Journal of Interreligious Studies
June 2026, Issue 49, 172–199
ISSN 2380-8187
www.irstudies.org

INVITED SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

Teaching Israel/Palestine as Jews: Negotiating Identity, Power, and Politics in the Classroom

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Abstract

In this conversation, three Jewish faculty members who teach about Palestine/Israel at university campuses in the United States discuss the practical and political components of their pedagogy and their role on campus. Hilary Kalisman of the University of Colorado, Boulder, Michal Raucher of Rutgers University, and Emily Schneider of Northern Arizona University share their approaches to teaching about Palestine/Israel, the tensions they struggle with, their concerns about students and faculty, and how they are dealing with the politics surrounding Palestine/Israel on campuses in the aftermath of October 7, 2023.

Keywords

Israel/Palestine, pedagogy, antisemitism, activism, identity, academic freedom

1. What is the institutional context in which you teach Israel/Palestine? How do you teach this topic, and how do you engage with and balance multiple narratives?

Michal: I am an Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University, a large public university in New Jersey. Rutgers has one of the largest populations of Jewish students at any public university in the US (approximately 7,000) and one of the largest populations of Arab/Muslim students as well (also approximately 7,000). My Israeli-Palestinian Conflict course is cross-listed with History, Jewish Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. I've taught the class at Rutgers since 2018, and the population since 2020 has pretty consistently been about ⅓ Palestinian/Arab and ⅓ Jewish/Israeli.

When I first started teaching the class in 2014 at the University of Cincinnati, I used a dual-narrative approach, but within a couple years I realized that this approach is problematic. I wasn't sure if students ever actually learned the history, and I found students were confused about the power imbalance because the dual narrative approach presents Israelis and Palestinians as possessing equal power. I shifted away from a dual narrative approach, but I preserved the importance of understanding how different individuals and groups have reacted to historical events. Therefore, since then, there are three units in my Israeli-Palestinian Conflict class: Nationalism and colonialism in Palestine, which starts at the end of the 19th century and proceeds through the British mandate; The Holocaust, partitioning of Palestine, and the War of 1947–1949; and the 1967 War through today. For each of those units, we start with a historical overview so that students have a firm grounding in facts and the historical record. Then, we turn to Palestinian and Jewish/Israeli reactions, reflections, and memories of these events. This part becomes more like a social history class with the intent on helping students understand how Palestinians and Jews/Israelis understood these events at the time, and how they understand them today.

This approach helps students see that the historical events never stand alone. People have been creating meaning from plans and treaties, and they still do today. We have narratives that shape our identities and our place within groups. These are the stories we tell about ourselves and about others, and these stories affect how we read history. I find that most students know that, and they want to appreciate why their understanding of history is so different from someone else's. Sometimes that's because they are operating from falsehoods about the past, and in my course I do a lot of work to correct their misunderstandings, but often it's because students' own narratives have selected facts that cohere with their worldview. Despite its

potential pitfalls, I find that demonstrating that many of us operate within a narrative framework helps the students reflect on their own understanding of history and pushes them towards a different one.

Hilary: I am an Associate Professor of History, and the Endowed Professor of Israel/Palestine Studies in the Program in Jewish Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. It is a large public university but it is not particularly diverse. The bulk of my classes are cross-listed between History and Jewish Studies. Usually about ⅓ of the students in each of my classes are Jewish. Very few students are Muslim, and even fewer are Palestinian. I have also had very few Israeli students. Each semester I teach at least one class devoted to Israel/Palestine: Most frequently I teach the history of Modern Israel/Palestine, but I have also taught "Modern Childhood in Israel/Palestine," and a course with a study abroad component, "History Today: Nationalism & Collective Memory in Israel/Palestine."

In my courses, I do not teach using a dual or multiple-narrative approach. I think that these approaches tend to do two things. First, these approaches make it seem as if different groups are equal in terms of power and their ability to speak. Second, I think it undermines the idea that one can actually learn about the past. Whether or not an event affected different groups of people differently doesn't mean that event didn't happen. For example, when teaching about 1948, I go over the history of the war itself, and its consequences, how it affected different groups of people across the region, as well as how the war is remembered, rather than only juxtaposing narratives about Palestinians' *Nakba* and Israel's *Milhemet Ha'atzmaut*. Part of my position as a professor of Israel/Palestine Studies, at least to me, is a commitment to the assumption that you can't tell the stories of people in the region in isolation from one another, and that it is important to take their perspectives and past decisions seriously, whether or not we today, in 21st century Boulder Colorado, agree with them or even relate to them. In terms of balance, I try to include perspectives from different types of historical actors, from different religions, ethnic groups, classes, professions, and political beliefs, without trying to balance each voice with one that exactly opposes it.

Michal: Hilary, I'd love to learn more about the course with the study abroad component. Have you taught that recently? Do you ever have Palestinian students in the course who can't travel to Israel/Palestine? I've wanted to teach a course with a study abroad component, but I'd be fearful

of excluding students who are not permitted to the region or putting them in a position where they might be detained.

Hilary: I haven't taught the global intensive course since 2022. The biggest issue then was the COVID pandemic, and the associated restrictions concerning international travel at the time. There was a lot of arranging testing, helping students pay for the testing, and supporting a student who ended up quarantined in Israel proper. Due to the way University of Colorado, Boulder (CU Boulder) funds study abroad, I found it difficult to find enough students to make the course run, which means I wasn't really worried about the course excluding anyone at the time. Now I would be more concerned about including Palestinian students and indeed international students who couldn't go to Israel, or whose visa status in the US might now be jeopardized if they went on the program.

One thing I did experience was that several of the students in the course were gender nonconforming. I explained to them that whatever they chose to wear I would support them and would work to protect them, but that if they wore gender nonconforming clothes they were more likely to be subjected to prejudice, and even violence. My goal there was to support whatever decision they made, but to make sure it was an informed decision. In the end, people were more confused by the religious diversity of our group than the gender diversity, but I think that is to some degree the approach I would take with Palestinian American students, i.e. I will support you no matter what but prejudice, searches, and even detainment are things you might encounter.

Emily: I am an Associate Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University (NAU), and I previously taught in the Sociology Department at Colorado College. NAU is a large public university with many Latino/a, Native, and first-generation students. Colorado College, on the other hand, is a private liberal arts college whose students come from some of the wealthiest families in the country. When I was at Colorado College, I taught a course called Peace, Conflict, and Social Justice in Israel/Palestine, which attracted many of our college's Jewish students. I have since adapted this course into a graduate level seminar for our masters students at NAU. Both courses are designed to ground students' understandings of the region in a historically-situated analysis of power. As a critical criminologist, I spend a lot of time focusing on the capabilities and limitations of international law, the ways that identity becomes tied to legal,

political, and economic structures, as well as how certain types of violence become normalized and even legalized in our societies.

