

BRICUP Newsletter 109

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

April 2017

www.bricup.org.uk

bricup@bricup.org.uk

CONTENTS

P1. To the Palestinian BDS National Committee: Israel's detention of Omar Barghouti will only strengthen the BDS campaign.

The British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.

P2. Legal opinion blasts holes in pro-Israel definition of antisemitism: use it to stop the adoption campaign

Naomi Wimbourne-Idrissi and Mike Cushman

P3. International Law and the State of Israel: Legitimacy, Exceptionalism and Responsibility: Conference report

University of Cork, 31st March- April 2nd

Haim Bresheeth

P6. UK Universities must stop repressing Palestinian activism

Yara Hawari

P8 Manchester students facing disciplinary action over BDS Action

Letter of support from Manchester academics.

P9. Prevent Training in Universities and Palestinian human rights.

A personal account of an encounter with a university's Prevent Training Programme

Israel's detention of Omar Barghouti will only strengthen the BDS campaign

Jonathan Rosenhead, BRICUP Chair.

British supporters of Palestinian human rights will be extremely disturbed to learn that Israeli government agents detained Omar Barghouti on 17 March and interrogated him in custody over five days before releasing him under a gag order.

The Israeli authorities claim to be investigating irregularities in Omar's tax returns. This explanation seems scarcely credible in light of their increasingly frantic efforts to stem the growing tide of support for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel's systematic abuse of Palestinian human rights.

For years, Omar, a long-time Israeli resident and co-founder of the BDS movement, has been a particular target of Israeli hostility. In March 2016, Israeli government ministers attended a large public event where they incited hatred against Omar by naming him and threatening him with "targeted civil elimination", a vague but sinister phrase which can only mean repression by one means or another. They subsequently threatened to revoke his residency rights in Israel, and since his recent detention they have imposed a travel ban on him.

This latest attack on Omar's liberty comes just a few weeks before he intended to visit the United States to receive the Gandhi Peace Award jointly with Ralph Nader in a ceremony at Yale University. The threats, the gag order and the travel ban leave no doubt as to the Israeli government's real motive: to silence Omar and disrupt the BDS movement.

Last year, as the newspaper Haaretz revealed, the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs set up a secret “tarnishing unit” to discredit BDS activists such as Omar Barghouti. It will, however, do nothing to deter British supporters of Palestinian human rights. If anything, it will strengthen their opposition to Israeli’s regime of apartheid, occupation and ethnic cleansing, and their commitment to the ever-expanding, non-violent international movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. As for BRICUP, we will continue to promote the academic and cultural boycott in the UK and across Europe with our partners in ECACBI.

Legal opinion blasts holes in pro-Israel definition of antisemitism: use it to stop the adoption campaign.

Naomi Wimbourne-Idrissi and Mike Cushman

Hugh Tomlinson QC’s [devastating legal opinion](#) on the [IHRA \(mis\)definition](#) of antisemitism marks a watershed moment in resisting Israeli-backed attempts to gag pro-Palestinian advocacy. There is a concerted campaign to get all Universities and Local Authorities to adopt the IHRA definition. It is important that BRICUP supporters and all who want to campaign for Palestinian rights contact their university management and local councillors to warn them of the dangers of adopting the definition: dangers both to free expression and political liberty and to their institutional reputation. This article contains links to resources that will strengthen the arguments you can make to get this dangerous undermining of free speech rebuffed. You can get more information from BRICUP or from Free Speech on Israel via their [website](#) or by [email](#)

The definition, which deliberately equates criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews, was adopted in December 2016 by the UK government and has since been vigorously promoted by pro-Israel lobbyists to local authorities, universities, Labour movement organisations and other public bodies. Its rollout has coincided with an increase in bans and restrictions imposed on pro-Palestinian activities, especially on campus. The definition was used as weapon in the [failed attempt of Israel’s apologists to undermine Israel Apartheid week](#). [Former](#) and distinguished Lord Justice of Appeal Sir Stephen Sedley, explains that this Counsel’s Opinion drives a coach and horses through the definition, exposing it as:

- badly drafted, confusing and not legally binding, i.e. public bodies are under no legal obligation to adopt or apply it
- putting public bodies that use it at risk of “unlawfully restricting legitimate expressions of political opinion”
- making public bodies liable to being sued if they curtail criticism of Israel that does not express hatred towards Jews.

