

# BDS & THE QUEER APPROPRIATION OF PINKWASHING

*Academic Engagement Network, Pamphlet Series No. 6, April 2019*

*R. Amy Elman*



Academic  
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NETWORK

## About AEN

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) is an organization of faculty members, administrators, and staff members on American college and university campuses across the United States. We are committed to opposing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, affirming academic freedom and freedom of expression in the university community, and promoting robust discussion of Israel on campus.

The AEN aims to promote more productive ways of addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In place of one-sided sloganeering reinforcing simple binaries, we advocate open debate acknowledging complexity. In place of aggressive, antidemocratic tactics galvanizing deep inter-group suspicions, we advocate respectful exchanges of ideas. We insist that the heckler's veto has no place in the academy – there is no free speech right that permits blocking free speech by others. We are committed as well to addressing antisemitism often found in BDS and anti-Israel narratives.

Network members serve as resources for reasoned discussion about Israel on campuses. They advise campus presidents, provosts, deans and other administrators on Israel, BDS, antisemitism, and related issues; organize faculty forums and public education programs; mentor students in their efforts to advance dialogue about Israel and oppose BDS on campus; encourage universities to forge and enhance U.S.-Israel academic ties, including student and faculty exchanges and research collaborations; and speak, write, participate in discussions, submit essays, and publish op eds.



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The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) pamphlet series is an occasional series that addresses the primary concerns of the organization: championing academic freedom on American college and university campuses, opposing the BDS movement, encouraging a robust and sophisticated discussion of topics related to Israel and the Middle East, and combating antisemitism. Authors include AEN members and other noted scholars and thinkers who contribute to the discourse on these subjects. Certain pamphlets may also be accompanied by discussions with the author in the form of recordings or podcasts.

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R. Amy Elman

## “BDS & the Queer Appropriation of Pinkwashing”<sup>1</sup>

Academic Engagement Network, Pamphlet Series No. 6, April 2019

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**B**y comparative international measures, Israel’s commitment to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights is impressive and unparalleled in the Middle East, but the reluctance of many self-identified progressives to embrace that record is a testament to the success that the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has had in casting aspersions against it. Despite Israel’s prohibition against sexual orientation discrimination and its recognition of same sex marriages, joint adoption, and open military service, Israel’s critics insist these efforts constitute “pinkwashing.” That is, Israeli policies are merely rhetorical repudiations of sexual and gender inequality employed to impede social justice by concealing Israel’s opposition to the human rights of Palestinians. This criticism has gained traction since 2010 when it was introduced in Great Britain (Puar 2010, 2011) and then the United States (Schulman 2011) by academics from within the BDS movement. Given the increased appeal of LGBT politics for millennials, it is hardly surprising that BDS is pursuing a pinkwashing plank across which it can burnish its progressive credentials and thus reach wider audiences. In 2012, for example, Angela Davis implored LGBT folk to “help radical forces around the world to develop new ways of engaging in ideological struggle” (Davis 2012).

This essay explores the origins of pinkwashing and suggests that the BDS movement’s appropriation of this term attributes to its advocates concerns over human rights they do not possess, but without which they could not as effectively mobilize. In coopting the progressive lexicon of social movements and then tarnishing their opponents with allegations of “racism,” “xenophobia,” and “homonationalism,” BDS has helped advance an agenda at odds with the enlightened politics it purports to profess. More pointedly, BDS may best be understood as part of a larger constellation of anti-democratic regimes and civil society organizations that employ the rhetoric of “social justice” in ways that undermine its realization.

<sup>1</sup> This pamphlet follows from research I conducted as a Fulbright scholar in Haifa (2017-2018) and portions of it were first presented at the conference, “Israel at 70: Complexity, Challenge, and Creativity.” The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, Michigan State University, September 16-17, 2018.

## *The Origins of Pinkwashing*

In 2001, American breast cancer survivors initially coined the term “pinkwashing” to condemn public awareness campaigns underwritten by foundations and corporations that profited from pink colored products at the expense of women whose lives they professed to champion. According to the Breast Cancer Consortium Archives, “Pinkwashing” involves “supporting the breast cancer cause or promoting a pink ribbon product while producing, manufacturing, and/or selling products linked to the disease. In recent years the definition has expanded to include any company or organization that exploits breast cancer for profit or public relations motivations” (Breast Cancer Consortium Archives 2017).

