PERFORMING ROOTEDNESS IN A LANDSCAPE OF WAR

TREES AS SITES OF ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN CULTURAL MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

Although trees are not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of the Israel/Palestine conflict, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that specific trees play a significant and active role in the conflict and in the construction of Israeli and Palestinian collective memories and identities. Beyond providing mere metaphoric expressions of Israeli and Palestinian rootedness, trees give material form to claims to the contested land of Israel/Palestine. Thus, the Israel/Palestine conflict is not merely a struggle over land, but also a struggle conducted and articulated through the land and through trees more specifically, as both Israelis and Palestinians invest memory in "their" trees, the pine tree and the olive tree respectively.

Drawing from the theoretical framework of memory studies, I argue that these particular trees are endowed and aligned with the collective memories of both parties involved in the conflict. They have become potent sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, marking a rupture of the people-land bonds of both Israelis and Palestinians, while simultaneously providing the potential to construct a past that is continuous with the present, thus marking both discontinuity and continuity. Importantly, trees as sites of Israeli and Palestinian collective memory perform certain tasks in the political present, (de)legitimizing power and profiling a distinct collective identity. Examining the ways in which memories of both Israeli and Palestinian rootedness are articulated, activated and mobilized through specific trees, I argue that these trees have become active bearers and agents of memory, which serve to support or subvert claims of natural belonging and legitimacy while consolidating a unique collective identity and distinguishing the group from other groups. Thus, in the context of Israel/Palestine, trees do not stand passively in the landscape; they are as active and political as the memory they are invested with.

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INTRODUCTION

When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy its trees by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayst eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down; for is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by thee?

—*The Holy Scriptures*, Deuteronomy 20: 19

According to Jewish law, fruit-yielding trees which belong to the enemy should not be cut down in times of war. It would be unwise to destroy such trees, the verse above suggests, since they provide a potential source of sustenance to friendly troops. Once the battle is won, moreover, the trees may continue indefinitely to supply the victors with nourishment if they were left standing to begin with. In effect, cutting down the trees of the enemy amounts to cutting down your own trees in the event of an ultimate victory. In addition to such practical objections, an ethical argument against the destruction of certain trees in times of war is raised by the question which concludes the verse above: *is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by thee*? This rhetorical question is typically taken to convey the notion that trees, by virtue of their innocence, should not be harmed in a conflict between human beings. Why should trees suffer, in others words, in a quarrel between humans?

Curiously, then, Jewish settlers have uprooted upwards of an estimated 800,000 Palestinian olive trees since 1967 in spite of the express Torahic command to refrain from doing so. Accordingly, conditions must exist under which the destruction of fruit-yielding trees in times of war is warranted and permitted under Jewish law. The legal scholar Irus Braverman suggests that the seeming immateriality of trees—and of particular tree *species*—to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians belies their true significance. Rather than existing naturally and neutrally in the landscape, Braverman argues, trees actually play an

active instead of passive role in the Israel/Palestine conflict and are invested with a particular allegiance on the basis of historic associations and perceived similarities between peoples and trees. Like the olive tree, which grows very old and is native to the land of Israel/Palestine, the Palestinians have lived on their lands for hundreds of years, and like the olive tree, which grows thick, deep roots, the Palestinians regard themselves as steadfast in the soil. The Israeli view, conversely, is that the land of Israel was populated by pine forests and by Jews in a more ancient past, and that the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland is mirrored by the return of pine trees to that land—the result of enormous afforestation efforts. According to its own figures, the Jewish National Fund has overseen the planting of more than 240 million pine trees in Israel since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Beyond providing mere metaphoric expressions of the Israeli and Palestinian positions, trees afford material form to claims to the land over which the conflict between the two peoples is centred. The contested soil is claimed by the Israelis through the extensive planting of pine trees, providing a further physical dimension to the replanting of Jewish roots in the land of Israel. The Israeli claim of rootedness is contested, however, through the Palestinian identification with the olive tree, which communicates the resistance to the dispossession of lands Palestinians have inhabited for centuries before they, like many of their olive trees, were uprooted—and continue to be uprooted—by the Israeli occupier. The Jewish people, however, have also (and on more than one occasion) experienced exile from their homeland, most recently—almost 2,000 years ago—at the hands of the Romans. Thus, both the Israelis and the Palestinians have at some stage in their histories been severed from the place they feel connected to and identify with. According to the historian Pierre Nora, such breaks between past and present induce the formation of sites of memory: places, objects, or various other phenomena which have become of symbolic significance to a particular group of people. To the Israelis and the Palestinians, then, the pine tree and the olive tree have

grown into powerful sites of memory. The pine tree generates memories of the Jews' return to and reclamation of the ancient homeland for the Israelis, while the same tree reminds Palestinians of dispossession and Jewish occupation. The olive tree, similarly, reminds Palestinians of their steadfast roots in the land, while the Israelis are reminded of the inconvenient and—in Israeli eyes—erroneous presence of the Palestinians and of their refusal to leave.

The concept of sites of memory was developed by Nora as an extension of Maurice Halbwachs' work on collective memory. In the first half of the twentieth century, Halbwachs advanced the idea that individual memory is informed by the historical narrative particular to a specific group or community, or, in other words, by collective memory. He held, furthermore, that collective memory serves principally to advance group interests in the present and is therefore highly selective in terms of what is either remembered or forgotten. The selective nature of collective memory is richly illustrated by the Israeli inclination to "forget" that other people were living on the land they claimed as their own in 1948. In more recent times, scholarly interest in collective memory has experienced a veritable resurgence, especially through the prolific and influential husband-and-wife authors Jan and Aleida Assmann, who have contributed greatly to the concepts introduced by Halbwachs and Nora. Another contemporary author interested in memory studies who is of particular interest to the subject matter at hand is Carol Bardenstein. Her article entitled "Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory" links and applies the concepts of collective memory and sites of memory to the situation in Israel/Palestine. It is in the vein of Bardenstein's article, which is relatively short, that I wish to continue in this thesis. It is my hope and belief that a deeper understanding of every facet of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict represents a step in the right direction on the road to resolution. While the uninitiated may struggle to regard the planting of a forest as anything other than a wholly benevolent act, the

reader of this thesis may not; and while most of us would not believe that some people would rather lose their hands than be deprived of their fruit tree, the reader of this paper will begin to understand. While the role of trees in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians may on the surface and instinctively appear minor, the reality of the situation is far more complex.

In this thesis, I will analyze the role of trees in the construction of cultural memory and collective identity in the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I hope to demonstrate that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not merely a struggle over land, but also a struggle conducted and articulated through the land and through trees more specifically, as both Israelis and Palestinians invest memory in "their" trees, the pine tree and the olive tree respectively. In order to do so, I will begin, in chapter I of this thesis, by discussing the pine and the olive: the involvement of these trees in the Israeli/Palestinian war, and how and why exactly these particular trees have grown to become so intertwined with the collective identities of Israelis and Palestinians. In chapter II, secondly, I consider trees as sites of memory: by linking concepts of space, place, history, memory, and identity, I consider how the landscape of Israel/Palestine has given rise to fundamentally divided memories, which trees are particularly potent triggers and selectively accessed markers of. In chapter III, finally, I examine the role of trees in functional cultural memory: how trees are employed by both Israelis and Palestinians to (de)legitimize claims to the land and to profile a distinct common identity by asserting rootedness, permanence, and continuity.

CHAPTER 1

THE PINE AND THE OLIVE

With you I was transplanted twice,

with you, pine trees, I grew—

roots in two disparate landscapes.

—Leah Goldberg, "Pine" (91)

I find myself looking at an olive tree, and as I am looking at it, it transforms itself before my eyes into a symbol of the samidin*, of our struggle, of our loss. And at that very moment I am robbed of the tree; instead there is a hollow space into which anger and pain flow.*

—Raja Shehadeh, *The Third Way* (87)

Conflicting claims to the land lie at the very heart of the struggle between Israel and Palestine. Because of this centrality of the land, it is perhaps not surprising that the landscape has become an important object of contention, both reflecting and affecting the on-going struggle over the land. Trees, in particular, figure significantly in articulations of Israeli and Palestinian cultural memory and collective identity, albeit in very different ways (Bardenstein 305).

The epigraphs to this chapter, written by Jewish poet Leah Goldberg and Palestinian poet Raja Shehadeh, illustrate the strong identification between Israelis and the pine tree on the one hand, and Palestinians and the olive tree on the other. According to legal scholar and ethnographer Irus Braverman, "these two tree types assume the totemic quality of their people, reflecting and reifying the standing conflict" (*Planted Flags* 165). In this chapter I explore how and why these specific trees have become such significant embodiments of

Israeli and Palestinian identity. As I will demonstrate below, the identification between Israelis/pines and Palestinians/olives is rooted in perceived relationships of similarity and resemblance. As a result, the pine tree has become highly symbolic for the Zionist project of reconnecting with the land after centuries of Jewish diaspora, while the olive tree has come to symbolize Palestinian resistance, steadfastness and clinging to the land.

1.1 Landscape, Trees and Competing Claims of Rootedness

In *Planted Flags: Trees, Land and Law in Israel/Palestine*, Irus Braverman explores the seemingly mundane acts of landscaping and tree-planting in the context of the long-standing Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In her introduction to the book, Braverman writes that "national wars are typically associated with soldiers, with blood, and with large flags blowing in the wind. They are not associated with trees or with greening the landscape" (1). As Braverman demonstrates, however, acts of planting, cultivating and uprooting trees, conducted by both Israelis and Palestinians, are in fact "acts of war," regulated by a range of legal strategies and proven to be powerful tools of nation building on the one hand, and resistance on the other. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the landscape of Israel/Palestine[1] has changed drastically. Today, the dominant landscapes in Israel/Palestine are pine forests and olive groves (Braverman, "The Tree is the Enemy Soldier" 450). These tree landscapes are not

[1] I follow Irus Braverman's use of the term "Israel/Palestine" when referring to the region under consideration in this thesis, as about half of the land in Israel/Palestine is disputed in terms of ownership. As noted by Braverman, under British Mandate—until the birth of the State of Israel in 1948—the entire region was known as "Palestine." Today, however, all of former Palestine is under Israeli control. For the purpose of this thesis, the term "Israel/Palestine" is used to refer to the land encompassed by the State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). See Irus Braverman, *Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine* (2009), 2, fn 1.

quite as natural as they might appear. In fact, before the twentieth century pine trees were a rare sight in the region that now comprises Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories; the European pine was introduced to the Mediterranean landscape by massive afforestation efforts conducted by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Israeli government (Stemple 16). Since the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, the JNF and the Israeli government have planted over 240 million trees, predominantly pine trees (Braverman, "Uprooting Identities" 2). Simultaneously, Israel has uprooted an estimated 2.5 million indigenous trees, mostly olive trees, in order to make place for Zionist settlements, infrastructure, and the West Bank barrier (Palestinian Ministry of National Economy 31).

