

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Dispatches from the Encampments and Beyond: Teaching and Student Protests for Palestine

by Bob Rosen and Joseph Entin



IMAGE: THE PEOPLE'S CIRCLE FOR PALESTINE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO (2024). PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNA MAINGOT

Back in May, when we sent out the call for “Dispatches from the Encampments and Beyond: Teaching and Student Protests for Palestine,” the race for the US Presidency was close, public pressure for a permanent cease fire in Gaza seemed to be building, and Palestine solidarity encampments were blossoming on college campuses.¹ Now, as we write this in mid-November, Donald Trump and a horde of right-wing fanatics are set to take over the government, the death toll in Gaza and the West Bank continues to rise gruesomely, Israel has bombed Lebanon, and the encampments have been shut down or abandoned. It seems clear that the United States and other Western governments will continue to support Israel’s genocidal slaughter with arms shipments, money, and diplomatic cover, and that the corporate media in these nations will continue to serve as channels for Israeli propaganda. Palestine support protests continue, for sure, on and off campus, but the outlook is bleak.

Since the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, at least 43,000 Palestinians, including 16,000 children, have been killed in Gaza alone.² Even were the killing to stop today, the death toll would continue to rise, as thousands are missing, buried beneath the rubble, as hunger and disease have weakened many more, as doctors have been killed and hospitals have been destroyed, and as food aid has been blocked. Survivors will have to deal with crippling injuries, disease, the loss of family members, psychological trauma, homelessness. In addition, Gaza’s institutional life has been devastated, including the destruction of all Palestinian universities in the territory, in what scholars have described as scholasticide. The 75-year history of displacement, occupation, expropriation, and killing of the Palestinian people continues relentlessly.

In the midst of this, we want to remember the campus encampments, ephemeral as they were, as a source of hope. According to BestColleges.com, at least 121 encampments were set up on US college campuses, and many more at universities around the world. Tens of thousands of students (and some faculty members) participated, often at considerable risk to their physical safety and academic careers.³ We hoped to create a record, however partial, of this inspiring movement. We weren’t sure how many people would have the energy and desire to write for us, after living in tents, facing the police, and recovering from the destruction of what they’d built, but people did write, and we’re pleased to present dispatches from Portland State University, San Jose State University, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the SoCal for Palestine Coalition, and the University of Toronto. We make no claims that these dispatches are representative, but we believe they shed light on what was so important about the encampments movement.

Palestine support encampments on college campuses were above all about solidarity. The protests against funding and arms for Israel, and the demands for divestment from companies that do business with Israel,

were highly visible acts of solidarity with the victims of Israel’s horrific violence. But they also involved mutual solidarity, between Muslim and Jewish protestors, between white students and BIPOC students, between students and professors, who often came to each other’s defense. An ethic of generosity and care grew out of the necessity of living and working together in often difficult conditions, and in opposition to the competitive and individualist values that dominated the institutions the protestors were challenging.

The personal and group connections forged in the encampments accompanied connections made between political issues, as protestors – through readings and discussions and teach-ins -- deepened their understandings of the parallels between North American settler colonialism and Israeli’s history as a settler colonial state. Students came to understand the connections between the increasingly obvious US imperial aims in the Middle East and earlier imperialist wars, whether in Vietnam or Afghanistan or Iraq, as well as the long traditions of anti-colonial resistance.

The encampments were also centers of learning about the university itself. College presidents and other administrators claimed to champion free speech while insisting that criticism of the state of Israel was antisemitic hate speech that needed to be squelched and punished. Institutions supposedly dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of truth succumbed rapidly to the pressure of politicians and large donors. The intensity and cruelty of the police crackdowns, which administrators allowed and often invited, and in which over 3,100 protestors were arrested at universities across the country, drove home forcefully these lessons about universities.⁴

However briefly and however haltingly, the encampments offered a vision of a different kind of higher education, one undeterred in seeking critical understanding of the world, one based on community not individualism, on cooperation not competition, one unafraid to follow its critiques of capitalism and imperialism to their logical conclusion. It’s no surprise that university officials, their image stained by their support of Israeli genocide, wanted to crush these encampments.

The attack on protestors was particularly fierce at Portland State University. In “Taking up Space and Making Demands,” Aaron Roussell and an anonymous co-author describe “police in soldier costumes” sent in to remove students from the campus library, which they’d occupied and renamed in honor of slain Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer. Protestors had “built community through art, poetry, and free expression,” but the PSU administration, heavily involved with the Boeing corporation, saw them as “an enemy insurgency.” The protests may have been suppressed, but students had

been able to “shake off the mental bonds” of a university education.

Hypocrisy and double standards abound in corporate media coverage and university statements about safety and violence at the encampments. In “Fighting for Palestinian Justice at a Hostile University,” a professor, Lucy Arnold, and four students, Adelita, Chaviv, Lea Howarth, and Mia Randall, discuss the attacks on their encampment at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The administration flooded them with sprinklers, looked away as counter-protestors harassed them, and authorized a raid by campus police, while making false and inflammatory charges of protestor violence. Students did not fail to notice the racism that informed these charges, which sought to paint a picture of “innocent civilians attacked by evil Muslim forces.”

Hypocrisy and racism also teamed up in the authorities’ response to protest at San Jose State University. In “Islamophobia, Dirty Water Tactics, and Student Encampments for Gaza,” Sang Hea Kil writes as the “only faculty member who camped with the students and openly supported them in the news media,” actions that led to her suspension. She attributes her isolation to a culture of fear among faculty and to the largely Muslim presence at the encampment -- all despite the university’s loudly proclaimed commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

“Decolonized Worldmaking: Campus Encampments for Civic Engagement,” by the SoCal for Palestine Coalition, is a wide-ranging essay that describes encampments at public universities across southern California. Set against descriptions of “police departments, sheriff’s departments, and state highway patrols in riot gear,” noble words from the Chancellor at the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement ring especially hollow. But community building in the encampments, instances of student-faculty solidarity, and “unofficial decolonized graduation celebrations” offered another vision of civic engagement and “forever changed many students and faculty.”

The United States may be the main funder and enabler of Israel’s genocidal aggression, but protest was worldwide. In “Notes from the People’s Circle for Palestine,” Jenna Maingot recounts her experience at an encampment that demanded an end to the University of Toronto’s investments in Israel and academic partnerships. Indigenous voices and culture were central; a “sacred fire” anchored the encampment and was maintained for the duration. Despite an outpouring of support by workers and community members as well as students and faculty, the encampment was shut down. But, Maingot writes, “the experiences of collective living, storytelling, cross-cultural learning, problem-solving, mutual care, and support will forever stay with me.”

Katherine Blouin and Girish Daswani also participated in the People’s Circle for Palestine at the University of Toronto. Their essay, “What Encampments for Palestine Teach Us About Epistemic Justice,” focuses on the question of the ownership of land, not just land in

Palestine but the land the University sits on and claims to own. The Indigenous-led encampment staked its ground right next to Convocation Hall, a classical edifice where a majestic multi-day graduation ceremony took place which included a Land Acknowledgment as part of the “decolonial performativity of the white settler colonial University.”

The last contribution to this collection is “From the Land to the Seeds: Pedagogies of Liberation,” by Clelia O. Rodríguez, a major force in the People’s Circle for Palestine, a faculty member at the University of Toronto whose class, “Social Action and Popular Education,” was held at the encampment.⁵ The fierce and loving poem at the heart of this piece captures the spiritual and Indigenous elements of this and many other Palestine solidarity encampments.

Ultimately the camps were destroyed or abandoned as the spring semester ended. A few were resurrected in the fall, and perhaps the spring of 2025 will bring a new flowering. But whatever happens, they’ve left an indelible mark on those who participated in them. Thousands of students were radicalized by their experience. What they’ve learned and what they’ve felt will inform and energize future struggles, of which there will be many.

Notes

1. We are grateful to Alex Pittman, of Barnard’s Center for Engaged Pedagogy, for the term “dispatches from the encampments.”
2. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>
3. Many student protestors faced academic sanctions, including expulsions. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/free-speech/2024/04/15/punishments-rise-student-protests-escalate>
4. In addition, several faculty members who supported student protestors this past year were arrested, disciplined, or suspended. One of those faculty members, Sang Hea Kil, has an essay in this issue of *Radical Teacher*. See: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/10/08/faculty-investigated-punished-arrested-oct-7-2023#:~:text=A%20Year%20of%20Investigations%2C%20Punishments,have%20now%20returned%20to%20work>.
5. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/us/pro-palestinian-college-protests-encampments.html>
6. Among the many projects to emerge from this encampment is [*The Watermelon Diaries Project*](#).

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Taking up Space and Making Demands: Portland State University Students Construct the Free and Autonomous Refaat Alareer Memorial Library

by Aaron Roussell and Anonymous¹



"CEASEFIRE" BY JOSH MACPHEE VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

The local hospital calls, telling you that your child has been injured in a car accident. In shock, your thoughts race: “Is my car ok? Is the chassis damaged or just the paint? Dang, I just changed the oil, too!”

If this litany of thoughts confuses you and your concerns are more for your child than the car, then congratulations and welcome to the moral common sense of persons over property. On the other hand, the administration at Portland State University (PSU) seems more concerned with repairs and costs of [damages to campus property](#) after a string of pro-Palestinian protests and occupations this last year than with the ongoing genocide in Gaza and now the West Bank. Or, more comparably, with the students involved in such protests. The relentless [administrative focus on damages](#) in media reports feels inhuman and dystopian, a focus on masonry superseding a concern for the wellbeing of the student body and bodies overseas.²

The whole ordeal — from protests, die-in, students chaining themselves to buildings, and Board of Trustees meeting disruptions to the violent spectacle of armored soldier-police purging the library — played out as if the University was dealing with an enemy insurgency—both in the sense of militaristic violence and in strategic counterinsurgency efforts. The students of PSU are not the enemy of the institution. In fact, they *are* the institution. The campus itself is a product of student work, tuition, fees, research, publications, creative ideas, and hearts, all fed into the insatiable capitalist academic machine and eventually spit out into the city of Portland. Without students, the University comprises empty buildings. Throughout the ordeal, the administration’s concern with preserving its investments and relationships regardless of PSU’s contributions to the international death machine escalated the protests.

PSU student protests in the spring of 2024 were part of a national—indeed, international—set of demonstrations against the ongoing, genocidal Israeli assault on Gaza. In a galvanization of collective consciousness after October 7, 2023, millions in the US and around the world [protested for a cease fire](#). Already in tatters after years of demonstrations over police killings of Black people, rising inequality, and an openly fascist presidency and coup attempt, the fig leaf of the US free speech regime was threatened anew by massive protests which exposed the [Palestinian Exception](#). Months passed and the Israeli military killed tens of thousands, destroyed archival records, and desecrated homes and graves, with the Palestinian people and culture enduring an unfathomable generational trauma. As US elites—from government officials to corporate officials to academic administrators—cracked down on the protestors across the nation, people shared information, organized as international collectives, boycotted involved conglomerates, and became radicalized by their growing knowledge.

Why is student involvement in anti-genocide protest so important and why did so many university students begin occupying campus buildings? [The US is the largest](#)

[financial and material contributor to Israel’s](#) military forces and manufacturers like Boeing contribute a significant portion of these weapons. Student activists learned that Boeing, among other corporations, was a massive financial partner to universities and municipalities across the US and began asking themselves why weapons manufacturers have such a vested interest in educational institutions. As public investment recedes, private partnerships fill the gap. [This sparked outrage as students](#) felt that their education, ostensibly a public good, was increasingly inseparable from the political interests of financial behemoths like Boeing.³

It is almost funny to realize that these same students sit in classrooms learning to idolize great people who changed the world by fighting oppression. As tensions rose and students began demanding divestment, they were reprimanded and threatened with academic repercussions. Activism was a fine thing in the past, they were told, but now we have established channels for making change—write your congressperson! Contradictions increased, and the angst, mania, sadness, and helplessness students felt demanded form. Students decided to take physical space away from the business-as-usual administrations they now saw clearly as connected with the colonial death machine. For a hot second, they believed that the money and time they had spent on these educational institutions would give them institutional leverage to make change, just as they had learned from history.

Students spoke up. They made demands. Many began to realize the fundamental lie of the liberal free speech regime: that voices alone are impotent when vested and moneyed interests control media narratives and all relevant political outlets are committed to slaughter. What do marches accomplish? Millions participated in the Women’s March and the Black Lives Matter protests, yet *Roe* was overturned and [police funding](#) to execute Black people continues with impunity. Students began finally to understand that these institutions care more about their figurative and literal facades—pleasing their political partners, wealthy donors, and corporate partners; their bleak, blank concrete, and stylized logos—than they do about their student body. As action swept the nation, PSU students watched as their brave peers at more prestigious academic institutions—[Columbia, Yale, NYU](#)—risked their expensive educations to demand divestment through occupation. Boeing is all over PSU’s campus, and the list of Israeli investment [is long, if sometimes complex](#). These campus campaigns ignited a movement. Why wouldn’t PSU students join?

A few dozen Portland State students began camping outside the University library on city land in late April. Protests, rallies, speak-outs, and die-ins grew around the space and official attention was immediate. PSU administrators called on the Portland Police Bureau, a violent organization still under [federal consent decree](#) with a documented inability to follow their own [use of force policies](#), to attack students. Undeterred, protestors moved onto the library steps on University property. A wall of piled supplies and political messaging decorated the front, and several “Free Gaza” writings adorned the upper

windows on the second floor. As city and campus police closed in, hundreds moved inside, barricading the space against violent and reactionary police. The Millar Library became the Refaat Alareer Memorial Library, named for a beloved and martyred Palestinian professor from Gaza. The library was thoroughly redecorated and politicized with spray paint, the newsprint of the unheard, inside and out.

After using faculty/staff allies of Palestine to pretend to negotiate with student protestors, PSU President Ann Cudd, in conversation with the Oregon Governor, called forth the violence. Upwards of 30 people were arrested, and the charges—regardless of their ultimate adjudication—opened up investigative channels to further administrative sanctions. The personal experiences of the authors and those they are in communication with provide additional details: on May 2nd, the day when police violence peaked, students, community members, staff, and faculty rushed onto campus, despite official warnings to stay away, ultimately forming an enormous crowd to protect the protestors. Arrest vans were blocked, lines were held and broken, and police were delayed and confronted. Police deployed chemical weapons, attacked faculty, sprained ankles, and broke bones. In a particularly harrowing moment, a determined counter protestor charged defensive lines in a white Camry and then attacked protestors with pepper spray.

In an ironic coda, several weeks later (May 23rd), a number of students chained themselves to the main administration building as part of a larger protest event—textbook nonviolence. Many participants are presently having the proverbial book thrown at them, including exorbitant fines and earned degrees held. Campus police (“Campus Public Safety Officers”) in this moment viciously assaulted protestors, choking, strangling, and sexually assaulting students (grabbing them deliberately by their breasts) who were later charged by administration for their own abuse. Campus police assigned one of the most violent and abusive officers to officially “handle” the resulting formal complaints. In perhaps the ultimate irony, the chief of campus police suffered a heart attack—multiple independent reports agree that a protestor’s service dog alerted to the impending heart attack, but the owner, a protestor, was dismissed and attacked.