Therefore pro-Palestinian campaigners who, for example, describe Israel as a settler-colonialist state enacting a policy of apartheid, or call for policies of boycott, divestment or sanctions against Israel, cannot properly be characterised as antisemitic.

‘We Believe in Israel’ a fiercely Zionist lobby group has written to all local authorities to get them to formally adopt the definition that they inaccurately described as being ‘very specific about which forms of extreme anti-Israel discourse cross a line and are antisemitic’. The [London Assembly](#) voted to adopt the definition in February with scarcely any debate and clearly intend to constrain discussion about Israel/Palestine. Some local authorities have also hastily adopted the declaration without discussing it with their residents and others are considering whether to follow suit.

Opinion launches at the House of Lords

Free Speech on Israel, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Independent Jewish Voices joined forces to commission the opinion, which was launched in the House of Lords.

The session was chaired by Labour peer Tessa Blackstone, who opened the proceedings by remarking, “Everyone who values free speech regrets the misuse of the IHRA definition.”

BRICUP member Salma Karmi-Ayyoub, a criminal barrister and external consultant for the Ramallah-based Palestinian human rights organisation Al Haq, said the Opinion demonstrates that claims made about the IHRA definition by its proponents are untrue. It is not a legal instrument and it does not permit labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitic. “The government adopted the IHRA definition informally in order to avoid the proper scrutiny required for a legal measure,” said Karmi-Ayyoub, “The Opinion shows the government to have been misguided in adopting a definition so lacking in clarity. Properly interpreted, it says that

conduct expressing hatred of Jews is antisemitic. Logically then, criticising Israel without expressing such hatred cannot be called antisemitic.”

Protect lawful political expression

The Opinion reminds us that public bodies have a duty to facilitate lawful expression of political views even if vociferous or objectionable to some, Karmi-Ayyoub said. Bans or restrictions put in place in response to allegations of antisemitism, without evidence of actual antisemitic behaviour, opens authorities to the charge of failing in their legal duty. If they hold pro-Palestinian events to higher standards than others, they are open to being sued.

Sir Geoffrey Bindman, until recently chair of the British Institute of Human Rights and a former legal adviser to the Race Relations Board and the Commission for Racial Equality, stressed that Israel cannot claim to represent all Jews in its unjust treatment of Palestinians.

“Antisemitism is hatred or disparagement of Jews,” Bindman said. “Israel is an independent political entity. We cannot permit the IHRA definition being used to close meetings critical of Israel on the grounds that such criticism is directed at Jews. It is not.” Both he and Stephen Sedley gave examples of experiences within their own families of genuine antisemitism that was both hurtful and shocking. Both were adamant that confronting antisemitism was at the heart of their approach. But it was clearly not the priority of those disseminating the IHRA definition.

Danger of implicating all Jews in “the excesses of Zionism”

Sedley expressed his concern about misuse of the concept of antisemitism for the political purpose of prohibiting or inhibiting “discourse or action inimical to the state of Israel.” He noted two “backstories” underpinning this misuse. One is the attempt over some years to uncouple antisemitism from racism in general. The other is the Zionist claim to represent all the world’s Jews. “Nothing suits Islamic fundamentalism better,” Sedley said, “than the idea that all Jews are equally implicated in the excesses of Zionism.”

“The adoption by government of the IHRA’s ‘working definition’ does not clothe it with any legal force,” he added. It was, however, not neutral and could influence policy both domestically and internationally. Sedley stated that no policy can be adopted or used “in defiance of the law.” Individuals’ statutory right of free

expression, for example in higher education institutions, “cannot be cut back by governmental policies.” He advised “a principled retreat on the part of government from a stance which it has naively adopted...”

In the discussion that followed, BRICUP chair Jonathan Rosenhead, speaking for Free Speech on Israel, said there were many examples of the IHRA definition already creating a “chilling effect” on institutions’ willingness to permit lawful political activity, even when the definition was not specifically cited. Bindman, Sedley and Karmi-Ayyoub advised the groups commissioning the Opinion to research and prepare dossiers on the policies being used by the police, universities and other public bodies as the basis for possible future legal challenge. Karmi-Ayyoub said a successful case brought against an institution curtailing campaigning on behalf of Palestinians, without showing evidence of hatred of Jews, was the best way to deter others. “Banning Palestinian activities needs to be shown to be a costly undertaking,” she said.

