

## RESISTING GREEN COLONIALISM

**RESISTING GREEN COLONIALISM:**  
**PALESTINIAN AND ISLAMIC STRIDES TOWARDS JUSTICE AND**  
**SUSTAINABILITY**

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
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## **Lay Abstract**

The nonhuman world is often excluded from conversations around (settler) colonialism. However, imperial powers ravage lands in their quests to eradicate or exploit Natives. Meanwhile, environmentalism is rerouted by states to dispossess Indigenous communities: in Palestine, ruins of villages that are ethnically cleansed and destroyed by Israel are afforested with European pines, territories are sequestered as “protected areas,” and hiking is capitalized upon as a practice that familiarizes colonists with the land. This dissertation (1) sheds light on processes of Israeli colonial genocide and ecocide, encapsulated by the term terraforming, (2) provides a historical and critical analysis of Zionist environmentalism, (3) reconstructs the past (and future) of Palestinian localities blanketed with invasive flora by engaging with oral history, and (4) platforms the anticolonial defiance of Palestinians and local nonhumans. I conceive of holistic decolonization by upholding the abolition of racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. Yet, I prioritize human rights.



## **Abstract**

Since the 1980s, Western academia began to thoroughly contend with anticolonialism and environmentalism, progressively connecting the two movements. At their crossroads, I make four major contributions as a Palestinian activist-scholar. Firstly, I theorize settler colonialism as an operation that is inherently genocidal, outlining ways in which it destroys human and nonhuman lives in my homeland. Secondly, I designate the absorption of environmentalism by Israel for expansionist purposes as “green colonialism.” I provide several examples of this manoeuvre, perceiving it to be a Western environmental, Orientalist, and Zionist concoction. They include Israeli construction of forests as border walls, rezoning of Palestinian localities as “protected areas,” recruitment of settlers into hiking and planting as exercises of Indigenization, and rendering of Palestinians as ecological enemies. Thirdly, I animate the stories of several demolished Palestinian localities, which have been smothered by the Zionist entity, sourcing them from oral archives. Fourthly, Indigenous rebellion in human and nonhuman forms is spotlighted. I also channel Palestinian, scientific, anticolonial, and Islamic knowledge to foster “holistic decolonization.” This notion prioritizes human rights, while attending to the abolition of White supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. The introduction of this dissertation is split into two parts: the first examines the four major foundations of green colonialism in Palestine, (Zionism, Orientalism, settler colonialism, and Western environmentalism), while the second expounds my contributions to literature on the topic. The first chapter of this thesis sketches out the colonial architecture of the Israeli park system, the second chapter largely consists of a case study, (which investigates the imposition of USA Independence Park over the remnants of 8 Jerusalemite villages by Israel), and the third chapter provides a glimpse into the paradoxical fusion of Zionist environmentalism and militarism. This dissertation closes with a summary and points to global openings for Indigenous healing, restoration, and return.

## Preface

As a “sandwich thesis,” this dissertation encompasses three separate chapters pertaining to the topic of Israeli green colonialism. The first two consist of a comprehensive overview and case study, published in the peer-reviewed journals of *Politics* and *Middle East Critique*. Only the first is an open-access article but both articles are possible to republish as part of this thesis under the respective licensing agreements. Chapter 1 is citable as Sasa, G. (2023). Oppressive pines: Uprooting Israeli green colonialism and implanting Palestinian A’wna. *Politics*, 43(2), 219–235. Chapter 2 is citable as Sasa, G. (2024). American colony in Jerusalem: Rebuilding the eight Palestinian villages buried by USA Independence Park. *Middle East Critique*, 33(4), 549–570. Except for corresponding author information, I included the two chapters verbatim. I also modified page numbers and spacing to meet the requirements of the dissertation. The third chapter is a manuscript that has been submitted as a chapter for a book and interrogates the entanglement of Israeli environmentalism and militarism.

To my late mother Wafa (الله يرحمها) who sowed love for justice and education in me

To my beloved father Ghassan whose noble character and faith inspire me daily

To my dear brother Khaled who leads with compassion, courage, and principle

To our kin in Palestine whose *sumud* empowers our struggle for liberation

And to those struggling for socioecological justice everywhere

## Acknowledgements

Producing this dissertation on Palestine, while experiencing a pandemic, witnessing the mass extermination of my community in Gaza, and facing severe repression due to my activism, was a monumental task. It would not have been achieved without the will of God, and the immense love and support of my family, friends, comrades, and colleagues. I do not have the space or words to duly thank you all for standing by me but here is my humble attempt. I would like to begin by thanking Carla Lipsig-Mummé (الله يرحمها) for urging me to write on Palestine soon after I embarked on my Master's research at York University. Carla was selfless, preferring that I give voice to my people over participating in her project on greening workplaces and securing justice for workers. As someone who was Jewish, she forcefully denounced the violation of Palestinian rights in her name. Alina Sajed, you were not only the best doctoral supervisor I could ask for but a dear friend. I tremendously benefited from your expertise in decolonization, in addition to your thorough and constructive feedback on various drafts. Your unwavering belief in my ability to succeed, astute academic advice, and encouragement to pursue multiple research opportunities were invaluable. To my committee members Marshall Beier and Peter Nyers, you broadened the horizons of my analyses through your critical interventions and instruction of engaging classes. I am indebted to your empathy, solidarity, and mentorship, devoting numerous hours towards assisting me in my scholarly and professional journey. To my external examiner Somdeep Sen, thank you for your labour, kindness, and stimulating questions regarding my work. I am honoured that you read and evaluated it. Zahra Tootonsab, you are among the most beautiful souls I ever encountered and I thank you for agitating with me for the abolition of Israeli apartheid, on campus and beyond. Mike Gordon, I greatly appreciate our friendship, as well as your generosity in helping me and others navigate the academic world. Spencer Naylor, Sidney Valentino, and John Hayes, it was a pleasure chatting together and advancing multiple progressive causes at McMaster University. To the anonymous peer reviewers and wonderful editors at *Politics* and *Middle East Critique*, particularly Lisa Tilley and Christian Henderson, thank you for your beneficial

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## Introduction: Resowing Universal and Selfless Love in a Liberated Palestine

### Introduction

In the span of a year, nearly 100 members of my family were martyred by Israel in Gaza. Yet, they were just a drop in an ocean of blood, as Israel massacred hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, most of whom were women and children (Chalabi, 2024; UN, 2024). My tears flowed when Israel brutally murdered Palestinian scholar Refaat Alareer, 5-year-old Hind Rajab, and young Mohammed Bhar who had Down's syndrome (Keane, 2024). I also mourned for my cousin's son, 19-year-old Mohammed Eid, who was fatally shot in the back by an Israeli settler in March 2024. Mohammed was returning from work to his home in the village of Burin, which is based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. May Allah (SWT) have mercy on the souls of all our beloved martyrs. Aside from the colossal loss of human lives, I almost became numb to an endless stream of videos, which documented Israel's expulsion, torture, and starvation of my kin. Simultaneously, the Zionist state reduced our beautiful homes, universities, orchards, and heritage sites to rubble. I did not become numb, however, because we Palestinians hold onto our humanity and dignity. We refuse to normalize *ibadeh* (genocide) or *zulm* (oppression) against ourselves or others. We possess strong faith too, remaining confident that truth and justice will prevail in this life or the next.

Most Palestinians are Muslim, including myself. While Allah (SWT) assures us that They will hold wrongdoers accountable and compensate the oppressed, They also command us to struggle against tyranny (Quran 4:75). We are mandated to always pursue *qist* or *adl* (justice), regardless of the expense to us or our loved ones (4:135). Guided by empathy and Islam, I joined millions around the world to halt history's most livestreamed genocide as soon as it was launched by Israel (Al Jazeera, 2024). I had already become a prominent advocate for Palestinian, Queer, Black, female, and other marginalized communities. However, my activism for Palestinian rights intensified tenfold during this time: I created

online educational content, led direct actions, gave countless interviews, spoke in dozens of public panels, and organized fundraisers for families in Gaza. At the outbreak of the genocide, I had also made substantial headway on my doctoral thesis, dedicating it to the liberation of Palestine. Still, I did not have the heart or energy to simply focus on completing it from an ivory tower. Additionally, Canada continues to abet Israeli war crimes. As a citizen of this settler colony, I was further compelled to *immediately* mobilize my knowledge, privileges, and skills to lobby it to cease its complicity in our genocide. I navigated *diverse* local and international channels to amplify my message and achieve results.

On October 14, 2023, a small group of activists and I protested a policy convention for Canada's largest left-leaning party. We urged the New Democratic Party (NDP) to forcefully denounce Israel's war on Gaza, but our peaceful action was met with brutality. I was grabbed in a headlock, while my brother was tackled to the ground by security at the venue. Joining our rally were four delegates who subsequently had their passes revoked by the party, in a retaliatory move that sparked outrage and made national headlines (Charron & Lee, 2023). NDP leader Jagmeet Singh finally acknowledged Israel's mass killing of Palestinians as a "genocide" two days later (as documented in Mulley, 2023). I am not claiming credit for this significant political breakthrough, but its timing suggests that our form of dissent was impactful.

In March 2024, I also led two demonstrations against local real estate shows selling stolen Palestinian land, including properties in illegal Israeli settlements (Balintec, 2024). Although these events were deliberately held in synagogues to twist any disapproval of them as anti-Semitic, this manoeuvre failed. I attribute this defeat not to the awareness of the public or even our efficacy as organizers, but to the shocking pro-Israeli assaults we faced on both days. Markedly, one Zionist fired his nail gun at men, women, and children, yelling "Every f\*\*\*ing Palestinian will die" in a video that was broadly circulated on social media. Even mainstream media, which consistently erases and

denigrates Palestinians, could not ignore this hate crime, transpiring in broad daylight near Tkaronto (Starr, 2024). This action, held across from a synagogue, thus succeeded in communicating our opposition to Zionism as a “death cult” rather than Judaism (El-Kurd, 2021). Local and global attention was also redirected to Israel’s ongoing takeover of Palestinian land, which has been glossed over by Western news outlets. They decontextualized and laundered its onslaught against Palestine as a “war on terror” at worst or a “humanitarian crisis” at best. We reminded the public that Israel’s depopulation of Gaza was intentional: it constituted merely an accelerated phase of the settler colonization of Palestine, which formally began in 1948 (Sasa, 2024a, p. 552; Abdo, 2024).

I also defied a kuffiyeh ban a week after it was implemented by the parliament of Ontario, Canada’s most populous province (Draaisma, 2024). This scarf is central to Palestinian identity and resistance. Its prohibition was thus formulated to suppress political backing for Palestine, as the genocide was in full swing. In April 2024, however, I walked with several human rights defenders into the building wearing our kuffiyehs as hijabs and scrunchies. These items were deemed admissible on the spot, as captured by a viral video of us negotiating our entry into the parliament with a police officer. Our act of resurgence exposed the racist, misogynistic, and Islamophobic character of the ban, where I as a Muslim Palestinian woman was interrogated about my attire by a White male cop. We also mocked the arbitrary enforcement of this discriminatory policy (Canadian Women Against Zionism, 2024). Two weeks later, the ban was partly retracted to allow people to don the kuffiyeh within the grounds of the parliament, save for the legislative chamber (Callan & D’Mello, 2024). It was a small yet significant win against the state’s move to invisibilize Palestinians. I recall the enthusiasm of a Brown schoolgirl at the sight of my keffiyeh and traditional dress (*thobe*) in a space as sterile and despotic as the parliament. Overall, I prefer to facilitate strategic, creative, and bold direct actions over marching around an empty US consulate on the weekend. The former tactics may carry greater risks to my safety

and wellbeing, particularly as a Palestinian woman. However, they are evidently far more likely to shift collective discourse and policies in favour of material decolonization.

In the meantime, I became disillusioned with Western academia to the degree that I paused attending conferences. Canadian universities and related professional associations extended to Palestinians only a shred of the moral and material support that they provided to Ukrainians. Even outspoken self-avowed progressive academics receded into the shadows, furtively supportive of another genocide against Brown folks. Alternately, they feared losing their livelihoods should they express any concern for Palestinian life. I do not excuse the deadly decisions of sympathetic yet idle experts: little is sacrificed by them in comparison to an entire nation being decimated, partly as a result of their silence and inaction. However, I recognize their shortsighted and self-centered pragmatism. Western scholars, physicians, journalists, and other workers have been defamed as anti-Semitic, penalized, and fired left and right for critiquing Zionism. Upon grasping the severity of Western academia's racism, I began to ask myself, why am I expending enormous resources in an institutional setting that dehumanizes me and generates a lot of anxiety? And why should I publish in an inaccessible journal when my views and findings could reach 50,000 followers on social media with the press of a button? Am I compromising my health solely to attain a prestigious title and career?

I dwelled on my path before appreciating the power of formal critical education to decolonize minds. Thoughtful epistemic intervention redresses uneven economic, political, and social relationships. Its influence on future generations is precisely what renders the campus a target of Zionist disinformation, censorship, intimidation, surveillance, and punishment (Makdisi, 2007). In 2024, US podcaster Bari Weiss attempted to pin a rise in Canadian anti-Semitism on scholars including myself for conceiving Zionism as a racist current (The Free Press, 2024). She is notorious for "her involvement in numerous campaigns to vilify and ruin the careers of several Arab and Muslim professors due to their criticisms of Israel" (Greenwald, 2018). Professor Refaat Alareer (2023) even predicted that he would be

assassinated by Israel as a result of a massive libellous campaign she spearheaded against him. She isolated him for ridiculing the Zionist hoax that “Palestinians put babies in the oven,” which was amplified by mainstream media. The genocide against Gaza was greenlit through the demonization of its inhabitants (Cook, 2024). The revolutionary potential of (pro-)Palestinian knowledge production and transmission – in the face of far-reaching Israeli propaganda – cannot be understated. Learning is especially esteemed as a vehicle for socioeconomic empowerment by Palestinians (Sasa, 2024a, pp. 558–559). Textbooks were often the sole items Palestinian children took when they fled Israeli offensives in 1948. After most of our land and wealth were stolen that year, academic pursuits became further prioritized (Irfan, 2023). Upon establishing camps, Palestinian refugees were chiefly invested in educating their children, besides securing food and shelter (Sayigh, 1979/2007, pp. 33–34). Therefore, despite being neglected, villainized, deprived, and silenced by Western institutions for decades, Palestinians managed to become renowned as highly educated on a global basis: their literacy rates have ranked among the best (Irfan, 2023). Muslims also believe that the first Quranic verse revealed to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was one word or commandment: “read.” It is widely recognized that the world’s most ancient continually operating university was launched by a fellow Muslim Arab woman, named Fatima al-Fihri, in 859 Morocco (Griffiths & Buttery, 2018). While empire corrupted postsecondary education, I thus recalled the latter’s centrality in Arab and Muslim worlds. Indeed, I immersed myself in Palestinian history as an undergrad primarily to defend my community from those who (sub)consciously negated or demonized my nationality (Sasa, 2024a, p. 550).

### **Israeli Green Colonialism and its Foundations**

My doctoral project tackles the central source of our trauma as Palestinians and envisions our collective emancipation. Palestinian revolutionaries Edward Said (1978) and Ghassan Kanafani (1967/2022) recognized that the Nakba resulted from the production and dissemination of Orientalist

and Zionist art and discourses – and thus the necessity to contest them. Palestinian novelist, Marxist leader, and intellectual Ghassan Kanafani particularly rejected the elitist divide between activism and scholarship. As noted by Steven Salaita, Kanafani (1967/2022) crafted his “critical approach to inform Palestine’s struggle for national liberation” (pp. vi–vii). Directed at fellow Palestinians and comrades, his scholarship armed readers with analytical and rhetorical tools for challenging Zionism (pp. xiii–xiv). At the same time, he theorized an internationalist, communist, and liberated Palestine. Inspired by Kanafani and Said, this thesis charts the settler colonization of our land from a lens that recognizes the genocidal basis of this process. My analysis encompasses the nonhuman sphere (Ghosh, 2021). Secondly, I interrogate the Zionist absorption of environmentalism, which takes place through multiple channels. These include the induction of hiking as a national practice by Israel, its defamation of Natives as ecologically deviant, its afforestation of Palestine, and its declaration of “protected areas” (Rabineau, 2023, pp. 15–16). In the context of Palestine, I pinpoint forests, national parks, and nature reserves as “protected areas.” I name the diversion of conservationism by Israel “green colonialism” to locate it within a long imperial trajectory. This path is delineated by environmental historian Richard Grove (1995) who coined the similar term “green imperialism.” Additionally, I appreciate the structure of this open compound where “colonialism” is the noun. This linguistic formulation stresses the colonial rather than green thrust of this program (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 222–223). Besides Western environmentalism, I distinguish Zionism and Orientalism as the foundations of Israeli green colonialism. Thirdly, I recuperate some of our memories that are hidden by invasive pines, planted by Israel over the remains of Palestinian villages it flattened. Legacies of a glorious past are also predominantly expunged or misrepresented by Israeli preservation authorities. From the railroads and *bayyarat* (orchards) of ar-Ramla to the generosity and honeyed figs of Bayt ‘Itab, I salvage centuries of an agricultural civilization that thrived across Palestine (Encyclopedia Palestina, 2014; Sasa, 2024a, p. 560). By restoring the names of the families, nonhuman communities, and significant landmarks

belonging to various Palestinian localities, I build an anticolonial archive. It can guide the just and ecologically harmonious restitution of Palestinian land and sovereignty (Sasa, 2024a, p. 567). Fourthly, I trace the resistance of our community and nonhuman kin to Israeli (green) colonialism, positing holistic decolonization. Kindled by Palestinian, Islamic, scientific, and anticolonial thought, this concept conjures a world where all lifeforms can breathe once more. It blurs the boundary between humans and nonhumans while concentrating on the rights of the former (Sasa, 2023a).

As a “sandwich thesis,” this dissertation consists of three separate chapters. The first two have been published in *Politics* and *Middle East Critique*, while the third has been submitted to be part of a book. Only the first is an open-access article, but both journal articles are possible to republish as part of this thesis under the respective publishing agreements. I chose this format for my thesis since the opportunity arose for me to contribute to these reputable journals, namely the special issues of “Race and Climate Change: Towards Anti-Racist Ecologies” and “Circuits of Production, Crisis and Revolt: The Environment and Capital in the Middle East and North Africa.” I tremendously benefited from the input of various leading scholars in my field during the editing processes. Naturally, there is some overlap between the main chapters. For instance, I weave summaries of Western environmentalism and Zionism into all three to expound the emergence of Israeli green colonialism. I also consistently trace the resistance of Palestinians and their nonhuman kin to green colonialism, thwarting our victimization. Gradually, I build the case for holistic decolonization by resurfacing the ethics, theories, and praxes of Muslims and Palestinians. I cite my published chapters throughout this introduction, expanding on them and clarifying my thoughts around centering human rights (Sasa, 2023a, p. 230).

This introduction is split into two major parts. The first fleshes out notions of Western environmentalism, Zionism, Orientalism, and settler colonialism as foundations of Israeli (green) colonialism. These movements remain acutely misunderstood and whitewashed, even by proponents of Palestinian liberation. Ample space is devoted to my explication of settler colonialism as a campaign



that is constitutionally genocidal. I critically engage with the scholarship of Patrick Wolfe who is credited with founding settler colonial studies. Several authors have challenged his work for overstating the permanence of settler colonialism, excluding its manifold manifestations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and discounting its exploitation of Indigenous labour (Kelley, 2017; Englert, 2022; Hugill & Simpson, 2023). As a Native, I underscore the urgency of dismantling settler colonialism by unmasking its severe destructiveness and lethality. Besides recurrent massacres, I identify continuous land theft, economic exploitation, and acculturation as settler colonial proceedings that culminate in Indigenous mass death (Ghosh, 2021, p. 64). And by calling attention to bloodshed in Turtle Island (where settler colonialism remains heavily normalized) and linking it to Palestine, I strive to fulfill some of my obligations as a settler. The second part of this introduction scans existing literature on Israeli green colonialism within and outside the discipline of International Relations (IR). At the junction of anticolonialism and environmentalism, I outline some of my major contributions to this body of scholarship, namely my advancement of holistic decolonization (Sasa, 2023a). I conclude by mapping the three chapters of this thesis. As an activist-scholar, I oppose all forms of injustice and am cognizant of my positionality as a Palestinian in exile. Hence, my lived experience as a third-generation refugee defines my struggle to liberate my homeland. Yet, I am cautious to appropriately address the most pressing needs of my community – and others that I advocate for – by uplifting the voices of those made most vulnerable, (including Nakba survivors and Palestinians enduring the genocide in Gaza). I further “embrace interdisciplinarity, and observe events from global, holistic, and historical perspectives” (Sasa, 2024a, pp. 550–551).

It may seem fanciful to discuss the revival of Indigenous memories and customs in Palestine as entire families there are wiped off the civil registry. However, I argue that the need to sketch a liberated homeland is critically urgent now, since our salvation is imminent. I predict the dismantlement of the Israeli settler colony within the next several years, inspired by Jamal Juma'. In 2015, this co-founder of

the Palestinian BDS National Committee visited the organization I volunteered for, Students Against Israeli Apartheid at York University. There, Jamal explained that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005, was modelled after South Africa's BDS campaign. The latter toppled the apartheid regime there within 31 years, leading Jamal to predict the triumph of the Palestinian BDS movement in the same timeframe. However, *Visualizing Palestine* (2019) produced a detailed comparative timeline, which demonstrated how the Palestinian campus divestment movement has been progressing at an even faster pace than its South African precedent. Our South African kin certainly paved the way for our success, and we are indebted for their sacrifice and continued solidarity. Newer technologies also enabled us to bypass deceptive journalists, broadcast footage of Israeli crimes, and rally individuals worldwide to boycott Zionist corporations. After observing fierce Palestinian armed, cultural, and environmental resistance in Gaza, I have utmost confidence that the liberation of my homeland is imminent. Despite substantially ethnically cleansing its north, for instance, we witnessed the return of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to their destroyed homes: Zionist aspirations were shattered. It also loudly reaffirmed their Indigeneity or the refusal of Palestinians to abandon an inch of the land of their ancestors due to their embeddedness in it (Almashni, 2025). On the other hand, Israel is being increasingly isolated on the world stage as an apartheid regime. Due to his genocidal war against Gaza, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in November 2024 (Borger & Roth, 2024).

Moreover, we are living at a pivotal moment. Beyond Palestine, suffering engulfs humanity, directed at those who are racialized, disabled, poor, Queer, female, and old. Genocides are also unfolding against the nations of Sudan and Congo, killing, starving, and displacing millions. As for climate change, I am no longer inclined to provide statistics proving its looming and dire threat to all earthly communities: soaring temperatures and the global intensification of “natural” disasters, such as wildfires, floods, and droughts, speak for themselves. In 2023, a “final warning” was issued by leading

climate scientists to world states, demanding they impose sweeping measures instantly to lower greenhouse gas emissions, avoid irreversible injury, and *safeguard human survival* (Harvey, 2023). Yet, heavy polluting states, institutions, multinational corporations, and individuals persist operating with a “business-as-usual” approach. Although the world today distressingly faces multiple serious afflictions – from the melting polar ice caps to Zionism to UAE’s pillaging of Sudan – I argue that they are all intertwined. They are nearly entirely fixed in the overarching, oppressive, and mutually reinforcing structures of White supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy (Sasa, 2023a). Indeed, while South Africa greatly stimulated Palestinians’ struggle to abolish Zionism (political apartheid), BDS movement co-founder Omar Barghouti (Verso Books, 2017) heeds a lesson: we must not repeat Nelson Mandela’s failure to defy capitalism (economic apartheid), since capital remained in the clutches of White settlers. Accordingly, I underscore that we stand a crossroads: we can swiftly move to crush all three repressive structures, preclude planetary ruin, and foster global equality, health, and happiness. Or we adhere to a self-destructive trajectory, saturated with egocentrism, cynicism, lethargy, ignorance, and supremacist ideologies (Sasa, 2023a).

### ***Zionism***

Zionism is a 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish supremacist movement that triggered the settler colonization of Palestine (Sasa, 2024a, p. 552; Masalha, 2012; Abdo, 2024). Akin to all other forms of racism, this doctrine falls under the umbrella of White supremacy (Justice, 2019). Ghassan Kanafani (1967/2022) firmly rejects the Zionist premise “that Israel was a part of the [resolution] to [anti-Jewish] oppression” (p. 21). Instead, he reveals that the European Jewish bourgeoisie propelled the growth of Zionism in various regions and periods where anti-Semitism was curtailed. In tandem, this elite quashed calls for social equality and integration emanating from proletariat and subjugated Jewish masses. Hence, the objective of Zionism was never to liberate Jews but to privilege them as “God’s chosen people” via the disempowerment of others and the creation of “Israel” (p. 25). Its representation of Jews as morally,

physically, and intellectually superior, on religious and historical bases, “counters racist oppression with racism” (pp. 24, 34–35). This ethnocentric narrative elides centuries of harmonious Jewish exchange with other religious communities, including Muslims (pp. 17–22).

Palestinian scholar Joseph Massad builds on Kanafani’s theorization of Zionism by baring the feelings of insecurity that prompted its rise (Baker Institute, 2011). Rather than rejecting anti-Semitic tropes conjured by the Christian West, he contends that Jewish Zionists internalized and intended to shed them by assimilating to it. Massad elucidates that they primarily embarked on this task by colonizing land outside of Europe and creating a White Jewish state. Indeed, nearly 90% of Jews who arrived in Palestine between 1919 and 1948 were Ashkenazi (European). They set up an Israeli settler colony by expelling the majority of the Indigenous Palestinian inhabitants. As a racist and capitalist entity, it soon recruited Jews from the rest of West Asia, as well as North Africa, to compose its cheap labour force (Hanieh, 2003, p. 6). Jews of colour continued “occupying the lowest rungs of the labour market” until Palestinians were intensely coerced into working for Israeli employers after 1967 (Hanieh, 2003, pp. 7–8). Israel illegally occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip that year, allowing it to “transform [their] economy ... into a captive market and a reserve of cheap labour” (Dana, 2020, p. 247). As observed by Palestinian political economist Adam Hanieh (2003), “in 1999, the salary of an Ashkenazi employee averaged 1.5 times that of a Mizrahi employee and twice that of an Arab employee” (p. 17). At the turn of the century, Israel permitted over 50,000 Ethiopian Jews to colonize Palestine, but secretly injected the women with contraceptives (Greenwood, 2013). These policies embody the grave anti-Blackness and misogyny of Zionism, which catapults Ashkenazis to the top of its racial hierarchy and relegates Palestinians to the bottom. Israel even resurrected Hebrew as a spoken language but promoted a broken and Europeanized version of it. A forced accent was readily adopted by Arab Jewish colonists to suppress their primitive, Middle Eastern heritage (Baker Institute, 2011).

But why was this White Jewish supremacist campaign directed at Palestinians? Zionists explored various Global South states, such as Argentina, Madagascar, and Uganda, where they could create “an outpost of [European] civilization” (Theodor Herzl quoted in Baker Institute, 2011; Masalha, 2012, p. 34). They settled on Palestine largely because they could exploit its high Abrahamic religious significance to faithwash Jewish colonization of it (Massad, 2012; Masalha, 2012, p. 34). Faithwashing is commonly understood as “a tactic which attempts to whitewash Israel’s war crimes and improve its image through interfaith work” (US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, 2025). I widen the definition of faithwashing to encapsulate the application of any religious framework to exempt injustice. Therefore, both the conflation of Zionism and Judaism *and* Queerphobic misquotations of the Quran are examples of faithwashing. This phenomenon is immensely disturbing and dangerous due to the high influence religions continue to exert on minds worldwide. It merits increased identification, study, and denunciation. While freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and principle in democratic societies, its protection should not license abuse under any circumstances.

### ***Orientalism***

Additionally, Massad underscores that Arabs were dehumanized in a manner highly similar to Jews – as Semites – prior to the advent of Zionism (Baker Institute, 2011). He cites Edward Said who outlines the main points of 18<sup>th</sup> century Orientalist discourse: it constructed Semites as inflexible, unimaginative, dirty, backward, and unproductive people to racialize Europeans as supreme. By colonizing another Semitic population, especially using Nazi methods, the Zionists solidified the “displacement of the Jew onto the Palestinian” (Baker Institute, 2011). In other words, they perpetuated anti-Semitism but sought to isolate non-Jewish Arabs, particularly Palestinians, as its victims. Israel labelled them as desert-dwelling parasites, incarcerated them en masse, and divided them into besieged ghettos across Historic Palestine (Baker Institute, 2011; Masalha, 2012). It also assaulted, gassed, and raped Palestinian prisoners, even emblazoning the Star of David on some of their shirts (Al Jazeera,

2025; Williamson, 2023). Further, Israel redefined Palestinians as eternal wandering and disappearing European Jews by denying them the right to return to their homeland (Baker Institute, 2011). Said (1978) demonstrates ways that other Western states facilitated “the transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target” (p. 286). For instance, they portrayed Arabs and Muslims worldwide as weak and inept following the failure of Arab regimes to halt Israeli expansionism in 1967. Following the imposition of an Arab oil embargo on Zionist states, in 1973, the West began demonizing Arabs and Muslims as economic controllers: they threatened Israel and a wider democratic Western order. These menacing images of non-Jewish Semites steadily stirred support among Western masses for US invasions of oil-rich Arab states (pp. 284–286). Regarding the exceptionalism of anti-Arab and Islamophobic bigotry, Said states, “for no other ethnic or religious group is it true that virtually anything can be written or said about it, without challenge or demurral” (p. 287). As anti-Semites, the Zionists not only closely mimicked but colluded with the Nazis from their initiation of the Holocaust during the 1930s (Massad, 2012). Benjamin Netanyahu and Bari Weiss defame Palestinians as inherent anti-Semites, while rationalizing the performance of Nazi salutes by Elon Musk (Fields, 2025; barbarism critic, 2025). This record bolsters the standing of Zionism as an anti-Semitic and Orientalist ideology, which evidently failed to single out Arab and Muslims as objects of hatred. Violence against both Palestinians and Jews is being incited by Zionism, as recognized by the anti-Zionist organization Independent Jewish Voices Canada (2019).

An etymology of the word *Nakba* (Catastrophe) seals the link between Nazism and Zionism. This Arabic term refers to the invasion of Palestine from 1948. However, Israeli anti-Zionist educator Eitan Bronstein Aparicio disclosed that the Israeli army coined it to designate this colonial operation: it dropped Arabic flyers over the Palestinian city of Haifa in 1948, threatening to perpetrate a “Nakba” against the Natives unless they “surrender” their lands (De-Colonizer 1948, 2020). During an online workshop in which I participated, Eitan shared a Hebrew copy of this leaflet that he managed to obtain

from the archive of the antecedent to the Israeli army, the Haganah. It translated “Nakba” to “*Shoah*” (Holocaust) (De-Colonizer 1948, 2020). The Haganah’s unequivocal proclamation of a Holocaust crystalizes the Nazi impulse of Zionism. Our struggle to dismantle this ideology must comprise the eradication of anti-Arab racism, anti-Jewish hatred, and Islamophobia. In turn, the disappearance of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism depends on the abolition of Zionism.

### ***Settler Colonialism (Genocide)***

I argue that settler colonialism is innately genocidal (Sasa, 2023a, p. 221; Short, 2010). This view contrasts sharply with the position of Patrick Wolfe (2006) who wrote a formative piece on the movement. He analyzes settler colonialism across Turtle Island, Australia, and Palestine, underlining its “eliminatorial” disposition: European empires set up settler colonies on these lands by murdering and expelling their original inhabitants, demolishing their infrastructures, eroding their identities, and replacing them with White invaders (p. 388). Although I concur with this historical assessment, Wolfe asserts that “settler colonialism is inherently eliminatorial but not invariably genocidal” (p. 387). He grounds his conclusion in the multilayered and protracted nature of the phenomenon, remarking that it does not always comprise summary executions (p. 387). From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wolfe contends that the US reduced its reliance on brute force against Indigenous peoples, for example. He alleges that it had colonized all lands where it could relocate them compulsorily, while the civil rights movement was rapidly gaining momentum (pp. 399–400). The settler colony then redirected its mission towards destroying the *souls* rather than bodies of Natives, as a more feasible yet covert land grabbing strategy (p. 397). This operational drift allowed the US to superficially defend “the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society” (p. 402).

Wolfe cites “residential schools” as outwardly altruistic institutions that the US and Canada established to “kill the Indian in the child” (2006, p. 397; Love, 2021). Over 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children were taken (read: kidnapped) by Canadians, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

centuries, and placed in these “schools.” It was not until the end of the 1990s that they were entirely shut down, whereas they functioned unofficially from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Parks Canada, 2020). To a great extent, churches collaborated with the Canadian state to sever the cultural, familial, and spiritual ties of Indigenous children (Love, 2021). By assaulting their inner selves, Wolfe determines that the settler colony weakened tribes and their traditional systems of collective land ownership. It directly imposed individualism and capitalism on the youth with the aim of influencing them to sell their lands to colonizers in the future (2006, p. 397).

