

BRICUP Newsletter 119

BRICUP

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CONTENTS

P1. On 'Neutral' Chairs

John Chalcraft

P4 Arizona University forces speakers to sign pledge they don't boycott Israel

From the Electronic Intifada

P4. Undercover Israeli Agents Arrest Head of Student Council at Birzeit University

Report from Al Jazeera .

P5. A call to Jewish students for Israeli Apartheid Week - I faced my Jewish racism, can you do the same?

Robert Cohen

P7. Former president of the Modern Language Association resigns following decision to ban debate on BDS

From Mondoweiss

P9. Manchester BDS student activists refuse to participate in a BBC documentary

Manchester University BDS Campaign

P10. Update on Mark Regev's tour of UK Campuses

The Editor

P10. News from other BDS campaigns

P10. Notices

On 'Neutral' Chairs

John Chalcraft

12 March 2018

On 7 November 2017, LSE imposed a 'neutral' Chair on a BDS panel organized by the Government Department.

In justifying the decision, the School cited its own [guidelines](#), which state that 'At controversial events it is not prudent to have someone in the chair whose own views mean they may not be seen as a neutral chairperson.' The School had been particularly concerned to discover – thanks to a [blogpost](#) in the Times of Israel – that the Chair chosen by the event organizers had signed a statement supporting the BDS movement. For the School, this put the Chair at risk of being perceived as not neutral. Imposing a Chair, the School contends, is nothing more than a pragmatic measure to protect Academic Staff and School against accusations of bias in staging controversial events. The School also stated that there is no infringement of freedom of speech because the deposed Chair is free to speak at the event.

For the deposed Chair, the organizers, and many academic staff, things look very different. To impose a Chair is very problematic in terms of freedom of speech, as it makes the beliefs and views of this or that academic a basis for determining the allocation of academic positions. It chills academic freedom on campus because it reduces the pool of available Chairs, and signals that certain views are beyond the pale and must be policed. It defines controversy and neutrality in simplistic, conventional terms, a particularly

egregious error at a research university, which exists to question the received wisdom. There is a serious issue over equality and diversity, given that School-imposed Chairs are more likely to be white, senior, and male. Above all, to depose a Chair is to signal to academic staff and to the wider world, that certain academics, thanks to their beliefs, are not competent to discharge basic academic functions. If academics cannot observe due process in the Chair, then how can they mark exams or teach subjects that are deemed 'controversial'? Far from protecting academics, these guidelines expose them to internal and external interrogations of their beliefs and views. It is in the words of one academic, a 'troll's charter'. So far there is little or no evidence that a neutral Chair has ever been imposed on a pro-Israeli event, or indeed, any event that was not concerned with Palestinian rights. On the other hand, the guidelines could be used, in principle, against any academic or event. As one worried academic said to me: 'I am German, does that mean I cannot Chair a Brexit debate?'

The event organizers moved to discuss and protest the decision to impose a 'neutral' Chair in the wake of the event. There were informal consultations with the School, and BRICUP, a wider network of concerned academics, and eventually UCU have become involved. A further School attempt to impose a 'neutral' Chair on a LSE Student Union Palestine Society event on 1 March 2018 during Israeli Apartheid Week was refused by the organizers. As invited Chair I explained to the School that my professional competence was at stake. The School, to its credit, took note of this and allowed the event to go ahead on the basis that the School guidelines allow for an element of discretion. The event went ahead successfully with myself in the Chair. This was a clear message that the views and beliefs of this or that academic are not relevant to the question of whether or not they can discharge the duties of the Chair to uphold freedom of speech and follow due process. This message was strongly reinforced by the [apology](#) that Cambridge University has recently issued for imposing a 'neutral' Chair on a BDS panel on 8 November 2017.

The issue goes beyond this or that event and this or that academic. In fact, there is a significant groundswell of opposition among academic staff at LSE to the existing guidelines. A letter signed by more than 100 academics has been submitted to the School (see below) , arguing that the guidelines go too far, are open to abuse, and

compromise intellectual freedom and professional competence. Arguably the issue has touched a chord where academics are discontented not only with the raid on pensions, but also with issues of managerialism and monitorialism. As things stand, LSE is engaging with these concerned academics, and a re-draft of the guidelines is in the works.

