

The Differential Outcomes of Contemporary Boycotting
An Analysis of the Global Boycotts against Israel and Russia

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Abstract

The academic community relies on international engagement to build reliable knowledge and conduct research. International academic engagement has recently stirred controversy because of the desire to cut ties with some countries whose actions fail to respect academic freedom and human rights.

Academic boycotts are often a response to such offenses, but recent cases of boycotting in Israel and Russia show that boycotting can produce differential outcomes in similar cases. While Israel and Russia both are accused of committing war crimes and using their militaries to occupy territory, the boycott against Israel has seen far less success. Both boycotts appear to reinforce global power stratification, are accused of prejudice, and poorly communicate their values. Future boycott efforts should establish better ways of coordinating action among diverse entities, communicating values, applying principles consistently, and considering facts. If these steps are taken, boycotts might adopt a more procedural methodology and be less prone to criticism.

Overview

Interaction between scholars is vitally important for the principle of academic freedom and for the generation and proliferation of knowledge around the globe. Authoritarian countries' recent crackdowns on freedom of speech and human rights have spurred the academic community to feel solidarity with people struggling around the world. This motivation has led to increasingly frequent calls for international boycotts against countries that perpetuate the alleged abuses. Many organizations have participated in boycotts, but they have been accused of partiality. The boycotts have been decentralized and conducted in an ad-hoc fashion that reacts to high-profile issues that gain popular attention while ignoring issues of similar magnitude receiving less attention. To overcome such criticism, boycotters must adapt through coordinated efforts, better communication, consistent application, and secure grounding in facts.

Improving boycotts first involves greater coordination of action. Myriad institutions, governments, and even individuals today operate independently rather than in concert, and many international boycotts become loosely agglomerated efforts of diverse actors, each with their own motives and approaches. This is chaos. Organizations must instead work together to create shared goals, approaches, and intentions.

Boycotts need also to better articulate their principles. Participants in boycotts should consider their intentions in the context of various philosophical approaches. Three distinct philosophical approaches can help guide boycott efforts: the deontological approach, the consequentialist approach, and the punitive approach. Each specifies unique outcomes and measures of success. A clearly communicated philosophical approach will help guide tactics and strengthen boycotts seeking to respond to criticism.

Boycotters also should determine how to apply their principles consistently across cases, as inconsistently applied justice leads to accusations of prejudice. Such consistency would mark a move from informality to more procedural justice.

Finally, boycotters must clearly identify and communicate the relevant empirical facts about alleged offenses. Wrongs must be described based on the facts at hand, and no boycott should be conducted without clear evidence of such wrongs. This evidence can then be leveraged to clearly link boycott targets to particular wrongs. When evidence is clear and unobjectionable, boycotts can better overcome challenges using the simple facts of the case.

The boycotts of Israel and Russia serve as examples of the different outcomes produced by the current boycotting status quo. Both boycotts are directed against similar targets and face similar criticisms, yet the boycott of Russia seems significantly more successful than the boycott of Israel. The Russian boycott involves strong global coordination among wealthy nations, whereas the Israeli campaign has relatively low support. The different outcomes produced across the two campaigns demonstrate the necessity of this paper's recommended actions.

Israel and Russia: Similar Cases, Different Outcomes

Israel and Russia are both being targeted by international academic boycotts. These cases clearly demonstrate the different outcomes produced by inconsistent boycotting. The Israeli boycott has persisted for years without much success and has been hindered by government interference. Some have argued that a lack of sympathy for Arab victims, because of their race, is to blame for the stalled momentum. Russia, in contrast, is an important juxtaposition: not only are the victims white, but Russia is an adversary to Western nations, while Israel is generally considered a Western ally. Many other factors set these examples apart, and many argue that the Russian boycott is more successful because Russia's offenses are morally worse, making the boycott more justifiable and deserved. The most

important lesson here is that a lack of clarity results in wildly different outcomes. The true motivations of the boycotters are murky, and participation is encouraged without explicitly established justifications.

