POWER, RESISTANCE, AND UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF THE 2024 PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY ENCAMPMENTS IN CANADA

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Abstract

The Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024 became one of the largest student movements in recent Canadian history, prompting debates surrounding university governance, policing, media representation, and student activism. This research examines the experiences of students who participated in the encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University.

Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants to explore their motivations for participating, their experiences within the encampments, and their perceptions of institutional responses, policing, surveillance, and media representation.

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing literature on student activism, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, and the governance of dissent in Canadian higher education.

Keywords: *Palestinian solidarity encampments, student activism, higher education, policing, surveillance, media representation, academic freedom, settler colonialism.*

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List of Abbreviations

APR	Anti-Palestinian Racism
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
CfMM	Centre for Media Monitoring
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRT	Critical Race Theory
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
INSAF	Integrity Not Spite for Falastin
LII	Legal Information Institute
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMI	Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
OPS	Ottawa Police Service
PSM	Palestine Solidarity Movement
PYM	Palestinian Youth Movement
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
REB	Research Ethics Board
SAIA	Students Against Israeli Apartheid
SPHR	Students for Palestinian Human Rights
SWAT	Special Weapons and Tactics
UN	United Nations
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In April of 2024, students across universities around the world established Palestinian solidarity encampments in response to the ongoing war in Gaza. Among other things, they called for institutional accountability and divestment from Israel's funds and organizations. The movement gained international attention after students at Columbia University established the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" on April 17, 2024, demanding that the university disclose and divest its financial ties to Israel. Similar encampments soon emerged across North America and beyond, including at the University of Ottawa, where students established an encampment on the lawn in front of Tabaret Hall, referring to the space as "Occupied Tabaret."

As a student at the University of Ottawa, I participated in the encampment and witnessed firsthand the community that developed within it. This collective space was more than a site of protest, but it became a place of learning, dialogue, and collective action. Students established tents, food stations, a community library, educational workshops, a medical tent, and discussion circles that encouraged engagement with issues of colonialism, social justice, and Palestinian liberation. Through these activities, participants sought to create an environment that reflected the values of solidarity, mutual aid, and political education.

My participation in the encampment was motivated by a desire to stand in solidarity with the people of Gaza, many of whom were denied access to education as universities and schools were damaged or destroyed by Israeli attacks. Images and stories emerging from Gaza influenced my understanding of the importance of student activism and educational justice. I was affected by accounts of Palestinian students, academics, and medical professionals who were killed before they were able to complete their studies, celebrate their achievements, or continue serving

their communities[1]. These experiences shaped my commitment to documenting and preserving the stories of students who participated in the Palestinian solidarity encampments in Canada.

This thesis seeks to examine the experiences of students involved in the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University. It explores the motivations that led students to participate, their perceptions of their universities' responses to the encampments, and their views regarding institutional ties to Israel. The research also investigates experiences of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, media representations of the encampments, and broader questions surrounding student activism, university governance, and political dissent. The overall research question is: How did the University of Ottawa and McGill University respond to the Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024, and to what extent did institutional responses, media representations, and policing practices reinforce or challenge experiences of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism? This thesis argues that participants viewed the encampments as spaces of collective resistance, political education, and community-building, while also revealing how universities responded to student activism through administrative restrictions and policing. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that participants perceived university claims of institutional neutrality as inconsistent with their financial, academic, and institutional relationships with Israel, contributing to broader concerns about anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian racism, freedom of expression, and the governance of political dissent on Canadian university campuses. The Palestinian solidarity encampments that emerged across Canadian universities in 2024 provide a significant case through which to examine the relationship between student activism, institutional governance, and state authority. The

[1] In December 2025, 168 Palestinian doctors received their advanced medical certifications during a graduation ceremony held in front of the destroyed al-Shia Medical Complex in Gaza City. The ceremony honoured those who completed their training despite the war and the destruction of Gaza's healthcare system, while also commemorating healthcare workers killed by Israel during the war with empty chairs displaying their photographs. Ali, F., & News Agencies. (2025, December 26). Palestinian doctors graduate in ruins of Gaza's destroyed al-Shia Hospital. Al Jazeera.

responses of universities such as the University of Ottawa and McGill University illustrate how administrative policies, security measures, and policing practices were employed to regulate protest and manage campus spaces. In doing so, the encampments exposed the tensions between institutional commitments to academic freedom, equity, and social justice and the ways these principles were enacted in practice.

In the context of contemporary social movements and transnational solidarity, this research topic is valuable because it examines a student movement that connected individuals and communities across national borders. While the Palestinian solidarity movement has existed in various forms for decades, the events following October 2023 generated an unprecedented level of international attention and mobilization surrounding occupied Palestine. Through social media, news coverage, and digital communication across platforms, images, videos, testimonies, and information from Gaza circulated rapidly across the world, creating solidarity among students, activists, and civil society organizations from diverse backgrounds.

In response to the post-October 2023 Israeli attacks in Gaza, the Palestine Solidarity Movement (PSM) re-emerged as a highly visible social and political movement. Alongside demonstrations, advocacy campaigns, legal initiatives, direct action, and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, student organizing became one of the most prominent forms of mobilization. Founded in 2005 by Palestinian civil society organizations, the BDS movement calls for non-violent economic, cultural, and academic pressure on Israel until it complies with international law and respects Palestinian human rights. Many student encampments adopted BDS principles by demanding that their universities disclose investments, divest from companies and institutions linked to Israel, and sever academic partnerships with Israeli institutions. As Sunnemark (2025) notes, “Palestinian and Arab diaspora students joined

by leftist, climate justice, Black, Indigenous, and Muslim groups – initiated a range of protest actions on their campuses" (Sunnemark, 2025, p. 2). Beginning with petitions, rallies, and educational events, the student movement gained international attention in April 2024 when students at Columbia University established the Gaza Solidarity Encampment on campus. The encampment quickly inspired similar actions across universities throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and other regions, resulting in a global wave of Palestinian solidarity encampments.

As a result, research examining these encampments contributes to a broader understanding of contemporary student activism, transnational social movements, and the role of universities as sites of political engagement and resistance. Given the global significance of the Palestinian solidarity encampment movement, this research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of contemporary student activism and the ways in which universities serve as sites of political contestation, resistance, and community-building. This introduction provides background on the Palestinian solidarity encampments and the significance of the study, presents the research questions and methodological approach, situates the research within its theoretical context, and concludes with an overview of the thesis.

1.1 Facts and Statistics

The destruction of educational infrastructure in Gaza has been documented extensively by international organizations and human rights bodies. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in their assessment conducted using data collected on July 8, 2025, approximately 97% of school buildings in Gaza had sustained some level of damage, including those categorized as "Direct hit," "Damaged," or

"Likely damaged" (UNRWA, 2025, paras. 1-3). The assessment further reported that nearly 91.8% of school buildings in Gaza (518 out of 564 schools buildings) would require either complete reconstruction or major rehabilitation before they could become functional again (UNRWA, 2025, paras. 1-3). Additionally, UNRWA found that 432 school buildings, representing 76.6% of all school buildings in Gaza, had been directly hit since October 7, 2023 (UNRWA, 2025, paras. 1-3). These findings demonstrate the extensive scale of destruction experienced by Gaza's educational sector and raise serious concerns regarding access to education for current and future generations of students.

Additional figures reported by the Qatar News Agency in June 2026, citing figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Education, further highlights the impact of the war on Palestinian students and educational personnel. According to the report, 21,701 students, teachers, and educational staff members in Gaza and the West Bank had been killed since October 2023 (Qatar News Agency, 2026, paras. 1-4). The extensive destruction of educational infrastructure, combined with the deaths of students, teachers, and academic personnel, has led scholars and international organizations to raise concerns regarding the phenomenon known as *scholasticide*. The term was coined by Palestinian scholar Karma Nabulsi in 2009, during the Israeli military assault on Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. Nabulsi defined scholasticide as "the systematic destruction of educational institutions" (Moody, 2025, para. 6).

Similar concerns have been expressed by United Nations (UN) experts. In a statement issued in 2024, several UN experts expressed alarm regarding the pattern of attacks on schools, universities, students, and educators throughout Gaza. They stated that with more than 80% of schools damaged or destroyed, it was reasonable to question whether there was an intentional effort to destroy the Palestinian education system, a process referred to as scholasticide

(OHCHR, 2024, para. 2). The experts defined scholasticide as “the systemic obliteration of education through the arrest, detention or killing of teachers, students and staff, and the destruction of educational infrastructure” (OHCHR, 2024, para. 3). Similarly, as emphasized by United Nations Special Rapporteurs Tlaleng Mofokeng and Francesca Albanese, “The world is witnessing the first genocide shown in real time to the world by its victims and unfathomably justified by Israel as compliant with the laws of war” (Dominguez, 2024, para. 5). Taken together, these findings illustrate the severe impact of the war on the educational sector in Gaza. The destruction of schools and universities, combined with the deaths of students, educators, and academic staff, has significantly disrupted access to education and has generated international concern regarding the long-term future of Palestinian educational institutions and the right to education.

1.2 Theoretical Location

The topic of this thesis, the experiences of students involved in the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University, is situated within the fields of student activism, social movements, and higher education studies. It also engages with scholarship on settler colonialism, anti-colonial resistance, decolonization, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, Critical Race Theory, policing and surveillance, media representation, and the role of universities as institutions of power and governance.

More specifically, this study draws upon literature related to student activism, collective identity, and social movements (Boren, 2019; Buheji & Hasan, 2024; Menocal, 2016; Polletta & Jasper, 2001), settler colonialism, colonial resistance, and decolonization (Fanon, 1959; Said, 1979; Wolfe, 2006), anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, Critical Race Theory, institutional

racism, and Indigenous epistemologies (Abotossaway & Pitt, 2026; Henry & Tator, 2009; Sun & Wu, 2018; Tabbah, 2020), universities, governance, and institutional authority (Brulé, 2015; Hewitt, 2002), policing, surveillance, and state power (Maynard, 2017; Vitale, 2017; Weisburd et al., 2001), and grievability (Butler, 2009).

These themes are explored in greater detail throughout Chapter 2 (Literature Review and Theoretical Framework) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social, political, and institutional contexts surrounding the Palestinian solidarity encampments. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide the analytical foundation for examining how participants understood the encampments, how universities responded to student activism, and how broader structures of colonialism, institutional power, racialization, media discourse, and state authority shaped both the encampments and the experiences of those who participated in them.

1.3 Research Questions

When approaching this study, I was interested in understanding how universities responded to the Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024 and how students experienced these responses. More specifically, I sought to examine the extent to which institutional actions, media representations, and policing practices shaped participants' experiences of activism, resistance, and racialization. Through the interview process, these themes emerged as central to participants' experiences and reflections.

1.3.1 Main Research Question

How did the University of Ottawa and McGill University respond to the Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024, and to what extent did institutional responses, media representations, and policing practices reinforce or challenge experiences of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism?

1.3.2 Sub-Questions

1. What motivated students to participate in the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University?
2. How did students experience and interpret their participation in the encampments?
3. How did participants understand the role of media representation, policing, and surveillance during the encampments?
4. What do participants believe the encampments revealed about universities, student activism, and social justice?

1.4 Methodology

This thesis takes as its starting point the personal accounts of students who participated in the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University in 2024 and seeks to understand the meanings, experiences, and perspectives associated with their involvement. As a result, a qualitative research approach based on semi-structured interviews was used to gain insight into students' experiences of the encampments, their perceptions of university responses, and their reflections on issues of activism, media representation, policing, surveillance, and anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism.

Ten semi-structured interviews of approximately 45 minutes to one hour were conducted between March 2026 and June 2026 with students from two research sites: the University of

Ottawa and McGill University. Participants were recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and the distribution of a recruitment poster through social media platforms and personal networks. The recruitment and interview processes were conducted in accordance with the University of Ottawa's ethical guidelines, and the study received approval from the University's Research Ethics Board.

Following the interviews, all recordings were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and points of divergence across participants' narratives. This process enabled the researcher to examine how students understood and experienced the Palestinian solidarity encampments, as well as the broader social, political, and institutional contexts in which they occurred.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into the following five chapters:

1. *Introduction:* This chapter provides an overview of the research topic, outlines the objectives of the study, and presents the research questions.
2. *Literature Review and Theoretical Framework:* This chapter reviews the existing literature relevant to the study, including scholarship on student activism and resistance, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, universities as institutions of governance and repression, and media representation and narrative power.
3. *Methodology:* This chapter outlines the research design and methods used in the study. It discusses the qualitative research approach, participant recruitment, ethical considerations, data collection through semi-structured interviews, and the thematic analysis used to identify key patterns and themes within participants' narratives.

4. *Results and Analysis:* This chapter presents and analyzes the findings from ten interviews conducted with students who participated in the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University. The analysis is organized around key themes that emerged from the data, including motivations for participation, experiences within the encampments, university responses, media representation, policing and surveillance, and experiences of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism.
5. *Conclusion:* The final chapter discusses the broader implications of the findings in relation to student activism, higher education, racial justice, and contemporary social movements. It reflects on the contributions and limitations of the study, offers recommendations for future research, and examines the significance of the Palestinian solidarity encampments within broader discussions of institutional power and social justice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the literature relevant to the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University and situates this study within broader scholarly discussions on student activism, racism, institutional power, and social movements. First, the chapter examines literature on student activism and resistance, highlighting the historical role of students in challenging political, social, and institutional structures. Second, scholarship on anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism is examined to contextualize the experiences of Arab, Palestinian, and other racialized students involved in the encampments. Third, scholarship on university governance, repression, policing, and surveillance is reviewed to examine how higher education institutions respond to political dissent and student mobilization. Finally, the chapter identifies key gaps in the existing literature, presents the theoretical framework guiding this study, and demonstrates how this research contributes to ongoing discussions of contemporary social justice movements.

2.1 Student Activism and Resistance

Student activism is not a recent phenomenon but a longstanding feature of universities and geographical contexts. Scholars have consistently identified higher education institutions as important sites of political engagement, resistance, and social change. Although students come from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, universities have historically functioned as spaces where broader political and social struggles are expressed and contested. Michael E. Boren (2019) argues that student resistance is “as old as the university itself” (p. 16). Throughout history, students have organized collectively to challenge authority, advocate for

social justice, and contest institutional structures they perceive as unjust. According to Boren, student activism has played a significant role in shaping educational institutions, political structures, and broader social movements (Boren, 2019, p. 8).

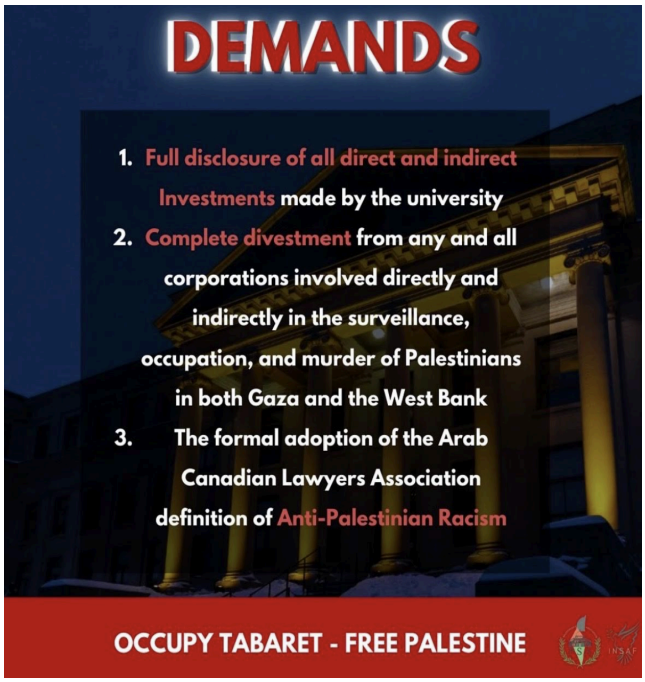
Central to the literature on student activism is the relationship between student agency and institutional authority. Boren suggests that students frequently perceive themselves as constrained by university structures, often viewing themselves as "besieged by rules and regulations" and "victims of a variety of oppressive forces" (Boren, 2019, p. 16). Student activism therefore emerges within a contested space where acts of resistance challenge institutional power. As Boren (2019) argues, students have historically been subjected to efforts by universities, governments, and other institutions to regulate and control their activities (p. 16). Yet, when students mobilize collectively, they possess the capacity to disrupt institutional authority and influence broader political discourse. The effectiveness of student activism is closely linked to collective organization, as mobilization around shared political and social concerns enables students to exert considerable influence both within universities and beyond them.

Beyond its political influence, collective student action functions as both a symbolic and material form of power because universities depend on students for their operation and financial sustainability. This complements the argument made by Boren (2019) that collective student action is most effective when participants recognize their shared experiences as part of broader systems of inequality and oppression. As political consciousness and solidarity develop, student movements become better equipped to sustain resistance, challenge institutional authority, and contribute to wider social change.

2.1.1 Palestinian Solidarity Encampments as Contemporary Student Resistance

The contemporary Palestinian solidarity encampments can be understood within this broader tradition of student activism and resistance. Buheji and Hasan (2024) argue that student activism has historically shaped universities and political discourse, emphasizing that "student resistance is as old as universities' existence" (p. 57). They situate the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments within a longer history of student-led mobilization, including civil rights movements, anti-war protests, and campaigns for social justice. Following the establishment of the Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Columbia University in April 2024, similar encampments emerged at universities across the United States and internationally. Students organized occupations and encampments while demanding institutional accountability and divestment from companies connected to Israel.

Figure 1. Demands posted by *@insafuottawa* on Instagram on April 29, 2024. The caption called on the University of Ottawa to sever ties with academic Zionist institutions.





