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'Giving PUMA the Boot'. A Case Study of a Contemporary Consumer Sports Boycott

Abstract

This article offers a conceptual assessment of a contemporary consumer boycott of a global sports brand. A critical reflection is offered of the 'Boycott Puma' campaign with an examination of the motives and positions of the different parties involved, specifically PUMA, the 'Boycott Puma' campaign, the Israeli Football Association, and UEFA/FIFA. The 'Boycott Puma' campaign is set against one of the world's longest conflicts and involves issues of civil and human rights, of corporate social responsibility, and accusations of antisemitism. A number of issues relevant to sports marketing and sponsorship are found within this case study. The focus here is on the consumer boycott and PUMA's role, drawing upon the company's corporate social responsibility statement, their claim that sport and politics do not mix, and their response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. A distinction is made between political boycotts and consumer boycotts, whether it is possible to separate sport from politics, and whether PUMA's claimed position of neutrality can be achieved. Puma is found to be failing to adhere to its own corporate social responsibility position. The response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the sanctions 'levelled' against the Russian state and corporations exposes the double-standards of Puma, UEFA and many other sport organisations which had hitherto claimed that they 'don't do politics'.

Introduction

In December 2020 the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) called on football clubs around the world to boycott the PUMA sports apparel brand (BDS, 2021a). A letter signed by 200 Palestinian football teams called on PUMA to end its

sponsorship of the Israeli national football teams. The organisers of the boycott viewed PUMA's sponsorship as an attempt to 'sportswash' the Israeli Football Association's support for Israeli football teams based in the occupied West Bank, in direct contravention of FIFA's statutes. The intention of the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign is to damage the company's brand image by influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Ultimately, the aim of the boycott is to effect a change in the policies of the company.

Given the highly competitive sports clothing apparel market, arguably the most valuable asset a company has is its brand. Organisers of consumer boycotts have become adept at using social media to organize and cause immediate damage to brands that have taken years to establish (Jolly, Cooper & Kluch, 2021; 2004; Makarem & Jae, 2016; Rugg, 2020; Vredenburg, et al, 2020). This article brings together a number of key themes within a single case study. The article distinguishes between boycotts that are based on political solidarity and boycotts that are based on the consumer, with the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign identified as a consumer boycott.

In order to locate the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign in its proper context, the article begins with a brief outline of significant boycott studies, the Israel/Palestine conflict, and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The article then distinguishes between political solidarity boycotts and consumer boycotts, before focusing on the specifics of the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign. The arguments used by those organising this boycott, and the responses of those opposed to the boycott are considered, against the claim that sport and politics do not, or at least should not, mix. The intention is to cultivate an understanding of this contemporary consumer boycott and to assess PUMA's corporate social responsibility position, and to identify its relevance for sports sponsorship and marketing.

Background

The term ‘boycott’ is thought to have originated with the English land agent, Captain Boycott, who attempted to increase rents in 1880s Ireland; when the community collectively refused to pay, he was forced to leave (ethicalconsumer.org, n.d.). It has since become a short-hand term for any non-violent action that involves the withdraw from commercial or social relations involving a country, organization, or person as a punishment or protest. Some boycotts have led to a change in public opinion, such as the 1955 boycott of public buses in Montgomery, Alabama, during the US Civil Rights struggle (Elliot, 2015; Peel, 2020). Arguably the most well-known boycott was the one linked to apartheid South Africa. The Anti-Apartheid Movement emerged in 1959 with a call for individual consumers, sports fans and organisations, as well as companies and governments, to boycott South African goods and services (AAM, n.d). Many of those who were hesitant, or resisted the calls, to boycott Apartheid South Africa experienced reputational damage and found it difficult to reposition themselves when the apartheid system collapsed (Booth, Mangan and Majumdar, 1998; Sikes, Rider and Llewellyn, 2022). These two successful campaigns are seen as inspirational for other current global boycott campaigns (see www.ethicalconsumer.org/ethicalcampaigns/boycotts for a list of active consumer boycott campaigns).

