Playing Africans

Kibbutz Educational Performance, 1950s–1990s

Raz Weiner



The Educational Performance of Africa Day

Jewish Zionists in kibbutzim used racial mimicry as part of a routine educational activity throughout the second half of the 20th century.[1] The first documentation of a practice reassembling an Africa Day performance—as it came to be named—dates to 1952. A short article in *Bakibbutz*,

1. As this study relies on primary sources from the 1950s and 1960s, it does not discuss communities of Jews who immigrated from African countries (mainly Ethiopia) or African non-Jewish immigrants or refugees who live in Israel today. These groups did not live in any relevant proximity to the events discussed. Although in the 1950s and 1960s kibbutzim included Mizrahi members from North African countries (mainly Morocco and Tunisia), they did not associate themselves nor were associated with the object of mimicry for Africa Day. On the contrary, Africa Day presented an opportunity for unity and inclusion for the heterogeneous settler society through collective impersonation of an ultimate stranger (i.e., the "African"). However, further research should inquire into the individual experiences of Mizrahi kibbutz members who participated in Africa Day to provide their vital perspective. See Shouach and Ben-Eliezer (2022) for relevant research on the Ethiopian Jews in Israel; Svirsky (2023), Khazzoom (2003, 2005), Lavie (2011), and Shohat (2015) for studies on Mizrahi Jews; and Kemp and Raijman (2008) and Yacobi (2011) for studies on communities of migrants and refugees from African countries in Israel.

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the Kibbutz weekly digest, reports about "children, as well as their teachers and guides turned into wild tribes of blacks, dressed in leaves, seashells, and different plants, their faces painted with cocoa-powder paste and shouting with ample wildness [..., participating in] bonfires, performances, and dancing—as befitting man-eating tribes" (*Bakibbutz* 1952). The latest record that I have of this practice is my own recollection from the 1990s. As one of the children in a kibbutz kindergarten, we were told one day that we were going to observe something special: we were going to visit an African village. In a grove at the kibbutz's outskirts, we met the older children of the elementary school, dressed in straw skirts, building makeshift huts between the trees, dancing, drumming, and singing. Their bodies and faces were painted with charcoal. As children often react to masked actors or clowns, we were mostly frightened by this strange and undecipherable sight. Later, when I questioned my parents about this memory, they showed me photographs of themselves as children, costumed much like the children I remembered. The images triggered a strong emotional response. More than the alarm and embarrassment I have felt, I found these images very strange. People I showed them to did not understand at first what it was they were seeing, finding them difficult to contextualize or explain.

The Africa Day images, memories, and stories left me confused. Aided by Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, I qualify the feeling as disorientating; "oblique" to the orientation of straight lines of identity, history, culture, and geography (Ahmed 2006:35, 38). When uninterpreted, curated in old photo albums alongside other typical kibbutz childhood scenes from hikes, agricultural work, and sport activities, they seem out of place. Understanding Africa Day's significance by reading it anachronistically reveals meanings it carries with it to the present. What impact does it have when encountered today? What are the "conditions of arrival" of the affects it generates (25)? Ahmed proposes a mode of close reading that "examines how different 'figures' get stuck together, and how sticking is dependent on past histories of association that often 'work' through concealment" ([2004] 2014:13). "The emotionality of texts," she says, "is one way of describing how texts are 'moving,' or how they generate effects" (13). I chart some of that stickiness of Africa Day through images and documents in the archive, through stories and rumors, and in the repertoire of kibbutz embodied culture (Taylor 2003). I ask what it is that young performers of Africa Day and their adult kibbutz educators/directors are attempting to assert about themselves and the place and time they live in. I ask, why is it Africa and Africans that they mimic, and what is the role of embodiment, nakedness, and bodypainting within this gesture? I inquire about what the practitioners of Africa Day and their communities are doing in the context of Zionist settler subjectivity formation, and the networks of symbolic and direct violence it sustains.

Stickiness is messy and so is this intervention, not only in terms of theory and methodology, but also regarding the archive I use and how I am placed in relation to it. I reconstruct Africa Day mainly from two texts that were written by two kibbutz educators, Dani Rozolio (1954) and Drora Magal (1959), complemented by images I found in kibbutz archives and my family's photo albums. Rozolio and Magal also happen to have been members of my mother's and father's kibbutzim of origin respectively and were friends and colleagues of my grandparents. I came across their texts in the central archives of the Kibbutz Ha'Meuchad Movement and then again in the local archives

Figure 1. (facing page) Drora Magal (center back) with students in an Africa Day performance at Kibbutz Givat-Haim, circa 1965. (Photo courtesy of Raz Weiner)

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of Givat-Haim and Kabri.[2] While these documents are public, historical, and archived, my engagement with the texts is both motivated and influenced by their biographical proximity to me. I read them against my own personal experience and multiple conversations with my grandparents, parents, and other family and kibbutz members. My own body and subject position, and therefore my analysis, are anything but neatly separate, clinically removed, or at all independent of the legacies of Africa Day or of my own grappling with settler subjectivity.