We must pause for a second, because most readers will hear—through media, administration, professional commentators, and other prominent actors, including professors who should know better—only that there is nothing redeeming or important about what happened here, much less that a campus occupation might be occasion for celebration. At its absolute best, such a narrative applauds intentions, while lamenting “destruction,” the inevitable and regrettable excesses of youthful protest, drawing implicitly or explicitly the line between “good” and “bad,” “peaceful” and “violent” protest and protestors, with side-eye directed at so-called “outside agitators.” Indeed, the PSU Administration is currently leveraging many elements of this narrative to punish students alleged to have participated—charging steep and arbitrary fines for damages (recall the difference between full cost and deductible), requiring

students to engage with nonprofits to learn “acceptable” forms of political expression, and demanding essays parroting liberal talking points on nonviolence. Officials in these hearings uphold climate activist Greta Thunberg as a nonviolent hero, even as students are *de facto* expelled for chaining themselves to buildings. (Climate change, of course, continues apace, and such (neo)liberal praise of Thunberg ignores her assertively pro-Palestine stance.)

Most people have never participated in a liberatory occupation. These occupations are, by nature, constructive and creative enterprises enabled by collaborative and conscious community building and care. PSU students organized food pantries available to all, liaised with media, and designed external-facing defenses to protect students, masking to protect everyone from physical and legal/administrative harm. They took seriously the mental health of the student body (participants, spectators, and the unhoused—categories which overlap), built community through art, poetry, and free expression, practiced and shared spiritual beliefs, and even created a mini-library full of informational ‘zines on practical and theoretical matters. They fought counter-protestors, armed riot soldiers, and self-appointed peace-police. After three days of occupation, police in soldier costumes pried the protestors from the library, with many escaping arrest through adroit tactics and the self-sacrifice of a few. Administrators immediately wrote off the tumultuous weeks as a childish departure from normality, while encouraging students to snitch and turn on one another, leveling punishments more intense than most of the legal sanctions ultimately adjudicated.

Maybe the administration is right. Maybe the students failed. Maybe they destroyed in an unforgivable fashion before they built. Maybe they built nothing of consequence. Maybe they damaged the space without remorse, childishly and gleefully glorying in destruction (they didn’t, of course—books and archives, among other things, were scrupulously protected). But one must consider that, after being exposed daily to the imagery of Palestinian death and destruction and with the searing knowledge that we contribute directly, these students didn’t look away. They watched as those with power did nothing while soberly pretending that pro-genocide and anti-genocide were equivalent and legitimate positions. Administrators mouthed language about “diversity,” “innovation,” “inclusion”, and “freedom” even while the daily evidence of US-supported genocide poured in. The students worked through their trauma, fear, and sadness to preserve the humanity of Palestinians. The word “gaslighting” is overused, but when power points at moral and tactical strength and declares it unintelligible, what other word can be used?

The truth is that the opposition—PSU Administration, Portland Police, and government officials—are attempting to make students feel crazy for responding how they did. They decry students as violent while bloodying them; in such upside-down moral logic, the Powers That Be suggest that locking oneself to a door is violence, while breaking student bones is justice; that words on walls are violent and threatening; that arrest, impoverishment, and exclusion from education is the return of peaceful order.

Words issuing from such authority mean little. All can be translated into whatever will maintain power and control, much like the occupation of Palestine itself. Power, unless forced, has no interest in negotiation, compromise, or sharing.

Indeed, Portland State University “paused” only a piece of its relationship to Boeing, spending instead a great deal of time on underattended listening sessions and task forces (e.g., “Building Community Through Dialogue”) to distract and smother.⁴ Even this will quickly fade, unless resistance continues. When leadership fails to listen, understand, or act, students will take up humanitarian responsibilities. Without brave, strong, and empathetic students, from the Vietnam War, through South African apartheid, and now the Palestinian genocide, US society would face a grim future, paralyzed by fear and inaction, without a moral rudder.

It is vital we acknowledge and understand that the United States is funding and participating in an active genocide, notwithstanding its pretenses to democracy and justice. None of us have any lawful control over this, no matter what ideals we harbor, unless we interrupt, disrupt, and fight. Students understand this intimately—they have seen opportunity dry up, costs soar, racism persist, bodily autonomy evaporate, a deadly virus ravage the poor, evictions multiply, and now they watch a US-funded and -supplied genocide unfold in real time. Their response? To shake off the mental bonds of a university education—which tells them to vote for professional politicians, call their Congressperson’s temp staffer, write a blog, or start a nonprofit—and instead construct a joyful and creative autonomous community to force boycott, divestment, and sanctions.

Power is interested in profit and its own maintenance. This terrifying march through the unending crises of late capitalism and neo-fascism in which we are unwillingly engaged will continue. The power of protest is not to show ignorant-but-well-intentioned politicians and administrators the error of their ways or to teach them morality. The power of protest is that it reminds us we are free. It reminds us of our collective strength, unburdened by repressive structures. It is a space where we bump up against others, act and react according to our morals and

instincts, and work together towards common goals, unbound by the internal surveillance that strangles our souls during our so-called normal lives. Some of us are unable to remember this, if we ever knew it. But that terrifying march also produces humans endowed with moral clarity, creativity, and bravery who will remind us before the end.

Free, free Palestine.

Notes

1. This piece was co-authored. Due to generalized fears of retaliation, the second author has opted to redact their name.
2. The obsession is also deliberately overblown. Media reports lead with a \$1 million price tag (or even larger), mentioning only in passing that the insurance deductible is \$100,000—a bill to the University one-tenth the headline figure.
3. A classroom down the hall from the second author’s classroom in the School of Business building literally has “BOEING” inscribed on the glass wall.
4. Such tactics are analogous to the counter-insurgency piece of military operations.

Portions of this essay are adapted from “An Open Letter to My Academic Colleagues” in the *PSU Vanguard*, 5/20/2024

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Fighting for Palestinian Justice at a Hostile University

by Dr. Lucy Arnold, Adelita, Chaviv, Lea Howarth, Mia Randall



ENCAMPMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE 2024. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

On April 29, 2024 student protestors erected a Gaza solidarity encampment on the quad directly in front of the student union at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. On May 1, sprinklers were turned on in this area for six hours, which flooded the encampment. The encampment was forced to relocate to a quad on the other (less visible to visitors) side of campus in front of Fretwell, a building housing English, math, and other traditional academic departments, surrounding the statue of a man carving himself from stone, who normally hangs out in that quad alone. On May 5, student representatives of the Gaza encampment met with university officials to present their demands, which, not unlike in the other Gaza solidarity encampments on campuses around the U.S., requested disclosure of funding to Israel, divestment from any projects engaging in colonization and genocide of Palestinians, defense of student activists on campus, and declaration of the genocide in Palestine as a humanitarian crime. Around 6 AM on May 6, the day after this meeting with the administration, campus police raided the encampment and students were forced to leave, under threat of arrest. One student was arrested.

This piece is a dialogue between a professor at UNC Charlotte and a group of students who were involved in the Gaza solidarity encampment on campus.

LA: Could someone start by providing a bit of context for the encampment, including numbers, interactions with administration, and other general information?

MR: When I first joined, the numbers were small, and the school was attempting to stifle the movement from growing in many ways. That didn't stop people from pushing forward. Students continued to put up tents and take them down every day to avoid violating "campus policy." We even attempted multiple times to follow campus procedure through student government and administrative avenues, both of which simply caused delays in progress for the movement. It had become blatantly clear to me that the school's plan of action was to "wait us out" and hope we would give up or fizzle out by the end of the semester. We continued to receive community donations, food, art supplies, and hygiene products that allowed us to remain in the space. We moved locations after the administration ran sprinklers for over five hours; they did the same thing in the new location as well.

LA: What did you learn from your experiences with the encampment and the development of this collective? Who and what were your teachers?

MR: As someone who had very little knowledge or context coming into the encampment, I learned so much about the history of the collective struggle and how far back the roots run both within this struggle and interconnected struggles globally. I actually just went to the encampment one day and was welcomed in by many

people. I've been passionate about speaking up and advocacy for many years, so when I heard about the encampment from social media, I wanted to see what I could do to get involved. News outlets often tell the stories of the oppressed in a way that is digestible to the oppressors, and it is something that never sat right with me. I wanted to know what was going on, on my campus, with my own eyes. Being exposed to professors teaching, books and movies, and even the storytelling of Palestinian classmates and experts: it allowed not only an opportunity to learn, become more conscious and more aware, but an opportunity to be involved, to make a difference, to put my passion into action.

At the height of the encampment, we had well over 200 students, professors, and community members helping and participating in the protests AND the teach-ins. There were teach-ins from professors, professionals, and even students. There were readings and movie showings. We ate meals together at least once a day, if not multiple times. There were arts and crafts, music, soccer, and football, just to name a few activities! I remember one of the first teach-ins I attended was about Guantanamo Bay and the interconnectedness of different struggles and movements around the world; it opened my eyes to the patterns of oppression I have seen in my past (many of which I saw before even knowing anything about Palestine at all), and the similarities were showing up all over. When an entire population's existence is this politicized, activism and protest become a building block of the movement. But it was just one brick in the foundation of Palestinian liberation and total liberation. That is why people such as myself, who have come from a very different background with very little knowledge, can see themselves with a place in this movement, with allies who are willing to fight for my liberation in the same way I am fighting for theirs.

C: I came into the encampment with a solid knowledge base of Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, revolutionary philosophy, and the like; however, I did not have as solid a base in genuine praxis, which is what drew me to the encampment in the first place. Books and writings from decades, even centuries, ago can only take you so far in the process of liberation. My biggest teachers were my comrades, for they too were learning from one another. We all came into this space with different relationships with revolutionary ideas, different relationships with Palestine, different relationships with imperialism; but through our ability to connect as a collective we began learning more than what theory could ever teach.

LA: I am a lover of theory. I would love for you to say more about how your connections helped you learn about revolutionary ideas. Any specific stories?

C: One of our biggest issues was with structure: when that many people come together with varying levels of knowledge regarding leftist ideology(ies), it's bound to happen that disagreements arise about the best way to organize ourselves and work together. For this, Engels's

"On Authority" was incredibly beneficial, because it helps remind and educate us that while authority is a scary word, and often used to describe violence committed by the state, a sense of collective authority is required to best allocate resources and facilitate education.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

LH: The easiest way to answer is that we all learned from each other. I came into the space with a revolutionary ideological backdrop, roughly based in the teachings from liberation movements such as the Zapatistas or the Algerian National Liberation Front. We have looked to a lot of Palestinian literature and media as well as other various revolutionary texts. We are a diverse group of students and our collective ideologies do not represent a monolith. But we unite on the front of calling for a liberated Palestine. During the time of the physical encampment space, we would organize daily readings or teach-ins. We have had reading sessions on the martyred poet Refaat Alareer and we have held readings excerpted from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. We have held various film screenings, in and outside of the encampment, inviting everyone to join, such as *Fedayin: George Abdullah's Fight*. We have had multiple teach-ins

led by a healthcare worker who had volunteered in Gaza. We have incorporated religious teachings as well, coordinating Jumu'ah prayers at the encampment with local mosques. Jewish Voice for Peace was also very active in leading public relations teaching sessions, to guide students into the best mechanisms of presenting our movement. We coordinated with *withinthemargins_* on Instagram and community members to facilitate a mobile liberation library where students and community members alike were encouraged to join us in the encampment space for independent reading sessions. We had a teach-in on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Day led by an Indigenous UNC Charlotte professor. We have overseen collective research in relation to UNC Charlotte's funding and academic ties to the colonial settler state of Israel; this has meant orienting our understanding of a variety of fields: archaeology, historiography, property laws, etc. The experience in and of itself was all-around conducive to new learnings daily.

A: For me: I came to the encampment with basically nothing. I did my best to know the basic history of Palestine, and I paid a lot of attention to what's happening in Gaza and the West Bank to keep myself up to date. I learned a lot within the encampment, so I guess my teachers were my comrades within the space. We had a lot of speakers come talk and teach, and those were so informative, and I enjoyed going to them when I had the chance during the encampment.

There were many teach-ins led by professors such as one led by an Indigenous professor on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Day. A teach-in was held by a medical volunteer who worked in Gaza. Daily readings were held, centering theory and similar revolutionary ideologies. We had a couple of film screenings as well.

LA: On a related but perhaps parallel note, safety has been a concern voiced by administration and other institutional actors around the encampments, both locally and globally. How do you frame the issues around "safety"?

LH: Safety within the encampment being framed as an issue of concern by academic institutions across the country is, at its core, a purely laughable issue. As university students, we are all aware of the historical significance of student protests as well as standard practice responses implemented by the state and its subordinate institutions. It wasn't students who posed issues of safety at Kent or Jackson State Universities, and the same is true today. It wasn't the universities who led initiatives to abstain from enabling genocide, and the same is true today.

Safety amongst encampment members was an issue of discussion that was constantly centered and focused

on: we had a rotating safety committee that served to patrol the encampment for potential agitators, as well as to educate and lead other encampment members in relevant practices of safety. Agitators were a constant issue, between students driving university golf carts on the encampment field, hecklers from Turning Point USA, or Zionist hecklers; most alarmingly, an individual would drive past the encampment on a longboard late at night in order to flash encampment members. These instances were not prioritized as an issue of safety by UNC Charlotte officials, despite their being wholly aware of these occurrences; one must imagine why. Continually, the abhorrent statements issued by the chancellor insinuated that encampment members were potentially violent— in a letter to the 107 UNC Charlotte faculty members¹ who had argued for free speech and academic freedom in a letter to the editor published in the student newspaper, she intentionally chose to construct an image of the encampment reminiscent of the same Orientalist fear-mongering used to describe Palestinians or any social movement that challenges the status quo: “Knives, boxcutters, baseball sized rocks, and a mattress used to collect and store feces.”² How sensationalistic could she possibly be -- insinuating domestic and biological terrorism when we just want our university to be in line with our ideals for a school we pay tens of thousands of dollars to attend? Additionally, a common narrative forced by universities is that a bulk of individuals present at the encampment are non-students. These are speculations made to render our demands illegitimate. A majority of encampment members were students or alumni. Community members (non-students) were present, but state appropriations fund state universities. In 2020, for example, \$3.1 billion of taxpayer funds were appropriated to the UNC system— every North Carolinian absolutely deserves a say in understanding and dictating what is done with their tax dollars. In short, concerns about safety are narrativized by state institutions to irreverently slander the solidarity encampment movement.

A: I agree with Lea. The administration seems very quick to denounce these movements, including our own, as violent, disruptive, and unsafe. But I have felt so incredibly safe and respected within our encampment compared to any other time I have been on campus. I rested easy knowing that we had a team that served as security for us, and there was always someone or a group of people still up to take care of us at night. These bigger

groups were usually hanging out pulling all-nighters for exams or just having fun, and hearing them laughing, softly speaking, and enjoying themselves made me feel easy and safe when I went to sleep within the encampment.

In fact, when other protestors, such as the anti-abortion and right-wing religious groups, come to campus, I feel incredibly unsafe. And it’s comically alarming that these groups who actively go up to students and heckle them and harass them aren’t getting any sort of reprimand or public statement from the university to students about the safety risk like our encampment has gotten. Or even have the police intervene, not that police intervention is desirable in any of these situations.

