Navigating Solidarity: How Palestine solidarity groups in the UK and Ireland have responded to the Palestinian statehood bid

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Résumé

Cet article analyse la manière dont les groupes de solidarité irlandais et britanniques se sont positionnés face au défi de la stratégie de l'Autorité Palestinienne de demander la reconnaissance de l'Etat palestinien à l'ONU en septembre 2011. Au premier abord, il apparaît étrange de qualifier une telle demande de « défi » pour des groupes de solidarité qui font précisément campagne pour le droit palestinien à l'auto-détermination. Le souhait de développer les institutions d'un Etat palestinien et de rechercher une légitimité internationale pour ce projet de construction étatique a émergé comme la priorité de l'Autorité Palestinienne en Cisjordanie. Toutefois, loin de supporter cette stratégie, les associations pro-palestiniennes sont demeurées, sauf exceptions, distantes ou même hostiles à ce projet.

Cet article examine les raisons sous-jacentes à la demande envoyée à l'ONU et les réactions des groupes pro-palestiniens en Irlande et au Royaume-Uni. Son argumentation repose sur des sources d'archives et des entretiens avec des membres clefs à l'intérieur de ces groupes, afin d'examiner ce que ceux-ci ont fait et dit en rapport avec cette initiative. Il précise ensuite les éléments qui ont influencé le positionnement de ces groupes au sujet de la demande de reconnaissance de l'Etat palestinien en examinant les arguments favorables et défavorables à cette demande et en inscrivant ces mouvements sociaux dans leur champ de concurrence. L'article avance que les différentes positions prises par les groupes peuvent être en partie comprises par des attitudes idéologiques distinctes, mais aussi par les dynamiques relationnelles propres aux mouvements sociaux et la manière dont ceux-ci s'affrontent dans le champ. Il prend en compte leurs relations avec leurs soutiens, avec les acteurs institutionnels ainsi qu'avec le sujet distant/objet de solidarité.

Mots-clés : *Palestine, mouvements sociaux, solidarité, demande de reconnaissance, campagne internationale, BDS*

Abstract

This paper asks how Western Palestinian solidarity groups have dealt with the challenge of the Palestinian Authority's strategy of seeking international recognition for a Palestinian state, in particular their UN statehood bid of September 2011. At first glance, it appears strange to call the Palestinian statehood bid a challenge to solidarity groups who campaign for the right of Palestinian self-determination. The strategy of developing the institutions of a Palestinian state and seeking international legitimacy for this statebuilding project has emerged as the prime goal of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. However, far from supporting this strategy, Palestinian solidarity organisations have remained, with some exceptions, distant or even hostile to this project.

The paper examines the reasons for the UN statehood bid and the reactions of Palestine solidarity groups in the UK and Ireland to the initiative. It draws on archival evidence and interviews with leading members of these groups to examine what groups did and said in relation to the initiative. It then outlines what influenced the groups' stance on the statehood bid – examining the arguments for and against the bid, and analysing their stance in relation to how social movements position themselves within fields of contention. It argues that the different positions that groups took can partly be understood by different ideological attitudes, but also by the relational dynamics of social movements and how those contending within the field need to manage their relationships with supporters and domestic institutional actors as well as the distant subject/object of solidarity.

Keywords: Palestine, social movements, Palestine solidarity, statehood bid, internationalisation campaign, BDS

Introduction

In September 2011, Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority and chair of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation went to the Security Council to seek UN recognition for a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. [1] This was a carefully planned diplomatic move announced by Palestinian Prime Minister Salim Fayyad in August 2009 and to which the Palestinian Authority devoted considerable effort in persuading other countries – in particular European states - to support (Elgindy, 2011; Ravid, 2011). Despite this, the bid failed and as a compensatory second best action it sought recognition as a non-member state through the General Assembly at the United Nations. They were successful in this and in September 2015 achieved another success in having their flag fly outside the UN building (UN, 2015)

This may seem like a purely symbolic act, one of the periodic announcements of self-existence which Palestinians necessarily need to undertake in reaction to Israeli attempts to efface their presence. However it was much more than this. For Palestinian political elites, the efforts to internationalise the conflict and the turn to international law signalled a turning away from the fruitless negotiations and even more fruitless violence with which they had tried to pursue their national aspirations (Burgis-Kasthala, 2014). It was also a keystone of Salim Fayyad's statebuilding strategy (Eden, 2013; Elgindy, 2011) The strategy of developing the institutions of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and seeking international legitimacy for this statebuilding project has emerged as the prime goal of Fatah, the party in control of the Palestinian Authority (Khalidi & Samour, 2011).