This push-back by academics has generated new forms of coordination, as well as results on the ground (such as the apology from Cambridge, or the acceptance of a Chair at LSE). In the face of many attempts at silencing and intimidation, there is clearly some room to assert academic competence and the values of freedom of speech.

Text of letter from LSE Academics

20 February 2018

Dear Dame Minouche Shafik,

We are writing as LSE Academic Staff to share with the School our concerns about the 'neutral' Chair advice (hereafter The Advice) contained in the School's 'Briefing for the Chair' and the School's Code of Practice on Free Speech (Para 6.2).

The Advice in question reads as follows: 'At controversial events it is not prudent to have someone in the chair whose own views mean they may not be seen as a neutral chairperson.'

We understand that the School Management Committee is now proposing to tighten The Advice as follows: 'Organisers of [controversial] events should ask the proposed Chair whether they consider that there is any reason for them not to be seen as neutral, and the proposed Chair has a duty to declare any such reason of which they are aware'.

The Advice may appear to be innocuous: nothing more than a pragmatic measure to protect Academic Staff and School against accusations of bias in staging controversial events. However, risk averse behaviour by universities in the face of media criticism may be contributing to censorship on campus, just as the Equalities and Human Rights Commission has recently found for the higher education sector in general (EHRC 1718-84: 2.3, point IV). Indeed, we believe that The Advice raises urgent concerns about academic freedom and may serve to undermine rather than protect the integrity and reputation of Academic Staff and the School.

First, The Advice makes the beliefs and views of Academic Staff the basis for School decisions

about who is and who is not qualified to discharge a routine academic function. This is a violation of core principles of academic freedom. The Education Reform Act 1988 states that academics have the right 'to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or the privileges they may have at their institution.' We do not offer here a legal opinion, but there is clearly a case to be made that The Advice as constituted, which appears to have no statutory or legal basis in and of itself, contravenes this key legislation designed to protect academic freedom because it directly implies that academics who voice 'controversial' opinions will lose the privilege of being allowed to Chair meetings.

Second, The Advice constitutes a serious infringement on the autonomy, professionalism and competence of Academic Staff. Chairing is a routine part of Academic Staff work. It is also an academic pleasure, a form of career development, a way to network and advance research, a form of public engagement, and a mark of authority and competence. It is a professional and skilled activity: Chairs must uphold freedom of speech and follow and enforce established rules and procedures – competences that are built into their academic training and part of their professional identity. In a trusting environment among respected staff, competence to Chair can only be questioned on the basis of real evidence relating to their own track record of Chairing. But The Advice tells us that Chairs are to be disqualified as a result of their beliefs and views. Skilled Academic Staff object that these matters are irrelevant. Otherwise, how would Faculty be trusted to grade papers and teach classes in controversial or sensitive areas? Academic Staff will not accept that their routine competencies are invalidated by this or that ideological test and can be expected to stand by their professional autonomy and competence in discharging the duties of the Chair.

Third, The Advice stifles freedom of speech on campus. It makes so-called controversial events harder to organize by reducing the pool of Chairs available to students or organizers seeking to stage events that challenge the conventional wisdom. It stigmatizes certain views, groups, or events by labelling them 'controversial'. It elevates and privileges the speech of those who adhere to a consensual script. It places a chilling effect on the public expression of views and

beliefs by Academic Staff – because such an expression may lead to their disqualification from Chairing events important to them. It generates an unpleasant and inhibited atmosphere in so-called controversial events, in virtue of the forbidding presence of unsympathetic Chairs who are remote from the aims and objectives of the Societies, speakers and organizers on which they are imposed. All of this is intrinsically undesirable. It is also legally questionable: The Education Act (No.2) 1986 provides that: 'persons concerned in the government of any establishment...shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the establishment and for visiting speakers.'

