

BRICUP Newsletter 37

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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FOR YOUR DIARIES

Shir Hever of the Alternative Information Centre will be speaking on Feb 17th at Kings College London in a meeting jointly sponsored by BRICUP, Action Palestine, PSC and ICAHD. Shir Hever is well known internationally amongst pro Palestinian activists. His incisive academic analysis of the economics of the Israeli Occupation is informed by his experience in the Occupied Territories as a prominent activist for a just peace.

Title: Shir Hever on *The Price of Occupation to Israeli Society*

Date: Thursday 17th February 2011

Time: 6.30pm

Venue: Room K4U.12, King's College London, Strand Campus, Strand, London

This meeting is part of a tour of 13 centres in the UK. See www.scottishpsc.org.uk for more details.

BRICUP offers its full support to Martha Mundy

Professor Martha Mundy, one of the founders of BRICUP has been under sustained attack by the Jewish Chronicle and subjected to abuse on Harry's Place and other Zionist hate blogs. In early December 2010, Martha chaired a meeting at LSE addressed by leading Arab journalist Abdel Bari Atwan following which a mendacious and defamatory press release was issued by the LSE Israel Society accusing her of complicity in criminal verbal attacks on Jews. While these charges have been comprehensively dismissed by the management of LSE after exhaustive enquiry, the attacks on Martha have accelerated.

Following a debate on the Academic Boycott at LSE on 13 January, sponsored jointly by the LSE Palestine and Israel Societies, on leaving with a student Martha was accosted and taunted that she

should learn what fair chairing was, and when she reponded, they proceeded to describe the incident as threatening behaviour by Professor Mundy in an account published in the Jewish Chronicle. Following the publication Martha has received vulgar and threatening emails.

BRICUP offers its full support to Martha Mundy and will assist, in any way it can, her complaint to the Jewish Chronicle about inaccurate and derogatory reporting. Martha is also receiving full support form UCU, her trade union.

[The report in the Jewish Chronicle](#)
[Martha Mundy's letter to the editor of the JC](#)

SOAS Israeli Music Conference brings Israel's Academia to the heart of London

In Britain the academic boycott of Israel has largely been progressed through successive changes in UCU policy voted at the university teachers union's annual congress, and through the so-called 'silent boycott' of academics simply severing their ties with Israeli institutions without publicity. Now however the Israeli academic road-show is coming to London.

Over March 28-31 the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) is hosting an international conference on 'Art Musics of Israel'. The academic sessions will be complemented by a series of recitals and concerts, one at the Purcell Room at the South Bank. Lest there be any doubt, this conference has sponsorship from the Israeli Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Culture and Sport, and Israel's London Embassy. This is the 'Brand Israel' project come to town.

The SOAS Music Department, in conjunction with the Jewish Music Institute Forum for Israeli Music, is hosting this conference. The Jewish Music Forum has been based at SOAS for the last 11 years. And the opening address at the conference will be given by the Director of SOAS Paul Webley. In other words, SOAS's fingerprints are all over it.

When BRICUP informed SOAS Palestine Society of this impending event they were quick to act. On January 24th they proposed a motion at SOAS Union

General Meeting which was passed without opposition. The terms of the motion included

- A demand that SOAS entirely withdraw all collaboration with the Conference
- A demand that the SOAS Director cancel his speech to the conference
- A commitment to work with campus unions to put pressure on SOAS to withdraw from the event.

BRICUP will be liaising with SOAS students to see how the pressure for cancellation can be made most effective.

The arrangements for the conference bring it clearly within the PACBI guidelines on academic and cultural boycott. The explicit support of Israeli state institutions put this beyond doubt. As the resolution passed by the SOAS student union puts it "By co-organizing, promoting and providing space to this conference, SOAS is aiding the Brand Israel campaign, facilitating the normalization of Israel's image. In doing so SOAS helps Israel disguise its institutional racism against Palestinian citizens of Israel and its illegal military occupation of the Occupied Territories."

