



PINKWASHING

A Resource and Reading Packet for LGBTQ Leadership

COMPILED BY THE FACULTY ACTION NETWORK

While the United States continues to take a more incremental approach to the adoption of federal laws and policies that would protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Americans, her ally Israel continues to serve as a source of pride for those who cherish equality and justice, and seek progress for the LGBTQ community globally. Israel has been a leader in the equal treatment of the LGBTQ community in policies including the integration of LGBTQ people in the military, adoption processes, spousal benefits, anti-discrimination protections and legal recognition for same-sex couples.

In recent years however, a cynical breed of activist has sought to silence this story by labeling Israel's strong record of LGBTQ equality as a means to divert attention away from other issues, including Israel's actions within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Commonly labeled 'pinkwashing,' this term diminishes the achievements of the Israeli LGBTQ movement for social and economic justice. Just as we seek the public support of leaders and officials to advance policy and practice on this and other issues, it is both desirable and appropriate for a democratic nation or its people to trumpet their achievements. It is essential both to laud what works and, where necessary, fairly criticize what doesn't. Many progressive leaders, including those in the LGBTQ community, exercise their right of free speech to raise questions about policies regarding issues affecting Palestinians. However, conflating the two issues, and using Israel's strong LGBTQ rights record as a weapon against it, is cynical, unwarranted and only serves to undermine progress.

Many peace advocates work diligently to bring about a two-state solution to the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But unfortunately, some seek to damage Israel's reputation, at times even challenging her right to exist, by falsely equating Israel with apartheid-era South Africa and calling for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS). The BDS movement promotes a one-sided view of the problem by attempting to isolate and vilify Israel. This does more to hinder than to promote peace and reconciliation.

'Pinkwashing' is just another part of this phenomenon. Denigrating a nation or people for promoting a strong record of inclusiveness towards the LGBTQ community as a "cover up" undermines the facts, as well as progress. By building on values of equality and democracy for all, we can provide a positive, rather than negative, model for those seeking two states for two peoples living in peace and security.

Table of Contents

RESOURCE

TALKING POINTS ABOUT PINKWASHING – A WIDER BRIDGE	4
--	---

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- **AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH: THE MYTHS OF PINKWASHING – ARTHUR SLEPIAN**.....7

THIS SEMINAL ARTICLE EXPLORES THE PINKWASHING PHENOMENON AND DEMONSTRATES THE NEED TO LOOK FOR NUANCE AND REALITY IN CONTRAST TO THE BDS MOVEMENT.

- **ISRAEL AND “PINKWASHING” – SARAH SCHULMAN**.....14

IN THIS *NEW YORK TIMES* PIECE, THE AUTHOR INTRODUCES PINKWASHING TO A WIDE AUDIENCE, ASSERTING THAT ISRAEL USES THIS TACTIC TO DEFLECT CRITICISM OF ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD.

- **PINKWASHING IS NOT BLACK AND WHITE – JAY MICHAELSON**.....16

THE AUTHOR COUNTERS SCHULMAN’S ARGUMENT AS FALSE AND OVERSIMPLIFIED, AND PROVIDES A CRITIQUE FROM A PROGRESSIVE POINT OF VIEW.

- **“PINKWASHING” IS A WHITEWASHING OF THE FACTS REGARDING ISRAEL – LILLIAN FADERMAN**.....18

THE AUTHOR QUESTIONS WHY ANYONE WOULD NOT WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ISRAEL IS AN OASIS FOR LGBTQ PEOPLE IN A REGION THAT HAS NEVER BEEN WELCOMING.

- **PINKEYE – JAMES KIRCHICK**.....20

A STRONG CRITIQUE OF SCHULMAN’S *NEW YORK TIMES* PIECE.

- **THE CASE AGAINST PINKWASHING, OR WHY I’M GAY FOR ISRAEL – JAYSON LITTMAN**24

A COMPELLING, PERSONAL TAKE ON ISRAEL. THE AUTHOR DEMONSTRATES WHY CONDEMNING A NATION FOR ITS LGBTQ RIGHTS BECAUSE OF OTHER UNRESOLVED ISSUES SHOULD NOT BE A QUEER VALUE.
- **WHEN THE RIGHT IS RIGHT ABOUT THE LEFT – JAY MICHAELSON**28

THE AUTHOR FURTHER AMPLIFIES HIS CRITIQUE OF ISRAEL’S MOST VOCAL CRITICS, INCLUDING THOSE IN HIS OWN LGBTQ COMMUNITY, WHO SEEM UNWILLING TO ADDRESS ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT THAT DO NOT ALIGN WITH THEIR OWN THEORIES.
- **J STREET STATEMENT ON THE ACCUSATION OF PINKWASHING (APRIL 2013)**32
- **THE ABCs OF BDS (BOYCOTTS, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS) – THE ISRAEL ACTION NETWORK BDS FAQs**.....33
- **J STREET BLOG POST ON THE BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS (BDS) MOVEMENT**36
- **A LEFTIST’S CRITIQUE OF BDS – NAOMI PAISS**.....38

THE AUTHOR DEMONSTRATES HOW ENGAGEMENT WITH ISRAELIS WILL DO MORE TO HELP THE PEACE PROCESS THAN CAMPAIGNS OF ISOLATION
- **MAKING THE PROGRESSIVE CASE FOR ISRAEL – DAVID CAIRNS, MP**41

A COMPELLING SPEECH BY THE LATE MEMBER OF THE UK’S LABOUR PARTY, AND FORMER CHAIR OF LABOUR FRIENDS FOR ISRAEL
- **NYC ELECTED OFFICIALS SUPPORT LGBT CENTER, SUPPORT ISRAEL AND CONDEMN THE ACCUSATIONS OF “PINKWASHING” – STATEMENT BY NYC COUNCIL SPEAKER CHRISTINE QUINN, ET AL**.....45



TALKING POINTS ABOUT PINKWASHING

1. **The progress on LGBT rights in Israel has been real and hard fought over the past 25 years. They are a source of pride for LGBT people in Israel and for all friends of Israel. Contrary to those who wish to silence positive information about Israel, they are not the result of some planned PR campaign by the government.** The important and most relevant comparison is not with other countries in the Middle East, where the contrast is painfully obvious, but with the United States and the rest of the Western world. **LGBT rights are advancing in different ways in many countries around the world, but few countries have made as much progress in the past 25 years as Israel in advancing LGBT equality. A strong network of LGBT political leaders and community organizations, in combination with key straight allies and a court system with deep respect for equality has moved LGBT rights forward step by step, often ahead of much of the world, including the U.S. As a result, more LGBT Israelis are leading open lives, creating families, serving their country openly, and contributing in countless ways to strengthening the social fabric of the country. Out LGBT leaders and artists are at the forefront of the country's economic, social and cultural achievements.** The accusations of “pinkwashing” devalue the efforts of all those who have worked to make this change happen. Some highlights:

- 1998, Israel abolished its sodomy law, five years before the United States did.
- 1992, Israel established a law that protects any LGBT citizen (whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim) from employment discrimination. (The comparable bill in the United States – the Employment Non-Discrimination Act – continues to fail to pass Congress.) The Israeli law is notable in that it includes transgender people.
- 1993 -- Israel lifted its ban on LGBT military service – 18 years before the United States repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Since 1997, Israel has recognized same-sex partners as family members of soldiers.
- 1996-98, Israeli court decisions provide that both government and private sector employers must give full spousal benefits to same-sex couples
- 2005 -- Israel registers all same-sex marriages performed abroad as marriage.

- Other matters: Israeli same-sex partners are easily able to adopt their partners' children. Surgery for transgender sex reassignment is covered by Israeli medical coverage.
2. **The accusation of “Pinkwashing” is essentially a non-sequitor.** It is a convoluted argument that suggests that Israel is using its record on LGBT rights to justify its occupation of the Palestinian territories. How are those two issues related? Any clear thinking person can understand Israel’s record on LGBT rights on its own terms, and develop their own separate opinion about other issues in Israel, including Israel’s foreign policy. Only in the minds of those leveling the accusations of pinkwashing are these multiple issues connected. Progress in LGBT rights in Israel is not about Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians. It is in fact “homophobic” to suggest that Israel’s record on LGBT rights does not deserve to be understood on its own terms. It is an area of civil rights that Israel has gotten mostly right, and for which it deserves credit. The attempt to reduce everything that happens in Israel to the conflict, to use the Palestinian issue to quash dialogue about LGBT life in Israel—*that* is the real disinformation campaign. Most importantly, doing so dishonors the courageous decades-long struggle of Israeli LGBT activists to transform Israeli society.
 3. **Israel, like all countries, is entitled to conduct diplomacy and to promote tourism.** In doing so, any country naturally highlights the best of what it has to offer. Israel, to its credit, has a long list of positive attributes, including an economy that has produced major innovations in agriculture, medicine, computing, and communications that have benefitted the entire world, a robust arts and culture sector whose artists are free from censorship, and the pluralism of a diverse society. Israel does in fact seek to attract LGBT tourists, but that effort represents a tiny fraction of its overall diplomatic efforts. (And probably one tenth of one percent of what the pinkwashing critics have suggested the country is spending in this effort.) And in fact, using liberal gay rights or colorful images from Tel Aviv Pride is an extremely smart and successful way of branding Israel as an amazing international gay destination, but what must be remembered is that the branding is true – Israeli is *actually* an amazing international gay destination.
 4. **The accusations of pinkwashing must ultimately be understood as just one part of the arsenal of those who seek to completely delegitimize the state of Israel altogether and to promote the movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. (BDS) .**
From the website “Pinkwashing Israel:” Today, anti-pinkwashing activism is exploding everywhere. To build on this momentum, Pinkwashing Israel and [Palestinian Queers for BDS](#) [seek to create] ... a global movement to promote queer-powered calls against

pinkwashing and pushing the [Boycott, Sanctions, and Divestment Campaign](#) against Israel to the forefront of the global queer movement.

Repeatedly, those on the far left who lead the charge of pinkwashing tie it to the call for support of an international movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. (BDS)

5. The rejection of the accusation of “pinkwashing” does not mean that there is no room for legitimate criticism of Israel. It is possible for progressive minded people to celebrate Israel’s record on LGBT rights and oppose the movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) while also being critical of Israel’s policies. This applies to issues including the expansion of settlements and the treatment of Palestinians or other domestic issues. It is imperative to see the complexities of Israeli democracy with nuance and not through any one single lens.

6. The charges of “pinkwashing” are an example of a tactic often employed by those on the political extremes who seek to make it “politically incorrect” to speak the truth, when the truth is inconvenient or complicates the singular message they espouse. Those for whom Israel can do no right blind themselves (and seek to blind others) to the real progress that LGBT people have made in Israel, progress that often equals or exceeds that of most other countries in the world. And sadly, they also blind themselves to the plight of LGBT Palestinians. They are not even able to acknowledge that the voices of the small number of Palestinian LGBT people who have been brave enough to come out are being heard around the world because they have NGO’s that are established, housed and welcomed in Israel, not in Ramallah.

An Inconvenient Truth: The Myths of Pinkwashing

by Arthur Slepian

July 3, 2012

(Please note: This article is part of a broader debate on pinkwashing. For the debate's full table of contents, [click here](#)).

I am a gay man, an American, and a Jew. I am passionate about Israel, devoted to its well-being, and I want to see a resolution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians that will enable both to live in peace and security. My love for Israel and my commitment to LGBT equality led me to create A Wider Bridge, an organization dedicated to strengthening the bonds between the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities in Israel and America. I believe LGBT Jews have been a transformative force for good in the Jewish world, and that LGBT Israelis have been and will continue to be a vital force in creating a stronger and better Israel.

According to a group of activists who have gained a national megaphone, **our work is “pinkwashing,”** part of a conspiracy orchestrated by the Israeli government and many American Jewish groups to use Israel's progressive record on LGBT rights to divert attention away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some suggest that visits by Israeli LGBT leaders, including some of our programs, should be boycotted.

