

BRICUP NEWSLETTER

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Of tunes and teaching and territory - the UCU Palestinian lecturers' tour.

Do the tones on some mobile phones annoy you? Is that because they intrude or because they induce pathos in the light of the implications for their users? If you are a teacher, do you have a routine ban on the use of cellphones in the classroom? If so, these are the institutional rules and self-indulgences of those not living in a war zone, or under military occupation.

This was one of the messages from academic colleagues from Palestine who toured branches of the UK's University and Colleges Union last month. These colleagues were members of the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUE).

In Palestine, mobile phones must remain on in classes in case of urgent messages about the killing or wounding of a family member by the Israeli army or by Israeli settlers. But, naturally, all calls come through, not just the urgent ones. Normality in Palestine is continual interruption. Normality is constant checkpoints at unpredictable locations, periodic shelling, frequent absence of delayed professors and teachers, extensive closures of educational establishments. Normality is the wall, and education only attended in your local college or university, and hence only amongst those with whom you have grown up. As a Palestinian student under occupation, you have no contact with others of your generation even from neighbouring towns, much less from other regions or other countries.

Normality in Palestine under Israeli occupation is, in other words, what would be considered abnormality, indeed intolerability, anywhere else

in the world. And this, not as the unintended consequence of temporary occupation or military manoeuvres but as part of a policy to make normal life for Palestinians impossible in the West Bank, and thus to encourage their departure into the Palestinian diaspora. In Gaza, under the Israeli siege, the situation is incomparably worse.

It was for these reasons that the Palestinian educational trade unionists were appealing for solidarity and assistance to members of the UCU. They wanted twinning arrangements so that they could get books through to their libraries past the Israeli postal delays, so that they could get staff exchanges and student exchanges arranged, so that they could get some other experience of 'normality' for their students that would give them reason to stay in education. In HE, they wanted contacts with other scholars and the development of joint work and publications, and invitations to international conferences so that the Israeli blockade could be broken. But most of all, they wanted political solidarity.

As Dr. Samia al Botmeh, Director of the Development Studies Institute in Birzeit University, explained 'Though we need all these things, and we need them immediately, we do not want them in order to normalise the Occupation. The root problem is not that we suffer these indignities and are treated in a sub-human manner as a result of the Occupation. All that is the case but the cause is the Occupation itself. So, while we appeal to you for all forms of technically practical help, our most forceful appeal to you is for political help. For members of the UCU, that means support for the boycott of Israeli academic institutions that are complicit in the Occupation, and have not voiced a collective condemnation of it.'

The tour was organised by the UCU following a

resolution at the 2007 national Congress. Four colleagues visited 18 institutions in groups of two over eight days. They also addressed members of the union's Strategy and Finance Committee. In addition to Dr. al Botmeh, the visitors were, Dr. Hala Yamani from Bethlehem University, Dr. Lisa Taraki from Birzeit, and Dr. Saed Abu-Hijleh from An-Najah National University.

At the 2008 UCU Congress this month (see item below in this Newsletter) there is a motion on this tour and the visit by a UCU delegation to Palestine organised by the PSC, which also invites delegates to submit the case of Ariel College in the West Bank to the union's international 'greylisting' procedure.

For further information, or to arrange support or solidarity or twinning, contact BRICUP.

Tom Hickey

Academic life under Israeli Occupation

This poignant contribution is by Haidar Eid, a lecturer at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza.

I know that hearing/reading a voice from Gaza is painful, but worse than that is writing about the slow-motion genocide taking place live on camera 24 hrs a day!

I woke up today, 26 April.2008, on the news of the brutal killing of 12-year old Mariam Maalouf in the northern town of Beit Lahia. Her father was arrested, her mother critically injured, and she, herself, was shot by an Israeli sniper and was left to bleed for 4 hours. No ambulance was allowed to pick her up.

The severe shortages in fuel have affected our teaching program. Our students and lecturers cannot attend their classes. Yesterday, I had only three students out of 80! Those who can walk long distances try their luck. But yesterday we had a heat wave and many of those who tried to walk to school fainted due to dehydration. Mind you that most of our students already suffer from malnutrition. To add insult to injury, UNRWA has halted all its activities yesterday, for the first time

in 60 years. 80 per cent of Gazans depend on food handouts provided by UNRWA.

