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### Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine

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IRUS BRAVERMAN\*

# Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine

## ABSTRACT

*This article reveals the complex historical and cultural processes that have led to the symbiotic identification between pine trees and Jewish people in Israel/Palestine. It introduces three tree donation techniques used by Israel, then proceeds to discuss the meaning of nature in Israel, as well as the meaning of planting and rooting in the context of the Zionist project. The article concludes by reflecting on the ways that pine trees absent Palestinian presence and memory from the landscape, and explains how Palestinian acts of aggression toward these pine landscapes relate to the Israel/Palestine relationship.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

I have to tell you, and I'm saying a lot here, that reforesting the land is the iconic image of the Zionist experiment.<sup>1</sup>

We must plant hundreds of million [of] trees. . . . We must clothe every mountainside with trees, every hill and rocky piece of land which cannot successfully be farmed, the dunes of the coastal plain, the Negev plains. . . . We must be able eventually to plant at the rate of half a million dunams a year.<sup>2</sup>

When thinking about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, one rarely thinks about trees. Trees, along with bees and butterflies, usually fall into a different classification altogether. They belong to the realm of nature, which is usually perceived as indifferent to human wars,<sup>3</sup> but is rarely seen as reflective of or as reinforcing these wars. This article offers a different perspective; it demonstrates the process through which a natural

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*Editors' note on sources & figures:* The *Natural Resources Journal* was not able to verify the foreign language sources used in this article. For the figures referenced throughout, see the Appendix following the article text.

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1. Interview with Phillip Siller, active member of the Jewish community, in Toronto, Can. (June 30, 2005).

2. JOSEPH WEITZ, *FOREST AND AFFORESTATION IN ISRAEL 195-96* (Isaac Arnon ed., Shlomo Levenson trans., 1974) (quoting Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion).

3. For a description of the 2006 war, see *infra* Part V.

entity<sup>4</sup>—here the pine tree—has come to represent and promote a national ideology—the mainstream Zionist ideology of the time. The article reveals the complex historical and cultural processes that have led to the totemic identification between the pine tree and the Jewish people. This identification is rooted in the ambivalent relationship of certain Zionist discourses to nature, to the Promised Land, and to the local community residing in this land.

In the Israeli context, the pine tree has become almost synonymous with the Jewish National Fund (JNF).<sup>5</sup> JNF is probably the major Zionist organization of all time.<sup>6</sup> It is also the most powerful single organized entity to have shaped the modern Israeli/Palestinian landscape. Over the course of the twentieth century, JNF has planted over 240 million trees, mostly pines, throughout Israel/Palestine.<sup>7</sup> I examine the minute, everyday techniques used by the JNF in its tree-oriented missions, studying the real and symbolic meanings of what may seem like mundane tree-related events. These techniques and events help account for

4. This article utilizes the term “nature” in its common usage as something that is relatively unaffected by humans. See KATE SOPER, *WHAT IS NATURE? CULTURE, POLITICS, AND THE NON-HUMAN* (1995); *but see* NEIL SMITH, *UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT: NATURE, CAPITAL AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE* (Blackwell 1984) (2008) (critiquing this view of nature).

5. JNF’s Hebrew name, Keren Kayemet Le’Yisrael, literally means “Perpetual Fund/Capital for Israel.” According to Walter Lehn, both names, and especially the Hebrew one, have misled researchers to assume that the Fund is simply another Zionist fundraising device. WALTER LEHN, *THE JEWISH NATIONAL FUND* vii (1988) (written in association with Uri Davis). I refer to this company by its English name—JNF—unless referred to differently by the interviewees or in the documents.

6. Since its inception at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basle in 1901, JNF has become one of the major arms of the World Zionist Organization, which considers itself as representing Jewish people around the world. The legal status of JNF is peculiar. It was first founded in 1907 in the United Kingdom as a “limited company.” Soon after Israel’s inception, the 1953 Law of the Jewish National Fund transmitted every “right or authority” of the “old company” also to the “new company.” Incorporated in Israel in 1954, the new company’s status is quite unique. For example, it holds the same status as a local government with regard to the law of public acquisition of land. Later, the 1961 Covenant between JNF and the State of Israel institutionalized JNF’s role as the caretaker of Israel’s forests, and also shifted its powers to that of the state’s land administrator. JNF has a dual identity as Israel’s major agency for acquiring and disposing of lands and as Israel’s official afforestation body. JNF’s environmental agenda legitimizes its role in acquiring and managing land for Israel. Although it is less apparent these days, the interconnections between JNF’s dual mission have not weakened through the years. See IRUS BRAVERMAN, *PLANTED FLAGS: TREES, LAND, AND LAW IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE* 47–57 (2009).

7. Uri Davis, Address at Carleton University, Ottawa, Can.: Apartheid Israel and the Jewish National Fund of Canada—The Story of Imwas Yalu, Beit Nuba and Canada Park (Sept. 24, 2004) (transcript available at <http://www.caiaweb.org/files/UriDavis-CanadaPark.pdf>). This includes plantings in the occupied West Bank, where JNF has been operating through the company Hemnutah. See BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at 51. Interestingly, forest cover comprises only 9 percent of the total territory in Israel. *Id.* at 91.

the incredible appeal of JNF's ecological mission to Jews and non-Jews alike. Specifically, JNF's programs that facilitate tree donations, tree planting, tree mapping, and the legal protection of trees, have led to an increased Jewish domination of the Israeli/Palestinian landscape. Guised as natural and inevitable, trees—particularly pine trees—are used as weapons of war. On the other side of this war are the Palestinian people who have come to see the olive tree as representing their plight in this context. I have explored the genealogy of the olive tree's construction as a Palestinian tree elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Some might argue that the two trees—pines and olives—and the national identities that they have come to assume and embody through the intense years of the Israeli/Palestinian struggle, are so interwoven that they cannot be discussed separately. Indeed, I have shown elsewhere that pines and olives not only inform each other's social and spatial identity but also interact and reify each other's strengths, acting like mirror images of each other in a tree carnival.<sup>9</sup> When reading this article about the pine tree in Israel/Palestine it is thus important to keep in mind that the genealogy of the Zionist's relation to trees, albeit a world in itself, is also part of a much larger picture.

This article is based primarily on in-depth interviews conducted during 2005 and 2006 with Israeli and non-Israeli Jewish officials and on participatory observations of their work. The article begins with an exploration of three tree donation techniques practiced by JNF: tree certificates, blue boxes, and memorial stones. Although these tree-related donation techniques are certainly not exhaustive, they serve to illustrate the power of trees in establishing Jewish ties to the land of Israel.<sup>10</sup> The article then moves on to discuss the act of planting trees. First, it points to the centrality of the planting act in transforming the diaspora Jew into a *halutz* ("pioneer") and in redeeming the land from its perceived desolation. From there, the article widens its scope to discuss the early Zionist ambivalence toward nature and to claim that nature not only provides Zionist narratives with a temporal bridge between antiquity and modernity but also remakes the landscape in a particular way that excludes the other.

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8. See generally BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6; see also Irus Braverman, *Uprooting Identities: The Regulation of Olives in the Occupied West Bank*, 32 PoLAR: POL. & LEGAL ANTHROPOLOGY REV. 237 (2009) [hereinafter Braverman, *Uprooting Identities*].

9. BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at 195, 221.

10. For the most part, this article focuses on Israel of the Green Line and does not discuss the occupied West Bank. For an elaborate discussion of the tree wars in the West Bank, see Irus Braverman, *The Tree Is the Enemy Soldier*, 42 LAW & SOC'Y REV. 449 (2008) [hereinafter Braverman, *The Tree Is the Enemy Soldier*]. See also Braverman, *Uprooting Identities*, *supra* note 8.

The general discussion of Zionism's relationship to nature paves the way for a more particular discussion on the question of why pines, of all trees, have become such an important emblem of the Zionist project in Israel/Palestine. Specifically, these sections discuss the nature of pines and their frequent monocultural use by JNF, JNF's use of distinct forms of mapping for making these pine landscapes more legible, and JNF's physical and legal occupation of land through planting pine trees. This last aspect is important for the link it creates between the tree as a physical occupier of space and the legal norms that identify and protect such a spatial presence. Finally, the article examines the flip side of the Jewish identification with the pine: a strong aversion to this tree by the Palestinian. It discusses pine burning as a counter-national act and positions the summer 2006 Hezbollah attack on northern Israel as an attack on Israel's nature.

## II. THREE TREE DONATION TECHNIQUES: PLANTING CERTIFICATES, BLUE BOXES, AND MEMORIAL STONES

"All I know is that it can only be good to plant trees . . . and [that] it will help the country become a more ecological success."<sup>11</sup>

### A. Planting Certificates

Shortly after my birth, my parents received a JNF certificate indicating that, together with the Jerusalem municipality, JNF had planted a tree in my name in Jerusalem's Peace Forest. While the practice of planting trees to celebrate birthdays is not uncommon in various traditions and geographies, it is perhaps much less common as a national act. The front of my certificate shows a lonely, fragile tree, while in the background, yet also at the center of the picture, a mass of green forest prevails (FIGURE 1, APPENDIX). Tellingly, the inscription on the certificate reads, "A tree is planted in the name of the newborn in the Peace Forest

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11. Interview with Steven Posen, JNF Toronto Board Director and a North American Jew, in Toronto, Can. (June 13, 2005). Likewise, several other North American Jews interviewed for this project emphasize JNF's environmental work as a central reason for their active donations to this organization. For example, Carol Weinbaum, a tree activist from Toronto, has donated large sums to JNF for planting trees in Israel. In an interview, Weinbaum mentions that green has to be good, and doing green in Israel connects her identity as an environmentalist and a Jew. Interview with Carol Weinbaum, tree activist, in Toronto, Can. (July 5, 2005). See also Irus Braverman, *Everybody Loves Trees: Policing American Cities Through Street Trees*, 19 DUKE ENVTL. L. & POL'Y F. 81 (2008) [hereinafter Braverman, *Everybody Loves Trees*].

in Jerusalem. We wish you the fortune of seeing it/her<sup>12</sup> grow with much pleasure and ease.”

Simple as this certificate seems, it demonstrates several interrelated themes in JNF’s tree planting mission. First, the certificate explains the connection between the individual and the nation, bound by notions of birth and renewal. Such notions of renewal operate on multiple levels. They refer to the newborn baby, to the new tree that redeems the reborn landscape, and to the renewal of the Jewish collective in its national identity. The certificate also demonstrates that the municipal project of tree planting is one of naming and commemoration. The location of the project is also important, as the forest, the newborn baby, and the partner organization are all situated in Jerusalem. Finally, the certificate assumes the interchangeability between humans and trees, as expressed through the use of the word “grow” to refer both to the newborn baby and the newly planted tree. In other words, the fate of the tree and that of the newborn are tied together through the dedication of one to the other.

The various themes at play in this specific instance of a joint JNF/Jerusalem municipal planting initiative also operate on a more global scale. On this level, JNF’s tree planting operation is nothing less than ingenious. The ingenuity of the operation is revealed when examining the narratives employed by Jewish people around the world, especially non-Israeli Jews from Western countries. Phillip Siller, an active member of the Jewish community in Toronto, Canada, and one of the first people I interviewed for this project, vividly recalls his childhood tree planting experience:

[E]very Friday, as part of our *Erev Shabbat* [Friday evening, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath] program everybody would . . . if you could bring your money . . . buy a leaf for a tree. That was part of our *Oneg Shabbat* [Saturday “pleasure”]. There was an article, this size [small], hanging on the wall with your name on it . . . and you had stickers with a picture of a tree . . . and your name would be written for . . . the cost of a candy bar—or maybe less—you know, the price would change as time went by. You could buy a sticker, and put the sticker on the tree. And when you had fifteen stickers . . . [you]’d mail in the form and a tree would be planted with your name on it, in your name, in Israel. Fifteen leaves would make up a tree.<sup>13</sup>

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12. “It” stands for the tree and “her” stands for the baby girl. In Hebrew these meanings are interchangeable because there is no gender-neutral “it” in Hebrew, and the Hebrew word for tree is “etz,” which is feminine.

13. Interview with Phillip Siller, *supra* note 1. Siller was born in Connecticut to activist Zionist parents, raised in New York City, and now resides in Canada.

Despite having grown up in another corner of the world, Simon Schama, a British Jew and an esteemed historian, has very similar childhood memories. In the opening pages of his book, *Landscape and Memory*, Schama acknowledges how inseparable these memories are from his early knowledge of the land of Israel:

Every sixpence collected for the blue and white box of the Jewish National Fund merited another leaf. 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. All over north London, paper trees burst into leaf to the sound of jingling sixpences, and the forest of Zion thickened in happy response.<sup>14</sup>

Schama's description also brings to the forefront the prevalence of the blue box in JNF's practices. Indeed, through the years the blue box has become emblematic of JNF's work, and a symbol of the Zionist project at large.

### B. The Blue Box

Vast numbers of Jewish people from around the world, mostly young children, learn about Israel from their intimate engagement with JNF's tree campaigns. These campaigns are not only brilliant fundraising techniques, but they are also a mechanism of Zionist education. The connection between gift-giving and education is made even more explicit through JNF's major fundraising technique: the blue box.

Menhahem Ussishkin, one of JNF's early leaders, describes the blue box's educational value as follows:

The coin the child contributes or collects for the redemption of the land is not important in itself . . . but as an element of education: It is not the child that gives to *Keren Kayemeth* [JNF], but, rather, the Fund that gives to the child . . . a foothold and lofty ideal for all the days of his life.<sup>15</sup>

Phillip Siller, the Canadian Jew introduced earlier, similarly describes the strong presence of the blue box in his childhood memories of his home:

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14. SIMON SCHAMA, *LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY* 5 (1995).

