

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

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Categories: Boycott culturel

Open letter to Wajdi Mouawad

Geneva, August 20th, 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 below, June 28th 2019).

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.

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

(Contact: geneve@bds-info.ch)

Download the letter [as PDF](#)

References

«Israeli theatre plans legal action over British director's boycott.» (Sandy Rashty, *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 28th, 2012). *The Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv is considering legal action for breach of contract against the veteran British theatre director, Peter Brook, after he pulled out of its annual International Festival of Plays in December.*

<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/israeli-theatre-plans-legal-action-over-british-director-s-boycott-1.36722>

«Peter Brook's Letter to the Cameri: "It is our free choice".» (*Refrain Playing Israel*, September 30th, 2012). ... A letter in strong support of the boycott was sent by Peter Brook to the Cameri theater in Tel Aviv. Rashti writes that Mr. Brook was due to perform *The Suit*, a play set in apartheid South Africa...

<http://refrainplayingisrael.blogspot.com/2012/09/peter-brooks-courageous-support-for.html>

« Contre la saison France-Israël. » (Les invités de Médiapart, *Médiapart*, 4 mai 2018). *Dénonçant une opération où la Culture sert de «vitrine» à l'État d'Israël et à sa politique chaque jour plus dure envers les Palestiniens, 80 personnalités issues du monde des arts affirment leur refus de participer à la «Saison France-Israël» et expliquent les raisons de leur choix. Parmi eux : Alain Damasio, Annie Ernaux, Tardi, Nathalie Quintane ou Jean-Luc Godard.* <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/les-invites-de-mediapart/blog/040518/contre-la-saison-france-israel>

«Letter: Over 100 artists announce a cultural boycott of Israel.» (*The Guardian*, February 13th, 2015). *Along with more than 600 other fellow artists, we are announcing today that we will not engage in business-as-usual cultural relations with Israel. We will accept neither professional invitations to Israel, nor funding, from any institutions linked to its government...* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/13/cultural-boycott-israel-starts-tomorrow>

«Why I cancelled my participation at the Israel Festival and joined the cultural boycott of Israel. (Tiago Rodrigues, Facebook, May 17th, 2018).» ... *I have decided not to perform in the Israel Festival in June because I believe that it is the only guarantee that my artistic work will not be used to condone and promote a government that deliberately violates human rights and is currently violently attacking the Palestinian people...* <https://www.facebook.com/tiago.rodrigues.986227/posts/10216429289273073>

«Free at last, Israeli actor-director Itay Tiran endorses BDS and says Zionism is racism (Jonathan Ofir, *Mondoweiss*, September 8th, 2018).» ... *You get up in the morning, drink your coffee and read the paper. You look at a story and say, So is this the moment in which we've become fascist or isn't it...* <https://mondoweiss.net/2018/09/israeli-endorses-zionism/>

«Resist With Dareen - My poetry is not A Crime.» [Dareen Tatour, *Avaaz*, July 2019]. ... *Despite the hardship of facing a new trial, I will continue my struggle for freedom of expression and especially artistic expression. This trial is not my personal trial. It is the trial of every artist, poet, writer and human being...*
https://secure.avaaz.org/en/community_petitions/_Resist_With_Dareen_My_poetry_is_not_A_Crime_shir_y_lys_jrym_qwm_m_dryn_1/

«Press conference: Cooperation of Festival del Film Locarno with Israel Film Fund.» [BDS Switzerland, *Youtube*, August 7th, 2015]. *"Press conference organized by BDS Switzerland addressing the cooperation of the Festival del Film Locarno with the Israeli foreign ministry and the Israel Film Fund. August 7th, 2015 at Teatro dei Fauni, Locarno, Switzerland. This video shows highlights of the event and speeches of Saleh Bakri, Ronnie Barkan, Mehdi Ben Attia, Romed Wyder and Stina Werenfels."*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0BHDo1_6fs&feature=youtu.be&t=260