Fourth, The Advice contradicts the mission of the research university. Research universities exist to educate, to innovate and to push back the frontiers of knowledge. Universities, perhaps uniquely, are aware of the simplicities of conventional discourse, and the difficulties of defining what is 'controversial' or 'neutral'. This is core to their identity. Nor is it evident that neutrality is always desirable: consider for instance, a panel on rape or genocide. On such a panel there is plenty of scope for controversy, with strong emotions and strong views present, but would we seek a neutral Chair? What would it mean to be neutral about rape? But The Advice invokes these key terms unproblematically. It makes no effort to define them. Far from encouraging intellectual freedom, a core principle of the LSE Ethics Code, The Advice appears to stigmatize those who hold views outside the norm, or even, those who have views at all. Finally, in proposing a measure which works to dampen the public expression of views, The Advice also contradicts both the university's role in developing active citizenship, as well as the public engagement agenda which is key to the School's impact strategy.

Fifth, The Advice is impossible to implement fairly, and is counterproductive in regards to the protection of Faculty and the School. In practice, it involves School administrators having to 'flag up' so-called controversial events, making their decisions to flag or not with arbitrary and subjective evidence and criteria. Indeed, The Advice establishes at the heart of the School administration an uncomfortable and unbecoming monitoring mechanism for scrutinizing Faculty beliefs. Further, given the sociological composition of the School, The Advice means that senior white male Chairs will be privileged over their younger, female, BME equivalents, a

negative result in terms of LSE’s own Equality Impact Assessment framework. The emphasis on ‘perception’ in The Advice further implies that whoever shouts the loudest, or has the most influence at any one particular moment, will get to define who or what is neutral or controversial, risking double-standards and arbitrariness in the application of The Advice. Some groups will lose out and will have legitimate grounds for complaint, especially under the terms of the Equality Act 2010. Other groups, perceived as more consensual, will be unduly privileged. Unreasonable perceptions cannot be the basis for School policy. Finally, The Advice concedes to the outside world that beliefs and views of particular Faculty are a cause of bias in formal School processes. Far from protecting Academic Staff against unfair accusations, this concession mistrusts the Academic Staff and will arguably stoke the fire, exposing Faculty and School to reputational damage.

We believe that the advice as it stands puts academic freedom at risk and is wide open to abuse. It does not protect Faculty and School but exposes us. We seek an urgent review of the present policy.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

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Arizona University forces speakers to sign pledge they don’t boycott Israel

From the Electronic Intifada

March 7th, 2018

A professor has filed a [lawsuit](#) against Arizona State University and the state’s attorney general over a gross violation of free speech rights. It is the second legal challenge to Arizona’s 2016 [law](#) against supporters of the [boycott, divestment and sanctions](#) (BDS) campaign for Palestinian rights.

The Muslim Students Association at Arizona State University had invited American Muslims for Palestine chair, University of California at Berkeley lecturer [Hatem Bazian](#), to speak about Palestine and the BDS campaign during an event on campus next month. In order to participate, Bazian and other members of his group who had been invited were asked to sign the university’s speakers agreement – usually a boilerplate legal document outlining the terms of an event.

But Arizona State University’s agreement includes a clause that speakers must certify they are not engaged with the BDS movement. The standard agreement was amended sometime after the passage of the state’s anti-BDS law, which creates a blacklist of companies and groups banned from state contracts if state officials deem that they are boycotting Israel.

According to the lawsuit, the speakers contract now includes this clause: “No Boycott of Israel. As required by Arizona [law], Entity certifies it is not currently engaged in a boycott of Israel and will not engage in a boycott of Israel during the term of this Contract.”

Bazian and his group say they cannot agree to the “No Boycott of Israel” clause.

See full article [here](#)

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Undercover Israeli Agents Arrest Head of Student Council at Birzeit University

Report from Al Jazeera

On March 8th, Omar al-Kiswani, the President of the Student Council at Birzeit University, was arrested inside the university campus by a group of armed undercover Israeli agents. Online video footage (see link below) showed six men dressed in civilian clothing pinning Kiswani to the ground, kicking and beating him while a few of them fired gunshots on campus.

