

# BRICUP NEWSLETTER

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[www.bricup.org.uk](http://www.bricup.org.uk)

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**In the September issue of this newsletter (#8) we announced the Clinicians' Tour to Israel & Palestine. Dr Brian Robinson, a retired NHS psychiatrist who was on the tour, recorded his personal impressions shortly after stepping off the 'plane.**

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*I wondered if I should re-write these notes before they got a wider circulation, thinking I should have left more time for reflection, but on second thoughts I left them just as they were, since that's how it was. I have however added one link (to DCI).*

Just home off the plane, with little sleep, so obviously it would be crazy to attempt anything remotely resembling a summary of a 10-day study tour by health professionals (days often starting at 5-30 and finishing at 10pm) but I wanted to say (1) Phew! and (2) it was worth it.

Even the Israelis denying us entry to Gaza (correction: "considering" it well past the date we could actually have used their permission) was extremely productive in that it gave us three whole extra days to gain further insights into the Palestinian plight.

Right at this moment if I were to say only one thing to give a sense (wholly inadequate) of the scene, it would be simply that we found a blatantly two-tier health-care system in operation - an excellent one for Israelis and a poor one for Palestinians and Bedouins. If anything clinched the overcoming of my previous resistance to the use of the word 'apartheid' in the context of this conflict, the evidence for this (which will be presented by others much better than I could) was indeed the pitiful clincher. I may still prefer to call it 'neo-apartheid' (or 'hafradah') but apartheid it is.

But that's much too inadequate, and anyway I want to add something even more distressing about an institutionalised practice that most of us found totally overwhelming, namely the systematic application of physical and even more, psychological, torture to young children (and that, I may add, regularly for the most trivial of behaviours that in the UK would not even rate as offences). Perhaps our day meeting our colleagues who descend into that pit of darkness to heal the traumas was the most difficult. (Of course not only Israelis amongst the nations engage in this, and maybe it's even sadder to have to note that with the tragic Fatah / Hamas split, Palestinians themselves are incriminated.) See [www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org)

There will be time to describe the make-do-and-mend, the drug shortages, the problems for patients and staff of even getting to the clinics and hospitals, and others will describe these (and I'll try in due course to do so myself). But leaving medicine and the therapies for a moment, I want to mention another myth that was exploded for me. We all know how difficult it is to criticise Israeli policies and actions when speaking and writing in Britain, but we also know how often we're told that within Israeli society itself this is not only possible but a daily occurrence: for example we were told that when Jimmy Carter shocked (apparently) many apologists for Israel outside of Israel, what he said was a commonplace amongst Israelis themselves. But this too, it seems, is sadly another myth. Yes, things are discussed but within strict limits - there are paradigms of permission, there is, we might say, a universe of discourse outside which it is generally agreed no-one shall stray. The clichéd elephant in the room is the one everyone (I gather) knows they don't want to notice. And only a paltry 5% or so of Israelis read Ha'aretz.

Therefore hard as it is to believe that in so militarized a society with the youngsters coming

home weekends from their brutalized and brutalizing week's work in the territories, hard as it may be to credit that "Israelis don't know what is going on", it seems to be true. Of course we could get psychological about it, I could say to you you're probably not aware at this very second as you read this of the pressure of the floor on your feet, or that you can feel your watch on your wrist, and you can suddenly become aware of just those things. But then do you think you could forget to notice? Or choose not to remember? Or simply remember to forget? (And how many Brits know what's going on in Iraq and Afghanistan? Knew about Northern Ireland? We may not be smug about this.)

The murder rate is going up amongst Israelis (men only, as I recall), domestic violence is on gigantic increase. Israeli society is destroying not only the Palestinians but itself from within, and no-one is safe. We had at least one participant who was able to quantify all of this in careful, diligent, accurate, statistical terms, completely free from hyperbole, simply stating - all the more effective for being uncontaminated by emotion - the killer facts. It is arguable that such sober statements, backed up by evidence impossible to deny, will start to bring the changes we want to see. I'm looking forward to reports of this kind.

