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Israel and a sports boycott: Antisemitic? Anti-Zionist?

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Abstract

The paper identifies and summarises the debates that surround the place of Israel in international sport and assesses how that place is increasingly being contested. The long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine has begun to manifest in the world of sport with the paper sketching the debates of those calling for, and those opposed to, sport sanctions/boycott of Israel until the 'Palestinian Question' is resolved. Five related tasks are addressed: first, to summarise the call for sanctions/boycott emanating from the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions movement. Second, to explore how this call is establishing itself in the world of sport. The responses of those opposed to any form of sanction/boycott are then considered. The confusion that surrounds the term antisemitism is addressed and the relationship between (anti-) Zionism and antisemitism unpacked. The discussion concludes with an assessment of the claim made by the Israeli state, and its supporters, that any action against the country's participation in international sport would be an act of antisemitism. Offering a timely, integrated summary of the heated debates that surround the Israel/Palestine conflict, the paper contributes to a wider discussion on the relationship between sport and politics.

Keywords

boycott, disinvestment and sanctions, human rights, Jewish, Palestine, politics, sanctions, Zionism

The paper examines the debates that surround the place of Israel in international sport and identifies how that place is increasingly being contested by the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Seeking to offer a timely assessment of how the conflict between Israel and Palestine is manifesting in the world of sport, the paper draws together the key debates of those calling for, and those

opposed to, sport sanctions/boycotts until the question of Palestine is resolved. Poulton and Durell's (2014) research on the term 'Yid' in English football and the response to Nicolas Anelka's quenele in support of the controversial French comedian Dieudonné M'bala (*BBC News*, 2014) indicates the level of confusion that surrounds antisemitism.

The paper begins by outlining the wider call for sanctions/boycott before assessing how this call is manifesting itself in the world of sport. The research draws upon a number of sources including news media sites based in Europe and the Middle East, and government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that support, or stand against, the proposed sanctions/boycott. The paper explores the positions of those calling for, and those opposed to, sanctions/boycott with the discussion located within a sport context. Although a crude characterisation, the Israeli government and its supporters have been quick to label criticism of the State of Israel as antisemitic. In order to understand how the debate is being framed, the paper centres and 'unpacks' the contested relationship between (anti-) Zionism and antisemitism, before concluding with an assessment of the popularist debate on how action against Israel's participation in international sport is seen, by some, as an act of antisemitism. The paper offers an integrated summary of the fluctuating and often heated debate that surrounds discussion of Israel/Palestine and contributes to the wider debate on the relationship between sport and politics.

The call to boycott Israel

In 2005 a co-ordinated campaign began when individuals and organisations within Palestinian civil society, those side-lined from both state-to-state negotiations and in the armed struggle, called for BDS. These should be applied to Israel until it complies with international law and ensures the fundamental rights of Palestinian people under the universal principles of human rights (Bakan and Abu-Laban, 2009; Barghouti, 2011; Lim, 2012; Wiles, 2013). The call was for a broad, non-violent boycott against Israeli institutions, not individuals, such as those used against apartheid South Africa. The BDS call was endorsed by over 170 Palestinian individuals and organisations (including political parties, NGOs, trade unions and community groups) representing Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), refugees and Palestinian citizens of Israel. The boycott was to be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

- Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall [The so-called Separation and Security Wall which the Israeli government began to build in the West Bank in 2002]

- Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN [United Nations] Resolution 194 (BDS, 2005).

The call for BDS gained support following the Gaza conflict in 2008–2009, the abortive humanitarian aid flotilla sent to Gaza in 2010, the ongoing construction of the ‘Peace Wall’ and the continual building of settlements in the OPTs.

Although the BDS movement represents a wide section of the Palestinian community it is not supported by all Palestinians and is not the sole authority on boycott and sanctions against the Israeli state. Both Fatah and Hamas were slow to respond to the emergence of the BDS movement and what is significant is that the BDS movement represents a wide range of Palestinian civil society; this suggests a distinction exists between civil society and the elements of the nascent Palestinian state in the OPT. The fractured nature of the Palestinian polity and the role of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a ‘client state under occupation’ and the different interpretations of Islam act to inform ‘the struggle for Palestinian rights (i.e. Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza), with the Fatah/Hamas distinction based less on religious faith than on the politics of national liberation and “political Islam”’ (Tamimi, 2007). What is significant is that geo-political relations and the local politics of post-colonial state-building are built upon the consequences of the partition of the region in the 20th century.

The BDS movement does not have a policy on whether there should be a one- or two-state solution to the conflict, but rather adopts a ‘human rights’ approach (Barghouti, 2011). The absence of a position on a one- or two-state solution is a weakness in their campaign. The two-state suggestion is both a fundamental problem for all groups (pro- and anti-Zionist), and can be seen as a shibboleth and a distraction. The notion of a two-state solution is fundamentally imbricated with the Oslo Peace Process (1993–1995) and with it the PA’s ‘client state’ status (although this has been superseded by circumstances ‘on the ground’). The BDS campaign has repeatedly said it has not taken a position because it is concerned about the three central demands (identified above), not the form of state or polity as this cannot be predicted given the rapidity of change. A second reason for not stating its position is that the BDS campaign needs to appeal to different audiences where adopting a position either way will likely alienate as many (or more) people than might be supportive of their agenda. Some of those calling for international pressure to be placed on Israel are opposed to two states because the call for ‘the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes’ is incompatible with a two-state solution. Such debates go beyond the agenda of ending Israeli apartheid and require consideration of a potential transition into a post-Israel political order; this is clearly

beyond the capability of this paper and, it seems, the international community.

A one-state solution (i.e. secular, pluralist and democratic) would see the end of a Zionist, predominantly Jewish state, as the 'right of return' would need to be extended from only to Jews to include Palestinians.¹¹ Critics of both the Zionist state and the BDS movement argue that it is necessary for the BDS movement to acknowledge Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. The absence of a clearly stated position on Israel leaves BDS supporters vulnerable to criticism that the Israeli state will simply 'disappear'. For Finkelstein (2011), revisiting the original 1947 United Nations (UN) proposal for two-states (albeit with different land boundaries to those originally proposed – i.e. the post-1967 Green Line) would allow support for the Palestinians to be more readily generated with a resolution to the issue being more meaningfully addressed. One counter-argument to the BDS narrative is that punitive measures against Israel would alienate rather than engender support within Israel and in the wider community.

