

## An Interview with Rabab Abdulhadi Knowledge for Justice, Part II

*THE FIRST PART of this discussion with Professor Rabab Abdulhadi appeared in our previous issue, ATC 206 (May-June 2020). Dr. Abdulhadi developed the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies (AMED) program in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University 13 years ago. In Part I she outlined how she built the program and came under attack from right-wing Zionists.*

*Most recently she received the Georgina Smith Award by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for excellence in scholarship, teaching and commitment to collaborating with a diverse group of academic, labor and community organizations. AAUP notes "Her leadership transcends the division between scholarship and activism that encumbers traditional university life."*

*Dr. Abdulhadi thanks Dianne Feeley, David Finkel, Katherine Hanna, Saliem Shehadeh and Jaime Veve for their helpful feedback.*

**Dianne Feeley:** You've tweeted that the protest against the police killing of George Floyd was an Intifada. How do the cases of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor resonate with the situation Palestinians face with the constant threat of Israeli violence?

**Rabab Abdulhadi:** Let me begin by honoring George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor and all those who fell as victims of racial violence and colonial terror in the United States, Palestine and elsewhere. Rest in power/rest in peace.

Today we invoke three names but the sad reality is that there are so many countless others who are killed every single day in the streets, in their homes, on the way to work, school, at checkpoints — for simply being Black, for being Palestinian, for being Indigenous, for being who they are, and for not having the means to defend themselves against such powerful structural racism.

There is no justification for these murders. We have to acknowledge the racial order of white supremacy and anti-Blackness that has been central to the creation of this U.S. settler-colonial state on the lands and over the bodies of Indigenous communities and kidnapped and enslaved Africans, and exploitation of other people of color and poor and marginalized communities.

I tweeted that this was an Intifada both because I see this as a social movement for transformation, to express my solidarity and to disrupt the dominant narrative by the media and politicians.

It was quite horrifying to hear liberal politicians echo Trump's condemnation of Black liberation protests by calling them "looting." That sounded a lot like labeling Palestinians and other Indigenous and anti-colonial movements as "terrorist" in order to smear them and dismiss their legitimate struggle.

It was such a vindication last week when the Center for Constitutional Rights retweeted a post exposing salaries of the New York City Police Department, stating "we are ready to discuss that 'looting' everyone was talking about."

When I think of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, I also think of Palestinians whose lives were extinguished in a similar manner, such as the medic Razan al-Najjar in Gaza killed by the Israeli military; the autistic Palestinian Jerusalemite Iyad Halak who was killed by Israeli police in Jerusalem despite repeated calls to stop by his caregiver, Warda Abu Hadid; or Mohammad Abu Khadir who was kidnapped, forced to drink kerosene and burned alive.

Palestinians have rightly expressed their solidarity with Black communities and the Black freedom struggle in multiple ways. In the U.S. diaspora, we stood back in respect, humility, deference and unconditional support for Black leadership. This is why I changed my profile picture to that of the mural Palestinian artist Taqi Spateen drew to honor George Floyd on the Apartheid wall.

I do not intend to conflate the struggles for Black and Palestinian liberation. There are historical and contextual nuances to which we must pay close attention, to avoid the impulse to provide quick conclusions. Each struggle deserves its own serious and careful consideration.

### Settler States

I do see parallels between the founding of the U.S. settler colonial nation-state and Israel, South Africa and other settler states. One difference that we observe today is the wider acceptance by U.S. liberals of the condemnation of white supremacy — I am hoping that this criticism is here to stay and not

a passing phenomenon provoked by white guilt. However, we do not see the same thing among Israeli or liberal Zionists.

We are still confronted, though, with arguments that define American racism, anti-Blackness, erasure of Indigenous life and the lives of communities of color, the poor and working people as a passing phenomenon. Along similar lines, Israel is also presented by its liberal supporters, *The New York Times* being a case in point, as a great exceptional case of the triumph over the evils of Nazism instead of the settler-colonial project that its founders sought.

I see a real problem in defining Palestinians as the "victims of the victims" of Holocaust Survivors. I argue that *both* groups were victimized by Zionist expansionist and colonialist zeal. After the United States and European countries closed their doors and imposed quotas, Holocaust survivors had nowhere to go, but to Palestine, which was colonized by British rule and was still "open." However, not all Holocaust survivors could escape with their lives and make it to Palestine.

