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**Painting Colonialism Green:**  
Understanding colonial ecology through the lens of Palestinian art

Lily Hibbard

In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in  
Environmental Analysis

December 2021  
Scripps College  
Claremont, CA

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## **Abstract**

The objective of settler colonialism is, at its core, land domination and the continued subjugation of Indigenous people. I argue that this objective is achieved through four avenues of violence: consumption, extraction, manipulation of space, and severance from identity. By analyzing Palestinian resistance art, I examine the role of landscape manipulation, via destruction or creation of space, in perpetuating these four heralds of colonialism. I specifically focus on the cultural value of trees in occupied Palestine and the Israeli settler community, and the ways in which these trees have become weapons in an ongoing war of colonial design. By understanding the cultural tensions between Palestinian olive trees and Israeli aleppo pines, I draw larger conclusions about the indispensable role of ecology in settler colonialism.

## **Opening Remarks**

This thesis was researched and written on occupied Tongva land by myself, a white settler woman, for the completion of a degree from Scripps college, an institution and appendage of colonial violence in The United States. It is important to me that my position and identity be transparent to readers, as any other presentation would be disingenuous. My ability to write this work and complete this degree is contingent upon the continued land theft committed by The United States, LA County, and Scripps College. With that in mind, I hope my work proves valuable at peeling back the curtain on white supremacy in ecological relations on occupied land.

## **Terminology**

Settler: A person living on and benefitting from the occupation and exploitation of Indigenous land. When I say “we” throughout this thesis, I am usually referring to settlers.

Indigenous: Originating from, or occurring naturally in a specific place.

Occupation: Forced military control and consumption of land for the purpose of settling.

Environment: The physical surroundings in which a person, non-human animal, or idea operates, lives, and interacts with others.

Culture: The customs, ideologies, structures, and ways of being that are of significance to an individual, community, or social group.

Land Relations: The ways in which a human or society interacts with their environment socially, religiously, economically, and physically.

Colonization: The process of taking and settling land belonging to Indigenous people for the purpose of establishing dominance over said group.

Genocide: The deliberate destruction of an ethnic group or nation for the specific purpose of eliminating that population. This can be carried out through the avenue of direct killing or cultural destruction.

Violence: Physical, emotional, and societal behavior intended to harm, damage, or kill.

Consumption: The act of using, absorbing, or eliminating a resource.

Extraction: The act of removing a resource for reappropriation elsewhere, especially by force.

Monopoly of Space: Complete possession or control over a landscape or spatial relations.

Severance of Identity: The dissociation of an individual from the characteristics, practices, or beliefs that are unique to their being.

## Introduction

*“There is a reason, after all, that  
some people wish to colonize the  
moon, and others dance before it as  
an ancient friend.”*

- James Baldwin

Landscape sets the stage within which our human messiness unfolds. Joy, creation, violence, and genocide; nothing is devoid of space. Humans play a variety of roles within the Earth system. Some of us catch fish and sing songs alongside our bird friends. Some of us toddle up the side of grassy hills and look outward for the oncoming storm. Some of us claw our way to higher ground and proclaim ourselves king of the trees. Many of us do all three and more.

Despite our best attempts to run from our ape ancestors and tip toe around the terrifying reality of living in a crumbling ecosystem, we are very much a part of the land. As a part of the land, our actions are both impacted by and impact the landscapes on which they occur.

The Red Nation<sup>1</sup> coalition has released their plan for climate policy and land relations in The United States, known as *The Red Deal*. One of their central demands is the divestment and end of occupation globally. They also seek the dissolution of borders and the free and liberated movement of all peoples on Turtle Island. The Red Nation teaches us that at the heart of our fight for a sustainable climate must be the fight against colonialism and land theft. As I write this thesis I turn to The Red Nation’s *Red Deal* for guidance and learning, and thank them for their shared knowledge.

Colonial violence has been a reliable plague for centuries, propagated by the persistence of white supremacist power in the West. From the continual extraction of resources, ways of

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<sup>1</sup> The Red Nation is a coalition of Native and non-Native activists seeking liberation for Native people’s from colonization, capitalism, and violence. They are a group focused on furthering the political agendas of Indigenous groups and fostering Indigenous leadership in the fight for repatriating Native land globally.

being, and people from West Africa, to the approval of poisonous oil pipelines on Indigenous land in Canada, colonialism is a thief that never rests<sup>2</sup>. We tend to think the realm of nature is outside the bureaucratic and violent politics of humanity, but the reality is that in the settler colonial age the trees, air, and organisms around us have become players in the game of warfare<sup>3</sup>. I argue that colonialism consistently exhibits four identifying practices: consumption, extraction, monopoly of space, and severance of identity. Throughout all four of these pillars, ecological relations and landscape manipulation are powerful tools of the colonial mission. For this reason, the occupation of land and its repercussions on the ecology of place are an indispensable component of settler colonialism.

### ***Methodology***

In chapter one I will explore the four pillars of colonialism I have defined above, and their relationship to landscape creation and destruction. This will establish the framework in which I will be analyzing my case study, theoretical understandings, and imagined futures. Chapter two will be a literature review and positioning of my work amongst leading scholars in this and similar fields. This chapter will also ground us in environmental, colonial, spatial, and disciplinary theory. In chapter three I will explore the evolving history of land, agriculture, and culture in occupied Palestine. I will focus specifically on the olive tree and the aleppo pine tree and their contrasting functions in the Israeli occupation. This will contextualize the four pillars of colonialism in action, and introduce the case study I explore in chapter four. Chapter four will be a case study analysis of the specific role trees play in Israel's occupation and environmental movement. By focusing on the niche of trees in Palestinian occupation, I am aiming to explore

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<sup>2</sup> Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9, no. 1 (September 2018): 135, doi:10.3167/ares.2018.090109.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Murphy, "Environment and Imperialism: Why Colonialism Still Matters," (University of Leeds, 2009), 5 - 25, [https://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/fileadmin/Documents/research/sri/workingpapers/SRIPs-20\\_01.pdf](https://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/fileadmin/Documents/research/sri/workingpapers/SRIPs-20_01.pdf).

the nuances of environmental violence and its physical manifestations. These specified findings will then be extrapolated to apply to a larger conversation on eco-colonialism.

I conducted this research through the analysis of Palestinian resistance art, specifically art relating to the culture of olive trees and the shifting landscape of Palestine. I examine thirteen works of art by seven different artists throughout this thesis, in order to foster an understanding of various Palestinian relationships to landscape. My exploration of Palestinian resistance art as my primary source is in an effort to analyze Palestinian culture and relations to landscape and space, as well as how these relationships have been skewed under colonial occupation. I will also investigate a variety of Zionist media, including The Jewish National Fund's website and statements made by leaders in the Zionist movement. I do this with the intention of surveying the publicity tactics of Zionism in the Jewish diaspora. In this thesis I will analyze Palestinian resistance art in order to understand the function of aleppo pine tree planting and olive tree uprooting in Israeli occupation. This analysis will expand the academic understanding of colonial landscape manipulation and demonstrate the vitality of ecology in upholding and expanding the four pillars of colonialism.

## Chapter 1 - Eco-Colonialism and Domination

### *Understanding the Land*

In the words of Glen Sean Coulthard, colonialism and settler regimes are contingent upon preserving the “ongoing state access to land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other”<sup>4</sup>. Other scholars and Indigenous leaders have offered similar analyses<sup>5</sup>. Land is the centerfold of colonialism and capitalism's quest to dominate Indigenous people. Operating under this framework all colonial efforts are inherently of and relating to land via landscape production, manipulation, or disruption in some capacity.

In Max Liboiron's *Pollution is Colonialism* they argue that colonialism of all varieties is about obtaining access; whether it be access to space, land, power, or people. “Colonialism”, they write, “first, foremost, and always, is about *Land*”<sup>6</sup>. For many settlers like myself, we may take our massive colonial footprint lightly. We do not realize that when we go to the store, the store is on stolen land, funded perhaps by a powerful conglomerate corporation responsible for exploitation globally. We just need to get our milk. Certainly there is no crime in that. But who processed that milk? On whose stolen land did the cows graze? These are spatial relations that we settlers often forget. We are able to forget with such ease because the presence of Indigenous people has been intentionally erased from view so that we feel more comfortable and are able to live in denial of our role in colonial land exploitation<sup>7</sup>. In the United States specifically we have

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<sup>4</sup> Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Red Nation, *The Red Deal*, 2019. Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*, 2021. Bacon, “Settler Colonialism as eco-social structure and the production of colonial ecological violence,” 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1474725>.

<sup>6</sup> Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2021), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Sheryl Lightfoot, “Indigenous Global Politics” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009) 30 - 41, <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/57954>.

seen the deliberate destruction of Indigenous memory and spatial evidence through the production of the “pristine myth” and other purity narratives surrounding land<sup>8</sup>. This technique has also been deployed globally, in places such as Palestine, Canada, Algeria, and Indigenous Australia. Our<sup>9</sup> existence on this land under capitalism is inherently colonial, yet many would insist there is “no other way”. Colonial disrespect of land and life has become normalized and entrenched in our imagined futures. We settlers (who may even consider ourselves good leftist allies) are an appendage of continual land occupation. Our numbness to land theft is precisely what makes landscape manipulation such an effective tool of wartime domination. The slow, creeping land seizure and seemingly benign landscape transformations we see on occupied land are constantly slipping through the cracks of our consciousness, creating dangerously insidious social conditions in which colonialism can flourish. Building off Max Liboiron’s work as a platform, I argue that colonialism can be broken down into four primary vehicles for violence, all embedded in landscape ecology: consumption; extraction; monopoly of space; and severance from identity.

### ***Consumption***

Throughout history, the colonial mission has been the pursuit of resources disguised as efforts to educate, save, or grow the country that is being colonized. Of course these white saviorism goals were never the actual ambition of colonial violence. We all know that the United States has not kept it’s nose in the business of the Middle East because we care so much about women’s rights. We are sniffing out their oil and will bomb any woman who may get in our way.

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<sup>8</sup> William Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of The Americas in 1492,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (September, 1992): 369 - 385, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1992.tb01965.x>.

<sup>9</sup> Settlers



Colonialism is theft. It is our sense of white entitlement to take from the Global South as if it were a bottomless well, and then turn around and ask why they are not as “developed” as us<sup>10</sup>.

Karl Marx coined the term primitive accumulation to describe the conditions necessary for capitalist development and the production of surplus. Primitive accumulation is the initial wealth accumulation that sets the groundwork for capitalism to grow, often via land wealth. Marx equates primitive accumulations with Eve’s original sin, an apt illustration of the role consumption plays in colonialism. Consumption of land is the first in a chain of colonial actions that make up the larger act of occupation, just as Eve’s consumption of the apple wrought further destruction. Once land has been seized, it becomes possible for exploitation of resources, displacement of Indigenous people, and construction of borders to begin. Consumption is not limited to land, however. Colonists consume culture, goods, traditional practices and resources with no regard for the impact this may have on Indigenous people. This reflects Marx’s theory of capitalist consumption. We do not understand that some things are not ours for the taking. Nor do we understand that there is no scarcity except for that which we have fabricated for ourselves. In this world of abundance there is more than enough to go around, if only the continuous vacuum of colonial consumption would take a day off.

### ***Extraction***

It would be easy for us to muddy the nuance between consumption and extraction, or to lump them together in our critique of capitalist practice. Admittedly there is a lot of overlap between what can be considered consumption and extraction, however, they are distinct facets of the colonial project and should be treated as such. Extraction differs from consumption because it involves the removal of resources from their original location for the purpose of redistribution

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<sup>10</sup> Theotonio Dos Santos, “The Structure of Dependence” *The American Economic Review* 60, no. 2 (May, 1970): 232 - 234, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1815811>.

elsewhere. Therefore, extractive practices are contingent upon the existence of a second party from which the colonial body may steal. This argument is illustrated artfully in Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Rodney explains that the exorbitant development of Europe and other Western colonizing forces was made possible by a historic series of extractions, beginning with the extraction of slave labor from Western Africa. He also establishes that the continuation of the colonial mission is contingent upon maintaining a subordinate class of global citizens, typically through resource theft. This extractive practice persists today with the "brain drain", in which successful African community members are enticed to leave their communities, assimilate, and lend their minds to further Western development<sup>11</sup>. The extraction of people, resources, knowledge, and wealth has caused massive damage to colonized countries' ability to provide a high quality of life<sup>12</sup>. This is a cornerstone of the colonial mission. Rodney helps us understand that what defines extractive colonialism is a lack of reciprocity, a lack of consent, and the creation of a distinct wealth gap.