The interviews revealed that, beyond their political demands, students experienced the encampments as educational and community-building spaces. Through teach-ins, workshops, cultural events, and mutual aid initiatives, students sought to create alternative spaces for learning, dialogue, and political engagement. The encampments therefore represented both a form of protest and a form of knowledge production. The literature also highlights the role of policing and surveillance in shaping contemporary student activism. The use of police force in response to student activism has become "a routine process in universities" (Buheji & Hasan, 2024, p. 69), suggesting that surveillance and repression have become normalized features of higher education institutions. Buheji and Hasan's argument is further supported by their observation that "according to the Department of Justice report, the police force is present in 95% of the colleges and universities" (Buheji & Hasan, 2024, p. 69). Moreover, they mention that legislation in 44 universities permits the establishment of independent campus police forces. These developments are linked to broader historical transformations following the civil rights movements of the 1960s, during which universities increasingly expanded policing mechanisms as a means of regulating student dissent. Within this context, university administrations frequently draw upon policing and security measures to manage student mobilization and maintain institutional control.

2.2 Encampments as Political and Spatial Resistance

Encampments have emerged as a distinctive form of contemporary political resistance, particularly within movements advocating for Palestinian liberation. For example, Majd Al-Shihabi (2025) examines how the meaning of "Free Palestine" has evolved across different historical and geographical contexts. Al-Shihabi argues that as forms of oppression have shifted,

so too have forms of resistance, resulting in a slogan that carries multiple and context-dependent meanings. Importantly, the author distinguishes between Gazans refugees living in camps such as Burj el-Shemali and university students establishing encampments in North America, emphasizing that these experiences are not equivalent and that the meaning of "Free Palestine" varies accordingly (Al-Shihabi, 2025, p. 424). Focusing on the University of Toronto encampment established during the first week of May 2024, Al-Shihabi describes how the action was coordinated by OccupyUofT, "a student collective formed in the early weeks of Israel's war on Gaza" (Al-Shihabi, 2025, p. 424). The encampment was accompanied by a series of demands that called upon the university to:

> disclose all the University's direct and indirect investments; divest from companies that sustain Israeli apartheid, that is, occupation and illegal settlement of Palestine; and cut ties with academic institutions that operate in West Bank settlements or sustain Israeli apartheid and genocide in Gaza" (Al-Shihabi, 2025, p. 424).

These demands demonstrate how encampments function not only as physical occupations of space but also platforms through which students challenge institutional relationships and demand accountability. Al-Shihabi's analysis also demonstrates the tensions that emerged between student activists and university administrations. Within three weeks of the encampment's establishment, opposition from university administration became evident. In a radio interview, University of Toronto President Meric Gertler rejected demands to sever ties with Israeli universities. As Al-Shihabi (2025) observes, "He stated, rather proudly, that even at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s, UofT did not heed the call to sever ties with South African academic institutions complicit in apartheid" (pp. 425–426). This response reflects a broader pattern within universities, where institutions often position themselves as politically

neutral while simultaneously maintaining relationships that students consider politically and ethically problematic. The refusal to engage with demands for divestment or institutional disengagement therefore demonstrates how universities become sites of contestation where competing visions of academic justice and accountability are negotiated.

Beyond their formal demands, encampments also function as spaces of political education, community-building, and collective engagement. Encampments serve as "a political experiment for a radical reconfiguration of relationships" (Al-Shihabi, 2025, p. 429). Through teach-ins, discussions, mutual aid initiatives, and cultural activities, participants create alternative forms of social and political organization that challenge traditional university structures. These spaces also foster broader coalitions between students, faculty, and community members. The University of Toronto encampment received support from "more than two hundred faculty members who showed up to support the encampment and its goals" (Al-Shihabi, 2025, p. 429). Consequently, encampments function not only as sites of protest but also as spaces where alternative political futures can be imagined and practiced.

2.2.1 Grassroots Resistance and Everyday Acts of Solidarity

A similar emphasis on collective action and alternative forms of organization is found in the work of Poulakidakos et al. (2024). The authors argue that resistance is not limited to large-scale demonstrations but is also expressed through everyday practices that become embedded in the lived experiences of participants. In this sense, resistance operates both through visible public actions and through the development of relationships, networks, and communities that sustain movements over time. The authors demonstrate this argument through examples such as the Spanish Indignados movement and its occupations of public space. Emerging in

response to economic inequality and unemployment following the financial crisis of 2008, the movement demonstrated how collective occupation of space could become a powerful form of political expression. However, the authors emphasize the importance of smaller and less visible forms of grassroots activism that focus on building solidarity and mutual support within communities. This perspective is particularly evident in their discussion of mutual aid networks that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. As they explain, “The forms of organization and theoretical foundations of these movements are then analyzed in tandem with the massive outpouring of mutual aid networks that emerged at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis” (Poulakidakos et al., 2024, p. 7). These forms of organization are characterized by non-hierarchal structures, collective care, and community-based support systems that operate independently of formal state institutions. Although grassroots movements are sometimes dismissed as “non-revolutionary” (Poulakidakos et al., 2024, p. 7), the authors challenge this interpretation. Such movements derive their significance not from immediately overthrowing dominant systems but from their ability to create alternative social relations and gradually undermine existing structures of power. Rather than seeking “the collapse of the capitalist system as a whole,” these movements aim to make “the dominant social/political/financial system more vulnerable” (Poulakidakos et al., 2024, pp. 3-4) through sustained collective action. Like other grassroots movements, the Palestinian solidarity encampments demonstrated how mutual aid, collective decision-making, political education, and solidarity could serve as practices of resistance. Their significance therefore extended beyond their formal demands to the ways participants challenged existing power structures through everyday collective action.

2.3 Racialized Policing, Surveillance, and Structural Violence

Scholarship on structural violence and racialized policing also provides an important lens through which to understand the regulation of dissent and the experiences of marginalized communities. Dukes and Kahn (2017) examine the persistence of racialized violence within law enforcement in the United States. They argue that "although not a new phenomenon, disproportionate police violence toward racial and ethnic minorities has garnered international attention in recent years" (p. 691). Such perceptions reflect broader patterns of mistrust between marginalized communities and law enforcement institutions, shaped by repeated experiences of unequal treatment and excessive force. Importantly, Dukes and Kahn demonstrate that racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to experience both threats of force and the actual use of force during interactions with police. They further note that similar patterns exist outside the United States, including in England and Wales, where Black individuals and "other ethnic minorities, refugees, and migrants experience a disproportionate level of force compared to Whites" (Dukes & Kahn, 2017, p. 691). These findings suggest that racialized policing is not limited to a single national context but reflects extensive systems of inequality and social control. Therefore, racialized discrimination and related forms of institutional bias also affect other marginalized groups, including Muslims, Arabs, and individuals perceived as ethnically or religiously "other." Beyond immediate physical harm, the "recurrent exposure to police violence against members of one's racial/ethnic group could be interpreted as a form of discrimination, and thus, has the potential to negatively impact physical and mental health" (Dukes & Kahn, 2017, p. 693). These impacts include elevated cortisol levels, poorer physical health outcomes, hypertension, increased risks of cardiovascular disease, and the adoption of harmful coping mechanisms (Dukes & Kahn, 2017, p. 697). Police violence must be understood as a structural phenomenon

with cumulative effects on the health, well-being, and collective experiences of marginalized communities.

2.3.1 Race, Social Control, and Policing

These arguments are further developed by Sun and Wu (2018), who argue that race or ethnicity is among the most influential factors shaping social affairs in the United States (p. 9). They contend that structural racism has historically shaped policing practices, tracing their origins to informal systems of racial control such as "slave patrol"[2] before the Second World War (Sun & Wu, 2018, p. 10). As policing became increasingly institutionalized, racialized communities continued to experience disproportionate surveillance and unequal treatment within the criminal justice system. According to Sun and Wu (2018), these experiences contribute to greater perceptions of injustice among minority populations, especially those who have direct contact with law enforcement (p. 11). The authors extend this analysis to Arab and Muslim communities in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, arguing that Arab Americans shifted from being "invisible citizens" to "highly visible subjects" (Sun & Wu, 2018, p. 47). They explain that this transformation was accompanied by increased public suspicion, intensified surveillance, expanded intelligence-gathering by local police, and a rise in anti-Arab discrimination and hate crimes, creating what they describe as a "special relationship" between Arab communities, law enforcement agencies, and the media (Sun & Wu, 2018, p. 47). These developments included FBI interviews with approximately 5,000 Arab men and the detention of

[2] Slave patrols were organized groups of white men established in the American South to enforce slavery, suppress resistance, and monitor enslaved Africans. They are widely regarded as an early precursor to modern policing in the United States. Burchett, M. H. (2022). *Slave patrols*. EBSCO Research Starters. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/slave-patrols

hundreds of Arab individuals for minor immigration violations, contributing to widespread fear, mistrust, and heightened surveillance within Arab communities (Sun & Wu, 2018, p. 47).

2.4 Anti-Arab and Anti-Palestinian Racism

Anti-Arab racism has long shaped the experiences of Arab communities in North America and beyond. Rhonda Tabbah (2020), for example, examines the lived educational experiences of Arab American students and the ways discrimination influences their interactions within academic environments. Tabbah argues that Arabs in the United States have historically been subjected to stereotyping and discrimination through mainstream media representations and government policies. Rather than viewing the events of September 11, 2001, as the beginning of anti-Arab racism, Tabbah argues that these events intensified existing prejudices. Negative stereotypes of Arabs became more widespread, reinforcing public suspicion, discriminatory practices, and racial profiling within American society. Individuals perceived as Arab or Muslim, including those mistakenly associated with either identity, became increasingly vulnerable to suspicion and racial profiling. These practices contributed to the racialization of both Arab identity and Islam, blurring the distinction between ethnicity and religion. As a result, anti-Arab racism affected not only Arab Muslims but also Arab Christians, who were frequently associated with stereotypes directed at Muslims because of their perceived Arab identity. These processes constructed Arabs and Muslims as perpetual outsiders and potential security threats, creating systems of racialization. Importantly, it presents that these forms of discrimination extend into educational institutions. Schools and universities are often assumed to be neutral spaces; however, they frequently reproduce broader societal patterns of exclusion and racialization. To illustrate this dynamic, Tabbah recounts the experience of an Arab student who recalled:

On 9/11 I was the only Arab in the class. We were watching TV and the teacher's way of dealing with me changed. He showed pictures of Osama bin Laden and said [pointing to the respondent], 'Ask him if you have any questions' (Tabbah, 2020, p. 33).

This account illustrates how racialized assumptions can shape interactions between educators and Arab students, reinforcing feelings of vulnerability and exclusion within educational institutions. The normalization of anti-Arab sentiment is also examined by Ben-Porat (2008) in *Death to the Arabs: The Right-Wing Fan's Fear*. Focusing on football culture in Israel, Ben-Porat argues that anti-Arab hostility is not confined to formal political discourse but is reproduced within everyday social spaces. According to the author, "some Israeli Jews do not accept the Israeli Arabs as legitimate citizens" (Ben-Porat, 2008, p. 5), demonstrating how exclusionary attitudes become embedded within social structures. Ben-Porat further shows how football stadiums function as political arenas where nationalism and identity are publicly expressed and reinforced. Drawing on interviews with 143 long-term football supporters, he found that supporters of right-wing clubs frequently expressed hostility toward Arab players. Ben-Porat (2008) reports that respondents stated, "I do not like Arabs," "I cannot identify with them," "we do not want Arabs in our team," "Beitar is a Zionist club," and "Beitar represents right-wingers" (p. 8). While anti-Arab racism has a long historical trajectory, recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the specific phenomenon of anti-Palestinian racism (APR). Drawing on a survey conducted in 2024, Mosse and Sibery (2025) provide empirical evidence regarding the prevalence of anti-Palestinian racism (APR) across Canada. Drawing on survey responses collected through SurveyMonkey, the report documents experiences of discrimination across schools, universities, healthcare settings, workplaces, and government institutions. The report highlights numerous examples of anti-Palestinian discrimination. For example, "a school

counsellor at an Oakville high school was recorded telling a student wearing a keffiyeh that he reminded her of terrorists" (Mosse & Sibery, 2025, p. 9). Similarly, "then B.C. Minister of Post-Secondary Education said while speaking as part of a panel that the region on which the state of Israel was created was previously 'a crappy piece of land with nothing on it'" (Mosse & Sibery, 2025, p. 10). According to the authors, these incidents reflect broader patterns of anti-Palestinian racism that manifest at both interpersonal and institutional levels. The survey findings further reveal the scale of APR in Canada. Among the 1,664 survey respondents, 81.43% reported experiencing APR, while 93.8% indicated that APR had worsened since October 2023 (Mosse & Sibery, 2025, pp. 5, 16). Additionally, 80.6% identified APR as a very serious issue in Canada, and 94.0% stated that Palestinians are very rarely or never fairly represented within Western media. The findings further demonstrate that APR extends beyond Palestinians themselves, affecting individuals who publicly express solidarity with Palestine. Respondents described experiences of workplace discrimination, educational sanctions, social exclusion, job loss, suspension, and accusations of antisemitism or extremism for expressing support for Palestinian human rights. APR functions not only as a form of racial discrimination but also as a mechanism that restricts political expression and public advocacy.

2.5 Universities as Sites of Power, Control, and Resistance

Universities are often portrayed as neutral spaces dedicated to knowledge production, academic inquiry, and intellectual freedom. However, critical scholarship has increasingly challenged this assumption, arguing that universities are deeply embedded within broader systems of political, economic, and colonial power. Rosalind Hampton (2020) examines how Canadian universities have historically functioned as institutions that reproduce elite interests

and colonial hierarchies. Focusing on McGill University, Hampton argues that the institution was established within the context of settler colonial expansion and elite nation-building. She notes that McGill was:

> Established in Montreal in 1821 on the former estate of colonial merchant James McGill, and by late century was popularly touted as the 'Harvard of Canada.' McGill played a particularly significant role in the further development of higher education as part of the westward expansion of the settler colonial nation (Hampton, 2020, p. 18).

Rather than functioning solely as centres of education, universities played an active role in legitimizing colonial governance and reproducing dominant social and political structures. Hampton situated McGill within a broader network of Canadian universities, including the University of Toronto and Queen's University, which formed part of "an expansive, transnational British imperial network, symbolizing and propagating European civilization and Western knowledge" (Hampton, 2020, p. 19). Universities therefore served not only educational functions but also ideological ones, shaping acceptable forms of knowledge, citizenship, and political thought. Hampton further argues that Canadian universities remain shaped by their colonial foundations and relationships to elite power. She notes that McGill has historically been "associated with some of the most economically wealthy and powerful families in Canada," with class[3] playing "a pivotal role in defining its 'eliteness' and determining assumptions and expectations of McGill" (Hampton, 2020, p. 70). Consequently, universities are influenced not only by educational priorities but also by broader social and economic interests. These dynamics are further demonstrated through Hampton's discussion of James McGill himself, who "was a slave owner" and "had both Black and Indigenous slaves" (Hampton, 2020, p. 36).

[3] The term "class" here refers to social class, meaning a person's wealth, income, family background, social status, and their ability to access resources.

Similarly, the University of Ottawa has longstanding ties to Canada's colonial history through its administration by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)[4]. Founded in 1848 as the College of Bytown by Bishop Joseph-Bruno Guigues, the institution was governed by the Oblates until 1965. By 1952, the Oblates administered 41 residential schools across the country, and several priests affiliated with the University of Ottawa later established or served in these institutions. In 1991, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate issued a formal apology to Indigenous peoples, acknowledging:

> For certain aspects of their presence and ministry" in light of the controversy which was beginning to erupt around patterns of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools and of the changed understandings. "Anthropological and sociological insights of the late 20th century", observed the statement of apology, "have shown how deep, unchallenged, and damaging was the naive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious superiority complex of Christian Europe when its peoples met and interrelated with the aboriginal peoples of North America (University of Ottawa, 2019, para. 14).

Although the University of Ottawa was not itself a residential school, its institutional history is closely connected to the religious order that played a central role in implementing colonial assimilation policies toward Indigenous peoples. Moreover, universities are not detached from colonial structures but are materially and historically connected to them.

[4] The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) are a worldwide Roman Catholic congregation of priests founded in 1816 in France by Saint Eugène de Mazenod. While their primary mission was to spread the Gospel, the Oblates also played a significant role in Canada's residential school system, where they administered and operated numerous schools across the country.

2.5.1 Universities and the Regulation of Political Dissent

The relationship between universities and political control is further explored by Elizabeth Brulé (2015). Brulé argues that universities increasingly regulate student activism through institutional policies that appear administrative but function as mechanisms of surveillance and control. According to Brulé (2015), student activists increasingly encounter institutional policies that regulate social justice advocacy through managerial technologies, including mechanisms of monitoring and administrative control (p. 159). These managerial technologies include risk-management assessments, behavioural policies, and administrative procedures that frame the regulation of student activism as a matter of neutral governance. The regulation of physical space therefore becomes a mechanism through which universities control political activity and determine acceptable limits of student dissent. Brulé's analysis is particularly relevant to Palestinian solidarity activism. She discusses the case of student activist Daniel Freeman-Maloy, who was expelled from York University for three years in 2004 after using a megaphone during two pro-Palestine demonstrations held in Vari Hall (Brulé, 2015, p. 162). This case illustrates how disciplinary measures can be deployed against political activism, particularly when such activism challenges institutional interests or dominant political narratives. Brulé (2015) also examines tensions surrounding Israeli Apartheid Week in 2009.. During this period, organizations such as Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) organized protests concerning Israeli military actions in Gaza, while counter-mobilizations were supported by groups such as Hillel and the Hasbara Fellowship. These debates extended beyond campus and attracted significant media attention. For example, B'nai Brith Canada purchased a full-page advertisement in the *National Post* urging universities to "Stop the Hate Fests on Canadian University Campuses" and prevent Israeli Apartheid Week events (Brulé, 2015, p. 164). In

response to these pressures, York University introduced stricter controls on student advocacy and revised its C*ode of Student Rights and Responsibilities*. Brulé (2015) notes that these policies prohibited students from "disrupting" others, a broadly defined restriction that afforded university administrators considerable discretion in disciplining student activists (p. 165).

