



We Must Do Better: Editor's Preface to Teaching Against Islamophobia

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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I serve as Associate Professor of Education at St. Mary's University in Treaty 7 Territory on the lands of the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot), where I am helping to train the next generation of truly excellent elementary and secondary teachers. I am lucky to live in the city of my birth. My ultimate goal is to foster in new teachers the skills and passion they need to become the finest educators the profession has to offer. A part of that goal is wanting teachers to have access to important research that is practically oriented. I am interested in socioeconomic equity, political theory, and simulations. My own professional development efforts have been focused on learning from Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers. Outside of my professional pursuits, I am a partner to an awesome midwife, Jenn, with whom I parent three little ones, I enjoy board and role-playing games, and playing ice—and fantasy—hockey, and a good IPA. I have been fortunate to travel to more than 50 countries, and lived in the United States for eleven years, where I taught high school social studies for six of them.



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PREFACE

After a brief hiatus to provide some reprieve to BIPOC scholars and mother-scholars who have been unduly burdened throughout this pandemic, we are back with plans to publish on a regular quarterly schedule. We have made a small change to the formatting of the issues.

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Based on feedback we received from readers, we have incorporated the Q & A into a single document at the end of article to reduce the number of files readers must download to read the full issue.

In this, the second issue published by ASSERT, we seek to address a long-standing source of oppression facing many of our students: Islamophobia. I am humbled by the dedication and craft with which Dr. Muna Saleh and the authors featured in this issue—Amanah Eljaji, Nisreen Alameddine, Asma Ahmed, Jeremy Stoddard, Randa Elbih, and Zahra Kasamali—have brought to bear to bring this issue to life. Their cumulative effort which calls for all educators to teach against Islamophobia has become altogether more salient in recent days as bombs rain down in Gaza—a Muslim-majority territory that is home to nearly two million Palestinians, 815,000 of which are children under the age of 15 (Book, 2021). In this disproportionate attack by the Israeli military that has left 243 people dead to date, many of whom were civilians, including 66 children—nearly a third of the casualties. By contrast, twelve Israelis, including two children were killed. This assault is staggering in its lopsidedness. And while the death of these children makes it easy for us to engage in handwringing and the shaking of fists we must remember, too, that the unforgiving daily conditions—owing in large part to Israel's oppressive occupation of the Palestinian territories—lead to many more preventable civilian deaths. The cumulative toll of Israeli attacks and occupation on Palestinian territories has eviscerated the economy, destroyed critical civilian infrastructure, and effectuated a longstanding humanitarian crisis.

According to a UNICEF (2018) report, fully two-thirds of children in these territories have nutritional deficiencies, and only 10% of the population has access to clean drinking water (compared to 60% a decade ago). Further the unemployment rate (53.7%) in Gaza has become “one of the highest in the world,” with nearly 80% of people “dependent on some form of humanitarian assistance” (p. 3), a situation which remains dire (UNICEF, 2021). To further illuminate the stark disparity in the conditions of life for children, infant (under 1 year old) and child (under 5 years old) mortality rates are 5.5 and 5.25 times higher, respectively, in Palestine than Israel (statistics can be found on Knoema.com).

Many comparisons, albethey imperfect, have been drawn between the Israeli state and other bad actors in the past (and present), including South Africa's Apartheid state (Sternhell, 2017), Canada's and the U.S.'s colonial subjugation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples (Krebs, 2012; Surasky, 2015), and even to Nazi Germany—including one by Israeli Defense Force Chief, Major General Yair Golan (Beaumont, 2016) and Holocaust survivors themselves (Maté, 2014; Meyer, 2011; Sternhell, 2018). Such comparisons taken without the specificity of context are problematic and almost universally decried as antisemitic by the Israeli government and its supporters. In fact, the widely adopted definition of anti-semitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), interprets these comparisons as antisemitic, which critics view as a “an attempt to muzzle discussions about Palestinian suffering” (Younes, 2021).

It is important to distinguish between the actions of the state and the diverse views of the individuals and organizations that constitute the Jewish diaspora. More than 40 international Jewish organizations have rejected the IHRA interpretation, which they view as



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taking “the form of cynical and false accusation of antisemitism that dangerously conflate anti-Jewish racism with opposition to Israel’s policies and system of occupation and apartheid” (Jewish Voices for Peace, 2018). Also responding critically to the IHRA definition is a body of more than 200 scholars “in the fields of Holocaust history, Jewish studies, and Middle East studies” who worked to create the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA, 2021) to provide “clear guidance to identify and fight antisemitism while protecting free expression” (para. 1) that supports reasoned critique of Israeli policies and practices; there are now more than 300 signatories to the document as of this printing.

A recent report by Human Rights Watch (2021) avoids these comparisons altogether in its critical analysis of Israeli colonialism; instead, they use internationally established criteria to make the damning case that the Israeli government’s laws, policies, and actions both within Israel’s borders and the occupied territories have led to “deprivations [that] are so severe that they amount to the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution” (para 1). It is not, in my view, inconsistent to insist that Israel has the right to exist and to thrive in peace while holding its government responsible for the perpetration of crimes against humanity in its colonial subjugation the Palestinian people. They, too, have the right to exist and to thrive in peace. They cannot do that so long as Israel is permitted, whether overtly or tacitly by the international community, to enforce an apartheid state and enact persecutory settler colonialism against the Palestinian people.

Although articles in this issue do not speak explicitly about the current tragedy unfolding in Gaza, there is a common thread of Islamophobia that ties our students’ experiences of alienation and otherization to the Palestinian people, who are too often portrayed unsympathetically and unworthy of our concern. Our Muslim students continue to face the daily indignities of racism, xenophobia, religious discrimination, ignorance, and neglect in schools around the world. Our own ignorance of Islam in combination with our reticence to address Islamophobia because we lack the tools or confidence to do so effectively, serve only to perpetuate it.

I am confident that readers will recognize these articles constitute a powerful contribution to the growing body of work dedicated to Teaching Against Islamophobia. I am grateful to Dr. Saleh and the contributing authors whose articles will undoubtedly help social studies teachers to interrogate their own biases while providing them with rich insights into how to enact practices to support their Muslim students. It is a small yet crucial step toward ensuring that all our Muslim students can live, learn, and thrive in peace.

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[israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution](#)

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