

Conserving the Spice of Life: An Analysis of the 1977 Za'atar
Regulation in Israel and Occupied Territories of the West Bank

by

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In 1977, the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture declared wild za'atar a protected plant in Israel, strictly regulating its harvesting. The criminalization of za'atar harvesting continues to be enforced in Israel and occupied territories of the West Bank by the Israeli Nature and Parks Association (INPA). The enforcement has disproportionately negatively impacted Palestinians, leading to debates about the policy's motivations and efficacy. The goal of this research is to understand the main themes of this issue through a lens of political ecology. I do this by isolating and analyzing narratives from the Israeli government and INPA, and from Palestinian foragers and scholars regarding the za'atar regulation and its continued enforcement. I perform a thematic analysis of the regulation, letters, articles, webpages, and a film from the two different narrative perspectives. The concept of green colonialism, which refers to the use of environmental conservation and protection to mask or serve colonial ends, is applied to the themes.¹The INPA emphasizes conservation concerns, while the Palestinian narrative situates the regulation within the context of the greater conflict. Joint Israeli-Palestinian efforts to address conservation in the West Bank are highlighted, and the importance of analyzing environmental conservation regulations to ensure efficacy and consideration of stakeholders is emphasized.

¹ Tilley, L., Ranawana, A. M., Baldwin, A., & Tully, T. M. (2022). Race and climate change: Towards anti-racist ecologies. *Politics*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957221127166>

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1. Introduction

On Om Said's kitchen table, there was a myriad of things that would rotate every day. Wooden spoons and ma'amoul² pattern presses would sit out one day and then be replaced with a bowl of green almonds and the newest edition of the paper the next. Playing cards from the night before would be cleaned up by afternoon and then various empty Tupperware would take its place. The only consistent item on the table was a little ceramic dish with two shallow bowls connected by a handle. One filled with olive oil and the other with za'atar. Every time I took a bite of bread coated with the za'atar, and let out a satisfied sigh, Om Said would grin and say "Azky"- the most delicious. Her za'atar was exclusively from Palestine and would make sure I knew it. She fled Palestine after her home in Nablus was occupied in 1967 by Israeli forces. She spurned Jordanian and packaged za'atar, and I came to understand that for her, Palestinian za'atar was emblematic of home.³

² A date-filled shortbread cookie, often with decorative designs on the top

³ My experience and introduction to za'atar by my host mother in Jordan



Figure 1. Photo of the well-loved za'atar and olive oil contraption on my host mother's kitchen counter alongside morning tea and labneh

1.1 Relevance and Research Questions

The za'atar you might come across in stores is a spice blend of dried thyme, toasted sesame seeds, salt, oregano, and cumin. This is its most common exported form. However, za'atar is also a plant that grows wildly. In English, the wild za'atar plant can be known as “middle eastern oregano” and is noticeably more aromatic and flavorful than European oregano. Its scientific name, *Origanum syriacum*, places it in the mint/sage botanical family, and it grows wildly in Syria, Palestine, Israel, and Lebanon.

The Palestinian usage of za'atar dates to medieval times, and preparing it is a regional and familial process, linking generations and personal geographies together.^{4 5} Today, za'atar is an

⁴ James Hodapp *Graphic Novels and Comics as World Literature*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

⁵ Basan, Ghillie. *Middle Eastern Kitchen*. Hippocrene Books, 2006.

integral ingredient in the Palestinian staple dish, manakeesh,⁶ tossed over salads, dips, and used as a spice rub for meats and vegetables. Its significance goes beyond its culinary uses. In many Palestinian and Levantine communities alike, it permeates idioms and superstition. For example, children are told that eating za'atar in the morning before school makes them smarter.⁷ The process of collecting the za'atar is a large part of its generational tradition. In the 17th and 18th century, Palestine operated on subsistence production methods locally referred to as “Musha’a”, translating to “the collective”.⁸ This was a kinship arrangement in which familial knowledge, practices, and resources were shared for effective management. Community members come together to gather za'atar and women sit together preparing it for drying. It is in these practices where social capital is gained and community is maintained.

2.2 Za'atar and Israel

Za'atar is similarly used by Israelis and has long culinary and religious roots in Judaism. The written historical usage of the herb dates back to the Book of Exodus, in which za'atar was referred to as “ezov”.⁹ The herb was notably used in ritual purity ceremonies.¹⁰ Most notably, the Book of Exodus specifies that the stalks of za'atar were used for drawing the Paschal sacrifice on the doorsteps of the Jewish people escaping bondage in Egypt, marking the holiday commonly

⁶ Flatbread commonly topped with olive oil, za'atar, ground meat, and/or cheese

⁷ Swedenburg, Ted. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. University of Arkansas Press, 2003.

⁸ Matan Kaminer, "The Agricultural Settlement of the Arabah and the Political Ecology of Zionism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 54, no. 1 (February 2022): 40-56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743821001021>.

⁹ Shayna Rose Triebwasser, "Zesty Za'atar: Biblical Herb, Modern Seasoning," *Jewish Journal*, March 10, 2021, <https://jewishjournal.com/culture/food/336015/zesty-zaatar-biblical-herb-modern-seasoning/>.

¹⁰ Leviticus 14:4, 6, 51-52; Numbers 20:18, Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

known as Passover in the Jewish community.¹¹ The Manisha also established the traditional culinary usage of the herb in the home as a seasoning for stews.¹²

Today, za'atar is referred to by some Israeli communities as “biblical hyssop.” The current culinary usages of za'atar in Israeli communities are very similar to that of Palestinian usages. It's used as a complimentary, staple spice for a variety of different foods, notably manakeesh, hummus, and salads. Both Israelis and Palestinians have connections to this herb that are based on historical and culinary traditions, however, with the conflict has come additional meanings and connotations placed upon za'atar by Palestinians which is what makes this research relevant.

2.3 Evolved Meaning of Za'atar for Palestinians

While za'atar is present in both Israeli and Palestinian communities, Palestinians have attached additional significance to za'atar specific to the context of the ongoing conflict. With a complicated and receding physical relationship to land, za'atar has become a symbol of a Palestinian tether to the landscape as well as resistance. This symbol is integral to understanding the role of za'atar in the lives of Palestinians. The widespread usage of za'atar as a symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance amidst occupation came out of the following poem written by Mahmoud Darwish, who frequently wrote about the Palestinian struggle for identity amidst war and occupation.

لبيدِين من حَجَرٍ وزَعْتَرٍ

هَذَا النَشِيدُ لِأَحْمَدَ الْمَنْسِيِّ بَيْنَ فَرَاشَتَيْنِ

¹¹ Exodus 12:22, Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

¹² Mishnah Torah, Parah Adumah 3:2, The William Davidson Talmud, Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Parah_Adumah.3.2?lang=bi.

مَصَّتِ الغيومُ وشرَّدتني

ورمتُ معاطفها الجبالُ وخبَّأتني¹³

For Hands of Stone and Za'atar

This poem for Ahmad, forgotten between two butterflies.

The clouds have parted and left me homeless,

The mountains have flung their mantles and concealed me...¹⁴

This poem utilizes za'atar as a symbol to describe the siege of Tel-Al Za'atar, a Palestinian refugee camp that was attacked by the Lebanese Christian Militia during the Lebanese civil war in 1976. The camp housed over 20,000 Palestinian refugees, many of whom were As-Sa'iqa Palestinian Liberation Organization supporters. Between 1,000-1,500 Palestinians were killed in the siege, not including those who died due to the mass evacuation without resources, and over 10,000 were injured.¹⁵ This event was one of many marking the necessity for home and place of the Palestinian people, which is echoed in this poem, using stones and za'atar as a metaphor for the hands of Palestinians, and giving the herb symbolic meaning in light of occupation.¹⁶

Palestinians often utilize plants as a metaphor for identity and resistance. Palestinians use this to show their steadfastness and resistance to occupation. In an interview about the conflict, a

¹³ Darwish, Mohamad. "Ahmed AlZa'atar" 1977 [excerpt]

¹⁴ Translation done by Kate Reynolds

¹⁵ "Tall Al-Za'tar | Lebanon, History, & Massacre | Britannica."

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tall-al-Zatar>

¹⁶ Swedenburg, Ted. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. University of Arkansas Press, 2003.

Palestinian man, Haqma Abu-Madighem, said, “I am like a tree rooted here. If they remove me, I will die,” and that “if they try to uproot us, we will grow back, we will come back. This is where I have my roots.”¹⁷ Another Palestinian who was interviewed, Fakhre Abu-Diab, said “We don’t need money, I can live with my children and my wife and eat only za’atar,” connecting za’atar to their immovability.¹⁸ This significance of za’atar in the home, as a community tradition, and as a symbol of identity and resistance, build it up with great importance to Palestinians.

2.4 The 1977 Regulation of Za’atar

In 1977 a study conducted by Israeli botanists and scientists warned about the environmental risks of overharvesting wild za’atar. The minister of agriculture at the time, Areal Shoroul, then declared the edible plants, za’atar and myramea¹⁹, as protected in Israel. Along with the label of being a protected species came criminalization. People could be briefly imprisoned or fined for picking, possessing, or trading za’atar, and several people were taken to criminal trials. However, the policy surrounding the criminalization of za’atar did not specify amounts that could be harvested, leading to misunderstanding of criminalization and fine amounts. In 2005, regulations about picking akkoub²⁰ and za’atar extended to military law and thus had grounds to be enforced in occupied territories of the West Bank. According to court documents, 100% of those sent to trial were classified as Palestinians from 1977 to 2017.²¹ This

¹⁷ Lecoquierre, Marion. *Emplaced Resistance in Palestine and Israel: The Cases of Hebron, Silwan and al-Araqib*. Routledge, 2021

¹⁸ Lecoquierre, Marion. *Emplaced Resistance in Palestine and Israel: The Cases of Hebron, Silwan and al-Araqib*. Routledge, 2021

¹⁹ Arabic transliterated word for “Sage” plant

²⁰ Another edible wild plant that grows in the Levant that is significant to Palestinian cuisine and culture.

