

# THE TRUE CRISIS IS NEOLIBERALISM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PALESTINIAN-LED BDS MOVEMENT’S PANDEMIC RHETORIC

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Although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the work of activists around the world, movements for social justice have turned the pandemic into an opportunity to intervene in hegemonic systems, including neoliberalism. One such movement is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinian rights. In this paper, I analyze the rhetoric of the BDS movement during the early stages of the pandemic to examine how the pandemic has shifted opportunities for rhetors who seek to resist neoliberal hegemony and promote intersectional justice. I find that BDS challenges the dominant frame of the pandemic as a crisis by reframing neoliberalism itself as a crisis. Within this frame, BDS combines multiple perspectives from marginalized groups around the world to enact collectivity as resistance to neoliberal ideology. My analysis suggests that these strategies of disruption are particularly effective against neoliberal ideology in the context of the pandemic. Ultimately, I argue that framing neoliberalism as a crisis offers activists opportunities to reject neoliberal policies and generate solidarity with other groups.

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## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic upended people’s lives around the world, leading to widespread lockdowns, social isolation, economic recessions, and, of course, sickness. This crisis has been particularly disruptive to the work of social movements, as social distancing requirements have often limited in-person actions and the coronavirus continues to command the world’s attention. At the same time, the pandemic has made activist work even more important. Geoffrey Pleyers notes that existing socioeconomic inequality has drastically worsened, austerity cuts have left marginalized people vulnerable to the virus and without appropriate healthcare, and many countries have

failed to contain the spread of the disease, leading to mass death (298). Both “reactionary movements” and racism have also intensified (Pleyers 306). Importantly, governments around the world have used the pandemic to solidify these trends toward greater inequality. Naomi Klein’s theory of the “shock doctrine” explains how crises, like pandemics, present an opportunity to entrench capitalist relations. Specifically, Klein argues that elites use times of crisis “to push through their wish list of unpopular policies that further polarize wealth” in countries around the world (qtd. in Solis). This phenomenon has already occurred with COVID-19, as many governments have given large sums of bailout money to corporations instead of supporting their citizens (Pleyers 306). In short, although the pandemic creates

many new barriers to activism, it makes the work of social movements increasingly urgent.

The pandemic can also augment the work of social movements in that it presents an opportunity for them to expand the scope of their activism. As Klein argues, just as the “shock” of the crisis allows governments to push for neoliberal policies, so might the pandemic enable activists to enact their visions for the world (Solis). When the whole world has been shaken out of life as normal, ideas previously dismissed as radical may not seem so radical anymore. The pandemic, in other words, is a site rich for rhetorical intervention, as social movements might break from previous politics and generate new ideological frames. In particular, the coronavirus and many countries’ failure to protect their citizens’ wellbeing may open up space for challenges to neoliberalism, an ideology and global economic system that has been targeted by many activists due to the extreme inequality that it creates (Pleyers 298). Among social movements taking advantage of the pandemic to challenge this system is the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which advocates for equal rights for Palestinians and an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. During the pandemic, BDS has broadened its focus on Palestinian rights to include resistance to neoliberalism and connections with other marginalized groups around the world.

In this paper, I examine the rhetoric of the BDS movement to determine how the pandemic has shifted opportunities for rhetors who seek to resist neoliberal hegemony and promote intersectional justice. Analyzing the BDS movement’s recent #SpreadSolidarity campaign using feminist criticism, I argue

that BDS reframes the pandemic as merely a symptom of the actual crisis: neoliberalism. Within this frame, BDS cultivates multiple perspectives to connect different marginalized groups’ experiences of injustice and enact resistance to neoliberal hegemony via collectivization. My findings suggest that the pandemic augments the rhetorical possibilities for social movements to challenge neoliberal hegemony and build intersectional coalitions. I also suggest that, even beyond the pandemic, framing neoliberalism as a crisis can be an effective strategy for resistance.

