

Critical Education

Volume 17 Number 3

August 18, 2026

ISSN 1920-4175

Palestinian Liberation in Education Solidarities and Activism for a Free Palestine (Part 2)

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Shatara, H. (2026). Palestinian liberation in education: Solidarities and activism for a free Palestine (Part 2). *Critical Education*, 17(3), 131-136. <https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v17i3.187574>

Introduction to Special Issue *Palestinian Liberation in Education (Part 2)*

Abstract

This introduction to Part 2 of the special issue on Palestinian Liberation in Education situates contemporary struggles for Palestine within broader histories of occupation, displacement, censorship, and resistance. Framed by the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, the issue highlights the ongoing efforts of educators, students, and scholars to challenge silencing and advance liberatory pedagogies in support of Palestinian self-determination. Part 2 of this issue is organized around three themes—solidarity, student perspectives, and engagement—and features contributions that examine anti-Zionist and decolonial pedagogies, Black–Palestinian solidarities, student activism and institutional repression, critical consciousness, human rights education, and Palestinian counterstorytelling. Together, these articles demonstrate how educational spaces serve as important sites of resistance, historical understanding, and collective action. Despite increasing attempts to restrict the teaching of Palestine, educators and students continue to develop scholarship and pedagogical practices that center Palestinian experiences, foster solidarity, and contribute to ongoing struggles for justice and liberation.



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“To Our Land”

Mahmoud Darwish

To our land,
and it is the one near the word of god,
a ceiling of clouds
To our land,
and it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns,
the map of absence
To our land,
and it is the one tiny as a sesame seed,
a heavenly horizon ... and a hidden chasm
To our land,
and it is the one poor as a grouse's wings,
holy books ... and an identity wound
To our land,
and it is the one surrounded with torn hills,
the ambush of a new past
To our land, and it is a prize of war,
the freedom to die from longing and burning
and our land, in its bloodied night,
is a jewel that glimmers for the far upon the far
and illuminates what's outside it ...
As for us, inside,
we suffocate more!

Translated By Fady Joudah
(Darwish & Joudah, 2005)

Mahmoud Darwish was born in al-Birwa, Galilee, Palestine, a village where he, his family, and community were displaced and ethnically cleansed by the apartheid and genocidal state of Israel. One of Palestine's famous poets, he lived from 1941 to 2008, mostly in exile and was imprisoned by Israel for writing and reciting resistance poetry. He eventually was able to settle in Ramallah, Palestine, where he was buried, and a museum was built there to commemorate his writings and memory, especially as Palestine's National Poet. His poem illuminates the dream and longing for Palestinians to live on/in/within a free Palestine, while also stating the current realities of occupation and displacement. He uses juxtaposing images to describe the Palestinian experiences of seeing a beautiful land as “we suffocate more,” highlighting both the struggle and hope for Palestine.

The struggle for Palestinian liberation is led by Palestinians and activists worldwide, who refuse to stay silent about what scholars, journalists, human rights organizations, and especially Palestinians themselves have called a genocide and apartheid inflicted by Israel. This is rooted in

decades of occupation, displacement, ethnic cleansing, and systemic human rights violations by Israel that did not begin on October 7, 2023, and have not ended since. Palestinian journalists for decades have documented this ongoing Nakba (catastrophe in Arabic) while many, such as Shereen Abu Akleh, were killed by Israel to silence documentation. As of April 2026, 235 Palestinian journalists and media workers in Gaza have been murdered by Israel since 2023 (International Federation of Journalists, 2026). The silencing continues on social media platforms as corporations censor Palestinians and activists speaking up for Palestine (Shankar, et al., 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). Still, Palestinians continue to bear witness. Among them is Peabody and Emmy award-winning journalist Bisan Owda, who has been reporting and documenting Israeli atrocities in Gaza. She is still alive as I write this introduction. You can follow her on Instagram @wizard_bisan1. In addition, young people on university campuses continue to organize and speak out, especially during the encampments of 2024 (Rubin, et al, 2024), all while universities suppress speech related to Palestine (Arria, 2025).

The 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). Legislation is now being used as a tool of that repression. With the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 715 in California, a pro-Israel education bill to censor criticism of Israel and silence the teaching of Palestine in K-12 classrooms (CAIR California, 2025) that was highly contested by 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), teachers are hesitant to bring up Palestine in classrooms and self-censoring. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) (2025) has a lawsuit against the bill due to restricting free speech, yet legislation like this could spread throughout the United States. In 2026, California Assemblymember Robert Garcia introduced AB 2159, a bill that provides safeguards to protect students and educators while also addressing the censorship issues in AB 715. However, the Assembly Speaker is not allowing AB 2159 to be heard in committee, even as activists call for a solution to the problem that the California legislature created (AROC Action, 2026). Even without laws, silencing is widespread against Palestinians in education spaces, with punishments for Palestinian American young people speaking up for Palestine at schools (Conybeare & Ramos, 2023) and universities (Palestine Legal, 2026). While there are some victories, especially for university and high school students (Geha, 2026; Kabas, 2026), activists are still fighting the criminalization of speaking up for Palestine.

