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Getting Anti-Zionist Curricular Disavowal, Radical Study, and Pedagogies of Solidarity with Palestinian Liberation

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Abstract

This conceptual paper thinks with dynamic critical pedagogies of Jewish anti-Zionists acting in solidarity with Palestinian liberation movements. From an anticolonial standpoint, the paper argues that other modes of education open radical possibilities for liberatory, collective work. Drawing on the author's memories and nonformal education experiences of a Zionist upbringing and current anti-Zionist activism, the paper traces curricular arrangements and explores implications of three types of educations. First, it analyzes the racist, settler colonial education of Zionism. Second, it thinks with the unlearning and radical study involved with becoming an anti-Zionist. Third, the paper explores the world-making pedagogies of solidarity that work toward a free Palestine.



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Introduction

Growing up Jewish, I was always told that we as a people deeply valued education. After all, like Bret Stephens (2019) pointed out in his eugenics-supporting *New York Times* piece, we (white, Ashkenazi) Jews have a “secret genius.” The discourse that Stephens champions suggests that our unrivaled smartness, intellectual ingenuity, and unique educatedness have played no small part in our survival. In my own experience, the meaning of the term education was rarely questioned. It always moved within defined boundaries. Unsurprisingly, the largest boundary formed around Palestine. Passover seders, rabbi’s sermons, studying for my bar mitzvah. All of these parts of Jewish life worked together to form a thick border wall. Unlike the physical border wall cutting through Palestinian land that so ruthlessly upholds apartheid, this was merely a curricular border. Yet the logics of these borders worked toward the same ends: settler colonialism and the ongoing suppression of Palestinian history and life.

Consequently, my childhood education at the end of the 20th century, like so many white Jews in the U.S., did not include the Nakba. I never learned about atrocities such as the massacre in Kfar Qasim. At no point did I encounter a curriculum that mentioned the Palestinian Revolt of 1936-1939. I vaguely recall hearing about the First and Second Intifada, though only as a way to remind U.S. Jews about the importance of supporting Israel. And so, I also did not read the words of Mahmood Darwish or Ghassan Kanafani. Recalling the formal and nonformal educations I encountered, Palestine and Palestinians appeared only in generalized, often violently dismissive explanations of “others.”

I do not share these experiences as a way of centering my own trajectory. This broad sketch instead offers a view of how Jewish education is used as a tool used to uphold the racist settler colonial state called Israel. Exploring these educations also provides insight into how they might be contested and unmade as part of a larger project of Palestinian liberation. This conceptual paper draws on memory, curriculum studies and critical pedagogy, and political activism to challenge anyone, but particularly white U.S. Jews, to study and struggle in solidarity against Zionism. I also aim to lay bare the educational mechanisms that maintain Zionism.

The paper follows three broad moves. First, it outlines a Zionist curricular world made for diasporic Jews. This settler colonial education generates a “curricular disavowal” that denies Palestinian freedom and instructs many groups to privilege Jewish feelings over Palestinian safety. The paper then turns to the ways that nonformal education such as study groups and subversive schooling practices contribute to unlearning Zionism. This section highlights the curricular possibilities born of listening to Palestinian writers, centering Palestinian voices, and joining ongoing political organizing efforts. Finally, the paper moves from unlearning toward considering education’s role in imagining radical, liberatory futures. It is important to note that these three moves are far from universal or linear. They represent certain experiences and some of the many pathways for people, especially Jewish folks in the U.S., to “get anti-Zionist” (following Stanley’s (2021) provocation to “get ungovernable”). Education work is often slow, nonlinear, and unending. Writing during the current genocide also presents an urgency to think and act against Zionism.

Position and Method: Learning Solidarity

In their founding document, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (2017) suggests that opposing Zionism is not merely a fight against the state of Israel. It is part of

a “world Zionist movement” that includes Jews and other groups all over the world seeking to legitimate Israel. Rather than some antisemitic trope, the PFLP point to the very real ways that Israel seeks to indoctrinate and build global support. The PFLP thus point to “the necessity of making a precise and detailed study of Israel and the world Zionist movement” (p. 30). As part of this study, it is important to situate Jewish institutions and Jewish educational life as a key aspect of Zionism’s educational endeavors.

As a white secular Jew living in the U.S. and working as a professor of education and holocaust and genocide studies (and an anti-Zionist actively engaged in the Palestinian liberation movement), I have deep experiences as someone educated into and against the world Zionist movement. I have encountered the ways in which so many of us have been the subjects of Zionism’s pedagogical address. These positions are not intended as guilty confessions (a teacher-scholar’s move toward settler innocence as Tuck and Yang (2012) would say). Instead, my experiences and work illuminate the ways that education both maintains Zionism and how education contests Zionism. While anti-Zionism should be a practice and standpoint for everyone, this complicity leads me to address this paper to Jewish anti-Zionists considering their role in Palestine solidarity work, anyone questioning Zionism, or those considering the ways in which education contributes to the unmaking of the world Zionist movement.

