

BRICUP Newsletter 62

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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www.bricup.org.uk

bricup@bricup.org.uk

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The Boycott Israel Network (BIN) holds a Cultural Boycott Strategy day

On Saturday February 16th activists from all over the UK met in Manchester to review strategy, tactics and the organisation of cultural boycott, both from a regional and a national perspective. The objectives of the day were

- To use the lessons learned over the last few years to determine what constitutes an effective cultural boycott campaign
- To evaluate the relative impact of protest versus engagement as differing approaches to cultural boycott, and to what extent they either compliment or conflict with each other.

- To learn from each other how best to counter anti-boycott arguments based on 'cultural exchange' and 'the right to freedom of expression'
- To identify ways that the Boycott Israel Network (BIN) can support and build the movement.

This workshop was the first ever opportunity for in depth, detailed examination of these complex issues, and the programme was designed to give maximum opportunity for activists to interact in small groups. Outcomes were fed in to plenary sessions where a wide range of potential areas of activity, and some concrete proposals emerged by consensus. These included the production and nationwide launch of a booklet on the politics and practice of cultural boycott, currently being prepared by an editorial team which includes three members of BRICUP. The booklet will first be offered to the BIN and other groups for individual endorsements.

Plans were made to rationalize and improve access to information sources on potential targets for boycott (planned tours abroad by Israeli cultural ambassadors, or visits to Israel by international names) to facilitate early intervention, and to develop a possible framework for giving statements from the cultural boycott campaign a public face.

It was generally agreed that tours of Palestine for cultural workers to learn about the occupation and the apartheid nature of the state of Israel would increase the numbers who would be prepared, as a result, to actively support the cultural boycott. An evaluation of the potential benefits and pitfalls of pledges of boycott for artists to sign is to be

undertaken in light of the of the experience with this approach in both Ireland and Canada.

There was little enthusiasm for a more formal structure for the cultural boycott campaign, but recognition of the need for better organization within the current network of groups and individuals. This issue will be raised again at the next BIN weekend workshop (10th -12th May, for details go to www.boycottisraelnetwork.net) on the basis of draft proposals, which will shortly be prepared in consultation with the Manchester workshop attendees.

Monica Wusteman

Changing targets and declaring victories

At the recent workshop on Cultural Boycott organised by the Boycott Israel Network (BIN) in Manchester (see above) , a question which repeatedly arose during our discussions was "When do we declare victory and drop the boycott against a previous target?"

This may sound a rather abstract debate, but much of it was focused around the Jerusalem Quartet (JQ). The JQ have been a target of the BDS movement for a number of years now. Most famously, five members of Scottish PSC disrupted their concert during the Edinburgh Festival in August 2008 and were subsequently charged with "racially aggravated conduct" before being eventually acquitted in April 2010. Since then, the JQ have regularly faced protests and disruption whenever they have performed in the UK.

The original grounds for targeting the JQ included the following:

- Their performance at the US Library of Congress in April 2007 was introduced by a "shockingly clumsy introductory speech" by the Israeli Ambassador.
- The media release from a record label stated that they joined the IDF in 1997 and "now enjoy the status of Distinguished IDF, playing for troops thrice weekly when the JSQ is in Israel."
- They are sponsored on tours by the Israeli Government
- They are funded and supported by the America Israel Cultural Foundation, whose

website boasts of "supporting the next generation of Israel's cultural ambassadors"

- When in Israel, they are based at the Jerusalem Music Center (JMC), which provides scholarships for musicians within the Israeli military.
- The World Zionist Press Service said of them in 1998: "for the three immigrants, carrying a rifle in one hand and a violin in the other is the ultimate Zionist statement".