The second part of this special issue continues to shed light on the resistance and activism within education spaces, inside and outside of classrooms and universities, for the liberation of Palestine. The second issue focuses on three themes: solidarity, student perspectives, and engagement.

This second issue begins with narratives of educators working to speak out and resist the dominant perspectives in education against Palestinians. Rachel McMillian, Asif Wilson, and Aja Williams write *In the Warmth of the Sun Black Educator Solidarity for a Free Palestine*, where they discuss how Black and Palestinian liberation movements center solidarity, and they showcase how they exude solidarity within their teaching. They intentionally use critical race counterstorytelling to contextualize Black and Palestinian freedom and liberation both in and out of classrooms. In *Getting Anti-Zionist: Curricular Disavowal, Radical Study, and Pedagogies of Solidarity with Palestinian Liberation*, Jordan Corson participates in curricular disavowal as a Jewish Anti-Zionist educator, experiencing intentional unlearning of Palestine from his

upbringing, and engaging in collective work to center solidarity for a free Palestine. These two papers show how solidarity movements continue to be essential for the liberation of Palestine and Palestinians with like-minded people from various backgrounds and experiences.

As discussed earlier, student repression when speaking out for Palestine continues to be the reality at universities throughout the United States and the West. Christopher M. Wright and Samuel Wiener speak about their experiences in *Student Resistance and University Repression: The Struggle for Decolonial Pedagogy and a Free Palestine*. Drawing on Black and Indigenous knowledge traditions, they document three specific experiences of repression by the university as student organizers for Palestine and imagine a world with liberation as a pedagogical position. They interweave their work with the history of Palestine and the words of Palestinians to showcase the silencing and opposition from higher education institutions. While this is one student narrative, Richard Chang, Minh Duc Pham, and Gloria Wong-Padoongpatt conducted a quantitative study on university students' perspectives on Palestine. In *Empowered Resistance Explains the Relationship Between Historical Knowledge and Support for Palestine Among College Students*, they used critical consciousness theory to show how students' historical knowledge of the injustices in Palestine by Israel increased their support for Palestinian resistance and liberation. This paper shows why there are legislative movements to censor the teaching of Palestine in education spaces, as it shows how historical knowledge of Palestine can empower students to disrupt. Coming from two different methodologies, both papers show how students are one way the message of liberation and freedom for Palestine is spread.

The last theme in this issue discusses how educators can engage inside and outside of classrooms through decolonial frameworks. In *Decolonial Praxis: Confronting Genocide in Gaza with TribalCrit and Human Rights Education*, Sean Corrigan tracks the current genocide in Gaza, Palestine, through TribalCrit and Human Rights Education. He presents various moments within the genocide inflicted by Israel that can be used to engage teaching for the liberation of Palestine in education spaces. The final article in this special issue also discusses a way to engage in liberatory pedagogy through counterstories. Bernardita Yunis, in *PalestinianCRT Counterstories in Education: Our Transformational Resistance to Erasure*, deliberately discusses how counterstories are a way for Palestinians to enact and engage with transformational survivance amid genocide and erasure. She speaks about her experience as a Palestinian Chilean living in the United States and how she used counterstories as a form of resistance, as she weaves in her narratives and experiences as a Palestinian. These two papers use very different forms of engagement, but they show how Palestinian liberation is central in all forms of pedagogy.

As I wrote in the first part of this special issue, this is just the beginning of the ways educators and education researchers “can center and incorporate Palestine and Palestinian liberation into their scholarship, teaching, and consciousness” (Shatara, 2026, p. 126). This special issue is just one example of the work scholars are doing for Palestinian liberation as censorship intensifies. For example, amidst the cancellation of Harvard Education Review’s special issue on Palestine and education (Mao & Paulus, 2025), *Curriculum Inquiry* launched a special issue highlighting those papers. Resistance is happening, and we need to continue to work in solidarity and in community with our justice work to include Palestine. Again, I want to thank E. Wayne Ross for this opportunity. As Yunis writes, “I write because it is my survivance—it is our Palestinian sumud.” To our land, Palestine will be free.

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Critical Education

criticaleducation.org

ISSN 1920-4175

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