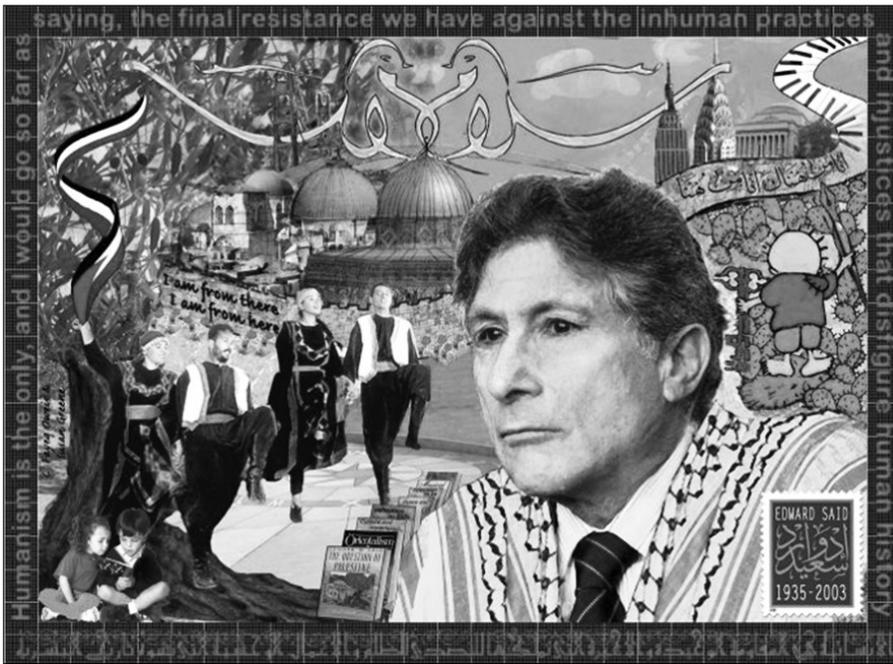
The United States and Israel (and other repressive regimes) are engaged in police and military collaboration that is quite extensive and multidimensional. Jewish Voice for Peace has developed "The Deadly Exchange," a comprehensive campaign against it. JVP is bringing up the connection between police brutality and the demand to defend and abolish the police.

Making the point are Palestinian muralist Taqi Sbateen, who painted George Floyd (RIP) on the Apartheid wall, and other Palestinian artists. Palestinian shop owner Abu Mayyaleh also denounced the Minneapolis Police and provided the movement with video footage of the killing of Floyd. This is a very clear example of how justice is indivisible.

### Normalizing Islamophobia

**DF:** You have made a case that university officials seek to undermine the AMED program for three reasons: the program is intersectional, it encourages critical thinking, and its subject matter is anti-racism, anti-colonialism.

**RA:** SFSU seems to have a problem with AMED Studies. I believe that in addition to advancing a radical approach to academic



The original design for the Palestinian mural contained the key of return that symbolizes the Nakba and dispossession and Handala, a cartoon character created by Palestinian artist Naji Al-Ali.

programming, what we do undermines SFSU's efforts to attract right-wing and Zionist donors at a time when the university administration has become overtly corporatized, departing from its social justice mission.

The campus has become deeply implicated in a "business model," placing dollars and cents ahead of the educational objectives to which we are committed. As I said in Part I, a university official specifically told me that classes should not be opened beyond registered students, implying only those who pay tuition. We, on the other hand, are committed to opening our classroom to our communities inspired by the spirit of '68.

Our students deserve to learn from, and engage with, elders who are our living archives. By making it possible to preserve oral histories and pass experiences along to younger generations who are leading today's movements, opening our classrooms directly contributes to producing knowledge for justice. There is a fundamental contradiction between our objectives and those of the administration. For example, while claiming the opposite, the university's definition of "student success" focuses on graduation rates for the purpose of submitting such statistics to Federal and State authorities to secure funding.

Please do not get me wrong. I have no problem with receiving public funds. On the contrary I believe that it is our right to demand and expect full funding for our public educational institutions.

The rush to prove "student success" for the sake of funding, though, compromises the mission of public education and prioritizes money over the pedagogical approach-

es that continue to attract students from marginalized communities and attracted me to SFSU in the first place.

