

Israeli lies unchecked, Palestinian perspectives censored on BBC

By [Amena Saleem](#)

Global Research, August 26, 2012

[Electronic Intifada](#) 24 August 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)



Israeli oppression of Palestinians not suitable for broadcast by BBC. ([Ryan Rodrick Beiler](#))

One of the most obvious examples of bias by the [BBC](#) is the taxpayer-funded broadcaster's habit of inviting Israeli politicians or the Israeli government spokesperson, [Mark Regev](#), onto its programs to speak without challenge. Meanwhile, Palestinians and those who would convey a Palestinian perspective are not given the same opportunity.

Film director [Ken Loach](#) recently learned that for the BBC, Palestine remains a taboo.

On 23 July, Loach was at the Royal Albert Hall in London to listen to a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, performed by the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. The orchestra consists of Israeli, Palestinian and other Arab musicians, and is conducted by Daniel Barenboim, who formed the orchestra in 1999 with the late Palestinian academic and activist [Edward Said](#).

So when Loach was asked during the intermission for an interview by BBC Proms, which was recording the concert for later broadcast, he considered it reasonable to air his thoughts on the nature of the orchestra as well as the music.

Loach said that he spoke to the BBC journalist for five minutes, during which time he said: "Seeing Israelis and Arabs, including Palestinians, sitting side by side on the stage makes us confront the issue of the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people, and I shall be thinking of them when I hear the music tonight."

These were typically passionate words from a director whose films, including *Land and Freedom* about the revolutionaries who fought in the Spanish Civil War, often reflect his keen sense of justice.

However, for the BBC, which in the last six months has alternately [denied the existence of Palestine and then the fact of Israel's occupation](#), the mere mention of the fact of the Palestinian people's oppression was too controversial to broadcast.

BBC admits to censorship

Loach received a phone call from the program producers informing him that his interview would be cut "due to the music over-running." He sent an email to the BBC, which has been seen by this writer, stating:

“Thank you for letting me know about the broadcast and the need to shorten the interview. Of course I understand about length. But I would ask you to include my brief remarks about the orchestra and the Palestinians. As an opponent of oppression and tyranny I think Ludwig [van Beethoven] would have approved. It was one of the reasons I agreed to take part. I’m happy if you need to reduce my thoughts on the music itself.”

His email was ignored and the interview was broadcast three days later on BBC Proms with his observation about the oppression of the Palestinian people removed. The rest of the interview remained intact.

Loach said: “I called the producer, Oliver MacFarlane, who admitted they had deliberately cut the line about Palestine. He said if they’d included it they would have had to have a balancing interview. I wasn’t pleased and I responded robustly.”

When asked to respond to this, a BBC spokesperson stated: “As part of the BBC’s comprehensive music television coverage of The Proms, esteemed filmmaker Ken Loach was invited to comment on his personal passion for Beethoven, given the time slot available and the fact that this was a music television programme, the most editorially relevant sections of Mr. Loach’s interview were used in the final edit.”

Israeli spokespersons unchallenged

But if it was the case that the BBC did feel the need to “balance” Loach’s simple words about the ongoing oppression of the Palestinians, it has absolutely no qualms about airing, totally unopposed, the wild, often lurid, mostly fact-free statements made by Israeli ministers and spokespeople.

Take, for example, James Naughtie’s interview with Danny Ayalon on Radio 4’s *Today* program on 16 January 2012. The interview was conducted the day after the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, called on Israel to end its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories and to end its violence against civilians.

This strong UN criticism of Israel was completely ignored by Naughtie, who focused on Iran with the unquestioned premise of the interview being that Iran is, without a doubt, developing nuclear weapons and consequently poses a grave threat to Israel.

Ayalon had been on air for less than a second when he said: “What we see here is a drive, a relentless push by Iran to illegally acquire and develop nuclear weapons and for them it’s not just a means, it’s a way to reach hegemony to continue with their very dangerous and radical approach.”

He went on to say: “Today Iran is the international hub of terror in the world.”

This was clearly Israeli propaganda; Ayalon used the BBC to loudly bang the drums of war against Iran. Yet Naughtie neither challenged his unfounded opinions, which were presented as facts, nor brought in someone to present an alternative viewpoint.

Ayalon’s wild accusations, so much more controversial than Loach’s mild remarks, were certainly not cut for lack of a “balancing interview.” Nor was Ayalon questioned about Israel’s widely suspected nuclear arsenal or about Israel’s staunch refusal to allow international weapons inspections.

BBC's double standards

Arthur Neslen was a BBC journalist for four years, but this didn't stop him falling foul of the BBC's double standards on this issue.

In March this year, he wrote an article for the *Guardian* newspaper describing how he returned to Gaza to meet the man who had tried to kill him more than two years earlier (["Why I met the man who tried to kill me,"](#) 2 March 2012).

This led to a phone call requesting an interview from the producers of *Outlook*, a BBC World Service program which is broadcast Monday through Thursday.

Neslen agreed, but even before he visited BBC studios, the problems began. "The BBC kept delaying the interview," he said in an interview. "Then they called two months later and said they were ready, so I went to do the interview which lasted 45 minutes."

In his interview, Neslen described how a stranger called "Khalid" (not his real name) had attacked him randomly in a Gaza street in May 2009, pulling a knife on him as he came out of the offices of the UN agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA). In 2011, Neslen had returned to Gaza to meet the man who had tried to kill him and, in his BBC *Outlook* interview, he told Khalid's story.

