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The murder of Juliano Mer-Khamis

On Monday April 4th 2011 Juliano Mer-Khamis, was murdered. In a moving tribute that was published in Haaretz, Gideon Levy [1] remembered Juliano as the “tall, strapping, handsome man who oozed charisma, a Jew and an Arab on account of his parents - perhaps a Jew in the eyes of the Arabs and an Arab in the eyes of the Jews – [who]decided to devote his life to Jenin where he lived as an Israeli and as a human being. One of the most talented

theatre actors ever to emerge here he was also the most courageous of them.” The brilliant film ‘Arna's Children’, which he co-directed with his dying mother, Arna Mer, is arguably the most moving film about the Israeli occupation ever created. Arna was the founder of the theatre in Jenin.

PACBI issued the following statement from occupied Ramallah on April 6th, “ PACBI mourns the tragic loss of our comrade, partner, and friend [..] and strongly condemns the cowardly murder that took his life. Along with all other Palestinians who fight against the grave injustice imposed on our people, Juliano embodied the hopeful and brave spirit of cultural resistance. He proclaimed and shared the spirit of freedom in all senses of the word. He believed in our collective cultural revolution that we fought for together. Through his special, organic blend of art and cultural activism, Juliano personified the spirit of resistance and the promise of liberation and justice. Juliano, born to a Palestinian father and a Jewish mother, followed in his mother’s legacy, to which he beautifully paid tribute in his famous documentary Arna’s Children: Arna Mer Khamis, as Juliano described her, “spent her life fighting against the Occupation, or, as she used to put it, struggling against the Zionist colonization of Palestine.” [3]

“A strong and thoughtful supporter of the cultural and academic boycott of Israel, Juliano also worked to construct hope for all Palestinians. From the devastated streets of the Jenin refugee camp, he saw Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), coupled with other forms of peaceful resistance, as the best

hope for exercising Palestinian self determination and realizing the refugees' aspirations to return to their homes of origin. In August, 2006, a great majority of Palestinian filmmakers and cultural workers issued a call for a cultural boycott of Israel inspired by that imposed on apartheid South Africa. Juliano Mer-Khamis was among the first to endorse the statement, help promote it, and defend it against attempts to misrepresent it. The statement said:

“We, the undersigned Palestinian filmmakers and artists, appeal to all artists and filmmakers of good conscience around the world to cancel all exhibitions and other cultural events that are scheduled to occur in Israel, to mobilize immediately and not allow the continuation of the Israeli offensive to breed complacency. Like the boycott of South African art institutions during apartheid, cultural workers must speak out against the current Israeli war crimes and atrocities. We call upon the International community to join us in the boycott of Israeli film festivals, Israeli public venues, and Israeli institutions supported by the government, and to end all cooperation with these cultural and artistic institutions that to date have refused to take a stand against the Occupation, the root cause for this colonial conflict.[4] “

“Juliano’s memory will for ever be a part of us and his loss will be mourned by all who struggle for justice and freedom. We shall continue to resist until every town, city and refugee camp in Palestine becomes an open stage for our collective freedom theatre!” BRICUP joins PACBI in mourning the death of this extraordinarily talented, inspiring and courageous man.

[1] <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/gideon-levy-remembers-juliano-mer-khamis-an-arab-a-jew-a-human-being-1.354100>

[2] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1546>

[3] <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11897.shtml>

[4] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=315>

Sources - PACBI and Haaretz

The arrest of Ahmed Qatamesh

The Israeli military has arrested the prominent and highly respected Palestinian writer, academic and human rights advocate, Ahmad Qatamesh and is holding him in Ofer detention centre, without charge, solely because of his writings and political

views. There is evidence to suggest that the detention order is a forgery. Human rights organizations have squarely condemned administrative detention as an affront to justice, as the detainee is not formally charged and is not given a chance to defend him/herself or even access to the charges list.

