

ENTANGLED OTHERS: INTERGROUP CONNECTIVITY IN RACIALIZATION— ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND BEYOND

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Abstract: This article develops a novel framework for conceptualizing othering and racialization by foregrounding an underexamined phenomenon: intergroup connectivity. Using Israel/Palestine as a case study, it examines how the othering and racialization of one group, such as Palestinians, are linked to those of others, including African asylum seekers, faraway Indigenous peoples, migrant workers, and non-European Jewish Israelis. The article introduces a typology of four such intergroup connections: “penal borrowing”, where mechanisms created to penalize one group are later extended to another; “justificatory analogy”, where parallels are drawn between groups to legitimize othering and racialization; “colligation”, the grouping of multiple minoritized groups into a single category; and “conflation”, where one group’s members are targeted after being mistaken for another’s. As such dynamics are not unique to Israel/Palestine, this typology offers a valuable tool for analyzing the interconnected and multi-sited nature of othering and racialization across diverse contexts.

Keywords: racialization; othering; Israel/Palestine; Indigenous peoples; asylum seekers; migrant workers.

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Introduction

“Israel is not a state of all its citizens”, proclaimed Benjamin Netanyahu, the country’s longest-serving prime minister, in 2019. “Israel”, he added, “is the nation-state of the Jewish people—and them alone” (Haaretz Staff 2019). This exclusionary vision of national–racial purity broadly reflects the views of many, if not most, Jewish Israelis. In a 2016 poll, approximately half of Jewish Israeli respondents were in favour of the idea of expelling all Palestinian citizens from the country (Pew Research Center 2016). A more recent poll found that 86 per cent supported the continued “Judaization” of Israel through efforts to reduce the proportion of Muslim and Christian citizens (Zulat 2023). Another survey revealed that about 80 per cent of respondents opposed their daughters being friends with “an Arab boy”, and 50 per cent objected to having “an Arab resident in their building”. When asked for their views about the statement “most Jews, by virtue of being born Jewish, are better than most gentiles”, nearly half either agreed (23 per cent) or only partly disagreed (25 per cent), while an additional 8 per cent said they had no opinion on the matter (Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research 2018). In yet another study, a majority of Jewish high-school students described the country’s Palestinian citizens as “uncivilized” (84 per cent), “unintelligent” (87 per cent), and “dirty” (84 per cent) (Kupermintz et al. 2007). Similar attitudes have been documented in other polls as well (e.g., Ali and Inbar 2011; Channel 2 News Staff 2016; Hexel and Nathanson 2010; Rosner et al. 2022; Valori 2020).

In this article, I argue that such racialization and othering of Palestinians often inform or build upon those of other groups. Among them are African asylum seekers in Israel and Indigenous peoples overseas (both of whom are the focus of my analysis), as well as migrant workers and Jewish Israelis of non-European descent (who are touched upon more briefly). The connections between the othering and racialization of these different groups take multiple forms, four of which are brought to light in this article. I term them “penal borrowing”, “justificatory analogy”, “colligation”, and “conflation”. The article examines how these forms of intergroup connectivity manifest themselves across a range of social sites and sources, including official statements (by ministers, diplomats, and others), popular rhetoric, legislation, custodial institutions, and acts of violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.¹

The following section lays out the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the article by situating my analysis within relevant theoretical debates and geopolitical sites. These include existing work on othering, racialization, and intergroup connectivity, as well as cases beyond the Israel/Palestine setting. This discussion clarifies the article’s distinctive contribution to the literature and highlights its relevance across wide-ranging contexts.

The remainder of the article investigates the four abovementioned types of connections between the racialization and othering of Palestinians and those of other groups. In the first type—“penal borrowing”—legal terminology and carceral mechanisms that were introduced with one minoritized group in mind are later extended to another. I will focus on Israel’s borrowing of modes of penal othering and racialization that were initially directed at Palestinians and were subsequently applied to asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan. Specifically, I will examine the classification of these asylum seekers as both “infiltrators” and “illegal aliens”—two legal categories originally designed for Palestinians—as well as the subjection of these asylum seekers to modes of incarceration first imposed on Palestinians. The second type of intergroup connection—“justificatory analogy”—comprises a range of rhetorical strategies with a common feature: drawing parallels with one minoritized group to justify the othering and racialization of, as well as state violence against, another. I will analyze three recurrent justificatory analogies in Israeli and other Zionist discourses: (a) depictions of African asylum seekers as a national threat analogous to Palestinians; (b) claims that Israel’s rule over Palestinians, much like the colonization of faraway Indigenous peoples, is rightful and necessary; and (c) attempts to legitimize Israel’s oppressive regime of control by likening Jewish Israelis to Indigenous peoples.

