at a time "when federal authorities, along with Israel and its supporters in the U.S., are continuing to search for ways to intimidate and silence those who are effective advocates for Arab-American communities, and who speak out for Palestinian rights."²⁴ The groups noted that Israel's military judicial process—and the conviction of Odeh—should be understood in its proper context. "Military courts operate exclusively to subjugate occupied Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. They routinely bypass all but a modicum of due process and justify holding individuals without charge or trial for months and years, often in abusive conditions and subject to torture." Odeh was indeed forced to confess a crime she testified she did not commit—after 45 days of torture and sexual abuse carried out by Israeli interrogators.²⁵

Writing in the *Electronic Intifada*, Maureen Clare Murphy added, "Odeh had previously been public about her arrest, describing in a documentary film the torture including sexual abuse she says she endured during the ten years she was in Israeli prison. Odeh was released and her sentence commuted as part of a prisoner release deal in 1979, when she was deported to Lebanon." Murphy continued:

It is hard to believe that [the] arrest of a prominent organizer in Chicago, home to what is thought to be the largest Palestinian community in the US, over a conviction by a military court four decades ago, is just the federal government objectively upholding the law.

The repression of the Palestinian national movement in the US has gone back for decades, since the waves of immigration from Palestine following Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967.

And now that the *status quo* of US aid to Israel is being increasingly challenged, the repression has increased.²⁶

It is against this backdrop—decades of intimidation and repression by the U.S. government and Zionist groups—that

today's students organize. Many current students were in elementary school during the U.S. wars and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and had parents and community members subjected to Islamophobic and racist harassment. Growing up in an atmosphere of constant war, fear, and attack has motivated the millennial generation of student activists to organize closely, steadily, and strongly.

The Palestine Solidarity Movement and Students for Justice in Palestine

After the outbreak of the second intifada—the uprising that began in 2000 as Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and inside present-day Israel revolted against Israel's occupation and unjust policies—Palestine solidarity organizations on U.S. campuses realized it was necessary to form a national coordination structure.

With a large and diverse immigrant population—including many Palestinian refugees who came to Canada after the first U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Oslo Accords—as well as tenacious groups of anti-Zionist Jewish activists, Canada's role in cultivating strong Palestine solidarity organizing is significant, especially on college campuses. Indeed, Canadian students have been tremendously influential in shaping and guiding the activism framework in the United States and beyond.

From the 2005 birth of Israeli Apartheid Week at the University of Toronto to the current wave of divestment resolutions being passed by undergraduate and graduate unions across Canada's universities, Canadian activists and student unions have forged powerful, indelible marks on the global movement for justice in Palestine.

Across the world, different groups representing European, Middle Eastern, Asian, Australian, Latin American, African, and especially South African students have formed enormous activist coalitions and have worked hard to bring attention and direct action to their university administrations in order to support Palestinian rights.

Fadi Kiblawi and I met in Washington, D.C., in late 2013. A member of the self-described “old guard” of the group Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Fadi graduated from the University of Michigan in 2003. He started his activism, he said, as a sophomore, just weeks before the second intifada broke out. “People were emotional and energetic,” he said, and students on campus were organizing protests within Arab and Muslim-associated groups. A coalition of student groups pushed a divestment resolution, which did not pass, but the spark of

campus divestment organizing inspired Palestine solidarity activists in Michigan and across the country.

Within the next year, and especially after 9/11, the start of the U.S. war and occupation in Afghanistan, and the explosion of anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia across the country, Kiblawi and other students decided they needed to expand the on-campus movement for human rights. They started SAFE—Students Allied for Freedom—which pursued activism on many different social justice issues including solidarity with Palestine. SAFE began discussing a new divestment campaign early on. Inspired by South Africa’s anti-apartheid campaign, the students saw “boycott, divestment, and sanctions as the obvious tool” to shift the debate on Palestine and wider Western aggressions in the Middle East, Kiblawi explained.

In 2002, the first National Conference of the Palestine Solidarity Movement (PSM) was held at UC–Berkeley, the site of the newly founded SJP. It would be three years before Palestinian civil society launched its call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel, but the UC–Berkeley PSM conference pushed divestment to the forefront. During the conference, participating student delegates decided that there would be a national day of divestment on April 9—the anniversary of the 1948 Deir Yassin massacre.²⁷

Kiblawi explained that approximately 30 different universities took part in the national divestment day of action. At UC–Berkeley, students demanded the university divest, while locking themselves down and occupying an administrative building. Other student groups held vociferous marches, demonstrations, and direct actions that were covered by national media.

At the University of Michigan, students held a street theater action in which some played the part of Israeli soldiers “abusing” other students, who were playing the role of Palestinians. “It was so powerful,” Kiblawi said. “Some students were so moved that they collapsed in tears on the ground. We were reading about what was happening in Palestine in the news that day and were able to act it out on campus.” It was the first time, Kiblawi noted, that students were able to access information about the daily events in Palestine in real-time through the Internet, which motivated their activism even further.

PSM held four more conferences in the following years: at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, at Ohio State University, at Duke University, and the last one at Georgetown in 2006. In addition to incorporating off-campus groups and Canadian organizations, PSM represented several hundred member-groups until it faded out.²⁸

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason for PSM's collapse, but journalist and former PSM member Abraham Greenhouse explains that of many possible reasons, "one of these was undoubtedly a lack of continuity with, and opportunities to learn from, experiences of the past."²⁹

Other national conferences were organized in the years after PSM's decline while a new national coalition was rising to the surface. In 2009, a national boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) conference at Hampshire College in western Massachusetts brought together hundreds of student activists and educators from all over the country. The Hampshire conference picked up where PSM left off and re-energized the student movement explicitly centered around the BDS movement.

National SJP emerges

Students for Justice in Palestine emerged from that first foundation at UC–Berkeley in the early 2000s as a new face of student activism. SJP chapters began to spread across the United States between 2002 and 2008, but picked up speed in the months after Operation Cast Lead. Students were outraged at Israel's actions and fed up with the U.S. media's pro-Israel bias. Many witnessed vitriol and aggression by Israel-aligned groups on campus during candlelight vigils or protests against Israel's attacks, and decided to start an SJP chapter in order to counteract the pro-Israel narrative.

As SJP chapters grew independent of each other, students began to feel a need for a national organizational structure. Evolving out of several meetings with activists and organizers of the U.S. Palestinian Community Network at the 2010 U.S. Social Forum in Detroit, student leaders decided to build a grassroots umbrella organization that would bind together the dozens of disparate student solidarity groups on U.S. campuses. Between 2010 and 2014, as it became easier for students to launch SJP

chapters on their campuses now that a national structure was coalescing, the number of SJP groups skyrocketed.

Sasha Gelzin, a National SJP organizer, noted that as of September 2013, there were more than 130 SJP chapters across the country. “SJPs are doing what mainstream media refuses to, bringing a narrative that captures the real consequences of Israeli policies to tens of thousands,” she added.³⁰

Within the national structure, regional coalitions of SJP chapters have started to band together. For example, on the West Coast, 23 SJP chapters in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia in Canada have formed SJP West and organize their own regional conferences at least once a year. SJP chapters in Chicago and on the East Coast have started to create similar regional umbrella organizations as well.

Sustained growth and a national structure

Tanya Keilani is a graduate of the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University. We met in New York City in the summer of 2013, near Central Park. Currently an endeared mentor to SJP activists around the city, Keilani told me that the impetus for the first National Students for Justice in Palestine Conference—which was held at Columbia—came about because of a growing need to reach more students.

“Some of our work is in response to attacks and to occupation and apartheid, but a lot of it comes out of the need for growth and wanting to nurture our own communities and build together. That’s a lot of what it is,” she explained.

Omar Shakir, who graduated from Stanford Law and has begun a Cairo-based fellowship at an international human rights organization, told me that it has become more and more critical to connect Palestine activism to a changing world and to the many other liberation struggles taking place. “When we talk about Palestine, there is still a myth that it’s a thousand-year-old conflict between two peoples who hate each other, and that it’s driven by nationalism and creed and ancient rivalries,” Shakir said. “But the reality is that it’s a human rights issue. It’s a conflict about land, resources, and human rights, and a system of inequality that deprives people of those rights on the basis of

their background. And there are many aspects of the campaign that are similar to other struggles.”

For a long time, he added, anti-Palestinian groups have tried to depict the situation as one that is “different” or “too complicated” for most people to understand. He said that these groups would prefer that the situation be pigeon-holed as a toxic issue that no one should touch (unless you subscribe to the Zionist, pro-Israel system of beliefs). “I think our ability to break through that narrative was honestly one of our major goals,” Shakir explained. “And the reason we founded a group in 2006, Students Confronting Apartheid in Israel, was that we really wanted to change that narrative. We really wanted to move beyond ‘this is occupation versus suicide bombing’ to ‘no, this is a system of inequality that deprives a people of fundamental rights.’”

At Stanford, the on-campus student Palestine solidarity organization was born as the Coalition for Justice in the Middle East, which operated for three years as a region-based organization focused on human rights—not just in Palestine, but across the Middle East. After it had changed to Students Confronting Apartheid in Israel, it then adopted the name Students for Palestinian Equal Rights (SPER). Finally, in 2014, SPER inducted itself as a new chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, folded under the national SJP umbrella.

Just outside of Detroit, I met Andrew Dalack, a law student at the University of Michigan and a member of the National SJP Organizing Committee. Dalack reflected on the importance of having a national organizing structure behind disparate SJP chapters.

Having this structure, he said, is reassuring to students who are being targeted by administrations and outside political organizations. However, Dalack stressed that one of the main challenges that the organization faces is being “meaningfully accountable to Palestinians in the U.S., in Palestine, and abroad.” As the movement is one of *solidarity*, not one that attempts to dictate political “solutions” or dismiss Palestinian agency, activists like Dalack work hard at understanding and discussing the appropriate role of solidarity activists.

“I think that one of the things that’s allowed National SJP to be so successful in maintaining such a diverse group of activists is that the framework through which we try to understand the situation in Palestine is nuanced,” he explained. “We try and understand it through a gendered lens, through a colonial lens, through a lens that takes sexual orientation into account, as well as gender identity.” The goal, he said, is not to limit activism to one view of justice in Palestine, “but to make sure that we appreciate all the different aspects of the Palestinian self-determination movement.” Effective student organizing, he added, emphasizes that it is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

“By helping plug alumni into community-based organizations which are doing divestment work, or Arab community organizing, or Palestine organizing in general, National SJP can ensure that the work doesn’t stop when students leave undergraduate or graduate school.”

The opposition

SJP’s rise in popularity, strength, and influence on college campuses has been counterbalanced with an expansion of attacks against the organization and its members by anti-Palestinian, anti-BDS groups.

Before the 2012 BDS conference at the University of Pennsylvania, the ADL released its list of “top five anti-Israel individuals” due to speak at the conference. The ADL named my colleague and the co-founder of the *Electronic Intifada*, Ali Abunimah, as the number two perpetrator, and Helena Cobban, the publisher of this book, as number four.

In the fall of 2013, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), one of the country’s largest and most influential pro-Israel lobby organizations, released its annual “top ten” list of “anti-Israel” organizations. Along with the usual suspects—such as Jewish Voice for Peace, the national grassroots organization CODEPINK, and American Muslims for Palestine—the ADL inadvertently praised SJP’s efforts to reach other marginalized communities, saying:

If the university and college environment can be viewed as the incubator for tomorrow’s leaders, SJP’s

success at introducing anti-Israel ideologies to today's college students is enormously significant. Indeed, SJP activists on campus have fought hard to expand the reach of their work and not just “preach to the choir,” using language and rhetoric that appeals to other minority student groups on campus, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] people and others.³¹

Groups like the ADL, along with Israeli officials, have noticed the “enormously significant” power of student groups such as SJP, and have amplified their tactics—overt and covert—aimed at shutting down activism and discussion sparked by SJP organizing.

Over the past few years, the Israeli government has launched campaigns to spread pro-Israel propaganda online, in an effort to counteract the bad press Israel's policies have garnered on social media—especially by Palestine activists. In 2011, the government partnered with an Israeli student union to pay students up to \$2,000 to promote Israel's image. Two years later, the Israeli prime minister's office organized Israeli students to tweet and post propaganda in “covert” and “semi-military” style units, without revealing their true identities as official government representatives.³²

The Reut Institute, a right-wing think tank based in Tel Aviv, infamously identified “hubs” of the so-called “delegitimization movement”—activism groups which seek to hold Israel accountable to international law—in London, Madrid, Toronto, the San Francisco Bay Area, and beyond. Reut labeled the Palestine solidarity movement and BDS activism an “existential threat” to Israel, and, as Ali Abunimah wrote in the *Electronic Intifada*, the think tank called on the Israeli government “to direct substantial resources to ‘attack’ and possibly engage in criminal ‘sabotage’ of this movement” in those regions.³³

As we will see in later chapters, Reut's recommendations are not isolated, hysterical acts, but are part of a growing pattern of attempts at discrediting, demonizing, and impugning solidarity activists on U.S. campuses.



Interview: Rebecca Pierce

Rebecca Pierce is one of the first students I interviewed for this book. We had been in touch well beforehand, on the phone and via e-mail, when I was covering stories for the Electronic Intifada about various acts of repression meted out by a Santa Cruz-based anti-Palestinian group. Even through our e-mail communications, Pierce impressed me as a fierce, courageous activist with a low tolerance for injustice. She struck me immediately as someone who is never afraid to say exactly what she thinks.



In Palestine solidarity activism, that steadfast courageousness can be an asset, especially during times of repressive opposition. As a student at the University of California–Santa Cruz, a city known for its laid-back surfing and skateboarding culture, Pierce had been fighting at the forefront of a pitched battle between her Committee for Justice in Palestine, the administration, and outside political groups intent on halting activism for Palestinian rights.

But Pierce’s activism extends beyond justice for Palestine. She has linked struggles for human rights and civil rights among marginalized and silenced communities in the United States and around the world. She has connected historical struggles for justice to current ones. And she is always unafraid to speak loudly and plainly.

I met Pierce, who grew up in nearby Palo Alto, in Santa Cruz in the spring of 2013. She graduated with a degree in digital media and film.

I grew up in a mixed Jewish and African-American household where my parents are both civil rights attorneys, so I pretty much grew up with very leftist ideas and very civil rights-oriented ideas. I remember early on protesting Proposition 209—California’s anti-affirmative action bill—with my mother; protesting against the sit/lie law, which targeted homeless people in our town; protesting against the war in Iraq.

When I got to college, I had a friend who was Lebanese—he introduced me to the Committee for Justice in Palestine (CJP). Watching Operation Cast Lead unfold—I was reading Yahoo News, which wasn’t progressive by any means—but seeing the death toll go up every day made me feel like this was something I had to get involved in. As someone who is Jewish, I knew Israel was carrying out these actions in my name, and it seemed so important to use the privilege I have to speak out.

I think also being African American, I empathize with the Palestinians so much. There’s so much in our collective struggles that is connected—that really motivated me to get involved.

Would you say that Operation Cast Lead was the catalyst that pushed you into Palestine activism?

Definitely. I wouldn’t say I was exactly Zionist growing up. There was a time when joining the Israeli army seemed cool because it was seen as “feminist” to be a girl and go fight in an army, which is obviously bullshit. But I think that participating in the model United Nations in high school and then watching Operation Cast Lead unfold was definitely the turning point. I haven’t been able to turn back since.

What did your parents think of you, at first, as a kid, idealizing the Israeli army and that so-called feminist idea, and then turning around 180 degrees?

My family’s not particularly Zionist—at least my parents aren’t—but at the same time I think they had the same

preconceived notions that most Americans do about Palestine, and so it took some getting used to on their part. But I give them a lot of credit. I studied in Haifa for a summer, and also I was working in Palestine, and they came to visit me. They stayed in a Palestinian hotel in East Jerusalem and went on an alternative tour in Hebron with an alternative tour company.

So after my mom saw that, it was impossible for her to call it anything other than apartheid. And I think my dad has always had a problem with the idea of connecting Judaism to a state, because it's the opposite of how he sees it. They've been increasingly supportive of me; I'm really thankful for that.

Talk about a moment you remember really well when you were in Palestine, and how your political consciousness came together.

There are a lot of moments. I've been on three different trips to the region. One of the things on my most recent trip, which was with a group that I know a lot of my Palestinian activist friends don't approve of—but I went to Palestine with the Olive Tree Initiative.¹ And a friend of mine, Yara, who runs OTI at UC-SC with me—she's Palestinian—we were crossing the border back from Jordan, and she was stopped and separated from the group and was forced to use a separate border crossing because her mother has a Palestinian ID.

She was almost refused entry into the country. Because this group has diplomatic connections, they had to call someone high up in the Israeli army to get her through. And even then, they cocked a gun in her face and tried to put her on a bus back to Jordan as she was getting this approval.

And I remember thinking that if I can come into Israel three times, and I can come and go so easily, and someone who's from there is treated in this horrible manner, and the rest of the time on the trip, she was there “illegally,” technically, because she didn't have the right permit (she just managed to get through the border).... So someone who's from there can show me the shops that her grand-parents used to own in East Jerusalem, but she can't go back. And I can. There's something seriously wrong with this system. It just reaffirmed my beliefs.

And every time I go there, it's the same thing—just pushes me further, I guess.

Talk about CJP and why you decided to get involved in this group instead of others on campus.²

I think what I found when I joined CJP was an incredibly diverse and committed group of students. Some are Palestinian, but a lot were just allies, and [there's] a lot of students of color and a lot of Jewish students. It just seemed like the right kind of organizing space and a good match for me. And I also just felt like the work we were doing was so important. The first event that I did with CJP was a teach-in on Gaza, and then we had a protest against Operation Cast Lead.

I think seeing that [protest], and seeing also the negative reaction from the Jewish community, really pushed me. If my identity is being used to combat this speech (the protesting of Israel's policies), then I need to be out there and combat that. It actually pushed me to get involved in CJP and Hillel—to be a dissenting voice.

How was it being in Hillel?

Unfortunately, I don't really go anymore. For a while, it was important that I was doing it, and I do other Jewish things now, like I write for the *Leviathan Jewish Journal*. But there were times when it was really difficult. For example, they had a [Jewish Agency Israel] Fellow³ who came in, and one year when I was going on an alternative spring break with Hillel, he posted something on our CJP page about how I had no morals, basically, because I'm involved with Hillel and CJP at the same time.

Talk about how that feels. Hillel was once a place for Jewish culture and Jewish identity and community-building, and it didn't have this intrinsic connection to Israel and an ideology of Zionism associated with it. So how does it feel as a Jewish woman just trying to find community on campus and then being told that you also have to abide by these political ideals?

I think that the Jewish students really deserve better than what we're getting from our community at this point in time. I think

that the resources that we have are politicized in a way that is against our values; I would say, [against the values] of most young Jewish people. Even pro-Israel students I know have a huge problem with the way certain things are done.

I think that I'm lucky. I'm mixed, so I have another identity to sort of fall back on in a way, and also other ways that I'm engaging with my Judaism. But for the students who just really want to be around their culture and their people, it's doing them a huge disservice to politicize it in this way, and I hear this all the time from Jewish students, that "I wish I could go to Hillel or do Jewish stuff, but here it's just not possible for me." What began as an attempt to hold the Jewish community together is really tearing us apart. At UC-SC, we have one of the largest Jewish populations in the UC system, yet not a very high rate of participation in our Hillel, and that's for a reason. It makes me sad, but I have a lot of hope in the next generation in terms of defining their own spaces.

And you've been able to find that in CJP as well. Talk about your experiences and your overview assessment of the kinds of attacks and intimidation that Palestine solidarity activists are facing not only at UC-SC, but also at other universities.

So the atmosphere at UC-SC was unique in that we had one lecturer in particular who was very vitriolic in coming after CJP in a number of different ways. We found that when we wanted to bring certain speakers—even Norman Finkelstein,⁴ who now we wouldn't characterize as being so extreme—we had phone calls being made to our advisors, telling them not to allow us to do the event, phone calls being made to the people giving us funding, telling them not to fund us, even the event spaces that we had booked were getting phone calls from this particular lecturer.

We also had, unfortunately, more public and overt things. This person [the lecturer] was caught on tape saying that Students for Justice in Palestine and the Muslim Student Association were groups that had ties to "terrorist organizations." At first, we tried to ignore things like this and not allow it to dictate what the situation on our campus was for us, but we found that that was increasingly difficult. So we had

to find a way to fight back. We did this through using a lot of the tools that were already available to us as activists. So we made a poster campaign, just using students' faces with the text, "I am not a terrorist." And other things like, "It's wrong that these things are being said about us," and "It's also wrong that the school is not taking any action on this." We also had videos that corresponded to the poster campaign that had students talking really frankly about what it means to be involved in Palestine solidarity activism.... We found that [the intimidation] was actually a blessing in disguise because we got a lot of support from our fellow students, and this actually kicked off a huge campaign across UC campuses of students creating bills specifically targeting Islamophobia and also mentioning that these [types of] comments about students were not okay.

There were about three or four different campuses passing anti-Islamophobia bills and also the UC Student Association passed a bill as well. That was really spectacular, and we really felt that we had the support of the community. It gave us the need to push it and think, okay now maybe we can go for divestment. Maybe this is something that can at least open up a broader conversation.

In the face of this looming intimidation, you're still pushing for divestment resolutions, you're still holding events, and you're still operating on a shoestring budget, if you have one at all. How do you assess that determination and drive to keep going, even though all these things are working against you?

I feel incredibly privileged to work with the students I work with. And the level of commitment is really driven by a belief that what we're doing is the right thing to do, and that as American citizens we have a responsibility to speak out on Palestinian rights. And I have faith in the knowledge that I'm on the right side of history here, and I think a lot of us do. And I think that when my kids ask me what I did about Palestine, I can say that I took the shit and I pushed through it, and I was able to do X.

And what does it say about the other side, the Israel lobby and the outside political groups, who are pouring so much time

and money and effort into trying to squash student Palestine solidarity activism and even criticism of Israeli policies, let alone divestment moves?

I think it's coming from a place of fear, fear of change. Whether people like it or not, change is coming.

I think that there are a lot of people who get caught up in these actions and attempts by these outside groups who wouldn't really support what's being supported. It's a battle against the truth, and you can't really win that; you can only drag it out longer. It may take a few years, it may take more than my lifetime. I hope it doesn't, but it may. But I think that you can't defeat this truth and you can't defeat history, and a change is gonna come.

Students are rising up all over the country. How does it feel to be a part of this movement at this time?

It feels great to be a part of this. When you see students coming together and forming these amazing coalitions, forming groups like MEChA—the rights of Chicano people and undocumented people in this country—it just feels really amazing. And we're doing a workshop on that, working with MEChA. And we're working with one of the groups that's challenging the prison industrial complex.

I really get chills when I think about all the students across the country working on all these different issues, and the more we work together, the stronger our movement gets. I think this is really inspired by and coming out of the civil rights movement in the U.S., but we're doing something new: we're not just talking about Black rights, or Chicano rights, or Palestinian rights, it's about everyone's rights, and speaking up for the prisoners and the impoverished, and the people in countries who are affected by U.S. policy in a negative way. The people who are suffering the most in a lot of ways....

My new motto lately has been, "Don't do anything that isn't worth getting punished for."

That's a good one to live by. What is your definition of solidarity?

For me, the question of “what is solidarity” in terms of Palestine has really changed as I’ve been involved. In the beginning, I thought I would come here and say what Israel is doing in the West Bank and Gaza is wrong. Over time, it became about understanding the Palestinian narrative and connecting it to my own struggle and saying that not only am I condemning Israel, but I’m standing here in support of the Palestinians for the demands that they’re making. It’s not about my feelings necessarily, but it’s about supporting them in their moment of need.

I think that on campus it started out as the same—it was at first condemning the way that the school is treating Palestinians or Muslims. And then it became “Your struggle is our struggle, too.” For me, that was a really beautiful moment, and it showed me how I wanted to be in solidarity with people. I had experienced solidarity in a really powerful way myself.



Creative Tactics

There is something very frustrating about planning a yearly “Israeli Apartheid Week” because it is a reminder that after 66 years of brutal occupation, we are still fighting just to tell the truth.

—Lena Ibrahim, George Mason University, Washington, D.C., January 2014



First row: Bradley Conway, Wael Elasady, Dalia Fuleihan

Second row: Andrew Dalack, Moira Geary, Rebecca Erickson

In 2005, the same year as the launch of the Palestinian-led call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS), a group of student activists at the University of Toronto launched Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW). Hazem Jamjoum, a longtime activist now working on his PhD at New York University, was one of the lead organizers and cofounders of IAW. In *Generation Palestine*, a collection of essays on the BDS movement, Jamjoum writes of the first IAW event at the University of Toronto:

One of the major successes of IAW was that the concept “Israeli apartheid” began to circulate as a subject worthy of discussion and debate, particularly through the media coverage of the event that

extended to corporate media beyond the confines of Canada.¹

In just a short amount of time, Israeli Apartheid Week spread globally. Organizers began to hold annual events in cities across North America, Latin America, Europe, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. In 2013, more than 100 cities across the world organized IAW events intending to educate students and the wider community about the situation in Palestine, Israeli violations of international law, and the BDS movement.

Whereas just a decade ago, dialogue groups were lauded as a pathway to “peace” between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, student groups are now rejecting this concept—labeling it as normalization—and having in-depth discussions about using the correct language, based on international legal definitions, when talking about Israel’s policies in Palestine. Students I spoke with also objected to the mainstream discourse around Israel’s occupation: that the situation is one of “complicated issues,” that the occupation is based on “an intractable conflict” or that the problem can be solved with “dialogue” (as though it were all just a big misunderstanding between two peoples). Normalization efforts tend to portray the entire issue as one of equal burden held by both Israel and the Palestinians, rather than a wholly unequal situation in which a U.S.-supported government with an occupying military force rules over the displaced, confined, excluded, and occupied.

Just as the ongoing, unending U.S.-brokered “peace process” between Israel and the Palestinians is meant to replace international law rather than implement it (as journalist and author Ben White² has so sharply said), activists see neutral dialogue groups as ways to pacify legitimate opposition to Israel’s ongoing violations of human rights.

Tareq Radi, an energetic and articulate student at George Mason University and an activist with the on-campus Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) group, told me on a chilly winter evening in Washington, D.C. that SAIA members have been trying to push the strategy of “anti-normalization” on campus. “Most importantly, my vision is to get people to stop believing in the sham of a ‘two-state’ solution,” he said, explaining that the two-state solution—where Palestinian refugees are still denied their right of return, and Israel is allowed

to continue its segregationist policies—is part of the normalization ideology:

Normalization is the idea that you can work within this framework of coexisting before the occupation is over. We need to talk about *co-resistance* versus coexistence. Some students don't understand—they think we can just sit together and eat hummus and allow this perpetuation of this idea of two equals fighting over land—we just need to get to know each other. I want people to start understanding that using the anti-normalization strategy is not a racist strategy; it's a political strategy. We're not sanctioning individuals, although individuals are not immune to being sanctioned if they're complicit and complacent with these institutions that we're opposing.

Students on college campuses have no choice but to challenge head-on the prevalent, favorable bias toward Israel in our media and national politics. To help educate their campus cohorts, student Palestine solidarity groups are creating new and inventive ways of advocacy and direct action, taking their cues from protest movements and liberation struggles of their parents' and grandparents' generations. But they are also moving beyond strictly educational goals, broadening the scope of Palestine activism to one of concrete, political organizing with the intention of helping to implement lasting justice in Palestine. In the next chapter, I'll look more closely at the BDS movement on campuses. But first, I asked students across the country which kinds of creative actions they've been most proud of.

Mock funerals, mock evictions

Sarah Radi is a biochemistry major at UC–Riverside and the daughter of a prominent Palestinian sheikh in the southern California Muslim community. A passionate activist with a quick, dry wit, Radi's tone quieted when she told me about the mock funeral procession she took part in at the time of Israel's November 2012 attacks on the Gaza Strip. They worked with students in the Engineering department to construct two full-sized wooden coffins, and a smaller one to represent the children who were killed in the assault. They covered the coffins in Palestinian flags. Everyone wore black.

“We carried the coffins around on campus,” Radi recounted. “We stopped at the bell tower, where we had people give speeches on behalf of Palestine, on behalf of the children, and on behalf of Gaza. Some people stopped walking with us and gave impromptu speeches—these people were not associated with Palestine whatsoever, and just realized that they had to make a difference as well. We really touched a lot of people that day.”

Mock funerals such as the one Radi helped organize are moving, poignant actions meant to humanize and expose—on a visceral level—the impact of Israel’s human rights violations. In the same vein, activists have also used paper and ink to evoke emotional responses from fellow students. For the last six decades, Israeli forces have destroyed tens of thousands of Palestinian homes across the occupied territories and inside present-day Israel itself, sometimes handing out eviction notices that give families merely days, or even hours, to evacuate before bulldozers come to tear a home down.

Especially in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the rampant demolitions of Palestinian homes is concurrent with the enormous expansion of Jewish-only settlements. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions reported that in 2012 alone, 600 Palestinian homes and structures (such as sheds and livestock pens) were destroyed by Israeli forces, leaving nearly 900 people—more than half of them children—homeless.³

In response to these shocking policies, student activists across the U.S. have printed and distributed mock eviction notices under doors in student housing units, reaching potentially thousands of students at once. The mock eviction notices are sometimes printed on university letterhead, with a shrill warning to the students that they are being evicted from their dormitory room and must leave within a certain amount of time before the building is demolished.

The flyer then points out that while this is a mock notice, Palestinian families receive real eviction orders on a regular basis. The notices often list the number of homes destroyed over a certain period of time and call students who care about human rights to action, pointing out that their tuition and faculty pensions could be invested in corporations which profit from these violations half a world away. In order to make it even more

clear that this is a political action, the mock eviction flyers say at the bottom that this is *not* an official notice and that no one will actually be evicted from their university housing unit—something that every college student should be able to clearly decipher.

These notices are powerful acts of political education—so powerful that, as we will see in the next chapter, student groups have been punished in various ways by university administrations, under pressure from outside political groups, who would rather this kind of information not be exposed.

Mock walls

Hassan Abdinur, a dedicated activist with an easy smile, told me that at San Diego State University he witnessed students' shock at the sight of a mock wall on campus meant to evoke Israel's wall in the occupied West Bank. The wall was constructed and organized by the university's SJP chapter. Like many other mock walls that students build across the United States, these walls can be 10 to 15 feet high, made of wood and cardboard, and painted with facts and statistics about restrictions on Palestinian movement and education; discriminatory water, housing, and land rights; and the names of Palestinian children, women, and men killed by the Israeli army.

"I remember seeing the apartheid wall during my freshman year," Abdinur told me. "The main question from students that was brought up was, 'I didn't know this was going on. I didn't know it was a real thing.' Seeing students being educated about what's going on was enlightening, and I think in itself inspired me to move ahead and pursue activism."

Abdinur added that tensions rise at his university whenever there is an action such as the mock wall. During Israeli Apartheid Week in 2013, Abdinur said that a member of a Jewish fraternity tried to physically assault members of SJP, and tried to push the mock wall down. "He tried to create problems," he said, understating the violence of the situation. Abdinur noted the double standard that is tacitly applied by the administration toward such harassment. He said that if it were a member of a Muslim student group or SJP trying to physically assault people and destroy something Jewish students constructed on campus, it

would have been a completely different situation. “A student would have been suspended.”



Mock apartheid wall at Columbia. (Courtesy of Columbia SJP)

In New Mexico and Arizona, students have been organizing mock walls in collaboration with local indigenous and Chicano/a student groups. The two communities work together to highlight the common struggles around border, migration, and freedom of movement issues. Bradley Conway, a student of earth and planetary sciences at the University of New Mexico, told me that he wants to be a hydrologist and became involved in Palestine solidarity activism through broader antiwar organizing in Albuquerque. He was especially proud of the mock wall that University of New Mexico’s SJP organized in 2011.

Conway said that SJP collaborated with more than 20 student organizations on campus to build and host the mock wall. “It was about eight feet tall and about 50 feet long, and it represented both the U.S.-Mexico border and the border in the West Bank,” he said. “It also represented barriers to social justice in the lives of other individuals on campus. We all talked about borders and started a conversation about borders, politics, and militarization.”



Mock wall construction, University of Arizona. (Courtesy UA SJP)

Generally, Conway explained, the response from the student body was positive. “It was a space for people to sit and eat lunch, and talk about local and global issues affecting all of us. We didn’t have too many hecklers.” He added that it built community and inspired a social justice group alliance across UNM’s campus.

Along with Conway, I met Julie Jaynes, an eloquent English and philosophy graduate of UNM and a longtime antiwar activist in her community. Jaynes told me that the mock wall was an important opportunity for expanding the discussion about borders and barriers, indigenous rights, and migrant justice. “It was a canvas,” she said. “Some professors brought their classes to see it and talk about what it represents. It’s essential to us to continue to make the connections: what’s happening with immigration and how can we talk about Palestine and immigration policy in our own state?” Jaynes added, adamantly, “We really have to work to make our activism relevant...because it’s just not going to work otherwise.”

Ehab Tamimi, a PhD student in biomedical engineering, is from the city of al-Khalil, also known as Hebron, in the south of

the occupied West Bank. He's lived between Tucson and Hebron his whole life. This struck me as a significant opportunity to talk with Tamimi about the challenges he's faced as an Arab American in the state of Arizona, where racial profiling and anti-immigrant laws have been passed, *and* as a Palestinian under Israel's racist occupation. In Hebron specifically, several hundred virulently right-wing Jewish settlers have taken over Palestinian property and homes inside the city itself, while being protected by legions of Israeli soldiers and police. During the past 20 years, the settlers have routinely evicted Palestinian families from the Old City, occupying the top floors of homes and apartment buildings, and have shot, attacked, and stoned Palestinians at whim. Settlers have also tossed garbage, feces, car batteries, and toxic substances onto the heads of Palestinians below with such regularity that the municipality has had to cover the open-roofed ancient alleyways with metal grates.

In 1994, a Brooklyn-born, extremist Israeli settler named Baruch Goldstein, wearing an Israeli army uniform, walked into Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque during crowded Friday prayers and opened fire. He killed 29 Palestinians and wounded more than a hundred before he was tackled and beaten to death by surviving bystanders. Goldstein's gravesite inside the Kiryat Arba settlement in Hebron has become a shrine to extremist right-wing Israelis, notably followers of Meir Kahane, the Israeli settler who founded the Kach Party, of which Goldstein was an active member. Kach is so extremist and pro-violence against non-Jews that it has been deemed a "terrorist organization" even by Israel and the United States.

Hebron is a microcosm of all the viciousness of Israel's racist, settler-colonial, and dehumanizing policies against Palestinians. Tamimi talked passionately about his involvement with restarting SJP on the University of Arizona campus after it had faded several years before. However, he sounded worn down by the apathy both on campus and at home in Palestine:

For me, I had always had the idea to create a map. We got people together, we restarted SJP, and we discussed what we were going to do. I felt that it was easier to organize people around a project rather than a concept. I wanted to build a 24-foot-high wall on the mall.

We raised \$5,000. We had faculty members who donated to the project. I wrote a proposal, and we sent it out to community members, and they donated funds as well. We used half of what we raised for the scaffolding and construction of the wall. We had a lot of people organizing around this project.

It all came down to the day that we were going to put it up on the mall. We came back the next day and the whole thing had fallen down, but we re-engineered it and it was up for about a week. After that, we decided to take the map idea and created a huge map to scale on the mall. It showed Areas A, B, and C [in the West Bank], where the settlements were, and population distribution. It was about 40 feet long, and we had classes coming out and observing it. And even the Hillel people came out and they had to admit that it was accurate. But no one covered it in the media.

After that, SJP kind of fell apart; some people stopped caring. It wasn't easy to get people to do things anymore. I got really hopeless. And when I went back to Palestine in 2010 and 2011, I realized that the apathy that existed there encouraged the apathy to exist here.

With the legislated banning of all ethnic studies programs at public schools across the state, and the passing of a law that allows police officers to check immigration status of any person of color and have them deported, quickly, Arizona has become a challenging state to grow solidarity activism—on all issues—on campus.

Walking out

A tactic of pro-Israel lobby groups and Israel-aligned student organizations on campus is to bring Israeli soldiers and officials to universities to talk about the role of the Israeli army, and to propagandize and advocate for Israel's mutual political and military interests with the United States.

In October 2009, student activists at the University of Kentucky in Lexington disrupted an on-campus speech by Ehud

Olmert—who was then the prime minister of Israel and had ordered the Operation Cast Lead attacks on Gaza in the winter of 2008–9. The next day, activists disrupted and shut down Olmert’s speech at the University of Chicago. Though interrupting or disrupting speeches or events is a protected form of free speech, different universities have varying degrees of tolerance for political protest and, as we will see in later chapters, some have taken harsh disciplinary measures against students who have been involved in Palestine-related protests.

Writing for the *Electronic Intifada*, my colleague Maureen Clare Murphy reported that nearly a dozen community organizations helped mobilize activists to challenge Olmert during his speech, including the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Network, the U.S. Palestine Solidarity Network, the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, and SJP chapters at various Chicagoland universities.⁴

Murphy reported that while more than a hundred activists protested outside the lecture hall, others interrupted Olmert’s speech inside. Demonstrators read off the names of Palestinian children killed during Operation Cast Lead, and “shouted that it was unacceptable that the war crimes suspect be invited to speak at a Chicago university when his army destroyed a university in Gaza.” She added:

Towards the end of the lecture, Olmert put his hand over his brow and squinted to search out the source of the shout, “There’s no discussion with a war criminal—the only discussion you should be having is in court!” That call was made by Ream Qato, who graduated from the university in 2007, and added, “You belong in the Hague!” Qato told the *Electronic Intifada* that [the] protest “Set the stage for University of Chicago students and students in the Chicago area...no one should be afraid of speaking out against someone.” She added that the demonstration was significant because “The Palestinian community [in Chicago] for the first time went to a university campus to protest.”⁵

Murphy further noted that these kinds of demonstrations “are part of a wave of notched-up dissent toward Israeli officials implicated in war crimes and racist policy. In 2003, former Israeli

[politician] Natan Sharansky was greeted with a pie in the face by an activist at Rutgers University in New Jersey. [In 2008], at [Britain's] Oxford University, a speech by Israeli President Shimon Peres was drowned out by protesters outside while students inside the hall disrupted his talk.”⁶ Even though recording devices were banned, the *Electronic Intifada* was able to secretly record video of the protest from inside the hall. The footage spread like wildfire across social media and activism groups worldwide.