Recent events, including the Equality Forum's annual Global LGBT Summit in Philadelphia in May, which selected Israel as this year's “featured nation,” and Tel Aviv's fourteenth annual Gay Pride Parade in June, have brought forth new rounds of pinkwashing accusations. In May, *Tikkun* published **“Boycotting Equality Forum's Israeli Sponsorship,”** an article by Columbia law professor Katherine Franke and Rabbi Rebecca Alpert.

But the event that has continued to provoke the most controversy took place a few months ago: in response to pressure from advocates of BDS—boycott, sanctions and divestment from Israel—the Seattle LGBT Commission cancelled a scheduled public meeting with the leaders of three prominent Israeli LGBT organizations visiting the West Coast. A Wider Bridge was the lead sponsor of this West Coast visit.

Some BDS supporters declared the visit a “pinkwashing tour.” This charge was expanded upon in Richard Silverstein's June online *Tikkun* article, **“U.S. Gay Rights Activists: Stop Pinkwashing Palestinian Suffering.”** An earlier *New York Times* op-ed on **“Israel and Pinkwashing”** by Sarah Schulman, a lesbian civil rights activist and professor at the City University of New York (CUNY), helped place such claims on a national stage.

These and other anti-pinkwashing articles are rife with errors of fact and logic, generating more heat

than light. It's time to set the record straight.

Israeli LGBT leaders will continue to visit the United States, and will likely return to Seattle this fall. No doubt, BDS activists will try to silence their voices in an effort to "reprise Seattle," both there and elsewhere. Bursting the myths of pinkwashing has never been more timely.

A Failure of Imagination

The fundamental problem with anti-pinkwashing rhetoric is that it proceeds from imagined motives to imagined outcomes, projecting invented intentions onto Israeli and American Jewish and LGBT leaders. Then it takes two unrelated topics—Israel's LGBT communities and their progress in the struggle for equality and inclusion, and the Israel-Palestinian conflict—and asserts that they are inextricably intertwined. It implies that learning about the former will somehow magically dull people's ability to think about the latter. Those who level charges of pinkwashing at A Wider Bridge would render us invisible through caricature, pretending that we fit into a box of their own making. It's time for people to hear directly from us about exactly who we are and why we do what we do.

- We believe that Israel is the most important project of the Jewish people. And we believe in *K'lal Yisrael*, that all Jews share a fundamental connection and responsibility for one another. Forty percent of the world's Jews live in Israel, and it will soon surpass the United States as the country with the single largest Jewish population in the world. We are struck by how little the American Jewish and LGBT communities know about Israel's LGBT communities (and vice versa), and we aim to change that.
- We believe, that all Jews, both straight and LGBT, have a stake in Israel, in learning about its past, experiencing its present, and helping to shape its future. That stake impels us to strive to understand, participate in, and often wrestle with, Israel. We hope that people will come to care enough about Israel that when they do criticize, whether on LGBT or Palestinian issues, they will do so from love.
- We are not a political organization, but our work is founded on two basic tenets. First, we believe in Israel as a democratic Jewish homeland, and that Israel not only can but must fulfill its founding commitment to democratic values and civic equality while maintaining its identity as a Jewish state. We believe that working for LGBT rights in Israel helps it move closer to fulfilling that vision. Second, we believe that Israel is a country worthy of more engagement, more dialogue, more exchange of culture and travel, and should not be the object of boycotts and sanctions. On these points A Wider Bridge is aligned with J Street, the New Israel Fund, Jewish Federations throughout the country and a great many other Jewish organizations across the political spectrum.
- Within this very broad framework, we do not espouse a particular party line. We welcome those with firm views, as well as those who are undecided, confused or uncertain about how much all this matters. Our goal is to create opportunities for education, engagement and experience, new pathways for Americans and Israelis to learn from one another. We bring Israeli LGBT leaders to the United States and lead trips for LGBT Americans to Israel, fostering dialogue and collaboration. We trust in people's ability to make up their own minds.
- While our work is focused on building connections with, and support for, Israel's LGBT

communities, we are acutely aware that other human rights struggles exist, both within Israel and in the Palestinian territories. Our pride and celebration of Israel's progress in LGBT rights does not mean that we endorse all the policies of its government. We hope for a time when Palestinians will live in dignity, free from occupation, and Israelis will no longer live with the daily threat of rocket fire or terrorist attack, or the fear of nuclear war. We care about the lives of LGBT Palestinians, who often face extraordinary and heartbreaking challenges.

There are those for whom the *only* frame through which to see Israel is the conflict, with a one-dimensional country cast as a colonial, racist oppressor worthy of the pariah status of South Africa in the days of apartheid. This is the taproot of the BDS movement; it is why there is so much agitation in some quarters about "pinkwashing."

I reject that frame, along with the portrayal of Israel as a nation that can do no wrong. Israel is a complicated, challenging, messy, inspiring, and exhilarating country. It is a land full of seeming contradictions that cannot be reduced to simplistic slogans.

But one of the most remarkable things about Israel is that over the past twenty-five years there has been great progress in the area of LGBT rights, which has made it easier for gay people to lead open lives, create families and serve their country.

This is not to suggest that Israel has become some kind of gay paradise: no country in the world qualifies for that title. It is still very hard to be gay in many parts of Israel, there are still many rights battles to be fought and won, and there have been some tragic incidents of anti-gay violence. But there is great work being done on the ground by activists of all kinds. Israeli LGBT filmmakers, performers, writers, and artists are creating groundbreaking work that is transforming culture. And never mind the obvious comparison with its neighbors. Relative to most nations of *the world*, including the United States, Israel is a good place to be gay.

All this is an inconvenient truth for those who want to demonize Israel, or turn every conversation about LGBT progress in Israel into an argument about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Much of the discussion of "pinkwashing," both in general and with regard to the recent Seattle events, is rooted more in myth than fact. Here, then, are the myths, in the critics' own words, and the evidence which explodes them.

The Top 5 Myths of Pinkwashing

Myth #1—It's really about something else. *What appears to be an event about LGBT issues in Israel is really an attempt to "justify the Israeli occupation" and deflect attention from it, a ruse to "ignore the oppression of Palestinians" or "promote Israel's human rights record."*

Fact: Untrue on all counts, as anyone who came to any of the events would know. The delegation we brought to the West Coast educated people about the Israeli LGBT community, its issues and struggles, and about their work. The leaders spoke frankly about both the positives and the negatives in Israel's gay rights record, in some cases highlighting shortcomings that they are fighting to change. Our aim was to enable Israeli LGBT activists to meet with and exchange ideas with organizations in the United States

facing similar challenges. Conversations focused on ways to help LGBT teens in crisis, prevent queer teen suicides, help parents LGBT children find support, and share strategies for HIV testing, prevention and care, among other topics.

Not surprisingly, many LGBT Israelis are people of the left. Many of the Israeli LGBT leaders we have brought to the United States hold very critical views of the occupation and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Even if it is not the main topic of discussion, audience members nearly always have some questions that in some way relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—usually about the situation of Palestinian gays in Israel, or occasionally about pinkwashing—and we and our speakers welcome that. Our guests respond with a variety of nuanced answers which would often surprise anyone who expected our speakers to parrot a single viewpoint. We don't select the LGBT activists we bring to the U.S. based on their views on Israeli-Palestinian issues.

Israeli LGBT communities, organizations, leaders, and artists existed long before the pinkwashing debate. The Israeli government didn't conjure them into existence as part of a PR campaign; nor did they come into being to serve as a foil for BDS supporters and the anti-occupation movement. They are their own people with their own objectives, leading real lives, often with great struggles, and there is much we can learn from both their triumphs and challenges.

Myth #2—The problem is our cosponsors, our West Coast events were an “official” tour, and we are really just a mouthpiece of the Israeli government. *The West Coast LGBT leaders' visit was a “pinkwashing tour.” The delegation was “in large part doing the bidding of the Israeli government,” and tour participants were “an official delegation ... chosen by the Israeli government,” says Silverstein. We “teamed with Stand with Us” to bring the delegation to the West Coast.*

Fact: False all the way around. The six Israeli leaders came here on their own initiative, and participants were selected by the Israeli LGBT NGO's together with A Wider Bridge. They came here—as numerous other Israeli LGBT leaders have—to strengthen the LGBT community in Israel by connecting with counterparts here and to share their work with the U.S. LGBT community. We helped them come here because we share those goals.

A Wider Bridge was the principal U.S. sponsor of this West Coast tour. Individual programs were cosponsored by numerous organizations including LGBT Jewish groups and synagogues, the New Israel Fund, local federations, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Israeli Consulate. Stand with Us helped to arrange and cosponsored several events in Seattle; they provided no funding for the tour. No matter who joins in with us, our audiences are always treated to an open, engaged conversation with an array of activists from Israel's LGBT leadership. We partner with a variety of cosponsors, on the right and on the left, even if we do not fully share their agendas, priorities or communication styles. But this need not mean that we cannot sometimes find common ground to work together. Nor do we believe that every cosponsorship of an event requires us to defend all that our cosponsors do or distance ourselves when we disagree. The presence of cosponsors does not change the fundamental nature and purpose of our events.

To state the obvious, we are not surrogates for the Israeli government. We are clear about our own mission and objectives. We do believe in Israel's right, like every other country, to conduct public

diplomacy, whether as an antidote to demonization, to encourage trade and tourism, or for other legitimate purposes. We take pleasure in the fact that among the multitude of things that Israel chooses to promote about itself (and there are a great many facets of Israel in which to take pride and celebrate), it devotes a small amount of attention to its LGBT community. Where our interests converge, we are happy to cosponsor programs together.

Yet sometimes the actions of the Israeli government on LGBT rights are not aligned with its rhetoric, and sometimes both the rhetoric and actions fall short of where they should be. We support many campaigns for change within Israel in this arena. Among these are the efforts to enact civil marriage, including same-sex marriage, and the recent initiative in the Knesset to bolster protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender. And we support those who are working to persuade the government to develop more compassionate policies regarding gay Palestinians who flee the West Bank and seek refuge in Israel because their lives are in imminent danger either from their families or the Palestinian police.

Sidenote: Now let's correct a matter of "photographic error." Silverstein alleges that a photo from the West Coast LGBT Israeli NGO leaders' tour depicts "an LGBT staff member from Israel's NW Consulate [who] accompanied the delegation and appeared on a panel with it as if he were a member," proving that the tour was an exercise in "Israeli government pinkwashing."

In fact, everyone in the photo was a delegation member, and not from the Israeli Consulate. JTNews mislabeled the photograph, confusing Avner Dafni, the executive director of Israeli Gay Youth, with a representative of the Israeli Consulate, who was not on the panel or in the photograph. Those who attended the event and got to see what it was really like, knew who the panelists were. Those who boycotted it, and encouraged others to do so, relied only on secondhand inaccurate information. This is one of the problems with cultural and educational boycotts: they prevent us from understanding each other, learning from each other, questioning our own assumptions, and even from knowing the facts.

Myth #3—Israeli gay rights can't be separated from Palestinian human rights: *When we celebrate gay rights in Israel, it is impossible to focus on "the human rights violations taking place in Palestine." To talk of one, is to deliberately ignore, or drown out, the other. The two can never be separated.*

Fact: Progress in LGBT rights in Israel is not about Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. A comparison with the U.S. civil rights movement might prove instructive. Advances in the United States toward African American civil rights and desegregation in the mid-1960s and beyond took place despite U.S. participation in a war in Vietnam that most Americans came to oppose. Celebrating and aiding that progress—marked by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—was not rendered inappropriate by a war waged by the very same American administrations that backed the civil rights struggle under presidents Kennedy and Johnson. A great many Jews fought *for* civil rights and *against* the Vietnam war. It would have been wrong to condemn American society or government *in toto* because of opposition to the country's actions abroad. It is wrong to do so to Israel today.

Whatever one thinks about Israel's role vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the attempt to reduce everything that happens in Israel to the conflict, to use its treatment of Palestinians to quash dialogue about LGBT life in Israel—that is the real disinformation campaign. Most importantly, doing so dishonors the courageous

decades-long struggle of Israeli LGBT activists to transform Israeli society.

