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Decolonial Praxis Confronting Genocide in Gaza with TribalCrit and Human Rights Education

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Abstract

This article uses Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and human rights education (HRE) to frame instruction and solidarity for Palestinian liberation. These complementary critical lenses illuminate the humanitarian crises and current genocide in Gaza, which began in October 2023. Human rights concepts can support a critical interrogation of colonialism and related conditions of injustice (Bajaj, 2011), while TribalCrit's ability to describe white supremacy and genocide in the experiences of Native nations in the United States (Brayboy, 2005) demonstrates analytical potential in teaching about atrocities inflicted upon Palestinian people in Gaza. The pedagogical approaches offered in this article link human rights violations during the Gaza genocide to HRE concepts and tenets of TribalCrit. These strategies are explicitly connected to social studies and social justice standards to scaffold instruction that supports justice-oriented transformational citizenship. Additionally, the author discusses recent successful experiences teaching university students and supporting campus activism with these critical frameworks.



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On December 29, 2023, the Republic of South Africa brought charges of genocide against the State of Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). They formally alleged that Israel had committed several war crimes since its invasion of Gaza eleven weeks prior, and was currently committing genocide in the 141 square mile territory. More precisely, South Africa's legal counsel argued, Israel had broken the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines genocide as the intentional destruction of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, in whole or in part (United Nations, 1948a). Additionally, South Africa cited several violations of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights by Israel (United Nations, 1948b). Prior to ICJ proceedings, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argued that it was Hamas who was committing genocide, and a spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry proclaimed, "History will judge South Africa for abetting modern heirs to the Nazis" (Sharon, 2024, para. 1). Despite Israeli protests, the ICJ decided that six of South Africa's nine genocide charges possessed merit. The focus of this ruling was on the killing of civilians and children, the destruction of health and educational facilities, and preventing the distribution of humanitarian aid to Gazans (Cascaini, 2024). Following this decision on January 26, 2024, Israel was given one month to report back to the court on the conditions in question. On February 26, Israeli officials filed a report, which was not released to the public, with the ICJ on measures taken to address charges of genocide. Days after responding to South Africa's claims of genocide, Israel's occupying forces resumed attacking refugee camps in Gaza, and the entrance of humanitarian aid remained lethally erratic.

As the genocide of Palestinian people continues in Gaza, citizens of countries that have a long history of supporting the nation of Israel have been forced to confront their relationship to these events. For example, Ireland, Norway, and Spain formally recognized Palestine as a state in May 2024, with each country explicitly linking Israeli atrocities in Gaza to this decision. That same month, 143 of 193 members of the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of Palestine joining the UN - something only states can do - as a means to addressing Palestinian oppression in Gaza (Al Jazeera, 2024b). In North America, this reflection has raised the critical consciousnesses of students in K-12 and university settings (Mayes-Osterman & Jimenez, 2024). The subsequent activism, particularly on college campuses, has centered around increasingly passionate convictions that the world powers and international institutions have failed to protect the humanity of Palestinians. In what is considered to be the longest military occupation in modern world history, Israel currently maintains sovereignty over East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and Gaza (Amnesty International, 2024a). Since its highly contested formation in 1948, Israel has expanded and tightened its control over these territories, often citing security concerns when faced with allegations of malgovernance (Khalidi, 2020). During this time, Israel has engaged in ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and a multitude of human rights violations (Abu Alkas et al., 2024; Alsaafin & Osgood, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024a). These actions, which have gone largely unpunished by the international community, have forced Palestinian people in Palestine (and beyond) to exist in a perpetual struggle for a dignified existence. Palestinians have suffered in a heavily disproportionate manner, as the international community ignores and/or supports Israel's committal of compounding human rights violations. Ominously, in January 2024, the Secretary General of Amnesty International decried:

There is no end in sight to the mass human suffering, devastation, and destruction we are witnessing on an hourly basis in Gaza. The risk that Gaza would be transformed from the world's biggest open-air prison to a giant graveyard has, crushingly, materialized right before our eyes. (Muzaffar, 2024, para. 14)

Nevertheless, war crimes and deaths (of primarily women, children, and the elderly) climbed throughout 2024, with Oxfam claiming that the death rate of 250 Palestinians per day far exceeded that of any major conflict in the 21st century (The Guardian, 2024).

This article examines the genocide in Gaza that has occurred since October 2023, providing theoretical and pedagogical frameworks for instruction that encourages critical approaches to teaching about human rights violations inflicted upon Palestinian people during this time. Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and human rights education (HRE) are offered as lenses to engage students in analysis of important and instructive events that have recently occurred in Gaza. TribalCrit provides theoretical structure through which settler colonialism and white supremacy can be analyzed (Brayboy, 2005; Padgett, 2015). Scholars have argued that this critical race framework, which centers the experiences of Indigenous people in the United States, is useful in evaluating and describing how racism has shaped the lives of Native nations since the colonization of their homelands (Grande, 2015; Brayboy, 2021). Several tenets of TribalCrit, it is argued here, can be used to analyze the plights of Palestinians in Gaza, as their colonial experiences have much in common with those of Native nations that share geography with the United States. Moreover, this line of inquiry is informed by Wolfe's (2006) contention that, "The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism" (p. 387). HRE serves as a pedagogical complement to TribalCrit by outlining dimensions of racism and genocide presently faced by Palestinians. By using human rights concepts and documents to name specific injustices, consciousness-raising may be scaffolded. Such analysis supports multiple aims of critical education, including anti-racism, decolonization, and praxis. Furthermore, the litany of violent events highlighted in this article illustrate specific examples of the injustices faced by residents of Gaza, such as famine, displacement, prevention of healthcare, and the denial of humanitarian aid. These examples are explicitly connected to key concepts of TribalCrit and HRE. They are also linked to NCSS Social Studies Standards and the Southern Poverty Law Center's Social Justice Standards. Ultimately, the critical perspectives homed in this article are meant to sharpen focus for activism and inspire justice-oriented citizenship that centers human dignity within a seemingly intractable engagement.

