

## Contribution to a JVL discussion on “normalisation”

Richard Kuper, 6 July 2025

### Advance publicity said:

**Richard Kuper** asks who speaks for movements of the oppressed and with what authority? Who speaks for Palestinians today? He says: “Our solidarity with those struggling against oppression must be solid and forceful – but not uncritical. We support BDS but must make our own evaluations as to whether certain groups or activities are “normalising” the situation and are therefore legitimate targets for BDS. We must have a view of what we hope to achieve by supporting any particular action. I will take the case of Standing Together in Israel and argue that the call to boycott it is misguided and counterproductive.”

**[I have taken the opportunity to add back in some text I was forced to cut on the day because of time constraints – RK]**

I want to make it clear from the outset that while in general I regard myself as a wholehearted supporter of the tactic of calling for BDS, boycott divestment and sanctions against Israel, I do not necessarily support with equal enthusiasm every call to boycott and, on occasion, find myself in opposition to a particular call.

At stake is how we express our solidarity with movements against oppression and exploitation generally, how we decide where to put our time and energy, where to focus, and how we assess what is likely to be most effective or productive actions where we are. Obviously, what those leading the movements we are in solidarity with call for us to do must rank high in our assessment.

But at the same time we must be true to ourselves and our values: we can't outsource our strategic assessment and our moral judgement to others. Where necessary we have to make our own calls and - if need be - simply not do, or not do with any enthusiasm, what we are being urged to do. Sometimes we must even oppose it.

I want to suggest that this is the case with regard to the Palestine BDS movements' call to boycott Standing Together, a group active within Israel.

But first a word on “normalisation”, the subject of our discussion this evening, a concept which underpins the movement's decisions about what to boycott or not..

AS Pacbi (Palestinian Campaign For The Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), one of the most influential members of the BDS coalition and the Boycott National Committee, put it back in 2011, this involves “rejecting the treatment of Israel as a “normal” state with which business as usual can be conducted”... We should think of normalization as a “colonization of the mind,” whereby the oppressed subject comes to believe that the oppressor's reality is the only “normal” reality that must be subscribed to, and that the oppression is a fact of life that must be coped with. Those who engage in normalization either ignore this oppression, or accept it as the status quo that can be lived with.’

So far so good. More recently the BNC published a statement explaining its [normalisation guidelines](#): joint work where Palestinians and Israelis, appear on the same platform or engage in joint activity with each other has to meet two conditions, viz:

1. The Israeli side publicly recognizes the UN-affirmed inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are set out in the [2005 BDS Call](#), and
2. the joint activity constitutes a form of co-resistance against the Israeli regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid.

And the BDS call from 2005 lists three conditions that Israel has to meet before the boycott is called off, viz:

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

### Turning now to [Standing Together](#)

It describes itself as “a progressive grassroots movement organizing Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel against the occupation and for peace, equality, and social justice.”

It says:

“The current socio-political reality in Israel is unbearable. Unending occupation feeds violence, fear, and hatred between Israelis and Palestinians. Economic inequality is widening. Poverty is deepening. Israel’s Palestinian minority faces increasing discrimination. Women, Mizrahim, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, the elderly, and people with disabilities are marginalized socially, economically, and politically.”

“Many people, “ they believe, “want progressive change...They need a movement to unite them, inspire them .. [and] “Standing Together is this movement.”

I think words like these, although wishy-wishy to some, are actually quite a strong statement in current conditions, matched by Standing Together supporters putting their bodies on the line to support the movement of food aid into Gaza when right-wing settlers were blocking it.

That is not Pacbi’s view. It describes Standing Together as “an Israeli normalization outfit that seeks to distract from and whitewash Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza”, that “pays lip service to “ending the occupation,” and even then it adopts a framework that sets Israelis and Palestinians as equally responsible for the oppressive reality”. It headlines its statement [Serving Apartheid Israel’s Propaganda](#)

“By trying to paint Israel as a tolerant, diverse, and normal state,”, it says “and focusing on “hatred” rather than oppression as the problem, this organization is intellectually dishonest and outright complicit. It is serving a key role in Israel’s

international propaganda strategy at this time.”,,,“it fails to even mention the elephant in the room: Israel’s 75-year-old regime of settler-colonialism and apartheid, the root cause of “conflict” and violence”... “fails to recognize Israel’s crime against humanity of apartheid... [but] instead, it pays lip service to “ending the occupation

OK. ST is not perfect. It is not a revolutionary organisation. Nor is it a solidarity-with-the-Palestinians organisation though a lot of its work bears on such solidarity. And its supporters in the UK Friends of Standing Together include some very dodgy JLM enthusiasts, I gather actively counterposing support for ST to support for the BDS movement in the trade unions here.

But it is against Standing Together in Israel that the boycott call is directed. This movement consists of many thousands of Palestinian and Israeli *citizens*, working within the framework available to them as *citizens*. It does not call for the end of apartheid or describe Israel as a colonial-settler state, or call for the right of the refugees to return. It does not call for one democratic state from the river to the sea. It does not meet the normalisation criteria.

But it does have a joint Israeli-Palestinian leadership, and it does mobilize tens of thousands for what I see as resistance activities in Israel (not defined as **co**-resistance by the BDS movement because its preconditions are not met). It seems to me *this is move in the right direction*, often very courageous, in increasingly repressive circumstances, amidst a population that is very hostile to ST’s aims, however limited some of us may find them.

Whatever they are doing, it does not make sense to describe it as normalising the situation. The normalisation criteria seem to imply that any action by Palestinian citizens of Israel that is anything less than rejecting one hundred percent the state of which they are citizens, is collaboration with the enemy.

I don’t accept this and say, respectfully, we have to make up our own minds on calls for BDS. While overwhelmingly in favour of the principle, we must reject the excesses and sectarian diktats which sometimes emerge from it. I for one express my solidarity with Standing Together in Israel.

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