MR: The manner in which administrators across the country have framed safety within conversations of the protests has, in my opinion, shown not only which students’ safety they value over others, but also which



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

humans are more deserving of their protection or “safety.” Encampment participants included many students of color, many students working to support themselves and their families while going to school, and many juggling educational, financial, and personal responsibilities while working to keep the encampment alive and safe. Yet, we needed our own safety team because the school was actively working against our safety, whether flooding us with sprinklers or being complacent about counter-protestors and agitators. It echoes institutional messages worldwide that those who speak against oppressive structures of any kind are not safe to do so. The school’s attempts to discredit or stifle us only emboldened solidarity because the school chose to protect the oppressor. We chose to reframe the safety of the encampment as a necessary component when different

threats arose and as it became more apparent that we would be vulnerable without the organized protection of each other. It was our own safety team who mitigated harm when police showed up in the early hours while everyone in the camp was sleeping, who allowed people within the encampment to feel safer while being there, and who kept our various campus events safe. And one of the beautiful things about the space of the encampment was that safety wasn't born out of fear or control but respect, autonomy, and communication.

LA: Some of you are using aliases or partial names. Would anyone be up for sharing your perspective on names in the context of this dialogue?

C: In Jewish culture, a name isn't just what you are known as -- it is what you are known for, so the meaning of a name is incredibly important for one's spiritual life. I have dedicated myself to Palestinian liberation and will continue to do so until the Zionist state has crumbled. Chaviv is the Hebraic equivalent to the Arabic Habibi -- "my love" -- and is the masculinized version of Chava -- "life." I chose it to symbolize the inseparable truth of Jewish and Muslim, Jewish and Palestinian solidarity and struggle.

In a political safety sense, my alias separates my day-to-day life from my organizing. The UNC Charlotte admin keeps a very close eye on student activism (especially for Palestinian solidarity) and has gone to great lengths to censor and block revolutionary progression. By using an alias, I create a counter-block for myself and others; Chaviv, as an idea, is the shield I need to fight another day and stay safe doing it.

LA: What lessons do you think our university specifically should take from the experiences with the encampment? What's your most hopeful vision for the university?

A: Well, my main takeaway is to actively listen to your students and what they are demanding of you. We are students who are actively paying this university; we have a right to know where our money is going; and, if we don't like it, we have every right to ask our university for divestments and disclosures.

C: I, for one, am heartbroken, yet unsurprised, by the university's treatment of protestors, encampment members, and uninvolved students (such as our Islamic student organizations) caught in the crossfires of discrimination and intentional profiling. The spreading of misinformation accusing an encampment/Palestinian solidarity movement, led by Arab, Black, and brown students, of violence and destruction only further reinforces the Zionist narrative of "innocent civilians attacked by evil Muslim forces." Not only is it incredibly racialized in its propaganda, but it is incredibly dangerous for Black and brown students, especially Palestinian/Muslim students.

MR: I think the university was put in a position to prove that history doesn't have to repeat itself, and although they failed miserably, they still have the opportunity to learn better for next time. Whether they choose to or not, that is up to them. Hopefully, the school will learn to listen to students, to hear them when they cry out for help. Hopefully, the school will see that the students are the life blood of school history, culture, and change. Our university very clearly exemplified their colonial, imperial interests, but they will learn that a university campus is capable of change and capable of taking a stance: we are not a branch of corporations but a branch of collective liberation.

LA: What about next steps for the solidarity and justice for Palestine movement? What are your thoughts?

A: A majority of those present at the encampment were either current students, alumni, or students from other universities within the UNC system. Due to the nature of how the UNC Management Company allocates funding throughout the UNC system, this allows students more flexibility and solidarity to work together to research funding and call for further transparency. As for those having no connections to UNC Charlotte or other universities in the UNC system, North Carolina's colleges and universities receive annual tax appropriations of more than \$4 billion. On a per-student basis, UNC schools receive more public funding than almost any other schools in the nation. Taxpayers, who are legally bound to provide this level of financial support to the UNC system, are owed transparency both in funding and in decision making by the board of trustees.

On the day after the forcible removal of the encampment, the administration described the events in an email to the campus community. Many points were covered in this email, but one part in particular is striking: "Protestors -- many of whom are not members of the University community..." What comprises the University community? We cannot be a community-centered, public university if we decide to declare as outsiders community members and students who choose to participate in activism on campus, especially activism that centers humanity and inclusion.

It is not lost on us that the events of April and May coincided with a push from the North Carolina university system to remove all DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) measures and staff from campus. Those offices supporting student identity and equity offer spaces for marginalized students to organize and collaborate in generative ways, but the structures themselves are inarguably stabilized and empowered only as far as, the neoliberal interests of the university allow them to extend. So, when faced with the controversy of the activism around Gaza, the neoliberal university administration sided with conservative power structures seeking to silence all voices that diverge from the White supremacist, patriarchal,

capitalist, cisheteronormative norms that dominate political power.

The Palestinian Liberation movement on campus did not hope to organize solely within the confines of the controlled and limited spaces offered by university offices, and these two coinciding events, the Palestinian Liberation encampment and the eradication of DEI offices in the university system, only emphasize the ways in which neoliberalism cannot meet calls for liberation. The hope we have is not embodied by neoliberalism and colonialism; it is the hope offered by the students and community members who built and enacted the Gaza solidarity movement on campus and imagine spaces where liberation for all is possible.

Notes

1. This letter to the editor was published in the *Niner Times* on May 7.
2. This letter, which includes additional hyperbolized statements from administration, was reported on by the campus newspaper, the *Niner Times* on May 9.

Dr. Lucy Arnold is an Assistant Professor of Education at Wingate University; their research interests include critical pedagogy, writing assessment, community engagement, activism, and critical service-learning. Their first book, with co-author Heather Coffey, is *Transformative Critical Service-Learning: Theory and Practice for Engaging Community College and University Learners in Building an Activist Mindset*, with Myers Press.

Adelita is currently a junior at UNC Charlotte; they grew up in the Appalachias and spent their young adult years doing environmental activism work as well as serving their Latino community.

Chaviv is a senior and transfer student at UNC Charlotte. They have been a member of the UNCC Revolutionary Student Front since its creation in 2023 and Jewish Voice for Peace since the Gaza Solidarity Encampment.

Lea Howarth is an alumna of UNC Charlotte and graduated with a degree in international relations in 2023. They have been involved in activist spaces since their teenage years, having grown up as an Arab-American post-9/11, which is itself a radicalizing experience.

Mia Randall is an MA student at UNC Charlotte. They have been involved in activism from youth and got involved with activism for Palestine in April.



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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Islamophobia, Dirty Water Tactics, and Student Encampments for Gaza: Threats to Free Speech at San Jose State University

by Sang Hea Kil



STUDENTS AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY HAVE SET UP MORE THAN A DOZEN TENTS ON THE GRASS IN FRONT OF CLARK HALL TO PROTEST THE UNIVERSITY'S LACK OF RESPONSE TO THE DEATHS IN GAZA. PHOTO BY B. SAKURA CANNISTRA.

On Monday, May 13, 2024, the San Jose State University (SJSU) administration engaged in what in my opinion amounts to Islamophobic repression of peaceful student protest—what I will refer to as “dirty water tactics,” as unsafe water from the sprinkler system was sprayed on our pro-Palestine encampment while we occupied it. The soaking occurred on the first night of the Muslim student encampment established next to the famous statue called the “Victory Salute” that commemorates Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s Olympic black power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics (both athletes are SJSU alumni). *Spartan Daily*, the campus student newspaper, was present and reported that a SJSU administrator:

...told students that the sprinklers would be turning on at 10:30 p.m. via megaphone outside the administration building at 8:46 p.m. Senior Director of Media Relations [...] said there was an effort by the administration to quell the sprinklers, but the valves were not shut off in time....[Another SJSU administrator] said the water is designated as “purple pipe” water, meaning that even though it is not potable, it is not gray water, and is chemically treated.... Environmental studies professor Rachel O’Malley said that the sprinkler system can be shut off at any time, and SJSU administration had more than two hours to shut off the water system, which works on a cycle....O’Malley said that even though the water is chemically treated and approved for agricultural use, it is not treated for human standards. “Unfortunately, it is not safe –it’s not authorized for human consumption or human contact,” she said. (<https://sjsunews.com/article/sprinklers-spray-sjsu-student-protesters->)

At the time the encampment was established, I was the faculty advisor for Students for Justice for Palestine (SJP) on my campus (before my job suspension -- more on this later) and co-chair of the Palestine, Arab, and Muslim Caucus (PAM) of my faculty union (California Faculty Association) that covers twenty-three California State University (CSU) campuses. I was on campus that night to protect and support the students (even though SJP for its own reasons was not an official endorser of this camp) and witnessed this affront to our democratic rights to protest a genocide. I posted on social media a screenshot of a SJSU’s administrator’s job page with the caption, “This sjsu admin turned the water on peaceful, mostly Muslim protesters/campers last night at 10.30 pm soaking everybody. The optics of using water as a weapon against students protesting a genocide is hideous! Shame on sjsu! Shame!” Here is the link to that post: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C681KaRRI6M/>.

This essay is an attempt to describe some aspects of the SJSU student encampment from my perspective as the only faculty member who camped with the students and openly supported them in the news media. I detail how both liberalism and the neoliberal university system enabled the silence about the Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people through its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Program and how the Office of the President promoted Islamophobia toward the Muslim

student encampment and suppressed free speech at SJSU.

SJSU Silence and the Matrix of Administrative Domination (MAD)

Paulo Freire (1970) talked about the culture of silence in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He explained that the dispossessed have few tools and little motivation to resist their oppression because of the complex, paternalistic dynamics of economic, social, and political domination, which “submerges” them as victims and diminishes their capacity for critical awareness and resistance. He was particularly focused on the educational system as one of the major institutions that maintained this culture of silence.

What strikes me about Freire’s analysis is that, regarding the current genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, this silencing applies more to the faculty than the students. Out of over 2,000 faculty members at SJSU, I was the only one to camp with the students in their 10-day encampment protest. I think faculty on my campus are “submerged” under three layers of silence in their dispossession and could not muster more support for our students’ protest against the genocide. First, the SJSU administration never acknowledged the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians. Second, our campus Academic Senate also refused to acknowledge the genocide in Gaza. Third, our campus faculty union (SJSU-CFA) refused to hear a resolution drafted by PAM that called for a ceasefire on the genocide, an end of aid to Israel, and the protection of academic freedom for those that speak out for justice in Palestine. SJSU-CFA even took an emergency vote (13 No, 1 Yes, 1 Abstain) to strike the resolution from the executive board agenda, barring both co-chairs of the PAM caucus from introducing the resolution to the campus union and its membership. To date, no administration or official faculty campus entity at SJSU has used the word “genocide” to describe what the Israeli government is doing to Palestinians.

This triple layer to the “culture of silence” at SJSU amounts to what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls the Matrix of Domination. The Matrix of Domination is made up of intersecting oppressions (race, class, gender, sexuality, and more) organized along interpersonal, hegemonic, disciplinary, and structural domains of power. I am modifying her concept for SJSU and beyond as a “Matrix of *Administrative* Domination” (MAD) because campus administrators are the key drivers of faculty dispossession that faculty find hard to resist. Many SJSU faculty are intersectionally oppressed as a class in a tiered job system, which gets more intersectionally complicated as there are more women than men, more whites than non-whites, and more part-timers than tenured/ tenure-track faculty (<https://bit.ly/3YiJM90>). About 60% of SJSU faculty are lecturers and do not have as much job security as those with tenure or on tenure-track lines. And those who are on the tenure-track can fear retaliation, abuse, and loss of tenure, which supports the culture of silence and SJSU’s MAD. And this fear can be more real at these

intersections for women, people of color, queers, non-citizens, and the disabled on the tenure track. By the time faculty make it to associate or full professor, where there is more job security and less at stake, the MAD continues to pressure these more privileged professors to not openly resist and effectively organize against the academic and political repression at our campus.

Liberalism, DEI, and “Free Speech is not an Absolute Right”

Critical race theory (CRT) advocates like Derrick Bell (1989) have pointed out that liberalism, the political philosophy that is concerned with the individual and state relationship and values limiting state intrusion on liberties, ignores inherent differences in social group categories that adversely affect the individual, and treats such differences as naturally random. CRT holds that the rule of law does not work for racial minorities, but always for the more empowered, privileged groups (Delgado, 1996). CRT treats race neutrality as a new form of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Gotanda, 1991), where only “aggressive, color conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 27). This trajectory of CRT can help make sense of why DEI programs on universities are ineffective and create a facade of racial remedy in the face of worsening racial disparities. Sara Ahmed (2012, p. 13) describes such efforts as a type of “diversity management” -- an administrative practice that contains dissent or conflict.

On February 19th, 2024, a few months prior to the SJSU student encampment, I sent an email to the DEI office and other departments asking them to withdraw their official co-sponsorship of a Zionist speaker who denied that what was happening to Gaza was a genocide. At a campus action to protest this speaker, I saw a SJSU history professor assault a Palestinian protester (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/02/27/professors-evacuated-put-leave-heckic-pro-palestine>).

An investigation was later opened on me for reasons that are murky and unclear to me but based on this event. Later the investigation would expand and also include my support of the student campers.

On May 9th, I received another email from an SJSU administration official. She wrote:

On May 8, 2024, you spoke at a protest at SJSU organized by Students for Justice for Palestine, an SJSU student group for which you are the current advisor.

Per witnesses, you directed student protestors to disregard SJSU's Time, Place, and Manner (TPM) Policy, specifically instructing them to march through the SRAC and to establish an encampment on the lawn by the statues. However, the students in attendance adhered to the TPM policy and did not follow your directives....

We never marched through the SRAC or student recreation aquatic center and I never ordered the students to put down a camp because the protest mentioned in the email was on the first day of a sit-in demonstration against the genocide so it was very easy for me to reply that I “categorically deny these claims.”

On May 24, 2024, I received an email from an Administrator at SJSU that informed me of the temporary suspension of my job duties. In her letter, she alleged that I violated Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) Article 17 on “Temporary Suspensions” that states the “President may temporarily suspend with pay a faculty unit employee for reasons related to (a) the safety of persons or property, (b) the disruption of programs and/or operations, or (c) investigation for formal notice of disciplinary action” (<https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/faculty-staff/labor-and-employee-relations/Documents/unit3-cfa/article17.pdf>).

I believe the accusations SJSU made against me are false. In fact, I believe that my temporary suspension is part of an academic freedom suppression campaign to control and silence all faculty on campus. I have been an outspoken critic of the genocide in Gaza as well as an advocate for faculty rights as a CFA union member and leader. In my capacity as a scholar-activist, I mentor all students who want a free Palestine, and it was within my duties to support these students in their campaign to bring greater awareness to the university community. It is their constitutional right to protest the Israeli genocide of Palestinians and the layers of complicit silence on campus.

One of the key mechanisms that the CSU is using against faculty who support their students are Time, Place, and Manner (TPM) Policies. These policies can diminish the First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendment rights on university campuses. Here is some reasoning from my campus on TPM issues about the First Amendment:

Freedom of expression is not an absolute right. It coexists with other rights and the need for public order. To ensure that the exercise of the right of free expression does not interfere with University functions, imperil public safety, or obstruct or damage university facilities, the University will enforce campus regulations regarding the Time, Place and Manner of the exercise of free expression by individuals and groups. (<https://www.sjsu.edu/president/priorities-and-initiatives/free-speech/time-place-manner/>)

However, these policies are selectively enforced. When we have sporting events, people on campus are free to make noise and encouraged to do so, but when it is about political protest then "Freedom of expression is not an absolute right."