²¹ Eghbariah, Rabea. "The Criminalization of Za'Atar and Akkoub: On Edible Plants in Palestinian Cuisine and Israeli Plant Protection Laws (Hebrew)." *Law, Society & Culture Series*, January 1, 2017,

revelation, which came to public knowledge after lawyer, Rabea Eghbariah's 2017 paper on the legal implications of the za'atar regulations, led to several articles and efforts to revise the regulation. Public pressure and the increase in the regulation's visibility led to challenges to the Israeli Nature and Park Authority's (INPA) enforcement. In response to the spike in articles and the consistent challenges, in 2019 the INPA reversed the prosecutorial policy and provided clearer definitions of when and why people can be taken into court based on repeat offenses and how much they pick of za'atar. The revision was in place for three years following 2019 and will be renewed for another year. Given the complex meaning to za'atar and its regulation in the West Bank, I ask the following research questions:

1. *How do the predominant themes differ in the narratives of Palestinians and the Israeli government regarding the implementation and continued enforcement of the wild za'atar harvesting regulation?*
2. *How is the Palestinian narrative emblematic and rooted in the theory of Green Colonialism?*

By answering these research questions, I aim to contribute towards a greater understanding of the attitudes towards conservation regulations in the West Bank and provides the groundwork for future field research into the impacts of such regulations. Most importantly, by understanding these narratives, research can focus on the conditions for effective future conservation efforts in the region.

https://www.academia.edu/34734748/The_Criminalization_of_Zaatar_and_Akkoub_On_Edible_Plants_in_Palestinian_Cuisine_and_Israeli_Plant_Protection_Laws_Hebrew_

2. Background



Figure 2: Bush of Wild Za'atar Image²²

2.1 Context of Territoriality: The Israel-Palestine Conflict

While the tensions between Israel and Palestine have existed since the early 20th century, it is commonly understood that the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict originated in 1947 with the United Nation's passage of Resolution 181, otherwise known as the Partition Plan. The Partition Plan allocated land from the British Mandate of Palestine to establish a Jewish state, which would become Israel.²³ The creation of Israel was a part of a longstanding desire for a Jewish homeland after years of persecution and diaspora. However, the Partition not only

²² Davidbena. "Bush of Wild Za'atar." Photograph. Wikimedia Commons, 16 June 2006, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bush_of_wild_zal%27atar.jpg. CC BY-SA 3.0.

²³ "Council on Foreign Relations. "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." Accessed on April 27, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict.>"

displaced Palestinians, but also created tensions over boundaries, resources, and citizenship between the two states.

Once the partition passed, the definition of Zionism incorporated notions of expansion, which manifested in Jewish settlements and raids in Palestinian villages and instances of occupation.²⁴ This ignited the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, in which the state of Israel triumphed over the Arab cause. The war displaced over 750,000 Palestinians (58-63% of the total population), depopulated 531 Palestinian villages and 11 urban districts, and established the West Bank and Gaza Strip.²⁵ Further territorial expansion into the West Bank and Gaza by the Israeli military occurred during the 1967 Nakba, displacing an additional 100,000-300,000 Palestinians.^{26 27} To this day, roughly 4.7 million Palestinians, or 67% of Palestinians worldwide, are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which was established to aid the vast number of refugees from the conflict.²⁸ The conflict and tensions between the Israeli government and Palestinians continue today, with frequent violent attacks against one another.

While the violence of the conflict is heavily covered in media, the non-physical dimensions of Palestinian-Israeli relations are just as consequential. Lately, attention has been

²⁴ Oren, Michael B. "Origins and Evolution of Zionism." Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 8, 2015. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/01/origins-and-evolution-of-zionism/>.

²⁵ Morris, Benny. 1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War. Yale University Press, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1np9bm>.

²⁶ D Newman (middle east peace class)

²⁷ "Middle East Palestinian Refugee Factbox/Timeline." ReliefWeb. Accessed on April 27, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/middle-east-palestinian-refugee-factboxtimeline>.

²⁸ "Middle East Palestinian Refugee Factbox/Timeline." ReliefWeb. Accessed on April 27, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/middle-east-palestinian-refugee-factboxtimeline>.

directed to natural resource management within the context of the conflict, especially given the region's susceptibility to climate change. Water accessibility is highly politicized in the Israel-Palestine conflict because of depleting resources and the allocation of the Jordan river flow to its four bordering nations. Literature focuses on the Israeli government's attempts in restricting water access from Palestinian villages, notably through military control of the Golan Heights.²⁹

³⁰ ³¹ Significant scholarship also addresses the necessity of transboundary, bilateral relations between Israel and Palestine to solve the water crisis in the Levant region and the narratives that surround building this cooperation.³²

Alongside water, other issues of natural resource accessibility are gaining recognition as a part of the greater conflict. Especially in the realm of differing power dynamics and territoriality, debates surrounding certain regulations that limit the harvesting of wild plants imposed by the Israeli government are increasing in media coverage.³³ One of the plants at the center of conservation regulations is za'atar, which has elicited debate between Palestinian foragers and the Israeli government on its continued, sweeping enforcement. This study focuses

²⁹ Duiker, William J. "The UN and the Palestine Question, 1947–1949." *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (1990): 293-324. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027688>

³⁰ Authority, Palestinian Water. "National water and wastewater policy and strategy for Palestine: Toward building a Palestinian state from water perspective." Ramallah: Palestinian Water Authority (2013).

³¹ Golan Heights is Israeli-occupied Syrian territory. While the territory itself is small, the Jordan river headwaters sits at its Northern Border, making it a strategic land-grab. This control over the headwaters has allowed Israel to divert and control water resources. In 2015, 92% of water from West Bank went to Israeli settlers in the region. Clemens Messerschmid and Jan Selby, "Misrepresenting the Jordan River Basin," *Water Alternatives* 8, no. 2 (2015): 258–79.

³² Morris, Avigail, Matthias Kalkuhl, et al. "The Water-Energy-Food Nexus in the Jordan River Basin: An Integrated Quantitative Assessment." *Water* 13, no. 5 (March 3, 2021): 620. <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/13/5/620>.

³³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Israel's Exploitation of Palestinian Resources is a Human Rights Violation, Says UN Expert," 18 March 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2019/03/israels-exploitation-palestinian-resources-human-rights-violation-says-un-expert>.

on understanding the narratives of the wild za'atar regulation by addressing the following research questions:

2.5 Relevant Literature

2.5.1. *Political Ecology in the Israeli-Palestine Conflict*

There is a multitude of literature on the environment, agriculture, and political ecology within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The most extensive example of literature pertaining to the political ecology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is “Palestinian and Israeli Environmental Narratives: proceedings of a Conference held in Association with the Middle East Environmental Futures Project” edited by Stuart Schoenfeld.³⁴ The scholarly articles explain the relationship between Zionism and environmentalism by the Israeli government and the implications of this approach for various stakeholders. It frames the power differentials between Israel and Palestine and establishes how these influence resource management in the region. The narratives utilized by these curated articles are utilized in framing the debates and discussions. The ties between the “administration of nature” and settler colonial strategies of Zionist settlements have been explored as well, most recently in “Settling Nature” by Irus Braverman. “Politics of Planting” by Shaul Cohen similarly discusses political ecology concerning territoriality, specifically analyzing how planting trees is used by Israelis and Palestinians to lay

³⁴ Schoenfeld, Stuart. “Palestinian and Israeli Environmental Narratives: Proceedings of a Conference Held in Association with the Middle East Environmental Futures Project.” *Palestinian and Israeli Environmental Narratives: Proceedings of a Conference Held in Association with the Middle East Environmental Futures Project*, January 1, 2005. https://www.academia.edu/2534589/Palestinian_and_Israeli_Environmental_Narratives_proceedings_of_a_conference_held_in_association_with_the_Middle_East_Environmental_Futures_Project

claim to land in Jerusalem.³⁵ As mentioned before, most scholarship on resources in the conflict is focused on water access, to the point where it is widely considered a human rights issue.^{36 37 38} All of these resources heavily draw upon the lived experiences and narratives of Palestinians and the Israeli government which is the approach this study utilizes as well. However, instead of asserting the Zionist and colonial relationship to environmentalism, I will be highlighting how this relationship transpires in the Palestinian narratives regarding wild za'atar harvesting regulations.

2.52. *Za'atar Politics*

Journal articles and literature shedding light on other aspects of ecology in the conflict are becoming more prevalent, whether it decentralizes water from the main argument or focuses entirely on plants and agriculture.³⁹ However, the narratives surrounding the regulation of wild za'atar harvesting have not been given the same attention as oil, water, and other topics of contention within political ecology scholarship of Israel and Palestine, written in English.

Available academic literature on the za'atar regulations is typically written with a stance for or against continued enforcement.⁴⁰ The available English arguments against the regulation and criminalization of wild za'atar harvesting are mainly characterized by the academic works of

³⁵ Cohen, Shaul. *Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

³⁶Shelby, Jan. "Divided Environments- An International Political Ecology Of Climate Change, Water and Security" *Cambridge University Press*. 2022.

