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PalestinianCRT Counterstories in Education The Necessity for Pedagogically Engaging Al-Hakawati and Palestinian Transformational Survivance to Erasure

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Abstract

Centering the counterstories and memory-keeping practices of Palestinians in the diaspora and the homeland, this work operationalizes PalestinianCRT, a framework developed by Yunis and Tanksley (2023), calling for Palestinian al-hakawati in education as a critical praxis. Heeding Martinez's call (2020), this article makes the case for counterstorytelling in academia as a pedagogical practice of the transformational survivance (Vizenor, 2008) of Palestinians in the face of colonial violence and epistemological erasure. Using counterstories pedagogically, PalestinianCRT challenges the colonial erasure, (re)centering Palestine through a critical, race-conscious, and justice-oriented feminist praxis that is life-affirming and engages anticolonial liberation of Palestinians with fervent hope (Ihmoud, 2022; Joudah, et al, 2021). By engaging counterstories, we historicize the violences we are witnessing in this moment in 2023-2026, naming a history that is actively erased by imperial forces worldwide and challenge the apartheid of knowledge in education that creates false and violent narratives about Palestinians.



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Introduction

*we have walked through fire through burning
 infernos we have wept we have suffered
 we call ourselves back we have survived we
 have become stronger we call ourselves back
 we have not lost any part of ourselves we are
 not diminished we call ourselves back
 we are whole.*

~ Ire'ne Lara Silva
 Poet, Friend, Hermanx¹

Narratives of Resistance, Part 1 – Bernardita

As I flip through Instagram and Facebook, I am consumed yet again.

Is @wizard_bisan still alive? Has she posted? Oh, shit. No. It's been two days. I'll message Hana, Ana, Sam, and Elyana to see if they saw any updates. Did I miss something?

A few hours later, Hana shares Bisan's latest story. She's still alive. But they bombed Al Shifa hospital. She is now forced to leave.

I see Bisan's story. She's walking with what's left of her belongings on her back to the south of Gaza. I see no sign of her cat. :: sighs ::

I scroll quickly through photos of bloodied children crying—it's hard to miss them—and I shouldn't. I'm not necessarily looking for funny cat videos, or cute baby posts, or parenting tips. I want to know what's going on in Palestine. I guess that's really the reason I pick up my phone nowadays. Not that the news ever changes. It just gets worse. Every day, worse.

I turned off the Resistance News updates. Every time I open Telegram, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of updates. It's so much. The IOF bombings are ceaseless. Palestinians are trying to fight back, but all I see are updates of more kinfolk becoming "martyrs," and I can't stomach it. The nausea is now permanent. And it's not just the bombings now. It's the forced famine. It's the endless list of illnesses that there are cures for, but Palestinians in Gaza have no access to. It's the deliberate targeting of children playing in schoolyards, or parks, with doctors reporting of precise sniper shots to children's chests and heads. And families burying their children in parts. It's all too much to bear.

¹ Thompson, S. (2020). Liberation. Cover of *Queer Indigenous Girl*, Volume 4 & Roots, Cover of *Black Indigenous Boy*, 2. In T. L. King, J. Navarro, & A. Smith (Eds.) *Otherwise worlds: Against settler colonialism and anti-Blackness*. <http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/811474/9781478012023-021.pdf>

Since October 7, 2023, we have seen a surge of rhetorical violence and erasure of the Palestinian existence along with the escalating violence of genocide in the homeland. From the dismissal of Palestinian lives and lived experiences (Glick, 2025; Vlahos, 2025), our violent death and murder at the hands of Zionist settler colonial forces (Lloyd, 2025), and the relentless erasure of our history (Pappé, 2019), vanishing of our people and our land, (Sharif, 2016) and diminishing our experiences (Khalidi, 1997, 2006, 2020; Bennett, 2023; Institute of Palestine Studies, 2024), there is a constant effort by the forces of empire to dismiss and erase our existence, our agency, and our ability to speak about who we are and what we have and are living through. Instead of spaces where Palestinians can speak, we see neoliberal narratives spewed across the news media (Vlahos, 2025) and at global conferences (Glick, 2025) that intentionally obfuscate histories and engage in propagandist dismissals of what we have seen occurring in Gaza and Palestine broadly—an internationally recognized genocide after nearly 80 years of occupation (Rutgers Center for Security, Race and Rights, n.d.), forced displacement, ethnic cleansing (Al Jazeera, 2017), and state-sanctioned apartheid (Grim, 2025).

In particular, in the world of education, encampments of Palestinian and allied activists calling for universities to divest from investments in the Zionist settler state were misrepresented and delegitimized (Friedersdorf, 2024), vandalized (Ellis et al., 2024), and criminalized (Treisman, et al., 2024), with many student activists detained and deported for their involvement (Harb, 2025). Professors have been silenced, pushed away from speaking on Palestine through firings (Gold, 2025; Salaita, 2015), tenure denials (Weissman, 2025), silencing at academic conferences (Editor's Collective, 2024; Muhtaseb, 2024), and demanding courses be cancelled due to false confluences of critiques of the Zionist state as antisemitic (Anguiano, 2025; Democracy Now!, 2025b).

In the face of this “crushing repression” (Democracy Now!, 2025b), starting within universities and spreading quickly across all sectors of our society, on speaking, teaching, writing about, and engaging in activism supporting the liberation of Palestine from this violent genocide and occupation, the imperative to speak on Palestine is undeniable. When silencing of Palestinian support has become an onslaught on all fronts—intellectual, legal, social, interpersonal, familial, and more—it is not just imperative, but an urgent necessity. One we must meet. In the following pages, I endeavor to further prove how this is an urgent call to engage in counterstories grounded in frameworks of Palestinian Critical Race Theory (or PalestinianCRT, Yunis and Tanksley, 2023). This piece operationalizes PalestinianCRT through the methodology of counterstory to directly challenge the now-violent and pervasive suppression of Palestinians (Saba, 2023), their lives, their histories, and those who are allies to their fight both in Palestine and here on Turtle Island. First, in a brief historical groundings section, I set up the Zionist Settler Colonial project as such, grounding this work on the necessity of a critical race framework. This is foundational due to Zionism's own racialization of Palestinians, which they use to rationalize their treatment of our people under occupation, and leads to how this is occurring today. Understanding these foundations supports the need to engage in PalestinianCRT counterstories to challenge these erasure narratives from forces of empire. Through what I name as narratives of resistance (on Turtle Island) and narratives of return (upon my first trip to Palestine) throughout the piece, I

demonstrate how these narratives enact Palestinian survivance and our *sumud*²—our steadfastness. In a closing section, I bring together how the narratives included in this piece, viewed within the context of Zionist violence and racialization of Palestinians, enact our steadfast survival and resistance to Zionist and imperial erasure of our people and our histories.

Who Am I to Speak?: Una Palestina en la Diáspora

I am una niña Palestina, nacida en Chile, who grew up living as an immigrant in the United States. My grandfather Saleh left Bethlehem, where he was born in 1898, for a better future in the South American country that had similar climates to Palestine, and where many others from his extended family, neighbors, and friends had begun migrating. He joined the likes of my great-grandmother Mercedes, her husband, my great-grandfather Abraham, with their infant son Solomon, who left in 1900 from Bethlehem as well, and birthed the rest of their 13 children, including my grandmother Olga in Chile. We are a community fiercely tied to our heritage, sharing our foods, our Catholic culture and traditions, and our fascination with fútbol with this far away nation. We built solid foundations for our Palestinian community to flourish in Chile, and I am a part of a powerful legacy that brought our culture to Chile so fiercely that we all know and connect and identify as *Palestinos Chilenos*, always.

