

(Illustration by Mohamed Elaasar)



Turcofobia Salvadorena:

Anti-Palestinian Discrimination in El Salvador's Mestizo Nationalist Era, 1929-1944

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Thesis

- This paper argues the development of mestizo-based Salvadoran nationalism, systematically marginalized Palestinian immigrants. Such marginalization manifests in the legal, economic, and social manners in which the community faced discrimination. This process of discrimination unintentionally facilitated the community's integration into Salvadoran society, leading to their near-total assimilation today.
- Gov't records, official publications, oral histories and interviews, *diarios*
- Runs contrary to traditional study of Palestinian historiography
- Expands research on Salvadoran mestizo nationalism



Salvadoran and Palestinian flags



Introduction to Palestinians in El Salvador

- Decline of the Ottoman Empire
 - WWI Poverty
 - Most “turcos palestinos” were economic immigrants seeking wealth
 - Majority from Bethlehem and surrounding area
- Most started as itinerant salesman, selling small religious items from the Holy Land
 - Entrance into middle class
 - Legacy of Spanish colonialism, LATAM was a “feudal” society off large *latifundistas*
 - As LATAM developed, Arabs were able to enter industrial capitalist class
 - Palestinians establishes some of the first textile factories in El Salvador



A Christian family in Bethlehem, Palestine, between 1898 and 1914 (Wikimedia)

Mestizo Nationalism in El Salvador

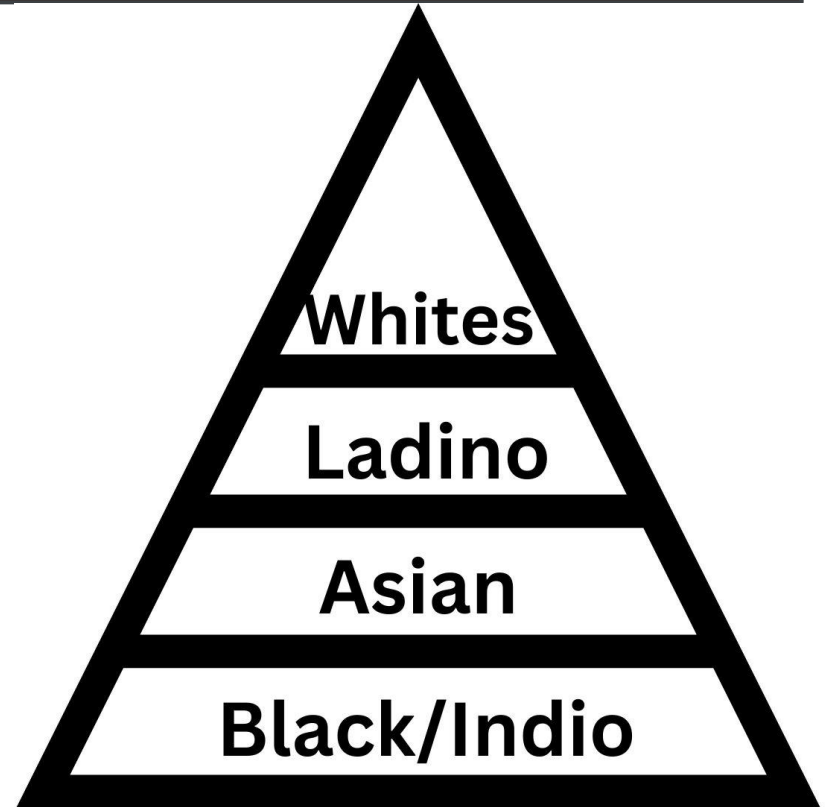
- Social and economic modernization
 - With coffee production and development
 - Development of a proletariat
 - Necessity for a new definition of ‘Salvadoran’
- The ‘national’ project
 - Blur class cleavages by stressing commonality
 - Defined ‘Ins’ and ‘outs’
 - Mestizaje
 - Popular amongst the educated middle and upper classes
 - Modernization
- Mestizo nationalism