During [Israel's massacre in Gaza in 2008-2009](#), Khalid, a schizophrenic, had gone to the front line to ask the Israelis to stop killing civilians. He was captured at gunpoint by Israeli soldiers, handcuffed and blindfolded, taken to the doorway of a house the Israeli army had commandeered, and repeatedly beaten by soldiers on their way in or out.

He was then used as a human shield by Israeli snipers, who placed him in front of an open window and shot from behind him. Khalid was later taken to a detention center in Israel and put through the court system, regularly beaten, before being released back into Gaza two months later.

Before telling his story in the *Guardian*, Neslen spent a month trying to get an explanation from several Israeli authorities, finally obtaining a statement from the Israeli Ministry of Justice which confirmed the dates of Khalid's arrest, court appearances and release.

BBC drops story

However, all this evidence proved insufficient for the BBC.

"The BBC called me after I'd left the interview, asking me to come back straight away. They wanted to know what the Israeli response was to Khalid's story and I told them about the statement," Neslen explained. "I was told the interview would go out the following week."

However, ten minutes before the interview was due to be aired, he received a series of "desperate" emails and calls from a BBC journalist asking to see all his correspondence with the Israeli authorities on the matter, which he emailed over immediately.

"They told me I hadn't provided them with proof that I had put the allegation to the Israeli army that they had used Khalid as a human shield," said Neslen. "Then they dropped the story."

“Why didn’t they put the allegations to the IDF [Israeli army] themselves?” he asked. “I was a BBC journalist for four years and they didn’t believe my story. But if Mark Regev goes on *BBC News* to say a hunger striker is a member of [Hamas](#) or [Islamic Jihad](#), the BBC never tries to go to the family to get confirmation. It only seems to go in one direction.”

The UK-based [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#) wrote to the BBC in May to ask why Regev had been allowed to make unchallenged and false comments on BBC1’s *News at 10* and Radio 4’s six-o-clock news bulletin on 11 May. Regev claimed the Palestinian hunger strikers, who numbered more than 1,000, were motivated by an “Islamist cause” and wanted to “commit suicide.”

Last week, the group received this response from the BBC’s Editorial Complaints Unit:

“You have said that the report lacked the necessary due impartiality because it contained an interview with the Israeli government spokesman, Mark Regev, but did not include a similar interview with someone putting forward the view of the Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike. The BBC’s Editorial Guidelines on Impartiality make it clear that due impartiality does not necessarily require all views and opinions to be covered in equal proportions on all occasions.”

As Neslen says, it only seems to go one way with the BBC. Take this line from the Editorial Guidelines on Impartiality, which the BBC appeared to disregard when interviewing Loach: “... it is not usually required for an appearance by a politician, or other contributor with partial views, to be balanced on each occasion by those taking a contrary view.”

The BBC seems to interpret this as meaning that someone who openly lies about the political motivations of [Palestinian hunger strikers](#) can be heard unchallenged on its airwaves, while someone who dares to mention the oppression of the Palestinians must be silenced.

Bowing to Israeli pressure

Neslen has his own ideas, based on his time at the BBC, for the double standards.

“They’re running scared of the Israeli authorities,” he said. He gives an example, detailed in his book, *In Your Eyes a Sandstorm: Ways of Being Palestinian*, of the Israeli embassy calling the BBC radio newsroom where he then worked. The Israel government asked a news editor not to run the Palestinian side of a particular news story, implying that doing so could involve an accusation of “terror collusion.” The Palestinian statement, sent by the [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#) to the BBC, was dropped.

On another occasion, at the beginning of “Operation Defensive Shield,” Israel’s massive re-invasion of the West Bank during the second intifada, the Israeli government threatened to close down the BBC’s offices in West Jerusalem if it did not pull its correspondent Barbara Plett out of the West Bank. The next day she was withdrawn.

“These sorts of things happen every day,” Nelson said, “and some news editors will stand up for core journalistic values. But in general, Palestinian calls of complaints about news bulletins tended to be laughed off. I remember one acting editor on a BBC Radio 5 live bulletin slamming down the phone on a Palestinian caller and saying ‘If I get one more call from a moaning Arab...’”

He added: "If the Israeli embassy phones in, there's a vast disparity of power [compared] to if a Palestinian activist calls in. They take Israeli calls very seriously, and critical stories about Israel get shot down through official pressure and the fear of official pressure. These are very powerful lobbyists — people know their careers can be broken."

The result of all this is obvious bias shown against the Palestinians in the BBC's broadcasts, whether it is by the complete omission of their story, the editing of comments which dare to mention their oppression, or the constant, relentless foisting of the Israeli narrative onto the audience.

Is this really journalism? Those who pay their licence fee so that the BBC can broadcast all across the world — and those whose lives are affected by those broadcasts — deserve much better.

Amena Saleem is active with the [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#) in the UK and keeps a close eye on the media's coverage of Palestine as part of her brief. She has twice driven on convoys to Gaza for PSC. Follow the PSC on Twitter: [@PSCupdates](#).

The original source of this article is [Electronic Intifada](#)
Copyright © [Amena Saleem](#), [Electronic Intifada](#), 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Amena Saleem](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca