

Writing About and Beyond Palestine

How Writing Practices Impact Thinking Among Palestinian Students About Their Cause for Liberation

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1. Introduction I arrived in Palestine in November 2021, never having lived here, but born and raised a Palestinian, deeply imbued with love of land, history, and a commitment to our cause for liberation. I grew up with stories of connection and belonging to this place that my foremothers and forefathers lived in, and in which we could trace our history back to the sixth century (last time I checked). My having been born into the Palestinian diaspora exposed me to cultures, realities, experiences, communities, ideologies, and belief systems that both rooted me in my own cultural community while expanding what the notions of both “culture” and “community” meant to me.

When I arrived in Palestine, I was under the impression that the Palestinian experience (yes, singular) was identical to my own—interconnected, interwoven, and global in its outlook. What I discovered is that my privilege (middle class, dual citizen, educated in the West, whose life experiences were neither shaped nor constrained by the brutality of occupation and borders) had misinformed how I would relate to my Palestinian students at Al Quds Bard College.

Over the course of more than a year, I stepped back from my privileged perspective, listened to students and colleagues, engaged with them outside of my own positionality, and did in Palestine as the majority of Palestinians do. What I realized is that this was a challenging process because as much as I tried to remove my own privilege and unwavering belief in the intersectionality of global struggles for liberation, I simply was not able to.

In the 2022 Fall Semester, I taught a course on Resistance and Social Movements. The goal of the course was to expose students to various struggles for liberation, undergirded by theoretical perspectives on liberation, and to relate these struggles to the Palestinian struggle for liberation. The pedagogy I used in this course was learned through my participation in the Center for Liberal Arts and Sciences Pedagogy’s (CLASP) Fellows Program, an innovative, two-year program in which I engaged with colleagues from around the world on how to use writing as a tool for teaching. CLASP is a project of Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking (IWT), a center for pedagogy that centers writing practices in the classroom to engage students in their own learning.

The question that I used to guide my course (theoretically and pedagogically) was, “How do writing practices inside the classroom affect how Palestinian students relate to global struggles for liberation?”

2. Context Al Quds Bard College (AQB) is a unique partnership between Al Quds University (AQU, the Palestinian university in Jerusalem) and Bard College, a liberal arts college located in upstate New York. The partnership sought to bring an American-style liberal arts education to Palestine, while leveraging the location of Palestine to engage students in questions around open society, democracy, and free thinking.

The partnership was established in 2009, and began with both undergraduate programs and one graduate program in teaching (for in-service teachers in Palestinian schools). In 2023, the nature of AQB’s programs have changed, and the college currently offers nine undergraduate programs in the social sciences (human rights & international law; social thought, economy & policy; urban studies; and global studies & diplomacy), humanities and the practicing arts (digital communication & media; literature & society), and the natural sciences (computer sciences, biology, and molecular genetics). The college also offers three master’s degree programs in teaching, American studies, and European studies.

The student body consists of Palestinians from across the country, including high concentrations of students from Bethlehem, Ramallah, Al-Khalil (Hebron), and Jerusalem. Some semesters, a few exchange students (primarily from Europe, coming on the ERASMUS+ exchange program, of which AQU is a partner institution) enroll in courses at the college.

Courses at AQB are taught using a liberal arts and sciences pedagogy, in which the emphasis is given on learning and thinking, not memorizing and reciting. Professors at the college are both Palestinian and international, and bring their varied experiences to the classroom in order to engage students in meaningful learning experiences, both inside and outside the classroom.

3. The course and my students In Fall Semester 2022, I taught a course in the Social Thought, Economy, and Policy program titled “Resistance and Social Movements.” As an elective course, I was able to design the syllabus as I chose, and I took this opportunity to co-design the

syllabus with students. With an insistence on a theoretical grounding in liberation struggles and transnational solidarity, the option was given to students on which struggles they were interested in learning about. With seventeen students (eleven female and six male students, all but one of whom were Palestinian), the first week of class was devoted to both setting expectations for the course and coming up with shared class guidelines, and deciding on which struggles would be studied during the semester.

The exercise in coming up with struggles laid the foundation for what I could expect in the course. Students were divided into groups and asked to come up with struggles they would like to study. The suggestions ranged from nationalist struggles (Algeria and Vietnam in the 1960s and Ireland / N. Ireland) and national struggles (Black liberation in the US and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, respectively) to cross-national struggles (including the global feminist movement, the LGBTQ movement, and the movement for disability rights). One group had a strong interest in studying the global LGBTQ movement, but five of the six groups in the class made it clear that they had no interest in this, displaying the bias among students (even in a liberal arts context) to studying an issue seen as widely taboo in Palestinian society. This was a telling, albeit not defining, moment in the class.

The trajectory of the course started with Paolo Freire's "The Act of Reading" as a way to ground students in the significance of both reading and writing as ways of knowing and making the world. The course then progressed looking at the following topics:

- Theories of transnational solidarity
- Settler-colonialism with case studies of South Africa and Ireland
- International feminism with case study of Palestine
- African-American civil rights, both historically and in the contemporary period (Black Lives Matter movement)
- Socialist / Anti-Capitalist movements
- Case studies in university student mobilizations from around the globe

It should be noted that the Fall 2022 semester was punctuated in Palestine by university strikes and closures. The students at Al Quds University went on strike for a number of days due to demands around financial aid and scholarships, and there were a number of nation-wide strikes related to the brutality of the Israeli occupation that had conducted incursions into various Palestinian cities and engaged in extra-judicial killings of innocent

Palestinians. The semester was extremely tense, and the course took on real-life examples of the effectiveness of striking in the Palestinian context. Furthermore, the last section of the course was intended to empower students in their own thought process around the role they can play in confronting oppression and working toward liberation.

4. Methodology The work is based on the case study research methodology. This methodology "an empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context" (Yin, cited in Priya, 2021). Case study methodology, as an approach to research and not merely a data collection tool, is "bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (Creswell, cited in Priya, 2021).

Yin (2014) identifies three types of case study methodologies: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. This research is exploratory in that it seeks "to study a phenomenon with the intention of 'exploring' or identifying fresh research questions which can be used in subsequent research studies in an extensive way" (Priya, 2021). Thus, I seek to offer a foundation from which readers of this research can use to both challenge the assumptions made here, and to further the research on the effectiveness of writing practices, both within and outside the Palestinian context.

As noted above, the pedagogical grounding for this course was the use of IWT practices. The practice I used in this class was the Focused Freewrite (done in class and submitted for grading via the in-class journal), which accounted for 40% of the student's grade. The remainder of the student's grade was based on engagement in the classroom (30%) and a final reflective essay (30%). In conjunction with the writing practices, I used small-group and classroom discussions, text rendering / collaborative reading, and group assignments to explore the variety of topics addressed in the course.

The in-class journal was / is a new form of teaching for me, as I was "reared" in the Socratic method of discussion and debate in the classroom, with no time or space given to writing as a pedagogical tool. The two primary IWT practices that were used in this case study were private Freewriting and Focused Freewriting. Students were asked to bring two notebooks to class, one for their private Freewrites (which I, the instructor, did not see), and one for their Focused Freewrites, that I saw and used as a tool of assessment.

At the end of the semester, students were given a final take-home exam that consisted of three questions. The first question reflected the core of this project, and that was how (or if) students had changed their perception of Palestinian liberation in light of the struggles that we had studied in class. The second question asked students to

reflect on the processes in which we engaged in class—so Process Writing, but not in-class. And the final question was an essay reflecting on larger themes related to struggle, yet unrelated to this project. The question was, simply, “Is violence the answer?”

The students were informed early on that this class would be used for the purposes of researching the effectiveness of writing practices in the classroom. The students in the class were also informed that any data collected would remain anonymous, and all agreed to have their work included in this paper, with that assurance of anonymity.

The data used for this research is three-fold: a) excerpts from the students’ focused Freewrites in their in-class journals; b) analysis of the students’ final essay questions responding to the teaching techniques used; c) observations I had of the in-class experience. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Carter et al., 2014). By collecting three different sources of evidence, I hope to make concrete conclusions on the effectiveness of writing practices in the classroom.

5. Literature Review

5.1. Theoretical Underpinnings of the Research This study is informed by a social constructivist approach that was developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1960s. His theory proposes that learning cannot be separated from the social context, and indeed that “all cognitive functions originate in (and must therefore be explained as products of) social interactions and that learning did not simply comprise the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners” (Graduate Student Instructor Teaching and Resource Page, 2023). The anecdote that was shared in the introduction is a prime example of social constructivism in action. While it should not be understood that the students were limited in or within social constructs, and that vibrant discussion and debate did occur in the classroom, the reality that social interactions (and norms) inform learning is central to the process of learning.

5.2. Writing as Pedagogy The use of writing as a pedagogical tool is one that was new to me, and one that I learned through participation in Bard College Institute for Writing & Thinking (IWT) workshops, and honed through my involvement as a Fellow in the IWT CLASP Fellows Program. The goal of using writing in the classroom is to “create a culture of learning in which students learn to listen and respond to opposing attitudes” (Vilardi, 2009, p. 5). Giving students that space in which to express their thoughts on paper, and to work through their own ideas on the topics related to the course. In a classroom in which sensitive topics were discussed, the use of writing presented a “safe space” (inasmuch as that is possible liv-

ing, learning and working under occupation) for students to explore contentious topics.

The flip-side of creating an engaged student culture in the classroom is how the use of writing practices is a self-reflexive teaching practice that “fosters certain habits of mind that change how we think and who we are as teachers and writers” (Vilardi, 2009, p. 2). Larrivee (2010) suggests that critical inquiry and self-reflection are essential to becoming a better teacher. Critical reflection (as she uses the phrase) involves challenging deeply held beliefs that shape our identity, and thus “revealing uncertainty and vulnerability” (Larrivee, 2010, p. 295). While there is no prescriptive path to self-reflection, she posts that “critical reflection is not only a way of approaching teaching—it is a way of life. The more teachers explore, the more they discover” (Larrivee, 2010, p. 306). The idea is that, through critical self-reflection, the classroom becomes a space that embodies openness to new ideas and vistas for exploration. That was a secondary goal of this project.

5.3. The Private Freewrite In thinking about writing and writing practices, I used two practices in the IWT repertoire: Private Freewriting and Focused Freewriting. The IWT handout on informal writing practice describes the former as a writing practice in which one can “become centered, present for the learning that is about to begin, grounding out the static we bring to class—time to breathe, hear oneself think” (Connolly & associates of Bard College Institute for Writing & Thinking, 2012). The practice involves giving students time at the beginning of class to write in an unstructured way, that will not be graded, and to, as noted in the quote above, clear their mind before class starts.

Marshall (2009) notes that because this is ungraded and unstructured, there is a critique of the practice as being either useless or self-indulgent. However, she continues that the practice “leads to better writers—by making students better thinkers, and perhaps even more aware and sensitive people” (Marshall, 2009, p. 14). By giving space for students to privately express their personal thoughts, related or unrelated to what is happening in the classroom, awareness is brought into the classroom of a student’s feelings, emotions, presence, and state of mind. This awareness can, as noted by Connolly and associates above, allow students to become centered and increase their presence in the learning space.

A second benefit noted by Marshall comes from Peter Elbow, at a conference on Freewriting, in which he noted that Freewriting is a “non-goal-oriented behavior [that] represents the ultimate emphasis on process. The benefit comes from not giving a damn about that product” (Elbow, cited in Marshall, 2009, p. 20). The idea here is that students are given a space in which they are not evaluated, assessed, observed, graded, or treated even

as students. They are individuals who are given the space to express what they may be feeling (if that's how they choose to use their Freewrite) in a space that is nonjudgmental and private. The idea behind the Freewrite supports Sanford's student development theory of challenge and support.