Some have commented that the Palestinian Authority failed to mobilise the extensive global Palestinian solidarity network to lobby their national governments for the statehood bid (Halper, 2011). However, this was perhaps inevitable, since the attitude of this network towards the statehood bid was mixed at best. At first glance this is surprising - one of the prime objectives of Palestine solidarity groups is to support the self-determination and national rights of the Palestinian people – that being so, one might expect these groups to back this diplomatic initiative. However, while Israel solidarity groups unanimously defended the Israeli state position - outright opposition to the statehood bid - Palestine solidarity groups displayed no such unanimity. Though some supported the bid, most professed neutrality with some groups openly opposing the initiative. This article examines this conundrum, seeking to understand solidarity groups' attitudes towards the statehood bid and what this tells us about the broader dynamics of international

1 The Palestinian Authority (PA) is the entity established by the Oslo accords to govern part of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was the UN-recognised representative organisation of the Palestinian people. In real terms, the proto-state that is the PA has more international legitimacy than the PLO, which has been left to wither by its main constituent party, Fatah.

solidarity activism – in particular the forces that work on solidarity movements and their position-taking with regard to the object/subject of solidarity.

The article begins by examining what the statehood bid was and why the Palestinian Authority undertook it. It then briefly describes the international solidarity movement and their relation with Palestine, before examining what solidarity groups in Britain and Ireland said and did about the statehood bid, taking their positions as symptomatic of other European groups. The article next examines why different solidarity groups took different positions - from enthusiastic support to barely-veiled hostility. It first examines the arguments advanced for and against the statehood bid and then looks at the different positions in terms of how social movements strategize within their fields of practice. I argue that strategic position-taking in relation to domestic actors intersects with ideological/solidaristic arguments to explain why organisations took the stances they did.

The paper is based on research into leading Palestine solidarity organisations in Britain and Ireland. The groups I selected were the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in Britain (PSC), the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) in Scotland, and the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) and Sadaka in Ireland. While there are many other Palestine solidarity organisations in the UK and Ireland, these are either very local groups or focus on specific aspects of the conflict, such as Gaza Action Ireland which highlights the plight of Gaza or the International Solidarity Movement which organises solidarity trips to Palestine. Thus, these groups would not be expected to take a stance on the statehood bid, and indeed did not.

I conducted documentary analysis of what these four groups wrote around the statehood bid, supplemented by interviews with leading members. The documents include all the groups' press releases, actions and public announcements around the statehood bid. Here I was interested in both how the groups framed the issues and the level of activities surrounding the statehood bid, which ranged from non-existent to considerable. To supplement this material, I interviewed four leading members from the groups involved in order to further investigate the rationale behind groups' position-taking on the statehood bid. Access to interviewees was relatively easy as I have been an active member of one of the solidarity groups in question – the IPSC. While this insider position comes with caveats, it also has the advantage in enabling me to better understand the issues that solidarity organisations face as well as their culture and ideologies (Labaree, 2002).

The Statehood Bid

There are two ways of examining why the Palestinian Authority devoted such time and energy to the statehood bid and more broadly to its "internationalisation campaign" - its efforts to seek a solution to the conflict through international channels. First, we can see how this strategy advanced "the cause of Palestine".

The bid can also be understood in relational and strategic terms, both in how those Palestinians who supported the statehood bid related to Israel and the wider world, and their relations with fellow Palestinians. The context of the statehood bid was primarily the failure of bilateral negotiations with Israel, specifically the collapse of talks in September 2010. Given the failure of the talks, internationalisation was seen as a logical next step. Initially the statehood bid was not seen as an alternative to negotiations with Israel, but more a means of regaining political leverage vis-à-vis Israel, by allowing the PA to raise the legitimacy of their own institutions and more broadly, to raise the cause of Palestine internationally (Elgindy, 2011). However, in time, it has been seen as an alternative to bilateralism, using international legal norms to change Israeli behaviour and challenge its human rights abuses (AbuZayyad, 2015). This bid would enable the PA access to UN bodies such as UNESCO, as well as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court which they could use to call Israel to account. There is also the important psychological benefit of the initiative, the statehood bid was a means whereby the PA has not simply responded to Israeli policies or incursions but set the frame of reference themselves.

