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ARTICLE

A Subversive Pedagogy for Teaching Palestine/Israel

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Abstract

In this article I show that teaching with intellectual integrity means we have to name what the evidence presents as what it is. Teaching with intellectual integrity means resisting the overwhelming force of institutional gaslighting. I first sketch what the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism is and its history before turning to how its adoption makes teaching Palestine/Israel with intellectual integrity impossible by design. I then discuss, secondly, how I navigated the demands of intellectual (and ethical) integrity in my courses on Palestine/Israel. I introduce my multifocal pedagogical methodology and use of the syllabi to counter epistemic violence. Finally, I return to the question of why it is crucial to use the correct words and concepts to describe what we are talking about when we teach Palestine/Israel and why such intellectual integrity and analytic precision not only rectify the epistemic violence that denied Palestinian narratives of what Zionism has meant for their experiences. Such analytic clarity also reaches beyond Zionist and Israeli historiography to multiple Jewish counter-archives. Introducing students to alternative Jewish historical and religio-cultural archives is especially generative in situating the study of Palestine/Israel within a broader examination of Christian European modernity and in pointing toward a constructive reimagining of Jewishness in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Keywords

Palestine/Israel, decolonial pedagogies, epistemic violence, Gaza genocide, Title VI, academic freedom, IHRA; Israel Studies, Palestine Studies, Nakba, "The New Antisemitism", settler-colonialism, weaponized antisemitism

The Challenge of Teaching with Integrity in the Academic Gulags

In a discussion on the Chris Hedges Report (released on October 8, 2025), eminent Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi reflected on "the anticipatory obedience" of US universities and their exploitation of the post-October 7th moment to push forward goals they have long pursued—specifically, reducing the ability to teach honestly about Palestine and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Khalidi said: "I just want to talk about ... what do we lose by creating, in essence, these academic gulags where any criticism of genocide can see you suspended or expelled?" He specifically refers to how his own Columbia University embraced the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, a definition widely challenged and discredited by scholars of antisemitism, who also proposed alternative definitions that distinguish between a political project in the MENA region and Jewish communities.[1] For Khalidi, adopting the IHRA definition has effectively prevented him from teaching his courses at Columbia with academic integrity and evidence-based accountability. As a result, he decided to teach them off campus in Fall 2025.

IHRA is the acronym for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which put forward a working definition of antisemitism that has already become hegemonic before, but in an accelerated fashion since the time of the Gaza genocide. It grounds itself on the conflation and equation of Jews with Zionism and Israel as a political project. A series of examples includes a stipulation that any discussion of Israel as "a racist endeavor" amounts to antisemitism. Based on this example alone, it becomes impossible to actually teach Palestine/Israel with integrity without being subjected to what Khalidi calls "Kangaroo Courts," or the disciplinary bodies put in place by universities, often inhabited by people who are not experts in the study of antisemitism as a historical phenomenon. Similarly, Khalidi's long-time colleague Marianne Hirsch at Columbia University, the William Peterfield Trent Professor Emerita of English and Comparative Literature and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, withdrew from teaching her post-retirement course because Columbia adopted the IHRA definition. A daughter of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch, who teaches

1 E.g. British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) and European Legal Support Center (ELSC), "Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom in the UK Higher Education: The Adverse Impact of the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism," *Institute for Jewish Policy Research*, September 2023, https://archive.jpr.org.uk/object-3797; Moshe Behar, "The IHRA's Careless Conflations on Antisemitism (and a Few Alternatives)," *Contending Modernities*, March 25, 2021, https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/inhra-careless-conflations/.

about genocides, shared in an interview with the Associated Press that "A university that treats criticism of Israel as antisemitic and threatens sanctions for those who disobey is no longer a place of inquiry … I just don't see how I can teach about genocide in that environment."[2]

I start with these notable examples to highlight the repressive and punitive regime under which teaching about Palestine/Israel occurs, raising serious concerns for academic freedom overall. Facing this repression and widespread top-down efforts to control and manipulate the narrative, the pedagogical conversation effectively ceases to be truly pedagogical. Before proceeding, I anticipate claims of false equivalence that respond to critiques such as Hirsch's and Khalidi's by asserting that Middle East Studies departments are fully dominated by anti-Zionist professors whose ideology infuses their teaching. According to this line of argumentation, which was also articulated by one of the anonymous referees of this article, identical claims of academic repression could be equally "made by the other side." Let me underscore that "the other side" is not, by definition, delegitimized or even criminalized as in the case with Palestine Studies. As a third referee of this article underscored in response to the argument of false equivalency, maybe it is true that every faculty member at Columbia is an anti-Zionist, but that does not make it true that they, or their pedagogy, is antisemitic. The IHRA definition has been used to make this claim and effectively partake in Palestinian scholasticide, a term depicting the actual destruction of Palestinian universities, schools, museums, archeological sites, and so forth in Gaza as it is extended into our classrooms and universities in Western academia, which gutted Palestine-related programs and also participated in whitewashing a genocide. Indeed, genocide, when the evidence of which is livestreamed on our phones, is not a topic for a pro-con debate.[3] Hence, I argue (with many others) that the weaponization of antisemitism (to be

2 Jake Offenhartz, "A Columbia Genocide Scholar Says She May Leave Over University's New Definition of Antisemitism," *Associated Press*, July 24, 2025, https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/columbia-genocide-scholar-says-she-040633909.html.

3 Harvard University provides a prime example of an elite university that, in the aftermath of October 7th 2023, gutted (while increasing collaboration with Israeli institutions and creating further opportunities for Israeli scholars). See, for example, Dhruv Patel and Grace E. Yoon, "Harvard Suspends Research Partnership With Birzeit University in the West Bank," *The Harvard Crimson*, March 27, 2025, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/3/27/harvard-suspends-birzeit-partnership/ and Susan Jaffe, "Harvard Fires Director of Center for Health and Human Rights," *The Lancent*, January 3, 2026, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(25)02638-8/abstract?rss=yes.

distinguished from actual, mostly white Christian supremacist forms of antisemitism) affects classroom pedagogy. I am not discussing the various ways faculty orient to certain ideologies or political sensibilities. Such conversations could go on *ad infinitum* and often serve as a distraction. This is a distraction tactic designed to redirect one's attention from overwhelming evidence that unsettles a narrative about Jewish Zionist innocence and ontological victimhood. There are "Israel Studies" programs and well-funded chairs and fellowships around the US and internationally. It is possible that there are faculty members who share ideological proclivities and pedagogical approaches there as well. However, the IHRA definition of antisemitism makes a program like "Palestine Studies" perforce antisemitic. [4] This is a methodological, pedagogical, and institutional problem.[5]

That is why Jewish Voice for Peace's Academic Council, along with Academics for Peace, organized an action in April 2025 where scholars openly violated the IHRA definition, exposing its absurdities and specific restrictions on academic freedom. Thirty-five scholars, most of whom are Jewish, participated in this act of civil disobedience and recorded themselves. This campaign to defy the IHRA definition highlights the classroom as a site of *non-learning* and underscores why our syllabi have become frontline conflict zones and sites of scholasticide. In fact, Israeli policymakers as early as the 2000s viewed American college students as enemies because they, as part of a global justice movement, threatened Israel's narrative.[6] As a result, colleges

4 For an exposition of the manufacturing of a distinct field of "Israel Studies" and the discrediting of Palestine Studies, see Pappé, Ilan, Tariq Dana, and Nadia Naser–Najjab. "Palestine Studies, Knowledge Production, and the Struggle for Decolonisation." *Middle East Critique* 33, no. 2 (2024): 173–93.

5 I share with the reader my engagement with the anonymous readers to highlight how deep the deployment of IHRA goes in terms of gatekeeping against scholarship that disrupts the conflation of Jews and Judaism with Zionism and the historical and political realities of the Israeli Zionist project.

6 For example, the Reut Institute, an influential Israeli think tank with ties to the formation of Israeli policies, ascertained in a 2010 report that rather than military forces in the region, the global solidarity movement in support of Palestinian rights constituted the most grave "existential threat" to Israel in the aftermath of the Second Lebanon War and Cast Lead operation in Gaza and therefore needed to be neutralized as a key strategic goal. Hence, a massive investment was directed to fighting the so-called delegitimizing network. In a high-level policy event (the Herzliya Conference) focusing on Israeli national security in 2010, the Reut Institute called Israel to focus on "sabotaging" the "delegitimization" networks through especially lawfare tactics in the US, targeting human rights organizations, NGOs, and college student activists to be combined with increased hasbara tactics to control the narrative about Israel's justness (without actually changing policies on the ground). The Reut Institute's recommendations at the time (which were

became hubs of intense *hasbara*—propaganda or public diplomacy, literally "explaining"—that often fueled and activated Islamophobia and weaponized antisemitism. Consequently, criticism of Israel shifted from issues of free speech and expression to accusations of "hate crime" and "discrimination" under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination by employers based on race, color, sex, and national origin. The IHRA definition stems from years of sharpening efforts and the anti-antisemitism industry. The events of October 7th and their aftermath have further advanced it as a tool to criminalize criticism of Israel and the lives of Palestinians, because the definition, as I will demonstrate below, is rooted in anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia.

