

BRICUP Newsletter 61

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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Freedom of expression at Brooklyn College

The story started with the sponsorship by the Political Science Department at Brooklyn College of [an event](#), scheduled for 7 February, featuring two advocates of the BDS movement. One speaker was

Omar Barghouti of PACBI and the other was Judith Butler, a Professor in the Rhetoric and Comparative Literature Department at UC Berkeley. The event was being co-sponsored by numerous student and community groups. At first, opposition was confined to the usual suspects – notably Alan Dershowitz, who denounced the event as a "hate orgy". (Dershowitz had previously [led the successful campaign](#) to pressure DePaul University to deny tenure to long-time Israel critic Norman Finkelstein.) Writing in the Guardian, (guardian.co.uk, Saturday 2 February 2013) Glenn Greenwald said that Dershowitz had been joined by “ a cast of crazed and fanatical Israel-centric characters who had publicly (and falsely) claimed that the event speakers "think Hamas and Hezbollah are nice organizations, and they probably feel the same way about al-Qaida" The president of Brooklyn College, Karen Gould, was labelling an anti-Semite and pressured to resign, The neocon editorial page of the New York Daily News [decreed](#) that "Brooklyn College is no place for an Israel-bashing lecture". Some Jewish students [demanded that the Department rescind its sponsorship](#) by cynically conflating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, complaining that the event will "condone and legitimize anti-Jewish bigotry" and "contribute significantly to a hostile environment for Jewish students on our campus".

According to Glenn Greenwald, the lynch mob that assembled against Brooklyn College and its academic event is all too familiar in the US. However, this controversy had significantly escalated in seriousness when numerous New York City elected officials tried to dictate to the school's professors what type of events they are and are not permitted to hold. Close to two dozen prominent City officials have [signed onto a letter to college President Gould](#), pronouncing themselves

"concerned that an academic department has decided to formally endorse an event that advocates strongly for one side of a highly-charged issue" and "calling for Brooklyn College's Political Science Department to withdraw their endorsement of this event."

Greenwald asks, "Does anyone have trouble seeing how inappropriate and dangerous it is to have politicians demanding that professors only sponsor events that are politically palatable to those officials? If you decide to pursue political power, you have no business trying to use your authority to pressure, cajole or manipulate college professors regarding what speakers they can invite to speak on campus." The danger posed by these politicians is manifest: Brooklyn College relies upon substantial grants and other forms of funding from the state. These politicians, by design, are making it mandatory for these college administrators to capitulate - to ensure that no campus events run afoul of the orthodoxies of state officials - because obtaining funding for Brooklyn College in the climate that has purposely been created is all but impossible. Manifestly, this controversy has nothing whatsoever to do with objecting to one-sided academic events sponsored by academic institutions. Such events occur constantly without anyone uttering a peep of protest. This has to do with one thing and one thing only: trying to create specially oppressive rules that govern only critics of Israel and criticisms of that nation's government. As Lemieux put it: "So, apparently, colleges have a moral obligation to have 'balanced' panels . . . in cases where the speakers might disagree with Alan Dershowitz." **But it was not to be!** The President of Brooklyn College, Karen Gould, did not budge from her principled position and, in spite of the Dershowitz campaign to silence them, Judith Butler and Omar Barghouti spoke at Brooklyn College as planned. The full text of Judith Butler's address, which is an impressive analysis of the BDS concept, and of freedom of expression is available on "The Nation" at [Judith Butler](#)

Compiled using material from Glenn Greenwald's account in the guardian.co.uk on February 2nd 2013

Zionism and Antisemitism: racist political twins.

The movement for freedom, justice and equality for Palestinians opposes Israel's occupation, colonisation of Arab lands and its apartheid system. The campaign for Boycott, Divestment and

Sanctions (BDS) targets the Israeli state, institutions and companies complicit in Israel's crimes. BDS has become an effective means for people of diverse backgrounds to express their humanitarian, anti-racist impulses in solidarity with Palestine.