Animated debate exists as to whether activists should target the Israel state or be confined to the OPT. Noam Chomsky, a long-standing critic of the Israeli state, has suggested that a general boycott of Israel would be 'a gift' to Israeli hardliners and their American supporters. Chomsky (2012) opposes the BDS tactics arguing that the comparison with apartheid South Africa is inappropriate because the boycotts and sanctions levelled against South Africa were highly selective and particular to each stage in the anti-apartheid campaign. Tactical choices within any campaign need to be carefully chosen to ensure they are appropriate to each stage; for example, Burmese opposition called for sanctions to be relaxed because they felt it would strengthen their particular situation (*BBC News*, 2012). Whilst Chomsky's point has merit, it can be seen as a misreading of the apartheid comparison given the BDS leadership has been careful to recognise the two situations are not the same and stress that the South African anti-apartheid campaign is an inspiration and neither comparable nor transferable (Barghouti, 2011). Much of the literature calling for sanctions/boycott of the Israeli state makes reference to apartheid South Africa. This comparison has been extensively discussed (Greenstein, 2009, 2011; Hass, 2013; Lim, 2012; MacLean, 2014; Tilley, 2012; White, 2012, 2013), with much of it responding to Naomi Klein's comment (quoted in Loach et al., 2011: 200):

the question is not 'Is Israel the same as South Africa?' – it is 'Do Israel's actions meet the international definition of what apartheid is?' And if you look at those conditions which include the transfer of people, which include multiple tiers of law, official state segregation, then you see that, yes, it does meet that definition – which is different than saying it is South Africa.

Chomsky (quoted in Sherwood and Kalman, 2013) doubts whether the BDS call for a general boycott of Israel would be accepted by a US audience and that the complexities of Israel/Palestine means much more education activity is needed. Chomsky (2012) notes that some 20 years of educational activities, starting in the 1950s, laid the basis for the widespread adoption of boycotts and sanctions applied to South Africa. However, in the sport movement, the first boycotts/sanctions pre-dated the formation of the Boycott Committee in 1959 and thus the current calls for boycotts/sanctions can be seen as part of the educational process. Both Chomsky and Finkelstein (2011), another supporter of Palestinian rights and a trenchant critic of Israel, is critical of the BDS movement and tactics. He advocates Palestinians bringing criminal charges against Israel (based on illegal settlements, the occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) to the International Criminal Court. Whilst accepting this would probably be unsuccessful, it would be an important educational activity.

Echoing the role played by trade unions in the early days of the boycott of apartheid South Africa, the biggest trade union in Britain (Unite) voted in 2014 to support the BDS movement. In 2004 Palestinian academics and intellectuals launched the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (Rose and Rose, 2008), and in 2009 the British Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) declared its support for an academic boycott of Israeli educational institutions, but not of individuals.² UCU was taken to an employment tribunal by Ronnie Fraser (with support from the 'Academic Friends of Israel' which receives funding from the Israeli state) on the grounds that the UCU boycott was 'institutional antisemitism' and constituted harassment of himself as a Jew. Fraser lost the case and was rebuked by the tribunal for a misuse of the legal process (British Committee for Universities of Palestine, 2013). The increasing use of courts against those who criticise Israel (dubbed from 'warfare to lawfare') has been, unsuccessfully, based on claims that individuals are motivated by racism against Jews. This was also claimed in a case brought against an Australian academic by Shurat HaDin, an Israeli Law centre³ with links to the Israeli state (see Goldberg, 2014), over his refusal to support a fellowship application from an employee of the Hebrew University; after a short hearing the case was dismissed for lack of standing. The suggestion that boycotts/sanctions prevent 'bridge-building' is moot given how when the Palestine Polytechnic University was closed by Israeli authorities in 2003, Palestinian academics requested support from Israeli academics, and found none was forthcoming (Parr, 2014).

There has been growing support for an economic boycott of the State of Israel, Israeli corporations and Israeli products. One of the main arguments given in support of BDS is that if Israel seeks to be part of Europe it should be subject to European Union (EU) rules on trade. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the labelling of food destined for western European countries (sourced in Israel *or* from the OPT) so that individuals can, if so moved, exercise their own boycott. There have been

instances of companies and pension funds, cognisant of their 'bottom line', reconsidering their involvement with Israeli companies with Germany's Deutsche Bank's 'flagging' the Israeli Bank Hapoalim as a morally questionable investment (Haaretz, 2014). Critics of the call for boycott/sanctions have been quick to point to a previous time when German organisations 'singled out' Jewish businesses.

In response to the growth of the BDS movement, several pro-Israel/Zionist groups (e.g. American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Anti-Defamation League, The Israel Project, the Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund, Shurat HaDin, StandWithUs, United Israel Appeal, We Believe in Israel, World Zionist Organisation, and the Zionist Organisation of America) have sought to counter the pro-Palestinian narrative (Fishman, 2012). Seeking to undermine international support for Palestinian human rights and the narrative that compares Israel with apartheid South Africa, the Israeli government, in 2005, launched its 'Brand Israel' public relations campaign to counter the negative international image of the country as a place of conflict and occupation (*The Economist*, 2005; Peled, 2013; Ravid, 2012). However, some see this campaign (*hasbara*)⁴ as little more than pro-Israeli propaganda and an attempt to whitewash the issue of human rights in Israel and, for some, cynically re-brand the state as gay-friendly (see Schulman, 2011 on 'pink-washing').