This surge in direct action against Israeli soldiers and official representatives of the state continued to inspire similar protests across the United States and Europe, especially on college campuses. Hassan Abdinur at San Diego State University told me that he was particularly proud of a walk-out action he was part of when Israeli soldiers came to his campus. “The cochair of SJP approached the group and said that we’re not going to stand for individuals who represent this war machine, this death machine, to come to our campus and act like it’s all cool.”

Abdinur explained that a wide range of students from various backgrounds and communities joined the action. When the soldiers began speaking proudly and nostalgically about their time in the army, the protesters in the lecture hall—who were all wearing zippered sweatshirts and had tape over their mouths to symbolize the silencing of Palestinian voices—unzipped their sweatshirts at the same time. Then they all stood up, revealing messages of dissent tacked to their t-shirts underneath, and walked out silently.

“There was literally no one else left in the room,” Abdinur said, his smile broadening. “The funny thing was, as we walked out, the Israeli soldiers said that we—the students who were walking out—were not supporting dialogue, that this is not the way to go about doing things. But at the end of the day, you being a soldier excludes you from even talking about this. You being part of this [system of oppression] excludes you from talking even remotely about justice or peace. It was the coolest thing I’ve done as a member of SJP. My heart was beating out of my chest. It’s one of the memories I keep.”

Across the country at George Mason University, student Lena Ibrahim told me that in an academic setting, “Israel always [finds] a place to lead the ignorant and [sends] Israeli soldiers to

lead propaganda discussions.” An astute and spirited young Palestinian-American woman who studies global affairs, Ibrahim explained that although she’s only been in college two years, she has already realized that students’ ability to take action against the propagandizing of a foreign military on a U.S. campus is important.

Reflecting upon a recent walk-out action that Students Against Israeli Apartheid organized against an Israeli official who came to speak at George Mason, she said that the walk-outs “make a symbolic statement; but it ultimately changes the discourse—because who’s left in the room are the [Israel Student Association] students, who don’t want to change their minds, and nobody else. And the people who are there, they see everybody walk out and they realize that they need to find out what’s going on, why people are walking out.”

Holding conferences, educating administrations

Zena Ozeir, who graduated from Boston University with degrees in international relations and Arabic, won an Emerging Leader Award from the National Network of Arab American Communities. A devoted activist and organizer, Ozeir recently interned for six months at the BADIL Center for Residency and Refugee Rights, an important Palestinian rights group based in Bethlehem in the West Bank.

Ozeir told me that she experienced a lot of pushback by Israel advocacy groups in the first couple of years of her activist work at Boston University. When tabling during Israeli Apartheid Week, Ozeir said that she and SJP activists would face aggression and harassment. BU Students for Israel began planning what they called “Israel Peace Week,” scheduled for the week before Israeli Apartheid Week launched on campus. Ozeir explained:

They’d table, give out a lot of free stuff and perpetuate a lot of propaganda, saying that Israel is a peace-loving state. So we try our best to table that week as well, and try to counter that. We have our own literature to pass out to people who are taking the free stuff from Students for Israel.

They definitely feel very threatened by SJP's existence on the campus, and a lot of times people would go to the administration and ask for us not to be allowed to table. We faced a lot of trouble and pressure from the administration when we'd do our wall demonstrations. In 2011, we did a wall demonstration and Students for Israel held a counter-demonstration in which they were on the plaza, and any time we had asked to be on the plaza, we were never allowed. We were always met with more administrative repression than other student groups were.

In the spring of 2013, Ozeir and other SJP members organized the Right of Return Conference, which discussed the Palestinian refugees' right of return to homes they were expelled from by Israeli forces. She said that the conference "received a lot of pushback from Zionists who called the administration in an effort to stop the conference from happening." SJP told the dean of students that they expected the administration to support them as a student organization with the right to express themselves freely. One week before the conference, the dean approached Ozeir and asked for a meeting. Ozeir said she was initially worried that the administration had succumbed to outside pressure and that the conference would be canceled. Explaining that the university had been fielding a lot of complaints and threats, the dean said that the administration had nevertheless agreed to make sure the event went on as planned—and even offered to provide extra security at no cost to SJP.

Afterwards, "the administration thought it was a really well-done conference, and the dean said he was impressed," Ozeir said. "But I thought it was important to frame this event well beforehand as an issue of free speech, that it was a student organization and not a university department heading it or funding it. It was well within our rights to hold the conference." Through careful planning and by developing a relationship with a sympathetic dean, Ozeir said that students managed to ensure that SJP events at BU are protected as free speech. Indeed, at a time when so many administrations are coming down hard on students—especially in Boston and the wider East Coast region—building strategies to deal with an aggressive opposition and forging alliances with the administration are critical tactics.



Interview: Shirien Damra

Shirien Damra, a graduate of DePaul University in Chicago with a master's degree in sociology, is a national organizing member of SJP. Although we were online acquaintances for years, I was excited to finally meet Damra face-to-face for the first time in Detroit in 2013. Damra's unflappable commitment to Palestine activism and broader anti-racist work have led her to become a mentor to hundreds of SJP activists across the country, but especially in Chicago.



Damra told me that even though she came from a Palestinian family and was politically aware at a young age, she wasn't interested in Palestine solidarity activism until she got to college. During the onset of the second intifada in 2000, Damra said that the broadcasted images and news reports of brutality and violence really affected her on a deep level.

Her family are Palestinians from Ramle (near Tel Aviv) and Jerusalem, but her mother and father grew up in Jordan as refugees before moving to Chicago. She had never been to Palestine, but her curiosity about the reality on the ground grew during high school and peaked when she got to college.

Damra said that the first Chicago-area SJP chapter was founded at DePaul in the mid-2000s. Since then, six other SJP chapters have opened up across Chicagoland universities. Damra was instrumental in the 2011 DePaul campaign to

boycott Sabra hummus (whose parent company supports two extremely violent brigades of the Israeli army).

I asked her to begin by talking about what she credits to the growth of SJP, and what the role of the National SJP organization has been so far.

I think each SJP is definitely autonomous. For National SJP, we started with different SJP-ers across the country seeing each other at different sorts of social justice conferences, and we would talk and we were like, “We should start our own conference!”

So we got together, started e-mailing each other, had conference calls, and it started growing from there. We were very intentional that we didn’t want a top-down organization; we knew that this whole National SJP thing is supposed to be a network so that more SJPs could be more aware of each other and then grow. And for people to be able to connect with each other.

It’s helped a lot with facilitating regional structures, as well. For example, with the SJP West coalition, a lot of them met each other at the SJP National Conference; and same thing happened with the Florida schools.

The coordination between Chicago schools was on and off; it was kind of weak—but when it came to the National SJP Conference, a lot of SJPs in Chicago went together and formed a bond. They went together and came back and said, “You know what, we should do stuff in Chicago together more. We should coordinate more.” So I guess the whole purpose of National SJP is to coordinate better—not necessarily to have a central place from which to give orders, or to say we are the governing body and you have to listen to us. We don’t like that at all; we’re not about that kind of thing.

It’s actually always been a dream of mine to see all these SJPs working together. It really is kind of shocking to me still to see how much it’s grown.

Let’s talk a little bit about the general dynamic between Palestine solidarity organizations on campus and the forces against them—local and national and international Israeli

lobby groups, administrations like at the University of California, for example, and community backlash. How would you assess the moment that students working for justice in Palestine on campus are in right now? What are they facing?

Well, from my personal experience at DePaul, we had our boycott Sabra [hummus] campaign, and you could totally see how the opposition plays out. We actually made a lot of publicity, a lot of local news and stuff like that. If you look at the local news footage of the Sabra boycott campaign at DePaul, it was so interesting because it said a lot—it showed SJP students grassroots campaigning on the one hand, and on the other hand they showed officials with the Jewish Federations of North America (a national coalition which has a large pro-Israel advocacy wing) in suits representing the other side.

So it showed that the opposition is not as strong. I think, generally speaking, the opposition is powerful, but they're not students. And I think SJP has that grassroots student flavor to it that the opposition doesn't have. They have the money, the power, the media connections, all that stuff, but they don't have the personal touch that students have with each other.

We succeeded in getting way more votes in favor of boycotting Sabra than the opposition on campus, mostly because we have the truth on our side. Of those students who have no idea about Palestine, once you've explained what you're doing and what you're campaigning for, naturally most people are like, "Yeah, I'm for that." So the other side definitely has more power in every way, but not in the people power way, which is more important.

What does it say about the nature of this movement that the foreign ministry of a state is pouring millions of dollars into trying to stop it, and then we have Israeli officials saying that U.S. student activism is a huge threat to the state of Israel? You have this massive entity fighting against students who have little to no resources.

They use money for greenwashing,¹ pinkwashing.² They also pay students, they pay Black student leaders to come to the AIPAC conference [the annual AIPAC Policy Conference].

That basically means they have to *pay* for superficial connections and networking.

Israel's occupation and apartheid are all racist policies, and no one's going to connect with that unless they're being paid or something. And I think the reason why students scare them is because we're making these connections with other groups: we're connecting with MEChA; we're connecting with other grassroots organizations that are not Palestine-related but have a lot of things in common with us.

As a Palestinian woman, how does it personally make you feel to see so many students from so many backgrounds all over this country and all over this world, standing up for Palestine and taking real risks to do so?

I think it's amazing. At the National SJP conference in 2010, I was so amazed at seeing every background of people there, because these people don't have any connection to Palestine—their family wasn't from there, they have no personal connection, but they still feel a connection because maybe they themselves have experienced another struggle and they see the connections between struggles.

So it's really cool seeing all these different people coming into the movement, and it just goes to show that it's not just a Palestinian-Israeli issue. It's a human issue.

What's the most important advice you can give to students who want to get involved in Palestine solidarity organizing on campus but who may be intimidated by how much effort it takes just to get some hummus pulled off a shelf in the cafeteria (weeks and months of organizing)? Or who may be afraid of facing attacks from large Zionist organizations. Having a record of your activism online could be detrimental to getting a job after college, for example. What do you say to those students?

First of all, there's so much support everywhere. National SJP has created this network of students where if something happens to you—like how the students at Florida Atlantic University are facing discrimination³—students in National SJP will be there to send out a statement against the repression

that's going on. Also, there's a network of lawyers who are dedicated just to student activism around Palestine. There are also many organizations out there to give you resources and support.

So I would say not to get intimidated because I know it's hard, it's definitely a struggle, but the reward is so much better. The résumé thing—I don't know if this is important or not—but organizing in SJP gives you so many different skill sets that you wouldn't get if you weren't a part of it. You're going to know how to run a campaign, you're going to know how to run events properly. You're going to know outreach, you're going to know legal advocacy, you're going to learn so much as a Palestine solidarity activist. Those things are very important skills to put on a résumé. Personally, I would hire you.

Is there anything else you really want to say about the work and where you think it's headed right now? Or how it feels to be part of this movement?

It feels awesome. Every time I'm in a room with a bunch of student activists, I feel empowered, because this movement is truly a movement where campuses and students are the powerhouses of it, and it's youth-led.



The Campus as a Battleground

Why can't we create our own discourse and push the bar?

—Taher Herzallah, Irvine 11 member



First row: Max Geller, Jamie Gerber, Sofie Ghitman

Second row: Amanda Ghannam, Shafeka Hashash, Carlos Guzman

On February 8, 2010, Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to the United States at the time, gave a speech at the University of California–Irvine defending Operation Cast Lead. During the speech, 10 student activists nonviolently confronted Oren with prepared protest statements. They stood up and challenged Oren’s justification of Israel’s attacks on Gaza the previous year, which killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, as well as the state’s ongoing human rights violations.

“Propagating murder is not an expression of free speech,” shouted one student before police escorted him out of the room. Another student stood up and stated, “You, sir, are an accomplice to genocide,” before he, too, was led away. After all 10 students had spoken, and all 10 had been escorted out of the auditorium

by police officers, they were frisked, arrested, and detained. Audience members in support of Oren jeered and yelled epithets at the protesters as they delivered their messages.

Following the disruptions, Oren was able to continue his speech for approximately 30 minutes while other solidarity activists outside of the hall gathered in a peaceful demonstration. Another student who was part of the protest, but who did not stand and speak out inside the auditorium, was also detained and arrested by a police officer for unspecified reasons. Those who were arrested became known as the Irvine 11. Eight of the students were attending the Irvine campus, and three were from the nearby University of California–Riverside. Many were also members of the Muslim Student Union at Irvine, and months after the protest, the entire union was suspended by university officials for an academic quarter. This punishment is usually reserved for campus groups involved with alcohol violations or “hazing,” a series of physically abusive fraternity initiation practices. In addition to the suspension, the Muslim Student Union was placed on a two-year probation, which meant that the organization remained under acute scrutiny by the university administration. But further punishment of the students’ protest action was sought by political forces well outside the campus, sending shockwaves through U.S. activist and student circles.

Orange County district attorney Tony Rackauckas took it upon himself to begin a year’s worth of investigations against the Irvine 11, including subpoenaing e-mails and going door-to-door to get testimonies from witnesses. The prosecution claimed that the Irvine 11 “shut down” Oren’s speech, infringing on his right to free speech. Rackauckas even empaneled a grand jury, and on February 4, 2011—nearly one year later—the district attorney’s office decided it would file misdemeanor criminal charges against the students who disrupted Oren’s speech. Rackauckas charged every student arrested that day with one count of both conspiracy to disturb a meeting and the disturbance of a meeting.

Notably, a photograph surfaced showing that, later in the evening, after his speech, Oren was with L.A. Laker Kobe Bryant at the Staples Center, where Oren had VIP tickets courtesy of the Israeli Consulate in Los Angeles.¹ Though he was able to finish the main portion of his planned speech, even with the interruptions by the students, Oren may have opted out of doing a

question and answer session simply because he had to race back up to Los Angeles from Orange County during rush hour in time for the basketball game to begin. As Max Blumenthal reported for the *Electronic Intifada*, “Oren probably viewed a question and answer session with Israel’s most devoted Los Angeles-area supporters as a dangerous diversion from the good times that awaited him courtside.” The prosecution’s insistence that Oren’s speech was “shut down” looked less and less plausible. However, the judge refused to let the jury see the photograph during the trial.

Each student, if charged and convicted, faced sentences that included up to six months in jail. Similar nonviolent disruptions of speeches by Israeli officials have taken place across the United States and in Europe, both on college campuses and in public venues, in places such as Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Scotland. No known legal action was taken against protesters in these cases.²

In September 2011, a year and a half after the original protest, the 10 students who stood up and challenged Oren found themselves in court, where I reported for nearly two weeks during the hearings and trial.³ (The 11th student, who was arbitrarily grabbed and arrested by police even though he did not participate in the vocal protest, was given community service before the trial began.) It was difficult to understand why the district attorney’s office would divert significant resources and energy to this case, including tapping the county’s lead attorney for their homicide unit to take on the prosecution of these students. Nor was it always easy to understand the prosecution’s approach. Months into the investigation, the judge overseeing the case removed the main investigator and several deputies from the prosecution team because of their use of confidential documents and communications between the students and their defense lawyers—a shocking breach of basic legal regulations—to build their case.

There was a palpable feeling of shock during the last day of the trial when the jury returned two guilty verdicts for every defendant. The 10 students were ultimately convicted of “disrupting a public meeting” and “conspiracy to disrupt a public meeting” under a rarely used California penal code that hadn’t been brought up in court since the 1970s. When the verdicts were

read by the court clerk, some people immediately burst into tears, and others stood up and walked out. From the back of the packed courtroom, one person shouted, “There is no justice.”

The judge announced that although the jury returned guilty verdicts, he would not be sending the students to jail. He said that the defendants had no prior records, were productive members of their community, and acted on their beliefs, so jail time would be “inappropriate.” He ordered the students to serve 56 hours of community service at a non-profit organization, and handed out mild, 3-year probations.

Outside the courthouse, in the students’ first public address since the trial began, Irvine 11 member Taher Herzallah implored fellow activists to stand strong. “My message is to all those activists who have been watching this story closely,” he said. “All of those who speak truth to power, and all of those who challenge the status quo. Do not let this case deter you. Do not let this case falter your activism. Make this the platform to intensify activism on the Palestine issue in this country.”

In the fall semester of 2012, about a year after the Irvine 11 convictions, the student senate at the University of California at Irvine passed—and upheld—a divestment resolution calling for the university to pull its investments in U.S. companies which profit from Israel’s occupation. For the students, it was a major victory against intimidation. And it showed other student groups that Irvine’s Palestine solidarity activists hadn’t acquiesced; they would not be silenced.

I asked Yazeed Ibrahim, who studied as an undergrad at Irvine during the time of the investigation and trial, to describe what kind of ripple effect the Irvine 11 investigation had on students there, especially on those involved in social justice organizing and Palestine solidarity activism. “On one side, it scared a lot of students, especially freshmen,” he said. However, he added, “We came back stronger. We brought back new tactics. We came back with a divestment resolution that passed unanimously. Our Palestine awareness activism and our Israeli Apartheid Week is stronger than ever.”

In March 2014, after the students had completed their community service, lawyers for the Irvine 11 filed appeals to overturn the convictions.

I spoke with Reem Salahi, one of the lawyers for the Irvine 11, for an article I wrote for the *Electronic Intifada* before the case went to trial.⁴ She said that the district attorney's office employed selective, discriminatory prosecution in this case, and that the county was trying to criminalize the students' acts of dissent. Salahi told me the following statements, which appear in the article:

If the students had done property damage, if they had gotten violent, then I could see some sort of justification for involving the criminal justice system. But they did not commit violence, they did not commit property damage. These students stood up and said a few statements. They did anything but resist arrest—they walked over to the police and turned themselves in. I can't say that [the DA's actions are] politically-motivated. But it clearly appears that there's something else going on. And they're preying on some of the weakest elements of society. They're preying on youth, on students, and unfortunately, in a post-9/11 world, they're preying on Muslims who at this point are seen as a suspect [group].

Using civil rights law to shut down free speech

The Irvine 11 case was emblematic of a growing number of attempts by local governments, pro-Israel lobby groups, and the Israeli government to repress Palestine solidarity activism in the United States, especially activism taking place on campuses. Moreover, the use of legal machinations and administration repression that characterized this case was not unusual.

Several years ago, the Reut Institute, an Israeli governmental think tank, published its recommendations on combating the expanding BDS movement and growing support for Palestinian rights, especially on college campuses. It referred to supporters of equality and justice for Palestinians as “delegitimizers,” and notoriously called on Israeli agencies to “sabotage” and “attack” the movement. The institute also claimed that the criminal case against the Irvine 11 was an “achievement,” and thanked “the Jewish Community of Orange County” for playing an “important role in bringing about this outcome.”⁵

But, for years beforehand, anti-Palestinian advocacy groups with close ties to the Israeli government had attempted to sabotage and attack critics of Israeli policy by going directly to the U.S. federal government. With guidance from the Zionist Organization of America and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the United States' Department of Education announced in 2004—and reiterated the announcement in 2010—that it was

expanding its interpretation of a section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in federally funded programs, including public universities, on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Under the new interpretation, pro-Israel lobby groups would attempt to legally curb Palestine solidarity activism and criticism of Israel by claiming it violated Jewish students' civil rights.

A key figure behind the new interpretation of Title VI was Kenneth Marcus, who currently leads the Louis D. Brandeis Center, a pro-Israel legal organization that pursues claims of “campus anti-Semitism” and “anti-Israelism on university campuses.”⁶ In his previous capacity as the Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education, Marcus issued a policy document in 2004 that changed the department's interpretation of Title VI to extend coverage to religious groups who share “perceived...ethnic characteristics” or “ancestral ties”⁷—thus purportedly allowing Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs to sue or file complaints against universities if they violate their rights under Title VI.

Marcus' efforts to make the law more inclusive and broad-based—a benign and welcome policy in theory—paved the way for Israel-aligned groups to now claim that Jewish students (a group with shared “ethnic characteristics”) were facing discrimination and harassment due to criticism of Israel on campuses, whether in the form of activism or discussions in the classroom. In essence, this was an attempt to treat new, overly-broad definitions by pro-Israel groups of the “new anti-Semitism” as the basis for identifying civil rights violations.

Following the 2004 policy change, a complaint was immediately filed under Title VI against the University of California–Irvine by the Zionist Organization of America. The ZOA claimed the university tolerated an environment of “harassment, intimidation and discrimination” against Jewish students.⁸ However, after the 2010 filing, the list had grown to include other universities, including the University of California–Berkeley, the University of California–Santa Cruz, and Rutgers University in New Jersey. And Zionist groups were not just filing complaints with the Department of Education, but also regularly threatening to do so if other university administrations did not curb Palestine solidarity activism on campuses.

This conflation of Judaism with Israel and Israeli policies—and, therefore, anti-Semitism with criticism of such policies—falsely and dangerously presents the Jewish people as a monolithic entity incapable of and disinterested in dissenting points of view. If one analyzes this point of view further, one might infer that all Jewish people are therefore also responsible for and supportive of Israel’s crimes of ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and racial discrimination. Ironically, this assertion that Jews make up a homogenous community aligned in full nationalist force with the state of Israel is not just offensive to non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews, but can easily be described as anti-Semitic itself.

Using civil rights law to curb dissent

In 2011, Zionist students filed a lawsuit against the University of California–Berkeley, accusing the administration of failing to protect Jewish students in the face of a “hostile atmosphere” and “harassment.” The suit had become known as the Felber lawsuit, named after the main plaintiff who filed the lawsuit—a Zionist student named Jessica Felber, who was a leader in the right-wing campus group Tikvah. It alleged that the university created a hostile atmosphere against Jewish students by tolerating the “development of a dangerous anti-Semitic climate on its campuses.”⁹

The plaintiffs claimed that the university failed to “adopt and implement policies, regulations, and student organizations[’] procedures to prevent threats, intimidation, and harassment by the anti-Semitic/anti-Israel SJP, MSA [Muslim Students Association] and MSU [Muslim Student Union] all of which threatens and endangers the health and safety of University of California’s Jewish students.”

The plaintiffs also alleged that “the more publicly activist SJP may be understood as the militant arm of the outwardly benevolent MSA” and adds that SJP, the Muslim Student Association, and the Muslim Student Union, help to “fund terrorism” and have ties to “terrorist groups including Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.” A central complaint in the lawsuit was that symbolic protest actions during the SJP-organized Israeli Apartheid Week along with the creation of a mock Israeli checkpoint on campus, created a “hostile environment” towards

Jewish students (notwithstanding the fact that Berkeley's SJP is a multicultural, multi-faith group that includes many Jewish students among its members).

The legal claim also, rather audaciously, compared the climate on Berkeley's campus to that of Germany under the Holocaust, an allegation that drew specific ire from Jewish students involved in Palestine solidarity work and actual families of survivors of the Holocaust.

Citing the First Amendment, the California judge threw out the lawsuit and ordered a settlement. However, undaunted, Felber's lawyers re-filed the claim under a Title VI complaint. For about a year, the Department of Education held open an investigation into the Berkeley campus based on Felber's complaint, creating a cloud over student activists who feared that they could be litigated against and punished by the administration if the lawsuit didn't result in their favor.

In August 2013, after years of the complaints sitting on the desks of Department of Education administrators, the U.S. government closed the books on three major Title VI claims filed against the University of California at Irvine, Santa Cruz, and Berkeley.¹⁰

Zionist groups indicated that they would begin appealing the Title VI dismissals, but learning that the complaints were thrown out was an enormous relief to student Palestine solidarity activists and their legal advocates in California.

Censorship from administrations

While Israel-aligned groups attempt to censor debate on U.S. campuses around Israel's policies, pursuing the matter outside of administrative jurisdiction, some university administrations are bowing to pressure from these outside groups and are censoring student activism themselves.

Students have organized "walk-out" protests when Israeli soldiers come to speak—a nonviolent, usually silent action, frequently replicated in numerous U.S. and European colleges. When Israeli soldiers begin speaking, protesters usually stand up, holding signs with the names of victims of Israeli attacks and massacres, and walk out. In some protests, the auditorium or

lecture hall has been left almost empty after such actions—a powerful refutation of Israeli policy. These walk-outs are a way to tell soldiers and pro-Israel groups who organize the events that students won't accept whitewashing of Israel's crimes.

In April 2013, activists with Northeastern University's SJP chapter organized a nonviolent, silent walk-out during an event in which Israeli soldiers were brought to campus to speak. Writing in the *Electronic Intifada* a few months later, Northeastern student Tori Porell said the walk-out tactic “struck a balance between respecting the free speech rights of the presenters and expressing our abhorrence that they were being hosted at our university. The Northeastern administration knew of our plans to protest in advance and we agreed there would be no picket signs or vocal disruptions.”¹¹

One student stood and stated, “The IDF [Israeli army] are war criminals and are not welcome on our campus.” Then the other student activists, wearing t-shirts with the names of children killed by the Israeli army, walked out chanting “Free, free, Palestine.” The auditorium was left halfempty, and the rest of the event proceeded as planned, Porell wrote.¹²

However, Porell explained in the same article, the Northeastern administration immediately sent a letter to the SJP members saying that their group was “under investigation,” and forced them to cancel a planned event with a Palestinian historian and analyst. One week later, SJP was told they had “failed to comply with directions of staff” and that they had violated the university demonstration policy. An administrative hearing was scheduled, and SJP was ultimately found “responsible” for the “violations” of demonstration policy. They were put on administrative probation and told they were mandated to sign a “civility statement” in order to remain as an official campus group.¹³ SJP members eventually signed a civility statement, but it was a statement of protest and was rejected by the Northeastern administration.

The next semester, in March 2014, after Northeastern SJP organized a mock eviction notice action during Israeli Apartheid Week, the university suspended SJP on campus and threatened two students—the only two women of color in the group—with charges that could lead to suspension or expulsion. (The threats

of expulsion were rescinded just days afterwards, due to an outpouring of condemnation by students and human rights defenders all over the country.)

It came as a shock to the Northeastern students and the larger Palestine solidarity activism community. Northeastern Palestine solidarity activists were being sanctioned by the university for a clear action of free speech. Legal groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Constitutional Rights, lent their support to the students, and asserted that this was a free speech issue, a right that should be encouraged and protected in an educational institution.

Northeastern University had no reaction or response to this external pressure. And extreme right-wing Zionist groups—who had long been vilifying Palestine solidarity activism and activists on Northeastern’s campus, and had been pressuring the administration to punish the on-campus SJP chapter for years—seized the opportunity to ratchet up the attacks against Palestine solidarity organizing. Throughout the fall of 2013, the ADL, the Zionist Organization of America, and the local right-wing Zionist group Americans for Peace and Tolerance began launching vicious, hateful, and dangerous attacks against students involved in SJP.¹⁴ Students were being accused of anti-Semitism, referring to Palestine solidarity activism and growing criticism of Israeli policies.

SJP member Max Geller, a Jewish law student, began receiving death threats and hate mail from right-wing Zionists associated with Americans for Peace and Tolerance via Facebook and e-mail.¹⁵ Ironically, as Zionist groups began complaining that the Northeastern administration wasn’t protecting Jewish students against harassment without providing a shred of evidence, an actual Jewish student was being attacked and harassed *by these very groups*.

I met Geller in Oakland in the fall of 2013. A serious Boston sports fan (as serious as he is about Palestine solidarity), Geller wore a Boston Bruins hockey jersey with “PALESTINE” emblazoned on the back and a Boston Red Sox baseball cap with the iconic “B” turned into the first letter of “BOYCOTT ISRAEL” embroidered in the same font and color as the team’s name.

“It was beyond my wildest dreams that at law school I would have to be defending myself against charges of anti-Semitism,” he explained to me. He added that as a Jewish person, it is especially painful to be labeled an “anti-Semite” when his family has been subjected to actual, violent anti-Semitism. Geller told me a story about his great-grandmother who, as a child playing with her sister in the Caucasus mountain region outside of Russia, saw her sister be slaughtered by a horse-riding Cossack in a pogrom attack. “That’s what anti-Semitism really is,” Geller noted.

Geller was irate that accusations of anti-Semitism were being thrown around by right-wing Zionist groups in the context of his support of Palestinian rights. But he was not frightened into silence. “I push back,” he said. “Discussing Israeli human rights violations is not a threat to my Jewish identity, and is not in any way related to my Jewish identity.”



*Brandeis SJP students disrupt event featuring Israeli Knesset members.
(Photo by Tess Schefflan/Activestills)*

Geller and Porell wrote in the campus newspaper in October 2013, five months before the suspension of SJP, that “[o]utside political forces are bullying Northeastern University into taking an increasingly punitive and aggressive stance toward student organizing around the issue of Palestine.” They noted that groups

such as the ZOA “intentionally and recklessly” conflate speech and activism in support of Palestinians with anti-Semitism.¹⁶

As soon as Northeastern University’s administration suspended SJP in March 2014, students and activists began a sustained protest campaign aimed at shaming the university for its actions and demanding that the group be reinstated. Marches, speaking events, and rallies took place in and around the Northeastern campus for seven weeks, with students demanding that the administration cease its draconian censorship of SJP.

I spoke with Porell in mid-April 2014, as the university’s battle against SJP seemed to be collapsing under the weight of public outcry. She said that the dean of Residential, Cultural, and Spiritual Life had requested a meeting with her and other SJP members, wanting to work toward a reinstatement agreement that would please both SJP and the administration. Sticking to their principles, SJP members agreed among themselves that they would not capitulate to any requests by the university related to “dialogue” between SJP and Zionist groups, and demanded that the university issue a public statement affirming the group as a legitimate student organization on campus that would be treated equally. The university seemed to understand these points and proposed that SJP habitually meet with the dean to plan a series of educational events that would be centered around two themes: discussions of political movements that have inspired SJP’s actions and organizing, including the South African antiapartheid struggle, and discussions of the intersectional relationships between Northeastern SJP and other student groups on campus working within liberation struggles. To the student activists’ credit, SJP was offered more funding and resources as a student group than was available before the March suspension.

“Although historically our side has been the one that’s been marginalized and powerless against this sort of arbitrary punishment, the tide is turning,” Porell remarked in an article I wrote for the *Electronic Intifada*.¹⁷

The campus as an ideological battleground

Anti-Palestinian organizations have targeted solidarity movements on U.S. campuses for decades. But since the early 2000s, such groups have more urgently identified criticism of

Israeli policy as something to be suppressed—precisely because campuses are places that encourage individuals to challenge the *status quo* and also because the campus-based Palestine solidarity movement is expanding year by year. Thus, national Israel advocacy organizations such as StandWithUs, which works closely with Israel’s Foreign Ministry,¹⁸ have been rapidly popping up on U.S. campuses and directly interfering with student Palestine solidarity activism.

Boasting a budget of more than \$8.7 million (as of 2012),¹⁹ StandWithUs works with on-campus Israel advocacy student groups and other national anti-Palestinian groups to discredit activists, students, and faculty members who support Palestinian rights. StandWithUs members troll and harass Palestine solidarity activists and flood campuses with pro-Israel propaganda, especially during student-organized Israeli Apartheid Weeks or Palestine Awareness Weeks. Leading up to campus divestment hearings, members smear the boycott movement as anti-Semitic and promote Israel as a peaceful, progressive haven for diverse communities.

Alex Kane, a New York-based journalist, reported for the online publication *Mondoweiss* in early February 2014 about a secret document he obtained that exposed the group’s strategy to combat Israeli Apartheid Week events on campuses.²⁰ In the document, meant to be a confidential memo to Israel advocates on U.S. campuses, StandWithUs offered grants of up to \$200 to student groups to promote events such as a “Hummus not Hamas” party. The group also suggested how Israel advocates should deflect criticism about the state’s racist and violent treatment of African migrants, and offered talking points to denigrate the Palestinian-led BDS movement.

The large, influential, and well-funded AIPAC—the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—has a wing devoted to on-campus advocacy of Israel and organizes all-expense-paid trips for student leaders to visit Israel. AIPAC promotes these trips as opportunities to “prepare young leaders to help build the pro-Israel community on and beyond the campus,”²¹ noting that they help place students into meetings with U.S. Congress members to help advocate Israel’s interests. Israel-aligned students can also become “Hasbara Fellows” (*hasbara* is a Hebrew word that translates to “public diplomacy,” frequently synonymized with

“propaganda”), paid advocates for Israel found on 120 university campuses across the country.

The Boston-based David Project, however, has gone a step beyond plain propagandizing. In a “white paper” document released in 2013, the David Project, a Zionist “educational organization” founded by Americans for Peace and Tolerance’s Charles Jacobs, encouraged student advocates for Israel to exploit personal relationships with different student organizations in order to get them to adopt anti-Palestinian positions, and to threaten faculty members who challenge the bias toward Israel in their coursework.

Writing in the *Electronic Intifada* about the David Project’s white paper, Abraham Greenhouse reported that the document examines the potential of students of color and marginalized communities to align with Palestine solidarity groups, and recommends tactics for Israel-aligned activists to steer such persons toward sympathy with Israel instead. The document, Greenhouse adds, “also suggests a manipulative strategy for seeking disciplinary action against faculty members critical of Israeli policies.... Beyond suggesting the use of administrative mechanisms to suppress academic freedom, anti-Palestinian advocacy groups have encouraged activists, including full-time campus-based professionals, to cultivate relationships of an extremely questionable nature with campus administrators, and even with campus police.”²³

Courageous and supportive faculty members are integral to the success of student Palestine solidarity activists. Faculty who dare to educate their classes on the reality of Israel’s policies against Palestinians and non-Jews face severe intimidation, smear campaigns, and threats by anti-Palestinian groups across the country. Those who act as faculty advisors to student Palestine solidarity groups are summarily targeted as well.

Because of these looming threats to their employment, some faculty members—especially educators without tenure—may be reticent to talk about Israeli policy in depth. Others may personally support the Palestinian-led BDS movement, but are worried that speaking out publicly in support of it—or supporting students on campus who do—will damage their scholarly reputation. In an article in *Inside Higher Ed*, Cynthia Franklin, a professor of English at the University of Hawaii–Manoa and a member of the organizing collection of the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, said that there is “a culture of fear” within the academy around talking about Israeli policies. “A lot of junior faculty and graduate students who support the academic and cultural boycott are fearful of putting their names forward because there are reprisals that can take the form of not getting tenure or not getting jobs,” Franklin added.²²

Other well-financed national organizations, such as the ADL, are helping on-campus pro-Israel groups and administrations attempt to dictate what kind of speech is permissible at universities. It is important to note that the ADL has had a lengthy history of infiltrating organizations and spying on left-wing activists. According to documents released as part of a civil case against the ADL in 1993, it was revealed that the ADL had spied on nearly a thousand groups from across the political spectrum, including, as the *Village Voice* reported at the time, “the NAACP, the Rainbow Coalition, ACLU, the American Indian Movement, the Center for Investigative Reporting, Pacifica [Radio Network], ACT UP, Palestinian and Arab groups, Sandinista solidarity groups, Americans for Peace Now, and anti-apartheid organizations.”²⁴ The group also worked with South Africa’s National Intelligence Service under the apartheid regime, and has also spied on legendary historian and social critic Noam Chomsky, according to the documents.

Sarah Moawad of Harvard University described to me the way in which the ADL—an outside political group unaffiliated with the university—attempted to tarnish and discredit students after an organized direct action during their Israeli Apartheid Week in 2013. As part of their event series, which included a screening of the Oscar-nominated documentary film *Five Broken Cameras* (about the nonviolent resistance struggle in the West Bank) and a talk by Chomsky, the students at Harvard’s Palestine Solidarity Committee organized a “mock eviction” action at the undergraduate dorms.

The students distributed a piece of paper on every single dorm room door that said, “You will be evicted within two or three days from your dorm,” using the same wording Israeli forces print on eviction notices handed to Palestinians before their homes are demolished. “And then on the back it said, ‘Want to learn more about Palestine?’ and listed our events,” Moawad told me. “It wasn’t a very threatening document.”

However, this mock eviction notice action “caused an uproar,” Moawad added, and the ADL issued a statement claiming the student activists had placed these eviction notices only on the doors of Jewish students’ dorm rooms—a completely falsified charge, according to Moawad. “This was an intimidation tactic, [and the ADL claimed] that students were traumatized. It became

a huge back and forth in the *Harvard Crimson*, the student newspaper, and in the *Harvard Political Review*—several publications were writing about this for a good two to three weeks after Israeli Apartheid Week.”

Moawad recounted how the *Crimson* refused to publish op-eds by members of the Palestine Solidarity Committee, but had published several op-eds against the group. “Finally, when the *Crimson* was being very unresponsive, we managed to get a piece published in the *Harvard Political Review*,” she explained. “It was written by three or four Palestinian students. And once it was published, there were complaints about it. People were calling for it to be taken down, or for revisions.... It just really exemplified what we’re up against on this campus and the kind of backlash we face.”

Meanwhile, in Florida, students who silently walked out of a speech given by an Israeli soldier at Florida Atlantic University in 2013 were forced by the administration to attend a re-education program—categorized as an “anti-bias training”—designed by the ADL. Two of the three students being forced to attend this program were also put on indefinite probation by the administration for the remainder of their academic careers.

Activists involved with SJP at Florida Atlantic University have faced extreme scrutiny and administrative retaliation since 2012. In April that year, students at FAU were subjected to administrative pressure and death threats from people outside the university after they engaged in a nonviolent direct action calling attention to the demolition of Palestinian homes by Israeli forces. Like the Harvard action, FAU students attempted to raise awareness of Israel’s rampant home demolition practices by posting 200 mock eviction notices on dorm room doors.

Fifteen rights groups including the Center for Constitutional Rights, the ACLU, Jewish Voice for Peace, and the U.S. Palestinian Community Network backed the students. In a press release, the Center for Constitutional Rights remarked that some news media “were willing to report falsely that the notices were posted only on the doors of Jewish students, without independently investigating the matter.”²⁵ CCR added that after several weeks, “the University announced that it would not take action against the students and confirmed that there was no

evidence that Jewish students were singled out and targeted by the notices.”

However, it seems that Israel-aligned groups kept up the pressure on the university. And after the walk-out action, just one in a year’s worth of similar protest actions against visiting Israeli officials and military personnel, the administration went full-throttle against the students.

Nadine Aly and Renata Glebocki of FAU picked me up at the airport when I arrived in Boca Raton on a sweltering and humid October evening. Aly and Glebocki are both members of the courageous SJP group at FAU, and Aly was a proud student senator before she organized the walk-out protest and was subsequently punished by the administration. She was prohibited from holding student office for the rest of her academic career.

Aly is a stunning young woman. She immediately struck me as a born activist, someone who’s nurtured that spark of righteous defiance toward repressive centers of power. She told me that she and fellow SJP members faced a litany of charges after the nonviolent walk-out protest, including “lying to a university official” and “withholding vital information” after she refused to give up the names of other students involved in the protest. I remarked that the FAU administration treated it like a criminal investigation. “They just wanted to shut us down,” Aly explained. “They wanted to make sure that anyone who’s a part of SJP would be sanctioned, that way they could make it collapse as a student organization.”

