

Editors' Introduction

E. Natalie Rothman and Andrew Zimmerman

1. BDS and the Politics of Comparison

The idea for this special issue grew out of a panel we organized for the annual meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 2016 on the comparative history of boycotts. At that time a number of national academic associations, including the American Studies Association (ASA), the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), were considering resolutions responding to the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). We thought that the AHA should have similar discussions.¹

PACBI, which a group of Palestinian academics, intellectuals, and civil society organizers launched in Ramallah in 2004, has called on academic institutions around the world to boycott Israeli academic institutions as part of a broader campaign for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) in support of the struggle of Palestinians to (1) end the occupation of the West Bank and the siege of Gaza, in accordance with international law; (2) recognize the equal rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel with its Jewish citizens; and (3) allow Palestinian refugees to return to homes they were expelled from in and since 1948, in accordance with UN Resolution 194.² Significantly, PACBI's call for boycott does not target individual Israeli academics, a point reiterated in many of the campaign's publications since then, but one eluding some critics.

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In 2016, as today, many historians regarded BDS as an effective and time-tested nonviolent strategy to support the ongoing Palestinian struggle for democracy, self-determination, and refugees' rights in Israel/Palestine, as endorsed repeatedly by the United Nations. Others saw it as singling out Israel and presented boycotts as an unacceptable form of hostility. The purpose of this special issue is not to call for the AHA or any other organization to consider a BDS resolution, but rather to pursue some of the conceptual, methodological, and historiographical issues raised by the debate. These issues are of relevance to scholars and activists alike.

It struck us that the rhetoric against the BDS resolution at the AHA tended to portray both the situation in Israel/Palestine and the method of boycotts as utterly unique, so unique that they should not even be discussed in conjunction with one another. Here our training as comparativists and transnationalists kicked in. For our panel at the AHA we assembled a group of scholars who were experts in the history of boycotts. Matt García presented on the grape boycott by the United Farm Workers in California in the 1960s, Julie Holcomb analyzed the boycott of sugar by British antislavery activists in the nineteenth century, Jon Soske considered the sports boycotts of apartheid South Africa in the 1980s, and Ilana Feldman outlined the campaign for a BDS resolution in the AAA. This issue offers an even broader set of historical case studies. At the most basic level, it underscores that boycotting is a long-standing, effective political technique that has been employed by myriad groups on a variety of scales, whether to fight for their own rights or to engender solidarity with other struggles. Of course, not all boycotts are made in support of causes that could be classified as progressive, but these are beyond the purview of this issue of *RHR*.

Already our call for submissions for this issue drew the ire of self-styled friends of Israel who again insisted that Israel—and its critics in the BDS movement—be exempted from transnational comparison. The neo-McCarthyite website *Israel-Academia-Monitor.com* detected what it saw as “one clear message” in our call: “The [*sic*] BDS should be considered an act against oppression on par with the boycott of the apartheid South Africa, the anti-Nazi boycott, the fight of the abolition against slavery and segregation in the United States and other egregious acts of suppression.”³ We leave it to the readers to ponder the ironies of a critique of comparison that itself draws comparative conclusions. More importantly, this kind of knee-jerk and ill-considered response, part of what Mearsheimer and Walt famously called the neoconservative “Israel Lobby,” shows the critical importance of rigorous and scholarly analytic treatment.⁴ Offering a scholarly comparative account of the history of boycotts, including the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel, is indeed our intention.

Comparative and transnational methods have long been central to the discipline of history, allowing historians to get outside specialized silos and endemic methodological nationalism, and yet at the same time providing empirically

grounded knowledge—and not just abstract theoretical claims. Here we aim to create a broad basis for historical and strategic discussion by exploring a variety of spatiotemporal scales of political action opened up by boycott campaigns, from visions of global solidarity to hyperlocalized social movements, and from the strategic deployment of historical comparisons to claims of singularity.

To speak about BDS, whether in comparative perspective or not, is to challenge one of the most strictly enforced thought prohibitions of the present moment, at least in North America.⁵ In the summer of 2017 Democratic and Republican members of the US Congress sponsored a bill that would have effectively criminalized support for BDS, and related legislative efforts are underway in Canada and elsewhere.⁶ Half the states in the United States have some sort of anti-BDS legislation, generally mislabeled as legislation against anti-Semitism.⁷ Scholars and students who have publicly endorsed BDS are subjected to harassment and intimidation by pro-Israel pressure groups (and, all too often, by university administrators), and several academics have now lost their jobs for voicing critiques of Israel. The case of Steven Salaita demonstrated that even tenure does not offer protection. This is also a reason that we felt it necessary to produce this special issue, to reject, as forcefully as we can, the very idea that boycott as a nonviolent struggle in solidarity with a violently repressed people should be subjected to such thought prohibitions.

Our aim with this issue is to contribute to an informed and grounded reflection on boycotts that eschews facile typologies and ahistorical condemnations precisely by pointing out the power of precedent and the invocation of comparison, both analytically and tactically. By framing BDS in a longer transnational genealogy, we wish to move beyond a purely comparative framework (“is BDS the same as the boycott of apartheid South Africa?”) to consider the current moment as entangled in specific historical conjunctures and potentialities. Thinking about boycotts relationally, indeed dialectically, allows us to move beyond the analytical dead end (and political non sequitur) of authenticity and imitation, to recognize how various collective movements coemerge and coproduce in specific imperial and transnational frameworks.

The question of comparison with the anti-apartheid struggle intersects with, but in no way settles, the question of BDS. It is possible, for example, to support BDS while recognizing fundamental differences between apartheid South Africa and contemporary Israel. Conversely, one can discern apartheid logics at the core of Israel state policies past and present while at the same time questioning whether boycott will prove as effective in Israel/Palestine as it was against South African apartheid (and how effective the latter was in the first place). Even if there are many similarities between these two settler colonial states, and the forms of racialization that enable them to police their populations, they exist in fundamentally different historical moments and geopolitical and political economic contexts.⁸

For the most part, the essays collected in this issue do not engage directly the well-known analogy between apartheid South Africa and Israel. Rather, they show

how common boycott has been as an historical strategy, and, moreover, how often activists already compared their campaigns to previous boycotts as they developed their own strategies. That is, boycott organizers themselves bring a comparativist awareness to their task. Similarly, the call for BDS issued by PACBI in 2005 was hardly the first time the question of boycott reached the region. Indeed, the history of boycotts in Palestine/Israel goes back to the earliest days of the British Mandate, when boycotts were used strategically by Zionists and Palestinians alike, as Abdel Takriti shows in his essay for this issue. And in developing their BDS strategy in the early 2000s, Palestinian activists were clearly informed by both the South African precedent and a growing body of scholarship and political mobilization that invoked the apartheid analogy for Israel/Palestine, including by dissident Jewish Israelis, as Amro Sadeldeen emphasizes.

