

## **Introduction**

Since the Jewish National Fund (JNF)'s inception, the nongovernmental organization with close ties to the State of Israel has planted over 200 million trees on over 900,000 dunams or 225,000 acres of land in Israel/Palestine (Braverman 2009, 48). The forests are afforestation projects initiated as greening and good environmental stewardship of the land. The afforestation projects created a "natural" means to possess and control land in Israel/Palestine for the Jewish state. The Jewish National Fund planted forests over approximately eighty-six Palestinian villages that were demolished and depopulated during the 1948 Nakba/Arab-Israeli war. The pine forests create both a physical barrier against Palestinians returning to their land, and also the forests hide evidence of Palestinians' history on the land. Through JNF pine forests, one can see the struggle between both the State of Israel and Palestinians to maintain, or in the case of the State of Israel to establish, a history and thus legitimacy upon the land of Israel/Palestine. Both the State of Israel and Palestinians are struggling to legitimate their right to the land through established histories on the land in Israel/Palestine. Thus the acts of resistance legitimate and aid in Palestinians' right to return to the land by preventing their past history from being covered by forests and forgotten. Palestinians' acts of resistance, like continuing to plant olive trees and deliberately setting fires to the JNF pine forests are a struggle to preserve their history and memory on the land against Zionist efforts to eradicate it.

## **Social and Material Ecologies**

The JNF receives donations for tree planting from all over the world. Through their donations to the afforestation projects, donors establish a physical connection to the land of Israel. The cost for a tree certificate, in which a tree is planted in the donor's name, only costs eighteen dollars, and the donor receives a tree certificate (Braverman 2009, 61-66). Thus "each tree represents a Jewish body, whereas together the trees form an entire forest, representing the Jewish nation that is both rooted in and disrooted from the actual landscape" (Braverman 2009, 69-70). While the afforestation projects are environmental; they are also psychological in rooting the Jewish people to a homeland. The JNF forests strengthen the Zionist movement toward securing a stake in a homeland within Israel/Palestine. A Palestinian's experience is quite the contrary from the afforestation projects. The JNF pine forests have managed to place a post-battle wedge between the Palestinian people and the land of Israel/Palestine. The Jewish National Fund's chosen designations for forests are a discriminatory practice toward the Palestinians. Such discriminatory acts include planting pine forests on the outskirts of Palestinian villages as well as planting on the ruins of Palestinian villages, which will be discussed further in the material ecology of the forests.

While the obvious material ecology of the JNF forests are pine trees it is the unique characteristics of pine trees that are quite important in understanding the effectiveness in their usage for the overall Jewish National Fund's agenda. Pine trees are able to grow quickly, and also their pine needles affect the acidity of the soil "which eradicates most

smaller plants and undergrowth between trees” (Weizman 2007, 120). The pine tree’s fast growth ensures a stronghold over the land, in which the land is held until possible future development at the Jewish National Fund or State of Israel’s discretion. Also the increase in soil acidity from the tree’s fallen needles makes it difficult for competing vegetation to survive in the surrounding areas. Thus the lack of small vegetation surrounding the trees make it more difficult for Palestinian shepherds’ flock to find grazing pasture (Weizman 2007, 120). Not only are the JNF pine forests a means for holding the land and preventing other land usages, but the forests are also a means of concealment.

The pine forests have concealed building ruins from demolished and depopulated Palestinian villages and the Palestinian histories from the landscape. The placement of forests has created a wedge between neighboring Palestinian villages, thus uprooting Palestinians in both time and space. Forests have been strategically placed on the outskirts of Palestinian villages, to prevent expansion of the Palestinian village too. Such sentiments were heard from one of the JNF’s chief inspectors, Amikam Riklin, who Braverman interviewed: “...The forests are situated in the outskirts of villages, some quite hostile towards the Zionist entity. Some of them are on the borders. Go to Gush Etzion, there are forests there. There are also forests in Maale Adumim and in Wadi Ara. All of Wadi Ara [a Palestinian concentration in central Israel] is one big forest... We also operate in Area C in the territories” (Braverman 2009, 96-97). Riklin acknowledges that the JNF forests occupied the outskirts of Palestinian villages and areas. The forests created a barrier around

existing Palestinian villages to not only prevent expansion, but the pine forests were able to prevent Palestinians from returning to their depopulated and abandoned villages.