I am particularly invested in the ways by which the practice of Africa Day utilizes the bodies of kibbutz children as a site for the projection of ideology and racial fantasies. I ask what symbolic, ideological, and affective functions these painted bodies served for the communities who initiated Africa Day and how these were extended to a dramaturgy of communal participatory performance. My reckoning with this ambivalent archive serves to expose the archetypal settler-colonial site of the kibbutz as one in which processes of liberation, appropriation, and racialization take place concomitantly, often overlapping and contradicting one another. As large portions of kibbutz culture and ideology shaped 20th-century Israeli public sphere, discourse, and ideology (Palgi and Reinharz [2011] 2017), the genealogical unpacking of Africa Day informs the ways by which race, and racism operate within contemporary Israeli subject formation and culture production.

This attempt to understand and theorize Africa Day participates in wider scholarly efforts to articulate in order to resist the peculiarities of racism within settler projects at large, and specifically within Zionism. In her work on settler subjectivity and the embrace of violence, Hagar Kotef points out that while much has been written about the dispossessed subject and the state as an agent of oppression, a "theory of the dispossessor" is largely missing (2020:6). Kotef centers the site of the home as a crucial link between the settler self and the settlement project. The home of the settler is for her an "array of connections between exclusion, often violent, and intimacy—an intimacy that always requires exclusion to maintain its parameters [...], yet tends to hide this aspect from the stories it tells about itself" (2020:8). Kibbutz life in the 1950s and 1960s tangibly materialized the intermingling of the collective and the private, the national and the personal—to the point of nearly theatricalizing them. The performance of otherness, mimicry, and fantasy in the kibbutz is therefore necessarily linked to and indicative of the shaping of settler selves and the embrace of certain kinds of violence as part of their identity. Following Kotef, rather than denying colonial violence, settlers tend to see themselves reflected in it, and their subjectivity framed by it. Contrary to mainstream, USA-centered discourse on race and blackface, Africa Day brings to the foreground a performed and context-specific understanding of whiteness, where intimate fantasies of race are practiced as an exclusionary mechanism of indifference; a whiteness that coheres as disregard. These experiments in the DNA of Zionist settler identity performed at the cultural-ideological laboratory of the kibbutz in the mid-20th century are today's monstrous mutations of Israeli ultra-Zionist, messianic, racist, colonial illiberalism. The educators who developed Africa Day and wrote about it would have never imagined such mutations.

Going Native, Becoming Settler

Drora Magal was a kibbutz-born schoolteacher in Givat-Haim. I remember her fondly; she was my father's teacher and one of my grandmother's closest friends. The walls in my grandmother's kibbutz apartment were decorated with several masks Magal brought with her from Asmara, Ethiopia, where she lived in the 1980s while her husband served as a military attaché at the Israeli diplomatic service there. These were most likely the first representations I saw of any African performance culture. I grew up with them, as a photograph featuring my grandmother, mother, and me testifies (fig. 2).

2. The Kibbutz Ha'Meuchad Movement is one of the two major movements under which kibbutzim are organized. Givat-Haim and Kabri both belong to this movement.

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Figure 2. The author in the arms of his mother and in the presence of his grandmother at Kibbutz Givat-Haim, 1985. A mask brought from Ethiopia is integrated in the domestic background of the kibbutz apartment. (Photo courtesy of Raz Weiner)

Ahmed understands whiteness in terms of straight lines of inheritance, as an accumulation that is sometimes activated through such objects that populate the family home and its walls. Echoing my memory of the Africa Day performance, the masks on the walls of my grandmother's apartment came to signify both the strange and the familiar. Rearticulating Edward Said's assertion about the domestication of the Orient, Ahmed notes that orientalism is a sticky process in which "the familiar is 'extended' by differentiating itself from the strange, by making what seems strange 'just about' familiar, or by transforming 'what is strange' into an instrument" (2006:117). The masks Magal brought to my grandmother from Ethiopia naturalized in her small kibbutz apartment, sustaining a relation to Africa that activated a certain quality. Their presence on the wall reassured us of our Zionist whiteness.