2.5.2 Surveillance and the National Security State

Beyond university-level administrative regulation, state surveillance has historically played a significant role in monitoring student political activism in Canada. In *The RCMP's Secret Activities at Canadian Universities, 1917–1997*, Hewitt demonstrates that Canadian universities have historically been sites of intelligence gathering and political monitoring, particularly targeting students involved in left-wing activism. According to Hewitt, surveillance of students was justified through assumptions that political radicalism posed a threat to social order. The extensive scale of this surveillance is further illustrated by historical records documenting the number of security files maintained by the RCMP:

> In Canada the final report of the McDonald Commission referred to over 800,000 security files on individual Canadians. In 1967, 'D' Branch, the countersubversion branch of the RCMP Security Service, maintained active files on 48,000 individuals and 6,000 organizations. In its final two years of existence, the RCMP Security Service opened new files, including those for security screening purposes, on 134,880 individuals and organizations (Hewitt, 2002, p. 3).

These activities were conducted largely in secrecy, as "mounted policemen performed these tasks largely in secret as part of the development within Canada of the national security state" (Hewitt,

2002, p. 3). This perspective reveals that university surveillance functioned less as a response to concrete safety threats and more as a way of monitoring political beliefs and regulating dissent.

2.5.3 Settler Colonialism and the Canadian Context

Nadia Abu-Zahra, John Carlson, and Veldon Coburn (2025) examine contradictions within Canadian state discourse, particularly Canada's portrayal of itself as a defender of human rights while simultaneously supporting Israel. The authors argue that Canada continues to provide political, diplomatic, and economic support to Israel despite its involvement in what they describe as “war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide” (Abu-Zahra et al., 2025, p. 1). In doing so, they situate Canadian foreign policy within broader settler-colonial structures that connect the experiences of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island with those of Palestinians living under occupation. Their analysis situates Canadian foreign policy within broader settler-colonial structures, connecting the experiences of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island with those of Palestinians living under occupation. In doing so, the authors highlight continuities between colonial practices in Canada and contemporary forms of dispossession, displacement, and state violence in Palestine. Through this lens, the relationship between Canada and Israel extends beyond diplomacy, reflecting deeper ideological and historical connections rooted in settler colonialism. This critique also extends to Canadian universities, whose financial investments and institutional partnerships may connect them to broader systems of violence. They specifically reference the University of Ottawa, arguing that the institution is “entangled in a military-industrial complex that dominates stocks with companies and products like CAE simulators for attack helicopters and drones, Bombardier military aircraft, and MDA satellite surveillance” (Abu-Zahra et al., 2025, p. 5). This shifts the attention away from universities as

neutral educational institutions and toward their material connections to global systems of power. Within this framework, universities are understood as active participants in political and economic structures, making student demands for disclosure, divestment, and accountability direct challenges to their institutional relationships.

These tensions became visible during the Palestinian solidarity encampments. Abu-Zahra et al. (2025) note that the University of Ottawa publicly stated that "encampments and occupations will not be tolerated" (p. 5). In response, students argued that universities should likewise not tolerate "investing in a 76-year military occupation of Palestine" (Abu-Zahra et al., 2025, p. 5). This perspective situates student encampments and solidarity actions within a broader tradition of resistance connecting Indigenous struggles, Palestinian liberation, and movements against colonialism. Rather than treating Palestine as an isolated issue, it emphasizes the relationships between Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization, and international solidarity.

Student encampments and solidarity actions can therefore be understood as part of a broader tradition of resistance that connects local and global struggles against colonialism. Rather than viewing Palestine as an isolated issue, these movements situate Palestinian liberation within wider conversations about Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization, and social justice. In this way, student activism functions not only as a response to Israeli military assaults in Gaza but also as a challenge to the colonial and institutional structures that shape political life within Canada itself.

2.6 Media Representation and Narrative Power

Media institutions play a significant role in shaping public understandings of political wars / conflicts and social movements. An analysis conducted by the Centre for Media

Monitoring (CfMM) examines representations of the war on Gaza within BBC coverage, drawing upon a dataset of 8,873 news articles and broadcast segments (CfMM, 2025, p. 81). The report evaluates whether the BBC fulfilled its obligation to provide fair and impartial reporting, concluding that its coverage demonstrated systematic bias by privileging Israeli perspectives while minimizing Palestinian experiences and suffering. One of the clearest examples identified by the report concerns the treatment of interviewees:

> The imbalance can also be seen with regards to non-Hamas Palestinian voices. The data analysis reveals an imbalance: between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024, interviewees from a Palestinian perspective were pressed to condemn Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 in 38 distinct instances. In stark contrast, we have found no instances where interviewees faced similar pressure to condemn Israel's actions. This, despite Israel's military campaign resulting in over 40,000 Palestinian deaths (during our dataset timeline, and now, over 50,000) — actions that have prompted serious concerns from the UN, an ongoing case at the International Court of Justice, and condemnation from numerous human rights organisations (CfMM, 2025, p. 71).

These findings suggest that media coverage does not merely reflect events but actively shapes narratives of legitimacy. The report conceptualizes this dynamic as an "uneven moral test," whereby Palestinian voices and individuals expressing solidarity with Palestine are repeatedly expected to condemn Hamas's actions before discussing Palestinian suffering, forcible displacement, or human rights violations (CfMM, 2025, p. 71). One example cited in the report concerns an interview broadcast on the BBC's Today programme on October 16, 2023. Former Palestinian Authority's spokesperson Nour Odeh was repeatedly pressed to condemn the events of October 7, 2023, and was directly asked, "can you say it was wrong?" (CfMM, 2025, p. 71).

Such questioning shifts attention away from the substantive topic under discussion and places a disproportionate burden of moral accountability on Palestinian interviewees. Palestinian voices become subject to forms of scrutiny that are not equally applied to other actors involved in the war. Beyond interview framing, the report identifies broader patterns of narrative control regarding how events in Gaza are described and interpreted. In particular, it notes that BBC presenters frequently challenged or dismissed claims that a genocide was occurring in Gaza. According to the report, presenters actively questioned or rejected genocide-related claims in more than one hundred interviews. For example, when United Nations Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese raised concerns regarding genocide on BBC Newsnight, the presenter responded by stating that "genocide is not what is happening here" (CfMM, 2025, p. 73). Similarly, BBC Radio 5 presenter Nicky Campbell suggested that the term genocide was being "misapplied" when discussing criticism of Israeli violence (CfMM, 2025, p. 75). The report also raises concerns about editorial decisions involving the promotion of particular viewpoints. It argues that the BBC provided airtime to commentators expressing dehumanizing or Islamophobic rhetoric toward Palestinians, raising questions regarding consistency in editorial standards. Critics questioned whether similar tolerance would be extended to explicitly antisemitic views, which would likely be condemned and excluded from mainstream discussion. One example highlighted in the report concerns columnist Melanie Philips, who denied the existence of Palestinians as a people and framed support for Palestine as inherently antisemitic (CfMM, 2025, p. 76). These findings demonstrate how media institutions shape not only which voices are heard but also which perspectives are considered legitimate within public discourse.

Therefore, media representations influence how activists are perceived by the public and may contribute to broader narratives that legitimize or delegitimize political action.

Understanding these processes is therefore essential for examining how students involved in Palestinian solidarity encampments interpreted both media coverage and public responses to their activism.

2.7 Synthesis and Gaps in the Literature

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that student activism, racialized policing, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, university governance, settler colonialism, and media representation are deeply interconnected. Building on Boren's (2019) examination of the historical relationship between student activism and institutional authority, the literature demonstrates how universities regulate political expression through administrative policies, disciplinary measures, and broader governance structures. Similarly, the Centre for Media Monitoring's (CfMM, 2025) findings demonstrate how language and framing influence public perceptions of political conflict and the legitimacy of particular perspectives. The terminology used in media coverage is especially significant, as mainstream media remains one of the primary ways through which individuals access information, including through the circulation of news on social media platforms.

The 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments bring these dynamics together in a particularly visible way. They reveal how power operates across multiple levels within the university, from administrative decision-making to the deployment of police force in regulating campus spaces. As observed at both the University of Ottawa and McGill University, institutional responses to the encampments involved forms of surveillance, control, and, in some cases, physical repression. The 2024 encampments can be understood as a critical moment that

brought these tensions into sharper focus, demonstrating how questions concerning Palestine tested universities' commitments to justice, equity, and academic freedom.

This thesis addresses these gaps by examining the experiences of students who participated in the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University. By centering participant narratives and analyzing institutional, media, and political responses, this study contributes to a more integrated understanding of how racialized power operates within higher education and how students challenge, negotiate, and resist these structures through collective action.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of Palestinian solidarity encampments and the actions of university administrations in Canada. This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of Palestinian solidarity encampments and university responses in Canada. Drawing on scholarship concerning colonialism, racialization, institutional power, and resistance, it establishes the theoretical perspectives used to interpret participants' experiences. Rather than viewing the encampments as isolated events, the study situates them within broader structures of colonialism, racialization, institutional power, and resistance. Throughout the analysis, these theories are used to examine both participants' experiences and the political contexts in which the Palestinian solidarity encampments emerged.

2.8.1 Settler Colonialism and the Logic of Elimination

Patrick Wolfe's (2006) theory of settler colonialism provides an important framework for understanding colonial power as an ongoing structure rather than simply a historical event. Wolfe

argues that “settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 387), emphasizing that the displacement of Indigenous peoples can occur through a range of legal, political, cultural, and social mechanisms rather than solely through physical violence. He further contends that settler colonizers come to stay and that invasion constitutes an enduring structure rather than a discrete historical event. Central to Wolfe’s analysis is the notion that settler colonialism operates through a logic of elimination, whereby Indigenous peoples are displaced, marginalized, assimilated, or otherwise forcibly removed from their homes to facilitate settler access to land and resources. As Wolfe (2006) argues, “settler colonialism destroys to replace” (p. 388), emphasizing the replacement of Indigenous societies with a new settler order. Drawing on examples from North America, he notes that Indigenous nations often possessed significant political power and signed treaties with European powers, including the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch (Wolfe, 2006, p. 391). Despite this recognition, European colonial powers continued to restrict the recognition and exercise of Indigenous sovereignty. This distinction was fundamental to settler-colonial expansion because it enabled colonial powers to acknowledge Indigenous presence while denying Indigenous sovereignty. Settler colonialism therefore operates not only through force but through legal and political structures that legitimize dispossession and territorial control. Settler colonialism is sustained not only through legal and political structures but also through narratives that conceal the processes through which Indigenous land is acquired and settler sovereignty is established. Rather than acknowledging the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, settler societies portray settlement as a peaceful and inevitable process.

This framework allows Palestinian land dispossession to be understood as part of an ongoing settler-colonial process rather than as a series of isolated political events. Wolfe directs

attention toward the institutions, policies, and systems that sustain colonial relationships over time. This theoretical perspective informs the analysis of how participants interpreted Palestine, university investments, institutional responses, and broader questions of justice, sovereignty, and decolonization. Understanding settler colonialism as an enduring structure provides a framework for analyzing how participants interpreted Palestine, university investments, institutional responses, and broader questions of justice, sovereignty, and decolonization.

2.8.2 Orientalism and Colonial Power

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism provides a theoretical framework for examining how Western systems of knowledge and power have shaped representations of the Arab world. Said argues that the "Orient" was not simply a geographic region, but a political, cultural, and intellectual construction produced through Western discourse: "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings" (Said, 1979, p. 1). In this sense, representations of the Orient were not neutral descriptions of Eastern societies but rather products of European imagination that reflected broader relations of power between the West and the societies it sought to understand, govern, and dominate. Orientalism therefore functioned not only as a body of knowledge but also as a mechanism through which colonial power was exercised and maintained. Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said, 1979, p. 1). Through this process, the Orient was constructed as fundamentally different from, and inferior to, the West. While Western societies were associated with reason, modernity, and civilization, Eastern societies were frequently portrayed as irrational, backward, uncivilized, and incapable of self-governance. These representations played an important role in legitimizing

colonial expansion. By portraying non-Western societies as inferior and in need of guidance, Orientalist representations helped legitimize colonial expansion, intervention, and domination. Orientalism therefore functioned not only as a body of knowledge but also as a mechanism through which colonial power was exercised and maintained. The production of knowledge about the Orient was inseparable from the political realities of empire and colonialism.

2.8.3 Grievability and the Politics of Recognition

While Edward Said's theory of Orientalism examines how Western discourse constructs and represents the Arab world, Judith Butler (2009) provides a complementary theoretical perspective by examining how political and media representations shape whose lives are publicly recognized as valuable and whose suffering is rendered invisible. Butler (2009) explores the relationship between media, politics, and war, asking fundamental questions about who constitutes the "we" in times of war and, ultimately, whose lives are considered worthy of recognition and public mourning. Central to Butler's argument is the concept of grievability, which refers to the unequal ways societies determine whose lives are publicly valued and whose deaths are considered worthy of collective grief. These distinctions are not natural but are socially and politically constructed through media, government discourse, and broader systems of power. Butler (2009) illustrates these inequalities in public mourning through their discussion of the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks:

> After the attacks of 9/11, we encountered in the media graphic pictures of those who died, along with their names, their stories, the reactions of their families. Public grieving was dedicated to making these images iconic for the nation, which meant of course that there

> was considerably less public grieving for non-US nationals, and none at all for illegal workers (Butler, 2009, p. 38).

The unequal visibility of victims demonstrates how political institutions and media organizations shape public perceptions of whose lives are considered worthy of recognition, empathy, and collective mourning. Butler further develops this argument through their discussion of the United States' wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Examining the publication of photographs documenting the torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison, Butler (2009) argues that these images challenged dominant narratives surrounding the War on Terror and raised questions about the moral legitimacy of U.S. military intervention:

> When the photos of Abu Ghraib were first released in the US, conservative television pundits argued that it would be unAmerican to show them. We were not supposed to have graphic evidence of the acts of torture US personnel had committed. We were not supposed to know that the US had violated internationally recognized human rights (Butler, 2009, p. 40)

This distinction reflects Butler's argument that public recognition of suffering is shaped by political and social frameworks that determine whose lives are considered grievable. Butler (2009) challenges these unequal understandings of humanity by asking, "whose life, if extinguished, would be publicly grievable and whose life would leave either no public trace to grieve, or only a partial, mangled, and enigmatic trace?" (p. 75). This question lies at the centre of Butler's theory. Political and media institutions shape not only how wars are understood but also whose humanity is considered worthy of recognition.

While Said explains how Arabs and Palestinians have historically been constructed through Western systems of representation, Butler examines how those representations influence

whose suffering is publicly acknowledged, whose deaths are mourned, and whose voices are considered legitimate. Butler's concept of grievability therefore complements Said's theory of Orientalism. These Orientalist narratives have implications for how Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians are represented within contemporary media, political discourse, and public debate.

Within Orientalist discourse, Arab populations are frequently represented through associations with violence, extremism, instability, or terrorism, while Western actors are positioned as rational, objective, and authoritative. These representations contribute to the construction of unequal relationships in which certain voices are viewed as credible and legitimate while others are dismissed altogether. As discussed in the literature review, media coverage of Palestine often subjects Palestinian voices to what the Centre for Media Monitoring (2025) describes as an "uneven moral test" (CfMM, 2025, p. 71), requiring Palestinians and their supporters to repeatedly condemn violence before their perspectives are considered legitimate. Orientalism provides a critical lens for examining university responses to the Palestinian solidarity encampments, particularly how Palestinians, solidarity activists, and the encampments themselves were represented within institutional communications and media narratives. Orientalism serves as a critical lens through which to examine how Palestinians, Palestinian solidarity activists, and the encampments themselves were represented.

2.8.4 Critical Race Theory, Institutional Power, and Colonialism

Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines how racism operates not only through individual prejudice but also through social, political, and institutional structures. Henry and Tator (2009) examine how racism functions within Canadian universities despite institutional commitments to diversity and equity. The authors argue that racism in higher education extends beyond overt acts

of discrimination and is embedded within the structures and practices of academic institutions. Additionally, racism manifests through formal and hidden curricula, as well as through campus climates that often reflect the interests of dominant groups (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 27). Rather than functioning as neutral spaces dedicated solely to knowledge production and social progress, universities can reproduce and sustain racial inequalities through institutional structures and practices.

A central concept discussed by Henry and Tator is everyday racism, which refers to the subtle and often normalized ways racialized ideas are reproduced through ordinary language, behaviours, and social interactions. Everyday racism is frequently overlooked because it becomes embedded within routine practices and accepted social norms. As a result, forms of exclusion and discrimination may persist even within institutions that publicly endorse equity and inclusion. One of the primary barriers to addressing racism within universities is the tendency to evaluate discrimination according to intent rather than impact (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 29). Institutional actors may deny the existence of racism because discriminatory outcomes were not consciously intended, despite the harm experienced by racialized communities. The authors also examine how universities, alongside institutions of governance, policing, media, and justice, function as "discursive spaces" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 32). Addressing racism, they argue, requires more than symbolic commitments to diversity; it requires substantive interventions capable of transforming existing social and political structures (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 33).

Drawing on CRT, the authors challenge assumptions of neutrality, objectivity, and colour-blindness within institutions. CRT emphasizes that racism is not an isolated occurrence but is deeply embedded within social structures and everyday practices. The theory further

emphasizes that dominant institutions frequently marginalize or dismiss the experiences and counter-narratives of racialized communities. CRT critically examines how individuals are positioned, to varying degrees, within structures of domination and subordination (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 39). This perspective guides the examination of how university policies, institutional discourse, and power relations shape the experiences of students participating in Palestinian solidarity encampments.