There have been attempts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together through various cultural, educational and sport projects (including Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Brighton University's 'Football for Peace' initiative and the Peres Centre for Peace 'friendly' match between Israeli and Arab children). However, there have been calls to boycott any organisation which receives funding from the Israeli state, including the Batsheva dance company whose performances are repeatedly disrupted by 'Don't Dance with Israeli Apartheid' protestors. Film-makers and musicians have refused to appear in Israel claiming that their appearance might be interpreted as supporting government policy (*The Guardian*, 2015). However, other musicians and film-makers continue to perform in Israel, advocating dialogue over isolation; a similar position used by entertainers who performed in apartheid South Africa.

The call for a sport boycott/sanctions

Contemporary sport cannot be fully understood without reference to history, culture and politics and its role in creating and sustaining national identity (Smith and Porter, 2004; Tomlinson, and Young, 2006; Wagg, 2008), with Ben-Porat (1998, 2009) identifying how professional sport was integral to the construction of a cultural façade for the Jewish state. During the 1920s, with financial support from the Jewish Agency, football became a means of national representation for the Jewish society and was used to promote the achievements of the Jewish

national home and develop ties to Diaspora Jewry (Galily, 2009; Harif and Galily, 2006; Kaufman and Galily, 2009).

The available history of Palestinian sport is more limited (Duerr, 2012; Khalidi, 2009, 2012; Sorek, 2000, 2013; Stewart, 2012) due, in part, to the systematic destruction of historical and cultural records linked to the Palestinian people, with Chomsky (1999) suggesting a deliberate effort has been made to render Palestine and Palestinians invisible. Palestine (via the Palestinian National Authority) became a recognised member of the Olympic Council of Asia in 1986 with FIFA recognising Palestine in 1998, some 10 years *before* the UN offered it partial recognition and in doing so became involved in much wider political processes. Sorek (2007) found that sport in general, and soccer in particular, offered an enclave in which non-Jews are 'accepted' and can flourish; however, he also found that the Palestinian population in Israel did not use sport to challenge Israeli hegemony, nor should their participation in local or national teams be seen as representing meaningful inclusion and/or empowerment. As Shor and Yonay (2010) have shown, although Israeli Arabs (Palestinians) play for Israeli teams they are tolerated so long as they do not say, or do, anything 'political'.

Although a full member of FIFA since 1998, Palestine did not host an official fixture 'at home' until they played Jordan in 2008 (Wheeler, 2008).⁵ In 2011 they played their first ever competitive home game, although later that year, six members of the Palestinian team were refused permission by Israel to travel with the team. The issue of free movement of players and officials has become an increasing source of tension between the Palestinian and Israeli Football Associations and, by association, between football's governing bodies and national governments. Whilst the Israeli Football Association (IFA) has sought to support the movement of footballers to attend training and matches, the Israeli state has accused Palestinians of using football as a cover for terrorist activities. Palestinian players are restricted by the Israeli authorities who regularly refuse travel permits on grounds of national security: half the squad for the 2006 World Cup qualifiers, and again 2007, 2008, 2010 players were prevented from travelling. In 2014 the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) jointly published a report with a Palestinian NGO which documented the systematic obstruction of the development of Palestinian soccer (Jennings et al., 2014). The report detailed the restrictions on the movement of players and officials, military violence against players, the prevention of stadium construction and pitch developments, and military actions which prevented youth tournaments and training schemes from taking place. However, not all the difficulties experienced by Palestinian footballers can be laid at the door of the Israeli authorities. The conflict between the Palestinian political factions, Hamas and Fatah, has also affected sport and sporting structures with the PFA suspending their football league between 2007 and 2010.⁶

In 2011, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) awarded Israel the right to host their biennial men's 2013 Under-21 finals. While

several large sporting events have taken place in Israel, including Europe's basketball 'Final Four' event in 2004 and the quadrennial Maccabiah Games which brings together thousands of Jewish athletes from across the world ('the Jewish Olympics' – see Galily, 2009), the UEFA tournament would be the most high-profile international sporting event held in the country since the 1968 Paralympic Games and would be a significant opportunity for the state to promote itself on the international stage. Two months before the decision was announced by UEFA, fighting between the Israeli Defence Force and Hamas in Gaza resulted in 139 deaths and over 1000 people wounded. The sports stadium in Gaza was bombed, killing four youngsters who were playing football, with the IDF claiming the stadium was being used to launch rockets (Ogden, 2012). Once Israel had been announced as the host, a number of individuals and organisations called upon UEFA to revoke the decision (Russell, 2012; Tutu, 2013; Warsaw, 2013c). A petition started by French/Malian footballer Freddie Kanoute initially included a number of high profile players although some later distanced themselves from the campaign (Ogden, 2012). Meeting pro-Palestine campaigners at FIFA headquarters, Michel Platini said he would 'think about' moving the tournament (Abunimah, 2013), although Platini later asserted that UEFA and the Israeli FA were responsible for football and could not be held responsible for the politics of governments. During the tournament, those opposed to the protest highlighted that the Israeli U21 squad contained six Israeli-Arab players (Taylor, 2013). Although between 17% and 20% of the country's population is identified as Israeli-Arab (depending if one includes Palestinians living in East Jerusalem and Druze in the Golan Heights), this particular demographic occupies a different position to non-Arab Israelis and Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza (Shor and Yonay, 2010; Sorek, 2005, 2007).

The IFA described hosting the event as an 'amazing opportunity' to promote its football and the country not only to Europe but to a global audience (Sanderson and Hart, 2011). Hosting the event would allow their national team to participate at the highest level, develop the country's infrastructure and raise the standard of Israeli football (Sanderson and Hart, 2011). Before the tournament began UEFA stated that 100,000 tickets had been sold; when compared to the 50,000 tickets sold during the 2011 tournament (in Denmark) it was hailed as a great success (Daskal, 2013). Attendance at the games averaged 11,500, which was approximately 70% take-up of the total tournament capacity. A cumulative global audience of over 120m followed the finals on television. On social media there were 1.9m visits and 7.6m page views made to UEFA.com during the tournament with some 100,000 fans linking to its U21 Facebook page and 9000 following the @UEFAUnder21 Twitter account (UEFA, 2013). At the end of the tournament Platini complimented the IFA on organising a successful tournament that saw no political violence or reported demonstration; for Platini this vindicated UEFA's decision not to move the event.