The drastic transformation of the Israeli/Palestinian landscape confirms the notion that landscapes are "cultural products," usually shaped by the dominant culture within a society, as Penny Richards and Iain Robertson note in their introduction to *Studying Cultural Landscapes* (2). In her chapter on the relationship between landscape and identity of this book, Catherine Brace contends that "landscapes give the abstract concepts of the nation material form" (16). As I will attempt to demonstrate below, in the context of Israel/Palestine, landscapes—and more specifically, trees—give material form to concepts of rootedness. For Israelis, the pine tree signifies the replanting of historical Jewish roots in the ancestral homeland, while for Palestinians, the olive tree signifies their long-established connection to the lost homeland. Thus, the pine and the olive tree convey Israeli and Palestinian claims of rootedness, respectively, in the contested soil of Israel/Palestine.

1.2 The Pine Tree: Striking Roots in the Holy Land

Pine trees have been planted in Israel since the turn of the 20th century, when Zionism emerged as a political and ideological movement dedicated to returning Jews to the Land of Israel. Early Zionism focused strongly on tree-planting in its endeavour to redeem and reclaim

the ancestral homeland, which was perceived as neglected during the two millennia of Jewish diaspora. Leading Zionist figures such as Theodor Herzl actively propagated the image of Palestine as a barren, desolate wasteland, "pining away in expectation for Jews to come and settle there" (Shapira 41). Chaim Weizmann, who later became the first president of Israel, described Palestine as a land of "rocks, marshes and sand," whose beauty could only be "brought out by those who love it" (Weizmann 371). According to Israeli scholar Idit Pintel-Ginsberg, most forests in modern Israel "are the result of immense planting efforts made by the waves of new immigrants to Israel in the 1920s and the 1950s, as well as constant professional planting by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the afforestation authority known in Hebrew as the *Keren Kayemet Leisrael* (KKL)" (176).

The Jewish National Fund, established in 1901 by the Fifth Zionist Congress, was originally dedicated to the purchase of land and its settlement by Jewish pioneers. Today, the JNF is the sole national organization responsible for planting and forestation in Israel (Pintel-Ginsberg 184). Immediately after its establishment, the JNF began introducing forests of non-native tree species, such as eucalyptus trees, cypress trees and—in particular—pines, creating a European-looking landscape. The JNF website reads that "when the pioneers of the State arrived, they were greeted by barren land." During the first decades of Zionist afforestation activity, the primary objective was "the fastest possible establishment of forests," which was why fast-growing "pioneer trees" were planted (JNF website). As pointed out by Israeli architect Eyal Weizman, the pine tree did not become JNF's tree of choice by chance; pines are quick-growing and their needles eradicate smaller plants and undergrowth, rendering them highly suitable for JNF's rapid afforestation efforts (120).

The centrality of tree-planting in Zionist ideology found strong expression in education programs, such as *yediat ha'aretz*, "knowing the land," which "did not simply mean the recital of facts in the classroom, but rather an intimate knowledge of the land that can only

be achieved through a direct contact with it," as Yael Zerubavel writes (28). In the early 1900s, the Teachers' Association of Eretz Israel declared the Jewish calendar event *Tu Bishvat*, the New Year of Trees, to be a tree-planting festival. Originally a minor event on the Jewish liturgical calendar that never involved planting trees, *Tu Bishvat* was transformed into a widely celebrated tree-planting holiday (Pintel-Ginsberg 174). Nurit Peled-Elhanan, who grew up in Jerusalem during the 1950s, recalls going out with her class "to plant trees in the forests planted by the Jewish National Fund, as the Israeli-Jewish children are still doing today, and we were told we were restoring the glorious biblical forests the Arab invaders destroyed with their herds while 'we' were away" (8). In an educational text printed in *The Book of Festivals*, an anthology of Jewish festival texts collected and published by folklorist Yom-Tov Lewinsky, the tree-planting ceremony is described as follows:

> Eight hundred children stand near four hundred seedlings, and wait, and the sign is given. The musicians start beating their instruments, immediately the children as one, lower the seedlings into the prepared holes, all are deeply at work . . . Man and Trees, trees and children. Both will become rooted in the Land, will blossom and grow. An alliance is set between our children and the land and its tree and the tree grows and the child grows. And years will pass by, and when the man, after years, will visit here, his soul shall love this place and the tree that he planted with his own hands. (Lewinsky, *The Book of Festivals*, 478–9)

Thus, tree-planting is imagined as an act of redeeming and being redeemed through the land. By ceremonially planting a tree, the children and the trees form a life-long "alliance" between them and the Land of Israel, as both the children and the trees strike roots deep within its soil, which in turn nourishes them and enables them to grow and flourish. Such an intense

identification between the tree and the planter also becomes evident in a poem by Aharon Zeev, written for a series of poems and songs about trees published by the Teachers' Council:

> I did not sing to you, my country
> I did not glorify your name with acts of heroism,
> with battles galore.
> My hands have merely planted a tree
> A tree I planted
> On Arbor day
> In my small garden, I bent down to the earth
> And speaking softly said:
> You and I
> Are linked forever
> In the fragile seedling
> May it sprout and grow
> (qtd. Shavit and Sitton 75)

Here, planting a tree on *Tu Bishvat*, or Arbor day, is depicted as the ultimate act of patriotism. Again, the planter and the tree are imagined as allies of a sort: the narrator and the tree, both deeply belonging to Mother Israel, are "linked forever," as if a powerful brotherly bond is established between them in the act of planting. In the same vein, during the 1969 celebration of *Tu Bishvat*, Israeli children began planting the 'Brother-to-Brother' forest in the hills of Jerusalem, which would eventually contain 13 million trees, "one for every Jew in the world" (Long 72). The name of the forest invokes the image of trees standing tall together, like the

Jewish people they are to represent: brother to brother, firmly rooted in a shared motherland.

Hebrew schools outside Israel celebrate *Tu Bishvat* by raising money and making tree donations to the JNF. For these children, *Tu Bishvat* is "a vivid reminder, even in the midst of darkness and exile, of the promise of putting down roots and flourishing in *Eretz Israel*" (Elon, Hyman and Waskow 251). The JNF website reads that participating children will receive a tree certificate and "make a personal connection to the land of Israel that will last a lifetime." In *Landscape and Memory*, art historian Simon Schama recalls glueing "small green leaves to a paper tree" at his Hebrew school in London, as the children were preparing for *Tu Bishvat*:

> 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 […] The trees were our proxy immigrants, the forests our implantation. And while we assumed that a pinewood was more beautiful than a hill denuded by grazing flocks of goats and sheep, we were never exactly sure what all the trees were *for*. What we did know was that a rooted forest was the opposite landscape to a place of drifting sand, of exposed rock and red dirt blown by the winds. The diaspora was sand. So what should Israel be, if not a forest, fixed and tall? (Schama 5–6, original emphasis)

Schama's recollection reflects the centrality of trees in the Zionist project of redeeming the Land of Israel from its perceived desolation; afforestation serves to reconstruct the biblical past in the Jewish present, restoring the divine relationship between the Jewish people and the

Holy Land. In accordance with Zionist narratives of redemption and return, Schama describes the act of tree planting as a means to replace the "drifting sand" of diaspora with a firmly rooted, "fixed and tall" forest. The trees function as "proxy immigrants," physically and symbolically rooting the diasporic children into the soil, and materializing their presence in the homeland. However, Schama's young mind could not fully grasp what exactly "the trees were *for*." Indeed, this is a complex question, which will be further explored in the following chapters.

1.3 The Olive Tree: Remaining Steadfast in the Soil

Because of its historical presence in the region of Palestine and its strong agricultural significance, the olive tree figured prominently in Palestinian culture long before the Israel/Palestine conflict erupted (Bardenstein 149). For example, traditional folk songs often pay homage to the olive tree, and many Palestinian villages pre-dating the conflict are named after the olive tree, *zeitoun* in Arabic, such as Bir Zeit, Zeitounia and Zeita. Over the years, olive cultivation has remained the dominant form of agriculture in Palestine, which makes it an important source of sustenance and income for Palestinians; according to a 2015 report by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an estimated 100,000 families in the occupied Palestinian territories depend on the harvest of olive trees for their livelihoods (16).

Although the olive tree remains to hold strong economic power, the tree's significance to modern-day Palestinians reaches far beyond economics. Since the beginning of the Israel/Palestine conflict, Palestinians have taken up the olive tree as an increasingly significant cultural symbol, as suggested by Irus Braverman. Over the years, the olive tree has become "both the symbol and the embodiment of Palestinian nationhood," as well as "a manifestation of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation" (Braverman, "Uprooting

Identities" 3). According to Braverman, this is largely the effect of the tree's targeting by the State of Israel and Jewish settlers, which has "vested the olive with enormous power" (240).

Millions of olive trees have been uprooted in the occupied Palestinian territories by the Israeli government, in order to make room for settlements, a separation barrier and infrastructure (Palestinian Ministry of National Economy 31). In addition, olive trees have been—and continue to be—uprooted, vandalized and sabotaged by certain Jewish settlers, particularly during harvest season, which is "a key economic, social and cultural event for Palestinians" according to a 2012 OCHA factsheet (1). By Palestinian peasants, the olive tree is often spoken of as a member of the family. In an article on the website of Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* Journalist Gideon Levy writes about the grief of Palestinians whose olive trees have been uprooted or damaged. He describes how a Palestinian farmer, whose olive trees had been targeted by settlers, asked him: "What must you feel if you plant and tend and then it's all cut down? What must I feel?", and added that, "If I had been there, I'd have told them, cut off my hands, but don't cut down my trees—what did the tree do to them, for them to treat it like this?" Another farmer, whose vandalized olive trees were planted by his great-great-grandfather, says that his trees are like his children. "Hands or children," Levy writes, "the grief of those who tend their olive groves is searing and deeply moving."

