

## Imagined Geographies: Property Rights, Land Improvement and the Origins of State Terror in Palestine

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Contemporary violence perpetrated against Palestinian civilians by state agencies of Israel and non-state actors affiliated to the Israeli government is a form of “terrorism.”<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, this characterization reverses the customary, largely uncritical designation of Palestinians as the purveyors of terror in the conflict between Israel and Palestinians. Nevertheless, what follows is not a debate about whether Israeli policy toward Palestinians is retaliatory and somehow justified, or deliberately targeted at civilians and thus terrorist in nature. Whatever the motivation, the well-documented Israeli activities aimed at Palestinian civilians—destroying farms, uprooting crops, demolishing homes, and ghettoizing entire cities, as well as the broad range of killings and assassinations committed almost daily against Palestinian civilians—are compatible with any of the myriad different definitions of terrorism. What demands explanation are the origins and motivations for these forms of civilian-targeted brutality.

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1. I define “terrorism” as the systematic use of violence, threats, or intimidation by states or private actors against civilian populations to achieve specific political objectives. Such acts are not limited to bodily injury or death. Terrorism includes acts of destruction or threats against land and property. While both types of violence and intimidation are committed by the Israeli state and non-state actors affiliated to it against Palestinian civilians, this chapter focuses on a specific type of terrorism in Palestine connected to practices of land dispossession.

Most explanations of Israeli policy, whether embracing or rejecting the terrorist designation, focus narrowly on the regional circumstances in accounting for the violence directed at the Palestinian population. Thus, in this framework, it is the uniquely beleaguered nature of Israeli society in enduring attacks on its citizens from Palestinians that accounts for its fundamentally defensive and justifiable policies, or alternatively, but from the same framework, it is the inherently colonialist nature of the Zionist project that explains Israeli terrorist activity in seeking unilaterally to drive Palestinians off the land. Whatever alternative is chosen, Israeli policy in this framework, whether justifiable or contemptible, is a function of time and place. There is an alternative to this approach, however, that reveals Israeli violence against Palestinians to be rooted in a more historically longstanding narrative about power, property, and socially constructed notions of progress, along with practices of territorial dispossession and conquest.

### The Argument

Israeli terrorism against Palestinians has its origins in an enduring practice of establishing meanings about geographical places that enables groups with power to remake the physical and human landscape. This practice of constructing alternative representations of places and people is what Edward Said refers to as the crafting of “imaginative geographies.”<sup>1</sup> According to Said, imaginative geography is a form of invention used by practitioners of empire to re-interpret the meaning of certain territories and create discourses justifying the need for control over such re-imagined places. For Said, this exercise in imagination begins by reconstructing the history of those places coveted by empire builders. Such a process of recasting the historical geography of places, however, fuses two key themes first popularized in the late seventeenth century by John Locke (1690), one focusing on *property rights*, the other on *progress*. By investing geographical landscapes with different notions of entitlement to property, and redefining what constitutes progress on the land, practitioners of imaginative geography establish rationales for replacing the landowners and occupants in selected places with groups supposedly more deserving, dedicated to implementing a “progressive”

1. Edward Said, “Invention, Memory and Place,” *Critical Inquiry*, volume 26, number 2, 2000, p. 175-192.

vision of *stewardship* on the land.<sup>1</sup> Imaginative geography, in effect, is a precondition for the politics of territorial conquest.

It is the imaginative geography of Palestine, put into practice by early Zionists and their present-day descendants, that is the source of Israeli terror against Palestinians today. With origins in the ideas of Locke about property rights and progress, this discourse reveals extraordinary staying power. It is a critical element in the writings of early Zionists such as Theodor Herzl (1896) and, later, Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1923) and David Ben-Gurion. The language of rights to land and notions of progress continues to frame the language of imaginative geography used by the current practitioners of the Zionist cause.

While rights to property and ideas about progress pre-dated Locke, the English empiricist philosopher and political economist invested these concepts with meanings amenable to conceiving of landscapes through a different prism of land ownership and control. Rights to property, according to Locke, were not some arbitrary entitlement to land. Instead, property rights derived from the "rational" presupposition of making land more productive by imbuing it with *labor*. Such reasoning enabled the notion of property rights to assume its meaning as part of a discourse of obligation to "improve" land, a connection critical to the process of imagining geographical landscapes in a different way.

From this connection of rights to own, and obligation to improve, emerged a potent ideology of "land improvement," disseminated to English landed society by a host of agrarian promoters in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These apostles of progress perceived in the English countryside the first great test of will taking shape between two alternative visions of the landscape, one based on the "progressive" notion of individual property, improved and thus rational, the other based on conservation of an outmoded, irrational, and inefficient system of property in common. As agrarian experts promoting the rational ideals of the Enlightenment, these men exhorted landowners to improve systems of stewardship on their estates not only as a path to private gain, but also to promote the greatest good for the greatest number. This discourse about land improvement, in effect, was an appeal to imagine the physical and human geography of the rural landscape differently, and transform it.

