

PALESTINIAN ERASURE IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

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DEDICATION

To Abdalqader.

ABSTRACT

While extensive research has been conducted on the concepts of dehumanization and settler colonialism, this thesis draws connections between the two concepts, highlighting how they empower and perpetuate each other to justify and maintain the erasure of Palestinians in alberta schools. The purpose of the thesis is not to prove Palestinian erasure, as facts speak for themselves, but to make visible the extent of it, by highlighting dehumanization and settler colonialism as the underlying factors advancing this erasure.

Therefore, this thesis serves to address the following questions: How has Palestinian erasure been justified? Why is Palestinian erasure necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics? And how has Palestinian erasure come to dominate school and curricular discourse in alberta? I address these questions using a framework of interdependence to shed light on the dependence of Palestinian erasure on dehumanization and settler colonial violence. This sets the stage for the conversation of how Palestinian erasure has come to dominate school and curricular discourse in alberta. I refer to this dominant discourse in alberta schools as the Official Story. I conducted qualitative interviews with three Palestinians who attended high school in alberta (February, 2026); the narratives shared by these participants serve as the Counter-Story to the dominant Official Story. Therefore, I used a counter-storying methodology throughout the thesis to highlight the extent of the erasure faced by Palestinians in alberta schools.

To further highlight this erasure in the Official Story, I conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of various alberta school and curricular documents, coding for

various discursive strategies: Normalization; Assimilation; Implicature; Framing; Repetition; Ambiguity and Manipulation of Truth; and, Passive Voice. These discursive strategies are the technologies of power that can turn dehumanization into material acts of physical and psychological settler colonial violence, thereby perpetuating the erasure and oppression of Palestinians in alberta schools. Alongside participants' counter-narratives, this thesis provides insights and recommendations for teachers, administrators, and school boards on how to live up to what they call "safe spaces" and "inclusive education," and strategies to challenge anti-Palestinian racism (APR) in alberta schools. This thesis is written with the intention of influencing curricular documents and decisions, as well as challenging administrators, teachers, and policymakers more broadly to end Palestinian erasure in alberta schools.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Work described in this thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “THE EXCEPTION OF PALESTINE IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS”, Study ID: Pro00150039_AME1, February 2, 2026.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APR	Anti-Palestinian Racism
ATA	Alberta Teachers Association
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
ICC	International Criminal Court
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
IOF	Israeli Occupation Forces
MA	Master of Arts
PCC	Palestinian Canadian Congress
PoS	Program of Studies
SWANA	Southwest Asia and North Africa

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

“If I must die, you must live to tell my story”

— Refaat Alareer, *If I Must Die*

Introduction

My name is Deema Abushaban. I recognize that it is not common practice to start a thesis, or any written academic piece, with your name; however, as a Palestinian, my name carries meaning. It is a way to situate myself in my writing. History and contemporary politics, along with Zionist propaganda, have taught people that Palestinians have either never existed, ‘*a people without a land for a land without a people*,’ or that we are animals, insects, terrorists, antisemites. As Arabs, we name our children with the hope that they will one day embody their names, *issim a’la musamma*. My name is Arabic for a cloud that lets down light showers of rain unaccompanied by lightning or thunder; it is a cloud that brings about spring flowers and an abundance of greenery. My family chose this name with the hopes that this is who I would become. However, what my family hopes is not for me to be a peacemaker, but someone who does whatever it takes to bring about spring flowers. As a Palestinian, these spring flowers became a symbol of Palestinian liberation. I am situating myself in my work as this cloud. Throwing my fist in the air, chanting *Free Palestine* in the streets, teaching about the genocide in Gaza in my social studies class, and challenging systems of power are still embodiments of my name, because a cloud that lets down rain *accompanied* by thunder and lightning is still a cloud, and resistance in the face of oppression is not terrorism. Terrorism can never bring about spring flowers, but resistance can.

The Global North (Mignolo, 2011) takes our names and molds our narratives; our names turn from meaningful to meaningless, our fight for basic rights is labelled an act of terror or antisemitism. During one of my education practicums, I had run into a student who I knew from a previous job. I called out his name, *Abdulrahman*, which is Arabic for *the servant of The Most Gracious*, excited to see him again. He looked at me in embarrassment and whispered “that's not my name here. Here they call me Abed. Only call me *Abed*.” They conveniently shortened his name from *the servant of The Most Gracious* to *slave*. *They take our names and mold our narratives*. So, while it may be unorthodox to start this thesis off with a conversation on names, it embodies the gist of this thesis work. This work is a reclamation of our names and our narratives in the face of Zionist settler colonialism and its objective of Palestinian erasure.

I begin this process of reclamation with my intentional decapitalization of settler colonial state names (i.e. israel, canada, the united states of america). Anything that exists on stolen land cannot possibly be classified a proper noun, as there is nothing proper about land theft and Indigenous erasure. The only time these names are capitalized are in the unfortunate circumstance of necessity in titles of other's work, and in citations. Forgive the red squiggly lines that appear as a result of my legitimate, forgiving act of resistance.

I am a Palestinian educator who has lived and breathed what it means to be Palestinian my whole life. I understand colonial violence firsthand, both in the context of being Palestinian in Palestine and in exile. I go nowhere without my politics. This understanding was further developed through my experiences as a graduate student conducting research on Palestine, and working alongside Palestinian participants. These

experiences of colonial violence are what fueled this thesis. Therefore, this work is a product of my own lived experiences as both a Palestinian teacher and student. My experience obtaining ethics approval for this research paints a clear picture of the colonial violence I am referring to.

When I began my MA, I anticipated what Miranda Fricker (2007) refers to as *epistemic injustice*. Fricker divides epistemic injustice into two types: *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. She defines testimonial injustice as a “prejudice [that] causes a *hearer* to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). The ethics approval process required to conduct research with students for this thesis was riddled with epistemic injustice. In the case of my ethics application process, the *hearer* was the University of [a]lberta ethics office, and the *speaker* was me, a Palestinian Muslim woman and researcher looking to work with other Palestinians. As a Palestinian working within my own community, I have a level of credibility that is higher than non-Palestinians, simply because I have a better understanding of the cultural nuances. I am in community with Palestinians and have been my whole life. I come from generations of resistance and refusal in the face of Palestinian erasure, and the commonalities in our experiences and our stories are the basis of the trust we have developed within our community. This being said, to conduct my interviews, I was still required to go through a mandatory process of obtaining approval from people *outside* of my community. However, what I am arguing here is not that I was required to obtain ethics approval to conduct my research, but the paradoxical nature of who I had to obtain it from. The process of obtaining approval is put in place to ensure that the focus of the research is “on the participants or subjects of the research rather than on the individuals

doing the research” (University of [a]lberta, 2025). Additionally, the fundamental objective of a research ethics review is supposedly to protect “participants by minimizing the harms or risk to which they are exposed” (University of [a]lberta, 2025). Therefore, I was put in a position where I, a Palestinian, was mandated to receive approval for conducting research within my own community from a settler colonial institution.

At the same time as I was going through the ethics process, a process which, again, the University of [a]lberta (2025) claims is essential to protecting participants by minimizing the harms and risks that they are exposed to, their administration approved the violent suppression and assault of Palestinian and anti-Zionist anti-israel supporters by police during the protest encampments that were erected as an attempt to pressure both the University of [a]lberta and the University of [c]algary to divest from the state of israel in May of 2024 (Kent, 2024). So, while I was applying for approval to conduct research alongside Palestinians from my community, with the intention of highlighting the importance of Palestinian narratives and discourse, and the detriments of anti-Palestinian racism (APR) in schools, the institution I was forced to seek approval from was actively dehumanizing and violating Palestinian lives. I mention this not solely because of its absurdly paradoxical nature, but also to highlight why my methodological approach, which I articulate in the following section, plays a pivotal role in understanding and fighting anti-Palestinian racism in alberta, and canada more broadly. This epistemic injustice is one of many sparks that fueled this thesis. When Palestinians are told that they are *too* Palestinian to share their history, their stories, and the stories of their ancestors, when they are named as terrorists for fighting to protect their land and their people, when they are classified as antisemites for criticizing those who have occupied their land,

uprooted their trees, and murdered their families, the spark turns to a flame, and the flame ignites resistance. This thesis is my resistance.

Anti-Palestinian racism permeates public school systems and universities (Majid, 2022). I know this firsthand, both as a Palestinian who has taught in these schools and as a Palestinian who has attended these institutions. Anti-Palestinian racism is unique in that it is a result of decades of Zionist propaganda that is intentionally placed in learning materials and curricular documents to advance settler colonialism in Palestine, and elsewhere (Said, 1978; Saleh & Awwad, 2024; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Weiner, 2023). In other words, anti-Palestinian racism is inflicted upon Palestinian students by the *schooling* system itself. I use *schooling* rather than *education*, as schooling “is a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (Shujaa, 1994, 15). This is the same system that is meant to protect *all* children. Schools are settler colonial institutions, and these institutions have adopted definitions and policies to ensure that the violence inflicted upon Palestinians by Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine follows them into exile, and in the context of this thesis, this exile is alberta schools. According to Tuck and Yang (2012), “settler colonialism has shaped schooling and educational research in the United States and other settler colonial nation-states” (p. 2). This is not coincidental. As I will discuss throughout the thesis, settler colonialism is a set of structures, it is not an event, and settler colonial societies share their methods of repression (Collins, 2000; Krebs, 2012; Wolfe, 2006).

Positionality

Salaita (2017) posed an important question: “What does it mean to conduct the work of Palestine solidarity in spaces that are themselves still colonized?” (p. 27). I am starting this section with this question to situate myself as a settler on stolen land.

Although I am not here by choice, and my being here in Canada as a Palestinian is a result of Zionist settler colonialism, I am still a settler, as I am benefiting from the settler colonial system put in place (Lawrence & Dua, 2011; Phang, 2011). Additionally, I do not intend to speak on behalf of other Indigenous peoples, or even all Palestinians throughout this work, as it is not my place to do so; however, I will begin a deliberate process of re/storying Palestinian history alongside Palestinian, Black, Indigenous and other authors and scholars from the Global South (Mignolo, 2011), offering a counter-narrative to the dominant Zionist propaganda that has been taught in Canadian schools for decades. I position myself as a Palestinian educator from Gaza, raised between the Global North and the Global South. According to Mignolo (2011), the Global South

is not a geographic part of the planet, but the places on the planet that endured the experience of coloniality - that suffered, and still suffer, the consequences of the colonial wound (e.g., humiliation, racism, genderism, in brief, the indignity of being considered lesser humans). (p. 185)

Therefore, I use the terms Global North and Global South, rather than the *west* and the *east*, as they provide the necessary context of colonial history. However, I use the terms west and east when engaging with Said's (1978) work in Chapter Two, as he used

these terms to make his arguments, and using these terms in conversation with his work allows for more clarity.

I position myself as someone who has experienced dehumanization, erasure, and silencing at the hands of settler colonial anti-Palestinian racism in both my personal and academic life. I aim to draw parallels and distinctions between being Palestinian in Palestine and being Palestinian in exile to highlight and recognize that violence is a spectrum, and that the settler colonial violence inflicted upon Palestinians does not end at the borders of our land, because for Palestinians, our skin is that border.

The Focus of the Thesis

My thesis initially focused on Palestinian erasure in alberta schools and curriculum as a violation of freedom of expression; however, after giving it some thought, I realized that it is not merely a violation of freedom of expression, but of humanity at the most basic level. Palestinian erasure is a genocidal practice calling for the elimination of Palestine and Palestinians.

My thesis asks educators who have only been taught, and now teach, Zionist propaganda to throw out history as they know it and have taught it, and to rewrite, relearn, and reteach it as the truth that emerges from Palestinian narratives and lived experience. This work also serves as a roadmap that draws parallels between the macro and the micro. I draw a straight line between the history of the dehumanization of the Arab and Muslim, to how this dehumanization works to justify the Zionist settler colonialism inflicted upon Palestinians in Palestine, and how this violence follows the Palestinian into exile, specifically how it is exercised against Palestinians in alberta

schools. This thesis forces educators to critically think about how language is used as a tool to advance settler colonialism, and how it has been mobilized to advance anti-Palestinian racism in alberta schools.

This is not a thesis in the general sense, in that it is not a hypothesis I have to prove. I do not seek to prove, or provide evidence of the effects of settler colonialism on Palestinians. This thesis is a statement of fact, not rooted in solid arguments, but nonnegotiable truths. It is a counter-narrative to the Zionist propaganda that suggests that any reference to Palestine, its people, and/or the violence and genocide committed against them, and any criticism of israel and Zionism is an act of antisemitism. It is the counter-narrative to the notion that Palestinians are subhuman, or human only under the label of terrorist or terrorist sympathizer. This thesis is a counter-story to the rampant Zionist propaganda that has dominated schooling discourse for decades. Students in our classrooms today are on social media, learning in real time in the digital age. They are bearing witness to the counter-stories of Palestinians every day; the discrepancies between the real world and what they are being taught in the classroom have become abundantly clear. Students are calling a spade a spade, and the spade here is genocide. Students are calling **bullshit in the face of Palestinian erasure**.

Finally, the process of writing and researching this thesis was not linear, as I expected it to be, as the violence inflicted upon Palestinians is not linear. There is no start or end point. It is a cyclical violence, and the end to the cycle is Palestinian liberation. I went back and forth, grappling with right and wrong, making sure I proceeded deliberately and intentionally throughout. I wanted to make sure I did not lose myself or my values throughout this process, as I quickly realized that this is an easy thing to do in

academia. It was a process of gaslighting myself, at times refusing to believe that what I had to say was just as important as what others said before me. I would talk myself out of making certain points out of fear of upsetting people or exposing myself. But I eventually decided that this was not something I had to consider, because while my truth may upset others, I refuse to center and prioritize their feelings over my own lived experiences, and the truth of what is happening and has been happening to Palestinians for centuries. I do not care to spare feelings in a conversation about the deliberate erasure of my people. All of this to say, this thesis will make many uncomfortable, but I ask the reader to sit in this discomfort and learn.

Methodology

My approach to this work begins by focusing on what it means to be Palestinian in the context of Zionist settler colonial occupation in Palestine, and how the violence inflicted by this world order follows the Palestinian into exile, specifically into schools and school curricular documents. I draw parallels between these two worlds to highlight the importance of attending to Palestinian students in alberta schools, and the importance of both recognizing and working to abolish anti-Palestinian racism. Palestinians do not only experience violence in Palestine; the violence they experience in exile just takes on a different form. Palestinian students are erased, silenced and dehumanized in alberta schools, and schools across canada (Saleh, Saberi, & Awwad, 2026). As a result, any academic work that aims to address the experiences of Palestinian students in school, should put into action everything I am putting into words beginning with this premise: Palestinians are human beings who deserve to be treated as such.

I am asking and will address three important questions in this thesis:

1. How has Palestinian erasure been justified?
2. Why is Palestinian erasure necessary, according to (Zionist) settler-colonial logics?
3. How does Palestinian erasure manifest in alberta schools and alberta curricular documents?

Answering these questions requires an understanding of what Alasah (2024) referred to as a framework of interdependence, which I will refer to throughout the thesis.

Interdependence relies heavily on understanding the existence of the matrix of domination within colonised societies. Alasah (2024) adopted the idea of the ‘matrix of domination’ from Collins (2000), who defined it as an “overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (p. 228). In other words, it is how structures of power are organized and interact with each other in a given society in order to sustain oppression. Alasah (2024) highlighted the importance of interdependence as a theoretical framework by using the example of patriarchy and colonial violence in the context of Palestine. She stated that “patriarchy and colonial violence do not simply intersect but rather empower and perpetuate the sustainability of one another” (p. 111). She argued that one system cannot be viewed as separate from the other, as the two systems - patriarchy and colonial violence - work in harmony to further the oppression of the colonized, and any change in one system inevitably impacts the other.

Similarly, I use this framework of interdependence to highlight how dehumanization and settler colonialism work together to oppress, and sustain the oppression of Palestinians in Palestine and in exile. Dehumanization and settler

colonialism do not simply *intersect*, just as colonialism and patriarchy do not, but empower one another to ensure that Palestinian erasure is sustained everywhere, even in schools. This is why it is important to use interdependence as a theoretical framework when working with Palestinians. All of this must remain at the forefront of consideration when working with Palestinians or teaching Palestinian students. To know how to apply these concepts to research, it is important to ask several necessary questions: How can researchers, teachers, or anyone working with Palestinians make sure they are not taking them out of context? How can Palestinians' safety and acceptance be ensured without forcing ways of existing that ask Palestinians to reject parts of their being and knowing? How can – and do – Palestinians continue to resist and exist, simultaneously?

Settler colonialism must be contextualized geographically and temporally. Although theorists like Patrick Wolfe (2006) argued that it is a structure rather than an event, the impacts and interdependence of settler colonial structures that Alasah (2024) discussed make our bodies the vehicles for different kinds of vulnerability, depending on the geopolitical, social and psychological contexts in which people are situated. In other words, people cannot conduct research alongside Palestinians, or teach Palestinian students, in settler colonial classrooms without understanding the dehumanizing and settler colonial histories that are specific to them, and that they have lived and breathed their entire life. Therefore, understanding this framework of interdependence helps answer the question of how Palestinians have been dehumanized in mainstream discourse, and alberta school curricular documents, as well as how language has been mobilized to advance anti-Palestinian racism in alberta schools.

Counter-Storying

Counter-storying is a method born out of Critical Race Theory to challenge reductionist narratives about racialized people that perpetuate inequity and marginalization, and that advance propaganda and stereotypes in academic literature. Counter-storying also interrogates the idea that research is ‘objective.’ Critical race scholars have long recognized that claims to objectivity in research mask these normative assumptions and deficit narratives (see, for example: Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) have expanded on Critical Race Theory work to include what they refer to as *Critical Race Methodology* (p. 24). This approach is in line with my research process, as it “foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process ... challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color” (p. 24). Foregrounding race and racism in my research process is a necessary step for the recognition of anti-Palestinian racism in schools.

Likewise, challenging traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories about Palestinians, other Arabs, and Muslims, as I do in Chapter Two, is integral to recognizing the problem before taking the necessary steps to resolving it. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) identified counter-storying as a necessary component of critical race methodology, classifying it as a form of “storytelling resistance” (p. 32), shattering complacency and challenging the dominant discourse, what I refer to in the final chapter of this thesis as the *Official Story*. The word *official* here does not imply *true*. It is official in the sense that it is what is officially defined and stated. It is the narrative that has been normalized and widely used to advance Palestinian erasure. It is the story undergirded by state power, which is why people do not question it. It is the *settler narrative* (Barakat, 2018) which I

refer to throughout the thesis. Therefore, counter-storying, as a part of critical race methodology, cannot be overlooked when working with Palestinian students.

While I do not necessarily agree with using the term counter-story to represent these narratives, it is the most appropriate term to use in the context of this thesis, as the intention of the thesis is to *counter* dominant settler narratives. The reason I do not agree with the term ‘counter-story’ is because it implies that these Palestinian narratives were born out of opposition to a dominant narrative, and that they were born when counter-storying as a methodology was born; however, they are stories that have always existed, and have been passed down through generations. They are the narratives that form the roots of Palestinian resistance and refusal; Palestinians are born into a storytelling tradition, listening to, and regurgitating stories which have been passed down intergenerationally. In other words, Palestinians have always narrated the counter-story, academia has just only now been able to label and define it.

In the final chapter of the thesis, as previously mentioned, I use this counter-storying approach to challenge the dominant narrative, which I refer to as the *Official Story*. The Official Story is comprised of the *[a]lberta Education Act, The Guiding Framework, and the [a]lberta K to 12 school curricula (program of study)*. The Counter-Story will be narrated by Palestinian students and teachers in alberta schools. These stories were shared with me during qualitative interviews I conducted alongside these participants. Putting the Official Story and Counter-Story in conversation with one another serves to highlight the discrepancies that exist between what is said to be happening in alberta schools, versus what is actually happening. It is also a means to counter the rampant Zionist propaganda that has dominated mainstream discourse,

including curricular discourse, both written and lived (Aoki, 1993), within the schooling system in alberta. Additionally, I share the Official Story and Counter-Stories in the final chapter of the thesis as they are products of the dehumanization and settler colonial violence discussed in the previous chapters.

As you read this work, please keep in mind that no two Palestinians are the same, just as no two people are the same. This consideration is important because the concepts and critiques discussed throughout the thesis draw from my experiences as a Palestinian teacher and student in exile, alongside the experiences of Palestinian participants.

Qualitative Interviewing

As mentioned, as a part of my research, I conducted open ended qualitative interviews with three Palestinian participants. Two of the interviews were conducted with Palestinians who graduated from high school in alberta and who are currently attending a post-secondary institution in alberta, and one with a Palestinian educator who has taught exclusively in alberta schools. The interviews were conducted in February 2026, and were recorded and transcribed. I provided participants with consent forms with clear expectations and an ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Two participants decided to remain anonymous, and one wanted to use their real name. As mentioned, as a Palestinian, I do not function independent from my community. Community was the focal point of my interviewing process. It made finding participants for this study quite simple, and it was the reason for the pre-existing rapport that I had with each participant, despite not knowing each of them personally.

When conducting research that involves Palestinian participants, there is a lot to consider to ensure that they feel safe enough to share. The researcher must show participants that they are interested in their stories as well as demonstrate deep consideration, including to their family's story of how they came to be in exile. It is important to consider where in Palestine they are from, because while Palestinians have a collective struggle, they have more localized struggles as well. This means stepping away from eurocentric conceptions of care and compassion, and thinking about what care and compassion look like for Palestinians.

Another consideration I took was to conduct the interviews in the homes of the participants, whenever it was possible, where they could be surrounded by family and were in a space that felt safe and familiar to them. This was important because I was asking participants to share their personal experiences with anti-Palestinian racism in Alberta schools, which understandably might weigh very heavily on the participants. While it was important to keep in mind that Palestinians are intergenerational victims of decades of settler colonial violence, I had to also consider our *sumud*, our steadfastness, as a people. There are many ways in which this Palestinian *sumud*, or steadfastness, and resistance can be highlighted, in order to view Palestinians through a lens of resistance rather than victimhood. I intentionally use the term *sumud*, rather than resilience. While some people may conflate steadfastness with resilience, this conflation in the context of the Palestinian “feels like a dehumanizing blow” (Dader, Shwaikh, Shoman, & Hamdan, 2026, p. 51). Dader, Shwaikh, Shoman, and Hamdan (2026) expressed that

Palestinian *sumud* is not an expression of joy, but a necessary survival tactic.

Those who expect us to embody *sumud* to inspire them must engage in genuine,

tangible efforts to support our liberation so we need not embody sumud any longer. Sumud must be understood as an indication of the violent lived reality that brought about those acts of resilience; it is not an aesthetic metaphor that needs to be made palatable for outside audiences. It is a lifeline rooted in generations of suffering, grief, and resistance, and its invocation demands collective political action, not passive admiration. (p. 53)

In schools, for example, instead of focusing on the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people by settler colonialism, Palestinian achievements, despite decades of occupation, should be foregrounded, and framed as resistance in the name of Palestinian liberation (Shatara, 2022). This very thesis is a product of *sumud*. I wrote this thesis during the genocide of my people, the genocide that has taken our family home, and uprooted our palm, citrus, and olive trees. But I, alongside other Palestinian academics, continue to write in the face of this loss. This is sumud. However, I too call on whoever is reading this to engage in tangible action to support Palestinian liberation, so we need not embody sumud any longer.

Although I too am Palestinian, I still had to take into consideration that research is imbued with power differentials; I was in a position of power in these interviews, with Palestinian participants in a more vulnerable position. However, as a Palestinian researcher, I had to extend these considerations to myself as well, because as Palestinians, no matter who we are, what positions we hold, or how much power we have, we can never assume safety and security.

Throughout every part of the research process, therefore, I needed to consider the safety of all research participants. This brings me to the concept of anonymity in research. There is a level of risk for Palestinians who are participating in a study, such as this one, which challenges dominant Zionist narratives. Therefore, it was important to seriously consider the concept of anonymity. Anonymity is the act of ensuring the identities of the research participants remain hidden, and that their names are kept confidential; however, it is ultimately the choice of the participant whether they would like to stay anonymous and use a pseudonym, or if they would like their name revealed. While my research is considered high risk, as Palestinians are already at higher risk than most other people, and because I am working with a younger, more vulnerable population, I had to consider the fact that participants may want to remain known to their audience, completely rejecting the notion of anonymity.