Israel's crimes (war crimes, breaches of international law, violations of human rights) extend into the cultural domain. The staging of this conference brings this into sharp focus. For it is evident that an equivalent conference about Palestinian Music is simply inconceivable. This is because of the multiple obstructions that Israel imposes on Palestinian music. Just a few examples - no musical instruments are allowed into Gaza; no permissions are granted for musicians (or anyone else) to travel out of Gaza; West Bank musical life is crippled by the road blocks and settlement building that fragments the residual Palestinian territory; and East Jerusalem musicians are unable to leave without losing their residency permits.

The 'Art Musics of Israel' conference seeks to normalize the cultural image of the Israeli apartheid state. The storyline of multi-cultural harmony (Arab music seen as one of a list of influences on or elements in Israeli Jewish music) mutes and seeks to disguise the political discord which results from Israel's institutional racism against its Arab citizens - not to mention the Palestinians under illegal occupation in the Occupied Territories. The world in which the IDF slaughters 1400 defenceless Gazans, and keeps the survivors penned into the largest open

air prison in the world is nowhere to be seen in the glossy brochure.

Perhaps by coincidence Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has just announced (Ynet News, 31 January 2011) an unprecedented PR campaign. Public relations firms across Europe – including the UK - are being engaged (at an annual cost of over £2million). The aim: “to acquaint Europeans with Israel’s character beyond the conflict with the Arab world. It will include more modern sides of the state – its culture, economy, history, tourism, high-tech, food, music...”. The SOAS conference fits this brief like a glove: a state-sponsored event to divert attention from Israel's violations of international law to its artistic achievements.

Activities to contest the holding of this conference are still being developed. Information on them will be posted on the BRICUP website www.bricup.org.uk

Jonathan Rosenhead

155 Israeli Academics declare their opposition to the occupation and settlements.

Support the Israeli call for a boycott of Ariel College in the heart of the West Bank.

The declaration reads:-

We, academics from a variety of subjects and from all the institutes of higher education in Israel, express here publicly our opposition to the continuation of the occupation and the establishment of settlements.

Therefore, we declare our refusal to participate in any academic activity, of any sort, that takes place in the college operating in the settlement Ariel. Ariel was established on occupied land. A few kilometers from flourishing Ariel, Palestinians live in villages and refugee camps, in hardship and deprived of even the basic of human rights. Not only are they denied access to higher education, some of them do not have running water. Two different realities, resulting from a policy that is leading to Apartheid.

Ariel is an illegal settlement, in breach of the international law and the Geneva convention, which Israel has signed. The establishment of Ariel was aimed at one and only purpose: to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian state,

and thereby prevent from us, the citizens of Israel, the chance of ever achieving a peaceful existence in this region.

Ariel is not part of sovereign Israel and we can not be obliged to go there.

Our conscience and our public responsibility compel us to express a clear position, especially at the current time, when there is a real chance for a peace agreement, and its clearer than ever that the settlements’ purpose is to prevent it.

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BRICUP Supporters note:

This is the first time that Israeli academics have issued an unequivocal statement condemning Israel’s policies as they affect both the relationship between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, and the moral and academic standing of Israeli Higher Education.

Their focus is the college of Ariel which stands on illegally occupied land in the West Bank. In consequence the signatories have refused to recognise Ariel as a legitimate university, and are therefore boycotting the college. This courageous stand of 155 academics demands the international support of their colleagues. Professor Gov and his colleagues have indicated that they would welcome support.

Prof Gov will be making available a full list of signatories in English. In view of the urgency of the situation please send a brief message of support either personally or together with colleagues.

The Guardian, Ian McEwan and the Jerusalem Prize.

Towards the end of January, the Guardian Newspaper published a series of letters concerning Ian McEwan’s acceptance of the Jerusalem Prize. British Writers in Support of Palestine (BWSP), writing on Jan 24th, advocated boycott as an appropriate reaction to Israel’s long history of denial of human rights to the Palestinian people and

military occupation of their land. On the next day Melvyn Bragg argued against boycott on the grounds that he could see “no value in such action.” He wrote, “Academic and intellectual freedom is surely too important to be checked by politics”.

