

BRICUP Newsletter 102

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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The Malevolence of Occupation

David Lloyd

A long-standing instrument of non-violent action, boycott remains one effective means by which civil society holds to account those responsible

for ongoing yet remediable violations of fundamental rights, including especially violations that threaten the capacity of any community to reproduce its means to life and cultural survival. It works quite simply by withdrawing or suspending ties with the perpetrators, refusing to collaborate with injustices even by passively endorsing or "normalizing" them through inaction.

Above all, boycott is an instrument of civil society. We call for a boycott when the means to redress an ongoing injury are denied by the legal or political institutions that ought to intervene. In December 2009, Israel launched its catastrophic "Cast Lead" assault on Gaza. Before it was over, Israel had killed some 1400 Gazans, mostly civilians with nowhere to hide and no means of escape. At the height of this indiscriminate slaughter, the US Congress passed almost unanimously [a resolution in support of Israel's campaign](#) that was mendacious in almost every clause. Given such lock-step support of Israel, even as the IDF was pursuing what the UN's Goldstone report would later establish was a criminal war on an imprisoned population, it became apparent that state institutions would never hold Israel accountable without countervailing pressure from grassroots social movements.

That's why, in January 2009, a handful of US-based scholars launched the [US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#) which calls for the suspension of all collaboration with Israeli academic institutions that are complicit with occupation and discrimination against Palestinians. Boycott was not simply an expression of our very lively disgust at Israel's indiscriminate and overwhelming slaughter. It

was, first and foremost, a response to the [call from Palestinian civil society](#) for boycott, divestment and sanctions on Israel (BDS), directed not to the powers that had consistently and for decades failed them, but to global civil society. We committed to helping shape a social movement that would breach the blockade round Palestine that Israel and its well-funded lobbies had for generations maintained. Those lobbies had succeeded in locking up not only the political process but also the US media that had consistently failed to cover with any accuracy the fate of Palestine and its people. Confronted with this blockade on justice and on information, only a civil society movement, we quixotically believed, could alter the balance of power and shape openings for any possible just peace.

The success of any boycott campaign depends less on the economic or social impact it exerts than on the transformation of public awareness that the campaign itself produces. The boycott movement has already achieved unanticipated successes in various spheres, from the endorsement of academic boycott by professional organizations like the [American Studies Association](#) or the [Teachers Union of Ireland](#) to the [blockade of Israeli ships in US ports](#) during the 2014 assault on Gaza, to the international campaign to get the French global corporation [Veolia](#) to suspend its transportation projects in occupied Palestine. But welcome as these successes have been, their effect on the Israeli economy or the power of its military remains limited. What they have achieved is something rather different, an ongoing transformation of public understanding of Israel's political system and regime of occupation. Boycott campaigns work primarily through educating people—in churches, in schools and colleges, in union halls—about the realities of occupation and discrimination that Palestinians suffer on a daily basis. Gradually, the perception is growing that the occupation is not a defence against intransigent terrorists, but an illegal annexation that dispossesses an indigenous population of its lands and basic rights, and that Israel itself is not a democratic bastion in the Middle East, but a fundamentally racial state, with more than [fifty laws](#) that discriminate against its Palestinian minority.

Meanwhile, daily life for Palestinians is a tedious labyrinth of legal and physical obstacles, from the hundreds of checkpoints and road closures that turn ten-minute journeys into hours-long treks to the permit regime that makes every single project,

from harvesting to medical travel, into a nightmare of arbitrary denials; from the student leader's well-founded dread of "administrative detention" that can be indefinitely renewed to the professor's anxiety about unpredictable but recurrent incursions onto campuses; from the annexation of one's family's or community's land for the illegal settlements that everywhere dominate the landscape to the daily threat of harassment and violence from right-wing settlers protected by the Israeli military. What is astonishing is not the occasional reactive outburst of violence on the part of those systematically oppressed, but the pervasive exercise of patience and persistence that Palestinians display under unimaginably humiliating and frustrating conditions of life.