While I believe that exposing students to multiple narratives is important, I agree with both Michal and Hilary around the limits of a dual-narrative approach rooted in the myth of balance. In addition to obscuring power dynamics and creating a false sense of equality between Israelis and Palestinians, this approach often leads students to blame everyday people instead of powerful structures for the ongoing violence in the region. I instead push students to engage with the moral complexity surrounding various stakeholders' positions, and I teach in ways that allow them to understand how particular forms of socialization lead us to hold political positions that others may find abhorrent. To accomplish this, I have readings and assignments that critically engage with identity, I include poetry and music in my courses, and I feature numerous guest speakers from a range of political and identitarian positions such as Palestinians refugees, former IDF soldiers/refuseniks, queer Palestinians living inside Israel, activists from groups like Youth Against Settlements, Sudanese asylum seekers living in South Tel Aviv, and representatives from peacebuilding NGOs. I then combine exposure to these diverse individuals with rigorous scholarship that prioritizes material outcomes over (purported) intentions. For example, I've had great success assigning authors such as Jasbir Puar, Mahmood Mamdani, Eyal Weizman, Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, Lana Tatour, Saree Makdisi, Neve Gordon, Laleh Khalili, and Tareq Baconi.[1] Centering this type of scholarship, which identifies the structural determinants of violence without resorting to individualistic moralizing, enables students to engage personal stories in ways that move beyond unproductive blame and judgment, and toward an understanding of the economic, political, and social forces that incentivize violent behaviors and policies.

In addition, through collectively studying social movements and advocacy groups as a class, we learn how moralizing tactics rooted in guilt and shame often fail to change material conditions on the ground. For example, I have each student choose an organization, political group, or ideological framework that they believe is most likely to bring about peace and justice in Palestine/Israel. They then conduct an analysis on why they believe their chosen group or framework will lead to positive social change,

1 Some books that I would recommend by these authors include: Jasbir Puar's *The Right to Maim*; Mahmood Mamdani's *Neither Settler Nor Native*; Eyal Weizman's *The Least of All Possible Evils*; Areej Sabbagh-Khoury's Colonizing Palestine; Saree Makdisi's Palestine Inside Out; Neve Gordon's Israel's Occupation; Laleh Khalili's Time in the Shadows; Tareq Baconi's Hamas Contained; and Lana Tatour's article, "Citizenship as Domination."

and they present their analysis to the class for debate. Through activities such as this, I facilitate students' exposure to diverse positions and political actors, and I encourage students to think deeply about the roots of oppression and violence so that they have the intellectual tools to effectively address them.

Hilary, could you elaborate on your decision to not "balance each voice with one that exactly opposes it." I'd love to hear more from either you or Michal about whether there is even such a thing as an "opposite voice," as well as any problems you two may see with a binary approach to platforming different perspectives in the classroom.

Hilary: That's a good question. I think it's more that, sometimes one group isn't really concerned with the intricacies of the other groups' perspective, or sometimes one view isn't relevant to the story and adding it seems false. For example, when I'm teaching about different types of Zionisms I don't get into an equal number of Arab Palestinian reactions because whether someone is a Labor or Revisionist Zionist isn't very important to the Arab Palestinian community. Similarly, when I talk about different types of Palestinian and pan-Arab nationalism in the 1950s/60s I don't really talk about Jewish Israeli perspectives, because the construction of the ideologies was less important to Jewish Israelis than their security risks. Also, I think the approach of balancing each voice with one in direct opposition makes it seem like the opposing voice was the most prevalent or important view, when sometimes most people were focused on something else at the time. That said, I do include views I don't personally agree with or relate to (essentially all the time).

Michal: Over the course of the semester, students are getting a variety of Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Arab perspectives. At any given moment or when we're looking at a particular time, students are not getting the "opposite" or the "complementary" perspectives. My choice of sources has a lot to do with the accessibility of the source and whether they will learn something new from that source. My hope is that by the end of the semester they learn that there were (and still are) multiple voices that play a role in history and how history has been understood. Some are stronger today, others were louder decades ago.

2. How does your identity as a Jewish American play a role in your teaching on Israel/Palestine?

Emily: My Jewish identity is the reason that I am a scholar of Palestine/Israel today. I grew up attending synagogue, spending my summers at Jewish summer camp, and participating in Jewish youth groups throughout my teens. It was at these places that I developed a deep emotional connection to Zionism that ultimately led me to move to Palestine/Israel in my early 20s. I have also always seen myself as someone who seeks to stand against oppression. While at first these two components of my identity seemed to complement each other, as I got older and began to learn more about Israel's occupation, the myths that sustained my connection to Zionism began to shatter. I have since been on a lifelong journey to understand the ideological pillars of Jewish-American support for Israel and what allows our community to continue to endorse mass violence against the Palestinian people.

Accordingly, my Jewish identity certainly plays a role in my teaching on Israel/Palestine. When I was at Colorado College, I had a large number of Jewish students in my courses who were being exposed to alternative narratives about Palestine/Israel for the first time. They would come to my office hours and grieve with me about family tensions, they would debate me, and they would express shock and sorrow over much of the material we covered throughout the course. My Jewish identity and my memories of being in a similar place as my students often colored how I approached topics like 1948, the Holocaust, and the right of return. I had deep empathy for them, and I found personal value in ushering them along a journey towards a more thoughtful and historically-informed relationship to Palestine/Israel.

Today, however, I have fewer Jewish students and most of my students are deeply engaging with this issue for the first time in their lives. I remember on the first day of my graduate course at NAU being asked whether the Israelis or the Palestinians were the Jewish ones, and feeling both nostalgic for my time at Colorado College and grateful for the opportunity to teach a group of students who could approach the material with such openness and unburdened curiosity. The contrast of these experiences has raised important questions for me about how we allow our own identities to dictate who is prioritized in our classrooms, which narratives are given emotional weight and validity, and what compromises we make out of fear of upsetting our own communities.

Today, I primarily treat my Jewish identity as an obligation to take pedagogical risks and to share historical and present-day truths that others cannot. While I will always understand what it feels like to be a Jewish student in a class on Palestine/Israel better than I can understand what it feels like to be a Palestinian student, a Muslim student, or a student with no connection to this topic, I remain empathetic to all of my students. Yet I recognize now more than ever that my Jewish upbringing has led me to take certain paradigms for granted, to grieve more deeply for lives that remind me of my own, and to fear political outcomes that jeopardize my own people's immediate safety. In this way, my Jewish identity is a reminder to myself as an educator that I have an obligation to all people's wellbeing and safety, and that the need to teach uncomfortable truths and to speak out against the violence of genocide and settler colonialism must always come before anyone's comfort.