### ***Monopoly of Space***

The third pillar of colonial domination is the monopolization of space and spatial relations. As we have learned from critical prison studies, the ability to cage people and regulate their movement is a massively effective strategy of oppressive control and dominance assertion<sup>13</sup>. The ability to move freely, utilize public space readily, and control your physical environment are often underestimated tools of resistance. This is why regulations on space relations and the privatization of land are so vital for a successful colonial regime. Land parcels are a common tool of occupation because they guise land theft in legal jargon. The existence of private land

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<sup>11</sup> William Carrington and Enrica Detragiache, "How Extensive Is the Brain Drain?" *Finance & Development* 36, no. 2 (June 1999), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1999/06/carringt.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Theotonio Dos Santos, "The Structure of Dependence" *The American Economic Review* 60, no. 2 (May, 1970): 235 - 236, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1815811>.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975): 135 - 162.

holdings is an inherently colonial force. In their work *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods*, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie write, “The most important aim of recasting land as property is to make it ahistorical in order to hack away the narratives that invoke prior claims and thus reaffirm the myth of *terra nullius*”. Terra nullius is Latin for “nobody’s land”. Tuck and McKenzie argue that the erasure of Indigenous land rights through the privatization of property is dependent on the continued belief that our land is ahistorical. The passive colonizer is once again able to ignore their colonial power through a series of legal technicalities and Western contracts created in a historic vacuum. Another common use of space in colonial occupation is the criminalization of gathering on public land. This restricts colonized communities from organizing and protesting their occupation. Dictatorial regimes globally have repeatedly shown how effective the limitation of community relations is at suppressing dissent. This technique has also been employed on a smaller scale through architecture and urban planning designed to restrict gathering<sup>14</sup>. Another manifestation of monopolized landscapes is the imposition of borders. Border mapping and the creation of land parcels is the oldest trick in the colonists playbook. By restricting the free movement of Indigenous people, colonizers are separating the individual from the natural landscape and traditional migration patterns. As seen in Palestine, this is also incredibly effective at dividing people and severing community ties. Many have called The Gaza Strip the world’s largest open air prison because of the restrictive borders, checkpoints, and apartheid wall constructed by the Israeli government. All of these methods of land dominance, often employed in tandem, work to suppress resistance, subjugate Indigenous people, erase historic land relations, and preserve the colonial regime.

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<sup>14</sup> University of California Irvine was founded in 1965 during the beginning of Vietnam War protests amongst college students. It’s campus architecture and planning are said to have been purposefully designed to restrict students’ ability to gather and thus their ability to organize.

## *Severance from Identity*

The final component of colonialism I would like to highlight is severance from identity. “Progress” has historically been used as justification for the stripping of Indigenous culture and kidnapping of Indigenous children for assimilation purposes<sup>15</sup>. The Western mission to “civilize” the native has always been a guise, of course; the real intention was further subjugation and exploitation of the native for economic growth. Centuries of colonial initiatives have deeply harmed Indigenous generational memory and communities’ ability to resist. Loss of culture and tradition can be perpetuated through many avenues, but for my purposes I will focus on severance via loss of land. For many Indigenous communities, relationship to the land is an essential component of identity formation and self actualization. In capitalist Western settler states we tend to create a large degree of separation between ourselves and the land. Land and nature are inanimate and consumable goods in our eyes. This is a very different philosophy than that embodied by many Indigenous practices. For this reason, ecological destruction often has dramatic social repercussions on Indigenous peoples, their mental health, and their identity<sup>16</sup>. A clear cut forest may be a sad sight to an ecologically conscious settler, but to an Indigenous person that forest may have been a vital spiritual site, a place of ritual gathering, or an ancestor. The effects of this loss are devastating. Many Indigenous communities have lost entire practices, languages, or oral histories because of the occupation of their land. Indigenous communities often face higher rates of mental health issues, suicide, and substance abuse as a result of colonial stressors<sup>17</sup>. Settlers and colonial apologists would portray this loss as unintentional

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<sup>15</sup> Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* (Local Futures, 1991): 320 - 325.

<sup>16</sup> Kyle Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene,” *English Language Notes*, *Forthcoming* (Fall, 2017): 154 - 160, <https://kylewhyte.marcom.cal.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2018/07/IndigenousClimateChangeStudies.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Gone, “Mental Health Services for Native Americans in the 21st Century United States,” *Professional Psychology Research and Practice* 35, no. 1 (February, 2004): 11, [10.1037/0735-7028.35.1.10](https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.35.1.10).

collateral damage in the development of humanity. A critical look at the history of ecological destruction allows us to see past this feigned innocence, and reject the historical gaslighting of Indigenous groups. Ecological degradation is not a symptom of colonialism, it is a tool; and the resulting severance from identity is not an unfortunate mishap, it is intentional violence. The colonial state severs the colonized from their traditional identity for the purpose of smoothing over resistance and furthering assimilation initiatives.

### ***Conclusion***

Colonialism is the persistent and violent erasure of Indigenous people's existence and rights. Landscape manipulation uproots people's livelihoods, traditions, and ancestry, while simultaneously allowing the colonial state to rebuild upon the evidence of their crimes. In order to properly understand the role consumption, extraction, monopoly of space, and severance from identity play in materialized instances of colonialism, I will ground my analysis in theoretical understandings of space, land, violence, and settler colonialism. Land has always been an active force in the unfoldings and ambitions of humanity, colonialism included.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### *Defining Settler Colonialism*

Decades of scholarship in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and political science have given us a rich understanding of colonialism and its effects. Critical analysis of colonialism in the United States has grown in depth throughout the 21st Century, with the development of colonial studies sects of academia and increased attention paid to Indigenous decolonial movements. Margaret Kohn's 2006 piece, *Colonialism*, introduced a definition and analysis of colonialism, assessment of mainstream philosophical understandings of the colonial mission, and critiques of critical colonial scholarship. Kohn defines colonialism as the domination of one people by another through the act of subjugation via political or military force. Kohn's definition also differentiates between colonialism and imperialism, arguing that colonialism is contingent upon the permanent occupation of territory by settlers while imperialism can be maintained by remote powers. This distinction aligns with my definition of colonialism as an act of consumption. Finally, Kohn's piece defines colonial legitimacy and the role governing structures play in the neglect of human rights. *Colonialism* is a pivotal text in the defining of colonialism as an ongoing, land-based, white supremacist act of global political violence.

In order to define colonial occupation, we must understand what it means for a person to be Indigenous. Identity is a slippery category to pin down and define, especially when the state is invested in a narrative that contradicts one's existence as they choose to identify. Hilary N. Weaver's 2001 journal article *Indigenous Identity: What is it and Who Really has it?* toys with the question of Indigeneity, and further complicates the discussion with concepts of scalarity, legal legitimacy, and state subversion. Weaver argues that identity is constructed internally and externally, and in many instances differs situationally. To illustrate the different components of

identity creation, Weaver separates the phenomenon into three categories; Self-Identification, Community-Identification, and External-Identification. Weaver argues that all three of these modes of identification work together, with equal weight, to shape an individual's status of Indigeneity. Due to the hegemonic power of the state, external identification plays a larger role in identity creation than it ideally would. For example, The United Nations definition of Indigeneity is externally imposed and often in conflict with an individual's self-identification, yet it continues to play a substantial role in global efforts towards Indigenous sovereignty and recognition of rights. The UN definition of Indigeneity extends to all peoples who were/are:

- 1) the first occupants of the land.
- 2) colonized.
- 3) subordinated by or incorporated into alien states in their original territory and, as a result, became marginal to or dominated by the state that claims jurisdiction over them.
- 4) remain culturally distinct from the dominant society.<sup>18</sup>

This sweeping definition may satisfy one Indigenous group, while frustrating and further marginalizing another. For example, one person reading this definition may recognize it's potential to protect Palestinian rights under international law, while another may read it as further Zionist justification. That is the core issue with generalizing definitions crafted by an imposing power. Legal definitions and political technicalities have the power to deprive an individual of the recognition of their rightful identity. While the UN attempts to address this by relying heavily on self-identification, this still muddies our understanding of identity and creates vague legal spaces in which people can be trodden over and forgotten. The existence of a UN definition also makes many Indigenous groups dependent upon the UN for recognition, further entrenching global politics in imperialism and the continuation of state based hierarchical power. Essentially,

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<sup>18</sup> Sheryl Lightfoot, "Indigenous Global Politics" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), 29.

Indigenous legitimacy on a global stage has been made dependent upon the continued existence of the very world powers that initially erased and denied their legitimacy. By understanding Kohn's working definition of colonialism, partnered with Weaver's definition of Indigeneity and in the context of global politics, I will position my discourse in critical colonial studies of the 21st Century.

In order to properly challenge settler colonialism, it is also crucial that we understand how the colonial state creates and maintains its power. State sovereignty is the recognized and legitimizing right of a state to rule itself or govern others. Colonial agendas center around the desire to maintain the sovereignty of the occupied state, which is contingent upon the continued subjugation of the Indigenous inhabitants. The influential 2003 text *Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe dissects the ways in which a state maintains its sovereignty and the ways in which global power is structured. He builds his analysis off of the framework established by Michel Foucault in his 1978 to 1979 lecture series at the Collège de France entitled *Security, Territory, Population*, during which he first coined the term biopower. Foucault's concept of biopower refers to the state's ability to control large populations, specifically the state's methodology of power maintenance via the subjugation of bodies and ultimate authority over life and death. The state and its sovereignty is dependent on its ability to kill or allow life. Mbembe furthers this definition of sovereignty by arguing that settler colonialism creates political conditions under which the state is able to dictate whose existence matters, and whose does not. For Mbembe, this idea of disposable populations is highlighted by and inextricably linked to the division of space in occupied land. He writes, "Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations"<sup>19</sup>. The restriction of movement, land relations, spatial traditions, autonomy,

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<sup>19</sup> Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," Translated by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 25.



and all other methods of monopolizing land relations are acts of necropolitical violence by the colonial state.

### ***Colonialism and Environmental Injustice***

The academic realm of environmental justice is increasingly engaging in discourse surrounding the role colonialism has played in the degradation of the environment and uneven distribution of environmental harm<sup>20</sup>. Max Liboiron's 2021 book *Pollution is Colonialism* is the most contemporary piece to flesh out this connection with great nuance and understanding. Liboiron's primary aspiration in writing this book is for the application of a more critical lens to scientific fields, specifically environmental science. They argue that most, if not all, of mainstream liberal environmental solutions are actually a perpetuation of colonial power, and must be redesigned if we are to properly address environmental justice. Liboiron also crafts a definition of colonialism that is intrinsically tied to the land and landscape formation. To construct this argument Liboiron focuses on the idea of the "sink", or the imagined dumping ground for all permissible levels of environmental harm. In this argument, land occupation takes the form of contamination and degradation, which Liboiron sees as a new iteration of land theft. Liboiron argues that proposed liberal environmental initiatives are just a "right to pollute" permission slip for corporations that further environmental harm to Indigenous communities. This concept of the sink can be extended to discuss forms of eco-colonialism beyond pollution. For example, working within Liboiron's framework we could conclude that the construction of dams on occupied Indigenous land is colonial, even if it is for the environmental benefit of

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<sup>20</sup> Traditional environmentalism has historically centered white people and romanticized nature. Justice has been a part of environmentalism since the 1960's, but has gained a much larger platform within the movement in recent years. Within the last few decades, the environmental justice movement has begun to think globally, and recognize the environmental impact of colonialism. This growing understanding of colonialism reminds us that Indigenous voices and leaders from the global South need to be at the forefront of environmentalism.

settlers. In summation, Liboiron leads us to think more critically about what we consider environmentally just, and push for environmental solutions that work for all, not just some.