Positionality here entangles with methodology. I build on my memories and experiences. I am not trying to uncover and prove rigid facts about Zionist education, only show something that is recognizable in broad discourse. When I have shared stories from my Zionist upbringing in organizing meetings, for instance, I have been met with vigorous head nods or similar anecdotes. My use of memory also partially functions through what Bruyneel (2021) calls settler memory. Settler memory shows how whiteness and settler colonialism move beyond simple matters of knowledge and ignorance to “undermin[e] critical attention to white settler society as a whole, affecting all who live under its domination and seek its abolition” (p. 4).

Exploring Zionist and anti-Zionist education are useful insofar as they work in solidarity toward a free Palestine. As such, the lessons of Edward Said, the political praxis of Leila Khaled, and the ongoing work of many educational researchers and everyday intellectuals—far from a monolith—all build an educational map toward a different, liberatory world.

Terms and Frameworks

Learning Zionism moves through informal lessons and direct propaganda, incidental interactions and sustained campaigns. In this paper, curriculum is thus engaged as something more than technical, practice-based material created for formalized lessons in institutionalized spaces like schools. It is something deeply political that is lived and enacted across multiple spaces (Pinar, 2019). El-Sherif (2021) expands this understanding of curriculum, using the Arabic word *manhaj* to show how curriculum asks “to clarify, to be intentional, to know, embody, and pursue” (p. 181). Applying this understanding of curriculum opens space to, as El-Sherif suggests, engage in “critical examinations of curriculum” to “transform systems of domination” (p. 183).

Challenging systems of domination leads me to write from explicitly anticolonial and anti-Zionist stances. Anticolonialism is a praxis of opposition to structures of extraction and hierarchical categorization used to privilege a relationship to knowledge and land that is grounded in ownership (here drawing on Césaire, Habash, etc.). Zionism is a clear iteration of settler colonialism. It is an ideological project that, among other aims, seeks to entrench a racist and

racialized hierarchical order and dispossess Palestinians from their land. Zionism's settler colonialism is explicitly made in its foundations. In calling for a militarized Jewish force in Palestine in 1925, for instance, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the right wing revisionist Zionist, wrote "Zionism is a colonizing venture and, therefore, it stands or falls on the question of armed forces" (as cited in Khalidi, 2020, p. 51). Elsewhere, Jabotinsky espouses another key feature of colonialism as a "civilizing" project, framing Zionists as those who would bring enlightenment and culture to the land of Palestine (cited in Massad, 2013; see also Said, 1979).¹

This framing also applied to racially minoritized Jews. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, repeatedly warned against the Arabization of Jews as something that would unmake Israel's enlightenment project. Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, he suggested, lacked "even the most elementary knowledge" and were "without a trace of Jewish or human education" (as cited in Shohat, 1997). Zionism, settler colonialism, and whiteness are intricately linked. Within this structure, education is something hierarchical and possessed. Conversely, an anticolonial stance within education work explores how people individually and collectively work to challenge these structures.

Correspondingly, anti-Zionism is unequivocal rejection of the many interpretations of Zionism, Zionist structures, and a complete unmaking of the nation-state of Israel. It is both a standpoint and an everyday practice. Anti-Zionism is far older than the state of Israel. Emma Goldman (1938) fiercely opposed Zionism, calling it "the dream of capitalist Jewry." It should go without saying, though is perhaps necessary to clarify, that anti-Zionism is neither antisemitism (Jaffee, 2024) nor is it something uniquely Jewish. There is no qualification for opposing apartheid, genocide, or a settler colonial state. While anyone can become Zionist, it is a structure that demands proximity to and maintains whiteness. I offer this framing specifically to point out that there is something deeply pedagogical about Zionism. It is something constructed, taught, and learned. In the U.S. in particular, it emerged as an educational endeavor in places like synagogues and Hebrew schools after 1967 (Knopf-Newman, 2011). As such, anti-Zionism is a stance and praxis that joins with anticolonialism to offer counter-pedagogies that work toward liberatory ends.