It is also useful to examine the situated pragmatics behind the statehood bid. Palestinians increasingly see a two-state solution as a receding mirage owing to the density of illegal Israeli settlements and Israeli hostility to an independent Palestinian state. Given this, Nadia Naser-Najjab (2014) argues that the continued support for the two-state solution from Palestinian political elites derives from their weaknesses and divisions, rather than their ability to achieve a realistic outcome. They are firstly weak vis-à-vis external powers, especially the important legitimating authority which is the EU (Persson, 2015). These powers support the two-state solution for their own reasons, and so "any alternative appears almost as an affront to the politically permissible" (Naser-Najjab, 2014, p. 139). This means that Palestinian elites need to voice support for an increasingly unattainable two-state solution and to appeal to these external powers in order to appear reasonable and politically pragmatic – that is, in order to have their voice heard at all. The internationalisation campaign can also be explained in terms of internal divisions among Palestinians. The statehood bid was seen as a means to arrest the PA's and Fatah's collapsing credibility and legitimacy among Palestinians – a bold political move that temporarily conferred legitimacy onto the ruling Palestinian elite, especially as it was opposed so strenuously by Israel (Elgindy, 2011). In addition the internationalisation campaign gave Fatah greater international legitimacy in their contestation with Hamas for Palestinian political leadership. Burgis-Kasthala (2014) argues that Palestinian political elites overstate the possibilities of internationalisation and ignore its contradictions mainly due to the failure of alternative pathways. The turn to international law and the UN is understood as standing in contrastive identification to violence, politics and colonialism. It is also

frankly understood as a means of reorienting Palestine and its cause to the desires of the Western metropole, who Burgis-Kasthala agrees are seen as being the players and judges of the only game in town – the two-state spectacle.

As the below references demonstrate, the question as to whether the internationalisation campaign is succeeding or not appears to depend on whether the author writes from an Israeli or Palestinian point of view. Those writing from an Israeli perspective have reason to downplay the chance of the initiative succeeding, and so tend to conclude that the internationalisation campaign "has alienated [the PA] from the Palestinian public and angered traditional regional allies" (Rumley & Rasgon, 2016). In contrast, those writing from the Palestinian perspective argue that it is the only chance the PA has left to achieve a two state outcome, and stress the futility of ongoing bilateral negotiations solution with an Israeli government increasingly opposed to a Palestinian state (e.g. Palestine-Israel Journal, 2015).

While the internationalisation campaign may have given the PA more legitimacy among foreign governments, especially in Europe, it does not appear to have affected the PA's distant relationship with the international Palestine solidarity movement. This is a loosely networked and multinational movement that, despite its organisational multipolarity, coalesces around both ideological and tactical points of unity. Ideologically, the movement which comes from a left-liberal background, is united by its support of Palestinian national liberation and human rights, usually prioritising the human rights framework to understand Israel/Palestine and forward its campaigning (Landy, 2013). In terms of its activities, it deploys the usual action repertoires of semi-institutionalised social movements – a mixture of lobbying, protesting, popular mobilisation and education work. Its main tactic is to promote the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, which was endorsed by Palestinian civil society through the Boycott National Committee in 2005 (BNC, 2005). This reliance on boycott is common to many international solidarity movements. We can understand international solidarity as a counter-globalisation, resisting international relations based on exploitation and oppression of the other. As such, it seeks to interrupt and disturb the normal flows of globalised exchange, and so the quintessential expression of international solidarity from anti-apartheid to the Colombian *Boycott Coca Cola* campaign, tends to be through boycott actions. This in turn has affected how solidarity groups relate to Palestinian political groups. Over the last decade, relations with Palestinian political leadership has been fraught, owing to conflict among Palestinian political groups, concerns as to how representative they are of Palestinians, as well as disagreements with their tactics – whether it has been Hamas's politics of violence or Fatah's politics of conciliation (Landy, 2014; Saba, 2015). In turn, the PA has distanced itself from the main tactic of the solidarity movement – BDS – and has kept solidarity groups at arm's length. This has led most solidarity groups to seek political leadership from civil society groups in Palestine who support boycott – notably the Boycott National

Committee (BNC), as well as campaigning and human rights groups such as the Stop the Wall coalition in the West Bank or the Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights.

