

BRICUP Newsletter 53

BRICUP

British Committee for the
Universities of Palestine

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A Turning Point? The campaign against Habima at the Globe

On May 28-9 Habima, Israel's National Theatre, performed The Merchant of Venice at Shakespeare's Globe in London. This was part of the Globe-to-Globe festival, in which all Shakespeare's 37 plays were performed there in 37 languages, by companies from round the world. Over the previous months a powerful campaign built up criticising the Globe for inviting a theatre company that was complicit in Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank. This article describes how the campaign developed (concentrating on those aspects in which BRICUP was involved) and what it achieved.

What the campaign was trying to achieve

In our view the campaign around the visit of Habima to the Shakespeare's Globe theatre has taken cultural boycott to a new level of sophistication and success, at least in the UK. Of course you wouldn't know this if you only read the Israeli papers, which presumably most Israelis do. What those papers are saying is – the two performances took place, the demonstrators didn't bring them to a halt, and our actors performed magnificently. In fact it was a "triumph".

What the Israeli papers are saying is true, up to a point. British drama critics were actually rather lukewarm in their praise for Habima's performance. But this is not a drama crit, we are not critics, and anyhow we were outside in the street so cannot comment on the quality of the production.

So if we see our action as a great success, even though the performances went ahead, what was it that we were we trying to achieve?

Well, our demand from the time that we heard that Habima had been invited to take part in the Globe-to-Globe festival was that the invitation to them to take part should be withdrawn. This was the position of PACBI, and also the Israeli group Boycott from Within. However, we recognised that getting a 'host' to uninvite a visiting company once that invitation has been issued was a big ask. So it was unlikely to happen.

What then were our aims? They were to use the visit of Habima

- to recruit visible support for the cultural boycott;
- to promote discussion and debate about Israel's immoral policies which are illegal under international law;
- to bring home to both public and media the ways in which even cultural institutions tend to be complicit with normalising these policies; and
- to deter future invitations to Israel's complicit cultural institutions.

We think we succeeded beyond our expectations on the first three of these. As to the fourth, we will see.

The campaign group

In this article we have been using the word 'we' without explanation. 'We' were and are a loose knit group, which recruited others to take on particular responsibilities as the Habima performances got nearer. The core group were drawn from a number of different Palestine solidarity organisations - BIN (Boycott Israel Network), British Artists for Palestine, BWISP (British Writers in Support of Palestine), J-BIG (Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods), and BRICUP. Of these BRICUP supplied the biggest contingent. And we were helped tremendously by others, especially PACBI and Boycott from Within who made the initial demands for the invitation to be withdrawn. PSC organised the picket outside the theatre on the nights.

The UK grouping first came together in the preparations for the visit of the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra's performance at the Proms last September. So when in December 2011 it was announced that Habima was coming to Shakespeare's Globe it was natural to reactivate basically the same group. Throughout we intended to learn the lessons of the Prom's 'spectacular' – when the BBC took the concert off the air – in organising for this new challenge.

For the Proms we had felt we needed to keep everything very quiet to give us the benefit of surprise. Our approach for Habima was quite different. Indeed the battle, if one may call it that, was to a considerable extent fought out in the columns of our more serious newspapers and journals. Between January and May we were

repeatedly drafting, circulating, re-drafting and fine-tuning Open Letters, letters to possible signatories, non-open letters to the Globe's Artistic Director, Press Releases, Frequently Asked Questions documents, letters to the editor and so on. We became a word factory.

The Open Letter

We rapidly came to the conclusion that the key to our campaign would be an Open Letter to be signed, we hoped, by sufficiently weighty theatrical people to get it noticed. So not just the 'usual suspects', but also people who had not previously aligned themselves publicly and who, crucially, had a clearly legitimate right to speak out on theatrical matters. This meant a quite elaborate and time consuming exercise in identifying possible signatories, finding how best to contact them, and explaining why we hoped they would sign the Open Letter we had drafted. Luckily we had time, as there were five full months between the announcement of Habima's visit and their performances on May 28 and 29.

Very few of the approaches to signatories were 'cold calling' (though some of those paid off handsomely). Between us we did know some prominent theatre people; and we knew other people who had theatrical contacts, and some of those we approached recommended others to us. And then there were a few people who had signed earlier letters about Palestine. We divvied up the work, and developed in some cases quite an active email relationship with our contacts, which we are sure will be useful again in future.