The Stagnating Israeli Boycott

The academic boycott of Israel is part of an international effort to cut ties with organizations and individuals involved or complicit with Israel's military actions against Palestine. These actions date back to the Israeli-Palestine War in 1948 and the Six-Day War in 1967. Several regional territories are in dispute between the two factions, including the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem. Today there is a complicated relationship of de facto sovereignty between Israel and Palestine in some territories. Throughout the decades, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been displaced or lost their lives due to the fighting. Israel has been repeatedly accused of segregation and racial discrimination. Israeli settlements within the occupied territories have been a major source of conflict because they are seen as colonial infringements on the sovereignty of the Palestinian State. The UN General Assembly and Security Council, the International Red Cross, and the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions have all stated that Israel's actions go against Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention. UN Resolution 476 in 1980 called the Israeli occupation a "flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention."¹

The academic boycott of Israel started in 2002 when two British professors, Steven and Hilary Rose, wrote an open letter in the *Guardian* calling for it. The proposal gained momentum in the UK and spread around the world as different universities, academics, and labor unions began supporting the campaign to varying degrees. The movement gained additional support in 2008 and 2009 when the Israeli military attacked sites in the Gaza Strip in an attempt to stop rocket attacks from Hamas.

¹ See UN Resolution 476, Conference of High Contracting Parties, and the 4th Geneva Convention in the bibliography.

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) and the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) led the boycott campaign. The PACBI and BNC have both called on the international academic community to cut ties with Israeli universities as well as anyone participating in or complicit in the occupation of the disputed territories. The first major organization to support the boycott was the UK's Council of the Association of Teachers (AUT) in 2005, which resolved to boycott Bar-Ilan and Haifa Universities in Israel. This action was short-lived because, after heavy pushback, the AUT reversed its decision the next month. In 2006 the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), another higher-education trade union in the UK, passed a resolution endorsing the boycott. Over the following years many other organizations have begun participation in the boycott efforts, attempting to pressure governments and larger organizations to take stronger action toward Israel. These organizations include the Association for Asian American Studies (April 2013), the American Studies Association (December 2013), the National Women's Studies Association (2015), the graduate workers unions at New York University (2016) and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (2016), and the United Educators of San Francisco (2021). Additionally, the University of Johannesburg cut ties with Ben Gurion University in 2011 after a petition cited its "complicity in Israeli apartheid."

Many organizations have expressed opposition to the Israel BDS movement, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Anti-Defamation League (along with many other pro-Israel organizations), and the Modern Language Association (MLA). They argue that the movement is anti-Semitic, that it is not in line with academic freedom, and that it harms the mission of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, many Western governments have made it difficult or impossible to boycott Israel through anti-BDS laws. Many US states have passed laws restricting government contracts with companies that participate in BDS, and the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal

Year 2019 forbids boycotting friendly foreign countries. In the UK, in 2016, many municipalities chose to participate in Israel BDS, but the UK parliament forbid economic boycotts on ethical grounds not explicitly authorized by the British government. These laws make it difficult to conduct the boycott, and they shrink the number of participant organizations.

Overall, the boycott of Israel has seen little success as evaluated on a number of factors—BDS participation has been suppressed, anti-Israeli policy changes have been blocked, and pain on Israel as punishment has been minimized. In the nearly 20 years since the original journal article called for a boycott, only one goal has been partially fulfilled: participation. Many organizations throughout the boycott's life span have chosen to participate, yet the lack of participation from major institutions has held the movement back. For example, while the Graduate Workers Union at UMass Amherst made a statement endorsing the boycott, the school's chancellor strongly condemned it, saying that "the University remains firmly opposed to BDS and to academic boycotts of any kind" (Subbaswamy, 2019). If the intention is to send a message of opposition, the near-immediate reversal of the AUT decision sends the exact opposite message.

The boycott effort has also failed to create policy change or inflict pain on the target. Israel still holds the occupied territories and has not changed its unfavorable policies toward Palestinians. Furthermore, it continues to receive military support from Western nations, including the United States; its economy has not been seriously affected; and opposing Israeli academics still play an important part in the global academic community.

The Successful Russian Boycott

By comparison, the boycott of the Russian Federation has been dramatically successful over its short life span, receiving enormous attention and support of governments around the world. The academic boycott is only a small component of a massive international effort by governments, individuals, and private organizations to support Ukraine and deter further escalation of the conflict. With strong

government involvement and broad popular support, the Russian boycott is experiencing an impressive level of coordination of action, setting it apart from most other academic boycotts.