On a recent trip to Palestine, on which we met with Palestinian scholars and students from some ten or more institutions in Israel and on the West Bank, my colleagues and I witnessed our peers' dismay at what they term *localization*: the cumulative effect of Israeli restrictions on Palestinian freedom of movement is the increasing fragmentation of intellectual life at all levels. Students from Hebron in the south now rarely attend Bir Zeit University near Ramallah: an hour's journey if settlements and the settler-only highways did not protrude into Palestinian land, but now taking several hours via mountainous detours along twisting roads punctuated by checkpoints. At those checkpoints, military violence may flash up at any moment, especially for young Palestinians. To the north, the Palestine Technical University at Tulkarem, the only free and public university in Palestine, used to serve students from all over the West Bank and even Israel. Almost daily Israeli army invasions of the campus have permanently injured twenty students and wounded hundreds more, at times with exploding or [hollow-tipped bullets](#) whose effects we could still witness on a disabled student and a technician some six months after the incident. In consequence of these lethal threats, the university has lost a high proportion of its students from outside the northern region who no longer feel safe there. One student at Bethlehem University told us that the first time she ever met a Palestinian student from anywhere outside her immediate area was when she managed to attend a study program in the United States. Palestinian students are rarely so fortunate. She was one of the few to survive the obstacle race that deters most Palestinians—especially male students—from seeking such opportunities.

Localization destroys the cosmopolitan principles that inform any university, preventing the circulation of people and ideas on which intellectual life and culture thrive. Palestinian scholars and students acutely feel this loss of access to a world of research, archives and learning, within and beyond Palestine. Palestine was always a society with high levels of literacy and a rich artistic and intellectual culture. Israel's regime of occupation is steadily destroying both that rich legacy and the dreams and visions of Palestinian youth. As Mariam, another student at Bethlehem University, put it to us: "We no longer dare to dream. If you have dreams you cannot realize, you cannot live with yourself."

The strangulation that the Occupation imposes on Palestinian life in East Jerusalem and on the West Bank may or may not be intended as a means to ethnic cleansing, but it is certain that the effect of the tight net of regulations and restrictions makes life gradually intolerable. Almost every Palestinian scholar or student we spoke to felt that the malevolent intent of ethnic cleansing was evident in the conditions inflicted on them, driving those who could to leave. This is the [structural violence that is the essential precondition](#) for the explosions of lethal violence that occasionally register in Western media.

What the universities suffer is merely a microcosm of the fragmenting impact of repression and dispossession on Palestinian society as a whole. The impact of localization falls not just on them, but on Palestinian culture as a whole. Palestine was once the hub of ideas, goods and people circulating through West Asia and North Africa: as a professor at Bethlehem reminded us, the ancient caravan route used to pass from Jerusalem through Bethlehem to Hebron and beyond. Now he cannot even travel the twenty minutes from Bethlehem to his former family home in Jerusalem without a special permit. Israel's regime has almost immobilized a people that were once an integral part of a cosmopolitan civilization based on movement and commerce.

The fundamental human right of freedom of movement is increasingly restricted, not only in historic Palestine but also for those in the diaspora, forced as they have been to undergo often successive exiles and denied the right of return by Israeli laws that protect an artificial Jewish majority against an indigenous population that has been dubbed a "[demographic threat](#)". Yet still they persist and refuse to be displaced without a struggle. Israel continues its punitive

and racist regime of occupation and dispossession that is by turns brutally violent and astonishingly ugly in its concern to inflict petty humiliation. It has done so with utter impunity so far. But, as almost every Palestinian affirmed to us, BDS is the last form of non-violent resistance that remains to them and, as such, offers the most promising means to achieve peace with justice against an ever-worsening situation.

But the boycott is not a tactic that Palestinians under Occupation or in Israel can very effectively deploy alone. It is, rather, a tactic that they have called on international civil society to implement. They ask us to respond to their call. If we do not, we too will be complicit, by virtue of our inaction, with the slow and deliberate destruction of Palestinian society and culture and with the daily violence that incrementally and malevolently pursues their elimination.

*David Lloyd is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, and a founding member of the [US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#). He is also a signatory of the [IPSC "Irish Artists' Pledge to Boycott Israel"](#) and has published numerous articles on Palestine and Israel. His most recent critical book is *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). He recently returned from a trip to Palestine with colleagues from the Modern Language Association which will consider a resolution to endorse the boycott of Israeli academic institutions at its annual convention in January 2017.*

'Beautiful resistance' meets cynical culture-washing on Edinburgh Fringe

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

The Edinburgh Fringe's renowned open platform for all forms of artistic expression produced a curious juxtaposition this year, as Palestinians deployed creativity to shatter the bonds of political repression while Israeli state apologists cloaked a discredited political message in threadbare cultural clothing. The gulf between the two was demonstrated in the pages of Scotland's press, the airwaves and in the streets, as well as in performance and display spaces across the city.

A major Fringe hub, the Pleasance Courtyard, was home every lunchtime for a week to *Café Palestine*, featuring Alrowwad, a youth theatre

and dance company from Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem. The fourteen young performers were in Edinburgh as part of an extensive [tour of the UK](#) arranged by the actor/director Justin Butcher with the charity Amos Trust.

