

SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE GENERAL UNION OF PALESTINE STUDENTS- SAN  
FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
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In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree

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Master of Arts

In

Anthropology

by

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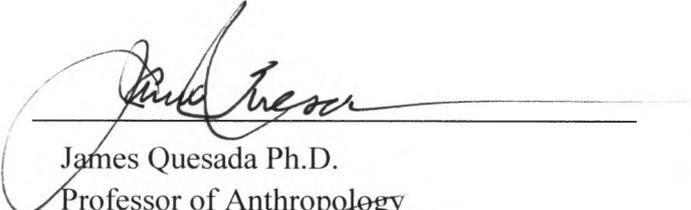
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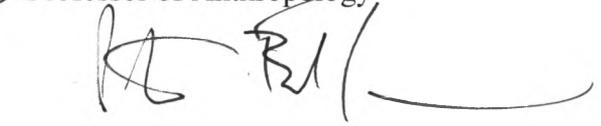
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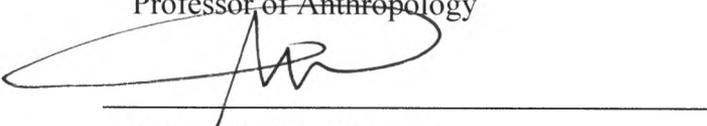
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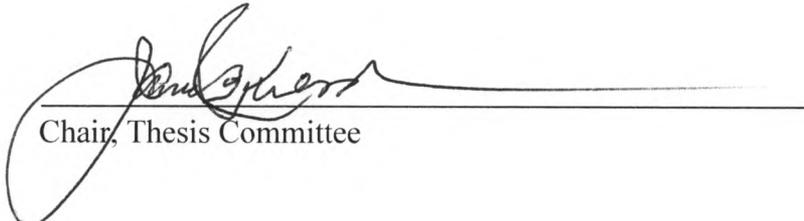
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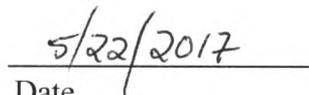
SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE GENERAL UNION OF PALESTINE STUDENTS-SAN  
FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

Saliem Wakeem Shehadeh  
San Francisco, California  
2017

My thesis is a compilation of the oral histories of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) at San Francisco State University with focus on the organization from 2000-2017. Employing “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) and activist ethnography (Abdulhadi 2004), I describe the lived experiences of diasporic Palestinian activists and scholars at SFSU at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I describe the targeting of GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi, Senior Scholar of the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) studies program, by anti-Arab, and Islamophobic organizations and the SFSU administrations’ repression of GUPS. I detail the ways in which GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi launched campaigns for their defense. I focus on three periods 2002, 2005-2007 and 2013-2017 to document the systematic targeting of Palestinian advocacy, scholarship and art on SFSU campus.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
Chair, Thesis Committee

  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Spring of 2002-Stigmatization and Marginalization .....	22
Chapter 2: 2005-2007- The Palestine Cultural Mural .....	60
Chapter 3: 2013-2017- Assaults on Academic Freedom .....	89
Conclusion .....	143
Bibliography .....	147

## INTRODUCTION

In this master's thesis, I explore the experiences of the General Union of Palestine Students at San Francisco State University (SFSU), from 2002-2017. The General Union of Palestine Students, or *GUPS*, is an on-campus student-led organization that advocates for justice in and for Palestine. The aim of this thesis is to represent what it is like to be a member of GUPS at SFSU. While my research started out as an in-depth study of Palestinian identity at SFSU, it has turned into an analysis on how diasporic Palestinians in GUPS have been misunderstood, stigmatized, and disenfranchised by university administrators and targeted by Israeli advocacy groups, typifying the experiences of Palestinian college activists throughout the US.

I deliberately use the term diasporic Palestinian to express exilic identities and to deviate from hyphenated Palestinian-American identity analysis. GUPS members identify as diasporic Palestinians and present themselves as having a high stake in the future of Palestine (Abdulhadi, 2017b). Many GUPS members have grandparents who were made refugees during the *Nakba* (English: *Catastrophe*), a term used to refer to the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians during the formation of the State of Israel and the making of Palestinian refugees still unresolved today (Sa'di and Abu Lughod 2007). As such, the question of return to Palestine is central to their families. These exilic identities are, in part, shaped by family, their alliances with other diasporic communities and the cultivation of a critical consciousness through their activism and studies. Through

this oral histories project on GUPS, I explore Palestinian experiences on the SFSU campus by zooming in on specific exchanges, actions and responses by GUPS members and SFSU administrators, as well as zooming out for broader socio-historical context and structural analysis. As an active and participatory member of the General Union of Palestine Students since the Fall of 2015, the oral histories I compiled reflect memories I in part contributed in making.

### **Description of GUPS at SFSU**

GUPS is a Palestinian centered organization at SFSU and its membership is open to all who support Palestinian calls for justice. Its leadership is comprised predominately of Palestinians. GUPS members past and present see themselves as accountable to Palestinian communities of the San Francisco Bay Area and have a history of working and volunteering within community organizations such as the Arab Cultural Center, the Arab Resource and Organizing Center, and the Palestinian Youth Movement. As SFSU has historically served the SF Bay Area, there is a pattern among GUPS members of inter-generational participation: many of their siblings, cousins or parents were former SFSU GUPS members themselves.

GUPS is a student-led organization. Its membership is in continuous rotation as students graduate and leave the institution with entering students taking their place. Despite membership volatility inherent in on-campus student-based organizing, many members spend multiple years in the organization throughout their studies at SFSU. This

allowed for the more seasoned GUPS members to mentor and teach incoming students about campus activism, Palestine, and GUPS' participation in the campus community. Further, many GUPS members pursue graduate school and academia in scholarship related to Palestine, advocate for Palestine among their co-workers and engage in other combinations of Palestinian advocacy work. The support from Palestinian communities in the SF Bay Area is cyclical. Community members and organizations provided instrumental support for Palestinians on campus including GUPS and the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas studies program, which, under Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, offered the first class on Palestine at SFSU in 2009.

GUPS has a long history of working in solidarity with student-led organizations on campus since it began in 1980. Together these organizations advocate for justice for their communities locally, nationally and globally. GUPS at SFSU has an office on campus in the Cesar Chavez Student Center where they frequently met, strategized and built friendships with allies on campus. This included members of *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA), League of Filipino Students (LFS), Student Council of Intertribal Nations (SKINS), Black Student Union (BSU), Pacific Islander Club (PIC), Muslim Student Association (MSA), Muslim Women Student Association (MWSA), African Student Association (ASA), JUSTICE, Students for Quality Education, Black n' Brown Liberation Coalition, Ethnic Studies Student Organization, and Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies minors. Forging alliances

amongst these organizations contributed to a shared vision of being part of trans-national social and political movements.

Speaking to the strength of the internationalist positions taken, many members within these solidarity groups reject domesticated or hyphen American identities as they do not view themselves as part of a hegemonically imagined United States of America (Anderson 2006; Abdulhadi 2017b). Rather, GUPS members align and identify themselves with all those who take issue with a conventional U.S. assimilationist national identity (Miller 1998) that has created an imagined separation between political developments inside and outside the geographical boundaries of the USA (Abdulhadi 2014). Indicative of this, the GUPS Constitution, that is found among the archived documents in the organization's office in the Cesar Chavez Student Center, states:

The General Union of Palestine Students supports other movements seeking justice, equality and freedom. We stand in solidarity with people of color and indigenous populations. ... The General Union of Palestine Students opposes all forms of occupation and colonization (GUPS Constitution 2005).

It is in that spirit that GUPS has forged solidarities with other like-minded organizations and its members cultivated identities as diasporic Palestinians.

### **International and Local History of GUPS**

Although, in the past, a number of national chapters of GUPS existed, today, GUPS at SFSU is the only one remaining. Its history is one shaped by international

complications felt on the SFSU campus. The story of these complications was shared with me by Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, a long time Palestinian activist and scholar on Palestinian resistance movements (Dr. Abdulhadi, personal correspondence, May 6, 2017). During the 1970s at SFSU, students on-campus organized around Arab and Palestinian politics and issues through the Organization of Arab Students (OAS). OAS began in 1952 “to unite visiting Arab international students studying in the US with Arab-American counterparts” (Smith 2013). By the 1960s there was an active chapter of the Organization of Arab Students at San Francisco State College (it received university status in 1972). During the late 1970s, OAS members contended with much internal divisions, disagreements and debate over politics in the Arab World including debates on pan-Arabism, Arab state nationalism, and regional imperialism. Further, OAS members had to contend with government monitoring and harassment from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as they were targeted for their Palestinian advocacy work (Pennock 2017:163). By 1978/79 many OAS chapters had split or ceased to exist (Abdulhadi 2017b).

Concurrently, in November of 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, leader of one of the most powerful Arab nations, visited Jerusalem and broke the boycott of Arab leaders from engaging in public diplomacy with Israel. In response, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) – an umbrella organization that brought together various Palestinian organizations – alongside other Arab governments formed the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front to affirm Arab states’ non-recognition policy of Israel. This

brought together the parties of the (PLO), namely the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), that had left the PLO in 1974. The PFLP had left over its rejection of the Fatah sponsored Ten Point Program which the PFLP saw as capitulation by denying the goal of liberation for the entirety of Palestine. The PLO then issued instructions through the Palestinian Liberation Organization Mission to the United Nations to Palestinians globally to create Palestinian mass-based PLO affiliated organizations; this included students, workers, grocers and - in 1982 – local women’s associations that came together to form a union in 1986 among which Dr. Abdulhadi was a founder. Heeding the call, U.S. branch of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) was thus formed in 1978 and Palestinian students across college campuses formed GUPS chapters. The split of the OAS coincided with the emergence of GUPS on college campuses. Some Palestinians hesitated to join as they preferred pan-Arab student organizing and saw GUPS as a potentially narrow Palestinian organization. Nonetheless, politically active Arab students joined GUPS in order to maintain an on-campus organizing center.

### **History of GUPS at SFSU**

By 1980 there was a localized city-wide San Francisco General Union chapter which the General Union of Palestine Students at SFSU joined. Throughout the 1980s, GUPS was an international organization with new chapters regularly emerging in many countries. This emergence slowed and stopped with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 by the PLO President Yasser Arafat, and the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The Oslo Accords formed the Palestinian Authority (PA), giving it limited governance over small territories and populations of the West Bank (divided into areas A, B and C) and Gaza. Many Palestinians disagreed with the Oslo Accords, and much confusion ensued about what it meant to be a liberated Palestine. Subsequently, a rupture emerged in Palestinian organizing through the resultant upheaval of the PLO: its status as a centralized and transnational political reference point was widely questioned (Mogannam 2014).

After the signing of the Oslo Accords, many GUPS chapters around the world collapsed, some right away, others after a few years. In the US, there were 60 GUPS chapters at college campuses; following the collapse of other GUPS organizations across the USA, by the end of the 1990s only the SFSU chapter remained (Mogannam 2014). The local General Union chapter of the San Francisco Bay Area also eventually collapsed but the SFSU chapter of the General Union of Palestine Students continued.

A number of reasons explain this outcome. In the first place, Palestinians in the SF Bay Area were dynamic politically and ideologically, supporting several different Palestinian political parties, and generally rejected the Oslo Accords under the Fatah political party and its President Yasser Arafat who had signed them (Lubna Morrar, personal correspondence, September 2016). Another reason for the unique position of GUPS at SFSU, is that anti-colonial organizations at that university and the College of

Ethnic Studies opened up spaces for GUPS to thrive in concert with the other progressive student organizations based there.

In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) formed on college campuses across the US as a central organization for student Palestinian advocacy.

### **GUPS' Palestinian Advocacy Work**

Historically, GUPS directed its advocacy to shift public opinion favorably towards justice in Palestine and challenge hegemonic discourses supporting Israeli dominance. Taking up this anti-colonial stance, GUPS supported movements and policies that strive to undermine and dismantle Israeli colonization (Said 1979) and U.S. oppression. To this end, the key, overarching principles in the SFSU GUPS constitution, are the following:

- (1) an immediate end to the occupation of Palestinian land;
  - (2) support for Palestinian self-determination;
  - (3) adherence to international law;
  - (4) a rectification of human rights abuses;
  - (5) support for Palestinian refugees' right of return to Palestine;
  - (6) an end to US financial support of Israel;
  - (7) a call for SFSU to divest from Israel; and
  - (8) opposition to all forms of occupation and colonization
- (GUPS Constitution 2005).

“Israeli Zionism,” a colonial project (described by the scholar and Palestinian diplomat, Edward Said [1935-2003]), is challenged by GUPS members as its decades-long manifestation constitutes the core injustices forced onto Palestinians. GUPS’ anti-colonial ideology is reflected in its political support for the right of return for Palestinian refugees as well as its advocacy for the liberation of the entire Palestinian homeland. In response, as this thesis will show, Israeli advocacy groups and SFSU administrators have targeted Palestinian activists and scholars on campus who challenge hegemonic discourses on Israeli domination. GUPS continues to resist this suppression as the university and Israeli advocacy groups adapt their methods correspondingly – a notion perhaps best captured by Michael Foucault’s assertion, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1978: 95-96).

Working towards these goals, GUPS held teach-ins, rallies, organized lectures, and distributed fliers among other activities to inform the wider campus about Palestinian history, culture and politics. All sought to echo Palestinian calls for justice. GUPS held annual commemoration events to teach about: (1) *Nakba*, the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 during the formation of the state of Israel; (2) *Deir Yassin massacre*, on April 9, 1948, in which Israeli Zionist paramilitary groups, the *Irgun* and the Stern Gang, massacred the inhabitants of the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, marking the beginning of Palestinian depopulation in the forthcoming state of Israel; (3)

*Arab and Palestine Awareness Week*, a week devoted to education on Palestinian history, experiences, culture and calls for justice; (4) *Sabra and Shatila massacre*, the September 1982 massacre of two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon; these atrocities were committed during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon by a right-wing Lebanese group called the *Phalange* which operated under Israeli military oversight; and (5) *The Palestinian Cultural Mural celebration*, starting in 2007 to annually mark the installment of a mural on SFSU campus that is populated with Palestinian diasporic symbolism.

In addition, GUPS organize Palestine-centered events on campus as they deem fit; such as the 2006 Al-Awda conference on the right of return for Palestinian refugees to historic Palestine, and the 2016 teach-in series on Palestine. GUPS led and participated in protests and demonstrations in support of the Al-Aqsa Palestinian Intifada (meaning “to shake off” or “get rid of”, the protests of perennial Israeli bombings and blockade on Palestinians in Gaza, as well as protests of Israeli politicians who support Palestinian displacement policies. Finally, GUPS participates in social justice movements including those supporting indigenous sovereignty, combatting police violence and anti-Blackness, and fighting for the defense and the growth of Ethnic Studies at SFSU. GUPS supports and is supported by local, national and international students, faculty, community members, and activists.

### **Research Methods:**

My thesis is a compilation of archival research and oral histories of past and present members of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) from 2000-2017. With guidance and suggestions from my advisors and mentors Dr. James Quesada and Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, I was able to hone in on the topic of my research thesis through the compilation of histories of GUPS members and examination of archival, published and written source material. I deploy activist ethnographic methods (Abdulhadi 2004) to collect testimonies through the use of semi-structured interviews, unstructured correspondences, personal communication and conversations, archival research, and ethnographic observation during my time co-organizing as an active and participatory member of GUPS. As a Palestinian student organizer in Students for Justice in Palestine during my undergraduate studies at the University of California, Davis, it was an organic decision for me to join GUPS upon entering SFSU in 2015 for graduate studies. I made clear on my first interactions with GUPS members my research goals. As a GUPS member, I spent nearly two years getting to know and working closely with other members on Palestinian advocacy work. In my capacity as an activist ethnographer, I was not solely an active member of GUPS, but also an ethnographer with a goal of representing the sentiments of GUPS members past and present. As a co-organizer in GUPS, I contributed to the making of histories I describe (Marx 1852). These narratives reflect the collective memories of Palestinians in SFSU GUPS, and is not solely a personal subjective story nor a narrative of a single person.

In the spring of 2016 I applied and received research approval from the SFSU Institutional Review Board, and was given an “Exempt” status from regulatory oversight due to the fact that my project was primarily comprised of oral histories and archival research.

As an active member of GUPS, I developed the trust of past and present GUPS members who primarily viewed me as a co-organizer and not as an outsider, nor an uninvested observer. Although my roles as both a participant member / co-organizer, and as a researcher might potentially have created complications, dual loyalties and distrust by other parties, I avoided this difficulty in part by making clear to all my co-participants that I did not pretend to write about every Palestinian student at SFSU, nor would I write about every member of GUPS. My narrative was intended to express collective experiences and the general sentiments of GUPS members as they shared them with me, and as I experienced them as a co-organizing member. I am grateful to the trust I was given by GUPS members, particularly because they have been the target of several smear campaigns. They are carefully selecting to whom they will give interviews, and circumspect about what information they share. My co-organizers appreciated the fact that I too partake in this guardedness - as a defense tactic and a way to protect my (our) integrity.

As I quickly learned in my research, the way that GUPS is generally presented and regarded by SFSU administrators and in their archival record contrasts deeply and is

entirely out of sync with the way that GUPS members present and think of themselves. Oral histories by colonized and marginalized communities challenges hegemonic discourses that seek to define history from the perspective of the oppressor (Abdulhadi 2015: 1003). This oral history of GUPS then functions to pass on knowledge and histories of the lived-experience that is not acknowledged by the university. Indeed, my work as an oral histories project on the General Union of Palestine Students purposely challenge the misunderstanding, marginalization and stigmatization by SFSU administrators.

As a Palestinian and active member of GUPS at SFSU, I locate myself within the collective memories that I narrate. As I complete this thesis, I am being investigated by SFSU on baseless accusations made by SFSU Israeli advocacy groups because of my activism with the General Union of Palestine Students. Concurrently, I am being recognized for my scholarship and will be the graduate student representative of the College of Liberal and Creative Arts during the SFSU graduation ceremony. My relationship with the university places me in an awkward position as I question and reflect upon my own sense of belonging and exclusion. For many Palestinians, my parents included, the USA was considered a safe haven for immigration, but increasingly, diasporic Palestinian activists on campus however, are made to feel unwelcomed and experience a profound weariness.

In Spring of 2017, my mentor Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi filed suit against the university leadership for the hostile work environment she has had to contend with and for breach of her contract (as I describe below); she awaits an outcome. Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS members alongside their allies have launched a new campaign calling for accountability from the SFSU administration to its responsibility to protect students, staff, and faculty. GUPS members, Dr. Abdulhadi and I share the view that the targeting of Palestinian activism and scholarship can no longer be business as usual. GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi demand justice.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

I present the oral histories as they were told to me, but with them I weave analytical arguments to enhance the expressed sentiments that were shared by placing them in a greater sociological context. Below I describe some of the reoccurring theoretical frameworks I employ in my thesis. The concepts of Islamophobia (Rana 2007), Orientalism (Said 1978) and Critical Consciousness (Freire 1972) are frameworks I use to analyze the collective experiences of GUPS. I do not contend that I will give an exhaustive account of these theories. I present them as a means preliminarily to contextualize the underlying structures and power dynamics surrounding SFSU members of GUPS.

*Islamophobia from Critical Race Theory Analysis:*

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) analysis is important in deciphering and making sense of the continuing Islamophobia that GUPS members and others have faced and continue to face. Tara Yosso defines CRT as, “a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso 2005: 70). Islamophobia scholar Junaid Rana notes a nexus between religious and political identities, and theorizes that identities become “racialized in the engagement with modern forms of power” (Rana 2007: 159). As Rana argues, Islamophobia derives from a racialization of religion (Islam) that exhibits qualities of both biological and cultural racism, engages in racial othering, and positions “the Muslim” as a threat within the assemblage of U.S. racial formations.

Anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani argues that what emerged from these racialized formations was a dichotomy that delineated a hard line between “good” and “bad” Muslims. Mamdani described this as a “fault line running through Islam, a line that separates moderate Islam, called ‘genuine’ Islam, from extremist political Islam” (Mamdani 2002: 767). Moreover, Mamdani contends that, “The implication is undisguised: ... Islam must be quarantined and the devil must be exorcized from it by a civil war between good Muslims and bad Muslims” (Mamdani 2002: 766). Mamdani and argues that this dichotomy has the effect of protecting U.S. hegemonic political discourses and actions in favor of U.S. imperialist projects in the Arab World including, as anthropologist Leila Abu-Lughod argues, interventionist policies and maintaining

military dominance in the region (Abu-Lughod 2013). We may further add that this dichotomy protects U.S. hegemonic security discourses and actions by favoring state policing, surveillance and mass incarceration of Muslim, Palestinian and other marginalized communities (Cainkar 2009; Cole and Dempsey 2002).

Mainstream US media and official U.S. government discourses blamed Muslims and Islam for the 9/11/2001 attacks. Muslims were represented as an “existential” threat to the U.S.A., a condemnation formerly reserved for Communists during the Cold War, Japanese in World War II, and educated or freed African Americans in antebellum U.S.A. (Williams 2005). In the media after 9-11, Muslims were widely represented as a monolithic community in which every Muslim was to be held accountable for violent actions done in the name of Islam. The result was rampant racism and Islamophobia running throughout the nation (Bayoumi 2008; Prashad 2012). Mainstream Muslim organizations at the time, such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), responded to Islamophobia with national and local educational campaigns as a form of damage control (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2015). In San Francisco, members of GUPS were not immune to this racism; and like many other organizations, such as CAIR, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, and Palestine Legal, GUPS organized publicly to combat Islamophobia.

*Discursive Power of Orientalism:*

Islamophobia, traced back by scholars to 1492, plays a formative role in Orientalist knowledge, a body of assumptions that stratify the globe creating the categories of the East and the West and position them as dichotomous (Said 1978; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Porter Abu Deiab 2016). Describing Orientalism, Edward Said writes:

It is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about ‘we’ do and that ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do). Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is- and does not simply represent- a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world (Said 2003: 12).

Tropes of Arab and Muslim violence are part of the Orientalist framing which function, as Said notes, within a “nexus of knowledge and power... obliterating him [the Arab] as a human being” (Said 2003: 27). In turn, Orientalist dehumanizations justify the violence waged upon Arabs, Muslims, Palestinians, globally and domestically (Abu-Lughod 2013). The process of dehumanization was experienced on SFSU by members of GUPS when, for example, an SFSU President stigmatized GUPS members by accusing them mockingly as being potential bomb throwers (see Chapter 1).

*Critical Consciousness and Agency:*

Throughout this thesis, I regularly employ Islamophobic and Orientalist theories to contextualize and analyze SFSU administrative relationships with GUPS. Its members challenge repeated harassment through their campaign work on campus. Their work is a driving force in their cultivation of a critical consciousness among members and their solidarity allies. Critical consciousness, described by Paulo Freire (1972), is an understanding of the world through its active and conscious engagement with social and political power dynamics. It involves being attuned to the stratified and hierarchal power relationships present in the world, and, above all, involves taking action against these stratified and oppressive power structures that operate to silence or discipline others (Freire 1972). Freire argues that educational models and institutions reproduce colonial power dynamics of oppressor and the oppressed and operate to legitimize and reinforce these stratified power relationships (Freire 1972: 21). This is accomplished in part through an educational method that Freire dubs the *banking model* of education: a method that treats students as empty vessels whom teachers fill with sanitized knowledge (1972: 57). In contrast, popular dialogue and co-learning among students and teachers are pedagogical methods that Freire proposes can undo colonial knowledge and develop liberation knowledge and critical consciousness.