The letter did not attempt to commit signatories to a cultural boycott of Israel's cultural institutions full stop. While many activists are strongly behind that position, our view was that a letter cast in those terms would at this point in time have gathered rather few signatures. The specific case we made against the Habima invitation was based, rather, on that company's practice of performing to segregated audiences in the 'Halls of Culture' in illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The result was spectacular – a roll call of 37 eminent actors, playwrights, and directors that would carry weight with the general public and inside the profession, and attract media attention. Naming names is invidious, but Emma Thompson was picked out by many newspapers, as was Mark

Rylance – perhaps the most celebrated actor of the moment and the Globe’s own first Artistic Director.

Other eminent signatories included writers Caryl Churchill and Trevor Griffiths, directors Mike Leigh and (Sir) Jonathan Miller, actors David Calder, Miriam Margolyes, Roger Lloyd Pack and (Dame) Harriet Walter.

Talking to the Globe

While we were doing the leg-work to build up the open letter, we also were able to make contact with the Globe’s Artistic Director Dominic Dromgoole, and a small delegation went to talk to him and the director of the Globe-to-Globe festival Tom Bird. After that initial meeting there were lots of emails to and fro, plus the occasional encounters during leafleting and other campaign activities at the theatre (see below for our work with the Palestinian theatre group Ashtar). These interactions were, by and large, extremely civilised.

At the meeting we of course told them that the Globe should withdraw the invitation, and (as expected) they declined to do so. However we did also suggest a range of other constructive ways in which they could show their concern for the situation of the Palestinian people. These were

- they should write to Habima and say that the condition of coming was that they issued a statement that they would cease touring to the illegal settlements
- the Globe should put an insert in the programme for the production explaining why the visit by Habima was opposed by some people
- the Globe should stage, ahead of the Globe-to-Globe festival, a debate with heavy weight speakers, on the issues raised by cultural boycott.

They promised to think about these ideas, and we submitted a possible text for the programme insert, but in the end the Globe followed through on none of them.

The letter is published

On March 29th the Open Letter appeared in the Guardian (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/29/dis>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/29/dis/may-globe-invitation-israeli-theatre?newsfeed=true>).

There was an editorial muddle at the Guardian, and many of the most celebrated names were missed out of the print edition. We feared that all our effort might have been undermined. But they were all there in the online version, and the letter itself soon became news in its own right. The chain reaction of comment, riposte, counter-comment and rejoinder began. Heavyweight known Israel-supporters (Maureen Lipman, Howard Jacobson, Arnold Wesker) pitched in against our letter, but so did more surprising figures like playwrights Howard Brenton and David Hare. Articles and letters were popping up all over the press, from the Spectator to the Observer to the Economist. Playwright David Edgar wrote a thoughtful OpEd piece in the Guardian which stopped just short of approving this boycott call. The sticking point for him was that he didn’t want to be part of a campaign that could be represented as boycotting Jews.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/libertycentral/2012/apr/15/globe-theatre-invitation-protest-israel-habima>).

Some of the counter-arguments that boycott critics advanced, often in intemperate terms, were

- Doesn’t this carry the stench of anti-semitism, and the Nazi burning of books?
- Isn’t boycott the same thing as censorship?
- Shouldn’t artists put openness, especially to other artists, before anything else?

Of course there were answers too

- Isn’t it grotesque to use the holocaust to justify the suppression (by Israel) of the rights of others?
- How can you support the South African boycott, but object to the call for the Globe to withdraw its invitation to Israel’s state theatre?
- How can anti-boycotters claim to be supporting openness, when they let Israel’s suppression of Palestinian culture go unremarked?

To cap it all, almost all the conservative members of the Parliamentary Culture Media and Sports Committee wrote a joint letter saying that Habima performing in the Occupied Territories didn’t matter because “it is widely accepted” that the settlements would be ceded to Israel in any Israel/Palestine peace agreement.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/20/israel-iran-mordechai-vanunu>)

The flow of letters grew into a torrent at the promulgation of this extraordinary new doctrine.

During this period, of course, members of our group were contributing OpEd pieces and letters to the press, only a portion of which made it into print, to try to ensure the Palestinian case got a fair hearing. Several signatories also joined in actively, as did Ken Loach, who later sent a message of support from the Cannes film festival (where he won the Jury Prize).