³⁷ "Lonergan, Stephen C. and David B. Brooks "Watershed: The Role of Fresh Water in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" IDRC - International Development Research Centre. <https://www.idrc.ca/en/book/watershed-role-fresh-water-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

³⁸ Zeitoun, Mark. "Power and Water in the Middle East: The Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict" *Library of the Middle East Studies*. 2008

³⁹ Braverman, Irus. "Settling Nature." Book. University of Minnesota Press, 2023. <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/settling-nature>.

⁴⁰ Swedenburg, Ted. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. University of Arkansas Press, 2003.

artist Jumana Manna and Eghribeyeah. Manna draws upon lived experience and theoretical implications of the regulation in the greater context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Eghbariah's research is mainly based on highlighting legal analysis and flaws of the criminalization of za'atar.⁴¹ Within the dialogue formed by these sources and others regarding za'atar, there is an emphasis on how the regulation is utilized to oppress Palestinians. Swedenburg calls the regulations on za'atar harvesting "Green Zionism," referring to the utilization of environmental conservation narratives to justify the control and occupation of more land from Palestinians.⁴² Instead of addressing whether the regulation's presence is justified or not, I will be breaking down the arguments made in favor and against it. This will provide a lens through which scholars can understand the main themes within the Palestinian perspective alongside and in response to the popularized narratives by the Israeli government.

Political ecology literature centralized in the Israel-Palestine conflict commonly relies upon narrative analysis, however, has scarce scholarship about wild za'atar regulations. Scholarship about za'atar regulations is not often treated through narrative analysis methodology. This study will fill the gap in the literature by applying a narrative analysis approach to the debate surrounding the wild za'atar regulation.

⁴¹ Eghbariah, Rabea. "The Criminalization of Za'atar and Akkoub: On Edible Plants in Palestinian Cuisine and Israeli Plant Protection Laws (Hebrew)." *Law, Society & Culture Series*, January 1, 2017.

https://www.academia.edu/34734748/The_Criminalization_of_Zaatar_and_Akkoub_On_Edible_Plants_in_Palestinian_Cuisine_and_Israeli_Plant_Protection_Laws_Hebrew_.

⁴² Swedenburg, Ted. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. University of Arkansas Press, 2003.

3. Theoretical Review

This paper aims to analyze the narratives around the za'atar regulation enforced in Israel and the occupied territories of the West Bank from a political ecology framework. Political ecology seeks to understand the political, economic, and social drivers of environmental change, including the role of power in environmental transformation.⁴³ Currently, political ecologists are engaging more with critically analyzing environmental security theory, ethics, and the interconnectedness of identity and the environment.⁴⁴ This project, which aims to identify the existence of underlying power differentials and motivations within environmental protection regulations, would be an ideal case to apply the framework of political ecology. I will apply a political ecology framework to occupied populations to examine how concepts of green colonialism can arise. In this paper, territoriality, the pluriverse, and green colonialism are theoretical concepts to be aware of.

3.1 Green Colonialism

The basic concept of green colonialism has been applied globally and historically in colonial power differentials. The concept of green imperialism in modern development scholarship was popularized by Helge Ole Bergesen in response to the 1987 Brundtland

⁴³ Benjaminsen, Tor A., and Hanne Svarstad. "Political Ecology." In *Encyclopedia of Ecology* (Second Edition), edited by Brian Fath, 391–96. Oxford: Elsevier, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-409548-9.10608-6>.

⁴⁴ Benjaminsen, Tor A., and Hanne Svarstad. "Political Ecology." In *Encyclopedia of Ecology* (Second Edition), edited by Brian Fath, 391–96. Oxford: Elsevier, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-409548-9.10608-6>.

Commission report.⁴⁵ In this context, Bergesen highlights the widespread understanding of the report as an extension of Western economic influence under the guise of development aid, calling it “green imperialism”.⁴⁶ Dr. Deepak Laal uses Bergesen’s definition of green imperialism and understands it as the modern conception of the “White Man’s Burden” and Christian crusades. Laal takes a hard stance against all forms of green imperialism, especially against green standards and regulations set forth by the World Trade Organization and World Bank. Other scholars critique Laal’s approach to green imperialism, especially given the urgency and seriousness of climate change. While Western powers do utilize environmental regulations for economic and political influence, some scholars believe that the precautionary principle is still valuable and ought to be considered globally in the fight against climate change. There is also an argument to be made that economic and political gains for Western powers and a concern for climate are not mutually exclusive in regulatory decision-making processes.⁴⁷

The definition of green colonialism used in this paper is the presence of climate-related messaging, policies, and development that harms the autonomy and identity of occupied and colonized populations. This definition was popularized by the Saami people of Northern regions of Norway, Sweden, and Northwest Russia. In Norway, regulations on reindeer herding and the building of renewable wind power facilities were passed and implemented without input from or

⁴⁵ The 1987 Brundtland Report is a publication under the World Commission on Environment and Development sponsored by the United Nations. Its main findings tied economic growth to social equity and environmental prosperity and encouraged the notion of sustainable development globally.

⁴⁶ Bergesen, Helge Ole. "Reformism Doomed to Failure? A Critical Look at the Strategy Promoted by the Brundtland Commission." *International Challenges* 8, no. 2 (1988): 6-10 <https://uoregon.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/reformism-doomed-failure-critical-look-at/docview/220391176/se-2>.

⁴⁷ "Are green activists the new imperialists?" *The Times of India*, December 3, 2013. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/are-green-activists-the-new-imperialists/articleshow/26854782.cms>.

regard for the social impacts of the Indigenous Saami people.⁴⁸ For the Saami people, ancestral reindeer herding is key to their identity, and the government dispossesses the Saami people of pasturelands by building high-power wind turbines. Acts such as these are labeled Green Colonialism by the Saami people and parliament, in which green policies, whether they are impactful or not, carry the additional implications of harming local people's identities and sovereignty.

Green colonialism alongside the term "greenwashing" has been used in scholarship to refer to actions by the Israeli government claiming to help the environment however with territoriality implications. On a large scale, Israel has designated large areas of land as "green areas" forcing the dispersal of Palestinian villages which were replaced with settlements. The village of Ras Imweis in addition to six other surrounding villages were turned into the settlement of Nahal Shilo after the area was designated as a state-run green area.⁴⁹ Researcher Ted Swedenburg characterized za'atar regulations as an instance of "Green Zionism", echoing similar concerns to green colonialism and the greenwashing of Israeli government actions. This study will establish an overarching theme of green colonialism in the Palestinian narrative regarding the intent and impacts of the za'atar harvesting regulation.

3.2 Territoriality

Territoriality is central to any discussion about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Human territoriality is defined by scholar Richard Sack as "the attempt to affect, influence, or control

⁴⁸ Normann, Susanne. "Green Colonialism in the Nordic Context: Exploring Southern Saami Representations of Wind Energy Development." *Journal of Community Psychology* 49, no. 1 (January 2021): 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22422>.

⁴⁹ Alam, Amal Equeiq. "An Environmental Nakba: The Palestinian Environment Under Israeli Colonization." *Science for the People* 23, no. 1 (2020): 20-27. <https://magazine.scienceforthepeople.org/vol23-1/an-environmental-nakba-the-palestinian-environment-under-israeli-colonization/#easy-footnote-bottom-20-11274>.

actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area.”⁵⁰ The concept of territoriality is highly utilized in political geography in the context of border conflicts or Indigenous colonizer relations, often labeled among the desires of modern nation-states.⁵¹ Territoriality rests on power imbalances, as the claim to territory must “be backed up by authority and power that are recognized and respected”.⁵²

The Israel-Palestine conflict is heavily rooted in a struggle for territory and the sovereignty from one another that owning territory is associated with.⁵³ In Shaul Cohen’s research, he finds that the natural environment is used as a tool to establish and protect territory by both Palestinians and the Israeli government.⁵⁴ This study focused on the motivations of afforestation by both parties. In 1967, a belt of forest was planted and used to establish Israel’s territory. Extension of this “green belt” continued upon the establishment of new municipal boundaries.⁵⁵ Palestinians continued to plant olive trees even beyond their economic relevance because of their symbolism of steadfastness and to also establish a territorial claim. The natural

⁵⁰ Lutz, Catherine A. "Engendered Emotion: Gender, Power, and Political Speech in the United States." *Political Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1995): 21-45. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2569346>.

⁵¹ Delaney, D. “Territory and Territoriality.” *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, edited by Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift, Elsevier, 2009, pp. 196–208, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00808-7>.

⁵² Kolb, Robert W. "Classical Conditioning." In *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, edited by Alan E. Kazdin, 117-120. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B0080430767024815>.

⁵³ B Kimmerling, Baruch. “Change and Continuity in Zionist Territorial Orientations and Politics.” *Comparative Politics* 14, no. 2 (1982): 191–210. <https://doi.org/10.2307/421586>.

⁵⁴ Cohen, Shaul. *Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

⁵⁵ Cohen, Shaul. *Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

environment's role in territoriality is not extensively researched, however, has a longstanding presence in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

3.3 Colonial Fire and the Pluriverse

I lastly ask the reader to remain cognizant of the idea of “colonial fire”. Colonial fire is a term coined by Indigenous activists in the United States to describe the difference between cultural fires, or those that Indigenous peoples historically lived with and worked with as opposed to the unpredictable and less harmonious fires we see today. I first heard the term “colonial fire” while listening to Indigenous activist Ryan Reed speak on controlled burns and the attitudes towards fire that we see today and rings true to many of the environmental issues we see today. And at its root is the nuance of human entanglement with nature. This draws upon the notion of “the pluriverse”, which refers to the several meanings and values of development in the world beyond a considerably Western connotation of innovation and globalization.⁵⁶ The narrative from Palestinians reveals a non-consensual push towards Western development ideals through wild za’atar harvesting regulations coupled with the promotion of za’atar domestication and cultivation.