According to Braverman, the erasure of olive trees from the landscape by the State of Israel and Jewish settlers is, in both cases, "perceived as necessary to make space for an alternative and exclusive Jewish presence" ("Uprooting Identities" 6). As discussed above, early Zionist narratives of return and redemption focused on restoring an originary Jewish presence in an empty land, thus ignoring and denying the presence of an existing Palestinian culture. Israel's 1948 War of Independence, known as "the catastrophe" to Palestinians, resulted in the expulsion of an estimated 770,000 Palestinians, leaving hundreds of towns abandoned. These empty towns were either destroyed or "Judaified" by the newly established

State of Israel, effectively erasing the Palestinian presence from the landscape (Swedenburg 20). Following the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel took control of all of historical Palestine, annexing East Jerusalem to the State of Israel and occupying the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, commonly referred to as the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Since Israel commenced its occupation of the Palestinian Territories, Israeli settlements have been popping out of the ground like a "marching cancer," in the words of Edward Said, further erasing the rural landscape of Palestine and establishing a distinct Jewish/Israeli presence instead (*After the Last Sky* 72). According to Swedenburg, this has lead Palestinians to take up the pastoral figure of the peasant, or *fallah*, as well as its emblematic crop, the olive tree, as "allegories for Palestine, the land, and the people's intention of remaining permanently on that land" (20).

In contrast to the fast-growing pine tree, the olive tree needs fifteen years to fully mature, only bears fruit after seven to eight years after planting, and can survive for hundreds or even thousands of years. For Palestinians, the longevity of the olive tree demonstrates the long-established ties between its cultivators—who have nurtured the olive trees for generations—and the land. As Nasser Abufarha writes, the old age of the trees "exemplifies the old Palestinian existence in Palestine and connects Palestinians to the lives of past generations in their family tree" (355). Juliane Hammer notes that Palestinian works of art and literature often depict "the Palestinian himself as a tree, rooted in the soil, having a long history, and unwilling to give up his homeland" (65). In this sense, the uprooting of the ancient olive trees has become metaphorical for the Israeli "uprooting" of the Palestinian people. In his song "Olive Trees," Palestinian-American hip-hop artist Iron Sheik raps:

> They exiled us and stole our homes
> Now all we have are old keys and new poems
> They turned us into refugees

And uprooted us like our olive trees

The lyrics of the song “I Have No Freedom” by Palestinian hip-hop group DAM articulate the same imagery of Palestinians as deep-rooted olive trees:

You won’t limit my hope by a Wall of separation
And if this barrier comes between me and my land
I’ll still be connected to Palestine
Like an embryo to the umbilical cord.
My feet are the roots of the olive tree,
keep on prospering, fathering
and renewing branches.

Similarly, Fadwa Tuqan’s poem “The Deluge and the Tree” makes clear that the hardy olive trees—and, by analogy, the Palestinian people—are sustained by roots that run so deep that they cannot be killed by acts of uprooting:

When the hurricane swirled and spread its deluge
of dark evil
onto the good green land
‘they’ gloated. The western skies
reverberated with joyous accounts:
“The Tree has fallen!
The great trunk is smashed! The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!”

Had the tree really fallen?
Never! Not with our red streams flowing forever,
not while the wine of our thorn limbs
fed the thirsty roots,
Arab roots alive
tunnelling deep, deep, into the land!
(Tuqan 489)

Thus, the connection between the Palestinians/tree and the land cannot be severed by the "deluge of dark evil" that has befallen Palestine. As noted by Bardenstein, Palestinians have taken up the olive tree as an emblem of the people's *sumud*, which translates to steadfastness, resilience, a clinging to the land (151). The way the olive tree symbolizes Palestinian *sumud* is clearly articulated in *The Unlikely Settler* by Bangladesh-born filmmaker and journalist Lipika Pelham, who narrates her life in Jerusalem with her English-Jewish husband and their two children. She becomes close friends with a Palestinian woman named Fida, who tells her: "The Palestinian people are like the olive trees—no matter how much you try to prune them, uproot them, try to burn them down, the next season new shoots will grow and new roots will spread deep into the soft soil after the winter rains" (Pelham 141).

A poster printed by Beirut-based artists' collective Jamaa Al-Yad sends the same message: the black and white linocut poster, entitled "The Uprooting of the Olive Trees," depicts a lamenting Palestinian woman holding on to the trunk of a pruned—or beheaded, if you will—olive tree, whose branches are lying on the ground. The poster reads: "Always remain standing no matter what happens." Similarly, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) printed a postcard depicting an old olive tree, which reads: "We are staying, and forever" (Abufarha 353). Thus, the Palestinian people are "like the olive trees," as Fida

affirms, in the sense that both the olive tree and the Palestinian people are naturally and permanently rooted in Palestine. The Palestinian people/trees cannot be erased from the Palestinian landscape, and their deep-running roots cannot be severed from the land. They are, in short, “staying, and forever.”

CHAPTER 2

TREES AS SITES OF MEMORY

A remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present.

—Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (68)

Palestine […] instances an extraordinarily rich and intense conflict of at least two memories, two sorts of historical invention, two sorts of geographical imagination.

—Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place" (183-84)

In the early twentieth century, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs published his seminal work *Les Cadres socieaux de la mémoire*, in which he introduced the concept of *mémoire collective*. In this path-breaking work, Halbwachs suggests that all remembrances are embedded within social frameworks, and that individual memories are always acquired, recalled and localized through group memberships. For Halbwachs, memories are constructs, and thus do not provide accurate reproductions of the past, but, rather, serve the needs and interests of memory groups in the present. Although his work was initially not met with great enthusiasm, Halbwachs' studies on collective memory gained wide recognition in the 1980s, with the "memory turn" inaugurated by French historian Pierre Nora (Erll and Nünning v). This has resulted in the proliferation of works examining "sites" that act as shared points of reference within memory groups (Rigney 345). Importantly, these sites do not necessarily take the form of actual places or objects. According to Nora, who developed the concept of *lieux of mémoire*, such sites take the form of "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic

element of the memorial heritage of any community" (xvii). Thus, sites of memory can be burial places, monuments, flags, buildings, rituals, anthems, national holidays, historical figures, and—indeed—trees.

Drawing on theoretical frameworks of memory studies, this chapter analyzes trees as sites of Israeli and Palestinian memory. I will first explore the relationship between collective memory and place, outlining the concept of *mémoire collective* as developed by Halbwachs in the 1920s. I will demonstrate that the landscape of Israel/Palestine has become a bearer of divided memories, which are selectively accessed and activated through trees. Second, I will show that trees function as Nora's *lieux de mémoire* in the collective memories of both Israelis and Palestinians, albeit in fundamentally different ways. Nora stresses that *lieux de mémoire* emerge when a rupture between past and present occurs. Since both Israelis and Palestinians have experienced exile, their respective people-land bonds have been disrupted, which, I contend, has given rise to trees as potent sites of memory. Although trees as sites of Israeli and Palestinian memory often highlight loss or discontinuity, I will show that they also embody the potential for establishing continuing bonds between past and present, and between land and people.

2.1 Collective Memory and Place

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, memories of emplacement and displacement are central to Israeli and Palestinian identity formation. As a result, "place" is of prime importance to the construction of both Israeli and Palestinian collective memory. "Place" is often defined as space invested with shared meaning, thus as a socially constructed and maintained entity (Carter, Donalds and Squires xii). Whereas space is a neutral category, place is charged with collective meaning. For Maurice Halbwachs, however, this definition would be incomplete. For Halbwachs, places are not merely passive entities endowed with

meaning by a cultural group, but, in turn, places also actively shape collective memory and group identity. In fact, Halbwachs argues that memory is always embedded within spatial frameworks. In his posthumously published *La Mémoire collective* (1950), translated in English as *The Collective Memory* (1980), Halbwachs makes the following statement:

> Places play a part in the stability of material things and it is in settling in them, enclosing itself within their limits and bending its attitude to suit them, that the collective thinking of the group of believers is most able to become fixed and to last. (232)

What is pivotal to Halbwachs' concept of *mémoire collective*, is the idea that memory is a reconstruction of the past, oriented towards the concerns and interests of the group in the present. For Halbwachs, memory does not passively preserve or retain the past, but "reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts and traditions left behind by that past" (*On Collective Memory* 175). Thus, memory is shaped and continually re-shaped by the ever-changing social contexts of the present. Building on Halbwachs' concept of memory, Jan Assmann asserts that although "memories may be false, distorted, invented, or implanted," the "truth" of a certain recollection lies not in its "factuality," but in its "actuality" (*Moses the Egyptian* 9). Thus, there is a complex relationship between history and memory, mediated by the ever-changing present.

Anticipating Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*, Halbwachs explored how communities appropriate and inscribe places, and how these places, in turn, give form to collective memory. Thus, there is an interplay between place and collective memory—or, as Maurice Halbwachs wrote, "place and group have each received the imprint of the other" (*The Collective Memory* 130). This mutually constitutive relationship between people and place is

captured by the following line from a popular Zionist pioneer song: "We came to the land to build it and be built in it" (qtd. Zakim 1). Cultural anthropologist Keith H. Basso refers to the reciprocal relationship between people and place as "interanimation" (55). While places are constructed by the group that renders them meaningful, these places in turn animate the memories and ideas they are endowed with. What follows, according to Basso, is that places come to possess a "capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become." Pierre Nora also emphasizes this dynamic character of place, arguing that *lieux de mémoire* "thrive only because of their capacity for change, their ability to resurrect old meanings and generate new ones" (15). Thus, place is not a passive container of memory, but, rather, it acts as a dynamic bearer and agent of memory, selectively articulating memories of the past, views of the present and hopes for the future.

In the case of Israel/Palestine, the relationship between memory and place is particularly complex, since the geographical space that constitutes Israel/Palestine is appropriated and inscribed by conflicting memory groups, which hold fundamentally different conceptions of the past, present, and future. As Edward Said notes, the Israel/Palestine conflict is "a conflict of at least two memories, two sorts of historical invention, two sorts of geographical imagination" ("Invention, Memory, and Place" 183-84). Interestingly, Halbwachs devoted his second book, *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land* (1941), to the collective memories of religious groups, examining Palestine and the Christian invention of the Holy Land. Because the remembrances of religious groups reach back thousands of years, Halbwachs argues that "a religious group, more than any other, needs the support of some object, of some enduring part of reality" (*The Collective Memory* 135). According to Halbwachs, Jerusalem and its surroundings constitute a landscape of commemoration, upon which generations of Christian pilgrims and crusaders superimposed

memories of a distant biblical past during the Middle Ages. These Christian pilgrims did not simply find or uncover the holy sites mentioned in the Gospels, but, rather, constructed them as such. As Patrick Hutton notes, Halbwachs sees the Holy Land not as a "discovery" but as a "localization of a mind-set" (81).