Teaching Palestine/Israel accurately and from multiple perspectives in US academia, as in other parts of Western academia, requires one to violate the IHRA definition. I am a scholar of Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, Peace Studies, and Palestine/Israel Studies, with a focus on religion, ethics, and politics. I have centered my research on Jewish critics of Zionism, a political ideology, as well as what the case of Palestine/Israel reveals about thinking regarding religion, violence, and conflict transformation or justice-oriented peacebuilding—specifically, efforts that aim to recognize and address historical harm. I am based at the University of Notre Dame, where I teach courses on Palestine/Israel. I use comparative explanatory analytic-descriptive categories such as genocide, apartheid, settler colonialism, military occupation, and (anti-colonial) human rights norms to describe and analyze empirical realities, which, in turn, demystify the modern history of Palestine/Israel. Most of what I teach and the scholarship I produce, including my ethnographic work with Jewish critics and activists in the US and Palestine/Israel, violates the IHRA framework. In particular, my classes violate what is listed as example 7 out of the 11 that the IHRA definition indicates as amounting to "antisemitism," namely "[d]enying the Jewish

immediately implemented as foreign policy integrated into a revised national security paradigm) stipulated that "Israel must identify and focus its efforts on global hubs of delegitimization … In this context, Israel should sabotage network catalysts and drive a wedge between its component parts, primarily between soft critics of Israeli policy and delegitimizers of its existence" (see Reut Institute, "Building a Political Firewall Against Israel's Deligitimization Conceptual Framework" Policy Paper [March 2010], https://20a1ea9b-cbf6-4da3-88fd-ab21d8ba06cc.filesusr.com/ugd/1bfcb5_d59cc682a61444439b12462b75e1fbb5.pdf) The Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP) also links to databases that track legal efforts on state and federal levels to criminalize boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns since 2014. See FMEP, "Anti-Boycott Legislation—Israel/Palestine," Research Data, last updated May 31, 2026, https://lawfare.fmep.org/resources/anti-boycott-legislation-israel-palestine/.

people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor," and example 10, which states: "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis." Both these examples expose the foundations of anti-Palestinian racism, which involves denying the Nakba, failing to acknowledge Palestinian indigeneity in historic Palestine, dehumanizing Palestinians, and justifying violence against them.[7]

Nakba is the Arabic word that describes the catastrophic depopulation of Palestine from 1947 to 1949, during what is also called the Israeli War of Independence in Zionist lore.[8] Notably, the settler colonization of Palestine began before this historical event and has continued since. Palestinians have experienced Zionism not as a redemptive idea but as a settler colonial reality. Zionist redemptive violence has meant Palestinian denial and destruction. Political Zionism, from its beginning and through Israeli policies, has been driven by the goal of creating and maintaining a Jewish-majority nation-state in Palestine. The demographic starting point in 1917, when a British colonial administrator "promised" the land for the creation of "a Jewish home" in what is known as the Balfour Declaration, is a straightforward matter of numbers. Only 6% of historic Palestine was Jewish at the time. Even if this number reflects the pre-Zionist Palestinian Jewish community, it offers a pedagogical anchor to show the minoritization of non-Jews in the land as the upshot of settler colonial processes.

As Mahmood Mamdani shows, the second *Aliyah*, or wave of Jewish colonization from Europe, following the 1903 Kishinev pogrom (1904–1914), began the process of incorporating the Indigenous Jewish Palestinian community, at the time Ottoman subjects like their non-Jewish neighbors, into the Euro-Zionist project that sought from its inception to establish a "Jewish state" distinct from the Jewish society that had lived in Palestine throughout the centuries. This is where, for Mamdani, the difference between settlers and immigrants is pivotal and illuminating. He distinguishes between the immigrant "Jews who made pilgrimage to Palestine" historically and who "chose to become members of a preexisting local political community" and the Jewish settler colonialists who came from Europe starting in the early twentieth century. "Immigrants are unarmed; settlers come armed with both weapons and a nationalist agenda. Immigrants come

7 For an incisive account of Nakba denialism, see Esmat Elhalaby, "Nakba Denial: On the Politics of History and Genocide," *P&RAPRAXIS* (2025), https://www.parapraxismagazine.com/articles/nakba-denial.

8 For examples of scholars who interrogate the pre-Nakba processes of depopulation, see Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine: The Zionist Left and the Making of the Palestinian Nakba* (Stanford University Press, 2023).

in search of a homeland, not a state; for settlers, there can be no homeland without a state. For the immigrant, the homeland can be shared; for the settler, the state must be a nation-state."[9] Introducing students to the incorporation of Arab-Jews (and their de-Arabization), including Jews in Palestine, into the Euro-Zionist frame is indeed a pivotal pedagogical move in disrupting homogenizing and hegemonic accounts of Jewish history and destiny.[10]

The Nakba, which also denoted the shift from the method of land purchase to active military means to enact Palestinian dispossession, was devastating in giving Zionist militias—later the Israeli military—a moment to expand beyond what was decided in the UN Partition Plan (UN Resolution 181) and to "cleanse" or "Judaize" this territory, concepts used already in the pre-Nakba decades.[11] Indeed, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and other Yishuv mechanisms were dedicated to "Judaizing" the land and "Judaizing" labor. Lands purchased systematically by the JNF were declared "redeemed" and "Judaized," or ready for "Judaization." This raises a complex and important question about what exactly makes land "Jewish." This should be a key question for any course on Palestine/Israel that aims to promote genuine religio-political literate understanding rather than simply reproducing nationalist redemptive narratives or, even more reductively, abstracting the analysis from its historical, material, and empirical realities to a "religious" and ahistorical (or anti-historical, messianic, and Manichean) terrain concerning a presumed incompatibility between Muslims (often interchangeable with "Arabs" in this discourse) and Jews. At this juncture, Mamdani's immigrant-settler distinction opens the door for students to encounter historical Jewish life and thought in Palestine and the broader Arab and Muslim region. Opening this door disrupts the redemptive-biblical anti-intellectual frame.

Therefore, when teaching about Palestine/Israel, one of the most perplexing and ethically challenging issues to navigate is the conflation of Israel with Jews. This conflation underpins the IHRA definition as a way to defend a political project rather than necessarily protecting Jewish people. In

9 Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Harvard University Press, 2022), 253.

10 For a window into the complex, evolving social identities of the people of Palestine in the 1910s and 1920s, see, for examples, Hilel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1929* (Brandeis University Press, 2015) and Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem Between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse University Press, 2011).

11 For a discussion of the Nakba before the Nakba, see Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine* and Patrick Wolfe, "Purchase by Other Means: The Palestinian *Nakba* and Zionism's Conquest of Economics," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 133–171.

fact, the working definition and its variations do not focus on more traditional antisemitism that originates from White supremacist Christian nationalist movements, as I will discuss below and as evident in the fracturing of MAGA (referring to the confluence of forces Donald Trump coalesced in his campaigns and administrations), where Israeli influence on American foreign policy, such as the decision to attack Iran, is filtered through classical antisemitic conspiracy theory tropes.[12] Indeed, there are robust traditions and social movements of anti-Zionist Jews who support Palestinian solidarity not despite being Jewish but because they are Jewish. However, according to IHRA's criteria, they are considered "antisemitic," which clearly violates their religious freedom to define their Jewish identity as they see fit, especially as they are directly challenged by the ethical demands Palestinians place on them.[13] Further perplexing is the anti-intellectualism that an IHRA-approved syllabus surfaces. If the IHRA definition also frames what is allowed to be included in an academic journal's special issue on teaching Palestine/Israel, then this special issue and the academic journal simply corroborate with such anti-intellectualism and an assault on Palestinian narratives as well as critical Jewish narratives and actors. Notably, you are reading this article because of a series of editorial decisions that have not adhered to the argument of false equivalency and the

12 This point concerning the MAGA fracturing on Israel and "the Jews" is related but beyond the scope of this article. For an important analysis on this issue, see Ben Lorber and Jess Schwalb, "The Zionist Right Has a MAGA Problem" *Jewish Currents*, November 26, 2025, https://jewishcurrents.org/the-zionist-right-has-a-maga-problem; and Ben Lorber, "Nick Fuentes Has Officially Breached the MAGA Gates," *The Nation*, November 4, 2025, https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/nick-fuentes-carlson-israel-maga/tnamp/.

13 For works that illuminate the traditions of Jewish-American Palestine solidarity organizing and other legacies of social justice oriented anti-Zionist Jewish intellectual and political traditions, see, for examples, Marjorie Feld, *The Threshold of Dissent: A History of American Jewish Critics of Zionism* (New York University Press, 2024); Geoffrey Levin, *Our Palestine Question: Israel and American Jewish Dissent, 1948–1978* (Yale University Press, 2023); Benjamin Balthaser, *Citizens of the Whole World: Anti-Zionism and the Cultures of The American Jewish Left* (Verso, 2025); Atalia Omer, *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians* (The University of Chicago Press, 2019); Oren Kroll-Zeldin, *Unsettled: American Jews and the Movement for Justice in Palestine* (New York University Press, 2024). For an analysis that examines how and why the imposition of the IHRA definition entails policing the boundaries of who is acceptable and who is not acceptable Jew, see Itamar Mann and Lihi Yona, "Defending Jews from the Definition of Antisemitism," *UCLA Law Review* 71 (December 2024): 1151–1217, https://www.uclalawreview.org/defending-jews-from-the-definition-of-antisemitism/.

anti-intellectual and anti-Palestinian racist dehumanizing refusal of evidence, enabled by the mainstreaming of IHRA.