Social justice activists have organised consumer boycott campaigns of clothing/sports apparel companies (Hond, et al, 2010). The focus of the activists has typically been on labour issues, including low pay, working hours, the use of bonded or prison labour, a ban on unionising, and/or the harassment of workers (HRW, 2018). In the 1990s a high-profile boycott campaign targeted Nike because of its poor labour practices (Wazir, 2001). A perception emerged that Nike was using sweatshop labour in its sub-contracted factories in Southeast Asia; the brand quickly became synonymous with low wages, poor working conditions, enforced overtime, and arbitrary abuse of its workers (Birch, 2021). In response to protests outside Nike stores and

calls to boycott the brand, Nike raised wages, improved working conditions and became more transparent about their labour practices. The success of the Nike campaign led activists to target other sports clothing brands (Hond, et al, 2010). In recent years, Nike and adidas have expressed concern at the use of forced/'slave' labour of the Muslim Uighur people in the Xinjiang region of China to grow cotton – some of which is used by the Chinese sportswear brand Anta (sometimes called 'the Nike of China', see Fair Observer, 2020); as a result of protests, these companies are facing a boycott by Chinese consumers, businesses, and government which had a negative impact on the companies sales (Fudge, 2021; **Olcott and Storbeck, 2022**).

Social justice activists have targeted those businesses accused of tax avoidance and evasion, such as Starbucks, Amazon, Apple, Google, and Facebook (Neate, 2021), and those companies which have been accused of poor working practices and treatment of staff, including Sports Direct, JD Sports, Amazon, and Apple (Butler, 2018; Goodley, 2020). Within sport, fan activism, including consumer boycotts, has been linked to ticket prices at football grounds, club ownership, and proposed changes to football league structures (Fitzpatrick and Hoey, 2022; Hill, Canniford and Millward, 2018; Welsh, 2022). The boycott of The Sun newspaper by fans of Liverpool FC, because of the newspapers mis-reporting of the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium football disaster, continues over 30 years after the incident (Bounds, 2019).

Sports organisations have become increasingly engaged in corporate social responsibility initiatives (Bason & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Walker & Kent 2009; Woods & Stokes, 2019). With consumers (including sports fans) becoming more aware of their influence and the impact of their behaviour and purchases, activists are turning to organisations' corporate social responsibility (CSR) statements, particularly if they are engaged in behaviour that is deemed unethical or unjustified (Franklin, 2008; Friedman, 1999; Klein, Smith & John 2004). There are on-going debates over exactly what constitutes CSR; typically, it includes activities such

as ‘good governance’ (e.g. transparency, accountability, anti-corruption), supporting community and non-profit organisations, adopting good labour standards and employee well-being, and endorsing environmental and human rights issues.

The Israel/Palestine conflict

Since the ‘Six Day War’ in 1967, which saw Israel occupy the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, Israel has created over 100 settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT); over 500,000 Israelis now live in the OPTs. The 2.5 million Palestinians who live in the West Bank are restricted to ever smaller areas and subjected to different rules to the Israeli settlers, leading to a number of human rights organisations describing Israel as operating a policy of ‘apartheid’ (Amnesty International, 2022; B’Tselem, 2021; Dugard and Reynolds, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2021; United Nations, 2021; Yesh Din, 2020). Unable to challenge the Israeli state through armed struggle, Palestinians switched to civil resistance. The Intifadas (‘uprisings’) in 1987-1993 and 2000-2005 generated widespread awareness and support for the Palestinians which crystalised in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement (Bakan & Abu-Laban 2009; Barghouti, 2011). Drawing inspiration from the successes of the US civil rights movement and South African anti-apartheid campaigns, the BDS movement called for an end to the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands, an end to racial discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees as enshrined in the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (adopted December 1948). The BDS boycott of Israel was not a wholly new tactic. In the period before the State of Israel was created, the Arab League launched an economic boycott of the Jewish community in Palestine (Dalloul, 2022).[1] This boycott lasted until the early 1990s, when the Israelis and Palestinians began ‘peace talks’ under the auspices of the United

States government. Since then, there has been an increasing normalisation of trade/economic relations between Israel and many of the regional states who had previously expressed support for the Palestinians. Led by the Palestinian BDS National Committee, the BDS movement is a global movement with a broad coalition of groups and supporters who organise boycotts of those companies which are complicit in, or who benefit from, the oppression of the Palestinians (for a full list, see pro-boycott research group 'Who Profits' at https://www.whoprofits.org/).

There have been calls for financial institutions and pension funds to stop investments that enable and normalise the occupation (Barrows-Friedman, 2021), with supporters of BDS pointing to a growing number of multinational corporations that no longer operate in the Palestinian territories. In some cases their withdrawal took place with very little publicity (e.g. G4S, General Mills, French-Belgian bank Dexia, French telecom company Orange, and French multinational Veolia - see BDS, 2021b; Moussa, 2021; Perry, 2021). However, when US-based Ben & Jerry's announced they would stop selling their ice cream in the West Bank, citing Israel's human rights abuses, significant media interest ensued (Baroud, 2021; Butler, 2022).

Sport has increasingly become a factor in the Palestine/Israel conflict (Dart, 2016; HRW, 2016; Khattab, 2019). Individual athletes who have showed their support for Palestine by refusing to compete against Israeli opponents have been sanctioned and called antisemitic (Frantzman, 2021). When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Spanish footballer Héctor Bellerín and Egyptian squash player, Ali Farag, asked why, when compared to other conflicts and humanitarian crises (for example, in Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Palestine), Ukraine had received extensive media coverage (Marca, 2022; Middle East Monitor, 2022; Zirin, 2022). Bellerín considered this might be because the Ukrainians were 'more like us' (i.e., White and Western), and because the conflict was closer to home and had a more direct impact. For Bayoumi (2022)

the [Western] media's "slanted and racist media coverage extends beyond our screens and newspapers and easily bleeds and blends into our politics".

Distinguishing between consumer boycotts and political solidarity boycotts

There are two different kinds of boycott in relation to the Israel/Palestine conflict. The first form of boycott, political solidarity, is encapsulated in the BDS goal of negating the ethno-nationalist basis of Israel as a settler state. This is a strategically deployed boycott and one of several forms of sanction that targets the constitutional and ontological basis of the state. This has a parallel to Apartheid South Africa (discussed later) and relates to the internationally recognised limits of the Israeli state (i.e., the 1967 borders as its de facto limits, although arguably the 1947 borders are the de jure limits). As a boycott premised on political solidarity it is tactically and strategically aligned to the actions of the state, its representatives, and agents. By contrast, a consumer boycott is much narrower in its scope. Activists target specific organizations with the intention to influence consumer spending, for example refusing to purchase from the boycott target (Albrecht, et al, 2013; Friedman, 1999; Neilson, 2010; Sen & Morwitz, 2001; Yener, 2017). The targeting of PUMA is an example of a consumer boycott that objects not to the product, but to the actions of the company. The same may be said for other major companies who are targeted because of their role in enabling the normalisation of the occupation of Palestinian territory (including AirBnB, Black & Decker, Caterpillar, Expedia, Hewlett Packard, L'Oreal, SodaStream, Stanley, and TripAdvisor). Although there may be concerns about them and their products, the call to boycott them is not ontological (i.e., that there is something inherently wrong with the corporation or its product), but primarily because of their imbrication with the cultural markers of the state and/or their complicity in the occupation.

In order to better understand the specific 'Boycott PUMA' campaign it is necessary to unpack this distinction. The tactical and strategic call for boycott, divestment and sanctions are directed towards the Israeli state on the basis that it is viewed as an apartheid state. Here, sanctions are designed to drive the state to change its policies and practices (in this case, the specific policies that sustain its ethno-nationalist basis and breaches of international law). The call to boycott a particular corporation (here, PUMA) is a tactical decision based on that corporation's support for the state. Here, we see a consumer boycott attempting to force the target corporation to change its practices which support the target state. When invoking previous boycott campaigns, a careful distinction needs to be made between consumer boycotts (here, of PUMA) and political solidarity boycotts: a decision to use another computer supplier to Hewlett Packard is a different kind of decision than refusing to go to a dance performance because they are funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and therefore an agent of the state.

On the surface, PUMA's decision to sponsor a country's national football teams might seem unproblematic; however, when assessing this particular sponsorship deal, things are more complicated. The 'Boycott PUMA' campaign is a specific tactical move (to mitigate support for the state) within a strategic programme with a broader aim (to change the state's form and practice). We now move to outline the arguments used by those supporting the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign, including the claim that PUMA is involved in 'sportswashing', before assessing the arguments of those opposed to the boycott and discussing the implications for sports sponsorship.

PUMA's sponsorship of the IFA and the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign

Morgan et al (2014) have shown how sponsors and sponsees will engage in collaborative relationships in the hope they will be mutually beneficial, productive and reciprocal, with trust

and commitment essential in maintaining a successful relationship (Farrelly and Quester, 2005). Sponsorships are time-based but can be terminated early if one party deems there has been transgressive behaviour (for example, an athlete caught using illegal drugs, or posting racist comments on social media). Both parties will be aware of the potential for transference of negative associations from sponsee to sponsor, with both parties conscious of their brand image (Farrelly, 2010; Roberts and Burton, 2018; van Rijn, Kristal and Henseler, 2019).