The lack of protest will see Israel host further international sport events⁷ and seeking to build on the success of the tournament, the IFA nominated Jerusalem as a potential host city for one of the 13 venues of the 2022 European Championship (Euro 2020). Their bid generated a similar response to the U21 tournament with Palestinian soccer clubs and NGOs writing to Platini and the newspapers to express their concerns (*The Independent*, 2014). In their bid document the IFA recognised that the political situation in Israel was complex and in the end Jerusalem was not selected because UEFA stated they received insufficient information on the budget and documentation relating to renovation work. BDS supporters claimed the bid was unsuccessful because of the recent Gaza conflict ('Operation Protective Edge'). In 2014 the seven-week conflict in southern Israel/Gaza led the International Tennis Federation to move Israel's Davis Cup tie against Argentina to the USA over safety concerns (Reynolds, 2014). Similarly, UEFA prevented Israeli teams from playing any home matches with the Champions League and Europa League games moved to Cyprus. An American Football tournament and an international swimming championship were also moved out of the country.

Prior to the U21 tournament, the head of UEFA met Palestinian football officials and implied he would annul Israel's membership of UEFA because of the restrictions imposed on Palestinian football players:

We accepted them (Israel) in Europe and furnished them the conditions for membership and they must respect the letter of the laws and international regulations otherwise there is no justification for them to remain in Europe. Israel must choose between allowing Palestinian sport to continue and prosper or be forced to face the consequences for their behaviour (Palestinian Information Centre, 2010).

However, for probable reasons of political expediency, Platini shifted from this position. In 2013 Palestinian football received a major boost when FIFA announced an investment of US\$4.5m into Palestinian football, including a new headquarters for the PFA, establishing a football academy, building two artificial pitches and rebuilding the national stadium. However, Israel has long restricted the import of goods and raw materials which significantly limits re-construction in OPT (Sherwood, 2010). Despite the substantial restrictions placed on the PFA their men's team have climbed the FIFA rankings and in 2014 competed in the Peace Cup, despite having only 14 players granted permission to travel to the Philippines.

The PFA recognised that sport (as soft power) could advance their political agenda and offered to host the symbolic annual FIFA Congress in 2017 which, if successful, would force Israel to allow access for *all* delegates from FIFA's 209 member associations. In 2013 the West Asian Football Federation held their U16 championship in the OPT. Israel initially refused entry to officials from various Arab countries but, under pressure from FIFA and UEFA, relented and granted entry permits to all

participants. Seeking to address the travel restriction placed on players and officials leaving and entering the occupied territories, the PFA called for the expulsion of the IFA from FIFA; however, during FIFA's pre-tournament conference in Brazil 2014, the PFA withdrew their call in response to the IFA and FIFA agreeing to hold an investigation into the issue of free movement. Although FIFA has shown caution, others have been more ambitious, including Barcelona FC who attempted to arrange an exhibition match against a joint Palestinian-Israeli team (Warshaw, 2013b) and Kuhn (2011) who suggested that Israel and Palestine jointly host the FIFA World Cup finals. Whilst FIFA president Sepp Blatter stated his desire to see the PFA and IFA sign a formal agreement of co-operation, what is evident is that FIFA is being drawn into a much wider debate on the escalation of issues relating to security and regional geopolitics.

'Normal' diplomatic relations have gradually been established between Israel and Arab countries with other sports governing bodies pressuring dissenting states to accommodate Israeli athletes; however, individual Israeli athletes continue to be refused entry to certain countries with the refusing country citing their objection to the treatment of Palestinians (Chong, 2011; *Telegraph*, 2009). There is growing evidence that when Israeli teams play abroad increased security measures are necessary to secure the event and team against potential protest (Dysch, 2012; Mondoweiss, 2015; Newman, 2009; Pfeffer and Klein, 2012; Zirin, 2009).

For different reasons, both Israeli and Palestinian athletes have had their sporting opportunities curtailed. Israeli athletes currently enjoy more freedom of movement than their Palestinian colleagues with sports governing bodies pressurising countries to allow athletes unrestricted access (Chauhan, 2013b; Lakhani, 2014). Some athletes from Arab/Muslim countries have refused to compete against Israeli athletes citing injury, tiredness or stomach aches, rather than stating a political objection which would invoke sanctions from their sport's governing body (Sinai, 2012). For Palestinian athletes, it is the restrictions imposed by the Israeli state on their ability to leave the OPT which restricts their sporting opportunities (Von der Lippe, 2014; Warshaw, 2013a), coupled with the very poor sporting infrastructure in the OPT. Given the events outlined above and the different access Israeli and Palestinian athletes have to sport infrastructures, facilities and related support (noting the significant differences between Gaza and parts of the West Bank) it is clear their experiences are not comparable.

'Sports sanctions against Israel are hypocritical and antisemitic'

The typical response to the call for action against the Israeli state is that of antisemitism: Why is Israel the target of action rather than its regional neighbours? Why is Israel subject to different standards to those applied to the rest of the world? Why does the BDS movement fail to highlight the (lack of) rights of Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab

countries? A broad pro-Israel campaign ('hasbara') has emerged to counter the growth of the BDS movement, with pro-Zionist groups comparing the call for sanctions/boycott with the Nazi-organised boycott of Jewish businesses in 1930s Germany. Organisations such as The Simon Wiesenthal Centre, the Zionist Federation and the Fair Play Campaign Group⁸ all condemn the proposed sanctions and argue that sport should be enjoyed without political interference and be used to bridge divides. During the campaigns against Apartheid South Africa, this 'bridge-building' approach was widely used by cultural workers, athletes and states although the consensus now indicates this was wrong.