Like the *Palestinos Chilenos* know well, Palestine for Palestinians in diaspora exists in the memory and enactments of our identity through cultural traditions passed down from generations. As I explored in my dissertation project (2025), “Palestinian Survivance and *Sumud* in Chile: Representing Reflections by a Diasporic Transnational Palestinian Feminist Daughter,” these traditions carried our identity forward, and represent our *sumud*. Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley tells in his article, “*Sumud* and Food: Remember Palestine Through Cuisine in Chile,” of the multiple meanings this word takes for Palestinians. He writes,

The concept of *sumud* emerged as early as the British Mandate and gained traction as a slogan of political resistance during the First Intifada in 1987 with Palestinian leaders’ direct calls for Palestinians civilians to remain living in the land itself and to avoid physical and symbolic expulsion at the hands of the Israeli army. The idea of steadfastness has carried over into the diaspora and has acquired new meanings in their local contexts (Bascuñan-Wiley, 2019, p. 104).

Saleem Haddad, in the “Foreword” of the 2025 collection *Sumūd: A New Palestinian Reader* writes that *sumūd* is the “process of steadfastness, of survivance,” but it is not “just a project of survival but also one of remembrance, record-keeping, and revitalization” (2025, p. 2). The editors of the collection, Malu Halasa and Jordan Elgrably, add that *sumud* is “above all, everyday resistance in the face of Israeli occupation” (2025, p. 5). *Sumūd* is “developing from an all-encompassing form of life into a form of resistance that unites the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation” (Halasa and Elgrably, 2025, p. 5). As a Palestinian in the diaspora, and as my writing shows, our *sumud* unites us in the diaspora and with our people in the homeland as well.

² *Sumud* is Arabic for steadfastness. In my 2025 dissertation project titled *Palestinian Survivance and Sumud in Chile: Representing Reflections by A Diasporic Transnational Palestinian Feminist Daughter*, I further name the connections between survivance and *sumud* as the ways in which Palestinians further our existence and futurity despite erasure efforts by imperial powers and the Zionist settler state.

In this piece, I urge us to engage in counterstory further, especially as we face suppression within the imperial core and within education systems, as another example of our *sumud*. Interspersed throughout this piece are narratives of resistance and narratives of return. These narratives, or counterstories, intentionally challenge us to acknowledge these stories of Palestinian existence and the impacts of imperial, settler colonial forces.

Through this writing, not only do I write as *una Palestina Chilena*. I also find myself in a uniquely compelling transnational role, where I write from a doubly transnational perspective—a naturalized U.S. citizen, born and raised in Chile, and fully a part of the Palestinian diaspora. I face the Zionist erasure efforts against Palestinians while living in the United States, yet coming from a vibrant, rich community of Palestinians in Chile (Arad, 2018; Bawalsa, 2022; Arancibia Clavel, Arancibia Clavel, & Jara Hinojosa, 2010). This transnationality of my own existence allows me to ground my work in a transnational rhetorical perspective that engenders my work the ability to disrupt the apartheid of knowledge of our U.S.-centric academic spaces where we are flattened and only seen as one—immigrants first, which *kind* second if at all, let alone in our full, colorful complexity. By writing, I create a space for my scholarship, like my transnational existence, to matter in multiple spaces: in this case, in the fields of education, communication studies, rhetoric, ethnic studies, cultural studies, and more, because I, like many others, exist in all these spaces.

In these pages, I share narratives of this experience as a transnational being, a *Palestina de Chile en los Estados Unidos*, in efforts to make sense of what I see and experience as this atrocity occurs. Our narratives are never merely stories. As Kynard (2015) tells us, “these narratives offer a place to decode the symbolic violence that is encoded into our disciplinary sense-making and move towards what a theory of Racial Realism might entail for our classrooms and discipline” (p. 4). The students we teach, the professors we collaborate with, the administrators and staff we engage with all exist in these complexities, at these intersections. Yet, As Abu El-Haj (2015) tells us, “normative discourses of liberal multicultural nationalism...interwoven with imperial projects” that are present in the everyday practices of the high school in the U.S. where she conducted her ethnographic study “affect how educators saw and understood their young Palestinian American students” (p. 107). This happens in all our academic institutions, where we labor and learn. Abu El-Haj observes how these educators hold a “desire to ‘Americanize’ the youth while almost making it impossible for these young people to be fully included in this nation” (2015, p. 107). This contradiction in goals and results of our experiences as multiply-identified peoples locates immigrants of all origins, including Palestinians, in a liminal space of unbelonging propelled by the racial realism that keeps us outside, never able to be *in*, determining the invaluable significance and necessity of our counterstories.

In the next pages, I briefly delineate how we arrived here to further demonstrate the urgency of this imperative: to create space for, encourage, celebrate, and share Palestinian stories against the call to hide and self-censor for our own protection as we work in educational spaces. Palestinian counterstories in education challenge the symbolic—and now often quite real—violence we face, creating spaces for us to exist, belong, and find ourselves in our people, regardless of the imperial markers that create our liminality. We belong.

Narratives of Return, Part 1 – Bernardita

After standing near the tomb of Yasser Arafat,³ one of Palestine’s last great leaders, we walked around his tomb, passed a reflection pool with a bright sun shining down on us, and we entered the official Yasser Arafat Museum in Ramallah in Palestine. As we walk up ramps that guide you through four floors of the museum, you travel through Palestinian history. As a part of the Palestinian diaspora, I was visiting Palestine for the very first time—a dream I never expected to become a reality. Remembering my grandfather Saleh was born in 1898 in Bethlehem, a mere 17 miles and 40-minute drive (if you have the right license plate on your car) from where I am standing and migrated to Chile early in the 20th century to build a life and survive outside Ottoman rule, I sought out the information around this period. I arrived at the Balfour Declaration of 1917, a document that determined Palestinian history for the next over one hundred years. I am eager to learn more, because there is so much history that has been erased and evaded even from me, a Palestina en la diaspora.

Historical Groundings: The Zionist Settler Colonial Project & Erasure of Palestine

In this section, I contextualize the current moment that is the impetus for naming PalestinianCRT and counterstory as necessities for our pedagogical praxis. I provide some of the history that led to the violence in and erasure of Palestine today, including the evolutions of Zionism and the Zionist settler state through the Nakba, as these processes define the foundational need of a Palestinian Critical Race Framework. The historical grounding provided demonstrates how the key ideological frameworks that underpin the Zionist state and its racialization of Palestinians are foundational to its creation. This historicizing addresses how we arrived at the seemingly perennial question of Palestinian existence as propelled by the narrative and propagandistic efforts of Zionism that have led to the unceasing genocidal violence of today. I close the section by renaming, with this historical understanding, the critical imperative of our stories as we see majoritarian narratives that erase them became the accepted truth.

