

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict Seen Through the Prism of the Olive and Pine Tree

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This paper will show how the Israeli-Palestinian struggle over land, both on the physical and discursive realm, can be approached and seen through trees, namely olive and pine trees as a botanical lens. The olive tree, which is the autochthonous feature of the Mediterranean landscape, represents Palestinian Resistance and attachment to the land over generations, while the imported pine tree forests serve as a fitting arboreal metaphor for Israel's Zionist project, as the land has been afforested at an unprecedented pace over the last century. The symbolic role of these two iconic trees is enhanced and (re)created in national discourses and popular culture, a dialectic arboreal metaphor that the article utilizes as a prism. Both the olive and the pine tree give material form to concepts of rootedness, mark ownership over a contested land, and are bearers of national memories and identities. Therefore, they act as mechanisms of national assertion, operating as national symbols. Yet, or perhaps because of that, their role transcends the symbolic dimension. Both the olive and the pine tree are in fact weaponized, used as tools of warfare in the daily and abiding Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Keywords: Olive tree, pine tree, Israeli-Palestinian land struggle, symbolism, materiality, Palestinian Resistance, Jewish National Fund, national symbols

Introduction

At some point in 2008, an uprooted olive tree was hanging from the ceiling upside down in the middle of the hallway of the Gropius Bau Museum in Berlin. As the days passed and its roots dried up, the tree began to die before the confused and even indignant gazes of the visitors. The controversial art piece was part of Israeli sculptor Dani Karavan's installation. When asked about it, he explained: "In all cultures [...] the olive is a symbol of peace. [...] I did this when Netanyahu decided to build Har-Homa, a settlement in the outskirts of Jerusalem¹. They [people] really got upset that the olive tree was dying. But they weren't as upset about people dying." (Braverman 2009b, 203). The installation was first of all meant to be a criticism of the Israeli government, turning a blind eye on Zionist settlers uprooting Palestinian olive trees as a way to later expropriate land, which, as will be shown, is a recurrent practice.

As the sculptor Karavan uses trees to narrate the story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so will I. In my view, the conflict over land, however

odd this may sound at first glance, can be approached and expressed through trees - namely the contrastive binary of the olive and pine tree,² both symbolically and through their de facto materiality. But why focus on trees? Trees usually belong to the realm of nature, alien to political processes, let alone wars. Yet, one of the underlying assumptions behind this study is that, contrary to popular belief, landscapes are not a random or natural phenomena, but rather are socio-political constructs. Deciphering the *raison d'être* of these constructed landscapes, their ideological meaning and the political intentions behind them, is one of the key guidelines of this paper.

First of all, the admiration of trees as symbolizing the beauty, purity and magnitude of nature is far from being a new phenomenon. The Bible was already replete with references to them, both as “descriptive features of the landscape and as metaphors for the people and their nation” (Ephraim Cohen 1993, 32). In general terms, trees are the quintessential representation of life, both of regeneration and continuity at the same time. In tandem with their robust legibility in a landscape and strong physical presence, they operate as anchoring devices (Braverman 2009), demonstrating a strong attachment to land, which is particularly relevant for the case of both Israel and Palestine, two nations characterized by a distinctive “uprootedness trauma” (Braverman 2008; Ephraim Cohen 1993; Bardenstein 1998).

Since both the olive tree and the pine tree will be used to approach the conflict, an explanation is in order as point of departure. The olive tree has traditionally represented Palestinian resistance and attachment to the land over centuries and has become a strong symbol for the Palestinian cause, while pine trees, but more concretely, pine tree forests, which have multiplied since the beginning of the 20th century and accelerated since Israel's official creation in 1948, serve as a natural even green arboricultural metaphor for Israel's Zionist project. The politics of afforesting the land in Israel are in fact a way to symbolically and factually ‘put down’ roots into the (new) Jewish homeland.

Assessing the role of these two trees may help us to better understand the ins and outs around the prolonged conflict over land and its control in Palestine and Israel. However, the role of trees is not limited to that of their symbolism. Due to the exceptional situation of perpetuated conflict, both the olive and pine tree are bearers of national memories, symbols of collective identities, and markers of ownership over a contested land (Zerubavel 1996). They have ended up vested with so much political and ideological meaning and emotional charge that they can serve to represent two opposing national projects. Consequently, they are weaponized, used in the conflict as tools of combat in order to advance land claims on the ground.³

The central research question examined is: How have the olive and pine tree (forests) emerged as national symbols and how are they used as tools of warfare to claim land in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? To do so, the paper is structured as follows: after first analyzing the symbolic role of the olive tree as synonymous with Palestinian resistance and assessing that of the pine tree as a metaphor for the Zionist project of settlement, the article's third section focuses on how both trees are also weaponized as tools of warfare in the conflict. The aim will be to understand how they are symbolically and performatively used for national purposes and for the sake of land acquisition and control over territory, material entities which are ultimately at stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In terms of methodology, the study seeks to build a comprehensive understanding of the role of these two trees as a compromise between symbolism and materiality, as these are two sides of the same arboricultural coin that shed light on each other.

Sources utilized encompass relevant secondary literature and a selection of Palestinian and Israeli posters. These posters constitute a main source for evaluating the symbolic dimension of these trees in Israeli and Palestinian popular culture: they can be considered as elements of popular culture yet can also be constructs imposed from on above by an ideological elite. Popular culture can be considered as a site through which cultural memory and the collective imaginary are kept alive and (re)produced. The focus on popular culture is based on the fact that cultural representations and performances related to the land constitute processes of nation-building.

The posters here utilized have been selected from the Palestine Poster Project Archives,⁴ a collection when searched that yielded 1464 items for the search item 'tree'. Also searched were all the posters under the tab 'olive' and 'JNF',⁵ (361 and 133 resp.). Regarding the criteria for selection, I selected the posters which seemed to me the most striking and symbolic, although I acknowledge how subjective this approach must seem: first I analyzed the repeated discursive patterns mirrored in the posters and then chose those that I assessed as more illustrative, providing more content for further analysis. Moreover, careful attention was paid to the publisher and year of publication; posters with an available explanation, a translation from Arabic and Hebrew and contextualization were prioritized for pragmatic reasons.

Pine Tree Forests and the Creation of Israel

This first section will revolve around the role of pine trees, and more concretely, pine tree forests within the Zionist project. First, the symbolic attributes of the forests will be analyzed; in a second step, I examine how this massive afforestation of the territory was carried out. I then seek to

better understand its *raison d'être*, as well as its consequences in the broader Palestinian-Israeli struggle over land.

As a starting point, I will provide a short overview of the role of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) within the Zionist structure, highlighting its guidelines, which have been that of maintaining the Jewish identity on land and promoting an “ethnically driven security agenda” (Braverman 2009b, 348). The JNF was founded in 1901 during the 5th Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, responding to the increasing emphasis in the late 19th century placed on the purchase of rural land to be later devoted to agricultural activities. It was at first one of several land acquisition bodies, but it soon became its ‘paramount institution’ (Ephraim Cohen 1993), aiming at ensuring its use for settlement by the newly arrived Jewish community.

The idea of planting forests in ‘desolate’ areas of Israel was originally discussed in 1896 by Theodor Herzl (Amir and Rechtman 2006), and it soon became an integral part of Zionist ideology and of its settlement and reclamation schemes to rescue the country from its alleged desolation. A committee of experts that was sent to Palestine in 1903 by the 6th Zionist Congress recommended planting olive trees, assuming that these would both contribute to the renewal of the landscape and help develop the economy by creating profit. Nevertheless, the supervisors of this project realized that the cost per tree was higher than initially expected, and that the olive trees took longer than expected to blossom, delaying and decreasing the income from the investment (Ephraim Cohen 1993). Relying on olive trees did not seem economically sustainable, and so the JNF changed its strategy and shifted to planting forest trees such as pine trees as a way to hold the land purchased. These were considered to have a better survival rate due to an easier maintenance, and thus were more suitable for the JNF’s rapid afforestation efforts, which quickly became apparent. As an example of it, right after the creation of the State of Israel, by 1949 the JNF had planted 2,910 dunams⁶ with forests. Just two years later, the number amounted to 56,400 (Ephraim Cohen 1993). This increase can partly be explained by the fact that the Martyr’s Forest was inaugurated in 1950, which is in fact the biggest one, both in size and symbolism. Six million trees were planted, one per each Jew killed in the Holocaust (see also Figure 5). The particular case of this forest will further be discussed below.

The ‘Uprootedness Trauma’ and the Interchangeability between the Pine Tree and the Israeli

Trees operate as anchoring devices (Braverman 2009), which is particularly relevant for Jews, historically characterized, as stated by some

researchers, by an “uprootedness trauma” (Ephraim Cohen 1993) or a ‘rootlessness anxiety’ (Bardenstein 1998). As planting a tree is a physical statement of ‘putting down roots’, trees emerge as the perfect symbol for the remedy of this purported ‘trauma’. Moreover, Zionist settlers have been characterized as being beset by anxiety regarding the forging of a connection to this (new) place, and so, in the early years of Zionism, trees were more than merely a visual or literary metaphor. The act of planting a tree was seen as a necessary ritual of connecting to the land, as an act of nationalistic performativity.

Bardenstein (1998) analyzes the connection between constructions of collective memory and this rootlessness anxiety. She studies how Zionist discourse and practices have incorporated this link to nature, and to do so, she assesses how education programmes since the 1940s have served the purpose of connecting the individuals to the land. For example, the aim of the public project *Yedi’at ha-Aretz* (“knowledge of the country”) was that of becoming directly acquainted not only with historical events, but also with the country’s flora, fauna, and geographical landscape. The project, which was implemented from kindergartens through primary and secondary school as well as in the army and in other organizations, was about intimately getting to “know the land”. It was crucial in order to bridge the gap between the fact of being in a “new” home and the recurring mantra of the “return”, central within Zionist discourse.

The role of collective memory is here crucial in this process of nation-making. Zionist narrative had to incorporate other discursive layers in order to ensure a collective national sense of belonging that would take place through the connection to the land. Some policies by the JNF are quite revealing in symbolic terms, as per example planting a tree for each newborn. It suggests a connection between the individual and the nation and the ground, linked to the notions of life and renewal; the fate of the tree and that of the newborn are tied together. This link is also enhanced with other activities promoted by the JNF. For example, Jews worldwide are committed to the project of planting pine trees in Israel, contributing through donations to what Braverman frames as the “psychic and mythic interconnection between nation and rootedness” (Braverman 2009b), described as: “the interchangeability between the tree planted on Israeli soil and the Jew living in diaspora is supplemented by feelings of guilt that these Jews may have for not being physically present in Israel” (Braverman 2009b, 342). In fact, these are only two examples among many other initiatives intended to connect the individual with the national project, reinforcing the national sense of belonging in an association of ideas that extends from the individual to the nation embodied: one pine tree equals one Jewish individual whereas one forest symbolizes the Israeli nation.

Braverman (2008) talks about a ‘totemic identification’, according to which the pine tree is the quintessential symbol of the Zionist project of afforesting the Holy Land. She suggests that there is a “perfect” connect-edness and interchangeability between Israel and pine trees. The latter is one of the indicators of Israeli State control over territory.

FIGURE 1

A JNF poster from 1950, celebrating *Tu Bishvat*,⁷ a Jewish Arbor Day holiday, including a poem in Hebrew that reads in translation: “This is the day to plant and be planted // to strike down a root // another year and another year // and here will be a grove!”.

JNF Photo Archive.



This poster (Figure 1) conveys the following message: as the saplings grow, so will the children planting them grow into a new identity, one inseparable from the land. The idea of interchangeability between trees and children/people seems rather straightforward. In fact, the representative of the JNF’s Teachers Association is quoted by Vermel and Ben-Yehuda (1957) as having said:

“Remember, children, that you do not plant trees, but people”.

Additionally, the temporal element that emanates from the poster is evident: children and trees are there to stay; a life-long link and alliance is created between the child and the tree, between Israelis and the land, in the ceremony of tree-planting – because that is what it is, a ceremony, a kind of initiation ritual of connection with the Land of Israel, land in both senses.”

Another example of interchangeability between trees and children is the fact that first names such as Ilan (tree), Oren (pine tree), Tomar and Tamas (palm tree), Amir (treetop), Elon or Allon (oak tree) are very

common in Israel (Masalha, 2015). In the early years of the Israeli state, even traditional European Jewish last names such as Rosenthal, Goldstein or Schwartz were changed to Galili and Golan (named after the Galilee and the Golan Heights), Even (stone), Sella (rock), Shamir (rock), Peled (steel), or Nir (furrow), aiming to reflect the new approach to nature, political geography, and tough masculinity (Massad 2006). The latter takes us to our next point, which is that of Jewish reinvented and reasserted masculinity.