When examining institutional racism in Canada through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), it is also important to consider Indigenous epistemologies[5], which offer distinct perspectives on knowledge, colonial power, and the relationships between institutions and marginalized communities. Rather than viewing racism as isolated acts of individual prejudice, they understand it as a product of ongoing colonial systems that continue to shape institutional governance and power relations within universities. Abotossaway and Pitt (2026) argue that "racism is produced, normalized, and sustained across the continuum of compulsory mainstream schooling and post-secondary education" (Abotossaway & Pitt, 2026, p. 50). Through CRT, the authors explain how race is socially constructed and how institutions reproduce racial hierarchies through seemingly neutral laws, policies, and administrative practices that privilege Whiteness. However, the authors argue that CRT alone is insufficient for understanding institutional racism within the Canadian context. They therefore combine CRT with Indigenous epistemologies, which situate racism within Canada's ongoing settler-colonial project and emphasize decolonization. This perspective recognizes that racism against Indigenous peoples cannot be understood solely through race but must also be examined through colonialism, as Canadian

[5] Indigenous epistemologies refer to diverse Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding, and interpreting the world. These knowledge traditions often emphasize relationships among knowledge, spirituality, community, and the natural world. Knowledge may be understood as holistic, relational, and grounded in lived experience, ancestral teachings, and responsibilities to past, present, and future generations (Antoine et al., 2018, para. 4).

universities were established on stolen Indigenous lands and developed through colonial institutions that historically marginalized Indigenous peoples, languages, histories, and knowledge systems. As the authors note, “Many universities are historically White institutions and undemocratic models” (Abotossaway & Pitt, 2026, p. 54). Together, CRT and Indigenous epistemologies provide a framework for examining higher education as a site where colonial power continues to be reproduced.

Furthermore, CRT complements both settler-colonial theory and Said’s concept of Orientalism. While settler-colonial theory explains the structural processes through which colonial power, dispossession, and the logic of elimination are maintained, and Orientalism examines how racialized knowledge and representations construct the “Other,” CRT provides a framework for understanding how these broader systems of power become embedded within institutional policies, governance structures, and everyday practices.

2.8.5 Social Movements, Collective Identity, and Political Consciousness

The Palestinian solidarity encampments can be understood as part of a larger tradition of social movements that emerge in response to perceived injustice and demands for institutional change. Rocha Menocal (2016) defines social movements as:

> Large, often informal groupings of people who come together against power holders around a common cause, in response to situations of perceived inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands. At their core, social movements are not about “polite debate” or “invited spaces” of interaction between state and society (Menocal, 2016, para. 1).

As Polletta and Jasper (2001) explain:

> People develop a "taste" for certain tactics, partly independently of their efficacy in attaining formal external goals. Some may enjoy staying within the bounds of legality, others stepping outside them. Some may pride themselves on their moderate demands and tactics, others on being avant-garde or radical. They may develop collective identities based on those tactical tastes. Tactical and organizational identities often coincide, as organizations embody forms of action (p. 293).

Participation in social movements extends beyond pursuing political objectives. Through collective action, individuals develop shared identities rooted in common values, experiences, and forms of resistance. As participants spend time organizing together, they often cultivate a sense of belonging, solidarity, and mutual support. These collective identities strengthen social movements by fostering trust, cooperation, and long-term commitment among activists. Importantly, collective identity in social movements differs from herd mentality, as it develops through shared values, conscious participation, and collective political objectives. According to Ungvarsky (2020), herd mentality, also known as mob mentality or crowd mentality, refers to "the phenomenon where individuals in a group often adopt behaviors and attitudes that differ significantly from their own personal beliefs" (para. 1). The Palestinian solidarity encampments do not reflect this phenomenon. Rather than abandoning their personal beliefs to conform to a group, participants joined the encampments because they already shared similar values and political commitments. The encampments also fostered spaces of mutual care through communal kitchens, educational programming, prayer spaces, medical tents, and emotional support networks, reinforcing the sense of community that emerged through collective action. Furthermore, participants sought to challenge media narratives that they believed misrepresented the goals, motivations, and activities of the encampments, emphasizing instead their commitment

to peaceful protest and institutional accountability. The development of collective identities and communities within social movements also helps explain why institutions and states may perceive these movements as threats to established power structures. When individuals organize collectively around shared grievances and political demands, they challenge existing power structures and create forms of solidarity that can resist institutional control. It is within this context that Frantz Fanon's work provides an important theoretical lens for understanding how authorities respond to collective resistance.

2.8.6 Anti-Colonial Resistance and Collective Liberation

Fanon (1959) argues that colonial authorities often seek to fragment and isolate populations to weaken collective resistance. Examining the French colonization of Algeria, Fanon observes that French colonialism attempted to separate individuals and communities from one another, noting that "the tactic adopted by French colonialism since the beginning of the Revolution has had the result of separating the people from each other, of fragmenting them, with the sole objective of making any cohesion impossible" (p. 118). For Fanon, colonial domination is maintained not only through military force but also through strategies that undermine solidarity and collective organization. By preventing the formation of cohesive communities, colonial authorities reduce the ability of individuals to mobilize, share knowledge, and develop a collective political identity. Fragmentation therefore serves to weaken resistance while strengthening colonial control. Rather than viewing colonized populations as passive victims of oppression, Fanon emphasizes their capacity for agency and collective action. He argues that participation in struggle reshapes political consciousness and enables individuals to become active participants in their own liberation: "The people who take their destiny into their

own hands assimilate the most modern forms of technology at an extraordinary rate" (Fanon, 1959, p. 145). This statement highlights how resistance movements can adopt new tools, forms of communication, and organizational strategies in pursuit of collective goals. Fanon's work challenges the assumption that power resides solely within colonial institutions. Instead, he argues that oppressed communities develop their own forms of knowledge, organization, and resistance.

Participation in collective struggle transforms both political conditions and the political consciousness of those involved. Through resistance, individuals begin to see themselves as political actors capable of shaping their own futures rather than as passive subjects of colonial rule. This perspective helps explain the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments, where students organized collectively, created alternative spaces for community-building, and utilized both physical and digital platforms to mobilize support, disseminate information, and challenge dominant narratives surrounding Palestine. Similar to Fanon's discussion of anti-colonial resistance, the encampments functioned as spaces where participants developed forms of solidarity, shared political knowledge, and engaged in collective action aimed at challenging existing structures of power.

Fanon's framework is also useful for understanding the educational dimensions of the encampments. Throughout the encampments, students organized teach-ins, workshops, community discussions, cultural events, and public demonstrations that encouraged political engagement and critical reflection. These activities enabled participants to collectively examine questions of colonialism, racism, state violence, and resistance while creating opportunities for learning outside traditional classroom settings. In this sense, the encampments served not only as sites of protest but also as spaces for developing political consciousness and engaging in

collective education. Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Indigenous, Black, and non-racialized students often worked alongside one another, building relationships and networks of solidarity across different communities. These interactions highlight the relationship between solidarity, education, and liberation, demonstrating that resistance is not merely a reaction to oppression but also a transformative process through which individuals and communities actively reshape their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

2.8.7 Policing, Surveillance, and State Power

To understand student activism, it is first necessary to define the concept of student dissent. According to Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute (2022), "dissent refers to at least one party's disagreement with the majority opinion" (para. 1). In a broader context, dissent refers to the expression of disagreement or opposition toward the decisions, policies, or actions of an authority or dominant group. Within the university setting, student dissent occurs when students challenge or oppose the policies, regulations, practices, or institutional decisions of their academic institution, often through protests, demonstrations, advocacy, or other forms of collective action. As student dissent frequently takes the form of public demonstrations and organized protest, these movements often involve interactions with law enforcement, making the relationship between police and the communities they serve particularly relevant.

The relationship between police and the communities they serve has long been characterized by fragmentation and mistrust. This strained relationship is rooted not only in the historical use of excessive force against Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities, but also in broader concerns regarding the abuse of police authority and the discretionary power afforded to law enforcement. According to Weisburd et al. (2001), aspects of police culture can

reinforce an adversarial relationship between officers and the public. One officer described policing as "almost like urban warfare," stating, "It is us against them. My job is to get them; their job is to bail out, and jump over fences" (Weisburd et al., 2001, p. 30). This statement reflects an "us-versus-them" mentality, in which members of the public are viewed as adversaries rather than members of the communities police are expected to protect. The report suggests that this mindset can contribute to the abuse of police authority by reinforcing suspicion and antagonistic interactions between police officers and civilians. This perspective closely aligns with Alex Vitale's (2017) argument that contemporary policing increasingly adopts a "warrior mentality" in which officers perceive themselves as combatants rather than guardians of public safety.

Vitale (2017) similarly challenges conventional understandings of policing by arguing that many contemporary policing practices are rooted in social control rather than public safety. Vitale contends that police institutions frequently exercise authority in ways that disproportionately target marginalized and racialized communities, contributing to systems of inequality. Rather than viewing policing as a neutral mechanism designed solely to prevent crime, Vitale argues that policing has historically functioned as a tool for managing social problems and maintaining existing power relations. A central concern identified by the author is what he describes as the "warrior mentality" within policing. According to Vitale, police officers often view themselves as combatants engaged in a battle against the public rather than as guardians of community safety. As he explains:

> Part of the problem stems from a "warrior mentality." Police often think of themselves as soldiers in a battle with the public rather than guardians of public safety. That they are provided with tanks and other military-grade weapons, that many are military veterans,

> and that militarized units like Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) proliferated during the 1980s War on Drugs and post-9/11 War on Terror only fuels this perception, as well as a belief that entire communities are disorderly, dangerous, suspicious, and ultimately criminal. When this happens, police are too quick to use force. Excessive use of force, however, is just the tip of the iceberg of over-policing (Vitale, 2017, p. 9).

Vitale further argues that policing has historically been used to monitor and suppress political dissent. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, activists, organizers, and social movements have frequently been subjected to surveillance, intelligence gathering, infiltration, and other forms of state monitoring. These practices demonstrate that policing extends beyond criminal law enforcement and often serves broader political objectives related to maintaining social order and protecting existing institutions of power.

Another important aspect of Vitale's analysis concerns the policing of protests and public demonstrations. He explains that contemporary protest policing increasingly relies upon strategies of control and containment designed to regulate collective action. Whereas earlier approaches often emphasized negotiation and the protection of free expression, many police forces now employ what Vitale describes as "command and control" tactics, in which authorities tightly regulate demonstrations through surveillance, restrictions on movement, barriers, permits, and the threat or use of force (Vitale, 2017, p. 198). These strategies prioritize order and compliance over political expression, frequently framing protesters as potential sources of disruption rather than participants in democratic engagement.

Vitale's framework is useful for understanding the responses to the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments. Across North America, universities frequently relied upon campus security personnel to respond to student encampments. These responses can be understood not

simply as efforts to maintain safety but also as attempts to regulate dissent and preserve institutional authority. The presence of police, security personnel, and surveillance mechanisms can therefore reflect broader institutional concerns regarding control and the management of political activism within university spaces.

While Vitale's analysis focuses primarily on policing as a mechanism of social control, Robyn Maynard (2017) expands this framework by arguing that state violence extends beyond police institutions alone. Rather than understanding policing solely in terms of the actions of law enforcement officers, Maynard argues that state violence is reproduced through a broader network of government institutions, including schools, child welfare agencies, immigration systems, and other state-funded organizations. She argues that these institutions collectively regulate and surveil marginalized populations through policies and administrative practices operating outside the criminal justice system. As Maynard explains, "state violence can be administered by institutions outside of the criminal justice system, including institutions regarded by most as administrative, such as immigration and child welfare departments, social services, schools and medical institutions" (Maynard, 2017, p. 25). These institutions possess significant authority to "surveil, confine, control and punish — the behaviour of state subjects" (Maynard, 2017, p. 25). Consequently, policing should not be understood solely in terms of the activities of police officers but rather as a broader system of governance operating across multiple institutions. Maynard further challenges the assumption that the state functions as a neutral protector of all citizens. Instead, she argues that state violence serves to maintain existing social, racial, and economic hierarchies, disproportionately affecting Black, Indigenous, racialized, and other marginalized communities. This conceptualization of state violence provides an important framework for the present study. Although universities are not law enforcement institutions, they

exercise significant administrative authority through policies that govern surveillance and regulate political expression.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional framework for understanding how participants interpreted their experiences within the encampments, institutional responses, media representations, policing, and broader questions of power, resistance, and political expression. The framework situates the encampments within interconnected structures of settler colonialism, racialization, institutional governance, and collective resistance.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology employed in this study. It begins by explaining the qualitative research approach and the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. The chapter then discusses the ethical considerations that guided the study, followed by the participant selection criteria, recruitment process, and interview procedures. Finally, it describes the structure of the interview guide and explains how the interviews were conducted to collect detailed and credible accounts of participants' experiences.

3.1 Qualitative Research Design and Semi-Structured Interviews

To gain insight into the experiences of students involved in the Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University in 2024, this study employed a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is one of the two primary methodological approaches used across a wide range of disciplines and is particularly valuable for understanding and explaining social phenomena. It addresses questions concerning the 'what', 'how', and 'why' of social phenomena, rather than questions of 'how many' or 'how much', which are typically addressed through quantitative research (Berk et al., 2015, p. 61). The interviews provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences, perspectives, and reflections on the Palestinian solidarity encampments. Through the collection and analysis of participants' narratives, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of the encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University, as well as students' perceptions of campus responses, activism, solidarity, and the broader social and political challenges associated with these movements.

Semi-structured interviewing was selected as the primary method of qualitative data collection for this study. Such interviews allow researchers to gather information by asking questions and collecting responses directly from participants, providing insight into their experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of social phenomena. This method was specifically selected to examine how students perceived the Palestinian solidarity encampments, how they understood their universities' responses to these events, and how they made sense of their own experiences within these movements. Given the research objectives, interviewing was considered the most suitable method for exploring participants' experiences and perspectives in depth.

This study employed semi-structured interviews guided by 24 questions (see Appendix A). This approach provided a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing the researcher to address key themes while creating a conversational environment in which participants could speak openly about their experiences. This approach fostered a level of comfort that enabled participants to express themselves. The interview guide allowed participants to take their time when responding, elaborate on topics they considered important, and reflect on their experiences in their own words while ensuring that discussions remained focused on the research objectives. The relationship between the researcher and participants was grounded in mutual trust and understanding, recognizing that knowledge produced through the interview process emerged collaboratively between both parties. As one participant noted during their interview, although the questions were very specific, they allowed participants to elaborate further on their experiences.

In addition to the interview questions, participants were asked to reflect on selected official university communications that had been distributed to their respective campus communities during the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments. Although both universities

issued multiple communications throughout the encampments, one email from each institution was selected as the primary discussion document. These emails were selected because they reflected the universities' official positions during key stages of the encampments and addressed central issues relevant to this study, including freedom of expression, institutional neutrality, and student demands. Using one representative email from each university provided a common point of reference across interviews, allowing participants to examine the language and messaging of university administrations while drawing on their broader recollections of communications received throughout the encampments. Participants were encouraged to compare the selected email with other institutional communications they had received and discuss whether they believed it accurately reflected their respective universities' overall responses.

To ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences, interviews were conducted in person, via video calls with cameras enabled, or through audio calls, depending on each participant's preference. Semi-structured interviews, conducted both face-to-face and online, were considered the most appropriate method for collecting detailed information about participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines established by the University of Ottawa. Before data collection began, the study received approval from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (REB). The ethics application included the participant recruitment materials, consent form, and interview questions to ensure that all aspects of the study met the university's ethical standards. Before participating in the study, all

participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research participants (Appendix B). Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were also given the option to remain anonymous through a pseudonym. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to those who chose anonymity, and any identifying information was removed from interview transcripts and research materials. Participants were consulted regarding their preferred pseudonyms to safeguard confidentiality and foster a research environment in which they felt comfortable sharing their experiences. All research data, including interview transcripts and participant contact information, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. All research materials will be retained for a period of five years following the completion of the study, in accordance with University of Ottawa ethical guidelines. To further support participant comfort and enhance the accuracy of the data collected, participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcripts following their interviews. This allowed them to review their responses and modify information they wish to not include in the final study. This process not only enhanced the credibility of the research but also fostered trust and collaboration between the researcher and participant throughout the process.

3.3 Participant Selection and Recruitment

Participant selection criteria were established before the interview process began. This study focused on students from the University of Ottawa and McGill University who had attended their respective institutions before and during the Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to be at least 18 years of age and have been

actively involved in the encampments. Active involvement included both organizers and participants who regularly engaged in encampment activities. Ethnicity, nationality, gender, and other demographic characteristics were not used as exclusion criteria for participation. Given that interviews were conducted in early 2026, participants were asked to reflect on experiences that had occurred approximately two years earlier. As a result, participants relied on their recollections of events, which may have introduced limitations associated with retrospective reporting. Nevertheless, the approximately two-year interval between the events and the interviews may have influenced the accuracy and completeness of participants' recollections.

To recruit participants who might otherwise have been difficult to identify and contact, particularly students at McGill University, where the researcher was not enrolled, a snowball sampling strategy was employed. Recruitment began with the creation of an informational poster (Appendix D), which outlined the purpose of the study, participation requirements, and researcher contact information. The recruitment poster was distributed through various social media and communication platforms, including iMessage, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Telegram, and Signal, as well as through the researcher's personal and academic networks.. Individuals who received the poster were encouraged to distribute it to others who met the study criteria and might be interested in participating.

3.4 Interview Procedures and Data Analysis

The 10 participants in this study were interviewed between March 2026 and June 2026. Interviews were conducted either through video conferencing platforms or in private graduate study rooms on the University of Ottawa campus. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, depending on participants' level of involvement in the encampments and the depth of

their responses. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour, while the longest interview was nearly two hours. As previously noted, 10 individuals participated in this study. All participants were over the age of 18 and had been enrolled as students at either the University of Ottawa or McGill University before and during the Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024.

The final sample consisted of five students from the University of Ottawa and five students from McGill University (see Appendix C). Recruiting an equal number of participants from each institution facilitated a comparison of experiences across the two university settings. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 30 years and represented diverse backgrounds and experiences within the encampments. Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the study and were asked to review and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B).

The interview guide consisted of 24 questions organized around 8 thematic sections designed to address the study's research objectives (see Appendix A): (1) Background and Studies; (2) Campus Climate Before the encampments; (3) Personal Experiences During the Encampments; (4) Institutional Silence, Communication, and Complicity; (5) Policing, Surveillance, and Witnessed Violence; (6) Media Representation and Narrative Control; (7) Resistance and Reflection; (8) Closing and Forward-Looking Questions.