Learning: Zionism From the Standpoint of Its Educational Subjects

For me, Zionism was like a fish learning to swim. Nobody taught me to be a Zionist. Or rather, too many taught me to identify a specific source. Countless teachers. Curricular materials sweating through the pores of everyday life. Ongoing lessons in passing moments and direction instruction. Though radically different depending on class, race, religiousness, geography, and much else, Zionist education organizes under the principle of Israel as a fact (a constant in Said's (1979) words). Liberal Zionism might enact pedagogies that imagine something like the "humane borders" of a two-state solution where a hardline Hebrew School emphasizes Israeli Occupation Forces² (IOF) military-recruitment focus of many Hebrew schools (e.g. Engler, 2024). Regardless, the pedagogical function of Zionist education creates a rubric under which education treats Israel as the outcome of all learning, study, research, and so on.

¹ "Jabotinsky was a right-wing Zionist revisionist, a key element of the Zionist movement in the early 20th century"

² IOF is a more accurate name than Israel's official name for their military, Israeli Defense Forces

Others have traced the emergence and use of Zionist education in a more systematic and formal manner. Knopf-Newman (2011), for instance, analyzes textbooks and other curricular materials to illuminate the ways in which U.S. Jews have been “Zionized.” Holocaust education is operationalized to teach with fear and rage while legitimating Israel. Aligning with these projects, this section explores the logics of Zionist education from the standpoint of its intended subjects³ (to reframe Said, 1979). Said writes that Zionism “has acquired for itself almost unchallenged hegemony in liberal ‘establishment’ discourse” that “has had hidden, or caused to disappear, the literal historical ground of its growth” (p. 11). My own memories of Zionist education reveal one way in which this “almost unchallenged hegemony” took shape.

Curricular Disavowal

Zionist education might seem like an example of a hidden (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1968) or null curriculum (Flinders, Nodding, & Thorton, 1986). These commonly explored theories address what is implicitly or indirectly taught (hidden) and what is left out (null). When I visited my Bubbe and Zayde (Yiddish for grandparents) as a child, their home was filled with, as we Jews say, *chachkas*. Pointing to various *chachkas*, they would tell stories of their journeys. I heard about soldiers defending their land and protecting democracy. My grandparents detailed their time on a *kibbutz* and I learned how Israel had supposedly turned the desert green⁴. I was implicitly taught that Israel is an exclusively Jewish land that Jews had saved. Such Zionist curricular narratives embed themselves within learning seemingly innocuous or intellectually interesting topics.

Understanding Zionist education through hidden curriculum or null curriculum, while providing a useful framework, hides something itself. A different curricular effect rumbles beneath these educations. Bruyneel (2021) describes settler memory as a kind of “disavowal, an active form of deflection from the implications and obligations to attend to what one knows” (p. 3). Segal (2024) builds on Bruyneel within the Zionist context. He says that “disavowing, then, casts a central element of our lives, experiences, people, and *what we do actually know* as irrelevant, thus rendering it/them an absent presence” (p. 6, emphasis in original). I think with these scholars to suggest that formal and nonformal Zionist education operates as a form of curricular disavowal. Here, Zionist education obscures and suppresses knowledge about Palestinian history, culture, and life. At the same time, curricular disavowal takes what is known and flattens it against the sides of a smooth, coherent history. Palestine and Palestinians float through the curriculum, in Segal’s terms, as a present absence, a people and history that Zionists can know about while still pursuing the settler colonial project of Zionism. Of course white Ashkenazi Jews have their history in Eastern Europe. Yes, Palestinian people have lived in Palestine for centuries. And yet, white diasporic Jews are somehow indigenous to that land.

The resolving of these contradictions to generate a settler colonial curriculum is perhaps most visible in the Birthright Israel program. When I became politically radical during high school and college, I hung onto a liberal form of Zionism. This phenomenon has been framed as lefty “except for Palestine” (e.g. Hill & Plitnik, 2021). My emerging liberatory politics contradicted my

³ Shohat (1997) makes a similar claim that critiques Zionism from the perspective of Arabic Jews

⁴ This narrative has been thoroughly debunked and has been used as part of the Jewish National Fund’s attempts to dispossess Palestinian’s from their land (Medaykim, 2022).

acceptance of and support for Israel, all of which culminated in shameful fashion when I participated in Birthright. Birthright Israel is a massive experiment in education, a refined propaganda machine that educates thousands of young diasporic Jews toward and through Zionism. During the trip, we received lectures about Theodore Herzl and the emergence of Zionism. We experienced “Israeli cuisine” like hummus. We went to the occupied Golan Heights (though of course any presence of the Zionist entity from the river to the sea is occupation). Every second of the trip acted as experiential education that normalized our “birthright” to the land.

We also encountered indigenous communities in a way that reinforced the settler colonial narrative. When we stayed with Bedouins, our Birthright guide described our hosts as the “good ones” who clung to old traditions. Bedouins sometimes served in the IOF, even though, our guide explained, Israel mostly left them alone. We encountered and learned about the Bedouins’ traditional, “unmodern” way of living as something we could know, not something about which we Jews needed to concern ourselves. Reflecting on that trip, the ways in which education can serve genocidal ends become clear. We young Zionists on the Birthright trip learned of our indigeneity. Any attack to that stable curriculum suggested that we assert our own indigeneity by disavowing that of Palestinians, often through many forms of violence.

Where hidden or null curriculum suggests that different educational materials might trouble Zionism, disavowal makes education a settled matter. The work of settler memory obfuscates elements of place and history. For instance, I always learned of Palestine before 1948 as a rural place with “little to no education.” As Pappe (2022) shows, Palestine had established a complex formalized education system by the early-20th century Palestine (Pappe, 2022). Returning to the framework of curriculum studies, questions like “which identities count” or “what knowledge is valued” become irrelevant. Following Bruyneel, Zionist education is under no obligation to answer these questions. Since Zionism brought Enlightenment and educatedness to the land (see also Corson, 2023 for a discussion of educatedness, curriculum, and place), the curriculum is already a settled matter. The only task that remains is to transmit this curriculum from one generation of Zionists to the next.

Zionist Enlightenment Makes Palestinian Scholasticide

Curricular disavowal is not merely a centering of one curriculum while leaving others alone. Instead, the work of curricular disavowal is that of legitimating a world of symbolic and direct violence. It is a core mechanism of teaching and learning that propels the genocidal Zionist project forward. Put another way, curricular disavowal makes possible, among other things, scholasticide. Scholasticide (or educide), as Karma Nabulsi initially framed it, refers to the systematic destruction of formalized education structures. During the current genocide, Israel has bombed or destroyed hundreds of schools and universities, displaced nearly every student and educator in Gaza, and murdered thousands of students, teachers, and scholars. Israel additionally continues to target schools and the people sheltering within them. These attacks also destroy Palestinian ways of knowing and knowledge production (Desai, 2024; Paradkar, 2024). From a broad understanding of education, scholasticide also includes many other places that Israel bombs and where education life flows—in libraries, museums, restaurants, mosques, amidst olive trees, and all parts of Gaza.

I do not suggest that there is a directly causal relationship between curricular disavowal and scholasticide. Rather, Zionism operates as a pedagogical device that contributes to the

possibility of scholasticide specifically and genocide more broadly. As part of settler colonialism, curricular disavowal supports the idea that Jewish knowledge, Jewish learning, and overall Jewish enlightenment are unique. As Said (1979) quips, “Zionism would finally bring enlightenment and progress where at present there was neither” (p. 22). In the name of ethnonationalism and settler colonialism, Zionist education produces white Jews as modern subjects participating in and furthering an enlightened society. Conversely, then, Zionist education denies Palestinian education. Such enlightenment discourses commonly produce an entire place and people as uneducated and outside the framework of white, Western modernity. It is also important to note that Western modernity, Zionism, and whiteness capture non-white and non-Jewish people. Once more, I am here articulating these as structures of domination.

The central and urgent matter here reveals how Zionist education supports the conditions of genocide. It is also worth noting that curricular disavowal and scholasticide limits Jewish education. During my Birthright trip, I was still firmly entrenched in Zionism but, thanks to my emerging politics, I was also desperate to visit East Jerusalem. When our tour guide gave us some time to explore, I walked toward East Jerusalem. An IOF soldier accompanying our group blocked the street and redirected me to another area. What stood on the other side of that street was unimportant, not part of the educated side we roamed. If settlers decided to evict families and take over their homes, that was only part of the educative work of Zionism.

While Zionist education makes possible the conditions for scholasticide, even during the current genocide education continues in Palestine and for Palestinians. In shelters, in bombed schools, with resistance and resilience, people in Gaza learn and study in all kinds of ways, including through formalized teaching. As Dader et al. (2024) remind, scholars and activists may highlight such resilience as an offering of hope for survival and a vision of different futures without romanticizing these educations. Even for those deeply mired in Zionist educations, shattering this curriculum, and perhaps ourselves in the process, remains a possibility.

Unlearning: Getting Anti-Zionist

During organizing meetings and protests, certain Jewish groups supporting Palestinian liberation sing part of a Leonard Cohen (1992) song called *Anthem*. It goes like this: “Ring the bells that still can ring/Forget your perfect offering/There is a crack, a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in.” A rather direct interpretation of this tradition sees cracks as ruptures in Zionism governing our educational trajectories. Ringing bells might be Jewish cultural life that exists beyond Zionism. The light getting in is the possibility of anti-Zionist education.