Another salient text in eco-colonial discourses is *The Red Deal* (2019 and 2021) proposed in by The Red Nation as a response to neocolonial environmentalism such as the Green New Deal. *The Red Deal* recognizes that the mass scale destruction of the environment is inextricably linked to oppression everywhere, and that solutions will only be reached by a united, inclusive, and collaborative front. The Red Nation argues for mass coalition building, and highlights the links between efforts for Indigenous sovereignty, prison abolition, class consciousness, anti-capitalist agendas, global anti-imperialism, etc. All of these agendas and more, The Red Nation argues, have overlapping aspirations and must be fought for in unity. *The Red Deal* is grounded in 4 pillars by which they judge the success of the movement and imagine future efforts. They are:

- 1) What creates crisis cannot solve it
- 2) Change from below and to the left
- 3) Politicians can't do what only mass movements do
- 4) Theory to action

These pillars guide those who follow the teachings of The Red Nation towards an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and even anarchist approach to the environmental movement. Arguments and proposed solutions made by *The Red Deal* share numerous commonalities with the framework established by *Pollution is Colonialism*. Both works emphasize the role of land in colonialism, and explicitly call for Land Back globally. Both works also trace the downturn in environmental security back to the beginning of modern capitalist colonialism. *The Red Deal* takes anti-colonial

environmentalism arguably further by pushing it outside the realm of theory<sup>21</sup> and into motion through tangible suggested actions.

### ***Colonialism and Spatial Relations***

The manipulation of space, architecture, freedom, and movement are well established pillars of the colonial mission and interpersonal domination. Many scholars have theorized about the role our physical surroundings play in building power relations, most notably Michel Foucault. While Foucault's work was not specifically tailored to the case of colonialism, his theoretical frameworks apply to many mechanisms of domination, power, and surveillance; colonialism included. Foucault's 1975 work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* has become a pivotal text for discourse in the field of critical prison studies, specifically when discussing fabricated power dynamics, mass incarceration, societal control, etc. In conversation with this thesis I am most interested in Foucault's analysis of discipline. I mention his work not because it is specifically relevant to eco-colonialism, but because I believe it provides a theoretical framework within which we can better understand strategic landscape manipulation by colonial regimes. Specifically Foucault's analysis of disciplinary architecture and spatially contrived control translates well into my understanding of settler colonialism and land occupation. Foucault assesses the most frequent methods of discipline and their impacts, including controlled distribution of individuals within a given space, control of activity, automated and anonymized state violence, and physical and psychological division from peers, all of which are tools of occupation. Perhaps the passage that is most salient to my analysis of colonial power is Foucault's dissection of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*.

The Panopticon (fig. 1) is a series of architectural sketches developed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 depicting the most effective and efficient architectural model for maintaining

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<sup>21</sup> Or limited practice within the context of scientific knowledge building

order and control. At its core the design is intended to foster constant surveillance of the subjects, as well as isolation of the individual from the larger community. Foucault dissects this architectural model, using it metaphorically to understand the ways in which we manufacture control and power in society via the same or similar methods. The key to the panoptic model is the denial of any privacy for the subject. Constant surveillance (or the threat of constant surveillance), and revealing spatial conditions, maintain what Foucault describes as “docile bodies”. Anonymity of the state and automation of surveillance are also crucial to the panoptic model, making the subject feel detached from community and under constant threat of punishment. The colonial state frequently operates under the panoptic model, via security cameras, segregation of housing, location based surveillance, and border control. On a much larger scale than that imagined by Bentham, Indigenous people living under occupation are confined to a panopticon by colonial powers and their settlers. Indigenous members of the community are frequently targeted for surveillance and restriction, at much higher rates than their settler counterparts. The state is invested in maintaining panoptic control over Indigenous people for the preservation of the colonial regime.



Fig. 1 Illustrated rendering of Bentham's Panopticon.  
Adam Simpson, *The Panopticon*, accessed December 10, 2021,  
<https://www.adsimpson.com/work/the-panopticon>.

Another critical text concerning spatially constructed power is the 1997 piece *Space and the Structuring of Disciplinary Power* by Matthew G. Hannah. In this journal article Hannah analyzes what social and spatial factors make for effective discipline, and what factors may diminish the power of the disciplinary force. Hannah emphasizes the important role scale plays in the efficacy of discipline, arguing that the larger the scale of the controlled population and their geographical region, the less effective traditional methods of control may be. To counteract this, disciplinary forces such as a colonial regime must strategically evolve by dividing populations or creating more insidious, modernized, and self-maintaining methods of social control. Hannah builds off of *The Panopticon*, crafting a spectrum of disciplinary structures in ascending order by geographic sprawl. On this scale Hannah categorizes all disciplinary models into five tiers: architectural discipline, compound discipline, urban discipline, colonial discipline, and national discipline. Each tier poses a unique set of conditions that must be accounted for by the disciplinary power, thus creating a variety of landscapes and spatial structures. For my purposes of discussing eco-colonialism, colonial and national disciplines will prove most salient, however all levels of discipline are characteristic of colonial regimes. For example, concentration camps would be an example of compound discipline, while segregation and apartheid would be examples of urban discipline. *Space and the Structuring of Disciplinary Power* further develops the theoretical framework previously established by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* to ground my understanding of colonial landscape design on a geographic scale.

### ***Palestinian Studies***

A number of studies have examined the ecology of Palestine and its shifting identity under Israeli occupation. Scholars such as Alan George and Irus Braverman have delved into the ways in which spatial creation and demolition construct the Palestinian experience. Others have

written extensively on the weaponization of nature, especially the uprooting of olive trees that has been an understood act of violence for decades<sup>22</sup>. It is the combination of these two areas of study, partnered with the rich history of Palestinian protest art, that I would like to expand upon.

While there is a great deal of literature on the topic of ecological colonialism and its impact on Indigenous personhood, much of this research positions the landscape as a backdrop for violence<sup>23</sup>. I believe this is also the case for the aforementioned literature on Palestinian occupation. Land and ecology have been depicted as passive observers throughout much of eco-colonial literature, yet we know them to be lively and active forces. Especially in the age of mass human manipulation of ecology, it is only appropriate that we deepen our understanding of the colonial power of landscaping. This is where I hope to further existing discourse to include analysis of landscape itself as the violent weapon.

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<sup>22</sup> Sonja Karkar, "The Olive Trees of Palestine Weep." *The Plight of the Palestinians* (2010): 51–53. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230107922\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230107922_6).

<sup>23</sup> Bacon, "Settler Colonialism as eco-social structure and the production of colonial ecological violence," 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1474725>. Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014). Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Grove Press, 2021).

### **Chapter 3 - Occupied Palestine**

Palestinian land relations are a currently unfolding case study in the ecology of occupation. The history of Palestine is a history of a landscape that is both sacred and subjugated. Historic Palestine stretches the landscape between Egypt and Lebanon, from the Mediterranean coast to the Dead Sea. Presently, the majority of this landscape is occupied by Israeli settlers in a militarized apartheid state. To say that Israel is a settler colonial apartheid state is not an accusation, but rather a statement based on historical fact and the definition of land occupation.

#### ***Palestine from 1200 BC to World War II***

The name “Palestine” is believed to have emerged from the 1200 BC civilization “Philistine”, which is featured in The Book of Joshua (Joshua 13:3) and The Book of Samuel (Samuel 6:17). Numerous people have lived in Palestine since its inception, including Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Egyptians, and more. In the few centuries prior to the 20th early century The Ottoman Empire ruled Palestine, until the British seized the territory at the end of World War I in 1918<sup>24</sup>. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire Palestine was not a formal nation state, rather a territory comprised of districts. It is this lack of formal national identity that many Zionists point to when justifying the 1918 land grab. Britain was able to seize Palestine due to a series of under-the-table dealings towards the end of the war.

Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt at the time, made a deal with Husayn ibn ‘Ali, Ottoman governor of Medina and Mecca. McMahon and Husayn agreed that if Husayn could lead an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire and support Britain in winning the war, the British government would swiftly establish an Arab nation state in historic

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<sup>24</sup> The Ottoman Empire held control of Palestine from 1517 - 1917

Palestine. This agreement, of course, was not upheld despite Husayn's loyalty to the deal. In conflict with the Husayn-MaMahon deal, Lord Arthur Balfour announced Britain's support for the creation of a Jewish nation state in Palestine in 1917. The Jewish nation state sought claims to Palestinian land because of their Zionist belief in the creation of a Jewish Holy Land. When the war concluded in 1918, The League of Nations made official Britain's mandate over Middle Eastern territories, including Palestine, which became a unified territory of Palestine in 1921.

The 1920's were defined by increasingly violent conflicts between the jilted Arab population of Palestine and the growing population of Jewish settlers. This decade also marks the beginning of the Jewish National Fund's (JNF) practice of purchasing large plots of land, which will be central to my discussion of current land holdings in Israel-Palestine. At this time, tensions between Palestinians and Jewish settlers were rooted in both populations' displeasure at Britain's failure to uphold their conflicting understandings, and the belief that the opposing demographic threatened their chances at an autonomous nation state. This tension was only heightened with the influx of Jewish refugees during The Holocaust and Nazi Regime.

### ***“The Palestinian Question” post World War II***

In the wake of World War II, the newly minted United Nations (UN) was tasked with creating peace in Palestine, to which they decided to divide the occupied Palestinian territory between Indigenous Palestinians and Jewish settlers. The 1947 UN partition designated greater territory to the Jewish state, under the assumption that settling would continue. The partition also designated the homes of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to become a part of the Jewish state. The UN approved occupation of Palestine emboldened Zionism, and in May of 1948 the Israeli quest to conquer Palestine began to accelerate. Palestinians refer to the brutal



displacement of their people and conquest of their homeland in 1948 as The Nakba<sup>25</sup>, which translates to “The Catastrophe”. During the Nakba, over 700,000<sup>26</sup> Palestinians were expelled from their homeland and became a part of the Palestinian diaspora, many of which still may not return home today. It is unclear how many Palestinians were killed during the Nakba, but many estimate the brutal land grab resulted in approximately 5,000 Palestinian deaths. In 1949, with the begrudged signing of peace agreements, borders were drawn to put an end to the seizure of



Fig. 2 Map depicting the changing landscape of Occupied Palestine between 1946-2010.  
Accessed December 10, 2021, <https://incision.substack.com/p/palestine>.

Palestinian land. At this time Israel occupied seventy seven percent of the territory, greatly exceeding the territory designated by the 1947 UN agreement (Fig. 2).

Violence continued from 1949 to 1967 with little notable changes in power and land holdings. Then, in 1967, a six day war shook the Middle East and established Israel as a military

<sup>25</sup> Commemoration of The Nakba by Palestinian’s in occupied Israeli territory continues to be heavily criminalized by the Israeli government.

<sup>26</sup> The exact count of Arab Palestinian’s forcibly expelled during the Nakba is highly contested. Many would argue Palestinians left on their own accord, despite the evident violence, death, and destruction of homes.

force not to be reckoned with. The war of 1967 also resulted in the remaining Palestinian land, The West Bank, The Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights to be captured by Israel from Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, respectively. While the war of 1967 marked a sizeable land grab victory for Israel, it also spurred the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization<sup>27</sup> (PLO) and other resistance movements. Following the events of 1967, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 242, calling for Israel to return seized land and recognize nations' right to peaceful coexistence. This resolution has been largely manipulated and did not succeed in returning the stolen territories. The resolution also does not recognize Palestine as a nation with rights to self determination.