Ward, Trautvetter, and Braskamp (2005) suggest that faculty should be involved in the holistic development of students, and not merely their academic progress. By this, they put forth that "developing students takes time, requires place for students to gather, discuss, and reflect" (Ward et al., 2005, p. 3). The relevance of this to writing practices is that writing in the classroom gives students that space and place to reflect and gather their own thoughts (although it is evident that the authors meant "gather" in the collective sense, but I use it in the introspective sense).

The use of the Private Freewrite as a daily classroom practice, while criticized by some scholars, does have its benefits. Marshall (2009) so eloquently puts it when she says:

Including opportunities for freewriting in my classes reflects my commitment to writing as a classroom practice, to the improvement of writing through constant practice, and respect for the unique writing, learning and thinking processes of those I teach (p. 20).

5.4. Focused Freewriting This practice was truly new for me in my pedagogical tools repertoire. The use of writing to engage with the classroom material through the use of guided prompts proved to be a highly successful strategy in my classroom as will be seen later in this chapter.

Focused Freewriting is "guided, in-class writing ... using class time to write about the texts they [professors / instructors] have assigned, and to use that extemporaneous writing as a serious part of class work" (Wallack, 2009, pp. 25, 26). The practice involves asking students to write about a text, or particular part of the text, in order to generate creative thinking on the topic, and subsequently, to ask students to share some portion of their writing either in small groups or with the whole class. Thus, this writing practice is generative, not only in allowing students to explore their own thoughts, but also in generating meaningful discussions in the classroom.

Connolly, et. al. (2012) define Focused Freewriting as "all reflective, probative, speculative writing ... that explores a term, problem, issue, question open endedly" (p. 154). The same authors suggest that "informal writing" (of which focused freewriting is one such practice) has the ability:

To develop abilities: the abilities to define, classify, summarize; to question; to deconstruct complex patterns ...

To develop methods: for example, methods of close, inquisitive, reactive reading ... of formulating theories ...

To develop attitudes: for example, attitudes toward learning ... toward the knowledge and opinions of others ...

To develop communal learning: encouraging, for example, open exploration and discovery in a community of inquiry ... to promote connected, not separated, teaching and learning; to develop active listening ...

To develop, in summary, general capacities for learning: the ability to question; to create problems (as well as solutions) to think for oneself while working with others (Connolly & associates of Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking, 2012, p. 153)

To return to the previous note about generative writing, Focused Freewriting uses prompts that "purposefully shape the content of writers' responses ... [and] Focused Freewriting questions and prompts generate Public Writing, rather than Private Writing" (Wallack, 2009, p. 28). Thus, students in my class were asked to respond to particular prompts on the reading(s) of the day, and then asked to share them in either small groups or with the whole class.

Of particular importance at this juncture is to note that, given that I was teaching students for whom English was not a first language, I emphasized that their Focused Freewrite journals would be graded based on content, and not language, that is, I was interested in the ideas they were presenting, and not on the grammatical or linguistic correctness of how they were writing. Given that their journal made up 40% of their final grade, I created the space for students to engage with texts and materials without the threat (or perceived threat) of grading as one would in a composition class. This approach is supported by Sanford's approach to "challenge and support": I challenged them to explore ideas and supported them by not limiting their thoughts to the constructs and structures of a language that was not native to them. While many of my students were extremely fluent and articulate in English, for those students who struggled, I was able to bring out the best in their ideas by allowing them to Freewrite without having to focus on grammar.

6. Findings and Discussion The class was conducted in the Fall Semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, and enrolled seventeen students: eleven female and six male students. All but one of the students (an international exchange student from France) were Palestinian. The final

grade for the course was based on three assessments: engagement in the course (30%), a final paper (30%) and the in-class journal (40%). In order to triangulate the data, evidence will be collected from three different sources: my observations of the class, excerpts from the in-class journals, and a simple quantitative analysis of students' final papers.

The question guiding this research was, "How can using writing practices inside the classroom impact how Palestinian students relate to global struggles for liberation?" Thus, the observations, in-class journal excerpts, and students' final papers will all serve to help answer this question.