This is not the first violent raid by Israeli army forces. They systematically invade and routinely harass students, faculty members and staff at Birzeit University and other Palestinian educational institutions.

According to [Birzeit University](#), while the group attacked 24 year old Kiswani, another armed Israeli unit detained the university's guards in a room and, according to Sondos Hamad, Coordinator of the Right to Education campaign, they then used their firearms against the students while providing cover for the kidnapping operation. Hamad explained that a similar scenario occurred at the beginning of 2017 when two students were arrested at the campus gate by Israeli soldiers disguised as civilians. This is also the second time Kiswani has been arrested. Previously, he spent a year in an Israeli jail due to his participation in a Hamas-affiliated group on campus

"Birzeit is like any university in the world. Students are given space to express themselves

and they have the right to belong to any political bloc but unfortunately, the Israeli occupation always violates our right to education and freedom of expression,"

See [here](#) for more information.

A call to Jewish students for Israeli Apartheid Week - I faced my Jewish racism, can you do the same?

Robert Cohen

Robert Cohen is one of the leading dissident Jewish voices on Israel-Palestine in Britain today. A prominent blogger, he takes a firmly Jewish but non-Zionist position on the conflict. His work has been regularly published at Mondoweiss, Tikkun Daily and Jews for Justice for Palestinians.

This first appeared on February 17th in Jewish Voice for Labour

<http://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/>

I know what you're thinking. How dare I accuse us, a people who've suffered so greatly from prejudice, hatred and persecution, of holding racists attitudes ourselves?

But it turns out that our past experience provides no protection and our communal memories can hinder not help us.

This particular conversation is about to become more urgent if you're a Jewish student on a campus in the U.K. or Western Europe, North America or Australia.

The 14th annual 'Israeli Apartheid Week' (IAW) takes place around the world from the end of February through to mid April. There'll be talks, film screenings, and mock West Bank security checkpoints and Separation Walls to highlight the daily indignities of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories. Thirty years after I graduated, I've been invited back to speak to students at Manchester University in the UK. It will be a homecoming – of sorts. But I've become a very different kind of Jew to the one who left there in 1988.

The intensity of this year's IAW activities will be heightened by the 70th anniversaries this year of the Palestinian Nakba and the creation of the State of Israel. Once again, Jewish students will find themselves feeling distinctly uncomfortable as

Zionism, and the Jewish State, are portrayed as a racist endeavour.

But is it fair to brand you, young Jews who support Israel, of being promoters and defenders of racism?

Well, to be blunt, yes it is. But that simple answer doesn't quite capture why that is or how it's happened.

I don't for one minute think young Jews who support Israel should be bunched together with members of the British National Party or White Supremacists. That's lazy thinking. It makes no attempt to understand the origins of Zionism or the current place of Israel in individual or communal Jewish life. But nonetheless, Jewish racism is 'a thing'. I know it from my own experience, from my own past ways of thinking, from how I was as a student in Manchester in the mid 1980s. This Jewish strand of racism is an inevitable consequence of the success Zionism has had in shaping Jewish identity over the last 70 years. And if we don't face into the racism that Zionism has created nothing will change when it comes to Israel/Palestine for another generation.

Less deserving

The truth is, all people are vulnerable to ways of thinking that leave others less deserving than themselves. That doesn't make all of us Adolf Hitler, it just makes us human. But that doesn't make it okay either. If any group should understand that, it's us, the Jewish people.

For a great many Jews (myself included for far too long) the "less deserving" have been the Palestinians.

Whether consciously or not, we're suspicious of them, we don't trust them.

We believe our needs are greater than theirs.

We believe our claims are stronger and more culturally important.

We see ourselves as vulnerable, we see them as a threat.

We act in good faith, while they are deceitful.

We ask only for what is rightfully ours, while they make unreasonable demands.

We protect ourselves, they seek only our destruction.

It's a set of attitudes and dispositions that together add up to racism.

Let me offer some examples of how this Jewish racism plays out through double standards, inconsistencies and hypocrisy.