Activists shamed the Susan Komen Foundation and its corporate sponsors (e.g., Kentucky Fried Chicken and Coca-Cola) for monetizing breast cancer through the foundation’s trademarked “pink ribbon” campaigns. They also inspired lawsuits that targeted pinkwashing companies like 3M, whose manufacturing of pink colored products increased risks for cancer. In 2004, 3M’s Annual Report acknowledged its \$300,000 donation to a cancer research center followed from a \$500,000 expenditure for a “pink ribbon” campaign that boosted its sales of Post-it Notes by 80% (3M, 2005, p. 14). Then, in 2017, the State of Minnesota sued 3M, alleging that “in pursuit of profit,” the company “deliberately disregarded the substantial risk of injury to the people and environment of Minnesota from its continued manufacture of PFCs and its improper disposal.” The next year, the parties reached a \$850 million-dollar settlement to help eradicate these cancer-causing chemicals (Marcotty 2017). Yet, by then the feminist use of “pinkwashing” as a descriptor to expose companies like 3M had long been eclipsed.

In 2010, nearly a decade after feminists had fashioned the term, BDS appropriated “pinkwashing” to insist Israel’s commitment to and promotion of LGBT rights is illusory and

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serves to conceal (i.e., “pinkwash”) the Jewish state’s alleged crimes against Palestinians. To grasp the political significance and appeal of pinkwashing’s confiscation, I will first attend to an often-overlooked fragment of gay history that is consistent with and has helped foster this and other appropriations by BDS.

### *Analogies that add insult to injuries*

Years before corporate executives increased sales by directing countless gender-conforming advertisements and pink products toward women, American gay men openly embraced pink to signify their displeasure with those gender roles they found confining. This move was most clearly and unfortunately expressed in gay men’s adoption of the pink triangle Nazis used to denote and facilitate the deaths of those men Nazis identified as homosexual (Elman 1996). That this exclusively male Nazi emblem came to signify LGBT rights is disturbing. Regardless of whether it was through historical ignorance or insensitivity, gay men’s “reclamation” of a Nazi symbol to foster their visibility furnished a foundational doublespeak without which BDS’s later confiscation of “pinkwashing” would have been less effective. That is, the gay male movement’s acceptance and promotion of a Nazi symbol as an incongruous marker for political liberation signaled other misappropriations to come, including the term “Holocaust.”

By 1987, the Nazi pink triangle gained further prominence when ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) used it for its logo. Founded by Larry Kramer, ACT UP’s mission involved combating the public’s indifference to “the AIDS Holocaust.” His book, *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist*, with its pink triangle cover, analogized the public’s apathy and the United States government’s inaction towards HIV with the willful destruction of European Jewry (Kramer 1989).


This strained analogizing between HIV and genocide marked an additional misappropriation from which Israel’s most rabid critics later prospered. As the HIV death toll mounted across the globe, the Nazi triangle and ACT UP’s rhetoric equating the epidemic with the genocide of the Jews became ubiquitous. Tony Kushner popularized this stance in his 1993 play, “A Bright Room Called Day” which trivialized the Third Reich by correlating

it with the “national senility” of the Reagan era. Despite occasional rebukes (see, for instance, Rich 1991), neither Kramer nor Kushner nor their cohort wavered from their position that the United States government’s callous indifference to and incrementalism regarding HIV-positive gay men was tantamount to genocide.

By 1997, the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s (PLO) permanent representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Nabil Ramlawi, insisted the Israeli government had infected 300 Palestinian children with the HIV virus. His colleague, who was then commander of Gaza’s Palestinian General Security Service, echoed this position when stating that Israel had encouraged “Russian Jewish girls with AIDS to spread the disease among Palestinian youth” (in Wistrich 2010, 709). With the exception of Jewish communities, these modern-day versions of medieval blood libels elicited little critical response. To the contrary, assertions that should have been shocking appeared reasonable, if not respectable (Israeli 2002).