In February 2022 the Russian Federation began an unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine that has caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. It was a major escalation from its 2014 invasion of Crimea and was preceded by a large buildup of troops on the Russian-Ukrainian border. The invasion has been widely condemned by the international community, including the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, which have both called for an end to the conflict. Russia's subsequent wartime actions have been questioned by many countries and international bodies. Russia is suspected of indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the intentional torture and killing of civilians in the towns of Bucha and Mariupol. The US government has officially stated that Russia has committed "war crimes," and US president Biden has said it "seems" like Russian troops are engaged in genocide.

Many nations, including the United States, have been using economic sanctions to deter Russian aggression. A White House statement on February 24 emphasized that sanctions and export controls are intended to "impose severe costs on Russia's largest financial institutions" and that the effort has received "an unprecedented level of multilateral cooperation." In the private sector, over 450 companies have chosen to participate in a boycott of Russia, and at least 174 companies have chosen to completely withdraw from Russia, including major oil companies, consulting firms, airlines, technology companies, banks, and more ("Almost 1,000 Companies . . ." 2022).

The sanctions and boycotts have had a profound impact on Russia's economy. Russia's ruble lost nearly half of its value immediately following the invasion, its stock market has been tumbling since international sanctions were announced, and Goldman Sachs has estimated that Russia's GDP will fall by 10 percent from 2021 levels (Robertson 2022). Ukraine's General Staff of the Armed Forces has claimed that Western sanctions have brought Russian tank production to a halt (Jankowicz 2022). Most important, however, Western military aid has allowed Ukraine's forces to achieve otherwise

unimaginable success. Western intelligence has helped Ukrainian troops target and kill Russian generals and destroy the flagship of its Black Sea fleet, the *Moskva*. Man-portable missile systems (along with other weapons) provided by Western countries for targeting tanks and aircraft have contributed to Russia's failure to achieve air superiority (Ward and Forgey 2022; Debusmann 2022; Beaumont and Borger 2022).

Sanctions are also being directed against Russian universities because of their stated participation in the war effort. A group of Russian university rectors signed a joint statement supporting both the war and Russian president Vladimir Putin, saying it is very important for them to support the Russian army and war effort (Matthews 2010). This statement sparked outrage in the international academic community and led many governments, along with universities and other academic organizations, to strongly reconsider their collaboration with Russian institutions.

Many academic institutions have chosen to join the boycott effort. *The Journal of Molecular Structure* has stopped considering "manuscripts authored by scientists working at Russian Federation institutions," thereby sanctioning individuals with institutional affiliation to Russian universities. The European University Association "suspended" twelve Russian universities after their rectors signed on to the statement supporting the war (Matthews 2010). Other universities have decided to cut all ties with Russian universities, including Universities UK (or UUK, which describes itself as the "collective voice of 140 universities across the UK"), the National Centre for Scientific Research and the National Research Agency in France, and universities across many other European countries. Additionally, CERN, one of Europe's largest and most well-known research centers, housing the world's largest particle accelerator, has suspended Russia's observer member status. The suspension likely means that the thousand-plus Russian-affiliated scientists working at CERN will have to pause their research until the suspension is lifted (Jefford 2022).

In addition to the voluntary efforts of private entities, some of the academic boycott efforts are required by governments as part of broad anti-Russian actions. Germany's Ministry of Education required that universities cut ties with Russia (Naujokaityte 2022), and in the United States some state governments have directed state-run universities to cut Russian ties, including Virginia and Arizona.

The boycott campaign against Russia—including, as we have seen, Western governments, the private sector, and major institutions like CERN—has only been in effect for a few months as of this writing, but the success has been dramatic. This success is measured by participation, effect on policy, and pain inflicted on the target as punishment. The boycott has also been successful by changing policy and punishing the target. Sanctions have severely impacted the Russian economy and hindered Russia's progress in the war effort. Whether success is measured by participation, impact on policy, or pain inflicted as punishment, the Western boycott and sanctions have been largely successful.

Similar Targets

The boycotts of Israel and Russia both target the aggressors' academic institutions. In both cases many academic institutions are targeted because of their complicity in their governments' military actions.

In Israel's case, boycotters accuse the country's universities of complicity and involvement with the military occupation (and discrimination against Palestinians). The Alternative Information Center (AIC) is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that disseminates information about the Israel-Palestine conflict. The AIC claims that Israeli universities participate in at least six different ways: (1) they conduct research partnerships with the military; (2) they provide exclusive scholarships and preferential treatment to Israeli military members; (3) they host programs to train private security personnel who often go on to fulfill military contracts for the government; (4) they build colleges within occupied territory; (5) they employ former military officers like Carmi Gilon, the former director of the General Security Services, who is also vice-president for External Affairs at Hebrew University; and (6) they stifle

political dissent against the Israeli government at their institutions. These arguments by the AIC outline its justification for targeting Israeli universities.