The JQ themselves see no reason why they should be a boycott target. When their concert in London's Wigmore Hall was disrupted on 29 March 2010 they put out an indignant statement asserting: "We are not representatives of the Government of Israel. We are Israeli citizens, but have no connection with or patronage by the Government. ... As Israeli citizens, we were required to, and did, perform our National Service when we were aged 18. As it happens, none of us was in a combat unit. We served our conscription as musicians playing for our fellow citizens. ... The demonstrators were ignorant of the fact that two of us are regular members of Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, composed of Israeli and Arab musicians."

Previous allegations that the JMC is located in occupied East Jerusalem have turned out to be untrue: it is in Mishkenot Sha'ananim, an artists' colony to the west of the Old City. And any current Israeli government funding for their latest tour of Europe and beyond has proved elusive to track down.

Can we, then, accept the JQ's declaration that they have no connection with the Israeli government and no longer play for the IDF? And should we take the omission of any such connections from the current JMC website as a sign that the protests have forced them to dissociate themselves from Israel and its military? The most damning evidence is now more than a decade old, and in any case the notorious quote about the violin and the rifle came from a journalist putting words into their mouths. Time to call it a day, then, and move on to a new, more obvious target for cultural boycott?

My personal view is that the JQ protest too much. Their indignant statements do not claim that they have in any way changed their relationship with, or loyalty to, the Israeli government. They do not accept that it was ever legitimate to boycott them,

even when they were playing for the IDF three times a week.

Cellist Kyril Zlotnikov told The Australian as recently as March 2006, "People say we are the best ambassadors from Israel, and we are happy about that." Have the JQ now ceased to promote themselves as cultural ambassadors for the apartheid state? Apparently not, at least when they are applying for \$140,000 worth of grant money from the Jerusalem Foundation: their blurb on its current Project pages boasts "The Quartet is among the top young quartets in the world and serves as a prestigious cultural ambassador for Jerusalem and Israel". (Incidentally, one wonders what is meant exactly by "Jerusalem": the Foundation's website sets out its vision as "A Jerusalem that is pluralistic, vibrant, modern and economically flourishing" but in the next sentence refers to the city as "the spiritual center of the Jewish people").

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.

It is right that activists should constantly keep their boycott targets under review. It may well be that the JQ is no longer the highest priority for cultural boycott in the UK. That is not the same, however, as saying that they have severed their previous links with the Israeli government and military and as such have ceased to be boycottable at all. Any declaration of victory would be premature.

Sue Blackwell

7th March 2013

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The PACBI Column

Brooklyn College, BDS and Palestinian Rights

Earlier in February, a panel held at Brooklyn College on the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel was subjected to relentless vilification, bullying and unfounded allegations. The campaign against Brooklyn College was so intense that even the New York Times and the mayor of New York intervened to express their support for academic freedom by urging the event to go ahead as scheduled. PACBI watched as one of its founding members, Omar Barghouti, was subjected to verbal abuse and the movement as a whole was demonized. We watched as media coverage of the Brooklyn College controversy suppressed Palestinian voices, those that can best explain why Palestinian civil society has embarked on this non-violent, rights-based struggle for Palestinian rights and how it is deeply inspired by the South African anti-apartheid and the U.S. civil rights movements.

Yet, despite this, we stood strong with admiration as our supporters around the US pushed back and rallied to ensure not only that the event took place, but also that the movement's principles were communicated with clarity and articulated with patience.

At PACBI, we feel it is necessary to offer a few words as we move forward, building from all the momentum that this episode has brought to the movement. In the case of the accusations of our adversaries from the far right and center left, Professor Judith Butler has already addressed these with eloquence in her [comments](#) at the Brooklyn College event. We would like, here, to deal with two specific issues that continue to be raised, unfortunately, by some supposedly well-read supporters of Palestinian rights, as we feel these are important issues to respond to as we build the movement, even if we have done so elsewhere over the years. Those who sought to shut down the Brooklyn event also held onto these two points. The first is that BDS does not take a position on a one or

two state solution, and really just seeks to destroy Israel. The second is that BDS targets Israeli *academics* and is thus against academic freedom, and worse, is racist.