She said that she attended the mandatory training program administered by the ADL, but challenged the group leaders at every turn during discussions of free speech versus hate speech. I asked her if the administration’s invasive investigation process, the forced attempt at re-education, and the stripping of her seat in the student senate have deterred her from wanting to speak out again. If other Israeli soldiers or an Israeli official came to FAU to speak the following semester, would she go to the event and walk out again?

“Hell, yeah. I’d walk out again, same as last time. And I wouldn’t be afraid of the administration,” Aly said.

Spying on students

Zionist groups on the West Coast, including a small but well-funded, bulldoggish outfit called the Amcha Initiative, have sought out students and faculty alike who take part in Palestine solidarity activism, including support of the BDS movement.

Amcha unleashed a barrage of attacks for years against David Klein, a professor of mathematics at California State University at Northridge, who is a member of the U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel and openly supports the Palestinian-led BDS movement. Amcha's repeated attempts to discredit Klein, label him an "anti-Semite" (even though he is Jewish), and threaten him with legal action have, so far, been futile.

Undeterred, in 2012, Amcha began attacking another professor, this time David Delgado Shorter at UCLA, when Shorter included articles on the Palestine solidarity movement and the BDS campaign as part of his non-required reading list for a class on indigenous resistance to settlercolonialism. Again, Amcha attempted to discredit Shorter and called for his removal from the university, but to no avail. Shorter told me in an interview that he was bolstered by Amcha's attacks and vowed to get more involved in educating his students about the Palestinian struggle.

That same year, Amcha's cofounder, Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, was videotaped making extremely bigoted remarks about Arab and Muslim students and Palestine solidarity activists on California campuses. When students demanded that the University of California hold her accountable, Rossman-Benjamin issued a statement of her own, demanding that Palestine solidarity groups and Muslim student organizations be shut down across the state.²⁶ The University of California said, and did, nothing. Because of the university's inaction, Rossman-Benjamin was *de facto* allowed to continue her harassment and attacks on students.

In late January 2014, writing for the *Electronic Intifada*, my colleague Asa Winstanley and I exposed the Amcha Initiative's efforts to secretly spy on students who participated in a student delegation to the West Bank and present-day Israel. Our exposé revealed that Rossman-Benjamin and others working with Amcha had recorded the experiences of the students while they were on the trip and made character assessments about the trip

leaders and the student participants in an effort to determine which persons were most likely to be sympathetic to Palestinian rights.²⁷ Again, the UC system—and the project which organized the trip, the Olive Tree Initiative—didn't say a word.

Andrew Dalack, a law student at the University of Michigan and a member of the organizing committee of National Students for Justice in Palestine, analyzed the vitriolic response by Israel-aligned organizations within the context of a marked disassociation by Jewish students in the United States to Israel and Zionism. “I think young Jewish students in the U.S. feel less and less connected to Israel, generally. They might be both uninformed or totally disinterested in getting into some sort of confrontation or argument about it, because they don't know enough to talk about it intelligently, or it's just not important to them,” Dalack explained. “And that freaks out a lot of Zionist organizations, which is why we see a ramped-up emphasis on Birthright [Israel] and related programs which try and foster a kind of commitment to Israel or a sort of amalgamation of Jewish identity with Israeli nationalism and Zionism.”

Dalack paused for a moment. “Their response [to the lack of interest in Israeli nationalism by American Jews] can really only be pouring resources into combatting dissenting opinions on Israel and then trying to deny that [the solidarity movement is] having some sort of an impact.”

As outside political forces attempt to dictate the discussions inside the classroom and on the college campuses, students have more access to legal resources and specialized advocacy. In 2012, the Palestine Solidarity Legal Support (PSLS) was established as a project to advocate for the civil rights of student activists on campuses across the country. A project of two notable and respected institutions for human rights, civil rights, and social justice—the Center for Constitutional Rights and the National Lawyers Guild—PSLS has taken on an extraordinary caseload since its establishment.

Tanya Keilani, a graduate of Columbia University in New York and a current mentor to student activists around the country, said that when she was an undergrad, she was harassed and tracked by the FBI. “I had no idea what to do,” she told me. “An agent kept calling me.” Keilani said she guessed it was because of her connection to the Palestine Children's Welfare Fund, a

Texas-based charity that was being investigated at the same time by the U.S. government in the wake of the Patriot Act. “They had been calling me non-stop just because I happened to be listed as a co-chair [of the organization]. And then at a certain point, I spoke to a friend whose sister was a lawyer—I spoke with an agent on the phone, and it was clear that they had nothing. They just wanted to talk to me to get information on something, but I had no idea; I didn’t even know what was going on.”

After speaking with a lawyer, Keilani told the agent that she’d retained counsel and if he wanted to speak to her again, he could do so with a lawyer present. “After weeks and weeks of harassment, he responded, ‘Oh, that’s okay.’ And I was so dumbfounded that I didn’t know what to say, and I said, ‘Are you sure?’ I was so shocked. It was very surreal. And I never heard from him again.”

Keilani added that she thought it was a good lesson for her and other activists who may face harassment by either the government or Israel-aligned organizations. “I realized that in a lot of cases, a lot of it is just knowing what your rights are and not being afraid to confront certain things. But also being able to reach out to your community members, to your elders, to ask for advice, which is what I did.”

Dalia Marina, a graduate of UC–Berkeley, told me that though the intimidation is unrelenting, it’s not working. “Students are still organizing and passing [divestment] bills, or at least introducing them and causing a stir. And the support network for the students is growing and is being strengthened.”



Interview: Liz Jackson

As the battle wages on college campuses for the right to organize around Palestine, a group of lawyers have stepped in to advocate for students' free speech rights. Palestine Solidarity Legal Support—in partnership with the Center for Constitutional Rights, the National Lawyers Guild and other civil rights advocacy organizations—provides resources, advocacy, and legal training for activists involved in Palestine organizing, and has focused primarily on supporting students and faculty who face repression.



It's a job that can be overwhelming, to say the least. With just a few staff members, PSLS, since its inception in early 2013, has responded to well over 100 cases of legal threats and other intimidation efforts against Palestine rights activists. The group also tracks incidents of repression, including physical assault, racism, and Islamophobic hate speech directed at student activists.

Liz Jackson, Dima Khalidi, and Radhika Sainath are the legal advocates students have turned to when facing repressive, aggressive, or litigious threats from Zionist political groups and university administrations.

Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, Jackson has forged a close relationship with many of the students on the West Coast who have asked for legal support when planning events, direct

actions, divestment initiatives, and—more often—when their free speech rights are being threatened. She graduated from Brown University, and from the University of California’s Berkeley Law after that. Jackson became involved in Palestine activism as a young Jewish woman in her 20s, realizing early on—after a Birthright Israel trip—that “it was clear that the situation was really distorted and deeply entrenched.”

After Operation Cast Lead, Jackson found herself being pulled away from her initial intentions to become involved in economic justice work and labor law, and plunged herself into legal work on Palestine issues. During the 2010 divestment campaign at Berkeley, Jackson said that it was “disturbing and fascinating to witness the effect of the Zionist lobby and the clear, concerted campaign to distort the issue and pull it away from talking about human rights in Palestine, to talking about how Jewish students on U.S. campuses feel when what they think is their ‘homeland’ is criticized.”

I asked her to evaluate the intimidation mechanisms by the Israeli government and pro-Israel advocacy groups across the country.

I understand why the Israeli government has identified U.S. campuses as a threat, and why they want to funnel money to combatting activism. Because they’re right—the campuses pose a threat to the *status quo*. U.S. campuses are places where the next generation of voters is developing real opposition to un-conditional support for Israel. A vision for a democratic state based on equal rights for all is growing on U.S. campuses and spreading worldwide.

...There are a few pretty well-coordinated and very well-funded organizations who are engaged in long-term, strategic, and concerted campaigns to silence criticism of Israel on campus. The explicit strategy and long-term plan is to build a record of discrimination on campus based on equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. As the student movement picks up, the funding for these repression campaigns has picked up. So that’s one reason why it seems so overwhelming right now, that we’re seeing it on every campus

where there's an active student Palestine solidarity group—it's because the repression movement is maturing.

Academics and more seasoned Palestine activists point out that censorship on this issue is definitely nothing new, but certainly we're in a new phase of it now. First, the lobby groups do a lot of media work and a lot of attempts to reach Zionist-leaning students on campus, and tell those students how unsafe they are and how threatened they are, and how this criticism of Israel on campus is anti-Semitic and they should feel unsafe. They tell students that. And they don't find a lot—based on how much money is coming in, it's probably a shocking failure. But they find a few students here and there on campus to express how “unsafe” they feel.

And then they use those students to file legal complaints against the school, to write op-eds about how they feel unsafe, and to engage [other] students into pressuring the administration. [This strategy is] mostly coming from outside organizations but there's some participation from Jewish organizations on campus like Hillel and others—they pressure the administration to crack down on Palestinian rights organizing.

They do it in different ways. First, they stigmatize Palestine activism. Lobby organizations pressure campus officials to say that campuses cannot restrict speech activities because of the First Amendment, but they view it as wrong. Campus officials often compare Palestine advocacy to homophobic acts or horribly racist acts to intimidate a community of students.

Then, in response to pressure, university officials restrict Palestine advocacy in different ways through bureaucratic measures—for example, applying extra scrutiny to SJP. So when SJP applies for a permit to hold an event or direct action, it takes longer for it to get approved, or they get more questions asked about the details of the event, or it takes them longer to get their SJP chapter approved at all, or they are required to have police at their events. All these are different ways to make it more difficult for SJP to do their normal work.

And then, third, lobby groups get the universities to discipline and punish the students for their pro-Palestinian

speech and protest activities. We saw what happened to the Irvine 11, and now we're seeing what's going on with the Florida Atlantic University case and the Northeastern University case. In the few key cases where these outside organizations are filing legal complaints against the schools, the schools are put in a defensive position, but they use those few examples to threaten every other school.

The other element is threats and intimidation against faculty, which also affects students because they see that happening. Intimidation against faculty supportive of Palestinian rights not only steers students away from activism, it also affects the course of their studies. A lot of students are interested academically in the Palestine issue, or broader Middle East issues, or the kinds of criminalization of Brown people in the U.S.—and they're steered away from those areas of inquiry. We see the effects of academic censorship; it seeps down. Something that we are working on directly is support for faculty who are also victims of the same repression campaigns. And these are faculty who should be able to stand up for students' rights vigorously, but they, too, are intimidated.

What kinds of patterns have you seen emerge from these intimidation campaigns—have you seen academics pull away from sponsoring an event, or even talking about Palestine in their classrooms? Have you seen students be steered away from solidarity organizing?

So, the really hardcore activists do not stay away from organizing. But I've seen them become more cagey or hesitant to put their names on things. They still ask us if it's okay if they let this Palestine solidarity organization use their name in a fundraising mailing, or if they can sign an op-ed talking about the latest atrocities in Gaza. They ask if it's okay to publicly sign a letter protesting the violations of their own free speech rights—irony upon irony.

I haven't seen the really committed activists pull back from organizing at all, but I have seen them pull back from taking credit—which is a huge shame, because they should not be worried about how this could affect them. They should be

proud and want to wear this as a badge for their careers, as something to point to, and say look what a principled human rights activist I am, and look what I've accomplished in terms of shifting world perception and opinion on one of the most urgent human rights crises of our time. But they don't have the freedom to wear that badge as proudly as they should. And I don't want to minimize the damage of that; I think that's really severe.

And then, there is a second tier of students—those who are interested in being active, and who are active, but aren't the hardcore people. And these students pull back on what they do, certainly. They're worried about immigration status, they're worried about what they can put on their résumé, worried about what their online profiles look like after the smear campaigns they may be subjected to. They are also under increased schedule pressure because they feel they have to do more activities, because they can't be seen spending all their time doing SJP activities even though the professional experience you get from being an SJP activist is incredible—from writing to fundraising to media, all the written and oral communications, and the strategic work. I mean for any job you can think of, from policy to politics to communications to finance, it's an incredible experience. But anyway, that's not enough because a lot of them aren't planning on putting that on their résumés. So they have to work harder, they are more stressed out, there is more pressure on them in terms of their studies and sleep—so they pull back.

The other piece is that there are a few who are facing criminal or punitive consequences at their school—we can't ignore that. But the other thing that is the hardest to measure are those who want to be involved, but who are afraid of being on record dissenting from the orthodox opinions on Israel. They are very often Arab or Muslim students who are first or second generation immigrants who are expected to put their heads down, to study, and become successful professionals. Their families are not supportive of them being activists, especially on a controversial issue. They shy away, they don't come to meetings—even if it contradicts their consciences. They express really caring about this issue, and they feel

ashamed of themselves for not being more involved. And that's true even for student leaders of Arab and Muslim student groups. They may be leaders of those organizations, but they may pull back on the Palestine issue to avoid being smeared by Zionist groups.

Legal advocates, students, and faculty are trying to hang on and resist the tides of repression. Part of your work is reminding the university administrations and politicians that the First Amendment still exists and needs to be protected.

First, the core of my work is also reminding them that regardless of what the First Amendment says, this is principled human rights activism. And even if the First Amendment didn't exist, there is no reason to restrict this activism. There's even more of a reason to be proud of the activism itself, and of the intensity of the debate that's happening on campuses—because it shows that students are engaging deeply in our world's most serious problems.

It's intense; nobody—for 60, 70 years—has achieved a political solution, so we want our next generation to be grappling with this deeply. It says really hopeful things about the future of our world and our children, our children's children, to see this happening on U.S. campuses.

Second, our work is to remind campus administrators that the First Amendment exists, and they cannot restrict speech critical of Israel because they don't like it. And it's very odd to be put in the position of being an orthodox First Amendment protector, because this is a departure from more recent trends in civil rights law. A lot of the civil rights attorneys from the free speech movement in the '60s, who started their careers as big First Amendment people, shifted away from that and had their positions challenged and questioned by people in the radical legal communities, thinking about how do we want to respond in an anti-racist way to truly racist and violent speech spoken by the oppressor to demonize the oppressed?

Many shed their First Amendment orthodoxy and came to favor balancing First Amendment principles with policies restricting “hate speech.” Now, as right wing pro-Israel organizations are distorting the definition of hate speech by

calling Palestine advocacy anti-Semitic, civil rights attorneys find themselves back in the odd position of First Amendment orthodoxy, saying “Hey, but the First Amendment protects hate speech!” This is true, but the more important truth is that advocacy for Palestinian rights is not hateful; it is principled, antiracist human rights advocacy.

And there’s no shortage of work on your plate. Every time there’s one victory, such as the Title VI claims being thrown out, there’s more harassment and threats to deal with.

Yes, we’re insanely overwhelmed. Between January 2013 and January 2014, we documented well over 100 cases of repression and intimidation—some of them big, some of them small. We’re scrambling to build a legal support network that provides legal representation, legal information, and legal advice, but a lot of it is strategic and about political nuance.

The way we measure the success of the legal work is if we can shift support energies toward more proactive thinking about how do we hold authorities accountable for the discriminatory and racist treatment that pro-Palestinian and Arab and Muslim students on campus are facing, and to what extent is the movement able to move forward despite all the obstacles.

There have also been incidents of physical assault against Muslim and Palestine solidarity activist students. Can you talk more about that?

When a student on campus is out there, holding a sign or putting up a mock apartheid wall, and someone spits on her, that’s a physical assault. But some students don’t even give it a second thought; it’s what they deal with every day.

There is a psychological impact from having to overcome that on a daily basis. Having a thick skin means you have scars, you have scar tissue. So it’s really heartbreaking. On the emotional level, our work helps students fight back and protect themselves in healthy ways.

Some students diminish it as well; they say, well I was spit on or punched in the face, but my classmate’s cousin in the West Bank had his home demolished.

Yeah. And I don't know what the right answer is in terms of holding both of those truths. Some of that though is education on what your rights are—that assault and intimidation and harassment is illegal and racist. And if you don't have the energy, and though it pales in comparison to a home demolition, it's still wrong and you may have legal remedies in the U.S.

We're doing Know Your Rights¹ trainings all over the country. It's also where we document a lot of incidents. As we're explaining First Amendments violations, you get a lot of students asking questions and giving us a lot of information about where their activism is at and violations that they've experienced.

Can you explain the significance of the intersectional, cross-movement work that student Palestine solidarity activists are engaging in?

It was powerful to me to see how students understand Palestine from a settlercolonialist connection, from the experience of being Brown in the U.S., and how students of color are treated on campus and the way that their complaints are received and digested by the media and by white students who don't have the personal and political understanding. And I loved how sophisticated the SJP students were at seeing those dynamics and talking about them, moving forward in solidarity [with] Palestine as a core racial justice issue. That's the kind of social change work I want to be involved in. Because it's going to work.

It's obvious. And it comforts me as a Jewish person with a personal connection to histories of oppression. It's such an important psychological antidote to the pain of being a Jewish person and seeing some Jews behave with such vitriol and evil in the name of being Jewish.

What inspires you about this movement and about your work?

Every couple of weeks, I get an injection of motivation from a horrible act of violence and suffering in Palestine, and then every few weeks I get an injection of motivation from a beautiful act of hope from Palestine. And that's just because of

my news intake. Those injections would be daily if I were paying more attention!

And then there's the injections of motivation from students who are so tough and so determined, and I see that we're making a difference. I really believe in the power of the student movement to change U.S. policy toward Israel. I see the moment happening now, and it's so tangible. In comparison to other social movements, it's on fire. The energy is so amplified.



Interview: Taher Herzallah

Taher Herzallah, a magnetic and charismatic young man, was a member of the Irvine 11, convicted and criminalized for his participation in a nonviolent political protest. In 2011, Herzallah graduated from the University of California at Riverside, where he studied political science and international relations. Currently the National Campus Coordinator and West Coast Director of American Muslims for Palestine, Herzallah said his family—his father, in particular—helped shape his activism since he was a young child.



When he was a freshman at Riverside, Herzallah joined the nascent SJP group there, one of the only SJP chapters in southern California at the time. Three years later, he joined in the protest against former ambassador Michael Oren at the nearby Irvine campus. Today, Herzallah is a dedicated and tireless mentor to students involved in Palestine solidarity activism in California.

When I met Herzallah at an SJP West conference on the Irvine campus of the University of California in the summer of 2013, he opened up about his experience as a member of the Irvine 11 and what led him to Palestine solidarity activism in the first place.

My family's from Gaza, so we have a lot of connections to the land and to the people on the ground, especially since we

heard the stories of what happened in Operation Cast Lead. So that affinity was definitely there already, although I've never lived in Gaza myself but visited a couple times.

In our household, we were more politically educated on Palestine than we were culturally educated. It took me getting to college to become more culturally in touch with my Palestinian-ness, as I started realizing its importance and the imminent threat to my identity as a Palestinian. Everything from *maqlooba* [a traditional Palestinian dish of rice cooked with meat] to *dabke* [traditional Palestinian dance] to cultural dress became important to me—an act of resistance to attempts at appropriation and ethnic cleansing.

You're one of the Irvine 11. Tell us about what happened in 2010, your part in it, and your reaction to what happened afterwards.

So, February 2010, Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, comes to the UC–Irvine campus. And I'm at UC–Riverside. Prior to Michael Oren coming to campus, about three days, four days before that, I had a couple of guys e-mail me, saying Michael Oren's coming and can we get some troops from UC–Riverside to come out. I said, sure. So I contacted a lot of people. Only a few respond usually, and this time only two guys responded: Khalid [Akari] and Shaheen [Nassar].

They came with me, and we drove from Riverside that day. I actually got a ticket on the way there—I rolled a stop sign, and I got a tinted windows ticket at the same time. *(Laughs)* Then I came to UC–Irvine, and I got arrested and got another citation! And then, a week later, as I was going to a meeting to discuss the Irvine 11 campaign, I got a speeding ticket. I got three tickets in the span of a week!

A hardened criminal.

Yeah. So I went from a nice, 3.5 GPA [grade point average] student to a delinquent. So that was interesting.

How old were you?

I was 20 years old.

And what did you say to Oren, what was the statement you chose?

My statement was a response to what the Dean of the Political Science Department said. He got up on stage after the first couple of guys protested, and he said, "Shame on all of you."

In my mind, I was like, the real shame is on you for inviting this guy in the first place. So my statement to Oren was "It is a shame that this university has sponsored a mass murderer like yourself." And that was my unscripted response to the situation. A lot of guys read off of their cards. I didn't. I just went with the flow.

So what happened is that we got arrested that day. We came to the event, and we settled ourselves in different parts of the room—the room's capacity was about 500 people, and there was an overflow room for about 200 people. And it was a very big room—the Pacific Ballroom on campus. It just happened to be that where I was situated, there were a few [protesters] already there. My turn came up—I was number six on the roll call. I went up and made my statement, and police took me to the back of the room.

There was a little space, like a storage unit, where they took us. They patted us down, asked us if we were affiliated with any gangs, and asked us if we had any diseases—the first question they asked.

So they arrested us, they put handcuffs on me, they sat us down for like two, three hours, handcuffed. One of the guys had a messed-up rotator cuff, so they put an extra handcuff on him [to extend the first pair] to let him move around. That guy is at Harvard Law right now. *(Laughs)*

That was the protest. But what happened after that gets really interesting. There was a period of one year where the university was taking action against us at that point. They were coming out with statements against what we did, openly condemning us, relating us to racist incidents on campus, stuff like that. And they were applying their own sanctions on each student. Throughout this period, what we realized was happening is that the Orange County District Attorney also

took on the case and was investigating students. He wasn't investigating us personally, those who protested; he was investigating the entire organization of the Muslim Student Union (MSU). He was going to people's houses—the [district attorney] also issued grand jury subpoenas to students who were not even involved in the protest but normal MSU members. He would send investigators early in the morning, like at 6 a.m., to knock on people's doors. People were surprised by this. This was a shock and awe type of tactic—this had never been used. And it's a tactic that is often used in counter-terrorism cases, not in student protest cases.

It was a very unique thing for us, as an experience. And we realized that there was a need for a legal team to come defend us because there might potentially be criminal charges against us. And in February 2011, a year almost after the protest, three days before the statute of limitations was up, the district attorney filed charges against us.

He wanted to meet with all of us. He sat down with us. There was about eight of us available at that meeting. He came to us and said, basically, I'm willing to negotiate. We can stop this whole thing right now. And his terms were that we plead guilty.

What was the original charge he wanted you to plead guilty to?

We would plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge, for disrupting a public event.

Which was what you were eventually convicted of.

Exactly. And do community service, and we'll call it a night. We all refused. Because none of us felt we were guilty of anything. We took it to court, and then the whole trial process began. That meeting happened in February 2011, and our trial began in September 2011, so about seven months after that.

Our trial took about three weeks, and our jury was selected from Orange County. A nice, friendly jury....

A very white jury.

(Laughs) Yeah. And they unanimously convicted us of two misdemeanors: disrupting the public event and conspiracy to commit that disruption.

It was a very obscure penal code that hadn't been used since the 1970s.

Yes. The last time they used it was in the '70s. I mean, the district attorney has the discretion to decide who he wants to charge. So this whole issue came up many times throughout the trial: why would the district attorney want to take this case? The university already [punished us]. And even the people on campus who were against what we did—the dean of the law school, for example—said, yeah, I consider it illegal but the district attorney doesn't need to take this case....

This whole thing is hard to prove, obviously, and it's open for speculation, but to us it was very clear why he did it. Someone put it on his desk, and someone gave him his arguments. It was clear because when we saw the assistant district attorney, Dan Wagner, making his arguments during the trial, it was as if it was scripted. The stuff he was saying was complete Zionist narrative. At that point, for all of us sitting there on trial, you see that the government really adopted their narrative—they accepted it, and they were using their institutional power they had to condemn us and criminalize us.

Talk a little more about what you think was in it for the government to do this. They took a year of their time and energy to build a case.

Yeah. The district attorney took a year to investigate a misdemeanor case. They don't even take that long for murder cases or money laundering, stuff like that. It was ridiculous. They spent a lot of money. He took the top attorney he had in the office at the time, Dan Wagner—who was the head of the homicide unit—to try our case. And I always ask myself what I think his benefits were. Tony Rackauckas is the district attorney of Orange County, and that is a very “red” county. He wanted to make an example of us, number one. And number two, he wanted to win some favor with some hardcore

Republican voters who saw this as a great move—suppressing the threats of terrorism in Orange County.

And he framed it that way. His spokesperson was in the news reports saying that the students are anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish. That wasn't the basis of the trial at all! That wasn't even the reason they were trying us, but that's what they were saying in the media.

And Tony Raucaucus would make statements like, "We're not going to allow a small band of people to hijack our freedoms"—that's the exact statement he said. So when you spew that rhetoric to a largely unsympathetic public, you're going to get some public support for doing that.

So the media, you had National Public Radio covering this story, a lot of others were covering it, they were questioning his tactics. The *LA Times* even had an editorial questioning Tony Raucaucus, and the *Orange County Register* even condemned him for doing it, but at the end of the day he won what he wanted to win.

And the day that we got convicted, the same day that the decision came out, he needed to get some spotlight off of this trial—so what he did was he started another trial the same day. He filed charges against police officers who killed a homeless man in Fullerton. So he completely switched gears. That was a good move on his part. But you could tell his motivations. That's something that we always think about, his motivations for taking this case.

Nevertheless, it got attention; it gave us a mouthpiece to speak about the Palestinian struggle. That's really what we wanted. If there was anything we wanted to gain from this, was to bring awareness and to bring more attention to the plight of the Palestinian people. And I think ultimately that's what happened.

And what's interesting, I think, is that there was this huge criminal case launched against you where the point was to silence you, the point was to instill fear in the rest of the student body in southern California, and it had the exact

opposite effect. Two years later, UC–Irvine passed its divestment resolution.

Oh, yeah. By trying us, they created seasoned soldiers. When you go through battle the first time, you're not really sure what's going to happen. Now, when I go out and I see [Zionist activists], it's a simple task; whereas compared to my freshman year, it was a daunting task to face the Zionists on campus. Now, not only with us, the Irvine 11 personally, but with SJPs and the student movement on campuses, it's gone to a level far beyond where we were at during that time. This was in 2010, we're in 2013 now and we're taking about divesting the entire University of California system! Whereas in 2010, that was not even on the table. We were still learning about what divestment was.

So, they screwed up in that sense. If they ignored us, we would probably be in the same position now as we were three years ago. And if they attack us, we're going to end up stronger. And that's the dynamic that they're in, that they're stuck in. They don't know how to react to us.

We were talking with [Israeli Parliament (Knesset) member] Dr. Jamal Zahalkha, who said that Benjamin Netanyahu came to the Knesset and said that the third most strategic threat to the state of Israel, behind a nuclear weapon and terrorism, is U.S. student activism. I swear to you, he said that. *(Laughs)* So when you have the freakin' prime minister of a country saying that the work that these little kids are doing is hurting us, that's a big deal. And I want to relay this message to the current students doing this work. That this is a very effective thing.

And you see the Jewish Community Relations Council, StandWithUs, the Anti-Defamation League, the Israeli foreign ministry, and other pro-Israel lobby organizations pouring millions of dollars into what they're calling the combatting of the "delegitimization" campaign. And on the other hand, they're saying that BDS is inconsequential. So what can you say about the power of student activism in that sense?

If you want to do a comparison, quickly, you have all these organizations pouring millions of dollars into doing work to

combat the work that we do for free. You understand what I'm saying?

And that tells you a lot about narrative. That tells you about the truth that it holds. That the work that we're doing doesn't need people that are paid millions of dollars to do. When a freshman comes out and yells, "Free Palestine!" and that threatens the existence of the state of Israel, that shows you how shallow that narrative is. So that's a beautiful thing for our cause, that it makes it that much easier for us.

That's a very baffling thing, if you think about it from an economic perspective. You'll be shocked about how that works. And you'll never find a Zionist group on campus which is willing to wake up at 5 a.m. to set up a wall on campus. They have to pay some organization or some group to come and do that. Whereas here, every single year, at least twice a year, you have 50–100 students get up in the morning and set up a wall. I've been here at UC–Irvine twice for that.

It doesn't take money; it takes truth. That's what these students feel like they're a part of, and that's what I'm involved in. And I'm very proud to be a part of that, and I'm still a part of that. That's something that really sets us apart, considering the massive amounts of resources that they're putting into this.

And the way I look at it, the Zionist community is very good at philanthropy. They're very good at soliciting money and donations even from governments like the United States. The more money they use to combat us here, the less money they have available to oppress the Palestinian people there. So we're willing to take bullets here. Please, spend more money on fighting "delegitimization." That's great. We'll take you on for that.

We've talked before about how all the Irvine 11 students have gone on to do incredible things. They're now in medical school or law school, and they're doing social justice work like what you're doing; going through this criminal process hasn't deterred anyone. What do you say to an incoming freshman who sees what happened to you, and your friends and your family and community, going through this lengthy trial process

which ended in a conviction, and might be intimidated and scared about finding a job—what do you say to them?

A lot of people asked me, “What are you going to do? How are you going to get work?” especially after the trial, and the way I always thought about it was that it’s a matter of principle. And if your principle is grounded in truth, then no one with a conscious mind will reject you for that.

For example, when [Irvine 11 member] Osama Shabaik applied to Harvard Law, he made his experience very clear. He didn’t hide from the fact that he was arrested. That was his personal statement, and they accepted him on that basis. Well, not only that, UCLA Law accepted him. University of Texas at Austin accepted him. UC–Irvine offered him a free ride....

(Laughs) After all that!

Yes! You know, in our community, we have this fear—just become an engineer, a doctor, forget about all that. When we came to our community about our experience, it was a big shock to them. They weren’t ready for it. And I think that we do come from a position of privilege. So all these freshmen who are coming in with the idea that they’re going to just become an engineer or a doctor, and then they realize there’s a whole world out there called activism, and that there’s something called social justice, things that are happening in the world that are wrong, that my mind didn’t comprehend before—now they’re going to jump into it.

And I think that’s something that draws so many people into SJPs and Muslim student organizations, all these different groups on campus. So my message would be: take that as a badge of honor. Take anything that happens to you—and nothing will happen to you, I’m still here, eating, drinking, sleeping under a roof—don’t take that as a negative outcome of your activism. Take that as something that builds you to another level of activism. Personally, I haven’t reached the ideal vision of who I’d like to be as an activist. I think this level of sacrifice is beyond protesting an Israeli ambassador. He’s not worth anything. It goes beyond that.

For a freshman, it's important to realize that when we discuss things on campus, we set discourses. That's why the prime minister of Israel would say that we're a very strategic threat. We were saying in 2003, 2004, that Israel is an apartheid state when nobody said that. Jimmy Carter said that in 2005, something like that. And everybody went crazy over that....

He got sued for using the word "apartheid."

Campuses were already discussing the issue of apartheid. Campuses now are analyzing what's happening in Palestine for what it is: open and blatant ethnic cleansing, genocide. Nobody in the mainstream says that now, but two years down the line, maybe the media will be talking about Israel committing acts of genocide.

When we say that Israel is not a true democracy, people are quick to react: "What do you mean, Israel's the only democracy in the Middle East!" But when you explain it here on campus, you have this discourse, despite the administration trying to suppress this discourse, then all of a sudden you have newspapers asking, well, why can't we talk about this?

That's the thing that I think is very important—we need to push the bar. We don't need to adopt the rhetoric and the discourse that's out there in the world. We critically analyze the situation. We bring the best speakers in the world to come and speak to us. Why can't we have our own critical analysis? Why can't we create our own discourse and push the bar? Why should we be limited to what is happening out there?



Interview: Noor Fawzy

Noor Fawzy founded the Students for Justice in Palestine chapter at Florida Atlantic University ready for battle. The group of students I met at FAU in Boca Raton all displayed a mix of fierceness and weariness, as their activism has been dealt blow after blow by the local Zionist community—not to mention the surprising levels of administrative repression they've faced, as discussed in the previous chapter.



In meeting with these students, it was clear that they drew a lot of their strength and passion from Fawzy's guidance and groundwork. She graduated from FAU with degrees in political science and Asian studies, but maintains a close connection with the SJP chapter on campus.

Fawzy told me that FAU never had anything like an SJP chapter before, so when the group first started planning activities, they didn't face a lot of backlash from the university administration. But after that initial year, when students organized a mock eviction notices action on campus, Fawzy said that's when members started to feel discrimination and antipathy from the administration. The repression SJP members have faced on campus, she added, has a lot to do with the very hostile, anti-Palestinian community in which they live.

During Fawzy's time as an FAU student, a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, was stalked and murdered in Florida by a man who, despite a highly-public trial, was not convicted and even had his weapons arsenal returned to him. Students at FAU, including members of SJP, marched against the impunity given to Martin's murderer and highlighted the racist violence that permeates the state.

FAU students also led the charge against the university's administration for awarding naming rights of their football stadium to the GEO Group, a for-profit, private prison corporation with headquarters near campus. By vociferously connecting the prison industrial complex and the "school-to-prison pipeline"¹ in the United States, and especially in Florida, students successfully thwarted the GEO Group's naming rights. Again, SJP members at Florida Atlantic were on the front lines of that protest, fighting the connected injustices of mass incarceration of people of color in the United States and the mass incarceration of Palestinians by Israel.

Fawzy told me right at the start of our interview about the difficulties she and SJP members have faced over the last several years.

This university has been under pressure from certain members of the community to try and curtail or end our activities. But we just keep doing what we're doing. We believe in our cause regardless of what some people think.

We knew from the beginning that this was going to be difficult, and that we had to—my mom told me that this was going to be hard, so we had to take our emotions and throw them in the garbage. When it comes to this issue, no one cares about how you feel. It's about facts, the documented record.

Founding [Florida Atlantic University's SJP chapter] was relatively simple; I founded it in April 2011. There was a lot of bureaucracy that I had to deal with. We started conducting our activism in the fall of 2011. Our SJP has 30 registered members, but the number of active members—the ones who attend our meetings and actions regularly—are about ten. It's a small group.

Tell me about the mock eviction notices action and what happened afterwards.

Well, we decided after our Palestine Solidarity Week, which was in March 2012, that we would do this mock eviction notices initiative. We went to the department of housing and spoke with the associate director, and we told her about our plans.

She was very interested in the issue and believed in the importance of educating the students, including the Palestine issue, which doesn't get covered very well in this country. She was fine with it, but had to make sure it was fine with the director of housing. And about a week later, we got our approval for the initiative. The day that we were going to do it, we went to the housing department to have them look over the flyer and make sure everything was fine—and they stamped it.

Four of us were escorted to the dorms by one of the employees of the housing department, and we randomly distributed about two hundred eviction notices on the front of the doors and elevators. The idea was to raise awareness about one of the issues resulting from the Israeli occupation, that of home demolitions, and how because they constitute collective punishment, they're illegal—and that the U.S. has a role to play when it comes to the issue of home demolitions given that Israel purchased the bulldozers that it uses to demolish Palestinian homes from the United States.

A lot of the students who received the eviction notices that day were very interested and very happy to have learned about this issue. Some of them, as a result, wanted to get involved. But it wasn't until the Monday after the action that we started to face backlash from the Hillel chapter, especially. Hillel decided to organize an emergency meeting to discuss the eviction notices action and ways in which to respond to the initiative. Groups like the Zionist Organization of America, and the Anti-Defamation League, which has its regional headquarters in Boca Raton, decided to get involved.

Hillel ended up issuing its own press release and issued a joint press release with the university about the eviction notices and how they shouldn't have been approved in the first

place, and how FAU is going to work more closely with Hillel in the future in order to ensure that these types of things don't happen. And that FAU continues to provide a comfortable environment to Jewish students. The senior vice president of the student affairs' department also issued a press release, pretty much condemning SJP for its activities and claiming that this was all illegal.

Even though this was all approved by the administration well beforehand.

Exactly. Despite the fact that it was approved. As a result, the university now has new rules when it comes to approving flyers and hosting events, particularly those organized by SJP. Now, instead of having the flyers approved on the spot it takes them at least 24 hours. For events, we have to wait at least one month before we get confirmation e-mails from the university's student union. Compare this with 10 days, which is the average number of days it takes for student organizations to receive confirmations from the Student Union.

In the aftermath, members of SJP, including myself, received death threats—we weren't really sure who issued them. But we also got dozens of hate e-mails delivered to our FAU e-mail accounts. And the one thing that really shocked us was that when we confronted the senior vice president of Student Affairs about the death threats and the hate mail, he refused to even listen to us. So from that moment on, we had to work on our own to try and get these death threats to stop. Ultimately, we had to work with the FBI to get them stopped, and then they stopped eventually.

What did the death threats say?

I don't remember. They were very explicit—very detailed in terms of how our members and I were going to die.

But the idea of the death threats was more to intimidate and to harass us to the point that we would stop what we were doing. It backfired. If anything, it made us stronger, it motivated us to keep doing what we were doing and encouraged us further to keep working for this cause. And

after that point onward, the discrimination just continued. It just got worse at the university, in terms of the administration and its handling of SJP.

How was it resolved? You worked with the FBI—did they find out anything about who was sending these death threats?

They never got back to us. The only thing I know of was that they made the death threats stop. But they didn't tell us who sent them. They said that they had to subpoena AOL and one other Internet service provider in order to get the death threats to stop, but we still don't know who was behind it.

Obviously, it's really troubling and really frightening that this happened. What kind of conversations were you having inside SJP about how to handle this situation and support each other through this ordeal?

The first talk we had was one on our constitutional rights. We felt it was really important to educate our members about our rights, what we have the right to refrain from. But in terms of the intimidation, because we were such a small group, but a strong group, we didn't really talk about it. It's weird that we didn't talk about it. But we kind of ignored it.

I guess on a practical level you have to keep going with your work and not let it affect you.

Yeah. But it's something that we should have worked on, having a serious talk about this. We have new members now, and we don't want them to get discouraged from getting involved in Palestine solidarity work on campus. The strategy that we have now is to allow the new members to see everything and take it in on their own.

Amazing. And then shortly thereafter, there was the walk-out protest. What was your reaction to the administration going crazy over your legitimate right to protest this event in the way you did?

It wasn't surprising. Like I said, this university has been under constant pressure from the Zionist community to curtail our activities and discipline us for our activism. It wasn't surprising that they would decide to punish us, but this

pressure is not a good enough excuse, or a justification, to violate our rights. And this is what they did—they violated our free speech rights. And it's really unfortunate because we thought we'd have a chance if we filed a lawsuit against the university, but we had two problems. One is that we didn't have the money to litigate. And two, these kinds of processes take a long time.