15. Jewish National Fund, Blue Box, <http://www.jnf.co.za/pages/bluebox-history.htm> (last visited Dec. 6, 2008).

Sure, we would put money in the *Keren Kayemeth* [JNF] box at home before my mother lit candles every Friday night. At school I bought the leaves, and at home we would put money in the *pushke* [Yiddish for “charity box”]. . . . [O]nce a year [JNF] would come by or you’d call them when it was full. And they would come by and they would take it. . . . I think this went on all over Europe, you know, before the Nazis, it was a *big* thing.<sup>16</sup>

The blue box (FIGURE 2, APPENDIX) has become a prominent symbol of JNF’s afforestation campaign and of the Zionist enterprise in general. Recently, JNF’s official logo has been redesigned to include the blue box.<sup>17</sup> Although the official JNF narrative attributes the blue box initiative to JNF’s founder Herman Shapira, some claim that the credit should go to a bank clerk from Galicia, who, in a 1902 letter to a Zionist newspaper, suggested placing this sort of box in every Jewish home.<sup>18</sup> The unique design on the tin box features a symbolic map of Israel that consists of a borderless space colored in white, extending into the Jordan drainage to the east.<sup>19</sup> The force of the white territory is amplified by the blue of the Mediterranean Sea, making for a blue and white (Israel’s national colors) nature/nation image. This cartographic representation of Israel has found its way into millions of Jewish Zionist homes, creating a significant link between the imagined landscape and its imagined community. Established by the act of donation, this link between the diaspora Jew and the land of Israel, negotiated by the blue box, is made explicit on JNF’s website:

The very act of collecting funds in a special box aroused in Jews everywhere a longing for the tastes and fragrances of *Er-*

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16. Interview with Phillip Siller, *supra* note 1.

17. Interestingly, the logo was changed only in JNF’s English materials, while the logo in Hebrew still features a tree rather than a box. The different logos reflect the perceived role of the American Jewry as donors rather than planters. Indeed, the blue box is not as prevalent in the Jewish Israeli culture as it has been for non-Israeli Jews. Growing up in Israel, I cannot recall directly encountering the blue box other than through school textbooks. This shows the separate marketing strategies for the two communities, and may also explain the two separate websites: one for JNF and one for Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (KKL). My comparison between the two separate websites ([www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org) for English speakers and [www.kkl.org.il](http://www.kkl.org.il) for Hebrew speakers, but the latter also features an English-translation option) reveals striking differences not only in the images used by the two sites, but also in the content of the materials presented. I explain this differential presentation in my discussion of JNF’s maps, *infra* Part IV.

18. Yoram Bar-Gal, *The Blue Box and JNF Propaganda Maps, 1930–1947*, 8 *ISR. STUD.* 1, 1 (2003).

19. *Id.* at 8.



*etz Israel* ["Land of Israel"], and strengthened their yearning for the homeland.

...  
 Their impact was immediate, not only in terms of the money they generated but as an expression of the deep bond between the Diaspora Jewry and the small Jewish community and the soil of *Eretz Israel*.<sup>20</sup>

Although its use has decreased through the years, the blue box is still prevalent in the homes of many Zionist Jews outside Israel. For example, Australian blue box donations still account for \$1 million in annual contributions. In an interview, Yechiel Leket, Director of JNF at the time of my fieldwork, emphasizes the popularity of the box and talks about the populist fundraising method that the blue box symbolizes:

Our secret is in our populism. Today . . . no one will take money from the masses, only from major donors. I challenge them by asking: what do you prefer, \$20,000 from 20,000 people or [that same amount] just from one? It is more efficient, they say, to take the money from one. [So] *I teach them that we are not only raising funds but we are also raising people, and that to raise people is more important than to raise funds.* . . . [I]f someone is excited about planting a tree, especially if he is a young child, he can later decide to plant a whole forest, or to donate his entire life's savings [to JNF].<sup>21</sup>

The populist agenda behind JNF's tree enterprise is also reflected in the affordability of JNF's tree planting: JNF trees cost \$18 apiece. Special tree discounts are also available. As indicated on JNF's website, "You can now plant 2 trees and JNF will add a third tree **for free**! Or, purchase 4 trees and JNF will add a tree **for free** to make it a circle of 5!"<sup>22</sup> Another Internet tactic utilized by JNF since 1996 is an offer for "practical planting from anywhere in the world." By clicking on the "click to plant" window, the website enables the surfer to "get closer to every forest," so as to detect which forests "still need more trees for completion, while every tree donation immediately updates the number of trees awaiting planta-

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20. Jewish National Fund of Canada, Our Blueboxes, <http://www.jnf.ca/bluebox-nav.html> (last visited Dec. 6, 2009).

21. Interview with Yechiel Leket, former JNF Director, in Jerusalem, Isr. (Nov. 30, 2005).

22. Jewish National Fund, JNF Online Tree Planting Center, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050728155049/www.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=trees> (last visited Oct. 21, 2008) (bold font in original).

tion.”<sup>23</sup> Such interactive maps and missing tree lists attempt to erase, or at least make less visible, the distance between the donor and the tree. In this sense, these are technologies of visualization that help the nation-state in its project of securing a legible landscape.<sup>24</sup>

The blue box has more recently served as a national fundraiser for restoring the northern forests damaged by the summer 2006 Hezbollah missile attacks. A JNF news article states that:

Twenty-two of Israel's most prominent artists volunteered to redesign giant models of KKL-JNF's famous "Blue Boxes." Each box was sponsored by one of Israel's leading financial companies or businesses, and the amount of IS50,000 [equivalent to US\$15,000] was earmarked towards production of the boxes and restoration of the forests. The giant boxes will be displayed to the general public [in Tel Aviv] . . .<sup>25</sup>

More recently, a news clip on JNF's website entitled "The Blue Box Hits Israeli Hotels" states that JNF "Blue Boxes have been introduced at the front desks of twelve Isrotel Hotels around Israel," and quotes KKL-JNF World Chairman Efi Stenzler, explaining that it is "a symbol of the bond between mankind and his land."<sup>26</sup> Isrotel's initiative, it states, "is part of a wider plan now being finalized, to [r]einstale KKL-JNF Blue Boxes in all educational institutions."<sup>27</sup>

### C. Memorial Stones and Other Memory Vehicles

In addition to the symbolic, educational, and economic values already stated, JNF's tree donation techniques are also designed to increase the size of individual donations. In an interview, JNF's then director Yechiel Leket outlines the available levels of donations and commemoration:

People who donate [in small amounts] get one of the trees planted [in their name] but not a *specific* tree. The minimum

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23. See IZI MAN, AND THOU SHALL RENEW THE LAND: KKL—A HUNDRED YEARS OF DOING IN BROWN, GREEN AND BLUE 108 (KKL-Achva 2002) (Hebrew).

24. See generally JAMES SCOTT, SEEING LIKE A STATE: HOW CERTAIN SCHEMES TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN CONDITION HAVE FAILED (1998).

25. Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, Israeli Artists Redesign Blue Box Towards Restoration of Galilee Forests, [http://www.kkl.org.il/kkl/english/main\\_subject/about\\_kkl/box/israeli%20redesign%20blue%20box.x](http://www.kkl.org.il/kkl/english/main_subject/about_kkl/box/israeli%20redesign%20blue%20box.x) (last visited Oct. 21, 2008).

26. Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, The Blue Box Hits Israeli Hotels, [http://www.kkl.org.il/KKL/basic\\_template\\_Eng.aspx?id=21945](http://www.kkl.org.il/KKL/basic_template_Eng.aspx?id=21945) (last visited Oct. 19, 2008).

27. *Id.*

number of trees that you have to contribute so that your name will appear somewhere is 1,000 trees. But then it wouldn't be a big thing, just a little line somewhere saying that this and this person donated these trees in this forest. Only if you donate a forest of 10,000 trees do you get a separate stone. This is a very developed administration from many years of experience.<sup>28</sup>

Generally, JNF's donation system is two-tiered. On one tier are the popular certificate donations (such as the tree planted in my name or the medium-sized donation of 1,000 trees) in which people donate a tree with no particular tree designated. On the second tier, as in the case of stone memorials, an actual forest is named after the donor.

JNF's website in English advertises a more detailed set of distinctions: donations of \$500 or more include a special certificate and are inscribed in the Book of Gardens in Jerusalem. Gifts of \$5,000 and over receive a "special certificate, beautifully plaqued and laminated for display. In addition, the designated name is inscribed on a beautiful dedicatory wall in American Independence Park in Jerusalem."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the acknowledged presence of the tree itself, the various memorial techniques listed above (inscription in the Book of Gardens, on a plaque, and on a dedicatory wall) provide a material embodiment to the donation act. This materiality is extremely important as both a reflection and an amplification of these gifts. Similarly, the intimate material presence of the blue box in the Jewish home is a constant reminder of the personal responsibility of every Jew, young or old, to work towards the redemption of the biblical Holy Land.

The enormous success of JNF's tree donation techniques in the diasporic Jewish community is not only a consequence of various donation techniques, as sophisticated as these may be, but is also intrinsically tied to the physical nature of trees. The psychic and mythic interconnections between nation and rootedness<sup>30</sup> create an intimate bond between the Jewish donor and the image, as well as the reality, of his or her Israeli tree. The interchangeability between the tree planted on Israeli soil and the Jew living in diaspora is supplemented by feelings of guilt that these Jews may have for not being physically present in Israel. Indeed, the tree's physical presence stands in for the Jewish presence. It replaces the

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28. Interview with Yechiel Leket, *supra* note 21.

29. See generally JNF Grove-Ilan Ramon, [https://secure2.convio.net/jnf/site/Donation?ACTION=SHOW\\_DONATION\\_OPTIONS&CAMPAIGN\\_ID=1403](https://secure2.convio.net/jnf/site/Donation?ACTION=SHOW_DONATION_OPTIONS&CAMPAIGN_ID=1403) (last visited Oct. 21, 2008).

30. See generally Liisa Malkki, *National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees*, 7 *CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY* 24 (1992).

void of the Jewish body, situated far away in the diaspora, with the body of the tree, as firmly rooted as a thing can be in the soil of the Holy Land. The trees, in other words, serve as “proxy immigrants.”<sup>31</sup> Each tree represents a Jewish individual, while together they form an entire forest, representing the Jewish nation that is both *en-* and *dis-*rooted from the actual landscape.

The relationship between the presence and absence of humans and the arboreal is especially strong in JNF’s project of commemorating the dead. For this project to succeed, the absence of presence must be turned into the presence of absence named after deceased individuals or collectives where the trees serve as living memorials.<sup>32</sup> The practice of naming forests after important historical figures associated with the Zionist revival began with JNF’s first forest, which was named after Theodor Herzl, commonly considered the “father” of modern Zionism.<sup>33</sup> Forests are also planted in the names of dead Israeli soldiers, Jewish communities that perished in the Holocaust,<sup>34</sup> prominent leaders such as Yitzchak Rabin, and iconic national figures such as Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut who perished along with six other astronauts on the Space Shuttle Columbia. Here, trees not only represent the dead, they also transform the memory of the dead through revival. The human body, in other words, is incarnated in the body of the tree.

The incredible success of these JNF tree donation techniques—the tree/birth certificate, the blue box, and memorial stones and other commemoration vehicles—demonstrate the importance of the nexus between natural matters and nationhood.

### III. NATURE AS A REDEEMER OF JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE HOLY LAND

“[C]an you imagine this place without those 240 million trees?”<sup>35</sup>

#### A. The Power of the Tree Planting Act

Whereas the previous sections explored the process of tree *donation*, this section focuses on the act of tree *planting*. In an interview, JNF’s

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31. SCHAMA, *supra* note 14, at 5.

32. Yael Zerubavel, *The Forest as a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archeology of Memory*, 1 ISR. STUD. 60, 62 (1996) [hereinafter Zerubavel, *The Forest as a National Icon*].

33. *Id.* at 91 n.9.

34. *Id.* at 62.

