



Our Schools/Our Selves

The Voice Of Progressive Education In Canada

Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives

Summer/Fall 2024

Palestine and the Canadian education system

Living, learning and liberation

// IT'S LIKE
WE'RE
NOT EVEN
ALLOWED
TO BE
PALESTINIAN //

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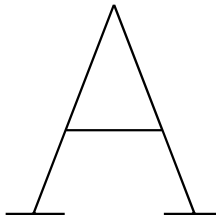
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Editorial

Risk and resolve: A litmus test for collective humanity

Erika Shaker, Nassim Elbardouh and Vidya Shah



As editors, we came to this project with both acknowledgement of the risk, and with an unshakeable sense of resolve.

That putting together this issue of the magazine is a risk is itself a source of tremendous frustration. To name the struggle of Palestinians, to address the impacts of what has been termed by the International Court of Justice a “plausible genocide” and an apartheid state, and to do this in the context of a painstakingly documented, decades-long campaign of dispossession and dehumanization made possible by imperialism and settler-colonialism should not be a risk. Learning about the impacts on children, on students, on families, on educators, on scholars, on the education system in Palestine and elsewhere is, particularly for those of us in positions of authority or guidance, part of our duty of care and should not be controversial.

And yet we also witness the silencing, the doxxing, the defamation of those who do this work, those who speak out against these daily displays of injustice, and those who live this reality.

We witness how the ongoing scrutiny and monitoring of educators and of public education is further compounded when considering the

fundamental role of teachers in helping students navigate challenging issues and provide them with the tools to challenge oppression — and the reaction of those in positions of power who see critical thinking and liberation theory as a threat to dominant hierarchy.

It is from this that we derive our resolve. For if we, as educators and as social justice advocates who have dedicated our lives to anti-racism and equity work, find that the limits of our compassion and understanding stop short of addressing Palestine, what does this say about our own complicity?

What does it mean when we can (carefully) talk about *tatreez* but not about Nakba; that we can eat *knafeh* but not wear a keffiyeh? Whose humanity will we fight for and whose lives and dignity will we protect — and whose will we ignore? Who do we deem disposable enough that we can turn away from their pain and suffering?

As the contradictions grow and the “Palestinian exception” becomes evermore evident, we need to ask ourselves: where is *our* “red line”?

This is such a dehumanizing moment — and the only way through this is to call deep on our collective humanity. And while that too, is a risk, it is one we are willing to take. We see ourselves as deeply interconnected to one another and to the underlying injustices — including but not limited to mass conflict and violence in

Haiti, the Congo and Sudan — that are also interconnected.

Some of us have been involved in liberation work for years. Others have come to this work more recently — and yes, some specifically because of the struggle for Palestinian liberation and the silencing of those who advocate for it and who show compassion and care for Palestinian wellbeing and humanity.

But what message are we sending our own children when the answer to the daily bombing of Palestine is not an immediate ceasefire but rather a qualification — that an election in Gaza in 2006 somehow implicates Palestinian children today; that the acceptable and “measured” response to the bombing of a refugee camp by the IDF is to affirm Israel’s right to self-defense.

This selective outrage of “DEI” (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) organizations and some educational institutions is both hypocritical and a betrayal.

It is also ironic. The clear message we’re hearing from grassroots Jewish community organizations is that classroom education about Palestine-Israel that humanizes Palestinians, that allows for criticism of the actions of the Israeli government, is good for Jews and Palestinians alike. They decisively articulate that anti-Zionism is not the same thing as antisemitism. They absolutely believe, as do we, that like anti-Palestinian racism, antisemitism is an issue that our classrooms need to tackle head on. It is imperative that we learn accurate information about how both anti-Palestinian racism and antisemitism have operated historically so that we can recognize and reject both

in the present. The conflation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism obfuscates such aims and does not give us as educators the tools to do this learning. Such conflation does nothing to help students understand and oppose the oppression of Palestinians and the oppression of Jews.

Contrary to oversimplified narratives that pit Jews against Arabs, these forms of oppression are not at odds; both are functions of white supremacy. In a thoughtful classroom that values the safety of all our students, the historic specificities and yet interconnectedness of each form of oppression are rendered legible. We do a disservice to our students when we allow them to be simplified as “at odds” with each other. In other words, while justice in this moment must centre and protect Palestinians, Palestinian and Jewish liberation are foundationally intertwined.

This struggle for liberation has become both a lens and a litmus test for so many — one that pulls aside the veil of imperialist hypocrisy; about who matters and who doesn’t; about which children are considered legitimate military targets and which children can play soccer on a beach without risking death; about whose history we sweep aside and deny and whose becomes the accepted and dominant narrative — regardless of who is hurt and what is erased in the process.

For some of us, it has been 10 months of wondering which bombing of a refugee camp, or which attack on a hospital or school filled with people praying or seeking shelter is *khalas* (enough); how many children carrying the remains of their siblings in backpacks and plastic bags, how many mothers preparing a meal of grass and animal feed for their starving family, how many fathers mourning the death of their newborn twins and the mother of their children?

For others, *khalas* was already reached long ago.

We have three aims for this issue.

First: the level of dehumanization of the Palestinian people is a global and historic shame that the world is finally coming to know. We need to talk about what it looks like.

Dehumanization looks like having your life, land, and livelihood taken from you. It looks like horrific living conditions that force containment, being surveilled and being met with violence regularly — almost inevitably with impunity. It is a little girl, or a grown woman, afraid to say they are Palestinian because of the exclusion and harm they may experience in Canada. It is not

The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing. — **Toni Morrison**

Societies built on prioritizing the rights, dignity, narratives, joy and experiences of one people above all others ultimately hurt us all — and when resistance erupts, as it inevitably will, and especially when that resistance is met with unprecedented military force, civilians on all sides pay the price. The cost has been disproportionately higher for Palestinians, but our collective humanity is degraded and undermined as a result.

having your birthplace or ancestral home listed on a map, or being removed from a map.

It is not being able to speak about your people, your customs, your strengths, your concerns, your desires without fear of them being misrepresented, ignored, or silenced. It is having your history told for you in a way that completely erases the experiences of your family and ancestors.

Second: part of acknowledging humanity is acknowledging the joy, resistance, wisdom, hope, and courage of the Palestinian people. This project has touched us in ways that we did not expect. How could a people, who have endured so much for so long, find wisdom and joy in grief, resist through the unthinkable, build community amidst multiple resettlements, find the courage to keep living and to keep resisting, and continue to love in a world that has largely abandoned and ignored their pain and death?

Finally, it is important to name the fundamentally interconnected nature of this movement. Palestine is a feminist issue in that women

are giving birth in horrific conditions without the necessary medical supports. It is a climate justice issue when we consider that both Palestine and the climate crisis are undergirded by settler-colonialism and capitalist militarization. Palestine is an issue of empire when considering the political and economic benefit to U.S. and U.K. imperialism. It is a queer issue in the practice of pinkwashing, which frames Palestinians as homophobic and misogynistic and Israel as queer-friendly, and more “in line” with Western values while ignoring the impact of the occupation on queer Palestinians (who, yes, do exist). This is a disability justice issue as militarized violence and the systematic dismantling of the healthcare system in Gaza significantly compounds the barriers already faced by the

disabled community in Gaza while we witness, in real time, a mass disabling event — one of the largest cohorts of child amputees in history. It is a food sovereignty issue, as access to water — including gathering rainwater — for Palestinians is severely restricted, and they can be fined and imprisoned for gathering (foraging) *za’atar*, a staple of Palestinian cooking declared by Israel in 1977 to be a “protected plant.” It is a workers’ rights issue, as livelihoods are destroyed and Palestinian employment interrupted and withheld; as journalists, medical staff and academics in Gaza are killed and as those who speak out in defense of Palestine have their jobs threatened and their reputations destroyed. And, it is an issue of racism, Indigeneity, identity and ancestry.

This is an admittedly incomplete list of the overlapping oppressions and obstacles faced by Palestinians. But it is also an indication of how these struggles for justice and liberation are interconnected. This should not be a surprise.

Liberation movements are at their core about our collective humanity. Societies built on prioritizing the rights, dignity, narratives, joy and experiences of one people above all others ultimately hurt us all — and when resistance erupts, as it inevitably will, and especially when that resistance is met with unprecedented military force, civilians on all sides pay the price. The cost has been disproportionately higher for Palestinians, but our *collective* humanity is degraded and undermined as a result.

Starblanket and Hunt write “stories can create the conditions for life on the one hand, but they can also justify the taking of life on the other.” The stories in this collection ask us to think about the stories we have been told about Palestine, the stories we are telling, and the stories yet untold.

They also ask us to simultaneously reflect on the stories we have been told about ourselves, the narratives they uphold and are upheld by, and the futures they engender. If we do, if we engage these stories as the seeds of liberation for all that they are, what worlds become possible for the next generation? ●



Erika Shaker

My father was an Arab. But were I writing this two months ago, that description would have been in the present tense.

At this point in my life, at this moment in time, in the midst of my gratitude for his existence and heartbreak at his absence, his departure has cut to the core of my identity.

The Arab side of my background has always played an outsized role in my life. The food and celebration. The terms of endearment and exclamations. Certainly my appearance. It takes only minutes before I'm trading recipes with cab drivers in Ottawa.

Much is made today of the Mediterranean Diet. But before hummus and baby carrots became staples at birthday parties for my own children, as a kid I was frequently told, in no uncertain terms, that my favourite foods looked "like barf." So I learned "adaptation." For years we referred to kebbe as "meat loaf" so as not to intimidate guests.

Growing up in the 70s and 80s I had teachers who were quick to insist that my dad wasn't *actually* Canadian (born in Trenton, ON after his parents emigrated). Or that "my people" were responsible for holding the world's finances hostage during the Oil Crisis. Or that Arabs (Ay-rabs) were by nature primitive and violent — though this didn't square with my multi-lingual grandparents, and the stories my Sittoo told me about Napoleon and Socrates and Aesop's Fables, the games of checkers with my Jiddoo, and the loving warmth (and elevated volume) of those multigenerational family dinners on weekends and holidays.

I grew up navigating the role of exotic "other" — repeatedly confronted by the confusion or suspicion of exactly who or what I was, if my dad spoke English, what I was "allowed" to eat, and what weird holidays I might celebrate.

White? Not quite (and — thanks to my inherited melanin — certainly not after Labour Day).

But nothing prepared me for summer orientation at McGill. The girl beside me noticed three Middle Eastern men at the next table and leaned towards me saying in a conspiratorial tone "I *hate* Arabs."

Shocked, I responded "I *am* an Arab."

There was an awkward silence. The student advisor suggested we both (both?) "cool it." I moved to another seat and left soon after. I had been subjected to Western ignorance and anti-Arab stereotypes for most of my life — sometimes it was amusing, sometimes it provoked defiance and other times it enraged. But no one had ever actually said that to me before.

The Iraq War and then September 11, 2001 precipitated new waves of anti-Arab racism that continued to shape my world — although there was a growing awareness among non-Arabs of the impact of the colonialization of the Middle East, of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, even of the ongoing treatment of the Palestinians.

But for the past 10 months, these weekly protests — their size, their duration, their diversity, their persistence — feel different. Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Christians, old, young, Indigenous, Black, Brown, queer, cis, students, workers, retirees and academics, people with strollers and with mobility aids and pets, standing, marching with and holding each other in solidarity and strength.

And what's also been unexpected is how important those connections have become. The empathy. The steadfastness. The shared pain. The emotion. The full-body laughter. The unity in diversity. The therapeutic catharsis, as one woman described it.

But also, the Arabic greetings and the hereditary familiarity I didn't realize how much I craved while I came to terms with the loss of the person and presence who I realize represented so much of how I have identified my entire life.

And all of this in the midst of the overwhelming sense of betrayal; the disbelief that this most recent bombing of children in tents or of a hospital or a school or the torture of Palestinian prisoners is still somehow not enough for elected leaders to call this what it is.

Hummus is a staple now, and labneh is all the rage. But don't mention the genocide.

The hypocrisy is galling. But it's also been thrown into high relief. And the whole world is watching. The children are watching. Students who saw their encampments that included prayer circles and reading rooms and commitments to safety dismantled amidst smear campaigns and blanket accusations of racism, or who had their graduations threatened, are watching. A new generation of activists is watching and demanding the rejection of settler-colonialism, the reclamation of art and culture and food and history, celebration of the indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people, and the deep commitment to solidarity and allyship with them.



Nassim Elbardouh

I am proud to bear witness to this powerful coming together of brilliant, thoughtful, and courageous teachers, community members, students, activists, artists, and scholars.

As the child of Lebanese parents who emigrated to Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis during Lebanon's civil war, I knew from an early age that what was said on the mainstream news was rarely, if ever, an accurate depiction of the rich culture and diverse traditions in the Middle East. I know what it is like to watch the news and wonder if my loved ones are safe, and rage at racist headlines depicting the civilians I know and love as terrorists. I know what it is like to wonder if family members will be safe from militarized violence abroad, or the victims of a hate crime here at home. I don't wish this on anyone.

As an anti-racist educator, much of my work consists of working alongside colleagues and students to prevent, recognize, and address the ways racism shows up in classrooms and schools.

I encourage the learners in my care to "zoom out" and see the big picture. I ask them questions like: who benefits from me thinking this way? Whose stories are being told and who are the people telling the stories? Whose perspectives are being centered and whose perspectives are being silenced or ignored? It's impossible to answer these questions in the context of Palestine and Israel and not see the blatant anti-Palestinian racism that arises when students wishing to speak about Palestinian rights and upholding international human rights law are silenced.