Still, IHRA has been aggressively promoted, especially after October 7th, and has been adopted by academic institutions of higher learning, including, as noted, Columbia. The University of California Board of Regents likewise voted in March 2026 to embrace IHRA in its effort to settle a lawsuit advanced by the Brandeis Center in 2023 seeking to delegitimize criticism of Israel.[14] Others, such as Harvard University and New York University (NYU), among other institutions, also divert people's attention from what is actually happening on the ground in Palestine/Israel.[15] A first comprehensive and evidence-based study by the American Association of University Professors and the Middle East Studies Association found, according to AAUP General Counsel Veena Dubal that "the Civil Rights Act of 1964—which passed in response to years of nonviolent civil disobedience against racial injustice—is being cynically misused to squash political dissent and speech that advocates for the human rights of Palestinians … This is a perverse outcome."[16] The report shows that despite the surge in investigations of "antisemitic" allegations, "all but one of the 102 antisemitism complaint letters analyzed focus on speech critical of Israel or Zionism with no reference to Jews or Judaism as antisemitism; 50 percent of the complaints consist solely of such criticism." "[B]ecause of their expertise on the region," Members of the Middle East Studies Association, the summary of the task force report surmises, "have long borne the brunt of

14 Strategic Communications, "UC Berkeley's Statement Following Brandeis Center Suit Settlement," *UC Berkeley News*, March 19, 2026, https://news.berkeley.edu/2026/03/19/uc-berkeleys-statement-following-brandeis-center-suit-settlement/.

15 See, for example, Benjamin Eidelson and Deborah Hellman, "Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and Title VI: A Guide for the Perplexed," *Harvard Law Review* 139, no. 1 (2025): https://harvardlawreview.org/forum/vol-139/antisemitism-anti-zionism-and-title-vi-a-guide-for-the-perplexed/.

16 Task Force on Civil and Human Rights, "Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine," Middle East Studies Association (MESA), November 5, 2025, https://mesana.org/advocacy/task-force-on-civil-and-human-rights/2025/11/05/discriminating-against-dissent-the-weaponization-of-civil-rights-law-to-repress-campus-speech-on-palestine?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQPNDA5OTYyNjIzMDg1NjA5AAEeNwa6BL20b6guuYkO47rf4R_9hF8e_p0AztkXml1kcOdYyt1ZWVeUYGTRH4w_aem_7FYp3Ifs57pRLOiLoNQ3bA. For the full report, see American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and MESA, "Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine," November 2025, https://mesana.org/pdf/Discriminating_Against_Dissent_Report.pdf.

allegations that falsely equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism."[17] This points to the epistemic level as a critical site of struggle and subsequently to our classrooms as either participants or disruptors of discursive violence shaping understanding and framing of Palestine/Israel.

Some institutions of higher learning have gone further to define Zionism as a protected category. Consequently, as they invoke Title VI, criticizing Zionism shifts from a matter of free speech and academic freedom to potential legal discrimination that could threaten the institutions' federal funding. The conflation of Jews with a political project in the MENA region, which IHRA articulates, uses Title VI to codify the boundaries of Judaism. The absurdity and danger of this move cannot be overstated, especially considering the risks it poses to "the wrong kind" of Jews—those who reject Zionist ideology and politics. Ironically, under the guise of "protecting Jews," weaponized antisemitism reduces all Jews to an essentialized and fetishized set of characteristics. The irony becomes even starker when Christian institutions and groups accuse Jews and Jewish-Israelis of not being truly Jewish because they supposedly fail to follow a predetermined script they expect "the Jews" to enact. I have personally experienced this, being repeatedly accused in my scholarship and teaching of not being "a real" Jew or "a real" Israeli.[18] My pedagogy challenges this scripted discourse that delimits an intellectually and ethically honest pedagogy about Palestine/Israel. How can we teach Palestine/Israel if any departure from a predetermined script and ideological boundary is immediately subject to litigation, silencing, character assassinations, academic gulags, and professional death/suicide? The problem to navigate is how to demystify the appearance of erudition that covers up the role of Palestine/Israel education in reproducing epistemic and political violence.

17 Task Force on Civil and Human Rights, "Discriminating Against Dissent."

18 See Atalia Omer, "I'm an Israeli Professor. Why is My Work in Harvard's Antisemitism Report?" *The Guardian*, May 9, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/09/im-an-israeli-professor-why-is-my-work-in-harvards-antisemitism-report. Likewise, on June 2, 2026, a group of Jewish Columbia University professors whose views diverge from IHRA filed claims with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for the being penalized on campus for literally being the wrong kind of Jews. One of the claims, for example, reads: "It was clear that the University's leadership embraced a stereotype that all Jews think alike, something that I find deeply offensive." See "Columbia Professors Bear Witness To the University's Antisemitic Discrimination Against Jews who Are Critical of Israel," published online, last updated June 3, 2026, https://sites.google.com/view/columbiauniversityantisemitism.

IHRA and related tools have opportunistically been adopted, as articulated explicitly in Project Esther of the Heritage Foundation (an addendum to this Foundation's "Project 2025" which outlines the blueprint for the second Trump administration's policies), by forces with regressive, racist, and Christian-centric agendas who capitalized on the use of antisemitism to whitewash an assault on academic freedom, LGBTQI rights, women rights, and affirmative action policies.[19] Suppose one aspires to teach Palestine/Israel, rather than reproduce Zionist hasbara or flawed explanatory frames that function to obscure root causes and delimit our ability to name what we learn and see using the precise analytic words and descriptive terms. In that case, we must violate the IHRA definition. Teaching with intellectual integrity means we have to name what the evidence presents as what it is. Teaching with intellectual integrity means resisting the overwhelming force of institutional gaslighting and gulaging. In what follows, I first sketch in more detail what IHRA is and its history before turning to how its adoption makes teaching Palestine/Israel with intellectual integrity impossible by design. I then discuss, secondly, how I navigated the demands of intellectual (and ethical) integrity in my courses on Palestine/Israel. I introduce my multifocal pedagogical methodology and use of the syllabi to counter epistemic violence. Finally, I will return to the question of why it is crucial to use the correct words and concepts to describe what we are talking about when we teach Palestine/Israel and why such intellectual integrity and analytic precision not only rectify the epistemic violence that denied Palestinian narratives of what Zionism has meant for their experiences. Such analytic clarity also reaches beyond Zionist and Israeli historiography to multiple Jewish counter-archives. Introducing students to alternative Jewish historical and religio-cultural archives is especially generative in situating the study of Palestine/Israel within a broader examination of Christian European modernity and in pointing toward a constructive reimagining of Jewishness in the MENA region.

19 Project Esther was published by The Heritage Foundation on the first anniversary of the Hamas-led attack on October 7th. This document is an addendum document to the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 which has provided the blueprint for the second Trump Administration's repressive policies. The weaponization of antisemitism in the aftermath of October 7th provides an opportunistic tool to mobilize the appearances of anti-racist discourse while promoting racist agendas. See also Darryl Li, "The Rise and Fall of Baby Boomer Zionism," *Hammer & Hope* 3, Spring 2024, https://hammerandhope.org/article/boomer-zionism; and Neve Gordon, "Antisemitism and Zionism: The Internal Operations of the IHRA Definition," *Middle East Critique* 33, no. 3 (2024): 345–360. Under the pretense of "protecting Jews," the regressive and conservative forces can proceed with their assault on the academy.

IHRA's Background

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is an international body established in 1998, tasked with thinking about the Holocaust as a global memory, with the intent to yield universally applicable pedagogies and memory curation of "never again." IHRA comprises 35 member states, bringing together experts, educators, policymakers, and diplomats. In its founding Stockholm Declaration (2000), it singles out the Holocaust as a unique event that threatened "civilization," thereby its lessons possess a universal significance. The inverse certainly is also the case; the Declaration "bestows uniqueness also on antisemitism, perceived as the key cause of the Holocaust, and on Israel, perceived as the post-Holocaust response."[20] Genocide Studies as a field of study has long problematized the singularity of the Holocaust, centering an analysis of European modernity/coloniality as predicated on multiple genocides against colonized and subjugated people.[21] De-exceptionalizing the Holocaust does not make it less of a horrendous crime against humanity, but it does situate it within a broader story of European modernity and its imperial, colonial, and settler-colonial projects, exposing the boomeranging of technologies and ideologies of extermination from the colonies back to Europe.[22] Yet, IHRA's privileging of the Holocaust's singularity (even upon its presumably universal lessons) has functioned to deny the Palestinian Nakba as an ongoing reality that has escalated into a genocide from 2023 to 2025. Indeed, the IHRA definition is predicated on anti-Palestinian racism.

This so-called IHRA's Working Definition on Antisemitism was adopted at the 2016 meeting in Bucharest, Romania. The history of this definition traces back to American Jewish lawyer Kenneth Stern, who wrote and published it in his role as the director of the antisemitism desk at the

20 Raz Segal and Sahar Aziz, "Threats to Free Speech and Palestinian Civil Rights: The IHRA Definition of Antisemitism," Issue Brief, Rutgers Law School, Center for Security, Race, and Rights, https://csrr.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/final-csrr-ihra-issue-brief.pdf, 4.

21 E.g., Dirk A. Moses. "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002): 7–36.

22 The concept of the imperial boomeranging was articulated by many critical theorists but is traced back to Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36. For a recent analysis of the boomerang effect of how US-patronage of the oppression, destruction, and dispossession against Palestinians has traveled back to authoritarianism at home in the US, see Noura Erakat, "The Boomerang Comes Back," *Boston Review* (Winter 2025), https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/the-boomerang-comes-back/.