Supporters of Israel might be willing to accept that whilst Israel is guilty of some human rights violations in its treatment of Palestinians, compared to any number of other states, these violations are negligible. Numerous Muslim countries are seen to fail to provide basic human rights, especially for women and homosexuals. Critics highlight that across Africa and the Middle and Far East, child labour is widespread, whilst female genital mutilation is practised in North Africa; Pakistan has a high incidence of female infanticide, whilst homosexuality is punishable by death in Iran. In Saudi Arabia, women are banned from driving, unable to travel without authorisation from a male relative, banned from working in a number of professions and have very limited sporting opportunities – yet there is no comparable group calling for sanctions and a boycott of the Saudi kingdom. That Israel detains Palestinians without trial is not dissimilar to the US policy that operated in Guantanamo Bay, with the US and the UK governments long targeting people identified as terrorists. In response to the charge 'Why Israel?' activists might question why Israel is given exceptional treatment in terms of continually flouting international law (including various UN resolutions), the exceptional levels of funding it receives from US governments, its exceptional and disproportionate use of violence against a civilian population, the longstanding nature of the dispute and the consistent description of Israel as a 'beacon of democracy'.

In the world of sport there is little consistency. China's ongoing occupation of Tibet and poor human rights record did not preclude their being awarded and hosting the 2008 Olympic Games. Whilst some EU government ministers boycotted elements of the UEFA 2012 Poland/Ukraine tournament in protest at the imprisonment of opposition leaders and racism within some fan groups, there was no call for wider sanctions or boycotts. Similarly, there was no official call to boycott the Bahrain F1 Grand Prix in 2011 in response to the state's treatment of anti-government protestors. This inconsistency led a UK parliamentary foreign affairs committee to report how there seemed to be no:

consistency of logic behind the government's policy in not taking a public stance on whether sponsors, drivers or the media should boycott the Bahrain Grand Prix, but implementing at least a partial

boycott of 2012 UEFA European football championship matches played in Ukraine. (*Channel 4 News*, 2012)

The committee concluded that ‘political and strategic factors [had] coloured the decision not to list the Bahraini kingdom alongside other states held responsible for human rights abuses’ (*Channel 4 News*, 2012). Few calls were made to boycott Qatar when it was awarded hosting rights for the FIFA World Cup finals in 2022, despite the country not being a democracy, having a poor human rights record and where male homosexuality is illegal (Conway, 2013). There were concerns from the players’ union FIFPro on the excessive temperatures the players would be subject to (Drayton, 2013) and the treatment of migrant workers (Dorsey, 2015; North, 2013). Similarly, Russia was allowed to host the 2014 Winter Olympics (Sochi) and was awarded the FIFA World Cup (2018) despite the government’s attack on political opponents, press freedoms, its war crimes in Chechnya and prejudice towards homosexuals. There have been calls for a boycott because of the conflict in Ukraine and those seeking reform of FIFA (Bernstein, 2014; Rumsby, 2014; Sky Sports, 2014). It is important not to conflate sanctions imposed by a state (in international law only nation states can impose sanctions) and those sought by solidarity movements in support of calls from local, in-country or in-exile, liberation movements, as well as the boycott campaigns emerging from those calls. This makes the BDS campaign akin to the anti-apartheid movement (there were calls from within the countries for BDS) and different from the examples listed here where there are no coordinated, significant or sustained calls being made.

As part of the build-up to the U21 tournament in Israel, the English FA cooperated with IFA on a number of anti-racist initiatives designed to address violence and racism within Israeli football (see Ben-Porat, 2008). The IFA has tried working with the PFA to reduce the barriers which prevent Palestinian players from travelling, but admit its ability is severely restricted and ultimately has to defer to the Israel state and its security concerns.⁹ As noted previously, the BDS movement is an umbrella network with individuals free to start their own local campaigns (for example ‘Football Beyond Borders’ and ‘Red Card Israeli Racism’ – RCIR). RCIR describes itself as an anti-apartheid action group with links to a number of organisations that support the Palestinian people. While recognising that sporting activities can improve relations between communities, it argued that by admitting Israel into European sporting competitions, UEFA was directly condoning the institutionalised racism of the Israeli state. Critics maintain that the Israeli government does not conform to European values and that its apartheid policies should disqualify the IFA from membership of UEFA. Moreover, it argues that excluding Israel from European sporting activities will lead Israel to address its racist and apartheid behaviour.

Given that Israeli teams currently play in European club and country competitions one might look to Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE), supported by both UEFA and FIFA, to take a lead. However, UEFA

has said that neither it, nor the Israeli FA, can be held responsible for the politics of the region or the decisions of the Israeli state. Michel Platini claimed that 'I don't do politics, I do football' (Nieuwhof, 2013) – this statement is a clear echo of those who supported maintaining sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa. Whilst FIFA and UEFA might claim they 'don't do politics', racism is certainly political and they have acted to counter it across western and eastern Europe (Chauhan, 2013a; *Daily Telegraph*, 2013). In September 2014, UEFA fined two Scottish and one Irish club after sections of their fans displayed Palestinian flags during Europa League games. The flags were deemed a political symbol because of the ongoing conflict in Gaza (Lowson, 2014). Official bodies and anti-racism groups have different, shifting agendas in how they approach inequity in football and it might be that the IFA and mainstream anti-racist groups necessarily adopt a very narrow set of criteria by which to identify 'racism' when deciding whether or not to get involved. The racism identified by those calling for a boycott is of a quantitatively and qualitatively different nature from that used by UEFA, the IFA and FARE, who limit their responsibility to the internal game in Israel.

Antisemitism and anti-Zionism

In seeking to ensure clarity and coherence, against a background of those who confuse and conflate Judaism with Zionism,¹⁰ it is necessary to clarify antisemitism, the development of Zionist discourses, anti-Zionism and 'new' antisemitism before stressing the importance of distinguishing antisemitism from anti-Zionism.