CRT & TribalCrit

The impact of race and the perniciousness of racism are neglected topics in hegemonic curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Love, 2019), and critical frameworks are needed to address these conspicuous omissions (Leonardo, 2013). Therefore, Howard and Navarro (2017) argue, in order to provide counternarratives that humanize the oppression of racialized groups at the hands of white supremacy, critical education, both theory and practice, must be more race-focused. Educators have the obligation to teach students about past and present racism in the United States, however, American curriculum often fails in this endeavor (Duncan & Murray-Everett, 2022). Vickery and Rodriguez (2022), for example, demonstrate how racism and/or antiracism are absent from commonly used resources in social studies classrooms. Furthermore, when racism is mentioned, it is hardly tackled head on. For instance, Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) historicized similar themes specific to Indigenous peoples in the United States. She highlighted how curricular discourse related to the extensive dispossession of land from Native nations is usually lumped into themes of westward expansion/migration with little to no acknowledgement of the human rights violations involved. Additionally, Blackhawk (2023) argued that the centrality of racially motivated/justified violence towards Native nations is woefully downplayed or outright ignored in

most narratives of United States history. Lastly, race frameworks can be used to address problems of historical distancing. Historical distance refers to the way historical narratives are ‘clarified’ over time, which is a process often influenced by power and privilege (Phillips, 2013). For example, much discourse around the current genocide in Gaza fails to recognize the oppression of Palestinians before October 7, 2023. The events of that day are part of a history of occupation and human rights violations in Palestine on Palestinians, which must be analyzed through a lens that illuminates how white supremacy and settler colonialism have underlined these interactions. Therefore, analytical frameworks that account for systemic and structural racism are needed to better capture these broader forces.

Rooted in critical race theory (CRT) and the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the United States, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) provides a framework that directly confronts colonialism’s effects on Native nations. Critical race theory is concerned with issues of white supremacy, colonization, and forms of oppression that have been racially motivated and maintained. Furthermore, CRT’s origins in legal studies addresses the structural and institutional nature of racism, specifically examining how racism is codified and maintained by law and law enforcement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In applying principles of CRT to present conditions and past experiences of Native nations that share geography with the United States, Brayboy (2005) outlined the following nine tenets of TribalCrit:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous people are rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous people occupy a liminal space that accounts for the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous people are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.

Due to its grounding in the United States context, TribalCrit is a powerful lens through which the brutality and inhumanity that has defined the relationship between Native nations and European colonizers can be examined. In a world where race is a key determinant of social and economic conditions, critical race frameworks are essential to illuminate and name human rights violations and other forms of race-based inequality (Adami, 2020). The engagement of TribalCrit with issues of white supremacy, colonization, and forms of discrimination that have been racially

motivated and maintained has applications beyond the United States. More specifically, TribalCrit provides a framework that can be used to unpack key events and conditions in the current genocide in Gaza. While TribalCrit was theorized to explain racialized colonization in the United States, many of the tenets outlined by Brayboy (2005) hold analytic potential for the treatment of Palestinians by Israel.

Framing Genocide in Gaza

A concise and powerful framework for analysis of oppression faced by Indigenous people in the United States, TribalCrit, as argued here, is also useful in examining the historical and present experiences of Palestinians, particularly during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. By drawing parallels between the dehumanizing conditions currently faced by Palestinians and tenets of TribalCrit, a shared consciousness amongst those who stand in solidarity with these historically oppressed people may be developed and/or deepened. The following circumstances are particularly analogous, and illustrate TribalCrit's potential to frame dispossession and genocide for people whose experiences with imperialistic brutality share characteristics with the Native nations who prompted Brayboy's (2005) framework. First and foremost, *Palestinians have been historically oppressed by complex and evolving colonial structures* (Khalidi, 2020; Eghbariah, 2024). Defined succinctly as, "The domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation" (Merriam-Webster, 2024), colonialism requires foreign invasion and subsequent direct political control of an indigenous society whereby colonizers are convinced of their superiority and mandate to rule, while also rejecting cultural compromises (Osterhammel, 2005). Go (2024) argues that territorial seizure, physical domination, and the denial of equal citizenship status are core characteristics of colonialism. Palestinians in Israeli-controlled territories exemplify these conceptions of dominance. The creation of Israel and mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948 was an act of colonialism perpetrated and maintained by colonial powers, namely the United Kingdom and United States. Moreover, Eghbariah (2024) contends that *Nakba*, a term used to describe the catastrophic rupturing of Palestinian society in 1948 and continued displacement, dispossession, and ethnic cleansing, is useful in naming the specific experiences of Palestinian people with settler colonialism. In offering Nakba as a legal construct to understand and interrupt Palestinian oppression, Eghbariah argues that Palestinians have endured an arc of elimination similar to that of Indigenous people in the United States. Second, *Gaza represents the ultimate liminal space*. Just as the United States has proven unable or unwilling to create a space for just forms of U.S. citizenship for Native nations and their citizens, Israel has failed Palestinians in the same way. Reservation systems throughout the United States' history share many characteristics and motivations with the Palestinian territories, as maintained by the Israeli government (Salaita, 2017). Gaza in particular, has served as a place of isolation and permanent transition, as well as the site of Israel's most brutal treatment of Palestinians. Moreover, Wolfe (2006) compared the "spatial sequestration" of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to that of Jewish people forced into the Warsaw Ghetto and Native nations driven onto reservations in North America and Australia (p. 404). Third, *white supremacy plays an important role in the oppression of Palestinians*. While the debate about Jewish people as a race is deeply contested (Rubin, 2020; Rubin, 2024), the face of American Jewry is White-passing Ashkenazi Jews (Schlosser, 2006), who hail from Eastern and Central Europe. In Israel and around the world, Jewish people are still predominantly White, but highly diverse according to common racial constructions. More importantly though, the State of Israel has been supported by white supremacist colonial powers in its policies towards Palestinians (Lentin, 2024). The United States and the United Kingdom