The boycott of Russia explicitly attempts to target only individuals affiliated with complicit institutions. A major influence in choosing which Russian universities to target is the joint statement by the Russian Rectors Union (RRU). This statement unambiguously connects Russian universities with the war effort, sufficient cause for many academic institutions to boycott *even if* they suspect the statements were made under duress. The UUK mentions the RRU statement specifically, saying its decision was made “in light of” the statement.

Many boycotting organizations have expressed hesitancy to boycott Russian institutions because of the possible impact on individual academics who may not support the war. The UUK statement says, “we are also mindful of the position of Russian staff and students, many of whom oppose this conflict.” The editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Molecular Structure* said in a statement, “the decision is not directed to Russian scientists, who certainly deserve all our best esteem and respect, but to Russian institutions, which support (and are funded by) the Russian Government” (Fausto in Oransky 2022). These statements show that for many boycott participants, the intended targets are institutions rather than particular individuals affiliated with them.

The RRU statement does the same job as the AIC report because it connects the universities to the war effort. In the case of Israel, a comprehensive argument needed to be made about the facts connecting the universities to aggressive actions, but in Russia’s case the universities did the job themselves. Both boycotts target universities alleged to support military activities deemed morally indefensible.

Similar Criticisms

The boycotts of Israel and Russia have both received similar criticism despite receiving vastly different levels of support from the West. This fact contributes to the argument that boycotting is not applied the same way to different situations and suggests that Western institutions need to rethink their approach to boycotting altogether.

The first criticism shared between the two cases is the argument for academic freedom. The AAUP and the MLA focused their criticisms on the boycott of Israel. The MLA said that a boycott effort could be “blocking possible dialogue and general scholarly exchange” and that the movement “contradicts the MLA’s purpose to promote teaching and research on language and literature” (MLA 2017). The AAUP took a similar position, believing that in most cases boycotting is indefensible because it restricts academic freedom. The AAUP makes exceptions for certain circumstances; a boycott could be permissible under especially dire situations or if a university administration breaches AAUP policy (in such cases the AAUP would use the term “censure” rather than “boycott”). Generally, however, the AAUP’s position is that communication with universities in countries with perceived human rights violations is especially important because such universities may help shed light on the issues involved.

Some entities argue that communication with Russian academics is one of the best ways to change Russia’s course. A *Nature* editorial board stated that a boycott “would divide the global research community and restrict the exchange of scholarly knowledge” (*Nature* editorial board 2022). The board believes that exposing Russian academics to Western values is essential to resisting the Russian government’s efforts over the long term. Furthermore, it argues that if Russian academics abandon their institutions and move to the West (a so-called brain drain) Russia could recede further into authoritarianism.

Another important criticism brought against both cases is potential discrimination toward the target nation’s people. An article by George Mason University professor Tyler Cowen compares anti-

Russian sentiment to McCarthyism, saying that boycotts of Russian artists and performers who fail to denounce President Putin are unnecessary and harmful (Cowen 2022). He says that there is no fair way to require people to repudiate their governments: “It is simply not possible to draw fair or accurate lines of demarcation.” He asks us to consider why we are not boycotting countries like Belarus, Rwanda, and China. He adds that artists and performers from the Soviet Union were previously allowed to come to the United States. Many academic journals, with the sole exception of the *Journal of Molecular Structure*, side with Cowen, claiming they do not discriminate against authors for their nationality or political views. *Nature’s* statement on the issue references the divisiveness of boycotting, claiming that boycotts serve only to “divide the global research community and restrict the exchange of scholarly knowledge.”

In the case of Israel, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) claims BDS activists are often anti-Semitic, writing in a December 2021 statement, “The ADL report found numerous examples where the campus anti-Israel movement’s rhetoric and actions crossed the line from legitimate criticism of the Israeli government into blatant expressions of antisemitism from certain groups and activists”. The Anti-Defamation League tracks incidents of anti-Semitism that occur in proximity to the BDS movement and suggests a connection between the two ideas. The ADL statement suggests that anti-Semitism and the BDS movement align frequently enough that something is necessarily related between them.