Myth #4—It's either Israelis or Palestinians: *“Pinkwashers aim to harness the global LGBT movement into supporting Israel at the expense of the Palestinians.” Exchanges with Israeli LGBT leaders “invisibilize” and “marginalize” LGBT Palestinians.*

Fact: Wrong. The anti-pinkwashing campaign helps feed the conflict by painting everything as a zero-sum game. Israel's record on LGBT rights and its treatment of Palestinians are positioned in some imaginary game of “tug of war.” If you are discussing one, your agenda must be to conceal the other. Yet celebrating gay rights in Israel has never stopped anyone, including our speakers, from criticizing the policies of the Israeli government toward Palestinians. Being pro-Israel doesn't make one anti-Palestinian, just as being pro-Palestinian doesn't automatically make one anti-Israel; these are false choices.

What's more, the idea that all gay people should automatically take either Israel's or the Palestinians' side in the conflict simply by virtue of being gay, as people on both the right and left sometimes claim, is equally misguided. In a response to Schulman, gay Jewish scholar and activist **Jay Michaelson writes** about the wide range of opinion among LGBT people on Israel: “LGBT people hold these views not because we are deluded or traumatized, but because people hold views. To suggest that queers should all have a certain view (i.e., the author's) is the kind of essentialism one usually finds among homophobes.”

In reality, it is often “pinkwashing” critics who seek to harness the global LGBT community in support of the “pro-Palestinian” campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel. We have never sought to cancel, boycott or silence Palestinian LGBT leaders, either in the United States or Israel. It is the pro-BDS movement that is attempting to silence and “invisibilize” Israeli LGBT leaders.

Myth #5—Anti-pinkwashing activists are for “true free speech”: *Those who agitated to cancel the Seattle LGBT Commission event were not violating the tenets of free speech. True free speech requires the airing of a diverse range of views at every event.*

Fact: The effort to cancel events like those in Seattle is an attempt to police the bounds of what may be discussed about Israel. For many BDS advocates, only the occupation may be spoken of—everything else is to be silenced and boycotted. For others, no conversation with Israeli LGBT leaders about the work of Israeli LGBT NGOs should be permitted unless it addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For these critics, speech is free only when it is “politically correct,” when it involves the “proper” range of political diversity, as defined by them.

Now some of those who protested the Seattle meeting suggest that if only the delegation were more diverse, if only a dozen other topics were added to the agenda, perhaps they would not protest some future meeting. Their arguments for canceling the meeting can be summed up this way: the meeting wasn't going to reflect their views about Israel. They say they favor “true free speech,” but in practice it looks a lot more like censorship.

Arguments about diversity and an expanded agenda ring hollow. One single meeting can never be

designed to satisfy everyone with divergent views. Must a panel of visiting religious leaders be canceled unless it includes atheists? Must a visit by the leaders of Planned Parenthood be transformed into a spirited discussion about the morals of contraception? When a delegation of visiting LGBT Palestinians toured the United States last year, should it have been criticized because no Israeli Jews were included? We did not think so then, and we do not think that should be the case now.

Here is one very timely example of how absurd this situation has become. On June 23 in San Francisco, Frameline's LGBT Film Festival showed "The Invisible Men." The film is a documentary by Israeli filmmaker Yariv Mozer about the struggles of gay Palestinian men who escape from the West Bank in fear of their lives, only to be forced to live illegally in Tel Aviv, with no possibility of Israel granting them asylum. The men live in constant trepidation of being discovered by the police, who usually deport them immediately back across the border. The Palestinian men are the heroes of the film, and the film shines a very critical light on Israeli policies that need to be changed.

Yet at the outset of the evening about a dozen people staged a protest inside the theater, **accusing Frameline of pinkwashing**. Why? Because the festival had allowed the Israeli Consulate to cosponsor the film and to provide funding to fly the director to San Francisco. The film and the director received a strong ovation from the audience. The protestors, who claimed to care about queer Palestinians, did not stay to see the film or hear the discussion with the director. The film also documents the efforts of Israeli volunteers, who work courageously (and in the case of the three men described in this film, successfully) to secure asylum for these men in an un-named European country.

Another Way

Pinkwashing has become the new straw man of the pro-BDS movement. It sees pinkwashers wherever it turns its gaze, much as the American right once saw "communists" lurking under every bed. If the pinkwashers are everywhere, BDS advocates have perpetual cause for mounting the barricades, now on Israel's LGBT front. Discourse about Israel must be all about the occupation all the time, or face charges of bad faith. If every visiting Israeli LGBT leaders' event can be cast as a bid to divert the attention of Americans away from the conflict, if anything touched by the Israeli government automatically becomes *treif*, there is always a simple choice between good and evil. Simple, all too simple.

But LGBT people embrace the rainbow. It's time we start seeing Israeli and Palestinian LGBT people—and Israel itself—through a lens that reveals every shade of the rainbow. Charges of pinkwashing distort the lens; calls for boycott and censorship shatter it. Now, more than ever, we must view Israel through a lens that shows the nuanced reality and illuminates the path toward a better future.

(To read Wendy Elisheva Somerson's [rebuttal to this article](#) and other perspectives on pinkwashing, [click here](#).)

Arthur Slepian is executive director of A Wider Bridge (awiderbridge.org), a San Francisco-based national organization that seeks to develop stronger connections between the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) communities in Israel and North America.

tags: **Activism, Gender & Sexuality, Israel/Palestine**

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

November 22, 2011

Israel and 'Pinkwashing'

By SARAH SCHULMAN

"IN dreams begin responsibilities," wrote Yeats in 1914. These words resonate with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who have witnessed dramatic shifts in our relationship to power. After generations of sacrifice and organization, gay people in parts of the world have won protection from discrimination and relationship recognition. But these changes have given rise to a nefarious phenomenon: the co-opting of white gay people by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim political forces in Western Europe and Israel.

In the Netherlands, some Dutch gay people have been drawn to the messages of Geert Wilders, who inherited many followers of the assassinated anti-immigration gay leader Pim Fortuyn, and whose Party for Freedom is now the country's third largest political party. In Norway, Anders Behring Breivik, the extremist who massacred 77 people in July, cited Bruce Bawer, a gay American writer critical of Muslim immigration, as an influence. The Guardian reported last year that the racist English Defense League had 115 members in its gay wing. The German Lesbian and Gay Federation has issued statements citing Muslim immigrants as enemies of gay people.

These depictions of immigrants — usually Muslims of Arab, South Asian, Turkish or African origin — as "homophobic fanatics" opportunistically ignore the existence of Muslim gays and their allies within their communities. They also render invisible the role that fundamentalist Christians, the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Jews play in perpetuating fear and even hatred of gays. And that cynical message has now spread from its roots in European xenophobia to become a potent tool in the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In 2005, with help from American marketing executives, the Israeli government began a marketing campaign, "Brand Israel," aimed at men ages 18 to 34. The campaign, as reported by The Jewish Daily Forward, sought to depict Israel as "relevant and modern." The government later expanded the marketing plan by harnessing the gay community to reposition its global image.

Last year, the Israeli news site Ynet reported that the Tel Aviv tourism board had begun a campaign of around \$90 million to brand the city as "an international gay vacation destination." The promotion, which received support from the Tourism Ministry and Israel's overseas consulates, includes depictions of young same-sex couples and financing for pro-Israeli movie screenings at lesbian and gay film festivals in the United States. (The government isn't alone; an Israeli pornography producer even shot a film, "Men of Israel," on the site of a former Palestinian village.)

This message is being articulated at the highest levels. In May, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Congress that the Middle East was "a region where women are stoned, gays are hanged, Christians are persecuted."

The growing global gay movement against the Israeli occupation has named these tactics "pinkwashing": a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life. Aeyal Gross, a professor of law at Tel Aviv University, argues that "gay rights have essentially become a public-relations tool," even though "conservative and especially religious politicians remain fiercely homophobic."

Pinkwashing not only manipulates the hard-won gains of Israel's gay community, but it also ignores the existence of Palestinian gay-rights organizations. Homosexuality has been decriminalized in the West Bank since the 1950s, when anti-

sodomy laws imposed under British colonial influence were removed from the Jordanian penal code, which Palestinians follow. More important is the emerging Palestinian gay movement with three major organizations: [Aswat](#), [Al Qaws](#) and [Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions](#). These groups are clear that the oppression of Palestinians crosses the boundary of sexuality; as Haneen Maikay, the director of Al Qaws, has said, “When you go through a checkpoint it does not matter what the sexuality of the soldier is.”

What makes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies so susceptible to pinkwashing — and its corollary, the tendency among some white gay people to privilege their racial and religious identity, a phenomenon the theorist Jasbir K. Puar has called “homonationalism” — is the emotional legacy of homophobia. Most gay people have experienced oppression in profound ways — in the family; in distorted representations in popular culture; in systematic legal inequality that has only just begun to relent. Increasing gay rights have caused some people of good will to mistakenly judge how advanced a country is by how it responds to homosexuality.

In Israel, gay soldiers and the relative openness of Tel Aviv are incomplete indicators of human rights — just as in America, the expansion of gay rights in some states does not offset human rights violations like mass incarceration. The long-sought realization of some rights for some gays should not blind us to the struggles against racism in Europe and the United States, or to the Palestinians’ insistence on a land to call home.

Sarah Schulman is a professor of humanities at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York.

◀ **MORE IN OPINION** (1 OF 23 ARTICLES)

OPEN

**Opinionator | Draft: Am I an
'Immigrant Writer'?**

[Read More »](#)

- Forward Association
 - Association Home Page
 - Events
 - Donate
- About
 - Masthead
 - History
 - In the News
 - Employment
- Contact
 - Advertising
 - Subscriptions
 - Editorial

Free Newsletter:



Forward.com

Forward Thinking



news and views

Previous

[Connect the Dots: IDF vs. Rabbis, Silencing the 99%](#)

Next

[A Piece of Hasbara Aimed at Alienating Me](#)

November 29, 2011, 1:15pm

Pinkwashing Is Not Black and White

By [Jay Michaelson](#)

Last March, this newspaper published a classic example of pinkwashing, which is the concerted effort by supporters of Israel to tout Israel's excellent LGBT rights record to win support for Israel in general. In their straightforwardly titled piece, ["LGBT Activists Should Know Friends From Foes,"](#) Stuart Applebaum and Benjamin Weinthal stated plainly that activists "should be sure we are on the right side of history" by supporting the only pro-gay regime in the Middle East.

This, of course, is absurd. Yes, Israel has a stellar record on LGBT rights, and yes, all of its neighbors have abominable ones. But that doesn't mean gay people should provide blanket support for all of Israel's policies, especially those vis-à-vis the Palestinians. To even suggest that queer people should "know who our friends are" is a wild over-simplification of what friendship means (to me, it doesn't mean a blank check), and what the LGBT community is meant to stand for. For example, plenty of thoughtful LGBT people believe that queers should not just look out for our own privileges, but stand with all oppressed people, including Palestinians.

And of course, plenty of supporters of Israel, this one included, believe that criticizing the current government's conservative policies is in Israel's best interests. Just as I patriotically criticized George W. Bush, so I Zionistically criticize Benjamin Netanyahu. This is what is meant by a "loyal opposition."

Now comes veteran lesbian playwright-activist Sarah Schulman, who somehow convinced the New York Times to give her [800 words of prime real estate](#) to over-simplify the situation from the Left. Schulman began

COMPILED BY THE FACULTY ACTION NETWORK

— after a distracting and obviously bogus discussion of the Netherlands — by rightly noting that Israel has been spending money to improve its image overseas, including highlighting its record of LGBT issues.

Then Schulman went off the rails. First she argued that all Israeli PR is “a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians’ human rights.” Then she argued that Palestinians don’t have it so bad; after all, sodomy is decriminalized, and there are three Palestinian gay rights groups. And then, drawing on the scholarship of Jasbir Puar (which was heavily criticized at the American Academy of Religion conference last month), she alleged that gay supporters of Israel “mistakenly judge how advanced a country is by how it responds to homosexuality.”