More than three decades prior to her stay in Asmara, Magal composed an educational program now filed in the Yad-Tabenkin Archive, a central archive of the kibbutz movement. Problematically, and typical of its time, the pedagogic protocol "The Nations of Nature" (*Amei Hateva*, עמי הטבע)[3] is a detailed syllabus devised for kibbutz elementary-school students in their fourth year (about 10 years old) (Magal 1959:1). The last section of Magal's program is entirely dedicated to Africa and includes an elaborate description of Africa Day performances (fig. 1). The description presents Africa Day as it gradually evolved over two decades, from sporadic outdoor youth activities in the early 1950s. It is during the time when her text was written that Africa Day performances seem to have gained their fullest and most elaborate form, considering the wealth of relevant archival material from these years. Stylistically, the use of present tense in Magal's writing theatricalizes her description, endowing it with an aura of an ethnographic observation, or the objective-yet-engaged authority of a nature film narrator. At the same time, the descriptive register befits a teacher who observes her students and carefully notes their actions for the benefit of other pedagogues who may want to replicate the exercise.

Magal opens by noting:

> Throughout the week preceding [Africa Day], Year Fours erect a range of African dwellings (Sudanese, Pygmies, etc.). African costumes are prepared, as well as weapons and decorations (costumes are also made for the parents). Big drums are constructed. Utensils made of natural resources are gathered (such as hollow pumpkins and bark) and will be used to eat and drink from. (1959:26)[4]

The extensive artful preparations testify to both the significance attached to and the resources allocated for Africa Day performances. Magal's inclusion of specially made costumes for parents in an elementary school activity reveals the importance of this event to the wider community and the

3. A name that seems to be a direct translation from the German *Naturvolk*, i.e., "primitive people."
4. All translations from Hebrew are my own.

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expectation of adult participation. Within the kibbutz educational system that was known as "communal child-rearing" (*Hinuch Meshutaf*, חינוך משותף), kibbutz children lived in houses designated for each age group while parents lived separately, with little to no daily engagement with their children. Actively involving the parents in Africa Day elevated the status of the event in the eyes of the performing children, implying that this activity was perceived by the community as worthy of spending grown-ups' working and/or leisure hours. The lifestyle of communal child-rearing also meant that the children's peer group became an independent entity that was often the subject of scientific research (Lavi 1990:3). Phenomenologically, this type of relation is not unlike the situation of an isolated preindustrial community in the global south under the objectifying colonial gaze of traditional anthropology. Magal herself was one of the first children to be raised in this system and therefore was accustomed to the external gaze that a kibbutz class was often subjected to.[5] With her voice enacting a certain participatory observation that can be read as that of a researcher as well as of a teacher, Magal's Africa Day is an activity in which spectatorship plays an active role.

The subject matter of the activity and the reality of children's life in the kibbutz intertwine as Magal goes on to describe the scenario of Africa Day.

> [the students] rise in the morning, quickly tidy the [communal] house, dress themselves as Africans, apply makeup and decorations, [and] arrive at the African Village.[6] They construct a fence around the village, prepare lunch and dance routines, then parade through the rest of the kibbutz. (1959:26)

The performance then extends beyond the confines of the students' peer group or the domain of a standard geography class as the kibbutz children parade in costumes and makeup and another age group is integrated as a generalized enemy in the exercises of Africa Day. Through these contact points of the performance with the wider kibbutz community it becomes a carnivalesque event that barges into the kibbutz's everyday life. It is a kibbutz ritual.

> Upon the return from the parade, lunch is served, and immediately after, war: After lunch (including bonfire roasted potatoes, whole chickens, and fruit) the village is attacked (by another year group of the kibbutz school, dressed as Indians [Native Americans], Arabs or whatever they feel like). After the battle, a peace ceremony is performed. The enemies dance and sing together. (1959:27)

The conflation of Native Americans with Arabs in the list of potential attackers—the "enemy"—is intriguing. Firstly, it poses an atypical break from the pedagogical aspiration for authentic representation evident in Magal's and Rozolio's texts. By aligning Arabs with "Nations of Nature," Magal's scenario implicitly acknowledges Arabs' indigeneity, a stance that is consistently refuted in Zionist education, politics, and advocacy to this day.[7] Resorting to Ahmed again for clarity, the obliqueness of the practice of Africa Day in relation to the "straight lines" of the Israeli national narrative emerges through the play of colonial scenarios and imageries. Since an opponent entity is required for the simulation of "African" rituals of war and peace-making, "Arabs" here are synonymous

5. The most thoroughly researched element of kibbutz life and its major source of attraction for social scientists was the communal rearing of children and the attempt to dismantle the nuclear family. By 1990, some 1,000 studies were published on this topic in international academic literature (Lavi 1990:3). Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists observed kibbutz children to test norms and assumptions regarding the structure of the family and its influence on children's psychology and behavior (see Rapaport 1958; Spiro 1956; Rábíń 1965; and Bettelheim 2001).
6. The site of the aforementioned African dwellings.
7. A telling example is an October 2016 English-language social media video produced by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Jewish New Year, *Welcome to the Home of the Jewish People*. The video depicts a Jewish-Israeli couple in their home, while different "guests"—Assyrians, Romans, Ottomans—try to take over their living room. After the last British guest leaves (acknowledging that "this is no Europe"), the doorbell rings once more. The new couple at the door are Arabs. While all the previous guests were addressed by name, the couple representing the Palestinians stand nameless and clearly unrelated/not belonging to the house/land. They are *not* native to the land (Marom 2016).