Recognising the power of BDS, Israel's defenders have regularly accused the movement of antisemitism. They use this favourite weapon to intimidate and silence critics of Israel, including Jewish anti-Zionists, who are dismissed as 'self-hating Jews'.

This briefing has been written by and for BDS activists to explain how the charge of antisemitism applies to Zionism itself. Indeed, they are racist political twins. Understanding their mutual dependence will help strengthen the BDS movement and inform our strategy.

- Read the full briefing text [on the J-BIG blog](#) with numbered references and onward links
- Download the briefing as a printable pdf file [here](#)
- Read the briefing as a pdf with notes in an appendix [here](#)

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The full text is available on the PACBI website at <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2107>

York University Palestine Solidarity Society - a hard won campaign for Student Union Recognition.

This contribution was written for BRICUP by Josiah Mortimer, Press Officer for the York University Palestine Solidarity Society (YUPSS). In it, Josiah describes the struggle that the members had for ratification by the York University Student Union. BRICUP congratulates YUPSS on its splendid campaign. The students are already engaged in BDS work and BRICUP looks forward to working with them in the future.

The newly-formed University of York Palestinian Solidarity Society recently won ratification as an official society, after an intense dispute with the university's student union, YUSU. After forming in response to the attacks on Gaza last November and organising a well-attended emergency protest on campus, students applied for official recognition as a society from the union. The request was rejected, on

the grounds that the society was solely ‘campaign’ based, despite the existence of a number of ratified political campaigning societies at the university. The Societies Committee also claimed PSS did not have enough core support to sustain itself, despite a massive show of support from the student body. The society was given less than a week to appeal.

In that time however, the group drafted a 14-page appeal document, with signatures and support from 37 NUS delegates and officers and societies across the country, as well as personal messages of support from those in the community and students themselves. The appeal was sent off - and was rejected, again, on largely the same arbitrary grounds as before including the claim that the society did not provide a platform for student development, despite the success of the launch event which attracted 170 people. Moreover, the appeals panel was the same as the original panel- they were given the appeals document in the meeting and were given 10 minutes to read before making its decision – barely skimming the document.

In response, Palestinian Solidarity Society set up a petition, attracting nearly 150 signatures in a few days, and got articles published in campus media. In little time, another appeal hearing was granted – for *all* rejected societies – and a new appeals committee convened. Under considerable pressure, it accepted our request in January, and ratified PSS and the other rejected societies. On top of that, the union pledged to completely overhaul the flawed appeals system and make it both more democratic and transparent.

The whole debacle, after a hard-fought campaign, represents a huge victory for student Palestinian activism. Make sure to listen out for University of York Palestinian Solidarity Society’s future actions.

Josiah Mortimer, Press Officer, York University
Palestine Solidarity Society

The PACBI Column

The Dishonor of Israeli Honors.

The Israeli academic and cultural establishment has always been keen on securing a place for Israel in the global academic and cultural arena as part of its untiring efforts to make Israel appear as a normal state and society. The Israeli establishment has

developed a “tradition” of honoring international academics and cultural figures through prizes, such as the Wolf Prize, the Dan David Prize, and the Jerusalem Prize, which are awarded every year. In such events, the Israeli branding machine goes into full gear, bestowing international scholars, artists and writers the dubious honor of receiving prizes from the head of state, honorary doctorates from Israeli universities, or the spotlight of keynote addresses at professional conferences.

It is rare to find scholars and cultural figures who can see through this crude Israeli ritual and the way their names are used cynically to further the Israeli propaganda agenda. It is indeed a testament to the success of this agenda that a belligerent colonial and apartheid state’s arrogant claim to value scholarship and creativity goes unquestioned, and instead, is further validated. It is also a reflection of the strength of Israeli exceptionalism that this state can get away with violations of international law and the denial of human rights of Palestinians, whereas at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa it was inconceivable for conscientious scholars or artists to accept honors from the South African head of state or from the state’s various complicit institutions, such as universities.