Israel's continued, tightened siege on the Gaza Strip has a catastrophic effect on all of us here. In addition to the chronic shortages of fuel, we also have shortages in medicine and some basic food stuffs. The situation is simply disastrous. I've just heard that patient number 138 has passed away. He is one of thousands of terminally ill patients who need urgent treatment outside Gaza, in Israeli, Jordanian, Egyptian, or even West Bank hospitals, but Israel is refusing to give them the necessary permits. Two days ago I visited Al-Shifa hospital and was told that almost all major surgical operations have been suspended due to regular power cuts and the absence of fuel to run their generator!

In addition to the dangerous shortage of electricity that threatens the lives of critically ill patients in all of Gaza's hospitals, and the chronic shortages of petrol and diesel and gas for domestic use, we are also suffering widespread shortages of bread, due to lack of electricity to run the ovens at bakeries across Gaza.

There is a lot to say, but I must tell you, on a hopeful note, that they will not break our spirit.

Haidar Eid

The PACBI Column

The “Israel at 60” celebrations

In this column, we conclude our review of activities around the “Israel at 60” celebrations; on the whole, the response of artists, writers, academics, and other public intellectuals has been heartening, showing that there are growing voices that see something fundamentally wrong in celebrating Israeli statehood while Palestinians continue to be dispossessed and denied their basic rights under international law.

Following the Palestinian civil society campaign statement on March 30, 2008 urging international civil society to boycott the "Israel at 60" celebrations [1], a series of well-publicized statements and actions were initiated around the

world. Among them was a letter in the Guardian on April 30 by 100 Jewish intellectuals declaring that they “cannot celebrate the birthday of a state founded on terrorism, massacres and the dispossession of another people from their land...the birthday of a state that even now engages in ethnic cleansing, that violates international law, that is inflicting a monstrous collective punishment on the civilian population of Gaza and that continues to deny to Palestinians their human rights and national aspirations”[2]. A statement titled “No Reason to Celebrate “Israel at 60!” was published in the International Herald Tribune on May 8 and signed by prominent international artists, writers, and other public figures. This statement ended by declaring that “celebrating ‘Israel at 60’ is tantamount to dancing on Palestinian graves to the haunting tune of lingering dispossession and multi-faceted injustice” [3].

In addition to statements issued by many solidarity movements and groups the world over, media attention was focused on the Turin International Book Fair, which had decided to honor Israel on the occasion of sixty years of the founding of the state.(See item below in this Newsletter.) On May 10, hundreds of people bearing a banners saying “Boycott Israel, support Palestine” demonstrated in the streets of Turin to protest against the Turin Book fair's celebration of Israeli writers [4].

The true disappointment was South African writer Nadine Gordimer’s rejection of Palestinian and British appeals urging her not to participate in the International Writers’ Festival in Jerusalem, an extravaganza organized to coincide with the Israeli “celebrations.” Despite appeals from Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activists abroad, she went ahead with her trip, granting legitimacy to an apartheid state, while she herself had been a staunch opponent of apartheid in its South African incarnation barely two decades ago. Her international stature will never be the same. She has disappointed many of her admirers.

[1] http://www.pacbi.org/announcements_more.php?id=706_0_5_0_M

[2] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/30/israelandthepalestinians?>

[3]. <http://www.pngo.net/english/news.asp?i=18>

[4] <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/05/10/turin-fair-protest.html>

PACBI

The letter from BRICUP to Nadine Gordimer was circulated with the April Newsletter. Haidar Eid also protested to her and his letter is reproduced here.

I am a Palestinian lecturer in Cultural Studies living in Gaza . I happen to also have South African citizenship as a result of my marriage to a citizen of that beloved country. I spent more than five years in Johannesburg , the city in which I earned my Ph.D and lectured at both traditionally black and white universities. At Vista in Soweto , I taught your anti-apartheid novels *My Son's Story*, *July's People* and *The Late Bourgeois World*. I have been teaching the same novels, in addition to *The Pick Up* and *Selected Stories*, to my Palestinian students in Gaza at Al-Aqsa University . This course is called "Resistance, Anti-Racism and Xenophobia". I deliberately chose to teach your novels because, as an anti-apartheid writer, you defied racial stereotypes by calling for resistance against *all* forms of oppression, be they racial or religious. Your support of sanctions against apartheid South Africa has, to say the least, impressed my Gazan students.