American Jewish Committee in 2005. The definition was originally posted on the website of the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. In this early version, the definition was adopted by a variety of official and non-official government and non-governmental organizations. It is also well known that, since those early days, Stern has written extensively, stating that he never intended what he drafted to become a legally binding definition, highlighting its ambiguities, potential pitfalls, and possible manipulations.[23] However, the IHRA definition was introduced and promoted by Zionist actors aiming to shield Israel from delegitimization and criticism, thereby enhancing the use of accusations of antisemitism as a hasbara tool.[24] The result has been the persistent denial of Palestinian rights and narratives, along with a deceptive framing of Israeli aggression as self-defense and Jewish self-fulfillment, completely ignoring the historical and material implications of the abstract ideas of "Jewish redemption" and "return" for Palestinian lives. However, such spins are more difficult to maintain after more than a two-year-long live-streamed genocide. This explains why the enforcers of the epistemic violence that characterizes academic spaces in the US have intensified and doubled down on their repressive measures, dismantling programs and collaborations that threaten the overall Nakba denialism that underpins "acceptable" obedient teaching.

23 Kenneth Stern, "A Bad Deal: By Adopting the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism, Universities are Sacrificing Academic Freedom," *The Knight First Amendment Institute*, Columbia University, September 5, 2025, https://knightcolumbia.org/content/a-bad-deal-why-using-the-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism-on-campus-is-incompatible-with-academic-freedom-and-students-right-to-open-inquiry; and Stern, "I Drafted the Definition of Antisemitism. Rightwing Jews Are Weaponizing It," *The Guardian*, December 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/13/antisemitism-executive-order-trump-chilling-effect.

24 For a sample of the extensive research supporting this argument, see Antony Lerman, *Whatever Happened to Antisemitism? Redefinition and the Myth of the "Collective Jew"* (Pluto Press, 2022), 127–29; Kenneth Stern, *The Conflict over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate* (New Jewish Press, 2020), 149–51; David Feldman and Marc Volovici, "The Pure Essence of Things: Contingency, Controversy and thru Struggle to Define Antisemitism and Islamophobia," in *Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the Politics of Definition*, ed. David Feldman and Mac Volovici (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 3–19; Jan Deckers and Jonathan Coulter, "What is Wrong with the International Holocaust remembrance Alliance's Definition of Antisemitsm?," *Res Publica* 28, no. 4 (2022): 733–52; Peter Beattie, "Anti-Semitism and Opposition to Israeli Government Policies: The Roles of Prejudice and Information," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 15 (2017): 2749–67; and Barry Trachtenberg, "The End of Antisemitism: How the Fight Against Hate Became a Weapon of Repression," *Contending Modernities*, December 19, 2025, https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/end-of-antisemitism/.

Nakba denial is ingrained, as the aforementioned 7th example of the IHRA definition conveys, and it appears in the insistence on framing "the conflict" as between two nations (one land) rather than naming it settler colonialism and apartheid, as recognized by the international consensus of human rights organizations.

The weaponization of antisemitism and the ascendence of the IHRA's definition, therefore, reveal an effort to suppress decolonial epistemic interventions that have entered fields of study in the Western academy (beginning in the 1960s but coming to fruition in the 1990s), such as Settler Colonial Studies and Indigenous Studies, which interpret Palestine through these conceptual lenses and de-exceptionalize it. Applying the conceptual frame of settler colonialism to the study of Zionism has threatened hasbara actors who, spearheaded by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), manufactured a scholarly discourse and a political project in 1974 under the rubric of "The New Antisemitism."[25] The latter's scaffolding has been Islamophobic campaigns, dehumanizing Palestinians and projecting on them the label of "Nazis," "Muslim terrorists," and "Amalekites," among other Manichean tropes. Discursive maneuvers that also contribute to abstracting the specificities of the Palestinian struggle and resituate it on a Manichean "civilizational" terrain. Fearing a loss of the Zionist narrative of return and redemption (from the ashes) and the loss of innocence as an ontological victim, by the 1990s, Israeli hasbara fixated aggressively on equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism and reducing all "the Jews" to a singularity and an essence (which is ironically antisemitic).[26] Further, the "new antisemitism" discourse portrayed "the Muslim" as the enemy of "the Jew," now signifying a "Judeo-Christian" civilizational positionality. Capitalizing on the post-September 11 escalation of Islamophobia during the "war on terror," Israeli and Zionist hasbara in the early 2000s reacted to the momentous epistemic shifts in understanding Palestine/Israel. Such shifts in the international arena included the United Nations World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, which failed to pass an official condemnation of Zionism as racism (a resolution which passed the UN General Assembly in 1975 to be revoked due to immense pressures by 1991). The subsequent mounting mobilization of international law mechanisms and bodies to expose Israeli crimes, including of apartheid, military occupation, and genocide for decades was responded to (by the ADL and the American Jewish Committee as key actors) as "antisemitic", thereby delegitimizing evidence based arguments and revealing how the IHRA definition has been

25 Segal and Aziz, "Threats to Free Speech," 3.
26 Lerman, *Whatever Happened to Antisemitism*.

deployed, like other earlier maneuvers to spin Israel's aggression as self-defense, in anti-evidentiary mode to contain and control knowledge. The massive effort to deny evidence and spin a human wrong as a human right (to dominate, destroy, deny, depopulate) exposes why adopting the IHRA definition in academia entails an embrace of anti-intellectualism. It is also antisemitic by insisting on essentializing characteristics of all Jews and its disregard for actual Jews over and against protecting a political project.[27]

IHRA clearly predates the second Trump administration, which has used Project Esther's weaponized antisemitism to suppress academic freedom and target marginalized groups, using Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activists as proxies. Released on the one-year anniversary of October 7, 2023, Project Esther opportunistically leverages the long-standing weaponization of antisemitism (also known as the anti-antisemitism industry) to silence debate and criticism of Israeli policies against Palestinians, as well as the Islamophobic anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Muslim racism and "counter-terrorism" tactics developed during the so-called war on terrorism to push technofascism, neoconservative, regressive, and White supremacist agendas. In an ironic twist, Project Esther invokes a classic antisemitic conspiracy trope of a cabal pulling strings but attributes it to a "Hamas network" and a related network of "woke" enablers that need to be eradicated, including supposedly gullible Jewish critics of Israeli policies and Zionism. The (Christian) drafters of Project Esther build from the conflation of Jews and Israel (a political project) through the Islamophobic maneuvering to render any critics of Israel and Zionism as not only antisemitic but also anti-American. Project Esther, as it escalates IHRA, further diminishes the possibility of a rigorous teaching of Palestine/Israel. As soon as the second Trump Administration took office, as noted, Harvard University, while otherwise supposedly taking on the mantle of fighting for academic freedom, embraced the IHRA framework (or "the Palestine exception" for academic freedom) and declared Zionism as a protected category, which means a protection under anti-discrimination laws.[28] Since

27 "Classical" modalities of antisemitism thrive and are on the assent also an outcome of the growing alliances of White supremacist Christian nationalism with Zionism. For example, there is a religious liberty clause in the weaponization of antisemitism in the US to respect people's right to say that "Jews killed Jesus." See, Jacob Kornbluh, "Why the Antisemitism Awareness Act Now Has a Religious Liberty Clause to Protect 'Jews Killed Jesus' Statements," *Forward*, April 29, 2025, https://forward.com/fast-forward/716347/antisemitism-bill-congress-jews-jesus/.

28 For a layered discussion of the Palestine Exception and its long legacy in the American academy in particular, see Palestine Legal & Center for Constitutional Rights, "The Palestine Exception to Free Speech: A Movement Under Attack in

October 7th, therefore, the promotion of the IHRA definition became even more aggressive with dismissal of the fact that hundreds of experts in Jewish Studies, scholars of antisemitism, and genocide studies have discredited IHRA as intellectually dishonest in counter efforts to define antisemitism, such as the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism and the Nexus Document, "Understanding Antisemitism at Its Nexus with Israel and Zionism," initially published in 2020.[29] The result is not only the denial of Palestinian humanity, dignity, and historical facts (and what is termed anti-Palestinian racism) but also an assault on evidence and learning. The IHRA definition reveals how our universities are becoming anti-intellectual strongholds of ideological policing. Any discussion about teaching Palestine/Israel must confront this issue and the broader implications of the Palestine exception, rather than pretending there isn't a powerful force that has suppressed our academic freedom for decades through the delegitimization of Palestinian scholarship and narratives. This infrastructure of the Palestine exception has become an effective tool for the authoritarian takeover of universities overall.

What is "It"? When did "It" Start?

The teaching of Palestine/Israel in American and other western academic spaces entailed navigating an entrenched orientalist epistemic form of violence. This navigation means intentionality in foregrounding Palestinian scholarship in my IHRA-violating syllabi. Hence, I first intentionally explain to my students the thought process that went into syllabus construction and why this process is complex, as it pushes against epistemic violence. Second, I introduce students methodically to Edward Said's critique of orientalism and convey to them the need for self-reflexivity about our own location in the academy and Said's critique (drawing on an intellectual genealogy including Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci) of the relation between knowledge and power. The key takeaway point for the students is that

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the US," *Palestine Legal*, September 2015, https://palestinelegal.org/the-palestine-exception.

29 Notably, the Biden administration did not adopt IHRA in its mammoth antisemitism strategy, and in the US context a pattern of court decisions has suggested it has little purchase on the thinking of judges handling First Amendment and antidiscrimination cases. Still, IHRA's underlying premise and conflation of Jews with the Zionist political project are so entrenched that October 7th offered an opportune moment to push its adoption across multiple state and national institutions as well as academia as I highlight here since this essay is on pedagogies.

knowledge is not innocent, and our positionality needs to be interrogated as part of the learning (and unlearning) process.

