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Palestinian Liberation in Education Solidarities and Activism for a Free Palestine (Part 1)

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Introduction to Special Issue *Palestinian Liberation in Education* (Part 1)

Abstract

This special issue sheds light on the resistance and activism within educational spaces, inside and outside of classrooms and universities, for the liberation of Palestine. The issue is split into two parts, both with similar overarching themes. The first issue focuses on three themes: foundations, community activism, and hope.



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“Enough For Me***Fadwa Tuqan***

Enough for me to die on her earth
 be buried in her
 to melt and vanish into her soil
 then sprout forth as a flower
 played with by a child from my country
 Enough for me to remain
 in my country's embrace
 to be in her close as a handful of dust
 a sprig of grass
 a flower.

Translated by Naomi Shihab Nye, with Salma Khadra Jayyusi

(In Memory of Fadwa Tuqan, 2006, p. 230)

Fadwa Tuqan was born in Nablus, Palestine, and lived from 1917 to 2003, during two world wars that affected Palestine through colonization by the British and settler colonialism, displacement, and occupation by the apartheid and genocidal state of Israel. She began writing traditional Arabic poetry at a young age. When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, where her hometown of Nablus is located, she “turned to more patriotic poems, a shift in subject matter reflected in the work of many Palestinian poets, artists, and novelists.” (In Memory of Fadwa Tuqan, 2006, p. 230). Her poem illuminates the struggle for liberation for Palestine and Palestinians. She uses the image of a flower to imagine death and rebirth through the land and through the perspective of a child, highlighting both the struggle and hope for Palestine.

Palestinians and activists for a free Palestine continue to raise global awareness of the genocide inflicted on Gaza in Palestine, and the oppression, displacement, ethnic cleansing, illegal occupation, apartheid, and human rights violations by Israel against Palestinians in Palestine. This is an ongoing Nakba (catastrophe in Arabic) happening well before and after October 7, 2023. Palestinians and activists continue to speak up despite social media companies censoring posts related to Palestine (Shankar, et al., 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). For example, Peabody and Emmy award-winning young journalist, Bisan Owda, who is still alive as I am writing this, continues to report and document the atrocities by Israel in Gaza, as she is living them. Follow her on Instagram @wizard_bisan1 to see her reporting. In addition, young people and organizations such as the Palestinian Youth Movement and Students for Justice in Palestine university groups throughout the world have shown up for Palestine through the encampments on university campuses in the spring of 2024 (Rubin, et al, 2024), all while universities suppress speech related to Palestine (Arria, 2025).

In education, repression of the teaching of Palestine in classrooms has heightened, especially with the rise of civic engagement among young people at protests and on social media (Roscoe, 2023). For example, Assembly Bill (AB) 715 in California is a pro-Israel education bill to censor criticism of Israel and silence the teaching of Palestine in K-12 classrooms (CAIR California, 2025). Despite mass opposition by the California unions and civil liberties

organizations like the California Teachers Association (2025), the California Faculty Association (2025), and the ACLU California Chapter (ACLU California Action, 2025), Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill into law. While there is a lawsuit against the law by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) (2025) due to restricting free speech, laws like this could spread throughout the United States. Even without laws, silencing is widespread against Palestinians, with the dismissal of the experiences of Palestinian young people in schools (Abu El-Haj, 2015; Shatara, 2023) and punishments for Palestinian American young people speaking up for Palestine (Conybeare & Ramos, 2023).

This special issue sheds light on the resistance and activism within educational spaces, inside and outside of classrooms and universities, for the liberation of Palestine. The issue is split into two parts, both with similar overarching themes. The first issue focuses on three themes: foundations, community activism, and hope.

