

REPORT FROM ATTENDEE – CNES EVENT AT UC BERKELEY, APRIL 28, 2017

...the Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) at UC Berkeley hosted a panel discussion titled – 6 Days, 50 Years: 1967 and the Politics of Time. The panel included Joel Beinin, Donald J. McLachlan Professor of History and Professor of Middle East Studies at Stanford University; Smadar Ben Natan, Visiting Scholar at Berkeley Law, from Tel Aviv University; Leena Dallasheh, Assistant Professor from Humboldt State University; and Noura Erakat, Assistant Professor at George Mason University. The panel was moderated by Emily Gottreich, Chair of CMES.

There were about 20 people in the audience – a handful of undergraduates, a few graduate students, potentially a few faculty and staff, and then community members.

The theme of the panel was introduced as forward-looking based on the events of the 1967 war. Throughout the panel, the future was hardly mentioned. Each panelist spoke only of the 1967 events as the start of the Israeli occupation of the territories and actually never mentioned the war. Israel was described as a white, colonialist country, who oppresses and does not recognize the Palestinian people.

Based on the title of the panel, we expected at least once view point to balance out the discussion. However, all four panelists, and the moderator, were clearly anti-Israel. They made no room for the opposite viewpoint.

Once the event was opened to questions, the discussion moved from anti-Israel to blatantly anti-Semitic. One question was asked by a woman likely in her 70s, who claimed to have traveled from New Mexico for the event. She started off by explaining that she's spent many years trying to figure out "who is a Jew," and that in all her time researching and asking questions, she hasn't been able to figure it out. She said that the only people who seemed to have figured it out were the Nazis.

Much of the room was in shock by such a horribly obvious anti-Semitic statement. What was more shocking was the fact that none of the panelists addressed this hateful remark. In fact, they reinforced it by agreeing that identifying who is a Jew is a challenge.

An Orthodox Jewish student asked a question about how the talk about the Israel-Palestinian conflict has led to more anti-Semitism and hate speech on both sides and Professors Beinin and Erakat essentially condoned the hate speech, saying it's a structural problem, and that people aren't born hating people, but rather, need to be taught how and who to hate.

A question regarding the narrative on campus regarding Israel's right to exist was asked. Professor Dallesheh grew animated and confirmed that she believed Israel did not have the right to exist as a Jewish state. The rest of the panel agreed in principle.

This panel did not give any semblance of balance on the topic, despite the seemingly open title of the event. The environment also did not allow for differences of opinion.

The whole experience was extremely disappointing, especially on a college campus where academic discussions where both sides are represented are so important.