

BRICUP Newsletter 113

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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The alphabet of oppression and liberation

Jonathan Rosenhead

PalExpo, an extraordinary celebration of Palestinian life, culture and (yes) politics, was held over two days in July, just across the road from Westminster Abbey. Despite energetic attempts from Zionist supporters to get it banned from the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, even the usually compliant government minister Sajid Javid couldn't quite bring himself to do that. Maybe the credible threat of legal action by the organisers, Friends of Al Aqsa, was persuasive.

All 4 floors of the building were thronged on both days with participants in festive mood, singly and in groups and families, in western and Middle Eastern dress. There was delicious food of course, and hundreds of stalls selling delicacies and craft items, and offering information and enrolment. BRICUP had a stall, as did Artists for Palestine UK (APUK), Free Speech on Israel, Jews for Justice for Palestinians and many more. BRICUP sold all the copies of our booklet Why Boycott Israeli Universities? (but we have more in stock). APUK sold out of The Case for a Cultural Boycott of Israel.

A range of PalExpo speaker sessions addressed aspects of the Israel/Palestine situation, both in plenary and in parallel. BRICUP, with Free Speech on Israel and support from APUK, contributed an event in a unique format, under the title Breaking Taboos: What Israel does not want you to hear. We offered a virtual A to Z of the attack on free expression about the Israel/Palestine situation, from A is for Apartheid through to Z is for Zionism. The room was packed out with an enthusiastic audience of around 200 spilling out into the corridors as

comic Mark Thomas, assisted by Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, compered the show.

The format was that audience members selected a letter of their choice, and then one from a panel of well informed and committed ‘experts’ gave a (mostly) pithy and often witty account of the real significance of the corresponding term, and of the attempts to suppress its open discussion. As one example, lets look at I – standing for Israel’s Right to Exist. The response went something like

We are allowed to talk about this – but not if we question it. Israel’s supporters see this as absolute: it would be antisemitic, they say, to deny Israel the right that every other country has. Or would it? First, no country has a right to exist – they either exist or they don’t. Does Yugoslavia, which broke up in the early 90’s have a right to exist? Does Mercia RIP for 1100 years? Second, Zionism took the land occupied by the Palestinians – but doesn’t Palestine have a right to exist? Third, if the issue of two nations on one piece of land is resolved by a new binational state (whatever its name) would Israel then exist or not? Does Mercia ‘exist’ now it is subsumed in Britain?

OK, its hard to capture exactly what was presented in front of an eagerly appreciative audience. And the people doing the presenting weren’t reading from a script – they were communicating.

Most of the 9 presenters had a BRICUP and/or Free Speech on Israel affiliation, but there were others from further afield. Sunaina Maira of USACBI (the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel) responded to B is for Boycott, O is for Occupation, and P is for Palestinians, while Israeli activist Ronnie Barkan handled D is for Divestment, V is for (Mordechai) Vanunu, and Y is for Yafa. I cant summarise what was said about the concept corresponding to each letter (and anyhow we had alternatives for quite a few of them - Israel has been very generous in this respect). But don’t despair – the event was such a success we may well stage it again from time to time.

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UK Government’s Anti-BDS Pension Guidance Declared Unlawful

Robert Wintemute.

On 22 June 2017, Sir Ross Cranston, sitting in the England and Wales High Court (Administrative Court), delivered his judgment in *R. (on the application of Palestine Solidarity Campaign Limited and Jacqueline Lewis) v. Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*, [2017] EWHC 1502 (Admin), <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2017/1502.html>, a judicial review of statutory guidance, *Guidance on preparing and maintaining an investment strategy statement* ("the guidance"), which the defendant Secretary of State published on 15 September 2016. The guidance, which governs the investment strategy for the local government pension scheme, permits ethical and social objections to a particular investment, but prohibits "... using pension policies to pursue boycotts, divestment and sanctions [BDS] against foreign nations and UK defence industries ... other than where formal legal sanctions, embargoes and restrictions have been put in place by the [UK] Government", and "pursuing policies that are contrary to UK foreign policy or UK defence policy". The guidance prohibits an investment strategy with an element of BDS, even if it would not involve significant financial risk to the pension scheme and irrespective of member support for the investment strategy.

