

Israel

Exposing hypocrisy: Ami Horowitz at the University of California, Berkeley, where in a candid camera-style stunt, he elicited reactions to alternatively waving the black flag of the Islamic State and the Israeli flag





# TAKING ON BDS

Some pro-Israel scholars and activists  
seek to expose the blatant double  
standards at the heart of the global  
boycott Israel movement

**By Tibor Krausz**

One fine day recently, Ami Horowitz, a Jewish-American filmmaker from New York best known for his satirical, guerrilla journalism-style videos aimed at exposing the hypocrisy of anti-Israel activism, packed his bags and hopped on a plane to Ireland. His mission: to see what local supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement were up to in a European heartland of the global anti-Israel campaign that seeks to isolate the Jewish state politically, economically and culturally.

In Dublin, Ireland's capital, he hit pay-dirt right off. "It didn't take long at all to find companies that proudly assert themselves as being champions of the boycott Israel movement," Horowitz tells *The Jerusalem Report*. "I wanted to give them an opportunity to showcase that bigotry on a global platform."

That he did. By pretending to be a sales agent variously for Iran, Sudan and North Korea, he approached local companies and asked if they would be willing to consider doing business with him. As he did so, he blithely reeled off some of the human rights abuses perpetrated in these countries to see whether that would be a deal breaker. It wasn't.

"We have workers slash political prisoners. Iran is known for hanging gay people – or stoning them," he tells one convenience store owner, who did not know Horowitz was secretly filming her. "The bad side [about Sudan] is the whole genocide thing," he tells another pro-BDS business owner, who displays a "Boycott apartheid Israel" sign on the door. "The good is phenomenal beaches." None of them seem to object to any country. They do, however, stress they would never buy anything from Israel.

The resulting short video, which Horowitz uploaded to YouTube on June 11, has since gone viral.

"I chose Ireland because it's ground zero for BDS. Besides, I love to drink Guinness!" quips the filmmaker, whose other recent candid camera-style exploits included waving the black flag of the Islamic State at the University of California, Berkeley, in support of the brutal terrorist movement to see how students would react. Several of them expressed support, yet when he did the same stunt with an Israeli flag, he immediately drew loud boos.

"I had no idea how far I would be able to push them before they saw through my ruse," Horowitz notes apropos his exploit in Ireland. "I didn't try to hide the egregious human rights records of the countries I was pretending to be from. Instead, I highlighted them! In a humorous way, of course."

Some of Horowitz's detractors have dismissed his video as a cheap publicity stunt, but he insists it underscores the selectively applied outrage at the heart of the BDS movement. "BDS is an insidious, noxious movement that needs to be fully exposed to the public. Its supporters are less human-rights advocates than anti-Israel bigots," Horowitz says. "I felt that there was no better way to expose that hypocrisy than to videotape their willingness to buy products from the world's most oppressive regimes."

### A MYRIAD OF PERENNIAL HUMAN- RIGHTS VIOLATORS DO NOT FACE ANY MEANINGFUL PROTESTS, MUCH LESS A GLOBAL BOYCOTT

In their defense, some of his interviewees may simply be ignorant of political and historical realities in the Middle East. One of them assumes Sudan is a landlocked country. Yet, it's often such ignorance that BDS activists exploit as they strive to indoctrinate many otherwise well-meaning people in the movement's Manichean certainties of "Palestinians are good; Israelis are evil."

**MODELED ON** the African National Congress-led boycott of apartheid-era South Africa, the BDS movement grew out of the UN's World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001, which turned into a notorious hate-fest against Jews and their state. Significantly, BDS was conceived a mere year after then-prime minister Ehud Barak had offered historic concessions to PLO head Yasser Arafat, who turned the offer down and launched the second intifada – a brutal uprising that

saw a relentless spate of suicide bombings and other attacks against Israeli civilians.

