

**We Deserve the British Academic Boycott!**  
**Benny Tzipper - June 4th 2007**

**Translated Rann Bar-On - original Hebrew at <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/866785.html>**

Last Friday morning I drove to the Palestinian village of Bil'in. Bil'in, the village that has turned into a symbol of the struggle against the Apartheid Wall and against the confiscation of Palestinian land by fraudulent Jewish real-estate sharks who hide behind fake patriotism. Bil'in, a Palestinian village geographically close to Tel Aviv and central Israel and to call the fake leftists who inhabit Tel Aviv's coffee shops.

It's easiest to cry over the occupation from afar, without ever seeing a Palestinian close up. I believe that there may not be a solution to the Palestinian issue, but that's nothing to do with the fact that one can act like a human being and to show Palestinians, who are imprisoned behind fences and walls only a few kilometers from us, that we share their pain and sadness.

This time I went to Bil'in with my daughter Talila, whose idealism and love of others never stops amazing me and that is expressed in so many different ways. I am so very lucky that none of my children are among those vile conformists who attempt to show how interesting they are by traveling to India and South America!

My mother's cousin Lillian also joined us. She came from Paris for her visit in Israel after many years of doubts. Lillian, professor of Spanish literature, translator and author, was a communist in her youth. She married a Moroccan Muslim, went to live in Morocco and had two boys, one of whom I know well. His name is Rashid and he's about my age. He's a nuclear engineer living in Toulouse with his wife and three wonderful children.

Because of all this, Lillian was afraid to come to Israel. She was scared that if she comes, she'll have to undergo an invasive interrogation in the airport. This indeed happened in the El Al section of De Gaulle airport in Paris. She was made to stand on her feet for thirty minutes, attempting to answer questions asked by a woman who spoke very poor French and who had difficulty understanding her answers. She felt pretty humiliated, considering she'd done nothing wrong, and was shocked by the intimacy of the questions. But she wanted to board the flight, so she suffered it all in silence. Despite all this, Lillian fell in love with Israel, was astounded by everything she encountered and praised the openness of Israelis, the beauty of the vistas in the Galilee and Jerusalem. But her most powerful experience she had here -in my opinion - was our visit to Bil'in. There she saw close up what many Israelis don't want to see. She saw together with me and with my daughter the brute force with which the Israeli soldiers - whom I have nothing against personally, of course, my complaints lie at the door of those who sent them - dispersed the tiny and non-violent demonstration that proceeded, as it does every Friday, from the mosque in Bil'in to the Apartheid Wall.

I should emphasize who the participants in this demonstration were. There is the elderly Palestinian with Parkinson's, who was close to Arafat and looks like a shade of a human being. Next to him there is a guy in a wheelchair, who was paralyzed in the lower half of his body after being shot with live ammunition by soldiers while tending his sheep. There are a few elderly Israelis, demonstration veterans, innocent Israeli and international youngsters, and Palestinians from the village, who really couldn't hurt a fly and for whom the demonstration has become a fixed ritual. And there was, as I mentioned, my cousin Lillian, who passed World War II in hiding. And there was me. Me, who certainly doesn't pose a threat to the >well-being of Israeli soldiers. Despite this, the soldiers attacked the non-violent demonstration aggressively and entirely disproportionately. Tear gas canisters landed on us one after another. This is the army's way of defending those real estate sharks who are scared that if someone will open their mouth too loudly, their plans to build their ugly buildings on land confiscated from Palestinians - idealistically called 'settlements' - will be spoiled.

In the newspapers, including my own, it was reported that two soldiers were injured in Bil'in that day. Maybe they were injured while running after seventy and eighty year-old demonstrators and after children

and teenagers. What I know is that among the demonstrators there were some who required medical attention after being chased by the soldiers, but nobody wrote about them. If my cousin had been as cowardly as the soldiers, perhaps she too could have said that oh god, she was injured by the gas that penetrated her eyes and throat, but she simply got over it, because she is a brave woman. Much braver than the Israeli soldiers, much to my dismay.