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Figure 3. Kibbtuz children enact a hunting scene at a Yom Africa event in Givat-Haim Meuhad. (Photo courtesy of Raz Weiner)

with "enemy," similar to the portrayal of "Indians" in North American Westerns, of Soviets in movies from the Cold War, or of Muslim Arabs in post-9/11 US American cinema. The interchangeability of the "Indian" with the "Arab" outlines the underlying frontier scenarios at the root of the educational Africa Day activity (Taylor 2003:53–78). The performance of a "faraway people" is a means for a settler's consolidation of self, and through enacting "Africans" kibbutz children learn their role as colonizers.

Photography scholar Dor Guez brought attention to the early 20th-century Zionist trend to be photographed in traditional Arab garments and typical 19th-century Ottoman clothing (Guez 2015). He contends that this performative practice is embedded within the dual orientalist ideology of early Zionism, which sought to "colonize the Orient" but also to identify with it and be immersed within it, i.e., retrace "authentic roots" and "return" to it (2015:19). "Their 'selfies,'" says Guez, "formed an attempt to hasten and materialize their becoming a 'new other'" (19). However, Guez relates the abrupt cessation of this practice to the deadly riots of 1929,[8] after which Palestinians were no longer perceived by Zionists as "friendly" and "harmless" (10). Africa Day poses a subverted surrogation for the same settler impulse, this time at the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba and its mass displacement of Palestinians. As settler-colonial violence reached its horrific climax, the role of an amicable Indigenous object for mimicry had to be removed much further. As the Arab garments of pre-1929 photography studios enlivened for the Zionist immigrants a connection to biblical times, the post-1948 racial mimicry of "nations of nature" enlivened a connection to no less fantastical, and racist, indigeneity. This time, the fantasy was devoid of any Arab-Palestinian markers altogether. Magal's description concludes with the culmination of the performance:

> The African tribe (for which of course they must choose a name) performs its songs and dances and offers fruit to everyone. The parents arrive in the afternoon, dressed as Africans.

8. Known in Zionist historiography as the Tarpat Riots and in Palestinian historiography as the al-Buraq Uprising, the unprecedented mutual violence of the summer of 1929 caused the deaths of 133 Jews and 116 Arabs in British-Mandate Palestine, including brutal killings, rape, maiming, and vandalism (Cohen 2013). Hillel Cohen assigns pivotal importance to the trauma of 1929 in shaping the collective Zionist mindset going forward, whereby "considerations of defense are the highest priority, and those bearing arms are prestigious" (2013:9).

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A hunting dance is performed (some depict the hunters, others the animals [fig. 3]) and a dance is conducted around an ill person (an exorcism), then there is a hospitality ceremony for the guests (featuring a shaman, for whom the children have written a monologue), then a joint dance for hosts and guests [children and parents respectively] and learning a song together. Finally snacks—fruits, sunflower seeds etc. (Magal 1959:27)

Fruit and sunflower seeds were a common type of refreshment in the 1960s kibbutz. While eating here serves as a cooldown from Africa Day, as it often does after a performance (see Schechner [1985] 2000:16–21), it simultaneously remains faithful to its themes by alluding to a generalized diet of hunter-gatherers. This duality suggests another linkage or point of contingency between the fantasy of the performance and the reality of kibbutz life, with its ideology of austerity, fitness, and its direct and literal relationship to land and communality.

Playing Anthropologists

Africa Day as an Orientation in Time and Space

Dani Rozolio was a primary school teacher in Kibbutz Kabri. In an article for the *Kibbutz Educational Review*, he elaborates on the general curricular category of the "Nations of Nature," which, together with "The Blacks in Africa," included subtopics about Native Americans, Indigenous Australians, Inuit, and the Indigenous people of the Arctic regions.[9] These were often dramatized and impersonated in special performances that concluded a period of study, similar to the performance Magal describes, if less grand and elaborate. In outlining the motivations for and objectives of this curriculum, Rozolio's text provides the context—phenomenological assumptions and workings—of the performance and performers. The educational importance of learning about "Nations of Nature" according to Rozolio lies in its efficacy as an appropriate introduction to the topic of the "prehistoric man" (1954:57). He argues that since "prehistoric man" might be too distant and abstract for the young students, they should first "be acquainted with the *simple* but *wholesome* cultures, close and known to nature" (57). While "simple" is readily interchangeable here with the equally derogatory "primitive," "wholesome" conjures the perception of kibbutz Zionism as an ongoing process, a work in progress, in need of relevant models and prototypes. A decade later, Magal advises in her text to fellow kibbutz teachers to begin with the topic of "prehistoric man" before the study of the "Nations of Nature" (1959:2). In contrast, the rationale behind her contention is that the initial knowledge of prehistoric man will enable the students to estimate and measure the level of progress of each of the peoples that are explored during the full period of study. As Rozolio mentions, this epistemology is directly borrowed from traditional Western anthropological discourse of the time and was hardly unique to kibbutz pedagogies, however conspicuous the desire to locate the kibbutz reality on a nature-progress continuum.[10] Whether "prehistoric man" was studied first or last, the category of the "Nations of Nature" afforded kibbutz educators the opportunity to construct narratives of race, progress, and indigeneity.