If you think we have an obligation to remember our homeland while Palestinians should be encouraged to forget theirs – that's racism.

If you think our Jewish 'right of return', after two thousand years' absence is sacred and undeniable, but the right of return for Palestinians, and their descendants, who fled their homes in 1948 is illegitimate – that's racism.

If you memorialise atrocities carried out against the Jewish people throughout our history but downplay or dismiss the Palestinian Nakba – that's racism.

If you think Jewish national self-determination is an incontestable right but Palestinian national self-determination must be negotiated and offered only as a 'reward for good behaviour' – that's racism.

I realise that your convictions about Zionism may come from a religious belief in a divine promise to the Jewish people. Well, you're welcome and entitled to your religious convictions. Although I'd remind you of the covenantal 'small print' that made our land entitlement conditional on upholding the Law of Moses. And are you aware that, for most of the last two thousand years, we considered our 'exile' as much a spiritual as territorial issue? But if you're still convinced it's ours by divine right then you'll need to abandon any affection for liberalism, democracy, equality or division of religion and state. You can't have it all.

No formal lessons

When you grow up Jewish within a Jewish community, as I did, and you did, Zionism and support for the State of Israel doesn't feel like an ideological position you've consciously chosen to champion. And there are no formal lessons in Palestinian discrimination either. But the attitudes that lead to 'anti-Palestinianism' happen all the same.

When you grow up Jewish, Zionism is just there. It's a given. There's no reason to question it. It's Jewish history, culture and religion all bound up together in a modern expression of religious and cultural entitlement. Zionism has become the very definition of Jewish safety and security too. After the Holocaust, isn't Zionism just 'Jewish common sense'?

So when you find yourself confronted by the language of Israeli Apartheid Week you will feel this is something far more than a political disagreement. This is an emotional attack on who you are, who your family is, the community that raised you. It's attack on your sense of physical security. No wonder it can feel so threatening. No wonder you may feel upset.

But sometimes it's good to be upset. Sometimes becoming upset is exactly what we need to see the truth and begin to deal with it.

Choosing our response

Israeli Apartheid Week is the moment we can choose to think differently. We can choose to recognise what our thinking really means and what has brought it about. We can confront our prejudices and face into our racism. We can move ourselves on and attempt to move forward today's understanding of Jewish identity, Jewish security and Judaism itself.

My advice to Jewish students anticipating Israeli Apartheid Week is not to get defensive, but to get responsible. Go to the events and the talks. But not to argue or to heckle. Go with a commitment to listen and learn.

Yes, you'll feel it's one sided. Yes, you'll think others there understand too little of our Jewish history and experience. You'll think that Zionism is being unfairly distorted and criminalised. You'll feel angry at how our own community is being portrayed. You'll feel defensive because your view of the conflict and its causes is so very different from those around you.

My challenge to you is to resist the urge to defend and 'explain'. This is not about winning debating points. This is about you facing into the racism you have towards Palestinians.

Grieving and questioning

If you've followed me this far expect to go through a period of grieving. You're losing something important to you. A part of your childhood and a part of your teenage years will suddenly look different from your new perspective. You are going to want to ask some difficult questions the next time you're back home too.

Why do our religious and communal leaders either refuse (or fear) to speak out on the injustices created by the Occupation of the West Bank?

Why do we claim to be such passionate supporters of peace and of '2-states' but then

welcome President Trump’s policy on a united Jerusalem?

Why have we lost all sense of proportion so that we see a slap in the face of an occupying soldier or a boycott of Settlements as acts of terror aimed at our total destruction?

And finally this...

Within our community, why have we made support for Zionism and Israel the touchstone of Jewish fidelity, while calling for human rights for all has become a Jewish heresy?

Our futures locked together

Leaving Zionism behind is not abandoning Judaism or your Jewish identity. Neither does it mean you don’t care about antisemitism, or Holocaust denial or the safety and security of Jews in Israel and around the world. But it does mean thinking about these things in a different way. A way that binds us to the Palestinian people rather than divides us from them. Our futures are locked together: either us oppressor and oppressed; or as equals. Which is it to be?

