

Introduction

Something unthinkable happened in the United States in the last few years: hundreds of academics—senior scholars and graduate students and untenured faculty—came forth in support of an academic boycott of Israel. Beginning in 2013, the movement to boycott Israeli academic institutions expanded rapidly with one major academic association after another endorsing the boycott and adopting resolutions in solidarity with the Palestinian call for an academic boycott. But this movement emerged several years after Palestinian academics, intellectuals, and activists called for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel, in 2004—and after years of military occupation, failed peace negotiations, ever-expanding and illegal Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, ongoing home demolitions, the building of the Israeli Wall, repression, and military assaults. All of these events and the military occupation of Palestine itself have been endorsed, defended, and funded by Israel's major global ally, the United States. The academic boycott and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement are thus embedded in a significant aspect

of the U.S. political and historical relationship to the Middle East, and in a particular cultural imaginary of Palestine, Palestinians, and Arabs in general, that has become an increasingly central concern of American studies.

What is the significance of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and academic boycott activism, in particular, for the U.S. academy and for social justice movements? What political paradigm is introduced by the academic boycott, and how has this transformed the debate about Palestine-Israel in the United States, and in the academy in particular? I focus on the academic boycott as a social movement that is at the intersection of anti-war, human rights, and global justice organizing in the university and beyond, and increasingly embedded in antiracist, feminist, and queer movements as well. This is a new perspective in the existing literature on the academic boycott, but I will show how it emerges from the politics of BDS when analyzed as a progressive social movement, and from its rich and dramatic history in challenging the status quo in the United States.

WHAT IS THE ACADEMIC BOYCOTT?

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)¹ issued a call in 2004 for a boycott by academics and artists until Israel complied with international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

A year later, in 2005, Palestinian civil society organizations—including over 170 political parties, refugee networks, popular resistance committees, trade unions, women’s groups, and other segments of the Palestinian national movement—called on the international community to put nonviolent pressure on Israel until it ended its violations of human rights, by enacting Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, based on the same three political principles, above. The fact that the academic and cultural boycott of Israel had actually been launched a year earlier than the BDS call is significant because it highlights the centrality of the *academic and cultural* front of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation, colonialism, and apartheid.

This Palestinian-led movement uses the framework of “freedom, justice, and equality,” invoking international law and the simple axiom that “Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.”² The BDS movement is thus an antiracist movement calling for racial equality. Significantly, it has also emphasized that the oppression of Palestinians is due to an Israeli “regime of settler colonialism, apartheid, and occupation.” These key terms have helped shift the discussion about Palestine-Israel in the United States and provided a new framework. I will elaborate on the terms *apartheid* and *settler colonialism* later, noting for now that the BDS campaign explicitly challenges Israel’s displacement and colonization of Palestinians since 1948, its occupation and fragmentation of Palestinian territories, its denial to Palestinian refugees of the right to return to their homes, and its system of racial discrimination subjugating Palestinian citizens of Israel. This denial of racial justice, freedom of movement, and sovereignty has persisted given the relative weakness of the Palestinian national movement in resisting the Israeli state and military, and also because of the failure of the international community to end

this oppression. As the BDS movement's statement observes: "Governments fail to hold Israel to account, while corporations and institutions across the world help Israel to oppress Palestinians. Because those in power refuse to act to stop this injustice, Palestinian civil society has called for a global citizens' response of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality."³

This observation for the rationale for BDS points out importantly that while Israel's hegemony is maintained by international collusion, it can also be challenged by international solidarity. Furthermore, it alludes to the powerful point that BDS is actually a strategy of last resort—an admission of failure, in a sense, that nothing else has worked to end Israel's ongoing occupation, injustice, and warfare against the Palestinian people. Israel's impunity is upheld by the support of other states (especially the United States) and international institutions that have either actively defended and funded Israel's occupation and racist regime or refused to sanction it, in contrast to other undemocratic regimes whose human rights violations are routinely denounced by the international community (for example, China, Russia, Egypt, Syria, and Myanmar). It is true that numerous U.N. resolutions have been passed, criticizing the Israeli state's actions and human rights abuses—for what those resolutions are worth, given the United Nations' own limited powers—but the United States has consistently vetoed these. The U.S. government is the most powerful ally of Israel and has provided it with unconditional military, political, and economic support, regardless of which administration is in power. Concomitantly, the issue of Palestinian liberation has historically been suppressed and subjected to censorship in the U.S. academy and public sphere, so there is a legitimization of consistent support

for Israel, regardless of its human rights abuses, in the intellectual and cultural realm. This is why the academic and cultural boycott is key.