A final criticism brought against the boycotts of both Israel and Russia is that they are simply ineffective. An opinion article by Eric Alterman, a professor at Brooklyn College, criticized the Israel boycott as being, in his opinion, impractical and therefore somewhat ridiculous. He wrote, “what they cannot offer is a remotely practical theory of how their movement will somehow lead to a better life for Palestinians” (Alterman 2019). Princeton historian Michael Gordin claimed that the Russian boycott would be ineffective, pointing to an academic boycott of Germany after World War I that had virtually no effect because German academics continued to publish in German journals. Furthermore, Russian

contributions to articles published in 2018 only accounted for 3 percent of the total, meaning that a restriction of Russian articles would be little more than a symbolic gesture (Brainard 2022). Both arguments focus on the expected inability of a boycott to achieve its ends. This line of criticism is interesting because the boycott of Israel has been around for decades yet has not achieved its ends, while the Russian boycott has been around for just months and is already being viewed skeptically.

Power, Prejudice, and Values

Despite important similarities, the Israeli and Russian boycotts have produced different outcomes. This is suspicious. It seems to reinforce existing global power stratification, reflect race- and nation-based prejudice, and confuse the boycotts' values among participants. It is not apparent that any of these propositions are true, but that possibility is concerning. Organizations conducting boycotts need to consider these concerns and address them.

Power Stratification

Boycotting risks reinforcing existing global power stratification. That essentially means that wealthy, powerful nations use boycotts to increase their own wealth and power, even at the expense of others and without proper consideration of justice. Just as consumer boycotting is a withdrawal of spending power, social-change boycotting is a withdrawal of one's valuable social interaction and mutual support. Waheed Hussain writes in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, "those who are poorly organized and control less-valuable resources cannot apply similar pressure" (118). Hussain points out how, in order to boycott, one must be in a powerful position to begin with. One person who spends millions of dollars buying fine wine, for example, will be able to boycott the wine industry more effectively than someone who only occasionally buys inexpensive bottles. The same principle applies in international affairs: influential academics and prestigious institutions are naturally able to leverage their privilege to

powerfully impact others' actions. Hussain argues that in order to conduct an ethical boycott, participants must consider what he calls the "proto-legislative" account of boycott justification. He developed the proto-legislative account to direct consumers how to conduct boycotts that respect the choice and will of the people who would be affected by the social changes boycotts seek to achieve.

Hussain's proto-legislative account emphasizes the need for boycotts to be conducted in a procedural fashion. Participants can embrace the challenge of power stratification by articulating principles that uphold fundamental human rights and the individual autonomy of communities around the globe. Without articulating principles, participants risk prioritizing their own values over those of the people that they might affect.

Power stratification plays an important role in contemporary boycotting. Onlookers should be suspicious of boycotts that may have ulterior motives. Support for Ukraine and sympathy for Ukrainian refugees among Western countries, for example, could reflect deep-seated antipathy toward Russia caused by long-standing geopolitical tensions. Similarly, the West is generally considered allied with Israel, naturally raising suspicion of partiality in its conflict with Palestine. Some American politicians, such as Ted Cruz, openly admit partiality toward American allies. When *Politico* asked Senator Cruz's office why he supports Ukraine but not Palestine, a spokesperson said in an email, "It's not complicated, Sen. Cruz stands with our allies and against our enemies" (Gedeon 2022). With at least one American politician saying that he supports Israel because Israel is an ally (and not necessarily because it deserves American support), it is difficult to deny partiality is not a guiding factor behind the Israeli boycott. Without a procedural method for determining which entities to boycott, it can be difficult or impossible to dispel suspicions of partiality or to ensure that biases of decision-makers are not in play. Ultimately, the result is that Western allies like Israel and Ukraine benefit from boycotting efforts, and less-powerful nations benefit less.

Another power consideration is the dynamic between political power and universities. Academic institutions are often at the mercy of their governments. US and UK laws specifically forbid unapproved boycotts, demonstrating the powerlessness of universities to determine targets of their own boycotts. Additionally, the Russian boycott has profoundly impacted Russia's warfighting capabilities because of economic sanctions that have little help from academic boycotts.