⁵⁶ Escobar, Arturo. *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

4. Methodology

In the Spring of 2022, I conducted exploratory research in Jordan on the social and economic role of community-based hydroponic agriculture structures for women living in the Mafraq municipality. During the four months I spent in Jordan, I was exposed to the greater debates and conversations of national identity, a significant portion of which, related to food. I came across articles on za'atar regulations while trying to understand the greater role of the herb in Palestinian identity, which initiated this research project.

This study treats the Israel-Palestine conflict and the debates around the za'atar regulation as a wicked problem. A wicked problem is identified by its indefinite causes and unclear solutions, often due to a dissonance in understanding what the issue is in the first place between different stakeholders.⁵⁷ The framework of design thinking is commonly used to approach wicked problems and emphasizes the role of stakeholders in solution-making. The core tenet of this approach is building empathy with stakeholders so solutions can be reflective of their respective needs in the issue. The first step in doing this is clarifying the problem in the first place for the different stakeholders. This study aims to understand why the Israeli government continues to enforce the za'atar regulation and why Palestinians respond negatively towards it. Understanding what both sides are arguing will provide the opportunity to ideate effective solutions that can be embraced by both stakeholders.⁵⁸

Narrative analysis is key to understanding the debate surrounding wild za'atar regulations in occupied territories of Palestine and Israel. Narrative analysis aids in understanding how

⁵⁷ Camillus, John C. "Strategy as a Wicked Problem." *Harvard Business Review* 86, no. 5 (2008): 98-106.

⁵⁸ Harvard Business School Online. "What is Design Thinking?" HBS Online Blog, September 27, 2018. Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-design-thinking>.

stakeholders might respond to climate or conservation-related policies.⁵⁹ Especially with debates regarding intention and impact, narrative analysis can help organize themes and arguments to help focus conversations about future efforts. The way conservation narratives manifest in media can also influence public perception of risk, whether of the issue at hand or of a given population.⁶⁰ This study attempts to shed light on the two major narratives of wild za'atar regulations side by side to show the major themes of the debate, which has not been done before in previous literature.

To understand what the Israeli government and Palestinians individually believe the issue is in this debate, this study employs narrative analysis. Narrative analysis isolates themes within the differing narratives, offering specific explanations to what each stakeholder understands the causation and implications of the za'atar regulation to be. Understanding these specific themes and arguments will help ideate solutions in future research that will promote collaboration between the Israeli government and Palestinians and lead to more effective strategies for conservation.

In this chapter, I will outline the steps I took to achieve a narrative analysis of the Israeli government and Palestinian stances on the za'atar regulation. I will also discuss how I approached the limitations of the study and my positionality on the subject matter.

⁵⁹ Moulton, Holly, Mark Carey, Christian Huggel, and Alina Motschmann. 2021. "Narratives of Ice Loss: New Approaches to Shrinking Glaciers and Climate Change Adaptation." *Geoforum* 125: 47–56

⁶⁰ Travers, Jenna. "Stories of Decline: Narrative and Risk Framing of Glacier Retreat and Salmon in Washington, USA." Bachelor's thesis, University of Oregon Robert D. Clark Honors College, May 2022.

4.1 Obtaining Sources

The study used secondary and primary resources to analyze the narratives of the Israeli government and Palestinians about the regulation. The sources were gathered from the internet and were a mix of articles, interviews, tweets, and dissertations. I also analyze themes in the film *Foragers* directed by Jumana Manna, and a translate seven-letter correspondence between the Arab rights organization, Adalah, and the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture and Israeli National Parks Authority (INPA). The Israeli National Parks Authority website on za'atar was also translated from Hebrew to English and used as a source. All the other sources used for analysis were in English. All sources were found through website searches related to the za'atar regulation. In total, 25 sources were identified and used for thematic analysis.

4.2 Primary Methodology

I used qualitative coding to analyze the collected sources. Qualitative coding allows researchers to extract themes from sources to develop the major aspects of narratives.⁶¹ This approach allows the ability to preserve a “society-centered dimension” to the research while still presenting meaningful data on sentiments.⁶²

To perform qualitative coding in the retrieved sources and documents I used the software, MaxQDA. In the first cycle, I identified key terms and themes from the sources to input as codes into MaxQDA. The two general codes identified in these preliminary readings were the “Israeli Government Narrative” and “Palestinian Narrative”. Within the “Israeli Government Narrative”

⁶¹ Simula, Brandy L., and Johnny Saldaña. *Teaching Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2018): 173–75. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26589017>.

⁶² Moulton, Holly, Mark Carey, Christian Huggel, and Alina Motschmann. 2021. “Narratives of Ice Loss: New Approaches to Shrinking Glaciers and Climate Change Adaptation.” *Geoforum* 125: 47–56.

code, I identified two sub-codes. The first is “environmental/ecological justification”, and the second is “Palestinian response to justifications.” Within the code “Palestinian Narrative” I identified three main sub-themes “Identity and Politics”, “Anti-Arab Rhetoric”, and “Appropriation”. In the second cycle, I assigned portions of the sources to their appropriate code and sub-code. In the study, these codes are referred to as “themes” and “sub-themes”. I utilized word clouds of the two overarching codes to get a general idea of the main ideas present in each narrative.

4.3 Addressing Limitations

Given the resources and time available to me as an undergraduate researcher, several limitations impact the nature of this study. As an English speaker, the most accessible sources to me were those written in English. While I was able to get translation of some integral sources, media coverage of za’atar regulations in English is scarce. There could be of Arabic, and Hebrew sources that speak to this study but could not be used because of translation and time constraints. This also limited the number of sources available to analyze, which could impact the accuracy of the study’s findings. Despite not having access to as many Hebrew/Arabic sources, I managed to isolate a few that appeared emblematic of the debate to use in my analysis and were directly tied to the Israeli National Parks Association (INPA) and/or Palestinian stakeholders and researchers on the subject.

Due to the limited resources, I was not able to make nuanced observations of different and smaller stakeholder groups. While my observations can apply to the general narrative and sentiments of the Israeli government and Palestinians, these are broad categories. Palestinians could have varied experiences with the regulation based on geographic location, gender, age,

and/or age. Future studies can use this study as a basis to investigate how Palestinian narratives on the za'atar regulation may change based on these variables.

Another limitation of this study is that I am the only person identifying, creating, and assigning codes within the qualitative coding process. Because I am the sole examiner of the sources, I might have imparted my bias on what the codes are and what fits into each code and subcode. If other researchers collaborated on the qualitative coding, then there would be more opportunities to explore different readings and potential codes.

Despite these limitations, this study will act as a basis for future research about reactions and narratives of the za'atar regulation. I will be continuing my education at the University of British Columbia where I will use this background to supplement my research on the complex role of conservation and environmental narratives in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and strategies to support natural resource access and conservation concerns in tandem.

4.4 Positionality

I'm not Palestinian or Israeli. My mother is Chinese American, and my father is European American. My interest in Middle Eastern studies stemmed from learning the language and culture for over a decade. I eventually had the opportunity to study abroad and research in Jordan during my junior year of college. During my time in Jordan, I volunteered at Gaza Camp in Jerash, Jordan which is largely made up of refugees from Gaza. I am an Arabic studies minor and come to this topic with little knowledge of Israeli culture and the Hebrew language. My collective experiences create a bias towards the Palestinian cause in the greater Israel-Palestine conflict which may have impacted my analysis. However, I remained conscious of this bias and its risk in effectively answering my research questions which do not call for partiality to a given side, but rather an exploration of both.

I support bi-lateral peacemaking processes between Israel and Palestine entailing as little displacement as possible. I also believe in the preservation of human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians living on the land. These guiding principles are what drive this research as opposed to my exposure to Palestinian perspectives, and it is my goal that this research can be the foundation for more scholarship and efforts in collaborative and effective conservation efforts in the region.

4.5 A Note on Translation

One of the sources I relied on was a correspondence between Adalah and the Israeli National Parks Association (INPA), which was entirely in Hebrew. Because of this, I hired a translator through the University of Oregon Judaic Studies department. I provided all seven letters and instructed the translator to translate them in order of correspondence to maintain continuity. I initially considered having the translator translate out of order to maintain a semblance of impartiality in erasing the ability to follow the development of the correspondence, however, I decided that the potential sacrifice to continuity and impacts on translation would outweigh this concern. The translator and I met weekly to discuss the translated documents as they completed them one by one to explain the tone, words, and phrasings that did not translate effectively to English.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The Environmental Debate: Israeli Government's Justification and the Palestinian Response

This section will discuss the narrative theme related to the environmental justification of the za'atar harvesting regulations, as adopted by the Israeli government and National Parks Administration (INPA). It will also discuss the response by Palestinians to the specific aspects of the INPA environmental narrative. Through thematic coding, this study revealed a strong environmental leaning in the greater Israeli government narrative about za'atar regulations.

This leaning is congruent with the narrative that started the regulation, in which “a research group of Israeli ecologists and botanists advised that, due to overharvesting, wild za'atar should be designated an endangered wild plant species.”⁶³ Figure 3 shows that the main words and concepts present in the Israeli government's narrative involve “protection,” “authority,” “harvesting,” and most importantly the “plant” itself. These words come together and form environmental justification as the predominant theme, isolated from human experiences with the za'atar. While environmental concerns do not characterize Palestinian narrative regarding the za'atar regulation, they do respond to the main concerns highlighted by the Israeli government. This section will follow the dialogue between the two stakeholders in terms of harvesting techniques, motivations of harvesting, and scientific substantiation.