In the end, change must come through the heart, but maybe we must first convince the head. I don't want to be misunderstood: there's a time to shout, to wave banners, to go on strike, to boycott; it may even be (I don't know) that all opportunities of rational argument have been taken and found to be wanting - and it will certainly be a sad day if words and figures and images and narratives have all been exhausted. Sad because that may leave only the Norman Finkelstein option, and as he said himself, who wants that? Not a one on this trip, which is precisely why we went on it.

Finally, although this was my second visit to the West Bank, it was only on this second visit that I really understood, with immense sadness and deep pain, why so many are now saying that Israel is indeed a criminal state. Not merely in some name-calling emotive way, but very precisely, the

law in this case being the international one. And I would add that it would be the very reverse of anti-Semitism to rephrase it, "The Jews have got ourselves a criminal state". Yet Jews and gentiles can join in restitution of historic wrongs.

***Brian Robinson** is a retired NHS psychiatrist. These impressions were written in a personal capacity and do not represent the clinicians' group in any way.*

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## **British-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership**

Last month we published, in Newsletter #10, the letter from BRICUP to the Chief Executive of the British Council, criticising their involvement in administering the UK government's BIRAX (British-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership) scheme. Here is their reply.

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*Thank you for your letter dated 16 October 2008.*

*The British Council's work in Israel and the Palestinian Territories takes place in a difficult and contested political environment. A balanced approach to our cultural relations work is therefore vital in building trust and engaging with our partners on both sides. This is what we consistently do and it is for this reason that we believe our reputation is deservedly high.*

*The position of BRICUP regarding support for an academic boycott of Israel is well known to us but here we differ. The British Council as the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities is firmly opposed to any idea of academic boycott and we take the view that it is in Britain's best interests to engage constructively with partners from both communities through dialogue and academic co-operation. This approach is reflected in all our programmes that support higher education in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories.*

*It is in this spirit of engagement that we have recently developed the new Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership (BIRAX) and*

at the same time embarked upon the development of new PhD scheme to support Palestinian academia.

The press release you refer to when we announced the launch of BIRAX does not demonstrate any bias towards the Israelis or, by inference, any bias against the Palestinians but simply makes an honest statement about the bi-lateral nature of the new scheme. Similarly, when we come to announce a new British Council initiative in support of higher education in the Palestinian Territories we would wish this to be received as news about our relationship with Palestinian universities and not a comment on the relationship with Israel.

The British Council enjoys excellent links with both Israeli and Palestinian universities and to suggest otherwise is simply inaccurate. We have a range of programmes with university partners that promote the exchange of knowledge and ideas through networking and seminars, professional development schemes, scholarships and quality assurance. Recent examples of our work in the Palestinian Territories include:

- A partnership with the Media Development Institute of Birzeit University, Palestine Television and MAAN Network, and Zan Studios for Graphic Design we developed the first animation series to tackle social issues. The episodes present a satirical view of problems present in Palestinian society and is part of our regional Media and Society project
- With Al-Quds Open University and the University of London we run an English course using video conferencing to develop teachers' and students' English Language skills in four centres in the West Bank and Gaza – with special reference to e-learning and dealing with large classes
- Partnering with Al Azhar University and Al Quds Open University in Gaza Strip, the BC has facilitated an English Club for 100 students in all, with emphasis on life skills and conflict resolution. Specialist facilitation is provided through video conference from the BC teaching centre in Jordan and certain UK institutes.

We are continually looking to develop our work in support of the UK's knowledge economy and that of our partners overseas. We have no plans to stop this important work any time soon.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Davidson [Chief Executive, British Council]

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The response is disappointing but sadly not surprising. We had not asked them to support the academic boycott, obviously a bridge too far. But we did suggest that they risked being perceived as lacking even-handedness between Palestine and Israel (at best) or a tool of the UK government (at worst). Martin Davidson's reply identifies just 3 British Council activities in Palestine. It would be good to know how the expenditure on these compares with the money going to Israel through BIRAX and other British Council mechanisms. We will try to find out.

