

# BRICUP Newsletter 42

July 2011

BRICUP

British Committee for the  
Universities of Palestine

[www.bricup.org.uk](http://www.bricup.org.uk)

[bricup@bricup.org.uk](mailto:bricup@bricup.org.uk)

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## **The Zionist reaction to the UCU motion on the EUMC ‘definition’ of anti-semitism**

Following the UCU vote to reject the EUMC ‘definition of antisemitism’ [1] there has been a flurry of reaction from the Zionist community. No doubt this will continue but here are a few relevant facts.

First the EUMC document is not “**the EU’s definition of anti-semitism**” still less “**THE definition of anti-semitism**”. It has not been adopted either by the EU or by any member state.

Most modern dictionary definitions of anti-semitism agree that it comprises irrational, hostile beliefs or actions that are directed towards Jews collectively just because they are Jewish. In contrast, the so-called EUMC Working Definition of anti-semitism is not, in fact, a definition at all: it is a list of diagnostic signs that are alleged reliably to detect anti-semitism [2]. These signs fall into three groups: a few that do reliably, and rather obviously, indicate an anti-semitic attitude; some that could arise either from an anti-semitic attitude or from an honest academic analysis; and those that are actually rational criticisms of the state of Israel, not of Jews in general. These distinctions are eloquently discussed by Richard Kuper [3, 4].

Following the UCU vote, Eric Pickles is quoted by the Jewish Chronicle (JC) as saying that “the UCU rejection of a widely accepted definition of anti-semitism sends a chilling message to Jewish academics and students” [5]. Setting aside the fact

that the 'definition' has not been widely accepted, he also alleged that "the UCU has been boycotting visits by Israeli academics for a number of years". It appears that the Equality and Human Rights Committee has been asked to investigate the UCU for alleged institutional anti-semitism.

Dr Sue Blackwell, who presented the motion to the UCU congress on behalf of the NEC, has responded to the JC as follows:-

"Eric Pickles seriously misrepresents the University and College Union's policies. My union has not been "boycotting visits by Israeli academics for a number of years". There has never even been a motion to UCU or its predecessor unions to do any such thing. The academic boycott of Israel targets institutions, not individuals, as called for by our Palestinian colleagues [6]. Israeli universities are a target for boycott because of their well-documented complicity in the occupation of Palestine. It is the apologists for Israel's war crimes and ethnic cleansing, not British trade unionists, who are trying to "silence dissenting opinion". Fortunately, they are not succeeding."

In the meantime, Anthony Julius of Mishcon de Reya has written to the UCU demanding that the motion be recinded: that the UCU acknowledge that it is guilty of anti-semitism ; that it agrees to abide by a special code of conduct with respect to Jewish members; and that it sponsors a programme to educate academics concerning the dangers of anti-semitism. All this by August 5<sup>th</sup> !

Watch this space!

#### Notes.

1] See [BRICUP Newsletter 41, June 2011](#)

2] <http://www.european-forum-on-antisemitism.org/working-definition-of-antisemitism/english/>

3] Richard Kuper. Antisemitism and delegitimation JNewsFebruary 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011

4] Richard Kuper, [Hue and Cry over the UCU.](#)

5] Eric Pickles. "UCU sending Jews chilling 'message'", JC, June 30, 2011

6] (<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>).

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#### *The PACBI Column*

### **On BDS Bashers and their Search for Fig Leaves**

In the context of applying the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement's guidelines for the international academic and cultural boycott of Israel, PACBI sometimes faces scenarios where boycott bashers attempt to redeem their conscience, and with it some moral ground, by using token Palestinians (or more rarely other Arabs) as a fig leaf to cover up their complicity in Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights. While the pool of available "fig leaves" is diminishing every year, thanks to the recent impressive spread of BDS consciousness among Palestinians and in the Arab world, there are still those who are ready to accept for their names to be manipulated in the cynical political agendas of international boycott violators. When these Palestinians and Arabs play such roles, it is sometimes due to a lack of political understanding, but, more often than not, it is due to a willingness to put personal interest ahead of collectively upheld principles of resistance to colonial oppression and apartheid.

Through the 1990s and the first half of the last decade, many Palestinians were lured into joint projects because of the hope for a real just peace, as well as the fact that seemingly unlimited sums of money were allocated to such joint projects by European and U.S. donors. Over the last two decades, it became clear that these projects had political agendas that centered on selling the illusion of peace to Palestinians – and the world – and on bribing Palestinians into submission to Israeli dictates and its perpetual colonial hegemony. If an Israeli organization wanted to secure generous funds for a project all it had to do was to include a Palestinian "partner," and vice versa. These Palestinian-Israeli collaborations created the perfect cover for Israel's ongoing colonization, occupation and apartheid, and they undermined the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.