Finally, a word on the comparative dimension of nonviolence. It is commonly said, generally in praise, that boycotts are a nonviolent political tactic. Certainly they can be a way for the disenfranchised to participate in politics without joining in an armed struggle. But as the comparative history of boycotts underscores, nonviolence in such situations means, in fact, one-sided violence, nonreciprocal violence exercised by the oppressor on the oppressed. When nonviolent African American civil rights activists marched from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 they did not commit acts of violence, but acts of violence were committed against them by Alabama state troopers. The march was hardly nonviolent. The situation was similar in the 2018 Great March of Return, when thousands of Gazans marched toward the border fence enclosing them in what has been called the largest outdoor prison in the world, articulating demands that resonate with those of the BDS movement. They were met with sniper fire. As of the time of this writing in late August, 2018, at least 171 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli army on the march, and an estimated 17,500 have been wounded, many permanently maimed.⁹ In all of these cases, nonviolence was a tactic of the oppressed rather than a description of the events.

These comparisons raise the question whether a nonviolent tactic like boycotts will work in Israel/Palestine. Or really the question might be whether they can work without global publicity, as George Orwell pointed out. In a 1949 essay on Gandhi's nonviolence, he noted that the nonviolent tactics employed against British rule were effective because Gandhi "was always able to command publicity," thus, in Gandhi's phrase, "arousing the world" against British occupation. But, Orwell continued, this "'arousing the world'. . . is only possible if the world gets a chance to hear what you are doing. It is difficult to see," Orwell continued, "how Gandhi's methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again."¹⁰ In fact, civil disobedience does continue against states, including Israel, that mow down unarmed protestors with impunity. Many other political processes converged to produce India's decolonization, but Orwell's point remains important.

2. Toward a Connected History of Boycotts

The practice of boycott predates the nomenclature itself by hundreds of years. So do the conceptual and etymological linkages—in Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and other languages—between the shunning of those who fail to uphold the ethical standards of a collectivity and the policing of social and spatial boundaries. The term used by medieval and early modern Ashkenazi Jewish communities to describe a boycott on individuals who had violated their laws was, in fact, the same term modern Hebrew speakers use to refer to anti-Israel boycotts, *herem*. In a long process that unfolded over several generations, Jewish communities came to embrace the *herem* regulations (“excommunication” on charges of bigamy, involuntary divorce, and many other aspects of kinship and matrimonial law), making them universally binding throughout the diaspora.¹¹ Boycott, in this case, was coconstitutive with the networked communal institutions that upheld it. Boycott became a key regulatory mechanism of the highest authority, whose enforcement was not always left to rabbis, but at times was also wielded by lay communal leaders.¹² *Takfir*, although only sporadically practiced, was similarly part of the Islamic theological universe from its inception. Its meaning and practicability were hotly debated, but in general it authorized the community to strip individuals and groups of their rights if they were deemed unbelievers. In some cases *takfir* could mean their “excommunication from the fold of Islam or even execution.”¹³ *Takfir* could be imposed on political and social, as well as doctrinal, grounds. Likewise, throughout Christendom anathematizing, banishment, and excommunication have been key to the arsenal of social disciplining methods of censure across many denominations.

These and other premodern contexts of boycott *avant la lettre* underscore its fundamental role in policing the boundaries of a community, often at a hyperlocal level. When artisan and merchant guilds in Ottoman Damascus wished to protest imperial policies, they not only shut down the marketplace but also boycotted Friday prayers at the Umayyad Mosque.¹⁴ Yet by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we witness the growth of forms of protest that are decidedly transregional, indeed imperial in scope, from the Boston Tea Party to the antislavery free-produce movement and beyond. Against the backdrop of these precedents it is perhaps unsurprising that both the scope of boycotting practices and the very nomenclature emerged in the context of an expanding British Empire, as elaborated by Andrew Phemister in this issue. Several other articles similarly underscore the inextricable relationship between empire and the transregional solidarities engendered by boycott.

Social scientists often discuss consumer boycotts as a late-modern articulation of ethical consumerism, globalized humanitarianism, and (capitalist) calls for corporate responsibility in a decidedly US-centric frame. It is hardly surprising that the canonical monograph on the subject, Monroe Friedman’s *Consumer Boycotts* (1999), deals exclusively with twentieth-century US-centered boycott campaigns,

eliding their much longer, transnational genealogy. More recently, historians have begun to address the fundamental transnational dimensions of even US-based boycott campaigns, showing how boycotts bound together actors over long distances and disparities of class, race, and gender. For example, the 1970s Nestlé boycott pivoted around the company's undercutting of breastfeeding practices in the newly postcolonial Global South.¹⁵ Even more critically, a rich historiography has also traced consumer boycotts back at least to the seventeenth century, when they often formed part of a wide range of practices that together constituted "food riots," part of a dynamic and ever-growing repertoire of social mobilization from the ground up that goes back even further.¹⁶ A recent study even uses the concept of boycott to analyze the Catholic Church's Crusade-era efforts to ban commerce with Muslim polities.¹⁷ In 1770s Ireland, campaigns "urg[ed] consumers to boycott English goods and purchase only goods of Irish provenance, with textiles and alcohol of particular importance."¹⁸ In pre-Revolutionary America, boycotts served as a key tool of political mobilization against Britain.¹⁹

Two of the hallmarks of boycott as a form of political praxis are its broad base of participation and its availability to disenfranchised, racialized, and subaltern populations. Both dimensions are well exemplified by the boycotts of British goods in pre-Revolutionary America, which vitally depended on women both as consumers refusing to purchase and as producers of household goods to replace the boycotted ones.²⁰ Women's role in orchestrating the nonconsumption of imported goods in fact goes back to seventeenth-century Ireland, and may provide an important genealogy for later boycott techniques both at home and across the Atlantic.²¹ Women's centrality to consumer boycotts throughout the Atlantic world continued, and in the nineteenth century expanded to include the free-produce movement, which advocated boycotts of slave-made goods, especially cotton and sugar.²² Such boycott campaigns, though not without their critics and skeptics, were central to abolitionist efforts in several arenas.²³

