

# BRICUP Newsletter 56

BRICUP

British Committee for the  
Universities of Palestine

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## **Obituary: Gabi Baramki ... Boundless giving, undefeatable spirit**

Days before he departed, Gabi asked his life companion, Mrs. Haifa Baramki, to read for him the latest email from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), so he could contribute to the discussion and share his views regarding a letter PACBI was drafting to encourage BDS campaigners in South African Universities to intensify their efforts. We in PACBI’s Steering Committee were astonished to see Gabi’s timely answer to the email! How could anyone in the intensive care unit, barely clinging on to his life, keep on thinking about resistance and his contribution to the national struggle till his last breath?

But here is where the secret lies, our dear colleague and friend Gabi was not just “anyone;” he was a distinguished, highly accomplished professional, yet also a most principled, dignified and compassionate human. He dedicated his entire life to education and resisting Israel’s colonization as well as the fight for the full rights for the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, freedom, justice and the right of return.

Gabi never made us or anyone else *feel* his prominence as a Palestinian figure, or even his seniority in terms of age, despite his eight decades with all their wealth of experiences, eminent achievements and lessons learned. He used to engage and participate with everyone as colleagues on equal terms, and did not seek to be distinguished, though distinction was in his DNA.

When we decided to launch a campaign against the Israeli museum that was established in the place of his birth in Jerusalem – the Baramki House – that was confiscated by Israel in the 1948 Nakba, we used to go over the details of the Israeli theft of the house, a fate endured by tens of thousands of Palestinians who were ethnically cleansed, forced out of their homes and turned into refugees by the Zionist paramilitary groups and later by the state of Israel. We discussed the intricacies of the house, poring over its particulars, architectural beauty, the details of the family uprooting and banishment to what became known as East Jerusalem... and Gabi participated in the discussion throughout while rising above his own personal sorrow. This continued till he described to us how his father, the architect and owner of the house, used to visit the separation line that divided West and East Jerusalem everyday and sit for hours watching his stolen home, in silence and anguish and with determination to reconnect with it, at least spiritually. At that point, Gabi, and only for a moment, was overwhelmed by his emotions.

Gabi never succumbed to his personal history of dispossession or resigned to the role of the victim; he resisted and triumphed in many ways: from becoming acting president of Birzeit University, after its president, Dr. Hanna Nasir was exiled by the Israeli occupation authorities, to leading his fellow colleagues in national demonstrations against the closure of Palestinian universities in 1988, in the midst of the first Intifada. He had many other major accomplishments, especially in developing education in Palestine through his prominent posts at the Ministry of Higher Education and the Council for Higher Education, as well as through his voluntary work in leading non-governmental organizations. Gabi commanded national respect and admiration like few others.

His contribution to building the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel through his voluntary work in the Steering Committee of PACBI was powerful, sophisticated, and marked by generosity and creativity. Gabi was without a doubt the 'Campaign's diplomat', par excellence. He was the man for tough jobs who did not hesitate for a moment in knocking on the door of a minister or senior official to set things right and resist normalization with Israel or to spread the culture of BDS in schools as an integral component of bringing up a generation rooted in principles of

dignity, freedom, and self-determination realized through resisting oppression.

The best of educators is that person who inspires people to think, to learn, and to take action on their own accord and without indoctrination, who instead of 'teaching', in the traditional sense, nourishes *learning* and leads by example. We have all learned from Gabi, without him needing to 'teach us'. We learned from him to combine dignity, humility and boundless giving in the process of struggling for freedom and liberation of the mind.

We will miss Gabi; all Palestinians will miss him. Indeed, all those fighting for freedom, justice and dignity will too.

PACBI

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## **Call for Boycott of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (HUI)**

A British University, York St John University, (YSJU) is collaborating with HUI to organize a conference entitled "Mediating Peace: Reconciliation through Art, Music and Film" to take place Jerusalem in November. BRICUP is advocating boycott and has presented its argument to YSJU: our text is printed in the August edition of this Newsletter (Number 55). In addition to the fact that Palestinian civil Society has called for a boycott of all institutions involved in Israel's system of occupation, colonialism and apartheid, there are powerful arguments that apply specifically to HUI – the theft of Palestinian land and the very close association with the Israeli military and security machine. Newsletter 55 also reproduces the letter that Kairos Palestine has sent to YSJU, urging boycott. Picking up that report, Sue Blackwell, a member of the BRICUP committee, has contributed further and devastating evidence of the specific abhorrent action by HUI – see the Letter to the Editor in this issue. Two other members of the BRICUP Committee have met with the deputy vice-chancellor of YSJU to urge cancellation. The University responded by calling a special meeting of the University's Ethics Committee. That committee was not aware that part of the HUI was built on Palestinian land or that the University had such a close association with the Israeli military establishment. They identified the ethical question as - how to contribute ethically towards a just solution, given the two alternatives of engagement or disengagement. They recognised the close

parallel with apartheid South Africa but considered that, in the absence of a mutual commitment to boycott by HE bodies in the UK, they were free to decide the matter themselves: Their decision was that the conference should not be cancelled. The committee envisaged various types of engagement to be implemented: that Palestinians would attend; that the organizers would make it clear in their introduction just how conflicted the YSJU committee was; that the ethics of organizing the conference would be discussed at the conference; that they would monitor any refusals by Israel to issue visas to attend; and that participants would be invited to attend an ‘alternative’ tour of Israel/Palestine.

BRICUP replied by urging that all Universities considering collaboration with Israeli universities should, at the outset, and before any contracts are signed, carefully consider the arguments for boycott advocated by the BNC, PACBI and BRICUP. We noted that the YSJU Mission Statement includes phrase “we [...] promote justice” yet collaborating with a University that is complicit in the deplorable actions and policies of the Israeli Government, is inconsistent with the promotion of justice. We noted that that the generalised argument that appears to have convinced YSJU is that engaging in debate, challenging prejudice and advocating justice are more likely to contribute to just solutions than is boycott. That could be true in this case if Israel were to be seriously engaged in such a debate and if there had been progress during the 64 years that have passed since al-Nakba. Moreover, it is clear from the continuing Israeli land grabs and ethnic cleansing, Israel’s record of aggressive military actions against its neighbours, and now from the leaked “Palestine Papers” that it is not, and never has been, the intention of Israel to reach a just negotiated settlement [1, 2]. In our view these facts utterly destroy the argument of the conference organisers.

Haim Bresheeth provides a detailed analysis of “engagement” in this Newsletter. While we reject ‘engagement’ we do not embrace ‘disengagement’ as defined by YSJU – that is “ignoring and having nothing to do with [...] people who do not agree”. We do not refuse to discuss the Palestinian issue with individual Israelis and in fact it is our experience that boycott actually increases such discussion – see “Talking to the Globe” in the June 2012 Newsletter, page 3 - and the article about the current Batsheva protests in this Newsletter. We say [3] that, “The boycott is aimed at institutions, not individuals. It applies to individual academics only in so far as they are acting on behalf of or as

officials or representatives of Israeli academic institutions or of Israeli higher education at the national level.”

We noted that the committee made the argument that “there has been no shared decision [...] for an academic boycott of Israeli universities [...] by any representative body in HE in the UK” However, the Palestinian boycott call of 2004 did not call for a boycott by institutions but by academic colleagues. In part, it read

*“ We, Palestinian academics and intellectuals, call upon our colleagues in the international community to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel’s occupation, colonization and system of apartheid”*

Thus the alleged absence of a shared decision by UK HE institutions to boycott Israeli institutions has no effect on the validity of the Palestinian call, which ethical and solidarity considerations all support. But in fact, the 2010 congress of the University and College Union in the UK, resolved “to reaffirm its support for BDS and to seek its implementation within the constraints of the existing law”, [...] to establish an annual international conference on BDS [and to] [...] commence the investigatory process associated with the imposition of a boycott of Ariel college”. (Motion 31). We noticed that the YSJU made no reference to contracts and finance yet these are often important considerations in such circumstances.

We have informed YSJU that we regret their decision and hope it is not irreversible. We intend to carry this action further by communicating directly with people who are planning to attend the conference. We informed YSJU that we have discussed the situation with Omar Barghouti at PACBI, and that he would be very happy to discuss the matter with them.

Prof David Pegg and Dr Monica Wusteman

### **Notes.**

- 1] Ilan Pappé: “A History of Modern Palestine: One Land , Two Peoples” 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Cambridge University Press (2006)
- 2] Clayton Swisher: “The Palestine Papers” Hesperus Press (2011)
- 3] BRICUP “Why Boycott Israeli Universities” p 24 (2007).

**Letter to the Editor:**

## **Hebrew University has a history of land theft**

Dear Editor,

In "Argument for the Boycott of an Israeli University" (August edition of the Newsletter), you mentioned that the Hebrew University is partly built on land confiscated by Israel in 1968, in breach of the 4th Geneva Convention. In fact there are more recent examples of land theft by HUJI.

On Sunday, November 21 2004, armed security guards hired by Hebrew University Properties, Ltd. arrived at the home of the Al-Helou family to announce that their land would be confiscated for the expansion of the university dormitories. The Al-Helou family is among seven families whose houses are trapped among the university dormitory buildings. They have lived in this area, called Ard Al-Samar, since 1948 when they were forced out of the Jerusalem village of Lifta with the establishment of the Jewish state. After the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem began in 1967, their land has been confiscated repeatedly by the university to build student dorms.

In the incident in November 2004, the Al-Helou family and their neighbours sat in the path of the bulldozers and called the police for help. However, the police joined the armed guards in attacking the families, who were all brutally beaten and suffocated by tear gas. Hasan Al-Helou (86 years old) was beaten unconscious, and Rami Taha (16 years old) was left with a fractured arm. This particular episode was meticulously documented and captured on camera by Shirabe Yamada, a human rights worker who witnessed it. A fuller account with photographs can be found on the "Electronic Intifada" website: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article3361.shtml>

It was this appalling history of land theft which prompted the Birmingham branch of the Association of University Teachers to submit a motion to AUT Council in 2005 calling for AUT members to boycott the Hebrew University. The motion got remitted to the Executive and never saw the light of day again, but members of AUT who were present heard my colleague Shereen Benjamin's moving speech while she held up enlarged copies of some of the photos showing distraught Palestinian families trying to challenge the University's bulldozers.

I do not know whether HUJI has by now succeeded in evicting the seven families from their lands.

Perhaps other readers of the newsletter can update us.

Yours,  
Dr Sue Blackwell  
Birmingham

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## **On Engagement and disengagement – the fallacy of ‘engaging’ with the Israeli occupation: academic posturing at York St. John University**

A standard argument of those who support Israel against BDS and the academic boycott, has been the so-called need to engage with Israel and Israelis, under the generalized pretence of assisting peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question. In the last 45 years of the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, many attempts at ‘engaging’ were repeatedly made, too numerous to be listed here, all welcomed by Israel and its academic institutions.