A dozen years later, Sweden’s evening paper (*Aftonbladet*) further legitimized the blood libel by publishing an article by Donald Boström that claimed Israel’s Defense Forces (the IDF) were trafficking in the organs of murdered Palestinians (Boström 2009). This news article stirred international controversy after the Palestinians he identified as his sources denied the claims he attributed to them. Boström nonetheless used the arrest of a Jewish businessman in the United States as a pretext to revive the discredited allegation that appeared in his earlier book, *Inshallah: The Conflict Between Israel and Palestine* (Boström 2001).

At present, efforts to boycott Israel benefit from a generation of LGBT activists so steeped in cooptation, doublespeak, strained Holocaust analogies and modern blood libels that many seem blissfully unaware or undaunted that their BDS chants (e.g., “from the river to



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the sea – Palestine will be free”) mimic the eliminationist ambitions of fascists from the last century. Yet it is precisely as members of a hated minority, whose own history and voice has so long been denied, that LGBT folk are especially susceptible to the conceits BDS offers. That BDS expects these communities to condemn the democratic advancements from which they and/or other communities stand to benefit is curious.

How LGBT rights became a leading leitmotif to promote Israel’s delegitimation, such that the country’s human rights record emerged as evidence of its wrong-doings, is the subject of the next section. It begins with an analysis of a *New York Times* op-ed article.

### *The queering of Islamists*

Unsurprisingly perhaps, it was an activist experienced with ACT UP agitprop and a *New York Times* connection who helped advance BDS from “a vanguard movement” to a “popular” one (Weiss 2012). Though new to BDS in 2010, Sarah Schulman wasted no time in coaching its organizers from ACT-UP’s playbook. She insisted BDS translate its “manifesto culture to soundbite culture” and thus engage celebrities with messaging to avoid “heightened rhetoric” and “ideological language” (Weiss 2012). Academic argumentation was shunned and so too were standards for reaching verifiable conclusions.

When the *New York Times* requested Schulman write an op-ed on the 30th anniversary of the discovery of HIV, she submitted “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing’” instead. Her 2011 piece reads,

After generations of sacrifice and organization, gay people in parts of the world have won protection from discrimination and relationship recognition. But these changes have given rise to a nefarious phenomenon: the co-opting of white gay people by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim political forces in Western Europe and Israel (Schulman 2011).

How “white gay people,” who had just received some measure of recognition for their intimate relationships and protection from discrimination, are implicated in undermining Muslims and immigrants remains unclear, especially as not all Muslims and immigrants are

straight. Yet, having rendered LGBT Muslims and immigrants essentially invisible, Schulman could also ignore the dozens of states from which these populations came and the reasons why many may have left.

Homosexuality is punishable by death, public stoning, and life imprisonment in many countries, conditions that inform the migration patterns of those Muslims and immigrants about whom Schulman and others within BDS claim to care. As the premier organization representing Muslim-majority states, two-thirds of which criminalize homosexual conduct, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, must not be ignored. After analyzing the policies of all its fifty-seven members, Javaid Rehman and Eleni Polymenopoulou conclude: “it seems there is a ‘privileged connection’ between Islam and the repression of homosexuality” (Rehman and Polymenopoulou 2013, 4).

## Deflections

The OIC and its ideological allies maintain the repressive character of these regimes by charging their critics with “racist”, “xenophobic,” “colonialist” and “Islamophobic” motives and few academics have been as effective in pressing these and similar allegations than Jasbir Puar. Her indictment of liberal LGBT rights discourse and impassioned pleas for Palestinians provide an arguably potent aphrodisiac of Islamism that helps mollify its detractors.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *This claim runs counter to her assertion that LGBT rights discourses are “arguably the most potent aphrodisiac of liberalism” (Puar 2013, 23).*

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Consider Puar’s deflection that the “purported concern for the status of homosexuals in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is being used to shield the Occupation from direct culpability in suppressing, indeed, endangering those very homosexuals” (Puar 2013, 34). This transfer of responsibility away from the Palestinian persecution of homosexuals within these territories onto both Israel and the shoulders of those who express concern is imbued with what Manfred Gerstenfeld called “humanitarian racism” (Gerstenfeld 2008, 22).<sup>3</sup> In this instance, such racism attributes intrinsically reduced responsibility to the Palestinians for acts which, were they perpetrated by Israelis, would be recognized as repulsive and worthy of resistance. This dichotomous understanding of racism and responsibility is all the more vexing when one recognizes that not all Israelis and not all Jews are white.