Noga Kadman did research on 418 Palestinian villages “depopulated and demolished during the 1948 war, almost half (182 villages) are situated in various nature sites...specifically, JNF forest were planted over 86 such villages” (Braverman 2009, 99). Also Kadman found “that, of the total of 418 villages, Israel (wholly or partially) appropriated the land of 372 Palestinian villages through the JNF” (Braverman 2009, 99). The forests ensured that the Palestinian people could not reinhabit the villages, and thus the land comes under the control of the State of Israel. The construction of the pine forests upon the ruins of Palestinian villages is not a coincidence but intentionally utilized to conceal the physical remnants of Palestinian history on the land of Israel/Palestine, and this concealment is ultimately used to also weaken the Palestinian’s claim for right of return, as stipulated by UN Resolution 194, while strengthening the Zionist claim to the land for the State of Israel.

### **Relationship Between the State, the Organization, and the People**

While the Jewish National Fund is technically a non-governmental organization, it has very strong ties with the State of Israel and national interests. Since The Jewish National Fund’s inception in the early 1900’s it has played a vital role for the State of Israel as a nongovernmental organization with vast capabilities for land acquisition through afforestation and environmental service projects (Braverman 2009,72). The State of Israel

takes advantage of JNF's status as a nongovernmental organization "to keep large tracts of land in Jewish hands without the risk of being labeled discriminatory" (Braverman 2009, 49). Thus the Jewish National Fund has made a handful of purchases of large tracts of land from the State of Israel, and also JNF is one of only three organizations, the other two being Israel's Development Authority and the State of Israel, that the state can transfer the ownership of agricultural land (Braverman 2009, 50). The Jewish National Fund is a Zionist organization. Which makes sense that the organization would maintain close ties to the state of Israel, so to advance the Zionist ideology in forming a homeland for the Jewish people in Israel/Palestine. However this relationship between Israel and the Jewish National Fund has been quite problematic for the Palestinian population that inhabited the land before and after the formation of the state. As seen in how and where the Jewish National Fund focused afforestation projects in Israel/Palestine.

### **The Struggle Over History**

The Jewish National Fund forests were used to secure land, but the forests were also a means through which to erase the Palestinian history both through concealment of the physical evidence of Palestinians existence upon the land. Pine forests were specifically utilized to create a new landscape that did not mimic that of the Palestinians but one of Europe. "While early Zionist farmers followed in the footsteps of Palestinian fellahin, planting vineyards, almond orchards, and citrus groves, after the Nakba the JNF concentrated on ecological colonialism, the reshaping of the physical environment,

transforming the Arab landscape, planting forests and demarcating the “Israeli space”(Masalha 2012, 127). One sees a shift in the landscape through the anthropogenic forests, which were comprised of “ non-indigenous conifers, pine trees (native to the northern hemisphere) and cypress trees.” The forests were attempts at recreating the European landscape within Israel/Palestine (Masalha 2012, 121). The utilization of non-indigenous vegetation by the Jewish National Fund in the construction of the forests and parks in an essence establishes a new history by drastically altering the landscape. This change is not only one of forging a landscape reminiscent of European aesthetics, but it attempts to alter the irrevocably alter the landscape in a way that no longer resembles its past state. As the new nation-state was being forged, so the land was also being formed and changed to resemble the European land of which the majority in Israel, Ashkenazi Jews, resided before. While the Jewish National Fund and the State of Israel are using the forests to create a new history upon the landscape, Palestinians are resisting through various modes from olive tree planting, to implementing plaques and tours in the parks and forests about Palestinian history, and also deliberate forest fires.

### **Modes of Resistance: Plaques/Tours, Olive Planting, Deliberate Fires**

One means of resistance can be seen through increasing both the Israeli and international communities awareness of the Palestinian history from the forced displacement and dispossession of Palestinians by the State of Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and 1967 Six-Day War. One such example can be seen in the tours of the

Jewish National Fund forests and parks in which the Palestinian history is presented.