So I wasn't really surprised, but the one thing that shocked me was when the interim president issued a public statement in which he talked about the Palestine Solidarity Month that SJP was planning—this was a day before SJP started its Palestine Solidarity Month activities [in October 2013]. And in his statement, he pretty much professed FAU's support of Israel. He talked about how SJP was somehow misguided and close-minded because we couldn't see how Israel is a democracy.

And he also said that this solidifies FAU's bond with Israel.

Yes. And he went on to talk about FAU's relationship with Israel, and how there's this study abroad program that allows FAU students to study at Haifa University, and how the university is investing \$2 billion in Israeli bonds. That's not really what you should be proud of or boasting about!

He also mentioned that FAU was proud to have hosted Israeli officials—proud to have hosted a war criminal? Seriously? In saying these things, he was crying for a refutation. Which we did. We got an op-ed published in the school newspaper responding to it. But it's really not surprising that they would do these things. It's all about the money and their image, at the end of the day.

In a public statement after the administration came down hard after following the walk-out, you wrote that you were forced to attend these "anti-bias trainings" designed by the ADL. You spoke so eloquently about how this is just wrong on a practical and political level, but also how it's strengthening your resolve as student activists. And that you weren't going to be discouraged or intimidated.

We thought that after we got punished, the university was going to issue a public statement about what happened, and that they would misinform the students about what took place. So we decided to set things straight and to explain to the students what really happened. And the president ended up issuing a public statement, but he left out a lot of information, he didn't place the issue into context.

The problem with the "diversity" course was that in having us take this course, the university was trying to make it look like we were prejudiced when we were just protesting war crimes. We were protesting war criminals. In what way does that make us prejudiced against Jews, or anyone else for that matter? The point was to explain what exactly happened and how our rights were violated, and how this shouldn't be tolerated at a university which claims to be a marketplace of ideas.

And I think the university made a big mistake. You don't stop activists from doing what they're doing by issuing these kinds of punishments. It takes a lot to really shut down activism. If anything, what the university did only made us stronger, it only made us better. Which is precisely the opposite of what they hoped to achieve by issuing us these punishments. But then again, FAU doesn't have a history of activism so they don't really know how to respond to these types of things. If they were smart and experienced with activism, they would know better than to punish us.

We had members of faculty speak up for us. It looks like a group of professors are working to bring up our case during the next faculty senate meeting, which is a big deal.

What's next for SJP at FAU?

I think now, in addition to conducting all of these different events, like a mock checkpoint and wall, something that we really want to focus on is establishing a student and faculty alliance. We think it's really important to reach out to the faculty; we see them as a future base of support. We also want to do more in terms of outreach, working with other like-minded groups.



Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions: A Growing Movement of Justice

The [divestment] process enforces a debate on campus. It forces people to have to look at what's going on and what they're directly investing in. Every time you have that debate, you come out ahead.

—Rahim Kurwa, UCLA student



First row: Yazeed Ibrahim, Lena Ibrahim, Ghassan Hussein

Second row: Julie Jaynes, Tanya Keilani, Sami Kishawi

Israel's policies of legitimized discrimination between Jews and non-Jews and the systematic privileging of one population over another conform to the legal definition of apartheid. As author and cofounder of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) Omar Barghouti wrote in his book, *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*:

Characterizing Israel's legalized and institutionalized racial discrimination as such does not attempt to equate Israel with South Africa under apartheid; despite the many similarities, no two oppressive regimes are identical. Rather, it stems from the argument that Israel's system of bestowing rights and privileges according to ethnic and religious identity fits the UN definition of the term as enshrined in the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid and in the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.¹

By the end of the second intifada, when popular uprisings were met by both Israel's perpetually brutal force and the intransigent silence of the international community, Palestinians launched an official call for comprehensive boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) in 2005. Signed by more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, the call for BDS signaled a new strategy to challenge and dismantle Israel's repressive policies by using nonviolent means and encouraging the global solidarity movement to affect change with an economic and educational platform that respects Palestinian agency for their own liberation.

Immediately, international activists, including a wide coalition of student groups, incorporated the BDS call into their organizing actions and began pressuring their trade unions, department stores, local governments, and university administrations into ceasing to do business with companies that do business with Israel. But it was during and after Operation Cast Lead, the three weeks of Israeli attacks on the Gaza strip in the winter of 2008–9, which killed more than 1,400 Palestinians and destroyed infrastructure as well as tens of thousands of homes, offices, schools, and clinics, when the BDS movement was amplified as a rallying call. Globally—from the U.S. to Canada, from Latin America to South Africa, and from Europe to Asia—people who were sickened and outraged at international governments' refusal to hold Israel accountable for yet another round of probable war crimes became activated around BDS. Students I spoke with overwhelmingly noted that their activism on and off campus was heightened significantly around these attacks.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the South African Nobel Peace laureate who fought to liberate his country from the apartheid regime, has said that Israel's treatment of Palestinians is comparable to South Africa's treatment of Blacks under apartheid rule.

A supporter of the BDS movement against Israeli apartheid, Tutu said in March 2014 that he has "witnessed the systemic humiliation of Palestinian men, women, and children by members of the Israeli security forces.... Their humiliation is familiar to all black South Africans who were corralled and harassed and insulted and assaulted by the security forces of the apartheid government." Tutu added:

In South Africa, we could not have achieved our democracy without the help of people around the world, who through the use of non-violent means, such as boycotts and divestment, encouraged their governments and other corporate actors to reverse decades-long support for the apartheid regime.

The same issues of inequality and injustice today motivate the divestment movement trying to end Israel's decades-long occupation of Palestinian territory and the unfair and prejudicial treatment of the Palestinian people by the Israeli government ruling over them. Those who turn a blind eye to injustice actually perpetuate injustice. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.²

A year later, the Israeli Navy raided a Turkish humanitarian aid ship in international waters, part of a large flotilla bound for Gaza to deliver supplies and solidarity. The soldiers opened fire on the human rights activists aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, killing nine people and wounding dozens. Again, support for BDS increased exponentially.

Israel supporters often lament that human rights activists who support the BDS movement are "singling out" Israel for special condemnation. Through this digressive assertion, they imply that Israel is the victim, not the aggressor. But the United States openly and boastfully singles out Israel every year as the recipient of its largest military aid package, along with veto power alliance in the United Nations, and unyielding protection from those who would pursue justice for international law violations and decades of possible war crimes.

The 2005 Palestinian Call for BDS³

In light of Israel's persistent violations of international law; and

Given that, since 1948, hundreds of UN resolutions have condemned Israel's colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal and called for immediate, adequate and effective remedies; and

Given that all forms of international intervention and peace-making have until now failed to convince or force Israel to comply with humanitarian law,

to respect fundamental human rights and to end its occupation and oppression of the people of Palestine; and

In view of the fact that people of conscience in the international community have historically shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott, divestment and sanctions; and

Inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid and in the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice and oppression;

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

Inspired by history

BDS is seen as a threat precisely because it has worked in the past. In the years since the official 2005 BDS call, the victories have grown in numbers, and the successes have been enormous.

Transnational corporations are feeling the heat of the global BDS campaign. For example, transportation giant Veolia—which contracts with the Israeli government to provide public buses and a light rail system between Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank—has seen tens of millions of dollars in lost contracts as activists in the United States and Europe campaign against the company in their cities. In Europe especially, banks are closing contracts with Israeli banks that do business with the settlements, and pension funds are pulling their Israel investments out of their portfolios.

Cultural workers have heeded the boycott call, with many world-class scholars, artists, architects, writers, and performers—including Alice Walker, Arundhati Roy, Angela Davis, Stephen Hawking, Roger Waters, Bono, Snoop Dogg, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott Heron, Coldplay, Cassandra Wilson, Cat Power, and Lenny Kravitz⁴—pulling out of events, concerts, and exhibitions in Israel. Entertainers have also reneged on Israel-sponsored events outside of Israel. For example, in 2012, music legend Stevie Wonder cancelled a scheduled performance at a Los Angeles gala to raise money for the Israeli army after international boycott activist coalitions launched a campaign urging him to cancel.⁵

Countless academics, trade unions, church organizations, and student groups have also endorsed the BDS call and have publicly condemned Israel's apartheid policies. But on college campuses specifically, BDS has become an organizing tool around which local campaigns for student agency and support of human rights are centered.

Student activists today find inspiration in the anti-apartheid South Africa movements of the 1970s and 1980s. As Black South Africans were fighting for their own liberation, they called upon persons of conscience across the world to support their struggle and drive wedges between the systems of economic and political power that supported the oppressive apartheid regime. As a result, students (including many Palestinian students) on campuses in the United States—from Hampshire College to Columbia University to UC–Berkeley—rose up *en masse*, organized creative direct actions, and demanded that their college administrations divest from companies profiting from the atrocities in South Africa.

Students across the University of California system, who were among the most active and influential groups to organize against apartheid South Africa, held enormous teach-ins, protest rallies, and strikes that shut down entire campuses. (As a little girl, I remember my mother taking me to the nearby UC–Berkeley campus to see the “shantytowns” that students had constructed in front of the chancellor’s office, in a symbolic gesture to educate the campus community about the deplorable living conditions for Black South Africans under apartheid. The university ordered hundreds of police officers to repeatedly destroy the shantytown encampments.)

In 1986, after three thousand students converged at their annual meeting, demanding full divestment, the UC Regents—the governing body of the University of California system—couldn’t hold back the tide. They voted to divest from South Africa’s apartheid regime, pulling \$3.1 billion from its investments or 30 percent of its total investment holdings. By 1988, 155 colleges and universities had adopted resolutions to divest from apartheid South Africa.⁶ After he was released from prison in 1990, Nelson Mandela came to the San Francisco Bay Area, stopping first at UC–Berkeley where he passionately thanked the students of the UC system for helping to end apartheid in South Africa through their solidarity protests, sustained strikes, and successful divestment campaigns. For decades inside Palestine, Palestinian activists, organizers, and everyday citizens have organized general strikes, tax revolts, and boycotts of Israeli products. The boycott movement was not a brand-new idea, but the 2005 call galvanized and heightened international solidarity with the longtime Palestinian struggle for self-determination. Today, less than 10 years since the official BDS call against Israeli apartheid and settler-colonialism was launched, the movement has grown exponentially around the world. Victories are being won as students, trade unionists, academics, faith-based groups, cultural workers, and human rights defenders campaign for Palestinian rights, using the BDS movement as a way to educate, energize activism, and—as in South Africa—make Israel’s occupation and apartheid system economically and politically unviable.

Hoda Mitwally of CUNY Law School in Queens, New York, told me that the BDS movement reinvigorated the Palestine solidarity movement in the mid-2000s. She said that the generation of activists that came before was torn apart by internal political debates. Instead of creating a strong solidarity struggle in the United States, activists were discussing political solutions for Palestinians in Palestine, such as one state versus two states. These were “things regarding the future of Palestine that I’m not sure if solidarity activists in the West really have a place to weigh in on—I don’t think that they have that place, actually,” Mitwally said. “So with the BDS call, that really remedies it. Because here, we’re not calling for a political solution. We’re restoring agency to Palestinians to do that. What we’re doing is recognizing the privileges we have in the U.S. and the responsibilities that come

with that by targeting corporations, by targeting government and military aid to Israel—and that’s ultimately how we can be most effective.”

In 2010, after a UC–Berkeley student-led campaign for divestment, founding SJP activist and lawyer Noura Erakat wrote:

[UC] Berkeley students have been at the forefront of BDS efforts since February 6, 2001, the day Ariel Sharon became Israeli prime minister. They erected a mock checkpoint on campus and unfurled banners exclaiming, “Divest from Israeli Apartheid.” Within the span of three years, this first university-based divestment campaign spread onto dozens of other American campuses as well as into churches and community organizations. Yet the movement did not gain international legitimacy and elicit serious treatment until a call for BDS came from Palestinian civil society in 2005.⁷

Targeting companies

Looking into the investment portfolios of their universities, students have identified many U.S.-based companies that do business with the Israeli government—companies that score multi-million dollar contracts for providing surveillance equipment, specialized missile systems, or attack helicopters to be used by the Israeli army against Palestinians, for example. From General Electric to Boeing, Hewlett-Packard to Raytheon, Motorola to Caterpillar, students have identified many companies—and there are many of them—and the various ways that they profit from Israel’s violations of human rights.

In April 2003, the student council at Wayne State University in Detroit passed a resolution recommending that the university divest its investment and pension funds from companies that profit from Israel’s occupation. Activists with the independent, on-campus group Students Movement for Justice at Wayne State drafted the resolution, which passed just weeks after 23-year-old American peace activist Rachel Corrie was killed by a Caterpillar bulldozer in Rafah in southern Gaza.

While Corrie was attempting to defend a Palestinian family’s home from imminent destruction during a spate of home demolitions by the Israeli military along the border with Egypt, the Israeli soldier operating the bulldozer—an enormous, weaponized version of the “D-9” model—ran her over twice and killed her. The soldier and the army escaped both responsibility

and conviction after a lengthy trial (of which I attended several sessions in 2010 and 2011 in Haifa). The army and the Israeli court blamed Corrie herself for her own death and refused to apologize to her grieving family.

In 2005 and 2006, the student council at the nearby University of Michigan at Dearborn passed two separate but similar divestment resolutions. Both resolutions invoked United Nations mandates against Israel's occupation and prevention of the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, while demanding the university divest from \$12 million worth of investments in U.S. companies doing business with Israel. Resolutions such as these are largely symbolic, as student councils and senates demand reform within the governing body of these universities, but cannot implement it themselves.

Hampshire College in western Massachusetts is not a stranger to historic divestment campaigns. In 1979, the college became the very first educational institution in the United States to divest from apartheid South Africa. Thirty years later, on February 7, 2009, Hampshire became the first U.S. college to successfully implement full boycott and divestment against companies that profit from Israel's violations of Palestinian rights. The victory came after two years of sustained pressure on the administration by members of the Hampshire SJP chapter, and with more than 800 students, professors, and alumni backing the divestment campaign, the board of trustees voted in favor to pull the college's investments in six companies that do business with Israel.

The students found that Hampshire was invested in Caterpillar, United Technologies, General Electric, ITT Corporation, Motorola, and Terex—companies that supply vehicles, equipment, military technology, or surveillance systems to the Israeli military. “Furthermore, our policy prevents the reinvestment in any company involved in the illegal occupation,” Hampshire SJP stated shortly after the divestment victory,⁹ adding, “SJP has proven that student groups can organize, rally, and pressure their schools to divest from the illegal occupation. The group hopes that this decision will pave the way for other institutions of higher learning in the U.S. to take similar stands.”

Wayne State University's BDS resolution read:

WHEREAS, the Student Council of Wayne State University has grave misgivings about financing violent ethnic cleansing, racially directed against millions of occupied Palestinian civilians, who are both innocent and helpless,

WHEREAS, those millions of Palestinians suffer long-term malnutrition, are surrounded by Israeli army bulldozers, tanks, soldiers, and by jet bombers, all of which have killed thousands of occupied Palestinians,

WHEREAS, on Sunday, March 16, 2003, an American college student, Rachel Corrie, was killed in plain sight, while dressed in bright orange, while waving, and while shouting at an Israeli Army bulldozer through a megaphone, by that same Israeli Army bulldozer, in the Occupied Gaza Strip,

WHEREAS, that Israeli Army bulldozer ran her over twice,

WHEREAS, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu has urged us all to divest from Israel due to its violent and humiliating apartheid policies,

WHEREAS, Israel was a long-time, close ally of White Apartheid South Africa,

WHEREAS, the Wayne State University Board of Governors ("the Board") has knowledge of University investments, including what governments our University is paying taxes to by means of investment, and has the authority to seek such information from its fund managers,

THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED, that we ask the Board to immediately divest (dis-invest) our university from Israel,

THEREFORE IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED, that we ask the Board for a report

this semester, on its progress in divesting the University from its investments in Israel, including divestment from all companies doing business in Israel, and divestment from all stocks and pension funds which include those companies.⁸

One year after Hampshire's divestment victory, students at UC–Berkeley began their campaign for divestment, following in the footsteps of the activists of the free speech movement and the anti-apartheid South Africa movement who had changed history on that very campus. Dalia Marina was a core organizing member of SJP at Berkeley during the 2010 divestment push. An exquisite singer with political acuity, she graduated in 2011 with a double major in Political Economy of Industrialized Societies and music. Marina and I met around the time I began reporting on UC–Berkeley's divestment campaign, and we became quick, dear friends. I met up with her in New York City, and we spoke about her time in SJP after a meal on the Lower East Side.

Marina said that it took at least two years of organizing and researching UC–Berkeley's connections to Israel's military industrial complex before SJP brought the resolution to the student senate in 2010—par for the course in student organizing around BDS, Berkeley SJP members agreed to dedicate time at the end of every meeting or educational event to highlight and promote BDS as a tool for change. “That's how it began. That's how the objectives began to become clear,” Marina recalled. “After BDS became a given, it transitioned to organizing around BDS and executing it on campus. Everything,” she said with a smile, “became a BDS action.”

Marina said that rank-and-file members of SJP were eager to incorporate BDS into their daily activism. She explained that within the core organizing body of SJP at Berkeley, there wasn't any debate about whether it was the right course of action or not. “We [were] excited that there was a way to center the organizing strategies—that we had something we could grasp—and we took to it enthusiastically,” she added. According to Marina, that excitement around BDS attracted a large influx of members, including a lot of Arab students, into the core SJP group at Berkeley.

With the surge of members, SJP was able to delegate specific tasks according to each student's ability and skill set. "We needed people working on publicity, media, and divestment research. We called ourselves the divestment taskforce, of which we had four members. We looked at the university's investment [portfolio], and tried to figure out which companies profited from the occupation and apartheid."

Marina said that it turned out to be more complicated than they originally thought. Money was invested in one fund which was invested in another and yet another after that. The Berkeley SJP decided that they were just going to look at the "direct" investments of the university—money that was directly invested in certain U.S. companies. "We compiled a list of companies that would fit the description of immorally profiting from the occupation, particularly, and then we looked for the names of those companies in the investment portfolios. We kept track of them and built portfolios with that information," she recounted. "Our bill said that the ASUC [Associated Students of the University of California] will not invest in these things, and that the university would not invest in these companies. The bill was about advocating for the UC system not to invest in this by way of the ASUC."

After meticulous research and drafting, SJP introduced the divestment resolution into the student senate on March 18, 2010. A tremendous coalition of 43 allied student groups representing a wide spectrum of student communities, identities, and voices on campus backed the resolution to divest from General Electric and United Technologies, two U.S. corporations that provide engines and equipment for fighter jets and helicopter gunships to the Israeli military. The student, faculty, and community supporters of the resolution spoke eloquently and passionately to the senators about how voting for divestment was voting for human rights and an end to UC–Berkeley's complicity in Israel's human rights violations. The resolution passed, and the students rejoiced.

Showdown in Berkeley

Influential Israel-aligned organizations and the regional Israel Consul excoriated the divestment resolution at UC–Berkeley. Jonathan Kessler, a top official for The American Israel Public

Affairs Committee (AIPAC), stated plainly and openly at a conference in Washington, D.C., that AIPAC would “make sure that pro-Israel students take over the student government and reverse the [pro-divestment] vote” at UC–Berkeley. He added, without nuance: “This is how AIPAC operates in our nation’s Capitol. This is how AIPAC must operate on our nation’s campuses.”¹⁰ It was clear that the pro-Israel lobby’s pressure was significant and would be unrelenting against the student senators.

One week after the divestment vote passed, the student senate president, Will Smelko, vetoed the resolution. It was a devastating turn of events for students who had worked so hard for this divestment success. Moreover, it showed how closely the pro-Israel lobby and governmental representatives were watching the campus divestment movement—and how much they were gearing up to stop such activism in its tracks.

Smelko’s veto had to be confirmed in a vote by the student senate in order to make it legitimate, and pro-Israel lobby groups descended on the UC–Berkeley administration with their full might to pressure senators to back the veto. According to an article in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, Hillel’s UC–Berkeley chapter “coordinated a comprehensive national lobbying campaign consisting of a teach-in, face-to-face meetings with student senators and an intervention by a Nobel laureate [ardent Zionist Elie Wiesel], all aimed at robbing the divestment supporters of three senate votes [previously in favor of the resolution].”¹² However, five other Nobel laureates—including South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, along with Shirin Ebadi, Mairead Maguire, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, and Jody Williams—joined dozens of noted scholars, human rights activists, authors, and more than a hundred UC faculty members in support of the senate to uphold the divestment bill and override Smelko’s veto.

After the president of Berkeley’s student senate vetoed the divestment resolution, former SJP organizer Yaman Salahy filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for communications between the university and Israel-aligned organizations. Salahy wrote about his findings in *Al Jazeera English*:

On March 18, 2010, hours after the student government passed the divestment initiative at UC Berkeley, the Israeli consul in Northern California had called the chancellor’s office to request a meeting.

A meeting was not possible at the time, but the chancellor's office faxed a letter to Israeli Consul General Akiva Tor the same day and a direct phone call was arranged the next day. In the letter, written in Chancellor Robert Birgeneau's name and addressed to Akiva Tor [the Israeli Consul General of the Pacific Northwest], the university distanced itself from the student government's decision and conveyed a willingness to express its opposition to any concerned party."¹¹

I was in the auditorium during the second of two hearings on the divestment veto on April 28, 2010, which lasted until the early morning hours. The energy inside the auditorium in the student union building, which was packed with students, community members, activists from every walk of life, and reporters, was electric. I remember several instances in which the people around me in the audience were moved to tears by the testimonies of the Palestinian students in particular.

Stepping up to the microphone and addressing the student senate, students passionately explained why they were for or against the divestment measure. Palestinian students talked about their family members who had been killed in the recent Israeli attacks on Gaza and, with tears streaming down their faces, conveyed the personal and historical significance of their university's chance to take a stand against funding war crimes in their fathers' villages, on their grandmothers' land.

Anti-Zionist Jewish students implored the student senate not to cave in to intimidation tactics by pro-Israel lobby groups. They explained, in eloquent and compelling language, that those groups don't represent all Jewish people, or all Jewish students on Berkeley's campus. Jewish activists reiterated the fact that there is a wide diversity of opinion inside the Jewish community about Israel's policies and Zionist values, and that Judaism and Israeli nationalism are not one and the same, as much as the Israel advocates would try to force the senators to believe.

Civic leaders, community activists, and lawyers encouraged the senators to take a stand for Palestinian rights, just as the UC had stood against apartheid South Africa, against discrimination of the LGBTQ communities, and against censorship right there on the same campus where the 1960s-era movements for free speech were ignited.

Those who spoke for the other side were emotional as well. Jewish student members of Hillel and others affiliated with

various Zionist groups argued that if the divestment vote was upheld it would create an “atmosphere of hostility” towards Jewish students, that Jews already feel harassed on campus because of student activism challenging Israeli policies, even that the resolution brought up memories of the Nazi Holocaust.

After the room had cleared, a “talking points” memo, drafted by Israel-aligned organizers, had been left behind. The memo specifically encouraged students to talk up fears of harassment, display emotions, invoke the Holocaust and, maybe most significantly, “not to debate the facts of the Israel-Palestine conflict.”

In the end, the veto was upheld. Writing for the *Electronic Intifada* in the aftermath of the debates, core Berkeley SJP member Dina Omar reported:

Once it was clear the veto was going to be upheld, despite the wishes of the 700 students, educators and community members supporting the bill, the supporters exited the room with their mouths covered in tape in a gesture meant to convey that their voices had been silenced by the veto.

Senator Rahul Patel, who supported the bill from the beginning, invited student supporters to raise their left fist in the air and to walk out. Patel said their [raised] fists symbolized “The seeds of truth and freedom that we have sowed tonight.”¹³

The students vowed to rekindle the divestment campaign using stronger strategies. However, the 2010 UC–Berkeley divestment campaign—and the enormous media attention around it—showed that even if divestment resolutions fail, the discussions about Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights become irreversibly amplified. Students across the country were changing the discourse. To this effect, Omar added in her article:

Hundreds of students walked out of the meeting, and reconvened outside to share their feelings about the vote. UC Berkeley and SJP alum Sophia Ritchie said, “Something has shifted—in the discourse, in the sheer numbers of people who are concerned, in the solidarity work and coalition building amongst a broad and truly diverse range of student and community groups, in the energy around Palestine—

that cannot be ignored. In this way, we are winning.”¹⁴

In August 2012, the California State Assembly passed a non-binding resolution, HR-35, boldly equating anti-Semitism with BDS activism. The resolution was passed without debate and without input from community groups. It called for public institutions to condemn “student- and faculty-sponsored boycott, divestment, and sanction campaigns against Israel that are a means of demonizing Israel and seek to harm the Jewish state.” The resolution was swiftly condemned by civil rights organizations and scholars and faculty of the University of California.

It was revealed shortly thereafter that the resolution was written with the explicit help of a major Zionist group, the Simon Wiesenthal Center,¹⁵ which works to discredit and defame Palestine solidarity activists and organizations. The Simon Wiesenthal Center is also building a “Museum of Tolerance” in Jerusalem—on top of the Ma’man Allah (Mamilla) Cemetery, an ancient Muslim burial site dating back to the 7th century. Working in conjunction with the Israeli government, the Simon Wiesenthal Center has already bulldozed and desecrated parts of the holy site and has dug up hundreds of graves.¹⁶

Launching strong campaigns

Ever since Berkeley’s showdown, the divestment momentum has intensified. About a week after Berkeley initially passed its divestment resolution (before the veto), the student government at the University of Michigan–Dearborn issued a statement to secure an advisory committee on campus to investigate the university’s investments, in order to determine if any involve companies that sell weapons, goods, or services to the state of Israel and to urge the advisory committee to immediately divest from companies that violate the university’s ethical foundation.¹⁷

In June 2010, students at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, passed two divestment resolutions at once. The first called for the university to divest from companies that profit from Israel’s occupation, and the other demanded that the campus ban the use of all Caterpillar equipment. The Caterpillar ban was a significant reference to Rachel Corrie, who was an Evergreen student.

Evergreen State’s divestment group, TESC Divest, stated the following in a press release shortly after the resolution victories:

The Caterpillar Corporation [is] responsible for knowingly selling equipment for war crimes and military use against a civilian population, despite calls to cease sales by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other human rights

organizations. Israeli military officials have acknowledged that Caterpillar is a “key weapon” in its continuing occupation of Palestine. Activists worldwide have waged a campaign for several years to hold Caterpillar accountable.

The resolutions have received broad support outside of the campus, including an endorsement by Jewish Voice for Peace. Organizers also received a touching letter of support by students in the Gaza Strip, who wrote, “We strongly believe that through steadfast campaigns and grassroots efforts, those dissident voices—people of conscience and bravery—will be victorious.”

The resolutions passed overwhelmingly, with 79.5 percent of participating students voting for the divestment resolution and 71.8 percent voting for the Caterpillar resolution. This election marked the largest student voter turnout since the creation of Evergreen’s student union.

“In passing these resolutions, students at Evergreen are sending a clear message to the administration that we want a socially responsible investment policy with an unwavering commitment to human rights,” said student organizer Noor Salah.¹⁸

A month later, in July 2010, the Olympia Food Co-op, a health-food store in Olympia, became the first grocery store in the United States to ban all Israeli products from its shelves. In 2012, a student-run on-campus café at Evergreen State voted to boycott all Israeli products.

Student activists across the United States began looking at products sold on campuses, especially in dining halls. The popular Sabra Hummus was scrutinized by BDS campaigners. Its parent company, the Strauss Group, gives direct financial support to the notoriously violent Givati and Golani brigades of the Israeli army, which have committed a litany of human rights abuses since their formation in 1947 and 1948, respectively.¹⁹

Israel advocacy group StandWithUs helped local Zionist individuals attempt to sue the Olympia Food Co-op for boycotting all Israeli products, but they lost—and were mandated to pay each of the 16 co-op board members \$10,000 for damages. The judge ruled that the plaintiffs violated a state law designed to prevent abusive lawsuits aimed at suppressing lawful public participation.

Identifying the Sabra Hummus brand as a target for boycott, student organizers at DePaul University in Chicago in 2011 and at the small, Quaker Earlham College in Indiana in 2012 managed either to get the products pulled from the shelves (at Earlham) or to have alternative brands offered (at DePaul).

In his book, *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, journalist Max Blumenthal describes an officer from the Givati Brigade speaking to a high school class “with tales of glory from Operation Cast Lead. He boasted that

he shot a pregnant woman, justifying his act to the students on the grounds that he killed a future terrorist.”²⁰

And during their last senate meeting of the 2012 school year, Arizona State University’s undergraduate student union unanimously passed a divestment resolution calling on the administration to pull its investments in companies that do business with Israel as well as the regime in Darfur, Sudan.

Following the divestment bill vote, the SJP chapter at Arizona State University said in a press statement:

Arizona State University, a university with an endowment of over \$735 million, aspires to be the “New American University” with globally engaged students. We, students, at ASU want our university to make socially responsible investment decisions; we also want ASU’s investments to reflect its values as an institution. The bill calls for ASU to divest from and blacklist companies such as Alliant Tech Systems, Boeing, Caterpillar, Motorola, United Technologies, Petrochina, China National Petroleum Company, Sinopec, Oil and Natural Gas Company and Alstom.

This is not the first time ASU has divested from companies supporting human rights abuses. In 1985, Arizona public universities supported divestment from apartheid South Africa. The undergraduate student government has also supported the idea of the creation of an Advisory Committee for Socially Responsible Investing on campus in the past.²¹

Lina Bearat was the SJP president at ASU until she graduated and became a civil engineer in Phoenix. We met near the downtown area on an early fall afternoon so I could ask her about the divestment move at ASU. Bearat told me that she was deeply affected by the death of an extended family member—a boy from her mother’s village in Palestine—by Israeli forces. Shortly after his killing, Israel began bombing Gaza in Operation Cast Lead, and Bearat knew that instead of just being depressed, she had to do something.

She began working with the newly formed SJP chapter on campus and also worked with MEChA (the largest Latino/a

student group in the United States), which voted by a landslide to endorse and adopt BDS at their 2012 national conference.²² Following that, members of Arizona State's SJP decided they would push for divestment. Immediately after the bill passed, Bearat said that the university administration "tried to say that it never passed. It turned out that the student government president was terribly lazy and never signed *any* bill, including this one. And when it came to our bill, they said that it didn't pass." But the resistance didn't stop there. Next, Bearat continued, "we got a letter from the new student body president saying that they don't support [the bill], and that the university administration didn't support it either. And then, we got a letter from U.S. senator John McCain himself, saying that this bill was shameful. That's why the administration was freaking out."

Bearat said that SJP and allied groups thought that the McCain letter was hilarious, but it exemplified the significance of the student divestment movement. "Imagine—he was somebody that was running for president!" she laughed. "And here he was, sending this letter to a student group. To us, it was a victory because it proves how effective we are. He was afraid of us, a student group on campus." The student voice supported this bill, Bearat remarked, and now the administration was trying to hide it, while a U.S. senator thought it was important enough to warrant a personal response. "But it's still on record that it passed," she said. "And now, we're still working on a bill that will make it clear that we're asking the university to divest."

Following Arizona State, the student government of the University of Massachusetts at Boston passed a resolution to demand the administration divest from Boeing. The U.S. corporation supplies the Israeli army with warplanes and attack helicopters, as well as missile systems and other weapons—including the Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM), a guided air-to-surface weapon, and 250-pound Small Diameter Bombs, both of which were used by the Israeli military during the 2008–9 attacks on Gaza.²³

California steps up

Boycott and divestment campaigns on college campuses were indeed heating up across the United States. But the 2012–13

school year was one that belonged to campus divestment organizers in California.

In a strategic effort to network California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia-based SJPs and other Palestine solidarity groups on West Coast campuses, the SJP West coalition was formed in 2012. Bringing together hundreds of Palestine solidarity activists, SJP West offered support, strategies, and community to student groups at a time when Israel-aligned organizations on the West Coast were threatening legal action—as in the federal Title VI complaints—or placing pro-Israel propagandists on campus to shut down activism. SJP West members also began organizing a wave of divestment campaigns, especially across the University of California system, which demonstrated the strength of such a coalition.

In November 2012, the same month as an eight-day assault against the Gaza Strip by Israeli forces that killed approximately 170 Palestinians, and further destroyed Gaza's infrastructure, schools, clinics, and media offices, UC-Irvine's SJP introduced a divestment bill to their student senate. It had been just over a year since an Orange County jury, in a seemingly politically motivated trial, convicted the Irvine 11 students for disrupting a lecture by former Israeli ambassador Michael Oren. Proving that the prosecution of the Irvine 11 did not hamper the level of activism on campus, as perhaps Israel-aligned organizations hoped it would, the Associated Students—the undergraduate student government—of UC-Irvine voted unanimously to call for divestment from companies that profit from Israel's occupation.



2012–2014 divestment campaigns. (Compiled by Rahim Kurwa)

The resolution, which passed 16-0 with no abstentions, called on the University of California to divest from six companies—Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, General Electric, SodaStream, Raytheon, and L-3 Communications—that assist or directly profit from Israel’s occupation and human rights abuses. In a press release, the campaign group Irvine Divest called the vote “an historic move that could initiate a domino effect across America’s campuses.”²⁴

Sabreen Shalabi, a core organizing member of UC Irvine’s SJP, told me at an SJP West conference that the Irvine 11 case “built solidarity on our campus, and I feel like our campus, despite what happened, is becoming a lot more pro-Palestinian.” Shalabi added that SJP members were still shocked that the vote was unanimously in favor of divestment. “I don’t feel like I’ve

had the time to think about it, but I'm in awe," she said, with pride in her voice. "We passed divestment at Irvine, and then you hear other people talking and you see other schools doing it and you're just like, 'Wow, we're really making history.'"

Shortly after Irvine's divestment resolution victory, UC-Riverside, UC-San Diego and UC-Santa Barbara presented divestment resolutions to their student governments.

Amal Ali, a student and SJP member at Riverside told me that one of the companies they targeted for divestment during their campaign was the weapons manufacturer Raytheon, which, she said, directly invests into the university's School of Engineering. Raytheon supplies weapons engineering research and technology to the Israeli military.

Ali said that some Riverside students were angry at the SJP activists for proposing that Raytheon should be de-linked to the university. "They said, 'how can we get hired by them if we're divesting from them, that's never going to happen, we can't support this,' and so on," she explained, visibly upset that students were dismissing human rights violations in favor of possible job opportunities.

After initially passing the resolution, student senators came under serious attack by Zionist individuals and groups. E-mails were sent to each senator with a barrage of talking points, insinuating that voting in support of a BDS resolution was tantamount to anti-Semitism, while others ludicrously claimed that Israel's violations of Palestinian rights were invented and not "proven by facts." Other e-mails, which I read through after a source (whose identity I agreed to protect) forwarded them to me, claimed that the divestment resolution was "divisive" and that it "misrepresented" the student body.

A month later, the student senate rescinded the divestment resolution. But students like Ali told me that UC-Riverside would continue to press for divestment, even if they had to start from scratch all over again.

The same semester, the SJP chapter at UC-San Diego introduced a divestment resolution to their student senate, which voted 20-12 in favor, with one abstention. The resolution named Boeing, General Dynamics Corporation (which sells engines and equipment for Israeli army tanks), Hewlett Packard (which

provides biometric screening systems at Israeli checkpoints in the occupied West Bank, as well as electronic equipment and IT infrastructure throughout the army), Ingersoll-Rand (which also provides biometric systems at checkpoints), and Raytheon (which supplies various missiles to the Israeli army) among other companies that “profit from Israel’s military occupation and violence against Palestinians in violation of international law and human rights,” and called on the University of California to divest funds away from those companies. Again, Zionist organizations on and off campus tried to create sustained opposition to the UC–San Diego divestment bill, claiming its passage would be “divisive.” They even recruited two local members of U.S. Congress to write letters asking student senators to vote against the resolution.

Some students echoed the false and inflammatory claims that other opponents of divestment have made in the past. A UC–San Diego senior told the student council, “This marginalizes the Jewish students on campus and makes them feel unsafe and unwanted.”²⁵ However, as Ali Abunimah remarked in the *Electronic Intifada*’s coverage on the divestment bill’s passage, “It would seem that the arguments in favor of divestment won out against political muscle.”²⁶

At UC–Santa Barbara, more than 30 student groups on campus endorsed a divestment bill, which did not pass. However, the SJP chapter at UC–Santa Barbara said in a statement that even though the vote didn’t pass, they were glad that it raised the level of discourse and debate on Israel’s policies on campus and in the community.

Following the divestment waves in southern California, UC–Davis and UC–Santa Cruz introduced divestment bills of their own. At Davis, the bill was prevented from a vote before the student senate, and the student government at Santa Cruz failed to pass the resolution by a small margin of votes. That same semester, in the spring of 2013, UC–Berkeley’s SJP took a deep breath and reintroduced a divestment resolution to the student government, exactly three years since the widely reported 2010 divestment hearing—and veto—had occurred.

This time, it passed.

After a senate meeting that lasted 10 hours, UC–Berkeley took a stand for justice, equality, and human rights as the tide around the country and around the world swelled in favor of divestment. As expected, Zionist groups—and the UC administration—admonished the vote. Students and activists questioned if the current president of the student senate would, like his predecessor in 2010, veto the resolution. Meanwhile, the local, weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian* ran a special investigation which found that the current student senate president had been on an all-expenses-paid trip to Israel, financed and sponsored by the American Jewish Committee (AJC), an ardently Zionist advocacy organization that has cultivated relationships with student government leaders and university newspaper reporters to advocate Israel’s interests on campus.

Even after it was revealed that the student president had taken advantage of a free propaganda trip to Israel, and had come under pressure by Zionist groups including the Israel Action Network (of which the AJC is a sponsor organization) and the Jewish Community Relations Council, he decided not to veto the bill, although he released a statement “firmly rejecting” the bill itself.²⁷

Writing in the online *Solidarity* magazine, UCLA’s Rahim Kurwa—a national SJP organizer—said that “a second setback at Berkeley might have put an indefinite halt to BDS efforts, but in a drawn-out senate session that lasted until 5 a.m. the next morning, Berkeley’s SJP and allied groups, along with several supportive senators, made eloquent arguments and withstood a series of tactics designed to distract and confuse moderate senators.”

Notably, he added that the tactics of anti-BDS groups included “to insert language into the bill that, if rejected, would make pro-Palestinian activists look unreasonable. One example was the attempt to insert language calling for a two-state solution into the bill. Although ‘pro-Israel’ senators hoped the rejection of this language would show moderates that BDS was truly a one-state movement at its core, the language was voted down and did not achieve the intended result because a broad majority of senators recognized how irrelevant the statehood question is to the issue of Palestinian rights.”²⁸

Also in 2013, students at Stanford University introduced a divestment resolution to the student senate that ultimately failed to pass, but garnered a lot of attention on campus and shifted the discussion immensely. I spoke with Omar Shakir, an Iraqi-American student who was finishing his law degree and gearing up to work in Egypt with an international human rights organization, and asked him to talk about how Stanford activists

targeted companies—especially since Stanford, as a private institution, is not obligated to publicize its endowments portfolio.