Solidarity groups and the statehood bid

The groups I studied in the UK and Ireland were the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) based in England and Wales, the largest group with dozens of branches and strong trade union affiliation. The PSC is not affiliated to any political party in the UK or Palestine and takes a mainstream human rights approach to Israel/Palestine, seeking to influence policy makers through a mixture of lobbying, education work and protest. The Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), while smaller, with about half a dozen branches and less institutional affiliation, takes a broadly similar approach. While supportive of Palestinian national liberation, the IPSC has mostly adopted the human rights frame on Israel/Palestine. As with the PSC, there is no affiliation with any political party, and the group is reliant on supporters and members for funding, rather than trade unions or other organisations. The IPSC's main focus for action is less political lobbying and more support of the BDS campaign. The Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) is another small but very active and committed group, with a reputation for militancy and anti-Zionism. [2]

These comments have been echoed by other activists (Winstanley, 2015), and SPSC has pioneered many boycott and political initiatives such as its anti-JNF campaign. As with the IPSC, its links with Palestine has mainly been through the Boycott National Committee (BNC). In contrast, Sadaka, the smallest group, has close links with the PA and more institutional actors. Sadaka split from the IPSC in late 2009 over claims that the IPSC was too hostile to Irish politicians and also to the Palestinian Delegation in Ireland (Landy, 2014). Sadaka has thus sought to take a more conciliatory position towards Irish political institutions and has concentrated on lobbying rather than popular mobilisation.

How did these organisations react to the statehood bid? Mostly they did or said nothing. The PSC in England and SPSC in Scotland privately opposed the bid and so maintained silence and undertook no actions. This was by far the most common reaction among Palestine solidarity organisations in Britain and abroad. For instance, groups such as Jews for Justice for Palestine (JfJfP) – the main Jewish Israel-critical group in Britain – posted a few articles on their website to discuss the bid, but avoided doing anything. In Ireland the situation was more complicated. Sadaka was a strong supporter of the statehood bid and much of their actions in

2 As writer and activist Mike Marquesee has said,
SPSC has been a beacon over the last decade, setting the pace and picking up the difficult but central challenges facing the Palestine solidarity movement. It's focussed, brave, active and effective, and has sustained a radical, well-informed and necessary critique of Israel and Zionism. (SPSC, 2016)

2011 involved mobilising around this issue. They lobbied politicians and wrote several briefing documents supporting Palestinian statehood (eg Morrison, 2011b), as well as organising a speaking tour with senior Palestinian negotiator, Nabil Shaath, to garner support for the bid (Sadaka, 2011b). They ran a half page ad in the Irish Times (Sadaka, 2011a), and after the UN vote to grant non-member status to Palestine, they organised a party in celebration. In contrast to their straightforward supportive position, the IPSC was more circumspect. It organised one meeting with legal expert John Reynolds outlining the pros and cons of statehood (IPSC, 2011a), and issued a press release and an article for an online newspaper – in both cases explaining why they weren't taking a position (IPSC, 2011b; Squires, 2011).

This difference of opinion was not an oddity of these islands but was Europe-wide. While some solidarity groups supported the initiative, others such as the Dutch group, NPK, strongly opposed it, concerned about its effect on the Palestinian right of return (NPK, 2011). This meant that the European-wide umbrella body, the European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP) decided not to take a position on statehood and instead drafted a neutral letter on the affair for their dealings with MEPs, mainly focused around boycott of Israel.

After September 2011, statehood did not drop off the agenda. Far from it, with bilateral negotiations stalled, the internationalisation efforts by the PA gathered steam. The next iteration of the statehood bid was parliamentary votes calling on national governments to recognise the state of Palestine. In all cases – the British House of Commons, the Scottish parliament and the Irish Dáil and Seanad (lower and upper houses of parliament) –the votes were passed either unanimously or by overwhelming majorities. However, as these votes were non-binding, they did not change the Irish and British governments' refusal to accord Palestine full diplomatic recognition, and should be understood primarily as symbolic position-taking by parliamentarians (for more on this: AbuZayyad, 2015, p. 114-115).