In conversations with other anti-Zionist Jews, it is rare to hear of a singular moment of breakage. Little ruptures are countered with the reaffirmation of Zionism’s necessity. When we encounter videos depicting the brutality of the IOF, our many Zionist teachers come forward to explain Israel’s uniqueness as a democratic homeland for Jews. As skeptical ideas about Israel’s creation in 1948 burst forth in our heads, lessons of the Holocaust and Jewish survival snap the order of things back in place. Centuries of diverse, diasporic existence, of Jewish flourishing, of co-existence with many groups vanish as Holocaust memory is weaponized. We cling to notions of two-state solutions and liberal Zionism. Of course, the journey toward anti-Zionism is radically different for all who unlearn the ideologies in which they were raised. This framing also ignores the many Jews who grew up anti-Zionist. Similarly, while challenging the Zionist master narrative, tracing unlearning risks creating a singular anti-Zionist master narrative rooted in Western, white

ways of unlearning, especially for Jews of color. There exists a multitude of ways that education can contribute to unmaking Zionism. Given the focus on memory work, I focus on the jarring pendulum swings I have gone through across a relentless journey of unlearning. Raz Segal describes the process this way:

it's like you open the door to a room and you turn on the light. And you say, oh my god... So you turn off the light. And you said, but shit, I've already seen something there. So you turn on the light again. You turn it off. In the dark, you start feeling, something drops to the floor or breaks... (personal communication, July 29th, 2024).

Jewish unlearning has been a bit of a buzz term recently. As Macklemore (2024) sings in *Hinds Hall*, “I’ve seen Jewish brothers and sisters out there and ridin’ in/Solidarity and screamin’, ‘Free Palestine’ with them/Organizin’, unlearnin’/and finally cuttin’ ties with/A state that’s gotta rely on an apartheid system.” Unlearning broadly refers to the changing of beliefs, forgetting habits, interrupting common sense, or any manner of challenging the given curriculum in favor of something else. At least in terms of Zionism, I also pose unlearning as reckoning, answering, shattering, and deep transformation individually and collectively. Unlearning here is a powerful manner of study that challenges the very roots of Zionism.

Unlearning and Unbordering in Worlds of Education

I do not recall when I first learned of the Nakba. Somewhere early in my questioning of Israel, the word sputtered to life, decontextualized. For weeks, I scoured the internet, reading and listening to stories. Villages destroyed, people massacred. Palestinian life and memory and land wiped out by Zionist forces. Keys held as symbols of hope. And more, that the Nakba was not a singular event. It is ongoing, an “all-encompassing system that affects all aspects of life” for Palestinians that, for over 75 years, “has been maintained by Israel with the support of the international community” (Najjar, 2023).

There were also other histories as well, vague and specific memories of how the threads of my Zionist identity came undone. I recall watching the movie *Carlos* (2010) about PFLP member Ilich Ramírez Sánchez (Carlos the Jackal) and questioning the ongoing narratives I had learned about Israel, Mossad, and military action. After the movie, I found myself stuck on a memory from 2002 when I sat on the phone with a family member, watching Israel bomb Yasser Arafat’s offices. At the time, Israel’s righteousness was so clear. The only concern we had was whether martyring him would backfire. The movie upended that moment. As I continued encountering new and different ideas, I returned to similar memories, suddenly with new eyes. The Nakba in particular presented knowledge from which I could not look away, an ongoing event that could not be made irrelevant or incorporated into the logics of Zionism. I felt shame, uncertainty, curiosity, determination. I questioned the Zionist teachers surrounding me. I often felt stultified in my unlearning, both unsure how to proceed and stuck in introspective rage and embarrassment of how I could ever have perpetuated such horrors.

This process is one of unbordering curriculum (Giroux, 2007). Moments of unlearning for me as a Zionist Jew opened something different, a curriculum that sabotaged the path I was walking while simultaneously opening countless other pathways. Encountering Palestinian writers, theorists, and artists, hearing perspectives that challenged Zionist history, and a harmony of educational experiences shook off the knowledge I had learned and had begun to reproduce. Every

step pierced the rigid borders of Zionist education. Unbordering curriculum in this way is not a simple inversion of unlearning Israel to learn Palestinian suffering. Saleh (2021) describes the harm and emptiness of treating Muslim people (specifically Palestinian woman) as a lesson for others. Instead, she describes how “our ‘worlds’ are constructed by and for us for ourselves and others” (Lugones, as cited in Saleh, 2021, p. 17). In addition to Saleh’s narrative about how such actions reduce complex educations to a single lesson (and, in doing so, reify a violent Othering). Treating unlearning as simply a matter of anti-Zionist individuals dismantling walls and checkpoints actually maintains Zionist logics. It suggests that those engaged in unlearning have an unrestrained right to knowledge and educational experience. Unbordering curriculum should open many routes to different educations while recognizing the need for care and collective responsibility. This unbordering shifts the relationship from learning as the possession of knowledge to education as connection, wonder, and stewardship. As Saleh writes, education with care and radical love centers “the need to be responsible for and accountable to one another” (p. 213).

For me, this process initially unmade some borders while creating new ones. I came to see my unlearning Zionism as a need to unlearn Judaism. My embrace of Palestinian liberation came with an untethering from Jewish identity. Much like the current International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition, my emerging beliefs that ever-increasingly critiqued the state of Israel made me as a Jew impossible (see also, Jaffee, 2024). The borders of Zionism always aim to dictate what is possible and what is permissible, who can know and be in what ways⁵. As the following section details, it is collective study that unbordered education.

Getting anti-Zionist, I signed letters and argued with friends and colleagues. Jewish affects lingered in my voice, my mannerisms, or my sense of humor. Otherwise, I wanted little to do with it. And then, I came across the Black Panther Haggadah. A Haggadah is a text that guides people through a Passover seder. There are many commonalities, but they differ based on beliefs, traditions, geography, and much else. With the Black Panther Haggadah, I saw one of my favorite Jewish traditions operating to ask Jews to think about liberation and Jewishness differently. In a similar vein, Rachel Martin and Sukey Blank, the co-founders of a group called Jewish Boomers Against the Occupation in Palestine, wrote an informal Haggadah that they have used for decades. It says,

More and more, Jews are taking this opportunity to remember the slavery and the rebellions of other people. As we celebrate our own freedom tonight, we will think about people whose freedom has yet to be won. The traditional Haggadah ends with ‘Next Year in Jerusalem.’ Instead we begin ours by saying after one more year of struggle, let’s gather again next year with our hope still intact that liberation for all will some day be real.

Just as border abolitionists (Bradley & Noronha, 2022; Riva, Campbell, Whitener, & Medien, 2024) suggest that border abolition means the freedom to move or stay, unbordered curriculum allows a possibility to get anti-Zionist and struggle for liberation as, through, against, or even outside of Judaism.

⁵ Shohat (1997) offers a powerful example of how Israel rendered her as an Arab Jew an “ontological impossibility.” Belonging in Zionist world meant unlearning the language, culture, and way of being Arab.

Study Groups and the Possibilities of Nonformal Unlearning

The formalized educational structures I encountered in Jewish life dominantly led me to disavow Palestine. It was in cultural institutions, tutoring sessions, and other formalized spaces that I encountered the kind of curriculum that makes scholasticide possible. Conversations, teach-ins, book clubs, and other nonformal educations offered a way toward anti-Zionism.. Study groups in particular provide a key formation for political education to challenge dominant social and educational structures (Harney & Moten, 2013; Meyerhoff, 2019). They often provide a non-hierarchical space organized around shared interest. There is no evaluative outcome, no disciplining authority. It's just about collective commitment to study and struggle.

My unlearning thrived within study groups. Even within study groups focused on anarchist pedagogies or poststructural theories in education, questions of Palestinian liberation arose. We read Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. Conversations about decolonization brought up Israel as a clear example of a colonizing force. Questions about indigenous knowledge interrupted narratives of Ashkenazi Jews being indigenous to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Reading Judith Butler brought forth an image of a Jewish person writing about a free Palestine. The meaning of anti-Zionism and Palestinian liberation took on complex and clear meanings through facilitated debates. Folks in study groups intimately challenged my Zionist discomfort. At the same time, while it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that despite anti-Palestinian racism and censorship, teachers regularly enact liberatory educations in public schools (see, for example, *Rethinking Schools*' 2024 panel "Teach Palestine").

Later, explicitly anti-Zionist Jewish study groups offered affinity spaces to build political education related directly to action for Palestinian liberation. We read Tareq Baconi, Ali Abunimah, discussed the importance of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, listened to podcasts on histories of anti-Zionism, and collectively explored where we wanted our unlearning to take us. We forged intellectual communities grounded in affinity and focused on relating the ideas generated in study group to ongoing political work.

Study groups, at least as they are described in this paper, are not merely about the pursuit of facts and knowledge. There is direct political education at work within them. "Study without struggle," Patel (2021) writes, "is to perpetuate the conflation between learning and school-based achievement through measures of whiteness...Study and struggle for liberation requires that we unknow many falsehoods that are foundational to settler colonialism" (p. 168). Nobody in study groups received an A. People messed up and worked through interpersonal conflict. They opened knowledge and always returned to anti-Zionist praxis.