Both Braverman and Masalha point to the relevance of understanding the Jewish diasporic past in order to understand this other symbolic attribute of pine trees. 'New Jews' (Israeli Jews) would somehow be ashamed of their image as a "submissive and passive diasporia" (Masalha 2015). Pine trees are the visual affirmation of the transformed Jews themselves. As Simon Schama wrote: "the diaspora was sand. So what should Israel be, if not a forest, fixed and tall?" (Schama 1996, 6). Zionism re-imagined the "New Hebrew" collectively in opposition to the "despised Jewish diaspora unable to resist European anti-Semitism" (Masalha 2015, 17). This led to a masculinized and militarized Israeli nationalism in opposition to a 'feminized' *other* that could either be the diaspora Jews or the Palestinians. In fact, tree planting can be considered as a 'sensual act' or as a 'moment of physical intimacy' (Braverman 2009), but moreover, it could be a phallic and fertility symbol of masculinity reaffirmation. These symbolic attributes should not be overlooked: the pine tree represents the trauma of rootlessness now 'overcome' and the masculinized new Israeli nationalism as opposed to the feminized *other*.

Redeeming and Designing the Land and the Nation

Chaim Weizmann, first President of Israel, described Palestine as a land of "rocks, marshes and sand", whose beauty could only be "brought out by those who love it" (Weizmann 1949, 371). The persistent claim that the European Jews transformed the land from a 'desert', a 'barren land' and a 'wasteland' to a 'blooming' green landscape is central to the construction of the Zionist collective memory. This interpretative framework is also verbally and visually displayed in the JNF posters, as will be shown (Figures 2, 3). In order to claim land ownership, it became important within Zionist ideology to create a whole discursive mechanism legitimizing Jewish presence and claims over land ownership. The whole lexicon around the "untamed territory" served the purpose of the repeated mantra of terra nullius: "a land without a people for a people without a land". As Berdugo (2020) states: "If Jewish stewardship is an ecological necessity, then Israel's territorial claims are legitimated".

FIGURE 2 & 3

(l.) "Give your hand to the great redemption project". Otte Wallisch, 1938, JNF.
 (r.) "Making the desert bloom". Strosky, 1950, JNF.



FIGURE 4
 "Branches of Our People".
 Otte Wallisch, 1950,
 World Zionist Organization.

Translation: "Give a hand to the revival of the nation, buy the shekel, join the World Zionist Organization!"

There seemed to be no-one taking care of nature, or no-one to 'love' it, as put by Weizman. Zionist narrative stresses the settler's heroic determination in taming the wild nature against all odds, and as Zerbavel states: "Their heroism stems from their attachment to the place, and serves as a proof of the bond between the Jew and the land" (Zerubavel 1996, 76).

The selected posters from The Palestine Poster Project

Archives (Figures 2 and 3) convey this message and serve the Zionist discourse around the Jewish heroism in making the "desert bloom".

Apart from the robust legibility of the tree, Figure 4 also conveys the message of the link between the past and the future. It can be horizontally divided by the center, presenting a chronological order of events that intentionally emblemizes a specific temporal continuity: the left side of a tree and distant landscape, which is dark, smoke-filled and features a

dead branch, represents the past, while on the right, the tree and landscape vista project a bright future that can only be achieved through the tree – as an iconic metaphor of the land and its redemption, and through Jewish identification as a people, as the Star of David shows. Therefore, and because of the interchangeability between the tree and the Jew, the transition, which is in fact the redemption of the land, must occur via the new Israeli nation. As the poster conveys, through the “shekel campaign” urging Jews to “buy the shekel” to join the WZO, the redemption of the land and Jewish “national renewal” go hand in hand.

FIGURE 5

“Forest of the Martyred Children”.
Gerd Rothschild, 1951, JNF.

On the other hand, another JNF poster from the early 1950s (Figure 5) conveys another message implying an additional layer of redemption. It announces the planting of the Forest of the Martyred Children, part of the already mentioned Martyr’s Forest (one tree planted for each person killed in the Holocaust).

Here again, the symmetrical overlapping of trees and children, whose usage is intentional as it conveys a message of both renewal and continuity, highlights the interchangeability between the two, while depicting the forest as an icon of national survival. Regarding the interchangeability and how this idea is interlinked with that of the redemption of the land – and that of the individual, one decade earlier, in 1942, even before the official creation of Israel, Kindergarten Inspector S. Fayens-Glick wrote:

When the child grows older and understands the link which exists between the tilling of the soil and the redemption of the land, the symbol, and the thing it symbolizes, will be fused together to express one single idea: the man who resurrects his land and brings about its redemption also resurrects his own self and achieves his own redemption (Fayens-Glick, as cited in Roberts 2013, 116).

The individual settler’s triumphs end up standing for the success of the nation as a whole; the individual and the collective redemption go



hand in hand. The redemption of the land is a multi-layered idea, and the poster (Figure 5) can be read alongside with the inaugural Martyrs' Forest dedicatory scroll, which reads as follows:

The Judean Hills and Jerusalem will again be rooted and afforested, again the branches of the Tree of Israel, those that were hewn in the great Holocaust and those that fell for the freedom of the nation and the land, the souls of our holy ones and our heroes will live eternally with the green trees, abundantly living to reawaken the barren land and to fertilize the exiled of the nation (Weitz, 1974, 392).

Thus, apart from the instrumental use of the Holocaust to legitimize the Zionist project, both the poster and this dedication to the Martyrs' Forest suggest the forest's triple redemptive meaning: it redeems the memory of the dead from oblivion, the land from its alleged deterioration, and Jews from their exilic past (Dolève-Gandelman 1987; Ephraim Cohen 1998; Braverman 2009b).

As settlers started to put down roots in this new homeland as a way to overcome the ideologized trauma of uprootedness, a range of possibilities emerged on how to reconfigure and redesign that so-called hollow space. Some literature suggests that there was an attempt by Zionists to recreate the Biblical environment of the Holy Land (Shoshan 2010; Masalha 2015; Braverman 2008). Based on the belief that the landscape was rich and highly afforested during Biblical times, planting trees was a means of reproducing the Garden of Eden, reintroducing nature into its 'native landscape', just like the reborn Hebrew nation. Here again, there is a clear interchangeability between a tree and a Jew, between the forest and the Israeli nation, expressing the link between the redemption of both.

