

(EN)PLANTING ISRAEL:
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND FORESTRY AND
THE NATURALISATION OF ZIONISM

by:

JOANNA CLAIRE LONG

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Abstract

This thesis discusses Jewish National Fund (JNF) forestry initiatives and the ways in which they have worked to naturalise the Zionist colonisation of Palestine by constructing the discursive and physical invisibility of the Palestinians in the landscape. Trees are widely perceived as being sources of incontrovertible good, ideas which JNF has played on and actively mobilised to garner support for its activities and to conceal their deeply ideological and political work. Afforestation schemes have been central to Zionist settlement in Palestine since the early twentieth century, with tree-planting promoted as central to 'developing' the 'barren and neglected landscape.' Through primary analysis of Jewish children's literature, historical newspaper articles published in Jerusalem, and literature produced by JNF and its representatives, I demonstrate how the previously marginal Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat was resurrected and co-opted in order to mobilise moral and financial support for these afforestation initiatives, particularly among children. With the declaration of Israel and the opening of the Knesset, I also show how imagery surrounding trees and the Tu B'Shvat themes of 'rooting' and 'awakening' resonate with other notions of the Jewish people being rooted in the soil of Palestine and in History, as well as being awakened from Diaspora dormancy along with the Middle East, which is perceived as awakening from pre-modern ignorance. Finally I argue that the trees themselves, particularly those planted over the remains of Palestinian villages depopulated and demolished during the 1948 war, construct the physical invisibility of the Palestinians by literally obscuring evidence of their previous existence on the same land. I suggest that all of this work is undertaken out of a desire to resurrect an idealised, *fetishised*, ancient Israeli subject using the tree as a fetish object.

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Any tree can grow in rich well-watered soil. It is only the righteous who can grow in circumstances like the salty sand dunes and the rocky soil of the Lebanon. For they cast their roots deep down and draw sustenance from the hidden depths

L. I. Rabinowitz

‘Tora and Flora: Palms in the Wilderness’

The Jerusalem Post, Friday 31st January 1969

Chapter 1 : Introducing the Jewish National Fund

A few months ago, I visited the small library at UBC's Hillel House in an effort to find out more about the Jewish New Year for Trees, Tu B'Shvat. I was attempting to look this festival up in Encyclopædia Judaica but, due to a momentary mental block as to where 'T' came in the alphabet, I ended up taking down and putting back every volume on the shelf other than the one I actually needed. A kind young man who was working at the library's computer asked if I needed help finding something. "Information on Tu B'Shvat," I replied, "and a crash course in the ABC." He suggested the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia but the volume I wanted appeared to be missing. He then asked why I was interested in Tu B'Shvat, to which I replied that I was writing my thesis on symbolism in Jewish National Fund forestry. "Not many trees in Israel," he said, adding with a hint of pride, "more than there used to be, though."

This young man's words struck a chord. Indeed, he seemed to have articulated exactly what this thesis was all about: the 'fact' that one hundred years ago Palestine-Israel was largely devoid of trees, that this state of affairs is being rectified, and that pride should be taken in those reforestation efforts. There is a sense of righteousness at work here, a notion that the relative scarcity of trees in Palestine-Israel 'before' was somehow wrong and the increased number of trees in Israel today is a necessarily good thing. Seated as he was beneath a poster for the Jewish National Fund, the young man and I both knew to whom that afforestation should be attributed, although we would almost certainly have differed in our opinions as to the laudability of those activities.

In the following pages I will unpack that young man's pride, exploring the ideas surrounding trees and tree planting in Israel, how those ideas are produced and sustained, and what practices they are mobilised to support and legitimise. Specifically, I argue that trees, tree-planting, and the resulting forests are meant to naturalise the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, to naturalise the presence of Jewish settlers and the existence of the State of Israel. In so doing, the trees simultaneously work to *de*-naturalise the Palestinians and Palestinian history, de-legitimising their claims to the same land. Put another way, I argue that discourses of trees, nature and environmentalism are mobilised to assert an incontrovertible belonging, to establish the presence of the Jews and the State of Israel as not only 'righteous' but as altogether beyond question. As such, I am constructing an historical picture of how Israel's forests were (and are) *given* to be seen, were *made* visible, have become *seeable* in particular ways by particular people. My focus is on political-Zionist ideas promulgated by the Jewish National Fund, Israel's primary afforestation body, its representatives and supporters. I am particularly interested in how the Jewish 'New Year for Trees' has been co-opted by these ideas, and how that festival is being put to work within Zionist discourse. More broadly, I am keen to explore how the imagery of trees, tree-planting, and forests helps to construct ideas about Israel and Israeli-ness, as well as ideas about Palestine and Palestinian-ness, by necessary association. Before elaborating further on this, I will set out the general background of the Jewish National Fund, the reasons for and circumstances of its establishment, the principles which guide it, and the kinds of work it has been engaged in over its one hundred-year history.

Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) was established in 1901 as the executive arm of the World Zionist Organisation.¹ Its aim was to assist colonisation of Palestine by raising money for the purchase of lands and for the settlement of Jews, providing a foothold for the future establishment of a Jewish State. The idea of creating this kind of fund was first conceived by Rabbi Judah Alkalai in 1840. He recommended the establishment of a fund for the acquisition and retention of land in Palestine and for the settlement of Jews, as well as the formation of an Assembly of Jewish Notables to represent the Jewish people in negotiations and to organise colonisation. These ideas were echoed by Hermann Schapira, a rabbi and mathematics professor, during his address to the First Zionist Congress, held in Basel in August 1897. This was the first time a national fund had been formally suggested and delegates responded well to the idea of an inexhaustible fund whose lands, purchased in the name of the Jewish people, would be inalienable (Lehn 1988).

The chairman of that Congress, Theodor Herzl, had similar ideas to Schapira but did not share his support for the 'Lovers of Zion' organisation which had, for a number of years, been advocating and advancing Jewish settlement in Palestine. Herzl considered these settlement efforts to be legally insecure since they lacked recognition from the Ottoman authorities (Lehn 1988). Besides, he had his own political agenda to advance: Herzl was hoping to obtain a charter from the Turkish Sultan for the establishment of a Jewish state, and in his view only when this had been achieved would a 'general-national' fund be required in order to assist secure

¹ Founded in 1897 as the 'Zionist Organization' (renamed the 'World Zionist Organisation' in 1960) this body set up companies and institutions to advance its goals of establishing "a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, secured under public law." With the end of the First World War and the installation of the British Mandatory Government in Palestine, the ZO was given the status of a Jewish Agency to represent the Jewish people vis-à-vis the Mandatory government and to cooperate with it in establishing a Jewish State (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

and concerted Jewish immigration to Palestine (KKL 1). Herzl therefore attempted to stifle discussion of Schapira's fund proposal at the First Zionist Congress, instead promoting his own suggestions for the establishment of a 'Society of Jews' (which would become the World Zionist Organisation) and a 'Jewish Company' or bank (which would become the Jewish Colonial Trust Limited). But word had travelled around the congress about this 'national fund' proposal and Herzl was under increasing pressure from delegates to allow Schapira's ideas to be heard, pressure to which he finally gave in during the afternoon session on the last day of the congress. A committee was subsequently set up to evaluate the various proposals, including Schapira's, and to draw up a plan of action for the next Zionist Congress (Lehn 1988).

Although Herzl's recommendations for the establishment of a Jewish bank were approved at the next Zionist Congress, the creation of a national fund was not discussed again until the Fourth Congress, which was held in London in August 1900. This time Johann Kremenetzky, an industrialist and electrical engineer from Vienna, presented a draft fundraising proposal on behalf of the Small Actions Committee, but delegates were unhappy with the ambiguous legal status of the fund since it remained in the hands of the committee which was not a legally constituted body. Official adoption was therefore deferred until the committee had prepared and presented the fund's statutes at the next Congress. When the committee came back at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, December 1901, the debate continued over the legal status of the fund and it seemed as though delegates would once again approve it only 'in principle,' deferring a final decision for a third time. Eventually it was Herzl himself who took charge of the debate and forced a decision by asking "Shall the national fund be created immediately?" (Lehn 1988). In the Fund's retelling of that evening, Herzl continued:

"Yours is the power to decide whether to postpone the establishment of the fund for another two years or until the coming of the Messiah!" And from all corners of the hall came a roaring chorus of "No! No!"...Congress delegates cast their ballots. A hush fell over the hall: as if here, at this moment, the

fate of the land of Israel and the Zionist Movement hung on the scales. When Herzl announced the results...stormy applause rocked the hall. At 7:40 p.m. on December 29, 1901, the 19 Tevet 5638 according to the Hebrew calendar, Herzl proclaimed: "The Jewish National Fund has been created" (KKL 1 p2)

Founding principles

The Fund was given the Hebrew name 'Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel,' which is not a literal translation of 'Jewish National Fund' but means basically the same thing: Perpetual Fund/Capital for Israel² (Lehn 1988). Its founding principle was that the lands acquired could not be sold, only leased, and leased only to Jews.³ This principle was derived from Leviticus 25:23 which states that "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and settlers with Me." In this understanding, the land belongs to God and those who dwell on it do so at God's discretion. Indeed, God is believed to have assigned particular people to particular territories as well as particular families to particular plots of land (see Figure 1.1). Since the land belongs to God it is not permitted, indeed it is impossible, for these 'original,' divinely-ordained individuals or groups to sell their land. Rather they are permitted to sell the *right to use* the land at any time during a 49 year period. In the 50th (Jubilee) year, the land reverts to its 'original' owner either by sale or by default, a system intended to prevent monopolies and to promote greater social and economic equality (Lehn 1988; Kark 1992).

The restoration of the original, divinely-ordained people-land relationship is referred to as 'redemption' and the original owners here are understood to be the Jews, to whom God promised

² Jewish National Fund (JNF) and Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel (KKL, pronounced ka-KAL) are used interchangeably here. The Fund refers to itself as KKL-JNF.

³ These discriminatory practices continue today, although Israel's Attorney General recently ruled that their exercise should disqualify the Fund from receiving state assistance. Chairman Yehiel Leket replied that "The state is obliged to treat all its citizens equally...but we are not the state." The Fund is currently in talks with the government to sever their official relationship. In watershed, Israel deems land-use rules of Zionist icon "discriminatory"

Nathaniel Popper Forward 4th February 2005

the Land of Canaan (Israel). However, after the Jews were exiled by the Romans in 70 C.E. the redemption of the people-land relationship became impossible without the physical return of the Jewish people to their homeland. But since the exile was perceived as a punishment from God, it was believed that only a divine miracle would redeem the Jewish people by returning them to Israel. God would do this in His own time and any attempts by humans to play God or to force His hand were considered not only arrogant but idolatrous, and some rabbis went so far as to condemn 'excessive praying' for return (Lehn 1988). By the nineteenth century, however, there were increasing calls for human efforts to facilitate a return to Israel with the expectation that a messianic miracle would follow. These calls no doubt gathered greater support with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the subsequent attacks on Jews (pogroms), and the increase of anti-Semitic sentiments in Europe more generally (Leoussi and Aberbach 2002).

The non-religious Theodor Herzl seized upon this shift in thinking to advance his own political agenda, redefining concepts of 'return,' 'redemption,' and 'Zion' in specifically political and national terms, and replacing God as the omnipotent administrator of the people-land relationship with the State (Lehn 1988; see Figure 1.1). In other words, the redemption of the Jewish people through the restoration of the original people-land relationship was transformed from a miracle of God to a miracle of the sovereign state. It was thus a miracle which humans had the power to bring about by purchasing land in Palestine and (re)settling Jews there. This was the purpose of the Jewish National Fund and for Zionists its creation marked "the moment that Zionism actually set foot in Erez Israel⁴ – not by mere words, declarations,

⁴ Erez/Eretz Israel/Yisrael means "land of Israel" in Hebrew, which in Jewish thought refers to the area believed to have been promised to the Jewish people by God (Jewish Virtual Library 2004). In order to acknowledge the different interpretations of the same area of land, I use 'Eretz Israel' when discussing perceptions which view Palestine as the Holy homeland of the Jews. Similarly, I use 'Israel' to refer only to the State of Israel and 'Palestine' to refer to the entire region which is now comprised of Israel and the Occupied Territories.

debates, and resolutions, but by land reclamation via a national fund of and on behalf of the Jewish People” (KKL 1 p1).

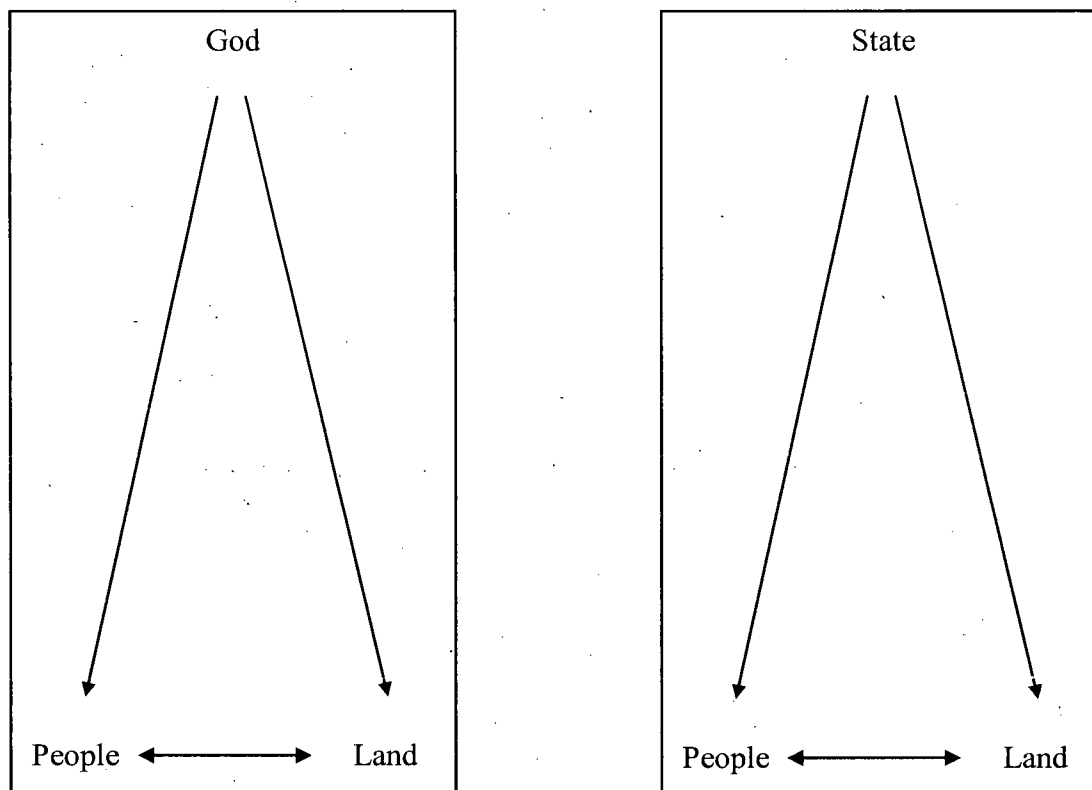


Figure 1.1: ‘Traditional’ and political-Zionist God-people-land triads (Adapted from Kark 1992)

The Fund in action

The Jewish National Fund began work almost immediately, with the newly-appointed Director, Kremenetzky, setting up office in Vienna and initiating three primary fundraising schemes: JNF stamps, the Blue Box, and the Golden Book. The stamps (Figure 1.2) depicted landscapes in Eretz Israel and could be put on official JNF documents, on correspondence both among the first settlers in Eretz Israel and in Diaspora, next to the official postage stamp. Although the funds raised through the sale of stamps were not expected to be great, since the stamp price was equivalent to the lowest denomination of postage stamp in the country of distribution, they were conceived more as a ‘public relations tool’ and collectors item which would “refocus Jewish hearts on the landscapes pictured on the stamps, drawing them closer to

Zionist symbols” (KKL 1 p3). Similarly, the Blue Box (Figure 1.2) was a small, simple, tin collection box which was distributed to Jewish homes and classrooms around the world, and depicted lands purchased by the Jewish National Fund. It was intended to be filled with household change or passed around when guests came to visit and once again their purpose was intended to be more educational than financial, “bonding diaspora Jewry with the land of Israel” (KKL 1 p4):

The coins dropped into the Blue Box and the purchase of KKL-JNF stamps were the most meaningful expression of the Jewish People’s bond to Erez Israel. The picture of Erez Israel that featured on the stamp journeyed, along with the letter, from one coast to another, reaching the most far-flung places. There, a Jewish child could hold it, “touching” the far-away land and sharing in its redemption (KKL 3 p5).



Figure 1.2: JNF Stamp and Blue Box (JNF Canada and JNF Australia)

The stamps and the Blue Boxes were the more accessible fundraising mechanisms than the Golden Book; an ‘honour book’ which is inscribed with the names of donors, the person being honoured by the inscription, the date and the occasion for which the inscription was made. The very first inscriptions in the very first volume of the Golden Book honour the delegates at the

Fifth Zionist Congress, some of whom came forward with donations of £10 Sterling to support the new Fund. Today an inscription in the Golden Book costs £100.⁵

With the Fund relying on Golden Book inscriptions and donations from wealthier benefactors, it was not until 1904, three years after its establishment, that the organisation made its first land purchase: two thousand dunums⁶ in the Lower Galilee, northwest of Tiberias. Since this land had been procured from the Anglo-Palestine Bank, a Jewish organisation, its acquisition did not constitute 'redemption,' which meant simply the transfer of ownership "into Jewish [hands]" (KKL 1 p5). Similarly, the two hundred dunums donated to the Fund in 1902 by Isaac L. Goldberg, one of the leaders of 'Lovers of Zion' in Russia, was already considered 'redeemed' thanks to Goldberg's Judaising ownership. Indeed, the Jewish National Fund's assets grew considerably over the following decades thanks to donations of land and capital by wealthier supporters, the Rothschilds in particular. More often, JNF representatives negotiated directly with absentee Arab landowners in Syria and Lebanon, who sold their land out from underneath the tenant farmers who worked it. For political Zionists it was these purchases which constituted 'redemption' of the people-land relationship, since the lands were being wrestled back from Arab ownership (*The KKL Story*; Lehn 1988).

During the Fund's early years, this concept of redemption quickly developed beyond the simple acquisition of lands from Arabs: "Although the Fund had been established to redeem lands – it was now clear that 'redemption' meant not only title registration and deed transfer...but clearing rocks, plowing, planting, and settling on the land" (KKL 1 p7). These expansions in JNF activity did not always go down well with delegates at the Zionist Congress or the Fund's own Board of Directors. Some felt that in exceeding its remit to simply purchase

⁵ Canadian \$225 or U.S. \$182, at time of writing.

⁶ A 'dunum' or 'dunam' is a Turkish measure for a unit of land. One dunum equates to roughly 1/4 of an acre.

lands the Fund was deviating, digressing from the 'straight and narrow.' The JNF Chairman during its second decade, Max Bodenheimer, found himself defending the Fund's activities explaining that:

"real redemption is settling, developing and reclaiming the land, restoring to it its colors and scents. Redemption is not reflected merely by land deeds or registration, which are open to and understood by few, but by what the eyes can see: a tree or neighborhood, a village or town, a school or university... land redemption can be smelled, it can be touched by hand or foot on a plowed furrow or a Zionist enterprise sprouting on the land and *striking deep roots within it*" (KKL 2 p3, my emphasis).

The KKL Story goes on to describe the Fund's work as being in two hands:

"in the one, a pen; in the other, a spade. One hand surveyed the terrain, the other tilled it. One hand extended from a sleek business suit, the other, from dusty overalls. [The head of KKL-JNF] literally wore two hats: at the Zionist Congresses he sported a top hat; but when visiting Galilee or the Negev, he donned a farmer's cap" (KKL 2 p5).

In a similar vein, the agronomist and botanist Yizhak Wilkansky once said:

"Our world hinges on redemption of the land. However, the land can be redeemed in two ways: via legal channels and via settlement. Through the first way one gains rights on paper, but *actual* rights can only be attained by means of the second way. The land of Hauran, acquired through legal channels is not yet ours, even though the purchase record lies signed and sealed in the archives of the Baron [Rothschild], since it has yet to undergo a second redemption through labour. And not even the moshavot are ours yet, so long as we ourselves have not cultivated their land. *The legal concepts are transitory, and the mouth that prohibits things today is the same one that permits things tomorrow. And only 'holding' rights last forever, and the holder is – the labourer*" (Kark 1992 p73, my emphasis).

Influential ideas

These ideas echo part of John Locke's labour theory of property acquisition in which the act of labour is perceived as establishing property rights. Locke argued that individuals held the private rights to their own bodies and therefore the private rights to their own labour. In mixing

the right to one's own labour with natural resources through agricultural work, those resources are annexed to the (privately owned) labour thereby transferring the resources to private ownership (Haddad 2003). Locke outlined this thesis in the second of his *Two Treatises of Government* and it is worth pausing to note that in the same publication he also wrote that "in the beginning all the World was America," a statement evoking the impression of "a continent awaiting the redemptive touch of European labor and private property" (Moore et al 2003 p7), a sentiment clearly discernible in Zionist discourse surrounding Palestine. Locke's writings emerged out of the Puritan Revolution in seventeenth-century England, a movement which, in combination with the French Revolution and various schools of thought relating to Russian farming, influenced the development of Zionist ideology. As such, formative Zionists subscribed to the idea of 'land to those who worked it' in an effort to rectify perceived injustices committed against the common citizen particularly by landed nobility. Other inspirations for Zionist ideology include writings of the physiocratic school, which claimed that nature was the sole source of society's material worth and that the cultivation of land could alone enhance this worth. Along similar lines, some early Zionists also believed in the strengthening of farming communes, encouraged by Russian populism, as a means of avoiding the inequities of capitalism. Indeed the utopian-populist ideals of personal fulfilment, agricultural settlement, manual labour, nationalisation of land, co-operation and equality were adopted by Jews in Palestine and are clearly present in the moshav and kibbutz movements, which established collective and communal farming colonies (Kark 1992, Simons and Ingram 2004).

The more overarching philosophy binding these various but interrelated streams of influential thought together is that of agrarian reform. The nineteenth-century U.S. social philosopher, Henry George, was a key thinker on such reforms and his ideas are said to be present in the philosophical foundations of co-operative settlement in early-twentieth-century Palestine.

According to Ruth Kark (1992), George was greatly influenced by biblical concepts of land and held enormous respect for the social legislation of the Torah, regarding the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbatical (seventh) year and the Jubilee (fiftieth) year as an ideal model of land husbandry and tenure. In a vein similar to Jewish beliefs outlined earlier, that land belonged not to people but to God, George believed that the 'natural land' ought to be regarded as a community resource, rather than a private one, and that rent collected by landowners was a form of exploitation in which the privileged few "share[d] in the rewards of production [laboured for by many] without themselves having contributed to that process" (Wasserman 2003 p28). George regarded the whole of the natural physical environment as the 'gratuitous gift of nature to mankind' and perceived the material 'value' of this gift to be derived solely from what humans made of it: land in its 'natural state' was little more than an "economic and social opportunity, the indispensable condition upon which human beings are enabled to live, to build, to manufacture the needs of life – and beyond that, to create the amenities of their civilization... Without a population to occupy an area, to cultivate and build upon it or to utilize its products, there is no value in land" (Wasserman 2003 p28-30).

George's ideas and writings are said to have provided inspiration for the creation of the Jewish National Fund, despite the fact that George himself saw no need for the nationalisation of land through such an organisation (Kark 1992):

"I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call *their* land. Let them continue to call it *their* land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it... *It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent*" (Henry George 1954 *Progress and Poverty* p405, quoted in Wasserman 2003 p34, the emphasis belongs to George or Wasserman)

Clearly the peculiarities of Zionism's *colonising* ambitions necessitated some adjustments in the interpretation and practical enactment of George's writings. For political Zionists, the 'they' in the above passage referred specifically to Jews and it was therefore absolutely essential for land to be 'confiscated' from the Arabs first through free market transactions, then through military conquest and elaborate legal manoeuvrings which are still in place today (see Forman and Kedar 2004).⁷ As long as the land was 'returned' to Jewish hands then it would be redeemed and as long as those Jewish hands worked the soil then it would be doubly redeemed. This leads to another necessary distinction between Henry George's thesis and the Zionist interpretation and application of it: for George, the 'value' derived from a human-made landscape was distinctly economic, but in Zionist discourse the 'value' was *ideological* as well as economic and is derived specifically from a *Jewish*-made landscape. For political Zionists the 'value' of such a Jewish-developed landscape lay both in its 'civilisation' or 'humanisation' of the environment and in its restoration of a perceived originality. These interrelated ideas were activated by the Jewish National Fund through agricultural settlement and afforestation, and they simultaneously speak to two opposing visions of nature.

Zionist conceptions of nature

The first is a classical, rationalist vision in which only artifice will bring out nature's true essence. The archetype of this was the carefully manicured French-style garden, which was considered "*more natural* than a wild forest" since "[w]hat is presented for aesthetic contemplation is a cultivated, controlled nature, pushed to the extreme, more real and more fragile at the same time because its essence is only reluctantly revealed" (Catherine Kinzler quoted in Ferry 1995 p95, Kinzler's emphasis):

⁷ See chapter three.

"It seems that God has covered the soil of Palestine with rocks and marshes and sand, so that its beauty can only be brought out by those who love it and will devote their lives to healing its wounds" (Chaim Weizmann quoted in Said 1992 p85).

The landscape of Palestine which was envisioned and later constructed by political Zionists was not quite the manicured, geometricised, mathematical masterpiece to which Kinzler refers. However, the central premise of 'humans drawing out a true nature' remains and it was drawn out through the careful application of scientific principles: among the JNF's earliest undertakings was the dispatch of research teams to analyse soil, climate, and vegetation, later establishing agricultural research centres and tree nurseries all over Palestine to experiment with different methods and techniques for cultivation (Figure 1.3). At the same time, however, Zionist visions of nature also call upon the 'aesthetics of sentiment,' an interpretation of nature which revolted against the classical, rationalist view. Here 'true nature' is understood as an 'original authenticity,' that which has not been 'denatured' by human hands and remains in its 'primitive state,' resonating with myths of a golden age and paradise lost (Ferry 1995 p96-7). Again, Zionist discourse does not strictly follow this conception (Jewish National Fund goals were not to reconstruct the Garden of Eden), but Zionist narratives and practices do promulgate a strong sense of 'originality' and 'authenticity,' which is attached to the landscape of pre-exodus Palestine. Thus along with 'redemption' – the restoration of the 'original' people-land relationship – necessarily comes the restoration of the 'original' landscape itself, agriculturally active and well-forested: the 'reintroduction' of nature corresponding with the reintroduction of the Hebrew nation in to its native landscape (Zerubavel 1996).



Figure 1.3: Tree nursery at Tzipori, 1960 (Weitz 1974 p347)

In both of these senses, the ‘natural landscape’ is considered not only to be developed, but developed specifically by Jews. The circular logic here is that, because the Jews are the divinely-ordained residents, the Jewish-made landscape *is* the natural landscape and it is considered natural because it is Jewish. This ‘natural,’ ‘original’ landscape is neither pristine nor geometricised, it is simply a *working* landscape, it is ‘naturally civilised’ and it was the Jewish National Fund’s job to bring it back into existence:

“The change in productiveness which has really occurred in Palestine is due to delay of cultivation, to decrease of population, and to bad government. It is man, and not nature, who has ruined the good land in which was ‘no lack,’ and it is therefore within the power of human industry to restore the country to its old condition of agricultural prosperity” (C.R. Conder quoted in Weitz 1974 p24)

Drawing the latent agricultural and forested bounty out of that rocky, marshy landscape was a task only achievable by the Jews. Only Jewish labour would redeem the land, liberate it from enslavement and realise its full potential, in a way that the ‘ignorant’ Arabs had never been able to do, so it was claimed. Such classical colonial sentiments were harboured not only by Jewish Zionists but by non-Jews as well. Winston Churchill, for example, argued that there was no injustice in removing Arabs from their land by dividing Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state: “The injustice is when those who live in the country leave it to be desert for thousands of

years” (quoted in Gregory 2004 p81). Similarly, C. R. Conder, who is quoted above, explored Palestine in the late-nineteenth century on behalf of Britain’s ‘Palestine Exploration Fund’ and had these words for the ‘native peasantry’: “They are brutally ignorant, fanatical, and above all, inveterate liars; yet they have all the qualities [cleverness, energy and endurance for pain] which would, if developed, render them a useful population” (quoted in Said 1992 p80). Under them the land had been ‘neglected for centuries,’ ‘ruthlessly exploited’ and allowed to fall into a state of ‘barren,’ ‘godforsaken wilderness’ from which it now needed to be rescued. The Jewish National Fund took this rescue upon itself, regarding the ‘restoration’ of the land as part of its ‘redemption’ remit. Not only did it do this by settling Jews on the lands purchased and by providing them with farming equipment, the Fund also embarked on afforestation initiatives.