Additionally, Wolfe (2006) discusses the Trail of Tears. It saw the US callously expel various Indigenous nations of the Southeastern Woodlands from their homes in the 1830s (Pauls, 2025). Their forced displacement westwards was arranged at the whim of “large numbers of Euro-American [businessmen] and settlers” (Pauls, 2025). However, Wolfe (2006) underscores that thousands of Choctaws escaped removal, since they accepted a US government proposal to “become homesteaders and American citizens in Mississippi” (p. 397). Those who acquired or sought citizenship, while abstaining from anticolonial resistance, were bestowed the right to possess land by the US. This course was formalized under the Homestead Act of 1862 (National Park Service, n.d.). Once more, Indigenous societies who were historically collectivist were fragmented by a colonial policy of “assimilation.” It converted their members into individual property owners, swaying them to place their homes and lands on the market (p. 397). To capture the slow, multipronged, and “eliminator” approach of settler colonialism, Wolfe proposes designating it as “structural genocide” (p. 403).

I share Wolfe’s interest in discerning features of settler colonialism that set it apart from more temporary forms of genocide and colonialism (Sasa, 2023a, p. 221). However, he whitewashes this system both in his portrayal and naming of it. For instance, he omits the fact that *15,000* Indigenous children were killed in Canadian “residential schools” alone due to ill-treatment, trauma, and torture. I place scare quotes around them since these institutions are more truthfully termed “dungeons and death



camps” by the Native American Rights Fund (Love, 2021). Canada could not fully conceal its barbarity, as bodies of the children continue to be found at the sites (Love, 2021). Regarding the Trail of Tears, Wolfe cursorily characterizes it as “brutal and murderous” (2006, p. 396). He does not specify the displacement of *100,000* Natives – who overwhelmingly rejected “assimilation” – or massacre of *15,000* among them during this march. They were killed by disease, starvation, exertion, and freezing temperatures (Pauls, 2025). Besides, Wolfe trivializes the mass abductions of Indigenous children, not only in Turtle Island (via the creation of death camps) but Australia. He refers to the continual kidnapping of thousands of Aboriginal children by Australian social workers as “genocidal moments.” Otherwise, he boldly proclaims that genocide across the island continent is currently “in abeyance” (2006, p. 403, p. 409). Continuous expulsions, police brutality against land defenders, disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous peoples, and the plight of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) are also overlooked (Cecco, 2020; The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2020; Amnesty International Canada, 2023). Hence, Wolfe acutely downplays physical state violence against Indigenous peoples, particularly in Turtle Island and Australia, through his articulation of settler colonialism.

What about Wolfe’s baseless insinuation that 4,000 Choctaws sold their souls and thus lands as a group of opportunistic Natives (2006, p. 397; Mississippi Choctaw, n.d.)? He does not mention that the US threatened Choctaws with obliterating their resistance and forcibly displacing them west should their leaders refrain from signing the relevant treaty. According to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (2023), “the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek negotiations in 1830 were full of deceit and coercion.” They were bluntly described as “persuasion at gunpoint” by Colonel Coffee who co-drafted the treaty with Major Eaton on behalf of President Jackson (Navarro, n.d.). Further, the alternative faced by the Choctaws who remained was evidently fraught with not only dislocation but death. It follows that neither the Mississippi Choctaw (n.d.) nor Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (2023) perceive the significant

compromise made by a large group of their ancestors as an act of betrayal. Instead, they consider it to have been a means of survival and even steadfastness, ostensibly allowing a minority of Choctaws to *retain* their cherished lands. In short, settler colonial plots to “kill the Indian in him and save the man” are illusive, ruthless, and subverted by Natives (Wolfe, 2006, p. 397). From the inculcation of settler values in Indigenous children to “persuasion at gunpoint,” this plan is more aptly conceived as “*forcible* assimilation” by genocide scholar Damien Short (2010).

My appreciation for Short’s (2010) contribution should not be misconstrued as a dismissal of Indigenous agency. Nor do I exonerate ongoing collusion between settler colonies and *very few* Natives who secure their personal interests at the expense of their kin (Sayigh, 1979/2007, p. 39). Rather, I correct the record on settler colonialism, striving to convey its immeasurable savagery and tyranny. Wolfe (2006) selectively focuses on “assimilationist” processes, falsely suggesting that Indigenous peoples were gently urged to abandon their lands in recent times. In this “eliminary” undertaking, he misrepresents Natives as not only passive but enthusiastic participants (pp. 396–397). Aside from sanitizing settler colonialism, he consequently displaces much of the responsibility for it onto the victims. Is Wolfe compelled to mitigate his discomfort as an Australian settler by peddling colonial narratives (Ghosh, 2021, p. 65)?

I view “acculturation” as an even more suitable label for the suppression of Indigenous identities than “forcible assimilation.” Whereas assimilation denotes “one group mixing itself into another,” acculturation entails “one group eliminating another,” generally during colonization (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Settler colonialism endeavours to not only manipulate Indigenous peoples into ceding their lands by muddling their beliefs. It requires the complete eradication of their cultures as a method for also erasing their presence and past. Short (2010, p. 46) describes this process as “cultural genocide,” explaining that Natives globally assert themselves as the original landowners by upholding their traditions. These embody their primordial, distinct, and profound bonds with local human and

nonhuman communities (p. 54). For instance, Palestinian *fellaheen* (farmers) still don kuffiyehs to shield their faces from the sun. The kuffiyeh also functioned to thwart surveillance by colonial administrators during *intifadas* (uprisings). Aside from their functionality, these scarves are adorned with patterns that encompass olive leaves, bold lines, and fishnets. Respectively, these motifs radiate the love Palestinians hold for their land, local trade, and the Mediterranean Sea – despite the fact that many are no longer able to reach this body of water due to racist Israeli travel restrictions. The kuffiyeh surged as a global symbol of Palestine, during the 1960s, since President Yasser Arafat “draped it over his right shoulder to resemble the pre-1948 map of Palestine” (Hirbawi, 2023). Concurrently, Native customs and artistic expressions expose the newness, vapidness, and foreignness of Israeli, Canadian, and US cultures. Settler colonies thus do not enable or even force the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Instead, these entities attempt to wipe out Native languages, practices, foods, knowledge, dances, and attire to feign rootedness in the spaces they occupy (Short, 2010, pp. 46, 54).

Acculturation starkly manifests in the operation of student dungeons and kuffiyeh bans, as well as Israel’s assassination of *dabkeh* dancers and intentional destruction of *thobes*. From early 2018 to late 2019, tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees led weekly rallies in Gaza, which constituted the Great March of Return. Men, women, and children gathered at the edge of the besieged enclave, courageously demanding their rights to live freely and recover their stolen homes in “Israel.” These demonstrations were chiefly peaceful but vastly televised. Israeli soldiers retaliated by killing 214 Palestinians and injuring 36,100 more – about a quarter of whom were children (UN, 2020). On November 29, 2018, I attended a lecture by Palestinian-Canadian medic Tarek Loubani who rescued Palestinians wounded during this revolt. He testified that the first among the protestors to be shot and killed by Israel, on a consistent basis, were *dabkeh* dancers and the disabled. *Dabkeh* is a folk dance that has gained prominence across Bilad al-Sham with marked national variations in Palestine. Regarding the 2023 onslaught against Gaza, the Zionist entity deliberately bombed the home of a

Bedouin Palestinian woman there named Aida Abu Sitta. Her preservation and upcycling of Palestinian antique silver and hand-stitched *thobes* gained acclaim. Although she survived the attack, many of the nonhumans and rare treasures she housed did not (Shawa, 2024). Israel’s persecution of Palestinian *dabkeh* performers and traditional fashion archivists may shock readers not only due to its mercilessness. The horrors of settler colonialism, including its wanton liquidation of Native cultures, are still underestimated.

Moreover, Indigenous cultures are coopted by settler colonies (Wolfe, 2006, p. 389). For instance, most Palestinians still live or identify as farmers (*fellaheen*), honouring the traditions of our forebears even if we were expelled by Israel (Sasa, 2024a, p. 550). As the original inhabitants of Palestine, we can trace our ancestry to one of the earliest agricultural civilizations. We are distinguished for growing olive trees, which rank among the earth’s oldest cultivated trees and longest living organisms (Bachmann & Phillips, 2021, p. 2). They bear fruits that nourish and heal our bodies, supply wood for the creation of exquisite local and religious crafts, and produce financially valuable oil (Abu Hanieh et al., 2020). These flora also stand as formidable living archives, memorializing lineages of their *ashab*. Palestinians employ this term, which instantaneously connotes “owners” and “friends,” to describe themselves in loving relation to their land (Sasa, 2024a, p. 560). In Palestinian localities where Israel destroyed all buildings and consciously shrouded their remnants, olive trees are particularly vital for marking Indigenous continuity. As Ilan Pappé (2006) articulates, “these fruit trees were planted and nurtured by human hands. Wherever almond and fig trees, olive groves or clusters of cactuses are found, there once stood a Palestinian village ... these trees are all that remain” (p. 228).

Israel uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive trees and other Indigenous flora to expunge millennia of Palestinian agriculture and existence from history. “Palestinian-crafted *bustans*, or home-centred orchards” were sometimes spared and claimed by the Zionists as *their* artistic creations (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 225–227). Over the olive groves Israel cleared, it planted fast-growing, invasive pines en

masse (Braverman, 2009, p. 343; Sasa, 2023a, p. 226). Their rapid ethnic cleansing, deforestation, and afforestation of Palestine emboldened Israel to declare it “made the desert bloom” as early as 1969 (El-Solh, 2025). Pre-colonial Palestine was expressly reconstructed by the settler colony as ““a desolate land that provided no shade whatsoever”” (Jewish National Fund, n.d., as cited in Sasa, 2023a, p. 225). Furthermore, Israel rebranded itself as the vanguard of afforestation on regional and global planes (Sasa, 2023a, p. 228). Israel also *bluewashed* its theft and overexploitation of water in Palestine by marking itself as a pioneer in drip-irrigation. Whereas Palestinian permaculture relied on rainwater (Sasa, 2024a), Israeli agriculture drained the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. Notably, the National Water Carrier of Israel irrigated plantations in the south of Historic Palestine by redirecting the flow of the Jordan (Silver, 2014). Since the river fed the Dead Sea, this diversion drastically depleted water reserves for the latter. They declined by 75%, causing the sea level to drop “at a rate of over a meter a year” (Brachya, 2013, p. 296). Additionally, the Zionist entity succeeded in gaining praise as “the top nation in the world for wastewater recycling” (Climate Adaptation Platform, 2024). Yet only one Israeli wastewater treatment plant was found to be the biggest polluter of the Mediterranean by far. The Shafdan reclamation system dumped sewage sludge in the intercontinental sea (Kerret, 2013, p. 231). Israel has effectively performed itself as a “cradle of agriculture” by annihilating Palestinian *fellaheen*, destroying their olives, appropriating their achievements, and heavily investing in (unsustainable) agriculture. It robbed the title from Palestine and the broader Fertile Crescent, because “settler colonialism destroys to replace” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). It choked its quiet yet piercing cries for liberation by mining Native heritage while targeting its keepers (Sasa, 2024a, p. 555; Ogunnaike, 2017).

Even in the absence of direct deaths, I contend that acculturation is just as savage, deplorable, and genocidal as “simple violence” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 401). Wolfe himself concedes that “not only did [Indigenous] numbers rapidly hit the lowest level they would ever record, but [acculturation] turned out to yield a faster method of land transference than the US Cavalry had previously provided” (p. 399).

He also notes that the life expectancy for Aboriginal peoples rests 25% lower than that of settlers after Australia recognized some of the former's rights in 1992 (p. 399; Short, 2010, p. 54). However, Wolfe does not expound these harrowing statistics. And although he concedes that "land is necessary for life," he does not probe the relation between the two (2006, p. 387). Consequently, Indigenous mass suffering and death are naturalized. The story of the Palestinian olive alludes to some of the indirect ways acculturation kills, beyond its mystification of Native "elimination." Indian anthropologist Amitav Ghosh (2021) elaborates on these mechanisms. Markedly, he debunks the myth that millions of Indigenous peoples were purely deficient in antibodies to pathogens carried by early settler colonists. Instead, infections met reduced bodily defences due to depression, anxiety, displacement, economic exploitation, starvation, and malnutrition due to European subjugation. Acculturation and expulsions thus precipitated the "Great Dying" of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (Ghosh, 2021, p. 64). Unabated, it is to be expected that settler colonialism continues to thoroughly diminish Native survival and wellbeing worldwide.

Dr. David Servan-Schreiber (2009) corroborates this view by identifying five major triggers of cancer, which are all outcomes of land and cultural dispossession. They are "denial of one's true identity," "persistent anger or despair," "social isolation," as well as adoption of a "traditional Western diet" and a "sedentary lifestyle" (p. 41). The US still obliges Indigenous peoples to consume low-quality European food and reduce their physical activity by separating them from their ancestral lands. It also renders them far more vulnerable than settlers to heart disease, obesity, and diabetes via its manufacture of food insecurity (McKinley & Jernigan, 2023, pp. 45–46). Meanwhile, chronic depression and stress suppress the immune system, induce inflammation, and significantly fuel the growth and spread of cancer (Servan-Schreiber, 2009, pp. 41, 47). My brother Khaled Sasa (2024) deduces from the findings of Servan-Schreiber that Natives and other oppressed groups jeopardize their lives even when they suppress their own souls – whether to evade oppression or enhance their

socioeconomic status. Land and cultural theft thus not only enable the disintegration of Indigenous communities and their disappearance in the abstract sense (Wolfe, 2006, p. 401). From uprooting them (clandestinely) to bulldozing olive trees, settler colonies covertly impoverish, starve, wound, and murder Natives (Ghosh, 2021, p. 64). Palestinian journalist Anas Al-Sharif – who was Israel assassinated months later (Tondo, 2025) – tweeted the following from Gaza on May 20, 2025, “more people have died from displacement than bombardment [translation mine].”

Settler colonies do not incidentally kill but are designed to endlessly exploit the labour or extinguish the lives of all Indigenous peoples. We have observed the assignment of the lowest-ranking jobs to Palestinians within the Israeli economy (Hanieh, 2003, pp. 7–8). Similarly, after the Dutch failed to recruit White farmers and slavery was abolished, they coerced South Africans into low-wage work. The Indigenous inhabitants were forced to live in small bantustans, barred from land ownership, skilled employment, and striking (Kelley, 2017, pp. 270–271). When the labour of Natives is substituted and all lands – where they could be concentrated – are appropriated, settler colonies resort to “mass killings or assimilation” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 403). Should forcible assimilation or acculturation not prove deadly, it does not satiate settler colonies. Note that the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee were derogatorily called the “Five Civilized Tribes” for conforming to various settler-capitalist norms. Nevertheless, the colonizer condemned these nations to death by sending them onto the Trail of Tears. Even the Choctaws who escaped this fate by accepting US citizenship, “were either scammed out of their land or forced away by white settlers [within the next two decades]. As a result, many left for Oklahoma” (Mississippi Choctaw, n.d.). From a wider historical lens, “acquiescing to the demands of racists never ends with them treating Black people or people of color with kindness or respect” (Wiltz, 2023). In fact, Wolfe (2006) reflects that the US explicitly expelled the Cherokee because their elite closely emulated it by becoming productive agriculturalists, drafting a national constitution, and enslaving Africans. The compatible and stationary ways of the Cherokee, including their mere

construction of homes, “signified *permanence*” and equality. These developments engendered settler colonial anxiety (p. 396). Still, temporary Indigenous dwellings are not safe, evidenced by Israel’s incessant bombardment of Palestinian refugee camps. Analogously, Canada refuses to provide clean water, proper health services, and adequate housing to Indigenous communities across the land it occupies until this day (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2020). Such widespread violations of Indigenous rights demonstrate that settler colonies view all Natives as disposable, targeting them for ceaseless exploitation and annihilation. Indigenous (cultural, military, and academic) resistance is not exclusively attacked by settler states in their central preoccupation to seize the greatest acreage of land (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). This objective was blatantly pronounced by Israeli politician and former Knesset member Moshe Feiglin. He stated, “Every child, every baby in Gaza is an enemy. The enemy is not Hamas... We need to conquer Gaza and colonize it and not leave a single Gazan child there” (B.M., 2025). Indigenous peoples have long understood the genocidal orientation of settler colonialism, popularizing the slogan “Existence is Resistance” among them (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). It is particularly tied to Palestinians, whose heritage and right to life are refuted in an exceptionally unguarded manner during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have previously stated, “Name me another ethnic group that gets placed inside scare quotes by US politicians, to openly advocate for its extermination” (Sasa, 2025).

Overall, Patrick Wolfe (2006) offers a valuable yet injurious study of settler colonialism. He neglects its constant deployment of brute force, the equally lethal impact of “assimilation,” its drive to execute all Natives, and Indigenous resistance. Therefore, Wolfe does not capture settler colonialism as a genocidal movement. Although he admits its spuriousness, he perpetuates a dichotomy between biological and social harm by far prioritizing the former (pp. 399–401). Wolfe comments, “Native Title in Australia or Indian sovereignty in the US may have deleterious features, but these are hardly equivalent to the impact of frontier homicide” (p. 387). His reductionist understanding of genocides as mass slaughter is widespread and explains the soaring preference for acculturation: this method of



extermination evades public scrutiny (Wolfe, 2006, p. 402). Indeed, Zionists regularly invoked statistics, (under my online posts before October 7), which showed an annual rise in the Palestinian population to deny the Nakba. However, settler colonialism should be understood as genocidal regardless of its speed or empirical substantiation. It is impossible for an ideology premised upon the theft of land and replacement of its inhabitants to be less violent (Weiss, 2017). Recognition of genocide against Palestinians should not have awaited and thus enabled the implementation of Israel’s “final solution” against them (Jewish Voice for Peace, n.d.). Moreover, the above quote appears to denounce the (limited) sovereignty exercised by Natives, rather than their stealthy “elimination.” “Elimination” is a euphemism employed by Wolfe (2006) for the dispossession and murder of Indigenous peoples. And by overlooking their resistance, he not only camouflages settler colonialism but forecloses the possibility of its dismantlement. Yet, the Wixárika just secured “the largest ancestral land restitution to date” after leading a cross-country march and a legal battle spanning two decades in Mexico (Mexico News Daily, 2025). Hence, settler colonialism *should* be differentiated from other breeds of colonialism due to its “long-run structural consistency” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 402). The latter focus on extracting labour and resources from the Global South for much shorter periods of time (King, 2018, p. 138). But settler colonialism is far from permanent, owing to continual Indigenous struggles for self-determination “by all available means” (UN, n.d.-b).

Furthermore, Wolfe (2006) emulates the same scholars he critiques for normalizing settler colonialism by labelling it “structural genocide” (p. 403). They suggest “ethnocide,” “cultural genocide,” and “indigenocide” (p. 402). “Genocide” is a concise and direct term that effectively relays the decimation of Indigenous peoples. Due to their abject dehumanization, it is particularly vital not to dilute or overly narrow the name of this barbaric project (King, 2018, p. 136). My belief in the power of language and the active voice even led me to promote use of the word “genocide” as a verb on X following October 7 (e.g. Israel is genociding Palestinians in Gaza). This linguistic practice has since

become prevalent. Additionally, “genocide” is the term Indigenous peoples employ to describe their persecution across settler colonial contexts (Monkman, 2019). By and large, the only genocide condemned by the West is the Jewish Holocaust, largely since its victims were European (Wolfe, 2006, p. 402; Césaire, 1955/2000, pp. 36–37). By applying the same terminology to the annihilation of racialized people, however, we bring global attention to it. A sense of urgency is evoked in society to end the slaughter, while challenging the treatment of non-White lives as disposable (Wolfe, 2006, p. 402). Veronika Bílková expands on the “symbolic value” of genocide recognition. She states, “genocide stands apart as the *‘the crime of crimes’* – it is so exactly due to the fact that unlike crimes against humanity, war crimes or common offences, it is directed [...] against entire human groups” (2022, p. 101). The designation of genocides must become uniform out of care and respect for Indigenous peoples.

From a legal lens, my argument that settler colonialism is genocidal aligns with the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This treaty defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (UN, n.d.-a). Nevertheless, I advocate for the recognition of genocides based on *all* protected grounds, including gender, disability, age, and sexual orientation (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.; Bílková, 2022). Hence, I view both intensifying state-led efforts to eradicate trans people and the transatlantic slave trade as genocidal (The Lemkin Institute, 2025a). Wolfe posits otherwise regarding the latter, claiming that the reliance of the US economy on the labour of Africans precluded their extermination (2006, pp. 403–404). He outright discounts the deliberate murder of *between 15 and 20 million* enslaved African men, women, and children by the West (Jones, 2006, pp. 23–24). Further, they too were stripped of their lands, ideas, and heritage in their conversion from Africans to “Negroes” (Kelley, 2017, pp. 268–269). Such apathy would never be extended to the slaughter, displacement, and enslavement of millions of White people. All communities should be equally valued and protected –

rather than targeted – for their distinctiveness. At minimum, the existential threats they face(d) must be named and addressed. Through the universal acknowledgement of annihilistic campaigns as genocidal, we also draw threads between them, baring the structures of oppression spawning these movements. Significantly, we recontextualize the mass murder of Jewish, Roma, and Sinti people. For instance, Aimé Césaire situates Nazism as an offshoot of not only White supremacy, but colonialism and capitalism (1955/2000, pp. 36–37). We can hope to end current genocides and impede their reoccurrence worldwide only when these systems are identified and abolished (Sasa, 2023a). Besides, solidarity among genocided communities is nurtured through the deployment of consistent language to describe their plights. From Palestine to Turtle Island to Congo, Natives are already making connections and building alliances to preserve their lives and lands – long before international law and Western academia catch up.

### ***Western Environmentalism***

Two centuries prior to the Nakba, France launched Western environmentalism. This movement was marked by racism, incoherence, and deception from the outset. Recasting humans as fundamentally incompatible with “nature,” it spawned various mechanisms to enforce their separation. The communities that were predominantly framed as ecological threats were Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC). They were sentenced to deprivation from the soil, air, and water that sustained their bodies for generations and were sustained by them (Suzuki, 2016). What explains the manufacture of this dualism? France and other colonial powers were in the midst of ravaging the extra-European world. They gradually grasped the depth of their ecological footprint there and the dangers it posed to *their* prosperity. In particular, the West was depleting lucrative resources at an unparalleled pace due to its “rapacious capitalism” (Grove, 1996, p. 70). Colonial regimes thus quickly moved to monopolize riches in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Australia, while implementing steps towards averting their full disappearance. Brazenly, the West shifted blame for ecocide onto racialized populations, (though

it generally shielded its prejudice by overtly reproaching humanity at large). They “were seen at best as too culturally backward and uncultivated and at worst too degenerate and savage to appreciate the natural landscapes” (Neumann, 2007, p. 1206). This conceptual reconfiguration created an environmental pretext for sectioning and cordoning off the lands of non-White societies. Empires then began exploiting them in a slightly more controlled manner than before. Such enclosures came to be recognized as hallmarks of Western environmentalism and dubbed “protected areas.” They encompass forest reserves, nature reserves, and national parks, the first of which was initiated by Britain in the Caribbean, while the latter two were introduced by the United States to Turtle Island (UNESCO, n.d.; Sasa, 2024a, p. 553). UNESCO (n.d.) still celebrates the Tobago Main Ridge Forest Reserve as “the oldest legally protected forest reserve.” The UN agency boasts that its 1776 inauguration constituted “the first act in the modern environmental movement,” quoting *Scientific American*. However, this law was enacted by the British to maintain soil fertility and the productivity of their plantations. Put differently, UNESCO lauds a historic landmark that enabled slavery, as well as the robbery and annihilation of Indigenous Caribs on the island. The inevitable reduction of biodiversity in Tobago, as a result of the mass cultivation of cotton, indigo, and sugar, is also dismissed (Grove, 1996, pp. 283–284; Huggan & Tiffin, 2007, p. 1). The British were only wary not to deforest Tobago completely since they had just desertified neighbouring islands, such as Barbados (Grove, 1996, pp. 69–70). It is absurd that Britain and its imperialist accomplices, which notoriously murdered millions and devastated the planet, remain pedestaled as ecological heroes. This massive moral and logical failure, on the part of the UN, underlines the persistent cogency of Western environmentalism (Sasa, 2023a).

Modern environmentalism continues to achieve many colonial objectives, aside from the legitimization of land expropriation for resource extraction (Zaitchik, 2018). These include the erasure of Indigenous memory, the concealment of military activity, the fomentation of settler nationalism, and the promotion of White tourism. In 2011, while enrolled in my undergraduate degree in International

Studies at York University, a Teaching Assistant shared with our class a humorous anecdote regarding her friend's eagerness to arrive in Tkaronto and jump in one of the pristine lakes she saw in Canadian postcards. Since no such lakes are to be found in the city, her presumption demonstrates the success of public relations pertaining to Canada. Its production of national parks and other paradises free of (non-White) humans now defines its image on a global scale (Sasa, 2023a, 2024a). In 2017, Canada even celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary by offering complementary admission to its national parks, which it branded as "untouched wilderness" (Jago, 2023). This form of propaganda masks its ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples, dramatically boosts its ecological status, and attracts international visitors. First Nations scholar Robert Jago emphasizes that Canada still declares "protected areas" without the consent of the original inhabitants. In the process, they are disparaged as "an infestation" and have their homes burned down (Jago, 2023). I argue that not only human but ecological devastation is propelled by Western environmentalism, as a capitalist, patriarchal, and White supremacist ideology. Besides being committed to the capitalist status quo (climate capitalism), it champions the elimination of the Global Majority (ecofascism) and the sterilization of non-White women (Malthusianism) in the name of sustainable development. Undermining attempts to diminish BIPOC, I substitute the term "Global Majority" to capture their global demographic power (Lee et al., 2023, p. 6). Green colonialism is the strain of environmental perversion acutely favoured method of domination by Israel, evidenced by its claim to be a Cradle of Agriculture (Sasa, 2023a). The settler colony joins not only Canada but many states worldwide that persist grabbing land and resources with the assistance of "protected areas." Ecuador dispossesses Indigenous peoples in various national parks, while officially and unofficially sanctioning the extraction of resources (such as gold) just outside and within these lands. In Yasuni National Park, where many original inhabitants live and are vulnerable to ecological harm, the Ecuadorian government itself mines oil (Zaitchik, 2018).

## Anticolonial Green Literature

At the junction of anticolonialism and environmentalism, lies my research on green colonialism. Martinican environmental engineer Malcom Ferdinand identifies four anticolonial movements, the first simply named *anticolonialism*. Generally associated with the mid-twentieth century, it consisted of a cascade of revolutions that resulted in independence from colonial rule. However, the colonized countered imperial logics and processes from their inception in 1492 (2019/2022, pp. 6–8; 176–177). The second is *postcolonial theory*, which emerged during the 1980s (Huggan & Triffin, 2015, p. 16). While empires mostly retreated by then, it acknowledged that they still wielded enormous influence over past colonies, especially through their cultural denigration. The third is *decolonial theory*, which was inaugurated by Latin American scholars in the 1990s who advocated for the decolonization of knowledge production. The fourth is *decolonial political feminism*, which was spearheaded by women of colour who viewed patriarchy and colonization as two sides of the same coin (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, p. 176). I describe my research as “anticolonial” since the term is all-encompassing, clarifies the continuity of territorial expansion, declares my opposition to it, and challenges the rigid divide between scholarship and activism. My study also pertains to environmentalism, which I widely define as a movement that is concerned with nonhuman welfare and existed for centuries. Along with postcolonial theory, *green theory* made major inroads into IR recently, although both fields remain peripheralized by the discipline (Persaud & Sajed, 2018, pp. 13–14; Eckersley, 2013). I obtained a BA in International Studies and Environmental and Health Studies, as well as a Master in Environmental Studies at York University. Having later pursued a PhD in IR at McMaster University, I can attest that both anticolonialism and environmentalism tend to overlook each another (Huggan & Tiffin, 2007, p. 3). I attended two of the most progressive institutions of higher learning in “Canada,” but was not taught about the colonial roots of Western environmentalism or the ecocidal dimension of colonialism. Indeed, the 2019 study guide I received for my IR doctoral comprehensive exam only contained 4 (out of

approximately 120) readings that focused on the nonhuman world. All these titles fell under the section of the Global Political Economy (GPE), authored by Jennifer Clapp, Peter Dauvergne, Peter Newell, and Matt Paterson (Department of Political Science, McMaster University, personal communication, April 2019). Below, I identify and elucidate gaps in IR and Western literature more broadly concerning the nonhuman world and colonialism, much less their overlap. Next, I scan four approaches that truly illuminate the interconnectedness between environmental and anticolonial struggles, namely postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism, livelihood environmentalism, and decolonial ecology (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Goldsmith, 2015; Ghosh, 2021; Ferdinand, 2019/2022). I then briefly review scholarship on Israeli green colonialism before outlining some of the key contributions of my research. In particular, I advance holistic decolonization as a theoretical approach that disturbs both anthropocentrism and biocentrism (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 229–230).

### ***Green International Relations***

The interests of the United States and to an extent those of Europe are still centered by IR, (which was born in land occupied by the former), in its attempt to cultivate international “peace” (Tickner, 2013, p. 633; Vogler, 1996, p. 1). The three main approaches of the discipline – realism, liberalism, and constructivism – are all devoted to the survival of (Western) states and unjust power dynamics (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2015, pp. 4–6). For example, IR constructivist Kevin Dunn interrogates green colonialism in Africa. However, he fixates on the reinforcement and disputation of state sovereignty, within national parks, as opposed to the plight of humans and nonhumans (2009, p. 423). Environmental issues became unavoidable for IR, during the 1990s, owing to global recognition of climate change (Vogler, 1996, p. 1). However, the discipline glossed over this crisis and mainly proposed a liberal remedy that consisted of improvements in resource management and international cooperation (Vogler, 1996, p. 8). An overhaul of the tyrannical world order was out of question (Eckersley, 2013, pp. 266–267). Even orthodox Marxism as a radical ideology that branched into IR

deemed humans to be separate from and superior to “nature” (Persaud & Sajed, p. 14). Its adherents espoused exploitation of a nonhuman world they perceived to be perpetually abundant in resources (Eckersley, 2013, p. 269). A connection between the liberation of the proletariat and that of nonhumans was forged by Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas, and other neo-Marxists (Eckersley, 2013, p. 270). Accompanied by cosmopolitan influences within the discipline, these Frankfurt School critical theorists stimulated the rise of *green IR theory* (Eckersley, 2013, p. 267). IR was confronted by this school of thought not only for its state-centredness and neglect of nonhumans (Eckersley, 2013, p. 266). Its maltreatment of the Global South, Indigenous peoples, and future generations was simultaneously contested (Eckersley, 2013, p. 267, p. 269). Green IR also traced climate change to its European colonial and capitalist origins within the framework of *ecocentrism*. According to green IR theorist Robyn Eckersley, ecocentrists foregrounded the inherent dignity of all organisms and lands (2013, pp. 267–269). Furthermore, they opposed militarism and were guarded against the ineffectiveness and harm of technological innovations, even in the realm of climate mitigation (Eckersley, 2013, p. 282). Green IR admitted the severe and enduring lack of information humans possessed in relation to the vast universe (Eckersley, 2013, pp. 269–270).

Although green theory brought urgent socioecological issues into the purview of IR, it still falls under the umbrella of Western environmentalism. Instead of countering modernization, a euphemism for colonization and capitalist expansion, it backs “reflexive modernization” (Eckersley, 2013, p. 270; Escobar, 1995). Capitalism as a system that unrepentantly abuses the Global Majority and nonhumans – in its incessant drive to gain surplus value – merely requires slight restraint according to green IR. This theory also advocates for a more even dispersal of its consequences among people worldwide, an idea captured by the concept of *environmental justice* (Eckersley, 2013, p. 270; McDonald, 2002, pp. 3–5). In fact, prominent green IR theorists, Newell and Paterson, make the case for a decarbonized “climate capitalist utopia” (2010, pp. 161–166). Clapp and Dauvergne also refuse to reject all forms of



oppression by touting “complexity and diversity” (2005, p. 4). They insist that it is not “inconsistent or hypocritical” for an individual to identify as both socialist and capitalist (p. 3). The ideological “neutrality” of green IR finds resonance among green political parties, which were initiated by the settler colony of New Zealand and the UK. They proliferated during the 1980s, chiefly in Europe, and campaigned under the slogan of “neither left nor right, but ahead” (Hancock, 2021; Eckersley, 2013, pp. 268–269). Dishonesty is inherent to the Western environmental mantra of “neutrality,” because one who does not contend with the source of socioecological anguish foments it. Contrary to its claim to bridge critical IR and environmental studies (Eckersley, 2013, p. 267), I thus argue that green IR theory is a liberal tradition. Loyal to a discipline carved in the heart of empire, it coopts neo-Marxist, postcolonial, and environmental language to maintain the status quo.

### ***Green Colonial Studies Outside IR***

Outside the narrow contours of IR, environmental consciousness swept Western academia during the 1970s. Anxieties accumulated around the socioecological consequences of pollution, pesticide use, nuclear proliferation, immigration, and population growth for the Global North (Kte'pi, 2025). Various emancipatory causes were tied together by a minority of environmentalists who remained principally male and White, (including political ecologists, ecofeminists, and social ecologists). Colonialism and racism were scarcely addressed (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, p. 6). Meanwhile, violence enacted against nonhumans has been rebuked by Edward Said, Thomas Sankara, and other leaders of the anticolonial movement 2022 (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, pp. 176–177). However, Ferdinand maintains that this current “did not make ecological issues an essential dimension of [its] political problematization of the world” (p. 177). Hence, Western environmental studies were slow to accommodate extra-European views, while anticolonialism gradually became more ecologically-minded (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, pp. 7–8).