Zionism as Ideological Foundation of Palestinian Erasure

The Zionist settler colonial project has successfully reshaped and erased much of Palestine’s borders (Bier, 2021) as well as its ability to function as a sovereign nation through its continual restricting of resources (United Nations, 2022), surveilling of its people (Safa, 2024), and expansion of its settlements throughout Palestinian land (United Nations, 2022). Though Palestinians are known to be Indigenous to the land, we are seen as stateless given the continuous occupation we have experienced from the Ottomans, the British, and now the Zionist settler state (Pappé, 2007, 2017; Bawalsa, 2022; Schwabe, 2018). In the 21st century and due to the conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and Europe that eventually led to World War I, the land of Palestine was declared to be a “national home” of the Jewish people (Balfour Declaration of 1917). This

³ Arafat was chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization from 1969 until his death in 2004. Unfortunately, the Oslo Accords and their creation of the Palestinian Authority, which works in conjunction with the Zionist state, did more harm than good for guaranteeing Palestinian liberation from the occupation and affirming Palestinian self-determination and statehood (CNN Library, 2013).

naming of Palestine, through the unwarranted and racist myth of a “land without a people, for a people without a land” (Pappé, 2007, 2017, pp. 3 -22), led to the migration of Jewish people out of Europe to evade the violences of Nazi Germany during World War II, to Palestine where they could build a new home. Since then, as a function of its settler colonialism, the Zionist settler state has worked to alienate Palestinians, attempting to erase their existence and value (Bier, 2021; United Nations, 2022; Safa, 2024).

As the Zionist state began to build itself, it did so through the Nakba,⁴ Arabic for the catastrophe, by forcefully expulsing from their homes and making refugees of 750,000 Palestinians, destroying about 530 villages, and killing 15,000 people in their series of mass atrocities enacted to take and ethnically cleanse the land (Rempfer, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2017; Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2024). As Edward Said, the eminent Palestinian scholar, wrote in 1984, this violence continued over the years with the invasions into Lebanon, and the massacres in 1967, the 1980s, through to the siege in Gaza in 2006 (Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2023b, p. 25).

It is critically important to name Zionism as the ideological and political project that promotes a “Jewish-only state in historic Palestine,” despite the existence of and with clear disregard for the people currently living on this land (Palestinian Feminist Collective, October 2023). In 1977, Said wrote “Permission to Narrate,” to “show the Palestinian experience is an important and concrete part of history, a part that has largely been ignored both by the Zionists who wished it had never been there, and by the Europeans and Americans who have not known really what to do with it” (p. xxxix). In fact, as feminist scholars and activists have noted, “Zionism contributes to the interconnected structures of racism and sexism” and is “an inherently racist ideology” that is a “colonialist, racist, and sexist project” (Naber, Desouky, Baroudi, 2006, p. 98).

Palestinian feminist legal scholar Noura Erakat’s work in *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* and her critical article on “Whiteness as Property in Israel” delineates how Zionism creates a Whiteness⁵ that only Zionist settlers can ascribe to, that Palestinians are

⁴ The Nakba is Arabic for *The Disaster or catastrophe*, which is the way Palestinians name the Zionist Israeli ethnic apartheid that began in 1947. Israel was named a settler colonial project in 1948.

⁵ The capitalization of White and Whiteness is an intentional justice-oriented grammatical praxis that enacts the decolonizing of our existence by naming the supremacist racial systems that PalestinianCRT is itself illuminating that organize our social structures. As published in MacArthur Foundation,

Language conveys values and has been used to uphold racist structures... Choosing to not capitalize White while capitalizing other racial and ethnic identifiers would implicitly affirm Whiteness as the standard and norm. Keeping White lowercase ignores the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities... “The detachment of ‘White’ as a proper noun allows White people to sit out of conversations about race and removes accountability from White people’s and White institutions’ involvement in racism,” according to the Center for the Study of Social Policy. “We intentionally capitalize ‘White’ in part to invite people, and ourselves, to think deeply about the ways Whiteness survives—and is supported—both explicitly and implicitly.”

As author, academic, and cultural critic Eve Ewing argues: “When we ignore the specificity and significance of Whiteness—the things that it is, the things that it does—we contribute to its seeming neutrality and thereby grant it power to maintain its invisibility.”

Language itself is radical. It can be used to either support or challenge the systemic racism we seek to dismantle (MacArthur Foundation, 2020).

Similarly, APA guidelines evolved to acknowledge this, writing “Racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. Therefore, use “Black” and “White” instead of “black” and “white” (do not use colors to refer to other human groups; doing so is considered pejorative)” (APA, 2026). For this reason, when discussing the racial construct of Whiteness that buttresses White supremacy, I insist on capitalizing it to call for acknowledging the responsibility we must own for the violences of this racial formation and its violent systemic expressions.

ineligible for, and that grants settlers the right to exist and have rights in the land they occupy (2015, 2017). She cites Israeli historian Ilan Pappé who explained that “Palestinians were ‘seen as part of nature’s hardship and as such were to be conquered or removed. Nothing, neither rocks nor Palestinians, was to stand in the way of the national redemption of the land the Zionist movement coveted” (Pappé, 2007, qtd. in Erakat 2015, p. 84). While these narratives are foundational for the settler colonial state that marginalizes and abuses Palestinians in the homeland, they crucially also shape how Palestine and Palestinians are viewed worldwide, impacting the support that Palestinians receive. We have vividly seen this as we hear government officials in the United States refer to Palestinians as only terrorists, nothing else, and not a state at all, but soon to be a “parking lot” (Harb, 2023b). This is in turn what sets up the necessity for a Palestinian CRT framework from which to understand our counterstories as they challenge these dominant narratives.

Zionism’s Narrative and Violent Erasures Today

These historical and modern contexts are critical to understand the violence happening in Gaza since October 2023, that reverberates in the West Bank (Democracy Now!, 2025a). Palestinian stories become critically important within the context of the blatant disregard of Palestine and Palestinian lives by imperial powers, crucially so in the United States. The Biden administration continued to unalterably fund the Zionist state’s violence (Harb, 2024), and the new second Trump administration has continually accelerated the suppression campaigns against Palestinians and allies through detention and deportation for speech in support of Palestinian liberation (Saba, 2023; Khalil, 2025ab; APNews, 2025; Caspian Kang, 2025; Fadel, Haney, Rezvani, & Gallego-Mackie, 2025). In 2019 and now in 2025, laws are being implemented⁶ with deep reverberations in the Middle East, for Palestinians in the diaspora, and for allies fighting for Palestinian liberation (Tribune, 2025ab; Lacy, 2025; Green, 2019; Schraub, 2019). After an executive order from the White House in early 2025 (The United States Government, 2025), student activists who supported Palestine and the fight for liberation and a ceasefire have been facing repercussions (AP News, 2025; Lacy, 2025). Even untrue stories of visas being revoked of student protesters (Tribune, 2025b) are being spread in efforts to further suppress pro-Palestine speech (Gallardo, Huang, & McClain, 2025).⁷ These events remind us of how critical it is to look at and understand this consequential moment in history, how it continues to reverberate today, and how speaking up and telling our Palestinian stories are critical forms of transformational survivance.

We must tell these histories as they are continually erased and dismissed because we see how majoritarian narratives take over truth and reality. In January 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled that it is highly probable that the Zionist settler state violated the Genocide Convention (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, “Gaza: ICJ Ruling”). In the over 2-years since, we have seen an acceleration of a forced famine occur with hundreds of deaths in

⁶ On 11 December 2019, Trump announced a new executive order that essentially declares “Judaism as a race or national origin, not just a religion, under the Civil Rights Act. His order also expanded the definition of anti-Semitism to include some anti-Israel sentiments. Both moves had been pushed by Kenneth L. Marcus, the head of the Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights, for years.” (Green, 2019; Schraub, 2019). Similarly, as he came into office in 2025, he has signed several executive orders to further suppress action and speech against the Zionist settler state and in support of Palestine and Palestinians (The United States Government, 2025; Tribune, 2025; Lacy, 2025).