35. Interview with Yechiel Leket, *supra* note 21.

then director Yechiel Leket describes the excitement stimulated even in non-Jews by the tree planting experience, giving the example of Sony's president, a Japanese businessman:

He came on a grey day, was uptight . . . and didn't want to get out of his car. He was cold as a fish. . . . Then he planted a tree, and read the planting prayer (we gave those to him in Japanese). And immediately, his whole essence changed. His assistant said he is now willing to go out to lunch with us. He was very excited by the act of planting the tree in the Jerusalem Mountains in the Holy Land. . . . And the same day he also contributed \$100,000 to the Israeli symphony, and I'm sure these two incidences were connected. . . . I am not a psychologist . . . but I see how people react with my own eyes. . . . It's unbelievable how they are moved by planting a tree.<sup>36</sup>

Leket also claims that the act of tree planting is deeply sensual:

When you plant the tree there is a physical connection. If you take the metaphors of land and forests you will find out that there are many sexual metaphors. . . . [Indeed,] many people say "I want to hug the trees," or "the trees hug me." . . . You take a tree and put your hand in the soil—it's a physical intimacy, all of these things.<sup>37</sup>

My interviews with several North American Jews confirm Leket's depiction of the unique bond established through the act of tree planting. Although he did not explicitly allude to any sensual reactions, Steven Posen, a Canadian Jew and member of JNF-Toronto's Board of Directors, did describe the physical and emotional effects that tree planting in Israel has had on himself and his children:

Planting trees with my sons in Israel was a very, very emotional experience for me. It was our little symbolic way of contributing to the reclamation of the land, the forestation of the land, and the making of the land into a success—from the point of view of growing life, you know, trees—you know, bringing vibrant growth back into the country. . . . I don't know exactly how it works but I'm told that it has nothing but healthy components to it, and that it will help the country. . . . I don't remember which kinds of trees I planted, and don't ask me whether they're indigenous—also don't ask me

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36. *Id.*

37. *Id.*

whether they'll survive. . . . All I know is it can only be good to plant trees.<sup>38</sup>

In Posen's narrative, the positive power ascribed to planting as a sensual act is reinforced by an ecological assertion that trees can only be good for the environment. This sentiment was reiterated by all North American Jews interviewed for this study. It was also emphasized in JNF's newer publications. For example, I found the following statement on a tree planting envelope that I obtained from a JNF booth at a public event in Boston, Massachusetts: "Trees planted in Israel will: Protect Israel's soil against erosion; Preserve Israel's precious watersheds; Show a practical, meaningful concern for the environment; Help replenish oxygen and provide a habitat for wildlife."<sup>39</sup> Although it is not my task here to question whether the ecological assumptions about forestation in general are also relevant to JNF's particular tree planting campaign, it is nonetheless important to note how JNF's narrative has evolved to reflect a more ecological focus as well as how it has changed over the years. This goes to support the point I have made elsewhere regarding JNF's gradual transformation from a land acquisition body into Israel's official afforestation service, as well as a nongovernmental environmental organization.<sup>40</sup> As emphasized earlier, this shift is not a product of a top-down fundraising tactic; rather, it is practiced with much conviction by JNF officials on a variety of administrative levels.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, one should not undermine the role of environmental framing as a sophisticated way of legitimizing JNF's other roles, which are still prominent in its mission, although rarely referred to explicitly. For example, JNF's Spring 2006 newsletter announces in its mission statement that the "Jewish National Fund is the caretaker of the land of Israel, on behalf of its owners—Jewish people everywhere."<sup>42</sup> In the same newsletter, JNF's president, Ronald Lauder, declares that "[t]oday, Jewish National Fund continues to improve the quality of life for all Israelis by protecting, preserving and beautifying the homeland we all worked so hard to build."<sup>43</sup> In this proclamation, ethnocentric notions

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38. Interview with Steven Posen, *supra* note 11.

39. From a JNF brochure, handed out in JNF booth, Boston, Massachusetts in June 2006 (emphasis added) [hereinafter JNF Brochure] (on file with author).

40. See BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at 47–57.

41. See Zvika Avni, *Effects of Institutions on Open Landscapes and Preservation Patterns in Israel* (2003) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem) (Hebrew) (on file with author).

42. See TOGETHER (Jewish National Fund), Spring 2006; see also Jewish National Fund, <http://support.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=JNFPresentsItsFirstCentury> (last visited Jan. 13, 2010).

43. TOGETHER, *supra* note 42.

(demonstrated by the use of the terms "homeland," "we," and "protecting") are entangled with liberalist notions ("for all Israelis," i.e., Jewish and Palestinian Israelis alike). The ethnocentricity of JNF's mission is even more apparent in the small captions of a JNF handout, obtained from the same JNF booth mentioned earlier. The handout states that "[t]hrough JNF's work, there is hope for a safer Israel. JNF builds security roads . . . so children and their parents can travel to school and work *shielded from harm*. . . . JNF-built parks provide a place for families to gather and enjoy simple pleasures away from the *stress* of daily life . . . *at this critical time*."<sup>44</sup> The explicit connection drawn between JNF's work and Israel's security is alienating to a range of non-Jewish Israeli citizens who may not necessarily share this narrative of security, and who may further feel that they are the source of Jewish Israeli insecurity.

### B. Planting People, Not Trees

In her analysis of a poster that declares the establishment of the Forest of Martyred Children, which commemorates the children who died during the Holocaust, Yael Zerubavel observes that trees have replaced the fading images of children.<sup>45</sup> The transformation of memory performed through this treescaping project is fueled by the recruitment of Jewish Israeli children to plant the trees. Zerubavel quotes the representative of JNF's teacher's association as saying, "Remember, children, that you do not plant trees, but people."<sup>46</sup> The power of this ritual is increased when one realizes that the project of planting is not that different from the actions of a burial ceremony. By digging into the earth to create a hole, placing something in it, and re-covering it with earth, the children are taught the idea of birth and death through their hands. Some suggest that such acts of planting also prepare Jewish Israeli children for their own burial as future soldiers ready to die for the national cause.<sup>47</sup>

As intermediaries between birth and death, and between past and present, the trees constitute an immediate physical and symbolic bond

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44. JNF Brochure, *supra* note 39 (emphasis added).

45. See generally Yael Zerubavel, *The "Mythological Sabra" and the Jewish Past: Trauma, Memory, and Contested Identities*, 7 *ISR. STUD.* 115 (2002); Zerubavel, *The Forest as a National Icon*, *supra* note 32; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (1995) [hereinafter ZERUBAVEL, *RECOVERED ROOTS*].

46. Zerubavel, *The Forest as a National Icon*, *supra* note 32, at 62. See also Jack Khoury, *Kids Transplant Protected Plants from Area Slated for Development*, *HAARETZ*, Dec. 3, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/963271.html>.

47. Naama Meishar, *Body in Forest*, 4 *PLASTICA* 134, 134 (1998) (Hebrew).

between the diasporic donor, the Jewish Israeli planter, and the Holy Land. Moreover, trees are an intrinsic part of the ideology of national birth and revival. This theme of collective rebirth is reinforced through the recent revival of the Jewish holiday *Tu Bishvat*.<sup>48</sup> Mentioned in the bible, *Tu Bishvat* was the New Year of Trees, one of four New Years on the Jewish calendar marking the separation of fruit for collection as tithes at the time of Jewish life in the Holy Land. A minor holiday traditionally observed among diaspora Jews by eating different types of fruit grown in the Holy Land and reciting certain biblical passages, the Zionists' *Tu Bishvat* transformed into a variation of the American Arbor Day.<sup>49</sup> Drawing upon ancient materials, a new tradition was invented so that "the old could be revived and revitalized, and the new could be anchored by the weight of the past."<sup>50</sup> The transformation of *Tu Bishvat* was largely facilitated by JNF through the adoption of a ritual of tree planting in Israel, which was not part of the traditional celebration of this holiday. Simon Schama provides a visceral account of *Tu Bishvat*, recapturing memories from his childhood:

Every year the tempo of leaf-gumming accelerated furiously toward Tu bi Shevat, the fifteenth of the month of Shevat: the New Year for Trees. . . . In Israel, though, it had been wholly reinvented as a Zionist Arbor Day, complete with trowel-wielding children planting the botanical equivalent of themselves in cheerful, obedient, rows. It was an innocent ritual. But behind it lay a long, rich, and pagan tradition that imagined forests as the primal birth places of nations; the beginning of habitation. . . . All we knew was that to create a Jewish forest was to go back to the beginning of our place in the world, the nursery of the nation. Once rooted, the irresistible cycle of vegetation, where death merely composted the process of rebirth, seemed to promise true national immortality.<sup>51</sup>

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48. *Tu Bishvat* literally translates to "the fifteenth of Shevat" (Shevat is the second month in the Jewish calendar, the day on which this holiday is celebrated).

49. See SHAUL EFRAIM COHEN, *THE POLITICS OF PLANTING: ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN COMPETITION FOR CONTROL OF LAND IN THE JERUSALEM PERIPHERY* (1993); Joanna Claire Long, (En)planting Israel: Jewish National Fund Forestry and the Naturalisation of Zionism 43 (July 2005) (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia) (on file with author).

50. Carol B. Bardenstein, *Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Collective Memory*, in *ACTS OF MEMORY: CULTURAL RECALL AND THE PRESENT* 148, 161 (Mieke Bal et al. eds., 1999). See also Carol B. Bardenstein, *Threads of Memory and Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges, and the Prickly-Pear Cactus in Israel/Palestine* 8 *EDEBIYAT* 1, 7 (1998) [hereinafter Bardenstein, *Threads of Memory*].

51. SCHAMA, *supra* note 14, at 6.



As Schama's recollection illustrates, *Tu Bishvat* is commonly celebrated as a children's event. For example, in *Tu Bishvat* of 1969, Jewish Israeli children planted the Brother to Brother Forest in the Jerusalem Mountains. This forest was to contain 13 million trees, "one for every Jew in the world."<sup>52</sup> Another aspect of *Tu Bishvat*'s association with birth is manifested in the fact that the Israeli Knesset (the legislature of Israel) was first convened on this day in 1949. The significance of the Knesset's "birth" on *Tu Bishvat* is celebrated every year by members of the Knesset by planting trees with soldiers and schoolchildren.<sup>53</sup>

In her examination of the Zionist construction of the Hebrew past, Zerubavel proposes that "[b]irth symbolizes at once and the same time a point of separation from another group and the beginning of a new life as a collective entity with a future of its own . . . [and] can also serve as a means of transforming the group's identity."<sup>54</sup> Disrupting the continuity between past and future, the birth event becomes a symbolic marker of change. A selective project of commemoration is carried forth through the act of tree planting, which utilizes the archetypal nature of the tree as both alive and rooted. The birth of the tree is thus tied to the birth of the old-new nation in the old-new land through the old-new forest.

But such notions of birth are also intrinsically linked to the death, or negation, of certain memories. Specifically, the ritual of naming forests after tragic incidents and dead people functions as a void between what are constructed as two national periods: first, the period of biblical antiquity that awakens into the second period of its modern Zionist version.<sup>55</sup> The new Israeli Jew is thus expected to repudiate the image of the submissive and passive diasporic Jew, creating a native subject of action and physical strength—what Israelis call a *tsabar* (or prickly pear cactus, which represents the *sabra*, the native born Israeli).<sup>56</sup> The rupture from the ancestral land of Zion is perceived in the Zionist discourse as the cause for the entire diasporic misfortune. Indeed, the story of Masada and the Bar Kokhba revolt,<sup>57</sup> which arguably terminated this period of

52. Long, *supra* note 49, at 64.

53. *Id.* at 69.

54. ZERUBAVEL, *RECOVERED ROOTS*, *supra* note 45, at 7.

55. *Id.* at 19.

56. *See id.* at 27.

57. Masada, situated in the Judean Desert, was the last fortress to fall in the First Jewish-Roman War in 73 A.D., when a siege of the fortress by troops of the Roman Empire led to a mass suicide of the site's Jewish fugitives when defeat became imminent. The Bar Kokhba revolt (132–35 A.D.) against the Roman Empire was the second major rebellion by the Jews of Judea and the last of the Jewish-Roman Wars. The revolt established a Jewish state for over two years, but a massive Roman army finally crushed it. The Romans then

ancestral existence, have provided a rich source for Zionist myths. The redemption of the uprooted Jewish exilic subject is thus intrinsically tied to and dependent upon the possibility of physically reconnecting to the land of their ancestors.

As mentioned earlier, the central Zionist narrative of land redemption is not limited to the acquisition of land through legal and administrative means; it is also a sensual project: "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."<sup>58</sup> This physical form of redemption occurs through labor: "[t]he 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 laborer."<sup>59</sup> Labor, and the transformation of nature through labor in particular,<sup>60</sup> was central to the development of the new Hebrew *halutz*—a pioneering Jewish farmer who cultivates the land and lives off the fruits of her labor. Through the performance of planting, the "rootless cosmopolitan" Jew is supposed to transform into a physical laborer. The labor involved in the act of planting thus naturalizes the Jew, while at the same time normalizing her to conform to the new national identity. Phillip Siller suggests that this naturalization idea originated in the Russian project of proletarian agriculture:

[T]his all grew out of the Russian labor Zionist view that part of the problem with the Jewish people is that it had an inverted labor pyramid, as Borochoy taught. You know, too many knowledge workers, not enough proletarian. So we were going to flip that. This was a conscious idea: create the Jewish working class with class consciousness, and especially a Jewish agricultural class. . . . You know, the Jews were not farmers. . . . You're getting involved in nature, which was an exotic thing for Jews. I think that Zionist history is an exten-

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barred Jews from Jerusalem. The massive destruction and loss of life occasioned by the revolt has led some scholars to date the beginning of the Jewish diaspora from this date. After the revolt, the Jewish religious center shifted to Babylon. See Masada, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Archaeology/Masada1.html> (last visited Nov. 23, 2009); see also Bar Kokhba, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/revolt1.html> (last visited Nov. 23, 2009).

58. Long, *supra* note 49, at 10 (quoting JNF Chairman Max Budenheimer).

59. *Id.* (quoting agronomist Yitzhak Wilkansky).

