**Empty rhetoric**

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Since October 7, scores of writers have authored scores of columns pleading – to no avail – with prominent politicians who wield transformative power to stop the genocide unfolding with such obscene lethality in the apocalyptic remnants of occupied Gaza.

The same dynamic applies to a gallery of preening artists who claim that they are not only allergic to conformity, but also reject as tantamount to censorship any call from any quarter not to entertain audiences in Israel.

Rather than beseeching Nick Cave, the Australian troubadour, or the British band, Radiohead, finally to heed the petitions of Brian Eno, Roger Waters and company and forgo performing in an apartheid state, my aim here is to challenge their, by now, discredited defences to opt to play in Tel Aviv.

After not performing in Israel for some 20 years, in 2014, Cave refrained from signing on to an artist-organised pledge – meant to show tangible solidarity with imprisoned Palestinians – to boycott touring in Israel in the aftermath of yet another Israeli killing spree in Gaza.

Cave later explained his decision this way: “There was something that stunk to me about that list. Then it kind of occurred to me that I’m not signing the list but I’m also not playing Israel and that just felt to me cowardly, really.”

The lobbying, Cave added, constituted a “public humiliation” that apparently fuelled his determination to spurn the overture and stage shows in Israel.

“It suddenly became very important to make a stand against those people that are trying to shut down musicians, to bully musicians, to censor musicians, and to silence musicians … so really you could say in a way that the BDS made me play Israel,” Cave said, referring to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

In this flattering construct, Cave is the portrait of the principled renegade resisting the “age-old” rejectionist forces bent on muzzling him and, by extension, his art.

In a 2017 letter to his “hero” Brian Eno, the British musical savant behind the boycott drive, Cave insisted that he was not a supporter of the Israeli government to blame for the “injustices suffered by the Palestinian population”.

And yet, like the Israeli government he distances himself from, Cave recycled the stock canard to discredit the BDS movement by claiming that “the boycott of Israel can be seen as anti-Semitic at heart”.

Cave suggested that Eno should, instead, adopt a more salutary approach by travelling to Israel to share his scorn for the “current regime” with “the press and the Israeli people … then do a concert on the understanding that the purpose of your music was to speak to the Israeli people’s better angels”.

Cave’s admonition is grounded on a false premise: that the “atrocities” endured by generations of Palestinians are the sole responsibility of a succession of Israeli “regimes” and not the millions of Israelis who empowered and emboldened those regimes by exercising their democratic franchise – time and again.

Cave lauded Israel as a “real, vibrant and functioning democracy” but absolved “ordinary Israelis” of the “atrocities” committed by the governments they elect.

Cave’s jejune reasoning reached an embarrassing zenith in the following sentence that confuses naivete for wisdom.

“How far must we have strayed from the transformative nature of music to feel justified in weaponising music and using it to punish ordinary Israeli citizens for the actions of their government.”

Thom Yorke, the lead singer for Radiohead, has rehashed, near-verbatim, this rationale in rebuffing filmmaker, Ken Loach, who implored the popular band not to go to Israel in 2017 given its encyclopaedic record of egregious human rights violations.

“Playing in a country isn’t the same as endorsing its government,” Yorke responded. “We don’t endorse [Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu any more than Trump, but we still play in America.”

Yorke’s rejection of BDS has the patina of gravitas that Cave’s smear lacks.

“Music, art and academia,” he wrote, “is about crossing borders not building them, about open minds not closed ones, about shared humanity, dialogue and freedom of expression.”

Yorke’s pretty soliloquy oozes saccharine. Gaza has been reduced to ruins by deliberate design. The Israeli architects of that ruin do not give a hoot about crossing borders, opening minds, shared humanity, dialogue and freedom of expression.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and his septic cabinet are razing Gaza and the occupied West Bank with the explicit consent, approval and encouragement of most Israelis.

Polls consistently show that the vast majority of “ordinary Israelis” back every malignant aspect of a genocide meant to erase Gaza. The carpet bombing. The blanket destruction of homes, hospitals, mosques, churches, schools and universities. The forced marches. The blockade of food, water, fuel, and medicine – a sinister blueprint to starve Palestinians into submission and capitulation.

The “better angels” Cave urged Eno to “speak to” through music, have, like the bulk of Israel, been consumed by an unquenchable killing rage that burns like a towering bonfire.

Cave and Yorke have compounded their blindness with hypocrisy that reveals a defining insincerity.

In 2022, Cave was challenged by a fan to square his vocal, unabashed “solidarity” with Ukrainians with his glaring failure to do the same for “brutalised” and “suffering” Palestinians.

“This saddens me,” the fan wrote, “for this puts you on [sic] a position of a double standard.”

Cave’s reply was a pretentious lump of rhetorical flim-flam brimming with the standard evasions about how “a brutal, unprovoked attack” differs from “a deeply complex clash of two nations that is far from straightforward”.

Cave wrote that he “sympathises deeply” with “the tragic fate of all innocents” and reminded his interlocutor that he has helped raise money for schools in Palestinian “communities”.

“But this is not the time for these debates,” Cave averred. “This is the time to unite in unequivocal support and love for the Ukrainian people. Right now a catastrophe is unfolding, and I stand with all Ukrainians at this horrific moment in history.”

Yorke parroted Cave’s condescension, scolding BDS supporters for engaging in “the kind of dialogue … that’s black and white.”

There is nothing ‘complex’ about the genocide being perpetrated with ruthless, relentless efficiency by an occupying army that has killed more than 30,000 innocents and maimed and traumatised countless others – with the hearty blessing of much of a grateful nation.

Excerpted: ‘Play in Israel, just don’t pretend you didn’t know’.

Courtesy: Aljazeera.com