Mohanty (2013) writes that "representational politics in neoliberal landscapes requires a profound flattening of difference. ... We must attend closely to notions of diversity that embrace generic conceptions of difference that are flattened, privatized, and shorn of a critique of power" (pp. 972-973). The fact that both the history professor who had assaulted the Palestinian protester and I were put on leave and placed under investigation is an example of this "flattening of difference." It seems his physical assault of a protester has been equated with my support of students organizing against genocide. This allows neoliberalism to thrive via the MAD, enabled by its DEI office, as well as the faculty's "culture of silence" on SJSU's campus.

The Neoliberal University and the Domestication of a Radical Symbol of Emancipation

Neoliberal transformations in higher education contribute to the MAD that feeds the culture of silence at SJSU. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2013) argues that neoliberalism negatively impacts higher education in two contrasting ways: 1) through government policies that prioritize the market through commodification, financialization, privatizations, and the "proliferation of difference" through cosmopolitanism that facilitate financial mobility; and 2) "authoritarian, national security-driven penal state practices" that criminalize and incarcerate people (p. 970). The result has been cutting public funding for education and the rise of privatization globally, where radical theory and knowledges are then commodified and disconnected from their emancipatory origins and insurgent activism and instead re-circulated as a sign of prestige for the neoliberal ivory tower.

The Victory Salute statue I mentioned in the introduction is an example of a radical symbol as a neoliberal prestige commodity. Below is an excerpt from an SJSU webpage about this important statute:

Designed by artist, Rigo 23, this larger-than lifesize fiberglass and mosaic monument, centrally placed on San José State University's Tower Lawn, depicts the heroic and symbolic action of two African-American athletes and San José State University alumni,



SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS ASSESSING NEXT STEPS WITH THE STUDENT ENCAMPMENT. PHOTO BY B. SAKURA CANNISTRA

Tommie Smith (24) and John Carlos (23), who during the medal ceremony for the [200-meter running final](https://www.sjsu.edu/ha-public-art-tour/public-art/black-power.php) in the Olympic Stadium in Mexico City on October 16, 1968, performed the Black power salute, raising their fists in silent protest. (<https://www.sjsu.edu/ha-public-art-tour/public-art/black-power.php>)

Harry Edwards was the founder of the Olympic Project for Human Rights and organized the placement of the Victory Salute on campus (Kuhn, 2015). On May 15th, 2024, he wrote the following email addressed to the student protesters that was released by *Spartan Daily*. The message was accompanied by pictures of the statue with a Palestinian Flag that the student protesters draped on Tommie Smith's figure. I include an excerpt below from the letter Harry Edwards, Tommie Smith, Ken Noel, and John Carlos submitted to the *Spartan Daily*:

[...]It is our position that to drape the Smith-Carlos Statue with flags and other political paraphernalia and artifacts and to post an array of signs, banners, and other messaging displays on the associated surrounding ellipse that are unrelated to, if not incongruous with the established purposes of the site is to defile and diminish the intent of that space and to approach desecration of the statue and the Movement it has come to represent and symbolize. There is also the real risk going forward that tolerating the Statue and ellipse site as a stage for protest encampments will invite any and every other emerging "cause" to commandeer the ellipse and Statue as backdrops for their diverse protests. For those of us who fought and forged the OPHR Movement, and -- for that matter -- for the University community, such an outcome would be utterly inappropriate, unacceptable, and intolerable.[...]

(https://www.instagram.com/spartandaily/p/C7BNq0uuOkB/?img_index=4)

The signers of the letter demanded the student encampment be dismantled immediately.

It is important to note that one day prior, on May 14, 2024, the SJSU president wrote an email to the campus community titled "Update Regarding Unsanctioned Encampment" that stated:

Violence, vandalism, and unprotected speech that promotes a hostile or harassing environment is prohibited by the law and [CSU policy](#). Those in violation of the TPM policy and/or breaking the law will face consequences. SJSU students, faculty, staff, visitors, and/or organizations will be held accountable for any vandalism, damage or misconduct. (https://pages.sjsu.edu/index.php/email/emailWebview?email=NjYzLVVLUS05OTgAAAGUUT58b8Wjg89HXycxRx8MG0RAOBZsKtUh8nAqs1pICxDq4Zik_1SMIYrLThuAKoPj80hj4PrI9QHhpXnEjzIzNISW_Oso9pZrg).

It is my belief that the President's framing of Muslim student campers with Islamophobic tropes, by associating them with violence and hate speech, helped to drive a division between our black alumni Olympians and Muslim student protesters. I did reach out to Harry Edwards to support my students but we were not able to come to any agreement on the issue.

The impact of this press release on my students was harmful. Given the unique unfolding of the encampment, I can only talk about my perspective of the encampment and I cannot speak for or describe that of my students. At the sit-in protest I gave an impromptu speech that inspired a student to approach me about the possibility of an encampment. We did not know each other but I immediately helped this student with advice on what to expect in launching one. Because these students decided they wanted a Muslim-focused encampment, they used code names, masks, and head coverings to protect themselves from the Islamophobia I warned them was coming, so I never really got a sense of these students as I did not ask any personal questions for fear of risking their safety. Due to the threat of doxing, they asked me to be their spokesperson for the news media and later as a liaison for the administration. The students even made me part of their encampment demands as they were aware of some of the emails I had received.

Overall, I think the encampment was a success for my students. They did something truly brave and historic given the campus climate at SJSU. Some faculty did come and support their programming. However, the culture of silence/MAD, the President's email, the "Victory Salute" press release, and the lack of meaningful progress between the campers and administrators frustrated the students, in my opinion. My hope is that they will keep fighting this genocide despite the overwhelming challenges.

While SJSU was the last campus to launch a student encampment in the CSU system in the spring 2024 semester (there were seven camps in total), SJSU was unique in the sense that it was the only mostly Muslim encampment of all seven CSU camps. And what made this encampment unique and historic also made it vulnerable to Islamophobia. I urged the students I worked directly with to consider the utility of broad-based coalitions moving forward in their protest endeavors before I was suspended and cut off from communicating with them at the urging of my union. Currently my union has declined to represent me in both of the statutory grievances I have filed related to my job suspension and told me to "advocate for yourself," though my union has provided me with a field representative for my investigation to serve as a witness.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Decolonized Worldmaking: Campus Encampments for Civic Engagement

by the SoCal for Palestine Coalition



"SOLIDARITY FOREVER" BY JOSH MACPHEE VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

"Why are you protecting murderers? Why are you fighting for people who killed children?" I shouted at the dozens of men in riot gear at the UCSD [University of California San Diego] Gaza Solidarity Encampment. Some of them (California Highway Patrol and Sheriff's deputies) glanced away, avoiding eye contact. They shuffled in their combat boots, visibly reassessing their perception. Others tightened their chest protectors or pulled out their nightsticks as if they needed protection from the truth cutting through the morning air. I was arrested minutes later on May 6th for peacefully protesting the United States' complicity in the genocide in Gaza and the UCSD's profiting from entities supporting the genocide. - UCSD camp activist.¹

This essay chronicles and affirms the mass mobilization of pro-Palestinian allies and University of California (UC) student activists who exercised their constitutional rights to free speech to decolonize university mindsets and spaces (Figures 1-5) through the establishment of several campus encampments in the spring of 2024. These encampments and the activists who founded them aimed to call out universities for being complicit in the Palestinian genocide, scholasticide, and ecocide in Gaza by refusing to divest from Israeli investments. This essay daylights the UC system's fear about the success of decolonized spaces, where students and faculty brought attention to centuries of colonization, oppression, exploitation, and a global network of systemic propaganda and gaslighting to support Eurocentric settler colonialism. (Lara 2024)

Background

On September 7, 2023, the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement held its fifth annual conference. Michelle Deutschman, the Center's Executive Director, warned that instead of valuing "reason, debate, or access to knowledge, higher education is often said in the same breath as words like 'indoctrination' and 'partisan.'" She was critical of legislators who sought to intervene in curriculum development, book bans, and tenure protections, which profoundly affect academic freedom.

At the same conference, Chancellor Michael Drake reminded the UC faculty and students:

At its heart, the function of a public university and society is inseparable from the health of a democracy. Like democracy, discovering, creating, and disseminating new knowledge is an endlessly hopeful endeavor. It can give us faith in the power of humans to continuously work toward a better future and ensure access and opportunity for all to participate in learning and creating new knowledge. (University of California 2023)

The conference energized and empowered students and faculty. UC campuses took Chancellor Drake's inspiring words at face value. We hoped that they could

"debate, learn, and listen to one another" in the "civic engagement" sites we developed over the course of the Spring 2020/4 semester (Gaza Popular University liberation zones) where we planned to mourn, heal, and halt the genocide through an arms embargo on Israel.

Spring 2024: Encampments Became the Ultimate Form of Decolonized Womanist Worldmaking to Stop Genocide

In late April 2024, as the death toll from relentless Israeli strikes on Gaza rose, and the U.S. became the largest supplier of weapons to the IDF (Kim, 2024), encampments led by pro-Palestinian students proliferated on U.S. college campuses. Before encampments, globalized demonstrations had temporarily shut down bridges, train stations, and airports (Ho & Doyle 2024). Students held numerous peaceful protests to stop Israel's ongoing assault (Figure 1), amid extreme Western media censorship.

Contextualizing Sumud Womanism² of Gaza Popularity Encampments

Palestinian students, their Jewish allies, and students of conscience were horrified by the complicity of Western governments in violence against Palestinian civilians and Palestinian detainees (Al Jazeera 2024c). UN Women reported that most Palestinian women (84%) and their families were extremely food insecure after October 7, 2023.³ Mothers and adult women were tasked with securing food (90% found this task extremely difficult) and eating less than everyone. UNRWA⁴ tweeted: "Thousands of breastfeeding and pregnant women in the #GazaStrip are facing hunger and malnutrition of their children, says @WFP_MENA."⁵ Students who are womanists committed to freedom, justice, human rights, and international law found themselves at a critical moment in history that demanded principled, bold, and resolute actions to broaden and expand intersectional womanist principles of liberation. (Figures 1-4)

Across the country Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM), Health Care Workers for Palestine (HCW4Palestine), Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Anak Bayan, MEChA,⁶ and many other pro-Palestinian groups galvanized into anti-war and anti-divestment actions as the scale of death and destruction in Gaza was being live-streamed by Palestinian journalists, who were being targeted by Israeli bombing and snipers. By the middle of April 2024, students were willing to risk arrests to fight for the Palestinian cause by setting up encampments on their college campuses calling for an end to the genocide and divestment from companies selling arms or funding genocide.

UC students, Cal State University (CSU) students, and UC and CSU faculty bonded over humanity, justice, and love at the encampments. They read books, shared culture, took classes, and attended teach-ins that opened their eyes to the years of injustice in the Occupied

Palestinian Territories (Mansoor, Ewe, & Moench, 2024). Campus encampments encapsulated decolonized worldmaking -- an Indigenous movement led by students who not only recognize but also confront the broad structures of oppression that continue to keep Indigenous people from reclaiming and protecting their cultures, economies, and natural resources. Goodman's (1978) concept worldmaking defines the intelligent, creative, and revolutionary artistic exposé that occurred on the campuses in 2024.

Decolonized worldmaking dismisses Eurocentric language and ideology and welcomes Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is integral to decolonizing the deficit narratives that are heaped on non-European cultures and encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual, and spirituality. The encampments held Jumma prayers, shared communal dinners, recited blessings during Shabbat, learned about the harmful settler colonialist policies from the local tribes, connected with MeChA on the importance of Chicano Movement to overcome deficit narratives hurled by Anglo-Saxon settlers, held space for the youth leaders of Anak Bayans who are committed to protect Philippine's indigeneity from US Imperialism, shared Maqluba, a traditional MENA dish, and dancing to the rhythms of Dabke (a Palestinian dance), and more...

Such collective, decolonial actions are radical, transformative, and feared by Eurocentric power elites who want to control the "rightness of the vision." Impactful worldmakers work through their secondary trauma to produce, perform, and display forms of resistance art and actions (Figures 2-5).

Many students supporting the encampments identified with the Palestinian cause because it resonated with other struggles for justice, such as those against excessive surveillance in black and brown neighborhoods, policing of our borders, apartheid, extractive exploitation on Indigenous lands, economic discrimination toward the Global South, and the impact of wars and policies on global warming (Mansoor, Ewe, & Moench, 2024; Peters 2024).



FIGURE 1. TOP LEFT: GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS, COLLECTIVE NAHDA (AWAKENING), BEGINS WITH A GROUP OF STEADFAST ARTIVISTS WHO STAND FIRM IN THEIR CONVICTIONS, RAISING THE FLAG OF PALESTINE EVEN WHEN ATTACKED BY COUNTER-PROTESTERS. OCTOBER 12, 2023. **TOP RIGHT:** THE CROWD SWELLED IN THE EVENING TO HONOR THE MARTYRS, ORGANIZED BY STUDENT JUSTICE FOR PALESTINE (UCSD AND SDSU) AND PYM SAN DIEGO. **CENTER:** ARTIVISM DURING THE UCSD STUDENT WALKOUT FOR PALESTINE ON NOVEMBER 29, 2023. **BOTTOM:** ARTIVISM WITH BANNERS AND SIGNS DURING THE FEBRUARY 21, 2024 PROTEST URGING THE ASSOCIATED STUDENT BODY TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF DIVESTMENT (RESOLUTION PASSED).

Student encampments on university campuses across North America (and globally⁷) can be theorized as anti-war and abolitionist worldmaking (Goodman 1978) in practice. Encampments worldwide are deeply interconnected as alternative ways of imagining justice, liberation, and freedom (Figure 3). Abolition movements operate under the assumption that current institutions like police and military (locally and internationally) are systemically violent—especially towards people of color—and thus block liberation, justice, or equitable outcomes over time, even with legal reforms (Oursler & DalCortivo 2024).



FIGURE 2. AS ENCAMPMENTS PROLIFERATE, DECOLONIZED WORLDMAKING HAS PROVIDED DRAMATIC VISUAL IMAGERY. THESE ACTIONS HAVE STRUCK A CHORD WITH STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND BROADER COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO SUPPORT STUDENT DIVESTMENT DEMANDS. PROTESTERS NATIONWIDE HAVE ADOPTED THE WORLDMAKING MANTRA, "DISCLOSE, DIVEST. WE WILL NOT STOP; WE WILL NOT REST." **TOP LEFT:** UC IRVINE'S ENCAMPMENT IS STRATEGICALLY LOCATED IN THE PHYSICAL SCIENCE QUAD TO EXPOSE THE LINK BETWEEN STEM RESEARCH AND SOPHISTICATED WEAPONRY. THE CAMP HAD A DEDICATED SECTION HONORING MARTYRS KILLED BY ISRAELI BOMBING. **CENTER:** CUNY SIGNS PROTESTING ISRAEL'S WAR IN GAZA STAGED TO MAXIMIZE ARTISTIC IMPACT. **TOP RIGHT:** A HANDALA MURAL AT CSULA. CREATED BY NAJI AL-ALI IN 1969, HANDALA SYMBOLIZES THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE TO OCCUPATION. **BOTTOM LEFT:** THE MURAL OF HIND RAJAB OUTSIDE THE CSULA ENCAMPMENT WAS A GRIM REMINDER OF THE HORRORS AND WAR CRIMES COMMITTED IN GAZA. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** ARTIVISTIC SOLIDARITY AT UCSD LISTING CAMPUSES BRUTALLY INVADDED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT, UNDERWRITTEN BY COLLEGE ADMINISTRATIONS.