Summing up on behalf of all four groups, PSC Director Ben Jamal said campaigners for Palestine faced a global threat from various forms of “lawfare” based on conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism. “They want to spread the message that it is best not to debate Palestine for fear of contravening the definition.” He stressed the importance of keeping discussion about Palestine centre stage. “Our views are mainstream, not extreme or fringe, whatever our opponents claim,” Jamal said.

There is more background in a [press release](#) issued ahead of the launch.

International Law and the State of Israel: Legitimacy, Exceptionalism and Responsibility: Conference report

University of Cork, 31st March- April 2nd

Haim Bresheeth.

After more than two long years of trying hold this crucial conference focused on International Law and Israeli legitimation, and being twice rejected by Southampton University, two High Court hearings, and many attacks by the Israel lobby, it took place at last in Cork, Ireland, between Friday 31st March and April 2nd, 2017. The first two days were held at Cork Town Hall, and the last day at University College, Cork.

Having taken part in many hundreds of academic conferences, I have found it to be the best I have ever attended and participated in. The preparation work by the organising committee of Prof. Oren Ben Dor, Prof. George Bisharat, Prof. Suleiman Sharkh and their colleagues was a model of careful and sensitive planning. From the many proposals sent, the organisers have selected an outstanding collection of papers from all over the world, and carefully weaved the papers into a number of main strands. As a result, the sessions were all very exciting and informative, with presenters complementing each other's work, and with debates emerging, and arguments building up and developing throughout the three days, and, as usual in conferences, at lunch, dinner and breakfast...

After two years in which arguments were vicariously made by Southampton University as well as the organs of the Israel lobby about the great security risks this conference was supposedly posing, it was illustrative to witness the orderly, serious, good-willed and positive manner in which this excellent conference was held and conducted. All sessions were chaired capably and amicably by academics for SU and UCC, and there was never any threat to safety and security of the event, despite some lame attempts of the 'agents' of the lobby to do so. There was not one incident in which someone had to be removed from the hall, or warned by the Chair. The hundreds of participants (I think around 300) were deeply involved in the discussions and contributed through Q&A sessions, and every speaker has pointed out the great value of the conference. Organisation was nothing short of exemplary, and this contributed to an atmosphere of commitment and intellectual investment.

That this was the first of its kind was very clear, and was also clear to the Israel lobby - the unique importance of this gathering was the reason they have tried so hard to stop the conference at Southampton. They were certainly right about its importance to the future debate about all the issues pertaining to the legitimacy, or rather, the lack thereof, of the Israeli state. From the first keynote address, given by Prof. Richard Falk, to the very last presentation on the Sunday, the multifarious aspects of Israel's crimes and lack of legitimacy, the uses and abuses of legal systems in the struggle to justify illegal and immoral actions by the Israeli state were carefully examined by some 70 academics and jurists from across the globe.

It is difficult to give a comprehensive description of such complex dynamics in a short report, so I shall try and describe some of the highlights, and also draw a simple map of the main arguments. The conference was divided into three broad themes, and papers were grouped under the headings: Legitimacy, Exceptionalism and Responsibility.

Legitimacy

The first two sessions, as well as the opening keynote, by Prof. Richard Falk, have dealt with issues of legitimacy. The keynote covered this focus from the period of the Balfour Declaration until the current impasse, and ended with a short description of the recent UN report, written by Richard Falk and Virginia Tilly, which has been withdrawn a short while after it was placed on the UN website, owing to Israeli and Lobby pressure on the General Secretary, and leading to the resignation of the UN official Rima Khalaf, the ESCWA Leader; Ms Khalaf could not accept the removal of the report, and resigned in anger: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/official-resigns-israel-apartheid-report-170317182241142.html>