Shakir explained that Palestine solidarity activists on campus began the process in 2007. “We focused on five criteria,” he explained. “Each criteria was tied to a specific practice that violated human rights and international law. Things like how companies engaged in facilitating acts of collective punishment, companies that supported the building or maintenance of the separation barrier, companies that operate in settlements or on occupied land, companies that facilitate acts of institutional discrimination, and at the time we had a criteria that was about military operations. We kind of merged collective punishment and military operations over the years.”

The campaign had mobilized many students, Shakir said. Nearly a thousand members of the Stanford community signed a petition of support. The students meticulously researched the policies and practices of the companies they identified as profiteers of human rights abuses in Palestine, and found “that they significantly violated human rights in contravention of international law and Stanford’s policy on investment responsibility,” Shakir said. “We were encouraged by university officials to identify which companies we’re concerned about, put forward our request, and, if Stanford is invested in them, they’ll divest; and if they’re not, they will commit not to invest until the company’s policies change.”

Thousands of miles away from California, students at the historically progressive Oberlin College were introducing a divestment bill of their own, attempting to echo the campus’s successful anti-apartheid South Africa divestment campaign of the late 1980s.

Jamie Gerber, a member of Oberlin Students for a Free Palestine (SFP)—the oldest campus Palestine solidarity group in the United States, founded in the 1980s—said that activists on campus were trying to enlist faculty support for the Oberlin divestment campaign against Israeli apartheid. They drafted a resolution asking that the board of trustees recommend divestment to the money manager for the college.

“I’ve been digging around in the archives, trying to figure out what the students did to get the college to divest from apartheid

South Africa,” Gerber explained to me over dinner with two other SFP members at an off-campus café. “And before the board of trustees gave their stamp of approval and recommended it to the money manager, they had to have the student senate endorse a resolution, they had [to have] the general faculty endorse a resolution, they had [to have] the alumni council endorse a resolution, they had [to have] the union for janitorial and secretarial workers endorse a resolution, and then the president’s office as well before the trustees did.” Because faculty members were at the forefront of the South Africa divestment campaign, alongside the students, Gerber said that they wanted “to identify a few professors that might be allies, get them all in a room together, and sense where people are at and whether their departments would be interested in having a larger conversation.... But I think with this issue, it’s a very scary thing for even a tenured professor to get behind, to be forthcoming in saying that there’s a problem and we should divest.”

Acting in coalition with 15 other student groups who had put together a list of demands, Students for a Free Palestine not only demanded the college divest from companies that profit from Israel’s occupation, but that there be specific scholarships for undocumented students, the implementation of an Asian-American studies major, and a ban on fracking (an environmentally-devastating process of natural gas extraction) on the Oberlin campus. “The board members’ reactions was really interesting,” Gerber told me. “We presented the demands all together, so they couldn’t directly respond to specific demands. They were clear that nothing was going to happen by the end of the night, which we expected.”

During the same conversation, Sofie Ghitman of Oberlin SFP told me that activists were busy beforehand gathering hundreds of signatures, meeting with allied student organizations, and plastering the campus with pro-BDS stickers. “We had been talking to the senate, and it was the last senate plenary of the year,” Ghitman said. “There was obviously some heat and backlash around it. But the senate was willing to listen, at least. And they weren’t convinced, in the end, by the kids from Hillel who tried to stop it. In May 2013, the bill was passed.”

In late February 2014, a wide coalition of student groups, led by SJP at the University of California at Los Angeles, introduced

a divestment resolution into the student senate. Not only did the resolution demand the UC pull money out of investments in companies that profit from Israel's occupation, but it demanded the same from companies that profit from the U.S. prison industrial complex. After an all-night hearing, the student senate voted down the resolution. It was a blow to the enormously determined SJP activists at UCLA, and the broad coalition in favor of the divestment bill. However, as students remarked on social media after the vote, that students, faculty, and community members were talking about Israel's occupation of Palestine and making connections between Israel's policies of mass incarceration of Palestinian children, women, and men and the mass incarceration of persons of color in United States was itself a victory.

As Yazeed Ibrahim of UC-Irvine poetically explained in a Facebook post shortly after the resolution was voted down:

Divestment was never about freeing the Palestinian people; we will free ourselves. It is about not standing in our way as we fight for our freedom and as we struggle for equality and self-determination.

The liberation of my people will never come at the hands of senators in privileged American institutions. Divestment is an opportunity to join an honorable cause and stand with those who are oppressed and occupied. The struggle will continue until liberation, the question is, which side will you be on?

Just two months later, in April 2014, SJP organizers at UC-Riverside re-introduced a divestment resolution as they had promised. Students packed the student government hearing, some holding signs that read "Don't fund the oppression of my family." The resolution passed and was upheld.²⁹

Israeli government forced to address BDS

The Israeli prime minister was standing on a dais at the annual AIPAC conference in March 2014 in Washington, D.C. Dressed in a navy blue suit, his silver hair perfectly parted on the left, he spent nearly one-third of his speech admonishing the growing movement to hold Israel accountable to international law. He assured his audience that the BDS movement "will fail."

Benjamin Netanyahu labeled the worldwide supporters of the Palestinian-led call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions as “anti-Semites” and “bigots,” saying that “they should be exposed and condemned.” Flashing a wry smile, the prime minister remarked: “The boycotters should be boycotted.”³⁰

This was not the first time that Benjamin Netanyahu—or other Israeli officials—had been forced to acknowledge the growing, grassroots BDS movement. Just nine months before, Netanyahu declared the BDS movement “a strategic threat” and assigned his government’s Strategic and Intelligence Affairs Ministry in charge of “dealing” with “the phenomenon.” He added that the ministry would get all the authorization and financial means they required. The head of the ministry, Yuval Steinitz, asked for about \$29 million in funding to counteract the global grassroots movement. According to the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*, the prime minister “has no intention of commenting on the figures since the plan is still being drafted.”³¹

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni—a war crimes suspect who helped orchestrate Israel’s Operation Cast Lead attacks—noted in late 2013 that the boycott movement was “moving and advancing uniformly and exponentially,” adding that “those who don’t want to see it, will end up feeling it... [Israel is turning itself into] a lone settlement in the world.”³² Meanwhile, other Israeli politicians and official sources have called BDS “the greatest threat faced by the country,”³³ or warned that if the boycott moves forward, Israel’s exports market will be hurt.³⁴ Others have called the movement “a constant war,” reporting Israel’s loss at around \$30 million in settlement-made products because of the boycott movement to date.³⁵



Penn BDS literature. (Photo by Sara Jawhari)

If it's true, as Israeli politicians and advocates cry, that Israel's foundation would crumble if the demands of the BDS movement were implemented—justice and equality for all persons, Jews and non-Jews alike—is Israel's current system one which the international community should be protecting and celebrating in the first place?

In January 2014, Omar Barghouti wrote in the *New York Times*, “BDS doesn't pose an existential threat to Israel; it poses a serious challenge to Israel's system of oppression of the Palestinian people, which is the root cause of its growing worldwide isolation.”³⁶ He added, in the same op-ed:

Israel remains the only country on earth that does not recognize its own nationality, as that would theoretically avail equal rights to all its citizens, undermining its “ethnocratic” identity. The claim that BDS, a nonviolent movement anchored in universal principles of human rights, aims to “destroy” Israel must be understood in this context.

Would justice and equal rights for all really destroy Israel? Did equality destroy the American South? Or South Africa? Certainly, it destroyed the discriminatory racial order that prevailed in both

places, but it did not destroy the people or the country.

Likewise, only Israel's unjust order is threatened by boycotts, divestment and sanctions.³⁷

I asked many of the students I interviewed to analyze the anti-BDS rhetoric repeated *ad nauseum* by Israel and parroted by its apologists. Sami Kishawi, a Palestinian-American medical student at Loyola University in Chicago, runs his own blog and posts frequently about the BDS movement and students who work for justice in Palestine. “[The pro-Israel lobby’s] attempts to delegitimize BDS only indicate how effective it has been as a strategy,” Kishawi told me. “The goal of BDS is ultimately to put pressure on institutions that promote the violation of civil and human rights. If Israel feels threatened by BDS, which it does, it is because Israel is founded on the backs and bones of the oppressed.”

Alexi Shalom of Hunter College in New York City explained that his SJP group has been organizing to get rid of Sabra Hummus at his campus. “It’s a company that supports brigades that are not just Israeli army scout troops—these are brigades that are literally violating human rights. You can’t believe that this pretzel and hummus combination company is supporting this. It’s wild.” Shalom said that not only are they trying to physically remove Sabra products from the cafeterias on campus, but that more importantly, the activists are hoping to start conversations “where people have to pick sides.”

Hunter’s SJP members are also working with queer groups on campus regarding “pinkwashing,” challenging the adage promoted by Israel that it is a gay-friendly haven. “It’s so ridiculous,” Shalom said, “considering that if you’re a gay Palestinian trying to get over the wall, Israel is not going to help you.” He said it was really important to the BDS campaign to build connections and solidarity with other communities. “That’s how BDS takes off,” he told me, adding that one of the reasons why anti-Palestinian groups and the Israeli government want to demonize and legislate against BDS is simply because *it is effective*. “Those people, like us, have studied history,” Shalom said. “They know that BDS works.”

Empowered by BDS

“When I started, I knew almost nothing about BDS,” Shafeka Hashash told me in New York City. Hashash and I met at Washington Square Park in the summer of 2013. A double major in politics and Middle East and Islamic Studies at New York University, she was enthusiastic about her involvement in activism on campus and was honest about her journey to the BDS movement.

“[At first,] I was really hesitant about what this was really able to do,” she explained. “And then, when I learned about the South African BDS campaign, which I also had learned nothing about before college—which is a real pity, that you don’t learn any of these things in high school—I completely did a 180-degree turn of my view of it.”

Hashash added that she was involved in the local TIAA-CREF campaign, which has brought together students, faculty, and administrative staff from universities across the country to demand that their pension fund—a financial services giant—divest from U.S. companies involved with Israel. Jewish Voice for Peace, a national Jewish social justice and human rights activism group, has spearheaded the lively and creative campaign that has galvanized activists demanding that TIAA-CREF divest.

“So, in terms of TIAA-CREF, saying you don’t want these mass amounts of people to not want to have pensions with you, the future professors and teachers and lawyers and doctors and NGO workers, and saying no, we refuse to have this pension plan—we’ll cause a lot more trouble when we’re actually part of this plan than when we were just students going to class,” Hashash added with a laugh.

At UCLA, student and SJP activist Angelica Becerra explained that she obtained a list of corporations which profit from Israel’s occupation from the website project WhoProfits.org, and has become conscious of her day-to-day purchases. She’s also been telling others about products such as Sabra hummus. “I always connected BDS with the *maquilladora* industries along the U.S.-Mexico border—the sweatshops that are [there], which profit from Mexican labor and Mexican immigrant labor. So I always tie back to my own roots, because that’s where I’m speaking from,” she said.

Students in Chicago were enthusiastic about their emerging BDS campaigns, from de-shelving Sabra Hummus to campaigning around divestment resolutions. “We see the change we’re making,” Loyola University of Chicago student Nashiha Alam told me, speaking of the growing BDS movement on campus. She said the act of campaigning around BDS also offers students real responsibility towards affecting change on the ground in Palestine.

Leila Abdul Razzaq at DePaul University in Chicago is an artist and activist, and the creator of a hand-drawn booklet that helps explain the BDS movement, designed to be distributed at actions on campus. The booklet was published for free online, and activists across the United States have been printing it out and using it to educate and inform others about the importance of BDS, while also dispelling the myths about the movement promulgated by Zionist groups.³⁸

“We try to have a BDS component at everything we do,” Abdul Razzaq told me, explaining the various actions and events on campus. “I think that BDS is really important especially for people in the diaspora and outside of Palestine. Since most of us aren’t living under the same kind of oppression that people in the occupied territories are living under, there’s not a good way for us to directly oppose what Israel is doing.... So we have to challenge the system that we’re living under, and the way that the system is complicit in what’s happening in Palestine.”

Tala Radejko of the University of Chicago is a comparative literature and pre-medical student. Enthusiastic about her role in campus activism, Radejko echoed the sentiment that BDS is one way for students to feel like they can actively contribute. “Having events and raising awareness is great, and does promote dialogue, and that is useful,” she said. “But at the end of the day, it hasn’t actually done anything concrete. BDS offers one of the ways in which to take advantage of people’s curiosity and potential support, and even though it is largely symbolic—because universities aren’t ever going to divest without some sort of national and international political pressure—all those divestment wins have a lot of weight in terms of shifting public perception and dialogue.”

Moira Geary, an anthropology major at Northwestern in Chicago, told me that it feels really good to be part of this

growing movement. “It seems like it’s gaining a lot of momentum,” she noted, smiling. “And looking at it recently and at a historical perspective, looking at the antiapartheid South Africa movement in the ’80s, just looking at the timeline of how long that took—and then looking at the growth of the BDS movement, and how it’s going forward, is really very heartening.”



Interview: Yaman Salahi

Yaman Salahi is an indomitable activist. He has worked tirelessly to uncover and challenge the machinations of the pro-Israel lobby's influence on U.S. campuses. A graduate in rhetoric at UC–Berkeley in 2009, who earned his law degree from Yale in 2012, Salahi was a part of SJP as a student since his freshman year at Berkeley. He now works as a staff attorney at the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, in their National Security and Civil Rights program.



Salahi was part of the second wave of divestment organizing at UC Berkeley, in the second half of the 2000s. He told me that as the SJP chapter grew, his favorite thing was “to talk to people.” He explained, with a wry smile, “I thought that if you talked to people about Palestine enough, they would finally get it. I don’t really believe that anymore, but at the time I had a lot of patience, and a lot of time.”

He and members of SJP reconnected with the previous era of Palestine activists on UC–Berkeley’s campus—those who had led the 2002 occupation of the administrative building in a demand for divestment¹—and solicited their advice as the group grew and faced new challenges. Like many organizers, activists, legal advocates, and students in the Palestine solidarity movement, I’ve long admired Salahi’s unyielding passion for justice and free speech. I asked him to begin our interview by talking about the turning point of Palestine

activism during and after Israel's attacks on Gaza in 2008–9, and the climate on campus during that period.

Operation Cast Lead was a huge turning point. When we started, there was one pro-Israel group on campus; it was called the Israel Action Committee [IAC]. They had been around for a while. They had standard AIPAC-like talking points and approach—nothing horribly racist or pro-violence, anything like that—but they had a super problematic discourse. Over the course of those two years, after we increased our activism and our public presence and our engagement with the various sectors of the campus Jewish community, there actually were new groups that started as a result.

First, there was a group on the liberal wing called Keshet Enoshi, some members ended up being almost SJP members by the end of it. What they wanted to do was create another way for Jewish students to connect with Israel that wasn't through the government but rather through civil society groups.

And then there was a group that started from the other side called Tikvah, and they were far right-wing nationalist—really aggressive. All of our problems after SJP started were really because of them. We never had trouble with IAC or Keshet Enoshi, even though we didn't see eye to eye with them. But Tikvah were provocateurs. They pushed things to the limit. And during Cast Lead especially, even though they were still quite marginal within the Jewish community, they were heavily on the scene. At that point, they were suspended from the Jewish Student Union and Hillel as well.

Why?

Well, there was an incident in November 2008, where the Tikvah group hosted the Zionist Freedom Alliance², which is a strange group [for an event on campus]. Three SJP students went up to a balcony on Eschelman Hall and displayed a Palestinian flag. A leader of Tikvah, who was also a student senator, along with an alumnus who was the former leader of Tikvah, and another person from an off-campus group rushed up and confronted them all and were yelling racist slurs at the

SJP students—“Arab dogs,” stuff like that. It ended up in a scuffle of some sort, but immediately after that happened, Tikvah was marginalized within the Jewish community. And they were kicked out from those settings in part because of that behavior. Now, they run the Jewish Student Union—so it’s actually flipped in the other direction.

But we also ran a successful recall campaign against a senator who was [the] leader of Tikvah that year. He was voted out of office because of that incident.

And some of the members of Tikvah were the ones who ultimately filed a civil rights complaint against UC–Berkeley.

Yeah. One of the members, Jessica Felber, brought the lawsuit, and her lawyers filed the complaint with the [U.S.] Department of Education, but she was one of the most aggressive and in-your-face people. It wasn’t like she was just some student who was wandering around campus and chanced upon a group of crazy activists—she was always on the front lines.

I specifically remember her during Cast Lead: she would wear an Israeli army sweatshirt every single day. I remember after the attacks, we had a protest where students put out milk cartons and dressed them up with flags to symbolize coffins of people who had died. We held up banners and signs near there, and the Tikvah folks came up to us—and Jessica Felber in particular came up to me—and they started yelling in our faces about it. They then went to the middle of our display and unfurled a banner that said “victims of Hamas terror.” It was the most childish way to hijack a protest.

That was the kind of thing that would then suck up all our time: it would lead to some complaint, we’d get sucked into some administrator’s office, we would have to [get] into an ongoing dialogue with administrators and Tikvah and other groups about the rules of engagement on campus. But the administration never really believed anyone on this. They thought it was just two groups of crazy people, that it was a matter of perspective.

And then it seemed like things got a little more serious in the lead-up to divestment. You revealed information through a Freedom of Information Act request about the Israeli consul general of the Pacific Northwest, Akiva Tor, going directly to the Chancellor's office to complain about the divestment bill. What else did you find?

Yes. So SJP had always had a divestment committee, but it was just in various stages of research and planning. But it really kicked off after Cast Lead, where they came up with a plan and came up with the research and decided to propose that bill the following year, in 2010. This was boosted in part because a student who was involved in divestment at London School of Economics had come to Berkeley and brought some strategic experience with him, but obviously a lot of other students played key roles in researching the investments and mobilizing a turn-out to the votes, too. I had already graduated at this point.

It was an epic four-month period during the divestment campaign. So, they passed the resolution by a very high margin, 16-4, and immediately, the next day, what the documents I got showed [was] that Akiva Tor's office e-mailed the chancellor and requested a meeting. They didn't meet in person immediately, but they had a phone call about it at that time.³

One of the things that the FOIA documents showed was that the chancellor's office was actually coordinating its press strategy with the Israeli Consulate. So there's an e-mail from Dan Mogulof, who's the UC-Berkeley chancellor's spokesperson, who also served in the Israeli army years ago, saying something like, "Either we agree with you, or do you agree with us that not saying anything is the best way to prevent this from getting picked up by major media?" It's amazing, because there never really was a mainstream media report about all of this, despite the three very long divestment hearings on campus. But after that very long period, the consul regrouped with the chancellor after the final veto which failed to be overridden. [UC-Berkeley officials] arranged a meeting in the summer of 2010 with the consul, a number of local Jewish Federation leaders, and the leader of Berkeley Hillel,

with the chancellor's office to discuss the implications and the fallout and how to prevent this from happening again.

What do you attribute that shift to? As you said, up until that point, the administration was pretty much hands-off, they pretty much disregarded both SJP and the right-wing Zionist group on campus. There wasn't this kind of coordinated relationship with an Israeli governmental representative before. Then, this happens. What made that shift occur?

Well, before that time, opposition was really limited to Hillel or the Jewish Federation, or the Zionist Organization of America. When there was a [Palestine] event on campus, they'd send e-mails expressing their dismay and concern, the administration would freak out, and they'd go from there. I think the consul saw this divestment move as a real threat and they were worried about it spreading to other campuses—or, not even just that, but they were also worried that it would open the doors to wider discussion in general about the issue.

And you saw, after that time period, there was a major regrouping in a number of Zionist organizations about how to stop divestment campaigns from going anywhere. The Jewish Federations of North America and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs pledged \$6 million to fight divestment on campus after that.

One of the major theories that I developed through that public records request was that we were doing a really good job of mobilizing the grassroots, but we were totally out of the loop and ten steps behind when it came to engaging with university administrations on an institutional level. The chancellor officially maintained his silence for about two months after the divestment campaign, and later we found out that he had actually been in touch with all these people in the interim and had even been sharing his views with the student president, who had vetoed the resolution.

There were a number of organizations from off-campus contacting the chancellor about the resolution, all against it and no one in support of it. We realized that we have to prevent the backlash from happening, because we can get all these small victories, but there's no way we can withstand the

backlash unless we start developing [communication with the administration].

That's when the idea of a national SJP gathering came up. We released a national statement and made a real effort to get as many [SJP] groups as possible across the country to sign on—and that was the first time anyone knew how many [chapters] there were! We ended up getting 60 signatures. All of us who were on the active campuses like Hampshire, UC–Berkeley, et cetera, we were like, holy shit, there's 60 of these groups around the country? No one knew that! We had vaguely known that UCLA had a chapter, and Stanford had a chapter, but after that, seeing how many groups there were, we committed to organizing a conference to bring people together. The first National SJP conference was hosted at Columbia University in New York in 2011.

There's been a sea change since then. Through these conferences, everyone meets each other. Nothing hierarchical was designed. We agreed to a [list of principles], and then decided that a steering committee would plan the next conference.

Talk about your own perspective on how Title VI evolved as a tool of “lawfare” against Palestine solidarity activists and academic freedom. You did so much research into the strategic use of Title VI by Israel-aligned groups.

The first Title VI complaint was filed against UC–Irvine in 2004. It was pretty much under the radar, which was surprising to me. When I started looking into this in 2010, I tried tracking down some UC–Irvine alumni to ask about this, and most had no idea what I was talking about—or had a vague recollection, but said it was never something anyone, let alone any lawyers, had paid attention to. We had no infrastructure to deal with it, and the Muslim Student Union members were being trailed by the FBI at that time.

There was an incident where a student felt he was being followed by a car, so [he] got out and confronted the person driving the car, and that person—who was wearing plain clothes—freaked out and almost ran him over. So [the student] called the campus police and sent them after this car, and they

stopped him, and the campus police came back and said there was nothing they could do—it was the FBI.

Oh my God. That's outrageous.

Yeah. Those Irvine guys have had to deal with a lot. It was also around the time when pro-Israel groups were mobilizing nationally after the second intifada.

...I started looking into Title VI during law school, trying to figure out who was behind it, what was going on. Around 2011, the complaint against Rutgers was opened.

Kenneth Marcus, under the George W. Bush administration, was the assistant secretary for enforcement at the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education. He didn't think Jewish students were protected under Title VI because [the DOE] thought [Judaism] was a religion and not a race⁴—he has a whole book about whether Jews are seen as a racial group or a religious group under anti-discrimination law. In different periods of history, there were legal, political, and social implications for one categorization or another.

While he was there, in September 2004, he issued a policy statement. First of all, it pretends to be a response to the post-9/11 environment, so he says we need to extend protection to some religious groups. So Muslim and Sikh students purportedly are to benefit from this change, too. The policy uses tortured language, saying something like, “Groups that have some actual or perceived shared ethnic characteristics or ancestral ties can benefit from Title VI even if they also share a religious identity.” So the example in the memo is Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs—those are the three groups he thought should be protected. A month later, the Zionist Organization of America filed the complaint against UC–Irvine. That was the test case for Marcus's policy.

Marcus claims that the San Francisco office of the Office of Civil Rights was prepared to find a “hostile environment” at UC–Irvine, but that D.C. overrode that decision. He blames it on the political appointees, which is nonsense, because this was during the Bush administration, which is not known for being friendly to people criticizing U.S. foreign policy or

Israeli policies. He inferred that Bush political appointees overrode the decision of career civil rights attorneys at OCR for political reasons—please. If it was overridden, it was likely done over concerns about the legal merits, not politics.

OCR didn't release a decision until the summer of 2007—an unusually long time period. Over 90 percent of OCR investigations are resolved within 180 days. So it was really unusual to go beyond that, and it was extremely unusual to go beyond three years. If you think about it, if there's a real Title VI violation, that means a whole class of students is graduating before there's a remedy for their civil rights violations.

So OCR closed the investigation in 2007, saying that most of the allegations were time-barred, meaning they were too old to consider. Then they went through a number of individual allegations, not all things that are easy to defend, but they concluded that those things were not based on race or national origin, but on political disagreements. So some were just people in heated political disputes doing not very nice things to each other, but there wasn't evidence that anyone was targeted because of their race or religion.

Then, a month later, ZOA [Zionist Organization of America] filed an appeal, which the OCR treated as a second complaint and they opened up another investigation in 2007. That wasn't closed until 2013. So for six years, that investigation was probably just sitting on someone's desk somewhere. I suspect that ZOA and others didn't push for it to be closed because they had a sense it would not be resolved in their favor.⁵

Just to be clear, here, the problem is not that Jewish students have protection under Title VI. It makes sense that they should, just like every other minority group should. It's always good to expand protection under civil rights laws, and like all other minorities, Jewish students encounter anti-Semitism—but it's usually not from Palestine solidarity activists. But the problem is the notion that speech about Israel and Palestine should be treated as potentially violating Jewish students' civil rights.

It was around [2010] that I started doing more FOIA requests to the Department of Education to get more information about the policies, and I did them in two phases. I wanted to get their interpretation of this clause in Title VI and what it covers, and I was trying to get all complaints that were filed alleging anti-Semitism on campus. I got those, there weren't many, and there were a few that weren't Israel-Palestine related—a few complaints from middle schools and elementary schools, where Jewish students were being bullied or treated differently from their peers.

And then there were the four open complaints: Berkeley, Santa Cruz, Rutgers, and Irvine. In 2011, there was also one at Barnard College, but that one wasn't sustained.

More recently, I got a stack of 1,400 pages from the Department of Education. I did some legal research into it because I didn't think the policy was completely sound, because it's unclear how the tortured language of the policy is actually applied in practice. Or, at best, it might protect Jewish students but it wouldn't really protect other religious groups.

I started to resent the framing of Marcus' letter of it being because of the post-9/11 environment. I did a follow-up request for complaints alleging anti-Muslim and anti-Sikh sentiment around the country. Those complaints are not political, meaning that they don't center around campus activism in the same way that the ZOA complaints do. They were just clear cases of bigoted, Islamophobic epithets against individuals as "terrorists" based on wearing a hijab [headscarf] or being Middle Eastern.

We also got some training documents on how they deal with Palestine stuff. The training pretty clearly says that graffiti, for example, that says "Free Palestine," is not a violation of Title VI and you shouldn't investigate it. So their internal documents seem to be on point, it's just the handling of these investigations is very suspect.

I think those DOE investigations of UC schools closed in 2013 because we—SJPs, legal groups, et cetera—mobilized to point out the problematic factual and legal basis for the

complaints, and the negative impact of these unending investigations on Arab and Muslim students in particular.

Before they were closed, how can you assess the way that these pending Title VI complaints affected student activism?

We were worried about a big political setback to the student movement as a whole. If we were being characterized as “anti-Semites” who create a “hostile environment” on campus, there’s no way you can mainstream the movement, or the BDS tactics, or anything. It was being waved in our faces. The anti-divestment groups were using the same language that is used to characterize violations of Title VI—saying that it was “a divisive” discussion, that it “makes students feel unsafe” or “not welcome on campus.” So not only do you have university administrators who feel like they need to do something about this in order not to get sued, but all the political work being thrown totally off course—because the discussion ends up being not whether or not what’s happening in Palestine is right or wrong, or whether U.S. foreign policy is right or wrong, but whether or not simply ***discussing it*** is poisonous for universities.

One of the major sources of the Berkeley complaint and lawsuit was the mock checkpoint actions. The student who filed the complaint was saying things like, “It was the first time in my life I had ever been confronted by people wearing military uniforms and guns, and asked me for my ID; I was terrified for weeks and I didn’t feel safe on campus after that.” So, what do you think the real thing is like? That’s the point. That’s the point the students were trying to make. If the theatrical version is horrifying to you, then you shouldn’t be filing this complaint against the university; you should be organizing against the occupation.



Interview: Rahim Kurwa

Rahim Kurwa is one of the most electrifying key figures in the national SJP organization. His consistently poignant writings from an anti-racist perspective on the issue of Palestine have helped to keep the solidarity movement pressing forward. He has not been afraid to offer constructive critique of Palestine activism and SJP's responsibility as an organization, based in his deep belief in the movement and those who align with it.



Kurwa told me he first got involved in SJP in 2006, when he was an undergraduate. After going to New York to pursue his master's degree, he came back to UCLA in 2010 to study sociology. Even though he's a national coordinator with SJP, and is seen as a mentor to a lot of student activists, especially in southern California, Kurwa balked when I asked him about his experience in a "leadership position."

"You never want one individual person to have a lot of leverage or influence," he explained. "If you subtracted me from the SJP here, it would still run like clockwork." That, I said, was the mark of a solid movement.

I met Kurwa at the end of the 2012-2013 school year near the UCLA campus, after seven University of California campuses introduced divestment resolutions into their student senates. I was eager to talk to him about the divestment campaigns and how he saw the movement expanding.

I asked him to begin by talking about how he became involved in SJP activism, and what he attributed to the rise in BDS activism specifically.

On campus as an undergraduate, I was more involved with fair trade work and other social justice-type projects. But I eventually took a Middle East politics class with a professor who was very clearly trying to enforce balance on how people learned about Israel-Palestine.

And you could tell, because he was trying so hard—every time something came up about Palestine, he would mention Israel, and back and forth. So I got curious and went to an SJP event. SJP was having Palestine Week, and it was the same information but just presented in a way where—when you don't try to enforce balance, it's very obvious what's going on. Just showing maps of settlements is a very quick way to get someone to be able to put information together on their own.

So that's how I got involved and educated, but everything changed after Operation Cast Lead, in terms of not just being involved and going out to events and getting educated, but feeling a sense of urgency about trying to do something on campus.

Briefly, how can you assess the immensity of what BDS has brought forth in the past eight years, in terms of activism and people being able to rally around something?

We always have these debates amongst SJPs about whether we should go for a bill or not go for a bill. And I now find myself on the side of always going for a bill whenever you can, because even when you lose the divestment vote—and who would expect to win a vote in a student senate that's made up by College Republicans, or who are not from an activist community, necessarily, or who have plans to run for public office, something like that—you don't expect to win except in rare situations.

But the process enforces a debate on campus. It forces people to have to look at what's going on and what they're directly investing in. Every time you have that debate, you come out ahead.

Multiple SJPs doubled, or tripled, or quadrupled in size after they went through the divestment process, even by losing a bill. And if that's the cost of losing, then I'd be happy to lose all the time! (*Laughs*) It's fine. So yeah, and every time you do win, it inspires 10 more schools who want to do it as well.

It's contagious.

Yeah.

Talk about the backlash that you've seen and documented yourself in terms of how the Israeli government is looking at what's happening on college campuses. You have written that the repression against this movement by Israel and Israel-aligned groups is being fought on two fronts—actualized repressive tactics and a push to transform this into an emotional debate where the feelings of some Jewish students are at risk of being hurt.

Yeah, I think actually it might not line up chronologically, but I feel like it's been one and then the other. There's always been repression against student activism on Palestine for decades, but I feel like in the last few years they've had the Campus Climate Report¹ where they're directly accusing any Palestinian speech, political or not, of essentially threatening Jewish students and therefore being anti-Semitic.

So it just becomes more and more obvious that whether [university administrations] try to shut down speech, or whether they recommend that SJPs are under scrutiny over who they can or can't invite to speak on campus, all this means is that they don't have a plausible alternative to what we're saying, and are trying to shut us up some other way.

The other thing that's interesting to see is that this strategy is applied everywhere—in France, to the people who are trying to boycott shopping market goods, or in England, where Ronnie Fraser² tried to accuse the University College Union of being anti-Semitic for debating whether or not to boycott occupation-related products (but that was also based on the exact same logic that was being tried out in California, and that also lost [in this case]).

So in an interview with [former UC President] Mark Yudof, someone says at the end “What are you going to do?” And he says that he’s not a fan of that repression stuff, so let’s try to find some new ways. And the new ways he was talking about was building up Israel studies programs on campus, stuff like that. And those are very isolated—it doesn’t have much of an effect on campus.

The other thing that’s being pushed very hard is this emotional angle—that if you pass this bill, you’re going to upset people. People were going to senate hearings, threatening to drop out the next day. Senators who were opposed to the bills were threatening to quit, and one of them had to after the bill was passed. It’s just emotional bullying.

Frankly, in the next few years, I think we’ll see less repression and more attempts to do this emotional bullying, or they’ll just send senators to go on these propaganda trips to Israel in advance—anything else that avoids the process of debate but slows down the process of divestment.

I was just reading about how the Israeli foreign ministry is now saying that because of all the divestment bills on campus this year, they’ll be trying all sorts of new tactics.

But you know, I’ve stopped putting much stock in those things. Because what are they really going to do? If they say, we’re against divestment and we want to persuade all of you college freshmen to be against divestment, then they’re doing us a favor because then everyone is talking about divestment.

So they don’t want to do that. If you can’t directly talk about it, then you have to go on this transparent “Israel’s a pluralistic society,” blah blah blah, and it’s so easy to take those arguments apart. Maybe it’s just my lack of creativity, but I can’t imagine anything that they’ll do to be successful. I’m starting to think that these are just press releases for the benefit of pro-Israel groups—to make it look like something’s being done—but every year you see these statements come out, and you see these conferences and announcements, and so on.

And you come back and it's the same people on the other side of the argument who are either extremely ill-informed, or who have been corralled into standing on that side even though they don't have all of the information and they may not even agree with everything that's being said, but they've been told that if you're in Hillel, if you're pro-Israel, then you have to be on our side.

It's interesting, because all of these propaganda trips where they send these student senators to Israel—as pro-Israel groups try to ally with students of color by saying that Israel is on their side, or try to ally with LGBTQ communities, saying that Israel is a gay haven—it seems like that's also backfiring. There are so many coalitions who are coming out in support of Palestinians and against Israel's policies.

Yeah. I mean I think those have been really effective, in a way. I mean, Project Interchange³ took somebody—I know they took an African-American student leader on a trip. He was unpersuaded. And he still supports SJP. That's good, but that's probably more rare.

I know they asked a student from the American Indian Student Association on campus to go on a trip, and I think he might. And he doesn't reflect the broader opinion in his group—but they have to pay for a lot of trips if they want the results they're aiming for. And it forces us to go back to these communities and have the people themselves who make up these groups make statements, because they can always buy off the one head leader of a group to go on an Israel trip, but they can't buy off entire groups. That's too much.

Talk a little bit more about the importance of cross-movement building at this point, between college students who are involved in the issues important to their community, and Palestine solidarity issues.

Well, campuses are definitely places for activism—to get something done. But it's also a school. The process of activism can be an educational experience. And that's probably the best thing that comes out of making these alliances. You end up in these spaces where you have students who are working against the prison industrial complex talking to students who are

focused on the effect of prisons in Palestinian society, and all of a sudden, it's clear that Palestine and Pelican Bay are very far apart geographically, but not that far apart in terms of the system itself that's in operation.

And making those connections is an extremely educational experience, but it also becomes a very strong foundation for activism in the future. You can't break that, once people make that connection. So I'm really excited that that's been happening.

And it seems like every divestment bill that comes up has the backing of dozens of student groups behind them.

Absolutely. The other thing that I think is interesting about that is that one of the efforts of the anti-divestment groups has been to make it seem like there are just two sides, and these two sides have an equal number of anti-divestment supporters as there are numbers of SJP members and supporters.

And then they say, well, there's balance, so there's no consensus on campus, and then these two groups disagree with each other, so just let them talk it out in a closed room and dialogue. It's ridiculous, because you're putting your finger on the scale to make it look like it's even.

People have had this very negative reaction to the word dialogue now, and part of that is because they've reframed what it means. Dialogue can look like SJP and MEChA and the African Student Union sitting down and talking about how to be in solidarity with each other. It doesn't mean that you have to have people who support building a wall through other peoples' land and people who don't support that, sitting and talking together. That's one form of dialogue, but there are other forms we can engage in.

So part of that process of building these connections is also to reorient what it means to be in dialogue and to show that, actually, at Santa Barbara, it was 30 student groups to two, and on our campus, it's all the College Republicans, and unfortunately the College Democrats, and then the pro-Israel groups. I think that's been one benefit of reaching out to those coalitions.

As someone in solidarity with Palestinians, how important is it to have enormous, broad-based support on campus for their struggle?

It's moving, it really is. For example, at UC–Berkeley, when they had the divestment hearings in 2010, there was someone—I think she was a Sudanese refugee—and she got up to speak and everyone thought she would talk about her own struggle and tie that in to the Palestinian cause. But she said, look, I'm going to read a letter from a Palestinian in the room who does not feel comfortable speaking because they want to travel back to Palestine this summer, and the more you say that goes on paper or online, the harder it's going to be to travel, or get a job, or whatever. And then she read that person's statement.

It would have been very easy to put yourself on center stage and put the spotlight on you, and make your own statement—and there's probably a very compelling story she has—but it was even more of a show of solidarity that she read somebody else's. Because that is a major problem; people feel a huge pressure not to speak out, and it's double or triple that pressure for Palestinians. It's really good when other students, students of color in those groups, can find ways to speak for them, but not above them—to amplify their voices.

Let's shift to historical precedence. You dug up some documents from the University of California archives, from the activism in the 1980s around the anti-apartheid South Africa movement. How do you measure the student movement around anti-apartheid on campuses during that time, and the differences between the actions of the administrations back then and the actions they're taking part in now?

It's interesting, because recently one of the main figures involved in anti-apartheid activism at UCLA was in town and gave a retrospective speech to the African Student Union, and a lot of SJP members came. And he was saying that in the early '80s, I think, the UCLA administration paid to fly Archbishop Desmond Tutu out to UCLA to speak against divestment. And then two years later, Tutu had changed his

mind and made an effort to come back to UCLA to support divestment. And that's a very interesting and moving story, because we always say, oh well, it's harder for us now because there's a pro-apartheid group on campus opposing us. But maybe that's not the full story, you know? Maybe there were a lot more things that were being done.

He shared some stories—they were really going after the banks really hard, like Bank of America. The branch that's right over here (*pointing to the nearby bank*). They would protest outside that one. And the banks had offered to basically pay students off: we'll give you a good job, we'll give you this, we'll give you that if you stop protesting. And so people say that there's a difference, but maybe the difference is not as big as we think it is.

Although one thing I will say that has changed on campus since then is the death of affirmative action, and the increasing reliance on standardized testing and other measures of privilege to how students are admitted, and it's caused a major decrease in the population of students from oppressed groups—African- American and Latino groups....