The central role played by women in boycott campaigns, from Alabama to Soweto, did not diminish in the twentieth century.²⁴ While a global gender history of boycott remains to be written, recent studies have demonstrated just how active women, many of them working-class housewives, were in the food riots that swept throughout Europe and North America—from Northern France, Barcelona, and West Cumberland to New York and Toronto—in the first half of the twentieth century. These riots invariably involved deliberate, highly publicized boycotts of overpriced foodstuffs, frequently initiated and organized by women and only later endorsed by leftist parties and workers' associations.²⁵ Women were similarly at the forefront of the anti-Nazi boycott movement organized by the American Jewish Congress in the 1930s.²⁶

Not only women but other disenfranchised constituencies are central actors in the history of boycott campaigns. Subaltern organizing and their deployment of a

wide array of boycott techniques beyond consumer boycotts—from electoral to labor, cultural, academic, and sports boycotts—have been the subject of numerous case studies, though a synthetic transnational treatment of the topic is yet to be written. The link between “the Age of Boycotts” and incipient revolutionary movements in the first decade of the twentieth century—from Russia and Iran to Mexico and the Ottoman Empire—is also receiving growing attention.²⁷ A grounded account of subaltern forms of organizing and visions of justice is vital if historians are to avoid the pitfall of assigning political agency primarily to metropolitan subjects. The success of the California grape and lettuce boycotts of the 1960s depended crucially on the disciplined activism of Filipinx and Latinx workers themselves, as members of the Farmworkers movement, as well as on the charismatic—if at times contentious—leadership of Cesar Chávez and Dolores Huerta.²⁸ By the 1970s, the grape boycotts not only “tapped into the energy of civil rights organizations, framing the struggle of Mexican American (and Filipinx American) farm workers in terms of racial justice or third-world solidarity” but also forged concrete alliances with grape farmworker activists in Pinochet’s neoliberal dictatorship in Chile.²⁹ The “paycheck boycotts” deployed by Egyptian workers at several moments throughout the twentieth century were always orchestrated as part of well-organized labor campaigns.³⁰ The 1964–65 school boycotts in Zimbabwe were not only an explicitly anticolonial campaign but have also given the country’s liberation movement a particularly participatory hue and reinforced the centrality of education to its agenda for decades to come.³¹ On a transnational scale, the boycott of apartheid South Africa was powerfully mediated to US publics through activist networks that built directly on civil rights-era black organizing. Mobilization against the apartheid regime in the North Atlantic was not simply bolstered by the antiracist sensibilities that the civil rights movement was so vital in articulating—it also relied on the labor, organizational power, and media savvy that activists brought with them from earlier civil rights campaigns.³² And because of the transnational character of Cold War alliances, the South Africa boycott was also, immediately, a form of resistance directed against Reagan’s neoliberalism and pervasive racism.

As the reflections by Mikki Stelder and Amro Sadeldeen in this issue foreground in different ways, the embodied positionality of boycott campaigners—like that of all activists—matters a great deal to the outcomes of their efforts (and shapes, to a degree, the historiographical attention their campaigns have received). Julie Holcomb has suggested that the consumer boycott orchestrated by the free produce movement was able to “transcend the boundaries of nation, gender, and race.”³³ Yet campaigners’ race, gender, and transnational connections may well help explain the disdain of some white male abolitionists, and perhaps also their subsequent historiographical neglect.

Consumer boycotts remained strongly tethered to transnational political sensibilities throughout the twentieth century. Some movements urged consumers

to boycott products of an entire country, for example in the series of Chinese boycotts of Japanese and American imports at the turn of the twentieth century or in the US boycott of Japan in the 1940s.³⁴ Others advocated divesting from, and boycotting, specific companies that lent technological, moral, or financial support to particularly odious regimes. In the 1970s, for example, activists boycotted Gulf Oil for its support of Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Polaroid for its support for the white minority regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa.³⁵ Even the Arab League Boycott of Israel and of companies trading therein—while often touted as the longest and most extensive consumer boycott in history—was clearly shaped by local particularities, ebbing and flowing with the shifting conceptions of development, decolonization, and globalization in specific political settings.³⁶

If part of the moral efficacy of anti-British boycott campaigns from Ireland to pre-Revolutionary America to twentieth-century India has had to do precisely with Britain's status as an "Empire of Goods," these campaigns have also underscored the deep relationality between boycotters and the boycotted.³⁷ For, if the boycott upends a deeply colonial relationship, its success cannot be measured in purely economic terms, as Gandhi himself argued so clearly. By resorting to boycotts as "weapons of the weak," as Stephen Pascoe shows in his article in this issue, the power—and illegitimacy—of the colonizer is brought into sharper relief. This might be an important lesson for BDS activists as well. While many have questioned the economic efficacy of boycott and divestment tactics against Israel,³⁸ historical precedents suggest that boycotts can be effective on entirely different terrains—not in radically transforming Israel's political economy, but in "mainstreaming" and historicizing the critique of Israel in the Global North. The boycott situates it in relation to other pariah states both present and past, opening new sensibilities and comparisons.

Another important dimension of transnational boycott campaigns is their multiscalar nature, involving both direct, highly localized activism that is channeled through networks, whether based in faith, labor, or universities, and the cultivation of solidarities across vast geographies of empire, race, and class. It is precisely due to these features that boycotts risk reaffirming a liberal humanitarianism marked by what Christopher Brown has diagnosed, in the context of early British abolitionism in the 1770s, as a "self-concerned, self-regarding, even self-validating impulse," a sort of shortsighted metropolitan liberalism that still permeates many transnational boycott campaigns, such as the antisweatshop movement of the 1990s, as powerfully documented by Gay Seidman.³⁹

But boycott campaigns and the right they foreground for participants "not to be perpetrators" hold the potential to go beyond differential solidarity and even allyship to more profoundly disrupt dichotomies of "here" and "there," "we" and "them."⁴⁰ In this sense, boycotts are not simply coalition based, they are also coalition building, fostering multiple forms of political identification as coresisters.⁴¹ They vitally rely on preexisting collectivities that can be mobilized and, more

importantly, on political consciousness that refused the atomized individualism of neoliberal consumer ideologies of market-based “choice.”⁴² But they also help cultivate new collectivities and political subjectivities, as Kim Scipes powerfully articulates in relation to Global South labor solidarity movements, and as Peter Cole shows empirically in the case of longshore workers’ unions in relation to the anti-apartheid boycott.⁴³