have staunchly backed Israel with hard and soft power since 1948, often shielding it from consequences for its severe human rights violations in the face of international condemnation (Masalha, 2018). Additionally, the newfound and/or increased support of Israel since October 7, 2023 by right-wing politicians and political groups in the United States, who often align themselves with white supremacist ideologies, is no coincidence. Lastly, *Native nations and their members see themselves in the Palestinian struggle, particularly in regard to issues of sovereignty* (White, 2005). Since October 2023, several Native nations and activists in the United States have drawn parallels between their colonial experiences and those of Palestinians, extending public support since the beginning of the genocide (Blend, 2024; Veran, 2024). For example, shortly after Israeli attacks in Gaza, members of the Navajo Nation (Diné) pressured their leaders to “advocate for the self-determination of Palestinian people,” arguing that, “the history of occupation and settler colonialism ties Diné and Palestinian people together” (Becenti, 2023, para. 3). Soon thereafter, the Navajo Nation publicly issued a statement of support for Palestinians, naming genocide as a motivation and outcome of recent incursions into Gaza. These sentiments have been echoed by Native nations advocacy groups, including the NDN Collective and The Red Nation, as well as individual tribal nations, such as the Northern Cheyenne and Oglala Sioux (Native News Online, 2024). Native scholars, including Professor of American Studies Melanie Yazzie, have also made these connections explicit:

The relationship between the United States and Israel is so intertwined that the colonial tactics in both countries must be understood as a parallel — if not a mirror — of each other. Palestinians struggle daily for land return, basic dignity, clean water, self-determination, freedom of movement, peace, freedom from violent settler incursion, and the right to return to homelands they have been forcibly expelled from in the name of Israeli colonial occupation. Native nations struggle and dream for the same. (Becenti, 2023, para. 10)

Likewise, Palestinians have reciprocated support for Indigenous people in the United States, particularly in their struggles for sovereignty and against treaty violations. Such demonstrations occurred at Wounded Knee (1973) and at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline (Kadi, 2016; Warrior Women Project, 2023).

While there are never perfect global or historical comparisons, the current dehumanization of Palestinians in Gaza shares much in common with the experiences of Indigenous people in the United States. Therefore, the use of TribalCrit to analyze the colonial and genocidal dynamics outlined in this article about current conditions in Gaza is warranted. Additionally, the pedagogical approaches offered are meant to operationalize selected tenets of TribalCrit, with the goal of deepening student understandings of colonialism, genocide, and human rights. Like Brayboy (2005, 2021), Wolfe (2006), Grande (2015), and Dunbar-Ortiz (2021) have argued that theoretical frameworks which center Indigenous experiences and worldviews are vital to the study of world history. These scholars emphasize that colonialism must be at the core of any such framework, and that emancipatory critical education thoroughly addresses this theme. Due to the aforementioned similarities between Native nations’ encounters with United States imperialism and Palestinian experiences with Israeli settler colonialism, this article offers TribalCrit as an approach to understand the oppression faced by Palestinians in Gaza (and beyond).

Human Rights Education

Human rights education (HRE) provides an additional layer for critical, analytical, and practical approaches to current conditions in Gaza, particularly in framing the inhumane conditions cited by South Africa in their allegations of genocide. While TribalCrit may help name the injustices of colonialism, HRE aims to interrupt them. HRE develops knowledge, builds advocacy skills, and instills values that place human rights at the center of learning. HRE prompts students to examine their own experiences and actions from a human rights perspective and incorporate human rights concepts into their personal values and decision-making processes (Osler, 2016). While HRE frameworks vary, scholars agree that HRE includes education *about rights*, and education *for rights* (Bajaj, 2011; Osler & Starkey, 2010). Education *about rights* includes knowledge of human rights discourse, such as treaties, declarations, legislation, or debates about what constitutes a human right. Education *for rights* includes skill-building and attitudinal orientations, which use human rights aims to promote advocacy and other forms of civic participation. Such dispositions and reflective action are important in a world where individual and/or community actions can have far-reaching impacts. Consequently, a HRE approach ensures that students consider their rights and responsibilities to all humans. The cultivation of such a disposition has the potential to create a more just society where members recognize that their actions have implications beyond their immediate surroundings, and teachers can play an enormous role in moving the needle in this direction (Liu, 2024). For example, Corrigan (2023a) found that HRE can support effective anti-racist instruction in secondary classrooms by building empathy and tolerance for oppressed groups. A human rights approach to social studies instruction offers a number of pedagogical benefits for teachers and students. HRE can provide a conceptual tool for teachers to frame “bad events” in history curriculum, help teachers address sensitive or controversial topics, and build empathy by emphasizing our shared humanity (Corrigan, 2022; Seals, 2024). Furthermore, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) maintains a position statement on the “importance of teaching and learning about human rights” in social justice education (NCSS, 2021).

Social studies classrooms, where students would most likely encounter instruction about the current genocide in Gaza and the region’s history, often fail to frame rights issues, such as colonialism and white supremacy, as human rights concerns. For example, Grant and Gibson (2013) argue that despite the use of human rights discourse by leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement, these connections are rare in social studies classrooms. This omission is important because human rights-focused curriculum and pedagogy can provide counternarratives to versions of United States history that often ignore or downplay racism and other human rights violations (Bajaj, 2011; Zembylas, 2011). Instead, uncritical stories that emphasize American exceptionalism are dominant. Social studies scholars have often noted the disconnect between these ‘traditional’ narratives and the lived experiences of many Americans (Duncan & Murray-Everett, 2022). Furthermore, Nelson and Pang (2006) note, “Social studies curriculum does a poor job of examining the disparity between the American credo and pervasiveness of racism in the American experience” (p. 129). In contrast to how the Civil Rights Movement is portrayed in U.S. social studies curricula, both Martin Luther King and Malcolm X intentionally used human rights discourse to frame their goals during the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, the NAACP used passages from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to shame the United States government into living up to a document it played a major role in creating. Moreover, Indigenous people in the United States used human rights doctrines as grounds to pursue social

justice and reparations during the 1960s and 1970s (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Blackhawk 2023). Additionally, LGBTQ+ history has also been interpreted through a human rights lens (Corrigan, 2023b), as have issues of sustainability (Kavanaugh, 2024) and children's rights (Bourke, 2024).

This article references a simplified version of the UDHR, created by Facing History & Ourselves (Appendix), to analyze human rights violations perpetrated by Israel against Palestinians since October 2023 (and before). The UDHR is the most widely accepted and cited standard of human rights. It was codified by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, three years after the UN was chartered in 1945. Though not legally binding, the UDHR, which Israel has signed, lists thirty individual rights meant to constitute the nucleus of human rights discourse worldwide. Consequently, scholars have advocated for the use of international agreements like the UDHR in social studies classrooms to help students engage with HRE (Osler & Starkey, 2010; Oberman & Mallon, 2023). The simplified version of the UDHR can be used as a scaffold to introduce students to human rights concepts. While some students may be able to understand and make connections to the original UN document (link in Appendix), the abridged version's plain language may remove linguistic barriers for others. Furthermore, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), signed one day before the UDHR, is also included (link in Appendix).

Naming Genocide

The following sections provide context for teaching about human rights violations committed by Israel during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Circumstances highlighted to support claims of genocide include the denial of healthcare and humanitarian aid, famine and thirst, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians (Amnesty International, 2023; Doctors Without Borders, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024b, United Nations Relief Works Agency, 2024). These related conditions are presented with a focus on how colonialism and a disregard for human dignity have influenced the treatment of Palestinians in Gaza. These circumstances are linked to tenets of TribalCrit and analyzed with a HRE framework, whereby connections to the UDHR are made. Additionally, the relevance of these powerful themes to NCSS Social Studies standards and the Social Justice Standards created by the Southern Poverty Law Center are outlined. These standards provide both guidance and justification for the inclusion of these topics in transformational classrooms.

Denial of Healthcare and Humanitarian Aid

Beginning in November 2023, Israel has been accused by the United Nations and international aid organizations of targeting healthcare facilities and denying the allocation of humanitarian aid to Gazans (Nichols, 2024). These actions lie at the core of genocide claims by South Africa and other nations. Within the first two days of the genocide, siege tactics employed by Israel's occupying forces caused a lack of fuel and reliance on backup generators, many of which failed due to extreme needs at Gaza's hospitals (Batrawy, 2024). These failures caused the immediate deaths of patients, primarily the elderly and premature babies in neonatal intensive care units. Healthcare providers have faced consistent supply shortages since the genocide's outbreak. By January 2024, there had been 304 attacks on healthcare facilities since October 7, resulting in over 600 deaths (United Nations, 2024).

The most devastating assaults on Gaza's healthcare system occurred at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. The first attack began on November 11 with a 13-day siege of the largest hospital in Gaza. At the time, the hospital housed approximately 1,500 medical workers, 1,500 patients, and 15,000 displaced people (Knell & Abu Alouf, 2024). Israel and the United States believed that Hamas was operating a key command center in the basement and tunnels of the hospital complex, and that some hostages taken on October 7 might also be on the premises. After four days of isolation and three days without power, Israel's occupying forces raided Al-Shifa Hospital on November 15, killing an untold number of people. After detaining doctors, patients, and others present at the hospital for questioning, thousands were evacuated. Two weeks later, Amnesty International UK (2023) reported, "Amnesty International has no evidence to indicate that al-Shifa Hospital has been used for anything other than treating patients during the current crisis in 2023" (p. 4), and specifically rebuffed Israeli claims that Hamas was operating a military command post in the hospital's basement.

The second assault on Al-Shifa Hospital began on March 18, 2024, when Israel's occupying forces began what they described as, "a high precision operation in limited areas of the Al-Shifa Hospital to thwart Hamas activity" (Gunter & Gritten, 2024, para. 27), and the Gaza Health Ministry would later characterize as a massacre of the sick and displaced, alongside the medical staff at the hospital attempting to care for them (Batrawy, 2024). After firing upon the hospital for hours, Israel's occupying forces dropped leaflets ordering the complete evacuation of the complex. Next, the hospital was raided, and hundreds were arrested or detained. Several journalists at Al-Shifa reported that they were stripped naked for questioning (Al Jazeera, 2024a). Over the next two weeks, Israel's occupying forces conducted raids on the hospital and engaged in gunfights in and around the complex. According to Gazan officials, hospital patients were rarely allowed to evacuate and over twenty died as a result (Knell & Seddon, 2024). Furthermore, at least two hundred displaced people sheltering at Al-Shifa died, while more bodies continue to be found in the wreckage. On April 2, the World Health Organization reported that the hospital is "no longer able to function in any shape or form as a hospital," as they discovered mass graves that have been difficult to excavate amongst the rubble and continued violence (United Nations Geneva 2024, para. 4). An additional mass grave was found in May, when searchers discovered a portion of the emergency department at Al-Shifa that collapsed during an attack, burying a still uncounted number of people alive (Reuters, 2024). This discovery came a week after finding a mass grave with over 300 women and children at the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis, Gaza. This hospital suffered a similar siege and fate as Al-Shifa Hospital. Doctors Without Borders (2024) has documented and condemned the attacks on both of these hospitals.

