Conference Companion

by

Music Scholars for Palestine



SEM Annual Conference
23–26 Oct 2025
Atlanta Marriott Marquis

Dear colleague,

Thank you for your interest in Music Scholars for Palestine's resolution to boycott and divest from the state of Israel and its institutions. This movement is part of PACBI—the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel—and is a call from Palestinian civil society for scholars and artists around the world to stand against the illegal Israeli annexation and occupation of Palestinian land. This cause is especially urgent now, when it is uncertain if the tenuous ceasefire will hold, because only the opprobrium of the people of the world can check the hand of empire.

You may have been horrified to witness scenes of genocide in Gaza unfolding in front of your eyes over the past two years. Perhaps you have felt pressure to stay silent from your academic institution, political regime, or powerful colleagues. These pressures are very real. Music Scholars for Palestine put forward this resolution, though, because we believe that ethnomusicologists yearn to stand on the right side of one of the moral litmus tests of our time. We have not always lived up to our aspiration to stand alongside the colonized and the oppressed. But MS4P believes that, through grappling earnestly with the cause of justice in Palestine, we will become stronger and better able to confront those times when we have fallen short in the past. As we are seeing in the world around us, when powerful institutions intended to safeguard democracy, justice, and truth falter, it is we who must carry those torches forward.

In this booklet you will find resources for the conference, as well as FAQs and more information about our organizing. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have questions.

Yours sincerely,
MS4P

Presenter's Solidarity Script

Please consider reading aloud any part(s) of this script before beginning your presentation at the upcoming SEM annual conference!

- "Before I begin my presentation, I'd like to voice my support for Music Scholars for Palestine's (MS4P) proposed SEM bylaws amendment in support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement."
- "In light of Israel's policies and actions of illegal occupation, land theft, apartheid, and genocide of the Palestinian people, it is our moral obligation to ensure that our scholarly community takes a stand by divesting from complicit companies and institutions and uplifting the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)."
- "Despite issuing past position statements regarding other violations of human rights and international law, SEM has yet to take a public stand or any action in this regard."
- "Thus, I urge you to vote yes on MS4P's BDS resolution during the upcoming SEM general elections."
- "If passed, SEM will join a growing body of other academic associations that have successfully passed BDS resolutions, including but not limited to:
    - Asian American Studies Association (2013)
    - Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (2013)
    - National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (2015)
    - Middle East Studies Association (2022)
    - National Women's Studies Association (2015/24)
    - American Anthropological Association (2023)
    - American Studies Association (2013/23)
    - American Sociological Association (2024)"

Selected Events

"Lider mit palestine: Articulating Jewish Solidarity
with Palestinians through New Yiddish Song"
Isabel Frey, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna
Panel 2E | Thurs, Oct 23rd | 11:45 AM - 12:15 PM | Room M-101

"Music Can't Stop a War Machine"
Matt Sakakeeny, Tulane University
Panel 3D | Thu, Oct 23rd | 2:15 - 2:45 PM | Room M-304

"Anarchive in the UK: Tape Collections as Diasporic Recollections"
David Novak, University of California, Santa Barbara
Panel 3F | Thu, Oct 23rd | 2:15 - 2:45 PM | Room M-102

"Irish Sound Paintings: Belfast's Palimpsestic
Politics in the Aftermath of October 7th"
Jessie Lee Rubin, Columbia University
Panel 3C | Thu, Oct 23rd | 3:15 - 3:45 PM | Room M-303

"President's Roundtable: SEM at a Crossroads:
Institutional Responsibility, Ethical Engagement, and the Proposed Bylaws Amendment"
Panel 6A | Fri, Oct 24th | 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM | M-301

"MS4P's Teach-in for Palestine"
Fri, Oct 24th | 7:00 - 8:00 PM | Room M-104

"MS4P's Ritual for Grief and Hope"
Fri, Oct 24th | 8:00 - 9:00 PM | Room M-302

"Straining to Hear Palestine: Al-Khalidi's Radical
Act of Listening During British Mandate"
Kira Gaillard, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Panel 9G | Sat, Oct 25th | 8:30-9:00 AM | Room M-103

"Refugees, Forced-Migration, and Ethnomusicology: What Can We Do?"
Session Chair: Lisa Gilman (Roundtable)
Panel 10D | Sat, Oct 25th | 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM | M-304

Frequently Asked Questions

What is BDS?

The BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) Call was launched in July 2005 by an overwhelming majority of Palestinian civil society unions, political parties, and organizations. Since 2007, it has been coordinated by the BDS National Committee (BNC). The campaign brings together the Palestinian and international community in a concerted effort to end Israel's denial of Palestinian rights through three main actions:

- Boycotting Israel: Economically, this means avoiding goods made in Israel or by Israeli companies, particularly- but not only- those produced in occupied territory. Culturally and academically, it means boycotting institutions that are complicit in the oppression of Palestinians.
- Divesting from Israel: This means targeting corporations complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights and ensuring that the likes of university investment portfolios and pension funds are not used to finance such companies.
- Implementing sanctions against Israel: This means an effort by governments and international institutions to stop business as usual relations with Israel until the country observes international human rights standards. This can be done by refusing Israel's participation in international forums and calling for embargoes and economic sanctions.

These three actions form the core of the BDS campaign and are indivisible from each other. However, the movement recognizes the choice of tactics and targets will depend on the particularities of each situation (Barghouti 2011, 60). For the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), our focus is on a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

Why is it necessary to boycott Israeli academic institutions?

Israeli academic institutions function as a central part of a system that has denied Palestinians their basic rights. Palestinian students face ongoing discrimination, including the suppression of Palestinian cultural events, and there is sanctioning and ongoing surveillance of Palestinian students and faculty who protest Israeli policies. Israeli universities have been a direct party to the annexation of Palestinian land. Armed soldiers patrol Israeli university campuses, and some have been trained at Israeli universities in techniques to suppress protestors (ASA). They provide the military-intelligence complex with indispensable research that directly benefits the occupation apparatus. Those who oppose the academic boycott may argue that it curtails freedom of speech; this ignores that these freedom of speech rights are systematically denied to Palestinians and Palestinian academics in particular (Barghouti 2011, 90, 105). In other words, the academic boycott doesn't violate academic freedom but helps to extend it. The ordinary working conditions for Palestinian academics and students are severely constrained by restrictions on movement to and from work, on international travel, by discriminatory permit systems, and by the ongoing genocidal slaughter carried out by Israel. All universities in Gaza have been destroyed by U.S.-backed Israeli- airstrikes, and a majority of all schools, leading UN experts to believe that there is an "intentional effort to comprehensively destroy the Palestinian education system, an action known as 'scholasticide'" (OHCHR 2024).

Is BDS anti-Semitic?

No. The Palestinian BDS Call does not target Jews, or even Israelis qua Jews; it is consistently institutional in nature and is therefore strictly directed against Israel as a colonial and apartheid power that violates Palestinian rights and international law (Barghouti 82). Moreover, to characterize actions and positions that target Israeli apartheid

and colonial rule as anti-Semitic is itself anti-Semitic because it perceives of Jews as a monolithic sum that Israel represents and can speak in behalf of, therefore silencing dissenting views within the Jewish community and implying that all Jews per se are somehow responsible for Israeli crimes (Barghouti 149). Conscientious Israelis have answered the BDS call positively, acknowledging that they cannot possibly have normal lives without first shedding their colonial status and recognizing Palestinian rights (ibid., 31). Since 2009, Boycott! Supporting the Palestinian BDS Call from Within, a growing movement in Israel has fully adopted the BDS call, with several institutions endorsing it, such as the Alternative Information Center (AIC), the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICAHD), and Who Profits from the Occupation?

Why is this issue relevant to SEM?

In the US, our colleagues and students are not safe on campus: students have been violently arrested, suspended, expelled, evicted, and kidnapped for taking public political stances against genocide and in support of Palestinian human rights. Our academic freedom of speech is under attack as a result of a brutal and well-funded attack by the powerful Zionist lobby. There is a tenacious network that exists-from Israel to the ADL and other pro-Israel propaganda organizations- that is built to spy on and disrupt student activism. The Washington-based organization Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) for example, has direct links to Israeli intelligence and AIPAC, and has consistently used student informants to gather intel on pro-Palestinian groups. The ICC's chief executive director Jacob Baime was caught on an undercover reporter's hidden camera describing the organization as a clandestine Israeli military command modeled on General Stanley McCrystal's counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, including the ongoing development of operations and intelligence briefs. The briefs, which include secret details about targeted students, get passed onto Israel's Ministry of Strategic affairs. Data from the ICC's campus spies

makes its way to the ADL, whose annual report on "Anti-Israel activism" strategically engages in fearmongering to further the crackdown on pro-Palestine campus groups (See: Bamford 2023).

What would an SEM BDS movement accomplish?

The ongoing crisis in Gaza should matter to us as academics, but most importantly, it should matter to us as humans and concerned global citizens. A BDS movement in SEM would validate the presence and significance of

Palestinian students, professors, and professionals who work in our departments and academic networks. SEM's campaign would add our voice to a stabilized and growing consensus of influential academic institutions with majority American membership that officially support BDS, including: the American Historical Association, the National Women's Studies Association, the American Sociological Association (2024), the American Anthropological Association, the Middle East Studies Association, the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, the Asian American Studies Association, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, and the Association for Humanist Society.