The BDS movement has ruptured the sanctioned narrative about Palestine-Israel, which occludes the history of colonization and displacement of the Palestinian people. This dominant discourse has for years been established as the norm, which has made it “controversial,” including in U.S. universities, to speak about Palestinian national liberation or even, in some instances, to criticize the Israeli occupation. While the lockdown on criticism of Israel has been increasingly challenged in recent years, in the U.S. academy as well as the media, and while more critical research about Palestine-Israel has emerged, scholarship on the social movements that have accompanied these intellectual and discursive shifts is meager. There has been much public debate and media controversy about BDS and the academic boycott, as well as journalistic and activist writing and some edited volumes about the BDS movement,⁴ but currently hardly any scholarly work offers an analysis of the historical and political import of the academic boycott. This book is not an exhaustive account of the academic boycott movement in the United States, however, but rather an introduction to the core paradigms, key moments, and significant debates about the movement. It is written from the perspective of someone who has been involved for several years in academic boycott organizing, and in the Palestine solidarity movement at large, and also from the vantage point of a critical ethnic studies scholar who writes about social justice and transnational solidarity activism.

I do not dwell on the cultural boycott of Israel, because those campaigns take place in a different sphere and entail different strategies, generally based on the refusal of international artists

to perform in Israel until it complies with the three principles of BDS outlined above, and the rejection of Israeli state sponsorship of cultural production and events. The cultural boycott is crucial for drawing attention both to Israeli apartheid and colonial policies and to its deployment of “soft power” to whitewash these through an international public relations campaign—as was the case in apartheid South Africa—in order to deflect from its violations of human rights.⁵ Inspired by the global cultural impact of artists and athletes who refused to participate in events in apartheid South Africa, the cultural and also sports boycott has been growing. Major cultural icons such as Chuck D of Public Enemy and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Diaz have publicly supported the boycott, and NFL players have begun refusing to play in Israel. Numerous consumer and corporate boycott and divestment campaigns have spread like wildfire across the United States and galvanized ordinary citizens and consumers to stop supporting corporations that do business in Israel; for example, Soda Stream, Ahava, Veolia, G4S, and Airbnb. Another important arena of mobilization is divestment from Israel by churches, which has included a string of successes in the American Friends Service, Mennonite Central Committee, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church, and United Methodist Church.

All of these campaigns are extremely significant and integral to the larger BDS movement, but there is much to be said about the academic boycott movement alone, given its meteoric rise in the United States in recent years, and as a campaign that shines a light on important shifts in American studies and in the U.S. university at large. Moreover, this book is not a primer on the Palestine-Israel issue—a vast topic of its own—as much work has already been published on this by specialists. I will not be

documenting here the history of Palestinian displacement and dispossession nor the various wars, atrocities, and human rights violations inflicted on Palestinians, which have been extensively recorded elsewhere.

This book theorizes the academic boycott in the context of current debates about rights-based politics, international solidarity, and academic abolitionism and addresses the implications of the boycott for antiracist, anticolonial, feminist, queer, and academic labor movements. To date, the BDS movement has not been adequately researched and analyzed as a *social justice movement*, which is an important theme in American studies. This book fills a gap in existing scholarship, drawing on interviews with scholar-activists deeply engaged with academic boycott organizing, as well as with Palestinian scholars and activists, about the core frames and key strategies of the boycott movement and its implications for the U.S. academy and, of course, justice in Palestine. The BDS movement at large has been the site of significant interracial and cross-movement coalition building, productively linking issues of colonialism, militarization, policing, anti-Blackness, indigeneity, borders, and labor. By all accounts, the boycott has fundamentally transformed the discourse related to Palestine-Israel in the U.S. academy and it has also generated important struggles over issues of censorship, campus governance, and neoliberal university structures.