Penal borrowing and justificatory analogy share a particular mode of operation. In both of them, the othering and racialization of a certain minoritized group are shaped or justified in reliance on, or by reference to, those of another. As these intergroup connections strengthen, the affected groups may come to be lumped together as a new and broader category—or even mistaken for one another. This is precisely what occurs in the last two types of intergroup connections: “colligation” and “conflation”. In the case of colligation, new state discourses and mechanisms emerge to jointly target minoritized groups that had previously been treated more separately. My analysis of this phenomenon will focus on Israel’s introduction of hostile legislation and arguments that group Palestinians, African asylum seekers, and, in some cases, migrant workers into a single category. As for conflation, this process involves cases in which members of one group are mistaken for those of another—a misidentification that can cost them their lives. The article will examine a range of such instances, including: (a) the lynching of an Eritrean asylum seeker who was mistaken for a Palestinian; (b) arrests, assaults, stabbings, and shootings of non-European Jewish Israelis with a supposedly Arab appearance; and (c) the targeting, arrest, and beating of Jewish citizens of Ethiopian descent who were perceived as non-Jewish asylum seekers.

Before turning to the analysis itself, four clarifications are in order. First, the fourfold typology developed in this article is, inevitably, somewhat crude and

incomplete. Supposedly distinct types of intergroup connections are, in actuality, superimposed and inextricably intertwined. Second, this typology does not constitute an exhaustive or prescriptive list. Rather, the types of intergroup connections highlighted in this article serve as illustrative prototypes. By foregrounding them, my aim is to shine a light on the connections that racialization and othering are able to draw between different minoritized groups, as well as on the material and symbolic effects of these connections. Third, the groups discussed—Palestinians, African asylum seekers, faraway Indigenous peoples, non-European Jewish Israelis, and migrant workers—are racialized and othered in profoundly different ways and for radically different reasons. Nothing in this article is meant to suggest otherwise. Lastly, the article does not seek to offer a comparative analysis of how different groups are racialized and othered. In previous work, I laid bare parallels between Israel's treatment of Palestinian children, the removal of Indigenous children to boarding schools in the US and Canada, Australia's Aboriginal "stolen generations", and China's mass separation of Uyghur children from their parents (Viterbo 2012; 2017; 2021a; 2021b). Additionally, I have examined similarities and connections among Israel, the US, the UK, and Syria in their use—and legitimization—of state violence (Viterbo 2014; 2018a; 2019; 2023). In this article, however, the only parallels and linkages considered are those already present in the Israeli discourses under examination. The aim here is not to compare but, rather, to develop a conceptual framework that throws new light on intergroup connectivity as an important, and previously underexamined, element of both othering and racialization.

Conceptual Foundations: Othering, Racialization, and Intergroup Connections in and Beyond Israel/Palestine

At the heart of this article are three elements: othering, racialization, and intergroup connectivity. Each of them is open to a multitude of definitions, some of which can serve as both a theoretical entry point into the subject as well as a means of clarifying the article's contribution to the literature. Thus, the term "othering" has been helpfully defined by Lister (2004: 101) as:

an ongoing [and] ... dualistic process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' ... [This] line ... is imbued with negative value judgements that construct [the other] ... variously as a source of moral contamination, a threat, an 'undeserving' economic burden, an object of pity or even as an exotic species. It is a process that takes place at different levels and in different fora ... [including] everyday social interactions ... the media, the legal system and policy-making.

As for the concept of “racialization”, Murji & Solomos (2005: 1) describe it as “the processes by which ideas about race are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon”. This includes “the process through which the supposed inferiority of black, colonized, non-white, and non-Western people is construed” (Lentin 2008: xiv–xv; see also Miles 1993). Racialization, like othering, “draws a line around all the members of the group; [it] instigates ‘group-ness’, and ascribes characteristics” (Garner & Selod 2014: 14).

Thus conceptualized, othering can be understood as an aspect of racialization (Jensen 2011: 65), while racialization can also be viewed as a form of othering (Koskinen 2015: 170). Similar thinking is evident in Balibar’s (2007: 83) observation that racism is “articulated around stigmata of otherness”, as well as in Spivak’s (1985: 250, 254) influential description of colonial “othering” as involving the “epistemic violence” by which colonizers constitute the “natives” as their “self-consolidating other[s]”. Given their complementary and partly overlapping meanings, these concepts—othering and racialization—jointly underpin the analysis that follows.