Signature trees

The first director of the Jewish National Fund, Johann Kremenetzky, had a vision of foresting Eretz Israel and suggested that, in addition to the stamps, the blue boxes and the Golden Book, the Fund call for donations to plant trees: “every Jew would donate one tree, a few trees – even ten million trees!” (KKL 1 p6). Planting trees was perceived as a means of ‘developing’ and ‘humanising’ the landscape of Palestine, since the one that nineteenth-century Jewish settlers found was “desolate... with not a mite of shade” (Forestry – General Information, KKL). Existence in such a landscape, “without the fragrance of flowers, the song of birds, the exhilaration of natural scenery, and other biological stimuli of the natural world” results in “an impoverishment of life, a progressive loss of the characteristics that make us human” (Dubos 1983 p9). It was partly in this vein that the JNF put the settlers on its lands to work planting trees, providing much-needed employment for new arrivals and civilising the landscape by ‘adding more greens’ in the process:

"[Afforestation schemes] closely dovetailed land redemption and the Fund's September 1945 issue of *Karneinu* ['Our Fund,' JNF bulletin] noted that 'Keren Kayemeth forests revive desolate land, dress arid rock, create soil amid stone... Afforestation activities are firmly grounded in land reclamation and settlement. Forests create a receptive home for thousands of immigrants, providing employment in tree planting during their initial absorption. Without forests, settlement of the hills would not be possible at all'" (KKL 5 p3).

This enthusiasm for tree-planting and its close association with notions of 'development' and 'modernisation' was likely to have been influenced by the British Mandatory government that Palestine fell under from 1918 until 1948, during which time an aggressive programme of afforestation was embarked upon. As Gideon Biger (1992) explains, although this was a rather different colonial situation than elsewhere in the British Empire at the time, general ideas about the need to 'develop' the outlying realms also prevailed in Palestine. These were classic imaginative geographies in which 'their' space was "seen as the inverse of 'our' space: a sort of negative, in the photographic sense that 'they' might 'develop' into something like 'us,' but also the site of an absence, because 'they' are seen somehow to lack the positive tonalities that supposedly distinguish 'us'" (Gregory 2004 p17).

In an attempt to mould a 'modern state' in Palestine, the British embarked on various 'development' efforts including the definition of territorial boundaries, the enhancement of Palestine's communications infrastructure, amelioration of the environment by draining swamps and planting forests, as well as nurturing the agricultural economy. The civilian administration, which took charge in 1920, placed particular emphasis on afforestation as a means of 'beautifying' and 'rehabilitating' the landscape, and thus as integral to the country's development. The Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat, the 'New Year of the Trees,' was especially popular in this respect and it was during the British Mandate that this rather marginal festival

was rescued from obscurity, transformed into a specifically tree-planting event and designated a governmental holiday throughout the country.⁸

According to Biger, the Mandatory government worked with Zionist organisations and the local Arab population to advance its development goals. It appears that the former seized this opportunity, actively using British partiality for afforestation to curry favour for the Zionist project of establishing the Jewish State. In the late 1920s, for example, the Jewish National Fund began planting a forest in the Galilee to honour Lord Balfour, the author of the (in)famous 'Balfour Declaration,' in which he pledged the support of the British government for the establishment of "a national home for the Jewish people" and promised to "use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object" (Weitz 1974 p94-100). Furthermore, during the 1930s JNF volunteered to plant a forest to mark the silver jubilee of King George V of England. Not only did the Crown approve of this gift, it even offered to send a tree from the royal gardens at Windsor. The 'King's Tree' was thus carefully packed up and shipped over to Palestine where, in December 1935, it was ceremonially planted in a prominent position overlooking the Haifa-Nazareth highway. The King's Tree did not survive long: it was mysteriously decapitated the following April and its lateral branches torn off, and in October 1936, two months before its first anniversary, the tree was uprooted⁹ (Weitz 1974 p103-6).

At the same time that tree-planting was seen as a means of 'developing' Palestine, it was also seen as a means of resurrecting the biblical landscape which was thought to have been widely 'forested.' The scare quotes are deliberate since the definition of 'forest,' as it is employed by

⁸ See chapter two

⁹ Weitz is ambiguous as to who was responsible for the tree's desecration, suggesting that it was simply part of the "bloody disturbances" of the 1930s. Given that elsewhere Weitz is quick to point the finger at "marauding Arabs," it is possible that this sabotage was carried out by an underground Jewish movement opposed to the Mandatory Government, such as the Irgun or Stern.

Israel's most influential forester, Joseph Weitz,¹⁰ is somewhat questionable. From the outset of his 'chronicle' of Israel's forests, Weitz states that he will "use the term *forest* in the ordinarily accepted sense common to many languages, that is to say, a 'group of large trees covering an extensive area,' or an area covered by closely spaced trees bearing no edible fruit, which either grow there naturally or have been planted by man" (Weitz 1974 p11). Weitz points to evidence from the Old Testament¹¹ to argue that forest trees of the Bible "were of considerable stature and possessed well-developed crowns" (ibid.) the presence of which apparently gave rise to the very concept of 'forest.' Most significantly, Weitz dismisses outright the possibility that contemporary and biblical definitions of what constitutes a forest might differ:

"One theory would have it that the 'forest' of the Scriptures does not necessarily refer to a grouping of trees, but rather to the type of rocky hill country whose soil is non-arable [endnote: The Hebrew *ya'ar* would then correspond to the Arabic *wa'ar*]... Such assertions, however, I regard as fundamentally erroneous, and I shall speak of the *ya'ar* of the Bible as 'forest' in the widely accepted sense of that term" (ibid.)

It was under these principles of 'land to those who worked it' (Locke), 'land value generated by [Jewish] labour' (George), rationalist and sentimental conceptions of nature, as well as classic notions of the coloniser's superiority, that the Jewish National Fund instigated a number of relatively small-scale forestry projects during the first half of the twentieth century. Not all of them were successful. Indeed it took years of research and development in order improve the survival rate of the saplings. However, as Jewish immigration to Palestine increased so did

¹⁰ Weitz was a leading figure within the Jewish National Fund for the better part of fifty years, thirty of which were spent serving as Director of the Lands and Afforestation Department. A more detailed discussion of Weitz, his politics, and his views on forestry follows in chapter three.

¹¹ "If thou be great people, get thee up to the forest and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites of the Rephaim; since the hill-country of Ephraim is too narrow for thee... The hill country shall be thine; for though it is forest, thou shalt cut it down, and the goings out thereof shall be thine" (Joshua 17:15,18, quoted in Weitz 1974 p12)

forestry, since JNF helped to settle new arrivals by providing housing and employment in afforestation. Forestry schemes mushroomed during the 1950s as the ‘fledgling’ State of Israel struggled to absorb thousands of European Jews and to secure the extra territory conquered during the 1948 war.¹² It was during this time that a number of forests were planted over the ruins of Palestinian villages depopulated during the war.¹³ Since then, afforestation has become the signature occupation of the Jewish National Fund in Israel, with millions of trees being planted all over the country every year. These trees are meant to clothe the landscape left naked by centuries of abuse; to restore the ‘colours and scents’ it possessed in biblical times, to reawaken the value of this apparent wasteland:

“The Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael acquired a halo through its work of redeeming the soil and its development, settlement and afforestation, with the last, the precious stone in the crown, covering large areas in the country today, and destined to cover more and more in the future” (Weitz 1974 p4).

Aims

The primary aim of my dissertation is to dislodge this green ‘halo,’ to problematise the Jewish National Fund’s spotless image as an environmental saviour. It is already recognised that the Fund’s land policies are at the very least discriminatory, some would say outright racist,¹⁴ and JNF is currently facing calls in Canada and the United Kingdom for its charitable status to

¹² This war is often referred to as the ‘War of Independence,’ a celebratory title which conjures positive notions of ‘freedom from subjection,’ ‘exemption from external control,’ ‘individual liberty’ (OED). The invocation of ‘independence’ is also an attempt to “rehabilitate the intrinsically colonial project of Zionism by establishing Israel as a *postcolonial* state” (Gregory 2004 p86). In order to acknowledge the enormous price paid by the Palestinians for this ‘independence’ I refer to it as the ‘1948 war.’

¹³ I elaborate on these practices and their geopolitical context in chapter four.

¹⁴ ‘In watershed, Israel deems land-use rules of Zionist icon “discriminatory”’ Nathaniel Popper Forward 4th February 2005

be revoked for this very reason.¹⁵ However, the Fund's forestry practices, particularly instances of planting over ruined Palestinian villages, remain under the critical radar.

Firstly, the Jewish National Fund's afforestation activities have received very little attention in English-language academic literature. A notable exception is Carol Bardenstein's work on trees, nationalist discourses and collective memory within the context of Palestine-Israel (1998; 1999). However, her analysis focuses solely on the social and cultural significance of trees and memory, a scope that is too narrowly anthropological to capture the wider geopolitical context in which these discourses are situated, the power struggles of which they are part, and the ideological purposes that they serve. In the rare cases when JNF forestry is discussed in relation to the dispossession of the Palestinians, it is usually in passing, taking second place to other more obviously belligerent and widespread Zionist offensives. And this is fair enough since, for all the puffery the Jewish National Fund creates around trees, forestry is still a relatively small-scale phenomenon in Israel and the incidence of depopulated Palestinian villages being planted over with trees is statistically minor. But physical magnitude is not the issue here; rather it is the trees' symbolic and ideological significance, which far outstrips their visible presence on the ground, that I intend to unpack.

In doing so, I aim to disrupt ideas about the inherent goodness of trees. I take my lead from Shaul Cohen (1999) who has charted the deployment of Edenic metaphors by corporate, non-profit and governmental groups in the United States in their environmental management strategies. He demonstrates how these divergent organisations unite in the promotion of trees

¹⁵ In July 2004 the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign raised a petition in the Scottish Parliament calling for the Charitable status of the JNF Charitable Trust in Scotland to be revoked (www.scottish.parliament.uk). Spurred by the success of that petition, on Land Day (30th March) 2005, protesters in Toronto launched a campaign to have JNF Canada stripped of its charitable status ('A campaign to challenge Jewish National Fund charitable Status in Canada launched on Land Day,' Kole Kilibarda and Hazem Jamjoum, al-Awda, March 2005 www.al-Awda.ca).

and tree-planting (that is, their own activities) as an ‘environmental panacea’ by mobilising the same, grossly over-simplified scientific premises that trees help combat global climate change, as well as notions about planting trees advancing ‘sustainability’ and the signal importance of each individual tree to those efforts. A measure of the pervasiveness of this sentiment can be found in the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize which was awarded to Wangari Maathai, a pioneering academic and feminist activist from Kenya, for her work in establishing and developing Africa’s ‘Green Belt Movement’ that helped women’s groups plant trees in order to conserve the environment and improve their quality of life.¹⁶ In a similar vein, the charity Oxfam recently ran a campaign in which people could donate money online to plant fruit trees “in the back yard of someone who needs it more than you.” My family was honoured with such a gift last Christmas when we received a card from a long-time friend exclaiming “I’ve planted you an orchard!” The card did not specify *where* the trees have been planted or *who* benefits from them, only that anonymous “farmers” will be able to “earn a living by selling the produce.” It went on to describe how the seeds from the fruits will enable farmers to expand their livelihoods by planting even more trees. “Different trees can be planted to prevent soil erosion, provide shade for cattle, and to supply wood for fuel and housing material.”

Underpinning both of these sketches is the idea that there can be *nothing inherently wrong with trees*, that their planting is an humanitarian gesture, pure (apolitical) and simple. It is ideas such as these which significantly impede a critical evaluation of JNF forestry. In order to overcome such impediments it is necessary to take a social constructivist approach to Israel’s trees and the discourses which surround them. As Noel Castree argues, statements about nature say as much about the speaker as about the nature under discussion: “knowledge of, and action in/on nature is unavoidably value-laden. It speaks volumes not only about who is doing the

¹⁶ www.nobelprize.org

knowing and acting, but what kind of a world they are trying to forge" (2001 p18). Moreover, claims about and knowledges of nature can serve as instruments of power and domination. In exploring those knowledges, actions, ontologies and power relationships I approach Israel's forests as socially constructed; as produced by their historical, cultural, and political contexts. Such an approach demands an exploration of nature's specific historical forms and the generative processes of its production, it "forces us to take responsibility for *how* [the] remaking of nature occurs, in *whose* interests, and with *what* consequences" (Braun 2002 p13, his emphasis). Peeling back the layers of meaning invested in trees, tree-planting and forests by the Jewish National Fund I explore Israel's forests as epistemic, cultural, and political spaces through which an array of imaginaries about Israel, Israeli-ness and Jews are constructed by Zionist discourse.

This thesis is therefore a contribution to a wider movement for the 'liberation' of popular discourse from 'tree-felling-bad, tree-planting-good' environmental narratives. As it stands we cannot see what might *not* be healthy, benevolent, and altruistic about planting trees, we cannot see the political and ideological work they do, because the assistance or enhancement of Nature seems so self-evidently good. According to Foucault, this kind of self-evidence (*évidence*) is symptomatic of any historical period: some things are illuminated, made visible, whilst others are cast into shade, and we cannot see how things could be any different because the light which illuminates is invisible to us. As such it is only by identifying a *rupture d'évidence*, a gap between self-evidence and what is 'actually' going on, that we can begin to understand how certain things are *made* visible whilst others are made *invisible*, "to see what is unthought in our seeing...to open as yet unseen ways of seeing" (Rajchman 1991 p74). In the process it becomes possible to 'see' power in a different way, to understand the techniques and technologies through which power becomes acceptable, for "Power is tolerable [and therefore effective] only on

condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault 1978 p86). The ‘natural world’ and the discourses surrounding it are particularly effective ‘cloaking devices’ in this respect: there is no room for politics in a ‘nature’ which is considered to be incontrovertibly good and beyond human interference, except when humans attempt to undo their own destructive handiwork by restoring nature to its pre-human glory. I argue that in making afforestation its defining feature the Jewish National Fund encourages the public to ‘see’ it as an instrument of good. JNF visualises, *visibilises*, itself through discourses of nature, playing on the international popularity of environmental responsibility, in order to conceal its deeply ideological and political ambitions and render its questionable practices tolerable.

Of course I am not the first to open a *rupture d’évidence* with respect to trees, tree-planting and environmental conservation. Nancy Peluso (1993) has already demonstrated the ways in which the pressing need for conservation, promulgated by the international environmentalist community, legitimates state violence in a pattern of ‘coercive conservation.’ Similarly, Rocheleau and Ross have shown how discourses of power and control surrounding the *Acacia mangium* tree in the Dominican Republic have led to the strict policing of large areas of land, facilitating state impingement upon local lives and livelihoods. As such they provide a valuable critique of forestry initiatives “sheltered in the discursive shade of trees as symbols of green goodness” (1995 p408). However, work of this kind has not been carried out in the context of Palestine-Israel. After all, when there are immediately life- and livelihood-threatening things going on, such as the erection of the ‘security fence,’ house demolitions, ‘suicide bombings,’ ‘targeted assassinations,’ who could possibly be worried about the *trees*? It is therefore not only ideas of nature that conceal the power and politics inherent to tree-planting in Israel. It is the deafening noise of bulldozers, gunfire, explosions, shouting and crying that drown out the quiet

expansion of subterranean root systems and leaves rustling gently in the wind. After all, these forested spaces have been created partly for Israelis to escape the politics and violence that saturates their lives. They are believed to be spaces outside or beyond all that.

They are not. Forests and the individual trees which comprise them are capillaries of Zionist power and they are instrumental in the physical and discursive dispossession of the Palestinians. JNF forests are spaces of constructed visibility designed to make certain things (Jewish-Israeli histories, events, and values) seeable in specific ways (as righteous, incontrovertible, natural). These wooded spaces give a 'material existence' to visual thinking about Jewish history and Israeliness, and they create spaces in which that thinking becomes intelligible. In this way, trees are techniques for reproducing and circulating particular images not only about Israel but about an idealised Israeli subjectivity:

“‘The spatial distributions in which (people) find themselves’...are spaces of constructed visibility. We are surrounded by spaces which help for the evidences of the ways we see ourselves and one another. Where we ‘dwell,’ how we are housed, helps in this way to determine who we are and what we think we are – and so they involve our freedom. We are beings who are ‘spatialised’ in various ways; there is a historical spatialisation of ourselves as subjects” (Rajchman 1991 p82)

Rajchman continues that, for Foucault, the built environment is more than a matter of what it shows “‘symbolically’ or ‘semiotically’ but also of what it makes visible about us and within us...‘The art of light and the visible,’ which such spaces are designed to deploy, is one which makes certain *kinds* of properties of ourselves stand out as self-evident” (ibid.). Israel’s forests are ‘edifices’ no less ‘built’ than the JNF’s headquarters in Jerusalem, or the former Jewish Agency building which now houses the Knesset. Forests, however, exact that clever trick of seeming un-built, un-constructed, *natural*. In producing such spaces in which Jewish history and the importance of Israel are visualised and visibilised as natural, and by extension righteous and incontrovertible, the Jewish National Fund encourages Jewish-Israelis to understand themselves

in particular ways *as* Israelis, that is, as the righteous, original, natural citizens of Palestine. I argue that this spatialised formation of Israeli subjectivity has been enabled by the fetishisation of trees and tree-planting, the invocation of arborescent forms and imagery in order to disavow the difference between 'homecoming' Jews and the physical landscape of Palestine.

In making this argument I also demonstrate that the innocuousness of trees in particular and nature more generally holds enormous material, social and political power. This power can be readily observed in the JNF record of planting forests over the ruins of Arab villages which were 'abandoned' during the 1948 war, a practice which I suggest was part of the strategy of 'retroactive transfer,' phase 2 of the wider strategy of 'transfer.' In the process, I argue that the Jewish National Fund is attempting to construct an 'Israeli national imaginary' around an idealised Israeli subject. By (re)constructing the landscape of Palestine as a forested one, the Jewish National Fund attempt, on behalf of the broader political Zionist project, to (re)construct an Israeli self which captures both the backgrounds (predominantly European) of the Jewish settlers and their 'original,' pre-exodus Israeli subjectivities.

Clarifications

I need to pause for a moment here and clarify a number of things. Firstly, the definition of Zionism that I am working with is a specifically secular, political, nationalist one; it was the one advanced by Theodor Herzl towards the establishment of the State of Israel and the one which is being advanced to this day by the Jewish National Fund. This is but one interpretation of Zionism. Indeed, as Ben-Israel (2003) demonstrates, there has never been a single accepted concept of Zionism throughout its entire history, partly due to the ongoing disagreement as to the meaning of the Jewish people's very existence: some believe that the existence of the Jews is secondary to the existence of Judaism itself, whilst others perceive the Jews to be a nation like any other which exists for its own sake. Herzl's Zionism adheres to the latter view and, in terms

of its nationalist ambitions, for the most part followed European models. Not all Jews or Jewish-Israelis support Herzl's ideas and practices and Zionism remains a topic of lively debate among Jewish scholars, on which there a great number of differing opinions. As I mentioned earlier, many rabbis disagreed with human attempts to effect a return to Israel, indeed the orthodox *Neturei Karta* ('Guardians of the City,' i.e. of Jerusalem) to this day do not recognise Israel, referring to it only as 'the Zionist State' (Lehn 1988 p5). Others may agree with the words of Albert Einstein:

"Apart from practical considerations, my awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish State, with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain, especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within a Jewish State... A return to a nation in the political sense of the word would be the equivalent to turning away from the spiritualization of our community which we owe to the genius of our prophets." (Albert Einstein quoted in Menuhin 1969 p93)

Variable support for the secular Zionist project did not, however, prevent its proponents from claiming to speak on behalf of the Jewish People, the State of Israel and Zionism. They did so in idealised terms, imagining these to be coherent, homogenous groups united under the same politico-nationalist ambitions as them. These imagined communities are necessarily ideological constructs, which rely upon activities such as JNF tree-planting for their production and reproduction. The purpose of this project is to explore how and why these activities *work*, to explore how trees and tree-planting have been mobilised to naturalise the colonisation of Palestine in the name of political-Zionism. Any reference to 'Jews,' 'the Jewish people,' 'Israelis,' 'Zionism' etc. should therefore be read in the sense of those homogenous, cohesive communities imagined by Herzl and his followers, rather than as attempts to generalise about enormously diverse groups of people and ideas.

Secondly, I must comment on the conspicuous lack of maps in Jewish National Fund and Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel sources. In the year I have spent researching this thesis I have come across only two maps of Israel's forests, both of which I obtained directly from KKL-JNF representatives. In every crevasse of the Jewish National Fund and Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel websites, in all ten-volumes of *The KKL Story*, in the five hundred pages of Joseph Weitz's 'chronicle of Israel's forests,' not *once* did I encounter a comprehensive map depicting the extent of JNF forests in Israel. The closest I came to finding any such map was on a visit to the virtual tree-planting page within the website of the Knesset, the impressionistic style of which obscured precise forest locations (see Figure 1.3). Were it not for my professional contacts in the Jewish National Fund and Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, for me to obtain a map of Israel's forests.

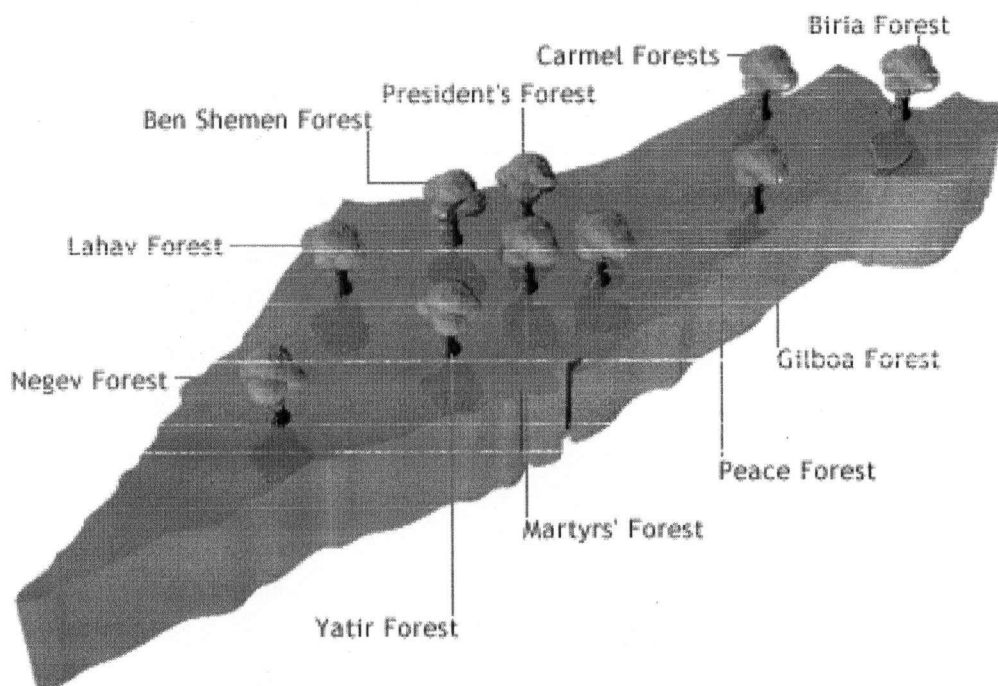


Figure 1.4: 'Virtual tree planting' (www.knesset.gov.il)

The conspicuous dearth of (accurate) maps struck me as remarkably odd at first, but I have begun to see it as remarkably telling. Maps are enormously effective visual tools: the

cartographic display of information is widely recognised as an incredibly powerful means of conveying (selected) information, not least in impressing environmental peril on an audience (see Demeritt 2001). It therefore seemed odd that the Jewish National Fund would forgo such a valuable opportunity to laud its afforestation achievements in the most striking way possible. This apparent oversight can be partly explained by the fact that today only around nine per cent of Israel is classified as 'forest,' just over half of that small area is designated as having been planted during the last century. This means that afforestation schemes, including but not exclusively those undertaken by the Jewish National Fund, can only take credit for 'greening' 4.4 per cent of Israel's total land area (Gafni forthcoming). I am not suggesting that this sad statistic is the result of JNF incompetence, indeed it is quite impressive in the context of Israel's semi-arid Mediterranean climate and in comparison with the rest of the middle-eastern region.¹⁷ But no matter how great JNF's 'achievements,' or how loudly they are extolled, such rhetoric is considerably deflated, and the imaginative geographies under construction are significantly undermined, by visuals depicting the sparse pockets of forests scattered across the country (see map Appendix 1). Another probable explanation for the reluctant cartographies of Israel's forests is their strategic location: over the ruins of Palestinian villages and around existing ones; through Jerusalem Corridor and along the Green Line. A map would 'give away' the geopolitical role that trees have played in Zionist-Israeli history, undermining the 'environmental imaginaries' the Jewish National Fund has worked so hard to create.

Finally, I shall clarify two deliberate omissions from this thesis, both concerning Palestinian olive trees. One of the most frequent comments I receive in relation to this work concerns the significance of olive tree symbolism within Palestinian nationalist discourses, and the resonance with almost identical Israeli claims to 'rootedness' and 'belonging.' Palestinian and Israeli

¹⁷ Forest cover in neighbouring Jordan, Syria and Lebanon does not exceed four per cent (FAO 2003)

nationalist discourses do indeed have a lot to say to one another (see Bardenstein 1998; Lindholm Schulz 2003), however I have deliberately chosen not to discuss this issue, primarily because of the simplistic inversion which it implies. There is a binary logic, all too common in conversations of the Middle East, in which the discussion of an Israeli phenomenon must also include a discussion of its equal and opposite Palestinian phenomenon. It is through this logic that the impression of 'balance' is given, for Palestine and Israel are so implicated in one another's existence that it is impossible to speak of one without speaking of the other. I do not disagree with this, indeed it is in this vein that I specifically discuss the relationship between forestry and Palestinian dispossession. However, what I want to avoid is the impression that Israeli and Palestinian naturo-nationalist discourses are simply mirror images of one another: each may necessarily be implicated within the other but to always speak of them in the same breath stifles the analysis of each in their own terms.

Another frequent comment and deliberate omission is a discussion of Israel's practice of uprooting ancient Palestinian olive groves in order to build a road, or in collective punishment for some infraction or simply for 'security' purposes. Such comments are entirely reasonable since the politics of uprooting Palestinian trees clearly extend from the politics of rooting Jewish ones, a duplicity which reinforces the fact that certain memories, people and trees count whilst others do not. I avoid discussing this partly for the reason I have just given but also because I see the act of *planting* trees as being less obviously belligerent than uprooting them, and therefore much more effective in advancing Zionist goals. It is the disingenuous promotion of tree-planting, and by extension the Jewish National Fund, as incontrovertibly good that I regard as so instrumental in the physical and discursive dispossession of the Palestinians and so desperately in need of examination.

Structure and methods

I divide my argument into three chapters, beginning with 'The Children's Holiday.' Here I chart the place within Jewish thought and tradition of nature in general and trees in particular, before going on to describe the origins and evolution of Tu B'Shvat, the Jewish 'New Year for Trees.' Since this marginal festival was rescued from obscurity in the early-twentieth century it has provided an annual focal point around which to mobilise moral and financial support for the Jewish National Fund's 'redemption' work in Palestine. As a holiday geared specifically towards children, I examine how the ideas surrounding the festival and its celebration are taught to children. Through an analysis of fictional children's literature and materials for teachers in Jewish schools, I explore how children learn about nature, trees, Israel as well as the Jewish National Fund. In doing so I am not suggesting that children absorb the ideas presented to them like sponges, rather I am interested in the discourses to which they are exposed.

The spacing of this chapter is necessarily diasporic since my selection of primary materials for analysis was done entirely on the basis of what was available in the Isaac Waldman Jewish Public Library at Vancouver's Jewish Community Centre. In all, I consulted fourteen sources: two of which aimed to teach children about the relationship between Judaism and nature; five dealt specifically with Jewish holidays, their meaning and celebration; and the remaining seven were picture-story books centred around trees. With respect to fictional stories in particular, almost all were set in North America, usually the United States. Moreover, only one story book was published by an explicitly Jewish publishing house. Two others dealt explicitly with Israel but were not published by Jewish houses, whilst the remaining three are neither Jewish in content nor did they have Jewish publishers. Reading Jewish and non-Jewish books alongside one another carries with it the assumption that literature held in the *Jewish* Public Library, regardless of publisher or content, is necessarily held for the Judaic sentiments it contains, in

light of which they are intended to be read. *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein, for example, is a book widely read in North American schools, not only in Hebrew schools. However, sitting as it does alongside *The Tree Full of Mitzvos* and the explicitly Zionist *Behold the Trees*, I believe such books can be read in association with political-Zionist and general Judaic ideas of trees and the landscape. At the same time, however, this intermingling of Jewish and non-Jewish texts also demonstrates that Zionist narrative of trees and nature are not exclusively Jewish, rather that they are also drawn from more general, Western ideas about the environment and the human place in it.

Chapter two remains with Tu B'Shvat but moves on to discuss the significance of this festival with respect to the establishment of Israel. Organised around the four parts of the Tu B'Shvat seder, I begin by describing the importance of the 'New Year for Trees' in 'cultivating hearts for the homeland,' focusing on the use of trees to bond Diaspora and settler Jews with their 'old-new' homeland in Palestine. This is followed by a discussion of the coincidence of Tu B'Shvat and the opening of the Knesset in February 1949. Here I begin to chart extensions in the imagery of trees and tree planting which went along with this event, including the notion that Diaspora wanderings were now 'rooted' in the land of Israel and in History, as well as the concept of the Jewish people 'awakening' from Diaspora dormancy just as Tu B'Shvat marks the time of year when trees are awakening from their winter dormancy. A simultaneous awakening of the Middle East is also said to be occurring, with the eruption of liberal democracy, and by extension Modernity, in this 'backward' region, as well as the return of proper environmental knowledge and care derived from Enlightened, scientific principles.

The final section of this chapter deals with the concepts of death and renewal which are activated when children plant trees in memory of others, imagery which explicitly eternalises both Israel and the Jewish people. However, the past which is being immortalised and the future

being ensured is necessarily selective. I therefore close this chapter with a discussion of Judith Butler's recent work on the politics of mourning (2004) and her argument that tarrying over grief and recognising human vulnerability is an important and valuable point of departure for non-violent political action. I demonstrate how forests might be regarded as a productive focal point for the sustenance of grief and mourning, when in fact it is only certain lives being memorialised, certain losses being remembered, certain vulnerabilities being sustained through planting trees. Other lives, specifically Palestinian lives, are not considered worth grieving through forests, their histories not worth immortalising in that forested landscape.

Source material for this chapter is drawn from newspaper articles, primarily *The Palestine Post* (later *The Jerusalem Post*) which was published in Jerusalem, but supplemented with articles from London's *The Jewish Chronicle*. I was limited in these selections by language and volumes held by the Center for Research Libraries which dated back to 1949. The views represented are therefore necessarily skewed in the direction of political-Zionists, as the following editorial demonstrates: "Since its first appearance *The Palestine Post* has stood for the Jewish National Home and its evolution into the Jewish State. It has supported all factors inside and outside Jewry, all decisions and actions making for the strengthening of the State. It has opposed all factors internal and external, which it has considered to be detrimental to Israel and its development."¹⁸ I concentrated on articles published in the months of January and February since, in the Hebrew calendar, this is when Tu B'Shvat, and necessarily also the 'birthday' of Israel's parliament, falls.

Up to this point my analysis focuses on the discursive dispossession – the narrative invisibility – of the Palestinians by the en-plantation of political-Zionist ideologies in the landscape; ideologies about the righteousness of the Jewish return, the incontrovertibility of the

¹⁸ 'Editorial: Today's vote of decision,' *The Palestine Post*, Tuesday 25th January 1949, p4

State of Israel, and the naturalness of associated Modern principles of liberal democracy and environmental responsibility. However, in the third major chapter I turn to examine how trees have effected the physical dispossession – the literal invisibility – of the Palestinians by actually obscuring their historic presence in the landscape. I describe the involvement of JNF afforestation in this dispossession through the figure of Joseph Weitz, the ‘Father of the Forests’ in Israel, whose ideals informed JNF afforestation policy and practice for over thirty years, indeed to this day. I demonstrate how Weitz’s passion for ‘forestry’ Eretz Israel dovetailed with his passion for the ‘transfer’ of the Palestinians into neighbouring Arab states, as evidenced by the numerous depopulated and demolished Palestinian villages which were planted over with JNF forests. In making this argument I demonstrate the ability of trees to effect material, geopolitical Zionist power whilst cleverly concealing that involvement behind its ‘green halo.’

Source material for this discussion is drawn from the English translation of Weitz’s own book, *Forests and Afforestation in Israel* (1974), with the critique in particular relying heavily on the work of Benny Morris, namely his article in *Middle Eastern Studies* entitled ‘Yosef Weitz and the Transfer Committees, 1948-49’ (1986). The reason for this seeming over dependence on Morris is that his is the only detailed report of Weitz’s involvement in the transfer committees. Although other authors, such as Nur Masalha, Walter Lehn, Edward Said and David Hirst, do refer to Weitz it is in a much more general sense – only Morris is so detailed in his account of Weitz’s activities and I must therefore rely on him to tell this story effectively.

In the final part of the chapter I turn to Homi Bhabha and his argument concerning the fetishisation of colonial subjectivities. Shifting to a more explicitly theoretical register I explain the importance of ‘originality’ in JNF-Zionist discourses of tree planting, arguing that this is symptomatic of a ‘double fetish’: the simultaneous fetishisation of a mythical, idealised, ancient Israeli subject, which is itself reinforced by the invocation of the tree-as-fetish object. As with

my discussion of Butler at the close of chapter two, this 'abstract interlude' may come as somewhat of a surprise in an otherwise empirically-driven thesis. This instrumental use of theory at selected critical moments is necessitated by the relative novelty of the story that I am telling, a story which depends on details at this preliminary stage. Indeed, having introduced the notion of constructed visibility above I leave those details to speak largely for themselves, drawing on Butler and Bhabha later to flesh out some straggling ideas; my way of 'putting theory to work' (Pratt 2004).

Throughout this thesis I draw on a number of primary sources relating to the Jewish National Fund. Firstly, I consulted Joseph Weitz in order to get a sense of the influential ideas which guided JNF forestry for over thirty years and whose legacy continues in the present. I also examined articles written by Paul Ginsberg and Avi Gafni, foresters currently working with KKL. My primary resource, however, has been *The KKL Story*, a ten-chapter chronology of the Fund's establishment, development and contemporary activities, which is available at www.kkl.org.il. Additional details of the Fund's establishment and legalistic workings were drawn from Walter Lehn's *The Jewish National Fund* (1988). I also relied on 'General' and 'Expert' forestry information from that same site as well as a brief history of the Fund which is available at www.jnf.org. Relying upon virtual material in this way opens up issues of durability and reliability, since web-based texts can be adjusted and updated on a regular basis. The versions of *The KKL Story* that I have appear to have been created in January 2003, following the Fund's 2001 centenary, and the story told is thus a retrospective and celebratory one. The temporal distance between the events themselves and their re-telling might also explain certain discrepancies: For instance, chapter one of the *The KKL Story* (KKL 1 p1-2) describes how Johann Kremenetzky broke down when it seemed that the Fifth Zionist Congress

would not ratify the creation of a national fund. According to Walter Lehn, however, Kremenetzky did not attend the Fifth Congress at all (1988 p21).

Finally, there are language and audience factors to account for: where the Jewish National Fund website appears only in English, the Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel site is available in both English and Hebrew, and by simply looking at the layout it is clear that these are not identical. Furthermore, *The KKL Story* itself appears to have been written first in Hebrew then translated into English. Which begs the question: for whom is this information written? It is tempting to suggest that language barriers divide information for Israeli visitors from that for non-Israeli visitors, or even Jewish from non-Jewish. But of course such distinctions are never so easy: one does not have to be either Israeli or Jewish to read and speak Hebrew, and printing in Hebrew excludes a wide range of people, myself included. I intend to overcome this methodological obstacle in future studies but for now it will have to remain simply something to bear in mind, as I move through the analytical chapters, beginning now with 'The Children's Holiday.' My intention in this chapter is to give a sense of the ideas about nature and trees in Jewish thought and tradition which are being drawn on by the Jewish National Fund in order to construct its forests as specifically *Jewish*. In exploring such environmental imaginaries, I chart the origins and evolution of the Jewish 'New Year of the Trees' and examine how children, as the focus of this festival, are taught about it, and I am interested in how these imaginaries are spatialised around Eretz Israel by Zionist discourse. I focus on the innocuousness of trees, their childlike innocence, and the associated imagery of personal, human-tree relationships, creations of 'place' and continuity, which provide the dazzling green halo behind which the Fund's less benevolent activities shelter.

Chapter 2 : The Children's Holiday

Nature and the importance of caring for it is said to provide the very substance of what is considered holy within Judaism (Bernstein 1998). In the most simplistic terms, God created the natural world and, since Jews worship God and all His work, nature is revered in Judaism as God's creation.¹⁹ What is more, God entrusted His creation to Adam, warning him and all his descendents "that he must protect the world and all that it contains, for if man should despoil G-d's²⁰ creation, not even G-d could set the world straight again" (Fellner 1983, p32). In Jewish thought the world is therefore considered a 'divine gift,' of which 'man' is merely the caretaker. The phrase "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28) is therefore taken to mean that nature was created not for humans to exploit but rather for humans, as God's 'junior partner in the work of creation,' to conserve and enhance (Gordis 1983). The natural world thus holds a special place in Jewish life and tradition. The various Jewish holidays throughout the year, for example, were markers for the changing seasons and shifting moods of the year before they became associated with historic events, which is why they are traditionally celebrated by drinking specific wines and eating specific fruits and nuts which are seasonal in Israel (Bernstein 1998). The prioritisation of nature in Judaism is attributable to the agricultural lifestyles led by the majority of Jews during biblical times. They were said to live 'close to nature's rhythms,' depending on the land for their very existence, knowing it intimately and

¹⁹ The same argument was made for Christianity by U.S. Protestants in the 1930s and '40s as part a broader 'greening of American theology' (see Schmidt 1991)

²⁰ Observant Jews avoid writing the Name of God where it might be defaced, obliterated or destroyed through either ignorance or hostility (Jewish Virtual Library 2005)

caring about it deeply. Indeed, many sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud²¹ were farmers, which led to the proliferation of natural metaphors found in these key Jewish texts (Ross 1983; Swartz 2005). In the centuries which followed the exodus from Israel in 70 C.E. Jewish involvement in agriculture declined. In Europe this was largely due to prohibitions placed on Jews owning land, whilst in the Muslim empires, where no such prohibitions were enacted, this decline was likely a result of economic and educational choices made by Jews (Botticini and Eckstein 2004). Regardless of this decline in Jewish agriculture, the significance of nature drawn from that heritage remains very much alive in the festive traditions of Judaism itself.

In religious texts this general valorisation of nature is repeatedly concentrated on the figure and imagery of the tree, beginning of course with the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9).²² The Torah itself is often described and depicted as the ‘tree of life’: “Like a tree that makes life better for everything around it, the Torah makes life better for all who learn from it” (Cone 1995, see Figure 2.1).

²¹ The Mishnah is the sixty-three books in which Rabbi Judah set down the Oral Law, the legal commentary on the Torah’s Written Law, around 200 C.E. The Talmud is a record of rabbinical discussions and commentaries of the Mishnah. The first version of the Talmud, the Palestinian Talmud or *Talmud Yerushalmi*, was produced around 400 C.E. However, Babylonian rabbis produced a much more extensive and authoritative edition, *Talmud Bavli*, over a century later. It is this edition which is most frequently studied and referred to simply as the Talmud. (Jewish Virtual Library 2005)

²² As part of the Old Testament, this imagery is also shared by Christianity, where trees are also symbolic measures of righteousness and an emblem of the cross, for example (see Davies 1988; Schama 1995; Schmidt 1991).

Torah Tree

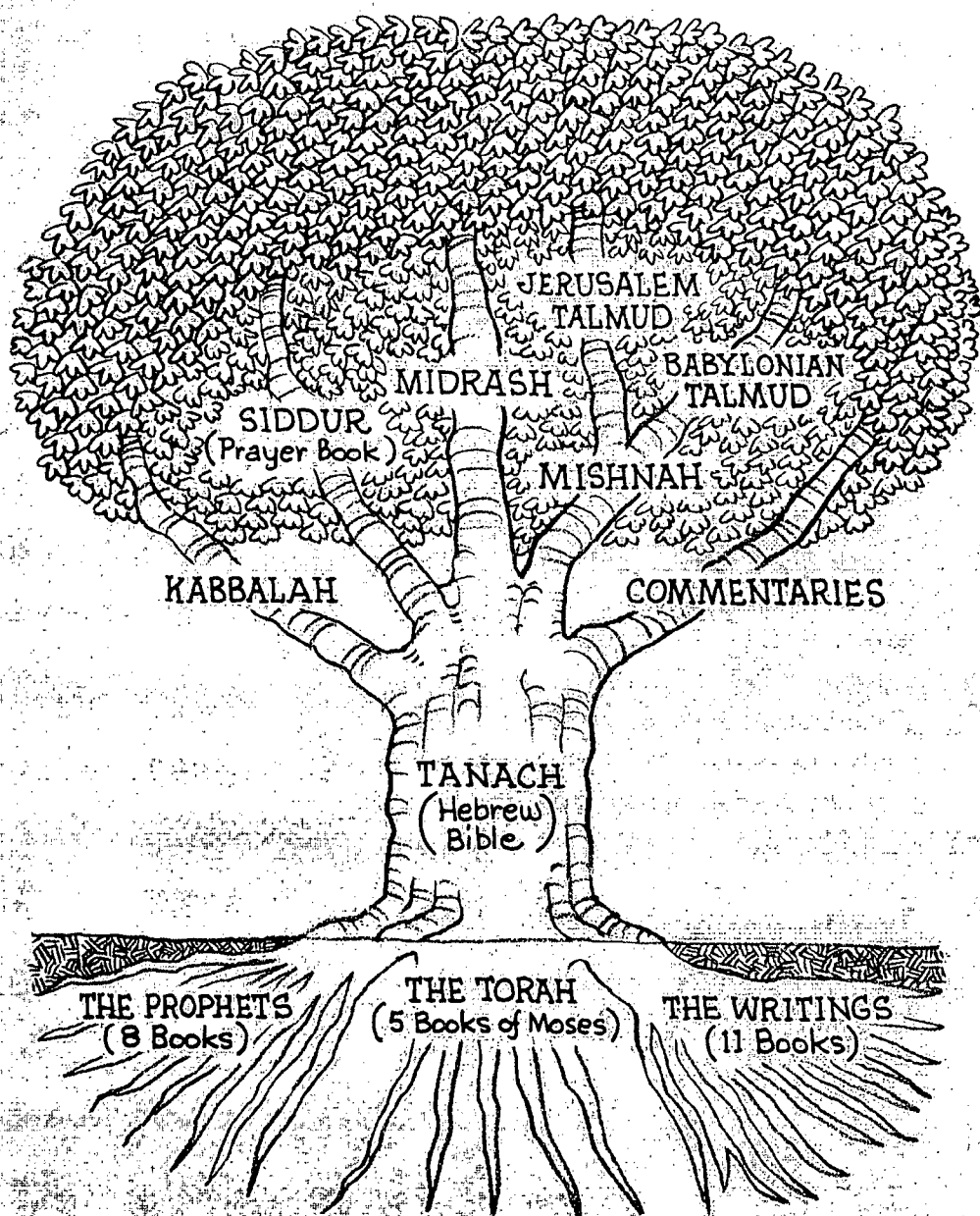


Figure 2.1: 'Torah Tree' by Roy Doty (Cone 1995)

Indeed the very anatomy of trees (roots, a trunk, and branches) lends itself to a variety of symbolic endeavours (Davies 1988). The tree, for example, is considered to be a symbol of the Jewish people (“for as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people” Isaiah 65:22) and in 1969 it was announced that the acclaimed sculptor, Jacques Lipschitz, would cast a bronze ‘Tree of Life’ statue, for the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus, depicting the Patriarchs and the generations stemming from them.²³ Similarly, Zerubavel (1996 p60) has described two images used in propaganda for the Jewish National Fund and the Zionist Federation. The first depicts a chopped tree with a new branch sprouting out from its side, symbolising “the curtailed Jewish national life during centuries of life in exile, while the new branch represented the beginning of national renewal.” The second image shows a tree with lots of green leaves but one dead branch. The caption reads: “Branches of our people are chopped down and fall off, but the tree is alive and well. Give your hand to our national renewal. Be a member of the Zionist Federation.” The imagery of the tree has also been invoked as a symbol of Jewish steadfastness and continuous attachment to the land of Israel:

“The tree weathers all storms and yet keeps on clinging to the soil. It suffers adversity, it is beaten by the winds and lashed by the rains, it is plucked bare in autumn and snowed over in winter. Yet it does not wither away. It retains its inner strength, and bursts forth into fresh blossom the moment the sun graces it again with its spring warmth”²⁴

“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and put forth boughs like a plant” (Job 14:7-9)

²³ ‘Lipschitz ‘tree of life’ for scopus’ The Jerusalem Post, Thursday 2nd January 1969 p8. The Patriarchs are the fathers (and mothers) of the Jewish people: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel (Jewish Virtual Library 2005).

²⁴ ‘Tu-BiShevat – Israel’s New Festival?’ Rabbi M. Spira, The Jewish Chronicle, Friday 11th February 1949, p6

Furthermore, the 'Father of the Forests' in Israel, Joseph Weitz, imagines the development of Israel and its forests through the anatomy of trees themselves, naming the four parts of his book after four different parts of a tree's anatomy and corresponding with "the four periods in the history of the forest tree in Eretz Israel" (1974 p5). Part one, 'Roots,' covers the four thousand years between the 'days of the Patriarchs' (around 1950-1500 B.C.E.) to the agricultural school of Mikveh Israel which was established in 1870 C.E., a period which resembles "the roots of the oaks which remained in the soil after the trees had been destroyed by vandals." In part two 'Shoots' begin to grow from these roots between Mikveh Israel and the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Part three covers the period of Mandatory rule in Palestine and is referred to as 'trunks' since it symbolises the way in which those "shoots grew to sturdy trees, and the first planting of non-fruit-bearing trees, with the object of creating forests." Finally, in 'crowns' Weitz addresses "The first years of the State of Israel during which forests have spread to all parts of the country."

The New Year for Trees

Beyond this imagery, individual trees themselves are considered so important that a first-century rabbi once said "if you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah" (Swartz 2005). Special respect is reserved for *fruit* trees, which provided physical and economic sustenance and therefore informed the most basic environmental law, *bal tashchit* (do not destroy). This law was derived from Deuteronomy 20 which forbids Jews from engaging in the popular wartime tactic of cutting off the enemy's food supply by destroying fruit trees.²⁵ This

²⁵ When thou shalt besiege a city a long time...thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, but thou shalt not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be

prohibition against the destruction of fruit trees during times of war was extended by Talmudic rabbis to prohibit the destruction of trees at any time (war or peace) and by any means, not just by 'wielding an axe against them' (Gordis 1983), and has come to be known as a prohibition against waste in general. Further rules governing fruit trees are found in an oft-quoted passage of Leviticus 19:

²³And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as forbidden; three years shall it be as forbidden unto you; it shall not be eaten. ²⁴And in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise unto HaShem. ²⁵But in the fifth year may ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you more richly the increase thereof: I am HaShem your G-d.

In order to adhere to these rules governing a fruit tree's first five years, and to calculate the levying of tithes or taxes thereafter, a date needed to be established to determine the 'ages' of trees. It was agreed that the 'new year' should fall during the month of Shvat, the eleventh month in the Jewish calendar which roughly coincides with January-February and which marks the onset of spring in Israel. However, during the Fifth Century C.E. there was some conflict among the rabbis as to whether the exact date of the 'new year' should fall on the 15th of Shvat, as proposed by the religious school of Bet Hillel, or on the 1st of Shvat, as suggested by the rival school of Bet Shammai. Bet Hillel won out since most of Israel's annual rains fall before the 15th of Shvat and this date was thereafter known as the New Year of the Trees, *Rosh Hashanah la-Ilanot* or, more commonly, Tu B'Shvat²⁶ (The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia 1948; Encyclopædia Judaica 1972; 1997).

besieged of thee? Only the trees of which thou knowest that they are not trees for food, them thou mayest destroy and cut down. (Deuteronomy 20: 19-20)

²⁶ The name means 'the fifteenth of Shvat,' as the Hebrew letters for nine (*lul*) and six (*vav*), which add up to fifteen, spell *Tu* (Gersh 1971). Different sources employ different spellings (Tu B'Shevat, Tu Bishevat, Tu bi-Shvat etc.)

Tu B'Shvat found greatest significance among the Kabbalists and the Shepardi Jews who called it 'The Feast of Fruits' and developed a seder²⁷ "to celebrate the connection of all living things to the earth" (Drucker 1994 p65; Encyclopædia Judaica 1997). As Malka Drucker (1994 p65) explains, the seder is celebrated at nightfall ("Because life begins in the darkness of the womb"²⁸) and is divided into four parts, signifying the four seasons, the four elements and the four corners of the earth. It begins with readings about earth and winter, eating fruit with hard shells and soft centres, such as pomegranate, walnut or coconut, and drinking white wine, "because white is the color of snowy winter." The seder then moves on to celebrate water and the awakening of spring. This time the prescribed fruit is soft on the outside but hard on the inside, such as cherries, olives or avocados, and the white wine is mixed with a little red. Part three focuses on air and summer ("The earth is awakening"). Fruits which are soft throughout, such as berries, figs and grapes, are accompanied with a wine which is now more red than white, "because red is both hot and strong." The final part of the seder celebrates fire and autumn ("Now the earth is fully awake") by drinking pure red wine, "which represents the spark inside each of us that connects us to God."

This was the way Tu B'Shvat was celebrated for centuries by Jews in Diaspora, if it was celebrated at all. Since the festival has no religious or historic significance, is not mentioned in the Torah, and has no liturgical requirements it was in danger of disappearing into oblivion. Until the early-twentieth century, that is, when it was rescued from obscurity and transformed into a specifically tree-planting event; a kind of Zionist 'Arbor Day.' Indeed some interesting

but all refer to the same festival. A more literal (but must less common) translation of '15th of Shvat' is 'Chamisah-Asar Bishevat', since chamishah-asar is 'fifteen' in Hebrew (Syme 1983).

²⁷ A dinner including special foods and ceremony

²⁸ Also, in Judaism the day begins at sundown. For example, the Sabbath (Saturday) begins at sunset on Friday.

parallels between the development and celebration of that North American holiday and the ascendancy of Tu B'Shvat that are worth pausing a moment to draw out.

Arbor Day was first suggested in 1872 by Julius Sterling Morton, a conservationist, newspaper editor, politician, and Secretary of Agriculture. Morton saw “beauty in a well-ordered orchard” considering them the “missionaries of culture and refinement... If I had the power I would compel every man in the state who had a home of his own to plant and cultivate fruit trees”. He therefore nominated 10th April to be “especially set apart and consecrated for tree planting” (Sassaman 1991 p43; see also Anderson 2000). Morton’s ideas were born out of a wider upward trend in nineteenth-century United States settler society of conservationist and preservationist anxieties following the Civil War. Where before the settlers, not unlike the Zionists, had seen themselves, in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville, “marching through the wilderness, drying up marshes, diverting rivers, peopling the wilds and subduing nature,” they were now deeply concerned about the mismanagement of resources and the loss of wilderness. As the focus of these apprehensions, forests became a central concern of the emerging conservation movement in the U.S. and a potent symbol of empire’s toll on nature (Schmidt 1991 p301). Less than twenty years after it was first proposed, Arbor Day was being celebrated in thirty states, on dates of particular importance to each,²⁹ and nationwide by the turn of the century. In 1884 Arbor Day was embraced by the National Education Association and mobilised to “raise the nation’s consciousness about deforestation and to instill [*sic*] a conservationist sentiment among children.” Moreover, the connections with nature thus supplied were intended to mould those children into ‘virtuous citizens’ (Schmidt 1991 p302; p307).

²⁹ For example, Nebraska hold their Arbor Day on Morton’s birthday, 22nd April, whereas California uses it to mark Luther Burbank’s birthday on 7th March (Sassaman 1991).

It was under similar premises that the Teacher's Movement for KKL-JNF resurrected Tu B'Shvat from the doldrums of the Jewish calendar. The Movement had been established in 1927 in response to a call by the teacher and JNF activist, Solmon Schiller, for children to be involved in the redemption of the land of Israel: "their souls must be engaged in the redemption of the People through the redemption of the land...teachers must not only look favorably upon fund-raising, but organize it as an educational project and charge children with redeeming the land as a national duty" (KKL 3 p7). The aim here was not necessarily to raise thousands of pounds, francs, marks, pesos, guilders, rands, florins, or dollars for the Jewish National Fund. The central aim was rather to instil children with a sense of importance concerning the Fund's land redemption work, its 'national accomplishments' on behalf of the Jewish People. As the then Fund Chairman, Menahem Ussishkin, put it at a Teacher's Movement conference in 1929: "The penny that a child gives or collects for land redemption is not important in itself, not by it will Keren Kayemeth be built up nor the land of Erez Israel redeemed. The penny is important as an educational element: it is not the child that gives to the Fund, but rather the Fund that gives to the child. It gives him a lifelong foothold and lofty ideal" (ibid.). In response to this address, teachers in Hebrew schools set up KKL-JNF corners in their classrooms, with the archetypal blue-box at the centre. More importantly, the teachers also began to revive various agricultural festivals, including Tu B'Shvat, which, in acknowledgement of the Jewish National Fund's redemption-afforestation work, was resurrected as a specifically tree-planting holiday. As a pupil at a north-London Hebrew school, Simon Schama experienced these efforts first-hand:

"Every sixpence collected for the blue and white box of the Jewish National Fund merited another leaf [on a paper tree]. When the tree was throttled with foliage the whole box was sent off, and a sapling, we were promised, would be dug into the Galilean soil, the name of our class stapled to one of its green twigs...The trees were our proxy immigrants, the forests our implantation. And while we assumed that a pinewood was more beautiful than a hill denuded by grazing flocks of goats and sheep, we were never exactly sure what all the trees were *for*. What we did know was that a rooted

forest was the opposite landscape to a place of drifting sand, of exposed rock and red dirt blown by the winds. The diaspora was sand. So what should Israel be, if not a forest, fixed and tall?" (Schama 1995 p5-6, his emphasis)

Teaching Tu B'Shvat

Tu B'Shvat is still celebrated today primarily as a children's holiday and every year the Jewish National Fund distributes thousands of saplings to schools across Israel free of charge, which thousands of merry children then take the day off school to plant. This emphasis on children at the Jewish New Year of the Trees is so great that "if you do not have a child in kindergarten, you are in danger of missing Tu B'Shvat altogether."³⁰ In children's literature Tu B'Shvat is presented in a variety of ways. Materials written for teachers in Jewish schools tend to focus on the history of the holiday itself and the lessons to be taken from its celebration. Some of these dispense general lessons about nature, the importance of appreciating where foods and natural materials come from, and that these things are not to be taken for granted (Musleah and Klayman 1997). In a similar vein, Tu B'Shvat is also presented as a holiday devoted to concern for the land (Ross 1983) as well as an opportunity to celebrate "our hope and intention to make the world more green and healthy" (Drucker 1994 p64). The 'greenness' here is specifically arboreal and some authors focus their lessons on trees, recognising their importance in *any* landscape (Kozodoy 1981) and understanding Tu B'Shvat as a seasonal marker for the onset of spring and the 'awakening of the tree' (Gersh 1971). In some instances these environmental imaginaries constructed through and around Tu B'Shvat take on a specifically Jewish flavour, with Tu B'Shvat promoted as capturing the symbolic bond between Diaspora Jews and the land of Israel (Syme 1983) as well as being a celebration of the unbroken Jewish love for Israel and the earth (Sorrof and Schwarzmman 1983). Lillian Ross (1983) goes so far as

³⁰ 'Glorious Greenery,' Helen Schary Motro, The Jerusalem Post, Thursday 4th January 1999 p8

to locate the very idea of 'ecology' in Judaism by virtue of the sustained attention in the Talmud to environmental issues. Fictional children's literature is quite different. Books in this genre tend not to deal directly with the festival of Tu B'Shvat but rather tell stories specifically about *trees*. As such they offer incredibly rich, evocative imagery of Jewish relationships with nature which falls into four interrelated themes.

Continuity

The first and most pervasive theme is that of *continuity* over time, specifically across generations. The majority of children in tree-fiction books appear with a grandparent or at least a grandparent-aged person, evoking a continuity from the past into the future, natural cycles of life and death into eternity: "A child who discovers that a tiny brown seed has the power to grow into a beautiful green plant is standing before one of the deepest mysteries of life. As such a time, *he can hold infinity in the palm of his hand!*" (Ross 1983 p70, my emphasis). The annual cycles of degradation and renewal experienced by (deciduous) trees and the notion of perpetuity to which this speaks, is reproduced when children and elders plant saplings together. There is a strong altruistic component in planting trees for the future, especially given the great longevity of trees, which far outstrips that of humans. This altruism is best captured in one recurrent story, adapted from the Midrash,³¹ called 'Honi and the Carob tree,' which tells of Rabbi Honi who one day comes across a very elderly man planting a carob tree. Honi ridicules the man for planting a tree, the fruit and the shade of which he is unlikely to live long enough to enjoy.

³¹ The Midrash is a category of (ongoing) rabbinical literature, it "consists of interpretations of biblical texts that explain or illustrate the laws and principles of the Torah through stories, legends and anecdotes" (Cone 1995, 78; Jewish Virtual Library 2005). The version I base this re-telling on is Malka Drucker's (1994 p66-67) but variations also appeared in Ross (1983), Cone (1995), Gersh (1971).

"True, young man," answered the tree planter, "but trees are beautiful things to have. My children will eat the fruit, and my grandchildren will enjoy the shade. I ate the fruit from trees my father planted, and I sat under the shade from trees my grandfather planted. Now I will prepare for those who come after me."