⁷ While originally some of these stories were proven to be untrue, as fascism has accelerated in the United States throughout the last 8 months since Trump took office a second time, many of these fear tactics have proven to be in effect as we see students and faculty lose visa access and deportation, as the news stories cited throughout this article show.

Gaza directly from the illegal blockades established by the Zionist settler state (World Health Organization, 2025). In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant for “for crimes against humanity and war crimes” (International Criminal Court). In the United States, however, Congress and the White House rejected the ruling and instead moved to sanction the ICC (Al Jazeera Staff, 2024). When such deep seeded suppression campaigns exist in our government, spreading into our schools, the history of the birth of the Zionist settler state and how it has maintained its power and occupation of Palestine remains a hidden surprise for many. Despite the constant scroll of genocide people are witnessing on their social media timelines, and the new censoring of Palestinian stories in these social media platforms (Shankar, Dixit, & Siddiqui, 2023; Tribune, 2025a), we see how the powerful can sideline narratives that may challenge their hold of that power.

Understanding, learning, and retelling the stories of Palestinians are critical processes needed to name our existence, ground our identities, and connect us to our homeland. In this moment as we witness the violences of genocide, ethnic cleansing, terrorizing racialization, and dehumanization of Palestinians in the homeland—in Gaza, in the West Bank, and in the since-1948 occupied territories—naming our existence, highlighting our history, and reaffirming our connections to our hometowns in Palestine is even more crucial *and* risky. It is imperatively also our responsibility to challenge these narratives in all spaces we encounter them. As RM writes in *The Nation*, “Cultural institutions—media, universities, museums, literary centers—form one element of the power structure that keeps the US government solidly in support of Israel’s massacres” (2023). Thus, “One major project that culture workers can undertake is therefore to identify the specific organs that provide ideological cover for Israel’s genocidal violence and then to intervene to stop them from doing so” (RM, 2023). As they write,

Here, too, culture workers are uniquely positioned to oppose this assault on solidarity, free speech, and political organizing. We need to organize inside our cultural organizations, our publications, and our academic departments to push for a different set of claims: that all people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea deserve a life worth living; that Palestinians deserve to live free from bombardment, settler pogroms, occupation, and apartheid; that adhering to the moral principles of Judaism and the historical lessons of the Shoah means opposing Zionist violence and injustice—indeed, opposing Zionism; that, at minimum universities and magazines should enable rather than repress political expression (RM, 2023).

This work is our responsibility, as RM calls all culture workers, because as our institutions enable genocide, we must speak to dismantle this violence.

PalestinianCRT is Needed in Education

Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Palestinian feminist epistemologies, this work engages PalestinianCRT as framework to (re)center Palestine, disrupting our erasure and engaging in the ongoing fight for anticolonial liberation. By centering the lived experiences of Palestinians in the diaspora through our diasporic counterstories and memory-keeping practices, this work leverages the PalestinianCRT framework developed by Yunis and Tanksley (2023) as an offshoot of CRT that moves outside of a U.S.-centric approach to explain the racialization of Palestinian existence. Specifically, PalestinianCRT names that we cannot understand the Zionist

occupation of Palestine without naming and understanding the racialization Palestinians created by the Zionist movement that is necessary for the existence of the Zionist settler state.

PalestinianCRT is defined as aligning with and expanding the principles of CRT to form PalestinianCRT's tenets as such: (1) naming the prevalence of racism and demonstrate how Whiteness is woven into the foundation of the Zionist state, (2) calling for the necessity of challenging dominant narratives, (3) demonstrating our a deep commitment to social justice, (4) a celebration of Palestinian's community cultural wealth (CCW) and our sharing of our experiential knowledge as valid forms of research, data, evidence, and theory and finally, (5) highlighting the transformational resistance of the Palestinian people through an interdisciplinary perspective (Yunis and Tanksley, 2023, pp. 132-133). As Yunis and Tanksley (2023) write, race and racism are

pervasive and permanent, and ... the form, function, and severity of racial domination is necessarily mediated by interconnected, mutually constructing systems of power of race, class, gender, immigration status and nationality to name a few. Because it is grounded in Palestinian feminist epistemologies, PalestinianCRT is intersectional, and gives us a vision for Palestinian survivance, healing, and liberation that dismantles the cisheteropatriarchal violences espoused by the Israeli settler state and even scaffolded by patriarchal systems within Palestinian spaces (pp. 132-133).

These tenets are key for explaining the intended purpose and impact behind this paper (Yunis and Tanksley, 2023). This vision for Palestinian survivance and sumud is grounded in our ability to speak and resist the erasure of the Zionist settler colonial state that is bolstered by U.S. imperial powers. As Palestinians people living in the diaspora on Turtle Island, under the capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal, governmental system of the U.S. that full-heartedly supports its interests in the Zionist settler state (U.S. Department of State, 2025), our words and stories challenge the power systems and are always seen as threatening.⁸

Through this piece, I call for counterstorying, a methodology of PalestinianCRT, as critical educational praxis. In line with critical race theorists⁹ (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Kynard, 2013, 2015, 2020; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Williams, 1992; Yosso, 2005; and more), Indigenous and Black Feminist scholars (Hartman, 1997, 2019; hooks, 1981, 1989, 1994; Lorde, 1984, 2000 and among others), I name how work that leverages PalestinianCRT offers ways to engage critical race narrative counterstorytelling in education to

⁸ Education scholar and Palestinian sister Amanda Najib's PalestinianCrit for Education developed in this journal in February 2026 expands on these principles to focus on Palestinian Americans. Her work is critical for how to consider this particular demographic on Turtle Island in the field of Education. Our writing and approaches work together to theorize the varying formations of the Palestinian diaspora within Critical Race Theory. The particularities of the diaspora on various locales, like Turtle Island, Abya Yala, and others, necessitate that we continue finetune our approaches for our different lived experiences. Najib and I have a forthcoming definition of PalestinianCRT that we collaborate on for The Bloomsbury *Encyclopedia of Social Justice in Education*, which will be published in late 2026-2027, where we bring together our definitions together for a comprehensive understanding. The way I engage PalestinianCRT in education in this work names the prioritizing of counterstorytelling for its imperative in enabling our survivance and futurity, and expands beyond only those of in the diaspora on Turtle Island.

⁹ In a chapter in Sajjad's collection *Peace as Liberation: Visions and Praxis from Below*, Tiera Tanksley, a CRT scholar in Education, and I develop the theoretical framework of PalestinianCRT to formalize within the Critical Race field a framework that further explains how Palestinians are racialized by the Zionist entity. This chapter titled, "What is Peace for Palestine/inians under Israeli Settler Colonial Occupation?: Counterstory Imaginings of Peace through Transformational Resistance to Erasure" develops this framework to understand how we expand scholarship from the West that names how Whiteness as a system racializes the Global South within Turtle Island. In our chapter, we develop specific tenets for PalestinianCRT that name its foundational frameworks and methodologies engaging with counterstories to challenge the master narratives that erase those they racialize.

demonstrate what transformational survivance (Vizenor, 2008) can be for Palestinians. When we engage in counterstory through a PalestinianCRT lens as educator and scholars, we lift the veil of imperialism that hides its true settler colonial intentions, naming how these suppression tactics are not acting alone, but in concert with broader racializations to justify the genocide of Palestinians.

