

June 18, 2014

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I write to provide a response to the false allegations made against me by the AMCHA Initiative in its latest escalation of the McCarthyist repression campaign to silence discussion of Palestinian rights on campus.

The accusation that I misrepresented the nature and purpose of my January 2014 trip to Palestine and Jordan is false.

The record, including documents which AMCHA cites, demonstrates that my application for travel authorization was transparent and accurate. In five separate documents, I noted that the purpose of the trip was to attend an international conference *and* to research, network, and collaborate with potential university partners towards a possible memorandum of understanding between San Francisco State University (SFSU) and Palestinian universities.

My stated intention to research and network with scholars in the region and throughout the world is a legitimate and important use of state funding. As Senior Scholar at the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative (AMED), it is part of my job duties to establish educational and research collaboration on Palestine and between Palestinians in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. Research and discussion between actors in the U.S. and Palestine is fundamental to my scholarship. It is one of the reasons why SFSU hired me in the first place. These relationships also create academic opportunities for students and my fellow faculty members at SFSU. I am also committed to nurturing AMED as a site for community engagement and knowledge production toward social justice - another reason why I was recruited for this position.

To my dismay, I was unable to attend the conference in Beirut because of university delays in approving my travel authorization request.

AMCHA alleges that I used the conference of the Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at the American University of Beirut as a false pretext to secure funding. In fact, I was forced to withdraw from participation in the conference due to university-imposed delays. Because SFSU and CSU delayed funding approval for my travel to areas which CSU to countries that the State Department define as “high-risk,”¹ I was not able to confirm my attendance to conference organizers by their deadline. Delays in approval from SFSU/CSU occurred despite extensive efforts on my part to expedite the approval process. This fact is well known and has been confirmed by university administrators.²

¹ Note, however, that while Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon, to cite a few Arab countries, are defined as “high risk”, Israel is not.

² In his May 28th report to SFSU President, Dr. Ken Monteiro, Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies, wrote:

Though confident in what we had originally authorized, I reviewed Dr. Abdulhadi’s travel claim and it is correct and appropriate. We hired Dr. Abdulhadi explicitly for her

Meeting with diverse and controversial figures in Palestine furthered the educational purpose of the trip.

AMCHA puts forward as evidence of wrongdoing that I “neglected to inform” the university of planned meetings with Leila Khaled and Shaikh Raed Salah. However, I was under no obligation to inform the university of each and every person with whom I met. Certainly, the 2014 North American Academic and Labor Delegation to Palestine that I organized and led³ met with Palestinian leaders and many others⁴ as we publicly shared on websites⁵, and during our report back to on and off campus AMED communities.⁶ Furthermore, there is no law or university regulation that prohibits meeting and speaking with figures seen as “controversial” in US media and dominant discourses. Such activity is clearly protected under the First Amendment and is a necessary part of gathering and sharing information. Such encounters are the very lifeblood of academia, journalism, and other fields of knowledge production and are also protected by academic freedom.

work in Palestine and with Palestinians in the Diaspora including, but not limited to, the USA. Her travel involved meetings and discussions with people who are related to her research. Her past, current and in preparation publications evidence publicly that her travel is the basis for her scholarship, scholarship that is internationally regarded.

No others mentioned in the email were supported by the College for their travel.

The reference to Dr. Abdulhadi indicating “Unfortunately my name was dropped from the Beirut conference” was a polite indication that because our process takes so long to confirm travel to areas like Lebanon and Palestine, the conference planners had to drop her participation because she was not able to confirm before their deadline. This was no fault of hers. It is just an operating fact based on our need for due diligence regarding travel to high risk areas as defined by our State Department. I would note that Israel is not a high risk area, though almost all nations surrounding it are and the portion of Israel designated as Palestine also is, which may be part of the unclarity in the attached email.

Regarding with whom Dr. Abdulhadi did or did not meet, the College of Ethnic Studies does not censor any of our scholars, nor does the college condone such censorship. Our scholars should and do communicate with Palestinians, Israelis or any others relevant to their research without obstruction from the College.

³ See Joanne Barker’s blog and her reports on the delegation’s activities

<http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-occupation-notebooks.html>

⁴ For example, this entry by Joanne Barker details a segment of Palestinians with whom we met <http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-occupation-notebooks-entry-13.html>. AMCHA, however, sticking to its smear campaigning, has selectively focused on two Palestinian leaders to whip up anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism.