Honi persists that the old man should plant some fast-growing species so that he might get something for his hard work. But the old man just smiles and keeps on digging. Just then, Honi becomes incredibly tired and lies down to sleep. When he wakes up he thinks it is only the next day but his body is all stiff and creaky, his hands are wrinkled his clothes are in shreds and his face now sports a long white beard.

"I'm old!" he exclaimed out loud. "How long have I slept?" he wondered. He looked around and found himself in the middle of a fruit orchard. A tall, full carob tree heavy with sweet pods hung low. Honi picked one and hungrily chewed it, savoring its rich taste. Just then a little boy passed by. "Stop!" Honi shouted to the boy. "Who are you?" "I am Moshe ben Shimon Halevi," the boy replied. "No! Moshe ben Shimon Halevi!" repeated Honi. "Why, he is an old man!" "You must mean my great-grandfather," the boy said, chewing a carob pod. "He died many years ago. I was named for him. This is the tree he planted in the last years of his life. About seventy years ago." Seventy years! Honi had slept a long time, but at last he understood the old man's wisdom.

Goodness

A second theme surrounding trees in children's literature is that they are inherently *good*, not only for the landscape but also for wildlife and for people. In *A Tree Full of Mitzvos* (Rosenfeld 1990) we meet a tree which grows in the garden of a Jewish family and yearns to take part in one of the many different ceremonies celebrating various Jewish holidays. The tree is doubtful that it can ever take part in the family's religious life, until a bird comes along and asks to build its nest in the tree, and then a squirrel asks to store acorns in it, and then a vine asks to grow around its trunk, and a daisy asks to grow in the shade of its branches. It is then that the tree realises that it *can* take part in Judaism because helping these animals and plants is considered a mitzva, a good deed.

In other stories trees are depicted as being good for people: they beautify the landscape, they provide shade and materials to make furniture, paper and clothes, and they produce food in the form of fruits and nuts (Cedarbaum 1984). In some cases trees can even save lives, as in *The Never-Ending Greenness* (Waldman 1997) when the forests around the Lithuanian town of Vilna provide a refuge for a Jewish family escaping the Jewish ghetto and almost certain death in a Nazi concentration camp. Such a dramatic tale is rare and trees are more often depicted as enriching the daily lives of the people around them. For example, *The Giving Tree* (Silverstein 1964) tells the story of a tree and 'her' friendship with a little boy. When the boy was small he would play with the tree, climbing up her trunk, swinging on her branches and eating her apples. As the boy grew older he visited the tree less and less, which made the tree sad. When he did come back his priorities had changed: he no longer wanted to play, instead he wanted money and a house and a boat. So the tree gave him all her apples to sell, and then a few years later she gave him her branches for a house, and then after a few more years she gave him her trunk to carve out a boat. The next time the boy returns he is an old man. The tree tells him that she has nothing left to give him, but he replies that he is only looking for a place to sit and rest a while. So the tree invites him to sit on her stump and she is happy again.

Friendliness

In this story, the tree acquires self-definition from her relationship with the boy, and it is this notion of *friendship* between (young) people and trees that is the third prominent theme in fictional children's literature. In *The Giving Tree* it does seem somewhat of a lopsided friendship in which the tree mostly gives and the boy takes, implying that the natural world is a resource for human exploitation. In other stories, however, the relationship is depicted as more reciprocal: whatever trees give to people, people give back to trees. As Sophia Cedarbaum explains: "People plant seeds for trees in nurseries. People take care of the little trees. They

water the trees. They spray the trees. They weed around the trees. When the trees are tall enough and strong enough they are planted in forests. Men called forest rangers watch so that no fire will start and burn up the trees. *Our friends, the trees*" (1984 p41, my emphasis). It is not clear exactly what the trees are being sprayed with but I presume it is pesticides, which would suggest a highly selective view of 'nature' in which trees are natural but the organisms that live off them are not, in which the mountains and valleys of Palestine are natural but the Huleh swamp and its mosquitoes are not.³² Nevertheless, the message here is clearly that without people to take care of them there would be far fewer trees in Israel. In such an arid environment, trees need people to nurture them so that they may return the favour by enriching people's lives and the land itself with their presence.

In befriending trees as a child, it is subsequently imagined that they will return each year, usually on Tu B'Shvat, to measure the sapling's growth against their own: "Happy birthday, little tree!/Next year you'll be big as me/I can hardly wait to see/Next Tu-Tu-Tu-Tu, next Tu biShvat."³³ Decades later these children may even chain themselves to those very trees to prevent them from being chopped down, which is what the (now grown up) children of Rosh Pina did in February 2001. During the 1960s, these children had planted a grove trees on the various Tu B'Shvat holidays, but forty years later their trees were threatened by a road-building scheme. A middle-aged woman who was one of those green-fingered schoolchildren said "I feel something special here...as if the trees are part of my own life, and my own life is part of the

³² See Joseph Weitz's conception of nature, chapter four.

³³ "Here come the planters" (Admon, Sheinberg, Buchman and Eisenstein)

park.”³⁴ The interviewing journalist feels the same: “Missing trees are like friends you’ve taken for granted until you lose them.”³⁵

As the children and the trees grow in tandem, so their histories become woven together, and many years later, when they themselves have children and grandchildren, the tree might help them remember events from long ago just as clearly as the day they happened. Like Pearl’s grandfather in *Pearl Plants a Tree* (Zalben 1995), who takes her back to the neighbourhood he lived in when he first arrived in America: “There is the apple tree I planted from a seed. That’s where I had my first birthday party, and where I asked Grandma to marry me. I remember it *much* smaller.” Stories often depict this investment of personal histories as flowing from the child’s imagination of the tree’s silent presence as steadfast friendship. Losing the tree or even just leaving it is therefore like losing or leaving a dearly beloved person, as we learn in *The Tree of Here* (Potok 1993). This tells the story of Jason, whose family are moving for the third time in five years. He has only been living in his current house for two years but has already forged some close friendships, particularly with the dogwood tree in his garden. During his final weeks in his current house, Jason spends lots of time sitting on a branch, talking and listening to the tree. On the day he leaves, their gardener, Mr Healy, gives him a dogwood sapling to plant in the garden of his next house, telling him “you take good care of this one...it’ll remind you of this place here.” Jason plants the tree as soon as they arrive at their new house and the little tree says “Any time you want me, I’m here.”

Place

This story speaks strongly to the fourth theme in fictional children’s literature, *sense of place*. The personal histories, which are invested by children/people in trees through their steadfast

³⁴ ‘Giving trees priority,’ Helen Schary Motro, *The Jerusalem Post*, Thursday 8th February 2001, p8

³⁵ ‘Glorious greenery’ Helen Schary Motro *The Jerusalem Post* Thursday 4th February 1999 p8

friendships, are place-bound histories. Jason's rootlessness speaks to the wanderings of Diaspora Jewry, and the tree is depicted as giving Jason a sense of place, a 'here,' perhaps even a home in an otherwise restless, homeless existence. Similarly, the trees in Arthur Levine's *Pearl Moscovitz's Last Stand* (1993) are place-makers in a neighbourhood with a high turnover of residents. In this story, our protagonist chains herself to the last gingko tree left on her street to prevent the electricity company from chopping it down to make way for more cables. The street itself is called 'Gingko Street' in honour of the all the gingko's Pearl's mother persuaded the city to plant many years previously. Pearl's drastic actions (which pay off in the end as the tree is saved and the mayor promises to re-plant the street with gingkos) demonstrate the critical importance of the trees to Pearl's history and to the history of the street. The trees endured as the neighbourhood grew and expanded. One might be cut down every so often to make way for a new building or to renovate an old one but there were always a few gingkos there to witness the coming and going of various individuals and families from all over the world, and to enjoy the shifts in the cultural life of the street which accompanied them.

The majority of such stories emphasising place are situated in unspecified towns in North America. We are told that Jason is moving *to* Boston but not where he is moving to Boston *from*. Similarly, we know only that Pearl Moscovitz lives in a city and we are left to deduce that it is one old enough to reach back through several generations and large enough to be vibrantly multicultural. The fact that these places, which mean so much to the characters, remain nameless to the reader leaves space for individual interpretation, for the audience to create their own meanings, their own geographical imaginations out of the stories told. In this way, the more generalised, abstracted, rootless environmental imaginations we encountered earlier around ideas of nature and landscape and trees in particular have become situated, they have become in some way spatialised, albeit in Diaspora. A couple of stories, however, are situated in Israel. One is

The Never-Ending Greenness (Waldman 1997) in which a boy and his family immigrate to Israel after the Second World War. There the boy dreams of a 'never-ending greenness' across the land after 'rescuing' a tiny sapling from the 'rocky ground' and nurturing it through the dry season that would otherwise have claimed it. From then on he religiously ventures out into the hills searching for more saplings to rescue, sometimes bringing his friends along with him. The boy's father commends his activities, saying that he is "helping to return these hills to the way they were thousands of years ago."

This is the classic political-Zionist geographical imaginary: the Jews were driven out of a verdant land; over the subsequent centuries the conquerors denuded the land so that neither trees nor wildlife could live there; Zionist settlers found the land empty, except for some architectural relics from the crusades and the odd Roman coin, and are restoring the land to its former glory by planting trees. Such messages are rarely so explicit, more often authors refer simply in passing to the 'barren and deserted' landscape which met nineteenth-century settlers. Some single out the Jewish National Fund and its afforestation work for recognition but few books are as loudly Zionist as *Behold the Trees* (2001) written by Sue Alexander, beautifully and evocatively illustrated by Leonid Gore, and dedicated to the Jewish National Fund "without whom there would have been no story to tell." Alexander says she was inspired to write the book by her childhood memories of "a small blue bank on the sideboard in our dining room" and after a trip to Israel. It has won and been nominated for a number of awards: in 2002 the Children's Literature Council gave it the 'Award for Distinguished Literary Quality in a Non-Fiction Work for All Ages' and it was also nominated for the Border's Original Voices Award. The Association of Jewish Libraries named it the 'Notable Children's Book of Jewish Content' and it was given an honourable mention by the Sugarman Family in their 'Award for Jewish

Children's Literature' at the District of Columbia Jewish Community Center.³⁶ Reviews have been similarly positive: "a riveting, heartbreaking picture of the long, slow devastation of one piece of Earth" (Amazon); a "profoundly satisfying" book that "delicately but powerfully implies a parallel between its trees of and the Jews who settled there" (Publishers Weekly); "A sensitive story for all readers about man's effect on the land, [and] a celebratory story of Israel's tree-planting holiday" (A-1 Women's Discount Bookstore); a "splendid book" which "celebrates an environmental miracle that people of all faiths can admire" (Books for Jewish Kids).

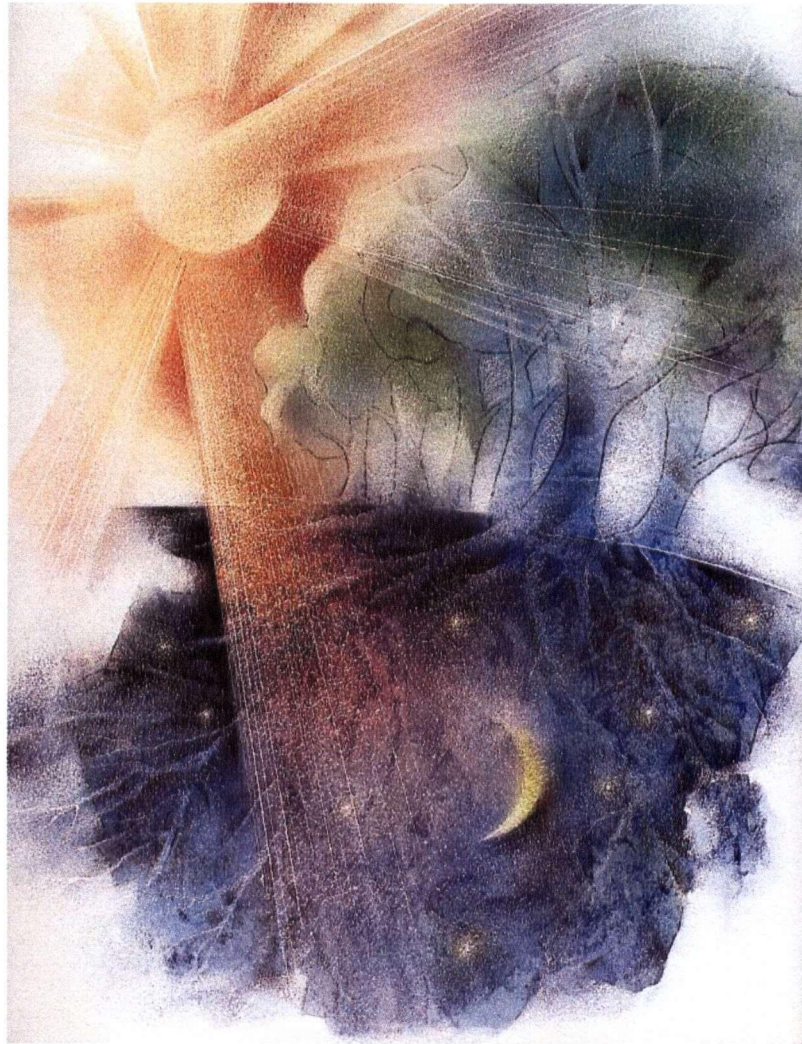
Behold the Trees charts the story of a "land once protected by all sorts of wonderful trees [and how it] is reduced over time by war and environmental neglect to desert, until new inhabitants plant trees and slowly make Israel bloom again."³⁷ In doing so it attempts to cover seven millennia of history across twenty pages and eight, wildly uneven time periods, ranging from six years to three thousand years. Moreover, the story itself is told entirely through trees, their historic abundance, their post-exodus destruction, their contemporary resurrection. Given its content and critical acclaim, Alexander's book is worthy of detailed discussion.

Behold the Trees

In keeping with dominant Zionist narratives perpetuated by the Jewish National Fund, the first sections (5000-1002 B.C.E.) depict an idyllic landscape where humans and nature existed in harmony with one another. Numerous different species of trees abounded providing shelter and sustenance for humans and animals alike. The accompanying illustration depicts magnificent trees and celestial beams of sunlight bursting between the branches, and the rich greens and blues evoke enormous fertility and luxuriance (Figure 2.2).

³⁶ www.sue-alexander.com

³⁷ Publisher's summary



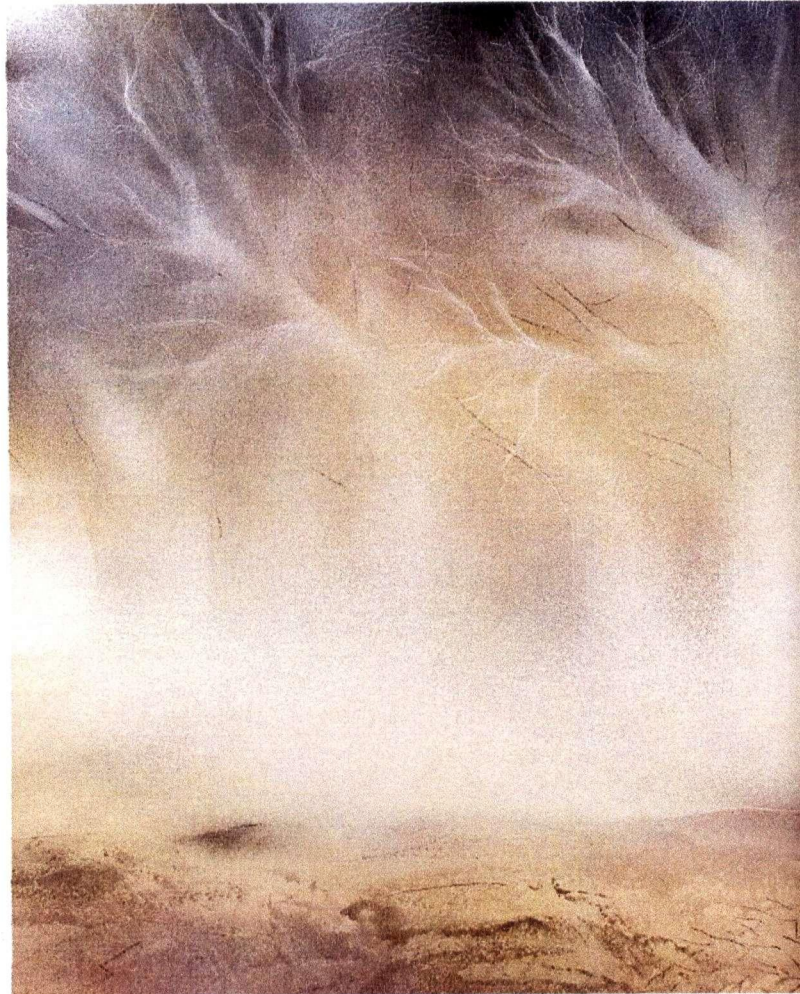
5000 B.C.E. – 2100 B.C.E.: *Oak and almond, fig and olive, terebinth and palm, acacia and pomegranate, willow and tamarisk. They grew wild when the land was called Canaan...Living, life-giving trees.*

2100 B.C.E. – 1002 B.C.E.: *They grew in stands and groves and great forests. They held back the sea, cooled the air, and protected the earth for the people and animals who lived there. Shepherds rested in their shade and travellers ate their fruits. Doves nested in their branches and gazelles ate their tender green leaves.*

Figure 2.2: Canaan (Alexander 2001, image © Leonid Gore 2001)

Over the next three thousand years, the land gradually becomes degraded. Trees are chopped down in increasing numbers to build towns and cities, “and no new trees were planted.” Yellows and greys begin to take over the illustrations, suggesting the onset of desertification and the cold creep of urbanisation. The idyllic pastoral ‘origins’ are fading away as the outlines of trees merge with those of axes, Roman pillars and architectural plans. During various wars the trees, red and bloodied, are barely distinguishable from the outlines of soldiers’ helmets and clashing weapons. Those who survived these battles fall victim to the Turks’ road-, bridge- and rail-building endeavours, “and no new trees were planted.” As the Ottoman Empire becomes increasingly unstable, from both within and without, the land is ‘ignored,’ the inhabitants abandon their farms, cities and towns to the goats. The illustrations are now very grey and bleak. Tree roots are visible underground but the roaming animals have cleared away anything on the surface, “*and no new trees were planted.*”

With the return of the Jews rich blues and greens also return to the frame and the sun rises for the first time in ages, literally. In a diluted reproduction of the ‘Canaan’ illustration, a pair of healing hands surrounds a lone stand of trees and we get the impression that everything is going to be all right. But the struggle is not over. The First World War thwarts the attempts of the Jewish settlers to restore the land to its former glory. More trees are sacrificed to the war effort and earlier narratives of tree-covered hillsides and grazing gazelles are rewritten to demonstrate just how far from that idyllic landscape we have come. The trees are all but ghosts in the cracked, dry landscape (Figure 2.3).

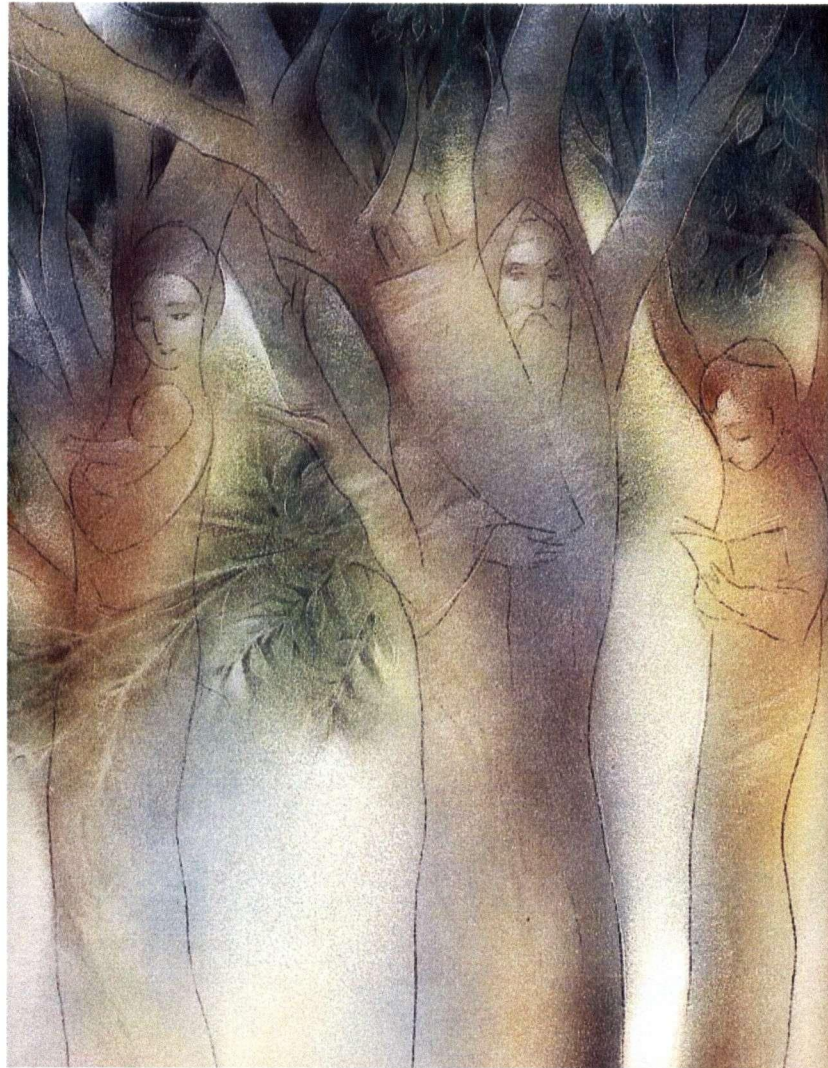


1918 C.E.: *Oak and almond, fig and olive, terebinth and palm, acacia and pomegranate, willow and tamarisk. They no longer grew in the valleys, on the hillsides, or along the shores of the seas and on the oases of the wilderness. There were few wild stands or groves and no more great forests. There were not enough trees left to hold back the sea, cool the air, or protect the earth. And the land became salt marsh and sand. Without trees to sustain them, the animals and birds disappeared. Gazelles and antelope no longer roamed the hillsides or lingered in the valleys. No owls or doves remained to soar through the air or trill their songs.*

Figure 2.3: Post-WWI (Alexander 2001, image © Leonid Gore 2001)

Between the wars Jewish men and women build more settlements and plant more trees and continue working to restore the landscape to the way it was twenty pages ago. Jews all over the world donate to the Jewish National Fund to assist in their reconstruction of the 'natural' environment, in which others find refuge. Finally, the State of Israel is established, reuniting the land with the forests and the Jewish people. In the closing scene the trees *are* the people: one is a woman nursing a baby, another is a rabbi or sage holding the Torah scrolls, next to whom a boy is studying a book; elsewhere people are revelling in the presence and fruits of the trees.³⁸ The 'natural' order of things has been restored, with the Jews and the trees being reinstated to their rightful places (Figure 2.4).

³⁸ One review described the branches in this illustration as sprouting "from hands tattooed with concentration camp numbers" (Books for Jewish Kids), despite depicting no such thing (see Figure 4.6).



1948 C.E. – PRESENT: *Cypress and pine, eucalyptus and acacia, orange and olive, lemon and pecan, oak and palm. They all grow now in the land called Israel. They grow at the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, in the valleys and on the hillsides, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and in the wilderness. They grow in stands and groves and great forests. They hold back the sea, cool the air, and protect the earth for the people and animals who live there.*

Figure 2.4: 1948 – Present (Alexander 2001, image © Leonid Gore 2001)

It is geographical imaginations such as this one promulgated in *Behold the Trees* that the Jewish National Fund attempts to en-plant in children's minds every year on Tu B'Shvat. When thousands of children in Israel and around the world plant a JNF sapling or donate money to the Fund to plant one on their behalf, they celebrate such ideas, making an investment in the 'lofty ideal' of righteous return which has been provided for them by Zionist discourses. Moreover, when combined with the wholesome and admirable qualities encountered elsewhere in children's literature (intimate Jewish knowledge of and respect for nature, the personal relationships between trees and people, their inherent goodness and longevity that will allow the planter's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to also enjoy them), the Jewish National Fund comes to be seen as a beneficent organisation through its tree-planting initiatives: it can be promoted as innocently helping children to connect with the land, is generously creating a 'home' or a 'here' for the Jewish people in Israel and altruistically ensuring that this home endures for generations to come.

In this way JNF is constructing 'landscapes of affect.' Having recognised the power of nature's terrain in establishing sentimental attachments among human subjects, JNF has activated that terrain in support of its own nation-building activities on behalf of political-Zionism. As Moore et al have explained, mechanisms of 'identity' and 'affinity' "sculpt both interior senses of selfhood and natural environments of nativity" and in doing so they "enable the simultaneous imagination and fabrication of inner selves, social bodies, and environmental milieux." (2003 p31, their emphasis). In the following chapter I explore how these imaginations of 'identity' and 'affinity' have been and are being manipulated by the Jewish National Fund through imagery of 'rooting' and 'awakening' in order to establish Israel as a natural and righteous presence in the Middle East.

Chapter 3 : 'Rooting' and 'Awakening'

The Jewish 'New Year of the Trees' offered an ideal focal point around which to rally moral and financial support for JNF's settlement and afforestation work in Palestine. It provided an opportunity to publicise the Fund's progress from year to year, demonstrating how its policy of "a dunam here, a dunam there" was adding up to so many thousands of dunams redeemed, so many millions of trees planted (KKL 2 p2). For example, *The KKL Story* boasts that in 1935 "the Fund could...take pride in the 7,000 dunams of forest that now glistened from afar thanks to a woodland mantle: green plumage, 1.7 million trees, that had begun to cover bald hillsides" (KKL 4 p2). Ten years later in 1945 "KKL-JNF's forestry books showed 3,620,700 trees in forests extending over the length and breadth of the country and covering 15,700 dunams of land" (KKL 5 p3). But although these achievements were something to be proud of, they were not laurels to be rested on, and the JNF also used Tu B'Shvat as a platform for renewing the call for donations in order for it to proceed with its urgent work.

This imperative was immaculately captured by Chaim Nahman Bialik, a well-known poet, in a speech he gave on the Fund's Silver Anniversary in 1926. He recounted an exchange between himself and a professor who had asked how much land a person needed to feel on a safe footing, particularly "a person standing on a mountain or some other elevation." Bialik had replied "He needs land equal to his full height, so that if he stumbles and falls, he will be on firm ground." Addressing the audience Bialik continued "I look at the land redeemed by Keren Kayemeth and I ask myself, is the land that has been redeemed commensurate with the stature of the Jewish People? Can it quell the fear of falling? And to this, the answer must be 'no!' For a people of 16 million, of a lofty world stature of thousands of years - the land redeemed thus far is not even

enough for his foot. May the day come that the land redeemed matches the full stature of the Jewish People” (KKL 3 p8). It was under these auspices of land redemption by and for the Jewish People as a whole that JNF solicited donations from those in Diaspora to buy up land from the Arabs and later forest it, thus redeeming the land not only from Arab ownership but also from the chains of wilderness bequeathed by poor Arab stewardship.

Moving through the four parts of the Tu B'Shvat seder (Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn), and with the illustrative help of Joseph Weitz, I will describe the importance of the 'New Year for Trees' in bonding Diaspora and settler Jews with their 'old-new' homeland in Palestine. I chart extensions in the imagery of trees and tree-planting activated when Tu B'Shvat coincided with the opening of the Knesset in February 1949. Thinking through the themes of 'rooting' and 'awakening' I demonstrate how the 'New Year of the Trees' now captures the anchoring of Diaspora wanderings and the stirring to life not only of the Jewish people but of the Middle East. In 'autumn' I turn to the concepts of death and renewal which are activated when children plant trees in memory of others, eternalising both Israel and the Jewish people. In this way, the Zionist geographical imaginaries I have been discussing so far begin to take on a specifically nationalistic and performative flavour, emphasising the practical importance of settlement-plus-tree-planting in bargaining for a second 'Israel' and the emotional significance of the physical act of planting trees. That is not to say that the broader symbolic meaning of trees was relinquished. Indeed the quintessential imagery of trees 'rooting' people in the land remained central.

As Liisa Malkki (1992) explains, the links between people and place are not simply territorializing but metaphysical and they are predominantly conceived and expressed in botanical metaphors of tree-like 'rootedness,' a tendency which naturalises those links. Drawing from Benedict Anderson's work on imagined communities (1991) and the notion of 'natural' ties

between people and nation, Malkki explains how terms such as 'mother-' and 'fatherland' "suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it. By implication, it is impossible to be part of more than one tree. Such a tree evokes both temporal continuity of essence and territorial rootedness" (Malkki 1992 p28). Therefore, by imagining the Jewish return to the land of Israel through the figure of the tree, political-Zionist discourse manages to not only naturalise Jewish links with and claims to the soil of Palestine but also holds all Jewish people hostage to their 'redeeming' mission. By this I mean that tree-imagery naturalises political-Zionist constructions of 'The Jewish People' as a coherent, homogenous entity, and thus legitimises those (Herzl and others) who would speak on their behalf. Mobilising such imagery helped the Jewish National Fund to draw more people into the political-Zionist fold, enrooting the hearts and minds of Diaspora Jews in the soil of Eretz Israel.