Like many educators teaching in times of increased polarization and political pressure from outside organizations, I am called to live in my integrity and practice what I preach. I do this knowing that the cost of choosing career over conscience is never worth the moral injury it brings. Like many of you reading this, I feel a certain kind of gnawing helplessness and rage every time I read the news, or walk into a room where ordinary "nice" people willfully silence and enable the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

I've seen Jewish, Palestinian, and Muslim students working together to try and raise

awareness about what's happening in Gaza today and they've shared with me their fears about how this advocacy might hurt their chances at everything from obtaining their permanent residency to post-secondary admissions. In 2024, it's unacceptable that they are forced to carry this weight for simply doing what our education system has taught them to do: be critical thinkers and global citizens that stand up for what they believe in.

It pains me to think of the Palestinian students and families we have collectively harmed through our silence and inaction.

When we normalize violence and justify murder, we lose a part of ourselves. Teachers have a duty of care to their students and if we are to protect our ability to truly care for them, we need to hold on to our humanity. When we turn our backs on the suffering of Palestinians, we close our hearts, and by extension, our ability to love and see the humanity in each and every one of the learners in our care. Not only do we need to teach about Palestine, we need to learn more about Palestine and understand the roots and realities of what it means to be Palestinian, what it means to be human.

As a parent, I can't help but worry about my children growing up in a world where their religious and cultural identity as Muslims and Arabs might be viewed with suspicion. I know parents of all religious and cultural backgrounds want their children to grow up in a world better than the one they came up in...and yet, we are complicit in maintaining a system that consistently devalues Palestinian life and leaves little room for interfaith solidarity.

Despite the helplessness I feel at times, I find peace in the knowledge that it remains possible to engage in this work from a place of justice and love, and this issue highlights how there are people of all faiths and backgrounds working to do the same.



Vidya Shah

As a former elementary classroom teacher, as a community activist, and as current professor of higher education, this time has made me question so much of who I am, who we are, and who we might be as educators and as human. It is a time of such stark contradiction, crisis, hope, and change that I find my heart breaking on a daily basis, with the hope that it breaks open and the fear that it is closing.

I am not Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim. I am someone who believes in the fundamental interconnectedness of all life, making the Palestinian struggle, my struggle. Like many, I have experienced the brutality of anti-Palestinian racism. This, in part, is because of assumptions that I am Muslim (given my last name), speaking to the complicated connections between anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia.

I wonder what people 10, 20, 50 years from now will write about these times, will speak about these times, will remember about these times, will silence about these times.

This is a defining moment in our collective, ethical, spiritual, political, social, ecological, and economic history. In many parts of the world, we are pulling back the veil and shining a spotlight on violence that has been normalized, legalized, and erased in Gaza for far too long. Painstakingly, this awakening and being called into greater humanity has been at the expense of another 40,000 Palestinians alongside the ongoing occupation of Palestinian land.

What scares me the most about these times is what our in/actions say about our collective humanity. What does it say about our humanity that we can see, in real time, the ongoing occupation of Gaza and the brutal killing of over 40,000 people, most of whom are women and children, and turn away? What does it say about our humanity that we can dehumanize a people to such a degree, that we justify our in/actions as “too complicated”

or “too political”? What does it say about our humanity that we can honour the pain, death, and histories of some people and literally denounce, erase, justify and deny the pain, death, histories of others? What does it say about our humanity that some of us care more about protecting or advancing our careers, maintaining relationships, or carrying on with life as usual, than standing with and for justice?

If we see humanity as the basis and purpose of education, then this is also a defining moment for education. I have witnessed educators in K-12 and in higher education risk (in many different ways) for the collective good, and reach across differences to collectivize and mobilize. I have seen strangers stand up for those who are being doxxed, denigrated, and silenced for simply humanizing Palestinian students, histories, and pain. I have seen people singing, dancing, and making art as resistance to the brutality of this moment. I have seen students and educators become more political because they simply cannot sit back and justify their complicity alongside institutions beholden to oppression. And my heart has broken open, again and again, at the strength, humanity, and resistance of Palestinian people in the face of such unfathomable violence.

Ultimately, this time is asking each of us to reflect on whether this moment reveals who we are becoming or who we have always been. ●

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Erika Shaker is the editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves* and Director of the CCPA National Office.

What does it say about our humanity that we can dehumanize a people to such a degree, that we justify our in/actions as “too complicated” or “too political”? What does it say about our humanity that we can honour the pain, death, and histories of some people and literally denounce, erase, justify and deny the pain, death, histories of others?

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SU·MUD |

صمود

(Noun) A Palestinian anticolonial mode of being meaning steadfastness. An ethos embedded in daily life and rooted in protection of the land.

Sumud: A Palestinian anticolonial mode of being meaning steadfastness. An ethos embedded in daily life and rooted in protection of the land.

Photo Erika Shaker



“Our freedom is interdependent”

Solidarities, world-building, and education during ongoing Nakba

Muna Saleh, Beyhan Farhadi, and Joy Henderson

In late April, we were invited for an article for *Our Schools/Our Selves* to consider how anti-Palestinian racism is impacting schooling; similarities and differences between settler-colonialism on these stolen lands and in Palestine; and what cross-racial solidarity might look like, in this context.

The following excerpt was part of a much longer conversation which was recorded and transcribed on May 14, 2024.

We began with (and continued to centre throughout the conversation) our rage about the ongoing colonization, genocide, and violence in Palestine, extended to dis/connections with ongoing colonization, genocide, and violence on these stolen lands, and included themes of:

- distinctions between education and schooling;
 - the racist politics of what (and who) is deemed political;
 - solidarities and collective world-building, without collapsing differences;
 - unlearning and abolishing racist colonial mythologies, systems, and logics;
 - nurturing radical love, imagination, and hope;
 - living and working towards liberatory futures;
 - and uplifting and centering embodied knowledge, strength, and resistances.
- silences, distortions, and erasures in colonial schooling;

Solidarity can't be expected, transactional, or flattened; different relationships, places, histories, and contexts must be honored when re/negotiating movements for collective liberation.

Beyhan: I don't want to separate the feelings we're arriving with. How are we arriving?

Joy: I'll get us started. I'm just arriving exhausted and extremely disorganized. My attention has been pulled in 70 different directions and I'm trying to focus but the world's on fire. I can't even triage at this point.

Muna: I think sometimes we forget that we're full human beings, embodying all of these different

emotions. I'm arriving absolutely infuriated, devastated, full of grief and mourning, and full of resistance. It's hard to actually allow myself to feel all the emotions.

Beyhan: This is a defining moment. And all I can think of is it took a genocide for this moment to arrive, more than 75 years in the making. I'm arriving with resolve about the work that needs to get done, especially in schools. I know we're all resisting the conflation of schooling with education because many students are going through a political education right now, outside the classroom. This education is often prevented from entering the classroom, and silenced.

Muna: It's not just silenced but forcibly erased. My children attend schools with a majority of Muslim and Arab students. They haven't been educated in school about Falasteen (Palestine) or about the [Nakba](#), about historical connections to these lands and to other settler colonial regimes and projects. They haven't even *said* the word Palestine in class, and when students bring it up, they're told "we don't want to bring politics in." Can you imagine? In social studies.

Joy: We get political talking about Black History Month, about Indigenous History Month, about our genocide. I guess they think it's in the past, but it's not. And it's not just a matter of being political, but of acknowledging that it's happening.

Muna: Yes...who gets to decide what's 'political?' Everything is political. It's our job as educators to teach students how to have these conversations, how to research, and how to make analytical decisions based on what we've learned. But to name something as off-limits? It's another form of violence, especially when

Palestinian students are bringing all of who they are, telling educators "we need to talk about this," and are silenced.

Joy: I've heard Indigenous people say, this is like watching our history in real time. The enforced famine, it hits that ancestral core, to see the same history play out under the same hateful umbrella. We don't even know if this will be the tipping point to change the world. Part of me holds the dream, and the other is watching with an existential dread. But as Mariame Kaba says, hope is a discipline. I'm so impressed with young people and the work they're doing to disrupt. I'm learning from them.

Muna: It hit me so strongly when you said that it's like watching history in real time. I'll never forget feeling exactly that about two weeks into this genocide as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were on a death march trying to escape northern Gaza because they were told that they needed to escape for their safety and their lives. And people were still killed in so-called "Safe Routes" or "Safe Zones"... I thought of Sittee, Allah yerhama (May she rest in peace), my grandmother.

Tomorrow (May 15) is Nakba Day, commemorating over 76 years of ongoing genocide, ethnic cleansing, displacement, and dispossession of over 750,000 Palestinians. Both sides of my grandparents' families were ethnically cleansed from our village, Mughr al-Khayt, in the Safad district of Northern Palestine by Zionist militia in early May 1948. Sittee Sharifa, my Dad's mom, shared with us in vivid detail about how people were afraid to stop during these death marches because Zionist militia were everywhere and they would be killed. They were injured and afraid and starving. But before they were expelled from their village, my grandfather was shot in his leg and my grandma was shot in her back. That bullet remained lodged in her back all her life. She was pregnant with my dad when she was shot. Talk about intergenerational trauma. Now, watching the images of death marches and all the horrific images and videos... It's like watching history in the present.

Beyhan: These histories are not an abstraction. The work of settler-colonialism, which abstracts the material violence over a people and their land: how do you counter this abstraction in collective building and world-making? You name it, Muna, in the details of your history and I'm thinking of how I'm witnessing that

for you. And holding that in a way that doesn't superimpose but makes space for your grief, moving with just enough righteous rage to turn that history into action for justice.

Muna: In any space I'm in, I share Sittee's story. I share it as many times as I can, as often as I can, because these are the stories that people need to know, they need to hear that Sittee was brutally dispossessed and violated along with all of her loved ones and community. But they also need to know about how she was the strongest, the most joyful human being I've ever known. And I mean that with my whole heart. Sittee loved life. She loved being with people, meeting new people. She loved everyone she met and they loved her.

I think I'm sharing that because I want to really underscore that Palestinians aren't only victims of the Zionist occupation regime's colonialism, genocide, massacres, displacement, dispossession, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, mass incarceration, and brutality. We are also firm in our conviction that Palestine will be free and are grounded in our ongoing resistance as Palestinians. We are connected to each other and the land.

There's so much suffering and death and displacement and oppression especially right now. But we are also witnessing Palestinians in Gaza resist through rescuing and caring for one another, doing dabke, getting married, even in the midst of horrific genocidal colonial violence. I think about Eve Tuck's words over 15 years ago in "[Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities](#)" about how, in research, Indigenous peoples, tribes, and communities are too often storied with 'damaged-centered' framings while beauty, strength, resilience, and resistance are never uplifted. And I think about Tuck and Yang's assertion that [decolonization is not a metaphor](#). I'm struggling with Palestine being used as a metaphor. Rather than a concrete *place*, it's abstract and disembodied. My family deserves to return to our village, to live on our lands. In a free Palestine.

Joy: It's kind of the point, right, to abstract history from its people. Like when we talk about Indigenous history like it's something of the

past, right? The whole John Wayne era. We're not real. We are a metaphor. Palestinians are a metaphor. And to bring this back to education, last week, one of our elders, Pauline Shirt, died after a long, beautiful life of advocacy and education. This woman literally created urban Indigenous education in Toronto. And I see a trustee on Twitter, with a history of anti-Palestinian racism, in one breath expressing loss about her passing and in another defending the genocide of Palestinians, which dishonours the legacy of grandma Pauline. School boards are actively removing educators from classrooms, punishing students, and putting forward hateful policies. They hold a position of power over the schooling of millions of children and adults because schools are, for better or for worse, hubs for communities. They can't do something as basic as acknowledge the violence students are living. As basic as that. How do we not see these struggles as connected?

Muna: And solidarity needs to continually be negotiated and renegotiated rather than expected, as if it's transactional, right? So it's really important for me, as a Palestinian Muslim woman, when I encounter statements that flatten contexts, histories, and differences, to interrupt and say these contexts and histories are different. Yes, there are similarities and connections, but we have to be very careful with how we situate ourselves in relation to different liberation struggles.

Beyhan: And for what ends. It's useful to talk about the common oppressor but it's not useful to collapse the specificity of violence and its history. We cannot resist without understanding that specificity and the patterns of its appearance. We also dehumanize a people by not honoring that specificity. We do not need to compare struggles to build solidarity; our freedom is interdependent. I think that building requires that relational work you're pointing to. It requires expanding community as widely as possible, without losing the power of our respective and intersecting struggles.

Muna: The reality is that we and our children are already in these schools. So what do we do *right now*? I keep thinking about the walls of the classroom, the walls of the school, who is allowed to enter and who isn't, who's told that your knowledge counts and who isn't. But my hope has always been with the children, youth, families, communities, and educators who continue to say, "No, absolutely not.

We do not need to compare struggles to build solidarity; our freedom is interdependent.

You're not going to tell us what we know. You're not going to tell us that you alone know, and that we don't know what we know. *We* are going to teach you, and you need to learn from *us*." Like these amazing student encampments and

how these principled students are continuing to teach us what it means to actually live out what we learn and know...that's where my hope is, in our ongoing refusal, resistance, and affirmation. Yes, it's exhausting and frustrating and infuriating. But our collective resistance and refusal are also powerful and important. And it's always happened, people coming together outside of these systems to teach and learn and unlearn in all these different, beautiful, messy, world-building ways.

Throughout our conversation (including moments that we didn't include in the above excerpt), we stressed the differences between schooling and education, the importance of un/learning colonial logics and mythologies, and actively disrupting silences, distortions, and erasures in colonial schooling. We centre our embodied, intergenerational knowledge as we name, resist, and refuse colonial narratives and hypocrisy in what — and who — is deemed 'political,' 'controversial,' and even unmentionable. How might educators (including children, youth, and families) in familial, community, and schooling contexts (continue to) collectively uplift and centre embodied knowledge, strength, and resistances, name, resist, and refuse colonial mythologies, distortions, erasures, and systems, and work towards liberatory futures, in this time of multiple ongoing genocides?