In the face of colonial violence and erasure, ever more present now since the renewal of brutal siege and onslaught¹⁰ on Palestinians in Gaza (Segal, 2023; Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2024) and now the West Bank (Democracy Now!, 2025a), the necessity for a counterstory praxis in education and beyond cannot be understated. This is especially true given the virally visible ongoing “textbook case of genocide” (Segal, 2023) of the Palestinian people and the censoring and suppression in the West of Palestinians and allies (Saba, 2023; Editor’s Collective, 2024; Muhtaseb, 2024; Kestler-D’Amours, 2024; Korte, 2024).

Delineating and enacting this counterstory PalestinianCRT methodology functions to address both violences and suppression that Palestinians and allies are experiencing in the homeland, in the West, and in academic spaces. The suppression and silencing experienced by Palestinians and allies in the diaspora and in the homeland further buttress the existing apartheid of knowledge in academia (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) and ongoing sophicide and scholasticide (Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2024; Jawad, 2024). Previous ethnographic work in education on transnational belonging of Palestinian Americans (Abu El-Haj, 2015) in the face of Arab- and Islamophobia after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States names the impacts that this suppression and silencing has had on our communities. Focusing her research on the experiences of high school Palestinian Americans, Abu El-Haj’s research highlights how “Othering discourses” have critically harmed our communities. She names that it is “across social fields (e.g. the media and politics), public school” and other spaces that are “key institutions[s] where ideas of national belonging (and not belonging) are produced, contested, and played out” (2015, p. 206). Because Palestinians are often living “within the theory and practice of a world, largely created by those ‘above,’ but also in worlds partly defined by alternative visions that critique praxis ‘from above,’” we have been systemically erased, silenced, and nearly completely destroyed, a practice we are physically witnessing now (Blaney & Innayatullah, 2009, p. 663). Consequently, it is critical that we re-center our histories so that we can begin to heal away from the colonizer, hegemonic, imperial narratives and focus on those of us on the other side of the “colonial difference” (Mignolo, March 2007). Abu El-Haj’s research states that “the process of racialization for Arab and Muslim communities are tied to contemporary circulating discourses of the American liberal multicultural imaginary that has been to a large extent constructed contrapuntally in relation to a hostile geopolitical imaginary of the ‘Muslim world’” (2015, p. 207). This call for PalestinianCRT in education, then, engages in the “hopeful response to the Othering discourses” that Abu El-Haj calls for, that challenges Othering narratives by creating space for our Palestinian stories and existence to be heard, to be seen, and thus, to challenge our erasure and heal the ongoing trauma of the genocide we are witnessing, living, and transforming through.

¹⁰ Raz Segal, a scholar of genocide, wrote this piece merely 6 days after the onslaught had begun, to name it for what it is: a genocide of the Palestinian peoples and lands. As he writes, this onslaught is yet another chapter in the Nakba, in which an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes during the 1948 war that led to the creation of the State of Israel. the assault on Gaza can also be understood in other terms: as a textbook case of genocide unfolding in front of our eyes. I say this as a scholar of genocide, who has spent many years writing about Israeli mass violence against Palestinians. I have written about settler colonialism and Jewish supremacy in Israel, the distortion of the Holocaust to boost the Israeli arms industry, the weaponization of antisemitism accusations to justify Israeli violence against Palestinians, and the racist regime of Israeli apartheid. Now, following Hamas’s attack on Saturday and the mass murder of more than 1,000 Israeli civilians, the worst of the worst is happening (2023).

PalestinianCRT as Framework

To address the apartheid of knowledge and ethnic cleansing of our people and our history, I engage this framework of PalestinianCRT because it gives me the tools to name the erasure of my people, retell our history to challenge the majoritarian narratives that discard us. In the collection *Peace as Liberation: Visions and Praxis from Below* (2023), Yunis and Tanksley develop this framework to name that Palestinian experiences are unique as people existing in the diaspora and in the homeland under Zionist occupation. Yunis and Tanksley (2023) define PalestinianCRT as an offshoot of CRT that explains the specific nuances of being Palestinian living underneath the suppression of the Zionist state. CRT is a framework that began in legal studies in the United States (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989) that has since then been used and augmented to elucidate the experiences of other groups of marginalized people. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) did the work of bringing this framework to the field of education as an “analytic tool” at the “intersection of race and property” through which we can understand social and school inequality (p. 48). Their work is foundational for furthering this framework to acknowledge the differential experiences of other racialized and minoritized populations. Creating a framework specific to the Palestinian experience (in diaspora and in the homeland) is essential for examining and understanding the Zionist entity’s machinations and their impacts in the Palestinian lands and beyond, especially with U.S. support. It allows for a grounding of conversations on Palestine to be focused on the violent racialization of Palestinians by the occupation, Zionist settler colonialism, and its ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people. Thus, PalestinianCRT enables Palestinian stories to be meaningful interventions into and against systems of violence that organize our societies (Ladson-Billings, 2013). In fact, our words, our stories, and our very existence, then, are always counter to the majoritarian narratives. *We are living counterstories.*

Counterstories for Our Lives—Our Survivance and Sumud

As a methodology within PalestinianCRT, counterstory actively challenges colonial erasure. This framework positions Palestinian narratives of resilience, perseverance, and cultural preservation as acts of transformational resistance and survivance. Survivance (Vizenor, 2008) is an Indigenous concept that names the survival and resistance of Indigenous peoples facing genocide as one. I employ it here as a critical concept that allows us to understand Palestinian existence and Palestinian storytelling as a resistance practice, and thus, what I name as transformational survivance. Connecting survivance with Palestinian storytelling does the critical work of enacting resistance and survival, creating a connection within the critical theoretical framework of CRT and PalestinianCRT, and demonstrating our sumud. Enacting a PalestinianCRT counterstory pedagogical praxis thus enables us to build knowledge about our people from our perspective, elevating our voices, validating our existence, demonstrating how our perspectives deserve to be heard and acknowledged, especially in American and Eurocentric, White-dominated educational environments where we are constantly dismissed, erased, and punished.

Martinez (2020) writes that “Counterstory is a methodology that functions through methods that empower the minoritized through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies” (3). It is grounded in the way CRT recognizes “that experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices,” like those that organize the education systems in the U.S. (Martinez 2020, 3).

Martinez also does the work of naming how counterstory as method “illustrate[s] a rhetoric of transformational resistance” because it emphasizes, as she quotes Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2020), the “importance of working toward social justice” (p. 28). In elevating experiential knowledge and voice, like counterstorytelling, CRT and PalestinianCRT frameworks are a form of resistance that serve to expose, analyze, and challenge majoritarian stories (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). My work in PalestinianCRT understands Palestinians’ resistance and counterstorytelling as projects of our transformational survivance—we survive and resist erasure by transforming our spaces with our stories.

Other scholars have engaged in this practice of using “counterstorytelling [as a] powerful mode of promoting epistemic justice by reclaiming the “permission to narrate” (Dutta, Azad & Hussain, 2021; Said, 1984)” (Atallah, et al 2022, p. 684). As Atallah, et al (2022) write, this practice of counterstorytelling promotes our “becom[ing] embodied in our work together of linking our stories, spaces, lands, waters, trees, spiritual/ancestral wisdoms, and so much more” (p. 686). Counterstorytelling is a form of transformational survivance despite the violences of colonialism, and naming these practices of passing down this Palestinian identity through our counterstories and building community enacts that fight against our erasure perpetuated by the systems we function within. Further, Atallah, et al (2022) write, “We may have been removed, separated, and condemned by colonialism, but we nurture one another as we find our way back into the stories, remedies, and wholeness that bring us home” (p. 686). We build collectives that continue our survivance, transforming our existences from attempted erasure to flourishing collectives, and these, in turn, are now bringing us home.