Despite his critique, Ferdinand (2022) emphasizes the moral upper hand of postcolonialism. Whereas modern environmental studies emerged out of White supremacy, the colonized have had their energy diverted towards survival (pp. 8–11). For instance, trees have long occupied a sacred status among Palestinians and Muslims (Shibly, 2024). Due to the genocide against Gaza, many locals were forced to harvest and burn wood to keep their families warm. When one is denied their basic needs, how could they be expected to fulfill their environmental obligations? How could they be judged as ethically equal or inferior to a European who plants trees but disregards BIPOC? While ecological concerns may have slightly receded into backgrounds of death and destruction, however, they never dissipated. We witnessed Palestinians in Gaza sharing the little food they had with stray cats, spending hours to rescue dogs beneath the rubble, and carrying their pets through multiple rounds of expulsion. The vastness and fortitude of their empathy astonished the world. Gazans clarified that land was never abandoned by its inheritors, not because they possessed some peculiar animalistic characteristics, (as suggested by the anti-Indigenous myth of the ecological savage). Rather, we acknowledged the souls of nonhumans and our dependence on them for our existence. Building indestructible relations with many flora and fauna, we viewed them as not only friends but children, mothers, and comrades (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 229–230; Sasa, 2024a, p. 560). This attachment greatly motivated us to defend our lands over the centuries at an enormous human cost. An infamous image comes to mind of Palestinian elder Mahfodah Shtayyeh mourning and hugging an olive tree. Israeli colonizers had just assaulted it when the photo was taken in 2005, leading her to lament, “I raised the tree like my child” (Al Jazeera World, 2023). Similarly, Palestinian farmer Salah Abu Ali guards a 5000-year-old olive tree from colonial attacks around the clock. It was named by locals in Bethlehem “the old woman,” “the fortress,” “Palestine’s bride,” and “the mother of olives.” The tree came to be perceived as blessed by Palestinians due to its age, impelling “women [to] collect its fallen leaves to protect them from the evil eye” (Hammad, 2019). Through locally-informed and available means, Natives thus persisted nurturing the

earth, despite colonial efforts to disconnect us through many mechanisms (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, p. 13). As decolonization proceeds, BIPOC will naturally allot more time to redress issues outside genocide. These include pollution, animal abuse, gender inequality, homophobia, and a host of other dilemmas that have also been triggered (or majorly aggravated) by Western incursion (Zaharin, 2022; Sasa, 2024a).

The racial violence of Western environmentalism also alienated BIPOC from protecting the nonhuman world (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, pp. 8–11). For example, South Africans rejected many conservation activities as White pursuits, which were tangential or antagonistic to their battle against apartheid (McDonald, 2002, p. 1). Racialized communities have even been deployed arms to obstruct some environmental initiatives (Sasa, 2023b, p. 1349). Economist Guillaume Blanc sheds light on the crimes committed by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) behind the banner of sustainability (2020/2022, p. 14). He cites an investigation by BuzzFeed News reporters Tom Warren and Katie Baker who reveal the following, “in national parks across Asia and Africa, the beloved nonprofit with the cuddly panda logo [WWF] funds, equips, and works directly with paramilitary forces that have been accused of beating, torturing, sexually assaulting, and murdering scores of people” (2019). The WWF either ignores or fights locals who complain to it about the torture and murder of their relatives (at the hands of its park rangers). Further, these green militias often involve WWF employees in the orchestration of their attacks on locals. The militarization of conservationism saw WWF take the lead, but several other green NGOs recently emulated its strategy. Their forest rangers received counterinsurgency training from US soldiers who occupied and terrorized the populations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Green imperialist violence precipitated the kidnapping of park officials and poaching of “protected species” by Natives (Grove, 1995). They reasoned that (regional) extinction of these fauna stripped NGOs of justification to usurp their lands and kill their loved ones (Blanc, 2020/2022, p. 99).

Modern environmental action and scholarship remain steeped in White saviourism, despite their increased attentiveness to the rights of the colonized. I published a scathing review on *The Invention of Green Colonialism* in 2023, which was written by French economist Guillaume Blanc in 2020 and translated into English in 2022. Although the author sets out to *critique green colonialism* in Africa through its rendering as “a land of savannas, safaris and ecologically destructive peoples awaiting rescue,” he effectively reifies this view (Sasa, 2023b, p. 1349). Ethiopians based in the Simien Mountains are spotlighted in this work but rarely consulted, particularly regarding the outcomes they seek. Yet, he professes to speak for them as a White man. To stem the harm of environmental intervention by Western organizations, Blanc primarily proposes they embrace “science.” He also advises the same actors that assaulted locals with sticks to inform Ethiopian farmers about sustainability, evoking the “White man’s burden” (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, p. 10). Their autonomy is continuously violated, their worldviews are disparaged, and the brutality they face is greenlit. Additionally, Blanc presents Africa as the only site of green colonialism, decontextualizes climate change, and offers individualized solutions to it, (e.g. discarding smartphones). He promotes the myth of “reverse racism,” shielding the West from anticolonial criticism (Sasa, 2023b, pp. 1349–1350).

### ***Ecofeminism to Decolonial Ecology***

Several scholars are truly illuminating the interconnectedness between environmental and anticolonial struggles. I benefitted from works representing a plurality of fields, not limited to political science (Ferdinand, 2019/2022; Tilley & Ajl, 2023; Gill, 2023), humanities (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Goldsmith, 2015), physical and human geography (Neumann, 2007), and anthropology (Ghosh, 2021). For instance, ecofeminists and postcolonial ecocritics are shedding light on *anthropocentrism* or *speciesism*. This paradigm is misleadingly named since it is grounded in Western thought and is synonymous with Eurocentrism. It affirms the supremacy of (cisgendered, straight, and male) Europeans by merging and subordinating non-Whites and nonhumans. This belief system still propels

the colonization of BIPOC who are not only animalized and racialized, but feminized and Queered (Huggan & Triffin, 2015, pp. 4–5; Goldsmith, 2015, p. 18). From this perspective, the West endeavours to impose a “rationalist” cosmology on them that separates and commodifies “nature.” For instance, to “civilize” and Christianize the Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island – who they also considered lazy – colonizers obliged them to domesticate nonhuman animals (Huggan & Triffin, 2015, pp. 8–10). It is thus integral we end the devaluation of all communities, including nonhumans, to combat racism and colonialism (Goldsmith, 2015, pp. 18, 25). However, while cognizant of its White supremacist origins and internal contradictions, postcolonial ecocriticism hesitates to declare itself “eco-socialist” (Huggan & Triffin, 2015, pp. 14–15, 17).

Ferdinand (2019/2022) and Ghosh (2021) confront the racism of modern environmentalism head-on, the latter also dubbing it exclusivist conservationism, elite environmentalism, and right-wing environmentalism (pp. 225, 227, 229). Ghosh brings our attention to the person who designated the word “ecology,” a German eugenicist and social Darwinist named Ernst Haeckel. He was inspired by Erns Moritz Arndt who is credited with founding the Western ecological movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both men inflamed German Nazism and Islamophobia, particularly among the youth, by promoting the “purification” of soil from non-Aryan blood (pp. 222–223). A self-described ecofascist carried out a massacre against Muslim worshippers in a Christchurch mosque as recently as 2019 (p. 225). Ghosh shares a quote from a book, published by Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier in 1995, stating that ““Hitler and Himmler were both strict vegetarians and animal lovers, attracted to nature mysticism and homeopathic cures, and staunchly opposed to vivisection and cruelty to animals”” (p. 223). Hitler also promoted various forms of green energy production (p. 223), foreshadowing the conduction of a *veganwashing* campaign by the Israeli army: the latter publicized its inclusion of 10,000 vegan soldiers whom it supplies with berets free of wool and non-leather boots (Doyel, 2019). Beyond equating Semites with nonhumans, Nazism thus grants more compassion to the latter, as noted by the

Executive Director of the Palestinian Animal League, Ahmad Safi (Doyel, 2019). Hindu nationalism also demotes poor Muslims, Adivasis, and Dalits to the bottom of the caste system, partly on the basis of their omnivorous lifestyles (pp. 228–229). To salvage human civilization from climate change, Ghosh places optimism not in exclusivist conservationism but “livelihood environmentalism,” citing Ramachandra Guha (p. 232). *Vitalist* communities are increasingly spearheading “grassroots, livelihood- oriented environmental movements” across the Global South (p. 241). They recognize the souls of nonhumans and interact with them on a close basis (p. 232). In a similar vein, Ferdinand proposes “an ecological extension” of anticolonial movements and theories that he calls *decolonial ecology* (2019/2022, p. 175). His vision is worldly, rooted in the epistemologies of the Caribbean, renounces anthropocentrism, and is unequivocally anti-oppressive (2019/2022, p. 20). Both books produced by Ferdinand and Ghosh are seminal in the genesis of an anticolonialism that accounts for the nonhuman world. I argue that the former author is more intersectional and revolutionary in his support for the abolition of White supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, p. 183). For the enslaved and their descendants, Ferdinand also advances the provision of reparations (p. 237).

### ***Holistic Decolonization***

Palestine is absent from much of the growing scholarship on green colonialism, despite its pervasiveness in the land. This glaring omission is not particularly surprising due to the mass defamation and censorship of voices critical of Israel. Nevertheless, Israeli green colonialism gained more attention in recent years, mainly from scholars focused on Palestine. They chart the adoption of Israeli environmental policies in the colonization of Palestine (Masalha, 2012, pp. 120–134; Shiff, 2017; Braverman, 2009; Pullan et al., 2013). To a greater extent, they analyze the burial of Indigenous memories in Israeli “protected areas” (Masalha, 2012, pp. 120–134; Sharif, 2016; Pappé, 2006; Balsam, 2011; Braverman, 2009; Kadman, 2008/2015; Gandolfo, 2017). Less discussed is the formulation of

environmental instruments and rhetoric by Israel to delay the restitution of Palestinian lands (Braverman, 2009; Balsam, 2011). The development of Israeli “protected areas” for the economic dispossession of Palestinians (Cook, 2025; Pullan et al., 2013) and stimulation of Israeli tourism is also examined (Shiff, 2017). Of the authors cited here, Israeli colonists Iru Braverman (2009) and Noga Kadman (2008/2015) became recognized as specialists in Zionist green colonialism. Although their analyses proved invaluable to me – especially since they gained access to information that I lacked as a Palestinian (Sasa, 2024a) – they have sadly both engaged in liberal Zionist discourse. Consider this concluding passage from Braverman (2009):

Clearly, the war over who is a bigger lover of nature has played an increasing role in the struggle for international public opinion. However, both sides seem to embrace this love of nature narrative only after most of the harm to nature has already been done. (p. 361)

Centering “nature” as a victim of the Nakba, Braverman dehumanizes the genocided. Moreover, by levelling the accusation of greenwashing at both the Natives (Palestinians and Lebanese) and colonizer (Israel), she minimizes the Holocaust. It is worth recalling these words from the poem “We Teach Life, Sir” by Palestinian political scientist Rafeef Ziadeh. They speak to our dehumanization as Palestinians and our gruelling resistance to it:

Today, my body was a TV’d massacre that had to fit into sound-bites and word limits and move those that are desensitized to terrorist blood.  
But they felt sorry.  
They felt sorry for the cattle over Gaza.  
So, I give them UN resolutions and statistics. (Ziadeh 2011, as quoted in Badri, 2024)

My notable contributions to scholarship at the crossroads of anticolonialism and environmentalism are the four research outcomes listed at the outset of this introduction. To summarize, this thesis (1) examines the commission of genocide and ecocide by Israel, within the trajectories of settler colonialism, Orientalism, Western environmentalism, and Zionism; (2) investigates Israeli green colonial practices, such as ecological demonization or romanticization, afforestation, exclusivist conservationism, and hiking (Rabineau, 2023); (3) recuperates some memories belonging to individuals

and localities in Palestine, particularly those hidden by Israeli environmental policies; and (4) traces the resistance of our community and nonhuman kin to Israeli (green) colonialism, positing holistic decolonization. I am grateful to have had my work recognized and disseminated by numerous scholars, media outlets, and organizations. The last include Slow Factory (n.d.) and Visualizing Palestine (2022). My designation of Israel’s conscription of environmentalism as “green colonialism” starkly contrasts with Braverman’s (2023) “settler ecologies.” Linguistically, apartheid is greenwashed through her choice to not only showcase Israeli ecogism but favour the normalizing word of “settler” over “colonial” (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 222–223). Indeed, she prompts the reader to heed the voices of nonhumans – rather than Palestinians – to “unsettle nature” (Braverman, 2023, p. 267). She thus belongs to a camp of biocentrists who “prioritise extra-human concerns over the interests of disadvantaged human groups” (Huggan & Triffin, 2015, p. 17; Sasa, 2023a, p. 222). This criticism of Braverman’s *unsettling nature* extends to the approaches of *postcolonial ecocriticism*, *livelihood environmentalism*, and *decolonial ecology* (Huggan & Triffin, 2015; Ghosh, 2021; Ferdinand, 2019/2022). These three theories are more progressive in their spotlighting of the oppressed, but their vocabulary also betrays their biocentric biases. For example, we must stand in solidarity with all Indigenous communities in their battles for independence and respect them as foremost experts on the lands they lived off for centuries. We can also learn tremendously from the kinships they built with local nonhumans. However, by suggesting the Indigenous peoples spearhead the battle against climate change, not only does Ghosh (2021) risk their fetishization but reassigns the bulk of the responsibility for disaster mitigation onto them (pp. 231–232, 235). And while Ferdinand (2019/2022) backs capitalist abolition, where is his call for the restitution of Indigenous lands and sovereignties to materialize decolonization on a global scale?

Huggan and Tiffin suggest granting the same rights to humans and nonhumans (2018, p. 18). While it is certainly commendable that laws have been passed to shield the latter from abuse, what happens when their rights conflict with those of humans? One of my earliest awakenings to the



misanthropy and racism of modern conservationism was in an introductory environmental course I took as an undergraduate student at York University (2012). The professor distributed a paper to every student in a massive lecture hall, asking us to respond to a short fictional scenario with little direction or feedback. From my recollection, it vaguely stated that we were facing a wild animal that was the final member of its species and was about to kill a child. Adding that we had a rifle in our hands, it asked if we would shoot the nonhuman (thus sealing its extinction) to save the child. For me, the answer was obvious – that I would shoot the nonhuman and save the child – and was horrified that for many of my classmates, the decision was not as easy to make. Reflecting on this exercise now, I wonder how many students imagined a Brown or Black impoverished child left vulnerable to an attack by a wild animal. How drastically might have the answers had it been mentioned that the victim was White? I make this postulation on the basis that instincts of *communal solidarity* and *preservation* generally determine the behaviour of both humans and nonhumans. This was the message I sought to relay in my first (published) chapter of this thesis, when I stated, “the environmentalism of Palestinians would lean towards anthropocentrism, because like all other humans, they are primarily concerned with their own wellbeing” (Sasa, 2023a, p. 230). Needless to say, I regret my choice to use the term “anthropocentrism,” which the environmental justice movement embraces (McDonald, 2002, p. 3). It was surely never my intent to deify (European) humans. Rather, I dispute the neutrality of biocentrism or ecocentrism as an ideology that ostensibly equates the welfare of humans and nonhumans. I draw attention to the racism which often lurks beneath its surface (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 222–223). Indeed, veganarchist Laura Schleifer corrects the misconception around the evolutionary work of Charles Darwin that it concludes the fittest individuals survive. Instead, Darwin establishes that the survival of many species relies on cooperation. Similarly, Peter Kropotkin examines a variety of nonhuman populations, remarking that they engage in mutual aid and egalitarianism. He thus promotes anarcho-communism as the way forward for people (Ishkah, 2018).

I emphasize that Palestinians have been disturbing the boundary between society and “nature,” while *centering human rights*, akin to other Indigenous communities (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 229–230). To exemplify the perception of nonhumans by many Natives, here is a comparative account of hunting in Turtle Island from the historian Virginia Anderson (2004):

Aware of the power of animal spirits, native hunters treated their prey with respect and performed rituals defined by *reciprocity*. Although *not quite a relationship of equals* [emphasis added], the connection between Indians and prey was not essentially hierarchical. But notions of domination and subordination were central to the English. (cited in Huggan & Tiffin, 2018, p. 10)

Returning to the story of the child and the nonhuman, the latter should have never been brought to the brink of extinction (likely due to the actions of the Global Minority). Its life is sacred and my mind drifts to Prophet Noah (AS) who underlined the value of biodiversity. Before the Flood, he rescued a male and female from every species (by including them on his boat) to ensure their continuation. However, from a humanistic and Indigenous lens, we must always concentrate the rights of humans. Besides, how do we confidently determine the needs of nonhumans, regardless of how much knowledge we may have acquired about them? And as Schleifer points out, the incapacity for nonhumans to speak renders them “absent referents” (akin to deities), which could be conjured to justify fascism (Ishkah, 2018).

As for cultivating a world that guards human and nonhuman rights, I cite not only the Palestinian traditions of *a’wda* (return), *a’wna* (collaboration), and *wajib* (duty) but the Islamic tenet of *tawhid* (unity) (Sasa, 2024a, p. 558). Islam as the prevailing faith in Palestine is immensely villainized by the West concerning socioecological matters. However, the unity of all creations is underlined by the Quran (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 229–230). It collapses human and nonhuman worlds, within and outside this planet, into a symbiotic and majestic whole fashioned by God. The Book’s contestation of all dichotomies can be gleaned from this description of the Islamic arts by Nigerian religious scholar Oludamini Ogunnaike (2017): “the Islamic arts do not mimic or imitate the outward forms of things but present their inner,

archetypal realities, hence the emphasis on number (geometry) and letters (calligraphy), which are the basic building blocks of space/time and language.” Celebrating the magnificence and diversity of billions of lifeforms, the Islamic arts are renowned for their intricate and colourful patterns. Yet they are harmonious, nurturing mutual admiration and tawhid by accentuating our physiological and sociological similarities. These express the oneness of Allah (SWT) who is also represented as ““a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere”” (Ogunnaike, 2017). Lacking a gender and incomparable to all creations, yet remaining close to them, Allah (SWT) refuses speciesism and misogyny (Rizvi, 2010, pp. 54, 56). Outside the artistic domain, Muslims apply tawhid in many areas of life. For instance, *halal* is often reduced to a signifier of the merciful and clean slaughter of nonhumans. However, as the halal certifying body the Islamic Services of America (ISA) stipulates, “animals must [also] be raised in a healthy, clean and humane environment” (2021). They should be appreciated by slaughterers as “valuable gift[s] from the creator” and slaughtered separately as to not elicit fear or stress in them. Moreover, Muslims have been prevented from harming bees, needlessly slaughtering nonhumans, and felling trees during times of war by Abu Bakr Siddiq (RA) (Shibly, 2024). He was the closest companion of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).

Muslims are required to practice numerous moral virtues within the theological framework of tawhid. Allah (SWT) is known by dozens of other names, including the Utterly Just (*Al-‘Adl*), the Source of Goodness (*Al-Barr*), the Most Kind (*Ar-Ra’oof*), the Merciful (*Ar-Raheem*), the Most Appreciative (*Ash-Shakoor*), the Sustainer (*Al-Muqeet*), the Most Generous (*Al-Kareem*), the Responsive One (*Al-Mujeeb*), the Most Loving (*Al-Wadud*), the Absolute Truth (*Al-Haq*), the Steadfast (*Al-Mateen*), and the All-Wise (*Al-Hakeem*) (Islamic Relief Canada, n.d.). Allah (SWT) states in the Quran, “I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me” (verse 51:56). As Imam Gülen (2004) elucidates, “worship is not simply the performance of a set of particular movements, as some believe; it is what we call complete submission and the acceptance of a broad responsibility.” Effectively, Islam

commands its followers to worship the Owner of the Dominion by embodying the noble traits reflected by Their names (Ogunnaike, 2017).

The concept of *hikmah* (wisdom), for instance, encourages the pursuit of knowledge but grounds it in altruism and humility. The rise of experts who commit egregious crimes against humanity and the nonhuman world, such as J. Robert Oppenheimer, is thus curbed. He remains celebrated in the West as the physicist who helped develop nuclear weapons, despite their capacity to eradicate all life and their deployment in Japan – where they killed hundreds of thousands of people. Both Islam and critical IR theory recognize that learning is never a neutral practice, (innocuously based on the absorption and execution of new ideas), but must be appraised by its intention and impactful outcomes, akin to all other processes (Ebbiary, 2022, p. 164; Persaud & Sajed, 2018, pp. 4–5). Indeed, Islamic and African historian Bilal Ware recounts that the word for mind (*'aql*) is absent from the Quran, whereas the heart (*qalb* or *fu'ad*) and the associated chest (*sadr*) are referenced 148 and 44 times respectively (Ebbiary, 2022, p. 166). Besides being spotlighted, the heart is designated as the sole organ of understanding (*'aqala*) by the Quran, blurring the Western division between emotion and rationality. Verse 9:87 in the Quran rebukes not the obliviousness of wrongdoers but their apathy and cruelty when it states, “their heart[s] are sealed, so they apprehend not” (Hussain, 2013, p. 1205). The Islamic emphasis on the heart over/as the mind is anti-ableist, anti-classist, logical, and life-sustaining. It substantiates a widely accepted truth today that people transgress due to their inflated egos rather than ignorance or struggles with mental health. Complementing *hikmah*, the Islamic philosophy of *ihsan* simultaneously denotes moral, spiritual, aesthetic, and academic excellence, while *adab* strikingly translates into literature and good manners. Islamically, one cannot behave unethically and be respected as an academic. Hence, ministries responsible for education are typically called ministries of *tarbiyah* (rearing) in the Arab world, while *madrasas* (Islamic schools) are among its most exquisitely designed buildings. Profound beauty is Islamically believed to cultivate scholarship and empathy. The Quran

thus provides a comprehensive roadmap for humans to purify their souls and uplift their earthly kin – as their ultimate purpose – during their limited time on Earth (Ogunnaike, 2017). Islam is merely one of several moralistic and vitalist faiths and philosophies espoused by Palestinians. By shedding light on its socioecological integrity, my goal is not to homogenize my community as Muslim or to claim the supremacy of Islam. Instead, I illuminate a major impetus to Palestinian “world-making” (Ferdinand, 2019/2022) while combatting Islamophobia (Sasa, 2023a, 2024a).

Aside from Islamic and Palestinian thought, scientific research informs my theory of holistic decolonization (Sasa, 2023a). The Environmental and Health Studies major I pursued in my undergrad was heavily influenced by biology and directed by Radu Guiaşu (2008). At the time, he was among a minority of Canadian zoologists who rejected exclusivist conservationism. In his classes (2012-2015), I learned that the dichotomy the West forced between nonhumans and humans – as mammals who can carry pollen in their hair and pick up seeds with their shoes – was both absurd and ecologically counterproductive. Fixated on equilibrium ecology or the idea that landscapes must remain “intact,” the West restricted the movement of both humans and nonhumans (Sasa, 2023a, p. 230). Species were haphazardly categorized as native and others invasive, when organisms have formed, migrated, and disappeared for millennia as part of the natural process of evolution (Guiaşu, 2008, pp. 28–30). For instance, Guiaşu highlights that the recent introduction of zebra mussels into the Great Lakes (via the ballast water of ships) benefitted many existing lifeforms as a food source (p. 32). Yet, due to their (inadvertent) spread by humans, these mussels have been demonized and targeted for removal by Parks Canada (CBC News, 2025; Guiaşu, 2008, p. 30). Instead of science, Guiaşu roots modern environmentalism in “species xenophobia” (2008, pp. 26, 32). He points out the hypocrisy of its practitioners who remove dandelions from their lawns in favour of monocultures of grasses. The latter are typically introduced and have their growth hampered by constant mowing (p. 32). Furthermore, Guiaşu reveals the high economic and ecological costs of many removal mechanisms, including the

use of poisons (p. 30). Yet their effectiveness is questionable to say the least, a point evidenced by the continual failure of Parks Canada to fully exterminate zebra mussels (Guiaşu, 2008, p. 32; CBC News, 2025). Guiaşu is not suggesting we wilfully relocate species to different soils and waters. Certainly, he does not advise repeatedly introducing a species to an area, despite its inability to adapt, and infliction of incalculable losses on humans and nonhumans, (as in the case of Israeli afforestation) (Sasa, 2023a, p. 226; Guiaşu, 2008, pp. 28, 32). Rather, he underscores the phenomenal self-regulatory capacity of the planet, noting that species transfers rarely wreak havoc (2008, pp. 30–31). When they do, their populations often skyrocket, (because of a lack of predators), but quickly drop and stabilize due to their evolution and that of local nonhumans (p. 32–33). Guiaşu concludes his article by echoing my recommendation for humanity to focus on itself rather than “saving nature”: “perhaps the best thing we can do for many wilderness areas, and the species they shelter, is to leave them alone as much as possible” (p. 32).

Palestinians reject modern classification and demonization of particular species, even extending our compassion towards the “Jerusalem pine.” Israel renamed it as such from “the Aleppo” to Indigenize the tree and appropriate it as a national emblem (Braverman, 2009, pp. 317–318, 342; Liphschitz & Gideon, 2001, p. 428). The “Aleppo pine” was also erroneously named by a European botanist, since the evergreen did not originate in the Syrian city of Aleppo. Rather, its presence has been concentrated in the south of Italy and France, Spain, and North Africa. Dubbed the “white pine of Provence” (Calanques National Park, n.d.), the Zionists spread this conifer across Palestine, though many members of its population have perished due to disease (Liphschitz & Gideon, 2001, pp. 427–428). Yet, Aya Faour and other Palestinians manage to see the innocence and value of a tree recruited by their occupier. For instance, she learned its high vitamin C content, and how to weave baskets and brew tea from its needles that have desertified and acidified our lands. “Perhaps this is how we reclaim our relationship with these unwitting soldiers, by finding healing in their gifts, by turning tools of

erasure into vessels of sustenance,” she states (Olive Odyssey, 2024). Palestinian geographer Ghazi Falah also underscores the rebellion of the pines of Provence in solidarity with his community. They grew to prevent Israeli bulldozers from eradicating the ruins of the homes they were meant to hide (Falah, 1996, cited in Salih & Corry, 2022, p. 394). “Hence crumbled walls continue to be visible among the vegetation and the pre-existing groves kept growing through the ruins,” according to Salih and Corry. The love Palestinians pour into each another, the rest of humanity, and local nonhumans is boundless and selfless. It is of no surprise that the land persists resisting for their survival (Sasa, 2023a, 2024a).

As a Palestinian and Muslim, I propose in Chapter 1 “an alternative environmentalism, which is holistic, anti-racist, feminist, socialist, and nonlinear” (Sasa, 2023a, p. 219). But am I not guilty here of straying into biocentric territory by advancing another form of environmentalism? I would like to reframe my theory as holistic decolonization, which enfolds the nonhuman world into the global battle against White supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. Although the term “decolonization” has been notoriously coopted, I emphasize the importance of redressing the original sin of 1492. It was the inception of settler colonialism – and the concomitant development of varying devices of oppression by the West – that set in motion the downfall of humanity (Sasa, 2023a, p. 221). All lands must be returned to their original inhabitants, from Palestine to Mexico to Turtle Island. The sovereignties and epistemologies of thousands of communities must be appreciated in a global process of democratization and localization. I echo calls for “a retreat from the large-scale industrial and capitalist life and a move toward local, self-reliant, small-scale economies” (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005, pp. 13, 16). In this transition, capitalism will be abolished, wealth will be evenly redistributed, reparations will be paid, and war criminals will be prosecuted. Women, Queer folks, and BIPOC will begin to be treated equally and honourably. Compassion and respect will be extended towards the nonhuman realm, valuing our enmeshment and the dearth of human knowledge. Regarding the culture/nature dichotomy and all other

despotic Western dualisms, the term “holistic” advocates for their great destabilization, (rather than unattainable elimination). They encompass man/woman, mind/body, and civilized/primitive dichotomies (Jackson & Scott, 1997, p. 553). This liberatory project is ambitious but indispensable in the quest for the survival and welfare of all lifeforms. It is also feasible. I add the prefix “re-” to the base word “sowing” in the title of this introduction to clarify that Palestinian society, prior to colonization, was highly equitable and sustainable. To stimulate the decolonization of our land and the planet at large, I merely salvage our traditions and epistemologies (Sasa, 2023a, 2024a).

### **Israeli Green Colonialism Chapters**

A synopsis of Israeli green colonialism across Historic Palestine and the Syrian Golan Heights is offered by the first chapter of this thesis. I focus on the four main objectives achieved through the creation of Israeli “protected areas.” These are (1) the enablement of ethnic cleansing, (2) the preclusion of Palestinian return, (3) the dehistoricization, Europeanization, and Judaization of the region, and (4) the concealment of Israeli human rights violations as conservation. I discuss the passage of Israeli laws that prohibit human habitation of “protected areas,” yet make customary and legal exceptions for Jews, for example. Restriction and surveillance of Native movement through Israeli afforestation of the West Bank border (Green Line) is also analysed. Spotlight is the Jewish National Fund (JNF), an Israeli environmental charity that spearheaded the colonization of Palestine. It has appropriated and afforested Palestinian lands, while funding and greenwashing its illicit activities (within and outside the Jewish world) by touting its ecological deeds (Sasa, 2023a). Aside from *a’wna*, *a’wda*, and *tawhid*, I feature the Palestinian ethic of *sumud* (steadfastness) as conducive towards holistic decolonization (Sasa, 2023a).

The second chapter is a case study that probes the creation of USA Independence Park by Israel on the outskirts of Jerusalem in 1976. I enquire into the four above-mentioned routes this park is enlisted to consolidate Israeli rule over the capital of Palestine. The memories of the eight Palestinian



villages Israel demolished and shielded from view with its plantation of this recreation site are also revived. These include Dayr Aban, Bayt ‘Itab, Allar, Dar al-Sheikh, Jrash, Sufla, Dayr al-Hawa, and Khirbat al-Tannur. Via my transcription, translation, and elucidation of oral interviews with Nakba survivors from these forested localities I build an anticolonial encyclopedia and archive. Additionally, I alphabetically organize historical summaries of these places “to allow their Indigenous descendants to locate and read about them easily” (Sasa, 2024a, p. 550). As fertile grounds for “sustainable paradises,” I draw attention to Palestinian *hanan* (compassion), honour, loyalty, hospitality, *rujuliyyeh* (courage/manliness), and *wajib* (p. 567).

Israeli green militarization and terraforming are examined in the third chapter of this thesis. I term the infliction of genocide and ecocide against Indigenous populations “terraforming,” citing Ghosh (2021). Divided into three sections, this chapter begins by underlining the hypermilitarization and socioecological violence of Zionism (Gordon, 2013). Since a leading driver of climate change – the global war industry – is not only neglected but sanctified by Western environmentalism, I further divulge the hypocrisy of this ideology (Sierra Club, 2015; Essa, 2022). The second section unveils the entanglement of Israeli militarism and environmentalism, although the latter is much subordinated by the Zionist entity. Israeli nationalization of hiking, crossover between national parks and firing zones, and development of an ecological NGO from its militia (the Palmach) are detailed (Rabineau, 2023; gov.il, n.d.; McKee, 2020). Thirdly, the Palestinian *sarha* is contemplated as a meditative walk that undermines the dichotomy between humans and nonhumans (Sharif, 2016).

## **Chapter 1: Oppressive pines: Uprooting Israeli Green Colonialism and Implanting Palestinian A'wna**

### **Preface**

A synopsis of Israeli green colonialism across Historic Palestine and the Syrian Golan Heights is offered by the first chapter of this thesis.<sup>1</sup> I focus on the four main objectives achieved through the creation of Israeli “protected areas.” These are (1) the enablement of ethnic cleansing, (2) the preclusion of Palestinian return, (3) the dehistoricization, Europeanization, and Judaization of the region, and (4) the concealment of Israeli human rights violations as conservation. I discuss the passage of Israeli laws that prohibit human habitation of “protected areas,” yet make customary and legal exceptions for Jews, for example. Restriction and surveillance of Native movement through Israeli afforestation of the West Bank border (Green Line) is also analysed. Spotlit is the Jewish National Fund (JNF), an Israeli environmental charity that spearheaded the colonization of Palestine. It has appropriated and afforested Palestinian lands, while funding and greenwashing its illicit activities (within and outside the Jewish world) by touting its ecological deeds. Aside from *a'wna*, *a'wda*, and *tawhid*, I feature the Palestinian ethic of *sumud* (steadfastness) as conducive towards holistic decolonization.

### **Abstract**

This article provides a comprehensive overview of Israeli green colonialism, denoting the apartheid state's misappropriation of environmentalism to eliminate the Indigenous people of Palestine and usurp its resources. I focus on the violence of ‘protected areas’, encompassing national parks, forests, and nature reserves. This article argues that Israel primarily establishes them to (1) justify land grab; (2) prevent the return of Palestinian refugees; (3) dehistoricise, Judaise, and Europeanise Palestine, erasing Palestinian identity and suppressing resistance to Israeli oppression; and (4) greenwash its apartheid

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image. I situate Israeli green colonialism within the broader histories of Western environmentalism – particularly its perpetuation of the human–nature binary – and Zionism. Furthermore, I identify various means through which Palestinians and their land resist this phenomenon. I also explore Palestinian environmentalism, which is influenced by the concepts of a'wna (collaboration), sumud (steadfastness), and a'wda (return), in addition to the Islamic concept of tawhid (unity). I offer it as an alternative environmentalism, which is holistic, anti-racist, feminist, socialist, and nonlinear, while rejecting the trope of the ecological savage. Overall, the intrinsic link between all humans, and them and the environment must be recognised, to realise a just and sustainable society, in Palestine and beyond.