Speaking from my own experience as a Palestinian who does not care to remain anonymous, even when it is considered high risk to do so, I do it because it feels like the only way I can resist and fight in exile. Having my name known to the world, despite the consequences it may entail, seems like a small act and risk in the face of the genocide, starvation and active Zionist settler colonial violence faced by my family and people in Gaza. No matter what my consequence may be, it will never compare. Therefore, this rejection of anonymity can be expected by many Palestinians in exile, as it is oftentimes rooted in survivor's guilt. This does not mean, however, that participants who chose to remain anonymous do not experience survivor's guilt, and are not engaging in resistance. Whether or not they remain anonymous does not negate their active participation in

providing a Counter-Story to the dominant settler colonial narrative, and thereby does not negate their fight for Palestinian liberation.

Identifying as someone who believes in Palestinian liberation, names what is happening in Gaza as genocide and refuses erasure has, in north america and Europe's presently intensified political climate, cost people their jobs, their reputations, and their voices in public spaces. It has also led to harassment, and in some cases physical violence, and death. In the united states, for example, a woman attempted "to drown a 3-year-old Palestinian-American Muslim girl in a May 2024 incident that local police said was motivated by racial bias" (The New Arab Staff & Agencies, 2025, para. 1). In another incident, Wadea Al-Fayoume, a six-year-old Palestinian-american kindergartener "was stabbed 26 times by his family's landlord ... The 'ongoing Middle Eastern conflict involving Hamas and the [i]sraelis' was why the boy and his mother – who also suffered more than a dozen stab wounds but survived – were targeted" (Maxouris, 2023, para. 3). In canada, an extensive report was compiled by the Palestinian Canadian Congress (PCC) highlighting acts of anti-Palestinian racism in canada since October 7 (Mosse & Sibery, 2025), a discriminatory practice I will focus on in the final chapter, where I address the experiences of Palestinians in alberta schools.

Critical Discourse Analysis

I conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Hodes, 2023; Lazar, 2017) of the Official Story, coding for various discursive strategies to highlight the extent to which the public school system in alberta can be said to be furthering a settler colonial agenda, and how this settler colonial agenda is impacting Palestinian students and teachers.

Michelle Lazar (2017) defined CDA as “a movement which seeks to raise critical consciousness about the discursive dimensions of social problems involving discrimination, disadvantage, and dominance with the aim of contributing to broader emancipatory projects” (p. 372). While I conducted a more formal CDA of alberta curricular documents in the final chapter of the thesis, I critically analyzed pre-existing frameworks, documents, definitions, etc. to highlight language as a tool used to advance settler colonialism, and in an effort to contribute to the broader emancipatory project of this thesis: the dismantling of settler colonialism. In the canadian settler colonial context, education institutions play a fundamental role in the reproduction of the state, and curricular documents are tethered to the white settler colonial formation. Therefore, I conducted a formal CDA of alberta curricular documents, alongside a more informal, but equally impactful, CDA of several other texts and concepts which I weave into my thesis.

It is also important to note that while I did not interview any students in elementary or middle school, I nonetheless conducted a CDA on the alberta curriculum (Program of Studies) across all grade levels, as anti-Palestinian racism is not only an issue of erasure, but of exceptionalism. In other words, it was crucial to not only look at what is missing in curriculum, but what has been emphasized in excess. It should be pointed out that curriculum is broader than written, formal, published curriculum (Aoki, 1993). There are transgressive meanings of curriculum that include teacher interventions, for example. As a teacher, curriculum extends far beyond the written form. This can be an intentional transgressive process, but also an inevitable truth, as teachers are humans with opinions and biases, and it is challenging to hold a teacher accountable for what they say or don't say, do or don't do in the classroom. Curriculum also happens in the home

and in community, because it is what we learn and know, meaning it cannot be exclusive to what is published and regurgitated in schools, as that is not where all learning takes place (see, for example: Aoki, 1993; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Saleh, 2024). The curricular CDA I conducted, however, is on written, published alberta curricular documents.

Critical Discourse Analysis asks us to think about the intentionality of language and rhetoric. It breaks down language into the range of discursive strategies that are used to advance certain political agendas. These strategies are broadly used across settler colonial jurisdictions including canada, the united states, and israel, to silence Palestinians and any anti-israel, anti-Zionist discourse. Importantly, these discursive strategies are also the technologies of power that can turn dehumanization into material acts of physical and psychological settler colonial violence, thereby perpetuating the erasure and oppression of Palestinians in alberta schools. Making room for this discourse poses a threat to the fragile settler colonial system. Different discursive strategies are identified throughout the process of conducting a CDA. I coded for several discursive strategies, which I list in the final chapter of the thesis, to highlight the various ways that canadian government and provincial education documents use these discursive strategies to produce a range of different political narratives.

The CDA will highlight the abundance of anti-Palestinian racism present in canadian schooling systems, as well as show the intentionality and strategic nature of the advancement of a settler colonial agenda. Structural violence exists within the canadian schooling system. As articulated by Tuck and Yang (2012), public education has

historically been, and continues to be, a major player in advancing the Canadian settler colonial project, and I would argue, the Zionist settler colonial project.

There are many CDA's that have previously been conducted that highlight anti-Palestinian racism in a variety of different discourses (see, for example: Shamim, Bushra & Dwivedi, 2025), although most do not refer to it as anti-Palestinian racism, which is itself an issue. What distinguishes the CDA I conduct in this thesis is that I am putting the Official Story into direct conversation with Counter-Stories by Palestinians who have directly experienced anti-Palestinian racism.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter Two- The Dehumanization of the Palestinian

This chapter serves to address the first research question posed above: How has Palestinian erasure been justified? Dehumanization is one of the most significant underpinnings of settler colonialism, long preceding settler colonialism. This chapter provides the context necessary to understanding *how* Palestinian erasure has been justified, which is why this serves as the next chapter of the thesis. In other words, this chapter highlights the extent to which people have grown accustomed to the dehumanization of Palestinians, and how this dehumanization has been utilized to justify and maintain Palestinian erasure in schools. I first define dehumanization and humanization as I would like them to be used in the context of the chapter, primarily using the work of Mohammed El-Kurd (2025) *Perfect Victims and the Politics of Appeal*. I then use Said's (1978) work *Orientalism* to highlight how the dehumanization of the Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian historically and contemporarily has led to the Global

North's inability to identify with these groups, and how this eventually led to the birth of Zionist propaganda and Zionist settler colonialism. Finally, I end the chapter by highlighting the role Zionist propaganda plays in driving Palestinian erasure in alberta schools, and thereby anti-Palestinian racism (APR). The most significant example of Zionist propaganda in the alberta public school setting is [a]lberta Education's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Therefore, this chapter along with the next one help explain why a definition such as this one was adopted by the canadian government, and why the language used in schooling and curriculum is the way it is.

Chapter Three - Settler Colonial Logics

This chapter serves to answer the second research question posed above: Why is Palestinian erasure necessary, according to Zionist settler colonial logics? The answer to this question, along with the question of how Palestinian erasure has been justified, explains why Palestinian erasure dominates schools and school curriculum in alberta. I answer this question by first defining Zionist settler colonialism, and how it differs from other forms of settler colonialism. I then explain that Zionist settler colonialism inflicts both physical and psychological violence on Palestinians; understanding the psychological violence inflicted upon Palestinians is necessary for understanding how the violence has followed Palestinians into exile. Additionally, I demonstrate the dangers of using what Barakat (2018) referred to as the success-defeat narrative when discussing Zionist settler colonialism and its impact on Palestinians. After understanding Zionist settler colonialism and the violence it inflicts on Palestinians, I frame settler colonialism as a fragile and anxious system (Nabulsi, 2023). This serves to explain why the violence

is necessary according to Zionist settler colonial logics. At this point, the only information missing to understand why Palestinian erasure is necessary across settler colonial contexts is drawing parallels between israel and canada as settler colonial states, which I do using Mike Krebs's (2012) article *Architect of Apartheid*. Drawing these parallels highlights why naming Palestine and Palestinians, as well as anti-Zionist and anti-israel discourse is such a threat to settler colonialism in canada. I will use the example of the encampments against israel's genocide and settler colonial oppression of Palestinians that were erected at the University of [c]algary, which demanded the divestment of the university from the state of israel to highlight this threat.

Chapter Four – Palestinian Erasure in [a]lberta Schools

Before highlighting the patterns of Palestinian erasure and other forms of anti-Palestinian racism in alberta schools, this chapter starts off with a conversation about Palestinian resistance in the face of erasure. This understanding, along with understanding what it means to be Palestinian, and the context provided in the two previous chapters will offer a critical perspective to the conversation on anti-Palestinian racism in schools. I conduct a critical discourse analysis of the *[a]lberta Education Act*, *The Guiding Framework*, and the *[a]lberta K to 12 school curricula (program of study)* as well as statements released by [a]lberta Education and the canadian government, which serve as the Official Story in this chapter, to highlight the patterns of Palestinian erasure. I later provide the Counter-Story, the stories that were shared with me by Palestinians during the qualitative interview stage of the thesis. This conversation between the Official Story and the Counter-Story highlights the propaganda and discursive strategies used within [a]lberta Education to advance anti-Palestinian racism, and serves to highlight that

schools are sites where settler colonialism is both produced and reproduced as ‘common sense.’ This approach will not only amplify the voices of Palestinians, but will also challenge the ways that dominant narratives produce and maintain different forms of racist structural violence through discursive practices that normalize and legitimize settler colonialism. However, please keep in mind that the purpose of this chapter, similar to the purpose of this thesis, is not to prove that Palestinians matter, because no one should have to prove this, but to help educators identify the extent of anti-Palestinian racism in alberta school systems.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

I conclude the thesis by providing recommendations for school boards and teachers on how to live up to what they call “safe spaces” and “inclusive education,” and strategies to challenge anti-Palestinian racism in alberta schools. This thesis is written with the intention of influencing curricular documents and decisions, as well as challenging administrators, teachers, and policymakers more broadly to end Palestinian erasure.

CHAPTER 2: THE DEHUMANIZATION OF THE PALESTINIAN

To reiterate, this thesis serves as a roadmap that draws a connection between the macro and the micro. I am drawing a line from the centuries-long dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, and thereby Palestinians, to how this dehumanization set the stage for Zionist propaganda, which now dominates mainstream, school, and curricular discourse. I am starting the thesis off with a conversation on dehumanization, because it is the primary justification for Zionist settler colonialism, and settler colonialism more generally. It is one of the major underpinnings of the violence inflicted upon the Palestinian both in Palestine and in exile. Dehumanization is not limited to settler colonialism, as it has long preceded settler colonial violence; they are two interdependent systems that empower and perpetuate the sustainability of one another, thereby sustaining the oppression of the Palestinian. Therefore, understanding dehumanization will provide the necessary context to understanding the violence of settler colonialism, how this violence follows the Palestinian into exile, and most importantly, how it has been justified.

This chapter, therefore, serves to answer the first research question posed in the previous chapter: *how* has Palestinian erasure been justified? To answer the broader question of how Palestinian erasure has been justified, it is important to first understand how Palestinians have reached a level of dehumanization that allows for Palestinian erasure to occur without accountability. The level of dehumanization I am speaking of is the level of growing apathetic towards the body of the Palestinian man, woman, and child; it is the level of being able to witness beheaded, maimed, burned, mangled bodies of Palestinian fathers, mothers, and children; it is the level of being able to turn off

emotive switches when seeing these bodies. To understand these patterns, it is integral to understand what it means to *humanize* the Palestinian, and to understand the centuries-long dehumanization of the Palestinian in western popular culture and text which has laid the foundation for the dehumanization and humanization of Palestinians.

I start the chapter by defining humanization and dehumanization as I would like them to be used in the context of the thesis. I then analyze the term dehumanization using a linguistic lens to highlight its intentionality, and define it according to Palestinian scholars (El Kurd, 2025; Erakat, 2019). I then call attention to what Said (1978) considers to be the three foundations of the dehumanization of the Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian historically and contemporarily, using his framework of *Orientalism* (1978): the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the [w]est through film and text, the almost impossibility of identifying with Arabs, Muslims, or Islam in the [w]est, and finally, the Palestinian and Arab struggle against Zionism, specifically in the form of propaganda, and the effects of this struggle on Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians (Said, 1978). I will focus on three types of propaganda when discussing this last foundational element of dehumanization: israel as “the greatest democracy of the Middle East”, the Zionist claim that there is and was no such thing as Palestine, and finally, the conflation of anti-israel discourse with antisemitism. This section will serve as the context needed to better understand the dehumanization of the Palestinian in alberta schools, and the justification of anti-Palestinian racism as a result.

The Humanization of the Palestinian

Growing up as a Palestinian in different parts of Southwest Asia and north america, I understand the in-between spaces of belonging, or lack thereof. I understand

and remember the interplay of different parts of my identity as an attempt to fit into different spaces. I also remember how safe it felt when people understood the different parts of my identity. However, something I have quickly come to learn is that what applies to most people does not often apply to Palestinians. This is not because we matter more, but because we matter *less*. The Palestinian has been victim to acts of dehumanization for decades, and while other acts of dehumanization against a people have been recognized by the Global North as cruel and uncalled for, the dehumanization of the Palestinian seems to be widely accepted.

However, before I explain this dehumanization, it is important to understand what it means to humanize the Palestinian. The word *humanize* can be used to describe the act of viewing someone as human, in the most physiological sense, as in a physical body made up of flesh and bones, with sensations and feelings. El Kurd (2025), however, defined the term more subjectively, making the argument that “we [Palestinians] are not human, automatically, by virtue of being human – we are to be *humanized* by virtue of our proximity to innocence...” (p. 38). Therefore, El Kurd argued that a Palestinian, by virtue of being Palestinian, does not have much of a chance at being humanized, due to their depiction of being far removed from this innocence, a depiction I will speak about in detail in this chapter. He wrote “I have always wanted to become human. Or, to report more honestly, I have always been advised to want to become human” (p. 33). He described being human as a “sacred, sought-after status” (p. 33), which is not taught in any manual. To highlight this, El Kurd described his experience writing short stories about his grandmother, a 1948 Nakba survivor, and how he was encouraged to *humanize* her, citing only the “tears, never the spit” (p. 34). He described this act of humanizing as

the west's attempt to "sanitize and subdue him [the Palestinian], sever him from his origin story..." (p. 35). This is to say that even when writing or speaking about our own families and lived experiences as Palestinians, we are meant to appeal to a "humanized" audience, watering down our experiences to include only that which may bring us pity, concealing our resistance:

You need to be polite in your suffering, should you be granted the right to a roof over your head. Crass statements are corrosive to your plight, even when such statements are about those who first steal your home and then loot your tent. The violence inflicted upon our lands and our bodies, we are told, is secondary to the blemishes tarnishing our image, the blemishes that stand between us and justice, it seems. The smears we live to scrub clean. (p. 34)

Speaking at public events, teaching in my classrooms, and writing this thesis have been similar experiences of taming my words and lived experiences to appeal to the white colonizer and their colonial systems of oppression. Even when Palestinians choose the path of political correctness, and polite grief, our stories are questioned. After a talk I did about my family history and the history of Palestine more generally, an audience member approached me and said, "I want you to know that I disagree with you," to which I laughed, because that would have meant that he disagreed with the *fact* that my cousin was killed in cold blood, that we lost our family home in Gaza, that my grandparents are Nakba survivors, all as a result of a genocide and decades long illegal occupation of Palestinian land by the state of Israel. How can someone disagree with, or frankly have any opinion on *lived* experience, a family history, and personal stories of survival and grief? After the same talk, another person came up to me and said, "don't call yourself

Palestinian if you really want to help your people,” insisting that I am not an Arab, but a Canaanite. She asked me how I could possibly call myself an Arab and still hope to have people on my side? How can someone disagree with the identity you were born into, and have identified with your whole life? Why can’t I just *be* Palestinian? When I was not tame, I was spoken to about the consideration of what El Kurd (2025) refers to as *humanizing* myself, scrubbing myself clean of the smears and blemishes that are placed on my body by the very people who wish to scrub me clean of them. I was asked to be “less political” and told that I was “too Palestinian” to be talking about a *conflict* with two sides of a story, one of which I was born into, have lived and breathed my entire life; it is the story that was passed down through generations to me and every Palestinian who lives to tell the tale. I was to be *defanged* (El Kurd, 2025, p. 33).

El Kurd (2025) made the point that the Palestinian, no matter how much we try to humanize ourselves, or the world tries to humanize us, can never fully be humanized. He stated that in order to humanize a Palestinian, you must “defang” them, but to defang them means to remove the feelings that accompany their pain, grief, and fight for liberation. El Kurd agreed with the notion that the dehumanization of the Palestinian is not merely a sentiment, but an intentional action or lack of action, describing it as an implicit phenomenon (p. 14). Therefore, while the dehumanization of the Palestinian is intentional, as I will explain in the next section, it is not necessarily explicit, but hiding behind the “politest murderers...and the most politically correct of killers” (p. 14), not only the vulgar right-wingers and brutal policemen” (p. 14). It is the implicit alteration or complete removal of Palestine and its true history from school curricula; it is the polite,

politically correct reprimanding for being too political in the classroom accompanied by reminders of still being a good teacher despite it.

What El Kurd (2025) addressed here can be tied directly to how and why anti-Palestinian racism has run rampant in schools for decades. Schools fall under the category of polite murderers and politically correct killers, a phenomenon I will highlight in the final chapter of the thesis, using Palestinian testimonies. El-Kurd stated that academics are “indulging in arrogance and willful misinterpretation...[that] deny human nature and contest even the laws of physics in order to pathologize our [Palestinian] resistance...” (p. 15), and I would argue that this arrogance and willful misinterpretation, this bending of reality, is advanced in school curricular documents, policies, and procedures as well. As El-Kurd argued, “We [Palestinians] are reminded, through policy and procedure, that we are unfortunately born to die” (p. 15).

Dehumanization and Intentionality

Before unpacking the dehumanization of the Palestinian, and how this dehumanization has distanced them from the innocence meant to humanize them, the intentionality of dehumanization must be discussed. The prefix de- in the English language is used to add the meaning “remove” or “reduce” when used before a noun or verb. For example, the word defrost means to remove or reduce frost. Therefore, we cannot reduce or remove frost if there is no frost to reduce or remove. Comparatively, the word dehumanize means to reduce or remove one’s humanity. To truly understand dehumanization, therefore, we must understand the basic premise that to dehumanize someone, naturally, you must first humanize them (Smith, 2016). In this section, I will use the word humanize in the most physiological sense, as I explained above.

Dehumanization is the intentional removal of someone's humanity with the full awareness of the pain this harm will not only cause to those targeted, but also enable the dehumanizer to justify. Not recognizing this humanizing element of dehumanization allows the one committing the dehumanization to fall under the radar without accountability. If we claim that the person or entity carrying out the dehumanization does not recognize the dehumanized as human beings, then we are not acknowledging the intentionality behind the harm dehumanization inflicts upon the dehumanized, or the dehumanizer's intent to harm. It is important to note that I am speaking about dehumanization from a settler colonial standpoint in this section. As mentioned, dehumanization is the primary justification for settler colonialism, and is intentional in the context of settler colonialism. This being said, I believe some forms of dehumanization that occur as a result of this intentional dehumanization may be unintentional. For example, teachers in schools may not be intentionally dehumanizing Palestinian students in their classrooms, but the dehumanization is still rooted in the intentional centuries-long dehumanization of Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians.

Both historically and contemporarily, Palestinians are typically referred to as animals or insects by Zionist leaders, officials, and those who support them, oftentimes to justify harming them. For example, Said (1984) outlined how the systematic weaponization "of the rubric 'terrorists'" by Israeli officials "made it possible for them to use phrases like 'terrorist nests,' 'cancerous growth,' and 'two-legged beasts' in order to bomb refugee camps" (p. 37). Most recently, during this current genocide on Palestinians in Gaza, Bibi Netanyahu, the current Israeli prime minister, has been framing Palestinians using the generic term "animal." Similarly, Netanyahu's defence minister, Yoav Galant,

stated “We besieged Gaza. We cut power, food, water, and fuel. All cut. We are fighting animals in the form of humans, and we are acting as such” (Maalej & Zibin, 2024, p. 12). Here, Galant is attempting to paint Palestinians as animals to justify israel’s actions.

Several scholars have long pointed to this intentional dehumanization of the Palestinian by the israeli occupation. Nadia Abu El-Haj (2014) stated that “when [i]srael attacks hospitals in Gaza, when it wipes out extended families, when it mows down children running on a beach, it is engaged in a premeditated [intentional] act” (n.d.). Puar’s (2017) *The Right to Maim* is another example that also highlights this intent. Puar highlighted the maiming of Palestinians by the israeli occupation as a way to dehumanize them. The israeli occupation would not maim Palestinians if they did not think it would have an effect on their ability to live a comfortable life (p. 142). The occupation recognizes that maiming Palestinians has negative effects on their physical ability and their mental health. In fact, this intentionality is what makes acts of dehumanization so disturbing. Erakat (2019) also discussed this intentionality in her International Criminal Law review *The Sovereign Right to Kill: A Critical Appraisal of Israel’s Shoot-to-Kill Policy in Gaza*. She defined this policy as one of many contemporary modes of dispossessing the native, Palestinian body (p. 783). Erakat (2019) stated, “[i]sraeli troops targeted protesters’ reproductive organs thus highlighting the existential threat posed by Palestinians...all injuries ... were centered on the head, knee joints, or pelvic joints, indicating that [i]sraeli forces were shooting to kill, or to cause disabilities” (p. 814).

Dehumanization, therefore, is not merely the act of treating someone as sub-human or referring to them as animals or insects. It is the intentional harming of human

beings with the awareness of the pain this harm will cause. The first step to understanding Palestinian erasure in alberta schools and its intentionality, is understanding how it has been justified. Ultimately, people typically need to justify violence to get away with it. The historical and contemporary dehumanization of the Palestinian is how the violence inflicted upon the Palestinian both in Palestine and in exile has been justified, which includes the violence inflicted upon them in alberta schools. Remember too that violence is a spectrum, and the violence experienced by Palestinian students and teachers in alberta as psychological violence is violence, nonetheless. I speak on this violence inflicted in the realm of the psychological in more detail in the next chapter.

El- Kurd (2025) defined dehumanization as the “West’s refusal to look us [Palestinians] in the eye” (p. 14). It is the “world’s reluctance or incapacity to see our tragedies as tragedies and our reactions as reactions...Fundamental instincts ... the basic conduct intrinsic to life on earth become luxuries [for Palestinians] ...” (p. 14). Providing evidence that between October 2023 and October 2025, 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza were maimed by israel and will live with permanent or long-term disabilities, 21,000 of whom are children, will not *humanize* the Palestinian. Providing evidence that Gaza has become home to the largest number of child amputees in modern history will not shake the core of humanity. This then beckons an important question: How are the people who are not shaken by these violent realities closer to innocence than the Palestinian whose only connection to this violence is being a victim to it? I will use Said’s (1978) work to draw a line from the history of the dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, which ultimately lead to the dehumanization of the Palestinian, to the west’s inability to identify with Arabs and Muslims as a result of the dehumanization. I will then highlight how this led to the birth

of Zionism and Zionist propaganda, which was easily adopted and accepted by the west as a result of the dehumanization of the Palestinian. Please note that I use the terms *west* and *east*, rather than Global North and Global South in this section, for clarity and flow, as these are the terms Said (1978) used in his work. This will serve as necessary context to help people understand how the dehumanization of Palestinian students and teachers through Palestinian erasure in schools in alberta has been justified.

The History of the Dehumanization of Palestinians

The dehumanization of the Palestinian can be traced back to the dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, which started centuries ago. Barakat (2018) stated that there are at least two approaches to writing Palestinian history:

one that involves a silencing or complete ignorance of Palestinian voices and relying on Zionist frameworks and conceptualizations, and one that is simultaneously a writing and a righting of Palestinian history through purposely elevating Palestinian indigenous experiences and narrative. (p. 353)

The purpose of this section is to highlight the former; however, the purpose of this thesis is the latter.