By now, most normalization [1] projects involving Palestinians and Israelis have ceased after being exposed as utterly futile or, worse, as a well-designed fraud meant to give Israel leeway to pursue its colonial project under the cover of “peace-making” from the bottom up, as was fabled during the Oslo “peace process.” The few remaining normalization projects have continued due to the lingering structures of power domination and dependency created throughout the Oslo years.

One good example is the McGill Middle East Program (MMEP) in Civil Society and Peace Building, a leftover normalization project from the heyday of Oslo that has yet to be challenged. In the context of a single joint project, the prestigious Canadian university signed separate agreements with Arab academic institutions (An-Najah University, Al-Quds University, and Jordan University) and with Israeli institutions. The fact that representatives of “both sides,” as it were, participate in the overall project with its common goals, sit on the same project committees, and attend joint meetings, largely blows the cover of “separateness” and exposes the normalization agenda of this project. The Palestinian institutions involved, while publicly eschewing normalization with Israeli universities, have continued to be active in this project, apparently seeing more benefit to their own institutions from keeping this partnership alive than the harm it does through undermining the growing academic boycott of Israel and its complicit institutions.

Palestinians are not unique in this sense. Given the dire conditions of resource starvation resulting from decades of Israeli occupation, ethnic cleansing and apartheid policies, Palestinians, like most other peoples struggling for de-colonization and self-determination, have had our share of not just what we call willing fig leaves, but also of those who collaborate at a much deeper level with the oppressors in return for narrow benefits. Avoiding the romanticization of the oppressed, and of the Palestinian struggle, is important to arrive at a rational critique of this phenomenon that is as old as revolutions all over the world. As in most other cases, there are generally those who would put their own interests above that of their community. However, a few wilting trees of opportunism or even betrayal should never hide the forest of consensus behind Palestinian civil resistance against Israel, a consensus that is reflected in the leadership of the boycott campaign, the BDS National Committee (BNC).

International academics and cultural figures, including music bands, that insist on crossing the Palestinian boycott picket line despite being asked by the BDS movement not to do so, often seek to organize a concert, a lecture, or even a symbolic tour in the occupied Palestinian territory -- especially Ramallah, Jerusalem and Bethlehem -- as the standard way through which they try to “balance” their political position and redeem themselves after violating the boycott appeal. By doing so, they in fact add insult to injury, as they are asking Palestinians to engage in normalizing projects similar to those of the Oslo era discussed above. Claiming neutrality in this blatantly lop-sided colonial situation and trying to project a false image of symmetry between oppressor and oppressed is beyond groundless and ill-conceived; it is morally suspect.

Musicians will often ask Palestinian organizations to organize a “Palestine tour.” Some Palestinian organizations may naively agree to such tours without first checking whether the musicians are simultaneously violating the boycott. Other organizations may willingly provide a Palestinian cover for such boycott violations because they themselves have not been able to transcend the corrupting, co-opting, and dependency-creating relations and dialogue discourse that have prevailed during the failed so-called Oslo “peace process.”

Managing to speak to some Palestinians here or there, or to partner with some clueless or deliberately fig-leaving Palestinian institution, cannot possibly reduce the damage done by violating the boycott guidelines, as such violations serve first and foremost to save Israel’s fast-dissipating veneer of respectability on the world stage. No fig leaf, no matter how large it may seem, can hide the act of complicity in whitewashing Israel’s occupation and apartheid that these boycott bashers commit when they cross the picket line.

One classic example was Leonard Cohen, who despite being repeatedly appealed to by PACBI [2] and its partners everywhere [3] to cancel his gig in Tel Aviv, insisted on going ahead with it and even accepted as a main sponsor of the gig an Israeli bank deeply implicated in the construction of illegal Israeli colonies on occupied Palestinian land. After being widely criticized for this blatant violation of the Palestinian-led boycott, Cohen sought just about any Palestinian interlocutor, venue or organization that he could use for “balance” and to fend off the critics. However, by wearing a mantle of “healing” and “peace” without uttering a word about justice or about Israel’s violations of international law, Cohen

failed to convince any Palestinian organization to cooperate with him [4], leaving him without the frantically coveted fig leaf. This, in conjunction with concerted pressure campaigns waged in many countries [5], ultimately convinced Amnesty International to abandon the idea of cooperating with Cohen to channel proceeds from his concert to “human rights” groups. [6]

Another example was the University of Johannesburg’s (UJ), which fell under enormous pressure [7] by South African academics to break its links with Ben Gurion University (BGU) and, as a result, attempted to find a Palestinian university ready to engage in a trilateral, albeit indirect, relationship with BGU. UJ was faced with a consensus in the Palestinian academy -- including government officials, university presidents and academic unions -- rejecting such a relationship, and insisting that meaningful solidarity with Palestinians today means severing links with complicit Israeli institutions like BGU and respecting the BDS principles. Unable to find such a Palestinian partner, the UJ Senate ultimately canceled its joint project with BGU. [8]

More recently, Shakira tried to do the same, using her UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador status to arrange a visit to a Palestinian NGO in occupied Jerusalem to “balance” her shameful participation in an official Israeli propaganda event at the invitation of the Israeli president, Shimon Peres. Peres’s well documented role in the myriad crimes and international law infringements committed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory and in South Lebanon is undeniable. [9] The targeted Palestinian NGO canceled Shakira’s visit at the last moment when it realized how she had violated the boycott, and that providing her with a Palestinian alibi could damage the BDS movement’s peaceful struggle for freedom, justice and equality.

Of course, no society can ever be monolithic or of one mind. Despite the persistence of some international artists, musicians and other cultural workers in breaking the boycott, and despite the willingness of a dwindling number of Palestinians to continue to serve as fig leaves when lured to do so, the overwhelming majority of Palestinians, through their representative organizations and unions, have endorsed BDS and its guidelines. It is time that international writers, academics, artists and others start listening to the voices of this vast majority and to respect our struggle for freedom and justice by, at the very least, refraining from undermining our boycott principles. This is a basic moral obligation that most of the world had honored during the

struggle against South African apartheid and should consistently honor in our case as well.

PACBI

Notes:

- [1] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1220>
- [2] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1006>
- [3] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1009>
- [4] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1039>
- [5] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1069>
- [6] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1080>
- [7] <http://www.ujpetition.com/>
- [8] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1532>
- [9] <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=833>

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## Freedom of Speech at Liverpool University

*BRICUP Newsletter 41 (June 2011) reported the suspension of a course for medical students at Liverpool University, following a complaint by two Jewish students concerning a talk that was given on Palestinian living conditions in the West Bank. The lecture was part of a Healthy Inclusion course that addresses social exclusion issues in health from a global, national and local perspective. The course is recognised nationally, and has been running for over three years.*

The course organizers write: The University suspended the Healthy Inclusion course on 11th April 2011, pending further investigation. **The University indicated in writing on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2011, that the course was reinstated in its current form, with the next cohort of students starting on Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011. It has been over twenty-three weeks (over five months), since the initial complaint but Healthy Inclusion has not received details of who made the complaint, and what were the specific details. These are still awaited.**

Regrettably this is not the first time that discussion of Palestinian health issues has been suppressed in the North West. Similar events occurred in October 2009, when a talk on Palestinian children’s health, by Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, was cancelled at short notice with no explanation by

Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool and Manchester Royal Infirmary. More recently, a talk by Dr Swee Ang Chai on Palestinian health was cancelled on 24th February 2011 by the Fairfield General Hospital in Bury at short notice.

The Lancet Magazine, the world's leading medical journal, continues to take an active interest in Palestinian health issues, and sees this as an important part of its global health advocacy role.

There would appear to be a major problem of academic freedom to discuss Palestinian health issues in the North West of the UK. This is a continuing and serious issue which needs to be addressed urgently by the NHS and the medical academic community. We are grateful for the support of Liverpool Students' Union:

[Facebook:](#)

[Petition:](#)

We are also grateful to UCU, academics, trade unions and churches in this matter. A number of responses have been advised by a range of agencies, to prevent further episodes of this nature. If you wish to be involved, please contact us for details of the one-day conference "Academic freedom – a core value", in Liverpool, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

Dr Joseph O'Neill, Honorary Lecturer,  
Liverpool University Medical School

Siobhan Harkin, Administrator for Healthy  
Inclusion

Contact us at

[Healthyinclusion@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Healthyinclusion@yahoo.co.uk)

Updated July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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## **What sort of culture does BRICUP boycott?**

The reason why BRICUP has been thinking about this seemingly arcane question is that cultural boycott of Israel, like the consumer boycott, has really taken off in the last year or so. At its launch BRICUP's *raison d'être* was clearly the boycott of Israel's academic institutions. However there are fuzzy lines between some cultural and academic activities, and it has proved inevitable that BRICUP would get involved in cultural boycott also.