Zochrot, an Israeli nongovernmental organization that attempts to bring awareness of the Palestinian history especially the Nakba, holds tours at Canada Park and shares the Palestinian history to tourists and visitors of the park. Canada Park in particular is controversial in that it was constructed upon three Palestinian villages: Imwas, Yalu, and Beit Nuba, that were depopulated during the 1967 Six Day War. Canada Park is also technically not within the international recognized borders of Israel, but rather the park is located in a section of the West Bank (Cook 2009). During the 1967 Six-Day War the State of Israel captured a segment of the West Bank, however the captured land was not returned to Palestinians. Instead the Jewish National Fund constructed Canada Park on the land through fifteen million dollars in donations from Canadian Jewry, and hence why the park was named Canada Park in honor of the donors (Cook 2009). “Until 2006, the JNF omitted the history of the Palestinian villages from the explanatory signs it posted around the park, instead presenting details of life, in the Second Temple, Hellenic, and Roman periods, adhering to a strictly Eurocentric narrative” (Blumenthal 2013, 185). The NGO, Zochrot petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court over the Jewish National Fund’s sign-posting practices in Canada Park because the park’s signage did not present any of the Palestinian history surrounding the park. In 2006, the Israeli Supreme Court accepted the request of Zochrot, in which to include the Palestinian history specifically the village names into the signage posted by Jewish National Fund around Canada Park (Braverman 2009, 101-102).

One of the signs reads: “”The village Imwas and Yalu existed in the area of the park until the year 1967. In the village of Imwas and Yalu existed in the area of the park until the year 1967. In the village of Imwas there lived 2,000 residents, who no reside in Jordan and in Ramallah... In the village of Yalu there lived 1,700 residents who now reside in Jordan and Ramallah”” (Braverman, 2009, 102). The signs did list the villages upon which Canada Park sits the signs did not mention why the residents now live in Jordan and Ramallah. The signs only mention a year 1967, but they do not mention that during that year the Six-Day War occurred that many Palestinians were displaced because the Israeli army captured a portion of the West Bank from Jordan. Nor does the sign mention that the village inhabitants and their descendents are living as refugees in Ramallah and also East Jerusalem (Cook 2009). While their signs were quite vague in presenting Palestinian history in Canada Park, nevertheless some of the signage that presented the Palestinian history were first defaced with black paint and then later stolen from the park. The stolen signs were attributed to possibly scrap metal thieves, however other metal signs in the park still remain (Cook 2009).

In another Jewish National Fund forest known as South Africa Forest, which was built upon the Palestinian village, Luby, after it was forcibly depopulated during the 1948 Nakba. A group in South Africa known as “Stop the JNF” aimed to bring awareness to donors of the Jewish National Fund about what exactly their donations were going towards. This year on May 1<sup>st</sup>, twelve people from South Africa and one from Australia



came to the South Africa Forest, and they apologized for their donation because they did not know what it was going towards (Levy 2015). “While Fathi al-Eidi, a refugee from Lubya who now lives in Taybeh village about three kilometers away, said he appreciated the event, but understood it was only symbolic. ‘I am happy that people came,’ he said. ‘To say sorry is always good. But I hope that one day all the people from Lubya can come back’”(Levy 2015). Both Canada Park and South Africa Forest are examples through education from signs, tours, and ceremonies in which raise awareness within Israel and abroad about Palestinian history surrounding the Jewish National Fund. While this is a start in educating people about the history, ultimately it is more symbolic and not necessarily beneficial in the right to return for Palestinians. However olive planting and deliberate fires may be more immediate in reclaiming the Palestinians’ tie to the land and right to return.

The olive tree is connected with the Palestinian identity, and as such it has come to symbolize the Palestinian struggle. Just as the pine tree is often associated with the Jewish identity in Israel/Palestine, the olive tree is also a means to hold and control land. According to the 1858 Ottoman Land Code Article Seventy-Eight, “‘every one who has possessed and cultivated [miri] land for ten years without dispute acquires a right by prescription... and he shall given a new title deed gratuitously’”(Braverman 2009, 167). Miri land is was a category of land ascribed by the Ottoman Empire, in which the land was essentially agricultural land (Cohen 1993,36). While the State of Israel is not the Ottoman Empire, Israel does still use this land code in its judicial system. While continuous

cultivation for ten years can transfer the deed of the land to another, the law also states that if the land is not cultivated for three continuous years than the land can revert back to the state (Cohen 1993, 36). The latter portion has been utilized quite frequently by the State of Israel to appropriate more land. “Ironically, Palestinian attempts to preserve the land they consider their own come only after Israel has taken steps to prevent them from having access to much of the area in question” (Cohen 1993, 17). This has been seen as the separation barrier has been constructed, in which Palestinian villages and their agricultural fields and groves will be separated by the barrier thus making it difficult if not impossible to access the land. This can then lead to the State of Israel appropriating the agricultural land because according to the Ottoman land code the land has not been continuously cultivated in three years. While the land code can be both beneficial and detrimental to maintaining control of their land, the planting and particularly cultivation of the olive trees and other vegetation are vital in controlling and reclaiming their land. The olive tree provides a physical marker in the land of the Palestinians presence and resistance. The olive tree unlike the pine tree is not quick growing, but the olive tree represents longevity (Braverman 2009, 115). Thus the planting and cultivation of the olive tree helps by staking a claim to the land, and also it creates a relationship between the Palestinians and the land as well.