I begin the issue on foundations, as it is important to understand the realities of Palestinians and Palestine in educational and societal spaces. Amanda Najib writes *Toward a Palestinian American Critical Race Theory in Education*, grounding Palestinian American experiences in relation to Critical Race Theory. Through her document analysis, she explains the racialization and vilification, systemic oppression, institutional barriers, and experiences of Palestinians in the United States. This foundational paper on the issue sets the tone for why Palestine is essential in critical education and justice-oriented activism. Muna Saleh, Farid Saberi, and Nada Awwad bring in the specific experiences of anti-Palestinian racism of young Palestinians in K-12 schools in *"You're Good as Long as You're Silent": Anti-Palestinian Racism in Schooling*. Through their qualitative research and narrative inquiry, they present narratives of young people along with their parents that show harm caused by schools and denial of their identities, which is in opposition to the education they receive at home about Palestine. This is another foundational paper in this special issue that illustrates the experiences of young Palestinians in North American schools.

Education is not only in spaces in the classroom, but also within justice-oriented spaces in which communities educate each other. The next theme in the special issue discusses how community activism can be a vessel to raise awareness for the liberation of Palestine. Jay Stanley and Leilani Sabzalian write *"Be the Auntie Rez Kids in Palestine Need Right Now"*:

Diné Civics and Solidarity for Palestine, which centers the work of Indigenous communities in solidarity with and for Palestinians, and was inspired by Shatara and Saleh's (2024) article on Black and Indigenous solidarities. They discussed the shared struggles and resistances to settler colonialism, and through social media posts and other forms of activism, raised awareness of Palestinian liberation to community members. They conclude with ways educators in all spaces can teach about Indigenous and Palestinian solidarity across movements. Tiffany Harris's paper, called *Flowers for Palestine: From Holy City to Holy City*, is another example of community activism for a liberated Palestine. Through a collective of Black femme-led multidisciplinary group of artists, activists, community members, and humans, they documented their experiences in creating a series of community education events within the greater Charleston, South Carolina area. Inspired by the feminist, armed resistance group, the Chrysanthemum Flowers, they describe how these community events led to a large public flower installation art piece, centering the intersections of Black and Palestinian struggles for liberation and collective resistance. Both papers show images that enhance their written work on activism.

The final theme within the first part of the special issue is hope, which Palestinians and other marginalized groups must hold on to for resistance. The last three papers describe hope and action in different ways within education spaces. Lilly Padia writes *Do Palestinian Lives Matter in Teacher Education?: Centering an Anti-Zionist Commitment in (Early Childhood) Teacher Education*, an autoethnographic analysis using FaithCrit. She describes how compulsory Zionism is in teacher education institutions and presents a teaching framework she calls ‘Pedagogical Integrity’ to implement anti-Zionism and Palestine in teacher education. She presents hope as actionable through her narrative, calling on education programs and educators to act. Hope can also be seen within schools. In *Educating for Unknowable Futures: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency-led Education for Palestinian Refugees in Jordan*, Julie Alstadnes Malme conducted a study on educators from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, known as UNRWA, schools to Jordan, which serve Palestinian refugees. Focusing on the Human Rights, Conflict Resolution, and Tolerance program from UNRWA and through analysis with a Freirean pedagogy, she found that teachers and other educational staff are providing opportunities for Palestinians to center their identities and liberation in schools. Lastly, Amany Al-Sayyed writes a creative piece on her experiences as a Palestinian as a faculty member at the American University of Beirut called *Standing by My Students as a Palestinian Educator During War On Gaza/Beirut*. She uses various vignettes to show negative experiences at her university in Beirut. While her stories are of struggles, she ends with a fairytale written by a group of students in her class. This story was, as Al-Sayyed describes it, “a beautiful wrap up to my journey, so far.”

This special issue is just the start of the ways educators and educational researchers can center and incorporate Palestine and Palestinian liberation into their scholarship, teaching, and consciousness. There are several publications that focus on Palestinian liberation. This is one example. Justice work must include Palestine, and as a result, will also include other genocides such as in Sudan and Congo (Srinath, 2023). I want to thank E. Wayne Ross for the opportunity to showcase these pieces and the support in fighting for Palestine. As a child from my country plays with a flower from the land, Palestine will be free, from the river to the sea.

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