In a sense, this cycle of events has proven beyond doubt that Israel and its international lobbies will stop at nothing in order to silence information about the nature and brutality of its occupation. As the report has pointed out that Israel occupation regime is an apartheid regime, Israel has again pressurized the UN General Secretary, together with the Trump administration, resulting in the withdrawal of the report. This changes nothing – the report stands as before, and one can read it on many other sites, including: <https://www.scribd.com/document/342202464/Israeli-Practices-towards-the-Palestinian-People-and-the-Question-of-Apartheid>

An article dealing with the withdrawal, Israel Is an Apartheid State (Even if the UN Report Has Been Withdrawn) can be found on: <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2017/03/31/israel-is-an-apartheid-state-even-if-the-un-report-has-been-withdrawn/>

Prof. Falk lecture was clear about the role of the continued illegalities in the history of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, and the fact that when a state such as Israel breaks the law – for example through refusal to let the 1948 Nakba refugees back to their homes, or by refusing to carry out UN resolutions demanding that it withdraws from territories occupied in 1967, it rest assured that nothing will happen to it, being

the protégé of the US and other western nations; this is in contra-distinction to other states' fate when they act against UN resolutions, such as Serbia or Iraq, for example, where armed attacks were agreed by the UN in order to force such rogue states to carry out the relevant resolutions. The keynote has been a perfect setting off point for the conference, and repeated reference was made to it during the other sessions.

The next session was a direct continuation of this argument. Speakers bar one, Prof. Geoffrey Alderman, related to the various aspects of Israel's refusal to follow either resolution 181 which partitioned Palestine or the later resolution 191 which called upon Israel to immediately return the refugees to their homes. Arguments were based on the two refusals to carry out international UN resolutions as a delegitimizing of Israel existence. Prof. Alderman, a staunch Zionist, has elected to deny the rights of the Palestinians by arguing that he is concerned only with the rights of Jews in Palestine and based those on the Balfour Declaration which, of course, was neither a legal nor moral document and has no standing as Britain did not control Palestine at the time it was issued. The mild and ineffectual parts of the Declaration purporting to protect the rights and status of the 'current inhabitants' of the country were of course ignored by Britain, a fact to which he preferred to ignore.

In the same session, very strong argument were made by Dr. Ghada Karmi and Dr. Blake Alcot on the illegitimacy of the Israeli state, based on its continued refusal to abide by international law, UN resolutions and other international treaties, such as the Geneva Convention. Such consistent illegal behaviour was used in other cases to delegitimize the states in question, and led to UN-sanctioned armed attacks in order to return the rule of law. They argued that the license given to Israel to ignore international law is weakening and discrediting a whole system of law.

Other speakers in the second session of this thread carefully mapped the complex role of international law, supposed to reinforce the rule of law and decision by the UN, but in practice is part of the problem, or even the main problem which bedevils Palestine.

Exceptionalism

This thread, run over two days, included three sessions and the second keynote address. The central paper here was delivered by one of the organisers, Prof. Oren Ben Dor, who has examined the two related concepts, in his mind –

that of Israeli exceptionalism (after Giorgio Agamben) which assists Israel in avoiding international law by claiming exceptional circumstances, and the background notion of separateness, a key concept in Jewish and Zionist self-identification, based on the biblical claim to be the 'chosen people'. Indeed, other speakers in this thread, such as Ronnen Ben Arie, accepted Ben Dor's reading that it is difficult to separate the two concepts and that separateness is at the heart of the conflict, and thus has spoken of the opposite tendency, which is the conscious coming together of activists from both communities in order to question and undermine the racism of both separateness and exceptionalism. This theme was also related to by Prof. Jim Bowen, and Ofra Yeshua-Lyth, both who have challenged the separatism which leads to Apartheid realities based of the perceived need to live in a closed Jewish-only society, with both supporting the pluralism of the single state, which was rejected as an option by the biased UN membership of 1947.

The crowning glory of this thread was the keynote by Prof. Ugo Mattei, a Comparative Law scholar. In his broad and comprehensive examination of international law he aimed to prove that the law, far from being the solution is, in most cases, the problem – western and westernised legal system being the yardstick by which all other, older systems are both judged, and ultimately, either ignored or totally rejected as legal systems. This Eurocentric, biased systemic approach has been the main reason for the exceptionalism which Israel has been able to use, and by which it remains immune to legal challenge through its U-backed impunity. The fact that international law is normally benefitting the strong and mighty is a feature of the societies which produced it, and should be challenged, argued Mattei. He supported an earlier argument by one of the speakers, Haitam Suleiman, who spoke of the role played by Sharia law in the area of the Moslem Wakf – a pre-capitalist as well as anti-capitalist set of measures which protects communal life by disallowing the commercial sale of Wakf properties. Both argued for the return to some of the earlier, communal systems of law, which were there to protect the life of communities rather than the globalised property owners.

Responsibility

This thread contained five sessions. I am unable to report back on the last two, as I had to leave by lunchtime due to flight times. The first session included four excellent presentations by four legal

activists: Prof. Robert Wintemute, Ardi Imseis, Dr. Jeff Handmaker and Salma Karimi-Ayyoub. They had taken their cue from Prof. Mattie, and examined in great detail and candidness the potential and difficulties of ‘legal mobilisation’ – using the law to defend the poor and weak, or looked at otherwise – the opposite of the Zionist concept of lawfare. This was an especially exciting and motivating session, indeed.

The role of religion in Zionist and anti-Zionist identity and argumentation was examined by another panel, on the Sunday morning, where Dr. Hatem Bazian examined the role of such concepts in the development of modern Zionism through looking at the work of Rabbi Kook and his influence on the most extreme Settlers today. Prof. Yakov Rabkin examined the Judaic challenges to Zionism, through the various narratives of extra-Orthodox opposition to Zionism and to the state of Israel. Prof. Haim Bresheeth spoke of the change from old anti-Semitism of the old fascist right, to the new alliance by fascist and Alt-Right regimes and Israel, and their common support of Islamophobia in the west. Prof. Joel Kovel provided an ecosocialist critique of the Zionist colonial project.

The last session I was present at was quite amazing, with Dr. Salman Abu-Sitta, the famous Palestinian city planner presenting his argument for the Palestinian Return (Awda) through a sophisticated and effective as well as visually superior map presentation. He used the maps to prove that the arguments against the return are false – most of the destroyed villages were not built upon, and can easily fit between existing Israeli habitations. He also proved the viability of the building programme for 5 million returnees, and calculated that it will cost half of the annual US support of Israel, but of course will be only spent once! This presentation was so elating and persuasive, that it led to a standing ovation. The following paper was also based on the work done by the De-Colonizer group headed by Eytan Bronstein, who presented the new map of the Nakba, a project taking a number of years, and adding a crucial resource for research, learning and political activity. In Israel, this map serves the increasing number of visits by groups of Israelis and Palestinians who are returning to the destroyed villages and towns together.

The last point I would like to report on is probably the most important. Halfway through the first day of the conference, it was decided to hold a closed meeting of all Israelis and Palestinian

participants, so as to see if some foundation can be built up for future collaboration. The meeting was held at the Clayton Hotel, near the conference venue, included between 32 and 38 participants during its 100 minutes, around 60 % Palestinians and the rest Israelis; it ended up by electing a working caucus group of ten people, which will be working on documentation, web-presence, a blog, and the parameters for extending the work of the group to a much wider group of Israelis and Palestinians who will work for the furthering of the co-existence agenda – not the sham co-existence we know from the 1980s in Israel/Palestine but the working together towards a political solution which excludes Zionism, colonialism and Apartheid and is based on total equality, democratic society and the return of the refugees. For now, as we are starting to work on the programme, reporting has to be limited to the guidelines laid in our meeting, but I assume we shall be reporting soon on further and more precise developments, and will also invite other Israelis and Palestinians to join us. This is an exciting project, complex as it will be, and most have left the meeting with great enthusiasm and commitments. Let us hope that even before the organisers start working on the conference anthology, this political coming-together will become the first result of this special conference.

Zionist organisations and the Lobby have tried to stop this conference for 30 months; They have perceived its ‘great danger’ - the coming together of academics and activists from both communities to analyse, inform and combine in action. They have failed. The organisers have succeeded, despite the odds and difficulties, in putting together exactly such a conference – learning from the past and present, but pointing towards the common future. We should all be grateful for their great efforts, which proved the value of all this hard work.

UK Universities must stop repressing Palestinian activism.

Yara Hawari

To commemorate Land Day, UK students have launched ‘Don’t Punish Protest’ to push back against university repression of Palestinian activism.