Michal: My answer to this question is similar to Emily's. I grew up in a Conservative Jewish home in North America where support for Israel and connection to Israel as a place that secured Jewish safety was accepted, though we were very firmly American Jews. I studied at a Jewish Day School for many years, and I was active in a Jewish youth movement, and Zionism was an integral part of those experiences. I went to college in New York City in the early 2000s at the Jewish Theological Seminary and Columbia University. While there I took academic courses on modern Israel and began learning about Israeli history from an academic perspective. I was at Columbia for the "Columbia Unbecoming" controversy wherein Zionist students accused Professor Joseph Massad, a Palestinian professor, of antisemitism. I was not politically active at the time, but I knew I didn't agree with my Jewish peers. Something about it didn't feel right, though I didn't have the language to explain why.

In graduate school, I turned my attention to the anthropological study of reproductive ethics with a focus on reproduction among Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews in Jerusalem. Living in Jerusalem for two years brought me face to face with the occupation and injustice for Palestinians. Informed by the ethical theories of many Jewish philosophers of the 20th century who I had studied for my comprehensive exams—including those of Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, and Emanuel Levinas—I began engaging in conversations with Jewish American and Israeli peers in Israel about the ethics of the occupation and about justice in Israel/Palestine. (Yes, I know Levinas' record on this isn't great, but his theoretical work informed my ethical orientation in a different way.) Although I discovered that many

people were not on the same page as me, it was a formative experience for my Jewish identity.

As a professor today, much like for Emily at Colorado College, I find my Jewish identity plays a huge part in my teaching. Many Jewish students enroll in my class assuming that I'll be sympathetic to Zionism due to my Jewish identity. Others have struggled with how to relate to me when I teach them things that conflict with what they learned from their synagogues or day schools. They are relieved to see that I cancel classes for Jewish holidays, but are also sometimes antagonistic to the way I teach the class. And still others have spent hours in my office debating with me or sharing their own political and personal evolution on Israel/Palestine.

Meanwhile, many of my Arab/Palestinian/Muslim students told me that they were initially nervous about taking a class with a Jewish professor. They were afraid of either being discriminated against or being singled out to share "the Palestinian experience." I'm grateful that students discover that I am not going to do either of those things. At Rutgers, as at other universities, students rely heavily on peer recommendations when choosing courses. At this point, enough students have taken my class that it has developed a reputation for being academically rigorous, respectful, and empathetic. Students who enroll in the class want to learn about Israel/Palestine from multiple perspectives, and they know that's what they're going to get.

I am so grateful for all the students who have trusted me with their education, and perhaps especially for those who have taken what they perceive to be significant risks in walking into my classroom. I do hope that as a Jewish professor I'm pushing students to see politics and religious identity beyond the stereotypes.

Hilary: One thing I have heard about, including at the Elon University symposium at which we first discussed these topics, was the idea that doing "me-search," i.e. researching one's own family history or group-history was seen as less rigorous or valuable than not. I have always had the other issue, namely if you're NOT researching your own history, or that of the group you belong to, you're not an authority to speak on a topic. My own family's history is boring, not particularly representative, and privileged as well. This means I am usually researching and teaching about, groups to which I don't belong. I make sure that my students understand this, and that I, and even the guest speakers I bring in who are from the region, aren't representative (in part because we're all scholars of both Israel and Palestine/Palestinians which doesn't make us the most representative group, intellectually and certainly not politically). I am very up front that I am American, Jewish, not

Israeli and not Palestinian, and that my own personal experiences aren't the focus of the classes I teach.

That said, I found a certain freedom in my current job, because my previous job was focused on Islamic history. Being able to teach about different types of history, i.e. Jewish, Middle Eastern, Islamic, Arab, etc. at the same time means I can take different perspectives seriously and talk about them in more detail. For example, when teaching about Israel/Palestine, and particularly when teaching my "Introduction to Modern Jewish History" course, I emphasize the differences between American Jewish experiences, status, Judaism and those in Israel. It's crucial that my students understand in the United States, Judaism isn't a legal status. If you decide to convert to or from Judaism, it doesn't change your citizenship or your rights. That is not at all true in Israel. In Israel, the definition of being Jewish is quite different if you are a Jew planning to immigrate to the country, versus if you are trying to get married. I don't think many American Jews know that only state-sanctioned Orthodox Rabbis can perform Jewish marriages in Israel; their Reform or Conservative Rabbis at home could be imprisoned for attempting to perform a marriage. For American Jews, denominations are extremely important: In Israel the bigger dividing line is between religious and secular.

3. How do you see your politics entering the classroom? Does it ever feel appropriate to take certain stances when you are teaching?

Hilary: For me, as a historian I feel an obligation to teach the past in a way that takes seriously why historical actors made the decisions they did, whether or not I personally think those decisions were right. I also tend to give students the benefit of the doubt. I think if I present information in a way that includes different perspectives students are more likely to make an informed, and moral decision about their own politics, even if that decision isn't the one I have made. I don't want to tell them what to think, I want to show them how people have thought in the past. I also think much of the way I approach teaching history is because of the discipline itself. As a historian you try to get as many perspectives and information on events as possible, to evaluate their consequences and their causality. This doesn't make my teaching balanced, as I also know I focus on particular areas because of my expertise and interests. For example, my students learn more

about education than they do about weapons and battles, but I also don't think I could teach in a different way.

Emily, in our conversations, you've referred to yourself before as a scholar-activist. Can you say more about your approach to teaching as an activist? I think framing the problems of the region as an issue of structures rather than people is fascinating, but I wonder about whether likening those structures to others across the world can lose the particularities of the current situation?

Emily: With the situation in Gaza becoming more dire every day, I find myself struggling with the tensions between my roles as both an activist and an educator. For me, teaching is unavoidably political. I don't believe that we as faculty hold the ultimate truth or that we can escape our own subjectivity (since, in my mind, no one can). Because of this, I see the types of ideologies, stories, and frameworks we teach as political decisions because they will inform the ways that our students go on to engage with the world. How we construct our syllabus reinforces particular worldviews, and we constantly make decisions about which authors to read, which time periods to focus on, and what types of limits we hold around acceptable and unacceptable speech and content in our classrooms. It is undeniable that teaching Palestine/Israel from scholarship that primarily comes out of Israeli universities and sees questions of anti-Zionism as a matter of antisemitism, for example, will cultivate a different political relationship to Palestine/Israel among students, than a class that teaches it from anticolonial perspectives that draw primarily on Arab and Palestinian scholarship. Because of this, I try to be cognizant of my ethical obligation to teach in ways that are most likely to bring about justice, equality, and peace and that equally value all people's lives and rights. Of course, we all have different moral compasses, but I don't think anyone can claim that there are not some ethical obligations that underlie the ways we teach and conduct research (even though I am open to being convinced otherwise!). With this starting point of teaching inevitably being political, I think it's best to make our goals and sympathies explicit so that students have the autonomy to support, challenge, or question us as their professors. In contrast to the widespread idea that we must rid ourselves of biases when we teach, I think that true academic freedom also requires us to be upfront about our own positionalities, our material interests, and how we subjectively relate to course material. Otherwise, I worry that portraying ourselves as fully objective authorities transmits our own biases as truths, which not only suppresses open debate, but can also reinforce hegemonic paradigms of knowledge that ultimately sustain the status quo.