Historically and at present, GUPS engaged in co-learning liberation models that challenge hegemonic discourses. GUPS, and Palestinian advocates generally, undertake measures to contest elements of Palestinian oppression by striving to sway public opinion

in favor of justice for Palestine. They seek an end to U.S. financial and political support for what diasporic Palestinians recognize as Israeli colonization. As such, GUPS' praxis results in the cultivation of critical consciousness. It informs how GUPS strategizes and develops political and educational engagement with SFSU administrators, with fellow 3<sup>rd</sup> World students, sympathetic community members, and with other members of the campus community in the pursuit of liberation and justice for Palestine. This is praxis of what Dr. Abdulhadi refers to as the *Indivisibility of Justice* as the collective and internationalist response to "oppose hatred and racism against any people" (Abdulhadi 2014).

### **Chapters 1, 2 and 3:**

I break the bulk of my thesis into three chapters to narrate the oral histories of GUPS from the years 2000-2017. I do not present an exhaustive history of GUPS during that time. Rather, I describe specific and reoccurring events within the oral histories that reflect collective sentiments and hold reverberating ramifications on the lived experiences and legacies of GUPS members. My narrative focuses on the experiences of GUPS during the periods of 2002, 2005-2007, and 2013-2017.

The first chapter focusing on GUPS in 2002 introduces the maltreatment of GUPS by SFSU administrators. Through a chronological series of case examples, I track the university's responses to and targeting of GUPS' demonstrations on campus. Further, this

chapter describes the hostilities faced by Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims in 2002 heightened by anti-Arab and Islamophobic racism during the al-Aqsa Intifada and after the 9/11/2001 attacks in the United States. I describe the sentiments expressed on campus as GUPS members felt the reverberating effects of imperialism and violence in the Arab World at SFSU. I detail the sanctioning of GUPS by SFSU President Corrigan following a SF Hillel Israel rally on May 7, 2002 that brought negative international attention to the university and stigmatized GUPS. I conclude the chapter by showing how President Corrigan organized a task-force whose suggestions brought about several structural changes affecting activism and educational programming on campus.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the struggles faced in commissioning the Palestinian Cultural Mural on campus between 2005-2007. I detail GUPS' attempts to safeguard self-representation over the Palestinian mural from university administrators' censorship. In the process, GUPS members learned about power dynamics and struggles for Palestinian justice. The oral history of this period demonstrates the tacit ways in which political activism on campus contributes to the cultivation of critical consciousness among students who take their knowledge with them as they leave the institution.

Lastly, in the third chapter I explore the smear campaigns launched against Palestinian student activists and faculty from 2013-2017. The smear campaigns held serious consequences as they exacerbated the vulnerabilities of diasporic Palestinians at SFSU. Further, these campus campaigns have threatened academic freedom and free speech as they relate to Palestinian and anti-colonial movements. I detail the responses

taken by SFSU administrators and attacks against GUPS made by national Zionist organizations, and the effect both have had on threatening and harming Palestinian students. Lastly, I detail the proactive stance taken by GUPS members, Dr. Abdulhadi and their allies as they launch defensive campaigns to redefine the experiences of diasporic Palestinians on campus and demand an end to campus hostilities.

## **Chapter 1: The Spring of 2002-Stigmatization and Marginalization**

### **Introduction:**

In this chapter I explore a series of events that took place in the Spring of 2002 at San Francisco State University (SFSU) which typify the stigmatization and marginalization that Palestinians and the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) have endured over the years. I interviewed and had conversations with many past and present members of GUPS from 2000 through 2017. All noted that the Spring of 2002 was an important period in GUPS' history. In their accounts, my interlocutors traced later GUPS milestones on campus back to 2002 when the university placed sanctions on GUPS. The sanction of GUPS included a one year probationary period, loss of funding and website, a temporary ban on reserving Malcom X Plaza, a freeze on amplified sound permits, and requirement for administrative monitoring at all public GUPS events that still lasts today (San Francisco State University 2002.07.25; Lee, Personal Correspondence 2017). The sanctions that punished GUPS were followed by a string of university measures to tighten administrative control over campus activism in general and Palestinian advocacy in particular that has had lasting effects.

GUPS members past and present, developed a mistrust of the SFSU administration because of the marginalization it has faced. In interviews and conversations, GUPS members discussed a lack of support from the university and an antagonism by administrators towards GUPS. GUPS members noted that their student

organization has been disproportionately placed under scrutiny by SFSU whenever they hold an event or participate in collective student-body actions. In addition, GUPS members noted that university scrutiny is usually followed by amendments to university policies to prohibit precisely the kind of actions taken by GUPS members. As a result of this, GUPS members consider the university to be *reactionary* in the sense defined by the Oxford Dictionary, i.e., “opposing political or social progress or reform” (Oxford Dictionary 2017). Such a definition is fitting when examining how GUPS members define themselves and their politics.

Article 2 of the GUPS constitution (located in the GUPS office on campus) describes the organizational “Purpose,” as,

... to increase awareness of the Palestinian struggle for liberation along with other ethnic struggles. This occurs through such methods by holding teach-ins, panel discussions, civic involvement and protests. GUPS supports justice, equality and works towards ending the occupation of Palestinian land (Constitution of the General Union of Palestine Students San Francisco State University Chapter 2005).

It is in this spirit that GUPS members organize grassroots student efforts on campus. This chapter explores the linkages between international and national politics unfolding in 2002 and their effects on local Palestinian organizing at SFSU. It is an analysis of the consistent misunderstanding and targeting of Palestinian organizing on SFSU campus by university administrators. It also illuminates and typifies the experiences of Palestinian student activists living in the USA today. I begin here by focusing on the history of

GUPS in 2002, which includes “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) of the actions of GUPS and SFSU administrators.

I explore a series of demonstrations, trials and sanctions that unfolded in Spring of 2002 at SFSU. It was just a few months after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the US had begun its global and domestic “War on Terror”. The US had just invaded Afghanistan and Congress approved the USA PATRIOT Act. During the same period, the Palestinian Second Intifada was underway. The Second Intifada or “uprising,” more aptly termed the al-Aqsa Intifada (Abdulhadi 2011), began in September of 2000 and lasted until 2005. Built up frustration by Palestinians after years of colonial occupation and failed negotiations for an independent state manifested into mass resistance against Israel (Tartir 2017; Barsamian 2001: 37). During this period, too, San Francisco State University and the United States generally were rife with rampant anti-Arab, anti-Muslim racism and *Islamophobia*, a racialization and homogenization of Muslims and those thought to be Muslim perceived as an existential threat to the West (Rana 2007: 159). These forms of racism, while not new to GUPS organizers, are woven into their experiences and, in part, inform how they orient their understandings and engage in constant tacit negotiations of self and community to mediate the contempt directed toward them (Abdulhadi et al. 2011).

Since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September of 2000, GUPS organized many rallies on anti-militarism, liberation and sovereignty for Palestine

(*Golden Gate Xpress* 2000.10.05; 2000.11.02; 2000.11.16; 2000.11.30; and 2000.12.07). Paying close attention to the experiences of past SFSU GUPS members particularly in their maintenance of the goal of liberation for the Palestinian people, members of GUPS in 2002 protested the continued Israeli military attacks, and killing and subjugation of Palestinians. In addition, they protested the United States' continuous military and political support for Israel. Working to inform campus and public opinion on Palestine and Israel from a Palestinian social justice perspective, they organized demonstrations and rallies on Malcolm X Plaza, distributed flyers, sponsored and participated in Palestinian centered conferences. Informing the public on Palestine from a social justice perspective was and still is an important step in organizing a wide grassroots base to apply political pressure towards the goal of Palestinian liberation.

At the same time, SF Hillel and the Israel Coalition, SFSU student organizations organized pro-Israel demonstrations against GUPS rallies. SF Hillel is a local chapter of Hillel International, a Jewish and pro-Israel organization with hundreds of chapters globally and millions of dollars of funding from pro-Israel donors (Hillel 2017; Pink 2016; *The Times of Israel* 2016). Hillel International states its pro-Israel mission on its website: "We envision a world where every student is inspired to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning and *Israel* (my emphasis)" (Hillel 2017). The Israel Coalition is a SFSU student organization and subsidiary of SF Hillel, that currently goes by the name I-Team (I-Team San Francisco 2017; Student Organization Directory 2017).

Members of SF Hillel and the Israel Coalition distributed flyers, chanted, held signs and organized their own rallies and engaged in hegemonic discourses on Israeli dominance, and countered GUPS demonstrations (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2000.11.16; 2000.12.07). In response, GUPS refused to partake in dialogue sessions with members of pro-Israel organizations or those who were admittedly pro-Israel politically. Instead, they focused their energies and limited resources on reaching out to wider audiences to develop a social and political base at a grassroots level and to apply pressure on US political power to sway the government and civil society towards supporting Palestinian liberation and justice.

Present in the underlying power dynamics of these demonstrations was the challenge GUPS has had to contend with throughout its history. This included an overtly pro-Israel framework of media coverage of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the fact that US political power is heavily supportive of and invested in maintaining Israeli dominance, inflicting a high emotional toll on members of GUPS whose family members in Palestine continued to be under siege and heavy military occupation by Israel (Alshaibi 2006, O'Connor 2006, Stawicki 2003, *Golden Gate Xpress* 04.11.2002). The facts that Palestinians have no autonomous Palestinian state to rely on, no standing army, and no defense fortifications, contributes to a general sense of disempowerment that GUPS have to contend with. The September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks in the United States produced greater scrutiny of GUPS as an organization in which, once again, Arabs, Muslims and

Palestinians were vilified and, through guilt-by-association (Cole 2008), were made to answer for the actions they took no part in.

Following dramatic 9/11/2001 event, the US government with the support of Congress passed and legalized massive and long-lasting suspensions of civil liberties and heightened surveillance. As a result, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) undertook massive sweeps of *Masjids* (English: Mosques) and rounded up Muslims for interrogation and administrative detention (Bayoumi 2008: 6; Cainkar 2009). The ramifications of these assaults on civil liberties were most deeply felt by Arabs and Muslims. As noted by Professor of Constitutional Law David Cole and James Dempsey, Executive Director of University of California Berkeley School of Law's Center for Law and Technology, noted:

By reserving its harshest measures for immigrants, measures directed predominately at Arab and Muslim immigrants, [the United States] sacrificed commitments to equality by trading a minority group's liberty for the majority's purported security- a trade that has from all objective measures proven ineffective (Cole and Dempsey 2002: 197).

The authors go on to argue that the FBI has historically used the screen of counterterrorism to monitor political activity and affiliations- notably those who support a Palestinian State (Cole and Dempsey 20002). That Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians are prime targets of state surveillance is not a new phenomenon: this is well demonstrated by the case of the Los Angeles 8 (Shehadeh 2002; Barros-Friedman and Murphy 2010). Palestinians in the US have long been vilified and subjugated on two fronts, the War on

Terror (Cainkar 2009) and ongoing Israeli/US media depictions of unruly Palestinians heightened by the al-Aqsa Intifada.

### **Contending with Islamophobia on SFSU Campus**

While many students and faculty on campus urged student bodies and faculty to educate themselves on Islam and US foreign policy and not to engage in fear mongering or support U.S. intervention in the Arab and Muslim Worlds, some students on campus reacted to the events of 9/11/2001 with Islamophobic rhetoric and support for heightened militarization as noted by Charlie E-Qare a GUPS member in 2001 (Charlie El-Qare, personal correspondence 2017; *Golden Gate Xpress* 2001.09.02; and 2001.09.27).

Charlie El-Qare noted that on September 12, 2001 a large crowd of students convened on Malcolm X Plaza to discuss the event of the day before. He noted the crowd was filled with politically conscious students of color, who shared histories of oppression by the hands of US imperialism in their homelands. It was an incredible display of solidarity by students who view themselves as indigenous and internationalists (Charlie El-Qare, personal correspondence 2017). Despite this, he notes that two students in particular expressed their support for heightened US militarism. Their presence did not hamper the event; rather, it reminded Charlie El-Qare that SFSU campus was not an exception to the heightened fear-mongering against Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. (Charlie El-Qare, correspondence 2017).

A week after the September 2001 attacks, on the SFSU campus GUPS, the Muslim Student Association (MSA), and the Muslim Women Student Association (MWSA) held a joint rally on Malcolm X Plaza to combat anti-Arab, anti-Muslim and Islamophobic sentiments. The onstage banners read “Media: The Enemy of Peace,” and “Media: The Fuel of War” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2001.09.20a). Attracting about 200 people, GUPS leader Nahiel Nazzal was heckled and booed by members of the crowd with someone shouting “bullshit” during her statements to stop the vilification of Arabs and Muslims (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2001.09.20a). Palestinian, Arab and Muslim students were harassed and called names such as “hijacker” or “terrorist.” Members of GUPS, MSA, MWSA and other Arab, Muslim, and Sikh students had to make decisions about how to manage their visibility that could be construed as markers associated with Islamophobic stereotypes, and negotiate presentations of self (Goffman 1959). They were forced to determine whether to wear the hijab, the turban, the Palestinian keffiyeh/hatta, or shave off beards. Palestinian and Muslim students were stalked, tormented and sent death threats on campus (Loubna Qutami, personal correspondence, 2017).

For years after the 9/11/2001 attacks, GUPS members would return to their office on the second floor of the Cesar Chavez student union to find hate mail slipped under their door and death threats sent to their emails. Hate mail included pictures of the Twin Towers on fire and letters along the lines of, “We’re going to kill you. You deserve to

burn in Hell and take the prophet Mohammad and his four wives with you, he is a pedophile” (Qutami, personal correspondence 2017). Nonetheless, GUPS, as a leading and highly visible student organization on campus, continued its Palestinian advocacy work.

GUPS faced an uphill battle as the university was undergoing structural changes that surrounded the heightened surveillance of students and undermining of the privacy of student records resulting from the USA PATRIOT Act. SFSU and the entire California State University (CSU) system became a site for the War on Terror. State surveillance seeped into procedural policies of higher education throughout the nation as part of the sweeping regulations of the USA PATRIOT Act. Specifically, section 507 “Disclosure of Educational Records” amended the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) by adding a new subsection titled “Investigation and Prosecution of Terrorism.” This gave Federal officers legal access to educational records formerly protected by both the GEPA and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) privacy laws (Family Educational and Privacy Rights Act 2001; Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism 2001). In September of 2001, CSU Chancellor Charles B. Reed issued the following directive to all its 23 campuses that read:

The Federal Department of Education (DOE) advises that campuses may release student information to the INS and FBI.... If the INS/FBI inquiry seeks information useful to the protection of the country from terrorists, it

is reasonable for the campus to determine that release is covered by the emergency exemption (of FERPA) (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.03.14b).

It did not take long for the FBI to approach SFSU administrators, and 17 days after 9/11/2001 SFSU submitted its first student records to the FBI upon receipt of a federal subpoena (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.03.14b).

### **GUPS Rallies on Campus**

In March of 2002, the frequency and turn-out of GUPS sponsored demonstrations rose dramatically concomitant with the onset of Israeli large-scale invasions of Palestinian cities in the West Bank under *Operation Defensive Shield* during the al-Aqsa Intifada (Whitaker 2002). Many people came out to protest the wars in Palestine, Afghanistan and the military offensive building up to the Iraq invasion. Loubna Qutami, a GUPS member who joined in 2003 and whose sister Leila was a GUPS leader during the 2002 period, noted, “GUPS was one of the main pillars to the community at that time during the al-Aqsa intifada. It was where the community mobilized around in order to do actions” (Loubna Qutami, personal communication 2017). Loubna Qutami refers to the community and network of Bay Area Palestinian students, non-student Palestinian activists, and participants in Palestinian cultural and religious organizations. Loubna Qutami explained that, historically, elders within the Palestinian activist community in San Francisco mentored GUPS students. This mentorship allowed GUPS to tap into networks cultivated by the more seasoned Palestinian activists. The relationship among

GUPS and the Palestinian activist communities in the Bay Area – which drew from wider Palestinian, Arab, and cultural and religious organizations - proved fruitful as hundreds of non-SFSU pro-Palestinian protestors would later rally on campus in an incredible display of solidarity with Palestine.

GUPS' first demonstration against heightened Israeli aggression in the Spring 2002 occurred on March 12, 2002 when the SFSU student government invited GUPS to a cultural showcase as part of SF State's cultural awareness week. Organizing a political demonstration, as GUPS members danced the *Dabke*- a Palestinian folk dance- other members of GUPS, in reenactment of Israeli anti-demonstration policies, dressed up as Israeli Occupational Forces. GUPS members in costume then stormed the stage and pushed the Palestinian dancers to the ground (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.03.14a). SF Hillel members responded to this demonstration in the campus newspaper, the *Golden Gate Xpress*, wherein they employed orientalist tropes to discursively present Palestinians as violent. Shortly thereafter a debate between GUPS and SF Hillel members over media representation in the student newspaper began. A GUPS leader at the time, Leila Qutami, condemned the *Xpress* for its misrepresentations of GUPS as a militant organization. These included defamatory inaccuracies by accusing Palestinians of engaging in name calling, and presenting pro-Israeli students as pro-peace victims while ignoring the impact that Israeli aggression in Palestine had on members of GUPS and other Arab students (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.03.21).

The *Xpress* ran two pro-Israeli responses to Leila Qutami's statements. The first, titled "Suicide bombers fuel reprisal," expressed concern over Leila Qutami's omission of Palestinian suicide bombers in her statement, and insisted that Palestinian suffering is self-inflicted while considering Israeli state violence legitimate and Palestinian non-state violence illegitimate (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11a). This blame-the-victim framework (Said and Hitchens 1988) shifted attention and criticism away from Israeli aggression against Palestinians which was exacerbated by greatly disproportionate military power in favor of Israel (Kuttab 2013). The second response to Qutami, titled "Jewish students endure aggression," presented Jews and Israelis as civil, law abiding and peace loving, and presented Palestinians as antagonistic (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11b). This legacy of misrepresentation by the *Xpress* is a contributing factor to the stigmatization of GUPS and Palestinians on the SFSU campus. These frameworks continue to this day to the frustration of GUPS, and has precipitated a running boycott of the newspaper by GUPS members until the *Xpress* rectifies these issues (GUPS 2017).

In late March and early April 2002, events in Palestine again resonated at SFSU campus. At that time, the al-Aqsa Intifada intensified when Israel placed Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat under siege in Ramallah while simultaneously laying siege on the Jenin Refugee Camp. Palestinians called Israeli actions in Jenin a massacre (El Fassed 2002; and BBC News 2002) and college campuses nation-wide, including GUPS at SFSU, responded with Palestinian solidarity rallies. On April 9, 2002, nine hundred

protesters made up of students, local community members, and activists congregated on Malcolm X Plaza. During opening remarks GUPS member Leila Qutami said, “We’re here today to show solidarity, support for peace and an end to the occupation from Israel and bring freedom to Palestine” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11c). The rally was filled with Palestinian flags, individuals wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh/hatta, and many carrying pro-Palestine signs while chants filled the air.

April 9 is significant to Palestinians as it commemorates the Deir Yassin massacre on April 9, 1948, committed by Israeli Zionist paramilitary groups the Irgun and the Stern Gang (McGowan and Ellis 1998; Encyclopedia Britannica 2017). It marked the beginning of the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians and the depopulation of over 532 Palestinian villages during the Nakba. Nakba means *catastrophe* in Arabic. The term is used by Palestinians to refer to the war in 1948 that led to the creation of the State of Israel and the making of Palestinian refugees who remain unsettled today (Sa’di and Abu Lughod 2007; McGowan and Ellis 1998: 3-4). As the rally grew, the 900 protesters took to the streets and marched on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, on the eastern border of campus, and blocked, for some time, a major connection portal between Highway 280 and the Golden Gate Bridge. The sizable demonstration got the attention of SFSU students, and news coverage of the demonstration pushed the question of Palestine to a wider audience. The rally’s wide spread message in support of Palestine contributed to informing public opinion (San Francisco Gate 2002.04.10).

The rally and march lasted four hours during which time they marched 1.8 miles on the Avenue. Holocaust Remembrance Day also fell on April 9<sup>th</sup> that year. Some of the protesters on Malcolm X Plaza were seen wearing both the Star of David alongside “Free Palestine” armbands; some of the speakers on stage discussed both the tragedies of the Holocaust and the ongoing tragedies committed against the Palestinians. Despite bringing together and discussing the two injustices, the Holocaust and the Nakba, members of SF Hillel did not integrate in this rally and were unwilling to dialogue with GUPS when the conversation was on Palestinian terms. Instead, Jewish students from SF Hillel started passing out yellow Stars of David and fliers with statistics of the Holocaust as they stood on the outskirts of the rally (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11c).

GUPS, having officially planned for the April 9<sup>th</sup> march to be held on campus, was approached by university administrators the Friday before the scheduled demonstration. At first the university denied GUPS’ request for Malcolm X Plaza since they noted it was booked for a food fair. After appeal, the university granted GUPS the Malcolm X Plaza but only after offering the space to SF Hillel as well (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11c). The university intervention as mediator between SF Hillel and GUPS over Malcolm X Plaza is very problematic. The fact that the university attempted to counter Palestinian narratives with a pro-Israeli one is not something new to Palestinian organizing. The notion that balanced accounts of Palestine must show “both sides” erases the power dynamics between the persecuted and the persecutor. Just as the

university should not invite the police to speak at a Black Lives Matter Rally or members of the Minuteman Project to speak at an amnesty/sanctuary rally for immigrants and those undocumented, it follows that Palestinian political expressions should be allowed to remain free from forced and disempowering dialogue with pro-Israeli advocates. Further, the university continued to stifle Palestinian organizing on campus.

In an *Xpress* interview on the April 9<sup>th</sup> rally, Leila Qutami is quoted as saying, “Basically [the Office of Student Leadership Planning and Development] said that if we march on campus our organization (GUPS) will be sanctioned. They are blocking our fundamental First Amendment rights, so the community stepped in and organized the March” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11c). By *community*, Qutami referred to local off-campus Palestinians and Palestine-inclusive activists, individuals who do not fall under the jurisdiction of the SFSU administration and cannot be punished with academic probation, suspension or expulsion. Qutami’s statements on the infringement of First Amendment Rights is a demonstration of GUPS’ marginalization by the university as GUPS members are threatened with punishment when they organize civic rallies, demonstrations and protests on campus- actions that are protected as civil liberties.

Taking place concurrently across the bay, Students for Justice in Palestine at UC Berkeley were conducting a sit-in at Wheeler Hall following a protest on campus that brought over 1000 individuals. GUPS coordinated rides to Berkeley in support of the demonstration taking place. Organizing the sit-in was UC Berkeley undergraduate

student Noura Erakat, who is today a legal and activist scholar. Noura Erakat demanded from the university a “full divestment of Israeli financial support by UC Berkeley and the UC system and a statement of solidarity between Berkeley and our sister university, Bethlehem University, in the besieged Palestinian city” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11d). The sit-in ended by force when the University of California Police Department (UCPD) raided the hall and arrested 79 students and activists forming the sit-in. University suppression of student demonstrations, was rationalized by the UCPD Lieutenant John West asserting that class disruptions warranted university sanctions and arrests (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.04.11d).