Jonathan Rosenhead,  
Secretary of BRICUP

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## The PACBI Column

### The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC). A new Palestinian civil society leadership.

A few days ago, the president of the United Nations General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, denounced Israel as a state practicing apartheid and called for "a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions" against it. This was by far the most prominent forum in which endorsement of BDS was voiced, underlining the steady growth of the Israel boycott movement worldwide.

In May, commemorating 60 years since the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of more than 750,000 indigenous Palestinians around 1948, the Palestinian leadership of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign was born. The BDS National Committee, or BNC, was formed to culminate a process that started with the issuing of the unified [Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS against Israel](#) in July 2005.

Inspired by the victory of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa in the early 1990s and

deriving from one hundred years of Palestinian civil resistance to the Zionist colonial conquest, the BDS Call in Palestine won the endorsement of a broad consensus in Palestinian civil society, where more than 170 unions, political parties, mass movements and social organizations signed on to it. The Call, which adopts a rights-based rather than a political solutions-based approach, urges various forms of effective pressure on Israel until it fully complies with its obligations under international law, and ends its three forms of oppression against the people of Palestine: the occupation and colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), the system of racial discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the denial of UN-sanctioned Palestinian refugee rights, particularly the right of refugees to return home and receive reparations. Accordingly, the signatories represented the three major components of the Palestinian people: Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip, the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Palestinian refugees.

The key goals of the BNC are:

- To strengthen and spread the *culture* of boycott against Israel as a central form of non-violent resistance to Israeli occupation and apartheid;
- To formulate strategies and programs of action in accordance with the BDS Call;
- To form the Palestinian reference point for BDS campaigns worldwide;
- To coordinate the various BDS campaign efforts in all locations.

The tasks of the BNC include local campaigning and awareness raising; training local activists and organizations on BDS work; international BDS advocacy; rapid response to projects and initiatives that violate the boycott and/or promote a deceptive image of coexistence despite occupation and oppression; media advocacy; and promoting BDS in the Arab World. The BDS campaign website, [www.bdsmovement.net](http://www.bdsmovement.net), is a principal tool in the BNC work.

The current members of the BNC are: Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine; Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition; General Union of Palestinian Workers; Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU); General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW); Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO); Ittijah: Union of Arab Community Based Associations; Independent Federation of Unions – Palestine (IFU); Palestinian Farmers Union (PFU); Occupied Palestine and Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI); Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (Stop the Wall); Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), Charitable Organizations Union; National Committee for the Commemoration of the Nakba; Civil Coalition for Defending the Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem (CCDPRJ); Coalition for Jerusalem; Union of Palestinian Charitable Organizations; Palestinian Economic Monitor.

In just a few years since its launch, the Palestinian boycott movement and its international supporters in the solidarity movement have scored a number of successes. Major trade unions, academic associations, faith-based organizations, artistic groups and many prominent intellectuals and cultural figures from the US to England to Sweden to Ireland to Norway to South Africa have taken diverse routes towards endorsing the BDS logic. Most recently, countering the so-called “Israel at 60” celebrations, for instance, leading artists and writers were convinced to stay away, at least partially due to appeals from the boycott movement. These included Russell Banks, Bono, Bjork, Jean-Luc Godard and Snoop Dogg, most of whom did not cite the boycott as a factor behind their decisions.

Similarly, many academics and artists observed what we call a “silent boycott,” shunning events in Israel without announcing public support for the boycott. The BDS movement has consistently encouraged this phenomenon, recognizing the intensive campaigns of intimidation and intellectual terror which a public supporter of the boycott would be subjected to by the Zionist lobbies.

Now that BDS advocacy has finally reached the halls of the UN, one hopes that a Palestinian “South Africa moment” is drawing closer, rekindling the hope that one day Israel’s acts of genocide in Gaza, its colonial wall in the West Bank, its settlements, its apartheid regime and its entire reign of oppression will come to an end, allowing a genuine, just peace to flourish in Palestine and the entire region.