Edward Said (1978) speaks to the foundations of the dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims in his work, *Orientalism* (1978). Said defined Orientalism as a practice by which the western world perceives and depicts the eastern world as lesser-than, backwards, uncivilized, barbaric, etc. oftentimes to justify their dehumanization. He defined countries of the eastern world as ‘the Orient,’ and countries of the western world as ‘the Occident,’ and argued that people of the Orient are perceived as lesser-than, as

Other, by people of the Occident. Said highlighted this by quoting George Orwell observing individuals in a market in Marrakech, Morocco:

When you see how the people live, and still more, how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings...Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff...? They arise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone. And even the graves themselves soon fade back into the soils. (as cited on p. 252)

Orwell's commentary not only demonstrates that the Other does not matter, but that they are not worthy of the title "human;" in other words, Orwell's commentary suggests that the Other can never be *humanized* (El Kurd, 2025). He implies that people of the Orient are not worthy enough to have names, and he questions whether or not they have the same anatomy as people of the Occident. Orwell stereotypes the Other, humanizing them for a moment, by generalizing that they are poor and hungry, making them forgettable, and stating that even the Other's grave soon disappears. He then dehumanizes the body of the Other describing it as mere "stuff" (p. 252).

Said (1978) identified three main contributors to this dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, as seen in Orwell's commentary: The first is "the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the [w]est" (p. 26), the second is "the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam" (p. 27), and the third is "the struggle

between the Arabs and [i]sraeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large” (p. 26). I will now speak to these three contributions in detail.

The History of Popular Anti-Arab and Anti-Islamic Prejudice in the [w]est

Anti-Arab and Anti-Islamic Prejudice in Film and Text

The biggest contributor to popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the west is the representation of Arabs and Muslims historically in western popular culture. For example, Shaheen (2003) in his book *Reel Bad Arabs* documented and discussed the over 900 Hollywood features which have distorted the Arab man, woman, and child. Shaheen stated, “in gathering the evidence for this book, I was driven by the need to expose an injustice: cinema's systematic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people [the Arabs]” (p. 172). Likewise, Haider’s (2020) work, *The Racialization of the Muslim Body and Space in Hollywood*, demonstrates the influence of Hollywood on Islamophobia, post 9/11. In post-9/11 america, Haidar argued, Islamophobia took on the form of “imposed racist policies on Muslims of Middle Eastern–North African (MENA) and South Asian origin, regardless of their U.S. citizenship status, in the form of travel bans, a Muslim ban, and enforced screening in immigration procedures” (p. 383). Haider (2020) stated that the reason Hollywood has such an influence on the dehumanization of the Arab and Muslim is because “films embody imperialist hegemonic frameworks, serving as cultural products, constructing and deconstructing inferior and racialized non-white identities” (p. 383).

Similarly, Ayyash (2024) argued that the dehumanization of the Palestinian is not surprising, given the power of media narratives, specifically in film, in shaping public perception. According to Ayyash “the idea of armed Arab Muslim men engaging in extreme violence somehow seems believable or expected to Western audiences. The roots of this stereotype trace back to European literature and American cinema” (para. 2). There are three specific films that Ayyash refers to, historical and contemporarily, that push this narrative, alongside the narrative that Arab women and children are also terrorists who deserve to be killed: *The Sheikh* (1921), *Rules of Engagement* (2000), and *American Sniper* (2014).

According to Ayyash (2024), the film *The Sheikh* depicts the Arab world and Arabs as underdeveloped, barbaric, and backwards. However, as Ayyash asserted, the term Sheikh is used to describe a person of high religious caliber in Islam; therefore, by calling the movie *The Sheikh*, the Muslim and the Muslim world is also portrayed as such. *Rules of Engagement* depicts Arabs in an “uglier and cruder” (para. 7) light:

The portrayal of armed men invading dozens of women and children led to a decision to shoot everyone without exception, reinforcing the idea that all Arabs are the same and even women and children are seen as potential terrorists who must be deterred by arms and force. (Ayyash, 2024, para. 7)

Ayyash also highlighted how the film *American Sniper*, which was released only ten years ago, underscores the dehumanization of Arab men, women, and children by subjecting them to “justified” horrific forms of violence and brutality. This depiction of women and children as terrorists in both films plays a significant role in the justification

of their killing in Palestine, as Zionist propaganda, which I will address in a later section, utilizes this idea of all Palestinians being terrorists, armed combatants, to justify their erasure.

Anti-Arab and Anti-Islamic Depictions in Texts

Apart from Hollywood, there are other examples to support Said's first argument related to the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the west through film and text. Sir John Mandeville's (1915) travel literature book *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* depicted the Other as uncivilized evil folk: "in that desert dwell many of Arabians, that men clepe Bedouins and Ascopards, and they be folk full of all evil conditions... they be right felonous and foul, and of cursed kind" (pp. 43-44). This description of the "Arabian" by Mandeville is not surprising, as this is how people of the Orient have been historically depicted (Said, 1978). Another historical example is *Here Be Dragons* (National Geographic, n. d.). The phrase "Here Be Dragons" was said to be inscribed on maps in the 16th century. These maps would use dragons, sea monsters, and other mythological creatures to represent the Orient, claiming it to be an undiscovered, unknown land. Although *Here Be Dragons* is considered by some to be an anachronism, it offers some insight into how the Orient was perceived by the people of the Occident.

It is important to note that Mandeville's (1915) work dates back to the 20th century, *Here Be Dragons* (n.d.) dates back to the 16th century; however, Eastern civilization, more specifically civilizations of the SWANA region or what Said (1978) refers to as the Near East (p. 2), dates back to the 7th Millenium BCE (Albright, 2024). Therefore, civilization in the Near East existed far before these works were published; in

fact, the SWANA region was often referred to as “The Cradle of Civilization” (History, n.d.). This depiction of the Orient as empty, barren land is one of the ways people of the Orient have been dehumanized. Above, Mandeville (1915) described the Arabs in the context “of the 'Desert between the Church of Saint Catherine and Jerusalem” (p. 43). The Church of Saint Catherine he is referring to is in Bethlehem, Palestine; therefore, he is speaking specifically about historical Palestine. He claimed that the people there “have none houses, but tents, that they make of skins of beasts” (p. 43).

However, there is historical evidence of civilizations in the ancient SWANA region, specifically in Palestine, which contradicts Mandeville’s (1915) claims. Nur Masalha (2022) extensively discussed the history of Palestine, specifically pertaining to education and literacy. According to Docker (2022), Masalha detailed how “in late antiquity [third to early seventh century] the two most advanced and literate cities of Palestine were coastal Mediterranean: Caesaria-Palaestina, the capital of Byzantine Palestine, and Gaza, economically, culturally and intellectually the most dynamic cities in the region” (p. 114). Therefore, there is a stark disconnect between the true history of the region, and works such as Mandeville’s. It is a clear attempt at dehumanizing the Other, claiming them to be uncivilized, unknown, and undiscovered.

This depiction of a land as empty despite the presence of Indigenous inhabitants, as seen in both the Here Be Dragons (n.d.) inscriptions and Mandeville’s (1915) work, can be tied back to the colonial doctrine, *Terra Nullius*. Terra Nullius is Latin for “nobody’s land,” and this doctrine “played a significant role in legitimizing the erasure of the native population in virtually every settler colony, and laying down the ‘legal’ and ‘moral’ basis for seizing native land” (Decolonize Palestine, n.d., para. 4). This doctrine

can be tied to my previous discussion on the inability to humanize the Palestinian, for example, because colonists would apply this doctrine to lands inhabited by people they did not consider *civilized* enough: “According to this principle, any lands not managed in a ‘modern’ fashion were considered empty by the colonists, and therefore up for grabs. Essentially, yes there are people there but no people that mattered or were worth considering” (Decolonize Palestine, n.d., para. 4).

It is clear that the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the west through Hollywood, and other media contributions (such as Mandeville’s outlined above) undergirds the dehumanization of the Palestinian people in the present. This history lays the foundation for the second contribution mentioned by Said (1978): “the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam” (p. 27).

The Impossibility of Identifying with Arabs or Islam

There is an absence of balanced or truthful discourse pertaining to Arabs and Muslims in the west, as highlighted in the above examples of depictions in western popular culture. The dominant discourse surrounding Arabs and Muslims is that of terrorism, barbarism, and uncivilization. Said (1978) mentioned that in newsreels or news articles, the Arab was never shown as an individual with personal characteristics or experiences, but were always depicted in large crowds or numbers in mass rage, misery, or irrational gestures (p. 287). This depiction of Arabs in large, angry masses alluded to the threat of *jihad*, which contrary to popular belief does not mean “Holy War.” Jihad is two-fold in Islam: the greater jihad, and the lesser jihad. The greater jihad is a fight against oneself, “the struggle against the lower self – the struggle to purify one’s heart, do

good, avoid evil and make oneself a better person” (Interfaith Alliance Religious Freedom Education Project, n.d., p. 7). The lesser jihad is an outward struggle of any kind. In an article titled *What is the Truth about American Muslims* (Interfaith Alliance Religious Freedom Education Project, n.d.), the myth of jihad being a holy war is debunked. However, for westerners who do not bother themselves with learning, the underlying fear of these depictions of angry masses of Arabs, this threat of jihad, is of Arabs or Muslims taking over the world (Said, 1978, p. 287). Said (1978) explained that this rhetoric and portrayal of Arabs and Muslims makes it difficult to identify with either group dispassionately or impartially. Therefore, if the Arab and Muslim have never been shown as being anything but barbaric, violent, and uncivilized, how could members of a “civilized” western society ever identify with them? Altogether, the above fosters the perfect environment for the rise of the third foundational element of the dehumanization of the Palestinian: Zionist propaganda.

The Palestinian and Arab Struggle Against Zionism & its Effects

This section will mainly focus on the integral role Zionist propaganda as settler ‘truth’ plays in dehumanizing Palestinians and justifying their erasure; remember that this propaganda is a direct result of the centuries-long dehumanization discussed above. While Zionism is often defined as a “Jewish nationalist movement with the goal of the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine” (Britannica, 2024), Palestinians know and *experience* Zionism as the fascist settler colonial project that displaced their families in 1948, and continues to advance its objective of the complete annihilation of the Palestinian today. According to Said (1978), the third major contributor to the dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, specifically the Palestinians, is

“the struggle between the Arabs and [i]sraeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large” (p. 26). This contribution to the dehumanization of the Palestinian is closely related to the last two in that Zionist propaganda had a major influence on anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim stereotypes, while also making it increasingly difficult for the west to identify with Arabs and Muslims. I will split this section up into three types of Zionist propaganda, each greatly contributing to the dehumanization of the Palestinian: the depiction of israel as “the greatest democracy of the Middle East,” the depiction of Palestine as barren land, and the equating of anti-israel rhetoric with antisemitism.

Zionist Propaganda #1: “[i]srael is the Greatest Democracy in the Middle East”

Since the creation of the state of israel in 1948, it has been considered the greatest (and often only) democracy in the Middle East (i.e. SWANA region). In fact, almost every president of the united states since the foundation of israel has highlighted their ties to this *democracy*. John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the united states of america, in his speech at a college in 1959 said “let us make it clear that we will never turn our backs on our steadfast friends in [i]srael, whose adherence to the democratic way must be admired by all friends of freedom” (Jewish Virtual Library, 1991). As mentioned, Kennedy was not the only president of the united states to praise israel’s democracy. This depiction of israel as a democratic state works to simultaneously humanize israelis and dehumanize Palestinians. Viewing israel as a democracy means viewing anyone in opposition to israel and its government as anti-democratic. Therefore, Palestinians, who have been fighting israel’s “democratic rule” since its inception are at the forefront of this criticism of being anti-democratic, and therefore, anti-rights and freedoms; connecting

back to El Kurd's (2025) work, this framing also serves to further remove Palestinians from innocence. This is what Said (1978) referred to as "the struggle between the Arabs and [i]sraeli Zionism" (p. 26). This struggle, along with the stereotypes created to dehumanize Arabs and Muslims in films, texts, etc., historically and contemporarily, makes it almost impossible for the west to view Palestinians as anything but barbaric, uncivilized, violent, democracy haters.

Zionist Propaganda #2: There is No Such Thing as Palestine

There is an attempt by israel and its supporters to completely erase Palestine and Palestinians, which is the premise of this thesis. The easiest way for them to do so, while maintaining their democratic façade, is to act like it has never existed. The land of Palestine was commonly referred to by Zionists as "a land without a people for a people without a land" (Walia, 2024, p. 32). In fact, Walia (2024) goes as far as to call this the "Zionist mantra" (p. 32). This implication of a Palestinian land as barren is an exercise of the concept of Terra Nullius, which I discussed previously. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2014) outlined, European Zionists were aware of inhabitants in Palestine, but "simply did not recognize them as a *people*" (p. 278). If we convince people in the west that the land was barren before the creation of israel in 1948, it can be implied that israel has a right to exist and defend itself against Palestinians who are attempting to take the land from "a people without a land," Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Palestinian erasure and racist gaslighting are patterns in school curricula that keep this narrative alive. I highlight these patterns in more detail in the final chapter.

Zionist Propaganda #3: Anti-israel Rhetoric as Antisemitism

This section highlights the conflation of anti-israel, anti-Zionist, and therefore, Palestinian, narratives with antisemitism as a way to advance the dehumanization of Palestinians, specifically through anti-Palestinian racism (APR), which is rampant in alberta schools today. Historically and contemporarily, since 1948, Palestinians have been told to stay quiet about their homeland, as it is too complicated, controversial, or political: “even the assertion of Palestinian identity therefore takes on the form of a political challenge” (Said, 1979, p. 14) However, our stories as Palestinians are not just made to seem too complicated, political, and controversial; the stories of our history and lived experiences are considered a form of hate speech, and we are labeled as what Ayyash (2023) refers to as “antisemitic terrorist sympathizers” (p. 959).

This conflation of anti-israel, anti-Zionist discourse with antisemitism has been rectified across all of canada by the government’s adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Ayyash (2023) addressed the pervasive toxification of the Palestinian narrative, primarily in western contexts, exemplified more recently through the institutionalization of the IHRA. He highlighted how anti-Palestinian racism came to be formally equated with antisemitism in schooling through canadian school boards’ adoption of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism. Ayyash (2023) classified the institutionalizing of the IHRA definition of antisemitism as an example of the toxification of the Palestinian as a “racialized being who can only bring toxicity to the struggles of other racialized minorities” (p. 954). As such, the primary goal of the IHRA definition is not to protect Jewish communities from white supremacists; it is “an effort to cast as antisemitic the Palestinian critique of

Zionism and [i]srael through the illustrative examples in the IHRA working definition” (Ayyash, 2023, p. 957), which are comprised of the following:

(1) Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews, (2) Accusing the Jews as a people, or [i]srael as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust, (3) Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to [i]srael, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations, (4) Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of [i]srael is a racist endeavor, (5) Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize [i]srael or [i]sraelis, (6) Drawing comparisons of contemporary [i]sraeli policy to that of the Nazis, and (7) Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of [i]srael. (IHRA, 2026, para. 3-11)

Ayyash (2023) argued that 7 out of 11 of definitions outlined by the IHRA, which conflate the critique of israel and Zionism to antisemitism, are “designed to formally institutionalize the already functional expulsion of the Palestinian critique” (p. 957). What this means is that the very existence of the Palestinian critique is deemed antisemitic, or racist.

The canadian government’s adoption of this definition is intentional, and a demonstration of the necessary erasure of Palestine and Palestinians from schools and curriculum for the survival of canada as a settler colonial state, and for the maintenance

of the settler perspective, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three. Not only did the canadian government adopt the IHRA, but they adopted it in the name of anti-racism: “In 2019, the Government of [c]anada adopted the non-legally binding International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA Definition) as part of [c]anada’s Anti-Racism Strategy” (Government of [c]anada, 2025, para. 3).

The IHRA definition’s implementation has intensified since October 7th, when israel began one of its “heaviest and most destructive bombing campaigns in modern history [against the people of Gaza]. Hospitals, schools, refugee camps, mosques, churches, residential buildings, UN shelters have all been destroyed” (Walia, 2023, p. 34).

These implementations are not a coincidence, and again, point to the efforts carried out by settler colonial states working in collaboration to conceal education of Palestinian history and liberation, and to preserve the settler perspective. Therefore, adopting and entrenching this definition prevents students and teachers from being able to openly criticize israel and Zionism in canadian schools. According to Walia (2024) “conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism suppresses dissent to settler colonial [i]sraeli state violence and [i]sraeli apartheid, and also actively perpetuates anti-Palestinian racism” (p. 32). Therefore, while the government of canada claims to have adopted the definition in the name of anti-racism, what they have actually done is advance anti-Palestinian racism (APR) in schools across the country, which in turn furthers the dehumanization of Palestinians both inside and outside the classroom. I speak to APR in more detail in the final chapter of the thesis.

Palestinian Skin as Border

If ‘border’ is to be understood as a word without any context, it would likely be described as an area of separation, an area of difference, of disjointedness. The term more readily evokes physical spaces, as the contemporary world is shaped by borders, separation, difference, and disjointedness. However, it can be argued that borders may also represent individual bodies, particularly in the context of Palestinian identity. The body itself can thus function as a border, moving through space and time. Frantz Fanon (1963) stated that “skin is not just assumed like a mask: it is God-given even if its meanings are social, discursive. What skin and masks have in common is that they mark the interface between the self and the world: they are the border” (as cited in Loomba, 2015, p. 175). So, for some people, their own skin is the border; wherever they move, they experience difference, separation, and disjointedness. I want to conclude this chapter with a personal story about the dehumanization of the Palestinian to highlight this concept of skin as border. I use italics in this section for internal dialogue and to emphasize moments of dehumanization.

In 2023, after not having seen my family for 11 years, I decided to make a trip to Gaza by myself. This was not a decision I made on a whim, as Palestinians do not have the privilege of going on spontaneous vacations to visit home. In fact, I am not sure we can even use the word vacation. Visiting Gaza is a longwinded, carefully thought-out and calculated process, but it was a process I had been preparing for since my last visit with my family in 2012. In the eleven years that I was away, I had vivid dreams of being back between my family, stepping foot on the land that my family had tended to for generations. I missed home, and I longed for it. I decided to enter through the Jordanian

border this time around, as going through the Rafah border in Egypt seemed like a bad idea by myself, a conclusion I came to after reflecting on the experiences I had on the border with my family in the past.

Growing up, my father wanted us to know our Palestine. He and my mom insisted that we have the experience of borders and checkpoints to get a sense of what it means to be Palestinian. Oppression fuels a fight for justice. We had crossed the Rafah border several times, and it never got easier. I remember Israeli soldiers taking my younger brother one year for questioning because he was a threat; he was only five at the time. That was the same year we had to sleep outside the border on the street because Palestinians weren't allowed inside at night. My mom had prepared snacks, anticipating this dehumanization. But my mom could not prepare herself for them taking her youngest for interrogation; no mother can prepare their heart for that.

One year, as we were waiting for our names to be called, indicating that we were approved to cross through the border and enter Gaza, two Israeli Occupation Forces (iOF) soldiers called all of our names except my mom's. They said she wasn't approved because she is a terrorist, and her name is on a blacklist. *Dehumanized*. My mother's name is *Zeina*, Arabic for *beautiful and radiant*. We refused to enter Gaza without my mom. My sister and I hugged each other, crying, both because we knew our mother as *beautiful and radiant*, angry at their lies, and because we would not get to see our Gaza. My father looked at us and told us never to cry; he said "never give them the pleasure of seeing your tears". Ever since then, it has become more and more difficult to cry on the border. They made us fish for our bags, and placed them back on the bus that drove us back to Cairo, by ourselves. *Dehumanized*. Every time we crossed through the Rafah

border, I remember seeing the ground flooded with cardboard boxes. I did not understand why as a kid, but my father explained that it is where people slept as they waited for their names to be called to leave for Gaza. *Dehumanized*. When I grew older, he shared that it is where people slept enough times to have their cardboard taken by someone else who needed it, because they waited so long on the border that they did not survive to see home, the home that is right outside. *Dehumanized*. So, while some of us weren't allowed in, some of us weren't allowed out either. *Dehumanized*.

This is how I came to the decision to go through Jordan instead, somehow convincing myself that this dehumanization was exclusive to the Rafah border. My aunt ended up accompanying me on my trip. She is the oldest of seven children, and has been more of a grandmother figure in my life, as my father is her youngest sibling. I learned very quickly that our dehumanization was not limited to the Rafah border. When we arrived at the border crossing in Jordan, we were herded like cattle into lines.

Dehumanized. Our bags were taken from us at this point. Once we reached the top of the line, we were expected to present our identification card and approval letter from Israel to cross the border - *tasreeh*; the colour of the card differs based on where in Palestine you're from. Our card was blue. Anyone with a blue card is from Gaza. After presenting our card and approval, we were herded outside to wait for the bus that would take us to the next checkpoint. Before getting on the bus, we were meant to go looking for our bags which they had taken from us as soon as we had walked in. The bags were thrown into piles on the concrete outside, and no one bag was found next to the other. *Dehumanized*. After fishing for all of our bags and putting them on the bus, my aunt and I waited in a line between two barricades that were no more than a foot and a half apart. We waited

there under the sun until they decided we could get on the empty bus we were not allowed to sit in as we waited. *Dehumanized*. This was the pattern of the entire trip: being herded into lines, presenting evidence that we were allowed to visit the land of our ancestors, fishing for our bags through piles, and waiting for no reason other than because they said so. *Dehumanized*.

Once we had finally arrived at the main checkpoint in *Areeha*, Jericho, which was fully run by Israeli soldiers, and after going through the dehumanizing pattern once again, my aunt and I sat and waited for our names to be called. Our passports and identification cards were taken from us as soon as we arrived at this checkpoint. We were very excited to have reached this point of the trip, because this was the final checkpoint before we got on a bus to Gaza. While we waited for our names to be called, I watched soldiers shove little kids with their rifles back into lines, I witnessed fathers and brothers being taken from their families for interrogation, I watched as tourists who were visiting *Israel* arrived on air conditioned buses, entering through different doors, walking through different lines, passports in hand, met with smiles and welcomes. I watched as their bags were carefully placed on luggage belts as ours were thrown in piles on concrete floors in back rooms. *Dehumanized, dehumanized, dehumanized*.

After hours of watching the dehumanization of my people on their own land, a soldier came up to me and said I did not have permission to enter Gaza today, but my aunt did. After showing him proof of my approval to enter, he still refused and insisted that I did not have approval. *Never give them the pleasure of seeing your tears*. After almost a full day of dehumanization, I was furious, but I still had hope because my bags were still in a pile somewhere, and no one had forced me to go looking for them yet.

Until a soldier came walking towards me, pointing at me with one hand, and holding my passport open, indicating that I am the person she's been looking for, with the other. She stood right in front of me, and the finger that was just pointing at me turned to a beckoning gesture to stand up and follow her. I asked her where she was taking me, and she stayed silent and continued to walk. I asked again, a bit louder this time, assuming she did not hear me, and I was met with the same silence once more. I then began to yell. Still no answer. She was ignoring me, acting like I did not exist. *Dehumanized*. In all honesty, I knew where she was taking me, because I had experienced this before, but chasing behind my father, not alone. The moment I had been dreading the entire trip was now happening.

She silently led me to the dark, back room with piles of bags. She pointed at a cart indicating that she wanted me to start loading it with my things; she still had not said one word to me. I yelled and yelled, asking her to explain to me why I was collecting my bags, refusing to move until she told me. Still no answer, but now she had a smile on her face. *Never give them the pleasure of seeing your tears*. At this point, I was hysterical, not understanding why my screams were met with silence and a smile. I found myself grabbing onto her and shaking her, hoping to get an answer. Still nothing, but now I was a threat. She called another soldier to monitor me. They both watched as I fished through mounds for our belongings. I could no longer hold back the tears my father told me never to give them the pleasure of seeing. They laughed as I cried. The soldiers gestured at me to follow them, and I screamed behind them that I would see my Gaza today. I screamed that I had been waiting for eleven years to see my family again, walk my land again, gullibly hoping they would have empathy. They smiled in silence and continued to walk.

Everyone on the checkpoint was now witness to my hysteria. My aunt ran up to me and told me it was okay, and told me to let it go out of fear of them escalating the violence they were already inflicting. But I turned away from her and continued to follow the soldiers, demanding answers. Then a Palestinian girl who was around my age stood directly in front of me, stopping me in my tracks, embraced me, and said “Never give them the pleasure of seeing your tears.” She told me never to give up on seeing my family and walking my land. So, I wiped my tears and continued to fight. Minutes later, they threw my aunt and I out of the room, forcing me to unload our belongings from the cart and put them on the bus that would drive us back to Jordan, alone. After arriving in Jordan, I turned to my aunt and told her I wanted to try again tomorrow, because I can never give up on seeing my family, and walking my land. Eleven years later, I saw my Gaza again. *Sumud*.