### **Keywords**

climate change, green colonialism, Indigenous resistance, Palestinian environmentalism, protected areas

### **Introduction**

This article explores Israel's appropriation of environmentalism, particularly its formation of 'protected areas', comprising national parks, forests, and nature reserves, for colonial ends (Kadman, 2010). I refer to this form of cooption as green colonialism (Klein, 2016). While officially merely 15.7% of forests worldwide are protected (Wolf et al., 2021: 522), I incorporate all Israeli forests under the umbrella of protected areas, following the lead of Palestinian scholar Dr Salman Abu-Sitta (Palestine Land Society (PLS), 2018). After all, Israeli timber failed to generate revenue adequately, leading Israel's sole afforestation authority, the Jewish National Fund (JNF, n.d.-b), to shift from productive to *protective* forestry in the 1990s (Tal, 2013: 93–96). It began to administer Israeli forests, ostensibly to primarily safeguard 'nature', and second, to promote leisure, tourism, and other societal gains, while only marginally valuing wood and timber (Tal, 2013: 93–96). For instance, construction is banned within Israeli forests (Tal, 2008: 129). This article argues that Israel establishes protected

areas to (1) colonise the land of Palestine and dispossess its Indigenous inhabitants (B'Tselem, n.d.); (2) prevent the return of Palestinian refugees (Balsam, 2011); (3) Judaize, Europeanise, and dehistoricise Palestine, obliterating Palestinian identity and quelling resistance to Israeli oppression (Abu-Sitta, 2011; Balsam, 2011; Gandolfo, 2017); and (4) greenwash its crime of apartheid, facilitated by the growth of Orientalism worldwide and JNF's production of false propaganda (Kershner et al., 2011; Said, 2003 [1978]). Despite disguising itself as an environmental nongovernmental organisation (NGO), JNF has acted as both a precursor and extension of the settler colony (Kershner et al., 2011: 4–6).

I will begin by theorising Israeli green colonialism as a Zionist and Western environmental phenomenon (Grove, 1995; McKee, 2016: 156). Next, I will delve into the four major arguments I presented above, before outlining forms of Palestinian, land, and global resistance against this form of aggression (Gandolfo, 2017; Pappé, 2006; Zatoun, n.d.). Drawing on Palestinian history, traditions, perspectives, and knowledge, I will then offer an alternative and more equitable form of environmentalism, while firmly rejecting the racist trope of the ecological savage (Nadasdy, 2005; Simaan, 2017). In order to homogenize Indigenous communities as exemplary environmentalists, this myth portrays them as subhuman members of the natural world. I conclude by emphasising that the global establishment of a holistic, anti-racist, feminist, and socialist environmentalism is essential for societal and earthly wellbeing, in Palestine and beyond (Ferdinand, 2022; Justice, 2019). As a Palestinian activist-scholar, I also rely on my lived experience to not only highlight ongoing green colonisation of my homeland, our resistance, and our epistemologies, but also urge solidarity with our cause and action to abolish oppression everywhere it exists. This article is part of a larger project, which analyses a wide array of media, including original Israeli government documents, human rights reports, and maps. This project seeks to unearth Palestinian memory and greenwashed forms of Zionist oppression against the Natives.

## Unearthing Israeli Green Colonialism

We shall try to spirit the penniless [Palestinian] population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our country . . . the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly.

—Theodor Herzl [founder of Zionism]  
(Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2013)

Israeli green colonialism must be understood within the broader histories of Zionism (Nakba) and Western environmentalism (Grove, 1995; McKee, 2016: 156). Around the mid-20th century, Palestine should have gained independence from the British, as a state, akin to many other colonies. Instead, Britain collaborated with the Zionists to create a Jewish ‘national home’ in Palestine, in what became infamously known as the Balfour Declaration (Abu-Sitta, 2011: 47). As a European ideology and movement, Zionism had recently arisen, targeting Palestine as the site of a future Jewish state (Caplan, 2005: 550– 551). Although Zionism was packaged as a solution to antisemitism, it was a *settler colonial* project and *antisemitic* itself (Massad, 2003: 440, 445). After all, Zionism blamed the spread of antisemitism on Jews, and thus promoted their exclusion from Gentile societies and the formation of a Jewish state, as the resolution (Massad, 2003: 445–446).

Meanwhile, I understand colonialism as a ‘historically specific set of processes and practices associated with the expansion and conquest by European powers of most areas of the world, which arguably started in 1492’ (Persaud and Sajed, 2018: 3). European colonisers, including European Zionists, perceived non-Western communities as *inferior*, and thus, their bodies and lands as exploitable and dispensable (Caplan, 2005: 550). Indeed, the Global South was not only racialised, but also feminised, (e.g. characterised as weak and illogical), and sexualised, by colonial powers. They then proceeded to plunder its resources, and rape and enslave its inhabitants, universalising capitalism as an economic structure, to systematise their exploitation of it (Akbari-Dibavar, 2018: 72; Persaud and

Sajed, 2018: 3). Overall, I concur with Justice (2019), that all global challenges, including colonialism and climate change, are rooted in the interlinked and oppressive systems of White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.

*Settler colonialism* is distinguished from colonialism by its *genocidal* character. In staking claim to the *land* of the entire colony, *perpetually*, settler colonialism seeks to *obliterate* not only Indigenous cultures, socioeconomic systems, and histories, but ultimately, peoples themselves. After all, original inhabitants were dehumanised into nonexistence, rendering their land available for takeover, morally and lawfully (*terra nullius*) (King, 2018: 138–139). Indeed, Palestinians existed for centuries prior to the founding of Zionism, at which point only about 5% of Palestine's population was Jewish (Caplan, 2005: 550–551). Consequently, following the signing of the Balfour Declaration, Palestine began to be colonised by hundreds of thousands of mostly European Jews (Caplan, 2005: 551–553). Zionists then expelled about two-thirds of the Indigenous population of Palestine (Kershner et al., 2011: 6). Eleven urban neighbourhoods were ethnically cleansed and 531 villages were razed to the ground (Pappé, 2006: xiii). This period of Zionist-perpetrated atrocities became known as the Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe (Pappé, 2006: xvii). Taking over 78% of Palestinian territory, Zionists then created the settler colony of 'Israel' (Abu-Sitta, 2011: 48). For the purpose of, this article, I use here colonialism and settler colonialism interchangeably.

Since its founding, Israel established more than 65 laws that disadvantage Palestinians, due to their identity, across the Holy Land (Adalah, 2017). Whether they reside in the remaining 22% of Palestine – including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which Israel illegally occupied in 1967 – or in what is now known as 'Israel', to which I refer to as *1948 Palestine*, Palestinians are targeted by the apartheid regime (Adalah, 2017). Israel's continuous denial of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands, in flagrant violation of UN Resolution 194, is one prominent example of the Zionist project's disregard for human rights and international law (Mohamed, 2016).

Another example is its adoption of *Western* or *modern* environmentalism (Grove, 1995; Kadman, 2010). For millennia, human societies globally sought and established healthy relationships with non-humans. In contrast, modern environmentalism was founded by French colonial administrators in the 18th century (Grove, 1995: 5–9). After launching capitalist, patriarchal, and White supremacist operations in the Global South, Western empires recognized that they were devastating Native landscapes and thus threatening the viability of their own resource extractive industries and the lives of settlers. Colonial powers, however, then sought not to cease their inherently unsustainable repressive processes, but to preserve them, under the guise of environmentalism (Grove, 1995; Justice, 2019). For example, they pioneered tools to outwardly *sustain forests*, in order to facilitate land grab, and the seizure and conservation of key sources of timber and water from Indigenous peoples (Grove, 1995: 9–10, 15). Former English slave master and plantation manager, Charles Waterton, is also credited for originating *bird sanctuaries and nature reserves*, while the Scottish-American naturalist, John Muir, invented *national parks* to boost tourism and enable nation-building for new settler colonies (University of Cambridge, n.d.; Wakefield Museums and Castles, 2020). Muir whitewashed slavery and labelled Indigenous peoples ‘savages’ (Ferdinand, 2022: 160–161; Neumann, 2007). Hence, I see Western environmentalism as the weaponisation of ecological discourses and practices for the achievement of White supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist aims.

*Biocentrism* is Western environmentalism’s defining feature, producing a duality between the ‘environment’ and humanity, where the interests of the latter – particularly non-Western, feminine, and poor ‘others’ – are neglected or even readily suppressed in the noble name of protecting the former (Ferdinand, 2022; McKee, 2016: 156). Modern environmentalism then legitimates paradoxical and reactionary undertakings, such as: the attempt to reconcile capitalism with environmentalism, captured by the term *climate capitalism* (Newell and Paterson, 2010); *Malthusianism*, which frames women of colour and the poor as primary environmental culprits, seeking to restrict their rates of reproduction

(Ferdinand, 2022: 207–208); and *ecofascism*, exemplified by many environmentalists’ celebration of COVID-19 as a cure, for killing humans – mostly non-White communities – who are vilified as the real virus (Newton, 2020). Whereas these three subversive environmental movements are exceedingly relevant and disturbing, and must be confronted, I am focussing on yet another trend: green colonialism (Grove, 1995). Colonisers seized vast territories, with the aid of Western environmentalism, by declaring their Indigenous inhabitants intrinsically environmentally irresponsible, expelling them, establishing protected areas to superficially preserve their lands (Neumann, 2007), and then distorting, romanticising, and sexualising the areas as ‘wild’ or ‘virgin’ green havens, expunging Native memory (Ferdinand, 2022: 104).

I am indebted to Richard Grove’s (1995) book, *Green Imperialism* for the language of ‘green colonialism’. ‘Green’ emphasizes the weaponization of environmentalism in the process of colonial violence (Klein, 2016). Unfortunately, Grove (1995) does not recognise the incompatibility of environmentalism with colonialism. Conversely, he praises the ‘pioneering conservationist role’ of the latter, particularly the work of Bernardin de SaintPierre, Pierre Poivre, and Philibert Commerson, while underscoring their alleged humanitarianism, although the trio were colonial administrators (7, 9). Hence, racism, such as the noble savage trope, instead of love for Indigenous communities, drove their actions, even if they condemned injustices occasionally (Robbins, 2002: 203). For instance, Poivre is commonly honoured as an anti-slavery activist, but he himself enslaved people and encouraged slavery (Ferdinand, 2022: 116–117). Such *colonial hypocrisy* can also be found in ‘an Israeli ethos that can best be described as “shoot and cry”’, where soldiers and politicians who were complicit in the Nakba aim to alleviate their guilt and improve their image by publicly displaying regret (Pappé, 2006: 110). Behind a green veneer, the noun, colonialism, clarifies what I will be ultimately critiquing as a colonial project.



However, despite my strong criticisms of Grove's (1995) work, it remains a seminal text that significantly details the colonial origins of modern environmentalism, across various continents. I am thus able to contextualise Israeli actions, historically and globally, by employing his terminology. Although they are frequently conflated, I opted for the term colonialism, rather than imperialism, since it more accurately describes Israel's structure, as I outlined above (Klein, 2016). Generally, colonialism necessitates the relocation of colonisers to Native land, unlike imperialism (Kohn and Reddy, 2017). Overall, green colonialism can be traced back to the colonial birth of Western environmentalism, as a White supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, and biocentric paradigm. Emulating its settler colonial predecessors, Israel embraced biocentrism, evidenced by its establishment of protected areas and general silencing of its environmental groups around 'political issues' (McKee, 2016: 156).

### ***Colonisation***

At least 380 nature reserves and 115 national parks were created by Israel. I argue that these conservation projects act as green conduits for processes of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and land grab (B'Tselem, n.d.; Kadman, 2010: 57). I call these landscapes green colonies, inspired by the term 'green settlements' (Agence France Presse, 2012), to better capture the colonial nature of these areas (Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME), personal communication, June 22, 2018). As seen in a map provided by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) (Tsimbler, 2022), I maintain that Israeli national parks and nature reserves are *tactically* concentrated in: (1) the region of *Jerusalem*, which Israel has been attempting to claim in its entirety as its capital, contrary to international law; (2) the *West Bank* and oft-forgotten Syrian *Golan Heights* that Israel also illegally occupies; (3) the South of 1948 Palestine, where Israel seeks to ethnically cleanse all Bedouin Palestinians (Manski, 2010); and (4) the *North*, where along with the South, the vast majority of the original inhabitants of 1948 Palestine still reside, as documented by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2021: 1). Notably, 92% and 98% of the inhabitants of two other areas of 1948 Palestine

consist of Jews and other non-Palestinians: categorised as the Central and Tel Aviv Districts, respectively, they are largely void of national parks and nature reserves (CBS, 2021: 1). Israel clusters its green colonies in valuable areas, where Indigenous Palestinians and Syrians mostly continue to reside, to justify their dispossession and the seizure of their territories (B'Tselem, n.d.).

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IMFA, 1998), national parks are established to safeguard vital *natural*, historic, archaeological, and architectural sites, while the role of nature reserves is to defend nature, for scientific and educational ends. However, Palestinians are stripped of the right to cultivate or build on their land, when it is labelled a national park or nature reserve, as they are designated as a threat to the integrity of these areas (B'Tselem, 2017; IMFA, 1998). They are thus denied opportunities to start families and engage in one of the prime accessible activities for income generation in Palestine: agriculture (B'Tselem, 2017). In contrast, Israel's Knesset approved an amendment to its National Parks, Nature Reserves, National Sites and Memorial Sites Law, in November 2018, to enable residential construction for *Jewish colonists*, inside a national park, located in the occupied eastern part of Jerusalem (Office of the European Union Representative, 2019). Israeli colonists are even permitted to pursue large building projects and pollute within protected areas (B'tselem, 2017). Consequently, Israel bluntly does not oppose all human residence within its protected areas, or even environmental degradation, but seeks to erode non-Jewish Palestinian presence only.

In addition, the establishment of Israeli national parks in regions 'devoid of any significant archeological findings or natural treasures' reveals their colonial, rather than protective, objectives (B'Tselem, n.d.). Many green colonies are even *planted* by Israel, signifying that a justification is entirely manufactured for their creation (Braverman, 2009). Indeed, 'initially, [Israeli] tree planting was not perceived as an ecological practice but rather as a way to physically freeze undeveloped [Palestinian] land for future Jewish development', an Israeli afforestation official blatantly stated (Braverman, 2009: 347). He adds that Israel will legally simply clear the trees when necessitated by its

‘development’ projects (Braverman, 2009: 347). For example, Israel is currently planning to uproot hundreds of trees, in its oldest planted forest, Hulda Forest, to power the Central District with renewable energy (Surkes, 2022). Meanwhile, the director of JNF’s Forestry Division, Mordechai Ru’ach, claims ‘the best guards of the land’ to be trees, since as Kadman (2015: 42) notes, they ‘create, preserve, and demonstrate presence on the ground’. From concentrating protected areas in Palestinian-majority regions to dispossessing their Indigenous inhabitants, Israel evidently employs environmental policies to colonise Palestine inconspicuously, rather than enhance the non-human environment.

### ***The Green Wall***

Besides serving as potent land-grabbing instruments, Israeli protected areas are meant to impede the return of Palestinian refugees, symbolically and materially (Bauman, 2004: 209). For instance, only a couple of years after Israel occupied Palestinian territories, it decided to fortify the Green Line via tree-planting (Braverman, 2009: 348). By actualising the name of the border that severed the West Bank from the rest of Historic Palestine, Israel sought to further isolate the former and curtail the freedom of Palestinians to fully access their homeland (Braverman, 2009). In addition, lands were delineated by the trees to facilitate the surveillance of Palestinians (Braverman, 2009: 347). Notably, the West Bank is inhabited by over 871,000 registered Palestinian refugees (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, n.d.). This plan materialised, as visible in a map produced by JNF (Amir and Rechtman, 2006: 36, 50; Manski, 2010). In an-Naqab, JNF also explicitly attempts to inhibit Bedouin Palestinian ‘incursion’ and herding through afforestation (Manski, 2010). As Kadman (2010: 57) highlights, Israel typically casts Bedouin Palestinians as ‘invaders’, because they continue to ‘live and herd their goats in areas that once belonged to them and were later confiscated by the state’.

Furthermore, Israeli authorities ‘fined, arrested, or beat up [Palestinians who attempted to tend their lands after they were usurped by green colonies], under the excuse of trespassing and causing

damage to [the environment]’ (Barnard and Muamer, 2016: 73). After all, without the existence of colonial laws and their execution, Palestinians would be able to easily reclaim their lands, as by clearing the oppressive trees (Braverman, 2009). More subtle forms of exclusion include the fencing of protected areas and the imposition of entry fees – and at least in the case of Ein Fara nature reserve, the provision of a considerable markdown for Jews, but not Palestinians (Bauman, 2004; Rinat, 2013).

*Symbolically*, it has been argued by colonial governors and noted liberal Western theorists that land ownership should be reserved for ‘civilized’ individuals or nations who cultivated it (Grove, 1995: 285–286; Locke, 1988: 290–291). In fact, the Latin root of the term, colony (*colonus*), denotes *farmer*, accentuating the centrality of cultivation in colonialism (Kohn and Reddy, 2017). For example, JNF colonised and afforested the land of Palestinians after it ‘accused [them] of failing to cultivate [their] fields regularly enough’ (Nathan, 2005: 158). On the other hand, ‘Israel [is] bulldozing agricultural land, uprooting olive trees’ (Kershner et al., 2011: 6), and scorching and intoxicating cacti, which are often employed by Palestinians to define their properties (Nathan, 2005: 136–137). Israel attempts to declare territory *its* property by afforesting it, while pillaging Indigenous flora, because the latter may testify to a rich history of cultivation and the associated right for Palestinians to remain or return to their lands.

Significantly, Kadman (2010: 58) finds that Israeli tourism and recreation sites, largely consisting of green colonies, encompass roughly 44% of 418 Palestinian villages, which were ethnically cleansed in 1948 Palestine. Of the territory Israel colonised, comprising the Golan, about 24% has been designated ‘[o]pen protected areas [that] include[d] nature reserves, parks, panoramic scenes, forests, [and] woods’, 27% military zones, and 37% vacant land (PLS, n.d.). Markedly, however, Israeli nature reserves, national parks, forests, and military zones can coincide (Amir and Rechtman, 2006; IMFA, 1998; INPA and The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, n.d.), even all four at once (Meishar, 2016 [2004]: 304).

Furthermore, the vacancy, militarisation, and ‘protection’ of approximately 88% of Israeli colonised territory is noteworthy, since Zionists frequently charge that Jews would have to be expelled to accommodate Palestinian returnees. However, as Abu-Sitta (PLS, n.d.) emphasises, since the British Mandate, only about 6% of 1948 Palestine remains populated by the vast majority (87%) of the Jewish Israeli population. Hence, following the dismantlement of Israeli settler colonialism, including its green variant, Palestinian return is entirely viable (PLS, n.d.). Overall, colonising nearly half of 418 Palestinian villages that were ethnically cleansed, as well as the Green Line, Israeli protected areas considerably hinder the highly feasible return of Palestinian refugees, symbolically and physically.

### ***Dehistoricisation, Judaisation, and Europeanisation***

Israel employs green colonies to Judaize, Europeanise, and dehistoricise Palestine, obliterating Palestinian identity and quelling resistance to Israeli oppression (AbuSitta, 2011; Balsam, 2011: 94; Gandolfo, 2017: 196). Notably, it is under the banner of ‘making the desert bloom’ that Israel plants them (Kershner et al., 2011: 4–5). According to JNF (n.d.-b): ‘Forests and parks were not always part of Israel’s landscape. The first Jewish pioneers who came to the land of Israel towards the end of the twentieth century found a desolate land that provided no shade whatsoever’. Zionists not only persist portraying pre-Nakba Palestine as entirely a desert, but characteristic of colonialists, as an uninhabited wasteland too – *terra nullius* – that they purportedly salvaged (Braverman, 2009: 340).

In fact, aside from inhabiting the land for centuries, Palestinians had a blossoming society, economy, culture, and land. The climate of Palestine’s northern half is largely Mediterranean (George, 1979). In addition, Palestinians were chiefly *fellahin*, peasants, who farmed all cultivable lands, before the major influx of Jewish colonisers, in the 1930s (Caplan, 2005: 552–553; George, 1979: 100; Masalha, 2012: 213). Indeed, around the time George’s (1979: 100) paper was published, Israel still failed to farm 1948 Palestine’s surface area as much as Palestinians had cultivated in 1947. Meanwhile,

in an-Naqab, which was, in fact, a desert, Palestinian ‘Bedouin increasingly cultivated this area, using terraces, dams, canals, wells, and cisterns’ (Pessah, 2016).

However, Israel may be completely converting Palestine into a desert, by uprooting its families, and stripping it of vegetation and water (Pessah, 2016). It was not until after 1948 that 90% of Israeli forests were grown, but non-Indigenous species constitute 89% of them (Pappé, 2006: 227). The majority of trees JNF boasts having planted, since nearly its inception, were non-Native evergreens (Pappé, 2006: 227), which devastated both local communities and ecosystems (Lorber, 2012). For instance, animals belonging to Palestinian shepherds could not feed on greenery, after it was acidified by the shedding of Israeli pine needles (Lorber, 2012). Besides, as evidenced by the most critical wildfire Israel experienced, in 2010, these are highly flammable trees (Lorber, 2012). Israeli planted forests have even been termed ‘pine deserts’, by environmentalists, due to the ‘biological paucity’ they have caused (Amir and Rechtman, 2006: 43–44). Furthermore, as Nathan (2005: 135) notes, Indigenous carob and fruit trees, including more than 800,000 olive trees, since only 1967, were uprooted by Israel (Visualizing Palestine, 2013). In Israeli-occupied Palestine, 80% of the responsibility for a staggering 23% reduction in its forests, which occurred from 1971 to 1999, fell on Israeli colonialism and militarism (Ghattas et al., 2005: 135). Only in 2001, the Israeli state uprooted 670,000 fruit and forestry trees there (Ghattas et al., 2005: 135). In addition, research has shown that an-Naqab possibly began to experience desertification due to JNF afforestation (Pessah, 2016). Yet, the ahistorical trope of ‘making the desert bloom’ continues to be widely proliferated by Zionists, assisted by green colonies, to stifle Palestinian memory and erase the Nakba (Pappé, 2006: 229).

***Judaising and Europeanising Palestine.*** In a deliberate attempt to dehistoricise Palestine, Israel afforested the ruins of ethnically cleansed villages to camouflage them (Masalha, 2012). For instance, the presence of the six villages of Dishon, Alma, Amqa, Ayn al-Zaytun, Qaddita, and Biriyya is obscured by Israel’s largest planted forest, Biryia Forest (Pappé, 2006: 230). Furthermore, Israeli green

colonies produce signs and publications, which largely fail to acknowledge Palestinian villages (Kadman, 2010: 58–59). Israel heavily censors and distorts key data about the localities when it does reference them. Often reducing them to schools and other lifeless relics, it neglects their Palestinian and Arab histories, founding dates, and numbers of inhabitants, while completely concealing the expulsions and massacres Zionists perpetrated against Palestinians (Kadman, 2010). Arabic is also absent from many park signs and most brochures produced by the INPA and JNF – the two primary bodies that establish and administer Israeli nature, heritage, and recreation sites (Kadman, 2010: 57–58).

Whereas Palestinians and their memories are subjugated or erased, Jewish and European histories are spotlighted or fabricated within Israeli green colonies (Bauman, 2004: 211–212). For instance, the Roman/Classical age would be ‘particularly celebrate[d]’, while Ottoman, Islamic, and Palestinian histories, including continuous Indigenous existence, are disregarded (Bauman, 2004: 211–212; Noy, 2012: 32–34). Israel also mostly planted non-Native pines, often even atop the culturally, spiritually, nationally, and economically integral Palestinian olive trees (Simaan, 2017) and other delicately sustained lands, to Europeanise the landscape (Pappé, 2006: 227). Its Europeanising mission via forestation has been declared as policy (Kadman, 2015: 42). Furthermore, Israel appropriates or naturalises Palestinian history. For instance, JNF has attempted to portray Palestinian-crafted *bustans*, or home-centred orchards, as a product of its own labour or an environmental miracle, within green colonies (Kadman, 2015: 230). Effectively, Israeli protected areas construct ‘a *purist fantasy of a homogenized ethno-national (Jewish) life*’ from which Palestinians are eliminated (Noy, 2012: 33–34).

***Cultural Genocide and Stifling Resistance.*** Israel’s genocidal aims are advanced by its dehistoricisation of Palestine – utilising protected areas – manifesting in the erosion of Palestinian identity and resistance to Israeli oppression (Abu-Sitta, 2011; Gandolfo, 2017: 196). Paralleling its

cooption of hummus and falafel, Israel's marginalization of the Arabic language and appropriation of Palestinian-built bustans, within green colonies, threaten to eliminate distinctive societal and environmental contributions, verily the identity of Palestinians (Abu-Sitta, 2011; Kadman, 2010; Pappé, 2006). Indeed, Palestinian youth are becoming fragmented by Israel's systemic assaults upon their cultural heritage and national identity, to the extent that some have begun identifying with their city or even neighbourhood, rather than Palestinianism (Tamimi, 2019: 4). Moreover, by partitioning the Palestinian community, Israeli green colonies hamper any potential for a revolutionary struggle.

This potential is even more forcefully stifled by the greenwashing of the Nakba and robbing of spaces where powerful and creative forms of resurgence can occur (Gandolfo, 2017; Masalha, 2012). Israelis can contentedly hike and serve in the military, rather than be compelled to acknowledge the colonial history of Israel, their complicity, and say: 'Not in My Name' (Bauman, 2004; Pappé, 2006). Meanwhile, by preventing Palestinians from encountering vivid evidence of the Nakba, such as rubble and ruins, they are further removed from a great injustice and thus less likely to revolt (Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), 2020). For instance, the activist, Ahed Tamimi (FOSNA, 2020), recently recounted her experience as a child, when she travelled, along with other Natives, from across Historic Palestine, to the de-populated village of Ein Hijleh. They lived, slept, and re-enacted Palestinian traditions there. Yet, the Israeli army invaded the village, beat, shot, and launched tear gas and sound bombs at them, driving them out under the sole protection of blankets. She emphasised that this, albeit less traumatic, chain of events stayed with her, since it fostered greater empathy for her displaced ancestors. It solidified her resolve to resist Israeli injustices – namely, the denial of the right of return. To assert Palestinian land ownership and prevent Israel from further obliterating ethnically cleansed localities, she then encouraged other Palestinians and allies to also reclaim them. Even temporary recovery of sites of dispossession allows Palestinians to better connect with one another, their land, and their past, heal by grieving collective trauma, and launch a new wave



of anticolonial resistance, sparked by hope (FOSNA, 2020; Masalha, 2012: 257). Consequentially, by dehistoricising and afforesting Palestine, Israeli green colonies simultaneously seek to efface Palestinian identity and memory, and curtail resistance to the Nakba (Abu-Sitta, 2011).

### ***Israeli Greenwashing on a Global Level***

Israeli greenwashing was instrumental in bolstering Zionism on a global scale, especially considering the history of JNF (Balsam, 2011). As a precursor to the Israeli settler colony, Zionists founded JNF, as early as 1901, to purchase Palestinian land for Jewish colonisation (Balsam, 2011: 93). Needless to say, however, JNF stole most of the territory it gained, succeeding in controlling 93% of 1948 Palestine, though 80% of it is co-administered with other members of the Israel Lands Authority Council (Kershner et al., 2011: 6). By transferring the vast appropriated lands to JNF, camouflaged as an environmental NGO, Israel was able to stifle global outcry (Kershner et al., 2011). After all, JNF (n.d.-a) claims to have planted trees, totalling 230 million and counting, led Israel into the 21st century as the lone state with a net gain of trees, and become the Middle East's chief environmental body. Meanwhile, donation or charity boxes for JNF have been globally distributed to Jewish households since its founding. They began featuring 'images of Jewish youth depicted as young pioneers assisting in the reclamation of the land', lately, instead of the maps that covered the boxes previously, which displayed occupied Palestinian territories as Israeli (Balsam, 2011: 95–96). Images of youth and environmentalism arguably gained favour over the maps, in an attempt to greenwash JNF's colonial ambitions (Balsam, 2011: 95–96). The effectiveness of Zionist propaganda is corroborated by the persistent perception of JNF as a tree-planting and playground-building organisation, among Jew communities worldwide, unaware of its settler colonial background (Pappé, 2006: 228). Hence, beyond the economic value of Israeli greenwashing in fundraising, Balsam (2011: 95) stresses that the allegiance of many Jews and others to Zionism was cultivated by the simple act of donating to JNF.

**Green Orientalism.** Israeli greenwashing is powerful to the extent that over a century after the creation of JNF, many states continue to recognise it as an environmental charity (Balsam, 2011: 93). To elucidate the effectiveness of this disinformation, I situate it not only within the broader racist history of Western environmentalism, as I detailed above, but also within multifaceted Israeli *hasbara*, or propaganda, and Orientalism (Balsam, 2011; Said, 2003 [1978]). As Jewish activist Laura Schleifer argues, intersectionality is being perverted by Israel: beyond its attempt to portray itself as an environmental leader or a necessary protector of all Jews (Ishkah, 2018), it also attempts to present itself as a world gay (pinkwashing) and vegan (veganwashing) haven. In addition, Israel recently began to brazenly coopt *Indigeneity*, claiming that the Natives of Palestine are Jews. These *hasbara* offensives can be largely traced back to 2006, with the launch of ‘Brand Israel’, designed to salvage Israel’s tarnished global reputation (Ishkah, 2018). Effectively, the settler colony seeks to market itself as a sustainable, democratic, progressive, civilised, and rational state, in contrast with the concocted terroristic, unsustainable, oppressive, homophobic, and irrational Palestinians, perpetuating Orientalism (Ishkah, 2018; Said, 2003 [1978]). In turn, this type of propaganda is readily accepted, even within certain Western ‘leftist’ circles, not only due to its ubiquity, but also their anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia (Ishkah, 2018; Said, 2003 [1978]). As a result, the slogan ‘Progressive Except for Palestine’ (PEP) continues to resonate with many segments of the Western left. The prolonged global acceptance of the ‘principal Zionist tool for the colonization of Palestine’, JNF, as an ecological NGO, is sufficient proof that Israeli greenwashing and Orientalism strikingly reinforce apartheid (Pappé, 2006: 17).

### **Implanting A’wna**

Quoting Serge Restog, Malcom Ferdinand (2022: 61) states that ‘despite everything, the Negro does not die’. Designating all oppressed people as Negroes, Ferdinand (60) emphasises the inevitability of

their survival, embodying not just resistance, but also victory, especially in the face of genocidal settler colonialism. Indeed, Israeli oppression continues to be challenged by Palestinians worldwide, notably by steering and participating in the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and the Stop the JNF campaign, which seeks to have JNF's charitable status annulled. However, there are less known and more direct forms of action against Israeli green colonialism, pursued by both Palestinians and their allies. These include: the development of technology to detect over 500 ethnically cleansed or damaged Palestinian localities, condensed into the iNakba app (Gandolfo, 2017: 205); lobbying efforts to have Israeli green colonies establish signs, which recognise the villages they shroud (Braverman, 2009: 352–353); and Palestinian-led tours (Masalha, 2012). On the afforestation front, the Canadian non-profit Zatoun (n.d.) directs the 'Trees for Life: Planting Peace in Palestine' programme since 2005. It supplies olive tree saplings to Palestinian fellahin, targeting small, young starter, and female farmers, and those who had their lands pillaged by the Israeli regime (Zatoun, n.d.). Regarding Israeli veganwashing, international vegan conferences have been launched by Palestinians, centring decolonisation, by linking human and environmental rights (Ishkah, 2018).

Palestinian land is also resisting, as demonstrated by the difficulty for Israeli-planted non-Indigenous trees to survive, plagued by their heightened susceptibility to combustion, ailments, and pests (Lorber, 2012). Palestinian agronomist Saad Dagher (personal communication, 30 March 2021) even referenced a photograph he took of a fire, where, on one side, Israeli-planted trees were overwhelmed by flames, while on the other, the Indigenous flora was left intact. In another instance of land resistance, Palestinian olive trees managed to sprout again, after more than half a century of Israeli repression, by slicing through JNF pines, which smothered the ethnically cleansed village of Mujaydil (Pappé, 2006: 227–228). From the strength and creativity of its inhabitants to the tenaciousness of its olive trees, Palestinian liberation is on the horizon.