The responses of international figures to Palestinian and international appeals to shun Israeli prizes and other honors have invariably focused on the tired argument that they do not want to punish Israeli academics or cultural workers by refusing such opportunities. Another related argument is that by their presence in Israel, they will be strengthening those Israelis who fight their establishment—on the assumption that the academy and the cultural arena are where Israeli dissent flourishes. Rarely is the fact that Palestinians are appealing to them a relevant consideration. It seems the only voice such people hear is the Israeli voice.

Take, for example, the Spanish writer, Antonio Muñoz Molina, who this month is expected to travel to Jerusalem to receive an award at the hands of Israel’s President Shimon Peres. It seems here that we face the tragic and astounding case of a writer who does not read. Molina has responded to appeals to him by both international and Palestinian civil society saying that he chooses to be with Israelis who are against their government rather than “to boycott a whole people,” and that boycott actions do not distinguish between people and their states [1].

Supposing for a moment that boycotts are politically naïve, as Molina seems to suggest, it behoves him to see how the acceptance of an award handed out by the head of the state would clearly be legitimizing that very state. More importantly, Molina has spoken against the appeals to him, while clearly having not read those very appeals, or, in all likelihood, not having attempted to understand their message, in which case he should have spared himself the embarrassment and stayed silent. No one has asked Molina to cut off all ties to individual Israelis; however, PACBI and other groups have called on him not to participate in functions involving complicit Israeli institutions, or in government sponsored events.

Had Molina read our appeal to him carefully [2], he would have learned that the Palestinian call for cultural boycott does not target individuals. This point cannot be stressed more. It is a call to boycott complicit Israeli institutions and events sponsored by the government and designed to promote Israel's image as a bastion of culture. As such, communication with Israelis is not in question. There are many forms in which an engagement with Israeli academics can take place outside the framework of complicit institutions. What is in question is legitimizing Israel as a center of academic and cultural life by giving lectures, accepting awards, and taking part in Israeli events, thereby granting recognition to its *complicit* institutions.

Our strong commitment to values of free speech and the right of individuals, within the context of the right to collective resistance, is such that we go to great lengths to explain and elucidate the various forms of complicity of Israeli institutions, and the role international artists play in whitewashing Israel's crimes. In our appeal to Molina, as with all our appeals, we explained the role of the Jerusalem Municipality in the continued dispossession of the Palestinian people, documented Israel's image-branding campaign that exploits the participation of foreign artists, and elaborated on the role of the Jerusalem Prize in maintaining Israel's system of oppression.

Such an appeal for boycott, and indeed the entire academic and cultural boycott campaign, is hardly a form of collective punishment, then, as some critics have suggested. These critics argue that there should not be a boycott by the international

community because there are Israelis who are fighting their establishment, and who might be weakened by such an act. First, even the softest critic of the Israeli establishment, assuming they are sincere, would recognize that accepting a state prize does not help their critical or dissident cause. Second, and more importantly, many of those Israeli critics who are held up to the Palestinians by internationals like Molina as reason for not resisting (a bizarre colonial act in itself), are in fact in support of BDS, if they truly believe in self-determination for Palestinians (end of occupation, return of refugees, and equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel). These Israelis are few and far between, but nevertheless, their position is commendable and we work with them.

Finally, if by collective punishment we mean to collectively target complicit Israeli institutions, then the movement is guilty of this, for this is the logic of boycott, whether this was in South Africa, India, or the US, where we take part of our inspiration. These institutions are part and parcel of the system that oppresses Palestinians. It would, no doubt, be a twisted logic to say that this can be equated to Israel's bombing of Gaza in November, or Israel's system of checkpoints placed to restrict the movements of an occupied people. For this parity is surely what is implied when claims of collective punishment are brought to charge. If our statements are read, with even a cursory eye, one will see clearly that boycotts are here being enforced against a powerful, privileged and oppressive regime as a form of civil resistance; a far cry from the military might of a state bombing a civilian population, enforcing a calorie intake limit on it [3], and erecting a wall around its cities, villages and refugee camps.