But we were also concerned that the argument might die away – after all, there were still two months to go before the Habima performances. As it turned out we need not have worried. The story had a life of its own. Indeed the day before the Habima performances, Radio 4's World This Weekend broadcast a discussion between actors Roger Lloyd Pack (a signatory) and Maureen Lipman (a bitter opponent). The pre-recorded broadcast showed signs of editing to give Lipman the advantage, but it was remarkable that the pro-boycott case was allowed on the BBC at all.

One key feature in keeping interest bubbling was the visit of Ashtar, the Palestinian company based in Ramallah, to perform in the Globe-to-Globe festival. Via PACBI we established contact with them early on, and they said they wanted to help in the boycott call in any way they could. In the end, through a triangular discussion, it was agreed that we would organise a public meeting after their first performance, and the Globe would make their own lecture theatre available for this. The meeting, on *What Does Shakespeare Have to Say to the Palestinians*, was packed out, with many distinguished actors in the audience. Almost all of the Ashtar company, fresh from performing Richard II, took part, as did a panel including writer and broadcaster Bidisha and playwright Sonja Linden.

Habima performs

May 28th and 29th had wonderful demonstrating weather. But the Globe Theatre itself was barricaded like a fortress – or more accurately, like an airport departure hall or Israeli checkpoint. Privately hired security heavies were brought in and detection equipment was installed to check for – what? knives? bombs?? What pressure, we wondered, had forced a theatre management - which had given a

hearing to the boycott call and shown sympathy for the Palestinian cause - to resort to this oppressive, and ultimately futile demonstration of state muscle?

Outside, a strong gathering of supporters made a brave showing with organisational banners, adapted Shakespeare quotes in English and Hebrew, and borrowed theatrical costumes. Not to mention Debbie Fink using her wonderful voice to project well known tunes with revised lyrics. A twenty foot long banner with the slogan “Israeli Apartheid Leave the Stage” arrived at the pier by boat, to add to the demonstration's display. A leaflet we had produced showed Will Shakespeare denouncing occupation and settlement because “’Tis illegal under international law”. This striking image, commented on in media reports afterwards, also appeared in an audio-visual presentation, twinned with the voice of actor-signatory John Graham Davies speaking an altered version of Shylock's famous speech: “Hath not a Palestinian eyes?”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5_os3Ufc-Q

Much preparation had gone on beforehand. As May 28th approached we realised that what happened on the night would determine the ultimate success of what had so far been an unprecedented sustained success for a media pro-boycott campaign. We had two concerns, and our sensitivity to both was drawn from our experience of the Albert Hall demonstrations against the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

One concern was that if there were aggressively disruptive activities during the performance, both public opinion and sentiment in the theatrical community could turn decisively against cultural boycott. The second was that we would need to get our pro-boycott message out loud, clear and at once if it was not to be drowned out by a flood of, sometimes mendacious, pro-Israel propaganda which would too easily be taken for fact.

On the first concern we did our best to contact people and groups we thought might interrupt the performances, and conveyed to them our worries. In the end some 25 people made their opposition known and felt during the first performance, and some 10 at the second performance. Almost without exception they did so silently and with dignity – standing in their seats with arms raised; unveiling banners and Palestinian flags (despite the airport

style security including body searches and body scanners); and standing with lips sealed with stickers, symbolising the suppression of the Palestinian people.

The second concern, about missing the media boat, required more detailed preparation. We obtained video statements from figures supporting the boycott demand (actors David Calder, John Graham Davies, and Miriam Margolyes, and from BRICUP member and Palestinian activist Ghada Karmi) and posted them on the web (<http://www.youtube.com/user/Art4Palestine>). We compiled lists of key journalists together with their email addresses and relevant phone numbers. We wrote a press release with full information – it ran to about 10 pages in all – which was sent out the night before, and followed up with phone calls the next day to check that it had been received and read. We prepared a template for a second press release, to be updated and sent out as the evening's events went on.

