

# ASSUMING BOYCOTT

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RESISTANCE

AGENCY

CULTURAL  
PRODUCTION

EDITED BY

KAREEM ESTEFAN



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AND LAURA RAICOVICH



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**RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND**  
**CULTURAL PRODUCTION**

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# THE UTOPIAN CONFLICT<sup>1</sup>

Yazan Khalili

What if BDS wasn't merely a political movement?! What if its agenda was not purely political, hinged on the reactionary relationship to Realpolitik? BDS along with many political parties in power demand the end of the Israeli occupation of the '67 lands, full rights for Palestinians living in the Israeli state, and the return of Palestinian refugees—all of which allows the apparatus that created the atrocities to continue existing. In a way, it is like giving black South Africans political representation and civil rights but keeping the apartheid system in place. Can the movement make an ethical demand: the seizure of the oppressive apparatus? That is to say, ending the very existence of the Zionist state?

Can an end to the injustice be achieved? Could one imagine the end of the injustice with the continuation of the apparatus that produced it? Haven't we learned from the history of post-colonial states that a real end to colonialism requires an end to the colonial system altogether rather than just a withdrawal of the direct occupation?

One of the many problems with addressing such an ethical demand is that it creates another ethical problem: the subjects of this

## The Utopian Conflict

apparatus—Israeli Jewish citizens—are missing from this demand.

What if we simply add another demand: In addition to emancipating the Palestinians from Israeli settler colonialism, emancipate all the Jews from Zionism! Instead of boycotting Israel in support of the Palestinians alone, what if we boycott in support of the emancipation of Jewish subjects from the Israeli state as well?

I'm not an expert on history, but it is common knowledge that the Zionist movement came about as one of the reactions to the establishment of the European nation-state, and to centuries of Christian European racism against its Jewish population. This racism first manifested itself as the systematic separation of Jews from society in the form of ghettos, and culminated in the physical annihilation of the European Jewish population during World War II. In this sense, the establishment of Israel as the state of “the Jewish people” should be read not as the emancipation of Jews from Christo-European oppression, but as a continuation of it, which actively cleansed European society of its Jewish citizens, ghettoized them far away, and made them someone else's problem.

The creation of the Israeli state didn't only result in the Palestinian catastrophe; it also allowed for the continuation of the Jewish catastrophe, by fixing “the Jew” as a national identity. This conflation of the religious and the political subject relies on the racism that led to the destruction of Jewish existence in Europe and, after the creation of the Jewish state, the destruction of Jewish existence in Arab and North African communities.

So, the Palestinian can't be emancipated without Jewish emancipation, and the Jew can't be emancipated within the structure of the Israeli state, or the state itself, as the structures of any state can only be structures of oppression. For the boycott movement to have a radical demand, a structural one, it must call for boycotting the Israeli state

## **Assuming Boycott**

until it dismantles itself as a Jewish state, meaning that the Israeli is no longer “the Jew.”

The boycott movement should speak on behalf of all the victims of the Zionist state, the Palestinian and the Jew; otherwise, whatever structure will come out of such struggle will only continue the injustice.

The moral emancipation of the Palestinian and the Jew is, first, the emancipation of the state from Zionism, and later their emancipation from the state as such.

## Endnotes

Michel Feher portrayed a model of sovereignty that operates in accordance with the logic of the corporation. The space of bargaining shifts from the workers/management to management/shareholders. This is applied to the neoliberal state as the space of politics shifts from tax-paying citizen/government to government/bondholders. See: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/visual-cultures/life/guest-lectures/>.

- 10 See: Adam Hanieh, "The Oslo Illusion," *Jacobin* 10, Spring 2013, 68–74.
- 11 See: Mezna Qato and Kareem Rabie, "Against the Law," *Jacobin* 10, Spring 2013, 75–78.

### *The Utopian Conflict*

- 1 This essay first appeared in *Tidal Magazine*, a journal for radical theory that is available online at: <http://www.tidalmag.org/>. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of *Tidal* editors Nitasha Dhillon and Amin Husain.

## III. Who Speaks? Who Is Silenced?

### *The Shifting Grounds of Censorship and Freedom of Expression*

- 1 *Tatlin's Whisper # 6* was held in the Wifredo Lam Center, the institution in charge of hosting the Havana Biennials. Audience members were provided with disposable cameras to document the performance and told that they could freely express their thoughts for a minute from the podium. Each person who took the podium was guarded by a woman and a man in military uniform who placed a white dove on the speaker's shoulder, an allusion to the emblematic image of Fidel Castro delivering his first speech in Havana after the Triumph of the Revolution, on January 8, 1959. In *Tatlin's Whisper # 6* there is no censorship for the one minute during which a member of the audience is at the microphone. When the time assigned for freedom of expression ends, the man and woman in military uniform who until then had been on either side of the speaker—to defend her/his right to talk or to control it—removed the dove from the speaker's shoulder and made her/him return to the audience. This action was repeated with each speaker. A total of 39 people made use of the mike to