PUMA was formed in 1948, when Rudi split with his brother Adi Dassler (Smit, 2007), and has since become one of the world's largest sportswear manufacturers. Their sponsorship of the Israeli national football team is a standard commercial arrangement, intended to generate benefits for those involved. For PUMA the deal is designed to increase awareness of their brand and increase their sales.

Until 2018, the main sponsor of the Israeli national football teams was Adidas. The 'Boycott PUMA' campaign group has claimed Adidas decision to end its sponsorship of the Israel Football Association (IFA) was informed by an international campaign and a petition of over 16,000 signatures; however, Adidas stated that their decision to end their partnership was not politically motivated (i24News, 2018). When Adidas ended its partnership with the Israeli FA, a new four-year sponsorship arrangement was signed with Delta Galil, who were the exclusive importers of PUMA products and brand activity in Israel (Farooq, 2020). The sponsorship agreement stated that PUMA would provide all Israeli national soccer teams (mens, womens, youth) with the necessary equipment, including match kit, training kit, shoes, and other related equipment (Jerusalem Post, 2018).

Farooq (2020) has discussed the details of PUMA's sponsorship and has shown that it, like many commercial deals, is more complicated than initially presented. Delta Galil are the exclusive importers of PUMA products and brand activity in Israel. They also operate in the

illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT. Farooq (2020) explained that PUMA's contract with Delta Galil was due to end in late 2020, and to be replaced by a new distribution partner, Al Srad Ltd, who do not operate in any of the illegal settlements. As for any continuing partnership with the IFA, PUMA said it was up to Al Srad as to whether it would continue to work with the IFA.

PUMA's response to the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign has been to claim that sport and politics do not mix, that they do not support the occupation, and that sponsorship arrangements are the decision of the local distributor. This position is disingenuous with all three responses interpreted as an attempt by PUMA to abdicate any responsibility. One option for PUMA is to 'do nothing and wait it out' relying on the rolling 24-hour news cycle and consumers short attention spans. However, as this article will discuss, this approach comes with a degree of risk, even if it might initially appear to be the most effective.

Because there has been very little comment from PUMA, 'evidence' of the impact of the campaign comes primarily from its activists and supporters. Since its launch in September 2018 the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign has claimed a number of successes, which it lists on its website, www.bdsmovement.net/boycott-puma. These successes include a claim that a lawyer for PUMA told a Palestinian rights supporter that the Boycott PUMA campaign was *"making our lives miserable"* (BDS, 2020). The website cites claims that PUMA privately admitted they had received *"an increase in the number of requests from our business partners and ambassadors"* (BDS, 2021c) in relation to Israeli attacks on Palestinians, and that officials from PUMA had met with the global advocacy organization, SumOfUs, to discuss the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign (BDS, 2021d). At the time of writing, the campaign was encouraging supporters to use social media to target those UK football clubs that had kit deals with PUMA; the website also listed examples of clubs who had ended their sponsorship deals because of PUMA's indirect association with Israel's human rights abuses.

PUMA has shown support for the Black Lives Matter movement, LGBTQ+ issues, and women's empowerment through sport (PUMA, n.d.). In response to the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign the company has stated that sport and politics should not mix, that it was not engaged in sportswashing Israel's illegal occupation, and that it,

> does not support football teams in settlements nor does its Israeli distributor have branches in settlements. PUMA does not have any other connection or association with any other Israeli football club team - neither in mainland Israel nor in settlements. As a brand concerned only with the power that Sport has to bring people together, PUMA does not support any political direction, political parties or governments (cited in Farooq, 2020).

The invocation of CSR is relevant because it locates the issues discussed here within the field of a consumer boycott. With consumers becoming more aware of the societal impact of their purchases, increased levels of awareness have allowed activists to draw attention to an organisation's CSR statement, especially if the organisation is engaged in practices that are deemed unethical or unjustified. Boycott activists have drawn attention to PUMA's Code Of Ethics (https://about.puma.com/en/sustainability) which states that,

> PUMA is committed to ethical, and responsible individual and corporate behaviour. Our Code of Ethics prescribes this commitment, which all of our employees and business partners are required to comply with.

In addition to its CSR policy document, PUMA has signed up to the 'Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact' which draw upon a range of UN declarations, including its Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[2] In doing so, PUMA is claiming to align itself with those working towards social justice, but seemingly fails to recognise that Palestinians are being denied their civil and human rights.