Additionally, Martinez defines this method and methodology of counterstorytelling within CRT as one that “functions through methods that empower the minoritized through the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies” (Martinez, 2020, p. 3). In this case, these experiences of erasure are not only not told, left out, or downright ignored, but we are witnessing their violent erasure in action as journalists continue to be murdered and Palestinian students and activists continue to be targeted. In a moment of complete and utter destruction (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, 2024), heartbreak, and unexplainable pain that we are currently living through (since Fall of 2023 to the Summer of 2026 thus far), engaging with PalestinianCRT and counterstory is a critical move of survivance. This makes these Palestinian counterstory narratives that much more urgent and imperative. This is in fact why and how Palestinian narratives become counterstories told not only to defy death, silencing, and erasure, but also to catalyze hope, healing, and futurity. They empower because they are spoken, written, performed by those who are currently being decimated. In midst of our own destruction, Palestinians refuse the majoritarian narratives and actions that are erasing us. In that refusal, in speaking our stories and ourselves into existence, we create hope. Because we are still here.

Naming Palestinian al-hakawati—storytelling—as a critical form of enacting survivance is a leveraging of PalestinianCRT as a critical framework that enables us to “delink” from colonization (Mignolo, 2007), by simultaneously considering the ways Palestinians leverage storytelling to understand, resist, and subsequently heal from the “herida abierta” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25) of colonialism (the open wound created by the colonial and imperial powers). Through our storytelling, our existence in our al-hakawati, we resist imperialist colonialism of Zionism that is making every effort to destroy our land, our people, and our history. In telling our stories, we are weaving a thread that sews the ripped fabric of our histories back together. Counterstorytelling as

a methodology of PalestinianCRT (re)centers Palestine as a place for enacting a critical, race-conscious, and justice-oriented feminist praxis that is life-affirming, and that engages in a fight for anticolonial liberation of Palestinians with fervent hope (Ihmoud, 2022; Joudah, et al, 2021) in every aspect of our lives. It is a critical framework and praxis to engage with in education because it presents healing opportunities, understanding our own implicated nature as scholars and educators in the imperial core that is actively and violently enacting the erasure of Palestine and Palestinians.

Palestinian counterstories matter because the Zionist settler state's occupation of Palestine perpetuates constant violations of the humanity and rights of the Palestinian people (Amnesty International, *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians*, 2022), which are present in our academic spaces (Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2024), as noted in the introduction through suppression campaigns. Our counterstories—as Palestinians under occupation and those kept from our homeland in the diaspora—challenge the erasure perpetuated on us by naming our existence and enacting our transformational survivance despite powerful and unfortunately successful efforts by the Zionist settler state and those entities that fortify it. In writing and speaking our stories, counterstorytelling births new opportunities for more Palestinians to shine a light on their histories, their sumud as survivors of an ongoing Nakba. Counterstorytelling as a pedagogical praxis is one way to operationalize PalestinianCRT to subvert colonial erasure, actively reclaiming and restoring our collective humanity, and persistently challenging the colonial impetus to erase, fragment, and obscure our stories, our community, and our very existence. This critical pedagogical practice enables us to write ourselves into history and the current moment in our classrooms and academic spaces, despite the doxxing,¹¹ censoring, marginalization, threats of violence, and suppression we are actively experiencing. In telling our stories, we challenge the imperial narratives that rationalize the genocide of our people. Our stories historicize the violences we are witnessing today, and tell readers, students, faculty, and broader university and academic communities of the history that has been obscured yet cannot be erased. In writing and teaching our stories, and narrating the struggles we face in the process, our writings lift the veil of the apartheid of knowledge in education, and healing by making ourselves present. By deploying counterstory in our educational praxis in every way, we enact our transformational survivance—of Palestinians—and we create a nurturing soil for further growth. We are showing we are still here, transforming spaces that wish we did not exist and telling our stories everywhere where they have been erased.

My Own Healing as a Transnational Diaspora Palestinian Ruptured by Imperial Colonialism

My writing is an intervention as I seek to enact the principles of PalestinianCRT and make space for these conversations in multiple fields, like education, rhetoric, ethnic studies, and communication studies. In fields like communication studies and rhetoric, there has finally been an increase and an evolution when thinking of and writing about the Global South (Shome, 2019). Similarly, education is working to critically engage in this conversation more and has had the

¹¹ Bernardita, the author of this piece, was herself doxxed by an online group for posts on her social media that discussed the violent acts by the Zionist state against Palestinians. Harassing emails from community folks as well as faculty at her graduate university relayed calls for her firing and removal as a faculty (sic) from the university, including a petition online that included screenshots of her personal social media and various university profiles, as well as a photo of *another* individual with similar features at a protest against Zionist violence. This harassment campaign led Bernardita to remove most of her social media presence to protect herself and her family, as well as all the online presence related to her university and her work.

foundation for such conversations in CRT, but not without its struggles and resistance (Hidalgo Bellows, 2024). Writing about Palestine today is not only still novel—it is also a critically challenging endeavor. The Zionist entity’s censure campaigns have been successful, and as noted above in footnote number 11, I myself was doxed in November 2023 for social media posts that led threats to my employment as a graduate student instructor.

As a PalestinianCRT project, and especially after the harassment I myself received, this writing is a counterstory itself that challenges the silence forced upon me and other Palestinians in the months since October 7, and before. I am telling these stories, in a U.S. imperial context, to name an existence that the U.S. honestly believes is a myth, merely historical, or worst yet, fiction and in fact, a group of terrorist extremists and nothing else (Al Jazeera, 2025). In my writing and endeavoring in my research throughout and since my doctoral journey, I am resisting the master narratives present in U.S. academia, transforming our fields by welcoming this marginalized knowledge, and dismantling the apartheid of knowledge¹² in education (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) through a celebration of the community cultural wealth of the Palestinian community (Anera, 2021). Grounded in Palestinian feminist epistemologies¹³ (Ihmoud, 2022; Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2024), PalestinianCRT is also intersectional, connecting critically with frameworks developed by the Combahee River Collective’s work in the 1970s (Taylor, 2017) and coined by civil rights legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) that names how different parts of one’s identity interact in relationship to power. These connections, naming how power interacts to further disenfranchise, and in the Palestinian experience, further enact erasure and ethnic cleansing, give us a vision for Palestinian survivance, healing, and liberation that dismantles the cisheteropatriarchal violences espoused by the Zionist settler state.

Narratives of Resistance, Part 2 – Bernardita

Naming the connections I have found through my research, searching for the story of why my Abuelito Saleh left Palestine in the early 20th century, directly counters the Zionist settler colonial state’s foundational narrative-myth that Palestine was “a barren land” until they arrived (Pappé 2017, p. 6; Sharif 2016, 18, pp. 22-23). In figuring out these connections, it dawns on me heavily that my very own existence, claiming proudly my Palestinian identity, is a direct and clear threat to the Zionist movement and its settler state’s foundational myth. I do not reflect or write on these realizations lightly and realize the risk I am taking in putting these words together. Yet, I understand that our Palestinian sumud is grounded in this bravery, and necessary for our

¹² Delgado Bernal and Villalpando write that, “an “apartheid of knowledge” (Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002) is sustained by an epistemological racism that limits the range of possible epistemologies considered legitimate within the mainstream research community (Scheurich & Young, 1997) ... We apply a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to analyze how an apartheid of knowledge that marginalizes, discredits, and devalues the scholarship, epistemologies, and other cultural resources of faculty of color is embedded in higher education” (2002, p. 169). The concept of the apartheid of knowledge is one I return to as I grapple with how Palestinian scholars are similarly disenfranchised in U.S. academia. My work further develops this tension as I implement this PalestinianCRT framework.