By contrast, these pine tree forests should also be understood as part of the creation of an "institutionalized landscape" (Amir and Rechtman 2006, 39) alien to local vegetation and genuine manifestation of natural and local conditions. There has been a transition from a local Mediterranean landscape with its typical vegetation, traditional agriculture and villages, to East European-like forests. Geographer Arnon Golan wrote that after the Nakba:⁸ "In just two years, Palestine's traditional Middle Eastern rural landscape was transformed into a Jewish-Europeanized landscape formed according to modernist and socialist conception" (Roberts 2013). For example, there is a forest called Little Switzerland in Mount Carmel, near Haifa. The newly afforested landscape is a result of decisions connected to processes of statehood (Amir and Rechtman 2006). This particular idea of modernity associated with pine tree forests and an Israeli identity portrayed as modern and highly technological (Braverman 2008) is juxtaposed to that of the Palestinians as rural and underdeveloped.

The Olive Tree or the Palestinian Resistance

After analyzing the role of the pine, let us turn to the other tree juxtaposed here. In order to understand why the olive has become the symbol of Palestinian resistance and attachment to land, it is essential to take into account a core agricultural fact: it is estimated that 45% of arable land in Palestine is planted with olive trees (Braverman 2009, 240). Its importance within Palestinian collective consciousness and discourse seems to be proportional to its physical presence in the landscape; the discursive world and the physical one seems to go hand in hand.

Palestinian popular culture as well as art productions are full of representations conflating the identity and experience of Palestinians with that of the olive tree (Bardenstein 1998; Braverman 2009b), and these constitute processes of nation-building. As Bardenstein states: “The olive tree appears frequently in visual representations as emblematic of Palestinian rootedness and of the revered quality of *sumud* or steadfastness, an insistence upon remaining, a defiant refusal to be uprooted” (Bardenstein 1998, 29). This steadfastness is linked to the olive’s strength, drought-resistance, and the fact that it grows under poor soil conditions; it represents Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation (Ephraim Cohen 1993; Reger 2018). The two following posters (Figures 6 and 7) convey this message. Interestingly enough, they are both much more recent than all the previous JNF posters displayed. Perhaps this indicates a later consolidation of the olive tree as a symbol of the Palestinian cause, or a later widespread use of it in popular culture and therefore also in poster art.

In Figure 6 the hand holding an olive branch contrasts with the one holding a rifle, yet it is still a determined, steadfast hand. It is also worth taking into account that the olive tree is sometimes also referred to as symbolizing peace.

On the other hand, the figure of the olive tree is tightly linked to that of the peasant and of the Palestinian majoritarian condition as agriculturalists. For Swedenburg (1990), the figure of the *fallah* (peasant) has acquired a pivotal role within Palestinian nationalism, and Palestinians have taken this pastoral figure, as well as its emblematic crop, the olive tree, to construct a sense of a unified Palestinian nation, where these two symbols operate as allegories for Palestine: the land and the people’s determination to remain permanently in and upon it.

After briefly assessing how the olive symbolizes Palestinian nationhood, let us consider how, beyond that, it also embodies the Palestinian individual. This constitutes a further step, because of how strong the interchangeability is between the olive and the Palestinian. The transition



FIGURE 6 & 7

(l.) The 25th anniversary of the Palestinian revolution (text lower right): “Jerusalem”. 1990, Published by Palestine Liberation Organization. Kamal Kaabar.

(r.) Mohammed Amous, 2008, Third Olive Festival. Text under tree: “Steadfast as an olive tree ... we will not give up or be weak”. Text at bottom: “We will write on your branches with fire and light. Palestine will remain as always defiant against all forms of tyranny”.

between the nationhood and the Palestinian individual happens quite naturally, since the community is omnipresent in Palestinian collective consciousness; the exceptional situation of conflict (turned into normality) is of such an intensity that the collective commitment transcends the individual recognition or consciousness. In that sense, the olive tree symbolically represents the Palestinian nation and its historical resistance but there is also an interchangeability between the tree and the Palestinian.

As the olive groves were uncommon among Jewish settlements at first, they “signified the ‘otherness’ of the Arab: the alien, the enemy” (Golan 1997, 8). This perceived image of the tree as the enemy will serve to understand some vandalizing practices against the olive, like olive tree uprooting by settlers.

Moreover, olives are a Mediterranean autochthonous and indigenous tree (as opposed to the pine tree), just like the Palestinians, who see themselves as the legitimate indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. The intense identification of the Palestinian people with the olive tree has enabled the interchangeability between the two.

Additionally, linked to the so-repeated myth of the terra nullius, the olive tree also seems to be an accurate metaphor of Palestinian ‘invisibility’, as it is often invisible in the landscape due to its “perceived wildness” (Braverman 2009b, 322). They are easily overlooked as a cultivated tree. Thus, according to the Palestinian narrative, Palestinians are what the olive tree is in the arboreal realm of nature.

Olive Trees Bearing Witness to and Emblematising Temporal Continuity

Yet the symbolism of the olive tree goes beyond these features. Its longevity is also quite symbolic, as it allows the olive tree to operate as the most evident anchoring mechanism of Palestinian presence in the geography. As a consequence, there have been numerous attempts by Zionists to eliminate the olives from Palestinian valleys, just like they have done with the Palestinians themselves. It is a matter of ‘de-arabizing’ the land, where the idea of the interchangeability between the tree and the Palestinian is back in the equation. In that sense, the uprooting of olive trees has become the metaphoric expression for the Palestinians who have been uprooted from their land by Israeli occupation. This issue will be analyzed in greater detail below, but in fact, as Braverman explains, “through uprooting, sabotaging and denying the Palestinians access to the olive tree, Israel and the settlers have vested the olive with enormous power” (2009, 238) and have enhanced its already significant status in Palestinian narratives. These actions could also be framed within what Pappé defines as ‘cultural memoricide’, i. e. the intentional attempt to erase a group’s (cultural) memory, the “erasure of the history of one people in order to write that of another people’s over it” (Pappé 2006, 231; Rashed et al. 2014, 5).

Competing claims of rootedness between Israelis and Palestinians are expressed through the trees, the olive and the pine respectively. If planting pine trees serves as a way to overcome the uprootedness trauma of the Jews, the olive tree functions similarly for the Palestinians. For refugees, “the shock and trauma of sudden displacement is immediately linked to an association with the trees back home or with their fruit”. (Bardenstein 1998, 18). In that sense, the olive emerges as an element to hold on to, as a symbol to overcome the material uprootedness suffered by the Palestinians related to the Nakba and the ongoing conflict. That is so because olive trees live hundreds of years, and so their longevity represents Palestinian presence and attachment to land for centuries. It points up, embodies and emblematises temporal continuity and it is a passive observer of history, yet sometimes actively involved in it. As Abufarha states: “the olive tree provides a medium for a transitive reciprocity amongst Palestinians that regenerates peoplehood fused with its land and past and future generations” (Abufarha 2008, 358). The olive tree is a way for Palestinians to connect to the land

across time, and through a cross-generational reciprocity, as the new generations are committed to planting new olive trees for future ones, since the olive trees planted by their ancestors have fed them. It is a matter of a specific historical collective responsibility and memory. In 1988, a poster of the Israeli Communist Party MAKI⁹ (Figure 8) exemplifies this idea. In fact, it also seems to perfectly match the idea emanating from the following quote from al-Taḥer: “You may enjoy an orange grove in your lifetime, and your son may enjoy it for part of his lifetime. But enjoy now what your forefathers left to you, and to your children, and to the descendants of their grandchildren — the olive tree — for as long as God wills” (al-Taḥer 1947, 66).

The fact that it has endured for centuries and despite all the adversities makes it once again the core symbol of steadfast resistance. But the olive tree is not only a symbol of the past; its temporality expresses a connection between the past and the present, operating as a bond between the two, and perhaps the future.



FIGURE 8
“From generation to generation”, Israel Communist Party (MAKI), 1988.

Salah, a Palestinian farmer interviewed by a BBC journalist who was doing a report about olive oil in Palestine, commented on one of his trees: “Only God knows how old it is. But it might be around 4,000 years or more. I am honoured to be this tree’s servant. The connection goes back to my father and grandfather. I feel so connected to this tree, it’s as if it’s part of my body and soul.” (BBC 2014). The olive tree is “a friendly sister of eternity, neighbor of time”, as in the poem “The Second Olive Tree” by Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), often referred to as the main Palestinian national poet (Hacker 2016).

Moreover, at the intersection between past and present, memory plays a relevant role. Due to its longevity, the olive tree has been given the role of a witness, which is ubiquitous within Palestinian collective memory. As Bardenstein states: “[i]t is presumed that the olive tree will survive the tragedies, outlive both perpetrators and victims, and remain to tell the tale, and as such, is the most appropriate repository for Palestinian memory.” (Bardenstein 1998, 28). It testifies to the past existence of destroyed Palestinian villages, operating

as a living proof that the villages had once been there, since traditionally olive trees delimited the village, its houses and terrains (Bardenstein 1998). The olive tree is thus a witness bearing memory, which in turn is articulated as a driving force for Resistance.

On the other hand, its symbolic dimension intertwines with its materiality and natural shape when the olives grow. The seasonal activity of olive harvesting can be described as a cultural event or family affair (Reger 2018), as a symbolic yet physical and practical moment of intimacy with the land. Moreover, and as a signal of the extent to which the olive harvest is a “communal affair” (Abufarha 2008), during the first Intifada, Palestinian institutions like universities and schools closed during the harvest season to allow all sectors of society and all family members to participate in this highly symbolic event; the olive harvest role as that of national expression was strengthened. Nonetheless, olive harvesting is often disrupted by Israeli Defense Forces. When Palestinian trees are trapped behind the fence, harvesting becomes very complicated, as permits to visit olive groves are very short in time limit, and attacks on farmers and trees increase.

A War of Trees

In order to assess the role of trees in the struggle over land in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is relevant not only to take into account their symbolic dimension, but also their physical one, as they are in fact used to contest and declare land ownership and even as warfare tools, which is what this last section will focus on. Because of the centrality of the land in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is not surprising that the landscape becomes an important object of contention. Both parts – the symbolic and the material one – cannot be understood separately.

As a starting point to understand the dynamics of the “cycle of tree warfare” (Boerner 2011), the 1858 Ottoman Land Code has to be taken into account. Article 78 states that “everyone who has possessed and cultivated [Miri] land for ten years without dispute acquires a right by prescription [...] and shall be given a new title deed gratuitously” (Ottoman Land Code 1858). “Miri” land refers to land, which is not registered as privately owned, yet, the very categorization of “miri” land is already quite problematic in historical terms. After the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, the Israeli military authority froze all land registration procedures, leaving more than two-thirds of the land unregistered, and therefore open to dispute (Braverman 2008).

Taking into account Article 78 is important, since it will help to understand the dynamics of tree-planting and tree-destruction that is necessary to analyze in depth. Article 78, which has to be understood within a framework of continuation and adaptation of Ottoman laws by

the successor regimes in Palestine (Ephraim-Cohen 1993), was initially conceived as a way to encourage and strengthen individual cultivation in the Ottoman period, especially in those areas distant from direct Ottoman imperial control. It relies on John Locke's conception that the land belongs to those who cultivate it. Yet its application nowadays has been distorted, as the Israeli military authority largely uses it so as to declare non-cultivated lands as state land. It is used as a way to enable Palestinian land to be transferred to Jewish hands in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank, as it is only still in force there, in areas B and C, which are largely rural. Article 78 therefore serves as the perfect legal instrument for Israel to declare state land, for the purpose of later establishing Jewish settlements. As a result of this strategy, between 1979 and 1993, Israel declared more than 40% of the lands in the West Bank as state land (Braverman 2008), after supposedly demonstrating that it has remained uncultivated for 10 years or more. Occasionally Palestinians have also profited from this legislation, especially through the olive trees. This should not be disregarded, as trees are used as a way to assert ownership.

First of all, and as a way of understanding the role of olive trees in this legal framework, it is necessary to concretize how cultivation is defined. In the Ottoman Land Code, fruit trees are the only form of tree cultivation. Therefore, since the 1990s, Palestinians have started some sort of community tree-planting campaigns as an intentional appropriation of what Israelis do through the JNF. They undertake olive tree planting in the West Bank as a way to reclaim land, and to do so, they sometimes plant trees that are already more than 10 years old (Braverman 2008). These sorts of practices are used on an increasing regular basis, which Bardenstein describes as "a kind of Palestinian Tu Bi'shvat" (1998, 32) – a reference to the ancient Jewish holiday, the "New Year for the Tree", which in Israel and within world Jewry has become a kind of Arbor Day (Zuroff 2011).

'The West Bank Tree Carnival'

Consequently, and in order to stop such practices and avoid their subsequent legal repercussions, Israel has developed control mechanisms involving olive tree uprooting. Israeli inspectors execute detailed visual surveys of the West Bank to detect Palestinian 'tree invasions.' They are in charge of uprooting the tree if they can prove that it is less than 10 years old. Braverman (2008) interviews some of these inspectors, who expressed that uprooting such olive trees is a patriotic act to them, a way to protect or safeguard Israeli land. One of them was Chief inspector Kishik, who happens to be an Orthodox settler. In a highly revealing statement that illuminates again the interchangeability between the tree

and the Palestinians, when asked about the contradiction of uprooting trees (according to Jewish scripture, Deuteronomy 20:20), one is not allowed to uproot fruit trees even in war times), he stated:

“It’s not like the tree is the enemy’s property, in which case the Bible tells you not to uproot it because it has nothing to do with the fight. Here it has everything to do with it. The tree is the enemy soldier” (Braverman 2008, 464).

Rabbi Ascherman, from Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli human rights organization, describes this performativity loop around the trees to reclaim land as “the West Bank tree carnival” (Braverman 2008). The following paragraph by Braverman seems to encompass all the dimensions and actors involved in this process:

“All [actors involved] are speaking the same language: a mixture of official and vernacular narratives in which the acts of planting and uprooting trees say something important about the status of the contested land. Instead of shouting ‘This land is mine!’ or announcing, ‘This land is definitely not yours!’ all relevant actors participate in commonly understood performances of tree planting and uprooting” (Braverman 2008, 478).

This has recently become more apparent with the role of new actors in the West Bank, namely the new settlers. The kind of olive tree uprooting that has received most attention is not that conducted by the Israeli state itself, which also happens – especially for alleged security reasons, for the construction of fences or barriers, and so on – but the one carried out by these settlers. They conduct the “tree warfare” (Braverman 2009, 250), thus adding another convoluted layer to the already complex land struggle performed through the trees.

The settlers vandalize olive trees either by burning or breaking them. They are radical Zionists who live in outposts declared to be illegal by Israel, usually in clusters of trailers. Within this “olive warfare” they burn olive trees in retaliation for evacuation of outposts, in order to then use this as a way to legitimize their future claims over land ownership. For example, Fields (2012) tells the story of Mahmoud, a Palestinian peasant whose olive trees were burnt by neighbor settlers. Mahmoud asks the security officer for the settlement why he allows the settlers to do such a thing, to which the latter responds: “They are tending the land”. As Fields points out: “burning Palestinian crops is a legitimate practice of cultivation; an affirmation of both an imagined geography and a legal geography that has delegitimized Palestinian presence on the landscape” (Fields 2012, 281).

Interestingly enough, as Fields points out, settlers also plant olive trees as a tactic of seizing land, specifically in the West Bank. The olive tree would seem not to be exclusively Palestinian anymore; Braverman

interviewed a Palestinian man who grieved: “they even steal our symbol” (Braverman 2008, 475). As Braverman states: “instead of the rivalry between pine and olive people, the national war now involves a much tighter contest between various nuances of olive treescaping”. In this context, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish famously described the situation: “If the olive trees knew the hands that planted them, their oil would become tears” (PaliRoots 2017).

In visual depictions of the Palestinian struggle, the following photo (Figure 10), taken after the woman’s olive trees were destroyed in 1990, soon became iconic in Palestinian visual culture. Olive uprooting has enhanced the symbolic role of the tree as that of Resistance. The photo is titled “If the tree knew”, echoing Darwish’s above-mentioned and often-cited quote.



FIGURE 10
Published by the Palestinian Peasant Union
in 1990.

The olive has historically been one of Palestine’s most lucrative activities, and by 2011 it was estimated that olive trees accounted for nearly 45% of cultivated land in Palestine (UN 2011). Given that agriculture accounts for nearly 25% of GDP, it can be stated that olives are an important element of the Palestinian economy (WB 2006). Within the context of a high unemployment rate in Palestine, olive picking has become one of the main sources of income for many. As already stated, olive harvesting is conducted manually by family units, and some estimates suggest that in fact about 100,000 families depend to some extent upon the olive harvest for their livelihoods (WB 2006).

Therefore, the uprooting of olive trees sabotages the ability of entire families to support themselves, more so as unemployment is rampant; it is used as a way to undermine the economic potential of Palestinians, and as a way to prevent refugees’ return.

Covering Over the Ruins of Destroyed Palestinian Villages

One of the most controversial aspects of pine tree forests is that of covering the ruins of destroyed Palestinian villages during the Nakba.

According to Noga Kadman's study, of the 418 villages depopulated and demolished during the 1948 war, almost half (182 in particular) are now situated in different nature sites, such as forests, parks, or nature reserves (Kadman 2008). Specifically, the JNF planted forests on approximately 86 Palestinian destroyed villages, most of which were razed before the planting (Tal 2013). Michal Kortoza, who supervised signage in the new forests at the JNF, said in an interview with the right-wing Israeli newspaper *Eretz Israel Shelanu*: "Many of the JNF parks are on land where Arab villages were once located, and the forests were planted as camouflage" (Zochrot 2008).

Afforestation has been used as a mechanism for expropriating land, and after the Nakba, forests were used as a way of preventing refugees from returning and as a way of erasing their memory from the landscape (Masalha 2015; Järvi 2010; Abu-Sitta 2010; Berdugo 2020). Forests operate as "sites of amnesia and erasure" (Banivanua and Edmonds 2010), which is linked to Hobsbawn's idea of "inventing tradition" (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) and to what Masalha describes as a "process of ethno-nationalisation and reinvention of the past" (Masalha 2015). This is congruent with what Berdugo claims: "[t]he 250 million trees planted in Israel over the past century are part of a coordinated program to maintain a continuous visual field which includes some political subjects and excludes others" (Berdugo 2020). The tactic is that of 'creating facts on the ground' (Ephraim Cohen 1993), and planting trees is used as a way to do so, as it asserts a message of continuity, erasing the Palestinian presence and factually denying the Nakba. The Israeli architect Malkit Shoshan, who discussed landscaping issues in a state of conflict in her book *Atlas of the Conflict*, noted: "[t]o plan, design and construct a building takes years. To destroy a whole country and build another one on top of it took a couple of decades" (Shoshan 2010). In that sense, two memories and two (imaginative) geographies are opposed and expressed through the pine and the olive tree, in the sense of "imaginative geographies" described by Edward Said as "the invention and construction of a geographical space [...] with scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitant" (Said 2000, 247). Trees can build and bear memories or erase that of *others*.