This spring the Administration cancelled two Palestine-specific courses that I planned for fall 2020 under the pretext of budget concerns in the age of COVID-19. The courses are "The Palestinian Mural and the Art of Resistance" and "Comparative Border Studies: Palestine and Mexico."

Resorting to familiar management budget excuses, administrators were using a bureaucratic trick to undermine AMED Studies. The history of AMED and these two particular courses, however, betrays a different reality. The truth of the matter is that administrators have had a political problem with the Palestinian Mural course since day one.

When we first proposed the course in 2016, the Associate Dean had a problem with the specificity of the topic and sought to make it about all murals. I argued that it was not our place as AMED to offer courses on murals representing the struggles of other communities, such as Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, Indigenous, India, or Pacific Islanders, but that such courses should be housed in the other departments of the College of Ethnic Studies.

Although the Palestinian Mural course was approved, every time we try to offer it, the Administration comes up with one obstacle or another, including advancing deadlines for student enrollment, to "hiding" it before we even had a chance to make it available to students in all 23 CSU campuses, to exerting pressure on me to remove Palestine from the title.

The instructor is Dr. Susan Greene,

the anti-Zionist Jewish feminist artist who co-painted the Palestinian Mural with the Palestinian artist Dr. Fayege Oweis. As I said in Part I, Zionist groups launched a campaign to prevent the mural from seeing the light and the SFSU administration sided with the Zionist argument.

The university administration simply would not allow the mural to move forward until we agreed to remove two symbols. The first was the key of return that simultaneously symbolizes the *Nakba* and dispossession and the determination of Palestinian refugees to return to the lands and homes of their ancestors. The second was *Handala*, the cartoon character created by Palestinian artist Naji Al-Ali, who was assassinated in London by the Israeli Mossad.

Zionists in SFBA and beyond claimed, and SFSU administration agreed, that *Handala* was antisemitic, a false charge employed to silence scholarship, teaching and advocacy for justice in/for Palestine. The Palestinian Mural course assumes added significance today as we see murals of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshad Brooks join murals of other Black and Palestinian martyrs.

"Comparative Border Studies: Palestine and Mexico," likewise demonstrates our consistent commitment to offer critical analysis in a comparative, nuanced and thoughtful manner. This course too came under attack by both right-wing groups as well as the university administration. "Hiding" the courses was therefore less an exercise of balancing the books and more the Administration's concerted efforts to slowly kill AMED's radical content and disappear the program.

### Policing AMED and Campus Activism

Policing course content has not been the only measure SFSU administration has taken. Collusion between management and the pro-Israel right wing is quite extensive. As I explained in Part I, everything to do with Palestine, campus activism, or the study of Arab and Muslim communities from a justice-centered perspective, has been targeted.

The university has tried to control my social media presence as well as that of AMED Studies. For example, in response to a Zionist campaign, the Dean and the Provost threatened me with disciplinary measures if I refused to remove a post from the AMED Facebook page in which a student group, Jews Against Zionism (JAZ) criticized former university president Wong for welcoming Zionists to our campus (see image in Part I).

Last fall, I was all of a sudden blocked from administering the facebook page of Race and Resistance Studies. I have no idea why this happened. However, this followed

new attacks by AMCHA and other Zionist groups against my social media activism.

The new campaign targeted me for sharing the banner of NYC Queers Against Israeli Apartheid and for my livestreaming of the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Stonewall uprising. On June 30, 2019, I joined the Queer Liberation March, that was characteristically anti-corporate. Organizers also refused to let police march in their uniforms, given the alarming police brutality against queer and Black youth.

Our contingent included Queers Against Apartheid, Jewish Voice for Peace, Queers against Islamophobia, trans Jewish youth and several Arab and Palestinian queer groups. This reflected my longtime alignment with our Jewish sisters and brothers who see justice for Palestine as part of their commitment to the indivisibility of justice.

By contrast, right-wing Zionist groups again falsely accused me of antisemitism labeling my posts as “hateful” and demanded that CSU punish me for these posts. The posts I shared pronounced “Palestine is a queer issue”; “Zionism equals racism”; “We should divest”; and BDS.

Pro-Israel groups have attacked me for raising the question of “who owns Jewishness?” for insisting that there are multiple Jewish narratives and multiple Jewish experiences. Zionist groups who were monitoring my social media called on the State of California to discipline and punish me for advocating for what I believed in. Apparently, SFSU administration took it upon itself to police me for refusing to fall in line and acquiesce to Zionist attempts to silence me.

### Holding SFSU Accountable

**DF:** *You're pursuing legal action against the SFSU administration for its failure to adequately protect you from threats and harassment by right-wing Zionist groups. Can you fill us in on the background to this, what you're asking for, and why did you decide to sue?*

**RA:** Suing the university administration has never been my first choice. My choice has been to pour all our efforts to build the AMED studies program and institutionalize it at SFSU and other U.S. colleges and universities and around the world.

However, when you're confronting a powerful institution with the resources of the state behind it, you don't really get to choose the timing, modalities or more broadly repression. You either accept the discrimination you face and experience constant humiliation and further marginalization, or fight it.

Having been victimized by a frivolous but dangerous lawsuit brought against me and the university by the right-wing and pro-Israeli Lawfare Project, I am in a position to speak directly to the detrimental impact of such litigation. It took almost 18 months of



*In solidarity with Black Lives Matter, Palestinian muralist Taqi Sbateen painted George Floyd (RIP) on the Apartheid wall*

my life to fight this lawsuit and the constant attacks by the pro-Israeli lobby.

It's perhaps instructive to add that SFSU did not make it easy for me to defend myself or defeat the Lawfare lawsuit, which sought and failed to establish their false allegations that Palestine-centered scholarship, pedagogy and advocacy caused a climate of antisemitism on campus.

SFSU excluded me from a meeting of the defendants, did not hire a lawyer to represent me for a month, provided Lawfare with over 400 pages of my correspondence with An-Najah National University (in which Lawfare hoped to but failed to find a smoking gun), and sought to undermine my defense over the grievance the union filed on my behalf a few months earlier.

In effect, the university was implementing what the Lawfare Executive Director Brooke Goldstein had promised a year earlier, namely to inflict “massive punishment” and “exact a heavy price” from critics of Israel. We refused to accept these false allegations, submit to the right wing agenda or allow SFSU to settle the lawsuit.

Instead, we built an international movement to confront Lawfare's extensive resources, including a mega law firm with almost 1,000 lawyers. After a year and a half, on October 30, 2018 we defeated them when U.S. District Court William Orrick III dismissed the lawsuit with prejudice.

We actually thought that winning this lawsuit and saving the university's reputation from such false allegations, and California taxpayers from wasting thousands of dollars, would motivate the SFSU administration to thank us and reinstate AMED faculty lines. Unfortunately, SFSU was not predisposed to supporting me or AMED nor stop its attempt to criminalize campus activism and student organizing.

As a result, what Lawfare was unable

to accomplish through the front door, i.e. Federal court, they achieved through the back door. Despite vowing to defeat these false accusations and the use of a major law firm with massive resources, SFSU settled behind closed doors, violating transparency and accountability that are required for a public institution.

In an October 2019 meeting, Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Indigenous students handed the new SFSU President Lynn Mahoney GUPS's statement opposing the Lawfare settlement and asked her to get back to them with her response since the settlement was reached during her predecessor. Students report that they have still not heard back.

### Hate Speech as “Free Speech”

The university has failed to protect us, as the first grievance the union filed on my behalf claimed. We argued that the inaction and refusal of the administration to firmly and appropriately respond to and reject several racist and Islamophobic incidents have been interpreted as an invitation to further attacks. The administration claimed they must allow free speech on campus.

The SFSU administration (and CSU Chancellor's office) did not investigate the wanted-style Islamophobic posters that falsely accused me, my colleagues and my students of “JewHatred,” labelling us as terrorists. On four different occasions these were posted on our campus presumably by persons affiliated with David Horowitz and the Canary Mission.

We expected an affirmation of our partnership agreement with An-Najah University, the only agreement SFSU has with any Arab or Muslim institution. The university could have used the opportunity to make a statement against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, highlighting the role of education and transnational collaboration in fostering

mutual understanding and respect among people in general and peace and justice in the region in particular.

Instead SFSU institutional leadership selected to issue a minimalist and lackluster statement in which SFSU and the CSU distanced themselves from the agreement.

I have received several death threats in writing, on my office voicemail (saying, "Muslims will die, Jews will live"), as well as mail to my office in the College of Ethnic Studies. This was not the only occasion on which SFSU failed to act appropriately. In fact, the administration has exhibited a pattern of negligence, discrimination, bias and failure to protect us and other marginalized communities.

Another glaring example of the disparate treatment SFSU systematically applies can be seen in the example of the Nazi student my students discovered in my Palestine class. According to my students of color who discovered it and shared it with the student paper reporters, this person had at least 250 posts on their Facebook page and Instagram account with racist posts against Arab Muslims, Palestinians, Blacks, Jews, women and refugees. The white supremacist sites contained Nazi symbols, calls for violence and featured a cannon pointed at arriving Syrian refugees.

Rather than defending us, the Administration's response was to call in the Nazi student and offer counseling, as the student paper *The Golden Gate Xpress* revealed. This was a far cry from how SFSU treated a Palestinian student in 2013 who faced disproportional allegations made by an Israel lobby campaign led by AMCHA of being a threat to Israelis on campus.

Former SFSU President Wong stated in an email to Israel sympathizers that SFSU investigated the Palestinian student in cooperation with UPD, the FBI and the Israeli consulate. The Palestinian student was also reprimanded by the university, forced to resign as president of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), ordered to stay off campus, and banned from taking in-person courses for two semesters.

None of these actions were applied by the Administration to the Nazi student in my Palestine class. Building upon their smear campaigns and misrepresentations, the same Israel lobby group, Campus Watch, twisted my interview with SFSU student paper to make it sound as if I was tolerant of Nazism and antisemitism.

The negligent manner with which SFSU has responded to years of smearing, intimidation, bullying and outright death threats against me, my colleagues and my students reflects such collusion with Zionist interests. SFSU administrators seem to be no longer satisfied with the earlier reliance of maintaining a neutral stand *vis-a-vis* the out-

side attacks against us but are now directly engaging in regular doses of "microaggressions," underhandedness and the use of the bureaucracy to marginalize AMED studies.

As a result, SFSU has forced me to seek legal remedies as a last resort after I failed to convince the administration to do the right thing and fulfill its commitments to me and our communities.

Let me also stress that AMED Studies does not only meet the needs of our communities. Equally important, AMED aligns with the needs of California and the U.S. education system, as the letter by the California Scholars for Academic Freedom pointed out when advocating for a California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that was inclusive of Arab American Studies.

I had insisted that these commitments be spelled out in the job contract the university offered me as part of the institutional record. Our faculty union has issued several statements, urging the university administration to refrain from harassing me and my students. These were unanimously adopted by the San Francisco Labor Council and subsequently lent support for the Palestine Study Abroad program.



The union, California Faculty Association, filed three labor grievances on my behalf. A coalition of community advocates, organized as Friends of AMED, and as AMED communities of justice sent letters, petitions, emails and protests, and demanded individual and collective meetings with SFSU leadership and persistently challenged SFSU's collusion with Israel lobby groups.

There is a growing list of "conduct"-based policies that SFSU administrators have instituted following student and labor protests. Such tactics allow administrators to discipline those who rock the boat and demand their rights, defining them as troublemakers. Our faculty union's plate is overflowing with grievances filed on behalf of professors and lecturers that demonstrate how toxic the campus climate has become.

I think that it's important to keep in mind that all false charges brought against me were proven to be without merit. Unfortunately, SFSU is deeply colluding with these groups since it has become so beholden to right-wing donors. As a result, SFSU has engaged in a systematic pattern of

discrimination, racism and retaliation against the AMED program and me.

I have reached out multiple times to university administrators from the Deans, the Provost, to the President and other top administrators, pleading with them to let our program see the light and to stop the harassment and discrimination, to no avail.

For 12 years prior to filing the lawsuits in 2018, I worked to advance our social justice mission and drive the point home that free speech and academic freedom are as essential to Arab, Muslim and Palestinian communities as they are to all other marginalized communities.

The university's response has been to offer lip service at best but not take any meaningful steps. At worst, it has been harassment, discrimination and retaliation. Suing the university is my way of holding them accountable. My demands in the lawsuit are for transparency and accountability, building AMED Studies, and respecting my faculty and human rights.