At SFSU similar policies exist and are codified in the university’s *Time, Place and Manner* (TPM) regulations, managed by the office of the Dean of Students. The use of TPM regulations to suppress popular dialogue, such as those taking place during Palestinian advocacy demonstrations that challenge hegemonic discourses on Israeli dominance, is tantamount to *anti-dialogue* that works to maintain the dissemination of knowledge that divides oppressed people and legitimizes continued oppression (Freire 1972: 155).

Instead of fostering co-learning spaces and the cultivation of critical consciousness, the university has set in place a series of policies to stifle such exercises and has deployed police forces to do so. Economically, it can be argued that SFSU is heavily invested to protect a flow of classroom exercises that includes administrative

jobs, funded grants, private donations, and fiscal management practices that rely on the uninterrupted flow of complacent, tuition-paying students (Giroux 2014). Attempts (both economic and ideological) to disrupt the “normal” flow of business are targeted and suppressed by SFSU, which includes Palestinian advocacy work as it challenges political US hegemonic discourses and institutions (state and non-state) that support the conventional role of public higher education. The following section is an analysis of SFSU’s response to the May 7, 2002 SF Hillel pro-Israel rally as a case study of the university’s maltreatment of GUPS.

### **GUPS at SFSU Under Fire**

The week of May 7, 2002 began with a Muslim Student Association (MSA) and Muslim Women Student Association (MWSA) sponsored rally titled, “Zionism in Palestine and Around the World” on Malcolm X Plaza May 6, 2002 (San Francisco State University 2002). Headlining the event was Dr. Hatem Bazian, a former GUPS president and SFSU student body president and, at the time, the director of the Al Qualm Institute of Islamic Sciences, an organization devoted to building relations among Muslim scholars and Muslim communities (Al Qualm Institute of Islamic Sciences 1996). Two hundred students gathered around the stage as Dr. Bazian discussed US imperialism, Zionism, and the ongoing intifada in Palestine. Explaining the false conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, Dr. Bazian is quoted as saying:

To expose Zionism, it does not mean that we are being anti-Semitic. Zionism is a movement to provide a state for the Jews by secular Jews. It is the national liberation of the Jewish people from oppression in European countries and it is based on the displacement of the people who were already there. If I say Israel committed war crimes in Jenin, I am told that it is an anti-Semitic statement. What is anti-Semitic about that statement? .... There is massive propaganda here in the U.S. Why is it that the rest of the world is appalled at what is going on in Palestine? We have the opportunity to change that, to put pressure on our leaders (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.09a).

Dr. Bazian's speech bears directly on the experiences of Palestinian activists and the stigmatization they face. The blanket label of anti-Semitism applied to Palestinian activists by pro-Israel groups is an attempt to discredit criticism of Israel. Charges of anti-Semitism shift scrutiny away from Israel and direct them towards Palestinian advocates and organizations, blaming the victim (Said and Hitchen 1988). Moreover, many Palestinians fear that surveillance and monitoring of their activism on campus may be shared with Israeli officials.

Members of GUPS fear that Israeli border security will deny them entry into Palestine because of their activism, since, as Sherwood (2012) has shown, Israel has a history of applying such tactics. Fear that student activism against Israeli occupation and aggression in Palestine can be disclosed and shared with the Israeli government leading to denial of basic civil rights such as the right to return to Palestine to visit relatives is a real fear and concern among SFSU GUPS members. Given that the only entry into Palestine is through Israeli border control that has a practice of denying entry of Palestinians to Palestine, SFSU GUPS are concerned that their activism might lead not

only to denial of returning to Palestine but denial that extends to family members. For Palestinian students, the expression of First Amendment rights in the United States may mean the inability to return to their homes, prolonged or permanent separation from family members and friends in Palestine.

Attempting to discredit calls for justice in Palestine, on May 6th pro-Israel students distributed fliers labeling Dr. Bazian a “Jew Hater” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.09a). Years later, GUPS members continue to face this form of harassment and intimidation on campus; the libelous strategy was replicated in the 2013-2017 smear campaigns against GUPS, the AMED studies program, and Dr. Abdulhadi. In Chapter 3, I describe these events in detail.

The invitation by MSA and MWSA to Dr. Bazian was in part intended to vindicate the groups from accusations of anti-Semitism leveled against them by SFSU President Corrigan. As I noted above, the April 9<sup>th</sup> demonstrations took place amid the bloodiest part of the al-Aqsa Intifada, during the Israeli invasions of Palestinian towns, and the massacre at the Palestinian refugee camp of Jenin. Everyone concerned with justice for Palestine was filled with a slew of emotions that pushed them to act. During the April 9<sup>th</sup> demonstration, GUPS members carried around signs reflecting their anger at Israeli violence. Non-student activists from the SF Bay Area who participated in the demonstration carried signs that were neither made by GUPS members nor made in consultation with them but were widely distributed by non-GUPS members. These signs

included cardboard Israeli flags with a swastika in place of the Star of David, referring to the similarities of collective punishment, mass incarceration and ethnic cleansing taking place during the Holocaust under the Nazi regime, and those orchestrated by Israel's suppression of Palestinians (Pappé 2006). In addition, some members of the MSA and MWSA distributed fliers made by a non-SFSU student that depicted a dead baby and the words "Slaughtered According to Jewish Rites Under American License." This is an example of anti-Semitic "Blood Libel" in which Jews were accused of ritually murdering Christian children for use of their blood (Goldish 2008). Apologizing for their actions, MSA and MWSA members were previously unaware of the history of Blood Libel. It was neither the knowledge or intent of MSA and MWSA members to be anti-Semitic. To them, the fliers referred to Israeli violence orchestrated by a "Jewish State" that has usurped Judaism and Jewish symbols into its nationalism and its colonial nation state building project of Zionism (Butler 2013; Said 1979; Abdulhadi et al. 2011) leading to confusion and conflation of religion and nationalism. While I do not agree with the tactics and the symbolisms utilized in the altered flag and fliers, they do reflect criticism directed at Israeli Zionism.

On the events, MSA president, Firas Shehaden, is quoted as saying:

The flyer came at the last minute before we had an event. We posted a few of the flyers before we realized what it said and once we noticed it, we blacked out the words 'Jewish rites' on the remaining flyers. We made a mistake and we admit it. After the incident, we wrote an apology letter to Corrigan clarifying our stance. We stand together with the Jewish people

but we refuse to work with Hillel or any other Zionist organization  
(*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.09a).

It is because of such lack of awareness that the university should support and teach in its curriculum the history of oppression of marginalized communities. President Corrigan responded by writing letters to MSA and MWSA expressing his “disappointment and dismay” to the fliers (Corrigan 2002.04.12). President Corrigan sent their members to meet with Kenneth Monteiro, then the Dean of Human Relations, and sent in a 300-word Letter to the Editor of the student newspaper the *Golden Gate Xpress*, which he writes:

The flyer contains a particularly repellent example of anti-Semitism. ... This is no political statement. It is hate speech in words and image. In particular, the phrase ‘Jewish rites’ echoes a type of ugly myth that has been used through the centuries specifically to generate hatred. ... The flyer was more than an offense to the Jewish community, it was an offense to the entire university community and to all that we stand for- most especially our ability to see the humanity in those with whom we disagree. With communications such as this flyer, your group defiles itself, dampens its voice, and distracts attention from the very cause you want to espouse (Corrigan 2002.04.12).

Despite the appeal and apology made by the MSA president, Corrigan’s statements condemned Palestinian advocates on campus. The last sentence of the president’s public statement was viewed by members of MSA as patronizing as he critiques the effectiveness and messaging of their actions, in effect judging and condemning the group. Further, the presidential statement, and the clout that comes with it, sends a message confirming Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinian advocates as anti-Semites. Later, on April 30, 2002 President Corrigan responded back to MSA president

Shehaden thanking the MSA for its apology regarding the flier. President Corrigan later placed the letter in a news brief on the university website. He did not send in the letter to the student newspaper, it was not widely publicized, and it was a forgettable gesture posturing himself as being gratuitous. In any case, the damage had already been done.

The next day, Tuesday May 7, 2002, members of SF Hillel and the Israel Coalition held a pro-Israel rally titled “We Stand with Israel: Now and Forever” on Malcolm X Plaza (San Francisco State University 2002). SF Hillel and the Israel Coalition scheduled the event just as the two-month period of Israeli invasions of Palestinian cities under *Operation Defensive Shield* came to end, invasions that constituted the bloodiest assault against Palestinians during the al-Aqsa Intifada. During the Israeli invasion, Israel killed 497 Palestinians, detained around 7,000, and wounded 1,447 Palestinians (United Nations 2002). SF Hillel and the Israel Coalition’s call for indefinite support of Israel through “Stand With Israel: Now and Forever,” called for the permanency of Israeli Zionist colonization of Palestine. This was especially troubling to those concerned with justice for Palestine on campus. SF Hillel’s declaration was made as Palestinians were mounting massive and collective resistance to Israeli occupation and colonization in the push for Palestinian liberation.

In effect, those who organized and participated in the Israeli advocacy demonstrations during the al-Aqsa Intifada chose to defend Israeli military suppression of Palestinian liberation. GUPS members and Palestinian advocates conducted a protest of

the event and its message. SFSU administrators insisted that university police attend the rally. The police set up metal railings to separate the rally participants from the protesters. According to a long-time member of the Cesar Chavez Student Center, the act of placing metal barricades at demonstrations was a common university practice at the time (Horace, personal correspondence 2016). At the sight of this, GUPS member Ehab Shqair expressed his frustrations with the university that consistently marginalized Palestinians, he is reported as saying:

The Jewish rally was over protected. They [SF Hillel] run to the administration and to gain support they cry anti-Semitism when we use the word Zionist, and they [the administration] take care of them like a baby. Nobody listens when we get called terrorists and get treated like terrorists (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.09b).

Shqair's statement typifies the marginalization of GUPS and Palestinian students on campus. The university consistently engages in double-standards, disenfranchising Palestinians, when it comes to disagreements between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli students. It is in this context that Charlie El-Qare, a GUP member at the time, noted that the university prejudicially considered Palestinians a threat on campus; that police presence and metal barricades were understood by GUPS as surveillance and policing of Palestinians, and not as means to protect students' free speech and right to assemble on campus (Charlie El-Qare, personal correspondence 2017).

GUPS members prepared and strategized for the protest. Charlie El-Qare noted that GUPS members created a list of chants they wanted to use and made posters in

advance; Charlie El-Qare even dressed up as Ariel Sharon for a demonstration in which he would receive an oversized bank check in critique of US military funding of Israel (Charlie El-Qare, 2017). Dozens of non-students participated in the rally as members of the administration and campus faculty looked onto the event. GUPS and Palestinian advocates chanted “Zionists off our campus now,” “Free Palestine,” and “Hey hey, ho ho, the occupation’s got to go”, as they stuck to their list of chants they had created. Antagonizing and harassing Palestinian advocates SF Hillel and pro-Israel demonstrators shouted Islamophobic, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim insults at GUPS. Members of SF Hillel accosted GUPS with chants including, “Racist terrorists have got to go.”

Cutting through the noise, one Palestinian protester leaned over the metal barricade and shouted, “Are you going to shoot me with a tank?” directed at an Israeli flag bearer. The statement referred to the Israeli practices of deploying tanks, helicopters, and soldiers to dismantle Palestinian rallies where Israeli soldiers shoot and arrest protesters (*The New York Times* 2004). The individual holding the Israeli flag shouted back at the Palestinian, “Go find a cave,” a slur presenting Arabs as uncivilized and barbaric. Later an older pro-Israeli SFSU student walked up to GUPS members and in racist statements told them to, “Go fuck a camel,” called Palestinian students *Sharmuta* which captures derogatory sexist terms such as *bitch*, *hooker* and *prostitute* in Arabic, and then started dangling her arms like a chimpanzee denoting white-supremacist ideologies of people of color as ‘less’ evolved than white people (*Golden Gate Xpress*

2002.05.09b; The Jewish News of Northern California 2002.06.28). Pro-Israel demonstrators shouted the words “terrorists” and “sand n\*\*gers” at GUPS and Palestinian advocates on the Malcom X Plaza as the police, university administrators and staff, and other students looked on and did nothing to intervene while Palestinians were harassed publicly. University administrators did not come to the aid of students and neither did the SFSU police whom GUPS do not trust and whose presence had in the past escalated already tense situations.

Charlie El-Qare noted that GUPS members, having strategized prior to the demonstration, stuck to the plan and the script they had organized. GUPS had on multiple occasions affirmed its solidarity with Jews in the struggle towards justice in Palestine and globally. So, it came as a shock when they found out that SF Hillel alleged that GUPS members shouted derogatory chants directed at Jews, as it was not true according to Charlie El-Qare (personal correspondence 2017). Professor of Jewish Studies Laurie Zoloth accused GUPS of shouting, “Go back to Russia,” referring to the colonial-settler history of Israel fueled by European Jews; GUPS denied the allegations. Further, SF Hillel members claimed that one GUPS member said something to the effect of, “Hitler didn’t do a good enough job, he should [have] exterminated you all when he had the chance.” This, directed at a Jewish student, is clearly an anti-Semitic statement referring to the Holocaust; however, GUPS members at the protest disavowed this accusation and

that as far as they knew none of their members engaged in making anti-Semitic statements (Charlie El-Qare, personal correspondence 2017).

By Charlie El-Qare's evaluation, it was the pro-Israel advocates who were harassing GUPS, not the other way around (Charlie El-Qare, personal correspondence 2017). Further, the San Francisco District Attorney's office, which investigated the claims, expressed doubt concerning the validity of the allegation, "the circumstances under which the student was identified as a suspect were irregular. She was not identified at the time of the May 7<sup>th</sup> incident, but rather two weeks later. Some witnesses could not identify her conclusively" (The San Francisco District Attorney's office 2002.07.16). The allegations of anti-Semitism overshadowed all other statements made on the plaza that day in the media portrayal of the event. The media sidelined the fact that GUPS chants were directed at the Israeli state and Zionism, and that Palestinian students were accosted with chants of terrorism, bestiality, incivility and dehumanization by SF Hillel members.

As the pro-Israel crowd began to disperse, members of SF Hillel started taking down the Israeli flags that hung across the plaza. The police removed the metal barricades and then formed a human wall to separate Palestinian and pro-Israel demonstrators. As one last Israeli flag hung on the plaza by the entrance to the Cesar Chavez Student Center, Palestinian advocates shouted "Take it down! Take the flag down!" Charlie El-Qare noted that SFSU administrators had not allowed GUPS members

to place the Palestinian flag on the walls of Malcolm X Plaza as administrators said it would be in violation of university policy. Naturally, they were upset at the hypocrisy and double-standards of the university that allowed SF Hillel and the Israel Coalition to display the Israeli flags. As one Palestinian advocate grabbed an Israeli flag off the wall, he was pulled back by the police and by GUPS member Ehab Shqair. The student who pulled the flag then stomped on it.

Two weeks later the university suspended the student who pulled the flag alleging it was a hate crime (San Francisco State University 05.22.2002). A week after that, on May 28, 2002, the university police submitted a request to the San Francisco District Attorney's office to file formal complaints and criminal charges on the student who pulled the flag, alleging that it was a hate crime and vandalism. The DA's office did not file charges- it found "no evidence that specific laws were broken" (The San Francisco District Attorney's office 2002.07.16). According to a university press release SFSU sent the DA's office three requests in total to file formal complaints against two Palestinian and one pro-Israel students (San Francisco State University 05.22.2002). University police delivered its detailed investigation and complaints against the two Palestinian students on May 28, but the university police did not file its third request against a pro-Israel student until several days later. The DA's report suggests that this last complaint was the weakest compiled of all three cases (The San Francisco District Attorney's office 2002.07.16). The DA did not bring charges against any of the students on the grounds

that, “offensive speech [is] not deemed [a] hate crime” (The San Francisco District Attorney’s office 2002.07.16). President Corrigan’s actions not only persecuted the Palestinian who were victims of harassment, he also sought means to persecute them to the fullest extent of the law.

During the May 7<sup>th</sup> protest, the demonstration ended when the remaining pro-Israel demonstrators were escorted off the plaza by university police. Interestingly, oral histories of the event differ underscoring how collective memory is formed (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007). All the oral histories I compiled of this rally mention the Israeli flag being torn down as an important catalyst sparking an escalation of GUPS actions. This indicates that the flag pulling was a significant event.

Reports regarding the flag pulling differed in four ways. First, in some of the oral histories, interviewees told me that a march across 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue took place following the removal of the flag. In fact, the march took place a month prior. Second, all the interviewees told me that the May 7<sup>th</sup> pro-Israel rally coincided with celebrations of Israeli declaration of statehood in 1948. Even the *Golden Gate Xpress* made that claim in its coverage, but this is inaccurate. Dennis Dubinsky, a member of SF Hillel and The Israel Coalition who organized the May 7<sup>th</sup> rally, clarified that the rally was intended as an Israel solidarity rally and not corresponding to an Israeli national holiday (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.16b). Third, SF Hillel director Seth Brysk told Bill O’Reilly of Fox News in an interview after the demonstration that Palestinian supporters trapped SF Hillel

members for over an hour on the plaza (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.16c). The university report contradicts his claim. SFSU's summary of the demonstration reports that: "No effort was made to stop the Hillel students from exiting the Plaza" (San Francisco State University 2002). And finally, some of the interviewees said that a fight broke out among Palestinian and SF Hillel Jewish students on the plaza, yet there was no mention of physical altercations in the news coverage or archive. In fact, the DA's investigation, President Corrigan himself and the SFSU investigation all noted that no physical violence took place (The San Francisco District Attorney's office 2002.07.16; Corrigan 2002.05.13; San Francisco State University 2002.05.16a).

The oral histories illuminated a pattern of conflating distinct events together, as well as the inclusion of events and descriptions that did not take place but were so often re-told that they were taken as truth. Such instances highlight the importance of conducting an oral history project on the General Union of Palestine Students, to preserve Palestinian oral histories and their struggles for justice (Mapping Arab Diasporas 2017), and provide an account of heated events that often portrayed the SFSU GUPS in a negative light without accurately representing their actions and the reasons behind them. For an analysis on memory formation, specifically collective memory formation from the perspective of Palestinians, I looked to the work of Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and The Claims of Memory*. These authors argue that the process of memory and the continued transmission of memory are not temporally bound to the

past but continues to influence and mold both individual and collective identifications in the present. Collective memories have produced a “canonization” of recollections adjusted to one another and to societal and political pressures (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007: 7). Further, the ability to make public Palestinian collective memory remains suppressed by the alternative narratives of European Jews (2007: 12). Sa’di and Abu-Lughod argue that memory is a process in which personal experiences mix with other stories, rumors and politics (2007: 22-23). It came as no surprise that the oral histories surrounding the May 7<sup>th</sup> rally reflect the dynamic process of memory as the resulting sanctions and formation of a campus Task-Force brought many changes to the university which affected Arab, Muslim and Palestinian communities on campus.

Reacting to the demonstration, SFSU sanctioned GUPS as an organization based on false allegations and pressure from Israeli advocacy organizations. Following the demonstration, Jewish Studies professor Laurie Zoloth distributed an open letter titled “Where is the outrage? Pogrom at SFSU,” in which she wrote: “I am saddened to see SFSU return to its notoriety as a place that teaches anti-Semitism, hatred for America, and hatred, above all else for the Jewish State of Israel, a state that I cherish” (Zoloth 2002). Dr. Zoloth’s open letter was publicly and widely circulated and sparked a media frenzy. The *S.F. Examiner* (2002) ran an article with the heading “Jihad on Campus?”; the *Vallejo Times Herald* (2002) ran “Hate University”; *FrontPage Magazine* (2002) ran “Anti-Semitic Pogrom at San Francisco State”; and *Jerusalem Post* (2002) ran “Anti-

Semitic riot at San Francisco State University” (San Francisco State University, 2002.08.1). Dr. Zoloth’s presentation of the event reached national news, and Bill O’Reilly invited SF Hillel member Seth Brysk and Leila Qutami from GUPS for an interview on his show. Accepting the invitation, Leila Qutami defended GUPS, denied the false allegations, and told her version of events (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.05.16c).

Her appeal was ignored by SFSU and the media, as coverage of the rally was sensationalized by the media as a display of violent anti-Semitism, so much so that even individuals present at the rally started questioning their own accounts of what took place (Dean Monteiro, personal correspondence 2017.04.17). The SF District Attorney’s office reported that over 1000 e-mails were sent to President Corrigan complaining that the “university had failed to protect Jewish students and that no legal action was taken against students who violated [US] law” (The San Francisco District Attorney’s office 2002.07.16). The mainstream news coverage of the rally ignored or glossed down the racist harassment and name calling directed at Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims. In doing so, their experiences and narratives were neglected, depreciated, and largely suppressed. Once again GUPS was vilified and its members stigmatized as anti-Semites and terrorists, this time to an international audience.

A week after the rally, President Corrigan sent out a message to campus titled “Join me in speaking out for this University’s true values.” He wrote about “the lack of

civility and decency on the part of a very few demonstrators,” with specific reference to Palestinians (Corrigan 2002.05.13). President Corrigan wrote:

A small but terribly destructive number of pro-Palestinian demonstrators, many of whom were not SFSU students, abandoned themselves to intimidating behavior and statements too hate-filled to repeat. This group became so threatening in gesture and hostile in language that we interposed a police line between the groups and eventually escorted the Hillel students, and the faculty with them, from the Plaza. No one was physically assaulted, but that encounter puts at risk all that we value and present as a university community (Corrigan 2002.05.13).

Once again in a campus wide statement President Corrigan labeled Palestinians as violent. Corrigan’s menacing representation of Palestinians is inconsistent with and ultimately discredited by San Francisco State University’s official summary of the rally issued three days later. In part, the report reads:

Some of the pro-Palestinian supporters were shouting for the Jewish students to take down the Israeli flag and signs. Some members of the pro-Palestine group tried to defuse the situation and asked their group to move away from the conflict, but they were not successful. As the confrontation continued, the SFSU Public Safety officers and the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) interposed a police line between the groups and on request, eventually escorted the Hillel students out of the Plaza. No effort was made to stop the Hillel students from exiting the Plaza. No one was physically harmed and no arrests were made (San Francisco State University 2002.05.16).