As might be expected, the various solidarity groups paid more attention to the vote in their national parliament than the UN vote. The outlier here was the SPSC, which – for reasons which will be discussed - ignored the Scottish and British parliamentary votes entirely, for reasons which will be discussed. In contrast, the PSC mobilised around the vote in the House of Commons, which was passed on 13 October 2014 by a margin of 274 votes to 12 (Reuters, 2014). They organised an email campaign urging supporters to ask their MPs to recognise Palestine to which over 50,000 people responded (PSC, 2014b). The focus was less on the ins and outs of statehood and more on the symbolic need to 'recognise the existence of Palestine' and highlight Israeli injustices towards Palestinians (PSC, 2014a). In the Republic of Ireland the motion to have the government recognise the state of Palestine was proposed by the opposition party, Sinn Féin with very little notice.

[3] Despite this, it was passed unanimously on December 10, 2014 (Irish Times, 2014). In response to a request from Sinn Féin, the IPSC sent a notification to their supporters stating "If you support a two-state solution in the Palestine-Israel region, contact your local TDs ... and let them know that you expect them to vote in favour of this motion' (IPSC, 2014)." [4] As the letter was sent the day before the statehood vote, it is unlikely to have affected many people. Sadaka were wrongfooted by Sinn Féin's surprise motion and did nothing at the time. However, in February 2015 they organised a billboard campaign in favour of recognition of the Palestinian state, sponsored by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), and demonstrating their close relationship with the trade union movement in Ireland. In the Irish parliamentary elections of 2016, Sadaka lobbied TDs to sign a "Pledge for Palestine" the first item of which was immediate recognition of a Palestinian state, maintaining their uniquely strong support for the statehood initiative.

Reasons for solidarity groups positions on the statehood bid

The above account demonstrated that different groups took vastly different positions on the statehood bid at different times – the question is why this happened. I open by giving the arguments that the various groups had to explain their position. I then examine the support in terms of how these groups were positioned in the political field.

Supporters of the bid

"It has drawn attention to the reality of Palestine in a way that nothing else has done in recent years. In addition, it carries with it the possibility of some constraints being put on Israeli behaviour in the Occupied Territories via the International Criminal Court and other international bodies" (Sadaka interviewee)

Agreement with the statehood bid was due to both ideological and strategic reasons. Ideologically, some people supported the bid because they straightforwardly supported the idea of a free Palestinian state, and UN and international recognition was a clear step towards achieving this goal. This was clear in the Sadaka published material where an independent Palestinian state in the occupied Palestinian territories was advanced as the best way to end the occupation and a viable solution to the conflict (Morrison, 2012). This is the most uncomplicated reason – those supporting the national self-determination of Palestinians supported their efforts to achieve it.

Another ideological motivation centres on the imperative for solidarity groups to support the political initiatives of those they are in solidarity with. Thus even if there were doubts as to the viability of the bid – and there was always a chance it would fail - there was an obligation for solidarity groups to support the diplomatic efforts of the Palestinian Authority, especially as these efforts were in alignment with its central state building strategies. In discussing this with a Sadaka representative, they emphasised the centrality of seeking guidance from Palestinian civil society and political sources before coming to their decision to support the statehood bid. Support for this strategy had the added advantage of legitimising Palestinian political authorities and strengthening their position vis-à-vis Israel.

Beyond these ideological arguments, there were reasonable strategic arguments for supporting statehood, even if the ultimate aim of statehood was in doubt. Firstly there was the diffuse reason that the bid would enhance "the cause of Palestine" in international circles, and make that cause appear more legitimate to those in power. This, in turn would make Palestinian claims appear more legitimate, coming as they were from a recognised entity which enjoyed widespread sympathy. A successful bid would isolate Israel diplomatically and give the Palestinians an intangible but real advantage in future negotiations (Morrison, 2012). This is a core aim of the statehood bid, to move away from what was perceived as a loser's game of bilateral negotiations or violence, and to involve the international community and international law. As we saw, this was a crucial argument for Palestinian supporters of the bid. This need to break the stalemate by involving international authorities was the main argument Sadaka put forward (Morrison, 2011a, 2011b). The statehood bid could be argued to advance Palestinian claims in a substantive, practical way in that they would have access to UN institutions such as the International Criminal Court which they could use to hold Israel to account for its actions.