## **TRANSNATIONAL PALESTINIAN ACTIVISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Existing scholarship has paid particular attention to appeals for international solidarity in the rhetoric of BDS and other pro-Palestinian activist groups. Jonathan Alexander and Susan C. Jarratt examine the Irvine 11, a group of student activists from the University of California-Irvine who protested Israel’s occupation of Palestine. Alexander and Jarratt find that the students “intended to bridge local, national, and international publics through their acts” and build connections with other activist groups (537). Convincing activists worldwide to oppose Israeli occupation is especially crucial for the BDS movement. Though led by Palestinians, BDS seeks to mobilize Western and other international audiences to put pressure on Israel to uphold Palestinians’ rights (Hitchcock 5). In her analysis of the BDS movement’s social media usage, Jennifer Hitchcock notes that BDS aims to align itself with other movements for civil rights around the world to create solidarity with activists in

other countries. For example, Hitchcock cites BDS activists' use of the "South African analogy" to liken their movement to the campaign against apartheid in South Africa, which represents an attempt to connect with other activists and appeal to international civil society (8). Other Palestinian activist groups have used similar tactics toward the same end. Matthew Abraham demonstrates how Palestinian activists and activists for racial justice in the United States have both worked to link their struggles. In addition to framing their separate experiences of oppression as fundamentally shaped by white supremacy, both groups have connected through their resistance to militarized police forces, as when Palestinian activists from Gaza and the West Bank advised protesters in Ferguson on how to face tear gas (Abraham 87). Connecting with activists across borders is, in short, a central strategy for current Palestinian activism.

While scholars like Abraham and Hitchcock highlight the ways in which Palestinian activists seek transnational solidarity, they do not look specifically at how neoliberal power relations influence transnational power relations. To this end, I turn to Rebecca Dingo, Rachel Riedner, and Jennifer Wingard, who identify the central project of transnational studies as "a cogent analysis of globalized power" (518). Transnational scholarship, they elaborate, "consider[s] how globalized power operates through a variety of linked scales—the economic, social, national, state, and political conditions of contemporary neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and neo-imperialism" (Dingo et al. 518). Thus, to more fully understand globalized rhetoric, scholars must examine the context of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism is both a system of economic policies and

a dominant ideology (Dingo et al. 522). As Dingo and colleagues summarize, neoliberal policies include marketization, deregulation, free trade, and a decrease in government support for social services (523). Together, these policies have the result of increasing income and wealth inequality. These policies are favored under neoliberal ideology, which posits that "strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade [are] a means through which to assure individual and social freedom" (Dingo et al. 522). Chandra Talpade Mohanty adds that neoliberal ideology further involves "the collapse of notions of private and public good" (9). That is, neoliberal ideology is profoundly individualistic, as the freedom of individuals to pursue their own self-interest comes to stand for the wellbeing of the collective. Most importantly, neoliberalism is hegemonic—framed as "beyond debate and common sense," it functions as a dominant way of understanding the world (Dingo et al. 523).

Although an analysis of neoliberalism is largely absent from previous scholarship on transnational Palestinian activist rhetorics, the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism makes it imperative to study. In particular, it is important to study how groups can most effectively resist both neoliberal ideology and neoliberal policies (Dingo et al.; Wingard). Dingo and colleagues call for scholars to examine "the precise ways that people (re)write and (re)read themselves into local and global contexts against and beyond the social relations, institutions, spaces, and economic processes of global capitalism and neoliberal governmentality" (523). Accordingly, my analysis of the rhetoric of the BDS movement focuses on how BDS activists resist neoliberalism and begin to craft alternative ways of thinking and being outside of neoliberal hegemony.