In the first instance, Israel and its well-oiled lobby groups, which even Thomas Friedman [accuses](#) of buying allegiance in Congress, have been trying to delegitimize the Palestinian quest for equality by portraying the BDS Call's emphasis on equal rights and the right of return as aiming to "destroy Israel." One must wonder, if equality and justice would destroy Israel, what does that say about Israel? Did equality and justice destroy South Africa? Did they destroy the US southern states during the civil rights movement? Justice and equality only destroy their negation, injustice and inequality. Indeed, the BDS movement does not take a position on political solutions; no matter what solution is reached, it must respect the three basic rights of the Palestinian people that are stated in the BDS Call and upheld by an overwhelming majority of Palestinians.

Specifically, BDS calls for an end to Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967; an end to what even the U.S. Department of State [slams](#) as Israel's "institutional, legal, and societal discrimination" against its Palestinian citizens; and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands from which they were forcibly displaced. BDS advocates equal rights for all and consistently opposes all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism. One can imagine a fulfillment of our demands, which are enshrined in international law, through a number of solutions. We do state, loud and clear, that any solution would have to be founded on international law, which would imply that Israel could not be an exclusivist Jewish state.

Those who condition their support for BDS on the movement's adoption of the so-called "international consensus," which is nothing more than an unjust solution dictated by Israel and the world's only current superpower, the US, are asking us to forfeit some of our basic rights as humans, which reveals a deeply disingenuous position. They are also asking us to forget the history of struggles from South Africa to Algeria to Northern Ireland to the U.S. south, where the "consensus" was once entirely unjust, until it shifted, with persistent, principled struggle, and tireless efforts by many, towards a more just solution. Our basic rights are not negotiable; solutions are.

On the second charge, PACBI has already stated clearly that the movement targets complicit Israeli *institutions* and not individual Israeli academics. However, some have continued to accuse the movement of targeting individuals, either because they do not read the BDS movement's literature, they are trying to spread misinformation for the sake of propaganda, or they legitimately feel that individuals *represent* the institutions they work in and thus see some inconsistency with this. We address the latter.

PACBI's [guidelines](#) explicitly state that, "mere institutional affiliation to the Israeli academy is therefore not a sufficient condition for applying the boycott". This is important because one could indeed draw the extremist position that affiliation is de facto complicity, and one would not be entirely wrong. However, PACBI has striven to ensure that guidelines could be properly implemented without falling into the traps of litmus tests for individual complicity, and was careful not to target individuals. Our guidelines do leave room for individuals to go further in their personal implementation of the boycott, even if we may not specifically endorse this. Thus, Israeli academics are regularly invited to speak in international venues with no objection by PACBI; our objection would arise should their participation be institutionally funded or sponsored by a complicit Israeli or Brand Israel institution. To not boycott at all on the grounds that the movement does not target institutional *affiliation* becomes counterproductive in this context, and may reveal dishonest motivations.

Still, for others, the fact that PACBI has consistently refrained from adopting blanket boycotts against individual Israeli academics, despite the involvement of a great majority of them in planning or at the very least justifying and maintaining Israel's occupation, colonization and apartheid, has not been sufficient, and they accuse academic boycott of infringing on academic freedom. In holding to international law, we take [the definition of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights on academic freedom](#), which includes:

the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the state or any other actor, to participate in professional or

representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction. The enjoyment of academic freedom carries with it *obligations*, such as the duty to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views, and to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds. [emphasis added]

Keeping in mind the validity of this definition, we are keenly aware of the importance of the academic freedom of the individual, but also recognize that such freedoms should not extend automatically to institutions. [Judith Butler](#) has called on us to question

the classically liberal conception of academic freedom with a view that grasps the political realities at stake, and see that our struggles for academic freedom must work in concert with the opposition to state violence, ideological surveillance, and the systematic devastation of everyday life.

