

# BRICUP Newsletter 77

BRICUP

British Committee for the  
Universities of Palestine

June 2014

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**Indiana Isaacs meets Lara Netanyahu – NBC TV series starts filming in Jerusalem**

This article describes an ongoing cultural boycott campaign, with a British angle.

NBC the major US media company has been bribed with Israeli gold to film an action-adventure series in Jerusalem. DIG's lead is British actor Jason Isaacs, and the director of the first of its 6 episodes is also British – SJ Clarkson. Extraordinarily the story line has archaeology at

its heart, and it will centre on Silwan – a major archaeological site and possibly the most contested area of Jerusalem. Filming started there on Thursday June 5th.

The possible implications of this project spread well beyond Israel/Palestine. The key figure in the whole enterprise is Gideon Raff, who created the Israeli series Hatufim (loosely translated as Prisoners of War) which was snapped up by US TV before the Israeli series even started filming. It became the hit series Homeland, on which Raff is executive producer. Not just a hit in the US, but also in the UK (Channel 4) and round the world. Raff is a former IDF paratrooper.

If DIG should rival Homeland in its popularity, the scope for Brand Israel publicity is all too evident. That is why the Israeli government has gone the extra mile to make sure that it happened. DIG is the first recipient of a newly created grant from the Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality designed to lure big-budget projects to Jerusalem. In other words, a tailor-made bribe. [Other programme makers have protested.](#)

The size of the bribe is 22 million Israel shekels (£3.8 million) some of which will only be paid if the programme returns to film a second season. Funding comes from several ministries, including those of Finance, of Economy and of Tourism. The new grant is being justified as a vehicle to boost employment and investment in Jerusalem, strengthen the current film and television industry and (says [Variety magazine](#)) “perhaps most crucially – [to] help brand Jerusalem and the State of Israel in a positive light”.

We don't just have to take Variety's word for this. We have it from [Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Naftali Bennett](#): “A picture is worth a thousand words — sometimes shooting a

series in Israel is worth more than a thousand publicity tours of the country,” Bennett said. The project would “brand Jerusalem as an international tourism destination.”

He went to meet the whole DIG team (including Isaacs, Clarkson and Raff) as soon as they arrived. Not to be outdone Jerusalem’s mayor Nir Barkat had dinner with the cast and crew. Barkat of course is notorious for presiding over the ethnic cleansing of whole areas of Jerusalem. But he is outshone in notoriety by Bennett, head of the far-right Jewish Home (Habayit Hayehudi) party. [Bennett has been described as “an upfront racist”](#) who is on record as saying [“I’ve killed many Arabs in my life and there’s no problem with that.”](#)

These are the people that the crew of DIG (including its British members) are dining with, and they are not using a long spoon

Lets look a bit more closely at the theme of the series, and at the location of the filming.

Archaeology, now that would be a nice safe, uncontroversial subject, wouldn’t it? Well no actually. Consider the BBC4 television series Archaeology: a Secret History screened last spring. That is, it was all screened except the programme Jerusalem: an Archaeological Mystery Story, which was pulled just days ahead of its scheduled (and widely advertised) screening. It was shown months later in a re-edited version, and followed by a studio discussion ‘for balance’. What then was so controversial about happenings 2000 or so years ago? Well, the programme presented archaeological evidence which suggested that the exodus of the Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple – didn’t happen. Which would imply: that the descendants of the Jews of that period are – the Palestinians. This is clearly highly charged territory.

It is probably safe to assume that DIG has no such dangerously revisionist ideas about the foundation myths of the Jewish people. What has been revealed about the plot is that it revolves around FBI detective Peter Connelly (played by Jason Isaacs) who happens to be working in Jerusalem. He “finds himself embroiled in a race to track down a religious artifact that could trigger an event that would change the course of history, and becomes the suspect in a sensational murder.” So not a threat to belief, but perhaps a serious requirement for the suspension of disbelief.

The plot may or may not provoke outrage for its take on the history of the Holy Land, but its filming already has. The United States does not

recognize Israel’s purported annexation of East Jerusalem, and to the great majority of the world’s nations Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem is straight forwardly illegal. So here is a major US television channel filming in an illegally occupied territory, and taking Israeli government money in order to provide a publicity coup for the occupying power.