I suggest that this remark incorporates three common errors concerning BDS. First, the boycott movement in question is not political: it is ethical, powered by the human rights of the Palestinian people. It does not espouse any particular political solution: it seeks justice. Secondly, the boycott movement strongly supports, indeed fosters, academic freedom. But this is not the case in Israeli Universities as Ilan Pappé’s recent book “Out of the frame” makes only too clear. The boycott of institutions does not prevent discourse between individuals: it may actually increase debate. Thirdly, concerning intellectual freedom this is never unfettered but is always subject to ethical constraints. These constraints make it inadmissible to advocate discrimination on a racial basis, or to support the mass imprisonment of civilians while denying them adequate food, water, medical care and education. The boycott movement supports intellectual freedom with civilising constraints: it boycotts Israel precisely because Israel lacks such constraints.

On the 26th McEwan replied to BWSP, arguing for dialogue and engagement to reach across political divides. Just how this was to succeed when the same approach has failed for 60 years was not specified. On the 27th, ten Israelis wrote in strong support of boycott and argued that the prize gives McEwan an opportunity to stand for human rights and justice. Then on the 29th BWSP responded to McEwan’s reply: they wrote, “In reply to Ian McEwan’s claim that literature transcends political considerations, we put three questions to him. First, as the prize is awarded by the Jerusalem municipality, isn’t accepting it a fundamentally political action? Second, would he have accepted a prize funded by apartheid South Africa? And finally, isn’t it now abundantly clear that the long slow process of “dialogue and engagement” with intransigent Israeli governments has only enabled them to tighten their stranglehold on Gaza and the West Bank?”

Discussions with Israel have continued for over 60 years during which time the situation of the Palestinian people has steadily deteriorated. If discussion is to be effective it will have to be accompanied by very significant pressure and the boycott movement is an important part of this pressure, showing Israel that it is not “business as

usual”, that we do know what it is doing to our Palestinian brothers and sisters and that we will use all possible peaceful means to put pressure upon Israel to change its ways. These issues are discussed in greater detail by PACBI in their column

David E. Pegg.

The PACBI column.

McEwan and Israel’s Accolades: Privilege and Ethical Responsibility?

The recent announcement by the British writer Ian McEwan that he will accept the Jerusalem Prize on 20 February 2011 during the Jerusalem Book Fair has disappointed many of his admirers around the world. In response to calls to reject the prize and refrain from participating in the book fair, he has said, “I think one should always make a distinction between a civil society and its government. It is the Jerusalem book fair, not the Israeli foreign ministry, which is making the award. I would urge people to make the distinction – it is about literature.” [1]

McEwan is not the first writer to present this kind of defense for accepting the Jerusalem Prize. Susan Sontag, who was awarded the prize in 2001, said: “It is a literary prize given not by the Israeli government but by the Jerusalem International Book Fair.” [2]

McEwan and Sontag are both factually wrong. The book fair is sponsored by the Jerusalem Municipality, a key node in the *official* Israeli structure of colonialism and apartheid, and a leading violator of Palestinian rights. The Municipality has, since its inception, been a major instrument in the colonization of Israeli-occupied Jerusalem. It is particularly notable for its role in promoting and deepening one of the starkest cases of urban apartheid in the world. The municipality continues to be actively involved in the illegal gradual ethnic cleansing of Palestinians out of Jerusalem, the demolition of Palestinian homes and destruction of property, and the sustained suppression of development in the Palestinian neighborhoods as a matter of policy [3].

John Dugard, a leading international law expert and former UN rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, had this to say about the situation of Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem:

The similarities between the situation of East Jerusalemites and black South Africans [under apartheid] is very great in respect of their residency rights. We had the old Group Areas Act in South Africa. East Jerusalem has territorial classification that has the same sort of consequences as race classification had in South Africa in respect of who you can marry, where you can live, where you can go to school or hospital. [4]

Moreover, it should be noted that the book fair is an important date on the Israel-promotion calendar, an occasion when Israel's misleading image as a patron of book publishing and the arts in general is highlighted. The fair offers visiting fellowships to young editors, agents and scouts from around the world, in an attempt to advance the carefully crafted image of Israel as a center of world-class writing. The Jerusalem Prize is central in this deceptive campaign of diverting attention away from Israel's persistent crimes and violations of international law.