In discussing Said's critique of orientalism as the discursive authorization of western colonialism, we zoom in on his discussion of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt (1798) and why he took with him a fleet of scholars (botanists, anthropologists, etc.) to study the "Egyptian mind." We reflect in class on why there was no counter-expedition by the Egyptians to study the "French mind" and what that means for our understanding of the relations between power and the production of knowledge. In some more advanced courses, we also carefully read Said's classic "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims" as a foundational text at the outset of our journey through the syllabus.[30] This article is extracted from Said's *The Question of Palestine*, the second in his trilogy, which also includes *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, all of which clarify the landscape of epistemic violence in which the question of how to teach Palestine/Israel is located.[31] I invite the students to reflect on the discursive conditions within which their learning experiences are performed as if innocently. Said writes with his characteristic analytic sharpness about the imperial discourse within which political Zionism was embedded: "Imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice, of changing the uselessly unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society."[32] Zionism as a colonial reality in Palestine, as a matter of the conditions for its fulfillment, has meant the denial and elimination of non-Jews in the land. It is the simplicity of land and demographics at the heart of settler colonial logic (maximize land, minimize natives on the land). Accordingly, Said writes: "[A]ll the constitutive energies of Zionism were premised on the excluded presence, that is, the functional absence of 'native people' in Palestine."[33] Any pedagogy on Palestine/Israel that brackets and ignores this basic analysis is intellectually dishonest and embedded within methodological nationalism and Zionist frames. At the same time, the imposition of the IHRA's definition makes such teaching with integrity impossible.

30 Edward W. Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 7–58.

31 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Pantheon Books, 1978); Said, *The Question of Palestine* (Times Books, 1979); Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (Random House, 1981).

32 Said, "Zionism," 28.

33 Said, "Zionism," 29.

In addition to Said, I intentionally introduce the students to other Palestinian thinkers who have used the analysis of settler colonialism and located the Zionist movement within its imperial nest from the onset and decades before the academic field of Settler Colonial Studies was shepherded by primarily White scholars such as Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini from Australia, New Zealand, and the US. These readings include, for example, Fayez Sayegh, "Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965)," which shows with clarity Zionism's or the Yishuv (the pre-state Zionist infrastructure in the land) reliance on British imperialism, the logic of racial segregation of space and labor, and force.[34] Introducing the students to Sayegh and to generations of other Palestinian scholars who have used this comparative analytic frame clarifies contrasts and tensions between the Zionist production of Jewish history in abstraction from Palestinian realities of depopulation.[35] Suppose the classroom experience takes Zionist claims without letting Palestinian interlocutors challenge them. In that case, the classroom is no longer a site of inquiry and evidence-based learning but a place to reproduce appeals to Jewish biblical (articulated as secular, aka "historical," or religious) entitlements, shifting the conversation from historical and political time to a messianic, teleological, and ahistorical narrative frame. Indeed, Said's early intervention directly challenges the later logic that underpins the IHRA's definition and stipulations for the containment of Palestine/Israel pedagogies. IHRA seeks to remain at the level of Jewish-Zionist abstraction where Jewish self-determination is enacted in biblical/messianic rather than material/historical temporality. Locating the analysis in history requires an ethics of relationality in which the fulfillment of self-determination and the creation of a Jewish-majoritarian political project necessitated the praxis of settler-colonialism (the displacement and replacement of the natives).

34 Fayez Sayegh, "Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965)," reprinted in *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 206–25.

35 See, for examples, Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine*; Rana Barakat, "Writing/Righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost(s) of History," *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 349–363; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Imagining Palestine's Alter-Natives: Settler Colonialism and Museum Politics," *Critical Inquiry* 47 (Autumn 2020): 1–27; Raef Zreik, "When Does a Settler Become a Native? (With Apologies to Mamdani)", *Constellations* 23, no. 3 (2016): 351–64; Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Baha Abu-Laban, *Settler Regimes in Africa and the Arab World: The Illusion of Endurance* (Medina University Press International, 1974); Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Stephen Sheehi, "Abolitionism, Settler Colonialism and State Crime," *State Crime Journal* 12, no. 2 (2023): 132–145.

Hence, foregrounding Palestinian scholars working within a comparative settler-colonial analytic frame is precisely where pedagogy happens. Actual teaching happens when the epistemic violence is exposed and transgressed. It is crucial to take on Said's challenge and let Palestinians narrate their story.[36] Often, such a pedagogical choice to center the colonized is delegitimized as counterproductive or "antisemitic." Critics might argue that beginning the syllabus immediately in a deconstructive mode with Said's work, without giving the students an opportunity to read the Zionist narratives and learn about the motivations of their proponents, is wrong. Such critics might ask, "Are students given a chance to understand why some European and Middle Eastern Jews would have embraced Zionism? And what did it mean to them?" Such critics might further argue that "students don't only need to learn how ideas are constructed and how they shape our vision of the world. They also need to learn about the ideas themselves, and why they resonate with people." In response, others might say: "Why should the instructor start with the narrative of the colonialists (even if they were persecuted in a different context)? Why is it impossible, or irresponsible, to start the narrative from the perspective of the colonized? Why is it irresponsible to demystify 'Zionist ideology?'" Palestinians have a narrative. Why should it always come second, or always as a response to Zionism?" Imagine how American history would be understood if we learned it first from Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*? Critical thinking requires decolonizing aspects of education. University classrooms should be the place for this type of pedagogy.[37] Starting with why people believe or support Zionism wouldn't change or challenge the "rigid binaries" of oppressors-oppressed, the critics assume when they urge and require us to center Zionist thought and experiences

Indeed, what is intriguing about Said's classic 1979 article is how he simultaneously outlines, with intimacy, what the Zionist idea has meant for Zionists and how it is nested within imperial discursive formations, as well as what it has empirically meant for indigenous Palestinians in Palestine. "Everything the Zionists did in Palestine they did, of course, as settler colonialists, yet everything they did in Palestine was enacted on the world stage … in a rhetoric and costume fundamentally of the same sort as the cultural currency of the period. Thus, Zionism initially portrayed itself as a movement bringing civilization to a barbaric and/or empty locale … Later

36 Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (1984): 27–48.

37 See Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2014).

… Zionism transformed itself into a movement bringing Western democracy to the East."[38] Said directs attention to the erasure of the people actually living in the land and their connections to broader movements such as Arab nationalism at the moment of their colonization by Euro-Zionists under the patronage of Britain. The epistemological orientalist violence manifests in the fact that "[v]ery little is said about what Zionism entailed for non-Jews who happened to have encountered it; for that matter nothing is said about where outside Jewish history it took place and from what in the historical context of nineteenth century Europe Zionism drew its force."[39] Said's points highlight the urgent need to bring the analysis down, so to speak, from the level of the biblical imagination to historical materiality and to a multifocal, multiperspectival analysis that is often deeply constrained by methodological nationalism in classroom teaching of Palestine/Israel.

In addition to disrupting the negation of Palestinian perspectives, experiences, and political aspirations, Palestine/Israel pedagogy within the IHRA framework entails a denial and negation of the Jewish tradition itself. Since this journal centers on "interfaith" inquiries and practices, it is essential to underscore that the meaning of "Jewish" in the construct and the practices of the "Jewish State" has to be interrogated, as it has been by scholars such as Yaacov Yadgar and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, among many others with historical and hermeneutical fluency.[40] Namely, what precisely "Jewish" means in Palestine/Israel and for Jews in other contexts, *and* what precisely it has meant for Palestinians for over a century of "contact" with Zionism. Indeed, as the aforementioned Palestinian interlocutors have stressed for decades, the story of self-fulfillment, "rebirth," and "redemption" for Zionism and the people who became embedded in this political formation has meant a narrative of displacement, depopulation, domination, and denial of humanity for Palestinians. It has meant, in the jargon of settler colonial studies, Palestinian *displacement* and their *replacement* by the settlers. This historical, political, and ethical point requires grounding the analysis in historical, political, and ethical frames, rather than in a secularized and then religionized biblical messianic timeline and land entitlements.

Raz-Krakotzkin's witty and whimsical characterization of the secular Zionists' founding fathers and mothers is illuminating: "[T]hey did not

38 Said, "Zionism," 12.

39 Said, "Zionism, 10.

40 Yaacov Yadgar, *To Be a Jewish State: Zionism as the New Judaism* (New York University Press, 2024); Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Mishna Consciousness, Biblical Consciousness: Safed and Zionist Culture* (Van Leer Institute Press and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2022).

believe in God, but God gave them the land."[41] This has caused ongoing tensions between the historical and comparative analysis of Zionist settler colonialism and the ways biblical narratives are used to justify a settler colonial reality, portraying it as re-indigenization or the teleological fulfillment of Jewish history. Indeed, narratives of return to a land where the settlers have never been are not unique to the settler colonization of Palestine by European Jews under the patronage of the British Empire. Manufactured (but probably authentically felt and experienced) narratives of chosenness and return are found in other cases of settler colonialism, as well as the use of the Bible to claim a providential license for the act of depopulating a presumably *terra nullius* and replacing the natives with a new society. Indeed, the discourse of Manifest Destiny in the land that became the US also deployed the tropes of Amalekite, chosenness, and providential calling for land conquest (and bringing "civilization," "progress," "democracy," and other "good news").[42]

To identify settler colonialism as an illuminating lens through which to explain and teach Palestine/Israel is not to discount other explanatory frames, such as nationalism. On the contrary, we need to convey to the students a multifocal interpretive scope. What the settler colonial analytic comparative lens does, however, is disrupt pedagogical approaches to Palestine/Israel that normalize it as a "conflict" between two nationalisms over one land. It further disrupts lazy framings of the discussion as "interfaith," which IHRA seeks to entrench in conflating "the Jews" with the political project of Israel. Situating Zionism within a more extended European colonial history and a racialized account of religion also clarifies where alternative Jewish histories and hermeneutics can enter the syllabus and destabilize the conflation of Jews with a genocidal settler colonial project. Hence, naming things as they are by using the most clarifying (and de-exceptionalizing) analytic frames also entails introducing students to the distinctions between "Zion" and "Zionism," and between Jews and their diverse and plural histories and hermeneutical praxis. It is indeed crucial to introduce students to how a reductive reliance on a selective reading (and reenactment) of the biblical texts, such as the conquest traditions or the anti-Roman rebellions of antiquity, at the expense of centuries of Jewish histories

41 This point is captured and unpacked in Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Religion and Nationalism in the Jewish and Zionist Context," in *When Politics Are Sacralized: Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalism*, ed.Nadim N. Rouhana and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 33–53.