Our freedom is interdependent. Understanding that all systems of oppression — including (settler-)colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Muslim racism, antisemitism, sexism, and ableism — are interconnected, leads us to understand how our collective struggles for liberation are also profoundly interdependent.

Throughout our conversation, we stressed that solidarities are continually re/negotiated. Solidarity can't be expected, transactional, or flattened; different relationships, places, histories, and contexts must be honoured when re/negotiating movements for collective liberation. How might we collectively build solidarities and worlds within education and beyond in ways that honour difference(s) and our interdependence? What are some ways that this work is already happening? How might we build with/from resistances and refusals in ways that nurture radical love, imagination, hope, and each other? This is the work ahead of us. ●

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Joy Henderson is a passionate CYW (Child and Youth Worker) and community educator dedicated to promoting equity, inclusion, and social justice. As a disabled, queer, Afro-Indigenous individual, Joy brings a unique perspective to their practice, recognizing the intersections of identity and the complex challenges faced by marginalized communities. She is starting her MSW at York University in the fall.



“It’s like we’re not even allowed to be Palestinian”

Anti-Palestinian racism in schools

Muna Saleh and Nada Awwad

“My Mom brought me a keffiyeh for school for cultural day...this guy took it out of my backpack and put it on his head and covered his whole face except for his eyes and started calling himself a terrorist...the teachers didn’t do anything.” – Bisan

“Adam had to do a project about ‘a recent conflict’ in an area, and he said, ‘Palestine.’ The teacher said, ‘No...I need to be able to find it on a current political map.’ That was her reasoning. And he was like, ‘No. That is who I am and that’s what I want to talk about.’” – Yafa

Readers might assume that Bisan and Yafa¹ shared these experiences of anti-Palestinian racism in schools recently, in the current context of the ongoing genocide in Gaza and settler-colonial violence across Palestine.

However, they shared these experiences in November 2022 (Yafa) and March 2023 (Bisan) in our research alongside Palestinian Muslim students and their families.

Anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim racism: Interconnections and distinctions

As Palestinian Muslim women, educators, and settlers living within amiskwaciy-wâskahikan on colonized lands, we’ve experienced and studied the interconnections of (gendered) anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian discourses and practices. Scholars are continuing to conceptualize anti-Palestinian racism as distinct from (yet intertwined with) anti-Muslim racism (see: Abu-Laban & Bakan, 2021, 2022; Majid, 2022; Zine, 2023).

Mapping these distinctions is vital because Palestinians of all faiths are often erased by mythologies that misrepresent oppression as an ancient religious ‘conflict’ rather than relatively recent settler-colonialism. These mythologies often erase our narratives and very existence as Palestinians.

We understand anti-Palestinian racism as “a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives” (Majid, 2022, p. 1). Majid identified multiple forms of anti-Palestinian racism, including:

- Nakba denial;
- justifying violence against Palestinians;
- not acknowledging Palestinians as an Indigenous peoples;
- eliding the human dignity of Palestinians;
- excluding or pressuring others to exclude the presence and/or perspectives of Palestinians;
- and, defaming Palestinians and allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, violent, or terrorist threats/sympathizers.

Although recently named as a distinct form of racism, anti-Palestinian racism is not new. It is rooted in historical and ongoing euro-western racial-religious supremacy, settler-colonial logics, Orientalist dehumanization, and Zionist mythologies.

Our research alongside Palestinian Muslim students and families

This article shares some of what we've learned in our narrative research alongside Palestinian Muslim students and families into their curriculum-making experiences in Alberta.²

With the support of Palestinian community members, Muna invited participants to this research after institutional ethics approval in July 2022. Between October 2022 and June 2023, Muna engaged in multiple (recorded and transcribed) research conversations with participants:

- Jenin (18), Yassin (16), and their parents Mahmoud and Hannah;
- Bisan (18), Suha (18), and Eman (18), and Bisan's mother Hiba;
- Othman (17), Hussein (14), Ali (13), Adam (9), and their mother Yafa;
- Aminah, a mother of two recently graduated high school students.

Alongside co-researcher Farid Saberi, Nada and Muna engaged in an extensive literature and media review from January to May 2024, focusing on anti-Palestinian racism in the Canadian settler-colonial context. Iteratively collecting and analyzing research texts, we identified two main narrative threads that reverberated across participants' stories: All participants experience(d) systemic anti-Palestinian racism in schools; yet all participants engage(d) in teaching and learning about Palestine in their homes and communities.

Narrative threads and participants' stories

We stress that the following threads are interconnected and cross-generational; parent participants experienced anti-Palestinian racism in schools both as parents *and* students.

All participants experience(d) systemic anti-Palestinian racism in schools through a combination of:

- **Silences and exclusions** whereby Palestine and Palestinians are not named/mentioned in classrooms and schools. These silences/exclusions were underscored in every research conversation — including by participants attending Islamic or Arabic-English bilingual schools who shared that, even if Palestine was named/mentioned, the history and ongoing colonization of Palestine was never taught/discussed. As Yassin asserted, "There's really no educating on the topic of Palestine [in schools]."
- **Silencing, censorship, and repression** of anyone trying to disrupt pervasive silences around Palestine in schools. Participants experienced this mainly through teachers or administrators shutting down their attempts to discuss Palestine. As Yafa's quote at the beginning of this article highlights, Adam's teacher attempted to stop him from focusing on Palestine for a relevant school project. Describing her high school's censorship/repression of Palestine compared to their vocal advocacy of other global justice issues as "hypocritical," Jenin shared her experience of being silenced by an administrator:

"I tried to tell [administrator], 'Is there anything we can do?... Can we at least just post posters about it so students can learn about what's going on?'... She straight up told me, 'No, you're not allowed'.... It's like we're not even allowed to be Palestinian."

As Hiba asserted when discussing her family's experiences with school censorship/repression of Palestine and Palestinians, "You're good as long as you're silent."

- **Colonial mythologies and erasures** where the ongoing Nakba, violent settler-colonization, and sometimes existence of Palestine are denied. Jenin shared a story of how, during Israel's bombardment of Gaza in May 2021, her high school's

Instagram account posted a message that erased colonial violence and oppression by referring to “the conflict” and how “we don’t choose sides.” Yafa shared a story of egregious anti-Palestinian racism by her son’s teacher, who denied the very existence of Palestine:

“We had just come back from Palestine...[Othman’s] teacher asked the students, ‘Who was somewhere that is humid?’ Othman said, ‘I’ve just come back.’ [She asked,] ‘Oh from where?’ [He responded,] ‘I was in Palestine.’ The teacher said, ‘Oh! That doesn’t even exist.’ He was in grade 8. He was upset.”

- **Dehumanization of Palestinians** via racist language, framings, smears, stereotypes, misrepresentations, and gaslighting. Hannah shared how, growing up on these colonized lands, and in the face of pervasive school silences and media vilification of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims, “you were always kind of...trying to portray yourself as a normal human, right?”

In addition to Bisan’s experience of teachers’ inaction when another student wrapped a keffiyeh around his head and declared himself a “terrorist,” she described how her grade 12 social studies teacher would regularly harass her with anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism:

“He’d always come to me when I’m with my friends and just say really weird remarks and talk about Israel and Palestine....like ‘no country’ jokes...then he would talk about me being Muslim, [asking] ‘Why don’t I wear the hijab?’... and also saying, ‘You’re the only Falasteeni [Palestinian] here, is it because there’s not a lot of you?’”

Bisan’s mom, Hiba, discussed Bisan’s decision to switch schools during her final semester of high school because of the administration’s inaction in confronting the racism Bisan regularly faced. Pained by Bisan’s questions of “Are we not human beings? Are we not people?” Hiba stated, “I think they [schools] traumatize our kids even more.”

However, participants engage(d) in teaching and learning about Palestine in their homes and communities through:

- sharing Palestinian knowledge, culture(s), traditions, narratives, and histories across generations;
- embracing who they are as Palestinians *and* Muslims;
- resisting systemic silences, censorship, erasures, and dehumanization in multiple ways;
- advocating for a free Palestine in different ways, including: leveraging social media; organizing and attending teach-ins, book clubs, rallies, and protests; leading and participating in student-led movements, cultural organizations, and liberation collectives.

Participants emphasized their intentionality in teaching and learning about Palestine, highlighting the power and beauty of Palestinian culture, sumud (steadfastness), resistance, joy, and love of their land. As Aminah asserted:

“I think also for our kids, the least we can do is teach them who we are, where you’re from, and what’s the story behind it.”

Ongoing systemic anti-Palestinian racism in schooling and society

Throughout our research, it became clear that anti-Palestinian racism in schools is not the exception but rather the norm. We noted (social) media cases of ongoing anti-Palestinian racism at all schooling levels across Canada, including:

Elementary school

- October 2023: An Ottawa principal asking a student to remove the Palestinian flag from their profile picture because “political statements are not for the classroom.”
- November 2023: After asking where he’s from, an Ontario teacher told a Palestinian student that “Palestine is not a country.”

Middle school

- March 2023: Students at a Halifax K-9 school asked to remove their keffiyehs during “multicultural day” by school administration because “it’s a sign of war.”
- May 2024: A teacher at a Mississauga K-9 school creating a display for Jewish Heritage Month that included Zionist mythologies and propaganda about the creation of the State of Israel.

High school

- Reports of anti-Palestinian racism in the Toronto District School Board dating back to the 1980s.
- November 2020: Ontario’s Ministry of Education suppressing a student-created

educational video about the history and ongoing occupation of Palestine.

- April 2024: School counselor at an Oakville high school was recorded telling a student wearing a keffiyeh that he reminded her of terrorists.

Post-secondary

- May 2024: McGill University administrators attempting to stifle class discussions about Palestine.
- May-June 2024: University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and York University enlisting militarized police to violently dismantle student encampments for Palestine.

Importantly, our analysis underscored that anti-Palestinian racism in schooling occurs within a wider sociopolitical context of systemic anti-Palestinian racism, evidenced through: the Ontario Legislature's keffiyeh ban; CBC's repression/censorship of Palestine and Palestinians; widespread surveillance, censorship, and repression of Palestinians and supporters; and ongoing smears of protests and student encampments against genocide and for Palestinian liberation.

Countering anti-Palestinian racism in schooling

Rather than oversimplified 'solutions,' we offer the following considerations and actions towards countering anti-Palestinian racism in school systems.

Countering anti-Palestinian racism entails working against all forms of racism and oppression on these colonized lands. We must root our practice with a deep understanding of the violent, settler-colonial, and racist origins and structures of Canadian schooling and society, and systemic anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism alongside other forms of racism and oppression. This is not a colonial racist 'history' or 'legacy;' it is ongoing racism and colonization.

Palestinian students cannot continue to inhabit spaces where their existence is silenced and/or liberation is up for debate. Claiming "neutrality" or presenting "both-sides" in situations of injustice is the antithesis of care and upholds systems of oppression. It is vital to take clear positions against genocide, racism, apartheid, and colonialism while encouraging critical analysis of media and processes/structures that uphold oppression.

Classrooms must be places for honest critical inquiry. Our research highlighted how, to maintain colonial comfort and narratives, schools often engage in what Sealy-Harrington called "racist anti-racism" — "claiming the mantle of racial justice, while perpetuating racial injustice." Racism against Palestinian students and supporters when discussing Palestine and contesting colonial

Online teaching and learning resources

Middle East Children's Alliance:
Teach Palestine

Visualizing Palestine 101

Rethinking Schools:
Teach Palestine

Decolonize Palestine

Palestine Teaching Resources –
Rethinking Schools

Palestine–Forensic Architecture

Zinn Education Project Collection
of Teaching Resources

Palestinian Feminist Collective
Digital Action Toolkit

Sociologists in Solidarity
with Palestinians – Syllabus

Preparing to Teach Palestine:
A Toolkit

Critical Media Literacy
Rooted in Ethnic Studies
Curriculum Toolkit

Lesson Bank from Teaching
While Muslim and Educators
for Palestine

Project 48

The Long Journey |
United Nations

Al Nakba: The History
of Palestine Since 1799

Interactive Encyclopedia
of the Palestine Question

Padlet of K-12 Activities and
Lesson Plans: Teach for Palestine

narratives must be countered by intentionally creating spaces for honest critical inquiry.

Anti-racist and anti-oppressive education is collective liberation work. Organize alongside educators, students, and community members in Palestinian liberation/solidarity movements/collectives like Teachers for Palestine BC, Faculty for Palestine, PCAAAN, Palestinian Youth Movement, and Students for Justice in Palestine to advocate for institutional/governmental policies, including:

- naming and countering anti-Palestinian racism;
- Nakba education;
- rejecting the IHRA working definition of antisemitism; and,
- implementing boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS).

Systemic anti-Palestinian racism must be actively countered. Developing increased knowledge around Palestine and anti-Palestinian racism is important but not a panacea. *Action* is needed alongside un/learning. Shatara (2022) and Elbardouh (2024) identified several actions for educators committed to teaching and learning about Palestine, including: uplifting Palestinian culture and joy; modeling how to engage in critical thinking and dialogue about colonial oppression; and engaging with the work of Palestinian authors, activists, artists, and scholars.

Palestinian existence is a form of resistance. Systemic anti-Palestinian racism in schooling must be countered by embroidering Palestinian culture, histories, narratives, resistance, art, literature, and joy into our classrooms and schools. ●

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Notes

1 Pseudonyms used for all research participants.

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“Children like flowers”

The article and inspiration behind “Reem”

Harpreet Ghuman

Reem Ali Badwan (also referred to as Reem Nabhan by the media) was just three years old when killed in an Israeli airstrike and buried underneath the rubble of her home in the Al-Nuseirat refugee camp in Southern Gaza, alongside five year-old sibling Tarek. These children were asleep at the time of the airstrike.