A compounding factor is that at an early stage it was announced that the filming would take place in Silwan. This is a highly contested area of East Jerusalem, and archaeology is right at the heart of the trouble. Silwan is home to some 55,000 Palestinians whose neighbourhood is being subjected to deliberate erosion. Homes are being systematically demolished and families displaced in order to build Jewish-only settlements and facilities. [Human Rights Watch has called on Israel to “immediately end unlawful demolitions of Palestinian homes”](#), and says that these activities quite possibly amount to “forcible transfer of residents of an occupied territory, which is a war crime”.

Archaeology comes into the picture because Silwan is an ancient, perhaps the most ancient, section of Jerusalem. It is a buzz of archaeological activity, but predominantly carried out by archaeologists who [“hold a spade in one hand and a bible in the other”](#) as they scramble to verify biblical events. The City of David, it is claimed, lies below the Wadi Helweh neighbourhood in Silwan, and this justifies the digging, the shafts and the tunneling going on into the hill and under the homes of the people who live there.

Remarkably the excavations in Silwan are controlled not by the Israeli Antiquities Authority, nor by a university archaeology department, but by a private organisation. This is the Ir David Foundation, popularly known as Elad, which is “dedicated to the preservation and development of the biblical City of David and its environs.” But it is also committed to establishing ideological Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem neighbourhoods - creating ‘facts on the ground’. Many people see Elad as an extremist organisation. “Armed with an explicit political agenda”, says Yonatan Mizrachi, archaeologist with Emek Shaveh (an NGO devoted to interrogating political archeology in Jerusalem) Elad [“is now the driving force behind much of the excavation of Jerusalem”](#). Its archaeological sites fence local (Palestinian) residents off, excluding them from what were playgrounds, sidewalks, roads etc – for them to be subsequently incorporated into the City of David National Park.

NBC's announcement that it would film its new drama series in occupied Jerusalem has generated strong opposition, not least in the United States. A 5000 name petition was handed in at NBC offices in New York and Los Angeles calling for the network to end its involvement in the series. The fact that filming would take place in such a sensitive neighbourhood has added to the outrage. Faced with growing opposition, NBC ducked and weaved. Cory Shields, Executive VP of Communications at NBC International, wrote to the General Delegation of the PLO to say "NBC Universal Cable Entertainment reiterates that there are no plans, and there will be no plans, to film 'DIG' in the City of David National Park or the village of Silwan." When activists wrote to NBC seeking assurances that the series would not be filmed in any other East Jerusalem location all they got was silence.

They need not have worried. The NBC assurance was a lie. When filming started on Thursday June 5th it was in the tunnel that [links the City of David National Park in Silwan with the Archaeological Park and Davidson Center](#), which is located near the Western Wall. Filming is also due to take place at other sites in the Old City, and in Sheikh Jarrah, another Jerusalem neighbourhood which has been the site of intense settlement activity.

What of the British lead actor, Jason Isaacs? Liverpool born, he has appeared with the National Theatre, but will be better known to younger (and maybe older) audiences for his performance as the Death Eater [Lucius Malfoy](#) in the [Harry Potter](#) films. His parents have settled in Israel. BRICUP in collaboration with other UK cultural boycott activists has been contacting British actors sympathetic to the cultural boycott about his involvement and their advice is unanimous – it would be professional suicide for Isaacs to withdraw at this point, and as a result we will not get support from theatrical people for a request that he does so. (He has however been contacted by fellow actors pointing out the problematic nature of the situation he has got himself into.) As a result we will be making our contribution to the international campaign in a different way. The aim must be to get the message into the acting profession so that its members are more fully aware of the moral hazard they would place themselves under should they be invited to film in occupied Palestine.

Jonathan Rosenhead

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The PACBI column

## Academic Boycott Grows in May 2014

In 2012, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) called on its supporters world-wide to

*intensify all aspects of BDS, but to especially focus, whenever possible, on academic boycott. Specifically, we call on faculty and student activists to pressure their academic organizations to end collaboration with complicit Israeli academic institutions or organizations, and not to organize or participate in conferences in Israel. Furthermore, we appeal to academics not to publish in Israeli academic journals and to withdraw from editorial boards of international journals based at Israeli universities. We also urge academics and students to oppose study-abroad programs that place students from the US and Europe at Israeli universities.*

One and a half years later, the Association for Humanist Sociology and the Association for Asian American Studies passed resolutions endorsing a full academic boycott of Israel. Less than two years after the 2012 statement, four other U.S. academic associations had passed resolutions or shown unwavering support for BDS, these being the Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA), the Arab American Studies Association (AASA), Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), and the American Studies Association (ASA). In addition, at least one university department, the University of Hawai'i Ethnic Studies department, came out officially in support of BDS. The US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI) led that direction in the US.