Rather than acknowledge the culpability of those actors and states that criminalize and openly oppress LGBT people, Schulman likewise placed Israel’s government alone in her cross-hairs for “harnessing the gay community to reposition its global image” (Schulman 2011). Then, with no further mention of Western Europe, she reduced the hard-won accomplishments of LGBT Israelis (all of whom she also implies are “gay white people”) to a sinister public relations exercise that conceals (i.e., “pinkwashes”) Israel’s apparent misdeeds against Palestinians – all of whom she presumes are people of color. For Schulman, Israel’s 2010 investment in branding itself as “an international gay vacation destination” through “pro-Israeli movie screenings at lesbian and gay film festivals in the United States” was compelling evidence of its underhanded ambitions (Schulman 2011). Puar explains, a nation’s “noisy touting” of gay rights serves as a distraction from its otherwise discriminatory policies (Puar

<sup>3</sup>As Gerstenfeld explains, “This racism is a mirror image of the white-supremacist variety. Humanitarian racists usually consider – without saying so explicitly – that only white people can be fully responsible for their actions; nonwhites such as the Palestinians cannot (or can but only to a limited extent). Therefore, most misdeeds by nonwhites — who by definition are “victims” — are not their fault but those of whites, who can be held accountable” (Gerstenfeld 2008, 22).



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2013, 32). And, although Puar acknowledges that Israel is not alone in such touting, she is adamant that it is unique in having mastered this strident subterfuge – which she coins “homonationalism” (Puar 2007).

Like others, Schulman drew from Puar’s insistence that the ascendance of LGBT rights in Israel and the increased mobility for its LGBT nationals during the 1990s (the “gay decade”) paralleled “the concomitant segregation and decreased mobility of Palestinian populations, especially post Oslo” (Puar 2013, 33). Puar bolstered this position through a reference to Rebecca Stein’s “Explosive: Scenes from Israeli Queer Occupation” (Stein 2010), a critical review of two Israeli gay-themed romantic comedies (Puar 2013, 33, note 31). Conspicuously absent from their analysis is the recognition that real-life restrictions on Palestinians during that time (e.g., curfews and closing educational institutions) followed in direct response to the violence from the First Intifada (from 1987-1993), some of which included intra-Palestinian violence.<sup>4</sup> Palestinians were, for instance, executed on suspicion of collaboration with Israel. Moreover, Puar neglected to recognize that Israel’s reforms mirrored an international sea change as democracies responded, albeit belatedly, to the AIDS crisis. Ignoring this wider context enabled Puar and her colleagues to characterize Israel’s treatment of Palestinians as vindictive while simultaneously discounting the Jewish state’s tenacious pursuit of LGBT rights, even in the midst of the Palestinian violence against it.

Evidence of Israel’s supposed cunning is repeatedly located in its LGBT-themed films and Tel Aviv’s designation as the “world’s best gay city.” The fact that a “gaycities.com” survey toasted Tel Aviv with this designation on January 11, 2011, the same day Puar attended a BDS gathering in Israel, convinced Puar and her “LGBTIQ solidarity delegation in Palestine” that something was especially amiss in “the belly of the beast”. And, to illustrate the “complexities” of her conspiratorial conviction, she quotes a delegation colleague who “quipped: ‘So now Tel Aviv is the best gay city. It is also the least Arab city you might ever find. It is incredibly rare to hear Arabic spoken on the streets of Tel Aviv’” (Puar 2013, 32, note 29). Indeed.

<sup>4</sup> See Corinne E. Blackmer’s chapter, “Zionophobia in Homonationalist Times: The Work of Jasbir Puar” in her forthcoming book (Blackmer 2020).

As Israel's second largest city after Jerusalem, Jews in Tel Aviv are a majority, Hebrew is the lingua franca and LGBT folk maintain a visible presence that is unparalleled throughout much of the world. Somewhat ironically, the influence of the LGBTQ community was felt, in 2015, when it objected to an 11 million-shekel (\$2.9 million) expenditure for painting a plane in a pride rainbow to promote the kind of boosterism that Puar and Schulman find repellent. Israel's LGBT protesters demanded greater funding for direct services to their communities and objected to this initial expenditure. Israeli politicians responded with a reallocation that guided funds away from international branding efforts promoting tourism and toward direct services. This news, however, received scant attention and none from BDS. Neither the protest nor the state's response conformed to BDS's pinkwashing narrative.