Ostensibly, the goal of the movement, which is funded largely by European governments through a variety of participating NGOs, is to enfranchise Palestinians by turning their oppressors into a global pariah. Yet, at best, critics insist, BDS activists hold Israel alone responsible for the lack of peace between Israelis and Palestinians and seek to coerce the Jewish state into making more and more unilateral and unreciprocated concessions through an unrelenting global campaign of political, economic and cultural isolation.

At worst, they say, BDS activists seek to dispose of the Jewish state entirely by replacing it with a new Arab-majority state through the so-called one-state solution. "It's a war on Israel by means other than violence with the same aim of ending Israel's existence and reversing the wars of 1948 and 1967," says Nicholas Dyrenfurth, a Jewish-Australian academic who is a coauthor of "Boycotting Israel is Wrong," a new book he wrote with fellow Australian academic Philip Mendes.

Qatar-born Omar Barghouti, a leading light of BDS who was a founder of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (and who calls Israel a racist "apartheid" state, yet, ironically, is happy to be a PhD student at Tel Aviv University), has made no secret of the BDS campaign's ultimate goal to turn Israeli Jews into a tolerated minority in a new Arab state. In other words, he seems to envision the same fate for Israeli Jews that he accuses them of having perpetrated on Palestinians.

"I view the BDS movement as a long-term project with radically transformative potential," another BDS activist, Palestinian-American Ahmed Moor, explains in an op-ed for Mondoweiss, a US-based political blog co-edited by two self-described "progressive" Jewish anti-Zionists, Philip Weiss and Adam Horowitz. "Ending the occupation doesn't mean anything if it doesn't mean upending the Jewish state itself," Moor insists. Couching the Palestinian-led movement's eliminationist creed in the "progressive" patois of "liberal values" and "human rights," he calls on Jewish "liberal Zionists" to "discard the 'Zionist' and become regular liberals like the rest of us [by refusing to] cling to notions of racial dominance in an



ill-got geographical space.”

A co-editor of the book “After Zionism: One State for Israel and Palestine” with Jewish-Australian anti-Israel activist Antony Lowenstein, Moor fails to elucidate why he has no problem with Arab-majority states, many of which are far more ethnically homogenous and hence more “racially dominant” than Israel, which has a sizable Arab minority. Elsewhere, Moor dismisses the “greasy Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis” with “their pornographer’s zeal” for seeking a two-state solution through dialogue.

Lowenstein, an independent journalist and political activist who is a columnist for Britain’s Guardian newspaper, shares such sentiments. “I support BDS as a human being first and a Jew second. Don’t believe the false rhetoric from the corporate press, some politicians and media, as well as the Zionist lobby that BDS is anti-Semitic or discriminatory,” he insisted in a statement of support last year for an academic boycott of Israelis. Somewhat undercutting his insistence that BDS activists aren’t prejudiced against Israeli Jews (“Zionists” in their parlance), Lowenstein labeled them “brutes” in the very next sentence.

“I am a 100 percent supporter of a boycott against Israel because the Jewish state, receiving almost blind Western financial and diplomatic support, is a serial abuser of human rights,” Lowenstein, who likewise supports a one-state solution, tells The Report. “That BDS is causing such fear in the hearts and minds of Zionists globally is a clear sign that they worry that their cherished racially exclusionary project, Israel, has lost its luster and legitimacy.”

It’s precisely such views that trouble Mendes and Dyrenfurth, who both work at Melbourne’s Monash University. In their book, they set out to demonstrate why they consider the BDS movement’s guiding philosophy factually challenged, morally suspect and intellectually inconsistent. BDS, they note, “collectively punishes all Israelis for the actions of their state,” whose actions “are far less brutal than” China’s actions in Tibet or those of myriad other perennial human-rights violators from North Korea to Myanmar, from Sudan to Syria, from Zimbabwe to Eritrea, from Pakistan to Turkey – none



COURTESY ANTONY LOWENSTEIN

of which countries face any meaningful protests against them abroad, much less a global boycott.