On 30 March 1976, Palestinians across historic Palestine rallied against the Israeli state’s plans to appropriate 2,000 hectares of their land in the Galilee. Exasperated by the state’s continuous

settler colonial expansion and subjugation of the Palestinian citizens, mass demonstrations were held not only in the Galilee, but also in the Naqab, the West Bank, Gaza and in the diaspora communities. Importantly, however, this was one of the first collective, organised and popular Palestinian actions against the state from within the 1948 borders.

The main protests took place in three villages in the Galilee: Sakhnin, Arabeh and Deir Hana. They later became known as the Land Day Triangle. In response to these demonstrations, the Israeli army and police attacked the protests with serious military force, killing six Palestinians - Khayr Muhammad Yasin, Raja Hussein Abu Riya, Khader Abd Khalil, Khadija Juhayna, Muhammad Yusuf Taha and Rafat Zuhairi - and injuring hundreds.

Land Day, for many Palestinians inside Israel, was a turning point in their relations with and attitudes towards the state. Where before, many had been fighting for civic equality within the system, the brutal response of the Israeli forces and the indifferent reaction from the Israeli public to their plight demonstrated with certainty that equality would never be achieved under Zionist rule.

Against repression

Today, in commemoration of Land Day and its legacy of resistance and organising, students at various UK universities protested the repression of Palestine activism on campuses this year.

The repression reached a crescendo during Israeli Apartheid Week in late February, when following [a leaked letter from Jo Johnson](#), the minister for universities, several events were cancelled by university administrations. At the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) a lecture on BDS was cancelled and similarly at the University of Exeter a mock checkpoint was not permitted to go ahead despite receiving the necessary permissions.

At the University of Manchester, two students are currently facing a disciplinary hearing after carrying out a banner drop reading "Stop Arming Israel" in an attempt to draw attention to the university's violation of its own ethical investment policy.

The student activists claim that the university violates this policy by holding investments in companies such as Caterpillar, which supplies the armoured bulldozers for the Israel Defence

Forces, and vehicles used to raze Palestinian homes in the occupied territories.

This repression of Palestine activists mirrors crackdowns on other progressive student activists as well, in particular those who raise questions of accountability to the university administrations over student fees and university investments.

In support of these students and activist groups, a nationwide campaign entitled "Don't Punish Protest" has been launched. Students at the University of Sussex did a banner drop on Tuesday, at the University of Manchester students held a protest on Wednesday in support of the two facing disciplinary action, while Exeter University activists held a "die-in" and also carried out a banner drop today.

Palestinian students in the UK and their allies also released a statement asserting their right to protest the Israeli apartheid regime on UK campuses, and demanding that university administrations cease their efforts to punish and block such protests.

Cracks in the regime?

In Palestine, Land Day has been commemorated every year since 1976. Emphasising the inseparable connection between the Palestinian people and their land, Palestinians not only protest the ongoing settler colonial project, they also plant trees as an act of resistance.

In the Galilee this afternoon, (March 30th) thousands marched between the villages of the Land Day Triangle carrying pictures of martyrs and chanting "long live Palestine". In Nablus, activists attempted to plant trees to be met by brutal attacks by Israeli army forces. Forty-five people are said to have been injured by rubber bullets and tear gas.

The commemoration of Land Day in 2017 is a reminder that the displacement and oppression of Palestinians is an ongoing settler colonial process. We are now coming up to 69 years since the settler-colonial project in Palestine was institutionalised as the state of Israel, and 50 years since Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights. This year also marks 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, the British document that guaranteed the establishment of a Jewish homeland in the place of Palestine.

In this context, Land Day's legacy of resistance and organising remains as important today as ever. Indeed, on Tuesday (28th March) as part of Palestine Awareness Week at George Washington University, renowned academic and activist

Angela Davis [declared](#): "This is the South Africa moment for the Palestinian people."

The extensive and aggressive attempts to shut down Palestine student activism on campuses, not just in the UK but also in the US, might indeed mean that Israel's apartheid regime is cracking.

Yara Harawi is a British Palestinian scholar-activist, currently a final year PhD Candidate at the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Exeter.