Organizing the interviews around these themes promoted consistency across interviews while allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on topics they considered significant. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' knowledge and consent. Recording the interviews ensured that participants' responses were captured in detail. Furthermore, after listening to the recordings and reading each transcript, the researcher conducted a more detailed review of the interviews to identify emerging patterns and potential themes. A chart was then

used to identify recurring themes and organize the collected data into categories through a careful analysis of the interview transcripts (see Appendix E).

3.5 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As the researcher, I recognize that my own experiences and perspectives influenced the development of this study. My interest in examining the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments emerged from my firsthand observations of student activism and the institutional responses that followed. Witnessing these events prompted me to explore how students understood their experiences, how universities responded to the encampments, and how participants interpreted broader questions of institutional authority, academic freedom, media representation, and political dissent. These experiences informed the selection of the research topic and shaped the questions that guided this study.

My familiarity with the encampments also influenced the interview process. My prior knowledge of these events enabled me to develop interview questions that reflected the context of participants' experiences and encouraged detailed discussions of issues that might otherwise have been overlooked. At the same time, I recognize that my own perspectives carried the potential to influence both data collection and interpretation. To minimize the potential influence of my own perspectives, I adopted a semi-structured interview approach that encouraged participants to speak openly in their own words. I also asked follow-up questions to seek clarification rather than confirmation and remained attentive to perspectives that challenged my own assumptions. Participants were also provided with copies of their interview transcripts and given the opportunity to review, clarify, or revise their responses. This process helped ensure that their accounts accurately reflected their intended meanings rather than solely my own

interpretations. Throughout the research process, I sought to approach participants' experiences with reflexivity, acknowledging that knowledge is co-constructed through qualitative research while striving to represent participants' perspectives accurately and fairly. Rather than treating my positionality as something that could be eliminated, I recognized it as an important aspect of the research process that required ongoing critical reflection throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed in this study and explained why a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews was the most appropriate approach for examining students' experiences during the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University. It discussed the study's ethical considerations, participant recruitment, interview procedures, data analysis, measures taken to enhance trustworthiness, and the potential influence of researcher positionality on data collection and interpretation. The following chapter presents the findings from the interviews and examines participants' experiences, motivations, and perceptions of the encampments, as well as the institutional, media, and political responses that influenced those experiences.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted with students who participated in the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University. Based on an analysis of the interview transcripts, the chapter is organized into a series of thematic sections that examine participants' experiences before, during, and after the encampments, as well as their perceptions of their universities' responses, policing, media representation, and broader questions of power, resistance, and institutional accountability. The chapter begins by examining participants' backgrounds, motivations for becoming involved in the encampments, and their perceptions of the political and social climate on their campuses before the encampments began. It then explores participants' lived experiences within the encampments, including the sense of community that developed, relationships formed among participants, and the educational, political, and organizational dimensions of the encampments. The discussion then turns to participants' perceptions of their universities' responses to the encampments, including institutional communications, administrative decision-making, partnerships with Israeli institutions, and broader questions of institutional silence, neutrality, and complicity. This is followed by an examination of policing, campus security, and participants' experiences of safety, racialization, and state authority during the encampments.

The chapter also considers participants' perspectives on media representation, examining how they perceived mainstream media portrayals of the encampments and whether these portrayals reflected their lived experiences. The final sections examine how participation in the encampments shaped participants' understandings of power, resistance, colonialism, and institutional authority. Participants also reflect upon what they believe the encampments revealed

about Canadian universities and discuss the lessons that institutions should learn regarding student activism, racial justice, academic freedom, and engagement with Palestine solidarity movements.

Throughout the analysis, the findings are interpreted in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters. Additionally, the findings are supported by excerpts from participant interviews. These excerpts provide insight into participants' experiences, perspectives, and reflections while strengthening the credibility of the analysis. Incorporating participants' own words not only strengthens the interpretations presented in this chapter but also centres the lived experiences of those directly involved in the Palestinian solidarity encampments.

4.1 Participant Backgrounds, Political Consciousness, and Motivations

The first set of interview questions explored participants' backgrounds and whether aspects of their identities, communities, or personal experiences influenced how they engaged with political issues on campus. Although participants came from diverse academic, cultural, and personal backgrounds, several common themes emerged throughout the interviews. Rather than describing their participation in the Palestinian solidarity encampments as a spontaneous decision, participants consistently explained that their involvement was shaped by prior experiences, political consciousness, educational backgrounds, and long-standing commitments to social justice.

4.1.1 Identity and Lived Experience

One of the strongest themes to emerge across both universities was the relationship between identity and political engagement. Participants frequently described how their racial, cultural, religious, gendered, and familial experiences shaped their understanding of oppression, colonialism, and justice. For many, solidarity with Palestine was understood as part of broader struggles against inequality and discrimination. For Nihad Hussein, political awareness developed through her experiences growing up in an Arab household where conversations about war and displacement were common. She explained

> *I think that, in general, being Arab means you often grow up feeling politically aware. I'm only in my early twenties, but I grew up with parents who would often reminisce about the war in Lebanon and other ongoing wars, so the idea of war was never something unfamiliar to me. I was taught that all of these struggles are interconnected, whether it's Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, or Black Americans facing violence in the streets of the United States. We're all connected, and we have a responsibility to do what we can.*

Leyla Khaled similarly emphasized the relationship between politics and personal identity, explaining how her lived experiences shaped her understanding of the world:

> *I see politics as inseparable from everyday life, everything is shaped by it in some way. My experiences aren't divided into what is 'political' and what isn't. Politics informs my material conditions, my identity, and how I move through the world. My experiences as an Arab, as a person of colour, as a woman, and as a Muslim, including being visibly Muslim as someone who wears a hijab, all influence how I understand and navigate these spaces.*

Similar connections between identity and political engagement emerged among participants from McGill University. Dania Al Qirnawi described how growing up as a Palestinian-Lebanese woman and becoming involved with the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) during adolescence fundamentally shaped her political identity: *"I started organizing with the Palestinian Youth Movement when I was around 17. It's what I consider my political home, especially in the diaspora, that experience was really formative."* Yara Darwish, whose maternal family is from Lebanon and whose grandmother is Palestinian, similarly connected her political engagement to her family history and religious upbringing: *"Growing up as a Muslim played an important role in shaping my political awareness. Palestine was consistently present in conversations within my family."*

Despite their varied backgrounds, participants demonstrated a consistent pattern of political engagement rooted in personal histories rather than abstract political interests. Factors such as cultural identity, religion, migration, and marginalization influenced their understanding of Palestine and their roles within the encampments. Not every participant connected their political engagement to Arab or Palestinian identity. Grace Miller reflected on how her family's experiences during apartheid in South Africa shaped her understanding of injustice, while Renee Bradford discussed how disability, queerness, and growing up in a second-generation immigrant family informed their broader commitment to social justice. Ajla Zukić reflected on her family's experiences of war and migration from Bosnia while acknowledging that these experiences alone did not fully explain her political beliefs. Despite these differences, participants shared a commitment to justice and collective action.

4.1.2 Previous Political Activism and Organizing

Another prominent theme was participants' involvement in political activism, organizing, and advocacy before the establishment of the encampments in April 2024. Several participants had been involved with Students for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR), one of the principal Palestinian student organizations operating at McGill University. Dania Al Qirnawi explained that her involvement with SPHR eventually led her to become one of the organizers responsible for establishing the 2024 encampment. Similarly, John Bennett described becoming involved in Palestine solidarity activism several years before arriving at McGill: *"I became involved in pro-Palestinian activism while I was still in high school. By the time I arrived at McGill University, I already had some familiarity with activism."* Alexandre Silva similarly highlighted his earlier organizing experience: *"I was part of SPHR at Concordia, and alongside SPHR McGill, we were among the primary organizers of the McGill encampment."*

At the University of Ottawa, Maya Tanaka discussed her involvement with Amnesty International uOttawa and Climate Justice Climatique uOttawa, while Nihad Hussein described volunteering with INSAF[6] throughout her undergraduate studies. Grace Miller also reflected on her advocacy work supporting survivors of sexual violence on campus. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that many participants entered the encampments with established organizing experience and activist networks, rather than becoming politically engaged only after October 2023.

[6] INSAF (*Integrity Not Spite for Falastin*) is a student-led advocacy organization at the University of Ottawa that promotes education, dialogue, and awareness on issues related to Palestine while advocating for Palestinian rights and justice. The organization's name also reflects the Arabic word *insāf* (إنصاف), meaning justice, fairness, or equity.

4.1.3 Motivations for Participating in the Encampments

One of the central questions guiding this research was what motivated students at the University of Ottawa and McGill University to participate in the Palestinian solidarity encampments. Despite differences in participants' academic backgrounds and levels of involvement, several common motivations emerged from the interviews. Their motivations reflected a combination of personal identity, moral responsibility, demands for institutional accountability, connections to activist communities, and the momentum generated by encampments across North America.

4.1.3.1 Identity and Personal Connections

For several participants, their Palestinian, Arab, and broader cultural identities informed their decision to join the encampments, reflecting a personal response to events affecting their communities rather than solely a political commitment. Nihad Hussein explained that her Palestinian identity played a central role in shaping her participation:

> *Being Palestinian definitely played a major role in my involvement. At the same time, many people I knew and communities I was part of were present at the encampments, so that also encouraged me to participate.*

She further reflected that her upbringing instilled a sense of responsibility to act: *"When your people are being killed, it feels like the least you can do is show up and do something."* Dania Al Qirnawi also emphasized her responsibility to centre Palestinian voices within the organizing process: *"Being Palestinian meant taking on a kind of bridging role, and that what was happening on campus stayed grounded in and accountable to the broader community."* Yara Darwish likewise acknowledged that her family's connections to Lebanon and Palestine

influenced how she understood the events unfolding in Gaza. However, she emphasized that her motivation was shaped equally by her position as a McGill student actively involved in organizing efforts:

> *My personal and familial connections to Lebanon and Palestine certainly informed how I understood the situation, but the most significant factor influencing my involvement was my position as a student at McGill.*

For participants with personal or familial ties to Palestine, involvement in the encampments represented not only political activism but also a responsibility toward their communities and a commitment to centring Palestinian perspectives within the movement. For others, moral responsibility was a primary motivation. Ajla Zukić, who did not have direct personal ties to Palestine, described feeling compelled to respond to injustice:

> *"I see my response to what's happening in Palestine ... an attempt to act in a way that aligns with the values I'd hope to uphold in moments of injustice."*

For Leyla Khaled, witnessing the establishment of student encampments across North America reinforced her conviction that she needed to take action:

> *"It wasn't even a second thought for me, it felt like something I had to do."*

John Bennett emphasized a different dimension of responsibility, arguing that his position as a member of the McGill community carried an obligation to address concerns surrounding the university's investments and institutional relationships:

> *"My involvement was less about particular identity and more about feeling that I was in a position where I could contribute and take action."*

Across these interviews, participants consistently described a sense of responsibility to act in response to perceived injustice.

4.1.3.2 Previous Organizing and Activist Networks

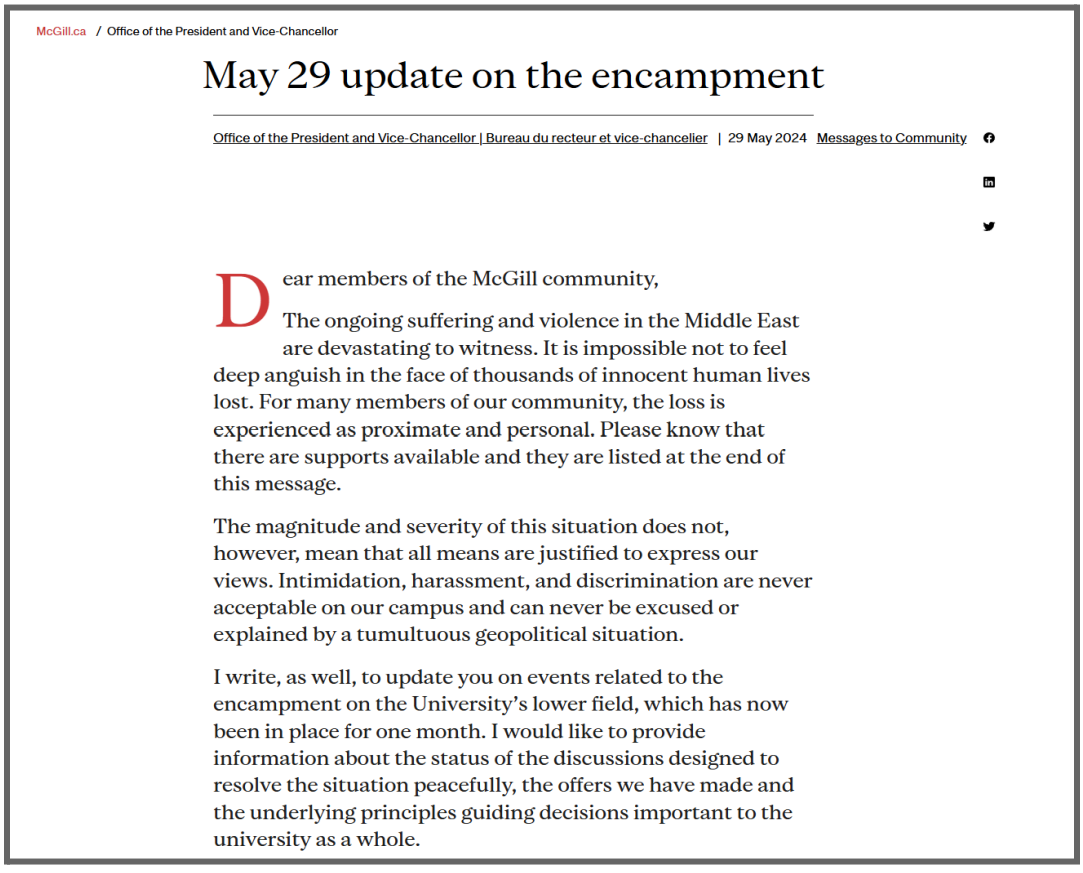
For many participants, joining the encampments represented a continuation of their existing political commitments rather than a new form of engagement. Grace Miller explained that she had been involved in Palestinian solidarity organizing since October 2023 and viewed the encampment as an opportunity to hold the University of Ottawa accountable for its institutional commitments: *"As a student contributing financially to the institution, I felt it was important to hold it accountable for its investments."* Maya Tanaka connected her participation to the relationship between her academic studies in conflict and human rights and her commitment to political action: *"It felt contradictory to learn about these concepts academically without taking action."* At McGill, Alexandre Silva explained that organizers felt a responsibility to respond to growing student demand: *"We felt that establishing an encampment was necessary."*

John Bennett similarly viewed the encampment as an extension of the demonstrations, occupations, and rallies that had taken place throughout the academic year in Montreal: *"Participating in the encampment felt like a natural extension of the organizing work that was already happening."* Beyond their existing political commitments, participants' relationships with friends and activist communities also influenced their decisions to join the encampments. Renee Bradford explained that their social circle played a central role in introducing them to the encampment: *"The biggest factor was my social circle…Many of my friends are involved in pro-Palestinian activism."* Nihad Hussein noted that many members of her own community were already participating, while Maya Tanaka explained that her previous organizing experience encouraged her to join the encampment.

4.2 Institutional Responses and University Authority

During the Palestinian solidarity encampments, the University of Ottawa and McGill University used university-wide emails to communicate with students, faculty, staff, and the broader campus community. Beyond providing official information, these emails reflected how each university asserted its authority, justified administrative decisions, and established boundaries around acceptable political expression. As discussed in the theoretical framework, universities can reproduce existing power relations through governance, institutional discourse, and the regulation of dissent (Henry & Tator, 2009). Examining these communications provides insight into how the universities framed student activism, constructed institutional narratives surrounding the encampments, and how participants interpreted these responses.

Figure 2. Official McGill University email titled May 29 Update on the Encampment, distributed to the university community on May 29, 2024.



McGill.ca / Office of the President and Vice-Chancellor

May 29 update on the encampment

Office of the President and Vice-Chancellor | Bureau du recteur et vice-chancelier | 29 May 2024 Messages to Community

Dear members of the McGill community,

The ongoing suffering and violence in the Middle East are devastating to witness. It is impossible not to feel deep anguish in the face of thousands of innocent human lives lost. For many members of our community, the loss is experienced as proximate and personal. Please know that there are supports available and they are listed at the end of this message.

The magnitude and severity of this situation does not, however, mean that all means are justified to express our views. Intimidation, harassment, and discrimination are never acceptable on our campus and can never be excused or explained by a tumultuous geopolitical situation.

I write, as well, to update you on events related to the encampment on the University's lower field, which has now been in place for one month. I would like to provide information about the status of the discussions designed to resolve the situation peacefully, the offers we have made and the underlying principles guiding decisions important to the university as a whole.

During the interviews, McGill participants were presented with this email and asked to reflect on both its content and the university's broader communications throughout the encampment. The purpose was to examine how students interpreted the administration's messaging and whether these communications influenced their perceptions of the university's response. Later in the email, President and Vice-Chancellor Deep Saini stated:

> Calls for divestment based on geopolitical issues – particularly when there are diverse and strongly held views in our community about those issues – serve to divide, not unite. Experience has taught us that maintaining a neutral institutional stance best supports as a whole our 50,000 members who hold varied political views, represent diverse identities, origins, and beliefs, and ardently espouse various causes. I also believe strongly that McGill must not boycott academic institutions or shut out scholars and students for geopolitical reasons. McGill's mission is to advance knowledge, not to limit it. The free exchange of ideas, of academic engagement is a powerful force for good in the world (2024, paras. 17-18).

