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Green Lines and Eco-Hegemonies:
Israel, Environmentalism, and the New Rule of Old Green Expertise

By
Miri Lavi-Neeman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in

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in the

Graduate Division

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Committee in charge:

Professor Gillian Patricia Hart, Chair
Professor Jean Carter Lave
Professor Michael John Watts

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Green Lines and Eco-Hegemonies:
Israel Environmentalism and The New Rule of Old Green Expertise

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Abstract

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Professor Gillian Patricia Hart, Chair

This Dissertation uses “Green Lines” as a type of Zionist environmental legacy—vision, reason, practice, and expertise, and as an analytical perspective, to explore Zionism as an eco-Hegemony. In the four chapters of the dissertation, I explore how a vision of “Green Lines” shaped two important development projects in two key moments and sites in Israel’s environmental history. The first, the Hula Drainage project in the north of Israel, during the 1950s and the 1960s, and the second the formation of the Wine Route in the Negev/Naqab highlands in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. I argue, that in each of these moments the vision of Green Lines that is deeply rooted in colonial understanding of nature and of nature management, worked as powerful terrain, articulating development and conservation, visions and practices, to support the Zionist hegemony as an ethnic project. It produces and solidify differences and boundaries between Jews and Arabs, and Judaize what is considered as good ecology and good environmental practice.

Drawing on scholarship in critical geography and historical political ecology, I employ the concept of “Green Lines” analytically as an alternative to previous scholarship on Palestine and Israel which often analyzed Palestinians, Bedouins, and Jews in a way that separates the histories and societies of these specific social groups, and the histories of these social groups and nature. In this dissertation I focus in particular on the ways historical visions of Green Lines, are reworked into present political economies, and ecological understanding of drylands, and form struggled-over social ecologies where the meaning of good healthy ecologies, environmentalists, and environmental expertise are contested.

To my best friends-Shira, Shiri, Maya, and Leron
To my children Aya and Neta
To the brave Bedouins of the Negev highlands

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GLOSSARY

CUBV Council of the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages

HA Kibbutz Hulata Archive

IDF Israeli Defense Forces

ILA Israel Land Administration

JNF Jewish National Fund

KKL Keren Kayemet Le'Israel

MEP Ministry of Environmental Protection

NDA Negev Development Act

NPA Nature and Park Authority

PEF British Palestine Exploration Fund

SCA state Central Archive

SPNI Society for the Protection of the Nature in Israel

SSA Steven Spielberg Archive for Jewish Films

TA Tuviyahu Archive of the Negev

ZA The Central Zionist Archive

Acknowledgements

Dissertations take time. And this one took very long time and spread across continents. Over that time, life happened, kids were born, loved ones have died, old friendships have deepened and new ones were formed. The say goes that it takes a village to raise a child, I think that raising my children and writing this dissertation required a metropole. So this, without question, could have been the longest chapter of this dissertation since, to be able to finish this project, I received endless help. First and foremost, to my chair in Berkeley, Gillian Hart I owe an ever- lasting thanks for a life changing, transformative intellectual experience; and for support of the kind I have never imagined could be part of academic life. Her patience and trust in me are the only reason this project is over. Jean Lave and Michael Watts, sincere and always astute notes, and brilliance, are luxuries that very few students are lucky enough to have and I am grateful for letting me stick with them.

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Introduction

Green Lines and Eco-Hegemonies:

The New Rule of Old Green Expertise

An Introduction over a Cup of Tea

It is Passover in Israel and I am forced to take a break from my field work. The solitary farms (single family-owned farms now called the “wine route farms”) where interviews for my research project take place in the Negev highland, are major sites of desert internal tourism. They are now at their full capacity, hosting and entertaining the spring wave of visitors, perhaps the last one before the big heat waves of early summer scares away all outsiders from the desert. All other public institutions—schools, libraries, and archives – are closed for the holiday. And so I join the crowds and some locals, to do what everyone else does during holidays in the desert – go on a hike. The winter rains have been generous this year and the desert is still in full bloom. Waterholes are outflowing the chalky rocky plains surrounding them, which makes the desert attractive and busier than ever. The Nature and National Park Authority (hereafter the NPA) rangers are desperately trying to regulate the traffic, to keep vehicles on the designated roads, and to enforce protection laws.

We choose a 10 km local hike, walking distance from our desert temporary home at the Desert Research Institute in Sde- Boker. We go down to Ein-Akev spring to beat the heat at a natural pool and then walk to Ein-Ovdat --the next shaded canyon, through the striking views of Ramat Divshon- a flat arid plain separating the two canyons. The spring is packed with visitors, and after a long break we leave the masses behind us and climb onto Ramat Divshon to encounter a tattered sign declaring in three languages “pitot (pita bread) and tea, Bedouin hospitality”. My daughter’s eyes enlighten with joy and we can’t refuse her (and the possibility of fresh pita bread in the middle of Passover). We reach the tent and walk in. Magdalene the tent owner is a chatty welcoming lady with sparkling eyes. We immediately become friends. She is running between the few visitors serving pita, hot tea and coffee from the fire, despite the warm weather, complaining to everyone about her failing business, and scolding her two 8 and 10-year-old daughters for not keeping up with their chores.

We depart leaving a voluntary contribution of 50 ILS for the unpriced meal and a promise to return soon. We also leave our fresh fruit with her following other local visitors whom we see bringing her fruit, olive oil, as well as shoes and coloring books for the girls. I learn that Magdalene’s daughters aren’t going to school and cannot read and nor can she. They barely leave the secluded tent. Since that day in Passover I often visited Magdalene and often meet Suleiman, Magdalene’s husband, on campus, with his red truck doing some gardening work or sitting in the shade smoking.

[illegible]

2



Image 3. Magdalene working in the wheat field with a local student. 2010 (photo by the author).

Magdalene's tent sparked my curiosity for several reasons. First, Magdalene and Suleiman are farmers trying to make a living from farming and tourism, just like the Jewish farmers I was studying during that time, only their farming has been their practice for decades, and the poverty and conditions in which they farm are incomparable to those of their Jewish neighbors. Second, their tent stands secluded – far from their Bedouin community, isolated and located in an inaccessible place. Its ability to draw tourist is very limited in comparison to tents located on the main highways or near a national park parking lot. Third, the tent stands in a visible place amidst an important nature reserve. It is quite unusual that, while other unrecognized Bedouin villages' structures and crops are being demolished regularly on the grounds that they are illegal and intruding military training zones and nature reserves, and risking sensitive ecological habitats, Magdalene and her daughters are visibly holding a piece of land, raising wheat, goats and chickens in a location highly supervised by NPA and that this is well known to everyone local.

A month after our second visit I learned more about the different ways Magdalene's life has been entangled with Jewish life in the Negev. I learned that Magdalene was brought from Gaza to the Negev to marry Suleiman's brother. The brother and Magdalene used to live in the nearby village, Abde, until he was caught some time in the 80s breaking into vehicles of visitors, tourists, and Negev residents. Given that the police proved incapable to track down the thieves, a resident of the Sde- Boker environmental campus who was also one of the founders of the "Green Patrol"¹, took the law into his hands, ambushed and

¹ The Green Patrol is the state unit for open spaces surveillance. It was founded in 1976 by the Minister of Agriculture Aharon Auzan and since 1994 is subjected and under the responsibility of the ministry for Environmental protection (MEP) it works however to serve several institutions such as KKL and Ministry of agriculture as managing and surveilling grazing the Israel Land administration (ILA) and the Ministry of interior, to enforce illegal extraction and building, and the Nature&Park authority to prevent hunting and invasions, and the ministry of security for trespassing through stealing building grazing and theft . Each of these institutions and ministries take part to fund the green patrol. The green patrol has broad power under state of emergency rule and has the authority to arrest, confiscate, or issue an order to enclosed military areas without special order. The green patrol was criticized as a policy that was meant to narrow Bedouins moves

caught the thief, and shot his leg. Magdalene's husband became a cripple, he was later sentenced for some time in a nearby prison and hanged himself short time after, while jailed. Magdalene then married Suleiman, his brother. Given her tragic story and the marginalization of the family from the community, the hearsay (which I found very hard to verify) is that she was excused and allowed to stay on those lands. The NPA and the Green Patrol were benignly neglectful, and flexible in this case, despite their strict policies about the Bedouin presence in what they define as sensitive ecological locations. Magdalene still tries, in addition to farming, to take advantage of hikers' traffic on the cliff and make an extra living, serving coffee, tea and Bedouin pita bread with labane cheese while her husband takes temporary gardening and maintenance jobs in a nearby Jewish community.

Magdalene and her family are an exception to the "state of exception" (Schmitt 1920)² –or the state Emergency Regulations authorizing the Green Patrol. She is part of what the state of Israel calls "unrecognized Bedouins". The term refers to roughly 85,000 people (out of 300,000 in 2023³) in the entire Negev/Naqab who refused to be resettled and sedentarized in townships planned for them by the state of Israel since 1965⁴ and stayed on lands on which they were settled by the state or in places where they resided previously and stayed in more southern parts of the Negev. Following the peace agreement with Egypt in 1979, most of the Negev lands were defined as military training zones or nature reserves or both. Bedouins who conducted a rural lifestyle rather than settling down in Bedouin townships in the 70s, were pushed from at the beginning of the 80s from southern and inner parts of the Negev desert to the north. They were also pushed to stay near highways rather than in the inland nature reserves and military zones. Limits on their ability to seasonally move and graze were strictly enforced⁵ by crop and structure demolitions, and by confiscations and the outlawing of goats and their replacement by sheep that require less movement in space and greater dependence on stable water resources which could be found on the highways along the Israeli water carrier pipes. This is why Magdalene's location and lifestyle stood out as unusual.

The unrecognized Bedouins are recognized citizens of Israel. Yet in the Negev highlands, where Bedouin villages and rural settlements are legally unrecognized, this

in general and violating human rights (Pri'el; 1976. Alagazi, 2010. P.232-253) see also chapter 3 and 4 in this dissertation

² Term of Carl Schmitt from 1920 describing the way political power and sovereignty are vested in state of emergency.

³ Numbers are based on Israel Central Bureau of Statistics from July 2022.

(chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://fs.knesset.gov.il/globaldocs/MMM/5bbeceb1-2e1f-ee11-8159-005056aac6c3/2_5bbeceb1-2e1f-ee11-8159-005056aac6c3_11_20201.pdf)

⁴ Between 1969-1996 the state has established 7 permanent settlements (townships) for the Bedouin Populations of the Negev, to which half of the Negev Bedouins have moved the rest were left unrecognized in terms of the land rights, their municipal affiliation and their building and residential rights (see for instance 2017 report of the Knesset (Lehrer; 1917).

⁵ The Black Goat Law, defined as nature protection law from the damages of goats was legalized in 1950 following orders of the British Mandate and was followed by imposing broad limits in grazing, the Law was cancelled with changes in ecological understanding of the goats in Mediterranean forest in 2021, but during the 70s and on provided the legal base of the green patrol to impose broad limits on Bedouins in Negev landscapes.

means that while Bedouins themselves are entitled to all civic rights, as unrecognized villagers they are deprived of representation in local municipality and denied all services and civic rights related to infrastructure or land (water, paved roads, electricity, sewage and waste disposal services). In the Negev highlands, the focus of this dissertation, they reside in 4 villages and are no more than 1500 people⁶. Along with them in the Negev highlands there are about 5000 Jews living in the town of Mitzpe Ramon and 8500 Jewish residents living in 13 settlements: Kibbutzim, Moshavim, and Community settlements and recently, as I will show Chapter 3, also in solitary (single family owned) farms.

Magdalene's story captures some of the main processes and power relations this dissertation sets out to understand and explore. I began my research many years ago to interrogate the role that environmental Zionist legacies (environmental understandings, practices and forms of governance) play in the production and reordering of precarious social ecologies. Two aspects of environmental Zionist legacies, that are also the object of analytical critique of this dissertation, shape Magdalene's life. One is a Zionist understanding of nature and culture, conservation and development, as oppositions. This is an umbrella framework which, as many scholars have shown, serves to legitimize ethnic and social exclusions, enclosures, and accumulation of land and resources, through (both) development and conservation projects. In this legacy which stretches from the British Mandate through Zionist environmental regimes, Bedouins are placed contingently and conveniently similarly to indigenous people in other parts of the world at some times as "too natural" (semi nomads, conducting an ungovernable lifestyle risking development and investors' interests), and at other times as "too cultural" (risking nature and ecology) (Robbins, 2016 Davis, 2016). So whether nature and healthy desert ecology are perceived as precious and desirably wild, or as worthless unless becoming cultivated and productive, Bedouins' place in it is never safe.

Until recently, much of the scholarship on Palestine and Israel has analyzed Bedouin and Jews in a way that separates the histories and societies of these specific social groups, and has also separated the histories of social groups and nature. In the case of the Negev highlands, a hub of environmental and ecological activities, environmental administrators, officers, and activists were thought of and naturalized as professional experts; and ecological warfare, has been distinguished from other human conflicts, or in fact, as historian political ecologist Diana Davis has described it "hasn't been recognized as a conflict at all" (Davis, 2011). But Magdalene's story is almost impossible to grasp without also understanding forms of environmental governance and rule in the Negev, the power environmentalists hold in the Negev, and the extent to which the histories and lives of Bedouins and Jews in the Negev are entangled through Zionist environmental imaginaries, practices, and understandings of nature, of Bedouins, of Jews, and of the desert.

Extending Antonio Gramsci's seminal writing on the working of hegemony, this dissertation makes the broad claim that Zionist hegemony is *also* an eco-environmental

⁶ The Bedouin village Bi'r hadage within the municipal area of the regional council of the Negev highland though geographically border the area on the north has an additional 6300 Bedouin resident and was recognized in 2012 and assign to the Bedouin regional council Neve Midbar. It isn't included in this dissertation ethnography.

hegemony. I understand hegemony as a contested *process*, in which “the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself.” (Roseberry in Joseph and Nugent, 1994. p. 361). The guiding perspective of this dissertation is that environmental legacies (in which I include environmental and ecological understandings and practices) are a significant terrain of power and contestation in sustaining Zionist hegemony in multiple, changing ways, that are articulated differently in different moments and spaces.

More specifically, I suggest that these environmental legacies form what I call “Green Lines and Green Settlements” an environmental regime that produces and shape the social spaces in which Bedouin and Jews in Israel reside, as highly uneven, precarious, and at times violent, social ecologies.⁷ Yet understanding their deep interconnections also holds open more politically enabling possibilities.

The term Green Line usually refers to the borders of Israel prior to the 1967 war, (although it has never been really a border but a separation line between Israel’s power and its neighbors). It serves today as an administrative border between territories under Israeli sovereignty and territories administered through military rule or through agreements with the Palestinian authority. Historically, the Green Line received its name due to the way it was marked in green in maps prior to 1967. I borrow this term not because of its controversial status as an international border but more because of its performances – in other words, because of what it does, or what and how it shapes and remakes space. The Green Lines I refer to, will never be an international border separating nation states but similarly to The Green Line they are formed by flexible vague planning and reworking of laws, to create highly uneven spaces for Jews and Arabs, creating differences and social separation between the two groups. So despite the fact that police forces or the military are employed differently I argue that Green Line logics and vague management practices travel into the regions where they are formed. I also argue that ecology and environmental legacies are central to their formations. And so the Green Lines I describe in this dissertations are environmental and development visions and plans and practices that constitute themselves as internal boundaries and borderlines between social and ethnic groups. They constitute, in short, a Zionist eco hegemony.

⁷ The concept of Green Lines as a type of social ecology (produced by a particular type of environmental thinking, governance, settlement, planning, development and conservation), does not characterize or capture the entire canvas of environmental thinking in Israel, and certainly not at the present. Since roughly the mid-90s, other, alternative types of environmentalisms (environmental thinking and activism) have emerged and now make up environmentalism as a more diversified, conflictual, and contested terrain than ever. But for many decades, prior to and since the declaration of the state of Israel, and until today, particularly within regions that are rural, and at the margins of the state geographically, economically, and socially, this legacy has been the dominant and most powerful, a form of environmental management, and representative of state institutions and policies.