The news of your conscious decision to take part in the "Israel at 60" celebrations has reached us, students and citizens of Gaza, as both a painful surprise, and a glaring example of a hypocritical intellectual double standard. My students, psychologically and emotionally traumatized and already showing early signs of malnutrition as a result of the genocidal policy of the country whose birth you intend celebrating, demand an explanation.

They wonder in amazement that you might have missed Archbishop Tutu's contention that conditions in Israeli-occupied Palestine are worse than those under apartheid? They ask how you can ignore John Dugard's dispassionate and insightful report on the dismal state of Human Rights in the Occupied Territories ? Surely, you

have not been unaware of Ronnie Kasrils' writings following his latest visit to Gaza and the West Bank ? Like you, these three men, all South Africans, were also active in the fight against racism and apartheid. Dugard's words on Palestine are very significant: "I certainly have a sense of *déjà vu*... The sad thing is that Israel is unwilling to learn from the South African precedent." In an article titled, "Israelis adopt what South Africa dropped," Dugard observed that the human rights situation in the occupied territories continues to deteriorate and called the conditions "intolerable, appalling, and tragic for ordinary Palestinians." Significantly, Dugard made shocking parallels between the situation in Palestine and your country South Africa under apartheid: "Many aspects of Israel 's occupation surpass those of the apartheid regime. Israel 's large-scale destruction of Palestinian homes, leveling of agricultural lands, military incursions and targeted assassinations of Palestinians far exceed any similar practices in apartheid South Africa ."

Moreover, in its final declaration, the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) NGO forum, held in Durban in 2001, stated that: "We declare Israel as a racist, apartheid state in which Israel's brand of apartheid as a crime against humanity has been characterized by separation and segregation, dispossession, restricted land access, denationalization, 'bantustanization' and inhumane acts."

You are no doubt aware of Israel 's deep ties with apartheid South Africa , during which Israel , breaking the international embargo, supplied South Africa with hundreds of millions of dollars of weapons. Apartheid South Africa relied on apartheid Israel to persuade Western governments to lift the embargo. How did you relate to Israel during that period and what was your position regarding countries and individuals that did not support the policy of isolating apartheid South Africa ? You were surely critical of the infamous policy of 'constructive engagement' led by Thatcher and Reagan at the height of the struggle in the 80s? And today, inexplicably, you have joined the ranks of sanctions busters.

The eminent Palestinian, Edward Said, who gave you his friendship, would have been dismayed by

your decision. He named you as a model for what he called, "oppositional intellectuals." It was his strong belief that, with regard to Israel, "[i]t only takes a few bold spirits to speak out and start challenging a status quo that gets worse and more dissembling each day." Little did he know that you would fail the oppressed in Palestine .

My cold and hungry students have divided themselves into two groups, with one group adamant that you, like many of your courageous characters, will reconsider your participation in an Israeli Festival that aims to celebrate the annihilation of Palestine and Palestinians. The other group believes that you have already crossed over to the side of the oppressor, negating every word you have ever written. We all wait for your next action.

Dr. Haidar Eid , Gaza , Palestine.

Boycotting the Turin Book Fair

Extraordinarily, the Turin Book Fair decided to make Israel its 'guest of honour' this year. True, a country is singled out in this way every year. But this year? Opening on May 10th on the eve of the 60th anniversary of Israel and of the Nakba, this was no coincidence. Even many Israelis are both bored and embarrassed at the shameless self-promotion of which this is a part.

As protests began to develop, the Book Fair organisers realised that they needed cover from the participation of Palestinian authors. Failing that, they asked authors who are Muslim, or at least from a Muslim-majority country. But the invitations were turned down. Tariq Ramadan said no. Tariq Ali announced his refusal with maximum publicity.