In that sense, it is not a coincidence that Israel is the only country in the world that has more trees in the 21st century than 100 years ago (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website). The JNF has created national parks, nature reserves, gardens and other protected landscapes, and after 1948, it was repackaged as an environmentalist organization enjoying charitable status, entitled thus to tax-exemption. Buying refugee land, covering the ruins of Palestinian villages and acting on behalf of the Israeli state

while keeping it under an international (Jewish) organization was conceived as a way to avoid international pressure advocating for the return of the refugees to their land (Abu-Sitta 2010; Quiquívix 2014). The environmental framing is a perfect mechanism of “greenwashing” (Braverman, 2009b), as nature is commonly conceived as benign. How can one oppose tree planting in a context where there is growing environmental and ecological awareness, and where trees, let alone forests, appear as the perfect symbol of eco-sustainability?

Fire Intifadas

If pine forests are the ultimate symbol of the Zionist project and are a living assertion of Jewish rootedness in the country, burning them becomes the way to deny and oppose such ideas. The Israeli strategy of tree planting triggered a Palestinian counter-response of destruction of trees, including in some instances setting forests on fire. The materiality and symbolism of trees are two sides of the same coin that in fact serve to shed light on each other.

It is estimated that the amount of arson cases rose in the late 1980s, related to the first Intifada (1987-1993). Fire was used as a highly visible action expressing resistance against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. For example, in 1987, out of the 3,709 recorded fires, 519 were categorized as caused by arson. In 1994, one year after the official end of the Intifada, the number of fires supposedly caused by arson went down to 153 (out of a total of 764) (JNF 1995). In 1988, JNF’s spokesperson, David Angel, stated: “This year, there is no doubt that the vast areas that were burned were fires set by people inspired by the intifada” (Los Angeles Times 1988), after JNF Chairman Mashe Rivlin, on a similar note, referred to the proliferation of arson cases as the “Intifada against trees” (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 1998).

Although the fires did not exclusively target forests, these soon were put under the spotlight, drawing public attention to the national significance of trees and forests. Accordingly, the JNF started a new campaign entitled “A Tree for a Tree”, which is suggestive of the quintessential vindictive and Biblical phrase of “an eye for an eye”. The campaign called for the replacement of a million burned trees (Zerubavel 1996).

In 2016, there were again many fires, and soon allegations of “fire terrorism” resurfaced, reminiscent of that time of the Intifada. Between the 19th and 28th of November 2016, there were 2,652 separate incidents of fires in Israel, as weather conditions were particularly conducive to this (dry weather and unusually strong winds), in addition to JNF’s huge monospecies forests, that contribute to the fast spread of fires. Qumsiyeh (2016) also stresses that central in JNF tree-planting over decades “was

the highly flammable European pine tree [...] Resinous pine is like petrol and burns with a ferocity". It is believed that 50 of the 2,652 fires started as a result of arson, particularly those in the West Bank, next to Jewish settlements. (The Times of Israel 2016). Rhetoric linking arson to terrorism became commonplace, further heating up the ambience, although the number of arson cases were relatively low. Gilad Erdan, Israel's public security minister, told an Israeli radio channel that the assessment was that around half of the fires were caused by arson (The New York Times 2016). Education Minister Naftali Bennett, leader of the right-wing Jewish Home party, hinted at seditious Palestinian involvement. He stated: "This a major wave of arson... Terrorism in every sense of the word" (The Times of Israel, 2016), and then tweeted: "Only those to whom the country does not belong are capable of burning it" (BBC 2016), although the Palestinian Authority sent some fire engines to help tackling the fires. Prime Minister Netanyahu also stated: "Any fire caused by arson or incitement to arson is terrorism". These declarations were later proven to be overblown (The Times of Israel 2016b), if not "almost entirely baseless" (+972 Magazine 2019). At least 35 people were arrested on suspicion of committing arson, yet police officials told the media that nationalistic motives in such incidents were far from being definitively concluded (The Times of Israel 2016c).

What was clear after the fires were extinguished was that the claims about terrorism were premature, and even exaggerated for political purposes. Yet whether these claims were true or excessive, the sole fact of considering this option already illustrates the idea of the forest as an allegory for Zionism; an attack on the forest is perceived as an attack on the Israeli nation. Surprisingly or not, as a response to the alleged arson wave, Avigdor Lieberman, former Defense Minister, called for expanding West Bank settlements (The Times of Israel 2016).

In an interview with The Times of Israel, when asked about the JNF action lines after the 2016 fires, and whether the conception was now to replant entire destroyed forests, Chanoch Zoref, the forest supervisor for the JNF in the Judean Hills region, stated that "the obsession with planting trees harkens back to an outdated vision of 'JNF Zionism' that is no longer relevant" (Times of Israel 2016b). He stressed that the JNF does not 'really' plant trees anymore. This is a quite surprising and interesting statement, as during the fires, the JNF sent donation requests, urging people to donate to their emergency fund called "Rebuild. Replant. Restore". Nonetheless, Zoref's statement makes sense: Israeli roots, through the forests, seem already well entrenched. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether this statement really illustrates the main JNF guidelines. It remains to be confirmed whether there has been a change in paradigm, and this is just a discursive element, a heritage of years of planting the

land to “make it bloom” – or if, by contrast, the “an eye for an eye” logic still prevails. It is still to be assessed what the new JNF strategy is, since so few years have passed. Yet, the relevance of forests as national signifiers is undeniable.

Conclusion

As a matter of fact, olive and pine trees are often considered to be perfect opposites, both agronomically and culturally (Braverman 2009, 238). They can actually grow next to each other, as they need the same sort of soil, which does not have to be particularly rich in minerals. Yet when planted among olive trees, the tall and rapidly growing pines can end up overshadowing and depriving the smaller olive trees of oxygen. The analogy between these two trees and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over land seems to be quite accurate.