⁵ <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=665437>;

<http://araborganizing.org/event/palestinian-delegation-report-back-and-discussion/>

⁶ <http://ethnicstudies.sfsu.edu/content/news-events>

Additionally, as and Dean Monteiro, College of Ethnic Studies, asserted in his May 28 report, SFSU would not and cannot censor a scholar's communications with controversial figures. In any case, there could be no reason to censor such meetings because interfacing with diverse figures falls squarely within the educational nature of the trip. I deliberately planned the trip to facilitate transparent discussion with Palestinians from all factions to better inform our scholarly understanding and analysis of the situation in Palestine. This is an essential aspect of my pedagogical practice as well as that of my colleagues who participated in the delegation. Critical analysis can only be developed from exposure to diverse viewpoints.

The 2014 North American Academic and Labor Delegation to Palestine spent 14 days meeting with 198 individuals from 89 organizations, and visited 21 cities, towns and refugee camps. We met with Palestinians from all walks of life: business people, social workers, legal experts, political prisoners, religious leaders⁷, artists and cultural workers, feminist, trade unionists, LGBTQ youth groups, and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council from different political parties with a range of views regarding Palestinian anti-occupation liberation strategies, including BDS. The purpose of these meetings was to familiarize participants with the broadest spectrum of Palestinian sectors, politics, schools of thought, cultural production, socio-economic analyses and social movements.

AMCHA's intentionally misleading focus on our meetings with Sheikh Raed Salah and Leila Khaled is aimed at insinuating that I support terrorism. In fact, these meetings are further proof of the wide spectrum of the people I interviewed: while Salah is a respected leader of the Islamic Movement among Palestinians in Israel, Khaled is a member of the Political Bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a member group of the PLO. We also met with other Palestinians involved with political parties and groups who represent critical constituencies of Palestinian politics, including centrist, leftist, and Islamist political tendencies (Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, FIDA, Palestinian People's Party, and Hamas in the West Bank and Israeli Communist Party, Abna el Balad, Tajamou, and Balad). Regardless of whether AMCHA likes it, these individuals are major figures in Palestine with substantial followings among the Palestinian people. A scholarly research would be incomplete if it ignored them and political analysis would miss the point by dismissing them.

The accusation that I support terrorism is both false and extremely dangerous in a post-9/11 climate that criminalizes advocacy and casts suspicion on even the most tenuous of associations with groups and individuals described as terrorists. AMCHA's racist attack is nothing but political bullying intended to stifle and criminalize any and all discussions of Palestine or Palestinians in order to shield Israel from accountability for its continued violations of Palestinian rights.

⁷ Including Father Jamal Khader who was one of the main spokesmen for the visit of Pope Francis to Palestine <http://popefrancisholyland2014.lpi.org/blog/2014/05/14/fr-jamal-khader-preparations-continue-to-welcome-pope-francis-in-palestine/>

AMCHA has predictably focused a huge amount of attention on our meeting with Leila Khaled, in an attempt to demonize the delegation and to damage my reputation. So let me clarify the purpose of meeting with Khaled. Khaled is a Palestinian feminist icon. She is therefore relevant to my research and pedagogy, both of which aim to revise Palestinian women's studies by critiquing conventional wisdom within the feminist canon. In my courses, I aim to provide a counter narrative to the orientalist depictions of Palestinian, and other Arab and Muslim, women as weak and docile – and men as bloodthirsty and misogynist. To this end, I screen several films including “Leila Khaled: Hijacker?” and open these classes to the public.

Meetings with Palestinian political prisoners were also directly related to my pedagogy, scholarship and advocacy at AMED. For example, I recently initiated and co-organized a major teach-in, “From Pelican Bay and Guantanamo to Palestine: Prisons, Repression, and Resistance” in May 2013 at SFSU that aimed at linking Palestinian prisoners' hunger strikes with two other struggles that were simultaneously taking place at Pelican Bay in California and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.⁸

Meetings with diverse figures in Palestine also inform the diversity of AMED programing and its connections with other social movements – indeed, I should note that AMED programing addresses many issues, including Palestine.⁹ The purpose of such programing is to contextualize the study of Palestine as well as the study of Arab and Muslim communities within other social justice struggles and affirm our principle of the indivisibility of justice.¹⁰

Collaboration with Palestinian Universities advances SFSU Global Mission and Ethnic Studies' Mission of validating knowledge production of marginalized communities

During our visit we met with representatives of An-Najah and Birzeit universities, toward developing the MOU and other collaborative relationships between SFSU and Palestinian universities. AMCHA has particularly sought to also attack Palestinian universities,

⁸ See, <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/pelican-bay-guantanamo-palestine>. This teach-in was co-organized with groups in the U.S., and featured a keynote speaker from Addameer, a prisoner's support organization in Palestine <http://www.addameer.org/>. It was not coordinated with any other foreign organization.