The occupation of The West Bank and Gaza Strip have become increasingly carceral and dehumanizing since 1967. Palestinian residents in land occupied by Israel face denial of basic political and social freedoms. Palestinian nationalism has been criminalized, and Palestinian rights to free speech, political assembly, press, and civil liberties have been trampled. The militarized Israeli state has enacted curfews, road blockages, closure of community buildings and schools, home demolitions, and implemented check points all over Palestinian land. Palestinians exist as distinctly second class citizens, in an apartheid state staking possession of their homeland. Imprisonment, torture, and neglectful death have become common treatment of Palestinians, with an estimated one million Palestinians detained since 1967, and over forty percent of the male Palestinian population having been incarcerated at some point in his life.

Israel has allowed (and encouraged) hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers to move into

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<sup>27</sup> The Palestine Liberation Organization was a coalition of Palestinian organizations seeking liberation from the oppressive Israeli state. The political and military organization that made up the PLO represented varying political positions and beliefs, but were united in the fight for Palestinian land back. Some notable groups in the coalition include Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Palestine People's Party. The PLO began to lose public support and power after the 1993 Oslo Accord, and was further weakened by the rise of the unaffiliated military group, Hamas, in the early 2000's.

encampments on occupied land, often bulldozing Palestinian homes to do so. This blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention has been overlooked by The United State's and other prominent actors. Israel maintains that their occupation of Gaza and The West Bank is legal and just under international law.

1987 was an eventful year for the Palestinian resistance movement. The First Intifada mobilized massive numbers of Palestinians and mainly consisted of civil disobedience, mass gatherings and demonstrations, boycotts of taxes and goods, political graffiti and a radical education movement. The Israeli forces brought in to quell the uprisings were instructed to use brutal force, and stamp out the Intifada by any means necessary. Between 1987 and 1991 over 1,000 Palestinians were murdered by Israeli troops. Mass arrests, censorship, targeted killings, and the public slander of Palestinians as terrorists were common practice by the Israeli military.

Negotiation efforts were pursued more forcefully after The First Intifada under pressure and mediation efforts by the United States. Israel still refused to negotiate with the PLO until 1991, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, a key player in the declining human rights standards in Gaza and The West Bank, reluctantly conceded to talks. These talks proved quite unsuccessful, as Shamir purposefully dragged along the negotiation process and Palestinian citizens became less and less impressed with the work of the PLO. Eventually, the Oslo Accords were developed. The Oslo Accords came nowhere near meeting the needs of Palestinians. The PLO had conceded many of Palestinians key demands and Israel simultaneously increased the rate of displacement and destruction in occupied land. In the end, no official agreements were ever reached. Palestinians had become disenchanted with the PLO.

### ***Violent Developments in the 2000s***

In 2000, reeling from the unsuccessful Oslo Accords and the increasingly horrifying conditions in occupied Palestine, The Second Intifada began. This time, the violence erupted in Jerusalem, the locus of conflict and tension. The Second Intifada was far bloodier than the first. The Likud Party, a staunchly anti-Palestinian Israeli political party, was gaining popularity with the candidacy of Ariel Sharon<sup>28</sup> for Prime minister. Israeli military responded to increasing Palestinian protests with a surge in violent control tactics. The firing of bullets into an unarmed crowd became the new normal. Soon the military evolved to the use of tanks, fighter planes, helicopter gun-ships, etc. funded largely by President George W. Bush and the United States.

As the violent response to protests grew, so did the use of suicide bombing by Hamas and Jihad. Between 2000 - 2005 there were over 150 reported bombings. Targeted assassinations of key Palestinian organizers became more and more prominent, as did the use of tanks to disperse crowds and destroy Palestinian neighborhoods. After a large suicide bombing in 2002, Israel launched a full invasion of The West Bank using bulldozers and tanks, and enacted all day curfews on Palestinian residents. 2002 also marks the construction of the apartheid wall. The wall splits Palestinian neighborhoods in two, and prevents Palestinians from getting to work and school, as well as from seeing loved ones. Marked by militaristic check points, electric fencing, and massive watch towers, the apartheid wall creates a physical barrier to Palestinian organizing and assembly. A clear example of state monopolized spatial relations.

The 2006 election of Hamas to the Palestinian Legislative Council, marked a significant shift in the political field. When Hamas took power they stated that they would not recognize Israel as a state until Israel recognized the rights of Palestinians. In response to this, The U.S, Russia, Great Britain and the UN withdrew funding for the Palestinian Authority. Western

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<sup>28</sup> Sharon staunchly refused any talk of Palestinian rights to Jerusalem

interference in the fallout of the 2006 election led to the expansion of Israel's military and a coup attempt against Hamas. Israel responded to the apparent growth in Hamas's popularity by tightening the blockade on the Gaza Strip and increasing attacks on the territory.

Palestinian land remains home to immense atrocities and sorrow, with the continuance of Israeli occupation today. Zionist lobbying campaigns hold tremendous sway in the Western public perception of Palestinians, as well as the funding allocated by major backing agencies. "Peace talks" have repeatedly been attempted with little to no success. Even those deemed "successful" limit Palestinian autonomy and rights to self determination. The apartheid zoning established by The Oslo Accords remains in place today, with Palestine divided into zones A, B, and C (fig. 3). Zone A comprises just 18% of Palestinian land, and is the only land on which the Palestinian Authority rules civil and security matters. Zone B, 22% of Palestine, is where the Palestinian Authority has control only in civil issues. Finally Zone C, which makes up 60% of Palestine and is home to the vast majority of Palestinians, is under the complete administrative control of the Israeli government. The apartheid state continues to evolve, with the creation of "Israeli only" streets and the bulldozing of countless Palestinian neighborhoods. Israel has conducted numerous offensive military strikes in Gaza in the past few decades, killing thousands of Palestinians. Israel also continues to heavily restrict imports and exports in Gaza and The West Bank, sabotaging the economy and depriving Palestinians of necessities. The continued occupation of Palestine and the dehumanization of the Palestinian people has taken on many forms. At the root of all of this violence is the land; Occupation of homeland, destruction of landscape, and desecration of relations to place. Land is the heart of Palestine.

**Oslo II Map**  
Outlining Areas A, B, and C



Fig. 3 Map of zones A, B, and C after the Oslo Accords.

Published January, 2014,

[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Areas-A-B-and-C-after-Oslo-II\\_fig1\\_276258691](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Areas-A-B-and-C-after-Oslo-II_fig1_276258691).

### ***Palestinian Ecology and Agriculture***

Located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, Palestine is characterized by its hot, arid summers and cool, rainy winters. The Mediterranean climate is conducive to high levels of biodiversity, sustainable human living conditions, and a thriving plant life. The Palestinian landscape is also diverse, and can be categorized into four climatic regions: The Jordan Valley, Central Highlands, Western Slopes foothills, and Eastern Slopes foothills.

### ***Agricultural Breakdown***

The Jordan Valley, located in The West Bank, is a semi-tropical climate where citrus and bananas thrive. Agriculture is central to traditional rural Palestinian life and a major source of income for most people. The Central Highlands make up the majority of the West Bank. This region is made up of mountains and valleys with healthy levels of precipitation and alluvial soil.

This region is rich with biodiversity and strong forests, however has been a major target for bombings by the Israeli military and thus faced serious ecological destruction. The region should be home to evergreen oaks and carob-lentisk maquis, but few healthy forests remain. It is also home to a large portion of Palestine's agriculture. Olives and grapes are the primary crop, as well as almonds and a variety of fruit trees. The agriculture here requires very little irrigation and is largely sustained by rainfall. The Eastern Slopes are a relatively barren portion of the West Banks ecosystem. With very little rainfall, the foliage that does grow is mainly used for livestock grazing. The coastal region of Palestine, including The Gaza Strip, has relied heavily on irrigation to sustain its agricultural needs. Much of the rainfall that would be used to irrigate is lost to evaporation and runoff in this area. Here they grow citrus, fruit trees, vegetables such as tomatoes and squash, and the Palestinian staples of olives, grapes, and almonds.

### ***Introduction to the Olive Trees***

Perhaps Palestine's most well known agricultural staple, the olive tree represents far more than merely crop production and economic prosperity. Palestine is the site of some of the world's oldest olive groves, dating back over 4,000 years<sup>29</sup>. The old olive trees are a part of Palestinian ancestry, and represent the Palestinian's deep roots and centuries long cultural foot print on the land. Olive tree caretaking responsibilities are often passed down through family lineage, and for many families the olive trees provide a deep sense of connection with loved ones and ancestors that have passed. There is a socio-culturally significant practice of tending to the same trees your great great grandparents may have cared for and that one day your great great grandchildren will inherit. The olive trees have also come to represent the Palestinian struggle and act as a symbol

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<sup>29</sup> "Fact Sheet: Olive Trees - More Than Just A Tree in Palestine," OCHA, posted November 21, 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/fact-sheet-olive-trees-%E2%80%93-more-just-tree-palestine>.

of ongoing resistance<sup>30</sup>. These trees are drought-resistant and grow in traditionally poor soil conditions, yet they continue to bring nourishment, culture, income, and an abundance of uses, much like the resilience of the Palestinian people.

The olive harvest serves many functions in Palestine. Olives<sup>31</sup> are a staple in Palestinian diet and traditional dishes, and are an excellent source of nutrients. Olive oil<sup>32</sup> production is a major industry in Palestine. The oil is used daily for cooking, seasoning, lubricating, moisturizing, insect repelling, cleaning, and more. The olive pits can be used as beads in traditional Christian and Muslim prayer beads, or carved into trinkets for tourists. The olive tree wood is also used for art and carving, as well as for livestock feed and firewood. Olive tree cultivation is the main source of income for 80,000 Palestinian families and comprises 48% of farm land. An estimated 14% of Palestine's economy is dependent on the olive trees<sup>33</sup>.

The real value of the olive tree, however, does not lie in the goods and services it provides. The cultural weight of the olive trees is unquantifiable. Many Palestinians have said that their trees are members of the family, not possessions or signifiers of wealth. It is the symbolism of olive trees and their role in maintaining Palestinian resilience and culture that has made them a target for ecological colonialism<sup>34</sup>. An estimated one million Palestinian olive trees have been uprooted by the Israeli Defense Force and (ironically) the Ministry of Environmental

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<sup>30</sup> Emily Cadloff, "Cultivating Resilience: Growing Olives in Palestine," Modern Farmer, posted September 13, 2021, <https://modernfarmer.com/2021/09/olive-tree-farmers-in-palestine/>.

<sup>31</sup> Zeitoon

<sup>32</sup> Zeit

<sup>33</sup> "Fact Sheet: Olive Trees - More Than Just A Tree in Palestine," OCHA, posted November 21, 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/fact-sheet-olive-trees-%E2%80%93-more-just-tree-palestine>.

<sup>34</sup> Mazin Qumsiyeh, "The Olive Tree - Not Just an Ordinary Tree," Transcend Media Service, posted October 28, 2019 <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2019/10/the-olive-tree-not-just-an-ordinary-tree/>



Protection<sup>35</sup>. In chapter four I will discuss the details of the tragic destruction of Palestinian olive trees.

Many Palestinian artists have focused on the olive as the subject of their craft, and as a result art is one of the best avenues through which we may understand the role olive trees play in Palestinian culture and community. The vast array of olive tree art being produced by Palestinians also allows me to find nuance in my analysis of culture and community. The olive holds a different space in each individual's cultural understanding, often shaped by lived experience and generational trauma. Nabil Anani is a painter living in occupied Palestine and channels the olive tree throughout much of his collection. His piece *In Pursuit of Utopia #8* depicts a sprawling hillside with rows of olive trees stretching towards the horizon. His use of bright warm colors for the landscape and sky contrast with the muted green tones of the olive trees, giving the painting an abstract and joyful appearance. This painting is deeply hopeful, depicting a future in which Palestinians have autonomy over the land and the olive tree is allowed to flourish. The human figure is notably absent from this scene, perhaps to indicate that this landscape is devoid of conflict and violence. Anani's titling of this piece is telling; his utopia is something not yet a reality, but a landscape he is able to imagine.

