

De-Osloization and the fight against Normalisation by Adie Mormech 25/10/2012

Dr Haidar Eid has termed the struggle for Palestinian liberation as opposed to normalisation with Israel as "[The de-Osloizing of the Palestinian mind](#)". He described Mahmoud Sarsak's stand against normalisation by refusing the joint hosting at Barcelona FC with former Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit as the fight against "The Oslo Virus".

The "Oslo Virus" refers to what was behind the spate of normalisation initiatives that began in earnest in 1993 in the wake of the Oslo Accords, and agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the then Israeli Labour Government.

Edward Said, who immediately saw the perils of normalisation without justice, wrote in 1995 of the Palestinian leadership's decision to endorse the Oslo agreement: "For the first time in the twentieth century an anti-colonial liberation movement had not only discarded its own considerable achievements but had made an agreement to cooperate with a military occupation before the occupation had ended"

The Palestinian Authority was created with Oslo in 1994 as an interim Palestinian governing body with limited powers and even more limited geographic independence from Israel, whose lifespan should have been only five years according to the stipulated timeline by which "final status agreements" should have been reached.

Tens of millions of dollars poured in to the Palestinian Authority (PA) from ardent Israeli supporters such as the United States and the European Union and similar investment continued in [smaller joint Israeli-Palestinian projects](#) that again made no effort to change the political and socioeconomic status quo for Palestinian life on the ground.

The prominent discourse around newly formed groups such as One Voice and other collaborations was that the Israeli-Palestinian "conflict" was a problem of ignorance and prejudice as opposed to an issue of injustice and the ongoing dispossession and subjugation of one people by another. (<http://www.maan-ctr.org/pdfs/Boycott.pdf>)

The wave of collaborations that followed Oslo increased Israel's global legitimacy such that bilateral agreements with the European Union and other countries multiplied, as did other agreements [including closer ties with NATO and the OECD](#). Between 1994 and 2000 there was a six-fold increase in direct foreign investment to Israel, from \$686 million to approximately \$3.6 billion.

[Throughout the same period](#), the number of Israeli settlers grew from 110,000 to 195,000 in the West Bank and Gaza and from 22,000 to 170,000 in East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities confiscated 35,000 acres of Arab land for roads and settlements, poverty increased and unemployment reached 40 percent. More frequent Israeli closure policies considerably reduced freedom of movement from the pre-Oslo period.

Israel's immunity was further aided by the helpful buffer created by the Palestinian Authority whose preventive security forces used all manner of violence to extinguish the remnants of the widespread Palestinian popular resistance, strikes, boycotts and tax refusals of the first intifada.

The PA and Oslo accords remain intact today, despite the number of illegal settlers now reaching over 600,000, protected throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem by nearly 500 Israeli checkpoints and an entrenched network of Jewish only roads - destroying any prospect of a separate and contiguous Palestinian state. Palestinian land expropriation and movement restrictions were further embedded through the construction of the Apartheid Wall, deemed illegal under international law by the World Court in 2004.

Palestinians in Gaza are now completely cut off, enduring their fifth year under an Israeli military blockade, a collective punishment of 1.7 million people of whom over two thirds are refugees, the majority children. By land, air and sea, the defenceless population is surrounded and regularly attacked with F16s, Apache helicopters, drones, white phosphorous, Gunships and Merkava tanks, such as that which Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit regularly manned along the Gaza border.

Even during the pinnacle of Israeli brutality, the 3 week assault of Gaza over the New Year of 2009, the Palestinian Authority was revealed to have had [prior knowledge of the attack](#) and attempted to oppose a United Nations investigation into the massacre. The blood of over 1400 Palestinians including over 330 children during this attack was not enough for the Palestinian Authority to break ties with their American paymasters and Israeli commanders.

It was in the context of the failures of normalisation and the incessant rise of Israeli colonisation that a call was made by [over 170 Palestinian civil society groups](#) for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions of the Israeli regime until they end their subjugation of Palestinians and abide by international law.

The Boycott National Committee was formed which represented all the main political parties and groups, endorsing the definition of normalisation as:

"The participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people."

It is from here that the de-Osloization process began, forming a new vision that rejects the ongoing normalisation policies of the Palestinian Authority and those of any parties or groups who continue to collaborate with the regime that has never shown any sign of ending the trajectory of violent colonization from which it has never veered.

Groups across Europe and the Americas have rallied around the BDS campaign. In October 2011, following a campaign that spanned more than 15 countries over the course of six years, Agrexco, the partially state-owned Israeli agricultural export company, [entered into liquidation](#).