Finally there was the domestic strategic argument that supporting the statehood bid offered those supporting it an invaluable opportunity to raise the cause of Palestine. According to my Sadaka interviewee, "The statehood bid was a very useful hook, and a very useful focus for advocating support for the cause of Palestine generally. It gave us an opportunity to talk about settlements, to talk about the wall to talk about human rights abuses." They added, "It can often be very difficult to get a hook that will bring in other organisations or will hook in the media". The statehood bid, according to its advocates did so. This was because the bid was something that virtually everybody supported - unions, civil society organisations, even civil servants and eventually the government. Therefore this was an easy ask and a means to mainstream the cause of Palestine. It also gave the Palestine solidarity movement a victory and as my respondent pointed out, these are few and far between. And so Sadaka saw their support for the bid as a way of gaining traction and building a mass movement in solidarity with Palestine.

3 Sinn Fein is a left-wing, republican political party which is very supportive of Palestinian solidarity, and which historically has maintained strong ties with the PLO (Louvet, 2016)

4 TD – *Teachta Dála*. Irish term for Members of Parliament

Opponents of the bid

"It's a phantom debate about a phantom state and the people who are drawn to that discussion we find are not particularly relevant to building the BDS campaign - except as opponents." (SPSC interviewee)

Turning to why people disagreed with the statehood bid – again there were ideological and strategic reasons. Firstly there was widespread cynicism about the two-state solution. While most Palestine solidarity groups do not take a position on the one-state vs two-state argument (in common with the Palestinian campaigning groups they take their lead from), in reality most active members of these groups believe the two-state solution to be an unjust and increasingly unrealistic demand (for this argument: Abunimah, 2007). Thus it was seen as counterproductive and even somewhat ridiculous to support the bid: "It's recognising a phantom state which doesn't exist and which seems unlikely to ever be born" (SPSC interviewee). The main ideological opposition to the bid derived from concerns that it effectively excluded the majority of Palestinians from political consideration – those in exile and to a lesser extent, those in Israel and Gaza - and there were fears that it would cement their exile as permanent and effectively spell the end to the Palestinian right of return (Abunimah, 2011; Ma'an News, 2011). This was a key consideration for the IPSC and PSC, and the IPSC consistently drew attention to the right of return and the fact that Palestinian refugees were being ignored in the debate around the bid (IPSC, 2011b, 2014).

Opponents were also motivated by the imperative of solidarity with Palestinian political actors, but did not identify Fatah as being this leadership. Far from it, solidarity groups were influenced by a suspicion of Fatah which often shaded over into hostility – a belief that the Fatah elite were corrupt collaborators whose actions betrayed their people and advanced their own self-interest. Thus solidarity with Fatah and their strategies was not seen by many solidarity activists as being solidarity with the Palestinian people. In this attitude of suspicion, activists were heavily influenced by prominent Palestinian voices who opposed the bid – for instance the leading Palestinian news site *Electronic Intifada* was uniformly hostile to it (e.g. Abukhater 2011, Abunimah 2011) . Likewise, Palestinian groups in exile such as the US Palestine Community Network and groups within Palestine such as the Stop the Wall Coalition vehemently opposed the bid (Erakat, 2012). The Stop the Wall Coalition argued that the bid was a way of diverting attention from the corruption of Palestinian elites and preventing a Palestinian Spring from happening. The US Palestinian Community Network were no less straightforward, calling the bid "an unacceptable threat to the Palestinian national movement" and writing,

"We call on all Palestinian and Arab community associations, societies and committees, student organizations, solidarity campaigns, to reject fully and unequivocally the Statehood initiative as a distraction that unjustifiably and irresponsibly endangers Palestinian rights and institutions." (USPCN, 2011)

This dissensus among their allies affected the positions of many solidarity organisations. Groups that prioritised the boycott campaign - SPSC and IPSC in particular - were also influenced by the BNC's attitude, which took no position on the statehood bid and treated it with a degree of suspicion (BNC, 2011).

"So, the IPSC's position was first and foremost informed by the position of the BNC which was 'this is not our priority'. And in a not so blunt way they said, 'and it shouldn't be your priority'. It's not really any of our business as solidarity activists." (IPSC interviewee)

This is not to say that there were not Palestinian groups sympathetic to the bid – there were many of them, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian National Initiative, and there were rallies of thousands in the West Bank in favour of the bid (Jansen, 2011). However the divisions among Palestinians made solidarity groups, wary of involvement in internal Palestinian conflicts, shy away from taking sides. This can be seen as both strategic and ideological – in practical terms, groups had suffered internal divisions previously when they sided with one Palestinian side against the other, and ideologically there was a strong belief among solidarity practitioners that external groups ought not get involved in Palestinian internal affairs (Landy, 2014). This formed the basis for the IPSC's position. Its statement on the bid noted that "the PLO's UN statehood initiative does not enjoy the unanimous support of Palestinian society" and so the organisation would not take sides, because the IPSC "does not see [their] role as intervening in internal Palestinian discussions on statehood" (IPSC, 2011b).