Green Lines as an environmental legacy and a social ecology

“Gone are the Arab villages...and with them the water Buffalos...gone are the many narrow and twisted irrigation channels. In their place there are straight channels and between them, broad fields where one can see tractors and agricultural machines all year round. Along the rivers different plantations are green and the fish ponds shine in the sun and stamp the whole region with signature of plentiful water and blessing...the whole environment is evidence of the plenty of life and deeds, in sharp contrast to the picture of poverty and degeneration of the previous Arab settlement in the Hula” (Karmon, 1956, *The Northern Hula Valley*, p. 95)

The concept of Green Lines follows what Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre meant by the “social production of space” (1991). Green Lines, as an environmental vision and reason encompasses projects of development and conservation that are simultaneously material and meaningful. Materially, they transform landscapes and bio-physical environments, aspiring to reform messy natures into straight green lines of different types of agricultural growth, in landscapes that before them were considered degraded, or empty and desolate. They are also transformative from an ecological perspective—admitting new species, whether invasive or native, changing topography, and types of human activity.

In addition to their material production of a new social- ecology (and “natures”), Green Lines are considered (although only by some groups) an “improved, productive nature” and “good ecology”. They bear promises for profit making. They are a product of historical, geopolitical, and environmental imaginations (Davis, 2010) reworking together ideas of settlement, and regimes of eco-management, into an imagery of an agricultural productive nature settled by “good” (Jewish) guardians, rather than Arabs. They are an aesthetic of a “nature in order” and under control rather than patchy (Tsing 2016) convoluted (as in the case of swamp), or unexpected (as in the desert). As such they also set in place and solidify differences and new social boundaries between Jews and Arabs or Bedouins. In that sense Green Lines resemble the way plantations are described in recent literature on the Anthropocene as “radicalized subtracted” ecologies which entail violent erasures of human and non-humans species and ways of life (Haraway, D., Ishikawa, N., Gilbert, S.F., Olwig, K., Tsing, A.L. and Bubandt, N., 2016. Haraway, D., 2015).

Green Settlements I define as the spaces and moments of ambivalence within the social ecologies of Green Lines. They are social spaces of lived contradictions, on the ground compromises, although they are complicit in helping to materialize official Green Line visions and participate in their production. As such, they are the spaces where the radicalized and reductive nature (Haraway; 2015) is experienced at times as loss and therefore they are a potential risk to the hegemonic working of Green Lines management.

By coining the term “Green Lines” I argue that as social ecologies, they are based on separations (between Jews and Arabs, nature and society, development and conservation) and on simplifications, and they are exclusive and segregating. Yet analytically, as a framework, they are unifying, not only in the sense mentioned above—that they illuminate the unity of processes in consolidating eco-hegemony – ecology and society or development and conservation—rather than presenting them as opposing processes. But Green Lines as a framework also illuminate the unifying elements between the management of different landscapes or social ecologies such as swamplands, forests (Braverman, 2009) and deserts, and they point therefore to the work performed and shared

with the other Green Line of 1967, marking and separating the occupied territories in Palestine and Israel. Formed in different geographies and historical moments, these “Green Lines” aren’t exactly the same. But they can all be seen as ecological regimes producing highly uneven social ecologies, displacements and precarity for some and more stability and environmental freedom for others.

The practices and processes producing Green Lines, their formation as social a separating ecology, and the consequences of their management is what unifies them. In other words, they show how the extremely dynamic and complicated processes of development (through settlement) and conservation through land enclosures, limits on traffic in space, and resource deprivation – practices of socio-ecological management – work within Israel but also in the occupied Samaria mountains, as a larger dispossessive project working in unity to create highly uneven, exclusive and separated geographies, and pressures on some ethnic groups.

Stretching Green Lines from swamps to desert: chapter summary

The dissertation is organized in two parts addressing two regions and two moments that are distant from each other in time and in space, but that should be understood as relationally interconnected. Although each part takes a different “cut” into the working of environmental legacies in Israel’s history, the first part can be seen as part of what Hugh Raffles (1999) calls the “sedimented histories” of the second.

The first part “Zionist Natures: The Hula Drainage Project and the Formation of Zionist Eco-Hegemony” looks into the initial emergence of visions and logics of Green Lines and their materialization into a social ecology in the context of the drainage of the Hula valley in the north of Palestine, and later Israel, between the 1936 and the late 50s.

Lake Hula drainage is infamously remembered as an event of unintended ecological ruin caused by ambitious and celebrated development project of drainage and agriculture that its Zionist implementers intended to replace the convoluted inaccessible landscape of the swamp and its habitants. It is also famously considered as the launching event of the environmental movement in Israel. In that sense it is the laboratory in which Israel’s environmental legacies, Zionist environmental subjectivities and notions of Zionist natures were conceived.

My goal in the two chapters that make up Part I is not to break down the familiar mythical story of the Hula swamp or evaluate the truthfulness of one or another historical vision of the Hula valley. In these chapters I rather try to de-abstract and complicate prevailing stories of the Hula as an inevitable consensual Zionist event in which environmentalism emerged to counter state development. I do that in order to build up a fuller picture of the drainage project as an environmental story that is rooted in broader more-than-Zionist environmental legacies and practices, and in order to re-evaluate the seemingly unified single historical Zionist process of the drainage as a necessary event with an inevitable outcome. I hope that de-abstracting and complicating will allow for the drainage outcomes to be seen as one possible outcome out of many historical interactions of social ecological discourses and relationship over years, through which the meaning of Zionist nature and redemption was generated but could also be contested at least as

ecological and agricultural. In this first part I ask to what extent was the swamp drainage a Zionist event or how it has become to be one? What are socio-ecological relations and visions that shaped the drainage project? What was the scientific and technological knowledge that inspired, promoted and created the precondition for the Zionist drainage of the swampland?

The point in de-abstracting does not necessarily result in what exactly the Hula was but in sketches of the space in which possibilities for and controversies over the Hula unfold. Hugh Raffles, following Said, notes in his work "In Amazonia" that his treatment of nature requires accounting for the "sedimented histories that have circulated and multiplied ever since Europeans first came here (to the Amazon) in the sixteenth century, and situated their geographical imaginations". He describes the natures in his book as "dynamic and heterogeneous, formed again and again from presences that are cultural, historical, biological, geographical, political, physical, aesthetic, and social" (ibid, p. 7). The first part of my dissertation is an account of sedimented history of environmental thinking in Israel and of the Hula which explains the Green Lines formed in the desert and explored in the second part.

Very few scholars of the Middle East have worked against an analysis that separates histories of specific social groups or that separate social groups and nature, and offered a more integrated and relational approach. Timothy Mitchell (2002) developed a history of Middle East in which he showed how natural technical biological and social elements shape one another in Egypt. Diana Davis (2011, 2016) has shown the working of western environmental imaginaries as shaping environment and development in the Maghreb and in Drylands. Sandra Sufian (2008) studied malaria as a medical social history and Tamar Novick in a new book describes the turning of Palestine to the biblical desired "land of milk and honey" through "technologies of abundance" particularly engineering the landscape of farm animals (Novick 2023). Together these quite recent works offer an emerging scholarship and analysis in which non humans and social and national groups of the Middle East, particularly Israeli, Bedouins and Palestinians, produce each other in multiple local and broader ways rather than by internal isolated or group-inherent natural logic.

There is no way to understand the Hula social ecology nor the Negev highland in the second part of the dissertation, without tracing the ways generations of European visitors and European and non-European regimes have altered through their engagement with nature, the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians as they were struggling "to locate new experiences on old intellectual maps, returning again and again to discover the region, as if for the first time" (Raffles page 6) and doing so in different ways.

In the first two chapters I employ a similar analytical perspective, bearing in mind the notion of a social ecology as a relational approach to society and nature as coproducing each other and as penetrable to and produced by larger processes. Thinking about the Hula or the Negev highland as a constantly transforming social ecology entails working against (rather than with) binary analysis that looks separately at nature and culture, (the type of knowledge that reproduce the distinctions between Europe and its others), at conservation and development as opposites, at Palestinians and Israeli Jews (or Zionists), and against a linear story of Zionist progress based on linear declensionist environmental history (Davis,

2007). Seeing the Hula swampland as a dynamic social ecological process responding to geopolitical changes, and new settlers' practices and visions, changes the publicly known story of the Hula as a "typical" swamp. It also challenge the depiction of the project as consensual and its consequence as "merely ecological" and overlooking the harms caused to people – local Arabs and Zionist Jews who lived by the lake.

In Chapter 1 "Muddy Beginnings and Colonial Roots" I lay out the context in which the Hula drainage project has developed, since the beginning of the 1800s and in which Lake Hula turns into a "concession to drain". I look into ways the lake was constructed and marked as an object of exploration and global interest first, by western travelers and explorers of biblical Palestine as "mysterious nature", nature "out of order" and "impenetrable" to humans. I then look at the years in which it has become an object of measurement, calculation, and engineering, by multiple drainage plans that emerged, each one at its time, responding to and shifting by regional changing geopolitical conditions and agrarian concepts, and which, in turn, shifted and re-engineered the swampland. Lastly, I show how these two forms of biblical/ecological curiosity and technological visions were adopted, adapted, and reworked into a "Green Lines" vision and practice of Nature management and development, by the Zionist leadership from the end of the British Mandate period into the new geopolitical conditions that the new state of Israel and the war of independence brought to the region.

Chapter 2, "The Children of the Lake" -- follows the unexpected and overlooked ways Zionist redemption "on the (Hula) ground" was generated since 1934, as agrarian and environmentalist, and the ways in which the meaning of Zionist Nature was re-constituted – on the one hand by the Zionist leadership-- as Green Line ecology, and on the ground within Kibbutz Hulata as Green Settlement, prior to, during, and after the drainage. The chapter offers a second corrective to the hegemonic story of the Hula as Zionist, consensual, and local. Instead it paints the Hula project as producing a precarious and fractured social ecology, a Green Settlement --in which people make compromises and sacrifices and in which nature, and Zionism, and more importantly the relationship between them. are radically re-defined and produce unexpected outcomes and possible alternative to developmental visions in the valley. Focusing on the home-land making practices of poor Zionist settlers, constituted as such by many other social relations and practices beyond the Zionist leadership, I pay a particular attention to understanding how and what it means to be a Zionist environmentalist, how Zionist redemption was re-constituted and regenerated through a situated life, and changing relationships of humans with the lake, its fish, plants, material objects, other inhabitants and the like. The Children of the Lake, is the what people of Hulata call themselves, a name that manifests their intimacy with the lake. But in a sense the argument of this dissertation is that generations of Israeli environmentalists who followed them are all the children of lake Hula, extending in some ways the desert environmentalists of the second part of this dissertation.

Part II of the dissertation: "From Swamps to Deserts: The New Guardians of Nature" looks into the co-production of two social ecologies of the Negev, in the 90s as well as into two types of environmental subjects or desert guardians. Chapter 3 traces the reworking of Zionist Legacies of nature improvement, Zionist understandings of nature (of Jews, of Bedouins, and of the desert) into the Negev Highland, a region that has become the hub and mecca of environmental research, education, thinking, but also an area vying

for development. The chapter interrogates how Zionist environmental legacies have unfolded through an “environmental” and “ecological “development project of privatized Jewish farms, and the return of agriculture and the emergence of climate security politics in the Negev. The chapter illuminates how conservation and development here again work together, rather than as opposing countering forces, to promote state goals now through market logics. So conservation and ecological health of the dessert is attempted to be achieved through private accumulation and enclosure of land for private profit (Dempsey, 2016) and the power of past Zionist environmental expertise gain new forms. Animated by material interest while still seeking liberal Zionist rationales of improvement, self - entrepreneurship, and self-sufficiency, their form of development remains deeply colonial and animated by establishing quantitative difference, erasures of past social life and highly uneven and vulnerable spaces from social and ecological perspective.

Chapter 4 traces Bedouin responses to the environmental marketization of the Negev via the legalization of the Jewish Green Lines and the illegality of Bedouin settlement and agricultural production. It follows the emergence of presumably another “Green Line” – namely “the tent road” as a political and social ecological alternative to the Green Line formed by privatized farms. The chapter looks at the different ways illegality and illegitimacy of Bedouins as desert inhabitants, is contested through Bedouin form of agro-tourism, struggle over “Rewilding projects” and off grid renewable energy; and into the ways new environmental subjectivities and types of nature guardians and experts emerge through this Jewish-Bedouin partnership. Most importantly the chapter point to the limits and the political possibilities formed by Bedouins aspiring to be the new guardians and climate experts of desert natures.

Part I

Zionist Natures: The Hula Drainage Project

Chapter 1

Muddy Beginnings and Colonial Roots

“...We will endeavor to do in Asia Minor what the British did in India — I am referring to our cultural work and not rule by force. We intend to come to Palestine as the emissaries of culture and to expand the moral boundaries of Europe to the Euphrates.”

Max Nordau, Chief Public Orator of the Zionist Movement 1920 (Nordau, 1962, p.113)

Hula Valley, 2005

What used to be the waterscape of Lake Hula, in the northern valley of Israel, is now two artificial bodies of water. The first, a 3197- dunam nature reserve was created in 1961 to preserve some of the lake's original landscape, four years after the lake-drainage, at the center of the Hula Valley. The second, an area of 1214 dunams in the western part of the valley, was re-flooded in 1994, four decades after the drainage, in an effort to overcome ecological and agricultural challenges caused by the drainage. It is now a recreational and birdwatching park administered by Keren Kayemet LIsrael (Israeli JNF, hereafter KKL) and a site dedicated to commemorating KKL legacy in the valley.

The Hula nature reserve is a fenced-in swamp; it was founded as the first nature reserve in Israel immediately after the drainage project, by naturalists, and it is carefully administered by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (hereafter NPA).⁸ Upon arrival, a ranger, wearing official Khaki uniform, admits the visitors for about 12\$. Visitor's first stop is a little museum with a taxidermic collection of wild animals, which used to be part of the lake's wildlife. Many of them disappeared after the drainage. For many years until 2020, the reserve's tiny museum offered a movie on the wildlife that was once part of the lake environment before it was drained. Another show offered an opportunity to learn how water birds take care of their siblings and offspring. Outside the museum, in the park, visitors might run into a flock of suspiciously tolerant pelicans, ducks, and water turtles. If they get lucky enough, they just might see the buffaloes, which famously resided here before, as a part of the Bedouins' cattle. The current ones are an import from South Africa, from the time the reserve was created.

The short tour in the reserve does not take more than an hour, it is a display of the way “nature used to be here” as the brochure declares, achieved by walking along long deck that crosses above the water. The water cannot be reached. It is a quiet place of untouched nature, and on regular weekdays, never too crowded. There are always a few

⁸ The NPA used to be then, the Nature Reservations Authority its name was replaced in the 90s to include historical national parks.

visitors: tourists, milling around politely, and, sometimes, a bus full of students breaks the silence. Signs warning not to bother the animal's peace are scattered all along the fenced footpaths. The place is a heaven for "nature-amateurs, bird watchers", and for "tourists wishing to relax", the official brochure declares.⁹



Image 4. Hula Nature Reserve. Photo by Doron Nisim. Taken from the Nature and Park Authority Website (retrieved 12/07/2014)

Despite the opening short movie which concisely mentions the current Hula nature reserve as "the first nature reserve of Israel" and as "the outcome of scientists' and nature lovers' insistence in maintaining some of the lake and the swamp landscapes," nothing in the serene landscape indicates the scale of the drama that led to its creation. The little swamp used to be 20 times bigger—almost 64,000 dunams – 60 years ago. The rest of the Hula Valley area, which once used to be the bottom of the lake, and a battlefield between empires and states, is now struggling agricultural fields. Few local Israeli agriculturists of the region come here to work. A tractor is sometimes seen on the gravel road, outside the reserve. On an April weekday, everything outside feels as peaceful as it is in the park. The air is heavy; temperatures are high. The area of what used to be the banks of the lake is sparsely settled. On the south-east side outside the nature reserve, after a 25- minute drive one reaches the Golan Heights' Kibbutzim and the Syrian border. On the west side, on what used to be the edge of the water, one can visit the new re-flooded area called "Agmon Hula" (little lake Hula) which was re-flooded in 1994 by KKL, still managed by KKL, and generates some hustle and bustle of tourist buses and visitors. This is a place where people come for birdwatching or to bike between ponds on an asphalt-paved well-cultivated road. Before they go outside, they watch a 7-minute audio show which celebrate the deeds of the

⁹ See <http://www.parks.org.il/ParksAndReserves/Hula/Documents/cHula.pdf> . Retrieved. 2010. The current Brochure was changed in the past years.