6.1. Observations The 2022 Fall Semester started off with Al Quds University students protesting the university for policies related to financial aid, tuition payments, and scholarship funding. The first week of class was canceled due to these protests, and this laid the foundation for thinking about student resistance and challenging authority. The students in the class had mixed feelings about this, and this proved to be a laboratory in exploring differing opinions. What I noticed in this period was a pronounced difference between the male and female students in the class, with the former being far more vocal about these issues than the female students, while the female students expressed a frustration with their academic calendar being interrupted due to these strikes.

The rest of the 2022 Fall Semester was challenging in Palestine given the increased aggressions committed against Palestinians across the West Bank. Israeli incursions into cities, towns, and refugee camps were marked by murder, destruction, and devastation that affected all Palestinians in profound ways. The lack of any sense of safety and security was evident among students across the West Bank, and they responded by striking and canceling classes, as symbolic means of both protesting occupation and mourning the dead. In that semester, most classes in the month of October were either canceled or held online, presenting a significant challenge for me in implementing writing practices for the first time in the classroom.

At the start of the semester, there was some hesitation both about the use of in-class writing, while simultaneously expressing joy at not having any assignments, essays, and papers to submit throughout the semester. In our first week of the course, when we co-designed the syllabus, I observed much enthusiasm for being able to participate in the creation of the course structure. I also saw the beginnings of dissent between those students who wanted to relate Palestinian to global and cross-national struggles, versus those who had an interest in studying historical and nationalist struggles for liberation.

My next observation had to do with students' reception to writing in the classroom. Students were perplexed (and some even disturbed) at having to put pen to paper, although there was a noticeable receptiveness to the Private Freewriting. Having gone through more than a year of workshops through IWT / CLASP, I found power in writing by hand, giving the mind time to slow down, to detach from the screen, and to focus on the task at hand without distraction. Less than half the class (eight students) were serious about focusing on writing after being given a prompt, while the remainder of the class felt this was time to have discussions and conversations with their friends in the class. Throughout the semester, I struggled to keep the class focused on writing.

What was extremely successful, from my perspective as the professor, was the use of writing to prompt discussion. This speaks to the effectiveness of the prompts given to the students that generated lots of thoughts that were written, and subsequently meaningful discussion among the students. In small-group discussions (either in pairs or groups of three or four students), I walked around the classroom to listen to and engage with the students as they were discussing their topics. Those small-group discussions showed that students were invested in the learning process, and interested in delving into the topics. When the discussions were opened up to the whole class, the majority of students were very participatory and engaged in the discussion, although there were times when the discussion became heated, some students felt scared of speaking out.

This leads me to another significant observation regarding the class. While the syllabus for the class refers to a "safe space in which ideas can be explored, debunked, and debated," the socio-political climate in Palestine limited how "safe" this space could be. The hegemonic culture that advances religion, loyalty to authority, and a disregard / disdain / hatred of / for (perceived) Western values (namely, advancing feminist and LGBTQ+ causes) found a strong voice in the class (especially among male students) and this stifled conversation on certain issues. One student was publicly (albeit anonymously) chided on a public social media space for daring to challenge religious authority, while other students were challenged out of class for their views on certain issues. My ability as the instructor to truly create a "safe space" was limited, and I take this in the spirit of Vilardi's (2009) comment on the reflexive process of teaching.

6.2. In-class journal (Focused Freewrites) The in-class journal contained student's Focused Freewrite responses to the prompts I had given them; these ranged from explanatory prompts about the reading for the day, to more complex analytical questions relating the readings to larger issues. I also included (on occasion), what Connolly and associates (2012) term "attitudinal writing," "narrative writing," "quotation, paraphrase, summary," and "defin-

ing.” While each has its own definition and writing style, I included a variety of prompts into the Focused Freewrite journal. I will illustrate student writing through a random selection from a sample of the student journals, and at various points in the semester to see how student thinking had changed through and in their writing.

