

INTERSECTIONALITY AND ISRAEL



WHAT IS “INTERSECTIONALITY”?

Intersectionality is a general concept and field of study exploring how different types of oppression interact. It examines how social categorizations such as gender, class, and race overlap in the lives of various people. This includes women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and others who have been marginalized by dominant social constructs like patriarchy and white supremacy. The term, which can be useful for understanding and challenging social injustices, has gained newfound exposure in the past four years, seeing more regular use in the context of political organizing.

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While intersectionality is an important and useful concept to create positive change, the term has been co-opted and abused by anti-Israel activists, especially those associated with the BDS movement. It has become part of their campaign to delegitimize and undermine support for Israel. These activists insist that the Palestinian cause shares the same underpinnings as the struggle for racial justice in America. Campaigns have been launched based on false comparisons, such as “From Ferguson to Palestine.” These efforts omit context, never including the legitimate security concerns of Israelis.

WHERE IS INTERSECTIONALITY USED AGAINST ISRAEL?

Anti-Israel efforts using intersectionality as a theme are prevalent on college campuses. As a technique to recruit others to their cause, groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine have linked domestic issues like criminal justice and LGBTQ rights to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Within this framework, Palestinians are presented as an oppressed people of color, while Israelis are described as dominant and white. This, of course, runs contrary to fact. Israel is a multi-racial society with the majority of its citizens originating in the Middle East, and hundreds of thousands who emigrated from Africa.

Another harmful abuse of the intersectionality concept is the effort to exclude Jews from progressive activist circles. In these cases, Jews are defined as part of the dominant American power structure and automatically linked to the militarily powerful Israel. This is especially troubling because Jews have fully demonstrated that they are natural partners in the struggle for social justice. It is not enough to be merely critical of Israel’s current government and policies, Jews are expected to reject Israel altogether. This misguided litmus test is, itself, discriminatory and has had a damaging impact on efforts to build pro-peace and pro-justice coalitions.

While the intersectionality construct can help understand many types of social injustices, its application to the Israel-Palestinian conflict is a malicious technique intended to delegitimize Israel, alienate Jewish people from the progressive space, and only move us further away from peace and understanding.