The connection to our broader political praxis, particularly after October 7th, provided unique opportunities to enact other kinds of education. Within study groups, I found different curricular possibilities and other pedagogical relationships. For instance, some folks expressed discomfort with how we chanted "from the river to the sea" or "long live the intifada." While reading folks like Khalidi (2020), we explored the history and uses of these chants. Our group returned to the distinction between white Jewish discomfort and Palestinian safety. Rather than a singular right answer, without an authority guiding to a desired outcome, and as much as I wanted to scream that we have an obligation to say "from the river to the sea Palestine will be free," study sessions did not lead to a consensus. The point was that we listened, thought, and pushed each other.

Where formalized education structures lock teachers and students in rigid positions and work toward desirable ends, radical study groups generate nonhierarchical and self-directed educations. Robin D.G. Kelley (2016) puts it this way: “Through study groups, we created our own intellectual communities held together by principle and love.” Eli Meyerhoff offers something similar. “We built relationships,” he writes about study groups in which he participated, “that gave life to projects” (p. 25). Anti-Zionist study groups offered a similar possibility to what these scholars describe; an emergent community, working from the bottom, focused on challenging self and others while animating ongoing political projects. The ongoing act of Jews coming together to refuse the curriculum we were given opened space for us to engage in solidarity work, dictated not by institutional structures but by people engaged in liberatory struggle.

World-Making Education and Futures of Solidarity

Meyerhoff (2019) poses the work of study as something world-making. Anti-Zionism offers a mode of world-making grounded in solidarity, possibility, and liberation. It is here that individuals and groups engage Zionist structures at their very roots. The point of anti-Zionism, after all, is not merely to hold a specific political label. Through unlearning a question arises of “what are you going to do once you get anti-Zionist?” Or, “how might your anti-Zionist education be of use to liberation?”

Spaces of Possibility: Public Pedagogy

On May 14th, 2024, on so-called Israeli Independence Day, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) members gathered outside the Israel Bonds⁶ office in a major U.S. city. Participants wore black shirts that said “ceasefire now” and “not in our name.” As many participants in the action linked arms to block traffic, others rushed to create a mural in the middle of the street. It said, “JEWS SAY: STOP FUNDING GENOCIDE.” Next to the mural, speeches screamed over the streets, testifying memories of Israel bonds presented as seemingly innocuous bat mitzvah gifts that were in fact used to fund a racist apartheid state. The action morphed into a march as participants moved through the streets singing the song *Lo Yisa Goy* (meaning “may no nation rise up in war against another nation”).

Linking arms with two strangers within this political action, I sang and chanted, observed and supported as part of the group encircling the mural drawers (uncomfortable as always during political actions or in any circumstance where I am near too many people). I noticed people slowing to listen to speeches. Counter protestors with Israeli flags paced back and forth, alternately filming us or shouting “am Yisrael chai” (a Zionist slogan meaning “the people of Israel live”).

JVP’s work and their May 14th action are nothing particularly distinct within the scope of relentless Palestinian-led efforts to end the genocide. I highlight the Israel Bonds action here because it strikes me as a clear example of Jewish unlearning enacted as a form of public pedagogy. The dozens of people with whom I spoke leading up to and during this action all had an understanding of Israel Bonds that, through their anti-Zionist education, had been unmade. This unlearning was then funneled into direct political action supporting Palestine. Moreover, through

⁶ Israel Bonds are direct loans that institutions or individuals (often given as gifts) provide the state of Israel. These bonds provide Israel’s economy, government, and military with crucial funding

participation in the action, we taught and learned with each other, with those on the street, and through social media and news coverage about the event.

Sandlin, O'Malley, and Burdick (2011) show a strand of public pedagogy, a field broadly concerned with education beyond formal schooling, that focuses on public intellectualism and social activism “linked to activist dissent that also seeks to educate” (p. 358). It emphasizes “*collective efforts* that enact strategies such as constructing alternative discourses focused on alliances across differences...integral to democratic social action” (p. 357, emphasis in original). As our action unfolded on a typically busy city street, we laid open what Israel Bonds do. Rather than the false narrative of gifts connecting Jews to their “homeland” or one investment among many that the city makes, the action publicly displayed that Israel Bonds are a key aspect of how our money funds genocide. In line with other nonformal educations, the action, while filled with specific carefully researched information, was not a lecture or some kind of explication. Its pedagogy turned on the offer of a possibility of encountering another way of thinking and acting about Israel while taking a clear stance that demanded the end to the genocide and occupation.