The Book Fair was due to be opened by the Italian President Giorgio Napolitano on Thursday May 8th. Just 2 days before, ISM Italy held an international seminar in Turin, whose title was Western Democracy and the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, but whose underlying theme was the Book Fair debacle. The seminar was attacked in the press, including the left wing *Manifesto*, as anti-Semitic. The University of Turin refused to

give it house room - until challenged by a professor with greater procedural expertise than the University's head.

The seminar, then was held on May 5-6 in an atmosphere of some tension – not least due to the very recent election triumph of Berlusconi and his post-fascist allies. The small room, all that was available, was packed out with an audience of more than a hundred. Speakers included noted Italian academics such as Diana Carminati (on the criticisms of Israel by UN officials) and Massimo Zuccetti (on the Italy-Israel military cooperation agreement). Wasim Dahmash, a Palestinian academic domiciled in Italy spoke eloquently on Arab documentary sources on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Two BRICUP speakers also participated. Ghada Karmi talked on the historical roots of the One State idea; while Jonathan Rosenhead updated the seminar on the British experience with academic and cultural boycott. There was certainly rapt, even excited, attention as our progress with the boycott was described – to the extent that one of the leading Italian academics present undertook to try and start a similar movement. Firm ties were established between BRICUP and the seminar organisers, which can only facilitate future cooperation.

The undoubted stars were Tariq Ramadan and Aharon Shabtai. Ramadan rubbed in his refusal of the Book Fair invitation by participating in the oppositional seminar – where his speech was to draw comments from the President of Italy. Shabtai, a translation of whose book of poems *Politics* into Italian was published the following day, spoke powerfully about the corruption of Israeli culture by the Occupation.

What upset the President of Italy? At the seminar Ramadan reported Napolitano as having said that anti-Zionism is another form of anti-Semitism. Napolitano called Ramadan a liar. What is indubitable is that the President's opening of the Book Fair, unprecedented in its 21 year history gave the lie to the idea that this was a 'cultural', apolitical event.

During the seminar we were treated to another manifestation of the new Italy. During the previous week US and Israeli flags had been burned at a demonstration against the Book Fair's invitation to Israel. On the same day a neo-Nazi gang had savagely beaten a young man in Verona. The victim died on the first day of the seminar. Gianfranco Fini, leader of Italy's 'post-fascists' and newly installed as President of the Chamber of Deputies(!), knew what to make of the two events. Speaking on state television he was quite clear – the flag burning was "much more serious".

Jonathan Rosenhead

The UCU congress 2008, Manchester. 28-30 May 2008

There are three motions on the agenda on Palestine: the first on relationships with Israeli academia will generate most controversy; the second, on Gaza, is expected to gain general assent; the third on the actions of the Histadrut may upset some people who see the federation as beyond reproach despite its record of involvement in the occupation.

SFC10 Composite: Palestine and the occupation *University of Brighton – Eastbourne, University of Brighton – Grand Parade, University of East London Docklands, National Executive Committee*

Congress notes the

1. continuation of illegal settlement, killing of civilians and the impossibility of civil life, including education;
2. humanitarian catastrophe imposed on Gaza by Israel and the EU;
3. apparent complicity of most of the Israeli academy;
4. legal attempts to prevent UCU debating boycott of Israeli academic institutions; and legal advice that such debates are lawful

Congress affirms that

5. criticism of Israel or Israeli policy are not, as such, anti-semitic;

6. pursuit and dissemination of knowledge are not uniquely immune from their moral and political consequences;

Congress resolves that

7. colleagues be asked to consider the moral and political implications of educational links with Israeli institutions, and to discuss the occupation with individuals and institutions concerned, including Israeli colleagues with whom they are collaborating;

8. UCU widely disseminate the personal testimonies of UCU and PFUPE delegations to Palestine and the UK, respectively;

9. the testimonies will be used to promote a wide discussion by colleagues of the appropriateness of continued educational links with Israeli academic institutions;

10. UCU facilitate and encourage twinning arrangements and other direct solidarity with Palestinian institutions;

11. Ariel College, an explicitly colonising institution in the West Bank, be investigated under the formal Greylisting Procedure.

