

Boycotting Myself? - *By Juliano Mer Khamis*

This is an open letter to my colleague Elia Suleiman who has withdrawn his signature from a petition by Palestinian film-makers calling for a boycott of Israeli cultural events and of artists supported by Israeli government institutions. I myself am one of the signatories of this petition.

Elia defines his act as a protest against what he considers as a total boycott of Israeli artists, regardless of their views or political activities; a boycott that does not distinguish between one Israeli and another “all of which is tainted by chauvinism and other heresies that stem from the dark side of nationalism”. (Elia Suleiman)

This is indeed the case. When I signed the petition, as an Israeli citizen I wanted to be sure that I would not be boycotting myself. As the petition clearly asserts, the boycott is not directed against Israelis as such, but against “those cultural and artistic institutions that to date have refused to take a stand against the Occupation, the root cause for this colonial conflict” (from the petition). However, this clear statement has not prevented Daniel Daniel, Osnat Trabelsi, Peter van Huystee and myself, creators of the film “Arna’s Children”, from being boycotted in certain parts of the world simply because we are Israelis.

I do not intend to “prove my innocence” or present my political history. Nor do I believe I should introduce you to my family, least of all to my mother, Arna Mer Khamis, who spent her life fighting against the Occupation, or, as she used to put it, struggling against the Zionist colonization of Palestine.

At a film festival in Sicily, the cultural representative of Egypt left the audience during the screening of “Arna’s Children” in protest against what she called the positive representation of a Jewish woman who helped the Arabs. She claimed that this was Zionist propaganda. In Hungary, the Palestinian community boycotted the film simply because I, the director, am an Israeli.

This cultural representative of Egypt, a country which fosters close economic and military relationships with Israel, together with the Palestinian community in Hungary, whose only contribution to the Palestinian cause has been to boycott me, are among those who foment the racist campaign to boycott Israelis indiscriminately, regardless of the fact that some of us have spent our lives struggling against the Occupation on both sides of the Green Line.

There seems to be no limit to such hypocrisy. So I thank you, Elia, for your declaration. Let us hope that it will expose all those cowards who are waiting to attack you, hoping to prove their loyalty to the Palestinian cause. In most cases this is mere lip service, a cover for their political impotence and their fear of being involved in the struggle of all of us, no matter of what nationality, who unconditionally oppose the Israeli occupation. This bigoted, nationalist, religious, and racist attitude is what underlies their call for a total and indiscriminate boycott of Israelis, including our friends the film-makers Shimon Biton and Avi Mugarbi.

Believe me, Elia, when I tell you that the real freedom fighters, the people who are constantly struggling against the Israeli occupation, do not participate in this boycott. They gladly accept the support of any Jew, Muslim, Christian or Israeli who joins them in their struggle for liberation.