PUMA's position reflects the approach that sport should be used to 'build bridges not walls' between communities (Schulenkorf and Sugden, 2011; Sugden, 2010). In 2015, a letter was published in the British Guardian newspaper which argued against a proposed boycott of Israel and instead called for greater dialogue. The letter contained many of the tropes used by bridge-builders and that dialogue would engender greater coexistence between the Israelis and Palestinians and "through such understanding and acceptance […] movement can be made towards a resolution of the conflict" (Rowling, et al, 2015). However, this approach is controversial given the longevity of the conflict, neglects that more illegal settlements are being constructed, and that it implies that the two sides are equal partners.

New forms of activism have emerged at the same time as membership of political parties and election turnouts have declined, and distrust with mainstream politics increased. The **growth of global social justice movements (including, but not limited to the BLM movement and #MeToo movement), the** advent of athlete activism, greater awareness of physical and mental abuse within sport, and of the concept of 'sportswashing', have all informed a growing realisation that sport is political. **In specific reference to the 'Boycott Puma' campaign, the Palestinian footballer Aya Khattab, has spoken about the impact of playing sport under Israeli occupation and the importance of the boycott for Palestinian football, sport and society (BDS, 2021e).**

Opposition to the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign

Having outlined the underlying issues and the position of those who support the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign, the article now discusses the arguments used by those opposed to the boycott. One response to the campaign would be to engage with the substantive issues and change policy/practices (as Nike did in response to activists' claims they were using child

labour and ‘sweatshops’, discussed earlier). One possible response to the ‘Boycott PUMA’ campaign would be to ignore it in the hope that it does not gain traction; by definition such a position would be difficult to identify and assess. Another possible response would be to reject any criticism and counter the activists’ campaign(s). It is this option that supporters of Israel have chosen, accusing the ‘Boycott PUMA’ campaign of being antisemitic. There are a number of well-funded and highly organised Israeli and pro-Zionist groups that work to counter any criticism of Israel and seek to undercut support for the Palestinians (groups include, but are not limited to, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Zionist Organization of America, the Israel Policy Forum; the Board of Deputies of British Jews; Friends of Israel; Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre, Anti-Defamation League, Campaign Against Antisemitism, We Believe in Israel, StandWithUs, and the Jewish National Fund).

Supporters of Israel have questioned ‘what other reasons could there be for targeting Israel unless it was informed by antisemitism?’ However, this position demonstrates a fundamental failure to distinguish Judaism from Zionism, and instead erroneously conflates Jews and Israelis, and anti-Zionism with antisemitism (Frey, 2021; Habeeb 2016; Lerman, 2018). The deliberate tactic of conflating Jewish people with the Israeli state has seen the term antisemitism ‘weaponised’ in an attempt to discredit the motives and actions of the ‘Boycott PUMA’ campaign. Those opposed to the ‘Boycott PUMA’ campaign’ and other BDS campaigns have begun to use anti-boycott laws that have been created in Western Europe and North America (HRW, 2019; Thrall, 2018). These laws increasingly cite the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s ‘Working Definition of Antisemitism’ – elements of which conflate anti-Israeli sentiment with antisemitism. The first part of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition (IHRA, 2016) contains a short, two-sentence definition of antisemitism:

> Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

The IHRA's Working Definition then gives 11 'illustrations' of potential antisemitism, seven of which refer to the State of Israel. Various pro-Israeli lobby groups have pressed governments, businesses, and organisations (including universities) to adopt the 'Working Definition' in full. Because many of the 11 illustrations conflate Zionism and Israel with antisemitism, criticism of Israel can be classified as 'hate speech' (Friedman, 2020). It is the 'illustrations', rather than the initial definition, which is used to disrupt the work of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and to undermine the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign.

The conflation of the terms Israel, Zionism, Jewishness, and antisemitism by self-appointed, antisemitism 'monitoring groups', many of whom have close links with the Israeli state (see Lerman, 2015), has resulted in a general sense of confusion towards the Israel/Palestine conflict. Jewish people are not a single entity or community; there are a number of Jewish groups which oppose the occupation of Palestinian land and the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians (i.e. B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence, HaMoked, J Street, the New Israel Fund, Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, Students for Justice for Palestine). Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that Jewish people can be, and are, anti-Zionist reflecting the fundamental differences that exist within the global Jewish diaspora and within the Israeli population. Jewish supporters of the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign undercut the claim that supporting Palestinians is antisemitic. Contrary to what some might claim, being anti-Zionist does not automatically equate with being antisemitic (Dart, 2017a; Gidley, McGeever & Feldman, 2020; Kelemen, 2012), with misuse of the term antisemitism rendering the IHRA code, in its current format, 'not fit for purpose' (Philo, et al, 2019; Stern, 2019; Ullrich, 2019).