SFC11 Gaza emergency University College London

Congress notes

1. The humanitarian catastrophe that developed in Gaza in March 2008, following a long siege and military bombardment, during which over 100 people died.

2. The call by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) to international trade unions to put pressure on their own governments to take action to stop the escalation of violence and relieve the humanitarian crisis.

3. Students and academics have been among those trapped in Gaza.

Congress resolves

To organise a fact-finding delegation to Gaza after the bombing stops and to send delegates on future TUC-sponsored visits.

SFC12 Palestine National Executive Committee

Congress notes the report of the Trade Union Delegation to Palestine in January 2008, facilitated by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, in which 4 representatives of UCU took part.

Congress notes that the delegation was generously hosted in Nablus by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.

Congress deplores the failure of the Israeli Histadrut to pay the approximately 2.5 million Euros owed to the PGFTU since 1995, representing 50% of the official organisational dues of Palestinian workers working in Israel, under the terms of the Framework Agreement of March 1995 following the Oslo Accords of 1993.

Congress calls on the Histadrut to pay the dues owed to the PGFTU; to call for an end to the siege of Gaza; and to call for an end to the occupation of Palestinian and Syrian territory.

BRICUP UCU pre-congress meeting

BRICUP is holding an eve of congress meeting on "The complicity of Israeli academia in the occupation: the case for boycott". This will be held on Tuesday 27 May at 8.30 at the Manchester Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester. We hope all BRICUP supporters who are delegates to congress or live in or near Manchester will support this meeting which promises to be both interesting and lively. Speakers are being confirmed as we go to press and full details will be circulated soon.

Israel: Torture, doctors and the Israeli Medical Association

The use of torture by Israel as an instrument of state policy has a long history. The independent evidence for this is so substantial that no neutral person could possibly argue otherwise. Amnesty International has long since shown that torture has been institutionalised in the interrogation suites handling large numbers of Palestinian detainees every year. Amnesty also concluded that the role being played by Israeli doctors working in and around these interrogation suites were fundamentally at odds with medical ethics. Indeed at least 11 of the over 300 publications by Amnesty on Israel since 2002 have the word 'torture' in the title! Amnesty and others who have approached the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) to urge them to take a stand have been consistently rebuffed. This too has been my experience when I have published articles in mainstream medical journals- notable the British Medical Journal and the Lancet. In response to one of these, published in the Lancet, the longstanding president of the IMA Dr Y Blachar actually justified the use of "moderate physical pressure", the euphemism in Israel for torture!

The moral position and strategic line taken over many years by the IMA was well captured by a remark made by Professor Eran Dolev, then IMA Head of Ethics (yes, Ethics!) in an interview in 1999 with a visiting delegation from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, London (for whom I was principal psychiatrist for 9 years). Prof Dolev stated that that "a couple of broken fingers" during the interrogation of Palestinians was worthwhile for the information it might garner. When I published this in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, verified by those present at the interview, Dr Blachar defended Prof Dolev. Dr Blachar has routinely labelled me and others as motivated by anti-Israel bias and by anti-semitism. Indeed after my BMJ review of Oct 2004 he wrote at bmj.com: "the lies and hatred he spews are reminiscent of some of the worst forms of anti-semitism ever espoused", a response that directs open contempt towards the mass of documentation in the public

domain - all from distinguished international human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and regional ones like B'Tselem in Israel and Health, Development, Information, and Policy Institute in the Occupied West Bank - that I am citing.

Two years earlier I had written to Prof Dolev after a human rights conference in Gaza, when an Israeli physician had told me that a medical colleague had confessed to her that he had removed the intravenous drip from the arm of a seriously ill Palestinian prisoner, and told the man that if he wanted to live, he should co-operate with his interrogators. I asked Dolev to investigate but he never replied, even after reminders.