For Halbwachs, the invention of the Holy Land demonstrates that "religions are rooted in the land, not merely because men and groups must live on land but because the community of believers distributes its richest ideas and images throughout space" (*The Collective Memory* 121). Indeed, the land of Israel/Palestine remains a central site of memory for the main three monotheistic religious groups—it is where Moses led the Israelites, where Jesus travelled with his apostles, and where Mohammed ascended to heaven (Fischer 144). Contemporary Israel/Palestine, however, is not only invested with the respective memories of Christians, Jews and Muslims—importantly, it is also the object and arena of the long-standing political conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Thus, the landscape of contemporary Israel/Palestine is not so much contested and constructed by different religious groups, but, rather, by two imaginary national communities that have conflicting interests in the present, and subsequently imbue the landscape with very different memories of the past. Because both Israelis and Palestinians invest the landscape with highly selective memories of the past, places within this contested space function entirely differently in the memories of both groups. Trees are examples par excellence of such hybrid sites of memory imbued with a plurality of meanings and remembrances, since both Israelis and Palestinians, two fundamentally distinct cultural groups, attach meaning to trees and endow them with memory. As a result, trees take on different meanings for the members of each group.

While in the memory of Israelis the pine, eucalyptus and cypress tree function as living reminders of a grand homecoming, Palestinians have come to associate these "Jewish" trees with memories of dispossession and homelessness. In the 2002 documentary film *500*

Dunams on the Moon, a Palestinian peasant describes how his village was depopulated during the 1948 war, and subsequently transformed into an Israeli settlement. The expelled Palestinian villagers settled in the outlying hills, only 1.5 kilometres from their former town, but were denied access to the surrounding farm lands they had cultivated for generations:

> The military governor, the army, and scores of people came here to implement the Israeli court's ruling that this land is not ours. Despite the olive trees, whose age can be determined from their trunks, hundreds years old. Despite this, they gathered the people, put barbed wire around the village and said all the land outside the wire is theirs, and the land inside the wire is ours. Outside the wire was the land that we farmed and lived from. True, we removed the wire, and they came and restored it. So we removed it again, and they restored it again. Then they came and planted cypress trees among the olives. Were they to plant them today we wouldn't leave a single cypress, even if we all had to go to prison. We wouldn't allow the cypresses to be planted so as to suffocate us. I hate the Jewish cypresses.

While non-native "Jewish" trees such as cypresses and pine trees are invested by Israelis with memories of enrooting in the reclaimed Holy Land, the same trees produce memories of uprooting and dispossession for Palestinians. It is worthwhile to note that, when planted among olive trees, the tall and fast-growing cypresses will literally suffocate the much smaller olive trees, by overshadowing them and depriving them of oxygen (Makdisi 233). As a result, the emplacement of the Israeli settlers/cypresses coincides with the displacement of the Palestinian villagers/olive trees in the most literal sense.

Like the non-native "Jewish" trees, indigenous trees such as olive trees, orange trees, cacti and palms also act as dynamic sites of memory, producing different meanings and

(hi)stories depending on who reads them and for what purpose. For Palestinians, the olive tree, in particular, articulates memories of Palestinian rootedness and steadfastness. Israelis have invested the olive tree with meanings of their own, in accordance with the interests of Israelis and Jewish settlers. For example, in an interview conducted by Irus Braverman, the chief inspector of the Israeli Civil Administration in the West Bank refers to the olive tree as the "enemy soldier":

> The [olive] tree is not only a symbol of the Arab's occupation of the land, but it is also the central means through which they carry out this occupation. [...] It's not like the tree is the enemy's property, in which case the Bible tells you not to uproot it because it has nothing to do with the fight. Here it has everything to do with it. The tree *is* the enemy soldier. (*Planted Flags* 464, original emphasis)

The chief inspector, who is an orthodox Jew and a settler, adds that while olive trees look "naive, as if they couldn't hurt anyone," they are in fact "terrorists that actually kill people." As Braverman argues, Israeli settlers have constructed the olive tree as forming a threat to Israel's national existence, thereby justifying their elimination from the landscape (467). Thus, trees take on multiple meanings in the collective memories of Palestinians and Israelis, supporting the different aims and interests of both memory groups.

For Maurice Halbwachs, memory is a collectively shared version of the past, actively sustained through real and imagined places, or "spatial images" (*The Collective Memory* 130). Such spatial images are socially constructed entities, in the sense that they are invested with "a collective shared knowledge […] of the past, on which a group's sense of unity and individuality is based" (J. Assmann, *Collective Memory* 15). Thus, places do not merely function as a neutral stage for the acting out of history, but actively construct and shape a

group's sense of identity: "The group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationship with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself" (Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* 130). For Halbwachs, this is why spatial images "play so important a role in the collective memory." Because collective memory is based on the group's present concerns, it proceeds in a highly selective way. While the collective memories of Israelis and Palestinians are grounded in the same geographical space, the needs and interests of these cultural groups in the present could not be further apart. As a result, both memory groups continually construct, define and defend their respective versions of the past through the landscape and its elements. An interesting feature of trees as sites of memory, is that they require upkeep. For example, trees must be planted, watered, fertilized, pruned, and monitored for fires. Thus, when regarded as symbolic and imagined sites of memory rather than passive elements of the landscape, trees are under constant reconstruction. Rituals such as tree planting ceremonies and communal fruit pickings contribute to the assertion of Israeli and Palestinian rootedness, and re-establish imagined connections to the land. Through this repeated interaction with "their" trees, Israelis and Palestinians continually participate in their respective collective memories of rootedness, while the trees are maintained as meaningful sites of memory.

2.2 Trees and the (Dis)continuity of People-Land Bonds

Pierre Nora's multivolume work *Les Lieux de mémoire*, published between 1984 and 1992, has had a vast influence on the field of memory studies. Building on Maurice Halbwachs' work on collective memory, Nora distinguishes between memory and history, where memory is "borne by living societies," while history is detached and without identity, since it "belongs to everyone and no-one" (8-9). For Nora, memory is an archaic mode of being that belonged to pre-modern societies, and has been "swept away" by modern historical consciousness

(*Between Memory and History* 2). Nora argues that the emergence of history as a discipline in the nineteenth century, and the subsequent "acceleration of history," has uncoupled the present from the past, cutting modern societies off from memory. As a result, there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, or real environments of memory. Instead, people invest in *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, which serve to "anchor" and "condense" memory (24). Although scholars now generally view history and memory as related rather than sharply divided, Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* can be helpful in understanding how cultural groups utilize particular sites—whether material or non-material—to construct their history and identity.

Importantly, *lieux de mémoire* emerge from a rupture between past and present: "The moment of *lieux de mémoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears" (29). In this sense, sites of memory are always connected to experiences of discontinuity, rupture or loss. As argued by Carol Bardenstein, the discontinuity of an experienced people-land bond is central to the construction of both Israeli and Palestinian collective memory (148). For both groups, trees function as sites of memory that, to speak with Nora's words, "anchor" and "condense" memories of rootedness and belonging.

The experienced bond between Jewish people and their land was disrupted for nearly two millennia. According to Jewish tradition, a Jewish nation has been in existence since the time of Moses, when the glorious kingdoms of Israel and Judah were established (Sand 16). The ancient Jewish people were exiled in the sixth century BCE, and again in the seventh century CE. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century, after nearly two thousand years of wandering, that "rare circumstances combined to wake the ancient people from its long slumber and to prepare it for rejuvenation and for the return to its ancient homeland" (Sand 17). Thus, as the first Zionist pioneers began to immigrate from different European countries, they returned "home" to a land they had never seen. Israeli scholar Alon Tal notes that these

pioneers were disappointed when they first arrived in the Holy Land, since it looked nothing like the biblical landscape they had imagined (283). Tal writes that Theodor Herzl, one of the founding fathers of Zionism, "was struck by the almost complete absence of trees. The little woodlands that did exist consisted of short Mediterranean trees and scrub lands, a far cry from a towering, temperate European forest." Tal argues that the first decades of settlement, therefore, were marked by conflict rather than harmony between the settlers and their reclaimed homeland.

By planting forests and restoring the land of Israel to its imagined biblical glory, a bridge is created between antiquity and modernity, and between the ancient Jewish people and their modern descendants. Through tree-planting rituals, the modern descendants of Israel commemorate and construct a collective past that is continuous with the present:

> When we plant trees, we say thanks to those who prepared for us in the past, and our concern for those who will come after us. In however a small way, we are contributing to the re-recreation of the world as it existed at the very beginning, as it is supposed to be, with all things living in perfect balance. (Koppelman Ross 273)

Similarly, in his chapter in *Trees, Earth and Torah: A Tu Bishvat Anthology*, Alix Pirani writes: "Tu Bishvat gives us the opportunity to go back to the roots of Jewish tradition and reassess their meaning for us now" (255). By planting a tree in the soil of the ancestral homeland, Israelis commemorate their shared origin while enacting their lasting rootedness in the land, thus bridging the two millennia of Jewish exile and re-establishing continuing bonds between past, present and future.

Palestinians have experienced a disruption of their people-land bond in more recent times, since the birth of the State of Israel in 1948 resulted in the massive expulsions of

Palestinian towns and villages. For Edward Said, this is what makes the exile of Palestinians so extraordinary, "to have been exiled by exiles: to relive the actual process of uprooting at the hands of exiles" ("Reflections on Exile" 141). Palestinian poet Salma al-Khadra captures this dialectic of Jewish enrooting and Palestinian uprooting in her poem "Dearest Love II":

> For the crows of death rumbled in every direction
> The palm raged in prayer
> And the pines fell
> Upon the slopes of Galilee
> (qtd. Elmessiri 77)

Here, in proxy fashion, the indigenous palm tree stands powerless—it can only pray—as the invasive pines befall Palestine. With the arrival of the pines/Israelis, the slopes of Galilee, a once familiar homeland, are now covered with the presence of a hostile other. Thus, the 1948 war's rupture of the past from the present marks the shift from *milieux de mémoire* to *lieux de mémoire*, that is, "from a place where traditional ways of life were once stable, to a place where nothing remains but shattered material links to the lost way of life" (A. Assmann 292).

Such material links to the lost way of life can be found in the form of trees: almost like ruins, the Palestinian olive trees stand out against their new surroundings, consisting of Jewish settlements, soldiers, outposts and the long separation barrier that runs through the West Bank and cuts off many nearby Palestinian villages from their lands. Bil'in is such a village, located only a few kilometres from the barrier. The 2011 documentary film *5 Broken Cameras*, shot almost entirely by Palestinian peasant Emad Burnat, gives a personal account of the disrupted bond between the villagers of Bil'in and their land. During the first few minutes of the film, Burnat introduces himself: "I was born and lived all my life in Bil'in, a village surrounded by

hills, just inside the occupied territories of the West Bank," he says, while the camera slowly pans over the tree-covered landscape. In the next shot, we see Burnat's father standing under an olive tree, as Burnat's voice-over says: "As a boy, I used to work the land with my father. We would pick olives." The shot moves from Burnat's father working his land to a big, yellow bulldozer amidst a field of olive trees. The bulldozer's blade digs under one of the trees and removes it from the soil. The trees have to make room for a security barrier that is being built, Burnat's voice-over explains, "in the middle of our land." Here, the olive tree is utilized to demonstrate Burnat's long-term connection to the land, and, subsequently, its uprooting denotes the disruption of this connection.