Just recently, over 700 academics appealed to participants of a Film Studies conference and an Oral history conference both taking place in Israel. Those appeals resulted in cancellations from major participants of the Film studies conference and the loss of Alessandro Portelli as Keynote speaker in the Oral History conference [1].

Student councils on campuses across the US, Britain, Ireland, Spain, Norway, South Africa, among others, have taken to heart the BDS movement's message and succeeded in passing BDS-related resolutions, mostly divestment from companies involved in the occupation, despite

unprecedented bullying and smearing from Israel and its well-oiled lobby groups.

Faculty and student activists around the world have played a key role in expanding the scope of campus-based boycott initiatives especially in the US, Britain, Spain and Norway. In comparison to previous years, where the BDS movement witnessed one to two academic boycott initiatives per year, there has been an exponential increase in the last two years. The month of May 2014 alone has seen a vibrant display of action and success in the realm of academic boycott. These are:

- In the UK, the National Union of Students (NUS) Black Students' Conference [2] adopted a motion in support of BDS. The Black Students campaign, is a self-organised autonomous section of the NUS, and "represents the largest constituency of Black students in Europe and students of African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean descent, at a local and national level on all issues affecting Black students" [3].
- In California, the student government of the University of California at Santa Cruz passed a divestment resolution, the fifth of nine campuses of the UC system to do so. This comes after a defeat on that campus a year ago and shows the changing tide and growing support for BDS on American college campuses [4]. The UC Santa Cruz motion passed despite bullying and fear tactics by Zionist groups and an intensifying anti-BDS campaign funded, promoted, and supported by the Israeli government and its lobby groups.
- In Chicago, students at DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the US, passed a resolution in similar conditions of fear and intimidation from Zionist groups. Students voted by 1,575 to 1,333 (54% to 46%) in favor of a referendum calling for divestment from companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Caterpillar for their complicity in Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian human rights [5].
- In Connecticut, Wesleyan University students also voted to support divestment from companies profiting from Israeli

military occupation in Palestine. This motion goes beyond the symbolic initiative as "the Wesleyan Student Assembly (WSA) holds a separate endowment that will soon be divested from companies implicated in the Israeli occupation" [6].

- In Florida, the University of South Florida chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine gathered an unprecedented 10,000 signatures for a petition calling for divestment. The petition is the largest student petition in Florida history [7]
- In the autonomous region of Catalonia in the Spanish State, a campaign for academic boycott has attracted the backing of over 800 academics, students and university staff [8]. In addition, activists forced the Secretariat for Universities and Research in Catalonia to examine campaigner's proposals aimed at ensuring the new deals for academic collaboration with Israel do not benefit institutions and companies that participate in Israel's occupation. [9]

Each month, academic boycott initiatives and successes increase, forcing the Israeli academic establishment and the Israeli regime at large into a panic and propelling them to high alert. BDS has been deemed one of the biggest strategic threats to Israel [10], and the government has called for allocating millions of dollars to combat the movement. The BDS movement and its global activists and organizational partners, however, are unperturbed, and as we show above, have doubled their efforts and propelled their energies. We have reached a tipping point, the taboos are breaking, and fear is dissipating. All of Israel's resources cannot stop the march towards freedom, justice and equality by a movement that relies on conscientious citizens of the world.

PACBI

#### Notes:

- [1] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2446>
- [2] <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/europe/11564-nus-black-students-conference-endorses-bds-slams-israeli-systemic-racism>
- [3] <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/who-we-are/how-we-work/black-students/>

- [4] <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/we-are-turning-point-uc-santa-cruz-passes-divestment>
- [5] <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/depaul-students-vote-divestment-despite-israeli-government-interference>
- [6] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2425>
- [7] <http://electronicintifada.net/content/how-israel-buys-loyalty-us-university-administrators/13399>
- [8] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2444>
- [9] <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=2429>
- [10] <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/b83b59c1-8651-41c6-9bda-4373a7d870e3>

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## **An updated report on the action against Jake Lynch**

The Israeli legal activist group Shurat HaDin, has now had much of its case against Jake Lynch (University of Sydney) struck out , See BRICUP Newsletters 70 ( November 2013) and 74 (March 2014) for details of the case.