## I WANTED TO GIVE THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOWCASE THEIR BIGOTRY ON A GLOBAL PLATFORM

**BDS ACTIVISTS**, the authors insist, are fixated on the crimes and shortcomings, real and imagined, of the Jewish state, even as they ignore or condone those of the Palestinians; they reflexively ascribe nefarious motives to all of Israel’s actions; and they routinely peddle anti-Semitic tropes under the guise of “anti-Zionism” by recycling “images of Jews as bloodthirsty oppressors [and] portraying Israel as a unique evil.”

Ami Horowitz, a former investment banker whose mother is Israeli, concurs. “It says something that in a region and a world full of oppressive regimes that treat their people as dirt, the only country being singled out happens to be the only Jewish country,” he observes. “Criticism of Israel is legitimate; focusing your ire solely on the only Jewish country is something else entirely.”

Lowenstein begs to differ. Jewish Israelis deserve being singled out, he insists. “The Israeli colonial project has been backed by a majority of Israelis for

Anti-Israel activist Antony Lowenstein: ‘I am a 100 percent supporter of a boycott against Israel’

decades, whether from the left or right,” he stresses. “BDS pushes for concrete steps against an Israeli-Jewish population that benefits economically from a racist arrangement against Arabs. If Israelis don’t think their society is defined by occupation, then they’re living in a bubble and need to pay a price for it.”

For Jews and Israelis, paying a price might mean being harassed and harangued at academic venues abroad during lectures that have no relevance to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It may also mean being accosted by activists chanting slogans like “Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas!” (such as at various demonstrations in Europe); by agitators singing songs like “Shoot the Jew” (such as at protests in South Africa); and by anti-Israeli students and academics circulating blatantly anti-Semitic materials, including cockamamie conspiracy theories about the evil machinations of rich Jewish financiers and conniving Zionist propagandists.

“In October 2014, South African BDS activists placed a pig’s head next to kosher products in a supermarket of the Woolworths chain in Cape Town,” observes Dyrenfurth, who identifies as a leftist and specializes in Australian labor history. “Other manifestations of anti-Semitism have included BDS protests against shops such as Starbucks and Marks & Spencer in London, simply on the basis that they are Jewish-owned; a BDS protest outside a synagogue in Colorado; and a planned protest outside a synagogue on the Shabbat in Melbourne.”

Several outspoken supporters of the BDS movement, such as Canadian author Naomi Klein and American gender theorist Judith Butler, are Jews themselves. “The best strategy to end the increasingly bloody occupation is for Israel to become the target of the kind of global movement that put an end to apartheid in South Africa,” Klein stressed in an op-ed for The Guardian. Then, in what seemed like rather dubious moral reasoning, Klein tacitly acknowledged that singling out Israel alone for boycotts might

seem unfair (albeit she cited only “the US, Britain and other Western nations” as worthy of mention as other egregious human-rights violators), but explained that “in a country so small and trade-dependent, it could actually work.”

“Many people on the left have a genuine concern for the Palestinian people,” Ami Horowitz argues. “While I understand their concern, they’re susceptible to the false Palestinian narrative that Israel is a [singularly brutal] serial human-rights abuser, which it is not.”

The way their critics see it, many self-identified left-wing Jewish anti-Zionists’ vociferous opposition to Israel serves to validate them in their oft-flaunted self-image as outspoken human-rights activists who have disposed of Jewish ethnocentrism in order to defend powerless Palestinians against racist and gung-ho Israeli Jews. Such humanitarian sentiments, however, are often marred by a seemingly unshakable conviction in the superiority of their political position, which makes them prone to holier-than-thou preening and which no inconvenient facts or counterarguments will moderate.