The last form of resistance is the usage of deliberate forest fires. “JNF’s web site indicates that, since the beginning of the first Intifada (Arabic meaning uprising) in 1987,

900 fires have been set in JNF forests, most of them, according to the web site, deliberately set by Palestinians” (Braverman 2009, 205). Given the sheer numbers of deliberate fires attributed to Palestinians according the Jewish National Fund, there is not much research around the use of arson by Palestinians. The acts of arson to the Jewish National Fund forests are often associated to the national security of Israel as well because the forests are a vulnerability and shield to the state. Also the pine trees are part of the State of Israel’s national identity, and thus through deliberate fires and arson to Jewish National Fund forests, it strikes a sensitive cord for Israel. It has been particularly telling through the use of literature surrounding the forests and acts of arson.

The use of literature surrounding the forest can be seen by from the 1930’s onward with writers such as Smolly, Yehoshua, and Fa’our, each have written stories ending in acts of arson. While all three stories are fictions, yet each are rooted within the current reality of Israel/Palestine. Eliezer Smolly wrote in 1933, *The Founders*, in which a Jewish guard is hired to protect forest, and within the forest he also begins a farm. The story ends with Arabs setting a fire that inflicts heavy destruction of both the forest and his farm (Zerubavel 1996:64-65). In A.B. Yehoshua’s *Facing the Forest* written in 1963, a struggling student takes a position as a firewatcher of a Jewish National Fund pine forest for a year. The firewatcher lives in a home with a mute Arab and his daughter. As the year progresses, the firewatcher realizes that the forest was built upon the village of the mute Arab, and the home in which he is staying is also the mute Arab’s. This story too ends with

the Arab burning down the forest, in which all that stands is the remains of the village and the plagues commemorating the donors of the trees. In this story however, the village ruins haunt the forest, and the Arab is a living ghost. "Look, here the Arab and the girl are disappearing among the trees and he cannot find them...They tread the soil softly. They avoid people, choose roundabout ways." (Yehoshua 1963:374). The Arab is not human rather an element of the landscape, one who cannot speak but glides between the house and forest, and maybe the firewatcher will catch a glimpse of the man. In both Smolly's and Yehoshua's acclaimed stories the Arab is seen as less than, and one who inflicts destruction upon the landscape. The Arab is thus portrayed as one not worthy or fit for the landscape, in comparison to the Jewish settlers, who watch-over, protect, and plant the forests. Both pieces of fiction, but ultimately political in which they play upon the relationship of the Jewish National Fund, Jewish settlers, the State of Israel, and Palestinians (referred to as Arabs). In the case of Israeli Palestinian writer, Ednan Fa'our, whose story focused around the act of arson faced charges of incitement by the state of Israel, none of which occurred to the other two Israeli Jewish authors.

The integration of literature and politics around the issue of arson was also brought to the limelight when an Israeli military censor charged an Israeli Palestinian writer for incitement against the State. The writer, Ednan Fa'our published a story about cats who sacrifice their lives by spreading fires tied to their tails as a revenge against a wicked Sheikh who took over their master's land. The charge of incitement to

arson was later dropped by the State (Zerubavel 88:1996).

Fa'our's story was also written during the First Intifada, Intifada is Arabic for uprising, lasted from 1987 to 1993 became marked as a Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation. In all three pieces of literature each bears the tale of arson. However because of the current political climate within Israel/Palestine during Fa'our's children's book was published, she was charged by the State of Israel for incitement of arson although later dropped. In terms of the literature surrounding arson and the Jewish National Fund forest, it becomes more than literature because of the connection to national security for the State of Israel as well as the significance of the forests in controlling and claiming the land and the narrative of the landscape in Israel/Palestine. It is also important to recall that the two Israeli Jewish authors did not face state charges for writing stories of an Arab man setting the Jewish National Fund forests on fire because the Israeli authors represented the Arab from an Israeli and also Jewish settler's point of view. Yet when an Israeli Palestinian author writes of cats who sacrifice themselves by spreading fire by their tails, Fa'our is charged with a crime. While Fa'our holds an Israeli citizenship, she is Palestinian and an Arab, in which case her story even a children's story has an Arab actually writing of committing arson. It is in this case that literature proves to be more than fiction, but it provides truth to the discrimination of Palestinians by the State of Israel, as well as a narrative that the Arabs were destructive to the land, and the Jewish people were the protectors and stewards of the land.