The lack of access to humanitarian aid has also been a defining condition of Palestinian life in Gaza since October 2023 (United Nations News, 2024). More specifically, Israel implemented a complete blockade within 48 hours of the October 7 attacks, preventing the entry of food, water, and fuel (Amnesty International, 2023). Within a week, hundreds of tons of aid were stuck on Egypt's side of the border with southern Gaza (Rafah crossing), as Israel's occupying forces attacked the area for fear of weapons deliveries (Nichols, 2024). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to pause airstrikes around Rafah or guarantee the safety of Egyptian convoys carrying aid. When Israel did submit to international pressure to allow aid into Gaza, only twenty of more than 100 trucks were allowed to enter southern Gaza on selected days, despite United Nations and Human Rights Watch estimates that 100 trucks per day of aid would be needed (Bashi, 2023). On several occasions during the genocide, trucks waited so long at the Rafah crossing that food spoiled and went to waste. Aid deliveries have surged during ceasefires, but they have been

repeatedly ceased following the resumption of hostilities. Additionally, relief workers have experienced violence and deaths themselves. Many humanitarian workers have reported being attacked by belligerents, and several international organizations have condemned countries, particularly the United States and United Kingdom, that have the power to leverage better conditions for aid delivery but remain silent. Within the first two months of the genocide, over 130 United Nations relief workers were killed in Gaza, making it the deadliest conflict for UN representatives in the organization's history (Human Rights Watch, 2024a).

Famine and Thirst

According to Human Rights Watch's December 2024 report, famine and thirst have been defining characteristics of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, with these conditions stemming directly from the aforementioned denial of aid (Human Rights Watch, 2024b). Between October 2023 and March 2024, at 300 hundred Palestinians died of famine or thirst, and that number is expected to rise sharply when 2024 death tolls are available, as approximately 700,000 people are in a state of 'starvation,' and over 1.8 million are in 'extreme hunger' (IPC, 2024). While food security and water rights have been an issue of paramount importance and contention in Gaza for decades, the current famine and water shortage will almost certainly eclipse the death tolls of prior losses of life. Currently, food supplies and access to drinking water in Gaza are nearly exhausted, causing residents to resort to drinking sea water (Human Rights Watch, 2024b). As the genocide continues into 2025, breadlines of hundreds of people are commonplace, as is begging. Prices for food and drinking water have skyrocketed. In May 2024, a survey found that approximately 85% of children under five years old in Gaza went at least one day without food within the last month (Graham-Harrison, 2024). According to the United Nations and several NGOs the famine currently experienced in Gaza is the most severe since World War II. Oxfam has stated that the levels of starvation in Gaza are the highest on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale since its creation in 2004, "both in terms of number of people and percentage of the population" (Serhan, 2024, para. 3). Also, the World Food Programme has issued several warnings about starvation and thirst, including in response to attacks in Rafah in May 2024 (World Food Programme, 2024). Furthermore, access to clean water is just as dire. Within weeks of the genocide, desalination plants in Gaza were shut down due a lack of power, sewage management systems collapsed (threatening underwater reserves), and waterborne diseases proliferated as residents drank contaminated groundwater.

It is important to emphasize that the famine and thirst experienced by Gazans has been manufactured by Israel (Beaumont, 2024; Bowen, 2024). Siege tactics and Israeli bombardments created the current situation and continue to maintain it. For example, in January 2024, Israel's occupying forces pumped seawater into tunnels and underground water systems, causing irreversible damage to these utilities (Human Rights Watch, 2024b). This occurred when all water supplies to Gaza were shut off after October 7. Following international outcry, Israel agreed to allow the delivery of water supplies, but only to southern Gaza. Additionally, as Palestinians were killed in Gaza City by airstrikes, millions of gallons of wastewater from damaged sewage facilities flooded the city. In April 2024, the Gaza Health Ministry stated that all residents of Gaza were now drinking unsafe water. Israeli tactics have had an even more devastating effect on famine in Gaza (United Nations Relief Works Agency, 2024). Bakeries in Gaza have been targeted in attacks. Within weeks of the genocide, over half of Gaza's bakeries were destroyed, and its last flour mill

was destroyed on November 14, 2023 (Washington Post, 2023). Furthermore, large amounts of trees and farmland have been destroyed by bombing, vehicle activity, and other contaminants.