It is precisely as a call for transnational solidarity that BDS places Palestinians and Palestine not as “them” and “there” but rather as integral parts of America’s empire, and reveals the academy of the Global North as complicit in the ongoing *Nakba*, the “coerced flight and direct expulsion” of Palestinians by Zionist paramilitaries and the Israeli army during and after the 1948 war.⁴⁴ Partaking in BDS, then, is not just an act of lending support to an anticolonial struggle, adhering to a call that has come from Palestinian civil society. It is also, fundamentally, partaking in the revolutionary projects of Palestine, which, like the settler-colonial projects of Zionism, have been transnational from their inception.⁴⁵ Through its three demands, and especially in its reaffirmation of the right of return as an inalienable right of all Palestinians, BDS further helps mitigate the ongoing fragmentation of Palestinian constituencies between Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and the millions living in the *shatat* (dispersal).⁴⁶

If nothing else, then, BDS should be credited with reopening political horizons that until recently seemed unthinkable beyond small cadres that have long been marginalized in the Palestinian (as well as the Jewish Israeli) public sphere.⁴⁷ As Gershon Shafir astutely observes, BDS is innovative in its “rejection of the state paradigm and its replacement with a rights-based framework [which has] not achieved predominance within Palestinian political life.”⁴⁸ Whether this rights-based framework will achieve what other frameworks have so far failed to achieve remains, of course, to be seen.

3. Refusal

Boycott is a political tactic that challenges not only the domination of the enfranchised but also the way the enfranchised have conceived and organized the political. The studies and comments presented in this issue all make this clear. Boycotts exercise the one power that no state, no corporation, no military can prevent. That is the power not to: not to buy from, not to work with or for. Herman Melville is the epic poet of this power, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have suggested.⁴⁹ *Bartleby*, his Achilles, gains a “wondrous ascendancy” over his boss with his refrain “I would prefer not to.”

Taha Muhammad Ali’s poem “Revenge,” which opens this issue, illuminates this power of refusal. It is a power of nonrecognition. Muhammad Ali came of age with the *Nakba*, and his poem opens with a description of a fate that has been too common for Palestinians: family members killed, homes destroyed, survivors sent

into generations of exile. But how to avenge this wrong? The poem begins by imagining a fight to the death, but quickly undermines this archetypal form. First, the narrator recognizes that killing his oppressor would inflict the same suffering on his oppressor's family and friends as he himself had suffered. That would be unjust the second time as it was the first time.

The poem's final stanza makes a second turn, going to the heart of this refusal, even a refusal to kill, revealing the extraordinary power of nonrecognition. He imagines how his oppressor could be found "without kin or neighbours or friends / colleagues or companions," a whole chain of affiliations. He imagines leaving that oppressor to live like this, with "his pain / within that aloneness." Killing him would, in a sense, subtract from this ultimate aloneness and diminish this refusal to grant the recognition that is at the heart of all domination. And it is in this sense, this radical nonrecognition, "that paying him no attention / in itself was a kind of revenge." Melville and Muhammad Ali both help clarify the otherwise inexplicable rage that the call for BDS often provokes: it is a rage born of fear, a fear of nonrecognition, of isolation. It is the fear of the "wondrous ascendancy" that boycott's no, its refusal to recognize, might give the disenfranchised of Israel/Palestine.

This act of refusal, like all boycotts, has always been active. This was true when an Irish landlord, Captain Boycott, found himself subject to that form of organized exclusion that has since taken his name. In the first article of this issue, Andrew Phemister reveals how Irish tenants and farmworkers developed a political tactic into a named strategy, one that quickly gained international currency. It was a tactic of direct democracy, a power that required no enfranchisement or other official permission to exercise. The tactic baffled and terrified the upstanding men of property who, as liberal representatives, thought themselves the demos. And the venom with which these upstanding men of property responded still rings familiar: they disparaged the boycotters as "primitive," "terrorists," a threat to civilization. And indeed, as Phemister shows, as a radically democratic political form, boycott really does threaten "civilization," understood as the structure and content of social domination.

Such anxieties about boycott as a political tactic had nothing, originally, to do with Palestine/Israel, but, as Abdel Takriti shows in his essay, boycott has been a part of the history of Palestine almost from the beginning of Zionist settlement. First, Jewish settlers boycotted Arab workers from their farms, factories, and unions. Palestinians responded by boycotting the economic products of the new settlers. Both sides recognized the value of boycotts to the struggle over the land. And, as Takriti reminds us, if the Palestinian boycott can hardly be said to have protected Palestinian land and property from being taken over by Zionist organizations, it nonetheless served as a political tactic of the dispossessed and disenfranchised. It should be evaluated as such, the "no" of the boycott becoming a founding "yes" for new communities of resistance.

But the community of the boycott, as Michael Bueckert shows in his analysis of the movement to boycott apartheid South Africa, can extend beyond the terrain on which the disenfranchised resist. Boycotts can create transnational communities of solidarity with local communities of resistance. In his study of the African National Congress (ANC) in Canada, Bueckert reveals not only its effective leadership of transnational anti-apartheid, but also some of the problems and pitfalls of this transnational solidarity: the ways in which local communities end up represented by one out of many organizations, threatening a shift away from the direct democracy that is the foundation of boycott as a political tactic.

The ANC presented itself, with much success, as the only significant representative of the struggle against apartheid abroad. Thus, supporters of apartheid, wary of trumpeting their enthusiasm for an openly racist regime, could instead seek to demonize the ANC as terrorists and communists. Those wishing to express solidarity with the struggle of the South African people against white minority rule, meanwhile, had to accept the ANC as the sole representative of this struggle, though some managed to work out a practice of “critical support.” The struggle in South Africa was one thing, while its relation to the international arena remained fraught.

R. Joseph Parrott’s interview with Dayton pastor Rev. Richard Righter, a key organizer of the boycott against Gulf Oil for its complicity with Portuguese colonialism in Angola in the 1970s, gives an insider’s perspective on how boycotts can draw activists from the Global North into solidarities and alliances with liberation projects in the Global South. It reveals how the political agencies this collaboration formed sustained antiracist and social justice activism in the Global North. It also reveals the ways hierarchies of race, class, gender, and geopolitics are not easily or necessarily overcome through solidarity.