Gaza Solidarity encampments embraced collective abolitionist womanist organizing, teaching, caring, learning, and bringing students and anti-war communities together (Oursler & DalCortivo 2024) (Figure 4). Student scholars, educators, and organizers were deeply engaged in conversations against settler colonialism projects that demanded prison and police abolition in all communities from occupied Palestine to every corner of the globe. Encampment members were educated, informed, compassionate, and determined to divest from carceral

approaches studied within feminist anti-violence movements.⁸ Collectively, the encampments represented one of the largest mass activist worldmakings in recent history. Jay Jordan, an expert in inspirational activism projects, who collaborates with activists at the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination,⁹ explained:

Activism is not a movement. It's more an attitude, a practice on the fertile edges between art and activism. It comes into being when creativity and resistance

collapse into each other. It's what happens when our political actions become as beautiful as poems and as practical as a perfectly designed tool... It is not about showing new perceptions of the world but about changing it. Refusing representation, activism chooses direct action (Jordan, p. 60 cited from Berkhoudt 2024).

The diverse direct action-resistant art techniques in the encampments were clever, witty, creative, Indigenous, spiritual, spontaneous, and symbolic, making no excuses for stopping "business as usual."

History will remember that unique, artistic decolonized worldmaking (Figures 1- 5) was brutally suppressed through arrests, which violated free speech. At UCSD, decolonized worldmaking by the UCSD Divest Coalition has brought together Palestinians and other oppressed groups who have enriched activism. The UCSD Divest Coalition article, "Globalize the Intifada"¹⁰ explains how pro-Palestinian decolonized worldmaking is infectious:

As Palestinians continue to confront ethnic cleansing and genocide bravely, it's time to globalize the Intifada. This call is rooted in direct action and driven by the belief that all colonized and oppressed people

have the right to take back their land, to realize self-determination, and to win their liberation by any means necessary. We build upon the revolutionary spirit and inspiration of Palestinian resistance, understanding that our liberation is either collective or non-existent and must reflect the interconnectedness of our struggles in our neighborhoods and homelands.

Decolonized worldmaking in the pro-Palestinian encampments has successfully built solidarity. It has fueled the globalized cry for justice to also include Sudan, Congo, Haiti, and most recently Lebanon (Taub 2024). From April 2024 to July 2024, Pro-Palestinian encampments mushroomed at US universities and spread to South Africa, Europe, and Australia.

The UCSD Divest Coalition student-led encampment had four distinct demands:

1. Calling for a ceasefire and committing to help rebuild the universities of Gaza, which have all been destroyed;
2. Ensuring amnesty to all those who participated in the Gaza Solidarity Encampment;
3. Implementing a full boycott of the Israeli apartheid regime; and
4. Divesting from Israeli apartheid, occupation, and genocide.

The student Intifada threatened the Eurocentric ideology embedded in university systems; U.S. university leaders and influential power elites ordered police departments, sheriff's departments, and state highway patrols in riot gear to intervene violently and charge students with misdemeanor or felony charges (Zhuang 2024). Videos emerging from UCSD,¹¹ UCI, UCLA, CUNY, Columbia, Art Institute of Chicago, and many other universities in various states showed hundreds of students – and even faculty members – being forcefully arrested.

Keeping severe suppression of free speech protections with "unfair censorship and retaliation" in public universities in mind, we reexamine Chancellor Drake's speech at the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement from September 7, 2023:

History and even the present are full of perilous moments for democracy...Significant threats to free speech, academic freedom, free and fair elections, and the rule of law, however, still exist...here today and why the University of California and every institution represented here today is engaged in the pursuit of truth. In 1995, American astronomer Carl Sagan wrote..."finding the occasional straw of truth



FIGURE 3. WORLDMAKING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES AROSE FROM INDIGNATION AGAINST SOCIETAL DISENGAGEMENT WITH THE PALESTINIAN NAKBA AND GENOCIDE. UNIVERSITY ATTACKS ON STUDENTS PROTESTING GENOCIDE HAVE DEEPENED DISTRUST TOWARDS COLLEGE ADMINISTRATIONS. THE ABOVE IMAGERY ILLUSTRATES HOW STUDENTS CREATED, PROTECTED, AND NURTURED SPACES FOR LEARNING AND EDUCATION. **TOP LEFT:** WORLDMAKING AT UC IRVINE. **TOP RIGHT:** CSULA ENCAMPMENT. **CENTER LEFT:** ARTISTIC POSTERS AND ART OUTSIDE UCSD ENCAMPMENT. **CENTER RIGHT:** UCLA STUDENTS. **BOTTOM LEFT:** ALTARS IN MEMORY OF LIVES LOST IN GAZA WERE PRESENT IN ALL ENCAMPMENTS. AT CSULA TOURS OCCURRED DAILY. **BOTTOM CENTER:** CSULA ENCAMPMENT'S LIBRARY AND ARTBUILD AREA. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** TRIBUTE ART FOR JOURNALISTS KILLED IN GAZA AT UCLA.

awash in a great ocean of confusion and bamboozle requires vigilance, dedication, and courage. But if we don't practice these tough habits of thought, we cannot hope to solve the truly serious problems that face us."

Future UC students will read and learn of the numerous violations committed by the UC campus police, the neighboring police departments, and the Highway Patrol in their use of extreme force against students and their allies for peacefully protesting against Palestinian genocide. At UCSD, the campus administration (without consulting faculty) greenlighted the plan that enabled the campus police and other law enforcement agencies to block all entries into the campus while they executed their early morning police raid on the encampment. The brutal

repression contradicted Chancellor Drake's claimed commitment to protecting free speech and exposed his liberal double standard. Student reporters¹² described the police crackdown as "repulsive and dangerous" (Roblin 2024).

Yet despite their destruction by police, the encampments forever changed many students and faculty. Around 60 UCSD faculty signed an open letter to students,¹³ celebrating their compassion and determination to take a stand against genocide and the unethical investment of UCSD funds. An excerpt illustrates the sense of belonging in decolonized worldmaking:

Then, you did something none of us had managed to do: You forced the entire campus to pay attention to Palestine. We watched in admiration as your

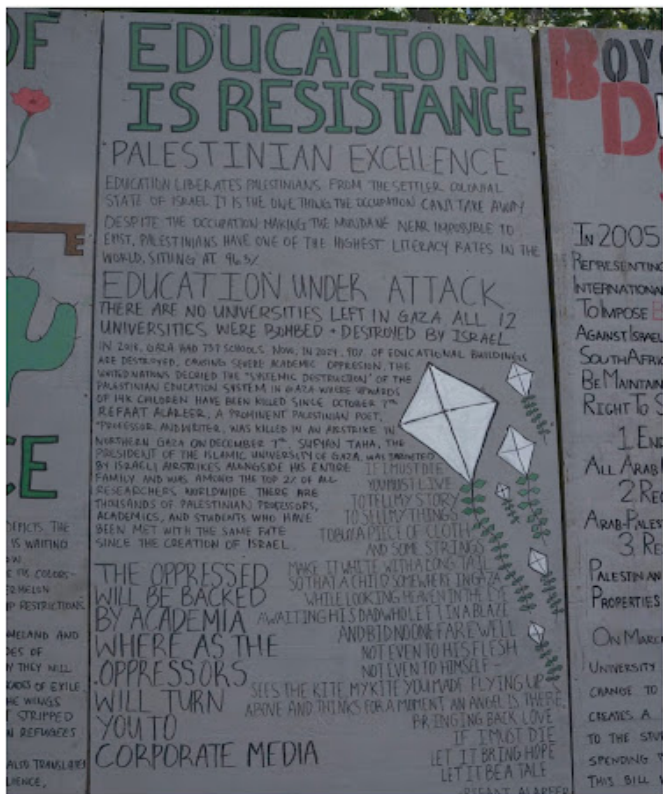
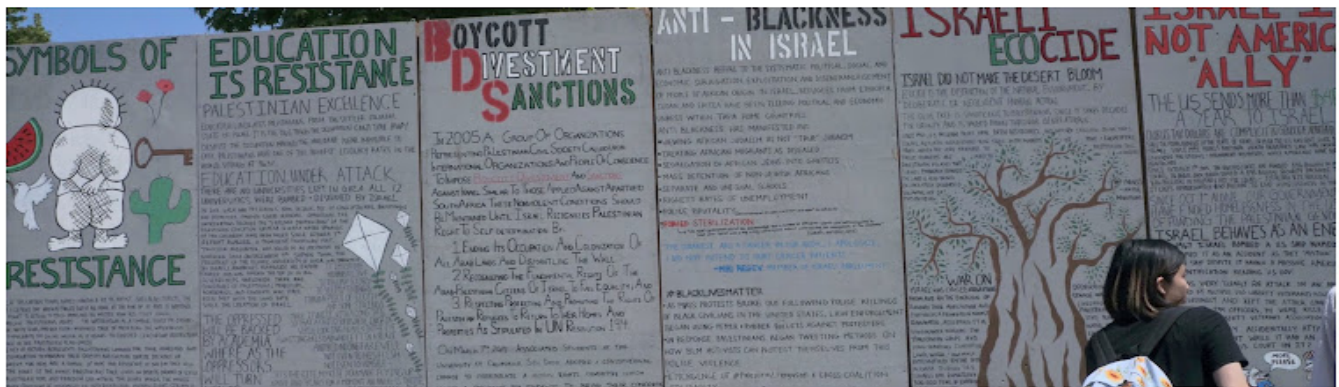


FIGURE 4. THE UCSD ADMINISTRATION PERMITTED POLICE AGENCIES TO DESTROY THE PEACEFUL STUDENT ENCAMPMENT ON MAY 6, 2024, JUST AS ANNUAL JUSTICE IN PALESTINE WEEK BEGAN. DESPITE THE LOSS OF THE ENCAMPMENT, STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS HELD EVENTS TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT PALESTINE'S HISTORY AND HERITAGE. ON MAY 7, 2024, THE UCSD DIVESTMENT COALITION ADDED THE INSTALLATION OF POLITICAL ARTIVISM ALONG LIBRARY WALK WHERE THE FORMER ENCAMPMENT WAS LOCATED.

encampment brought together a multiracial and interfaith coalition of students, faculty, alumni, medics, and spiritual and community leaders to share food, dance, teach, read, pray, and protest. As educators, we appreciated how people inside the encampment weren't motivated by grades or external praise but by a sense of responsibility to each other and the people of Gaza. Some of you shared that, for the first time, you didn't have to worry about having enough to eat. No racist cops were allowed inside the camp. You cared for and kept each other safe. You made Library Walk come alive — a liberated zone.

UC students, faculty, and alums will remember brutal police crackdowns on peaceful campus protests and the university's failure to follow the policies in President Drake's 2021 UC Campus Safety Plan.¹⁴ We share two other counterstories of systematic violence against decolonized worldmakers. The police demolished a "pro-Palestinian encampment at UCLA — using flash bangs, firing projectiles at protesters, and arresting those who refused to leave. It was in stark contrast to the scene overnight ...when counterprotesters had torn at barricades, thrown fireworks, and beaten and pepper sprayed the protesters — and no law enforcement officers intervened or made any arrests" (Iyer, 2024).¹⁵ Howard Gilman, Chancellor of UCI, and National Advisory Board Co-Chair of the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, shall be remembered for supporting suppression of free speech of the UCI student protesters to protect Israel and for effectively eliminating any due process for the students by suspending students without specific misconduct allegations (Lacy 2024).¹⁶

Despite the crackdown, pro-Palestinian students on all UC campuses organized unofficial decolonized graduation celebrations (off campus) because of the punitive UC policies that withheld the diplomas and graduation of those arrested in the free speech encampments (Acevedo 2024; Figure 5).

As Fall 2024 began, UC and CSU officials have limited and redefined "free speech and civic engagement" to ban encampments (Crosnoe, 2024). Many students are alarmed at the policies that also restrict the use of walkways and facial coverings. Ronald Cruz, attorney for BAMN (Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration and Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality by Any Means Necessary), called these limits and policies around the nation the "biggest crackdown on free speech since the McCarthy era, [...] completely discriminatory, showing their hostility to free speech" (Howland 2024).

While genocide (Hawaleshka 2024), scholasticide, and ecocide continue in Palestine (Nichols 2023), President Drake asked students to abandon their humanity and disconnect from the values of free speech and civic engagement in order to protect Israel (Keene, 2024). Drake's directives to redefine DEI and control free speech mock the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement. Richard Leib, former President of UC Regents, stated that protests won't be tolerated this fall because of the new zero-tolerance policy regarding demonstrations (Watanabe 2024). Pro-Palestinian

protesters argued that the decision to ban protest tactics revealed the school system's bias against the Palestinian cause. Leib responded that previous campus protest movements, like Occupy Wall Street in 2011 and against the Vietnam War before that, were different from the pro-Palestinian movement, which they claim was "harassing — discriminating against students" (Keene, 2024). Leib's comments contradict reports compiled by the Faculty for Justice in Palestine across UC campuses. For example, a report by the UCLA Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Muslim, and Anti-Arab Racism¹⁷ stated:

The racism and violence we document include not only long-standing incidents of harassment and punitive actions taken against faculty and students for their support of Palestinian rights but also the recent violent attacks from counter-protesters on the Palestine Solidarity Encampment, the university's utter failure to protect the students under attack, and the violence perpetrated by police who at the administration's behest cleared the encampment by injuring, detaining and arresting peaceful protesters.

The right-wing Brandeis Center filed a lawsuit¹⁸ against UC Berkeley and the UC system for supporting the Pro-Palestinian free speech of students, faculty, and staff who oppose the Israeli government's ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza with US weapons.¹⁹ On August 19, 2024, BAMN filed a Federal Court motion on behalf of itself, Berkeley Law Jewish Students for Justice in Palestine, Berkeley Muslim Student Association, Movement for Justice By Any Means Necessary, and 33 individual activists (this included Palestinian, Jewish, and other pro-Palestinian students), demanding their right to intervene as co-defendants in the lawsuit of Brandeis Center v. the University of California, Berkeley.²⁰

Xuan, a graduate of UC Berkeley, echoes Students for Palestine on all UC and CSU campuses:

American Universities act as a training ground for the ruling class, training our CEOs, businessmen, politicians, and professionals to uphold the capitalist standard. The current system requires this function of universities to maintain the ruling class's power...UCs are so threatened by the mobilization of students,...meant to be the future of the capitalist system. We know the power of the student movement. We must continue to support the struggle on campus and fight back.²¹ against the UC's tactics to quell the student movement (to Free Palestine).

Despite efforts to silence pro-liberation, anti-war movements on campuses across the U.S., students and faculty have shown incredible strength in their determination to stand on the right side of history -- as student movements always have -- to demand an end to higher education's complicity in Palestinian occupation and the current bombing of Lebanon by Israel. Decolonized worldmaking has played an essential part in these efforts and continues to foster solidarity to confront suppression of free speech and fight for justice by students. (Figure 5)



FIGURE 5. TOP ROW: POPULAR GRADUATION FOR UCSD STUDENTS HELD ON JUNE 14, 2024, AT BALBOA PARK. CENTER LEFT: ON OCTOBER 7, 2024 UCLA STUDENTS STAGED A WALKOUT AND RECLAIMED THEIR RIGHTS TO FREE SPEECH TO CONTINUE THEIR ANTI-WAR AND ANTI-OCCUPATION EFFORTS TO DEMAND UC DIVESTMENTS FROM COMPANIES PROFITING FROM WARS. CENTER RIGHT: UCI STUDENTS STAGED A WALKOUT ON THE "ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF GENOCIDE" IN GAZA. BOTTOM: UCSD STUDENTS HELD A VIGIL FOR MARTYRS IN GAZA AND LEBANON AND CONCLUDED WITH RECITATION FROM QURAN AND ISHA (EVENING) PRAYERS.