Sir Ross Cranston stressed at the outset that the case was about the legality of the guidance, not the political merits of the two sides’ arguments. He described the claimants as objecting “to the limiting effect of the guidance on their ability to campaign around the investment of local government pension funds affecting the Palestinian people and the Occupied Territories”, and Ms. Lewis as wishing, “as a matter of conscience, to influence how the pension monies she has earned are invested”. He listed three concerns of the UK Government: “local government pension funds should not be involved in such political issues because of the mixed messages it might give abroad; because it might undermine community cohesion at home by legitimising anti-Semitic or racist attitudes and attacks (although it accepts that anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian campaigning is not in itself anti-Semitic); and because it could impact adversely on the financial success of UK defence industries.”

An important aspect of the rule of law in a democratic society is that the executive must have legal authority for everything that it does. The Secretary of State argued that the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 (an Act of the UK Parliament) authorised the making of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Management and Investment of Funds) Regulations 2016, which in turn authorised the publication of the guidance. Sir Ross Cranston observed that “the regulation-making powers conferred by the [2013 Act] can only be exercised for pensions purposes”. Similarly, “the power to make guidance under the 2016 Regulations ... may only be exercised for pensions purposes. Yet ... the parts of the guidance the claimants challenge were not issued in the interests of the proper administration and management of the local government pension scheme from a pensions perspective, but are a reflection of broader political considerations, including a desire to advance UK foreign and defence policy, to protect UK defence industries and to ensure community cohesion.”

He concluded that “the flaw in the Secretary of State's approach is that the guidance has singled out certain types of non-financial factors, concerned with foreign/defence and the other [BDS] matters ..., and stated that administering authorities cannot base investment decisions upon them. In doing this I cannot see how the Secretary of State has acted for a pensions' purpose. Under the guidance, these factors cannot be taken into account even if there is no significant risk of causing financial detriment to the scheme and there is no good reason to think that scheme members would object. Yet the same decision would be permissible if the non-financial factors taken into account concerned other matters, for example, public health, the environment, or treatment of the workforce. In my judgment the Secretary of State has not justified the distinction drawn between these and other non-financial cases by reference to a pensions' purpose. In issuing the challenged part of the guidance he has acted for an unauthorised purpose and therefore unlawfully.”

PSC and Ms. Lewis have won the first round, but the Secretary of State is appealing Sir Ross Cranston's judgment to the England and Wales Court of Appeal. Even if the claimants were to succeed there and in the UK Supreme Court, the UK Parliament could theoretically override a final judgment in their favour by providing express statutory authority for the guidance. However, lack of parliamentary time, because of efforts to

organize the UK's exit from the European Union, and lack of political support for central government interference with the investment strategy of the local government pension scheme, might preclude an amendment to the 2013 Act.



Sir Patrick Bateson FRS- an Appreciation

Steven Rose- Founder member of BRICUP .

When, in 2002, Hilary Rose and I sought signatures for our letter to The Guardian urging a moratorium on EU- funded research collaboration with Israel – the forerunner of the PACBI boycott call and the creation of BRICUP - Pat Bateson was one of the first we called on, and The Guardian gave him prominence amongst the names it highlighted. Scarcely surprising, as Sir Patrick Bateson FRS, who died last month, aged 79, was an eminent academic and academic administrator, for fifteen years Provost of King's College Cambridge, sometime vice president of the Royal Society and president of the Zoological Society, along with numerous other academic honours. He was also amongst our oldest friends, and a close research collaborator with me for a decade in the 1960s and 70s.

Quintessentially an English academic, even though by birth three quarters Norwegian, Pat's familial antecedents included both the inventor of the term genetics, William Bateson, and the anthropologist Gregory Bateson. He was an ethologist, to use a slightly old-fashioned term, at home as much in the wild, observing his favourite subjects, mainly birds – as we discovered on a memorable trip with him and his zoologist daughter Melissa to the Galapagos - as he was in the lab as an experimentalist and Director of Cambridge's department of animal behaviour. His central interest lay in development and in the role of play in helping young animals learn about their environment and how to respond to its challenges. His focus on development, not as a passive process but one in which the infant organism is an active player, led him to eschew the reductionism of genetic determinism and of simplistic terms such as instinct (“Taking the stink out of instinct” was one of his favoured sayings.) He was also fascinated by the close relations humans themselves have with other companion species; he and his wife Dusha bred Russian Blue and Egyptian Maus cats.