¹³ As Ihmoud delineates, “a Palestinian feminist analytics allows us to hold our vision of liberation as inclusive, diasporic and transnational, while at the same time maintaining the centrality of our relationship to the homeland. In calling up the force of return, we refer to the process of mapping a diasporic and transnational Palestinian feminist epistemology through bringing together an archive of Palestinian feminist rebellion, one rooted in our histories in the homeland and the still expanding boundaries of shataat (diaspora) as the anchor for reimagining both Palestinian liberation and a future Palestine” (p. 286).

resistance and survivance.¹⁴ Thus, as my great grandparents and grandparents did, traveling the long journey by boat and train and donkey rides through treacherous terrain of the Andes mountains to get to Chile and build a new life, I honor their journeys, their commitments to building communities of the colonia¹⁵ Palestina in Chile, and ensuring a future in our new home by retelling these stories, naming our journeys, reminding and sharing with unfamiliar audiences of the rich history of Palestinians (and other Arabs) in Latin America, and our deep connections to our culture and our homeland. I also write these narratives throughout my academic work as I disrupt, challenge hegemonic traditions that continue to further sideline Palestinians and our narratives. We are here, and we make ourselves seen despite revisions in academia used to keep us at the margins, if there at all.

By furthering my writings as a transnational being on my travels through Palestine and my family's diasporic and immigrant story, connecting it to the historical development of Palestinians in Chile (in my dissertation work), this scholarship highlights how Palestine is being erased (as noted in the histories above and in the news stories highlighted from the last two years), and how diaspora Palestinians fight this erasure in their very existence by maintaining and passing down that cultural heritage and identity through our counterstories.

Since October 7th, the Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC) organized a Teach-In on October 18 and co-planned the November 4th march in Washington that was the biggest demonstration for Palestine in history in the United States. I watched both on live feeds on YouTube since I couldn't fly to DC last minute with my baby.

Seeing these demonstrations has been so heartening. I know there is still ignorant hate for Palestinians. I know they demonize us by labeling us all as terrorists. There's no acknowledgment that we are a people, a community—instead, we are treated as just vermin to be killed. We've known this all along. But people worldwide are finally seeing it because they cannot hide what people see on social media today. It's amazing. We're being heard.

It feels like years that I've been fighting tooth and nail to speak on Palestine, to tell people Palestine exists and never went away. That the Zionist entity has been doing what it's doing.

And I've been afraid. For decades. To speak on it. I've always known the danger in it. And I'm still scared to speak. That fear is so real. So powerful. So strong. It is encoded in my DNA. Growing up Palestinian, born into a dictatorship (in Chile), a military regime basically created by the U.S. just to see what happens. The whole world is the U.S.'s laboratory.

I've known this. I've always "known better" than to speak freely. My safety has always been contingent on my silence. I learned this early on.

¹⁴ A piece in Peitho's Spring 2025 issue with sarah dweik (Dweik and Yunis Varas, 2025) develops Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics as a rhetorical move enacted through counterstory and PalestinianCRT (developed in my chapter with Dr. Tiera Tanksley, also cited here).

¹⁵ While I struggle using the language of colony as it is the language of the colonizing project, Palestinos Chilenos proudly talk of the "colonia Palestina," which I see as a subversive use of the word in this context.

So, to see... So. Many. People. Even utter the word Palestine. To see this flag I've always seen and identified as mine, and to now see it proudly displayed by freedom fighters of all types. It is hard to explain what it feels like. To be seen for the first time without feeling like I must translate myself or scream who we are to all winds. And you are all fighting so fiercely. For a people Zionism has tried almost so successfully to erase.

It is beyond words. I am... Beyond words.

Survivance Counterstorying of Palestinian Chileans

One of the ways Palestine continues to live, outside of those in the homeland who exist and persist under this violent and restrictive Zionist settler colonial operation, is in the diaspora. I was birthed in the Palestinian community in Chile, from a Palestinian Chilean father and a Chilean mother. This community in Chile makes up the largest in the diaspora outside of the Arab region, amounting to at least half a million people (Arad, 2018). Establishing its foothold in Chile over 80 years before the Nakba of 1948, the Palestinian Chilean community remains an interesting and thriving people. Palestinians' migration to Chile started in the 1860s, during the Ottoman Empire's colonization of the nation, through the British colonization of the early 1900s, and has continued through the current colonization of Palestine by the Zionist settler project that started with the Nakba of 1948 (Espín Ocampo 2020). Palestinians in Chile are Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—just like the Palestinians that remain in the homeland.

Narratives of Return, Part 2 – Bernardita

While Mercedes and Abraham, my great grandparents, arrived in Chile around 1900, and Saleh, my grandfather, in or around the 1920s, the current Zionist settler state's hold on our homeland impacted the family deeply. Saleh, the grandfather I yearn to know but never got to meet, never returned to his hometown of Bethlehem. While my father got to visit the homeland and took my mother, it was under the auspices of the Zionist settler regime. The trauma of that trip meant that for as long as she was alive, my mother would not return—being searched and mistreated as they were was more than she could or wanted to experience twice. Who could blame her?

For me—Palestine was a myth, a beautiful dream of a land far away, too far to touch, too out of reach. When the possibility of going to see where my family comes from landed on my path, I was overcome—not just with excitement, but fear. The narratives of the dangers in Palestine pervaded everything, including my own understanding of my homeland. But I couldn't not go. I've yearned to know more, to meet my grandfather in some form. How could I not try?

In 2019, I lived a dream that feels even more distant today. I visited the homeland, walked the streets of Bethlehem where my grandfather played as a child, where Mercedes and Abraham met and formed a family that would eventually birth my grandmother Olga (after whom my daughter is named). These stories, these lineages, are carried. Menakem (2017) tells us about the way trauma lives in our bodies and is carried throughout generations. As I carry their story of migration, I also carry their pain of being from a home they never got to see. I write these stories today because I want you to know we've always been here. There are 7.6 million Palestinians in the diaspora (Awad, 2024) yearning for a homeland we can't often reach, successfully reshaped

into pieces of land they now call “the West Bank” and besieged Gaza, currently being bombarded into death, destruction, famine, and obsolete illnesses by a brutal regime. This is what I saw in Palestine in 2019. The arbitrary checkpoints to keep Palestinians in their place, and outside their homes, in refugee camps in their own land. I saw cameras placed inside mosques. I saw unending traffic in a small area of land because of the walls built by the Zionist settler government to keep us out of what they’ve chosen is now theirs. Our bus going into Jerusalem, which they now control even though so many Palestinians live within its walls, was stopped by a group of what seemed like teenage IOF officers who, with their AR guns across their chest, who asked to see our passports before letting the bus continue its route.