Acknowledgments

This paper is a collaborative effort of Palestinian, Lebanese, Jewish, Muslim, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ students, activists, civil rights organizations, and allies. Students and faculty from UCSD, SDSU, CSULA, SJSU, SFSU, SSU, CSUSB, Humboldt, UCI, UCLA, UCB, UCSC, UCD, UCR, UCSF and more learning spaces, along with conscientious allies from countless different backgrounds, intersect to construct a striking variety of activism and visions, to demand that fellow Californians pressure elected leaders to stop the genocide in Gaza and keep U.S. funds for local human needs, not reckless campaigns of pointless violence. The groups have been cited through their Instagram links and images.

Notes

1. The term activist is a hybrid of artist and activist, explained in greater detail later on in the essay.
2. Poet Alice Walker coined "Womanism" to draw attention to the sufferings and exclusion of Black women. In Palestine, the commitment to decolonize feminist research to create social justice womanist scholarship was taken up in the post-1980s during the First Intifada period by a surge of sociological scholarship that amplified the "Othered" experiences of marginalized peoples under settler colonialism (Cavazzini et al., 2023; Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al., 2022; Muhtaseb, 2020; Erakat, 2019; Griffin, 2015; Arraf, 2008; Darraj, 2003; Karmi, 1994)
3. www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2024/03/press-release-9000-women-have-been-killed-in-gaza-since-early-october
4. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.
5. https://x.com/UNRWA/status/1819750068788056452?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1819750068788056452%7Ctwgr%5E2b838415f839ce55ecbecf99c24080f13ae26562%7Ctwcon%5Es1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.aljazeera.com%2Fnews%2Fliveblog%2F2024%2F8%2F3%2Fisraels-war-on-gaza-live-us-sends-ships-jets-to-region-as-tension-soars
6. Please visit the Instagram sites of these organizations to learn more about their activism.
7. <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/resistance-is-beautiful-uct-students-set-up-camp-in-solidarity-with-palestine-20240516>
8. Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* 2022.[1]
9. <https://labo.zone/index.php/what/experiments/?lang=en>
10. <https://wolpalestine.com/campaigns/globalize-the-intifada/>
11. UCSD Guardian staff compiled the traumatic experiences of students, who were surveilled and caught off-guard by the enforcement and the administration. (UCSD Guardian Staff, 2024)
12. <https://triton.news/2024/05/may-6/>
13. <https://ucsdguardian.org/2024/06/04/letter-from-uc-san-diego-faculty-to-the-students-of-the-gaza-solidarity-encampment/>
14. <https://www.ucop.edu/uc-operations/systemwide-community-safety/policies-and-guidance/community-safety-plan/uc-community-safety-plan.pdf>
15. More information in [Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine \(FSJIP\)](#)
16. [UC Irvine \(UCI\)](#) administration supported the Orange County District Attorney in filing misdemeanor charges against 10 protesters arrested at UCI in late September. Please read UCI Academic Senate Report. <https://bit.ly/UCIAcademicSenateReport2024>
17. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45989/UCLA-Report-of-Task-Force-on-Anti-Palestinian,-Anti-Muslim,-and-Anti-Arab-Racism>
18. <https://brandeiscenter.com/brandeis-center-sues-uc-berkeley-for-longstanding-unchecked-spread-of-anti-semitism-11-28-23/>
19. The Brandeis Center seeks to force the UC Regents and campus administrations to discipline, remove funding for, and remove official recognition of students and student organizations who voice support for the Palestinian people. <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/us-weapons-israel-war-crimes>
20. On September 3, 2024, Council of American Islamic Relations released a petition to [Demand U. Administrators Protect Academic Freedom, Free Speech on Campus](#)
21. [Columbia University were picketing on the first day of classes on September 3, 2024 for suppressing their rights to peacefully protest](#)

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The SoCal for Palestine Coalition comprises of Palestinian, Lebanese, Jewish, Pro-Palestinian, Pro-Lebanese, and Indigenous students, activists, artists, scholars, and faith leaders who have supported the protest encampments in various ways.



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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Notes from the People's Circle for Palestine

by Jenna Maingot



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO ENCAMPMENT 2024. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Operating from May 2nd to July 3rd, 2024, the People's Circle for Palestine at the University of Toronto (UoT) was a space for learning, community building, and resistance at the centre of campus. The main demands of U of T Occupy for Palestine, the student group that set up the encampment, are for UoT to "disclose investments, divest from endowments that have direct and indirect investments sustaining the Israeli apartheid, occupation, and illegal settlement of Palestine, and terminate all partnerships with Israeli academic institutions" (UoT Occupy for Palestine, 2024, pp. 2-3).

I am a white female settler of European descent and graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at UoT. I study adult education and community development. I'm writing this less than a week after having to clear the encampment following a court order and amid the looming threat of violent police action and arrest. What follows is a series of reflections about my experience at the encampment.

With a background in climate justice organizing, I am relatively new to Palestine solidarity work. Being at the People's Circle for Palestine encompassed learning far beyond my studies and previous organizing experience. I participated in the space as a student, marshal, supporter, facilitator, and camper. Stepping into the People's Circle for Palestine was like stepping into another world where care, compassion, and learning were central. It was a world where people were paying attention and actively calling for justice.

The encampment was a space to enact different ways of living and being with each other. Learning came from being in the space, organizing activism, and navigating daily life with others. The experiences of collective living, storytelling, cross-cultural learning, problem-solving, mutual care, and support will forever stay with me. Many students that I talked to didn't have the opportunity to talk about Palestine in their classes. Entering the encampment allowed these important conversations to happen. Care, compassion, and support were also central at the encampment as evidenced by the flourishing of mutual aid and peer support. In the first few days following the establishment of the encampment, there was an overwhelming amount of food, supplies, and support from the wider community. There was so much support that student organizers had to ask the community to stop bringing supplies. Instead, any time something was needed such as food, water,

and camping supplies, the organizers would put out a call out and within a couple of hours the supplies would be brought to the encampment. Spiritual care, Afro-Indigenous care, and first aid were also provided onsite by peers and community members.

As well, cross-cultural learning and storytelling emerged through various cultural ceremonies and activities. There was a sacred fire at the encampment for multiple weeks that was maintained by Indigenous firekeepers, and which was a site for storytelling and knowledge sharing. Daily prayers and a weekly Shabbat ritual were also held for anyone wanting to participate. Despite not being Jewish, on a few occasions I participated in the Friday Shabbat ritual. As a camper, I found it was important to learn how to live together collectively. Everyone had a role or way that they contributed to the space. These roles included working at the food tent, organizing and managing supplies, acting as a marshal, medic, or legal observer, or being on one of the various teams, including the garbage, social media, urban planning, and programming teams.

I also took a course which was held at the encampment. The course, titled "Social Action and Popular Education," was taught by Dr. Clelia Rodriguez. This was a unique course because the central learning activities involved being at the encampment, experiencing teach-ins, helping with everyday tasks, and creating art. The course moved beyond theoretical discussions in the classroom and instead invited us to be embedded in social action and popular education on campus. One assignment for this class was to present our own teach-ins. The teach-ins covered various topics, including activism, the environment, and islamophobia. Since the class was often held at the encampment, other students, community



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO ENCAMPMENT 2024. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

members, and supporters could join and participate in the discussions too.

Beyond my weekly classes, I also participated in numerous teach-ins, workshops, and events at the encampment. The teach-ins and workshops were led by students, faculty, and community members. For instance, a South African lawyer led a teach-in on the legal implications of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case brought forward by South Africa against Israel. Numerous teach-ins touched on settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance in so-called Canada. Other teach-ins focused on student activism, labour organizing, and pinkwashing. As well, there were teach-ins about Sudan, the Armenian genocide, and the persecution of Afghans in Pakistan. Creative workshops were held, including Tatreez (embroidery), drumming, and Dabke (dance), and various art installations were constructed within and just outside the encampment. For example, painted banners lined the outside of the fences surrounding the encampment. Many student groups created their own banners to show their support for the encampment. As well, a large olive tree, constructed from paper-mâché, wood, and wire and then painted with phrases and symbols of resistance was the final structure standing in the encampment. The tree was a collaborative art piece, as anyone visiting the encampment was invited to contribute to it.

The daily workshops, teach-ins, creative activities, and conversations made the opportunities for learning endless. A major part of my learning also came from being in the space with others, problem-solving, listening, and reflecting on my role within and outside the space. During my time at the encampment, I had many conversations with campers, students, and community members.

In one conversation, I spoke to a law student from Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) who was visiting the encampment to attend a teach-in. She spoke to me about her experience being part of a small group of law students who wrote an open letter on Palestine in October 2023 that was signed by over 70 students, and which condemned the law school's neutral position on Palestine (Chaudhary, 2023). She spoke of how she and her peers

faced professional censorship and lost opportunities for internships at many Toronto law firms and with the Ontario government, which screened law students who signed the letter. I spoke with her almost 7 months after the letter was released, and she explained that while she knows she has greatly reduced her options of future employers, she would not have wanted to work at places that are refusing to hire students who signed the open letter. A few weeks after our conversation, on May 31st, 2024, TMU released a report on the external review of the letter, which concluded that the students did not breach the code of conduct and cannot be sanctioned (MacDonald, 2024). The TMU student's story, along with many others I heard, speaks to how many people participating in the encampment were facing negative repercussions or making sacrifices to be there. Despite these sacrifices, people continued to show up every day for two months to support the encampment. Being a full-time student who was frequently on campus, I felt that being part of the encampment was an important way for me to show up and fight for the social justice that I study and speak about in my program.

Additionally, at the encampment, anyone could teach, and anyone could learn. Formal roles, degrees, and titles disappeared. Often, I didn't know anyone's real name, or whether they were a student, faculty, staff, or community member. Everyone brought knowledge to share, no matter what level of formal education they had. Someone helped me set up

my tent. Another person helped sort the trash. Others handled the meals each day. People stepped into roles and provided their skills so the encampment could function. I often floated between different roles and stepped in when support was needed with marshalling, rearranging the layout of the encampment, cleaning, and fixing damaged tents.

Most of the time, I found myself listening. I listened to people's stories and experiences as well as debates about how to keep up the momentum and achieve our demands. The more I talk to fellow students about their experiences at The People's Circle for Palestine, the more evident it is that the community space created through the encampment was something new that many people



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

hadn't experienced before. UofT is known for not having a close-knit community, since most students commute from outside the city. The encampment changed this. The encampment was a space for building community. I met dozens of people beyond the boundaries of my academic department and the university. I even bumped into someone from high school, whom I had not seen in over eight years. Importantly, the space allowed for connecting and reconnecting.

Learning also happened during times of difficulty and conflict. The encampment wasn't perfect. Racism, sexism, transphobia, and ableism are deeply embedded in our society and the encampment was not an exception. It's important to recognize these issues and find ways to address them. For instance, one evening I was present for a tense community meeting in which campers spoke of witnessing and experiencing anti-black and anti-Indigenous racism in the encampment space. Some campers left due to their experiences of racism. This was difficult to hear. Addressing these issues immediately and effectively was a challenging task for the organizers. Following the revelations, space was made for listening to black and Indigenous voices. Experienced organizers, including black and Indigenous community members, stepped in to provide support. There are many ways the encampment could have been improved and it's important to recognize the harm caused and hold each other accountable. However, one lesson I have taken away is that just because the encampment wasn't perfect, doesn't mean it wasn't worth doing. Many of these lessons can be taken from this encampment to future organizing spaces. While perfection is not feasible, it's important to recognize and address harm in new and existing organizing spaces.

Lessons from previous encampments and student activism were also brought to the People's Circle for Palestine. For instance, the student-led fossil fuel divestment campaign at the university taught organizers that UofT's president, Meric Gertler, could and would refuse to listen to recommendations put forward by a committee. In 2016, following consistent student activism, UofT created a committee to put forward fossil fuel divestment recommendations (Alexander & Anielska, 2021). When the committee produced a series of recommendations, Gertler rejected all of them. Five years later, in 2021, the university changed its commitment and announced a plan to divest from fossil fuels by 2030 (Alexander & Anielska, 2021). The same tactics that delayed fossil fuel divestment for years was not going to work for divestment from companies complicit in Israel's genocide in Palestine. When UofT's administration offered to create a committee to review the school's current investments and make recommendations, the students refused to accept the offer. The students explained that divestment must be immediate and asked for a clause to prevent the president from rejecting the committee's recommendations. The students held out and forced the university to go to the courts if they wanted the encampment to end.

On July 2nd, 2024, an Ontario court ruled in favour of UofT's administration and ordered that the camp be cleared within 26 hours (CBC News, 2024). This ruling was

not a complete surprise and was based on the grounds of private property. We prepared for this decision. However, it didn't make leaving easier. There was always a small piece of hope left. I hoped that the outpouring of community support for the encampment would make those in power come to their senses. The ruling proved otherwise. The ruling proved that private property and maintaining the status quo are held above the right to protest and calls for justice. Now comes the lessons on how to keep going. How do we maintain momentum when so many people are burnt out? How do we keep resisting and organizing until we see a free Palestine? How do we keep going until all people who face oppression are free?

These questions have been in my mind over the last few weeks. Recently, for me, keeping up momentum has meant returning to my community to engage with people and find ways to invite them to participate in this work. Whether it's inviting them to volunteer their time, paint a banner, attend a protest, write an email, or simply have a conversation, I aim to make space for people to join the countless others who have been working non-stop for years to fight for justice. In the last ten months, I have seen the importance of Palestine solidarity work in the collective struggle against power, settler colonialism, oppression, and apartheid globally.

Even though the physical space of the encampment has been cleared, the community, relationships, and learning remain. The activism has also continued. Student groups are continuing to call out the complicity of the university in the ongoing genocide. In August and September 2024, rallies and sit-ins were held on campus and at the University of Toronto Asset Management office. In response, there was police violence and an attempt by UofT's administration to repress students' right to protest on campus. In August 2024, the university released a protest policy that prevents "affixing signs, posters, or flyers (including the use of chalk, marker, paint, and projections) outside designated areas" (University of Toronto, 2024). Despite this policy, protests on campus continue. As well, local organizing groups continue to be active in the fight to end Canadian complicity in the genocide. There is a wide network of local pro-Palestine organizing groups across the country which have been carrying out protests, rallies, blockades, teach-ins, outreach, and national campaigns directed at companies and the federal government. One ongoing national campaign is the Arms Embargo Now campaign that is led by a wide coalition of organizations and which calls on the federal government to enact a full and immediate arms embargo on Israel. The goal of this campaign is to end the flow of all weapons and military equipment to and from Israel (Arms Embargo Now, 2024).

For those of us who are newer to the movement and to organizing, these learnings from first-hand experiences at the encampment are eye-opening. Today, reflecting on these experiences is strengthening my resolve. My experiences are still fresh in my mind, and I imagine I will continue to learn from them for many years. My experience at the encampment allowed me to learn about myself and my role in advocating for change and justice. Importantly, the encampment showed me the potential of

building collective power. A memorable moment for me was the act of solidarity that came from faculty, labour unions, community organizations, and the wider community when UofT's administration threatened to forcibly clear the encampment. On May 24th, 2024, the university issued an ultimatum to students demanding that they clear the encampment by Monday, May 27th at 8 a.m. or be in violation of a trespass notice and face police enforcement. On May 25th, 2024, Laura Walton, the President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), which represents 54 unions and one million workers in Ontario, released a letter to UofT's president condemning this act and calling on all workers to show up to a solidarity rally on the morning of May 27th (Walton, 2024). In the letter addressed to UofT's president, Walton stated that "if you decide to move against the students, you'll have to go through the workers first" (Walton, 2024). Similarly, Amnesty International Canada published a press release warning the university against criminalizing the encampment (Amnesty International, 2024).