Winter: cultivating hearts for the homeland

For decades the Fund has relied upon the 'New Year for Trees' to encourage Jews across Israel and the world to plant trees in celebration of Jewish connections to nature as well as in celebration of the redemption and return, of both the people and 'their' land. Trees were an 'icon of national revival' (Zerubavel 1996) and Tu B'Shvat thus helped the Jewish National Fund to 'cultivate Jewish hearts for the homeland,' nourishing the dormant roots of the Jewish people which waxed old in the soil of their native land. Just as "mystic Jewish teachers planted their own seeds of wisdom on the metaphysical fields of their own creation" when the Jews lived in Diaspora and there was no actual land to sow, so the Jewish National Fund would plant mystic 'trees of life' "in the hearts of a faithful congregation [so] that the redemption of Israel and the closeness of the Jewish People to Heaven will be assured."³⁹

³⁹ 'The Seeds of the Past,' Alexander Zviely, The Jerusalem Post, Friday 27th January 1956, p4

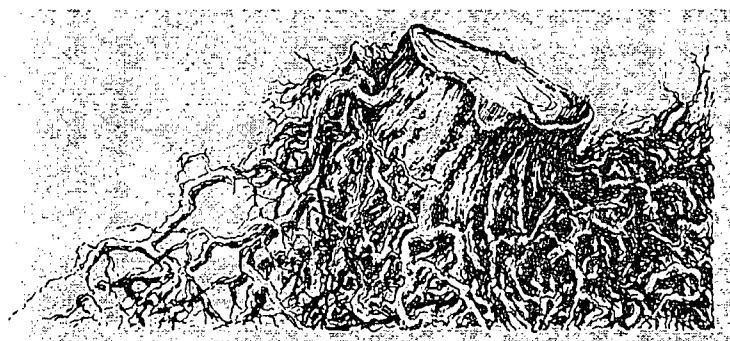


Figure 3.1: 'Roots' (Weitz 1974)

As such JNF offers to plant individual trees in Eretz Israel on behalf of individual donors, who would then receive a 'tree certificate' stating how many trees had been planted, where they had been planted and the occasion they had been planted to honour. This could be anything from the passing of a relative to a child's Bat/Bar Mitzvah, what mattered was the personal connection thus established between distant Jews and their 'homeland' whilst also contributing to the wider Zionist project of 'redeeming' the land by 'adding more greens.' The head of the JNF Information Department, Theodor HaTalg, believed these certificates to be "an indescribably potent instrument of the sentimental bond between diaspora Jewry and the land of Israel" (KKL 6 p4) as demonstrated by the 'place of honour' which they occupied on the eastern wall of many a Jewish home.⁴⁰ But these certificates and the trees they represented were more than sentimental bonds between Diaspora Jews and Eretz Israel, they were, as Schama put it, 'proxy immigrants.' For example, in 1969 children began planting a 'Brother to Brother Forest' in the Jerusalem hills which was to contain 13 million trees, "one for every Jew in the world."⁴¹ For those Jews who have chosen to remain in Diaspora at least an arboreal proxy 'returned home.'

⁴⁰ *The KKL Story* does not explain why the tree certificates were hung on specifically on the eastern wall but presumably it is because these were *Western* Jewish homes and that is the wall which faces Eretz Israel.

⁴¹ '40,000 saplings planted in Tu Bishvat rites' *The Jerusalem Post* Tuesday 4th February 1969 p8

The redemption of the land which was enabled by Diaspora donations therefore also translated into the redemption of those donors themselves, who had immigrated to Israel in all but body.

For those who *had* actually immigrated in body there was a similar redemption derived not only from having physically ‘returned’ but also from the afforestation work to which they were so often put upon their arrival. As I have already mentioned, working and developing the land was an essential part of the land’s redemption and in doing that work settlers were intended to bond with their old-new homeland: through *working* the land settlers would come to *know* the land as their home, anchoring themselves to Eretz-Israel just as they would anchor the sands with forests. Embodied knowledge of Eretz-Israel would be gathered in “messages sent through nerve and muscle” (White 1995 p9), forging an intimate connection between settler and soil, so that “[i]n the process of physically rejuvenating the land through forestry, immigrants themselves were rejuvenated and renewed” (Ginsberg 2000 p34). Of course, such notions are not the exclusive preserve of political-Zionist discourse. Indeed, they have been articulated elsewhere by none other than Nelson Mandela himself, another Nobel Peace Laureate, during his inaugural address as President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa in 1994:

“To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of use is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld. Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal” (quoted in Moore et al 2003 p31).

Working, knowing, owning

These ideas of trees, soil, personal rejuvenation, and nationalism were part of *yedi’at ha-aretz*, the project of ‘getting to know’ or ‘knowledge of the country,’ not only its history but its physical geography. The impetus here was that, although Jews were returning to their spiritual homeland, in practical terms they did not ‘know’ the land and therefore needed to be taught: “the overwhelming majority of people who were to comprise the Jewish homeland as conceived by

secular, political Zionism were transplanted from other locales, and thus in a very literal sense did not 'know' the country" in the way that nations of people are assumed to know their own country (Bardenstein 1998 p3). Political Zionism, however, did not assume anything. Instead it actively undertook, through organisations such as the Jewish National Fund, as well as educational institutions and the army, to retroactively fill in the knowledge the people would have had if they had been there before, as Zionist discourse claimed. In this way, with the majority of incoming settlers engaged in tree-planting with JNF, the original people-land relationship was being re-established and the idealised, ancient Israeli subject was being resurrected who, through 'the sweat of his brow,' knew the land intimately. The return to the land was thus a mechanism for the psychological recuperation of this 'original subject': "the image of the new [old] Jew, cleansed of Diaspora dust, was not meant to sink into rustic ignorance, but to develop as a technologically advanced, modern, self conscious, educated labourer" (Ben-Israel 2003 p92).

The redemption of the tree-planting Jew and the resurrection of her ancestral Israelite resonates with some of Karl Marx's ideas about the relationship – the 'metabolism' – between humans and the physical environment, which he saw as being powered by labour: "through their work people develop the 'potentialities slumbering within' both the external natural environment and their own material bodies" (Moore et al 2003 p7). The potentialities being awakened in those planting trees for the Jewish National Fund were their potentialities as Israeli citizens, as people immediately and deeply connected to the land, as their ancestors had been. This fusing of 'soils and selves' through work also produces "racial orders of difference" (Moore et al 2003 p9). For the Jewish people are being constructed as a race, the subjects of which are characterised by an affinity with and knowledge of the land not possessed by the local Arab population. These characteristics, these 'natures,' are grafted to nature itself through the act of

tree-planting, producing the Jewish settlers as the legitimate residents of Palestine over and above similar claims made by the Palestinians. As we shall see in the sections that follow, there are a number of other characteristics embodied by the Jewish-Israeli subject that have similarly been grafted to nature via tree-planting, namely dispositions of progress, democracy and modernity, which were claimed to be previously unheard of in this shadowy part of the world.

Spring: Israel awakens

Although the practices of donating and planting were feverishly promoted on Tu B'Shvat as enacting a multiplicity of redemptions, as enrooting the Jews were more firmly in the soil of Eretz Israel, and as bringing the prospect of a Jewish State a little bit closer, the 'New Year for Trees' remained a peripheral festival in the Jewish calendar since it fulfils only one of the three criteria for a Jewish holiday. As Rabbi M. Spira explained,⁴² Jewish holidays are threefold in character: they are natural festivals, historic festivals, and religious festivals. Tu B'Shvat is clearly a natural festival, since it marks the transition from winter to spring. However, it lacks attachment to an event in Jewish history which would make it a specifically *Jewish* festival. It also lacks any religious significance: it is not mentioned in the Torah and is treated in the Talmud as little more than a date in the agricultural calendar. It therefore does not teach anything about the "fundamental truths of life [which bind] man to God and brings God nearer to man." Lacking as it does two of the three criteria for a Jewish holiday, Spira asks "Are we, indeed, forced to conclude that Tu BiShevat is, after all, only 'a third of a festival'?" The answer came on 15th Shvat 5709 (14th February 1949) when Israel's Knesset opened:

"What greater event in Jewish history can we wish for than the present restoration of our people in its ancient homeland? What greater miracle than the realisation of Israel in its Old-New State, after a

⁴² 'Tu-BiShevat – Israel's New Festival?' Rabbi M. Spira, The Jewish Chronicle, Friday 11th February 1949, p6

frozen wintry period of two thousand years of suffering! Yet in all that wintry spell of *Galut*⁴³ we kept on, silently and steadily, gathering strengths, so as to be able to blossom forth again in the Land of Israel the moment the Sun of Freedom began to shed its redeeming rays.”

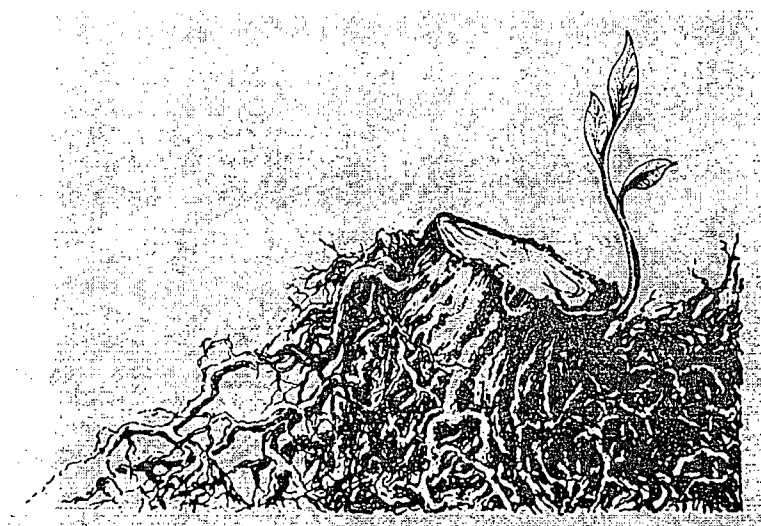


Figure 3.2: ‘Shoots’ (Weitz 1974)

The State of Israel had been declared on 14th May 1948 whilst war still raged. It had therefore taken several months to organise elections, which eventually took place on 25th January 1949. The holding of elections in itself was considered to be the “natural sequel”⁴⁴ to the declaration of Israel on 14th May 1948, an event which was followed, after a nine-month gestation period, with the opening of parliament on 14th February 1949. The elections were Israel’s “first formal act of democratic living,”⁴⁵ its first enactment or *performance* of democracy. Just under three weeks later, on Tu B’Shvat, Chaim Weizmann, the new President of Israel, declared the Constituent Assembly⁴⁶ open, placing the seal on Israel’s autonomy, ratifying its existence. In acknowledgement of the coincidence with Tu B’Shvat, delegates to the

⁴³ ‘Exile’ in Hebrew

⁴⁴ ‘Column One,’ David Courtney, *The Palestine Post*, Monday 14th February 1949, p1

⁴⁵ ‘Editorial’ *The Palestine Post*, Wednesday 26th January 1949, p4

⁴⁶ Renamed the ‘first Knesset’ two days later on 16th February 1949

Constituent Assembly, including the new Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, spent part of the inauguration day participating in a tree-planting ceremony on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road.⁴⁷ Earlier on there was also a parade of Jerusalem schoolchildren up to the government buildings where they were addressed by Ben Gurion before marching off to the tree planting site on the southwestern outskirts of the city.⁴⁸

The practice of planting trees on special occasions is a well-established tradition taken part in by dignitaries and politicians around the world to this day. In the nineteenth century, for example, many settlers in the United States planted 'liberty trees' to mark and celebrate their independence from colonial rule, an act which some believed demonstrated that the popular strive for liberty is "not just a modern notion but an ancient, irresistible instinct, a truly *natural* right" (Schama 1995 p17; see also Jackson 1994). From this perspective it is only fitting that the Jews' should realise their right to a homeland on the very date in the Jewish calendar that celebrates nature and has come to be marked with the planting of trees. Indeed, it is all but divinely-ordained since Tu B'Shvat is "a tribute to the initiation of creation...the starting point of a divine design,"⁴⁹ making the opening of the Knesset the 'natural' rebirth of the State of Israel, sanctioned by God despite being brought about by human endeavours. The significance of its 'birth' on Tu B'Shvat is recognised every year when the Knesset celebrates its 'birthday' on 15th Shvat (rather than on 14th February) with Members of the Knesset planting trees with soldiers and schoolchildren.

⁴⁷ 'Constituent Assembly to meet in Jerusalem today: City decorated for historic occasion,' The Jewish Chronicle, Monday 14th February 1949, p1

⁴⁸ 'Arbour Day' The Palestine Post Tuesday 15th February 1949

⁴⁹ 'The Seeds of the Past,' Alexander Zviely, The Jerusalem Post, Friday 27th January 1956, p4

Sedentarising the Jewish people

The symbolism of trees and tree-planting in association with the opening of the Knesset speaks to a range of 'rootings' and 'awakenings' bound up in the establishment of Israel. One of the most obvious 'rootings' is that of Diaspora, that is, the curing of a condition considered to be almost pathological by political-Zionists as well as scholars (see Malkki 1992). As Carol Bardenstein has explained, many of the earliest narratives informing a collective Jewish consciousness are characterised by restlessness (the banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden, Abraham's journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan, Jewish settlement in Egypt, Jewish exodus from Egypt, decades of wandering in the Sinai desert with Moses before returning to Canaan etc.): "Clearly 'homeland' as a place in which one is securely rooted has been a very precarious construct in Jewish narratives, in which the possibility of uprooting or being uprooted seems to be always just barely at bay" (Bardenstein 1999 p3). Bardenstein argues that an 'uprooting anxiety' therefore pervades the collective Jewish consciousness, fears which were ostensibly put to rest with the establishment of Israel and particularly with the opening of the Knesset, which made the new state fully operational. A line was supposed to have been drawn under Diaspora, promising the Jewish people stable sovereign autonomy within a defined territory. In the words of Dr. Israel Goldstein, the year 1949 "was an opportunity for the Jewish people to be cured of its homelessness,"⁵⁰ a cure which coincided with the 'New Year of the Trees' to give extra significance to an already "tangible symbol of the transformation from dispossession to homeland."⁵¹ Tree-planting on Tu B'Shvat therefore symbolises the rooting of the formerly wandering, Diasporic Jewish people in the very soil of Palestine.

⁵⁰ "“End of Jewish Homelessness”: Dr. Goldstein at Hendon' The Jewish Chronicle, Friday 18th February 1949, p9

⁵¹ 'Giving trees priority,' Helen Schary Motro, The Jerusalem Post, Thursday 8th February 2001, p8

However, as we encountered in the previous chapter, there is a certain amount of Jewish cultural essentialism which converges upon Tu B'Svhat, with Judaism being constructed as the green religion *par excellence*, a claim for which trees bear the standard and provide the benchmark. As James Clifford points out, "[t]he idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots, of stable, territorialized existence" and within this metaphysical conception of a culture existing in soil "culture and nation are kindred concepts: they are not only spatializing but territorializing; they both depend on a cultural essentialism that readily takes on arborescent forms" (Malkki 1992 p29). Malkki is critical of scholars who 'spatially incarcerate' the 'natives' they study through the cultural essentialism associated with 'rooting.' She argues that this not only renders indigenous peoples sedentary but speaks volumes about the scholastic desire to reiterate the "segmentation of the world into prismatic, mutually exclusive units of 'world order'," as well as the moralistic and metaphysical sinking of "'family of nations' into Mother Earth" (p31). With respect to Zionist colonisers of Palestine there is a certain spatial *self*-incarceration at work in which the wandering Jews are rooted and sedentarised in the soil of Palestine by political-Zionism. This is the result of that same moralistic and metaphysical imperative that Malkki detected in anthropologists, an imperative that saw the territorialization of the Jewish people as a mechanism for their re-entry into civilisation and into History.

As Piterberg has argued, one of the founding myths of Israel has been the 'return to history' a belief which is rooted in nineteenth-century Romantic nationalism and German historicism and which understands temporality only in terms of the nation state. In other words the nation-state was perceived as the "natural and irreducible form of human collectivity" (Piterberg 2001 p32), a sociological organism moving "calendrically through homogenous, empty time." (Anderson 1991 p26). It therefore followed that, for as long as the Jews remained exiles, for as long as they remained in Diaspora without sovereign geopolitical territory, they would continue to be "a

community outside history” (Piterberg 2001 p33). An existence without territory, without sovereignty over one’s homeland, was perceived to be a meaningless existence. The declaration of Israel and the *enactment* of democracy through the election and opening of the Knesset marked the rooting of the Jewish people not only in the land but in the history books, along with other civilized peoples. Indeed, Rabbi M. Spira expressed the hope that, once the political situation in Palestine-Israel ‘quietened down,’ it would be possible “to resume Jewish history at the point where it was broken by the Roman conquest.”⁵² This was therefore a moment of Jewish self-determination, indeed of Jewish self-actualisation: “no more were Jews voting by charitably dispensed privileges in the service and interests of others. At last they were masters of their own destinies.”⁵³ As Chaim Weizmann put it: “Having taken part in the great battles of the human spirit, having shed our blood and given our lives for the liberation of many peoples, we have at length won the right to toil and labour in order to give expression to our distinct national identity and make our contribution as a free people among other free peoples to the spiritual treasure of the world.”⁵⁴

From darkness to light

All of these physical and metaphysical ‘rootings’ which took place on Tu B’Svat 5709 were augmented with the other major theme of the festival: ‘awakening’; for it is on this day, which symbolises the ‘revival of nature,’ that we also see the ‘renewal of ties between the Jewish people and its land.’⁵⁵ Marking as it does the “transition from dormant winter to verdant

⁵² ‘Tu-BiShevat – Israel’s New Festival?’ Rabbi M. Spira, The Jewish Chronicle, Friday 11th February 1949, p6

⁵³ ‘Editorial’ The Palestine Post, Wednesday 26th January 1949, p4

⁵⁴ ‘Must build bridge between science and spirit’ Chaim Weizmann (Knesset opening address), The Palestine Post, Tuesday 15th February 1949, p2

⁵⁵ www.knesset.gov.il

spring,”⁵⁶ Tu B'Shvat thus speaks directly to the ‘awakening’ of the Jewish people from centuries of dormancy in Diaspora to a verdant future within the Jewish State. Having walked in darkness since 70 C.E., the Jewish people were emerging from “the dawn light of provisional authority...[into] the full sunshine of orderly democratic rule.”⁵⁷ Perhaps more importantly, Tu B'Shvat and the opening of “the first democratically elected Parliament in the history of the Middle East”⁵⁸ also embodied the ‘awakening’ or enlightenment of that entire region. Zionism has always been associated with ‘progress,’ ‘modernity,’ and their associated concepts of liberalism, freedom, democracy, knowledge and light (Said 1992). As such, the State of Israel, “the Middle East’s only functioning democracy,”⁵⁹ was imagined to be ushering Palestine and its neighbours from the darkness of oriental ignorance into the light of Western modernity.

Summer: Modernity dawns in the Middle East

Building on my earlier discussion regarding the production of racial orders of difference, I now shift emphasis from the symbolic capital of trees and tree-planting to discuss some of the principles and practices considered by political-Zionists to be characteristic of the Jewish settlers and Jewish settlement in Palestine; characteristics, or more accurately ‘natures,’ which have become grafted to nature itself through the act of tree-planting on Tu B'Shvat. Under the umbrella of ‘Modernity’ these principles and practices included environmental responsibility, as enabled by scientific knowledge, and the exercise of an exemplary liberal democracy which could balance the tensions between East and West.

⁵⁶ ‘Nation’s Children Plant Trees on Jewish Arbor Day’ The Jerusalem Post Tuesday 19th January 1954 p3

⁵⁷ ‘Must build bridge between science and spirit’ Chaim Weizmann (Knesset opening address), The Palestine Post, Tuesday 15th February 1949, p2

⁵⁸ ‘Column One,’ David Courtney, The Palestine Post, Monday 14th February 1949, p1

⁵⁹ ‘A fresh start’ The Jewish Chronicle, Friday 4th February 1949, p12

Environmental knowledges

A hallmark of Modernity's dawn was the proper care for the environment which had been demonstrated by the Jews since the establishment of Mikveh Israel in the late-Nineteenth Century. According to Joseph Weitz, up until that time "An age-old struggle had raged unceasingly between the vitality of that natural force which strove to carpet the earth with forest, and [Arab] man's wanton acts of burning and destruction, coupled with his heedlessness in allowing his animals to graze freely." With the return of the Jews and the establishment of this agricultural school at Mikveh Israel "a new era was about to be opened by a different type of man who would stand on nature's side, and if he indeed lacked the authority for conserving what still remained, he would still be able to play a decisive role by planting and sewing new forests in the Holy Land" (Weitz 1974 p24). And the reason why this new man's role would be so decisive was because he had *science* on his side. As I mentioned earlier, one of the first things Zionist pioneers did was to establish various research centres and tree nurseries across Israel in order to visibilise Palestine in a language intelligible to the incoming Jews, the language of positivism with its observation, measurement, and experiment. In this sense, Zionists were adhering to the classical, rationalist vision of 'nature,' outlined in chapter one, in which the application of scientific principles would draw out 'nature's true character. It was in this way that the Jews were imagined to be the only ones who could make use of the Negev desert: "The Arabs could make no use of it. The Jews, on the other hand, could irrigate it, make it again what it was in antiquity – a fertile garden – and settle there perhaps 2,000,000 refugees."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ 'Only Jews can make use of Negev Desert' The Palestine Post, Monday 24th January 1949, p3

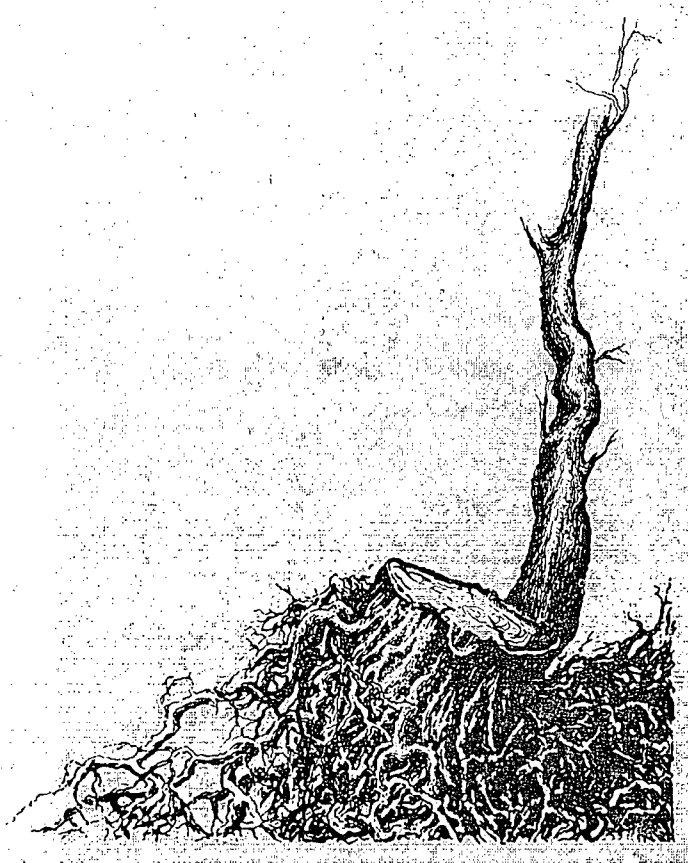


Figure 3.3: 'Trunks' (Weitz 1974)

It was in keeping with these modern ideas that Chaim Weizmann later made his call for the new Israelis to “strive to strengthen our constructive resources by enhancing the position of science and research in the life of Israel. Science and research are the basis of human achievement. All the scientific capacity that we have displayed in every country in the world must now be mobilised to help build up our motherland.”⁶¹ For an organisation like the Jewish National Fund, ‘building up the motherland’ meant foresting it both as a mechanism of economic and social development. This did not mean that spiritual ideas about the authentic, original, biblical landscape the Jews were perceived to be resurrecting had to be relinquished. On the contrary, Weizmann went on to call for bridges to be built between science and spirituality, for

⁶¹ ‘Must build bridge between science and spirit’ Chaim Weizmann (Knesset opening address) The Palestine Post Tuesday 15th February 1949 p2

“not by science alone shall we win through...we see what scientific progress leads to when it is not inspired by moral vision – to the atomic bomb that threatens to destroy the entire planet.” As such, the re-establishment of that ancient landscape was considered to be an integral part of Israel’s ‘development,’ a kind of retrospective progress. Indeed, it is this very landscape which science itself proved to be ‘luxurious’ when, in 1959, fossils of tree branches and trunks, measuring up to 20 centimetres in diameter and dating back to the mid-Jurassic period (around 150 million years ago) were found in the Negev: “No comparable discoveries are known in the Middle East.”⁶²

Exercising an exemplary democracy

Another characteristic of Modernity’s ‘arrival’ in the Middle East naturalised on Tu B’Shtat 5709 was the practicing of liberal democracy, the “plunging of [a] new, dynamic force into the social sluggishness and economic backwardness of this key segment of the world.”⁶³ Journalists with *The Palestine Post* were particularly careful in their reporting of the electoral process to emphasise the awareness among the Arab population of the enormity of this event. Arab voters “enjoying a franchise for the first time” were said to perceive a “sense of significance of the day” similar to that experienced by the Jewish voters. Particular attention was given to Arab women, whose opportunity to participate in the democratic process and their seizure of it, was described as “revolutionary,” and possibly “a presage of the profound social influence which the State of Israel will inevitably exert on the other countries of the Middle East. In no Arab country are women allowed to vote.”⁶⁴ The alacrity with which the Arabs, especially the women, were reported by *The Palestine Post* to have exercised these newfound democratic rights suggests to

⁶² ‘Fossils show Negev fertile 150 million years ago’ *The Jerusalem Post* Tuesday 27th January 1959 p2

⁶³ ‘Column One’ David Courtney *The Palestine Post* Tuesday 25th January 1949 p1

⁶⁴ ‘Editorial’ *The Palestine Post*, Wednesday 26th January 1949, p4

the reader that this is what the people wanted, that the existence of Israel benefited Arabs as well as Jews. Indeed, one article tells of long queues at polling stations across the country and the determination of female voters to cast their ballots, even if it meant waiting in line with the men, the suggestion being that such a break with tradition in the name of democracy demonstrated the Arab's thirst for progress which had been satisfied by the Jews.⁶⁵

The voting process seemed to go without incident. Indeed, the whole enactment of democracy was exemplary: not only was the voting superbly organised but the voters themselves, who turned out in exceptional numbers, were extremely well-behaved.⁶⁶ This seamless execution of the democratic process was considered enough to rocket this 'infant state' to a rank of political stature equal to "the most solid democracies of Europe."⁶⁷ One editor even suggested that Israel *surpassed* those European states with the uncommon orderliness of its inaugural election, something which was "rare even in the Western democracies with their long parliamentary experience."⁶⁸ A number of other writers made similar hints that Israel had not only organised exemplary elections but was an exemplary manifestation of democracy itself, as evidenced by its remarkably engaged, 'politically mature' electorate.⁶⁹ As the front-page columnist, David Courtney, put it: "This is an intelligent people, by the accident of circumstances relatively more so than most national groups."⁷⁰ He therefore considered it

⁶⁵ 'Orderly turnout in Tel Aviv,' The Palestine Post, Wednesday 26th January 1949, p1.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Almost eighty-seven per cent of all registered voters cast a ballot. However, only three quarters of those eligible to vote were actually registered, bringing the turnout among *eligible* voters down to sixty-five per cent, the lowest in Israel's history (Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics; IDEA).

⁶⁷ 'A fresh start' The Jewish Chronicle Friday 4th February 1949 p12

⁶⁸ 'Editorial' The Palestine Post Wednesday 26th January 1949 p4

⁶⁹ 'Political Maturity' The Jewish Chronicle Friday 28th January 1949 p20

⁷⁰ 'Column One' David Courtney The Palestine Post Monday 14th February 1949 p1

"nobody else's business to tell the citizen of Israel how he should vote. He is responsible enough to choose for himself and by the look of things has plenty to choose from. The outsider may simply hope that he will, in fact, make the choice; and *not satisfy himself with the lazy notion, common to Democratic electorates all over the world, that his vote won't make a difference anyway.*"⁷¹

Cherry-picking the ideal democracy

This intelligent and engaged Israeli voter was imagined to be someone who was well aware of his responsibility, and by extension the responsibility of the State of Israel itself, to balance the tension between East and West and bear the burden of the 'big power interest.' London, Washington, Paris and Moscow were all carefully watching the vote-counting in Israel, an interest which was taken to show that "an understanding of Israel's potentialities as a social, economic and military force in the Middle East."⁷² And although East and West might vie for Israel's allegiance, the reporter was confident that this new little country would "not serve as a springboard for any one of them against the other" and that both will have to "accept less than a predominant position." This East-West burden of interest, admirably borne by the 'infant' Israel, was accompanied by an international interest in the remarkable phenomenon of a democratic state emerging fully formed and a curiosity as to how it would conduct itself.⁷³ As such, Israel was in the unique position of being able to cherry-pick its model of democratic government, a rare opportunity to reappraise the democratic model itself, much-needed at a time when "Democracy is in peril all over the world":

The external policy of the young State of Israel is to take a middle way between the protagonists of the two Democratic conceptions [of self-serving manipulation and the only alternative to tyranny]. *It might do worse than ignore them both as conceptions and found itself, not on a synthesis or a cautious*

⁷¹ 'Column One' David Courtney The Palestine Post Tuesday 25th January 1949 p1, my emphasis

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ 'Editorial' The Palestine Post Wednesday 26th January 1949 p4

picking of the way between what seems reasonably good in the one and reasonably harmless in the other, but *upon an independent judgement of Democracy* which should not, simply, be government of, by, and for the people, but of an intelligent people, by intelligent people, for an intelligent people. Few legislators have had a better opportunity to govern in accordance with that principle than those who will meet in Jerusalem today.”⁷⁴

It was in the same vein that R. A. Rosenblatt set out the pros and cons of the European and United States modes of government.⁷⁵ He cautioned against imitating the French Chamber of Deputies “with the dangerous precedent of constant changes in Government caused by the whim of party interests” and he lamented the blind adoption of the British parliamentary system in Central Europe, with no consideration for the fact that this model depends for its stability upon a two-party system and becomes chaotic when applied to multi-party systems which are based on proportional representation. Rosenblatt suggests that Israel take its precedent from “beyond the British Isles” and that perhaps “America has something to offer,” with its relatively permanent Senate that would not be “composed – if not decomposed – by every gust of party passion” in the same way as a Chamber.

