



◀ The entrance of the Axel Springer building in Berlin on May 6, 2019
● SVEN BRAUN/
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In December, Yad2 took out its own advertisement in an Israeli business paper to promote home sales on its site. "From the River to the Sea," the ad, which appeared in *The Marker*, says in English, depicting a map of Israel and Palestine with pins dropped all over. The map has no "Green Line" or other markings separating Israel's internationally recognized borders and occupied Palestinian territory. Below the co-opted protest slogan, the ad continues in Hebrew: "Yad2 helps you look forward and build a future in your next home in Israel."

Yad2's advertisement may be, as many commenters saw it, a cheeky reference to the pro-Palestinian rhetoric, but it also points to how Springer makes money off Israel's settlement enterprise. Like Craigslist, many individuals can post ads for free on Yad2, but some categories of advertisers — including real estate brokers or dealers — need to pay to put up listings.

"Advertising on the website is free for private users," a representative for Yad2 said in response to an inquiry. "Business users are required to pay according to the terms of the site." Paid listings, which are highlighted on the site, allow advertisers to increase their reach, they added.

The Intercept found thousands of apartments for sale and for rent in illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank. Of those, more than 1,000 were paid ads from brokerage houses — meaning Yad2, and therefore Axel Springer, made money on them. Some of the ads, according to an expert who scanned the listings for *The Intercept*, are for homes in so-called outposts, or settlements considered illegal under even Israeli law; other home listings appear on private Palestinian land that was seized by the Israeli military for security purposes but now hosts Jewish settlers. Publishing ads that promote real estate deals in Israeli settlements is both contributing to and benefiting from human rights

abuses, said Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch, which has concluded that Israel's occupation and settlement enterprise contribute to an apartheid system.

"The land these settlements are built on has been expropriated from Palestinians," Shakir said. "Ultimately, our call would be for the company to end its activities that are contributing to grave human rights abuses." Shakir noted that Palestinians — including stateless Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as those from Jerusalem or Israel proper who hold Israeli IDs or citizenship — cannot in practice buy or rent in Jewish-only settlements.

"Discrimination has no place at Axel Springer," said a spokesperson for the company. "This is clearly regulated in our Code of Conduct, which applies to all companies at Axel Springer and is available in several languages, including Hebrew. Axel Springer speaks out clearly — also in the essentials — against any kind of racism. Yad2's terms of use explicitly state that no one may be discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity or age." (In fact, Yad2's terms of use prohibit users from posting "harassing, insulting, hostile, threatening, rude, racist character or content" but don't explicitly bar discrimination.) Springer did not respond to questions about paid and unpaid advertising for settlement homes on Yad2.

For Shakir, the classified ads for homes in Israeli settlements not only profit off discrimination but also enable the entire Israeli settlement project by making housing markets in the West Bank viable.

"Companies engaging in this are benefiting from a system that systematically discriminates against Palestinians, that denies them building permits and resources and roads and infrastructure," he told *The Intercept*. "They're also helping to make settlements more sustainable economically and thus further entrench the settlements practice."

Yad2 in the settlements

Since its founding in 2005, Yad2 has become Israel's top online platform for classified ads. A user can look up anything from animals to weapons. The site's initial growth, however, was on the strength of its property ads and used car sales — which remain its most popular categories for ads, featured prominently at the top of the site.

The tab for apartment sales leads users to a huge number of real estate listings, including for approximately 1,300 apartments and commercial spaces in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank alone, as of mid-January. Yad2 users can also find around 1,000 available rental apartments in Jewish-only settlements. Of those, paid posts from brokerages make up more than 800 sale listings, more than 100 rental listings, and more than 100 commercial real estate listings. The website features a map searchable by region — a map where Palestinian villages and towns seem to not exist.

The Yad2 listings encompass properties available for purchase or rent in some of the most ideologically extreme settlements in the West Bank, including Kochav Ha'Shachar, Kedumim, Talmon, Shilo, Eli, Psagot, Tekoa, Otniel, and Susiya. These settlements, like most of the Israeli housing development in the West Bank, exclusively cater to Jewish Israelis. Property acquisition or rentals within their gated communities often hinges on an internal approval process influenced, in part, by ideological considerations. Israeli settlements are considered

illegal under international law, which prohibits the transfer by an occupying army of its own civilians into occupied territory, according to the United Nations Security Council, other international bodies, and every nation in the world except for Israel and, as of the Trump administration, the US. The settlements are a key catalyst for escalating violence, killings, and routine house demolitions inflicted on Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israel distinguishes between settlements it considers to be legal, which make up the vast majority of settlements that exist in the West Bank, and unauthorized settlements known as outposts that are illegal even by the country's own laws.

Yad2's real estate listings promote properties in such outposts. As of three weeks ago, for instance, there were two listings for apartments in the community Bat Ayn B, north of the Palestinian city of Hebron, which Dror Etkes, an expert on Israeli settlements, said was a West Bank outpost that is unauthorized by the Israeli government. Neither of the ads were paid listings from brokerage houses.