We call upon international academics and cultural figures to read our statements and our guidelines within the framework of resisting colonization through strategies of pressure rather than the 'handle colonizers with care' approach. We appeal to them once more, as the indigenous oppressed people, to respect our strategy of resistance in the form of boycotts and moral pressure and not to accept the dishonor of Israeli honors.

PACBI

Notes:[1] <http://www.publimetro.co/vida-con-estilo/munoz-molina-viajara-a-israel-y-pide-distinguir-entre-un-estado-y-su-gobierno/lammaC!j6qEGZp6uJaO022ZZshpfO/>

[2] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2106>

Defeating attempts at academic boycott (?)

Israel does take academic boycott seriously!
The following account, published by the University of Haifa and circulated by Ben White can be read at <http://newmedia-eng.haifa.ac.il/?p=6381> . They report that “some of the most eminent British and Israeli biological scientists came together yesterday for the annual UK Israel Life Science Council meeting ”with the objective of improving scientific collaboration between the two countries.” They refer to “seven major research projects. [that] receive BIRAX grants for their research and form the BIRAX Regenerative Medicine Initiative, a five-year multimillion-pound programme initiated by the UK Israel Life Sciences Council that represents one of the most ambitious and innovative bi-lateral medical science collaborations between two countries anywhere in the world.”

The conference was attended by the British Ambassador Matthew Gould who is reported to have said,” Science is one of the cornerstones of the relationship between Britain and Israel. Listening to the presentations today it’s clear the collaborations between our scientists and universities are making exciting progress in fighting some of the world’s worst diseases. Their work is a powerful symbol of what Britain and Israel and can achieve together.” Haifa University President Amos Shapira said, “Today’s event bears testament to the bond between the Israeli and British academia, and is a blow of defeat to every attempted academic boycott of Israel. Mr. Ambassador, the collaboration that we have celebrated this evening is evidence that academic boycotts will not overcome the bond between us.”

Is that so? The fact that Israeli Institutions organise and publicise these jamborees indicates that Israeli academia does indeed feel the impact of boycott. By its very nature, the magnitude of the largely “silent boycott” is difficult to

measure but we do know that many scientists quietly just refuse to collaborate with institutions that are complicit in the occupation of Palestinian territory and the denial of human rights to the Palestinian people. It is difficult indeed to understand how anyone, knowing the apartheid nature of Israel, could not decide that the ethical objection to collaboration vastly outweigh the scientific merit of the collaborative projects currently funded by BIRAX. It is our responsibility to discuss the situation in Palestine/Israel with our colleagues so that they cannot say, “We did not know.”

David Pegg.

Open Letter to the Barber Institute

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts is renowned for providing a resource for learning and culture, promoting the study and encouragement of art and music for the benefit of the University of Birmingham and the wider public. This is a role we appreciate and applaud.

At times, however, love of culture finds itself in conflict with humanitarian imperatives and issues of principle. This was true for many performers and artists during South Africa’s apartheid period.

On 13th February you are scheduled to host the Jerusalem Quartet from Israel. The information on your website concerning this concert of works by Mozart, Shostakovich and Beethoven says "The importance of patronage in music is illustrated by this programme." We wonder whether you have any idea of how ironic this statement is. We would ask you to consider the following examples of the Quartet's close links with the Israeli government and the Israeli Defence Force (IDF).

Cellist Kyril Zlotnikov told The Australian (14th March 2006), "People say we are the best ambassadors from Israel, and we are happy about that." The Quartet's tours regularly receive sponsorship from the Israeli government and from Israeli embassies in the various countries they visit; their performance in the Library of Congress in 2007 was introduced by the Israeli Ambassador to the USA.