In sharp contrast, artist Michael Halak depicts the olive as a site of strife and upset. His piece *Olive, Olive Oil and Olive Press* is reminiscent of a crime scene photograph, and plants a distinct feeling of uneasiness in the viewer. A table is littered with shattered glass, squashed olives, spilled olive oil, and what appears to be blood. This scene is zoomed in, both in scale and in context. The viewers do not know what events led to this spillage and bloodshed, and their imaginations are left to fill in the gaps. This is a radically different depiction of the olive than

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<sup>35</sup> Sonja Karkar, "The Olive Trees of Palestine Weep," in *The Plight of The Palestinians*, ed. W.A. Cook (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010), 51 - 53.

that by Anani. This gives us insight into the complexity of the Palestinian experience; where one person finds hope, another person may only see destruction. The difference in these renderings also speaks to a generational divide. Where Halak has only known violence and struggles to see beauty, Anani was born pre-occupation and can imagine a different way of living. Even the artists' chosen styles tells us something about their relationship to the olive. Halak's work is hyper-realistic and depicts a fragment of a scene, as if to place the viewer into a moment that is immediate, real, and raw. Alternatively, Anani's work is more cartoonish and abstract. The viewer is observing the scene from somewhere outside, as Anani's titular utopia has not yet been realized. This is the Palestinian reality of living in contradiction. The imagined versus the experienced; The hopeful versus the devastating; The life versus the death.



*In Pursuit of Utopia #8, Nabil Anani*



*Olive, Olive Oil and Olive Press, Michael Halak*

## ***Repainted Landscapes and the Pillars of Colonialism***

Israel's occupation of historic Palestine is an explicit example of ecological colonialism and the political power that can be harnessed by dissociating people from their landscapes. As many academics of colonialism have argued<sup>36</sup>, access to space and the manipulation of spatial relations is a powerful tool of domination. As is the case in many occupied landscapes, the Zionist agenda is contingent upon the narrative that *this is not Palestinian land*. To erase a cultural community and ethnic identity with centuries old roots burrowed deep in the ground takes extreme manipulation of space.

## ***Consumption***

Consumption manifests in occupied Palestine most blatantly via the consumption of land and space, but also through the stealing of rights, liberties, access to traditional ways of being, and life. One of the most common Zionist arguments is that there has been loss and destruction on "both sides". In the case of land theft and loss of opportunity this is simply not true, and in all other examples of consumption the levels of loss are incomparable. For example consumption and destruction of life has been vastly unequal, with twenty-three Palestinian deaths for every one Israeli death<sup>37</sup>. Prior to the British mandate in Palestine, the Jewish population was about 6% of Palestine's total population. In 1948, 78% of Palestine was captured, consumed, and transformed by Israeli military and Zionist forces. Since 1948 Israel's manufactured borders have shifted. At times such as the war of 1967 Israel occupied all of Palestine and displaced many hundred thousand Palestinians<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975): 135 - 162. Matthew Hannah, "Space and The Structuring of Disciplinary Power: An Interpretive Review," *Geografiska Annaler* 79, (1997): 172 - 178, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.0435-3684.1997.00016.x>.

<sup>37</sup> "Fatalities in the Occupied Territories and Israel," B'Tselem, Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://statistics.btselem.org/en/intro/fatalities>.

<sup>38</sup> Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, "Palestine, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," Middle East Research & Information Project, Published 2014, <https://merip.org/palestine-israel-primer/>.

Bashir Qonqar illustrates the feeling of being consumed by the Israeli state in his work *Eaten by the City*. For him, Jerusalem is a towering half-city-half-human mutant that is eating itself alive. The grey-skinned humanoid faces wear disturbed expressions and their limbs flail outwards at unnatural angles, except for one figure that lays at the bottom of the pig-pile with a peaceful look. Perhaps he has accepted his fate, or is resting to flail again. Perhaps he has been crushed to death. This is a scene riddled with physical discomfort. The buildings stacked in and around the figures look ready to collapse, yet also coagulated into one unit. There is no clear food chain present. The mutants are both consuming and consumed, ravenously rushing towards their own destruction. This scene communicates how it feels for Qonqar to be a part of a landscape in constant destruction. The city is not just his home, but a part of him; and it's consumption and destruction feels like being eaten alive. Qonqar paints a scene of utter destruction. The only depiction of clarity and strength is one limb holding a flag high. The ambiguous flag is neither Israeli nor Palestinian.



*Eaten by the City*, Bashir Qonqar

Current land division, still primarily reflective of the Oslo Accord, affords Palestinians only a fraction of their rightful land. Palestine today is comprised of The Gaza Strip, and the three divided zones within The West Bank, in theory. All other land has been consumed by Israel, and even the land still technically Palestinian typically lacks any semblance of freedom or state autonomy. Zone A is supposed to be under full control of the Palestinian Authority, however that is frequently not observed in practice and many movements or decisions are violently overseen by Israel. In zones B and C, Palestinian autonomy is even lesser<sup>39</sup>.

The city of Jerusalem has been the site of Israel's most blatant disregard for international law and Palestinian personhood. Jerusalem is a holy space for Jews, Muslims, and Christians, and as such was to be administered by the United Nation. West Jerusalem was annexed by the Israeli state in 1948 after the mass expulsion of Palestinians. East Jerusalem, which is majority Palestinian, was occupied and administratively taken over in 1967, and in 1980 Israel declared Jerusalem their "complete and united capital", a violation of international law<sup>40</sup>. This violent land consumption results in displacement, death, and destruction of culture, which I will discuss in greater detail later.

Another form of consumption frequently weaponized by Israel is consumption of property. In 1948, during the Nakba, Israeli forces destroyed five-hundred and thirty Palestinian villages for the purpose of constructing Israeli settlements in their place<sup>41</sup>. Since then the violent bulldozing of houses, and theft of belongings, property, and homeland have not ceased. In East Jerusalem and other sought after Palestinian territories families are frequently served demolition warnings with essentially no avenue for filing an appeal, self-advocacy, or legal protection of

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<sup>39</sup> Under the terms of the Oslo Accords control of Zone C was supposed to be turned over to the Palestinian Authority, but this transition never occurred and suppression of Palestinian life has only heightened.

<sup>40</sup> Article 49 of The Fourth Geneva Convention

<sup>41</sup> "When You Are A Refugee," A Cry for Home, Published January, 2018, <https://mcc.org/sites/mcc.org/files/media/common/documents/acfh-refugeefactsheetus.pdf>.

their rights. These demolition warnings give families a time window, typically of twenty-one days, to demolish their own homes and become refugees, or Israeli demolition crews will forcibly destroy the home at the homeowners expense. Most recently bulldozers descended upon the city of Silwan demolishing the homes of 130 residents<sup>42</sup>. Israel plans to use this newly destroyed landscape as the site of a religious theme park, settlement housing, and “green space” allocated for environmental protection. This instance of violence has sparked a series of uprisings throughout East Jerusalem and other occupied Palestinian territories, as well as international attention.

### ***Extraction***

The colonial pillar of extraction materializes in occupied Palestine most clearly in the distribution of water. It is important to note that even in territory supposedly under Palestinian control and autonomy, the air and water rights are held by Israel. Control extended to the Palestinian Authority exclusively applies to matters of the physical land. Israeli Military Order 158, issued in 1967, made it illegal for Palestinians to construct new wells without first receiving a permit from Israel<sup>43</sup>. This order made it impossible for Palestinians to exercise autonomy over their water supply and is still in effect today. This has had devastating effects on citizens of occupied Palestine’s health, safety, economy, and sense of personhood. Palestinians in militarily occupied areas are still unable to drill for water or install pumps to existing wells. They are also restricted from accessing potential water supplies from The Jordan River, The Dead Sea, or any other fresh water sources, in some instances including rain water.

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<sup>42</sup> “Demolitions begin in occupied East Jerusalem’s Silwan,” *Aljazeera*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/29/demolitions-begin-in-occupied-east-jerusalems-silwan>.

<sup>43</sup> “The Occupation of Water,” Amnesty International, November 29, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water/>.

Close to two hundred Palestinian communities are without any source of running water and must purchase water extracted from their land back from the state owned water company Mekorot. Often even those communities with the infrastructure for running water are so heavily restricted in water use, or their taps run so dry, that they too need to purchase water from Mekorot. Mekorot is also responsible for the destruction of many Palestinian water sources and the extraction of water in The West Bank for unequal distribution. While Palestinian residents of the West Bank ration their water supplies and suffer the health effects of dehydration and poor hygiene, Israeli settlers mere miles away enjoy swimming pools, hot showers, and a day free from water insecurity. Israel's practice of water extraction is illegal under international law, yet no action has been taken to stop it. At least 90% of the water available in Gaza contains some contaminant and is unfit for human consumption per World Health Organization (WHO) standards<sup>44</sup>. Saltwater intrusion, over-extraction, and sewage contaminants have all contributed to the slow destruction of Gaza's water. As a result, occupied Palestinians consume an average of 73 litres a day, whereas Israeli settlers consume upwards of 300 litres a day<sup>45</sup>.

Bashir Qonqar once again captures this phenomenon and depicts the everyday strife of living in occupied Palestine in his piece *Fighting Gravity*. In this piece, Qonqar explores what it feels like to have your legs pulled out from underneath you. A human figure is seated in a chair with an entire city stacked in his lap. In a similar style to *Eaten by the City*, the buildings in this city are so overlapped and intertwined they have become one mass. They appear to be collapsing into each other and building outwards from each other at once. The jumbled city is sitting heavily in the figure's lap, with three unstable stilts helping support the weight. The figure cannot escape his burden for holding the city, not only because the city would collapse, but also because

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<sup>44</sup> "The Occupation of Water," Amnesty International, November 29, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water/>.

<sup>45</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum of 100 litres per person a day.

he is pinned to the chair under its weight. Qonqar paints a desperate scene. The figure wears a pained expression and is curling his legs up towards his chest, as if trying to reach fetal position. This painting embodies the feeling of desperation that comes from living in scarcity. There is nothing to support the life of the city except for the figure's hands holding it together at the cracks. Like a Palestinian family whose groundwater has been pumped and stolen, the figure has had everything sucked out from underneath him. The figure also represents the overburdened Palestinian caretakers who fight against massive state violence in order to provide for children, parents, neighbors, and friends. The figure here is solitary to illustrate how isolating it can be to suffer yourself while seeking to reduce the suffering of others. Israel's practice of water theft is just one example of the way Palestinians have been left to survive in an impossible situation.



*Fighting Gravity*, Bashir Qonqar

Israel's practice of extracting and monetizing Palestinian water has also had devastating effects on the Palestinian economy. Pumping water into Israel has slowly decreased the efficacy



of Palestinian wells by depleting ground water and aquifers. This act of slow violence has led to the steady decline of Palestinian's ability to farm and participate in the global trade economy. Water scarcity has shortened the Palestinian growing season and forced a shift towards less water intensive crops that generate less profit. Meanwhile, Israeli farmers are experiencing increasingly bountiful growing seasons and are able to grow water intensive crops like grapes, that produce lucrative products like wine<sup>46</sup>.

Despite an evident need for greater water infrastructure, the Israeli government routinely denies Palestinian applications for well building permits. Anyone caught building a well or other form of water infrastructure without a permit will face harsh, often violent, punishment and destruction of the project. The Israeli army has also been known to destroy the water storage tanks of Palestinian families and devices intended to collect rainwater<sup>47</sup>. Images of IDF soldiers firing a deluge of bullets at water storage tanks rarely circulate in the United States mainstream media<sup>48</sup>. Tangible instances of egregious human rights violations and disregard for international law have been glossed over for decades. There is not even a semblance of a justification for these acts of violence and blatant dehumanization, yet Israel is continually funded and supported by The United States. Israel is draining Palestine of its resources, capital, and opportunities, and repurposing them to strengthen Israel's global position and build state legitimacy. The uneven distribution of such a vital resource has heightened the pre-existing economic disparity between Palestinians and Israelis, solidifying Palestinian's violently manufactured position as *second class citizens* in an apartheid state.

