

Backgrounder



A Growing Threat: “Anti-Palestinian Racism” in K-12 Education

By Mika Hackner

Since October 7th, radical ideology with antisemitic connotations has rapidly spread in K-12 schools. This ideology is constantly expanding and mutating and now a new approach has been added to the mix - “anti-Palestinian racism.” The [Toronto District School Board in Canada](#) has already adopted the framework in its anti-racist “learning strategies.”

This backgrounder will cover the emerging threat of “anti-Palestinian racism” and why Jewish communities and friends must be on the lookout for this noxious framework and be prepared to oppose it head-on. The framework not only formally adopts a radical, but one-sided anti-Israel also understanding of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, it treats any disagreement with the anti-Israel party line as inherently racist. And, given the penchant of radical education fads to spread from school system to school system, it is a real and present danger to Jewish communities in the diaspora.

Anti-Palestinian Racism and the Toronto District School Board

On June 20th, the Toronto District School Board adopted a [report](#) that advocates including “anti-Palestinian racism” in the District’s “Combating Hate and Racism Student Learning Strategy” as well as professional development seminars on “anti-Palestinian racism” for school administrators and educators. The training will help school administrators “center, support and affirm Palestinian-identifying learners.”

Incredibly, the report itself does not define “anti-Palestinian racism” - potentially leaving it open to broad interpretation. It is quite possible that a student professing pro-Israel views in class, asserting Israel’s right to exist, or objecting to phrases such as “from the river to the



More than 200 pupils at Marc Garneau Collegiate walked out of class in 2021 to take part in a Free Palestine rally organized by Toronto District School Board (TDSB) educator Javier Davila @PalestineTdsb/Instagram

sea” could be punished for “anti-Palestinian racism.” Jewish and pro-Israel teachers could face severe consequences for failure to toe the party line. This possibility becomes a probability the closer one looks into how “anti-Palestinian racism” has been defined by activists promulgating the framework.

Defining Anti-Palestinian Racism

Our knowledge of “anti-Palestinian racism” grows out of an [influential](#) report “[Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing, and Manifestations](#)” published by the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association. According to this report, “anti-Palestinian racism” is “a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including: denying the Nakba¹ and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to

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

The report states that this is not an exhaustive list of how “anti-Palestinian racism” might manifest. Nevertheless, we examine below three key forms of “anti-Palestinian racism” as outlined in the [report](#) (emphasis added):

“NAKBA DENIAL includes: claims that there are no such people called Palestinians or no state of Palestine exists; that Palestinians do not originate from a land called Palestine; denial that Palestinians were ethnically cleansed (along with accompanying crimes) to create the state of Israel; rejecting the inalienable rights of Palestinian refugees including the right of

¹ The Nakba, or “catastrophe” in Arabic, refers to Israel’s founding in 1948 and the subsequent exile of now-Palestinians from Israel. While the historical record shows that many Arabs sold their land or left at the behest of their leadership, today the Nakba is painted as ethnic cleansing.

Backgrounder

A Growing Threat: “Anti-Palestinian Racism” in K-12 Education



return; appropriation of Palestinian history and culture without recognizing their origins; erasure of Palestinians’ connections to the land (i.e. emotional, historical, ancestral, cultural, economic).”

- The first example of “Nakba Denial” is truly puzzling as there is no internationally recognized state of Palestine with defined borders or leadership. Acknowledging this fact apparently will leave one open to accusations of “anti-Palestinian racism.” Communicate clearly the Jewish community’s opposition to radical Ethnic Studies
- Next, acknowledging the complicated history of 1948 which is not as clear-cut as presented in this framework leads one open to accusations of racism (indeed, one wonders if mentioning the cleansing of Palestinian from Arab lands would count as anti-Palestinian racism or only when it comes to Israel. The report seems to suggest the latter).
- Failure to recognize the “right of return” — the right of all Palestinians to return to Israel— is deemed “anti-Palestinian racism” even though the “right of return” has never been included in any contemplated peace deal, as it would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state, nor recognized as an “inalienable right” as the report claims.