The term 'anti-Semitism' first appeared in 1879 when a German journalist, Wilhelm Marr, used it to characterise his anti-Jewish movement, the Anti-Semitic League (Rattansi, 2007). Meer and Noorani (2008) identify how Marr sought to identify the Jews as a distinct race with the term seeking to sound like a new, scientific concept rather than simple religious bigotry. Anti-Jewish activity has a long history, albeit one with specific historical reasons; it has been particularly evident in Christian Europe, with prejudice often based on the accusation of being 'Christ's killers'. Other types of antisemitism have been evident throughout history and are based on a range of factors including economic, racial, social, cultural, religious and/or ideological stereotypes (Beller, 2007; Browning, 2005; Dee, 2012; Finkelstein, 2008; Herf, 2014; Julius, 2012).¹¹

An increase in reports of antisemitism in 2014 was seen, by some, as a reaction to the incursion of the IDF into the Gaza Strip ('Operation Protective Edge'). The UK parliament undertook research on the antisemitic discourse associated with these incidents (All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism, 2015). As part of this research Gidley (2014) highlighted the importance of context in determining 'antisemitism' and using the example of a Palestinian flag displayed outside an Israel embassy, argued that this should not be seen as antisemitic, but if displayed outside a kosher deli or synagogue would

be an act of antisemitism. Gidley (2014: 5) also noted how the slogan 'child murderer', if directed at Israel, was 'potentially legitimate criticism' but could provoke sensitivities because of the association with the historical antisemitic blood libel trope. The many 'grey areas' of genuine disagreements or misunderstandings led Gidley to state that most demonstrations against Israel were not antisemitic but that whilst words and deeds may have no antisemitic intent, they might be 'objectively' antisemitic in their impact. Gidley (2014: 13) concluded that the media (both mainstream and Jewish) should report antisemitism responsibly and avoid hyperbole which would increase tensions, and to recognise the need for 'mainstream Britain to understand and take seriously the insecurity of the [Jewish] community'.

While emerging archaeological is generating heated debate and a engendering revision of the history of the Jewish people (El Haj, 2001; Sand, 2009, 2012) and thus what constitutes 'Jewish' (as a religion/race/tribe/people/nation and/or an ethnicity), the nature and consequences of Zionism are more readily identifiable. Zionism emerged in central Europe in the 19th century in response to increasing violent antisemitism. As a political project its goal was to create a national homeland for the Jewish diaspora (Avineri, 2014; Beinart, 2013; Chomsky, 1999; Gilbert, 2008; Rose, 2004; Sand, 2009, 2012; Shalaim, 2014). Often drawing upon socialist ideas, Zionist groups generated a gradual influx of Jews to the region, with activity culminating in the 1930s and 1940s. The successful establishment and maintenance of the State of Israel led to the emergence of post-Zionists who suggested that Zionism had fulfilled its original remit (Chan et al., 2002; Morris, 2007; Pappé, 1999, 2007, 2011, 2014; Segev, 2000; Shalaim, 2014). These post-Zionists, many of whom were on the political left, took a radically different position to the standard Zionist approach and began to question whether it was possible for Israel to be a 'Jewish state' and a democracy (especially when it continues to occupy neighbouring states' lands). Together with a group of fellow travellers, known as 'new historians', they began to question whether Israel had always been the 'innocent party' during its creation, maintenance and in the ongoing peace negotiations with its neighbours.¹²

The influence of post-Zionism was only fleeting when compared with the Neo-Zionist narrative. This variation of Zionism sees the land of Israel as the natural home of the Jewish people and has been promised to them by god (i.e. they have a biblical mandate). This right wing and nationalistic ideology is informed by a religious faith and claims that Arabs and Jews cannot peacefully coexist, with its followers calling for the expulsion of all Arabs from the Land of Israel.¹³ Two events fuelled the growth of Neo-Zionism; the first was the 'Six-Day War' in 1967 which left Israel in control of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. The second event was the election in 1977 of the first right-wing party (Likud) to lead the government and who permitted religious activists to settle these 'spoils of war' – particularly across Judea and Samaria (Zertal and Eldar, 2007).¹⁴

The accusation of 'new antisemitism' is typically levelled against those on the political left, the political right and those associated with political/radical Islam – in short anyone opposed to calls for the Israeli state to be sanctioned. Widely used in the 1990s, the term 'new' antisemitism dates back to 1921 with the 'roots of the idea deep[er] and ... older than the State of Israel' (Klug, 2013: 469). Because Israel is increasingly proclaiming itself as a Jewish state, and some Jews electing to identify with Israel, long-standing antisemitism is seen to be embodied and displaced onto the Jewish state. This hostility towards Israel and Zionism (antisemitism 'by proxy'; Klug, 2003) allows criticism of Israel to be interpreted as both anti-Zionist and antisemitic ('two sides of the same coin'). The claim that 'Israel' has replaced 'the Jew' becomes increasingly problematic when a rise in antisemitism was attributed to reactions to the conflict in Israel and Gaza (Berg, 2015).

As a political ideology, opposing Zionism should not necessarily or automatically be seen as racist or antisemitic. The Israeli state and its supporters have deliberately sought to exploit antisemitism by conflating Zionism with Judaism and thus suggesting that any criticism of Zionism is antisemitic. This has proved successful in closing down almost all criticism of the State of Israel. What is evident is how the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism has drawn attention away from other forms of racism (such as Islamophobia and Romany racism in Europe). Associating anti-Zionism with antisemitism is to misuse the terms and silence those opposed to Israeli actions and policies. In the same way that the Israeli state has sought to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism in order to reject criticism, genuine antisemitism might seek to hijack anti-Zionist slogans in order to gain legitimacy. Klug (2013) acknowledges that antisemitism can be expressed through anti-Zionism and submits that the claim that the burden of proof is on those who deny the allegation of antisemitism.

Distinguishing antisemitism from anti-Zionism

Throughout history persistent forms of discrimination have been shown towards Jews and whilst it is no longer acceptable to be prejudiced against 'the Jews', Europeans in general (and Germans in particular), are seen to have a pathological, guilt-filled response to the Holocaust¹⁵ (Weinthal, 2014). As Tony Judt (cited in Corrigan, 2009: 151) suggests, as antisemitism and anti-Zionism become conflated in everyday imagination, the 'holocaust will come to be seen as just a political defence of Israeli policy'. Others have warned against exploiting the Nazi Holocaust in contemporary politics, not least because its critics accuse Israel of failing to meet the standards they expect of others (Finkelstein, 2003; Novick, 1999).