As the examples mentioned above illustrate, trees function as *lieux de mémoire* in the collective memories of both Israelis and Palestinians. Both Israelis and Palestinians have experienced exile, which Edward Said describes as a "fundamentally discontinuous state of being" ("Reflections on Exile" 140). As a result, both groups have experienced the loss of their respective people-land bonds, which, as argued by Carol Bardenstein, is central to the construction of both Israeli and Palestinian collective identities and memories. Exiles, according to Said, are "cut off from their roots, their land, *their past*" (140, my emphasis). Thus, as Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* generally spring from a rupture of the present from the past, trees have emerged as sites of Israeli and Palestinian collective memory as a response to and a symptom of the discontinuous state of exile. For both Israelis and Palestinians, trees function as material links to the lost past, through which a constant recuperation and reconstruction of this once stable past takes place.

Aleida Assmann strictly distinguishes between *places of memory*, which "aris[e] from the longterm link between families or groups and a particular location," and *places of commemoration*, "where something has been preserved from what has gone forever but can be reactivated through memory" (291-92). Thus, places of memory derive their binding power

from a sense of generational continuity, whereas places of commemoration are based on absence, loss or discontinuity, like Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*. According to Assmann, "the sense of the past that arises from places of commemoration is quite different from that which pertains to the firmly established place of generational memory" (292). However, I contend that in the collective memories of Israelis and Palestinians, trees are both markers of generational continuity and markers of discontinuity, thus functioning both as places of memory and as places of commemoration. Although trees articulate memories of exile and the disruption of a people-land bond for both Israelis and Palestinians, these trees are not necessarily remnants of an *irretrievable* past, like Assmann's places of commemoration. In fact, trees highlight long-established ties between people and the land, and establish continuing bonds between the lost past and the present. The Israeli afforestation project makes this abundantly clear; in the cultural memory of Israelis, trees create a temporal bridge between Jewish antiquity and modernity, thus establishing continuity rather than merely marking discontinuity. In a similar vein, Palestinians invest trees not only with memories of exile and loss, but also with memories of their *sumud*, or steadfastness. The olive tree symbolizes a lost way of life, and is in this sense a marker of discontinuity, but this lost past is not imagined as lost *forever*. Thus, the present is not cut off from the past entirely. For Palestinians, the olive tree denotes the thread that this connection between past and present is still hanging by, and therefore inspires resistance to the Israeli occupation and hope for restoration.

This is illustrated by a scene from *5 Broken Cameras*, in which the residents of Bil'in set out to pick olives on the other side of the barrier during harvest season. When the villagers arrive, they are told to leave by an Israeli soldier, or they will be "forcibly evacuated." Here, the olive trees signal an abyss between the present and a once stable past, which is—quite literally—no longer at hand and normally accessible. The olive trees stand as remnants of a

lost past, surrounded by bulldozers and heavily armed Israeli soldiers who guard the on-going construction of the separation barrier. The following shot shows one of the olive trees, as a handful of villagers start picking olives from it. In this brief shot, before violence breaks out between the villagers and the Israeli army, the olive tree denotes the persistence of a broken continuity, the possibility of performing an act that is no longer performable in the present. In another shot, we see one of the film's protagonists, Adeeb, wrapping his arms tightly around an olive tree and saying: "We were born on this land, and we'll die here. We'll live on this land for the rest of our lives!" Thus, while the olive trees are markers of a lost way of life and a violent break with the past, they also embody the possibility of steadfastly clinging to this lost way of life. By tending to their lost trees and holding on to them, the villagers of Bil'in in effect refuse this loss and attempt to re-establish continuing bonds between the past and the present, and between the Palestinian people and their land.

Thus, in the collective memories of both Israelis and Palestinians, trees do not merely highlight discontinuity, or a break between the present and an irretrievable past. Like Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, trees have emerged as sites of Israeli and Palestinian memory from a rupture between present and past, in the form of exile. However, trees do not only illuminate the *discontinuity* of both groups' people-land bonds, but they also articulate, promote and establish the *continuity* of these connections. As a result, Aleida Assmann's strict distinction between places of memory and places of commemoration does not seem tenable in the analysis of trees as sites of Israeli and Palestinian memory. By planting trees, caring for them, and endowing them with memories of rootedness, the broken bonds between land and people, and between past and present, are re-imagined as unbroken, continuous and continuing.

CHAPTER 3

FUNCTIONAL CULTURAL MEMORY: THE TASKS OF TREES

Collective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning.

—Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place" (263)

A fundamental assumption running through this thesis is that memory is not an "inert and passive thing," as Edward Said affirms in the epigraph cited above, but, rather, an activity that occurs in the present and serves a multitude of purposes. In *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann looks in detail at some of the tasks performed by memory, arguing that memory serves to (de)legitimize political power and provides the foundation for a distinct common identity. For Assmann, this is not true for all forms of memory—she distinguishes between an inactive *storage memory*, and an active *functional memory*. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which both Israeli and Palestinian acts of memory fixated upon trees selectively access and mobilize functional cultural memory in the political present, performing at least three important tasks described by Assmann: legitimization, delegitimization, and distinction.

First, I will briefly outline the distinction between storage memory and functional memory as formulated by Assmann. Second, I will explore the relationship between Israel's massive tree-planting efforts and the state's politics of remembering and forgetting, demonstrating that post-1948 afforestation served to legitimize the power of the State of Israel by selectively "planting" memories of a shared past in the consciousness of Israeli citizens,

while—quite literally—covering up memories of pre-1948 Palestinian communities. Third, I will demonstrate that indigenous "Palestinian" trees have been taken up as embodiments of a Palestinian counter memory, which aims to delegitimize the dominant Zionist narrative and re-shape the political present and future. Fourth, I will explore the centrality of concepts of (up)rootedness—articulated by trees—in the construction of a distinct Israeli and Palestinian collective identity.

3.1 Two Modes of Memory

For Maurice Halbwachs and those who follow in his tradition, the collective memories of cultural groups are active, present-oriented, and highly selective. These groups hold a certain version of the past and define their distinct identity through collective remembrances, which sustain a certain "we" and are sustained and perpetuated by it. Importantly, memories are retained and inhabited by the group only if these memories are relevant to the group in the present. Since memory itself has no sticking power, it will only enter the collective memory—and "stick"—if the members of the group select this memory and "re-embody it as its bearers and addressees" (127). As a result, only a fraction of memory's contents has presence in the active collective memory of a given group, while most handed-down memory remains or becomes latent—at least until new circumstances render it useful again. Therefore, Aleida Assmann proposes to distinguish between an active "functional memory" and an inactive "storage memory" (123). These two modes of cultural memory do not exist in opposition, but, rather, are complementary. For Assmann, the continually shifting relationship between these two modes of memory creates the possibility for change:

> The deep structure of memory, with its internal traffic between actualized and non-actualized elements, is what makes it possible for changes and innovations to take place in the structure of consciousness, which would ossify without the amorphous reserves stored in the background. (123)

Thus, Assmann regards storage memory as an inactive "background," a kind of reservoir for unused memories that have the potential for entering or re-entering the active "foreground," that is, the realm of functional memory.

Unlike storage memory, functional memory makes a political statement and profiles a distinct identity. This inhabited form of memory is "functional" in the sense that it performs certain tasks. In *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Aleida Assmann describes three of these tasks. First, functional cultural memory can serve to legitimize the power of particular groups or rulers. Second, it can function as a counter memory, opposing the official memory of regimes or rulers and delegitimizing their power. Third, functional memory serves to profile a distinct collective identity by consolidating references to a shared history. As I will demonstrate below, in the collective memories of Israelis and Palestinians, trees are potent cultural symbols that serve to support or subvert claims of rootedness and legitimacy while consolidating a unique collective identity and distinguishing the group from other groups. Thus, in the context of Israel/Palestine, trees do not stand passively in an inactive background; they belong to the realm of functional cultural memory, to the foreground, where they actively perform the tasks of legitimization, delegitimization, and distinction.

3.2 LEGITIMIZATION

Legitimization is the principal object of "official memory," which constitutes the form of collective memory propagated by those in power (A. Assmann 128). As I will demonstrate below, trees and forests are central to Israel's official memory, as they articulate biblical, historical, and environmental narratives that legitimize the existence of the State of Israel and the power of its rulers. Not only are distinct "Jewish" trees such as pine trees physical and symbolic markers of Jewish presence on the land, but forests also function as public memorials and monuments, keeping memories of significant historical events and figures alive in the collective remembrance of Israeli citizens. Moreover, the Israeli government and the JNF have planted forests to erase material traces of Palestinian presence from the landscape, further consolidating Israel's claim of being the sole legitimate owner of the land. As a result, trees are of key importance to Israel's politics of remembering and forgetting.

When Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion read the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, the Zionist objective of establishing a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel* was achieved. The Declaration of Independence begins with an account of Jewish history, emphasizing the unbroken bond between the people and the land, as even during the years of forced exile the Jewish people "never ceased to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom" (qtd. Mazur 2). Ben-Gurion, who became the first prime minister of the newly established State of Israel, spoke the following words: "By virtue of our

natural and historic right and of the strength of the United Nations General Assembly[2], we hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel*, to be known as the State of Israel." With these words, Ben-Gurion legitimized the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, proclaiming the Jewish people as the rightful owners of the land based on their "natural and historic right" to it. He supported this claim by citing the biblical connection of Jews to the Holy Land, the forced exile of the Jewish people, their suffering during the Holocaust, and Zionist accomplishments of redeeming the neglected land and making it bloom again. Thus, Ben-Gurion's historic speech relied on religious, historical, and environmental collective memories, united into a single Proclamation of Independence. These narratives, which establish a specific historical consciousness and legitimize the creation of the State of Israel, continue to be promoted by Israel's memorials, monuments, and celebrations, many of which are centred on trees and tree-planting.