The stability of such government is allegedly guaranteed by the depth of its roots in ancient Israel. Indeed, for all his criticism, Rosenblatt does admire the Draft Constitution as reflecting “the tradition of social justice inherited from the prophets of Israel and now applied to modern life.” It is apparently the case that the principles basic to constitutional government have, in the first instance, been inherited from Judaism. In the words of Chaim Weizmann: “It is our people that once gave the whole world a spiritual message fundamental to civilization...If we are using State forms that have been moulded by the experience of the enlightened nations of the modern

⁷⁴ ‘Column One’ David Courtney The Palestine Post Monday 14th February 1949 p1, my emphasis

⁷⁵ ‘Two parties or two chambers’ B.A. Rosenblatt The Palestine Post Wednesday 5th January 1949 p4

world, we know truly that these forms contain a treasured essence of the heritage of Israel... The root principle of the constitution of that novel State was the limit set to the authority of the King, and it is in this sense that the ancient Hebrew polity was the mother of constitutional government in the modern age.”⁷⁶

Thus, in addition to the fusion of pre-modern, Palestinian soils with Modern, Jewish selves that occurred during tree-planting ceremonies on Tu B'Shvat 5709, we also witness the return of the principles of social justice and constitutional government to their rightful place in Palestine. Another originality is being restored, but with the unique advantage of having picked its way through the rubble of experienced but flawed democracies towards a more refined and therefore more effective model.

Autumn: death and renewal

This fusion of selves and soils, this metaphysical rooting of the Jewish people and awakening of the Middle East, is implicit in Tu B'Shvat celebrations. In practice, tree-planting ceremonies emphasise remembrance and frequently involve physically memorialising those who died fighting for Israel or could have been saved by its existence. For years the Jewish National Fund has encouraged Diaspora Jewry to plant in memory of loved ones to establish individual connections with the land. However, in order to construct a collective appreciation of the past through tree-planting, JNF undertakes specific memorialising projects, often in memory of soldiers, both pre-state 'freedom-fighters' and those in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), who have died during various conflicts. One of the earliest ceremonies mentioned by JNF occurred in

⁷⁶ 'Must build bridge between science and spirit' Chaim Weizmann (Knesset opening address) The Palestine Post Tuesday 15th February 1949 p2

1938 after five members of a settlement group were killed whilst working for the Fund building a new road. The song 'Five' was written for them:

Five set out a homeland to build, five... Their hammers hacked hill, hacked hill. Five men a team, pavers of dreams, of roads and rails and all. Shots rent the morning still. Hammer in hand, soul sound. Five bodies fell... stood tall!⁷⁷



Figure 3.4: 'Crowns' (Weitz 1974).

Later that year a kibbutz was established and named after those five men. The Director of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, Moshe Sharett, gave the eulogy in which he said that "their blood had been spilled on 'an unfinished road,' but that the 'road would not remain unfinished... It will be paved to the end. The forest will be planted and it will flourish thanks to your blood and the sap of your lives'" (KKL 4 p4). The metaphorical implication here is that the 'road' the men were helping to construct when they were killed was itself a path towards the

⁷⁷ By Mordecai Ze'ira and S. Shalom

creation of the State of Israel, and the forest which flourishes from the 'sap' of their lives is an expression of the Jewish State which flourishes thanks to their sacrifices.

Similarly, when the Knesset was inaugurated on Tu B'Shvat 5709, three memorial forests were also inaugurated in memory of soldiers who had died to bring the longed-for state into being. Comrades of 'felled' soldiers had requested this 'living memorial' which would "constitute a link with the soil for which the soldiers had died."⁷⁸ The Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, and the Chairman of the Jewish National Fund, Dr. Avraham Granovsky, attended the planting ceremony at the 'Forest of the Defenders' near Jerusalem. In his address, Ben Gurion said "Let their memory be engraved in our hearts in reverence, glory and honour, *not only in this generation but in the generations to come.*"⁷⁹ Parents of the 'fallen,' children and soldiers then took saplings which had been provided by the Jewish National Fund "and planted them in the soil between the boulders and rocks which had replaced the earth that had been neglected for hundreds of years. They scooped the dirt with their hands or with sticks to plant the seedlings. Most marked the spot so that in future years they might return and pay homage at the tree that had been planted in honour of someone who had fought and died." The scroll of inauguration read:

On the 15th day of Shvat in the year 5709, the second year of the State of Israel, we have gathered here on the soil of the nation in Sha'ar Hagai on the way to Jerusalem, the citadel of our national life, to make the first plantings in the Forest of the Defenders. This forest shall arise as a memorial of honour to the defender and soldier of Israel who fought in the battle of his people against the enemies who rose to destroy and vanquish it. This is a living monument to the fighters of Israel and its defenders who sacrificed their lives for their homeland. This is a testimony for Israel – that this place is consecrated soil where there shall forever flourish this remembrance to the joyous youth and simply courage and self-sacrifice of these eagles of Israel who fell.

⁷⁸ 'Tree Memorials for Soldiers' The Palestine Post Thursday 10th February 1949 p3

⁷⁹ 'Memorial wood at scene of road battles' The Palestine Post Tuesday 15th February 1949 p1 (my emphasis)

Israel immortal

In keeping with its earlier goals, the Jewish National Fund accepted pledges of a hundred thousand trees from Brazil and ten thousand from Mexico to be planted in the 'Forest of the Defenders.'⁸⁰ The men who stood tall and strong for Israel will be forever remembered in the trees which stand tall and strong in their place, thanks to international donations and those who planted them: "With sacred reverence let us recall the memory of our sons and daughters, precious and beloved, who bravely died in order that Israeli might live."⁸¹ Such memorialising becomes even more poignant when it is children doing the planting, for it is their presence which has been enabled by the sacrifices they are remembering: only because others died were they able to have been born or at least to live in a place called 'Israel.' Just as continuity is established across the centuries through the bodies of trees, so continuity is also established between the bodies of those who have died and the bodies of children who commemorate them. And this continual planting *of* new life by individuals who *are* new life, in memory of old lives, eternalises Israel: "Each generation adds a link to the traditional chain that started when Abraham first planted a grove in Beersheba... [his planting] was a tribute to the glory of his Creator. It is in that same spirit and in the spirit of upbuilding that we plant our trees today."⁸² Indeed the tree itself, in which death merely composts the process of rebirth, promises national immortality (Schama 1995).

⁸⁰ 'Defenders' Wood' Dr. Elisabeth Boyko The Palestine Post Wednesday 23rd February 1949. The 'Forest of the Defenders' is not to be confused with the 'Defenders of the Forest,' an environmentalist group campaigning for the preservation of the Jerusalem Forest in the face of urban development pressures (see Cohen 2002).

⁸¹ 'Must build bridge between science and spirit' Chaim Weizmann (Knesset opening address) The Palestine Post Tuesday 15th February 1949 p2

⁸² 'Tree Planting is in Long Tradition' Alexander Zviely The Jerusalem Post Monday 7th February 1955 p4

Clearly, what is remembered and what is forgotten in the trees is selective. In *Behold the Trees*, tree-planting is part of forgetting Diaspora, of effacing the exodus by restoring everything and everyone to how they were before, as if the Jews had never left. In contrast, planting memorial forests for those who have died is an act of resolute remembering. They are 'living monuments,' whose longevity greatly outstrips that of humans. In this way tree-planting again attempts to recuperate the loss of a loved one, not to efface that loss but to remember it forever. Nothing captures this more powerfully than the Martyr's Forest in the Jerusalem Hills where six million trees are planted in memory of the six million victims of the Nazi holocaust:

"The planters included survivors who were highly conscious of the green memorial they were establishing to the dear ones they had lost. Though they found the work rough-going, especially if unaccustomed to it, many of them noted at the time that they felt as if the planting of a tree in a forest were their own personal victory over the Nazis who had felled entire communities" (KKL 6 p1-2)

Similarly, Yael Zerubavel describes a poster announcing the establishment of the 'Forest for Martyred Children,' which depicted a new forest of trees symbolically replacing the fading images of the dead children. A representative of the JNF's teachers association apparently told the children participating in the inaugural plantings "[r]emember, children, that you do not plant trees, but people" (1996 p62-3). Here, individual trees are not only planted *for* individual victims, they *are* those victims and they thus provide a haunting and valuable reminder of human vulnerability, ensuring that the holocaust will never slip from living memory. At the same time, these memorial trees enact the 'return' which the victims themselves were unable to do. Just as the 'Brother to Brother Forest' enacts the right of return on behalf of all those in Diaspora who have *chosen* not to exercise it, so the trees enact the right of return on behalf of holocaust victims who were *prevented* from exercising it. Indeed, setting these trees in the soil performs a burial of sorts, a burial which those people were denied and in the land which saved so many others. National or native soils are therefore as important in death as in life, for in the same way that

ashes or bodies of people who have died abroad are transported 'home' for burial, the trees planted in memory of the millions lost is a means for returning them "to the land where the genealogical tree of their ancestors grows" (Malkki 1992 p27).

The powers of mourning and violence

Tree-planting is therefore part of the process of grieving terrible losses from the Jewish body politic, losses of incomprehensible magnitude. Children are once again central to this process since it is they who are replenishing the body politic: "The planting by the young of new saplings at this season of nature's rebirth symbolises so exquisitely the sure and certain hope of our people's renaissance."⁸³ Not replacing those who are gone but rather demonstrating the persistence of life and of these histories through the people who remember them. To borrow Judith Butler's expression, the children carry within them "the enigmatic traces of others" (2004 p46). As human beings, socially constituted through their relation to and interdependence with others, these children experience the loss of the holocaust whilst offering an expression of hope for the future.

In her recent book, *Precarious Life*, Butler writes about the possibilities of mourning and grieving, the recognition of human vulnerability, as a point of departure for non-violent political action. "Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all" (p20) and Butler suggests that grieving such loss need not, indeed *is* not, a privatising, depoliticising process, instead she sees it as furnishing "a sense of political community of a complex order...by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" (p22). Mobilising such a community requires a different 'normative aspiration' that goes beyond the claims to bodily integrity and self-determination, which have been fundamental to many political

⁸³ 'New Year for Trees' The Jewish Chronicle Friday 11th February 1949

movements, a normative aspiration that prioritises the relationality of the body. From there Butler hopes that we might be able to imagine community in ways which reaffirm the interdependence of all human beings, considering and confronting the exploitative place of violence in those relations:

“We all live with this particular vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot pre-empt... Mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions... We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself, a situation in which we can be vanquished or lose others.” (p29)

Butler argues that banishing grief by taking assertive action, as in the post-9/11 U.S. backlash, is unproductive. It suggests that grief and grieving is something to be feared, giving “rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly” (p29-30). Instead, she suggests that more might be gained from tarrying with grief, that foregrounding human vulnerability – “our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another” – forces us to recognise that same vulnerability in others and encourages us not to act in ways that would reproduce grief through violence. Transposing this argument to the JNF’s memorialising forests, it might seem that this tree-planting is a healthy process which helps grieve losses of incomprehensible proportions. The trees do not attempt to banish the sense of loss, rather they sustain it, providing a constant reminder of Jewish vulnerability. Unfortunately the leap that would recognise this same vulnerability in others, which Butler regards as so productive, is not made: it is only certain losses and vulnerabilities which are being mourned and sustained in these forests. As I have already said, the forests are selective in what they remember and what they forget, and certain lives are not worthy of being grieved in them.

Such a hierarchy of grief is a central problem for Butler: the 'cultural contours of the human' in which some lives are protected and some deaths avenged, whilst others are hardly recognised as lives in the first place. In constructing Palestine as 'a land without a people' political-Zionism negated Arab lives from the outset, releasing its proponents from any desire or obligation to memorialise, acknowledge or even notice injuries to or erasures of those lives, which had always already been less than human, less than alive or a life. Public acts of grieving for these losses cannot therefore take place because there is no loss to register. Trees are not planted to commemorate the victims of the Deir Yassin massacre or to commemorate any of the other atrocities committed during the 1948 war. Nor are trees planted for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians evicted to make way for the State of Israel, or the thousands killed during the First and Second Intifadas, or the hundreds killed annually through the daily business of occupation.

Trees cannot provide obituaries for these people since they are not considered people at all, and, for Butler, circumscribing which lives are available for public grieving in this way constitutes the public sphere itself: "The public will be created on the condition that certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses, and violence is derealized and diffused. Such prohibitions not only shore up a nationalism based on its military aims and practices; but they also suppress any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence" (p37-38). The official landscape of mourning and memory constructed by Jewish National Fund forests thus creates a public for whom only Jewish lives and Jewish losses matter. This kind of active selection of grievable lives undermines the forest's appearance as productive sustainers of grief and vulnerability. This is not all. For, as we shall see in the next chapter, JNF forests are also part of attempts to banish grief and foreclose vulnerability through assertive geopolitical action; planted

in an effort to quickly resolve a grief that was and is almost too enormous to comprehend let alone confront, and to recuperate some of that loss by reinvigorating an original fantasy.

I am referring to the practice of planting over the ruins of Palestinian villages, which is the topic of the next chapter. I begin by introducing the politics and policies of Joseph Weitz, whose name has popped up several times already and whose twin passions for afforestation and political-Zionism greatly influenced JNF's geopolitical plantings. Through Weitz I demonstrate how forests have worked to actively efface Palestinian existence from the landscape by planting over places such as Ma'lul, Saffuriyya, Saris, Safaf and 'Aqqur. Finally, I draw the whole thesis together by explicating how the trees and the Israeli subject have been fetishised all along.

Chapter 4 : Constructed (in)visibility and the double fetish

Joseph Weitz was a man who felt very passionately about afforestation, specifically the afforestation of Eretz Israel. In the preface to his book⁸⁴ *Forests and Afforestation in Israel* (1974) he writes of his distress when, as a young boy, his father took him into the pine forest which he tended for the local nobleman and showed him the trees which were slated for felling: "In Eretz Israel, [young Weitz said to his father], forest trees will not be cut down; I will plant trees and they will stand forever" (p3). In 1908, at the age of eighteen, Weitz left his home in Wolhynia, Russia, for an agricultural settlement in central Palestine. He later worked at a number of other agricultural settlements, before becoming manager of a 'Planter's Association' farm in the Lower Galilee during the First World War. In 1919 the then chairman of the Jewish National Fund, Dr. Akiva Oettinger, recruited Weitz to supervise tree plantations in JNF settlements and to oversee the rehabilitation of the Herzl Forest, which had been planted in honour of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political-Zionism, but had been damaged by a locust and during the fighting of the First World War (Weitz 1974).

Over the next fifty years Weitz rose through the ranks of JNF becoming Director of the Lands and Afforestation Department in 1932, a position he held until 1967. In assuming this role Weitz's responsibilities came to include not only the 'clothing' of the 'barren landscape' with trees but also the very selection of lands for JNF acquisition and he is credited with expanding the Fund's holdings into strategically crucial, prospective border areas, thus contributing to the defence of Jewish colonies and Israel's territorial victory during the 1948 war

⁸⁴ This book is 'based on' his Hebrew book *Hayaar Vehayiur Beisrael* (Forests and Afforestation in Israel) 19**

(Lehn 1988; KKL 7). Weitz went on to represent JNF on various national committees and served on the JNF Board of Directors from 1950 until 1967 (Morris 2004; Lehn 1988).

En-planting Israel

Weitz's passion for planting trees seems to have been matched only by his passion for establishing the Jewish state. He was brought up in a 'traditional Zionist family' for whom Eretz Israel was "not a land of messianic yearning and prayer, but a real and solid place, which, though at present conquered and enslaved by strangers, sought redemption at the hands of its dispersed sons, redemption by work on the land and by building" (Weitz 1974 p3). Clearly in keeping with Henry George's influence on Zionist thought and practice, Weitz considered afforestation central to the successful Jewish (re)settlement and redemption of Palestine: a *civilised* landscape was a *forested* landscape since trees humanised, they made hospitable and inhabitable, an environment which Jewish settlers from Europe had initially regarded as hostile. Weitz's visions of Eretz Israel clothed in a 'green mantle' influenced Jewish National Fund afforestation policy long after his death in 1972 and he is hailed in JNF literature as the 'Father of the Forests' due to the millions of trees planted under his direction and the 'miracles' he performed in 'rolling back the desert.'

The most lauded of his achievements is the establishment of the Yatir Forest in the Southern Hebron mountains, along the 'Green Line' (see Figure 4.1). In this area, which receives less than two hundred millimetres of annual precipitation, Weitz intended to establish a conifer forest. "A forest will grow here!" he apparently cried, jabbing the arid soil with his walking stick in defiance of the experts who declared it impossible (KKL 7; Forestry – General Information). A journalist travelling with Weitz described the moving moment: "The area was totally barren, a godforsaken land – and suddenly, a whole region was thrown open. It was an incredible experience." (KKL 7 p2). Weitz died before he could see this vision realised and, in

reminiscing over his achievements, colleagues talked of how he “triumphed over the experts” by planting a forest that “vanquished the desert,” a miracle which “derived from the great love that Weitz had poured into the earth and trees, and may not have happened elsewhere” (KKL 7 p3).

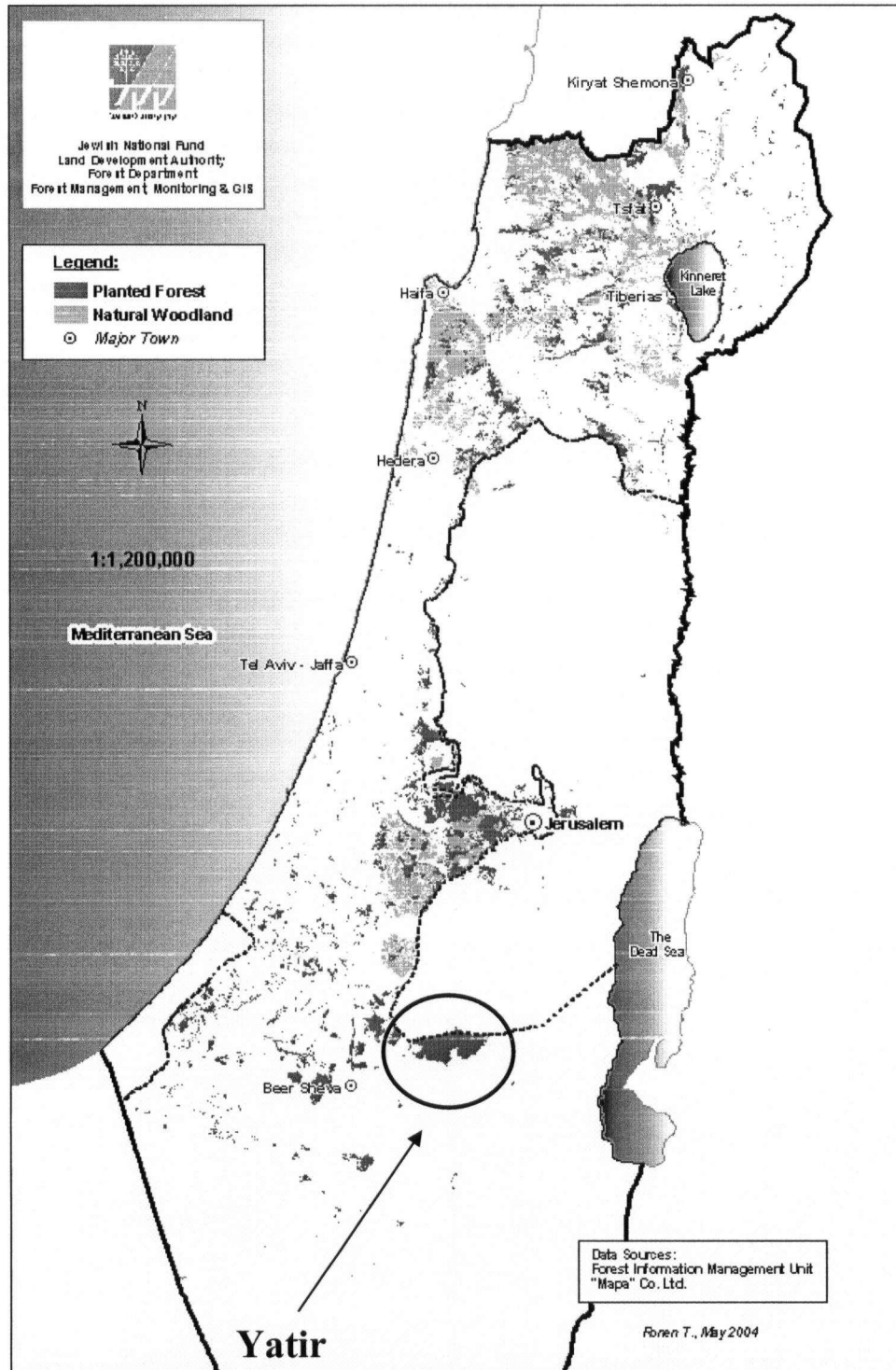


Figure 4.1: Yatir Forest (Adapted from Gafni forthcoming)

This passion stemmed from Weitz's fervent belief that mixed forests covered the land of Canaan, that the land had been 'conquered and enslaved by strangers' and that the best way to 'revive' it was to follow C.R. Conder's suggestion of planting quick-growing species, such as pine. As I mentioned earlier, the perception of forests at work here, and thus the imagined landscape that was being resurrected, is somewhat dubious.⁸⁵ However, Weitz sidesteps this technicality with a fuzzy, and therefore conveniently flexible, distinction he makes between 'nature' and 'landscape' (Weitz 1974 p321):

Is not 'nature' perhaps the more fundamental manifestation, unchangeable at least by the hand of man, while 'landscape' is nature's garment which may be altered or changed at man's will and within the limits of his capacity?

As far as Palestine is concerned, then, 'nature' refers to "mountain and valley, desert and field, plain and rift, yellow sand and brown loam, perennial and ephemeral stream, hot summer and rainy winter, west and east wind," whereas the 'landscape' "was nothing more than a vista of unrelieved desolation, the product of gross neglect. Not only was it not worth conserving; it was our duty to supplant it with the more civilized landscape of human settlement" (ibid.). It is therefore due to the centuries of poor stewardship and the land's 'enslavement by strangers' that the arriving Zionists felt obligated to rejuvenate and redeem it. At the same time, however, Weitz is clear about the superiority of 'man' in the 'natural' scheme of things, since he is the active agent whose responsibility it is to work with passive plants and trees for the benefit of the landscape. Indeed, man's capabilities are said to include 'levelling mountains, emptying streams and turning desert into lake' (p320), a notion which contradicts Weitz's definition of unalterable

⁸⁵ Recall that Weitz employs 'forest' in the "commonly held sense" of the word, dismissing the likelihood that biblical conceptions of what constitutes a 'forest' might differ from contemporary conceptions, and indeed that there might be any further variations in the definition of 'forest' among those contemporary conceptions (See chapter one).

'nature.' For Weitz, it is therefore perfectly acceptable to lend nature a 'helping hand' by replanting the trees that would have been there anyway had the Jews not been driven out all those years ago. As such, he has no time for environmentalists who would preserve as 'natural' the landscape created by the Arabs. Not only is that landscape considered unnatural, and therefore not to be celebrated or preserved, by virtue of being created by non-Jews,⁸⁶ but its revitalisation-through-afforestation is central to the *development*, the social and economic strengthening, of Israel. In other words, Palestine was considered to be "unused, unappreciated, misunderstood... [and] was therefore *to be made* useful, appreciated, understandable" (Said 1992 p85, his emphasis).

Retroactive transfer

In addition to his afforestation work, it is Weitz's activities during 1948 and their implications in the decades which followed that interest me here. When the United Nations announced its plan in November 1947 to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State (see map, Appendix 2) Weitz was one of the first to recognise the need to reduce or eliminate the Arab population from areas earmarked for the Jewish state. This is the basic premise of 'transfer,' a strategy for which Weitz was a strong advocate: in order for a *Jewish* state to be viable it needed, at worst, a majority Jewish population or, at best, a wholly Jewish population. The presence of a sizeable Arab population (around one million) thus posed a serious problem and had done since political Zionists first laid ambitions on Palestine in the late-nineteenth century. Ideas were therefore floated about the possibility of relocating ('transferring') some or all of this existing population since, as 'Arabs' rather than 'Palestinians,' these people would

⁸⁶ Man-made landscapes are clearly acceptable to Weitz, as long as it is specifically Jewish 'men' who made it.

have no problem settling anywhere else in the Arab World (Morris 2004). In a widely-quoted extract from his diaries, Weitz writes in 1940:

Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country...With Arab transfer the country will be wide-open for us. And with the Arabs staying the country will be narrow and restricted...the only solution is the Land of Israel, or at least the Western Land of Israel [i.e. the whole of Palestine], without Arabs...the only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries, all of them, except perhaps Bethlehem, Nazareth and old Jerusalem. Not a single village or a single tribe must be left. And the transfer must be done through their absorption in Iraq and Syria and even in Transjordan. For that goal money will be found and even a lot of money. And only then will the country be able to absorb millions of Jews...There is no other solution.⁸⁷

Nur Masalha argues that this concept “occupied a central position in the strategic thinking of the leadership of the Zionist movements and the Yishuv...as a solution to the ‘Arab question’ in Palestine” and that it solidified into a systematic policy of expulsion during 1948 war (1992 p1; 1997). Benny Morris agrees that although the idea of transfer ‘went against the grain’ for the many that held liberal ideas and values the concept was generally accepted in principle among the Yishuv leadership. However, nowhere in his meticulous analysis of diaries and documents from this period can he find an explicit, written order for the expulsion of the Palestinians (2004). There are three possible reasons for this, the first being that David Ben Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency and *de facto* leader of the Yishuv, was careful not to attach his name to a policy which “contemporary critics and future historians would brand as morally questionable if not reprehensible” (Morris 1986 p537). A second reason is that an explicit order to transfer the Palestinians did not need to be given. As I have already mentioned, Zionist ambition to establish the Jewish state was *predicated* upon the removal or at least the significant reduction of the Arab population and “[b]y 1948, transfer was in the air” (Morris 2004 p60). But

⁸⁷ Masalha 1997 p78

the third and most crucial reason why transfer was not explicitly put into practice by the Yishuv leadership was that the 1948 War did the job for them. During the violence which followed the announcement of the UN Partition Plan, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled their homes, villages and lands for relative safety in Arab majority, mostly urban, areas. In some cases villagers were expelled by Jewish forces, a military assault or psychological warfare tactics such as whispering campaigns. In other cases, residents left out of fear of being caught up in the fighting, or after a near-by town fell to Jewish forces, or under recommendations from the Arab leadership (Morris 2004). People also fled as news of massacres filtered out, particularly in places such as Deir Yassin, near Jerusalem, which had been considered one of the safest from attack due to its excellent relationship with its Jewish neighbours, but whose inhabitants (two hundred and fifty four of them, to be precise) were slaughtered in an early-morning attack by the Irgun and Stern⁸⁸ on 10th April 1948 (Hirst 2003 p248-254). Whatever the circumstances of their departure, Palestinians left with the full intention of returning once the violence subsided.

The transfer committees

The largest exodus occurred between April and June of 1948, as the Haganah and Irgun implemented plans to secure rear areas of the new Jewish State's territory as well as its main roads. The mass departure apparently caught the Yishuv leadership by surprise and Joseph Weitz in particular recognised that this 'fortuitous flight' needed to be capitalised on:

⁸⁸ 'Irgun' is shorthand for Irgun Zeva'i Le'umi (I.Z.L./Etzel, "National Military Organisation") and 'Stern' is short for 'Stern Gang,' the common term for Lohamei Herut Israel (Lehi, "Fighters for the Freedom of Israel"). Various classified as 'terrorist organisations' or 'liberation movements,' both subscribed to 'Revisionism,' a radical, right-wing opposition to mainstream Zionism and carried out violent activities against the British Mandatory Government during the inter-war years (Viorst 1997; Levene 1998; Jewish Virtual Library; Wikipedia).