And tuition. The tuition increases have been enormous even from just 10 years ago.

Yeah. And indigenous students. And so whereas on campus before you'd have very large populations of students of color from traditionally under-represented groups, now, that's flipped.

There was a point on campus at UCLA where African-American students were less than two percent of the incoming class, just 96 students. That was 2006, less than 10 years ago. In that sense the university has become more and more racially exclusionary.

And what that means is that the base of students who would feel an affinity for this cause has changed. And that means there's more work for us to do to persuade people who are that much more removed from these issues. And who come from different racial backgrounds, or different class backgrounds, who now make up the university. And when we fight for

divestment that has to be bound up with the struggle to reopen the university to people of color in our state, too. Because it doesn't look the way it looked like back then.

It really was a public university system back then!

Yeah!

Finally, you mentioned something earlier about looking at Palestine solidarity campaigning through a human rights perspective, and the issues that that brings up.

Right. You'll see at times a discussion about this rights-based discourse that's happening within SJPs. And I think that this is something that's really important. I read an article in *Jacobin* magazine (a leftist online and print publication), and it wasn't really talking about SJP and I don't think the authors were talking about SJP, but it reflects something that's worth thinking about in SJP spaces, which is that a rights-based discourse is problematic in many ways.

What Amnesty International determines to be human rights, or human rights violations, is looking at a very narrow scope of what justice and freedom should look like for people. And the same with the United Nations, and the same with all of these other organizations. And to say simply that when these rights happen, and that's it, poof, everything is good again, that's also very naïve.

Those authors had talked about other groups, but they said essentially that a discussion of rights shouldn't happen at the expense of discussing colonialism, or directly talking about what Zionism is, et cetera. I think they have a good point. And I think that the perception of SJPs is misguided, in a way, and it reflects a lack of experience, and that at the university level, at these senate meetings, the discussions are about rights. But it's only that way because that's what the political environment will allow at a senate.

For example, there was a Libertarian senator at UC-Berkeley who supported the divestment bill on Libertarian principles. And this person is never going to be on board with talking about settler-colonialism—maybe they will be, but it would take a long time. But at the moment, you can reach

them based on people's rights to not have their property demolished. And that doesn't mean that at UC Berkeley's SJP or at UCLA's SJP the discussion inside of SJP doesn't incorporate those issues. When we have control of a discussion, we make it centered around Palestinians and what they want, what they say, and what issues are important to them.

So when a bill gets watered down and language that we would never have put in ourselves gets inserted into the bill, it shouldn't be looked at as a reflection on us; it should be looked at as a reflection on how messed up the larger discourse still is, and how far it still needs to go.

On many campuses that put divestment bills up, they said that first and foremost that this was in solidarity with indigenous peoples and their lands everywhere. And they would point out the specific First Nation community on whose land the university was built. And at San Diego, this was a huge sticking point. The senators wanted to get rid of this language, and people were saying that it would increase the odds of it passing if they dropped this language, even though it directly insulted both reality and people on campus.

Or, they thought, do we stick with the language and lose the bill? And in most cases, they've decided to take out the language, because this is the condition under which we can pass a bill. And there are larger [effects] that we are looking at that would benefit [our activism] if we pass this bill.

But that's not SJP's fault. And just because those bills don't end up discussing indigenous rights, it doesn't mean that it's not being talked about explicitly in our spaces. So when I see that criticism of SJP, that we're just talking about rights and who cares, okay. I agree to some extent—rights are not the end-all, be-all of what justice looks like. But also, it's just the surface and there's a lot more going on beneath it that would satisfy a lot of those criticisms.

You mentioned that SJP members attended a talk by an anti-apartheid South Africa activist. And I'm sure there was a lot of discussion on settler-colonialism or imperialism there. But

the first step toward acting to end the apartheid regime there was for students to get universities to pull their money out.

Not only that, but this is where third-world coalitions began on campus. And also the victories in the anti-apartheid movement went hand-in-hand with gaining victories like affirmative action, and creating admission and retention programs for minority students on campus, especially Black students. And I've yet to see an obvious analogy for SJP. What comes hand-in-hand with the divestment movement for SJP?

Maybe it is reawakening this alliance between oppressed groups, maybe it's something related to the problems with admission or tuition. If students have a say in where their tuition is going in terms of the overall UC budget, then maybe they have a say in how much their tuition should be, or other issues like that. Or maybe this is going hand-in-hand with fighting against Islamophobia, where report after report comes out showing how bad it is on campus.

We're not really far enough to know which one of those things will be hand-in-hand, or whether we're following that exact model where these two movements are working together, but it's interesting to see the different possibilities that are out there.

It seems like we've come so far since the 2005 BDS call, whereas it took decades for people to even start talking about how to start divestment initiatives in the South African anti-apartheid movement.

Absolutely. And it's funny—at the end of that event [at UCLA], during the Q & A, [the South African anti-apartheid activist who spoke] kept going around the room and pointing at people in the audience. And it was mostly African-American students, and they were asking questions, [however] he kept going towards people he identified as being in SJP. And he would say, you look like you have a question. And nobody wanted to say anything, because we didn't want to hijack the discussion.

But eventually he kept asking people, and they eventually started talking about Palestine. And he said, I was wondering

when that would come up! And he said, look, you guys are just behind. We would take a film, and we had a projector, and we would show it 2-3 times a week on campus, at the fraternities, at the sororities, and he said that's what we would do. We would go and every week we'd be protesting in front of the bank, and we'd set up shantytowns in front of stores. And he said, so what are you doing? What movie are you showing? And we had some suggestions. But it didn't match up well with what they were doing. So it shows just how far we have to go.



Empowering Scholarship

The lessons from South Africa are very clear: boycott forced complacent academics to rethink their personal and institutional relationship to apartheid, to talk to each other across the color line, and to better understand how their own work relates to social justice.

—Robin D.G. Kelley, Gary B. Nash Professor of American History, UCLA



First row: Sarah Rose Lejeune, Lucia Anne Kalinosky, Dalia Marina

Second row: Hoda Mitwally, Sarah Moawad, Brooke Lober

American students involved in Palestine activism recognize the enormous privilege they have. There are no checkpoints to cross, no threats of regular military incursions that would impede getting to class on time. There are no permits needed to traverse imposed boundaries—permits which can be revoked at any time.

However, since 1948, Israel has held the keys to Palestinian freedom of movement, livelihood, and education. And since the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, Israel has only extended and tightened policies that disrupt and prevent Palestinian students from accessing higher education, either within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, inside present-day Israel, or abroad.

Since 2000, it is impossible for a student from Gaza to study in either Israel or the West Bank, or for a student from the West Bank to study in Israel or Gaza. These restrictions severely limit Palestinians' options. And opportunities for study abroad are inaccessible to many, either for economic reasons or because of Israel's discriminatory travel policies.

Palestinians who can afford to educate themselves abroad and want to advance fields of research and study to better their conditions at home are subject to Israel's whim and control. For example, aspiring scholars in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip who wish to study in the United States must first attain permission to cross numerous checkpoints in order to get to Jerusalem—simply to apply for the international passport visa, because there is no U.S. consulate in either the West Bank or Gaza Strip. If a student is denied permission to enter Jerusalem, their entire study plan may be shot down. Some students have applied for permits repeatedly and have been denied repeatedly for no reason, forcing students in the West Bank to choose whether to evade Israeli occupation forces and somehow sneak around the wall and checkpoints, traveling at risk for days to make an appointment at the U.S. consulate, which is sometimes just a few miles as the crow flies from their home. It is also not uncommon for students in the Gaza Strip to have received scholarships for studies in North America or Europe, only to have Israel deny them a permit to leave Gaza, thereby causing the students to lose those hard-earned scholarships.

Although Palestinian scholars and academics have fought hard to introduce and grow world-class local universities in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem and inside the Gaza Strip, academic progress is regularly disrupted by incursions, invasions, and closed checkpoints. Youth who are detained and arrested by Israeli forces for participating in a demonstration in their own village can spend months, even years, in jail and can miss crucial periods in their education.¹ And especially in Gaza, which remains under a suffocating blockade and siege, Israel has targeted Palestinian universities and schools in bombing attacks. Amnesty International calls Israel's blockade collective punishment and a violation of international law.²

Constant violations of safety on campus

In 2012, the *Electronic Intifada's* Maureen Clare Murphy interviewed a 20-year-old activist from the West Bank village of Ni'lin, where residents have been fighting against encroaching Israeli settlement colonies and Israel's wall. Saeed Amireh had "been shot at several times himself, and was arrested in December 2008 when he was 17 years old and in his last year of secondary school," Murphy wrote.³

Like many Palestinian youth captured in sweeping raids by Israeli forces, Amireh was arrested, ostensibly, for participating in demonstrations against the occupation. In the *Electronic Intifada* article, Amireh explained that children are targeted for arrest "because Israeli forces have greater success in coercing them to sign false statements used to incriminate and arrest the popular committee leadership⁴ for 'illegal protest' or being in a closed military area."

"In terms of our study, your future depends on this year," said Amireh. "I was on a scientific [track] and my average was more than 95 percent; by arresting me they were targeting my future as well as punishing my father, who is one of the organizers of this struggle of unarmed protest against the wall."⁵

Israeli forces have also raided high school and university campuses in the West Bank, disrupting classes and arresting students on site. Students at the Al-Quds University in the occupied East Jerusalem suburb of Abu Dis, for example, say they have been subjected to constant harassment and attacks by Israeli soldiers. The army has frequently stormed the campus, firing tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets, arresting students and injuring scores of bystanders. In addition, Israel's illegal wall in the West Bank cuts through the land belonging to the Al-Quds University campus, isolating the university and separating Abu Dis from the rest of Jerusalem.⁶ As Tala Abu Rahmeh, a professor of Arabic and English literature at Al-Quds University, said to the *Electronic Intifada* reporter Patrick O. Strickland in March 2014, "How do you ask a student to delve into Aristotle when he or she feels like their basic safety is constantly violated?"⁷

International aid agency Save the Children reported in 2011 that in nearly one-third of 113 communities in the Oslo Accords-designated "Area C" of the West Bank—the 60 percent of the

West Bank under total Israeli military control—“school children, youth, and teachers had to cross one or more military checkpoints to reach their schools, affecting more than 2,500 children daily.”⁸ Meanwhile, 33 communities reported that children must cross Israel’s wall in the West Bank, “which comprises a series of concrete walls, electrified fencing, military watchtowers and crossing points. And in 18 communities, children reported experiencing harassment by Israeli military and security personnel while crossing the Separation Wall on their way to school.”⁹

Save the Children adds that schools themselves are under threat of attack and demolition. Because Israel controls all building and planning in Area C, and designates large swaths of land as “live firing zones” for use by the military,¹⁰ it is either extremely difficult or outright impossible for Palestinian families and communities in this area of the occupied West Bank to receive permits from Israel to build onto existing homes or to expand structures—including schools—in their communities. Israel uses construction that takes place by Palestinians without permits as a pretext to demolish houses, livestock pens, structures, and buildings. In the same report, Save the Children notes that at least 23 schools serving more than 2,200 children in Area C, including East Jerusalem, “have pending stop-work or demolition orders, meaning they could be demolished at any time.” Some schools have been demolished, rebuilt, and demolished again.¹¹

Inside present-day Israel itself, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are barred from an extraordinary array of rights as students and scholars. Palestinian students in Israel are subjected to state-sponsored and legalized discrimination, exclusion from certain fields, and widespread silence within the Israeli academy over violations of Palestinian rights in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

State funding to public primary and high schools—which are completely segregated between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians—is unequal. Funding to public Palestinian schools in Israel “falls far behind that provided to Jewish schools,” notes Adalah, a Haifa-based legal organization advocating for the civil rights of the Palestinian minority. According to Adalah, Israel provides at least three times as much funding to Jewish students as to their

Palestinian counterparts, and “this underfunding is reflected in many areas, including relatively large class sizes and poor infrastructure and facilities.”¹²

A 2013 report in Israel’s daily newspaper *Haaretz* stated that the gap between the state’s funding of Jewish high schools and Palestinian high schools in Nazareth, the city with the largest Palestinian population in the north, is 35 percent.¹³

In 2009, Israel’s Channel 10 reported that the Carmel Academic Center in Haifa—a major city in the north, where the Palestinian population of the country is concentrated—closed its accounting track of the Business Administration Department because there was “a majority [of] Arabs” applying.¹⁴ Imagine if this had happened in the United States and the same was said about Black students or women.

Working from a 2013 report by the Hirak Center for Advancement of Higher Education in Arab Society, the U.S.-based Institute for Middle East Understanding listed several of the many ways Israel discriminates against Palestinian students and scholars, including:

- Discrimination in the awarding of scholarships through the granting of extra credit for army service or residence in so-called “national priority areas,” where few Palestinians live.
- Lack of access to campus housing due to preference given to applicants with military service and growing racism in Israeli society that makes it difficult for Palestinian students to find housing on and off campus.
- A lack of freedom of speech for Palestinian students, who are often denied the right to freely express their political opinions on campus.
- A lack of access to higher education offered in Arabic, as all courses at Israeli universities are given in Hebrew, and books in Arabic are extremely rare.
- A lack of representation in the academy. Just two percent of 174 senior staff members of state-funded institutions are Palestinian, and there are zero Palestinian members of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities which comprises 108 of Israel’s most distinguished scholars.¹⁵

In addition to the many obstacles Palestinian students and scholars face, the Israeli academy itself is entrenched in Israel’s structure of racial discrimination, occupation, and land theft. There are a number of ways the Israeli academy restricts education for Palestinian citizens. For example, Jewish citizens of Israel who have served in the army receive a considerable state benefits package, which includes subsidies for tuition and benefits for housing. Because most Palestinians, the Druze minority being the exception, are exempted from compulsory

service, this program automatically perpetuates a discriminatory system. Palestinian citizens comprise approximately one-fifth of Israel's population, but they have, for the most part, viewed Israeli military service as enforcing the occupation of their community and have rejected Israel's attempts to divide and conquer the indigenous Palestinian population. The *Electronic Intifada* contributor and independent journalist Jonathan Cook wrote in 2013, "Israel has also persuaded some Bedouins to volunteer as army trackers. Otherwise, only a tiny number of Christians and Muslims request to have their exemption waived—in most cases, according to scholar Rhoda Kanaaneh, in the hope of accruing extra financial benefits related to army service."¹⁶

The Druze religious minority, who are Palestinian citizens of Israel, are not exempted from mandatory army service as other Muslim and Christian Palestinian citizens are, and have been conscripted into the military since the 1950s. However, over the past few years, more and more Druze youth—as well as a growing number of Jewish Israeli youth—have become draft refusers and have spent time in jail for their conscientious objection. Omar Saad, a Palestinian Druze youth and a talented musician with Israeli citizenship, has been repeatedly detained by Israel for refusing to report to the draft—becoming the longest-serving conscientious objector in Israel by May 2014. "I prefer prison to conscription," Saad said in a televised interview.¹⁷

Some Israeli academic institutions have become part of the Israeli settlement industry: Hebrew University is partially built on occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank, and Ariel University is built entirely inside an illegal settlement colony in the West Bank, on land from which Palestinians continue to be displaced as the settlements expand.

Moreover, universities such as the Technion, Israel's foremost technical college, have a direct hand in developing military technology used on a daily basis by the Israeli army. For example, the Technion developed the militarized version of the Caterpillar D9 bulldozer, which is used to demolish Palestinian homes and raze Palestinian agricultural land. The D9 was also the vehicle that was used by an Israeli soldier in 2003 to kill American peace activist Rachel Corrie, who was run over as she attempted to defend a Palestinian family's home from destruction in Rafah, Gaza.

The Technion has extensive partnerships with Israeli weapons manufacturers and arms companies, and has become a main player in the Israeli drone industry. Its partnerships include

Rafael, a missile manufacturer, and Elbit Systems, one of the main contractors for Israel's illegal wall in the West Bank. Elbit has supplied the military with surveillance equipment, including cameras and drones, along the wall.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that Elbit is also major contractor for the wall at the U.S.-Mexico border—a connection not lost on students who understand the international struggles against the militarization of borders from the United States to Palestine.

The academic boycott and the right to education

Because of these violations to Palestinian freedom of education and movement, and as the Israeli academy continues to work with the Israeli military and reinforce its systems of repression and discrimination, Palestinian civil society issued a call for academic boycott in 2004—a year before the full BDS call was issued. Launched and organized by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel (PACBI), the call for academic boycott against Israeli institutions provides “the Palestinian reference for a steadily growing and sustainable institutional academic boycott effort throughout the world.” PACBI notes that Israel's three-week assault on the Gaza Strip in 2008–9, also known as Operation Cast Lead, “served as a catalyst for further activism, and the period since then has witnessed a tremendous growth of initiatives in the spirit of BDS and targeting Israeli academic institutions.”¹⁹

The call for academic and cultural boycott urges scholars and cultural workers to “comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation, colonization and system of apartheid, by applying the following:

1. Refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions;
2. Advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions;
3. Promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions;
4. Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic, professional and cultural associations and organizations;
5. Support Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or

The call is in place against Israeli academic institutions until Israel withdraws from all the lands occupied and colonized in 1967, including East Jerusalem; removes all its settlements and the wall in those lands; agrees to UN resolutions relevant to the restitution of Palestinian refugees’ rights; and dismantles its systems of apartheid, segregation, and inequality between Jews and non-Jews inside Israel. Importantly, PACBI has consistently advocated a boycott of institutions, *not individuals*. Some opponents of BDS, especially the academic boycott, regularly attempt to argue that the latter targets Israelis and Jewish scholars individually (and, again, use this misconception to attack the movement as “anti-Semitic”).

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) reiterated that the 2005 BDS call “does not call for a boycott of individuals because she or he happens to be Israeli or because they express certain views. Of course, any individual is free to decide who they do and do not engage with.” As the BDS movement grows, especially on college campuses, and as Palestinians consistently fight for their right to education and the right to be heard, the discussion on *what* academic freedom is, and *who* is able to enjoy it has been amplified. According to Israel-aligned organizations and some politicians in the United States, academic freedom for Israeli institutions should be prioritized over academic freedom for Palestinians and their counterparts in solidarity across the country.

In February 2013, Students for Justice in Palestine at Brooklyn College—part of the City University of New York system—organized a panel discussion on BDS, featuring the philosopher, gender theorist, and pro-boycott activist Judith Butler, and the author and cofounder of PACBI, Omar Barghouti. Immediately following an announcement of the event, local politicians along with Alan Dershowitz—former Harvard Law School dean and staunch Israel advocate—launched a campaign against the school, students, supporting professors, and the speakers themselves. CUNY was threatened with funding cuts if the event went along as planned, and the university president was called on to resign. Disturbingly, members of the New York City legislative “Progressive Caucus” backed New York state assemblyman Dov Hikind (who represents Brooklyn) and

Dershowitz's attacks against the event. Glenn Greenwald, columnist for the British newspaper the *Guardian* at the time, wrote:

Dershowitz has been joined in his current crusade by a cast of crazed and fanatical Israel-centric characters such as Brooklyn State Assembly member Dov Hikind. Ignoring the BDS movement's explicit non-violence stance, Hikind publicly (and falsely) claimed that the event speakers (to whom he referred as "Barghouti and...the lady") "think Hamas and Hezbollah are nice organizations, and they probably feel the same way about al-Qaida."

Hikind called on the college's President, Karen Gould, to resign, recklessly insinuating (needless to say) that she's an anti-Semite: "Perhaps President Gould wasn't bullied; maybe she secretly approves. ...I can only speculate to what her motivation or lack of motivation is in allowing this irresponsible endorsement of this loathsome event by her College." In 2011, Hikind led the campaign to force Brooklyn College to fire the young adjunct professor Kristofer Petersen-Overton for the crime of writing a pro-Palestinian paper (after firing him, the college rehired him days later).²¹

To their credit, CUNY's administration refused to cower under such threats even while media attention of the event grew to a fever pitch. Activists, scholars, and students across the United States and around the world took notice and solidified their support of SJP at Brooklyn College.

Days before the event was to take place, and as Hikind's efforts to shut it down and threaten CUNY's funding were backfiring, then-mayor Michael Bloomberg publicly admonished the legislative attacks and declared his support of Brooklyn College's right to academic freedom.²² (Even though Bloomberg is an avid supporter of Israel and an open critic of BDS,²³ he is also a liberal defender of the First Amendment, and in this case, he chose to defend Brooklyn College's right to free speech.)

Despite the raucous attempts to intimidate and threaten the panel discussion out of existence, the event was a success. The

lecture hall that night was packed. Students and journalists I spoke with said that it was precisely because of all the vitriol against the event and its organizers that so many people were interested in the discussion and that many audience members came away with a broader knowledge of the BDS movement and its efficacy.

In an interview I did with him for the *Electronic Intifada*, reporter Alex Kane of *Mondoweiss* and the independent online news publication *AlterNet* said that the politicians' attempts to curb discussion on Israeli policy and the Palestinian-led BDS movement only served to highlight the real threats to academic freedom across U.S. campuses. "I think that this is a phenomenon that is particular to public universities," Kane explained. "Private universities, while they may have donor pressure, legislators have no role in how they're funded—but when it comes to public universities like Brooklyn College, which is part of the City University of New York system, as well as the University of California, you often have these legislators who feel that because they're responsible for the funding, that they are able to dictate what gets said and what doesn't get said."

In New York City about six months later, I met Carlos Guzman, a photography and documentary filmmaking student at Brooklyn College and a member of the SJP group there. He said that the Barghouti-Butler event showed just how effective the BDS movement is at informing the general public about Israel's policies. "The fact that [politicians are] going to City Hall, and threatening the school, saying they'd withdraw funding to the school, it just shows that BDS is very effective and they don't want people talking about it," Guzman said. "Because they know that if people find out what's happening, especially if people know that our tax money is funding the occupation, that it's going to killing innocent people, if that gets out, it's going to change. It's changing the way people see Israel."

Legislating against boycott

Almost a year later, New York was host to another anti-BDS uproar following an enormous victory for the boycott movement. In December 2013, the American Studies Association—which includes 5,000 individual members and 2,200 library and other institutional subscribers—voted in favor of the Palestinian call

for boycott of Israeli academic institutions. This came just eight months after the Association of Asian American Studies adopted the same call for academic boycott. In a statement, the ASA announced that:

Boycott is warranted given U.S. military and other support for Israel; Israel's violation of international law and UN resolutions; the documented impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian scholars and students; the extent to which Israeli institutions of higher education are a party to state policies that violate human rights; and the support of such a resolution by many members of the ASA.²⁴

The ASA's national governing council called for a referendum of the entire membership body to endorse the decision. Weeks later, the referendum passed, and the academic boycott of Israel was upheld and supported in a landslide vote.

A few days after the ASA vote, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) also issued a statement of adoption of the academic boycott of Israeli institutions, making strong references to the parallel struggles of indigenous peoples in North America and Palestine against settler-colonialism, land theft, and destruction of heritage.²⁵ However, university administration officials, many of whom represent institutions with deep research and funding ties to the Israeli government and academy, were notably dismissive of NAISA's declaration of solidarity and focused their condemnation on the ASA and its members. In numerous statements, university presidents across the country denounced the boycott and scolded its supporters, oftentimes bragging about their university's longstanding relationship to Israeli academic institutions and the Israeli government.

University administrative officials also misrepresented basic facts about the academic boycott, suggesting that they either did not read the ASA statement or the general academic boycott call at all, or that they only read information from Israel-aligned organizations that provided administrations with false propaganda about the BDS movement. For example, Wesleyan University's president, Michael Roth, called the ASA boycott "an irresponsible attack on academic freedom," and criticized the BDS movement as an example of "phony progressivism." In a

strong statement, Wesleyan students and alumni—unidentified with any political or student activism group—admonished Roth’s misunderstanding of the terms, saying they “reject President Roth’s understanding of progressivism and academic freedom.” One student added, “Roth’s remarks shocked me because they seemed to come from the kind of uncritical thought that we learn to denounce at Wes. I feel like his comment would be laughed at if it was said in a classroom setting, it was so clearly inaccurate...it is like he hadn’t done the proper reading.”²⁶



Israeli apartheid week action 2014. (Courtesy of Columbia SJP)

Other university presidents repeated the false narrative that the academic boycott of Israeli institutions targets individual Israeli scholars, while others decried that the boycott “singled out Israel” apart from other countries. And, not surprisingly, the common trope of labeling the boycott movement and its supporters “anti-Semitic” was trotted out repeatedly. Yet, as the ASA boycott states, and as the PACBI guidelines clearly indicate, the boycott doesn’t prohibit scholars and academics from Israeli institutions from traveling to the United States or to international conferences, and these scholars can continue to share research and collaboration with American scholars and academics. Nor does the boycott punish individual scholars in either the United States or Israel for doing so.

ASA members and supporters in the human rights and Palestine solidarity community—including local and national student groups—spoke out against the inaccurate criticisms in editorials, articles, and public statements. However, about a month after the ASA boycott adoption, New York legislators introduced a bill intended to punish the American Studies Association and other current and future academic departments and institutions that support the Israel boycott. On January 28, 2014, the state senate passed a bill pushed by Dov Hikind and state senator Jeffrey Klein (both members of the New York state Democratic party) that sought to defund departments with American Studies Association (ASA) members and prohibit faculty from attending meetings of organizations that endorse academic boycott. Bill S6438, with minor modifications, passed in the state senate, but, as professor and ASA member Steven Salaita wrote, “faced considerable obstacles” as it moved forward.²⁷

The bill “prohibit[s] colleges and universities from using state aid to fund academic groups or associations that have passed resolutions or taken official actions to promote boycotts against higher education institutions in countries where the New York Board of Regents charters institutions, which includes Israel, Lebanon, the Czech Republic, and Hungary,” stated the American Studies Association.²⁸ In a press release, ASA also pointed out, rightly, that the legislation would impose restrictions on academic freedom and penalize individual members of departments based on their academic affiliation—the exact opposite of what the Palestinian call for academic boycott calls for:

The bill also prohibits a college or university from using state funds to pay membership dues to those associations or to reimburse travel or lodging for an employee attending any meeting of such an association.

...This legislation would impose restrictions on academic freedom, represent an assault on free speech and professional activity, and set a dangerous precedent. We join the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Center for Constitutional Rights, the National Lawyers Guild—

New York City Chapter, and Jewish Voice for Peace in believing that, regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the ASA's specific boycott or with the use of academic boycotts in general, this legislation must be opposed.

We are especially alarmed that faculty and students at public universities and colleges across the state would bear the financial burden of this test, a *de facto* assault on their right to participate in their professional association. In addition, these bills, unlike the ASA boycott itself, penalize individual faculty and students who do not support the academic boycott or do not wish to take a public stand one way or another.²⁹

However, the New York State Assembly withdrew the bill “after a chorus of educators and legal groups denounced it as a bold assault on academic freedom,” reported the *New York Times*.³⁰ It was also revealed that former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, inspired the bill after he had demanded repressive laws be passed in Congress against activists who oppose Israel's violations of Palestinian rights. “What's needed is a way to fight back, and Congress can do it,” Oren wrote in the online news publication *Politico*.³¹

Zionist groups have long wielded the legislative sword in an attempt to wipe out BDS and the solidarity movement for Palestinian rights. If they can't win on a fact-based level of debate, and as more and more students are seeking out the truth about Israel's history and current policies, the tactic of threatening legislative action becomes a last resort. “The language Klein and Hikind use to rationalize Bill S6438 is rooted in the traditional conceits of liberal democracy,” Salaita added in his article in the *Electronic Intifada*. “They speak of ending discrimination, of promoting tolerance, of protecting educational integrity. According to their PR strategy, Klein and Hikind are selfless crusaders of high-minded ideals. The greatest term in their arsenal is ‘academic freedom,’ a locution so overused by the anti-BDS crowd that the adjective ‘academic’ now assumes its less-utilized connotation, as in perfunctory or pointless. ‘Academic freedom’ transmits a distinct, albeit tacit, message in the boycott debate: ‘How dare you criticize Israel!’”³²



Palestinian Freedom Riders on settler-only bus. (Photo by Oren Ziv/ActiveStills)

To this end, a congressional bill landed on Capitol Hill just a few days after the New York state legislative bill was dismissed. House Resolution 4009, in response to the American Studies Association's adoption of the academic boycott, exposed a new, chilling side to the McCarthyist tactics Israel advocates are willing to use to try to suppress the BDS movement. Bill 4009 would deny federal funding to public institutions that participate in the academic boycott of Israeli institutions and scholars on their behalf.

Immediately after the bill became public, national civil rights groups and legal advocacy organizations sent letters to Congress members urging them to recognize that denying federal funding to universities based on protected free speech is a clear violation of the First Amendment and a threat to academic freedom. Maria LaHood, a senior staff attorney with the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), stated in a press release issued by CCR, the Council on American Islamic Relations, and the National Lawyers Guild that "the bill's sponsors attempt to dictate what kind of political speech is acceptable on college campuses, where free inquiry and debate should be able to thrive without government interference."³³ In the same press release, the rights groups also noted, appropriately, that the United States

itself is “a product of a colonial boycott against British, Irish, and West Indian goods.”³⁴



Protest in Boston against Israeli attacks on Gaza.

(Photo by Tess Schefflan/ActiveStills)

The bill was so clearly an alarming attempt to dictate political debate that even the largest Israel advocacy and lobby groups—including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Anti-Defamation League—said they were not planning to support it. But by March 2014, state legislatures in Maryland, Illinois, and Florida were considering similar anti-BDS bills and resolutions.

Meanwhile, students across the country continued to introduce divestment resolutions on their campus, organize the next Israeli Apartheid Week or Palestine Awareness Week, and publicly shame leaders of their universities for condemning the ASA boycott. A coalition of student Palestine solidarity groups across the New York tri-state area, for example, sent a courageous message in support of the ASA boycott and addressed the interim chancellor of the City University of New York system in response to his condemnation of the ASA boycott and his blatant misconceptions about the BDS movement. Interim Chancellor William P. Kelly had reaffirmed CUNY’s relationship with Israeli universities and scholars and noted “with

particular pleasure a new joint MBA program between the Zicklin School at Baruch College and the College of Management Academic Studies in Rishon LeZion” in Israel. “The need for global cooperation has never been more urgent, and we repudiate any effort to foreclose productive dialogue,” Kelly added.³⁵

More than a dozen New York City-area chapters of SJP and other student organizations took him to task and shamed CUNY for bragging about its collaboration with the apartheid state. “We would like to set the record straight and say that you do not speak for many of the students, faculty and staff members of the City University of New York,” the statement read. “By collaborating with the College of Management Academic Studies (COMAS), an Israeli institution directly complicit in the occupation and dispossession of Palestinians, Baruch College violates the university’s statement on academic freedom while also denying and normalizing the reality of oppression Palestinians face on a daily basis.”³⁶

In a similar fashion, the SJP chapter at Johns Hopkins University condemned their president’s and provost’s rejection of the ASA boycott: “When have leading figures at Johns Hopkins felt compelled to speak out in defense of Palestinian students and scholars? We agree with the President and Provost that as students and scholars in the US it is important for us to support, through words and actions, the freedom of our peers and colleagues abroad to engage in scholarly activities and collaboration.”³⁷

But some of the most poignant statements in support of the academic boycott of Israel come from Palestinian students in particular. In February 2014, Murad Owda, a student at the School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, wrote a moving op-ed in the school newspaper about his take on the American Studies Association’s boycott of Israeli institutions, the condemnation of the boycott by the university’s chancellor, and the right to freedom—of education, movement, and equality.

Murad is from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. He defied the Israeli occupation—and crawled through a sewage pipe—to be able to study in the United States. He wrote:

I risked imprisonment and death in order to study at Washington University.

Last summer I was thrilled to learn that I had earned admission and a scholarship to the Brown School of Social Work. But I almost could not be here—for one reason.

I am a Palestinian from Bethlehem.

I needed to go to the United States consulate in Jerusalem to apply for my visa. Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem, but it is extremely difficult to get there because less than a decade ago the State of Israel built a giant wall between the cities. I went through the proper bureaucratic channels to apply to enter Jerusalem. The Israelis denied me permission—on four separate occasions. They claimed I was a security threat—but offered no explanation why. I have never committed any crime or been to jail.

When I explained the situation to the American officials they told me that's not their problem. In order to apply for a visa I needed to be at their consulate at 10 a.m. on July 16.

So I had to sneak around like a criminal, evading soldiers. I went miles away to find a small opening. I went through hills. I went through thorn trees. I crawled through a sewage pipe—knowing that others caught in such pipes have suffocated to death after Israeli soldiers discovered them and shot tear gas into the pipes or sicced dogs on them.

When I arrived in Jerusalem I washed myself with a bottle of water, covered my cuts and bruises with an extra pair of clothes I had in a backpack and went into the consulate to talk with the American officials. Then I immediately hid in a friends' house for three days, not daring to go outside.

I made it here. I'm lucky—thousands of other Palestinians who want to study aren't so lucky. That's why it upset me to read that Washington University Chancellor Mark Wrighton recently condemned the

American Studies Association's (ASA) endorsement of a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Although an extremely limited boycott, which only targets institutions and not individual academics, Wrighton stated that he was "deeply troubled and dismayed" because "the boycott directly violates academic freedom."

What about my academic freedom? What about the tens of thousands of Palestinian children and teachers whose movement to and from their schools is impeded by the Israeli military?

Forget academic—what about basic freedom? The State of Israel made my family stateless refugees in 1948 until now. It steals our lands. It steals our water. It denies us freedom of movement. It taxes us without representation. It subjects us to arbitrary violence and detention without any meaningful due process. It allows fanatical, armed religious settlers to torment us and applies a separate code of law to Palestinians than it does to Jewish Israelis.

Why is Chancellor Wrighton unconcerned about violations of both my academic rights and my basic human rights, but he is "deeply troubled and dismayed" that perhaps a handful of Israeli academics may have to pay for their own airplane tickets if they decide to participate in an ASA conference?

I commend the ASA for heeding the call of the Palestinian people for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against institutions that are complicit in sustaining the Israeli system of ethnic discrimination and domination. This nonviolent movement helped change the unjust apartheid system in South Africa—and it can also support our struggle to end apartheid in Palestine so that all can enjoy equal rights, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion.³⁸

“It’s in our power”

Students across the country are more determined than ever to build on the momentum that the academic boycott gained in the 2013–14 school year. They have taken note of the ASA’s monumental success not only in passing the boycott, but in amplifying the national discussion on Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights.

Nadya Tannous of UC–Santa Cruz told me that one of the reasons she supports the academic boycott is to pressure the Israeli left—as small and fractured as it is—to speak out against Israel’s policies. “I was recently on a panel about normalization at the University of San Francisco,” she said. “And it was interesting, because I brought up academic boycott and how important it was. And someone I know very well said, ‘I’m afraid that the university is the only place for the Israeli left.’ And I said yes, but the Israeli left is not speaking out. There’s no pressure, and they’d be inconvenienced—they’re respected, they have a great job, and they can say, oh what’s going on with Palestinians is not so great, and occupation is hurting us too. But there’s no pressure for moving them forward and saying that the occupation is wrong.”

In a strong statement just after the ASA adopted the academic boycott of Israel, members of National Students for Justice in Palestine expressed their gratitude to the ASA: “We are proud of our professors for refusing to ignore the crimes of Israel. We are honored by their refusal to cover their ears.” They added:

Far from stifling academic freedom, the ASA’s action shows that scholars in the United States can have honest and nuanced conversations about Israeli control of Palestinians, Palestinian liberation, and the role of the United States and its learning institutions in shaping consensus on both. We are increasingly confident in our knowledge that Palestine is no longer an issue the American academy is afraid to confront.³⁹

Back when support within the ASA for the academic boycott of Israel was growing, I asked a leading member of Brooklyn College SJP if she saw the tide turning in terms of support for BDS, for Palestine solidarity, and for student activism. Sarah Aly, a 19-year-old sophomore at Brooklyn College and the vice-

president of SJP there, spoke with me as the ASA boycott was being debated in conference in late November 2013.

“Absolutely, I see the tide turning,” she said. “I remember not long ago, maybe two or three years ago, the whole mentality was ‘that looks like a mess over there, let’s stay away from it.’” Aly explained the trajectory of SJP activism at Brooklyn College—and the broader Palestine solidarity movement—from that point on. “Honestly, I always think about Nelson Mandela,” she said. “I see an end to what’s going on in Palestine. I see an end to the unjust laws. Because it’s in our power to do so.... The way I’ve always seen things—and maybe this is a little premature to see things this way because I’m just 19—but I always see things as since I’m going to die someday, I want to leave this world knowing that I did something to make it a better place. This is the issue of our time; this needs our focus right now.”



Interview: Tom Pessah

Tom Pessah has been a longtime organizer and mentor with both the SJP chapter at the University of California at Berkeley, and the national SJP organizing structure. He is a Israeli graduate student in sociology and a member of SJP since 2006. Pessah returned to Israel in late 2013 to write his doctoral dissertation on the history of settler-colonial societies and how they define or represent ethnic cleansing of indigenous groups. He's been researching and comparing the histories of genocide against indigenous peoples in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Palestine.



An anti-Zionist, Pessah grew up in a “left-of-center, liberal Zionist” household in Tel Aviv, and told me he remembered attending protests as a youth against Israel’s war on Lebanon in the 1980s and against Israeli aggression during the first intifada. But his political consciousness grew from liberal to radical when the second intifada erupted. He started going to the occupied West Bank and joining Palestinian-led protests—what he describes as the best education about the occupation and Zionism that he could have received.

Pessah said he was excited to be part of the movement for justice in Palestine and the hope that it demonstrates.

You open your newsfeed on Facebook, and every single day, there’s someone in this country or somewhere else who is

working on the same project as you. You feel as if there's a wave behind you, which is pushing in the right direction, and you're part of it.

As a student, it's exciting to feel that you have an actual impact. Because in Israel, you feel overwhelmed. You feel there are so many fronts you have to face—there's the West Bank, Bedouins getting displaced in the Negev, in Jaffa people are getting pushed out, land being appropriated in so many areas in the country.

In this country, there are over 100 chapters of SJP, and there are people calling us from Scotland, from Australia, setting up chapters on their campuses. It's an amazing achievement, so many small groups of people working at the same time.

I am proud of the atmosphere within SJPs: it's one of tolerance, of running the chapters democratically, of being pragmatic and not getting too caught up in rhetoric to try and show your self-righteousness, and trying to share a formula of the three points of unity: equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, ending colonization of lands under occupation, and the right of return. But it's also about allowing for flexibility within different campaigns, which is what I like about the BDS campaign in particular.