The course started with Paolo Freire’s 1981 speech on “The Importance of the Act of Reading.” Students were asked to describe their world, and then to write about how the article complicated their “reading” of Palestine. The following responses were recorded by students:

This [is] how I can briefly describe my world in my childhood. An apartheid wall surrounding me and my home. Feeling of danger hovering around me (male student 1)

I can’t delete the memory when I asked my mother if God loves us, and He could do anything, Why he make Palestine occupied? (female student 1)

The article connects or even bases your perception to / on your past experiences. Reading Palestine up to this point has been a reflection of what I’ve experienced inside it, what I want from it be [sic], and the idea I have of a good nation based on comparisons. I would like to try to strip those elements and achieve a more realistic image of Palestine, what it’s been, where it’s heading, and the best form it can realistically reach (female student 2)

The goal of this exercise was to have students recall memories as related to their experience in Palestine, and from the two examples above, it is clear that the students approached the exercise deeply and delved into their memories deeply, while engaging with the words of Freire.

At another point in the course, students were asked to reflect on Palestinian solidarity with global studies through a reading of Tabar et. al.’s article “On Palestinian Studies and Queer Theory.” The reading was included not to force a discussion on LGBTQ+ issues, but instead to force students to think about how they can create allies using a queer theory approach to liberation. The prompt given was to summarize the article.

One student wrote:

We haven’t started the semester yet, and I have to admit that this reading have [sic] been the most challenging and hardest to read article I have read although it is short. I tried to read and understand somethings and I think I could reach the core. However, in case I summarized something wrong, I am sorry, I tried my best (male student 2)

The student went on to write two pages of astute analysis on the article, despite his own reservations on and with queer theory. But part of the Focused Freewrite in this class was about allowing students the space (Sanford would call that support) to express their anxieties and limitations with the readings in class.

It is interesting to note that only the above noted student was able to grasp the complexity of queer theory as a liberatory ideology meant to challenge all heteronormative and patriarchal forms of oppression (of which the occupation is one). Most students were able to latch onto how Israel “pinkwashes” the occupation, i.e. paints Palestinians as homophobic and barbaric while simultaneously claiming Israel is a free society because it (namely, Tel Aviv) accepts homosexuality. Thus, the complexity of global struggles was not quite grasped by students, although it should be noted this reading came early in the semester, and so it could be claimed that students were not fully engaged in the content of the course at that early point in the term.

I move now to a particularly difficult part of the semester, the month of October, that saw most of our teaching either interrupted by strikes or moved online due to the closure of universities across Palestine for reasons outlined previously in this paper. For two weeks during this month, the class focused on issues of intersectionality and global feminist approaches to liberation. Here, students were able to use their writing to critically analyze and reflect upon the connections between feminist approaches to liberation. The prompt given was, “How is Palestine a feminist issue?”

A female student noted that:

they [feminists] are a group of people who try to support anyone that has a rights [sic], also they are trying to defend humans (both genders) specially [sic] women. If I’m going to answer the question, the answer would be that Palestine is a feminist issue, because a lot of people don’t have their rights, and the occupation [is] working against them, and taking their rights from them (female student 3).

A male student noted a perfunctory approach to global feminism as:

acquiring equal rights for women as men (male student 3)

without an understanding of the larger issues inherent in the readings related to global feminism or intersectionality of causes. Another male student also chose to focus on events rather than approach the issue theoretically. He writes that:

they [the Israeli occupation forces] attack every Palestinian despite their gender ... they hit and sexually check them on the checkpoint. They arrest and torture them in their jails. They kill them most of the time for no reason (male student 3).

Another female student echoed the sentiments of her male counterpart by saying that:

Israeli occupation targets Palestinian women as they are the source of social, cultural and political reproduction (female student 4).

While this is certainly true, it only starts to scratch the surface of the complexity of how Palestine is a feminist issue. The rest of her entry was similar to the above student's entry in that she spoke of the abuses against Palestinian women by the Israeli occupation forces.

The examples provided were intended to show that only a minority of students were able to discuss ideas related to feminism and how Palestine is a feminist issue beyond the abuses faced by Palestinian women by the occupation forces. The central question in this research was about relating Palestine to global struggles, and more than one month into the course, the majority of students were focused on Palestine with few connections made with global struggles or ideologies.