A common feature of both othering and racialization is their tendency to cut across, or bring together, multiple identity categories simultaneously. This occurs in several ways, two of which are known in the literature as “relationality” and “intersectionality”. The former term denotes how each category is defined, construed, utilized, and experienced in relation to its perceived opposite—for example, “White” in relation to “Black” or “colonizer” in relation to “native” (Barraclough 2009; Fanon 1967).² The latter—intersectionality—concerns the various forms of convergence and interaction between identity categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality (Crenshaw 1989).

The focus of this article, however, is neither on relationality nor on intersectionality. Instead, it casts light on a third, and hitherto undertheorized, type of connection between different identity markers: namely, the various ways in which both the othering and racialization of one minoritized group build upon those of others. Such intergroup connections are by no means unique to the Israeli–Palestinian context. Consider, for instance, justificatory analogy—the rhetorical likening of one group to another in an effort to legitimize state violence. In the nineteenth century, British colonizers frequently justified their rules in India and Ireland by drawing parallels between the two colonies (Cook 1992). Penal borrowing—in which a certain group is subjected to penal instruments and terminology that were originally devised for a different group—was another recurring feature of the British Empire. Ireland, in particular, served as a testing ground for policing practices that were later deployed in India, Nigeria, England, and other parts of the Empire (Hillyard 1985; Killingray & Anderson 1992; Williams 2003). In more recent decades, these practices have also been exported

to faraway conflict zones, including some of Britain's former colonies (Ellison & O'Reilly 2008; Kapoor 2013). Similarly, criminal codes introduced by the Empire in India and Australia were subsequently exported across many other territories under British rule (Swanepoel 2019). These examples are not exhaustive, nor are such phenomena confined to the British Empire (see, e.g., Neocleous 2006; Saito 2007; Viterbo 2018a).

Against this backdrop, a growing body of scholarship has called for greater attention to be paid to the “webs of interconnection” (Ballantyne 2002) or “connected histories” (Bright & Geyer 2012; Subrahmanyam 1997) that link different times, places, and populations, including in contexts of racialization, othering, and state violence. The focus of these calls, however, has been on the global circulation and evolution of, as well as interaction between, beliefs, practices, and people. Meanwhile, intergroup connections such as those discussed in this article have remained largely underexamined and undertheorized.

The fourfold typology proposed here—comprising “penal borrowing”, “justificatory analogy”, “colligation”, and “conflation”—seeks to fill this gap. Though developed through the lens of Israel/Palestine, it offers a framework for understanding how the interwoven logics of both racialization and othering often transcend individual group boundaries in other contexts as well. Moving beyond established concepts such as “relationality” and “intersectionality”, it sheds new light on the varied ways in which the othering and racialization of one group are shaped through their entanglements with those of others. By reconceptualizing these processes as drawing upon the perceived similarities, shared stigmas, or interchangeable identities between marginalized groups, this framework opens up important avenues for scholars and activists to engage more fully with the multi-sited and interconnected nature of othering and racialization, both in and beyond the Israeli–Palestinian context.

In previous work (Viterbo 2017), I analyzed a broad array of analogies, drawn in political and legal discourses over the past two centuries, between Israel/Palestine and other settler colonial societies. In addition, I have discussed the connections and cross-influences between Israel's policies toward asylum seekers from Northeast Africa and non-citizen Palestinians (Viterbo 2018b). Building on this work, the following sections flesh out the new conceptual framework of intergroup connectivity in othering and racialization, while investigating its diverse manifestations and effects.

Penal Borrowing: Extending Repressive Tools from One Group to Another

Israel has long cast Palestinians as both a demographic (Kanaaneh 2002; Lustick 2011) and a security (Berda 2011; Kemp 2004) threat. Law's complicity in

entrenching this image is hardly surprising, given law's centrality both to othering (Lister 2004: 101; Stabile 2016: 392–399) and to racialization (Harris 1993; López 2006) in other geopolitical contexts. Among other examples, Israel enacted the Prevention of Infiltration Law in 1954, with the aim of outlawing the return of Palestinian refugees following the 1948 war (Prevention of Infiltration Law (Offenses and Jurisdiction) 1954). At the time, the statute defined “infiltrators” as unlawful entrants who were Palestinian refugees or nationals, residents, or visitors from neighboring countries. However, a 2012 amendment expanded this classification to encompass any non-resident entering Israel's pre-1967 borders unpermitted (Prevention of Infiltration Law (Offenses and Jurisdiction) (Amendment Number 3 and Temporary Order) 2012). As a result of this statutory reform, Eritreans and Sudanese seeking asylum in Israel—currently numbering approximately 20,000 (Population and Immigration Authority 2024: 4)—have, like Palestinians, been labeled as “infiltrators”.

