

Israel, Palestine, and BDS: Cultural Conflict in Israel and Palestine



BDS: Problematic, Anti-Semitic, and Harming Cooperation and Understanding

By Natalie Goldberg, Vice President, 8/21/2019

Lorde. Jennifer Lopez. Nick Cave. Radiohead. Lana Del Rey. Not only are all of these well-known musicians, but they have also all faced intense controversy for a proposed Israeli show, with fans and haters alike calling for its cancellation. World tours turn political with the addition of such a program, leaving many artists cancelling tours in the area altogether. This begs the question of how artistic and cultural sharing affect the Israel-Palestine conflict, and more specifically, what this means for the cultural synergy that is oftentimes facilitated through music and art. So, who exactly is holding these artists “accountable” for their shows in Israel? The answer to this is supposedly the group Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, or BDS, a group modeled after South African anti apartheid organizations. BDS attempts to pressure the Israeli government to quell the human rights abuses occurring (Bakan and Abu-Laban 2009). While theoretically positive, in actuality BDS becomes nothing more than a shell covering up controversial and anti-semitic ideologies, with a definitive inability to separate anti-Israeli government/anti-Zionist sentiment with simple anti-semitism.

Anti-BDS advocates often remark that the primary goal of BDS is not productive. Rather than advocating specific policy changes and challenging government action, they are delegitimizing Israel as a whole, not just the policies being put in place. This has raised concerns regarding anti-semitic practices within the BDS movement, which are compounded by their lack of support for a two-state solution. Many Jewish leaders have also commented on the anti-semitic nature of the BDS movement. Dr. Harold Brackman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, remarks that the BDS “...is a thinly-veiled, anti-Israel and anti-semitic ‘poison pill,’ whose goal is the demonization, de-legitimization, and ultimate demise of the Jewish State.”

The involvement of BDS within the Israel-Palestine conflict has dire implications for the state of art and cultural coordination between the two nations, as one of the principal ways that BDS calls to boycott Israel is through art and music (Bulut 2018). Not only is BDS wildly anti-semitic; their actions are incredibly harmful to the state of cultural cooperation and understanding that music, art, and other creative avenues attempt to facilitate (Wolpe 2015). Thom Yorke of Radiohead, a band deeply involved in the Israel-Palestine controversy, wrote in a [tweet](#) that “music, art, and academia is about crossing borders not building them, about open minds not closed ones, about shared humanity, dialogue and freedom of expression.” Though met with criticism, the sentiment that Yorke expresses is important to consider when evaluating BDS’s actions.

Just earlier this week, artist Kota the Friend came under fire for his decision to cancel tickets for an Israeli show, and shared an [Instagram post](#) stating, “I’ve decided not to do the show in Tel Aviv due to the conflicting narratives. The internet is a wild place. Instead I’ll be taking a trip to

Israel and Palestine on my own so that I can speak to people, see what's up and learn more...I will go and come back informed. Peace!” The reactions from fans from both Israel and Palestine were mixed. Israeli fans critiqued his willingness to believe everything the media was telling him, yet others wished him a safe journey as he visited their country. Some Palestinian fans thanked him for his decision, while more expressed that they wished he would have performed one show in Tel Aviv and one show in the West Bank. Regardless, fans were pleased that Kota the Friend decided to take it upon himself to visit both Israel and Palestine in an attempt to see both sides of the conflict for himself.

Perhaps both sides of this ideological clash can look to his example, and seek to understand each other.

“Art-Washing”: The Usage of Culture to Cover-up Human Rights Violations
By Sumayah Basal, Head of Geopolitical Relations, 8/21/2019

Note: It is possible to criticize the state of Israel without being Anti-Semitic, as the state of Israel and Judaism are not one and the same. It is often important to separate these sensitive topics when discussing them as not to misconstrue either side.