### Complaints on Top of Complaints

**DF:** *I understand that you were invited for the second year in a row to keynote the Students for Justice in Palestine national conference at UCLA and to lecture on Islamophobia. How was your talk received? Was there a Zionist backlash?*

**RA:** I was very honored to have been asked to speak at the national conference of Students for Justice in Palestine two years in a row.

The Houston 2018 conference was very significant, not only because it was held not far from the border where Trump is trying to build another Apartheid wall using the same Israeli company that build the one in Palestine. Further, it allowed me to discuss the Teaching Palestine project where I focused on 100 years of colonialism and resistance.

The 2019 conference at UCLA was quite besieged by pro-Israel groups after they failed to compel UCLA to cancel it. Pro-Israel groups gathered outside UCLA with Israeli flags and signs supporting the erasure of Palestine.

When we were about to leave at the end of the conference, we were accosted by young men who spoke to us in broken Arabic. I have to tell you, that took me back to very unpleasant memories of trying to cross Israeli checkpoints during the *Aqsa Intifada* and growing up under the Israeli occupation

With regards to my guest lecture on Islamophobia, I was invited to speak in Professor Kyeyoung Park's UCLA course on race and racism. As I started to speak, I was interrupted by the student who now claims that I silenced her. In my response I insisted that Zionists don't own Jewishness and

drew parallels between Zionism and white supremacy. This infuriated the pro-Israel network who once again launched a new campaign to silence me and my colleagues.

My lecture was fully streamed live and continues to be available on Facebook; it clearly vindicates me against another round of false accusations. But here is another rude awakening — where Zionists are concerned the truth is never relevant. They have continued bullying us — with their noise pollution hoping to drown our voices or yell loud enough for the lies to appear as truths.

StandWithUs, a major player in the pro-Israel right-wing network, has filed a complaint against UCLA mostly over the NSJP conference and my Islamophobia lecture. Just like the Lawfare lawsuits, the allegations are baseless. UCLA conducted a full investigation before concluding that I did not harass the student nor engage in antisemitic hate speech, but was exercising my academic freedom and freedom of speech.

My own university, SFSU, has conducted at least three overzealous audits of my travel that did not include any questions about missing funds or receipts but rather focused on my research trips and collaboration with Palestinian universities.

SFSU financial audits were unnecessary because before dispensing a penny in reimbursements, SFSU (and other institutions accountable to the public) must conduct multiple audits and have in fact subjected me to unreasonable scrutiny above and beyond its usual practice. Aside from the business-as-usual racialized and Islamophobic practices of constantly questioning the veracity of faculty of color, SFSU has applied exceptional treatment to me in response to pro-Israel groups.

UCLA engaged in a similar response, immediately assuming truth on the part of the student who falsely accused me and painting me as “controversial.”

SWU is not the only pro-Israel group that files baseless complaints with the Department of Education. Other Israel lobby groups have done the same against Duke, UNC, Columbia, NYU and a host of other universities. The timing is not accidental nor is the target of the complaints. The DoE has never been more predisposed to the pro-Israel agenda than it is now with Betsy DeVos whose Christian right-wing and privatization commitments need no citation.

As well, Trump’s appointment of Kenneth Marcus as the Department’s chief civil rights’ investigator has been the outcome of Trump’s unconditional support for Israel combined with the expectations by Christian Zionists and the Israel lobby to deliver in return for their donations and political clout. Civil rights groups have filed a complaint against his selective targeting of Palestine campus activism.

We have organized as scholars, students and communities. For example, when Zionists demanded that UCLA investigate the lecture I gave on Islamophobia and my talk at the national conference that Students for Justice in Palestine held there, a number of organizations sent off a letter in response, despite the preoccupation of our communities with the difficult conditions of the coronavirus.

It was initiated by the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and co-organized by ns Palestine Legal, and signed by the Center for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, Jewish Voice for Peace, my colleagues in the league Department of Asian American studies at SFSU, IFCO, ADC, National Education Black Agenda and National Women’s Studies Association. California Scholars for Academic Freedom issued a strong statement and so did many other academic associations, student groups and community organizations.

For my part I will continue building AMED, teaching Palestine, and producing knowledge for justice. All I need is continued community support. It might take long and sacrifices but what choice do we have? Losing our chains? So be it.