It is interesting to note the results of such ‘engagements’. It would be bad enough if they resulted in nothing whatsoever, but that is not the case; At each point that public opinion and diplomatic pressure were applied by western nations, Israel has returned to the formulaic retort – what is required is more ‘engagement’, more discussions and more meetings, more negotiations between the sides, that will inevitably lead to a just solution... This automatic reaction saw off the US Presidents who tried to ‘engage’ the Israeli government in meaningful discussions about a long-term resolution, which will involve Israeli withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967, and illegally settled since, in defiance of clear UN resolutions demanding immediate withdrawal. The results of such discussions and engagements were rather impressive.

Under the guise of continuing discussions and negotiations, a process never really active unless enormous pressure is applied to Israel, and then employed in a manner which denies any possibility of resolution, Israel has managed to use this ‘engagement’ cover, and settle some 700,000 illegal settlers in the Occupied Territories of Palestine and Syria. This is almost the number of Palestinian refugees who were forcibly driven out in 1948 by the Israeli forces, never allowed to return, despite UN resolutions demanding their return to their land and homes.

In over six decades of its existence, Israel has defied the UN on the most crucial resolutions it passed on the rights of the Palestinians. It has broken international law (and its own legislation, in numerous cases) and settled the territories, not just stealing Palestinian lands to build those, but also denying all human rights to the Palestinian people under its jackboot, collecting taxes from those under occupation, in order to finance their occupation. More than 12,000 Palestinians are in Israeli prisons, many in illegal administrative detention. Israel has defied and denied the Geneva Convention on numerous counts, denying not only human right to the Palestinian under occupation, but had also refused to honour its legal duties under the Convention, to look after the population under occupation. It has continuously refused to allow Palestinian institutions of Higher education the license to operate, and closed such institutions for long periods – Bir Zeit University, for instance, was closed for over four and a half years. During the long years of occupation, terrible atrocities have been conducted, with total immunity, against the Palestinians by Israel. The Gaza massacre of over 1450 men, women and children (over 450 of them alone) that followed the Israeli attack during Christmas 2008, was only the latest of such atrocities. A system of racially skewed illegal laws and regulations has been imposed on Palestine, and has built what can only be described as an apartheid state, continuously denying the human rights of over 2.5 million people using racist arguments to deny their rights, by a militarized colonial state, fully supported by the great majority of its academics, and all its universities and colleges. The universities have built colleges in the occupied territories, have enlarged their own campuses on occupied land, and have assisted the military occupation in any way they could, enforcing what are racist regulations. One can clearly say that Israel's universities have played their full role in the occupation and oppression of the Palestinians – from their professors serving in checkpoints to their research assisting the military in a myriad ways.

During these long decades of occupation, little if any opposition to Israel's crimes was mounted by academics abroad. This was very different in the case of South Africa, of course, where many academics were involved for decades in the Anti-Apartheid movement, and played an important role in defeating the apartheid regime. Only in 2005 did the BDS campaign start in earnest in the UK, with the PACBI call for an academic boycott and the setting up of BRICUP, which has since been

involved in numerous actions, mostly successful, in the academic and cultural boycott of Israel.

As a result of the early successes, Israel's universities have spent much funding and organization on countering the boycott, financially supported by various government ministries. A long-term policy was devised, and the UK it was given the utmost priority of this campaign, as it has been in the forefront of BDS action worldwide. A number of Israeli special task forces, made up from all seven Israeli universities' dispatched representatives to Britain to 'explain' the need for 'engagement' and 'dialogue'. These were the same professors who had for years disengaged from any support of human and civic rights of Palestinians, as well as their right to education and higher education, they were now globe-trotting in support of the real victim – Israel, and fomenting the need for 'engagement' with the forces of occupation under the banner of dialogue.

### **What could be wrong with dialogue? Surely one should never stop dialogue?**

Actually, one should NOT have a dialogue with racists and fascists, arguably. One should not collaborate in the efforts of a racist, militarized colonial state in cleansing its crimes and covering up its actions by asking for 'engagement', so that the same crimes, and newer ones, could be continued. Indeed, without such partners in crime, always prepared to 'engage' with Israel, and pretending that this is somehow, despite some five decades of evidence to the contrary, helping to resolve the conflict, while not a single shred of evidence for how 'engagement' has led to resolution actually exists. In the case of South Africa, it was clear to all academics with a moral consciousness that there is no way to 'engage' with apartheid by speaking to its representatives. The only way to engage with apartheid positively was to oppose it – to boycott and divest and to apply sanctions, to deny South African institutions any support and dialogue, and to follow the advice and request of the ANC – total opposition to apartheid. Most UK academics have come round to this conclusion rather quickly, and avoided any links with South African universities.

In the case of Israel, this has not been the case until now. Despite the UCU resolutions against support for the occupation, many universities and some academics find it justifiable to continue supporting the apartheid regime in Israel. A special organization, called of course "Engage", was set up

to support such institutions, and to oppose the growing call for BDS across Britain, Europe and the rest of the world. In the last few years, after a number of defeats suffered by Engage, the members of this voluntary arm of the Israeli Hasbara have become much muted and are almost inactive. Instead, the official Hasbara, with hundreds of millions at its disposal, has started a campaign to 'engage' UK universities with Israel. They finance conferences, pay for academics to travel to Israel, and gladly wine and dine such collaborators with its policies with considerable generosity. The topics chosen for such conferences are also telling: 'Co-existence', 'dialogue for peace', 'reconciliation', 'options for peace', 'peaceful dialogue', 'conflict resolution' – all are obviously a reinforcement of the Israeli process of speaking while settling illegally. Not, you understand, speaking to the Palestinians meaningfully – this is obviously out of the question, and has been so since 1948; no, instead they would like to speak to anyone else and especially to academics from the US and Europe, and the other western nations. This is a way of building bridges, making friends, and making allies also – those who were generously flown, housed, wined-and-dined and entertained at Israeli expense, are much less likely to join or support the campaign for Palestinian freedom and justice.