THE US CAMPAIGN FOR THE ACADEMIC
AND CULTURAL BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL

Five years after PACBI was launched in Palestine, a small group of U.S.-based academics founded a national campaign to mobilize support for the boycott call in the United States in 2009,

forming USACBI (the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), in the midst of the 2008–9 Israeli war on Gaza (known as Operation Cast Lead). During that massacre in the besieged territory, in which approximately 1,400 Palestinians were killed (and 13 Israelis), Israel destroyed schools and universities and wreaked havoc on Palestinian society, including its educational institutions and academic life. This attack was part of an ongoing assault on the Palestinian right to education over the years, through closures of Palestinian schools and universities, restrictions on freedom of movement, military violence and incarceration, and repression and humiliation, that has led to a state of “scholasticide,” or destruction of the educational environment, in Palestine.⁶ USACBI’s founders were also responding to the “Open Letter to International Academic Institutions from the Right to Education Campaign” at Birzeit University in Palestine (January 17, 2009), asking the international academic community, unions, and students “to show support and solidarity with the people of Gaza by calling upon their respective governments to impose immediate boycott, divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel.”⁷ The academic and cultural boycott is a tool that people of conscience the world over can use to refuse complicity with this scholasticide, and sociocide, in Palestine—especially scholars living in the United States, the state that has provided a lifeline to Israel and sustained its regimes of occupation, apartheid, and colonization. When it was launched, USACBI proposed concrete actions that supporters of the boycott could take to withdraw their complicity with Israel and simultaneously support Palestinian academics and students in proactive ways:⁸

Since Israeli academic institutions (mostly state-controlled) and the vast majority of Israeli intellectuals and academics have either contributed directly to maintaining, defending or otherwise justifying

the above forms of oppression, or have been complicit in them through their silence, we call upon our colleagues to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation, colonization and system of apartheid, by engaging in the following actions. We aim at the full implementation of all these steps. However, recognizing that different actions may be feasible and appropriate under the many different academic and political circumstances that pertain in US institutions, we urge our colleagues to undertake as many of the following initiatives as possible:

1. Support Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or implicit condition for such support;
2. Encourage your university and college administrations to institute funding for scholarships and fellowships for Palestinian students;
3. Request your administration/president to issue a public statement censuring Israeli destruction of and interference with Palestinian schools and universities, archives and research centers, both in Gaza and throughout occupied Palestine;
4. Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic, professional and cultural associations and organizations;
5. Organize teach-ins or similar events with campus and community organizations at which the campaign for the economic, cultural and academic boycott of Israel can be fully and openly discussed;
6. Refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions;
7. Advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions;

8. Promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by academic institutions, and place pressure on your own institution to suspend all ties with Israeli universities, including collaborative projects, study abroad, funding and exchanges.

I cite these suggested actions in detail because they show that the boycott is framed by BDS activists as just one element in a larger repertoire of tactics that include positive, proactive programs to support Palestinian scholars and students. This framework also highlights how the boycott can be used to actively promote the Palestinian right to education and academic freedom, including in the United States, a point that has often been obfuscated by the boycott's opponents who have consistently alleged that the boycott undermines academic freedom, as I will discuss in Chapter 3 (see Glossary, *s.v.* *academic freedom*). Furthermore, it is important to underscore that the academic and cultural boycott complements other BDS strategies, particularly divestment campaigns, which have also spread rapidly across U.S. campuses and churches. I will not be addressing these here, as they deserve a book of their own.

THE POLITICAL PARADIGM OF BOYCOTT

This book focuses on the academic boycott as a transnational social movement that has used the language of global and social justice as well as human rights to reframe the question of Palestinian freedom, and that has historically been suppressed and subjected to censorship in the U.S. academy as well as in the larger U.S. public. The boycott movement has been key to challenging the lockdown on open discussion of Palestine, Israel, and Zionism in the U.S. academy and to transforming the Palestine issue from a marginal cause into a central node of progressive-