The arrest was made by a large Israeli force in the early hours of Thursday, April 21st, after first holding his wife, Suha Barghouti, their 22-year old daughter Hanin and other family members including Omar Barghouti’s 14-year old daughter Nai. Hanin described the events in these words, ‘As they were about to enter my room, I warned the commander, “My MacBook and Blackberry are inside; I hope they’ll still be there after your search.” “We never take anything that is not ours,” he irately shot back. I could not resist shouting, “Aside from stealing our land on a regular basis. Nine years ago, Israeli soldiers were caught lifting valuables from many Palestinian homes. Don’t you dare tell me you do not steal what is not yours!” Pointing his US-made M-16 at me, he silenced me. How ironic, a weapon made in my country of birth is being used by Israeli soldiers to silence me while they ransack my own room in the middle of the night.” 14-year old Nai described events in these words: “Shut your mouth up,” barked a huge, scary Israeli soldier at me, like a rabid bulldog, whenever I challenged his orders. This is not even a fair comparison; a bulldog, despite his intimidating appearance, can be quite sweet and loving on the inside. Well, this soldier was anything but! So maybe criminal describes him better. He and a dozen other soldiers smashed through my aunt’s apartment window in the middle of the night last Thursday and took hostage my aunt, Suha, my 22-year old cousin, Hanin, my 69-year old grandmother, and me.”

Omar Barghouti has urged us all to distribute this information to our human rights and activist networks, urging everyone to do their best to pressure Israel to release Dr Qatamesh and all other Palestinian prisoners of conscience.

For more see:-

<http://electronicintifada.net/content/when-israeli-soldiers-came-arrest-my-father/9901>

<http://mondoweiss.net/2011/05/they-can-never-shut-me-up.html>

Sources: Omar Barghouti, PACBI and Haaretz

Artists Violating Cultural Boycott of Israel: Moral Inconsistency and Logical Incoherence

As the cultural boycott of Israel gains pace around the world, some artists, writers and cultural workers are finding it increasingly difficult to engage consistently and coherently with the arguments posed by those advocating for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). Insisting on performing music, exhibiting artwork or accepting literary prizes in Israel, these cultural figures have resorted to one of at least three arguments to defend their violations of the cultural boycott guidelines set by Palestinian civil society. Some argue that they do not know enough about the nuances of the “conflict” between Palestinians and Israelis to take a position, so they prefer to “go see for ourselves.” Others claim that if they were to begin boycotting one country, like Israel, for its violations of international law and human rights then where would they stop, given that many countries fall into the same category and may even be worse offenders. A third group, usually quite politically aware and, to an extent, sympathetic to the cause of Palestinians, argues that BDS is not in the best interest of Palestinians and that artists should engage Israelis since it is through dialogue and communication that “peace” will come about. We have thought it necessary to address these points.

1. We Do Not Know Enough to Take a Political Position – We Need to See for Ourselves

To this group, we simply ask that they do the sensible thing and stay away from Israel until they are knowledgeable enough about the “situation.” Artists are not being asked by one or two local individuals to boycott Israel, which could be dismissed as uninformed or unrepresentative of the common interest. In the Palestinian case, artists are being asked to respect the cultural boycott of Israel and its complicit institutions by a majority of Palestinian civil society, over 170 organizations from across the political and social spectrum, and especially by a great majority of Palestinian artists and cultural figures. If the Palestinian near-consensus is not sufficient to convince them, then they can at least refrain from performing, accepting prizes, or exhibiting art in Israel until they have visited the occupied Palestinian territory and spoken

with exiled Palestinian refugees. However, hiding behind supposed ignorance as an excuse for complicity in whitewashing Israel’s criminal behavior is unacceptable morally or logically, and is not befit for cultural workers who claim to defend human rights or care about peace, justice and equality for all.

Moreover, did everyone who joined the cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa insist first on seeing for themselves before taking a position? Can we not criticize or take effective action against a state abusing human rights until we have visited that state? Finally, how can entertaining Israel, despite its occupation and apartheid, be considered non-political, whereas refraining from doing so is seen as political? [1]

2. Why Not Boycott Other Human Rights Offenders Too?

The main points to consider in this context are: (a) Whether the oppressed have called on international artists to support a boycott of their oppressors to end oppression, and (b) whether the international artist’s own state is implicated – and to what extent – in supporting or maintaining the system of oppression in a country targeted by the boycott in question. To address (a), we refer to the Palestinian consensus argument mentioned above. Artists who sincerely care about human rights and upholding international law should at least listen to the oppressed voices coming from within Palestine who are pleading for BDS. They should consider the presence of a local BDS initiative that has developed into a worldwide protest movement and international picket line. It takes a comprehensive, consistent and ethical non-violent form of struggle to face the forms of Israeli oppression, and it is precisely this struggle that these artists, writers, and cultural workers reject when they ignore calls by the Palestinian BDS movement.