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And so we come to the case of York St John's University, and its organizing of a conference, in Jerusalem, titled "Reconciliation through art, music and film". One has to wince at the title, indeed. If reconciliation is involved, it must be reconciliation of European academics with Israeli apartheid, indeed. After the Deputy VC, Prof. David Maughan Brown, has been written to by BRICUP members David Pegg and Monica Wusteman, who asked him to cancel the YSJU conference, he invited them for a meeting. At that meeting, it became quite clear he had no idea of the depth of Israeli university involvement in the occupation in an enabling role, and as a full participant; that at least is the picture painted at the meeting. Prof. Brown promised to investigate and invite them for a second meeting, to give them the university reaction and any actions that it might adopt.

Such a meeting was never held. Prof. Brown used the machinery of the Ethics Committee, called especially during the summer, a fact unusual in itself, in order to make Koshers that which is obviously not so. Despite the facts laid before the Committee, none of which did they dispute, they found it necessary and justifiable to continue with the conference at the Hebrew University, part of

which is built on land forcibly confiscated from Palestinians. The reasons given, in spite of all the evidence provided, and which is attached on the BRICUP site, were two: It is better to engage than not engage, and the fact that there is no 'mutual commitment' to BDS, which they appear to understand as a UCU commitment to BDS, still lacking. What can one say about the moral, political and intellectual foundation to such conniving rationale?

It is clear that any Ethics Committee worth its salt would not be capable of such an intellectual *salto mortale*, defying the basic principles of ethical decision-making, and advancing the Israeli 'engagement' policy as a cover-up for moral capitulation. One can understand the need of YSJU to get out of a straightjacket of breaking contracts and changing arrangements – that is the real-world they live in – but to paint this into an ethical and moral act, one which may, or will, assist in bringing about a just solution in Palestine is the height of hypocrisy. It is this attitude that enables and underwrites Israeli atrocities and the continuation of its illegal occupation – the refusal to stand up and be counted, to openly and courageously oppose apartheid, and reasonably stand up for international law, the UN resolutions, the Geneva Convention, and the rights of the Palestinians. If such was the stand by all academics during apartheid, it may have still been with us.

Rather than a failure of BRICUP to persuade YSJU to change its mind after it blundered into collaboration with Israeli apartheid, it is a failure of YSJU to face up to the ethical challenge that Israeli policy is forcing all of us to take up. No doubt they will be enjoying the conference on "Reconciliation through art, music and film", and also their role in bringing about just peace in Palestine by playing along with Israeli Hasbara, giving Israeli propaganda another victory.

Prof. Haim Bresheeth

Israeli Cinema Studies scholar, Filmmaker

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## The PACBI Column

**Call to academics, students and artists around the world: Join the World Social Forum Free Palestine to build Solidarity with the Palestinian People!**

From November 28 to December 1, 2012 the World Social Forum Free Palestine will be held in Porto Alegre (Brazil). This is a historic event that brings together Palestinian groups (including the BNC, PACBI, Herak Shababi, amongst others) together with solidarity, human rights and social justice movements and organizations from across the globe to develop and debate ideas, share experiences, network, and plan strategies and campaigns to advance solidarity with the struggle for Palestinian liberation. (For more information and the full call for the WSF Free Palestine, see:

<http://wsfpalestine.net/> and [www.facebook.com/WSFPalestine](http://www.facebook.com/WSFPalestine) )

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel calls on academics, students and artists around the world to mobilize in support of the WSF Free Palestine. By expanding and strengthening academic and cultural boycott campaigns and strategies amongst a broader audience across the globe, we wish to build a new generation of Palestine solidarity.

We ask you to join the effort by organizing delegations to the event and developing ideas for discussions and strategies. This can include organizing academic and cultural boycott campaigns, discussing the role of the academy with regards to Palestine, enhancing anti-colonial studies, promoting right to education campaigns, and developing other areas drawing on your own experiences to share and build upon with the global solidarity community.

The potential scope of the WSF Free Palestine is tremendous: together we can build relations and coordination mechanisms among Palestinian and international academics, artists and student movements (including academic and cultural boycott campaigns, campus divestments, and twinnings of universities). We can promote participation in specific global action days around BDS activities (including the Israeli Apartheid Week, and days of solidarity with the Palestinian people), and in international forums related to Palestine (including major academic conferences). And we can organize forums/conferences that promote anti-colonial studies and fight against the normalization of Israeli studies within the international academy.

Please join PACBI in the WSF Free Palestine and contact us at [academics@wsfpalestine.net](mailto:academics@wsfpalestine.net) so that you can be part of the mobilizing process!

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel was launched in Ramallah in April 2004 by a group of Palestinian academics and intellectuals to join the growing international boycott movement. The Campaign built on the Palestinian call for a **comprehensive economic, cultural and academic boycott of Israel** issued in August 2002 and a statement made by Palestinian academics and intellectuals in the occupied territories and in the Diaspora calling for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions in October 2003.