Instead, under new lawyers, Shurat HaDin will narrow its racial discrimination case to Professor Lynch's refusal to endorse Professor Dan Avnon's application for a fellowship at Sydney University. The four other applicants, including Israeli academics and lawyer Andrew Hamilton, have indicated to the court they want to withdraw from the case. Shurat HaDin has been ordered to put up a \$100,000 bond for costs should Professor Lynch win.

The landmark case involves competing arguments about academic freedom. Shurat HaDin argues that Professor Lynch has breached the academic freedom of Professor Avnon while Professor Lynch argues Shurat HaDin is trying to breach his.

The case has seen a surge of campus support for Professor Lynch, who heads Sydney University's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and claims that the latest developments in the case are further tactical victories. ,” Professor Lynch told *The Australian* that “This legal action was conceived as an attack on political freedom in Australia by a foreign agency, so we should all be relieved that it is now failing in court. [...] Its effect has been to draw interest and support from many more people here for the Palestinian call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel.”

Shurat HaDin issued a statement insisting that its case was still on track, but under a different approach. “By refusing employment to an Israeli professor simply because he is Israeli, Lynch plainly violated Australia’s anti-racism law, which was legislated to protect against discrimination based on national origin and religion,” Professor Lynch has strenuously denied he discriminated against Professor Avnon, who took up the fellowship in another Sydney University department. He says his stand on BDS is directed against the policies of the Israeli state and not individual Israelis. The case is due to resume next month.

The material for this article was extracted by the editor from a report by Ean Higgins in *The Australian*, May 28<sup>th</sup> 2014

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## **The RIBA Motion to suspend Israel**

The Motion to suspend Israel from the International Union of Architects (UIA, see BRICUP Newsletter 75 , April 2014) received a barrage of pro-Zionist pressure on the RIBA from American and British Jewish architects –including the famous Richard Meier, and Daniel Libeskind who reprimanded the RIBA for targeting Israel. Yet it was the Israeli architects Eyal Weizman and Rafi Segal who had documented the politics of Israeli architecture at a proposed exhibition entry on behalf of Israel at the 2002 UIA General Assembly in Berlin entitled “A Civilian Occupation” and who came out with cogent support for the move to suspend Israel. Here is Weizman’s statement which was published in *The Architects’ Journal* on April 10th, 2014.

Abe Hayeem

**STATEMENT** in support of the motion which was adopted by RIBA Council on 19 March, 2014.

The duties of professional organizations such as the International Union of Architects and the Royal Institute of British Architects are not only to promote design excellence but also the political and ethical implications of architecture, in the UK and internationally. Such organizations must thus confront violations of human rights and international law, especially when these violations are undertaken by architects and through architecture.

The Israeli regime of military occupation is in violation of international law including the Geneva Convention and human rights laws and regulations. This is accepted by virtually all international bodies including the International Court of Justice, the UN, the EU amongst others.

In the context of Israel's occupation, architecture — employed for the construction of settlements, segregated roadways, industrial zones, and the wall — is the very means by which these violations are perpetrated. Israeli construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is undertaken upon land illegally seized from its private or public owners. It squeezes out Palestinian communities, robbing them of their resources and water, and cutting them apart from each other. The architecture of Israel's occupation is an ongoing form of violence that must be stopped.

While not all members of the Israel Association of United Architects are involved in building in Occupied Palestinian Territories and many may be against such actions — as an organization it must take an ethical and legal stand, but it has not. Anyone who has seen the built realities of Israel's occupation would understand that this stand is also professional. Architects should be pained to see the beautiful and fragile landscape of the West Bank ruined by a form of architecture that is as careless as it is criminal.

At a time when political negotiations seem to be shipwrecked, forms of civil non-violent action are the only avenue left to help Israelis and Palestinians escape this pathway of mutual destruction.

The accusations of anti-semitism against the RIBA, predictable as they might be, are offensive to both Jewish and non-Jewish signatories of this initiative, to those of us committed to peace there, and those of us working for social and spatial justice in other places. Worse, they wilfully invert perpetrator and victim, divert the discussion from the ongoing suffering, theft and violence enacted through the architecture employed in the context of Israel's occupation, and close an avenue for a better and more hopeful future.