While the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) sees all injustice and racism, including anti-Semitism, as deserving to be condemned and resolutely fought, each struggle and context generates its own tools of resistance. It would, therefore, be disingenuous to respond to a people’s demands for BDS by telling them to wait till the world boycotts all regimes in violation of human rights before one can boycott Israel. If a movement by Chinese activists, say, began today calling for a boycott of China, would we argue that we should not heed the Chinese call because we are not boycotting Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or the US? Should we have ignored calls to

boycott the South African apartheid regime in the last century because we were not boycotting other regimes – some committing worse crimes – at the time?

Such arguments are a diversion from the real issues facing us, namely that there is, today, a growing BDS movement called for by an unprecedented majority of Palestinians reaching out to the world to heed their call, and to hold Israel accountable for its crimes of apartheid, as defined in international law [2], and for its wholesale violations of international law and abuse of human rights.

As to point (b) above, Israel is today the only state practicing a three-tiered system of oppression – occupation, colonization and apartheid – while being treated by Western states as part of their “democratic club” and, consequently, receiving unlimited political, economic, diplomatic, academic and cultural support from them. This entrenched and persistent Western complicity is precisely what perpetuates Israel’s colonial oppression and makes it a moral obligation for citizens of the West to endeavor to end their states’ respective complicity in Israel’s crimes. Striving to end collusion in human rights violations should be the absolute minimum that we expect from any conscientious artist or cultural worker.

3. We Do Not Think BDS is in Palestinian Best Interest

This is perhaps the most problematic of all positions, primarily because it is most veiled in a concern for Palestinian rights, and because these cultural figures think somehow that they know what is best for Palestinians. This is another form of cultural colonialism, par excellence, as foreigners also claim to know best how Palestinians should struggle and behave – one hears clear echoes of the “civilizing mission,” for example, and of the white man coming to educate the native.

In some cases, artists or writers may attempt to cloak personal interest and/or fear of the expected wrath of Israel and its influential lobby groups, with a mantle of wisdom and concern for the “real” interests of the oppressed. As Desmond Tutu says:

Struggles for freedom and justice are fraught with huge moral dilemmas. How can we commit ourselves to virtue - before its political triumph - when such commitment may lead to ostracism from our political allies and even our closest partners and friends? Are we willing to speak out for justice

when the moral choice that we make for an oppressed community may invite phone calls from the powerful or when possible research funding will be withdrawn from us? [3]

Most often, those who disregard BDS as a legitimate form of Palestinian civil resistance are in fact dismissing the package of Palestinian rights protected under international law, and often confine these rights to Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, a mere one third of the Palestinian people. However, Palestinians are not just fighting to end a 44-year old illegal occupation, but also for equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and for the Palestinian right of return in accordance with UN Resolution 194. When the oppressed have come together to develop a form of ethical, peaceful resistance to fight for these rights, when they have worked hard over the years to build a movement with consensus, and when they are appealing to international cultural workers to stand with them in solidarity and put pressure on the Israeli apartheid government, how does a direct slight of the BDS movement serve the interest of the Palestinians? And who decides?

In some cases, otherwise liberal minded cultural workers refer to objections from their Israeli colleagues to justify their rebuff of the voices of the oppressed. Deferring to the hegemonic discourse of the oppressor obviously circumscribes the rights of the Palestinian people to what fits the selective agenda of this or that Israeli writer, activist, or group. Moreover, it renders the Palestinian voice absent in our own struggle for self determination. Imagine people took the lead from white South Africans in the struggle against South African apartheid, and dismissed the voices of the black population!