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**The following is another of our occasional narratives of academic life under Israeli Occupation, this time written by Islah Jad**

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**The painful path of academic cooperation: A case from Birzeit.**

I work at the Women's Studies Institute at Birzeit University. Part of my work is to follow up a cooperation agreement between the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex University) and the Women's Studies Institute. In order to follow up the agreement activities, I had to be in Brighton by October 5, 2008, and of course I needed a British visa. All Palestinians living in the West Bank or Gaza are banned from entering the city of Jerusalem (even the Arab part) unless they obtain a permit from the Israeli military government. To get such a permit is an incredible hassle. One has to queue in humiliating conditions and has to 'prove' why s/he needs to go to Jerusalem, the site of the most holy places for Christians and Muslims.

During this past Ramadan, the Israeli Authorities showed great 'generosity' by allowing Palestinians above the age of 45 to reach Jerusalem on Fridays to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque. I used this opportunity to reach the British Consulate in East Jerusalem without having to go through the painful path of getting a permit. I left my house at around 7 am on the second Friday in Ramadan. I reached the Qalandiya checkpoint only to find a huge wave of thousands of people waiting to pass the ugly checkpoint. It was melting heat and many old men and women were swimming in their sweat waiting under the burning sun hoping to

pray at al-Aqsa Mosque, the second holiest place for Muslims worldwide.

After two hours of waiting I realized that the line was not moving and that I was standing in the same place. I decided to find another way to cross the checkpoint. Then I heard a young soldier telling the crowd on a loudspeaker to go to another entrance. Suddenly I saw a huge crowd of dust running after me; I felt as if I was in a buffalo race. Without thinking I started to run with the crowd out of fear of being knocked over or pushed aside. When we reached the second entrance of the checkpoint, a long line of soldiers waving their weapons ordered us to go back from where we had come from. We told them that we were sent by the other group of soldiers to this place; some were allowed to pass and some others were sent back again. I was among the lucky ones. After a few meters, we were met by a third row of soldiers asking us to show our ID cards so they could check our ages. This time they asked the people who were above the age of 55, and not 45, to pass. Again, some were lucky and some others were sent back and again I was among the lucky ones. Now, we met a fourth line of soldiers who separated men from women to pass through a revolving gate. The Palestinians call this gate the '*ma'aata*' (a machine for removing chicken feathers). I regretted that I was separated from the men, since men respect some tiny space for women. Once I was with only women there was no space and I felt that my feet were removed from the ground by the pressure of women's bodies around my own body. I felt as if I was reduced to a piece of paper pushed and pulled by the crowd.

After passing the fourth row of soldiers and the revolving gate, we were met by a long line of soldiers spread along a long corridor with watchdogs, then a sixth row of soldiers with horses, until we reached a huge walled place from where we were supposed to take only buses (no cars) to 'ship' us, like cattle, to Jerusalem. Once I reached this ugly place I could not recognize where I was; the huge concrete walls deformed the place and the landscape.

I reached the British Consulate to find another row of checkpoints and revolving doors. I had to leave my camera and my mobile phone, I had to give my ten finger prints, I had to be photographed, etc.,etc. By the end of my ordeal, I was asking myself what academic cooperation meant when one was reduced to being a non-human, when the whole process from its Israeli beginning to its British end made you feel that you are part of a buffalo herd and not a human being.

**Islah Jad**  
**Birzeit University**

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**BRICUP joined with the Palestine Society at SOAS and the PSC to organise a meeting on “The Occupation and Israeli Civil Society” at SOAS on Nov 29<sup>th</sup> 2008. Jonathan Rosenhead was in the chair. The capacity audience was estimated at 150.**

Ilan Pappé took as his subject ‘Israeli impunity and immunity’. He said that whenever accurate and damaging information is presented to the Israeli Government it fails to be translated into policy. The need to counter the Zionist propaganda that is fundamentally responsible for Israel’s immunity was emphasised. Newly released cabinet papers from 1967 make it clear that Israel calculated that, because the world allowed them to get away with the events of 1948, they could do the same in 1967. The sense of immunity in Israeli society is very strong, which is why the academic boycott is felt as a real threat to them - the first chink in their wall of immunity. The academic and cultural boycott will eventually succeed in identifying Israel as a pariah state but progress will then depend on Palestinians defining their own vision of the future.