left academic organizing and campus activism. Palestine was a leftist cause in the 1960s and 1970s during the era of the Third World movement and its anticolonial politics; as I will show in Chapter 1, it was also a contested cause. However, with the consolidation of the special relationship between the United States and Israel and the growing power of the Israel lobby, it was increasingly shunted aside as an issue no one dared to touch for fear of risking the ire of Zionist backlash. The success of the BDS movement, then, has been accompanied by a shift in politics as well as academic thought; over the years, the silencing of criticism of Israel that occurred even in the U.S. left and the erasure or marginalization of Palestinian rights activism led to the unfortunate label, “Progressive Except on Palestine” (or PEP). The Palestine national question could only be framed through a state-sanctioned and euphemistic discourse about “the conflict,” and any critique had to be limited to the Israeli military occupation and the Palestinian territories conquered in 1967. The rise of BDS and the boycott movement has been accompanied by and has propelled a new framework that, first, centers Palestinian rights as *integral* to left movements for global and social justice, and second, uses the discourses of settler colonialism, apartheid, and antiracism to challenge foundational narratives of the Israeli state and the displacement of Palestinians beginning in 1948 (see Glossary, s.vv. *settler colonialism*; *apartheid*).

The call for boycott, and the BDS movement, must be situated in the specific political conjuncture created by the Oslo Accords, signed by Israeli and Palestinian leaders in 1993–94, and the national crisis it created for Palestinians. Oslo represents for many Palestinians the betrayal of the national struggle for self-determination, as it bestowed only limited sovereignty to Palestine, promoted a framework of neoliberal governance, and

relegated the newly created Palestinian National Authority to the role of collaborator with Israel in maintaining internal security (that is, in suppressing and disciplining Palestinians).⁹ It also compromised on the right of return of refugees and the rights of Palestinian citizens in Israel, creating a framework that gave up on these two groups of Palestinians and splintered the national movement. The Oslo framework rested on the two-state solution and confined a Palestinian state to only 22 percent of historic Palestine; thus, many saw it as leading to the dismembering of Palestine. In addition, Israel's occupying regime maintained control of all borders and generated ambiguous legal categories and forms of identity documentation for the Palestinian population and territories—differentiating between peoples and geographic spaces, for example, in Israel, East/West Jerusalem, Gaza, and West Bank Areas A, B, C. In fact, many commentators observe that the Oslo agreements gave “birth [to] what Jeff Halper has called Israel's ‘matrix of control’” in Palestinian areas with the construction and expansion of the Apartheid Wall, (illegal) settlements, (Jewish-only) bypass roads, and checkpoints, strangulating Palestinian life, including educational life.¹⁰

The emergence of the BDS movement represented a rejection of the Oslo paradigm that was a major factor in the waning and pacification of Palestinian national resistance. Oslo played a role in the decline of mass mobilization in Palestine as it funneled many political activists, including leftists, into a defanged civil society infrastructure based on neoliberal concepts of participatory democracy and “good governance,” undermining grassroots movements that were already brutally suppressed by Israel. Oslo led to the Palestinian national community's fragmentation and division into political and administrative units through greater confinement as a result of the expanding Wall

and settlements, increased (racial) segregation, and restrictions on freedom of movement by Israel.¹¹ Palestinians were increasingly disconnected and divided from one another in the bantustans¹² created in the West Bank; in an encircled and peripheralized Jerusalem whose Palestinian residents were subjected to ongoing home demolitions and vicious settler attacks; and in a besieged and blockaded Gaza targeted for serial warfare and recurrent massacres.

The BDS paradigm challenges Oslo as it unifies Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and inside Israel within a movement based on shared national struggle, as outlined in the three principles of PACBI's call, cited above, challenging Zionist policies of colonization, displacement, and enclosure that have fostered partitioning and political division among Palestinians. It attempts to revive grassroots mobilization, outside of the Palestinian national parties and beyond the language of statehood and neoliberal democracy promoted by the Palestinian Authority. The BDS movement thus represents an important political intervention in the post-Oslo moment of political disillusionment and fatigue and the spatial shrinking of the Palestinian nation. BDS is one plank in an autonomous, grassroots movement to expand the horizon of the Palestinian national movement, and it is one to which many Palestinians of diverse ideological persuasions, religious backgrounds, and generational and geographic locations belong.¹³ It is important to situate the emergence of BDS in this historical context of Palestinian national politics, for it is a strategy to revitalize Palestinian collective resistance while creating and reviving circuits of global solidarity, linking the inside and outside of the besieged nation.