“I think that this [flight prone] state of mind [among the Arabs] should be exploited, and [we should] press the other inhabitants not to surrender [but to leave]. We must establish our state” (extract from Weitz’s Diary entry, 22nd April 1948, quoted in Morris 2004 p207).

This is what is meant by ‘*retroactive* transfer’: where ‘transfer’ concerns the active removal of the existing Arab population, ‘retroactive transfer’ concerns barring the return of those who left ‘of their own accord.’ Thanks to his prominent position in the Jewish National Fund, Weitz was well-connected and therefore well-positioned to ‘facilitate’ the Arab exodus from areas earmarked for the Jewish state. He had access to key cabinet ministers as well as the Yishuv’s military brass, and during Spring 1948 he used these contacts, particularly those in the Haganah, as well as his own JNF offices, personnel and equipment to encourage the departure of the Palestinians. For example, there were some instances where JNF had purchased land from absentee owners but the tenant farmers had refused to leave the land. The Fund thus disbursed financial compensation to the farms which obliged them to leave and justified the use of force if they continued to ‘squat.’ In other cases so-called ‘squatters’ were forced out under threats from the Haganah (Morris 1986).

These methods of eviction were somewhat *ad hoc*, expensive and inefficient, and Weitz wanted Ben Gurion to set up a committee dedicated to capitalising on the Palestinian exodus, a committee for which he actively began campaigning in March 1948. In early June Weitz finally managed to get a meeting with Ben Gurion during which he suggested that the cabinet appoint himself, along with Ezra Danin, a former Haganah intelligence officer, and Elias Sasson, the newly-appointed head of the Middle East Affairs Department of the Foreign Office, as the ‘Transfer Committee’ with the remit of:

1. Preventing the Arabs from returning to their places [through]
 - a) Destruction of villages as much as possible during military operations

- b) Prevention of any cultivation of land by them, including reaping, collection [of crops], picking [olives] and so on, also during times of ceasefire.
- c) Settlement of Jews in a number of villages and towns so that no 'vacuum' is created.
- d) Enacting legislation [geared to barring a return]
- e) [Making] propaganda aimed at non-return.

2. [Extending] help to the Arabs to be absorbed in other places.⁸⁹

Diary entries about this meeting by both Ben Gurion and Weitz suggest that Ben Gurion, now the Prime Minister of Israel,⁹⁰ was happy with this proposal and approved of the fact that Weitz had already issued orders for the demolition of certain villages. With this tacit approval the committee began implementing its proposal, although nothing had been committed to paper. Over the following weeks, as rumours of demolitions leaked out, Ben Gurion came under heavy fire in parliament from those strongly opposed to such practices. The issue threatened to destabilise and possibly collapse the coalition government and the Prime Minister was therefore even more hesitant to put his seal of approval on such a divisive policy. Although Weitz understood Ben Gurion's position, he was uncomfortable about continuing his activities without official authorisation and so, at the end of June, with funds and equipment in short supply due to the war effort, this self-appointed Transfer Committee ceased operations.

Over the next few months, however, whilst pressure mounted from the international community to allow the refugees to return, talks continued about barring that return. Finally, at the end of August 1948 Ben Gurion authorised the establishment of a Transfer Committee comprised once again of Weitz and Danin, with the addition of Zalman Lifshitz, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Land and Border Demarcation (Forman and Kedar 2004). Its remit was restricted to considering the "possibilities of settling the Arabs of the Land of Israel in the Arab

⁸⁹ Morris 1986 p531-2

⁹⁰ The State of Israel having been declared in on 14th May 1948

States” (Weitz diary entry, 29th-30th August 1948, quoted in Morris 1986 p547) and did not include the active expulsion of Arabs from within Israel’s borders, although the committee and its individual members continued to consult and lobby on issues around the fate of the Arab communities. The committee reported the following to Ben Gurion at the end of October 1948⁹¹:

A) The Arabs themselves are guilty of their flight; B) They should not return, because they will constitute a Fifth Column, they will hold a grudge in their hearts, their economic [infrastructure] has been destroyed and repatriation will require giant sums, beyond the state’s capacity; C) The Arabs who remained inside the state should be treated as equal citizens...; D) The Arabs who fled – will be resettled by the Arab governments in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan... [and] Lebanon...; E) The resettlement [costs should come out of] the value of the immovable goods [lands, houses abandoned] in the country (after reparations [for war damage to the Yishuv] are deducted), the Arab states will give land, the rest [will come] – [from] the UN and international institutions; F) The extrication of the Jews of Iraq and Syria; G) What to do if the Arab States refuse to settle the refugees?; H) [What to do] if a return [of refugees] will be forced on us? On no account will we accept a return to the border villages, [and] to the cities only a certain percentage (15 per cent [of the Jewish population of each city]), only craftsmen and others who can support themselves...

These recommendations were never implemented as, in early 1949, the Israeli government became preoccupied with armistice negotiations and agreements with the Arab States.

All that remains

With or without a systematic policy of expulsion, the fact remains that over four-hundred Palestinian villages were depopulated during the 1948 war and were later wholly or partially demolished (see map, Appendix Three). Although difficult to quantify, Joseph Weitz’s impact with respect to the eviction of villagers and the destruction of their homes may have only extended to a few dozen sites (Morris 1986). Other mechanisms include: retaliation by the

⁹¹ From Ben Gurion’s notes, Morris 1986 p550

Haganah against villages (suspected of) hosting Arab fighters, as well as in revenge for Jewish deaths; military and strategic purposes, that is, to prevent Arab forces from taking up positions in them; to prevent infiltration by refugees attempting to harvest their crops; to prevent the return of internal refugees; destruction for Jewish settlement needs, including the expansion of Kibbutzim and Moshavim, as well as to prevent settlement by non-agricultural Jews which might lead to the establishment of an urban centre; destruction by private individuals; and destruction during the 1960s to 'clean up the natural landscape of Israel' and, after 1967, to prevent occupied Palestinians from making pilgrimages to former villages (from Kadman 2001 p50-56). But even if the magnitude of Weitz's impact is indeterminate, what remains abundantly clear is his commitment to constructing the invisibility of the Palestinians in the landscape of Israel. A commitment which permeated all of his work, including afforestation: of the 418 villages depopulated and demolished during the 1948 war, 71 lie in tourist and recreation sites managed wholly or partially by the Jewish National Fund. Just over half of those sites are covered with or surrounded by Jewish National Fund forests (Kadman 2001).

Ma'lul and Saffuriyya

For example, the village of Ma'lul in the Galilee (Figure 4.4) is today covered with a JNF pine forest dedicated to various European monarchs and U.S. politicians: the hills "which in 1930 were bare and desolate, have now been clothed in a green mantle of man-made forest" (Weitz, 1974 p107). This particular afforestation programme actually began during the 1930s as a means of securing Jewish possession of the land. The Palestine Land Development Company⁹² had purchased it in 1921 from the Sursuq family of Beirut but the tenant farmers of Ma'lul had continued to work the land through a lease agreement with the Company. When the lease was

⁹² The central land purchasing agency for the JNF as well as for private individuals, established to keep prices and speculation in check, and to ensure the purchase of contiguous plots (Lehn 1988 p35)

up in 1927 the tenants attempted to exercise their option to buy the land but the Land Development Company said that it had already been passed to the Jewish National Fund which was not permitted to sell any of its lands in accordance with Leviticus⁹³ (Khalidi 1992). The residents continued to challenge this abuse of legal process, threatening to render the Fund's 'ownership' worthless. JNF thus responded with "possessory action" which, since the land was considered unsuitable for Jewish settlement, took the form of afforestation (Weitz 1974 p102). According to Weitz the tenants left in February 1931 following financial compensation. According to Khalidi, however, the issue had still not been resolved by May 1947 and the town was occupied and evacuated during the second stage of Operation Dekel, an Israel Defense Force (IDF) offensive to capture the Galilee which took place in mid-July 1948.

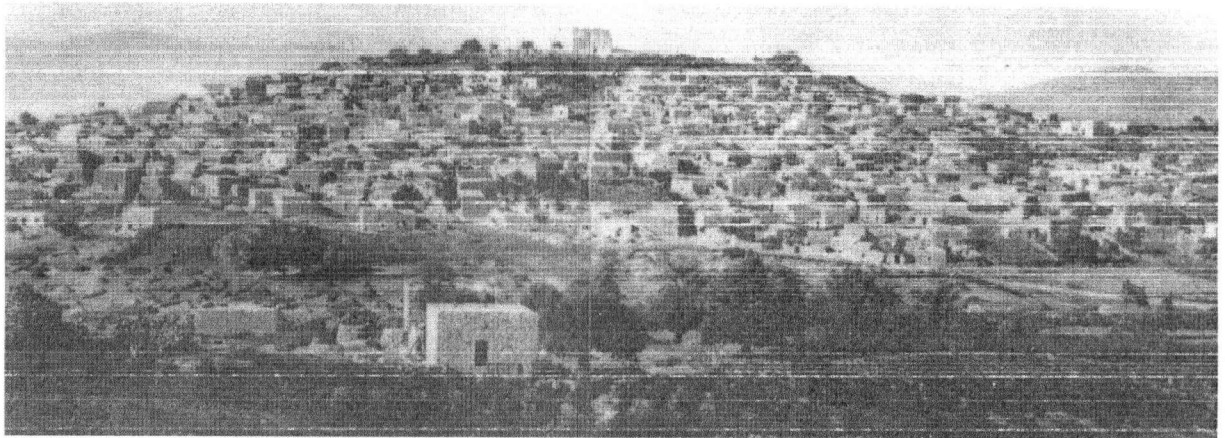


Figure 4.2: A general view of Saffuriyya with threshing floors in the foreground, 1931 (Khalidi 1992 p352)

Another forest in the Galilee contains the remains of Saffuriyya, a formerly prosperous town famed throughout the region for its pomegranates, olives and wheat. Villagers managed to resist advancing Jewish forces until 15th July 1948 when the IDF launched an air attack for which the residents were unprepared. Most fled, although about one hundred, mostly old people, continued to live among the ruins until they were expelled a few months later. The village was

⁹³ "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and settlers with Me" (25:23)

subsequently levelled and during the 1950s a pine forest commemorating various persons and occasions, including Guatemalan Independence Day, was planted over the ruins. This forms part of the Tzippori National Park which contains archaeological remains from the Roman era and is considered “a nationally important site.”⁹⁴ On village lands, approximately three kilometres to the Southeast of the former village site, is the agricultural community of Tzippori (Morris 1987; Khalidi 1992; King-Irani 2000; Kadman 2001).



Figure 4.3: The village site and houses on the settlement of Tzippori, May 1987 (Khalidi 1992 p351)

In March 1992, Laurie King-Irani and her husband visited what remains of Saffuriyya with some Palestinian friends:

Climbing a steep hillside, we parked our cars in a clearing surrounded by pine trees. I asked where the town had been. Smiling sadly, Kamal responded, “We’re standing in the heart of it.” My husband looked shocked and asked to see traces of the old houses. Kamal and Karim beckoned for us to

⁹⁴ ‘Dust to Dust’ *Jerusalem Post*, Weekend Magazine supplement, Friday, 5th February 1999 p13 [J.P. 99-02-05 A]

follow, and soon we came across some old building stones and a square, hollowed-out piece of grayish limestone – an old grape press – half-hidden by weeds and dried pine needles. Karim looked wistfully at the stone press, which was probably still in use when he was born in January 1948, but which now lay forgotten under the detritus of the pine forest planted by the Jewish National Fund in the 1950s to dissuade Palestinians from returning to resettle and cultivate their destroyed village. “This is not unusual,” said Karim. “We could show you the remains of so many Arab villages covered by pine forests.” Pushing the dead pine needles off of the press, Karim added that, for Palestinians in Israel, pine trees had come to symbolize loss and exile (King-Irani 2000)

These plantings over Ma'lul and Saffuriyya were part of a wider strategy of ‘Judaization,’ described by Falah (1991) as the project of achieving a demographic balance in favour of the Jewish population. This strategy was effected through ‘regional planning’ and, more specifically, by dispersing Jewish settlements and restricting the expansion of Palestinian villages. This project was particularly urgent in the Galilee where the Arab population constituted a significant majority, a threat to Israel’s territorial integrity. Strategic establishment of settlements and forests throughout the Galilee stifled communication among the remaining Arab villages as well as with neighbouring Arab states, and forests were particularly effective barriers to the residential and agricultural expansion of those villages. In the words of Mordechai Ru’ach, a recent director of JNF’s Forestry Division, the forests serve as “a clear sign to the villagers...[that the] Arab villages end where the forest begins.” For him, trees are “the best guards of the land. There is no better. Walls and fences can be cut down. A tree says ‘we are here.’ If you plant a tree, that’s your land” (Cohen 1993 p67).

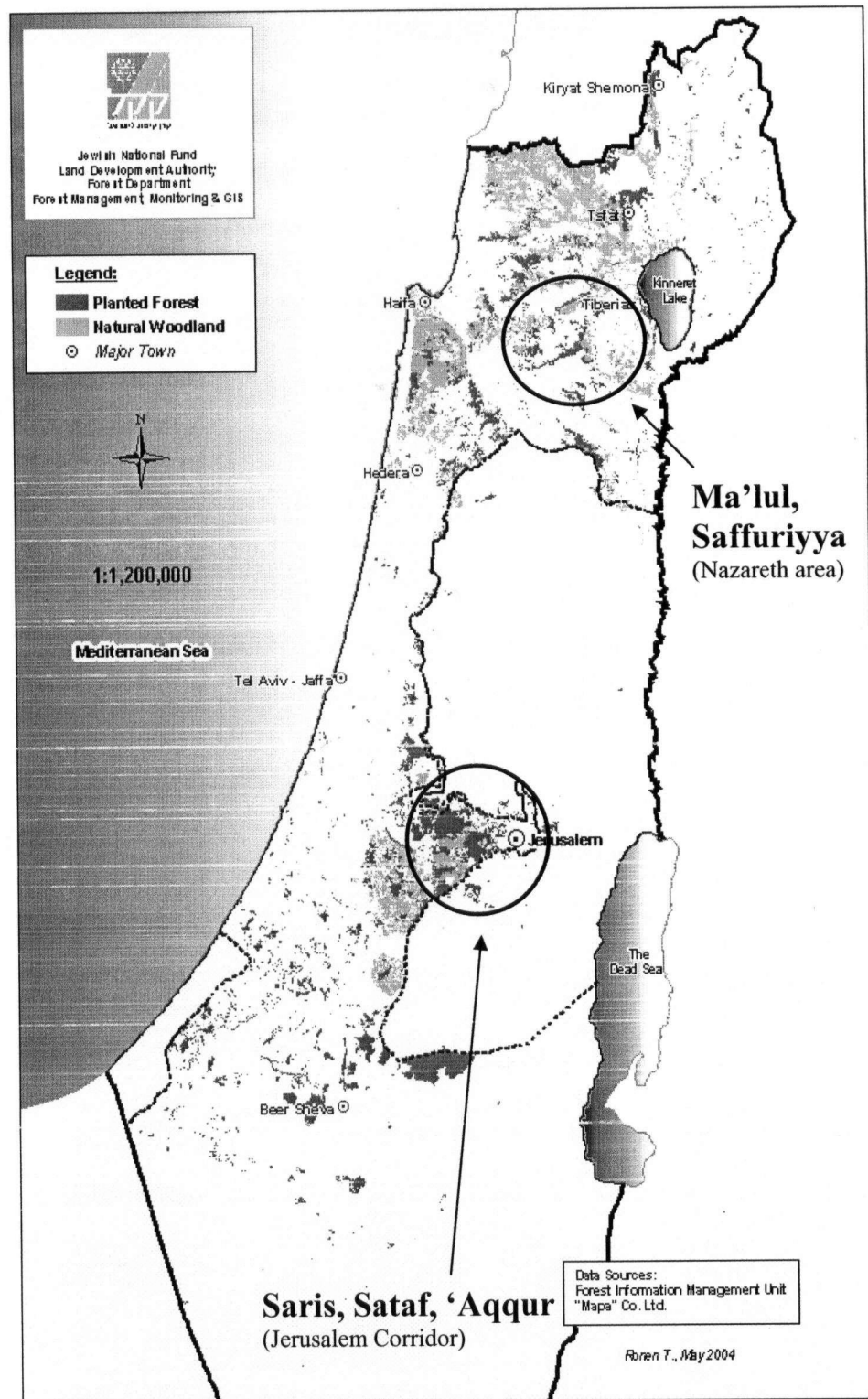


Figure 4.4: JNF Forests in the Galilee and Jerusalem Corridor (Adapted from Gafni forthcoming)

But of course trees *can* be cut down: even the prized King's Tree could be unceremoniously decapitated. What makes Ru'ach and his predecessors so confident is the protective *legislation* surrounding JNF trees, legislation that enables the exercise of power through the trees and therefore makes forests such effective sentinels. The legislation in question here is the Palestine Forest Ordinance of 1926, put in place by the Mandatory Government and augmented during the 1950s and 60s with various edicts (Weitz 1974). This law stipulated that the cutting of specific trees (olive, carob, oak, pistachio, pine, tamarisk, poplar, willow, acacia, eucalyptus, cypress, laurel, to name but a few) was prohibited without a licence from the government. Any breach of these regulations would be met with a six-month jail term and/or a £50 fine, a penalty which was doubled in a 1947 amendment of the Ordinance (Cohen 1993).

The territorializing legislation of forests has a long history. In seventh-century Europe, for example, woods were used to demarcate the boundaries of monarchical realms and to exercise sovereignty right to the edge of those realms, and sometimes even beyond, by issuing permits and licences for access to and use of the forest resources (Kiess 1998). Similarly, in the late-nineteenth century, the British Raj used forest legislation as a means of consolidating control over large areas of India, a practice which was also employed in the re-territorialisation of Siam/Thailand, under the influence of British/Indian techniques of governance (Guha and Gadgil 1989; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; Vandergeest 1996). In India and Thailand, however, the state was establishing its own authority over existing forests rather than actively planting new ones, as was the case in Israel. However, in planting trees on lands which could not be settled, the Jewish National Fund was bringing otherwise unregulated areas within the realm of British-Israeli law and mobilising those laws to the advantage of the Jewish-Israeli population and the disadvantage of the Israeli-Palestinian population.

Saris, Sataf and 'Aqqur

It was under these principles that tracts of land in the Galilee were expropriated and later forested by the Jewish National Fund, principles which also buried the villages in the Jerusalem Corridor (Figure 4.4), where the motive was to secure the strategically crucial and highly vulnerable route in and out of Jerusalem. Here the ruins of Saris can be found in the Shores Forest, which was named after a nearby Israeli settlement established by youth of the Jewish National Fund in Johannesburg. Previously an agricultural village of nearly five hundred, Saris evacuated upon hearing of the Deir Yassin massacre and the buildings were demolished days later for 'security purposes' (Morris 1987; Khalidi 1992). In addition to the Shores, a number of memorial forests have been planted in the vicinity, including a forest dedicated to the child-victims of the Nazi holocaust,⁹⁵ the 'Forests of the Defenders' in honour of those killed during the 1948 war,⁹⁶ the Wood of Czechoslovakian Martyrs,⁹⁷ and a wood in honour of the Cuban national hero, Jose Marti.⁹⁸ Similarly, an extension of the Moshe Dayan Forest⁹⁹ has been planted around the nearby village of Sataf, forming part of Sataf National Park (Khalidi 1992 p317; Kadman 2001). The village of 'Aqqur has also been planted over by the Jewish National Fund with a thick forest of fir and cypress¹⁰⁰ in memory of Zvai Dubroski, Rose Marcus, and Fami Miliman of Los Angeles, and Sam and Rose Schneider of Detroit (Khalidi 1992 p267).

⁹⁵ 'Forest planted for million child martyrs' *Jerusalem Post*, Wednesday 4th February 1953 p3 [J.P. 53-02-04 A]

⁹⁶ 'Memorial wood at scene of road battles' *Jerusalem Post*, Tuesday 15th February 1949 [J.P. 49-02-15 A]

⁹⁷ 'First trees planted in Czech Wood' *Jerusalem Post*, Thursday 29th January 1953 p2 [J.P. 53-01-29 A]

⁹⁸ 'Marti Wood' *Jerusalem Post*, Friday 4th February 1955 p2 [J.P. 55-02-04 A]

⁹⁹ Moshe Dayan was a senior military commander during the 1948 war and later a politician.

¹⁰⁰ Sataf Forest (Kadman 2001)



Figure 4.5: Picnic ground on village lands now belonging to the Shores settlement, 1986 (Khalidi 1992 p315)

Walter Lehn (1988) and, more recently Forman and Kedar (2004), have described in detail the slick legalistic manoeuvrings through which the Jewish National Fund acquired these lands upon which it later planted forests. Areas which were ‘abandoned’ or ‘vacated’ by the Palestinians during the 1948 war could not be left unattended for security and settlement reasons: the Arabs might attempt to return and the space was needed to accommodate thousands of new immigrants. Therefore, even before the war was over, Zionist legalistic forces swung into action with the Fallow Lands Regulation of October 1948 and the Absentee Property Regulations of December 1948.¹⁰¹ The former authorised the Ministry of Agriculture to redistribute lands, which were being temporarily tended by the Haganah, to Jewish settlers for cultivation. The latter bill created a new legal status of ‘absentee’ as: “anyone who, on or after 29 November 1947 (the date of the United Nations General Assembly resolution to partition Palestine), had been: (a) a citizen or subject of one of the Arab countries at war with Israel; (b) in any of these

¹⁰¹ Full titles: ‘Emergency Regulations regarding the Cultivation of Fallow Lands and Unexploited Water Sources’; and the Emergency Regulations regarding Absentee Property’ (Forman and Kedar 2004).

countries, or in any part of Palestine outside the jurisdiction of the regulations; or (c) a citizen of Palestine who abandoned his or her normal place of residence” (Forman and Kedar 2004 p815). This comprehensive designation ensured that tens of thousands of Arab-Israeli citizens were classified as ‘absentees,’ despite being present within the borders of the new state, thus earning them the absurd title of ‘present absentees.’ Their ‘abandoned’ land consequently reverted to the ‘Custodian of Absentee Property’ in the Finance Ministry, which illegally sold one million dunums of this land to the Jewish National Fund in January 1949 (Lehn 1988).

This sale achieved the objective of converting formerly Arab lands into Israeli ‘national property’ without seeming like state expropriation, a scheme which was systematised with the passage of the Absentee Property Bill (March 1950) and the Development Authority Bill (July 1950).¹⁰² The former superseded the previous Absentee Property Regulations with a more permanent law permitting the Custodian not only to lease lands but to sell them, but only to the newly-established Development Authority (DA). Ostensibly separate from the government, thus an effective ‘land-laundering’ body, the Development Authority could do virtually anything with the lands in its possession, including sell them. It was, however, required to obtain government consent for any sales and could only sell land to the state, the Jewish National Fund, local authorities or a proposed “institution for settling landless Arabs,” which was never established (Lehn 1988). The relationships between the state, the Development Authority, and the Jewish National Fund remained ambiguous throughout the 1950s and it wasn’t until July 1960 that a hat-trick of laws were passed, which consolidated the land holdings of the state-DA-JNF troika into ‘Israel Lands,’ closing the reservoir of expropriated lands to non-Jewish parties (Forman and Kedar 2004).

¹⁰² Full titles: ‘Absentee Property Regulations Extension of Force Bill’; and the ‘Transfer of Property to the Development Authority Bill’ (Forman and Kedar 2004).

Lands which had passed into the hands of the Jewish National Fund during the 1950s became the 'inalienable property of the Jewish People,' for whom the Fund held the land in trust and was forbidden from selling. In October 1950, nearly two years after the first illegal land sale and before the Fund had completed payment, the government agreed to transfer another 1.3 million dunams with payment due over the following ten years. The JNF thus acquired "in one year as much land as it [had] acquired in the long period of 47 years of unremitting effort" (Lehn 1988 p347 n285). As was always the case for the JNF, simply 'owning' the land was insufficient, it needed to be used in some way, either settled or forested. Indeed the period from 1951-1960 is dubbed by the Fund as the 'mighty afforestation endeavour,' as tree-planting work provided jobs for new immigrants, as well as helping to secure conquered territory and supply a useful propaganda tool for encouraging refugees to give up their intentions to return.

In 1951, Shamai Kahane, a high-ranking Foreign Office official, wrote a proposal entitled 'Propaganda among the refugees in order to sober them from illusions of return to Israel,' which he submitted to the Acting Director of the Middle East Department of the Foreign Office. In it he suggested the circulation of brochures and articles to discourage Palestinians from returning by demonstrating that there was nothing for them to return to: "The refugees fancifully imagine that their homes, furniture and belongings are intact, and they only need to return and reclaim them. Their eyes must be opened to see that their homes have been demolished, their property has been lost, and Jews who are not at all willing to give them up have seized their places." In particular, Kahane suggested the publication of contrasting 'before' and 'after' photographs of Arab villages: "These photos ought to prove that the Jewish settlers found everything in ruins and have put a great deal of work into restoring the deserted villages, that they tie their future to these places, look after them and are not at all willing to give them up" (quoted in Piterberg 2001 p40). Of course, where actual Jews were unable to populate former Palestinian villages, arboreal

proxies were established in their place. Uprooting those trees so that the Palestinians could return is unthinkable because, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, those trees *are* the Jewish people, they embody Jewish history, Jewish memories, Jewish principles, and the Jewish future. They *are* the Israeli national imaginary irrevocably tied to the soil of Palestine and their removal would constitute an assault on the very existence of Israel, a desecration of holocaust history, an egregious affront to the individual sacrifices made for Israel by those who fought for its establishment, and an endangerment of the happy future Israel's children have a right to enjoy secure in the Jewish State.

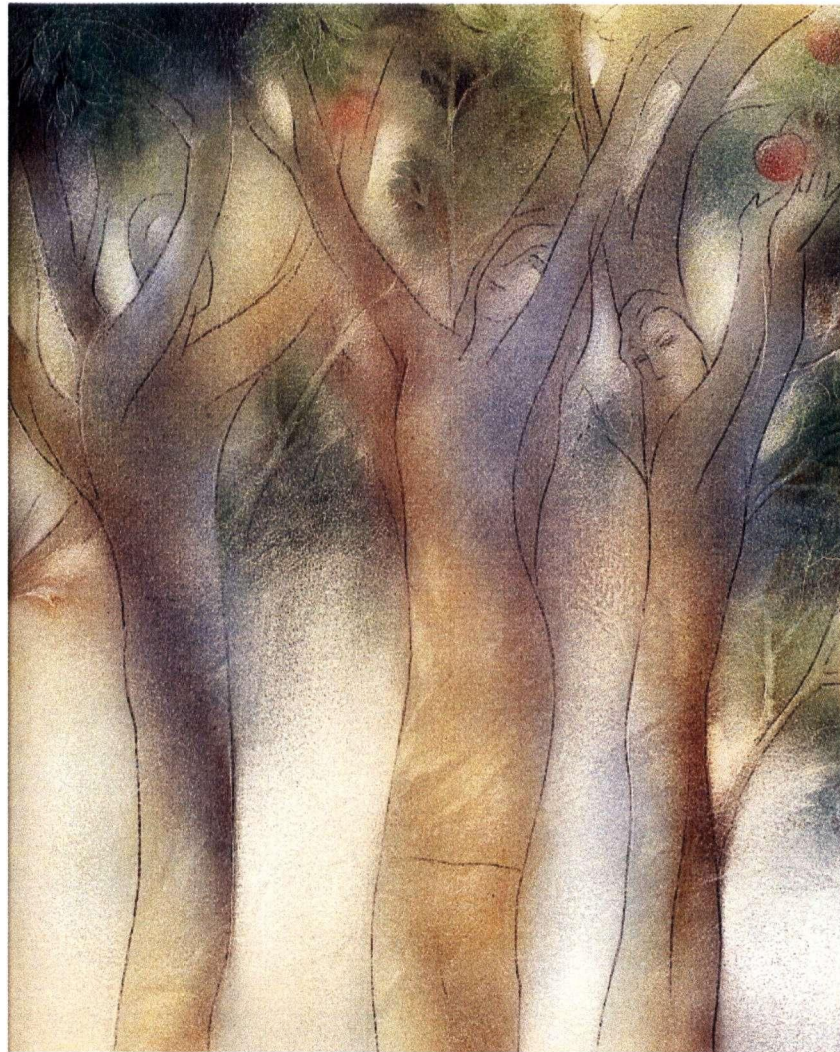


Figure 4.6: 1948 – Present (Alexander 2001, image © Leonid Gore 2001)

Constructed (in)visibilities

Piterberg understands such tactics as a means of erasing Palestinian memories of those places, to alienate the people from the land. The ever increasing strength of the Palestinian struggle for justice demonstrates that this has not been successful. Rather what has been achieved is the alienation of the *land* from the *people*, the estrangement of the landscape from its former residents by rendering it unrecognisable to them, remaking the material reality of Palestine in the image of Israel. Superimposed upon a landscape saturated with Palestinian history is the idealised (forested) landscape of Israel. The memories of the previous residents are still present amongst the trees, it is just that alternative, Zionist-approved memories have been laid over them. As such they have become sites upon which multiple memories converge but one has gained "ascendancy and legitimacy in the constructed present, and other layers of memory are submerged to varying degrees" (Bardenstein 1998 p2).