The public pedagogy of this action may also be understood in similar terms to what Desai (2015) calls anticolonial “participatory politics.” Desai’s focus on Palestinian youth engaged in filming, video production, and sharing media of settlers and IOF soldiers shows how “cultural production becomes a site of teaching, learning and conscientization that could open up possibilities for social change” (p. 111). This kind of public pedagogy explores Palestinian youth in the West Bank collectively learning and expressing refusal to recognize settler colonial authority. While JVP’s Israel Bonds campaign is ongoing, it joins successful institutional campaigns such as the Anthropological Association of America’s 2023 resolution to support BDS (where I was one of many Jewish anthropologists supporting) and moments of public pedagogies of solidarity such as students performing Dabke or holding a Passover seder during the encampments.

In April of 2024, in another example of public pedagogy, hundreds of educators and scholars gathered outside a major education conference for a Scholasticide Vigil for Gaza. People spoke, flew Palestinian flags, cried. Many held photos of people Israel had murdered since October 7th. I held a photo of Dr. Sheri Al-‘Asali. In the photo he is clad in white, posing for a picture in Mecca. A note accompanies the photo, saying:

Sherif Al-‘Asali was a senior lecturer in the College of Education at the Islamic University of Gaza. He held an MA and a PhD in Education. An active member of the University’s Teacher’s Union, he was much loved and respected by his students and colleagues.

*Dr. Al-‘Asali was **killed** in an Israeli bombardment of his home in the Daraj neighborhood of Gaza City, along with some 30 members of his family on December 7th, 2023.*

I share this note not to victimize, romanticize, or project my feelings of rage and sadness. A vigil about scholasticide in Gaza organized by U.S.-based education scholars illuminates the relentless place of solidarity in this form of public pedagogy. Solidarity here hints at unconditional, multidirectional commitments to justice. Sometimes, that means strength in standing shoulder to shoulder. Whether coalitions marching together or the fact that, as Pappe (2022) describes, the “entire history of Mandate Palestine is dotted with instances of cooperation between workers,” including times of class solidarity and communalism (p. 110), solidarity is shared work. Other

times, that means Jewish anti-Zionist activists making themselves visible or putting their bodies on the line in overt ways.

For anti-Zionist Jewish educators, solidarity entails active risk-taking. Rescinded job offers, firing tenured professors and high school teachers, and routine threats about speaking out are part of an oppressive tradition that has only intensified since October 7th (Abunimah, 2014; Lennard, 2024). As scholars, our teaching about Palestine is an urgent small part of solidarity work. Gaztambide-Fernández, Brant, and Desai (2022) suggest that people who have benefited from oppressive structures must sacrifice as part of solidarity work. Those of us offered freedom of movement, a centering of our feelings of comfort, and who faced nothing but support in our educational journeys must be willing to refuse our status, risk our positions, and interrupt these privileges. Much like education itself, there is no guarantee or universal manual for this work. At some point, anti-Zionist educators will need to attend a meeting, go to a demonstration, join a study group, and teach in ways that center Palestine and Palestinian perspectives inside and outside the classroom. In doing so, educators enact pedagogies that show the urgency and possibility of an education otherwise.

Conclusion

The three moves mapped in this paper should not be taken as linear, total, or guaranteed. They often happen all at once. They are always shifting and emerging. Even anti-Zionist education is not a settled matter. Unlearning settler colonialism and studying toward another world is an ongoing process. This paper offers one possibility for another kind of curriculum, one of many, forking liberatory pathways for those of us so deeply entangled with the racist, settler colonial project of Zionism. It has emphasized Jewish education but anyone and everyone should walk these pathways. The curriculum given does not have to be accepted. Another education is possible.

Amidst a century of attack, occupation, catastrophe, and genocide, the role of education may seem insignificant. But, the constant fundings of educational programs to perpetuate Zionism shows its importance. The incomprehensible impact of scholasticide shows education's importance. Alhaj Ali (2024) outlines the impact of the current genocide on young Palestinians in Gaza. Hundreds of students have been murdered and nearly 40,000 have missed the matriculation exam for entering university. Addressing scholasticide, she writes that "For Palestinians, educational spaces have historically served as vital hubs for learning, revolutionary activism, cultural conservation and the preservation of relations between Palestinian lands cut off from each other by Israeli colonization." Conversely, the resilient, persistent presence of educational life in Palestine shows education's liberatory potential. In November of 2025, Al-Aqsa University in Gaza held its first graduation ceremony in two years. One graduation speaker, Dr. Ahmed Kamal Junina, told the graduates, "you are the ones who will rebuild what has been destroyed." Students' education, he suggests, makes possible a future where Palestine is free. Education alone may not unmake Zionist structures and reach toward a free Palestine. Its potential to contribute to making other worlds, though, shines across many spaces. Through unlearning and radical study, by getting anti-Zionist, people might join in the educational work of Palestinian liberation

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