Understanding how activists can resist neoliberal hegemony is particularly important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic, especially in its early stages, has disrupted typical methods of activism, it has also allowed activists to expand and intensify their work. In particular, activists around the world have used the pandemic as an opportunity to disrupt neoliberal hegemony. Many movements have framed the pandemic as a result of capitalism and capitalist environmental destruction, spurring calls for international solidarity and global transformation (Pleyers 303). Additionally, social movements have responded to the pandemic by resisting neoliberal economic policies. In Portugal, activists pivoted from promoting awareness about housing inequality to successfully positioning housing as a human right (Mendes 328). In this case, changing social realities and shifting perspectives during the pandemic enabled activists to bring new issues into public discussion—if understanding housing as a human right seemed too radical pre-coronavirus due to neoliberal ideology, the importance of housing for social distancing during the pandemic allowed activists to make this argument more mainstream. The pandemic has also enabled activists to make new connections with other groups. Sabrina Zajak, Katarina Stjepandić, and Elias Steinhilper find that pro-migrant activists in Germany united “migrants, care workers, single parents, [and] homeless people” by emphasizing their shared experiences of precarity during the pandemic (S178). Instead of viewing migration as a single, isolated issue, these activists broadened their focus to view migration as part of a larger system of neoliberal policies that negatively impact many marginalized groups.

These examples suggest that the pandemic presents an opportunity for activists to intervene in neoliberal hegemony and generate new frames for understanding and acting in our world. However, as I mentioned above, governments and elites may also take advantage of the pandemic to further entrench neoliberal ideology and policies (Pleyers; Solis). It is therefore urgently important to understand how social movements aiming to resist neoliberal injustices can most effectively respond to the pandemic. In the following analysis, I examine how the BDS movement uses rhetorical strategies of disruption to reframe the crisis and collectivize marginalized groups around the world to challenge neoliberal hegemony.

## **BDS AND THE #SPREADSOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN**

The BDS movement is one of the most recent in a long line of groups advocating for Palestinian rights since the formation of the Israeli state. According to Human Rights Watch, Israel “maintains entrenched discriminatory systems that treat Palestinians unequally,” including widespread human rights violations, illegal settlement on Palestinian land, and a longstanding blockade of Gaza (“Israel/Palestine”). BDS aims to end this oppression with the help of the global community. BDS demands that Israel end “its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands,” recognize “the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality,” and protect “the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes” (“Palestinian Civil Society”). To do so, BDS advocates for boycotting Israeli cultural and academic institutions, divesting from Israel, and applying sanctions to the Israeli state. Although BDS has been successful in inserting Palestinian rights into the global conversation on Israel and

Palestine, the movement remains highly controversial. Abigail B. Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban note that opponents of BDS claim “that [BDS] is counterproductive to peace and/or security, that it is contrary to norms of academic freedom and that it is in fact motivated not by progressive but reactionary sentiment, tied to anti-Semitism” (31). Leaders of the movement assert that their problem with Israel is not its Jewishness but its oppression of Palestinians, and many Jewish groups are involved in the BDS movement. BDS activists also emphasize that the movement denounces anti-Semitism, as it stands against all forms of oppression.

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, BDS launched the #SpreadSolidarity campaign, which I analyze in this paper. Due to Israel’s longstanding blockade of Gaza, a violent neoliberal policy exploiting Palestinian land and labor, Palestinians were left without the economic resources and healthcare equipment necessary to combat the spread of COVID-19. BDS called for an end to the blockade to allow Palestinians access to healthcare during the pandemic. While this petition encouraged one-way solidarity from the West to Palestine, later actions linked Palestinians to other marginalized communities. For example, BDS broadcast a virtual rally on May 15, 2020, the anniversary of the Nakba, when Israeli soldiers forcibly removed Palestinians from their homes in 1948 (“Nakba Rally”). The Nakba Day rally engaged activists from the U.S., the U.K., and South Africa in expressing support for Palestinians, while Palestinian activists expressed solidarity with other oppressed groups around the world. Although the stated focus of this rally was the Nakba, it also connected Palestinians’ and

other marginalized groups’ experiences of oppression to the COVID-19 pandemic. BDS went on to release a video in June 2020 entitled “Angela Davis, activists worldwide fight injustices exposed by COVID-19.” Narrated by Palestinian activists Rafeef Ziadah and Remi Kanazi, the video explores the effects the pandemic has had on marginalized communities around the world, from India, Brazil, and Palestine to the U.S (“Angela Davis”). The video ends by showcasing activists from many different countries coming together to call for intersectional justice. In my analysis, I focus on the BDS movement’s Nakba Day rally and COVID-19 video to examine how the pandemic has shifted opportunities for rhetors who aim to resist neoliberalism and promote intersectional justice.