The groups who are opposed to the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign claim that Israel is being subjected to double standards. Opponents question the campaign organisers' motives and question why Israel is being targeted and not what they see as other, 'worse' offenders (for example, the hosts of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, the hosts of the 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cup finals tournaments). However, this claim of 'double standards' fails to recognise that there were campaigns which opposed these events. Reason why campaigns against Israel have a high profile include the longevity of the conflict, Israel's desire to align itself with Western Europe, the level of funding it receives from the US government, and the disproportionate level and frequency of both real and symbolic violence experienced by the Palestinians.

The claim that double-standards are being applied to Israel can be seen as correct in that Israel is given more favourable treatment when compared to the sanctions applied to Russia for their invasion and occupation of Ukraine. When Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022 Western governments, sport governing bodies and clubs were quick to impose a raft of economic and cultural sanctions and boycotts. UEFA/FIFA immediately suspended Russia from all its competitions, including the national team's play-off for FIFA's 2022 World Cup finals tournament. Within weeks of its invasion, Russia had been banned from all international sport. Support for Ukraine was expressed by fans flying their national flag at football grounds across Europe, including at the UCL's match between Bayern München and Red Bull Salzburg. This was in stark contrast to the much-vaunted convention against mixing politics with sport and was a direct challenge to UEFA's ban on political demonstrations within stadia.[3] Despite PUMA's position that it wanted to keep politics out of sport, PUMA ended its sponsorship agreement with the Russian Basketball Federation before they suspended all their activity in the country. As organisers of the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign pointed out, 'Never has PUMA's

"we don't do politics" excuse fallen flatter. Never has its hypocrisy been more exposed' (BDS, 2022a).

One of the main arguments used by the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign (BDS, n.d.) is the IFA's links with six teams located in the West Bank[4]. Those coordinating the campaign explain that the six teams, which are based in illegal settlements, receive support from the IFA and compete in the Israeli football league system. Some teams are registered in the OPTs and play some matches in Israel proper, with other teams registered in Israel and playing some of their matches in the OPTs. In 2016 a report by Human Rights Watch, found there were 26 settlements that had an organised football league, with a further 17 settlements containing non-FIFA football facilities for its residents (HRW, 2016). Typically these clubs do not let Palestinians use any of their facilities. FIFA's own rules are very clear on the issue of membership. Any club that is affiliated to a FIFA member (here, the IFA) may not play on the territory of another football association (here, the Palestinian FA) without the other association's permission. A similar issue arose when Russia occupied Crimea and attempted to incorporate Ukrainian clubs into the Russian league in 2014 (Saakov, 2014). When FIFA threatened to act, Russia relented and set up its own leagues in Crimea, which lay outside FIFA's control (BBC, 2014). FIFA have also taken action in response to Armenia's occupation of Nagorno Karabakh (O'Connor, 2017) and Turkey's occupation of Northern Cyprus (Lekakis, 2015).

Comparisons between Israel and apartheid South Africa have been made by the 'Boycott PUMA' campaigners because the Israeli state has been described as 'an apartheid state'. Elements of the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign draw upon the language and tactics used by anti-apartheid campaigners, and while some comparisons exist, this does not mean the issues are 'the same' (Greenstein, 2011; Jacobs & Soske, 2015; Pappé, 2015). As in seeking to compare the situation in Israel with Apartheid South Africa, comparisons between Ukraine/Russia and Palestine/Israel are not an exact match; each situation is unique, but there are some similarities.