There is also another kind of boycott international, as Stephen Pascoe reveals in his study of the influence of Gandhi’s anticolonial strategies in French Mandate Lebanon and Syria. For Gandhi, nonviolent coercion combatted not only specific colonial rulers, but also the violence characteristic of all colonialism. That is a point Taha Muhammad Ali also makes in his poem. Especially after many armed struggles against colonialism met defeat in the greater firepower of the colonizer, Gandhi’s notably successful boycott seemed like a good model. In adapting Gandhian methods, those struggling against French rule in the Middle East found not only a new way to say no to colonialism, but also a new way to do politics, one whose very form was as threatening to the politics of elite domination in the 1930s in the Middle East as it had been in the 1880s in Ireland. The boycott became part of an anticolonial international, united in method as well as in aim.

Yet many struggling against imperialism and other forms of oppression have rejected the boycott as ineffective, small scale, and quietist, despite the anxiety it produces among those its targets. Allyson P. Brantley addresses this issue in her study of the long-standing boycott of Coors beer by a coalition of prolabor and

antiracist and antihomophobic groups. The action against Coors is but one of many more strictly consumer boycotts, movements that looked to each other in distinct, but related, campaigns. Together they organized what Brantley calls a “counterpublic,” a public constituted by the boycott, against a specific company or commodity seen to be especially odious, but also for a broader project of social justice. Brantley draws our analytic attention, moreover, to the role of ephemera—posters, buttons, pamphlets, and the like—in constituting this counterpublic. Boycotts are always about creating new political forces, communities of dissent, counterpublics affirming themselves by a kind of collective *Bartlebyism*. And these counterpublics produce art to produce themselves and in producing themselves they produce art. There is a material and a visual culture to boycotts.

Below we reproduce four posters, especially stunning examples of this visual culture of boycotts. All four also further reveal the range of injustices that have inspired such transnational activism.

The cover image, “US Corporations Support Apartheid Gov’t” expresses the energy of the boycott, the genuinely popular nature of a revolt that might at first seem to be nothing more than individual consumer choice. It is a collective action in which every individual is asked to say no to a product as a way of saying no to an injustice. The flyer offers us identification with a man about to be clubbed by two police officers, and this identification forces us to disidentify with Coca Cola. It is the inverse of an advertisement: not the conventional, individual cathexis with an object of consumption but an explosion of the object into the deep transnational structures of capitalism, US imperialism, and racism. It undermines the facile separation between injustice in the Global South and the supposedly liberal Global North, insisting that we recognize the ways the United States was deeply implicated in sustaining apartheid in South Africa, as it is in sustaining the current forms of settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine.

The first two images below, “Solidarity for the People of Koto Panjang” and “Del Monte Profits from Apartheid,” each attempt to portray the sometimes difficult to perceive connection between the individual acts demanded by boycotts, particularly consumer boycotts, and the social aims of the boycott movement. The practice of boycotts can feel hyperindividualized, solitary, maybe just a personal ethical quirk. That, however, is in the nature of their structure, that of *Bartleby’s* refusal. Through sharply cut images, these two posters reveal the fundamental connections among the resolve of boycotters themselves, the social terrain that they engage, and the collectivities with which they develop solidarity. We do not just contain multitudes, they tell us; multitudes also contain and produce us.

The poster calling for a boycott of Japan over the Koto Panjang Dam captures the global circulation of technologies, visual tropes, and political rhetoric as part of transnational solidarity movements in general, and boycott campaigns in particular. Created circa 1991, the poster refers to a Japanese-funded dam project in



SOLIDARITY FOR THE PEOPLE OF KOTO PANJANG

We are campaigning against the Japanese funded dam in Koto Panjang, Riau, Sumatera, Indonesia. The dam will flood 10 villages, 300 hectares of protection forests and displace 4000 families and at least 30 elephants. The Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan is financing the project with US\$ 290 million.

JOIN IN THE BOYCOTT OF JAPAN
KASANG (ACTION COMMITTEE FOR THE SOLIDARITY WITH KOTO PANJANG)
P.O. BOX 6288, Jakarta 13062, INDONESIA

Figure 1. "Solidarity for the People of Koto Panjang. Join in the Boycott of Japan" (Jakarta, Indonesia: KASANG [Action Committee for the Solidarity with Koto Panjang], ca. 1991), International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam). The text reads: "We are campaigning against the Japanese funded dam in Koto Panjang, Riau, Sumatra, Indonesia. The dam will flood 10 villages, 300 hectares of protection forests and displace 4000 families and at least 30 elephants. The Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan is financing the project with US \$290 million."