⁶³ Boyd, Brian. "A Political Ecology of Za'atar." *EnviroSociety*, June 8, 2016. <https://www.envirosociety.org/2016/06/a-political-ecology-of-zaatar/>.



Figure 3. Word Cloud of Coded “Israeli Government Environmental Narrative”

5.11 Harvesting Techniques

Overharvesting is consistently drawn upon to defend regulations against the picking of the herb. On the za’atar informational page of the Israeli NPA, they state that unchecked harvesting of za’atar, such as before the 1977 regulation, "is liable to obliterate the plant completely."⁶⁴ Overharvesting is a serious concern when it comes to the biodiversity and longevity of plant species we see today, and it takes several different forms. Governments globally continue to fail in meeting biodiversity targets that were outlined during the Aichi Agreement signed by over 200 nations in 2010.⁶⁵ Over 40,000 different species are projected to

⁶⁴Israel Nature and Parks Authority. "עכובית הגלגל." Israel Nature and Parks Authority, <https://www.parks.org.il/new/%D7%A2%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%92%D7%9C/>.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Watts, "Biodiversity Talks: Ministers in Nagoya Adopt New Strategy," The Guardian, October 29, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/oct/29/biodiversity-talks-ministers-nagoya-strategy>.

go extinct in the next few decades.⁶⁶ There are several ways that countries have approached the issue of biodiversity spanning from the establishment of nature preserves, to investing in technological solutions.

However, the Palestinian response to this narrative highlight that the concern of overharvesting in part comes from a misunderstanding of commonly used harvesting techniques. In *Foragers*, Jumana Manna and an Israeli farm owner discuss the threat Palestinian harvesting of wild za'atar poses.⁶⁷ The Israeli farm owner, who economically benefits from the regulation and thus supports it, states that "Palestinians threaten za'atar because they pull it out from the root."⁶⁸ While harvesting information on za'atar is not readily available, akkoub, another significant wild plant that was criminalized shortly after za'atar, has seen a similar narrative. In the case of akkoub, "larger harvesting networks are known to dispatch truckloads of elderly men and women who often uproot the entire plant."⁶⁹ This harvesting technique of pulling by the root causes an environmental concern given that it completely eradicates the plant from the landscape. It is one of the assumptions that the continued enforcement of the regulation rests on and protects against. However, the Palestinian narrative explains a different widespread method of harvesting.

⁶⁶ Martin, "Forests, Desertification and Biodiversity," United Nations Sustainable Development, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>.

⁶⁷ *Foragers*. Directed by Jumana Manna. 2022. Pseudo-Documentary.

⁶⁸ *Foragers*. Directed by Jumana Manna. 2022. Pseudo-Documentary.

⁶⁹ Ibrahim Hussein, "For Israelis and Palestinians, a battle over a humble plant," Salon.com, February 17, 2020, https://www.salon.com/2020/02/17/for-israelis-and-palestinians-a-battle-over-a-humble-plant_partner/#:~:text=Though%20Samir%20and%20Nadya%20say,from%20replenishing%20the%20following%20year.

Manna, who is one of the leading voices against the harsh criminalization of za'atar regulations, explains that Palestinian foragers trim stems from the za'atar bush, rather than pulling it from the root.⁷⁰ Za'atar is a relatively resilient wild plant, and the trimming of za'atar is encouraged for healthier, larger za'atar plant yields.⁷¹ In *Foragers*.⁷²

Palestinian scholars state that the regulation doesn't prevent, but instead promotes improper and unsustainable wild za'atar harvesting techniques. Manna suggests that the regulation may encourage the uprooting of wild za'atar plants "in [the forager's] haste and fear of being caught."⁷³ Yatir Sade, a researcher based in Tel Aviv, similarly states that the regulation has adverse effects. Sade states that the criminalization of gathering deters traditional gatherers (usually women), leaving the traders (usually men), who do not necessarily abide by traditional gathering practices that protect plant reproduction.⁷⁴ While the regulation is supported by claims of improper harvesting techniques, Palestinians believe these claims to be unfounded, and the regulation promotes unsustainable harvesting practices.

5.12 Motivations of Wild Harvesting

Another point of contention and misunderstanding between the Israeli governments and Palestinian narratives is the motivations and demographic primarily harvesting wild za'atar. The

⁷⁰ *Foragers*. Directed by Jumana Manna. 2022. Pseudo-Documentary

⁷¹ "Origanum Syriacum," Missouri Botanical Garden, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=f247>.

⁷² *Foragers*. Directed by Jumana Manna. 2022. Pseudo-Documentary.

⁷³ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁷⁴ "For Muzna Bishara, Za'atar is the Scent of Winter," ASIF, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://asif.org/for-muzna-bishara-zaatar-is-the-scent-of-winter/>.

concern on the part of the Israeli National Parks Authority (INPA) comes from the commercial selling of wild za'atar harvesting. It is widely understood that the domestic harvesting of wild za'atar does not pose an issue to its conservation as much as commercial harvesting does. Didi Kaplan, a scientist whose work on akkoub conservation is heavily used to justify za'atar regulations, is actually in favor of restricting harvesting of the plant for domestic purposes.⁷⁵ Nativ Dudai, a researcher of za'atar based in Israel, believes that there ought to be harsh punishment if collected for non-domestic purposes.⁷⁶

The INPA attempts to mirror this nuance in the wording of its regulation, however, the Palestinian perspective highlights its vagueness as a tactic for increased criminalization. In a letter responding to lawyer Eghbariah, the INPA states that "It was determined within the framework of the legal bureau's guidelines for inspectors in the field, that the quantity of the seized plant should be considered as a circumstance for seriousness as long as it is any significant quantity that is not for frequent self-consumption."⁷⁷ However, the Palestinian narrative takes issue with the regulation assuming that there is a large presence of non-local commercial harvesting of za'atar, especially given the implementation of the regulation. While the INPA's treatment of the regulation states that quantities of wild za'atar harvested for self-consumption are permissible, the ultimate decision goes to INPA inspectors in the field. In her field research, Manna encountered several INPA workers who stated that the ambiguity has pushed them to be more liberal with their fining of people caught harvesting wild za'atar, stating

⁷⁵ Didi Kaplan, Dror Pevzner, Moshe Galilee, and Mario Gutman, "Traditional Selective Harvesting Effects on Occurrence and Reproductive Growth of *Gundelia Tounfortii* in Israel Grasslands," *Israel Journal of Plant Sciences*, no. 43 (1995).

⁷⁶ Foyer, Dror. "שיח מפלג: איך אפילו ביטול האיסור על קטיף של זעתר הפך לקרב נרטיבים בין יהודים וערבים." *Globes*, October 20, 2019, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001303934>.

⁷⁷ Israeli Nature Parks Authority Legal Office. Letter to Rabea Eghbariah. May 7, 2019.

“How can we know whether these ten women in the valley all work for one man who goes to sell them in the market, or whether they are just picking a basket to feed their family?”⁷⁸

To Palestinians, this narrative held by INPA workers reveals a flaw in their conception of the major reasons wild za’atar is harvested as well as who is harvesting it. In an interview, Sade says that the number of wild za’atar foragers is small and mainly restricted to a demographic of elderly Palestinians or those that are food insecure.⁷⁹ Manna explains how seasonal foraging doesn’t inherently suggest a desire for commercial gain but is such a historic practice that can serve other purposes. She writes that “for some it’s a leisurely weekend activity, a way of being close to nature, and for others, a means of survival—a safety net in precarious times.”⁸⁰

However, because the regulation does not specify how much za’atar constitutes fines and potential imprisonment, this poses a threat to all za’atar foragers. Eghbariah and Adalah pushed for the INPA to specify specific amounts of akkoub and za’atar that people may be able to harvest before being fined. In a letter to the INPA, Eghbariah not only says that this is necessary to protect foragers with domestic intent, but that the regulation had a responsibility to do so in the first place. He writes that the lack of specific weight or amount restrictions for foraging za’atar “indicates that the authority did not attach importance to the fact that these are plants that

⁷⁸ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁷⁹ Foyer, Dror. "שיח מפלג: איך אפילו ביטול האיסור על קטיף של זעתר הפך לקרב נרטיבים בין יהודים וערבים." Globes, October 20, 2019, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001303934>.

⁸⁰ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

are well-known edible plants in the Arab cuisine, as it should have done.”⁸¹ As a result of Eghbariah and Adalah’s efforts, the INPA did amend and add specified amounts of akkoub and za’atar that can be harvested before criminalization. However, while the amounts of akkoub are publicly available, the amount of za’atar that the public can pick is not published on any INPA website.⁸²

Another argument that combats the INPA narrative and perspective comes from Kaplan, who is often cited by the INPA to justify their regulation. Kaplan says that “No one talks about the fact that we, the Jewish [Israelis], destroy much more za’atar than the Arabs pick. Do you know how many great za’atar populations were uprooted by bulldozers? In Har Adar or Elyaqim interchange—locations with beautiful amounts of za’atar, and all of it is now gone. But the Arab? He picks five kilograms and gets a fine.”⁸³ Dudai echoes this sentiment in an interview, stating that the majority of za’atar is uprooted in construction projects by the Israeli government, which is a greater threat to the population than wild harvesting.⁸⁴ This echoes a similar sentiment to Sade and Manna in suggesting that the Israeli government’s actions have adverse impacts on za’atar conservation.