No matter where I was on my trip, crossing borders or checkpoints, in a taxi on the way to the border, on a bus leaving it, or going through formal airport security in Jordan or Egypt, I was met with *Ah, inti ghazaweya? 3ashan haik ...Oh, you're from Gaza? That's why*. That's why you were interrogated by every soldier and guard who saw your name; that's why you stood in the sun between barricades waiting to get on a bus that you could see but were not allowed to ride because they said so; that's why they sent you back on a bus by yourself; that's why you had to sift through piles of thrown baggage to find yours and pack them on the bus that drove you farther away from your Gaza, when you had hoped it would drive you towards it; that's why you slept on the sidewalk with your siblings and mother at age ten; that's why your brother was taken, and your mother was called a terrorist. That's why I have come to the following conclusion: a

Palestinian's dehumanization is not limited to physical borders and checkpoints, but a border that follows them. It is a border tied to our very being; a Palestinian's very skin is the border that separates them from the rest of the world. *Ah, inti ghazaweya? 3ashan haik ...*

Palestinian skin is itself the border that separates them from the rest of the world, for both Palestinians in Palestine, and Palestinians in exile. They exist in the in-between, the interstitial spaces: rejected in their own land by occupiers and rejected in exile by supporters of occupiers, racists, xenophobes, and islamophobes, more broadly. There are obvious similarities between Palestinians and the experiences of other racialized people in the Global North. However, what distinguishes the Palestinian from other marginalized people (i.e. Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour from the Global South) is their erasure as a people not only from conversations and lessons, but from maps, textbooks, and resources in schools and other spaces. Being Palestinian is not just an experience of being erased and marginalized; it is an experience of being criminalized - a criminalization of adults and children just the same. Kanji (2023) highlighted the *justified* criminalization of the Palestinian child: "Palestinian children are responsiblized as 'terrorists' – as one former Mossad official pronounced on [i]sraeli state television: 'anyone over the age of four is a Hamas supporter' and deserves to be starved" (p. 4).

Palestinian students in alberta schools can help us better understand how being Palestinian is an embodied experience. The Palestinian body they occupy acts as a border between them and the rest of their peers, teachers, and environment. To escape the limitations put on them by their *Palestinian-ness*, or peoples chosen understanding of their Palestinian-ness, rather, is often to either: hold onto their Palestinian identity and

risk marginalization and criminalization, or to let go of it, which may decriminalize them but not demarginalize them. This is a pattern I will highlight in the final chapter of the thesis. Now that the question of *how* Palestinian erasure has been justified has been answered, it is important to understand *why* this erasure is necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics.

CHAPTER 3: SETTLER COLONIAL LOGICS

I am referring to this chapter as *Settler Colonial Logics* for a reason, and maybe not the reason some academics use the word *Logics* in their own work. Oftentimes when academics speak of ‘logic,’ it is not spoken about in terms of common sense. Many academics use it in the context of reasoning, claiming that logic is a more systemic, rigorous analysis of topics using *proper* reasoning. However, in this chapter of my academic work, I plan on doing the exact opposite. I am using the word logics to mean common sense, refusing to advance the western narrative that the Zionist colonialist history of Palestine is *too complicated*, but also to highlight that settler colonialism is an ongoing settler colonial process. I am not alone in doing this, as many scholars have taken this approach to logic. Rifkin (2013) stated that “Developing a notion of common sense that is understood neither as a structure, ontology, nor logic allows for thinking of settlement as pervasively active without being totalized as a singular, self-generating, somewhat uniform whole” (p. 326). In other words, Rifkin (2013) argued that settler structures should not be totalized as a uniform whole, but as an ongoing process, which he refers to as *settler common sense*. Understanding settler colonialism in this way also allows for an understanding of it as a part of a matrix, working interdependently alongside other systems such as dehumanization to sustain the oppression of Palestinians everywhere. Sustenance is a process, after all.

After reading this chapter, one should understand the foundations of Palestinian erasure, and *why* it trickled down into schools and school curricula. While the previous chapter highlighted *how* Palestinian erasure has been justified, this chapter will help readers understand *why* it is necessary, and advanced in alberta schools. I start the chapter

off with the foundational work of several Palestinian authors, and other authors from the Global South, to develop a necessary understanding of the truth of settler colonialism, and the unique nature of Zionist settler colonialism. This section will serve to help the reader develop an understanding of the Palestinian experience in Palestine. I spend the remainder of the chapter highlighting why the settler colonial violence inflicted upon the Palestinian in Palestine followed them into exile. I explain this by drawing parallels between Canada and Israel as settler colonial states, using Mike Krebs's (2012) article *Architect of Apartheid*. This serves as the context needed to understand why Palestinian erasure in Alberta schools is necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics, and why settler colonial violence has trickled down into schools, following Palestinians into exile.

Settler Colonialism and Palestine

Before discussing *why* Palestinian erasure is necessary, it is integral to understand settler colonialism, specifically in the context of Palestine. As I was writing this section of the thesis, there was a pressure to cite the settler colonial scholars that everyone knows and believes to be the *most* credible. This pressure existed in the realm of my psyche (Fanon, 1961/1963), and was not an expectation that was directly stated to me. This speaks to how colonization is just as much a passive power as it is an active one. After recognizing this pattern, and engaging in reflection and conversation, I decided to focus on Palestinian scholarship for this section, as the Palestinian experience of settler colonialism cannot be fully understood through the lens of non-Palestinian scholars and their work, even if the focus of their work is Palestine. In other words, why would I cite the works of Veracini or Wolfe when Palestinians have long written on the topic of settler

colonialism from their own lived experiences of it, both in Palestine and in exile? Why would I cite non-Palestinian scholars when I myself have experienced the settler colonialism I wish to discuss in this section? Therefore, I will open this section of the chapter with Rana Barakat, who stated that it is important to “read Palestinians as the makers of Palestinian history as opposed to Palestinians as a part of a Zionist narrative” (Barakat, 2018, p. 350).

Settler colonialism is highly dependent on carefully constructed bodies of knowledge, like propaganda, circulated so widely that they become a form of common sense, or unquestioned settler narrative (Barakat, 2018). It is a system highly dependent on the indoctrination of the settler, due to the fragility of settler colonialism, which I will address later on in this section, and the dehumanization of those whose land has been settled. To tie this back to the theoretical framework of interdependence, dehumanization and settler colonialism cannot be viewed as separate from one another; they are two systems that work together to sustain the oppression of Palestinians, and to sustain Palestinian erasure.

However, while indoctrination plays a pivotal role in the survival of settler colonialism, it does not equal absolution, in that it does not justify the settlers’ behaviours and actions or preclude their responsibility to oppose settler colonial systems of oppression. That is to say, human agency must still be considered, both for those advancing the settler colonial agenda, and those resisting it. Just as human agency does not allow the settler to preclude their responsibilities, it also does not minimize the work of the people resisting settler colonialism. Therefore, assuming that there is a small group of people indoctrinating the entire world gives settler colonialist propaganda too much

agency, victimizes the settler, rids them of all accountability, and reduces all resistance movements to a mere nothing. So, while territoriality by the settler cannot exist without this indoctrination, we cannot consider it to be a totalizing theory. To put it simply, giving indoctrination this totalizing power allows anybody watching a genocide of an entire people for two entire years without calling it out to be victims of simple ignorance. However, because I do not believe in indoctrination as a totalizing theory, I no longer believe in simple ignorance in the context of Palestine. All ignorance is willful ignorance, especially when what you're choosing to ignore has been broadcasted loudly to the entire world through platforms like social media, which have played a pivotal role in settler colonialism's inability to contain dissent; Kanji (2023) referred to this as a colonizer's *right to ignorance*.

Zionist Settler Colonialism

As mentioned previously, Zionist settler colonialism would not have been possible without first dehumanizing Palestinians, because they are two interdependent systems. Dehumanization advances and justifies Zionist settler colonialism, and Zionist settler colonialism advances dehumanization. It is a vicious cycle of oppression. Growing up, every time my father would come across another Palestinian in *the west*, he'd say *hay hal il falasteeniya, kulna zay ba'ad; this is our situation; we, Palestinians, are all the same*. The situation my father is referring to is that of diaspora. I no longer like to use the word diaspora when referring to Palestinians outside of Palestine, as it does not provide context for why so many Palestinians are away from their homeland. The Arabic word for diaspora is *alshatat*, which translates to *the scattered [people]*. Palestinians in exile, and those who have been internally displaced within Palestine, are not a scattered people, but

an exiled people. We are a people who were forcefully *scattered* from our land with a promise of return. Seventy-six years after my great grandfather received that promise, I am writing to you as a Palestinian in exile in Canada.

In order to understand settler colonialism in the context of Palestine, we must turn to the foundational work of Fayegeh Sayegh (1965/2012), a Palestinian Syrian scholar, who wrote *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*. Sayegh argued that *Zionist colonialism* is a more appropriate term to use when addressing settler colonialism in Palestine. He highlighted the differences between what he refers to as *European colonialism* and Zionist colonialism throughout his work, framing his arguments “within the political context of resistance and liberation” (Barakat, 2018, p. 349). What I appreciate about Sayegh’s work is that while he uses these specific terms to distinguish the two types of colonialism, he always precedes the term European colonization with the word “other” (i.e. other European colonization/colonialism/etc.), implying that Zionist colonialism is also European. Therefore, Sayegh constantly and consistently conveyed the message that Zionists are not indigenous to Palestine, as Zionist ideology itself is a European invention. It is important to keep this in mind throughout this section of the chapter.

Sayegh (1965/2012) stated that three essential features distinguished the inception of other European colonialism in different parts of Africa and Asia from Zionist colonialism in Palestine. The first distinguishing feature is that other European colonisation is driven by economic or politico-imperialist motives, whereas Zionist colonialism is driven by the desire to attain nationhood for the Zionists, and to establish a Jewish state (pp. 208-209). Secondly, other European settlers are willing to coexist with the Indigenous populations they exploit and dominate, while Zionist colonialism is

incompatible with the existence of the Palestinian native population (p. 209). Finally, Sayegh stated that Zionist colonialism was, at the time, under the threat of Ottoman authorities and the native Arabs of Palestine, who will resist their dispossession from the land, while other European settlers could count on protection from other imperialist sponsors (p. 209). These features of Zionist colonialism were seen as obstacles that stood in the way of the Zionist movement's ultimate objective: "... to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law" (p. 208). These obstacles also added to the fragility of an already fragile settler colonial system.

It is important to mention that while Zionists claim that their ultimate objective is to create a Jewish homeland, "relatively few Zionists are in fact believing or practicing Jews" (Sayegh, 1965/2012, p. 214), which means that the Zionist movement uses religion to justify and advance its political agenda. Colonizing in the name of a so-called Jewish homeland justifies the elimination of the native non-Jewish, Palestinian, Arab inhabitant of that land. Additionally, Sayegh (1965/2012) highlighted the Zionist's opposition to *Jewish assimilation*, as they believe it is the "prelude to the 'dissolution' and 'elimination' of the 'Jewish nation'" (p. 215). The Zionist movement, therefore, calls for what they refer to as *self-segregation*, which they define as "the only pathway to national 'redemption,' 'salvation,' and 'fulfillment'" (p. 215). Therefore, the Zionist ideal of racial self-segregation calls for

The departure of all Jews from the lands of their 'exile' and the eviction of all non-Jews from the land of 'Jewish destination', namely, Palestine ... according to the teachings of Zionism: the 'Chosen People' can attain its 'special destiny' only when it is *all together* and *all by itself*. (Sayegh, 1965/2012, p. 215)

The Zionist settler-state, to meet this objective of self-segregation, is therefore characterized by three main features: “its racial complexion and racist conduct pattern; its addiction to violence; and its expansionist stance” (Sayegh, 1965/2012, p. 214). In highlighting parallels between Canadian and Israeli apartheid systems, Krebs (2012) illuminated that while these three features are not unique to the Zionist settler colonialism of Palestine, these features manifest in distinct ways across different settler colonial contexts. Sayegh (1965/2012) stated, “racial self-segregation, racial exclusiveness and racial supremacy ... constitute the core of the Zionist ideology” (p. 214). We cannot deny that settler colonialism in every context depended on, and continues to depend on, racism; however, Sayegh argued that while “Race-supremacist European settlers elsewhere in Asia and Africa ... have openly disdained the ‘natives’, ruthlessly suppressed them, and methodically discriminated against them” (p. 215), they exploited them for their own benefit, thereby deeming them useful, and allowed them to coexist in the same colony (p. 215). This is not the case with the “Race-supremacist Zionist settlers” (p. 216) in Palestine.

Sayegh (1965/2012) summarized this difference in race-supremacy by stating that if other race-supremacist European settler-regimes in Asia and Africa had a motto, it would be *racial discrimination*, while the motto of the race-supremacist Zionist settler-regime in Palestine is *racial elimination* (p. 217). Therefore, Zionist settler colonialism calls for the *complete* elimination of the native Palestinian Arab. I emphasize the word *complete* here because racial elimination is not exclusive to Palestine, as we see and have seen this elimination of Indigenous peoples through different means in every settler colonial context. However, the uniqueness of the elimination in the context of Palestine is

the settler's unwillingness to similarly exploit any native Palestinian for their own benefit.

The second distinguishing feature of Zionist settler colonialism, according to Sayegh (1965/2012), is their violence and terrorism towards the Palestinians. Violence and terrorism are the state's chosen methods of intimidation and eviction of the Palestinian native: *eviction-by-terrorization* (p. 218). There are countless examples of this eviction-by-terrorization carried out by israel against Palestinians. Sayegh named the massacres of Dair Yaseen, Ain ez-Zaitoun, and Salah ed-Deen which occurred in 1948 as examples of this terrorization. However, a more recent example is the most recent genocide carried out on the people of Gaza by israel. [i]srael launches terrorist attacks on Palestinians in Gaza with the intention of killing *all* of them, which can be considered the fastest and easiest way for them to evict-by-terrorization. However, when the Zionist colonizer is not successful in the targeted killing of the Palestinian, their eviction-by-terrorization is carried out in other ways. The Zionist regime will forcibly starve the entire population, kidnap, maim, and rape them, thereby creating uninhabitable environments where the Palestinian is forced to seek better circumstances. [c]anadian settler-colonialism, for example, is much better at *pretending* to be peaceful, at least temporarily. Zionist settler colonialism is *shameless* in its expressions of violence. The reason why israel's first choice is the targeted killing of the Palestinian, is because they have not been successful in evicting the *living* Palestinian from their land. The Palestinians forced into exile seek to return, and the Palestinians in Palestine seek to stay – an ode to Palestinian steadfastness: *sumud*.

As for the third distinguishing feature of Zionist settler colonialism, Sayegh (1965/2012) identified territorial expansion, a nation state in all of Palestine with a *complete* emptying of all its Arabs, as “the perennial aim of Zionism” (p. 220). Again, the distinguishing feature here is not territorial expansion, as territorialization is the basis for all settler colonial systems; the distinguishing feature is the *complete* eradication of the Indigenous Palestinian from Palestine. In 1948 my great grandparents and grandparents were forcibly removed from their homes in *Akka*. In 2023, my uncles and aunts, and all of my cousins were forced to leave their homes in *Gaza*.

World leaders and international organizations fight for *peace* and *love* between Palestinians and israelis, assuming a two-state solution to be the end of the so-called ‘conflict.’ In fact, israel also pseudo-fights for peace with the Palestinians, behind the guise of peace agreements such as the Oslo Accords. Dana and Jarbawi (2017) addressed this pseudo-fight for peace:

The ‘peace process’ has proved to be an illusion. While this process was initially heralded as the beginning of the end of [i]srael’s occupation of the territories occupied in 1967 and was supposed to result in two states living side by side in peace and coexistence, the Oslo process enabled Israel to reinvent its colonial order by other means. In fact, the Oslo framework was used by [i]srael as a fig leaf to cover its continued colonization and to assure unrestricted control over the occupied territories, all under the banner of peace. (p. 210)

I mention this because oftentimes people will come up to me and ask why Palestinians *do not want peace*. I usually respond to this by asking them a question: would you want to

make peace with the people who call for the complete elimination of your people and occupation of your land? Would you want to make peace with the people who killed and displaced your family, who stole your home and uprooted its olive trees? So, it is not that Palestinians *do not want peace*, it is that our definition of peace is different from the definition that has been forced upon us by the Global North. Our peace lies in the land that they occupied, the homes that they looted and stole, the trees that they uprooted, and the families that they killed. A Palestinian's peace lies in their liberation. The Global North speaks of peace as a solution, but peace cannot be the solution for Palestinians, because colonial 'peace' will not bring about liberation, resistance and refusal will. And only then, under the skies of a liberated Palestine, in fields of spring flowers, will Palestinians be at *peace*.

After understanding the foundational work of the Palestinian scholars who have closely studied the Zionist settler colonialism of Palestine, it can be concluded that the story I shared about Palestinian skin as border to conclude the previous chapter, was not only a story of the violence of dehumanization, but a story of Zionist settler colonial violence and how it presents itself in the life of Palestinians. They are two interdependent systems that empower and perpetuate the sustainability of one another, thereby sustaining the oppression of the Palestinian.

Zionist Settler Colonialism in the Realm of the Psychological

As previously mentioned, the violence inflicted upon Palestinians in Palestine by Zionist settler colonialism follows Palestinians into exile. Understanding how it follows a Palestinian into exile is crucial for understanding how it is inflicted upon Palestinians in alberta schools. Remember, too, that violence is a spectrum, and while the violence

inflicted on Palestinians in exile may not be the same form of violence, it is violence, nonetheless. The effects of colonization run much deeper than the economy and land takeovers; they surpass physical space and enter the mind of the colonized Other, they enter the realm of the “psychological” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 43). We cannot talk about settler colonialism without addressing the psychological violence inflicted upon the colonised. This psychological violence is twofold: the colonization of the mind through tactics of indoctrination and assimilation, and through psychological torture. This psychological violence is as rampant today as it was centuries ago.

The indoctrination and assimilation of the mind happen in settler colonial structures like schools, for example. Many are only fed information that supports the existence of the system and does not challenge it. An example of psychological torture, in contrast, could be the dropping of leaflets by the Israeli government on the people of Gaza during times of genocide. These leaflets were dropped as a warning for them to evacuate, knowing very well that there was nowhere for them to evacuate to. Therefore, colonization is as much a psychological violence as it is a physical one, making it a violent phenomenon. Loomba quoted Fanon (1961/1963) when stating, “the colonised could not ‘cope’ with what was happening because colonialism eroded his very being, his very subjectivity...The colonial experience annihilates the colonised’s sense of self, ‘seals’ him into ‘a crushing objecthood’, which is why he is ‘not a man’” (Loomba, 2015, p. 122). This complete annihilation of the colonized self is a direct result of colonial violence on both the physical and psychological level.

The purpose of this section is not to prove that Zionist colonialism places first in the settler colonial olympics, implying that Palestinians are more oppressed than other

Indigenous communities. The purpose is to highlight the importance of understanding the context of the land being settled, and the Indigenous peoples of that land who are victim of the settlement. In other words, it is important to understand the geopolitical context of the land being settled, and the ideology being advanced by the settlers of that land, as these differ from one settler colonial state to the next. Not all Indigenous communities are the same, and therefore not all settler communities and settler colonial systems are the same. However, while we cannot paint all acts of settler colonialism with the same brush, it is still important to draw parallels between the different settler colonial states in the fight for Indigenous liberation, because all settler states work together to uphold their oppression of the colonized; they are a part of a matrix of domination. Therefore, the liberation of one of us is the liberation of all of us. I will touch on this relationship in a later section. Now that Zionist settler colonialism and the physical and psychological violence it inflicts on Palestinians in Palestine and in exile is understood, the next step is ensuring that the decades long Zionist settler colonialism of Palestinians is not framed using what Barakat (2018) referred to as a *success-defeat narrative*.

The Problem with Understanding Zionist Settler Colonialism through the Lens of Triumph and Defeat

Barakat (2018) highlighted the dangers of using a *success-defeat narrative* when addressing settler colonialism in Palestine, specifically. Settler colonial scholars like Veracini, and even scholars of the Global South, such as Achille Mbembe (2019) in his work *Necropolitics*, have used this narrative in their works.

Barakat (2018) argued that when addressing Palestine, “reproducing this paradigm of success and defeat is exactly what others have done in the exploration of

settler colonialism as a tool of comparative analysis in Palestine” (p. 351). Barakat criticized Veracini for utilizing this narrative because Veracini “asserts that the 1948 boundary is a case of settler colonialism whereas the Occupied Territories conquered by war in 1967 are viewed by him as a ‘failure’ of the Zionist settler colonial project” (p. 350), highlighting his use of the success-defeat narrative. She also criticized Veracini for arguing that only the part of Palestine conquered in 1948 is classified a case of settler colonialism because it was *successful* in eliminating the entire native people, rather than simply controlling the ones who remained in 1967 (Barakat, 2018, p. 350). In this way, Veracini limits settler colonialism to the elimination of the native by the colonizer, implying that this is the only scenario where settler colonialism applies. Barakat challenged Veracini’s work, and posed an integral question: “How is it that Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1967 [Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem] are not part of the settler colonial project?” (p. 350).

Building on Barakat’s critique, I consider Veracini’s argument incorrect for two reasons. Firstly, I would pose a different question to Barakat’s: *How is it not understood that controlling the native is also considered a form of elimination?* Veracini contradicts himself, as the elimination of the native and the control of the native cannot be seen as separate; they are not and cannot be mutually exclusive. This is the same as saying that murdering innocent civilians is illegal, but kidnapping them and keeping them in your basement (i.e. controlling them) is not. Therefore, it would be incorrect to consider the elimination of the native as an act of settler colonialism, and not the control of the native. They are two peas in a pod, and the pod is settler colonialism. This is also why I built on

Sayegh's (1965/2012) argument that racial elimination is unique to Zionist settler colonialism; elimination takes on different forms.

Secondly, I disagree with the notion that israel was *successful* in their elimination of the native Palestinian in 1948. If they were successful, how are Palestinians still resisting the israeli occupation today? If there were no Palestinian resistance, there would be no Palestine. Yes, they murdered countless Palestinians, and expelled them from their homes; however, we cannot equate this forced expulsion and murder to the complete elimination of the Palestinian; controlling a people and displacing them is **not** eliminating them. Therefore, Veracini's argument negates Palestinian resistance, and advances the Zionist settler-colonial narrative. Again, to tie this back to the argument made on the *complete* elimination of the Palestinian, this is the *objective* of Zionist settler colonialism; however, they have not met this objective.

Barakat (2018) also addressed this cognitive dissonance, by stating,

He [Veracini] seems to be neglecting a key element in understanding the settler colonial context, which is the demographics of elimination— still very much at play in all fragmented parts of Palestine. It is not that settler colonial aims do not exist in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, it is simply that the context differs. (pp. 350-351)

Therefore, according to Veracini, the mass incarceration of Palestinian civilians in israeli prisons without charge in the West Bank and Gaza, the illegal demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, the various checkpoints and blockades, the 708 km apartheid wall separating Palestinian natives from israeli settlers, the siege that israel has

imposed on Gaza since 2007 making it the largest concentration camp in the world, and the countless genocides committed against the people of Gaza, all cannot be classified as acts of settler colonialism. Barakat (2018) continued to state, “because of the way he casts settler colonial projects in terms of ‘triumph’, some of Veracini’s rhetorical divisions end up mirroring Zionist settler conquest and come eerily close to the Zionist narratives” (p. 350). This is a perfect example of why it is important to amplify Palestinian voices when speaking about settler colonialism in the context of Palestine; this amplification of Palestinian voices serves as a counter-narrative to dominant, widespread Zionist propaganda, as mentioned earlier. Veracini is making this conclusion as a white European settler working in Australia who has never been the target of settler colonialism, only its beneficiary and certainly has never known what it feels like to be Palestinian. This is not abstract research that I or other Palestinians have dedicated our lives to; it is our lived reality.