August 1, 2019 - singer Jennifer Lopez came under fire for performing in Israel. She would not be the first. In recent years, multiple artists have been scrutinized for their decisions to perform in Israel; some inevitably choose to cancel their concerts altogether, while others kept their tour dates. The criticism and pressure that they face often comes from a group called BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanction) which is modeled after the movement in South Africa that formed against the apartheid situation. BDS believes that Israel is an Apartheid state, and protests the human rights and international law violations of Israel. Thus, when it comes to artists performing in Israel, they argue that such shows further perpetuate the Israeli occupation through instilling a sense of normalcy that covers up the atrocities occurring against the Palestinian people. While many critics try to dismantle the BDS, a UN [report](#) classified the state of Israel as an apartheid state “if being an apartheid state means committing inhumane acts, systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over another” (WP).

But what does any of this have to do with artists performing in Israel? This is where the term “Art-Washing” comes into play. Art-washing refers to the usage of art and culture to mask the actions of a state (Dazed). Israeli officials are even open about the usage of such tactics as a way to “show Israel's prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war” (Al Jazeera).

When artists perform in Israel, three things occur: Firstly, a distraction from the oppression of the Palestinian people. Further, a political statement of support occurs when artists simply visit Israel, whether they intend to or not. Finally, performances further segregate between Israelis and Palestinians as only Israelis can attend the concerts.

Artists touring or presenting in Israel perform only for Israelis due to the mass segregation present within Israel. Palestinians are not granted free movement, and must be granted special permits to travel outside of their towns and thus are not allowed to indulge in the performances that are brought to the region. This in and of itself is a massive inequality. While Israeli youth feel targeted by not being able to attend certain concerts, their Palestinian counterparts are trapped and must suffer the injustices of the Israeli occupation. When artists perform in Israel, it is a political statement of support for Israel, and it creates the narrative that the oppression of the Palestinians don't matter.

Furthermore, when it comes to the aspects of culture and art, the occupation has led to the erasure of a lot of Palestinian music and art. The dislocation of nearly one million Palestinians led to the elimination of the distinct village and regional music types. Before occupation, "every village had its own musical taste and style, different from other villages, and this gave birth to many unique, traditional songs. But that all changed when Israel was created and its forces occupied [Palestinian] land, tearing all this apart" (WRMEA). Furthermore, the conditions of relocation are not conducive to creativity, and thus stunt any cultural growth.

Finally, as we see in the case of Jennifer Lopez, the Jewish Journal wrote that "a thousand ambassadors would not have been able to improve Israel's image in the eyes of the world the way Jennifer Lopez, who has over 100 million followers on social media, has done during her five day visit to the Holy Land as part of her concert tour." Here we can see the direct effects of Art-Washing, as while Jennifer Lopez was vacationing across Israel, multiple concerning violations of human rights and international law occurred. However, the media was so focused on Jennifer Lopez and her trip that the instances never gained any real traction in the news scene.

These instances occurred firstly on August 11th 2019, which was Eid al Adha (religious holidays for Muslims). Approximately 1,500 settlers, protected by armed Israeli forces that lined the alleyways, stormed the yard in the biggest settler storming of Al Aqsa Mosque that occurred post Eid Prayer. The 100,000. Palestinian Muslims were greeted with an assault of rubber bullets, tear gas, and batons. These provocations aren't new, and there are often groups of settlers that stage such things daily (of which I, the writer, witnessed while visiting). However, no large media coverage arose from this instance, and it largely faded into the distant memory. Another instance in early July concerns the demolition of 10 neighborhood apartment complexes in Sur Baher Neighborhood, which is on Palestinian territory. Videos of Israeli soldiers celebrating demolishing the apartments were released on the Internet. This celebration of destruction sat sourly in the minds of many, especially considering the families in these homes were woken up to threats of demolition and thus forced to move. Furthermore, despite being gross violations of international law, the destructions have not been condemned by any international body. These are just two of many recent events occurring against the Palestinian people.

Yet, the focus of the world and the media has been the art and culture of Lopez. This is exactly how art-washing works. It creates a bigger facade to mask the underlying issues and

redirects attention away from the atrocities. Here, celebrity news has overshadowed some of the fundamental violations and injustices occurring, painting a mask of normalcy over violations that would not go overlooked had they been coordinated by another state.

Altogether, when looking at the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the lens of international law, analyzing factors such as culture helps contextualize some of the common indifference towards Palestinian struggles. In attempting to depict total normalcy through concerts, less questions arise towards the conditions and treatment of Palestinians.

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