The implications for education are catastrophic - students will be taught a lopsided version of history and any view outside the official anti-Israel narrative will be called “anti-Palestinian racism” and treated accordingly.

“JUSTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE includes: **equating the oppressed with the oppressors or blaming the oppressed for the actions of the oppressor or rationalizing the use of violence against Palestinians.** The violence can be against Palestinians in Palestine or Israel or in the diaspora and can be committed against Palestinian lands.”

- This definition is troubling for several reasons - it minimizes, some might even say legitimizes and rationalizes, the history of Palestinian terrorism while viewing any response to Palestinian terror and violence as illegitimate. That is - critiquing the Hamas attack on October 7th and expressing support, for example, for the recent Israeli hostage rescue operation would fall foul of “anti-Palestinian racism” according to this definition.

“FAILING TO ACKNOWLEDGE PALESTINIANS AS AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE includes: Denying the existence of Palestine and Palestinians as a people; **denying the settler colonialization of Palestine;** appropriating the culture,



Instagram advertisement by @PalestineTds promoting the selling solidarity keffiyahs in the school district cafe.

architecture, language, traditions, clothing, cuisine, music, arts etc. of Palestinians without acknowledgement of its origins; erasing Palestinian ancestral and present-day ties to their land and communities and **denying their right to return; benefiting from, or complicity with, the removal of Palestinians from their lands; blocking redress of Palestinians in pursuit of their rights.**”

- Taking issue with the characterization of Israel as a settler-colonial project will leave one open to accusations of racism - indeed asserting Jewish indigeneity to the land or the Israeli narrative of the founding of Israel would leave one liable to anti-Palestinian racism.
- These last two statements are incredibly broad - does everyone in Israel and with family in Israel now meet the definition of anti-Palestinian racism? What exactly does blocking redress mean in this context -refusing to support the “right of return” or even more sinister, refusing to support violent efforts of redress?

Ironically, the report is careful to say that “naming [anti-Palestinian racism] is not to be weaponized or be used to impede good faith discussions on Palestine/Israel.” Clearly a good faith discussion must first recognize the historical fact of the Nakba, accept the right of return of all Palestinians and, hence, the dismantlement of Israel and agree that Israel is a settler-colonial project.

Ultimately, failing to agree or go along with a dogmatic Palestinian narrative of the Israel-Palestine conflict makes one racist according to this definition of “anti-Palestinian Racism” (APR).

Backgrounder

A Growing Threat: “Anti-Palestinian Racism” in K-12 Education



Anti-Palestinian Racism in K-12 and Higher Education in the United States

The threat of APR is not limited to Canada, though it is no small thing that the Toronto District School Board - the largest in Canada - has uncritically adopted the anti-Palestinian racism framework for its schools. Antisemitism is a mutating virus that cares not about borders.

The [Massachusetts Teachers Association](#), through their anti-racism taskforce, cited the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association and their report on APR, in a March 2024 webinar on “[anti-Palestinian racism](#).”

- In March 2024, the San Diego State University Senate passed a [resolution](#) condemning “anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism.” Its definition of “anti-Palestinian racism” comes from “[Anti-Palestinian Racism 101](#)” a website which seeks to explain “anti-Palestinian racism” and which itself references and cites as a resource the [Arab Canadian Lawyers’ Association](#) report.