Mbembe (2019) similarly takes a defeatist approach when speaking about the effects of settler colonialism in Palestine, implying the triumph of Israel over the defeated Palestinian people. Mbembe introduced the concept of *Necropower*, stating that “the most accomplished form of necropower is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine” (p. 27). According to Mbembe, settler colonialism in Palestine manifests as *necropolitics* or *necropower*. Building on Foucault’s concept of *biopower*, which is a form of political control that divides people based on who must live and who must die that is rooted in racism, Mbembe defined necropolitics as “the ultimate expression of sovereignty [which] largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die” (p. 66), again, emphasizing the triumph of Israel over the Palestinian people. It is a form

of political control and power that creates *death-worlds* and a *living dead*. Mbembe defined death-worlds as “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead” (p. 92). Mbembe argued that Palestine has become a death-world, and Palestinians a living dead, under the Zionist settler colonial occupation by the state of israel.

While Mbembe’s (2019) definitions speak to the extent by which Zionist colonialism has devastated Palestine, they fail to acknowledge Palestinian resistance. In other words, while it is important to apply terms like these to the Palestinian situation to highlight the magnitude and severity of it, it must be done in a way that still empowers the Palestinian. The Palestinian story does not end at Palestine being a death-world. If any *developed* nation turned into what Mbembe (2019) described as a death-world, the nation would have disappeared. This is rooted in a lack of understanding of Indigeneity, which is not just the idea that a land belongs to a people, but that a people belong to a land: “Palestinian indigeneity is shown to persist through exile: that is, even if the Palestinian body is expelled, it inheres in the land itself” (Nabulsi, 2023, p. 31).

Therefore, no matter how brutal the Zionist settler colonialism, and how gruesome the living conditions, even if they take the lives of every Palestinian, the land itself belongs to the Palestinian hands which worked it. Mahmoud Darwish (1964), in his poetry collection *Awraq Al-Zaytun (Olive Leaves)* described this relationship between the Palestinian and the land: “If the olive trees knew the hands that planted them, their oil would become tears.” Another Palestinian poet, Maha Zimmo, who is also the daughter

of the aunt I travelled with to Gaza in 2023, wrote a poem about our grandfather, highlighting this relationship between Palestinians and the land:

he would pick the fullest one from his tree, lift and place me next to him, equal, so
 i could watch as he unfolded the pomegranate placing every seed gently into rose-
 water and melted sugar. i would reach, push into those soft cushions, rose-water
 hands, wait as they slowly refilled, ignoring his task, making a simple unfolding
 into an hours-long conversation. a sea of devotion. Principle were my
 grandfather's gifts to me. he, whose pomegranate roots stood long before
 Occupation was bre(a)d (& butter), whose heart direction facing east still today,
 especially today is cause for imprisonment. bullets. bombs. when he left, and i had
 to unfold the pomegranate myself, they told me that Once upon a time he had
 been taken for nine months a political prisoner, who when returned first took the
 hands of my grandmother and then kissed his children, ate and had his coffee,
 ended his night with a small broom to sweep the carpet of pomegranate rotten
 without his rose-water hands. (Stanzas 1-7)

Classifying Palestinians as a living dead is a failure to acknowledge Palestinian resistance, and the connection of Palestinians to the land. Palestinians have been resisting since the *Nakba*, or *Catastrophe*, in 1948, through necessary violent resistance (Fanon, 1961/1963), and more passive forms of resistance such as *sumud*, the Arabic word for steadfastness. Dana and Jarbawi (2017) stated that “resistance constituted the backbone of Palestinian steadfastness [*sumud*] and survival in the face of Zionist colonization, dispossession, and dehumanization” (p. 213).

The story of Zionist settler colonialism is often interpreted as a story of the defeat of the Palestinian people; this success and failure narrative is what Barakat (2018) referred to as the *settler narrative* (p. 361), which does not account for Indigenous resistance and sovereignty. This narrative needs to be reframed to what Barakat referred to as the *Indigenous narrative*, focused on Indigenous sovereignty (i.e. Palestinian resistance and endurance) (p. 361). Therefore, while we acknowledge the severity of the Palestinian plight for liberation, and the cruelty of the state of israel, we must also acknowledge the resistance of the Palestinian people. Because if it were not for this resistance, there would be no Palestine. Dana and Jarbawi (2017) summarized this beautifully, stating

Regardless of the way in which [i]srael continues its colonization, the unrelenting steadfastness of the people of the land will always pose a structural challenge to [i]srael's settler-colonial project. And the continuation of this state of affairs will likely make the accomplishment of the Zionist dream unattainable, and might result in devastating consequences for the whole settler-colonial project in Palestine. (p. 216)

The purpose of this section was to define Zionist settler colonialism, and the violence it commits against Palestinians, using Palestinian narratives as fact, rather than the Zionist propaganda people have been fed for centuries. While I briefly explained how the violence of Zionist settler colonialism extends to Palestinians in exile in this section, a pattern that will be discussed in detail in the final chapter, the next section serves to explain *why* this violence is necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics. I will speak specifically to the violence of Palestinian erasure. To answer this question, it is

important to understand the role Canada plays in Zionist settler colonialism, and to understand Palestine and Palestinians as a threat to settler colonialism everywhere. While this section highlighted this threat, as seen in Dana and Jarbawi's work (2017), specifically in relation to sumud, the next section will trace this threat even further, and the role it plays in Palestinian erasure.

Palestinian Erasure and Its Role in Settler Colonialism

While the focus of this section is Palestinian erasure, the purpose of it is not to 'prove' Palestinian erasure in Canadian schools, but to highlight why this erasure exists, and why its existence is necessary for the advancement of Zionist settler colonialism, and to oppress both the Palestinian in Palestine and the Palestinian in exile. Palestinian erasure is a nonnegotiable fact; facts are stated, not discussed. I will speak extensively to Palestinian erasure as a product of anti-Palestinian racism (APR) in the next chapter.

This section serves to answer the second research question of the thesis: *why* is Palestinian erasure necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics? While I cannot fully address this question within the confines of this thesis, I will attempt to begin the conversation of why the erasure of Palestine and Palestinians is necessary by arguing that it is integral to the survival of settler colonialism: "Palestine is precarious vis-à-vis its undesirability and its destabilizing potential" (Salaita, 2017, p. 23). Although this erasure is not limited to schools, understanding it in the context of schools is the focal point of my thesis.

The inclusion of Palestine in schools and curricula would expose the parallels between Israel and other settler colonial states, thereby posing a threat to settler

colonialism and its “fragile and anxious claim to legitimacy” (Nabulsi, 2023, p.28). As Simpson (2023) wrote, “I think about how Palestine is revealing the deep connections between Zionists and governments, educational and cultural institutions, and mainstream media, in [c]anada and in other settler colonies” (para. 3). To recognize Palestine and Palestinians is to recognize Turtle Island and First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples; it is to recognize Jagera and Turrbal land and Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples; it is to recognize Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu and Māori people; it is to recognize Kashmir and Kashmiri people; therefore, to expose israel is to expose every settler colonial state. Palestinian erasure in schools is not only preferred, but integral to the survival of settler colonialism, everywhere.

This section will highlight the interdependence of canada and israel as settler colonial states, and the role they play in the matrix of domination. This will explain why Palestinian erasure in schools is integral to the survival of settler colonialism everywhere. To highlight the parallels that exist between canada and israel as settler colonial states, I will turn to Krebs’ (2012) *Architect of Apartheid*. I will then highlight why Palestinian erasure in schools is integral to the survival of settler colonialism everywhere using Tuck and Yang’s (2012) concept of the *settler perspective* in their work *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*.

Understanding Settler Colonialism as a Fragile System

While settler colonialism is a violent system that inflicts its violence in the realm of the physical and psychological, it is also a fragile system. Understanding it as a fragile system will help to explain why Palestinian erasure in alberta schools is necessary. In the context of both the Palestinian in Palestine and in exile, this fragility is most heavily a

result of Palestinian resistance. Jamal Nabulsi (2023) explained the fragility of israel's settler colonialism in Palestine and stated that

While Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty is grounded in the land itself, [i]sraeli sovereignty rests on the surface of the earth. It is anxious because Palestinians have utterly refused to disappear. Their ongoing sovereign presence poses an inherent threat to the legitimacy of [i]sraeli sovereignty. (p. 36)

I would expand on Nabulsi's point to indicate that Palestinians' utter refusal to disappear is not only seen in the Palestinians refusal to leave Palestinian land, but in a Palestinian grandparents refusal to stop telling their stories, a Palestinian poet's refusal to stop writing their poems, a Palestinian teacher's refusal to stop teaching Palestinian history. It is a refusal that exists in *tatreez*¹, and the symbolism of the *kuffiyah*². Therefore, it is not only a Palestinian's physical presence on Palestinian land that threatens israel's anxious and fragile claims to legitimacy, but Palestinian history, storytelling traditions, art, poetry and literature.

This thesis, for example, can also be considered a threat to this legitimacy.

Nabulsi (2023) highlighted the necessity of violence in upholding settler colonialism, stating that “precisely because it [israeli sovereignty] is grounded in the baseless denial of Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty, [i]sraeli state sovereignty must be performed through continuous violence on Palestinians (who embody enduring sovereignty)” (p. 36).

Because the threat is not limited to a Palestinian's physical presence on Palestinian land,

¹ Palestinian embroidery which has long been a way of resistance, and a gatekeeper of history (Taleb, 2024, p. viii)

² A Palestinian scarf that has become a “symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance” (Hirbawi, para. 7).

the violence committed by israel is not limited to physical violence. It is the violence of the complete erasure of the Palestinian, as well as the erasure of Palestinian history and the various forms of Palestinian expression mentioned above. Recall that Sayegh (1965/2012) defined this violence as a characterization of Zionist settler colonialism (p. 214).

This conversation on fragility, along with the remainder of this chapter, helps to explain the physical violence faced by Palestinians in Palestine and in exile, specifically in alberta schools. Opposition to one settler colonial state is an opposition to them all, another point I will expand on in the coming sections. To put it simply, settler colonialism is fragile because it is up against the truth.

Drawing Parallels Between [c]anada and [i]srael as Settler Colonial States

At this point, it should be understood that settler colonialism is a fragile and anxious system, which depends on a matrix of structures of power that work together to sustain oppression (i.e. the matrix of domination). In the context of this thesis, this oppression is Zionist settler colonialism and its infliction on Palestinians in Palestine and in exile. In order to better understand how this oppression is inflicted upon Palestinians in canada, it is important to highlight canada's role in the matrix. This helps explain why canada as a settler colonial state is so threatened by Palestinian resistance movements, such as the encampments, which I will use as an example to demonstrate this threat at the end of the chapter. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to explain why Palestine and Palestinian discourse pose a threat to the matrix, which thereby explains why Palestinian erasure is necessary and advanced in alberta schools.

Many people do not understand, and are starting to question, why Canada, a “peacekeeping nation” (United Nations, 2026), formally recognizes a genocidal state like Israel. People do not understand why Israel holds so much power in Canadian politics, or why Canadian tax-payer dollars pay for Israel’s weapons of mass destruction. Students in K-12 Canadian schools are beginning to wonder why Palestine is not brought up in their social studies classes. These students are learning in the digital age, and are exposed to news on social media, where there has been an increase of Palestinian discourse and narratives. Students in postsecondary schools in Canada are wondering why Canadian universities invest so much money into Israel. We can sum all of these wonderings into a single question: why is Canada so invested in Israel, and why is Canada trying so hard to erase Palestine? The answer is simple; it is not *too complicated*, or *too political*: Exposing Israel exposes Canada.

Krebs (2012) stated that “the [c]anadian government’s unbending support for [i]srael is well known ... What is less understood is the basis for this support” (para. 2). Therefore, as mentioned, what is less understood is the *why*, and understanding the *why* will help people better understand why Palestinian erasure in schools is integral to the survival of the settler colonial project. [c]anada, the “peacekeeping nation,” has provided Israel with an apartheid, colonial playbook and how-to-guide for how to establish and maintain a settler colonial state. This is the same playbook provided to the South African apartheid regime (Krebs, 2012, p. 4). Krebs drew several parallels between Zionist and Canadian settler colonialism. He compared the Canadian pass system enacted in 1885, which “dictated that Indigenous peoples required written permission, including their reasons for leaving, from the local Indian agent to leave their reserves” (p. 6), to Israel’s

elaborate system of checkpoints, permits, borders like the apartheid wall, and the siege on Gaza to restrict and regulate the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza (p. 7). I am a Palestinian from Gaza, but I am not allowed into the rest of Palestine unless I give up my Gazan identification card. Movement of Palestinians within Palestine is not allowed; just as I cannot yet see Jerusalem, a Jerusalemite cannot yet see Gaza. Until all of Palestine returns to the Palestinians, we cannot experience the rest of our homeland.

Another parallel that Krebs (2012) drew between the two settler states is their use of seemingly endless negotiations “as a deliberate stalling tactic and a means of further entrenching the control of Indigenous lands and resources” (para. 10). In Canada, this looks like Treaty negotiations between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples:

When Treaty 7 was negotiated between the Canadian government and representatives from the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuu T’ina nation, and a number of Nakoda and Assiniboine communities, the representatives of the Crown brought a sizable contingent of North West Mounted Police, who pointed their cannons directly at the Indigenous encampments and occasionally fired at them as a show of force. (Krebs, 2012, para. 10)

These endless negotiations, and the use of violence as a threat, are a common theme in Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine. The Oslo Accords, the Road Map to peace, and other so called “peace processes” and negotiations (para. 11) occurred while Israel continued its illegal expansion of settlements and active erasure of Palestinians through land theft and forced displacement, as well as genocide, war crimes, crimes against

humanity, and ethnic cleansing. As I write this thesis, israel is carrying out a genocide against people in Gaza. I write this section after countless *ceasefire agreements* – another one of israel’s so-called negotiations for peace – which was again broken by israel (Abo Helow, 2026; Baconi, Albouq, & Eid, 2025; Hajjaj, 2025). My cousin, may Allah have mercy on his soul, was killed during a *ceasefire* agreement. There is no such thing as a ceasefire granted by a Zionist settler colonial state that has actively been erasing Palestinians since 1948, and shamelessly calls for the complete elimination of the Indigenous Palestinian.

To put it simply, both israel and canada are settler colonial states founded on the stolen land and forced displacement of Indigenous peoples (Krebs, 2012). Today, the land is still stolen, and the people are still displaced. These colonial processes have never ended and continue today: *Settler common sense*. [c]anada and israel are fragile and anxious because they recognize their own illegitimacy, an illegitimacy that can be easily exposed through acts of teaching and learning about settler colonial violence inflicted upon Indigenous communities globally. Krebs (2012) reminded us that “if [i]srael is held accountable for its crimes against Indigenous people on the world stage, [c]anada has a greater risk of meeting the same fate” (pp. 10-11). In other words, once students start to draw the parallels themselves, which they already have been, we can begin to count down to the end of settler colonialism.

I want to reiterate that Palestinian erasure does not only occur in schools, but I focus on schools in this thesis because, as Tuck and Yang (2012) highlighted, schools are shaped by settler colonialism. In *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, Tuck and Yang (2012) carried out work to prove that “settler perspectives and worldviews get to count as

knowledge and research and how these perspectives - repackaged as data and findings - are activated in order to rationalize and maintain unfair social structures” (p. 2). The point to be made here is that Indigenous perspectives and worldviews, histories and stories do not count as knowledge, as they pose a threat to this settler perspective due to the reasons mentioned earlier. This settler perspective was put in place in schools and curricular documents to justify and maintain the oppression of Indigenous peoples. The Official Story I define in the coming chapter is an example of this settler perspective. Therefore, the erasure of Palestine and the inclusion of Zionist propaganda in schools is a part of this settler perspective, which serves to justify israel’s existence and it’s *right to defend itself*. The settler perspective then becomes integral to the survival of settler colonialism everywhere, which is why this thesis serves to counter this settler narrative, which I do in the next chapter.

Now that I have explained why Palestinian erasure is necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics, I want to end this chapter by addressing what happens when people start to identify this settler perspective, draw parallels between the different settler colonial states and the populations they oppress, begin to challenge the fragile, anxious system, and realize that their very psyche is colonized. It is in moments like these that it becomes harder for settler colonialism to mask its violence. To reiterate Nabulsi’s (2023) point, “precisely because it [israeli sovereignty] is grounded in the baseless denial of Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty, [i]sraeli state sovereignty must be performed through continuous violence on Palestinians (who embody enduring sovereignty)” (p. 36).

To highlight this violence as an attempt to continue Palestinian erasure and uphold settler state sovereignty, I will use the example of the University of [c]algary encampments. These encampments were erected to protest universities' continued support for the state of israel across north america in 2024. The common request made by the student protesters in these encampments was for their respective university to divest from the state of israel. It is important to briefly mention some context regarding the cause and context of these protests. Palestine has been occupied by israel since its foundation in 1948, a day the Palestinian people refer to as *Al Nakba*, or The Catastrophe (Maalej & Zibin, 2024, p. 2), which I have referred to extensively throughout the thesis. However, the encampments were erected in response to the most recent genocide committed against the people of Gaza in Palestine: "On October 7, 2023, Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, launched Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which was an incursion in the Jewish settlements in the Gaza envelope" (Maalej & Zibin, 2024, p. 2). This incursion was a response to seventy-five years of the israeli occupation of Palestine. The European Medical Human Rights Monitor (2025) published statistics of this genocide two years after its initiation on October 7th. They stated that after two years of genocide, israel has killed 75,190 civilians, including 21,310 children, and 13,987 women, leaving 45,600 children orphaned. It has injured 173,200 civilians, forcing 40,000 people to live with permanent or long-term disabilities, 21,000 of whom are children, making Gaza home to the largest number of child amputees in modern history. [i]srael has detained or forcibly disappeared 12,000 civilians, and has forcibly starved the entire population, causing 482 people to die of malnutrition, including 160 children (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2025). It is

important to keep in mind, however, that these numbers are based on the people that have been accounted for. The numbers of people both missing and killed are likely much higher due to contemporary developments in artillery technology such as israel's use of thermobaric munitions that burn at approximately 3, 500 degrees Celsius (Mansour, 2023).

On May 9th, 2024, in response to israel's genocide of the people of Gaza, students at the University of [c]algary organized an encampment to pressure the University to divest from the state of israel. This encampment was one of 174 encampments globally, most of which were organized across university campuses in north america (Palestine Is Everywhere, 2024). According to the [c]algary Herald,

The protesters had set up a tent camp surrounded by wooden pallets on MacEwan Hall's south lawn early Thursday morning and had engaged in peaceful activism calling for the university to divest itself of any israeli-linked investments during the course of a warm, sunny day. (Kaufmann, 2024, para. 2)

I arrived in the afternoon, and the environment was indeed peaceful. There were arts and crafts activities for kids and adults, traditional Palestinian music was playing, and people were dancing and singing. An Indigenous Elder attended the encampment to bless it, and to give us permission to be on the land to advocate for the people of Palestine. However, it became clear very quickly that the opinions, permissions, and positions of the Indigenous people of this land did not matter. The administration of the University of [c]algary called the [c]algary Police to inform them that a trespassing order has been violated. The [c]algary Police promptly responded to the university's call:

At around 8:30 p.m., police officers including tactical team members and others equipped in riot gear and appeared to be armed with rubber bullet rifles moved into the camp's southern perimeter, pulling down some of the pallets and hurling aside a few of the roughly 20 tents erected by demonstrators. (Kaufmann, 2024, para. 5)

At around 8 p.m., I found myself in the front line, linking arms with about twenty of the remaining protesters, face to face with the police in riot gear, before they attacked us three hours later with brutal force. They were violently pushing through us, hitting us with their batons and shields, before starting to shoot us with rubber bullets, and intimidate us with pepper bombs, tear gas, and flash bangs. We were met with this level of violence after three hours of peacefully chanting and singing, after a day of arts and crafts, and dancing to the songs of Palestine. This violence followed the student's agreement to take down their tents, as the police ordered. This violence followed the receiving of permission from the Indigenous people of this land to be on this land.

Danielle Smith, the premier of alberta, in a statement made to the [c]algary Herald said, "there are reasonable ways to protest," but "trespass and camping is not acceptable on university grounds" (Kaufmann, 2024, para. 27). This is ironic for many reasons. In 1999 and 2003, encampments were organized in the same exact area as this one to protest the cost of tuition. CBC News interviewed a man who was at both the 1999 and 2003 encampments: "Matt Stambaugh camped out at both the 1999 and the 2003 protests. In fact, he helped organize the latter...He recalls the entire atmosphere surrounding those protests as fundamentally different from those of last week [at the Pro-Palestine encampment]" (Fletcher, 2024, para. 18-19). Matt stated, "Especially in '99, there was

never a feeling like this was a charged up or a tense situation," he said. "It was very calm and it was very respectful, too" (para. 20). It is clear that the encampments in 1999 and 2003 were fundamentally different from the encampment against israel's genocide and ongoing oppression of Palestinians, as they were rooted in issues of tuition cost and not in the genocidal engagement and support of a genocidal state. However, one commonality between all three is that they were peaceful. So then, what was different about the anti-israel encampment that made it more *threatening*, leading to violence from the police? The answer to this question is the same answer to *why* Palestinian erasure is necessary, according to (Zionist) settler colonial logics: the downfall of israel is the downfall of canada.

I concluded with this example of the encampments because it is an amalgamation of everything discussed throughout the chapter. It highlights the violence of settler colonialism, and how the violence follows Palestinians into exile. It demonstrates the necessity of violence in upholding settler colonialism, thereby highlighting settler colonialism's fragile and anxious claims to legitimacy. Most importantly, however, the encampments serve as a concrete example of the beginning of the end of the matrix of domination, because it is a clear demonstration of the parallels of different settler colonial systems being drawn by thousands upon thousands of people across the country and the continent. This example of the encampments can be considered a macro version of what schools across alberta can expect to see from their students. The students who are calling bullshit in the face of Palestinian erasure.

CHAPTER 4: PALESTINIAN ERASURE IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

In this chapter I will first, in Section One, tell a story to highlight Palestinian resistance in the face of erasure. In Section Two, I will discuss the concepts of curriculum and curricular violence to set the stage for a conversation on anti-Palestinian racism (APR). In Section Three, I engage in a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of various alberta education documents to identify the Official Story and highlight the prevalence of APR in the alberta schooling system. I will highlight that APR is not only experienced by Palestinian students, but Palestinian teachers alike by providing participants' Counter-Stories. These Counter-Stories serve three main purposes: to show how APR can manifest in alberta schools, to provide the truth about Palestinian erasure in canadian K-12 and postsecondary schools, and finally, to offer Palestinian participants an opportunity to share their Counter-Stories.

Accounts of Palestinian students and teacher's experiences within alberta schools, which were shared with me during the qualitative interviews I conducted, form the Counter-Story to the Official Story, the dominant narrative. I interviewed three participants for this thesis as I wanted to give more space for a few participants rather than take snippets from very vulnerable, meaningful stories. I did not want to take anything away from what they wanted to share, as Palestinians have been silenced enough. If I wanted to prove the existence of APR in schools, I would have had a larger *sample size*, but I do not seek to prove this, as mentioned in the introduction. Also, Palestinians are more than a mere sample size. To call people a sample size is derogatory when used to describe any participants; however, in the case of Palestinians specifically, terms like these just add to the dehumanization I highlighted in the previous chapter.

Through reflecting on participants' Counter-Stories, I conclude this chapter with insights into how educators can challenge anti-Palestinian racism, and the erasure of Palestine and Palestinians more generally, in Alberta classrooms.

Palestinian Resistance in the Face of Erasure

Understanding the concept of Palestinian skin as border, as discussed in previous chapters, and the Palestinian existence within in-between spaces, is pivotal to understanding the experience of Palestinian students with anti-Palestinian racism in Alberta classrooms. This understanding is a step towards the advancement of truth in the face of Palestinian erasure. This experience of Palestinian identity is not to be mistaken for a lack of resistance, however.

In the winter of 2025, I travelled to Egypt to visit my displaced family who fled from Gaza during the most recent, ongoing genocide committed by the Zionist settler colonial state of Israel. The last time I saw my family was in Gaza in August 2023, two months before the genocide broke out. For myself, a Palestinian in exile in the Global North, I have a level of survivor's guilt for not undergoing the same oppressions Palestinians experience on a daily basis in Palestine. This guilt is heightened during times of active genocide, but does not ever really disappear, because Palestinians do not have the privilege of living *normal* lives. When they're not being actively bombed and intentionally starved, they are surviving a life of illegal settlement on their lands; they are surviving the stripping of their land from the hands that worked it for centuries. My survivor's guilt transformed into a yearning to do anything I could to help, both as an attempt to alleviate this guilt, and liberate our Palestine. Recognizing too, that this guilt

alone is not what drives the actions I take to support Palestinians, but my duty as a Muslim to stand firm for justice.