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1. On notions of land stewardship in the early modern period see Chandra Mukerji, *Intelligent Uses of Engineering and the Legitimacy of State Power, Technology and Culture*, volume 44, number 4, 2003, p. 655-676.

What ensued from this effort to re-imagine land and implement this vision of property rights, progress, and land improvement—Parliamentary Enclosure—was the single greatest transformation in the history of the English landscape, marked not only by the changing visual rhythms of the countryside, but also by a profound set of changes in agrarian practices and systems of ownership, occupancy, and human circulation on the land.<sup>1</sup> In this transformation, an agrarian system of customary rights to property in common, reinforced by open access on the land for peasant commoners, gave way to a system of closed circulation across the landscape in which land came under the control and legal purview of individuals.<sup>2</sup> These institutional changes on the landscape were reinforced by the construction of untold miles of walls and fences which also communicated new meanings about property while acting materially to enforce the newly-bounded system of ownership, access and trespass on the land.<sup>3</sup> In this way, an ideology grounded in rights of property and notions of land improvement became the basis for re-imagining the landscape and remaking it, in a manner akin to conquest, to fit this imagined vision.

While the ideology of land improvement in early modern England served as the inspiration for Enclosure and the agrarian preconditions of capitalist development, discourses about property rights and improving the land became the basis for more thorough-going imperial ventures involving the remaking of landscape. It is this lineage, inspired by Locke and notions of property rights and progress that emerged as the foundation of “Manifest Destiny” in the US, justifying colonization and capitalist development of Native American land, and inspiring the terrorist practices of “removal” against Native Americans so fundamental to these aims.<sup>4</sup> It is this same combination at work inspiring the Zionist project today. From the British Enclosures, through the colonization of

1. Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, p. 9; Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside*, London, J.M. Dent, p. 190-91.

2. Michael Turner, *English Parliamentary Enclosure: Its Historical Geography and Economic History*, Folkstone, William Dawson & Sons, 1980; Michael Turner, *Enclosures in Britain 1750-1830*, London, Macmillan, 1984.

3. Nicholas Blomley, “Making Private Property: Enclosure, Common Right and the Work of Hedges,” *Rural History*, volume 18, number 1, 2007, p. 1-21.

4. Kathy Squadrito, “Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian,” in Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (eds.), *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, p. 101-124; Barbara Arneil, “John Locke, Natural Law, and Colonialism,” *History of Political Thought*, volume, 13, p. 587-603; Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and Amer-*

Native American land, to the dispossession of Palestinians, a relatively unchanging discourse about unimproved land—even *barren* land—has inspired certain groups with power to imagine an improved landscape, and to stake claims to such barren and unimproved territory based on promises to work the land, and appeals to the progress ensuing from these labors.

Locke's ideas of rights to property and visions of land improvement that influenced Parliamentary Enclosure and justified the taking of Native American land, resurfaced among Zionism's early architects who exhorted Jews victimized by anti-Semitism to colonize the Palestinian landscape and improve this territory based on an imagined representation of place. Such notions about property and land improvement deriving from Locke inspired Zionists to re-imagine the Palestinian landscape from one where Palestinians were its cultivators and stewards, to one where systems of ownership and stewardship on the land, along with socio-economic practices became Jewish. At the core of this process of re-imagining land was an invented idea of who rightfully belonged to the Palestinian landscape. For Zionists, this notion of ownership and belonging was far from invented, but instead had the backing of a "Higher Authority." The actual project emerging from this exercise in geographical imagination, however, did not only recast the system of property rights in Palestine. Much like what occurred in England, this project created a new class of legitimate property owners and trespassers. In targeting for destruction such institutions as the Palestinian farm and the Palestinian home that anchor Palestinians physically and culturally to the landscape, this imagined—and now remade—geography has formed the taproot of Israeli terrorist violence against Palestinian civilians. The destruction of these anchors aims precisely at re-arranging the demographic, socio-economic, and physical landscape in accordance with a geographical imagination in which bulldozing farms and demolishing homes is the route to improving land and fulfilling God's will. In the end, claims made by Israeli officialdom about self-defense as the motivation for these acts of brutality committed against Palestinian civilians are questionable if not improbable. Such activities instead spring from the historically deeper impulses of imagining land differently

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*ica: The Defense of English Colonialism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996; Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005.

### Property and Imagined Imperial Geographies

It was in his celebrated work, *Orientalism* (1978), and later in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), that Edward Said crafted his concept of “imaginative geographies” in explaining the formation of ideologies aimed at controlling places and the people living there.<sup>1</sup> For Said, imagining geography is a cultural process of creating representations about places designed to reinforce and at the same time justify the conquest of territory and the subjugation of its people. This cultural process of ideology-making refers to the way groups with power invent the meaning of geographically-placed landscapes while reinterpreting notions of who *belongs* to the places being imagined.