⁹ To name a few examples of many, AMED sponsored the following programs on a variety of social justice struggles: “[Colonialism, Orientalism, and Islamophobia: Queer Arab and Muslim Communities Speak out!](#)”; lectures with Israeli and Jewish anti-occupation scholars and activists; Arab Revolutions' Teach-Ins including “[Libyan Uprising: A Teach-In](#)” and [Egyptian Revolution Teach-In](#); and Women's Herstory Month programming.

¹⁰ See program of the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, “Palestine and the Indivisibility of Justice? [Situating Palestine within American Studies](#)” <http://asa.press.jhu.edu/program10/saturday.html>. Also see Palestine and the Indivisibility of Justice, the 4th annual celebration of the Palestinian Cultural Mural honoring the late Professor Edward Said http://www.indybay.org/uploads/2011/10/27/palestinian_mural_event.pdf

describing them as “well-known for their virulent antisemitism and support of terror” in order to prevent communication and collaboration between the U.S. and Palestinian academics. In fact, An Najah and Birzeit Universities are highly respected prominent universities in the Arab world and contrary to AMCHA’s insinuation, are not listed as “terrorist organizations” by the US State Department. Our future collaboration with Palestinian universities will allow expand SFSU’s plans to become a global university especially in the Arab region in which it has no collaborative agreement. Such an achievement would fulfill the mission of the College of Ethnic Studies to connect with communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as to validate the experiences and support the empowerment of marginalized and oppressed communities.

As well, we put in praxis our commitment to the Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel¹¹ by meeting with individual faculty members from Hebrew University and Ben Gurion University while boycotting the Israeli institutions of higher education, to invite them to participate in a symposium for the World Congress of Middle East Studies.¹² And I met with alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society to discuss the invitation they extended to me to teach in their summer school¹³.

The March 6 report-back event also furthered the educational purpose of the trip.

I also wish to respond to allegations AMCHA made in separate letters dated March 5 and March 26, 2014, that the March 6 public forum threatened the safety of Jewish students. Here are the facts. I co-organized this event with my colleague Joanne Barker, Professor of American Indian Studies to share the trip with the SFSU community. The event was a model of open, exciting and timely public discussion on current events with urgent human rights and political implications and furthered the educational purpose of facilitating discussion about diverse Palestinian viewpoints.¹⁴ I fail to see how discussing the Palestinians struggle for justice creates a hostile campus climate for Jewish students.

Indeed, the event addressed our first hand experiences from the trip and included criticism of Israeli state policy and Palestinian conditions under occupation. Criticism of the Israeli state and our commitment to the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, issued by Palestinian Civil Society in 2005 that was advertised in our flyer is not anti-Semitic or threatening to Jewish students and it is not harassment that creates a hostile environment. It is political analysis and protected expression. The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (DOE) has also recognized this distinction. In 2013, the DOE dismissed three complaints filed by AMCHA and others, which falsely alleged that

¹¹ <http://www.pacbi.org/>. The Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, PACBI, clearly calls for boycotting Israeli academic institutions because of their role in perpetuating the occupation of Palestinian lands and the denial of Palestinian rights but does not prohibit collaboration with individual Israeli scholars especially those who refuse to let the Israeli government speak in their names.

¹² See WOCMES program, “Palestine: Solidarity and Resistance: A Symposium”.

¹³ See alQaws Sexual Politics in the Colonial Context of Palestine Summer School <http://sexualityschool.wordpress.com/about-2/>

¹⁴ Videos of the event will be available soon through SFSU DIVA <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/coes/#browse-collections>.

criticism of Israel creates a hostile environment for Jewish students.¹⁵ According to the Department of Education:

In the university environment, exposure to such robust and discordant expressions, even when personally offensive and hurtful, is a circumstance that a reasonable student in higher education may experience. In this context, the events that the complainants described do not constitute actionable harassment.

The standing room only audience included students of diverse backgrounds and from programs across the university, engaged in a healthy and vibrant discussion over the issues speakers raised. To facilitate discussion, all participants were able to raise their questions openly and respectfully. We addressed several questions and dissenting opinions in a collegial and respectful manner aimed at fostering critical thinking.

Finally, AMCHA makes much of the fact that the report-back event is described in “political” terms. The fact is that all scholarship has an agenda. It is the mission and core value of ethnic studies to put forward the legitimacy of ideas produced by the marginalized to challenge the status quo. My scholarship and pedagogy fits with the mission and *raison d’être* of ethnic studies in general and the College of Ethnic Studies in particular – and by extension SFSU – which recognizes and validates the lived experiences of marginalized communities whose narratives are usually devalued by the status quo. The fact that I returned from my trip with a political analysis of what I saw, and that I shared that analysis with the campus community, does not diminish from the scholarly value of my fieldwork or research. It is, rather, its very purpose.