My trip to Egypt was one such attempt to take action. I had an opportunity to volunteer at a school for children who escaped genocide in Gaza and are now living, or more appropriately surviving, in Egypt. This is a K-11 school that only opens five days a week in the evenings, as Palestinian children displaced from Gaza are not allowed to attend Egyptian schools. Therefore, the school functions in an Egyptian school building after regular school hours for four hours every school day. There are approximately two hundred school-aged children in attendance each day. My job was to attend as a teacher and offer support wherever it was needed. Before I begin speaking of my experience at this school, I want to preface by stating that I expected to be working with two hundred broken children, children who are helpless and hopeless, who were stripped of their past and future by Israel.

I walked into the school on my first day, and joined the school assembly which I learned happens at the start of every school day. My heart sank when I realized that I was surrounded by hundreds of children who all escaped genocide within the past two years; children, all between the ages of three and eighteen. I was welcomed with open arms by the leaders of this school initiative, and the school's teachers. Throughout my three weeks at this school, I did not see a single tear shed by a child, and instead was enveloped in laughter, smiles, and conversations about the beauty of Gaza and their lives there - reminiscing accompanied by underlying tones of grief and loss, not the opposite. I witnessed education in its truest and purest form at this school. The students showed up every day eager to learn, knowing that they would not receive a diploma, or any form of

recognition for their efforts. They studied for their tests and wrote them with conviction. They were happy when they did well and devastated when they didn't, despite knowing that the grade they received served no purpose but a representation of how much harder they had to work the next time around. They were there simply for the sake of gaining knowledge, and the hopes of using that knowledge to fight to better their lives in a liberated Palestine. I did not meet broken children; I met children who embody *sumud*, with an appetite for knowledge, without promise of reward or opportunity.

When working with Palestinians in research, and when teaching them in schools, it is therefore important to keep them in context, just as it is important to keep anyone in context. The Palestinian experience is one of dehumanization, and of resistance to that dehumanization. It is a fight for liberation from the second you are aware of the world around you until the day you die. Palestinians live in a constant state of politicization and thereby embody *sumud* as they go through life with their skin as border. Palestinians strongly believe in the need to hold onto their identities, because of ongoing attempts at their erasure by the Zionist colonial regime in Palestine as well as their (state) supporters in the Global North.

As I clarified in Chapter Two, while the border may be a physical space that separates two different worlds, our Palestinian skin is our border. We are walking borders so long as we occupy this skin. Because anywhere we go that is not our Palestine, our home, we are stuck in the in-between spaces, the different worlds. For many Palestinians, going home is not an option. Instead, we wear this skin with pride and demand its acceptance. As I will demonstrate in the next section, both the students and teacher

research participants, and I, as the researcher, speak truth to power in the face of our erasure.

Anti-Palestinian Racism

It is important to note that the violence settler colonialism inflicts on Palestinians is not exclusive to Palestine; it is also the experience of those of us in exile. The settler colonial violence is just exercised through different means. One way that this violence is exercised on Palestinians in exile is through Palestinian erasure, which can be classified as a form of anti-Palestinian racism. Anti-Palestinian racism in Alberta schools is a result of the centuries-long dehumanization of Palestinians and Zionist settler colonialism; it is also one example of how settler colonial violence has followed the Palestinian into exile. The term anti-Palestinian racism (APR) was named and framed by Dania Majid in her 2022 report for the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA). Majid (2022) argued that anti-Arab racism does not fully envelop the experiences of discrimination faced by Palestinians in Canadian society specifically, or in society more generally:

There is broad agreement among those consulted for the need to name anti-Palestinian racism as a distinct form of oppression faced by Palestinians and those advocating for Palestinian rights ... It validates their experience as a collective one unique to Palestinians and provides an impetus to confront APR. (p. 8)

Majid decided against providing a concrete definition for APR, to ensure it can represent all Palestinians and their experiences. She instead created an APR framework “[by] focusing on naming and framing APR as a form of racism and understanding it through the lens of settler-colonialism, instead of creating a formal definition, the APR

framework remains fluid, contextual and adaptable to various and diverse circumstances” (p. 8). Majid also added that this shift from definition to framework primarily stems from “growing controversies and push-back around the redefinition of antisemitism to capture political critiques of the [i]sraeli state, as well as the redefinition of discrimination to halt critical race theory in education” (p. 8). The redefinition of antisemitism Majid referred to is the IHRA definition, which I discussed earlier in the thesis.

Although Majid (2022) did not offer a concrete definition for APR, she clarified various forms anti-Palestinian racism can take, including:

Denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies; defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values. (para. 1)

The transition from definition to framework ensures that APR is not classified as a definitive list of experiences. Experiences of APR cannot and should not be reduced to a list.

Finally, Majid (2022) stated that while some definitions or understandings of racism are adopted by different institutions, and are widely established and accepted, APR is typically ignored (p. 9), an action which can, ironically, itself be classified as an act of anti-Palestinian racism. Therefore, Majid argued that “APR should be recognized

[...] covered by existing laws, policies and guidelines [...] and those that promote diversity, inclusion and freedom of expression. It should also help foster understandings and co-solidarities with other anti-racism and settler-colonialism struggles” (p. 9).

In later sections of this chapter, I highlight the unique experiences faced by Palestinians in Alberta schools to demonstrate the necessity of adopting such a framework. While school divisions across Canada have adopted a definition for antisemitism and have not formally recognized APR, as mentioned, they have not yet adopted definitions or even frameworks for Islamophobia or anti-Arab racism to protect Arab and/or Muslim students more generally; instead, these institutions group all of these students together in more general definitions of discrimination. Terms like Islamophobia, APR, and anti-Arab racism are often used interchangeably. Majid (2022) stressed that “institutions typically fail to recognize APR; address APR under Islamophobia; or improperly characterize APR (i.e. as a political issue)” (p. 9).

Descriptions of Anti-Palestinian Racism

The first description of anti-Palestinian racism (APR) I would like to highlight is APR as a form of curricular violence. Nassim Elbardouh (2024) is an educator who defined Palestinian erasure as a form of APR, and thereby a form of curricular violence:

When we erase and silence Palestinian culture and people from the curriculum and classroom conversations, we [educators] commit curricular violence and contravene our professional responsibilities ... If we fail to mention entire portions of history on the principle that these stories are “difficult” or “too complicated,” we disconnect students from reality—as well as from how they see history and themselves. (para. 2)

Violence, as I mentioned in earlier chapters, is a spectrum, and so too is curricular violence. In the context of Palestine and schools, violence lives in erasure. While the absence of something may seem like a more passive form of violence, I would argue that it is not. This violence can be understood in relation to the argument, *silence is compliance*. It is not only violent to be pro-Israel and pro-Zionism, choosing to support the side of the colonizer over the colonized; it is also violent to stay silent in the face of the brutal colonization of the Palestinian people. Staying silent is siding with the oppressor. Not addressing what is happening in Palestine in our classrooms is a version of this silence, and thereby, a complicit act of APR.

Elbardouh (2024) classified this silence as a part of what Jackson (1968) conceptualized as the *hidden curriculum*. This is the curriculum that is not explicitly written out in education documents, but what exists, or doesn't, in the conversations that take place in the classroom between teachers and students. Elbardouh (2024) also posed several important questions:

What is the hidden curriculum of your classroom? In other words, what messages do you send not only when you speak, but when you are silent? Which perspectives do you center, and which are left to the periphery? Which narratives do you surface and which are the ones you avoid? (para. 7)

Therefore, while the violence may be one of erasure from the formal, written curriculum, it may also exist in the realms of hidden curriculum. This hidden curriculum is similar to what Aoki (1993) conceptualized as *lived curriculum*.

Frantz Fanon (1963) highlighted the psychological impacts of colonial violence, as I illustrated in Chapter Three. I draw on his work again in this section to illustrate the impact of the erasure of Palestine from curriculum that is the result of pretences of *neutrality*, through silence as a product of the hidden curriculum. Fanon (1963) described the effects of colonization on the colonized, stating that “every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture ... to recognize the unreality of his ‘nation,’ and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure” (p. 236). The effort that Fanon described can be understood in the context of this thesis as the effort canadian schools, as settler colonial institutions, exude to erase Palestine and Palestinians; this can also, therefore, explain the various forms of APR experienced by Palestinians across schools in canada, and the lack of effort taken to eradicate them.

Fanon’s (1963) point that colonial efforts bring the colonized person to “recognize the unreality of his nation” (p. 236), can be linked directly to Palestinian erasure. Elbardouh (2022, 2024) as well as Saleh and Awwad (2024) classified this as an experience of APR. Weiner (2023) also addressed efforts to have Palestinians “recognize the unreality” of their Palestine. This brings me to another example of settler colonial violence that has followed Palestinians into exile: cartographic erasure. A part of the experience of Palestinians in exile is people asking them where they are from on a map, and them not knowing where to point because they were erased from all maps and refuse to be called israeli. This *is* a result of both dehumanization and settler colonial violence. Weiner (2023), who examined sociological textbooks in schools in the united states, stated that “texts simultaneously erase and dehumanize Palestinians. Over 80% of all

textbooks ... depict Palestinians in stereotypical ways and half engage in Palestinian erasure, removing it from maps and/or referring to Palestinians as Arabs” (p. 997). While removing the word “Palestine” from a map may seem harmless, it is a violent strategy to erase Palestinian identity, and a way to advance Zionist settler colonialism. It is simultaneously an attempt to force Palestinians to recognize the “unreality” of their nation “because ‘maps often play a role in not only visualising historical or present-day realities but also to frame the students discourse around certain issues” (Peled-Elhanen, as cited in Weiner, 2023, p. 998; also see: Alayan, 2018, p. 86). According to Weiner (2023), “erasing Palestine replicates and contributes to the Zionist project of Palestinian elimination” (p. 998). The cartographic erasure highlighted by Weiner (2023) is an example of the psychological violence described by Fanon (1963).

Therefore, one of the first steps to understanding Palestinians and working with them as students in classrooms, or participants in research studies, is once again to understand violence as a spectrum. In schools, which are one of the most effective settler colonial institutions of oppression, psychological violence against Palestinians is rampant. Tuck and Yang (2012), for example, drew attention to how schooling in north america and other settler colonial nation states has been shaped by settler colonialism (p. 2). They stated that one task of settler colonialism in schools is to ensure that “settler perspectives and worldviews get to count as knowledge and research and how these perspectives - repackaged as data and findings - are activated in order to rationalize and maintain unfair social structures” (p. 2).

Weiner (2023) explored this task of settler colonialism in schools, and in the conclusion of her article, classified her findings as a “discursive apartheid” (p. 1004):

The discursive apartheid, colonialism, and anti-Palestinian racism evident in these textbooks suggest the necessity of deeply engaging with these disciplinary critiques to ensure introductory texts facilitate students' understandings of, instead of contributing to, imperial settler colonial projects ... these texts inhibit students' active solidarity with globally oppressed peoples and anti-racist and anticolonial movements, such as Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, and Kashmir, across the globe. (p. 1004)

Weiner's words alongside Fanon's conceptualization of violence underscore the violence of Palestinian erasure as APR. However, remember that this violence would not have been possible without the centuries-long dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, and the settler colonial violence highlighted in the last chapter.

Current research on APR almost always mentions the IHRA definition, implying that the adoption of the IHRA definition played a pivotal role in the advancement of APR (see: Abdo, 2022; Ayyash, 2023; Majid, 2022). While I absolutely agree with this argument, I think there needs to be more conversation around APR preceding the adoption and implementation of the definition. Palestinians, myself included, must be careful in tying APR exclusively to this IHRA definition, as it may further the narrative that APR is a new form of racism, when it is, in fact, not. Saleh and Awwad (2024) stated that "although recently named as a distinct form of racism, anti-Palestinian racism is not new. It is rooted in historical and ongoing euro-western racial-religious supremacy, settler-colonial logics, Orientalist dehumanization, and Zionist mythologies" (p. 15).

The Official Story Vs. The Counter-Story

Before I start this section of the chapter, I would like to reiterate that my intention is not to prove the existence of anti-Palestinian racism (APR) in schools. Anti-Palestinian racism has been prevalent in schools for decades; this is an undeniable, non-negotiable truth. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to highlight this prevalence, and the contradictions of what alberta education and the alberta government outline in their education documents and advocate for, versus what is actually happening in the classroom.

To highlight these contradictions and the various discursive strategies used by alberta education and the alberta government to advance APR, I will first identify the Official Story being narrated. This story is comprised of statements, guidelines, and definitions from three different alberta education documents: *the alberta K-12 curriculum (Program of Studies) (2005)*, *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum (The Guiding Framework) (2024)*, and *the province of alberta Education Act (2025)*. I will then conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of these documents, to break down the language used by alberta education to advance settler colonialism and Zionist propaganda, and therefore, APR. The discursive strategies I highlight in each CDA, which I list and define below, are used to silence Palestinians, as making room for this discourse poses a threat to the fragile settler colonial system. Lastly, and most importantly, I will highlight Palestinian research participants' stories, which provide a Counter-Story to the Official Story.

My use of a counter-storying method when interpreting and analyzing participants' stories is intentional, as it is an anti-colonial means of countering the rampant Zionist propaganda that has dominated curricular discourse, and all discourse, within school systems in alberta. To reiterate what I outlined in the introductory chapter of the thesis, counter-storying is a method born out of Critical Race Theory to challenge reductionist narratives about racialized people, narratives that perpetuate inequity and marginalization, and advance propaganda and stereotypes in academic literature (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, the stories that I highlight, through participants' words and experiences, will provide these Counter-Stories. However, it is important to remember that Palestinian stories come from a Palestinian narrative tradition, and were not born out of opposition to dominant narratives. This Palestinian oral tradition grounds my approach to Counter-Storying as a methodology.

This section is divided into three Official Story vs. Counter-Story conversations, respectively: Safe Spaces, Inclusion, & Belonging vs. Palestinian Erasure; Curricular Expectations vs. Curricular Outcomes; and finally, Anti-Bullying vs. The Gaslighting of the Palestinian.

The Official Story Documents

It is important to note that I am extracting the Official Story verbatim from published alberta government documents. I am intentionally not paraphrasing anything, and only including direct quotes from these documents to highlight that this work is not based on opinions, but statements of fact. It is also important to acknowledge that even though the Official Story documents outline what *will* or *should* be taught, this doesn't

mean that educators agree. In essence, nothing and no one is really holding teachers accountable or ensuring that they are following these documents *exactly*. Much is changed according to teachers' judgements, including their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs, as well as student needs and classroom context.

The [a]lberta Education Act

The *[a]lberta Education Act* (2025) lays out the goals of alberta's Early Childhood Services to Grade 12 (ECS-12) in the alberta education system and "identifies the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry, school boards, charter schools, private schools, teachers, parents and students. The Act came into force on September 1, 2019" (para. 1).

The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum (The Guiding Framework)

The Guiding Framework (2024) "is intended to provide transparent guidelines to help parents, educators, and curriculum developers understand curriculum development in [a]lberta" (para. 1). It claims to set a "clear direction for developmentally appropriate curriculum of high academic standards for personal excellence. Together, *The Guiding Framework* and the curriculum are central elements of formal education in [a]lberta and the basis for students' learning and assessment" (p. 5). The term "developmentally appropriate" is repeated several times throughout the document but is not explicitly defined.

The [a]lberta K-12 Social Studies ‘Curriculum’ (Program of Studies)

[a]lberta Education (2024) defined “curriculum” as *content*³, stating that it is “what students learn. This learning includes what students should know and what students should be able to do” (para. 1). It is important to note that [a]lberta Education has increasingly been using changing the language of ‘curriculum’ in their documents. While, in the past, most were previously named and referred to as a “Program of Studies” (PoS), implicitly acknowledging that curriculum is broader than the PoS, [a]lberta Education has been shifting their language to “curriculum,”⁴ thereby narrowing and limiting curriculum to published programs of study. I am conducting a CDA on the 2005 Social Studies PoS which uses the language of “program of studies.”

Both *The Guiding Framework* (2024) and alberta’s *Program of Studies* (2005) are byproducts of the *[a]lberta Education Act* (hereinafter “*The Act*”) (2025) and thereby must follow that which is outlined in the *Act*. It can be assumed, therefore, that similar language (i.e. Safe Spaces, Inclusivity, Belonging, etc.), if not the same language used in the *Act*, is used throughout *The Guiding Framework* and the alberta *Program of Studies*.

Identifying Discursive Strategies

As discussed in the introductory chapter of the thesis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) asks us to think about the intentionality of language and discourse. It breaks down language into the range of discursive strategies that are used to advance certain political

³ It is important to note that this is a very limited, vague understanding of curriculum, as everything that is taught and learned – intentionally or not – through experiential and relational engagements (Aoki, 2005; Donald, 2009), including in and across home and community contexts (Huber et al., 2011 ; Nxumalo et al., 2022 ; Saleh, 2025) is also curriculum.

⁴ The new LearnAlberta platform, managed by [a]lberta Education uses the term “curriculum” rather than PoS <https://curriculum.learnalberta.ca/curriculum/en>

agendas (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Discursive strategies are “linguistic practices that speakers and writers use to convey meaning and messages. Often, speakers revert to different discursive strategies to maximize the impact and effect of the message and to fulfil different interests” (Hodes, 2020, as cited by Turay, 2023). These strategies are broadly used across settler colonial geographies including Canada, the United States, and Israel, to silence Palestinians and any anti-Israel anti-Zionist discourse. Making room for this discourse poses a threat to the fragile settler colonial system.

Different discursive strategies are identified throughout the process of conducting a CDA. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I will show the various ways that Canadian government and provincial education documents use a variety of discursive strategies in ways that produce and advance a range of different political narratives.

The following critical discourse analyses (CDA) highlight the abundance of anti-Palestinian racism present in the Alberta schooling system, and showcases the discursive strategies advancing the Zionist agenda. I coded for discursive strategies in the Official Story documents listed above. Coding is “an approach to organizing qualitative data by assigning short words or phrases to identify important features” (Hodes, 2023, p. 228). Through this process of coding, I identified the following discursive strategies, each evident in research participants’ stories, and all of which contribute to Palestinian erasure: Normalization; Assimilation; Implicature; Framing; Repetition; Ambiguity and Manipulation of Truth; and, Passive Voice.

Normalization

Normalization is “a set of simultaneous or subsequent discursive strategies which gradually introduce and/or perpetuate in public discourse some new – and in most cases often uncivil or untrue – patterns of representing social actors, processes and issues” (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p. 432). It occurs when “certain phenomena are naturalized or given a taken-for-granted or indisputable quality” (Hodes, as cited by Turay, 2023).

Assimilation

I define assimilation using the [a]lberta Teachers Association’s (ATA) (2019) definition: “The process of absorbing one cultural group into another” (p. 1). In these documents, the language used creates a discursive effect that mirrors the process outlined in this definition. I therefore code for assimilation as a discursive strategy that is used by the narrators of the Official Story. The ATA identified the following concepts as types of assimilation carried out by the canadian government against Indigenous peoples: cultural genocide, genocide, eurocentrism, among others (p. 1). I mention these three intentionally as they relate to the content of this thesis and speak to the purpose assimilation, as a discursive strategy, serves in these documents.

Implicature

Implicature is an overarching discursive strategy that, according to Ghawaidi and Alsmari (2025), is used to “convey subtle meanings, avoid controversial topics, or appeal to different audiences without making explicit commitments” (p. 49). Ghawaidi and Alsmari further argued that implicature is “deliberately indirect or vague for strategic purposes” (p. 49). While the authors discussed implicature in a political context,

specifically analyzing language used in western media outlets, this same definition can be applied to implicature in the context of school and government documents.

Framing

According to Hall and White (2008), framing is a discursive strategy which highlights “certain facets of reality to make specific issues more prominent, consequential, and memorable” (p. 32).

Repetition

Repetition leads to normalization, as it is the constant and consistent use of language to normalize certain ideas. It is a discursive strategy used “to assert authority and persuade audiences ... to reinforce ideological stances” (Shamim, Bushra, & Dwivedi, 2025, p. 465)

Ambiguity and Manipulation of Truth

Shamin, Bushra and Dwivedi (2025) described ambiguity as a discursive strategy that “allows speakers to appeal to diverse audiences while avoiding accountability. Ambiguity is often manifested in vague terms ... which lack precise definitions but carry positive connotations (p. 466). They also described the manipulation of truth as a discursive strategy that serves dual purposes. It is a practice that results in both inclusion and exclusion, because it uses selective facts, recontextualization, and omission to “create persuasive but ideologically loaded narratives” that mask contradictions and legitimize contentious policies (Shamim, Bushra, & Dwivedi, 2025, p. 466).

Passive Voice

Using passive voice and language is intentional, as it “affects readers' attitudes towards political issues” (Almahameed, Al Bataineh, & Ammari, 2022, p. 1196). This discursive strategy is ambiguous and manipulative, as it obscures “clarity of meaning by hiding the identity of the doer of the action” (p. 1196) While Almahameed, Al Bataineh, and Ammari (2022) discussed this discursive practice in the context of political news, it is also visible in school and government documents. To be “vague about the doer of the action is primarily deliberate” and serves political purposes (p. 1196).

Throughout the following Counter-Stories and Critical Discourse Analyses, I bold and italicize specific terms or sentences for the reader to pay particular attention to them, and to highlight specific patterns.

The Research Participants

As I outlined in the introductory chapter, two Palestinian students and one Palestinian educator agreed to participate in this research. I reached out to them myself or through other members of the Palestinian community. The participants were required to have attended either high school or postsecondary school in alberta between the years 2015 - 2024. Additionally, I gave my Palestinian participants an opportunity to decide whether they wanted to remain anonymous. My first participant, Jannah, decided against it, while the two other participants decided to remain anonymous. Therefore, the other names provided in this section are Pseudonyms. During the interview process with each participant, I noticed similar themes. While I asked all three participants the same questions, which guided the conversation, the questions were open-ended and did

not allude to any particular answers. Therefore, the themes I noticed from the interviews were not directly related to the questions asked, but the experiences they all shared as Palestinians in Alberta school systems.

Jannah

Jannah attended K-12 and postsecondary schools in Alberta for all of her schooling. Jannah is currently in her second year of postsecondary school. Jannah is a Palestinian who has been in exile her whole life; Jannah's father is from *Bayt Mahsir*, and her mother is from *Akka*. She completed grades 11 and 12 during the most recent genocide on Gaza. Jannah chose to remain known to the reader, thereby rejecting anonymity.

Dunya

When I asked this participant what she would like her pseudonym to be for the thesis, she gave it a lot of thought. She began to tell me a story of a little girl in Gaza who lost her family, and who was injured and forced to have her leg amputated during the most recent genocide. She said that this little girl exuded resilience; she would tell journalists that she wanted to grow up to become a doctor one day, despite everything that happened to her. This little girl was martyred, joining her family in heaven. Her name is *Dunya*. My use of the present tense verb 'is' is intentional, as Muslims do not believe life ends when you leave this world. *Dunya* is the Arabic word for *world* or *earthly life*: "*Ala hathihi al-ardh ma yastahiq al-hayah* - On this land, there is that which deserves life" (Mahmoud Darwish, 2002). This participant wanted to use the name *Dunya* to honor this little girl.

Dunya completed grades 5 to 9, as well as grade 12, in alberta. She is currently enrolled at a postsecondary school in alberta to pursue a medical profession. Dunya is a Palestinian; her father is from *Yafa*, and her mother is from *Akka*. Dunya shares several stories of her experiences as a Palestinian both in grade school and postsecondary.

Israa'

Israa' is a Palestinian educator who graduated with an education degree from a postsecondary school in alberta, and works in alberta. Israa' taught Middle School and High School English Language Arts and Social Studies for most of her teaching career. Israa' decided to remain anonymous. The choosing of the name Israa' was also intentional for this participant, as it is the name of someone beloved to her in Gaza; Israa's father is from Gaza, and her mother is from Akka. *Israa'* is an Arabic name which means *night journey*. It is a significant name in Islam, as it represents the night journey of the Prophet Muhammad, *salla Allahu a'layhi wa salam*, from Mecca to Jerusalem, before his *Mi'raj*, his ascension to heaven.