60. See generally JOHN LOCKE, TWO TREATISES OF GOVERNMENT AND A LETTER CONCERNING TOLERATION (Ian Shapiro ed., Yale University Press 2003) (1690). See also DAVID DELANEY, LAW AND NATURE (2003).

sion of Russian revolutionary politics. . . . That's where these guys got their ideas. So the trees were a big thing.<sup>61</sup>

The project of transforming the disparate identities of Jewish immigrants into a uniform national identity frequently involved afforestation labor, often coerced. New immigrants, especially of Mizrahi descent,<sup>62</sup> were sent by Zionist organizations and later by the State of Israel to settle peripheral lands and to afforest their surroundings (FIGURE 3, APPENDIX).<sup>63</sup> Indeed, afforestation was one of the key tools of the Zionist settlement effort. Its goals were to provide employment for the new immigrants while at the same time improving both their personal living conditions and the state of the land. However, such coerced settlement and forced employment in the frontier areas triggered various acts of everyday resistance on the part of Mizrahi newcomers.<sup>64</sup>

Another major component of Zionist labor ideology was the inclusion of women in the labor forces. Tree nurseries were particularly relevant in this context, especially with the third and fourth waves of immigration where hundreds of young women came and asked to do "pioneer work," but not all of them could actually work together with the boys paving roads or doing other rough labor tasks. The solution that was found for them was the establishment of tree nurseries—a labor that had a touch of pioneering but that was fit for women because it required precision and devotion, but not hard physical work.<sup>65</sup>

Although the first tree nurseries were run by women's associations (*mishkei poalot*) and were close to urban areas, economic concerns such as proximity to the peripheral planting sites began to take precedence. As a result, numerous nurseries were established near the new

61. Interview with Phillip Siller, *supra* note 1. Siller's mention of the Russian influence on early Zionism is also supported by certain scholars. For example, Uri Eisenzweig splits this influence into two trends: theory (as advanced by Herzl) and praxis (as promoted by the Russian and Polish pioneers, mostly from the Russian Residence Zone). Uri Eisenzweig, *An Imaginary Territory: The Problematic of Space in Zionist Discourse*, 5 *DIALECTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY* 261, 266 (1981). For further distinctions within Zionism and its position as a national discourse, see Hedva Ben-Israel, *Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative Aspects*, 8 *ISR. STUD.* 91 (2003).

62. Mizrahi or Sephardic Jews are Jews, or descendants of Jews, who fled the Spanish Inquisition. See George E. Bisharat, *Land, Law, and Legitimacy in Israel and the Occupied Territories*, 43 *AM. U. L. REV.* 467 (1994). This includes Jews from various Muslim and Arab countries and regions collectively, including Egypt, the Maghreb, Iraq, Persia, Turkey, Palestine, Central Asia, and others.

63. COHEN, *supra* note 49, at 57.

64. Adriana Kemp, *State Control and Resistance in the Margins of Israeli Society*, in "MIZRACHIM" in ISRAEL (Yehuda Shenhav et al. eds., 2002) (Hebrew).

65. NILI LIPSHITZ & GIDEON BIGER, *GREEN DRESS FOR A COUNTRY: AFFORESTATION IN ERETZ-ISRAEL—THE FIRST 100 YEARS 1850–1950* 91 (2000).

frontier settlements, alongside the afforestation projects,<sup>66</sup> which usually meant that they were out of reach for urban women.

### C. Redeeming a Desolate Land: Zionism and Nature

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 the place of drifting sand. . . . [T]he diaspora was sand. So what would Israel be, if not a forest, fixed and tall? No one bothered to tell us which trees we sponsored. But we thought cedar, Solomonic cedar: the fragrance of the timbered temple.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of landscape for the Zionist agenda lies in its visual affirmation of the transformed Jewish self. The Zionist idea of nature was not simply one of originality and authenticity; it also involved a sense that only artifice—brought about by human labor—could bring out nature's true essence. The notion that nature must be improved by humans was emphasized by Theodor Herzl in his 1898 article, *Zionism*, where he noted, "At present the land is poor and neglected: the slopes of the hills are bare, the places with famous names are sad piles of debris and the fields lie fallow. The Holy Land is a wilderness. But there are oases—our Jewish settlements!"<sup>68</sup>

Chaim Weizmann, who later became Israel's first president, proposed a similar idea: "It seems as if 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."<sup>69</sup> Herzl's and Weizmann's formulations emphasize the Zionist belief that—because Jews were perceived as Israel's authentic people—it is not simply any labor, but rather it is specifically Jewish labor that can redeem the land from its desolate state. The central premise, then, is that Jews can draw out the true nature of the Holy Land, mainly through a careful application of scientific principles. To this end, one of JNF's earliest undertakings was the dispatching of research teams that analyzed soil, climate, and vegetation.

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66. See WEITZ, *supra* note 2.

67. SCHAMA, *supra* note 14, at 5–6 (emphasis in original).

68. Eisenzweig, *supra* note 61, at 282 (quoting Theodor Herzl).

69. EDWARD SAID, *THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE* 85 (Vintage Books 1992) (1979) (quoting CHAIM WEIZMANN, *TRIAL AND ERROR: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CHAIM WEIZMANN* 371 (1949)).

Out of JNF's various campaigns for the improvement of nature, its Negev Project for reversing desertification is the most ambitious. JNF's first experiments with planting trees in the Negev, a sandy desert in southern Israel, began in 1943. Since then, the Negev's transformation has been a major part of JNF's agenda, and recently its primary mission. But while the earlier Zionist visions were of blooming the Negev,<sup>70</sup> the more recent versions oscillate between the anthropocentric emphasis on making the Negev into "a hospitable environment that will become home for over 250,000 new people over the next five years,"<sup>71</sup> and the simultaneous reassurance that "JNF is a global leader in protecting the fragile desert environment."<sup>72</sup>

In JNF's theming of the Negev, it is important to briefly mention the invisibility of the Bedouin residents of the Negev, most of whom are Israeli citizens and many of whom serve in Israel's Defense Forces. Two material practices have been at the forefront of Israeli policies concerning the Negev: the mass transfer of the Negev's Bedouin population to planned townships and the corresponding registration of the Negev lands as state property.<sup>73</sup> These practices are an excellent example of a clash between JNF's two arms that I have explored elsewhere:<sup>74</sup> its land acquisition arm, which has been promoting the planting of trees so as to occupy Negev land and protect it from the local Bedouin population (traditionally, such practices went hand in hand with the regulation of nomadic grazing, commonly executed in the name of tree protection); and its environmental or ecological arm, which advocates protection of desert environments, thereby questioning the viability of afforestation projects there. According to the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*,<sup>75</sup> JNF's heavy mechanical equipment uprooted existing vegetation to make way for its new trees, thereby preventing Bedouin construction or grazing in the

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70. WEITZ, *supra* note 2, at 133.

71. *Blueprint Negev—It's Not a Mirage, It's Our Vision*, TOGETHER (Jewish National Fund, New York, N.Y.), Summer 2005, at 10, available at [http://support.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=BN\\_main](http://support.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=BN_main).

72. Jewish National Fund, *Blueprint Negev*, [www.jnf.org/negev/about.html](http://www.jnf.org/negev/about.html) (last visited June 19, 2006).

73. This is accurate, despite the reality that such land struggles have also been taking place through tree wars. For example, see Zafrir Rinat's claim that JNF's tree planting practices "thwart Bedouin growth in the Negev." Zafrir Rinat, *JNF Using Trees to Thwart Bedouin Growth in Negev*, HA'ARETZ, Dec. 8, 2008, available at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1044396.html>. See also Ronen Shamir, *Suspended in Space: Bedouins Under the Law of Israel*, 30 LAW & SOC'Y REV. 231 (1996) (positioning Israel's conflict with the Bedouins as a cultural conflict between nomadic and settler societies rather than a purely national one).

74. See BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at 47–57.

75. See Rinat, *supra* note 73.

area just east of the Bedouin town of Hura in the northern part of the Negev.

Zionist narratives often describe nature as supporting the Zionist effort to create a bridge over exile by constructing a symbolic continuity that history denies.<sup>76</sup> In other words, nature is used to smooth the transition between the two archetypes of Hebrew nationhood: the biblical people and their modern descendants. This is practiced in Israel through educational projects such as *yediat ha'aretz* ("knowing the land"), which attempt to refamiliarize the *tsabar* with his or her ancestral knowledge about the land, mostly through *tiyulim* (or nature hikes) that provide a path for reconnecting Jewish Israelis to their pre-diasporic knowledge of the land.

JNF's narrative of the history of forests in Israel demonstrates just how selective this project of "bridging through nature" is. A book funded by JNF that celebrates *100 Years of Afforestation in Israel (1850–1950)* includes a section dedicated to the birth of forests in the world and in "our" region. This section is followed by a chapter titled "The Forest in the Land of Israel in the Past," which is divided into two parts: "The Forest in the Land of Israel in Antiquity" and "The Forest in the Land of Israel in the 19th Century."<sup>77</sup> The 2,000-year gap between the first and the second section of the book calls attention to the fact that this is a carefully choreographed forest genealogy that elides 2,000 years of non-Jewish forest history.

Ilan Iluz, an inspector for Israel's Nature and National Parks Protection Authority in Jerusalem, sheds further light on the modern Israeli fascination with antiquity. In an interview, Iluz clarifies that he is proud of his work of planting and protecting olives and figs in the park's jurisdiction, especially on the slopes of Jerusalem's Old City. This, he says, is precisely because of the connection to biblical times established by these trees:

Is there anything more beautiful than nature? Is there anything more beautiful than to find, in an urban area, such a green spot with olives, like in biblical times? Now that's something! In the time of the [Jewish] Temple there were olives and figs, they were part of the seven holy species, those were the main ones used in the Bible.<sup>78</sup>

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76. ZERUBAVEL, *RECOVERED ROOTS*, *supra* note 45, at 33.

77. See LIPHSCHITZ & BIGER, *supra* note 65. See also MAN, *supra* note 23.

78. Interview with Ilan Iluz, Inspector, Israeli Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, in East Jerusalem (Dec. 14, 2005). See also Ethan Bronner & Isabel Kershner, *Parks Fortify Israel's Claim to Jerusalem*, N.Y. TIMES, May 9, 2009, at A1, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/10/world/middleeast/10jerusalem.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/10/world/middleeast/10jerusalem.html?_r=1) (discussing the

Sohil Sedan, JNF's director of Natural Forests, Orchards, and Grazing, provides one last example of how trees serve as a bridge over history in Zionist narratives. Sedan proudly discloses that his team recently found an olive pit that existed in Masada at the time of the insurrection against the Romans in 73 A.D. According to Sedan, this find shows that "there was an olive in Masada and we know exactly which type."<sup>79</sup> Sedan also mentions that there are 250 types of olives in Israel today, including the Maalot olive, which is "an Israeli creation." To this Sedan adds, "Let me tell you that we are one of the leading countries in the world for the improvement of olives."<sup>80</sup> In Sedan's narrative, Zionism is a bridge over time and place that fuses biblical associations with modern technology.

#### D. Zionist Nature and the Other

Zionist narratives not only use nature to provide a temporal bridge for constituting continuity between antiquity and modernity—Zionism also remakes landscape in a particular way that excludes the other. Theodor Herzl's major work, *Altneuland*, clearly illustrates some implications of this point.<sup>81</sup> This utopian novel describes a desperate young man, Friedrich, who visits Palestine for the first time, accompanied by his non-Jewish friend and supporter, Kingscourt. Here is Friedrich's first impression of the place:

Jaffa made a very unpleasant impression . . . the town was in a state of extreme decay . . . the alleys were dirty, neglected, full of vile odors. Everywhere misery in bright Oriental rags. Poor Turks, dirty Arabs, timid Jews lounged about—indolent, beggarly, hopeless. . . .

The landscape through which they passed was a picture of desolation. The low-lands were mostly sand and swamp, the lean fields looked as if burnt over. The inhabitants of the blackish Arab villages looked like brigands. Naked children played in the dirty alleys. Over the distant horizon loomed the deforested hills of Judea. The bare slopes and the bleak, rocky valleys showed some traces of present or former cultivation.

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politicization of archeology in the context of the struggle over Jerusalem and the strong affiliations between the radical Jewish settlers of Kfar Silwan in East Jerusalem and Israeli nature authorities that operate in this place).

79. Interview with Sohil Sedan, Director, JNF National Forests, Orchards and Grazing (Dec. 18, 2005).

80. *Id.*

81. See generally THEODOR HERZL, *ALTNEULAND* (Lotta Levensohn trans., Bloch Publishing Co. & Herzl Press 1960) (1902).

"If this is our land," remarked Friedrich sadly, "it has declined like our people."

"Yes, it's pretty bad," agreed Kingscourt. "But much could be done here with afforestation, if half a million young giant cedars<sup>82</sup> were planted—they shoot up like asparagus. This country needs nothing but water and shade to have a very great future."

"And who is to bring water and shade here?"

"The Jews!"<sup>83</sup>

Upon their return to Palestine 20 years later, the two companions discover that "[t]here's been a miracle here."<sup>84</sup> Hosted by prominent figures of the New Society (Steineck), and Arab members of this Society (Reschid Bey), Friedrich and Kingscourt travel across the land, recording their impressions:

[T]he car glided past luxuriant orange and lemon groves whose red and yellow fruit gleamed through the foliage. . . . "Cultivation is everything," roared Steineck aggressively . . . "we Jews introduced cultivation here."

"Pardon me, sir!" cried Reschid Bey with a friendly smile. "But this sort of thing was here before you came—at least there were signs of it. My father planted oranges extensively." He turned to Kingscourt and pointed to a grove on the side of the road. "I know more about it than our friend Steineck, because this used to be my father's plantation. It's mine now." The well tended grove was a beautiful sight. The everblooming trees bore flowers, green and ripe fruit, simultaneously.

"I don't deny that you had orange groves before we came," thundered Steineck, "but you could never get full value out of them."

Reschid nodded. "That is correct. Our profits have grown considerably. Our orange transport has multiplied tenfold since we have had good transportation facilities to connect us with the whole world. Everything here has increased in value since your immigration . . ."

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82. Interestingly, in the Hebrew version of Herzl's book, translated directly from the German origin, the tree type is translated as pine rather than cedar. See THEODOR HERZL, *ALTNEULAND* 42 (Miriam Kraus trans., Bavel 2002) (1902). This difference can be ascribed to Israel's attempt to legitimize pine planting through its association with the father figure of Zionism.

83. *Id.*

84. *Id.* at 58.