Another posting, according to Etkes, lists land near the existing outpost Ma'ale Rehav'am, in a separate outpost unofficially named Nachal David 224, that was seized from Palestinians and put directly up for sale. (The ads for properties in Bat Ayn B and Nachal David 224 are privately placed listings, meaning the seller is not required to pay for the listing but can do so to promote it.) Etkes, who founded Kerem Navot,

an Israeli organization dedicated to monitoring settlement construction in the West Bank, also located two listings for land in settlements that were taken by the Israeli military in the 1970s for security reasons but are now being sold by brokerages in paid ads on Yad2.

The failure to distinguish between outposts and those settlements considered legal by Israel itself is routine in the country, said Etkes. "Israel made a decision many years ago to sacrifice the rule of law for land grabbing and intensifying its settler presence in the West Bank," he said. "The law is treated as less than a recommendation."

Etkes pointed out that, among other politicians, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Simcha Rothman, a member of the Knesset who heads the Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee, reside in settlement homes that even Israeli law considers to be illegally constructed. Pointing to the horrors of Israel's war in Gaza, Shakir noted that unchecked impunity for human rights abuses can escalate into even more severe violations. "We've repeatedly sounded the alarm on settlement construction and associated human rights abuses, which Human Rights Watch has identified as crimes against humanity, apartheid, and persecution," Shakir said. "The key takeaway here is the imperative for ending impunity and ensuring accountability for grave abuses."

The full article first appeared on *The Intercept*.



◀ Muslims join in for prayer in Palu City, Indonesia, on November 3, 2023, declaring their boycott of McDonald's over an Israeli franchise's decision to provide free meals to Israeli soldiers.
● AP

What is happening now?

Calls to boycott Israel have found support on TikTok during the war, which was touched off by the October 7 Hamas raid on communities in southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people. More than 25,000 people have been killed in Gaza.

Social media creators have uploaded videos explaining which brands they've targeted, rejecting specific products by certain brands, or walking through stores and rating brands on their approach toward Israel.

BDS has called for boycotts of Puma, the sportswear brand, because it had a sponsorship deal with the Israel Football Association. Human Rights Watch has criticized the IFA for operating in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, and the IFA website continues to list teams from the West Bank for the

2023–2024 season.

On December 12, Puma said its sponsorship contract with Israel and some other countries would end in 2024 as part of a new marketing strategy. BDS called this a "win." Puma had previously said that the Israeli national soccer teams were supplied with Puma equipment to compete in international competitions, but that it had no association with any other Israeli soccer team, in settlements or otherwise. It also said it was supporting two local aid organizations, one in Gaza and one in Israel.

Ahava, a skincare and cosmetics brand that has a factory and showroom in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank advertised on its website, is a BDS target. Ahava did not respond to emailed requests for comment.

McDonald's was targeted — in a social

media campaign that was endorsed by BDS in November — because a franchise in Israel promised free meals to Israeli soldiers. In an email, McDonald's said that it was not supporting any government involved in the conflict; that the Israel franchise had acted independently without consent or approval from the company.

Starbucks has been a popular focus of boycott calls on TikTok because of legal battles over the pro-Palestinian actions of its union. The company sued the union for trademark infringement over a since-deleted social media post made on October 9, reading "Solidarity with Palestine!" It appeared above someone else's post of a photo purporting to show a bulldozer breaking through the barrier separating Israel and Gaza. The company said that the post was "reckless and

reprehensible" and that its own position was to condemn violence in the region. The union has since countersued.

Disney has also been criticized. It plans to feature the controversial Israeli superhero Sabra, a fictional member of the country's real-life intelligence agency Mossad, in an upcoming Marvel film in the Captain America franchise set to premiere in 2025. BDS has called for a boycott of the specific movie, but many on social media have called for followers to boycott the company altogether.

In an email, Marvel Studios said: "While our characters and stories are inspired by the comics, in the MCU [Marvel Cinematic Universe], they are always freshly imagined for the screen and today's audience, and the filmmakers are taking a new approach with the character Sabra."

What is the impact of BDS?

From the start of BDS's efforts almost two decades ago until right before the war, Israel's economy grew. Dany Bahar, an economist and associate professor at Brown University's Watson Institute, said in a phone interview that "it's very likely that it has had zero effect" on the country's economy. In a 2018 Brookings Institution analysis,

he and co-author Natan Sachs found that Israel's economy is resistant to boycotts because it specializes in exports that are difficult to source elsewhere, such as advanced technologies and the intermediate goods used in the production of other goods, both of which are difficult to boycott. But the movement has had some notable successes, particularly in divest-

ment, Chalcraft said. He pointed to the French services and utilities company Veolia, which pulled out of Israel in 2015 after a years-long BDS campaign that Chalcraft said caused it to lose "billions." Veolia denied that BDS was a factor. Maia Hallward, a professor of Middle East politics at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, wrote in an email that

BDS's impact had been in bringing "issues not traditionally in the US discourse into the public eye".

She added that the number of US states passing legislation against the movement shows that "BDS is seen as a threat."

The full article first appeared on *The Washington Post*.