## **METHODOLOGY: FEMINIST CRITICISM**

To analyze the ways in which BDS attempts to resist neoliberal hegemony, I use feminist criticism. Sonja Foss defines feminism as “a challenge to hegemonies” (143). Her method of feminist criticism accordingly involves identifying strategies rhetors use to disrupt hegemony and construct new possibilities for being in the world. Foss asserts that strategies of disruption may enable rhetors to “refuse to be confined by an ideology of domination,” “transform dominating structures and relations in imaginative ways,” and “articulate a different mode of being altogether,” among other outcomes (154). This is certainly true for activism that seeks to resist neoliberal hegemony. Feminist critics have paid particular attention to challenges to neoliberalism and the effectiveness of strategies rhetors have used to resist

neoliberal ideology (Dingo et al.; Wingard). I selected the BDS movement's Nakba Day rally and COVID-19 video as artifacts for my analysis because they both utilize a range of strategies to challenge neoliberal hegemony in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which makes them suitable for feminist criticism. Both of these artifacts also represent the views of the main BDS movement, as they were promoted by official BDS social media accounts. To study these artifacts, I first located specific strategies of disruption they use. I then analyzed these strategies to determine how they resist neoliberal ideology and promote counter-hegemonic ways of acting in the world.

In my analysis, I find that BDS uses reframing and redefinition to upset the dominant narrative of the coronavirus itself as a crisis, suggesting instead that neoliberalism is the underlying crisis at hand. The first strategy of disruption I analyze is reframing, which Foss understands as a change in perspective to see a situation from a new point of view (150). Instead of working within and reproducing hegemonic ways of understanding the world, rhetors who engage in reframing reject dominant perspectives and promote alternative worldviews. Foss identifies a specific subtype of reframing as redefinition, or "providing a new meaning for a word" (151). Challenging traditional definitions allows rhetors to play with and unsettle entrenched meanings; outside of the constraints of traditional definitions, rhetors can think about ideas in unfamiliar ways. I use this concept to examine how BDS redefines survival to require freedom from oppression under neoliberalism. Along with reframing and redefinition, I argue that BDS promotes an understanding of oppression as systemic that counters neoliberal individualism. I specifically look at how BDS

juxtaposes incongruities, or "merges categories typically believed to be mutually exclusive," to break apart hegemonic systems of categorization and generate new concepts that unite different experiences of oppression (Foss 153).

After exploring the worldview that BDS creates, I analyze how BDS cultivates a range of perspectives to enact collectivity in response to its critique of neoliberalism. Foss contends that the strategy of cultivating multiple perspectives disrupts the idea that social problems have only one correct perspective (147). In particular, she draws attention to the "repetition of the same word or image but with the context varied so the meaning changes with each new context" as one specific tactic for rhetors to cultivate multiple perspectives (Foss 148). By demonstrating a range of viewpoints on a subject, rhetors can avoid presenting one view as dominant and instead advocate for multiplicity, which BDS does by bringing together activists from around the world. In my analysis, I further understand the use of multiple perspectives as a form of enactment. Foss defines enactment as a strategy rhetors use to "embody the point they are making about the new reality they desire" (Foss 152). Moving beyond criticizing hegemony, enactment entails bringing new worldviews into being through action. In my analysis of BDS, I look to collectivization and coalition-building as tactics used to enact resistance to neoliberal individualism.