And it worked! We established a media operation round the corner from the theatre. As the internal protest started we were kept informed by mobile phone calls, tweets, and visits from those who had just been ejected. Two revised press releases were sent out as more and more news came in. A supporter on standby in the Netherlands posted material to blogs, and a flow of our own tweets helped sustain the already strong activity on Twitter. (The hashtag #lovejustice4all had trended no 1 in the UK earlier in the day.) The next day and the days that followed showed how successful this had all been, as newspapers from the Evening Standard to the Independent gave sympathetic news coverage to the campaign, and virtually all drama critics did likewise. There was fair coverage on BBC Radio 4 News (twice) – is this a record for a Palestinian news story? – and on the BBC website.

We cannot be complacent, however. There was no coverage that we are aware of in either the Times or Sunday Times and in keeping with the BBC's default pro-Israel position, there were headline bulletins on Radio4's Today programme which focused on the one arrest that occurred and told listeners, "Habima has been criticised for performing to Jewish audiences in the occupied territories." This implied racist, anti-Jewish motives for the campaign and is being strongly challenged by us and PSC's media monitoring unit.

Adding it up

While this campaign was building up, the pro-Israel organisation StandWithUs announced its finding that the UK BDS movement, in particular, is "well funded and well organized" This caused many wry smiles.

The whole campaign cost next to nothing, though BRICUP did fund some leaflets. The campaign was a model of what organisation and commitment can achieve even in the absence of resources. The cost, such as it was, was in time. For some of us around a quarter of all emails throughout the last many months have been on this issue.

Detailed preparations for communicating to the media in real-time was crucial. We sought and obtained professional guidance on how best to do this. We hope that this will not be the last boycott activity for which this level of media competence will be put to work.

In the run up to May 28th Israel's President Shimon Peres made a revealing admission: "If Israel's image gets worse, it will begin to suffer boycotts. There is already an artistic boycott - they won't let Habimah Theatre enter London." We didn't quite achieve that. But the writing is on the wall. There is now a receptive audience for the BDS message. It is our job to connect effectively with it, and hasten the day when governments will have to listen also.

Jonathan Rosenhead

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

For another account of the campaign and the issues see

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/naomi-wimborne-idrissi/israel-is-not-immune-to-boycott>

There are campaign reports and extensive links to media coverage here: <http://jews4big.wordpress.com>

Israeli Apartheid: What's in a Name?

This month, almost a year after South Africans succeeded in severing institutional ties between the University of Johannesburg and Ben Gurion University, the University of KwaZulu-Natal cancelled a lecture by a representative of the Israeli state [1]. It is significant that the first major successful implementations of the academic boycott of Israeli institutions should come from South Africa. For all who wish to see, this highlights the way formerly oppressed South Africans recognize the parallels between their oppression under apartheid rule and the apartheid that continues to be practiced on the Palestinians. It also puts the nature of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, specifically, and the Palestinian struggle more generally, in perspective. It forces us to move beyond an occupation-only paradigm and to think instead of three-tiers of Israeli oppression: occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid. It is the apartheid paradigm that we wish to focus on here, as it is often the least understood or recognized, despite the mounting international studies that have shown beyond doubt that Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid.

It is crucial for the world to understand that ending the occupation alone will not bring about justice for the majority of the Palestinian people, 69% of whom are refugees or internally displaced persons, a whole 50% are still in exile, and only 38% live in the 1967-occupied Palestinian territory, more than 40% of whom are refugees [2]. Nor will it address all their rights under international law. For justice and equality to prevail, we must understand Israeli apartheid, and resist it.

Many have spoken out against Israel for practicing apartheid, among them former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Richard Falk. In some cases, when public figures have endorsed the charge of apartheid, they have referred to apartheid policies in the OPT and not in Israel within its – still undeclared -- pre-1967 borders. However, it must be stressed that authoritative opinions have emerged that extend the ambit of apartheid: recently, the Cape Town session of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine found that “Israel’s rule over the Palestinian people, wherever they reside, collectively amounts to a single

integrated regime of apartheid” [3], while the 80th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2012 also found Israel in violation of the crime of apartheid in the treatment of its Palestinian citizens inside Israel by determining that many state policies within Israel also violate the prohibition on apartheid as enshrined in Article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) . [4].