### Global Contagion?

**DF:** *Israel’s “Jewish nation-state” law makes the lower status of Israel’s non-Jewish Arab citizens an official reality, despite the flowery language of its 1948 Declaration of Independence. At the same time, we’re seeing global examples like India’s steps to strip non-Hindu citizenship in Assam province, and the abrogation of Kashmir’s constitutional autonomous status. Do you see a global contagion in these developments?*

**RA:** First, I do not think that the Israel declaration of independence was “flowery.” It may have sounded flowery to liberal Zionists but neither to anti-Zionist Jews nor to anyone else who opposes colonialism and racism. It certainly was not to Palestinians who became refugees overnight, whose land



Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi at the 2019 Students for Palestine conference.

was taken, who had to live under military rule inside Israel from 1948 to 1966. The declaration stripped them of their legal status and their very existence. Therefore, it was another step in Israel’s dispossessing Palestinians. I see July 4th in the same light.

Second, I don’t see a fundamental contradiction between Islamophobia, Zionism, Hindu nationalism, caste hierarchy and white supremacy whether in the United States, Israel, India, Kashmir or elsewhere. I see them as going hand in hand.

We must pay attention to nuances to each context and examine historical differences. We should not conflate them, nor is it in the best interests of critical thinking and social change to do so. At the base of it they are about hate and constitute forms of racism and racial discrimination and we must fight them with the same determination.

We saw how Trump responded to Charlottesville when he maintained that there were “very good people on both sides.” We see it in the forces in Europe who donate money to the right-wing AFD in Germany, which was also funded by Zionist donors.

In Europe and the United States, white supremacy, Islamophobia and Zionism go hand-in-hand. Israel is right at the center of it, with Netanyahu very much in agreement with Modi of India, with Trump in the United States, with Bolsonaro in Brazil.

The discourse is similarly racist, supremacist and oppressive with an audacious disregard for the lives of Indigenous communities, third world communities and communities of color from Minneapolis and Atlanta Kashmir and from Gaza to São Paulo.

This gives us a roadmap of how the right wing works, how these forces are coming together. You can see a clear connection between the attempts on campuses to

silence advocates for justice in Palestine, to police activists for Black liberation or sovereignty for Kashmir, and the authoritarianism of Bolsonaro and Trump.

They connect with each other and with police states like Saudi Arabia with its oppressive human rights policies. These leaders seem to be drawing from the same book, even from the same page. Clearly Israel is part of this group. And those of us who support social justice must expose these racist, homophobic and misogynistic policies.

### Trump's Plan to Liquidate Palestine

**DF:** *Although uncritical support for Israel didn't begin with the Trump presidency, we know that Trump has indicated his total support of Israeli supremacy by his actions and support to the Netanyahu government. Now Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner has developed an apartheid-annexation plan, "Deal of the Century." Will the plan succeed in pushing back Palestinian rights or is it dead in the water?*

**RA:** Palestinians and everyone else sees Trump's deal for what it is. It aims eliminating Palestine and crushing Palestinian resistance. It was preceded by Trump's cutting off U.S. funding of the United Nations Relief (UNRWA) program. Now he's trying to tie a noose around the very neck of Palestine.

But let's keep in mind what Jared Kushner stands for. His family's real estate business has been involved in questionable schemes as well as direct funding and support for Israeli settlements. He tried to organize a workshop in Bahrain to find Palestinian business elites, enticing them with money if they agreed to liquidate the cause of the Palestinian people. He only managed to find one person.

No matter how much money has been offered, the Palestinian people have not given up their rights. Palestine is not for sale. For years Israel has tried to create "facts on the ground" by building more colonial settlements and by confiscating more land from Palestinians. Land confiscations are also on the rise among Palestinians in the 1948 areas who are Israeli citizens.

Another harsh reality is the number of Palestinians who are imprisoned, including children. And even when children are released from actual detention centers, they are assigned to house arrest and their parents forced to act as their wardens. Under house arrest, these children are denied their right to an education.

Currently, we have a serious situation with around 5,000, including children, in prison. Although it's not widely or adequately reported in the news, there are nightly raids of Palestinian homes by the Israel military, not much different from that by U.S. police that in which they killed Breonna Taylor.

People are arrested and tortured.