“There is only a small number of Jews worldwide who support the aim of the BDS movement to destroy Israel, but sometimes they constitute a vocal and disproportionate grouping within Western pro-BDS campaigns,” Mendes, who is director of Monash University’s Social Inclusion and Social Policy Research Unit, tells *The Report*. “These Jews provide an alibi for the BDS movement against accusations of anti-Semitism by showcasing Jews who share their views and who are willing to exploit their religious and cultural origins in order to vilify other Jews.”

To ward off charges of anti-Semitism, Jewish BDS activists regularly cite their Jewishness in their apparent belief that it lends them unimpeachable moral authority for their often vituperative criticisms of the “Zionists” and their state. “Because we are Jews, we have a particular legitimacy in voicing an alternative view of American and Israeli actions and policies,” Jewish Voice for Peace, an American pro-BDS organization, declares on its website. “As Jews, we can make the distinction between real anti-Semitism and the cynical manip-

ulation of that issue to shield Israel from legitimate criticism.”

During a debate on Al Jazeera English in April about whether it was Israel’s alleged crimes that were fueling a resurgence of anti-Semitism worldwide, a pro-Israeli Jewish panelist asked Richard Cooper, a founder of the British anti-Zionist group, Jews for Justice for the Palestinians, how he felt about joining an anti-Israel mass protest last summer in London, which featured signs that read “Hitler was right.”

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“LET ME tell you of my experience,” Cooper retorted. “Hundreds [and] hundreds of young Muslims said that they were absolutely delighted to see that all Jews were not in support of what was happening in Gaza. I was proud to be there.” In other words, Cooper appeared to condone virulent anti-Semitism so long as he was personally exempted from it by its purveyors by virtue of his being a “good” Jew, who proved his worth by opposing Israel.

“[Activists’ citing their Jewish origins] is mainly a cynical strategy because the media tends to give greater weight and publicity to Jews who support the BDS movement,” Mendes argues. “It’s also a useful means of undermining the legitimacy of Jewish concerns about the potential anti-Semitic implications of the BDS movement,” he adds. “For some, it’s an opportunistic career or marketing ploy because their profile is raised due to their being Jewish anti-Zionists. For some others [such as estranged Jews],

there may be a personal revenge motive against Jewish communities – a bit like retaliating against a former wife or husband.”

Mendes, who supports a two-state solution, has come in for plenty of flak from some of his fellow academics, including anti-Zionist Jews, who advocate for a Greater Palestine and accuse him through various platforms of being a “hard-core Zionist” – left-wing anti-Israeli firebrands’ shorthand for someone they regard as no better than a card-carrying member of the Ku Klux Klan.

Dyrenfurth hasn’t fared much better. “I don’t think my moderate position on the conflict has helped the cause of a young scholar seeking a tenured position in the academy,” he says. “Over the years, I’ve been sent some horrific hate mail to my university address, suggesting, for instance, that ‘Jews are lower than bacteria,’ along with the usual slurs that ‘Zionists are no better than Nazis.’”

Ironically, however, Mendes has also been lambasted by some right-wing Greater Israel advocates over his support for a Palestinian state alongside Israel. And so, even as the Jewish state faces increasingly poisonous attacks on its legitimacy worldwide, some of Israel’s supporters do not help their case by being just as shrill in their reflexive denunciations of Palestinians and more moderate Jews alike as rabid anti-Zionists are of Israelis en masse.

In countering the aims and claims of the BDS movement, pro-Israel voices need to recognize the justness of the Palestinians’ own national aspirations, even while they continue to defend Israel against the customary libels recycled ad nauseam by its myriad detractors.

“The important thing is not to preach to the converted but rather to target the great majority of the liberal left, who want to help Palestinians but also don’t wish to harm Israelis,” Mendes stresses. “[Pro-Israel voices] need to educate those in the middle about the complex history and politics of the conflict and the necessity for concessions on both sides.

“It’s not just about dismantling the settlements or just about the Palestinians recognizing Israel, but about both national groups agreeing to compromise on their core demands and national narratives.” ■