At the close of the 1948 war, Israel possessed roughly 78% of historic Palestine (Fields 277). This new political geography was accompanied by the crafting of what Edward Said calls a new "imaginative geography" ("Invention, Memory, and Place" 181). Archaeologists and biblical experts were tasked with the rediscovery and reconstruction of ancient Hebrew sites and cities (Pappe 225-26). New maps were drawn, places were renamed, and historical events were linked to particular sites, geographically anchoring Israel's national history in space. According to cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai, "the nation-state relies for its

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[2] In 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations recommended that the British mandate over Palestine should be terminated, and Palestine should be divided into two separate states--a Jewish state, and an Arab-Palestinian state. The Zionist movement accepted the UN Partition Plan, but the Palestinians did not. Nevertheless, the Zionist movement issued Israel's declaration of independence immediately after Britain's withdrawal from Palestine. This resulted in the 1948 war, at the end of which Israel possessed over 75% of former Mandate Palestine, far exceeding the territory allotted it by the General Assembly of the United Nations. On the role of the UN in the partition of Palestine, see Bennis 47-76.

legitimacy on the intensity of its meaningful presence in a continuous body of bounded territory" (189). For the newly established State of Israel, the massive planting of fast-growing trees such as pine trees served the state's desire to establish its visible presence as soon as possible (Cohen 116). Although tree planting was already an important part of the pre-1948 Zionist project—as Yael Zerubavel notes, for early Zionist settlers the act of planting a tree was considered "a necessary ritual of connecting to the land"—the Zionist use of planting trees was greatly expanded and institutionalized after the creation of the State of Israel (Zerubavel 61). This becomes evident when comparing the number of trees planted during the first years of Israeli statehood—in 1949, nearly three million trees were planted throughout the country, while in the next year, this number had more than quadrupled to twelve and a half million trees, with over fifty-six million trees planned for 1951 (Cohen 64).

Importantly, trees and forests also took on an official commemorative role after the formation of the State of Israel, as they were planted to commemorate significant historical events, leading figures and fallen members of the community. The two largest forest-memorials were for those who perished during the Holocaust, and for those who died in Israel's wars (Cohen 63). The Holocaust Martyrs' Forest, planted in 1950, counts six million trees—mostly pines and cypresses—for each of the six million Jews who were killed in the Nazi Holocaust. The JNF website describes the forest as "a living monument of eternally green memorial candles for the six million of our people who perished during World War II." However, the Martyrs' Forest does not merely commemorate the victims of the Holocaust—it is a much more complex landscape of memory, articulating collective memories of dispersion, suffering, sacrifice, return and redemption. As an excerpt from the dedicatory scroll of the Martyrs' Forest reads:

> Thus the Judean Hills and Jerusalem will again be rooted and afforested, again the

> branches of the Tree of Israel, those that were hewn in the great souls of our holy ones and our heroes will live eternally with the green trees, abundantly living—to reawaken the barren land and to fertilize the exiled of the nation. (qtd. Elon, Hyman and Waskow 216-17)

The Martyrs' Forest is an embodiment of the Israeli endeavour of reshaping the time line of Jewish collective memory, "from one of open-ended exile after dispersion, to a completed cycle ending in return" (Bardenstein 159). The trees of the Martyrs' Forest, representing the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust, function as "icon[s] of national revival" (Zerubavel 60). By commemorating the victims of the Holocaust as "our heroes" and retrospectively according them the status of "martyrs," their deaths are interpreted as sacrifices that contributed to Israel's national rebirth. This is made explicit in a short video posted on the JNF website, titled "A Walk Through Martyrs' Forest," in which Yehiel Cohen, deputy director of JNF's Central Region, explains that planting six million trees in memory of the six million Jews who were murdered during the Second World War was "a way of saying, 'By their deaths, they commanded us to live.'" Thus, the establishment of a sovereign state for the much-persecuted Jewish people is not merely presented as legitimate and just, but as a moral imperative, an obligation to the six million Jews who stood powerless.

The relationship between Jewish death and rebirth that is highlighted by forest-memorials such as the Martyrs' Forest can also be found in the structuring of Israel's national days. One week after the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Remembrance Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism takes place, which, in turn, is immediately followed by Israel's Independence Day. As a result, the national commemoration of the fallen members of the community and the celebration of Israeli statehood succeed each other within a period of eight days. In this way, destruction and renewal, uprooting and re-rooting, past and future

are tied together. An annual event that articulates the link between the Holocaust and Israel's national revival particularly vividly is the March of the Living, established in 1988 by the Israeli Ministry of Education (Aviv and Shneer 62). The March of the Living—named after the infamous "Death March" that Jews endured during the Shoah—is an educational program for Jewish youth, starting on Remembrance Day and ending one week later on Independence Day, in which adolescents from different countries travel from Poland to Israel. In Poland, participants visit Jewish museums, learn about Jewish life before the Second World War, and visit several deportation centres and death camps, among which Auschwitz and Birkenau. The marchers then travel to Israel "to witness the redemption that followed the Holocaust" (Goldman 168). There, to conclude their march, they plant trees, symbolizing "a Zionist history that moves from European death in the past to Israeli life in the future" (Aviv and Shneer 64).

In his 1882 lecture "What is a nation?", French philosopher Ernest Renan argued that national identity depends on shared remembering, as well as shared forgetting, stating that "forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation" (11). Similarly, Aleida Assmann asserts that official memory does not solely promote knowledge of a shared past, but it also "drives out any unofficial remembrance that might present itself as a critically subversive functional memory" (A. Assmann 128). Thus, while nation-states promote knowledge of the past that is considered worthy of remembrance or decisive for national identity, they simultaneously suppress any memory that disaffirms or challenges this official history. Indeed, in the official memory of Israel, trees not only serve to plant memories of a shared past in the consciousness of the Israeli people, but trees and forests also serve to erase traces of the past that conflict with the official narrative. Today, many of the Palestinian villages that were destroyed and bulldozed by Israeli forces during the 1948 war are covered by pine forests, which the Israeli government and the JNF proudly refer to as the vast "green lungs" of

Israel (Pappe 154). In these parks, audio-visual equipment displays Israel's official national history, presenting the land as empty and barren until the arrival of the Zionist settlers, who revived the desolate land (Pappe 228). All traces of the expelled Palestinians and their demolished houses remain hidden beneath the trees, picnic sites and playgrounds. In this manner, these forests, mostly planted during the first years of Israeli statehood, served to overwrite Palestinian history, inscribing Israel's official memory onto the landscape while simultaneously aiming to erase all remnants of a pre-existing Palestinian culture and its subsequent obliteration by Israeli forces during the 1948 war. In this sense, not only the Palestinian people themselves were besieged by the newly established State of Israel, but their memories and histories were as well.

3.3 DELEGITIMIZATION

Edward Said writes that "the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence, and with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality" ("Invention, Memory, and Place" 184). Indeed, Israel's master commemorative narrative negates the existence and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, denying them access to their histories in the most literal sense, as their villages lie entombed under recreational forests, or have been replaced by Jewish settlements. However, the officially-erased Palestinian history has not been completely eradicated by Israel's politics of remembering and forgetting. The 1948 dispossession of the Palestinian people, referred to by Palestinians as the *Nakba*, is increasingly researched,[3] documented, and

[3] One particularly significant research project is Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, published in 1992 after years of cooperation between several Palestinian research institutions. This 636-page work, containing photographs, maps, articles and testimonies of former inhabitants, aims to reconstruct the officially-erased histories of more than 400 Palestinian villages that were destroyed in 1948.

discussed, and, as sociologist Ronit Lentin asserts, "Palestinians are increasingly taking charge of commemorating their Nakba, in Palestine and elsewhere" (208). In addition to scholarly efforts of recovering Palestinian history,[4] important commemorative literary works were published from the early 1960s onwards. This period marked a turning point for *adab al-muqawamah*, "resistance literature," as writers such as Ghassan Kanafani began producing important fictional accounts of the Palestinian expulsion, and poets such as Mahmoud Darwish took a vital role in the Palestinian resistance movement (Masalha 45). As a result of academic work and cultural and artistic representations of Palestinian history, a new historical consciousness has emerged, which directly opposes the official memory promoted by the State of Israel and can therefore be characterized as "counter memory."

In the introduction to their book *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Loghud write that "Palestinian memory is, by dint of its preservation and social production under the conditions of its silencing by the thundering story of Zionism, dissident memory, counter memory. It contributes to a counter-history" (6). They argue that this counter memory is "at its heart, political," as it aims to revise remembrances of the past in order to effect political change in the future (8). Similarly, Aleida Assmann contends that counter memory is as political as official memory, since "in both instances it is linked with a claim to power" (129). Whereas official memory is primarily concerned with the legitimization of power, the motif underlying counter memory is the *delegitimization* of power. In this sense, the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians over

[4] It must be noted that efforts to revise the official memory of 1948 have not only been made by Palestinians, but by Israelis as well. Israeli-born historian Ilan Pappe, for example, has contributed significantly to the Palestinian struggle against *Nakba* denial. Pappe is one of the so-called "New Historians," also known as the Revisionist or Post-Zionist Historians, who challenged the official version of the establishment of the State of Israel from the 1980s onwards. For a brief introduction on Israel's New Historians, see Ottman 55-65.

power, land control and legitimacy is in fact a struggle over memory. Strikingly, Joseph Rosen described the Israel/Palestine conflict as a "memorial conflict," between a memory that is "acknowledged, legitimized and institutionalized" and a memory that is "disavowed or forgotten by the State of Israel" (Loubani and Rosen 120).

Trees play a pivotal role in the reclamation of Palestinian memory. Importantly, trees provide "proof" of Palestinian presence and persistence on the land, challenging Israel's master commemorative narrative of a return of "a people without a land to a land without a people." According to Edward Said, this widely-propagated slogan expresses the Zionist objective "to cancel and transcend an actual reality—a group of resident Arabs—by means of a future wish—that the land be empty for development by a more deserving power" (*The Question of Palestine* 9). Beyond providing mere metaphoric expressions of Palestinian rootedness, trees give material form to Palestinian claims of pre-1948 existence on the land. Thus, "Palestinian" trees such as the olive tree testify to the officially-erased memory of Palestinians, re-activating and re-exposing the silenced reality that Said refers to. This is illustrated by "The Path of Affection," written by Palestinian poet Laila 'Alush, which depicts trees as living reminders that the land is naturally and essentially Palestinian, despite Israel's efforts to appropriate it and transform it into a European-looking landscape:

> The land is still the old land
> despite pawned trees on the hillsides
> despite green clouds and fertilized plants
> and water sprinklers spinning so efficiently.
> On the startling road seized from the throat of new accounts
> the trees were smiling at me with Arab affection.
> … Everything is Arabic still,

despite the change of language
despite the huge trucks, and foreign tractors.
Each poplar and the orange grove of my ancestors
laughed to me, my God, with Arab affection.
(’Alush 173-75)

Undeterred by the newly imposed Israeli landscape, the indigenous trees have remained loyal to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, “smiling” to their rightful tenders and demonstrating that “everything is Arabic still.” In the same vein, Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “Diary of a Palestinian Wound” confronts the absenting of Palestinians from the landscape and from official history. Here, too, trees are central to the Palestinian struggle against Israeli efforts to Hebraize the landscape:

The archaeologist is busy analizing stones,
Searching for his eyes in the rubble of legends
In order to certify
That I am merely a passer-by on the road,
Without eyes or words in the scripture of civilization!
But I go on slowly planting my trees,
Singing about my love!
(qtd. Parmenter 92)

Although his land is expropriated and appropriated by the Israeli occupier, the narrator resolutely persists in cultivating it. While authorative figures such as archaeologists decide that the Palestinian is nothing more than “a passer-by,” his trees and his love for the land

seem to provide the only evidence to the contrary—that is, the Palestinian is not a mere passer-by on the road of Israel's history, but he is as deeply and firmly rooted in the land as the trees that he has nurtured so devotedly. Thus, the narrator's refusal to stop cultivating his confiscated land is, in effect, a refusal to be obliterated from the landscape, from history, from memory.