Some images and videos of Reem that were later aired on various media outlets would feature her grandfather Khaled Nabhan who held a doll that Reem would play with. The grandfather and granddaughter’s affection for one another was also captured on footage of him lifting and twirling his precious granddaughter while she smiled, laughed and pulled at his beard.

Reem, just one of 15,000-plus Palestinian children killed since the fall of 2023, has become a global symbol of the innocent lives lost in Gaza. For me, as an educator and parent, her passing—like the passing of any child killed in such circumstances—was hard to process and come to terms with, knowing the impact the daily loss of innocent life in Gaza was having on Palestinian, Arab and Muslim-identifying students in the very schools and communities I serve as Superintendent of Education in Toronto.

I often hear these students speak about feelings of invisibility, whether in day-to-day

curriculum and learning experiences or feelings of erasure through mainstream media. They express the need for allies to amplify their voices and bring light to their experiences both in our school system and the ongoing realities for Palestinians in their own homeland.

Despite the heavy burden of knowing their loved ones back home may no longer be alive, I am always struck by their unwavering courage to speak up and draw attention to their lived experiences when the education system, and those leading it do not always do so.

From attending candlelight vigils in the community to hearing from students and families about the ongoing trauma they are experiencing, I ponder the role and purpose of a non-Palestinian, particularly in the education system. I was inspired by the student leaders across schools and communities that utilized their voices to demonstrate, stage peaceful protests and bring light to an identity and community not often seen, heard, or represented in mainstream media or in educational discourse. I vividly recall the smiles on students’ faces seeing their fellow peers or educators (who were non-Palestinian) wearing keffiyehs as a form of solidarity and support.

I reflected as well on my own social location as a Sikh Canadian whose faith-based teachings speak to service and a call to action for those facing injustice. As someone who

often writes as a form of both self-care and documenting narratives that are not always represented in the mainstream, the image of young Reem would reappear in my mind and eventually inspired words on paper.

The journey of writing about Reem or the Palestinian experience would take me from current realities back to the 1948 Nakba or “Catastrophe” and the mass displacement many in the community had faced.

A question I would often pose to myself was; “What do we do with all the hurt, helplessness and rage we feel?” Let us write, let us tell stories and let us create in the rich traditions that so many Palestinian artists/scholars such as Refaat Alareer and many others have inspired us to do. And as Sikhs, we are bestowed a purpose to speak up and act, so how could I not?

May this writing be a testament to all the Palestinian children whose smiles, laughter, innocence and humanity we shall never forget.

Someone I’ve learned a great deal from about the Palestinian experience is my dear friend and fellow educator and artist Summer Hawamdeh. I’d like to express immense gratitude to

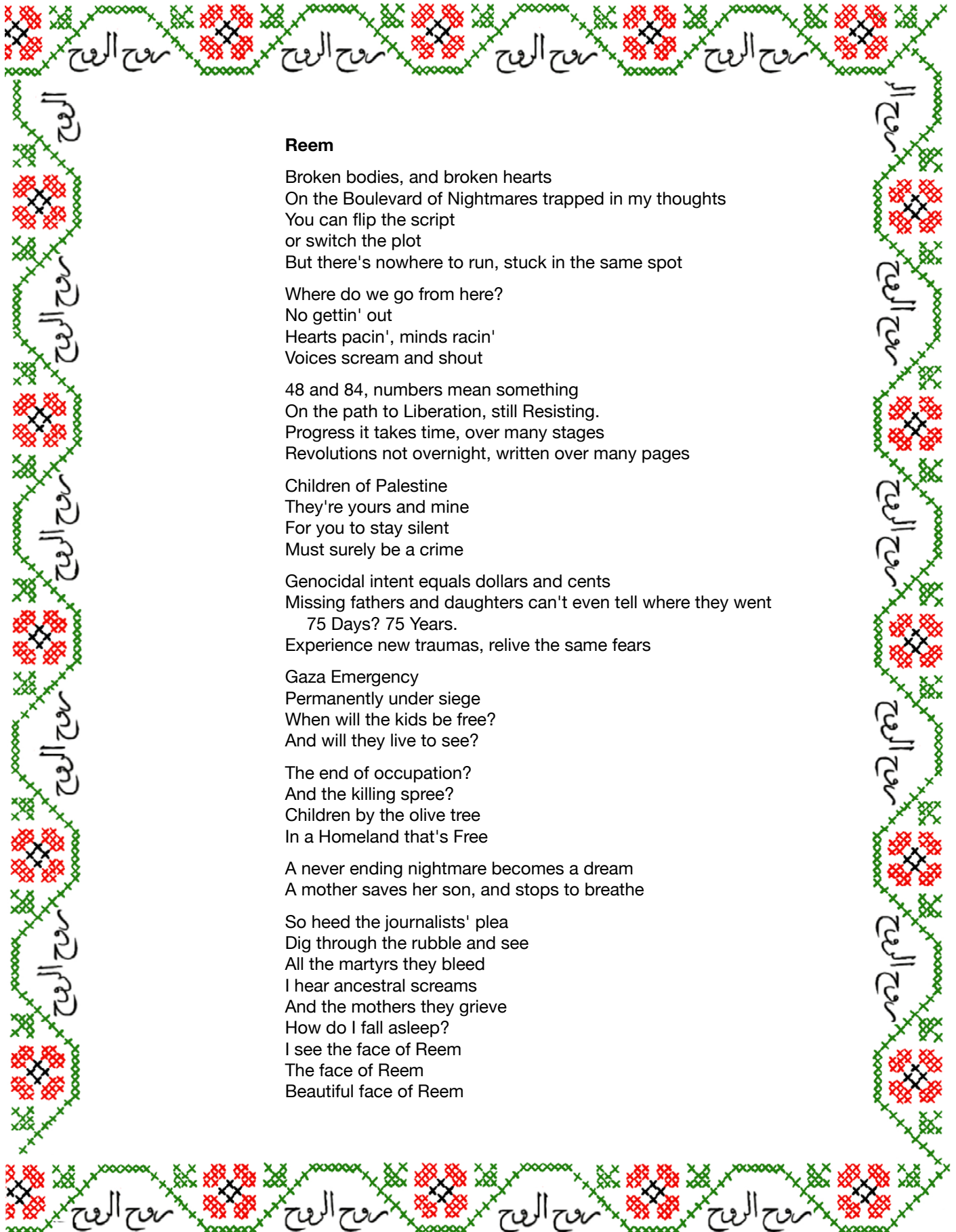
Summer for the beautiful Tatreez-inspired border featured on the poem which is a tribute to the memory of Reem and all Palestinian children.

The border combines both Tatreez art practices (digitally), an ancient form of embroidery traditionally done by Palestinian women, and Arabic calligraphy. It incorporates poppies, the national flower of Palestine, as a means of honouring the children lost in this genocide. The Arabic calligraphy that is wrapped around by the Tatreez poppies translated reads, “the soul of the soul,” a nod to the words of Reem’s grandfather Khaled, after he learned about her death.

Oftentimes, Palestinians describe children and youth that are killed as “youth/children like flowers,” a stark contrast to the dehumanizing representations often found in western media.

We will always remember and honour the beautiful “children/flowers” of Palestine. ●

Harpreet Ghuman is a Canadian/Sikh educator in Toronto who accesses writing as a form of self care, creative expression and storytelling that seeks to shed light on identities and experiences not always captured in mainstream spaces.



Reem

Broken bodies, and broken hearts
On the Boulevard of Nightmares trapped in my thoughts
You can flip the script
or switch the plot
But there's nowhere to run, stuck in the same spot

Where do we go from here?
No gettin' out
Hearts pacin', minds racin'
Voices scream and shout

48 and 84, numbers mean something
On the path to Liberation, still Resisting.
Progress it takes time, over many stages
Revolutions not overnight, written over many pages

Children of Palestine
They're yours and mine
For you to stay silent
Must surely be a crime

Genocidal intent equals dollars and cents
Missing fathers and daughters can't even tell where they went
75 Days? 75 Years.
Experience new traumas, relive the same fears

Gaza Emergency
Permanently under siege
When will the kids be free?
And will they live to see?

The end of occupation?
And the killing spree?
Children by the olive tree
In a Homeland that's Free

A never ending nightmare becomes a dream
A mother saves her son, and stops to breathe

So heed the journalists' plea
Dig through the rubble and see
All the martyrs they bleed
I hear ancestral screams
And the mothers they grieve
How do I fall asleep?
I see the face of Reem
The face of Reem
Beautiful face of Reem



From South Africa to Palestine

Trajectories of resistance

Salim Vally

In March 2023 at the annual Palestine lecture at the University of London's School of Oriental African Studies,¹ I said that while Israel has always been a settler-colonial apartheid state maintained through military rule, we needed to be very concerned that under the present Israeli government the situation would not just go from bad to worse but that, at a certain point, the quantitative change would become qualitative. This assessment was based on the makeup of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's government, which includes [Minister of National Security] Itamar Ben-Gvir, [Deputy Minister of National Jewish Identity] Avi Maoz, and [Minister of Finance] Bezalel Smotrich, who now have responsibilities for key areas, such as building settlements and security.

What has happened in the past (at the time of writing) nine months did not come as a surprise, even if Israel has been doing this from time to time over the past eight decades, for example when it facilitated the massacre of thousands of unarmed civilians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila or its regular bombing sprees (what the Israeli generals referred to as "mowing the lawn") against the

civilian population of Gaza over the past two decades.

But the present destruction of infrastructure, hospitals, universities and schools, and the killing of more than 40,000 men, women and children from a population of just 2.3 million is really staggering. The number of people murdered (over 70% of whom are children and women), those buried under the rubble and those maimed are the equivalent of over two million Canadians excluding those who have died from starvation, illness and lack of medical treatment.

Growing international solidarity

Internationally, many of us feel that a tipping or inflection point has been reached. For a long time, Israel was allowed to act with impunity and without restraint. But we are starting to see changes we would not have thought possible a few years ago. Primarily in the U.S., but also in Germany and some other European countries, cracks are starting to show. For example, sanctions are now on the cards for many countries and even United Nation agencies. Malaysia has refused to allow Israeli-flagged cargo ships to dock in their ports. Namibia has

sanctioned the sale of diamonds to Israel. So, things are changing.

Something similar happened with South Africa. The first call for a boycott campaign against apartheid was made as early as 1959. But it was only when dockworkers in Trinidad, Norway and Liverpool started refusing to load and unload South African goods in 1960 and waterside workers in Sydney refused to handle cargo on a ship that was believed to be carrying arms to South Africa in 1964; when shop workers in supermarkets in places such as Ireland started refusing to handle South African products; when people such as in New Zealand started to protest against touring South African sporting teams, that governments around the world started to change their positions.

Today, the hard work of activists throughout the world has enabled us to make very rapid gains. Of course, this has come at a huge price for Palestinians. And we still have much work to do. The reality today looks very grim — as it did in the '80s in my country. But there is a well-known phrase that “the night is darkest just before dawn breaks.” Many Palestinians feel this current moment may be a moment of change. That is why we need to build on the momentum that exists and, among other things, push for more sanctions including pushing to stop Israel from participating in cultural events.

Building on South Africa’s legal case at the Hague we held a global gathering of solidarity organisations in Johannesburg on

May 12, 2024. The conference was attended by over 400 participants from 32 countries, and adopted the ‘[Johannesburg Declaration on Israel’s Settler-Colonialism, Apartheid and Genocide: Towards a Global Anti-Apartheid Movement for Palestine](#)’. The Declaration urged people and organisations globally to expand, intensify and escalate actions in solidarity with the Palestinian people’s courageous liberation struggle to end genocide, ethnic cleansing, occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid ‘from the River to the Sea’.

Conference attendees agreed to cooperate with other organisations working on the various issues and campaigns in this Programme of Action.

Since the Johannesburg conference, and despite the provisional measures issued by the

International Court of Justice (ICJ) on May 24, 2024 explicitly ordering Israel to halt its military offensive, Israel continues to relentlessly bomb civilians and Gaza’s infrastructure, increasingly making the territory unliveable. The ICJ also reiterated its order for Israel to immediately allow the unhindered passage of humanitarian aid, including food, water and medicines. Israel has ignored this and previous orders and is deliberately hastening the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians through disease and famine. Israel has also rejected United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions demanding a ceasefire, including one on June 11, 2024 that was supported by 14 of the 15 UNSC members (with one abstention).

International solidarity actions

Given that the genocidal war against Palestinians is being carried out with weapons supplied by Western powers — especially the U.S. but also Germany, Canada, Italy and England, among others — conference participants raised the need to pressure governments and parliaments to immediately impose a military embargo on Israel, as called for by the UN Human Rights Council and dozens of UN human rights experts. This embargo needs to include the sale and transfer of weapons, military equipment and dual-use technology, an end to military funding and a ban on importing Israeli arms and spyware, and on joint military and security projects. Another issue was attempting to identify Israel’s economic vulnerabilities. Israel’s economy is increasingly tottering on the edge. Given this, there was a strong belief that we need to identify its strategic weak points. The Palestinian BDS National Committee and the BDS movement globally have identified many such weak points. In this context, participants at the Conference vowed to support, strengthen and expand BDS actions.