42 John Corrigan, "Amalek and the Rhetoric of Extermination," in *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

in the plural and geographic diversity, reproduces an essentializing singularity of Jewish history and destiny that is rooted in Christian Europe. This also negates the many layers of history spanning centuries of the Land itself.[43]

Therefore, the Palestine/Israel syllabus has to address the multiple Zionist negations that shape and contain the pedagogical horizons. In addition to addressing the negation of Palestinian humanity and indigeneity and the negation of the Jewish tradition and hermeneutics that put guardrails against false messianism, the syllabus needs to highlight the negation of Arab-Jewish histories and legacies of Jewish lives in Muslim and Arab contexts, including in Palestine. The syllabus thus introduces students to critical Mizrahi scholarship and unsettling of Euro-Zionism from the perspective of "its Jewish victims" as Ella Shohat powerfully engages with Edward Said's analysis, understanding the experience of Jews who became incorporated in European Zionism through the same analytic lens as Palestinians albeit recognizing their differences, especially over time as Jews from Arab and Muslim lands became assimilated into the "Jewish" regime.[44] Students need to grapple with how Palestine/Israel relates to the concept of the "Judeo-Christian" and the assimilation of Jews into the framework of European coloniality/modernity and a "civilizational" struggle, positioning Jews as "buffer communities," such as during the French colonization of Algeria. This approach disrupts the more historically accurate conditions of Judeo-Muslim coexistence and communal interwovenness.[45] Rendering "Jews" and "Muslims" or "the Jew" versus "the Arab" as enemies and as antagonistically locked in an eternal conflict is a colonial and neocolonial discursive tool. Hence, introducing the students to texts such as Avi Shalim's memoir that depicts Jewish life in Baghdad where communities were interwoven with one another rather than reduced to their religious identities

43 For this crucial discussion, see Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (University of Chicago Press, 2001) and Nur Masalha, *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History* (Zed Books Ltd., 2018).

44 Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1–35; Shohat, "Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews," in *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, ed. Caren Kaplan and Robyn Wiegman (Duke University Press, 2006). See also, for other interventions, Smadar Lavie, "Mizrahi Feminism and the Question of Palestine," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7, no. 2 (2011): 56–88 and Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

45 For an exposition of the assimilation of Jews into whiteness and an Islamophobic "civilizational" discourse, see Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

along with films such as *Forget Baghdad* portraying the central involvement of Baghdadi Jews in Arab nationalism before it was disrupted by Zionism and broader colonial meddling through divide and conquer methodologies to the story of radical Mizrahi mobilization including of the Israeli Black Panthers in the 1970s and later feminist mobilization such as Shovrot Kirot and Ahoti help us to cover a massive pedagogical terrain through a process of unlearning the discursive framing that seeks to binarize "Arabs"/"Muslims" and "Jews."[46] Such scrutiny and unearthing constitute a decolonial approach to "interfaith" studies, by situating the production of "faith" (Jews versus Muslims, for example) in its context of colonial erasures and divisions.

Therefore, naming things for what they are and retrieving counter-archives (including counter-Jewish archives) to disrupt the various negations Zionism has imposed both epistemologically and materially has become an essential teaching method, focused on real understanding rather than coloring within the lines or reinforcing people's preset narratives. Such a syllabus challenges Zionist negations of interpretations and Jewish histories (including those in the MENA region), and it also unsettles Zionist teleology and historiography that emphasize biblical conquest traditions and antiquity by rejecting the notion of diasporas. This provides students with tools to study how Zionism and Israel are constructed as historical phenomena rather than solely biblical ones (without dismissing the importance of how biblical narratives and tropes are felt and selectively used and understood). Such a syllabus faiclitates learning how Jewish Zionism was rooted in Christian Zionism and influenced by imperial and colonial agendas.[47] Undoing these negations inherent in the Zionist frame that constrains pedagogy in the classroom (now with a threat of litigation as IHRA is adopted widely) finally creates the Palestine/Israel classroom as a site of learning rather than reproduction of mythologies and *hasbara* talking points. Only when the classroom is thusly subversive can actual pedagogy happen. The subversive aspect of this pedagogy is the simple empirical and analytic move to naming things what they are without a spin.

A syllabus that names things as they are, letting the evidence speak without an ahistoric gaslighting spin, amounts to an epistemology from the

46 See Avi Shlaim, *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew* (Oneworld Publications, 2023); Samir Jamal al Din, *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs- The Iraqi Connection* (Arab Film Distribution, 2002), and Asaf Elia-Shalev, *Israel's Black Panthers: The Radicals who Punctures a Nation's Founding Myth* (University of California Press, 2024).

47 See also Atalia Omer, Diane L. Moore, and Hilary Rantisi, "Touring Absences, Erasures, and Futures in the Unholy Land: A Religiously Literate Diasporic Reading of Palestine/Israel," *Palestine/Israel Review* 1, no. 2 (2024): 313–342.

margins, centering Palestinians. Relatedly, centering radical Mizrahi scholarship and other nonnormative Jewish voices moves the analysis from the ahistorical to the structural and empirical, and into the realm of the hermeneutical and constructive unlearning of Zionist dogma. This unlearning involves reclaiming alternative histories and Jewish traditions of interpretation, negated by the reduction of Jewishness to the biblical text and by the Zionist reading of Jewish history and redemption through biblical land entitlements. Hermeneutical religious literacy, retrieval, and reconstitution of alternative Jewish traditions need to be integrated into analytic frames that de-exceptionalize Palestine/Israel by deploying comparative analytic categories such as settler colonialism and racism. My Palestine/Israel pedagogy, therefore, is decolonial in terms of the deployment of religion and faith, thereby unsettling the ahistorical and depoliticizing use of "interfaith" in reference to Palestine/Israel as a "religious" topic.

My pedagogical prioritizing of an epistemology from the margins leads me to the second key pedagogical question. If the first concerns naming "it" for what it is, using a settler colonial perspective and the language of genocide, apartheid, and military occupation, then the second related question is: When did "it" begin? Mainstream pedagogies tend to start the timeline in 1948 with the "War of Independence" or the Nakba and the Shoah in Europe, or even later in 1967, when "Proper Israel" was officially normalized following the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem. As a result, "the conflict" becomes increasingly confined and fragmented territorially and normatively, with shrinking accountability for the Nakba or Palestinian depopulation that took place *before* the mass depopulation from 1947–9.[48] Starting the story there is also ripe with opportunities to redeem Zionists from their accountability to the Nakba by also foregrounding the Jewish trauma of the Holocaust, thereby risking conceptual traps of equivocation and absolving them from responsibility for the atrocities committed against Palestinians. This is the case despite the critical pre-October 7th interventions such as Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, who sought to think about the Holocaust and the Nakba multi-directionally and concurrently rather than through a zero-sum game to articulate an alternative political ethics accountable to historical crimes.[49]

48 See Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine* and Patrick Wolfe, "Purchase by Other Means."

49 Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, eds., *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History* (Columbia University Press, 2018). See also Michael

Notably Palestinians scholars have challenged the Bashir-Goldberg premise as a form of Nakba "recognition within a settler reconciliation framework," as Rana Barakat discusses the museumification of Lifta, one of the villages near Jerusalem, depopulated during the Nakba.[50] Relatedly, other critics such as legal scholar Sonia Boulos challenge the "liberal mode of genocide denialism" for failing to "link between the current genocidal violence in Gaza and the foundational violence of the Nakba and for subsequently positioning "genocide as an aberration rather than as the logical outcome of a political order premised on permanent security for the settler population at the expense of the Indigenous."[51] Even the Jewish Israeli human rights organizations, B'tselem and Physicians for Human Rights, finally (almost two years into it) called what Israel has been doing in Gaza genocide, along with prominent Jewish and Israeli figures who publicly wrote and spoke about their painful recognition that, yes, Israel, after all and despite their strong sense of tragic irony, has been committing genocide.[52] Rhetorically, these public reflections involve a reluctant disengagement from a conception of Jews as ontological victims (victims as a matter of their essence and identity). The long genocidal aftermath of October 7th has therefore made the discussion of an alternative political ethics delusional without an actual acknowledgment and reckoning with the genocide against Gaza and how it connects to the Nakba as an ongoing process and structures of depopulation, domination, denial, and destruction. This issue presses the need for the syllabi to explicitly name the realities (and the crimes) using their appropriate names: apartheid, illegal military occupation, settler colonialism, and genocide.