As Jewish students during Israeli Apartheid Week don’t waste your time attempting to defend the indefensible. Much better to confront the racism we’ve created and begin a journey towards a different expression of Jewish self-determination, one built on respect and equality for all.

I faced my Jewish racism, can you do the same?



Former president of the Modern Language Association resigns following decision to ban debate on BDS

From Mondoweiss

<http://mondoweiss.net/>

Below is the [letter of resignation](#) from Professor Margaret Ferguson Distinguished Professor of English (Emerita) from the University of California at Davis. Professor Ferguson was President of the Modern Language Association in 2014.

January 9, 2018

To Paula Krebs, Executive Director of the MLA, and to the Officers and other members of the MLA Executive Council

Dear Colleagues,

I write with great regret to tell you that I have decided to resign from the MLA. My decision was long and hard in the making. No other past president has taken such a step, to the best of my knowledge, and I am not at all sure it is a step that will bear fruit. Please let me explain why I am leaving.

By passing [Resolution 2017-1](#), which closed the door in a constitutionally unprecedented way on future debate about the Palestinian call for boycott of Israeli academic institutions, the Association has sent a message to the world that it wants protests about the conditions of teaching and learning in Palestinian universities off the table. Because the resolution misrepresents the MLA’s purpose in its opening clause, leaving out the Association’s long-standing efforts to advocate for humanities educators’ rights; and because the resolution prohibits future discussion of an issue of public concern, eleven past presidents with different views on boycott asked the Council not to treat the resolution as business as usual at its meeting last February. The decision to do just that means that the Association has gone on record as wishing to prevent further discussion of infringements of educators’ rights in the Occupied Territories; instead, the Association agrees that its proper business is with more pressing matters closer to home—home evidently defined as the United States that gives [massive](#) financial aid to Israel. But the MLA’s multilingual members, both teachers and students, come from at least 104 nations; and MLA members of Palestinian descent have [testified](#) repeatedly to losing their freedom of expression and movement when they seek to enter the Occupied Territories in order to teach and do research.

As a member of a small, unofficial group of MLA members who visited West Bank universities in the summer of 2016, at the invitation of a member who works at the University of Bethlehem, I saw firsthand how teachers and students are prevented daily from doing their work of teaching and learning. My experience in Israel-Palestine, detailed in this [report](#), is one of the many reasons I am giving up my membership in an organization I have participated in and learned from for over 40 years—long enough to acquire the privileges of “life membership.” Those privileges are now a burden to me. I relinquish them to give myself a chance to speak out through a symbolic gesture of separation after having exhausted the means of protest available to me as a member.

My decision to resign is painful for many reasons. One is that my mother, Mary Anne Ferguson, served on the MLA's Commission on the Status of Women in the late 60s and early 70s. She saw the Association, as I did then too, as a site in and from which humanities educators could work to effect social change, including improvements in what the current [mission statement](#) calls "workplace equity." The question is whether "equity" will be interpreted narrowly or broadly. With the passing of Resolution 2017-1, the Association has opted for an interpretation eerily consonant with President Trump's doctrine of "America First."

In the years when I first joined the MLA and my mother was working on the Commission, the Association did vote after "divisive" debate to intervene in a public arena that was both national and international by making a statement against the U.S. Government's conduct of its war in Vietnam (for a discussion of this historical statement, see my [Presidential Address](#) of 2014). Those were the years when the Delegate Assembly itself was created as a "voice for members" and as a structure that would enable the Association to become more representative (although that remains a difficult concept in the MLA's documents and election practices). Since the Assembly was formed, the MLA has certainly become more open than it had previously been to the scholarly, pedagogical, political, geographical, and economic concerns of its members, most of whom do not work at the elite, East Coast American institutions from which the Association's founders hailed in 1883. But the Association has evidently not become more open to discussing what I, and many others, consider to be one of the major assaults on access to education and academic freedom in our time. If the Association could amend its bylaws to affirm its commitment to allowing debate on all issues of public concern to members, I would eagerly rejoin.