The IMA have been entirely silent about such events, as they have always been. This is in fundamental breach of their mandate - not least as members of the World Medical Association (WMA), the official international body charged with overseeing medical ethics. Incredibly, IMA President Blachar was for 3 years until recently Chair of Council of the WMA! I don't doubt that he was there to shield the IMA from awkward questions or enquiries. As the Executive Director of the excellent Physicians for Human Rights - Israel put it in the Lancet, the IMA's collusion with torture is part of "its long tradition of siding with 'national Israeli considerations' rather than with universal medical ethics". Nor has the issue of medical collusion with torture attracted condemnation from Israeli medical schools, with their academic bases and research institutes. Many of these doctors have international academic connections, and unlike their Palestinian counterparts their movements are unhampered, their respectability and probity unchallenged. Why is this? We must sadly conclude that with honourable exceptions most doctors and medical academics are in active or passive collusion with an aggressive colonisation, with the control and, increasingly, the frank crushing of every sector of Palestinian civil society, and with a self-justifying discourse that trades on a dehumanising contempt for Palestinian as people in a different moral universe.

No recent evidence has been more telling than that compiled by the Israeli organization Public Committee Against Torture (PCATI), entitled "Ticking Bombs". Testimonies of Torture Victims in Israel'. (PCATI funders include the European Union, United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and British and Norwegian Embassies in Tel Aviv). Their report, published in May 2007, records the detailed testimony of 9 Palestinian men tortured by Israeli security services between 2004 and 2006. Here, yet again, is graphic demonstration of the extent to which Israeli doctors form an integral and everyday part of the running of the interrogation suites whose output is torture. Doctors, several of whom are actually named, saw the prisoners at various points between episodes of torture (which in one case led to spinal cord damage and disability), did not take a proper history, did not protest on these men's behalf, and typically prescribed simple analgesia before returning them to their interrogators. They did not need to ask the prisoners what had happened to them because they knew perfectly well. It is also remarkable that doctors in position of authority were directly involved in several of these cases, and are also named: the Chief Medical Officer of the Israeli Prison Service, Dr Alex Adler; the Chief Medical Officer of Israeli Police Dr.Tzvi Lankovski; and-most telling of all- no less than the Chairman of the Ethics board of the Israeli Medical Association, Professor Avinoam Reches. These accounts carry the imprimatur of a human rights organization of many years standing and high reputation. The named doctors have not demanded a retraction or sued the report's authors in order to clear their names. When a number of us published an account of this in the Lancet last December, we received a letter from the IMA threatening to sue. Remarkably, they condemned themselves out of their own mouths, since they did not dispute that their Chair of Ethics had received a copy of the report, sent to him by PCATI. Thus, there can be no argument that he knew the facts, and did nothing about it.

Here we should note the terms of the WMA's Declaration of Tokyo (1975), a key document in medical ethics internationally. This specifies that "physicians shall not countenance, condone or

participate in the practice of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading procedures, and in all situations, including armed conflict and civil conflict". Further, in two recent press releases- in May and in October 2007 - the WMA upgrades its call for doctors to document cases of torture, and for support for doctors facing pressure on torture. In the second of these, WMA President Dr Jon Snaedal, notes that "doctors are in a key position to witness and report acts of torture, and by documenting and providing information about what they see, they can become a powerful voice in helping the struggle against torture. This is the first time the WMA has explicitly obliged doctors to document cases of torture of which they become aware. By doing so we hope that doctors around the world will put pressure on those who perpetrate such acts to stop such degrading treatment". Furthermore, "the WMA said that the absence of documenting and denouncing such acts might be considered as a form of tolerance and of non-assistance to the victims". Professor Reches and Dr Blachar could hardly be more obviously guilty of disowning the ethical duties the WMA mandates, a matter of the deepest disgrace.

Derek Summerfield

BRICUP podcasts.

The new BRICUP website has launched a series of podcasts. The first ones are:

- 1.Lisa Taraki speaking at Lambeth College on 25 April 2008
<http://www.bricup.org.uk/podcasts/01taraki.mp3>
2. Samia al Botmeh in conversation with Mike Cushman on 27 April 2008
<http://www.bricup.org.uk/podcasts/02albotmeh.mp3>
3. A Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel who is an FE lecturer and UCU member talking about her experience of abuse as a student at Tel Aviv University
<http://www.bricup.org.uk/podcasts/03reTAU.mp3>

Comments and suggestions concerning the Newsletter are welcome. Email to newsletter@bricup.org.uk