**FOR BARGHOUTI AND OTHERS IN THE BDS MOVEMENT, THE ISSUE IS NOT THE OCCUPATION OF 1967 BUT THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE JEWISH STATE FROM 1948.**

In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Puar denounces the use of 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' of gays and lesbians as a reliable barometer for state capacity and legitimacy (Puar 2007, 4), a position in keeping with scholars who find themselves similarly unimpressed with or disappointed by the shortcomings that attend liberal rights rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the unrelenting focus on and turbocharged allegations against Israel that characterize much of Puar's work are suggestive of its antisemitic effect, if not intent (Kaplan and Small 2006).

## Denying Antisemitism

Tellingly, although Puar believes it is "worth thinking about the accusation of antisemitism," she is determined that it remain "deeply embedded in biologically deterministic notions of race" and not extend to those who take a "stance against the existence of the Israeli state" (Puar 2011, 140, added emphasis). Thus, she assuredly claims that it is not antisemitic

<sup>5</sup> *My own work on women's rights within an integrated Europe considered how the European Union's (EU's) rhetorical repudiations of inequality both enhanced and impeded concrete acts to promote social justice. Thus, not all of the EU's ("liberal") efforts to address inequality were designed to end it. Consider, for instance, "Wedding Rights to Marriage," my ninth chapter (Elman 2007).*



to take a position that would require the mass murder of millions of Israeli Jews. As Per Ahlmark makes clear: “Deliberately suggesting mass murder of Jews – openly, disguised or in vague formulas – has always been the most extreme form of anti-Semitism” (Ahlmark quoted in Gerstenfeld 2008, 21). Moreover, this suggestion is also “genocidal,” the term invented to depict the antisemitic crime for which there had been no name. The term “genocide” also covers acts intended “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948).

For Ahlmark, the most meaningful distinction between old antisemites (like Nazis) and their extremist contemporaries is that the former desired to live in a world rid of Jews (*Judenrein*) whereas the latter want a world “cleansed of the Jewish [nation] state” (*Judenstaatrein*) (Ahlmark quoted in Sheleg 2002).

When it comes to the optics of antisemitism, not all proponents of BDS are as concerned as Puar. Consider, for instance, the Nazi-inflected rhetoric of the movement’s purported founder, Omar Barghouti. Whether in his determination to “euthanize” the “Zionist project” (Barghouti 2004) or in his candid opposition to the two-state solution, because not even “the end of occupation” will end his struggle (in Boycott Divestment Sanction Israel 2010, ca. 4-5 minutes), Barghouti provides clarity. For those like him, there is no negotiation with Israel because “the very idea of a Jewish state in the region depends on the dispossession of others and because the concept of Jewish democracy is an offensive oxymoron that can only perpetuate the unjust and discriminatory status quo.” In short, “Israel and Zionism are ... cast as illegitimate, incorrigible abominations” (Pessin and Ben-Atar 2018, 1). For Barghouti and others in the BDS movement, the issue is not the occupation of 1967 but the very existence of the Jewish state from 1948.

## *Inconvenient Truths*

For BDS supporters, Israel’s vibrant responsiveness to its LGBT communities serves as an inconvenient truth, one that worried Schulman about whether “people of good will ... mistakenly judge how advanced a country is by how it responds to homosexuality” (Schulman 2011). Why

this concern? If LGBT rights, universal rights, and/or an embrace of liberal democracy's ambitions are the metric by which one were to judge Israel or any state, the movement stands to lose in its efforts to undermine Israel's legitimacy and – by extension – the rights of Jews to self-determination. This explains Puar's explicit "intent" to "destabilize" the metrics of "progress" as we have come to know them so that she can reveal their "unprogressive" consequences (Puar 2013, 23–24).