Veolia and Alstom, two French multinational companies helping build and operate the Jerusalem Light Rail project that [links illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territory](#) have lost billions of dollars in European contracts and investments, notably in the UK, France and Sweden.

Trade Unions have begun divestment from Israel, notably in the United Kingdom and South Africa. South Africa's position at the forefront of these campaigns is a testament to the global boycott campaign that contributed so effectively to their victory over the similarly race-based oppression carried out by the South African apartheid regime.

When in 2010, the University of Johannesburg cut ties with Ben Gurion University in Tel Aviv, it was the first to cut ties with an Israeli University. Archbishop Desmond Tutu actively campaigned for the boycott, stating in a letter, "It can no longer be business as usual." The University of the Witwatersrand Student Representative Council also recently passed a resolution that called for [a cultural and academic boycott](#) of all Israeli institutions.

North America's United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and United Church of Canada all voted to boycott products from Israeli settlements. In June this year Pension fund giant TIAA-CREF removed Caterpillar, Inc. from its Social Choice Funds portfolio, wiping out shares worth over \$72 million from the company who provide Israel with the bulldozers specifically designed to destroy Palestinian homes and farmland.

Across the arab world the revolutions have inspired a renewal of anti-normalisation activity, notably in Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon. Syrian singer Lena Chamamyan, Lebanese MC Malikah, and Palestine's DJ Sotusura and MC Boikutt's [recent withdrawal from Austria's Salam Orient 2012 music festival](#) because of sponsorship from the Israeli embassy have joined the rising number of global singers, artists, actors and writers [endorsing the cultural boycotts](#).

These include filmmakers, Ken Loach, Jean-Luc Godard and Mike Leigh, actors Meg Ryan and Dustin Hoffman, novelists Alice Walker, Iain Banks, Arundhati Roy, Henning Mankel and musicians, Roger Waters, Brian Eno, Annie Lennox, Carlos Santana, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott-Heron, Gorillaz, The Pixies, Massive Attack, Gilles Vigneault, Lhasa and Vanessa Paradis.

Mahmoud Sarsak's decision to refuse to be hosted by Barcelona FC in the company of former Israeli Occupation Soldier Gilad Shalit has refocused Palestinian strategy from the failed reconciliation attempts of the past to the rising resistance principals of the present.

Thirty one years ago another sporting act of defiance broke boundaries when the South African Rugby Union team or "Springboks" toured New Zealand in 1981. In light of the rising anti-Apartheid movement and South Africa's apartheid policies in sport, [massive rallies were organised against the tour](#) and against the New Zealand government's decision to support it.

In the second game against Hamilton, despite resistance from pro Rugby groups like "Stop Politics in Rugby" and the presence of more than 500 police officers, 5000 anti-Springbok protesters converged towards the Hamilton pitch, and more than 300 made it onto the field, forcing a match cancellation. The protesters endured a constant bombardment of

bottles and other objects from rugby fans in the stands, but a marker had been set, and the watching world took heed.

It was a wave of such actions that inspired movements and governments to follow. Soon international governing bodies were under so much pressure they had no choice but to oppose apartheid, to stand alongside the people of conscience such as those on the Hamilton pitch who took these first courageous steps when it wasn't fashionable to do so.

The South African movement was helped by a leadership that was closely tied to global resistance as opposed to global compliance, a leadership that has not yet formed in Palestine away from the entrapment that remains the Oslo Accords and the apparatus that came with it. Calls for the dismantling of the Palestinian Authority are however mounting, to be replaced by a more representative [Palestinian National Council](#), the supreme legislative body of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, which would include the voices of the millions of Palestinian refugees who under international law still have a right to return.

With more acts like that of Mahmoud Sarsak, it is not inconceivable that a movement around real justice in the Middle East, with equality and liberty at its heart could really emerge. We may not be so far away from the point that international governments also start to believe that Israeli immunity is no longer valid, and once a major country takes a stand, others may follow. But just as with South Africa it starts with us.

[In the words of Rifat Odeh Kassis:](#)

To dismiss injustice and inequality only in name – while continuing to fund Israeli companies or buy Israeli products or play a concert in an Israeli hall because to do so seems logistically convenient or ethically uncomplicated – misses the point altogether. The BDS campaign is a reminder that the Israeli occupation is an enormous and intricate apparatus that can only change if we refuse to support it. Which is to say, if we refuse to normalise with it.

Let us remember that normalcy without honesty is meaningless, as is cooperation without justice. Let us care so deeply about our capacity for change that we will refuse to undermine ourselves, and each other, along the way."