Even as we witness the awakening of a society, in the United States and worldwide, to what Palestinians have been living under for over 75 years, there are so many who still do not believe it. We are seen as evil. Like Said’s work on *Orientalism* (1978) defined decades ago, “Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (p. 42). And, thus, we arrive at the complete dehumanization of the Arab, which has been so successful that even our children are seen as future terrorists and nothing more (Levy, 2025). But as you watch the videos, from news outlets (though still rarer) to mostly alternative social media sources (Khamis & Sena Dogbatse, 2024) on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and others,¹⁶ you only see children who want to go home, to play, to live and be free. The children of Gaza, who make up half of its population, have literally never known freedom, existing under an air, sea, and land blockade by the Zionist settler colonial project. *Before October 7* and the current massacre and genocide, Gaza was already living in unlivable circumstances. The food they have access to is measured (Lipkind, 2024; Ezz & Swirki, 2023), the electricity is intermittent (AbuQamar, et al, 2023), sometimes only coming on for three hours at a time, fuel is at the mercy of the occupier (Lipkind, 2024; United Palestinian Appeal, 2024), with hospitals collapsing nearly entirely even before they were bombed (Cormack, 2023). The attack on Palestinians is violent, misogynist, anti-LGBT, racist, anti-feminist, thorough, and now, due to the allowance of genocide by the United States and other imperial powers of the West, almost nearly complete.

Despite all this evidence I have provided for you here, readers, which is widely available to anyone willing to see it, we still must fight to tell our stories. In my graduate career, as I learned methods and theory, and prepared to work on my dissertation, I experienced continuous pushback.

May 2022 - Post-Comps Debrief

“Your committee is worried you’re going to want to just write about your trip”

¹⁶ With this I highlight how the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and now the West Bank has mostly been seen due to social media, as mainstream media has continued to “fail Gaza” and Palestinians writ large (Khamis & Sena Dogbatse, 2024). In their analysis, Khamis & Sena Dogbatse (2024) write, “social media has filled the gaps in reporting on the Gaza war. In recent years, it has emerged as a powerful force in shaping the narrative around global conflicts, including this latest one. Social media platforms have become indispensable instruments for providing alternative narratives. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter are giving voice to everyday people on the ground, showcasing their personal stories, images and real-time updates. Viral posts and hashtags, such as #FreePalestine and #GazaUnderAttack, have increased awareness and spurred conversations across geographic and ideological boundaries. Citizen journalism on social media has enabled diverse viewpoints by presenting stories that may not be found in traditional media. This democratization of information allows ordinary citizens to share their perspectives with a wide global audience” (Khamis & Sena Dogbatse, Social Media Shines, paras. 1-4).

August 2022 - Advising Meeting

“Your personal narrative can drive the question, but you must distance yourself”

My stories, my life experiences, my identity has never been enough. We must make the case for our stories. We must fight to be heard, even as the genocide is glaring and undeniable.

On the Necessity of Counterstory in Education

Palestine and Palestinians have resisted the Zionist settler colonial project that successfully reshaped and erased much of Palestine’s borders and that attempts to colonize and absorb Palestinian culture as its own (Massad, 2021). This process of erasure, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid in the homeland reverberates through the Palestinian diaspora. As Jasbir Puar (2017) wrote years ago, and we are witnessing so clearly in 2023, 2024, 2025, and now 2026, “the production of widespread debilitation is a key to maintaining colonial rule” (2017, p. 161). This effort is part of a “project of elimination of the Indigenous through either genocide or assimilation” (Puar 2017, p. 144). Through my research and writing, I demonstrate how this plays out in our research and educational contexts, with the constant silencing, alienating, and removing of Palestinian voices. My work broadly is fighting this project of elimination by the Zionist settler colonial state specifically by elevating our own experiential knowledge as transformational survivance through our counterstories, which are foundational parts of CRT and PalestinianCRT.

It is in efforts to continue to name the Zionist settler colonial project that this critical intervention finds its grounding—and why I see this project as centrally founded in education while engaging both with critical theories, decoloniality and critiques of imperialism, as well as transnational rhetorical practices and critical pedagogical praxes. My family, like millions of others, exists with strong ties and a deep, indelible connection to our Palestinian roots, despite being kept away from the land that birthed our family and our ancestors. This project critically enacts counterstory of PalestinianCRT in education to address the apartheid of knowledge that is a direct result of the Zionist settler colonial project that has kept us away from this land. This project operationalizes PalestinianCRT, highlighting how these practices of Palestinian al-hakawati, storytelling, are in fact transformational survivance practices of counterstory. Our Palestinian community leverages these practices every day to maintain our collective, cultural identity, and existence despite Zionist efforts to erase the country and its people from historical, physical, and theoretical existence. These are our counterstories of transformational survivance that directly challenge the colonial, imperialist, white supremacist legacies of patriarchy, racism, Whitening, and White possession that are enacted by Zionist settler project. Palestinian scholars experience these criticisms often and even violent removals from academic spaces, through doxxing, firing (Salaita 2015, 2017), and more—tactics that have become are even more brutal in 2025 and 2026. With my words, I transform spaces in academia, creating room here for a community constantly fighting erasure worldwide, within Palestinian territory, in the West, and the United States specifically.

As Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) wrote, our identities are developed of crisscrossing histories and realities, past and present tejidos of our experiences and relationships (p. 69). As I have written in the past and continue to do now—my name is Bernardita Maria Yunis Varas. My name carries histories. My Spanish first and middle names honor my mother and my Chilena identity. My last names carry the histories of colonialism and Palestinian displacement. In the telling of my story

and my family's diasporic, immigrant history, I reclaim my Palestinian ancestry and the legacy of Latin America to which my name alludes. The tapestry of my family history is vibrant and yet obscure for me as a second-generation Chilena and immigrant in the United States. Recovering our stories, connecting to my ancestors, and discovering what I do not yet know, motivates my life. Palestinian feminist epistemologies, Anzaldúa thought and theory, and other Indigenous and women-of-color feminisms provide the tools for doing this work of recovery, discovery, and reclamation in just, nonviolent, life-giving ways. My methodologies must acknowledge and connect with other fights for survival and resistance. My work must be grounded in Palestinian, women-of-Color, Indigenous, Black, and feminist methodologies to reclaim and expose the stories of my peoples as Palestinian and Latinx communities whose lives have been displaced and erased. Therefore, I do what Anzaldúa calls us, "I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you" (Anzaldúa 1983, p. 169). I write to state and honor the names of those removed, destroyed, replaced, erased, and brutally killed. I write because it is my survivance—it is our Palestinian sumud.

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Bernardita M. Yunis Varas, Ph.D. was born in Chile, and grew up in Miami, FL. In 2008, she received a BSC and BLA in Communication Studies, International Studies, and Religious Studies from the University of Miami, and her MA in 2015 from The Pennsylvania State University in Rhetoric. In May 2025, Bernardita successfully defended her RSA-award-winning dissertation titled “Palestinian Survivance and Sumud in Chile: Representing Reflections by a Diasporic Transnational Palestinian Feminist Daughter,” earning her doctorate from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Bernardita found her teaching vocation in graduate school, teaching at PSU, UDC, DU, CU, and GWU. Her teaching focuses on empowering students through Communication and First-Year Writing courses, and supports students through her teaching, mentoring, and Writing Center work as consultant, faculty mentor, and now Assistant Director at Colorado State University, Pueblo. Bernardita’s scholarly work enacts an anti-colonial praxis grounded in PalestinianCRT and Palestinian feminist epistemologies. She writes counterstories telling her experiences as an immigrant, Latinx, Chilena of the Palestinian diaspora, grounding her scholarship and pedagogy in anti-racist values and the drive to dismantle violences enacted by settler colonialism and White supremacy on students, writers, faculty, and more.

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