Manchester students facing disciplinary action over BDS Action

Manchester University has become the latest of several UK academic institutions accused of suppressing student activism in support of the Palestinian people. In this case, two students have been disciplined for their part in an event to mark Israeli Apartheid Week. A banner reading 'Stop Arming Israel' was dropped from a campus building as part of the ongoing campaign by the student BDS movement against the university's violation of its own ethical investment policy through its ties to companies involved in producing equipment for the Israeli army.

Seventy-seven Manchester academics, backed by their unions, have condemned the ongoing disciplinary action against the students in a letter to Nancy Rothwell, the University President, and Paul Redmond, the Director of Student Life. They backed the student action and call on the University to end its hypocritical attitude to ethics and divest from firms complicit in the Israeli apartheid regime.

The letter is printed below followed by a press release from the students themselves. The two students at the centre of the action do not want to disclose their names pending the outcome of the disciplinary measure, which has yet to be announced.

Dear Dame Nancy and Dr Redmond,

Two of our students from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) Movement are facing disciplinary hearings this week (29th March) due to carrying out a banner drop on the Samuel Alexander building which read 'Stop Arming Israel'.

This action occurred on March 2nd as part of the activities of Israeli Apartheid Week. The students drew attention to the University of Manchester's contravention of its own Policy for Socially

Responsible Investment in investing in companies such as Caterpillar, who supply armoured bulldozers for the Israel Defence Forces, vehicles used to raze Palestinian homes in the occupied territories, and in collaborating with Technion Institute of Technology, leaders in the research and development of hi-tech weaponry for the IDF.

Such investments and collaborations by the University lend credibility and infrastructural support to Israel's occupation, a regime 'sustained by the same three pillars of apartheid that were once maintained in South Africa: the designation of a racialized identity with preferential legal status (whites in South Africa, Jews in Israel and the occupied territories); the fragmentation of territory for the purposes of segregation and domination; and the maintenance of "security" laws directed against one population (blacks, Palestinians) for the protection of the racially privileged group' (Saree Makdisi, 'Architectures of Erasure', *Critical Inquiry*, 2010). Indeed, as Makdisi continues, the structure of apartheid is even more complete in the occupied territories, for its function here is not to control, circulate, and exploit black labour within society, but to separate, contain, and remove Palestinians in the onward expansion of Israel's land-grab.

The University should applaud these two students for drawing attention to the hypocrisy of abetting Israel's apartheid regime while professing a socially responsible investment policy. Instead, we see with dismay that they are to be subject to disciplinary hearings.

We the undersigned members of the academic community at the University of Manchester appeal to you in the strongest terms: 1) to withdraw completely the threat to discipline these students; 2) to make swift moves to divest the University from firms that abet the apartheid regime of Israel; and 3) to meet the University's obligation to respond to the two Freedom of Information requests by the BDS Movement (due on 3rd and 7th April) to present publicly the full extent of the University's financial involvement with companies who invest in Israel.

Yours sincerely,

***Manchester UCU Executive Committee,
UNISON, University of Manchester, Plus 77 academics***

Prevent Training in Universities and Palestinian human rights.

A personal account of an encounter with a university's Prevent Training Programme

Jo Tomalin, Senior Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University

This is a brief personal account of my encounter with my university's Prevent training, and my attempts to raise issues about the ways in which I felt it unhelpfully associated support for Palestinian human rights with extremism.

As academic teaching staff I was recently required to complete this training in online form. (It is also delivered to face to face groups, using the same materials on Powerpoint.) The materials are in the form of a series of slides. The participant is encouraged to reflect on various issues, and offered certain definitions and descriptions of their legal duties under the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security act. The earlier slides of the training attempt to negotiate a balancing act between the importance of academic freedom and the duty to watch for potential radicalisation. A section on extremism gives a government definition as:

"vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces."

The next slide, headed "Extremism" states:

" Below is a list of contentious topics. Do you think these are extremist?"

Anti-immigration?

Pro-life?

Anti-vivisection?

Vocal support for Palestine?

Opposition to Israeli settlements in Gaza?

Opposition to gay marriage?

Criticism of wars in the Middle East?

Rise of terrorism as result of foreign policy?

Opposition to Prevent?"