Corrigan’s public statement on the May 7<sup>th</sup> rally defamed GUPS, Palestinians, and Palestinian advocates. His statement reads as Orientalist tropes of the savage Arab brute as he depicted the actions of Palestinians as hate-filled, threatening and hostile. Corrigan then imposed sanctions on GUPS. The sanctions included a one year freeze on student

government funding of GUPS, a temporary ban on amplified sound permits for Malcom X Plaza, and the requirement for administrative presence at all GUPS events. President Corrigan did not sanction SF Hillel for harassing Palestinians. Rather, he gave, “A letter of warning to Hillel for inability to control its participants in one area of the rally” (San Francisco State University 2002.07.25). Corrigan’s view of Palestinians as violent prone was made evident when in September of 2002 he responded to a request to remove the sanctions against GUPS with “why, so you guys [GUPS] can start throwing bombs in January” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.10.17). The university lawyer confirmed that Corrigan uttered those words, but that they were taken out of context (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.10.17). In what context might such a question be appropriate? Once again statements by President Corrigan stigmatized GUPS as a violent organization. It need hardly be added that President Corrigan did not lift the sanctions on GUPS after that meeting; rather, he left GUPS further marginalized.

In an act of collective punishment, President Corrigan placed a temporary ban on the formation of new clubs on campus and banned the use of amplified sound for all organizations on campus until late September of 2002 after student organizations completed a sensitivity training retreat on “campus civility”. These restrictions upset students across campus that were punished for something they took no part in. Members of GUPS and other student activists viewed the regulations as infringements on their civil liberties and assaults on free speech on campus. In addition, President Corrigan formed

“The President’s Task Force on Inter-group Relations” comprised of 42 members from SFSU faculty, staff and students, along with civic and religious leaders within Palestinian and Jewish affiliated organizations. The group was tasked to provide policy recommendations to “improve relations within the Jewish and Palestinian communities” (San Francisco State University 2002.08.09).

Four months later, the task-force argued for wide ranging recommendations touching on many aspects of university policies, curricula and employment. To raise awareness and knowledge of Arab, Palestinian, Muslim and Jewish experiences, the task-force made recommendations to increase scholarship about their communities on campus. In fact, serious consideration to grow scholarship on Islam and Muslims on campus was already in the works as early as Fall of 2001 after the 9/11/2001 attacks (San Francisco State 2002.12.16; *Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.08.29). The university discussed faculty hires within the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences and the College of Humanities which it implemented. But it was the Task-Force recommendation to house Arab and Muslim scholarship within the College of Ethnic Studies that set the stage for the 2007 development of the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) studies program by Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi who was scouted by the Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies, Kenneth Monteiro, in 2006 to design the program and then hired in 2007 to direct it.

The task-force also recommended several policy changes concerning “the conduct of rallies and the expression of free speech” on campus (San Francisco State University 2002.08.09). Students’ views of these recommendations varied. They welcomed some of the changes and rejected others as overly restrictive. These proposals included the placement of counter demonstrations onto the lawn area, the insistence that only event hosts may use amplified sound, and the application of Student Center Policies on all flyers across public campus spaces. The recommendations to move counter-protest spaces to the lawn area and the ban on amplified sound by counter-protesters was particularly disconcerting to students. They considered the restrictions an assault on free speech since the restrictions were seen as weakening protesters efficacy (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.09.12). Students responded with demonstrations and rallies directed at the university calling for an end to its hostilities towards GUPS and student activism.

### **Free Speech: GUPS and others**

President Corrigan lifted the ban on sound amplification on Malcolm X Plaza on September 17, 2002, yet the other sanctions imposed on GUPS remained in place. A week later, GUPS with other student organizations MSA, MWSA, Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavors (PACE), *La Raza*, and speakers from United Farm Workers and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) held a demonstration on Malcolm X Plaza to promote free speech. They called the rally “Free Palestine” and discussed the intersections of developments in Palestine, assaults on free speech for Palestinians, labor

union strikes, their condemnation of U.S. plans for invading Iraq, and assaults on campus activism (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.10.03). Leticia Arellano from the International Socialist Organization is quoted as saying, “I’m here to support GUPS because an injury to one is an injury to all. We need to band together against the administrations attempts to crush political activity” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.10.03). GUPS member Nabeel Silmi noted “This rally is about free speech, not just Israel and Palestine. But you can’t talk about the conflict without free speech” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.10.03). Paul Harris, a professor at the New College of San Francisco, speaking at the rally said, “You are not children, and the administration should not treat you like children. They [SFSU administration] have no right to infringe on your First Amendment Rights” (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2002.10.03). The university sent police officers to monitor the GUPS rally presumably to implement the sanctions on GUPS. This surveillance included sending university staff, administrators, and police to monitor all public GUPS and SF Hillel events on campus. Over the years, the university stopped sending designees to monitor SF Hillel events, yet the university continues to send designees to all public GUPS events today (Lee, personal correspondence 2017).

Continued panoptic<sup>1</sup> university surveillance over GUPS was seen by GUPS as an intimidation tactic. The knowledge of constant scrutiny by the university was (and remains) unsettling to the GUPS members as it sends the message that the university

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<sup>1</sup> I use *Panoptic* as coined by Jeremy Bentham (1843) and invoked by Michel Foucault (1975) to describe the effect surveillance and monitoring has on modifying behavior as a form of disciplinary power.

mistrusts the student organization and considers it a danger. GUPS members view administrative presence at their events as a tactic to compile evidence on its members. That such evidence will enable the university to make a case to prosecute them through student conduct hearings. At times, GUPS members remained defiant and continued with their rallies and speeches unfazed by university surveillance and the potential for punitive measures. On other occasions, GUPS members were forced to change plans to comply with university regulations, including regulations that are overly restrictive.

In the course of my work, I found two analytical frameworks that help in theorizing GUPS's relationship with the university's surveillance strategies, the first, being Foucault's argument on the relationship between power, surveillance and behavior. Foucault theorizes that surveillance stemming from disciplinary power, such as exercised by the university, produces a feeling of domination over the affected individual with the effect of modifying their behavior (Foucault 1977). Second, is Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony consisting of a "war of maneuver" and "war of position", in which he uses these military metaphors to analyze direct and in-direct confrontation with political power that has sufficient strength to exterminate foes (Gramsci 1992). GUPS members, critically aware of how power operates, maneuver strategically to continue supporting their ultimate goal of justice for Palestine. In this sense, GUPS members oscillate between directly challenging U.S. hegemonic political actions and discourses that operate

to disenfranchise both Palestinian calls for justice and university activism, and retreating to preserve the survival of the organization.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I described the stigmatization and marginalization of GUPS by SFSU administrators in 2002, a time of increased anti-Arab, anti-Muslim racism during the ongoing al-Aqsa Intifada in Palestine as well as a time closely following the 9/11/2001 attacks. Reverberations from wars, invasions, and anti-colonial movements that took place in the Arab world and central Asia made their way to SFSU and were especially felt by GUPS. I explored GUPS' response to these events as well as its proactive and continued struggles towards justice for Palestine, Arabs and Muslims. Moreover, I try to transmit that actions that were misconstrued as anti-Semitic or violent on the part of members of GUPS were actually more expressive of the felt needs to respond to what was considered momentous events – rather than trivial or inconsequential occurrences – that needed to be openly confronted.

## **Chapter 2: 2005-2007 - The Palestine Cultural Mural**

In this chapter I explore the events surrounding the establishment of the Palestinian Cultural Mural in 2007 at SFSU. The celebration and affirmation of Palestinian heritage through this mural persisted despite SFSU's censorship of Palestinian resistance politics and iconography in the initial stage of the process.

The Cesar Chavez Student Center at SFSU houses a number of murals inspired by social justice movements; in 2007 the Palestine Cultural Mural joined four others on the exterior wall of its building: (1) the Malcolm X Mural (1994 and 1996) celebrating the civil rights and black power movements, (2) the Cesar Chavez Mural (1995) celebrating the farm labor-rights movement, (3) the Filipino Community Mural (2003) depicting the Filipino struggle for national independence in the Philippines and justice in the US, and (4) the Asian and Pacific Islander Mural (2004) celebrating the people who have fought for justice and the rights of their communities locally and internationally.

The mural tradition is well practiced in San Francisco Bay Area. Over 600 murals exist across the city of San Francisco with the largest collection being in the Mission District, a historically Latino and indigenous neighborhood that has been heavily gentrified (Oweis 2009b; *The New York Times* 2015.05.22). At the time of the inauguration of the Palestinian Cultural Mural, San Francisco featured only two murals centered on Arab or Palestinian experiences (Oweis 2009b), both of which featured the work of Dr. Susan Greene, a co-artist on the Palestinian Culture Mural at SFSU. One of

the Arab centered murals in San Francisco, the “Our Roots are Still Alive,” mural painted in 1991, has since been boarded up after someone using a sledgehammer smashed the face of a Palestinian woman it depicted; the building owner decided it was too dangerous to keep the mural up (Oweis 2009b; Susan Greene, personal correspondence 2016). The Palestinian Cultural Mural became the third Palestinian mural in San Francisco and the first Palestinian mural on any public institution (Oweis 2009b).

The approval process of the mural took nearly three years as President Corrigan and other SFSU administrators sought to block its realization by censoring icons representing Palestinian refugees and their call for return, and at one point refusing the idea of the mural completely. Despite the university challenges, GUPS successfully inaugurated the Palestinian Cultural Mural on November 2, 2007. It thus acknowledged the dedication of GUPS members and brothers Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, Jacqueline (Jackie) Husary, Loubna Qutami, Sharef an-Najjar, Palestinian activist and incoming SFSU faculty member Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, the artists Faye Oweis and Susan Greene, the members of the Arts Committee of the Palestinian Mural Project, the student members of the Student Center Governing Board, the Student Council of Intertribal Nations and other political and ethnic student organizations on campus, and Palestinian community members of the San Francisco Bay Area including, Dr. Jess Ghannam, Dr. Hatem Bazian and Eyad Kishawi. All supporters participated in a collective struggle to permanently honor Palestine and Palestinians on SFSU campus.

The idea for the Palestinian Cultural Mural was inspired by the Student Council of Intertribal Nations (SKINS) who in 2005 sought to produce a Native American Mural on campus. SKINS members, in a meeting with GUPS member and their friend, Charlie El-Qare, asked him, “Why don’t you put up a Palestinian mural?” (Charlie El-Qare, 2017). El-Qare brought the idea back to GUPS whose members embraced it with excitement. Immediately envisioning this as a communal project, they reached out to Palestinian community members and organizations in the SF Bay Area for input and suggestions on how they envisioned a Palestinian Cultural Mural.

Charlie El-Qare reached out to his professor Dr. Fayege Oweis, who taught Arabic at SFSU. Dr. Oweis, started working closely with Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare and other GUPS members to get the mural idea off the ground. On April 7, 2005, Ramsey El-Qare excused himself from the GUPS *Deir Yassin* event in memory of the massacre which occurred during the Israeli Zionist led mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948 (Sa’di and Abu Lughod 2007; McGowan and Ellis 1998). He left to attend the monthly meeting of the Student Center Governing Board (SCGB), the controlling body over the student center which would house the future mural (Ramsey El-Qare 2016). During public comment, Ramsey E-Qare informed the board of GUPS’ intent to establish a mural in honor of Edward Said. The news was well received and Ramsey El-Qare was informed that to move forward GUPS needed to generate a proposal and present it to the SCGB.

The first order of business for GUPS, then, was to seek community input and draft a preliminary design of the Palestinian cultural mural. During this process, GUPS members discussed among themselves general outlines of the mural. They finally decided it should focus on one figure but that the mural should be gender inclusive and feature men and women. Loubna Qutami suggested that the mural honor Professor Edward Said. The idea stuck and became a central focus of the mural. Dr. Oweis then drafted a rough sketch of the mural. A month later, on May 5, 2005, Ramsey and Charlie El-Qare distributed Dr. Oweis' rough drafts of the mural at the SCGB meeting.

The administrative university representative of SFSU to the SCGB, Mr. Richard Giardina, said that he would not support the Palestinian mural. He first used technical excuses citing the limited mural spaces on the student center building. Then he objected that, "when one supports a mural that portrays a group that clashes with another group, problems could occur on campus" (SCGB minutes May 5, 2005). According to Charlie El-Qare, without explicitly saying it, Mr. Giardina argued that the SCGB should not approve the Palestinian mural because it would upset Jewish students in SF Hillel. Charlie El-Qare noted that SFSU had historically treated GUPS and SF Hillel as adversaries and had given preferential treatment to SF Hillel (Charlie El-Qare 2016).

On the issue of limited space for murals, Mr. Giardina argued that no policy existed to distribute mural spaces and that the board should not approve the Palestinian mural until it put a policy in place. Student members of the SCGB corrected him on the

matter by pointing out that art installment policies exist within the SCGB and noted that the SCGB distributed mural spaces on a first come first serve basis (SCGB minutes May 5, 2005). Mr. Giardina continued his arguments against the Palestinian mural, and, by extension against the struggle for justice in Palestine, when he suggested that the SCGB reserve mural spaces for “unrepresented communities.” This led Ramsey and Charlie El-Qare to conclude that by this concept, Mr. Giardina meant there was an over-representation of communities of color on the murals and space should be reserved for white and Jewish communities, whose struggles Mr. Giardina apparently considered to be underrepresented (Ramsey and Charlie El-Qare, interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). The student members of the SCGB challenged Mr. Giardina on his prejudices and noted that the job of SCGB is to serve the students who bring proposals to them and not to dictate which specific student organizations should bring murals forward.

Charlie El-Qare told Mr. Giardina that the nature of the discussion was unwarranted, that GUPS was not in conflict with another group on campus. In calling out his prejudices against Palestinians, Charlie El-Qare asked Mr. Giardina: “Is there a different policy depending on what community you come from?” (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). SCGB member, David Abella, then made a motion to vote to form an ad-hoc arts sub-committee for the Palestinian mural project. This sub-committee would draft a formal mural design proposal to be submitted to the SCGB and the SFSU president’s office for approval. Mr. Giardina insisted on his objections to the Palestinian Cultural Mural, by noting that the formation of any art

committee indicated that the SCGB was supporting GUPS, and that it would be tantamount to letting them put the mural up (SCGB minutes May 5, 2005; Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). Mr. Giardina's meaning was apparent: that the SCGB should not publicly support GUPS nor allow a Palestinian mural on campus. After 45 minutes of debate the SCGB approved the formation of the Arts Committee for the Palestinian Cultural Mural by a vote of 6 to 2 with Mr. Giardina opposed and one abstention.

The position and actions of Richard Giardina reflected wider university prejudice against GUPS and Palestinians. In 2005, Mr. Giardina held the position of Associate Vice President for Academic Planning and Assessment (San Francisco State University 2005.09.12). As a ranking member of SFSU administration and as the representative of President Corrigan in SCGB meetings, his actions reflected the position of the President to whom he answered. Mr. Giardina firmly held the position that SCGB, and by extension SFSU, should not publicly support GUPS or give approval of any kind to the Palestinian Cultural Mural. As his objections made no mention of the content of the mural, he clearly disagreed with the mural itself, as a symbol of Palestinian resilience. His opinion that the SCGB deny GUPS mural space and, instead, reserve it for "unrepresented communities" (which many suspected to have meant SF Hillel communities), reflected structural and deliberate suppression of making public Palestinian memories, experiences, and knowledge production on campus. Given the

history of GUPS, SF Hillel and the administration, it is very likely it also reflected preferential treatment for pro-Israel advocates.

As scholars have argued, Western hegemonic knowledge has suppressed acknowledgement of Palestinian collective memory to protect hegemonic discourses on Israeli dominance (Said 1979; Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007). This argument helps explain the attempts made by SFSU administrators to control and define the production of knowledge and meaning pertaining to the Palestinian experience on the SFSU campus. In arguing with SCGB, Mr. Giardina, a San Francisco State administrator, was not simply attempting to censor Palestinian students, he was attempting to repress public acknowledgement of Palestinian collective memory. Interestingly, Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare noted that the official minutes of the SCGB made no mention of the more prejudicial statements Mr. Giardina made; they glossed over those exchanges with the words: "The board discussed the issue further" (SCGB minutes May 5, 2006). Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare also noted that they had asked for audio recording of meeting, but were told by a representative in SCGB that they would not be made available to students (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). This obfuscation of the facts is objectionable and an infringement on free access to information regarding public meetings and on the ability to challenge the presentation found in the minutes with an audio recording.

Further, the failure to include Mr. Giardina's comments in the SCGB minutes highlights how this archive, as compiled by SFSU, has the ability to recall the past but also to "anaesthetize the past" with selective inclusion, exclusion and representation to the benefit of the powers who hold the ultimate decision-making on creating the archive (Mbembe 2002). Oral histories can challenge the subjective and biased presentation of history as told by the archives. Highlighting the importance of oral history in general and of the General Union of Palestine Students in particular, the archival record itself does not accurately represent SFSU Palestinian experiences, but on the contrary has contradicted Palestinian lived-experiences on campus.

In challenging the university administration's lack of support and its censorship of Palestinians, student representatives of SCGB supported GUPS and the production of the Palestinian Cultural Mural on campus. At the time - May, 2006 -, several of the SCGB student representatives belonged to politically active 3<sup>rd</sup> World organizations on campus with which GUPS had built solidarities over the years. Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare noted they spent just as much time in the MEChA and SKINS offices as they did the GUPS office building friendships, collaborating on events, and co-learning from one another about their experiences (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, interview with Yusra Oweis 2006). This solidarity network among the politically conscious students in the Student Center provided instrumental support for the mural. Recognizing how institutional power operated on campus and that the SCGB exerted a lot of control over the mural process, GUPS members Jackie Husary, Ramsey El-Qare, John Saadeh and

Sharef an-Najjar joined the Student Center governing body. In this way, they were able to build and exert political clout in favor of Palestinians.

With the approval of the Ad-Hoc Art Committee in hand, the first order of business for GUPS was to invite members to serve on the committee. Mural guidelines dictated that the committee had to be comprised of 15 members and must include: two members of the Student Center Governing Board (one whom would hold the position of Committee Chair), six members to represent the target constituency, two faculty members, one campus staff member, one campus administrator designated by the university president, one member of the Student Center staff, the Managing Director of the Student Center, and the Dean of the College of Creative Arts or a designee. Ramsey and Charlie El-Qare sought staff and faculty to join the committee whom they thought held “good politics on Palestine,” or as Ramsey put it, *were supportive of Palestinian calls for justice and fair and justice-centered representation of Palestine in classrooms.*

The original committee members included: GUPS members Charlie El-Qare, Ramsey El-Qare, Jenan Eadeh, Kelly Parpovic, Loubna Qutami, Naser Halteh; Professors Lucia Volk and Nicole Watts; President Corrigan’s appointee Dean Kenneth Monteiro; Student Center and SFSU members Georgiana Esquivias, Chris Jackson, Karen Carrington, Rafeal Martinez, Guy Dalpe, and Jim Davis; the committee would later add GUPS members Chris Kazaleh, Jackie Husary, and Sharef an-Najjar; and Committee Chair Mirishae McDonald.

The mural design was largely a student led effort with the exception that the staff and faculty were expected to support the students to bring the mural to fruition. Ramsey and Charlie El-Qare noted that all decisions related to the mural were discussed and decided in GUPS meetings. GUPS representatives on the Arts Committee would inform the wider committee of GUPS' discussions, retaining all decision power on the mural with GUPS and members of the local Palestinian community with whom GUPS networked (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, personal correspondence 2017).

GUPS meetings on the mural spurred lively and dynamic debate on Palestine and Palestinian representation. Reflecting on the decision to honor Edward Said, Loubna Qutami noted, "I was thinking, what could we [GUPS] get away with? We aren't going to be able to get away with Ghassan Kanafani, to be honest. That wasn't going to happen here. If you are thinking in comparison to Malcolm X, Edward Said is not our [Palestinians] Malcolm X, but for us it was like there was such internalized policing in our minds about the exceptionalism around Palestine that we already had done that [internalized policing] from the very beginning" (Qutami, personal correspondence 2017). Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian writer and spokesman of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and editor of the magazine *Al-Hadaf*, was assassinated by Israeli Mossad agents in a 1972 car bombing that also took the life of his niece (Harlow 1994).

Loubna Qutami, while a participant in the preliminary conversations on the murals, left campus in the Spring of 2006 for a semester abroad at Birzeit University in

Palestine when the committee finalized its first proposal to the university. In hindsight, Loubna Qutami noted that in 2005 she and other GUPS members did not comprehend the magnitude of the mural. She noted:

In the beginning we were, like, that sounds like a fun project, but we [GUPS] didn't really think of its political significance. All of that we learned along the way. Like, wow! What would it mean for us to have something that is long term on a public university in the United States, on a public institution in the United States? There's no Palestinian anything on any public institution in the United States. So, for us, we learned that later down the line. But in the beginning, we were kind of taking the mural as an activity to do on top of all the other actions we would do in the quad, et cetera (Loubna Qutami, personal communication 2017).

It is interesting that Loubna Qutami referred to an internalized policing, or self-censorship among GUPS members when it came to political expression and messaging on the mural, especially in light of the fact that they did not subject themselves to that level of internal censorship when it came to political demonstrations on campus. On the contrary, GUPS, being cognizant of university scrutiny and pressure, resisted and challenged SFSU's censorship of Palestinian political organizing. GUPS member Ramsey El-Qare described the situation this way:

Part of our planning discussion was we were worried about the university coming down hard on us. My thing on that was, I don't care, because no matter what we do they [SFSU Administrators] are going to come at us. ... As long as we are within the bounds of reason, I don't care if we are pushing university policies because, really, if you come down to it, they always change the rules no matter what we do (Ramsey El-Qare interview with Yusra 2016).

Loubna Qutami's sentiments reflected an initial severance of culture and politics. She noted that through the process of establishing the mural, she and other GUPS members learned to undo that framework and came to understand the intersection of culture and politics - the political as cultural and the cultural as political (Fanon 1967; Said 2001).

Moving forward on the design of the mural, GUPS members then decided on the themes, ideas, icons and messaging they wanted to include in the mural. Needing an artist to bring their ideas into visual representation and with the Arts Committee approval, they decided on Dr. Oweis who had supported the mural since the beginning. Dr. Oweis decided to bring a co-artist on board, and he first reached out to local Palestinian artist named Mayy. While GUPS liked her work, it was not in the style for which they were seeking (Charlie and Ramsey El-Ramsey, interview with Yusra Oweis, 2016). Dr. Oweis then proposed Dr. Susan Greene. Dr. Greene, an anti-Zionist Jewish American, had over 20 years' experience with community murals on resistance and Palestine. Dr. Oweis thought it fitting to bring a Jewish supporter of Palestinian liberation on board in a display of Palestinian-Jewish solidarity (Oweis 2009b). GUPS and the Art Committee approved Dr. Oweis and Dr. Greene as lead artists of the mural, and the two set to work to design it. After nearly 20 drafts they decided to include over 25 elements and symbols on the mural (Oweis 2009b). I describe some of the images and their symbolism below, but a more exhaustive list can be found at Dr. Oweis's website (Oweis 2009a).

GUPS decided to honor Professor Edward Said because he was a prolific Palestinian scholar, human rights activist, and proponent for justice and peace in Palestine (Oweis 2009a). Dr. Oweis noted that the depiction of Edward Said wearing the Palestinian kuffiya/hatta served as symbols of the struggle of Palestinian liberation and that Said, along with other Palestinians, carry that struggle on their shoulders (Oweis 2009b). Behind Edward Said, the mural depicts Jerusalem through its religious monuments. On the Walls of Jerusalem is written, in both English and Arabic, “I am from there, I am from here,” lines taken from a poem Mahmoud Darwish wrote as a farewell to Edward Said upon the latter’s death (Darwish 2003). In honoring Said himself, the poem pays tribute to Palestinian diasporic experiences. These experiences are also highlighted in the depictions of New York and Columbia University where Said spent a large part of his life. In a reflexive note, the artists also included depictions of San Francisco and the Malcolm X Plaza at SFSU, honoring the home place of the mural.