German guilt has inhibited them from criticising Israeli policy with this inhibition, by Europe's strongest economy, playing a significant role in

perpetuating 'the Palestinian problem.' For Klug (2013: 470) 'If Zionism is seen as the only alternative to anti-Semitism, then it follows that hostility to Zionism (or to the state of Israel as the expression or fulfilment of Zionism) must be anti-Semitic'. There are many reasons why people might feel hostility towards Zionism or Israel and as Peace (2009: 117) notes, 'the fact that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are not interchangeable does not mean that anti-Zionism or anti-Zionist cannot be anti-Semitic'. For Corrigan (2009: 154):

there is no rational basis for the argument that criticism of the state of Israel and the political ideology of Zionism is antisemitic; just as it makes no sense to criticise South African apartheid towards blacks as evidence of racism towards whites, or that the Nazi policies towards Jews should be allowed because it is evidence of racism against Germans.¹⁶

Those calling for BDS to be applied to Israel need to be cognisant, at all times, of the importance of the language used. Poulton and Durell's (2014) study of the contested uses and meanings of the term 'Yid' in English football fan culture revealed multiple meanings were available with the word used as both an ethnic epithet and term of endearment and concluded that the cultural context and intent behind the use of the term were crucial. In order to establish and maintain credibility for their campaign, supporters of BDS need to maintain a clear and absolute distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism and distinguish between individual Jews and the action of the State of Israel. Many countries have a poor record of human rights, but to campaign for a boycott of Israel is not to claim that they are necessarily 'top' of a league table of human rights abusers. It is unknown how many activists sit down to make a list of human rights abusers, rank them and start at the top; those who chose to 'get involved' do so for different reasons (Barr and Drury, 2009; Verhulst and Walgrave, 2009; Woods et al., 2012). Such statements give an indication as to how each activist might explain their involvement in pro-Palestinian activity; however, more specific research such as Barrows-Friedman (2014) would be needed on the social, political and/or cultural motives of those who support the Palestinian cause to assess the claim that Israel's exceptional treatment stems primarily from antisemitism. Addressing Klug's (2013) statement that the burden of proof is on those who deny the allegation of antisemitism, such a study can investigate why Israel has gained a special place in human rights activism and why there is no comparable boycott movement against Saudi Arabia, China or any number of other states. That said, supporting BDS against Israel would not preclude an individual or organisation from being involved in other campaigns with many involved in other anti-racist activities, including campaigning against the rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia, and would find it deeply offensive to be called a racist.

Due to Israel's desire to integrate itself into European sporting competitions, BDS campaigners argue the standards of human rights sought (if not always achieved) in Europe, should apply. Rather than holding Israel to a higher standard than any other country, BDS supporters argue that Israel is failing to meet its basic commitment to the Declaration of Human Rights. The ongoing abuse of the human rights of Palestinians (be it those living in Israel, the OPT or as refugees) continues to be documented by several organisations, including the International Red Cross, the UN, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as Israeli/Palestinian human rights organisations (including Adalah, B'tselem and Breaking the Silence).

Ryall (2006) has shown the limits of sport's responsibilities and whilst no country has a 'perfect' human rights record and if 'perfect' criteria were adopted, no country would be allowed to host a sports event. As Dein and Calder (2007) point out, how a line might be drawn in a non-hypocritical fashion is a highly complex, philosophical issue. However, for activists, this should not be an excuse for inaction, with an individual incapacitated because they could not solve all the world's problems at the same time. As Marqusee (2014a, 2014b) has noted, the logic of not 'singling out' a country and campaigning against any injustice would leave every struggle isolated from international support. It is not easy to identify the reason(s) why individuals chose to oppose the actions of the Israeli state and those who are involved in acts of antisemitism: is the motive anti-Zionist or antisemitic? As Klug (2013: 478) suggests, one can look at the 'company they keep': what is their history/pattern of anti-racist activity? What literature is produced, who are the members of their organisation and what are their political connections?

The Israeli state and its supporters have sought to delegitimise argument(s) with ad-hominem attacks on those seeking 'better' (i.e. equal) human rights for Palestinians. This type of 'moral blackmail' – that is, calling anyone who opposes the current treatment of Palestinians antisemitic or a 'self-hating Jew' – does nothing to address the fundamental issues. Antisemitism should not be abused in order to support Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. What is evident is that a clear and consistent distinction is needed between antisemitism and anti-Zionism; it is when language is used carelessly that confusion emerges and allows Israel to play its 'antisemitism card'.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed sports responsibilities in the context of Middle East politics and that those proposing sport sanctions/boycott would accept, but challenge, the limits of sport in abrogating their responsibilities as corporate citizens. It has discussed the place of Israel in contemporary sport and assessed the arguments for, and against, the application of sanctions and boycotts. Pro-Palestinian campaigners have sought to move the discourse from one based on nationalism to one based on human rights, noting how South African anti-apartheid

campaigners were eventually able to overcome an initial reluctance to mix sport and politics when the case was made in terms of human rights (Kidd and Donnelly, 2000). The State of Israel is no different from any other state in using sport as a political tool. In the near future it is likely that the 'Palestine' and Palestinians will also seek to use sport as a form of 'soft power' in the struggle for statehood.

It is unknown whether the BDS movement can foreground the human rights of the Palestinian people to the same extent, enter the public consciousness and generate widespread popular support. Palestinians living in Israel, the OPT and refugee camps experience discrimination, mass unemployment, subsistence wages, poor living conditions, inadequate health services, sub-standard transport, housing shortages and inferior education.¹⁷ The logic of Zionism has created a racist and genocidal environment in which Palestinians and their supporters are accused of antisemitism for protesting against systematic ethnic cleansing, house/village/community demolitions, collective punishments, (illegal) Jewish-only settlements, travel restrictions, an illegal 'Peace Wall', state torture, detention without trial and assassinations (Corrigan, 2009). Those opposed to BDS argue that building bridges and maintaining links is a more constructive approach. Are boycotts and sanctions legitimate means of protest against occupation, racism and colonisation? Whilst the merits and faults of BDS are debated, the Israeli state continues to allow illegal settlement of the OPT, thus preventing the two-state option. As 'peace talks' stumble on, between two very unequal partners, 'facts' are being established on the ground.