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<sup>46</sup>"The Occupation of Water," Amnesty International, November 29, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water/>.

<sup>47</sup> "Palestine runs dry: 'Our water they steal and sell to us'," *Aljazeera*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/15/water-war-palestinians-demand-more-water-access-from-israel>.

<sup>48</sup> "Even during a pandemic: Soldiers shoot holes in water tanks at Kafr Qadum," B'Tselem, May 27, 2020.

## *Monopoly of Space*

Achille Mbembe describes Israel's assaults on Palestinian statehood as "*infrastructural warfare*". Palestinian activist and poet Muhammed El-Kurd refers to Gaza as "the world's largest open air prison". Both of these quotes highlight the indispensable role architecture, landscape, and spatial manipulation play in the maintenance of the illegal Israeli occupation. Palestinians have been in a state of constant motion since 1948. Mass evictions, land theft, demolition of entire towns, and waves of incoming settlers have made uprooting and relocating the only way of life many young Palestinians have ever experienced. Israel's monopoly of space in occupied Palestine is created by two compounding acts of violence: 1. The constant and forcible movement of Palestinians and 2. The caging of Palestinians in highly militarized and surveilled landscapes. First, by violently relocating Palestinians, Israel severs the community's ability to organize, connect with one another, build care networks, and put down roots. All of this leads to a vulnerable population of Palestinians at risk of further subjugation and erasure. It is also helpful in maintaining the Zionist narrative that Palestinians are not Indigenous to the land and have no claim over the spaces in which they reside. Five hundred Palestinian villages have been bulldozed or bombed to complete ruin since the Nakba<sup>49</sup>. This has produced a massive transient refugee population, most of which now reside in The Gaza Strip. Nearly two million Palestinians live in Gaza and are unable to leave the city due to Israeli military declarations and apartheid blockades<sup>50</sup>. Under Israeli control, Palestinians are not allowed to move between Gaza, The West Bank, or Jerusalem without a permit from the Israeli government, something they are not eager to distribute. Almost all permit requests are denied, and the draconian surveillance and threats of violence make illegal border crossing difficult. Israel has also carefully designed its illegal

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<sup>49</sup> "Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories," Amnesty International, 2021, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>.

<sup>50</sup> "Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories," Amnesty International.

settlements in such a way as to surround Palestinian communities and sever them from the rest of the state. Palestinians are being ousted from their homes, forced into a state of constant transition, and then held captive under the guise of national security and terrorist accusations.

As I have referenced already, the second component of Israel's spatial monopoly is the caging and surveillance of Palestinians. In a Foucauldian nature, Israel has manufactured a nearly airtight system of monitoring the movement of Palestinian people within the occupied territory. A prime example of this is the network of Israeli military checkpoints (fig. 4) through which Palestinians must pass every day. There are eleven checkpoints along the Israel-Palestine apartheid wall. These are the only places Palestinians with work permits are able to pass in and out of the territories in order to go to work. This means that every day the 70,000 Palestinians working in Israel must pass through security, prove their identification, prove their employment, and allow the state of Israel to surveil their schedule<sup>51</sup>. This is what Matthew Hannah refers to as the spatial mechanics of colonial discipline. Hannah explains that a sealed border with very few highly monitored perforations for controlled traffic flow is the most effective way for larger populations to be surveilled. When seeking to discipline large populations like that of Palestine it is impossible for the state to have eyes monitoring all individuals at once. As the next best option, controlled population flow and checkpoints where the individual must identify himself allow the colonial state to maintain power.

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<sup>51</sup> "Checkpoints," *Aljazeera*, 2018, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2018/commuting-through-israeli-checkpoints/index.html>.



Fig. 4 A shot of the security tower along the apartheid wall at the Bethlehem checkpoint.  
Bethlehem Jerusalem (Gilo) Checkpoint, jpg, Wikipedia Commons, February 2, 2008,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bethlehem\\_Jerusalem\(Gilo\)\\_checkpoint.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bethlehem_Jerusalem(Gilo)_checkpoint.jpg)

As one can imagine, eleven points of entry and exit is not nearly enough for 70,000 people a day to travel comfortably. This is especially dangerous when the checkpoints are purposefully neglected, poorly run, understaffed, and cramped. It typically takes hours for an individual to pass through the checkpoint, meaning that if a Palestinian is to make it to work on time they must arrive at the checkpoint hours before their shift starts. Many begin to line up at three or four in the morning in order to make it to their seven o'clock shift<sup>52</sup>. The architecture of these checkpoints is dehumanizing and carceral, with cramped quarters, jagged concrete floors, dirt pits, and barred queues (fig. 5). On many occasions Palestinian workers have been killed or injured at checkpoints when they fall beneath the crowd and are trampled, or are stuffed against the bars until they can no longer breathe. As if this brutalist design were not enough to demean

<sup>52</sup> "Checkpoints," *Aljazeera*, 2018,  
<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2018/commuting-through-israeli-checkpoints/index.html>.

the Palestinians, Israeli Defense Force soldiers armed with assault rifles loom over the lines of Palestinians, in some cases just waiting for an excuse to initiate violence.

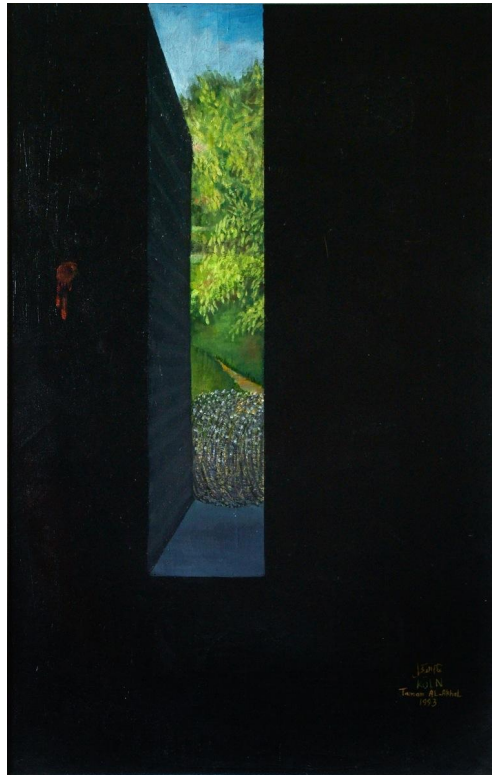


Fig. 5 Palestinian men climbing the bars of the Bethlehem checkpoint on their journey to work.  
Accessed December 10, 2021, <http://alice.fjordside.dk/Portfolio%20redesign/bernittsommer/pernilleindex.html>

Space on occupied Palestinian land has been deeply militarized and appropriated for violence. Palestinians can neither move freely nor stay in their homes. Israel has created a constant state of forced migration and simultaneous caging that utterly severs the individual from their land. The destruction of human relations to their own land is intrinsically ecological, and also painfully effective at disassociating a person from their geographic sense of belonging.

Tamam Al-Akhal captures the feeling of severance from the land in one of her untitled pieces. This unique rendering of landscape shows a view of trees and hillside that is almost entirely blocked from the observer's eye by a thick concrete wall. The juxtaposition of the bright blue sky and lush green landscape against the dark, bleak inside walls is striking to the eye. Al-Akhal illustrates a yearning for the outside world that is felt by many Palestinians incarcerated on their own land. Here the lush landscape beyond our view represents more than

just nature and beauty, it represents personal autonomy and freedom to move as one pleases. Interestingly, no light is stretching through the window as it would naturally. The light is stopped abruptly at the window's inside ledge, furthering the stark contrast in color palette, while also depicting the complete deprivation of land-based resources for Palestinian people.



*Untitled, Tamam Al-Akhal*

### ***Severance from Identity***

The objective of colonialism is to destroy the native; culturally, spiritually, and physically. Historically, colonial regimes have attempted to destroy Indigenous culture through the creation of an imposed hierarchy and subscription to concepts of Social Darwinism, as is seen in the brutal colonization of Indigenous Americans and Canadians. In the case of Palestine, the destruction of Indigenous culture is predicated on the belief that Palestinians are non-native squatters on land that is Jewish by divine right. This method of Indigenous erasure and

imposition of colonial thought patterns is what Patrick Wolfe refers to as “the elimination of the native”. He argues that the rightful identity of Palestinians as indigenous to the land is being strategically erased by media coverage, political decisions, and religious narratives that position Israelis in the role of the native.

The denial of Palestinian’s history on the land is deeply harmful to the psyche. This form of historical gaslighting has the power to devastate a community’s generational memory and sever entire populations from their ancestral land. Agnes Williams coined the term ethnostress to describe the ways in which the Indigenous psyche is harmed by colonialism. Ojibwe scholar and activist Winona LaDuke writes about her experience with ethnostress, saying “That’s what you feel when you wake up in the morning and you are still Indian, and you still have to deal with stuff about being Indian—poverty, racism, death, the government, and strip-mining”<sup>53</sup>. While LaDuke is speaking to her experience as an Indigenous American, her insight is similar to that experienced by Palestinians daily.

The Palestinian artist Beesen Arafat uses traditional cloth, paint, and texture to capture the feeling of ethnostress and culture death in his mixed media painting, *The Family*. This painting shows a traditional Palestinian family lined up as if for a formal portrait. Five adults and two children fill the painting. They are wearing brightly colored clothes that Arafat made out of real fabric incorporated into the painting. The headwear and colors worn by the men and women tells us that this is likely a muslim family. This scene should be beautiful, but instead the viewer is left haunted. None of these figures have facial features, they are blank and lifeless in appearance. The decision to leave these figures without any identifiably human facial features was strategic on the part of Arafat. This painting could be of any Palestinian family, but

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<sup>53</sup> Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations* (Charlottesville, VA: Students of Brown College at the University of Virginia, 2012), 166.



simultaneously it is none of them. They appear wiped of any individuality and sense of self, much like the loss of self that accompanies ethnostress. While their culture remains intact through their clothing, this is purely superficial in significance. The figures also appear to be fading into the background in some places, perhaps representing the fading of knowledge and culture with each new generation.



*The Family*, Beesen Arafat



*Self Portrait*, Michael Halak



Michael Halak shares his feelings of severance from identity in his painting *Self Portrait*. This simple painting is a hyper realistic rendering of a photograph of Halak that has been ripped into four pieces. The photograph is taped to a piece of cardboard as though someone tried to tape its severed pieces back together. The ripping of photographs is a common motif in Halak's work, representing his experience being split and shredded internally by the loss of his culture and land. Halak's artistic decision to create a self portrait that is a photograph within a painting is also meaningful. Photographs are often associated with memory, and such methods of remembering have been vital in the resistance of culture death. By taping his self portrait back together Halak is defying state violence and memory destruction. He is refusing to be erased and forgotten. No matter how splintered his identity may feel, it remains intact.

The Israeli government has been artful at disguising their colonial efforts intended to squander Palestinian culture as environmental preservation or restoration initiatives<sup>54</sup>. Landscapes are an important facet of memory. We underestimate the power of destroying an individual's childhood landscape and replacing it with something that is violent and hostile towards their very existence.

Rafat Asad explores concepts of memory and landscape in his paintings *Marj Ibn Amer* and *Haifa I*. These landscapes appear tranquil and beautiful at first glance. Upon further inspection, one can see that Asad has used fog as a motif for restricted horizons or horizons that have been made invisible. In both of these paintings the beautiful colors in the foreground are cut short by a wall of grey. Both of these paintings depict familiar landscapes for Palestinians and Israelis, Haifa and The Jezreel Valley. By providing a partial view of these iconic landscapes Asad is making a statement about accessibility of space for Palestinians. The horizon, a space

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<sup>54</sup> Ahmed Abofoul, "Israel's Ecological Apartheid in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," *OpinioJuris*, October 22, 2021, <http://opiniojuris.org/2021/10/22/israels-ecological-apartheid-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory/>.

traditionally representative of hope and the future, is veiled from the viewer as if to represent an unachievable goal. Asad is referencing the spaces of occupied Palestine that are off limits due to the apartheid, and the impact this has on one's view of landscape. These paintings capture the ominous sadness that comes with losing one's connection to a place.



*Haifa I, Rafat Asad*



*Marj Ibn Amer, Rafat Asad*

All of this violence is ecological, but the ties between colonialism and ecology are most apparent when the colonial regime co-opts environmentalism, as is the case in Israel. The Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection is one of the most insidious arms of the colonial mission. On multiple occasions Israel has demolished Palestinian villages under the guise of using the land as green space for natural parks. This violent displacement is warped into an environmental triumph and would likely be skewed by Western media representation to praise Israel for their contributions to a better environment. Palestinian history is being steamrolled and painted green. Landscapes of rich ancestral history have been flattened for the sake of planting non-native trees and invasive settlements. This has been a site of major identity erasure for Indigenous Palestinians. The deeply disturbing image of a Palestinian woman clinging to her olive tree as the IDF come to uproot it may surface in the minds of many of us (Fig 6). Her suffering is not

singular, the same violence is taking place daily off camera across Palestine. Traditional crops, gardens, waterways, trees, and organisms are being steadily weeded out of existence and replaced by strange and unfamiliar terrain. This is not just a loss of aesthetically pleasing landscapes or rich biodiversity. Palestinian culture has profound relation to the land and its creatures, such as their deep connection to olive trees, orchards, and wild edible plants. With these organisms uprooted, cultural practice is being stolen, and with it we risk losing the fire of the Palestinian resistance movement. Palestinian olive trees have been especially targeted for violence, a case which I will delve into in great detail in chapter four.



Fig. 6 Palestinian woman hugs her olive tree in order to protect it from the Israeli Defense Force. Moment Magazine, Summer 2015, <https://momentmag.com/opinion-stop-the-destruction-of-palestinian-olive-groves/>

## Chapter 4 - Weaponizing the Trees

### *The Pristine Myth*

What better way to erase a group of people and their culture than to rewrite the landscape on which they thrive. Afforestation is the process of planting trees on land that was not previously, nor Indigenously, a forest ecosystem. Afforestation is not a new tactic of the colonial agenda; it has been studied in Algeria, Aboriginal Australia, and India<sup>55</sup>, to name a few. Colonial afforestation is dependent on what geographer William Denevan calls “the Pristine Myth”. The myth here is that prior to 1492 The United States was mainly untouched wilderness, with little human-ecology interaction. This fallacy was used to justify and conceal the genocide of Indigenous Americans that took place after European colonizers arrived in the Americas, and is continuing to this day. American settlers argued that the American natives had no established roots, culture, or societal structure, and therefore no right to the land. The pristine myth is insidious and wildly detrimental to the preservation of Indigenous land sovereignty. It has often found a home in the environmental movement<sup>56</sup>, perpetuated by white activists seeking to “return” “nature” to its pre-human, edenic ways. While Denevan referred specifically to colonization in the United States, the theory of the pristine myth can be extrapolated and applied globally. The creation of national parks on Indigenous land, criticism of unfamiliar Indigenous practices, and most afforestation missions are all violent manifestations of the pristine myth.

### *Pristine Palestine and The Jewish National Fund*

The pristine myth has been a key weapon in Israel’s mission to invalidate the existence of Palestine and cover up the genocide they have committed against Indigenous Palestinians. The

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<sup>55</sup> Caroline, Ford. “Reforestation, Landscape Conservation, and the Anxieties of Empire in French Colonial Algeria.” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 2. (2008): 341–62, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.113.2.341>.

<sup>56</sup> Most famously in the work of John Muir.

Zionist mission is predicated on the belief that Palestinian land belongs to Israeli Jews by divine right, however the rich history of Palestinians on the land hampers this narrative. Evidence of Palestinian livelihood, culture, joy, and history threaten the existence of the Israeli state, and therefore must be eliminated for the Zionist mission to be realized. Continuing the tradition of colonial environmentalism, Israel aims to make Palestine disappear by painting it green, planting some trees, and calling it conservation land.

Tamam Al-Akhal explores the feeling of disappearing in her painting *Al Tarheell*. Here she utilizes negative space to communicate loss and separation from land. This simple painting shows the trunk of an olive tree, cut off at the midline. There is no fruit on this tree except for a single remaining bud. The remnants of an erased clothing line hangs from a branch with a lone piece of red cloth hanging. A path with no discernable destination appears next to the tree trunk before fading into the white backdrop. Finally, five disembodied feet appear to be running along the foreground. The feet are cut off at the calf, as if the bodies they once belonged to disappeared in the middle of a sprint. Despite the constraints of the medium, this painting gives off the impression that it is in motion. It is almost as if you could watch the remainder of the scene dissolve into nothingness if you stare long enough. There is a great ominous presence to this painting. Much like *Olives*, *Olive Oil* and *Olive Press*, this piece gives the impression that we are witnessing a mere snapshot of a larger scene. Of course this piece is speaking to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their land, but it also depicts the loss of land in tandem with the loss of life. It is as if the Palestinians and their land are forever linked, even in disappearance.



*Al Tarheell, Tamam Al-Akhal*

Zionist Israel has always purported environmentalism as one of their greatest ambitions. Even under the most generous analysis, Israel's pursuit of environmentalism is only environmentalism for the few, not the larger global community. In reality, environmentalism has been a highly effective guise for violent land dispossession, and murder. Theodore Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, wrote in 1898 "At present the land is poor and neglected — The Holy Land is a wilderness. But there are oases, our Jewish settlements'<sup>57</sup>". What this quote communicates is the belief that Indigenous Palestinians are not capable of managing their land, and it must be taken from them. This is the foundational description of the landscape on which Zionism was created. While it is not a government organization, The Jewish National Fund (JNF) acts as a pseudo-government entity in occupied Palestine and plays a major role in the afforestation of Palestinian land. The primary role of the JNF since its founding in 1901 has been to dispossess Palestinian land at the ground level via shady real estate deals and white washed

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<sup>57</sup> Irus Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine," *Natural Resources Journal* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 335, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24889569>.

ethnic cleansing propaganda. In 1940 the director of The JNF Land Department, Joseph Weitz, wrote his thoughts on the future of occupied Palestine:

“There is no way besides transferring the Arabs from here to the neighboring countries, and to transfer all of them, save perhaps for [the Arabs of] Bethlehem, Nazareth and Old Jerusalem. Not one village must be left, not one [Bedouin] tribe. And only after this transfer will the country be able to absorb millions of our brothers and the Jewish problem will cease to exist. There is no other solution.”<sup>58</sup>

Weitz does not shy away from his violent ambitions of ethnic cleansing. By “transfer” he of course means dispossession, land theft, and genocide. In his vision of the future it is the duty of The Jewish National Fund to oust all Arabs from their land, with no exception. This document provides enlightening insight into the genuine ambitions of the Zionist movement and its leading organization.

Bashir Qonqar makes reference to the above Joseph Weitz quote in his piece *Transfer*, which explores themes of displacement in a sardonic style. This piece shows another of Qonqar’s signature stacked and amorphous cities, this time packed neatly into a roller cart. The power lines, buildings, and streets of the city, and presumably the life that exists within, have been consolidated into a portable, palatable offering. The bright pinks and reds of the backdrop make the piece appear childish, an allusion to the feigned innocence of Weitz, with the use of the term “transfer” rather than genocide. Qonqar’s facetious depiction of the city pokes fun at the idea that an entire people and culture could be “transferred” peacefully, as well as the obvious fallacy of justified genocide. The piece also speaks to the belief that Palestinians have no fixed home, and therefore no right to land. Qonqar’s work frequently returns to the image of packing up and

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<sup>58</sup> Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of The Israel-Palestine Conflict* (Verso Books, 1995), 86.



portability, likely due to his inability to feel secure in any housing under the threat that it may once again be taken.



*Transfer*, Bashir Qonqar

Today the JNF’s ambitions remain largely the same, just with softer language and more neatly veiled genocidal tactics. On their official website their “strategic vision” is “population growth in the north and south, connecting the next generation to Israel, infrastructure development, ecology, forestation, heritage preservation, and more -- all for the land and people of Israel”<sup>59</sup>. Population growth, infrastructure development, and strengthened land relations for Jewish settlers are all conveniently worded goals that neglect to address the drastic loss of Palestinian life and culture they necessitate. In fact, the JNF’s website does not mention the existence of Palestinians once. Again, I return to Wolfe’s concept of the elimination of the native.

Something the JNF’s website does feature, however, is a link to “plant trees” at the center of their homepage. Remote tree planting is likely the JNF’s largest contribution to the

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<sup>59</sup> “JNF Tree Center,” Jewish National Fund, Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://usa.jnf.org/jnf-tree-planting-center/>.



greenwashing of Israeli occupation, and has become a massive trend in Western Jewish communities. Under the link to giving and planting trees the website reads:

“Planting trees in Israel is a beautiful way to show you care. In fact, we’ve been planting trees in Israel for over a century. It connects us to the land, it celebrates our joys and it literally plants a stake of hope and optimism in the future of Israel”<sup>60</sup>

The JNF has used remote tree planting to bring the Zionist global community in, and engage them in physical harm on the ground level. The bounds of settler colonialism have been expanded so that Palestine can be colonized with the click of a button. The JNF is correct in saying each tree planted “literally plants a stake of hope and optimism in the future of Israel”, as with each tree planted Palestine’s presence is further concealed. Hope and optimism in the future of Israel is synonymous with the destruction of Palestine.

The final piece of the JNF’s website I wish to highlight is their promotional video for the tree planting services. The minute long video opens with an upbeat young woman talking to the camera. She is surrounded by serene countryside and a beautiful horse. “There’s no better gift to give or receive than one that can connect you with *nature* and *your homeland*” she says. This opening statement accomplishes two goals immediately; It associates the JNF tree planting initiative with environmentalism, and it tells the viewer that Israel is their homeland to be claimed. She then goes on to discuss the ease with which one can order a tree and “connect with Israel on a spiritual, emotional, and physical level” all without ever stepping foot on the land. The JNF has digitized occupation. To finish off the advertisement she lists a variety of reasons to plant a tree, most notably “as a link to the land of Israel” and “to help the environment, and

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<sup>60</sup> “JNF Tree Center,” Jewish National Fund, Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://usa.jnf.org/jnf-tree-planting-center/>.

reduce your carbon footprint”. The deep irony of believing violent occupation can ever be environmentally progressive is lost on the JNF. “Every tree counts”, is her final message and perhaps the first word of truth. Every tree does count. Every tree planted by the JNF is an act of violence, land consumption, Palestinian erasure, and genocide.

### ***2021 Attacks on the Olive Harvest***

In 2021 alone, villages in The West Bank have seen a substantial increase in extremist attacks on their olive trees<sup>61</sup>. There has always been great levels of violence against olive growers and their crops, but this year with increasing Palestinian resistance and news coverage globally, attacks have reached a new high. In October of 2021 over nine hundred apricot and olive saplings were uprooted in the village Sebastia alone. The Zionist attackers also stole the community’s olive crop that had already been harvested. In occupied Burin forty-five olive trees were chopped down, all of which were owned by Indigenous Palestinians. Another seventy olive trees were fully uprooted in Masafer Yatta<sup>62</sup>. These few highlighted cases are just a snapshot of the violence that has unfolded this year. In other villages and in past years settlers have set fire to olive crops and fruit orchards, beat olive growers for attempting to harvest, vandalized olive growing communities, threatened farmers and their families, dispossessed farms, and destroyed olive crops once harvested<sup>63</sup>. This violence has deep implications on Palestine's economy, psyche, and culture. It is important to note that these extremist settlers often operate under military protection from the IDF, or are military themselves<sup>64</sup>. These violations of international law are supported and encouraged by the Israeli government, the United States government, and Zionist organizations like the Jewish National Fund.