Also, as someone who is Jewish, I really like that there is getting to be a strong awareness of anti-Semitism and speaking up against it. It's good for my personal complexes and from growing up in Israel with this culture of "We Jews have to defend ourselves," mostly because [speaking up against real anti-Semitism is] the alternative to Zionism. Zionism was born out of that feeling that wasn't completely crazy, of Jews defending themselves, that they would be persecuted no matter what, and the only way to do it was Zionism—it was the wrong solution to a real problem. The BDS movement is creating a real serious alternative to that.

People are evolving in their consciousness. It's a big source of optimism. When I go back to Israel, I say we did this, we did that, and people are surprised and eager to hear it. Because

it's being kept under wraps in the Israeli media. And when you pass it on, people are really excited.

On the anti-Semitism note, not only are Israel lobby groups trying to define what anti-Semitism is in the context of Palestine activism, but the California State legislature passed a non-binding resolution—HR-35—in 2012 that equated BDS activism with anti-Semitism. It's a very broad and calculated way of circumventing the politics around Israel and why students are organizing against Israel's policies. How do you see this tactic being used, and how does it affect Palestine solidarity activism on campuses?

They just lie. That's the most infuriating thing. But every time they overreach, there's a backlash. And HR-35 was actually good for us. It was a boon for Palestine activists, because they interfered with academic freedom. And if there's one thing that students universally care about, it's academic freedom. When you say that these people are going to dictate what you can and can't study...I could say that, personally, because my research is about ethnic cleansing.

So we went to the Graduate Assembly (UC-Berkeley's graduate student government), and we went to the UC Student Association, and in both cases, we told them that Judaism is an ancient religion, whereas Zionism is a political movement which is about 100 years old, and it's okay to criticize it. We said that this resolution was a direct infringement of academic freedom. Because it says that *talking* about ethnic cleansing, which is my dissertation topic, is a form of anti-Semitism. And research on that is a form of anti-Semitism, according to this resolution.

We said, take a look at what's happening in Arizona. They banned ethnic studies for similar reasons—it was “hateful” against white people to talk about Chicano history. And not just one book, or one professor—the entire discipline. So we said, if you keep quiet about this, you'll wake up tomorrow and you'll find the whole topic banned. It's created a backlash, and we've created a lot of sympathy from people who weren't aware of it. It shows we're having an impact. It's part of the struggle.

During the divestment initiatives, there was a concerted effort to turn politics, and the reaction to enacted policies, into an emotional response. And also to turn it into a local thing as though this issue is not happening 10,000 miles away—this was about Jewish students having an identity crisis who were demanding pity because what we were saying about Israel wasn't the same narrative they received during summer camp or on Birthright, and we were supposed to have sympathy for them—while in Gaza, people don't have water and are living under a brutal military occupation.

We had great support from Jewish Voice for Peace because they knew how to back us in a way that wasn't taking over, wasn't speaking for us, but rather amplifying our voices. The bottom line was that Palestinian voices did get amplified. People heard those voices. And the student senators said they had never heard stories or testimonies like that. People's opinions were changed; they were transformed. For the students speaking, it was very emotional, very liberating. It was a transformational experience for everyone involved in divestment.

What about the impact BDS has on actual policy in Palestine?

Before policy, there are the companies. McDonald's decided not to set up a new franchise in Ariel, the biggest settlement in the West Bank. That's huge. That's what we want. It's one thing to get companies to move out, which is already happening, but we can get companies not to move in in the first place. They won't want all the controversy.

And if I were a performing artist, I wouldn't want the headache of meeting protesters in every [other] city I perform in if I decide to go perform in Tel Aviv. I would say this is controversial. That's the way non-political people think—they don't want the headache of controversy. Unless you're a diehard Zionist, and you want to do it on the basis of principle, like Barbra Streisand, you just won't want to be involved.

In the near horizon, what I can see is more companies pulling out, and that pushes people within Israeli society to discuss [the occupation] more, to push the government. I think it's going to take time for actual change in the policy of the

Israeli government. In South Africa, it took a huge economic crisis. And large portions of the Israeli economy are invested in the occupied territories.

To create a counter-balance to that will take time. I wish it could be over tomorrow—I'm not the person who's suffering the most; the ones who are suffering the most want it to be over yesterday—but we can see the trend.

A lot of younger people are feeling a sense of urgency, which is important. But they still have an idea that [U.S. secretary of state] John Kerry is going to come and fix everything. And it's clear that the "window of opportunity" is going to close—this government is completely intransigent, there's nothing new about that. And that's going to push people to radicalize. It's blatant: Israeli politicians are saying there will be no Palestinian state, period. In the end, it's unfashionable for young, liberal, Reform or secular American Jews, to support rabid nationalists like [right-wing Israeli politician] Naftali Bennett. Over time, the trend is going to move more into radicalism. And BDS offers a recipe for action on campuses.



Intersecting Struggles and Common Causes

For us in joint organizing... this is family. This is our life.... We understand each other on a more human level.”

—Danya Mustafa, National SJP organizer



First row: Ruben Pacheco, Bo Outland, Michelle P.

Second row: Zena Ozeir, Jadd Mustafa, Lissie Perkal

In the fall of 2011, a group of Palestinian activists in the occupied West Bank boarded Israeli settler-only buses bound for Jerusalem, in an act of civil disobedience inspired by the Freedom Rides during the civil rights movement in the United States. The six Palestinian Freedom Riders on Israeli public bus 148 were arrested by Israeli forces for “illegally” crossing over the green line—Israel’s internationally-recognized armistice line with the occupied West Bank—without Israeli-issued permits.¹ They said they aimed “to challenge Israel’s apartheid policies, the ban on Palestinians’ access to Jerusalem, and the overall

segregated reality created by a military and settler occupation that is the cornerstone of Israel's colonial regime.”²

Their bravery exposed two corporations that profit from Israel's apartheid policies: the Israeli Egged bus company and the French multinational Veolia. Both companies operate transportation systems that serve Israel's Jewish-only settlement colonies in occupied East Jerusalem and the broader West Bank. Activists in solidarity around the world engaged in protests and direct actions targeting Veolia and Egged and calling out Israel's systems of racism, inequality, and apartheid. Legendary social justice activist and scholar Angela Davis remarked, “Palestinian Freedom Riders poised to collectively resist Israeli apartheid are inspired by the fifty-year-old legacy of US Freedom Riders, whose bold defiance of Jim Crow laws in the South helped to dismantle legal structures of racism. All those who celebrate the achievements of the Civil Rights Era should be prepared to stand in solidarity with our Palestinian sisters and brothers today.”³

Every day, Palestinians challenge Israel's apartheid system in significant and creative ways, whether a specific campaign is organized, whether the media pays attention or not. Nour Joudah, a Palestinian American educator and writer was denied entry and deported by Israel as she attempted to return to teach at the Friends School in Ramallah, in the West Bank, after a holiday in Jordan in early 2013. She, like countless Palestinian-Americans every year, was turned away simply because of her heritage, last name, and being of the “wrong” religion.

Writing so poetically in the *Electronic Intifada* after the arrests of the Palestinian Freedom Riders, Joudah highlighted the risks that both Palestinians and African Americans have taken for freedom:

Veolia, a multinational urban transportation and waste management company, has become a main target for worldwide boycott campaigners for its role in the segregated settler transportation systems, including the Jerusalem Light Rail project which runs between Jerusalem and colonies in the West Bank. Because of sustained boycott campaigns (especially in Europe), Veolia has lost nearly \$24 billion worth of contracts in just a few years, according to a report released by the human rights organization Global Exchange.⁴

In the 1960s in the U.S., the saying was “We shall overcome.” In Palestine, we say “*Samidoon*,” or “We are steadfast.” There is courage, perseverance, strength, and a deep sense of justice that binds rights struggles around the world. The mantra of *sumoud*, or steadfastness, that Palestinians hold dear, is difficult to adequately convey in

translation, but it is not unique to them. It is a common root from which the oppressed draw inspiration and build solidarity.

To those who stood against injustice in the 1960s, and who are proud of that moment in human history, the time has come to raise your voices again now—this time to demand justice for Palestinians and an end to rampant Israeli discrimination. The ride to freedom is long and ever-evolving. But it is also a ride that knows no geographical boundaries—whether in the Jim Crow South or occupied, apartheid-administered Palestine.⁵

One of the most significant themes within Palestine solidarity organizing is that of cross-movement building—creating coalitions within the historical and current intersections of different struggles. Discussions about anti-racism, anti-sexism, immigrant justice, and oppressed peoples’ liberation struggles are all amplified within the Palestine solidarity movement. As Hoda Mitwally of CUNY Law in New York City so poignantly said, “Our work has no value or purpose if we’re not connecting it to other struggles.”

“Solidarity with those who have shown solidarity with us”

Students involved with Palestine solidarity organizing are fully aware, and outraged, at the heavily-financed military partnership between Israel and the United States as the Obama administration’s deportations of undocumented persons reach record levels, as the border becomes a cash cow for weapons dealers and military contractors, and as social services, health care, and education are left to waste, impacting the most vulnerable communities.

“I think it’s really important as solidarity activists to look in our own communities and see that what we’re fighting against far away in Palestine is also targeting our communities here, and our neighbors and family members,” said Gabriel Schivone, a longtime SJP activist at the University of Arizona and a member of the national organizing committee. Schivone has taken part in countless protests over the years, including an important direct action in October 2013 against the Obama administration’s rampant detention and deportation of undocumented persons. Immigrant rights activists and members of Students for Justice in Palestine barricaded themselves at the entrance to a federal courthouse in Tucson, Arizona, where buses carrying migrant

detainees pull up. Others, including Schivone and other SJP and immigrant justice activists, locked their bodies to the buses themselves.⁶

Students for Justice in Palestine stated that the coordinated action was called to stop Operation Streamline—“the mass prosecution program that criminalizes, *en masse*, on average eighty (mostly Mexican and Central American) migrant detainees each day in Tucson.”⁷ President Barack Obama has refused to halt the mass arrests and deportations of undocumented persons. In fact, under his term, the United States “has been deporting more than 1,000 people a day, and nearly 410,000 [in 2012], a record number,” according to the *Washington Post*.⁸

Danya Mustafa with the SJP chapter at the University of New Mexico told me by phone on the day of the lockdown that “this is an important action to show solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are struggling here, whose families are being torn apart, whose livelihoods are being taken away from them.” What is happening to immigrants and undocumented persons in the United States under the Obama administration and the Arizona state government “is an injustice,” Mustafa added. “At SJP we know that injustice all too well, especially as Palestinians. We need to keep our families together. Community support is important. This is a direct action based on the needs of the community, and mothers, brothers, sisters, and fathers are coming out to support this action. We support it 100 percent. We want to show solidarity with those who have shown solidarity with us.”⁹

Schivone’s work in documenting the impact of U.S.-Mexico border policy has led him to uncover not just the political connections between the struggles of indigenous and migrant peoples in the United States and Palestine, but the classist, militarist, and capitalist connections as well. He started off by explaining that he sees the intersection in himself, personally. “I’m an embodiment of it,” he added. “My father came from a white settler background, a European immigrant from Italy. And my mother was born in Sonora, in Mexico. And when they married, my mom moved in with my dad and they got a house out of the El Hoya, which is a Chicana, Mexican-American neighborhood, or *barrio*, in Tucson. It was during ‘white flight,’ and they went to a sprawling urban new white development neighborhood. I lost half of myself through that process. I would

grow up in public school not wanting to learn the language (Spanish) and rejecting half of myself.”

It took some time, but with guidance from an older, politically radical sister, Schivone embraced his identity. “For a while, when I started working with the migrant rights group *No Mas Muertes* (No More Deaths), that perspective on my family background became a [pillar of] my political life. But then I started, unconsciously, perhaps, dividing my time between both concerns—Palestine, SJP, student organizing on the one hand, and humanitarian aid and human rights work at the border on the other hand.” But he realized that there is no reason why they should be divided when there are fundamental ways that they’re connected. “So I started connecting them,” he said, “looking at ways that they’re connected analytically and more deeply in structural forms.”

One of the clearest ways the United States and Israel exemplify their shared values begins with the walls both countries have constructed to keep others out. At the U.S.-Mexico border, which stretches from California to Texas, the U.S. government’s expanding practices of border militarization have reached unprecedented levels, and Israel has stepped in to not just share the technology it has field-tested on Palestinians, but to profit from this project as well. In March 2013, one of the two leading contractors for Israel’s wall in the West Bank, an Israeli company named Elbit Systems, won its second contract—worth \$145 million—to provide surveillance systems for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Elbit’s first contract with the U.S. government provided 450 unmanned drones to the Arizona Border Patrol in 2004. Writing in the *Electronic Intifada*, Jimmy Johnson reported:

The new DHS contract calls for “Integrated Fixed Tower systems” that will “assist [Border Patrol] agents in detecting, tracking, identifying and classifying items of interest” along the border. This contract largely reprises Elbit’s role in the Boeing contract. Initial installations will be in Arizona.

Both the US and Israeli projects affirm settler-state partitions of indigenous land: Palestinian land in the Israeli case and Tohono O’odham land in Arizona.

The Tohono O’odham Nation is just one of several indigenous nations facing further partition because of US and Mexican border policies.

And both projects intend to stop the movement of persons under the guise of “security.”¹⁰

In 2011, Schivone started organizing tours to the border wall with other students from Palestinian, Jewish, white European, and Chicano backgrounds, “just observing, seeing it first hand,” he said. “And then talking about it, taking it in, discussing it, putting on conferences with students and speakers from all over the country from Palestine-oriented activism and from Chicano and human rights and border work. We put it all together and learned about each others’ struggles.”

Denise Rebeil works with UNIDOS (United Non-Discriminatory Individuals Demanding Our Studies) on issues related to the ban on ethnic studies. She attended the 2013 National SJP conference at Stanford University, and was eager to plug deeper into the Palestine solidarity community around the United States. She said she quickly realized the stark similarities between the two struggles. “Both people had their lands ripped from them,” Rebeil remarked. “Both have to deal with white supremacy. And they always have to be on the defense. I realized those connections, which are really important.”

Rebeil was a high school senior in Tucson in 2011 when the ethnic studies ban, House Bill 2281, was signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer. She had been an enthusiastic student in her Mexican-American studies classes and was outraged when the state addressed its plans to cut them. The Arizona legislature ludicrously alleged that such classes supposedly promoted the overthrow of the U.S. government and were “racist” against white people because they provided an alternative view to the European version of the colonization of the Americas. In the lead-up to the state’s ban on ethnic studies, Rebeil and other students in Tucson tried desperately to get politicians to preserve this valuable educational link to the histories of Chicano/a and First Nations students. “We were being ignored constantly,” she said, with rage returning to her voice. “We went through the system, sending letters and trying to set up meetings, but nothing was working. As students, we knew our voices needed to be heard, and they weren’t being heard.”

On April 26, 2011, during a Tucson school board meeting at which members would vote to dismantle ethnic studies classes, Rebeil and other students chained themselves to the board

members' chairs in a powerful, inspiring direct action that forced the vote to be postponed. The ban on ethnic studies ended up passing during the next school board meeting, but the motivation to keep pursuing educational justice for communities of color couldn't be quelled.

Less than a year later, the largest Chicano/a student organization in the United States, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), adopted the Palestinian call for BDS during its 19th annual conference. The conference coincided with international observances of both Cesar Chavez Day, honoring the migrant workers' rights leader, and Land Day, when Palestinians commemorate the six Palestinian citizens of Israel who were killed by Israeli forces during protests of ongoing land theft and settlercolonization in historic Palestine.¹¹

MEChA's alliance with SJP chapters all over the country has been vital to both communities. Students have long supported each other's events, marched alongside each other in protest of racist and unjust policies, and, like Schivone, have worked for justice seamlessly within both organizing spheres. Students involved with SJP linked up with MEChA to protest SB1070, Arizona's racial profiling law that was signed in 2010, and have collaborated in leading sustained protests in California against the 2013 appointment of Janet Napolitano as the president of the University of California. In her former role as the U.S. secretary of Homeland Security, Napolitano implemented the Obama administration's expanded deportation policies of undocumented persons.

Brooke Lober, a PhD student of gender and women's studies at the University of Arizona said that one of the significant aspects about racist legislation in Arizona is that—although there are some local specificities to it—“it's not truly exceptional.”

She added: “Especially in terms of the history of the Southwest, it's been a really long-term effort by those in power to subjugate Chicanos through the prison system, through the labor force, and through school discipline and language discipline.”

Lober said that she brought a friend, Bay Area activist and educator Amirah Mizrahi, to the University of Arizona to talk about the Mizrahi (Arab Jewish)¹² experience and the colonization of Palestine. She added that during Mizrahi's

workshop, it felt “like a Chicano-Mizrahi comparison began to get fleshed out, and it was really interesting to people.”

In New Mexico, Ruben Pacheco, an economics and political science graduate at the University of New Mexico and an active member of both SJP and other social justice organizations, explained his involvement in the Palestine solidarity movement in the context of the rich history of resistance to colonialism in the state. In order to understand the struggle for Palestinians today, Pacheco said it was important to understand the resistance of indigenous peoples on the land he stands now, dating back to 1680 when the Pueblo Indians first revolted against the Spaniard colonists “and effectively kicked them out of New Mexico for 12 years.”

In 1967, Pacheco added, the same week that Israel waged war on indigenous Palestinians and Syrians, and began its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Syrian Golan Heights, “a group of land grant activists attempted to reclaim ancestral land grants that were converted to national forest land in New Mexico. As Israeli tanks were advancing during the Six-Day War, national guard tanks were rolling through the mountains of northern New Mexico to prevent the Chicano activists from reclaiming their ancestral homelands.” Pacheco’s voice softened. “We always talk about the different names that were given to Palestinian villages that were destroyed by Israel. Names of places have a historical connection to a people and their language. Changing a name is traumatizing to people. It erases memory. In New Mexico, the injustice runs thick, and both the Chicano and the American Indian populations have endured this type of historical trauma.”

Pro-Israel groups courting marginalized communities

While students from marginalized communities continue to support each other’s struggles for liberation and equality, pro-Israel lobby organizations are building public relations campaigns that seek to defend Israel from accusations of discrimination and racism. For example, Project Interchange, a program of the American Jewish Committee—which launched its own “Latino and Latin American Institute” intended to “secure support for Israel throughout the Americas, and foster favorable

political alliances between Jewish and Latin American communities in the United States”¹³—organizes “educational” delegations to Israel for members of the Latino/a, LGBTQ, and various religious communities, as well as media workers, business leaders, and politicians.¹⁴ Other pro-Israel lobby groups such as the Anti-Defamation League are recruiting Latino/a student leaders to go on all-expense paid trips to Israel.

Reporting for the *Electronic Intifada*, Rania Khalek and Adriana Maestas sought out former participants of an ADL trip to Israel organized for members of the Latino/a community. One participant “came away believing that the conflict is rooted in ‘religion and centuries of mistrust between both sides,’” the journalists wrote. “This is a typical line in pro-Israel propaganda that erases almost seven decades of Israel’s forced dispossession and displacement of Palestinians.” Khalek and Maestas also noted that:

Michael Freund, the former deputy communications director for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, took to the pages of the *Jerusalem Post* to demand that Israel “launch a comprehensive and coordinated *hasbara*, or public diplomacy, campaign that makes Israel’s case to Hispanics directly and ‘en Español.’”¹⁵

Citing America’s rapidly growing Latino electorate, Freund explained rather candidly, “the face of America is rapidly changing, and so too should Israel’s *hasbara*.” Israel, he said, must follow the example of Project Interchange.¹⁶

Groups like the ADL are “particularly worried” about the growing alliances between Palestine solidarity groups and the Latino community, writes Ali Abunimah in his book *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*. “For the ADL, Latino/a and LGBTQ individuals and groups are no more than passive recipients of Palestinian propaganda. The implication is that if any see a common interest, share similar experiences with Palestinians, or resist the use of their communities in Israeli propaganda, they have somehow been duped,” Abunimah notes.¹⁷

Similarly, Abunimah adds that as Israel ramps up its racist treatment of African asylum-seekers—arresting and detaining thousands of people, sending them into squalid detention camps in the desert and planning schemes of mass deportation back to countries where they face violent persecution and imminent death—Israel’s propagandizing efforts to deflect criticism of such racist policies has been aimed at Black communities in the

United States. As independent journalist David Sheen and author Max Blumenthal have so importantly documented during the past few years, Israeli politicians have incited violence and racist pogroms¹⁸ against non-Jewish Africans in Israel. Government ministers such as Miri Regev have been the face of Israel's systematized racism toward non-Jewish Africans.

There are an estimated 45,000 asylum-seekers in Israel who have fled persecution, systematic violence, and genocide in eastern and central African countries. The African Refugee Development Center in Tel Aviv says that Eritreans make up 60 percent of the asylum-seeking population, and 90 percent have arrived in Israel since 2007. Israel's racist policies against African refugees include arresting people on-site and warehousing thousands in desert detention centers. For more information on Israel's treatment of African asylum-seekers, visit www.ardc-israel.org/.

Appointed to lead the sector that determines the state's policies affecting asylum-seekers, Regev famously called African refugees "a cancer," and then later apologized—not to Africans, but to cancer victims for comparing them to Africans.¹⁹ Another Israeli leader, Interior Minister Eli Yishai, did not feel the need to mince words when he claimed in 2012 that "most of those people arriving here are Muslims who think the country doesn't belong to us, the white man."²⁰

In an important 2012 article in the online magazine *Colorlines*, reporter Seth Freed Wessler analyzed recent attempts by pro-Israel lobby groups such as AIPAC to fend off descriptions of Israel as an apartheid state and cover up its treatment of African refugees. By recruiting students from historically Black colleges and universities "as moral shields to make the case for Israeli impunity," AIPAC "is finding and developing a cadre of Black allies to declare there's no way Israel can be racist," Wessler wrote.²¹

However, African-American student groups on campus are not, for the most part, falling for Israel's courtship. Time after time, divestment resolutions calling for university administrations to pull investments from companies that profit from Israel's occupation are supported by Black student unions. Black liberation groups like the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and countless Black student unions on campuses across the United States have stood alongside Palestine solidarity activists—just as the once prominent Black Panther Party did in the 1960s and '70s.

Fighting institutionalized racism

Walking through a relative's neighborhood in Sanford, Florida on February 26, 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by a man who stalked and then shot him at point-blank range. For the murder of an unarmed Black teenager, Martin's killer was found not guilty and was released after a short trial in the summer of 2013.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, national correspondent for the *Atlantic*, profoundly contextualized the acquittal, writing: "When you have a society that takes at its founding the hatred and degradation of a people, when that society inscribes that degradation in its most hallowed document, and continues to inscribe hatred in its laws and policies, it is fantastic to believe that its citizens will derive no ill messaging."²² Coates continued: "It is painful to say this: Trayvon Martin is not a miscarriage of American justice, but American justice itself. This is not our system malfunctioning. It is our system working as intended."

Immediately after the trial, nearly 40 U.S. student Palestine solidarity organizations, along with two dozen Palestine rights groups and individuals (including myself), signed a national "Statement of Solidarity with Trayvon Martin and Victims of Racial Violence." The statement read:

In light of the recent acquittal of George Zimmerman, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights (SUPER), and other organizations that work to secure the rights of the Palestinian people take a firm position against the racist institutions and laws that allowed for the murderer of an unarmed teenager to walk free. SJP and SUPER are in solidarity with Trayvon Martin's family and loved ones, and with all victims of racist violence, as well as with the thousands of people who are working for racial justice in the U.S.

This trial highlights yet again that we do not live in a post-racial society, nor is our justice system colorblind. As [writer] Syreeta McFadden put it, "Only in America can a dead black boy go on trial for his own murder." Through an appeal to racist stereotypes and character assassination, Trayvon was unjustly criminalized, much like thousands of black youth, women, men, and trans people in this country are everyday.

As people who are fighting for justice in Palestine, we understand how racism is used to justify and perpetuate an unjust system that oppresses whole populations. Our government tries to divide us by telling us that black is synonymous with "criminal" in the same way that it tries to tell us that Arab and Muslim is synonymous with "terrorist." In many ways the Black struggle coincides with the

Palestinian struggle, from racial profiling, to youth incarcerations, to segregated roads, buses, housing, and education.

On top of this, a handful of the same corporations, like G4S and other prison industries are profiting off of the racist mass imprisonment of both African Americans in the US and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

We understand that racism did not end with the abolition of slavery, nor did it end with the defeat of Jim Crow, and as people who are fighting to end US support for the racist system of Israeli apartheid, we know that this struggle cannot move forward without challenging racism here at home.

We also must address racism within our own organizing spaces and college and universities. Advocating for human rights is incomplete without challenging institutional racism in the university. SJP and SUPER are in solidarity with the victims of racist injustice here at home and those struggling to end it, because we know that “*La union hace la fuerza*” (With unity there is strength).²³

Nadine Aly of Florida Atlantic University said that though the campus SJP chapter is small, they’ve connected with other student groups on campus to fight local and global issues of injustice—including the kind of racism that let Trayvon’s killer go free, as well as the codified U.S. prison industrial complex. Student activists protested a contract between the university and the GEO Group, a private for-profit prison corporation with its headquarters near the campus, for naming rights to the football stadium. SJP members joined together with other social justice organizations to march, protest, and rally the community against the naming rights contract. After sustained protests and outrage, the GEO Group lost its contract bid in April 2013.

Aly explained why SJP members identified the GEO Group deal as a rallying point around Palestine. “It’s important for various reasons, including being able to confront the school-to-prison pipeline industry,” she said. “Students are taken out of school and put into prison [here in the U.S.]. You find [the same system] in Palestine, where children are being taken and put into Israeli prisons, sometimes indefinitely. Their writ of *habeas corpus* is suspended.” As human rights activists, Aly explained, members of SJP became involved in fighting both the U.S. and Israeli prison industries.

SJP joined with the on-campus Dream Defenders movement, which pulled together Black and Latino/a students involved in social justice organizing. Dream Defenders launched after the death of Trayvon Martin and pushed for “Trayvon’s Law,” an

effort to end racial profiling in Florida and repeal the racist Stand Your Ground law, which helped acquit Trayvon's killer. "We're also working for [U.S.] prison divestment at the same time we're pushing for divestment from companies that profit from Israel's occupation," Aly added.

LGBTQ students fight pinkwashing

"From bronzed muscle-gods and elaborately decorated floats to pointed political placards and masses of rainbow flags emblazoned with the Star of David, Tel Aviv's annual gay pride parade is a must for those who want to experience Israel's at its gayest, and some would say its freest (and still others at its most degenerate)," wrote Judd Yadid of Israel's daily *Haaretz* in March 2014, in an article listing the top ten ways to "discover Israel's miraculously well-endowed LGBT scene."²⁴ As part of its decade-old "Brand Israel" marketing campaign, Israel's tourism and foreign ministries have poured tens of millions of dollars into public relations and advertising strategies to promote the country as the "gay mecca" of the Middle East. This marketing campaign also promulgates Western tropes about Arab and Muslim culture: Israelis are civilized and gay-friendly while Palestinians are uncivilized and homophobic.

Humanities professor Sarah Shulman of the City College of New York at Staten Island, a writer, playwright, AIDS historian and longtime social justice activist, wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* admonishing Israel's marketing campaign—what activists call "pinkwashing"—while the state continues to oppress, occupy, and discriminate against Palestinians and ignore (queer and non-queer) Palestinian rights. Pinkwashing, Shulman explains, is a "deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life."²⁵

Palestinian queer organizations inside Palestine are fighting an extraordinary battle against pinkwashing within the context of resisting Israel's broader systems of occupation and apartheid. "Being queer does not eliminate the power dynamic between the colonized and colonizer despite the best of intentions," wrote West Bank-based queer activist Ghaith Hilal of the Palestinian organization Al Qaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, in an op-ed for the *Electronic Intifada* in

2013.²⁶ “Pinkwashing strips away our voices, history and agency, telling the world that Israel knows what is best for us. By targeting pinkwashing we are reclaiming our agency, history, voices and bodies, telling the world what we want and how to support us.”²⁷

Student activists in the United States are organizing against Israel’s pinkwashing and LGBTQ marketing campaigns as well. Hazim Abdullah, an SJP member at Northwestern University in Chicago, has talked with his friends about Israel’s systematic discrimination against Palestinians and African asylum-seekers even as it promotes itself as a liberal “haven” for other groups including members of the LGBTQ community. “It’s difficult feeling like the only person who brings up these issues outside of Palestine solidarity circles,” Abdullah said. “But I really think that this intersectionality is such an important thing, and I try to apply that as much as I can to my life. I don’t want to be drawn into everything, but I am. I’m queer, I’m Black, I’m low-income; so I have to be very pro- a lot of things, and anti- a lot of other things.”

He continued: “I talk [to my friends in the Black community] about how African refugees are treated in south Tel Aviv...if you care about the African diaspora, you have to understand the fundamental inequalities within the Zionist system and what it takes for a Jewish state to exclude a population—whether it be African or Palestinian.”

Abdullah also wants people to know about pinkwashing. With pinkwashing, he said, Israel is “gaining money through tourism, but they’re also casting a negative light and stereotypes about Arab societies. That, in turn, creates a bias and a hatred towards Palestinians and Arabs.” Notably for Abdullah, these different issues ultimately tie together: “Queer politics isn’t just centered around gay marriage and military service. And that’s something that I want to challenge a lot of people on. The event that I organized at Northwestern was called ‘Queer Liberation and Pinkwashing 101,’ and I had two queer speakers come to talk about queer liberation and its relationship to pinkwashing, and what Palestine solidarity from a queer perspective looks like.”

Abdullah thought that it was an important event to hold at Northwestern, because it challenged the stratification that exists even inside the oppressed LGBTQ community, especially among

white LGBTQ persons. In considering going to Israel to experience the heavily-marketed “gay haven” there, Abdullah said that members of the U.S. LGBTQ community should be aware of what Palestinians—including queer Palestinians—face as a people occupied, displaced, and discriminated against. “I don’t think that...going on a trip to a ‘gay-friendly’ country means it gives you a pass to oppress and ignore another group [the Palestinians],” he said.

Bringing workers’ rights into the movement

Sarah Moawad, a Middle Eastern studies major at Harvard University, believes it’s a prime moment to bring together different communities around a common cause. While Boston-area activists have rallied around Northeastern University’s repression of the solidarity movement on campus, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#), local unionized bus drivers have been in sustained protest against the French multinational Veolia for union-busting tactics. Palestine solidarity activists, including students, have joined forces with those transportation workers in protesting Boston’s contracts with Veolia, citing human rights and workers’ rights violations from Palestine to the United States.

Moawad explained that the Palestine Solidarity Committee at Harvard was contacted by a worker at the university, a chef who cooks Muslim students’ dinners, who was involved in the protests against Veolia’s union-busting practices. He reached out to the PSC and the Muslim student association, knowing that both the Palestine solidarity activists and union workers had common cause in protesting Veolia. “The fact that he knows this and reached out to the students is huge,” Moawad explained. “We can’t disappoint them. To have this worker-student solidarity is immense.”



UCLA divestment efforts. (Photo by FEM Magazine)

Shafeka Hashash of New York University is excited about her involvement in workers' rights organizing. Active in groups such as Students for Economic Justice on campus and a member of the National Federation for the Blind, Hashash tied BDS activism to the disability rights movement in the United States. "Boycott is now a strategy for the disability rights movement," she said, explaining the resistance against the shocking level of discrimination against differently-abled workers. "We started a campaign called Boycott Goodwill—the clothing store—because they pay disabled employees less than minimum wage." (The National Federation for the Blind confirmed that disabled employees at Goodwill Industries have been paid as little as \$1.44 an hour.)

"In America, that's legal," Hashash added. "There are 20 regional CEOs who take in over \$30 million a year. However, in Canada, they manage to pay everyone a full wage, because it's not legal in Canada to pay these minimum wages." To see the National Federation for the Blind engage in a boycott campaign, Hashash said, was empowering. "It's real, strategic action that can be implemented. And I see that the Palestine solidarity community is doing this. And it's not just them; I see disability networks who have signed on to the Boycott Goodwill campaign.

It shows that this must be something if all of these human rights and disability advocacy networks are taking this approach.”

Amal Ali, a history major at the University of California at Riverside, said that it’s not a surprise that groups such as MEChA and other Chicano groups, African student unions, workers’ rights activists, and LGBTQ groups are joining with SJP in common cause. But during the UC–Riverside divestment campaign, she was surprised at how easy it was to receive support from lesser-known student organizations.

“When I was looking for student group endorsements and seeking out every random student organization I could think of that was not Hillel or [the on-campus Israel advocacy group] Highlanders for Israel, one group that I came across was the Society of Women Engineers,” she recounted. “And I’m always going to remember this, because I walked into their general meeting with the intention of asking whether they would endorse our bill, thinking they would say, ‘Who is she, what does she think she’s doing here, we’re the Society of Women Engineers, what do we have to do with this?’”

Ali laughed. “But I gave them all the facts, and made sure that I spelled it out in such a detailed way that they would know exactly what they were doing and why they should support divestment, and they didn’t even have to think about it. It was the biggest shock to me. I realized it was because there are so few female engineers, and they knew about the struggle of just being any kind of minority. They felt that even though engineering may not have any ties to divestment or any kind of action like that. It just shows how strong this movement is in that you find allies in the most unexpected places.”

Max Ajl, a doctoral student of developmental sociology at Cornell University, noted the importance of bringing together communities—from both expected and unexpected places—to make sure social justice demands are met. What the United States needs is a “big social movement that will hammer the system,” he said.

Ajl added that solidarity with the Palestine liberation struggle doesn’t matter much if activists can’t widen their scope of involvement within the local communities. “There’s no doing anything about Palestine without big structural reforms of the

system we live in, and everything else is a delusion that people prefer, for obvious reasons, because delusions are comfortable. But they're not helpful."

Ajl and I spoke in the fall of 2013, after a group of university student senates in California had held votes on divestment bills. "Every victory is a victory, even if it's small, because it raises the bar of what's possible," he said. "It changes the field of what people believe is politically possible. And I think that's what's most important, but we do have to know that it's getting worse on the ground in Palestine, and we need much bigger victories *yesterday*."

Palestine solidarity activists on campuses are certainly doing their part to hammer a system that would otherwise prefer to separate and isolate battles for freedom and equality. To this effect, Dalia Fuleihan of Northwestern University in Chicago remarked on the enormous success Palestine solidarity groups have had in making these connections between other struggles apparent and resolute. "When you get such a broad coalition all pushing for the same thing, it isolates how small the actual powerful group in the situation really is," she said. "It highlights the absurdity of the way the general global system works—that there are just a few countries that are running the entire world. And it's the opinions of these small countries that are determining the fate of everyone else. It makes people aware that it is absurd, and it goes against the values that people especially in the West believe: democracy and power in the hands of the people."



Interview: Danya Mustafa

Danya Mustafa began an SJP chapter at the University of New Mexico when she was still a high school student in Albuquerque. A powerhouse in the truest sense of the term, Mustafa has galvanized her local community on and off campus, and has inspired many to become tremendous activists themselves. She is part of the national SJP organizing committee, and is constantly working on a myriad of different campaigns at once. When I met Mustafa for the first time in New York City, and then again a few months later in New Mexico, it was clear she was a local legend in the activism circles in both regions. It was hard not to love her immediately.



A women studies/gender and sexuality studies double major as well as a journalism student, Mustafa's goal is to "empower young women" and to focus on media within the Palestine rights movement and other social justice movements. She told me that her family took her to see her father's family in the occupied West Bank when she was 11 years old. "The first time I went there, I wasn't sure what to expect," she explained. "I didn't know much about the world or where I came from. When I got there, things seemed pretty intense. I saw my first Israeli soldier with a gun, and it started to make me think."

Her family, she said, is the main reason why she has become an activist. "Every time I go there, I get to come back

here without the occupation,” she said. “I want to be able to see my cousins live in a place where they don’t have to deal with that.”

I asked Mustafa to situate Palestine solidarity activism within the geographical and political context of New Mexico.

New Mexico is a minority-to-majority state: there are more Latinos in our state than any other demographic group. So, there is a Latino majority on campus as well. I started learning about the migrant justice issue in high school during my media work, and I made a lot of connections with undocumented students.

New Mexico is interesting. It’s unique in the sense that we give a lot of scholarship opportunities to undocumented students, which is nice. But we have a governor now who is very anti-immigrant. So there’s been a lot of mobilization [in terms] of getting the migrant justice organizations together and really fighting back against our state. Our administration is pretty lenient on a lot of things, but we’re afraid that our governor is going to start cracking down.

We made friends with some MEChA kids who would come to our table and say, “Wow, finally someone’s into politics!” because our campus is very apathetic. Anything to do with nothing to do with sports is not talked about on campus at all, pretty much. So we realized that we’re a small base as it is, so we started having joint meetings, trying to figure out how we can have anti-oppression trainings, how we can really mobilize on our campus on a more intimate level. The migrant justice movement and the Palestine solidarity movement started doing BDS research together, and we started realizing that a lot of companies that deal with the occupation also deal with the militarization of the U.S. borders, and the militarization of the detention centers. We realized we needed to come together full-force on this. Actually, we’ve been on committees with MEChA, and a lot of them are very much on board with BDS and we’re trying to figure out how we can all work together toward this common goal.

In terms of where we’re at, we realized that a lot of these students who are mobilizing are undocumented themselves. So

organizing for us isn't just fun and games; it's our lives. For me, it's personal—I have family back home in Palestine. For the MEChA students, they have families in detention centers who they're trying to get out. For us in joint organizing, we've come to a point where this is family. This is our life. So it makes us more tuned into what we're doing, and we understand each other on a more human level.

And there is a level of real self-empowerment, it seems, when you have this solidarity between two communities coming together.

Right. And Albuquerque is nice in the sense that our community is a little small in terms of social justice work, but we're a family. We're all a family, and we all work together as a family. If there's something going on, like someone is getting detained by ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], we'll mobilize and we'll get all of our people to go to the detention center. Or if something is happening in Gaza, we'll all mobilize and plan an action. It's nice to know that we have that.

This movement recycles its membership every four years or so, as students enter into college and then graduate. So when you talk to incoming students, like freshmen who are just learning about these connections between indigenous communities here in the U.S. and in Palestine, and how there's all this solidarity forming, but who may also be intimidated by the Israel-aligned groups, or they saw what happened to the Irvine 11, what kind of advice do you have for incoming students who want to get involved but may be on the fence about direct organizing?

Well, for me, my advice is to always be true to yourself and be true to your cause. Know that the truth is always on your side. That's one thing—sometimes I get so intimidated about things, but then I realize that truth is on our side. You have this opposition that is really freaking out. They do all these scare tactics, they intimidate because they're very desperate right now. They're not being honest, and people are starting to catch on. But our thing is that no matter what, we know that in the end we're on the right side of history.