I take as the final point of time in the class our session in December in which students were asked, "What can you learn as a Palestinian student from student activism in Quebec, Chile, the UK, and South Africa?" I will spend considerable time offering many examples as the student answers are directly related to the main question of this research, and their reflections were quite meaningful and thoughtful.

These movements show us that our educational, social, economical, and political issues inside the university campuses are not separate from our and our people's issues outside the campus. They also prove that the system is just a part of a bigger and wider system which is mostly controlled by capitalist, colonial, and racist governmental system... the students' voice can be carried outside campus and create a broader change that includes all groups of society, especially the minorities (female student 5).

I learned that we aren't the only country facing strikes. We are able to stand up for [sic] settler-colonialism as that is our right to have our voice be heard [as] other countries try to also stand up for us. As Palestinians students to stand up for what is supposed to be right (female student 6).

The most prominent lesson is the effectivity [sic] of joining forces between activists of different struggles.

The student movements against imperialism didn't look down on or ignore other struggles, such as against racism or capitalism. Instead, they've embraced these activists and joined forces with them in the favor of both. They have also sought to learn from other older movements, such as the labor movement. The relationship between the different movements has allowed students to re-employ the most successful approaches, and work against repeating the same mistakes as other movements (female student 7).

I see that Palestinian student movements kind of exclude gender issues in their work, as they don't realize that fighting against patriarchy is an essential part of fighting against the oppressive systems and that patriarchal culture is manifested within higher education institutions (female student 3).

Coincidentally, one of the more focused answers to this question came from the lone non-Palestinian student in the class who had this to say:

In my opinion, universities (not only in Palestine) often feel like bubbles or like small societies within the society. Therefore, it can be extremely easy to forget about general societal and political issues that are not centered on the university, and it can also be easy to forget that we as students actually are a part of society as a whole. I think it is important that we as students start seeing our selves and the issues we deal with (as financial cuts) in relation to intersectionality. By seeing our struggles as intersectional and by collaborating with other social groups it might be easier to gain actual political power. In relation to Palestinian universities, I think the two chapters show that student movements can be a good foundation for international solidarity and activist work as the issues experienced at universities in Palestine are as much connected to the oppressive capitalist system as they are in ex. Canada or the UK. Also, intersectionality can be a tool to see that the issues connected to the universities in Palestine is also connected to the issues experienced by other social groups in Palestine as homosexuals or un-skilled workers for instance (female student 8).

The above were examples of students who truly engaged in the material and for whom writing proved to have an impact on their ability to think about the Palestinian liberation struggle in relation to other global struggles. The students' work shows evidence that thinking and writing about liberation did have an impact on their opinions on this subject.

The remainder of the students had some good insight related to the role Palestinian students can play, but their analyses did not bring in any ideas related to the global

liberation struggles or ideologies we had studied. They made comments such as:

Palestinian students should have a unified voice and strict decision (female student 5).

Palestinian universities can implement the same ways of strikes and marches to change their universities' politics and educational systems (male student 4).

We have to learn to unite to beat the occupation's policies and strategies (male student 3).

For these students, and given that I have not analyzed individual student growth, but instead looked at the whole class, the use of writing did not seem to have an impact. However, it could also be that the readings themselves did not have an impact on their thinking, or that they were entrenched in a particular way of thinking that did not change through the writing.

6.3. Final Paper Students were assigned a final paper in which they were asked three questions: two of which I will analyze below. The first question was: "The readings for this semester focused on thinking about Palestine in relation to international struggles for liberation, linked by the idea of international solidarity and intersectionality. We discussed and read controversial ideas. The question for you is: How do you see yourself as Palestinian in relation to these struggles? How do you see your struggle for liberation in light of the intersectionality of the topics we covered this semester?" This is central to this research, and while the previous section analyzed the in-class writing with extensive use of examples, for the purposes of this paper, I am employing a simple quantitative look, based on students' responses.

Relation	Students
Related Palestinian struggle with global struggles	16
Did not relate Palestinian struggle with global struggles	1

Table 1.

There was an overwhelming change in students' attitudes toward the Palestinian struggle for liberation in that they were able to relate their struggle to other global struggles for liberation. Students, with some time to think about the material studied over the course of the semester, were able to connect global struggles with their own liberation struggle in Palestine.