## **ANALYZING RESISTANCE TO NEOLIBERALISM IN BDS RHETORIC**

### **REFRAMING THE CRISIS**

BDS uses redefinition to challenge the idea that overcoming the pandemic means a return

to normal, instead suggesting that normal *is* the underlying problem. In the COVID-19 video, Kanazi says, “Surviving the pandemic also means: social justice, economic justice, racial justice, gender justice, indigenous justice, [and] climate justice” (“Angela Davis”). While he speaks, the video moves between images of various activists holding up signs in support of those specific types of justice. Taken together, they question what it means to “survive” the pandemic. The dominant perspective suggests that survival will be marked by a return to normal, which is positioned as the desired result of our efforts to fight the virus. In this view, we will have survived if we get through the pandemic without dying. BDS redefines the idea of survival with its claim that survival “also” requires social justice. While this acknowledges that survival still requires living through the pandemic, it argues that survival as merely not dying and going to live life the same way is not enough—true survival, according to BDS, entails justice for all. Importantly, this redefinition demonstrates BDS’s commitment to intersectional justice, as it specifies a whole list of justices beyond just “social justice” that it believes are necessary to survive the pandemic in the new sense of the word, ranging from gender justice to environmental justice. With this redefinition, BDS suggests that our current normal way of life is antithetical to survival for people around the world. This new definition directly problematizes the dominant perspective by implying that a return to normal will only be a return to injustice and, therefore, not a meaningful indication of survival. Thus, BDS suggests that the crisis at hand is not the pandemic but a system of underlying injustices that have only been exacerbated by COVID-19.

In the same video, BDS juxtaposes different injustices to position neoliberalism specifically as the problem with normal life. Ziadah narrates, “Years of austerity cuts have devastated our public services and healthcare. Now is the time for real change: Public investment in education, decent jobs, climate justice, and healthcare, not in authoritarianism, surveillance, and warfare” (“Angela Davis”). In this segment, Ziadah juxtaposes different social services that lack decent public spending under the category of “austerity cuts.” Outside of this frame, education and healthcare may seem to be completely separate issues; however, combining these two issues under one heading turns them into symptoms of a larger, systemic issue. By relating austerity cuts to increased investment in surveillance and warfare, Ziadah suggests that this issue is neoliberalism, the system that reduces support for social services like education and healthcare while increasing support for privatized warfare. Her urgency in stating that “now is the time for real change” positions neoliberalism itself as a crisis in need of an immediate response. In this frame of neoliberalism as crisis, the virus itself is not the primary cause of death and suffering for Palestinians—neoliberalism is. Indeed, when Ziadah mentions “warfare,” an image of a military drone appears with the caption, “Stop Israeli killer drones.” This graphic references BDS’s campaign against Elbit Systems, an Israeli arms company that makes drones used against Gaza (as well as migrants in the E.U.) and, therefore, profits from violence against Palestinians. By linking this type of for-profit warfare to neoliberalism, BDS demonstrates how neoliberal policies underlie Palestinian suffering and why framing neoliberalism as a crisis is crucial to efforts for Palestinians’

liberation. The same frame can apply to other marginalized groups. Ziadah emphasizes this when she goes on to say, “Oppressed communities are hit the hardest by corona and other disasters that we must talk about: militarism, disaster capitalism, racism.” Here, Ziadah juxtaposes the pandemic, militarism, racism, and disaster capitalism, combining them under one common definition: disaster. Although these issues may normally seem unconnected, Ziadah links them by describing them all as disasters. This pushes at the normal, neoliberal worldview that sees these problems as totally separate from one another. Further, Ziadah problematizes the normalcy of militarism and disaster capitalism, or privatized solutions to crises, by calling them disasters. The fact that both of these “disasters” are closely tied to neoliberalism via privatization suggests that neoliberalism itself is a disaster, especially for Palestinians but also for other marginalized groups around the world.