We believe that Israel is not becoming, or at risk of turning into, an apartheid state, as many left Zionists would like us to believe; it is and has always been since its foundation an apartheid state, according to the UN definition of the term. That the charge has become more popular today indicates, more than anything else, that awareness of this aspect of Israel’s oppression has become much more heightened in recent years as a result of Israel’s adoption of fanatically racist laws and the myriad reports by human rights organizations addressing the matter from a legal perspective. In addition, more South African anti-apartheid leaders, with their morally authoritative voice, have come forth accusing Israel of apartheid [5].

But what is apartheid and why exactly is Israel considered an apartheid state? What is Apartheid?

While the term apartheid, an Afrikaans term, was first used in the South African context and referred to clear institutionalized and legalized segregation by white settlers over the indigenous population, it later took on an international legal dimension. In 1973, apartheid became encoded in the UN International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid [6], which was later adopted by the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Under Article II of the Convention, the crime of apartheid is defined as “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them,” and also includes “similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination as practiced in southern Africa.” While South African style apartheid is one benchmark, the real determinant of the crime of apartheid is whether or not policies and practices of

oppression fall under the list of violations included in Article II [7] of the Convention.

The crime is defined in terms of oppressor and oppressed (not majorities and minorities, as some incorrectly understand it), and prohibits the institutionalization of racist discrimination and oppression in which racism is legally enshrined through state institutions. Racial discrimination is defined in international law [8] as any distinction based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin. So the argument that since Palestinians are not a “race” then apartheid does not apply is at best misinformed and at worst intentionally misleading.

Israeli Apartheid

In the West Bank and Gaza, the prolonged Israeli occupation has developed into a pervasive system of apartheid, which includes checkpoints, the Wall, house demolitions, destruction of property, denial of access to education, arbitrary imprisonment, Israeli-only roads and a siege. The Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their lands in 1948 are also subjected to Israeli apartheid in the sense that they are denied, based on their ethnic/national identity, their internationally sanctioned right to return to their homes, in violation of Article 2c of the apartheid convention, as well as of UN Resolution 194 [9].

In Israel, Palestinian citizens face apartheid through an intricate Israeli legal system, with over twenty laws, that enables and justifies the entrenched system of racial discrimination [10]. Like South Africa’s notorious Population Registration Act, Israel has its own Population Registry Law (1965) whereby every citizen must register his or her nationality as defined by the state. In Israel, much of life and many rights and privileges are organized on the basis of nationality, which is defined primarily as either Jewish or Arab (there are many other categories as well, such as Druze and Bedouin). “Israeli” nationality is not recognized within this system, as demonstrated by rulings from the country’s Supreme Court rejecting cases calling for citizens to be allowed to register as Israeli.

Aside from this two-tier system of citizenship, Israeli land policy is also comparable to South Africa’s Group Areas Act (1950), which legally reserved 87% of South African land to whites. In

Israel, 93% of land is reserved for Israel’s Jewish citizens [12]. These are but a few examples of the many laws that expose the myth that is Israeli democracy. The most significant of these racist laws have existed since the founding of the Israeli state and have been supported by both liberal and conservative Israeli governments. The tension between laws, such as the Loyalty Oath and the Population Registry Law, and Israel’s professed commitment to democratic values, pervades many aspects of political life. For example, in order to field candidates in parliamentary elections, Palestinian political parties in Israel must recognize Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. In this context, the electoral process has become little more than a cover for racial discrimination.

Conclusion

Supporting the fundamental and inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination means, at a minimum, upholding the basic rights of all Palestinians as enshrined in international law. Calling for ending the occupation addresses, at best, most of the rights of 38% of the Palestinian people. Without ending Israeli apartheid and supporting refugee rights, the Palestinian people as a whole cannot exercise its right to self-determination. Real solidarity with the Palestinians means rejecting Israel’s occupation, colonization as well as apartheid. Only then can Palestinians enjoy freedom, justice and equality.

BACBI

Notes:

[1] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1887>

[2]

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=18485>

[3]

<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1755&key=russell%20tribunal>

[4]

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/CE_RD.C.ISR.CO.14-16.pdf

[5] For instance, ANC leader and former Mandela advisor Ahmed Kathrada declared his solidarity with the Palestinians “resisting Israeli apartheid”:

www.citypress.co.za/Columnists/Lessons-for-solidarity-Palestine-can-teach-us-20120324;

Reverend Allan Boesak called Israel’s apartheid “more terrifying”:

<http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/resources/interviews/3079-reverend-allan-boesak-calls-israeli-apartheid-qmore-terrifyingq-than-south-africa-ever-was>; and South African Christian leaders have accused Israel of being a “worse apartheid” than South Africa:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/south-african-response-to-kairos-palestine-document.html>.