Prominent writers who accept to participate in official Israeli events and receive the state's honors are, in fact, unwittingly lending their names to the state's *hasbara* effort, which is part and parcel of the "Brand Israel" campaign. [5]

What is more disturbing than certain writers' refusal to see the connection among the event, the prize, and the apartheid state is a certain pretentiousness that characterizes their responses to appeals to shun a prize or refuse to be part of the Israeli branding campaign. McEwan's response to the appeals he has been receiving is a case in point:

As for the Jerusalem prize itself, its list of previous recipients is eloquent enough. Bertrand Russell, Milan Kundera, Susan Sontag, Arthur Miller, Simone de Beauvoir – I hope you will have the humility to accept that these writers had at least as much concern for freedom and human dignity as you do yourselves. Your 'line' is not the only one. Courtesy obliges you to respect my decision, as I would yours to stay away. [6]

The Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, who shared the stage with the President of the Israeli state along with the mayor of Jerusalem in 2009 while accepting the Jerusalem Prize, said of his decision to accept the prize:

One reason for my decision was that all too many people advised me not to do it.

Perhaps, like many other novelists, I tend to do the exact opposite of what I am told. ... Novelists are a special breed. They cannot genuinely trust anything they have not seen with their own eyes or touched with their own hands. [7]

Did conscientious novelists need to "touch" South African apartheid before taking a moral position against it? Aren't writers, as humans first and foremost, obligated to act by and defend the same universal principles of rights and ethical responsibility? It is difficult indeed to accept that writers occupy a privileged place as truth-seekers rather than being ordinary world citizens with a moral responsibility to speak truth to power and injustice.

At a time when the Palestinian civil society-initiated, global BDS movement is growing, the appeal to McEwan is not to cross the Palestinian, international, and increasingly Israeli boycott "picket line." It is not a question of whether a person has a concern for "freedom and human dignity." The issue is about one's readiness and moral courage to act on this "concern" by standing with, not against, a movement whose chief objectives are freedom, human dignity and justice.

Accepting an award funded by Israel, a state practicing military occupation, colonization and apartheid, and hand delivered by some of this state's worst representatives, in total disregard to a people's non-violent movement for justice, cannot but call into question one's actual concern for this justice. This act clearly undermines our collective and sustained struggle as a civil movement striving to affect change.

To return to the Jerusalem Prize, how can the hypocrisy and utter cynicism of an apartheid state bestowing a "freedom of the individual in society" award have escaped McEwan and Murakami? The open letter sent in 2009 to the Japanese prize-winner Murakami by the Palestine Forum Japan makes this point:

"What we are particularly concerned about is the purpose of the 'Jerusalem Prize', being to praise one's contribution to 'individuals' freedom in society'. This concept is in total contradiction of Israel's criminal acts such as massacre, collective punishment, blockade policy, construction of settlements and building of the 'separation wall' in East Jerusalem that are effectively eliminating

Palestinians' freedom. If you receive the 'Jerusalem Prize' it will contribute to a false image of Israel respecting 'individuals' freedom in society' which will be portrayed and spread by the media. We fear that the unimaginable devastation of humanity which Israel has inflicted continuously and systematically upon Palestinians will be disregarded and Israel's actions will be accepted.”[8]

Finally, McEwan might be considering accepting the prize while acknowledging or even denouncing the violation of Palestinian rights in his acceptance speech. If he chooses to do that, he will be following in the footsteps of Susan Sontag (2001), Arthur Miller (2003) and Haruki Murakami (2009) whose acceptance speeches were critical of Israel [9]. We believe that this is not a principled option. McEwan's very presence at the ceremony and the acceptance of the prize are what matter and what will remain on the record.

In informing his decision, McEwan would do well to consider the comments of Mike Leigh, who cancelled a scheduled trip in October 2010 to lecture at the Jerusalem film school in Jerusalem, emphasizing in a media interview his support for the cultural boycott of Israel. Referring to the boycott opponent's advice for him to go to Jerusalem and make his critical statement there, Leigh said: “in so far as anything achieves anything, more publicity has come out of what I have done than would have been the case had I simply not gone, or had I gone and merely made a few statements that no one was listening to inside Israel.”[10]

We ask that McEwan reconsider his position and heed the BDS call by rejecting the Jerusalem Prize.