In their so-far futile attempts to skirt real pressure on Israel and to blunt or thwart the spectacular growth of the BDS movement, some on the Zionist “left” have misleadingly promoted a peace industry fraught with unequal “dialogue” where Palestinians lack any power to influence the outcome and joint projects that do little more than normalize oppression rather than help to end it. When Palestinians refuse to engage in this unprincipled engagement and insist, instead, on calling for effective international solidarity in the form of BDS, the adoption of international cultural workers of the Israeli tactic cannot but undermine the cause of freedom, justice and equality--the main slogans of the BDS movement.

[1] As Archbishop Desmond Tutu quips, “investing in apartheid South Africa was not seen as a political act; divesting was.”

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/world/article675369.ece/Israeli-ties--a-chance-to-do-the-right-thing>

[2] [http://classic-](http://classic-web.archive.org/web/20061001200717/http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm)

[web.archive.org/web/20061001200717/http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm](http://classic-web.archive.org/web/20061001200717/http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm)

[3]

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/world/article675369.ece/Israeli-ties--a-chance-to-do-the-right-thing>

The BBCs Mavi Marmara whitewash

On April 19th the BBC Trust published the results of its enquiry into allegations of factual error and bias in its programme ‘Death in the Med’. Broadcast in August 2010, the programme concerned the Mavi Marmara massacre in May 2010. At least 1,400 viewers complained alleging bias in favour of Israel. The BBC extracted 51 specific points from 19 selected complaints and then assessed them individually for accuracy and impartiality. I was one of those 19. The outcome was that just three complaints were upheld: 48 were rejected and the programme as a whole was praised.

If you read the 123 page report I think that you will find that this outcome was not justified. The report incorporated a considerable number of the actual complaints in the complainant’s own words and even those heavily selected complaints are powerful yet the appeal committee did not uphold them. To quote an example:- “The committee acknowledged the allegation that the weight of legal opinion says that the blockade [of Gaza] is illegal and the allegation of the illegal nature of the blockade prompted the flotilla.” Complainants pointed out that this important statement was not included in the programme but the committee decided that its inclusion was not essential to understand the story which, the committee asserted, was just about the specific event of the boarding of the Mavi Marmara. However, the program itself stated that it was not intended simply to record events: it’s objective was to explain “why things turned out as they did”. To do that I and others argued that some familiarity with the historical and legal background is essential. Similarly, the committee decided that “it was not material to the

viewers understanding of what happened that night for the audience to hear [arguments concerning the legality of the interception]”. Yet, inconsistently, when dealing with a complaint that the programme mentioned Gazan attacks on Israel but ignored Israeli attacks on Gaza, the committee considered that only the former was essential for the viewer to understand the Israeli rationale for blockading Gaza... - which of course it isn’t!

In dealing with one complaint (Point AI) , which concerns the poor treatment of casualties by the Israeli forces the committee upheld the complaint of imbalance. However the bias was so great that it could not have arisen in that one item without the same attitude being present on other occasions.

Two examples of clear pro-Israeli bias are as follows: the first was the statement (p11) that “Israel has a strong tradition of an independent judiciary”; I am sure that Palestinian Israelis will be delighted to know that. Another example, in connection with point Q, was that the committee noted that an expert who was quoted by one of the complainants was known to be an activist who supports the academic boycott of Israel. Why should that have any bearing on his expert opinion unless the programme itself was biased towards the Israeli position? And why, if it is true, does the fact the Palestine Solidarity Campaign encouraged its members to complain lead to doubt concerning the sincerity of those complaints? (p3)

The final point (AY) required the committee to take account of all 51 separate points raised and decide whether collectively they demonstrated a failure of impartiality. I read all the individual committee responses and noted that it was relatively uncommon for the committee to reject a complaint of bias out of hand, absolutely and completely. In 28 cases, with varying degrees of force, the committee suggested or implied that that the programme could have used a somewhat different wording, suggesting that it found deficiencies that were significant but, in their opinion, insufficient to justify upholding that specific complaint. I think that there was a flaw in this procedure. If you have a complex system and split it up into 51 pieces, then look for one characteristic in each part separately, there will be little of that characteristic in most of them, yet taken together the aggregate mass may be very significant. I argue that the final point in the committee’s analysis was not dealt with correctly and that the whole process, which has consumed vast amounts of time and paper has simply confirmed the BBC’s pro-Israeli bias.

David E. Pegg,

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