[6] http://www.un.org/documents/instruments/docs_en.asp?type=conven

[7] <http://web.archive.org/web/20061001200717/http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm>

[8] <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm>

[9] <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>

[10] For details, see Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, which documents over 20 laws that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel

(<http://www.adalah.org/eng/backgroundlegalsystem.php>). See also the “Inequality Report”: http://www.adalah.org/upfiles/2011/Adalah_The_Inequality_Report_March_2011.pdf

[11] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/10/israel-jewish-oath-new-citizens?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>

[12] See <http://muftah.org/understanding-the-boycott-divestment-sanctions-movement-against-israel/> for details of this breakdown

[13] <http://bdsmovement.net/>

Hasbara posts in Israel Studies threaten academic integrity

For many years, supporters of Israel have sought to re-brand its global image. They have promoted an intense campaign of *hasbara*, the Hebrew word for ‘explanation’, though also often translated as ‘public relations’. This is a euphemism for propaganda: *hasbara* portrays Israel as a centre of academic and cultural excellence. This diverts attention from its colonisation of Palestine, where Israel has systematically violated international law. *Hasbara* initiatives have been well funded by the Israeli government and Zionist foundations.

More recently the strategy has been extended to academia, especially for countering calls to boycott Israeli universities. Money can buy *hasbara* in universities, which thereby become complicit in rebranding Israel. In the UK a key *hasbara* initiative is the Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange (BIRAX), which aims to strengthen research cooperation between Israeli and British academics, especially as a way to counter boycott calls against Israeli universities.

Going beyond academic cooperation, Zionist donors have been funding new posts in Israel Studies. This strategy has been promoted especially by the Reut Institute, whose website said in 2009: ‘the suggestion to create chairs of Israel Studies in leading UK universities could act as an important component of Israel’s strategy’. A *hasbara* strategy in academia was likewise developed at a 2009 conference convened by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Likud Minister of Knesset Yuli Edelstein, especially in a working group on ‘Delegitimization of Israel: Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions’.

Since 2009 several UK universities have created posts in Israel Studies. The list includes: the School of African & Oriental Studies (SOAS), Manchester University, Leeds University (all funded by the Pears Foundation) and at Oxford University (Stanley and Zea Lewis Family Foundation). At SOAS the posts are named Israel Studies. At the other universities the names link Israel with Middle Eastern or Mediterranean Studies.

At Sussex University the Yossi Harel Chair in Modern Israel Studies is named after a Mossad spy-provocateur who sought to escalate conflict with Egypt during the 1954 Suez crisis; he also fought in the Haganah. The Chair’s name indicates the pro-Zionist political objectives of the sponsors. Sussex University staff and students have started a campaign against this post.

In financing these posts, donors aim to promote the Zionist narrative, e.g. by either obscuring or justifying Israel’s ongoing and illegal dispossession of the Palestinian people. This *hasbara* agenda profoundly contradicts the mission and basic values of universities. Academic integrity and freedom are under threat at every stage: in accepting such funds, selecting staff, setting the curriculum, research topics, framing issues, etc.

To defend the basic mission of the university, we have a responsibility to question the aims and conditions of a new post in Israel Studies. As a general question: How do the criteria and procedures for this post compare with other new posts in the

department? A campaign can maximise initial unity by posing questions to donors and universities, who may be sensitive about their reputation.

Questions can be flexibly deployed for different purposes or at different stages, for example:

1. pressurising universities to demonstrate that the post is *not* Hasbara Studies, or
2. opening up debate about the academic integrity of such a post, or
3. trying to set conditions for improving its integrity, or
4. opposing the post.

BRICUP has web-posted a briefing document at <http://www.bricup.org.uk/documents/HasbaraStudiesBriefing.pdf>

It provides a more detailed history of *hasbara* in academia, explains the threat to academic integrity, suggests opposition strategies, lists specific questions to be asked and appends information about key Zionist donors. We welcome extra information and comments for future development of the briefing document.

Les Levidow

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

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Account Number 65156591

IBAN = GB20 CPBK 0892 9965 1565 91

BIC = CPBK GB22

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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.

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