All three of these statements are inexcusable lapses in reason.

First, Israeli Gay PR exists for many reasons. One is indeed to burnish Israel’s overall reputation and “pinkwash” its policies toward the Palestinians — and I have criticized that not just in my written work, but to Israeli governmental officials in person. However, surely branding Tel Aviv as a “gay destination city” has more to do with tourism than propaganda, and surely celebrating diversity in Israel can exist to, well, celebrate diversity. Schulman views all of Israel through the single lens of the Israel/Palestine conflict. In fact, there are many perfectly ordinary and perfectly defensible reasons why Israel would want to tout its pro-gay civic life.

Second, Palestine is hell for queer people. LGBT Palestinians live in constant threat of state-sanctioned murder and violence. Family members murder gay relatives in “honor killings” while the police do nothing. The three miniscule advocacy organizations Schulman cites are courageous, but totally marginal. I’ve met Palestinians who sneak across the green line to hide from vengeful relatives, to find queer community, and even to dance at gay bars. Yes, the Palestinians are oppressed. But not all victims of oppression are angels. Schulman’s depiction of a rainbow Palestine is a radical oversimplification that smacks of Orientalism.

Finally, I know many gay and lesbian supporters of Israel, including some whose politics are quite right-wing. Although a few, like Applebaum and Weinthal, purport to do so on the basis of Israel’s treatment of its gays, the vast majority support Israel for the same reasons straight people do: because they are Zionists. (When push comes to shove, I suspect this is why Applebaum and Weinthal do too.) Some queer Jews emphasize their solidarity with all victims of oppression, while others feel more solidarity with the Jewish state. Some of us feel pulls in both directions. LGBT people hold these views not because we are deluded or traumatized, but because people hold views. To suggest that queers should all have a certain view (i.e., the author’s) is the kind of essentialism one usually finds among homophobes.

Schulman’s views on Israel – she supports boycott/divestment/sanctions (BDS) and is on the advisory board of Jewish Voice for Peace – are perfectly legitimate, as is her linkage of them with her understanding of queer identity politics. And pinkwashing is real, notwithstanding the hysterical denials of some. (The AJC’s David Harris, who should know better, offered [one](#) on the Huffington post, adding the insult-word “lifestyle” to describe sexual orientation and thus undermining any credibility he might have with LGBT issues.)

But it is also possible, coherent, and defensible to at once appreciate Israel’s LGBT rights record, criticize Israel’s policies in the occupied territories, oppose BDS, condemn Palestinian oppression of LGBT people, and highlight the nuances and complexities of the Israel/Palestine issue that do not reduce to simplistic oppressor/victim dichotomies. Maybe that’s too complicated a position to pitch to the Times editorial page. But Israel, and Palestine, are complicated places.

Jay Michaelson writes the Forward’s Polymath column.

COMMENTARY: "Pinkwashing" is a whitewashing of the facts regarding Israel

Sarah Schulman **suggests that Israel**, in its diabolically cunning way (now where have we heard that before about the Jews?), started a cynical campaign in 2005 to improve its image, and that campaign included an appeal to progressives who support LGBT rights.

Yet the fact is that LGBT rights in Israel go back *long before* 2005.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, Israeli LGBT people have enjoyed rights that predated or exceeded those rights given to LGBT people in America -- and almost anywhere else in the Western world. And the struggle for them in Israel has been nowhere near as prolonged or difficult as it has been in America and most of Europe.

I'll limit myself to just a few examples of those rights enjoyed by ALL LGBT citizens of Israel, whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim:

- In 1988, all sodomy laws were abolished in Israel.
- In 1992, Israel passed a law protecting any LGBT citizen (Jewish, Christian or Muslim) from employment discrimination.
- In 1994, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in favor of spousal benefits for same-sex couples — regardless of whether they were Jewish, Christian or Muslim.
- In 2004, Israeli lesbian or gay couples (Jewish, Christian or Muslim) were given the right to qualify for common-law marriage status.
- In 2005, the same year that Schulman says Israel began its suspicious attempts to show that LGBT people were welcomed there, Israeli legislation recognized all same-sex marriages performed abroad.



Lillian Faderman

The only place in the Middle East that Arab LGBT people can organize OPENLY is Israel.

Al Qaws holds its "Palestinian Queer Parties" in a gay bar in Tel Aviv. Aswat, the Palestinian lesbian organization, held its conference at Tel Hai College in northern Israel. Jerusalem Open House hosts meetings of Arab Israeli LGBT people and organizations.

Since 2002, the Refugee Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University has been fighting for asylum for LGBT Palestinians who fear for their lives in the territories.

A 2008 academic report "Nowhere to Run," on gay Palestinians who seek asylum in Israel, records experiences of, for example, a gay man living in the West Bank who was set on fire as punishment for his sins; another who was immersed for days in filthy water up to his neck; another who was sodomized with a coke bottle by West Bank police who taunted him, asking whether it was as good as a "c*ck up his a**."

With all the disasters going on in the world — e.g., the near-genocide of non-Arabs in Sudan, the murder and starvation of hundreds of thousands there, the ongoing conflicts there, such as Northern Sudan's attempts on Nov. 10 to bomb a refugee camp in Southern Sudan (where's your outrage about that?) — what else but insane, irrational, obsessive hatred of Israel would cause people who believe they care about the world to focus on Israel's best policies and to find diabolic intent behind them?

What else but insane, irrational, obsessive hatred would keep you from acknowledging that Israel is an oasis for

LGBT people in a region of absolute horror?

Lillian Faderman is an internationally known scholar of lesbian history and literature, as well as ethnic history and literature. Her work has been translated into numerous languages, including German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Turkish, Czech and Slovenian. Among her many honors are six Lambda Literary Awards, two American Library Association Awards, and several lifetime achievement awards for scholarship, including Yale University's James Brudner Award, the Monette/Horwitz Award, the Publishing Triangle Award, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives Culture Hero Award, and the American Association of University Women's Distinguished Senior Scholar Award. The New York Times named two of her books, "Surpassing the Love of Men" and "Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers," on its Notable Books of the Year list. You can learn more about Faderman at her [website](#).

Pink Eye

Critics of Israel say the state touts its gay-rights record only to conceal its oppression of Palestinians. They call it pinkwashing. That's nonsense.

By [James Kirchick](#) | November 29, 2011 7:00 AM



In June 2007, I [marched](#) ^[1] in Jerusalem's gay pride parade. To do so was a risk. A group of ultra-Orthodox rabbis had issued a hex on the event. "To all those involved, sinners in spirit, and whoever helps and protects them, may they feel a curse on their souls, may it plague them and may evil pursue them," they declared ahead of the march. Two years earlier, a fanatical Orthodox Jew had stabbed three parade participants. And in 2006, a prominent Hebron sheikh had asserted that the parade was "a cancer whose objective is to destroy the Islamic nation through humiliating Jerusalem by demonstrating the perversions of gays and lesbians." Gays serve an ecumenical purpose in the Holy Land: Extremist Jews and fundamentalist Muslims put aside their differences to join together in hating them.

Thankfully, no violence occurred at the 2007 parade, though hundreds of anti-gay activists lined the route shouting imprecations and holding hateful signs. "Go to a shrink," one particularly blunt poster

read. “Go Away. Your sickness should be healed, not flaunted,” declared another. Over 7,000 police and army officers protected the marchers, and snipers were placed on the rooftops of nearby buildings.

As the ugly reactions to the parade revealed, the vast array of rights that gay people enjoy in the Jewish state—which include serving openly in the military, adoption, domestic partnerships, and the recognition of marriages performed abroad—did not emerge from nowhere. These rights are the fruit of hard work on the part of many activists, gay and straight, who had to push for them against politically powerful, socially conservative elements. This ongoing fight for inclusion was manifested most recently in the [creation](#) ^[2] of an LGBT faction within the Labor Party, supported by all the party's Knesset members except for Arab-Israeli MK Raleb Majadele.

But the struggles of Israeli activists and the progress they've achieved are meaningless to some, including [Sarah Schulman](#) ^[3], professor, novelist, and self-described “active participant citizen.” In a *New York Times* [op-ed](#) ^[4] published last week, Schulman argued that these advances in gay rights are merely a “potent tool” in the Jewish state's “pinkwashing,” by which she means Israel's “deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life.” As evidence of this so-called pinkwashing, Schulman cited the fact that the Tel Aviv tourism board is spending \$90 million on a campaign to market the city as “an international gay vacation destination.” For Schulman, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's reference to the Middle East as a region “where women are stoned, gays are hanged, Christians are persecuted” in his May speech to Congress is yet another example of the sinister pinkwashing trend, also known in many quarters as diplomacy.

Schulman, a supporter of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, isn't the first person to employ the phrase. In May, a writer for *Time* magazine alleged that Israel and Israelis' participation in a series of international gay events was part of a [coordinated campaign](#) ^[5] undertaken “in the hopes of redirecting [Israel's] global image away from politics, terrorism and the occupied territories.” Joseph Massad, a professor of Arab politics at Columbia University, told *Time* that Israel launched this effort “to fend off international condemnation of its violations of the rights of the Palestinian people.” (Massad has written a book, *Desiring Arabs*, which [alleges](#) ^[6] the existence of a nefarious “Queer International,” with supporters of Israel at its core, whose “discourse ... produces homosexuals as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist” so as to paint Arab cultures as barbaric.)

The first fallacy of the pinkwashing meme is that it's a non sequitur. No one is saying that Israel ought to be immune from criticism because it treats gay people humanely. Israel's stellar record on gay rights does not prevent anyone from condemning the country's settlement policies, its proposed ban on foreign funding of NGOs, or its lackluster effort to integrate Arab Israelis—issues that Israeli gay activists, many of them leftists, would gladly join Schulman in denouncing. But none of these failings renders Israel's record on gay rights any less impressive, nor does touting that record constitute a covert method of justifying the occupation or racism against Arab citizens.

Schulman seems incapable of such discernment. “Increasing gay rights have caused some people of good will to mistakenly judge how advanced a country is by how it responds to homosexuality,” she wrote in the op-ed. While it would be foolish to judge a country's “advancement” solely on the rights of

gays, it is a telling standard. The protection of minorities is a bedrock principle of any liberal society, and it is an indisputable fact that sexual, racial, and religious minorities are better off in Israel than they are anywhere else in the region.

Though Schulman claims that, “pinkwashing ... manipulates the hard-won gains of Israel’s gay community” it is Schulman who renders these gains meaningless. According to her, the victories of gay-rights advocates in Israel do not exist in and of themselves, but are cogs in a grand propaganda machine to legitimize occupation and oppression. The effort to create a more open and inclusive Israeli society is merely part of a broader PR campaign—undertaken, ironically enough, by the same right-wing forces who recommended I see a psychiatrist to cure me of my homosexuality—to fool credulous Western liberals into believing that Israel is something it’s not.

While accusing the government of Israel and pro-Israel activists of deceiving well-intentioned progressives, Schulman and her ilk are in fact using the issue of gay rights to forward an ulterior agenda. So consumed are they by hatred of Israel that they are willing to distort the truth about the horrible repression of homosexuals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. If there’s any cleaning of dirty laundry going on here, it is Schulman’s whitewashing the plight of Palestinian gays.

Schulman’s assertion that homosexuality has been effectively “decriminalized” in the Palestinian territories since the 1950s when Jordan revoked colonial-era sodomy laws, will come as cold comfort to the countless gay Palestinians who have fled^[7] to Israel after being tortured or receiving death threats by Hamas or Fatah agents. Schulman’s claim would certainly come as news to Maen Rashid Areikat, the PLO’s ambassador to Washington. When asked earlier this year if homosexuality would be tolerated in a future Palestinian state, Areikat replied, “This is an issue that’s beyond my [authority].” Hamas strategist Mahmoud Al-Zahar was blunter. In comments directed toward Westerners, Al-Zahar told Reuters last year that “You do not live like human beings. You do not (even) live like animals. You accept homosexuality. And now you criticize us?” And whatever law might be on the Palestinian Authority books has yet to persuade the leaders of Aswat, a Palestinian lesbian organization, to relocate their headquarters to Ramallah from Haifa. By making the absurd claim that the issue of gay rights is being “manipulated” by the Israeli government, Schulman ends up making excuses for people who kill homosexuals.