The next question of import for the purposes of this research is the second question, in which I asked students to assess the value of the variety of learning strategies used in the classroom. These included Focused Freewriting,

the use of the in-class journal as a primary assessment tool, text rendering, group work, and any other techniques that worked / didn't work for students. I will focus on the first two as they are the most germane to this research.

Views about Focused Freewriting	Students
Positive views about Focused Freewriting	17
Negative views about Focused Freewriting	0

Table 2.

Views about in-class journal	Students
Positive views about the in-class journal	17
Negative views about the in-class journal	0

Table 3.

There was a unanimously positive view of writing in class, and the use of Focused Freewriting as a means of expressing ideas. Every student in the class expressed positive views of this pedagogical tool, and at this juncture, I would like to share the writing of one student who so eloquently expressed the views of the class:

At first, I did not like this way too much, I found it heavy and unnecessary, but after engaging in class, participating, and being against or with the ideas that the professor or the students would suggest, I was excited to write in my class journal, to express what I want, also I was excited for the professor to read what I wrote. This technique helped me to think differently and read what I think, when people write what they think and then read it, it gives them new ideas and a chance to read what they think about a specific topic, and how they wrote it, such as abrasively or calmly. Thus, I find it a good idea of expressing, and maybe some classes should use this technique, giving the students the space they want especially in their writing and opinions is a good way for them to improve through classes, in their papers, and also in their minds.

7. Lessons Learned and Limitations The use of a new pedagogical tool has engendered within me the need to be self-reflective on my own teaching practice. As Vilardi (2009) and Larrivee (2010) suggest, implementing new tools inside the classroom forces the instructor to think about who they are in the classroom, and to open up the space for critical inquiry and self-reflection.

As I think about the course that I taught and the tools that I used, I recognize the challenges of the semester in terms of teaching modalities due to the political events that shook Palestine. That is outside of my control, and yet, I think about the following lessons learned.

First, I would develop a more methodical script of prompts asked, and how students responded to those prompts. While I am comfortable with the prompts themselves, as they generated much meaningful writing, I felt that I was a little scattered in how I kept track of both the trajectory of the prompts as well as student responses to those prompts.

Second, I would create a more fixed way of assessing students on their journals. This point, combined with the above point, would allow me, while I was happy with the hand-written journal, even when I was grading the journals, I found a wide discrepancy in terms of how many prompts the students had responded to, and how thorough they were in their responses. Some students wrote pages, while others barely wrote a few lines. By possibly developing a rubric, students could have a clearer idea of how they were going to be assessed.

Finally, I would create a methodical timeline for collecting and reviewing student texts. I collected the journals intermittently throughout the semester, but not on a fixed timeline, and I think this may have given the impression that the assessment was more lax. By collecting them every two weeks, I could give students regular feedback on their writing, and give them the opportunity to improve their writing in class.

The biggest limitation of this research is that it is difficult to ascertain whether the learning or change in student perspectives is a direct result of the writing practices employed. In a quantitative study measuring causation, this would be possible, but given the qualitative nature of this study, and that the study did not track students individually to measure changes in attitude, the best that this study offers is correlation and not causation. A future study that employs a mixed methods approach could more adequately ascertain a direct link between the method and the outcome.

8. Conclusion This research asked the question of how writing practices in the classroom affect how Palestinian students relate to global struggles for liberation. I employed IWT writing practices, namely Focused Freewriting and the in-class journal as a primary assessment tool, to engage students in thinking and writing about a variety of global liberation movements. Over the course of fifteen weeks and a tumultuous semester marked by violence against Palestinians, students wrote about movements ranging from global feminism to liberation in South Africa, Cuba, and Ireland, and about the pivotal role students at universities globally play in the quest for justice and change. This research showed a strong connection between Focused Freewrites as a pedagogical tool and its effect on how Palestinian students relate their struggle

to global struggles for liberation. The process was also one of self-reflection for myself as the instructor of the course and I recognize areas of improvement in my own pedagogy and praxis.

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