## **Conclusion**

The Palestinian's right to return is both simple and complex. The simplicity lies in that the Palestinian people have the legal and expressed desire to right to return to the land from which many were forcibly removed during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the 1967 Six Day War. The complexity lays in the logistics about how the Palestinians will return to the land they once occupied given the ongoing land appropriation. The Jewish National Fund constructed pine forests on approximately eighty-six villages, and many of the forests are also wedged between villages and right on the outskirts of villages to prevent expansion. Thus logistically if Palestinians were granted the right to return, for many and their descendents their land and village is now invaded by lines of pine trees. That is not to say that Palestinians should not be granted the right to return because logistically for many they cannot simply return to their land just as it was left. The right to return for Palestinians will however be difficult, but I do not believe it will be a deterrent from Palestinians and everyone in solidarity struggling for their right to return to Palestine. Nor am I entirely sure about how Palestinians will bring out the right to return through what strategies or aims. While many of those that were originally displaced during the 1948 Nakba and during the Six-Day War are being coming an aged generation, there is still a transmission of the collective history and memory to the next generations. In a letter by Ghassan Kanafani to his son he writes about after his son becomes aware that he was a Palestinian.

There was something bigger than my awareness being born in the other room

through your bewildered sobbing. It was as if a blessed scalpel was cutting up your chest and putting there the heart that belongs to you... I knew, however that a distant homeland was being born again; hills, plains, olive groves, dead people, torn banners and folded ones, all cutting their way into a future of flesh and blood and being born into the heart of another child... Do not believe that man grows. No; he is born suddenly—a word, in a moment, penetrates his heart to a new throb (Kanafani 1999, 10).

This segment of the letter beautifully and eloquently relays how Kanafani's son, the next generation, suddenly has this awareness in his heart of the Palestinian's history and struggle. In terms to the Palestinian's right of return, they will find a way to bring about their right to return to their land.

## Works Cited

Anand, Nikhil

2012 Municipal Disconnect: On Abject Water and Its Urban Infrastructures, *Ethnography* 0(00):1-23.

Blumenthal, Max

2013 Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel. New York: Nation Books. PDF e-book.

Braverman, Irus

Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine. Cambridge Studies on Law and Society, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, Shaul Ephraim

The Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Cook, Jonathan. "Canada Park and Israeli 'Memoricide'." *The Electronic Intifada*.

Last modified March 10, 2009. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/canada-park-and-israeli-memoricide/8126>.

Carse, Ashley

2012 Nature as Infrastructure: Making and Managing the Panama Canal Watershed, *Social Studies of Science* 42:539-563.

Ingold, Tim

2012 Materiality. Theme issue, "Toward an Ecology of Materials," *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 41:427-442.

Kanafani, Ghassan

Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories. Trans. Hilary Kilpatrick. United States: Lynne Rienner Publishers, INC.

Levy, Sarah. "South Africans Apologize Over Forest Planted on Palestinian Village."

*The Electronic Intifada*. Last modified May 5, 2015.

<http://electronicintifada.net/content/south-africans-apologize-over-forest-planted-palestinian-village/14494>.



Lien, Marianne Elisabeth, and John Law

‘Emergent Aliens’: On Salmon, Nature, and Their Enactment, *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 76(1):65-87.

Long, Joanna C.

2009. Rooting Diaspora, Reviving Nation: Zionist Landscapes of Palestine -Israel. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34(1): 61-77.

Masalha, Nur

2012 *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*, London: Zed books.

Masalha, Nur

*Catastrophe Remembered: Palestine, Israel and the Internal Refugees*, London: Zed books.

Weizman, Eyal

*Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. New York: Verso.

Yegoshua, A.B.

“Facing the Forests.” in *Modern Hebrew Literature*, Edited by Robert Alter, 357-398. New York: Behrman House, INC.

Zerubavel, Yael

1996. “The Forest as a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archaeology of Memory.” *Israel Studies* 1(1): 60-99.