We also identified and discussed issues such as Israel’s deliberate effort to comprehensively destroy the Palestinian education system — an action known as “scholasticide”. The term refers to the systemic obliteration of education through the arrest, detention or killing of lecturers, teachers, students and staff, the destruction of educational infrastructure and the erosion of the intellectual and cultural fabric of Palestinian society. Thus far, 450 schools and all 12 universities in Gaza have been bombed, together with archives, libraries and printing presses. Israel’s destruction of this infrastructure leaves 625,000 school and 90,000

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university students in Gaza without access to education. At the time of writing, 6,000 students, 381 educators, 98 professors and four university presidents have been killed, many with their families. Because of this, we need to step up our support for a comprehensive and consistent boycott of all academic institutions in Israel, as advocated by the [Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#).

We discussed the Israeli regime's reproductive genocide in Gaza, through systematic violence and the deliberate targeting of women and children, which has increased exponentially since October 2023. Imposing restrictions on access to vital resources such as food, water, electricity, and medical treatment results in women, particularly pregnant women, and children suffering the most. That is why, as a movement, we see the need to advance the fundamental rights of Palestinians to bodily autonomy, safety, and justice. It was also noted that Israel's military onslaught has had enormous effects on Gaza's ecosystems and biodiversity. Participants agreed that the scale and potential long-term impact of this damage amounts to ecocide and must be investigated as a war crime.

When you look at all this, you start to see

why Palestine is such a key issue: it is capable of bringing together environmentalists, anti-racist activists, Indigenous peoples, anti-militarists, anti-capitalists, feminists and many others from all around the world in an intersectional way.

Another important aspect we see is Israel's particular role in global capitalism. Palestinian Adam Hani-ah who spent time in Canada, was very clear on this many years ago when he [said](#): "It is not merely the depth of suffering or length of exile that makes the Palestinian struggle an imperative of international solidarity in the current period. It is also the central location of the struggle within the broader context of global resistance to imperialism and neoliberalism." Israel's role is to make the region safe for oil companies in concert with despotic Arab regimes, but its role extends beyond that to supporting military dictatorships elsewhere and suppressing workers' struggles around the world in very concrete ways. For

example, Israel has carved out a niche market producing high-tech security essential for the day-to-day functioning of global capitalism, with the weaponry and technology it exports being field tested on the bodies of Palestinian men, women and children.

This is important in terms of the whataboutism we often encounter: "What about the Congo?" "What about Sudan?" "Why aren't you boycotting other countries?" During apartheid in South Africa, the international boycott campaign faced the same issue. The period of apartheid overlapped with the period of Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia, during which many more people were killed than under apartheid. But the reality was that the West did not support Pol Pot in the way that it supported the South African regime, and the boycott campaign was, for us, a tactical weapon. The same is true with Israel today. Moreover, we see a direct connection between our struggle against Israeli apartheid and struggles such as those in the Congo and Sudan, because Israel is very much involved in funding and fuelling those conflicts, extracting minerals and supporting warlords. This has been well documented. So, for us, the campaign to boycott Israel does not undermine or reduce the importance of the other struggles; rather, we see a victory for Palestine as aiding those struggles.

The roots of South African solidarity

South Africans' solidarity with Palestinians does not start with the ICJ initiative. The historical roots are fundamental to understanding contemporary times and the significance of the ICJ order. Many people see the latter as a government initiative, but actually it has come to this point as a result of a deeper history. Since 1994, after the ending of legal apartheid, the government has had to give rhetorical support to the Palestinian struggle because of the strong and visceral feelings of the majority of South Africans in support of the Palestinians — and it was social movements, trade unions, youth groups, feminist organisations, progressive faith-based organisations that pushed the government to take this particular stance.

South Africans' identification with the struggle of Palestinians includes the recognition of Israel's culpability in our own oppression. For instance, Israel was an important arms supplier to Apartheid South Africa despite the international arms embargo, and as late as 1980, 35% of Israel's arms exports were destined for South Africa. Much has been written about the subsequent relationship between Apartheid

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When you look at all this, you start to see why Palestine is such a key issue: it is capable of bringing together environmentalists, anti-racist activists, Indigenous peoples, anti-militarists, anti-capitalists, feminists and many others from all around the world in an intersectional way.

South Africa and Israel. It will suffice here to say that Israel was loyal to the Apartheid state and clung to the friendship when almost all other relationships had dissolved. During the 1970s this affiliation extended into the field of nuclear weaponry when Israeli experts helped South Africa to develop at least six nuclear warheads and in the 1980s, when the global anti-Apartheid Movement had forced their states to impose sanctions on the Apartheid regime, Israel imported South African goods and re-exported them to the world as a form of inter-racist solidarity. Israeli companies, subsidised by the South African regime despite the pittance they paid workers were established in a number of Bantustans.

There are also clear similarities between the 65-odd pieces of discriminatory legislation in Israel that govern all aspects of everyday life, the fragmentation and theft of the land and the matrix of security laws with what existed in Apartheid South Africa. While the laws are similar they are not the same and actually apartheid in Israel is much more severe than what existed in South Africa. Other South Africans have also said this including the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

There is one critical difference though. Apartheid South Africa depended on the super exploitation of the labour of Indigenous Black people. In Israel the Indigenous Palestinians are disposable.

Despite the genocide, we take succour from the fact that acts of defiance, determination and resistance often against seemingly overwhelming odds continue to support and encourage the will of Palestinians. Global solidarity activists need to be inspired and strengthened by the steadfastness and courage of Palestinians despite the abject obsequiousness of some 'leaders.' Despite 75 years of massacres and atrocities piled upon outrages and injustices the resistance on all fronts continue. It is an antidote to the all too human feeling of despair at the extent of the horror of the genocide.

We on the outside should be inspired by this resistance and we have a clear role to play. The most potent weapon we have learnt to rely on, forged through the tried and tested struggles of workers and oppressed people spanning time and space: solidarity. International solidarity in this sense in the words of the late Mozambican leader, Samora Machel is "not an act of charity but an act of unity between allies fighting on different terrains toward the same objectives." ●

Editor's note: Since this article was submitted, the number of casualties has increased exponentially. In an article in *The Lancet*, the number of deaths was estimated at 186,000. The majority of these were not caused by bombing or execution, but by other indirect health-related implications.

Salim Vally is a professor at the University of Johannesburg and South Africa's National Research Foundation Chair in Community, Adult and Workers' Education. He is also a coordinating committee member of the SA BDS Coalition.

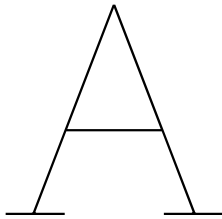
Notes

¹ The [annual Palestine lecture](#) at the University of London's School of Oriental African Studies.



How and why I got here

Endre Farkas



Although the poems accompanying this article came quickly, they were difficult to write. They are poems I didn't want to write. Not because I shy away from

poems of engagement and not because I believe that a poet has no loyalty but to the poem. No, I didn't want to write them because they go against "my people."

I am a child of Holocaust survivors. A child, who, from an early age, heard the horror stories of my parents' experiences in the Auschwitz and Mauthausen concentration camps. I come from a deracinated family, whose grandmothers and eight aunts and uncles were murdered and cremated.

I am a child of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 who, at eight years of age, sat on my mother's lap in the dark, afraid, while a mob gathered outside my house in the middle of the night chanting, "Kill the Jews!" I am the child who escaped my antisemitic birthland by hiding in the bathroom of a train, and crossing no-man's land in the middle of the night.

We arrived in Montreal, Canada in 1956. Here, aside from regular school, I attended Jewish *chaider* (school) where I learned about the historic horrors committed against "my people" and about the great miracle of Israel, the safe haven for Jews. Every Friday I would bring to school my nickel in exchange for a stamp with a picture of a leaf on it that I would

stick in my colouring book onto a picture of a bare-limbed tree. At the end of the year, my tree full of leaves, a tree in my name was planted in Israel. This way, I was told, I was making my contribution to turning an empty desert into the land of "Milk and Honey."

Summers, I would spend two weeks in a Jewish camp in the Laurentians (Camp B'nai Brith) where not so long before, signs of "No Jews" were not uncommon. Every morning we sang "God Save the Queen" followed by the Israeli National anthem.

As part of my secular education I went to Baron Byng Protestant High School. I would say that 99% of the students were first- and second-generation immigrant Jewish children. It was the Alma Mater of Canadian poets Abraham Moses Klein and Irving Layton (né Lazarovitch) as well as future NDP leader David Lewis (né Duvid Losz). It was a high school made famous by its most famous student, Mordecai Richler, in his novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Academically, it was regularly ranked among the best in the province. In addition, it often won the top prize in the Montreal high school Christmas choir competition. Imagine a gym full of proud Jewish immigrant parents listening to their Jewish children sing, "O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord."

I came of age and entered university in the 60s. It was here that I developed an interest in reading and writing poetry. It was here that I

encountered the poetry of A.M. Klein. Klein was a poet I could relate to. He was a child of Jewish immigrants who fled the pogroms in Russia, lived in my neighbourhood, went to my high school, and wrote of “our people.” He wrote of our heritage, culture, and lives. But he also wrote, sympathetically, of the French Canadians (as the Québécois were called then). And even though there were tensions between the two groups who shared some of the same space — and he wrote about that too — he saw common traits between them. Both deeply believed in the bond of families, culture, language, faith, and had a deep desire for a land of their own.

In retrospect, the empathy in his poems for the “other,” who might sometimes be his “enemy,” might have been the first time I encountered the idea of understanding conflict from both sides.

One of the wonderful learning experiences I had in university was about diversity. I attended Sir George Williams University, (now Concordia), the working class, immigrants’ university. I met the world there. It was also a time of student activism. It was a time of teach-ins, sit-ins, be-ins, love-ins. I participated in the occupation of the university in what is now referred to as the “computer riots.” The Black students were protesting a white professor’s discriminatory grading and the university’s handling of the situation. They occupied the computer rooms. We, the white students, occupied the faculty lounge in support. It was a time and place for expanding your consciousness and learning about racism. They were idealistic, attractive, sexy, and righteous times. I was drawn to it. I had the feeling of being on the right side of history.

In 1967, the Six Day War exploded and my hippie love of the world with it. My child-of-survivors gut reaction of “Never Again” and wanting revenge surfaced. I must admit, it never was far from the surface. Israel was totally surrounded by Arabs who wanted to drive us into the sea. I went down to the Israeli embassy to volunteer. I was told thanks but no thanks. We’ve got this. And I rejoiced in David’s victory over Goliath. “My people” not only survived but were convincingly victorious against those who wanted to annihilate us for no reason. That’s all I knew, that’s all that mattered.

I spent the early part of the 70s on a commune communing with nature and a diverse group of young artists, reconnecting with the idea of Love and Peace. They were “my people” then.

The 80s was a return to the city and the honing of my craft. I became part of an experimental, alternative literary community. I collaborated with artists from other disciplines: music, dance, theatre. One of the poetry/dance pieces I created in 1980 was *Face-Off/Mise au Jeu* which dealt

Tree Stamp

I was about twelve
before my bar mitzvah,
before I bloomed into a man.

I brought to *Chaidar*,*
every Friday afternoon,
before the Sabbath,
proudly, my nickel
to buy a stamp.

On it a picture of a tree
to paste onto my stamp page
in the shape of a tree.

By year’s end, it bloomed
full of stamp leaves and
bought me a tree
to plant in Israel.

Oh, how proud I was!
My tree joined other stamp trees
in the land of the Jews
and turned the empty desert
into groves and groves of oranges.

Ignorant of the bulldozed homes,
markets, lies and lives from which
my tree’s roots drew life,
they and I grew tall and proud.

Now, older, wiser and sadder,
of the people of Palestine
I ask for forgiveness.

And to the people of Israel
in the land of Milk and Honey
I say
I want my death tree back!

**Chaidar*=Jewish school

— **Endre Farkas**

with the Quebec/Canada separation issue. Like Klein, I saw and presented both sides, their fears, prejudices, differences and similarities. They were my “divided people” then.

The rest of the 80s and on I spent married to a Québécois Catholic woman and raising kids. My parents were deeply hurt and worried that I had married outside “our people”. Their biggest fear was that during the first fight, she would call me a dirty Jew and then I would experience the truth that they experienced. You can’t trust “them” was their conviction, if not their motto. That fear disappeared once they really got to know her and we had children. Then she became their “favourite daughter-in-law.” The lesson here is pretty obvious.

In 1994, I published a book of poems called *Surviving Words*. It almost coincided with the 50th anniversary of my parents’ liberation from the concentration camps. The book was partly a tribute to “our people’s” survival and thriving. It is divided into three sections. The first is about their experiences. The second is about our escape to freedom—“my story.” The broader third section examines the horrors and genocide in the world. It is about the “Never Again” happening over and over again. To “other people.” A poem in the book called “Jews” questions the “Israel right or right” attitude that my parents had instilled in me. It doesn’t deny the horrors done to us

but it also points out some of the horrific things we do to those not so different from us.

Only upon re-reading the poem now do I notice that I used the third-person plural noun “they” instead of “we.” I think it was the first time (maybe subconsciously) in my creative life that I was making a break with “my people.”

I remember reading this poem in a synagogue and being met with a loud silence. Afterwards I was lectured about my ignorance and warned that this was giving ammunition to the enemy. I was also told not to be a self-hating Jew.

In 2006, after one of the many Israeli incursions into Lebanon, I began an email exchange with poet Carolyn Marie Souaid (of Lebanese ancestry). She started it. She wrote, “There go ‘your people’ again.” We were good enough friends that I understood her playful/serious jab. But still it got my guard/hackles up.

I couldn’t deny the rightness of it. The missives flew back and forth for quite a while. And because we are poets, it was inevitable (for us, at least) that they became “poetic” missives.