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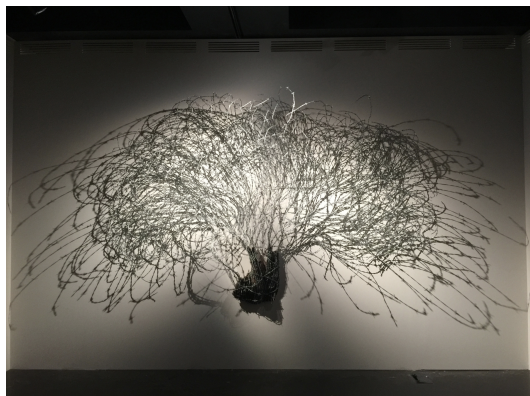
<sup>61</sup> “Israeli settlers vandalize Palestinian property in northern West Bank towns,” *Wafa*, October 13, 2021, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/126428>.

<sup>62</sup> “Israeli settlers vandalize Palestinian property in northern West Bank towns,” *Wafa*.

<sup>63</sup> Emily Cadloff, “Cultivating Resilience: Growing Olives in Palestine,” *Modern Farmer*, posted September 13, 2021, <https://modernfarmer.com/2021/09/olive-tree-farmers-in-palestine/>.

<sup>64</sup> Service in the Israeli Defense Force is mandatory.

Abdul Rahman Katanani explores his relationship to olive trees in his sculpture installation *Olive Trees*. Rahman Katanani is a Palestinian modern artist that uses found objects in his works, primarily barbed wire and sheet metal. In this piece he has sculpted an abstract olive tree growing from the gallery wall entirely out of barbed wire. The lighting design casts shadows of the work back onto the wall, making it appear expansive and threatening. Through this work Raham Katanani captures the complexity of the modern Palestinian relationship to the olive tree. In one respect, the olive tree is soiled. It has been transformed from a beautiful family member to a threatening, painful mass of violent matter by the state. By using barbed wire, a prominent feature of the apartheid wall, Raham Katanani is mourning the olive trees that have been forcibly absorbed into warfare, and weaponized against their people. In another sense, this piece could be interpreted as a sign of resistance and strength. The olive tree has reappropriated violent state weapons to build its own armor, turning Israel's manipulation of land back upon them. In this sense, Raham Katanani is commenting on the ability of Palestinians to survive and emerge from the rubble time and time again. I believe both of these interpretations can be understood simultaneously, as no resistance movement will always be clear and smooth. This piece reminds us that colonialism is a convoluted system, and in order to resist we must work through its complexities and contradictions.



*Olive Tree*, Abdul Rahman Katanani

### ***Making the Desert Bloom***

The Jewish National Fund has planted over 260 million trees on occupied Palestinian land, mostly Aleppo pine trees<sup>65</sup>. The Yatir Forest is a human designed monocrop of Aleppo pines that stretches approximately 7,413 acres in the Judean Mountains and the Negev Desert. It is the largest of the many planted forests created by the Jewish National Fund<sup>66</sup>. The crowning jewel of the JNF's tree planting endeavor, The Yatir Forest and the Aleppo pines have become symbolic for the Zionist dream. Aleppo pines are pioneer species, meaning they are resilient plants that are the first to populate a barren landscape or a landscape that has been disrupted by ecological disaster<sup>67</sup>. As a naturally occurring ecological tool, pioneer species are beneficial. They are intended to revive a landscape and return biodiversity through the provision of nutrient cycling. This is not, however, the role of the Aleppo pine in occupied Palestine. Instead, the planting of Aleppo pines embody the four pillars of colonialism and massively aids in Israel's occupation of Palestine.

There is an old and reliable saying in Zionism that Israel “made the desert bloom”<sup>68</sup>. This saying is intended to celebrate Israeli settlers' violent occupation under the guise that they have transformed the landscape into its true, divine, and lush potential. Palestine has never been barren, however, and therefore was never in need of an imposed ecological salvation nor any pioneer species. The Negev desert is an ecosystem with its own biological value, not a blank slate to be developed. The monocropping of Aleppo pines may have turned the native Palestinian

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<sup>65</sup> “JNF Tree Center,” Jewish National Fund, Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://usa.jnf.org/jnf-tree-planting-center/>.

<sup>66</sup> “Negev,” Britannica, Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Negev>.

<sup>67</sup> “Primary succession,” Britannica, Accessed December 9, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/primary-succession#ref1272358>.

<sup>68</sup> Alan George, “‘Making the Desert Bloom’ A Myth Explained,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979): 88 - 100, DOI: [10.2307/2536511](https://doi.org/10.2307/2536511).

landscape into something tourists can admire, but at a steep cost to Indigenous ecology and human life.

Nabil Anani illustrates the emotions the destruction of landscape brings about for himself in his piece *Olive Intifada*. This piece is radically different from the other works of Anani I have analyzed previously. Unlike his usually idyllic dreamscapes, this piece captures the pain and suffering of the land. Using exclusively deep red and black tones, Anani paints an olive grove that appears almost post-apocalyptic. The olive trees are anthropomorphized by Anani's choice in color scheme, making them into furious and even vengeful characters in the scene. The title, *Olive Intifada*, references the historic moments of collective Palestinian resistance over time. Anani's painting is a premonition of what the landscape will look like the day the olive trees resist. He is warning of the boiling anger that is within the land, and the destructive forces that will act if more violence is committed.



*Olive Intifada*, Nabil Anani

Ecologically, The Yatir forest and others like it are likely causing more harm than good in the fight against climate change. Even the director of the Israeli organization Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, Alon Rothschild has voiced concerns about Israel's afforestation

initiatives<sup>69</sup>. The Aleppo pines are ill-equipped to thrive in this climate, as they have not adapted to Palestine's soil, water supply, diseases, and sunlight. A great deal of biodiversity is at risk of disappearing as the JNF continues its expansion of the Yatir forest, including endemic species such as the Be'er Sheva fringe-fingered lizards and the *Allium kollmannianum* daffodil<sup>70</sup>. Many ecologists, even those that subscribe to the Zionist imaginary, are opposed to this mass movement to plaster occupied Palestine with Aleppo pines.

There are many ecologically beneficial trees Israel could have used for their colonizing mission, yet they chose the imperial imagery of the pine strategically to disrupt the landscape and rewrite the land. The Israeli government's love of environmentalism is nothing but a ploy for land consumption and feigned state legitimacy. Tree planting has also become a viable method of land theft by Israeli settlers. The Ottoman Land Code article 78, which was established in 1858 and is still in effect today, states that land that is cultivated by an individual for ten years without legal dispute is understood to belong to the cultivator and he will be given a deed. This code also establishes that land deemed vacant will be absorbed by the state. This code has been abused greatly by Israel and the JNF, and allowed the state to seize many hectares of Palestinian land after 400 villages were forcibly expelled during the Nakba. Palestinian land is depicted as unkempt and neglected by Zionist propaganda in order to justify dispossession by the state. The code has also allowed settlers to take over the residences of Palestinians via denied legal recognition of Palestinians historic existence on the land. All it takes is the planting of trees and a few discriminatory legal decisions for settlers to claim land that has belonged to Palestinian families for generations.

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<sup>69</sup> Fred Pearce, "In Israel, Questions Are Raised about a Forest that Rises from the Desert," *YaleEnvironment360*, published September 30, 2019, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/in-israel-questions-are-raised-about-a-forest-that-rises-from-the-desert>.

<sup>70</sup>"In Israel, Questions Are Raised about a Forest that Rises from the Desert," *YaleEnvironment360*.

The planting of Aleppo pines is also a tactic of colonial spatial manipulation. Underneath Israeli forests and national nature reserves lie 200 forcibly evacuated Palestinian villages that have been obscured<sup>71</sup>. Aleppo pines are particularly good at concealing previous land relations because of their low cost, rapid growth rate, and thick tree canopy. Afforestation is a political tactic intended to revoke Palestinians' right to return to their land. These man made forests also serve to divide up Palestine. Israel controls over sixty-five percent of The West Bank because it is designated forest land. Trees have been strategically planted to create buffer zones between Israeli settlements and Palestinian villages, as well as to create "green zones" that limit Palestinian mobility<sup>72</sup>.

The final destructive force the Aleppo pines have brought to Palestine is fire. Aleppo pines are not suited for Palestine's climate and have not adapted to survive in the foreign environment. For example, the pines are unable to absorb the intense sunlight of Palestine so they reflect it instead, worsening climate change rather than reducing it as the JNF would like us to believe. They are also highly water intensive trees, and impractical to grow in Palestine because it is an arid state. Finally, the trees are not equipped to resist high temperatures<sup>73</sup>. By planting Aleppo pines in Palestine, Israel has created the trifecta of wildfire inducing conditions. This has led to dangerous wildfires and further destruction of Palestine's landscape in recent years. In 2016 fires raged across Haifa covering 2,000 hectares of land and burning multiple Israeli settlements. Most recently, in August of 2021 a wildfire spread outside of Jerusalem and took three days to contain<sup>74</sup>. During both of these fires accusations of terrorist arson were cast at Palestinians with no foundation. These deadly wildfires were almost certainly due to the high

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<sup>71</sup> Sami Erchoff, "'Green Zionism' Buries Palestinian Memory through Forestation," *InsideArabia*, October 2, 2021, <https://insidearabia.com/green-zionism-buries-palestinian-memory-through-forestation/>.

<sup>72</sup> "'Green Zionism' Buries Palestinian Memory through Forestation," *InsideArabia*.

<sup>73</sup> "'Green Zionism' Buries Palestinian Memory through Forestation," *InsideArabia*.

<sup>74</sup> "'Green Zionism' Buries Palestinian Memory through Forestation," *InsideArabia*.

heat, dry climate, degraded soil, and the susceptibility of Jewish National Fund forests to fire. The JNF's colonial mission is putting millions of lives, even those of their own settlers, at risk with their intentional degradation of Palestine.

This case study demonstrates the indispensable role the environment plays in upholding the four pillars of colonialism, and the ways in which human interference in the environment can be wielded to cause harm. Israel and the Jewish National Fund have weaponized ecology to the fullest extent, demonstrating the colonial powers available in the landscape. Aleppo pines and their invasive tendencies consume land and resources from Indigenous Palestinians, extract desperately needed water supplies for irrigation, spatially constrict Palestinian movement and conceal Palestinian history, and disrupt Palestinians cultural relationship to their remembered landscape. Eco-colonial afforestation transforms trees into active players in the violence committed against Palestinians every day.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to me that I conclude this thesis with hope. Palestinians have not been pushed off the map. The Palestinian tradition of radical resistance has historically been one of joy, creativity, and community care, and it will persist into the future until Palestine is free. To paraphrase the words of Palestinian activist and poet Muhammad El-Kurd, Israel's existence is younger than that of his late grandmother, and he will witness the freeing of Palestine in his lifetime. Palestinians who resist their occupation have been the targets of violent silencing, execution, doxxing, and imprisonment, yet they persist. This is a trend across colonized communities and subjugated peoples, and we should find inspiration in the resilience of both humans and the environment.



Colonialism is not an event of the past, nor is it stagnant and routine. The methods of colonialism are constantly evolving to fit our societies, values, interests, and power structures. It is no surprise that colonialism has infiltrated our ecology and relationship to land. Ecology is a constant presence in the course of human evolution. Our relationship to land is one of perpetual feedback and symbiotic influence. We cannot pretend to be outside of the land if we wish to find viable solutions to what devastates our communities: whether that be climate change or colonialism.



*In Pursuit of Utopia #7, Nabil Anani*

Colonialism is not a new beast; however it is one we become better and better at recognizing and combating. This leaves me hopeful. No one has ever said massive societal overhaul will be easy, but it is within our wheelhouse. We are old friends with the land, and we can rekindle our knowledge of survival. Like the Palestinian olive tree, we know how to resist.

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