



ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA

JACOB AND LIBBY GOODMAN ZOA HOUSE

4 EAST 34TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10016

(212) 481-1500 | FAX: (212) 481-1515 | EMAIL@ZOA.ORG | WWW.ZOA.ORG

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VIA EMAIL

Professor Lila Abu-Lughod
The Middle East Institute
Columbia University
606 West 122 Street
Knox Hall - Third Floor
New York, NY 10027

Dear Professor Abu-Lughod:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) after learning that the Middle East Institute and the Center for Palestine Studies at Columbia University will be sponsoring a teachers' workshop on "Citizenship and Nationality in Israel/Palestine," scheduled to take place on Saturday, June 20, 2015. The workshop is supposed to give K-12 teachers and college-level instructors "the tools to both understand and teach critical issues of dispossession, belonging and citizenship in the context of Palestine/Israel."

We are deeply concerned that the workshop will fail to fulfill that mission. Indeed, the very title of the workshop is inaccurate and would mislead teachers and instructors since there is presently no country called "Palestine"; Mahmoud Abbas is the president of the Palestinian Authority, not Palestine. We also have legal concerns. The Middle East Institute is a recipient of funding from the Department of Education, pursuant to Title VI of the Higher Education Act. As you surely know, the law requires that Title VI programs "reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views and generate debate on world regions and international affairs." The diverse perspectives requirement was included in the law after experts investigated Title VI programs and concluded that many were pervasively one-sided and marred by anti-American and anti-Israel bias.

We have good reason to believe that the upcoming workshop will be one-sided and riddled with anti-Israel bias. The curriculum for the workshop was designed by Katherine Franke, Director of the Open University and Professor of Law at Columbia University, who is also reportedly going to be teaching the course. Katherine Franke makes no bones about her hatred of and animosity toward the State of Israel, even going so far as to distort and pervert Israel's exemplary record on protecting LGBT rights in order to promote her vicious anti-Israel agenda.

Here are just a few examples of Katherine Franke's venomous bias against Israel:

- In April 2012, Columbia University's Center for Gender and Sexuality held a conference called "The Ethics of Pinkwashing: LGBT Rights in Israel/Palestine." Katherine Franke is the director of the Center and was the lead speaker at the conference. Instead of acknowledging and indeed touting Israel's progressive record on LGBT rights as a model for other countries to follow, Katherine Franke claimed that Israel exploited LGBT people, "describing it as a 'self-conscious' and insincere propaganda effort [by Israel] to divert attention from the [so-called] occupation." (Katherine Franke's reference to an "occupation" is misleading and false. Gaza is entirely under the rule of the terrorist group Hamas; almost half of Judea and Samaria [i.e., the West Bank] is under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Ninety-eight percent of the Palestinian Arabs in all these territories live under their own regimes – not Israel's – with their own parliament, courts, police, schools, textbooks and universities, and their own newspapers, TV and radio. Israel shares responsibility for security, for obvious reasons, since the threat of Palestinian Arab terrorism coming from these territories is real and ongoing.) And, instead of holding the Palestinian Arabs accountable for their abysmal treatment of LGBT people when she spoke at the conference, Katherine Franke distorted the truth and blamed Israel for the Palestinians' civil rights abuses; the Anti-Defamation League reported that Katherine Frank falsely accused "Israel of creating a situation where gay Palestinians are viewed with suspicion and are isolated by Palestinians because it is assumed that they are collaborators" with the Israeli government. (See <http://blog.adl.org/tags/katherine-franke>.)
- In May 2012, Katherine Franke publicly declared her support for the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. She was scheduled to speak at a conference called the Equality Forum, which celebrates the LGBT civil rights movement. Katherine Franke issued a public statement and video in which she explained that she was going to boycott the conference because it would be highlighting Israel and the Jewish State's progressive policies toward the LGBT community, and because Michael Oren, then-Israel's Ambassador to the United States, was scheduled to speak. (See, e.g., <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/05/feminist-scholar-katherine-franke-refuses-to-be-pawn-in-orens-equality-game>.) Katherine Franke failed to appreciate that actions like hers have been criticized by the American Association of University Professors, which views academic boycotts as "a setback for the cause of academic freedom." (See http://aaup.org/sites/default/files/AAUPStatementASAVote_0.pdf.) Her ugly hatred toward the Jewish State of Israel is so intense that she cannot even appreciate that the

Jewish State should be lauded, since there is no place in the Middle East *except Israel* where LGBT individuals can live freely and openly, and without fear for their very lives.

- In September 2014, Katherine Franke wrote (and published) a letter to the Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, informing the Chancellor that she was cancelling her plan to speak at the university because of its decision not to hire Steven Salaita as a professor. During the Gaza war against Israel last summer, Salaita posted numerous vicious “tweets” that showed his intolerance of and contempt for Israel and anyone who supports Israel. Here are just a few examples:
 - “Let's cut to the chase: If you're defending #Israel right now you're an awful human being.”
 - “If it's ‘antisemitic’ to deplore colonization, land theft, and child murder, then what choice does any person of conscience have?”
 - “Zionists: transforming ‘antisemitism’ from something horrible into something honorable since 1948.”
 - “I repeat: if you're defending #Israel right now, then ‘hopelessly brainwashed’ is your best prognosis.”
 - “At this point, if Netanyahu appeared on TV with a necklace made from the teeth of Palestinian children, would anybody be surprised?”

The President of the University of Illinois rightfully noted that “Professor Salaita’s approach indicates he would be incapable of fostering a classroom environment where conflicting opinions would be given equal consideration.” The Chancellor of the University wrote, “What we cannot and will not tolerate at the University of Illinois are personal and disrespectful words or actions that demean and abuse either viewpoints themselves or those who express them.” (See http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/world/middleeast/professors-angry-tweets-on-gaza-cost-him-a-job.html?_r=0.) Yet Katherine Franke actually legitimized Salaita’s vicious and hateful tweets, writing to the Chancellor that she planned to use them in an academic forum to explore “the complex questions of belonging, dispossession, and possibilities for legitimate uses of state and non-state violence that may underlie Professor Salaita’s tweets.” (See https://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/gender-sexuality/Franke_uiuc_letter.pdf.)

Given Katherine Franke's record and her undeniable hatred of and bias against Israel, it is impossible to believe that the upcoming workshop at Columbia will comply with Title VI's diverse perspectives requirement and provide a wide range of views concerning Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. It is a virtual certainty that the workshop will be yet another opportunity for Katherine Franke to bash Israel with factual distortions and outright lies, failing to give the workshop participants any credible or usable tools with which to understand and teach the complicated and nuanced issues regarding Israel and those seeking its destruction.

We ask that you provide us with the information that shows that this upcoming workshop will comply with Title VI, including in your response the following information:

1. The name(s) and professional affiliation(s) of all additional speakers besides Katherine Franke;
2. The names of any films that will be screened; and
3. A copy of all the readings and other materials that will be used and distributed to the participants in the workshop.

We take the fair, accurate and unbiased education of teachers and students very seriously. Our members and supporters, who include many alumni of and donors to Columbia, do as well – especially when taxpayer money is at issue and might be used wrongfully to indoctrinate rather than educate, with propaganda that is false, one-sided and hostile to Israel. We look forward to hearing from you, and would be pleased to work with you to ensure that the upcoming workshop truly provides useful and reliable tools to the participants, that it disseminates information that is factually and historically accurate, and that it presents diverse perspectives and a wide range of views, as required by Title VI.

Very truly yours,



Morton A. Klein
National President



Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice