

28 January 2015

Deb Abbott, Director
Cantú LGBTQ Center
University of California at Santa Cruz
1156 High St.
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

Dear Deb,

We write as faculty who have come together to express our concern about your event, “Queer in Israel,” which was held on Tuesday, January 27 at the Cantú Center. For a long time, Israel has put forth a media campaign in the United States to portray itself as a country that supports gay rights and therefore can be considered a democracy. This event is part of that effort, and it promotes a study abroad that supports the displacement and colonization of Palestine.

“A Wider Bridge,” the organization you are hosting, engages in single-issue politics that present gay and lesbian issues as completely separate from other social justice issues in the societies in question. Thus, they can argue that “Israeli LGBT communities and their progress in the struggle for equality and inclusion” are somehow completely separate from the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This move represents an LGBT politics that actively hides the conditions of violence on which our lives are based, namely occupation, colonization and genocide. These are active processes that we can either recognize and struggle against, or decide to live with and benefit from. Presenting this speaker is not creating an opportunity for dialogue, it’s sanctioning this way of doing politics, and it’s creating an unsafe and unwelcoming space for Palestinian students, faculty and staff on campus, thus denying their rights as full members of the UCSC community.

Within the debate over LGBT conditions in Israel, even those criticisms that pinpoint problems with gay rights there nonetheless do not generally address the overarching problem here: the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the ongoing siege of Gaza, the lack of full equality for Palestinians within Israel, and the refusal of the right of return for Palestinian refugees who were forced out of their homes by the Israeli government. In the latest assault on Gaza in July 2014, the Israeli government killed over 2,000 Palestinian civilians and bombed 141 schools. With the occupation, the Israeli government also denies basic rights to education for Palestinians. They have repeatedly bombed, closed, and militarily occupied Palestinian universities. Birzeit University in the West Bank, for example, has been closed for a total of seven years out of the last twelve. Israeli

universities also discriminate against Palestinian students and have less than one percent of their faculty that are Palestinian.

Our university should not be supporting or colluding with this enormous violation of human rights. We hope you brought the issue of occupation to the attention of your audience. We hope you will bring the issue of racism within Israel to the attention of students who participate in Cantú Center activities. We hope you allow a discussion of the ongoing campaign of boycott, divestment and sanction against Israel until it complies with international human rights law. We hope in the future you will invite Palestinian lesbians and gay men (there are several organizations) as well as Israeli and non-Israeli Jewish queers who are actively struggling to end the occupation to speak about their experiences.

Respectfully,

Lisa Rofel

Marcia Ochoa

Gail Hershatter

Neda Atanasoski

Felicity Amaya Schaeffer

Christine Hong

Carla Freccero

Irene Gustafson

Felicity Amaya Schaeffer

Anjali Arondekar

Emily Honig

B. Ruby Rich

Deborah Gould

Boreth Ly

Gina Dent

Karen Barad