Drawing from seventeenth and eighteenth century British writers, Said observes how, in literary representations of the British countryside, a new sense of entitlement to land seemed to permeate the collective psyche of the landscape’s newly ascendant rural property owners. What these authors, were celebrating, Said insists, is the virtue of “a new propertied class,” marked by changes in the landscape itself.<sup>2</sup> Property in these literary works, he argues, now stands triumphantly as a private, individual preserve, freed from the encroachments of peasant commoners with their customary rights to land. In transmitting images of land encumbered by individual prerogative, these representations of landscape convey a new structure of property rights overlaid upon the land, and legitimize a type of territorial conquest in the countryside. For Said, such conquests of territory begin with the practice of inventing new meanings about territory and re-imagining systems of sovereignty on the landscape.

There was good reason for Said to focus on England of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in arguing about ideologies of property and discourses of land improvement as the basis for remaking and colonizing land. Not only was England at that time securing a place alongside Spain and France as European empire builders, the historical soil of England was emerging as a hothouse of new theory about politics and the economy that would elevate property rights and land improvement as legitimate concerns of government. Locke was a pivotal figure in this emergent theorizing. In his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690),

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Knopf/Random House, 1993.

2. Said, “Invention, Memory and Place,” *op cit*.

he insisted on property as the most important philosophical problem of politics, civil society, and the state of nature. His theory of property in this work served not only as an inspiration for Parliamentary Enclosure and the improvement of English agriculture. Much of Locke's work on property provided a philosophical defense of England's right to the land of Native Americans on economic as well as ethical grounds.

According to Locke, in the beginning of human society "all the world was America," an assertion intended to emphasize the supposedly primitive nature of Native American society, a land with property in common absent property rights.<sup>1</sup> With the advent of agriculture, however, individuals were vested with rights to land based on their capacity to improve it through *labor*. "God gave the world to men in common"; he wrote, "but it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common [...]. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, and labor was to be his title to it." For Locke, "cultivating the earth [...] which requires labor and materials to work on, necessarily introduces private possessions." Nevertheless, for Locke, private possession of property had a specific meaning. Property was "the earth itself" while title to portions of the earth derived from the work put into it. At the same time, Locke emphasizes that it is God who commands humans to work in order to overcome their condition in the state of nature and lay claim to property. "God and his reason commanded [humans] to subdue the earth, i.e. improve it for the benefit of life," he writes. By improving the land through labor, human beings could stake a claim upon the soil of the earth and make it their own. Accordingly, property rights derived not from inherited title but from *rational* presuppositions; from the capacity to work and be industrious on the land, and improve it. If land could be made more productive through labor, then according to Locke the maker of that land had a private right to it—and the blessing of a Higher Authority to claim it.

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1. Locke was far from an objective party in his assessments of North American society. As an advisor to the Earl of Shaftsbury on colonial affairs in North America, Locke was intimately familiar with colonial accounts of Indian agriculture which admitted to systems of cultivation and notions of use rights. Consequently, his misrepresentations of North American Indians and their life on the land seem to be intentional and support the view that he developed his characterization of Native America to contrast it with his labor-based, improvement-driven theory of property so as to justify the appropriation of Native American land. See Banner, *op. cit.*, p. 46-48 and Squadrito, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Citations from Locke's *Treatise* taken from Chapter 5.

### Locke and Native Americans

For Locke, land imbued with labor had two distinct characteristics. It was *cultivated*, and *enclosed*. “As much land as a Man tills, plants, improves, cultivates and can use the product of, so much is his *Property*. He, by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the Commons.” Locke refers repeatedly to these two characteristics in defining rights of land ownership. Cultivation and enclosure, in turn, are what enable land to assume its character as improved and are the features differentiating English land from the land possessed in common by Native Americans. In this sense, Locke actually echoed many earlier English colonists, notably John Winthrop, the first Governor of New England, who in the 1620s argued that the Indians possessed no property because “they inclose noe land.”<sup>1</sup> As colonial agriculture expanded gradually filling open land with a landscape of cultivated fields enclosed by fences, and as colonists began to prosper by the end of the century, Locke would have the evidence he needed for the superiority of privately cultivated and enclosed land over land held in common.

In making these connections between labor and land improvement, Locke adds an important element to his labor theory of property in explaining why the fate of the English and Native Americans diverged. He insists on the importance of money and commerce as incentives to improving land and supplementing the commandments to labor of a Higher Power. Lacking the incentives of commerce, Native Americans, he argued, failed to work the land and improve it. As a result, Native Americans were needy and wretched with the poorest beggars of England enjoying a better way of life. Accordingly, the conclusions for colonial land policy were obvious. In the absence of land that was improved, Native Americans, reasoned Locke, had no rightful claims to ownership of the land they were using.