The BDS movement has helped resuscitate the politics of international solidarity with Palestine by invoking the discourse

of international human rights and international law. This is an important, if complex, move given that the Palestinian national struggle has long been exceptionalized in the United States as undeserving even of liberal human rights and outside of the acceptable parameters of global legal activism.¹⁴ The boycott is also embedded in a politics of left internationalism that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s—the era of Third Worldism and decolonial struggles that linked nations in the global South and left struggles with Palestine—but that has eroded with the decline of these movements, since the 1980s, under a consolidation of neoliberalism and neoconservatism and the dominance of U.S. imperial militarism (see Glossary s.v. *neoliberalism*). In the post-9/11 era and with intensified U.S. military interventions in the Middle East (or West Asia), progressive activists and intellectuals in the United States have increasingly situated Palestine within a framework of antiwar, anti-imperial, feminist, queer, and indigenous politics, viewing the Palestinian struggle as an important front of resistance to U.S. hegemony, in the West Asian region and globally, despite the immense pressure of the Israel lobby and the demonization of Palestine solidarity activists. In this context, the book considers the role the BDS movement has played in providing a language for international solidarity with Palestine that is embedded in an anticolonial and antiracist politics, as well as in rights-based activism.

BDS AND RIGHTS-BASED ACTIVISM

The political principles of the BDS movement are based on human rights, and the strategic power of the call for BDS is its appeal to international human rights and international law. This has been one of the strengths of the boycott movement that has

led to its growing power, as well as a thorny issue for leftists and progressives critical of rights-based activism. However, I argue that the boycott movement both rests on and exceeds the language of rights by relying on international human rights law to legitimize the Palestinian struggle, on the one hand, and on the other, by exposing the rightlessness of Palestinians and providing a political paradigm that is radical at its core.¹⁵

To press on this dualism of rights-based BDS politics, which may on the surface appear paradoxical but which I view as ultimately productive, I would point out that rights are not an abstract concept; rather, they are claimed by specific groups in particular contexts that perform rights claims, in order to make visible forms of violence or acts of erasure. It is certainly true that international human rights institutions are embedded in the racialized world order and distribute and endorse rights unevenly, as critics have rightly pointed out. Clearly, they have failed Palestine, and the Palestinian struggle has generally not been recognized as a legitimate human rights issue within liberal or mainstream U.S. discourse. This has led to a great deal of skepticism about the viability of human rights as a framework for Palestinian national liberation, understandably, especially in Palestine. But as anthropologist Lori Allen argues, drawing on her research with human rights workers in Palestine, this cynicism about human rights can be productive and animates a (Palestinian) political subjecthood that grapples with contradictions and tensions in human rights politics, and that is not duped by the promise of rights but able to operate in multiple political registers.¹⁶ We should thus view the rights discourse deployed by the BDS movement in a more nuanced and strategic way, as playing an important role in highlighting the rights of the rightless, and the power of those who can bestow rights. As the

political philosopher Jacques Rancière observes, it is mobilizing this gap, or space of contradiction, that is vital for politics. This is what the BDS movement, and boycott activism, does in mobilizing the contradictions of “Palestinian human rights.”¹⁷

Furthermore, the three principles guiding the BDS movement, cited earlier, address the fundamental contradictions created by a settler colonial state that professes to uphold human rights and democracy while creating an exception of rightlessness for Palestinians. The political framework of USACBI, on which the BDS movement is based, does not offer an explicit solution to the conditions in Palestine-Israel, nor does it propose a one-state versus two-state model; rather, it simply demands equality and justice for Palestinians. The Palestinian call is for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel until it ends its violations of the human rights of the three segments of the fragmented Palestinian nation, namely, refugees denied the right to return; those living under illegal military occupation in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem; and Palestinians within the 1948 borders of Israel, subjected to systemic racial discrimination. The focus on these core ethical principles has been unifying for the Palestine solidarity movement outside Palestine, which has been rife with internal divisions, as are most political movements across time and space.