Collective Punishment

During the first five days of the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, Israel's occupying forces carried out approximately 6,000 airstrikes across Gaza, killing over 3,300 people and injuring over 12,000 people (Ibrahim et al., 2023). United Nations officials called these attacks "indiscriminate" and "absolutely prohibited under international law and amounting to a war crime" (Reuters, 2023, para. 4). This assessment refers to the concept of collective punishment, whereby a group (i.e., Palestinians in Gaza) are punished, often disproportionately, for the actions of a small group of its members (Hamas). Collective punishment is prohibited by the Geneva Conventions and Hague Conventions, making such a practice a violation of international law. For instance, Darcy (2010) outlined how the warring factions in the Sierra Leonean Civil War (1991-2002) were found to be in violation of these conventions. In several cases, revolutionary groups massacred entire villages or destroyed crops and water supplies of communities suspected to have ties with opposing forces. After the war, several leaders were tried in international courts and found guilty of the war crime of collective punishment. Likewise, Drumbl (2007) documented the use of collective punishment during the Rwandan Genocide and in conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. In these cases, families and communities were severely punished (often killed) for any association with opposition forces. Additionally, allegations of collective punishment stemming from indiscriminate attacks on civilians have been proven against France for its actions in the Algerian War, and the United States during the Vietnam War (Zinn, 2007). With these precedents in mind, Amnesty International (2024a) concluded that Israel has engaged in collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza since October 2023. These assertions were based on an investigation which found that strategists for Israel's occupying forces knowingly accepted damage ratios as high as 20 civilians to one Hamas combatant, even for low-ranking members. This disproportionality was accentuated in June 2024 when four Israeli hostages held by Hamas were rescued from the Nuseirat refugee camp, resulting in the deaths of 276 Palestinians and over 700 injuries. Several Middle Eastern countries called this rescue operation a massacre and a war crime, as did European Union and United Nations officials (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2024).

The alleged massacre in Nuseirat is one of many attacks on civilians in refugee camps in Gaza. The first such assault during the genocide occurred on October 9, 2023, in the central market of the Jabalia refugee camp, which had been the largest refugee camp in Gaza for decades. Over sixty people were killed, as the market and surrounding buildings were destroyed. Attacks on the camp continued into the summer of 2024, with the death toll around 350 people (Al-Mughrabi, 2024). The camp's infrastructure has been reduced to rubble, and other refugee camps have experienced similar fates. Additionally, indiscriminate attacks have also resulted in the destruction of landfills, roads, communication services, power generators, amongst other public services. Private property and religious buildings have also been annihilated by massive carpet-bombing campaigns. These examples of collective punishment have drawn international condemnation since October 2023 (Al-Jazeera, 2024b; Reuters, 2023; United Nations News, 2024). Moreover, Amnesty International (2024b) has stated that several Israeli military actions in Gaza, "should be investigated for the war crimes of wanton destruction and of collective punishment" (para. 1).

Children in Gaza have suffered severely and disproportionately from the collective punishment of Palestinians during the current genocide (UNICEF, 2024). Gaza has one of the highest birthrates in the world and the Palestinian population in Palestine is relatively young. Therefore, the civilian deaths (38,000 in June 2024) are disproportionately young; more than 15,000 were aged fourteen or less. Analysts estimate that more children in Gaza were killed between October 7 and December 20 than in all global conflicts in the previous three years combined (Johnston, 2023). It is also worth noting that approximately 11,000 casualties are women over the age of fourteen. Additionally, children have been disproportionately wounded during the attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. In December 2023, UNICEF reported that thousands of children in Gaza had undergone limb amputations (UNICEF, 2023). In January 2024, Doctors Without Borders stated that children in Gaza were “dying in every way possible” (Alsaafin & Osgood, 2024). They also stated that the lack of proper clothing, missed vaccinations, poor diet, lack of sleep, and other psychosocial stressors would contribute to severe declines in health. Furthermore, indiscriminate attacks have also resulted in the destruction of schools across Gaza, leading Scholars Against the War on Palestine (2024) to call these actions ‘scholasticide.’ All of Gaza’s twelve institutions of higher education have been destroyed during the genocide, and approximately 70% of K-12 institutions (Abu Alkas et al., 2024). This has left approximately 700,000 would-be students without opportunities to further their education now and for the foreseeable future.

TribalCrit and HRE Analysis

The tenets of TribalCrit provide a multidimensional lens through which colonialism and racism faced by Palestinians in Gaza can be examined, and the aforementioned experiences provide several opportunities for analysis. To begin, the desperate conditions that Palestinians have faced for generations can be connected to the first tenet of TribalCrit, which asserts, “Colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). The recent genocide is part of a much longer arch of the colonization of Palestine. Khalidi (2020), in *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, chronicles the brutal process of colonizing Palestinians and Palestine, whom he argues are indigenous to the land that is now occupied by the State of Israel. His arguments about settler colonialism in the region draw the same parallels that Indigenous Americans have made in supporting contemporary Gazans. More specific to the current events in Gaza, the genocide highlights the cumulative effects of white supremacist and imperialistic policies aimed at Palestinians. These conditions correspond to TribalCrit’s second tenet, which argues that policies towards Native nations are rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and material pursuits (Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2015). Israel’s strategy during this genocide clearly emphasizes a racial hierarchy in which the lives of whiter people are worth significantly more than those of others. How else can killing 276 people to rescue four hostages be justified? Additionally, nations such as the United States and United Kingdom, that have done much to perpetuate white supremacy in the world, continue to support and remain silent about the genocide in Gaza. Meanwhile, many more countries, who strongly object to Israel’s policies, are sidelined in White/Western dominated international institutions. Furthermore, the refugee camps that have been targeted represent a liminal space (Tenet Three) within a larger and highly symbolic liminal space that is Gaza. The Palestinians at these refugee camps find themselves in transition and under attack in a territory that has been in a permanent state of limbo since its creation (Khalidi, 2020). Lastly, throughout this genocide, as Israel’s previously outlined tactics have been publicized, struggles for freedom and justice have become increasingly viewed

through a Palestinian lens. Activists and analysts across the world, including on American college campuses, have expressed new and increasingly critical perspectives on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza that demonstrate raised consciousness about colonialism and genocide. For many, these new orientations represent a step away from ethnocentrism, which lies at the core of TribalCrit. More specifically, this heightened/needed awareness can be tied to Tenet Five, which underscores the importance of Indigenous worldviews (Blackhawk, 2023; Grande, 2015; Hämäläinen, 2022).