There are parallels in that both Russia and Israel have contravened international law and have committed war crimes. While Russia has been sanctioned for its invasion of Ukraine, little to no action has been taken against Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

The impact of the boycott and the implications for PUMA and for sports sponsorship

Because it is an ongoing campaign, there is no way of knowing how things will unfold. **It is not possible to identify the precise impact of the boycott on PUMA's sales due to issues of commercial confidentiality.** However, those supporting the campaign have identified a growing number of sports clubs and organisations who have publicly cut their ties with PUMA because of its links with the Israeli Football Association (**Abusidu, 2022; Reuters, 2018). Supporters of the boycott claim their campaign is having an impact because of their opponents attempts to develop legislation designed to block BDS activity (Buchanan, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2019). BDS supporters claim that if their campaigns were not having an impact, then there would be no need to seek to introduce 'anti-BDS laws'.**

The initial strategy of PUMA to the campaign was initially to ignore it and adopt a 'wait and see' approach. However, waiting to see if the campaign gains traction can be viewed as a risky strategy as shown by the Nike incident (noted earlier), and by Nestlé's sale of baby formula in poor countries (Muller, 2013). The fact that PUMA can see there is the potential for reputational damage is likely to have informed its decision to meet with representatives of the advocacy organisation SumOfUs. Sports clothing apparel is a highly competitive market, and with substitutable products available, consumers are easily able to switch their purchase intention to a competitor brand. The PUMA brand is built on creating a particular type of brand image, and as Nike found out in the 1990s, a positive image and brand awareness are essential in the sports apparel market.

The call to boycott FIFA's 2022 World Cup tournament in Qatar was highly unlikely to result in national teams refusing to attend or the cancellation of the event. What the various calls to boycott have done, however, is to shine a spotlight on the human rights abuses in the country, and led to much greater public and consumer awareness. The response to the question on whether the boycott of Qatar and of PUMA is working, will depend on how 'success' is measured. The intention of the PUMA boycott is to get the company to stop its sponsorship of the Israeli national football teams. At the time of writing this had not been achieved, but there is evidence that the wider BDS movement, of which the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign is a part, is having an impact. In recent years sports corporations have been speaking out on a range of social, environmental and/or political issues, symbolised in the terms 'conscious capitalism' (Gwartz and Spence, 2019) and the 'triple bottom line' (Weiler and Mohan, 2010). Fuelled in part by changing societal attitudes and heightened expectations among values-minded consumers, companies are engaging in CSR initiatives and environmental, social and governance (ESG) programmes. The Laureus Sport for Good Index contains two of Puma's competitors, Hummel and Nike, who are cited as organisations that are having a clear and meaningful impact on using sport to drive sustainable social change. PUMA will be aware of the negative publicity generated by the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign, and as noted earlier, PUMA executives have reached out to the global advocacy organization, SumOfUs, to discuss the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign (BDS, 2021d).

Almost 40 years ago Friedman (1985) reported that of 90 boycotts that took place in the United States between 1970 and 1980, 24 had successfully (completely or partially) changed the behaviour of the target organisation. Friedman identified it was those campaigns that were the most organised, and which used 'attention-grabbing techniques' which were the most successful. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. **Social media has become an important**

weapon in the armoury of consumer activists because of its potential to promote participation and interaction between activists and consumers (Commetric 2020; Liaukonytė, Tuchman, and Zhu, 2022). Coverage in the mainstream media can increase social media commentary, for example, when fans of Glasgow Celtic FC fly the Palestinian Flag during matches against Israeli clubs (Judah, 2022), or when English Premier League players, such as Paul Pogba, Amad Diallo, Hamza Choudhury and Wesley Fofana display the Palestinian flag immediately after games (Al Jazeera, 2021; SkySports, 2021). Instances such as these create headlines which will have been seen by PUMA executives.

'Boycott PUMA' campaigners have claimed that sports organisations across the world are participating in the boycott campaign (BDS, 2022b) The BLM protests, the #MeToo movement have engaged with sport and generated greater awareness of 'sportswashing', with consumers becoming more aware of social justice on a global scale, and how the Palestinian struggle intersects with other marginalised groups and movements. Klein, et al, (2004) identified one of the key factors in participating in a boycott was the desire to make a difference, something that was noted by Dart (2017b) in their study of the motivations of pro-Palestine activists. PUMA's commitment to social justice in its CSR statement is being used by boycott activists to highlight what they see as a disconnect between PUMA's stated vision and its actions.