Although this specific legal development has been discussed elsewhere (Viterbo 2018b; Weinblum 2017; Yaron et al. 2013), it needs to be contextualized as exemplifying a broader intergroup connection of othering and racialization, which I refer to as “penal borrowing”. This term, as I have explained, denotes how legal terminology and carceral mechanisms are introduced to deal with one minoritized group but later end up being deployed against another group as well. The legal category of “infiltrators” is not the only one illustrating this trajectory. “Illegal aliens” is another, traditionally designating unauthorized Palestinian entrants but, over time, similarly being commonly used in reference to asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan (Tsurkov 2012: 4–5).

Israel has borrowed not only from its legal classification of Palestinians. The modes of incarceration to which Palestinians have long been subjected, and the facilities in which they have long been confined, have also come to be deployed against African asylum seekers. Following decades of imprisoning Palestinians without charge or trial—a form of incarceration euphemistically called “administrative detention” (Viterbo 2018c: 385–386)—Israel has, since the turn of this century, similarly detained asylum seekers without trial for up to a year. Ktzi'ot Prison, in which Palestinian political prisoners have been confined since the late 1980s, was also used, from 2004 to 2013, to detain asylum seekers (Guthmann and Rozen 2019: 5; Israel Prison Service 2020). The warden of Holot, a detention facility that held more than 13,000 African asylum seekers between 2013 and 2018 (Physicians for Human Rights—Israel et al. 2019: 2), had previously supervised a facility for Palestinian political prisoners in the West Bank (Kubovich 2014).

Israel is hardly alone in criminalizing and securitizing immigration and refugee protection (Huysmans 2006; Stumpf 2006). However, these processes benefit from its particular legal regime, which permits immigration only to Jews and

their relatives, except for limited provisions for non-Jewish labour migration (Kritzman-Amir 2009: 604). Public sentiment mirrors this institutional hostility: according to a global survey, 73 per cent of Israelis oppose immigration to their country—the second-highest rate among the 27 countries surveyed (Connor & Krogstad 2018). Crucially, this hostility appears to be directed primarily at non-Jews, since Jewish incomers are not perceived in Israel as “immigrants” (*mehagrims*) but rather as “ascendants” (*olim*) (Ram 1995: 32–33). For example, one governmental report condemns anyone who treats Ethiopian Jews in the country “as immigrants and not as Jews seeking to fulfil their right to ascend to Israel” (Serphos et al. 2016).

Having modeled much of its incarceration of African asylum seekers on that of Palestinians, Israel has also pursued a reverse course of action, albeit to a much lesser extent. Specifically, the Saharonim detention facility, established in 2007 for asylum seekers from Northeast Africa, later had some of its wings converted to house Palestinians who entered Israel’s pre-1967 borders without a permit (Guthmann & Rozen 2019: 4). In this manner, the penal borrowing has come full circle: Palestinians, whose penalization had largely served as a template for Israel’s treatment of African asylum seekers, have come to be subjected to penal practices that were originally designed for these asylum seekers.

Justificatory Analogy: Drawing Parallels Between Groups to Legitimize State Violence

Justificatory analogy is the rhetorical strategy of legitimizing state violence by likening one group to another. In this section, I analyze three such analogies, which recur in Israeli or other Zionist discourses.

1. Analogizing African Asylum Seekers to Palestinians

Since 2011, Israel has accepted only 0.06 per cent of asylum requests by Eritreans and Sudanese—less than a thousandth of the global recognition rates, which stand at 90 per cent for Eritreans and 60 per cent for Sudanese (Zucker & Avigal 2020). These asylum seekers have been the target of brazen racism. Miri Regev, an Israeli parliamentarian (and later a minister in several governments), has described them as “a cancer in the nation’s body”—a view shared by 52 per cent of Jewish Israelis, according to a poll (Times of Israel Staff 2012). In another poll, two-thirds of Israeli Jewish respondents expressed support for deporting asylum seekers to Africa (Hermann & Yaar 2018). In 2012, seven years before her election to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), May Golan—now serving as Israel’s Minister for Social Equality and Minister for Women’s Empowerment—said at a demonstration against Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers: “I am proud to be a racist!”