Ideas held by many Palestinians that inspire their resistance, namely *a'wna* (collaboration), *sumud* (steadfastness), and *a'wda* (return), as well as the Islamic notion of *tawhid* (unity), can form the basis for an anti-oppressive and scientific environmentalism (Furani and Rabinowitz, 2011; Justice, 2019; Ogunnaike, 2017; Simaan, 2017). *A'wna* recognises that, due to our deep interrelatedness, individuals cannot truly prosper while even indirectly harming others or non-humans (Simaan, 2017). Rather, this Palestinian concept emphasises the importance of strong familial, communal, environmental, intergenerational, and global solidarity, for the blossoming of all present and future humans and non-humans. Simaan provides the example of an ‘ancient practice’, which involves Palestinian families manifesting their generosity and belonging in the community by not picking all of their olives, to keep some for those who were landless (Simaan, 2017: 518). Ascribing agency to the land, there is unsurprisingly also a spiritual component, to land: ‘*The land you dig will pray for you, but the land you abandon will curse you*’, states one Palestinian (Simaan, 2017: 517). Other Palestinians approach trees with the same type of devotion with which they approach their children (Simaan, 2017). Hence, while modern environmentalism may be driven by materialism, opportunism, or perceived altruism, Palestinians uphold a sacred and intimate bond between people and non-human nature (Simaan, 2017). Arguably, the predominant religion, Islam (Caplan, 2005: 550), influences Palestinian environmental philosophy – especially the accent placed on *tawhid*. *Tawhid* recognises that, despite our seeming differences, all creations are unified, by their belonging to a single God, and are thus deserving of respect and ‘selfless love’ (DeLongBas, 2018; Ogunnaike, 2017).

Significantly, the holism that Palestinians espouse erodes the human–nature dualism, eschewing the biocentrism associated with Western environmentalism and the anthropocentrism of the mainstream view of environmental justice (McDonald, 2002; Simaan, 2017). However, I am not claiming that Palestinian environmentalism seeks the *entire* dismantlement of the human–nature

binary. *A'wna* merely *severely erodes* it by granting non-human nature respect, agency, and love, to advance its interests and those of all of humanity collectively (Simaan, 2017). The environmentalism of Palestinians would *lean towards anthropocentrism*, because like all other humans, they are primarily concerned with their own wellbeing. Indeed, in contrast with the noble savage trope that characterises Indigenous relations with nature as entirely agreeable, Nadasdy (2005) stresses that, often drastically, lands were *always* transformed by Indigenous inhabitants to *accommodate their interests*. For instance, my great-great-grandmother continues to be celebrated in my family for her courage in killing venomous snakes in pre-Nakba Ramla, Palestine. Yet, the same family raised me to be careful not to move houseplants around, as they have souls, and can become depressed and die. Hence, instead of essentialising Palestinians as either environmentalists or non-environmentalists, I underline their heterogeneity and humanity, seeking to recognise their worldviews and traditions that are rooted in societal and environmental justice to progressively inspire others (Nadasdy, 2005: 311).

Palestinians and their land also pursue *a'wda* or *return*, embarking on a non-secular and circular path towards liberation (Furani and Rabinowitz, 2011; Pappé, 2006). Many, including notable environmental scholars, argue it is impractical to abolish capitalism due to its extensive entrenchment (Newell and Paterson, 2010). However, the resurging olive trees and enduring struggle for Palestinian return urge humanity to act on principle, shed pessimistic determinism, embrace degrowth, and pursue socialism as an egalitarian economic system. Yet, as demonstrated by Abu-Sitta's (PLS, n.d.) work on Palestinian return and just coexistence with Jews, this concept vastly differs from the backward, romanticised, stagnant, and ecofascist vision of a 'return to nature', where people of colour are removed (Ferdinand, 2022: 197). *A'wda* allows us to conceive of a radically different, just, sustainable, and inclusive future. It would be built on many local and traditional epistemologies, accommodating scientific, agricultural, technological, and other innovations, to enhance relations between humans and non-humans (Simaan, 2017). Meanwhile, the *sumud* of Palestinians inspires

patience during the thorny process of challenging prevailing structures, and envisioning and realising a healthier society (Furani and Rabinowitz, 2011).

Besides, Palestinian stewardship is scientific, because it tackles the repressive roots of climate change, including the society-nature binary. After all, the dichotomy ruptures ecological interdependence, namely the Earth's constitution of humans and vice versa, leading to its ruin (Ferdinand, 2022; Justice, 2019; Simaan, 2017). Even Western environmentalism – also termed fortress conservationism – acknowledges the role of people as positive environmental innovators (Neumann, 2007). For instance, green colonies are often forced to draw on the environmental methods of the Native communities they ethnically cleansed, such as slashing, burning, and wildlife culling, to stem ecological degradation (Neumann, 2007). Ultimately, 'nonequilibrium ecology suggests that flux, dynamism, and nonlinear and unpredictable change' are integral for promoting biodiversity and environmental health, denouncing the fortress approach (Neumann, 2007: 1206). By segregating and policing human and non-human species, it endeavours to stunt evolution (Neumann, 2007). Indeed, Porter-Bolland et al.'s (2012: 6, 14) study of '40 protected areas and 33 community managed forests' found that, across the tropics, the former experienced heavier annual deforestation than the latter, which respected Indigenous rights. Furthermore, as Neumann (2007:1206–1207) notes, while 'the number of parks and equivalent reserves increased exponentially', in the last couple of decades, climate change continues to escalate. Thus, aside from the necessity to reject biocentrism outright due to its moral depravity, it must be abandoned on ecological grounds (Ferdinand, 2022). It fuels climate change by legitimating the interlinked structures of White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism driving it, while falsely designating Indigenous peoples as the culprits. The Palestinian ethics of *a'wna*, *sumud*, and *a'wda* can be the beginning of an alternative environmentalism that is holistic, anti-racist, feminist, socialist, spiritual, scientific, and nonlinear.

## Conclusion

This article provided a snapshot of Israeli green colonialism, identifying it as a Zionist and Western environmental phenomenon. I demonstrated that apartheid Israel establishes protected areas to (1) dispossess Indigenous Palestinians and usurp their lands; (2) prevent the return of Palestinian refugees, physically and symbolically; (3) dehistoricise, Judaise, and Europeanise Palestine, eroding Native identity, concealing Zionist crimes, and choking resistance to Israeli oppression; and (4) greenwash its image as a Western environmental saviour, situated in a deserted, backward, and violent Middle East, on a global scale, employing Orientalism. However, I also emphasised how, despite the military, political, and financial might of the settler colony, Palestinians and their land persist in their struggling for justice and liberation. I then presented the Palestinian concepts of *a'wna* (collaboration), *sumud* (steadfastness), and *a'wda* (return), along with the prominence of *tawhid* (unity) in the Islamic tradition, as possible building blocks of an anti-oppressive, atemporal, spiritual, and scientific alternative to Western environmentalism, challenging the mainstreamed human–nature binary. Yet, I dispelled the ecological savage myth, by underlining the anthropocentric leanings of all human environmentalisms. In sum, the dismantlement of White supremacy, (including Orientalism), patriarchy, and capitalism, as well as erosion of the human–nature dichotomy, are both a moral and environmental obligation.

In fact, as an activist-scholar, I encourage myself and others to consistently problematise binaries wherever they may dwell, acknowledge and utilise our positions of power, and embrace intersectional and interdisciplinary methods, with the ultimate aim of achieving social and environmental justice. Regarding Israeli green colonialism, I am interested in further understanding its role in undermining the Palestinian political economy, perpetuating patriarchy, and building Israeli identity. I also noticed, in the last couple of years, large environmental organisations, such as Greenpeace, increasingly tying human and ecological rights, signalling they will become allies against global oppression. Yet, I am disappointed, though unsurprised, with the resounding silence exhibited

by them, in 2021, concerning Palestine. Although Israeli oppression and Palestinian resistance were spotlighted worldwide, and criticism of the unresponsiveness of these bodies was expressed by people on their social media, they continue to endorse Zionism implicitly and explicitly. Clearly, we must amplify our efforts to oppose the dehumanisation of Palestinians, and the appropriation of environmental, LGBTQ+, feminist, and other progressive movements for oppressive ends.

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## **Chapter 2: American Colony in Jerusalem: Rebuilding the Eight Palestinian Villages Buried by USA Independence Park**

### **Preface**

The second chapter is a case study that probes the creation of USA Independence Park by Israel on the outskirts of Jerusalem in 1976.<sup>2</sup> I enquire into the four above-mentioned routes this park is enlisted to consolidate Israeli rule over the capital of Palestine. The memories of the eight Palestinian villages Israel demolished and shielded from view with its plantation of this recreation site are also revived. These include Dayr Aban, Bayt ‘Itab, Allar, Dar al-Sheikh, Jrash, Sufla, Dayr al-Hawa, and Khirbat al-Tannur. Via my transcription, translation, and elucidation of oral interviews with Nakba survivors from these forested localities I build an anticolonial encyclopedia and archive. As fertile grounds for “sustainable paradises,” I draw attention to Palestinian *hanan* (compassion), honour, loyalty, hospitality, *rujuliyyeh* (courage/manliness), and *wajib* (p. 567).

### **Abstract**

In 1976, Israel physically planted USA Independence Park over the ruins of eight Palestinian villages it depopulated during the Nakba, which are located near Jerusalem. The creation of this ‘protected area’ over ‘Allar, Bayt ‘Itab, Dar al-Sheikh, Dayr Aban, Dayr al-Hawa, Jrash, Khirbat al-Tannur, and Sufla was sponsored by US taxpayers. This article critically analyzes Israel’s design of this park as a device to seize Palestinian land, bar the original inhabitants from returning, purge their memories, and greenwash its settler colonial undertaking. Zionism and Western environmentalism are featured as the ideological underpinnings of Israeli green colonialism. Subsequently, this research unearths the history of the eight villages Israel desperately attempted to bury, comprising the Arabic names of central

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<sup>2</sup> The second chapter of this dissertation reprints an article published in *Politics* with the citation Sasa, G. (2024). American colony in Jerusalem: Rebuilding the eight Palestinian villages buried by USA Independence Park. *Middle East Critique*, 33(4), 549–570

landmarks, and reaffirms the claims of the Indigenous inhabitants to their stolen lands. By translating and transcribing interviews with Nakba survivors, the article not only salvages Palestinian memory, but also maps the return of refugees. Its aim is to serve as an anticolonial archive, while sketching the pre-1948 lifeways, wisdoms, and values of these villagers to galvanize readers into action oriented towards universal justice.

**Keywords**

USA Independence Park; Palestine; anticolonial archive; Jewish National Fund; Jerusalem; green colonialism; Nakba; right of return; Indigenous ethics; greenwashing



## Introduction

This article spotlights the colonial function of USA Independence Park, located near al-Quds or Israeli-occupied Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine. According to the Jewish National Fund (JNF) (n.d.-b), ‘The park is located in a forest section planted ... during the British Mandate, and especially on the forests planted in the 1950s by Jewish immigrants.’ Zionists physically planted this park over the ruins of the eight Palestinian villages of ‘Allar, Bayt ‘Itab, Dar al-Sheikh, Dayr Aban, Dayr al- Hawa, Jrash, Khirbat al-Tannur, and Sufla (JNF n.d.-b; Kadman 2015, 190). Israel ethnically cleansed their 4,000 inhabitants as part of Operation ha-Har (Hebrew: Mountain) in October 1948, and nearly destroyed them afterwards (Khalidi 1992). An article published on the website of JNF (n.d.-a), explicitly titled ‘American Independence Park - Friendship through Nature’ highlights that 1976 was chosen as the founding date of the park to commemorate the United States’ 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. Seeking ‘to celebrate the relationship between the two freedom-loving countries, Israel and the US,’ the park bolsters Israel’s alliance with its benefactor, while whitewashing settler colonialism as a harbinger of liberty. The US subsidiary of JNF, which remains universally acknowledged as an environmental charity, sponsored this ‘conservation’ and afforestation initiative (JNF n.d.-a). However, JNF covertly operates as an arm of the Israeli state, playing a significant role in both its formation and expansion (Sasa 2023).

This article critically analyzes Israel’s design of USA Independence Park as a device to seize Palestinian land, bar the original inhabitants from returning, purge their memories, and screen its settler colonial undertaking with a display of sustainability. The term *green colonialism* captures Israel’s annexation of Palestine via its plantation of (invasive) forests, nature reserves, parks, and other ‘protected areas.’ I begin by discussing my methodology, inclusive of my positionality,

conceptual framework, and case study selection. I feature Zionism and Western environmentalism as the ideological underpinnings of Israeli green colonialism, drawing out elements that contextualize this article as an anticolonial archive (el-Malik and Kamola 2017). Subsequently, I unearth the history of the eight villages Israel desperately attempted to bury, comprising the Arabic names of central landmarks, and reaffirm the claims of the Indigenous inhabitants to their stolen lands (Khalidi 1992). I examine each of the villages separately, in alphabetical order, to allow their Indigenous descendants to locate and read about them easily. By translating and documenting oral interviews with Nakba survivors, I thus not only salvage Palestinian memory but map the return of refugees. On a larger scale, I sketch the pre- 1948 lifeways, wisdoms, and values of these villagers to galvanize readers to organize against the Western human-nature dichotomy, as well as global capitalism, racism, and patriarchy (Sasa 2023).

### **Methodological Notes**

I identify as a Palestinian activist-scholar, devoting my life (not only research) to realizing justice worldwide, as by leading protests and lobbying politicians (Price 2002). In contrast to Western fixation around ‘objectivity,’ I spotlight my heritage as a third-generation refugee, drawing on my lived experience to direct and enrich my work. My praxis is rooted in empathy, the Islamic faith, and critical theory. Critical theorists evaluate and acknowledge their positionalities to benefit society and mitigate harm, tailor their research towards eradicating oppression, embrace interdisciplinarity, and observe events from global, holistic, and historical perspectives (Freyenhagen 2018). My scholarship also educates *me* on the plight of my community, as the world denies my identity and defames my existence, allowing me to better advocate for myself and kin.

This article consults encyclopedias, maps, and most significantly, oral interviews with aging or late Nakba survivors. I prioritize oral communication, as it has been a central form of knowledge production in the Arab world for centuries, manifesting in the compilation, preservation, and distribution of the Quran, as well as the cultural pastime of storytelling (*al-hakawati*) (Masalha 2018, 27). Additionally, nearly 70% of Palestinians were fellahin (peasants), the vast majority (85%) of whom were illiterate as of 1944 (Masalha 2018, 23). It is thus imperative we engage with oral history to conserve and disseminate their memories (Ibid., 9, 28). As Palestinians and their archives remain subjected to brutal Israeli state violence, the internet has also recently become a key vehicle for remembrance (Ibid., 11, 20). Israel does not even allow me to *visit* most of my homeland (including Jerusalem) due to my Palestinian identity, which is why I largely draw on invaluable online interviews, combined with field research, when possible. I refer to interviews with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon conducted by Rosemary Sayigh ([1979] 2007); a magisterial encyclopedia on Palestinian localities depopulated or destroyed by Israel in 1948, edited by Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi (1992); an educational YouTube channel run by Al-Quds Open University (Qouchannel 2020a); and crucially, the website of Palestine Remembered. In 2003, Salah Mansour (Abu al- Sous) developed this site to share and conserve over 600 oral interviews with Nakba survivors and their descendants. Its distinctive feature is that anyone can upload their own photos, maps, family trees, and interviews with Nakba survivors, rendering it highly inclusive and comprehensive (Hastings 2016, 3–4).

Although many Western scholars may question the validity of oral history, it constitutes a chief and highly trusted form of memory transmission among many Indigenous societies, including Palestinians (Masalha 2018, 23): ‘There is no detail of village life, from crops to quarrels, that [Palestinian peasants] cannot remember in microscopic detail, in spite of—or perhaps because of—

the completeness of their severance from their past’ (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 2). Aside from the trauma of expulsion, Sayigh credits enduring Palestinian familial and village solidarity, markedly in refugee camps, for safeguarding recollections *via* narrative repetition. In addition, I underline the importance of centering the voices of those whose cause we champion to ensure that our solidarity organizing remains authentic and constructive (Hastings 2016). I thus often quote Nakba survivors to relay accurately their experiences and messages. Moreover, as Palestinians remain exceptionally dehumanized by the world, raw oral testimonies reveal our personalities, sufferings, dreams, and beliefs (Masalha 2018, 14).

This article creates an *anti-Zionist* or *anticolonial archive* ‘with the aim of countering Israeli denial and correcting distortions of omission and commission that eradicate the Palestinian presence in the land’ (el-Malik and Kamola 2017; Masalha 2013, 149). I avoid similar phrases, such as ‘counter-archive’ and ‘alternative history’ (Hastings 2016, 2–5), to *de-legitimize entirely* Israeli ‘historiography’ and clarify that my endeavor *combats oppression*. Especially since the Nakba is still notoriously whitewashed as a ‘conflict,’ I underscore the importance for anti-Zionists to be extremely careful not to reproduce hegemonic discourse. Aside from conquering memoricide (Pappe 2006), anticolonial archives facilitate decolonization by re-embedding Indigenous nations in their lands, providing them with a template to rebuild their societies, and arming them with data should they opt to challenge colonial courts in their struggles to return (Hastings 2016; Zochrot 2017).

More specifically, my anti-Zionist archive challenges Israeli green colonialism, building on the contributions of Masalha (2013), Kadman (2015), and Pappe (2006). This article distinguishes itself by prominently gathering oral accounts to recover ethnically cleansed Palestinian villages that have been forested. While Israel established dozens of ‘green spaces,’ each

worthy of critical analysis, I narrowed my focus on parks it named after other states. These encompass Canada Park, British Park, (Apartheid) South Africa Forest, and German States Forest (Stop the JNF n.d.). Expectedly, Israel pays tribute to allied colonial powers. As a settler on Turtle Island, I am passionate about zeroing in on connections between Israel and the West, allowing me to tease out means of decolonizing my homeland *and* site of exile. I selected USA Independence Park as a case study, since it has scarcely been explored. Yet, the US remains a hegemonic world power, as well as Israel's strongest economic, political, and military ally. The memories of the eight Palestinian villages it shrouds have also been overlooked by academics.

### **Zionism and Western Environmentalism**

I now shift attention to Zionism as the primary trigger for Israeli green colonialism and to debunk some of the myths produced by USA Independence Park. At the time of writing, Israel is genociding hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the illegally occupied and besieged Gaza Strip. However, its slaughter did not begin on October 7, 2023: Zionism was founded in late nineteenth century Europe, bent on wiping out all Palestinians to establish a Jewish state on their land. This initiative was settler colonial and imperialist in nature, immensely backed by the British (Sasa 2023). Palestinians fiercely resisted nascent Zionism and British rule. They led 'the most sustained phase of militant anti-imperialist struggle in the Arab world before the Algerian War of Independence' during the 1936-1939 Great Palestinian Revolt (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 43). However, Britain posted 20,000 soldiers there, exceeding the number based in the entire Indian subcontinent, to quell the rebellion of 15,000 Palestinian fighters. Besides banishing Palestinian leaders, it martyred 5,000, injured 14,000, and imprisoned thousands more Palestinians in its onslaught. Simultaneously, Palestinians fought off increasingly systematic offensives by Zionist militias.

Britain's social, military, and political devastation of Palestine paved the way for Zionist takeover (Ibid.; Pappe 2006, 14). As the British departed, Zionists martyred another 15,000 Palestinians, conducted over 60 massacres against them, placed survivors in concentration and forced labour camps, drove out two-thirds of the Native inhabitants, (creating an enormous and protracted refugee crisis), and demolished 531 of their villages (Palestine Land Society 2018; Sasa 2023, 221; Sayigh [1979] 2007, 63). Although Palestinians continued to defend their homeland, the *Jaysh al-Jihad al-Muqaddes* was their sole official armed force, established near the end of 1947. Severely deficient in military training, weapons, and size, 95% smaller than the Zionist militias, it did not stand much of a chance against the colonizer (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 79). After Israel's formation in 1948, Zionism prevented Palestinians from returning in violation of UN Resolution 194, killing 5,000 of those who still risked the journey (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2016, 171). This process is known as the *Nakba* (the Catastrophe) and continues to unfold today, from Israel's displacement of Palestinians to its elimination of them.

At this point, it is worth asking how do Israeli 'protected areas' serve Zionism? Western environmentalism, which gave rise to 'protected areas,' was initiated by eighteenth century French colonial administrators who were keen on disconnecting humans from 'nature.' This ideology mainly denigrated non-Whites as environmental offenders to justify subjugating and eliminating them from certain spaces (Sasa 2023, 221–222). It is conceivable that Indigenous peoples were forcibly removed from nearly all lands that were enclosed and converted into national parks due to the segregationist logic of these cornerstone environmental policies (Neumann 2007, 1203, 1205). In the meantime, the recent proliferation of 'protected areas' not only failed to curtail climate change but hastened it, since they disregarded capitalism, racism, misogyny, and other unjust structures as the real agents of planetary destruction. This finding substantiates a view long

held by many Indigenous peoples, including Palestinians: human and non-human destinies are inexorably intertwined (Sasa 2023, 230–231).

National parks were devised and globalized by the US during the nineteenth century, while other settler colonies, comprising Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, were the first to implement them. In Congo, the ruthless regime of Belgium introduced the first African national park in 1925 (Neumann 2007, 1202–1203). Neumann argues that the US’ development of the first national park and state-delegated ‘protected area’ in the world, Yellowstone and Yosemite respectively, was primarily driven by its desire to set itself apart from the European metropole and construct its identity around ‘nature.’ Their launch as top *tourist* attractions and a benchmark of *civilization* further popularized ‘protected areas,’ including among newly liberated and financially vulnerable Global South states (Ibid., 1203–1205). Israel took the path of older settler colonies in operationalizing Western environmentalism to usurp land (Alqaisiya 2024). It carefully scatters its national parks and nature reserves across Historic Palestine to embezzle the country, including its capital, save for the region encompassing the cities of Yafa and ar-Ramla, since it has already been almost exclusively settled by Jews. Notably, Israel’s declaration of national parks and nature reserves denies Palestinians their rights to develop or cultivate their lands, while informally and formally granting Jews unrestrained access to the same territories. Additionally, while most of the world’s forests are ‘unprotected,’ Israel pursues ‘protective’ forestry, particularly following the bankruptcy of its timber industry in the 1990s. Hence, it manages many of its forests, such as USA Independence Park, akin to its parks and reserves (Sasa 2023, 220–224).

Israeli ‘protected areas’ also entrench trees, entrance fees, fences, and violent environmental laws and authorities to preclude Palestinian expellees’ return (Ibid.). For instance, Nakba survivor Ibrahim Masaeed was deprived of his ability to *locate* even his home, since Israel

reduced his ancestral Dayr Aban to rubble, before clearing and afforesting it (Roya TV 2019a). At the same time, Israel destroys Indigenous plants including olive trees, which alone attest to centuries of Palestinian existence and agriculture. By eradicating fruits of Palestinian labour and replacing them with its own forests, Israel is ‘demonstrating a cultural superiority and a moral right to the land,’ as part of a Western colonial tradition that associates cultivation with civility and the right to own land (De-Colonizer 1948 2020). Of Israeli-colonized land (the Golan included) and of the 418 villages from which Palestinians were driven, 24% and 44% respectively have been converted into Israeli ‘protected areas.’ Regarding the former, another 64% of the land remains empty (37%) or consists of Israeli military zones (27%) (Sasa 2023, 224–225). Israel is thus frantically planting and ‘conserving’ trees to argue that its stolen land is productive and not awaiting the return of its Palestinian caretakers (De-Colonizer 1948 2020).

Furthermore, Israeli afforestation officer Michal Katorza overtly affirms that ‘a large portion of JNF parks are on lands where Palestinian villages used to stand, and the forests are intended to camouflage this’ (Kadman 2015, 43). From planting predominantly invasive conifers to burying Palestinian villages in its parks, Israel squashes Native memories and resistance. Simultaneously, it Europeanizes, Judaizes, and Christianizes the land (Sasa 2023). Israeli ‘protected areas’ are, for example, more likely to acknowledge ethnically cleansed Palestinian villages in their materials when they contain Crusader remnants (Kadman 2015, 122). Evidenced by Theodore Herzl’s early promotion of mass Jewish conversion to Christianity and his posterior backing for Jewish colonization of Palestine as a civilizational project, Zionism seeks proximity to Whiteness in response to European anti-Semitism (Balsam 2011, 92). I will later demonstrate the significance of access to unforested ruins for igniting Palestinian resistance with the example of a tour of Dayr Aban (Zochrot 2017).



### **Jewish National Fund (JNF) and USA Independence Park**

Since 1901, JNF fundraised for the seizure of Palestinian land, expulsion of its original inhabitants, and afforestation of it on behalf of the Zionist state. JNF soon began purchasing some territory in Palestine from Ottoman rulers, and absentee Syrian, Egyptian, and Lebanese landlords, only to forbid permanently its resale to non-Jews (Massad 2023). The Hebrew name for JNF (Keren Kayemet Le'Yisrael) translates into 'Capital for Israel' or 'Perpetual Fund,' clarifying the chief role of this entity (Braverman 2009, 318). However, fellahin strongly resisted Zionism from its birth around 1885, particularly JNF acquisitions that gradually resulted in unprecedented 'legal' evictions against Palestinians. Native Palestinians even surprised Zionists by promptly taking up arms to defend their communities (Massad 2023). Hence, only 6% of Palestine was owned by Jews as late as 1946, despite JNF's immense resources and efforts to colonize more land (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 36–38). It was not until the Israeli settler colony was founded, that it reassigned JNF and other Israeli government representatives over 90% of the Palestinian land it *robbed*. World states remained silent regarding this unlawful act partly since responsibility shifted to JNF, which proclaimed itself to be an altruistic NGO that cultivated the earth (Sasa 2023). In 1961, Israel designated JNF as its formal manager of forestation, although it continues to lead Israeli colonization as a quasi-state institution (Braverman 2009, 318). JNF also came to co-govern most of Israel's 'protected areas' with the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (Sasa 2023, 226). Today, JNF operates as a taxpayer-subsidized environmental charity in numerous states, including 'the US,' directly implicating their citizens in the Nakba (JNF n.d.-a; Stop the JNF n.d.).

In addition, JNF instills Zionism in Jews worldwide, markedly through three afforestation-based fundraising strategies: blue boxes, tree certificates, and memorial stones (Braverman 2009, 319). Patrons only need to pitch \$18 to plant one tree in 'Israel' and receive a certificate, while

forests and stone memorials are dedicated to bigger sponsors. USA Independence Park erected a ‘Wall of Eternal Life’ where Zionists can donate \$1,800 to engrave the name of a deceased loved one on the wall (JNF - USA n.d.). JNF thus relies on afforestation as a fundraising and indoctrination technique not merely due to the common view of it as an inherent good. Rather, non-Israeli Jews can feel embedded individually and collectively in Palestine by donating towards JNF tree planting, even if they reside outside of the ‘Holy Land’ and after their passing. Zionism inaugurates trees as proxy settler colonists (Balsam 2011, 97; Braverman 2009, 326–327).

Moreover, JNF invigorated the Jewish holiday *Tu Bishvat* in the last several decades, converting it into the Israeli version of the US’ Arbor Day by introducing tree planting as a custom and involving children as the main participants. The Israeli Knesset (Parliament) was also instituted in 1949 on this date to materialize and greenwash the ‘birth’ of the settler colony, while MKs have since planted trees with schoolchildren and soldiers to mark the occasion annually (Braverman 2009, 331–332). At the same time, Israel naturalizes colonizers primarily *via* afforestation projects. A strong emphasis is placed on environmental labour’s capacity for ‘transforming the stereotypically weak and wandering Jewish body into a [White,] strong, Hebrew one,’ baring the anti-Semitic and ableist foundations of Zionism (Balsam 2011, 96). As JNF’s teacher association spokesperson states, ‘Remember, children, that you do not plant trees, but people’ (Braverman 2009, 330).

JNF also led toponymicide. This process entailed the obliteration of hundreds of Indigenous placenames (toponyms) and their values to assert Israeli ‘political’ and ‘spiritual ownership’ over Palestine, as per the first Israeli prime minister, Ben-Gurion (Kadman 2015, 92–93; Masalha 2018, 27). British maps of Palestine featured thousands of placenames, of which just 5% were Hebrew, newly coined by colonizers or maintained from centuries prior, until 1948.

However, Israel did not authorize names for most Palestinian villages it ethnically cleansed. Concerning villages it recognized, it generally Hebraized their names, even if the process drastically altered their significance or rendered them unintelligible (Kadman 2015, 91–92). From 1949 to 1951, 533 Palestinian placenames were Hebraized by Israel: About 60% were derived from the former, (33% as translations, 28% as similar-sounding words, and merely 1.5% as transliterations), 23% referred to history, 9% mentioned figures in the Bible, and 6% were ‘new’ (Kadman 2015, 93). By *effacing, debasing, muddying, altering, and arrogating* Palestinian memories through this process, early Zionists attempted to Indigenize themselves (inwardly and outwardly) and ease their conscience upon colonizing Palestine (Kadman 2015, 94). In sum, JNF seizes Palestinian land, denies the right for Natives to return, extinguishes their memories, and greenwashes colonization on behalf of Israel, palpably by implementing Western environmental policies. In such a context, it is possible to situate the case of USA Independence Park.

Kadman’s (2015, 190) seminal book on Israeli green colonialism mentions USA Independence Park and lists 7 villages within its boundaries, excluding Dar al-Sheikh. However, the original JNF (n.d.-a) webpage for this park urged hikers to ‘visit Dar al-Sheikh,’ without clarifying its status as a village. JNF (n.d.-a) also immediately referenced ‘the railway line that was first laid here in 1880s, and which is undergoing improvements ... for its return to service,’ indirectly addressing the Dar al-Sheikh train station that the Ottoman Empire constructed (Abu al-Sous 2012a). As I was completing this article, JNF (n.d.-b) slightly updated its webpage to reference ‘a white dome ... which remains from the ruins of the *village* of *Dayr* al-Sheikh’ (emphasis added). Nakba survivor Muhammad Abu Omar (Abu al-Sous 2012a, 2012c) affirmed that the village was originally called Dar al-Sheikh after its ancient mosque of Sheikh Sultan Bader. Israel changed Dar to *Dayr* (Arabic: Monastery), the latter of which typically designates a Christian

village, although Abu Omar emphasized that it did not even have a monastery (Abdulhawa 2017, 59). Encyclopedia Palestina (2014a) defines the locality as Dar al-Sheikh too.

According to JNF (n.d.-a), this park encompasses three nature reserves: Nahal Sorek (South), Nahal HaMe'ara, and Nahal Dolev. The first occupies Dar al-Sheikh, while the third buries Sufla and Jrash (Kadman 2015, 191, 194). Note that Jrash is ordinarily spelled as Jarash, but the former is the more accurate transliteration of the Arabic term, as confirmed by Nakba survivors (Abu al-Sous 2010; Abu al-Sous 2012f). Regarding the reserves, all three adopt phonetically similar, Hebraized versions of the Indigenous names of the rivers, which are Wadi es-Sarar (Small Stone River), Wadi al-Mgharah (Cave River), and Wadi ed-Dilbah (Plane-Tree River) (Survey of Palestine 2021). Israel only translated the latter two. Palestinians named the first river es-Sarar after the many small stones that filled its water, although they called the lower third of its course Wadi Rubin (Al-Hasan 2013; Encyclopedia Palestina 2014b).

Regarding JNF's (n.d.-a) design of this space, its webpage begins by listing 'Special Sites in the Park.' They chiefly consist of memorials to astronauts who perished in the Challenger and Columbia Space Shuttle disasters, including Israeli Air Force fighter pilot, Ilan Ramon. He is notorious for having participated in Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and 1981 assault on the incomplete Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq. The latter attack was unanimously denounced by the UN Security Council and decried as 'state-sponsored terrorism' by the Los Angeles Times (L.A. Times Archives 2003; Steele 2002). Another place featured on the webpage is the Avshalom or Sorek Cave (JNF n.d.-a). Israelis inadvertently uncovered this stalactite cave after detonating the area in 1968 and named it after Israeli soldier, Avshalom Shoam (Times of Israel Staff 2017). Basim Saleh (2019) revealed that this cave belongs to his village of Dayr al-Hawa. Leading to the park, JNF (n.d.-a) points out 'Humphrey Road,' which was named after the 38<sup>th</sup> American vice president as

‘a true friend to Israel.’ Along this route, JNF adds that it built a memorial to ‘Israel Sela’ without explaining who this person was, as well as a map of ‘Israel’ carved in stone. All park sections are also individually signposted as separate Jewish American undertakings to espouse collaboration between Israel and the US: Jewish Texans are particularly honoured for their donations (Lubin et al. 2013, 83).

Additionally, JNF (n.d.-a) underscores that Israel ‘occupied’ the 8 villages during the 1948 Succoth, a Jewish harvest festival that marks the sheltering of dispossessed Jews (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Consequentially, Israel converts the Jewish community’s emancipatory celebration into the Nakba of thousands of Palestinians, further co-opting Judaism to whitewash Zionism. It appears that Israel is inspired by Canada and the US, which continue to celebrate Thanksgiving as a religious and cultural holiday, based on the falsehood that Indigenous peoples gifted them their lands. In observance of Thanksgiving, European-perpetrated genocide against the Natives of Turtle Island, their resistance, and their establishment of a Day of Mourning during the harvest festival are expunged (Hutton 2021). Indeed, fancy Thanksgiving dinners are still offered by ‘Ahwahnee’s culinary team’ in Yosemite National Park, perpetuating a national colonial narrative (Aramark n.d.).