Over the past eight years, and inspired by the integral role that Israeli academic institutions play in developing the knowledge and technology behind Israeli occupation, colonization and apartheid, and planning and justifying Israel's worst crimes, **academic boycott** campaigns have spread to campuses across the world:

- Setting a worldwide precedent for the academic boycott of Israel, [the University of Johannesburg severed ties with Israel's Ben-Gurion University](#) in 2011, following a campaign backed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and over 400 South African academics.

- Campaigns against EU-funded collaboration with private Israeli companies and Israeli universities have sprung up at campuses across Europe in response to a [call from Palestinian academics and civil society](#).

- Academic unions in the [UK](#) and [Canada](#) have voted to support various academic boycott campaign initiatives. There are also active academic boycott campaigns in [India](#), the US, South Africa, Ireland, Chile, Brazil, Pakistan, and in many European countries.

Israel is rapidly losing support around the world and has recently been voted again as one of the [most negatively viewed countries in the world](#). Israel's attempts to whitewash its system of colonization, occupation and apartheid using culture is increasingly thwarted by a highly visible **cultural boycott**:

- [Scores of artists](#) — especially musicians and filmmakers — and writers have refused to perform in Israel or cancelled scheduled performances following pressure from the BDS movement including Bono, Snoop Dogg, Jean Luc Godard, Elvis Costello, Gil Scott Heron, Carlos Santana, Devendra Banhart, Faithless, the Pixies, Cassandra Wilson, Cat Power, Zakir Hussain.

- Many artists and other cultural figures now speak publicly of their support for BDS: [Roger Waters](#), [Alice Walker](#), Naomi Klein, John Berger, Judith Butler, Etienne Balibar, Ken Loach, Arundhati Roy, Angela Davis, Sarah Schulman, among others.

- Israeli artists who accept funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are required to sign a contract committing them to be part of Israel's cultural public relations offensive. Protests and campaigns against state-backed performances — such as those by the Batsheva dance company, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Habima theater, and the Jerusalem Quartet — are now commonplace in Europe and North America, forcing some cultural venues to defend or retract their decision to host representatives of Israel and persuading others not to invite state-backed Israeli artists at all.

The level of success of the WSF Free Palestine is dependent on having representation from as many academics, students and cultural workers as possible to reflect the diverse nature of the Palestine solidarity movement and to be able to share the vast and diverse knowledge and experience it has accumulated. We therefore call upon you to join us in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to spread the word regarding WSF amongst colleagues, and to help organize a delegation or meeting. Let's work together to bring freedom, justice and equality to Palestine.

PACBI

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### **Culture as political propaganda**

Protests against the imminent appearance of Israel's Batsheva Dance Company during the Edinburgh International Festival have started to attract support from contemporary dance figures including Alain Platel, founder of the Belgian dance company Les Ballets C de la B, and UK choreographer Jonathan Burrows.

Both have endorsed statements opposing Batsheva's participation in the festival because the company is part of a Brand Israel campaign, begun in 2005, explicitly using culture as a political propaganda tool to distract attention from Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinian people. Palestinians and their supporters around the world have countered with a boycott call modelled on the anti-apartheid campaign which helped to end white supremacy in South Africa in the 1980s.

Tiffany Jenkins argued in the Scotsman last month (Sing a song of freedom, the show must go on, July 24) that boycott campaigns, including the campaign against South African apartheid, threaten to stifle artistic expression. She said that artists must not be blamed for the politics of their governments and was impressed that Batsheva's artistic director Ohad Naharin has asserted the company's independence from government despite the state funding they receive.

But this independence is a fiction. Whatever Mr Naharin's personal beliefs, the Israeli government regards his company as its 'most important global ambassador'. As in every other case of a significant Israeli cultural institution visiting the UK, the Israeli embassy in London has celebrated Batsheva's forthcoming tour, hailing it as an example of the 'fruitful links' fostered by culture. Israel has been enjoying cultural links with Europe for decades without anything 'fruitful' happening, especially for the Palestinians. Welcoming Israel's dancers and musicians in the UK does nothing to resolve the confiscation of Palestinian land, the fate of their refugees, the siege on Gaza, the occupation of the West Bank and east Jerusalem or the resulting suppression of Palestinian culture.

Those who support the boycott recognise that Batsheva produces world class work. The campaign does not target individual artists nor attempt to censor the content of their performances. Batsheva is just one of the institutions enmeshed in the Brand Israel system. Continuing to treat them as 'normal' merely reassures Israelis and their government that no change is needed. Those who wish to shield Israel from the consequences of its actions talk about artistic freedom and make fraudulent claims that culture has nothing to do with politics. Meanwhile Friends of Batsheva organisations in the US and Australia invite donations specifically to 'contribute towards a positive image of Israel globally' and Palestinian cultural life is trampled underfoot.

The Palestinian boycott call has been taken up as a last resort by people of conscience, including a growing number of Israelis, because there is no alternative means to defend the powerless against the powerful. Israel is granted total impunity by western governments who are quick to use sanctions and worse against other human rights transgressing states. Dance scholar and author Dr Nicholas Rowe, who has extensive experience of working with dance

in the occupied Palestinian territories, said that Israeli artists have to make stark choices if they are not to play the part of ‘political puppets.’ He challenged Batsheva as a company and Naharin as its artistic director to ‘publicly condemn the illegal military occupation of the West Bank and the ongoing theft of land and property by the government that pays them to tour in the name of Israel.’