While Magal's students in Givat-Haim depicted the African village, Rozolio's students in Kabri first embodied the role of explorers. Conforming to the kibbutz pedagogical approach, which privileged experiential over theoretical learning, Rozolio's text describes a voyage from the kibbutz to Africa as an all-encompassing metaphor used to teach this topic to pupils. The playful simulation of a scientific excursion to Africa here bears a symbolic gesture akin to the classic colonial archetype of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) or the extensive accumulation of historical narratives

9. Rozolio uses the denominations *Indianim* (אינדיאנים; Indians) for Native Americans and *Eskimoim* (אסקימואים; Eskimos) for Inuit.

10. The one source referenced by Rozolio is James George Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law*, published 1919. As one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology, the Scottish social anthropologist is known for his evolutionist view of "human belief," which, according to him, originated in primitive magic, replaced by religion, and in turn by science. Frazer's book is a comparative lexical study of decontextualized practices from around the world, structured according to the chronology of the Old Testament.

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and texts of "going native" that inspired Conrad (Huhndorf 2001; Lindqvist 2014). This imaginary temporal and spatial voyage of Africa Day is multifaceted: what commences as role-playing Western explorers culminates in the impersonation of Africans in the kibbutz's avocado or banana orchards. The journey through space is simultaneously a journey in time, from the contemporary revolutionary kibbutz through the liminal yet accessible strata of "Nations of Nature" to that of "prehistoric man." Magal's version reverses this logic: her journey begins with the physical qualities of the geological and biological earth (land), moves to "prehistoric man," and concludes with "Nations of Nature," the concrete reality of kibbutz children being the final destination. Both versions eventually sustain a connection, a route from the modern kibbutz to nature (as well as a root in nature) in which "primitive" societies are the missing link. In this way, the kibbutz becomes a part of an extended perception of the natural world, *through* the "Nations of Nature" and *with* them. The performance utilizes the common Western conflation of indigeneity with the primal, where indigeneity is understood not just as a legitimately inherited right to land, but as implying a coherent and uninterrupted connection to nature, of being *part* of the land. As they accumulate through years of performing children, these scenarios construct a utopian cosmology of indigeneity for kibbutz settlers, responding to what the well-theorized literature of settler colonialism deems an irresolvable anxiety (Wolfe 2006; Veracini 2015).

Simultaneously, the play of a scientific excursion offers a symbolic transition from the position of the Jew as an object of the Christian-European, scientific, historiographic, and anthropological gaze to a universalist humanist subject who possesses and reproduces the knowledge of an Other in the service of her own world-making. The special connection of Jews to the social sciences and specifically to anthropology is discussed in depth by historian Amos Morris-Reich in *The Quest for Jewish Assimilation in Modern Social Science* (2008). Morris-Reich examines ways two founding fathers of modern American social science, Franz Boas and Georg Simmel, were guided and motivated professionally by their Jewish identity and experience of anti-Semitism. He demonstrates how their influence on the presuppositions that sustain a given form of inquiry, that is, sociology or anthropology, reconstituted the "representation of the Jews and the [field's] understanding of their future" (2008:2). Similarly, in her study of world's fairs and cultural expositions, performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes how Jews were historically "constituted as a subject by scholars, curators, and collectors [...] and how scientific and popular displays were implicated in the fight against religious intolerance, racism, and other forms of xenophobia" (1998:5). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett shows how 19th-century world expos served as a ground for reclaiming an "agency of display," where Jews refused to exhibit themselves in live ethnographic shows, and resisted "being paraded as dime museum freak[s]" (1998:6). Alternatively, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett found, Jewish ethnographers who were in managerial positions in museums, such as Semitic studies expert Cyrus Adler, deliberately worked to integrate the category of civilization—and by that route, Jews—into the anthropology department of the United States National Museum (today's Smithsonian Institution) to avoid subjecting Jews to the ways that "primitive" societies were studied and displayed (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:5). Both Morris-Reich and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett highlight a common strategy of resistance to racialization and objectification, in which Jews reposition themselves in the favored end of the primitive-civilized continuum, rather than rejecting the continuum altogether. Like Boas, Simmel, and Adler in their time, by playing anthropologists with their pupils, kibbutz educators positioned themselves on the objectifying side rather than the objectified side, both experientially and symbolically, inevitably risking the racial objectification and dehumanization of others. Their Africa Day adventure story emerges here as an idiosyncratic rite of passage of Jews out of anti-Semitism and into modernity, accumulating more whiteness.