While reading through the interview transcripts, I realized something significant, and completely unintentional. Jannah decided to remain known by her real name, which is Arabic for *heaven*. *Dunya* and *Israa'* were intentionally and carefully selected pseudonyms, meaning *world* or *earthly life*, and *night journey* before the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, *salla Allahu a'layhi wa salam*, from Jerusalem to heaven, respectively. Completely unintentionally, therefore, the participants' names signify the world, heaven, and the journey between them; a straight line, and the basis of this thesis

work. A straight line from oppression in this Dunya to a promised liberation in Jannah for the believers, *insha'Allah. Subhan Allah.*

Conversation One: Safe Spaces, Inclusion, & Belonging Vs. Palestinian Erasure

The Official Story: Safe Spaces, Inclusion and Fostering a Sense of Belonging

According to the *Act* (2025), each school board has a responsibility to ensure that all staff and students (ECS-12) feel a sense of belonging:

The board has the responsibility to ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. (p. 52, s. 33)

Following the same theme of fostering safe spaces, diversity, and inclusion, *The Guiding Framework* (2024) states, “[a]lberta’s inclusive K–12 education system promotes equal opportunities for all learners to thrive in safe and caring environments that are responsive to their needs. Quality education is extended to all students without prejudice” (p. 19). They take this inclusivity a step further by defining who they are referring to when they say *all learners* and *all students*:

The curriculum will ... incorporate a diverse range of insights, understandings, and perspectives. It will include **all** Albertans, such as [a]lberta’s First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (and their knowledge, language, and pedagogies), as well as the diverse peoples who have come to make a home in [a]lberta. (p. 5)

The word prejudice used in the statement above, although not explicitly defined in *The Guiding Framework* (2024), is implicitly defined in the “Forward” section:

All students will see themselves in the curriculum in multiple ways Students should perpetually seek to both know themselves and understand their neighbours. Such knowledge can shine the light of *truth* on **prejudice**. *Truth* overcomes the ignorance and lack of empathy and imagination that lead to racism, bigotry, and intolerance and that stand as a barrier to reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (pp. 5-6).

Additionally, under the “Social Studies” subsection of the “Subject-specific Guidelines for Kindergarten to Grade 12” section of *The Guiding Framework* (2024) it is stated that, “Students will learn about histories, contributions, and perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, Francophone communities, and settlers and immigrants” (p. 13). Furthermore, under the section on “Pluralism”, it states: “In addition to learning about significant [a]lberta and [c]anadian history; the history of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; the coming of the French and the British; and the establishment of modern [c]anada and subsequent waves of immigration ...” (p. 18).

Critical Discourse Analysis of The Official Story

Language, as mentioned previously, creates conditions; it is never neutral. The same words are repeated again and again across the alberta education documents: *equal*, *safe*, *caring*, *belonging* ... These terms are used in these education documents to defend alberta education and entrench a cover story. They work to gaslight students who do not feel this sense of belonging, equality, and inclusivity. In other words, these terms are the

mask [a]lberta Education hides behind to advance its settler colonial agenda. This is demonstrated by the Counter-Story provided by the Palestinian students and educator research participants in the following section. In [a]lberta education's definitions of inclusion, there are promises made to extend education to *all* students in alberta classrooms without prejudice. However, the prejudice that they claim is *intolerable* is practiced in their definitions.

Firstly, in the statements highlighted above, notably related to who the curriculum includes, the document is clear that curriculum “will include **all** [a]lbertans, such as [a]lberta's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit” ([a]lberta Education, 2024, p. 5). Here, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are classified as *[a]lbertans*, not as Indigenous peoples. This is a discursive performance of assimilation insofar as alberta is claiming all Indigenous Peoples who inhabited alberta long before alberta existed or joined confederation through the possessive “[a]lberta's”. Here, a province of the settler state not only claims possession of Indigenous Peoples, but it also renders their legal status secondary. Clarifying the nation-to-nation relationship between the settler colonial nation-state and Indigenous peoples would imply that all other “[a]lbertans” (the european colonizers who stole the land) are *not Indigenous* (i.e. colonizers and/or settlers) to the land; it would also force the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in canada as canada's original Peoples in possession of the unique constitutional rights recognized in canadian law. This speaks directly to not only assimilation but also to normalization as discursive strategies in *The Guiding Framework* (2024).

Second, normalization comes into play when considering the following inclusions in the curriculum documents: “Francophone communities, and settlers and immigrants

...” ([a]lberta Education, 2024, p. 13). Here, the document uses a combination of implicature and normalization insofar as what it implies regarding certain power relations. To suggest that Francophone communities, who are descendants of the French (i.e. the first colonizers of this land), and immigrants, people who benefit from the settler-colonial system, are separate from settlers normalizes *settler nativism*; it excludes both French Canadians and new immigrants from the category of settler. Tuck and Yang (2012) defined *settler nativism* as “a settler move to innocence because it is an attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land” (p. 11). Therefore, both Francophone communities and immigrants, regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, are classified as settlers, whether intentionally or unintentionally. However, I do not believe Francophone settlers and immigrants from the Global North, some of whom were forcibly and violently displaced through slavery, for example, can be classified as the same type of *settler*; the term is nuanced. Immigrants are settlers on this land as they are “participants in and beneficiaries of [c]anada’s colonial project” (Malissa Phung. 2011, p. 292), certainly making them settlers, but not in the same way Francophone communities settled the land. Therefore, any non-Indigenous person who is benefiting from settler colonialism and resides on Indigenous land is a settler. This is a *truth* the province of Alberta chooses not to recognize, thereby normalizing certain groups and identities (particularly of Francophones and immigrants) as distinct from settler identity; as such, it also uses *ambiguity and manipulation of truth* to naturalize settler colonialism.

Third, passive voice and ambiguity manipulate the truth through implicature throughout the statements cited above. This process serves to further normalize settler-

colonialism. This is seen in the language “the coming of the French and the British; and the establishment of modern [c]anada ...” ([a]lberta Education, 2024, p. 18). The French and the British did not just *come* to canada to visit or by accident, and canada was not *established* without violence. The French and the British invaded, colonized, and settled on the land that they stole; they did not *establish* canada, they *stole* Turtle Island. Here we can see that the truth is manipulated through passive language implying that the arrival of Europeans to Turtle Island and the colonization of the land was peaceful; and obscures the fact that Indigenous societies existed prior to colonization with their own legal orders and governance systems (that are very much alive today). The use of passive language in these passages redirects readers away from the violence, genocide and forcible displacement that characterize much of canadian history; it also reflects similar discursive strategies used by western media networks when reporting on Palestine and israel: “Palestinians *dead* ... israelis killed.” In May of 2021, for example, ABC released a recycled article titled “Rockets **kill** 2 [i]sraelis; 26 **die** in Gaza as [i]srael hits Hamas” (The Associated Press, 2021). The Palestinians did not just die. *Who killed them?* This language is intentional, and advances settler-colonialism, as it is a form of Indigenous erasure. *Is Indigenous erasure not considered prejudice?*

Fourth, *Truth* is defined in *The Guiding Framework* (2024) as that which overcomes prejudice; it is that which overcomes ignorance and a lack of empathy, which leads to racism, bigotry and intolerance. The document then stated that a lack of this *truth* acts as a barrier to reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. This is an example of framing. The document framed the colonization of Turtle Island as a peaceful arrival, “the coming of the French and the British ...” (p. 18), and the creation of the

canadian nation state as a matter of “establishing” something; however, it omits exactly how that was done, through what the House of Commons unanimously decided was a genocide (House of Commons [c]anada, 2021, p. 8978)⁵. This also implies that there was no one on the land when it was settled by the French and the British. This is an example of Terra Nullius, which I discussed in Chapter Two. Audra Simpson (2007) stated that

The legal doctrine of terra nullius [...] offers stark testimony to the differential power of one account over another in defining not only difference but establishing presence, by establishing the terms of even being seen: an historical perceptibility that empowered possibilities of self- and territorial possession in the present. (p. 69)

The contradictions are palpable. How can Indigenous, Palestinian, and other students possibly be safe in a system whose foundational documents practice the “prejudice” that they claim is intolerable? How can a system that engages in Indigenous erasure by omitting and obscuring truths possibly protect Indigenous peoples? How can a system which explicitly and implicitly enacts, drives, and advocates for anti-Palestinian racism claim to *shine the light of truth on prejudice*? The stories shared in the following section by Palestinian participants of their experiences in alberta schools shed light on the truth in contrast to these curricular documents.

⁵ The House of Commons [c]anada formally recognized canadian Indian residential schools as an act of genocide.

Participants' Counter-Stories: Resistance to Palestinian Erasure

I will now contrast what was said in the Official Story with the stories shared by Palestinians in alberta schools. Therefore, I will be putting alberta education's claims of safety for, and inclusion of *all* students in conversation with the Counter-Stories of Palestinian research participants who have experienced erasure, a form of anti-Palestinian racism (APR), in alberta schools. In our conversations, Jannah, Dunya and Israa' articulated the following:

Jannah: *Okay, so before [October 7th], nothing. There was, there was no, no one even knew what Palestine was, I don't think. And then after ... the only thing that changed was people knew what it was, maybe, or like when it was ... brought up in class ... occasionally, people like, knew what we were talking about ...*

Dunya: *It [Palestine] was never brought up, like, it was never, I mean, I think that's a form of anti-Palestinian racism. It was never brought up as like a topic of discussion in social studies ever, **not once in my life**. I think I want to say it [APR] got more intentionally worse, I think [after October 7th] ... So, I think it [APR] is just more obvious and more outward after October 7. I don't think it never existed before, right, but it's just more clear ... After October 7, there was more direct anti-Palestinian racism ...*

Israa': *I've never felt seen or heard as a Palestinian student or teacher in alberta public schools, but after October 7th, I definitely felt more seen, but not in the way you want to be seen. I am no[t] someone who ever shied away from being Palestinian. It was always one of the first things I told my students, before October 7th, and after. I always felt seen by my students. The anti-Palestinian*

racism I experienced was never from my students, but from administrators and other teachers, and it got worse after October 7th. I was always labelled as “radical” because I didn’t shy away from “uncomfortable” topics in my classroom. Before October 7th I got away with being “radical”. After October 7th I couldn’t.

One side-effect of APR in the form of Palestinian erasure is the need to feel seen, heard and included. We often want people to validate our experiences, and more so even, our existence. This is a natural human response to erasure:

Jannah: ... *it was literally, like, like, the elephant in the room.*

Deema: *What was the elephant in the room?*

Jannah: *Palestine, like, all of it, I don't know. It's just like ... people did not know what this was. I'm pretty sure in grade 11, I would tell people I'm from Palestine, and they would still think, Pakistan. After October 7, yeah, it's like, it was literally like, an overnight switch where I was like, oh, people know what this is now. I've never had people know what this is.*

All three participants stated that before October 7th, there was really no mention of Palestine, which points to the experience of Palestinian erasure prior to October 7th. They also all expressed that they noticed a shift in how they were treated after October 7th. Therefore, while the Official Story claims that *all* students will see themselves in the curriculum in multiple ways, participants’ Counter-Stories indicate that they experienced Palestinian erasure prior to October 7th, and an increase in APR post October 7th.

When I explicitly asked participants if they had ever felt like they experienced anti-Palestinian racism (APR) in school, they shared what they considered acts of APR, which also constitute erasure:

Jannah: *In grade 12, when I was graduating ... we had to submit our yearbook quotes. And I was like, what do I put for my yearbook quote? What do I put? ... And I said, this is perfect: I'm gonna say "free Palestine". And I submitted it ... And usually, I worked in the yearbook for like, the past years ... and when someone would say something, like inappropriate or ... something that they couldn't include, they'd ... tell them and be like, "Hey, you can't write this" ... Usually it would be like, jokes ... or like someone would try to say something with a swear ... And they'd like, let them know, like, "hey, you're not allowed to..." whatever. So, I was already like ... are they gonna let me put this?*

Deema: *So, in your head, you were equating "Free Palestine" to swearing and inappropriate jokes?*

Jannah: *Well, I yeah, I was like, I don't know this is gonna be **too crazy or too political**. They weren't gonna let me be **too political**. And so I was, I was like, I was actually expecting something back from them. Being like, you can't put this. I didn't get anything back.*

Deema: *Is it just students who look them over, or do teachers also look them over, or like admin?*

Jannah: *I think the teacher looked it over. And then I didn't get anything back from anyone, being like, "you can't put this". So, then I was like, okay, this should be in the yearbook. And then we got our yearbooks, and it was not in the*

yearbook. So, it was just ... they didn't even like, like they left me hanging. They just didn't put my quote.

Deema: *So, did they just leave it empty?*

Jannah: *A lot of people have theirs empty because they didn't put a quote, or, like, they didn't submit it in time. I was wondering, maybe I, like, maybe since, maybe they, I don't know. I mean, I submitted it in time, so either they should've put it in, or ... but then, even if they told me, "Hey, you can't put this in", that's still a problem ... But also, like, I'm assuming if someone put, like, Trump 2020, they wouldn't have put it in ... so I was thinking, like, okay ... **I guess this is political ...***

Deema: *And you would classify that as an act of anti-Palestinian racism?*

Jannah: *I mean, I was very I was like, really annoyed. I was like, K, well, it is, yeah.*

There are a few things I want to emphasize in this exchange. First, Jannah continuously questions whether her Palestinian-ness is *too crazy* or *too political*, gaslighting herself out of believing that what happened to her was an act of APR, an explicit one, nonetheless. As mentioned in other parts of this thesis, Palestinians, Palestinian history, and contemporary events taking place in Palestine are very often described as being too political, too complicated, too violent, etc. Therefore, this pattern in Jannah's story is not surprising to me.

Israa' shared a similar experience she had in an exchange with her school administrator, which she also classified as an act of APR:

Israa’: *I was a social studies teacher when the genocide first started. I spoke to my students about what was happening in Gaza in my class, not only because I am literally mandated to teach current event in social studies, and the genocide was currently happening, but because it is just the right thing to do. My mood was also noticeably different to my students, and when they asked me what was wrong, instead of lying, I would just tell them the truth, that my whole family is in Gaza and that I was worried about them and angry at what was happening. I did not shy away from vulnerable conversations with my students because vulnerability was always something we cherished as a class, and ultimately what strengthened our connection. They always understood and showed me empathy. I was called into the office one day and was told that these conversations had to stop, that they were **too political and controversial**, even for a social studies class. I was **told to keep my politics out of the classroom**, and that I was **too Palestinian to be talking about Palestine** because of my biases.*

Dunya also shared a story about Palestine being described as controversial in postsecondary school while attending a conference pertaining to health sciences. She shared that Palestine and the “Palestine-[i]srael conflict” were framed as controversial topics, alongside abortion:

Dunya: *So, she [the conference presenter] was talking about **controversial** topics, and one of them was like, abortion. So, she was like, for example, if you're asked about your views on abortion, what would you do? ... And then the second or the third example was, what if you're asked about your views on Palestine? ... so then, like she, set the tone after that discussion that you should essentially stay quiet*

*because of your role as a healthcare professional and not engage in any discussions about "controversial" topics such as the "israel-Palesine conflict" ... so that, like, for me, that set the stage of, okay, like, I guess now this medical community is outwardly saying that this is like **my identity is a controversial topic** ...*

This idea that Palestine and Palestinians are too political, too controversial, too biased, etc. contributes to Palestinian erasure, and therefore, APR. Framing Palestinian identity, narratives, and calls for freedom in this way is a tactic used to justify said erasure. Therefore, it is a tactic used to justify Palestinian erasure, but how else is the erasure practiced in alberta schools? Jannah shared, *"It [APR] is the fact that, like, I was in high school and in the university now, and I had to continuously, like, walk past the [i]sraeli flag."* Dunya, when I asked if she had ever experienced being shown a map in class and not seeing Palestine, she responded, *"Oh, that's like the norm, yeah ... the map. We're never on the maps of any book."* While alberta education documents claim to care for *all* students, to value the Truth and to be invested in ending prejudice, racism and discrimination through inclusion, APR and erasure is the experience of Palestinians who have both taught within and attended alberta schools.

Conversation Two: Curricular Expectations Vs. Curricular Outcomes

The Official Story: Curricular Expectations

As mentioned earlier, the alberta curriculum (Program of Studies) is a byproduct of the *Act* (2025), and thereby must follow that which is outlined in the *Act*. Therefore, the language used in the alberta K-12 curriculum follows the same theme of fostering

safe spaces, diversity, and inclusion. The focus of this discussion will be the social studies Program of Studies (2005), specifically. It will highlight what is outlined as curricular expectations (referred to as “Outcomes”) and the strands of social studies. I will analyze both the alberta social studies Program of Studies (2005) and *The Guiding Framework* (2024) in this conversation to highlight the discrepancies between what is outlined in these documents and what was shared by participants.

According to the “Social Studies Guidelines” outlined in *The Guiding Framework* (2024), students “will” learn:

About histories, contributions, and perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, Francophone communities, and settlers and immigrants ... the select histories of [a]lberta, [c]anada, and the world from ancient to modern times ... how to engage respectfully with a variety of contrasting opinions, explore important questions, and actively engage with issues in order to understand the privileges and demands of active citizenship ... to develop, analyze, and respectfully discuss opinions to approach the world with curiosity and humility, engaging with new ideas and diverse perspectives, questioning assumptions ... [to engage] with contemporary issues and questions ... about injustices and how they have been addressed in the past and may be addressed in the future. (pp. 13-14)

In addition to outlining the importance of students learning world history and contemporary issues, *The Guiding Framework* (2024) outlines the importance of students seeing themselves in the alberta curriculum:

[a]lbertans from varied backgrounds will see themselves in the curriculum, “regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor(s),”⁶ both in their common humanity and in the diversity of valuable contributions to society. (p. 19)

The [a]lberta Education (2005) social studies Program of Studies highlights the role of the social studies curricula more explicitly. Social studies is defined as “an **issues-focused** and **inquiry-based** interdisciplinary subject that draws upon history, geography, ecology, economics, law, philosophy, political science and other social science disciplines” (p. 1). This issues-focused approach to teaching includes the teaching of *current affairs* and *controversial issues*. According to the [a]lberta Education (2005) social studies Program of Studies:

Current affairs play a central role in learning and are integrated throughout the program. Ongoing reference to current affairs adds relevance, interest and immediacy to social studies issues. Investigating current affairs from multiple perspectives motivates students to engage in meaningful dialogue on relevant historical and contemporary issues, helping them to make informed and reasoned decisions on local, provincial, national and global issues ... current affairs helps students apply problem-solving and decision making skills to real-life and controversial issues. (p. 6)

⁶ The Guiding Framework (2024) is referencing [a]lberta Education’s Inclusive Education Policy

The document then defines the second prong of this issues-focused approach, controversial issues, as

Those topics that are publicly **sensitive** and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs. They include **topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree**. Opportunities to deal with these issues are an integral part of social studies education in [a]lberta ... **Controversial issues** that have been anticipated by the teacher, and those that may arise incidentally during instruction, **should be used by the teacher to promote critical inquiry and teach thinking skills.** (p. 6)

Additionally, it is explicitly stated that current affairs/current events were introduced to the [a]lberta Education (2005) social studies Program of Studies with the intention of ensuring that every student has an opportunity to share their lived experiences and perspectives:

Students bring their own perspectives, cultures and experiences to the social studies classroom. They construct meaning **in the context of their lived experience** through active inquiry and engagement with their school and community. In this respect, **the infusion of current events, issues and concerns is an essential component of social studies.** (p. 5)

These definitions of current affairs and controversial issues fit perfectly in the social studies PoS, as it is also defined as a subject that “fosters students’ understanding of and involvement in practical and ethical issues that face their communities and humankind” ([a]lberta Education, 2005, p. 1). Therefore, according to this definition,

students who speak out against what is happening in Gaza, and educators who teach about what's happening in Palestine, and the Global South at the hands of the Global North more broadly, should be celebrated, as they are enacting the Program of Studies exactly as it was intended; however, this is not the case.

Critical Discourse Analysis of The Official Story

[a]lberta Education's (2005) classification of events occurring around the world as *controversial topics* and *issues*, is problematic because these terms imply (i.e. implicature) complexity and incomprehensibility. This in turn advances settler colonial logics, rather than the settler common sense I discussed in Chapter Three. Even on a more personal level, people often classify things as 'issues' when they are not easy to solve. Similarly, people often classify things as 'controversial' when they are *uncomfortable* to talk about, and when they are *taboo*. Settler colonial narratives oftentimes push the idea that the Global South is ridden with issues that are too complex to comprehend. Therefore, terms like these discourage knowledge exploration.

The term *issues* is also an example of the *passive voice* because it suggests that the 'issues' are intrinsic, and that the Global North plays no role in what is happening in other parts of the world. Additionally, what do they mean when they define a controversial topic as "topics on which *reasonable* people may sincerely disagree" (p. 6)? On what basis are people determined to be reasonable or unreasonable? The classification of a person as *reasonable* is a legal classification. This legal standard has historically excluded women, children, dis/abled people, and community members who are Indigenous, Black, and Brown. Moran (1999) stated,

[A]ssumptions about what kind of behaviour is *reasonable* - far from being some kind of uncontroversial reflection of reality - actually incorporate common sense assumptions and stereotypes about the normal and the appropriate behaviour for different groups. While this may not generally be troubling, it does have deeper and more problematic significance where the underlying social understanding unfairly disadvantages particular groups - where history shows that we have consistently been unable to do justice. (p. 191)

The classification of someone as “reasonable” is vague, openly subjective, and has been criticized by feminist, dis/abled, and Indigenous, Black, and Brown legal scholars in settler colonial states for almost a century for not only failing to have any objective or scientific grounding but for its inherent biases when applied by judges (Armour, 1997; Lee, 2003). Reasonableness is therefore open to interpretation and subject to personal bias. Who are people of *ordinary* intelligence and prudence? Who is determining what is *proper* and *improper* conduct? These definitions and terms are examples of ambiguity that can lead to the manipulation of truth.

Palestinian erasure in alberta schools results in the exclusion of Palestinian students and teachers from the category of “reasonable” through their erasure. If there are no historical maps, if there is no discussion of israel and Palestine that is not considered controversial, if Palestinian organizations are classified by the federal government to be terrorist organizations, and finally, if Palestinians are told, as the students and teacher research participants who shared their stories were told, that talking about Palestine is too controversial, read too unreasonable, the dehumanization in alberta schools is complete. The point I’m trying to make is that while Palestinians are constantly told that talking

about Palestine is too controversial, the topic of Palestine is not even classified as an *appropriate enough* controversial topic, according to these documents, on the basis of the inherent unreasonableness of Palestinians. This is how deeply seeded the dehumanization of the Palestinian is.

Palestinians “sincerely disagree” (p. 6) with their ethnic cleansing, with their genocide, with the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against them, but because they do not meet this standard of reasonableness, thus, the illegal occupation of Palestine by settler colonial israel is not classified as a *controversial* topic; it is naturalized to the point where any other framing of historical or current events is considered too political, too controversial and therefore unreasonable. This is not an argument I am making; it is a fact that is proven by the Official Story itself, and participants’ Counter-Story presented below. Otherwise, Palestinian erasure as a form of APR in schooling would not be an *issue*, and this thesis would have never been written.

Again, language is intentional and creates conditions and omissions. The discrepancies between the Official Story and the Counter-Story are clear. While the Official Story preaches the importance of focusing on global issues to ensure that *all* students see themselves in curriculum, bringing their own perspectives, cultures and experiences to the social studies classroom, the Counter-Story highlights that there is no place for Palestine and Palestinians in alberta schools. Palestinians are not included in alberta education’s (2024) definition of *all*. They are not a part of *the world* the documents insist alberta students must learn about. When it is stated that students will learn to “engage with contemporary issues and questions” (The Guiding Framework, 2024, p. 14), it is clear through these Counter-Stories that the *issue* of Palestine does not

count. It also suggests that Palestinian students and educators are an 'issue' if they resist their own erasure.