Michal: I agree that teaching is unavoidably political. Many of the choices I make on the syllabus reveal my politics, to an extent. My goal is to humanize all actors and to encourage my students to have empathy for all people in Palestine/Israel. That doesn't mean I justify every action or think that every decision is in the best interest of all of those people. It means that my political goal is to get the students in my class to learn about each other and about the topic at hand with compassion and critical analysis.

I was teaching a class of 100 students in the Fall of 2023, and although I had always been attuned to the needs of my particular students, something changed that semester. There was no assumption of goodwill between students. As much as they were nervous about what I would do, they were also nervous about their fellow students. So I began thinking of my classroom as a proxy—in an idyllic way—for how they could relate to each other outside the classroom, and how they could relate to Israel/Palestine outside the classroom. After consulting with a friend whose pedagogy I admire greatly, I decided to ask the students to read poetry several times during the semester. Their responses revealed how close the conflict is for them. They read Yehuda Amichai's "The Diameter of the Bomb," and one responded "We are all in the diameter of the bomb."https://allpoetry.com/The-Diameter-Of-The-Bomb[2] They also read Taha Muhammad Ali's "Revenge," and one wrote, "As a student, these poems empower me to challenge the prevailing narratives and stereotypes surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.https://lithub.com/revenge-a-poem-by-taha-muhammad-ali/[3] They remind me of the importance of fostering an environment where respectful dialogue and empathy can thrive, allowing for a more nuanced and compassionate understanding of the human experiences on both sides of the conflict. In a world where political tensions often overshadow the human element, these poems serve as a powerful call for empathy." My political goal is for students to be able to feel compassion and read critically all the sources at their disposal. This shouldn't be a political message, but it is.

This doesn't mean I'm ignoring the structural elements. I'm regularly naming and teaching the students to identify colonialism, nationalism, religion, racism, antisemitism, and more structures of power and politics that shape individuals and their capacity for action. Recognizing those elements can, I find, help students have more compassion because they see that individuals are acting within structures largely outside of their control. I just

2 Yehuda Amichai, "The Diameter of the Bomb," All Poetry, .

3 Taha Muhammad Ali, "Revenge," *Literary Hub*, December 14, 2023, .

always have to remember that my students are bringing a lot of themselves into the classroom, and they are bringing a lot of preconceived notions about who else is in the classroom. I'm not just teaching history or structures for many of these students. I'm teaching about their lives and the lives of their families. This makes me a different type of educator in that space.

4. What is our responsibility to our diverse students in terms of religious, ethnic, and other forms of identity? Do you have assignments or ways you approach topics that have successfully engaged students' identities?

Michal: As I mentioned, the students who show up in my class reflect the diversity of the student body at Rutgers, with approximately ⅔ of the students who have direct, personal connections to Israel/Palestine. Our campus has also repeatedly been the site of active political engagement around Israel/Palestine, and while some students think the classroom should be the place to advocate for their cause, many other students fear that the classroom will become uncomfortable, or that some might feel "unsafe." While I want to create a classroom environment where each student's religious, ethnic, national, and racial identities are welcome, in order to do that, I have to acknowledge that they are coming into the classroom with different forms of identity that shape their understanding and their reactions to the material while also keeping the classroom as a space that does not privilege any of those experiences. I don't want the ⅓ of students who have no personal connection to Israel/Palestine to feel like they can't speak. Therefore, in the classroom, we prioritize scholarship and scholarly analysis. Elsewhere, I invite students to reflect personally and bring themselves to the material.

One of the primary ways I do that is through journals. Once a week, students are invited to submit a journal through our course management software. I'm the only one who can view their journals. They can submit either 400 words in writing or a short video journal. I count five of these for credit to incentivize them, but most of them welcome the opportunity and complete more than five. These journals ask them to reflect on the material in a personal and informal way. Many of the Jewish students who enroll in my class grew up with a Jewish education that was expressly Zionist. Many of the Palestinian students in my class grew up as children or grandchildren of refugees from the Nakba. And among the other students I hear from immigrants, or members of another minoritized population who find that something within the course material resonates with their lives. These

journals give students a chance to reflect on the material, which has been shown to be helpful to their learning process, and it also provides me insight into how they are feeling and thinking throughout the course. I comment briefly to demonstrate that I appreciate that they shared something personal with me, and I'll check in on students who are having a particularly hard time with the material.

Hilary: Michal, I think that sounds like a really great assignment. Do you ever get complaints that personal responses are shaping how students are graded?

Michal: Hilary, great question. The students are just graded on whether they submitted the journal or not. I'm not assessing the content. And though many students use the space to talk about their family or their friends' reaction to the material, many also just use it to reflect on the material for the week. It's a really low stakes exercise that forces students to pause and think about the previous week. It's good for cognitively absorbing the material as well as helping me understand what's happening for them in the class.

Hilary: In terms of my own experiences, for me it is crucial that the classroom is welcoming to students, and that everyone knows they belong there. In my "History of Modern Israel/Palestine" course for example, I try to be as welcoming to students as possible, while making it very clear that the course is about both Israelis and Palestinians and that if this isn't the semester students want to talk about these groups of people, I can find them another course. I actually have this phrasing in the syllabus, in the course description.

In the semesters I have taught after October 7, I have also had students ask me, before classes began, if they would be ok taking my courses. I always begin my reply with, you are welcome in this course, I would love to have you attend and whatever your identity is is fine.