The current genocide in Gaza can also be analyzed with a HRE framework, whereby teachers make connections between human rights issues linked to long-standing conditions in Gaza or recent instances of famine and thirst, the denial of healthcare and humanitarian aid, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. By using the UDHR to frame injustices faced by Palestinians in Gaza, teachers employ a HRE approach that allows students to evaluate key issues of justice and dignity through the lens of human rights. For example, Israel's attacks on Al-Shifa Hospital illustrate several human rights violations. Article 9 reads, "No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile," and Article 5 reads, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." These rights were clearly violated during attacks on healthcare facilities. Additionally, the right to "a decent life, including enough food, clothing, housing, medical care, and social services" (Article 25), applies to these situations as well as the famine and water shortages imposed by Israel during the genocide. Additionally, the mass destruction of schools, or 'scholasticide,' infringes on the right to an education (Article 26). Furthermore, movement prohibitions within Gaza have prevented Palestinians from exercising their right to travel (Article 13) and seek asylum (Article 14). Also, the recent brazen violations of some of the most basic human rights, such as the right to life (Article 3), peacefully assemble (Article 20), take part in one's own government (Article 21), and the freedom from torture or inhuman treatment (Article 5) are not new to Israeli practices in Palestine, but have been on more prominent display since October 2023. Lastly, identifying human rights violations in Gaza is not an end to itself. While naming injustice and raising consciousness is essential to critical education, action must follow. HRE provides clear measures for such activism by outlining rights to be reclaimed or protected.

Connections to Social Studies and Social Justice Standards

The theoretical and pedagogical approaches offered in this article align with K-12 social studies standards created by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). In the *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (2010), the NCSS outlines ten themes of social studies education. Critical instruction about the current genocide in Gaza supports several of these themes. For example, *Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance*, asks students to analyze how people interact with power structures. As argued in this article, TribalCrit provides a useful lens to view both historical and contemporary oppression of Palestinian people in Gaza, and HRE provides useful terminology to name specific injustices. More specifically, understanding the actions that created famine and thirst in Gaza, as well as the prevention of humanitarian aid, demonstrates power imbalances within Palestine and the influence of Israel's allies in international organizations. Knowledge of these global dynamics is very important for students, particularly those who wish to support Palestinian causes. TribalCrit and HRE frameworks also address *Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change*, which states that "social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy" (NCSS, 2010). Additionally, the Palestinian struggle for freedom, dignity, self-

determination is strongly tied to geographic and religious themes, which are outlined in *Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments. Furthermore*. Furthermore, *Theme 9: Global Connections*, asks students to evaluate interrelated phenomena worldwide. The parallels drawn between Palestinian and Native nations experiences with colonialism and white supremacy illuminate these global dynamics, as do responses to the current genocide by international organizations and individual nations. Lastly, *Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices*, emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and justice-oriented citizenship. HRE, which names specific rights violations (as modeled in this article) and provides avenues for advocacy, addresses this important dimension of active citizenship.

A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Learning for Justice advocates for the use of its *Social Justice Standards: Teaching Tolerance Anti-bias Framework*. These standards provide guidance to centering critical forms of social justice in K-12 classrooms, which this article aims to promote. The framework is divided in four interrelated domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, Action. Each of these domains contain five anchor standards that are adapted for grade level appropriateness. The conditions and events of the current genocide in Gaza, coupled with the critical perspectives inherent in TribalCrit and HRE, align with several of these anchor standards, particularly the Justice and Action domains. For example, one Justice standard specifies, “Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today,” while others encourage critiques of “injustice at the institutional or systemic level” (Learning for Justice, 2016). This article has outlined war crimes and examples of inhumane treatment of Gazans during a genocide. The use of TribalCrit to analyze these events, as well as the connections made to global and historical colonial systems, addresses injustices faced by Palestinians. This process frames the Palestinian struggle as unique, but also recognizes shared struggles against colonialism and oppression across time and space in a way that builds empathy. This complex approach to consciousness-raising is promoted by multiple Diversity anchor standards. And perhaps most importantly, the critical pedagogical techniques offered here can be explicitly linked to several Action anchor standards in this framework. For instance, one Action standard states, “Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice” (Learning for Justice, 2016). HRE is clear in regard to the obligations of every person to protect the rights of *all* others. In this case, HRE serves to identify avenues for action- along human rights lines- until these rights are realized by the oppressed. In order to achieve these gains, students may pursue action that supports another standard in this domain, “Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure” (Learning for Justice, 2016). This Action standard requires confidence in what is just. HRE provides a framework for the analysis of the blatant human rights violations in Gaza. By providing language that contextualizes war crimes and genocide committed by Israel against Palestinians, HRE gives those who pursue transformative action self-assurance in their advocacy.