There were also strategic reasons for opposing the statehood bid, or at least sitting it out. The reasons that Palestinian groups viewed the bid with suspicion were the same for Palestinian solidarity organisations. They discounted the tactical advantages of statehood and were concerned that it was a purely symbolic act, done to bolster a corrupt Fatah elite rather than advance the cause of Palestine. Furthermore, there were worries about the opportunity costs of supporting the bid, namely that it would divert resources from the prime tool of Palestinian solidarity – the grassroots popular BDS campaign – and towards a top-down diplomatic approach that would disempower solidarity groups and direct them towards a dead end struggle:

"And so we think it's very much a diversion from building the BDS campaign, and it's also an alibi for those who oppose or who do not want to sign up to the BDS campaign" (SPSC interviewee)

The latter part of the quote indicates another problem opponents saw with the statehood bid. They feared that states and institutional actors could use their support of the purely symbolic statehood bid as a gesture to parry popular demands that they engage in actions for Palestinian solidarity that moved beyond the symbolic – that is, support for boycott. In this view, the statehood bid was not simply a distraction, but could be employed by institutional actors as a firewall against pressure for more substantive political solidarity. As the SPSC interviewee said,

"I think the whole commitment to the two-state solution and Israel living side by side with Palestine and recognising Israel as a Jewish state is really bringing the policy of people who seemingly advocate for Palestine very much in line with the foreign policy of the London government or the US government even, at least on paper – so we don't want to go down that road"

This is certainly the reason that more centrist Israel-critical groups have pushed statehood. For example the left-Zionist US group, J Street has openly said that the best way of defeating BDS is to support the two-state solution and to that end has begun to support the internationalisation campaign (Skolnik, 2015). More tellingly, in Ireland the trade union federation ICTU nominally has had a position supporting the full boycott of Israel. While this means ICTU has gone further in support of Palestinian rights than any other European trade union federation (Louvet 2016), in practical terms it has done nothing to implement this position. Rather than engaging in such disruptive oppositional political action, the statehood campaign has provided it with an alibi for inaction. Over the past four years ICTU has diverted its energies, firstly towards a less disruptive campaign against settlement goods, and secondly to publicly supporting the statehood bid and towards what remains a largely symbolic campaign to "recognise Palestine" (ICTU, 2016).

Conclusion: Mixing ideology and pragmatics in order to navigate the political field

The above indicates that all Palestine solidarity groups grounded their opinions on the statehood bid on a shared notion of political solidarity with Palestinian leadership, effective action and support for self-determination of the Palestinian people. Despite this, different groups took diametrically different attitudes towards the statehood initiative. One can say that the reason for this lies in the difference between who they have chosen to be in solidarity with – the leadership of the Palestinian Authority or grassroots Palestinian organisations grouped around the BNC. But this merely raises the question of why certain solidarity groups chose certain Palestinian fractions to be in solidarity with and not others.

Here we need to move beyond understanding groups' position-taking as a result of their ideological understandings of the situation. Clearly ideology matters –

solidarity groups are fundamentally ideas-driven and their positions depend on their reading of the political situation. But they depend on more than this – social movements are not debating societies with people taking positions simply because they are ideologically congenial. One can best understand social movements as existing within a Bourdieuvian field of power and engaging in contestation for field capital. Movements can be seen as operating in an external political field and being themselves fields of contention (Crossley, 2003). This model of social movements situated in strategic action fields understands movements relationally, with groups taking positions in order to relate to other actors on the field, rather than simply because of the intrinsic merits of the arguments (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). So one can understand groups' differing points of view on the statehood bid as being somewhat determined by their positioning within the political field and by their need to negotiate relations with potential allies and supporters as well as with institutional actors.