That said, I tend to avoid assignments or questions that focus on students' identities in the classroom. I don't stop students from discussing their identity or experiences if they bring it up, but I don't use assignments that focus on students' personal experiences. In part this is because I am teaching history classes. I want students to understand identities, and how we talk about them have changed over time. I don't expect students to relate to everything we are learning about. For example, I discuss the BILU, one of the earliest Zionist groups to immigrate from the Pale of Russia to Mandate Palestine. This group combined Marxism, farming and the Bible, meaning it

isn't usually top of students' lists for relatability. I don't want the course to be a course about personal feelings (which don't tend to require you do the readings), but rather a course where you learn more about the subject, namely how people acted and made decisions in the past, and then you can use that knowledge however you like. I am happy to put students in touch with advocacy groups and identity building groups if they feel that would help them. I believe that students need to have spaces to protest and express themselves, their politics, and their personal feelings, particularly on campus. However, I think that the classroom, at least my classroom, is meant to be a very different space. I have also told students, from different advocacy groups, that learning different perspectives can only help their advocacy, and that I am not here to convince them of any political perspective. This means I don't really make a lot of space to discuss student's identities, or even my own, in the classroom.

Emily: On the one hand, I think it is impossible to teach Israel/Palestine without focusing on identity. Almost every mainstream news source and form of engagement with this issue in the United States is filtered through a Western-centric approach to identity that prioritizes the narratives of Jews, Israelis, white people, Westerners, and others who are aligned with those in power. If we ignore identity, we fall into the trap of treating various forms of inequality, particularly around violence and death, as natural or at least inevitable. On the other hand, I do not believe that identity is the root of the violence in the region. Instead, identity has become a facade to cover up the economic and political interests that sustain Israel's violence against Palestinians.

My teaching reflects this perspective in that I allow identity to flow freely into the classroom, but I ultimately use it as a tool to demonstrate how our identities are not actually what is driving the oppression and violence we study. I aim to humanize every "type" of person we encounter in our course, ultimately to show that Israeli settler colonialism and Palestinian resistance to it, are sustained by structural forces, not individual morality or different groups' cultures. For example, I have students complete an assignment in which they choose one "sub-group" from Palestine/Israel to write a paper about and conduct a presentation for the class. Over the years, students have delivered insightful presentations and papers on groups such as the Druze, queer Palestinians, Bedouins, Palestinian refugees, Holocaust survivors, Mizrahim, and African asylum seekers. After researching the history of their chosen group, I ask students to reflect on how this group's lived experiences reflect underlying dynamics of "the conflict" and how they simultaneously challenge dominant narratives of it—namely the binary between Israelis and

Palestinians. Students are surprised to discover, for example, that Israel's outward representation and discipline of Holocaust survivors, queer Palestinians, and African asylum seekers in Israel are all driven by a performative commitment to liberal values that ultimately prioritizes capitalist interests. Similarly, as the group studying Israel's Bedouin population in the Negev, for example, hears about the civilizing rhetoric used to describe Israel's early Mizrahi immigrants, the whole class begins to understand how white supremacy and Eurocentrism have colored Israel's approach to racialized populations regardless of whether they are Jewish or not. This then challenges fundamental myths about the Israeli state and allows students to move past simplistic understandings of how race and Jewishness operate within Zionism.

I also allow my students, when appropriate, to share aspects of their own identities in class. For example, one of my Jewish-American students whose grandparents were Holocaust survivors did a presentation about her experience on Birthright and March of Living that generated a plethora of questions and intrigue from her classmates. Another student, from Egypt, shared her memories of growing up in a strongly anti-Zionist community, which viscerally exposed my US-born students to popular opinions in neighboring Arab countries. I also had a student in my class who was born in Israel and had decided to refuse military service. She did a powerful presentation on this decision, which allowed the other students to understand the emotional gravity and societal pressure in Israel around military service. Most memorably, I had a student from Gaza audit my class while she taught Arabic on campus as a Fulbright scholar. I devoted one of our class periods to her giving an incredibly powerful albeit painful presentation on her experiences living through Israel's 2008, 2012 and 2014 attacks on Gaza. To me, this first-hand experience was an invaluable addition to the class that no reading, video, or other assignment could have compared to in terms of its educational value.

Rather than fear derailment or conflict in platforming these students' stories and identities, my goal has always been to create a classroom that makes space for the realities of these different lived experiences. My hope is that my students have such sharp and solid analyses of the region that these personal stories do not feel threatening to their understandings of it, but instead add texture, humanize, and clarify the things they have learned in class. If someone's personal experience does not fit into what we have studied, it means we need to work harder to collectively find frameworks and analytical tools that explain these divergent perspectives. In this way, my students' diverse identities and personal experiences operate as a check on

my teaching and on the accuracy and applicability of the tools I am giving them to rigorously engage with the region.

5. How is Jewish identity being used to advance particular political agendas on campus? What has been your experience with outside organizations interfering with your teaching?

Hilary: CU Boulder's campus dynamics, in terms of protests and political agendas, are fairly disengaged. There have been protests, and those advocating for Palestinians have faced worse consequences than those advocating for Israel. However, I have been lucky in that outside organizations have not yet seriously interfered with my teaching. I had one student sponsored by an outside organization where I was concerned that they were not taking my class in good faith (they also failed due to only turning in AI written assignments) but nothing came of it. My classes have been a bit of a refuge; students by and large are there to learn, and to ask questions they are afraid to ask in other contexts, including about things like settler colonialism, genocide, antisemitism, etc. It's something where I can go in, and talk to students about the past, and have discussions about why people advocate for particular positions, where they come from, and what the stakes are, rather than a place to advocate for those positions.

Outside the classroom is another story. In the fall of 2024, I was asked by a pro-Palestinian student group at a different university to speak about the film *Israelism*.[4] I have a policy where I will speak for any student group that asks me, and also thought it was good that I discuss the film, as it is focused on the relationship between American Jews and Israel. It contains certain antisemitic tropes, but also makes a strong case as to why there is a generational divide in the US in terms of support for Israel. The discussion was difficult; there were cagey armed campus police and I had someone screaming at me in the audience that Netanyahu was worse than Hitler. However, I thought I did a good job discussing the film and the history it referenced. Nevertheless, I got on the radar of at least one pro-Israel group that targets professors.

