

Open letter to Wajdi Mouawad

## We might as well be candid and not beat about the bush...

Geneva, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Dear Sir,

Your creation *All Birds (Tous des oiseaux)* will be performed this season during La Bâtie Festival in Geneva, Switzerland. We noticed that throughout the long tour of this show, which began in January 2018, indications about its production have not always been exhaustive. Sometimes, it is mentioned that the show has benefitted from the support of the “cultural services of the Israeli Embassy in France”, and some other times there is no mention at all of this fact.

For its programme here, La Bâtie limited itself to a laconic line on its website, while the [Théâtre de Carouge](#) suddenly removed more detailed information at the beginning of July, after having published it for several weeks (screen shot, beside. June 28<sup>th</sup> 2019).

Production [La Colline théâtre national](#)

Avec le soutien des services culturels de l'[Ambassade d'Israël en France](#) et du [Cameri Theatre de Tel-Aviv](#)

Remerciements à l'équipe de la bibliothèque de l'[Institut national d'histoire de l'art](#) - salle Labrouste, site Richelieu de la [Bibliothèque nationale de France](#), à la [Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz](#), au [Festival de Stratford \(Ontario\)](#), au cours [Florent à Elinor Agam Ben-David](#), [Saleh Bakri](#), [Michaël Charny](#), [Sigal Cohen](#), [Olivier Guez](#), [Pierre Krolak-Salmon](#), [Claire Lasne Darcueil](#)

The erratic communication surrounding the production and touring of *All Birds* is indicative of a certain uneasiness which we can understand, but as activists of the BDS movement, we feel that the institutional support of the Israeli regime to certain shows should be clearly mentioned. It is on the basis of this data that we can assess whether or not a cultural product falls within the criteria for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel, the cultural component of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

### **Our role is to inform the public about the reasons why a production should be boycotted.**

As a preamble, it should be recalled that the BDS movement responds to the call launched in 2005 by 170 trade unions, human rights associations, cultural workers, representing Palestinian civil society. The aim of the BDS movement is to support the Palestinian people's claims in their struggle for existence through a peaceful boycott. These claims are simple: an end to the military and colonial occupation of the Palestinian territories by the Israeli State, an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip, respect for the civil rights of Palestinians subject to the Israeli regime wherever they may be, the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes from which they have been expelled since 1948.

**As long as the Israeli regime is based on an apartheid system, any cultural product benefiting from a cash or in-kind subsidy from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs is reprehensible and can be boycotted.**

**Open Letter To Wajdi Mouawad, page 2**

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign is not an embargo imposed by a government supported by a legal and repressive arsenal. It is a process of persuasion, a call to every person, invited to act peacefully and responsibly, in the face of a regime that, taking advantage of the complicit passivity of the great powers, defies human rights, the rights of peoples, and all the UN resolutions that have been adopted on the Occupied Palestinian Territories. However, some missionary artists find it more daring to "resist" the boycott called for by human rights activists than to refuse to perform at the court of the powerful.

Oppressive regimes are very fond of bards who, by means of their creations, validate their most repugnant policies. The Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv is one of them. In 2012, [Peter Brook](#) refused to perform his famous play, *The Suit*, in protest against Cameri's involvement in the colonial offensive in the West Bank. This same Cameri Theatre that hosted your play, *All Birds*, in November 2018, as part of the France-Israel Cultural Season. To speak frankly: It is appalling!

Were you unaware of the fact that dozens of artists in France had the courage to call for a boycott of the France-Israel Season, the largest *whitewashing* operation conducted in France in 2018? We take our hat off to these artists who had the lucidity to realise that it was a powerful propaganda machine: [Simone Bitton](#), [Irène Bonnaud](#), [Nicolas Bouchaud](#), [Robert Cantarella](#), [Enzo Cormann](#), [Valérie Dréville](#), [Jean-Luc Godard](#), [Leslie Kaplan](#), [André Markowicz](#), [Maguy Marin](#), [Adeline Rosenstein](#), [François Tanguy](#) and many others. We would have preferred to see you raise your voice alongside them, alongside [Peter Brook](#) (2012), [Simon McBurney](#) (2015), [Tiago Rodrigues](#), the artistic director of Teatro Nacional D. Maria II of Lisbon (2018), or the Israeli actor [Itay Tiran](#) (2018). We would have preferred to hear you defend the freedom of expression of the Palestinian poetess [Dareen Tatour](#), imprisoned and continuously harassed by the Israeli authorities because of her poems.

In the notice about *All Birds* we were also very surprised to see, on several occasions, the name of the Palestinian actor Saleh Bakri in the acknowledgements, just below the mention of the Israeli Embassy's support. A most unlikely association in view of [Saleh Bakri](#)'s courageous and determined commitment against any artistic collaboration with Israeli apartheid. In 2015, he presented his position to the press at the Locarno Festival. Associating Saleh Bakri's name with the Israeli embassy is a violation of his ethical stance. An institution as important as the Théâtre national de la Colline should set an example in protecting committed artists and should respect the ethical limits they impose on themselves.

We hope that our letter will have clarified for you the meaning of the cultural boycott of the Israeli apartheid regime.

Yours sincerely,

**Collectif BDS-Genève**

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