Defining neoliberalism as a disaster or crisis as BDS does is particularly important in the context of the pandemic because dominant frames of the pandemic as crisis reify neoliberal ideology. In the West, the central framing of the pandemic suggests that the virus itself is our enemy—our efforts are aimed at “fighting” or “eradicating” the coronavirus. If we understand the virus as our enemy, then the natural response to the pandemic becomes shoring up our defenses and going to war against it. This frame only further promotes a society focused on competition and domination instead of collectivity and solidarity, thereby entrenching neoliberal individualism. By failing to consider how social and political decisions shape the pandemic, this narrative also absolves governments and elites of their

responsibility for neoliberal policies like environmental devastation and austerity cuts in healthcare, which allowed the virus to become widespread and therefore earn the designation of “pandemic” in the first place. The dominant narrative of the pandemic is, in short, clearly antithetical to the goals of movements for social justice like BDS. In contrast, BDS’s frame of neoliberalism itself as a crisis not only challenges this dominant narrative but also opens up possibilities for a future that rejects neoliberal policies and ideology. Perhaps most importantly, this frame generates opportunities for collectivization against neoliberalism and justice around the world.

#### COLLECTIVIZING FOR INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE

Within this frame of neoliberalism as crisis, BDS combines multiple perspectives of injustice during the pandemic to link different people’s experiences of oppression. In the Nakba Day rally, Kanazi argues that “in the context of COVID and coronavirus,” many groups have experienced heightened “disposability,” “be that Palestinians, be that refugees, be that Black and Brown communities, apparently be that anyone over the age of 60 in the United States” (“Nakba Rally”). By listing different groups he identifies as “disposable” during COVID-19, Kanazi connects their perspectives of the pandemic. This implies that their experiences, while certainly different, are similar enough to be joined under this concept. Kanazi then names the crisis as neoliberalism: the fact that “countries and corporations and systems of power profit off of all our suffering,” which he says links the Palestinian “catastrophe” to “a larger system that’s putting a



lot of people in marginalized places.” As such, Kanazi joins multiple perspectives within this new frame to connect Palestinians’ experiences of oppression with those of other groups. This not only challenges the hegemonic frame positioning the virus itself as the problem but also creates new opportunities for collective resistance and solidarity. Neoliberal individualism alone makes it hard for people to collectivize—if everyone is self-interested and sees their issues as primarily individual, they are not likely to join forces with other people facing related issues (Mohanty 250). This has perhaps never been truer than during the pandemic, when social distancing regulations have often made this ideological separation more material. But if people understand how different injustices come from neoliberalism—from the fact that elites profit from suffering, as Kanazi says—then they can more easily join forces to resist the system responsible for all of their suffering. BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti also speaks about “the millions of migrants, refugees, and people experiencing homelessness everywhere, who today have no place to call home due to the social and economic ravages of years of neoliberalism, militarism, and climate destruction” (“Nakba Rally”). Like Kanazi, Barghouti unifies the perspectives of different marginalized groups facing displacement under neoliberalism. While these individuals may not have the exact same experience of homelessness during the pandemic, Barghouti suggests that their experiences intersect due to their common cause: neoliberalism. The frame of neoliberalism as crisis, therefore, allows BDS to connect different groups’ experiences of injustice, creating the potential for new coalitions.

To actualize this potential, BDS combines international and Palestinian perspectives in

an act of collective resistance to Palestinian oppression. Framing neoliberalism as the problem makes solidarity the necessary response to the crisis; individual resistance will not work because neoliberalism is a systemic issue. Instead, activists must come together to support each other in their fights against different injustices. This occurs in the middle of the Nakba Day rally when organizers ask participants to display “keys to justice” while Kanazi reads Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “I Belong There.” The result is a screen full of Zoom boxes of participants displaying different keys. Crucially, the meaning of this collective action takes place through the interplay between these keys and Kanazi’s poem. Kanazi says, “I have learned and dismantled all of the words in order to draw from them a single word: home.” This narrative imbues the participants’ keys with this connection to Palestine, suggesting that one key to justice is literally a key to home, or the Palestinian right to return. Kanazi goes on to describe “a prison cell with a chilly window.” This adds another layer of meaning to the participants’ keys, which come to represent freedom for Palestinians imprisoned and denied rights within Israel, as well as for those who cannot return to their homeland. This action suggests that solidarity itself, the act of standing with other oppressed groups, is a key to justice. Most importantly, the combination of Palestinian and international perspectives resists neoliberal individualism. By joining international voices with Kanazi’s Palestinian perspective, the rally enacts collectivism, as international participants and Palestinians both speak out against injustice in Palestine together.