Her words were met with shouts of agreement from the crowd: “It’s our right to be racist!” (Ofir 2019). Eli Yishai, while serving as interior minister, warned: “The Jewish state is at risk because of the [African] infiltrators ... The values, the Jewish majority, Jewish identity, and the Zionist enterprise are all being threatened” (quoted in Tsurkov 2012: 20). On another occasion, he added: “In having to choose between being called ‘enlightened and liberal’ but not having a Jewish and Zionist state, and being called ‘unenlightened and racist’ but being a proud citizen, I choose the latter option” (quoted in Weiler-Polak 2012).

However, these racialization and othering of African asylum seekers have been directly connected to those of Palestinians. In particular, the former group has repeatedly been portrayed as a national threat resembling the latter. Among those to have drawn this analogy is the previously mentioned Eli Yishai. During his tenure as interior minister, he described asylum seekers from Africa as a demographic threat so existential as to bring to mind the so-called “War of Independence” (namely, the 1948 war that resulted in the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians). According to Yishai, Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers should have been deported from Israel, in the interest of “maintaining the Jewish identity if we don’t want War of Independence II, and I’m not exaggerating” (quoted in Tsurkov 2012: 20).

Another former interior minister (and currently the minister of foreign affairs), Gideon Sa’ar, drew a similar analogy. Speaking at a 2013 parliamentary debate about one of the amendments to the counter-“infiltration” statute, he called for incarceration to be used as a deterrent to unpermitted entry from Africa. And, in making his case, Sa’ar drew an analogy to Israel’s ongoing battle against unauthorized Palestinian entry from the West Bank and Gaza Strip: “The fence [along the Israel–Egypt border] alone is not enough [to stop African asylum seekers]. There is also a fence within the Land of Israel and illegal Palestinian residents do cross it ... Without ... [detention] facilities ... asylum seekers will [still] come” (quoted in Weinblum 2017: 121). Reinforcing this image of Israel as “a villa in the jungle” of the Middle East and Africa (Yacobi 2016: 104–108), Sa’ar, on another occasion that year, described the country as “the only Western country that has a land border with the African continent”, adding: “If we decide to be the liberal benchmark of the West, with our own hands, we will lose the only Jewish state that exists” (quoted in Weinblum 2019: 705, 707).

2. Analogizing Palestinians to Faraway Indigenous Peoples

Palestinians have been analogized not only to local groups, such as asylum seekers, but also to others overseas. In particular, Zionist figures have repeatedly likened Zionism to anglophone settler colonization and Palestinians to faraway Indigenous peoples, on the assumption that settler colonial violence is

rightful and necessary across these different contexts. One Israeli minister to have drawn this analogy is Miri Regev (quoted earlier in another context). Speaking before the parliamentary Interior and Environmental Affairs Committee (2013: 27–28), she dismissed criticism of the forced transfer and dispossession of Palestinian Bedouins by describing them as no worse than “what the Americans did to the Indians”. For Regev, settler colonizers elsewhere are a role model: since they, too, engaged in dispossession and displacement, there is no reason for Israel not to follow suit. Former prime minister Ariel Sharon similarly told a US official that these faraway settler colonizers had provided Israel with valuable lessons: “We have learned a lot from you Americans, how you moved West” (Ditmars 2013).

Such analogies are by no means new, though their racist iterations have transformed over time. Thus, although some pre-statehood Zionists sought to distance themselves from imperialism (Shenhav 2015: 7), other prominent ones frequently analogized themselves to European settlers in other times and places. David Ben-Gurion (1974: 13–14), who would later become Israel’s first prime minister, vowed in 1915 that Jewish settlers in Palestine would “turn the wasteland and desolation into a flourishing ... oasis, as did the English migrants in North America and the Dutch migrants in South Africa”. Harking back to the “history of American settlement”, he praised the “herculean ... tasks of the colonists who came to find the new Homeland in the New World” and their “fierce ... fights ... with wild nature and wilder redskins, the sacrifices made before they unlocked the continent for mass influx and colonization” (Aruri 1980: 200). Speaking to members of the World Zionist Congress in 1921, Chaim Weizmann, later Israel’s first president, similarly reported that Jews in Palestine, unlike the history of “British dominions”, were making great strides, especially considering “the inevitable percentage of failures which occurs in all colonizing work” (Robinson 2013: 54). And in 1950, prime minister Ben-Gurion urged Jews who visited Israel from the US to consider themselves “on the edge of colonization”, in an enterprise even more difficult than the “conquest of the Wild West” (Robinson 2013: 54).