My immediate response to this slide was to wonder why an attempt to balance different kinds of contentious views included two items about support for Palestinian human rights. One of these was now so uncontroversial that even the

Israeli government had agreed with it since 2005, when it withdrew all settlements from Gaza. I also wondered briefly how Palestinian rights could be supported in a non-vocal manner. If the aim was balance around contentious views, why hadn't an item also been included on the lines of "Support for Israeli bombing of Gaza?" It seemed that for any contentious issue, only one side had been selected as potentially extreme.

The next slide moves away from allowing the reader to make up their own mind. It implies that everything on the previous list is an example of potential extremism when it states, under a heading "Extremist views",

"the holding of any of these views is legitimate provided they are not expressed or furthered by statements, deeds or actions which result in the harassment, intimidation or threats of violence against individuals or society itself."

The last item on this slide is: *"It is therefore important that universities have appropriate policies in place for assessing and managing the risks around events where extremist views may be vocalised."*

It is hard not to conclude that one aim of the slides was to direct excessive scrutiny to any events organised in support of Palestinian human rights, while directing no such scrutiny to events supporting Israeli government policy. In fact I had recently heard that an event organised in the university with the Israeli academic, Ilan Pappé, who supports Palestinian rights, speaking on "Palestine in the Trump era" had had its booking queried on the grounds that it needed extra scrutiny, and that the organisers were having to devote time and attention to finding an alternative site in case the booking was refused. This seemed to me a direct result of the message of these particular slides, and the association of support for Palestinian human rights with extremism.

I wrote to the Vice Chancellor, explaining the problems that I had found with the slides, and arguing:

" I think it is really important that the training states clearly that support for human rights in Palestine (vocal or otherwise) is not an extremist position, but in fact a strong expression of the best humanitarian values, of the kind that the training seeks to call British. I think both the statements need to be removed from the list of extremist views. To have any hope of influencing the radicalisation of young Muslims, university personnel need to be well-informed about the

abuses of human rights in Palestine, and able to show that British values have real meaning in engaging with that debate. Knee-jerk categorisation of any support for Palestinian rights as potential terrorism will have exactly the opposite effect. I am really saddened by this incident, and somewhat ashamed of my university."

The Vice Chancellor briefly acknowledged my letter, and then passed the matter on to a Chief Operating Officer responsible for the training. The officer informed me that the slides used in the online training were based on materials from the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, and were being used in many universities. (There is a link here: <https://www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/programmes-events/prevent.cfm> on the Leadership Foundation's involvement.) He noted "I recognise the importance of getting terminology right in this area, and I also think we could improve some of the language on the slides to reduce any risk of misinterpretation. I will follow this up with the training team". He also stated that he didn't believe there had been any suggestion of cancelling the Ilan Pappé event, but it had needed to go through the correct procedures with the Board of Governors agreed in the previous year, but that he had now confirmed that he was happy with it.

We then had some further correspondence, but he would not reply to my questions about why there were two examples on Palestine, including the hugely outdated one on Israeli settlements in Gaza, other than to state that these came from the Leadership Foundation, nor to my suggestions for more appropriate examples ("If there does need to be mention of Palestine (and I am really not sure why there should be), surely the balanced version of the statement with a possible extremist connotation would be 'vocal support for violent action in support of Palestine or Israel.'"), simply stating that the wording would be changed to avoid ambiguity: "underlining the key message of slides 11 and 12 that holding strong views on contentious issues is legitimate; the risks arise in relation to how views are expressed or furthered."

The changes in the slides have now been applied: the item on Gaza has been removed, and the slide following the list is no longer headed "*Extremist views*" but instead "*Understanding the Risks*". This shows that it is worth taking up these points, though it can be a long struggle for small changes. I intend to continue this particular struggle, pushing for the item on 'vocal support for

Palestine' either to be removed, or joined by a similar item on support for Israel. It would be good if people in other universities could check the materials use in their Prevent training and also respond to them.

Notices

Speakers: BRICUP is 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.

Financial support for BRICUP

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 justanding order form](#) here.

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

Account Number 65156591

IBAN = GB20 CPBK 0892 9965 1565 91

BIC = CPBK GB22 .

If you use this mechanism, please confirm the transaction by sending an explanatory email to treasurer@bricup.org.uk