⁸¹ Rabea Eghbariah and Adalah. Letter to Member of the Knesset Zeev Elkin, Attorney Avichai Mandelblit, Attorney Shai Nitzan Minister of Environmental Protection, Attorney General, State Attorney. January 13th, 2019

⁸² Israel Nature and Parks Authority. "עכוּבִית הַגִּלְגֵל." Israel Nature and Parks Authority, <https://www.parks.org.il/new/%D7%A2%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%92%D7%9C/>.

⁸³ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁸⁴ "For Muzna Bishara, Za'atar is the Scent of Winter," ASIF, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://asif.org/for-muzna-bishara-zaatar-is-the-scent-of-winter/>.

5.13 Scientific Substantiation

The final main theme observed within the environmental justification debate is the presence or lack of scientific substantiation to support the continued enforcement of the regulation. In 2018, Zeev Elkin, the Minister of Environmental Protection and member of the Knesset officially declared za'atar sage and akkoub in an updated version of protected species.⁸⁵ In his correspondence with the INPA, Eghbariah requested the scientific studies used by the INPA to justify the inclusion of these plants on the list. He writes that,

The problem inherent in the declaration of the Za'atar, Gundelia, and Sage plants as protected natural values stems first and foremost from the lack of reliable and convincing scientific data that substantiates the assumption that picking these plants causes their depletion in the wild or puts them in danger of extinction.⁸⁶

This sentiment is echoed by Dr. Margareta Volchek, an ecologist at the Nature and Gardens Authority, who is often cited by Palestinian scholars on the topic. Volchek states that there is not sufficient scientific basis for the restrictions against the wild harvesting of za'atar.⁸⁷ In response to Eghbariah's request for scientific studies, the INPA forwarded an article written in

⁸⁵ Rinat, Zafirir. "Reversing Decades-Old Policy, Israel to Allow Some Harvesting of Wild Herbs." Haaretz, August 6, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2019-08-06/ty-article/.premium/reversing-decades-old-policy-israel-to-allow-some-harvesting-of-wild-herbs/0000017f-f692-d460-afff-fff640b30000>.

⁸⁶ Rabea Eghbariah and Adalah. Letter to Member of the Knesset Zeev Elkin, Attorney Avichai Mandelblit, Attorney Shai Nitzan Minister of Environmental Protection, Attorney General, State Attorney. January 13th, 2019

⁸⁷ Rinat, Zafarir. "האזוב המצוי עומד במרכזה של התנגשות חזיתית בין מסורת לבין חוק." Haaretz, April 26, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/food/foodmagazine2/2017-04-26/ty-article/.premium/0000017f-dc1c-db5a-a57f-dc7e4bd50000>.

1995 by Kaplan on the increased consumption of akkoub in the region.⁸⁸ Kaplan, as mentioned before, is against a sweeping regulation restricting za'atar. In an interview with Manna, Kaplan highlights that there are no scientific studies detailing the impacts of the regulation on za'atar's survival to date.⁸⁹ Ambiguity in the scientific basis of the policy is further echoed in Eghbariah's correspondence, stating that za'atar is not listed on another list the INPA collects on "plants that are on the brink of danger," nor is it considered an endangered or at-risk plant by the Nature and Gardens Authority.⁹⁰

Manna also explains how the regulation could have been made stronger with the input of Palestinians, who are very familiar with the plant and the conditions it needs to thrive.⁹¹ Eghribayeh states that this policy brings disproportionate harm to "mainly, if not only, the Arab population" given that there is so little substantiation.⁹²

5.14 Concluding Thoughts: The "Green" in Green Colonialism

Upon isolating and organizing this dialogue about the regulation's environmental justification, the beginning arguments of green colonialism can be observed arising in the

⁸⁸ Didi Kaplan, Dror Pevzner, Moshe Galilee, and Mario Gutman, "Traditional Selective Harvesting Effects on Occurrence and Reproductive Growth of *Gundelia Tounfortii* in Israel Grasslands," *Israel Journal of Plant Sciences*, no. 43 (1995).

⁸⁹ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," *e-flux journal* 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁹⁰ Rabea Eghbariah and Adalah. Letter to Member of the Knesset Zeev Elkin, Attorney Avichai Mandelblit, Attorney Shai Nitzan Minister of Environmental Protection, Attorney General, State Attorney. January 13th, 2019

⁹¹ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," *e-flux journal* 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁹² Rabea Eghbariah and Adalah. Letter to Member of the Knesset Zeev Elkin, Attorney Avichai Mandelblit, Attorney Shai Nitzan Minister of Environmental Protection, Attorney General, State Attorney. January 13th, 2019

Palestinian narrative. Green colonialism rests upon the assumption that factors beyond the environmental can influence policies and programs that are enforced in the name of conservation. The dialogue in this section highlights that while the Israeli government asserts that the regulation is in the best interest of za'atar conservation, Palestinians believe that this justification is misinformed. The environmental narratives and justifications the Israeli government claims do not resonate with Palestinians. This, in turn, leads to the Palestinian narrative questioning in motivation for the regulation's continued enforcement.

5.2 The Palestinian Narrative of Disproportionate Impacts

The Palestinian narrative situates the za'atar regulation in the greater context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, mainly by expressing the negative impacts the regulation has disproportionately imposed upon Palestinians. Palestinian narrative focuses on these negative impacts as intentional or favorable to the Israeli government, thus explaining the continued enforcement of the regulation that goes beyond conservation. Thematic coding of Palestinian narratives revealed the central focus on "Palestinians" and "Israel" in relation to za'atar. This differs from the Israeli narrative which focuses on the "plant" independently of Palestinian populations. As represented in the word cloud, there is an emphasis on the human impacts of the regulation, bringing in common words such as "foraging," "market," "food," and other non-environmental concerns about the regulation. "Land" is also seen in the word cloud, which is notable given the aspect of territoriality and colonialism.



Figure 4. Word Cloud of Coded “Palestinian Narrative”

The section is divided into three main arguments proposed by the Palestinian narrative: Political/Identity Suppression, Anti-Arab Rhetoric, and Appropriation. These three sections are emblematic of the main concerns Palestinians have with the regulation as coded. The difference between the Palestinian and Israeli narratives is the presence of the other’s response. While Palestinians responded to the specific points and themes in the Israeli government narrative regarding environmental conservation, the Israeli government does not entertain or specifically address the concerns and themes brought up by the Palestinian narrative as thoroughly. This is not only anticipated but a reality of the power dynamic between the Israeli government and Palestinians impacted by the regulation. The Israeli government doesn’t need to prove or respond to the Palestinian narrative because it is situated in a position where it can unilaterally make and enforce decisions on Palestinian’s behalf.

5.21. Political and Identity Suppression

Political and identity suppression was the largest theme revealed during thematic coding. This theme encapsulated moments of Palestinian narratives that viewed the regulation to suppress their identity and/or as a message to the Palestinian people regarding their claim to the land. The following quotes and excerpts are mainly from journal and news articles in addition to tweets from Twitter from Palestinians regarding the regulation.

5.21.a Identity Implications

The role of za'atar in the Palestinian identity is very central. As discussed in the background, za'atar is a part of everyday life in the Palestinian home, which has made it a symbol popularized in art, music, poetry, and other areas of cultural life. For the Palestinian narrative, the role that za'atar plays for Palestinians is focused upon in the debate regarding the regulation because, as Manna says, "it's impossible to understand the ban and the injustice without the cultural context, meaning the significance that za'atar and harvesting it have in Palestinian culture and in shaping Palestinian identity."⁹³

Eghbariah says in an interview how za'atar "has gained special status in Palestinian culture. Za'atar, which for hundreds of years was picked in nature, has always symbolized a link to the land," and the nakba of 1948 solidified this link.⁹⁴ A common saying in the Palestinian community is "we will stay here as long as za'atar and olives", using za'atar as a device to

⁹³ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁹⁴ Vered, Ronit. May 7, 2017. "How Za'atar Became a Victim of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict - Israel News - Haaretz.Com." <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-05-07/ty-article-magazine/.premium/how-zaatar-became-a-victim-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/0000017f-e9bc-df2c-a1ff-ffffd14a80000>

signify their relationship to the land and their steadfastness in light of occupation.⁹⁵ This is foundational in understanding what the regulation has meant for Palestinians and is often cited in Palestinian narratives pushing against the regulation.

The timeline appears common in discussions about the regulation's inception. According to field research by Ted Swedenburg, za'atar gained sacred status in Palestine following the 1976 siege of Tal-al-Za'atar. Since za'atar in the name of the camp, "another powerful symbol of heroic resistance and suffering... was added to the herb's polysemy."⁹⁶ Manna and Swedenburg explain that some Palestinians believe that the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture "caught onto the symbolic value of za'atar" following the siege, thus prompting its regulation in 1977, just a year after.⁹⁷ Manna additionally points out the connections between the Minister of Agriculture at the time, Ariel Shanon, and his connections with the Lebanese Christian Militia, who were allied in the "1982 massacre of Sabra and Shatila."⁹⁸ These aspects of the timeline highlighted by Palestinian narratives show a suspicion of ulterior motivations in the za'atar regulation aligned to identity and symbolic suppression.

The Israeli government is adamant in its ecological justification and, in my research, doesn't entertain the narrative about the regulation as a means of identity suppression. Israeli authorities have been trying to encourage the cultivation of hyssop plants as a replacement for

⁹⁵ Falah, Ghazi-Walid and Caroline Nagel, eds. *Emplaced Resistance in Palestine and Israel: Bodies, Walls, and Spaces*. University of Mississippi Press, 2021.

⁹⁶ Swedenburg, Ted. 2003. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. University of Arkansas Press.