The analogy between Jewish settlers and European settlers elsewhere is often interwoven with analogies between Palestine’s Arabs and other native peoples. The revisionist Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky (1923) made this abundantly clear:

That the Arabs of the Land of Israel should willingly come to an agreement with us is beyond all hopes ... [There has never been] a country settled with the consent of those born there ... [T]hose “great explorers”, the English, Scots and Dutch who were the first real pioneers of North America were people possessed of a very high ethical standard; people who not only wished to leave the redskins at peace

but could also pity a fly; people who in all sincerity and innocence believed that in those virgin forests and vast plains ample space was available for both the white and red man. But the native resisted both barbarian and civilized settler with the same degree of cruelty ... [The natives] fought the white settlers not out of fear that they might be expropriated, but simply because there has never been an indigenous inhabitant anywhere or at any time who has ever accepted the settlement of others in his country. Any native people ... views their country as their national home ... And so it is for the Arabs. Compromisers in our midst attempt to convince us that the Arabs are some kind of fools who can be tricked by a softened formulation of our goals, or a tribe of money grubbers who will abandon their birth right to Palestine for cultural and economic gains. I flatly reject this assessment of the Palestinian Arabs. Culturally they are 500 years behind us, spiritually they do not have our endurance or our strength of will ... but they understand as well as we what is not good for them. They look upon Palestine with the same instinctive love and true fervor that any Aztec looked upon his Mexico or any Sioux looked upon his prairie.

Not only Zionist Jews themselves, but also their supporters, drew such analogies to justify both Zionist and other settler colonization. In 1937, three years before becoming the UK prime minister, Winston Churchill likened Palestinians to a “dog in the manger”, adding:

I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black [i.e., Aboriginal] people of Australia ... by the fact that ... a higher grade race ... has come in and taken their place (Prasad & Prasad 2003: 283).

In 1946, British Labour MP Richard Crossman, a member of the government-appointed Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry into the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine, used a similarly racist rhetoric:

Zionism after all is merely the attempt by the European Jew to rebuild his national life on the soil of Palestine in much the same way as the American settler developed the West. So the American will give the Jewish settler in Palestine the benefit of the doubt, and regard the Arab as the aboriginal who must go down before the march of progress (Louis 1984: 403).

3. Analogizing Jewish Israelis to Indigenous Peoples

Before Israel's establishment as a state, Chaim Weizmann, who would later become the first Israeli president, emphasized that Jewish settlers were not a "native population" in Palestine. "There is a fundamental difference in quality between Jew and Native", he asserted (Segev 2000: 109, 154). Although Zionists spoke of Palestine as their "ancestral land" and hoped that future Jewish generations would be native to the local landscape (Zerubavel 2008), it was clear in Weizmann's mind that Jewish settlers were non-Indigenous.

But in more recent times, amid pro-Palestinian solidarity campaigns by Indigenous activists overseas (e.g., Krebs & Olwan 2012; Olwan 2015), Israel has increasingly pursued a different rhetorical strategy. Rather than analogizing itself to settlers elsewhere, it has taken to what Native Hawaiian scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui critically calls "redwashing"—analogizing Jewish Israelis to Indigenous peoples in an attempt to mask Israel's settler colonial violence against Palestinians (Toensing 2013). This is a recent incarnation of Israel's longstanding claim that Jews, and they alone, are the land's Indigenous people. In addition, this is a reminder that Zionism has portrayed itself as not only an outpost of Western civilization amid Palestine's natives but also a movement that reproduces some of the logics of non-White decolonialization (Abu El-Haj 2010; Goldberg 2009; Hochberg 2017).

A case in point is the following exchange between a US reporter and Michael Oren, formerly Israel's ambassador to the US and a deputy minister in the prime minister's office (Chotiner 2019):

Oren: I think it is our incontrovertible right as Jews to live anywhere in our ancestral homeland ... Anywhere. And a member of the Sioux nation has a right to live on Sioux nation territory. These are our tribal lands. The cradle of our civilization.

Interviewer: Just to be clear: You were born in New York, correct?

Oren: I was.

Interviewer: So you think that you, as a Jewish person born in New York, have a right to be anywhere in Israel ... Plus the West Bank, plus Gaza.

Oren: Absolutely.