January 28, 2011

PACBI

Notes:

[1] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/19/ian-mcewan-accept-jerusalem-prize>

[2] <http://www.thenation.com/article/courage-and-resistance>

[3] The policies of the Jerusalem Municipality are widely documented. For one example see:

www.alhaq.org/pdfs/Report%20-%20The%20Jerusalem%20Trap.pdf

[4] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/feb/06/south-africa.israel>

[5] On the Brand Israel campaign, see:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/world/middleeast/19israel.html>; and

<http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/about-face-1.170267?trailingPath=2.169%2C2.225%2C2.239%2C>

[6] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/25/ian-mcewan-defends-jerusalem-prize>

[7] <http://korjpcoll.springnote.com/pages/5600927/attachments/3229773>

[8] <http://palestine-forum.org/doc/2009/0129-e.html>

[9] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1323032.stm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/jul/06/usa.israel>

<http://korjpcoll.springnote.com/pages/5600927/attachments/3229773>

[10] <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/40043/zionism-to-hell-all-says-%EF%AC%81lm-director>

Two open letters to performers

Dave Randall of Faithless posts a message on Macy Gray's wall.

“We have been to Israel before but now we have joined the boycott. I have visited Gaza and the West Bank and seen with my own eyes what is going on. Some things are bigger than gigs, no matter how well intentioned the artist and fans are. You must join us Macy and say no to apartheid. To those who say, why don't we boycott lots of other places including the US.? Because:-

1. The oppressed people in the occupied territories have asked us to boycott.

2. It will make a difference in a way that boycotting the US simply wouldn't.

Boycott is not always the right tactic to try making the world a better place. But on this occasion it is the right tactic Be on the right side of history – DON'T GO MACY.”

From the French BDS Campaign to Emir Kusturica,

We have learned that you are intending to give a concert in Israel with the No Smoking Orchestra, and we are writing to urge you to cancel the concert.

We know that you are making a film in Israel/Palestine, and we trust your political sense to guarantee that the reality of Palestinian daily life under occupation will be presented in all its horror, from the dispossession of their homes to the numerous discriminatory laws to which they are subjected, in an undemocratic system that can be described as apartheid.

By performing in Israel as an artist, on the other hand, you are offering your image to this country, and Israel will use your image to polish its own, to prove itself a representative of "civilized" culture and in this way to trivialize its crimes. It is absolutely certain that the state of Israel will view your concert as a form of political support, not merely a cultural event. And please don't forget that the vast majority of Palestinians will not be able to hear, share, or experience the invigorating music of the No Smoking Orchestra, because they will not be permitted to travel to the site of your concert.

As a reaction to decades of oppression and to the failure of all attempts at peace, and taking inspiration from the South African struggle against apartheid, the Palestinian people have called on artists of conscience to join the movement of Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, in order to end the longest conflict in recent history. The BDS campaign asks for nothing more than the application of international law : ending the settlements, the occupation, and the blockade of Gaza, and dismantling the Wall ; ending apartheid for the Palestinians of 1948 (the so-called "Israeli Arabs") ; and the right of return for all refugees.

Things have changed as a result of this BDS call. Filmmakers and actors like Ken Loach, Jean-Luc Godard, and Meg Ryan, and musicians such as Elvis Costello, the Pixies, and Massive Attack, have publicly refused to play this game. To perform in Israel today is to make a political statement. We hope to count you among the artists joining the non-violent call to boycott Israel, and in this way helping

to bring about equality of rights and justice in Palestine-Israel.

In response to the Palestinian call for international solidarity, please refuse to entertain Israeli apartheid, we remain at your disposal for any further information.

Issued by [The French BDS Campaign](#), Paris, January 28, 2011 on behalf of the European Platform for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel ([EPACBI](#)), which includes: Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine ([AURDIP](#), France) Akademisk og Kulturell Boikott av staten Israel ([AKULBI](#), Norway) Berlin Academic Boycott ([BAB](#), Germany). Belgian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI, Belgium) British Committee for the Universities for Palestine ([BRICUP](#), UK) Comissió Universitària Catalana per Palestina ([CUNCAP](#), Spain) Dutch EPACBI group (The Netherlands) Irish Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel (ICABI, Ireland) Italian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel ([ICACBI](#), Italy) Action Group at KTH for Boycott of Israel ([PSABI](#), Sweden)

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

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More details can be obtained from treasurer@bricup.org.uk

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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