It is incumbent on all of us to develop such a nuanced understanding of academic freedom if we are to call for social justice and work alongside the oppressed in their struggles. Without increasing international pressure to hold it accountable to human rights principles, Israel will carry on with total impunity its brutal and illegal siege of Gaza; its untamed construction of illegal colonies and [wall](#) in the occupied West Bank; its “[strategy of Judaization](#)” in Jerusalem, the Galilee, the Jordan Valley and the Naqab (Negev); its adoption of new [racist laws](#); and its denial of refugees’ rights, to name just a few violations. A total and comprehensive boycott, including academic boycott, is a necessary and ethical form of resistance to achieve freedom, equality and justice when the international community has failed to do so.

PACBI

The PA is to sue Israel over crimes against Palestinians.

<http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/5322-pa-to-sue-israel-over-crimes-against->

[palestinians](#)

On February 25th 2013 16:30 the Middle East monitor reported that the Palestinian Authority (PA) decided to take the Israeli occupation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against Palestinians in general, and against deceased Palestinian prisoner, Arafat Jaradat, in particular.

"The Palestinian leadership has definitely decided to go to the ICC and other human rights organisations in order to hold the Israeli occupation accountable for its crimes against Palestinians, especially Palestinian prisoners," the Palestinian minister of prisoners' affairs in Ramallah, Issa Qaraqe, told the Gaza based Al-Resalah newspaper.

Qaraqe said that the time had not been specified as yet, but that the necessary arrangements were being put in place to start an international anti-occupation campaign. "The need for this was reiterated after Jaradat's death," he said. "Prisoners in Israeli jails live in a very bad situation which requires an international movement supported by the Arabs."

Abdul-Kareem Shobair, a Palestinian expert in international law from Gaza on Sunday called for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to take such steps. He also called for him to sign the Rome Treaty in order to be able to sue the Israeli occupation over its crimes.

"If he does not go, one of the Arab states should adopt the prisoners' issue and sue the Israeli occupation instead," he said during a rally held on Sunday in Gaza protesting against Jaradat's murder.

While Israeli sources claimed that Jaradat died of a heart attack, Palestinian officials insist that he was tortured to death as no signs of cardiovascular problems and no blood clots were found in his heart.

Final findings of the PA autopsy concluded that Jaradat was pummelled repeatedly on his chest and body. He sustained a total of six broken bones - in his spine, arms and legs, his lips were lacerated and his face was badly bruised.

Discrimination against Arab students

A valuable source of information on discrimination against Palestinian students in Israeli universities is to be found in this 36-page report

http://alrasedproject.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/alrased1_eng.pdf

It is published by the Arab Culture Association and documents racial discrimination and political oppression against Arab students in Israeli universities during the 2011-2012 academic year. It records many incidents that indicate discrimination, some gross and some more subtle - for example the removal of Arabic language from the University of Haifa's official logo.

Lecture by the Deputy Israeli Ambassador to the University of York .

On Thursday 28th February, despite a strong campaign of protest on the campus and in the city, the University of York welcomed the Deputy Israeli Ambassador, Alon Roth-Snir, to address a meeting on the York campus. The invitation to speak was issued at the request of the Israeli Embassy in London, which then proceeded to lay down terms under which the meeting was to be conducted. All the arrangements were made in an atmosphere of deep secrecy. Tickets were limited to staff and students and the exact location of the meeting revealed only at the last minute. According to the Vice Chancellor's office, this is common practice when controversial speakers are expected on the York campus. The 'Chatham House Rule' was imposed whereby "participants are free to use the information received during the meeting but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), or any other participant, may be revealed. " This caused considerable confusion and some controversy amongst the audience since, in this case, both the name of the invited speaker and his affiliation were publicised by the University! Did this mean that all the discussion was to be secret? The Vice Chancellors office has clarified that whereas direct quotations from identified speakers would contravene the Rule, general statements of content would not. The following is such a general summary of the meeting, based on hand-written notes made at the time.