Further, Israeli soldiers in the Golani brigade, possibly alluding to stereotypes of Native Americans as fearless savages, have long referred to themselves not as settlers but as "American Indians" (Becker 2003). In 2016, a soldier was photographed wearing a shirt that depicted a Native American chief and the text: "When ... the Indian hits, every Arab mother shall cry" (Fadel 2016).

Colligation: Merging Groups into a Single Category

As intergroup connections of othering and racialization tighten, the affected groups can end up being colligated or even amalgamated into a broader legal and political category. To an extent, such has been the case with African asylum seekers and Palestinians. At the statutory level, in 2016, Israel introduced an ordinance colligating these two populations, as well as another group of non-Jewish noncitizens: migrant workers. Narrowing down their rights, this piece of legislation requires that if they wish to sue their Israeli employers, they must first deposit a sum of money against the employer's potential litigation costs. This does not detract from other legal domains, in which these groups continue to be separately targeted in very different ways. However, when considered alongside the previous intergroup connections, it demonstrates how the denial of these groups' rights increasingly takes the form of targeting them as a broader statutory group. The Israeli supreme court has dismissed a petition challenging this ordinance and deemed the impact on these non-citizens to be adverse yet "proportionate and reasonable" (*Adalah v Minister of Justice* 2018: ¶ 22).

The mainstream political discourse in Israel has witnessed a similar colligation of these minoritized groups. Eli Yishai, the minister whose remarks about Asylum seekers I quoted earlier, has lumped them together with Palestinians on at least one occasion. Voicing overt Islamophobic³ and anti-black racism, he proclaimed:

The infiltrators, along with the Palestinians, will quickly bring us to the end of the Zionist dream. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, we haven't faced such an imminent threat. We established a state, and now we're losing it daily ... Most of the people coming here [from Eritrea and Sudan] are Muslims who think that this country doesn't belong to us, the white man (quoted in Yerushalmi 2012).

Interestingly, Yishai, the defender of "the white man", is himself the son of North African (Tunisian) immigrants. Moreover, his assertion is factually incorrect: most of the African asylum seekers in question are not Muslim but Christian. Yet this has not prevented others in the Israeli legislature from echoing the same claim. In 2012, for instance, Danny Danon—the deputy Knesset speaker at the time and later Israel's ambassador to the United Nations—portrayed Sudanese and Eritreans as menacing Muslim enemies: "We see that an enemy state is being established in Israel. The state of infiltrators, who come here from Muslim countries" (Tsurkov 2012: 13). Thus, the anti-Black "racialized othering of asylum seekers"—to borrow a phrase from Bailey & Harindranath (2005)—has entailed more than lumping them together with Palestinians. In labeling African Christians as Muslims, and Jews (regardless of their descent) as "the white man",

this discourse has conflated religion with complexion—and vice versa. A range of identity signifiers often used in racism have simultaneously been brought into play, then, including those that are socially associated with biology, religion, culture, and nationality (Balibar 2007; Barker 1981; Blaut 1992). This leads me directly to the fourth and final type of intergroup connection.

Conflation: Mistaking One Group's Members for Another's

As I have shown, the intergroup connections of othering and racialization can become so fortified that the groups concerned end up being lumped together as a broader category. No wonder, then, that they can also become tightly associated with one another in both perception and practice. Such conflation of different racialized groups has been a longtime element of Zionism. Prior to Israel's establishment as a state, for example, some Zionist figures described the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa as mentally and physically degenerate "Arab hybrids" (Nurieli 2015: 273–274). Echoing this sentiment, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations warned in 1952 that the influx of Jewish immigrants from these regions might "lower Israel's cultural level to that of its neighboring countries" (quoted in Noy 2025).

Such intergroup conflation is not always intentional. During the first decades of statehood, Israeli police frequently stopped Jews of Yemenite origin for questioning on account of their dark skin complexion or their white headcloth—features associated with Arabs (Robinson 2013: 42). In more recent years, Jewish citizens and state agents have physically assaulted, stabbed, and even shot Jews with an "Arab appearance" (Ben-Zur 2017; Dearden 2015; Heller 2015; Ifergan 2019; Kol Rega Staff 2021; Middle East Eye Staff 2024). Thus racialized, Jews of non-European descent have been placed in a category between the European Jew, the Black African, and the Palestinian (Yacobi et al. 2020). Given that approximately half of Jewish Israelis support the extrajudicial killing of injured and incapacitated Palestinian attackers—according to polls conducted in 2015 and 2016 (Schaeffer Omer-Man 2016)—being perceived as Palestinian can be a matter of life and death. Even in the US, in 2025, a Jewish man shot two Jewish Israeli tourists he thought were Palestinian (Stub 2025).