The particularly significant role of the olive tree in the reclamation of Palestinian memory becomes evident in the poem "On the Trunk of an Olive Tree" by Tawfiq Zayyad:

> Because I cannot own a piece of paper,
> I shall carve my memoirs
> On an olive tree, in the courtyard, of the house
> … I shall carve the number of each deed of our usurped land,
> The location of my village and its boundaries
> The demolished houses of its people, my uprooted trees,
> . . . And to remember it all,
> I shall continue to carve all the chapters of my tragedy,
> and all the stages of the disaster, from beginning to end,
> On the olive tree, in the courtyard, of the house.
> (qtd. Elmessiri 55)

As the narrator of the poem is denied a voice in official history writing—"a piece of paper"—he invests his memories in his olive tree. As a result, the olive tree narrates his story, and will continue to do so even when the protagonists of this story are gone. In this manner, the olive tree functions as "a proxy Palestinian witness, aligned with and testifying to Palestinian collective memory" (Bardenstein 155).

The typical alliance between memory and power finds strong expression in the Palestinian concept of *al-'awda*, "return," as it includes both "the *dream* of return ... and the *right* of return" (Hammer 75, my emphasis). Trees, I contend, operate on both levels—they articulate nostalgic memories of a lost homeland, while also asserting Palestinians' natural and rightful belonging to the land. Strikingly, indigenous "Palestinian" trees sometimes spring back after they have been bulldozed or overplanted, thus giving material form to the Palestinian narrative of return. In *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Ilan Pappe reports visiting the former village of Mujaydil with relatives of the town's original inhabitants. Transformed into a Jewish settlement after the 1948 war, the ruins of Mujaydil were partly overplanted with pine trees by the newly formed State of Israel. Because the pine trees failed to adapt to the local soil, however, the original flora was able to spring back between the disease-afflicted pines. In some instances, the pine trees had literally split in two while "in the middle of their broken trunks, olive trees had popped up in defiance of the alien flora planted over them fifty-six years ago" (228).

Similarly, Nasser Abufarha contends that the cactus tree has acquired new meanings since the 1948 *Nakba*, because of its refusal to stay buried in sites of bulldozed Palestinian villages (363). As Abufarha writes, "Palestinians perceive the cactus tree as a witness that refuses to die, so defiantly battling Israeli bulldozers that have tried to kill it and erase the traces of the Palestinian villages the cactus trees surrounded." It is no coincidence that these cactus trees grow in perfectly neat rows—Palestinian farmers planted cactus trees as fences to delineate boundaries of properties and plots of land. Often the only remaining traces of destroyed villages, these rows of cactus trees provide a macabre blueprint of the former Palestinian village. Ilan Pappe stresses that apparently "wild" fruit trees growing in and around Israeli settlements, such as olive trees, almonds, figs and cactuses, are in fact not wild at all: "[T]hese trees were planted and nurtured by human hands. Wherever almond and fig

trees, olive groves or clusters of cactuses are found, there once stood a Palestinian village" (228).

Importantly, the continued presence of indigenous Palestinian trees standing out against their new Israeli surroundings does not merely engender a particular articulation of the *past*. Indeed, the counter memory embodied and articulated by these trees not only challenges the official Israeli memory of the past, but also re-envisions the Palestinian present and future. Acting as bearers and agents of Palestinian counter memory, these trees undermine the dominant Israeli official memory as well as the political status quo sustained by it, thus inspiring resistance in the present and allowing for alternative visions of the future. As Carol Bardenstein writes, trees function as "relics of a receding past being brought back in attempts to revise the collective memory-in-the-making, as it unfolds into the present and future" (151). The present-orientedness of Palestinian counter memories fixated upon trees is exemplified by the documentary *5 Broken Cameras*, which I briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The film depicts the struggle of the residents of the village of Bil'in, located in the occupied West Bank, who continue to cultivate their confiscated lands as a form of non-violent protest. During harvest time, for example, the villagers set out to pick olives from the trees they are no longer allowed to access, as these trees stand on the Israeli side of the separation barrier. Similarly, when an olive orchard on village land is set on fire by Jewish settlers, the villagers immediately gather to replant young olive saplings. One of the protesters, walking with a sprouting young olive tree in one hand and the Palestinian flag in the other, tells an Israeli soldier: "We have to plant this on our land … I'll plant it and it'll feed us with olives." Although in both instances violence breaks out before the villagers are able to successfully pick the olives or plant the seedlings, these are powerful acts of memory. The dispossessed Palestinians persist in planting and harvesting their trees—as they have done for generations—even though the Israeli occupier persists in confiscating and destroying

them. In this manner, the Palestinian villagers continue to re-assert and re-enact their presence on the land and their control over it, if only for a brief moment. Endowed with memories of the past, the olive tree provides a powerful means to re-claim the land in the present. Thus, rather than merely articulating memories of a remote, nostalgic past, the power of the olive tree lies within its potential to activate dissatisfaction with the political present and to inspire hope for an alternative future.

3.4 DISTINCTION

A third task of functional cultural memory described by Aleida Assmann is "distinction," which constitutes the construction and stabilization of a distinct common identity. The relevance of memory for the construction of a collective identity was stressed by Maurice Halbwachs, who asserted that "every group develops the memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. These reconstructed images provide the group with an account of its origin and development and thus allow it to recognize itself through time" (86). Similarly, Jan Assmann argues that it is through shared remembrance that "a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" ("Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" 130). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the collective identities of both Israelis and Palestinians are inextricably linked to memories of the defining events of 1948—remembered by Israelis as their War of Independence, while commemorated by Palestinians as their *Nakba*—which marked the enrooting of one group and the uprooting of the other. As a result, collective memories of rootedness, rootlessness and uprootedness are central to the identities of both Israelis and Palestinians. As demonstrated earlier, trees are particularly potent triggers and selectively accessed markers of these identity-forming memories. Therefore, they play a key role in the construction and stabilization of a distinct Israeli identity, as well as a unifying Palestinian identity.

The foundation of a Jewish state in 1948 forged a new imagined community and thus marked the construction of a new Jewish-Israeli identity. In the process of defining a distinct collective identity, the greatly diverse immigrant society of the newly formed State of Israel almost obsessively re-examined its own history and national foundations (Zerubavel, "The 'Mythological Sabra' and Jewish Past" 115). In *Recovered Roots*, Zerubavel proposes that the commemoration of a group's beginnings, or "birth," is essential for delineating its identity vis-à-vis other groups (7). She asserts that the commemoration of beginnings establishes the group as a distinct unit, often by tracing its common roots back to a distant past. The foundation of the State of Israel marked a break with the exilic period and the emergence of a new collective entity, which traced its common roots all the way back to Jewish antiquity. Indeed, Zerubavel asserts that the construction of a new Jewish-Israeli identity was grounded in the desire for "continuity and identification with Antiquity and a dissociation from the period of exile." While the Diaspora Jew was portrayed as "uprooted," and as defenceless in face of persecution, the "new Jew" was imagined as strong, resourceful, firmly and permanently rooted (116). Indeed, Carol Bardenstein argues that Israel's massive tree-planting projects served to redefine Jewish collective identity as a national unity rooted in a specific geographical location, breaking with the "diasporic collective identity" of the exilic period (158). At the same time, the afforestation project forged a sense of continuity between Jewish antiquity and Israeli modernity, reconstructing the imagined biblical past in the present.

By planting trees and forests and thus restoring the land to its biblical glory, the rebirth of the Jewish people was linked to the rebirth of the landscape, giving material form to the new Jewish-Israeli identity. In her article "Planting the Promised Landscape," Irus Braverman writes that after she was born in Jerusalem, her parents received a JNF certificate stating that a tree was planted in the Jerusalem Peace Forest in their baby's name. The certificate's

inscription read: "A tree is planted in the name of the newborn in the Peace Forest in Jerusalem. We wish you the fortune of seeing it/her grow with much pleasure and ease" (320). The certificate depicts a single tree in the foreground and a large, green forest in the background. As Braverman asserts, the certificate demonstrates the importance of notions of rebirth and renewal in the construction of Israeli collective memory and identity, tying together the newborn child, the new tree, the reborn landscape, and the renewal of the Jewish collective. Today, a variety of certificates can be purchased in the JNF web shop, in honour of a birth, bar/bat mitzvah, birthday or wedding. For 18 US dollars, the JNF will send the recipient a certificate with a personalized message, and plant a tree in his or her name. Furthermore, in contemporary Israel references to a common history and a distinct collective identity continue to be consolidated and stabilized through tree-planting rituals, the annual celebration of tree-planting festival *Tu Bishvat*, and education programs such as *yediat ha'aretz*, "knowing the land." Indeed, "[t]here is hardly a citizen of the state who has not planted a tree with his or her own hands" (Cohen 8).

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was definitive for the construction of Israeli identity, and simultaneously constituted a turning point in the collective memory and identity of Palestinians. Indeed, the *Nakba* forms "a constitutive element of Palestinian identity," which "connects all Palestinians to a specific point in time that has become for them an 'eternal present'" (Sa'di 177). Although the *Nakba* shattered the geographical unity of Palestine, producing three geographically distinct populations—the Palestinians inside Israel, those in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the refugees outside former Palestine—memories of the *Nakba* unite all three Palestinian constituencies, thus shaping and sustaining their collective identity (Masalha 31). In the construction of post-1948 Palestinian identity, memories of uprootedness reinforced the centrality of the land. As political sociologists Eitan Alimi and Hank Johnston contend, connectedness to the land is at the core of Palestinian

collective identity, not despite but *because* of the continuing experience of dispossession and occupation (174). After 1948, the figure of the peasant, or *fallah*, emerged as a powerful symbol of Palestine and Palestinian-ness (Essaid 3-4). According to Ted Swedenburg, "[t]he figure of the *fallah* is employed not to rally an actual peasantry to the national cause, but to constitute a unified people-nation and endow it with an authentic history and culture" (19). In Mahmoud Darwish's long poem "A Lover From Palestine," the image of the orange grove—emblematic of Palestinian rural life—is employed as an allegory of the uprooted Palestinian people, who are unified and resilient despite the experience of exile:

> How is it that the green orange grove can be dragged
>
> To a prison, to an exile, to a port
>
> And despite all its travels,
>
> Despite the scents of salt and longing,
>
> Still remain so green?
>
> (qtd. Elmessiri 125)

Here, the Palestinian people are imagined as intact, despite experiences of expulsion and exile. The resilient trees/Palestinians grow thick, deep roots, and, as a result, are undeterred by the Israeli oppression.

As demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, clinging to the land in the face of dispossession is considered an iconic trait of Palestinian identity. The concept of *sumud*, "steadfastness," emerged when Israel took control over the Occupied Territories in 1967, and

constitutes "perhaps the most central concept in modern Palestinian identity," as British journalist Arthur Neslen suggests in his book on Palestinian identity (10). When Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the ideal image of the Palestinian became "the peasant who stayed put on his land and refused to leave" (Schulz 104). The olive tree was taken up as the ultimate symbol of Palestinian *sumud*, representing the non-violent resistance strategy pursued in the Occupied Territories from 1967 onwards. The 2009 documentary film *Budrus* depicts the concept of Palestinian *sumud* in an exemplary way, demonstrating its close relatedness to the land, and, particularly, olive trees.

The film shows the struggle and steadfastness of the villagers of Budrus, a small West Bank village that relies on the cultivation of olives. When the villagers learn that the construction of Israel's separation barrier will cut them off from 300 acres of land and 3,000 olive trees, they decide to fight the construction of the wall by organizing non-violent demonstrations. The resistance movement is led by a villager named Ayed Morrar and his fifteen-year-old daughter Iltezam. When the Israeli army announces the uprooting of olive trees in order to start the construction of the separation barrier, the villagers march into the olive fields before the arrival of the bulldozers and refuse to move. "If they uproot one tree, we will plant ten more," the protesters sing. Eventually, the bulldozers leave. The villagers continue their protests, joined by Israeli and international activists. In one scene, Iltezam jumps in front of a bulldozer in order to stop it from uprooting an olive tree. "The soldier could do nothing except taking the bulldozer and going away," Iltezam tells the camera in an intersecting shot. "I'm sure everyone in Budrus remembers that day." Finally, after ten months of protesting, the determination of the villagers pays off: the Israeli government decides to move back the route of the separation barrier, saving the land of Budrus and its olive trees from destruction. The film concludes with the documentary's voice-over affirming that "Budrus has inspired villages across the West Bank to adopt non-violent resistance to

save their lands." In the film's final shot, Ayed Morrar sets out to the nearby village of Nil'in to support the local resistance movement there.

Non-violent protests aimed at saving or re-planting olive trees are important acts of memory, asserting memories of long-established roots in the land and profiling a distinct "tree-like" identity, characterized by pacificity, immobility and resilience. Like the trees, the Palestinian villagers remain steadfastly on their land in the face of uprooting. However, the concept of *sumud* extends beyond the physical persistence of Palestinians. Importantly, "[a] Palestinian can be *samida* or *samid* (steadfast) when she or he does not live on Palestinian soil but still works toward keeping Palestinian identity alive" (Rijke and Van Teeffelen 89). Abdel Fatah Abu Srour, who was born and raised in a refugee camp and now directs cultural programs in the 'Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, describes the concept of *sumud* as follows:

> To reclaim that I am Palestinian, wherever I am, is *sumud*. *Sumud* is preserving the identity, the memories, the customs and habits, the popular arts, the attachment to the land, the values that make us into human beings, across generations. (qtd. Rijke and Van Teeffelen 91)

Thus, beyond signifying a mere material clinging to the land, *sumud* entails holding on to collective Palestinian memory and identity. *Sumud* may take the form of continuing to cultivate olive trees in the Occupied Territories, but, more importantly, it means continuing to cultivate the memories that the olive trees are endowed with.

CONCLUSION

We insist on the historical right of the Jewish people to the whole of Eretz Israel. Every hill in Samaria, every valley in Judea, is a part of our historical homeland. We do not forget this fact, even for one moment.

—Ehud Olmert, "The Herzliya Address" (2)

My roots

Were entrenched before the birth of time

And before the opening of the eras

Before the pines, and the olive trees

—Mahmoud Darwish, "Identity Card" (74)

The Israel/Palestine conflict is one of the most enduring conflicts of our time. In this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate that the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians is not merely a struggle over land, but also a struggle conducted and articulated through the land and through trees more specifically, as both Israelis and Palestinians invest memory in "their" trees, the pine tree and the olive tree respectively. At the crux of the territorial struggle between Israelis and Palestinians are competing claims of rootedness, as both parties regard the land of Israel/Palestine as their primordial homeland. Both parties advance their right to the land on the basis of an historical connection to it; Palestinians had been living on the land for hundreds of years before the conflict arose—that is, "before the pines and the olives"—while

Israelis trace their roots in the land all the way back to biblical times. The epigraphs cited above, taken from a speech by former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert and a poem by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, express these conflicting claims of historical rootedness and belonging. I have chosen these epigraphs specifically because they highlight two central focuses of this thesis: the significance of memory in Israeli and Palestinian discourses of rootedness—as Olmert asserts, the Jewish origins in the Land of Israel are not forgotten, "even for one moment"—and the ways in which these collective memories are selectively accessed and activated through trees, more specifically through pine trees and olive trees.

I began my analysis of the role of trees in assertions of Israeli and Palestinians rootedness by exploring the origins of the strong identification between Israelis and the pine tree on the one hand, and between Palestinians and the olive tree on the other. As legal scholar Irus Braverman suggests, these two tree species have assumed "the totemic quality of their people, reflecting and reifying the standing conflict" (Braverman, *Planted Flags* 165). The totemic relationship between Israelis/pines and Palestinians/olives is based on perceived similarities between the peoples and "their" trees. For Israelis, the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland is reflected by the return of pine trees and forests, of which the neglected land had been deprived during the two millennia of Jewish exile. Through the highly symbolic act of tree-planting, both the people and the pines re-establish deep roots in the soil of their homeland, which, in turn, sustains the pines/people and enables them to grow and flourish. The Israeli narrative of return and redemption is contested, however, by the Palestinian identification with the olive tree, which articulates the resistance to the dispossession of Palestinian lands. Like their olive trees, Palestinians have been uprooted—and continue to be uprooted—by the Israeli occupier. Thus, a powerful alliance is forged between Israelis and the pine tree on the one hand, and between Palestinians and the olive tree on the other.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I argued that the "Israeli" pine tree and the "Palestinian" olive tree function as powerful sites of memory, as they have become invested with collective memories of Israelis and Palestinians respectively. The concept of sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, was developed by French historian Pierre Nora, referring to sites—whether material or immaterial—which are of symbolic significance to a particular cultural group, as these sites have become endowed with memory. Nora argues, as I have previously noted, that sites of memory emerge when a rupture between past and present occurs. Both Israelis and Palestinians have experienced such a break between past and present in the form of exile, which has disrupted their respective people-land bonds. The disruption of the people-land bonds of both Israelis and Palestinians has given rise to trees as potent sites of memory, albeit in fundamentally different ways. Israelis have invested the pine tree with memories of an ancient past, from before the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora, when a sovereign Jewish state existed in the Land of Israel. Through re-forestation, the land is restored to its imagined biblical glory, creating continuing bonds between antiquity and modernity and between the ancient Jewish people and their modern Israeli descendants. Palestinians have experienced exile in a more recent past, as the emplacement of the Israeli people resulted in the displacement of the Palestinian people. Standing as remnants of a lost way of life in the newly imposed Israeli landscape, indigenous trees such as the olive tree offer a material link to the Palestinian past, through which a constant recuperation and reconstruction of this once stable past takes place. Thus, for both Israelis and Palestinians, trees function as potent bearers of memory, marking loss and discontinuity, while also embodying the potential for establishing continuing bonds between past and present, and between land and people.

A key assumption running through this thesis is that memory is not a passive container of representations of the past, but, rather, an activity that occurs in the present and serves a

multitude of purposes. Aleida Assmann has delineated some of these purposes or "tasks" of memory, arguing that memory can serve to (de)legitimize power and profile a distinct collective identity. In the third chapter of this thesis, I showed that trees, functioning as active bearers and agents of Israeli and Palestinians collective memory, perform precisely these tasks. According to Assmann, the legitimization of power is the primary task of "official memory," or the collective memory promoted by those in power. For Israelis, afforestation has served to legitimize the establishment of the State of Israel by "planting" memories of historical rootedness in the consciousness of the Israeli citizens. In contemporary Israel, trees and forests have an official commemorative role, as they function as memorials and monuments commemorating the official history of Israel. Furthermore, forests serve to cover up material traces of a pre-existing Palestinian presence in Israel/Palestine, literally overplanting the ruins of destroyed Palestinian villages. The official Israeli narrative is contested by the Palestinian "counter memory," which aims to delegitimize power that is experienced as oppressive or tyrannical. Invested with memories of a once-stable Palestinian past, indigenous "Palestinian" trees such as the olive tree challenge Israel's master commemorative narrative, which seeks to retroactively obliterate Palestinian presence from the landscape and from the annals of history.

Aside from (de)legitimizing power through the assertion or denial of historical claims to the land, a third task of memory—performed by trees—in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict is distinction, or the profiling of a unique collective identity. For Israelis, the renewal of the landscape mirrors the rebirth of the Jewish people in the ancestral homeland, redefining Jewish-Israeli identity as a geographically unified and firmly rooted one, breaking with the diasporic identity of the exilic period. Through numerous tree-planting rituals, the annual celebration of tree-planting festival *Tu Bishvat*, and education programs such as *yediat ha'aretz*, "knowing the land," references to a shared history and a distinct collective identity

are reinforced and continually consolidated. For Palestinians, trees articulate a strong and long-established Palestinian connectedness to the land, which, as I have noted, is at the core of Palestinian collective identity. Importantly, the olive has been taken up as the embodiment of Palestinian *sumud*, or steadfastness, as both the Palestinian people and their olive trees are naturally and permanently rooted in the land. Even in the face of uprooting, they cannot be erased from the landscape, and their roots cannot be severed.

I hope that with my research, I am able to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Israel/Palestine conflict and the unlikely role played by trees therein. As I have argued, acts of memory directed towards trees and tree-planting actively reflect and shape the on-going struggle between Israelis and Palestinians. Perhaps, then, a better understanding of the relevance and significance of trees in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict might constitute a step in the right direction on the road to resolution.

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