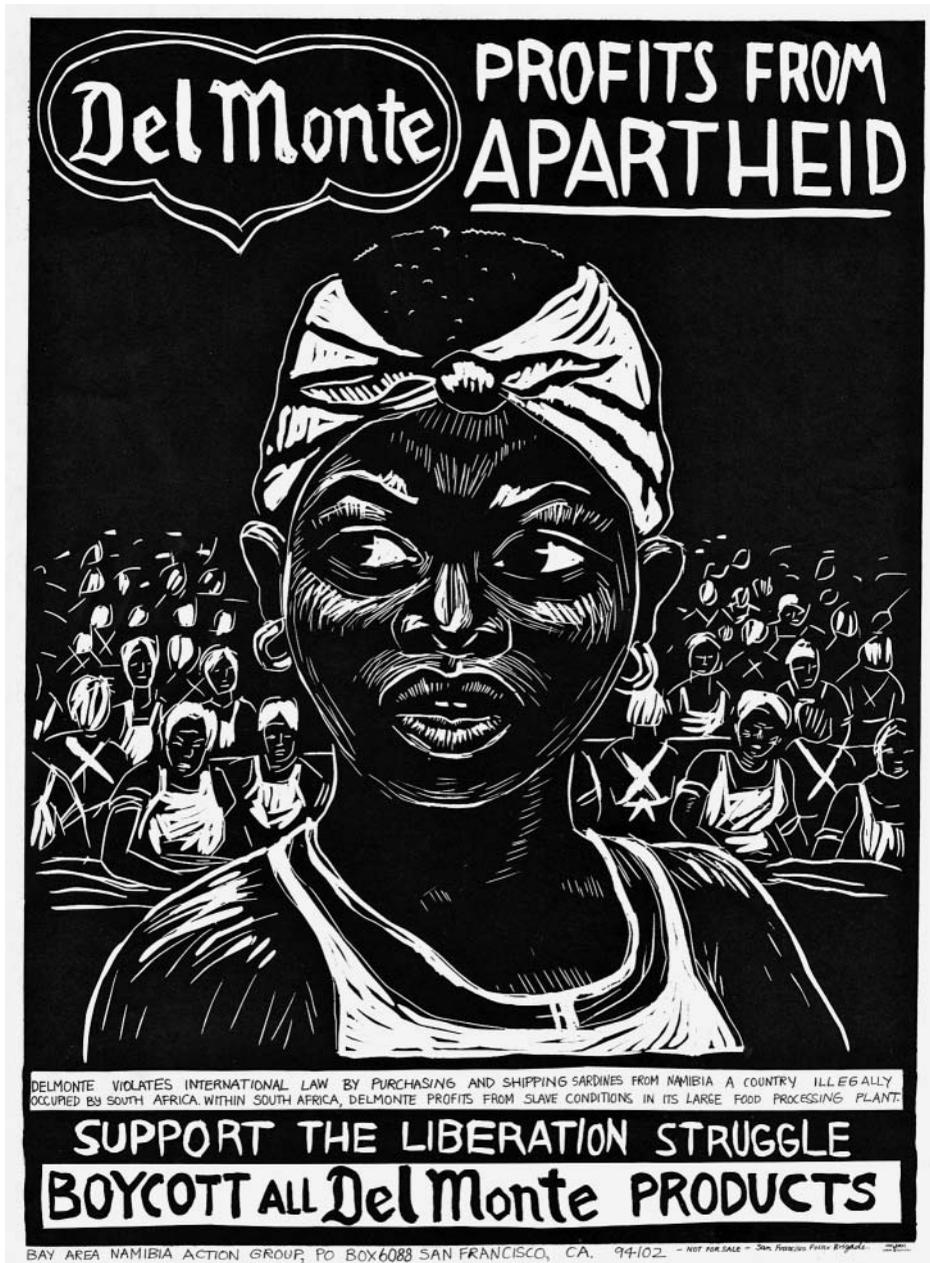


Figure 2. Romero, Rachael. "Del Monte Profits from Apartheid. Support the Liberation Struggle. Boycott all Del Monte products" (San Francisco: Bay Area Namibia Action Group, 1978). International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam). The text reads: "Del Monte violates international law by purchasing and shipping sardines from Namibia a country illegally occupied by South Africa. Within South Africa, Del Monte profits from slave conditions in its large food processing plant."

Sumatra, Indonesia, and publicizes a boycott campaign against the Japanese government, which was funding the project amid fierce local resistance in Koto Panjang and a global outcry. Using the technique of linocut printing, it ominously presents young villagers fleeing downstream from two caricatured Japanese figures—a businessman and a government official—who gleefully drill down while clutching a bag of yen and unfurling a “Development” banner. Their Indonesian military crony is standing guard closely behind them. The poster proved far from hyperbolic: in the course of construction over the next decade, close to seventeen thousand area residents were forced out of their homes and off their lands. In 2015, the Japanese Supreme Court rejected a class-action lawsuit brought by over eight thousand residents against the Japanese government, two Japanese overseas development agencies, and Tokyo Electric Power Services Company.⁵⁰ The poster accentuates the racial and neoimperialist dynamics of one of the many ecological and social disasters brought about in the Global South in the late twentieth century in the name of development and unfettered global capital.

The next two images, “Mundial 1978 Argentina Boycott,” calling for a boycott of the FIFA World Cup held in Argentina after the commencement of the Dirty War, and “Boycott Apartheid Israeli Goods,” make palpable another connection in boycotts: that between the goods—mere objects we are asked not to consume—and the fundamentally human terrain of the boycott. The relationships that advertisers design to conceal, these posters reveal. They do so by visualizing the social mediations of consumption as physical properties of the objects themselves: reification gorgeously reified. The Argentinian soccer ball is opened to reveal the oppressive state and its direct links with US imperialism. “Boycott Apartheid Israeli Goods” uses a technique from one of the earliest boycotts, the attempts by abolitionists to boycott the products of the slave trade. Then it was sugar, now it is oranges, but the visual device is the same, concretizing the metaphor: there is blood in your sugar, says the one, there is blood on your orange, says the other.

Boycotts ask us to think about ourselves and the commodities we consume as fundamentally social, and these posters help us think beyond the individualistic frameworks in which consumption is conventionally imagined. The posters borrow the vocabulary of advertisement in order to challenge the structures of empire and capital in which advertisements are conventionally deployed. They may also reveal the limitations of conceiving the boycott as a kind of inverted consumerism.

The final section, “Reflections on BDS,” turns directly to the topic that inspired this special issue. It opens with an essay by Mikki Stelder, who relates her experience co-organizing a queer forum together with Palestinian queer activists at the 2012 World Social Forum: Free Palestine. The forum discussed how to respond to Israeli “pinkwashing,” the practice by which it justifies the abuse and dispossession of Palestinians by pointing to the protections Israel claims to offer to gay men and lesbians. As if there were no queer people among those they oppress. As if there



Figure 3. “Mundial 1978 Argentina. Boycott.” Call to boycott the 1978 FIFA World Cup, held in Argentina the year after the beginning of the US-backed Dirty War, in which somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 Argentine leftists and suspected leftists were murdered, many “disappeared.” International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam).