It is not only Jews who face this danger. African asylum seekers, too, have been among the fatalities of such intergroup conflation. One such case is the 2015 killing of Eritrean asylum seeker Haftom Zarhum. Shortly after a Palestinian citizen of Israel shot to death a soldier and wounded at least 10 passengers in a bus station, Israeli security guards shot Zarhum, whom they presumed was the Palestinian perpetrator. As Zarhum was lying incapacitated in a pool of his blood, he was kicked by bystanders. The lynching was caught on video, and four of the

perpetrators were subsequently taken to court. Two of them, however, were acquitted, while the other two were given relatively light sentences: community service for one and three months in prison for the other (Noy 2020).

Eritreans and Sudanese who seek asylum in Israel are already at risk of violence, even without being misidentified as Palestinian. Some of them have even had their homes set on fire by Molotov cocktails (Kubovich & Lior 2012). Israeli-born daughters of African asylum seekers have been assaulted and called “dirty niggers” (Goren 2010)—a racist epithet reportedly used by law enforcement officers as well (Schlesinger 2010). It is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that violence has been waged not only against Jewish Israelis perceived to be Palestinian but also against those misidentified as Eritrean or Sudanese. Jews of Ethiopian descent, in particular, have repeatedly been targeted, forcefully arrested, and beaten by fellow Jews who have mistaken them for non-Jewish asylum seekers (Hillel-Mizrachi 2015; Hotline for Refugees and Migrants and Association for Civil Rights in Israel 2015: 22; Shalmor 2014).

Conclusion

The othering and racialization of one minoritized group often draw upon, reinforce, or are otherwise entangled with those of others. But while matters such as intersectionality, relationality, and the transnational circulation of discourses and practices have garnered significant scholarly attention, this form of intergroup connectivity remains underexamined and undertheorized.

Addressing this gap, this article has put forward a novel framework for conceptualizing the interconnected and multi-sited nature of both othering and racialization. Focusing on the case of Palestinians, it has developed a fourfold typology of intergroup connections. The first type—penal borrowing—relates to terminology and mechanisms that were initially created to penalize one group, such as Palestinians, but were later extended to another, such as African asylum seekers. The second type—justificatory analogy—involves rhetorical strategies that invoke one minoritized group to justify the othering and racialization of another. Examples include analogies portraying African asylum seekers as a national threat comparable to Palestinians, justifying Israel’s control over Palestinians by equating it to other settler colonial regimes, or likening Jewish Israelis to Indigenous people entitled to land rights. The third type—colligation—involves the grouping of several minoritized groups into a single category, as seen in Israeli legislation jointly targeting Palestinians, African asylum seekers, and migrant workers. Finally, conflation entails instances in which one group’s members are mistaken for another’s, often with violent consequences. Such incidents include attacks on African asylum seekers or non-European Jewish Israelis who were perceived as Palestinian,

and the targeting of Jewish citizens of Ethiopian descent who were misidentified as non-Jewish asylum seekers.

This analysis offers both conceptual and contextual insights. Conceptually, it provides a new vocabulary for understanding how intergroup connections serve as a mechanism of racialization and othering. Perceived similarities, shared stigmas, interchangeable identities, and other entanglements between minoritized groups play a crucial role in (re)producing racializing and othering violence. Contextually, the article highlights how these dynamics manifest in the specific setting of Israel/Palestine, where they shape the lived experiences of Palestinians and other minoritized groups. While the affected groups differ markedly in their histories and social positions, they are all racialized and othered in connection with one another. Without recognizing and theorizing these intergroup linkages, processes of othering and racialization cannot be properly understood and tackled—whether in Israel/Palestine or beyond.

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Notes

1. The article focuses on relatively high-profile examples identified over the past decade through keyword searches via online search engines and by following references in secondary sources—primarily media reports, human rights publications, and academic studies—related to the five groups under examination: Palestinians, African asylum seekers, faraway Indigenous peoples, migrant workers, and Jewish Israelis of non-European descent. While the conceptual framework proposed here is based on this initial mapping, future empirical research would be valuable for further developing and assessing it.
2. Some scholars have used “relationality” to denote other dynamics: see, e.g., Weheliye (2014) and Goldberg (2015).
3. On Islamophobia as a form of racism, see, e.g., Garner & Selod (2014) and Sayyid (2014).

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