This article has first analyzed the aura of symbolism that envelops the olive and pine trees in order to understand their role as national symbols, and then assessed how these two trees are in fact used as instruments of warfare in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On the symbolic plane, as emphasized throughout the article, the pine tree serves as a perfect metaphor, indeed icon, for the Zionist project. It is relevant to stress once again the conceptual shift from the pine tree to the forest. Many of the already mentioned policies sponsored by the JNF are quite revealing in symbolic terms, as per example planting a tree in Israel for each newborn Jew. It suggests a connection between the individual and the nation as it is linked to the notions of life and renewal. It reinforces the national sense of belonging in an association of ideas that extends from the individual to the nation embodied; one pine tree equals one Jewish individual, whereas one forest symbolizes the Israeli nation. On the other hand, the olive tree represents Palestinian Resistance and attachment to the land over centuries. Due to its longevity, it operates as a bond between the past and the present, and becomes a witness bearing memory, which in turn is articulated as a driving force for resistance. As expressed in Palestinian discourse and conveyed traditionally in its popular culture, the olive tree has resisted all misfortunes thanks to its characteristic steadfastness, and has passed from generation to generation, which makes it the symbol not only of the Palestinian individual, but of Palestinian nationhood. The transition from the individual to the nation is clear in both cases, which makes both the pine and the olive tree national symbols.

Yet their role in this conflict is barely just metaphorical. In material actuality, these trees have ended up converted into warfare tools and have been instrumentalized for the purpose of land acquisition. For example, Israeli pine forests have historically been used as a way of erasing other's memories, as they cover the ruins of the demolished Palestinian villages

and operate as a perfect mechanism of “greenwashing”. In that sense, when assessing the role of trees in the struggle over land in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is relevant not only to take into account their symbolic dimension, but also the physical one. Because of the centrality of the land in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is not surprising that the landscape becomes an important object of contention. Focusing on the representational dimension of these trees and overlooking the material layer might play at the expense of a broader understanding of the iconic role these two trees play in the conflict. But is their symbolic status enhanced by their instrumental usage in the conflict – or are they, on the other hand, used as warfare tools because of their symbolic meaning? It is believed – and perhaps as a way to avoid stumbling into the proverbial chicken-and-egg dilemma – that this is a vicious circle that feeds backwards. If the olive tree has acquired such relevance in the discourse of Palestinian resistance, or if the pine tree represents the Israeli project to take roots in this land to such an extent, it is partly because of the strikingly ‘active’ role these trees have taken in the conflict, and vice versa. Perhaps Israeli settlers would not burn down or uproot olive trees if they did not know what their meaning and relevance for Palestinians families is. As analyzed here, both dimensions, the symbolic and the material one, need to be taken into account simultaneously in order to have a holistic understanding of how these two trees are utilized in a performative way to reclaim land, both conceptually and physically. Considering both dimensions interspersed is an added value of this research.

To conclude, both the olive and the pine tree are instruments of national assertion, bearers of national memories, symbols of collective identities, and markers of ownership over a contested land and its soil. This is enhanced and (re)created in national discourses and popular culture, the article’s central focus. It remains to be assessed to what extent Palestinians and Israelis might actually experience something “more-than-representation” (Müller 2015), since these trees seem to embody national identities to such a degree that they have been attributed with the ability to stimulate and stir a wide range of emotions and affectual associations. Yet as has been shown, Palestinians are linked to the olive with an unparalleled intense emotionality that seems to outweigh that of the bond between the Israeli and the pine. Or perhaps that is only and inevitably my own personal impression, as I could not avoid finding myself involved in the emotional entanglement of these trees, in particular that of the olive tree.

The fact that the olive tree is the symbol of Palestine is indisputable, as this article has sought to demonstrate and underscore. Nevertheless, a certain appropriation of the olive by Jewish Israelis seems to take place, which has to be understood within the framework of the olive being

considered as a sacred tree, therefore praised by many religions and thought of as a peace symbol. For example, the olive color is defined as the official color of Israeli military uniform, and the military ranks are represented by olive branches (Braverman, 2009). Braverman laments: “At the end of the day, then, the olive’s role as a peace tree does not seem to offer a way out of the national bifurcation of landscape performed in Israel/Palestine” (Braverman 2009, 207). Additionally, there is a relatively recent trend among wealthy Israelis consisting of planting 100-year-old olive trees in the gardens of their villas as decorative embellishing additions, instead of having some large artistic sculptures. Most of the time, these olive trees happen to have been uprooted and thus purloined from Palestinian land or purchased from the owner for a small sum in recompense, and then smuggled out and sold for thousands of Euros to affluent Jewish Israelis (Haaretz 2011; The Telegraph 2002), veritably a dubious form of “olive tree trafficking”. This inevitably brings us back to Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s memorable verse: “If the olive trees knew, [...] their oil would become tears” (PaliRoots 2017). The olive tree is often also claimed by the Jewish side, but it seems like the powerful emotional bonding of Palestinians with the olive tree will persist this appropriation.

Notes

- 1 Har-Homa is an illegal Israeli settlement, as declared by the United Nations (UN 1997).
- 2 Both pleonasm “olive tree” and “pine tree” will be used when referring to these trees, first to avoid confusion with the fruit of the olive tree, but also because that is how the consulted sources usually refer to them.
- 3 When studying the trees in Palestine/Israel and their symbolic meaning, the olive and pine trees appeared unquestionably as the two opposed national symbols, but I found out that other trees such as the orange tree and the Sabra cactus were also used as disputed national symbols. As they are ambivalent symbols, they are not used as war tools, therefore I could not use them for my research. Nonetheless, I believe that their role in asserting national meaning is relevant. Much more could be said about these trees and about their role in the discursive battlefield, but due to time and space limitations, it has not been possible to cover the entire landscape dynamics as political constructs in this article.
- 4 The Palestine Poster Project Archives started as a personal collection by Daniel J. Walsh in the 1980s, and ended up turning into a web-based ‘Archive’ displaying more than 6,000 posters in a searchable format, providing translation, background information and interpretation for most of them. The archives gather posters from around 1900 until the present day, retrieved from the Liberation Graphics collection, the Library of Congress, the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, the International

Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Yale University, the University of Chicago and a host of other sources. See the website: <https://palestineproject.org>.

- 5 Jewish National Fund (to be later introduced).
- 6 The dunam was the Ottoman unit of area. In Israel, 1 dunam = 1000 square meters or about 1/4 acre.
- 7 Tu Bishvat etymologically means the 15th day of the 5th month of the Jewish calendar in Hebrew, and is therefore derived from the date of the holiday.
- 8 Nakba, which in Arabic means “catastrophe”, refers to the expulsion of about half of Palestine’s Arab population during the 1948 war, and the transformation of those remaining into refugees or ‘incomplete’ citizens in their homeland.
- 9 MAKI was an anti-Zionist joint Jewish-Arab political party that split in the 1980s, and is now represented in the Israeli Knesset in the party Hadash.

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