- In April, [Palestine Legal](#), an organization helping those “speaking out for Palestinian freedom” and which receives money from the extremist-supporting Tides Center, filed a [complaint](#) against UNC-Chapel Hill with the Department of Education. The complaint cited instances of “anti-Palestinian racism” such as the fact that immediately after October 7th, resources were offered to Israeli students but not to Palestinian students: “On October 10, 2023, the Dean of Students office sent an email to all current and former students whose birthplaces were listed “in or around Israel” in UNC records to extend support and resources—including mental health counseling and academic accommodation. According to students we have spoken with, several Palestinian students received this message because their birthplace was listed as Israel. No other Palestinian students reported receiving this message.” A further instance of supposed “anti-Palestinian racism” occurred on October 13, when the university released a statement regarding the Hamas terror attack but “failed to mention the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians by the Israeli government.” The

email also only addressed anti-semitism on campus failing to mention anti-Muslim sentiment which apparently is an instance of anti-Palestinian racism according to Palestine Legal. Palestine Legal suggests that the university must “adopt mandatory training across campus on anti-Palestinian racism” and “cease discriminatory, intrusive investigations of Palestinian students, Students for Justice in Palestine, faculty, staff, or other student groups who advocate for Palestinian rights or criticize Israel.” Finally, the complaint asserts that the university must “issue a public statement condemning anti-Palestinian racism on its website, on social media, and to the campus community.”

- [Umass Amherst](#) also had complaints of anti-Palestinian racism filed against it with the Department of Education. Just as in the UNC-Chapel Hill complaint, this [filing](#) takes issue with the fact that Umass Amherst condemned the Hamas terror attack without also condemning Israel’s actions (the filing goes on to cite the false Hamas casualty figures in Gaza). As in the UNC-Chapel Hill complaint, it takes issue with the targeting of Students for Justice in Palestine and the treatment of students involved in campus protests.



Webinar featured anti-Israel activists who introduced a broad definition of “anti-Palestinian racism” that would make it more difficult to criticize false claims.

- In [May](#), Palestine Legal lodged a similar complaint of anti-Palestinian racism against Columbia University. These complaints all contain characteristics of APR as defined by the Arab Canadian Lawyers’ Association - particularly in defense of how one advocates for Palestine and its critique of those condemning the actions of the “oppressed” (the Palestinians) not the “oppressor” (Israel).

- On June 24, 2024, the San Francisco Bay Area office of the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) used the language of “anti-Palestinian racism” in its press release on the Department of Education investigation into the [Berkeley Unified School District](#). Indeed, they directly cite the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association report. Examples of APR in the BUSD, according to CAIR, include: “Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students and their allies were falsely accused of using hateful slogans during student walkouts when they were in fact protesting against war and for Palestinian

Backgrounder

A Growing Threat: “Anti-Palestinian Racism” in K-12 Education



life”, “Recently during a class trip to Mosaic – a program that celebrates racial diversity and multiple perspectives – the program director’s comment about peace between Israelis and Palestinians, caused the student to cry because she had no space to discuss the context of genocide with her class”, “Students in a middle school American history class were denied the ability to learn accurately about American history, and about current events in Palestine when their teacher was informed by an administrator that two words were no longer allowed in her classroom – colonization and genocide”, “An elementary school post-it note, “Stop bombing babies” in reference to bombings of Palestinian babies was taken down from a hallway bulletin board that had been an ongoing space for anti-hate messages in the school for the past six years.

The term is traveling from higher education to K-12 schools and becoming normalized. If adopted by schools in the US, and the case against Berkeley Unified School

District and embrace of the term by the Massachusetts Teachers Association is a strong indication that it will be, Jewish faculty and students will face extreme ideological pressure and real world consequences for expressing an independent view of the conflict. Students will be taught only one version of history so as not to be accused of “anti-Palestinian racism.” This version rewrites history to all but erase Jewish indigeneity from Israel in favor of the idea of Arab Palestinian indigeneity and therefore to recast Israel as a settler-colonial project rather than the story of a people returning to its homeland.

The implications for the Jewish community, freedom of expression and the quality of education are staggering.

Dr. Mika Hackner is a Research Associate at JILV. She has a PhD in Politics from Brandeis University. Her research focuses on Militant Democracy and institutional threats to liberal democracy.



Jewish Institute
for Liberal
Values