It was through the planting of forests and ideologies that the Jewish National Fund, on behalf of the broader Zionist colonisation project, that a 'network of realities' was implemented, converting Palestine from its previous condition of neglect into the Jewish State, "This network would not so much attack the existing 'realities' as ignore them, grow alongside them, and then finally blot them out, as a forest of large trees blots out a small patch of weeds" (Said 1992 p86). Said's trees (and weeds) are much more than a metaphor, they are active agents in the constructed visibility of Israel and Israeli-ness, and the constructed invisibility of Palestine and Palestinian-ness. Not only do JNF forests physically obscure evidence of a previous, non-Jewish population but they discursively edit that history out of the landscape by instilling it with Zionist memories, morals, principles and politics. The wooded spaces created by the Jewish National Fund all over Israel speak to visitors about Jewish-Israeli history (the landscape before the exodus, the Nazi holocaust, the struggle for 'independence'), about Jewish-Israeli characteristics

(modernity, progress, enlightenment, environmentalism, innocence) whilst simultaneously effacing both the prior existence of a non-Jewish population as well as the mechanisms of their dispossession. Trees, tree-planting and the Jewish National Fund are all implicated in the strategy of 'retroactive transfer' whilst simultaneously invisibilising both that process and their own involvement. Discourses of nature circulating around trees make invisible the morally reprehensible practice of depopulating and demolishing Palestinian villages as well as the Palestinians themselves. Dazzled as we are by the green halo we cannot, we are prevented from, seeing the trees for all the political and ideological work they do.

Tree fetishes

But why does this magic work? What is being invested in the trees to make them such effective capillaries of Zionist power? Surely the material social and political clout of the trees is too great to be drawn only from discourses of nature? Is there not a certain inadequacy to the explanation given by standard imagery of trees enrooting people and ideas in a landscape for all eternity?

Stereotyping the old-new Israelites

In order to answer these questions and take this analysis of Zionist forestry further I want to explore in more detail the idealised Israeli subjectivity which is under construction here. I argue that the Zionist discourses promulgated by the Jewish National Fund through trees and tree-planting initiatives produce the Israeli subject who is environmentally aware and responsible, who is modern and enlightened, and who is, above all, the natural, rightful, righteous resident of Palestine-Israel. Zionist discourse imagines this ideal subjectivity to permeate the entire Jewish people, considered to be a homogenous, cohesive community, united behind the principles of secular-Zionism. The individual Jews who comprise that cohesive body are imagined to be Israeli citizens in the making, exiles simply awaiting their moment to exercise their right of

return. This is a form of racial stereotyping, which fixes Jewish identity and attaches it to Israel in ways that support the ideologies of political-Zionism. Following (1994), such stereotyping is a necessary feature of colonial discourse, and is part of the process of identification through which the coloniser recognises her/himself *as* the coloniser and the colonised *as* the colonised. This identification is not, however, “the affirmation of a pre-given identity... [rather] it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (p45). It is also an identification made in relation to an ‘other,’ for “to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness” (p44). For Bhabha the construction of that otherness depends on fixity and therefore on the stereotype; it depends on a “paradoxical mode of representation” that simultaneously “connotes rigidity and unchanging order” and “disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.” The stereotype is a major discursive strategy of ‘fixity,’ it is the mechanism through which that paradox is negotiated, it is “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (p66).

The stereotype that Bhabha is referring to is the racially stereotyped *other* in the colonial relationship, a necessary part of constructing the colonising self. But Zionism is an unusual form of colonialism and as such there is a particular kind of stereotyping at work in it. Zionism is unusual because, unlike other nineteenth-century European powers, the ‘natives’ of the conquered territories were not to be included in “the redemptive *mission civilisatrice*,” rather they were to be pushed out, excluded, ignored (Said 1992 p68, his emphasis). Therefore the stereotyping engaged in by Zionist colonial discourse is a stereotyping of the colonial *self*, as natural and modern and original. Whilst the production of this self necessarily involves a corresponding construction of the Palestinians as the unnatural, pre-modern, secondary colonial *other*, that constitutive outside is discarded, ignored, irrelevant, willed out of existence. This is

part of the Jewish National Fund's naturalising discourse and practice: the production of the Palestinian other as invisible, as a functional absence, an excluded presence. Thus in Zionism the objectifying gaze of the coloniser is reflected back onto the colonising self, like a well-lit room at night when the window-glass shows nothing but your own image, until someone turns off the lights. The idealised Israeli subject is thus a racialised stereotype of the colonial self as natural, righteous and, most importantly, *original*. For Bhabha, such stereotyping and the associated claims to originality may be read as a fetish.

Erasing exile

In psychoanalysis, the fetish is involved in the recognition and disavowal of difference, namely sexual difference. Once aware of his [*sic*] mother's absence penis, the child is forced to acknowledge not only the sexual difference between them but also his separation from his mother and the possibility of castration by his father if he fails to abandon his mother as a love object. The fetish thus operates as a mechanism for the disavowal of this sexual difference by providing a substitute for the mother's absent penis (Pratt 1997). In Bhabha's words, fetishism "is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference...is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence". Functionally speaking, fetishism is therefore "always a 'play' or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity...and the anxiety associated with lack and difference... [It represents the] play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack)":

The fetish of stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. For *the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy – the*

subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division, for the subject must be gendered to be engendered, to be spoken. The stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence – the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture. (Bhabha 1994 p74-75, my emphasis)

The notion of 'originality' has surfaced again and again in Zionist tree-narratives. As I have already demonstrated, trees, tree-planting and forests have repeatedly been held to (re)establish various originalities: the original people-land relationship; the original Jewish knowledge of the land; the original landscape itself; the original precepts of Jewish environmentalism; the original Jewish concept of constitutional government. As such, I argue that, for the Jewish National Fund, *trees* constitute fetish objects in the discursive construction of an idealised Israeli subjectivity; they are the mechanism for the disavowal of Jewish difference through the reactivation of the material of original fantasy. The pioneers of political Zionism knew from the outset that, although Jewish settlers would be described as 'returning home,' they would in reality be strangers; culturally, racially, historically *different* from the locals and alienated from the land itself.

Projects like *yedi'at ha-aretz* (knowledge of the land) were therefore instigated, in which tree-planting played a central role, to "fill in retroactively the kind of knowledge [the Jews] could have had if they actually *had* been [to Zion] before, or if there had been no dislocation of the Jewish population in centuries past. It could then become *as if* they were returning to a place, *as if* they had known it before" (Bardenstein 1998 p4, her emphasis). In closing the knowledge-gaps between ancient and contemporary Israeli subjectivities, tree-planting became implicated in the resurrection of the ostensibly original, environmentally-knowledgeable Israeli subject. The trees themselves became fetish objects for the activation of a fantasized originality via the disavowal of contemporary Jewish difference, the denial of centuries of exile and the alienation which it wrought.

The double fetish

It is important to pause here and note that, for Bhabha, one of the differences between a general theory of fetishism and fetishism in the context of racist discourse is that there is no 'fetish object,' simply a 'fetish subject.' Within the context of Zionist colonisation, however, I consider both to exist side by side in a kind of 'double fetish': the idealised, fixated, stereotyped, fetishised Israeli subject itself, reinforced by the tree-as-fetish-object. The other difference is that in colonial discourse the fetish is not a secret as it is in the Freudian schema: the marker of cultural and racial difference (usually skin colour but for my purposes the marker is the tree) is on full and inescapable display.

It is also worth emphasising Bhabha's assertion that to stereotype does not mean to set up a false image as the scapegoat for discriminatory practices, "It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse" (p81-82). These split and multiple beliefs are constitutive of the stereotyped colonial subject and negotiating this repertoire of conflictual positions therefore requires the continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes for successful signification: "the same old stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time" (p77). Similarly in Zionist colonial discourse, the stereotype of the Israeli subject as natural, righteous and modern, is bolstered by supporting stereotypes about the physical landscape; how it was found 'barren and desolate' by Jewish settlers but has now been restored to its ancient glory. Closing the aesthetic gaps between ancient and contemporary Israel, the recreation of the ancient Israeli landscape by the ancient Israeli subject thus enacts the reunification of land and people and re-

establishes civilisation. The geographical 'return' to the homeland is therefore, relatively speaking, a small step in relation to the giant leap back in time to before the fall of the Second Temple, and before the Palestinians.

Indeed, implicit in the disavowal of Jewish difference is the disavowal of the very *existence* of the Palestinians and their legitimate claims to the same land. Just as Zionist 'pioneers' were aware of how strange the lands of Palestine would be to the 'homecoming' Jews, they were equally aware that a sizeable Arab population already lived in the land they coveted and had legitimate historical, cultural and economic claims to it. The (in)famous catchphrase was thus coined in which a land purportedly 'without a people' and awaited settlement by a people who were purportedly 'without a land.' This slogan enabled political Zionists to disavow the local Arab population as well as their own identity (and responsibility) as 'colonisers,' and to continue their (re)settlement plans unobstructed. This rhetorical disavowal of Jewish difference was followed by a manifest disavowal in the form of Jewish National Fund forestry. Tree-planting schemes constructed Jews as the natural residents of Palestine since they truly understood the landscape and were able, through their expertise, to restore it to its former glory. This *naturalisation* of the Jewish presence was also a *legitimisation* of the Jewish presence and an assertion of their incontrovertible *belonging*. Through the same discourses, the Palestinians were the *de-naturalised* residents of the land: they were considered lacking in the expertise to manage the landscape properly, they were therefore discredited as poor stewards, their land-claims were *de-legitimised* and evidence of their existence was effaced from the landscape by forests.

Chapter 5 : Closing discussion

All my attempts to 'conclude' this thesis were foiled by the seemingly infinite number of further questions that need to be explored in the future. What about the trees *as trees*? What is the significance of the particular 'native' and 'exotic' species being planted and what biophysical impact have they had on the local ecology? Furthermore, what about the trees' legal standing and the legal status of the forests? To what extent are these figures and spaces outside the realm of normal law and what practices would such an exception authorise?

Perhaps most importantly, what *alternative*, potentially subversive, discourses are being articulated in and through these same trees? For it is clear that, despite the best efforts of the Jewish National Fund, and political-Zionism more broadly, the Palestinians have never fully disappeared. They return, over and over, in the forested spaces so carefully cultivated by the Jewish National Fund. Village rubble is clearly and unavoidably visible amongst the trees and those remains cannot go unacknowledged, albeit cursorily and vaguely, in park signage.¹⁰³ Indeed, there are Israeli organisations such as *Zochrot* that are actively working to visibilise Palestinian histories, to denaturalise the forests that obscure them, by organising tours of ruined Palestinian villages and posting signs at their entrances.¹⁰⁴ Palestinian voices are also loudly and clearly audible in the incidence of forest fires deliberately induced as part of the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ See Kadman 2001. In some cases, however, this evidence is simply ignored, see 'The Palestinian Past of Canada Park is Forgotten in JNF Signs,' Yuval Yoaz (translated by Talia Fried) Haaretz 12th June 2005

¹⁰⁴ www.nakbainhebrew.org

¹⁰⁵ Zerubavel (1996) explores the significance of forest fires in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in relation to the Jewish-Israeli culture which glorifies tree-planting. See also Cohen 2002; Kliot 1996.

In this way the disqualified lives and histories of the Palestinians remain animated, living on even in a 'state of deadness' (Butler 2004). Israeli narratives may have gained ascendancy and legitimacy over the Palestinian narratives, effectively invisibilising them, but the latter perpetually haunt the forests in which they converge with the constructed present. They are the constitutive absences "whose disavowal is necessary for the fiction of natural/national forests to exist at all" (Braun 2002 p9, my emphasis). But these disavowals must be repeated again and again by en-planting more trees, more Jewish-ness, more Israeli-ness lest the subjugated histories return to disrupt the ontological truths operating through their very absence (Braun and Wainwright 2001). The Palestinian refusal to disappear goes beyond inert 'evidence' to be actively articulated through the very trees which would silence them. The forests may have been planted in order to promulgate dominant, political-Zionist discourses but there is always space for those trees and forests to be reinterpreted and recast in alternative, potentially subversive and possibly empowering ways.

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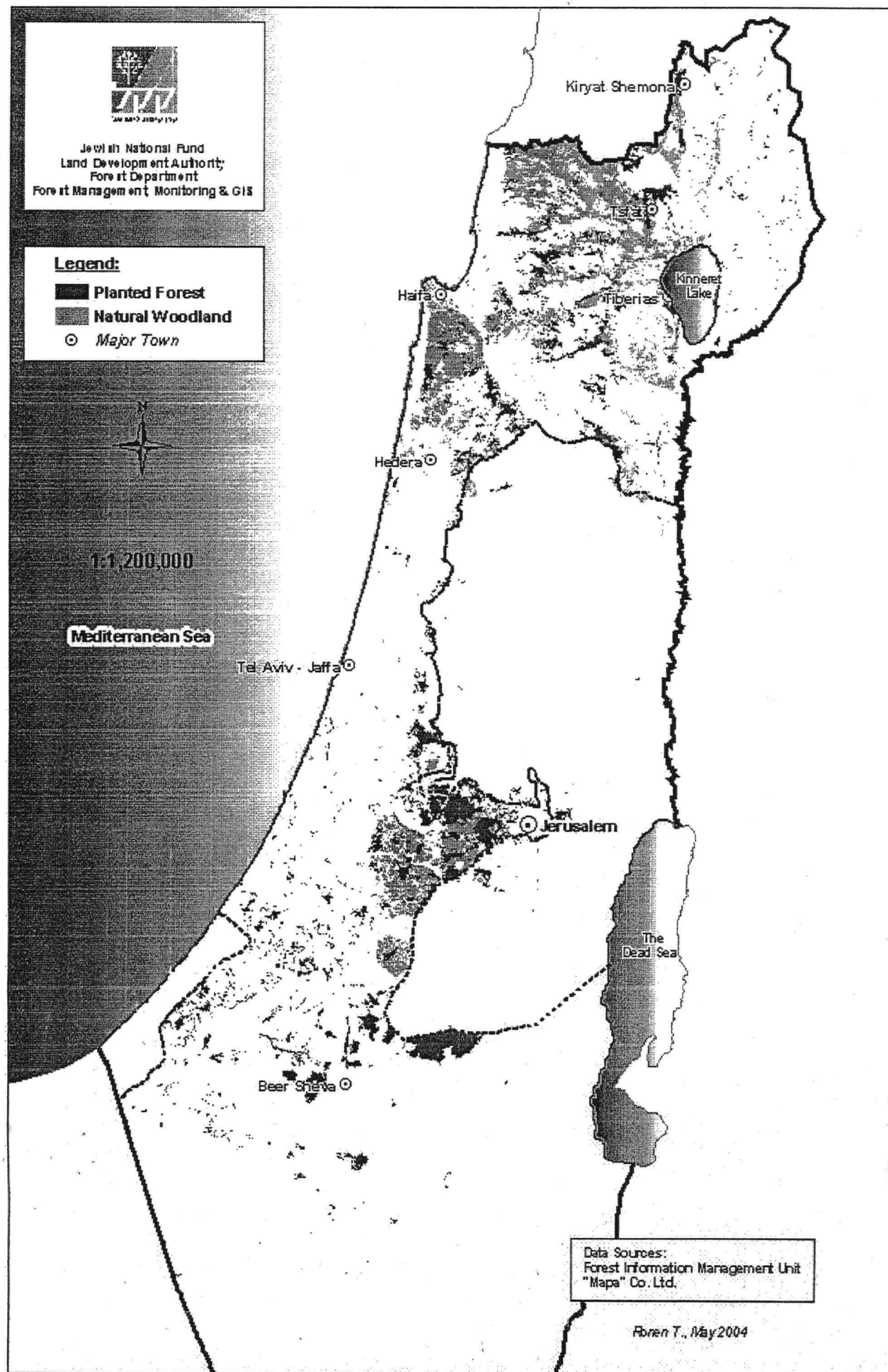
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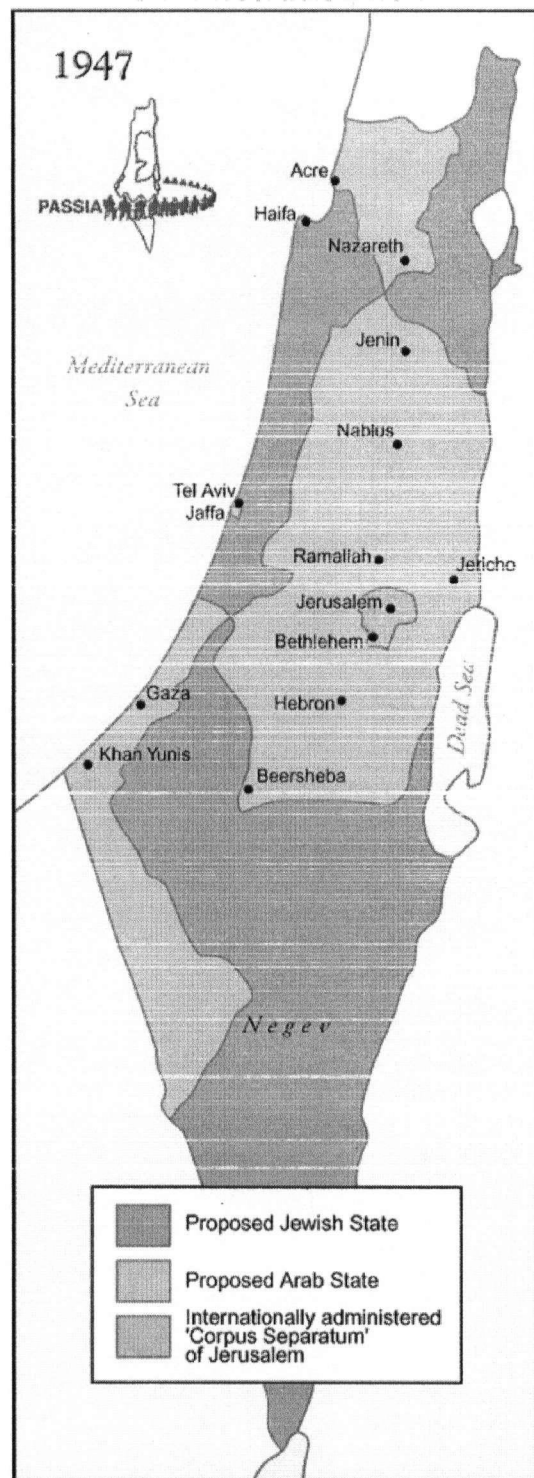
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Appendix 1: Map of planted forests and natural woodlands in Israel



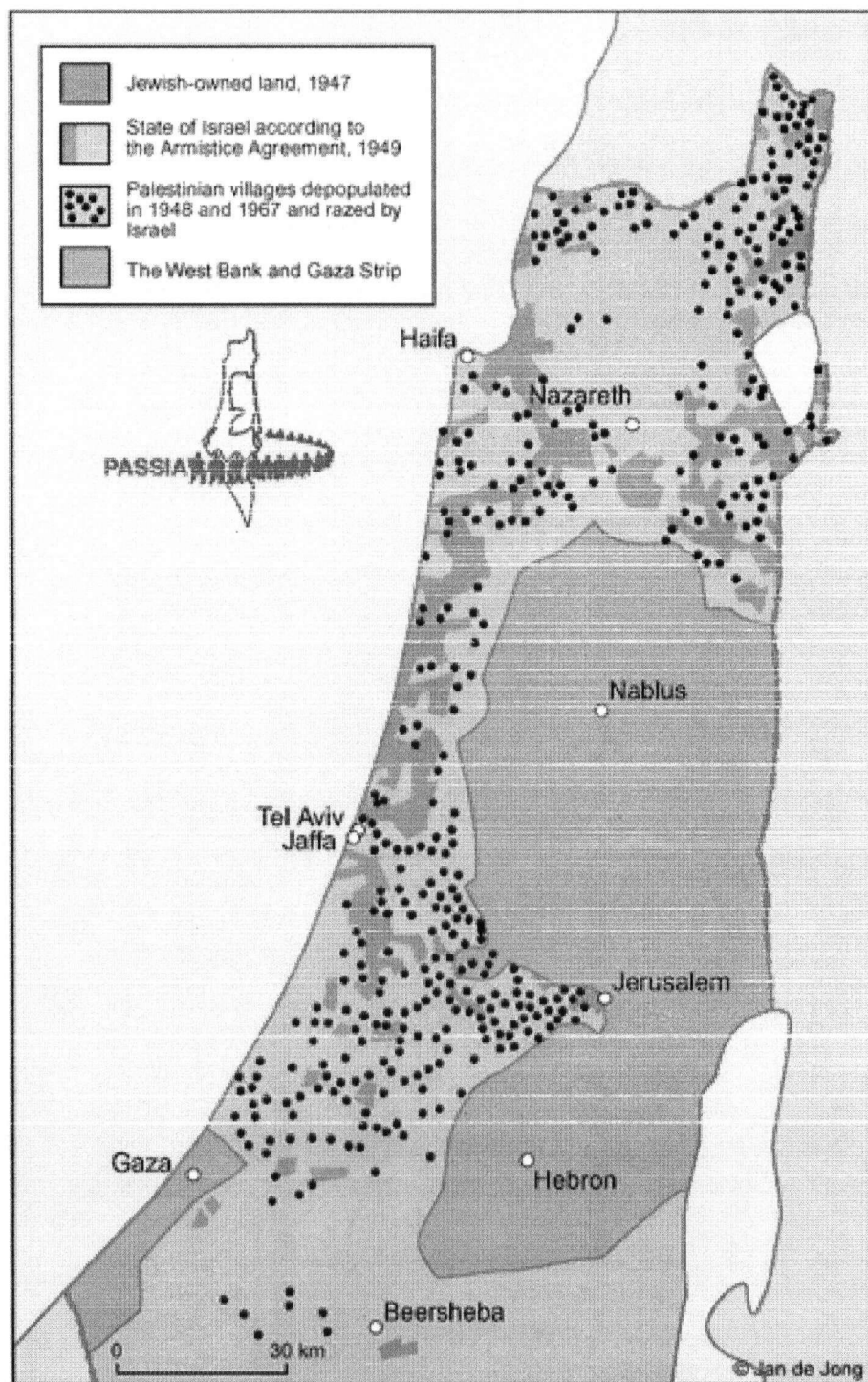
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Appendix 2: United Nations Partition Plan, November 1947



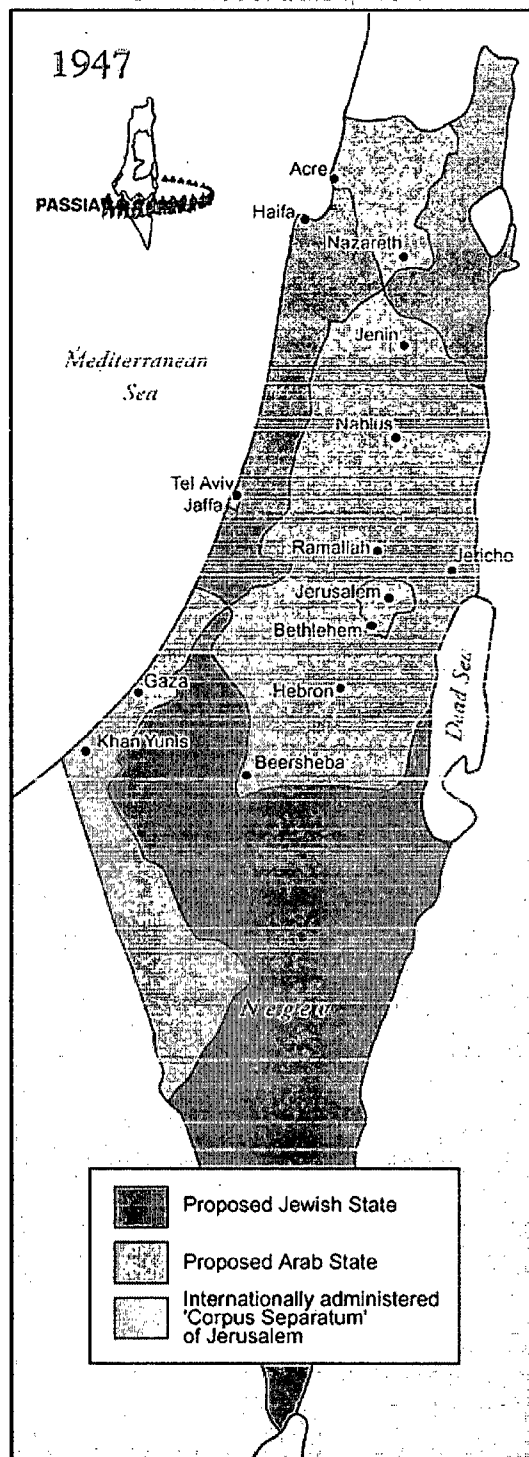
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Appendix 3: Depopulated and demolished Palestinian villages



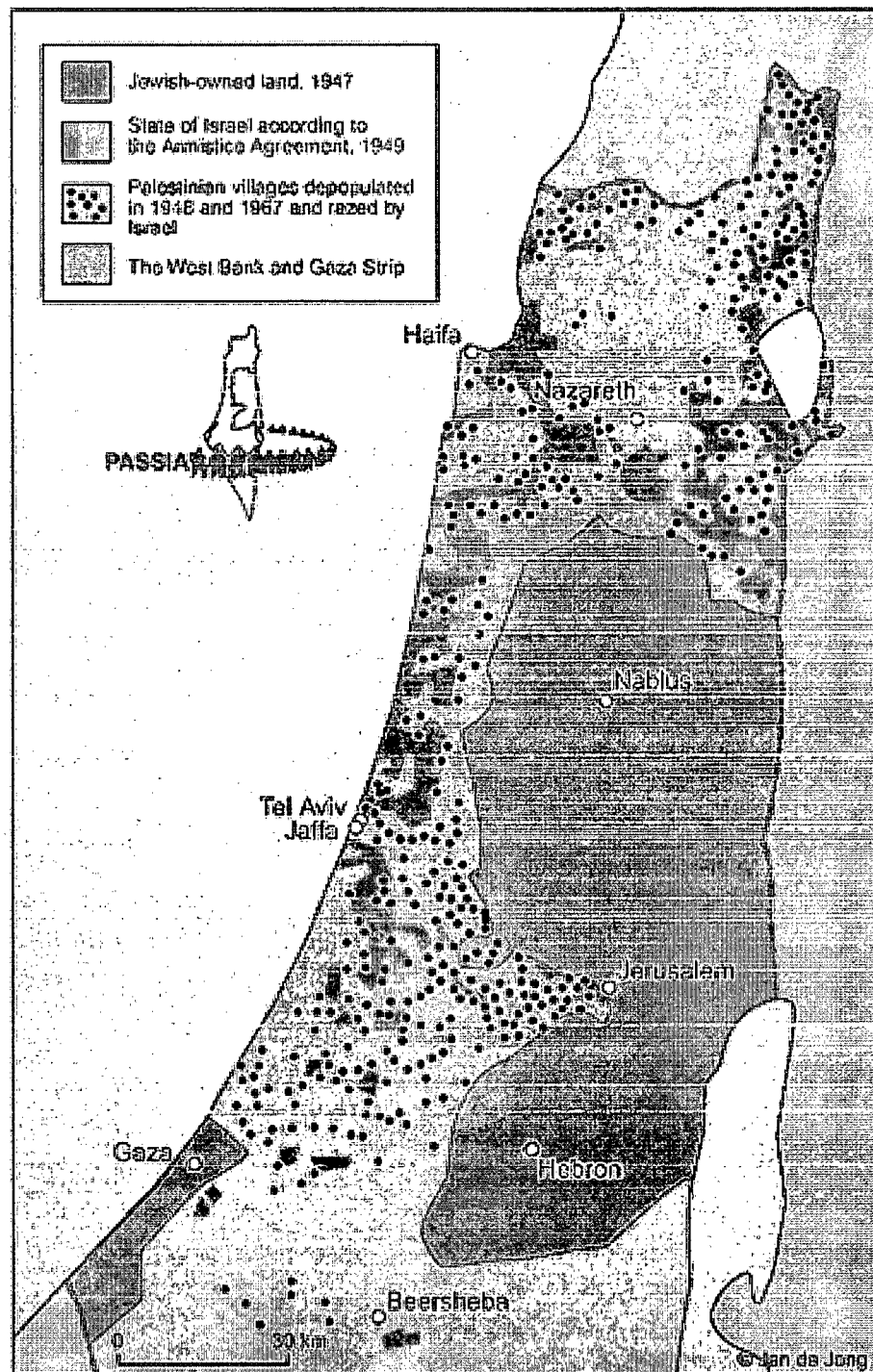
(The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs [PASSIA])

Appendix 2: United Nations Partition Plan, November 1947



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