The display of participants’ keys connects not only participants to Palestinians but also

all participants together, thereby further resisting neoliberal individualism. Some participants hold real keys, and others display a drawing with a slogan or an image as their Zoom background; some boast skeleton keys, others have regular house keys. With these differences, participants' keys "speak" for them and present their unique perspectives. For example, a literal house key may represent material wealth, while a drawn key may suggest the opposite. The participants' keys are also not the only thing on display—their faces are as well. The collection of Zoom boxes shows that people of all different races, ages, and genders came together to call for justice for Palestinians. In this way, participants' bodies and keys become a message of their own. Individually, they speak to participants' identities, but together, they form a diverse coalition supporting Palestinian justice. The combination of participants' keys joins their individual voices to enact collective resistance to Palestinian oppression, which rejects the individualism inherent in neoliberalism. Importantly, because this collectivization preserves participants' differences while combining their perspectives into one message, it avoids flattening the divisions between participants, which are necessary to fully appreciate oppression and resist it in all of its forms (Mohanty 226). This combination of diverse perspectives as a way to collectivize is, then, appropriate to resisting the systemic injustices that intersect under neoliberalism, which must be fought together.

The COVID-19 video also engages multiple perspectives to resist systemic injustices by allowing activists to express solidarity for all of their intersecting struggles, making it a more direct form of resistance to neoliberalism. At

the end of the video, images of the previously featured international activists build into a collage. Each one now holds a sign that says "#SpreadSolidarity" in their own language. Small variations in this repeated slogan and the activists' presence in their photos reinforce their individual perspectives—a sign in Korean emphasizes that activist's Korean identity, while a Palestinian activist's sign in Arabic in front of the Palestinian flag does the same. However, the fact that the signs repeat the same words combines their perspectives in a message based on connectedness and collectivity. The separate images of each activist holding up their sign end up filling in the background for the words "Spread Solidarity," which spread across the screen. These separate, individual messages then become one message that is literally constituted by diverse perspectives. The repetition of this message from different activists promotes BDS as a movement based on collectivity, one that calls upon people to work together to fight the interconnected injustices identified earlier in the video, which include militarism, disaster capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, sexism, and ecological destruction. As such, this moment enacts collective resistance to neoliberalism by engaging activists in speaking out against unjust neoliberal policies; instead of "merely reify[ing] the neoliberal economic ideologies of a place," this collective challenges specific neoliberal injustices as well as individualism (Wingard 219). By promoting a worldview in which both people and injustices are connected, this tactic directly resists the entire system of neoliberal policies, making it BDS's most effective challenge to neoliberal hegemony.

## CONCLUSION

### IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTIVISTS

By reframing the crisis as not the pandemic but neoliberalism, BDS challenges the dominant goal of returning to normal and instead suggests that this moment of rupture calls for radical, systemic change. Its combination of multiple perspectives begins to enact this change, as it enables activists to collectivize in direct resistance to neoliberal hegemony. BDS's use of these strategies of disruption illustrates their particular relevance and effectiveness in times of crisis. As for other social movements, the pandemic required BDS to quickly reorient itself to respond to the coronavirus and work in a changed landscape. Specifically, BDS activists had to pivot from long-term arguments for equality and the Palestinian right to return to address the immediate necessity of medical care and support for the many people who lost jobs and homes during the pandemic. While this upheaval undoubtedly constrained BDS's work, my analysis suggests that the pandemic also encouraged BDS's use of strategies of disruption that were particularly effective in the context of COVID-19.