Recognizing the enormous gap between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on their respective gay-rights records, critics of the Jewish state have gone to tremendous lengths to propagate a massive lie in order to win over Western progressives. This cognitive dissonance has driven ostensible intellectuals like Columbia University’s Massad to justify the oppression of gay Arabs, as he did in the aftermath of the 2001 “Queen Boat” incident in Egypt, when police raided a gay disco and 52 men were arrested, tortured, and put through a humiliating show trial. “It is not the same-sex sexual practices that are being repressed by the Egyptian police,” Massad wrote in *Desiring Arabs*, “but rather the sociopolitical identification of these practices with the Western identity of gayness and the publicness [sic] that these gay-identified men seek.” In a 2006 interview with the *Advocate*, Aswat co-founder Raudo Morcos complained^[8] about people who portray Palestinian culture as “backward” regarding its treatment of homosexuals. “What is backward? Backward to whom? Are we comparing the Middle East, the Arab community, to the Western world? This is not a fair comparison,” she said. But if Morcos and other

advocates of the Palestinian cause genuinely believed in human rights then they would, without hesitation, acknowledge the suffering of Palestinian gays. It's not mutually exclusive to criticize both Palestinians and Israelis.

Introducing the term "pinkwashing" into the mainstream debate about the Arab-Israeli conflict is edifying in at least one respect: It lays bare the delusion, paranoia, and cynicism of the Jewish state's most earnest detractors. In their minds, any positive statement made about the country is necessarily part of a propaganda campaign in the service of a far-right agenda. For an increasingly large swath of the international left, there really is no good Israel can do, short of disappear.

James Kirchick, a fellow with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, is a columnist at [Tablet](#). Follow him on Twitter [@jkirchick](#).

Find this story online: <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/84216/pink-eye>

Tablet Magazine is a project of Nextbook Inc. Copyright © 2013 Nextbook Inc. All rights reserved.

OPINION: The Case Against Pinkwashing, Or Why I'm Gay For Israel

Imagine a nation that prohibits workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, allows gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military, provides domestic-partner benefits in the private and public sectors, recognizes gay adoptions (and gay marriages performed abroad), has LGBT celebrities whose careers haven't been hurt by their coming out, and saw more than 100,000 people attend its most recent Pride parade—even though the whole country is smaller than the state of New Jersey?

What if I told you that, despite being one of the most pro-gay democracies on Earth, this country is under fire from the gay-activist set?



You may have guessed: I'm talking about Israel—a country that, when it comes to Pride, proves size doesn't always matter.

As an American Jew born and raised in New York, my connection to Israel as a child was somewhat limited. I wasn't one of those cool kids whose family did a bar mitzvah tour of the Western Wall, but I do remember being extremely annoyed receiving as gifts, certificates of trees that were planted in Israel in honor of my becoming a "man."

But I lived in Israel for two years after high school and have made several trips back since. I am active and support various LGBT organizations in Israel and other pro-Israel organizations in the USA.

I'm not exactly sure what Zionism really means today. But "Zionism" was my winning word in a game of *Scrabble* during a Fire Island Pines weekend back in 2008.

My love and passion for the State of Israel actually matured after I came out: I truly felt comfortable in Israel as a country that supported and accepted my two greatest identities: gay and Jewish. It was amazing to be in a place that provides legal protection to LGBT people and has a rich cultural gay life—and simultaneously embraces my Jewish identity. It felt like home.

But lately my home is being attacked by other gays, Jewish and non-Jewish. And that makes me uncomfortable and even angry.

Many vocal queer activists are accusing Israel of using its positive record on LGBT rights to divert national and international attention away from Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people. They've created a term for this:

COMPILED BY THE FACULTY ACTION NETWORK

Pinkwashing.

In the *New York Times* op-ed “[Israel and Pinkwashing](#),” Jewish lesbian writer and playwright Sarah Schulman defines the term as “a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians’ human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life.”

Pinkwashing is a misleading term because it implies that Israel’s treatment of gays is merely a stunt, which is completely invalid. Are pinkwashing activists really suggesting that the richness and diversity of pro-gay life there is all a conspiracy by the government to distract me from other issues within the region? It would be hard to make up the reality that is gay life in large swaths of Israel.

You really can’t invent a climate of not just tolerance, but acceptance, for the sole sake of propaganda.



If people like Schulman are claiming that progressive attitudes towards the gay community are being used to conceal certain violations against Palestinian people, then they must also accuse Israel of womenwashing (for the rights women have), speechwashing (for freedom of speech), presswashing (freedom of press) and other transgressions.

Each year the Human Rights Campaign [applauds Fortune 500 companies](#) that provide benefits to their LGBT employees. Is HRC pinkwashing by not highlighting some questionable practices of Corporate Equality Index honorees like Bank of America and Nike?

In January, members of our LGBT community have been arrested and tortured in [Kuwait](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#) for their sexual identity. Why have we heard *so little* from these same activists protesting such atrocities?

And how many of them protested Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iran’s anti-gay statements when [he visited New York City](#)?

I have no issue with people criticizing Israel’s policies or treatment of the Palestinians but the Jewish State is singled out more than many other nations. Activists are perpetually dismissing Israel’s record on LGBT rights for the sake of highlighting other issues.

This is wrong.

Israel is held to a standard that no other country has to clear: In the last ten years, the United States went to war with Iraq and Afghanistan and [civilian losses](#) there caused by the U.S. military are far higher and have continued longer than any conflict in Israel.

When Israel pulled out of Gaza, Hamas was elected by the Palestinians—a known terrorist group now issuing bans on women from [riding on the back of motorbikes](#), men from [working in hair salons](#), and most recently, [the Palestinian version of American Idol](#), calling such things indecent.

Where are the queer marches against Hamas?

I think one of the main reasons why queer American activists and organizations [don’t target](#) many Middle Eastern countries where gays are truly oppressed is because there’s little satisfaction protesting countries where freedoms (sexuality, speech, assembly) are limited for *everyone*. Has New York’s LGBT Center held a Sanction Iran

Day, the way it attempted to host [Israel Apartheid Week](#)?

Yes, Israel is advertising its homo-loving tendencies to the world. And, yes, GayCities members just voted Tel Aviv [Best Gay City in the World](#), with 43% of vote.

But that's isn't to say things are perfect. It's no secret that the Israeli LGBT community is still dealing with major issues: Just as in the U.S., the religious right is attempting to strip queer Israelis of their rights. Additionally, some gays suffer mistreatment [in the army](#), basic rights of HIV carriers [have been violated](#), many are still recovering from [the 2009 shooting](#) at Tel Aviv's LGBT center, and the recent closing of the city's [last lesbian bar](#) has saddened locals.

And Israeli LGBT activists are still pushing Israel for further civil protections and protesting Israel's treatment of Palestinians—with no reprisals because they live in a democracy.

In a recent article in [Tablet](#), James Kirchik sums up claims of pinkwashing by saying :

“[They reveal] the bare delusion, paranoia and cynicism of the Jewish State's most earnest detractors. In their minds, any positive statement made about the country is necessarily part of a propaganda campaign in the service of a far-right agenda. For an increasingly large swath of the international left, there really is no good Israel can do, short of disappear.”

Israel's immediate neighbors are Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria—I can tell you for a fact that the rights of gays and lesbians in these countries aren't boastworthy—they're nonexistent. LGBT activists should spend more time, money and energy protesting nations where gays and lesbians are persecuted, jailed, tortured and even killed.

To put this into context, during my last trip to Israel I logged onto Grindr while spending some time near Kibbutz Misgav Am near the Lebanese border. I chatted briefly with a guy who was just a couple of miles away.

Here's part of our conversation:

Me: Where u at?

Him: SoLe.



Me: ???

Him: Southern Lebanon.

Me: Ohhh... um, I'm in Israel. I can't get across the border because I have Israel stamped in my passport.

Him: Well, I can't come across either, well, because I'm in Lebanon.

Me: Damn you Middle Eastern politics for getting in the way of my possible future husband! How about you add me on Facebook?

Him: Too risky, your Facebook profile is too gay.

I was stunned—I never had to worry about being too gay in Israel. But just a couple of miles away, in South Lebanon, the fear a gay man had of befriending me—for being too gay, mind you, and not too Jewish—was quite telling.

I will continue to show the world that I love Israel and believe in its inalienable right to exist—and I appreciate the liberties and confidence it gives me as a gay Jew. I don't necessarily have to agree with all the policies of the Israeli government. I would encourage our community not to create a queer value of condemning a nation that has progressive LGBT rights to its citizens just because there are other unresolved conflicts.

Meanwhile, I am trying to locate my bar mitzvah gifted-trees so I can cash them out for my next summer-share on Fire Island.



Jayson Littman is the founder of He'bro, a social group that produces and promotes events for secular and cultural gay Jews in New York City. The views presented here do not represent the opinions of He'bro. For more information, please go to myhebro.com or contact Jayson at jayson@myhebro.com. You can also follow him at twitter.com/jaysonlittman

Photos: Jayson Littman, Andrew Ratto and David Shankbone

When the Right Is Right About the Left

Critics of Israel Should Be Open About Beliefs



Against War, or More? And once the occupation is ended, is there a next target for a protest?

By [Jay Michaelson](#)

Published July 30, 2012, issue of [August 03, 2012](#).

Let me start with my bona fides. For several years, and at significant personal cost, I have spoken out about Israeli policies in the West Bank, in particular the settlements and the route of the separation barrier, which I deem to be generally illegal, immoral and harmful to both Israelis and Palestinians. I am also a longtime activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and have supported those in my community who protest Israel's policies — including by calling for boycotts, divestment and sanctions, which I do not support — on the basis of a shared solidarity with those who are oppressed. And an essay I wrote in these pages a few years ago on my wavering love for Israel still gets plenty of airtime and plenty of nasty comments.

I begin with these left-wing credentials because my aim in this column is to call out my liberal colleagues on certain of our blind spots and try to communicate to fellow progressives when, in my view, their criticism of Israel becomes deeply problematic — even, dare I say it, anti-Semitic. I do so because, just as I am uncomfortable in Jewish nationalist circles where people routinely make racist, violent and ethnocentric remarks (and where those remarks support real-world policies with real effects on real people), so, too, I am uncomfortable in left-wing circles where some people evince a casual disregard for the legitimate concerns of Israelis and Jews, for the very real and very deep problems on the Palestinian side, and even for the truth.

When does this happen? I'll give four examples, focusing, where appropriate, on the LGBT community, which I know fairly well.

COMPILED BY THE FACULTY ACTION NETWORK

First, there is a problematic lack of disclosure among many critics of Israel that their ultimate view is that Israel should not exist at all. For example, despite having recently defended the Jewish Voice for Peace organization in these pages, I do not accept its leadership's decision to remain officially agnostic on the "one-state solution" — that is, the end of the Jewish state and its replacement by a majority-Palestinian one — especially because when I talk with the JVP supporters I know, that turns out to be their personal view.

Now, whatever the merits of a one-state solution as opposed to a two-state solution, surely activists and pundits should be clear about their ultimate views so that they may be understood. In my view, what is wrong with the Occupation is that it oppresses Palestinians, undermines Israel's sustainability and contradicts Israel's own democratic ideals. But that's quite different from saying that the entire Israeli state is illegitimate. Yet, many times, left-wing critics of Israel pretend to speak out about this or that human rights abuse, while really, they have no vision for the future other than Israel not existing at all. I find myself supporting one cause (criticizing this latest abuse) when the *real* cause is actually something else (calling for the end of Israel).