Aside from children’s playgrounds, JNF (n.d.-a) also flags its creation of ‘picnic areas, active leisure sites, scenic lookouts and footpaths’ in the area, transforming Palestinian homes, lands, and graveyards into an Israeli amusement park (Pappe 2006, 229). It then boasts about revitalizing ‘the *natural* woodlands and archeological sites’ of the region (emphasis added). However, JNF predictably planted many *invasive* species in this park (Lubin et al. 2013, 83–84). Furthermore, JNF (n.d.-a) promotes Israel as a civilizing force that reclaimed antiquities and the non-human environment from destruction by nonexistent/negligent/violent Palestinians. While this

argument entrenches Israel's Orientalist trope that it is 'making the desert bloom,' it interrupted four millennia of Indigenous ecological and sociological flourishing by unleashing ecocide and genocide upon Palestine (Qleibo 2007; Sasa 2023)

Towards the end of the webpage, JNF (n.d.-a) references Dayr al-Hawa's observable 'remains' and a sign drawing attention to 'battle sites in the region.' JNF does not confess that Israel was the agent of destruction or even allude to the past inhabitation of Dayr al-Hawa, whitewashing the ethnic cleansing of this village. In addition, it calls the locality 'Arab,' while the word Palestine/Palestinian is nowhere to be found on the entire webpage. JNF (n.d.-a) then points to 'a planting center and an educational field center that is usually filled with young people' launched near the colony of Nes Harim, which as of 1950, occupies Bayt 'Itab (Khalidi 1992, 275). JNF (n.d.-a) only mentions 'Khirbet Beit Itab' (khirbet translates to ruin in Arabic), while the updated JNF (n.d.-b) webpage describes the village as 'Beit Atab Ruins.' JNF (n.d.-a) briskly moves onto Mgharat Umm a Taomin (Arabic: Cave of the Mother of Twins), which the webpage renamed Twins' Cave, and Wadi al Mgharah. Both are located within Jrash, as testified by Nakba survivor Abdulrahman al-Zaghari (Abu al-Sous 2010) and a map from the 1940s, although this locality is left out of the JNF webpage altogether (Survey of Palestine 2021). According to Abdulrahman, tourists from around the world, including other Arabs, Americans, and Jews, visited the cave where 'a sterile woman who drank water dripping from [its] roof...became fertile and gave birth to twins' (Shapira 2012).

Moreover, the park (JNF n.d.-a) states that 'Moshav Bar Giora is situated on the remains of a British officers' recreational facility called Allar,' blatantly reducing the Palestinian village of 'Allar to an *imperialist army leisure centre*. It suggests that Jerusalem pines were planted by the British to shield their military zone. Also, the webpage (Ibid.) mentions Khirbet Hanut, which was

originally called Khirbat al-Khan and lies in Khirbat al-Tannur (Know Your Country with Ziad Muna 2021; Survey of Palestine 2022): ‘At the site [of Khirbat al-Khan] the remains of a Byzantine church, a caravanserai and ancient wine presses can be seen. A magnificent mosaic floor found inside the church has been covered with sand in order to preserve it’ (JNF n.d.-a). Unfortunately, while JNF (Ibid.) claims that Israel conserved the 1,500-year-old mosaic using sand, after excavating it in 1986, ultra-Orthodox Jews likely destroyed it in 2012 (Altman 2012). The assaulters left behind graffiti that stated: ‘The magnitude of destruction equals the magnitude of desecration.’ The shards of the extraordinary Byzantine mosaic were gathered by the Israeli Antiquities Authority, which declared ‘there is no budget to reconstruct it’ (Altman 2012). Kadman (2015, 121–122) criticizes JNF for neglecting Khirbat al-Tannur, save for its Crusader era.

### **Unearthing Palestinian History**

Having critically analyzed JNF’s design of USA Independence Park, I now broadly unearth the history of the 8 Palestinian villages the park suppresses before delving into each. These localities are situated in a mountainous region near Jerusalem, which only several decades ago, harboured rich, agricultural societies (Khalidi 1992). Their original inhabitants describe these lands as exquisite, harmonious, and plentiful paradises (Abu al-Sous 2012f; Qouchannel 2020a; Roya TV 2019a). Sayigh ([1979] 2007, 1) cautions against disregarding these testimonies as nostalgic exaggerations, because villages *were* self-sustaining and collectivist, despite battling imperialism and capitalism. The Palestinian communal tenure system of *masha’* uniformly (re)allocated land and resources among villagers, sustaining mutual land ownership and class unity (Ibid., 30). Fellahin of these localities cultivated all sorts of seeds, legumes, and grains, such as wheat, barley, lentils, sesame, hummus, fava beans, corn, *jilbana* (flat peas), and *qarsanna* (Palestinian vetch or

*Vicia palaestina*); vegetables, such as zucchini, okra, and *fakkous* (cucumber); and fruits, such as apricots, plums, cactus pears, pomegranates, watermelons, and cantaloupes. Many edible plants grew wildly, comprising *khubbayzeh* (mallow), mushrooms, akkoub (*Gundelia*), and chamomile (Abu al-Sous 2010; Qouchannel 2020a, 2020b). Crops were largely rainfed (Khalidi 1992). Furthermore, the locals reared goats, cows, and camels (Abu al-Sous 2012f).

Aside from prosperity, Palestinian families were closely bonded to each other and to their land, nurturing economic, sociocultural, military, and environmental solidarity, peace, and contentment (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 6, 39–40). Principles, such as *wajib* (duty), *rujuliyyeh* (courage/manliness), generosity, hospitality, honour, and loyalty were espoused by fellahin. They thus rushed to defend other villages from colonial aggression and assist fellow villagers in their agricultural work, as charitable acts or *faz'at* (Ibid., 8–10; Abu al-Sous 2010). These tenets also motivated efforts, often steered by women, to promptly resolve disputes. Meanwhile, the love and respect accorded to all locals counteracted patriarchy, classism, and other structures of repression (Sasa 2023; Sayigh [1979] 2007, 17, 19, 134).

Fellahin were people of faith, respecting religious differences among them. The Indigenous inhabitants of the 8 villages were mainly Muslim, as only Dar al-Sheikh and Dayr Aban were home to a small minority of 10 Christians each, although religious statistics for Khirbat al-Tannur are absent (Khalidi 1992). Susan Abdulhawa (2017, 59) hypothesizes that her ancestral Dayr al-Hawa was also Christian, but all its residents became Muslim by the time of its depopulation (Khalidi 1992, 285). Meanwhile, Palestinian anthropologist Dr. Ali Qleibo (2007) emphasizes that shrines assigned to local saints, *maqamat*, were the main places of worship for fellaheen prior to their construction of mosques in the 1900s. Shaded by centuries-old carob or oak trees, these one-room structures were generally domed and square-shaped possessing, in the middle, a grave (Abu Alsaud



2019, 23). Villagers had designated individuals *awliya' Allah* (friends of God) based on their *karamat* (noble and miraculous qualities) and their associated ability to intercede for them, although this form of valorization has been rejected by orthodox Islam (Qleibo 2007). Several of the 8 localities' maqamat were dedicated for Islamic teachers, likely due to Palestinian society's strong appreciation for knowledge and education as tools of emancipation (Khalidi 1992; Sayigh [1979] 2007, 33–34). Dar al-Sheikh descendant, Abu Omar (Abu al-Sous 2012b), expresses his reverence for educators by firmly repeating, '*el-ustath, ustath*' or 'the teacher is a teacher.'

As a result of their profound connections to their lands and each other, Palestinians experienced not only severe pain, loss, and humiliation during the Nakba but enduring 'psychological trauma': 'The village...was built into the personality of each individual villager to a degree that made separation like an obliteration of the self' (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 109–110). Belonging to the region of al-'Arqub, the inhabitants of these villages can largely be found today in Dheisheh refugee camp, located in Israeli-occupied Bethlehem (Abu al-Sous 2011; Khalidi 1992, 274). Yet, the Natives and their landscapes continue to resist Israeli settler colonialism, including for their right to return. For instance, evidence proving the existence of these villages rests in the form of olive, almond, and fig trees, rubble, and cacti, which Palestinians utilized to divide their plots of land (Pappe 2006, 228; Sasa 2023). Below, I provide a mere glimpse into the diverse stories of each of these beautiful Palestinian villages, which remain heavily stifled by the Israeli regime.

### **'Allar (علا)**

'Allar denotes 'on a mountain' since '*al* and *yar* translate into 'on the' and 'mountain,' respectively (Roya TV 2017). Before 1948, it was inhabited by 440 Palestinians and featured four maqamat,

stores, and a primary school. One maqam (singular) was attributed to Native religious instructor, Sheikh Ibrahim (Khalidi 1992, 266). Qouchannel (2020a) interviewed Msallam Salman, who was about 20 years old when he was expelled from the village, as he visited ‘Allar. He exclaimed ‘the village was in a heaven ... local apples and pears were the size of oranges.’ Later, he added, ‘we were happy in it and living a royal life.’ The four major families of ‘Allar were Qaraqe’, Hammad, al-Baraqe’, and Zboun. Msallam expressed his condition as a refugee as ‘*hamm*’ (anxiety) and ‘*ghamm*’ (grief) saying, ‘I cannot believe when I close my eyes and see it, and then leave it again.’ He did not even recognize the village after Zionists destroyed everything in it, except for a cave, school, and domed building, even burning the olive trees (Khalidi 1992, 267). At one point, he stooped to gather some *qurniyya* (*Micromeria fruticose*) to make tea, noting its ability to alleviate pain, especially for children. He described his land as *hanoun* (compassionate): ‘I wish we died in it and didn’t leave it ... and didn’t see this entire community [of colonizers].’ The camera zoomed in on him widely smiling, as he held a piece of local flora close to his face, while holding onto the fence that shackled the built-up area of his hometown (Qouchannel 2020a). In 1950, both the colonies of Matta’ (Hebrew: Orchard) and Bar-Giyyora were formed on land belonging to ‘Allar (Kadman 2015, 102; Khalidi 1992, 266). Msallam remained in Bethlehem’s ‘Aida refugee camp, describing the Nakba as a hell where they never got to relax as expellees (Qouchannel 2020a).

### Bayt ‘Itab (بيت عتاب)

I was shepherding the goats at night ... I walked back from Bayt Nattif to the land of my village and found the families of our village packing ... I cried watching them. They looked scary as they were walking, walking in sadness ... Israelis killed my cousin and his wife inside their home.

Abulkader al-Lahham (Roya TV 2019b)

Abulkader described life in Beit ‘Itab as ‘free’ and ‘sweet,’ producing the most delicious, large figs prior to its colonization by Israeli forces. That day, he witnessed tearjerking scenes, such as the one quoted above, and another of a fellow villager who was ‘pulling his children, asking him for food, but he didn’t have any to provide ... He walked to Jordan.’ Living in a refugee camp since, he said he could no longer enjoy any food, from ghee, to oil, to meat, and still longed for the perfumed wind of Beit ‘Itab. He said his ‘heart burned’ over the loss of his village, and his community came to fear Israeli imprisonment from simply picking its fruits. Another descendant of Beit ‘Itab, Mahmoud al-Lahham (Roya TV 2019b), explained that it was central in the region as ‘Beit ed-Daeef’ (House of the Weak), overseeing 25 villages and always ready to welcome and aid the oppressed. Rihab al-Lahham (Ibid.) likened revisiting her village after about 50 years to being reunited with her son: ‘Look at what happened to the *dalia* (grapevine). The *dalia* cries for her *sahib*; the fig cries for her *sahib*.’ By opting for the word *sahib*, translating into both *friend* and *owner*, she illustrated the reciprocity Palestinians nurtured with non-humans.

Late Bayt ‘Itab descendant, Izzat al-Laham (Abu al-Sous 2011), who was guarding Dayr al-Hawa when Zionists attacked his village with cannons said, ‘if people truly knew [permanent dispossession] would be the outcome, they would have stayed put and not left their village.’ Sayigh ([1979] 2007, 66) corroborates his assertion: ‘Most [Palestinians] had no time to think, as they fled under bombardment. But none had any idea of leaving Palestine for good.’ Instead of being forced out from their homeland, Sayigh adds that Palestinians ‘would say that it would have been better to have been massacred in thousands’ (Ibid., 67). Izzat (Abu al-Sous 2011) also noted that Israel had offered to buy a connecting road from Bayt ‘Itab but the villagers adamantly rejected the proposal, avowing:

The only position that we will never retreat from, and these words will be passed from generation to generation, is that we will not accept compensation or compromise on our land. We will only accept return ... and we will never sell a grain of dirt from the land of Palestine.

He then displayed defiant optimism and the deep rootedness of fellahin in their *balad*, (which translates to country or village).

No doubt, neither our right [of return] nor country is lost, as long as we hold onto our *ard*, which of course preserves our '*ard* and our faith ... as the saying goes, remove the rock from its place, it becomes imbalanced.

Note how the words *ard* (land) and '*ard* (dignity) are closely linked together in this quote, linguistically and metaphorically. At a spectacular elevation of 675 meters, Bayt 'Itab housed over 540 Palestinians from the major families of al-Lahham, Milhim, Isa, 'Atallah, and Hammash. There were an elementary school, a mosque, a maqam for Sheikh Ma'roof, and remnants of a Crusader castle in the heart of the locality (Roya TV 2019b). It also had 2 *mukhtars* (village leaders), Darwish Mustafa and al-Abed Milhim, as well as 2 cemeteries (Abu al-Sous 2011; Khalidi 1992, 274–275).

#### **Dar al-Sheikh (Dayr al-Shaykh) (دار الشيخ)**

Over 220 Palestinians resided in Dar al-Sheikh (Khalidi 1992, 288). Some of the major families were al-Ashraf (al-Shurafa), Abu Saleh, A'jamy, Musleh, Shqeir, and Abu Omar (Abu al-Sous 2012b). One of its mosques remains standing, although when Muhammad Ahmad Abu Omar visited it to worship in the 1980s, he found Israelis sheltering goats there, desecrating it. He explained that there were no sicknesses, since they ate from local herbs and their 'ayn (spring) was as clean as the 'ayn (eye) of an eagle (Abu al-Sous 2012c). Many of its members partook in The

Great Palestinian Revolt of 1936. They also hid and fed revolutionaries, countless of whom sought refuge in the caves and trees of Dar al-Sheikh. As Zionist aggression grew, the village supported its neighbours in their defense, walking for kilometers armed with guns, knives, or sticks (Abu al-Sous 2012d). Muhammad (Abu al-Sous 2012d) asserted ‘the people had *sharaf* (honour). It was not a material issue.’ Eventually, the villagers were also forced to escape Israeli shelling: ‘The village was depopulated; depopulated meaning striking fear in you. You wonder if beasts crossed it ... as the saying goes, *a paradise without people is not enterable*’ (Abu al-Sous 2012e). This Arabic parable emphasizes Palestinian rejection of Western environmentalism’s romanticization of ethnic cleansing.

### **Dayr Aban (دير آبان)**

Avowing that Dayr Aban had the best wheat in all of Palestine, Ibrahim Masaeed (Roya TV 2019a) said it was tall to the extent men disappeared behind it. The name of Dayr Aban has Roman influence, signifying a striking, elevated place (Ibid.). Resting on a mountain as a sizeable village, it belonged to 2,434 Palestinians (De- Colonizer 1948 2020). The al-’Umari mosque and a primary school were to be found at its center, and Israel set up five colonies on its land: Tzor’a, Yish’i, Machseya, Beyt Shemesh, and Zanoah (Khalidi 1992, 283–284). ‘Dayr Aban Train Station’ was also built there by the Ottoman Empire, which Israel renamed ‘Beyt Shemesh Train Station’ (Zochrot 2017). Yousef Abdelhafiz Daamaseh (Ibid.) who was 10 when he was expelled, shared that his father joined a local legion of men to defend the village from Zionist attacks. An Israeli sniper martyred him as he was playing with his grandchild in his yard following one of his shifts.

Also hailing from Dayr Aban, leading organizer and social worker, Naji ‘Owdeh (De- Colonizer 1948 2020), meticulously recorded how Israel martyred over 45 Palestinians, several of

whom were resisting Israeli incursion or attempting to return to the village in search of blankets, food, and other necessities for their families (Sansour 2013). For over a week, many of the inhabitants sheltered nearby in the mountains and beneath the trees during the cold, windy, and rainy month of October before they realized that Israel was killing all who attempted to even re-access their homes and lands. He recounted the harrowing experience of his uncle who was delivered and kept under a rock during the exodus, as his mother was alone and could not carry him, until his relative rescued him. During the Second Intifada, however, this man who miraculously survived his birth had his son martyred by Israel (De- Colonizer 1948 2020).

For over a decade in Dheisheh camp, Naji has been managing Al Finic Community Center and the Palestinian Youth Action Center (Laylac) to promote liberty, collectivism, generosity, originality, art, education, love, leadership, and feminism, particularly among the youth, with limited funding. Israeli soldiers detained him for participating in a demonstration as a teenager. Thus, Naji later assisted in founding a Palestinian parliament for children to support formerly incarcerated, disabled, and waged children in their healing journeys (Sansour 2013). He insisted on staying in the camp he was born in until return to Dayr Aban became achievable (De- Colonizer 1948 2020): Palestinian generally view refugee camps as statements and hubs of resistance. Despite their often-appalling socioeconomic state, the camps allow Palestinians to conserve their ties to each other and their ancestral lands, as well as articulate the temporary nature of their dispossession to the outside world (Sayigh [1979] 2007, 112).

At an educational webinar on the Nakba hosted by De-Colonizer (an anti-Zionist Israeli non-profit), a participant named Michael K. told Naji that his kibbutz of Tzor'a colonized Dayr Aban and the Palestinian depopulated village of Sar'a:

So, I want to say first of all, Naji, that I'm sorry about the part of my member of the kibbutz took place in holding the land and not letting your people to come back. This is a kind of a war crime. And second, I want to say that I really wish that one day something will happen ... and I wish that my kibbutz member will help you eventually to rebuild your village again. (De-Colonizer 1948 2020)

When the host Eitan Bronstein applauded Michael for his apology to Naji and statement of solidarity, saying 'Bravo,' Michael quickly countered, 'Not bravo until it will be done' (De-Colonizer 1948 2020). I share this interaction to highlight how many Israelis are beginning to decolonize their minds and work towards Palestinian



A well with a metal lid in the ethnically cleansed village, Dayr Aban, March 3, 2015 (Zochrot 2021).

Courtesy of Michael K.





The ruins of a building and cacti in Dayr Aban, March 3, 2015. Courtesy of Michael K.



Israel established a garden to host events, including weddings, called ‘Derech Eretz Farm – Events that connect to nature’ over Dayr Aban’s ruins, March 3, 2015 (Zochrot 2021). Courtesy of Michael K.



liberation. He then shared a couple of pictures from Dayr Aban, taken in 2015, during a tour there with Yusuf Abu Naji, who was 11 years old when Israelis expelled him from the village (Michael K., pers. comm., May 3, 2022). Michael graciously gave me permission to share them in this article.



A room in a partly demolished building in Dayr Aban has been decorated by Israelis to accommodate couples throughout their weddings, March 3, 2015 (Zochrot 2021). Courtesy of Michael K.

In January 2016, a bilingual (Arabic and Hebrew) tour of Dayr Aban was led by Filistiniyyat (Arabic: Palestinian women) and Zochrot (Hebrew: Remembrance), another anti-Zionist Israeli body. They distributed booklets to the Palestinian and Israeli attendees, replete with survivor testimonies and information from *The Village of Dayr Aban*, written by local Nakba survivor, Abdelaziz Abuhadba. After visiting the partially demolished homes, caves, and a grape press in Dayr Aban, they reached its major cemetery, which was in horrendous condition. Graves were defiled and dug up by Zionists out of malice, or they were searching for gold and money due to their myth that Palestinians buried these items with their loved ones (Zochrot 2017). Similarly,

American ‘Pilgrims robbed ancestral graves’ belonging to the Indigenous village of Patuxet that they ethnically cleansed (Hutton 2021). The visitors quickly moved to cover the holes over the Palestinian graves with rocks and thus protect the bodies. Towards the end of this event, a Palestinian tour guide (Zochrot 2017) stressed that his presence and that of fellow Indigenous hikers in the village, their remembrance of the local families’ names and experiences, and their restoration of its graves merely marked the first stage of Dayr Aban’s recovery. The second will involve the reconstruction of the mosque and the church, and the third will encompass drawing the boundaries of the demolished homes to resurrect them, as a ‘praxis of return.’ Psychologically, these kinds of anti- colonial group tours also empowered Palestinians refugees, filled them with optimism that return was feasible, and motivated them to achieve this goal by reminding them of their belonging to the land. Anti-Zionist resistance is nurtured *via* access to unforested ruins, such as the cemetery, and anticolonial archives (Sasa 2023, 227).

### **Dayr al-Hawa (دير الهوا)**

Approximately 70 members of the Saleh family inhabited Dayr al-Hawa (Basim Saleh 2019). Perched on a 650 meters tall mountain, it revealed a stunning view of the Dome of the Rock and Wadi es-Sarar, while ushering cool winds (Khalidi 1992, 285). The latter feature seemingly delivered Dayr al-Hawa (Monastery of the Wind) as its name (Abdulhawa 2017, 59–60). Abdulhawa’s ancestor Hasan was banished from this village by his family during the late seventeenth century. It is rumoured they chastised him for committing murder or for embracing Islam out of interest in wedding a Muslim woman. Moving to the nearby village of el-Tur, he became known as Abu el-Hawa by the inhabitants of his new home, passing on the family name

Abdulhawa to his lineage. Dayr al-Hawa built a shrine for the Native instructor, Sheikh Suleiman, and a mosque (Khalidi 1992, 285).

### **Jrash (جراش)**

Situated 425 meters above ground, Jrash's name aptly signifies a high place, distinguished among the mountains and dates to the Roman period: Approximately 220 Palestinians inhabited it in 40 homes. They had two maqamat for Native religious instructor, Sheikh Ahmad, and medic, Sheikh Abrood (Khalidi 1992, 296). The latter was renowned for treating epilepsy and infertility, prompting neighbouring villagers to visit him. There was also a small boy school near a new mosque and a *madafeh* (guesthouse) where all families gathered. In 1967, however, Israel destroyed even the village's mosque and trees. The Israeli industrial zone of Hartuv exploits most of the village lands today for agricultural purposes (Qouchannel 2020b). Late elder Mahmoud-al-Zaghari was about 14 years old when he was expelled from Jrash. Since then, he was able to visit his home again in 1980 and 2020:

I remember, always dream of the village of Jrash...I was not able to walk before you [interviewer] came to me here, but when you came and said you wanted to take me to Jrash, God filled me with strength and you can see my condition now. As if I can walk from here to Bethlehem! Alhamdulillah...I am 85 years old...if I have the opportunity to sit here in my village in a *mgharah* (cave), I swear I am ready to sit. What can we do? (Qouchannel 2020b)

Walking the interviewer over to the highest point of Jrash to visit one of its cemeteries, Mahmoud recounted that Palestinians resisted Israeli colonization for 6 months in Wadi 'Illin, Dayr Aban, which was later colonized by Beyt Shemesh. He gestured to where other fighters buried his father after he was martyred in July 1948. Three months later, the Israeli army struck Jrash with bombs and bullets, killing some of the Native population, while many fled without managing to carry

anything with them. He carried his 6-month-old brother only and his mother held his 3-year-old sister, as they walked through the mountains for 2 or 3 days to reach Bethlehem. Surrounded by the stones of his old home and sitting under a massive tree, in 2020, he remarked that the plant had died. He said he was originally ‘happy to return to [his] home, but now, sadder than before because everything is gone.’ However, he added defiantly, ‘I send a message to all the people of Palestine that they continue to hold onto their inheritance and attempt to return to their lands ... those inside and outside of Palestine ... either amicably or through force’ (Ibid.).

### **Khirbat al-Tannur (‘Allar es-Sufla) (خربة التور)**

Also known as Lower ‘Allar or ‘Allar es-Sufla, Khirbat al-Tannur was populated by some 400 Natives in 1875 before it was vacated and reinhabited by a small, unknown number of them under the British Mandate. Only 4 of its 10 homes were spared from Israeli demolition (Khalidi 1992, 320). Rich in historical and spiritual significance, one may stumble there upon Ein al-Tannur (Arabic: Oven Spring). ‘Allar’s late mukhtar Muhammad Abdullah Elhoni, provided a religious narrative describing how the *tannur* initially functioned as the oven of Prophet Noah. It said that the *tannur* metamorphosed into a spring to prove his devotion to Allah following the engulfment of the region to punish the wicked. Failing to recall its previous form after the end of the flood, however, the mountain spring continued to supply water, causing Prophet Noah to not recognize his home from his ark and to settle in Mount Arafat instead. Akin to Prophet Noah, many passers-by today likely miss the spring that is accompanied by an ancient, massive fig tree, since Israeli hiking maps distort its position and call it Ein Mata, after the Israeli colony of Matta’ that was erected in the vicinity. Bewilderingly, another local spring, Ein Banat Noah (Arabic: Spring of Noah’s daughters) was also named Ein Mata by Israel (Ben Yosef 2007).

### **Sufla (سفلى)**

70 Palestinians inhabited Sufla pertaining to the three major families of Odeh, Yousef, and Wakkat (Qouchannel 2020c). Nakba survivor, Salim Mustafa Yousef Udeh, was born in 1925 in Sufla (Abu al-Sous 2012f). He recalled the height of its sage exceeding that of men and the size of the leaves of its zaatar rivalling that of the sage. Juxtaposing the greenery, bright red *hanoun* (poppies) dotted the landscape (Abu al-Sous 2012g). Crusader ruins and a shrine for Sheikh Mu'annis were also to be found in Sufla (Khalidi 1992, 319). When Israel began assaulting Sufla, its inhabitants only had 4 or 5 rifles to resist with. One woman attempted to escape, carrying her daughter as bombs fell overhead, but was killed by Israeli forces. Refugees fled, taking what they could at 1 am, including their blankets and domesticated animals. Salim affirms, 'even if I currently live in a heaven, if I could return [to Sufla], I would ... I see my house as better.' His village also had a *diwan*: a box to record everything related to its inhabitants, including deaths, keeping their memories alive (Abu al-Sous 2012h).

### **Conclusion**

This article revealed Israel-US's plantation of trees and 'protected areas' as a device to seize Palestinian land, bar the original inhabitants from returning, purge their memories, and screen settler colonial activity with a display of sustainability. I delved into USA Independence Park as a case study, which Israel literally planted over the ruins of eight Palestinian villages that it ethnically cleansed and destroyed in 1948 near the city of Jerusalem. They encompassed 'Allar, Bayt 'Itab, Dar al-Sheikh, Dayr Aban, Dayr al-Hawa, Jrash, Khirbat al-Tannur, and Sufla. This park was launched by the US branch of JNF, which remains financed as a tax-deductible environmental charity around the world, while mainly robbing Palestinian territory and properties on behalf of

Israel. It was publicly announced, in 2024, that Canada was revoking the charitable status of JNF over its financial support for the Israeli air force, navy, and army, as a stunning and ‘major blow’ to one settler-state alliance (Baxter 2024).

This article began by discussing my positionality as a Palestinian activist-scholar and the bedrocks of Israeli green colonialism: Zionism and Western environmentalism. It moved to contextualize and critically analyze JNF’s design of the park, before consulting oral interviews with Nakba survivors to unearth and preserve the memories of each of the Palestinian villages buried by this park. I recovered the Arabic names of many of their important landmarks and local species, showcased the culture, knowledge, agricultural success, and steadfastness of their Indigenous inhabitants, and reaffirmed the expellees’ claims to their stolen lands. As an anticolonial archive, this article not only resists Israel’s attempt to obliterate the existence of Natives, but also provides a blueprint for the re-establishment of egalitarian Palestinian villages and sustainable paradises. The Palestinian values of equality, courage, and respect should augment our efforts towards annulling the charitable status of JNF worldwide, contesting the modern separation between humans and ‘nature,’ and recognizing Indigenous sovereignties. From viewing *ard* (land) as ‘*ard* (honour), to calling a tree *sahib* (friend) and land *hanoun* (compassionate), Palestinian lifeways also impel us to rekindle our kinship with non-humans, as well as abolish global capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. A lot more interviews with Nakba survivors need to be translated and documented to honour their experiences and insights, while facilitating the return of their descendants.

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## **Chapter 3: Terraforming Palestine: Zionist Genocide, Ecocide, and Green Militarization**

### **Preface**

Israeli green militarization and terraforming are examined in the third chapter of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> I term the infliction of genocide and ecocide against Indigenous populations “terraforming,” citing Amitav Ghosh. Divided into three sections, this chapter begins by underlining a key plank of Zionism, hypermilitarization, and its socioecological violence. Since the global war industry – a leading driver of climate change – is not only neglected but sanctified by Western environmentalism, I reveal the hypocrisy of this ideology. The second section unveils the entanglement of Israeli militarism and environmentalism, although the latter is subordinated by the Zionist entity. Israeli nationalization of hiking, crossover between national parks and firing zones, and development of an ecological NGO from its militia (the Palmach) are detailed. Thirdly, the Palestinian *sarha* is contemplated as a meditative walk that undermines the dichotomy between humans and nonhumans.

### **Abstract**

This chapter delves into the Zionist terraforming of Palestine, revealing genocidal and ecocidal dimensions of the Nakba. Contrary to the popular Orientalist trope that Israel is “making the desert bloom,” I argue that the Zionists are converting a prosperous Palestine into a Europeanized firing zone. This chapter is split into three parts. First, I discuss Israeli hypermilitarization and its settler colonial significance. Despite modern environmentalism’s enduring embrace of militarism, I also emphasize the irreconcilability of sustainability with the war industry. Second, I unearth Israeli

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter is a manuscript that has been submitted for publication in a book.

green militarization, demonstrating the subservience of even Israel's ecological movement to its expansionist project: I examine hiking as an essential Zionist activity, the overlap between Israeli firing zones and "protected areas," and the evolution of the terrorist militia, the Palmach, into Israel's largest environmental organization. To recover Palestinian memory and underscore the socioecological violence of the Palmach, I briefly describe its leadership in ethnically cleansing 1948 Palestine's northern half. Third, I explore a way in which Zionism, as well as the Western human-nature binary, (responsible for greenwashing oppression worldwide), are resisted by Palestinians, namely their participation in *sarhat* or meditative walks. Inspired by the rich Palestinian tradition, I advocate for holistic decolonization.

**Keywords:** green militarization; hiking; Palestine; protected areas; Indigenous rights; anti-colonial environmentalism.

## **Introduction**

In the words of Palestinian scholar Dr. Salman Abu Sitta (Palestine Land Society, 2018), "Israel is a military base basically with people in it." Indeed, the *Haaretz* article, "Hiking Israel's Iconic Cross-country Trail Could Kill You" (On, 2019), highlights that more than a *third* of "Israel" has been converted into firing zones for the Israeli army. I call the geographic space formally recognized as "Israel" 1948 Palestine to reassert its name prior to the violent founding of the Zionist settler colony in 1948. Zionism is the 19<sup>th</sup> century European movement that paved the way for the colonization of Palestine by mainly Ashkenazi Jews, while forcibly expelling and killing most of its Native inhabitants (Sasa, 2023a, p. 221). Incorporating the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Syrian Golan Heights, Israel militarized nearly three-quarters of the region it is actively annexing. Thus, it is unsurprising that "proportional to its size Israel has the world's most extensive

military control of land” (Gordon, 2013, pp. 243–244). And while Israeli “protected areas,” such as national parks and nature reserves, comprise about a quarter of 1948 Palestine, not only do they frequently overlies its combat areas, but akin to all other Israeli policies, they are substantially and distinctively militarized (Sasa, 2023a, p. 225; Braverman, 2009, p. 341). For instance, as an honourable, voluntary extension of mandated service to the Israeli army, citizens of Israel often hike on its most popular trail, (which traverses the 1000-km length of 1948 Palestine), the Israel National Trail (On, 2019). Hiking itself has deep roots within the Israeli military and continues to allow Zionists to usurp Palestinian land (Rabineau, 2023, p. 23).

This chapter delves into the Zionist terraforming of Palestine (concept further explained below), revealing genocidal and ecocidal dimensions of the Nakba (Ghosh, 2021). Contrary to the popular Orientalist trope that Israel is “making the desert bloom,” I argue that the Zionists are transforming a prosperous Palestine into a Europeanized firing zone (Palestine Land Society, 2018). This chapter is split into three parts. First, I discuss Israeli hypermilitarization and its settler colonial significance (Barbancey, 2020). Despite modern environmentalism’s enduring embrace of militarism, I also emphasize the irreconcilability of sustainability with the war industry (Annecke & Masubelele, 2016, p. 202). Second, I unearth Israeli green militarization, demonstrating the subservience of even Israel’s ecological movement to its expansionist project: I examine hiking as an essential Zionist activity, the overlap between Israeli firing zones and “protected areas,” and the evolution of the terrorist militia, the Palmach, into Israel’s largest environmental organization (gov.il, p. 14; Rabineau, 2023; Sasa, 2023a, p. 225; McKee, 2016, p. 156). To recover Palestinian memory and underscore the socioecological violence of the Palmach, I briefly describe its leadership in expelling 1948 Palestine’s northern half (Pappé, 2006, p. 45). This region includes the villages of Khisas and Sasa, as well as the cities of al-Lyd and my ancestral

ar-Ramla (Pappé, 2006). Third, I explore a way in which Zionism, as well as the Western human-nature binary, (responsible for greenwashing oppression worldwide), are resisted by Palestinians, namely their participation in *sarhat* or meditative walks (Sharif, 2016). Inspired by the rich Palestinian tradition, I advocate for holistic decolonization (Sasa, 2023a).