"Were not the older inhabitants of Palestine ruined by the Jewish immigration?" [Friedrich asks, to which Reschid Bey replies:]

"What a question! It was a great blessing for all of us. . . . After I had sold them to the New Society, I took them back on lease. . . . Since I wanted to join the New Society, I had to submit to its land regulations. Its members have no private property in land."<sup>85</sup>

Written by one of the most influential early Zionist figures, this literary testimony allows a glimpse into the mode of thinking at the time of its writing. Herzl's agenda is articulated and visualized through the design and urban architecture of both the pre- and post-redemption states. Strikingly, and despite popular beliefs to the contrary, Herzl does not ignore the existence of the local community in Palestine. Rather, he contends that the mutual existence of locals and newcomers will benefit both populations: the locals, who have the heritage (Bey's father cultivated oranges), and the newcomers, who bring a focus on technology.<sup>86</sup> In both pre- and post-redemption states, landscape design and urban architecture serve as important tools for the articulation and visualization of Herzl's agenda.

In contrast to Herzl's utopian vision, many Zionist writings do characterize the Holy Land as a land without people. For example, in 1914, Chaim Weizmann wrote: "There is a country which happens to be called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exists the Jewish people, and it has no country."<sup>87</sup> The vision of bringing a "people with no land" to a "land without people" closely resembles the colonial configuration of *terra nullius*, or *vacuum domicilium*, which in turn may support the contention that Zionism is yet another instance of colonialism.<sup>88</sup> However, although the typical colonial project has been one of *deforestation*, the Zionist project focuses instead on *afforestation*. Moreover, whereas colonial ecology is usually framed in terms of preservation and conservation,<sup>89</sup> the ecological discourse in Israel still

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85. *Id.* at 120–22.

86. See SAID, *supra* note 69, at 85–90.

87. Eisenzweig, *supra* note 61, at 282 (quoting Chaim Weizmann).

88. See, e.g., Gershon Shafir, Preface to the New Edition of *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 1882–1914*, in COLONIALITY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAELI SOCIETY (Yehouda Shenhav ed., 2004); GERSHON SHAFIR, LAND, LABOR, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT 1882–1914 (1989).

89. RICHARD GROVE, GREEN IMPERIALISM: COLONIAL EXPANSION, TROPICAL ISLAND EDENS AND THE ORIGINS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM 1600–1860 (1995).

frames afforestation as a way to *protect* nature.<sup>90</sup> Although Israel's discourse of nature protection shares several features with both preservation and conservation ecologies, it is unique in its strong emphasis on security. This is hardly surprising in a state that considers its military force a significant part of the most mundane societal interactions.

The *terra nullius* framework, then, is relevant not only to those Zionist narratives that have ignored the presence of the other but also to narratives that have acknowledged the other's existence. Accordingly, when Prince Hohenlohe, Imperial Chancellor of Prussia, asked Herzl who dwells on the lands that Herzl intended to purchase in Palestine, Herzl responded, "Oh, the whole mixed multitude of the Orient, Arabs, Greeks."<sup>91</sup> While Herzl acknowledged the natives that dwell on the land, he seemed to see them like rocks or swamps, devoid of human agency.<sup>92</sup> The perceived emptiness of this land from trees thus becomes the perceived emptiness of the land from significant human communities. This perception enhances the invisibility of local communities in certain Zionist narratives. Consequently, the land's virginity could be maintained in such narratives, awaiting redemption by her natural lover, the Jewish people.

Uri Eisenzweig similarly highlights the role of nature in Zionist conceptions of space. "The space of an ethnocentric discourse can be conceived only in a context where the other does not appear—in Nature. The positivist Zionist discourse must 'clean' the site of the future society, must *not see* the other."<sup>93</sup> The perception of the landscape as natural thus denies the observer the ability to visually see the place of the other, which in this case means characterizing the Palestinian issue as an "unseen question" and avoiding the moral implications of appropriating Palestinian lands. But, while the perception of Palestine as an empty, natural site cannot but remind us of classical colonialist discourses, the dream of escaping anti-Semitism by creating an independent nation-state is far from colonial. The para-colonial rhetoric of nature articulated in certain Zionist discourses is therefore the paradoxical, yet inevitable, consequence of precisely its most humanistic dimensions.<sup>94</sup>

Parallel to the *terra nullius* motif, another, perhaps less apparent, colonial tendency in certain Zionist narratives is ecological. Up until the 1990s it was commonly assumed that the ecological habitat in Israel had

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90. Naama Meishar, *Fragile Guardians: Nature Reserves and Forests Facing Arab Villages*, in *CONSTRUCTING A SENSE OF PLACE: ARCHITECTURE AND THE ZIONIST DISCOURSE* (Haim Yacobi ed., 2003).

91. Eisenzweig, *supra* note 61, at 281.

92. *Id.* at 283.

93. *Id.* at 280 (emphasis in original).

94. Eisenzweig, *supra* note 61, at 280–82.

suffered from centuries of intrusion, especially through fires and over-grazing. This intrusion was, for the most part, attributed to the Bedouins and the Palestinians. "After centuries of wild grazing by goats and logging for firewood, woods have gone to waste. . . . The Arab shepherd let his herd grow regardless of the effect of over-grazing on the quality of future pasture."<sup>95</sup> Indeed, adopting the ecological theory of climax state, according to which a certain natural flora reaches its final and stable presence after having undergone all phases of succession, traditional Israeli environmental narratives contend that the main cause of ecological instability has been the Palestinian maltreatment of the land.<sup>96</sup> In the name of nature protection, then, these environmental narratives attempt to retroactively legitimize Israel's appropriation of land based on the portrayal of the victims of this appropriation as guilty of this land's deterioration.

In the mid-1970s, however, alternative ecological discourses emerged that contested some of the understandings of climax theory. This discursive change, which challenged certain assumptions about equilibrium such as the competition over resources between ecosystem populations,<sup>97</sup> reached Israel only in the 1990s and has, for example, shifted the national war against grazing into an encouragement of grazing for the purpose of fire prevention. Indeed, Amikam Riklin, JNF's Chief Inspector at the time of our interview, mentions that JNF has recently been paying Palestinians to bring their herds out to mountainous areas to assist in fire prevention.<sup>98</sup>

### E. Planting the Jewish Tree

The Zionist perception of nature as both authentic and artificial might explain the initial obsession of the early Zionist afforestation project with non-local species. Depicted as a miraculous dryer of swamps, the eucalyptus was the first icon of this approach. Soon, the pine replaced it and has served for over a century as an emblem of the Zionist project.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the Palestinians interviewed for this study have fre-

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95. Meishar, *supra* note 90, at 307 (quoting Israeli ecologist Zeev Naveh).

96. *Id.* at 308.

97. See, e.g., KLAUS ROHDE, *NONEQUILIBRIUM ECOLOGY* (2005).

98. Interview with Amikam Riklin, Chief Inspector, Jewish National Fund, in Tel Aviv, Isr. (Dec. 8, 2005).

99. JNF primarily plants two types of pines. Until the early 1960s, the most commonly planted tree was the Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*). The name is a misnomer, as this species is actually not found in Aleppo, Syria, after which it is named. Rather, this area in Syria supports the Brutia pine (*Pinus brutia*), JNF's second-most common tree. The Aleppo is referred to in Hebrew as the Jerusalem pine, and has received stronger legal protection than the Brutia. COHEN, *supra* note 49, at 57 n.51.

quently referred to the pine as “the Jewish tree.”<sup>100</sup> Despite the increased recognition of biodiversity as the central theme of sustainable afforestation projects around the world, a theme that is increasingly acknowledged in JNF’s work as well, the pine still remains the dominant species in JNF’s planting efforts.

The extensive use of the pine tree can be explained in various ways. First, the pine grows quickly and prepares the soil for more diverse plant societies. These attributes have led to the pine’s definition by certain botanists as a “pioneer species.”<sup>101</sup> In no time, the moment of the pine’s planting becomes invisible. What seems wild (the pine tree) takes over, as if it was always there. In addition, the pines construct a distinct, European-type landscape. The pine trees therefore mediate between what the ex-European eye longs for and what is visible to it. Indeed, Jewish Ashkenazi<sup>102</sup> immigrants to Palestine could not hope for a better treescape to remind them of their lost European homeland. The pines, then, soften and conceal the geographical dislocation of Ashkenazi Jews. Living in Jerusalem, they can imagine being back in Leipzig.<sup>103</sup> Although it was intended to work toward negating the image of the exilic European Jew, the reconstitution of the Jewish homeland in Palestine and the project of putting down roots in this new place through the Zionist afforestation project, nonetheless, reaffirms the old European identity precisely by its linking one homeland to another. This is established through the visual treescaping of Israel with monocultural pine forests, as though it were Europe. During the period of exile the real land was Europe and the imagined land was Zion; now the real homeland is Israel, whereas the lost home in Europe has become an object of nostalgia.

JNF’s early years of massive monocultural pine planting (until biodiversity became the prevalent environmental discourse in the 1990s) has had detrimental ecological consequences, as JNF itself acknowledges:

[M]any of these [pine] trees were damaged by its biggest enemy, an endemic pine aphid ironically named *Matsucoccus josephi* after the “father of the forest” Joseph Weitz. In order to heal the trees, it was decided to shift to what the foresters call

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100. See also 500 DUNAM ON THE MOON (Momento! & RLJ Productions 2002) (documentary film containing similar references to the pine).

101. Interview with Sohil Sedan, *supra* note 79; Interview with Hanoch Tsoref, Director of Jerusalem Regional Area, Jewish National Fund (Dec. 9, 2005). For criticism of this definition, see Meishar, *supra* note 90, at 303–24.

102. Namely, Jews whose ancestors emigrated from eastern and central Europe, particularly Germany, Poland, and Russia. The large majority of Jews in the United States are of Ashkenazi descent.

103. Bardenstein, *Threads of Memory*, *supra* note 50, at 5.

a more diverse planting, including the Pine brutia and other conifers as well as deciduous trees.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to the high mortality rate caused by this endemic pine aphid, which spreads more easily in a non-diverse environment, the monocultural nature of JNF's pine planting has also increased forest fires. Ironically, this has made pine forests much more susceptible to Palestinian arson, as discussed later in the article. One last devastating ecological consequence of JNF's extensive monocultural pine-planting process has to do with the pine's construction of a noncompetitive environment where its needles enhance the acidity of the soil and prevent the development of most other forms of vegetation.<sup>105</sup>

#### IV. PRESENCE/ABSENCE THROUGH TREES

##### A. Mapping the Jewish Landscape

In the Second Knesset's opening session in 1951, then prime minister David Ben-Gurion spoke about the importance of the afforestation project in the new Israel:

We must plant hundreds of millions [of] trees [on a quarter of the area of the state]. We must clothe every mountainside with trees, every hill and rocky piece of land which cannot successfully be farmed, the dunes of the coastal valley, the Negev plains east and south of Beersheba. . . . We must be able eventually to plant at the rate of half a million dunams [125,000 acres] a year.<sup>106</sup>

Although only 9 percent of Israel is currently classified as forest, and although only half of such forests were planted during the twentieth century,<sup>107</sup> the significance of the afforestation scheme for the Zionist project cannot be exaggerated. Further, an outsider to this context could thus easily characterize the Zionist tree-planting mission as a sort of tree fetish.

Yet, although JNF takes pride in its achievements and highlights them in the most striking of ways, I could trace no scientific maps of JNF forests. In her unpublished Master's thesis, scholar Joanna Long makes a similar observation, suggesting two underlying reasons for what she de-

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104. MAN, *supra* note 23, at 107.

105. See HCJ 288/00 *Isr. Union for Env'tl. Def. v. Minister of Interior*, Padi 55(5) 673 (articulating this claim, especially in Dr. Aviva Rabinovitch's statement).

106. JOSEPH WEITZ, *FOREST AND AFFORESTATION IN ISRAEL 195-96* (Isaac Arnon ed., Shlomo Levenson trans., 1974) (quoting Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion).

107. Long, *supra* note 49, at 29 (citing Gafni).

scribes as JNF's lack of mapping. First, Long suggests that accurate maps would reveal just how limited the acclaimed Zionist success really is. Second, such maps might reveal that JNF forests were intentionally situated over the ruins of depopulated Palestinian villages.<sup>108</sup>

Through artistic uses of JNF's cartographic images of its forests, artist Ariane Littman further explores themes of concealing and revealing the landscape. Specifically, in her search for the forest planted by JNF in her grandfather's memory, Littman discovered that it has been used as camouflage for a secret military camp. Therefore, her access to both her grandfather's forest and his memorial stone has been forbidden. She named her art exhibit accordingly, "The Forbidden Forest." One of the most revealing images in this exhibit depicts a censored aerial photo of the area, with a large white patch in place of the acclaimed forest (FIGURE 4, APPENDIX).<sup>109</sup>

Although I agree with Long that the security concerns constructed around mapping in Israel can provide some explanation for what she has described as an ambiguity in JNF's mapping strategies, I would qualify her conclusion that JNF generally refrains from map-making. JNF is actually very much engaged in mapping projects, although probably not the kind that Long has been looking for. Indeed, the colonial obsession with map-making<sup>110</sup> would render any other finding surprising. Geographer Yoram Bar-Gal's distinction between scientific and symbolic maps is helpful in this context.<sup>111</sup> While it is somewhat true that the JNF has not been keen about the production of scientific maps, it has nonetheless produced an abundant array of symbolic maps. Explicitly unscientific representations of geography, symbolic maps—such as the map inscribed on the blue box—have many advantages over scientific maps, but their main advantage is that they enable their creators to emphasize desired perspectives without taking responsibility for accuracy. At the same time, the blind trust that modern people have in map representations, elsewhere called "cartohypnosis,"<sup>112</sup> is relevant also with symbolic

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108. *Id.*

109. In principle, every aerial photo of Israeli territory undergoes state censorship, which paints military zones in white. The role of aerial photos in the war over land in Israel/Palestine is further explored in Braverman, *The Tree Is the Enemy Soldier*, *supra* note 10, at 465–69.