We *Are* Africa

Performing Friendship

The enactment of Africa Day received a special primacy among the several ethnic groups that the "Nations of Nature" syllabus covered. Pedagogic modules about Africa were key priorities in Israeli elementary school education during the 1950s and 1960s. Sociologist Haim Yacobi recounts

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more than 10 different textbooks about Africa that were published in Israel between 1952 and 1973 (2015:69). Yacobi finds that these books mostly depict Africa as a continent of starving people while also highlighting the struggle of African nations against imperialist exploitation. Yacobi quotes a statement from one of these textbooks that is typical of the books' recurring message of Israeli/Jewish and African mutuality: "The Jewish people have suffered throughout the ages from an excess of history and a lack of geography, the exact opposite can be said of the African continent" (in Yacobi 2015:69).

This sentiment echoes throughout Rozolio's description of the imaginary excursion to Africa with his students:

> We climbed up to Kilimanjaro's peak, made our first introduction with the Savannah, with the blacks, [and then] we "met" with the Mau Mau people of Kenya—this, of course, included a friendly conversation over a bonfire in the heart of the jungle where they told us about their struggle for liberation from the burden of foreign rule. (1954:59)

As evident in Rozolio's and Magal's texts, the political affiliation and solidarity with African nations resisting imperial oppression were integral to the syllabus that informed the performances of Africa Day. In the extended section about Africa in Magal's text, she points out that in her own class she concluded the introduction to the topic with references to African contemporary politics and "to the changes African countries were presently undergoing" (1959:22). In contrast, the political situation of Native American communities or Indigenous Australians was not part of the program. Disrupting the performance's time-travel trajectory, Africans are singled out as contemporaries. Significantly, the comparison to other settler societies (such as US American, Canadian, Australian, South African, etc.) is avoided while the (British) imperialist oppression comparison is emphasized.

This special attitude towards Africa in Israeli education of the 1950s and 1960s especially played a part in a general interest of the Israeli government and society of that time. Under the auspices of a national sentiment branded as "friendship with the African peoples" and sympathy with their anti-imperial struggles, the Israeli government undertook well-invested diplomatic gestures towards African countries. These included agricultural and industrial training programs in more than 15 sub-Saharan countries, as well as a continuously growing arms trade (Bar-Yosef 2013:123; Yacobi 2015:25).[11] Africa Day participated creatively in a discourse amplifying a contradictory Janus-faced Israeli position: liberally anticolonial (fighting for independence) as well as neocolonial (financial-military influence in African countries). Golda Meir, Israel's foreign minister at that time and later prime minister, inadvertently expressed this contradiction in her autobiography: "We couldn't offer Africa money or arms but, on the other hand, we were free of the taint of the colonial exploiters because all that we wanted from Africa was friendship" (in Bar-Yosef 2013:124). Kibbutz members who were employed by the government in national projects in different African countries (as was Magal's husband) served as important informants for the performance of Africa Day, often invited to the classroom for a firsthand show-and-tell (Rozolio 1954:58; Magal 1959:22).

Rozolio's insistence on the imaginary encounter of his students with Mau Mau warriors as a "*friendly* conversation over a bonfire" indicates that such encounters might *not* have been friendly. This is hardly surprising given the media coverage of the Mau Mau's fierce struggle against the British in the 1950s. In Rozolio's scenario, the Mau Mau not only accept the children of the kibbutz as their friends, but also reveal their sacred oaths to them, indicating that they officially accept them as political allies.[12] This ideological alignment with the anti-imperial oppressed is compromised by a condescending image of Africans as inherently amicable and childlike, a trope often reproduced in children's Hebrew literature of the period, as in the popular *Little Alikama* (1949) by

11. Yacobi relies on Ronen Bergman (2007) in pointing out that the actual initiators of the Israeli involvement in Africa were in fact security institutions: Mossad, the IDF, and the Ministry of Defence. Their involvement with and service to the American government generated much of the funding for Israel's extensive African philanthropy (2015:25–26).
12. In *Imperial Reckoning* (2005), Caroline Elkins, who recounted the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya, describes these oaths, which were also featured in British media during the 1950s and '60s.