### **Israeli Hypermilitarism**

Before expounding the notion of terraforming, I would like to define three other terms I employ throughout this chapter. Genocide denotes the purposeful elimination of a group of people (Weiss, 2017). Ecocide is a broad expression that describes the infliction of substantial damages on the planet (Pavoni & Piselli, 2022, pp. 17–18). Citing Elizabeth Lunstrum (2014), the authors Annecke and Masubelele (2016) outline green militarization as “the use of military and paramilitary (military-like) actors, techniques, technologies, and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation” (p. 197). However, as these scholars recognize that militarization is environmentally harmful, I redefine the phrase as the subversion of environmentalism by the military as a channel to oppress others: Emphasis falls on the noun “militarization,” while “green” is merely an adjective (cover) (Sasa, 2023a, p. 223).

“Terraforming” applies to the establishment of neo-Earths or the conversion of other planets into livable spaces for human beings. However, the founding of neo-Europes via Western settler colonization is captured by this notion. Settler colonists who are mainly European persist annexing territories that belong to other nations over the long term. Subsequently, they wage wars against the Indigenous inhabitants and their lands to genocide and replace them (Ghosh, 2021, pp. 59–62). Ecocide is perpetrated by empires to overtly or covertly perpetuate this form of genocide: They often destroy ecosystems and strategically unleash pathogens to kill Natives, only to



subsequently and deceptively portray these violent acts as “natural disasters” (Ghosh, 2021, pp. 64–67). In this chapter, I deploy the term “terraforming” based on its primary definition, encompassing settler colonial genocide and ecocide.

Since settler colonists terraform land – annihilating even women and children in the process – they tend to hypermilitarize (Ghosh, 2021, p. 61). In fact, Israeli researcher Haim Bresheeth (Barbancey, 2020) states that Israel exercised brute military force annually since its founding, as “a militarized State, preferring the state of war.” Besides targeting Indigenous Palestinians through ongoing home demolitions, expulsions, and extrajudicial killings, Israel regularly launches military offensives more typically understood as genocidal, especially at the Gaza Strip (Weiss, 2017). Gaza is both illegally occupied and besieged by Israel: based on a 2012 report exposed by *Haaretz*, Israel even placed Gazans on a starvation diet, allowing food to enter the Strip only by allotting 2,279 calories for everyone. As Palestinians are not only severely oppressed but routinely and arbitrarily massacred by the occupying army there, the dubbing of Gaza as the world’s largest open-air prison shockingly becomes too generous (Filiu, 2014, p. 57).

Israel killed 1,417 Palestinians in Gaza during “Operation Cast Lead” (2008-2009), 166 Palestinians during “Operation Pillar of Defense” (2012), 2,251 Palestinians during “Operation Protective Edge” (2014), and 232 Palestinians during “Operation Guardian of the Walls” (2021) (Filiu, 2014, pp. 53–54, 56–57; UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 2014; B’Tselem, 2022). Additionally, “Operation Cast Lead” was not the first but tenth Israeli onslaught against the Gaza Strip (Filiu, 2014, p. 56). At the time of writing, Israel is launching its most lethal attacks yet on Palestinians in Gaza, slaughtering tens of thousands of them. Israel’s ruthlessness is not limited to a settler colonial context either, evidenced by its repeated incursions against Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt (Barbancey, 2020). These attacks are

spearheaded by Israel to squash local anti-Zionist resistance and further colonize Arab lands. Meanwhile, Israel is among nine states worldwide that own nuclear weapons, although it has yet to disclose the fact. It also does not accept the Non-Proliferation Treaty, along with only three other states (Gambrell, 2021). In sum, Israel relies on its significant military power and offensives to sustain itself as a formidable settler colonial and imperialist force in the region.

Akin to other settler colonies, Israel also pursues a strategy of hypermilitarization to carve a national identity, rally citizens behind its colonial violence, and fire its economy. Bresheeth (Barbancey, 2020) affirms that the founding pillar of the Israeli state are the Israeli Defense Forces, which Palestinians more accurately refer to as the Israeli Offensive Forces (IOF). The IDF/IOF united Jews of highly diverse cultures by conscripting both Jewish men and women. Consequently, Israel's first prime minister David Ben-Gurion boasted that "the whole nation is the army." Furthermore, the IOF is the only army to dominate the social sphere to its extent, from performance arts to education to business. Even Israeli academia is deeply militarized: this reality is corroborated by the housing of a substantial army camp (enclosed with barbed wire) at Hebrew University and the offering of IOF training courses by Israeli universities. Besides forging a national identity, hypermilitarism allowed the army to gain "almost total support for its [illegal] actions" from Israelis. Regarding its war profiteering, Israel consistently ranks among the world's ten largest arms exporters. Notoriously advertising its weapons as "battle-tested," it converted Arab states – primarily Palestine – into "the largest testing grounds of modern arms." Furthermore, Israel's nationalized weapons and security enterprises, as well as high-tech establishments managed by former IOF soldiers, hire most of its citizens. Receiving billions of dollars every year from the United States, the IOF and its associates also constitute Israel's most profitable sector

(Barbancey, 2020). Terraforming Palestine into a neo-Europe, hypermilitarism permits Israel to genocide Palestinians, fire its economy, and bolster nationalism among Zionists.

I now turn my attention to the ecocidal dimension of the war industry, which is coupled with colonialism: at least 10% of carbon emissions worldwide are attributed to it (Gordon, 2013, p. 250). However, this number is grossly underestimated, given the refusal of many states to disclose clearly, fully, or even partly their militaries' carbon footprint (McCarthy, 2022). Notably, the largest consumer of oil in the world is the military (Hynes, 2014, p. 3). If it was a state, the colonial American military would be positioned as the 47<sup>th</sup> biggest producer of greenhouse gases, exceeding Sweden, Denmark, and Portugal (McCarthy, 2022). Even “conservationist missions” carried out by militaries typically devastate both human and non-human communities: “in practice, species conservation and troop training are in contradiction and the military are quite clear that species protection will not be allowed to interfere with training needs” (Annecke & Masubelele, 2016, p. 197). The aggressive and segregationist tactics of militaries also rouse antagonism in local inhabitants toward environmental projects (Annecke & Masubelele, 2016, p. 198–199). Although Israel has still not evaluated the environmental consequences of its militarism, Israeli scholar Uri Gordon (2013, p. 248) deems them “negative and severe.” Until now, the international community is attempting to hold Israel accountable for polluting the Mediterranean Sea, after it invaded Lebanon in 2006: Damaging oil storage tanks, the Israeli army caused tons of fuel oil to leak into the body of water (Pavoni & Piselli, 2022, p. 14). I will not delve further into the environmentally distressing effects of the global industry of death, which have been thoroughly documented by Hynes (2014), as well as Gordon (2013) in the context of Palestine.

Principle 24 of the 1992 United Nations (UN) Rio Declaration even states that “[w]arfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development.” (Pavoni & Piselli, 2022, p. 9). Defining

“sustainable development” as the advancement of socioecological wellbeing, the UN highlights its innate irreconcilability with militarism (Pavoni & Piselli, 2022, p. 9). Note that the concept of development has been historically associated with the repressive and interwoven structures of capitalism, patriarchy, and White supremacy (Escobar, 2011). These three systems are the source of most global crises, (including poverty and climate change), rendering the phrase sustainable development an oxymoron (Sasa, 2023a, p. 221). Nevertheless, the close connection made between climate change and warfare by a body as powerful and influential as the UN is extremely valuable, since this link is generally overlooked by both the international community and the modern environmental movement (Essa, 2022).

In fact, modern environmentalism celebrates militarism. For instance, a Military Outdoors program is still operated by the “largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization” in the “United States,” Sierra Club (2015). In a promotional video titled “The Land We Defend” on YouTube, Sierra Club (2015) boasts about immersing current and former US soldiers into the “wilderness” to help them build camaraderie, boost their nationalism, and heal. The concept of “wilderness” was developed by US settler colonists to manifest Indigenous land as untouched and uninhabited: this myth triggered and concealed their ethnic cleansing and obliteration of the memory of its Indigenous inhabitants (Ferdinand, 2019/2022, p. 104; Sasa, 2023a, p. 222). Hence, the Military Outdoors project exemplifies Sierra Club’s militarization of environmentalism and greenwashing of US settler colonialism. One ex-US soldier asserts in the clip, “I mean you get out of the military and public lands in America are really the best way to continue to protect that idea of democracy and to help fight for what makes America great” (Sierra Club, 2015). Nature hikes are designed to improve the morale and reputation of an imperialist army, which terrorizes racialized populations worldwide to secure American interests under the

banner of democracy promotion. In another instance, a former combatant boasts, “my best conservationist, my best lover of the serenity of nature, the best steward who will defend, doggedly, will be a vet. We're always on watch. We're always on post,” recasting genocidal and ecocidal American troops as environmental saviours.

What explains modern environmentalism’s neglect, defence, and flagrant endorsement of militarism-colonialism, given its dire socioecological consequences? From the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement to COP27, “the paternalistic mantle of *national security*” is still adopted to silence all critique of militarism (Hynes, 2014, p. 1): The 2016 Paris Agreement only made it *optional* for armies to report their emissions (Essa, 2022). To provide context, the French colonial empire originated modern or Western environmentalism around 300 years ago. This project was distinguished by its adoption of the human-nature binary, portraying humans as not only separate from, but even inherently hostile towards non-humans. Racialized, low-income, and feminine people were especially demonized and criminalized, allowing colonial administrators to oppress them behind a green façade. For instance, modern environmentalism instituted national parks to protect “nature” via the expulsion of Native communities and confiscation of their lands (Sasa, 2023a, 221–222). Similarly, warfare, which mainly devastates poor women of colour, continues to be not only ignored but endorsed by many environmentalists (Sierra Club, 2015). Consequently, Western environmentalism ironically stimulates the same racist, capitalist, and misogynistic forces steering ecological collapse. Meanwhile, its violent, isolationist, and technological solutions, including its installation of fences and enforcement of laws, fail to control the movement of water, birds, plants, and toxic fumes on this spherical planet. Instead of operating out of ignorance, I argue that the human-nature dichotomy was strategically devised to greenwash militarized settler colonialism, which is inherently genocidal and ecocidal (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 230–231). It also

suppresses genuine environmental action in the West. In the following section, I will provide clear examples of the ways modern environmentalism facilitates Israel's terraforming of Palestine into a Europeanized firing zone.

### **Israeli Green Militarization**

There is a need now for strong and brutal reaction. We need to be accurate about timing, place and those we hit. If we accuse a [Palestinian] family – we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise, this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.

—Yigal Allon [commander of the Palmach]  
Quoted by David Ben-Gurion in his diary (as cited in Pappé, 2006, p. 69)

I want to tell you that the simplest and most original way of [inculcating Zionism] is to connect these young people to our homeland through their feet – through becoming familiar with the country, travelling the country.

—Benjamin Netanyahu [Israeli Prime Minister]  
(as cited in Rabineau, 2023, p. 15)

Despite Israel's position as a chief arms dealer, it dresses itself up as a global vanguard of veganism and environmentalism more broadly (Sasa, 2023a, p. 228). Thus, Israel's green propaganda is more intense than that of its US benefactor, which advertises itself as a Western state that protects "wilderness" (Sierra Club, 2015). Zionists were forced to expend increased efforts in concealing their war crimes, since they usurped Palestine as colonialism began to be curtailed (Palestine Land Society, 2020). Orientalism is conscripted by Israel to allege it is "making Palestine bloom again" after the land was converted into a "ruined" "desert" during their centuries-old exile (de-Shalit, 1995, as cited in McKee, 2016, pp. 32–33). Hence, Palestinians are framed by Israel as absent, nomads without land rights, or uncivilized inhabitants who mistreat the non-human world. This form of anti-Arab and Islamophobic environmental discourse is most heavily directed at the southern half of Historic Palestine, an-Naqab (the Negev), due to its desert

climate as opposed to the Mediterranean north (McKee, 2016, p. 8; Sasa, 2023a, p. 225). However, even the northern half of an-Naqab, which was home to 95% of its 100,000 Bedouin Palestinian inhabitants, was renowned for its fertility and was heavily cultivated by them – prior to their mass expulsion at the hands of Zionists. Valuable minerals and ancient archeological remains filled the southern half of an-Naqab (Abu Sitta, 2012). Colonialism is indefensible, regardless of the agricultural expertise of Indigenous communities or characteristics of their lands. However, it is important to discredit the fabrication of Palestine as a desert that White supremacists redeemed, particularly to preserve the memory of its Native inhabitants who still largely identify as farmers or *fellahin* (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 225–226). Fixatedly, Israel utilizes environmental rhetoric to greenwash its militarized settler colonialism.

Environmental actions, such as tree planting, are also subverted by Israel to conceal the rubble of Palestinian localities it destroyed, poison Native flora, block Palestinian refugees from returning, and Europeanize and annex land (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 225–226). For instance, leading Israeli environmentalist and member of Knesset Alon Tal (Dalloul, 2022) explicitly stated, “Bedouins [Palestinians in the Negev] are squatters, and one way to make them stop doing that is by planting trees.” While Israel recruits environmental policies in service of Zionism through myriad mechanisms, this second part of the chapter narrows in on Israeli green militarization: by unpacking the centrality of an institution as genocidal and ecocidal as the military in Zionist conservationism, I illustrate this movement’s grave hypocrisy.

### ***SPNI and the Palmach***

The Israeli environmental movement arose in the 1950s, out of the Palmach (Hebrew: striking force), under the name of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) (McKee,

2016, p. 156; Kadman, 2015, p. 44). The Palmach is a terrorist group that sought to eliminate all Palestinians, comprising non-combatants, women, and children, as evidenced by the quote I shared above from its commander, Yigal Allon (Pappé, 2006, p. 69). As a commando unit, the Palmach belonged to the Haganah, which ravaged Palestine as the most significant Zionist militia and precursor to the IOF (Pappé, 2006, pp. xi, 19). To recover Palestinian memory and underscore the socioecological violence of the Palmach, I will briefly describe its leadership in expelling and murdering Natives in 1948 Palestine's northern half: these include the villages of Khisas and Sasa, as well as the cities of al-Lyd and my ancestral ar-Ramla (Pappé, 2006, p. 45).

Both villages were home to hundreds of (Christian and Muslim) Palestinians, as well as reputed for the splendor of their landscapes. However, Palmach terrorists invaded them at night, bombing the homes of the sleeping Native families, massacring 15 Palestinians in Khisas and 60-80 Palestinians in Sasa, many children included. Ben-Gurion apologized for the barbaric and cowardly assault on Khisas, following an investigation by the *New York Times*, but lauded the incursion as a victory soon after. Sasa, which was nestled in the sole region that was evergreen and adjacent to the tallest mountain in Palestine (Jabal al-Jarmaq), was since converted into a major Israeli tourist site (Pappé, 2006, pp. 57, 77–78). The Palmach also committed massacres in Qisarya (Caesarea), Al-Husayniyya, and Safad (Masalha, 2012, p. 85).

While it remains unclear whether Sasa has any connection to my father's family, sharing our name, he descends from the city of ar-Ramla, which neighbours al-Lyd. Al-Lyd is esteemed as a center of fierce Palestinian resistance, in both military and cultural forms, since the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine arose there (Pappé, 2006, pp. 166–167). One of the pioneering Arab rap groups and the first on the Palestinian hip-hop scene, DAM, also emerged in al-Lyd, challenging Zionism, Orientalism, imperialism, and misogyny (Turinsky, n.d.). Regionally dubbed



as the “city of the mosques,” it also had the central Lydda International Airport in the north (that Israel renamed after Ben-Gurion) and – connecting al-Lyd to Egypt – the Lydda Grand Station in the west (Pappé, 2006, p. 166; Busailah, 1981, p. 129).

As for my hometown of ar-Ramla, it was initiated around 705-725 as the capital of Palestine (Masalha, 2012, p. 76). Due to its proximity to the port of Yafa, the city was wealthy according to the online Palestinian archive Encyclopedia Palestina (2014), allowing it to import goods and export citrus fruits. Its geostrategic location at the center of Palestine also prompted the construction of railways and roads, which tied Palestinian cities to each other and neighbouring countries. Ar-Ramla was named after the abundance of its sand (Arabic: *raml*) or a hospitable, local woman who met the city’s founder, Prince Suleiman bin Abdul-Malik. The soil of the city was fertilized by sea sands: nurtured by a moderate climate, and an abundance of rainfall and groundwater, most agricultural crops such as grains, olives, and lemons, thrived. My grandfather’s family had *bayyarat* (orchards), lush to the extent that at a young age, he used to toss oranges he didn’t fancy, since they had more than enough fruits to feed themselves and their neighbours.

Relying on old rifles, the sons of al-Lyd and ar-Ramla valiantly attempted to defend themselves from colonization by the far better funded and equipped Palmach, in 1948, akin to other Palestinian communities. Its brutal assault on the former constituted the earliest instance of Zionist aerial bombardment against a Palestinian city. The Palmach massacred 426 Palestinians, including women and children, both in the streets and the Dahamish Mosque of al-Lyd (Pappé, 2006, pp. 166–167). Zionists then arranged mass forced evacuations against the 70,000 Indigenous inhabitants of al-Lyd and ar-Ramla, in what came to be known as the Lydda Death March (Pappé, 2006, p. 156, Masalha, 2012, p. 76). Israeli soldiers pushed families out of their homes before systematically robbing the Natives themselves, targeting women. The Palmach obliged the

Palestinian expellees to walk without any necessities, in the dead of summer, to an unspecified place of refuge, resulting in starvation, dehydration, fatigue, and sickness, killing hundreds of them (Masalha, 2012, p. 76; Pappé, 2006, pp. 166–169). As a third-generation Palestinian refugee, I am still denied the right to even visit my ancestral city by the Israeli state. Overall, the Israeli environmental movement was misleading and staunchly Zionist from its outset: SPNI stems from the Palmach, which was a terrorist militia that terraformed the northern half of 1948 Palestine, killing hundreds of Natives along its way. This region included the beautiful villages of Khisas and Sasa, as well as the prosperous, fertile, and steadfast cities of al-Lyd and ar-Ramla.

As the oldest and largest Israeli environmental group, SPNI maintains strong institutional, ideological, and pedagogical connections with the Palmach/IOF. Notably, SPNI demands its trained guides to have served in the army, while the Zionist state allows its citizens to evade conscription by serving as park rangers (McKee, 2016, pp. 156, 162). SPNI also carefully chooses and trains guides for three months, typically granting more senior roles to 22- to 25-year-old men. They carry maps and other essentials on their backs, mirroring the form of their predecessors in the Zionist youth movements and the Palmach, as they navigate unfamiliar terrain. Furthermore, the uniforms of SPNI guides consist of “wide trousers, faded (sometimes even torn) t-shirts, walking boots, and wide-brimmed hats or *kaffiyes*” (Ben-David, 1997, p. 132). They also coopt words from the Arabic language and the traditions of Bedouins, as by brewing herbal tea, baking pita, and recounting Palestinian short stories. In fact, many early Zionist colonists mimicked the agricultural strategies and modes of living belonging to Palestinians, especially Bedouins. By appropriating the culture of Palestinians while hiking, including their language and nationalist scarf, SPNI guides attempt to Indigenize themselves outwardly and psychologically, paralleling the Palmach (Ben-David, 1997, p. 132; McKee 2016, p. 35).

The guides mock Palestinians as barbarians who are ideal people to emulate in the “wilderness.” A separation between “nature” and society is reinforced by SPNI, as indicated by its name, akin to other Western environmental organizations. On the one hand, this dichotomy paradoxically casts Natives as violent savages incapable of cherishing their surroundings, validating their oppression. On the other hand, it stereotypes them as animalistic environmental protectors who simply blend into the landscape. Extremely villainized or romanticized, Palestinians as Indigenous inhabitants are dehumanized by the Zionist colonizer. SPNI guides and hikers even stay silent, consume raw foods without washing their hands, disconnect from mass communication entirely, and engage in strenuous exercise to become truly immersed in the “wilderness” (Ben-David, 1997, pp. 135–139). SPNI thus Indigenizes Zionists, frames Palestine as untouched, degrades its Indigenous inhabitants, (as by portraying them as animalistic and stagnant), and greenwashes militarized settler colonialism. Israeli conservationism also reasserts the Zionist self as distinct, civilized, and an ecological saviour, as its adherents must change or downgrade their behaviour and appearance upon entering a “wild” space (Ben-David, 1997, p. 139; Goldsmith, 2015; Sasa, 2023a). Pedagogically, Zionists incorporated hiking into their school curriculum since 1903, and this practice intensified over the decades “in ways that appeared less like outdoor recreation and more like conquest” (Rabineau, 2023, pp. 19, 23). The militarized settler colony of Israel now requires all its secondary students to enrol in a 3-4 day SPNI field trip (Ben-David, 1997, pp. 140–141). Although several Israeli environmental organizations emerged in the 1980s, which attempted to advance human and ecological rights, they followed SPNI by upholding Jewish supremacy (McKee, 2016, pp. 156–158). The ruthless Palmach not only birthed but continues to heavily influence Israeli environmentalism institutionally, ideologically, and pedagogically, especially among the youth.

### ***Zionist Hiking***

To expand on the centrality of hiking in Zionism, Shay Rabineau (2023) illustrates that the Palmach constantly engaged in this activity. Before 1948, they hiked to covertly train (with prohibited arms), foster amity, strengthen their bodies, gain geographic expertise, assert land ownership, and surveil Palestinian villages, while disguised as harmless backpackers (pp. 1–2, 25). Generally, at night, they also marched in rows, preparing to raid the villages (p. 83). Palmach forces marked the first hiking trail in the Middle East, in 1947, when they headed towards Ras Feshkha, which Jews were barred from by the colonial UN Partition Plan: This peninsula was slated to be part of an independent state of Palestine (pp. 1–2). “Armed not with guns and grenades, but with paintbrushes, ladders, compasses, and paint,” Zionists thus painted a path to facilitate accessing it (p. 2). Effectively, Israel adopted modern waymarking, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century European invention that defined hiking paths using signs and symbols. Hiking is even credited with allowing the Palmach to colonize an-Naqab (p. 8). After 1948, Israel marked trails primarily along borders with neighbouring countries and territories it occupied, as well as desert zones inhabited by a few, to assert its sovereignty (p. 10). Currently on a global scale, “Israel has one of the most extensive and highly developed hiking trail systems” (p. 2). Naturally, the majority of hiking paths were formed by Palestinians centuries prior to being marked and mapped by Israelis (p. 10). The Palmach and other Zionists weaponized hiking and trail blazing, however, to enable and greenwash their terraforming of Palestine.

Israel also imitated European states by inaugurating hiking as a core part of its nation-building, as illustrated by the Netanyahu quote provided in the opening of this section: Zionists promoted hiking as a tactic for them to forge a bond with Palestinian land (Rabineau, 2023, pp. 15–16). Following WWII, Israel diverged from Europeans who began to increasingly allow

tourists to access their trails and view “nature” in less nationalistic terms. Instead, Zionists doubled down on the material and metaphorical exclusivity of their hiking (p. 16). Early Jewish colonists even employed the term *yedi’ah*, which connotes knowing and sexual intimacy, to describe their mission to understand the land through hiking. More precisely, they saw themselves as “male lover[s]” of a female land (p. 38). Thus, besides racializing “nature,” Zionists sexualize and feminize it, leading me to acknowledge a striking commonality between Israeli militarism and environmentalism: patriarchy. Although the Israeli army conscripts both men and women – albeit the latter for only two years, rather than three, and reassigns the former to reserve duty up to the age of 45 – it perpetuates misogyny substantively among Zionists (Gordon, 2013 pp. 243, 247). As Gordon (2013) contends, “women’s service in the IDF [should be viewed] not as an equalizing factor but rather as a mechanism for reproducing their subordination” (p. 247).

Israeli or Western environmentalism “seeks to construct women, people of colour, queer people, and others as non-normative, inferior, or closer to nature,” naturalizing their repression (Goldsmith, 2015, p. 18). Discrimination against women, gays, Palestinians, and other “deviant” folks then triggers ecocide as part of a never-ending cycle of violence. Consequently, I argue that Israeli colonists (including hikers and soldiers) strive not to love but rape land, akin to past imperialist forces (Sharif, 2016, p.18). Consumed by power, Zionists hikers simultaneously idealize, exploit, and obliterate Palestinian women and land, rather than value them. And because Zionists accepted the European antisemitic trope of the weak and urban Jew, they became fixated on hiking as a method of transforming into powerful Israeli bodies (Goldsmith, 2015, p. 19; Rabineau, 2023, p. 104). Tilling Palestinian land is similarly regarded by Zionists as a way of recovering Jewish physical health, namely achieving a body that is “masculine, Jewish Ashkenazi [White], perfect and wholesome” (Weiss, 2004, as cited in Goldsmith, 2015, p. 19). Zionists even

began calling Jews born on Palestinian land *sabras*, in reference to the prickly cactus pear fruits Indigenous to Palestine, alluding to strength, and their desire for “mastery and domination over the land.” (Goldsmith, 2015, p. 19). This environmental metaphor once more venerates masculinity, heterosexuality, and subjugation, while allowing Zionists to Indigenize themselves (Goldsmith, 2015, p. 19; Sasa, 2024a, p. 555). By embarking on the same paths created by Palestinians, Zionists terraform Palestine, Indigenize themselves, and reinforce and greenwash chauvinist nationalism.

### ***“Green” Firing Zones***

Besides delivering SPNI and coopting hiking, the IOF trains in “protected areas,” akin to Apartheid South Africa’s army training in Kruger National Park (On, 2019; Annecke & Masubelele, 2016, p. 198). Of Israeli nature reserves, almost 40% intersect with Israeli military zones, rising to 50% in an-Naqab (Gordon, 2013, p. 250). In the occupied West Bank, Israeli closed military areas seize 17% of its landmass, concentrated in the East or the Jordan Valley region (Abraham, 2022). Of the nature reserves Israel established in the West Bank, 81.6% are to be found in Area C, which is entirely ruled by the Israeli army and state: about 75% of these protected areas overlie firing zones (39.5%) and Israeli colonies (36.2%) (Ghattas et al., 2016, pp. 47–48). Generally, the institution of Israeli protected areas (forests, national parks, and nature reserves) and military zones legally necessitates the exclusion of both Palestinians and Israelis. However, Israel typically allows colonists to steal the homes of Palestinians who are the only ones forcibly displaced (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 220, 223–224; Abraham, 2022). Furthermore, Israel’s National Parks and Nature Reserves Law explicitly exempts the Israeli army from its requirements (gov.il, n.d., p. 14). That Israel forbids Palestinian access to its protected areas, while allowing nearly half its

nature reserves to be exploited by not only Jews but an institution as genocidal and ecocidal as its army, without restrictions, speaks to the racism and hollowness of Zionist environmentalism.

Moreover, while Israel purportedly creates firing zones to train its soldiers, a report published by the Israeli organization Kerem Navot finds that this purpose is served by only 20% of the West Bank's military areas. Largely sitting idle, Israeli military training areas await colonization or grazing by Jews, exhibiting another environmental practice utilized to stake claim to Palestinian land (On, 2019). Then-Israeli Agricultural Minister Ariel Sharon confessed, "as the person who initiated the military fire zones in 1967, they were all intended for one purpose: to provide an opportunity for Jewish settlement in the area" (Abraham, 2022). The pattern of converting Israeli firing zones into farming outposts into colonies rapidly intensified of late (Abraham, 2022). By and large, I argue that Israel designates both protected areas and military zones to justify its ethnic cleansing of Palestinians rather than benefit "nature" or even train its soldiers.

Markedly, locations of both military camps and "protected areas" are often concealed by Israel, making it difficult to ascertain their scale. For instance, Israel's national "forester" (the Jewish National Fund [JNF]) planted a forest in the name of Ariane Littman's grandfather to shield the construction of a military camp (Braverman, 2009, pp. 344–345). Ariane has a photo that whites out the forest and was herself prevented from visiting the forest or her grandfather's memorial stone. Braverman adds that Israel censors all aerial images of its landscape, whiting out military areas. And while Israel established 495 national parks and nature reserves, the most comprehensive and clearest map I can locate is from the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) capturing only 69 (Sasa, 2023a, p. 223; Tsimbler, 2025). To obscure the militarized colonial roles

of its forests and military zones, Israel purposely provides inaccurate maps (Braverman, 2009, pp. 344–345).

Rotem and Weil (2014, p. 102) provide another useful map from the INPA, revealing not the quantity but size of Israeli “protected areas” across Historic Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The border of the Syrian territory is not demarcated, reflecting the interest of the INPA as an “environmental agency” to annex it to Israel. Nevertheless, Israeli nature reserves occupy more space than national parks by far, according to this map, which is noteworthy since the former solely claims to protect “nature,” unlike the latter that is motivated by a wider range of concerns (from archeological to “natural”) (Sasa, 2023a, p. 223). Israel’s preference for establishing nature reserves proves the significance of the strategy of greenwashing to its settler colonial operations. This map also confirms my previous hypothesis that Israel converges its nature reserves and national parks in strategic districts and where most Palestinians remain to ethnically cleanse them. These are the North of 1948 Palestine, an-Naqab, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Golan Heights, and Jerusalem (Sasa, 2023a, p. 223).

Moreover, this map is rare, sketching the distribution of Israeli military zones, appearing to also be concentrated in the West Bank and Golan Heights, as well as the majority of an-Naqab. Over 60% of the southern half of 1948 Palestine is now covered with Israeli military zones (McKee, 2016, p. 196). We can also discern more national parks and nature reserves in the northern half of Historic Palestine but far more sizeable ones in the South (Tsimbler, 2022; Rotem & Weil, 2014, p. 102). Israel fills an-Naqab with nature reserves and military zones, intersecting them to realize its vision of this region as “a wasteland and wild space” (McKee, 2016, p. 8). Israel also set up its sole hazardous-waste management site and a nuclear reactor there: since this area is scarcely inhabited by Jewish people, Israel thus displaces environmental and health risks onto



Bedouin Palestinians too in a classic case of environmental injustice (McKee, 2016, p. 196). Israel already forcibly expelled 90% of an-Naqab's Bedouin Palestinian population by the 1950s and is evidently intent on fully eliminating them (McKee, 2016, p. 127). In sum, while Israel attempts to conceal the locations of its protected areas and military reserves, it overlays them to greenwash Zionism, terraform Palestine, and dehistoricize it, especially the region of an-Naqab. From its roots in the terrorist Palmach to its deep ongoing collaboration with the IOF, the Israeli environmental movement reveals itself to be a smokescreen for militarism-colonialism.

### **Palestinian Sarhat**

The 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nakba (Catastrophe) was marked on 15 May, 2025. As the popular chant in Palestinian protests goes, however, “existence is resistance.” Palestinian life, joy, success, knowledge, agriculture, and even grief continue to threaten the Zionist project, since its largest objective is to wipe out all Natives. Here, I would like to spotlight a mode of anti-colonial resistance and an alternative form of hiking that destabilizes the Western human-nature dichotomy: the ancient practice of *sarha* (plural: *sarhat*) among Palestinians (Sharif, 2016; Sasa, 2023a). Originally, trails were mainly created by Palestinians for transportation rather than recreational use (Rabineau, 2023, p. 56). On the other hand, to embark on a *sarha* is to wander physically and mentally. It is to follow one's heart in an organic, limitless, and joyful exploration of their vast surroundings without being confined to a particular path: the most accurate translation of the Arabic term *sarha* is perhaps a “meditative walk” or as Raja Shehadeh puts it, “a drug-free high, Palestinian-style” (Shehadeh, 2008, as cited in Sharif, 2016, pp. 28–29). The affiliated adjective *sarhan* applies to one who is lost in their thoughts. Palestinian *sarhat* powerfully juxtapose with

the obsession Israeli hikers-soldiers have around conquest and gaining power, as I will illustrate drawing on my lived experience.

My late mother is from Madama, a village near Nablus located in the occupied West Bank. I visited it several times, perceiving it as an open-air prison. Akin to many other Palestinian villages in the region, our hilltops are covered with heavily guarded illegal Israeli colonies that continue to encroach on our land. Furthermore, settlers regularly descend upon our village, armed and protected by Israeli soldiers, to assault us as well as Native non-humans. At night, Israeli watchtowers beam a strong light on all our homes to surveil us, while soldiers threaten to break our doors at any time to arrest one of our male family members without charge or trial. Children, especially boys, risk losing their lives just for leaving the house, as Israel randomly and regularly carries out extrajudicial killings against them. Withstanding such severe trauma at the hands of the Israeli settler colony daily takes a heavy toll on the health of Palestinians. Yet, we manage to carve out spaces for pleasure, as by taking *sarhat*. As teenagers, my cousins and I often climbed up the hills to stroll in our *ard* or land without following particular paths. We curiously explored the landscape, observed the village and settlements from above, laughed, snacked, pondered, engaged in deep conversations, walked alongside wild dogs, and took pictures. We also picked fruits off the trees but were careful not to reach too far up, since Israeli watchguards threatened to fire at us if we got too close. As Sharif (2016, pp. 28–29) remarks, our *sarhat* are increasingly being restricted by Israeli colonization: our land is shrinking, and our walks are bloating with grief and anxiety. Hence, Palestinians are struggling to hold onto our *sarhat*, which allow us to destress, stumble upon unique local plants and treasured artefacts, learn about human and non-human worlds, and protect and recover our familial and national histories (Sharif, 2016, p. 30).