This paper has identified the positions of those calling for, and those opposed to, sanctions/boycott of Israel until the Palestinian question is addressed. It has discussed how the popular debate is increasingly being framed by the concepts of (anti-) Zionism and antisemitism and unpacked the relationship between them. The discussion has shown how a crude characterisation used by the Israeli government, and its supporters, is seeking to neutralise any criticism of the State of Israel by labelling it as antisemitic. In assessing the call for sanctions/boycott it is therefore essential to distinguish between the two concepts and resist the attempts of those who seek to conflate them.

It is recognised that in writing about a region subject to constant political turmoil one can be overtaken by events. However, some things remain constant and are based on enduring and fundamental questions: whether one sees Israel as a safe haven for a Jewish diaspora against unending antisemitism, or as a colonising-settler state, the use of religious texts by religious extremists to settle Judea and Samaria, why the Palestinian leadership has consistently 'failed to deliver', the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish-only state, and so on, will define one's position and one's response to the call for a boycott/sanctions. BDS supporters claim that repressive regimes do not represent the sporting values advocated by the International Olympic Committee, FIFA and other governing bodies. Those supporting BDS stress that repressive regimes

should not be rewarded with international sports events; sanctions will draw attention to human rights abuses and encourage the offending state to instigate reforms. As Dein and Calder (2007) note, boycotts and sanctions need to be supported by those on whose behalf the sanctions are called for and that any call for intervention must have the potential to achieve genuine change rather than just empty posturing. Taking no action or ignoring the problem is a political choice and to suggest that 'politics has no role to play' is taking a political stance, with implications, irrespective of whether or not they are intended or desired.

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1. Currently any Jew (anywhere in the world) can use the Jewish Law of Return, whereas a Palestinian born in the country (and subsequently 'leaving'/expelled) has no equivalent right of return or entitlement to Israeli citizenship. Whilst being a Palestinian carries no default religious identity, ethnic or racial criteria, to qualify as a Jew, in the Jewish state, there are certain racial, ethnic and religious criteria to meet (Corrigan, 2009).
 2. See also the US Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI) in the USA, the Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine (L'AURDIP) in France, the Berlin Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel (BAB) in Germany, Academics for Palestine in Ireland, and Plataforma para el Boicot Académico a Israel (PBAI) in Spain. In 2014 the Modern Language Association (MLA) criticised Israel for restricting the right of US scholars to enter the West Bank to work at Palestinian universities. The American Studies Association (ASA) endorsed an academic boycott of Israel, with both organisations noting that Palestinian academics/researchers rarely had free movement. See arguments for and against by Fish, Butler, Mearsheimer and Chomsky in Bilgrami and Cole (2015).
 3. '... senior Israeli officials have been training such Israel-friendly lawyers for some time in an effort to deal with deligitimisation claims against Israel...' (Molad, 2012: 35).
 4. Hasbara is a term that ranges from 'explanation' through 'overseas image-building' to 'pro-Israeli propaganda' (see Ravid, 2012).
 5. Four players '... including the team's captain, Saeb Jundiye, from Gaza and others from refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria could not get Israeli permission to enter the country' (Wheeler, 2008).
 6. One can contrast the 'power' of the PFA with the Palestinian Authority (West Bank) which has no control over issues of security, land, water, movement of people and goods, industry and trade (Hass, 2013).
 7. In March 2014, Israel was chosen as host for the 2015 European Short Course Swimming Championships.
 8. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre is an international NGO which focuses on Jewish human rights. The Zionist Federation (full name: The

Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland) is an umbrella organisation for Zionist groups in the UK. Established in 1899 it campaigns for a permanent homeland for Jewish people. The Fair Play Campaign group was established by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council in December 2006. It works to co-ordinate activity against boycotts of Israel and other anti-Zionist campaigns.

9. Galily et al. (2012) have shown how various international sports organisations adopted different positions when Israel hosted a sports event during a period of heightened security concerns.
10. Louise Mensch demonstrated the lack of understanding between the two. The former British MP expressed her concern over rising antisemitism and tweeted that she 'would mute the word "Zionist" from her feed because it was used to attack Jews'. In response to a tweet which asked if Theodore Herzl would be muted, Mensch replied 'Who? If he uses Zionist, then yes. Cheap code word for Jew. Anti-Semitism. Not having it.' (Media Mole, 2014). Herzl was a founder of the modern Zionist movement and author of the key texts for the modern Zionist movement.
11. Researchers have begun to focus on the relationship between the rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism, but without reference to sport (see special edition of *Racial and Ethnic Studies*, 2013; Meer and Noorani, 2008; Romeyn, 2014; Werbner, 2013).
12. They also questioned whether a single state solution, a state that was secular and liberal, neither Jewish nor Arab in character, would be a realistic option.
13. Eretz Israel (Greater Israel), as opposed to Medinat Israel (the State of Israel).
14. Religious settlers have moved so far to the political right that they now describe any Jew (Israel or Diaspora) who opposes settlement of the 'Land of Israel' as an antisemite, and a non-Jew who opposes settlement as a Nazi – see Misgav (2015).
15. Adorno and Horkheimer labelled this 'guilt-defensive antisemitism' (Weinthal, 2014).
16. This flawed logic was clearly evident in the UK's *Sun* newspaper report on a 'celebrity' who supported a campaign for better housing, see Twitter's #TheSunLogic (Barrell, 2014).
17. Palestinians in many communities across Israel have been subject to forced relocation and repeated house destruction in 'illegal' villages; employment opportunities are limited due to their not having served in the military – a condition increasingly necessary to secure employment; see Pappé (2011).