What was not inevitable was that they morphed into a two-voice poem that later became *Blood is Blood*. The piece presented both sides of the Arab/Israeli, Arab/Jew “problem.” We wanted to show the human and inhuman sides of both and the inevitable end of such conflicts on a universal scale. It was a “fair and balanced” piece that ended with “Let us take an eye for an eye/until everyone is blind.” (See *Our Schools/Our Selves* summer 2013.)

Interestingly, when we presented it at readings, we upset people on both sides of the issue. I felt if we upset both sides, then we must be hitting nerves on both sides. At one such event, however, I was confronted (quite forcefully) with the fact that, although outnumbered and surrounded by Arab countries, Israel was/is the superpower in the region. The conflict was an unequal one between two peoples, one with slingshots and another with rockets.

After that encounter, I realized that our “fair and balanced” piece wasn’t so “fair and balanced.” The more I thought about it, the more I witnessed Israel’s right-wing Zionist government’s actions over the years, the less comfortable I felt about my position. Were I to write it now, it would be very different. Israel’s recent actions have led me to feel that “fair and balanced” had to be redefined. In a way, these new poems I have included with this article are the rewrites and redefinitions.

Yes, I was horrified and angry about the events of October 7th. But the “Never Again” response also resonated in another way. This time I knew, as an informed human being, that this attack by Hamas and others before it were not simply “inexplicable” antisemitic acts by Jew-hating terrorists. There was history. This horror had its beginnings in other horrors beginning with the Balfour Mandate of 1917 and the 1948 Nakba. I found myself caught between my child-of-survivors gut feelings for “my people” and my empathy and understanding for an occupied and exiled people. After the first couple of weeks, it was obvious that the scale of the response and the lies about it could not be justified. They were more than unjustifiable, they were criminal and genocidal.

So here I am now, writing poems I don’t want to write but feel I must. I know that they and others I’ve written since the Zionist “revenge” began will offend “my people.” A relative has already called me an antisemite.

I am a child of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 who, at eight years of age, sat on my mother’s lap in the dark, afraid, while a mob gathered outside my house in the middle of the night chanting, “Kill the Jews!” I am the child who escaped my antisemitic birthland by hiding in the bathroom of a train, and crossing no-man’s land in the middle of the night.

These poems are about calling out “my people,” and telling “my people” that their actions should make them ashamed and angry. It certainly makes me ashamed and angry. And I’ve come to the conclusion that these “my people” aren’t, in fact, my people. They are not “our people.” *They* are the antisemites! Indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary calls a Semite “A member of any of the peoples who speak or spoke a Semitic language, including in particular the Jews *and Arabs* (emphasis mine). The name comes via Latin from Greek Sēm ‘Shem’, son of Noah in the Bible, from whom these people were traditionally supposed to be descended.”

On a related tangent, April is National Poetry Month in Canada. Usually it is the month when we celebrate the art and craft of our poets. But what I don’t think we celebrate enough is that poetry has an important role in society. To quote a non-poet, Salman Rushdie: “A poet’s work is...to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it from going to sleep.”

To do this we must think globally, and act locally. Writing poems of engagement is one way. But there are others. Aside from writing poems about the horror, I decided to team up with Carolyn and do something that would combine the two. Together we forged a plan that would make National Poetry Month mean more, be more. We decided to make it a learning / teaching moment. We wanted to show that poetry matters and can and must contribute to the struggle for justice.

We curated two Poets for Palestine reading events. We invited poets to read not only their poems but the poems of Palestinian poets. We wanted to showcase Palestinian poets, to show how they and their poems are vital, alive and integrated into the survival of their people. Both nights, Librairie Pulp Books and Café in Verdun, Quebec was packed to the rafters. They were powerful, moving events. What pleased us to no end was that the majority of the audience was young, enthusiastic and engaged. It showed not only by their reactions to the poems but in the fact that we raised \$2,000 for the Palestinian Children’s Relief Fund. That’s putting your money where your heart is.

[We recorded a video of the evening to give people who couldn’t be there a chance to see it](#), to be a testament of engagement, and to be a record of Palestinian poets’ voices. ●

Endre Farkas born in Hungary, is a child of Holocaust survivors. He has published two novels, twelve books of poetry and two plays. His work has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, Slovenian and Hungarian.

White Flag

Armed with a white flag
tied to a broken-off twig
held aloft in the flapping wind
under a blazing sun and black smoke.

This is how they move about in the Holy Land.

A man, hands in the air,
proceeds with care,
comes in peace
looking for his family
among the bombed-out rubble
of the Holy Land.

God willing.

God is not willing.
The soldier’s aim is true.

Quick as the flash
The man’s wife
is now his widow.

A hole in the body of his bloody Holy life.

Under the beautiful blue sky,
under the flapping wind,
under the black smoke of the Holy Land,
mouth to mouth,
breath to the breathless,
man, husband, father, son
no more.

From the river to the sea
the white flag on his chest
is burning red.

This is my people’s shame.
This is my people’s
Holy, holy, unholy death.

— **Endre Farkas**

For Palestine

A painting

Nellie D.

By the middle of the school year, I saw all my classmates impacted.

On my walk to school, posters on lampposts highlighting atrocities happening in Palestine. Palestine became a frequent topic of classroom discussion. Students walking out of classes and defying school board schedules to display their support for suffering Palestinians.

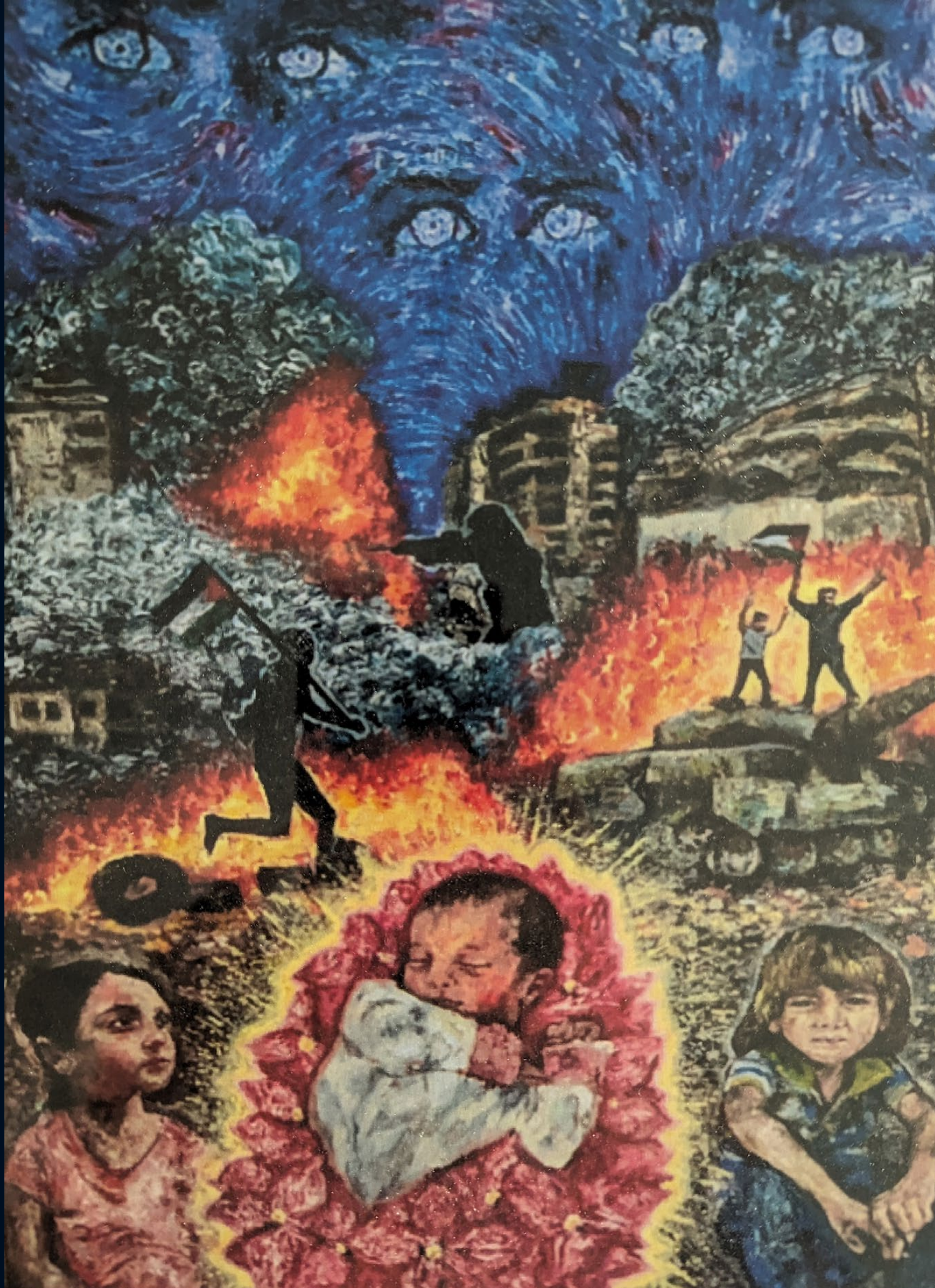
I see small actions taken by a collective of students with bigger intentions, intentions derived from love and peace. All of my peers are mourning. On social media, I see videos of students protesting in the streets; one holds a microphone as she voices the grief in her heart for all to hear. Her friends follow behind her, holding flags in solidarity for Palestine. She reads a poem that poignantly describes the ongoing atrocities. Thousands are dying — children, women, innocent people.

What is my place amidst all this? I shall show my unwavering support for those who are suffering. I will stand with my classmates and grieve with them.

This painting embodies those exact intentions — I wanted those who are grieving to feel understood and seen. I wanted to use my skills to highlight an important issue in my heart, an issue drastically impacting the lives of those around me. I believe I satisfied those intentions, for when I showed this to a girl at my school, she cried and hugged me.

I hope that the people who see this painting are able to mourn with one another and feel understood. I hope that the whole world is aware of the atrocities that are happening in Palestine. ●

Nellie D. is a public school student from Windsor/Essex County (Ontario).





Colonialism, racism and the IHRA

Harsha Walia

In June 2024, after years of advocacy from Palestinian and Jewish families, the Toronto District School Board voted to include anti-Palestinian racism as part of its Combating Hate and Racism strategy. While many people saw this as long overdue, a number of pro-Israeli organizations almost immediately began campaigning to have the decision reversed. Some even went so far as to suggest that anti-Palestinian racism is an oppressive and antisemitic framework, and called on the TDSB to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism instead.

Anti-Semitism must be vigorously challenged as a pillar of Eurocentric white supremacy. Zionism is a specific political ideology and form of ethnonationalism that drove the establishment of the state of Israel and maintains the illegal occupation of Palestine. The Zionist mantra of “a land without a people for a people without a land” parallels the settler-colonial ideology of *terra nullius* (barren land) that led to the colonization of the Americas. But Palestine was not a land without people. The land purchase agency for the Zionist project was actually called “The Jewish Colonization Agency,” and Israeli

civilians call themselves “settlers” and refer to their colonies (recently deemed illegal under international law by the International Court of Justice) as “settlements.”¹

Conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism suppresses dissent to settler-colonial Israeli state violence and Israeli apartheid, and also actively perpetuates anti-Palestinian racism. The report “Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations” identifies anti-Palestinian racism through its many forms, including “denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies; defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values.” A recent study reveals that slander of Palestinians as antisemitic is the most common subtype of anti-Palestinian racism in Canada.

IHRA definition: state-sanctioned anti-Palestinian racism

“When the State of Israel claims to represent all Jewish people, defenders of Israeli policy redefine antisemitism to include criticism of Israel.” – On Anti-Semitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice

A key legislative tool to suppress Palestinian human rights and institutionalize anti-Palestinian racism in Canada is the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) working definition of antisemitism, which the federal government and several provinces and municipalities have adopted.

The primary goal of the IHRA definition is not to fight antisemitism or to protect Jewish communities from racist attacks, predominantly carried out by white supremacists; it is a mechanism to suppress advocacy for Palestinian rights. Of the definition’s 11 examples, seven deem criticism of Israel or Zionism to be antisemitic. Even one of the definition’s original authors, Kenneth Stern, has condemned its anti-democratic and repressive impact on Palestinian rights.

In 2023, over 100 Palestinian human rights groups and global organizations including American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, urged the United Nations not to adopt the IHRA definition. They wrote “the UN should ensure that its vital efforts to combat antisemitism do not inadvertently embolden or endorse policies and laws that undermine fundamental human rights, including the right to speak and organize in support of Palestinian rights and to criticize Israeli government policies. For these reasons, we strongly urge the UN not to endorse the IHRA definition of antisemitism.”

Forty international Jewish organizations similarly write: “The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which is increasingly being adopted or considered by western governments, is worded in such a way as to be easily adopted or considered by western governments to intentionally equate legitimate criticisms of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism, as a means to suppress the former.”

In a sweeping letter in 2020, a group of 122 Palestinian and Arab intellectuals also expressed their

concerns about the IHRA definition and the cover it provides to a global military super-power: “There is a huge difference between a condition where Jews are singled out, oppressed and suppressed as a minority by antisemitic regimes or groups, and a condition where the self-determination of a Jewish population in Palestine/Israel has been implemented in the form of an ethnic exclusivist and territorially expansionist state.”

In Canada, the IHRA definition is opposed by an array of organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, Coalition of Palestinian Canadian Organizations, Independent Jewish Voices Canada, Canadian Federation of Students, BC Civil Liberties Association, Canadian Association of University Teachers, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Confédération des syndicats nationaux, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, as well as 40 faculty unions, 200 Jewish faculty, and over 650 Canadian academics, all of whom cite the threats to freedom of expression, academic freedom, and constitutionally-protected rights to oppose government policies.