110. See generally Nicholas Blomley, *Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid* 93 ANNALS ASS'N AM. GEOGRAPHERS 121 (2003).

111. Bar-Gal, *supra* note 18, at 4. Scientific maps were prepared by cartographers in accordance with strict and professionally exact standards of measurement, while symbolic maps were not so stringent with regard to accuracy, but tended to emphasize specific details in the maps. *Id.*

112. *Id.* at 2.

maps. This could explain the inclination to use such symbolic maps in the first place. Bruno Latour explains the power of mapping quite eloquently. "There is nothing you can dominate as easily as a flat surface," he argues, concluding that "[t]he 'great man' is a little man looking at a good map."<sup>113</sup> Indeed, JNF's mapping projects assign a scientific aura to the everyday project of dominating the Israeli/Palestinian landscape. This is probably the reason behind Bar-Gal's naming of JNF's maps as "propaganda."

An interesting exception to JNF's abstention from the utilization of scientific maps is provided on its Hebrew website.<sup>114</sup> Seeking fulfillment of the site's promise for an "interactive experience," I was linked to numerous detailed online map images of JNF forests. The maps inform web surfers of topographic markings, forest and nature reserves, and settlement zones. Strikingly, the maps depicted as part of this interactive experience fail to recognize political borders, or, to be more precise, they fail to acknowledge the official Israeli borders. Another important feature of this interactive experience is the map's fragmented format. The only way to see the "bigger picture" is through a small orientation map in the corner of the screen. Otherwise, the map is divided into arbitrary regions that provide an abundance of detail. Precisely because of this density of information, the interactive experience provided by JNF's website maps is disorienting and confusing.

## B. The Jewish Tree Occupation

The previous sections have demonstrated how trees facilitate a reconstitution of personal and collective Jewish identity by their symbolic and real enrooting into the reclaimed Holy Land. I have also suggested that the Zionist idea of nature erases both the idea and reality of the other precisely by labeling the other as native. Together, the various readings of the Israeli/Palestinian tree landscape provided in the previous section depict the intense preoccupation of the Jewish people with trees. Carol Bardenstein ties this preoccupation to an "uprooting anxiety," suggesting that the physical and symbolic act of tree rooting aims at filling the enormous void created by the recurring traumas of Jewish uprootedness.<sup>115</sup>

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113. Bruno Latour, *Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands*, in *KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY: STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE PAST AND PRESENT* 21, 29 (H. Kuklick & E. Long eds., 1986).

114. Interestingly, no parallel section exists either on the English part of the site or on JNF's English site.

115. See generally Bardenstein, *Threads of Memory*, *supra* note 50.

Amikam Riklin, who at the time of our interview had been working as JNF's Chief Inspector for more than 10 years, describes another reason for the importance of trees to JNF's overall mission and the particular significance of the laws governing trees:

In order to prevent the taking of state land by anybody: you, me, Bedouins, Druze—it's not important who—[Israel] understood that it must find a tool for preventing people from occupying these lands. . . . And this tool was forestation. When you have trees you have to first cut them down if you want to take over territory. But since there's a law that protects trees you can't easily do that. Trespassing happens only in the margins of the territory, and if it happens you can see it. . . . The moment that you know the contour of the forest area you can also identify this territory. Since you can't realistically take out a plane that will shoot [aerial] photos for you every single day, planting is used to control the land.<sup>116</sup>

Riklin stresses that trees not only occupy territory, but also that they make the territory a visible and identifiable object for central management and control. Therefore, the trees are not only proxy Jewish bodies, but they are also a proxy Jewish border police. Furthermore, Riklin clarifies the significance of law for making the trees and the territory more governable, mostly because law grants administrative protection to trees. The power of trees to prevent trespassing thus depends on their legal status; if not for the enforcement of a legal protection of trees, anyone could just cut them down and occupy the land.

Later in the interview, Riklin explains that, initially, tree planting was not perceived as an ecological practice but rather as a way to physically freeze undeveloped land for future Jewish development. In his words, "the moment that development is requested, the state will just arrange to take down the trees, in full compliance with the law."<sup>117</sup> Riklin becomes somewhat uneasy, for the first time in the interview, when I ask him to explain this point further. After some hesitation, he explains that JNF has functioned as the long arm of Israel's Land Administration, implying that in this capacity it is responsible for maintaining the Jewish identity of the land.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, Riklin is deeply upset that the laws pertaining to forest protection are weak and disrespected by everyone, including the State of Israel, a situation he further describes as "lawless." "There are only 10 [JNF] inspectors throughout Israel," he says,

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116. Interview with Amikam Riklin, *supra* note 98.

117. *Id.*

118. For more on the Israeli land system devised in the 1960s, see BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at 29–57.



"but we cooperate with other units, which is critical for doing the very best we can do with the little resources we have. We are all authorized by law, and we are all grownups using vehicles and carrying weapons."<sup>119</sup>

Finally, Riklin also talks about the importance of the particular location of JNF's forests, indirectly listing an additional rationale for their planting:

Our work is dangerous. . . . A large portion of our forests are on the border [*kav hatefer*], in Judea and Samaria, in all these places. Take a look at the maps and you'll see for yourself; the forests are situated in the outskirts of villages, some quite hostile towards the Jewish, Zionist entity. Some of them are on the borders. Go to Gush Etzion, there are forests there. There are also forests in Maale Adumim and in Wadi Ara. All of Wadi Ara [Arab concentration] is one big forest. . . . We also operate in Area C in the territories.<sup>120</sup>

This claim is supported by official JNF documentation. As early as 1969 (two years into the occupation), JNF proposed an extensive project of afforestation along the Green Line<sup>121</sup> so as to prevent trespass by Palestinians from the occupied West Bank.<sup>122</sup>

The perception of the forest as an edge or as a frontier might ring a familiar bell.<sup>123</sup> Here, however, existing forests do not represent the wild and threatening frontier, but are planted, rather, to soften a perceived threat. In any case, it might seem surprising to hear such an explicit acknowledgment from one of JNF's prominent figures. Indeed, Riklin implies that JNF's tree planting practices are not merely ecological in their mission but also promote an ethnically driven security agenda. Again, this claim finds support in the JNF's official documents. For example, a JNF document from 1982 reads: "The purpose of afforesting territory in Judea and Samaria is to protect land. The intent: to start oper-

119. Interview with Amikam Riklin, *supra* note 98.

120. *Id.*

121. The term Green Line is used to refer to the 1949 Armistice lines established between Israel and its neighbors Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The Green Line separates Israel not only from these countries but from territories Israel would later capture in the 1967 war, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula which has since been returned to Egypt. Its name is derived from the green ink used to draw the line on the map during the talks.

122. See Central Zionist Archives (CZA), KKL5/31325, Mar. 28, 1969 (courtesy of Ariel Handel).

123. For a discussion of *fori*, see BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at 1-27. See also Bardenstein, *Threads of Memory*, *supra* note 50, at 10; Ilan Troen, *Frontier Myths and Their Applications in America and Israel: A Transnational Perspective*, 5 *ISR. STUD.* 301 (2000).

ations without performing . . . routine proceedings.”<sup>124</sup> Riklin’s interview was not exceptional in this sense. In fact, some of the most informative interactions and the most radical criticisms of JNF that I recorded were expressed in my interviews with JNF officials themselves, irrespective of their position within the organization’s hierarchy.

Why this openness to criticism on the part of JNF officials? Before conducting this study, I had several personal encounters with this organization. Most significantly, when working as a lawyer in an environmental organization, I initiated and pursued a petition that contested the legality of some of JNF’s practices. Eventually, the Israeli Supreme Court found in favor of the petition, ordering the JNF to execute certain zoning procedures and to acquire permits for various forest practices. When planning for my interviews, I was concerned that my critical stance from some 10 years earlier might hinder the openness of JNF’s officials. I was, therefore, surprised when I did not encounter any initial feelings of distrust, suspicion, or, for that matter, even interest in my intentions. Moreover, JNF officials interviewed readily shared all the information I asked for, volunteered their own, and were open to being interviewed for any length of time. Many even spent entire workdays as well as holidays showing me their areas of jurisdiction and explaining their work. I cannot say the same about interviews I held with professionals in other quasi-official institutions, such as the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. After giving this phenomenon some thought, I have come to see it as the clearest indication of JNF’s immense self-confidence, which is probably a reflection of its uncontested status in Israel. Rather than threatening its existence, research projects such as mine—as critical of the JNF as they may be—eventually reiterate and support the Zionist scheme by lending it a sense of importance, viability, and strength.

### C. The Jewish Tree Absents the Other

Nonetheless, even JNF officials’ criticism of their organization’s projects has its limits. The most apparent example is with regard to the issue of depopulated Palestinian villages within the Green Line. None of the JNF interviewees acknowledge or even refer to what is probably the most extreme accusation against the JNF: that such forests have provided a green cover to hide the presence of demolished Palestinian villages, thereby preventing Palestinians from returning to their lands after the wars of 1948 and 1967. A.B. Yehoshua, a prominent Jewish Israeli novelist, articulated such claims in his writing. In his short story, *Facing the*

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124. Central Zionist Archive (CZA), KKL5/62492, Apr. 1, 1982 (courtesy of Ariel Handel) (translated from Hebrew by author).

*Forests*, Yehoshua describes the progression of a strange relationship between a Jewish fire-watcher (a firefighter who watches the forest from a tower, looking for any signs of fire) and a mute Palestinian Israeli (“Arab”) worker. The following excerpt is from the climactic moment in the story; the moment when the Jewish fire-watcher is confronted with the events that took place in the forest he was responsible to guard:

When they return at twilight, lit by a soft autumnal glow, the fire watcher will lead the Arab to the tree-engulfed house and will linger a moment. Then the Arab explains something with hurried, confused gestures, squirming his severed tongue, tossing his head. He wishes to say that this is his house and that there used to be a village here as well and that they have simply hidden it all, buried it in the big forest. The fire watcher looks at this pantomime and his heart fills with joy. What is it that rouses such passion in the Arab? Apparently his wives have been murdered here as well. A dark affair, no doubt. Gradually he moves away, pretending not to understand. [Was there] a village here? He sees nothing but trees.<sup>125</sup>

This story illustrates the invisible flip side of the visible Jewish tree presence: an erasure of any other landscape but itself. A recent study by Noga Kadman argues, in this vein, that of the 418 villages depopulated and demolished during the 1948 war, almost half (182 villages) are situated in various nature sites such as parks, forests, or nature reserves. Specifically, JNF forests were planted over 86 such villages.<sup>126</sup> Among these various nature sites are 46 JNF parks and forests, each covering one to several Palestinian villages.<sup>127</sup>

Such numbers speak for themselves. Whether or not they also speak to the intention of JNF’s afforestation policy—namely to prevent Palestinians from returning to their villages and to encourage their transfer to surrounding Arab countries—remains the focus of a bitter debate. As one of the more vocal opponents of JNF’s policies, Uri Davis argues

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125. A.B. Yehoshua, *Facing the Forests*, in *THREE DAYS AND A CHILD* 131 (Institute for Translation of Hebrew Literature ed., 1970).

126. See also *Where Are the Villages?*, HA’ARETZ, July 6, 2008.

127. See NOGA KADMAN, *ERASED FROM SPACE AND CONSCIOUSNESS: DEPOPULATED PALESTINIAN VILLAGES IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN DISCOURSE* (2008). Moreover, Kadman shows that of the total of 418 villages, Israel (wholly or partially) appropriated the land of 372 Palestinian villages through JNF. *Id.*; see also Long, *supra* note 49, at 99; BRAVERMAN, *supra* note 6, at ch. 1 (explaining JNF as a land appropriation vehicle); Noga Kadman, *Financing Racism and Apartheid: Jewish National Fund’s Violation of International and Domestic Law*, *PAL-ESTINIAN LAND SOC’Y*, Aug. 2005, at 41. (explaining that out of a total of 116 parks in Israel, 33 were planted by Israel’s Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, 60 by JNF, and 22 by both).

that JNF has performed an active role in the erasure of Palestinian villages in Israel by afforestation, defining this involvement as a war crime. In our interview he says:

One cannot understand the priorities of planting trees and forests in the State of Israel if one ignores the one central purpose of this policy, which is to cover up crimes against humanity by ethnic cleansing and through the destruction of 400 to 500 Palestinian villages. . . . The first priority of JNF's forestation policy is to hide its war crimes so that Israel can be considered the only democracy in the Middle East. . . . [So] the cover provided through forestation is essential, and the seemingly shared forest is important so that an apartheid state, i.e., the State of Israel, can present itself as democratic.<sup>128</sup>

This perspective argued by Davis is surely uncommon among the Israeli public, and even among most leftist academics in Israel. Yet, his views find support from an unexpected source—Joseph Weitz. Weitz served as Director of JNF's Department of Lands and Afforestation for over 35 years, and is widely referred to as the father of Israeli forestry (parallel to Gifford Pinchot—who, from 1905 to 1910, was the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service<sup>129</sup>). Weitz has clearly been in favor of capitalizing on the Palestinians' "fortuitous flight" from their villages:

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. . . . [T]he only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighboring countries, all of them, except perhaps Beit Lechem, Nazareth, and old Jerusalem. Not a single village or a single tribe must be left. . . . There is no other solution.<sup>130</sup>

Equipped with the informal consent of Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, toward the end of 1948 Weitz set up a "Transfer Committee" with the proposed purpose of "[p]reventing the Arabs from returning to their places [through] [d]estruction of villages as much as possible during military operations . . . [and through] prevention of any cultivation of land by them, including reaping, collection (of crops), pick-

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128. Interview with Uri Davis, anthropologist and activist working against JNF, in Jerusalem (Dec. 7, 2005).

129. Forest Hist. Soc'y, U.S. Forest Service History, Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/people/Pinchot/Pinchot.aspx> (last visited Jan. 29, 2010).

130. Long, *supra* note 49, at 94 (quoting Joseph Weitz). See also NUR MASALHA, A LAND WITHOUT A PEOPLE 78 (1997).

ing (olives) and so on. . . .<sup>131</sup> The Transfer Committee operated for several weeks only, at which point it was replaced by a different committee with Weitz still on board. The newer committee was restricted to considering the possibilities of settling Israeli Arabs in Arab States, instead of actively transferring Arabs from within Israel's borders.<sup>132</sup> In addition, most of the texts provided in the brochures and other publications of the park do not mention the villages in any way.<sup>133</sup> In June 2005, Israeli non-governmental organization Zochrot ("remembering" in English) petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court against the JNF's sign-posting practices in its Canada Park. The petition argued:

The selective exclusion of segments of local history is an unreasonable decision of an extreme nature which hinders these same abovementioned values and which embody the basic rationale for historical signage advanced by every planning body in the world. With due caution, owing to the absence of an expressed justification for the decision, it may also be argued that there is suspicion that the refusal derives from motivations that are essentially political in nature and whose purposes are to prevent visitors to the place from becoming familiar with the Arab past of the area which teemed with Palestinian life until the war.<sup>134</sup>

In May 2006, the JNF and several Israeli authorities conceded to Zochrot's request and posted signs in Canada Park that commemorate the destroyed Palestinian villages Dayr Ayub, Yalu, and Imwas. One of the newly posted signs reads as follows:

The Ayalon-Canada Park is replete with historical sites . . . including the remains of a church from the Byzantine period and the remains of a crusader fortress. . . . The village Dayr Ayub, which overlooked the road leading up to Jerusalem, existed in the area of the park until the War of Independence. The villages Imwas and Yalu existed in the area of the park until the year 1967. In the village of Imwas there lived 2,000 residents, who now reside in [Jordan] and in Ramallah. Near the remains of the village is a cemetery. In the village of Yalu there lived 1,700 residents, who now reside in

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131. Long, *supra* note 49, at 96–97.

132. *Id.*

133. *Where Are the Villages*, *supra* note 126.

134. HCJ 5580/05 Zochrot v. Military Commander et. al, art. IV, § 35.

Jordan and Ramallah. There remains a spring and a number of wells in the village.<sup>135</sup>

Shortly after its posting, one of the new signs situated at the former site of Yalu village disappeared. According to JNF's manager of Canada Park, the culprits were "scrap metal thieves."<sup>136</sup> In response, Zochrot's Director Eitan Bronstein informed me that these alleged metal thieves have not touched JNF signs in other locations (also made of metal) that describe the Jewish history of the area.

Based on the success of their case in Canada Park, in April 2006 Zochrot requested that JNF act "in a similar fashion at every site for which JNF is responsible and to post signs designating the Palestinian communities and sites that existed there until 1948."<sup>137</sup> According to Bronstein, JNF first refused the request to update all of its signs, then suggested a partial revision of its signage system, but eventually withdrew all its suggestions, thereby maintaining the existing situation.<sup>138</sup>

Clearly, the organized act of Jewish rooting, mainly of pine forests, into the Israeli/Palestinian landscape is simultaneously and inevitably also an act of Palestinian uprooting. These two events are opposite sides of the same coin. To use Lacanian terms, one image is the "narcissistic mirror reflection" of the other.<sup>139</sup> Images of uprooting were made apparent in an eyewitness report of the events that took place in 1967 in the three Palestinian Arab villages of Imwas, Yalu, and Beit Nuba. In his report, reserve Israeli Defense Force soldier Amos Kenan, also a distinguished novelist and intellectual, writes:

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135. Zochrot, *The Signs Are Posted*, <http://www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=434> (last visited May 10, 2008).

136. EITAN BRONSTEIN, *RESTLESS PARK: ON THE LATRUN VILLAGES AND ZOCHROT 14*, [http://www.zochrot.org/images/latrun\\_booklet\\_englishsupplement.pdf](http://www.zochrot.org/images/latrun_booklet_englishsupplement.pdf) (last visited Oct. 21, 2008).

137. Letter from Eitan Bronstein, Director of Zochrot, to JNF (Apr. 13, 2006), <http://www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=441>.

138. E-mail from Eitan Bronstein, Director of Zochrot, to author (Dec. 4, 2008) (on file with author).

139. The idea of the "mirror stage" is an important early component in Lacan's critical reinterpretation of the work of Sigmund Freud. Drawing on work in physiology and animal psychology, Lacan proposes that human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an I. For Lacan, the mirror stage establishes the ego as fundamentally dependent upon external objects—on an "Other." JACQUES LACAN, *ÉCRITS: A SELECTION* (Alan Sheridan trans., 1977). See also CriticalLink, *Lacan: The Mirror Stage*, <http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticallink/lacan/index.html> (last visited Oct. 19, 2008).

The homes in Beit Nuba are beautiful stone houses, some of them luxurious mansions. Each house stands in an orchard of olives, apricots and grapevines, there are also cypresses and other trees grown for their beauty and the shade they give. Each tree stands in its carefully watered bed. Between the trees lie neatly hoed and weeded rows of vegetables. . . . With one sweep of the bulldozer, the cypresses and the olive trees were uprooted. Ten or more minutes pass and the house, with its meagre furnishings and belongings, had become a mass of rubble. After three houses had been mowed down, the first convoy of [Jewish] refugees arrives, from the direction of Ramallah.<sup>140</sup>

What Kenan describes is a project of Palestinian tree uprooting that has physically and perhaps also symbolically enabled a Jewish project of tree enrooting to emerge. In other words, one's tree uprooting has been the other's tree enrooting.

Similarly, in her depiction of the transition between the Palestinian village Ein Houd and the Israeli art colony Ein Hod (the latter constructed on the site of the former), Susan Slyomovics observes the recurring mention of trees by different informants.<sup>141</sup> For example, the artist Isaiah Hillel was one of the new Jewish settlers of Ein Hod who, before 1945, was recorded as saying, "The weeds were taller than a human being. . . . The only trees that were here were wild fig trees and the wild kind of oak, and that's all. Nothing. Not a single tree."<sup>142</sup> Perplexed by this description of the landscape as empty, Slyomovics recovered a series of aerial photographs of the area that date back to 1945. These photos clearly record the existence of local olive orchards during that period. Evidently, through the construction of the Palestinian olive tree as invisible due to its perceived wildness, the project of Jewish afforestation could then present itself as operating in an empty space.<sup>143</sup>

Made possible through the use of various legal and technical devices, the shift between the Palestinian village Ein Houd and the Jewish Israeli village of Ein Hod adds another important dimension to the tree-caping project—that of replacement. The transition between what are constructed as two opposing landscapes is made possible through the use of various legal and professional devices. Yet, it would be a mistake

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140. Davis, *supra* note 7, at 6.

141. SUSAN SLYOMOVICS, *THE OBJECT OF MEMORY: ARAB AND JEW NARRATE THE PALESTINIAN VILLAGE* 48 (1998). The story of this Palestinian village that turned into an art colony has triggered much literary and academic attention. See, e.g., Meishar, *supra* note 90.

142. See SLYOMOVICS, *supra* note 141.

143. This aspect also corresponds with the notion of *terra nullius* referred to earlier in this article.

to consider the transition as state-orchestrated only; the transition has taken place also with the active participation of Jewish residents who are mostly leftist artists. An important aspect in the transition was the new residents' sense of aesthetic preference. This aspect is further described by sculptor Shoshana Heimann, a current resident of Ein Hod:

Lots of people in the first year tried to bring a garden, like lawns and flowers. . . . And people put a lot of effort into it, lots of tending and everything. In the end, it all collapses somehow. . . . It takes some time and everything becomes wild again. I never tried to make a garden here: I planted a few olive trees which grew like mad. . . . I didn't do anything else, I don't want to do anything else, I don't want to change it.<sup>144</sup>

Although articulated by a Jewish Israeli, this quote seems to contest the basic Zionist idea of the land's primordial loyalty toward the Jewish people. Instead, the land, the trees, and, in fact, nature at large are posited in this narrative as rebelling against the Jewish intruders and their invasive species, preferring the Palestinian wilderness and, even more specifically, the Palestinian olive tree. This quotation also highlights another important aspect that is largely missing from the discussion of trees in the national context—the possibility that, rather than being just mutant objects shaped at the whim of human interests, the trees also function as active entities in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.<sup>145</sup>

## V. BURNING THE JEWISH TREE

Perhaps inevitably, the flip side of the Jewish identification with the pine is the Palestinians' strong resentment toward this tree. Indeed, JNF's official website indicates that since the beginning of the first Intifada in 1987, 900 fires were set to JNF forests. JNF's website further states that most of these fires were deliberately set by Palestinians. A cartoonist in a Jerusalem-based news article depicts the Palestinian Authority as giving out "tree burning certificates," a pun on the "tree planting certificates" awarded by the JNF. Clearly, the two narratives are mirror images of each other; a tree for a tree, implying, dead or alive.

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144. SLYOMOVICS, *supra* note 141, at 49.

145. See Irus Braverman, *Governing Certain Things: The Regulation of Street Trees in Four North American Cities*, 22 TUL. ENVTL. L.J. 35 (2009) (exploring the "actancy" of trees in a very different context—that of four North American cities). In a Latourian vocabulary, this activeness by nonhumans is referred to as "actancy." Bruno Latour, *Technology Is Society Made Durable*, in *A SOCIOLOGY OF MONSTERS: ESSAYS ON POWER, TECHNOLOGY, AND DOMINATION* 103 (John Law ed., 1991).



Of course, the complexity of the human relationship to forest fires begins neither with Jewish pines nor during this century. Rather, it has a very long history. In his book, *World Fire*, Stephen Pyne suggests that fire grants humans new powers and responsibilities, and that its expulsion would reduce man to "a large, talking chimpanzee."<sup>146</sup> In Australia, for example, the Aborigines gained access to most of the landscape using fire.<sup>147</sup> When the Europeans first discovered Australia they were surprised by the extent of fires on the continent, and some worried that "the endless fires made by the natives" would imperil European cultigens.<sup>148</sup> In other places as well, fire was used for various purposes, including hunting. In North America, aboriginal fire-hunting targeted bison, deer, and antelope; aboriginal Alaskans used it against moose and muskrat; Yuman Indians for wood rats; Californians for rabbits; and Texans for lizards. Despite its many historical attributes, in the last century fire imagery has come to represent human and environmental catastrophe and has usually been associated with devastation.<sup>149</sup>

Forest fires in Israel are similarly associated with destruction; moreover, they are mostly associated with destruction of a specific kind—one that poses a national security threat. The image presented in Figure 5 (APPENDIX) clearly illustrates the unique status of forest fires in Israel/Palestine. It depicts a road sign posted in the hills that approach Jerusalem. The sign reads: "It takes only one idiot to set an entire forest on fire." Graffiti has struck the word "forest" and replaced it with the word "state." This sign represents the intense connectedness, even interchangeability, between the pine forest and the Israeli nation-state.

This correlation is also central in A.B. Yehoshua's story, *Facing the Forest*, mentioned earlier. In that story, the Jewish fire-watcher is obsessed with his role in the prevention of forest fires. At the same time, his awareness of the immoral dimensions of the forest and the oppressive stories that it conceals increases as the story develops. The story reaches its climax when a real fire finally erupts in the forest but the Jewish fire-watcher does nothing to stop it and allows the entire forest to burn down in silent cooperation with the mute "Arab," whose tragedy this forest attempts to hide.<sup>150</sup> Both in the signpost and in *Facing the Forest*, the forest

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146. STEPHEN J. PYNE, *WORLD FIRE: A CULTURE OF FIRE ON EARTH* 23 (1995) [hereinafter PYNE, *WORLD FIRE*]. See also STEPHEN J. PYNE, *THE STILL BURNING BUSH* (2006); STEPHEN J. PYNE, *FIRE IN AMERICA: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF WILDLAND AND RURAL FIRE* (1982).

147. PYNE, *WORLD FIRE*, *supra* note 146, at 31.

148. *Id.* at 34 (quoting Captain Willing Bligh).

149. *Id.* at 5. See Smokeybear.com, *Get Your Smokey On*, <http://www.smokeybear.com> (last visited Oct. 19, 2008) (demonstrating the anxiety around fire management in the United States as represented by the cartoon figure Smokey Bear).

150. See Yehoshua, *supra* note 125.

has become another way of talking about the national Zionist project. Its burning is presented as antipatriotic, not only in that it subverts the state's seemingly innocuous forest story but also in that it threatens to expose the bare truth that the state has attempted to cover up through its planting.

The strong correlations between trees and the nation, as well as the antipatriotic meanings assigned to the act of burning the forest, were further magnified by the Israel/Hezbollah clashes in northern Israel and southern Lebanon that took place in the summer of 2006. This is how JNF summarizes the effects of these events on its website:

Four thousand rockets were fired into northern Israel throughout the month-long war with Hezbollah. When rockets were reported to have fallen in "open areas," they landed in the Galilee's forests and nature reserves, destroying 2 million trees and 20,000 acres of land. 20% of the forests in northern Israel were burned during the war.<sup>151</sup>

Near the date of *Tu Bishvat*, on February 1, 2007, the *Jerusalem Post*, an English-language Israeli newspaper, published a more emotional account of these events:

You're darn right, it isn't easy being green. Not when you're standing only kilometers from the Lebanese border. Not when you're within spitting distance of a target as tempting to Hizbullah gunners as the Northern Command headquarters. Not, in other words, when you're a tree in the Biriya forest and Katyusha rockets are raining down all around you, as they did in last summer's war.