We found shelter in the house of Zahara and Hashem. Their house is the furthest one in village, the closest to the Apartheid Wall. Last week soldiers shot at it and threw tear gas canisters at it, knowing full well that there were children and defenseless elderly people in it. This week, the atmosphere was calmer. Zahara served tea made from herbs from her garden to all the demonstrators who crowded in the small living room. Two rooms and a kitchen, that is Zahara and Hashem's entire house. But it glowed with humanity.

Among the people who sat in the living room were youngsters from Zahara and Hashem's family. They all spoke fluent Hebrew. And there was a lecturer of political science from Al Quds University in East Jerusalem. His name was Issa Ibn Zuhairia. He told me of the torturous journey he has to undertake every day and every evening on his way from his house outside Jerusalem to the university that is in the municipal area of the city. He has been trying to get a certificate allowing him to stay in Jerusalem and that will spare him the wait at the checkpoints, but that takes time. Dr. Issa is not a violent person. He is an intellectual who wants to lead a normal life. But that is impossible for him, because that's the way it is. He's a Palestinian. As such, he cannot even step into the campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. No one will let him in there even to visit the library. And I never heard of a single Professor from the Hebrew University who objected to this policy, that under their very noses, they have colleagues who suffer terrible discrimination just because they are Palestinians.

However, there is a storm brewing in Israel about the '>anti-Semitism' of British universities who are threatening to boycott Israeli academics. And what about the boycott we impose on Palestinian academics? I think that the boycott the British declared on us is a wonderful thing, because finally some of our arrogant professors will start to feel a tiny drop of the feelings of Palestinian professors, whose academic freedom is routinely crushed under the force of Israeli occupation. Once there were academics like Leibovich, like Plosser, who protested the occupation with harsh words. Where are they today? The vast majority of the Israeli academy today cooperates with the evil. When I wrote a few weeks ago in Ha'aretz that the digs undertaken by the Jerusalem-based archaeologist Ehud Nezer in Herodion (which is in the occupied territories) were illegal according to international law, I was attacked by two respected professors from the university with harsh words. They wanted to protect the honor of their colleague instead of admitting, like people with real honor, that confiscation of land is confiscation of land, even if it goes by a scientific name. In the case of Herodion it's the confiscation of the treasures of the past, and in the case of Bil'in it is the confiscation of the treasures of the present for some deluxe settlements.

It is true that one could say that British universities are acting hypocritically, and that they should have boycotted Chinese academics for China's violations of human rights, and Russian academics, for Russia's atrocities in Chechnya. Perhaps that is true, but in my opinion the fact that we are being boycotted should be blessed. After forty years of occupation, it's about time we understand that this situation cannot continue, that while we cry over how persecuted we are, we cynically crush the basic rights of the Palestinians underfoot.

It is true that it is not the professors in the universities who are oppressing Palestinians, but in their silence, they are approving of the atrocities. And with their huge egos they ignore what is happening at spitting distance from them: that there are professors and lecturers just like them who can be treated like dogs by every pissy soldier, whose decision it is whether or not they will give their lesson today, and all this because they are Palestinians. England, cradle of civilization, I salute those civilized people amongst you, who finally found the courage to to say to Israeli academics that they can't just worry about their own academic freedom, and that true civilization means fighting for the academic freedoms and for the rights of those who do not have them.

You know what? I'm am looking forward to the day when every Israeli who took part in the evils of the occupation will be refused entry into England. I want to see the faces of all those young heroes, who throw

tear gas canisters at elderly women and who chase a disabled man in a wheelchair, and then when they're done with the army travel to India and become spiritual.

That disabled guy in the wheelchair, the smiling sheep herder, showed me his arm that had just been burned by a grenade. He didn't hate me for being Israeli or Jewish, despite what other Israeli Jews did to him. Zahara and Hashem could also come to me complaining that I am a citizen of the state that has been oppressing them for forty years. Instead they laid out for us a table in her kitchen, sat us around it and served us soup, and vegetable with zatar and home-baked pita bread.