A recent 2024 report “Combatting Anti-Palestinian Racism and Antisemitism: An Intersectional Approach to Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy,” states: “[C]onflating legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and actions with antisemitism makes it more difficult for the public to identify genuine antisemitism, thereby advertently putting Jews in danger. Further, insisting that Judaism/Jewishness means uncritical support for the policies and actions of a state that is widely and justifiably condemned for serious human rights violations is itself antisemitic, erases non-Zionist Jewish identities and histories, and also puts Jews at risk.” This report also highlights the systemic power imbalance between Palestinian and pro-Israel Jewish communities in Canada.

The IHRA definition continues to be pushed in Canada by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, B’nai Brith Canada, and other staunchly pro-Israel organizations. The 14-page report “IHRA’s True Intentions” by Canadians for Justice in Peace in the Middle East details how efforts to adopt the IHRA definition in Canada comes from an explicitly pro-Israel coalition that wants to subdue growing pro-Palestinian movements. Independent Jewish Voices has also painstakingly documented numerous examples where the IHRA definition has been used to silence the Palestinian solidarity movement in Canada through fabricated smears

The primary goal of the IHRA definition is not to fight anti-semitism or to protect Jewish communities from racist attacks, predominantly carried out by white supremacists; it is a mechanism to suppress advocacy for Palestinian rights.

of antisemitism. Their report “Unveiling the Chilly Climate: The Suppression of Speech on Palestine in Canada” sheds light on the wave of suppression of pro-Palestinian speech, including intense reprisals, harassment, and intimidation faced by students, teachers, and organizations speaking in support of Palestinian rights.

The intensifying energies to implement the IHRA definition and escalating smears on advocacy for Palestinian human rights coincide with Gaza being subjected to one of the heaviest and most destructive bombing campaigns in modern history. Hospitals, schools, refugee camps, mosques, churches, residential buildings, UN shelters have all been destroyed. Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah harrowingly reports that children in Gaza are “the biggest cohort of pediatric amputees in history.” Almost two million Gazans have been displaced. These war crimes are in the context of Israel’s illegal and violent 76-year-long occupation of Palestine.

At this juncture in history, acting to urgently end the genocide of Palestinians and fighting antisemitism both necessitate the dismantling of colonialism and racism. This means we must be able to openly criticize Israel in the same way as any other state — including

Canada. This includes education on Palestinian history and liberation; fighting anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, Zionism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-Arab racism as interconnected forms of racism; rejecting the adoption of the vague and problematic IHRA definition in educational institutions; and upholding the right of students and educators to teach Palestine and act for Palestinian rights, such as through university encampments, without reprisal. As Nelson Mandela said “In extending our hands across the miles to the people of Palestine, we do so in the full knowledge that we are part of a humanity that is one.” ●

Harsha Walia is a Punjabi Sikh writer and organizer based in Vancouver, unceded Coast Salish territories. She is the award-winning author of *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (2021) and *Undoing Border Imperialism* (2013), and co-author of “Never Home: Legislating Discrimination in Canadian Immigration” as well as “Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.”

Notes

1 As described by Jewish Voices for Peace “The political ideology of Zionism, regardless of which strain, has resulted in the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in the land of historic Palestine. In 1948, 750,000 Palestinians were expelled as part of that process, their homes and property confiscated. Despite recognition of their rights by the United Nations, their rights to return and be compensated have long been denied by the U.S. and Israel. In 1967, Israel occupied what is now known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, putting millions of people under military rule. Longstanding systemic inequalities privilege Jews over Palestinians inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories.”



Teaching Tatreez

Khaled Shawwash

Palestinian Tatreez refers to the traditional Palestinian embroidery that is intricately stitched onto fabrics, typically using brightly colored threads. This traditional form of embroidery has deep cultural and historical significance among the Palestinian people and is often used to adorn clothing, accessories, and household items.

Tatreez has been passed down through generations of Palestinian women, and each region or village may have its own distinct patterns and motifs. These designs often carry specific meanings, telling stories about the wearer's identity, social status, and personal history.

This lesson will not only teach students about the history and significance of Tatreez, but will also help students understand the importance of textile art/embroidery to different cultures across the world.

This lesson can be adapted to both the diverse needs of your class and to grades other than the ones listed below.

Curricular connections: arts education grades 4-7

Big ideas

- Exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives.
- Experiencing art is a means to develop empathy for others' perspectives and experiences.
- Experiencing art challenges our point of view and expands our understanding of others.

Curricular competencies

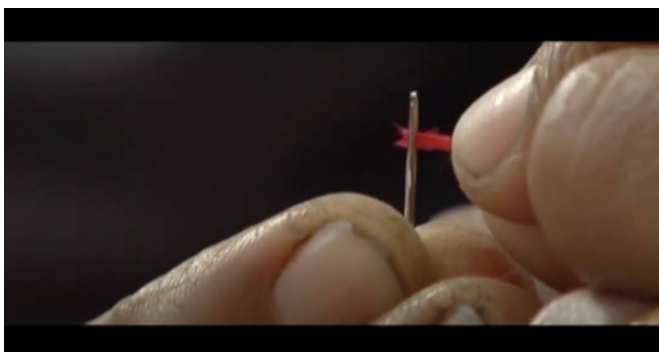
- Interpret and communicate ideas using symbols and elements to express meaning through the arts
- Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts
- Examine relationships between the arts and the wider world

Content

- symbolism and metaphor create and represent meaning
- a variety of regional and national works of art and artistic traditions from



**A complete lesson plan
and appendix materials
are available on-line**



- visual arts: elements of design: line, shape, space, texture, colour, form (visual arts), value; principles of design: pattern, repetition, balance, contrast, emphasis, rhythm (visual arts), variety, unity, harmony diverse cultures, communities, times, and places

Key terms

Palestinian: Someone or something that is from the region of Palestine.

Tatreez: Palestinian embroidery using cross-stitch patterns.

Embroidery: The art or process of forming decorative designs with hand or machine needlework (Merriam-Webster)

Textile: Relating to fabric or weaving. (Oxford Languages)

Culture: The customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group. (Oxford Languages)

Symbol: A thing that represents or stands for something else. (Oxford Languages)

Symmetry: When two halves perfectly mirror each other.

Pattern: A repeated design.

Materials

- Laptop
- Projector
- Whiteboard markers
- 1 copy of Appendix A per student/2 students
- 1 copy of Appendix C per 2 students
- Copies of Appendix D
- Copies of Appendix E
- Copy of *Coloring Palestine* (optional)
- Watercolor paint
- Small, thin paintbrushes

Lesson

Part 1, 5-10 minutes

Go over the key terms (decide which ones work best for your age group) with the students and see if any already know what they mean. Explain to the class what the lesson

will be about. Have them discuss any of the following in groups of 2-3:

- How can art be important to culture and people?
- Why is art important to culture and people?
- What are some examples of art that are culturally significant?
- Why/How can art represent hardships that people from certain cultures face?

Have a member from each group go up to the board and write their response down. Discuss as a class.

Part 2, 40 minutes

Watch the following videos:

1. [The art of embroidery in Palestine, practices, skills, knowledge and rituals \(0:00–4:10\)](#)
2. [Tatreez Timelapse – Palestinian Embroidery by Lina Barkawi](#)
3. [Tatreez: How Palestinian women use their dresses as an act of resistance](#)

Either on laptops, on iPads, as a class, or with printouts (you will likely have to adjust the print settings), have the students read the article “[The Art of Tatreez – Palestinian Embroidery](#)” from Bayt al Fann.

Individually or in groups of two, have the students complete the assignment from **Appendix A**.

Once most are finished, compile their responses as a class on the board.

Part 3, 50-60 minutes

Using the same article from Bayt al Fann, project 2-3 examples of Tatreez on the board. Ask the students if they can identify any symbols or motifs. You can also use examples from **Appendix B**.

Once they are done, give each student a copy of **Appendix E (T11 & T12)**. As a class, go through those same examples again but this time using the legend—see what they can identify.

Set up the paint supplies and the printouts from **Appendix E (T1-T10)**. Have the students paint the Tatreez art. Emphasize the importance of symmetry (both halves should be exactly the same colour) and the importance of intricacy (the symbols and shapes should be painted very carefully and not with large brushes of paint) to mimic the attention to detail that Tatreez requires.

Once finished, have the students share their art with the class. Ask students to discuss what messages or stories they are choosing to share through their art. Have them share their responses with the class. Specifically:

- What the story is about
- How the story is told through the art using symbols, patterns, and colours
- What theme or message is conveyed through the art

Part 4, 35-40 minutes

Whether from the Bayt al Fann article or the appendices, briefly show examples of Tatreez art.

Show the students examples of textile art/embroidery from other cultures from **Appendix D**. Discuss the importance and uniqueness of textile art/embroidery to their respective cultures. If you would like, have students share examples of textile art/embroidery from their own cultures.

Pick one example of textile art/embroidery from another culture. Review what students notice and identify, as a class, what similarities and differences they see between it and Tatreez.

Have the students get into groups of 2. Give each group a handout of the Venn Diagram sheet from **Appendix C** as well as a printout from **Appendix D**.

Have them complete the assignment, then discuss as a class what each groups’ responses are. In addition, have them discuss and share any of the following points:

- How art can be used as a form of resistance or activism in the face of oppression
- Why do oppressors often attack/suppress the art of the people they are oppressing?
- How have Palestinians used art to fight oppression? ●

Khaled Shawwash is a Palestinian teacher that lives and works on the stolen lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. On top of the activism and union work he does, he loves to cook and read in his free time. He hopes to one day visit Nablus, the town in Palestine where his ancestors are from.



**Overlapping patterns:
keffiyeh, tatreez and Indigenous beadwork**

Photo Erika Shaker



Upholding our moral compass

Why now is the time to talk about Palestine in schools

Heba Mousa and Shirel Pegios

“Equity is teaching and learning that is centered on justice, liberation, truth, and freedom, and is free of bias and favouritism. You cannot talk about true justice, liberation, truth, and freedom without talking about anti-racism.”¹

—**Dr. Gholdy Muhammad “Unearthing Joy”**

Dr. Gholdy Muhammad’s ground-breaking work in laying the foundation for a Culturally and Historically Responsive teaching and Learning Literacy Framework is creating a major shift in how educators understand equity in education today.

According to Dr. Muhammad, true equity work requires focusing on five pursuits: Identity, Skill Development, Intellectualism, Criticality, and Joy. Equity work should not be confined to just “reading a multicultural book to the classroom or providing access to something educationally good or sound. Doing that does not ensure that children will learn about their identities and histories, nor the liberation of themselves and others.”²

Education is changing, it always has and always must. This is a requirement, as our

society does the same. We must, as educators, be committed to the development of our own knowledge and understanding as well as to unlearning that which impedes our ability to facilitate fair and equitable treatment of all our students under our care. We are required to be anti-racist and anti-oppressive educators who work alongside others to dismantle the systemic racism, marginalizations and oppressions which have been rampant across Canadian governmental agencies including in education.

It is our job to support students in the process of being lifelong learners. We are expected to teach them the critical thinking skills they require to engage with the world around them, be mindful of their own, and others’ biases, and equip them with the tools to become lifelong learners. As educators we do not have infinite knowledge, nor should this be an expectation. In fact, there is an expectation that we learn and unlearn alongside our students and colleagues, in order to prepare our students “for a complex and unpredictable future with rapidly changing political, social, economic, technological, and ecological landscapes.”³

Unfortunately, systemic racism, oppression and marginalization continue to impact many

Many educators have told us they are not sure what anti-Palestinian racism is and/or they don't fully understand the history. Some have also shared that they are not sure how to approach this topic and are afraid to do so. "Affirming the Palestinian Identity in Education" is an effort to remedy that. At unlearn, we do not believe that by affirming one identity, it diminishes or erases another. Just as we do not want anybody to experience anti-semitism, we also do not want anybody to experience anti-Palestinian racism. Anti-Palestinian racism is real and causes harm and also needs to be identified and addressed. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with Heba and Shirel to open up this critical conversation.

—**Abhi Ahluwalia, Founder, unlearn**

communities today. Anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Palestinian racism as well as antisemitism, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Queerphobia, and anti-Asian hate remain a national problem in 2024. While we have an obligation to address and dismantle all forms of racism, we (as Palestinian educators) have observed and felt a significant rise in anti-Palestinian racism in schools since October 7th 2023. There has been a great deal of **silencing and labelling** when Palestinians and their allies have tried to speak out about the atrocities happening in Palestine or shed light on the struggle for freedom and liberation of Palestinians. And although the world witnessed horrendous violence on October 7, the subsequent actions of aggression inflicted on the civilians of Gaza and what the International Court of Justice has called a "plausible genocide", woke the collective consciousness of Western society.

This pivotal moment, though not defined by a single event, encapsulates a series of transformative occurrences that are reshaping global perspectives and ideologies. Whether it be unlearning historical milestones, exploring Palestinian cultural values, witnessing steadfast bravery with student encampments, or mobilising social media platforms, we as educators

can agree that there is a shift in societal paradigms. It serves as a reminder of the **power of pivotal moments to challenge ingrained beliefs**, inspire new movements, and foster a greater sense of unity and understanding among individuals.

It also serves as a reminder for us as educators, about the importance of facilitating a learning environment for students to question, challenge, advocate and critically think through events happening around them. And to do that, educators need to stay abreast of the factual and accurate historical information about Palestinian identity — not only to enhance educators' ability to impart knowledge, but also to ensure they provide students with accurate and relevant information.

This is why Dr. Muhammad's vital *Culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching Framework* is so pivotal today. Educators must focus on the five pursuits — Identity, Skills, Intellect, Criticality and Joy — in order to engage and reach all learners. But how can we do so while being silenced by the powers of systemic racism still prevalent around us?