Ramsey El-Qare, Loubna Qutami, Jackie Husary, and Sharef an-Najjar are depicted dancing the Palestinian folk dance *Debke* and wearing traditional Palestinian attire. The decision to depict their faces came after a 2007 meeting with President Corrigan and the university lawyer, who claimed the depictions of al-Founoun *Debke* dancers could violate copy right laws. The intention to include al-Founoun dancers was for symbolic connection to Palestine, as Dr. Greene had in 2004 included the image of the dancers in her work on the “Break the Silence” murals in Palestine. In negotiating with the university, they suggested to replace the image of the dancers faces with the

faces of GUPS students. Further, the university lawyer thought that the university may be sued for use of Mahmoud Darwish poem. Dr. Abdulhadi's response was the following: "In Palestine we see things in collective terms; Mahmoud Darwish belongs to Palestine and no one has a copyright on Palestine" (Abdulhadi, personal correspondence 2017a). Palestinians dismissed such concerns as too capitalistic and unattuned to notions of collective belonging. Mahmoud Darwish's poetry represents a popular voice of Palestinian experiences and, as such, it belongs to Palestinians everywhere. Dr. Abdulhadi thought it was comical that the lawyer would be concerned with copyright issues on Mahmoud Darwish.

The cactus tree in the picture honors Palestine's national tree (Loubna Qutami 2017). Its fruit is called *sabr* in Arabic, which also means *patience* (Oweis 2009b). Oweis noted that the cactus represents a resiliency indigenous to Palestine, and that: if cut, it still grows back (Oweis 2009b). As part of common Palestinian knowledge, Dr. Oweis noted that there were many stories of Palestinian refugees using the location of cactus fruits to pinpoint where their homes used to be before they were uprooted during the *Nakba*, displaced to refugee camps, and their homes were demolished. The cactus fruit came to represent Return for Palestinian refugees (Oweis 2009b).

The original design of the mural also included the depiction of Naji al-Ali's Handala cartoon of Handala, a Palestinian refugee boy, the cartoon was widely known throughout Palestine and internationally. Naji Al-Ai was well known and accomplished

cartoonist; his cartoons spoke to the Palestinian reality especially of displacement and diaspora and criticized the oppressive rule of Arab leaders and their collusion with U.S. intervention in the region. I describe the cartoon at length later in the chapter as cultural production (Skurvida 2015). Here I will only say that Handala originally was to be depicted holding in one arm a key inscribed with the word *awda* in Arabic calligraphy. The word means *Return*, and refers to the right of return for Palestinians. In his other arm, Handala was holding a fountain pen carved in the shape of a sword, expressing, of course, the idea that the pen is mightier than the sword (Oweis 2009b).

The mural committee held two town hall meetings in the Spring of 2006 to present their designs and receive input on the mural from the San Francisco bay area Palestinian community who largely approved of and supported its design (GUPS letter to President Corrigan 2006). At that point, just one year after the idea for the mural was brought to the SCGB, the Art Committee submitted its draft to the Student Center Governing Board. As the Board prepared to finalize the approval process and vote on the mural design, on July 13, 2006, President Corrigan set in motion a series of actions that changed everything.



Original design of the Palestinian Cultural Mural submitted by the General Union of Palestine Students and the Arts Committee, July 2006.

### **President Corrigan's Censorship of the Palestinian Cultural Mural**

President Corrigan not only reacted to the Palestinian Cultural Mural with censorship and condemnation, he also forced amendments to university policy. Once he was informed of the intent to commission both a Palestinian and a Native American mural in 2005, President Corrigan urged the SCGB to label mural space on the outside

walls of the Student Center as a “finite resource” and to change its existing policies concerning the allocation of mural spaces (Corrigan July 7, 2006). The SCGB meeting minutes again reflect that Richard Giardina, representing SFSU Administration, and Professor Larry Medcalf, SCGB member representing faculty, brought up the issue of campus mural space.

The student representatives responded to Giardina and Medcalf by reminding them that all policy changes fell under the jurisdiction of the Rules Committee of the Student Center (SCGB minutes August 11, 2005; October 6, 2005). The SCGB could not introduce policy changes outside of the Rules Committee. The SCGB was to follow the rules already in place, and to approve or deny future policy changes proposed by the Rules Committee. Only that process could validate new policies and regulations. As such, Giardina and Medcalf proposed a violation of SCGB policy and process every time they attempted to block the Palestinian Mural using finite space issue as an excuse. During the time of the SCGB vote on the Palestinian mural in Spring of 2006, the Rules Committee had not drafted new policies concerning mural spaces on campus which was within its mandate. As an autonomous student body, Rules Committee members were accountable to the students: they were not supposed, expected or required to answer to President Corrigan.

After receiving the original mural draft from the Palestinian Cultural Mural committee, President Corrigan sent a letter to the SCGB on July 7, 2006 demanding that the SCGB deny the draft of the mural. President Corrigan wrote:

The proposed Mural is conflict-centered. Its focus is on international issues, not on pride in one's heritage. Its spirit is less of a celebration than of challenge. In short, it is at odds with the most fundamental values to which San Francisco State University is committed. ... I ask that as you consider the design, you measure it against these high aims, that rather than approve a piece that would prompt - has already prompted - division, you send it back to the Art Committee for further work. You can remind them that their aim is to enhance appreciation of a people and a culture" (Corrigan July 7, 2006).

In another display of his anti-Palestinian stances, President Corrigan used his powerful position to undermine GUPS' self-representation and to stigmatize them. His statements frame a false dichotomy of culture and politics as it erases the assemblage of "history, language and culture" and its bearing on how we represent ourselves (Hall 1996: 4). Nowhere in his statement did the president provide evidence or an explanation to his claims. Nor did he reference Palestine, or Palestinian culture, leaving by innuendo that anything having to do with Palestine was seen as a challenge rather than a celebration. His letter left anyone who read it confused since nothing on the mural warranted such a condemnation. To GUPS, the letter again reflected Mr. Giardina's position. It was not the content of the mural that was the issue; rather, it was the fact that Palestinians wanted a mural at all. Reflecting their views on this question, Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare (2016) had this exchange:

*Ramsey El-Qare:* Now when we first proposed the mural, the entire mural was controversial.

*Charlie El-Qare:* Just the mention of the word Palestine was controversial.

*Ramsey El-Qare:* Everything. Everything was controversial

(Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare, interview with Yusra Oweis 2016).

Jackie Husary, a member of GUPS at the time, expressed the same sentiments: “The system [at SFSU] is inherently hostile to us. We cannot be a part of the system because it cannot make room for us” (Jackie Husary, personal correspondence, 2017). GUPS members came to expect nothing but censorship and marginalization from the university. Jackie Husary’s comments speak to how this marginalization is structural and political, and not simply a matter of personal bias or prejudice.

Not succumbing to President Corrigan’s bullying tactics, the SCGB proceeded on July 13, 2006, by a vote of 6 to 2, to approve the mural (*Golden Gate Xpress* 2007.02.07). That same day, President Corrigan placed a moratorium on all new murals to the Student Center, thus blocking both the Palestinian Cultural Mural and the Native American Mural. Corrigan wrote a letter to the SCGB members reprimanding them for not heeding his demands to deny the Palestinian mural design, establish a policy designating mural spaces as limited, and develop a set of “priorities as well as university values that these works of art must reflect” (Corrigan July 13, 2006). GUPS member Loubna Qutami said that, “We saw that as a form of bureaucratic harassment, a form of putting bureaucratic obstacles in our way. I am sure that he was hoping that we would graduate, give up, get tired, not be strong enough or strategized enough” (Loubna Qutami, personal correspondence 2017).

All the while, the Student Center Governing Board was an autonomous student organization; its funding came from student fees collected every semester by the University but were distinct from tuition. The SCGB leased the Student Center building from the University. President Corrigan violated the autonomy of the SCGB when he wrote in the letter:

Accordingly, until the Student Center Governing Board can present us with a plan for the utilization of spaces and the principles you will follow in approving future murals, has received approval of this plan by the President's Cabinet, and has incorporated this material into the Student Center Public Art Policy, I am placing a moratorium on all Student Center murals. The moratorium will be lifted when you have successfully completed the work I have just described (Corrigan July 13, 2006).

President Corrigan's explicit role as outlined by the SCGB policies was to review and give approval for the mural prior to its painting on the Student Center building (Student Center Governing Board 1995). In a move consolidating control over an autonomous student body, Corrigan manipulated his approval and veto power to place an ultimatum. His position: either follow his orders or get no mural.

The SFSU President's veto power over murals was a university structural response after Corrigan overtly censored criticism of Israel that occurred over the 1994 Malcom X Mural. In 1994, the Pan Afrikan Student Union and the Afrikan Student Alliance commissioned a mural in honor of Malcolm X on the Student Center building by its entrance. The original mural featured Malcolm X's face, an outline of the African continent and the US flag with dollar signs, Stars of David, skulls and crossbones, and the

words *African blood* (*LA Times* 1994.05.21)<sup>2</sup>. The artist of the mural, Senay Dennis, defended himself and the mural from accusations of anti-Semitism: “It was not intended to offend Jews but to reflect Malcolm X’s criticism of Israel” (*The New York Times* 1994.05.27).

The flag of the State of Israel is made up mostly of the Star of David with two lines presumably representing two rivers or a river and a sea. In addition, the Israeli Defense Force, the Israeli Air Force and the Israeli Navy all include the Star of David on their emblems. Israel uses this Jewish symbol in its displays of nationalism and the military, which oppress Palestinian communities and place them under military occupation (Butler 2013). It is through this reading of the Star of David that Senay Dennis intended it to criticize Israeli state violence.

Nevertheless, members of the SCGB, who had approved and commissioned the Malcolm X mural, claimed they did not know it would contain the symbol, and did not “muster a quorum” to discuss the mural, and only after the fact, did they allow it to stand by exercising protecting expressions of free speech (*LA Times* 1994.05.21; *The New York Times* 1994.05.27). President Corrigan took the position to censor criticism of Israel by removing the mural. He ordered the mural painted over. As students kept watch, painters hired by the university came with police escort and painted over the Malcolm X mural

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<sup>2</sup> People wrongly assumed that this mural depicted the Nazi Swastika, and that it was not merely juxtaposed with but treated as identical to the Star of David.

with gray paint. However as soon as the painters and police left, the students washed off the paint with water. That same day the university brought the painters back with the police escort again and painted over the mural with gray paint.

During the night, the students came with sponges, water and soap and again washed off the paint. They proclaimed, “Malcolm’s alive” after recovering the image of his face (Rafael Martinez, personal communication 2017). At 4 A.M. on the morning of May 27, 1994, a crew along with police in riot gear marched onto campus and sand-blasted the mural, permanently erasing it (*The New York Times* 1994.05.27; Rafael Martinez 2017). Under pressure by President Corrigan, the SCGB then created and adopted the “Policies and Guidelines for Acquiring Works of Art for the Cesar Chavez Student Center.” This document required that all murals must be approved by the SCGB and the University President before they could be commissioned. This gave the president the veto power he was to wield in 2006 on the SCGB, indigenous communities, and Palestinians. In 1996, the second Malcolm X mural was commissioned under the new guidelines. Importantly, among its images was included the phrase, “Our objective is complete freedom, justice and equality, BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY [emphasis original]” (Student Center Governing Board 1996).

On September 18, 2006, two months after President Corrigan imposed the moratorium on murals, President Corrigan sent two letters, one to the SCGB and the

other to the Arts Committee reiterating his intransigence on his censorship. He wrote, because the SCGB:

approved a mural that you know to be unsatisfactory in its present form, I am taking another action: bringing a halt to the installation of any artwork on the exterior of the Student Center. Perhaps in the future, when the Student Union Governing Board shows more sensitivity to its obligation to serve all students, I or a future SF State president will lift this restriction. I remain gravely disappointed by the Board's actions, which run counter to the values of this university (Corrigan September 18, 2006).

Here again, by changing the rules to fit his purpose, President Corrigan, exerted control over matters not under his jurisdiction through the use of his veto power. His mention of a future SF State president brought the threat into perpetuity and suggests that future presidents would hold the same position on the matter. His condescension was considered patronizing by the SCGB who never solicited his opinion of them. However, in issuing his moratorium, President Corrigan presented SCGB as trouble makers, and himself as the safeguard of the university to which the autonomous SCGB must heed to.

His second message, this one to the Arts Committee, had a similar tone:

I am making a final decision not to approve the mural proposal. I find that it includes images that are inappropriate for display at the SF State Student Center. So that there can be no misunderstanding about my meaning, I am enclosing examples of images that are explicitly offensive and identified with an international conflict, rather than celebratory of the Palestinian-American experience and culture (Corrigan September 18, 2006).

President Corrigan attached to his email images of Handala, a key, and *awda* the right of return for Palestinians. This word is particularly sensitive because it represents a cultural reality for many. Loubna Qutami and Jackie Husary both said that most of the

Palestinians in GUPS in 2005, 2006 and 2007 were grandchildren of Palestinian refugees displaced from their homes in Palestine during the *Nakba*. And that therefore, the question of return was central to their families (Jackie Husary 2017; Loubna Qutami 2017). The key came to represent the return of Palestinians, as many Palestinians during the *Nakba* locked their doors and took the keys to their homes along with them as they fully expected to return once the fighting stopped (Palestine Solidarity Campaign Factsheet 2010). Thus, Corrigan's email again conflated a cultural and historical truth with political incorrectness.

It is inconceivable to divorce the right of return for refugees from the reality of Palestinian-American or from Palestinian diasporic experiences. While never explicitly expressing why he opposed Palestinian return, Corrigan's position stemmed from Israeli Zionist nationalist discourses which consider Palestinians a demographic threat to maintaining Israel as a Jewish state (Iraqi 2015; Sadot 2013). This discourse defines Palestinians to be an existential threat to the state. It runs counter to social justice principles and the protection of human dignity and respect.

Further, Naji al-Ali published hundreds of drawings of Handala and over 40,000 cartoons from 1961 until his assassination by Israeli Mossad agents in 1987 (El Fassed 2004; Eraji 2016). Handala is featured in relation to Palestinian resistance and hopes for liberation and justice. Corrigan's email included samples of a few cartoons in which Handala holds a rock or slingshot, apparently in resistance to armies, tanks, rockets, and

assassination squads. The fact that Corrigan culled the few existing cartoons of the boy in stances of anger and resistance severed the images from their historical context, and gave the false impression that Handala is a consistently violent character, someone who called for the destruction of Israel (Oweis 2009b). Yet Naji al-Ali's Handala represents all experiences and stances of Palestinian refugee children, all witnesses "to the injustices of human history" (Palestinian Cultural Mural Committee January 25, 2007). It is true that Handala "exposed the brutality of the Israeli army" but he also combatted "the hypocrisy of the PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organization]" (El Fassed 2004). His resistance was that of desperate refugee children everywhere. GUPS sought to honor the totality that was Handala.

### **Navigating Censorship and Erecting the Palestinian Cultural Mural**

One year after President Corrigan placed the moratorium on all murals at SFSU, blocking the efforts of Native Americans and Palestinians, GUPS was finally successful in erecting the Palestinian Cultural Mural at SFSU. Immediately following President Corrigan's moratorium, GUPS organized a broad-based grassroots campaign to combat censorship against Palestinians. During the 2006 struggle, President Corrigan attempted to engage in "divide and rule" tactics by pinning SKINS against GUPS when he placed a moratorium on the Palestinian mural that froze the Native American mural as well. However, the already tight-knit relationship between SKINS and GUPS was cemented as they joined together in challenging university censorship (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare,

interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). GUPS circulated petitions calling on the university to lift the moratorium and uphold the right of self-representation and the democratic process by approving the Palestinian mural as is. GUPS members also solicited statements from the faculty as well as from local Palestinian community members. They held teach-ins and lectures about the meaning of Handala and Return (Oweis 2009b; Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). *Al-Jazeera News* became involved and organized a panel on the Palestinian Cultural Mural and the university roadblocks faced by the students. The panel was held entirely in Arabic and broadcasted across the Arab World (*Al-Jazeera* 2006; Loubna Qutami 2017; Jackie Husary 2017).

Ramsey and Charlie El-Qare invited the fourth annual convention of “Al-Awda, The Palestine Right to Return Coalition” to be held on SFSU campus. The convention participants discussed Palestinian return and the Palestinian Cultural Mural (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare interview with Yusra Oweis 2016). Through this grassroots level campaign and the process of designing the mural, GUPS members learned about Palestine (Loubna Qutami 2017; Jackie Husary 2017; Oweis 2009b). For example, Jackie noted that she did not know who Handala was until she became involved in the mural proposal. Political activism on campus, as channeled through the mural, forced GUPS members to learn in detail about Palestine, Palestinian experiences and their Diaspora (Loubna Qutami 2017; Jackie Husary 2017). They also learned how power operated, how it was used to silence Palestinians, and how they had to use their positions to challenge

the powers at large (Jackie Husary 2017). As such, the mural was a tool in cultivating a critical consciousness among GUPS members.

2006 came as a stressful but transformative year for GUPS. Taking cue from the 2002 President's Task-Force on Inter-group Relations, Dr. Abdulhadi designed and created Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas studies. She started having a larger presence on campus in 2006 during her job interviews and in 2007 she was hired as a professor on campus to direct the program. She quickly became a mentor to GUPS as they consulted with her regarding strategies on how best to approach the university and garner support from local Palestinian community activists. Professor Abdulhadi met with university administrators to hold them accountable to commission the mural.

The backdrop of the Arab World at the time struck home to GUPS members. 2006 was the year of an Israeli military assault in Gaza killing over 400 Palestinians (B'Tselem 2008). Israel invaded Lebanon in the summer of 2006 resulting in 1,109 Lebanese and Palestinian deaths, over 4,399 injured and an estimated 1 million displaced (*Human Rights Watch* 2007). The US was an occupying military power in Afghanistan, and President Bush was planning a surge of US soldiers into occupied Iraq. On top of everything going on in campus, GUPS members continued to protest Israeli aggressions and advocate for justice in Palestine and against imperialism in the Arab and Muslim worlds (Charlie and Ramsey El-Qare 2016).

On campus, debates were heated amongst GUPS members and politically active local Palestinian community members on how to move forward with the mural. Some individuals were adamant to keep the mural as it was; others were willing to give up Handala and the key of return in order to get the mural up. They debated the issues for hours on end over months. Things became quite heated as GUPS members were for a time cemented in their positions and unwilling to compromise amongst each other. In the meantime, Jackie Husary chaired the Rules Committee of the Student Center. Her committee amended the mural policy so that existing murals maintained permanent status, with new murals given temporary installment status on a four-year revolving basis of display and removal; thus dealing with the Corrigan's 'Finite Space' issue. The Palestinian Cultural Mural and Native American Mural, already in the committee design process, were included as permanent installments.

After months of heated debate in weighing all their options, GUPS with strong encouragement by Dr. Abdulhadi, under what she called "politics of the possible," decided that it would be better to have the mural up, without Handala and the key, than to have no mural at all (Abdulhadi 2017a). Dr. Abdulhadi said that the mural still included symbols of resistance and Return despite the removal of the two symbols. This was after GUPS submitted one rendering of the mural after another to the President's office. At one point Jackie Husary submitted a drawing with an elderly Palestinian peasant carrying the key in place of Handala. However, negotiating with GUPS on behalf of President Corrigan, Vice President Penny Saffold refused any compromises (Abdulhadi 2017a).

GUPS submitted a proposal of the mural without Handala and key of return. At the same time, they also submitted amendments to mural policies that had been drafted by the Rules Committee. Soon after, GUPS received formal approval by President Corrigan giving them the green light to produce the censored version of the mural.

Dr. Oweis noted that with GUPS and Palestinian community support, they painted the mural over two weekends (Oweis 2009b). GUPS held the inaugural celebration on November 2, 2007, in honor of Edward Said's birthday on November 1. On the day of the inauguration, GUPS members arrived wearing Handala t-shirts to keep the image present during the celebrations. GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi note the silver lining is that Handala and the key of return live in the oral histories of the mural. The censoring of Handala and the key did not succeed as they are at the forefront of descriptions of the mural and in the retelling of the mural process. The significance of its pronouncement in the oral histories reflect the power of collective memory to challenge hegemonic discourses, to resist censorship and to assert agency in historical and other forms of knowledge production.

### **Chapter 3: 2013-2017 - Assaults on Academic Freedom**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I detail the assaults on academic freedom and free speech for Palestinian students in the General Union of Palestine Students and Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) studies faculty at SFSU. These assaults are the product of defamation by racist right-wing organizations that combined with SFSU administrators' negligent and often hostile reactions to criticisms of this defamation. The defamation presents Palestinian activism and scholarship as anti-Semitic and linked to terrorism, as it falsely equates criticism of Israel with the hatred of Jews. These organizations then mount legal charges and press for punitive measures. At SFSU this has included the suspension of Palestinian student activists, numerous university investigations and conduct hearings, assaults on the AMED studies program, and rigid revisions to and strengthening of punitive student conduct policies. The defamation and assaults on Palestinian activism and scholarship was renewed with vigor at SFSU in 2013 and continues today.

Exposing these racist organizations, of the type that has been active on SFSU campus, are two reports which describe a tightly linked network of individuals and organizations spreading anti-Muslim and Islamophobic bigotry working with multi-million-dollar budgets (Duss et al. 2015; International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network 2015). This network includes the likes of David Horowitz and Pamela Geller, and their

organizations the Horowitz Freedom Center and Stop Islamization of America among many others (Duss et al. 2015). The Southern Poverty Law Center characterizes David Horowitz as a “driving force of the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-black movements,” and lists Stop Islamization of America as a hate group (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017). These organizations push an explicit pro-Israel agenda and receive funding from right-wing Israel advocacy organizations (Duss et al. 2015: 60). They intersect where the Islamophobia industry and the pro-Israel industry coalesce.

Organizations from this network, such as AMCHA Initiative [meaning “your people” in Hebrew (AMCHA Initiative 2017)], Horowitz Freedom Center, Campus Watch, Middle East Forum and the Canary Mission, have all taken their work onto college campuses where they publicly target scholars and students for their scholarship and activism on Palestine. San Francisco State University has been a central front for attacks by these organizations because of the activism and scholarship of GUPS, AMED studies and Dr. Abdulhadi.

AMCHA Initiative is a core component of this network on college campuses. AMCHA’s definition of anti-Semitism includes what they refer to as the demonization and delegitimization of Israel (AMCHA Initiative 2017). This definition therefore erroneously conflates anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism (Butler 2013; Palestine Legal 2017; California Scholars for Academic Freedom 2012). While AMCHA claims to be combating anti-Semitism, the effect of its work has been an assault on

Palestinian activism by stifling all criticisms of Israel. David Palumbo-Liu, a human rights activist and Professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford University, writes:

The AMCHA Initiative, Canary Mission and other groups claim that they are fighting anti-Semitism on campus. But because they equate criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews as a people, any act or speech critical of Israel may be construed as anti-Semitic. These groups then exert political pressure on administrators to punish what they call anti-Semitism, and administrators will often bend to their will to avoid bad publicity, *abrogating their responsibilities to protect free speech and academic freedom* (Palumbo-Liu 2016; emphasis mine).