KKL in the valley. The audio, along with a multi-dimensional presentation with a micro model of the valley shows the visitor how a convoluted desolated “natural” landscape transforms into a valley marked by straight lines and cubic fields, along which little plastic tractors are moving.

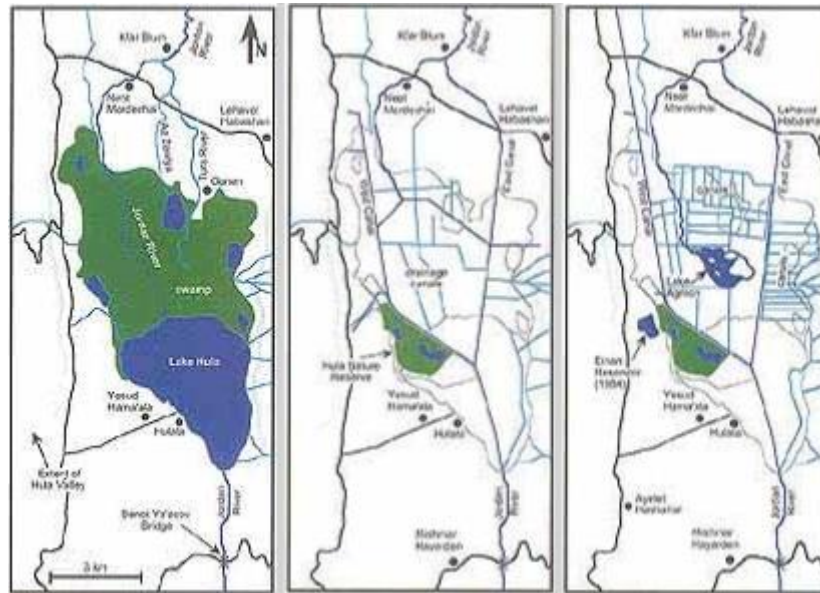


Image 5. Left: Lake Hula (blue) and the Swamp Area before 1951 and the drainage; Middle: The Hula Nature Reserve, post Drainage Work, 1956. Right: the Nature Reserve (in green) and the re-flooded area (in blue) called now Agmon Hula (little lake Hula). <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hula-valley>

On the south-west side of what used to be the lake, big basalt stones are scattered in several locations on the road between eucalyptus trees. These ruins mark the Ghawarane tribes who used to live here (Khawalde & Rabinowitz ; 2002)¹⁰. People of the region say they come here once in a while from villages in the Galilee to gather around graves and memories of what used to be their home. On what used to be the southern-western bank of the lake there are two Jewish settlements. The only two Jewish settlements that used to sit right on the lake’s shore. The first is one of Rothschild’s’ agricultural colonies, “Yesud HaMa’ala” the first Jewish settlement in the Hula Valley founded in 1883: big well-maintained, spacious houses, large yards with green lawns, and fruit orchards, some houses still offer a rural yet luxurious bed- and- breakfasts. A big, impressive stone building, the historic “Dobrobin Manor,” stands out. This is one of Rothschild’s famous efforts to establish a European-modeled farm in the valley.¹¹ The Farm today is a small museum that has been restored and describes the house’s history and the hurdles faced to survive during the days of malaria. Driving southeast a short distance, one reaches Kibbutz Hulata, on what used to be the southern shore of the lake. It is located on a low hill where the founders, before the drainage took place, thought the lake would be seen from every house and every public building.

The two waterscapes – the only remains of the lake and the swamps, present a

¹⁰ For locations of Ghawarane Villages on maps see also Zochrot website. https://www.zochrot.org/villages/village_details/49213/he

¹¹ Gershon Shafir (1996) discuss this type of settlements supported by Rotchild as ethnic plantation colonies, to explain Zionist settlement practices as colonial.

change that has taken place since 1957 in the way Israel (and past Zionist officials) understand, from an ecological perspective, their swamplands. This is also how they represent themselves – albeit with different emphasis – as memorials to Zionist history in the valley and to an inevitable ecological lesson learned. But seeing these waterscapes merely as capturing Zionist history and a change in ecological zeitgeist, is reductive and misleading. First because, much more than ecology or nature, the Hula valley as well as the lake has always been a society, a living changing social ecology since hunters and gatherers settled on the lake’s shore to begin an agricultural way of life. Second, each of these waterscapes may represent a “Zionist Nature” – but this Zionist nature is the product of the enduring work of colonies and empires, colonial science and research, restructuring of lands and markets, wars, colonial environmental imaginaries, Jewish and Arab power struggles on ways to work and settle the lands, Zionist settlement practices, and philanthropy. The current waterscape and the valley can be seen as a map to the persistent bubbling power of these social political forces and legacies, the product of countless power struggles and controversies over the way the valley was imagined and understood. They each capture a different particular way in which nature was eventually envisioned, appropriated, enclosed, and reproduced in practice as a “Zionist Nature”: Zionist specific ways of understanding healthy and ill “natures” (of both people and the physical environment), nature management and administration, and the constitution of Zionist environmental subjectivities. They also show how these Zionist Natures came to be, capturing long-term processes in which the relationships between the Jewish settlement and the social ecological environment of Palestine, and later, Israel, have been shaped and how ideas and techniques of Zionist Nature administration, gained traction.

Disrupting these waterscapes’ peaceful landscape—tracing the processes that led to their material and institutional formations—is not just about tracing the histories of the institutions that are now responsible for nature administration in Israel (SPNI, NPA and KKL). It is rather tracing more broadly the power of environmental legacies, discourses and practices that have held and still hold in solidifying the Zionist Hegemony in Israel to this day. It entails figuring out environmental legacies and environmental regimes as articulated alongside ethnic struggles and geopolitical powers, or Environmentalism as regimes of knowledge and of nature management that constitute and still shape many of the ways in which social ecologies of nature and societies are thought of in Israel today. De-abstracting these waterscapes—retracing some of the social-ecological changes and the changing geopolitical context for their emergence—is the topic of this chapter.

Lake Hula (which means papyrus in Aramaic) was formed as part of the Jordan river basin by the Hula valley’s special geomorphology. The Valley lies within the northern part of the Syrian-African Rift Valley at about 70 meters above sea level. The mountain surrounding it (400-900 meters above sea level), turns the valley into a big basin into which many water sources have drained over centuries from the northern mountains and springs. A 200 meter high basalt rock (referred to as “the plug”) rising in its south blocked the water drainage of the valley downstream restricting the water into the Sea of Galilee (hereafter Kinneret) and created a wide lake.¹² Following geological fault processes over time, a narrow opening was formed and allowed the lake water to flow downwards and

¹² I will be using in the rest of the dissertation the common Israeli name Kinneret to the Sea of Galilee. The word comes from the Hebrew word *kinor* (violin) describing the shape of the lake.

southward to form the southern Jordan river stream into the sea of the Kinneret, near where the bridge of Jacob's Daughter (Bin't Yaakub in Arabic Benot Yaakov in Hebrew) stands today.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Lake Hula spread over 52,000 dunams in the summer to 60,000 dunams in winter, across the valley. Eighty percent in its north was a swamp and the rest a clear sweet-water lake. The sweet lake water, the deep-water holes within the swamps, the boggy area of swamps, springs, streams, and countless creeks, created a rich, diverse, and unique landscape of hydrophilic plants which provided a habitat to hundreds of species and huge groups of water birds. For African plants and wildlife, the lake was a northern border, and for many European plants and animals, the lake marked the southern border of their dispersion. Given the lake's location at a junction of several phyto-geographic regions, it was also a home to many endemic species (Livne 1988; Barslavsky 1955). Only near its extinction did the West recognize this international botanical and zoological treasure. For thousands of years the lake was also a home to different local people of the valley who fished and hunted in the lake pools, utilized the reed and the papyrus, and reshaped the lake and its swamps for their use, clearing vegetation, opening pools for fishing, and waterways for their boats.

Lake Hula and its swamps is a remembered landscape. But to us, generations of Israelis born after its drainage, the rich complicated social-ecological histories of the lake were unknown. The lake was taught and known to us similarly to the way it is revealed in the KKL audio show: a huge swamp, or nature at its most uncultivated and wild appearance; an icon of the wild nature of the valleys in Palestine, empty unlivable land, infested with frightening malaria, swarms of mosquitoes, deep mud and unbearable weather. It was that ill, useless, and out of control nature, the enemy of Zionist pioneers, we were told, that motivated the first Zionist transformation of Nature in the form of a complete drainage, and the remaking of the valley by courageous pioneers and Zionist technology, into agricultural lands. The Hula swamplands were to us a mythical nature without people, that the Zionist settlement acted upon. This was for many years the only way in which Lake Hula story was told and passed on. This was also the same limited way in which it was represented in writing and scholarship, mainly, of ecologists or historians of Jewish-Zionist settlements. And even though there was at least one geographer that, prior to the drainage in the 30s, provided a situated perspective of the valley (Gorney; 2007), noticing its richness and even the unique material culture that surrounded it, his writings remained buried in archives and were completely absent from school texts and sources available to the public.¹³ Lake Hula drainage has been told as an exclusively Zionist story, and as a linear story, which begins with the Zionist settlement in the valley and ends with Zionist technological victory over nature. In addition, it was portrayed as necessary and inevitable, hence also a consensual project, but with unintended ecological consequences which resulted in the formation of the environmental movement in Israel.

The Hula nature reserve, the first in Israel, marked the foundation of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (hereafter SPNI) and the NPA. "A Zionist Swamp was

¹³ In the past decade, and after these chapters were formed two works offered alternatives to existing Zionist writing about the Hula. Maya Duani (2022) has published a richer history of the drainage that includes a broad review of more positions about the drainage history and Edna Gorney (2011) analyzed the historiography of the Drainage and the re-flooding from an ecofeminist and post-colonial perspective.

unperceivable. Swamps had to be extinguished,”¹⁴ and so, the nature reserve had to be justified and fought over. The nature reserve is known as the result of a struggle of avid naturalists and concerned scientists who dreamed to protect the landscape they considered unique, and were heroically willing to swim against mainstream understanding and to risk their reputation as faithful Zionists as they fought for rare birds and vegetation and requested to allocate land for it (Regev, 1993, Kliout, p. 217 Tal, 2006). Presented in this way, environmentalism was inscribed in Zionist collective memory as critical or countering Zionist development.

The following two chapters are a corrective to these prevailing descriptions of the Hula drainage story. My goal in writing them is to expand the understanding of the conditions and legacies in which environmentalism, understanding of nature and its administration, and environmental subjectivities have emerged in Israel and have become an enduring form of governance I call “a social ecology of green lines”- a particular aesthetic vision that materially shapes Zionist-Israeli social ecologies as uneven and ethnically and socially exclusive, and purifying.

Indeed, the draining of the Hula swamps in pre-state Palestine has been a pillar of Zionist legacy and Israeli national heritage for more than seventy years. But the Lake and swamplands, the drainage, and the waterscapes that are now its remains, were shaped, and have emerged within larger and longer colonial, geopolitical, economic and ecological projects of the reorganization of Palestine. The formation of “Zionist Nature” and Zionist Environmentalism through the re-making of lake Hula was enabled and driven by the attempts of early surveyors, empires, and settlers to offer countless accounts of swampland exploration, documentation, and categorization, in the entire world as well as in Palestine. Exotic visions of swamplands out of order, and environmental imaginaries of nature-in-order have supported, all over the world, widespread practices of landscape transformation, particularly schemes of drainage and development, in swamps and wetlands (Ogden, 2011). In Palestine, similarly, since the 1800s and on, the value of swamps existed for colonizers, as for the rest of the world, mainly for its potential for “reclamation” and cultivation of agriculture or tax revenue. Bringing together particular ideas of nature and culture (or lack thereof), of swamplands, and understandings of the environmental history of the region, scientists, explorers and officers of colonial regimes, pre-staged the creation of “Zionist Nature” in the Hula. These legacies were carried out later on by Zionists into science and education, agricultural imperatives in the Israeli desert, the development of Israel’s national water carrier and conservation policies, creating Green Settlements and Green Lines.

The final acquisition and purchase of the concession of the drainage was a dramatic turning point in the history of Zionist settlements. A dramatic shift in terms of the perceived possibilities in regard to the reorganization of “Zionist Natures”—the cultural, economic, social, and political organization of nature in Israel/Palestine that conformed with particular logic and was rooted in environmental knowledge that reproduced the distinction between Europe and its others, between culture to nature. As Sandra Sufian (2008) shows

¹⁴ This is citation but also the overall position of naturalists, presented to me in an interview with Yossi Lev Haari, who was in 2002 the director of the Beit Osishkin Nature museum of the Hula Valley and at the time of the drainage an activist and then key member and figure of the SPNI.

in her remarkable work on Malaria in Palestine, the Hula drainage project (in her view, the larger project was healing the land and the nation from malaria) was not only a project of land redemption but also the redemption of the people. The Hula Swampland was a site in which this double redemption took place through the transformation of the nature of people and land.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will follow two stages in the construction of the Hula Valley as a site in need of redemption. The first stage, at the beginning of the 19th century in which the Swampland and lake become an object of interest to explorers, travelers, and naturalists, and are constructed as impenetrable, as a blank spot on the maps. The second, from the mid-19th century in which the lake becomes an object of measurement, calculation, and scientific-technological evaluation. The two chronological stages can be seen as the work of two different environmental imaginaries of middle eastern nature (Davis 2010), as unruly and mysterious and as repairable through technology and modernization. Together these established the vision of drainage which would later become a Zionist territorial and ethnic Project.

Blank spot on the maps: The impenetrable & mysterious Lake Hula

“I never anywhere else have met with a swamp so vast and so utterly impenetrable, first there is an ordinary bog, which takes one up to the knee in water, then after half a mile a belt of deeper swamp, where the yellow water lily flourishes. Then a belt of tall reeds. The open water is covered with white water lilies and beyond them, again an impenetrable wilderness....” (Tristram, 1866 p. 591-593)

The swampland, wildlife, fauna and flora of Lake Hula was for a long time unknown to westerners. Despite being one of the oldest sweet water lakes in the world, Lake Hula is not mentioned in either the new nor the old testament and did not attract in itself travelers and explorers who came to Palestine in the late 18th, and early 19th centuries. However, being on the main road from Damascus and within the Jordan river basin, travelers crossed the valley and expressed curiosity and interest in its landscape. Most of them however, avoided entering the area for different reasons and ended up describing the swampland outskirts from the outside, avoiding passing through the lake or sailing in its waters. Those who tried claimed it was impenetrable and dangerous. And so while the outskirts and the surrounding area of the lake and the swamp along with the Jordan river were documented, and marked the area as rich with zoological and botanical treasures, the swamp and the lake were established like other swamplands in the world, as seen through western eyes as curious and mysterious, but also unruly and inaccessible. Entering the Hula swamp remained a particularly adventurous and heroic achievement which later on further highlighted the success of Jewish natural explorers as bold and innovative.