Unlike Zionists who mark trails to plainly segregate society from “nature,” encourage silence and eating raw food, and hike to confirm White Jewish male supremacy, Palestinian *sarhat* also exude love for non-humans, blurring the division between them and society (Ben-David, 1997). Palestinians’ attachment to their *ard* is an extension of their affection for one another and God, appreciating the divine link between all, regardless of sexual, racial, and other differences (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 229–230). Indeed, the *ard* is where Palestinian couples escape for romantic and private getaways, individuals allow their spirits to roam and be invigorated, faith strengthens via the body’s absorption of natural wonders, and “Palestine’s wedding” takes place in October in the form of the olive harvest season. Even schools are closed during this month to allow children to assist and play, and families to gather olives, sing, and have picnics (Simaan, 2017, p. 518; Sharif, 2016, pp. 29–31). Hence, by remaining in their homes, and expressing love and respect for one another and their *ard*, the Indigenous inhabitants of Palestine undermine the Zionist militarist project and the human-nature dichotomy more broadly.

Reflecting on the concept of a *sarha*, I also ask: how would Western societies transform by hiking less on confined trails, and exchanging more freely and diversely with their landscapes? In what ways does Palestinian environmentalism challenge settler colonialist, militarist, patriarchal, and capitalist processes worldwide? By centering love and reminding us that we are a part of nature just as it dwells in all of us, Palestinian *sarhat* certainly motivate one to advocate against all structures and actors feeding societal and ecological collapse. In this regard, we must push for decolonization through a holistic lens (Sasa, 2023a). Environmentalists must cease apologizing for militarism-colonialism and join hands with all communities made most vulnerable in promoting their rights. Furthermore, *sarhat* fuel our curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and drive to form a new just and sustainable global order.

## Conclusion

This chapter outlines the hyper-militarization of Israel, inclusive of its conservationist movement, repudiating the widely propagated Orientalist myth that it is “making the desert bloom.” Instead, I argue that the Zionists are terraforming a burgeoning Palestine into a Europeanized firing zone, executing genocide and ecocide against its Indigenous inhabitants to acquire their land behind the banner of environmentalism. In the first part of this chapter, I situate Israeli war manufacturing and profiteering within a settler colonial context. Emphasizing the unavoidable and socioecological extremely destructive effects of the industry of death, I illuminate and challenge modern environmentalism’s approval of it. In the second part of this chapter, I delve into Israel’s green militarization, beginning with its ecological movement’s roots in the terrorist Palmach, its atrocities, and the histories (including resistance) of the Palestinian communities it targeted. I also chart Zionism’s cooption of hiking from its early days, as a self-Indigenizing, chauvinist, nationalist, and militarist tactic. Exposing the considerable overlap between Israeli firing zones and protected areas, I then wholly reveal Israel’s subordination of its environmental concerns to its imperialist project. Lastly, I shed light on Palestinian *sarhat* or meditative walks for resisting Israeli green militarization-colonization, as well as inviting love and a more reciprocal relationship with non-humans. I interpret this tradition as a launching pad for holistic decolonization, opposing all structures of oppression and the Western human-nature dichotomy responsible for greenwashing them.

## **Conclusion: A Collectivist March of A'wda**

### **Introduction**

Beit Nuba is built of fine quarry stones; some of the houses are magnificent. Every house is surrounded by an orchard, olive trees, apricots, vines and presses. They are well kept. Among the trees, there are carefully tended vegetable beds.

At noon the first bulldozer arrived and pulled down the first house at the edge of the village. Within ten minutes the house was turned into rubble. The olive trees and cypresses were all uprooted. After the destruction of three houses, the first refugee column arrived from the direction of Ramallah. ... There were old people who could hardly walk, murmuring old women, mothers carrying babies, small children. The children wept and asked for water. They all carried white flags. (Kenan, 1968, as cited in Zayid, 2011, p. 100)

The above quote is from Israeli soldier Amos Kenan who facilitated the ethnic cleansing of Imwas, Beit Nuba, and Yalu. On June 6, 1967, these Palestinian villages on the outskirts of Jerusalem were colonized by the Zionists. Kenan is cited by Ismail Zayid (2011), a Nakba survivor from Beit Nuba, in his chapter “Canada Park: Canadian Complicity in a War Crime.” Zayid discloses that Israel forcibly expelled 10,000 inhabitants from these three localities. Due to the perpetration of Zionist massacres against Palestinians 20 years prior, the Natives were stricken with fear (Gadzo, 2017). They watched helplessly and agonizingly as the occupier bombed their homes, mosques, and schools. Beneath their roofs, disabled and elderly Palestinians were martyred as they refused to or could not immediately escape. The Israeli army killed several other Indigenous inhabitants, including those who attempted to flee: their bodies were strewn across fields and roads (Desjarlais, 2022, p. 28). Kenan extends limited empathy for those he dispossessed, perpetuating a tradition among the Zionists of “shoot and cry” (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 222–223). “The refugees gnashed their teeth when they saw the bulldozers pull down the trees. None of us understood how Jews could behave like this. No one understood why these ‘fellaheen’ [villagers] shouldn’t be allowed to take blankets,” he laments (Kenan, 1968, as cited in Zayid,

2011, p. 101). Flora and fauna, such as doves and chickens, were not spared from the Israeli onslaught. In the blink of an eye, the tireless work Palestinians put into crafting splendid societies and ecologies over centuries was eradicated. Stories of the villages were buried beneath mounds of ashes, including a religious legend pertaining to Imwas (Emmaus): it was the site of the reappearance of Jesus Christ following his resurrection according to many Christians. Israel swiftly converted three segments of rich human history and earthly paradise into a “wasteland” (Kenan, 1968, as cited in Zayid, 2011, pp. 100–101; Sasa, 2024a).

Another son of Beit Nuba, Ahmad Ali Zaid, recalls being awakened by a threat blasted through loudspeakers at 5 am (Gadzo, 2017). An Israeli soldier ordered, “leave your homes, leave the village. Go to Jordan; this is a military zone.” He added, “anyone who doesn’t leave will have their house demolished on top of them” (Gadzo, 2017). As for the Native inhabitants of Yalu and Imwas, an Israeli officer claimed ownership over the entirety of the land between these villages and Jeddah: this large stretch of territory subsumed Jordan. Empty-handed, barefooted, and still in their pyjamas, the Palestinian residents were thus directed to march towards the Saudi Arabian city instead (Gadzo, 2017). This officer was not simply intoxicated with power and expressing colonial greed on an individual level. He vocalized a core Zionist belief that all of Historic Palestine and Jordan, as well as parts of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia constituted a “Greater Israel” (Mațoi, 2024). Theodor Herzl, one of the founding figures of Zionism, notoriously envisioned the capture of this region “from the Brook of Egypt to the Euphrates” (Herzl, 1960, as cited in Mațoi, 2024). Escaping a bloodbath and rejecting two outlandish Zionist directives, thousands of the expellees headed to the mountains: they marched to the Palestinian city of Ramallah where they sought refuge, following a gruelling trip that took days (Gadzo, 2017). Domesticated animals, such as camels, lambs, donkeys, and goats accompanied some families

during their flight (Kenan, 1968, as cited in Zayid, 2011, p. 101). In transit, a baby and four elders were martyred as a result of heat, exhaustion, terror, thirst, and hunger (Desjarlais, 2022, p. 28). Palestinians belonging to Imwas, Beit Nuba, and Yalu were violently denied return by Israel since their removal (Kenan, 1968 as cited in Zayid, 2011, p. 100). They rejected a proposal made by an Israeli military leader to live in homes subsidized by the colonial government in different parts of Historic Palestine. Instead, the Natives insisted on return with the refugees from Imwas affirming, “we will not accept a dunum in heaven instead of our dunum in Imwas” (Gadzo, 2017).

The Canadian branch of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) sought to obscure this atrocity six years later. This offshoot of an Israeli federal government agency, masquerading as an environmental charity, was led by Bernard Bloomfield (Sasa, 2024a, p. 554). To create Canada Park, the Montreal businessman raised \$15 million in tax-deductible donations from Canadian Jews (Desjarlais, 2022, pp. 28–29; Zayid, 2011, p. 101). During the late 1970s, this picnic area was founded over the ruins of Imwas, Yalu, and Dayr Ayyub. In 1948, Dayr Ayyub was depopulated and razed by Israel as a neighbouring Palestinian village (Braverman, 2009, p. 352). Beit Nuba was excluded from this plan since the Zionists built a colony on its land (Desjarlais, 2022, pp. 28–29). In the other three localities, JNF Canada hid the rubble of homes year-round through an insidious technique: it planted five million trees, most of which were evergreen and fast-growing European pines (Gadzo, 2017; Cook, 2017). The conifers were marshalled into shrouding proof of not only colonial massacres but Native continuity (Desjarlais, 2022, p. 29). Indeed, JNF Canada produced a guidebook for the park that merely highlighted Biblical, Roman, Crusader, and British legacies in the region (Zayid, 2011, p. 101). The green space also honoured its Canadian benefactors, along with “the Americans and Canadians who died in Israel's wars or were victims of terror” (JNF Canada, n.d.). Names of the former (donors) were featured on a wall

in the park, while a group of trees were planted and dedicated to the latter (JNF Canada, n.d.). Indigenous populations were rendered invisible (Zayid, 2011, p. 101). Backed by NGOs such as Zochrot (n.d.) – an Israeli organization championing return and justice for Palestinians – the refugees “successfully petitioned the courts in May of 2006 to have two signs installed which mark the former sites of [their] villages” (Desjarlais, 2022, p. 31). Scant information was provided about Imwas, Yalu, and Dayr Ayyub by these guideposts, (e.g. the sizes of communities that lived there). The Palestinian identity of their inhabitants was neglected too, while the Nakba (Uprooting) was laundered as a “War of Independence” (Braverman, 2009, pp. 352–353). Nevertheless, the Zionist story of finding a “land without a people for a people without a land” was shattered by this slight intervention. One sign was stolen, while the other had the names of villages it listed blacked out, merely a month after they were set up. JNF did not replace them or accept an invitation by Zochrot to install historical signs in other parks (Braverman, 2009, pp. 352–353; Desjarlais, 2022, p. 31).

Besides, the pines obstructed the return of Palestinians by concealing and occupying their demolished homes. These trees also did not bear fruits, unlike much of the Indigenous flora they replaced and on which the fellaheen had closely relied for sustenance. Further, the conifers killed species long-rooted in the region by dropping acidic needles. Revitalizing and living off the land consequently became an extremely challenging task for the original inhabitants if they managed to return (Cook, 2017). Moreover, Palestine was Europeanized and Judaized by Israel in its determination to plant pines everywhere (Sasa, 2024a, p. 554). The evergreens exuded a comfortable atmosphere for European Jewish colonists and visitors who were not accustomed to the sight of Mediterranean lemons, apricots, or olives (Cook, 2025). Zionist leaders and JNF also alleged that pines dominated Palestine when it fell under the control of the ancient Hebrews (Desjarlais, 2022, p. 26). Additionally, JNF has admitted that it initiated forestation in Palestine to



“demonstrate ownership” (Liphshiz, 2022): Israel illegally occupied and annexed a part of the West Bank by declaring Canada Park on its territory. Described by JNF as the “heart of Israel” and “a jewel in the crown of the Israeli park system,” the production of this site brazenly widens the borders of the Zionist entity (Desjarlais, 2022, p. 30; JNF Canada, n.d.).

On April 30, 2025, as Israel intensified its genocide against Gaza and marked its 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a settler colony, a massive fire was unleashed. It incinerated large tracts of the land Zionists occupied, wiping out 70% of Canada Park. The majority of “Israeli Independence Day” events were cancelled. Palestinians were immediately and baselessly accused of sparking the blaze by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He commented, “our neighbors, who claim they love this land, talk about burning the land” (Times of Israel, 2025). However, it quickly became apparent that Israeli hikers inadvertently launched it – perhaps as they were celebrating the Nakba (Times of Israel, 2025). According to Tourist Israel (n.d.), “Yom Haatzmaut [Israeli Independence Day] is a day typically spent with family, and Israelis flock to Israel’s National Parks, hiking trails, and beauty spots, hosting barbecues and picnics.” Israeli President Isaac Herzog acknowledged that climate change increased the frequency and severity of wildfires (Times of Israel, 2025). However, he did not make a connection between this disaster and the extreme flammability of Zionist pine plantations. In 2010, 2016, and 2021, monocultures of these conifers ignited wildfires that consumed numerous forests of JNF. The establishment of this correlation led Israelis to rebuke their government’s plantation strategy (Philip, 2025; Liphshiz, 2022). In 2024, the biggest Israeli planted forest also had a sizeable portion go up in flames: Biryia Forest, which was stationed on the remnants of 6 Palestinian villages, was struck by Hezbollah (Curiel, 2024; Sasa, 2023a, p. 226). As of 2009, JNF has quietly acknowledged its colossal mistake and attempted to redress it by “thinning out pines” (Surkes, 2024). This colonial policy reversal has been documented by

renowned journalist Jonathan Cook (2025) and noted by the Times of Israel (Surkes, 2024). Notwithstanding, JNF publicly insisted on the non-flammability and Indigeneity of its chosen “Aleppo pine” (Liphshiz, 2022). This tree was erroneously named by a European botanist, since it originated in Spain, France, and North Africa (Liphschitz & Biger, 2001, p. 428). The head of JNF’s forest department Klil Adar even asserted that the Spanish pine “will continue to be the backbone of [Israeli] forestation efforts” (Liphshiz, 2022).

Herzog also failed to draw links between the wildfires and his persecution of Palestinians. Surpassing that of 100 countries, the carbon footprint of Israel’s genocide against Gaza has been estimated to be 31 million tonnes (Middle East Eye, 2025). Beyond October 7, Herzog could not grasp the heavy environmental toll of settler colonialism. The Zionists ethnically cleansed most of the Indigenous inhabitants of Palestine who intimately and efficiently managed it for *4000 years* (Sasa, 2024a, p. 557; Masalha, 2018). Mainly of European origin, those who founded the settler colony in 1948 arrogantly assumed they could simply replace or improve upon Palestinian agricultural society (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 221, 225). Yet, Israel criminalized the local black goat in 1950, because the nonhuman fed on pine needles. Bedouin Palestinians also substantially depended on the goat culturally and economically. Israel sought to force the seminomadic Natives into working for the settler colony as cheap labour by undermining their agriculture. It consequently nearly caused the regional extinction of black goats, (through widespread slaughter), until Zionists recognized the significant firefighting roles of these fauna. In 2018, the Goat Damage Law was annulled, in large part due to the advocacy of Palestinian politician Jamal Zahalka (Cook, 2017). Palestinian grazing steadily became sought after by directors of Israeli “protected areas” (Philip, 2025). There are many other examples illustrating the Zionist conversion of Palestine into a “tinderbox” (Cook, 2017). One is the introduction of Israeli policies prohibiting Palestinians

from foraging wild plants that have formed key parts of their diets, such as sage and *za'atar*. Similarly repackaged as environmentally friendly, these restrictions aimed to dispossess Palestinians while allowing these flora to gather as fuel for wildfires. The ban was scaled back by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority in 2019. As a result of climate change and enduring settler colonial policies, wildfires are progressively wreaking havoc across Palestine, Australia, and Turtle Island (Philip, 2025).

### **Inscribing Holistic Decolonization**

This doctoral project accomplished four major aims. Firstly, I theorized settler colonialism as an inherently genocidal and ecocidal process with a focus on my homeland of Palestine. This analysis contradicted a prevailing view that diminished the lethality of settler colonialism, particularly on Turtle Island and in Australia. Western intellectuals, including the eminent scholar of settler colonial studies Patrick Wolfe (2006), have often strictly associated genocide with physical violence enacted on a large scale and in a short timeframe. For Wolfe, Israel's war of extermination against Gaza, and the expulsion and murder of Palestinians during 1948 (Nakba) and 1967 (Naqsa) may have amounted to "genocidal moments" (2006, p. 403). However, I detailed ways in which Israel, Canada and other settler colonies have gradually proletarianized, dispossessed, and killed Natives: from the inception of these states, their objectives were to usurp lands, dispose of or exploit their inhabitants, and manage capitalist economies for perpetuity. Referencing medical studies and historical events, I argued that the outcome of cultural, economic, and land displacement itself – a traumatizing experience linking all Indigenous peoples – was mass death. As Natives repeated throughout concentration camps, prisons, exile, and battlefields, "land is life." I appealed for the recognition of all exterminationist campaigns directed against particular

communities, (including women, elders, and Queer folks), as genocidal. Use of this wording begs an honest reckoning with and the urgent termination of such violence. I also advanced the notion of “acculturation” in settler colonial contexts as a replacement for the misleading phrase “(forced) assimilation.” The former crystallizes the tyrannical and savage approach to the obliteration of Native heritage and lifeways. This thesis stressed the importance of salvaging millions of not only human but nonhuman lives through the dismantlement of settler colonialism worldwide. I outlined the terraforming of Palestine into a neo-Europe through the wholesale annihilation of local nonhumans and the introduction of Western species. The landscape was reshaped in drastic ways to extinguish Indigenous life and embody colonial desires. This overhaul triggered an avalanche of ecological degradation. I shed light on the numerous environmental harms of Zionism from deforestation to pine plantations to hypermilitarism to displacement. Many Indigenous flora perished following the expulsion of their caretakers, revealing the inseparability of ecological and human rights (Sasa, 2024a).

Secondly, this project investigated the manipulation of environmental discourses and policies by Israel to gain control over Palestine. I labelled this convoluted exercise green colonialism, focusing on the development of Zionist “protected areas,” such as forests, nature reserves, and national parks, (e.g. Canada Park). It was my contention that these green colonies (1) stripped Palestinians of their lands; (2) blocked their return; (3) dehistoricized, Europeanized, and Judaized the Arab world; and (4) extolled genocide as ecological stewardship. Another Israeli environmental practice I thoroughly analyzed was hiking, particularly its valorization as a mode of disciplining colonizers-soldiers, acquainting them with the geographic features of Palestine, and usurping land. At the same time, this sport performed innocence, health, strength, civilizational refinement, and environmental attunement. I also critiqued the Zionist dual portrayal of

Palestinians as ecological demons and saints, which reinforced their dehumanization. It was through the classification of Palestinians and local nonhumans, (such as black goats, olive trees, and camels), as ecologically harmful that Israel greenwashed its elimination of both (Braverman, 2023, p. 4). To quote the former Israeli deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti (2000), “I myself ‘made the desert bloom’ by uprooting the ancient olive trees of al-Bassa to clear the ground for a banana grove, as required by the ‘planned farming’ principles of my kibbutz, Rosh Haniqra” (p. 2). Aside from Zionism and Orientalism, which have presented Arabs and Muslims as morally and intellectually inferior, I observed the descent of Israeli green colonialism from Western environmentalism. I pointed out the introduction of this movement by the French empire, which privileged White people and certain nonhumans over the Native and other racialized bodies. John Muir’s national parks, Hitler’s vegetarianism, and Zionism’s afforestation all trampled on the rights of BIPOC under the guise of protecting nature.

Thirdly, this thesis redirected some light towards the memories of Palestinian cities and villages that have been shadowed by Israel. My second chapter particularly embarked on this goal through my engagement with online archives to transcribe, translate, and synthesize interviews with Nakba survivors. It provided a snapshot of life in 8 Palestinian villages, prior to their destruction and concealment by USA Independence Park: these were Dayr Aban, Bayt ‘Itab, Allar, Dar al-Sheikh, Jrash, Sufla, Dayr al-Hawa, and Khirbat al-Tannur. By reviving the names and stories of the families, nonhumans, and rivers that distinguished these localities for centuries, I sought to contribute to the anticolonial archive. Besides honouring the martyrs and descendants of this region, this resource served to aid our just and ecologically balanced return (Sasa, 2024a). Similarly, the third chapter of this thesis discussed the violence of the Zionist militia, Palmach, which morphed into the biggest Israeli ecological organization, the Society for the Protection of

Nature in Israel. The massacres and other crimes it executed against Natives in the northern half of Palestine – namely the villages of Sasa and Khisas, and my hometown of ar-Ramla and sister city of al-Lyd – was summarized. Simultaneously, I provided an overview of the religious diversity and ecological beauty of Khisas and Sasa, armed and cultural resistance of al-Lyd, and the fertility of soil in ar-Ramla. The first chapter also rebutted the myth “Israel made the desert bloom” by underlining the productivity of Palestinian land prior to the Nakba, which the Zionist entity could not sustain (Sasa, 2023a, pp. 225–226).

Fourthly, this dissertation illuminated the resistance of Palestinians and their nonhuman kin to colonization, within the paradigm of holistic decolonization. Palestinian refusal to invasion and subjugation has not been limited to those who sacrificed their lives defending their communities, led campaigns to cancel the charitable status of JNF, or provided tours in Israeli parks debunking their narratives. It has also been seen in fires that ravaged Israeli pines while sparing Native ecosystems, and the endurance of local flora through decades of persecution and neglect: they persisted nourishing the original inhabitants when they were able to reach them (Sasa, 2023a, p. 229; Sasa, 2024a, p. 559). My conceptualization of holistic decolonization drew from Palestinian wisdom, Islam, and zoology. Denouncing all forms of oppression – encompassing White supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, speciesism, and anthropocentrism – it favoured *a’wda* (return), *a’wna* (intercommunal and interspecies collaboration), *tawhid* (unity of creation), *rujuliyyeh* (courage), and nonequilibrium ecology. This visualization of a more harmonious world centers human rights but rejects Cartesian dualisms (Sasa, 2023a, 2024a). First and foremost, I urged the return of all lands to their rightful owners.

### **Cracks in the Walls of Enclosure**

It is difficult to grasp onto hope as we witness the commission of genocides against Palestine, Sudan, and Congo. However, it is imperative for us to try since optimism is revolutionary, plunging us into anticolonial action (Sasa, 2023a, p. 227). On a global scale, there are three radical processes that are unfolding and merit our attention. Firstly, Indigenous communities worldwide are recovering their lands, including those that have been declared “protected areas.” Many Western environmentalists began to critique human rights abuses in their fields during the 1990s, primarily due to Native protests. Following the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and its promotion of Indigenous ownership, in 2007, more environmentalists became invested in the plight of the colonized (Zaitchik, 2018). Over the course of writing this dissertation, I observed a tremendous improvement in the embrace of human rights by mainstream environmental organizations (Sasa, 2023a, p. 231). From October 7, environmentalists have even begun advocating for Palestinian rights. For instance, the Canadian branch of the Sierra Club, which I rebuked in the third chapter for its anti-Indigenous racism, contacted me for an interview on genocide and ecocide in Palestine (D. Yao, personal communication, August 1, 2025). Greta Thunberg who grew to be a leading environmental advocate also heroically joined a flotilla in an attempt to break the siege on Gaza in 2025. She stated during a protest, “if you, as a climate activist, don’t also fight for a free Palestine and an end to colonialism and oppression all over the world, then you should not be able to call yourself a climate activist” (Mitrovica, 2024).

Governments have also been influenced into respecting Indigenous sovereignty. In 2003, representatives of 154 states resolved to co-administer “protected areas” with Indigenous communities “on a fair and equitable basis” (Zaitchik, 2018). Various regimes upheld their commitments to safeguarding Indigenous rights. For instance, Natives regained sovereignty over

the Meghalaya groves in India, which they revered, and Aboriginals recuperated half of the lands reserved by Australia for conservation purposes (Zaitchik, 2018). In “Canada,” Indigenous peoples have been “reclaiming parks whenever possible and asserting stewardship and economic rights when [they] can’t get the land itself back” (Jago, 2023). Indeed, the Ojibway occupation of Anicinabe Park in 1974 sparked the modern Land Back movement. A couple decades later, First Nations won the legal right to hunt in certain parks, while fighting to curtail the growth of “protected areas” without their consent. Besides, Indigenous peoples have been creating tribal parks that protect treaty rights and local nonhumans (Jago, 2023). The gap between anticolonialism and environmentalism appears to be finally closing.

Secondly, communities worldwide are conserving and recovering their relationships with the land. As genocide, capitalism, and climate change forge ahead, Palestinians are exploring multiple avenues for sustaining their ecosystems, themselves, and others. Openings include the safeguarding of numerous *baladi* (heirloom) plants through the launch of seed banks and libraries. Meanwhile, these “living archives” transmit Palestinian memories, culinary practices, and agricultural knowledge (Vivien Sansour quoted in Bauck, 2024). Vivien Sansour purposefully instituted a Palestinian seed “library” rather than a “bank” to underscore cooperation and the immediacy of climate change. Instead of storing seeds, she urges the public to begin planting them with a focus on vulnerable and hardy (*ba’al* or rainfed) species. Sansour recuperates a past, biodiverse, and organic agricultural complex in Palestine, which encompassed house gardens. Cultivation then was not choked by Israeli economic or colonial expansion. Yet, she investigates innovations, such as possibilities of growing more drought and flood resistant fruits and vegetables. Sansour shares a powerful and ancient Palestinian parable, which emphasizes the bond between food sovereignty and (internal) decolonization: ““He who does not eat from his own adze



cannot think with his own mind’” (Beaumont, 2016; Guimarães & Paq, 2019). She elucidates that anticolonial resistance is invigorated when Natives nurture their minds and bodies by growing and consuming healthy food. In her words, “that’s when the occupation really wins. When we start to believe we are trash and we start to eat trash, when we start to live as if our lives don’t matter” (Guimarães & Paq, 2019). On a global scale, Sansour challenges racist stereotypes describing Palestinian fellaheen as lazy and unskilled: “their dynamism and their spirit of experimentation over time” is brought to the fore by her initiatives (Meneley, 2021, p. 164). Israel demolished Palestine’s sole national seed bank, on July 31, 2025, in another blatant attempt to crush Native human and nonhuman life (Friends of the Earth International, 2025). “Agroresistance” persists through many channels, however, such as the swelling of a female-led movement to form rooftop vegetable gardens (Vivien Sansour quoted in Guimarães & Paq, 2019). It is to be found in the Dheisheh refugee camp of Bethlehem, which is based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank (Guimarães & Paq, 2019). Palestinian agroecologist Saad Dagher also promotes waste reduction and recycling, invoking the local rhyming parable “*badayel mush zabayel*” (alternatives not trash) (Saad Dagher, personal communication, March 30, 2021). Palestinians are strengthening ties with their lands and ancestors – despite decades of systemic disenfranchisement – whether they live in exile or a concrete camp (Bauck, 2024; Guimarães & Paq, 2019).

Thirdly, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are being reclaimed as faiths that are justice-oriented. Although Palestine is an exquisite tapestry of ideologies that are intimately woven together, its population mostly identifies as Muslim. The immense love Palestinians continue to pour into one other and their land greatly emanates from Islamic spirituality: 2 of the 99 names Muslims attribute to Allah (SWT) have been adopted by leading Palestinian NGOs, Al-Haq (Truth) and Adalah (Justice). However, Islam has been heavily suppressed and denigrated by the

West to rationalize imperialism since the rise of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Quranic verses have also been misconstrued to perpetuate capitalism, misogyny, and Queerphobia (Ul-Haq et al., 2022). For instance, Queerphobia spread among the Ummah subsequent to European colonization during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Zaharin, 2022). Muslim elites who were invested in maintaining the status quo also suppressed efforts to revisit mainstreamed interpretations of the Quran, as captured by the terms *ijtihad* (striving) and *tadabbur* (critical reflection), over the last several centuries (Let the Quran Speak, 2022). A young Palestinian journalist who survived the genocide against Gaza, memorized the Quran, and studied Islamic laws has been challenging Muslim complacency, complicity, and inaction in the face of injustice (Abed, 2025). Abubaker Abed published a letter to Muslims in the New Arab on March 28, 2025: it reminded them (us) that emancipatory work has been ranked by the Quran higher than fasting, donating, and praying (4:76). Due to the large influence of Islam in Palestine and the wider Arab world, I underline the necessity of (re)comprehending and communicating the anticolonial, socialist, inclusive, and environmentalist qualities of the faith (Abdou, 2022). The fall of the brutal Assad dictatorship in Syria and its replacement by a Sunni supremacist regime emphasized the importance of bringing holistic, localized, and worldly approaches to liberation (The Lemkin Institute, 2025b).

While viewing the decolonization of Islam as foundational to breaking the chains of Zionism, I argue that the progression of Palestinian freedom is enabling religious salvation. Struggles against Israeli pinkwashing, (the false depiction of the Zionist entity as a haven for LGBTQ+ individuals), and settler colonialism are being led by Queer folks who link sexual and national freedom (Matari, 2024). Myself, I am drawing on the work of Jasbir Puar (2013), Scott Kugle (2010), Khaled el-Rouayheb (2009), Aisya Aymanee M. Zaharin (2022), Dr. Aisha Y. Musa (2022), and fellow Palestinian scholar Walaa Alqaisiya (2018) in my imagining of a Palestine that

(re)protects the rights of its Queer children. One of my most popular yet controversial threads on X dates back to June 2024, which meticulously examined Quranic verses and hadiths to effectively dispel Queerphobic interpretations of the faith. On the other hand, it underscored Islam's celebration of diversity, acceptance of gay and asexual men, and condemnation of rape – rather than same-sex love – in the story of Prophet Lot (PBUH) (Kugle, 2010). I believe it garnered much attention due to a severe dearth in modern Islamic scholarship on the topic, particularly direct engagement with the Quran, in an age of global heightened Queerphobia. By situating Queer equality in the heart of the highly unifying Palestinian cause, I also sought to persuade fellow Arabs and Muslims to challenge prevailing Queerphobic assumptions (Sasa, 2024b). Within the West Bank, Palestinian civil society has forced its collaborationist government (the Palestinian Authority) to reverse its ban against a prominent gay and transgender rights organization, Al Qaws (The Rainbow) (Ashly, 2019).

Moreover, Palestine remains an emblem of religious pluralism from its rejection of Sunni-Shia sectarianism to the recitation of the Quranic chapter, “al-Fatiha,” over the body of Christian Palestinian martyr Shireen Abu Akleh (Ibrahim, 2022). Some non-Palestinian Muslims, such as Tom Facchine (2024) from the Yaqeen Institute, are attempting to coopt Palestine solidarity from a fundamentalist, right-wing standpoint. Yet, the Quran rejects division and arrogance, devoting an entire chapter to promoting religious tolerance in “Al-Kafirun” (“The Disbelievers”). As seen in Chapter 2, socialism and self-sufficiency also defined Palestine prior to the Nakba (Sasa, 2024a, p. 558). Rosemary Sayigh notes that Muslim Palestinian villages were less likely to execute class divisions or privatize property than their Christian counterparts (1979/2007, p. 31). The weight Islam places on social welfare and its ban on usury demonstrate its strong anti-capitalist streak, although the topic remains grossly underdiscussed (Abdou, 2022; ul-Haq et al., 2022). In his

rejection of Zionism, local Palestinian rights defender Rabbi David Mivasair is also espousing Reform Judaism. Besides immensely fundraising for Palestinians based in Gaza, he is outspoken in his condemnation of Canadian Zionist organizations. He joined Rabbis for Ceasefire in 2023, along with 338 other Jewish religious leaders (Robin, 2024). The Holocaust against Gaza has exposed deep cracks in mainstream religious foundations concerning their failure to meaningfully act and direct followers. Among the faithful, people of conscience are courageously taking a stand to end their collusion and assist in healing society by engaging in communal, religious soul searching.

This is my rendition of an anthem to be sung  
I will rise and soar above your matrix of control  
With the strength of my will your walls will fall  
And this concrete that segregates us will be used to rebuild homes  
Your bulldozers and tanks will dissolve into the earth  
The sap will run in the olive trees  
The gates will open wide for the refugees  
We will be free  
I will be your equal  
And only then you will be mine  
My other self  
My fellow human being. (Samah Sabawi, n.d., as cited in Vlazna, 2017)

The above poem is by brilliant Gazan writer Samah Sabawi, addressed to the Israeli colonizer. It envisions an inclusive, socialist, democratic, and sustainable future in an emancipated Palestine. It demands a radical shift in the global economic and social order, which may seem unviable, but the ongoing sumud of Palestinians and the three developments highlighted above tell another tale. Indeed, I mentioned in Chapter 2 that the charitable status of JNF Canada was being revoked by the Canadian government (Sasa, 2024a, pp. 556–557). This decision has been finalized after the Zionist organization failed twice to appeal this verdict in November 2024 and June 2025 (Just Peace Advocates, 2025). The defunding of JNF Canada was spurred by the decades-long

advocacy of Naqsa survivor Dr. Ismail Zaid (2011, p. 102) and various NGOs, such as Just Peace Advocates and Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV) (2024). Still, IJV demands that Canada also sanction JNF in Historic Palestine and other Canadian charities siphoning money to the genocidal regime. For instance, the charity Israel Magen Fund of Canada, has been found to gather donations on behalf of JNF Canada (Howe, 2025). According to Just Peace Advocates (2025), \$362 million were transferred to Israel through 200 Canadian registered charities in 2022 alone, highlighting the necessity of combatting greenwashing and other forms of money and crime laundering schemes. For now, some justice has been restored to the Indigenous inhabitants of Yalu, Beit Nuba, Imwas, Dayr Ayyub, and hundreds of other Palestinian villages that have been colonized and forested by JNF.

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