Furthermore, the logical outcome of the three specific demands of the BDS call is that Israel would have to cease its colonial and racially discriminatory policies, end its military occupation, and recognize the right of return of Palestinian refugees. In effect, Israel would no longer be entitled to uphold the supremacy of Jewish citizens over non-Jews and no longer be a colonialist, apartheid, militarized garrison state. The core character of the Zionist state would be transformed (in theory) and

the racist logics of Zionism dismantled in order to realize a society based on racial equality, rather than racial and religious hierarchies that regulate life and death. So while the boycott formally relies on a rights-based approach, and it is true that human rights is embedded in a liberal universalist framework of international law, the BDS principles actually use the language of rights to promote an *anti-Zionist and decolonial paradigm* for liberation. These terms are not used in the official BDS call, obviously for strategic reasons, but in its de facto application the boycott paradigm enshrines a radical vision of emancipation.¹⁸ This point has been sometimes misunderstood or distorted—including by some left supporters of Palestine, for whom the boycott is not radical enough, not anticolonial enough, or even not grassroots enough—even though it has been acknowledged by Zionists, who have been increasingly panicked by the powerful threat that BDS poses to Israel. The vicious Zionist backlash, and the shrill claim that BDS aims to destroy Israel, is thus based on an understanding that BDS is a growing grassroots movement that essentially targets the fundamentally racist and colonialist nature of the Israeli state as we know it.¹⁹ As Steven Salaita points out, the BDS framework pivots on “basic rights of self-determination for the Palestinians (e.g. to return, to reside, to participate, and to belong),” and while nowhere does it include “the destruction of Israel,” these basic rights are incompatible with the “cultural and biological strictures of Zionism.”²⁰

In the following chapters, I will discuss how academic boycott organizers and advocates who endorse and promote the BDS principles sometimes do so while exceeding a liberal rights discourse, utilizing the language of apartheid and settler colonialism and framing solidarity via anticolonial, antiracist, anticapitalist, queer, feminist, and indigenous politics. While not all

these terms are explicitly invoked in the BDS call, many BDS campaigns have adopted the framework of settler colonialism and apartheid, concepts that travel across national borders and resonate with many who are drawn to anticolonial and antiracist struggles, especially in the United States. Later in the book, I will address how this intersectional politics—invoking race, gender, sexuality, nationalism, class, and indigeneity—has infused the boycott movement and driven successful campaigns based on cross-racial and cross-movement alliances. This broader solidarity and turn to BDS among progressives is precisely what has been so threatening to defenders of Israel, on the right as well as on the left, as I will explore in Chapter 3.

In the first chapter, I situate the academic boycott and BDS in a broader historical context, touching on earlier boycott movements during the civil rights and antiwar struggles in the United States, such as the Montgomery bus boycott and the United Farm Workers grape boycott, as well as the boycott and divestment movement challenging apartheid in South Africa. I also discuss the much less known history of the boycott in Palestine itself, and examples of civil disobedience that have historically been a central part of Palestinian resistance but have been overshadowed in U.S. mainstream discourse by the sensationalized focus on militant Palestinian resistance. This brief historical discussion reframes the narrative about the academic boycott as emerging from the experience of Palestinian anticolonial resistance, and not outside it. Chapter 2 charts a succinct history of the academic boycott movement in the United States, from the founding of USACBI to the first boycott resolution endorsed by the Association of Asian American Studies in 2013 and academic boycott organizing in other national academic associations, particularly the American Studies Association and American Anthropologi-

cal Association. This chapter combines personal reflections on my own organizing and interviews with some key organizers and supporters of the boycott from various fields, offering for the first time a grounded history of this social movement.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the backlash against BDS, especially attacks on the academic boycott movement, which is part of a well-orchestrated right-wing campaign that has reached the level of state legislation against BDS. Going beyond existing reports that simply document antiboycott campaigns, I use this archive of repression to offer an analysis of the cultural politics and racial/cultural wars in which the backlash is embedded. Furthermore, I discuss how Palestine is often the funnel of academic repression, in which powerful conservative and Zionist groups collude with university administrations to undermine democratic campus governance and academic employment rights. Building on this discussion, Chapter 4 explores how the boycott movement is on the frontlines of the struggle to democratize the neoliberal university, sparking solidarity among contingent academic workers, dissident and fugitive scholars, and activists. National campaigns, such as the mobilization in support of Palestinian American scholar Steven Salaita, and local labor union campaigns, have highlighted the centrality of the boycott to struggles over academic labor. The boycott, I conclude, is part of the struggle for academic abolitionism, or the movement to decolonize the university, and in support of decolonial struggles in Palestine. This book shows how the academic boycott is not just an act of withdrawal of complicity with settler colonialism and apartheid, or one of academic refusal, but also an act of demanding self-determination and decolonization, here and there.