“Las castas.” Anonymous, Nacional del Virreinato, Tepetzotlán, Mexico

The Nationalist Era

- Racist component of nationalism
- Open-door immigration (1880s–1920s) aimed to "whiten" population but brought Palestinians.
- 1930s dictator Martínez admired fascist racial policies of Hitler and Mussolini, banned "undesirable" immigrants.
- Social evolutionism, orientalist, and racialist ideas of Western Europe amongst white, criollo, and Ladino elites
 - *La Turcophobia*



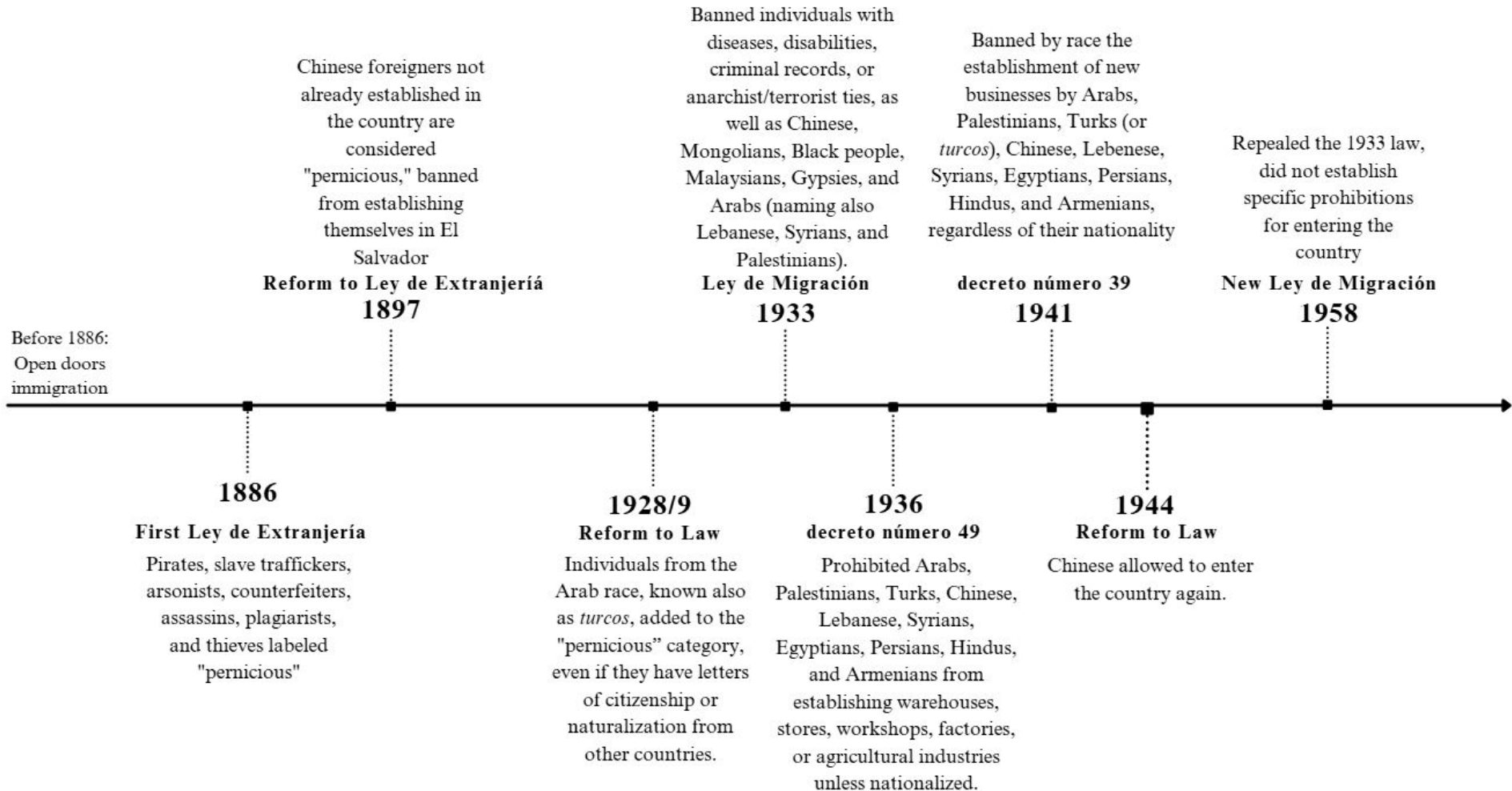
Salvadoran Racial Hierarchy



Historiography

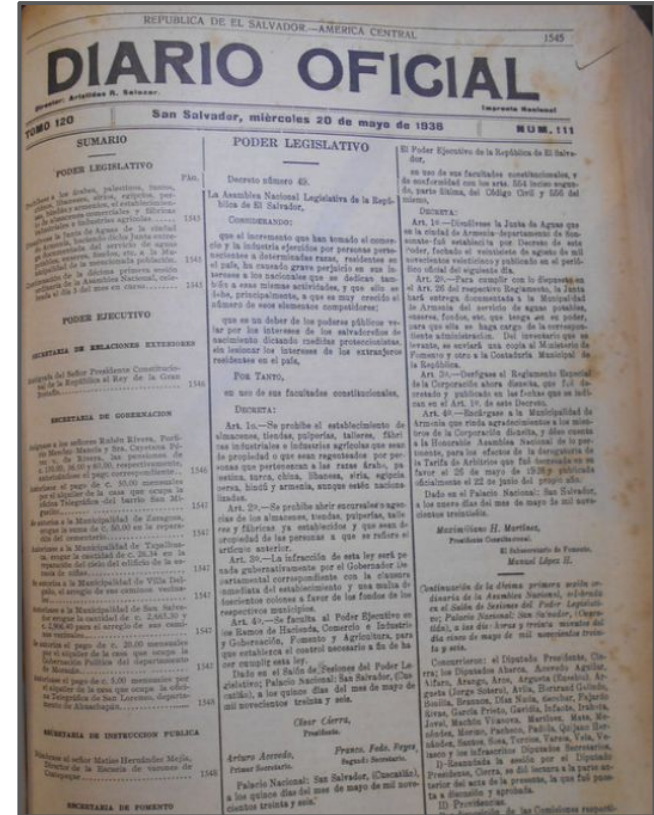
- **Suter (2001):** Linked mestizo nationalism to discrimination against Chinese and Arab immigrants
 - Archival documents
- **Foroohar (2011, 2013):** Detailed the Palestinian community in El Salvador, its origin, and discriminatory laws and social outcasting of the migrants
 - Oral histories
- **DeLugan (2016):** Connected mestizaje to erasure of Indigenous and immigrant identities in narratives of “the Mestizo Nation.”
 - Secondary sources
- **Montoya (2021):** Emphasized elite-driven racism, not widespread public discrimination.
 - Government archival documents, oral histories, newspapers

Legal Timeline of Anti-Asian Laws in El Salvador



Discrimination

- 1929 reform to the Law of Foreigners labeling Palestinians ‘pernicious’
 - Cromeyer: “[turcos] had invaded in such a way, that if they did not dictate these measures, who knows if Salvadorans would have had to leave our country.”