When I was asked to speak to interested teachers and staff about the history of Israel/Palestine at the public school system which my two older children attend, protesters showed up. They allowed me to complete my talk (which they recorded without my permission) but the Q&A period was full of

4 *Israelism*, directed by Erin Axelman and Sam Eilertsen (Tikkun Olan Productions, 2024).

shouting at me that I was perpetuating the blood libel, and was just like the KKK. In one particularly memorable exchange, a protester asked me why I hadn't mentioned that all the Arab countries invaded Israel first in 1967. I replied that well, they didn't—actually Israel destroyed Egypt's air force right in the beginning, which was part of the reason why Israel won the war so quickly—but I was happy to talk about how Egypt's president Nasser's closing of the Straits of Tiran was seen as an act of aggression, and how it related to the Suez Crisis … The protester screamed at me, "Stop using facts! You shouldn't be using facts!" The protesters later complained about me to the school board, and circulated a petition in part describing me as a notorious anti-Israel scholar and as promoting antisemitism. My daughter at the time was the only Jewish kid in her class. I talked about this incident to members of my synagogue, the head of my kids' Hebrew school, the principal of their school, the Chair of History and the Director of Jewish Studies, as well as the Dean of Arts & Humanities (and a lawyer). After I reached out to Jewish advocacy organizations, the public-school petition was altered to remove my name, and no one has targeted me since, that I know of. Yet, I was targeted, even though I am not an activist, I am not a particularly public figure, and I am Jewish, not Israeli or Palestinian. I want to be very clear that I believe free speech means people who are activists, Palestinian, Israeli, etc., should be able to speak too without fear of being targeted. The climate in Boulder has only worsened after the antisemitic attack which took place in June of 2025.[5] I see the public space for having discussions about Israel, Palestine and Palestinians narrowing, along with space for experts and expertise. I feel like I am being asked to lie about the past to conform to particular narratives.

Emily: Seeing how Jewish identity has been used on our campus to suppress free speech and justify Israeli violence against Palestinians has been profoundly disturbing. I am deeply familiar with the ways that Judaism and Jewish identity are conflated with Zionism and pro-Israel politics. It is the subject of my research, and it is something I have grappled with personally throughout my life. Nonetheless, I have been somewhat surprised by the brazenness with which people have promoted this conflation as a tool to silence critics of Israel and to defame those they disagree with.

As the primary person who researches Palestine/Israel on my campus, I frequently give public lectures that critically outline the settler-colonial

5 See, for example, Cindy Von Quednow and TuAnh Dam, "Their Synagogue Taught them to Build Peace. And an Antisemitic Attack is Testing their Resilience," *CNN*, updated June 4, 2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/04/us/colorado-attack-congregation-bonai-shalom.

foundations of the current violence and that advocate for an end to oppression. For the past few years, these efforts to educate about the history of the region and to stand up for human rights have led to various forms of intimidation, censorship, and surveillance. I've received threatening messages from community members, my talks have been aggressively recorded followed by complaints made to my employer, and I have been monitored and harassed by various watchdog groups. I am one of many across the country who has experienced such actions, and I feel strongly that it is our duty as faculty members to organize against this rising repression.

This type of weaponization of Jewish identity, which is largely being orchestrated by actors outside of the university, is dangerous because it foments support for genocidal violence, represses activism, and prevents access to accurate historical knowledge. Concurrently, it is corroding the moral fabric of our Jewish communities themselves, especially on college campuses. In September of 2024, for example, I received an email from our campus Hillel advisor asking Jewish faculty if they would like to appear on a website entitled, "Jews at NAU" to connect Jewish students with Jewish faculty. I enthusiastically agreed and was excited for the opportunity to further support Jewish students on our campus. After only four days of being featured on the webpage, however, I received a second email stating that the Hillel officers had asked for me to be taken off the page. I was angry and hurt by this decision, and so were many of my fellow Jewish colleagues, who each wrote to Hillel to say that they would refuse to be on the website if I was not also included on it. My colleagues' efforts were not successful, and it felt like my own Jewish identity was being denied to me on account of my politics. While upsetting, I've tried to come to terms with the fact that this may be the price I have to pay for standing up for justice and against genocide during these times as our institutions repeatedly prioritize allegiance to Israel over an inclusive Jewish community.

Our campuses must resist the cynical use of Jewish identity to repress free speech, criminalize our students and promote anti-intellectual politics that ultimately serve the interests of racial capitalism and the state. While groups like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and other Zionist organizations claim to be fighting hate, they are actually engaged in an incredibly harmful, ahistorical exceptionalization of antisemitism that associates it with the right-wing politics described above and divorces it from broader solidarity frameworks. Groups like Hillel and Chabad are facilitating these processes, and as a result, they are creating an exclusionary culture of Jewish life on campus that requires students to espouse pro-Israel politics in order to participate in Jewish holidays, rituals, and community. Again, while

the most life-threatening outcome of these measures is how they enable Israel's genocide in Gaza, they are also endangering the future of the Jewish people. From a personal level, it has been hard to watch my own community go down a hateful and egocentric path of unfettered self-interest where the impulse to rally behind a racist, genocidal state overpowers the need for inclusive communities, dissent, and even historical accuracy (as Hilary's case shows). It is clear to me that such approaches are paving the way for increasingly fascist politics in this country that will ultimately fan the flames of antisemitism and fracture the foundation of Jewish life in the United States.

Michal: Wow, Emily, that experience sounds so painful—to be told you are not allowed onto the page listing Jewish faculty because of your political views is so marginalizing.

I've had similar experiences. There is a strong and influential group on campus of Jewish faculty and staff, and at some point in the 2023–2024 academic year, they changed their mission statement to include combatting "antisemitism and anti-Israel bias" without alerting their members to the change, thus marginalizing many Jewish faculty who are critical of Israel or are anti-Zionist.

What's been more painful is watching my Jewish students who say that Hillel and Chabad exclude them because of their anti- or non-Zionist politics. My Jewish community was very important to me in college, and it's sad to see these students struggling so much. I've tried, through informal extra-curricular programming, to create a community for these students. But I can't replace Hillel. I don't have the time or resources to offer the kind of pastoral support and community that institutional Jewish spaces provide, but I try to reach out to students when I can.

I haven't had any outside organizations interfere with my teaching. Recently, a student threatened me with the potential for that kind of interference, but nothing came of it. More so, outside organizations like Canary Mission are threatening my Arab and Palestinian colleagues. They have posted their pictures on websites and doxxed them. The wider Jewish community in my state has also organized letter-writing campaigns to the president of the university requesting that one of my colleagues be fired and her center closed for what they considered to be antisemitic lectures. As a Jewish faculty member on campus, I try to provide protection when I can to these faculty members by partnering with them and speaking up on their behalf when I hear disparaging remarks. There's a much bigger system of

discrimination against Arab faculty in the US, and I know I can't fight that by myself, but I can disrupt patterns and interference on my own campus.

Hilary: Emily, I'm also so sorry that happened to you. Are you able to find a space for your Jewish identity and those of students who agree with you on campus or in your community?

Emily: Luckily, I have several groups of friends and colleagues in my life that are predominantly Jewish. I am part of two Jewish reading groups, I have a group of anti-Zionist Jewish friends who I regularly meet with in Flagstaff, and I am part of several political and academic groups that focus on Jewish solidarity with Palestine. For my students though, it is much harder as they often feel too scared to come forward with their beliefs about Israel/Palestine on campus and even among their own families and friends. As a result, they end up either isolating themselves from the wider Jewish community or hiding their true thoughts about what is happening in Gaza.