Race- and Nation-based Prejudice

We must also consider the racial identity of the alleged victim groups. Western onlookers may feel greater sympathy toward white Ukrainian refugees than Palestinian Arabs. The systemic racism in Western societies surely influences the attitude of Western onlookers toward the two boycotting efforts. The lack of discussion about race- and nation-based prejudice is concerning because overcoming prejudice requires intentionality of action.

Boycotts can also sometimes create a "categorical perception" or an "us versus them" paradigm that leads to fierce opposition to the boycott from within the target country (Sacco et al. 2011). One study examined pro-government mobilization in a boycotted country before and after foreign nations announced sanctions and threats; it found a significant increase of pro-government mobilization in the months immediately following the announcement of sanctions. On average, pro-government mobilization increased by 23 percent directly after the imposition of international sanctions (p. 460). The author states, "autocrats can fuel nationalist sentiments and frame foreign interventions as an attack on the nation as a whole" (Hellmeier 2021). Thus, the psychological impacts of a boycott can work against its objectives and even strengthen government support in targeted nations.

This means it is morally and practically necessary to avoid real or perceived discrimination. The only factor shown to lessen the effect of sanctions, according to the study, was freedom of the press in targeted countries. The three countries that did not censor media saw the lowest levels of pro-

government mobilization following the imposition of international sanctions (p. 471). This finding suggests that messaging around boycotts is extremely important in preventing unintended consequences.

Communicating Values

The Israeli and Russian boycotts do a poor job of communicating a singular set of values. This is likely due to poor coordination between participants, as boycotting initiatives bring together many organizations, each with its own set of values and goals.

Many organizations argue that the Israeli boycott should not target individuals, but others disagree. Tom Hickey, a philosophy lecturer at the University of Brighton, claimed that academics share in the complicity, saying, “the majority of Israeli academics are either complicit or acquiescent in their government’s policies in the occupied territories” (Joffe-Walt 2006). This reasoning concords with the NATFHE resolution, which states that it “invites members to consider their own responsibility for ensuring equity and nondiscrimination in contacts with Israeli educational institutions *or individuals*,² and to consider the appropriateness of a boycott of those that do not publicly dissociate themselves from such policies” (Cowell 2006). This wording importantly establishes a distinction between those who do and do not “publicly disassociate” from the perceived wrongdoing. Hickey’s position demonstrates how target selection is often contentious, and different organizations participating in the same boycott often disagree as to who the targets ought to be.

In addition to the disagreement about target selection, the messaging from the BDS movement is itself confusing. The PACBI and the BNC call for a wide range of boycott efforts; both state at least five actions to further the movement’s goal. They advise supporters to:

² Emphasis added by the author, not NATFHE.

1. refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration, or joint projects with Israeli institutions;
2. advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions;
3. promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions;
4. work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic, professional, and cultural associations and organizations; and
5. support Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or implicit condition for such support.

This set of actions is wide ranging, and PACBI and the BNC claim that their purpose is “resistance to injustice and oppression” (PACBI 2004). The list provided by these organizations creates confusion about the ultimate aims of the boycott and fails to provide a clear idea of how their actions might lead to a specific conclusion. Boycotts aim to do one of three things: send a message of solidarity, change the policies or actions of the target, or punish the target for wrongdoing. It is not clear from this document what aim the BDS movement is pursuing, and it seems to be pursuing all three aims at once. This produces a management problem: the document does not have a clear strategy or objective. A narrower aim with achievable ends would help the myriad participants to more effectively join their efforts.

In the case of the Russian boycott, aims are also difficult to tease out because of the hundreds of companies and dozens of governments contributing to the boycott effort without a central organizing body directing the effort. European countries are boycotting Russian oil exports and sanctioning the yachts of Russian oligarchs, liquor stores are stopping the sale of Russian-made vodka, and at least one academic journal has stopped accepting submissions from authors affiliated with Russian institutions. It is difficult to make sense of such a diverse boycott effort without a clear organizing body.

Contemporary boycotts are a free-for-all, where every actor contributes what it can, but this opens the door for confusion and criticism. Even PACBI—the central organizing body behind the Israeli boycott—has a muddled message: to “do everything” in support of the boycott effort. If boycotting is ever to overcome its challenges and criticism, organizers must present a clear message that conveys the boycott’s goals and strategies.