⁹⁷ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," *e-flux journal* 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

⁹⁸ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," *e-flux journal* 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

wild foraging, however, this also comes into conflict with Palestinian identity. Manna explains that it's not just the presence of the herb that is significant, "it also relates to the tradition of going out into nature and of the harvest."⁹⁹ Further interviews talk about the "distinct difference between wild za'atar and the cultivated variety."¹⁰⁰

The role of identity is central to the Palestinian narrative regarding the za'atar regulation. Manna writes that "These preservation laws constitute a thin ecological veil for racist legislation designed to further alienate Palestinians and Syrians in the occupied Golan Heights from their lands," highlighting the significance of the regulation to the Palestinian identity.

5.21.b Economic and Political Implications

Palestinian narrative suggests that the INPA's criminalization of harvesting wild za'atar has positive implications for the Israeli government and Israeli settlers economically and politically, and the adverse effect for Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank. This argument rests on the idea that the regulation leads to "disproportionate damage to the Arab population and imposes disproportionate criminal sanctions on the pickers."¹⁰¹

The economic aspects of the regulation are based on the domestication and commercialization of za'atar. The Israeli narrative encourages domestication for conservation purposes, however, also ties this to economic benefits. Israeli researcher Dudai states that

⁹⁹ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

¹⁰⁰ Vered, Ronit. "How Za'atar Became a Victim of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." Haaretz. May 7, 2017. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-how-zaatar-became-a-victim-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-1.5452702>.

¹⁰¹ Rabea Eghbariah and Adalah. Letter to Member of the Knesset Zeev Elkin, Attorney Avichai Mandelblit, Attorney Shai Nitzan Minister of Environmental Protection, Attorney General, State Attorney. January 13th, 2019

“several Israeli private enterprises have been working to domesticate the plant so it can be sold in large quantities, thus easing the pressure on the wild supply.”¹⁰² This puts Israeli private enterprises at the forefront of za’atar domestication and production. Manna states that the inception of this “commercialization process,” for za’atar “was among the reasons that led to the legislation,” because of the economic benefits that came as a result.¹⁰³ The film *Foragers* included a soundbite from an interview with an Israeli farmer in the 1980s, explaining how if Palestinians want za’atar, now they would have to buy it from him. Because of this regulation, what once was a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation must now be bought from Israeli farmers.

While Israelis and the Israeli government benefits from za’atar regulations and domestication, Palestinians do not. Domestication is widely understood as “an attempt to undercut a rare Palestinian cash crop.”¹⁰⁴ Samir explains that his Palestinian village, Arraba, in the Golan Heights depends on foraging as a means of sustenance. The regulation, Samir says, is “made, on principle, against the Arab residents of the country, to hurt their livelihoods,” intended to “starve us out.”¹⁰⁵ Palestinians against the regulation also cite the severe fines, reaching 5,000

¹⁰² Rachel Cohen, "For Israelis and Palestinians, a battle over a humble plant," Salon, February 17, 2020, https://www.salon.com/2020/02/17/for-israelis-and-palestinians-a-battle-over-a-humble-plant_partner/.

¹⁰³ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

¹⁰⁴ Rachel Cohen, "For Israelis and Palestinians, a battle over a humble plant," Salon, February 17, 2020, https://www.salon.com/2020/02/17/for-israelis-and-palestinians-a-battle-over-a-humble-plant_partner/.

¹⁰⁵ Rachel Cohen, "For Israelis and Palestinians, a battle over a humble plant," Salon, February 17, 2020, https://www.salon.com/2020/02/17/for-israelis-and-palestinians-a-battle-over-a-humble-plant_partner/.

new Israeli shekels (\$1,300) imposed upon foragers at West Bank checkpoints.¹⁰⁶ By highlighting the unbalanced economic impacts of the regulation, the Palestinian narrative suggests that it contributes to a power imbalance that capitalizes on the Palestinian practice of za'atar foraging.

5.22 *The “Rightful Guardians of the Land” and Anti-Arab Rhetoric*

One of the main tenants and underlying assumptions in green colonialism is the establishment of the “environmental champions” and the “environmental threats” to establish a favorable narrative for the populations with the power to pass and enforce legislation. This notion of “redeeming the land” is a Zionist concept that frames the land as safe under the regulations and guardianship of the Israel state as opposed to the hands of Palestinians.¹⁰⁷ This is attached to the orientalist view of the Middle East by European imperial powers which has been pervasive for centuries. Common understandings of the land under Palestinians describe it as “desolate” and “wild” as opposed to Israeli’s guardianship bringing upon a “wondrous” and “rational” treatment of the land.¹⁰⁸ The Palestinian narrative suggests that this rhetoric is present in the regulation of wild za'atar harvesting.

On the INPA website about za'atar, they state that their main motivation for the regulation is to combat the “primitive” practice of wild za'atar harvesting that will deny future

¹⁰⁶ Yael Mizrahi-Arnaud, "A Political Ecology of Za'atar," *EnviroSociety*, June 20, 2016, <https://www.envirosociety.org/2016/06/a-political-ecology-of-zaatar/>.

¹⁰⁷ "The Redeemers of the Land," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed on April 26, 2023, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-redeemers-of-the-land-quot>.

¹⁰⁸ Edna Gorney, "Desolate' vs. 'Wondrous' and 'Wild' vs. 'Rational' Representations of Nature, Native, and Self in Two Geography Books about the Hula Valley, Northern Israel," in *Environmental Narratives: Proceedings of a conference held in association with the Middle East Environmental Futures Project*, edited by Stuart Schoenfeld (December 2004).

generations of the plant.¹⁰⁹ Given that all of those who have been fined or arrested under the regulation have been Palestinians, this indirectly speaks to Palestinian foragers. In his research, Swedenburg understands the sentiment of the regulation addressing Palestinians, saying that since they “despoil the land and have no feelings for it, [they] have no rights to it. Since Israelis do care for it, they are its rightful owners.”¹¹⁰ Manna similarly ties this into Zionism, understanding it as a “movement [that] seeks to acquire control over nature, over plants and the land” in its desire to make “the desert bloom... and extract the best from the land, unlike the ignorant natives who did not develop the natural environment and only harmed it.”¹¹¹ This enforces anti-Arab stereotypes and ideologically helps to seat the Israeli government’s claim and guardianship to the land.

For Manna, the regulation acts as a commentary on how Palestinians are viewed by the Israeli government. She states that “over the past seventy years, Palestinians themselves have been treated as an invasive species in urgent need of elimination and control.”¹¹² The Israeli government has framed Palestinian livelihoods as a threat to za’atar, and thus are treated as unfit to tend the land and forage. She notes that the top-down approach of conservation laws is a

¹⁰⁹Israel Nature and Parks Authority. "עכורבית הגלגל." Israel Nature and Parks Authority, <https://www.parks.org.il/new/%D7%A2%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%92%D7%9C/>.

¹¹⁰ Swedenburg, Ted. 2003. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. University of Arkansas Press.

¹¹¹ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

¹¹² Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

natural way for colonizers to characterize and restrict the agency of “ignorant natives”.¹¹³ The justification of Israel’s ability to pass environmental conservation laws is cultivated by these characterizations, and according to Manna, allows the Israeli government access to “state land.”¹¹⁴ The Palestinian narrative emphasizes the environmental connotation rhetoric that the za’atar regulation provides and the implications it has for territoriality.

5.23 Appropriation

The last argument I isolated from the Palestinian narrative comes from the issue of appropriation. Appropriation is a common conversation in Israel-Palestine relations, accusing one another of stealing and monetizing the other’s culture. Accusations of appropriation typically refer to food. North America was introduced to the flavor profiles and dishes of the Levant region in the 1990s under the branding of “Israeli cuisine.”¹¹⁵ The appropriation of Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese food is understood as an attempt by Israel to reconstruct its national identity.¹¹⁶ Most recently, the subjects of this debate have been hummus, falafel, and tabouleh. While this sharing of culinary tradition is a common result of cultural diffusion, Palestinians find issues with the joint monetization and erasure of Arab influence on the food branded as

¹¹³ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

¹¹⁴ Manna, Jumana. "Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin," e-flux journal 113 (February 2021), accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360006/where-nature-ends-and-settlements-begin/>.

¹¹⁵ Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera, and Sarah Ihmoud. "Land, Property, and the Right to the Ethos of Life: Bedouin and Palestinian Citizens of Israel." *Journal of Arab & Islamic Law* 5, no. 1 (2019): 61-83, <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1587&context=jatip>.

¹¹⁶ Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera, and Sarah Ihmoud. "Land, Property, and the Right to the Ethos of Life: Bedouin and Palestinian Citizens of Israel." *Journal of Arab & Islamic Law* 5, no. 1 (2019): 61-83, <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1587&context=jatip>

“Israeli.”¹¹⁷ In addition to restricting access to za’atar for Palestinians, the Palestinian narrative views the Israeli government as enforcing the notion that the herb belongs to Israel.

The accusations of za’atar appropriation are largely discussed in the context of the conflict itself. Tweets in response to a 2013 article titled “Za’atar: an Israeli spice” hyperbolize the impact of such a label.¹¹⁸ One tweet by Brian Whit of the *Guardian* reads “‘Za’atar’”¹¹⁹ A tweet from Muhammad Karim suggests that the article title could “spark some violence” and that the Israeli government is “stealing the whole culture now.”¹²⁰ Twitter user Farah Filasteen tweets the reply “I present to you: Za'atar, the spice of #Israel! What else are you now going to steal?”¹²¹ The upset because of this article shows the Palestinian claim to za’atar and its attempted mislabeling as an “Israeli” product.