Conclusion: Praxis on campus

I was inspired to write this article in part because the approaches offered here have been valuable in my teaching and activism. I teach primarily multicultural education and social studies methods courses, but also taught Introduction to Ethnic and Racial Studies in Fall 2023. In all of my classes, I teach *about* and *for* social justice. My lived experiences as an American citizen and domestic/international educator drive my desire to create a more just global society through teacher

education. Therefore, the genocide in Gaza has consumed my thoughts and professional actions since October 2023. Teaching my social studies methods class on October 9, minutes of seeing images of babies dying in the Al-Shifa NICU, left me searching for ways to encourage my pre-service teachers to think and teach about the injustices that many observers knew were soon to accelerate in Gaza. My impulse, since HRE is central to my research interests, was to use the UDHR to frame conditions in Gaza. Over the remainder of the school year, I constantly referred to the UDHR and other human rights agreements/concepts in most of my courses to name oppression and channel activism. My students found this method powerful, with one pre-service teacher/campus activist remarking that HRE is “straightforward and provides focus for our goals.” Furthermore, I am convinced of TribalCrit’s explanatory power for white supremacist and colonial dynamics across the world. Personal and professional work with Indigenous communities in several countries and travel to over 135 countries (including a visit to Gaza) motivate me center decoloniality in my teaching and research. As a white American, TribalCrit has been a valuable tool to reflect upon these experiences. I have seen too much to be silent about global inequality, genocide, and ongoing forms of colonialism as a scholar or citizen. These goals are reinforced by TribalCrit, particularly its ability, like HRE, to frame activism.

Many pre-service teachers care deeply about the events and injustices in Gaza, but some are afraid to discuss it in their student teaching or current classrooms. Like in-service teachers, they are concerned about blowback, intimidation, and ostracization in response to teaching politically polarized topics, such as this genocide and other instances of racism and colonialism. Several of my students have found the perceived ‘neutral’ or ‘apolitical’ approach of HRE empowering. Furthermore, a large number of Indigenous students at my university have expressed empathy for the subjugation experienced by Palestinian people. As displaced people in Gaza were attacked in November, several Native students in my Introduction to Ethnic and Racial Studies class described recent discussions with family and friends regarding the parallels they saw between the current genocide in Gaza and the experiences of Indigenous people in the United States. These comments resonate with the views of other Indigenous Americans detailed in the TribalCrit section. Lastly, as Pro-Palestinian protests spread across college campuses, peaking in April 2024, I encouraged thoughtful, passionate, and informed discussions about the genocide, including the United States’ complicity. I have witnessed bold and compassionate citizenship on my campus and others. The students/protesters with whom I have spoken appreciate the ‘simplicity’ of the appeal to humanity central to HRE, as well as the praxis component to Brayboy’s (2005) TribalCrit framework (Tenet Nine). They have found the concept of praxis useful in forging solidarity.

The conditions in Gaza demand immediate intervention, and critical education must inform these pursuits. Silence is not an option. Thankfully, many students and scholars have answered a deafening call to confront genocide. This article is a contribution to the growing conceptions of allyship and diverse perspectives on these events in Gaza, which are urgently needed across the field of education (and beyond). As rights violations and persistent colonial structures continue to dehumanize Palestinians, I offer TribalCrit and HRE as powerful frameworks to analyze the ongoing genocide of Gazans outlined here. Liberation from this struggle (and accountability for perpetrators) is the goal.

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Appendix

UDHR Simplified, from *Facing History & Ourselves*

Preamble:

All people everywhere have the same human rights which no one can take away. This is the basis of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

This Declaration affirms the dignity and worth of all people, and the equal rights of women and men. The rights described here are the common standard for all people everywhere. Every person and nation is asked to support the understanding and respect for these rights, and to take steps to make sure that they are recognised and observed everywhere, for all people.

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| Article 1 | Everyone is born free and equal in dignity and with rights. |
| Article 2 | You should never be discriminated against for any reason. Rights belong to all people, whatever our differences. |
| Article 3 | Everyone has the rights to life, liberty, and security. |
| Article 4 | No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. |
| Article 5 | No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. |
| Article 6 | You have the right to be treated as a person in the eyes of the law. |
| Article 7 | You have the right to be treated by the law in the same way as everyone else. Everyone has a right to protection against violations of their human rights. |
| Article 8 | If your rights under law are violated, you have the right to see justice done in a court or tribunal. |
| Article 9 | No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. |
| Article 10 | You have the right to a fair and public trial by an independent and impartial tribunal. |
| Article 11 | Everyone is to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in a fair trial. No one should be charged with a criminal offense for an act which wasn't an offense at the time the act was done. |
| Article 12 | No one has the right to intrude in your private life or interfere with your home and family without good reason. No one has the right to attack your good name without reason. |
| Article 13 | You have the right to freedom of movement within your country. Everyone as the right to leave a country and to return home. |
| Article 14 | You have the right to seek and to enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries. You may not invoke this right if you are fleeing just laws in your own country. |
| Article 15 | You have the right to a nationality. |

- Article 16 You have the right to marry and to raise a family. Men and women have the same rights when they are married and when they are separated.
- Article 17 You have the right to own property and it cannot be unreasonably taken away from you.
- Article 18 You have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and to peacefully express those beliefs in teaching, practice, and worship.
- Article 19 You have the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- Article 20 You have the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- Article 21 You have the right to take part in the government of your country.
- Article 22 As a member of society, you have a right to social security.
- Article 23 You have the right to work, to good working conditions, to equal pay for equal work, and to form and join unions.
- Article 24 You have the right to rest and leisure.
- Article 25 You have the right to a decent life, including enough food, clothing, housing, medical care, and social services.
- Article 26 You have the right to an education.
- Article 27 No one may stop you from participating in the cultural life of your community.
- Article 28 You have the right to live in the kind of world where your rights and freedoms are respected.
- Article 29 We all have a responsibility to the people around us and should protect their rights and freedoms.
- Article 30 There is nothing in this declaration that justifies any person or country taking away the rights to which we are all entitled.

United Nations Links: [UDHR, Complete Document](#), [Convention on the Prevention of Genocide](#)

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