 - “The degeneration of the race has been due in its major part by this immigration [of palestinians]”



Discrimination

- Fears that immigrants were responsible for communism and 1932 Uprising
 - *El Dia*: “In Guatemala, it has been proved that the peddlers were provocateurs of the communist movements”
- Deportation of Jorge Abullarade
 - “a measure that would be a great example for the entire Palestinian community, which includes members who interfere in the internal politics of the Republic.”



Familia Palestina en Usulután, El Salvador 1952

Integration

- A key part of Mestizo Nationalism was linguistic conformity to Spanish
 - *El Ateneo* argued for a bill for “conservación de la pureza del idioma español”
 - Attacks against Palestinian youth for speaking Arabic in public
 - Lead to loss of Arabic amongst children
- Social discrimination against Palestinian culture
 - José Jorge Simán Jacir: “Look here turco, look there turco, turco eats eggplant.’ That is what my classmates would tell me, and then I stopped eating it because I thought, when I would eat it, the smell of eggplant would stay on me.”



Members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), including Jeries Abu Rummaneh, in Latin America. The Maha Saca Collection.

Conclusions

- Systemic Discrimination Under Mestizo Nationalism
- Forced Assimilation as a Survival Strategy
- Cultural Erasure and Adaptation
- Challenging Homogeneity Myths



President Maximiliano Hernández Martínez enacted laws that discriminated against migrants, putting Palestinian arrivals at a disadvantage (Wikimedia)

Conclusion