Toward Greater Consistency

Universities, other academic institutions, and academics will likely continue to conduct boycotts long into the future. While some institutions undoubtedly will refrain from almost all boycotting, there is no sign that boycotting will vanish anytime soon. But it is also not realistic for boycotting to go on in its current form. Boycotting, as it exists today, is faddish. Few entities consider a boycott until they are forced to. Organizations *react* to calls for boycott rather than move proactively. This reactive nature has led to inconsistency from one instance to another and a sense of injustice and prejudice.

As stated in the previous section, there are serious questions about why it has suddenly and rapidly become popular to oppose Russia through boycotting. The BNC (organizers of BDS Israel) claims that supporting Ukraine and not Palestine is hypocritical of the West because of the BNC’s belief in the similarity of the two cases. In an official statement, the BNC writes, “We see in the West’s warm reception of Ukraine’s white refugees an example for how all refugees escaping the ravages of war, economic devastation, or climate injustice should be treated by the West” (Palestinian BDS National Committee [BNC] 2022). The level of support for a boycott effort should not be determined by popularity, media coverage, or the race/nationality of the victims and perpetrators. Boycotts should be considered on their merits in a systematic and nonbiased manner.

This paper has articulated the issues of contemporary boycotting in light of the examples in Russia and Ukraine. With an understanding of these shortcomings, academic organizations can take

action to ensure that they have consistent, well-articulated, and fact-based strategies for boycotting. The following suggestions can help institutions shape their boycott policies with greater consistency, legitimacy, and effectiveness.

Coordinated Action

Organizations that wish to boycott should coordinate their actions in order to align their goals. Boycotts must successfully coordinate between multiple actors, and this depends on social capital. Social capital is defined by an entity's relationships with others and a network of social relations. A network's resources, power, and influence define its "amount" of social capital (Lin 2001; Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2000). Neilson and Paxton surveyed almost 25,000 people around the world and identified that social capital increases someone's likelihood of participation in ethical consumption. Association involvement, in particular, correlated with an 82 percent increase in an individual's odds of being a political consumer (Neilson and Paxton 2010). Coordinated action leverages social ties and institutional agreements to encourage broader participation in boycott efforts. In addition, coordinated action projects a singular message that avoids the confusions and accusations that often plague contemporary boycotting efforts.

One specific action that organizations can take for more effective boycotting is to make agreements with other entities that specify when or under what conditions to boycott. Such agreements would bring organization and a higher level of legitimacy to boycotting efforts and potentially increase the impact of a boycott.

Improved Communication

Improved communication depends on understanding one's values and applying principles consistently. Without this understanding, organizations have difficulty sending a clear message across myriad actors. Academic institutions should be prepared to respond to calls for boycotts. Institutions may choose to

abstain from or participate in boycotting, but their position should be clear ahead of time. Institutions and individuals conducting boycotts must understand and communicate their approach to boycotting and apply the same principles consistently across cases. Three main approaches should be considered by boycotters: the deontological approach, the consequentialist approach, and the punitive approach.

The deontological approach considers the participant's actions irrespective of their outcomes. The righteousness of actions is the determining factor for a deontological approach, so it considers whether participation in the boycott is the "right" action. Right action does not always align with good consequences. It is possible to "do the right thing" and still produce morally bad outcomes. Even in circumstances where a boycott produces bad outcomes, the deontological approach prescribes that participants continue to conduct the boycott because it is the *right* action. For example, assume a candy company has unethical labor practices. It is considered wrong to purchase products made unethically. A deontologically motivated participant would boycott the company regardless of whether the boycott affects the company in any way. Even if a participant expected that their purchasing restraint would cause the company to conduct *more* unethical practices, they would still boycott on the principle that doing so is the "right" action.

The consequentialist approach is concerned with producing a good outcome. Therefore, using the consequentialist approach, any action should be undertaken if it produces good, in spite of the action's righteousness. The most extreme result of the consequentialist approach is when an utterly vile and horrible action produces good results. Imagine a murder being justified because it would lead to a hundred years of prosperity for an entire nation. This example necessarily comes down to a value judgment between the consequences of multiple actions. Therefore, the consequentialist approach

demands an evaluation of the good produced from boycotting and the good produced by *not* boycotting.³