For the time being, the MLA has taken an extreme and ethically untenable position by endorsing the idea, promoted by a group of members who were openly "[assisted](#)" by outside groups, that it is illegitimate for professional groups to protest Israel's policies towards its Palestinian subjects. This despite the fact that the Executive Council clearly does not accept the narrow definition of the Association's mission given in Resolution 2017-1 when it comes to speaking out about other communities of educators whose academic freedom and freedom

of movement are threatened, whether in Trump's America (see [Resolution 2017-2](#)) or in [Erdogan's Turkey](#). Having spent part of the last year in a university in South Africa, I am acutely aware that the organization I was honored to serve was dishonorably silent about the South African regime's apartheid policies. At a watershed moment when even the mainstream press in the U.S. describes the creation of [apartheid "bantustans"](#) in Jerusalem neighborhoods just outside the "separation" wall, I find that I must leave an Association that has chosen again to remain silent, this time by actively proscribing debate.

Torn as I have been about what to do in the wake of Resolution 2017-1, I have found myself thinking hard about how another former MLA President, Edward Said, might have viewed these matters as he pursued his long effort to balance pessimism of the intellect with optimism of the will. Because he is dead, I cannot ask him for counsel. But I can ask you to consider some words from his book *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*: "Memory adds to the unrelieved intensity of Palestinian exile. Palestine is central to the cultures of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism . . . There is no forgetting it, no way of overlooking it." The Palestinian call for justice will keep coming, and the MLA resolution enjoining deafness to it will be questioned from within and from outside in the coming years.

As the MLA's elected leaders resume work after the 2018 Convention, where members in many sessions engaged with President Diana Taylor's theme ([#States of Insecurity](#)) by exploring its premise that "the academy cannot be separate from the political, economic, and ideological turmoil of our time," I hope that there will be robust discussion in your meetings about how, why, and to whose benefit the Palestinian call for boycott was deemed officially unspeakable by the world's largest association of teachers of the humanities.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Ferguson

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Manchester BDS student activists refuse to participate in a BBC documentary

February 20th 2018

We, students of the BDS campaign, have refused permission for Lion TV to film us on behalf of BBC for Manchester's Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) due to their attempts to incorporate us into a documentary that is not about Israel's military occupation of Palestine, not about the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, but specifically for their BBC documentary on 70 years since the creation of Israel.

Despite us declining to be filmed or having any association with the documentary, the producers have persisted in contacting and deceiving our Pro-Palestine allies in an attempt to convince us to partake in a documentary which we believe is searching for a tokenistic representation of Palestinians and BDS student activists, in order to be able to claim their documentary has "balance". Yet it is clear that the entire premise of the documentary has no balance when the oppressor is placed at the heart of the film and the oppressed – the Palestinians are merely a sideshow. Many of the members of the Palestinian BDS society in Manchester are not even allowed to go to their homeland in Palestine because of the discriminatory policies of the Israeli government.

This documentary is described as a two-part documentary where British Jews explore their religious identity to the state of Israel. To target our Israeli Apartheid week for a documentary on this subject is a massive insult to Palestinians who have suffered, and continue to suffer under Israeli military occupation, the siege and slaughter of civilians in Gaza and the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population of Palestine.

So far since the filming has begun, we have learned that the producers have filmed Pro-Israel events across the country which culturally appropriate Palestinian culture, and use it as a weapon to normalise Israel's war crimes against them.

The producers have contacted and encouraged Pro-Israel students at the University of Manchester to undertake events during our Israeli Apartheid Week such as a planned stall flying the Israeli flag whilst giving out falafel which they claim to be from Israel when evidently it is of Arab heritage. What's more, the filming for the documentary had already begun on our campus much earlier. On February 7th, the BBC were seen filming a similar stall with an Israeli flag,

where Pro-Israel students were giving out Moroccan falafel and claiming it as Israeli.