They were featured on the BBC's [World Tonight on Aug 23](#) and attracted enthusiastic audiences included the Scottish National Party's spokesman in Westminster, Tommy Sheppard MP. Sheppard praised their energy and passion and said, "It is vital that the Fringe continues to provide a platform for performers to share their experiences, particularly for those who have such an important political message to share."

Butcher partnered Alrowwad with different UK artists daily, contextualising their performances with short films, projected commentary and the eloquent words of the theatre's founder Abdelfattah Abusrour. His aim, he said, was to inspire the young performers with his philosophy of "beautiful resistance". "I want them to live for their country, not die for their country," said Abusrour. Film clips by Phil Chetwynd of the [Network of Photographs for Palestine](#), and [from Scottish TV](#), demonstrate the company's life-affirming vitality. Also included in the Fringe programme were the El-Funoun dance company working with Shams and Marhabtain from Lebanon to [present two separate pieces](#): *The Rooster* and *Partial Memory*.

Photographer Hamde Abu Rahma, from the West Bank village of Bil'in, succeeded this year, unlike last, in persuading the British visa authorities to allow him to accompany his work to Edinburgh. Supported by the Network of Photographers for Palestine, he exhibited his pictures and spoke at a number of venues about his experiences documenting the resistance to Israeli occupation. Abu Rahma's book, *Roots Run Deep*, is dedicated to his cousin Bassem who was killed taking part in peaceful protests. Abu Rahma's family home was raided by the Israeli army while he was in the UK, as [reported in the Herald newspaper](#).

Meanwhile an exhibition outside St John's Church on Princes Street of work by four photographers from Gaza was vandalised – almost every picture deliberately slashed with a razor blade or penknife. Phil Chetwynd from the photographers' network said the power of the pictures remained undiminished and they would continue to exhibit them unrepaid.

[Israel's contribution to the 2016 Fringe](#) was sneaked onto the online programme after the printed version was published in the spring.

The [International Shalom Festival](#) on August 17 was an initiative of COFIS, the Confederation of Friends of Israel Scotland, and StandWithUs – two pro-Israel advocacy organisations that work with the Israeli Embassy to undermine and oppose campaigning work in support of Palestinian rights.

In the past, Israeli artists appearing on the Fringe attracted the attention of pro-Palestinian boycott campaigners because of backing from the Embassy or other state institution. Artists were being used as cover by the state's Brand Israel PR operation. In this case advocacy for the state of Israel was the openly stated purpose and took clear precedence over any artistic goal. Performers were not even named until after the initial public launch which included a [slick PR video featuring Mark Regev](#), Israel's ambassador to the UK. This is the man who, as Israeli government spokesman during the assault on Gaza in 2014, outraged even hardened TV presenters by his insistence that Israel bore no responsibility for the deaths of children slaughtered by its armed forces. And yet Shalom Fest organiser Nigel Goodrich, a Christian Zionist who heads COFIS, repeatedly claimed in newspaper articles that the event was all about dialogue and building bridges and had no connection with the Israeli state.

The [Shalom Fest Facebook page](#) reflects its lacklustre nature and demonstrates who it was targeting for its bridge building exercise – not the Palestinian people with whom Israel is in conflict, but fundamentalist Christian communities in Britain who are largely ignorant of the political realities of the Middle East. These are the groups setting up Friends of Israel organisations like Goodrich's around the country. It can be no coincidence that the Regev video appeared on Revelations TV and the Shalom Fest was hosted by the Baptist Church-owned Central Hall.

Goodrich was allocated [ample space in the Herald newspaper](#) to brand pro-Palestine activists as antisemitic hate-mongers while painting a delusional picture of his propaganda fest as a multicultural cornucopia. This applied even while the paper was [reporting on a protest letter](#) from high profile cultural figures that it had declined to publish! It took many attempts by members of [Edinburgh Action for Palestine](#) (EA4P), working together with [Artists for Palestine UK](#) (APUK), for the Herald to publish a [counterbalancing piece](#). While repeating Goodrich's claims and downgrading the number of artists supporting the Artists Pledge for

Palestine from more than 1000 to 100, it at least included a rational explanation of the protest.