The punitive approach attempts to punish the target for wrongdoing as a means of bringing about retributive justice. The punitive approach is best conducted consistently across diverse cases, but it is more often conducted informally without a central arbiter. Boycotts occur in spaces where systems of procedural justice are unable to extend. Sanctions between nations are perhaps commonplace because of the limited power of international institutions to bring about procedural justice. Informal retributive justice takes its place. Social punishment is the motivation for a punitive boycott. The punitive approach seeks to cause harm to the target regardless of its effect on the target's action. The punitive approach seeks retributive justice rather than right action or good consequence.⁴

The punitive approach must also seek a more limited set of targets compared to deontological and consequentialist boycotts. The targets of a punitive boycott must deserve the consequences the boycott tries to effect. Participants in a punitive boycott must be especially careful about their approach and communication of their intentions because many people around the world expect procedural justice and may perceive participants as unjustified vigilantes rather than righteous judges.

Identifying an approach is necessary because there are aspects to each that are mutually exclusive. A deontological boycott targets the complicit, a consequentialist boycott targets influential entities, and a punitive boycott targets only wrongdoers. Furthermore, a consequentialist boycott would end when the targets have ceased their offensive actions, while a punitive boycott would not end until it is perceived that the target has been sufficiently punished. These distinctions define how a boycott

³ For further reading on deontological and consequentialist ethics see Sinnott-Armstrong 2021 and Alexander and Moore 2021.

⁴ For further reading about procedural justice see Miller 2021, and for further reading on retributive justice see Walen 2021.

might operate, and without proper identification and communication of values, a boycott can lose validity and be subject to criticism.

Applying Principles Consistently

In order to overcome criticisms of power stratification, prejudice, and confusion, entities should choose a methodology for evaluating proposed boycotts around the world to ensure greater consistency across cases. Ultimately, boycotts must be selective in recognition that not every wrong can practically be boycotted; they should prioritize the issues. Selectivity recognizes practical limitations and establishes consistency across cases. A comprehensive selectivity system would ensure that boycott campaigns are chosen based on desert rather than popularity or media coverage.

Some have suggested a “ranking of evil” (Rodin and Yurdin in de Shalit 2016) to sort all evil actions and compare them to one another. Others suggest that a more practical way of selective boycotting is by using a “test of reasonableness” to determine which cases to boycott (de Shalit 2016). Either way, consideration must be given to the comparative evils of the target. The “test of reasonableness” and the “ranking of evil” limit the number of boycotts that an entity could conduct and make the selection of which boycotts to undertake more procedural and less susceptible to personal or institutional prejudice.

Consider the Facts

Critics are justified in asking why the boycotters of Israel and Russia have not acted in what they say are “similarly evil” situations. Academic organizations should not take these criticisms lightly and should seriously consider establishing the means to systematically evaluate evil throughout the world and take coordinated action to prevent it. It is entirely inauthentic for academic institutions to conduct boycotts against only evils that make front-page news. Organizations unable to conduct a systematic evaluation

in-house might consider incorporating the evaluation architecture into a collaborative initiative with other institutions, or they might defer to an existing group, such as the United Nations.

Considering facts is also essential for identifying targets. Determinations of a specific individual's or organization's participation and complicity should be evaluated prior to the announcement of a boycott, and the relevant facts must be central in the decision to conduct a boycott in order to avoid prejudice.

Academic institutions should also make it a part of their mission to study the outcomes of their boycott strategies. Strategies that do not produce the intended outcomes must be abandoned. It can be extremely difficult to track the outcomes of a single actor's influence, but if an issue can be studied and quantified, the value of that analysis could influence future decisions and make the institution's boycotting strategy more coherent and effective.

Conclusion

Contemporary boycotting produces different outcomes in the cases of Israel and Russia despite their similarities. The Israeli boycott has received a relatively small level of support for nearly twenty years and a relatively large amount of opposition, while support for the Russian boycott is high after only a few months. The disparate outcomes can be seen as reinforcing global power stratification, reflecting lines of prejudice, and failing to communicate a clear set of values. Therefore, this paper makes recommendations for any entities considering participating in current or future boycotting (whether they be governments, organizations, institutions, or individuals). These entities can coordinate their action with others, improve their communication, apply their principles consistently across cases, and incorporate facts into their considerations. Entities that follow these guidelines will put themselves at the forefront of a possible transformation in boycotting strategy. They will also ensure that their

practices are aligned with a morals-based agenda. Only through critical reasoning about its own boycotting activities can an entity decisively overcome its own prejudices and external criticism.

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