Not only has this taken place on our campus in Manchester, the film-makers are helping to perpetuate cultural appropriation across the country. For the documentary, they have filmed an 'Israeli' hummus festival, co-organised by UJIA, a group which co-actively works with the Israeli embassy, which occurred in Leeds. The premise of this festival was not only to propagate Israeli propaganda, but to normalise the erasure of Palestinian culture which is a political tactic of the Israeli government to aid the physical erasure of the Palestinian people.

The filmmakers are actively magnifying Israeli propaganda and attempting to demean Israeli Apartheid Week. They are working with the people that support the discriminatory system that Israeli Apartheid week is fighting against. This week is dedicated to fighting for Palestinians to have the basic freedoms that every human deserves, denied to them by Israel for coming up to 70 years. It raises awareness of Israel's well-documented war crimes and furthers the movement for the non-violent tactic of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against the Israeli state until they comply with international law and the basic principles of human rights.

To cover Israeli Apartheid week with the main thrust of the documentary on the 70 year anniversary of Israel's creation, is yet another example of the BBC's diminishing of the 70 years of horror Palestinians have faced since the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. "The Nakba", which is on record as being pre-meditated by all of the main architects of the Israeli state, was Israel's violent expulsion of 800,000 Palestinians from their homes – to where the vast majority were never allowed to return. The focus on Israel's creation is an act of Nakba denial, which is a denial of one of the gravest international crimes in the post-war era and a despicable slur against the Palestinian people.

Our campaign is focused solely on promoting Palestinian human rights and we refuse to participate in a documentary that we believe will only help sustain Israel's apartheid regime against the Palestinian population at every point of their lives.

We strongly recommend every supporter of the Palestinian justice movement to not participate in this documentary, which has to date perpetuated Israeli propaganda and deceived our allies in an attempt to provide tokenistic balance to what is

yet another BBC whitewashing of Israel's ongoing crimes against the Palestinians.

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Update on Mark Regev's tour of UK Campuses

The Editor

We have news of invitations to the Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev to at least three UK campuses during February/March. There may, of course, have been more. BRICUP would welcome any information about other visits by Regev to UK campuses. Please contact us via newsletter@bricup.org.uk.

At Warwick on February 1st, members of Warwick Socialist Students joined trade unionists and activists from various local solidarity campaigns to protest at Regev's presence on the campus, which was at the invitation of the Jewish Israeli and Warwick International Relations Societies (see [report](#) here). The basis of their protest was that that giving Regev a platform on their campus was "not be an exercise of freedom of speech, but an exercise in the extension of state power into an institution of learning " and that his presence was "divisive and alienating for Palestinian and other Arab students, as well as being antithetical to...academic principles and ideals

Students at Cardiff university actually raised a [petition](#) in advance of the event - In Conversation with...Mark Regev, Israeli Ambassador to the UK"- which was organized jointly by the University and the Student Media Society. The petition, which gathered over 200 signatures in a single day, asserted that "providing a platform to a representative of an oppressive state such as Israel is akin to providing a platform for representatives of any other terrorist organisation"(see [report](#) here). In the end, the event was cancelled, sadly not because of a change of heart of the university authorities, but because of heavy snow. No doubt some attempt will be made to reschedule the event and, no doubt the students will be well prepared.

When Regev visited the University of Exeter on February 15th however, its Friends of Palestine Society took a different approach to that adopted in Cardiff and Warwick. Out of respect for the individual's right to freedom of speech they did not attempt to prevent him from appearing, but mounted a silent demonstration outside

highlighting the war crimes and violations of international law that Regev stands for, and expressing their revulsion and condemnation of his presence on campus.

<http://exepose.com/2018/02/15/protest-at-israeli-ambassadors-talk/>

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News from other Campaigns

The Association of Academics for the Respect of International Law in Palestine (AURDIP)

<http://www.aurdip.fr/?lang=en>

BRICUP and AURDIP and BACBI have co-signed an open letter in response to the EU's [public consultation](#) on the use of EU funds for investment, research and innovation. This [letter](#) concerns Israel's eligibility for participation in EU's research programmes.

The Belgian Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel (BACBI) See their monthly [Newsletter No 33 - March 2018](#)

The US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

<http://www.usacbi.org/>

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

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