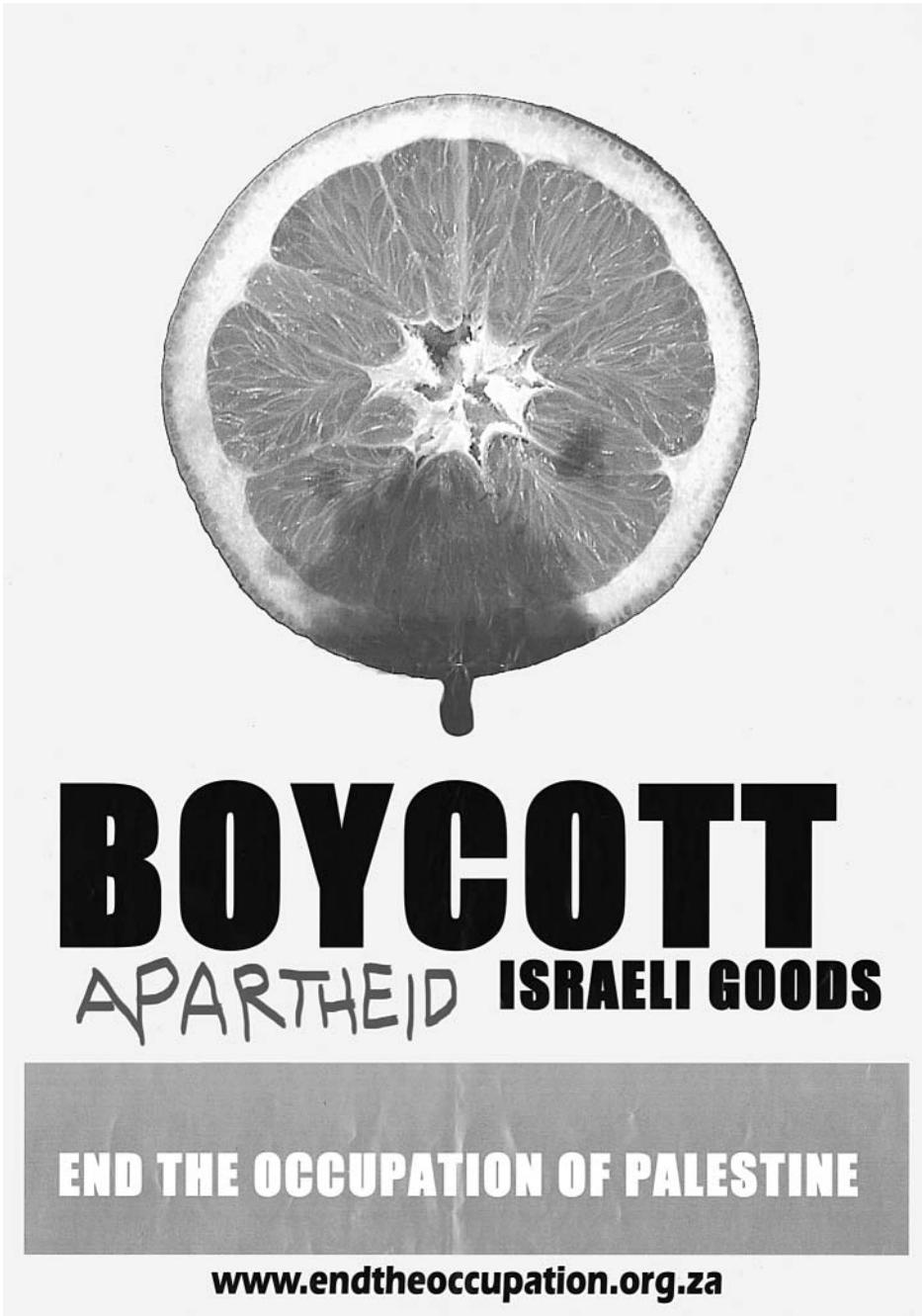


Figure 4. "Boycott apartheid Israeli goods. End the occupation of Palestine. End the occupation (South Africa: End the Occupation, ca. 2007). International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam).

could be any racism, with its bloodlines and politics of descent, that was not, necessarily, violently, heteronormative. As if liberation could be one-dimensional, as if queer people could be liberated only insofar as they are queer, but not insofar as they are, for example, Palestinian. And yet, as Stelder relates, she and other queer activists at the World Social Forum experienced not only solidarity, but also resistance to conceiving Palestinian liberation outside a heteropatriarchal framework. Indeed, she suggests the relevance of a queer analytics in understanding the Zionist settler-colonial project as a whole. Her essay reminds us of the difficult work of cultivating the necessary linkages among all struggles for liberation. As Karl Marx wrote, “to be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself.” And for Marx’s “man himself” we might substitute the occluded queerness at the center of our biopolitics.

The next two reflections on the BDS movement, by Ilana Feldman and Amro Sadeldeed, present an illuminating tension. Both recognize BDS as the most important current movement for justice in Palestine, and both consider it from the perspective of “coresistance” to the Israeli occupation. Feldman highlights how adhering to the Palestinian call for BDS allows international scholars to follow a Palestinian lead, resisting with, rather than on behalf of, the oppressed. Sadeldeed, by contrast, finds the very international appeal of BDS to miss an opportunity of Palestinian coresistance with dissident Jewish Israelis, and, moreover, to privilege the Global North connections of Palestinian civil society actors, with their necessary class and other privileges.

The call for BDS by academic organization raises the issue of the role of the scholar, of the intellectual. This is the topic of the final two reflection essays, by Peter Makhoul and Jeffrey Sacks. Makhoul begins with Edward Said’s question of why scholars in Europe and North America could, in the 1960s and 1970s, express solidarity with the Vietnamese people in their struggle against US imperialism but not solidarity with the Palestinians, who similarly engaged in a struggle against US imperialism, as well as Israeli colonization. The question only grows more insistent: How can scholars who are horrified at every instance of racism and dispossession make one exception, an exception for Israel/Palestine?

Makhoul and Sacks are less interested in exposing this hypocrisy than in asking what it tells us about the situation of the North American intellectual and, crucially, what BDS offers to intellectuals who would revolt against this situation. For both, BDS presents an opportunity, not simply to criticize one among the many oppressive regimes in the world, but to break with US imperialism and racism. For the presupposition of Zionism, that Palestinian lives don’t matter, is both a scandal in itself, a scandal of US imperialism, and a proxy for the scandal of all white supremacy. For Makhoul this allows an approach to the universal through the particular, a hallmark of intellectual work. And this universal is both the universal of humanism, the universal that insists that Palestinian lives matter, and the right,

articulated by Ariella Azoulay, “not to be a perpetrator.” BDS, Makhoul suggests, is the practice of this universalism.