Does BDS call for a boycott of Israeli scholars?

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) has called for a boycott that targets academic institutions only. The boycott does not apply to individual Israeli scholars. The boycott of Israeli academic institutions entails a "pledge not to collaborate on projects and events involving Israeli academic institutions, not to teach at or to attend conferences and other events at such institutions, and not to publish in academic journals based in Israel." Cooperation and exchange with individual scholars is encouraged, so long as it does not happen on the

grounds of or through the auspices of an Israeli academic institution. Under the boycott, individual Israeli scholars can still be invited to international conferences, publish in international academic journals, and the like. Israelis are not being called on to boycott their own institutions, an Israeli scholar with state funds can still be invited to a conference abroad. Rather, the boycott is directed at the Israeli universities themselves.

Does BDS have a stance on the political solution?

No. BDS is a rights-based campaign; as such, it departs from the premise that real peace entails justice and the pre-conditions for such justice to take place are these:

- End the 1967 Israeli occupation of Gaza, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and other Arab territories in Lebanon and Syria.
- End Israel's system of racial discrimination against its Palestinian citizens.
- End Israel's persistent denial of the UN-sanctioned rights of Palestinian returns, particularly their right to return to their homes and receive reparations.

Apart from these minimal requirements, BDS does not advocate a particular political agenda nor does it take a stance in the one-state-versus-two-states debate. Thus, while individual BDS activists and advocates may support diverse political solutions, the BDS movement as such does not adopt any specific political formula, focusing instead on Palestinians' right to self-determination. BDS simply fights for the conditions necessary for such self-determination to take place (Barghouti 2011, 52).

SEM Anti-Harrassment Policy

March 8, 2021

Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) meetings, programs, and communication channels are forums for research, discussion, education, professional development, and advocacy related to the field of ethnomusicology. Harassment of participants in these forums is inconsistent with SEM's strong commitment to academic freedom, equity, and human dignity. Consequently, harassment is considered by SEM to be a serious form of professional misconduct. The following Anti-Harassment Policy outlines expectations for all who participate in the SEM meetings, programs, or communication channels.

Purpose. SEM is committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all participants, free from harassment based on age, race, color, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic or employment status, academic rank, marital status, domestic status, parental status, or other categories of identity and material condition. "Participant" in this policy refers to anyone present at an SEM-sponsored meeting or engaged in an SEM-sponsored program or communication channel.

Expected Behavior. All participants are expected to abide by this Anti-Harassment Policy in all SEM meetings, programs, and communication channels, including ancillary events and social gatherings. Specifically, participants are expected to abide by the following:

- Follow the norms of professional respect that are necessary to promote the conditions for academic freedom, equity, and human dignity.

- If you witness potential harm to a participant, be proactive in helping to mitigate or avoid that harm.
- If you see a situation in which someone might be in imminent physical danger, alert venue security personnel or law enforcement.

Unacceptable Behavior. Harassment is unwelcome behavior. It may consist of a single act or of multiple persistent or pervasive acts that are demeaning, abusive, or offensive, or create a hostile professional environment. Harassment may include sexual solicitation, physical advance, stalking, or verbal or non-verbal conduct that is sexual in nature. It may also include threatening, intimidating, or hostile acts; circulation of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility toward an individual or group; or epithets, slurs, or negative stereotyping based on group identity. Participants are encouraged immediately to report instances of harassment during an SEM meeting, program, or communication channel to the SEM Executive Director or an SEM Board member in accordance with the Society's complaint procedures. Reports will be treated as confidential.

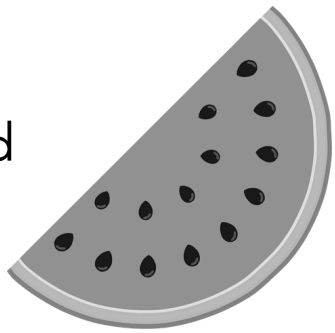
Violations of this policy may lead to actions such as removal from the meeting, program, or communication channel. Note: This statement is adapted in part from the Anti-Harassment Policy of the National Humanities Alliance.

Let's Connect!

Scan this QR code for links to our website, full BDS resolution text, and various social platforms.

Email list: musicscholars4palestine.com/subscribe
Instagram: @musicscholars4palestine
YouTube: @musicscholars4palestine
Facebook: Music Scholars for Palestine

For questions/comments and if you would like to organize with us, email us at:
musicscholars4palestine@proton.me





And remember to vote YES on MS4P's bylaws amendment proposal in 2026!