The traps of equivocating through the discussion of "trauma" also myopically conceal a much earlier starting point. The settler colonial perspective requires us to begin the story of "the conflict" at the latest in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration and to highlight the significant roles of both imperialism and Christian Zionism that existed before Jewish Zionism. The settler-colonial comparative framework repositions interpretive tools within the materiality of land accumulation and the influence of Christian European modernity and its racialized accounts of religion. It further de-

Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

50 Rana Barakat, "Lifta, the Nakba, and the Museumification of Palestine's History" *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 2 (2018): 1–15, 5.

51 Sonia Boulos, "The 'G Word,' Liberal Israeli Elites, and the Prospect of Decolonization." *Journal of Genocide Research* 28, no. 3 (2026): 553–73.

52 B'tselem, "Our Genocide," July 2025, https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202507_our_genocide_eng.pdf.

exceptionalizes Palestine/Israel, allowing for a more precise analysis rather than reproducing nationalist narratives about themselves as if they were empirical facts beyond questioning and historical context. What is "it"? When did "it" start?—these are the fundamental questions for analyzing every conflict because how we periodize and label "it" can significantly influence the pedagogical upshot.

Indeed, the main pedagogical challenge in teaching Palestine/Israel involves our ability to apply analytic frameworks that we typically use to examine other cases of settler colonial nationalism, apartheid, military occupation, and genocide. Because much of the teaching about Palestine/Israel tends to avoid disrupting the concept of methodological nationalism on one hand, and the biblicalist Zionist narrative of "return" to land rooted in settler colonialism and European imperialism on the other, the pedagogy often disregards accuracy and ends up reproducing Zionist nationalist discourses. Studying and teaching all forms of nationalism can include analyzing sociological facts and what nationalists say about themselves and their origins. However, the analytical work must also extend beyond the nationalist perspective to interpret when, for example, the nationalist discourse is embedded in racist exclusionary policies or to question who is pushed out of the frame.

Multifocal Pedagogy: Literally!

Methodologically, in introductory courses on Palestine/Israel, I use films to tell the story from multiple lenses, literally. The students are instructed to think carefully throughout the syllabus about who is and who is not within the frame and why. We begin with the film *1913: Seeds of Conflict*, zooming in on a particular moment that highlights the choice of what to include in the frame and what to exclude.[53] The film is based on an actual recruitment/promotional film done by the development (fundraising) organs of the Zionist Congress. The rediscovery of the old footage allowed historians to reflect on the critical moment in the transition from Ottoman Palestine to the British Mandate. The moment in the film that students always identify as pivotal is when the camera angle shows empty, "uncultivated" dunes, but if the cameraperson turns a bit to one side, a flourishing Palestinian neighborhood comes into view, which the film omitted. The camera's angle, in other words, was intended to convey a *terra nullius* ("a land without people

53 *1913: Seeds of Conflict*, directed by Ben Loeterman (PBS, 2015), https://www.pbs.org/show/1913-seeds-conflict/.

for a people without a land"). But this slogan immediately contradicted the reality of the land in between the two world wars as also noted explicitly by many Zionist thinkers of the Yishuv, such as Labor Zionist Yosef Weitz who wrote in his diary about the inevitability of "transfer" of the natives to accomplish the goal of creating a Jewish majoritarian state and Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky who wrote with honesty in his "Iron Wall" (1923) that force against the natives is the name of the game because their resistance to Zionist colonization is inevitable.[54] Indeed, early Zionist texts incriminate the movement precisely in the terms that IHRA seeks to censor from our pedagogies: settler colonialism, racist discourse about blood and soil, Eurocentric narratives about bringing "civilization" to the east, "transfer" to "Judaize" the land, and so forth.

Other key clarifying films that pertain to particular watershed moments, such as the Nakba, include *Farha* by the Palestinian filmmaker Darin J. Sallam (2021), which takes the viewer through the experience of the Nakba from the perspective of an adolescent girl stuck in her house's pantry, waiting for her father to come back and get her.[55] He never comes back because he and many others in the village were killed. Farha witnesses through a narrow opening the killing of an entire family by the Jewish militias, turned into the Israeli military. The film begins on the eve of the British departure. Farha resists her father's resolve to marry her off and insists on going to the city to complete her education. Moments before the Nakba begins in her village, she tells her best friend she wants to return and dedicate herself to girls' education. This potential path into social transformation in rural Palestine ends abruptly with the Nakba. At the moment the assault on the village begins, the dialogue in the film ends, and the viewer, in almost total silence, experiences, together with Farha, the long hours in the pantry. The film ends with her emerging into the long journey of exile and refugeehood, alone without her father.

Another film that foregrounds the Nakba as an ongoing experience of longing to return is *Salt of this Sea* by the Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir (2008), which tells the fictionalized story of Soraya, who grew up in Brooklyn but has imprinted in her brain the map of Yaffa of her grandparents, who were chased out from their home to a refugee camp in

54 Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, "The Iron Wall (*Rasswjet*)," originally published in *Deutsches Heft*, November 4, 1925 [1923], https://en.jabotinsky.org/archive/search-archive/item/?itemId=158379. We reflect on Weitz's "transfer" realism through Said's exposition of it in his "Zionism from the Standpoint."

55 *Farha*, directed by Darin J. Sallam (Picture Tree International, 2021).

Lebanon.[56] Soraya manages to come to Palestine, and with friends she meets in Ramallah, she ends up going to her family's home. They are welcomed in by the peace activist Irit, who lives there, and despite her niceness and hospitality, refuses to acknowledge that Soraya's family did not just "leave" Yaffa and that this is no "ancient history" but as Soraya screams at her in the film's pivotal moment, the experience of uprooting is her every day, not a closed off historical chapter (unfortunate but necessary for creating a "Jewish home" as the central early Israeli motif of "shooting and crying" connotes). Soraya demands acknowledgment, which Irit refuses to grant, and Irit calls the police to have Soraya kicked out. The apparatus of state violence is literally at Irit's fingertips. The film captures the entrenchment of liberal settler colonialism along with the narrative of Palestinian return and demand for acknowledgment of their experience of forceful depopulation and mass expulsion, also known as "ethnic cleansing." We view this film in class alongside Hagar Kotef's reading, which argues that violence is constitutive of the settler's consciousness, including in its liberal variety, such as that embodied by the fictionalized Irit.[57]

Other films that offer glimpses into the anatomy of structural violence include *The Law in These Parts* (Directed by Ra'anan Alexandrowicz, 2011) and *The Gatekeepers* (Directed by Dror Moreh, 2012), which, respectively, take the viewers into the consolidation of different sets of laws for the territories occupied in 1967 and "Israel proper" within the Green Line and the role of the security/intelligence infrastructure in maintaining and entrenching the military occupation.[58] Yet other films introduce the students to how the military occupation invades even the most intimate spaces and moments in Palestinian lives (e.g., *Omar,* directed by Hany Abu-Assad in 2013, and *Out in the Dark* by Michael Mayer in 2013).[59] Yet others go in-depth into the theo-politics of the settlers in the 1967 territories (*The Settler,* directed by Shimon Dotan, released in 2016), while others convey the role of Christian Zionists

56 *Salt of the Sea* (*Milh Hadha al-Bahr*), directed by Annemari Jacir (Lorber Films, 2008).

57 Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine* (Duke University Press, 2020), 137–184. We also engage with other scholarship on liberal settler colonialism, such as Lana Tatour, "Citizenship as Domination: Settler Colonialism and the Making of Palestinian Citizenship in Israel," *The Arab Studies Journal* 27, no. 2 (2019): 8–39 and Shira Robinson, *Citizens Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal State* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

58 *These Parts,* directed by Ra'anan Alexandrowicz (Roco Films International, 2011) and *The Gatekeepers*, directed by Dror Moreh (Cinephil; Sony Pictures Classics, 2012).

59 *Omar*, directed by Hany Abu-Assad (Adopt Films, 2013) and *Out in the Dark*, directed by Michael Mayer (Transfax Fil Productions, 2013).

(*Till Kingdom Come,* directed by Maya Zinshtein, released in 2020).[60] Yet, others engage in radical imagination through science fiction (*Lyd,* co-directed by Rami Younis and Sarah Ema Firedland, released in 2024).[61]

The use of such films, in a context dominated by a large industry of Palestine/Israel "conflict" films and a wealth of Palestinian cinema that also refuses to define Palestinians solely by their oppression, effectively conveys a multifaceted perspective within a relatively short timeframe of a syllabus. This includes the chronology of modern Palestine/Israel complexity and sharpens students' ability to interpret editorial choices, while prompting them to ask who is marginalized or omitted from the frame/lens and what functions these omissions serve. Moreover, the more than two-year Gaza genocide has added to the list of films—shorts and features—that document people's daily struggles and their fight for survival. Films such as *From Ground Zero* (curated by Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi, based on shorts by Gazans, released in 2024) and *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk* (a documentary on genocide by the slain filmmaker Fatma Hassona and Sepideh Farsi, released in 2025) as well as the Oscar nominated *The Voice of Hind Rajab* (2025) by Kaouther Ben Hania, centering the actual disembodied voice of a little 6 year old girl pleading with the grownups at the Red Crescent to come save her from a car riddled with bullets that murdered her relatives (alas the grownups struggle to get the green lights from the Israeli authorities to move their ambulance through an 8 minute drive)—all these films should be incorporated into the curriculum, alongside discussions of the heroism of Gaza's journalists and media workers, nearly 300 of whom were killed by Israel during the genocide.[62] Students need to grapple with why reporting from Gaza and the West Bank (and Lebanon) is so threatening to Israel and why Israel has forbidden foreign journalists and independent Israeli journalists from covering these areas without the filter of the military's propaganda apparatus. What is the connection between killing journalists and controlling narratives in our classrooms in the US? Pedagogies related to Palestine/Israel, especially after the escalation of genocide from October

60 *The Settler*, directed by Shimon Dotan (Talisma Prouctions and Filmoption International, 2016) and *Till Kingdom Come*, directed by Maya Zinshtein (Abramorama and MetFilm Sales, 2020).