Perhaps even more importantly, the focus in Locke’s theory of property on labor and land improvement undercut any claims to property and land based on *occupancy*. Whatever the accuracy of Locke’s mischaracterizations of Native American society, his theory of property provided a powerful set of justifications for English settlement of Native American land. If the existing occupants on the land did not improve it, then in the logic of Locke’s argument, their occupancy was insufficient

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1. Quoted in William Cronon, *Changes on the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1983, p. 130.



for claiming possession and the land in question was thus free for the taking—for those willing to do the work.

By 1751, colonists such as Benjamin Franklin were describing a “destiny” for Americans to fill the West. Others, such as Thomas Jefferson, expressed similar messianic and expansionist visions, even proposing the idea of Indian Removal during his presidency, while John Quincy Adams was emphatic in connecting colonization to a divine mission. “The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one *nation*,” Adams argued in 1811.

With discovery of gold in Georgia in 1830, Andrew Jackson and the American Congress put this vision into practice when they passed the Indian Removal Act dispossessing the Cherokee from Georgia and forcing them to march on the infamous Trail of Tears to Oklahoma, in the course of which roughly 5,000 of 15,000 Cherokees lost their lives. For most of the nineteenth century, American army troops and homesteaders terrorized a Native American population, convinced, much as Locke had emphasized, that God had reserved the land of North America for them to cultivate, improve, and enclose. In this way, ideas about property rights supported by an ideology of progress created an imagined geography of North America justifying a westward march of American colonists and the taking of Native American land.

### Locke and British Enclosure

While Locke’s ideas about property had a colonialist bias, his theory was equally formidable in promoting a domestic colonial geography of imagination. In this case, however, the central target was not the land of Native American Indians. Instead, the target was land in common and the institution deriving from the custom of *common right*.<sup>1</sup> This institution is what entitled small peasant commoners to access certain lands as a collective resource.

By the late seventeenth century, the so-called open field system of family farms tied to common right was coming under attack by agrarian experts as unproductive and irrational.<sup>2</sup> Locke himself contributed to this campaign by admitting to the comparison between Native American land, unenclosed and unimproved held in common rather than in

1. See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, London, Merlin Press, 1991.

2. Susanna Wade Martins, *Farmers, Landlords, and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720-1870*, London, Central Books, 2004.

severalty, and the system of common right farming. What emerged during this period was an influential public discourse extolling the virtues of land improvement and the necessity of private individual rights to property in order to achieve the aim of productive land stewardship. As this discourse sharpened, linking progress and land improvement to property rights, a new type of enclosure system, Parliamentary Enclosure, emerged as a remedy to achieve these abstract goals.<sup>1</sup> Enclosure, it was reasoned, consolidated landholdings in creating larger farms. Such farms, in turn, were thought to be more productive because they could more easily absorb, and were more readily amenable to modern, efficient techniques. In this way, land improvement became tied to a program of enclosure and the creation of large agrarian estates. What enabled enclosure and the creation of larger farms to evolve from a once-private activity to a Parliamentary concern, however, was a parallel discourse proclaiming land improvement and productivity enhancements in agriculture to be part of the national interest.<sup>2</sup> Such reasoning entitled landowners aspiring to land improvement to seek help from government to enclose land and create more productive estates. What was, in effect, being imagined was an agrarian geography absent peasant commoners whose land would be appropriated by larger farms as part of a socially constructed vision of land improvement.

Among those with a prominent role in promoting this new outlook to a constituency of landowners as well as Parliamentarians was the celebrated agricultural writer of the late eighteenth century, Arthur Young (1741-1820).<sup>3</sup> For Young, enclosure was critical for creating what he termed “great farms” and achieving the productivity gains needed to improve the state of agriculture. For this reason, enclosure was for Young “the first and greatest of all improvements.” Commenting on gains in agrarian productivity throughout the realm during the 1770s, Young states emphatically: “Without GREAT FARMS you would never have seen these improvements.” What was being contemplated through this program of enclosure and land improvement was nothing

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1. Enclosure had been part of the English landscape since the fifteenth century, undertaken piecemeal by landowners as a private activity of enlarging and consolidating estates. Parliamentary Enclosure elevated what was essentially a private activity to a matter of public concern.

2. Wade Martins, *op cit.*, p. 7-17.

3. G. E. Mingay (ed.), *Arthur Young and His Times*, London, Macmillan, 1975, p. 104 and 107.

less than a wholesale transformation in the system of land tenure for creation of “capitalist agriculture.” In this transformation, large farms absorbed small farms while the owners of these large estates leased the amalgamated holdings to tenants who cultivated the land with wage laborers.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, supporters of Parliamentary Enclosure argued that the economy of common right to land needed improvement because, lacking in private property rights, it was primitive similar to North America. Preserving common right was thus akin to leaving North America to the Indians. Arguably, it was John Sinclair, President of the Board of Agriculture, who likened the common economy most strongly to a primitive age, and who, inspired by the Napoleonic wars, insisted in 1803 on subduing it like a foreign enemy. “Let us not be satisfied with the liberation of Egypt, or the subjugation of Malta,” writes Sinclair, “but let us subdue Finchley Common” while forcing those in its wake “to submit to the yoke of improvement.”<sup>2</sup> Land improvement had now become codified through metaphors of submission and conquest. Such a campaign had a profound impact on the landscape. As late as 1688, thirty-three percent of the land was owned by small freeholders. By 1801, this figure had dropped to ten percent.<sup>3</sup> What was imagined in the form of a discourse promoting a set of changes on the land had become part of the landscape.