In 2011, Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, a lecturer at the University of California Santa Cruz, along with Leila Beckwith, a professor at University of California Los Angeles founded the AMCHA initiative (AMCHA Initiative 2017). AMCHA's work seeks to protect hegemonic discourses that are supportive of Israel. This is especially true as public opinion on Israel has declined because of its continued assaults on Palestinians, especially through the Israeli bombings on Gaza (*The Jerusalem Post* 2012.05.17; Schneider 2014; Muhtaseb 2017).

Tammi Rossman-Benjamin has taken special interest in San Francisco State University. In 2013, she criticized the emergence of Black Studies and the College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU as giving way to rising anti-Semitism. Her argument was that they provided a platform for the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) and allowed the institutionalization of Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) studies (Rossman-Benjamin 2013). Rossman-Benjamin writes:

The case of SFSU raises the possibility that programs [ i.e. Ethnic Studies] whose core mission include the promotion of group identity and the pursuit of social justice may be linked to expressions of political animosities in general and antisemitism in particular (Rossman-Benjamin 2013: 22).

In this article, Rossman-Benjamin also cataloged events and speeches by GUPS members, AMED studies senior scholar Dr. Abdulhadi, and their invited participants. She took issue with individuals who criticize Israel, advocate for justice for Palestine, and support the Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) campaign. BDS campaigns are directed at companies and institutions which work with Israel. They are intended to last until the day that Palestinian demands for justice are met (Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS 2005). Rossman-Benjamin proposes the inflammatory suggestion that support for the Palestinian anti-colonial movement is tantamount to anti-Semitism; likewise, she also equates criticism of Israel with the hatred of Jews. With Rossman-Benjamin asserting these falsehoods, it is no wonder that she sees the existence of GUPS and AMED studies on SFSU as examples of the institutionalization of anti-Semitism on college campuses (Rossman-Benjamin 2013: 19). Rossman-Benjamin's article reflects a fear of 3<sup>rd</sup> world empowerment, and poses it as a threat to Israel and Jews, another result of her equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism.

Attacks, like that of Rossman-Benjamin (2013), have multi-faceted consequences beyond the borders of SFSU and extend throughout the globe. The attacks against GUPS are directed at individual members and the organization precisely to apply pressure on the university to undermine the efficacy of the organization and to censor criticism of Israel.

The attacks levied against Dr. Abdulhadi and the AMED studies program aim to exert pressure on the university to undermine the program and its academic partnerships, and discredit the scholarship of Dr. Abdulhadi through a direct assault on academic freedom (Palumbo-Liu 2016). Because of the smear campaign and accusations of anti-Semitism against Dr. Abdulhadi, she is afraid to walk across campus alone for fear that self-identified vigilantes will physically assault her.

Another threat that SFSU can hold over the heads of GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi is their knowledge that if SFSU accuses them as being anti-Semitic, they may forever be denied entry into Palestine by Israeli border police. This is especially troublesome as an online search of GUPS members' names leads to the website Canary Mission website that falsely accuses them of anti-Semitism. This website is easily found and shared with Israeli border police. As a result, Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS members recognize that their actions and visibility in campus activities have reverberating global ramifications that could affect their families.

Refusing to acknowledge legitimate Palestinian concerns in 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2017, the university has dismissed urgent calls made by GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi to institute campus changes and to publicly defend them against character assassination. The university did little to combat these assaults and their vilification. The university responded with vague statements condemning assaults in general instead of specifying Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian harassment. In an affectation of compassion that was

too-little-too-late, SFSU offered police escorts and counseling services to victims of Islamophobic threats, but its response placed the bulk of the responsibility for protection onto the victims themselves as; threats are conceived as matters of individual security and psychology issues. There is no acknowledgement of legitimate security concerns that require the undoing of Islamophobic knowledge along with the cultivation of justice-centered knowledge of Arabs, Muslims, Palestinians and all marginalized communities (Abdulhadi, 2017).

In the pages that follow, I detail the string of assaults on freedom of speech and academic freedom at SFSU against AMED studies and GUPS. I discuss the university's response and reaction which have emboldened these assaults. I focus on two defining moments of the assaults against GUPS and AMED studies in 2013 and 2016. These assaults build up on earlier ones. I adopt Dr. Abdulhadi's use of the term "New McCarthyism" to describe the tactic of applying misconstrued evidence to smear Palestinian advocates and implicate them as enemies of a social justice society (Rabab Abdulhadi 2014). The term comes from the manner in which the Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee of the early 1950s targeted communism, imagined communist activism, and anyone in anyway associated with The Communist Party.

### **2013-2014: Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian smear campaigns against GUPS**

AMCHA's 2013 accusations against GUPS and AMED studies of anti-Semitism and terrorism set into motion a series of FBI investigations, intervention by the Israeli Consulate, hundreds of death threats against Palestinians on campus, university suspension, and the attempted dismantling of the AMED studies program and the firing of Dr. Abdulhadi.

On November 7, 2013, GUPS held its annual celebration of the Palestine Cultural Mural that was inaugurated in 2007. Celebrations lasted for the whole day including an afternoon open mike and music on Malcolm X Plaza and a gala in the evening. Lining Malcolm X Plaza during the afternoon celebrations were tables sponsored by allied student organizations. The table of the Student Council of Intertribal Nations (SKINS) included a stencil that stated, "My Heroes Have Always Killed Colonizers." This statement reflects movements promoting indigenous empowerment and their challenge to Euro-centric colonial history. It has had a long history in Native American indigenous movements throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and college campuses. In 2000, at San Diego State University, students protesting the school mascot- Monty Montezuma, wore t-shirts that said, "My Heroes Have Always Killed Cowboys." This was a spoof of the Willie Nelson country and western single, "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys" (Lipsitz 2001: 235). The students did so to prove a political point. As George Lipsitz argues, "cultural images have an important impact on our understanding of ourselves, [and] that attractive cultural icons and narratives can be used to occlude the ugliness of the unresolved hurts of history" (Lipsitz 2001: 236).

In 2012, the Center for Political Education (CPE), a SF Bay Area grassroots organization, started an annual event to commemorate Indigenous Peoples Day on October 12 and named it, “My Heroes Have Always Killed Colonizers”. CPE billed the event as:

A night of song, words, and resistance, a celebration of every global indigenous warrior who’s been labeled a terrorist, unpatriotic, and/or savage while defending the land, the people, and our traditional ways. Through storytelling, spoken word and performance we will collectively Re-Indigenize our heroes, such as Leila Khaled, Boukman, Lapu, and Geromino so that they may claim their true role in history (Native American Health Center 2012).

In that spirit, SKINS brought the stencils. Further, GUPS brought t-shirts with the image of Leila Khaled, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) who hijacked two planes in 1969 and 1970 to bring attention to the plight of Palestinians (Khaled and Schmitt 2014). GUPS’ defended the stencil of Leila Khaled noting that she “is a popular icon frequently used by Palestinians and non-Palestinians alike to symbolize Palestinian women’s roles in anti-colonial resistance and to counter Orientalist and racist portrayals of Arab (and Muslim) women as docile, oppressed and unable to speak for themselves” (Abdulhadi 2013). It is in that spirit that SKINS brought the stencils and GUPS brought the t-shirts.

Soon after the mural celebration, the AMCHA Initiative emailed President Wong asking him to denounce the images on the pretext of an incitement to violence and started a media campaign publicly smearing GUPS and its student leaders as anti-Semites as

well as Dr. Abdulhadi as GUPS' advisor. AMCHA claimed that the stencils and the t-shirts presented a threat to Jewish students (Rossman-Benjamin and Beckwith 2013). Palestinians assured that use of "My Heroes Have Always Killed Colonizers" at the event was symbolic rather than a call to kill, something that reasonable people can distinguish. Of course, discussion about killing "colonizers," or "cowboys" is legitimate and valuable for those who have been oppressed in the past and present; killing oppressors is a form of resistance, just as Malcolm X said: "Our objective is complete freedom, justice and equality by any means necessary." This quotation is printed on the Malcolm X mural hanging above Malcolm X Plaza where the stencils and t-shirts were displayed.

Responding to AMCHA's inaccurate presentation of the stencil and t-shirt, President Wong immediately issued a statement claiming that the images celebrated "violence...promoting intolerance, bigotry and anti-Semitism" (Wong 2013.11.19). In doing so, SFSU President Wong, with a stroke of his pen, reinforced the vilification of GUPS, SKINS and their allies on campus as well as the AMED studies program highlighting the discursive power he wields. President Wong's statement muted the point raised by the stencils and t-shirt that reclaim proud histories of indigenous sovereignty and resistance to colonial violence. In contrast, as I later discuss, President Wong would not issue out a statement condemning what were clearly acts of Islamophobia in spite of GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi's appeal for him to do so.

Incessant assaults on GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi through hate mail followed, along with condemnations of by nine members of the California State Legislature who issued a joint statement (Levine et al. 2013). President Wong's statement gave the green light to others to assault GUPS and AMED studies. Non-university individuals could defame with impunity since our own university led the way in giving license for others to condemn GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi. Hate mail and death threats flooded into the GUPS office and e-mail account, such that GUPS members were afraid to answer the phone. They had to disconnect the phone line because it rang incessantly. To defend their reputation, Dr. Abdulhadi, GUPS, their student allies (including SKINS and MEChA at SFSU and Students for Justice in Palestine chapters), as well as non-student members of the Palestinian community, mobilized a campaign to defend GUPS as an organization from AMCHA's slander. GUPS responded to the condemnation and vilification with a public statement to President Wong:

We are proud to continue the rich legacy of justice-centered student activism at SFSU. GUPS has historically stood for justice in/for Palestine and has linked our struggle with that of all people's struggles for self-determination, justice and peace. We are concerned over our own safety and the safety of our friends, allies, and all those standing in solidarity with our movement, especially when photos and names have been posted online as if to make them a moving target for violence (GUPS 2013.11.18).

AMCHA's then conducted an online search of GUPS members. Investigating GUPS president Mohammad Hammad, they went through hundreds of his online blog

posts on Tumblr spanning back to when he was 17 years old in 2009. Mohammad Hammad had noted that he utilized his blog as a place where he:

Discussed Palestinian issues, our history, current events/global politics, and all other manner of personal things. It had amassed several thousand followers over the years I had it, and through it I was aiding others around the world and helping to educate on the plight of Palestinians. I had helped numerous teachers/professors literally around the world with lesson plans on Palestine, even skyping into classes for Q&A sessions and to aid in lectures. It helped people with assignments, and I'd frequently answer any questions people had on Palestine & Israel [and the greater Middle East as well] (Hammad 2016).

Mohammad Hammad noted that at times he used dark and sardonic humor to contend with anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Muslim racism, and, at other times, to relay a political point. AMCHA, selectively picked out a few of his blog posts that expressed his resentment of the Israeli military and constructed an image of Mohammad as a sociopath and a threat to Jews on SFSU campus. Of the short list of posts that AMCHA plucked out, the one that AMCHA particularly highlighted showed Mohammad holding a knife with the caption:

I seriously cannot get over how much I love this blade. It is the sharpest thing I own and cuts through everything like butter and just holding it makes me want to stab an Israeli soldier (Hammad Tumblr 2013).

Mohammad's statement on Israeli soldiers is fantastical thinking, and it reflects his contempt for the occupying power that has subjected Palestinian families, including his own, for generations. Under Israeli colonization Palestinians have been subject to displacement, murder, and incarceration (Said 1979). Frantz Fanon argues in *Wretched of*

*the Earth* (1966), that there is a direct relationship between violence and the psyche of the oppressed in colonial situations as manifested in Palestine today. Fanon writes,

The appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals. For the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler. ...The practice of violence binds them [the natives] together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. ...At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect (Fanon 1966: 92-93).

Mohammad never physically assaulted anyone. His statements were a snapshot of Fanon's thesis on the cleansing force of violence for those who are disempowered by the colonial experience. Mohammad Hammad directed his fantasy at Israeli soldiers who are responsible for the colonial violence committed against Palestinians (Said 1979).

Despite the unreasonable nature of how Mohammad Hammad was misrepresented, the university, in accordance with AMCHA, brought Student Conduct charges against him. The Director of Student Conduct Osvaldo Del Valle presided over the conduct hearing at which Mohammad was forced to defend himself from allegations portraying him as a threat to campus safety. Del Valle conducted the hearing against Mohammad in a manner that echoed AMCHA's misrepresentation of him with no attempt to get his side of the story.

As part of the allegations made against Mohammad, Dr. Fred Astren, Chair of Jewish studies, wrote to the SFSU President claiming that he was worried for the safety of students and members of the faculty who had served in the Israeli military because of Mohammad Hammad's presence on campus. Mohammad Hammad said that he had never and would never hurt anyone. Mohammad admitted that given his little physical prowess, he would never get the upper hand in an altercation with someone with military training (Hammad 2016). The investigation centered around the ways in which Mohammad was suddenly constructed as a danger to campus, even though he did not pose a credible threat to the safety of the campus community. In violation of due process, SFSU placed the burden of proof on Mohammad during the hearing and he was forced to prove that he was innocent rather than SFSU having to prove he was guilty. This highlighted the power a group like AMCHA has over SFSU. The hearing was simply a formality as SFSU has already determined Mohammad Hammad guilty because a right-wing Israeli advocacy group accused him. At the end of the hearing Del Valle suspended Mohammad for one year. As a result, he was forced to withdraw from his classes, delayed his graduation for twelve months and canceled his plans to travel to Palestine to visit his relatives that summer.

Adding to the stresses of his suspension, Mohammad Hammad learned that AMCHA pursued legal charges against him and that the Joint Terrorism Task Force and the FBI were investigating him (Hammad 2016; AMCHA 2014). In February of 2014 Mohammad learned of the investigation when he was awakened by knocks on his front

door by FBI agents. He shared his terrifying experience, “Learning the details of the FBI investigation was particularly chilling. From my understanding of what was relayed to me, they had gotten my school schedule, followed me from my class all the way to where I was living at the time, over an hour away, and watched me in my home” (Hammad 2016). The Israeli Consulate got involved in the FBI investigations. And, just as Mohammad said from the beginning, the investigations concluded that he “presented no threat, had violated no laws, and there was no reason for any action to be taken against [him]” (Hammad 2016). Mohammad noted that the participation of the Israeli Consulate during the investigations was particularly “horrible” as he was afraid that Israel would deny him entry into Palestine based on the false accusations of anti-Semitism. Before the character assaults and investigations Mohammad Hammad had frequently traveled to Palestine where he reconnected with family in the West Bank. He has not been able to return since the assaults started in 2013 for fear that he will be denied entry, or worse, detained and arrested by Israeli soldiers (Mohammad 2013).

For Mohammad Hammad, the persecution is made worse by the fact that internet searches of his name and affiliation with SFSU turn up a long list of articles denouncing him as a violent supporter of terrorists and an anti-Semite. The university suspension gives false credence to these characterizations. Further, Mohammad Hammad was ostracized by those within and outside his communities. If it was the intent of the administration to isolate and make example of Mohammad, they were successful.

### **2013-2014: McCarthyite Style Assaults on Dr. Abdulhadi**

In addition to its smear campaign against Mohammad Hammad and GUPS, AMCHA went after GUPS advisor and AMED Senior Scholar Professor Rabab Abdulhadi. In a public statement, Dr. Abdulhadi challenged the mischaracterization of GUPS and the stencils and t-shirts on the grounds of academic freedom (Abdulhadi 2013). Dr. Abdulhadi resisted and challenged the racism AMCHA exhibits against Palestinian activist students. In turn, AMCHA launched a smear campaign against Dr. Abdulhadi asserting that Mohammad, “expressing a desire to stab Israeli soldiers, may have felt encouraged by Prof. Abdulhadi” (Rossman-Benjamin and Beckwith 2013.11.21 and 2013.12.10). As AMCHA escalated its smear campaign against Dr. Abdulhadi, it targeted her scholarship and the AMED academic program in a McCarthyite style.

In January 2014, Dr. Abdulhadi organized and led an Academic and Labor Delegation to Palestine. In March of 2014, delegation members Dr. Abdulhadi, SFSU Professor of American Indian Studies Joanne Barker, and union activist and former member of the Young Lords Party Jaime Veve who is also Dr. Abdulhadi’s partner, presented their first on-campus report of the delegation. The event brochure, designed by Professor Barker, said that:

Each delegate came to bear witness to the political and economic realities confronting Palestinians as a result of Israel’s occupation of their homeland and to build working relationships and solidarities with Palestinian scholars, artists, and activists consistent with their 2005 call for “a campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel

until it complies with international law and Palestinian rights” (College of Ethnic Studies 2014.07.17).

The three speakers shared their experiences on the delegation and what they learned from Palestinians. They also affirmed the endorsement of the academic boycott of Israel. Dr. Abdulhadi also shared that she was working on collaborative agreement with an-Najah University and Birzeit University in Palestine, to encourage inter-university goals and objectives of producing justice centered knowledge. In fact, President Wong had encouraged Dr. Abdulhadi to pursue these collaborations as he hoped to connect with donors in Arab and Muslim communities (Abdulhadi 2017a).

Individuals at the delegation report back, who later were revealed to have been connected to AMCHA, engaged in surveillance and audio-recorded the presentation. They then reported Dr. Abdulhadi to AMCHA Initiative. This was the second time that the movement of Palestinian activists and scholars at SFSU were spied on and reported to AMCHA. This confirmed that individuals were monitoring the movement of Palestinian activists and scholars on campus. Seeking to silence Palestinian scholarship and discredit criticism of Israel, AMCHA presented the work of the delegation as threatening the safety of Jewish students on campus. AMCHA also put forth allegations that Dr. Abdulhadi had misused public tax-payer funds to collude with Palestinian terrorists during the delegation (AMCHA et al. 2014.03.26). In a public statement, Dr. Abdulhadi detailed the inaccuracies and misrepresentations that AMCHA claimed and stated, “The

false allegations are part of a concerted intimidation campaign to limit academic freedom and suppress viewpoints critical of the Israeli state” (Abdulhadi 2014.06.18).

Nonetheless, in accordance with AMCHA’s, SFSU proceeded to audit the travel claims of Dr. Abdulhadi. In doing so, SFSU gave credence to the accusations instead of (1) putting a stop to the smear campaigns, protecting the faculty, and (2) exposing them as the partisan extremist organization bent on socially, politically, and professionally harming those they attack . The university ran three redundant audits of Dr. Abdulhadi’s travel expenses. Each investigation found no fault on Dr. Abdulhadi’s part and thus no wrong doing. The Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies, Ken Monteiro, Dean of the college Dr. Abdulhadi worked in, 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 work in Palestine and with Palestinians in the Diaspora, including but not limited to, the USA. ... 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 (Monteiro 2014.05.28).

Dean Monteiro here stresses that interference with the people scholars meet as part of their research is tantamount to censorship. By extension, the fact that the University conducted not one, but three audits, including audits of her international trips of the past five years, was an intimidation tactic by AMCHA to stifle her research on Palestine, an intimidation tactic that was carried out wittingly or unwittingly by the SFSU administration.

Despite the fact that AMCHA accusations were baselessness, the allegations held serious ramifications. AMCHA's joint letter was forwarded to California Attorney General Kamala Harris, Deputy Attorney General Stepan Haytayun, and a list of California State Senators and Assembly Members. This suggests that AMCHA sought legal prosecution of Dr. Abdulhadi, as it had against Mohammad Hammad, the former GUPS president who was investigated by the FBI. AMCHA's terrorist allegations against Dr. Abdulhadi and Mohammad held the possibility of formally pressing charges against them for acts of terrorism punishable under US law. This is not unprecedented as what they were going through was similar to the case of the Los Angeles 8, in which the eight defendants faced legal persecution and deportation proceedings, some for over 20 years, on trumped up charges of providing material support for communism and terrorism. The eight had distributed educational material and organized humanitarian aid fundraisers for Palestinians and the PLO in 1987 (Center for Constitutional Rights et al. 2007). As a result, Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS were forced to respond; for their safety, they could not leave unchallenged the baseless accusations of terrorism and anti-Semitism charged against them. This is a persistent pattern of harassment Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS have had to contend with and has over time become a stressful and exhausting exercise.

GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi spent hundreds of hours over months to organize a grassroots level campaign of self-defense. The false accusations forced them to: (1) defend their reputations from Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian libel; (2) prepare the evidence and defense for university and FBI investigations; and (3) expose AMCHA

for its McCarthyite attacks against Palestinian activism and scholarship. During the months when this defense was put together, GUPS students were taking full course loads at SFSU and Professor Abdulhadi lost her sabbatical to defend herself and the AMED studies program from the attacks. For Dr. Abdulhadi, the laborious defense ate up all of her sabbatical (Abdulhadi, personal correspondence 2016). Losing the time of her sabbatical delayed the publication of her book which focused on gender and sexual justice in Palestine and the need to develop justice centered pedagogies on Palestine. Her study fills an important gap within the academy since most curricular materials on Palestine focuses on Israel or frame it as the “Middle East” conflict without referencing Palestinians as a colonized people (Abdulhadi 2017a). Further, AMED’s curricular foci on justice for Palestine and Palestinians and on Arab and Muslim experiences is part of the *indivisibility of justice* frameworks Professor Abdulhadi uses to “oppose hatred and racism against any people” (Abdulhadi 2014). On means of combating Islamophobia, AMED is crucially important to student communities and to GUPS. Yet, her scholarship and standing among her peers also suffered as she was now falsely accused of anti-Semitism.

Many GUPS students’ grades suffered as the time it took to defend themselves ate into any time they had to study. The ordeal affected students’ future academic endeavors and future career options. Students were concerned over how they could explain to graduate school admission officers or to employers during a job interview, that the slump

in their grades or that gaps in their enrollment were due to their preoccupation with defending themselves and their peers from allegations of terrorism and anti-Semitism.

### **Assaults on Academic Freedom**

Public intellectuals argue that the role of the academy and academics is to challenge power and work towards a more just society (Said 1994; hooks 1995; Freire 1972). As Edward Said noted: “Criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom” (Said 1983: 29). It is in this spirit and under the protections of academic freedom that academics, public intellectuals, and the university should be morally bound to support marginalized and underrepresented communities, and should seek to dismantle oppressive structures that create their marginalization. Posing a threat to academic freedom, the network of Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian organizations seeks to stifle critical pedagogies (see Freire 1972), as well as justice centered and emancipatory education on Palestine. The term *New McCarthyism* that Dr. Abdulhadi coined to describe the systematic assaults on Palestinian activism and scholarship likens them to the 1950s history on college campuses where communist activism and scholarship were targeted and punished by law; repressive discourses presented communism as a threat to students’ safety and the safety of the nation (Abdulhadi 2014; Missé and Ghandehari 2017). The New McCarthyism does not single out communism as a threat, but rather targets Palestinian calls for justice.