The false allegations are part of a concerted intimidation campaign to limit academic freedom and suppress viewpoints critical of the Israeli state.

AMCHA’s call to investigate and punish my activities is aimed at suppressing the scholarship and speech of those who honestly discuss Israel’s violation of Palestinian rights and express critical viewpoints, including our commitment to justice in and for Palestine as part of justice for all peoples. AMCHA and similar organizations¹⁶ frequently attack criticism of Israeli policies as anti-Semitic.¹⁷ These groups are

¹⁵ The decisions are available at, <http://ccrjustice.org/newsroom/press-releases/victory-student-free-speech%2C-department-of-education-dismisses-complaints>. They held, “In the university environment, exposure to such robust and discordant expressions [such as criticism of Israel], even when personally offensive and hurtful, is a circumstance that a reasonable student in higher education may experience. In this context, the events that the complainants described do not constitute actionable harassment.”

¹⁶ Co-signers to AMCHA’s previous letters include Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Stand With Us, and Zionist Organization of America.

¹⁷ See Letter from National Lawyers Guild San Francisco Bay Area to University of California President Napolitano and California State University Chancellor White concerning Amcha Tactics to Silence Speech, February 21, 2014, *also available at*, <http://palestinelegalsupport.org/2014/02/21/rights-groups-write-to-uc-csu-trustees-about-amcha-tactics-to-silence-speech-on-palestinian-rights/>.

committed to defending and promoting Israeli policies by stifling criticism of Israel in the U.S. through the misuse of legal instruments, and accusations that conflate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Many groups have written about the serious consequences of this McCarthyist repression campaign on academic freedom and First Amendment rights.¹⁸ Repeatedly, the accusations made by AMCHA and similar organizations have proven to be baseless, as they are in this case.

This most recent set of false allegations echoes previous attempts to attack legitimate use of state resources for critical analysis of Palestine/Israel, including criticism from Jewish faculty. Examples abound including David Klein, David Lloyd, Lisa Duggan, David Shorter, Paola Bacchetta, Persis Karim, Hatem Bazian, Gabi Piterberg, Lisa Rofel, and visiting Israeli professor Ilan Pappé. The idea that state funding can or should be restricted for the study of a political conflict because those on one side of the conflict wish to suppress the critiques of the other is anathema to the most essential values of the academy.

Baseless accusations of anti-Semitism and support for terrorism have had devastating impacts on me and other members of the university community. Students and faculty have been consumed by defending our right to speak freely. These smear campaigns can affect our future and career opportunities and subject us to unwarranted government scrutiny of our speech activities.

These attacks are deliberately intended to isolate me and AMED, to drive a wedge between AMED and the College of Ethnic Studies on one hand and the University President on the other, and to undermine our work at a time when we are beginning to see the fruits of our intensive efforts over the past few years. We have already received the approval of a Minor at the College level and will be submitting it for university-wide vetting and approval in the fall. We have also achieved a record approval of 24 new courses, and secured the GE approval of 15 courses in several areas.¹⁹ I hope to stay focused on building AMED's successes towards our academic mission, and expect the continued support of SFSU.

In light of the false accusations, and the serious interests at stake, I have asked SFSU/CSU to promptly conclude there has been no misuse of funds or any other wrong doing on my part. I also urged SFSU to publicly clarify that my activities further the value and mission of AMED, College of Ethnic Studies and San Francisco State University.

¹⁸ For example, California Scholars for Academic Freedom who wrote to President Wong on March 14, 2014 , <http://cascholars4academicfreedom.wordpress.com/tag/amcha-initiative/> the National Lawyers Guild in the letter cited above, the University of California Committee on Academic Freedom who expressed concern about efforts to suppress speech on Israel/Palestine (attached), and the Center for Constitutional Rights (see generally, www.Palestinelegalsupport.org, citing numerous examples of repression of speech on campus throughout the U.S.)

I am therefore asking you to join me in urging Dr. Les Wong, President of San Francisco State University, to publicly clarify that there have been no wrong doing on my part and to ask him to further clarify that my activities advance and are consistent with the values and mission of AMED, the College of Ethnic Studies and San Francisco State University. Please also ask President Wong to continue to defend free speech and academic freedom at SFSU.

To take action to support me, please go to bit.ly/supportrabab

Thank you for your support,

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