### **Locke and the Origins of Israeli State Terror**

State terror against Palestinian civilians has its origins in an imagined vision about the landscape of Palestine. At the core of this process of geographical imagination was a vision of “Judaizing” and “de-Arabising” this territory.<sup>4</sup> The historical geography of the Palestinian landscape attests to the thoroughness of this effort at both imagination and implementation. In 1947-1948, Jewish public agencies and private investors owned roughly six percent of the land in Palestine while Pales-

1. Robert C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman: The Agricultural Development of the South Midlands*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 1 and 25.

2. Quoted in Neeson, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

3. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

4. Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

tinian Arabs owned roughly ninety percent. Today, these figures are reversed.<sup>1</sup>

The process of “land redemption” was not, however, driven exclusively by issues of ethno-religious identity. Redeeming Palestine is also a project of economic modernization consisting of a transformation in the agrarian, urban, and industrial structure on the land. It is in this context of both rights to land and economic progress that current Israeli activity toward Palestinian civilians such as destroying farms and demolishing homes assumes its meanings. Invented notions of property rights—who has rightful claims to the land—and ideas about improving the land—who is capable of land improvement—are decisive in this process of imagining and remaking geography. This story about remaking landscape begins with creating a new set of ideas about what land can be.

### **Zionist Ideologies of Entitlement and Improvement**

Violence against the Palestinian population committed by the Israeli state is rooted in the convergence of two historically created discourses about land and landscape. The first derives from nineteenth-century nationalism affirming the legitimacy of culturally differentiated groups to statehood, and the influence of this ideology in convincing European Jewry of its right to a territorial “container” within the modern state system.<sup>2</sup> The second is rooted in notions of entitlement to property and ideas about land improvement. From this convergence evolved the idea of a “Jewish state,” along with a specific ideology for remaking Palestinian territory, the ideology of Zionism. At its core, Zionism was an exercise in re-imagining the geography of the Palestinian landscape as a Jewish landscape. Although secular as an ideology, Zionism drew from the belief of many Jews and Jewish organizations in the right of the Jewish people to return to Palestine as part of God’s will. This vision of return was reinforced not only by ideas about entitlement to land based on property rights granted by God, but also on notions of improving what was represented as an unimproved, backward, and even barren territory.

1. Graham Usher, “Unmaking Palestine: On Israel, Palestinians and the Wall,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, volume 35, number 1, Autumn, 2005, p. 25-43 and 27.

2. Peter J. Taylor, “The State as Container: Territoriality in the Modern World-System.” *Progress in Human Geography*, volume 18, number 2, 1994, p. 151-162.

Although Jews had begun to re-settle in Palestine by the 1870s, it was Theodor Herzl who, in 1896, popularized the idea of Jews establishing their own state, proposing Palestine as the territory most deserving of this state-building enterprise. Such a program, however, posed a seemingly intractable problem: how was this territory, almost entirely Arab, to be remade as land with a Jewish character? Central to the ideology developed by Herzl and later Zionists to resolve this dilemma was the belief that Palestine *belonged* to the Jewish people by virtue of God's will. Early Zionism, in effect, made the same appeals to divine providence in support of a right of property as Locke and the American colonists.

A critical assumption behind Herzl's vision was the non-recognition of the Arab population in Palestine and the notion of the area as empty land. For Herzl, European settlement, with its industrious character and preoccupation with economic development, contrasted with a landscape represented as barren and is what would "improve" the land. Zionists, however, knew Palestine to be inhabited, but believed that remaking the territory and creating a state could occur by ignoring or bypassing the indigenous population. Others insisted that an agreement with Palestinian Arabs was possible to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. One Zionist hostile to both approaches, who grasped fully the ramifications of Zionist colonization on land already inhabited, was Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880-1940).

Unlike other Zionists influenced by Herzl, Jabotinsky rejected the idea of Palestine as empty, conceding the inevitability of Palestinians resisting Zionist colonization of their land. The aims of the Palestinians and those of Zionist colonists, he argues, are inherently in conflict, and thus "it is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestinian Arabs for converting 'Palestine' from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority." Jabotinsky goes on to criticize Zionists who believe that the Palestinians could be tricked into believing the benevolence of Zionist aims, or bribed to accept a Jewish state in Palestine. While Jabotinsky insisted upon the moral right of Jews to settle in Palestine, he understood how such morality placed Jews on an irreconcilable collision with Palestinians.

Nevertheless, Jabotinsky considered it "impossible to eject the Arabs from Palestine" as some of his colleagues were promoting, in order to establish the demographic facts for an eventual Jewish state. Without transfer of the Palestinian population, the Zionist project can proceed, he argues, "only under the protection of a power that is independent

of the native population—behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.”<sup>1</sup> For Jabotinsky, the iron wall was a metaphor that represented one thing: Jewish military force. For Jabotinsky, either Zionists would have to use such force against Palestinians, or abandon the Zionist project. His was an imagined geography with extraordinary prescience.

If Jabotinsky was one to accept force but reject transfer as the solution to the Zionist dilemma, it was David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) who eventually synthesized both ideas into a coherent ideology and program for Jewish statehood in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Like other Zionists in that he was at least partly inspired by socialism, Ben-Gurion was reluctant to promote force to achieve statehood. After Palestinians resisted colonization during events known as the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, however, he accepted Jabotinsky’s view that military power, not negotiation, was necessary to accomplish Zionist aims. At the same time, the Revolt compelled Ben-Gurion to diverge from Jabotinsky and embrace transfer as the logic of force. In 1937, Ben-Gurion made his sentiments public at the Twentieth Zionist Congress in Zurich where he insisted that transfer had always been the aim of Zionist settlement. By 1938, transfer was discussed openly at meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive and Ben-Gurion admitted: “I support compulsory transfer. I don’t see in it anything immoral.” It is thus with Ben-Gurion that Zionism arrives at a vision of how the human geography of Palestine could change.

At roughly the same time as Ben-Gurion was embracing transfer, Zionists were already on the way to recasting the landscape in accordance with how they imagined it. Known as the *Homa Umigdal* project, this plan for redesigning the land consisted of three primary architectural elements: a settlement, a wall, and a guard tower. Although seemingly defensive, these settlements were an offensive system of land development consisting of a conquering troop to seize the land, walls to preclude encroachment, and a tower to police the surroundings for

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1. Ze’ev Jabotinsky, *The Iron Wall: We and the Arabs* (1923)  
[www.marxists.de/middleeast/ironwall/ironwall.htm](http://www.marxists.de/middleeast/ironwall/ironwall.htm)

2. Sources in this paragraph on Ben-Gurion include Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2001; Nur Mashala, “The Historical Roots of the Palestinian Refugee Question,” in Naseer Aruri (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return*, London, Pluto Press, 2001, p. 36-67; Benny Morris, “Revisiting the Palestinian Exodus of 1948,” in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 37-59.

what was considered hostile opposition.<sup>1</sup> From 1936-1947, roughly 118 such outposts were established not only to take control of land acquired through purchase; they aimed at making the area surrounding the settlement *de facto* Jewish by rendering it dangerous, if not impossible, for Palestinians to access their own land adjacent to these enclaves. Essentially the *Homa Umigdal* project translated an imaginary geography of statehood into an actual landscape of built forms. Perhaps most importantly, settlement, wall, and tower became prescient signals for the type of landscape remade by the Zionist project in the years to come.

### Removing Palestinian Anchors

Through the war of 1947-1949—what official Israeli society refers to as the War of Independence and Palestinians call the “Catastrophe”—Israel was able to implement its vision of a Jewish landscape on roughly seventy-eight percent of historic Palestine. Since 1967, when Israel emerged victorious in a war that redefined the region, this state has initiated policies to complete what it began in the remaining twenty-two percent of Palestine it now occupies. It is in these Occupied Territories where the Israeli Government and individuals allied to it are involved in violence as a way of securing control of the land still in Palestinian hands, and changing the character and identity of the landscape.

In this campaign to alter the landscape, the Israeli government and its allies have used two practices in particular as part of a broader campaign of redeeming Palestinian land, erasing the Palestinian farm and demolishing the Palestinian home. These two practices have emerged as critical in this campaign because of the role played by farms and homes in anchoring Palestinians to the landscape. Logically, if these anchors are weakened and eventually dislodged, the demography and human geography of the territory can change. In this way, the Palestinian farm and home lie at the center of a re-imagined landscape remade through violence and terror.

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1. Sharon Rotbard, “Wall and Tower (Homa Umigdal): The Mold of Israeli Architecture,” in Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman (eds.), *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture*, London, Verso, 2004, p. 39-56 and 42.

### Erasing The Farm

The settlement of Jewish Israelis in the Territories occupied by Israel drives the process of seizing Palestinian farmland. Conceived as official government policy shortly after occupation in 1967, settling Israeli citizens in the West Bank and Gaza began in earnest in 1972 and has expanded unabated owing to both official policy directives, and the activities of settlers themselves. The result is a diminishing land inventory for Palestinians. As land passed from Palestinian ownership into the inventory of Israeli state land to be eventually allocated to Israeli settlements, or as Palestinian land was directly appropriated by force by settlement groups, the Palestinian farmer was essentially dispossessed of property. As the Israeli human rights group Peace Now describes it, this process is one of “daylight robbery.”<sup>1</sup> It is also a process replete with violence and terror often carried out by military contractors who uproot and bulldoze the land, and destroy what is cultivated on it, as well as by settlers and settler groups convinced of the righteousness of what they are doing. The question is: how do such acts of violence and terror become legitimate, even mundane?

The answer is found in an imagined geography that elevates one group of people as rightful owners and stewards of the landscape while designating the other as trespassers, removable if necessary by force. Adding to this belief in the legitimacy of Jewish ownership of Palestinian land is the notion expressed forcefully by Mayor Ron Nahman of Ariel, one of the West Bank’s largest settlements, about the territory’s barren character and need for improvement. “Look at the landscape,” insists Nahman. “They [Palestinians] *don’t* plant! They *don’t* cultivate” (Interview, May 8, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

1. Dror Etkes and Hagit Ofran, “*Breaking the Law in the West Bank: Israeli Settlement Building on Private Palestinian Property.*”

[www.peacenow.org.il/data/SIP\\_STORAGE/files/9/2569.pdf](http://www.peacenow.org.il/data/SIP_STORAGE/files/9/2569.pdf).

2. Nahman was using this argument to justify the seizure of what he insisted was empty land for the settlement. When I suggested that his observations about empty land were mistaken, and that settlements such as Ariel had confiscated Palestinian land, he said I was wrong. “We never took one square inch of Palestinian land,” he insisted. When I told him of farmers from the Palestinian village of Marda down the hill from Ariel who told me of the land they lost when Ariel was built, he asked me whether those farmers could *prove* that they owned the land. “They have no proof that the land belonged to them,” was how Nahman responded. These farmers, in fact, do have proof of ownership but, in what is a conflict over property rights between different legal systems, the types of documents in their possession, some dating from Ottoman practices



Owing to this imagined vision of the landscape, mayors of West Bank towns tell the same story of how land belonging to local residents is confiscated and allocated for Jewish settlement. “We used to have 7,800 dunums of land,” says Ali Mustafa Shoshe, Manager of the Village Council for the town of Husan. “From 1982-86, Israeli authorities took 5,200 dunums of land belonging to farmers from the Village to build the settlement of Bettar Illit. After the settlement was built, we were left with only 2,400 dunums” (Interview, July 24, 2006). Mahmoud Sabatin was one such farmer with land where Bettar Illit now sits. “In 1985, my family lost 30 dunums of land with olive, fig and almond trees,” he explains. “Now houses from Bettar Illit sit on land that was ours. They robbed us,” he insists (Interview July 24, 2006). Yet, Sabatin’s story is far from finished. He still owns roughly 15 dunums of land with olives, figs, and almonds directly next to the settlement that was not seized during construction. On any given day, however, trees from his land are burned by nearby settlers, while branches are broken or shorn from their trunks and scattered on the ground. On July 24, 2006, Sabatin confronted the director of security at the settlement. “Why do you allow your residents to vandalize, burn, and destroy my land,” he demands. “They are *tending* the land,” is the response he receives from the head of security for Bettar Illit.

The fate suffered by Mr Sabatin at the hands of settlers underscores one of the primary activities undertaken by both state and private actors undermining the Palestinian farm and disabling the anchors holding Palestinians to land—the destruction of crops, most notably olive trees. From 1994-2006 the Israeli army and contractors working for settlements have uprooted roughly 680,000 olive trees worth US\$104 million in Occupied Palestine.<sup>1</sup> Such destruction, however, has more than economic significance. Because olive cultivation occupies over fifty percent of the agricultural land area, olives and the olive tree permeate the economic and cultural life of Palestinians and have a symbolic meaning as metaphors of the roots attaching Palestinians to landscape. When Palestinian olive trees are uprooted and bulldozed, the owners invariably suffer from these violent acts almost as if they have lost a family member. “These trees have been a part of my family for

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of land registration, are not recognized as proof of ownership under Israeli law. In this context, such “uncultivated” land is ripe for taking. See *idem*.

1. From Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem [www.arij.org/](http://www.arij.org/) in a personal correspondence.

500 years,” explained Tawfiq Hasan Salim from the Palestinian village of Jayyus after settlers from the nearby settlement of Zufim uprooted and destroyed 300 of his olive trees to make way for the expansion of the settlement (Interview, December 11, 2004). Consequently, the destruction of olive trees plays a very specific role in the re-imagined geography of Palestine. It is a form of cultural violence aimed at eradicating those elements of material culture that enable Palestinians to imagine their place on the landscape, and at substituting a different group of people on the land.

### **Demolishing The Home**

If destroying farms and uprooting olive trees have been ongoing practices on the Palestinian landscape, so too is demolishing Palestinian homes, a policy central to Israel’s approach to Palestinians since 1948.<sup>1</sup> From 1967 to the present, roughly 18,000 houses have been demolished in the Occupied Territories. As the occupying power, Israeli authorities have invested themselves with the discretionary power to determine what Palestinians can build—and what is “illegal.” The logic of house demolition as a vehicle for recasting the landscape is obvious. “Demolishing homes is a form of transferring Palestinians from Palestine,” says Salim Shawramreh, whose home in Anata in the West Bank has been demolished four times by the Israeli army. “They destroy your house to send you a message that they don’t want you here” (Interview, August 28, 2007).

In addition to actual demolitions, Israelis use threats of demolition as a systematic policy of intimidation. At any one time, there are over 2000 standing demolition orders for Palestinian houses. Mr Sami al-Refaie, a resident of Anata next to Jerusalem is one such homeowner. His story illustrates broader issues of land confiscation in Jerusalem where, since 1967, Israeli policy has transformed the city’s demographic structure by annexing Palestinian land adjacent to city boundaries while reducing the Palestinian population in these annexed areas. Under this policy, land belonging to Palestinian villages was incorporated into the city’s redrawn limits, but the Palestinian population of these areas was invariably refused rights of residency in Jerusalem. Without the proper identi-

1. Jeff Halper, “The Message of the Bulldozers,” *Forced Migration Review*, number 26, 2006, p. 28-29.

fication papers allowing the right to live in Jerusalem, their lives are precarious, while their homes face demolition. In September, 2004, Israeli military authorities came to the house of Mr al-Rafaie and arrested him. Mr al-Rafaie explains how Israeli authorities, in expanding the boundaries of Jerusalem in order to annex land, made it “illegal” for him and his family to remain in his house. “They have done something nobody can believe,” he says.

They have split my house down the middle. One portion of my house is in Anata [West Bank] while the stairs and entry are now in Jerusalem. On this map they have given me, the new boundary of Jerusalem goes through the front portion and the stairwell. To enter my house, I must now pass through Jerusalem, but I do not have a Jerusalem ID. I have a West Bank ID. They arrested me claiming I entered Jerusalem when I passed through my own house and was therefore in Jerusalem illegally without a permit. I am afraid they will demolish my house (Interview, December 26, 2004).

How is it possible to understand the forms of terrorist violence and intimidation used by Israeli state authorities and private actors allied to the state of Israel against Palestinian civilians aimed at destroying the foundations of Palestinian society? These practices of terror are little different from other forms of violence perpetrated against weaker groups and inspired by a particular way of imagining geographical places. In this sense, Israeli terror against Palestinian civilians has much in common with other states engaged in similar kinds of activities and atrocities.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Israeli terror against Palestinian civilians, although part of a general historical trend, has a very specific set of targets such as farms and homes, the destruction of which is aimed at remaking land in accordance with an imagined geographical vision of who belongs to the landscape—and who does not.

At the core of imagined geographies lie reframed notions about property rights and ideologies of land improvement that provide legal and moral rationales for dispossessing those who own and control the coveted and imagined territory. Here, John Locke plays what might be an unintended role. His ideas about rights of property and land improvement resonate across time and resurface in historical moments as seemingly different as the British Enclosures, the American frontier, and

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1. James Ron, *Frontiers and Ghettos: State Violence in Serbia and Israel*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003.

contemporary Palestine. In each of these cases, the voice of Locke, in explaining the basis for rights to land and the need to improve it while, invoking at all times the will of God, provides inspiration for re-imagining landscape and dispossessing people of land and property.

There is, in this sense, continuity in what transpired during the British Enclosures, the Indian wars of the American frontier, and the Israeli terror in Palestine. In each case, groups with power were unsatisfied with the economic and demographic configuration of the landscape and appealed to laws of property and ideologies of land improvement in re-imagining and remaking the landscape, and dispossessing certain groups of their rights to ownership, stewardship, and occupancy. When Ariel Sharon, the architect of Israeli settlement policy, suggested that the goal of Israeli settlement-building was to incorporate the land of Palestine into Israel proper, “dunum by dunum,” he spoke in a voice similar to Andrew Jackson, the seventh president of the US, who in the 1830s advocated removal of American Indians to the West, and John Sinclair, President of the British Board of Agriculture who in 1803 likened the unenclosed system of common property to a primitive age and insisted on subduing commoners and making them submit to “the yoke of improvement.” Dispossession, whether from British enclosure, American expansion, or Israeli occupation, is an ongoing story often involving violent, terrorist acts. In this way, Israel is not unique but is part of the same historical lineage of what Edward Said has termed “the politics of dispossession.”

For the state of Israel, being part of this lineage has important consequences in terms of its claims of resorting to violence against civilians as a form of self-defense. If indeed Israeli terror is part of a longstanding lineage of dispossession connected to re-imagining geographical landscapes, then its claims of using violence against civilian populations in self-defense are weakened by the symmetry of its acts with violence committed as part of past campaigns of territorial conquest. Sadly, this history of dispossession linked to geographical imagination appears to have a firm foothold in the modern world.