In the 18th century initial efforts were made by curious travelers to map the region. First by Napoleon’s engineers and second by Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville, the French geographer and cartographer. Napoleon’s engineers ended up mapping the region south of the lake and d’Anville left the swampland area a blank space on its map while mapping only the areas around it. Other explorers with biblical inspiration, and, at times, some degree of scientific training arrived in the region with different interests, hoping to discover it for their home countries in Europe (Davis 2010). Very few dared to enter the

lake and explore the Hula swamp wildlife. German explorer Ulric Jasper Seetzen (Seetzen, U.J., 1810), who was inspired by von Humboldt's ideas and was eager to explore natural history and technology, arrived in the region in 1802, speaking Arabic, and pretending to be a Muslim beggar. He was fascinated by the abundance of wildlife south of the lake and mentioned wild boars, panthers, bears, foxes, wolves and more around the Banias river north of the Hula. He then arrived at the Daughters of Jacob bridge, at the south of the lake but claimed it was impossible to pass through the swamps or to pass on its eastern side therefore he passed on the western side and did not study the world of the swamp or the lake, at all. (Goren, 2002.p.57).

A group of British officers from Egypt arrived in the region in 1818. Charles Leonard Irby and James Mangles described the area in writing from their hunters' perspective as "among the finest hunting grounds in Syria, home to panthers, leopards, bears, wild boars, wolves, foxes, hyenas, gazelles and otters," as well as "rich in ducks and wild water birds" but also that it was "unfortunately a swamp" (Irby, C.L. and Mangles, J. 2014.pp. 85-86). Edward Robinson, an American biblical scholar, famous as the founder of scientific research of the region and of a field of research he called "Palestinology," described the Hula region as unsafe to enter because of robbers and was worried for personal safety. He reports that his companions warned him as well that the swamp was inaccessible to either humans or animals and so he chose to describe the area only from above, observing it from Naftali mountains on the west side of the valley (Robinson, E. and Smith, E., 1857, pp. 223-227).

Beginning in the 1840s more visitors arrived in the region but as individual travelers, organized into delegations with a purpose. These delegations were made up mostly of natural scientists, who came mainly to document, categorize, and identify natural assets of the region, lake and swamps, as well as to collect samples of its treasures that were taken back to their home countries. Their descriptions pictured the area as extremely rich in reptiles, plants and zoological treasures. The local inhabitants of the valley were not of much interest but were rather noted as a sight on the travelers' way, or mentioned as assisting the delegations finding their way to learn local nature. Officer and nature explorer Felician Louise de Saulcy arrived in 1850, and William Francis Lynch arrived with a delegation of officers in 1848, and with British Arthur Stanley, who wrote extensively on Palestine, toured the region. But in regard to the Hula lake and swamp he only described the "sea" as swampy and inaccessible, surrounded by high reeds and full of wild animals.

Henry Baker Tristram arrived in the region in Spring 1864 and in his writing reflects deep familiarity with previous travelers' written experiences and maps. Tristram was more generous in his description of the area bordering the lake and made several physical steps towards the lake itself. He described in detail a plethora of water birds and many other bird species. His delegation collected samples of unique amphibians but, at the end of his tour, he summarized that the "the marsh is marked in maps as impassable and most truly it is so. I never anywhere else have met with a swamp so vast and so utterly impenetrable..." (Tristram, 1866 p. 591-593). Together with other travelers like Stanley he reached the conclusion that past travelers were right in regard to the lake and, back in England, advocated for a more elaborated study of Palestine in general and the north in particular, arguing, based on their journeys, that Palestine is still very much an unexplored land and that it required more thorough and rigorous research, conducted by more trained

and professional explorers.

In 1865 the British Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF hereafter) under the patronage of Queen Victoria, was founded by surveyors and explorers following the recommendation of Stanley and Tristram. They set as their goal to explore with expert naturalists the “botany zoology and meteorology of the holy land” (Ben Arye, 1970. p. 178) and declared as their goal to achieve scientific objectivity in ways that other explorers and writers, with their unique perspectives (like Stanley’s and Robinson’s) did not. Several explorers’ reports are mentioned by the PEF in their mission statement as partial, isolated, and at times contradicting in findings: “the state of our knowledge of Palestine was very far from what it ought to be; and that, to make it as complete as possible, individual effort must give way to such scientific exploration as can only be obtained by organized expeditions conducted by specially trained and qualified explorers (Ibid. p.178). Their aspiration was therefore, to build a delegation with experts from different fields of natural science as well as archeology and topography that together would finally compose a comprehensive reliable report.

The PEF Survey is not without its own imperial and religious complications, and it too bears the marks of the authors’ perspectives and interests in its representation of the Holy Land’s environment, but its insistence in its primary declared project to be a scholarly endeavor rather than a religious, military, or literary one pursued by biblical geographers or biblical archaeologists was important and new (See Mabie, J., 2016.). After the first PEF delegation visit from 1871 to 1877, young army officers of the Royal Engineers produced a one-inch-to-one-mile map and a set of accompanying volumes that provided comprehensive descriptions of the topography, hydrography, and archaeology of the land that was surveyed, which included the Hula Lake and swamps (Ben Arye Mabie, J., 2016).

But even the PEF whose goal was to produce “a trustworthy and thoroughly satisfactory document” ended up mainly with more accurate mapping of lake Hula and the swamp but not much beyond. In reporting about the Hula the PEF noted the land was fertile but stricken with malaria and the swamp was dense reed with open pools. Like others, they concluded that the area was impenetrable except for very short distances and even that was described as possible only for “buffalos and Arabs” (Conder, C. R., 1881.p. 195).

The first and only explorer to enter and cross the Hula water during the Ottoman period was traveler John MacGregor. McGregor, a British adventurous traveler, who dedicated his life to philanthropy, religion, tourism, and mechanics, sailed with his canoe along the Jordan river in 1869 and described his journey in the famous book, “Rob Roy [the name he gave his boat] on the Jordan River.” Using a canoe enabled him to enter and maneuver better the swamp jungle of reed and papyrus; and crossing the Hula is described in detail in an entire chapter of his book, as the peak and climax of his journey. MacGregor’s goal, unlike previous naturalist travelers, was mapping and measuring. He based his measurement of the swamp and the lake area on the number of rowing movements he made, and timed them by his clock. He also measured the depth of the water in different parts of the lake with a rope. In his rich book he claims the task did not leave him with much time to observe “the strange sights of fish, birds, animals, plants and stones” which had satisfied him in past journeys around the world, but he was impressed by the papyrus and documented, in paintings sketches and writing, its landscape and the multiple

ways it was put to use. In the book, MacGregor used plenty of information from the other explorers' reports that preceded him as well as the PEF maps. But he also contributed new maps of his own that detailed the water areas, helpful to understand changes in the Hula landscape over time, to this day. However, overall, given that most of his description is dedicated to a heroic incident of his capture by local Bedouins, which he describes as savages and similar to Native American in their appearance, his journey further exacerbated and established the Hula as a dangerous wild place, suitable only for adventurous spirits. His conclusion at his journey's end marked what was about to become Hula's future: that it may be possible, by deepening the outlet of the Jordan river at the south of the lake, to drain the entire swamp and the lake so a "huge area would become a fertile land and healthy living place for humans".



Image 6. Opening image of MacGregor's book. "It was not entirely without misgivings that I once more paddled to that same mysterious corner at the northeast end of the lake, where the Arab, like a spider in his web, had full command of the approaches, and might wait in ambush for his prey." The photo opening MacGregor's book on his Journey to the Jordan river is his captivation by Bedouins in the Hula. (MacGregor, J., 1874.p. 307)

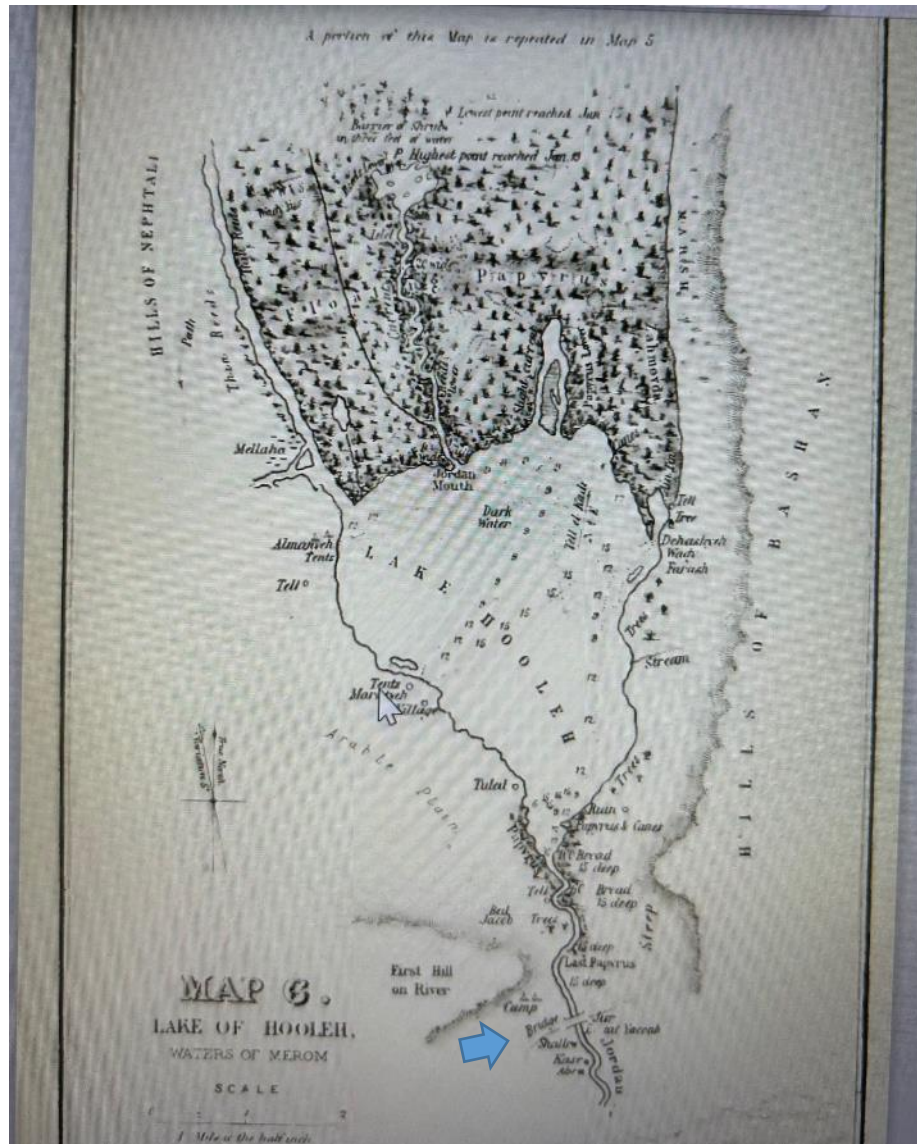


Image 7. MacGregor's map of the lake and the swamp. With the Bridge of Jacob Daughter in its south (MacGregor, J., 1874.p. 307)

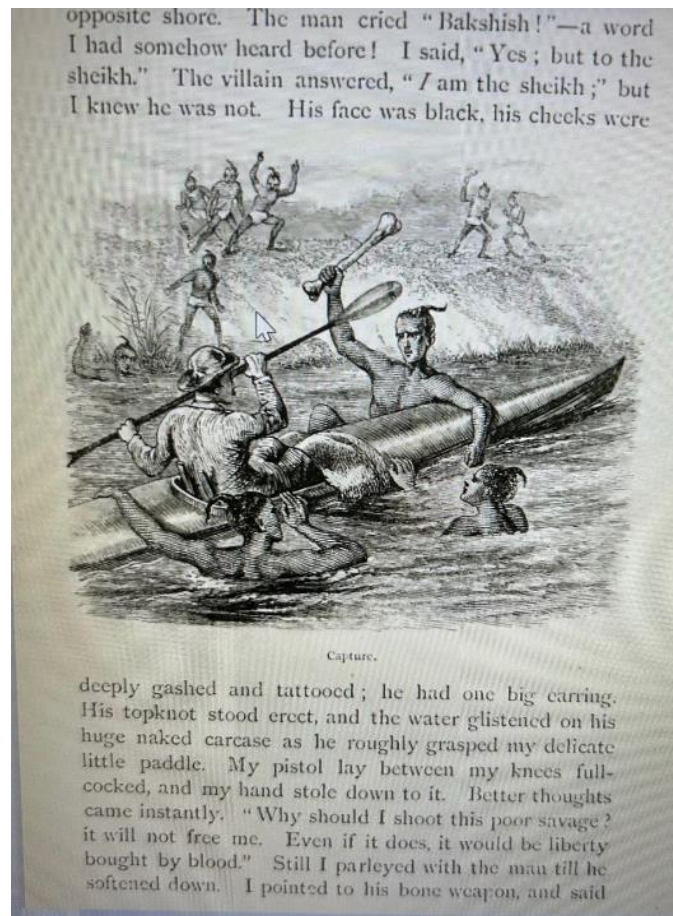


Image 8. A page from John MacGregor book describing in detail his encounter with Ghawaraneh Bedouins in the lake painted as Native Americans.

Reclamation: re-engineering the Hula swamplands

"Hula Plain is the most northerly part of Palestine, to the east of the country, and lies to the north of the Lake of Tiberias. Its area is reported by the Director of Surveys as 191,000 metric dunams; of this extent 126,000 dunams are cultivable. As in the case of other tracts there are wide variations in the estimates of area. The Experts, in their Report, p. 22, put the area at 150,000 Turkish dunams, i.e., 138,000 metric dunams, and the cultivable area at 120,000..."

"The Hula Plain may be divided into three parts. In the north there is rich alluvial cultivable land; south of this there is a large marshy area covered with papyrus reeds, the haunt of the wild boar and the grazing ground of numerous water buffaloes which are the property of the Bedu tribes of the neighborhood. South of this again is the Lake of Merom, through which the Jordan flows outwards to Lake Tiberias. The Lake and marsh are caused by a ridge of basalt across the Jordan Valley. If this ridge were cleared away or the river deepened, the whole valley could be drained and considerable areas of land made available for irrigated cultivation."

"There are widely varying estimates of the extent of the marsh and of the extent of the lake..."

The concessionaire estimates the marsh at 41,400 metric dunams and the Lake at 13,800 metric dunams. Of the former some 9,200 metric dunams are, he says, cultivated by Arabs. In the Experts' report (p. 154) Dr. Strahorn says that the area of the marsh north of the Lake is not less than 52,000 Turkish dunams, i.e., 47,800 metric dunams....”

“No survey of the marsh area has been made, nor is one possible, except by air, until the marsh is drained. It will be safe to assume that, excluding the cultivation of the Arabs in that area, there is still an area of some 25,000 to 30,000 metric dunams of marsh land available for reclamation. Were the Lake also drained a further 9,000 or 10,000 metric dunams would be rendered cultivable.

The soil of the whole Hula Plain is exceedingly fertile. It is indeed said to be the most fertile soil in Palestine.”

(Hope-Simpson report, 1930)

The above descriptions are segments from the report on “immigration land settlement and development issues” submitted to the British parliament at the request of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield, in 1930. The report summarizes recommendations of the Shaw Commission, a special British committee headed by Sir John Hope Simpson, which was sent to Palestine following the Arab riots in August 1929 to evaluate the prospects of the land of Palestine in relation to the size of its population. The report described the expected land productivity of different regions and parts of Palestine and recommended limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine (a policy adopted in 1930s White Paper) given the overall poor “economic capacity of the land” and the effect this might have on the livelihood of current residents. The Hula swamplands, as the segment above indicates, stand out in the report as uncharacteristically productive and promising in comparison to other areas in Palestine that must be drained if they are to materialize their potential.

Between the last decade of the Ottoman rule to the end of the British mandate period, at least 14 surveys and reports, and 11 actual plans were issued by British, Turkish, German, French, and Jewish engineers and suggested plans and approaches to the drainage of Lake Hula, and the cultivation of its lands for agriculture. These plans as the Hope-Simpson report indicates, differed in their conclusions, but built on each other’s data and measures. The accumulated database built by them established the Hula as having technological agricultural potential, as prospectively profitable and its local inhabitants and most of its wildlife as unworthy, invasive, and irrelevant to this imagery. Dreams of peat-soil turning into precious land for intensive agriculture, subjected the Hula lands to shifting real estate speculations. Concession (to drain the lake) became a key word, and was passed, beginning in the Ottoman period, from one group to another, creating, over time, a dynamic hierarchy of those who could be entitled to drain, according to changing principles and environmental visions and understandings.

So while travelers, naturalists, and explorers wrote about the rich natural landscape of the swampland as mysterious, inaccessible, and inhabited by poor native people, establishing thereby, the notion of a regressed or unsettled area in need of repair; the drainage plans of engineers and hydrologists employed and added a new techno-environmental imagination of a healthy and profitable land and nature.

Turning the swampland into an object of repeated measurement and calculations, they framed the valley through scientific methods, language, and technologies. Surveys, counting, mapping, sketching, sampling, and even experimenting small scale drainage actions, begun in the mid 19th century and continued until the actual drainage by Israel in 1951, and have shaped and reshaped future visions of the valley. These environmental rationalities, technologies, and methods of re-claiming (re-ordering, administering, and governing) the swamplands and its inhabitants articulated, in their environmental imagination, the multiple geophysical and political conditions of the valley and shifted to respond to geopolitical changes, changes in global markets, and land reforms. They created the repertoire of practices and material conditions for the Zionist leadership to purchase wide areas of land in the valley and for the drainage to take place.

Prior to the early drainage plans, the Hula valley, as multiple explorers indicated, was settled mostly by Bedouin from the Ghawarne tribes that, according to Ottoman surveys from much later, 1917, arrived from the Jordan valley and lived in twelve different villages in the valley (Kawhalde and Rabinowitz 2002). Malaha was right at the water edge on the south, and Halassa their small center in the valley was not far from the lake. Fellahin, who were mostly past Egyptian soldiers, who came to the valley in 1831, with the arrival of Ibrahim Pasha and the occupation of Akko (Karmon 1956, pp 62-63)¹⁵. Given the spread of malaria in the valley, it was an undesired destination for settlement and Pasha enticed poor new landless settlers by offering tax exemptions and providing them with new species of cotton for agriculture. The expanded presence of settlers, and new types of agriculture in the valley reshaped over and over again the physical and biological landscape of the swampland. During the time Egyptian settlement was encouraged by Pasha, new canals were dug to transform the lake to suit agricultural needs. When Pasha was pushed out by the Ottomans in 1841 the numbers of settlers in the valley decreased and parts of the region were covered again with more wetlands. (Zitrin, 1987).

The Ghawarne, who were landless tribes used to lower swampy areas, stayed in the region, according to writers' and travelers' reports, despite these shifts, and malaria, living in papyrus huts, raising rice, corn, and wheat, the men raising water buffaloes and livestock, the women weaving simple reed mats and more delicate products, and using the papyrus for heating, and to produce multiple products including boats, furniture, and food for the animals (Shalem, 1935, p.79). However, in the writing of surveyors and planners, the Ghawaraneh never represent a possibility for sedentary agriculture and are noted as incapable of putting into consistent productive use the resources of the valley which, in western eyes, was understood as much needed in order to restore the valley to its ancient fertility that characterized it during the Roman and Byzantine eras. Their intricate crafts, even if without numbers, are never considered, in writing, as useful for moving towards a higher stage of development in the valley (Karmon, 1956).

¹⁵ It seems that most inhabitants practiced different methods for working with reed which was an Egyptian expertise, as well as raising water buffalo. Many had the family name el Masri and many villages are marked in sketched maps as Jamuseen, Arab word for buffalo)

In the 1860s, following world shortage of cotton, due to the Civil War in the US, the valley drew new interest as British traders searched for alternative cotton resources. Fellahin in the valley, who had gained some experience in Pasha's time, were encouraged to grow cotton for good prices by Jewish traders from Damascus. For a short time, the British and French explored the region as a potential global cotton center. Settlements in the valley attracted more new settlers in response, including Algerian refugees and immigrants who followed Abd el Kader el Hussein's land purchase in the region after the failed 1847 rebellion against French Occupation. These Algerian refugees eventually established a village in the Salihya Valley, raising cotton and transforming the lake-scape by digging more canals for irrigation.

A survey from 1877 shows declining settlement and more areas that were gradually covered again by swamps. The Turkish sultan, following the survey, purchased lands in the valley which were now considered "giftlik"- sultan's lands. Turkish engineers were recruited in order to try to partially drain the valley in order to expand its lands and increase the sultan's income. They focused on deepening the southern gorge of the Jordan River, cleaning the mud and vegetation around the Daughters of Jacob Bridge, thereby lowering the level of water in the lake and exposing thousands of dunams for agriculture. These plans attracted more fellahin to purchase lands in the valley despite the malaria that remained stable. The Sultan issued two more plans to drain the valley: one was ordered by French engineers in 1903 and was based on mapping and scientific research but was never executed; the other was issued earlier, in 1901, together with the Sultan's concession to drain the southern side of the lake. The Ottoman concessions granted private capitalists and companies the right to perform different economic projects to replace government capital investment. The Hula southern swampland were now part of a privatized commodity in the valley, a land open to multiple visions and available to those who could pay for them and execute them.

Following the concession, Jewish settlers also showed interest in the valley. In 1884, land owned by a Jewish family from Damascus was bought by a group of Jewish settlers, who became, without much knowledge of the region, the Ottoman land laws, or malaria, the owners of 2500 dunams in the southern bank of the lake. Given no building permit on the land by the Ottoman authorities, this first Jewish settlement in the valley, Yesud HaMa'ala, settled in reed huts following the ways of the Ghawaraneh. Their Polish urban origin and complete lack of local knowledge forced them to patiently watch the Ghawaraneh plowing and sowing the land. They also hired Arab workers to watch and learn from them as they worked. In 1886 the entire settlement was reduced because of malaria. Rothschild tried to adopt the settlement as one of the Rothschild's Colonies in Palestine. In 1887 he expanded the lands of the settlement and built European farm houses. He also provided agronomic guidance and helped the farmers develop a flower nursery with more modern methods of land cultivation. For several years, the settlement expanded but within a decade, malaria defeated the settlers and, until 1912, 24 people out of 7 families died. The colony closed its flower factory. The swampland remained for Yesud HaMa'ala merely a source of malaria that had to be drained.

In 1908 when the Sultan was overthrown by the young Turkish revolt, another restructuring of the land took place, and the lands were transferred to government

ownership. More companies and groups showed interest in purchasing the concession. An Egyptian company wished to take advantage of papyrus and to establish a paper factory in the valley, and a Zionist organization made efforts to accept the Turkish concession for the drainage. Their plan was to use the same plan recommended by the Turkish engineers and drain 3000 dunams, a small part of the valley on the south, but the Ottomans conditioned the concessions to recover and use the entire land and, given that almost no other Zionist organization joined the initiative, the concession was appropriated and the land recovered was captured by Arab fellahin. The project seemed to require more financial human and technical power (Zitrin, 1987,p.116) and the concession was passed instead, in 1914, to two traders from Beirut, Sursuk and Bayhum, who, in return, promised to drain the lake and the swamps. They both held Ottoman citizenship and were subjected to Ottoman laws and rules which was an advantage in the eyes of the Ottoman government. Sursuk established the “Syrian Ottoman Company for Agriculture” and appointed Salim bay Salim as responsible for the drainage work. Engineers from Beirut were sent to start measuring the area but their work was halted during the war and was replaced by German engineers, Zoller and Weidner, who, despite the ongoing war (a testimony to the important status of the project) worked to develop a drainage program. In 1924, they issued their report proposing to focus on the lake outlets in the south and on partial drainage, expanding and deepening the Jordan river at the lake outlet. Their report was the basis for many others that followed.

Modernizing: British mandate reclamation

While plans prepared for the Ottomans were based on the Sultan’s desire to make tax -profits and present the valley as worthy of investment, the British plans during the Mandate¹⁶ to develop and extract profit from the valley were rooted in their understanding of modernization and first focused on healing the land from malaria. Focusing on the valley as an object of public health and health science, in addition to the need in infrastructural change and technological capacity, again reshaped the ways Arab traders, Jewish settlers, and local Arab dwellers were perceived. In a 1924 report on health conditions of the region, the valley was marked overall as “stricken by malaria unlike any other familiar region” and practical advice offered by of the authors included guidelines to any avoid settling in the area before solving the problem of malaria and rejected any program that did not solve the problem first, absent which any attempt to develop the region would fail (Rendel Palmer and Tritton 1934. pp 17-19). The importance of healing the region was compared to the development of any electric system and the building of a port in Haifa. British experts demanded that the British government take the task upon itself given its importance, but the government preferred to avoid investing its own capital and sought to sell the concession to Jews, estimating that their chances to actually realize the project were the

¹⁶ British Rule in Palestine lasted between 1917 and 1948 though the mandate officially started in September 1929 and was granted to Britain in 1920 by the UN and following agreement between France and Britain over the division of the previously Ottoman space. The mandate period was of special significance in terms of development of modern infrastructure and legislation and in particularly in institutionalization of the beginning of nature conservation. (for more see El Eini 2004. P.190-191).

highest since they had shown concern about it and had invested time in researching the subject. (Sufian, 2008).

The main focus of the British for progress was conditioned by the defeat of malaria and this shaped their vision for drainage and its reach. Their plans rejected any compromise on partial drainage. Their wish was to have a plan that would expand the drainage beyond the area of the concession to the north. One suggestion for partial drainage was by Rotenberg, the director of the Palestine Electric Company, who, in 1921, was given the Jordan river concession by the British Mandate, and who rejected the notion of drainage if the area would be in Jewish hands. He envisioned in the lake as a reservoir of hydroelectric power, with a station that would be built between the lake and the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret), and suggested building a canal that would bypass the lake and channel the water of the valley towards the mountains. Another suggestion by Tishbi, the secretary of British ministry of industry and commerce, was the temporary drainage of the lake until the swamp dried out and then using the area for artificial fish pools for fishing. His approach saw the lake's potential for bringing profit from fishing and products based on papyrus and reed. His offer was also rejected as it was based on partial drainage and fish pools, both risking that the region would harbour more malaria. Both plans were rejected on the grounds of being "partial" and continuing the risk of malaria in the region. (Randal Palmer and Triton, 1934.p.15-19).

Zionist reclamation

Zionists leadership responded to and adopted both environmental imaginaries albeit not in the same order. At first, prior to 1934, as the concession purchase was negotiated with the British Mandate, the Zionist leadership initiated surveys, research, and drainage plans, using experts from Europe and the US to evaluate on their own the financial worthiness and technical specifications and stakes of the drainage. After the concession was purchased but the drainage delayed until after WWII, Zionist reclamation focused on detailed research of the lake and on intimate exploration of swamp assets. During and after the drainage years, modernization of the desolated land through agriculture was again heralded by , legitimizing the need to completely eradicate unruly nature, human and non-human, and to transform the valley onto a landscape of straight agricultural fields.

Prior to purchasing the concession from Salim bay Salim, Zionists were concerned to ensure that Hula lands would be suitable for agriculture and saw the British desire to sanitize the valley from malaria as minor compared to agricultural development even though one that might play to their advantage. Zionist writing on the swamp shows Zionists admitted that the knowledge about the swamp was limited. Their explanation was similar to travelers' conclusions that the swamp was impenetrable and despite several acknowledgements of animals and particular attention to edible fish, not much interest was expressed in the swamp beyond its economic potential until the purchase of the concession. (Braslavski 1950. p 111)

In 1926, Cyril Hendrix, an expert on water and agricultural problems was appointed by the Zionist leadership to examine the potential of the valley. Hendrix, motivated by biblical interest, suggested a partial drainage plan offering to demolish and rebuild the arches bridge, Daughters of Jacob, at the end of the lake and have a dam built

at its outlet to control the level of water. He wished to combine in his plan Rothenberg's concern and believed a partial drainage would preserve an opportunity for more diversified development projects. He also validated the drainage by connecting it to biblical ideas about wetlands and hydraulic knowledge. His final conclusions, though, were financial, and indicated the way Zionists had already adopted a rational economic modern framework for thinking about the valley. He claimed the project was too costly and useless without the purchase of at least an additional 100,000 dunams of land north of the concession area, which qualified for agriculture without further financial investment. He also estimated that such a drainage project would last at least 10 years during which no profit, but mostly loss, could be expected. The Zionist leadership realized that, at least financially perhaps, the project might not be worthy, as noted by KKL after Hendrix's report, but noted there were geopolitical circumstances to consider, as the concession area was close to the border, and was forming a rare continuum of land that could be purchased as a whole. Zionist responses to British plans for the drainage continued to a certain extent the same logic that guided previous plans, though for different territorial) calculated reasons. Lake Hula was seen as what was to become a unified agricultural area, and although information on malaria and agriculture was shared and interpreted similarly to the ways the British understood it, Zionists, even prior to the drainage, intended to utilize it for different ends (Zitrin, 1987. p. 97-105).

In 1930, an infrastructural change executed by the British government together with Salim bay Salim, changed again the geological and biophysical conditions of the lake and the swamplands. Daughters of Jacob, which was an arches bridge at the outlet of the lake, was replaced with a hanging bridge which allowed for water to be drained into the Jordan river. The lake surface shrank and was lowered by about 1-2 meters. In response, the Zionist leadership appointed Joseph Weber, an engineer, to check again, in the light of the new conditions, the financial worthiness of acquiring the concession. Verber calculated and found that costs of the drainage would now decrease and profit from intensive agriculture that did not require more than 200,000 sterling, could balance them out. In response, Zionist leadership started negotiating the purchase of the concession (Zitrin, 1987.p. 135).

With the publication of Hope-Simpson's report in which the Hula lands were marked as the most promising for agriculture in Palestine, the value of the Hula lands further increased. The report described the area as suitable for large scale settlement in which every 40 dunams would suffice to support one family. It clearly stated thereby that development of the valley was achievable only if the valley were planned as one unit (instead of the concession area and the lands surrounding it separately). Despite the report's recommendation to halt Zionist immigration to Palestine, it made clear to British authorities, that the healing of the entire valley (Rather than parts of it) could not take place when the concession was in the hands of Arabs from Beirut as it required a wider financial and support network that Zionist settlement could establish. Given the reluctance of the British government, to advocate for an act that would evoke tension, negotiations took some time and the government eventually conditioned the purchase of the concession by the Zionist leadership in the allocation of 15,773 dunams of land that would be granted the Arab residents of the valley after the drainage. This area was considered the best for

agriculture within the concession area and was meant to please Arab public opinion which fiercely objected selling the concession into Jewish hands. (Zitrin, 1987.p. 169-170).

In 1934 the concession was purchased by the Hachsharat Hayishuv company (a settlement Zionist company) for 192,000 sterling. Ben Gurion describe the deal as of much symbolic and political importance:

“ ..one of the greatest events in the history of our settlement project in the land of Israel, this year would be remembered not only for the largest immigration but also, and perhaps mainly, as the year in which Hula was purchased. The political importance of this area and its geographical situation, the size of its land and their productivity, grant this purchase a special political and economic meaning” (Harozen, 1955.p. 166).

The British Mandate authorities saw the deal as possibly resolving the problem of malaria in the region and providing better conditions for Arab Fellahin of the region, which was more than the Turkish government could obtain for them. During the same year Rendel, Palmer and Tritton, an engineering company, was hired to solve the issues of malaria in Palestine. In 1936 a drainage plan for the entire region, far beyond the concession area, was published, addressing in its conclusions all previous reports and drainage plans, the 1924 international health survey, and, in addition, the company’s own survey from 1935 (Rendell Palmer and Triton, 1936. pp.2-6). The plan contested many findings of previous reports, most importantly showing the concession land as infertile given its chemical composition, thereby canceling the hope for profit as a result of the drainage. The report predicted a slight rise in the land’s value based on the very fact that the land would be malaria-free but not based on its agricultural prospects. The plan made specific suggestions in regard to nature and buffalo management, creating water points to control their transit in the valley, and to prevent them from constantly creating mud pools and attracting *Anopheles* mosquitoes.

The report’s negative conclusions opened a controversy between the Zionist leadership and KKL over the low prospects of the project’s profitability. But WWII ended the controversy and halted the execution of the drainage. The delay in the execution of the drainage between 1934 to 1951, left the 57,000 dunams of lake, swamplands in Jewish hands. These years are almost completely overlooked in writing about the Hula drainage project but their contribution to understanding the lake more distinctively is pivotal.

Ironically, the 30s and the 40s opened up a period, perhaps for the only time in its history, in which the lake, was approached, explored, and studied in a way even if temporarily, that later on paradoxically posed a threat to the drainage vision and to the role “Zionist Natures” played in supporting the Zionist hegemony. Researchers and visitors paid detailed attention to the landscape that was soon expected to disappear, and these descriptions became the only ones to counter the rational analysis of developers and scientists who took measures and described “populations” from afar and in numbers. Gorney (2011) compared the writing of two Jewish geographers -- Natan Shalem who published a book in 1935, and Yehuda Karmon’s book on the Hula Valley that was published immediately after the drainage in 1956 and turned into the main and most acknowledged and cited official resource about the valley. Shalem, a geographer who was never recognized by Israeli academia, at least not until after many years after his death, toured the valley as an ethnographer, with a team made up of a naturalist, an historian, a physician, an engineer, and an archeologist. He spent time in different villages in the valley

including those by the lake. Despite having his engineer evaluating the swamp potential for industrialized fishing, and geology of the valley for the chances of the drainage to succeed, most of Shalem's book is dedicated to descriptions of the valley and the swamp as a "multi-hued and wondrous area" (p. 467) full of life. Shalem saw the natural and cultural life of the swamp as entangled, inseparable, and co productive, as well as the life of Arab and Jews. Unlike engineers' scientific reports and drainage surveys, Shalem does not portray the valley as a "population" using numbers, statistics, and maps, but, rather, as groups of women and men, individual hunters and healers. He learns about local swampland traditions and practices mainly from locals' expertise, bringing their own voices and sharing their swampland experiences. Shalem used his teammates as partners for different conversations rather than as ultimate experts about the valley. Locals were key to him in learning about the details of life in the swampland, ways different genders utilized the lake for their use, methods of working the swampland for different types of growth and agriculture in different seasons, men's practices of hunting and fishing, and the ways women used the rich vegetation for making useful products that were being traded and exchanged in the valley between Arab Jews and travelers. Dr. Mar, the Jewish physician and expert on malaria, who was part of the team, contributed to understanding the disease they encountered in the valley, pointing to mosquito presence and malaria in the valley overall. The naturalists discussed with the team the value of the zoological treasures revealed in the swamp. The group did not ignore poverty and illness and, at times, cast a condescending gaze towards the Ghawaraneh for being "out of time" or confusing history with traditions. Also they did not refrain from discussions in regard to the region's prospect to become an agricultural area after the drainage. Nevertheless, the valley is depicted as being full of life and the team members, far from depicting it as desolated or unruly, raise for the first time concerns and worries in regard to the future of the region following the drainage. Mar, despite his rich experience with malaria, challenged the group engineer and his vision for the valley asking: "and all that all that you wish to extinguish?" and when the engineer answers that these things are "luxuries, invaluable things," Mar answers, "No not invaluable. This [meaning the drainage] would be your crime for which there would be no atonement." Jewish historical connections to the valley are mentioned in different places in the book as the group tour the valley. Shalem weaves a story in which Jewish connection to the place does not depend on its erasure but is, rather, amplified by the cultural and natural richness and details of the area.

These pre-drainage years were also when the environmental and political conditions under which the Hulata community was founded on the lake shore in order to start preparing it for the drainage were framed. In Chapter Two, I follow the history of the lake from the Hulata perspective and the ways in which Shalems' ethnographer anecdotes during his short tour to the valley, were tested in practice in Hulata for more than 20 years. Drawing on colonial legacies and Zionist dreams of reclamation upon their arrival with the intention to drain, in practice, given the geopolitical circumstances, and the need to delay the drainage, Hulata happened to offer a distinctive vision of life at the lake that countered, contradicted, and may have become a threat to the Zionist prevailing visions for it, but never came to alter it in practice.

Chapter 2

The Children of the Lake

“We were children brown of mud. We had a permanent brown muddy mustache around the mouth. We drank, ate, and learned from the lake”.

(Roni Ganon, 2003)

“This? (pointing at the lake) this we need to plough; and grow something”

Prime Minister Ben Gurion visiting Lake Hula in 1943 with Hulata residents
(Gershoni 2002)¹⁷

Introduction

In the 2000s, Kibbutz Hulata like several kibbutzim across Israel was going through privatizations and structural changes. In 2003 and then again in 2005, I visited the kibbutz as a young student looking to gather historical information on the historical Lake Hula. It was after several months in which I was working for the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel's (hereafter SPNI) education department on a special project. I was asked to help refresh the educational program at a nature museum commemorating the environmental history of the Hula valley, “Beit Osishkin” in Kibbutz Dan. During the previous year I was helping to think out and plan innovative pedagogies for visitors interested mainly in birds and wetlands wildlife. The museum similarly to the Hula nature reserve focused solely on the natural species extinguished due to the drainage and those who survived and can still be studied and watched. Back in Tel Aviv I heard one day about a musical cantata that was written about the lake by a nearby Kibbutz Hulata member. I heard it included imitations of birds of the lake at different seasons and times of the day and was curious to find out more about it. Until then I had not heard anything major about Hulata in relation to the lake. I grew up, as do all Israeli children, hearing the one linear story: There was a lake that was mostly a swamp, it was drained, like all other swamps in Palestine (later Israel), except that this one was full of special endemic species. It was a necessity of the hour to drain it as it was unproductive and carrying malaria and its land was needed for agriculture. I also knew the story of nature lovers who struggled to save some of the lake's special species. Some of them I met at the museum and in my work for the SPNI. Their struggle ended with the foundation of the first nature reserve of Israel and was followed by the establishment of the first nature conservation movement in Israel- the SPNI.

Nothing in this story prepared me for what I later found out about Hulata and discovered about the Hula drainage project. In a nutshell, hearing about the lake in Hulata, completely altered the narratives I knew. Lake Hula emerged to me a rich social-ecology full of life, with unique settlements and even unique Zionist life around it. The drainage,

¹⁷ The following chapter is based on Interviews with Hulata Members Mussa, Amnon, Roni, Israel, Arnon, Tamar Rachel and Gal. Conducted in Spring 2002. In Hulata and In Tel Aviv.

on the other hand, seemed all of a sudden much less consensual, certainly not inevitable or merely an ecological unintended event; but rather a destructive event, which ended with a great loss, not only of natural species but of socio-cultural worlds.

Kibbutz Hulata, spring 2003

When I first entered Hulata in summer 2003, looking to find out more about the cantata, the kibbutz was struggling over its future, barely making it socially and financially with the privatization processes and the structural changes it was undergoing. When I first walked in, without too much background about it, I encountered the typical combination of kibbutz smells, and some neglect in the common areas. At first I was hit by the typically strong scent of cowshed. Then I was struck by the quietness of Hula Valley and the heavy hot air that I remembered from previous visits to the valley. A heap of junk welcomed me at the main entrance road. In front of it, a wooden sign directed visitors to the new local “rural bed -and -breakfast,” which also offered indulgent therapeutic massage in a “simple healthy setting.” This new economic branch of the kibbutz was owned by young Hulata residents with their own private source of income. But Kibbutz Hulata did not create the impression of a touristic site. It was late spring in the valley and yellow lawns were needing water. Weeds grew everywhere without being disturbed, common buildings and some residential houses were peeling, and in need of repainting. Wall drawings on the kindergarten fence appeared somewhat pale. The dining hall was almost empty and seemed dysfunctional. And the common laundry room and the bike repair house seemed deserted. From time to time someone crossed the paths, quietly riding an old bike; elderly people were moving slowly along the paths using walkers. Up to this point Hulata gave me the impression of a struggling kibbutz, not a rare sight during the early 2000s when lots of privatization took place in Israel and in particular in Kibbutzim.

What seemed odd to me were the names of buildings in Hulata when I saw them the first time. The store carried the title “papyrus”, the nursing-home was called “the lake house.” In the children’s house, which used to be the kibbutz school and had several rooms, one room was called “Anafa” (herons) the second “Nofar” (a yellow water Lily), the third “Shaldag” (kingfisher) the fourth “Amnun” (the endemic Tilapia, a kind of big fish). The big old collective dining hall was decorated with old dim black-and-white photographs of the historic Lake Hula taken by one of the kibbutz members, and a well-known local nature photographer, Peter Meirom. I recognized some of the photos from a book in my grandparents’ home, an Israeli classic which could be found on many Israeli bookshelves.

These visual aspects of the lake in Hulata, stood out in their omnipresence. On the one hand the lake was emerging everywhere in texts, on buildings, and later on, I discovered, in paintings in peoples’ living rooms. I later learned that even some of the people I have interviewed were named after the lake’s wildlife and landscapes. Clearly, the lake symbolized something very meaningful to community of Hulata. On the other hand, despite its omnipresence, the lake in Kibbutz Hulata was almost eerie—more a shadow or a ghost – pale, dim, lifeless. It was not clear whether the kibbutz’s economic situation following privatization was responsible for this impression. But it was the first time and place in which I noticed and learned there was some mutual past, a connection between the lake and the people who lived by the lake, or as they choose to describe it – lived *with* the lake. Nowhere else where the lake was commemorated or its drainage celebrated or

lamented — was there any reference to such connection. The Hula Nature Reserve —the space of nature conservation organizations and naturalists, declares that “Scientists after the drainage acted full force to preserve a small part of the lake landscape, and as a result, the Hula nature reserve —the first nature reserve in Israel — was officially established and declared in 1965, though multiple species of plants and animal were extinguished in the process.”¹⁸ The Beit Osishkin Museum, which hired me — was a museum of regional nature and environmental history. It was founded in the 1950s during the drainage project and after, and documented plants, landscapes, and overall settlement in the valley but barely mentioned a human community that lived by the lake except for those involved in the drainage. The very idea to place a lake-related museum in a kibbutz relatively far from the lake, was in itself puzzling to me as I learned more about Hulata. The same was true for literature and movies about the drainage, in national archives, and documents from which I gathered information and read about the drainage as well as in media of the time. Several books were published about the Hula Valley prior and during the drainage. Amnon Karmon, a central historian of the valley prior to and during the 50s, did not say much about Hulata other than a short mention of the kibbutz. In a book that was issued by KKL to provide teaching materials about the Hula Valley and swamps, I found plenty on the botany, zoology, landscape, soil, poetry, Zionist settlement, and historical Jewish references to the lake, but only two mentions of Hulata. In one mention they are counted among other pioneer settlements in the valley who joined the valley in the 1930s after the concession was sold into Jewish hands. No more than one line on “those who will be rowing the water” (implying their proximity to the lake). In a second place in the book Hulata is mentioned as offering a tour of the swamp for teachers that were interested touring the area with students. But one winter day in the 2000s in Hulata, after heavy rains, the fields were flooded with water. Children went out to play at the temporary lake that formed as a result, and I overheard an older woman describing the event: “There was so much joy. For a moment it was again like those days with the lake.” It was under the impression of these striking gaps, between national and regional representations of the Hula drainage project, that completely excluded Hulata, and silent, local, isolated but present manifestations of the lake within the kibbutz, as well as the difference in the quality of these reminiscences, that I began my research on Lake Hula project within Hulata.

I quickly learned that the community of Hulata has a strong past with the lake, as well as a history within Israel’s leading environmental organizations, and with which I worked. But for several years when I was visiting the nature reserve, no one ever mentioned the community of Hulata to me. The Hula Nature Reserve was planned to be a reminder and reservoir of the local nature in its purity. And this approach that characterized the SPNI for years after, did not include people. Later in the 1990s, when some parts of the valley were re-flooded by KKL and turned into a mini lake and park commemorating KKL in the Valley, nothing again was to be found about Hulata. I discovered that in addition to the lake as nature administration organizations perceived it, there was also the lake of the people who lived by, off, and with the lake — the Hulata community — and that this lake, as well as its drainage, was different than the one conveyed in more publicly available and familiar stories of the lake and its drainage. This was also the case in more recent

¹⁸ Cited in the NPA Brochure <https://www.parks.org.il/reserve-Park/%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%AA-%D7%98%D7%91%D7%A2-%D7%94%D7%97%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%94/> retrieved 2005.

scholarship that took a more critical approach and stance about the drainage¹⁹. For many years I saved the recordings and the documents I collected in Hulata without putting them to use. It was only beginning in 2010, when I started looking at processes of development, settlement, and conservation that took place during the 2000s in the Negev, that I began thinking about the importance of a “local theory” (Raffle, 1999) of the Hula Drainage project for later understandings of nature management and environmental subjectivities in other parts of Israel.

Goals and structure

This chapter is guided by two main broad questions – empirical and theoretical. First, why was the community of Hulata absent from the lake’s national history that emerged during and after its drainage. Second, how would using a “methodology of locality” (ibid. p.323), looking at Lake Hula from the distinctive and perhaps marginalized experience of the Hulata community, contribute to our understanding of the lake and its drainage, and, more broadly, to the way nature has been managed in Israel over the years to support the Zionist colonial-capitalist project?

I argue in this chapter that looking at the Hula project in a “distinctive way” (ibid 1999) which is marginalized in public records, suggests a corrective understanding to the long-standing popular and academic understandings of the Hula as a negative place, a problem in which local populations, Jewish and Palestinian, were hostage to the powerful swamp, and to the ways the Hula lake has been consistently portrayed as an environment, rather than as a society or a social ecology (and therefore that its drainage consequences were environmental rather than social). Second, I argue that the story of Hulata does not only challenge the hegemonic notion of Zionist nature with an alternative view of a no less Zionist but positive and dynamic social ecology of the Hula; but also that the hegemonic notion of Zionist Nature has been contested since 1934 when the concession passed into Jewish hands, even if not loudly enough. But contesting voices and the possibility of life in the lake, never made their way to public discourses for different reasons.

Thirdly, I argue that the Hulata story complicates our understanding of the development of an environmental movement, of environmental subjectivities, of understandings of nature and nature management in Israel. The environmental movement in Israel has been depicted, since the Hula drainage for many years as anti-Zionist, a counter movement to Zionist development and as a purely ecological warfare distinguished from other human conflicts (Davis, 2007). The Hula story from the Hulata perspective challenges this notion and clarifies that it served, rather, via its visions of conservation, the same Zionist visions and goals. My analytical argument focuses on the epistemology that enables these understandings. The erasure of Hulata society from the story of nature management in the Hula enabled the existence of a sanitized conservation movement that positioned itself outside society – settlement, development, and territorial conflict, on the side of Nature. But conservationists exert control through enclosures that could seem controversial with some aspects of the state territorial project, yet they powerfully amplify

¹⁹ Gorney’s work analyzing the drainage from an ecofeminist perspective (2007, 2011) is an example. Rabinowitch and Kawalde (2002, 2000) add an important aspect of the geo;olitical considerations on which the drainage was founded and the fate of the displaced Bedouin communities as a result. None of these critical scholarship pay attention to Hulata.

its project by providing the logic and the mechanism for these sterile enclosures.

Hulata realized its Zionist redemption by becoming “lake people,” engaging with scientific forms of knowledge production about the local nonhuman and human environment, but also becoming a society of “lake people” (the way they call themselves), situated and immersed in it. They have become a disruption to the neat Zionist vision of eco and nature management in which Jewish people do not belong to nature but tame it. Hulata residents could not find their place in the drainage project or the conservation efforts, and turned into a “green settlement” – a compromised development/settlement project – highly aware of the contradictions of the Zionist eco-hegemonic vision; but remaining silent and eventually qualifying the ethnic capitalist and ecologically destructive purifying project of Zionism.

Lake Hula and the drainage, as well as the “Zionist natures” that emerge from this reconstruction, are not as stable as they appear in public records of Zionist institutions, they are remembered and felt differently by different generations, occupations and genders over the years. Rather it appears in Hulata as a set of relations and meanings, social, material and symbolic that were shaped over 20 years. There is no useless single nature (the way Zionist leadership saw the swamp) in Hulata but, rather, a social ecology and an ongoing politics, in which Lake Hula was imaginatively materialized and enacted through practices of variously positioned people. The Hulata story grants visibility to a different lake and to a lake history that replaces the reproduction of Euro-Zionist mythologies and shows, even if retroactively, the potential creative agency of local people and the possibilities for different alternative conservation legacies and development strategies that could have led and guided this region better than those offered by formal institutionalized vision of science and the nation state.

From a methodological perspective, understanding how Lake Hula was viewed, experienced and reshaped distinctively, is possible only by looking into the ways the lake resided in people, was embodied in them, and narrated by them. To recover this distinctiveness of the Lake and the drainage I did not rely so much on national archives as I did in the first chapter, since very little, if any at all, in these archives addressed everyday life during the lake years. Much more was written about the lake after the drainage or near its completion. I therefore rely in this chapter on personal interviews and conversations with people who lived by the lake and in Hulata, and on private and local archives they kept that detail everyday life in the lake between 1936-1957, the years prior to the drainage, and also more broadly in the decades that followed the drainage during which the lake was remembered and its absence experienced.

I begin by providing a short history of how Hulata was founded entangled with the lake. I then continue with the ways the lake was remade and can be understood as a social ecology and the ways it has formed and reformed those who lived by the lake as adults and community leaders (“the lake generation”), those for whom the lake was their childhood (“the children of the lake”), who experienced the drainage as they turned into adults, and the “post-lake generation” in the kibbutz, who knew the lake but only through stories and memories on dry grounds.

Grounded in drainage: foundation of Hulata

The members of Hulata arrived in Hula Valley as emissaries of the Zionist approach to nature: to occupy wilderness, improve whatever was not cultivated and to make it bloom, thereby to be “planted in the natural soil ... and establish new relationship with nature.” (Gordon in Aytzim 2020) It was a group founded as a kibbutz after the concession over the Hula lands and the drainage was finalized, in September 1936, by three Zionist youth movements consisting of 18-19-year-old immigrant youth from Germany and immigrants from several Arab countries, mainly Syria and Iraq who crossed the border by foot to Palestine. Hulata’s special mission was to be a task force that would start preparing the drainage of the lake (Levin 2003). The only other Jewish settlement that was on the lake shore these days was the Yesud HaMa’ala colony, colony of private farms, owned by relatively well-off settlers, that was founded earlier in 1883, and suffered tremendously from malaria. Yesod Hama’la showed no interest in the lake and saw it as a bother and a hazard, disruptive to the agriculture of the colony (Gershony, 2003.; Levin, 2003, Cohen, 2001). Hulata was the first Jewish community whose future was tied to the lake, which approached the lake, entered its water, and cleared lands on its eastern side, on what was then called “the Dardara,” a swampy area right below the Syrian border. Meanwhile, as the plan to drain the lake was delayed and suspended, following the Arab Revolt of 1936 and WWII, and, later on, the war of Independence, Hulata, which consisted of a poor group of young Zionists who had to find a way to make a living, became a kibbutz of fishermen, specializing in fishing in the lake (Levin, 2003). They have re-invented themselves as the first fishing settlement in Palestine and later in Israel, and as experts of the lake, and in fact the first settlement which had any interest in the lake itself at all.

In February 1938 the first fishing boat went out to the lake, and according to Hulata residents “quickly the Sea has become the main source of income. The unique biophysical conditions of the Hula provided an abundance of fish and as time passed and secrets of the lake were reveled, methods were improved, and the quantities we have fished kept increasing gradually ... It was during this time that has passed that the unintended has happened and the big love affair of Hulata with the sea has occurred, the romantic landscape that conquered every heart, our pride in our uniqueness, and our income”. (Levin 2002 and also in HA). Lake Hula still stretched out at that time all across the Hula Valley, over 60,000 dunams from the Golan Heights and Syria in the East to the Naftali Mountains in the West. Hulata was situated by the water’s edge on the south-west bank.

The Arab inhabitants lived on Hula lands on the lake shore as well when Hulata was founded. Mainly, Bedouin tribes who had lived as vassal-shepherds in the region since the mid-19th century, and now made a living of hunting and fishing in the lake and its swamps (Khawalde and Rabinowitz, 2002). They grew bison and chickens, and were experts in weaving reed for different purposes. When the Zionist “Hachsharat Hayishuv” society received the Hula lands, it has assured the British government, as it demanded, that with the drainage of the lake, 15,0000 dunams would be allocated to its Arab inhabitants. But during the War of Independence, Hula Valley settlements were attacked by Syrian and Lebanese armies, and when the latter were defeated, the shepherd tribes escaped to Syria, and the Hula Valley was vacated of its Arab population. When the armistice was signed in July 1949, the tribes were allowed to return. They stayed on the lake for a few more years in their village, “Malaha,” and until the drainage took place, lived, like Hulata people and

not very far from them, fishing for their own needs, hunting, weaving reed baskets and products, and raising bison (ibid, and Zochrot website).

The first stages of the drainage in the early 50s were physically interrupted and thwarted by Syrian armed resistance. This was the background to the transfer of the Bedouin inhabitants from Lake Hula to two villages in the Galilee. Some of them returned to the lake after a few months but stayed only until the “Kadesh” military operation (1956). This second displacement occurred again (like the first one during the 1948 war of independence), apparently due to pressure of the Israeli military governance (Rosental, 1995). Therefore, even if beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that lake Hula social ecology was also a highly militarized landscape of displacement as it was shaped and reshaped by wars and in times in between the wars. These events are not discussed in this chapter but it was highly significant to the way the wetlands and its communities interacted with each other in space and were viewed and shaped by the different governments.

The Lake generation

“The only important thing here, is the Lake. It was clear to her since she first stepped in Hulata. She has never been here; and here, everything was different. She stood all of a sudden in front of a special lake. The bus dropped her at the water edge; and the place looked like the end of the world, the end of the road. No other road continued from here and here one must stay. Here the lake dictated life without much care who was at its shore. It was just there, and people, people lived on its sides, and in its water, bonding with it and forming attachments and great love.”

Gerda Cohen, “Living with a Lake,” Hulata. (2001)

The “Lake Generation” refers to the founders of Hulata, people who arrived in Hulata as immigrant youth, built Hulata from scratch, and are also the parents of the second generation (the children of the lake), and the grandparents of the “post-lake” generation, who knew the lake only from memories and stories (currently twenty and thirty-year-olds). Most of them have passed away by now, but some were still in Hulata when I began my study, and, until the 90s, they all participated actively in Kibbutz life and held an active role in shaping the collective consciousness of Hulata. It was a difficult task to gather the information I wanted from the group I call the “lake generation.” Many were concerned or cautious in talking about Hulata’s present and future; but not all of them were enthusiastic to talk about life in the past either. The first effort I made was with a group of 4-5 people who regularly met together, and used to be, as I was told, the fishermen of Hulata. It was not a great success, but the fishermen’s reluctance to speak has taught me that the past of Hulata in the years that followed the lake drainage were charged and remained like that for many years. The turning point in my search for more generous conversation was finding Mussa Gershoni – a member of the same age group and generation of Hulata, and their teacher.

Fishing for identity: becoming a fishermen’s village

“Since she has arrived she wanted to be a fisherwoman. But it was a hard goal to achieve. Fishing was the fortress of men in Hulata. The eldest one was 23 years old. Girls would not be easily admitted. After all, everyone wanted to be fishermen and there were also shepherds and gardeners in need, and those who worked in the kitchen and in laundry. But all that was a mere appendage of fishing. The fisherman was the king of the world and that is how he behaved ...” Gerda Cohen 1939, in Cohen (2001).

“Fishing! Not a tradition handed to us from our parents! This labor we have learned from our neighbors and despite that we have gained some achievements. Fishing became a branch but unlike the other branches...”

“Five years of Fishing in Hulata”.(HA)

Even in the 2000s, 50 years since the lake was drained, the fishermen’s club used to get together every Friday afternoon at one of its members’ houses. It has been like that for decades. Being a former Lake Hula fisherman is an essential and sufficient qualification for becoming a member and a participant. To meet this criterion one must be eighty years or above, and a male; lake Hula knew only one fisherwoman for a short time.

The house in which the meeting took place was clean and decorated, and it was a cheerful and noisy event. Vodka (the same kind of vodka for 50 years) was poured into small glasses and salty crackers passed. Nothing special happens there, and yet I was told that this used to be one of the most prestigious social circles in Hulata during lake days and after. The men were cynical and not very talkative, but they were willing to tell me that this meeting is a tradition they have held since the lake days. They worked very hard at the time, days and nights under any weather conditions; they laid the economic foundation for the Kibbutz and established its pride and its future. They started from scratch. In 1936, newly arrived at Hulata, they were all in their early twenties, new immigrants from various countries, mostly Germany. Their families stayed back in Europe, and most immigrants could not keep any contact with them. Many of their relatives were eventually murdered in the Second World War and they were family to each other. Hulata was, then, a few tents at the water’s edge of Lake Hula.

Given the delay in the drainage work, Hulata people were unemployed, and had nothing to make their living from, so they began to work for the more established and, in their view, condescending, higher class settlement, “Yesud HaMaa’la ” (Cohen 2001; Levin, 2002; Gershoni, 2003). Hulata people took turns cleaning and doing laundry for the farmers of Yessod Hama’la at their homes. They knew nothing about fishing but wanted to become independent and to make a “meaningful living.” So in a short time, as they formed connections with the local Ghawarane, they learned from them how to get into the water, what fish could be found, where and when, and gradually developed a local fishing industry, “the first Hebrew fishing,” as they phrased it. They had started fishing using the Ghawarane method called in Arabic “garifa,” using special fish nets (Garef) on the ground, and following the Ghawarane in navigating the seasonally changing fishing zones in the lake and the swamp. Several of them told me how they would at times compete over the best locations with the Ghawarane, who were not always happy sharing with Hulata or their taking over potential fishing pools. But they also described days and moments which ended with a fishermen’s Haflah (a festive meal) with the Ghawarane. After several years, they sent people to Scandinavia and Europe to learn more advanced fishing methods, and even brought a consultant from Yugoslavia to tutor them. They combined advanced fishing methods with nets and eventually electric shocks. Over time, they developed special fishing areas in the lake, carving passages through its jungle of reed and bringing new species of fish, carp mainly, to suitable areas within the lake. Carp had a good selling market, and were a good seasonal replacement for summer tilapia and catfish. Sardines were also valued though mainly available in winter times. Over the second decade of Hulata, kibbutzim from all over the country came to Hulata to learn how to develop a fishing industry in artificial fish pools. The members of Hulata were the mentors and the founders

of this type of Israeli agriculture though this status did not receive public attention, perhaps because it was never a form of the desired industrialized agriculture. I heard this in Hulata, and from relatives in kibbutzim with fishing pools.

Lake Hula was a stormy and unpredictable lake and mostly a huge swamp. Swamps were perceived, in the eyes of Zionist settlers in the valleys, as a symbol of the most insuperable power of nature, one which defeated Jewish pioneers everywhere; at least, this is how they were described in the Zionist pioneers' discourse²⁰. In this sense the Hulata community has accomplished the most heroic thing, managing to "beat" its swamp, mosquitoes and malaria, and turning it into a thriving industry and source of income. They learned the times and places in which the mosquitos were more active, dressed accordingly in different times of the day, slept under covers, wearing long sleeves and pants. They also often got sick and learned to identify the first signs and live with them (Cohen, 2001). But whereas in Yessod Hama'la, which suffered extremely high death rates, in particularly of babies, in the 19th century, where malaria was a great threat for the residents and remained a traumatic experience, even after the lake was drained, in Hulata the fishermen described it succinctly: "This was the way it was. Some of us did have fever, time and again, at times in the middle of the night we identified the shivering, as we were fishing. So what?" (Gershoni, 2002). Several diaries of residents describe in detail how they felt the first signs, how they recognized the switch from freezing to sweating, learned what they could handle and what they could not as they were sick (Cohen 2002). But from hearing and reading these descriptions it seemed that malaria was normalized, and that the myth of a deadly enemy was not ascribed to in Hulata. It was accepted and tolerated as inevitable and part of life although it did affect people in the long term.²¹ In 1945 when Gideon Mer, the physician of the Jewish settlement in the valley who also held a malaria clinic where he treated Arab and Jews, brought DDT from the war, he was named the god of DDT. Hulata saw malaria as the marker of its resilience, immersion and convergence with the lake.

Almost every piece of writing I have found in Hulata praised the fishermen. Songs were written for them and by them. They were described by the children in holiday songs, and in poetry. These tough old men I met used to be a local nobility; and, later on, after the lake days, they kept on carrying this title. They were a distinctive social class in Hulata. They were considered brave, as they worked hard in tough conditions—storms, cold, and heat, they worked at night and slept during the day, and they were acknowledged and given credit for that. Newcomers who wished to work with the fishermen had to go through different "tests" that are described similarly to informal tests performed by special combat units. They were tested for their ability to row, to toughen up, to overcome little humorous humiliations. People said the fishermen "deserved to get different food," and they did, most of the time, enjoying fish on the boats, or at the collective dining hall while the rest of the group made do with simpler food, enjoying fried fish only once a week. They were the first to move into permanent housing from the papyrus shelters and the tents, since "they really needed the sleep." Their kids were the most respected at school (there was a phrase, in Israel "the best men to the air force," which in Hulata, in retrospective

²⁰ For examples in Hebrew high-school textbooks from the 40s there is a huge sketch of Mosquito and before the biological description one meet the title "enemy of the pioneers." Swamps were also mention repeatedly in songs and poems as the main mission of Zionist in Palestine.

²¹ There are descriptions of long term implications of Malaria on people in terms of their mental health in Cohen (2001) and in other resources describing swamp in early Zionist settlment.

descriptions of the fishermen, was half-humorously replaced with the phrase “the best men to fishing”.²²

The fishermen and fishing culture were even at the center of social events since, with time, the lake became the center of the social and cultural life of Hulata. Initially, it was because the lake was the only option. “There were no other public spaces in which they could gather. People had no privacy. Couples were living together in tents which were not the most pleasant place to for couples to get together, since they functioned as living areas. The lake became the place for romance, for new couples to get some privacy, but also a public space, a ‘social living room’,” in the local words²³. Holidays and ceremonies gradually began to take place at the lake, as did social gatherings, and spontaneous events there became institutionalized traditions, lake legacies. The holidays were reinterpreted with lake- and fishing content and unique endemic ceremonies. Fishermen songs were inserted in the Passover Hagada texts and the holiday was re-named in Hulata as “the festival of the pelican migration.”²⁴ There were also new locally-invented ceremonies and holidays. Once a year, the Hulata community celebrated “the fishing holiday”; which was the biggest holiday of Hulata. The people of Hulata were invited to speak on public national radio about their lake and about fishing. They read members’ poetry and re-scripted Shubert’s “Die Forelle song” with new words suitable to their fishing world.