They have received significant funding from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, which

"provides vital scholarships for musical study, including numerous chamber groups such as the Jerusalem Quartet, who were created, nurtured and launched onto the world scene from the JMC [Jerusalem Music Center]."

The AICF's website boasts: "In the past five years alone, AICF has awarded over \$5m in scholarships to Israeli students of the arts, supporting the next generation of Israel's cultural ambassadors". Its donation page recently stated: "These artists and institutions represent Israel throughout the world. Israel's need to allocate scarce resources to defence and security necessitates AICF's vital contribution to the arts." In fact AICF has direct links with the Israeli military: its brochure states that it provides "Support to maintain and acquire musical instruments and sound equipment for the IDF's musical groups".

The booklet accompanying one of the Quartet's CDs states: "The four members of the Quartet joined the Israeli Defense Forces in March 1997 and are serving as Distinguished Musicians." An article by the World Zionist Press Service in 1998, entitled "Israeli musicians also have military strings attached", described how since completing their military service: "The Quartet now serves as Distinguished Musicians, performing for troops three times a week. ... For the three immigrants, carrying a rifle in one hand and a violin in the other is the ultimate Zionist statement. 'It's something our parents could hardly have imagined ten years ago,' says Zlotnikov".

In May 2010 BRICUP wrote to the Quartet inviting it to clarify its current relationship with the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the IDF. We received no reply to our letter, and regretfully have to conclude that although the Quartet's composition has changed over the past decade, it continues to pride itself on representing a state which is in constant violation of the most basic human rights.

Palestinian artists and musicians are routinely prevented from studying, rehearsing and performing by an illegal occupation. We will

just give two examples, one from Gaza and one from the West Bank.

On 27th December 2008, the Gaza Music School, which was located in the Palestinian Red Crescent Society building in Gaza City, was destroyed along with all its instruments and the entire building by the first wave of Israeli bombardments in 'Operation Cast Lead'. The School had been established by the Qattan Foundation, with co-funding from the Swedish development organization SIDA. On 30th June 2012 the Ramallah Orchestra, an initiative of the music conservatory Al Kamandjati, was to perform a free concert at Saint Anne Church in East Jerusalem, organized with the assistance of the French Consulate. Like the Jerusalem Quartet concert at the Barber, the programme included pieces by Mozart and Beethoven. However, approximately half of the international ensemble's musicians are Palestinians from the West Bank. Israel, which militarily occupies East Jerusalem under a de facto annexation not recognized by international law, blocks these musicians from entering East Jerusalem unless it grants them a special permit. Despite every effort to follow Israel's requirements, none of the West Bank Palestinians was given a permit, and so all were prevented from reaching the concert. The event had to be cancelled and a message was read out to this effect to the disappointed audience.

In this context, the Jerusalem Quartet's willingness to be 'poster boys' for the Israeli state has led to its being identified as one of the targets of a Palestinian-led boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign. This campaign, modelled on the boycott movement which helped bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, regards cultural institutions such as the Quartet as complicit in Israel's violations of human rights and international law. (See <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1047>.)

The boycott is not directed at individual performers. The targets of the boycott are institutions (orchestras, theatre companies, dance troupes etc) that are exploited by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 'Brand Israel' PR strategy. This deliberately uses art as a political weapon in an attempt to make cosmetic improvements to the image of a state which subjects the Palestinian people to an oppressive,

discriminatory regime, suppressing their artistic expression in the process.

Therefore the statement on your website that "The Jerusalem Quartet illustrates the importance of patronage in music" is far truer than you could have imagined.

We urge the Barber management and the University, mindful of the Barber's charitable funding and its mission to serve the wider community, to urge the Quartet to dissociate itself from the Israeli government and its 'Brand Israel' propaganda efforts; and to suspend the Quartet's appearance planned for February if it will not. We would be happy to meet you to discuss these issues in more detail. Please contact us at the above address, e-mail addresses or telephone number if you would be willing to arrange a meeting. We look forward to hearing from you.