**As long as Batsheva continues in its role of paid ambassador for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, it should expect to be challenged by boycott campaigners wherever it appears.**

Naomi Wimbourne Idrissi

#### **Note:**

This is the unedited text of a letter submitted to the Scotsman before the performances by Batsheva started. An abbreviated version was published by the Scotsman

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### **Don’t Dance with Israeli Apartheid**

Over three nights in Edinburgh last week, BRICUP members joined Scottish PSC and other human rights activists from across the UK in major protests at the appearance of the Israeli dance company, Batsheva, at the Edinburgh International Festival. This talented contemporary dance company is funded by the Israeli state and hailed by the Israeli Minister of Culture as ‘Israel’s best known cultural ambassador of Israeli culture’ – therefore qualifying it for boycott under the criteria laid down in the 2005 boycott call to the international community from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI).

Each of the company’s three performances at the Edinburgh Playhouse took place against a backdrop of very large protests outside - with audience members arriving and leaving to chants of ‘Your tickets are covered in Palestinian blood’ - and regular interruptions of the performances inside. Information from a reliable source put the attendance as low as 600 on the first night, and dropping to around 400 on the subsequent 2 nights. This poor attendance, which was supported by the testimony of the activists inside, was in sharp contrast to the audiences for another contemporary dance company, this time from Brazil, which performed at the Playhouse earlier in the Festival to capacity crowds - suggesting the possibility that the cultural boycott is beginning to bite hard, at least in Scotland.

The impact of these protests continues to unfold in unexpected ways that give the lie to the assertion that academic and cultural boycott prevents engagement and dialogue between opposing sides. We expect to be able to report further on these in future editions of this Newsletter and on the continuing protests which will follow the dancers during the rest of their UK tour (see [www.coordin8.org.uk](http://www.coordin8.org.uk) for tour details)

Dr. Monica Wusteman

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### **New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership.**

New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership, NYACT for short, would like to thank BRICUP for giving us this opportunity to describe our campaign in your Newsletter. A brief introduction was published in the July issue (number 54). Our campaign exists because of a proposal by Cornell University to partner with The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology to build a 12 acre applied sciences and technology campus on Roosevelt Island, Manhattan. The proposal was announced in December 2011. The significance of the Technion’s plans to build in NYC, being as it is a global hub of international business and commerce, cannot be overstated. The Acting Consul General of Israel in New York stated “This is of strategic importance in terms of positioning Israel not only in America, but all over the world, as a bastion of creativity and innovation”.

#### **What is The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology?**

The Technion – Israel Institute of Technology was founded in 1912, 36 years before the formation of the state of Israel, with a donation from New York banker, businessman, and philanthropist Jacob Schiff<sup>[1]</sup>. The Technion is located in Haifa in what was then Ottoman Palestine. Classes began in 1924, and from the outset the institute’s purpose was to educate the engineers, planners, and weapons manufacturers who would go on to create the Jewish-only state of Israel. The Technion quickly grew into Israel’s major weapons lab thanks to the continuation of financial support from the US. According to a recent article on the WNYC News site:

*“[The Technion’s] operating budget comes from the Israeli government, but two-thirds of all private*

*fundraising come from the U.S. – and the biggest donor region is the New York metro area”<sup>[2]</sup>*

Education and research at the Technion is focused on the development of hi-tech weaponry, serving as an incubator for the Israeli military-industrial complex, and developing technologies which are detailed below. Most Israeli universities are involved in one way or another in helping the military, but the Technion has all but enlisted itself in the Israeli armed forces.

Despite this history, or perhaps because of it, the mainstream press has supplied little information about The Technion. Events hosted by Cornell University and Mayor Bloomberg’s office have also sidelined the issue. The Technion is not contributing financially to this project<sup>[3]</sup>, and the principal actors kept its involvement secret until ten days before the City’s deadline for proposals<sup>[4]</sup>. Less than two weeks after Cornell announced their receipt of a \$350 million ‘gift’, later revealed to be from Cornell alumnus and millionaire Charles Feeney<sup>[5]</sup>, the frontrunners in the race, Stanford University, dropped out. Stanford’s President said that: “The city had changed the terms of the proposed deal”, and Stanford’s general council stated:

*“I have been a lawyer for over thirty years, and I have never seen negotiations that were handled so poorly by a reputable party”<sup>[6]</sup>*

Following Stanford’s exit, the Cornell-Technion proposal was speedily approved in what Cathy Dove, Vice President of the New Campus, called an “amazing fast tracked progress”<sup>[7]</sup>. Why all the secrecy?

## **1. The Technion is complicit in crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian people**

According to Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, The Technion was complicit in ethnic cleansing in the Galilee, a north-central region of Israel largely populated by Palestinians. Leading academics from The Technion prepared a plan, publicized in 2003, which stated that the Jewish ‘takeover’ of the Galilee was a national priority. Their prospectus began by saying: “It is either them or us. The land problems in the Galilee proved that any territory not taken by Zionist elements is going to be coveted by

non-Zionists”.<sup>[8]</sup> A 1993 United Nations Commission defined ethnic cleansing as “the planned deliberate removal from a specific territory, persons of a particular ethnic group, by force or intimidation, in order to render that area ethnically homogenous”<sup>[9]</sup>, and it is considered a crime against humanity under the statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>[10]</sup>

## **2. The Technion is deeply involved in the research and development of weapons and surveillance equipment**

### *The remote-controlled Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer*

The armored bulldozer is an essential component of the Israeli occupation. It has enabled the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to demolish approximately 25,000 Palestinian homes since 1967, according to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions<sup>[11]</sup>. Bulldozers have occasionally come under attack by Palestinian resistance fighters and stone-throwing children, defending their homes and property from unwarranted and illegal demolition. In response, The Technion has developed remote-control capabilities for the Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer to facilitate the continued destruction of Palestinian houses, olive groves, and tunnels without any risk to their operators. According to one IDF officer, the IDF doubled its order for D-9s after they “performed remarkably during operation Cast Lead [the invasion of Gaza]”<sup>[12]</sup>. A UN-appointed fact finding mission later reported strong evidence of war crimes committed during that operation<sup>[13]</sup>.