Where the organizations I detailed used accusations of terrorism and anti-Semitism to stifle Palestinian scholarship and activism, SFSU launched accusations of “incivility” to accomplish the same goal. Giroux (2014) notes that for university administrators, incivility has become “code for those who take intellectual risks and are willing to think critically and hold power accountable. ... this banalized appropriation of civility is code for a flight from moral, political, and pedagogical responsibility” (2014: 82). As a case in point, the 2015 hire of Palestinian scholar Dr. Steven Salaita was revoked by trustees at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign after they labeled Salaita’s posts on his personal Twitter account criticizing the 2014 Israeli bombings of Gaza “uncivil” (Salaita 2015). The firing of Salaita reflects how people in positions of power, such as university administrators, evoke the concept of civility to suppress activism, scholarship and ideological positions that challenge hegemonic political discourses in general, and Palestine specifically (Salaita 2015; Dutt-Ballerstadt 2016).

Note that at SFSU, Presidents Corrigan and Wong consistently used the notion of “civility” against GUPS and Palestinians on campus. In 2013 President Wong condemned the actions of GUPS during the mural celebrations as undermining: (1) “civil dialogue,” (2) “a safe and civil campus environment,” and (3) “a campus culture that cherishes civility (Wong November 19, 2013). In 2002 President Corrigan wrote that GUPS protesters lacked “civility and decency” (Corrigan May 13, 2002). In 2016, President Wong publicly noted in a campus wide email that he was “concerned for the state of civil discourse” after GUPS and their allies protested the visit by the mayor of Jerusalem Nir

Barkat (Wong April 7, 2016). In 2006 President Corrigan publicly noted that the GUPS designed mural “is at odds with the most fundamental values to which San Francisco State University is committed” (Corrigan July 7, 2006). While Corrigan did not use the term civility *per se*, condemning GUPS as antithetical to the university was based on that concept.

When used in reference to poor people, people of color, and indigenous and 3<sup>rd</sup> World peoples, the concept of civility echoes a long history of colonialism. In *Orientalism* (1979), Said details how Western knowledge of a constructed “Orient” was deployed by Western intellectuals and how such knowledge presented the West in binary opposition to the imagined “Orient”. In these constructions, the West was defined as the *civilized* world, and the “Orient” as the *uncivilized* and savage world. As Said argues, knowledge is a form of power across social spheres (Said 1979). Orientalist knowledge, and the dichotomy of civilized/uncivilized, played out to rationalize and legitimate global Western colonialism (Said 1979) that remains discursively alive at SFSU.

Civility is discursively evoked by the university in this context. SFSU subjects Palestinian activists on campus to a litmus test that evokes the University’s concept of “civility”. According to the constructed binary Palestinians and other marginalized communities on campus either fit in/line up with university interests and expectations (in which case they are civil) or they do not (in which case they are uncivil). These university interests are increasingly defined by three criteria: (1) the neo-liberal

corporatization of colleges which prioritizes economic management by private means and the interests that come with it (Giroux 2014); (2) the university's role in supporting state policies, imperialism, and racism (Ahmed 2012; Chatterjee and Maira 2014); and (3) the university's role in "defining the racial boundaries of the nation and its 'proper' subjects and 'proper' politics" (Chatterjee and Maira 2014:7). These criteria for civility are used to justify attacks against Palestinian activism, scholarship and advocacy which challenge hegemonic discourses on Israeli dominance (Abdulhadi et al. 2017).

### **Spring 2016: Recurrent Assaults**

In this section, I explore the assaults on academic freedom of Palestinian students at SFSU by examining the coercive actions of the university following protest against an Israeli politician. In April of 2016 GUPS and its allies protested a speech on SFSU campus by the mayor of Jerusalem Nir Barkat, a city that is held under Israeli occupation (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1982). Over a period of months beginning in April, 2016, and still going as of this writing in Spring 2017, GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi faced numerous and redundant university investigations and were(are) forced to defend themselves from another smear campaign. As GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi were only just recovering from the 2013/2014 assaults against them, the 2016 assaults again drew them into a vicious cycle of activism and exhaustion, which has typified the experiences of Palestinians on SFSU campus.

On April 6, 2016, twenty students from GUPS and their allies in anti-colonial student organizations protested a campus visit of the mayor of occupied Jerusalem Nir Barkat. The protesters moved out of their seats and collected on one side of the room. Protestors chanted, “We don’t want you on our campus”, “Get the fuck off our campus.” Palestinians in particular repeated the chants that are used in protests against the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian land, “Free Palestine”; “Long live the intifada”; “From the River to the Sea Palestine will be Free.” Student allies brought a bullhorn and GUPS members Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat directed the chants from its microphone. Barkat then moved to the other side of the room, huddled with Pro-Israeli students and members of the SFSU administration, and with his own microphone in hand, continued his speech and engaged in a question and answer period. SFSU administrators from Student Services, in attendance from the start, remained seated during the protest. The students continued their protest until Nir Barkat left the room forty-five minutes later.

On April 18, 2016 GUPS issued a statement explaining why students protested the mayor of occupied Jerusalem’s campus visit. As a member of the Likud, the right-wing political party chaired by the current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Nir Barkat is committed to the party platform that the Jordan River will be Israel’s permanent border and that it will not allow the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian state within those borders (i.e. the West Bank; *Y Net News* 2008). Barkat’s policies seek to push Palestinians out of Jerusalem and revoke their Israeli

citizenships. He supports the expansions of illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem that were declared in violation of international law by UN resolution 2334, in 2016. Threatening public safety, Barkat has a history of neglecting and limiting municipal services to Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem (GUPS 05.04.2016). Nir Barkat's call for Jews in Jerusalem to carry guns directly incited violence against Palestinians (The Jerusalem Post 2015.10.09). Nir Barkat represents a racist wing of the Israeli political spectrum, and advocates for Jerusalem to be made the official capital of Israel. His politics are considered detestable by many in Jerusalem.

In April of 2017, students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem protested Barkat's appearance by chanting, "End discrimination. End the occupation" ; "A racist municipality is a security threat". Their chant "Don't worry Nir Barkat, we'll see you in The Hague" highlighted Barkat's Palestinian de-population plans as crimes against international humanitarian law that may one day be persecuted in international criminal courts in The Hague (Alternative News 04.23.2017; Horn 2010). For some Palestinian GUPS members, the violence espoused by Barkat directly affects their families in Jerusalem, some of whom were uprooted from the city in 1948 and forced to live in refugee camps; others have families who faced discrimination and are denied entry into Jerusalem. Capturing their motivation for protesting Barkat's visit, GUPS wrote: "It is our responsibility as student leaders for equality to act ethically and stand up against oppression wherever it may occur, including in Palestine" (GUPS 05.04.2016).

The day after the protest of the mayor of occupied Jerusalem's visit, President Wong sent an email to the entire campus expressing his "concern for the state of civil discourse on our campus" (Wong April 7, 2016). In yet another stigmatization of 'uncivilized' Palestinian activism on campus, Wong denounced the protest, announced a university investigation of the student demonstration, and promised more stringent enforcement of campus policies (Wong April 7, 2016). Wong's message highlighted the campus power imbalance and the systematic censorship of Palestinian advocacy.

President Wong, wrote that he apologized to the mayor of occupied Jerusalem and had invited him back to campus (The Jewish News of Northern California 05.06.16). Not once did President Wong mention Barkat's politics and actions, instead he sanitized the issues surrounding his visit describing it as bipartisan debate and ignoring the systematic Palestinian disenfranchisement Barkat advocates for. Although he was made well aware of Barkat's oppression towards Palestinians, Wong's re-invitation signaled to GUPS, their allies and anyone concerned with Palestine, the president's unwillingness to support justice for Palestinians. President Wong could have invited to campus any number of Palestinian or Israeli scholars or politicians who support justice in Palestine. Instead, his act of inviting a right wing and racist politician onto campus violated the social justice legacy of SFSU. Further, President Wong's invitation to the mayor of occupied Jerusalem symbolically signified the university's approval of Barkat and raised concerns that the university would not conduct a fair hearing on GUPS.

Within a week of the protest, Canary Mission - a national website that smears Palestinian advocates on campus as anti-Semitic - posted the names of SFSU student protestors. Canary Mission's profiles include links to students' and faculty's social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn giving access to personal communications of those targeted (Jewish Voice for Peace 2015; California Scholars for Academic Freedom 10.11.2016). The Canary Mission's profiles of Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat, GUPS members and protest-chant leaders, led to harassment and violent threats against them, and calls to the employer of one of them demanding she be fired. Soon after, GUPS members noticed strangers following them around campus, taking photos of the GUPS office and of students leaving the office. Strangers called the Cesar Chavez Student Union sending harassing messages and demanding to speak with GUPS members.

In the following days, four more student protestors were targeted by Canary Mission. The targeted students suspected that their classroom peers in SF Hillel had sent Canary Mission their names, as there was no way the national organization would have otherwise known their identities. SFSU did not investigate how students' names were released, did not release a public statement denouncing Canary Mission for publicizing personal information, nor did they decry the harassment that followed. Rather, the university made only superficial gestures to defend Palestinian students from these assaults and the bullying campaigns they endured. At best, had they done so, the university could have addressed the root cause of the wave of harassment and put an end

to it; or, at the very least, administrative support would have demonstrated to GUPS students that the university was protecting them. Instead, the university's gesture was to offer a police escort to the students and a meeting with the office of the Dean of Students (Assistant Dean of Students Stuart 04.18.2016).

In correspondence with the Dean of Students, GUPS member Linda Ereikat expressed their concern over the lack of university support:

... Yes, I'm feeling seriously afraid, anxious, and threatened. The tweets, comments, and blogposts have turned violent and extremely hateful and bring back trauma. This is a scary moment for me. I am concerned about my ability to participate fully in campus life, to study, to walk alone, and I am concerned about my employment, as the Twitter account associated with the website Canary Mission has been actively tweeting Bank of America telling them that they should fire me. I have received numerous threatening and hateful comments over social media, that I'd like to share with you. I would like to meet to seek the university's support. It would really help me because I don't know what else to do.

As you know, I am a Palestinian student and I experience all of these attacks as targeting me because I'm Palestinian.

But, I am aware, via President Wong's public communication - that the university is investigating the protest, and planning to issue student conduct charges against protesters. You can imagine that I am seriously concerned about being unfairly targeted through that process. I already have a lot of anxiety and unrest due to my now negative social media reputation and threats that is affecting me emotionally. So, I would like to clarify, is the purpose of our meeting to offer me support?

"Afraid, anxious, and threatened," this was how GUPS students felt in that moment. Not only were they receiving threats from anti-Palestinian bigots, but their own university brought charges against them. Simultaneously they faced the threat of unemployment, suspension and physical assault. The online harassment directed at Lubna Morrar and

Linda Ereikat included sexual and gendered threats and harassment. They received threats of rape. The gendered assaults cast Linda Ereikat as a “terrorist cheerleader” and one harassing post attacked Lubna Morrar’s career choice with “why are we wasting tax payers’ dollars to educate a hair stylist?” Linda Ereikat tells me that during this time she could not eat. She felt like throwing up in the morning because of the anxiety.

GUPS members sought counseling and were seen by the head of counseling Dr. Derechia Duval, and counselors Susan Chen, Chair of the SFSU chapter of California Faculty Association Affirmative Action Committee, and Michael Ritter, member of the SFSU Senate Executive Committee. Their studies suffered, yet again, as GUPS members were forced to spend hundreds of hours defending themselves and their reputations against Canary Mission’s smear campaign while simultaneously preparing their defense in the university investigation.

Two members of GUPS, Amena and Lubna Morrar, had been active GUPS members throughout the 2013/2014 smear campaigns against Mohammad Hammad, GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi. Amena and Lubna Morrar had to go through the same traumatic experience. Yet again, Dr. Abdulhadi defended GUPS from these assaults, helped them strategize on their defense and arranged for them to meet with counselors to alleviate their anxieties. GUPS then started a campaign at the grassroots level, asking for support from student allies, faculty across campus, Palestinian organizations in the SF Bay Area, and wider Palestinian activist networks in the US and internationally.

At the same time, during the Spring of 2016, the “Defend and Advance Ethnic Studies” campaign was underway to secure funding for the College of Ethnic Studies. SFSU administrators had cut the budget of the College. The systematic underfunding of Ethnic Studies and the threat of losing funding for two retiring professors in Africana Studies sparked a massive student led campaign to fund and enlarge the college. The campaign was directed at the SFSU president and provost. Hundreds of students demonstrated and aired their grievances with the university at a town hall meeting in Seven Hills Conference Center with President Wong, Provost Sue Rosser, and other top university administrators. Four students from the College of Ethnic Studies went on a hunger strike for nine days. Receiving a lot of media attention, the university opened negotiations on funding the college. First on the list of demands submitted to the administration was the reinstatement of the two AMED professors (GUPS 05.05.2016). President Corrigan had cut the positions in 2009 in direct breach of Dr. Abdulhadi’s contract as well as breaking his commitments to Palestinian communities.

When Dr. Abdulhadi was hired in 2007 to develop AMED studies, her employment conditions specified the hiring of faculty to collectively build the program. During contract negotiations, she and the university settled on two tenure track professors as a start. Searches for the two professor positions were underway in 2009, when former SFSU President Corrigan cancelled AMED searches along with other faculty searches claiming it was a budgetary issue. However, while the other searches were restored, AMED’s were not. Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS members suspect this was the university’s

way of punishing them for GUPS' invitation of BDS activist and co-founder Omar Barghouti to speak at the Palestinian Cultural Mural event in 2009 which AMED co-sponsored (Abdulhadi 2016; Loubna Qutami 2017).

GUPS members heavily participated in the campaign to support AMED. They devoted dozens of hours strategizing, demonstrating and meeting with administrators to advance financial support for the Ethnic Studies curriculum and the advancement of AMED. GUPS members were especially hurt when SFSU administrators reneged on their commitments regarding AMED faculty hires by outright failure to meet their commitments, and under false pretext, unsuccessfully attempted to defame the students' trusted mentor and advisor Dr. Abdulhadi, claiming that she misled them. This campaign left GUPS feeling emotionally exhausted and further marginalized.

The day after the protest of the campus visit of Nir Barkat, GUPS members met with the local chapter of Palestine Youth Movement, and the Arab Resource and Organizing Center. During the meeting, GUPS shared the sense of empowerment that they felt leaving the protest. But, fully cognizant of the potential backlash, they wanted to strategize their defense. Having been members during the 2013 public assault on GUPS, Amena and Lubna Morrar knew from past experience that it was unwise to communicate with the press. When they urged other GUPS members to avoid the press, instead of seeing this as a defense strategy some members interpreted it as indicating shame of their actions. Amena articulated her analysis:

There are lots of emotions going around. This is something serious, but it is not something that has happened for first time in on-campus student organizing. I think that not wanting to talk about the protest in public is for our protection, and not necessarily that we are hiding it (Amena, April 8, 2016).

“Lots of emotions going around,” was an accurate snapshot of the emotional tenor of the meeting. For many GUPS members, the protest had been the first demonstration in which they participated. They shared their excitement and their willingness to take direction from the more seasoned GUPS activists and from their mentor Dr. Abdulhadi, since for them this was something new and they did not fully know what to expect. This represents how GUPS members continue to be renewed with new inexperienced yet highly motivated Palestinian students who are not fully aware of the perils of being a Palestinian student activist and signifies how each year there is a learning curve students must go through over the course of their SFSU activism. The more seasoned GUPS activists shared their sense of pride but also anxiety as they knew they had just gotten themselves into a set of circumstances that would require a whole lot of work. For those unfamiliar with Palestinian student activism, the anxiety they expressed could have been misunderstood as regret, but it is far from it. The anticipatory anxiety stemmed from the frustrations of consistently being targeted, vilified, and marginalized by pro-Israel organizations as well as the SFSU administration. The activists suspected that their schedules and their lives were going to be turned upside down for the next few months by SFSU administrators who consistently sided with pro-Israeli groups and sought to

discipline and punish Palestinian students and Dr. Abdulhadi. They resented the university for that. Reflecting on that sentiment, Amena said, “I’ve been on campus for 3 years. Why do I have to go through this again and again? It’s not fair to expect to have a hearing every time we have an event. It is very stressful!” (Amena 2016)

During the meeting of April 8, 2016, Amena shared her worries that the bad press concerning the protest might affect her family’s ability to travel to Palestine and that Israel might deny her parents entry because of her actions. She shared that for the same reasons and fears, Mohammad Hammad had not traveled to Palestine since the smear campaign against him in 2013. Insensitive to Amena’s sense of Palestinian diasporic identity and the fact that she considers Palestine her home, Majed Abuzahriyeh responded “Let’s not be worried about our summer vacations” (Shabaneh 2010, Joseph 1999, Abdulhadi 2003). Amena replied: “It’s way beyond that.” Then she stopped in mid-sentence out of frustration that a fellow Palestinian didn’t understand how she felt about Palestine as home.

Palestinians with U.S. citizenship, including some GUPS members, can travel to Palestine and reconnect with their family relatives. Amena’s comments were specifically in reference to fear of a temporary ban from Palestine, or, in extreme cases, being made permanently exiled from Palestine along with members of her extended family. In such cases, return, under the current political power structures, would be made impossible. These fears were exacerbated in March of 2017, when the Israeli parliament passed a law

barring entry to non-Israeli citizens and Palestinian human rights activists who advocate for Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) campaigns directed at Israel (Mondoweiss 2017.03.08). SFSU's condemnation of GUPS and the university's negligence in defending GUPS from public smearing have serious and real global consequences, since these abuses exacerbate Palestinian students' vulnerabilities at the borders of Palestine and threatened their safety and security.

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016, SFSU Student Services officer Osvaldo Del Valle once again presided over an SFSU student conduct hearing to investigate and possibly prosecute GUPS organizational standing at the university. The university said the charges against GUPS were based on its members' use of a bullhorn in violation of university sound policies. Yet these policies have only inconsistently been implemented in the past. During the hearing, Dr. Abdulhadi, and Dr. Derethia Duval attended as observers, the only role the university allowed them. At the hearing Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat asked who brought the complaints against them. Director Del Valle showed them the charges and complaints of the protest brought forth by the Dean of Students Mary Ann Begley, the Assistant Dean of Students Brian Stuart, the Interim Chief of Police of the SFSU Police Department Reggie Parson, and both the Student Organization Coordinator Larry Birello and Greek & Student Organization Advisor Lee Twyman of the Student Activities and Events office. To GUPS, this list of high ranking administrators across several offices confirmed that SFSU was institutionally opposed to GUPS and Palestinian student activism. The event was predominately a lecture not a trial, a patronizing talking down at

GUPS. It was an attempt to convince Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat to redefine their actions to make them acceptable to what SFSU deems approved forms of protest. GUPS understood this to mean that SFSU permits the idea of protest but not the practice. Where SFSU claims to welcome the idea of campus activism, it has set in place regulations to intimidate and punish its manifestation.

At the end of the hearing, Director Del Valle handed Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat a prepared statement in which he claimed that that the accused had broken Time, Place, and Manner (TPM) regulations. It said that although they had received an official warning on TMP, that they were nonetheless excused. Nevertheless, with the statement also included the exiting clause that the emergence of new information can result in the university's reopening of the charges against the students and GUPS. This exit clause did not contribute to students' relief; rather, it deepened their well-founded fears that they might be suspended because they saw the clause for what it was- as an intimidation tactic to stifle and persecute future activism.

On June 9, 2016 GUPS members Linda Ereikat, Yusra Oweis, Amena, Lubna Morrar and I, along with Dr. Abdulhadi, as an advisor, met with President Wong, Vice President of Student Services Luoluo Hong, and Chief of Staff Alison Sanders. SFSU administrators presented a few points worth noting. First, President Wong admitted that there has been selective enforcement of the university policies that were codified and referred to as *Time Place and Manner* (TPM) rules. Second, the President said that he

was working with his cabinet to restructure TPM in order to “find the right balance of activism we [the SFSU administration] are willing to accept and activism that we aren’t willing to accept” (author’s meeting notes June 9, 2016). Third, President Wong said that he has hired a private law firm to investigate the protest as well as to investigate the university’s response to it.

President Wong said that students can still be punished depending on the outcome of the private investigation and he offered no immunity or willingness to drop the charges despite students demands. He left suspension and expulsion as possibilities on the grounds that TPM regulations had been broken, even though he admitted that it was selectively (and thus, discriminatorily) applied. GUPS noted that suspension or expulsion of students for use of amplified sound was a drastic punitive measure. To that, Vice President Hong responded, in her time at SFSU, “never has the use of a microphone been used as the grounds for suspension” (author’s meeting notes June 9, 2016). VP Hong said that, “When others perceive that their rights were violated, we [SFSU administration] have to intervene” (author’s meeting notes June 9, 2016). GUPS responded by listing the pattern of discrimination against Palestinian activists on campus. To this, President Wong replied: “If you think you are the only group that we have targeted you would be quite wrong. What I want to get back to is there is no absolute freedom to activism” (author’s, meeting notes June 9, 2016).

VP Hong asked if we or any of the protestors talked to Jewish students or threatened them; this is the only question the administrators asked GUPS students during the entire two-hour long meeting. Linda Ereikat and Yusra Oweis responded: “We did not harass the other students, the other students harassed us. They yelled at us and gave us the finger” (author’s, meeting notes June 9, 2016). During the meeting, GUPS stressed the importance of AMED studies and teaching about Palestine on campus; this they said, would combat Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism. In addition, GUPS members stressed the need to develop the program and reinstate the two faculty lines of AMED. President Wong and VP Hong would not talk about AMED or the structural remedies needed to combat the racism GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi are subjected to.

GUPS members left the meeting feeling that nothing had changed and that the university was disingenuous in meeting with GUPS as they were only going through the motions. Moreover, they felt further disenfranchised by the president’s statements as the new structural changes the President proposed were intended to tighten the regulations on student activism and more strictly enforce them. GUPS members felt criminalized and especially vulnerable to suspension or expulsion because of President Wong’s decision to hire a private investigator and the potential of suspension or expulsion it might bring.

A week after the GUPS meeting with the president, the Director of Student Conduct, Osvaldo Del Valle, was asked to resign from the university by VP Hong. He did resign. No longer an employee of the university, Del Valle opened up about his

experiences. He told Lubna Morrar that no one in Student Conduct wanted to bring charges against GUPS students for the protest; however, it was an unstated demand from higher-up administrators that he should do so (Lubna Morrar, personal correspondence August 25, 2017). Officially, SFSU administrators claimed he was let go for improperly handling the case by not disclosing to VP Hong the threats made against the Palestinian students on social media. However, it is widely acknowledged among those who work and interact with Student Services that he was, in essence, fired for not bringing harsher punishments onto GUPS.