This is especially true for challenges to neoliberalism. Although extreme inequality under neoliberalism comes to seem natural in "normal" times, the pandemic makes neoliberalism even more deadly than usual. My analysis suggests that reframing is one tactic movements can use to exploit the pandemic and other moments of crisis to resist neoliberal hegemony. BDS redefines neoliberalism itself as a crisis, demonstrating how neoliberal policies are behind much of the suffering marginalized groups have experienced during

the pandemic. For BDS, the frame of neoliberalism as crisis also opens up space for new connections with other groups and collective resistance to neoliberal hegemony, which I argue is another way social movements may take advantage of the pandemic. In particular, my analysis identifies the combination of multiple perspectives as one tactic for challenging neoliberalism, at the exact time when this resistance is most urgently needed and has the potential to be extremely effective. BDS's successful use of these rhetorical strategies suggests that social movements can and should capitalize on the pandemic as a kairotic moment for rejecting neoliberalism and generating new coalitions with other oppressed groups.

At the time of writing, increasing vaccination rates and a relaxation of social distancing guidelines in many Western countries have prompted some to prematurely declare the beginning of the end of the pandemic. However, global disparities in access to vaccines mean that outbreaks will likely continue to occur around the world for years after life in the West may return to some semblance of "normal." Months after vaccines became more widely available in wealthy nations, Palestinians living in occupied territories continued to lag behind Israelis in vaccination rates, a direct result of Israel's prioritization of its own vaccination program (Sawafta and Ayyub). This suggests that BDS and other social movements, especially those in the Global South, can continue to use strategies of disruption like reframing, combining multiple perspectives, and enacting collectivity as an effective and necessary response to the pandemic.

Even when the pandemic truly ends, social movements can still use the rhetoric of crisis

paired with the strategies of disruption mentioned above to resist neoliberal hegemony. If, as BDS suggests, neoliberalism itself is an ongoing crisis for marginalized groups around the world, then it follows that rhetorical strategies aimed at resisting neoliberalism in the context of crisis will still be necessary and effective. Put another way, framing neoliberalism as a crisis can open up space for challenges to neoliberal policies and ideology and for the creation of new coalitions that can outlast the pandemic. Naming neoliberalism and identifying it as a problem makes it visible, which is the first step to challenging its hegemonic position. As my analysis of BDS demonstrates, this visibility can facilitate the creation of connections between different policies and injustices, as well as between different groups, which in turn may increase opportunities for collectivity and solidarity across borders. When based on opposition to neoliberal policies, collectivization itself becomes an act of resistance to neoliberal ideology.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

It is important to note that my analysis of BDS's rhetoric during the pandemic is limited to two artifacts from the first half of 2020 and is therefore not representative of the movement's response to COVID-19. Although I only studied artifacts produced by the official BDS movement led by Palestinians, the BDS movement as a whole is composed of many smaller groups around the world, which have different goals and audiences. Future scholarship could examine the rhetoric of these groups and compare it to that of the

Palestinian-led BDS movement. Future research on BDS could also consider the impact of its use of human rights discourse on the effectiveness of its challenge to neoliberalism. As Hitchcock notes, BDS relies on "international law, universal principles of human rights, and United Nations (UN) resolutions" to make a case for its call for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (1). However, the discourse of human rights enshrined in international law is fundamentally one of individual rights, which uphold neoliberal ideology. Claims for human rights were not central to the artifacts I analyzed (which may contribute to their success in resisting neoliberalism), but human rights remain integral to the BDS call.

My analysis has also been limited to BDS rhetoric directed primarily at Western audiences. With the exception of Pleyers, all of the literature I cite on activism during COVID-19 analyzes activist groups in Western countries. Future research on social movements' responses to the pandemic should examine anti-neoliberal activism outside of the West, which is especially important to study considering the global scale of the pandemic and the possibility that disparities in global vaccine access may prolong the pandemic in the Global South. Ultimately, the success of international activists' resistance to neoliberalism matters because all of our lives depend upon this challenge. If we do not make changes now, we will see many more crises in the future, be they pandemics or environmental disasters. Understanding how social movements can most effectively resist neoliberal hegemony, both during and after the pandemic, is of vital importance to our collective futures.

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