This is a shell game, and it's dishonest. Just as I call out my right-wing friends to tell me their endgame (per Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon, this involves Israel wearing down the Palestinians for decades so that they will be willing to accept a deal; per Avigdor Lieberman, it involves population transfer), so I call out my left-wing friends to do the same. Tell me what the endgame is. Is it the end of the Jewish state entirely? Is it the return of Jewish "colonialists" to Europe and North Africa, from whence they fled under the shadow of anti-Semitic violence? Or, perhaps, is it an immediate, unilateral withdrawal — in which case, what is to prevent the West Bank from becoming the next Gaza, with rockets falling all over Israel? I am absolutely on board with criticizing many Israeli policies, but I also want to know where my partners stand on "final-status" issues. Otherwise, I'm being co-opted.

In addition to betraying liberal allies, the radical-left shell game also causes conservatives to be rightly suspicious of anything the left says. J Street, for example, consistently and regularly repeats that it supports the existence and security of the State of Israel. Yet because its further-left allies do not make the same assurances, the whole progressive enterprise is viewed with suspicion by the right (which includes most funders of American Jewish institutions).

Second, there's the one-state policy itself. Café-radicals who support this view need to look it squarely in the eye and call it what it is: selective cultural genocide. There is no way that a binational state will be a safe haven for the Jewish people or that it will preserve Jewish culture. It also creates a curious anomaly: the one-state solution means that every people on the planet, from Peruvians to Pakistanis, deserves self-determination — except one. This is where anti-Zionism slides into anti-Semitism. Why are Jews to be treated differently from every other nation on the planet? Is Jewish nationhood more dubious than others? Other states, too, have minorities within them, and have boundaries that include those minorities' historical lands — including Peru and Pakistan (the latter, of course, the result of the partition of British Colonial India). So why call for one state in Palestine but not elsewhere?

Now, a good radical can argue that all states and all forms of nationalism are illegitimate, that the United States should return Native American lands to the Native Americans and so on. But that same radical must explain why that change should begin with Israel, a small state surrounded by enemies, rather than with, say, France. Critiquing nationalism strikes me as a good idea — but using Israel as the test case is so bizarre as to invite accusations of bias. At the very least, radicals should "come out" if their real target is nationalism of all kinds. Of course, doing so places one beyond the pale of mainstream political discourse — but at least it's honest.

Third, and relatedly, it is true, as the Jewish right alleges, that the left is oddly focused on the State of Israel, as opposed to human rights abusers who are demonstrably and quantitatively worse — including Chinese policies

in Tibet, America's unrecompensed genocide of Native Americans, the suppression of the Roma in Europe, the destruction of indigenous cultures in the Amazon and countless other examples. China's occupation of Tibet has killed more Tibetans than there are Palestinians in Gaza. If we're interested in solidarity with the oppressed, let's focus on those who are most oppressed.

Of course, Israel, unlike China, is the beneficiary of massive aid from the United States, so Americans may be right to focus on it. But the rhetoric one hears is not so subtle. As reflected in the recent public opinion poll that ranked Israel roughly equivalent to North Korea (a totalitarian regime with a network of concentration camps, widespread starvation and nuclear belligerence toward its neighbor), Israel is often depicted as the most oppressive country on Earth. Which is objectively absurd.

It's not hard to see why many Jews perceive this as anti-Semitism. And for leftists to simply wave away these deeply felt concerns is, itself, offensive. No, the Holocaust does not justify every policy of the State of Israel. But it does justify a heightened level of scrutiny when criticizing Jews. Just as I try to remind myself of my white privilege, my economic privilege and my male privilege in my anti-oppression work, so, too, anti-oppression activists should be aware of the reality of anti-Semitism and the way it informs political discourse. If you single out the Jewish state for criticism among all countries in the world, the onus is on you to demonstrate that your discourse is free from conscious or unconscious anti-Semitism. Even if you're Jewish.

Finally, many of Israel's critics are guilty of massive oversimplification of both Israeli and Palestinian society. For its part, Israel is often defined solely in terms of the Occupation, as if it's the only salient feature of Israeli life and culture. Any discussion of other topics — its environmental achievements, LGBT rights, even domestic social justice issues — is said to be a distraction, or propaganda, or worse. That is absurd. Israel, like anywhere else, is multifaceted and complex, and discourse about Israel is not a zero-sum game. Ads promoting "Gay Tel Aviv" are tourist advertising, not political propaganda. Hyperbolic public relations about Israelis inventing the cell phone is PR, not some attempt to justify the Occupation. Imagine if everything Americans said about themselves was seen as a smokescreen to obscure the oppression of Native Americans.

But the flattening of Palestinian society is even worse. Ironically, given the critics doing it, it's Orientalist to depict the Palestinians — as Sarah Schulman did [in the pages of The New York Times](#) — as noble victims of European colonialism, free from blemish and fault. Such oversimplifications are no different from those of noble "Indians," noble poor people, or noble savages in general and are offensive to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

For example, in one of the accounts of an LGBT trip to the Palestinian territories last year, one participant expressed dismay at being told not to be visibly affectionate with her female partner. This naiveté is revealing. Palestinian society is patriarchal, homophobic and conservative. The Palestinian Authority has done little to prosecute so-called "honor killings" (that is, murders of LGBT people or unmarried women suspected of sexual activity), and there are hundreds of LGBT Palestinians living, legally and illegally, in Israel as a result. That doesn't mean that Palestinians shouldn't have the right to self-determination, but it does mean that facile dichotomies of victim and oppressor are misplaced. I don't know what queer paradise this particular individual expected to find in Ramallah, but the expectation says much about the naive propagandizing that takes place in my community. There's pinkwashing on both sides of the political fence.

And I've not even touched the erasure of non-European Jews from this Orientalist, black-and-white rhetoric; the lack of economic analysis of Arab oppression; the shockingly naive statements about Islamist parties and their aims (from the likes of Judith Butler, no less); the shared responsibility for the collapse of the Oslo process at Camp David; the death toll in the second intifada that provoked the construction of the security barrier, and a dozen other complicating factors that undermine the attempts of literature professors and armchair activists to adequately assess this situation.

I remain committed to a two-state solution and a just resolution of this conflict. My sympathies are still with progressives, Jewish and Arab, who seek peace rather than victory. I oppose the ethnic cleansing of East Jerusalem (funded by a handful of American Jewish “philanthropists”), and the minimizing of Palestinian issues due to the threat of a nuclear Iran. But just as I wrote three years ago that I was losing my love for Israel, so, too, am I losing my affinity with Israel’s most vocal critics, especially in my own LGBT community, who seem unwilling to address those aspects of the conflict that do not comport with their theories, or to forthrightly state the assumptions that underlie their critiques. There is a place in public discourse for rigorous and radical critique of oppression, imperialism and politics. Yet the critical eye must be turned inward, as well.

Top Stories

J Street Statement on the Accusation of Pinkwashing

APRIL 9TH, 2013

J Street applauds the achievements of the Israeli LGBT community and Israel's record of LGBT equality. This record underscores many of the shared progressive, democratic values we as supporters of Israel celebrate.

J Street disagrees with those who seek to cast any and all promotion of Israel's record of LGBT equality as merely a means to obscure other issues, like Israel's treatment of the Palestinians-- a notion some have called "pinkwashing."

Israel is far from alone among nations in promoting its positive attributes in its public diplomacy, and we welcome Israelis expressing pride in the achievements of their LGBT community.

At the same time, Israel, as with all countries, has serious concerns that it must address, including the treatment of Palestinians and its policies in the Palestinian Territory.

As the conflict continues, the need for two-states has never been greater. And never before has a renewed, forward-focused conversation about the urgent need for American leadership been as necessary. Viewing Israel solely through any one lens -- either through the gains of the LGBT community or through the occupation -- does not advance the pragmatic conversation this situation demands.

The same progressive, democratic values reflected in Israel's strong record on LGBT equality similarly highlight the urgency of preserving Israel's Jewish and democratic character and ending the occupation through a two-state solution.



WHAT ARE B.D.S TACTICS?

- BDS refers to boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) that place economic and political pressure on states to influence their behavior.
- The Jewish community – along with many in the international community – has and does correctly support the use of these methods when appropriate, such as Apartheid-era South Africa in the 1980s and Iran today.
- Unfortunately, these tactics have been co-opted by the “BDS Movement” that propagates an extreme, inflammatory and biased political agenda designed to end the democratic Jewish, multicultural State of Israel.

WHAT IS THE B.D.S. MOVEMENT (OR CAMPAIGN)?

- The BDS Movement is a global network of individuals and organizations who aim to isolate Israel politically, economically and culturally. Their overall objective is to challenge Israel’s right to exist as the sovereign homeland of the Jewish people, which is often called delegitimization.
- The BDS Movement attempts to have their agenda adopted by institutions including colleges and universities, faith-based communities, labor unions, civil and human rights organizations and minority groups, as well as all others they can successfully influence.
- While they claim they are interested in an equitable and peaceful solution to the conflict, their goal is undermine the democratic Jewish state of Israel and the two-state solution, and to create one Arab majority and one Arab state.
- To accomplish their goal, the BDS movement offers a distorted, intolerant and one-sided picture of a complex situation.
- At the same time, the boundaries of the BDS Movement and its supporters are not always clearly defined. Often the BDS Movement attempts to co-opt well-meaning people who seek an immediate peaceful resolution to a complex, long-standing conflict. It is thus essential to recognize the true goals of the BDS Movement. They offer a false choice of acting either in Israeli or Palestinian interests while the goal should be to act in both of their interests.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE B.D.S. MOVEMENT?

- Despite claiming to seek “peace,” the BDS Movement works unambiguously to undermine the “two states for two peoples” solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is the commonly accepted goal of the United States, the European Union and the United Nations.
- For example, the BDS Movement calls for the return of Palestinian refugees (from the Arab war against the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948) to move into modern day Israel, not a Palestinian state, which would eliminate the State of Israel as we know it and replace it with an Arab majority state in all of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.
- Omar Barghouti, one of the founders of the BDS Movement stated, “Good riddance! The two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is finally dead. But someone has to issue an official death certificate before the rotting corpse is given a proper burial and we can all move on ...”
- Even Norman Finkelstein, a prominent and harsh critic of Israel, denounced the BDS Movement because it aims for “the end of Israel.”
- Clearly the strategy of the BDS Movement is to delegitimize Israel’s very existence in order to secure a one-state solution to the conflict through Israel’s dissolution as a Jewish and democratic, multicultural state.

WILL BDS TACTICS HELP TO SOLVE THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT?

- The goal of peace depends on both Israelis and Palestinians working together with international support towards the mutual goal of a negotiated two-state solution. In contrast, BDS tactics are one-sided and are focused solely on pressuring Israel, thus creating a distorted picture of the region. Rather than improve the situation, these advocates undermine the internationally-backed peace process that is premised on the development of mutual understanding and respect.
- Economic boycotts and divestment actions will not help the Palestinian people. The path to the two-state solution depends on creating an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation combined with economic development and political achievement.
- Boycotts are not new. Ever since Israel's establishment, the Arab world has tried to use an economic boycott to isolate and weaken Israel politically and economically. While Egypt and Jordan have trade links with Israel, most Arab countries do not trade directly with Israel. The Roadmap peace plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (proposed by the United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations) specifically calls for the normalization of relations between the Arab states and Israel, including the return of trade links.

WHY ARE ACADEMIC, TRADE AND CULTURAL BOYCOTTS PROBLEMATIC AND WHO HAS REJECTED THEM?

- Promoting an academic and cultural boycott of Israel – a central goal of the BDS Movement – contradicts the principles of academic freedom and the open spirit of international cooperation between scientists, artists and others. It is particularly counterproductive to target Israel's academic community, which promotes honest debate, criticism and self-examination within Israeli society. Israel's universities enroll significant numbers of Arab students and are important forums for interaction and cooperation between Jews and Arabs. Indeed, Omar Barghouti, the BDS leader, recently received his doctorate from Tel Aviv University.
- It is for that reason that the American Association of University Professors [has rejected any academic boycott of Israel](#). Likewise, prominent Palestinian academics such as Sari Nusseibeh, president of Al Quds University in East Jerusalem, have been firm critics of efforts to boycott Israeli universities and academics.
- For similar reasons, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 312 affiliated organizations in 156 countries and territories representing 176 million workers, [rejected calls to support the BDS Movement](#) and, instead, called for a two-state solution to allow both peoples to live in peace and security.