At Biriya, trees that burned were some of the oldest planted trees in the country, some even predating the state. Naturally, there is no way to replace trees of that age except to plant saplings and wait another half-century.

Some people ask whether it makes sense to replant all these trees, if they can all just get burned again. Boneh [Dr. Omri Boneh, the director of JNF's northern region] says with obvious understatement, "Well, we don't see it that way." Actually, they see rehabilitating the forest as a sign of the country's civilian resolve, no less important than its military resolve. Replanting trees becomes an act of defiance against Israel's enemies, an old-time expression of Zionism.<sup>152</sup>

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151. See Jewish National Fund, *Sarasota Resident and Area Federation Donate Fire Truck to Israel Through JNF*, [http://support.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=miami\\_pr](http://support.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=miami_pr) (last visited Dec. 6, 2009) (Scroll down to "Sarasota Resident" title).

152. Sam Ser, *Slashed and Burnt*, JERUSALEM POST, Feb. 1, 2007.

This text is revealing. First, the trees are presented as innocent entities that have “found themselves” amidst the rockets, unfairly suffering the cruelties of the heartless Arab enemy. They are humanized only to then be victimized.<sup>153</sup> Second, reforestation is posed as an act of civil resistance to the enemy’s mission of abolishing Israel. Finally, nature is made to seem dependent on Zionist action. And so again, Zionist labor is an improvement of nature, as is articulated by the next quotation from the same *Jerusalem Post* article: “It used to be that people thought that forests could take care of themselves . . . [b]ut now people see that even trees need help sometimes.”<sup>154</sup>

Similarly, in their interviews, Michael Warberger and Sohil Sedan—two top JNF officials who spent most of that summer fighting fires in northern Israel—describe firefighting as a military practice.<sup>155</sup> Specifically, the firefighters position themselves as soldiers who have heroically risked their lives to save a wounded fellow soldier on the battlefield. It does not seem to matter to them that such fellow soldier is in arboreal form. In a similar vein, an Associated Press account published during that period states that, since professional firefighters prefer to save humans and buildings in urban areas, “the task of protecting nature falls on the shoulders of [Israeli] forest rangers, many of whom have risked their lives in recent weeks trying to limit the ecological damage.”<sup>156</sup> Further, JNF’s newsletter quotes one of its foresters who points out that “[e]very green tree standing here is a result of our work.”<sup>157</sup> A JNF newsletter from that period quotes from one of JNF’s foresters who points out that “although the teams are exposed to Katyusha [a type of rocket artillery] fire and can be found in the most dangerous areas while rockets are falling, all workers have mobilized and are working devotedly, risking their lives to defend our northern forests and their inhabitants from the fires.”<sup>158</sup>

This form of human sacrifice for the arboreal was repeated in several of my interviews with JNF officials, as well as in a telephone conversation with JNF’s spokesperson. These narratives stress that the war on

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153. See, e.g., Aron Heller, *Israel: Nature, Wildlife Victims of Rocket Attacks*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, Aug. 2, 2006, available at <http://sports.espn.go.com/outdoors/general/news/story?id=2537668>.

154. Ser, *supra* note 152.

155. Interview with Michael Warberger, head of JNF’s “Fire Mission,” in northern Israel (Sept. 4, 2006); interview with Sohil Sedan, *supra* note 79 (discussing his “summer job” as a JNF firefighter).

156. See Heller, *supra* note 153.

157. *Id.* (quoting Ido Rasis).

158. Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael-Jewish National Fund, *Workers in the North Fighting Katyusha Fire*, July 23, 2006, [http://www.kkl.org.il/KKL/basic\\_template\\_Eng.aspx?id=18720](http://www.kkl.org.il/KKL/basic_template_Eng.aspx?id=18720).

nature has brought together not only JNF workers in various positions but also laypersons from all walks of life in the Israeli society. Here, for example, is how Warberger, a JNF forester for over 26 years and one of the top officials in the firefighting squads during the war, describes the spirit of volunteerism that prevailed at the time:

The war was controversial, but the forest was not. The volunteers were not only Jewish. There were also Druze, Christians, and Muslims. Because the forest is income; it's landscape. And the fire caused an economic problem. This forest took 50 years to grow. We moved around the area with helmets and security vests. It was dangerous. People from Amuka [a prosperous Jewish community] and Druze from the area of Beit Jan; everybody worked together. Don't ask me whether Muslims were involved as much as Christians, I don't think about things this way. The most important thing was that people worked together to put out the fire.<sup>159</sup>

JNF newsletters from that period provide a similar account,<sup>160</sup> highlighting the diverse ethnicity of the volunteers and implying that Israelis, Jews, and Arabs alike, fought the fires side by side and that the controversial politics of this war were completely irrelevant in the face of the disaster that was happening to their common natural landscape (see, for example, FIGURE 6, APPENDIX). This approach might not have been prevalent in the northern Druze villages, which were castigated by the Israeli media for supposedly cheering whenever a Hezbollah rocket hit a Jewish target (although one may wonder if they similarly cheered when the rocket hit trees). Nonetheless, JNF's public statements about a common landscape are an interesting addition to its traditional Jewish-centered security narrative. In its role as forest protector, JNF has thus managed to reposition itself as representing a much larger constituency than that of the Jewish community, transcending nationalism or, perhaps more precisely, changing the nature of nationalism in Israel. This romantic view of nature could, in other words, be seen as an attempt to transform the traditional Israeli narrative of nature protection into something more inclusive.

In the midst of the violent clashes in the north, JNF implemented what it called Operation North Renewal.<sup>161</sup> The purpose of this operation was to raise funds in support of rehabilitation efforts in the north and,

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159. Interview with Michael Warberger, *supra* note 155.

160. See *id.*; see also WHAT'S NEW, (Jewish Nat'l Fund, New York, N.Y.), July 25, 2006.

161. Again, the military connotations in the name are evident.

specifically, to replace each burnt tree with a new one.<sup>162</sup> JNF's promotional materials for the operation emphasize nature as transcending politics and as something that all citizens, Jews and non-Jews alike, have in common. As part of this scheme of renewal, large reforestation projects were soon underway. Here is how JNF depicts the reforestation of one of the affected zones at Biriya forest:

Amongst the 1,500 people who attended were the Minister of Education, KKL-JNF World Chairman, Municipality Heads, UN Military Attachés, UN peace-keeping forces and IDF soldiers, many hundreds of schoolchildren and teachers also took part in the planting. Amos (10) from Carcom: "Each child planted a tree today, and this is our way of telling everyone we're still alive and our trees are still growing—after all."<sup>163</sup>

Attending the same planting ceremony, KKL-JNF World Chairman Efi Stenzler commented that:

Israel is the only country in the world that has more trees in the 21st century than it had 100 years ago. For this our thanks are due to the entire population of the country, to KKL-JNF's devoted workers and to the many schoolchildren who come and help plant trees."<sup>164</sup>

Yet, the only mention that the newsletter makes of a non-Jewish participant is a brief reference to one Druze JNF worker, who "moved among the children as they worked, helping them and showing them how to position the young saplings."<sup>165</sup>

One way or another, since the war in the summer of 2006, JNF's news bulletins have been filled with ecological accounts of the catastrophic devastation that the Arab enemy inflicted on Israel's environment, including numerous descriptions of the underground fires in the Hulla Valley<sup>166</sup> and of the extreme harm inflicted upon the orange salamander population.<sup>167</sup> One issue of JNF's newsletter emphasizes the natural catastrophe elements as follows:

162. Eli Ashkenazi, *JNF Replacing Trees Burnt by Katyushas in the War*, HA'ARETZ, Feb. 1, 2007. See also *Planting the First Tree to Rehabilitate the Northern Forest*, WHAT'S NEW, (Jewish Nat'l Fund, New York, N.Y.), Aug. 2006.

163. *Planting the First Tree to Rehabilitate the Northern Forest*, *supra* note 162.

164. *Still Growing—After All: Planting in Biria Forest with the Education Minister*, INFORMATIONS ACTUALISEES (Jewish Nat'l Fund, New York, N.Y.), Feb. 4, 2007 (emphasis added).

165. *Id.*

166. *Planting the First Tree to Rehabilitate the Northern Forest*, *supra* note 162.

167. FROM THE NEWSPAPERS (Jewish Nat'l Fund, New York, N.Y.), Nov. 6, 2006.

Every time we heard that a Katyusha had landed in open country in the Galilee, we sighed with relief that there were no casualties to people. However, it was at the expense of the animals and plants in open spaces. They suffered. Enormous stretches of forest have disappeared and with them reptiles, birds and rodents—as well as the clear air.<sup>168</sup>

What could be the underlying reasons for this increased emphasis on ecology in general and on the natural catastrophe caused by the war in particular? At the risk of sounding cynical, I propose that Israel's emphasis on the ecological crisis created in summer 2006 was at least partly triggered by the strong international criticism directed toward Israel's bombing of the oil tanks in southern Lebanon and the subsequent ecological damage caused by the large spills. The international media then criticized Israel's unfriendly approach toward the environment, while widely praising the Lebanese Minister of Environment for his emotional appeal for assistance in the cleanup of Lebanon's polluted shoreline.<sup>169</sup> It is only natural, one might suggest, that Israel would respond to this international attack by presenting itself as a promoter rather than a destroyer of forest ecologies. Clearly, the war over who is a bigger lover of nature has played an increasing role in the struggle for international public opinion. However, both sides seem to embrace this love of nature narrative<sup>170</sup> only after most of the harm to nature has already been done.

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168. Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, *Scorched Earth*, [http://www.kkl.org.il/KKL/english/main\\_subject/war%20in%20israel/scorched%20earth](http://www.kkl.org.il/KKL/english/main_subject/war%20in%20israel/scorched%20earth) (last visited Oct. 21, 2008).

169. IUCN, WORLD CONSERVATION UNION, WEST/CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA (WESCANIA) (Nov. 2006), available at [http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/e\\_newsletter\\_oct2006\\_1.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/e_newsletter_oct2006_1.pdf). See also IUCN, "The oil spill"—How the Lebanese Environment Was Affected by the War (Apr. 26, 2007), <http://www.iucn.org/search.cfm?uNewsID=97>.

170. See Braverman, *Everybody Loves Trees*, *supra* note 11 for a further discussion of the "love of nature" narrative promoted by tree landscapes, this time in North American cities.

## APPENDIX



FIGURE 1: The tree certificate sent to my parents on my birthday by JNF and the Jerusalem municipality. The certificate documents that a tree was planted in my name in the Peace Forest in Jerusalem.

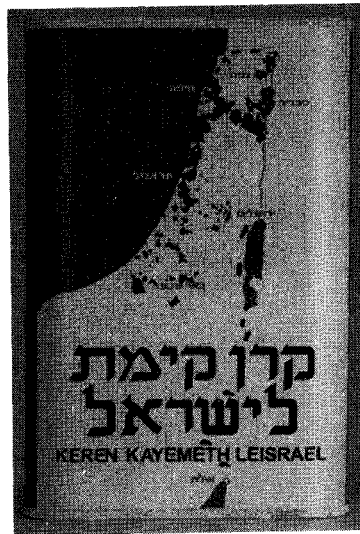


FIGURE 2: An old JNF *pushke* (blue box) painted with a map of Israel/Palestine (KKL-JNF Photo Archive, photo by Pnina Livni. Reprinted with permission.)



FIGURE 3: Laborer afforesting Yatir in the northern Negev. (KKL-JNF Photo Archive, photo by Yehuda Hanegbi, 1963. Reprinted with permission.)



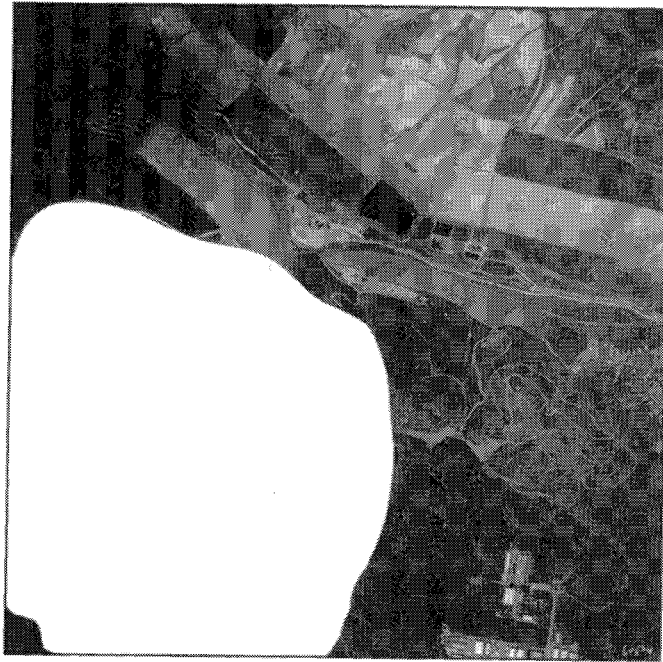


FIGURE 4: Censored aerial photography, "The Forbidden Forest: White Land, 1967–2001." (Photo by Ariane Littman. Reprinted with permission.)



FIGURE 5: Signpost on Highway 433 between Modi'in and Jerusalem. (Photo by author, August 2006.)



FIGURE 6: Aerial photo depicting the effects of the fires in the Biriya forest during the 2006 Israel/Hezbollah war. (KKL-JNF Photo Archive, photo by Alabatros, 2006. Reprinted with permission.)