Karma Nabulsi spoke next, concentrating on the harsh realities of life under Israeli Military Occupation. But, she said, Israel must realise that the Palestinians will not give up. The present restrictions on academic life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) are intolerable. She gave many examples of the difficulties

deliberately created by Israel and pointed out that the inevitable result is erosion of the standard of education, which in turn encourages alienation and de-humanization - all this in a people who have always valued learning and education very highly.

The final speaker was Gideon Levy, the campaigning Ha’aretz journalist. He explained that he grew up a typical Jewish Israeli boy, seeing his society as just and desiring only peace. He described how, as a journalist, he visited the OPTs in the mid 80s and gradually realised that a great drama was taking place but that nobody was paying any attention to it. So he began to tell the story that nobody wanted to hear. In such circumstances, he said, it would be easy to impose self-censorship, but that would be very dangerous and he persevered with his newspaper reports. He stressed that the occupation simply is not discussed by Israelis; the subjects that are discussed are anti-Semitism and the victim status of the Israelis. Security is Israel’s true religion and the whole of society is involved. He thought that the behaviour of soldiers at checkpoints is possible only because they consider the Palestinians to be sub-human so that ethics don’t come into it... but cover-up does and this harms not only the Palestinians but also the soldiers and the settlers. What of the future? Israelis say that they want a two-state solution but in the upcoming elections they will elect Netanyahu! All the candidates are “in favour of negotiation” but they will go on building settlements and check points. His message was pessimistic, suggesting that only two scenarios are possible: the first is terrible bloodshed; the second is international intervention, He saw little prospect of the latter.

The talks were followed by a vigorous question and answer session following which there was a meeting for BRICUP supporters that was chaired by Mike Cushman. Sue Blackwell introduced the discussion with a brief account of the formation of BRICUP and its recent activities. There was then an active discussion that identified a number of areas which BRICUP might consider developing. These included: improving our contacts with academic sympathisers in Israel; holding a

conference to consider different types of boycott; improving our knowledge of academic complicity in the UK; learning more about academic boycott in other countries; mobilizing students more effectively; updating the BRICUP pamphlet on boycott; paying more attention to the D of BDS; increasing and improving contacts with the media; and exposing the Israeli use of support for cultural activities abroad to present Israel in a favourable light.

This BRICUP meeting was a valuable opportunity for discussion and we hope to repeat it. Please post your views to [bricup@bricup.org.uk](mailto:bricup@bricup.org.uk)

*Note: This commentary on the meetings is the personal view of David Pegg.*

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### **Fringe meetings at the UCU congress 2009**

UCU is asking Branches and local associations to submit any topics that they would like to be considered for fringe meetings to be held at Congress in 2009. These are official fringe meetings; BRICUP will be discussing whether to hold its own nearer the date of Congress.

LSE has already submitted a suggestion for "a meeting on how UCU can carry forward its policies on Palestine as adopted at the last two Congresses. This would be a meeting with UCU officers describing progress to date and future plans plus speakers from Palestinian academic trade unions, this would provide an interesting and useful discussion."

BRICUP invites other branches to consider making similar requests as weight of numbers counts as well as quality of suggestions. Requests need to be sent to [cwilkinson@ucu.org.uk](mailto:cwilkinson@ucu.org.uk) by 14 January 2009.

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### **Financial support for BRICUP**

BRICUP needs your financial support. The recent, and well overdue, redesign of our website absorbed much of our reserves and we need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands.

You can make a one off donation

- by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK
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*Comments and suggestions concerning the Newsletter are always welcome.*

Email to [newsletter@bricup.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)