In addition to the 1977 regulation, appropriation of za’atar is an additional affront to Palestinians. In response to learning that za’atar is branded as an Israeli ingredient, Palestinian spice trader, Holm Al-Masri responded by saying “who told you this lie? Za’atar comes from

¹¹⁷ Ramanathan, Lavanya. "Here's why Palestinians object to the term 'Israeli food.' It erases us from history." *The Washington Post*, February 14, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/heres-why-palestinians-object-to-the-term-israeli-food-it-erases-us-from-history/2020/02/14/96974a74-4d25-11ea-bf44-f5043eb3918a_story.html.

¹¹⁸ Kamin, Debra. "Why an Article About a Middle Eastern Spice Prompted an Internet War." *The Atlantic*, June 4, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/why-an-article-about-a-middle-eastern-spice-prompted-an-internet-war/276529/>.

¹¹⁹ Whit, Brian [@Brian_Whit]. "Zaatar, the spice of Israel" Oh dear, this could start a war. Twitter, May 30, 2013, 9:35 PM. Tweet. https://twitter.com/Brian_Whit/status/340072956849963008.

¹²⁰ Karim, Mohamed [@mkarim]. "WTF!?! --> 'Za'atar, the spice of Israel', this could spark some violence. They're stealing the entire culture now." Twitter, May 31, 2013, 9:48 PM. Tweet. <https://twitter.com/mkarim/status/340331999657082880>.

¹²¹ Karim, Mohamed [@mkarim]. "I present to you: Za'atar, the spice of #Israel! What else are you now going to steal?" Twitter, May 31, 2013, 9:48 PM. Tweet. <https://twitter.com/mkarim/status/340331999657082880>.

Palestine, even before you could find it in other parts of the Middle East.”¹²² The regulation takes away Palestinian’s main access to za’atar, and the appropriation of it further alienates and reconstructs Palestinian’s relationship to za’atar in the region. Al-Masri suggests this by saying that “The Israeli’s are trying to steal our culture and identity from us. Za’atar was born in the Palestinian land, just as I was.”¹²³

The conversation about za’atar appropriation is two-sided, and the Israeli perspective stresses the role of cultural diffusion. Unlike the Palestinian narrative, Israel removes the context of conflict or the 1977 regulation from this debate. Instead, this perspective is centralized on geographic realities. The author, Debra Kamin, responds to the “Za’atar: an Israeli spice” article with the assertion that “Israel is in the Middle East. [Their] soil is as Levantine as that of the Muslims who surround [them], and while Israel is young, its culinary traditions are ancient and linked to the land.”¹²⁴ As a result means they “eat za’atar here because its ingredients are grown here, weaned from the earth just as the biblical seven species -- barley, dates, figs, grapes, olives, pomegranates, and wheat -- are.”¹²⁵ This instead touches on the building of Israeli nationalism as

¹²² Pessah, Tom. "Are Palestinians Right in Saying That Israel Is Appropriating Their Food?" Palestine-Israel Journal, December 5, 2018. <https://www.pij.org/blogs/489/are-palestinians-right-in-saying-that-israel-is-appropriating-their-food%3F>.

¹²³ Pessah, Tom. "Are Palestinians Right in Saying That Israel Is Appropriating Their Food?" Palestine-Israel Journal, December 5, 2018. <https://www.pij.org/blogs/489/are-palestinians-right-in-saying-that-israel-is-appropriating-their-food%3F>.

¹²⁴ Kamin, Debra. "Why an Article About a Middle Eastern Spice Prompted an Internet War." The Atlantic, June 4, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/why-an-article-about-a-middle-eastern-spice-prompted-an-internet-war/276529/>.

¹²⁵ Kamin, Debra. "Why an Article About a Middle Eastern Spice Prompted an Internet War." The Atlantic, June 4, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/why-an-article-about-a-middle-eastern-spice-prompted-an-internet-war/276529/>.

a relatively new state with land in the Levant. They also reject that a given country or culture can “own” za’atar, especially given a history of “tectonic migration and displacement”.¹²⁶

5.24 Concluding Thoughts: The “Colonialism” part of Green Colonialism

This section discussed the predominant Palestinian narrative in response to the za’atar regulation. This narrative centers around themes of identity and economic suppression, anti-Arab rhetoric, and appropriation, which are a part of the colonial dynamic between Israel and Palestine. The za’atar regulation is viewed as a strategy by the Israeli government to further evict Palestinians from the land, symbolically and literally, to establish settlements. By taking away access to wild za’atar and foraging practices, the Israeli government strips Palestinians of their metaphorical relationship and steadfastness to the land in addition to their physical presence on the land. The economic impacts of not being able to harvest za’atar in addition to the imposed fines enforce the economic and power imbalance between Israelis and Palestinians. The regulation is fueled by and contributes to anti-Arab rhetoric in terms of who is fit to care for and manage the land. And lastly, appropriation restructures the perception of za’atar in Palestinian communities. These themes within the Palestinian narrative depict the regulation’s role in the colonialism they are currently enduring.

¹²⁶ Kamin, Debra. "Why an Article About a Middle Eastern Spice Prompted an Internet War." *The Atlantic*, June 4, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/why-an-article-about-a-middle-eastern-spice-prompted-an-internet-war/276529/>.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Environmental Regulations in Conflict: Main Takeaways from Za'atar Regulation

Narratives

The Palestinian and Israeli narrative themes unveil two main trends in the conversation in the 1977 za'atar regulation. The first of which is their utilization or recognition of the greater Israel-Palestine conflict. The Israeli narrative suggests that the regulation comes from a sole concern of za'atar conservation. This narrative does not situate the regulation in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict or the implications of territoriality. Instead, it stipulates that concerns of za'atar conservation exist separately from the dimensions of identity or conflict. The Palestinian narrative rests on the idea that these regulations do not exist in a vacuum. They argue that the continued enforcement of this regulation and its impacts are inherently tied to the subordination of Palestinians by the Israeli government. Research into environmental debates echoing this za'atar regulation emphasizes this “need to be examined through interdisciplinary perspectives that account for the broader settler colonial and neoliberal contexts in which they occur.”¹²⁷ This establishes what both sides view as the issue, for the Israeli government, it is za'atar conservation. For Palestinians, it is cultural erasure and appropriation.

The second observation made in analyzing and isolating the major themes of the Palestinian narrative is how closely it aligns with an accusation of green colonialism. The Palestinian narrative surrounding the environmental justification of the regulation establishes the lack of Palestinian voices in the inception and enforcement of the 1977 za'atar harvesting

¹²⁷ Hughes, S. S., Velednitsky, S., & Green, A. A. (2023). Greenwashing in Palestine/Israel: Settler colonialism and environmental injustice in the age of climate catastrophe. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 6(1), 495–513. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211069898>

regulation. This is suggested through the different narratives of wild za'atar harvesting techniques and what za'atar is commonly used for in Palestinian communities. At the same time, this narrative emphasizes the disproportionate harm the regulation has inflicted upon Palestinians. This is explained through their Palestinian narrative themes of identity suppression, political and economic dominance, and the promotion of anti-Arab rhetoric. This narrative specifically draws upon the implications or territorial claim in the connotations that spur from environmental regulations coming from the Israeli government, characterizing Palestinians as destroyers of the land and the Israeli government as the “proper guardian” of the land. The Israeli government also alienates Palestinians from the land given the symbolism of za'atar and the gathering traditions it regulates. While the Israeli government continues to enforce this regulation, it also benefits from a global perception of za'atar as “Israeli” in its efforts of nation-building, further stripping Palestinians of its symbolic za'atar in the context of the conflict.

6.2 Avenues for Future Research

Because this paper served to provide the groundwork for future research, there are many opportunities for scholarship to expand upon political-ecological considerations within occupation contexts globally. In the case of Israel and Palestine, this research can be supplemented well by in-person interviews with impacted Palestinians and the INPA. Interviews with Palestinians could expand upon the social and cultural implications of the regulation. It would be insightful to understand how these implications vary by age group, socioeconomic status, and especially by gender.

In my research, I found that the regulation on za'atar and other edible plants (akkoub and sage) may also impact local community economies. Because Palestinians face larger hurdles for land ownership than Israelis, za'atar cultivation is much harder. I was not able to find much

evidence of this economic consideration in the resources available to me, however, this could be explored through interviews about the local economy, the role of land permits, and revenue generation sources in Palestinian rural communities.

Another avenue for future social science research could utilize interviews for a more current perspective and narratives around the za'atar regulation now that small amounts can now be harvested. Research specifically on the legal process for this policy change would also be an interesting narrative analysis given the participation of Palestinian lawyers in supporting more clarity for the regulation.

A scientific study on the impact of this regulation on za'atar populations in Israel and occupied territories of the West Bank is necessary to justify its continued enforcement. To understand and weigh the costs and benefits of the regulation there needs to be a clear understanding of what those benefits are. This can be best done through a collaborative effort between the Israeli NPA and Palestinian scientists, or through a third party researching za'atar populations in the region and their risk of being overharvested. In any scientific study, there still needs to be the participation of local Palestinian communities that harvest wild za'atar to understand how the plant is harvested, stored, and used, to fully understand the risk that is posed.

Za'atar is a burgeoning case study for a trend of green colonialism in occupied territories of the West Bank and Israel, which only increases tensions in the greater Israel-Palestine conflict. To prevent such disagreements and sources of conflict in the future regarding conservation, there must be measures to ensure scientific basis as well as effort for stakeholder engagement and implementation. Interdisciplinary research and implementation will help address this wicked problem as well as others like it.

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