Gentle and courteous as Pat always appeared, he was a principled liberal, and not afraid of inviting controversy. Nonetheless, he was shaken by the abuse – depressingly familiar to all of us involved in the moratorium and later boycott movement - that he received after the Guardian letter. He described it as even worse than he had experienced after his report on deer hunting with dogs to the National Trust, which concluded that it was a cruel practice and indeed caused the deer to suffer. Then, he said, he was assaulted at Cambridge railway station by an irate opponent threatening to beat him over the head with an umbrella.

He was saddened by the response of some of his Oxbridge colleagues to his support for the moratorium call, but this did not prevent him in 2015 from being one of the early signatories to the Academic Commitment on Palestine, in whose launch BRICUP played a major role. Pat's death is a sad loss, and we will miss him greatly.

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News from BDS Portugal - Portuguese photographers launch Israel boycott pledge- News from BDS Portugal (<https://www.facebook.com/BDS.Portugal/>)

On World Photography Day, over 40 Portuguese photographers, teachers of photography and photography students have launched a pledge not to accept professional invitations or financing from the State of Israel and to refuse to collaborate with Israeli cultural institutions complicit in Israel's regime of occupation, colonialism and apartheid.

The pledge is the first of its kind and follows similar pledges to boycott Israel culturally by hundreds of high-profile artists in the [US](#), [UK](#), [South Africa](#), [Canada](#), [Switzerland](#) and France. The photographers pledge to boycott Israel until it "complies with international law and respects the human rights of Palestinians."

Among the pledge supporters are João Pina, winner of the 2017 Prémio Estação Imagem Viana do Castelo, Portugal's only photojournalism award and Nuno Lobito, TV personality and one of the most travelled

Portuguese of all times (204 countries, 193 recognised).

The pledge comes in response to the 2004 [call from Palestinian artists and cultural workers](#), including journalists and photographers, for a cultural boycott of Israel due to its use of culture to whitewash the oppression of Palestinians.

The cultural boycott of Israel [is part of the](#) global the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which is modeled after the South African anti-apartheid boycott campaign. The Palestinian-led BDS movement has seen impressive growth into the mainstream in the past few years.

Miguel Carriço, winner of the 2012 Concelho da Bienal de Vila Franca de Xira award, urged fellow photographers to join the call:

"Having witnessed first-hand the crimes Israel is committing daily against Palestinians, signing up to this initiative has become a natural step. It is fundamental to promote this effort through all means possible."

Palestinian photography artists [are not exempt](#) from the brutality of Israel's occupation. Artists have been denied visas by the Israeli military establishment, preventing them from participating in conferences and performances internationally. Artists have also been detained at checkpoints, arrested, had their equipment broken, and exposed to the same violence perpetrated by the Israeli army on all Palestinians.

In 2014, Israel was considered the [second most lethal](#) country for journalists. Israel continues to step up its attacks against journalists in 2017. Last April, Israeli police fractured the ribs of [AFP photographer](#) Ahmad Gharabli and smashed two of his cameras. He was among six photographers targeted by the Israeli authorities on the same day. In May, an [Israeli settler shot](#) Majdi Mohamed, photographer for the Associated Press, while he was covering an Israeli incursion in Nablus. Israel's attacks against Palestinian and international photographers are part of a systematic policy and have been perpetrated with impunity.

Traveller-photographer Nuno Lobito said:

"It is time for Israel's brand of apartheid to enjoy the same treatment as South African apartheid and be target of a comprehensive international boycott until it respects human rights. Photographers can no longer be silent about the treatment of their Palestinian colleagues living under an indefensible occupation that has lasted

for over half a century. Palestinians have called for solidarity through boycotts and this pledge is our practical contribution to their struggle.”