Our initiative is undertaken by people closely familiar with and deeply respectful of the place and its people. Non-intervention in this context is not neutral but the taking of a political position for the violent status quo by default.'

Eyal Weizman

**Notes;** The author is co-editor of 'A Civilian Occupation' He is an architect, the Professor of Visual Cultures and director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. Since 2011 he also directs the European Research Council funded project, [Forensic Architecture](#) - on the place of architecture in international humanitarian law. He is also the author of "Hollow Land" which exposes the complicity of Israel's architects in creating the architecture of Occupation.

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## **Open letter to Manuel Hassassian, Palestinian Ambassador to the UK**

Dear Professor Hassassian

### **Criminal charges against peaceful protestors in Ramallah**

We are writing to you concerning the disturbing reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International about the arrest and ill-treatment of peaceful protestors at the Al- Qasaba Theatre in Ramallah on April 12<sup>th</sup>.

As you know, the call from Palestinian civil society for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel has been taken up by a wide range of Palestine solidarity groups around the UK, including the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. It is widely regarded as a most valuable means of both expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people and bringing international civil society pressure to bear on Israel to end its 66 years of injustice and oppression of the Palestinian people.

Activists across the UK therefore find the news of these arrests and mistreatment of BDS activists by the Palestinian Authority police deeply disturbing, particularly since many of us have engaged in similar protests inside UK theatres and other public places without arrest. We strongly believe that continuing with these charges will reflect very badly on the reputation of the Palestinian Authority internationally. We therefore ask you to use your influence to ensure that these charges are dropped, that the acts of violence against the peaceful protestors are investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

Yours sincerely

Monica Wusteman

On behalf of **York Palestine Solidarity Campaign**

Jenny Lynn

On behalf of **Halifax Friends of Palestine**

Linda Clair

On behalf of **Manchester Palestine Solidarity Campaign**

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

On behalf of **Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods**

Robert Boyce

On behalf of the **British Committee for the Universities of Palestine**

Cc Dr Hanan Ashrawi

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## **The Palestine National Music Competition**

The bi-annual Palestine National Music Competition took place in Jerusalem in April, organised by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, Palestine (ESNCM).

An international panel of experts travelled to adjudicate young Palestinian musicians in a wide range of instrumental categories, and in both Western and Arabic music. Most candidates could travel to Jerusalem to perform live (including some from Gaza, a minor miracle brought about by European embassies and EU representation), but some were not given permission and had to compete via video link from Ramallah or Gaza.

It was extraordinary to see the reactions of the jury members who had not been in Palestine before - I am a regular visitor - they had no idea how high the standards were going to be, and in many cases said that what they heard was better than what they would have expected in their own countries, including Norway, Sweden, the UK, France, Spain, Italy and Switzerland.

Amongst the winners was a 14 year old trumpet player from Gaza, who had memorised his entire programme, and an Arabic/Jazz fusion ensemble from Jenin, who narrowly beat a string quartet from Rammallah playing a rarely heard unfinished work by Edvard Grieg.

I think many European musicians - and sadly Israeli ones too - would be shocked to know that music is so well developed in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The musicians performed at the Yabous Cultural Centre in East Jerusalem, and the nearby branch of ESNCM; a delightful 19th century building newly converted for bespoke use

as a centre for teaching and administration, complete with a number of fine grand pianos, and sound-proofed teaching studios.

ESNCM also has exceptional new premises in Beit Sahour (Bethlehem) and a soon-to-be-opened centre in Ramallah - spaces and facilities that would be the envy of every Conservatoire in the UK. As the situation in Palestine develops in the coming years, I hope that the eyes and ears of the world will also be opened to the inspiring development of music amongst young Palestinians. This is a musical story as well as a political one.

Tom Hammond

### **Notes**

Re The Edward Said National Conservatory <http://ncm.birzeit.edu/en>

Re Tom Hammond [www.tom-hammond.com](http://www.tom-hammond.com)

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## Notices

**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)

## 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. Letters and comments should also be sent to [newsletter@bricup.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)

## 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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If you use the direct funds transfer mechanism please confirm the transaction by sending an explanatory email to [treasurer@bricup.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@bricup.org.uk)

More details can be obtained at the same address. 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.