6. What role can you as Jewish faculty play in navigating the increasing tensions regarding faculty advocacy on college campuses, especially in the face of claims about antisemitism?

Emily: I believe that we as Jewish faculty have an obligation to speak out against the weaponization of antisemitism. For far too long, false allegations of antisemitism have been used to whitewash Israeli crimes against Palestinians. Today, this strategy of conflating legitimate criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews is rampant on our college campuses. It is being funded and orchestrated by right-wing groups that are interested in amassing political power (not protecting Jews), and it is tearing our Jewish communities and our college campuses apart. Most importantly, this cynical use of antisemitism to silence activists and scholars is helping to enable an ongoing genocide in Gaza. From my perspective, our primary role as Jewish faculty is to disrupt attempts to frame anti-Zionism as a matter of prejudice against Jews. This can look like speaking to our administrators on the differences between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, opposing the presence of groups like the ADL on our campuses, and holding organizations like Hillel accountable for excluding non-Zionist Jewish students and for their role in efforts to justify mass violence. Finally, I believe that our role as Jewish faculty is to support our students, including unequivocally defending their right to protest the Israeli genocide in Gaza. I believe that our duty as educators, no matter our identity, is to stand by our students when they take the lessons we

have taught them about justice, oppression, and equality, and they put them into practice.

Hilary: This is a very interesting question, and I really respect Emily's perspective. I also completely agree that it's our duty to stand by our students.

I think one of the issues in the present is that being Jewish doesn't shield you from accusations of antisemitism. Clearly more Palestinian and Arab scholars are targeted by outside organizations, as are scholars of color more broadly. I have seen an assumption, particularly among pro-Palestinian groups, that Jews can act as protection for Palestinian scholars and activists, if we so choose. One thing I've found is that for pro-Israel organizations, if someone tries to help Palestinian scholars, students or activists, or indeed just isn't pro-Israel enough, pro-Israel groups label them antisemitic, a Maidhof, a Kapo, or a self-hating Jew. According to these groups, if one isn't towing a pro-Israel-without-any-questions line, one is taking advantage of one's Jewishness to undermine Israel and the Jewish people and to increase antisemitism. I wrote an op-ed in June of 2025 on the need to keep talking about Gaza, Israel and Palestinians and almost all of the comments were of that nature.[6] On the other hand, I have worried that the fact I do teach about Israel, and in a Jewish Studies program means I could face mild discrimination the other way, i.e. having Palestinian-supporting colleagues being less willing to engage with me. I haven't seen that yet, though.

In the United States, I think we must emphasize the dangers of weaponizing antisemitism. Defunding research or taking away peoples' rights in the name of antisemitism is not exactly going to make Jewish people popular, or safe. In addition, Jews and Americans are on the hook for Israel's actions, Jews in particular. In Boulder we have seen how, when someone couldn't attack Israelis, he turned to Jews, the closest group possible. In this case I don't think it matters that this particular group of Jews were Zionist, they're still being targeted as Jews for Israel's actions and that's a pattern I don't see stopping in the future.

Michal: I appreciate what Emily and Hilary said, and I agree. I wrote an op-ed in February of 2024 calling out the weaponization of antisemitism on my own campus and arguing that the rhetoric was making it harder for

6 Hilary Kalisman, "I teach Jewish history in Boulder. Is my community taking the wrong lessons from Sunday's attack?" *The Forward* June 3, 2025. https://forward.com/opinion/725191/boulder-colorado-attack-antisemitism/

students to do the work of learning.[7] And one of the initial criticisms I got from a pro-Israel commentator was that I wrote that the reports of violence on campus—against Jews and Palestinians—worry me "as a Jew, as a university professor, and as a human being." This commentator called into question my rights to speak "as a Jew" because I didn't have the right political perspective about antisemitism on campus. These criticisms are always going to be there, but I stand by my message then, and I think it's even more imperative now. We must speak out against the mischaracterization of free speech as antisemitic. We must insist that discomfort is not the same as danger. And we must emphasize the need to treat Jewish students as mature adults in a pluralistic society. As a Jewish faculty member, I think it's important to help our students build resilience and to show them how to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

Because I see my primary role on campus to be one of education, I don't engage in advocacy as much. I don't have the time for it, but I also don't want my advocacy to make people think that they can't approach me or see me as a resource. So, I build connections and networks privately and I'm in touch with those doing the important advocacy work, but I also try to maintain a non-judgmental approach with students so that I can help them grow into intelligent critical thinkers in this complicated political world.

Emily: Michal, I really appreciated what you wrote about the distinction between discomfort and danger. I'm wondering what examples you both have seen of this on your campuses and how you have engaged with them?

Hilary: I haven't had a lot of personal experience talking with students about discomfort vs. danger. I had students question whether or not they would be comfortable in my classes, but I believe that was the phrasing they used, rather than would they be safe. I have also had students come to me because they were experiencing danger. For example, a student was spit on, another student was doxxed, others faced threats of physical violence. In those cases I have made sure the students are getting all the campus resources possible, followed up with them consistently, and I tend to give out extensions like candy because I'm a professor not an administrator or a therapist. I have had several students mention that they're not comfortable talking with their peers or posting on social media about Israel/Palestine because they're worried about losing friends, or sounding uncool. For those

7 Michal Raucher, "Sensationalizing campus antisemitism isn't serving Jewish students like mine." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* March 4, 2024. https://www.jta.org/2024/03/04/ideas/sensationalizing-campus-antisemitism-isnt-serving-jewish-students-like-mine

students, as I have described, I try to make the classroom and my office hours into a place where they can talk and ask questions without being afraid of getting canceled by their peers. If they ask questions that I think have the potential to make other students uncomfortable, I both try to talk about that potential if it happens in class while encouraging the students asking those questions to come to me outside the class.

Emily, could you say a bit more about if you have encountered examples of discomfort vs. danger on your campus and how you have handled it?

Emily: I repeatedly heard from students associated with Hillel and Chabad that the Students for Justice in Palestine encampment on our campus made them feel unsafe. I know for a fact that the students leading the encampment did nothing to threaten anyone's safety, while on the contrary, several people made threats and invoked violent speech against them. I also know that there were calls made to the ADL and that complaints were levied against me when I spoke about the genocide in Gaza and about the differences between antisemitism and anti-Zionism on our campus. Any student who has ever worked with me would tell you that I am kind and welcoming to individuals of all beliefs, and so again, I feel certain that those who may have complained about feeling unsafe were not actually in any danger.