Kangaroo trials, denial of rights, and inhumane prison conditions, are the norm as Israel tries to force Palestinians to comply with its will.

The Israeli military has used the outbreak of the coronavirus to increase surveillance. Since 2002, Israeli intelligence has been gathering data from Palestinian phones. Now, under cover of controlling the pandemic, they have justified the imposition of emergency regulations and increased their spying, including on all Israeli citizens.

Prisons and detention centers all over the world are places where diseases are easily spread. If not in solitary confinement, Palestinian prisoners share the same cell with only one toilet. There is no possibility to maintain social distancing or frequently wash one's hands with the use of soap. Instead, authorities advised prisoners to use their socks as shields against the virus.

It has already been established that an Israeli interrogator, who was involved in torturing Palestinian prisoners, has tested positive and infected four prisoners.

The demand is that all Palestinian prisoners and all prisoners be released, starting with the elderly, the sick and children.

### BDS: A Quest for Justice

**DF:** *Clearly your harassment predates the Trump administration's recent moves. But just looking at Trump's recent moves, we're seeing a campaign to intimidate and silence campus movements for Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) in support of Palestine. How do you assess the current state of the BDS movement?*

**RA:** The Executive Order that Trump issued last December is indicative of his interest in catering both to the Christian right as well as Israel's supporters. The order falsely claims that our criticism of Israel is equivalent to antisemitism. This could not be farther from the truth. It is a typical ploy by supporters of Israel within and outside the White House to bully us.

*Bullies continue bullying.* They do not stop. Pro-Israel lobby organizations with massive budgets, direct support from the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and the Trump Administration have been working against advocacy for justice in/for Palestine, including BDS. And now, Trump has once again joined by issuing an executive order that conflates racism with antisemitism.

Right-wing supporters of Israel, like the mega-billionaire Sheldon Adelson, are trying to stop BDS by banning the movement, but the movement continues to move forward.

We have seen a shift in U.S. public opinion — from being sympathetic to Israel to an understanding of what the Palestinian struggle is all about. There is growing support for Palestine, including among young people of college age, many of whom are Jewish. This is a very big disaster for Israel

because it means that the Zionist movement doesn't speak for all Jews.

Many young people see Israel's laws and actions targeting Palestinians and perpetuating injustices. This includes Jewish youth who are going on the so-called "Birthright" trips to Israel — but then defect and visit Palestinian areas to see the reality. They are contesting the colonial narrative that Zionists have spun.

The BDS movement is similar although not identical, to the international movement against South African apartheid during the 1980s and '90s. It's very similar to the students in the United States who sat in at lunch counters to oppose Jim Crow laws and boycotted businesses that engaged in segregation.

In that tradition, BDS is a movement that says that we are not going to allow injustice, colonialism, racism and apartheid to continue unchallenged in Palestine; we hold Israel to the same standard as any other country.

When educational institutions attempted to deny the right of professors or teachers to engage in BDS, there has been a push-back. The American Civil Liberties Union is standing up for the right of people to advocate for BDS. Now artists who are invited to perform in Israel are thinking twice about going because they don't want to identify with an apartheid regime.

Palestinian civil society and national and Islamic groups as well as the Arab opposition developed the BDS strategy (in 2005) as a way the whole world could express its solidarity with the Palestinian people. Despite the fact that the boycott hurts Palestinian small business, and despite the harsh penalties Israel imposes for those who speak out in support of this strategy, there is widespread BDS work inside Palestine and among Palestinians living in Israel.

As BDS builds, Palestinians see that we have not been abandoned, we are not alone. We also understand that the Israeli government and the lobby it sets up around the world to win support for its positions are hard at work.

So, the struggle continues. One of the latest, in California, is a vicious attack waged by Zionist and right-wing groups on the ethnic studies model curriculum required in all K-12 classes. They don't like this curriculum because it includes sections around Islamophobia and Arab-American studies, including the question of Palestine.

*To support Rabab Abdulhadi, Palestine at SFSU, visit the International Campaign to Defend Professor Rabab Abdulhadi (<https://www.facebook.com/DefendProfAbdulhadi/>). To learn more about AMED Studies, visit its official site at <https://amed.sfsu.edu/> or its unofficial FB page at <https://www.facebook.com/AMEDStudies/>. ■*