By characterizing Israel's LGBT rights monitoring and related reforms as either illusory or a strategic means of solidifying that state's (ostensibly white) aggression against a vulnerable (and ostensibly brown) Muslim/Arab other, BDS ensures Israel's efforts add up to no more than "white queer (men) saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals" (Puar 2013, 35). These "brown homosexuals" are notably distinct from those "queer" subjects with whom Puar organizes in Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS) (Puar 2013, 35).<sup>6</sup> According to Puar and her cohort, "it is irrelevant whether Palestinian society is homophobic" (Puar 2013, 36) because "foregrounding the occupation" has become the "primary site of struggle" (Puar 2013, 36–37). For those who struggled to bring the public's attention to homophobia at great risk to their

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<sup>6</sup> "Queer" is an attractive label precisely because its intentional ambiguity covers all sexual and gender "minorities" who self-identify as non-gender-conforming and/or not heterosexual. Originally connoting "strange" or "peculiar" in the late 19th century, the expression "queer" persisted for decades and was used pejoratively against people with same-sex desires or relationships. Then, to the chagrin of those lesbians and gay men pained by the insult, activists identifying as anti-heteronormative and/or anti-homonormative "reclaimed" the term at the end of the 20th century ("Queer" 2018). It is far from coincidental that queer politics took flight in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the United States and Great Britain, at the height of neo-liberalism and in opposition to feminists who mobilized against sadomasochism (S/M) and the growing global sex industry. These politics are, as I have argued elsewhere (Elman 2020), entirely consistent with a long-standing authoritarian determination to deny Jews self-determination.



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own lives in the hope that their reasoned, non-violent protests would matter, Puar’s disparaging analysis has the potential to worsen the very conditions that inspired people to come out.

Puar’s disdain for “liberals” and her simultaneous embrace of those queers for whom homophobia has become “irrelevant” is reminiscent of the Bolsheviks who harbored similar suspicions about (“bourgeois”) feminists and others outside of their control until, at last, their radical regime destroyed all autonomous women’s groups and civil society itself (Applebaum 2016, 2012). Nevertheless, when Puar reminds readers that “the homosexual question” has come to supplant “the woman question” (in reproducing the “gender binary” for states), it is unlikely she meant to invoke that tainted past (Puar 2013, 35).

With authoritarianism’s most recent resurgence, there are other reservoirs from which Puar and her colleagues can draw. The BDS movement’s denunciations of Israel’s “pinkwashing” and “homonationalism” mirror the OIC’s longstanding assault on homosexual conduct, gender equality, Zionism and universal human rights undertaken decades ago at United Nations (UN) fora under the insidious cover of “anti-racism”, “anti-imperialism” and “civilizational diversity.”

In 1990, for instance, the OIC derided feminist efforts to recognize women’s rights as (universal) human rights as racist and culturally insensitive through countless venues. The OIC called civil society meetings and funded myriad non-governmental organizations and prominent women speakers for whom sexism was irrelevant. Ironically, it was precisely in disparaging feminism from within key institutions like the UN that such women claimed the mantle of feminism for themselves and legitimized the OIC’s adoption of the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights. That Declaration, by contrast to the UN Declaration, insists on an Islamic perspective on rights that prove consistent with Shariah. Years prior, in 1975, the OIC worked



with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Soviet Union to have the final declaration from the UN's International Women's Year Conference explicitly condemn Zionism.<sup>7</sup>

Christopher Walker's warning that today's authoritarians have "refined their techniques" by constructing "phony social movements" that mimic their democratic counterparts but which operate to prevent "authentic democracy from taking root" (Walker 2016, 224) appears tailor-made not only for the OIC's opposition to and cooptation of feminist movements, but also BDS and its more recent cooptation of LGBT movements. In *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*, David Hirsh reveals that dispossessed Palestinians neither initiated nor implemented BDS;<sup>8</sup> it was British academics who did this. As Sue Blackwell, one of those British activists explained, "One of the reasons we didn't win the last time was that there was no clear public call from the Palestinians for the Boycott" (Hirsh 2018, 98–99). Determined not to lose again, she and her colleagues wrapped their boycott in Palestinian flags and established the British Campaign for Universities of Palestine and the Palestinian campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). The subterfuge of solidarity proved mutually beneficial. In addi-

<sup>7</sup> *United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, adopted on 10 November 1975 read:*

*"Peace requires the elimination of colonialism, neocolonialism, foreign occupation, Zionism, apartheid, and racial discrimination in all its forms." At the time, the Soviet Union's empire encompassed 11 time zones and covered more than one-eighth of the world's inhabited land area. For these reasons and others, the Soviet Union's rhetoric of anticolonialism was rich.*