BRICUP's leading UK role in academic boycott is generally acknowledged. In this we draw our legitimacy from PACBI (the Palestinian Call for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel). But whereas from its formation PACBI has seen academic and cultural boycott as linked, BRICUP initially did not do so, and so took up only one part of the dual challenge.

Gradually this has been changing. In fact it was a BRICUP initiative that led to the first declaration by writers and artists in support of cultural boycott launched by John Berger as early as 2006. More recently there has been a steady flow of open letters from BRICUP to prominent international cultural figures known to be planning to visit Israel. One special feature of these letters has been meticulous research into each target's previous political positions, well known work, close associates, and the email addresses and websites through which we could be sure of reaching both the artist herself, but also her (in the case of pop-culture) fan base. The other speciality of these letters has been the strong emotional and political appeals made to the artist, in the case of singers often making use of quotations from their own lyrics. I have been a joint signatory of all these letters, but I was not their author. So I can report without any question of immodesty what so many have said – that these letters are remarkable for their scorching, incandescent intensity. People who have experienced the force of this approach include US novelist Russell Banks, singer Leonard Cohen, Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh, South African author Nadine Gordimer, US saxophonist Branford Marsalis, Swedish opera singer Ann Sofie von Otter, German tenor Thomas Quasthoff, and US spoken word performer Gil Scott-Heron.

Some of those targeted in this way have decided not to go through with their visit to Israel. Most have persisted. But there is another measure of the success of this campaign. These open letters have travelled round the world, being picked up, transmitted and amplified. For example the call for Nadine Gordimer to cancel her visit grew into a storm in South Africa so that she had to continually attempt to justify herself both before and during her actual trip to the 'holy land'. The letter to Amitav Ghosh led indirectly to the formation of an Indian chapter of the academic and cultural boycott campaign. Each 'failure' of this kind is a triumph both in its educational impact on audiences who might not be accessed through conventional political channels, and in its deterrent effect on future potential visitors. And more and more we can see

significant cultural figures either cancelling gigs, or announcing their adherence to the boycott.

BRICUP has every intention of continuing with this high quality, high impact activity. But now we do more. For example we were involved with staff and students at SOAS in a very successful campaign against an academic musicology conference organised by the Jewish Music Institute on “The Art Musics of Israel” announced to take place there this March. The conference was advertised as receiving funding from two Israeli Ministries and the Israel Embassy in London. The campaign resulted in the director of the Jewish Music Institute having to successively reject all Israeli support – in the Jewish Chronicle, no less.

Other groups (eg Boycott Israel Network, and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods) are also very active in the area of cultural boycott. Information is now being made available from within Israel about which performers (often ones that the mature folk who make up BRICUP have never heard of) have been advertised to appear there. Using this information there is now a world-wide pressure on performers, exercised for example at concerts in the UK, USA and Europe given by groups scheduled subsequently to appear in Israel. At the ‘higher’ end of the cultural market place there are now a growing number of UK groups specialising in boycott in particular cultural art forms. The first of these was BWISP (British Writers in Support of Palestine). On the point of formation is BAP (British Artists for Palestine); and still more fluid is a growing boycott activity, provisionally ‘Musicians against Apartheid’, concerned with classical music. Nearby, Architects & Planners for Justice in Palestine is well established. If we are to work in these fields BRICUP must cooperate with the more specialist organisations, and provide added value.

BRICUP has now decided to give added emphasis to its cultural boycott activities, to which end we have set up a cultural boycott working party. But unlike the academic target area we are used to a) there is a tremendous diversity of potential targets; and b) a wide range of other groups are operating very effectively in the area. To avoid duplication, and to make the BRICUP contribution effective, the working party has adopted guidelines for its efforts.

What should we focus on? To establish this focus we went back to the reason why the linkage between academic and cultural boycott is such a natural one. This arises because some types of cultural production have aspects in common with academic activities, and may also happen in or through the same institutions. Examples are university museums,

and departments of music, art, film studies and art history. This gives the two types of boycott shared institutional features which distinguish them both from (say) consumer, sport or financial boycott.

We have agreed to focus the BRICUP contribution to cultural boycott on activities of a type where there is an actual or potential academic-cultural connection. For example, classical music falls clearly within our domain; but we will, broadly, leave pop stars and groups to other organisations, who are already doing an excellent job with much better grounded understanding. But of course we will be flexible in applying this simplifying rule; and in particular we will be continuing our incendiary open letters to high status cultural performers without fear or favour. In the case of the open letters we apply a much simpler criterion – that the people we write to are world class cultural figures in fields we know about.

To deliver on this remit we will need to carry out the following tasks;

Scan for forthcoming cultural activities in the UK with Israeli state sponsorship or support; and for forthcoming cultural activities in Israel involving UK participants.

Write fully researched open letters to prominent individuals or organisations to persuade them not to undertake an announced activity in Israel, or other Israel-linked activity, such letters to be promoted actively through the internet.

Join with other international boycott organisations (PACBI, EPACBI) to promote internationally coordinated boycott campaigns in appropriate cases.

Mount activities targeted on boycottable Israeli individuals or ensembles scheduled to participate in cultural events and activities in the UK, with the aim of achieving cancellation or withdrawal.

In carrying out all these activities we will have dual aims of securing a result, and of gaining public air time for discussion of the issue of Palestine.

Jonathan Rosenhead

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## **An open letter from BRICUP to Paul Simon**

Dear Paul Simon,

We know you're no stranger to controversy. When you recorded parts of 'Graceland' in apartheid South Africa with black South African musicians, you were publicly criticised by the liberation movement, the ANC, and anti-apartheid organisations, for breaking the cultural boycott.

At the time, you told the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid that you yourself had 'refused to perform in South Africa'. And since anti-apartheid icons Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela played in the live 'Graceland' tour (even though there were anti-apartheid demonstrators at some of the venues), you clearly convinced key members of the anti-apartheid movement that you were not colluding with, or intending in any way to promote, the apartheid regime.

We're struggling to see any carry-over from this situation to your forthcoming concert in Ramat Gan, Israel, on July 21. You've played in Israel before, so perhaps this event doesn't seem that important to you – just a one-night add-on to your US and European tour (and maybe that's why the Ramat Gan date doesn't figure in the tour list on your website).

But if you hope this concert in Israel can be about music, not about politics, that's not how your promoter, Marcel Avraham, sees things. In July last year he told the Israeli online news site, Ynetnews.com, that he does shows in Israel 'as a mission, a sense of Zionism, not just to make a buck'.

Whether you intend it or not, your show in Tel Aviv will make a political statement. And Avraham is absolutely clear what he believes that statement to be. He told Ynetnews that Elton John, Metallica and Rod Stewart, all under pressure to cancel their shows in Israel, had approached him 'with questions. "My answer to them was very simple. Listen", I told them. "Israel is a small country still fighting for its existence. The Arabs want to throw us to the sea. If you want to come and lend us a shoulder, by all means, we'll be delighted".'

This hackneyed scenario – small beleaguered state teetering on the edge of extinction -- won't wash any

more. Israel's army has dominated the region for the past 40-something years, and the people who are clearly and evidently 'fighting for existence' are the Palestinians.

So -- are you willing to 'lend a shoulder' to daily land-grabs and water-grabs and the inexorable squeezing and stifling of Palestinian lives and hopes? Are you willing to 'lend a shoulder' to illegal settlements and illegal military checkpoints, to detention without trial, torture in prison, and the innumerable daily cruelties, small and large, aimed at making Palestinian existence intolerable and driving people out?

If you don't support these actions by successive Israeli governments (documented in comprehensive detail by human rights organisations like Amnesty International), and if you don't want to appear to condone Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity (see, for example, the UN Goldstone report on the Gaza onslaught in 2008-9), then we believe you should want to cancel the Ramat Gan concert.

Your choice is simple: occupier vs occupied; ethnic cleanser vs ethnically cleansed; oppressor vs oppressed. You can't avoid it. Please follow the logic of your opposition to South African apartheid. 'Strong wind destroy our home' – it's happening to the Palestinians every day. Please lend a shoulder to them.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Haim Bresheeth

Mike Cushman

Professor Jonathan Rosenhead

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP)

PS: We've just noticed that the liner notes of your recent album, 'So Beautiful or So What', were written by Elvis Costello. You probably know that Elvis Costello cancelled the concerts he was scheduled to give in Israel last year as 'a matter of instinct and conscience'. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) said Costello's decision was 'exceptionally brave and principled...a victory for the ethical responsibilities of international cultural figures'. When you cancel, you'll be in good company. Please don't go.

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## Financial support for BRICUP

BRICUP needs your financial support.

Arranging meetings and lobbying activities are expensive. We need funds to support visiting speakers, book rooms for public meetings, print leaflets and pay the whole range of expenses that a busy campaign demands.

Please do consider making a donation .

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

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Like all organisations, while we welcome one-off donations, we can plan our work much better if people pledge regular payments by standing order.

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

More details can be obtained from [treasurer@bricup.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@bricup.org.uk)

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**You can follow BRICUP on twitter at**

[twitter.com/bricup](https://twitter.com/bricup)

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**BRICUP is the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine.** We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: [newsletter@bricup.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)