WHO HAS REJECTED DIVESTMENT RESOLUTIONS?

- Divestment resolutions promoted by the BDS Movement have been widely rejected by a variety of organizations as being counterproductive to the goal of reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict.
- For example, in 2013 TIAA-CREF, the leading retirement provider for people who work in academic, research, medical and cultural fields, declined to present a divestment proposal to its shareholders. In fact, TIAA-CREF won approval from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) stating that consideration of such a resolution was unnecessary in 2013, and follows a similar SEC ruling in 2011. Similarly, the United Methodist Church, the nation's largest mainline Protestant denomination, and the Presbyterian Church (USA), both voted against divestment resolutions at their 2012 conventions. The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church has also rejected divestment and boycotts as "unhelpful."

WHAT ABOUT SANCTIONS?

- Sanctions typically refer to attempts by national governments, multilateral organizations and other international bodies to limit or ban trade and other relations with certain states. Importantly, the United States and Western countries – as opposed to Iran or Apartheid-era South Africa – completely reject applying sanctions to Israel. Indeed trade, scientific exchanges and cultural relations have flourished between Israel and the rest of the world over the last decade. In fact, in 2010, the influential Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) voted unanimously for Israel to join its ranks, praising its scientific and technological progress as having “produced outstanding outcomes on a world scale.”

WHAT IS THE JEWISH COMMUNITY’S VIEW ON APPLYING BDS TACTICS AGAINST ISRAEL?

- While the safety and welfare of Israel is of great concern to the entire American Jewish community, it holds diverse views on what will bring peace in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the community, including organizations such as [Ameinu](#) and [J Street](#), seeks peace with Israel’s neighbors and has consistently opposed the approach, methods and goals of the BDS movement.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADVANCE PEACE FOR THOSE IN THE CONFLICT?

- Those seeking to foster peace should support programs and efforts that promote reconciliation and coexistence, rather than those that attempt to eliminate the Jewish, democratic, multicultural, sovereign State of Israel, as advocated by the BDS Movement. We need to support efforts that help the parties move toward a “two states for two peoples” solution that would create a Jewish and democratic state of Israel, alongside an independent nation-state of Palestine.
- There are many positive opportunities to build the Palestinian economy and infrastructure, as well as encourage economic cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. It is through these types of activities that we can help both Palestinians and Israelis live together, side-by-side.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON THE BDS MOVEMENT

- Israel is a pluralistic and democratic society and these tools are neither appropriate nor are they an honest attempt to bring about peace. The BDS Movement is simply using these tactics to tell an anti-Israel story which is counterproductive, disingenuous and plain wrong.
- We need to extricate ourselves from the old paradigm of the BDS Movement that advocates a win-lose approach and unfairly demonizes Israel. We should be building bridges between different peoples, not burning them.
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: “Don’t use cures that don’t cure, blessings that don’t bless, solutions that don’t solve.” BDS tactics won’t solve the conflict, encouraging investment, engagement and a negotiated solution can.



[J Street Blog](http://jstreet.org/blog) (<http://jstreet.org/blog>)

[Get The RSS Feed](http://jstreet.org/feeds/blog) (<http://jstreet.org/feeds/blog>)

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement

May 1st, 2012

J Street strongly opposes views and positions such as those captured at the Palestinian BDS National Committee's website, www.bdsmovement.net. As laid out in that site, the BDS movement fails to explicitly to recognize Israel's right to exist and it ignores or rejects Israel's role as a national home for the Jewish people. In addition, the promotion by some in the BDS movement of the return to Israel of Palestinian refugees from 1948 and their families indicates support for an outcome incompatible with our vision of Israel and incompatible with a two-state solution to the conflict.

For some, the BDS movement has become a convenient mantle for thinly disguised anti-Semitism. While concern about the present and future of the Palestinian people is both legitimate and warranted, these concerns do not justify categorically delegitimizing and demonizing another people. J Street recognizes the legitimate and urgent concerns related to peace, justice and human rights that have motivated calls on college campuses and beyond to boycott certain Israeli products or divest from U.S. companies that support continuing Israeli policies of occupation and settlement expansion, or for governments to impose sanctions on Israel. We recognize that the sluggish pace of diplomatic progress toward a two-state solution motivates some of these efforts. However, the urgent need for peace will not be reached through alienation. J Street believes that a peace resolution will be reached through international, and more specifically regional, cooperation. Long-term progress will be achieved through diplomatic means, not isolation.

We oppose the occupation of the West Bank and the expansion and entrenchment of settlements there. We also oppose encroachment on Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem, which must be part of a future Palestinian capital if a two-state outcome is to be achieved. We support loosening the blockade of Gaza, since – in addition to the humanitarian concerns it raises – Israel has smarter, more effective ways of ensuring security through monitoring rather than blocking imports into Gaza at secure crossings. We oppose governmental and NGO expenditures beyond the green line to the extent that their purpose is to expand and deepen the settlement enterprise.

J Street believes, however, that these legitimate concerns are best addressed through urgent pursuit and implementation of a two-state resolution to the conflict. A two-state resolution is, in our view, the only way for Israel to guarantee long-term international recognition and security. Failure to achieve it in the immediate future threatens the founding vision of Israel as both democratic and the national home of the Jewish people – as Israeli leaders including Ehud Barak, Tzipi Livni and Ehud Olmert have pointed out.

We note positively that some groups promoting BDS tactics are trying to narrow the scope of boycotts or divestment initiatives to oppose simply the occupation and not Israel itself. The Palestinian Authority, for instance, does not call for a boycott of Israel itself or Israeli goods, but of settlement products, unlike the all-encompassing boycott of Israel promoted by the global BDS Movement. J Street, however, will not participate in targeted boycott or divestment initiatives. We are focused on creating the political will and atmosphere necessary in the United States to promote strong American leadership to achieve a two-state resolution to the conflict.

We are concerned that the global BDS Movement will build momentum and enjoy viability so long as the occupation continues – and that makes the pursuit of the two-state solution all the more urgent. Efforts to target Israel’s legitimacy as a Jewish state will probably continue even after the conflict is resolved and the occupation ended, but the strength of such efforts will dwindle.

Barring proponents of BDS from participation in communal discussion or events is counterproductive and, more important, is a violation of our values. We believe that the Jewish, democratic and most effective way to counter views one disagrees with is not to try to silence them, but to subject them to the scrutiny of a vibrant and open debate.

Finally, as Palestinians and others explore avenues to express non-violent opposition to occupation and settlements, we would urge the pro-Israel community to distinguish carefully between the use of non-violent tactics to oppose Israeli policy and the violence that has so plagued the region in the past. We welcome the emergence of significant non-violent activism in the Palestinian community and beyond, and we recognize the vital difference between pursuing violent and non-violent forms of struggle for freedom and human rights.

Read more:

- [Letter from Rachel Lerner, VP for the J Street Education Fund regarding BDS](http://jstreet.org/blog/post/letter-from-rachel-lerner-vicepresident-of-j-street-education-fund) (<http://jstreet.org/blog/post/letter-from-rachel-lerner-vicepresident-of-j-street-education-fund>)
- [BDS Puts Allies at Odds](http://jstreet.org/blog/post/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions-put-allies-at-odds) (<http://jstreet.org/blog/post/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions-put-allies-at-odds>), by Jeremy Ben-Ami
- [J Street Students Reject Attempts to Curb Free Speech on Brooklyn College Campus](http://jstreet.org/blog/post/j-street-students-reject-attempts-to-curb-free-speech-on-brooklyn-campus_1) (http://jstreet.org/blog/post/j-street-students-reject-attempts-to-curb-free-speech-on-brooklyn-campus_1)

- [Share](#) (0)
- [Tweet](#) (0)
-

[Share](http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&pubid=ra-4f6cdcc976ac8d87) (<http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&pubid=ra-4f6cdcc976ac8d87>)

Tags: [Barak](/blog/by_tag/Barak) (/blog/by_tag/Barak) [BDS](/blog/by_tag/BDS) (/blog/by_tag/BDS) [Boycott](/blog/by_tag/Boycott) (/blog/by_tag/Boycott) [Olmert](/blog/by_tag/Olmert) (/blog/by_tag/Olmert) [Tzipi Livni](/blog/by_tag/Tzipi Livni) (/blog/by_tag/Tzipi Livni) [West Bank](/blog/by_tag/West Bank) (/blog/by_tag/West Bank)

- [Older](http://jstreet.org/blog/post/j-street-position-on-palestinian-application-for-full-un-membership_1) (http://jstreet.org/blog/post/j-street-position-on-palestinian-application-for-full-un-membership_1)
- [Newer](http://jstreet.org/blog/post/opening-up-our-community_1) (http://jstreet.org/blog/post/opening-up-our-community_1)

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to colleagues, clients or customers, or to license text, images or graphics, use the Reprints tool at the top of any article or visit: [Reprints \(http://www.newsweekdailybeastreprints.com\)](http://www.newsweekdailybeastreprints.com)



A Leftist's Critique of BDS

by [Naomi Paiss \(/contributors/naomi-paiss.html\)](/contributors/naomi-paiss.html) | March 16, 2012 9:37 AM EDT

What do you call a movement that polarizes and even penalizes the progressive community, increases the intransigence of ordinary Israelis, and provides political cover for the most extreme right-wing ultra-nationalists?

These days, progressives should call that movement Global BDS.



A BDS protest in East Jerusalem (Gali Tibbon / AFP / Getty Images)

A predictable tempest roiled Philadelphia last month when the University of Pennsylvania reluctantly sponsored a public conference on boycott, divestment and sanctions. More recently, a highly-charged argument over Israeli seltzer and organic paprika has made a battleground of the Park Slope Food Co-op in Brooklyn. Meanwhile, a progressive organization that provides world-class training to social change leaders is being forced to fend off attacks for daring to bring its expertise to Israel.

More than two years ago, I wrote an op-ed explaining why the New Israel Fund doesn't support BDS. We found that while boycotts, divestment actions, or sanctions in general may be legitimate tactics for change, the Global BDS movement targeting Israel is counter-productive and inflammatory. (Boycotting goods and services coming from the settlements, however, is another matter.) Moreover, Global BDS, even when it succeeds, tends to penalize collectively academics, artists and others who actually oppose the occupation, while leaving untouched those responsible for Israel's most destructive decisions.

Since that time, the movement has accomplished very little. Major corporations have not stopped doing business in Israel or the territories; the exception that proves the rule was a pullout from the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv light rail project. Universities and churches are not divesting. A few European pension funds have changed their investment policies. A few singers have cancelled their concerts. That's about it. Meanwhile, the reality of occupation and the continuing erosion of Israel's democracy remain unchanged.

But the damage from Global BDS also continues, and we can't just dismiss its activists as modern-day Don Quixotes tilting at windmills.

That's because the BDS bogeyman allows the proponents of the status quo to deflect pressure for change by pointing to the imminent danger to Israel posed by this so-called giant delegitimizing force. Count how many times settler organizations and other right-wing ultranationalists cite BDS as evidence that the world is just anti-Israel, period, giving them cover for continuing to push the same odious policies. In this way, both the BDS proponents and their arch-enemies get what they really need—publicity way out of line with the actual impact of the movement, and fodder for their own propaganda machines.

The folly of Global BDS activists is compounded when they target the institutions and organizations that promote peace and justice.

The damage from Global BDS also continues, and we can't just dismiss its activists as modern-day Don Quixotes tilting at windmills.

This was borne out recently by a BDS attack on the Rockwood Leadership Institute. RLI is a well-respected training institute, headquartered in Oakland, with a long record of providing top-notch leadership training to progressive organizations.