<sup>8</sup> *Indeed, there were many like Sari Nusseibeh, president of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, who deplored BDS as counterproductive. But, they went ignored.*

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tion to kickstarting another boycott against Jews,<sup>9</sup> it absolved some Brits of their colonialism and offered protection to a corrupt Palestinian leadership whose responsibility for obstructing academic freedom in Gaza and the West Bank would no longer be scrutinized. With Israel now under a political microscope, “gangs of student enforcers trained by Hamas to intimidate, harass, and assault dissident members,” were free to do as they pleased—almost always at the expense of other Palestinians (Nelson 2016). This circumstance led Cary Nelson to ask: what was the greater threat to academic freedom, the IDF’s practices or those of Hamas? A similar question might be asked of boycotters focused on pinkwashing: what is the greater threat to human rights, Israel’s “pinkwashing” movies and LGBT reforms or BDS warriors whose rhetoric emboldens Islamists?

The expectation that “queer” Palestinians under the iron-fisted governance of Islamists should “foreground” the priorities of the BDS because it possesses a “healthy skepticism” toward “liberal” LGBT rights discourse mirrors the similarly absurd claim that Hamas and Hezbollah are “social movements that are progressive” and “on the [global] left” (*Judith Butler Whitewashes Hamas and Hezbollah 2006*, circa 6 minutes). In advancing this position and electing to ignore the explicitly annihilationist ambitions and Islamic fundamentalism of these militants, Judith Butler’s credibility took a significant hit. Years later, Schulman offered a more reserved response to a question about Hamas. After sidestepping the matter of its human rights violations in the Gaza Strip, she likened Hamas to the United States Democratic Party, which she also claims to have never supported (Ahmari 2013).

*<sup>9</sup>As Hirsh notes, there is a long history of Christians boycotting, shunning, and excluding Jews from societies they dominated. And, the Arab League wasted no time in pursuing their own anti-Jewish boycott within months after the defeat of German Nazis. In December of 1945, the newly formed Arab League Council announced: “Jewish products and manufactured goods shall be considered undesirable in Arab countries.” Moreover, all Arab “institutions, organizations, merchants, commission agents and individuals” were expected to “refuse to deal in, distribute, or consume Zionist products or manufactured goods” (Hirsh 2018, 97). Israel had not yet been established. The term Zionist, then as now, was used interchangeably in reference to Jews. From the 1950s on, the Soviets supported the Arab League in its efforts to promote left antisemitism.*

## Conclusion

To the discerning eye, BDS and its cooptation of LGBT rights are suggestive of the larger global trends identified by scholars of authoritarianism's resurgence (e.g., Applebaum 2016; Walker 2016). These include, but are not limited to, the authoritarian targeting of democracy's crucial institutions (e.g., academia and autonomous non-profit groups), high-jacking concepts (e.g., pinkwashing), and belittling the hard-won accomplishments of democratic social movements (e.g., LGBT rights) by undermining social norms (e.g., freedom of speech and association) and developing authoritarian-friendly ones instead (e.g., heterosexism and antisemitism). Puar's assertion that the accusation of antisemitism has no bearing in describing those who (like her) take a "*stance against the existence of the Israeli state*" is one example. Her insistence that homophobia is "irrelevant" to queer Palestinians for whom ending the Occupation came first is another. Recall as well that soon after Sarah Schulman's op-ed in the *New York Times* went viral, the claim that Israel employs "its stellar LGBT rights record to deflect attention from, and in some instances to justify or legitimate, its occupation of Palestine" (Puar 2013, 32) was so often repeated by the BDS movement's proponents that few of them furnished evidence to substantiate the allegation. Proof seemed unnecessary, particularly for those whose zero-sum understanding of human rights convinced them that any gains made by one group (e.g., LGBT Israelis) come at the expense of another (e.g., all Palestinians). Thus, far from supporting and/or seeking to expand on Israel's democratic reforms for others, the BDS movement's appropriation of pinkwashing has helped induce indifference to, if not foster, anti-Jewish bigotry and heterosexism among those LGBT communities that are most vulnerable. Such efforts encourage a political pessimism that obliterates the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

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