We must Learn and Unlearn about Palestine, and Palestinians' histories and narratives. We must do all we can to undo the many years of indoctrination we have undergone as a society that dehumanizes Palestinians and erases their lived experiences and narratives. Students must be able to proudly name who they are and share their experiences, histories and joys with their classmates in order to fully develop into those critical thinkers mandated in the global competencies by the Council of Ministers of Education. We must dismantle our biases and preconceived ideas and push back against those who continue to silence Palestinian voices. Finally, we must affirm students' identities and lived experiences so they may be able to build on these pursuits throughout their lives well beyond their time in our K-12 schools.

Because of this, we were compelled to work with the unlearn team. We began this process together in August of 2022 by creating a resource called [Affirming the Palestinian Identity in Education](#).

Understanding the much misunderstood history of Palestine and its people had to be our starting point. Without this, student identity, which is the first of Dr. Muhammad's *5 Pursuits*, would not be available to ensure equity for Palestinian students.

The course is organized around 4 big ideas: 1. What is Palestine? 2. Who is a Palestinian? 3. How Palestinians face anti-Palestinian Racism



and 4. Why should we support Palestinian students?

In one of the chapters of the course, the iceberg analogy is used to shed light on the years of confining the Palestinian struggle in western society to “Gaza/WestBank”, “Jerusalem” and the “Religious conflict” narrative.

In fact, the struggle for Palestinian liberation should also encapsulate contexts of “Historic Palestine”, “Settler-colonialism”, “Illegal settlements and Military Occupation”, “Apartheid” and more.

The course also explores evidence of forms of repressions and silencing experienced by Palestinians and their allies. For example, a report by Independent Jewish Voices in October of 2022, “documents the impact of reprisals, harassment, and intimidation faced by Canadian activists, faculty, students, and organisations in relation to scholarship and activism in solidarity with the struggle for Palestinian human rights.”⁴ The report demonstrates the massive silencing campaign against Palestinian rights, identities, lived experiences, history and narratives. According to the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association, “anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives.”⁵

Unfortunately, forms of silencing and defaming have been inflicted by power structures in our educational institutions for quite some time. For example, Stephen Lecce, the former

Minister of Education in Ontario, ordered an Ontario school board to “reverse their decision and leave politics outside of the classroom” in response to this school board’s recognition of “Nakba Remembrance Day” on their Days of Significance calendar. Apparently, Lecce “made his expectations clear to all school boards that there is no room for politics or the influence of personal opinions in Ontario classrooms.”⁶

Politics? The commemoration of the Nakba is not politics, it is a vital part of the lived experience and catastrophic outcome of 76 years of settler-colonialism, ethnic cleansing and apartheid of the Palestinian people. To call the discussion and commemoration of the Nakba political fails to meet the expectation of dismantling of racism and oppression in education. We heard this loud and clear from students, parents and community members in the classrooms and public delegations. The notion of “No place for Politics in schools” fails to acknowledge the suffering and outcry from the Palestinian students and educators (whom the Minister of Education is the guardian of) for upholding their human rights, justice and equality. Silencing and marginalization not only perpetuates injustice but also obstructs the path to understanding and resolution.

We teach students about the important contributions of Nelson Mandela and the dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa, as we should. We teach students about Martin Luther King Jr. and his role in the dismantling of “Jim Crow” and the Civil Rights Movement, as we should. We teach

Book list for education

Elementary

Homeland:
My Father Dreams of Palestine
Baba What Does My Name Mean?
A journey to Palestine
You Are The Colour
These Olive Trees
We Are Palestinian
Ida In the Middle

Secondary

A Day in the Life of Abed Salama:
Anatomy of a Jerusalem Tragedy
Baddawi
Salt Houses
They called me a lioness:
A Palestinian Girl's Fight for Freedom
Her First Palestinian
Behind You is the Sea
Mother of Strangers
On Palestine
The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine
The Hundred Years' War on Palestine

Reports

IJV: Unveiling the Chilly Climate
Arab Canadian Lawyers Association:
Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming,
Framing and Manifestation

Resources

The following are resources which can be used to facilitate your own learning and unlearning in addition to supporting the same for your students.

Websites

<https://learn.unlearn.com/course/affirming-the-palestinian-identity-in-education>
<https://decolonizepalestine.com/introduction-to-palestine/>
<https://101.visualizingpalestine.org/>
<https://www.antipalestinianracism.com/Promoting-Equality-of-Educational-Opportunity>
Pan-Canadian Systems-Level Framework on Global Competencies – Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

Reading

Unearthing Joy
Cultivating Genius

students about the atrocity of the Holocaust on the Jewish people and other genocides, as we should. We teach about the impact of settler-colonialism on Indigenous people of Turtle Island and our journey as settlers on the path of Truth and Reconciliation, as we should. However, educators are silenced and often reprimanded when we teach about the injustices happening in Palestine such as the apartheid system imposed by Israel or the history of Nakba.

It is an expectation that students of all identities advocate for their own rights as well as the rights of others. But when our students are advocating for Palestinian rights, they are often silenced, sometimes disciplined and told that these discussions are “too political”. When a school board in Ontario recognizes the Nakba, as they all should, including the trauma and lived experience that goes along with it, they are pressured to remove it from their Days of Significance. Teachers, students and family members are consistently silenced and erased which are explicit examples of anti-Palestinian racism.

One example is the case of Selina Robinson, at the time the B.C Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills who, in February 2024, stated, during an online event, that Palestine was a “crappy piece of land with nothing on it”. This is surely a sign that more education around Palestine and anti-Palestinian racism is required in our country, and the world.⁷

Dr. Muhammad’s *Framework* also includes joy, skills and identity and we felt the need to highlight the crucial role culture plays in defining

the Palestinian identity. Culture encompasses a diverse tapestry of customs, art, cuisine, music, and language, all of which serve as pillars upholding our collective identity in the face of ongoing challenges. It serves not only as a means of preserving heritage but also as a form of resistance against attempts to erase or diminish our existence.

As educators, you will likely encounter many diasporic Palestinian students in your classroom. Culture connects Palestinians across geographical boundaries and fosters a sense of pride, affirmation and empowerment to maintain a steadfast connection to their land and history amidst adversity.

We currently live in a time where people all over the world

are demanding change. We are living in a time where governments are acknowledging Palestinian experiences and their peoplehood. We are living in a time where a few members of our own Canadian government are lobbying for change to anti-racist policies and balanced education around Palestine including the Nakba. We are living in a time that supports our desire to continue the deconstruction of the imbalance of power in our societal systems including, but not limited to, education.

We understand that sometimes it feels like change is an impossible task; that dismantling the system-wide problems is hopeless. We push, we teach, we have difficult conversations, we feel discomfort and we fight, all to take three steps forward and two steps back. We mustn’t give up and we mustn’t yield to the naysayers and those whose power is jeopardised by our actions. The practices, policies and processes must be changed. It is a slow undertaking, but we must remain steadfast, resilient and determined. We must continue to be brave, courageous and resolute. We must press on! ●

Heba Mousa is a Palestinian secondary school Vice-Principal with the Peel District School Board. During her education career of 18 years, she supported school and system wide learning around dismantling racism, Inclusive Design for Learning, and Restorative Justice education.

Shirel Pegios has been an Elementary Educator for 15 years. She strives to create learning environments where every student feels seen, heard, and valued for who they are, their various identities and intersectionalities. Her Palestinian Christian and Moroccan Jewish heritage has resulted in an extraordinary lived experience which has driven her passion for anti-racist/anti-oppressive work.

Notes

1 Dr. Goldy Muhammad ~ *Unearthing Joy ~ A Guide to culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning* pg 33

2 Dr. Goldy Muhammad ~ *Unearthing Joy ~ A Guide to culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning* pg 33

3 Council of Ministers of Education ~ *Pan Canadian Global Competencies* pg 2

4 Independent Jewish Voices ~ *Unveiling the chilly climate* pg 1

5 Arab Canadian Lawyers Association ~ <https://www.canarablaw.org/>

6 “Peel School Board urged to remove Nakba Day from calendar of significant dates,” Isabel Teotonio, April 16, 2024, *Toronto Star*

7 Question of Palestine: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-204960/#:-.text=Early%20Zionist%20leaders%20described%20Palestine,resulted%20in%20a%20Palestinian%20diaspora>.

We must do all we can to undo the many years of indoctrination we have undergone as a society that dehumanizes Palestinians and erases their lived experiences and narratives. Students must be able to proudly name who they are and share their experiences, histories and joys with their classmates.



Educators at forefront of social credit punishment

Mara Fridell

44

The campaign to institute online Teacher Discipline Registries and Commissions, including across policy-leading Canadian provinces such as Ontario, BC, and Alberta, is not at its core about protecting children and youth from sexual misconduct, in spite of how it has been sold in [Manitoba](#).

As social-credit punishment, Teacher Discipline Registries are expansively, irresponsibly punitive. Even as school districts across Canada and the U.S. sue social media corporations for the harms their products inflict upon the mental health and human development of our children, and [a Manitoba school division sues a parent for defaming teachers on social media](#), Teacher Discipline Registries constitute perverse official sanction of the [trauma of online shaming](#).

Young people are almost always cared for and taught by not only their family, but the larger community as well. While governesses, tutors, private coaches, and private school teachers serve as community carers for the children of inegalitarian and religious families, public school teachers labour as the modern welfare state's main community carers, entrusted with young people's development within

complex, unequal societies. Whatever the mix of family and community carers and teachers, to thrive, children need not only a sufficient supply of reliable, responsive, and stimulating care, but also the healthy, orderly boundaries that allow young people's own agency to grow. When it involves sexually-targeting children and youth, educator sexual misconduct (ESM) disrupts the child or youth's thriving and contributes to trauma.

Sexual abuse and assault of young people is all too common in settler societies. One in nine girls and one in 20 boys under the age of 18 report suffering sexual abuse or assault, according to the [U.S. National Crime Victimization Survey](#). Modern criminal law assigns and enforces punishments for sexual abuse of children, as it must. As a [feminized profession](#), teachers are under extensive and intensive managerial control, in contrast to the self-regulating collegial professions, for example law and medicine.

In recent years, political parties have instituted laws further criminalizing ESM specifically. Although fewer than 1% of the children recently surveyed by ESM experts [report](#) having being subjected to sexual grooming or sexual abuse by public school employees (including but not limited to teachers), public school teachers in

particular seem to be subjected to social credit punishment under the ESM brand.

From sexual assault to statements perceived as sexual, from school employees broadly to unionized teachers specifically, ESM is inconsistently defined, reinforcing the narrative that educators are abusers. Once public online shaming is instituted in Teacher Discipline Registries and Commissions, it expands even further into a dog's breakfast of complaints and charges against the people labouring as teachers.

Teachers are routinely publicly humiliated in the British Columbia online public registry — often not for grooming or assaulting children, but for making everyday mistakes and learning on the job, for trying out the wrong profession, for suffering mental health breakdowns in the pandemic, for getting caught in the dragnet of political and war mobilisations, and for finding themselves on the wrong side of a boss or an imperious parent.

This is social credit punishment levied against workers. Inspired by Ronald Reagan's anti-education legacy in California, which led the way in publicising parents' and students' complaints against teachers, British Columbia was an early Canadian adopter of the policing approach toward teachers. UBC researchers contributed to this by recommending punishment for especially stressed older (over-35) workers, since "Teaching today requires the patience of a saint, the reserve of a Supreme Court magistrate, and the caring of Mother Teresa" (Spetch, Manley-Casvir, and Pidocke, 2004).

Unfortunately for the fat-funded phalanxes of education reformers, saints aren't real, the judiciary is a feudal holdover, and teachers chained on the anvil can't magic away all the inhumane depredations of unmoderated economic and political inequality.

Discrediting public educators is an aspect of a larger inegalitarian restoration sowing vulnerability and crisis. Within the inegalitarian constraints of today's technofeudalism, public education has been under wide-ranging attack. Conservative parties have attempted legislation prohibiting teachers from teaching accurate history. They have even waged cheap political war against rival liberal parties by

attacking trans students. Where the U.S. has become dedicated, economist Yanis Varoufakis observes, to impoverishing, disorganizing, and undermining its own working class, Manitoba's political parties have targeted teachers in line with American political opposition to teachers' recent, successful efforts to reinvigorate egalitarian working-class capacity, unionization in the U.S. From Columbia to McGill and across to Manitoba's Rady Faculty, and the universities of Calgary and Los Angeles, political, legal, policing, and managerial firepower has been unleashed against teaching and learning about Palestinians in the imperial crosshairs.

There's a pattern here: The enemy of public education is antidemocratic intolerance of learning how to constructively share ideas, information, and grievances. It's inegalitarian. It stunts human development. It's imperial. It exploits and expropriates. It is the anti-enlightenment, back with a vengeance.

Children are not being saved from child predators by restoring the public stockade in the Online Teacher Discipline Registry and Commission. Nor can authoritarian inegalitarianism solve the problem of child vulnerability, as child development experts Joan Durrant and Ashley Stewart-Tufescu have demonstrated. From the trauma inflicted in elite British boarding schools to the trauma and death inflicted upon Indigenous children, authoritarian-inegalitarian schemes are the cause of children's vulnerability and torment, and the disorganization of communities.

We cannot protect vulnerable students when we allow ourselves to be herded into the toxic, irresponsible online culture of human failure intolerance, shaming. It is by learning from developmental communities elevating themselves to respect and support public education for universal human development that we can actually expand responsibility toward young people, and support them to flourish.

Trauma is real — but it is no problem-solver (Mate, 2023; Smith, 2022h, 2022). We should not be prepared to expand into social credit surveillance and punishment, even as a pilot project on teachers. ●

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