These statements directly address two central demands of the encampment: divestment and an academic boycott of Israeli institutions. Rather than engaging with the underlying concerns motivating these demands, the administration rejected divestment as a course of action, raising questions about its claim of institutional neutrality. Many McGill participants interpreted the administration's position as dismissive of the humanitarian concerns that motivated their participation in the encampment. Several participants further argued that the administration's framing minimized Palestinian suffering by portraying their demands as contentious geopolitical

issues rather than responses to what they understood as an ongoing humanitarian crisis and genocide.

Figure 3. Official University of Ottawa email titled *Message to the uOttawa Community on Freedom of Expression,* distributed to the university community on April 28, 2024.



Message to the uOttawa community on freedom of expression

Dear uOttawa community,

We continue to feel the pain and anxiety that many in our University community are experiencing due to the scale of suffering in the Middle East, and we are carefully observing the latest wave of protests that are occurring in the United States and now in Canada. We are hearing that one is planned in front of Tabaret on Monday.

As always, our institution supports and protects the right to peaceful protest as a cornerstone of both our university mission and our democratic life. In fact, our University Senate's Statement on Freedom of Expression in the University Context, dated September 19, 2022, reaffirms the freedom of expression of all members of the University community within the limits set by university policies and regulations, and by the provincial and federal laws that govern us. The statement highlights in clear terms that "protecting freedom of expression in a university setting and academic freedom must be seen in light of the University's fundamental mission, that is to create an inclusive environment for teaching and learning, and for knowledge creation and transfer."

Nevertheless, everyone in our University community has the right to feel safe and respected. We have forcefully and repeatedly affirmed that no incitement to violence or incidents of harassment or hate, including Islamophobia and Antisemitism, will be tolerated on our campuses. These critical responsibilities are institutional priorities, and we will act in accordance with our policies and regulations to ensure the safety and wellbeing of each member of our community.

On April 28, 2024, the University of Ottawa issued an email titled "*Message to the uOttawa Community on Freedom of Expression.*" University of Ottawa participants characterized

the email as deliberately vague, arguing that its wording allowed the administration to avoid taking a clear position or addressing the concerns raised by the encampments. The statement further noted that, "While peaceful protest is permitted in appropriate public spaces on campus according to our policies and regulations, encampments and occupations will not be tolerated" (University of Ottawa, 2024, para. 5). Although both universities adopted restrained language in their communications, their approaches differed in important ways. McGill provided more detailed explanations of its position, while the University of Ottawa offered comparatively limited justification for its decisions. Participants interpreted this approach as an attempt to maintain institutional neutrality, which some believed was influenced by the university's relationships with major donors. The following sections explore participants' perceptions of institutional decision-making, neutrality, and administrative responses during the encampments. Despite differences between the two institutions, participants identified similar concerns regarding administrative authority, institutional neutrality, and the treatment of Palestine-related discussions on campus. Many viewed university administrations as the primary decision-makers and interpreted official communications as attempts to shape public perceptions of the encampments. Participants also questioned claims of institutional neutrality and expressed concerns that discussions surrounding Palestine faced greater scrutiny than other political issues.

Since the interviews for this study were conducted, an investigative report published by *The Breach* has provided additional context regarding the institutional responses to the Palestinian solidarity encampments across Canada. According to the investigation, university emergency managers from numerous Canadian post-secondary institutions, including the University of Ottawa and McGill University, participated in a national communication network through which they allegedly shared information, coordinated responses, and monitored student

activism. The report states that these networks "shared information to surveil and suppress Charter-protected political activity on their campuses" to inform senior university administrators (Thomson & Slater, 2026). The investigation also alleges that some universities employed heightened surveillance measures, including the use of security cameras and facial recognition technology to identify encampment participants. Meanwhile, institutions such as the University of Ottawa reportedly increased security preparations before encampments were established.

Figure 4. Canadian post-secondary institutions identified in *The Breach* investigation as members of a national communication network concerning the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments.



Although this investigation was published after the interviews were completed and was not peer-reviewed, its findings provide additional context for participants' perceptions that university responses were coordinated and extended beyond routine campus administration. The investigation also offers a broader institutional context for participants' accounts of surveillance and the regulation of student activism.

Taken together, participants' accounts suggest that university communications reinforced administrative authority while shaping the boundaries of acceptable political expression. Rather

than viewing these statements as politically neutral, participants interpreted them as attempts to manage dissent and limit engagement with the concerns raised by the encampments. This aligns with Henry and Tator's (2009) argument that universities are not politically neutral spaces but can reproduce existing power relations through their policies and discourse.Participants therefore understood institutional messaging as a means of prioritizing administrative order over the political grievances motivating the protests, illustrating how university discourse can reinforce existing power relations.

4.2.1 Institutional Decision-Making and Authority

Participants consistently identified university administrations as holding primary decision-making authority during the encampments. However, many emphasized that this authority operated within broader political, legal, and financial contexts, creating tensions among university administrations, police, governments, and other external actors. Several participants distinguished between the operational role of campus security and police and the broader decision-making power of university administrations. Nihad Hussein recalled hearing that the University of Ottawa administration had considered requesting police intervention, but that the Ottawa Police Service was reportedly reluctant to intervene:

> *Definitely the administration and campus security. At one point, the administration was reportedly considering asking the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) to dismantle the encampment, but OPS didn't want to deal with it.*

Grace Miller believed uOttawa administration always possessed the capacity to dismantle the encampment but exercised restraint because of potential political and public consequences: *"I did feel that the administration held more power. If they wanted to remove us, they had the*

capacity to do so." Dania Al Qirnawi argued that although police and courts did not always support administrative decisions, the university ultimately retained authority through alternative means: *"Decision-making power very clearly sat with the administration…the administration had the ability to make and enforce decisions on the ground."* Ajla Zukić further emphasized that the administration influenced how the university community perceived the encampments: *"The administration had considerable power not only in terms of decision-making, but also in shaping the perception of the events [encampment]."*

Other participants described institutional authority as more dispersed. Maya Tanaka described campus security, policing, and surveillance as interconnected mechanisms of institutional control: *"Campus security held a significant amount of decision-making power. It became clear that these systems of policing and surveillance were interconnected."* Alexandre Silva and John Bennett similarly described decision-making as distributed among university administrators, municipal officials, provincial governments, police, students, and the broader public: *"Power wasn't centralized but it interacted between institutions and public discourse."* These accounts suggest that although university administrations retained significant authority, their decisions were shaped by competing institutional and political interests.

Although several participants initially described their institutions as silent, further discussion revealed that many viewed this "silence" as an institutional position rather than a lack of engagement. University of Ottawa participants frequently criticized the administration's claims of neutrality. Nihad Hussein recalled that university communications focused primarily on the encampments while avoiding direct discussion of Gaza: *"Most of what we heard from them were neutral emails."* Grace Miller similarly argued that neutrality functioned as a means of

avoiding responsibility: *"There was a strong emphasis on neutrality, which really felt like a way of avoiding accountability."* Leyla Khaleed also observed that the university initially avoided engaging with Gaza before shifting toward communications that portrayed student activism negatively: *"Before the encampments, there was a kind of avoidance or deflection of the issue at hand, and once student action became visible, the response became more assertive of those involved."*

In contrast, McGill participants generally rejected the characterization of institutional silence, arguing that the university's actions demonstrated a clear political position. Dania Al Qirnawi explained: *"I wouldn't describe it as just silence. It felt more like the university took a position… and that didn't feel neutral."* Yara Darwish expressed a similar perspective, arguing that McGill's actions reflected donor influence rather than neutrality: *"I don't think McGill was silent. They intentionally picked a side, and it was clearly not the side of the students."* John Bennett likewise argued that institutional responses reflected a political and financial relationship rather than neutrality. Across both universities, participants challenged institutional claims of neutrality, interpreting administrative responses as political decisions shaped by concerns surrounding reputation, funding, and institutional interests.

These findings align with Henry and Tator's (2009) critique of institutional racism and the perception of universities as impartial spaces of knowledge production. Rather than viewing universities as politically neutral institutions, Henry and Tator argue that higher education institutions are embedded within broader social and political structures that reproduce existing relations of power while often presenting themselves as impartial and committed to principles of fairness and equality. From this perspective, institutional neutrality does not necessarily represent the absence of political engagement but can instead operate as a discourse through which

existing institutional priorities and dominant power relations are maintained. Participants' accounts suggest that participants understood neutrality less as an impartial institutional principle and more as an administrative strategy. Rather than interpreting silence as disengagement from the genocide in Gaza, participants viewed administrative inaction, carefully worded communications, and selective engagement as political choices that shaped how the encampments and broader issues concerning Palestine were addressed on campus. This interpretation aligns with Henry and Tator's (2009) argument that seemingly neutral institutional practices can reproduce inequalities affecting racialized communities. Participants' reflections also align with Maynard's (2017) conceptualization of institutional power as extending beyond law enforcement to administrative structures that regulate behaviour and political participation. From participants' perspectives, institutional silence therefore functioned as a form of governance that regulated political expression while reinforcing administrative authority.

4.2.2 Participants' Perceptions of Official Communications

Participants closely examined official university emails issued throughout the encampments. Across both institutions, participants interpreted these communications as attempts to shape the wider university community's understanding of the encampments. Several University of Ottawa participants criticized the language used in administrative communications. Grace Miller described the emails as *"Cowardly… dismissive… evasive."* Similarly, Maya Tanaka argued: *"The use of neutral language seemed like a way to avoid accountability."* Leyla Khaleed also emphasized that although the emails frequently invoked concerns of safety and respect, they did not engage meaningfully with students' concerns: *"The communication didn't feel like it was written in good faith."* Renee Bradford described the emails as Islamophobic and

inconsistent with the university's stated commitment to dialogue: *"They felt very Islamophobic to me… the administration said they were willing to discuss students' concerns, but their actions didn't really reflect that willingness."*

Participants from McGill raised many of the same concerns. Dania Al Qirnawi argued that the communications attempted to isolate the encampment from the larger student movement: *"Their main function was to shape the public narrative around the encampment in a way that framed it negatively."* Ajla Zukić similarly believed the administration selectively emphasized particular incidents while ignoring the context of months of student organizing: *"The language framed student actions as aggressive or disruptive, without acknowledging the larger context."* John Bennett likewise argued that communications emphasizing safety and antisemitism reinforced a particular narrative surrounding the encampment rather than presenting events comprehensively. Several McGill participants observed shifts in the tone of administrative communications throughout the encampment. Yara Darwish identified differences in the communication strategies of senior administrators, while Alexandre Silva argued that official messaging became increasingly reactive as public scrutiny intensified.

Collectively, participants interpreted administrative communications as efforts to shape public perceptions of the encampments and reinforce institutional legitimacy during a period of heightened political tension. These perceptions can be understood through Said's (1978) analysis of how discourse produces and legitimizes particular representations, challenging the assumption that institutional communications are politically neutral. Participants consistently questioned the universities' claims of neutrality, suggesting that official communications privilege particular interpretations of the encampments while minimizing or excluding the perspectives and demands advanced by student protestors. In this sense, institutional communications functioned not

merely as administrative updates but as mechanisms through which universities shaped public understandings of the encampments.

4.2.3 Academic Freedom and Institutional Discourse

Participants' experiences within classrooms presented a more nuanced picture than their assessments of institutional communications. Rather than describing widespread censorship by individual professors, most participants distinguished between academic freedom within classrooms and broader institutional practices. Classroom experiences varied considerably depending on individual instructors. Renee Bradford noted that many professors were willing to discuss Palestine despite institutional pressures, while Grace Miller observed that some facilitated meaningful conversations whereas others avoided them. Maya Tanaka explained: *"Discussions about Palestine were mostly avoided, and this varied depending on the professor and program."*

Nihad Hussein likewise argued that topics such as Gaza, genocide, and criticism of Israel often became controversial at the administrative level even when individual professors remained open to discussion. Participants at McGill offered similar observations. Alexandre Silva noted that academic freedom allowed many instructors to incorporate discussions of Palestine into their courses but argued that institutional support remained uneven: *"There aren't dedicated courses specifically focused on Gaza or Palestine, whereas there are multiple courses centred on Israel."*

Ajla Zukić distinguished between supportive classroom environments and institutional barriers, noting that restrictions primarily affected Palestine-related events rather than classroom discussions. Similarly, John Bennett observed that institutional restrictions were more apparent in campus programming, guest speakers, and student organizations than in classroom teaching.

Dania Al Qirnawi extended this critique beyond Palestine, suggesting that universities often avoided critical engagement with their own institutional histories and relationships to systems of power: *"Topics that would require institutions to reflect critically on their own histoires… seem less visible in the curriculum."* Moreover, participants distinguished between the relative autonomy afforded to individual instructors and the broader institutional authority that determined which topics, events, and forms of political engagement received support. Across both universities, participants perceived Palestine as a subject that attracted heightened institutional scrutiny, particularly outside formal teaching spaces.

These findings suggest that academic freedom was experienced differently across university spaces. While individual instructors often facilitated critical discussions about Palestine, participants identified greater institutional restrictions on political expression beyond the classroom. This distinction can be considered alongside Wolfe's (2006) analysis of settler colonialism as a structure sustained through institutional arrangements and practices. From this perspective, participants' experiences illustrate how administrative authority can shape the boundaries of political engagement without necessarily imposing direct censorship within classrooms.

4.3 Academic Partnerships and Divestment

A prominent theme emerging from the interviews was participants' concern regarding their universities' continued academic partnerships with Israeli institutions, particularly exchange programs with universities in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Participants from both universities interpreted these partnerships as expressions of broader institutional priorities and political commitments rather than purely academic collaborations. Participants also situated these partnerships within

broader discussions of institutional governance, surveillance, and campus policing, highlighting how they understood these issues as interconnected expressions of university authority.

4.3.1 Academic Partnerships and Boycott Demands

Academic boycotts emerged as an important component of participants' demands, reflecting their opposition to the continuation of institutional partnerships and exchange programs with Israeli universities during the war on Gaza. Nihad Hussein described academic boycotts as equally significant as consumer boycotts: *"Academic boycotts are an important part of activism…Exchange programs don't only involve financial support, they also symbolize a form of institutional endorsement."* Yara Darwish explained that opposition to these partnerships predated the events of October 2023: *"Academic boycotts were a major focus as early as 2014 or 2016…These exchanges are literally developing and exchanging knowledge, ideas, technology, and innovation."*

Participants also questioned the use of academic freedom as a justification for maintaining these partnerships. Grace Miller challenged this reasoning, stating: *"I found it difficult to understand the argument that maintaining these relationships is necessary to preserve academic freedom."* Alexandre Silva noted that campaigns opposing exchange programs had existed long before the encampments themselves: *"Before October 7, one of the central campaigns within the student movement focused on ending exchange programs and institutional partnerships with Israeli universities."*

Participants also questioned whether these exchange programs prioritized educational objectives. Leyla Khaleed discussed the University of Ottawa's Haifa exchange program, arguing that the relocation of certain program activities demonstrated its ability to operate outside Israel.

She also raised concerns about accessibility for Palestinian students: *"The program doesn't actually need to take place in Israel to exist…Would a Palestinian student be able to travel safely to Israel or participate in that program without facing serious barriers or risks?"*

John Bennett similarly questioned the political neutrality of McGill's exchange programs: *"These programs aren't politically neutral…They were seen as reflecting institutional choices about which partnerships are prioritized and funded."* His perspective reinforces participants' broader concerns about the institutional priorities reflected in international academic partnerships.

4.4 Policing, Surveillance, and Experiences of Safety

Participants described surveillance as an ongoing concern that extended beyond the encampments themselves. Nihad Hussein recalled daily monitoring by campus security, which she indicated continued even after the encampments had ended. While University of Ottawa participants primarily described experiences of intimidation, surveillance, and isolated confrontations, McGill participants reported more extensive incidents of police force during demonstrations associated with the encampment. Yara Darwish described how police responded during demonstrations surrounding the occupation of the administration building: *"People were brutalized by the police and severely tear-gassed."* Dania al Qirnawi recalled personally experiencing tear gas while witnessing police chase protestors and strike individuals with batons. John Bennett likewise described what he considered the most violent incident associated with the encampment period: *"The police response was extremely aggressive…officers deploying tear gas canisters, using batons, kicking, pushing, and striking protestors."*

Several McGill participants also described the dismantling of the encampment. Alexandre Silva identified the university's contracted private security company as primarily responsible for removing participants, while John Bennett recalled being physically detained and witnessing another participant sustain injuries during the operation. Although experiences varied between the two universities, participants described surveillance, intimidation, harassment, and the anticipation of police intervention as recurring aspects of life within the encampments. Rather than associating police presence with protection, participants generally perceived it as a potential source of intimidation and violence. Renee Bradford reflected that participation in activism fundamentally altered their perception of policing: "*Since attending protests, it's become clear to me that the police aren't there to keep me safe.*" Grace Miller distinguished between campus security and police, explaining that the latter created greater unease: *"Protected? Not at all...I felt more uneasy around police presence."* Maya Tanaka similarly described riot police as particularly threatening during moments of escalation, while Leyla Khaleed emphasized the lasting effects of police surveillance, describing "*a kind of lasting vigilance*" that extended beyond the encampment. McGill participants expressed comparable concerns. Yara Darwish recalled feeling intimidated rather than protected, while John Bennett characterized policing as a potential threat to participants' safety, These findings can be understood through Vitale's (2017) critique of policing as a mechanism of social control and Maynard's (2017) analysis of state violence and institutional authority. Participants' accounts suggest that police and campus security were not consistently experienced as sources of protection but were frequently associated with surveillance, intimidation, and the regulation of political expression. Although the nature and intensity of these experiences differed between the University of Ottawa and McGill University, the findings illustrate how participants understood

policing as an exercise of institutional power that shaped their ability to engage in collective protest.