When Monday morning came around, hundreds of workers, faculty, students, and community members showed up at the gates of the encampment in the pouring rain to support and protect the students. From within the encampment, I was listening to the speeches and seeing the outpouring of support. It was inspiring. The act of solidarity gave me hope and reignited my commitment to being at the encampment. Continued acts of solidarity from students, faculty, and the community changed my perspective of what is possible when we come together to push back against oppressive institutions. Building this type of power takes a lot of work and comes with sacrifices. However, I now know that I'm willing to make some of those sacrifices.

The encampment made me evaluate who I am and what I can do. Doing nothing meant complicity and giving in to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness. I knew I needed to do something. I started by showing up to rallies and visiting the encampment to attend teach-ins and workshops. This eventually progressed as I became more engaged after talking to people and hearing what was needed. The simplest way to support calls for justice is to show up. Showing up is exactly what I did. I showed up to help when and where I could.

Overall, the People's Circle for Palestine was one space that was created in a long and ongoing journey of resistance. We must create more radical community spaces in order to continue imagining and enacting a more just world. Today, the lessons and learnings from the encampment are propelling me forward to continue organizing because they give me hope that justice is within reach. I truly believe that Palestine will be free in my lifetime.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

What Encampments for Palestine Teach Us About Epistemic Justice

by Katherine Blouin and Girish Daswani

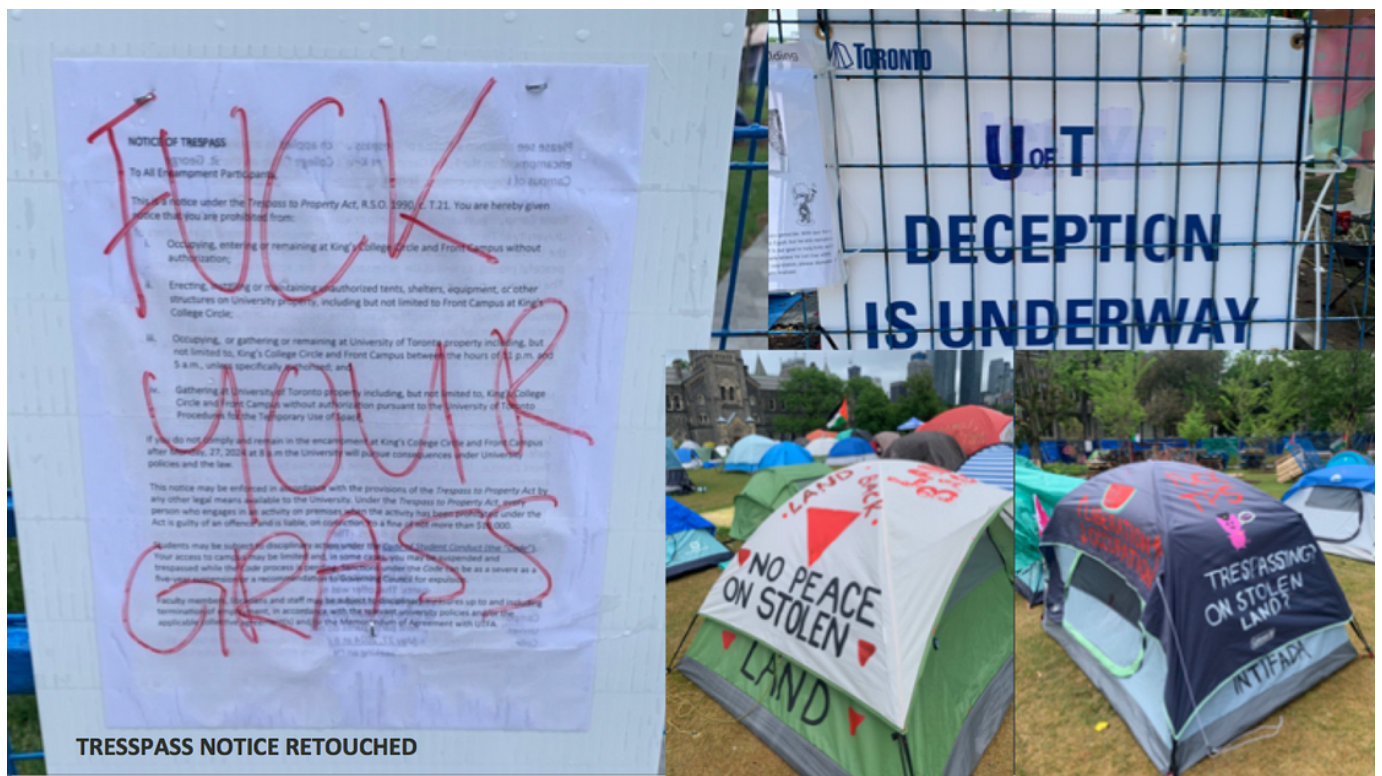
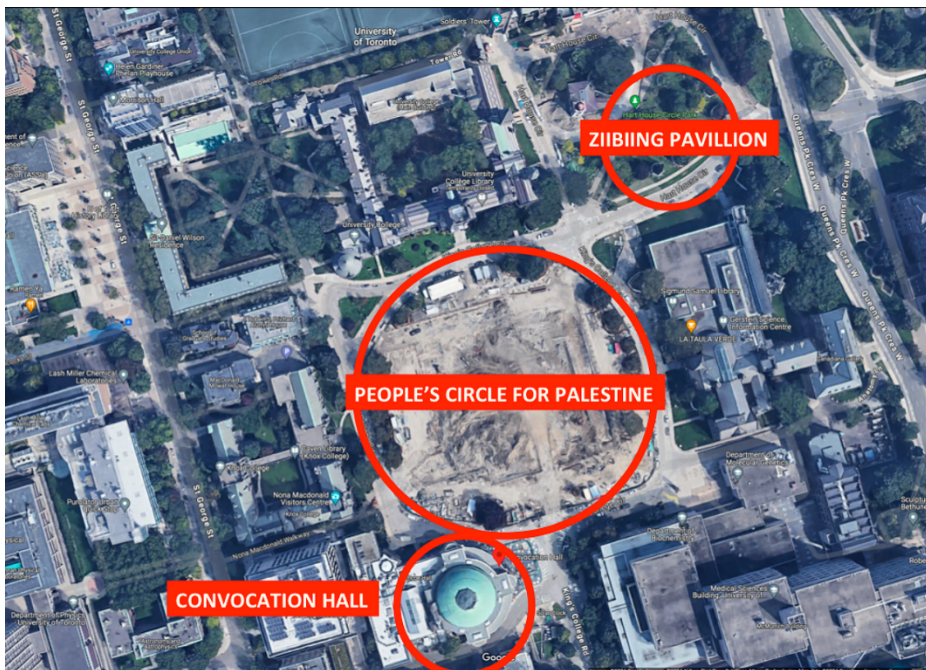


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Context

OccupyUofT's Student's Circle for Palestine was initiated on May 2, 2024, after six months of student protests and many requests for a meeting with University of Toronto President Meric Gertler. When emails and protests were ignored, a group of students occupied Gertler's office in Simcoe Hall until he agreed to meet with them. After that meeting, Gertler declined their demands to divest from weapons manufacturing companies that benefitted from genocide or to cut ties with Israeli institutions that were on illegally occupied land. Gertler also claimed not to know about the scholasticide in Palestine. When the Columbia University protests happened (April 17), UofT decided to fence off King's College Circle in anticipation of what was to come. In the early hours of May 2nd, students reclaimed these fences and occupied the circular field that you see on the picture below.



ANNOTATED GOOGLEMAP. THE PICTURE WAS TAKEN PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE UNDERGROUND PARKING THAT NOW SITS BELOW THE CIRCLE.

Looking at the map above, you can see three circles: the one in the middle is King's College Circle (now, People's Circle for Palestine), on the bottom left is Convocation Hall (where colonial-style graduation ceremonies are celebrated), and on the top right corner is a pavilion, which UofT built in honour of Ziibiing (meaning 'river' in Anishinaabemowin), an underground waterway that flows north to south from St.Clair and Bathurst into Lake Ontario and which was a meeting place and travel route for several Indigenous peoples. This river still flows underground and sometimes rises to the surface after a heavy rainfall as a reminder of its presence.

The People's Circle for Palestine was set up on the river's path and became a community space for learning and care — it contained several tents that housed a library, a counseling center, a kitchen, and a sacred fire that was cared for by several firekeepers. It hosted teach-ins and workshops, and held social gatherings and

religious ceremonies, including Shabbat services every Friday.

The People's Circle for Palestine has become an example of decoloniality in the face of the "decolonial performativity" of the white settler colonial University.

On Private Property and Epistemic Violence

If epistemic violence manifests when oppressed people are prevented from speaking for themselves, the student encampment became an anti-colonial (multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-national) space where epistemic violence was challenged and disrupted and made visible for all to see. It became a space that challenged the collective histories of epistemic violence on Indigenous land that is now claimed by UofT as "private property."

On April 28th, Sandy Welsh, the vice-provost of the University of Toronto, issued a statement to remind the public that the lands and buildings at UofT are "private property" and that a student encampment was not welcome. Less than a month later, on May 24th, the university issued a trespass notice and threatened to discipline students as well as terminate the employment of supporting faculty, staff, and librarians.

The land UofT claims as "private property" was granted (some say taken through fraudulent treaties) by the British Crown. During colonial rule, the Crown simply gave Indigenous lands to universities as "educational land grants" — the land was meant to be leased or sold to pay the university's ongoing operational expenses.

As a sign of protest (for what UofT admin was threatening to do to students), Kristen Daigle, who was designated to be the Eagle feather bearer for the multi-day Convocation ceremonies, resigned, is Mushkegowuk (Cree) and a member of Constance Lake First Nation in Treaty 9 territory. In her resignation letter, she writes:

The protection of property cannot and should not be mobilised as a tactic to prevent this political protest, because that is not the role we are playing here... many of these students have lived through a similar type of violence that we are now seeing streamed live to us every day through our phones. And here they

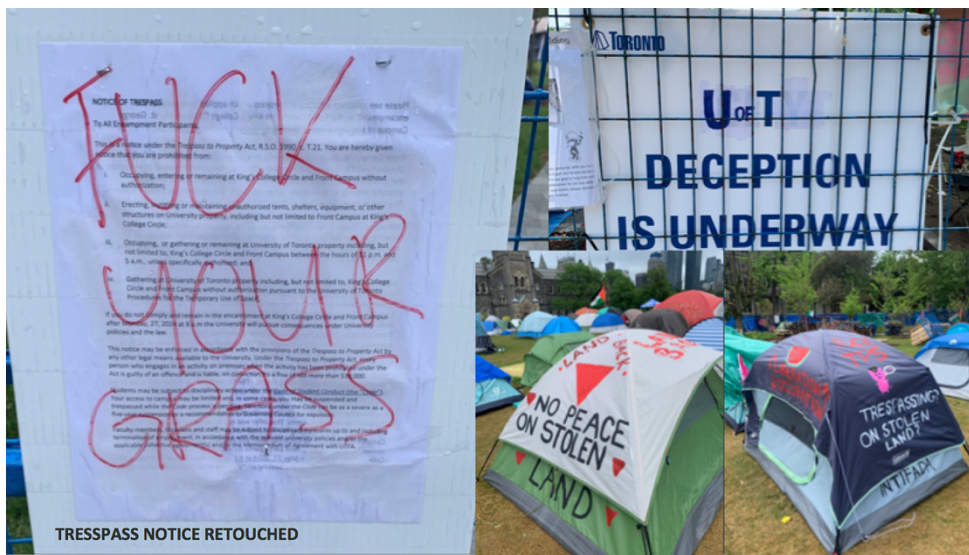


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are, putting their bodies and minds and spirits at risk. All in the name of visibility; to make us see, to make you see what is so easy to ignore. It is important to know who is showing up and who has been showing up, even before October 7th, in this resistance against the genocide of Palestinian people.

The claim that the University is built on “private property” and, therefore, sees itself as property owner and landlord, allows it to enact colonial harm and violence upon its undergraduate students. And, yet, the People’s Circle for Palestine has demonstrated what epistemic justice and care, what anti-colonial solidarity, look like. The same can be said of UofT’s convocation season.

Convocation Ceremonies as Spaces of Epistemic Justice

Indeed, what we have seen happening this convocation season at the University is something extraordinary: Located next to the People’s Circle for Palestine, Convocation Hall has been turned into a space of transgressive pedagogy. There, the dissonance between, on the one hand, the University’s branded performances of truth, reconciliation, and EDI and, on the other hand, its British, colonial, and increasingly corporatised power structure, is made impossible to unsee.

The graduation ceremony at UofT takes place in a domed rotunda building called Convocation Hall. Located right next to the People’s Circle, this Pantheon-like structure, which was inaugurated in 1907, is described in a [2006 piece by UofT Magazine](#) as “designed in the classical style of ancient Greece, echoing the historic foundations of higher learning”.

On June 3rd, UofT had yet [another fence](#) set up in front of the building entrance, seemingly as an attempt to hide the People’s Circle from the graduates and their loved ones.

Obviously, just like the fencing of King Circle’s lawn, this attempt at occlusion did not work. On the contrary.

The graduation ceremony itself is structured like a Christian mass: It starts with a golden-scepter-led procession of regalia-clad faculty who, accompanied by a pipe-organ, walk from the back of the hall to the stage. Once everyone is seated, the Chancellor and President or other high administrators filling in for them read a welcoming speech that includes a Land Acknowledgement. They then introduce the honorary speaker, who is generally a

member of the local cultural scene, a donor, a member of the Governing Council, or a faculty with some higher administrative role. At the end of their speech, speakers must recite some sentences in (unintelligible) Latin. Once this is done, the parade of the graduates starts. In a university shamefully nicknamed UofTears, to make it to the graduating ceremony is no small achievement. One by one, the students step to the front of the stage. There, instead of getting a eucharist, they stop for a few seconds, the time for someone stationed at a pulpit to read their name. Applause and cheers from the audience follow, as they walk to the other end of the stage, passing by the officiant, special guests, and mostly White high administrators who face the applauding audience. At the end of the ceremony, the organ comes back, everyone stands up for the national anthem of Canada, and the regalia-clad guests exit in a parade. Once they are gone, the audience is allowed to mingle and leave.



CONVOCATION HALL FROM WITHIN (PICTURE: UOFT)



SCENES FROM UOFT 2024 LIVESTREAMED CONVOCATION. COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Despite the overwhelmingly racialized, and to a large degree non-Christian, fabric of its graduating cohorts, UofT's convocation ceremony continues to epitomize the institution's Britishness, Whiteness, and Christian nature. Peppered on top of this ritual we find some "EDI" and "truth and reconciliation" initiatives: the opening Land acknowledgement, the granting of honorary degrees to Indigenous, Black, and racialized folks, and, more

recently, the presence at the start of the procession of an eagle-feather bearer.

This year, convocation became something more.

To paraphrase Gayatri Spivak's seminal piece, it became a space where those deemed "subalterns" by European colonial powers and their agents, spoke.