Sacks discerns in the resistance to boycott, in the common refrain that BDS is not an issue for academic disciplines to take up, a political move in favor of a certain constitution of an academic discipline as such, “an apoliticism,” to quote Theodor Adorno, “that is in fact deeply political.”⁵¹ For Sacks, literature as an academic discipline—but we might say the same of virtually every discipline, including history—understands itself as the study of discrete, internally coherent and externally differentiated objects by discrete, internally coherent and externally differentiated autonomous subjects. This constitution of the disciplines, Sacks suggests, repeats one of the fundamental gestures of whiteness, that of claiming its own ground as neutral, universal. For both Makhoul and Sacks, BDS is entirely about justice in Israel/Palestine and it is also entirely about what it means to be a scholar and an intellectual writing inside the belly of the beast, the empire that calls itself a republic, the settler colony that calls itself a democracy.

And that, finally, is what this special issue is about too.

E. Natalie Rothman and Andrew Zimmerman

E. Natalie Rothman is associate professor of history at the University of Toronto. She is the author of *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Cornell University Press, 2011) and is currently completing a second monograph, “The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism.” She is a member of the inaugural cohort of the College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada.

Andrew Zimmerman is professor of history at the George Washington University. The author of *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (2001) and *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (2010), he has also edited Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in the United States* (2016). He is currently writing a history of the US Civil War as a transnational working-class rebellion titled “A Very Dangerous Element.”

Notes

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1. The discussion of the politics of academic boycotts is vast. For an especially illuminating discussion by a dissident group of American Association of University Professors (AAUP) members, see Dawson, *Journal*. For other recent discussions of BDS in the North American academy, see Estefan, Kuoni, and Raicovich, *Assuming Boycott*; and Maira, *Boycott!*

2. For the original BDS call in 2005, see “Palestinian Civil Society Call.” For PACBI’s Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel, see PACBI, “Guidelines.”
3. “Blurring the Lines.”
4. Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*.
5. Iraqi, “Short Cuts”; see also Stoler, *Duress*, on scholars’ reluctance to consider Palestine in a postcolonial frame and to apply to it the same analytical framework of settler colonialism that is effectively applied to other regions.
6. Iraqi, “Short Cuts.”
7. A list of this legislation can be found under the strangely ambiguous title “Anti-Semitism: State Anti-BDS Legislation,” Jewish Virtual Library (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise) jewishvirtuallibrary.org/anti-bds-legislation.” Accessed Aug. 31, 2018.
8. See, inter alia, Hyslop, Vally, and Hassim, “South African Boycott”; Soske and Jacobs, *Apartheid Israel*; Shafir, *Half Century*, 222–42; Alsheh, “Apartheid Paradigm”; and Zreik and Dakwar, “On South Africa.” On the analytical usefulness of applying the paradigm of settler colonialism to Israel/Palestine, see Peteet, *Space and Mobility in Palestine*; cf. Robinson, *Citizen Strangers* on the impact of liberal settler sovereignty on the ongoing colonial situation in Israel/Palestine.
9. “MOH: 189 Palestinians Injured.”
10. Orwell, “Reflections on Gandhi.”
11. Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 72.
12. Albert, “Rabbi and the Rebels.” See also the famous example of the herem imposed on Spinoza by the Amsterdam community in 1656, in this case for theological transgressions, as discussed in Kasher and Biderman, “Why Was Baruch Spinoza Excommunicated?”
13. Adang et al., *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam*, 1; cf. Timani, *Takfir in Islamic Thought*.
14. Grehan, “Street Violence,” 29.
15. Sasson, “Milking the Third World?”
16. Titone, *Disciplined Dissent*.
17. Menache, “Papal Attempts.”
18. Higgins, “Consumption, Gender,” 88.
19. Kerber, ““History Can Do It No Justice.””
20. Kerber, ““History Can Do It No Justice.””
21. O’Dowd, “Politics, Patriotism, and Women.”
22. Midgley, “Slave Sugar Boycotts”; Holcomb, *Moral Commerce*; Kett, “Quaker Women and Anti-Slavery Activism.”
23. Glickman, ““Make Lisle the Style.””
24. Brooks, *Boycotts, Buses, and Passes*.
25. Taylor, “Foot Riots Revisited.”
26. Sheramy, ““There Are Times.””
27. Çetinkaya, *The Young Turks*.
28. Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*; García, *From the Jaws of Victory*.
29. Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime*, 154.
30. Posusney, “Irrational Workers,” 112–13.
31. Foley, “Struggling over the Cost.”
32. Stevens, “Boycotts and Sanctions,” 62.
33. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce*, 3.
34. Horesh, “Money for Empire”; Meissner, “China’s 1905 Anti-American Boycott”; Wong, “Chinese Boycott.”

35. Parrott, "Boycott Gulf!"
36. See Labelle, "De-coca-colonizing Egypt" for a study of the limitations of boycott campaigns in 1960s Egypt; cf. Sparks, "Crude Politics," for a parallel argument about the ANC's ability to control oil shipments to the apartheid regime by ostensible anti-apartheid allies.
37. Higgins, "Consumption, Gender," 90.
38. See, inter alia, Jones, "Sanctioning Apartheid," but also Who Profits (whoprofits.org) for a dissenting perspective.
39. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 26; Seidman, *Beyond the Boycott*.
40. See Azoulay, "'We,'" and Makhoul in this issue. Of course, not all boycotts are premised on solidarity. The pervasiveness of well-organized and heavily publicized boycotts directed at Jewish businesses, professionals, and artisans from the late nineteenth century and up to the Second World War are often cited as one clear manifestation of the victimization of an already persecuted minority, part and parcel of the era's maturing anti-Semitism. On the highly participatory nature of anti-Jewish boycotts in Nazi-era Berlin, see Kreutzmüller, *Final Sale in Berlin*.
41. Weizman and Estefan, "Extending Co-Resistance," and Sadeldeen in this issue.
42. Bartolovich, "Natural History."
43. Scipes, *Building Global Labor*; Cole, "No Justice."
44. Pegues, "Empire, Race." For a sustained discussion of the centrality of Palestine to critiques of American racism and militarization, for example struggles against the Zionism of the Christian right, the arms industry, campus censorship, and policing and military exchanges with Israel, see Soske and Jacobs, *Apartheid Israel. On Nakba*, see Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, 70.
45. See "Transnational Revolutionaries."
46. Shafir, *Half Century*, 216; see also Feldman in this issue.
47. For a recent taking stock of BDS's significant contribution to shifting public discourse about the future of Israel/Palestine, see Thrall, "BDS."
48. Shafir, *Half Century*, 215.
49. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 203–4.
50. Jb, "Koto Panjang Dam Damage."
51. Adorno, "Commitment."

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