61 *Lyd*, directed by Rami Younis and Sarah Ema Firedland (Icarus Films and Mad Films, 2024).

62 *From Ground Zero*, curated by Rashid Masharawi and the Masharaw Film Fund (2024), https://www.masharawifilms.org/from-ground-zero/; *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*, directed by Fatma Hassona and Sepideh Farsi (24Images Production, 2025); and *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, directed by Kaouther Ben Hania (Jour2Fête, 2025).

2023 to October 2025, cannot simply isolate the genocide and analytically return to October 6th, 2023, as if it never happened. One cannot simply return now to deploying the IHRA's definition to continue denying apartheid and an illegal occupation, along with Nakba and genocide denialism.

The multifocal approach and a syllabus of epistemology from the margins that challenge Zionism's multiple negations provide students with tools to interpret Palestine/Israel through comparative explanatory frameworks that promote unlearning methodological nationalism. The comparative analytic framework does not amount to an unreconstructed embrace of liberal accounts of human rights norms but rather is embedded in a decolonial counter-hegemonic approach to human rights, such as articulated in critical legal studies.[63] The challenge in teaching Palestine/Israel is that such an analytical step—namely, calling things as they are by allowing the evidence to speak—often gets wrongly labeled as antisemitic because the weaponization of antisemitism is used to restrict honest and critical teaching. Professors are disciplined and dismissed (professionally assassinated) for including words and concepts like apartheid, settler colonialism, and genocide in their syllabi, as if these analytical categories threaten Jewish safety and comfort. However, what such censorship truly undermines is our academic integrity.[64]

Beyond "Interfaith": A Conclusion?

This essay reflects on teaching Palestine/Israel at a time when, for more than two years, the world has been watching on livestream the utter destruction of Gaza and its people (extended into south Lebanon), along with a massive escalation of government-sanctioned settlers' violence in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem. The dominant policy in the American academy diverted attention from genocide and also refused to name it as such, despite overwhelming evidence and expert analyses. Underlying this form of intellectual dishonesty is the broad adoption of the IHRA's definition as one culmination of a long history of weaponization of

63 E.g. Balakrishna Rajagopal, "Counter-hegemonic International Law: Rethinking Human Rights and Development as a Third world Strategy," *Third World Quarterly* 27 (2006), 767–783.

64 For one prominent case involving a Jewish anti-Zionist professor activist in Palestine solidarity, see Sarah Viren, "A Professor Was Fired for Her Politics. Is That the Future of Academia?" *New York Times*, June, 6, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/06/magazine/academic-freedom-politics.html.

antisemitism for the purpose of shutting down criticism of Israeli policies and Zionism. On the other side of silencing and policing critics is the denial of Palestinian narratives, humanity, political claims, and truth. This denial is predicated on anti-Muslim racism and orientalism. Indeed, rather than think of the venue of a journal dedicated to "interfaith" in terms that simplistically extract "religion" from the structures of racialization and other forms of domination, an analysis that is "interfaith" has to demystify and historicize the construction of Israel as "Jewish" or an embodiment of a collective Jew or a part of a "Judeo-Christian civilization." This decolonial pedagogy exposes the Islamophobic and orientalist scaffolding of such a construction and highlights how a move to critique, in effect, opens up pathways for a constructive reimagining of the future otherwise, disrupting the colonial logic of deploying racialized "religion" to divide and rule.

However, a decolonial approach to teaching Palestine/Israel is threatening. It has been threatening for decades. Rather than inventing it, the post-October 7th period saw an increased weaponization of antisemitism to attack protests against Israeli genocidal policies and student movements demanding that their universities disclose and divest from their financial, intellectual, and military ties and collaborations with Israeli institutions and companies invested in the occupation, apartheid, and genocide (such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin). The students also resented being lied to and being treated in the classroom with intellectual dishonesty in terms of teaching on Palestine/Israel. What does this mean? It means, as noted, that teachers and students are fearful of calling genocide, apartheid, and settler colonialism by their comparative analytic names. The IHRA's definition and earlier variation on this type of censorship are at the heart of an intellectual dishonesty in the classroom and programming on Palestine/Israel. Hence, the students organized teach-ins to educate students and other community members. The challenges of anti-intellectualism, along with disingenuous and simplistic accounts of Jewish meanings, are often reduced into the agendas of a political project in the MENA region. This issue is compounded by orientalism and Islamophobia that sustain such reductive accounts, which conflate Jews with Israel. These challenges will persist in the aftermath of the Gaza genocide. While the fire will finally cease, the destruction and genocide will forever remain etched in Jewish and Palestinian histories, albeit differently.

The embeddedness in a narrative of Jewish victimhood and a Zionist storyline about redemption from the ashes of the *Shoah* (though Zionism as a settler colonial movement from Europe predated the *Shoah*) allows public regrets to express shock and disgust at how the political and military

leadership of Israel led it astray. Regardless of how sharp the critique is, it diverts attention from the foundational settler colonial processes and ideology (Zionism) of dispossessing and replacing Palestinians and the need to interrogate the racialization and reduction of Jews to a political project. In the same way, Palestinians' humanity and dignity do not and should not be indexed to their "faiths," and framing their freedom as an outcome of an interfaith deliberation is flawed and depoliticizing, even if liberatory theological and religious texts and praxis play generative roles in Palestinian resistance to occupation, apartheid, and empire.[65] "Faith" and "interfaith", therefore, cannot simply be analyzed as self-evident categories in Palestine/Israel pedagogies. Here comes once again the pedagogical imperative to name things what they are, puncturing the pull of faith-washing.

Indeed, many experts and observers have for months called the utter destruction and starvation of the narrow strip genocidal.[66] The latter group often suffered professional and other consequences for their intellectual and ethical integrity as experts in international law or the comparative study of genocide. Meanwhile, the apologists did not. The Jewish and Jewish-Israeli latecomers rhetorically displayed the same familiar pattern. First, they explain why they denied genocide till an extremely late stage. Second, they explain how their willful refusal to name things as they are connected to their Jewish Holocaust education and how their admission is emotionally painful (once again centering "Jewish feelings" in a time of genocide against Palestinians). The public acknowledgment of genocide is framed as the upshot of a careful process and is linked to a storyline about antisemitism on campuses.[67] This rhetorical maneuvering and rationalization anticipate that "One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This," as the title of Omar El Akkad's book provokes.[68] Hence, such maneuvering with its focus on Jewish emotions persistently centers Jewish fragility, still discussing "our"

65 See, for example, Munther Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza* (Eerdmans, 2025); Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible* (Orbis Books, 2023); and John S. Munayer and Samuel S. Munayer, *The Cross and the Olive Tree: Cultivating Palestinian Theology amid Gaza* (Orbis Books, 2025).

66 See Raz Segal, "A Textbook Case of Genocide," *Jewish Currents*, October 13, 2023, https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide; Sonia Boulos, "The 'G Word.'"

67 E.g., Lihi Ben Shitrit, "As an Israeli Political Scientist, I Resisted Thinking this War was a Genocide. Here's What Changed My Mind," *Forward,* August 2, 2025, https://forward.com/opinion/759877/israeli-genocide-gaza-liberal-jews/; Dov Waxman, "Why I Changed My Mind on the Genocide Charge Against Israel," *Medium*, August 1, 2025, https://medium.com/@dov.waxman/why-i-changed-my-mind-on-the-genocide-charge-against-israel-897c9e043b9e.

68 Omar El Akkad, *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* (Knopf, 2025).

genocide through the language of Jewish safety, security, and self-defense. Filtering the irrefutable genocide through a particular Jewish-Zionist narrative frame ultimately refuses to discuss Zionism as a racist ideology that has colonized the meaning of what it means to be Jewish.

I conclude with this discussion of "our genocidal" moment because, although it was not inevitable, there may have been off-ramps. The genocide and attempt to depopulate Gaza are consistent and part of a continuum with the Nakba. Teaching students about the long processes and different methods of displacement and replacement of native Palestinians would mean explaining how a principle of supremacy—where "from the river to the sea," Jews have more rights than non-Jews—has been put into action. You cannot discuss Jews and Judaism without also analyzing the logic of racialization, which necessarily requires including critical Mizrahi scholarship in the educational scope. This scholarship has long highlighted that the stories of Palestinian displacement are intertwined with the uprooting of Jews from Islamic and Arab countries, *including* Palestine, and their incorporation into the euro-Zionist agenda that homogenizes Jewish history and identity. However, the discursive space in American academia and other parts of the West often prevents honest pedagogies. The horrific events of October 7, 2023, and the weaponization of antisemitism to divert attention from the U.S.-Israeli genocidal response to the Hamas-led attack have undermined the possibility of maintaining academic integrity in teaching spaces. Those who uphold intellectual honesty are often policed, marginalized, or silenced. Many professors—especially vulnerable ones—face students who could (and know they could) destroy their careers. If the IHRA parameters restrict our teaching, then what we do is not true teaching but merely coloring inside a pre-set frame that excludes words and ideas such as apartheid, settler colonialism, and genocide. Instead, it perpetuates a form of methodological nationalism that constrains and polices the pedagogical landscape. The only form of teaching, therefore, has to be subversive.

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