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Miriam Bartov. Children performing Africans "visiting" the kibbutz annually, while reasserting and canonizing prejudices and stereotypes, appears also to have addressed this greater public interest in a fantasized friendship and comradeship with fellow "Indigenous Africans" with whom they imagine sharing a history of imperialist oppression and anticolonial struggle.[13]

Cross-Dress Race to Transgress Race

The Ethnic Drag of Africa Day

The people who invented Africa Day belonged to the first and second generation of mostly Eastern European Jewish settlers in Israel-Palestine, and its performative pedagogic means of racial mimicry emerged immediately after the Shoah, the Holocaust. Alongside postcolonial and settler-colonial analysis, the symbolic and affective functions of Africa Day—particularly its use of body painting—should be considered in terms of modern discourses of race and the racialization of Jewish bodies—and their proximity to and dialectics with blackness and black bodies.

Within the dichotomies of Western race discourse and eugenics, the position of European Jews was continuously contested, especially when it came to their physical features, as famously studied by Sigmund Freud and Edward Said. Both theorized the racial instability of "the Jew" in different ways. Anthropologist Sander Gilman's classic study of anti-Semitic constructions of the Jewish body shows how it was often depicted and imagined as black:

> The consensus of the ethnological literature of the late nineteenth century was that Jews were "black" or, at least, "swarthy": [Jews'] "Blackness" [...] was not only a mark of racial inferiority, but also an indicator of the diseased nature of the Jew [...], being black, being Jewish, being diseased, and being ugly [came] to be inexorably linked [...] indeed, the blackness of the African, like the blackness of the Jew, was believed to mark a pathological change in the skin, the result of congenital syphilis. (Gilman 1991:171)

Gilman also gives several examples of how this scientific discourse was accepted and internalized by Jews themselves. Various scholars have described Zionism as a project of racial recovery, or at least an "improvement," aiming at whitening the Jewish body (Khazzoom 2003; Boyarin 1997; Raz-Krakotzkin 1994). Within the racist reasoning of 19th-century scientific/medical discourse Gilman describes, a process of whitening implies a process of healing. In light of this discourse on Jews' body image, Zionism—and the kibbutz as its machine and icon—is to be understood as attempting a revolution in physiological and phenotypical terms no less than in political, national, or historical ones.

Daniel Boyarin highlights Theodor Herzl's intention that the act of colonialism would Westernize the "exilic body" of the Jew (1997:372). Following the 1903 proposal of Britain's colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain to establish a Jewish colony in East Africa ("The Uganda Scheme"), Herzl expressed his hope to form "a miniature and inverse England" in Uganda, then under British rule. Anthropologist Eitan Bar-Yosef holds that the opportunity to colonize an Africa already colonized was seen by early Zionist leaders as a triumphant solution to Jews' "unstable whiteness" (2013:11).

Body painting as part of the Zionist ethnic drag of Indigenous peoples is evident in Europe as early as the mid-1920s, as seen in 1924 pictures from the summer camps of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement (fig. 4). Hashomer Hatzair was the most left-leaning of the several kibbutz movements. The use of redface in children's performance should be read against the popular German "Ethnic Shows," which exhibited people from German colonies for "anthropological study" (Sieg 2009:125–27). These shows and their like were immensely popular in Europe. They probably inspired Zionist youth camp organizers to imitate them as an outdoor

13. The myth and rhetoric of friendship with Africa were resurrected when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Uganda in June 2016, declaring: "I am excited to have arrived to Africa and Africa is excited about my arrival to it" (Netanyahu 2016).

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Figure 4: Performances of redface in Hashomer Hatzair summer camp, Poland, 1924. (Photo courtesy of the Yad Ya'ari Archive, Giva'at Haviva)



Figure 5: A kibbutz member in "European drag" posing as a colonial visitor to the African village on Africa Day. Photograph from the online archive of kibbutz children culture, created by Einat Amitay (uploaded 2011). (Photo courtesy of Raz Weiner)

activity asserting the normality and health of Jewish youths' bodies and minds. Indeed, in Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim "Indians' Day" developed parallel to "Africa Day."

Ethnic dressing up was featured along with many outdoor sport activities associated with health, virility, and strength. Michael Rogin, who studies blackface Jewish American performers during Hollywood's first decades, contends that blacking up served as a means by which American Jews asserted and consolidated their claim to Americanness. "Through blackface American Jews exposed the contrasting situations of Jews and blacks that allowed Jews to rise above the people whose cause and whose music they made their own" (1998:68). Considering Rogin's analysis of Jews' motivation to perform in blackface and Bar-Yosef's analysis of Zionism's desire to be contrasted with "Africa," coloring the skins of children can be a test of racial whiteness by way of negation. Performing as Africans (or Native Americans) not only emphasized the whiteness of second-generation Eastern European kibbutz members, but also redeemed the historically missed opportunity of Zionists to feature Jewish bodies as unquestionably white when juxtaposed with Africans. Such juxtapositions repeatedly enacted in the photographic archives of Africa Day. One example is a photograph archived online by a collector of kibbutz child culture, showing an adult woman kibbutz member dressed in a colonial straw hat and white shirt posing with a group of costumed children during Africa Day (fig 5).