In terms of organizing, one thing that our SJP does is that for incoming students, we hold anti-oppression trainings. We do this every year, at the beginning of every semester. We work with MEChA; we work with Amnesty International; we work with La Raza Unida¹ and Young Women United. And we invite a professor from Critical Race Theory to present the workshop. We do a day of exercises, including something called the “privilege walk,” where you describe what you see in different neighborhoods and talk about oppression and racism. We really focus on anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-classism. Just to make sure that we can talk about this struggle as a human struggle. We need to realize that when we’re doing this, we’re fighting against colonialism. We’re fighting against racism.... A lot of people who come out of high school [are] not used to talking about these issues. So it’s very much a shock to them.

How do you see the tactics of Israel-aligned groups trying to clamp down on Palestine solidarity organizing, to try to undermine and malign BDS organizing?

They’re freaking out about BDS because it’s a human rights tactic and it comes from the basis of protecting human rights. And these corporations that profit from Israel’s occupation are tied to so many different issues, and they know that it’s going to garner speed. It’s funny that they’re starting to launch an anti- BDS campaign.

When they make claims of anti-Semitism, saying that Palestine solidarity activists are “Nazi sympathizers,” it’s really insulting to those who were victimized in the Holocaust. When I went to Yad Vashem [the Holocaust museum] in Jerusalem, I went with a Holocaust survivor who was from former Czechoslovakia, and she told me that she was disgusted to the point to where she asked how Zionism was in her name. “How was this honoring me?” she asked.

It made me realize, too—when I was younger, I was very much into learning about the Holocaust, learning about the injustices. When I went to the library, every book I got was about the Holocaust. I was so upset about how this could have happened, how can people lose their humanity? When I was in

elementary school, I thought that if I was alive during those times, I would have joined the movement against it. I would want to fight for justice no matter who is being oppressed. And as I'm getting older, I'm thinking that we're a part of history right now. That intimidation doesn't work on me anymore. I really believe that they're insulting those who they're claiming to speak for.

Students are rising up all over the country in Palestine solidarity. How does it feel to be a part of this movement?

It's great. You know, I started doing direct action when I was about 15, and I thought I was the only student—all I saw at first were older people! But it's so amazing to see more students get involved, and with different schools growing new chapters.

Recently, I saw that the University of Denver started a chapter, which is great because it's in our region. And not only that, but the diversity of students—I love going to SJP conferences and seeing Jewish-American students. I feel like for me, personally, seeing Jewish-American students makes me the most happy ever. Because every time I go to Palestine, I see these kids on Birthright Israel trips. And it's painful. But when I meet a Jewish-American kid who is open about their anti-Zionism, it's beautiful. That's solidarity. And also seeing Native-American students who are part of SJP—to link those indigenous struggles together, it's inspiring. I'm optimistic about the future.



Advice to Student Activists

I think the importance of doing activist work is precisely because it allows you to give back and to consider yourself not as a single individual who may have achieved whatever, but to be a part of an ongoing historical movement.

—Angela Davis, 1997



First row: Gabriel Schivone, Tareq Radi, Sarah Radi

Second row: Denise Rebeil, Tala Radejko

While organizing for Palestinian rights, students in the United States have faced extraordinary repression from university administrations and outside political groups. Many students say they're not being heard, that the discussion on Palestinian rights is taken over by loud, well-funded Israel-aligned groups, which pounce as soon as students challenge Israel's policies. Some of these organizations—and the Israeli government itself—have made it a priority to harass and malign students organizing for Palestine solidarity. As we've seen in previous chapters, students have been litigated against, secretly spied on, slandered in the media, and branded as anti-Semites if they dare speak out against Israel's settler-colonialist policies. This post 9/11

atmosphere has had severe repercussions for many students, their families, and their communities.

However, a common refrain from the dozens of students interviewed for this book is one of strength, courage, and determination. Students, especially students of Arab and Muslim descent, are acutely aware of the different modes of repression that exist in this country today. And in the face of such repression, students say they know they are on the right side of history. As Nashiha Alam of Loyola University in Chicago explained, “When you know you’re making change, you get a lot of response. And it’s not always positive response.”

How do young activists working with little to no resources, under constant scrutiny, and facing real risks press forward? Several students, reflecting on the lessons they learned, offered advice for the next generation of activists on U.S. campuses.

Hassan Abdinur of San Diego State University, who has seen attacks on campus against student Palestine activists, said that one has to expect to take risks for the sake of justice. “People may dislike you, they may hurl threats at you, they may physically harm you, but at the end of the day, if you know what’s right, then stand up for what’s right,” he explained.

Alexi Shalom, the sociology major at Hunter College in New York City, encouraged student activists to plainly and clearly “just speak out.” He poignantly added: “The reason we’re getting clamped down on is not because people are speaking out, but because not enough people are speaking out. Once something is made an acceptable position, you can’t repress it because it’s an acceptable position. So if more and more people sign statements publicly, if they speak out, if they make clear their positions on Palestine—I’m sure, once upon a time, it wasn’t good politics to support the anti-apartheid South Africa movement, right? Nelson Mandela was branded a ‘terrorist,’ just as we say Palestinians are.”



Protest in Boston on Palestinian Land Day, 2012. (Photo by Tess Scheflan/ActiveStills)

“But things change,” he continued. “And something that changed South Africa was the condition in the world, but the other was peoples’ willingness to speak out about the problem. So I would say that students should speak out. And they should read, so that they are totally and completely educated about the subject. And that’s an issue, if people aren’t educated. We have that problem. Which is why SJPs need to hold more political education. I’m a big proponent of that.”

Lastly, Shalom said that engaging people who are willing to be engaged is an important way to build the movement. You may not convince that person that they should accept your position, “but you may be able to convince them that your position is legitimate,” he remarked. “And that’s what I think is really important.”

Andrew Dalack, a law student at the University of Michigan and an organizing member of National Students for Justice in Palestine, said that this current moment for student organizing is critical, but it is also a time to be careful. “I think we’re in a position where we think our activism can represent the extent of our work, or we can assume that our activism is the core, the heart of the Palestine liberation movement, and that’s just not the

case,” he explained. “I think that as the NSJP community grows stronger and becomes more institutionalized, it’s going to really have to be intentional about maintaining contact with grassroots Palestinian organizations like the Stop the Wall campaign, for example, or U.S.-based organizations like the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, to coordinate with. Because if the goals and the missions aren’t aligned with one another, then it could be the case that the solidarity work is not really promoting the interests of Palestinians, or of the movement.”

Dalack noted that the movement is building incredible, rapid momentum. After the success of the annual conferences and the growth of new SJP groups across U.S. campuses, it becomes even more critical to solidify the organizational structure. Student organizers of National SJP need to create a democratic process whereby regional representatives are elected. “But it’s exciting,” Dalack said, “because these are all good problems to have.” He added that procedural clarity will only strengthen the organization’s foundation.

Bo Outland of UC–Santa Cruz laughed sweetly when I asked her what advice she has for activists who are passionate about Palestine solidarity organizing but may be put off or intimidated by the blowback from Israel-aligned individuals or groups. “Toughen up!” she said. “There’s this quote by Gandhi: ‘Silence becomes cowardice when occasion demands speaking out the whole truth and acting accordingly.’”

Outland is a feminist studies and politics major interested in prison abolition work after college. For Outland, activism “is about knowing what’s going on and finding your own truth within that. It’s about listening to yourself—to your gut—and going with that. I’m speaking from a place of privilege—I’m a white female—but I don’t feel like the opposition can touch me or my voice. And the fact that they think they can gives me motivation to speak up, and I hope that other people can get the same kind of motivation.”

Nadya Tannous, Outland’s co-organizer with the UC–Santa Cruz Committee for Justice in Palestine, echoed those sentiments. “I would tell students to not be afraid,” Tannous said. She recounted a conversation she had with a longtime Palestine activist, Sandra Tamari. “I was talking about my fear of being barred from seeing my family in Palestine this summer,” she said.

“What would I do if the Israelis asked me about my activism? And seeing my family members not being able to go back—it’s this purgatory of having a very privileged life, a very beautiful life here—but when you can’t have something, you want it so much more.

“I told Sandra that I was really afraid. I do so many things here that I’m not afraid to do, and I don’t care—I press forward, and I accept risks with what I’m doing. Yet going to Palestine—I’m afraid of them denying me entry or penalizing my family there and here. And Sandra said, ‘You know, there are prisons that have solid walls. And they’re very good at keeping you in. Don’t let that prison follow you around. Don’t let that prison be in your mind. They can control you at the airport, they can control you physically, but don’t let their fear, don’t let their oppression fall upon your head and stay there. Because they don’t have that right, and they shouldn’t have that power.’”

Tannous said that for students coming into the activism world, it can be a similar experience. The intimidation levels can be intense. “It’s easier to study and put your head down,” she said. “But there is something beautiful about being a student and having an academic freedom to search. And I think that becoming rooted in this struggle and really dedicating yourself to a liberation of your fellow people is a feeling that you have that really supports you in your knowledge of yourself. It solidified something inside of me to not feel so alone. And to feel like there are people who have the same experiences as I did, who care about the same things. Who agree that we’re fighting for the same thing.”

Tannous laughed and confessed that maybe she was being a little idealistic, but her advice was also pragmatic. She repeated: “Don’t let the prison follow you around. Don’t let it have that power.”



Defining Solidarity

Tu eras me otra yo—you are my other me. Meaning, if I do harm to you, I do harm to myself. If I fail to act, fail to stand up, especially if my neighbor’s being attacked, I fail myself and fail humanity. That’s what solidarity is.

—Gabriel Schivone, University of Arizona and National SJP organizer



First row: Nadya Tannous, Alexi Shalom, Sabreen Shalabi

Second row: Ehab Tamimi, Omar Shakir

Too often, Americans want to passively solve problems of injustice—by donating a few bucks to a large international charity or hoping that politicians will eventually come to their senses—rather than working with struggling communities to disrupt the root cause of injustice itself. Students involved in Palestine activism, however, make the distinction between charity and solidarity. They understand the importance of amplifying Palestinian voices through direct action and protest campaigns, rather than relying on politicians or international aid agencies. They want their activism to have a direct, tangible effect—what student Rebecca Erickson refers to in this chapter as “meaningful support.” This kind of solidarity is central to

student activism not only with regards to Palestine issues, but also as it is applied to many other social justice and civil rights movements around the world.

My two final questions during the dozens of interviews I conducted concerned how students felt being a part of this expanding solidarity movement and how they defined the word *solidarity* as a practice. I received tremendously moving and nuanced answers.

Lena Ibrahim of George Mason University in Washington, D.C., said that her Palestinian parents raised her to be cautious about her identity for fear of reprisal or racist attack. She had to be careful telling other people at school that she was Palestinian, Ibrahim said, and was told never to talk about Zionism or Israel. She defined solidarity within that context.

“Finally finding my Palestinian activism at college, and seeing that there are other people who are willing to work and break the rules a little, and to say those things—it not only helped me grow as a person and as a Palestinian, but it also gave me so much hope to say we have so much power as Arab Americans, Palestinians here in the U.S., in D.C., to change peoples’ minds, to share my father’s and my family’s stories,” Ibrahim explained. “So I think solidarity for me gives me so much hope in a place where you don’t think you can find any hope at all. So much time is spent being depressed about the things you see and read about your family and friends back home, worrying about them constantly, and remembering the soldiers at the checkpoints and the racism you encounter when you’re there.

“And then you come here and you put all of that energy into work. People come up to me all the time and tell me, ‘Thank you for sharing your story, I’ve never known about this before.’ And for me, that is it. That is why I do this; because this one person seeing that is enough.”

Ibrahim’s family is originally from a Palestinian village called Bisan, which was ethnically cleansed by Zionist militias in 1948. Her family fled to the Jenin refugee camp in the northern occupied West Bank, and half of her family is still there more than six decades later, struggling to return home. “I was there this past summer, and it makes you so depressed,” Ibrahim

said. “I had so many moments when I was in present-day Israel where I just looked around and thought, ‘This is never going to end.’ And then going through the checkpoints in the West Bank, and thinking, ‘This is really bad’—and coming back to D.C. and knowing we have so much work to do.”

“Palestine solidarity, for me,” she said, “is being Palestinian in exile.”

In Boston, Massachusetts, I met with Alex Abbasi and Sarah Moawad of Harvard, and Ryan Branagan of Northeastern University. I asked each of the students how it felt to be part of this movement at this time, and how they defined solidarity. Abbasi explained his definition of solidarity through the lens of his family history. “For me, Palestine solidarity means to exist, to resist, and to love,” he said. “My grandfather was born in Jerusalem. His family had lived there for generations, growing their olive trees, birthing beautiful babies, and continuing their way of life that was so vibrant. And after 1948, during the Zionist colonization of his homeland, his family, my family, our peoples were forced to leave. They were ethnically cleansed; and this continues today.”

“In light of these stark realities,” Abbasi continued, “I choose to exist and to continue those traditions in that culture. In light of this brokenness, I choose to resist within social justice movements like the one we’re building right now. And in light of those systems of power and individuals who take us from a way of being to non-being, and who make us feel like we are the wretched of the earth, I choose to love.”

Branagan said that solidarity is “a basic human recognition that we’re all in this together. It’s one fight. It’s not about doing this for someone else. It’s not the idea of the ‘white savior’ sort of thing,” he added. “Our struggles are different, but we have a common interest in fighting them together. It’s not just cheering on someone else, but it’s as Che Guevara said, ‘You go with them to victory or to death.’ Either you’re in it all the way, or you’re out. That’s what solidarity should be.”

Moawad agreed. “[Journalist] Chris Hedges says that the lesson of any form of suffering or genocide is not about a specific group, or a specific war; it’s the idea that we’re all culpable the next time that it happens and we don’t say

anything,” she said. “Malcolm X used to say that ‘if you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything.’ Neutrality is complicity. Solidarity is the basic recognition of the urgent need for justice and how that reflects on you and your own life as well as the wider community of humanity. It’s about everybody’s right to live in a safe world.”

Sami Kishawi, a medical student at Loyola University in Chicago, was born to two Palestinian parents who were each born and raised in the Gaza Strip. Kishawi’s attention to detail, an important trait in successful practitioners of medicine, reveals itself also in his exquisite photography. He brings along his camera on regular trips to visit family in Gaza—to document the resilience and beauty of the people there, when most of the world only knows of Gaza’s suffering.

Kishawi explained that his involvement in SJP stems from the awe he feels toward the “dynamic humanism” that is essential to good medical practice—the necessary synergy and trust between physician and patient in times of crisis. “In medicine, everyone is seen as a human,” he explained. “That’s a feeling I haven’t always experienced growing up as a Palestinian Arab Muslim in the United States and in the Middle East. So maybe that’s another reason why I’m so drawn to medicine.”

I asked Kishawi how it feels to see so many different students in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. “It really blows me away,” he answered. “It moves my heart to see so many people from all kinds of backgrounds working in unison to achieve the same goal, and it just goes to show that working for Palestinian human rights by resisting Israel’s occupation is one of the many crucial steps the world must take to rid [itself] of bigotry, violence, and oppression.” At the same time, he said, “support and solidarity from non-Palestinians reminds us that human rights are universal and are not confined to borders.”

Rebecca Erickson, a sociology PhD student at the University of New Mexico, visited Palestine for the first time in 2011 with a delegation of anthropology and American studies majors. Being there, she said, and learning about the occupation first-hand, helped form her definition of solidarity as an activist moving forward in this movement.

“Solidarity means support for Palestinian civil society, for freedom and equality, for the right of return [for Palestinian refugees],” Erickson explained. “And meaningful support in a way that centers on what Palestinians in Palestine and in the diaspora call for across the world. So solidarity as a concept and a practice really does have to be cause-centric, it really has to center in the needs of Palestinians themselves rather than what those on the outside think needs to happen.”

Through her visit to Palestine, Erickson said she learned that the perspectives of Palestinians “are so diverse, which complicates things in a good way. It also means that the practice of solidarity has to be a critical project. It can’t be formulaic, it can’t be always looking the same way. Being able to be flexible and organic with it, and to understand what specific communities need. Ultimately, what do they ask of us and how can we meet those needs?”

Erickson’s fellow American studies graduate student at the University of New Mexico, Lissie Perkal, explained to me that she understands solidarity as a complex concept that should be applied to all movements of justice and equality. “I see it as a two-fold process,” she said. “The first part of solidarity is changing the way we think, and denaturalizing everything—for example, questioning what assumptions we have about straightness or class. Noticing when the spaces we hold events in are not accessible to all people and to be constantly paying attention to things that so easily get taken for granted. So the first part is about changing the way we approach the world.”

The second part of solidarity, Perkal said, “is what I would argue is the most important part of solidarity—the actions we take. Talking about decolonization means nothing if we don’t move to enact it. In terms of Palestine solidarity, this means listening to Palestinians and following their lead. At the same time, this does not mean that only Palestinians should be in charge of planning all of the protests, actions, letters, and so on. It does mean being pro-active, but being respectful of Palestinians, the historical context of Palestine, and the gross power imbalance, structurally speaking, between Palestinians and U.S. citizens like myself.”

Jamie Gerber of Oberlin and a member of the Students for a Free Palestine said that as a white Jewish American, “it’s important to think about what solidarity means and what my role is, what it can be and what it *should* be. That means doing a much better job of self-education and listening. Because this is not something new; there are people who have been doing this work for so long. And there is a lot to be learned from Palestinians. BDS is their call. Solidarity to me means going to the source and recognizing that their demands, their self-determination, and their call is being practiced, no questions asked.”

Gabriel Schivone of the University of Arizona paused for a moment before answering my question about his definition of solidarity. “It means empathy,” he said softly. “And human sympathy, and *tu eras me otra yo*—you are my other me. Meaning, if I do harm to you, I do harm to myself. If I fail to act, fail to stand up, especially if my neighbor’s being attacked, I fail myself and fail humanity. That’s what solidarity is.”

Omar Shakir, a graduate of Stanford Law, said that he and his fellow student activists used to joke that more than 75 percent of their time was centered on student organizing, even though they’re paying an extraordinary amount of tuition to be there. “That’s all to say that anyone who’s involved in this movement has skin in the game,” Omar said with a chuckle.

It would have been easier not to be an activist, he admitted. “It would have been easier to do almost anything else. It’s not just in terms of your academic career, but also families—even coming from a family that is Muslim or Arab in my case or for other members who are Palestinian—many families encourage their children to just focus on their own careers and not get involved in activism. So I think we all feel a sense of being in this together.” In 2010, Shakir traveled to the West Bank with a richly diverse group of about eight student organizers from colleges on the East Coast and the West Coast, from different genders and ancestral backgrounds. “At one point, we went to the separation wall with a can of spray paint. And we spray-painted ‘reunion in liberated Jerusalem in 2030,’” Shakir recounted. “We all made a pact together that we were going to work to end the occupation and to have a Jerusalem in a liberated land where everyone was treated equally. We are all

committed to that. We put that on the wall and took a picture. And all of us check in every year to see how we're all working to get towards that goal."

Shakir said that the pact speaks to the level of investment that the group felt working for justice in Palestine. "And [we] know that when the separation wall comes down, which is only a matter of time, the collective effort of students will have played a part in making that happen."



Glossary

'48: Shorthand for 1948 Palestine, or historic Palestine, the land of presentday Israel that was colonized by Zionist forces in 1948. Many Palestinians and activists use '48 instead of "Israel" as a way to describe the lands from which Palestinians were expelled and are struggling to return.

ACLU: American Civil Liberties Union, a non-profit organization established to defend civil rights as guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.

ADL: Anti-Defamation League, a leading pro-Israel organization.

AIPAC: American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a pro-Israel lobby group.

AJC: American Jewish Council, a Jewish-Zionist advocacy organization.

BDS: Boycott, divestment, and sanctions are nonviolent tactics to hold Israel economically and politically accountable for its violations of international law and the rights of Palestinians to justice and equality.

Birthright Israel: Also known as "Taglit-Birthright," this is a program that, since 1999, has brought hundreds of thousands of young Jews to Israel for all-expenses-paid 10-day trips. Connected to the Israeli government, Birthright Israel programs are ardently Zionist and are designed to encourage young non-Israeli Jews to move to Israel.

CJP: Committee for Justice in Palestine, the Palestine solidarity organization at UC–Santa Cruz, which is part of the national SJP coalition.

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

GUPS: General Union of Palestinian Students, established in 1959 in Cairo, Egypt, and later incorporated as the student wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Hillel: An international Jewish student organization founded in the 1920s in the United States.

IAC: Israel Action Network, a Jewish-Zionist, anti-BDS initiative of the Jewish Federations of North America and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs which works to “counter attempts to undermine Israel’s legitimacy.”

IAW: Israeli Apartheid Week, founded at the University of Toronto in 2005, is an annual global week of events related to Palestine awareness, direct action, and BDS organizing.

Intifada: From the Arabic verb “to shake off,” *intifada* refers to two periods of major, sustained popular uprisings by Palestinians against the Israeli military occupation. The first intifada began in 1987; the second began in 2000.

Islamophobia: Hatred, prejudice, and fear of Muslims and the religion of Islam.

LGBTQ: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

MEChA: Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, the largest Latino/a student organization in the United States.

MSA: Muslim Student Association, an organization established in 1963 in the United States and Canada, with local chapters on college campuses.

MSU: Muslim Student Union. MSUs on campus are independent student groups.

Nakba: “Catastrophe” in Arabic. The systematic expulsion of more than 750,000 indigenous Palestinians from their homes and land by Zionist forces ahead of and during the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

Operation Cast Lead: Israel’s attacks on Gaza in December 2008–January 2009. These attacks killed more than 1,400 Palestinian women, men, and children, and flattened thousands of homes, offices, and factory buildings. More than 5,000 people were injured.

Open Hillel: An alternative organization to Hillel that celebrates Jewish life and culture while at the same time

making space for a wide spectrum of viewpoints on Israel and Zionism.

PA: Palestinian Authority, the interim government structured under the terms of the Oslo Accords in the mid-1990s.

PACBI: Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. The campaign was launched by Palestinians in 2004 to grow an international boycott movement against Israel.

Pinkwashing: A term used by solidarity activists to describe Israel's promotion of itself as an "LGBTQ-friendly haven" in order to distract the public from human rights abuses.

SAFE: Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, the Palestine solidarity organization at the University of Michigan, which is part of the national SJP coalition.

SFP: Students for a Free Palestine, the Palestine solidarity organization at Oberlin College, which is part of the national SJP coalition.

SJP: Students for Justice in Palestine, a college campus-based, studentled organization working for Palestinian liberation and justice. National Students for Justice in Palestine is a national coalition of local SJP chapters.

SUPER: Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights, the Palestine solidarity organization at Portland State University in Oregon, which is part of the national SJP coalition.

Zionism: A nationalist political ideology that calls for a homeland exclusively for Jews and claims that the land of historic Palestine belongs only to the Jewish people. The founders of Zionism agreed that ethnically cleansing the land was a valid option. For more on the history of Zionism, see historian Ilan Pappé's important book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

Notes

Preface

1. Every year on May 15, Palestinians in Palestine and across the global diaspora commemorate the anniversary of the Nakba (“catastrophe” in Arabic). Protests and rallies are organized to remember the expulsion of more than 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of hundreds of villages leading up to and after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the ongoing Nakba that continues decades later.

1. Inspired to Act

1. War on Want, “Angela Davis on Palestine, G4S and the Prison Industrial Complex,” YouTube video, 32:46, December 20, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1kRNJtV>.

2. Meaning “brothers” in Spanish, Hermanos is a Chicano/Latino student community organization.

3. Sin Barras—“Without [prison] bars”—is an on-campus student group working to organize against the prison industrial complex.

4. Hillel, “Hillel Israel Guidelines,” <http://bit.ly/1eAMXd6> (accessed March 26, 2014).

5. The Workmen’s Circle is a progressive, socialist, and social-justice oriented Jewish cultural organization founded in 1900.

6. News Agencies, “UN Envoy: Gaza Op Seems to Be War Crime of Greatest Magnitude,” *Haaretz*, March 19, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1m4bZJv>.

2. Building from History

1. The 2005 call by Palestinian civil society for comprehensive boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law, ends occupation and apartheid, and implements the right of return for Palestine refugees.

2. Rabab Abdulhadi, "Activism and Exile: Palestinianness and the Politics of Solidarity," in *Local Actions: Cultural Activism, Power and Public Life in America*, ed. Melissa Checker and Maggie Fishman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 231-253.

3. Lawrence Davidson, "Debating Palestine: Arab-American Challenges to Zionism 1917-1932," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 227-240.

4. Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook, et. al., "New Palestine Party: Visit of Menachen Begin and Aims of Political Movement Discussed, A Letter to the *New York Times*," *New York Times*, December 4, 1948, <http://bit.ly/1s6ZuAX>.

5. Lawrence Davidson, "The Past as Prelude: Zionism and the Betrayal of American Democratic Principles, 1917-48," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 31.3 (Spring 2002): 25.

6. Ibid.

7. Abdulhadi.

8. Hilton Obenzinger and Joel Beinin, "The Pressure Should be on the US and Israel to Recognize the PLO," *MERIP Middle East Report* no. 146 (May-June 1987): 31-32.

9. Intifada is an Arabic word meaning "the shaking off." The first Palestinian intifada erupted in 1987 as a response to Israel's brutal policies of occupation, home demolitions, wanton killings, mass incarcerations, settlement building, and ongoing land theft. Palestinians engaged in mass resistance, sustained protests, civil disobedience, and rebellions. Israeli forces killed hundreds of youth, men and women during the intifada, which lasted until the early 1990s.

10. Union of Palestinian Women Associations of North America, "Union of Palestinian Women Associations of North America Records 1975-1995," University of Illinois at Chicago, <http://bit.ly/1dn1AFZ>.

11. Charlotte Kates, "Criminalizing Resistance," *Jacobin Magazine*, January 27, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1bvFyKH>.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. The Oslo Accords were a series of “peace process” negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from 1993–1998. During and after the Oslo process, Israel tightened its control over the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip (while giving nominal civil “control” to the newly formed Palestinian Authority in parts of the occupied territories) and settlement expansion skyrocketed.

15. For more on this subject, I highly recommend Dr. Sara Roy’s analysis of Palestine’s economy after Oslo titled “A Dubai on the Mediterranean,” published in the *London Review of Books*, vol. 27, no. 21, November 3, 2005 (<http://bit.ly/1n8f08K>).

16. Kates.

17. Ali Abunimah, “Twenty Years On, Palestinians Refuse to be Defeated by Oslo,” *Electronic Intifada*, September 12, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1nYAkSV>.

18. Center for Constitutional Rights, “Daughters of Holy Land Five Respond to Court Decision,” February 18, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1l2U8ma>.

19. Andrew Cohen, “The Feds’ Macaroni Noodle Strategy,” *Washington Post*, October 23, 2007, <http://bit.ly/1hoQnQX>.

20. Meg Laughlin, Jennifer Liberto, and Justin George, “8 Times, Al-Arian Hears ‘Not Guilty,’” *Tampa Bay Times*, December 7, 2005, <http://bit.ly/UxHzok>.

21. Jonathan Turley, “Federal Court Dismisses All Charges Against Dr. Sami Al-Arian,” *JonathanTurley.org*, June 27, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1jWvmz6>.

22. Nora Barrows-Friedman and Maureen Clare Murphy, “US Activists Face New Repression as Political Prisoners Fight for Justice,” *Electronic Intifada*, November 15, 2010, <http://bit.ly/1gnNMdX>.

23. Committee to Stop FBI Repression, “Documents for Raids on Anti-war Activists Unsealed,” February 26, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1m4M41x>.

24. Maureen Clare Murphy, “Palestinian Arrested in Chicago Because of her Community Activism, Groups Say,” *Electronic Intifada*, October 26, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1j0RQkE>.

25. Josh Ruebner, “Why is Obama’s DOJ Prosecuting a Torture Victim?” *The Hill*, June 10, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1u1z7Ij>.

26. Murphy, “Palestinian Arrested in Chicago Because of her Community Activism, Groups Say.”

27. On April 9, 1948, in one of the most violent events during the Nakba, Zionist militias rounded up Palestinian children, women, and men from the Jerusalem village of Deir Yassin and systematically executed them. More than 100 people were killed.

28. Abraham Greenhouse, “Palestine Activism on Campus and Beyond: Overcoming Israel’s Efforts to Erase History,” *Electronic Intifada*, November 8, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1IDG7IC>.

29. Ibid.

30. Sasha Gelzin, “Third National ‘Students for Justice in Palestine’ Conference Aims to Build on Victories of the Past Year,” *Mondoweiss*, September 9, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1IDG9QO>.

31. Anti-Defamation League, “Top Ten Anti-Israel Groups in 2013,” October 21, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1gxfdxy>.

32. Barak Ravid, “Prime Minister’s Office Recruiting Students to Wage Online Hasbara Battles,” *Haaretz*, August 13, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1iKa64l>.

33. Ali Abunimah, “Israel’s New Strategy: ‘Sabotage’ and ‘Attack’ the Global Justice Movement,” *Electronic Intifada*, February 16, 2010, <http://bit.ly/1oUkL9U>.

Interview: Rebecca Pierce

1. The Olive Tree Initiative is a project of the University of California that takes UC students on delegations to Israel

and the occupied West Bank. Students meet with Palestinian and Israeli political leaders, entrepreneurs, and peace activists. OTI says it was established “in response to tensions on campus surrounding the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and a desire to address them in a constructive and innovative way,” but past participants have expressed frustration with OTI’s attempts to present the political situation as an equal conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians, instead of addressing Israel’s role and responsibility as a military occupier that has controlled Palestinians’ freedom for more than six decades.

2. An independent student group, CJP is the Palestine solidarity organization on campus, and it is included under the national SJP umbrella.

3. The Jewish Agency for Israel, founded in 1929, is a Zionist non-profit organization based in Israel. Hillel has paired with the Jewish Agency to bring young Israelis who have served in the army to advocate for Israel on U.S. campuses.

4. Dr. Norman Finkelstein is a scholar, political scientist, and author who was denied tenure from DePaul University in Chicago in 2007 after publicly and fearlessly challenging Israeli policies and Israel’s apologists in U.S. academia. However, in the past few years, Finkelstein has come out strongly against the Palestinian-led BDS movement, and has criticized Palestinians and human rights activists for supporting it.

3.Creative Tactics

1. Hazem Jamjoum, “Israeli Apartheid Week: A Gauge of the Global BDS Campaign.” In *Generation Palestine: Voices from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement*, ed. Rich Wiles (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 204-215.

2. Sara Chaudhry, “Ben White: ‘The Peace Process Is Meant to Replace International Law rather than Implement It,’” *Ceasefire*, February 28, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1fFOz9V>.

3. Emily Schaeffer, Jeff Halper, and Itay Epshtain, “Israel’s Policy of Demolishing Palestinian Homes Must End: A Submission to the UN Human Rights Council,” Israeli

Committee Against House Demolitions, March 2012, <http://bit.ly/1jbL9J5>.

4. Maureen Murphy, “EI Exclusive Video: Protesters Shout Down Ehud Olmert in Chicago.” *Electronic Intifada*, October 16, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1im8MSn>.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Interview: Shirien Damra

1. “Greenwashing” is a term to describe Israel’s attempts to distract attention from its crimes of occupation—including environmental degradation of Palestinian land—by promoting its “green” technology and “environmentally-friendly” product industries.

2. “Pinkwashing” is a term to describe Israel’s promotion of itself as an “LGBTQ-friendly haven” as a way to distract the public from its abuses of the human rights of non-Jews.

3. Students at FAU were put on administrative probation and were forced to attend an “anti-bias” training designed by the pro-Israel Anti-Defamation League after they silently walked out of a speech given by an Israeli soldier on campus in 2013.

4. The Campus as a Battleground

1. Max Blumenthal, “How Kobe Bryant Blows a Hole in the Irvine 11 Prosecution’s Case,” *Electronic Intifada*, September 11, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1kTd2sO>.

2. Nora Barrows-Friedman, “US Students Face Jail Time for Disrupting Israeli Official’s Speech.” *Electronic Intifada*, March 2, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1cZuDzz>.

3. The information about the trial that follows, including the quotations, is based on this reporting and can be found on the *Electronic Intifada*: <http://bit.ly/1lfxqGL>.

4. Barrows-Friedman, “US Students Face Jail Time for Disrupting Israeli Official’s Speech.”

5. Ali Abunimah, "Israel's Reut Institute Claims 'Price Tag' Attacks on EI, Irvine 11 and Palestine Return Centre," *Electronic Intifada*, December 15, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1aUJZnx>.

6. Louis D. Brandeis Center, "Mission and Values," <http://bit.ly/UZgsmm> (accessed March 29, 2014).

7. Arne Duncan, "Dear Colleague Letter," United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, October 26, 2010, <http://1.usa.gov/UswMva>.

8. Morton Klein, "Jewish Students at UC Irvine Harassed & Intimidated, ZOA Reports in Complaint to U.S. Civil Rights Office," Zionist Organization of America, October 15, 2004, <http://bit.ly/1jFYz0X>.

9. Felber v. the University of California, United States District Court, March 3, 2011, *Berkeleyside*, <http://bit.ly/1gakNpd>. The quotes that follow in the next two paragraphs come from the text of the Felber lawsuit.

10. Nora Barrows-Friedman, "Victory for Campus Free Speech as US Dept. of Education Throws out 'anti-Semitism' Complaints," *Electronic Intifada*, August 28, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1gUPHWW>.

11. Tori Porell, "Students Forced to Sign 'Civility Statements' for Walk-out Protest," *Electronic Intifada*, August 21, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1cZuImU>.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Obviously, the group's name belies its actions.

15. Ryan Branagan, "Jewish Student Receives Death Threats over Palestine Solidarity Work," *Electronic Intifada*, November 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1qDwdug>.

16. Max Geller and Tori Porell, "Letter: Misdirected Attacks Only Hurt Student Rights," *Huntington News*, October 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1fx8gMd>.

17. Nora Barrows-Friedman, "Northeastern Lifts Suspension of Students for Justice in Palestine," *Electronic Intifada*, April 22, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1nGV51n>.

18. Nathan Guttman, “StandWithUs Draws Line on Israel,” *Jewish Daily Forward*, November 27, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1kZdPWn>.
19. Based on StandWithUs’ federal 2012 tax returns. <http://bit.ly/1ijWDR2>.
20. Alex Kane, “Revealed: Right-Wing Group StandWithUs’ Strategy to Combat Israel Apartheid Week,” *Mondoweiss*, February 6, 2014, <http://bit.ly/Mvxvrg>.
21. From AIPAC’s “Campus Training Opportunities” webpage. <http://bit.ly/1qra9SO>.
22. Elizabeth Redden, “Backing the Israel Boycott,” *Inside Higher Ed*, December 17, 2013, <http://bit.ly/JCT6gx>.
23. Abraham Greenhouse, “Anti-Palestinian Groups’ Advice to Campus Activists Raises Serious Ethical, Legal Concerns,” *Electronic Intifada*, March 25, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1cGgPcB>.
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Interview: Liz Jackson

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Interview: Noor Fawzy

1. The American Civil Liberties Union describes the school-to-prison pipeline as “a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Many of these children have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are isolated, punished and pushed out.” (For more, see <https://www.aclu.org/school-prison-pipeline>.)

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Interview: Yaman Salahi

1. For more on the 2002 protests at UC–Berkeley, see [Chapter 2](#).

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3. For more information on this, see: Yaman Salahi, “Behind the Scenes with Israel’s Campus Lobby,” *Al Jazeera English*, September 28, 2011, <http://aje.me/1m4BQ3U>.

4. The Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights says that "no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin" under Title VI. The 2004 interpretation of Title VI expands this list to include groups with shared "ethnic characteristics," meaning Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs.

5. When the government closed the first Irvine complaint in 2007, Marcus believed the Office of Civil Rights changed its interpretation once again, Salahi told me. However, in 2010, the Department of Education confirmed that the 2004 policy interpretation of Title VI—extending protection to communities with shared "ethnic characteristics"—was still in place and being followed.

Interview: Rahim Kurwa

1. In 2012, the University of California issued the Campus Climate Reports in an effort to gauge the concerns of Jewish and Arab/Muslim students. The report on Jewish students was co-authored by Rick Barton, national education chairman of the Anti-Defamation League. Many students found the report to be problematic, as it attempted to castigate speech critical of Israel while categorizing Palestinerelated activism as a "negative experience" for Jewish students. For more analysis, see Rebecca Pierce's op-ed in the online publication *J. Weekly*, from August 2012: <http://bit.ly/ly/1iCxlxi>.

2. Fraser is a member of Academic Friends of Israel, a Zionist anti-BDS group in the UK. He attempted to sue the University and College Union for "institutional anti-Semitism," but the case was thrown out by a judge who ruled that the ten points of the complaint were "without substance... devoid of any merit...palpably groundless...untenable...[and] obviously hopeless." For more, see Asa Winstanley's analysis of the lawsuit and its dismissal published in the *Electronic Intifada* in March, 2013: <http://bit.ly/1wtP0dp>.

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Chapter 7: Intersecting Struggles and Common Causes

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Interview: Danya Mustafa

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About the Author

Nora Barrows-Friedman is a journalist, editor, radio broadcaster, musician, and mother. She received her B.A. in Humanities with a focus on Palestine from the New College of California in San Francisco. She is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Media Freedom Award from the Media Freedom Foundation.



From 2003–2010, Nora was the senior producer and co-host of Flashpoints, an investigative newsmagazine broadcast over the historic Pacifica Radio Network. During her time at Flashpoints, she began covering human rights issues in Palestine, and spent several months every year in the occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, and present-day Israel reporting from the ground. She also worked with teenagers and young adults at a radio station and production studio they established at the Ibdaa Cultural Center in the Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem.

Nora is currently an associate editor of the *Electronic Intifada*, an award-winning and widely-acclaimed independent online publication focusing on Palestine and Palestinian rights. She also produces the regular *Electronic Intifada* podcast, contributes investigative stories, and blogs about student activism, the Palestinian-led BDS movement, and the

violations of the rights of Palestinian youth under Israel's occupation.

She has written for numerous print publications and news services including the *Electronic Intifada*, *Inter Press Service*, *Al Jazeera English*, *TruthOut* and *Left Turn Magazine*. She also contributed a chapter to the 2011 Project Censored anthology about U.S. corporate media's lack of appropriate coverage of the situation in Palestine.

Born in 1978, Nora grew up in Berkeley, California, and lives in nearby Oakland with her husband Zach Wyner, a writer and educator, and her teenaged daughter, Ciel Phoenix.