Despite the UofT higher administration having served notices of trespass to the campers; despite having singled

out a few of occupyuoft's leaders in their affidavit to the court; despite having waged a campaign of disinformation portraying students' demands for disclosure, divestment, and the cutting of ties with Israeli institutions as "unreasonable"; despite misrepresenting the encampment as an unruly and antisemitic space; despite President Gertler having, for the whole duration of the People's Circle for Palestine [May 2 to July 3 2024], refused to meet face to face with the negotiators or visit the encampment; despite, or perhaps because of all those reasons, many students have brought Palestine into Convocation Hall.

There, and just like in the People's Circle, the students occupied the physical, visual, and audible space that exists between the university's White patriciate on the one hand, and their enthusiastic peers and loved ones on the other. They were doing so by wearing Palestinian symbols, waving Palestinian flags, displaying banners, screaming "Free Palestine" to the crowd, or talking directly to the President when he was in attendance.

Most of these courageous students are racialized, and a majority are female. While we find them in all ceremonies, some fields — Medicine and Social Work — have been more vocal in their support of the encampment than others — Management, Commerce.

Faced with such transgression of convocation's hierarchized and ritualized displays of power, what has the university done?

So far, the UofT has not actively prevented students from wearing Palestinian symbols and showing banners. However, from that day on, it started censoring the livestream. Whenever a student came on stage with a flag or a banner, the camera cut to the crowd. On day 3, they also muted the cheering crowd. Thankfully, videos and pictures taken by members of the audience have allowed for this censorship to be publicly exposed and countered.

Administrators, guests, and faculty seated on stage displayed different reactions, from enthusiastic applause (a small minority) to, for the most part, half-assed applause and a rigid half-smile to, and this is especially frequent with the higher-ranking guests, an absence of a smile or applause. A big donor was also pictured giving a thumbs down to one of the brave students.

By showing their support for the People's Circle for Palestine on stage, graduates transgress the symbolic border the convocation ceremony is meant to enforce. There, in front of a cheering, supportive crowd that acts as a chorus, they not only bring the very encampment administrators have fought so hard to dismantle and discredit into the sacred precinct of the university; they also show the university's colonial administration how naked it is.

Through their courageous stances, these students refuse the university as it is being shaped by UofT's White, and increasingly

Zionist and corporate, élite. Instead, they affirm that *they*, the students, are the university. In the face of a too-often disconnected, blasé, and cowardly lineup of White administrators, they exemplify what true experiential learning and epistemic justice entail: the active resistance to colonial violence; the courage to embrace discomfort as a liberatory act of (un)learning; and the rooting of one's learning in communities of care.

It is in these interstitial spaces of colonial encounters, be they encampments or convocation ceremonies, that the liberatory potency of epistemic justice lies. In this moment of profound moral and ethical failure, these students are teaching us what epistemic justice should, could, and does, look like.

What the Camp Means to Me: Drawing as Pedagogy

by Katherine Blouin

The hand drawings pictured below were made shortly by my nine-year-old son and by me before the dismantlement of the People's Circle for Palestine. Not only is drawing an art form I have always practiced, including with my son, but art making has become a choice pedagogical medium in my history classes. To my son, the People's Circle for Palestine means first and foremost the fire, his solidarity with Palestinians (including the children pictured at the entrance of the camp), and the time he spent with one of the campers, who he grew very fond of. To me, the camp means the fire, the hawks, and radical care. To us both, the camp means the Land and all the generative connections it fosters, from Turtle Island to Palestine.

My son and I went to the People's Circle for Palestine often. There, we shared the space with folks who, for over two months, embodied what anti-oppressive community-building and Land-based pedagogies mean. Our favorite



WHAT THE CAMP MEANS TO ME. AUTHOR AND SON'S DRAWING. COURTESY OF AUTHOR

part of the camp was the sacred fire. The sacred fire, which was kept by firekeepers, including Indigenous matriarchs, was alive. It was the beating heart of the People's Circle for Palestine, and a ceremonial protection of its ground. Like an iris around a pulsing pupil, we sat several times around the dancing flames. In addition to the fire, two hawks protected the camp. We would see them often fly very low above the fire tent and the nearby trees. One Sunday, during a drumming and dancing gathering, one of the hawks flew in a circle above the seated crowd. When the drumming came to an end, everyone stood up for one last song. At that moment, the hawk started flying higher and higher, and eventually drifted away in the horizon.

The Circle's sacred fire, the hawks, the trees in which they lived and in whose shade we sat or gathered all taught me something. So did the silence around the flames; so did the burning cedar and the matriarchs' sharings; so did the damp soil outside the fence, where the now buried Taddle Creek runs; so did my son's smile as he played soccer with his favorite camper; so did his tears the day he came to the fire only to find it gone.

Conclusion

The People's Circle for Palestine, with all the encounters and teachings it contained, taught us that despite the lawns and fences and trespass notices and campus police violence, UofT stands on sovereign, Indigenous Land. *Terra nullius* and its British colonial offshoots are, fundamentally, legal fictions. The reality is that this Land belongs to no one but herself. She is not a commodity and neither is she private property.

Our time at the Circle also taught us that despite the corporate, Eurocentric, and White supremacist fabric of the University's high administration, despite its institutional violence and gaslighting, despite its nickname of "UofTears" and its commitment to the settler colonial status quo, there lives within and beyond it alternative universities where liberatory pedagogies coexist.

These universities are plentiful, and they are as fragile as they are strong: They are the fire, they are in the trees, they are the hawks, they surge like the water. For two months, these universities met in and around the People's Circle for Palestine; they shined on stage and in

the audience during convocation; they were sprayed on tents, lived in the art that covered the fence and gave birth to the [papier mâché olive tree](#) that stood on the ground of the Circle until its very end. These universities are powerful loci of resistance and resurgence. These universities are the only universities that matter. These universities are fuels to the fire of liberation and histories to come, from Turtle Island to Palestine.

*An earlier version of this was published June 17, 2024 on <https://isisnaucratis.medium.com>

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

From the Land to the Seeds: Pedagogies of Liberation

by Clelia O. Rodríguez



OLIVE TREE AT UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO. PHOTO BY MARIANA MEDELLÍN CANALES



*"It is not revolutions and upheavals
That clear the road to new and better days,
But revelations, lavishness and torments
Of someone's soul, inspired and ablaze."*

- Boris Pasternak

Photo taken of the **Olive Tree**, a communal DNA congregation of Hope, an artistic installation branching across oceans and territories sketched by artist Mariana Medellín. After 60+ days of endless *innersectional*¹, not inter, pursuits transcribed into intergenerational action-oriented presence by humans from across the globe chanting unapologetically FREE PALESTINE organized and led by [@occupyuft](#), a judge ruled that the land will continue to be incarcerated under the [legal](#) discourse of “private property.” On July 9th, 2024, the judge determined that although protestors were boxed in as “well-meaning, group individuals,” the [University](#) of Toronto (UofT) had the right to use brutality if the ruling was disobeyed. We are seeds and our dreams are flowing along the buried creek that runs underneath this settler colonialist educational that makes false claims on commitments to Truth and Reconciliation. One day, I know it, another apology will be issued... may pity be with you and the 7 next generations that will inherit your crimes – silence included.

Vow to Seeds

- I mother you beyond genealogies -
- like when Cacao embraces the sound of Fire -
- like when obsidian tingles the divine bell of Dignity -
- like the unwavering arms of a child screaming: "YUMMA" -
- like the knowing that Death knows no caste -
- like knowing that Caste knows Death -
- like the crystalized saliva of a brown Auntie's tongue screaming: "IT ENDS WITH ME" -
- like boarding the Orient Express train with sharpened cinnamon sticks -

Free Pakistan! Free Bangladesh! Free Nepal! Free Sri Lanka! Free the Maldives! Free Bhutan!

- I mother you with the roots aligned in my uterus wall -
- like when Cintli's gentleness rushes to communal kitchens -
- like when the inception of Hope touches patience to whisper: "share watermelon" -
- like the corridors of tents reciting to the heavens with bread and oil -
- like the questioning of all things partitioned by writing -
- like knowing the possibilities of learning to show up with Respect -
- like how Fire is Home -
- like what happens when we contemplate a tear's sanctuary carved in an Elder's face -
- what would it take to listen politically? -

LAND BACK means LAND BACK is LAND BACK means LAND BACK!

- I mother you furiously in love with love -
- cutting, chopping, slicing, peeling, pouring, boiling, broiling, steaming, roasting -
- imagining beyond censor-ship because my waters drown the navels of hate -
- unveiling the way of the corn as it paths outwards: STOP MAKING EXCUSES FOR VIOLENCE -
- all violence -
- reproducing plastic-made criticisms -
- like the fake grass leaving First Nation children without water -
- like I don't know, maybe-just-maybe protesting on stolen land begs for questions -
- "where are we?"

STOP MAKING EXCUSES FOR MALE VIOLENCE

- I mother you preceding public speeches condemned with salt -
- like when a voice echoes the torrential sounds of Xibalba: "Drop the MIC! -
- like when the grace of Elders preaches spiraling Truth: "Respect the Fire!"
- like when your jewel is to remember to remember -
- like it's not about the unsustainable in-and-out cloud seeding of modern solidarities -
- like it's not a catwalk of check-marks treating Fire as a vaping session -
- seeding sovereignty to transcend digitalized modalities of organizing: can you imagine it? -
- rituals, ceremonies, rituals, ceremonies -
- did I miss the teachings of Grandmother Moon? -

Feel-Think to become the be in BE-ing.

- I mother you with offerings -
- an anatomy of forever grieving-breathing-EXISTING -
- fertile hands to bless the healing rituals happening in 7-grain salads -
- fertile historical hands constantly in spiral movements -
- fertile multivocalities dancing to awaken you from patriarchal domination -
- fertile grounds sustained on known codes of wisdom printed in the pupils of my eyes -
- fertile trans-trans-trans-trans-trans-trans-trans-NESS -

- fertile continuum cross-pollinating lessons witnessed by memories of the Land -
- fertile abundant waist-to-waist walks towards the water -

Josephine Mandamin. Water is life. Is listening. Is sense. Is sound. Is memory.

- I mother you from abolitionist cribs -
- where rice and beans are spiced up with oxygenated articulations to demand DIGNITY -
 - where ethics are inner-laced to presence and not representations -
 - where water is protected and not left at the mercy of plastic bottles -
- where the everyday, everyhour, everyminute, everysecond is liberated -
 - where podiums and gowns are a distant nightmare -
- where the cloning of jokers' asses lives in the perpetuity of anonymity -
 - where voices are the conduits to orgasm Humanity -
 - where the livestreaming is that of the rivers to the sea -

A Freed Palestine Means Liberated Dreams

- I mother you when wings birth the impetuous energy to restore ENERGY -
 - when the Eagle streams its fury against Criminals Against Humanity -
- when the Condor soars with intuition connecting to the Palestinian sunbird -
 - when their tweets infiltrate the noise of pollution to trumpet creation -
- when the Seven Truths chirp above Fire, above Water, above Elders, above Matriarchs -
- when the layering of sacred geometry is transformed in chitters: DIVEST to detach -
- when wings flap back to ask: "When are you going to start disclosing your chains?"
 - when In-Flights to the heart traces the resting places of dying claws -
 - when the Feather is RESPECT -

Dancing cranes made up of Returned Black Divine spiritual ⇌ ⇌ ⇌ ⇌ ⇌ ⇌

Notes

1. This is not just my own emphasis. This is my own pedagogical ancestral alignment to ways of teaching-learning beyond likes – “likes” often attached to destruction of one’s soul in exchange for plastic curriculums where students are presumed criminals even before they meet instructors all under the plagiarism section. It is the case that professionals in universities who have plagiarized their way through by using the same tactics as the colonizers they criticize in their publications. INNERsectionality as it is shared in abundance in this text is meant to be deeply analyzed. If you are going to be “borrowing” the word/metaphor, acknowledge the Ancestors that are staring directly to you – the ones standing behind and besides me. This is the last ancestral warning you get through my writing.

2. **The Urgency of Political Imagination in the Pursuit of Higher Consciousness**

At the encampment a Free Palestine was imagined, dreamt, manifested, invoked and honored in the four directions. The political imagination that emerges when extraordinary pain meets action. Students, or co-learners as I prefer to say, greeted life in hope-affirming bonds encircling questions generating more questions; we loosened up hierarchal ties that cause us to drag along internalized racism, classism, homophobia, islamophobia, sexism; we connected to those who see, hear, feel, taste, and smell our Humanity when they acknowledge themselves.

To prioritize imagination in a world made up of critical perspectives written, analyzed, gathered, deconstructed, presented, archived, anchored, and co-opted by the same old, same old discussants of “knowledge” is a rare condiment that reveals a sensorial spectrum of future possibilities in the pursuit of becoming higher conscious Beings. We are ahead of our times. That much was self-evident. Imagination is/was a key to learning the ways of slow knowing that moves/d the righteous chants echoing the voices of siblings across the world weeping as bearers of destructions of seeds. It requires a serious shutting the fuck up.

Political imagination was a conduit that led to the creation of a reading circle, The Watermelon Library. This activated place adorned by the presence of lettered and documented knowledge on crimes against humanity, land, seeds, bodies of water, air, spirit, and all spiritual Beings ventured towards the challenging task of staring back at our own’s cruelty. The People’s Circle, a name that resembles the idea of a homogenous entity, was a gathering of endless circles of knowledges spiraling in a path that still seeks to break away from all forms of oppression. Like this. Like this now in forever. What fed the urgency to find each other in Palestine is a collective experience of erasure, eradication, and all forms of elimination of knowledge. The encampment was not an exceptional place of liberation because we are all sacred seeds. It was a hub of electrifying energy where the sun’s presence magnified light and darkness.

Sacred Tlel

No one is above the land. NO ONE IS ABOVE THE LAND. There was a sacred Fire present at the People’s Circle for Palestine at UofT. The magnetic strength of perpetual burning ceremony, protected, maintained, and cared for First Nations Matriarchs and fire-keepers, appeared on a place that for thousands of years, as it appears on the UofT website, “it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.” UofT expresses gratitude “to have the opportunity to work on this land.” The Sacred Fire was disrespected from day one and that is a burning lesson for fragile entities that walk by the mercy of strings drowning in gasoline – the infamous gaslighting world. Liberals & Co.: Faculty, administrators, staff. All well read/published/informed on anti-indigeneity, women’s rights, rush-rush Global South feminism, abolitionist theories, and its parental distant Marxist former grandfathers. All well read/published/informed on how censorship and punishment work, Fanon/Foucault/King/Lorde/Simpson decolonizing styles. All affiliates of institutions mocking the Land with linguistic theatrics contaminating ears with the excess of notorious white and patriarchal guilt.

I say this: Disrespect to the Fires beyond your reduced scopes of Indigeneity to only Turtle Island is Anti-Everything falling within a spectrum of violence. Fire is life, is creativity, is home, is the vivid undercurrent of a river as a path to the weeping of mothers.

The Fire that accompanied us at the encampment taught me that no matter how hard humans try to package gasoline as sustainable, I know that it will be short-lived. This is not new knowledge. The Moon is a witness. The University of Toronto, an institution that claims to be committed to Reparation and its journey to do that failed to do that harming, contaminating and hurting the land and seeds. Violence was brought in to the encampment, in marches, in meetings, in Telegram chats, in Departmental meetings, in the court rooms – Free Palestine? Not so fast.

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