Although several participants became accustomed to police presence over time, this familiarity did not necessarily translate into feelings of safety. Dania Al Qirnawi explained that participants gradually became accustomed to seeing the same officers each day: *"The underlying feeling of being surveilled never really went away."* Instead, many participants identified the encampment community as their primary source of safety. Leyla Khaleed emphasized the role of marshals and fellow participants in providing protection through mutual care and de-escalation. Ajla Zukić explained: *"My sense of safety didn't come from the presence of police, but it came from being surrounded by others at the encampment."*

Across both universities, participants distinguished between institutional security and the forms of safety developed within the encampments. While police and campus security were frequently associated with surveillance and intimidation, participants emphasized solidarity, mutual care, and collective support as important sources of protection. These experiences also informed their broader understanding of institutional authority. Participants connected university partnerships, administrative decision-making, and policing to the political and financial priorities that shaped institutional responses to the encampments. Their accounts suggest that the encampments represented not only opposition to the war on Gaza but also challenges to the institutional relationships and governance practices of their universities.

4.5 Racialization and Differential Treatment

Participants from both universities raised concerns about the unequal application of surveillance and security measures during and after the encampments. Several believed that

campus security and university administrations directed particular attention toward organizers and students publicly associated with the movement, suggesting that visibility and leadership roles increased the likelihood of institutional scrutiny. Leyla Khaleed explained that members occupying organizing positions were frequently approached by campus security, contacted directly through their personal phone numbers, and monitored more closely than other participants. She noted that some interactions *"went beyond what would be considered standard protocol"* and created a strong sense of being singled out. Alexandre Silva similarly recalled being followed through campus buildings and observed by security personnel stationed outside meetings, including months after the encampment had ended. He interpreted these actions as attempts to intimidate organizers rather than measures intended solely to maintain campus safety. Dania Al Qirnawi suggested that surveillance often became most visible after the encampment concluded. While overt targeting was not always apparent during the protest itself, she explained that organizers later became the focus of disciplinary action. *"It felt like there was a level of monitoring happening, and that information was then used to decide who to pursue or penalize once the encampment ended."*

Maya Tanaka also recalled campus security documenting participants and attempting to gather information about organizers. These accounts raise questions about how institutional scrutiny was distributed among participants, particularly those whose racial identities, religious backgrounds, or organizing roles made them more visible during the encampments. Although participants reported varying degrees of direct exposure to discriminatory treatment, several identified race, religion, and visibility as factors influencing interactions with police and campus security. Grace Miller reflected on her positionality as a white woman, noting that she could access university buildings without significant difficulty while several Arab and racialized peers

reported experiencing additional questioning or restrictions. She explained: *"I'm conscious of my own positionality as a white woman… I heard from others, especially people of colour, that they experienced more difficulty accessing university buildings during that time."*

Leyla Khaleed described multiple instances where darker-skinned students were questioned while simply walking across campus. She also observed that campus security often interacted differently with racialized organizers than with white faculty members. Maya Tanaka likewise believed that Black students, Muslim women who observed the religious headscarf *(hijab)*, and Arab students were subjected to heightened surveillance and more aggressive treatment during moments of enforcement. Nihad Hussein pointed to broader anti-Arab hostility during the encampment period, recalling racist graffiti reading *"death to all Arabs,"* which reinforced participants' perceptions that anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment extended beyond isolated incidents. These experiences reflect patterns identified in the literature on anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism. As discussed in Chapter 2, Tabbah (2020) argues that the post-9/11 period intensified the racialization of Arabs and Muslims, normalizing heightened suspicion, surveillance, and exclusion. Similarly, Sun and Wu (2015) demonstrate how state institutions have disproportionately targeted Arab and Muslim communities through practices of surveillance and security, while Henry and Tator (2009) argue that racism is often embedded within institutional practices rather than expressed solely through overt acts of discrimination. Participants' accounts suggest that surveillance during the encampments was not understood simply as a response to campus safety concerns but as part of broader patterns of racialized governance in which Arab, Muslim, Palestinian, and other visibly racialized students experienced heightened scrutiny and differential treatment.

Participants from McGill University offered varying perspectives on the extent to which racial discrimination influenced policing and surveillance during the encampments. Alexandre Silva explained that the widespread use of masks during demonstrations made it difficult to determine whether differences in police treatment were attributable specifically to race. Nevertheless, he acknowledged reports from women wearing hijab who believed they were followed more closely by campus security. Dania Al Qirnawi suggested that many racialized students deliberately limited their exposure to police confrontations by participating in educational programming rather than occupying front-line positions. Yara Darwish suggested that Arab and Muslim students experienced targeting through institutional rhetoric as well as concerns about direct police confrontation. She noted that some visibly Muslim students deliberately avoided police encounters, reflecting broader experiences and concerns surrounding surveillance of Muslim communities following September 11, 2001. Although participants differed in their assessments of discriminatory policing, their accounts highlighted concerns about the heightened scrutiny and hostility experienced by racialized students within and beyond university spaces.

4.6 Media Representation and Narrative Contestation

Nearly every participant identified a disconnect between their experiences within the encampments and their portrayal in mainstream news coverage. Participants described the encampments as organized community spaces that combined political activism, educational programming, mutual aid, cultural activities, and collective care.

Ajla Zukić described the encampments as *"a very welcoming and engaging environment,"* explaining that participants gathered not only to protest but also to attend lectures,

film screenings, vigils, artistic programming, and discussions. Leyla Khaleed similarly emphasized the importance of mutual care, shared meals, and religious inclusivity, arguing that these dimensions of encampment life were largely absent from mainstream reporting. Instead, participants argued that media coverage frequently emphasized controversy, disruption, vandalism, or public disorder. Maya Tanaka believed that news outlets portrayed the encampments as disorganized despite the extensive planning, labour, and coordination required to sustain daily operations. Renee Bradford similarly argued that journalists frequently relied on statements from university administrations rather than interviewing students directly, resulting in coverage that privileged institutional perspectives over participants' experiences. However, participants also distinguished between news outlets, acknowledging examples of reporting that they considered balanced and attentive to students' experiences. Grace Miller spoke positively about *The Fulcrum*[7], explaining that its journalists consistently respected participants' anonymity, spent significant time inside the encampment, and sought to understand the movement rather than sensationalize it. At McGill, Alexandre Silva similarly acknowledged that some outlets, including *La Presse*[8], produced balanced reporting that seriously examined the encampment's demands and, in some cases, proved valuable during legal proceedings surrounding injunctions. Participants also described how organizers developed proactive media strategies to influence public narratives surrounding the encampments. Yara Darwish explained that organizers intentionally accepted nearly every interview request because maintaining communication with journalists allowed them to preserve greater control over public messaging. Likewise, John Bennett described media engagement as an ongoing strategic process, explaining

[7] *The Fulcrum* is the University of Ottawa's independent English-language student newspaper. Founded in 1942, it provides coverage of campus news, student politics, local events, and sports through its print publication and official website.

[8] *La Presse* is a major French-language news outlet based in Montreal, Québec. It is one of the most established news organizations in Canada.

that organizers continuously monitored news coverage and adapted their communication strategies to ensure that the movement's demands remained central to public discussion. Despite these efforts, many participants ultimately felt that mainstream media misrepresented the encampments. Dania Al Qirnawi observed that early reporting often focused on the encampment's demands but gradually shifted toward questioning protesters' continued presence on campus. She interpreted this change as portraying participants as unreasonable while minimizing the political concerns that motivated their activism. Yara Darwish recalled moments when organizers were portrayed as threats to national security and described media narratives that employed racist and xenophobic language toward participants. Nihad Hussein similarly recalled hostile online comments telling participants to "go back where they came from," which she understood as reflecting the stigmatization of student organizers within broader public discourse. These findings suggest that media representation became an important arena in which competing interpretations of the encampments were negotiated.

These findings suggest that media representation became an important arena in which competing interpretations of the encampments were negotiated. Participants identified a disconnect between their lived experiences and mainstream news narratives, particularly in reporting that prioritized institutional perspectives while overlooking the movement's educational initiatives, mutual aid efforts, and political demands. These observations can be understood through Fanon's (1959) analysis of colonial power, particularly the role of representation in shaping public perceptions of resistance. Rather than accepting these portrayals, participants described actively engaging with journalists, monitoring news coverage, and developing communication strategies to maintain public attention on their demands. Their accounts demonstrate how media engagement became an extension of collective resistance,

allowing organizers to challenge dominant narratives and assert greater control over the public representation of their movement.

The findings also align with Menocal's (2016) understanding of social movements as collective responses to inequality that seek to challenge existing power structures, while Polletta and Jasper (2001) emphasize that social movements construct shared identities and narratives through collective action. Viewed through these theoretical perspectives, media representation emerged not simply as a reflection of the encampments but as an important arena in which institutional authority was challenged and competing narratives of resistance were negotiated.

4.7 Power, Resistance, and the Role of Universities

Looking back on their experiences, participants described how the encampments reshaped their understandings of power, resistance, institutional authority, and the role of universities. Across both the University of Ottawa and McGill University, participants viewed the encampments as more than temporary demonstrations, emphasizing their significance as experiences of political education, collective organizing, and sustained resistance. Although universities retained considerable institutional authority, participants increasingly recognized the capacity of collective action to challenge established power structures and influence institutional responses. For Leyla Khaleed, participation fundamentally changed how she understood institutional authority:

> *It really shifted how I understand power, resistance and institutional authority. More than anything, it was empowering. It showed me that power isn't only something held by institutions, it also exists in collective action. When people organize, build community,*

> *and act together with a shared purpose, that creates a different kind of power, one that institutions can't easily ignore.*

Grace Miller emphasized the importance of collective organization, describing the encampment as a relatively inclusive and transparent space rather than one defined by hierarchical leadership: *"For me, that represents the core of resistance…I felt that the encampment was well-managed, transparent, and relatively inclusive. It didn't feel hierarchical or controlling."* Participants also understood the strength of institutional responses as evidence that collective resistance could exert meaningful pressure on university administrations. As Leyla Khaleed further explained: *"The fact that the encampment generated such a strong response from the university made it clear that collective resistance does matter."* Participants from McGill University also emphasized the importance of understanding the encampments within a broader, long-term movement for Palestinian solidarity. Dania Al Qirnawi explained that the encampment itself should never be understood as the objective: *"I think one of the biggest realizations was that the encampment itself was just a tactic, it wasn't the end goal…the real question isn't how long you can sustain something like that, but what comes after."* Rather than measuring success solely through immediate institutional concessions, she described resistance as an ongoing process:

> *It pushed me to think about resistance in a more long-term and layered way. It's not just about confrontation with institutions…it's about building something that can outlast those moments and continue to grow despite its limitations.*

John Bennett extended this perspective by situating the encampment within years of political education, relationship-building, and sustained organizing:

> *The encampment was the product of years of organizing, relationship-building, political education, and campaigning…The encampment was simply one tactic within a larger*

> *movement. Meaningful change requires sustained organizing…and the ability to apply pressure over time.*

Participants also reflected on how their experiences exposed tensions between universities' stated commitments and their administrative practices. Several described becoming increasingly skeptical of universities' public commitments to inclusion, academic freedom, and student engagement. Ajla Zukić reflected on how participation made her more conscious of the extent of administrative authority and the potential disconnect between institutional priorities and student well-being:

> *Participating in the encampments made me more aware of how significant that power is, and where the administration's priorities lie, particularly that they do not necessarily align with students or their well-being.*

Renee Bradford connected these concerns to policing, arguing that institutions could contribute to maintaining systems they regarded as harmful: *"Being involved in activism has reinforced my belief that policing can be harmful and that many institutions participate in maintaining those systems."* Maya Tanaka similarly emphasized the difficulty of challenging institutional power, particularly when administrative decisions appeared to prioritize institutional interests: *"These experiences reinforced my understanding of how institutional power operates and how difficult it is to challenge, and it highlighted the extent to which institutions act in their own interests."* Nihad Hussein described the emotional toll of confronting institutional authority:

> *At times I felt discouraged, especially when you're confronting an institution that doesn't seem to support its students…it was exhausting to realize that many people in positions of power simply do not care because it doesn't align with their interests.*

Participants were also asked whether they believed the institutional response would have differed had the encampments centered on another issue. Most believed that Palestine occupied a uniquely political position within university governance. Grace Miller argued: *"If the issue had been environmental or feminist, for example, I don't think it would have been treated in the same way."* Similarly, Maya Tanaka stated: *"Of course, I believe issues related to Palestine are often treated differently and are more likely to be criminalized." For Nihad Hussein, institutional responses reflected broader racialized hierarchies: "When the victims are European, universities respond more readily. As long as the victims aren't Black or Brown, institutions tend to be more comfortable expressing support."*

McGill participants reached similar conclusions. Yara Darwish compared the encampments to previous environmental occupations, explaining: *"The issue of Palestine is so central to everything that McGill stands for and what it represents…definitely, I think the response would have been different."* Alexandre Silva also argued that the events in Palestine are one of the few issues that produce this degree of mobilization within universities. Participants also reflected on what the encampment ultimately revealed about their universities. Across both institutions, many described the experience as exposing a disconnect between universities' stated values and their institutional practices. Leyla Khaleed explained: "*The encampments revealed a significant gap between how the university presents itself and how it actually operates…"* Similarly, Grace Miller concluded: *"Institutional decisions were driven largely by concerns about financial impact, rather than by meaningful engagement with the issues raised by students."*

Participants from McGill University similarly identified contradictions between their institution's stated commitments and its responses to student activism. Alexandre Silva argued:

"A deep contradiction between what universities claim to stand for, values like freedom, academic inquiry, and open debate, and how they actually respond when those principles are exercised in practice." John Bennett echoed these concerns, emphasizing the perceived gap between McGill's publicly promoted values and its treatment of student dissent. Dania Al Qirnawi extended this critique by reflecting on how the encampments clarified the university's institutional priorities and sensitivity to public scrutiny:

> *The encampments really clarified, almost definitively, where the university stands and who it is aligned with…It actively protects certain interests. The encampments also revealed institutional vulnerabilities…how sensitive the university is to public perception, especially media coverage.*

When reflecting on the lessons universities should draw from the encampments, participants emphasized the need for meaningful engagement with students, greater institutional accountability, and consistency between publicly stated commitments and administrative practices. Renee Bradford emphasized: *"Begin genuinely acting on the commitments they make…Universities often speak about reconciliation, colonialism, and racial justice, but those conversations sometimes feel performative."* Similarly, Leyla Khaleed argued: *"Listening would mean taking students' concerns seriously, engaging with their lived experiences, and being willing to act on them in meaningful ways."* Maya Tanaka emphasized the need for universities to recognize the diversity of students' experiences and address specific forms of discrimination, particularly anti-Palestinian racism. Likewise, Nihad Hussein stated that universities should be *"spaces where revolutionary ideas and movements begin."* Yara Darwish summarized her position simply: *"The main lesson is that universities should listen to their students."* Alexandre Silva extended this argument by emphasizing that universities' commitments to social justice and

ethical responsibility should apply consistently to contemporary political issues: *"Social justice can't be selective…If universities see themselves as institutions committed to public good and ethical responsibility, then those commitments have to extend to present-day issues."* Ajla Zukić and John Bennett both challenged the characterization of student activism as a disruption to university life. While Ajla understood activism as an extension of academic engagement, John emphasized its intellectual significance: "Student dissent isn't an abnormal disruption of university life but should be viewed as an important part of intellectual engagement."

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter examined participants' experiences of the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University, highlighting the relationships between student activism, institutional authority, policing, racialization, and media representation. Across both institutions, participants identified tensions between universities' publicly stated commitments and their administrative responses to the encampments. Their accounts also demonstrated how experiences of surveillance, differential treatment, and institutional communication shaped their perceptions of university governance and political expression. At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of collective organizing, mutual support, and sustained resistance in challenging institutional power.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusions of this thesis by synthesizing the key findings in relation to the main research question and four sub-questions. It also addresses the study's limitations, identifies avenues for future research, and concludes with a reflection on the broader implications of the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments for student activism, institutional accountability, and Canadian higher education

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This thesis examined how the University of Ottawa and McGill University responded to the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments and how students experienced and interpreted these institutional responses. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with ten participants, five from each university, the study explored student motivations, lived experiences, institutional communications, policing, media representation, and questions of racialization and political dissent. Although participants differed in their backgrounds, roles, and levels of involvement, their accounts revealed several common themes concerning institutional authority, collective resistance, and the relationship between universities and student activism.

The main research question asked: *How did the University of Ottawa and McGill University respond to the Palestinian solidarity encampments of 2024, and to what extent did institutional responses, media representations, and policing practices reinforce or challenge experiences of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism?* The findings suggest that participants generally interpreted both universities' responses as prioritizing institutional reputation, financial interests, and existing partnerships over meaningful engagement with students' concerns. University communications were frequently perceived as attempts to maintain administrative

authority, regulate dissent, and shape public understandings of the encampments. Participants also questioned the consistency between their institutions' stated commitments to equity, inclusion, academic freedom, and social justice and their responses to Palestine solidarity activism. Experiences of policing and surveillance further shaped these perceptions. Although participants reported different levels of confrontation at the two universities, many associated campus security and police presence with intimidation rather than protection. Several participants also described or identified patterns of heightened scrutiny affecting Arab, Muslim, Black, and other racialized students, particularly those visibly associated with organizing activities. These accounts suggest that institutional responses were experienced not only as matters of campus governance but also through broader dynamics of racialization and unequal treatment. Media representation emerged as another significant concern. Participants frequently argued that mainstream coverage emphasized disruption, confrontation, and institutional perspectives while overlooking the educational programming, mutual aid, and community-building activities that characterized daily life within the encampments. Nevertheless, participants distinguished between different journalistic approaches and described efforts to engage with media outlets to ensure that the movement's demands remained visible. Despite these challenges, participants understood the encampments as important spaces of political education, solidarity, and collective action. Many described their involvement as a continuation of previous activism and reflected on how the experience deepened their understanding of institutional power and the possibilities of organized resistance. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the encampments represented more than temporary protest sites. They became spaces in which students challenged institutional practices, developed political relationships, and reconsidered the responsibilities of universities toward their communities.

5.2 Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of lived experiences, this study has several limitations. First, the relatively small sample of ten participants limits the range of perspectives represented in the findings. While interviewing five students from each university provided opportunities to compare experiences across two institutional settings, their accounts cannot be assumed to represent those of all students involved in the encampments. Furthermore, the study focused specifically on student participants, meaning that the perspectives of faculty members, university administrators, campus security personnel, journalists, and other community members were not directly examined. Including these groups in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships and tensions that shaped institutional responses.