In 2006, the Church of England divested from Caterpillar, stating that it would not invest in “companies profiting from the illegal occupation [of Palestine]”<sup>[14]</sup>. In May 2012 the Quaker Friends Fiduciary Corporation voted to divest completely from Caterpillar due to their “zero tolerance for weapons and weapons components... We are uncomfortable defending our position on this stock”<sup>[15, 16]</sup>. Also, in May 2012, one of the world’s largest pension funds, TIAA-CREF, removed Caterpillar from its Socially Responsible Investment portfolio following the downgrading of Caterpillar by the MCSI ratings agency, which cited “on-going controversy associated with use of the company’s equipment in the occupied Palestinian territories”<sup>[17, 18]</sup>.

### *Drones as weapons and surveillance devices*

The first modern drone was developed in Israel in 1973<sup>[19]</sup>, and Israel is the single largest exporter of drones in the world<sup>[20]</sup>. As part of the Technion

Autonomous Systems Program (TASP), students at The Technion developed the “Stealth drone” which can fly up to 1850 miles and carry two 1100-pound “smart bombs.” TASP also developed the “Dragonfly” drone whose 9-inch wing span makes it small enough to “easily enter rooms through small windows and to send back photos from a miniature camera” according to the American Technion Society’s website.<sup>[21]</sup>

For decades, The Technion has been engaged in weapons research and development as part of Israel’s longstanding war against Developing World liberation struggles. The effect, according to Israeli scholar Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, is that:

*“What Israel has been exporting...is not just a technology of domination, but a worldview that undergirds that technology...the logic of the oppressor, the way of seeing the world that is tied to successful domination...not just technology, armaments, and experience, not just expertise, but a certain frame of mind...that modern Crusaders have a future”*<sup>[22]</sup>

Furthermore, The Technion receives significant funding from Amdocs, a telecommunications company on the BDS boycott list for its declaration of support for Israeli “security” policies against Palestinians, and for its alleged spying on US citizens via digital tracking and recording of telephone conversations<sup>[23, 24]</sup>. Amdocs awards annual prizes to Technion students and hires many Technion graduates<sup>[25]</sup>. The Technion’s Computer Science Department library is even named Amdocs Computer Science Library<sup>[26]</sup>.

### **3. The Technion works closely with two of Israel’s largest weapons manufacturers**

**Rafael Advanced Systems** is one of Israel’s largest government-sponsored weapons manufacturers, famous for the “advanced hybrid armor protection system” used on the IDF’s Merkava Mk4 main battle tank. Shots were fired from one such tank in April 2008, killing a 24 year old Reuters cameraman and eight Palestinian civilians, aged 12-20<sup>[27, 28]</sup>. The relationship between The Technion and Rafael reaches back over 10 years. In a 2001 press release, The Technion announced an “MBA program tailored specifically for Rafael managers”<sup>[29]</sup> further solidifying the relationship this collaboration represents between academia and the military.

**Elbit Systems** is a major Israeli private weapons research company. It is one of the two main contractors of the electronic detection fence<sup>[30]</sup>, a key component of Israel’s Separation Wall in the West Bank which the International Court of Justice has deemed a violation of international law<sup>[31]</sup>. Elbit provide surveillance equipment (Lorros surveillance cameras, unmanned ground vehicles, and the TORCH surveillance system) which are used to monitor activity around the wall<sup>[32]</sup> and are now being exported to the United States through its American subsidiary, Kollsman, Inc.<sup>[33]</sup>.

Norway’s Finance Ministry divested from Elbit in 2009, stating:

“We do not wish to fund companies that so directly contribute to violations of international humanitarian law”<sup>[34]</sup>

In 2010 Denmark’s largest financial institution, Danske Bank, and Sweden’s largest pension funds also divested from Elbit<sup>[35, 36]</sup>. In contrast to these investors, The Technion opened a center for the development of electro-optics in partnership with Elbit in 2008. According to The Technion’s Dean of Electrical Engineering, “We view the establishment of the new research center as a major upward step in our long-term partnership with Elbit Systems”<sup>[37]</sup>.

### **4. The Technion gives special treatment to Israeli soldiers while discriminating against Palestinian students and stifling political dissent**

The Technion boasts the highest percentage of students serving in the army reserves, many of whom form part of both the academic elite at Technion and the military elite in the IDF<sup>[38]</sup>. Israeli law stipulates that universities give special treatment to student reservists<sup>[39]</sup>, and no Israeli university has ever expressed even symbolic opposition to that law. This practice highlights not only the complicity of Israeli academic institutions in the occupation, but also discriminates against Palestinian students, none of whom may serve in the Israeli military. It also discriminates against the small but significant number of Jewish conscientious objectors who refuse to serve in the IDF.

Grants and academic benefits are commonly awarded based on past, present or future military service. More recently, reservists studying at The Technion who had served in Operation Cast Lead were rewarded with academic benefits in excess of the usual and customary benefits<sup>[40]</sup>.