When the conflict flares up in the OPT, there is often widespread public expressions of support for the Palestinians in many Muslim countries. If the 'Boycott Puma' campaign were to gain traction in the 'Muslim world' then there is the potential for significant reputational damage. It is again important to note the boycott is designed to support the Palestinians and is against the actions of the Israeli state, and not against Jewish people. As was discussed previously, while some seek to conflate Israel and Jewish people in an attempt to deploy the accusation of anti-Semitism to undercut support for Palestinians, the State of Israel and Jewish people should be

viewed as different. The deliberate attempts to conflate Israel and Jewish people is one reason why PUMA (as a company with German origins) might be reluctant to end its sponsorship of Israeli football. This case study has illustrated why companies need to be aware of wider geopolitical environments before they enter sponsorship deals. Companies also need to ensure they adhere to their own CSR statements to avoid accusations of hypocrisy. The impact of a boycott should not be viewed solely in terms of its immediate impact on a company's 'bottom line'. As noted throughout this article a company's reputation is the cornerstone of its business, with the trope that reputations are 'hard to build and quick to lose' apposite here. A company that finds itself consistently in a negative media spotlight can quickly experience damage to its brand equity.

Conclusion

Since 2018 pro-Palestinian supporters have been campaigning against PUMA because of its sponsorship of the Israeli national football teams. Palestinian supporters argue that PUMA is guilty of sportswashing by legitimising the Israeli national teams, the IFA, and by extension, the actions of the Israeli state and its illegal occupation of Palestinian land. This article has focused on the question of brand security from PUMA's point of view and, with the boycott entering its fourth year, there are two possible ways the boycott could end. The first would be the end of this particular BDS campaign or because PUMA's brand identity became so compromised that its sponsorship of the Israeli national teams became a brand liability. Boycott campaigns involve a tactical focus on those companies which are seen to provide succour to a particular regime and are premised on a goal of devaluing the brand identity. PUMA would not need to change its product, just its practice. To a much more significant degree, Israel would

need to change its ‘product’ (specifically, to recognise the UN General Assembly’s Resolution 194).

The participation of six clubs, based in West Bank settlements, in the Israeli football league is seen by the boycott activists as illustrative of how the Israeli FA are allowing football to be used to normalise the illegal occupation of Palestinian land. According to the Palestinian FA, by failing to abide by its own rules, UEFA/FIFA are complicit in the annexation of Palestinian land because of the funds it provides to the Israeli FA, which it uses to develop Israeli football, at the same time as it restricts the development of Palestinian football (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Israeli FA could refer to UEFA/FIFA’s own statutes and ***not*** accept clubs based in illegal settlements into their national league. By not doing this, the Israeli FA can be seen as part of the Israeli state apparatus and therefore, punitive measures, including the ‘Boycott PUMA’ campaign, can be seen as legitimate and necessary tactics until the illegal teams from the illegal settlements are removed from the Israeli domestic league system. The Israelis have repeatedly claimed that the Palestinians are politicising football, and that sport should be kept separate from politics, but it is shown here that it is the Israelis who are doing this by allowing teams based in illegally occupied territory to play in its domestic leagues.

Measuring the impact and success of any boycott campaign is not a straightforward activity. Boycotts are partly educational in that they are engaged in awareness raising and in starting a debate. One such debate that took place during the period of South African apartheid was premised on the question of whether one can have ‘normal sport in an abnormal society’. The boycott of apartheid South Africa began in 1959, with a very limited call to boycott South African fruit, sherry and Craven A cigarettes (AAM Archives, n.d). As this article has discussed, there is not a straight-forward correlation between this sporting boycott and the ending of apartheid, with multiple factors at play, both within and external to sport.

It will not be possible to assess the impact of the 'Boycott PUMA' campaign, until PUMA ends its association with the IFA, or until there is some kind of resolution to the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis. The question as to whether the boycott will be successful will depend, in part, on how success is defined. Of course, a successful boycott of PUMA, on its own, would not be enough to resolve the conflict nor would it bring about an immediate improvement in the lives of the millions of Palestinians who live under occupation or as a a refugee. To bring pressure on the Israeli state to address the 'Palestinian Question' would require a much wider consumer and/or political solidarity boycott and extend to other areas of trade, military assistance, science, technology, and education, all united in a broad front working towards a resolution of the conflict.

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[1] The Arab League led a boycott of Coca Cola across North Africa and West Asia between 1968-1991 because of the company’s business in Israel.

[2] The Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact are derived from: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, see https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles

[3] UEFA have repeatedly fined Glasgow Celtic FC fans for flying Palestinian flags inside Celtic Park (Mckenna, 2016).

[4] The term ‘Occupied Palestinian Territories’ is used to describe the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip – all controlled by Israel. The Israeli government prefers the terms ‘Judea and Samaria’ or the ‘disputed territories’ (Pappé, 2007; Morris, 2001; Zertal and Eldar, 2007).