Rogin writes that what motivated Jews to perform blackface was their desire to assimilate into American society as equals. Blacking up was perceived as partaking in an American practice denigrating blacks in order to be regarded as Americans by those who were "already white."[14] Beyond

14. Rogin cites James Baldwin's *On Being White...and Other Lies* (1984). Baldwin: "No one was white before he/she came to America. [...] Jews came here from countries where they were not white, and they came here in part because they were not white" (Baldwin 1984:178; in Rogin 1998:13).

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an internalized racializing gaze, it's difficult to justify Africa Day as a means of assimilation and acceptance as white among Jews in the kibbutz given that, for Ashkenazi kibbutz members, the kibbutz (like the Israeli state) was not a white establishment. This gap emphasizes the wider question of reception. Who was Africa Day for; who was its audience? Family members, interested kibbutz members, and kindergarten children, such as myself, were invited to watch Africa Day and to partake in it. The racial, ideological, and political validation sought through Africa Day was performed by the kibbutz community for itself. It represents an oblique moment of a community dressing-up, indeed dragging-up, in front of a mirror, or rather projected on the bodies of its children who were regarded as the kibbutz's most valuable product.

Africa Day's accumulation of whiteness is different from the Jewish American minstrel performers in other ways, marking a critical specificity of racial colonial violence and its break from the prevalent US-centered discourse of blackface. Parallel to anti-Semitic texts, early Zionist writings vividly recreated the image of non-Zionist exilic Jews as "pale, weak, sickly and cowardly" (Almog 2000:132). In this context, whiteness as synonymous with Europeanness was often equated in kibbutz ideology with paleness, sickliness, or worse—a bourgeois middle classness. The Zionist-colonial pursuit of "Jewish whiteness" was met with the Soviet-inspired kibbutz socialist cult of labor, the idealization of the proletariat body, the negative image of the overwrought bourgeois body. These two constructions—a Zionist whiteness and a sabra[15] kibbutz physicality—sustained a contradiction.

The kibbutz often saw itself as a utopian, post-European project, creating a new type of human who will surpass the West by inheriting all its rights and correcting all its wrongs. If the binary European versus non-European is indicated by skin color, then what is the skin color of a post-European? For early- to mid-20th-century kibbutz communities who challenged themselves to confront these questions in the most direct empirical ways—very often through their physical bodies—Africa Day performances offered a space that momentarily put racial anxieties into relief. Under the guise of education, kibbutz members opened a space of playful performance where corporeality was foregrounded through nakedness and manipulated through makeup and costume, allowing the illusion that the burdening determinism of one's race can be unmade, however partially, momentarily, and exclusively (for kibbutz members, certainly not for blacks). Along with the ideological and phenomenological functions I explored earlier, painting the skin of kibbutz children and placing them in the liminal space of groves and orchards (part nature, part civilization), Africa Day performances were acts of wishful futurity by means of literal symbolism. They enacted racial fantasies that mirrored a desire for a legitimate claim for a place in, and a connection to, nature entangled with a settler desire for indigeneity, or more accurately, to be a native, if only temporarily by means of performance.

Africa Day has not been performed in kibbutzim for the last 20 years. However, in 2016 a kibbutz relative sent me a video showing children participating in a summer outdoor activity, titled "Brazil Day." The activity was conducted in relation to the opening of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. In the video, kibbutz children are dressed in straw skirts; their youth guide applies dark makeup to their faces. At one point, they are encouraged to run around, hum, and shout. As a third-generation kibbutz member, the guide appeared to be citing markers of the performance repertoire accumulated in the kibbutz's collective memory around generalized notions of "Nations of Nature." The striking resemblance of this semi-spontaneous summer camp activity to the performative devices of Africa Day and the uncritical use of racial mimicry in an educational setting highlights the contemporary relevance of a genealogical study for the understanding of the crossroads of performance, archive, and racism in Israel-Palestine, as in other settler cultures.

Such nostalgia is the time capsule through which specifically Zionist whiteness is accumulated and naturalized. A whiteness that represents not only the violence of racial supremacy, but also the violence of selfish disregard, of living out your idiosyncratic fantasy, projecting it on landscapes

15. A Jew born in Israel.

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and bodies, as a means for not seeing the project of settler-colonial violence, its victims, and your role in it. This is a performed whiteness that can include non-European settler communities. A blinding, actively acquired settler whiteness that persists, while its projected theme may vary and change with time. The fantasy of biblical Hebrews projected by Zionist immigrants in the 1920s on traditional Arab garments is no different from the fantasy of an African village projected on bodies and landscapes of the kibbutzim of socialist Zionism in the 1960s. Both of them activate the same underlying settler mechanisms by which today, ultra-right-wing, messianic Zionist projects are operating and expanding.

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