Signatory José Soudo, a veteran Photography teacher and Historian, commented:

“The history of photography is full of examples, from the 19th century to today, of photographers who gave their sight to the service of the oppressed and destitute.”

For João Henriques, winner of the 2015 Fnac New Talents Award, “to participate in this solidarity initiative for Palestine is to believe in the power of photography to provide testimony, to create conscience and to have empathy for the Other.”

Support for the cultural boycott of Israel enjoys broad support internationally, among them [Roger Waters](#), [Ken Loach](#), [Mike Leigh](#), [Lauryn Hill](#), [Mark Rylance](#), [Emma Thompson](#), [Alice Walker](#), [Naomi Klein](#), [Elvis Costello](#), [Brian Eno](#), [Jean Luc Godard](#) and [Mira Nair](#).

In 2011, Queer Lisboa International LGBT Festival [dropped its Israel sponsorship](#) following a BDS campaign. This year, BDS activists [called on](#) the Almada Festival to cancel a collaboration with the Israeli government and its Brand Israel whitewash campaign.

Full text of the pledge:

“We support the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality. In response to the call from Palestinian photographers, journalists and cultural workers for a cultural boycott of Israel, we pledge to accept neither professional invitations to Israel, nor funding, from the Israeli state and to refuse to collaborate with Israeli cultural institutions linked to its government until Israel complies with international law and respects the human rights of Palestinians.”

‘ The photographers’ pledge to boycott Israel is work-in-progress. Portuguese photographers wishing to add their name to this initiative should write a message to: comitepalestina@bdsportugal.org

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News from the Belgian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI- <http://www.bacbi.be/>)

BACBI’s August newsletter can be found at <https://app.flashissue.com/newsletters/39a49e60ffa95e68dc233444f9255454c3eaac7>

The link includes a video of Ilan Pappé delivering a keynote address titled De-Colonizing Israel.

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Artists Boycott Berlin’s Pop- Kultur Festival

<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/thank-artists-who-pulled-out-pop-kultur-palestinians-urge>

Palestinians are [encouraging people to thank](#) the artists who [pulled out of Berlin’s Pop-Kultur festival](#) (23rd – 25th August) because it accepted funding from the Israeli embassy. The British electronic punk band [Sleaford Mods](#) became the ninth act to join the boycott, [announcing](#) that their manager had withdrawn from a panel at the festival. [PACBI](#), the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, noted “many of the artists stressed their firm stands against all forms of discrimination and oppression and the responsibility of artists to be true to their beliefs” in announcing their cancellations.

Among the bands that withdrew was [award-winning](#) hip hop trio Young Fathers, which [cited](#) their “long history of opposing any form of hatred including racism and anti-Semitism” and their support for “a peaceful solution that allows Palestinians the right to return to a safe homeland and that allows Israelis and Palestinians of all faiths (and none) to live together in peace.” The boycott was also backed by Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth.

Confronting smears and distortions

PACBI said the “eloquent statements from the artists stand in stark contrast to the festival’s [crude attempts](#) to falsely portray the Palestinian boycott call as directed at individual Israeli artists, shrewdly omitting the fact that the protests were clearly aimed at the Israeli government involvement.”

German media also [joined in the smears](#), giving a platform to false accusations the boycott was an “anti-Semitic” move by “participants from various Arab nations.” Such pro-Israel spin has been ably confronted by [German Jewish](#) and Israeli activists, who fully backed the boycott.

Israeli activist group Boycott from Within [stated](#) that: “Israel openly and actively

uses culture as part of its state branding campaign strategy. The Israeli foreign ministry openly acknowledges spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually to improve Israel's image."

The "Brand Israel" campaign was launched a decade ago, "in order to change Israel's deteriorating image around the world, which has been badly damaged after decades of occupation, apartheid and military attacks," the group added.

In the face of the media hostility and distortions by festival organizers, PACBI noted, "Some of the artists referred to their acts of solidarity as 'tiny' or 'minor.'"

"Let's make sure they know their refusal to cross the Palestinian-led cultural boycott of Israel picket line is huge and means the world to Palestinians and all those working for a more just world," PACBI added. The Palestinian group is inviting people to [add their names to a thank you letter](#) for the artists.

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.

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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**

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