At the same time, I have no doubt that it is hard for some students to hear scathing critiques of Israel or that it feels deeply uncomfortable for them to find out that many people understand Zionism to be a form of racism and colonialism. I know this because I remember feeling deeply uncomfortable as an undergraduate myself when I heard these types of comments. Yet, it is absolutely essential that we as a campus are able to distinguish between feeling challenged—politically, ethically, and socially—versus feeling unsafe. The people who are unsafe right now are the Palestinians living in Gaza whose bodies are being dismembered, whose homes are being leveled, and whose family members are being murdered every day. I find any attempt to center one's own discomfort with people calling attention to a genocide over an actual genocide, to be incredibly selfish and harmful. I think it is my duty as a scholar and educator to value all life equally, and so I refuse to allow people's feelings about heated political speech to come before attempts to advocate for people's actual safety. To be clear, I oppose any form of discrimination or violence against anyone, but we must reject the strategic and cynical use of the concept of "safe spaces" to silence those who are bravely speaking out against genocide.

Michal: I heard similar concerns about Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) protests on campus—that Jewish students felt unsafe. I had a Jewish

student in my class in the Fall of 2023 tell me how unsafe she felt and how terrified she was. When I compassionately asked her why, whether someone had made her feel unsafe, whether there was a threat, she told me that nobody had threatened her, that there had not been any violence, but Hillel had increased their security in and around the building. I am not sure whether there was ever a threat to Hillel. It's challenging because for some of these Jewish students, they are surrounded by structures telling them that they are unsafe. So to say to them, "no, you're just uncomfortable" doesn't really help. I think we need to think about this moment in terms of discomfort in a wider context of helicopter parenting and post-Covid lack of resilience among our college students. Many of these Jewish students in particular have been told to be wary of campus protests. They are told that campus is not a safe place for them. And they don't have the skills to face the criticisms of Israel that they are hearing. Many students took classes in high school about how to "defend Israel" from its critics, but that doesn't actually give them tools to know what to do when they hear conflicting information. They hear that information as an attack on them and on Israel, so they become defensive. I think education is the key. I try to give students many different opportunities to learn about Israel/Palestine so that their first reaction to a real history of Zionism isn't defensiveness or fear. But I think we need to start earlier.

All that being said, I did see some reason to warrant concerns about antisemitism at our encampment. As a safety officer patrolling the perimeter, I was on various chat groups about the encampment. Our encampment was located in a central location on campus with a lot of classroom buildings. Many people have to walk through that area. And every time someone dressed in the trappings of an observant Jew (*kippah*, skirt, etc.) passed through the area, someone on the chat commented, "here comes a Zio," or "beware, Zio approaching." Regardless of whether they engaged with the encampment, the assumption from those who were running the encampment was that Jews were Zionists and were a source of concern. I share this because it's part of the underbelly we don't always want to talk about. We had several other incidents on campus that were plainly antisemitic—a Jewish student who was having lunch when students from a Palestine-solidarity protest ran over and knocked his *kippah* off his head, for instance. There have been antisemitic acts and probably more sentiment that we don't hear about on our campuses.

And of course, it's much worse for Palestinians in Gaza. There is no comparing. We've also had Islamophobic acts directed against students and buildings. Those, too, don't compare to the genocide in Gaza. And just

because they are not of the same scale doesn't mean they don't matter. I don't think we should use antisemitism to distract from what's happening in Gaza, but I don't think we should be ignoring antisemitism on our campuses either. I struggle with this balance. Can we responsibly address the antisemitism and Islamophobia in our midst while also remaining focused on Gaza? I'd like to think we can, but we don't have a lot of models for it.

Emily: I agree with Michal and certainly don't think we should ignore antisemitism on our campuses, but I believe that antisemitism must be understood and addressed just like any other form of prejudice or discrimination. It is not exceptional nor is it more common than other forms of racism, and we have excellent sociological tools to understand how prejudice and discrimination operate in our society. Exclusionary thinking and actions come from living within political and economic systems that incentivize competition and exclusion. When we are forced to compete for limited resources along ethnic and racial lines, or when we understand our safety as being tied to the exclusion of certain people from our communities, or even our countries (as is the case in Israel and increasingly in the US)—we end up holding discriminatory beliefs about those who are different than us. The remedy to antisemitism then is not aligning with right-wing forces that further entrench these unequal systems, but to instead work in partnership with all of those who have been oppressed by them.

7. What do you think universities should do in this current political moment with regards to teaching about Palestine and Israel?

Michal: I'd like to see so much more education around Israel/Palestine on our campuses. I'm so glad that students are politically active, because it's better than political apathy, and I wish we could encourage students to pair that activism with education. I'd also like to see our administrators really protect and defend the important work that faculty do on campus. So many of my colleagues of Arab descent are scared—justifiably—to speak on campus or to share their work widely. We need administrators who make it clear that these scholars are precisely who should be teaching all of us right now. Universities are facing attacks right now that are overwhelmingly political in nature, and at the same time, I think we might learn something from them. We (universities writ large) have forgotten that our primary responsibility is to educate. Universities are corporations—some large, some

small—but they are more interested in making money than education. We need to return to this core value and elevate the importance of learning.

Hilary: I agree with Michal. One of the issues undergirding the controversy around discussions of Gaza, Israel, genocide and protests for Palestinians, is an anti-intellectualism that undermines expertise. Universities are places to educate, and to advance knowledge. I have tried to make space in my classroom, and on campus, for scholars, particularly Palestinian scholars, to speak as experts in their field not just as a token Palestinian to balance an Israeli or vice versa. This past spring I had too many guest lectures, in part because as I told my students, I didn't know how much longer they would be able to hear these voices; of Israeli, Palestinian, and American scholars doing cutting edge research on the history of Israel/Palestine, Israelis and Palestinians. Academic freedom has to include the ability to conduct research, to teach students how to research, and to present that research even when it's politically inconvenient.

Emily: As Michal described, universities are placing profits before education. This is because capitalism requires institutions, including institutions of higher education, to make a profit in order to exist. In order to make a profit, you cannot fully undermine the laws and economic dictates of the government that governs you. This is true under liberal governments as well, but it is more overt now under our current administration. This interplay between capitalism and the state explains why nearly every college and university, along with most politicians, corporations, and other institutions, have capitulated so quickly to the current administration's repressive demands. As a result, we are currently living in a McCarthyist period, where those fighting for a better world are being systematically targeted through intimidation, loss of livelihood, and even criminalization. As faculty, and especially as Jewish faculty, I believe we have a responsibility to disrupt this process. Specifically, I believe we must fight against the instrumentalization of Jewish fear, as a scapegoat and cover for right-wing attacks on free speech, anticolonial politics, and solidarity with the oppressed. We must find ways to fight for all people's safety and liberation rather than just our own. Otherwise, I fear we will become (or have already become) pawns in the rise of fascism.

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