Rockwood is also funded by NIF, and it partners with our action arm SHATIL to bring leadership training to progressive civil society leaders in Israel. And for this, the Rockwood leadership has been called to account by BDS proponents, who demand that this organization—which empowers the most open-minded Israelis—take political positions regarding very divisive issues, come out in favor of the Palestinian right of return, and stop “enabling the occupation.”

Seriously? These BDS proponents remind me of a teenager who, afraid to take on the real bullies from the jockocracy, persecutes the geeky kids who make easier targets. In this case, the geeky kids at Rockwood, true to their mission, are patiently listening to the case made by global BDS proponents because they actually believe in discourse and dialogue to move forward productively.

I admire their restraint. I cannot emulate it.

It's obvious whom Global BDS attracts. There are those who naively believe the situation can't be changed until Israel is being beaten, metaphorically or actually, with an international club. Some of those people are well-intentioned, horrified by 44 years of occupation and human rights abuses, and stand ready to use anything they can for leverage. Others clearly intend the end of Israel as a recognizably Jewish entity, and they hold Israel to standards that no other nation in its circumstances could meet. This group reminds me of the radical Israeli ultra-nationalists who will not accept any challenge to Jewish hegemony over the entire

Land. Both are maximalists whose all-or-nothing ambitions continue to collide to everyone's detriment.

There is another way. Those of us who truly care about Israelis and Palestinians must support the beleaguered Israelis working to defeat the status quo. We must encourage groups like Rockwood, the Presbyterian church, and European pension funds to operate and fund in Israel, with the long-term goal of empowering pro-democracy and anti-occupation forces. We must engage, rather than disengage.

Anyone who cares about Israelis and Palestinians can play a productive role in ending this prolonged conflict. We can support political leaders and organizations, in the U.S. and Israel, with a demonstrated commitment to democracy and a two state solution. Let's do that, and relegate Global BDS to the trash-heap of failed strategies, where it belongs.

Tags:

- [Israel \(/topics/israel.html\)](/topics/israel.html)

© 2013 The Newsweek/Daily Beast Company LLC

[\(javascript::\) \(javascript::\)](#)

Making the progressive case for Israel

LFI Chair David Cairns MP - Making the Progressive Case for Israel. Delivered by LFI Vice-Chair John Woodcock MP, 15 March 2011, House of Commons

I want to begin by saying what this speech is not.

It's not an attempt to deflect attention from the pressing urgency of achieving an agreement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It's not an argument which posits that Israel is always right and should be allowed to act with impunity.

And it's not intended to diminish the need to resolve the complex issues of borders and settlements; of refugees; and of Jerusalem.



So let me begin by re-iterating the need for both sides to return to the negotiating table to make the painful and necessary compromises that will be required to end this conflict for good.

In all of the forums I have been involved with LFI, and in every meeting in which I have participated, this has been the consistent message. It has been conveyed to Israeli politicians of all parties, and every Palestinian leader of recent years.

And, if needs be, in months and years ahead, LFI will continue to focus on the need to resolve this tragic conflict, which has already claimed too many lives and caused too much grief.

But tonight I want to offer another message – not in contradiction to the first, but complementary. And the message is this: in a time of upheaval and unrest we will never find a just and lasting agreement if we forget or overlook the fact that that Israel is the only regional exemplar, not just of democracy but of social democracy.

Its values are rooted in left-of-centre principles.

It is a place where

- women enjoy equality;
- the LGBT community flourishes;
- the media is unfettered and critical;
- an independent judiciary protects the powerless from the powerful;
- where trade unions are well-organised and strong;
- educational excellence and scientific innovation are pursued;
- religious minorities are free to practise their creeds;
- a welfare state supports the poor and marginalised;
- and, yes, it is a fully functioning, vibrant, participatory democracy.

And the reason I feel the need to deliver this message tonight is that the failure to make progress in securing an agreement to end the conflict, bolstered by opposition to the very concept of Israel, has resulted in not just reasonable criticism of Israel's conduct and behaviour, but in increasing attempts to de-legitimise the Israeli state; and the advocacy of a policy which would see its demise as a social democratic beacon.

Years ago, when I first became involved with LFI the two-state solution was accepted by mainstream Israelis and Palestinians alike. It was rejected by the Israeli right and by Islamist extremists.

Today much of the Israeli right now accepts the principle of a two-state solution, which is obviously welcome, and it is still the goal of the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank. But Hamas in Gaza remains committed to the destruction of Israel by force, and the so-called One-State solution is becoming much more mainstream. For some, this popularity is born from frustration but, let's be absolutely clear: the one state model means the demise of the Jewish state. It is the end of the dream of national self-determination for the Jewish people. And that is why Hamas wants it.

And why does this matter?

It matters for two reasons: the first is the fact of the state of Israel, how and why it came to be. And the second is the nature of the state of Israel and the values that it has come, through time, to embody.

As recently as 2001 the Guardian, not always Israel's most staunch supporter, called the establishment of the state of Israel a "moral necessity".

This was the long held belief of the British left; and not just the left, but the left of the left: writing in 1968 Eric Heffer said: "When Israel was established by resolution of the United Nations, like most Socialists, I was delighted."

Why the delight among Socialists? It was their belief in the right of self-determination for the Jewish people, the searing experience of World War II, and the overthrow of colonial rule that galvanised left-wing support for David Ben Gurion's declaration.

It was precisely these reasons that gave some on the Labour right, most notably the formidable figure of Foreign Secretary Ernie Bevin, cause for concern.

The right of self-determination for the Jewish people was a matter of progressive principle and conscience in 1948 and it should remain so today. And it is because I believe in the right of Jewish self-determination that I support Palestinian self-determination too.

On both sides, we should see the other's goal as an essential part of our success, not a fundamental barrier to it.

But it was not just the fact of the Jewish state that won it support from the left; it was the type of state it was to be: a socialist, egalitarian society, one where Labour would be the natural party of Government.

The Declaration of Independence speaks of an Israel which "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture"

Or as we might put it today – this would be a progressive country.

And so it remains.

But failure to secure agreement to the conflict with the Palestinians has obscured this progressive reality: it has

pushed Israel's positive story from the headlines; and it has allowed Israel's longstanding enemies to build support for false analogies with some of the ugliest right-wing regimes imaginable – apartheid South Africa and even Nazi Germany itself.

Israeli speakers are shouted down in university campuses; otherwise left-wing union leaders demand wholesale boycotts of all Israeli produce; Israeli opposition politicians are afraid to come here for fear of arrest; leftist pop stars won't play concerts in Tel Aviv; and, bizarrely, an Israeli diplomat, Ishmael Khaldi, had to abandon an address at Edinburgh University after he was surrounded by protestors chanting "Nazi" and "boycott Israel". Khaldi is a Bedouin, Muslim Israeli citizen.

As of 2010, Israel had been condemned in 32 resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council, almost half of all resolutions passed since its creation.

In the decade of genocide in Darfur, unspeakable war crimes in Sri Lanka, and state-sponsored oppression of gay men and lesbians in a dozen African states, Israel remains the only country that the UN Human Rights Council has specifically condemned.

I mention all of this not to elicit sympathy or to play the victim card. But it is undeniable that today, if you are on the left it is presumed to be axiomatic to be anti-Israel.

How has this come to be? It's partly because there are two progressive principles that Israel is accused of denying the Palestinian people: one is their right to self-determination; the other is the general principle of "fairness", the sense that the Palestinians are not treated fairly by a powerful majority.

This belief is exacerbated by events. International sympathy for Israel rose when it was attacked by its neighbours in a series of attempted wars of annihilation. When bus bombs were exploding on a regular basis in Jerusalem, and gay bars were being targeted by suicide bombers in Tel Aviv, even hostile commentators were forced to admit that Israel was facing real problems.

And in response to this terror, to protect its people, Israel built a security barrier, which many didn't like, but has drastically limited the ability of suicide bombers to enter Israel, at least for now. And, facing security threats on the majority of its borders, Israel has been to war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and has targeted Hamas in Gaza, who have been sending rockets into southern Israel on a daily basis since Israel unilaterally withdrew from the territory and Hamas took control of Gaza in a violent coup.

It was, I know, hard for people to watch what was happening in Lebanon and Gaza on their TV screens because innocent civilians were killed – as sadly happens in all wars.

Whereas Israel viewed these as wars of survival, support for Israel plummeted as a result. And just a few days ago we saw the terrible and gruesome murder of an Israeli family, and the pendulum swings back a little – until the next time.

And the fact is that because of Israel's understandably tough approach to security, including myriad check-points on the West Bank, as well as the Security Barrier, life for Palestinians can be really hard and restrictive, and that offends our sense of fairness.

But today I want to propose a new approach for progressives.

Currently the dividing line is wrong. People are either categorised as pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian. This creates a pressure to support "your" side in a sectarian, loyalist sense.

As I have set out, it's because Israel embodies progressive values that I am a proud friend of Israel.

And yet I have observed a curious phenomenon: whenever I say something supportive of Israel I am almost always challenged to say something critical too. It's as if I have to buy permission to say something positive.

I'm regularly encouraged to be a "critical friend" by which is usually meant more criticism, less friendship.

My point is this: I want to work with all progressives – here, in Israel and the Palestinian territories – to build the confidence and trust that will be required to bring about a lasting agreement.

I will be critical of Israel when I need to be. But I call on my friends and colleagues who support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to cease the language of de-legitimisation; to end the comparisons with South Africa and Nazi Germany; to halt the demands for boycotts of Israeli produce and people; to put an end to the movement to sever academic ties; and to recognise Israel's strong and continuing adherence to the self-same progressive values that we fight for here at home.

It is not left wing or progressive to ally ones-self with those that seek Israel's destruction, or those who don't value one iota the type of society we strive for in this country. So I am appealing for all those who value peace and justice to support our values where we see them lived out, and to assist – not obstruct – those people working on the ground to resolve their conflict and build their progressive society.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Photo: kudumomo



David Cairns, Israel, John Woodcock, Labour Friends of Israel

NYC ELECTED OFFICIALS SUPPORT LGBT CENTER, SUPPORT ISRAEL AND CONDEMN THE ACCUSATIONS OF “PINKWASHING”



JOINT STATEMENT BY NYC COUNCIL SPEAKER CHRISTINE C. QUINN, NYS ASSEMBLY MEMBER DEBORAH GLICK, NYS SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN, AND NYC COUNCIL MEMBER JIMMY VAN BRAMER

Re: New LGBT Community Center Space Use Guidelines

“We support the new Space Use guidelines, terms and conditions being implemented by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center. Their decision to allow groups to have open discussion and to create a resolution process to address complaints of potential hate-related speech is the correct approach. Under the Center’s new guidelines, all parties will have access to rent space to organize around LGBT issues, and the Center will remain a safe space, where hate-related speech will not be tolerated. This will allow the Center staff and board to promote its core mission of providing health and well-being services to our community, in addition to providing a safe and secure forum for issues relevant to NYC’s LGBT community.

That said, we want to make abundantly clear that we categorically reject attempts by any organization to use the Center to delegitimize Israel and promote an anti-Israel agenda. We adamantly oppose any and all efforts to inappropriately inject the Center into politics that are not the core of their important mission.

We vehemently oppose the absurd accusations by some groups that Israel is engaged in so-called “pinkwashing”. We find this charge offensive and fundamentally detrimental to the global cause of LGBT equality. These accusations should be understood as just one part of the arsenal of those who seek to completely discredit the state of Israel altogether. In fact, Israel’s highly laudable record in advancing LGBT rights deserves praise, not scorn. Given the very poor record of much of the world on LGBT issues, we should be celebrating Israel’s – or any country’s – LGBT equality advances. We must always encourage countries with strong records of achievement for our community to be rightly and publicly proud so they may set an example for others. We continue to believe that the boycott, sanctions and divestment (BDS) movement against Israel is wrongheaded, destructive, and an obstacle to our collective hope for a peaceful two-state solution.

We applaud the Center Board and staff for taking this important step. We now hope everyone will respect the Center as a safe space for open and safe discussions. We hope the Center can move forward and serve the LGBT community as it has always done.”