The Herald quotes a Fringe Society spokeswoman saying its open access principles “guarantee artists the freedom to present their work to the public.” This is a commendable principle, but as EA4P and APUK pointed out in posters and leaflets, it is grossly hypocritical for Israel to demand the freedom to present its propaganda to the public while suppressing Palestinian cultural voices and destroying their infrastructure. This was evident to comedian Mark Thomas who visited a city centre display focusing on the case of poet Daren Tatour, one of more than 150 Palestinians arrested between October 2015 and February 2016 for Facebook posts unpalatable to Israeli censors.

These and other protests in the days leading up to the Shalom Festival on August 17 gave Edinburgh residents and festival visitors ample opportunities to learn about Palestinian life, art and resistance. A conference organised by Scottish PSC and a series of [lively street displays and actions](#) attracted activists from all over the UK and beyond. On the day itself the busy traffic intersection outside Central Hall was festooned with flags, banners and placards as supporters of many Palestinian solidarity organisations, from Scottish Jews for a Just Peace to French EuroPalestine, gathered to sing, chant and listen to poems and speeches. It was noisy and exuberant, but entirely non-violent and could only be seen as threatening by friends of Israel determined to ally themselves with a state which regards as incontrovertible its own right to deploy violence with impunity.

Campaigners will be continuing the dialogue opened up this year with the Fringe Society, in order to prevent a repeat of the Shalom Fest travesty. The distinction between artists seeking a platform for self-expression they are largely denied, and a powerful propaganda machine cloaking a political message in cultural garb, must now be clear for all to see.

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Is Zionist a rude word?

Jonathan Rosenhead

“How are we to understand the amazing increase in rhetoric about antisemitism, quite divorced from any actually discernible increase in antisemitism itself?”

Read [the article on opendemocracy](#) published on 3 September 2016.

Jonathan Rosenhead is Emeritus Professor of Operational Research at the London School of Economics and Chair of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

Letter to NATURE

On July 13, 2016, the international journal *Nature-online* published the following letter concerning the distinguished Palestinian astrophysicist, Imad Ahmed Barghouti. (See also BRICUP Newsletters 99 and 101)

Professor Barghouti was arrested and detained without charge by the Israeli military – for the second time in less than 18 months. (see [Nature http://doi.org/bk44;2016](http://doi.org/bk44;2016)). We protest against his imprisonment and renew the call for his release.

Once again it was alleged that that Barghouti made statements on Facebook and on television in opposition to military Israeli attacks and occupation. Subsequent international pressure again contributed to a ruling by the military court of appeals a month later for his release (see go.nature.com/299v9nd). This has not happened. Barghouti has instead been transferred to a facility run by Israel’s internal security service, Shin Bet, for further interrogation.

Signed by 14 international academics.

BRICUP joins ECCP

Sue Blackwell

BRICUP has formally affiliated to the [European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine \(ECCP\)](#).

ECCP is a network of 42 European committees, organizations, NGOs, unions and international solidarity movements from 19 European

countries, dedicated to the struggle of the Palestinian people for freedom, justice and equality. It supports a 'rights-based approach' (focusing on the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people) as opposed to a 'solution-based approach'. Its objectives include:

- The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination as enshrined in international law and relevant UN resolutions
- An end to the 1967 occupation of all Arab lands, particularly the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, and its associated regime
- The right of Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality
- Respect, protection and promotion of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as stipulated in UN Resolution 194
- The unconditional release of all Palestinian prisoners

ECCP aims to achieve these objectives by promoting the BDS campaign, advocating in support of Palestinian prisoners, supporting the Russell Tribunal on Palestine and co-ordinating joint actions and campaigns.

ECCP seeks to put **pressure on European states and EU institutions to respect international law and the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, to take effective action to put pressure on Israel and to deny Israel any preferential status until it complies with international law.**

ECCP's principles and aims overlap so completely with those of BRICUP that affiliation was a no-brainer. The organisation holds regular meetings in Brussels, and BRICUP's delegates - Sue Blackwell, Ghada Karmi and Monica Wusteman - will be taking turns to attend these.

Despite Brexit, campaigners for Palestine are increasing their co-ordination across Europe! We look forward to meeting new comrades and exchanging information and campaigning ideas with other activists.

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

Register as a supporter of BRICUP

You can register as a supporter of BRICUP and of the academic and cultural boycott of Israel [by completing this form](#).

We recognise that many individuals may wish to support our aims by private actions without wishing to be publicly identified. Supporters receive our regular newsletter by email and receive occasional emails giving details of urgent developments and of ways to support our activities. We do not disclose the names of our supporters to anyone outside BRICUP or share them with any other organisation.

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One-off donations may be made by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at Sort Code 08-92-99
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We welcome one-off donations, but we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

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