A second limitation concerns the geographical scope of the research. By focusing on the University of Ottawa and McGill University, this study examined two Canadian universities with distinct institutional contexts but did not capture the full diversity of Palestine solidarity encampments across the country. Future comparative research could include institutions such as the University of Toronto, as well as universities in other Canadian cities and French-language institutions. Such studies could provide further insight into how differences in institutional governance, student organizing, and regional political contexts influenced responses to the encampments. Further research could also extend beyond Canada to examine encampments at universities in other countries. Comparative studies involving American institutions, particularly Columbia University, where the Gaza Solidarity Encampment became an influential example for subsequent student mobilizations, could contribute to a broader understanding of how political, legal, and institutional contexts shaped student activism. Examining these movements across

national settings would also help identify both shared experiences and differences in institutional responses, policing practices, and media representation.

5.3 Final Reflections

When I began this thesis, my goal was to better understand how students experienced the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at the University of Ottawa and McGill University and how they interpreted the responses of their respective institutions. Having participated in the University of Ottawa encampment myself, I approached this research with an interest in documenting the perspectives of those directly involved and examining how their experiences related to broader questions of institutional authority, political dissent, and social justice. Throughout the interviews, I encountered participants whose experiences differed in important ways but who also shared concerns about university responses, policing, surveillance, and the treatment of Palestine solidarity activism.

Conducting this research reinforced the importance of centering students' voices in discussions of campus activism. Much of the public attention surrounding the encampments focused on institutional statements, legal proceedings, and media coverage. By contrast, this thesis sought to document how participants understood these events from their own positions within the movement. Their accounts revealed dimensions of the encampments that could not be fully understood through official communications or news reports alone, particularly the relationships, educational activities, and collective practices that sustained participation.

On a personal level, completing this thesis deepened my understanding of the complexities of student activism and the role universities play in shaping the conditions under

which political dissent occurs. It also reinforced the importance of preserving participants' experiences as part of the historical record of the 2024 encampments. Their reflections demonstrate how student movements can challenge institutional authority while creating opportunities for political learning, collective care, and critical engagement with the values universities claim to uphold.

I hope this thesis contributes to scholarship on Palestinian solidarity movements, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, institutional governance, and higher education in Canada. Most importantly, I hope it encourages continued examination of how universities respond to student dissent and how their commitments to academic freedom, equity, and social justice are reflected in institutional practice. Above all, this research seeks to ensure that the experiences and perspectives of students who participated in the 2024 encampments remain part of the broader conversation about the responsibilities of universities within democratic societies.

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APPENDIX A — INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Some of the questions that may be asked will depend on the university the student attends, either the University of Ottawa or McGill University. These questions are subject to change as the research evolves and new themes emerge:

Section 1: Background and Student Context (Warm-Up)

1. To start, could you tell me a bit about yourself and your time at the university?

2. Where are you originally from, or where do you consider home?

3. Are there particular communities or personal experiences that shape how you engage with social issues on campus?

4. Do you feel comfortable sharing whether any aspect of your background influenced your involvement in the encampments?

Section 2: Campus Climate Before the Encampments

5. How would you describe the political or social climate at your university before the encampments began?

6. What motivated you to participate in the encampments?

7. Could you indicate the period during which you participated in the encampments and the length of your involvement?

Section 3: Personal Experiences During the Encampments

8. In what ways did the encampments influence you personally, and how did these experiences shape your broader reflections?

9. In moments of confrontation or tension, who did you feel held decision-making power: the administration, campus security, police, or external actors?

Section 4: Institutional Silence, Communication & Complicity

10. In your view, did the university intentionally remain silent in response to the war on Gaza?

11. How do you interpret the official communications and emails issued by the university during the encampments?[9]

12. Do you find that the university intentionally avoids engaging with particular subjects in classrooms or institutional discourse? If so, which topics are most often silenced?

13. How do you feel about your university's continued student exchange programs with institutions in Tel Aviv, particularly in light of the ongoing violence in Gaza?

14. What do these international partnerships signal to you about the university's political and ethical positions?

Section 5: Policing, Surveillance & Witnessed Violence

15. During the encampments, did you personally witness any form of violence, use of force, or physical confrontation on campus? If yes, could you describe what you saw?

16. Were you aware of incidents involving force, detentions, or aggressive policing through others?

17. Did the presence of police or security make you feel protected, threatened, or something else?

18. Did you notice differences in how racialized students, particularly Arab or Muslim students, were treated during enforcement or moments of tension?

[9] **Note.** Participants from the University of Ottawa and McGill University were presented with the official email issued by their respective university. During each interview, the researcher read the relevant email aloud before inviting participants to reflect on its content. The complete emails' reproduced in Figure 2 and Figure 3 (pp. 71-73).

Section 6: Media Representation and Narrative Control

19. How did external media coverage compare with your lived experience inside the encampments?

20. Did you feel misrepresented, erased, or stigmatized in mainstream media portrayals of the encampments?

Section 7: Resistance and Reflection

21. How has being part of this environment influenced how you reflect on power, resistance, and institutional authority?

22. Do you believe the response to the encampments would have been different if the issue were not Palestine-related? Why or why not?

23. Looking back, what do you believe the encampments revealed about the university as an institution?

Section 8: Closing and Forward-Looking Questions

24. What lessons do you think universities should learn about engaging with student dissent and racial justice?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX B — PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Power, Resistance, And Universities:
The Case of the 2024 Palestinian Solidarity Encampments In Canada

Researcher: Ghadir Salame
Supervisor: Professor Maïka Sondarjee

School of International Development and Global Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to take part in this Master's thesis research study conducted by Ghadir Salame, a graduate researcher in the Master of Arts program in International Development and Globalization at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Professor Maïka Sondarjee. The purpose of this form is to explain what the study is about and what your participation will involve. Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary, and you may decline or withdraw at any time. Please take the time to read the information below and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to move forward.

Purpose of the Study: This study examines how Canadian universities responded to the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments, with a focus on three interconnected themes:

1. Anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism on university campuses, including how racialized students, particularly Arab and Muslim students, experienced institutional responses, administrative pressure, disciplinary measures, and public narrative framing.
2. Media representation and bias, including how news coverage portrayed student activists, Palestinian solidarity, and university decision-making, and how these portrayals shaped public perceptions and campus climate.
3. University policies and practices used to regulate, manage, or suppress student dissent, including protest policies, campus safety protocols, disciplinary procedures, and administrative communication strategies.

Participation: If I, the participant, choose to participate in this study, my participation will consist of taking part in one individual interview with the researcher (Ghadir Salame). The interview will last approximately 60–90 minutes and will take place [online via Zoom / MS Teams / in person, choose one], depending on my preference and availability. With my permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during analysis. If audio recording is not used, the interview may be video-recorded with cameras on, and I will be informed of this in advance. I may request that the recording be paused at any time. Once the

researcher has completed transcribing the interview, I, as the participant, will have the opportunity to review the transcript upon request. If I wish to do so, the transcript will be sent to me by email. I may request that specific sections be omitted from the study. In such cases, the researcher will delete the designated portions of the transcript as requested. After the researcher incorporates the requested edits, the revised transcript will be sent back to me for final review. I will have approximately 14 days to provide any additional feedback or confirm the changes. If no response is received within that period, the researcher will proceed with the study using the revised version of the transcript.

During the interview, I will be asked questions about topics related to:

- My experiences with or observations of the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at Canadian universities;
- My perceptions of university administration responses, including disciplinary actions, communications, and policy enforcement;
- My experiences with or observations of anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian racism on campus, if applicable;
- My views on media portrayals of student activism and how these portrayals shaped campus or public perceptions;
- My perspectives on student rights, academic freedom, and political expression within the university context.

Risks: My participation in this study will involve discussing personal experiences and potentially sensitive topics related to student activism, anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian racism, media portrayal, and interactions with university administration or campus security. Speaking about these experiences may cause me to feel emotionally uncomfortable, distressed, or anxious, particularly if I have encountered discrimination, conflict, surveillance, or disciplinary action. There may also be a minimal social or reputational risk if my identity were to be linked to my participation, especially given the political nature of the encampments. I have been assured that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. These measures include:

- I may refuse to answer any question without explanation.
- I may pause or stop the interview at any time.
- I may withdraw from the study at any point.
- My identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details from transcripts and publications, unless I explicitly request to have my real name used.
- Audio recordings, transcripts, and notes will be stored securely and accessed only by the researcher and supervisor.
- No identifying information will be shared with university administration or any external parties.

- If I experience distress, the researcher will provide information on university and community support resources.

Benefits: By sharing my experiences, I will be contributing to a broader understanding of how Canadian universities respond to political activism, particularly activism related to Palestine. My insights may help highlight issues related to anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, media misrepresentation, and the impacts of institutional policies on student rights and academic freedom.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researcher (Ghadir Salame) that all information I share will remain strictly confidential between the researcher and myself. The data collected will be used solely for the purposes of this Master's thesis and may also be used for future doctoral (PhD) research on this topic, should the researcher choose to pursue it. If I, the participant, choose to remain anonymous, my identity will be protected using pseudonyms and the removal of any personal or contextual details that could reasonably be used to identify me. No identifying information will appear in the thesis or in any future publications unless I explicitly request otherwise. I understand that I have the option to choose whether I wish to remain anonymous or whether I consent to having my real name used in research outputs.

Conservation of Data: The data collected for this study may include audio recordings of interviews, written interview transcripts, researcher notes, and signed consent forms. All electronic data (including audio files and transcripts) will be stored on a password-protected, encrypted drive accessible only to the principal investigator (Ghadir Salame). In accordance with the University of Ottawa's research ethics guidelines, the data will be retained for a period of five (5) years following the completion of the thesis. At the end of the retention period, all digital files will be permanently deleted, and any hard-copy materials will be securely shredded, provided that no doctoral research is pursued on this specific topic. No data will be shared with any third party outside of the research team, including university administration or external institutions.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I am under no obligation to take part, and if I choose to participate, I may withdraw from the study at any time within 30 days after my interview, without providing a reason. If I choose to withdraw within this 30-day period, all data associated with myself, including audio and video recordings, interview transcripts, and researcher notes, will be permanently deleted and will not be used in the study. After the 30-day period, it will no longer be possible to withdraw individual data. My decision to participate or withdraw will not affect my relationship with the University of Ottawa, the researcher, or my access to any university services.

Next steps after the interview: After the interview, which will last approximately 60–90 minutes, upon request, I will receive a copy of my interview transcript. I will have the opportunity to review the transcript to ensure accuracy and comfort with the content. At this stage, I may request clarifications, deletions, or the use of pseudonyms for any part of the transcript. Once I approve the transcript, the data will be used for analysis in the thesis research. If the researcher does not receive feedback within 14 days of the transcript being sent, the transcript will be considered approved and may be used in its original form for analysis.

It is recommended that I (keep/print/save) a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By signing my name below, I agree to participate in this research study:

Participant's name: _____ Date: _____
Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____
Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C — LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Participant	University	Interview Date	Format
Nihad Hussein	University of Ottawa	March 8, 2026	Online at 11:20a.m.
Renee Bradford	University of Ottawa	March 12, 2026	Online at 4:20p.m.
Maya Tanaka	University of Ottawa	March 22, 2026	Online at 2:30p.m.
Grace Miller	University of Ottawa	March 28, 2026	In-Person at 12p.m.
Leyla Khaleed	University of Ottawa	April 6, 2026	Online at 10:40a.m.
Ajla Zukić	McGill University	April 26, 2026	Online at 11a.m.
Alexandre Silva	McGill University	April 29, 2026	Online at 1p.m.
Dania Al Qirnawi	McGill University	May 3, 2026	Online at 11a.m.
John Bennett	McGill University	June 15, 2026	Online at 10a.m.
Yara Darwish	McGill University	June 21, 2026	Online at 1p.m.

APPENDIX D — RECRUITMENT POSTER

uOttawa

THESIS RESEARCH

THE PALESTINIAN ENCAMPMENTS OF SOLIDARITY: ANTI-ARAB RACISM, MEDIA BIAS, AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES IN THE REPRESSION OF STUDENT DISSENT

RESEARCHER - UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
Ghadir S. - Master's Thesis Researcher

WE'RE RECRUITING STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

THIS STUDY INVESTIGATES:

- How universities handled encampments as political and racialized spaces
- How anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism shaped campus climates
- How media narratives influenced public and administrative reactions
- How student dissent was regulated, suppressed, or reframed through policy

METHODOLOGY

Students aged 18 years or older who participated in the Palestinian student encampments at the University of Ottawa or McGill University will be eligible to take part. Participants will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis.

DATA COLLECTION:

One-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting 60–90 minutes, conducted either in person or online. Interviews will be audio / video-recorded only with the participant's permission.



APPENDIX E — ANALYSIS

Theme	Recurring Findings
Participant Backgrounds & Political Consciousness	● Arab / Palestinian identity ● Muslim identity ● Experiences of migration and war ● Family influence ● Previous experiences of discrimination ● Commitment to social justice
Previous Activism	● SPHR involvement ● Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) ● Amnesty International ● Climate Justice activism ● INSAF (uOttawa) ● Previous demonstrations and organizing
Motivations for Participating	● Palestinian identity ● Moral responsibility ● Collective responsibility ● Existing activist networks ● Institutional accountability ● Social circles and friends ● Columbia encampment inspiration
Decision-Making Power	● University administration held primary authority ● Police and campus security enforced decisions ● External political influence ● Power viewed as interconnected rather than centralized
Institutional Silence & Neutrality	● Neutrality viewed as political ● Administrative avoidance ● Protection of institutional interests ● Donor influence
University Communications	● Emails viewed as dismissive ● Lack of meaningful dialogue ● Framing encampments negatively
Academic Freedom & Classroom Experiences	● Experiences varied by professor ● Palestine received heightened scrutiny ● Classroom discussions more open than

	institutional policy
Academic Partnerships & Divestment	● Opposition to exchange programs ● Support for academic boycott ● Financial partnerships criticized ● Research collaborations questioned ● Academic freedom challenged as justification
Institutional Priorities	● Financial interests ● Donor influence ● Research funding
Policing & Surveillance	● Constant surveillance ● Monitoring of organizers ● Police intimidation ● Tear gas and batons (McGill) ● Private security ● Disciplinary investigations after encampments
Safety	● Police not viewed as protective ● Community provided safety ● Marshals and mutual aid ● Vigilance around police presence
Race & Differential Treatment	● Greater scrutiny of Arab students ● Islamophobia ● Anti-Arab racism ● Muslim women observing the religious headscarf targeted ● White privilege acknowledged by some participants ● Unequal access to campus spaces
Media Representation	● Misrepresentation by mainstream media ● Negative framing ● Organizers actively engaged media ● Strategic communications
Power & Resistance	● Collective action creates power

APPENDIX F — TIMELINE OF THE PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY ENCAMPMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA (2024)

Date	Event
April 27, 2024	INSAF and the Palestinian Student Association (PSA) announce plans for a sit-in on Tabaret Lawn.
April 28, 2024	University administration responds to the planned sit-in.
April 29, 2024	The student-led sit-in officially begins on Tabaret Lawn. Protesters present their demands for disclosure and divestment.
April 30, 2024	The sit-in develops into a Palestinian solidarity encampment.
May 1, 2024	Student demonstrations continue as community support increases.
May 2, 2024	The encampment expands to more than 30 tents, with organized first-aid, food, and art stations.
May 3-4, 2024	The encampment continues with educational activities, community gatherings, and growing support.
May 6, 2024	The protest enters its second week, with a Palestine Youth Movement (PYM) demonstration passing through Tabaret Lawn.
May 7, 2024	Negotiations between student organizers and university administration break down.
May 8-11, 2024	Teach-ins, solidarity speeches, and community activities continue.
May 13, 2024	Student organizers meet with university representatives to discuss the encampment and future negotiations.
May 14-15, 2024	Demonstrations continue, and the university discusses a timeline for disclosing its investments.

May 17-18, 2024	The university announces plans to release updated investment information by June 1.
May 19, 2024	Student organizers report developments in negotiations as the encampment completes its third week.
May 26, 2024	The encampment completes its fourth week despite other Ontario university encampments ending.
May 27, 2024	University administration submits its first formal proposal to student organizers.
May 30, 2024	Community demonstrations take place at CANSEC, Parliament Hill, and other Ottawa locations.
June 1, 2024	INSAF and PSA publish an update on negotiations ahead of the university's investment disclosure.
June 4, 2024	The university sends a second proposal to encampment organizers, who publicly oppose it.
June 27, 2024	Encampment organizers hold a press conference addressing stalled negotiations and the university's threatened trespass action.
June 29, 2024	*The Fulcrum* publishes its report on the threatened trespass notice.
July 7, 2024	Protesters erect plywood barricades outside Tabaret Hall.
July 10, 2024	The Palestinian solidarity encampment ends after 71 days.

Note. This timeline was compiled by the author based on reporting published by *The Fulcrum* between April and July 2024. It presents selected developments associated with the Palestinian solidarity encampment at the University of Ottawa. The original news articles are cited in the reference list.

APPENDIX G — PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION OF THE PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY ENCAMPMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA (2024)

Figure G1

Student-created protest sign displaying the phrase "By Any Means Necessary" during the Palestinian solidarity sit-in at the University of Ottawa, April 29, 2024.



Note. Photograph taken by the author on April 29, 2024.

Figure G2

Tabaret Hall at the University of Ottawa, featuring a Palestinian flag and a student-created sign reading "Liberated Zone" during the Palestinian solidarity sit-in.



Note. Photograph taken by the author on April 29, 2024.

Figure G3

Close-up of a Palestinian keffiyeh and a "Land Back" button worn by an attendee during the Palestinian solidarity sit-in at the University of Ottawa.



Note. Photograph taken by the author on April 29, 2024.