This was the 13th university campus to be addressed in this series of lectures. The intention was to present the audience with a view of Israel as seen by an ordinary Israeli citizen rather than a diplomat. It was asserted that the Peace process is the most important issue right now but first the meeting considered the difficulty of predicting events in Israel as illustrated by the recent Israeli general

elections results. Everyone was predicting a move to the right – to Lieberman et al – but in fact Israel has moved towards the centre.

It was stated that Israelis do listen the West: they hear us saying, 'Stop the Occupation!' But then they look at what happened in Gaza and South Lebanon when Israel ended its occupation. Gaza responded by making 30,000 rockets to shoot at Israel. There was no analysis of possible reasons for this reaction. Israel, it was claimed, has the same problems as other democracies. But Israelis do not hate all Palestinians and Israel claims not to be an apartheid state. When Israelis are killed by Palestinians they may hate the killers but not Arabs in general. Many Israelis have Arab friends and an Ethiopian woman has just won an Israeli beauty contest!

The general approach was informal, sometimes awkward and generally unconvincing. Much use was made of stories to illustrate specific problems but they were all anecdotal – with no or very few numbers – and featuring, for example, Palestinian homosexuals and sick babies fleeing to Israel from the West Bank and Gaza. Or of Israelis suffering from suicide bombs and rockets . Very little quantitative data was presented; the number of rockets that did any damage was not stated. Nor how many Israelis were killed by suicide bombers or Palestinian rockets: and nor, for that matter, how many Palestinians have been killed or injured by the IDF.

The presentation was largely unstructured. Whenever comparisons were made between Israelis and Palestinians the latter were always "the problem" and there was a lot of "them and us" narrative. HAMAS was blamed exclusively for the situation in Gaza and Iran was seen as a major threat. Again, on the evidence of a few anecdotes, there was no apartheid. Thus, the presentation followed the expected line of justifying Israeli policies with the familiar combination of obfuscation, partial or incomplete truths and downright untruths - as we might expect from a state that is in constant breach of international humanitarian law. In short, nothing was said that differs from the standard hasbara issued daily by Israeli officialdom. And there was nothing to justify use of the Chatham House Rule.

Audience questions addressed a range of problems: the religious ultraorthodox Jews; the probability of

ever resolving the conflict with HAMAS or the perceived threat from Iran; why it is that 60-70% of cases that go to the Human Rights Council are complaints about Israel, which Israel interprets as bias; support for the creation of a nuclear free Middle East only if it includes all WMD and the overall situation is stable; Israeli opposed the Palestinian quest for statehood at the UN because it decided that it did not give the Palestinians any benefits; racist discrimination against Muslims; the alleged fact that when the Palestinian state is created, many Palestinians will prefer to live in Israel. In Israel there is an active debate on the issue of the settlements but it was claimed that the settlements have never been an impediment to Israeli participation in peace negotiations for example in the Sinai peninsula, but Israel will not allow peace negotiation to be subject to Palestinian preconditions. Two of the questioners were so upset by the inadequacy of the response to their questions that they left the auditorium in protest.

At the end of proceedings , the audience was complemented on its questions.

York University Palestine Solidarity Society joined with members of York Palestine Solidarity Campaign to mount a loud and lively demonstration outside. It soon became apparent from text messages from inside the meeting and the behaviour of the security staff (who called the police) that the chants of the protestors were audible inside, so efforts were redoubled and continued under the watchful eye of an obliging and courteous police officer until the end of the meeting.

While fully supporting the principle of free speech and open debate, it is difficult to understand how such a visit can contribute to an informed academic debate on the Israel/Palestine crisis. Many deeply regret that the University of York felt obliged to provide a platform for this familiar propaganda. It is hoped that, in future, when approached by the Embassy, the answer will be a firm 'NO'

Monica Wusteman & David Pegg

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

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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.

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