Professor Jonathan Rosenhead
and Dr. Susan Blackwell,
BRICUP

Open Letter to Sir Cliff Richard, OBE

We read that you're [scheduled to perform](#) in Tel Aviv, Israel, on July 11 this year. From the [TV coverage](#) of your 1988 birthday celebration for Israel, where you say that 'as a Christian, Israel has special significance for me', we understand your forthcoming show might have similar motivation.

It seems to us, however, that such automatic identification with Israel is increasingly questioned by Christians, who express concern about Israel's racist actions in the Palestinian territories it illegally occupies and call for action against the Israeli government. We are writing to ask you to reconsider your decision to perform in Israel.

We wonder if you've read the [letter](#) from church leaders to the US Congress, published on 5 October last year. Fifteen senior Christian leaders, from the US Presbyterian, Evangelical Lutheran, United Methodist, American Baptist and other churches, told Congress: 'As leaders of churches and religious organisations committed to seeking a just peace for Israelis and

Palestinians...it is our moral responsibility to question the continuance of unconditional U.S. financial assistance to the government of Israel'. Their letter lists many human rights violations committed by Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians, including the killing of children, house demolitions, and the use of prohibited weaponry such as white phosphorus and flechette shells.

Perhaps you missed the [press release](#) issued in December last year by Southern African church leaders, including the heads of the United Methodist and Presbyterian churches and the Evangelical Alliance. From Jerusalem they reported, 'Our exposure to [occupied] East Jerusalem and the West Bank was overwhelming, one which traumatised us. We did not expect the extent to which Israel violates international laws to oppress the Palestinian people. However, even though we experienced that Palestinians live in open-air prisons, they were still able to inspire us with their dignity and their commitment for a just peace based on human dignity for both themselves and the Israelis'.

Importantly, the Southern African church leaders renounced any kind of biblical justification for what is happening to the Palestinians: 'We are conscious how a literal reading of the Bible, one where the Israel of the Old Testament is confused with the State of Israel, can result in the oppression of people'.

Sir Cliff, when you sang Yerushalayim, the anthem of the Israeli occupation forces in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, did you not realise – as the church leaders we've quoted do – that Israeli conquest means Palestinian dispossession and ongoing repression?

Palestinians under occupation are [calling for](#) a cultural boycott of Israel by international artists like yourself. The South African church leaders support the boycott call, as 'a strategy that helped end apartheid in South Africa'. In response to an appeal from [Kairos Palestine](#) that describes the occupation as 'a sin against God and humanity', growing numbers of individual Christians and church groups around the world

are engaging in campaigns of boycott, divestment and sanctions.

Your appearance in Tel Aviv, however, will reassure Israelis that ethnic cleansing and repression of the Palestinians are morally tolerable – to you, at least, if not to presidents and congregations of churches in the USA, South Africa, and elsewhere. Sir Cliff, we urge you to consider whether this is a message you want to give.

Please don't go.

Professor Haim Bresheeth,
Mike Cushman,
Professor Adah Kay,
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead,
on behalf of BRICUP.

Notices

BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: newsletter@bricup.org.uk

Publication date.

We aim to publish the monthly Newsletter around the end of the first week of each month.

Letters to the Editor

Please note that we do have a "Letters to the Editor" facility. We urge you to use it. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of the campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month's newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible. Letters and comments should be sent to newsletter@bricup.org.uk

Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are expensive. 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.

Please do consider making a donation .

One-off donations may be made by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at Sort Code 08-92-99
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If you use the direct funds transfer mechanism please confirm the transaction by sending an explanatory email to treasurer@bricup.org.uk
More details can be obtained at the same address.

Like all organisations, while we welcome one-off donations, we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

You can [download a standing order form](#) here.