There is no clear division between those who saw the statehood bid as a problem and those who saw it as an opportunity. At different times, groups saw it in different ways – this can be seen in how the PSC and IPSC, while initially ignoring the bid, later came to urge members to support it. The IPSC compromised on the issue of the parliamentary vote as it was asked to do so by a political party, Sinn Féin. In order to maintain some institutional purchase and not to be seen to oppose the statehood bid, and thus more nebulously "the cause of Palestine" they asked their members to support it in their carefully worded statement – "If you support the two-state solution..." (IPSC, 2011b). The PSC viewed the parliamentary vote more creatively. It offered them an opportunity to display their strength and their ability to mobilise people. Thus their press release described the vote as one to recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination and focused on the PSC's ability to mobilise tens of thousands of its supporters (PSC, 2014b).

A key issue for groups was to keep their members on board and ensure that differences over the statehood bid would not lead to divisions among members. This was the prime aim of the IPSC statement and in this they were successful. In Breifne O'Rourke's study (2015), he noted that IPSC members were by and large happy with this non-position, accepting that even if it was "bogus", in the words of one member, it was necessary. O'Rourke noted "the campaign's statement on the bid was a success in traversing a minefield of latent intra-group divisions, but not without cost to its engagement in important and potentially transformative institutional politics" (2015, p.47). Rather the group saw the statehood bid as a problem that had to be carefully navigated around in order not to disrupt their relations with supporters, allies and Palestinians.

This was not an issue for the SPSC who have more ideological agreement among its membership. As a radical, anti-Zionist organisation, they have successfully educated their membership into recognising Israel/Palestine primarily as a settler-colonial project engaging in ethnic cleansing. As my interviewee stated "That in a way makes the discussion about two states irrelevant and it inoculates people and enables them to deal with the debate around recognition". The oppositional stance of the SPSC towards domestic institutions goes a long way in explaining their uncompromising stance towards the statehood bid. As a group which has been vocally critical of the institutionalisation and co-option of Palestinian solidarity, it was perhaps inevitable that they would oppose a top-down diplomatic project for change, as opposed to the grassroots boycott campaign. The relationship with domestic institutions can also explain Sadaka's enthusiastic support for the statehood bid. They saw the statehood bid in creative and productive terms – as a tool which they could wield to pro-actively improve their relationship with supporters, allies and Palestinians, and to gain institutional legitimacy and funding from groups such as ICTU, who had their own reasons for supporting the statehood bid. That groups used the statehood bid to manage their relations with their members and supporters, and also with their Palestinian allies is analogous to Naser-Najjab's (2014) argument that Palestinian positions on the bid were mainly due to pragmatic positioning. Naser-Najjab has noted that Palestinian groups exist within a field of contention whereby they can access resources and institutional legitimacy over other claimants in the field by supporting the two-state solution. A similar institutional framework exists in Western European countries.

However there is a danger in moving from an over-idealised to an over-cynical view of solidarity groups and completely dismissing the role of ideology. A more fruitful question is to ask in what way the two modes interrelate with each other – the strictly ideological with the pragmatics of contending within the social movement field. Bourdieu was clear on this – field contention takes priority in explaining causality and the ideological positions of social movements are ideological in the Marxist sense – that is, a smokescreen of words used to both mask and forward one's advantage in accruing field capital (Girling, 2004). Yet this seems an unsatisfactory and reductive understanding of the processes that determined how groups took positions on the statehood bid, if for no other reason than their position on the political field was largely determined by their ideology on entering the field. To reduce everything to questions of tactical manoeuvring fails to acknowledge that field agents are strategizing over substantive questions that are more important to them than the accumulation of field capital and advancement of one's group. It fails to acknowledge that there is often no difference between strategic and ideological aims – for instance those who argued that the statehood bid enabled them to gain traction and liaise with other groups in society or, in other words, to build a mainstream mass movement – this is both a strategic and ideological goal for any solidarity group. In addition, one of the actors which solidarity groups were

strategically positioning themselves in relation to were Palestinians - the position of the BNC was crucial in explaining the stance of most groups on the statehood bid. This cannot be seen simply as a question of strategy, a central ideological norm of solidarity groups is to accept the political leadership of those they are in solidarity with.

The answer then is not to force a dichotomy between (good, unrealistic) ideological positions and (bad, reasonable) political pragmatics, but rather to recognise and to investigate further the degree to which the sincerely held ideological positions of the various groups were channelled by the political pragmatics of their positions within the domestic field of contention and their relationship to domestic actors, as well as their positions with regard to the various Palestinian political actors and aspirations. It is this interrelationship that explains such divergent responses to the statehood bid from groups who agree on the fundamentals of political solidarity and Palestinian self-determination.

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