The Technion has a long record of stifling political dissent. In 2009 the Student Union produced a poster supporting the IDF invasion of Gaza, and arranged a counter-demonstration against Palestinian students holding a protest outside The Technion against the IDF atrocities. Despite having received no prior approval, the pro-IDF demonstration was allowed to continue within the grounds of the Technion. In contrast, in 2010 ten Palestinian students were arrested for peacefully protesting the assault on the Gaza-bound Freedom Flotilla, even though they had applied for, and been granted permission to demonstrate <sup>[41]</sup>.

Finally, The Technion trains students for specific positions in Israel's military and is a partner in the Brakim academic reservist program which trains students in Mechanical Engineering and, according to the publication *Technion Focus*, allows students to "complete their undergraduate degrees and apply their education during their military service" <sup>[42, 43]</sup>.

### We respond to the Palestinian call for action

In March 2012, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) <sup>[44]</sup>, a Palestinian civil society organization, sent out an Appeal for Action to End the Cornell Collaboration with The Technion. They stated:

*"[W]e call on US civil society to bring the injustices of this venture to light. In the first instance, all New York City residents should, rightfully, be outraged that their tax dollars are being apportioned in the service of such an endeavor, and we appeal to them to pressure the City of New York administration to end this collaboration. Moreover, we ask students, staff, and faculty at institutions around the country, including student groups such as SJP [Students for Justice in Palestine], as well as workers, labor unions, and other civil society organizations in New York City, to mobilize against the administration of Cornell University to end its partnership with Technion. More importantly, we call on people of conscience to mobilize against the Cornell-Technion partnership, and more broadly, [to boycott Israeli academic institutions] through street protests, educational venues, media presence and other such mobilizations"* <sup>[45]</sup>

NYACT now joins the campaign against The Technion as it attempts to open a campus in New York City. Our demands are:

- That the City of New York Administration ends this collaboration, for which \$100 million of New Yorker's tax-payer money has been promised
- That the Cornell University Administration ends its partnership with The Technion, in line with the call by the Palestinian Council for Higher Education's request for "non-cooperation in the scientific and technical fields between Palestinian and Israeli universities" <sup>[45]</sup>

We ask all people of conscience to join us in our campaign and to make it clear that institutions complicit in ethnic cleansing, house demolitions, illegal separation walls, surveillance and weapons drones, and academic and social discrimination have no place in New York City.

### Campaign strategy

To ensure success, our campaign must be sustained over the long-term. Realizing this, we have focused on three main areas:

#### 1. *Engaging Roosevelt Island residents and workers*

One of our first actions was to go to Roosevelt Island where the proposed campus is to be built, and talk to local residents both while leafleting, and at a public meeting we held. There was an overwhelming feeling that no one was talking to them about the involvement of The Technion. Some of those in support of our efforts expressed concern that a "war mongering" institute was coming to their neighborhood. This sentiment was reflected particularly powerfully in a message sent to NYACT from a woman who works at the nursing facility which is due to be demolished to make way for the campus:

*"... For a long time we thought Donald Trump had bought the property for luxury condominiums. Then we were told about the college campus project. Now, we learn that the nursing facility is to be torn down and the forest land de-forested in order to provide a safe haven for the military destroyers created by Technion. As a health care professional you can not disrespect my life-giving work more than by replacing my work with the profession of death and destruction... of national supremacy and war mongering. I spoke out against any invasion of the Goldwater Campus which will endanger our peaceful forested campus. Your involvement is a welcome increase in numbers of those who care about health... and peace."*

We continue to be a presence at meetings held on Roosevelt Island by the local Community Board, and by Cornell University. It is vital that local residents and workers are involved in our campaign, and we will maintain a focus on that as we move forward with more actions and public engagement.

## 2. *Raising awareness*

Carefully researched documents have been distributed via leaflets, social media, our website, and read out at public talks. We promote our campaign at BDS workshops and local actions, many of which are organized by our endorsers. We have also been written about in the local press, and have responded with comments and statements.

To date three academic faculty members out of an expected total of 250 have been recruited, and NYACT have issued Open Letters asking them to reconsider their appointments. We will continue to do so, bringing attention to the complicity of The Technion in war crimes. In a similar fashion we will also issue letters to companies and organizations recruited to design and build the campus.

## 3. *Building a local and international network of support*

The Technion campaign is relevant to other types of campaign groups; for example their involvement in drone weapons and surveillance technology makes them an obvious target for the peace movement and local Muslim groups who have recently bought civil liberties court cases against the NYPC for surveillance practices. Our outreach therefore includes not only Palestinian solidarity groups, but also anti-war groups, anti-racist groups, immigrant groups, and unions. We are also connecting with groups working on other Technion campaigns in Toronto, London, and New Delhi, to form a network of Technion campaign groups. In this way we will be able to share resources and support each other as our campaigns grow.

NYACT

**Note:** All the references cited in this article are on the [NYACT website](#) at) To find out more about NYACT go to their [website](#). To get in touch email: [nyact@riseup.net](mailto:nyact@riseup.net)

## 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  
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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](#).here.

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

## Notices

We hope to be able to publish more detail of the Batsheva action in the October edition of the Newsletter.

## Letters to the Editor

Please note that we do have a “Letters to the Editor” facility. We urge you to use it. It provides an opportunity for valuable input from our supporters and gives you the opportunity to contribute to the debate and development of the campaign. Please send letters to arrive on or before the first day of each month for consideration for that month’s newsletter. Aim not to exceed 250 words if possible.

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## You can follow BRICUP on twitter!

See [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)