Participants' Counter-Stories: Actual Curricular "Outcomes"

This is how current events/current affairs were described by Jannah and Dunya in social studies class at their respective k-12 schools when I asked whether they remember current events as a part of their social studies classes:

Jannah: *There was like, a current events ... part of the class ... It would always be like, **the first 15 minutes of a Thursday or something**. It's like, not talked about. So, there would be like ... a couple classes where it'd be like, "hey, this is going on. Anyone know about that?" And then people would be like, "Yeah, I heard like, this happened." ... obviously being a Palestinian in that class, I'm just like, **there's so much here that ... that we're not unpacking ... They always brush over current events**. And it's like current events is literally ... the most important thing of what's happening right now. It's **always like a quick little ... thing**.*

Dunya: *I think so. But I think it was very lightly touched on, because I don't remember us spending too much time on it. I think it was more of like an **offhanded** like mention of, "oh, just so, you know", like it wasn't really something that was like, tested or talked about, in so much detail. And, no, literally, all I remember is, like, some short talks about Trudeau, or whatever was happening at the time. **There wasn't anything like global** from what I remember.*

These stories demonstrate the clear shortcomings of current events discussions in the alberta classroom as experienced by research participants, not only in the scope of

Palestine, but global issues more broadly. Both Jannah and Dunya expressed that these discussions were limited to north america, and that not enough time was spent talking about the events that *were* discussed. Dunya described current events as an “*offhanded mention*,” and Jannah described it as a quick little thing that takes place in “*the first 15 minutes of a Thursday or something*.” Jannah continued to explain that after October 7th was the first time she had ever seen or heard anything about Palestine in her classroom, even though the occupation of Palestine dates back, officially, to 1948:

Jannah: I remember the one, the first time I ever ... walked into social studies a week after, like, October 7, yeah, I think so probably around then I walked into social class, and there was the map of Palestine, like, the, you know, the map of, like,

Deema: Oh, the green and the white one?

Jannah: Yeah, like how it uh, how it's [historic Palestine] changed.

Deema: How it's [historic Palestine] changed after '48 [the Nakba].

Jannah: Yeah on, on the board. And I was like, whoa, okay, that's crazy. Just because ... I've never, like, seen that [the map of Palestine] obviously. Well, I mean, I've seen it. I don't think anyone else has seen it, and so, like, we brushed on it briefly, not in a, still ... it wasn't in a very ... direct way of, like, I didn't know what side my teacher was on, but like it was, he was basically like, “Yeah, this is what happened”. And yeah, like, it was probably, like, two classes where we briefly, briefly talked about it [the genocide in Gaza]. It wasn't really even talking. It was more like, “this is what happened on this day. Does anyone else?

*Does anyone know about it?" Wasn't even like, a discussion of ... "Oh, what do you think?" Or like past stuff or anything. It was more just like, "This is what happened." I'm pretty sure my teacher at the time probably gave like, a history of like, this is what it was. This is what it is now, **obviously**, like briefly, but not like enough to understand, **obviously**.*

I bolded the word *obviously* here to point out that Jannah has no expectations of teachers, even in social studies class current events discussions, to talk about Palestine, let alone have them talk about it enough for anyone to *actually* understand anything about it.

When I explicitly asked Jannah what she thought of when she heard the term “current events” and what she understood the term to mean, she said,

I definitely think it's more international than like ... then high school taught it. Like it was always current events, and it was always, like, focused on whatever is happening in [c]anada or America. And I would always be like, there's ... crazy stuff happening in the Middle East, and we're like, not talking about it. Or, ... when the genocides happened, like in ... 2023 or whatever ... the fact that we didn't talk about it like that much. And again, it was, like, my whole life, I was like, this is crazy. Like, why aren't we talking more about ... anything that I'm seeing on social media the things that I'm interacting with ... after October 7, I started finding out about like the Congo and Sudan and all of this other stuff that was like, okay, I had no idea about that. Why isn't school teaching about that? Um, so, yeah, I would say we focus a lot on like America and [c]anada ... And ... there's other stuff happening in the world. Also, I feel like it should be a way bigger thing, ... I always felt like it was always, is always what I wanted to learn

about in Social because I was like, there's a lot going on in the world right now. I'd like to know about what's going on. I would like to understand it, yeah, but I'm learning more from like, a TikTok, a five-minute TikTok, or like an Instagram slideshow, than my teachers are telling me in current events.

Israa', who was mandated to teach current events as a social studies teacher, shared,

Current events were always treated as a thing teachers would just want to tick off a list of things they had to do every week. No one really checked in to make sure we were doing it, but within our own teams we'd kind of hold each other accountable, like "oh did you talk about current events with your kids yet?" It was always kind of treated as an afterthought, which is crazy because its currently happening. I always tried to speak extensively on events happening outside of north america, or to Black, Indigenous and Brown communities, just because the kids never really knew anything about anyone or anything outside of north america. And I would never just state the event, but we would make connections between the events happening globally to events happening in north america. But yeah, I was told not to talk about Palestine at all. So, I was basically told I was not allowed to do what I was mandated to do: teach current events.

I asked Jannah what she would change about social studies class or about school, or her school experience, and she said,

I would say like, I do think current events is a big thing that should be talked about longer, maybe have its own class for people who want to be informed, more of, like an international focus, because like, we focus on, like globalization, like we talk about, like the world and the problems in the world, but like the Middle

East does not get talked about in ... a whole even, like ... [there's] a huge wave of like Syrian immigrants, and people probably don't know why ... So, schools just being censored ... like, you're supposed to learn about this stuff no matter how bad it is. It's like, why are we trying to make this why are we trying to ... put a band aid over it already, when it's like, we haven't even unpacked what happened?

Conversation Three: Anti-Bullying Vs. The Gaslighting of the Palestinian

The Official Story: Anti-Bullying

In line with a school board's responsibility to foster a sense of belonging amongst students and staff, they also must provide a “welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour” (The Education Act, 2025, pp. 52-53, s. 33). Bullying is defined in the *Act* (2025) as

Repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including **psychological harm** [emphasis added] or harm to an individual's reputation. (p. 15)

The province of alberta thereby recognizes bullying as an act committed in the realm of the physical and the psychological. This will be important to remember while reading participants' Counter-Stories.

Critical Discourse Analysis of The Official Story

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is invested in asking what language is doing. In these passages, the use of discursive strategies such as implicature, repetition and normalization lead to a form of gaslighting. According to Dr. Ramani Durvasula (2019), gaslighting means “to manipulate someone else’s reality through techniques such as denial, misdirection, contradiction, and lying” (1:27). This is a pattern that is apparent in the following Counter-Story. Two main factors contribute to the gaslighting of the Palestinian in these alberta education documents: repetition, ambiguity and the manipulation of truth.

First, these documents utilize repetition as a strategy to ensure that what is stated in these documents cannot be questioned. By repeating language such as inclusion, fostering safe spaces and belonging throughout these documents, and repeatedly mentioning the importance of learning about diverse communities to ensure that *all* students see themselves in the curriculum, [a]lberta Education is normalizing the representation of practice through language. The repeated use of words like inclusivity, safe space, fostering belonging, etc. normalizes certain expectations among students. This can lead to the gaslighting of students whose experiences do not match what the normalized language suggests. In other words, if schools constantly claim to foster safety, belonging, and respect all students regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, etc., then students who feel unsafe, like they do not belong, disrespected, and/or discriminated against will not feel comfortable expressing these feelings. They will question themselves for having them. Each Counter-Story represented in the following section illustrates an experience of gaslighting. Gaslighting is a form of bullying.

Second, while bullying is explicitly defined in the *Act* (2025) as both physical and psychological, language within the definition is vague and open to interpretation, making ambiguity and the manipulation of truth visible across all documents. In the *Act's* definition of bullying, it is an action which is “intended to cause harm” (p. 15). But how can we determine if the harm inflicted was intentional or not? If the person causing the harm states that it was unintentional, is that enough to ignore the behaviour? What if the bully claims it was unintentional, but the victim is harmed, afraid, and/or distressed? Even if the bully did not intend to do harm, this does not mean the harm was not done. Additionally, while the *Act* defined bullying, they failed to define what constitutes psychological harm. Gaslighting can be classified as a form of psychological harm, including through the use of discursive strategies that make the victim question their reality and experience.

Participants’ Counter-Stories: The Gaslighting of the Palestinian in [a]lberta Classrooms

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed some fear in disclosing that they are Palestinian. However, this fear was expressed as more of an internal dialogue, questioning themselves in and out of the fear inflicted on them by the school system that has given them a reason to fear being Palestinian. As mentioned earlier, this can be attributed to institutional gaslighting; the normalization of language around safety, respect and care, and the framing of bullying as the abnormal exception worthy of consequences. Instances of psychological harm inflicted on Palestinians in alberta school systems are highlighted in Jannah, Dunya and Israa’s Counter-Stories:

Jannah: *I only realized I started doing this recently, but like, I probably would have had no ... problems ... repping Palestine, like, before October 7. And I still don't have problems now, but I'll, I'll find myself being like, a little bit nervous. Or, like, I'm wearing a kuffiya [Palestinian scarf]. I'm like, I'm aware. And I'm also like, it's like, a little bit of a safety thing, but also, **I don't know if I actually think anything's gonna happen. But like, I know that people know this now, and it's like, I don't know if people think I'm wearing this because they think I'm some radical crazy whatever, or “Hey, this is where I'm from.”***

Dunya: *... my parents, growing up, they always encouraged me to say I'm Jordanian. Like they, I don't know, from their experiences, they were really protective. So, they were like, anytime someone asks you where you're from, say you're from Jordan. You know, you want to be safe ... And at the time, obviously I didn't question. I was like, okay, sure, yeah, but I'm gonna do, do as I'm told, up till, I think, like around high school, and then then I think, you know, my brain grew a little, started to make my own, more of my own kind of decisions then. So, I would say, from grade 12 till undergrad, I was open about it, about being Palestinian.*

Israa': *Teaching in rural alberta during the most recent genocide on Gaza, I intentionally wore my kufiyah every day. I also wore shirts that said “Palestine” on them. I did it because it is the least I could do during the genocide of my people. I did it hoping it would spark conversation. I feel like most teachers thought it was just a normal scarf. But I did still feel like all eyes were on me, and*

that I had to make sure I was always ready to defend myself both verbally and physically.

Dunya then addressed her fear of expressing that she is Palestinian out of anxiety over harming her reputation (a form of bullying specifically outlined in the *Act*):

*Now this ... community is outwardly saying that this is, like my identity is a controversial topic that I have to think of the implications of what it would do to my career, which I also value. Of course, that kind of made me take a step back, but I wouldn't say I ever hid my identity. I just it just stayed at the back of my mind, yeah, but that by then, like, I was openly Palestinian, like people around me knew I was Palestinian. And then, actually, after October 7, like after the genocide started, I was more outwardly comfortable with saying I was Palestinian, because I think at that point I was like, I don't know, like, the severity of everything happening, and realize how ridiculous it is to just be hiding my identity. So, I feel like I was more outspoken about it. But then to continue that, because of other things that we'll probably talk about in this interview, I feel like since then, I've, and especially now with my like internship here, I've kind of struggled with micro decisions of like, oh, **do I mention it? Should I avoid this? Like, I'll be completely what is this going to do to my like future, and is it worth it?** And then I also balance it with like, there's a genocide going on. Like, this is the least ... this should be the least of your concerns, you know?*

What Dunya shares in her story is also an example of the survivor's guilt I discussed earlier, which may lead to the rejection of a concept like anonymity. Dunya expresses this

rejection to hiding her Palestinian identity as “*there's a genocide going on. Like, this is the least ... this should be the least of your concerns, you know?*”

The internal dialogue, which I bolded in both Jannah and Dunya's stories are important, as they represent how it can feel to be a Palestinian in alberta, including constant back and forth conversation we have with ourselves, weighing the risks and benefits of our actions. This internal dialogue would not exist if alberta school systems made Palestinians feel safe enough *to exist as we are*. As mentioned, a big part of this fear is rooted in being accused of being ‘radical,’ ‘political,’ ‘controversial,’ and/or or antisemitic - by just existing as a Palestinian.

Concluding Remarks

Palestinians in our classrooms, whether they are teachers or students, want to be recognized for who they are, not erased and forced to assimilate. Jannah expressed how it felt to simply be acknowledged as a Palestinian at school:

*I guess when, like, my teachers or professors would talk about Palestine, it was like, in my head, it was like, okay, after the class or after we talk about it ... it's not like I learned anything, but it's like you acknowledged it; everyone in the classroom acknowledged it. One time in leadership ... **This isn't actually like, a big thing**, but like, the teacher was trying to put up flags in her classroom, and was like, I'm putting up flags ... just to be more, like, diverse or whatever ... And I was like, I was like, you should put up the Palestine flag. And she was like, “okay”. She agreed, “okay ...”*

It is important to note that this was the response she gave after I asked her to describe a time she felt seen as a Palestinian at school. Jannah expressed feeling seen by something as simple as seeing the Palestinian flag in her classroom, even when she was the one to ask for it to be put up. Jannah expresses that it was not “a big thing,” and she’s right, in that this is really the least teachers should be doing to make the Palestinian students in their class feel seen. However, it is a big thing when all you know as a Palestinian is erasure. So, while this may seem like a *small thing* for non-Palestinians, for a Palestinian, it is *everything*.

I then asked Jannah if it felt foreign to hear about Palestine in her classroom, even with her peers. This was the exchange we had:

Deema: *Does it feel foreign to hear about Palestine in the classroom?*

Jannah: *Well, I'm like, I'm not used to that. But it's like, yeah, no. Like, we all know about it now, like everyone, everyone knows. And it's also like, not something that we should shy away from, yeah. And it just feels like I do feel validated, though, because I'm like, people did not know about this. **People did not know who I was, where I was from, yeah. And now it's like you're saying the, you're saying the word Palestine, that's crazy.***

Deema: *Do you have social media to thank for this shift?*

Jannah: *Fully. **School does not play a single role in that [student awareness of Palestine].** Even like my friends ... like, my white friends, it's like they didn't learn any of what was happening through school. They learned it through me and through social media. So, like, if there was, if we were back in the 80s and there*

was no social media, this would still not be, people would still not know what was going on. People still wouldn't know what Palestine was.

As Jannah asserted, and as highlighted throughout this thesis, schools do not play a role in any of the activism or advocacy for Palestine, Palestinian liberation, or against israel's settler colonial oppression of Palestinians. After reading through these Counter-Stories, and the thesis in its entirety, this should no longer be surprising. The ongoing dehumanization and erasure of Palestine and Palestinians, including Palestinian students and teachers in alberta school systems, is violently *miseducative*.

Importantly, however, Palestinians exist and resist in alberta schools every day; whether it is Palestinian teachers, like Israa', who insist on speaking truth to power, not only in an attempt to help their own people, but to ward against doing a disservice to students; or the Palestinian students who still sit through their classes every day, forced to exist in spaces where they do not feel welcome or safe. Spaces that gaslight them into questioning whether, or even believing that, their very identity is controversial, too political, an issue. Spaces where Palestinians are constantly reminded that the borders that separate their *Ghazza* from their *Quds*, their *Akka* from their *Haifa*, followed them into exile.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Ending the Erasure of Palestinian Identity

I want to conclude this thesis work with ways educators can put an end to Palestinian erasure. This is not an impossible task, and it is not even a *big* job. It's time educators live up to the statements of inclusivity and fostering a sense of belonging in their classrooms for *all* students. It is not about challenging Palestinian erasure in schools, it is about putting an end to it completely. *Challenging* implies trying, and Palestinians can no longer afford for educators to *try* to end Palestinian erasure. While I recognize that it is not up to the teacher to change the language used in alberta curricular documents, it *is* up to the teacher to ensure that Palestine is not erased from what Ted Aoki (1993) described as the *lived curriculum*. He stated that the lived curriculum “is not the curriculum as laid out in a plan, but a plan more or less lived out. It deserves the label ‘curriculum’ as much as the plan deserves the label ‘curriculum-as-plan’” (p. 257). Remember, curriculum is not just written; it is the conversations and experiences we have with our students in the classroom; it is the materials we choose to use as teachers to ensure that *all* our students see themselves in their learning. It is *the plan lived out*. After all, *The Guiding Framework* (2024) states,

A good curriculum **must** ... leave teachers free to decide how to teach in their particular context, using common themes and engaging narratives whenever possible ... Teachers need the flexibility to do what works best for their students in a variety of contexts. (pp. 16-17)

According to Shatara and Saleh (2024), “in order to fully engage in justice work, educators and educational scholars must engage with and for solidarities with Palestine”

(p. 2) They defined solidarity in two different contexts in the fight for Palestinian liberation: Solidarity *with* Palestinians, and solidarity *for* Palestinians. They state that solidarity *with* Palestinians means “to work alongside Palestinians to fight against oppression and collective struggles” (p. 2), and solidarity *for* Palestinians as “disrupting the erasure of Palestine and Palestinian voices within curriculum, standards, research, and materials. It is an action to resist ...” (p. 2). A shift in language is a shift in action, as actions are shaped by language. To reiterate, what is being asked of teachers is not to rewrite the curriculum, the Education Act or Guiding Framework. For these to change, the system must collapse, as anti-colonial, anti-racist pedagogy will never exist in settler colonial documents. Again, settler colonialism is a *fragile* system. Therefore, what is asked of teachers is **resistance** and **refusal**. Resist the colonial, racist, Islamophobic narratives and refuse to teach them. Resist the Zionist narratives, think critically about definitions such as the IHRA definition of antisemitism and refuse to apply it in your classroom, because applying it erases your Palestinian students. As teachers, we have a responsibility to our students. We are truth-tellers. It is time we speak truth to power, even if it comes at a cost.

This thesis work taught me that the violence I experienced as a Palestinian my entire life was never a coincidence. I grew up knowing how it feels to fight for land, to fight for home. I grew up crossing borders and checkpoints by foot to see my family on that land and in that home. It was never a *vacation*, never a determined round-trip ticket, with known departure and arrival times. When my family and I would finally make it into Gaza, leaving always felt permanent. Goodbyes were the heaviest I ever knew goodbyes to be. Palestinians in exile leave their Palestine with pieces of the land, because another

visit is never promised, and that is if they were allowed to visit in the first place. I was in Gaza visiting my family two months before the genocide began on October 7th, and left with pockets full of sand and seashells, leaves from my grandfather's olive trees, and petals from my uncles *Yasmina*. Because just like every goodbye, it felt permanent. Since leaving, my family home has been destroyed, my entire family has been displaced and scattered, the olive trees and *Yasmina* have been uprooted, but my people still stand: *Tasqut Al Ajsad, La Al Fikra* (Kanafani, 1962/2022): even if the Palestinian body falls, the approach and thoughts of Palestinian liberation live on.

All of this to say that I have always known that the violence inflicted upon Palestinians is intentional, and have always known it as calculated. What I did not know, however, and what this thesis work taught me, is that the violence is *defined*. The violence inflicted upon the Palestinian body and mind is framed by language. Language that is intentional and calculated. Language defined in government policy, international criminal law, United Nations documents, and school curricula. Actions do not speak louder than words. Language shapes action.

This thesis work is rooted in *truth*, and truth poses a direct threat to settler colonialism, as it is up against said truth. The relationship between canadian settler colonialism and Zionist settler colonialism is clear to me as a Palestinian living in canada. When the calgary police attacked me and others for linking arms in the name of Palestinian liberation, I was reminded of the brutality used against me and my family by the state of israel, “whose adherence to the democratic way must be admired by all friends of freedom” (Jewish Virtual Library, 1991). I looked at my black eye and swollen jaw the next day and remembered the guns pointed at my head as a child, as a teenager

and as an adult; milestones in human life that are meant to be marked by maturity, not guns. I remembered the Israeli occupation force's (IOF) imprisonment of my father, exile of my grandfather, murder of my cousin, destruction of our home, uprooting of my grandfather's and uncles' olive groves, citrus trees, and pomegranate shrubs.

Important Note on Accountability

I still ask myself this question: how did so many get to this point of growing apathetic towards the body of the Palestinian? Of being able to witness beheaded, maimed, burned, mangled, and unrecognizable bodies of Palestinian fathers, mothers, and children? How did so many get to the point of being able to turn off their emotive switches when seeing the body of the Palestinian? I am not sure I addressed these questions in the context of the human and human emotion; however, we can conclude that it has a great deal to do with the stereotypical portrayal of the Arab, Muslim, and Palestinian body, both historically and contemporarily. The power propaganda and whiteness play into the dehumanization of the Palestinian body and anti-Palestinian racism are unequivocal. Palestinians are constantly having to prove their right to life. While it is important to highlight the effects of the centuries-long dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, and more specifically, Palestinians, it is necessary to conclude with a comment on accountability.

Willful ignorance and intentionality also play fundamental roles in the contemporary and historical dehumanization of the Palestinian. Although there is concrete evidence to prove that Palestinians are perceived as subhuman, or non-human, we cannot negate the fact that this perception is also a choice people continue to make,

despite the history of dehumanization. The colonizer, the racist, the Islamophobe, the racist Islamophobic colonizer, do not get to be let off the hook by merely using this history of dehumanization as a cop-out justification for their colonization, racism, and Islamophobia. They are not brainwashed. They make conscious choices every day. Colonization like decolonization, and humanization like dehumanization, are conscious choices that people enact and choose, every day.

The Conclusion of the Conclusion

I wrote this thesis angry. Angry at the world, angry at myself for not being able to do more, angry at all of the people who are unable to draw parallels, and who stand idle to oppression. I am angry because I bear witness to the atrocities while having to simultaneously bear witness to all those who choose to stay silent, practicing their right to ignorance (Kanji, 2023). There is an Arabic proverb that states *atal il ateel w mishi bijnazto* - *They killed them and walked in their funeral*. [c]anada is killing Indigenous people and walking in their funeral, and israel is doing the same. Settler states kill us, and then performatively grieve us once they put us ten feet underground. The reason Palestine is erased from schools is the same reason why the american government is currently kidnapping, and illegally detaining people whose only charge is the colour of their skin, or the calling out of the crimes of the israel. It is the same reason why a Palestinian's very existence is classified as an act of antisemitism. It is the same reason why at least 255 Palestinian journalists have been killed since October 7th, 2023. It is the same reason why they are targeting our academics, poets, writers, scientists, and doctors. Palestine and Palestinians are a threat, and their erasure is integral to the survival of settler colonialism everywhere.

As El-Kurd (2025) asserted, “There is no denying that there is a hierarchy of lives” (p. 54), whether we compare the killing of Ukrainians to that of Palestinians, or the killing of a Palestinian journalist who holds an American passport to one who doesn’t. This hierarchy of lives is intentional, and integral to the survival of a fragile settler-colonialism. It is important to recognize that this thesis has not addressed even a fraction of the problem. Palestinian erasure is not a topic one can comprehensively cover in a thesis, but the questions posed in the thesis are worth addressing moving forward. We should continue to search for the answers to these questions as people bearing witness to the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people, a people who are worthy of living a life of dignity:

These days I am haunted by a subtler though deadlier refrain, an unwanted realization: Gaza has the right to forsake us, to never forgive us, to spit in our faces. How many wars has it confronted? How many martyrs has it given? How many bodies were stolen from it, snatched from their fathers’ embrace? And how many of us stutter when asked about resistance, or disavow our right to resist entirely, our *need* to resist? How many of us choose our careers over our kin? How many of us could have done something, anything, and did not? (El-Kurd, 2025, p. 184)

I asked Dunya what message she wants to relay to Palestinians. She said:

It can be a pretty heavy thing to carry being Palestinian, like in trying to improve your life, like personally, professionally, for your people. But I think, Inshallah [God willing], that with time ... as long as you have the right like ... you have your people in front of your ... your eyes, you know ... then I think that's what, that's

*what you should just carry as you like, go through all of this, all of this, I guess, dehumanization that's happening on top of a genocide like, I think it can feel like a lot to carry, but it's, in my opinion, **it's something that's like, I'm honoured to carry.***

Just like Dunya, **Palestine, I am honoured to carry.**

Final Thoughts

It is important and necessary to mention that the Palestinian fight for liberation, while heavily rooted in reclaiming Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty, is rooted more so in our religious duty as Muslims. We have a duty as Muslims to protect *Masjid Al-Aqsa*, Al-Aqsa Mosque. Some might say that this is also israel's argument, as they claim it to be their holy land. However, let us not forget that israel, while it is a self-proclaimed Jewish state, is also a Zionist state, and Zionism is a far-right political movement with genocidal political goals, not religious ones. There is a difference between justifying violence in the name of religion, and protecting land against said violence in the name of religion. While the fight for the liberation of Palestine has Islamic underpinnings, the fight against its liberation has Islamophobic underpinnings. The reason I did not touch on this in this thesis is because it requires a thesis of its own. The fight against Palestine is also primarily a fight against Islam. May Palestine and Islam one day be free from this fight and left to thrive in peace beneath the olive trees (Abushaban, 2023).

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