In August of 2016 the university-appointed law corporation of Van Dermyden Maddux completed its investigation of the protest, and their report was published. The report indicated that the university had made many mistakes preparing and securing a room for speech. Further, their findings corroborated everything GUPS members had said throughout the proceedings. Among other findings, the report confirmed that: (1) GUPS did not threaten Jewish students. The investigation found no evidence to support claims of being threatened brought by three Jewish students. It concluded that GUPS had presented no threat to public safety (Van Dermyden Maddux 09.24.2016: 3); (2) GUPS students were not approached by administrators to stop protesting; the students could not reasonably have known that a man in plain-clothes who asked them to stop was in fact a police officer (Van Dermyden Maddux 09.24.2016: 3); and (3) “The Protestors’ chanting and use of amplified sound disrupted the event. However, several witnesses noted that the campus has tolerated similar disruptions at past events in a manner that was arguably also

in violation of this same policy, yet without ramifications to the offenders” (Van Dermeyden Maddux 09.24.2016: 3). This last finding highlights not only the inconsistent and disproportionate treatment GUPS faces but also the means by which the university has selectively enforced its policies to punish critiques of Israel on campus. As noted above, President Wong admitted as much when he confirmed in the June 9<sup>th</sup> meeting with GUPS that there has been selective enforcement of university policies on campus.

Thus, President Wong at least is fully cognizant of how the university marginalizes and prejudicially treats GUPS. SFSU administrators’ response was to tighten policies and policing on campus, a move which caused GUPS members to conclude that they were being treated as involuntary subjects in the university’s field-testing of its campus-control policies.

In late August 2016, VP Hong laid out the proposed policy changes to university protocol. These were published in a statement titled, “Initiatives & Interventions in Response to Incidents at Mayor Nir Barkat Event, April 2016” (Student Affairs and Enrollment Management 2016). Leaving no room for imagination, the university publicly declared that it was changing university policy because of the GUPS protest. These changes included calls for: (1) clarity and strengthening of language to the *Student Organization Conduct Policy* which defines the student conduct policies; (2) extensive training of university officials to respond to protests; (3) strategies to inform students of student conduct policies; and (4) the development of a 5-step intervention guideline when

violations to student conduct occur (Student Affairs and Enrollment Management 2016). The training of university officials included a joint-training session between the University Police Department (UPD) and the office of the Dean of Students. The training included ways to identify demonstration leaders and to build communication with the leaders as to put an end to demonstrations (San Francisco State University 2016).

These guidelines placed the burden of responsibility of any demonstration onto its student leaders. In doing so, facilitating the university goal to bring student conduct charges against them for discipline and punishment in their attempts to modify their behavior (Foucault 1977), as it did in the case of Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat. Further, the guidelines stated that limits on amplified sound were to be strictly enforced. The Dean of Students noted that any noise above 75 decibels outside of permitted areas or without former permission violated student conduct polices, “Even multiple voices could be considered amplified sound” (Begley, email 04.03.2017). In addition, the 5-step intervention guideline of the Dean of Students included police presence beginning at step 2, police removal of student protesters at step 4, and arrest by the police or citizen’s arrest by members of the office of the Dean of Students at step 5 (Student Affairs and Enrollment Management 2016). To GUPS and their allies, this is an indication of the co-optation of the office of Dean of Students for student policing purposes by unreasonable and overly restrictive policies.

By the end of the Spring 2016 semester, GUPS members were exhausted. They broke for the summer and the members went their own ways. Their intentions to organize and mobilize students to resist the university's tightening control over student policies was going to pick up in the Fall. They took the time to recuperate. Amena and Yusra tested their luck and booked a flight to Palestine that summer, uncertain if they would be allowed entry. As they flew in a few days apart, they consistently checked-in with each other asking repeatedly, "Did you get in?" Each felt nervous whenever there was not an immediate response that might have been due to lapses in cell coverage and Wi-Fi internet connection. GUPS returned to campus apprehensive and still traumatized and exhausted from the previous semester. Still, members looked forward to reconnecting with their campus friends and allies.

**Fall 2016:**

As the Fall semester began Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS were victimized by another smear campaign by the same network of organizations. In September 2016, the Middle East Forum - a right wing think tank led by Daniel Pipes - launched a petition demanding that SFSU revoke its memorandum of understanding (MOU) with an-Najah National University in Palestine. The demand was made under misguided and exaggerated accusations which characterized an-Najah being as a site for terrorist collaborators. The Forum also smeared Dr. Abdulhadi, who initiated, designed and proposed the MOU, asserting that she was a terrorist apologist (Middle East Forum 2016). The MOU with an-

Najah University was intended to build transnational and co-learning pedagogies with Palestinian communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and Palestine about their experiences and their struggles for justice.

Because of SFSU's patterned response of acting against AMED and Dr. Abdulhadi, she quickly organized a campaign to defend the MOU with an-Najah and demanded that SFSU defend the MOU publicly. Others joined the campaign, and while dozens of statements of support for the MOU from many scholarly and activist organizations denounced the false characterization of an-Najah as a terrorist collaborator, the SFSU's response was muted, too ambiguous and vague. The response noted that SFSU has 106 partnerships in 35 countries, asserted its support for the academic freedom for all its faculty. However, tellingly, it did not name Professor Abdulhadi who was targeted or an-Najah that was also smeared (CBS 2016.09.09). The Palestinian faculty member, Dr. Abdulhadi, and the MOU of cooperation with the Palestinian university an-Najah were under fire and there was an immediate need to name and support them publicly as the university administration is responsible with doing. Instead SFSU's statement obscured the specificities of the assaults on Palestinian scholarship when it made no mention of it but relegated it to generalities.

Two weeks later David Horowitz, who has been identified as "a driving force of the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-black movements," (Southern Poverty Law Center: David Horowitz) falsely accused SFSU of being one of the top ten schools

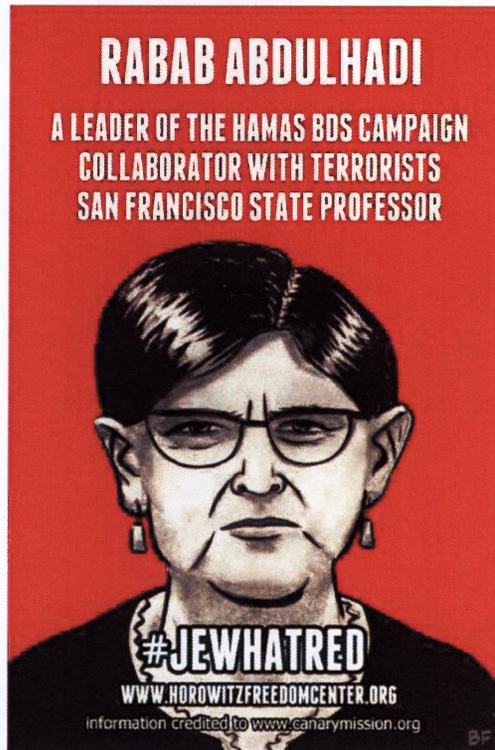
supporting terrorists (Horowitz 2016a). The David Horowitz Freedom Center one again smeared GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi, labeling their support of justice for Palestine terrorism. A week after this smearing of SFSU was published, the David Horowitz Freedom Center escalated its tactics, plastering racist, Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian bullying posters all over the SFSU campus. The posters targeted Dr. Abdulhadi, and Students for Justice in Palestine which they equated with GUPS and Palestinian student activists.

On the morning of October 14, 2016, Rex, an SFSU student who has worked closely with GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi, found a poster with the caricature of Dr. Abdulhadi, along with her name and the caption “Jew Hatred.” He tore down the poster and contacted GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi. Students broke out and began to search campus for more posters. They found dozens of execrable posters plastered throughout heavy trafficked areas of campus. Posters were found in front of the library, the campus quad, Malcolm X Plaza, the entrance to the garage of the Administration Building and the main MUNI Bus Stop on campus on the intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Holloway Avenue. A second poster depicted a bull’s eye over individuals labeled Europe, America and Israel in the center sporting the caption, “Think the terrorist war won’t come here? Think again”. A third poster depicted a gun-slinging individual labeled “Hamas” who served as the puppet master to another individual labeled, “American Muslims for Palestine.” This individual in turn was depicted as the puppeteer of a third individual labeled “Students for Justice in Palestine”. A fourth poster depicted an individual wearing the Palestinian Keffiyeh/Hatta

and holding a rifle with the names of SFSU Palestinian student activists and their allies that had been targeted on Canary Mission. Students led efforts tore down all of these posters after taking photos and documenting them. These posters are reproduced below.



Professor Rabab Abdulhadi  
(Abdulhadi, 2016).



Smear poster of  
Professor Rabab  
Abdulhadi (Horowitz  
Freedom Center,  
2016b).

**STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE - HAMAS**  
A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION WHOSE STATED GOAL IS TO EXTERMINATE THE JEWS

**HAMAS:**  
A TERROR ORGANIZATION PLEDGED TO WIPE OUT ISRAEL

**AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE**  
HAMAS-CREATED CHIEF ORGANIZER AND FUNDER OF SJP

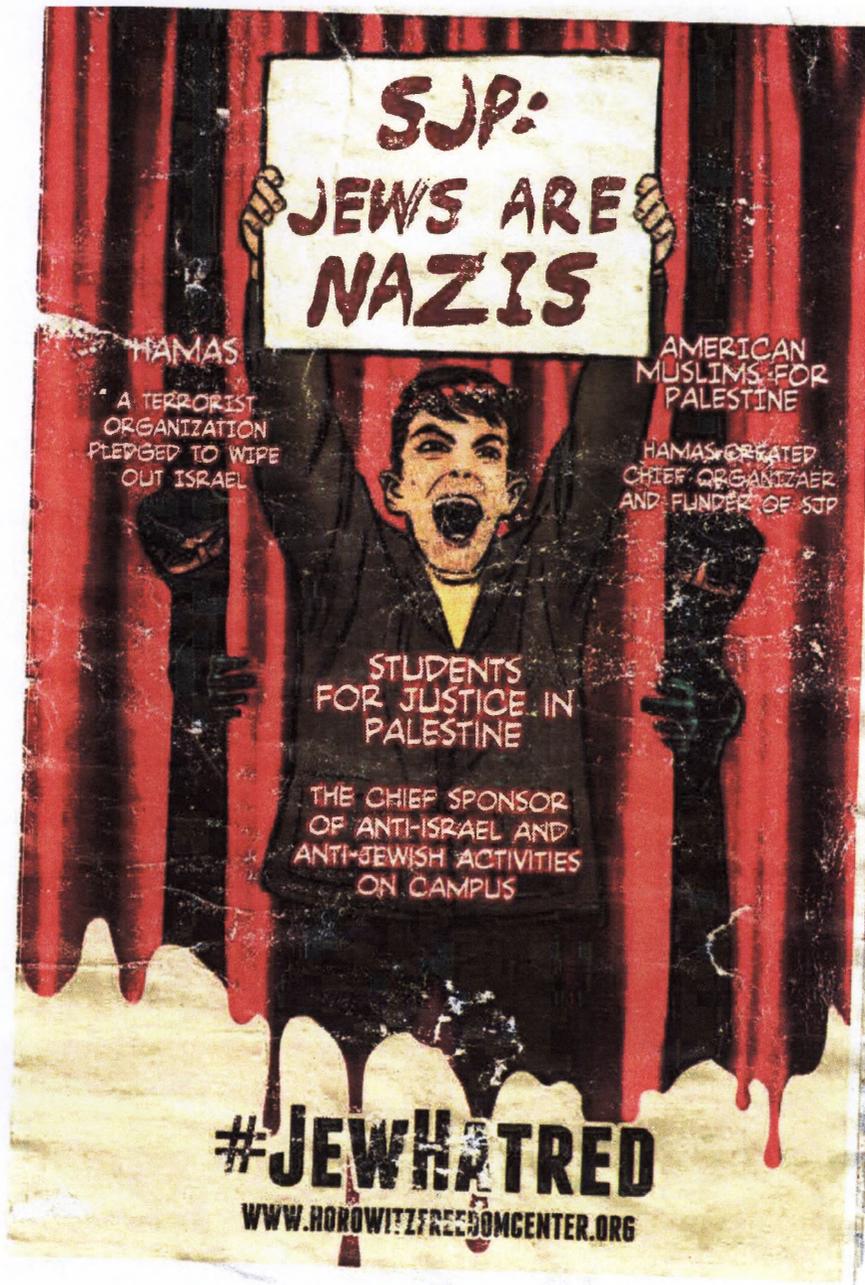
**STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE**  
THE CHIEF SPONSOR OF ANTI-ISRAEL AND ANTI-JEWISH ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES**  
FUND SJP AS A LEGITIMATE STUDENT GROUP

**#JewHatred**

[www.HorowitzFreedomCenter.org](http://www.HorowitzFreedomCenter.org)

Smear poster found at SFSU on October 14, 2016 (Horowitz Freedom Center, 2016b).



Smear poster found at SFSU on October 14, 2016 (Horowitz Freedom Center, 2016b).

**THINK THE  
TERRORIST WAR  
WON'T COME HERE?**



**THINK  
AGAIN.**

[www.HorowitzFreedomCenter.org](http://www.HorowitzFreedomCenter.org)

Smear poster found at SFSU on October 14, 2016 (Horowitz Freedom Center, 2016b).



Smear poster found at SFSU on October 14, 2016 (Horowitz Freedom Center, 2016b).

The event left a chilling effect on Dr. Abdulhadi, GUPS and those who heard about it. Dozens of faculty and students at SFSU wrote statements and signed petitions demanding that President Wong take a firmer stand to protect the safety of Dr. Abdulhadi and Palestinians students on campus. However, President Wong ignored their petitions and a request signed by over 50 SFSU faculty members to meet with him about the event (Abdulhadi, personal correspondence 2017a). In December 2016, VP Hong admitted that the administration knew about the posters early in the morning, but choose not to instruct campus facilities to remove them until late in the afternoon, long after the students had already torn them down. The university's negligence and marginalization of GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi was evidenced in VP Hong's admission. She said the administrators had been in meetings all morning and they choose not to interrupt them. When the meetings' attendees finally discussed the posters, they debated for a long time whether removing them would infringe on the freedom of speech of the David Horowitz Freedom Center (author's meeting notes 2016.12.19). To GUPS members this meant the university feared a lawsuit as David Horowitz is infamous for legal harassment; this indicated to them that the university's primary concern was not their protection but insurance losses.

On the day the posters were found, President Wong sent out an email condemning them but making no mention of Dr. Abdulhadi, GUPS, Palestinians, Islamophobia, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, or anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudices. Wong's statement confused those who read it, as they were given no idea what problems the president referred to. SFSU again offered Dr. Abdulhadi as well as the Palestinian

students and their allies named on the posters police escorts and counseling services. Once again, the university ignored urgent requests for university protection that was public, unambiguous and structural.

In response to the posters, Dr. Abdulhadi, GUPS, and supporters of Palestinian rights launched a grassroots campaign to demand that the university: (1) conduct an investigation on how dozens of posters had been plastered with wheat glue across campus without detection and had been allowed to remain; (2) publicly and unambiguously defend and support Dr. Abdulhadi, GUPS and the named students; (3) end the hostile work and study environment at SFSU; and (4) reinstate the two AMED lines in order to teach what Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination is and how to combat them (Abdulhadi, personal correspondence 2016). Through the campaign, hundreds of individuals across academic institutions and civil rights organizations signed and submitted statements in support of Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS (Abdulhadi, 2017a). Despite this, SFSU has yet to respond to the reasonable needs of Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS. Rather than taking proactive steps to protect Palestinians and Palestinian academic freedom on campus, SFSU administrators placed the onus on Palestinians by saying that if they want something from the university then they needed to push the university administrators. Again, the already traumatized GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi found themselves forced to launch their own defense from smear campaigns.

SFSU's response – or lack of response – has serious consequences for Palestinians on campus. The fear and anxiety Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS felt are palpable. Dr. Abdulhadi is afraid to walk across campus alone and has had to rely on her student assistants and faculty peers to walk with her. For Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS members even re-telling the stories of their experiences at SFSU is an emotionally taxing and painful task. Dr. Abdulhadi writes, "In my case, every time I tell the story of how SFSU betrayed its commitments to me and the community I experience a very deep sense of disappointment, sadness, anger, and anxiety" (Abdulhadi 2017b). Linda Ereikat prefers not to talk about the assaults against her at all as its emotionally triggering. But as Dr. Abdulhadi and GUPS are entrenched in the campaign to get accountability and structural changes from the university, they are forced to keep retelling their stories.

### **Spring 2017:**

In 2017, Nir Barkat, the mayor of occupied Jerusalem, accepted President Wong's offer for a second visit to campus. GUPS members were angry, fearful and anxious over the anticipated second visit. They knew that they had to act and expected another smear campaign and university investigation to follow it. Lubna Morrar warned that another round of smear campaigns and investigations "will kill GUPS," that GUPS members - already exhausted, stressed and traumatized – could no longer manage another defense campaign, and that GUPS would break apart.

Yet GUPS allies on campus were quick to respond. They came together to shield and protect GUPS members who could therefore take a less visible role at the forthcoming protest of the mayor of occupied Jerusalem's visit on April 6, 2017. Students debated whether they should even chant and, if so, who would lead the chants as everyone knew that the university's prosecution of Lubna Morrar and Linda Ereikat focused on them as chant leaders. The students' protest focused on three interconnected issues that they highlighted: (1) President Wong's invitation of the mayor of occupied Jerusalem Nir Barkat, onto campus; (2) accountability of the President on social justice for Palestine; and (3) the targeting of Palestinian and social justice activism on campus. For those reasons and notwithstanding Nir Barkat's last minute cancellation of a second visit, students proceeded with their protest and transformed the space into a teach-in to discuss their grievances against the university.

The university's monitoring of Palestinian activism on campus was evidenced by the presence of university officials from different offices standing in observation and following students as they marched from the teach-in at the Seven Hills Conference Center to Malcolm X Plaza. Members of the monitoring team included individuals from the Dean of Students' office, from University Police Department, and from the office of Student Activities and Events. About 50 students participated in the teach-in and the march.

Later that day VP Hong sent GUPS members an email titled “Reach out and check-in.” Already so injured by the university, GUPS members saw this attempt at dialogue to be more performative than real. They were frustrated at being offered “dialogue” with a university whose only tangible or structural changes had been the tightening of punishments concerning student “misconduct” and “incivility.”

This then is the continuing cycle of trauma and criminalization that has animated the diasporic Palestinian student and faculty experience at SFSU. This cycle has at times led to physical harm and severe psychological stress of GUPS members and faculty. It has also contributed to undermining their intellectual and academic pursuits in these hallowed halls of public higher education.

Addendum:

As I am just completing this M.A. thesis, on May 3, 2017 another hostile campaign of poster plastering of Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian attacks on Dr. Abdulhadi, GUPS, and supporters of Palestine has taken place on campus. It remains to be seen if SFSU will rise to the occasion and protect its students and faculty.

## CONCLUSION

My thesis has been an exercise in narrating the historical memories of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) at San Francisco State University between 2000 and 2017. It has been a poignant exploration in the collective memory of Palestinian activist students. Very often social justice organizations go through changes in their membership, a fact that is especially true for student-led organizations on college campuses. What gets lost in membership transitions over time is an institutional memory. One reason I have narrated the oral histories of GUPS members is that they, and others, may never forget the struggles they have undergone. Hopefully the paths they forged and the spirit of justice they embodied will empower future generations of GUPS members.

This project is also designed to allow the SFSU community to learn the history of GUPS. It is an organization that has taken a leading role in activism on the SFSU campus, advocating as it does for Palestinian social justice and social justice generally. As I describe in my thesis, SFSU administrators and anti-Palestinian and Islamophobic organizations have consistently responded to Palestinian activism and scholarship by repressing GUPS members and Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, Director of Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies.

As I describe, anti-Palestinian organizations have labeled SFSU as one of the most anti-Semitic campuses in the country. This accusation holds extraordinary weight internationally and functions to place individuals charged as being anti-Semitic as Nazis,

terrorists, and extremist fanatics. As a result, Palestinian students and faculty have been singled out and scapegoated episodically for many years. But what has become lost in the barrage of accusations are the lived experiences of diasporic Palestinians, students and faculty. Their lives on campus, their lives as family members, and their lived experiences as members of a diasporic community has systematically been made invisible. These depictions and accusations, though baseless and deployed with malice, still undercut and damage those accused.

This thesis project is a means to challenge the lies, misunderstandings and stigmatizations directed at GUPS as an organization, at GUPS members, and at Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi, whose position as a university faculty member and director of an academic program is directly threatened.

The stigmatization of Palestinians in the U.S. is so entrenched that as recently as the 2016 Presidential elections, Palestinian-Americans and Muslims were falsely accused by the current President of the United States of celebrating in the streets of Jersey City the horrible 9/11/2001 events (Fine and Khawaja 2009: Chapter 11; Ross 2015). The U.S. president's claim was an outright lie, but what was remembered is the acceptance of the lie as fact. The effect is a lasting negative image that remains to this day in the body politic and political imaginary of the United States. This negative image, alongside all the other harsh actions, sanctions, admonishments, reprimands I have conveyed in this thesis, collectively functioned to intimidate and isolate GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi on campus.

In looking over the thesis a pattern emerged. The first chapter takes meticulous care to detail all that occurred in order to identify ways that events have been construed prejudicially against GUPS. The second chapter strives to place the reader in the midst of the arguments and debates as they occurred in real time. The third chapter underscores the exhaustion and cumulative effects of constantly having to defend our status as a legitimate and progressive student organization. The scope of my work shows the extent GUPS students and their advisors have had to undertake under conditions of duress and university climate of antagonism.

Nonetheless, GUPS and Dr. Abdulhadi continue to advocate for justice and for Palestine. Cultivated in their critical consciousness is a need to respond to global events as well as address the social justice issues which reverberate at the local level of our SFSU community. However, the targeting of GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi has led to anxiety and traumatization. GUPS members and Dr. Abdulhadi describe a strong feeling of being besieged because of the episodic allegations, hearings and investigations to which they have been and continue to be subjected.

Yet, over time, GUPS members have developed a resiliency and thick skin as a coping mechanism in order to continue their advocacy and studies on campus.

An important dimension that perhaps has been barely touched upon is the fact that members of GUPS are students - students committed to their studies and to improving themselves yet who are motivated to do so not at the expense of forsaking who they are

and where they come from. Hence when national and international events occur that impact them and their communities but that might be erroneously viewed as inconsequential to non-Palestinians, these students feel it is their obligation to respond. As this thesis shows, responses and political actions come at a high price. Often anxiety overtakes not only individual members of GUPS, but the whole organization. Concerns about the actions they take and how their actions are interpreted produces apprehension and unease such that a general anxiety not only becomes pronounced but lasts as a roller coaster of emotions. The cycles of activism and exhaustion, tempered by persistent university reprimands and public condemnations, has a wearying and wearing effect on members of GUPS. This side of SFSU GUPS activism has never been openly disclosed or acknowledged by the university. Instead the university image that lingers and continues to lay siege to the reputation of GUPS and their advisor identifies a radical, extremist, fanatical student organization that must be disciplined if not banished entirely. The indignity of Palestinian displacement and dispossession after 69 years leaves a lingering collective psyche that shapes Palestinian students that is not generally understood nor empathized by the SFSU Administration that openly sympathizes with Israel and even took an official tour to Israel. Lost in all this is the fact that diasporic Palestinians are as entitled as all other people to a homeland free of colonialism. The lack of which to this day remains a haunting persistent moral and international failure that plays out intimately in the local context of the SFSU community.

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