Kibbutz members described how it felt that “the entire country listened and respected the little kibbutz near the sea of the Hula.” On the day of celebration, important people from the Zionist leadership were invited, a huge raft was built every year for the occasion, to float on the lake like a floating stage, the raft was lit with electric bulbs, which they remembered as an extremely rare project. Kibbutz members with Moshe Morad, (Mopel) the kibbutz musician and conductor, squeezed into the raft to sing a special song, there were multiple blessing, and on the shore, there was a feast with multiple types of fish that manifested the culinary expertise of Hulata – “bread and fish and nothing else” (Cohen 2002). But the fish, as they described, came in any way one could think of, to suit everyone’s taste-- baked and fried fish of different kinds, bread to go with it and a little bit of wine that was rare and hard to get. They also celebrated each new fishing boat they purchased with a special ritual. The fishermen would imitate a Scandinavian ceremony and raise a glass of vodka at the lake as the kibbutz members watched and called out “ask the boat are there any fish aren’t there fish.” Each of these ceremonies and holidays had special sailor songs and special rites for the adults and children, and, in all these, the fishermen stood out and played a central role, organizing and leading the ceremonies. Even when representatives of the Zionist leadership or, later on, the government, arrived to visit Hulata they would be led to the lake (instead of the food-court, the common Kibbutzim public space for gathering) to a special raft that was built for hosting such events. If they were courageous enough, they would be given a short boat tour into the lake.

The fishermen refused to talk about the lake drainage with me. I once heard that one of them say that drainage felt as if he lost his wife. “Widowers, live as well,” he said. Comparing the lake to a wife told much about the unique role the lake played in redemption

²² Based on Interviews with Ganon, Levin and Gershoni, 2003

²³ Ganon Interview 2003.

²⁴ The Lake is internationally known as a seasonal site of spring- migration of water birds

as a realm in which Zionist masculinity was reshaped and constituted in Hulata²⁵. The lake as a wife replaced the land of the homeland in other geographical contexts (De Shalit, 1995, Gorney, 2007.), “and conquering the lake” (rather than draining it and turning it to an agricultural land) was the masculine Zionist act. The pioneer’s masculinity in Hulata was achieved through fishing. The privileges of the fishermen as well as their ceremonies, the alcohol, the songs, the night life, reminded those of hunters or cattle growers, later in other Zionist settlements.

It was only with the help of others, and of locals’ writing about drainage that I was able to learn about the fishermen’s response to the drainage. Hulata members described the fishermen as particularly injured in their spirit after the drainage. As a class in Hulata they lost their pride and purpose and felt eviscerated. A whole culture went along with the lake, a culture that had developed and thrived in Hulata for more than twenty years. Some of the sense of loss is manifested in Peter Meirom’s book that years later has become a best seller in Israel; though not exactly representing Meirom’s intention, it was received in Israel as a document of a great victory: “people looked at the photos (of diggers and natural landscapes) and did not read the words,” Tamar Borer, a woman from Hulata, told me (2002), “they did not get it at all.”

Meirom was a fisherman who knew the lake intimately, and a nature photographer who became the only (and unofficial) voice of the fishermen in regard to the lake and the drainage. Several years before he died, in 2005, he expressed, in an interview, what he saw as the fishermen’s position that echoed the state voice that “at the time there were other more important considerations than our love and pain for the lake.” It was typical in the rural Zionist settlement to diminish pain and even see it as feminine and weak. But the photos that Meirom took and the few words he intertwined between the photos, written by Hulata member Yedida Peles, not a fisherman but a shepherd and the person responsible for cultural affairs in the kibbutz, speak for themselves. For years they were the only available fishermen’s voices that expressed the great Zionist victory in words of personal loss and pain. Meirom opens the book lamenting in the name of all fishermen:

“These photos are dedicated to my closest Friend-Lake Hula. 20 years I sailed within its water seeking for its fish. These days were days of fervor, freezing nights, magnificent sunrises and storms full of wrath. I knew it in his life and in its death and so I learned to be captivated in its magic...I am thrilled to carry out my duty for this old bosom-friend, perpetuating lives”.(Meirom, 1961.p.1)

A lake-centered school: beginning of Israel’s environmental education

In contrast to the fishermen, Mussa has always felt more comfortable talking about the lake, and kept a private personal archive of the lake at home. He became full of energy when he told me about the lake. I met him twice at his house, each time for several hours, and he never seemed tired. He let me look at his meticulous diaries and patiently filled me in with missing pieces of the puzzle that I was trying to complete, everything that I could not hear from the fishermen.

Mussa was the founder of the Hulata educational system, 20 years from the time the first class opened in the mid-40s. At the time of our conversation, he was an eighty-six year- old, vital, clear, and articulate. He waited for me at the parking lot with his bikes and

²⁵ Boyarin (1997) following also Mosse (2020) describe the Zionist project as a masculinity project transforming Jewish urban dwellers sexuality of the diaspora into men through labor and land.

led me to his house. In front of the house there was a beautiful, very well-maintained, exotic garden contrasting sharply with the surrounding neglected common areas. “All Australian trees, which fit the local climate as well,” according to Mussa. The garden and the house created a protected, separate niche which, I understood later, was one of the signs of privatization in the kibbutz. It was a time in which people tried to mark their future territories or just felt uncomfortable, as in the past, in exposing their life to others. The interior of the house was just like the exterior garden: the house was simple, clean, and tidy. In a huge bookcase I saw, again, Peter Meirom’s photography book. A big painting hung on the living room wall, oil on canvas, titled, “A storm in the lake.” It was painted by one of the Kibbutz members. Mussa explained to me, “The Lake was an infinite source of creativity for the Hulata people; they wrote poems and prose about it, painted, sculpted, and even composed it.”

Mussa was not one of the German immigrants who built the kibbutz, as most of the other elder members of his age were. Just before we started talking, he took out texts by Tshernichovsky and Bialik, the epitome of Ashkenazi European literature and poetry, in order to tell me about education in the lake. Mussa arrived from Iraq. Over the years, Hulata had had several members and youth immigrants who arrived from Arab countries, but everything he presented as his source of inspiration, during our conversation, was typical of Ashkenazi cultural resources, expressing western views and imaginations of nature. When I asked Mussa about his own, original, cultural traditions, he insisted and said that he is an Israeli and that Bialik and Tshernichovsky spoke to his Israeliness. Bialik’s prose and poems, which Mussa used with his students, were written in Europe and about the European environment (Mussa of course knew that). But the history and life of Mussa, just like the rest of the elderly Hulata members, started here in Hulata, at the age of eighteen. They all talk as if they were born in Hulata, as if they have never known any other place.

Mussa arrived at Hulata with the founding group in 1936, working with the rest of the founders in “Yesud HaMaa’la .” Like the rest of the founders he spent a lot of time at the lake. Since he was considered “the intellectual type” among Hulata members at the time, and since the Hulata group already had school-age children, he was sent by the group in 1942 to a teachers college in Tel Aviv for four years, to be trained as a teacher. He received his education from two of the most famous educators and nature-scientists with an international reputation at the time, Joshua Margolin and Prof. Heinrich Mendelson, both Jewish naturalists, and enthusiastic Zionists. Mendelson was a German-Israeli zoologist who later founded the faculty of Life Science in Tel Aviv University and served as its dean. He became famous worldwide for revealing an endemic species of amphibian in the Hula valley and dedicated his life to conservation of the species. He was highly involved in establishing the SPNI, and the Nature Park Authority in Israel, and in advocating for a first nature reserve in the Hula valley. Margolin was of Russian origin, a poet and a naturalist who dedicate his life to the Zionist rural settlement and to science education, in particular botany and zoology. He established the biological pedagogical institute in Tel Aviv that later laid the foundation for Israel’s first teacher college, where he developed his approach towards experimental and outdoor pedagogies for natural science studies. When Mussa returned to Hulata, influenced by these two mentors, he founded a unique school system – the first environmental education system in Palestine and later Israel, that could not have taken place in any other location, since it took very

seriously the notion of rooting the children in their surroundings. In his own words Mussa, “invested a lot of thought and effort, designing a school that would realize the ideal type of Zionists – ones that are a synonymous with their place, in this case ‘lake-children.’”

Influenced by child-centered schools, mainly Dewey, Rousso, and Spencer, and inspired by German romanticism, and Margolin, Mussa replaced Dewey’s child-centered school with a place-centered school or as he called it a “lake centered school.” And his school was a significant factor in shaping the entire community’s attachments to the lake. He was able to integrate economy, culture, and science into the curriculum that revolved around the lake, and to develop a complicated concept of nature, a product of science, national and Jewish sentiments, and colonial investigative practices like journeys, combined with local Bedouin knowledge and arousing intimacy. By doing that he unintentionally perhaps, challenged the notion of modernity and the nation as modern, showing that science and politics are local. The school he founded was the most important project of Hulata along with fishing.

Lake expertise

Three generations of Hulata (later described as “the children of the Lake”) have spent their school years at the lake, waking up every morning, three days a week, at 4:00 am, to a repeating ritual: watching the lake awakening together; reaching there before sunrise, lying quietly, separated from each other, looking forward to the climax moment, sunrise over the lake:

“It was still dark when I woke them up. I took them to the lake before sunrise, speaking quietly; I adjusted my talking to the landscape, since I wanted them to identify with it. This goal--identification was important for me and I was constantly thinking how to implement it, how to shape their identities so they become the landscape of their homeland. The lake was covered with fog and I organized the kids in different spots so each of them has a private separated niche. The instructions were to sit quietly, listen and merge with the lake, absorb everything and later on each will share with everybody his impressions. The fog turned gray and then white, and suddenly the sun emerged on the east side of the lake creating a golden –red micro cosmos delineated by the Naftaly Mountains. I was walking from one kid to the other, quietly pinpointing how the fog was changing in different parts of the lake, at first, like a cotton candy, then, creating rainbows on the eastern side, and eventually disappearing and leaving us with a beautiful clean- blue lake. At these moments the lake was filling up with noise at once. Chirping, singing, and calling, of all kinds of awakening birds. Thousands of pelicans, ducks, and cormorants-- everything was vibrant and I was jumping from one kid to the other verifying they recognized all of the birds, that they are not missing any chirping sound.”

(Mussa, 2003. about the morning activity at the lake)

Not only mornings but the whole curriculum of the Hulata School was based on the lake as well. Hulata children did not have regular literature and Hebrew classes. Instead, they read Bialick and Tchernechovski with Mussa at the lake, trying to “see” the described landscapes as their own environment, to understand the poems in the lake setting:

“I took them during sunset hours to the hill above the lake and we read “As the Evening Sets” by Bialick. I told them: “you watch as I read aloud for you” and I read: “The sun set down at the edge of sea...”and we really had a sea ...There was no need of explaining.... they saw everything....”

Mussa Gershoni (2002)

These literature classes segued into writing classes in which the children, imitating the adults (or perhaps Bialick), were asked to express themselves. All of them, without exception, wrote about the lake, using high language and titles such as “beautiful sparkling

sun patches in the lake” (a fourth-grader’s paper), phrases such as: “swaying ducks on the water,” “green papyrus glistening in the sun,” or “our pellucid lake and the darker swamp” (fourth and fifth grade writers diaries).

They did not learn math either. Instead, Mussa told me, “I wanted them to be involved in the economy of the fishing industry, manual work, in the natural environment with the fishermen.” They substituted math classes with the economy of the fishing industry. According to the curriculum records, Hulata had 250 hours of math and fishing per year and in addition 310 hours of work with fishermen and in the kitchen (HA). They had a lot of nature-science hours. They learned how to define vast new endemic species that were revealed almost once a week at the lake. In addition the curriculum was based on 80 hours of bible reading, 150 hours studying “Arab and primitive nations,” 100 hours climate phenomena (in the lake), and 150 hours of expeditions and hikes, and many hours to process and document findings (in scientific and artistic ways). 150 additional hours were dedicated to “others” (which included holidays, social events and special topics).²⁶

In addition to sunrise “ceremonies,” the school conducted many journeys to the lake on a weekly basis, but also frequent wilderness journeys, which were, to my impression, the jewel in the crown of Hulata’s educational system. They are very well-documented in the children’s notebooks and adults’ diaries, and inscribed in residents’ memories, and it is almost impossible not to notice the colonial gist they contain, similar to naturalists like Joseph Conrad and others, who wrote about Africa and the tropics.

The children were holding diaries of these expedition journeys. Here, as well as in former citations, nature is always perceived as Edenic, wondrous and desirable, even if mysterious, rather than hostile and degenerated as we see in many writings of Jewish and British scientists who always described the valley as desolate and barren:

“We entered a jungle of papyruses and canes trampling the swampy muddy black ground. Our bodies injured from the canes, our clothes heavy from mud. The Bedouin guide got scared and disappeared. But we trusted Mussa (the teacher). We took a break for a moment and went on. Our goal was a Heron’s nesting colonies in the middle of the swamp...”

From fifth grader Diary, 1950.

In these journeys, Hulata children went out to discover wilderness areas of the lake, where humans had never visited before. Sometimes it was to explore the marshy area, sometimes to look for a new nesting colony. Mussa, still well-connected to the Zionist academic frontier which, in turn, was well-connected to European academies, and particularly to the British museum, took these expeditions most seriously and fearlessly as scientific mission. And so, Mussa and the children, along with other adults of Hulata, functioned as expeditors to the burgeoning Hebrew academy, sending new findings from the lake to Tel-Aviv laboratories, hosting and joining research expeditions. Professors from universities staying in the school for a few days, and joining school activities, were part of the routine, and all these connected the community to Western-Zionist ideology and culture of science, knowledge, discovery and progress and contributed to Hulata’s collective self-esteem, appreciation of the lake and communal sense of pride.

Not only was half of school time²⁷ spent at the lake but, in fact, even when Mussa

²⁶ Based on schedules found in Hulata Archive.

²⁷ According to the “Weekly and annual a schedule of Hulata school” in 1950 (HA)

and the students were in the “real school,” meaning, at the school’s little building, they were still at the lake, since school was designed as a micro-cosmos of the lake and the lake was everywhere, fusing western science and locality. Each class was named after one of the species of the lake; inside the class there were all kinds of seasonal finds from the lake that both Mussa, the kids, and the fishermen collected. The walls were covered with Latin and local names, sketches of the lake, and taxonomies. There were also paintings of the lake by the children and adult members of Hulata, fishing tools, and Latin field-guides to birds and plants. Outside the building, in the yard, there was a miniature artificial lake with living samples of real fish, seaweed, and water flora from the lake, and a small zoo with a chicken from the Ghawaraneh, birds, and a famous pelican that was once wounded and was brought in by the fishermen to Hulata and stayed until it “passed away.” This pelican was also the hero of a classic Israeli children book called “Peli” written about Hulata children. As Mussa defined it, “All these were part of the community: the school was the lake and the lake was school.” His students phrased it differently: “For us, Mussa and the lake were a single being, everything that we knew about Hulata was from Mussa and he also taught our parents and insisted they join us so eventually, the whole kibbutz was Mussa’s school, or the lake. It does not really matter” (Roni Ganon, 2002).



Image 9. An opening page from a children’s book written about Hulata children’s “An Adventure in the Lake,” by one of the most appreciated Israel novelists and advocate of nature conservation, S. Yizhar. The text describes the boy Arnon Gluzman son of a fisherman and later a second teacher in Hulata that joined after the drainage at the NPA: ...” Arnon, tall, rooted in his bareness in the land. Fields mountains and skies beyond him and his gaze towards the events that would soon unfold ... he is nine, his father a fishermen, is in the lake beyond the trees. let’s follow him...”

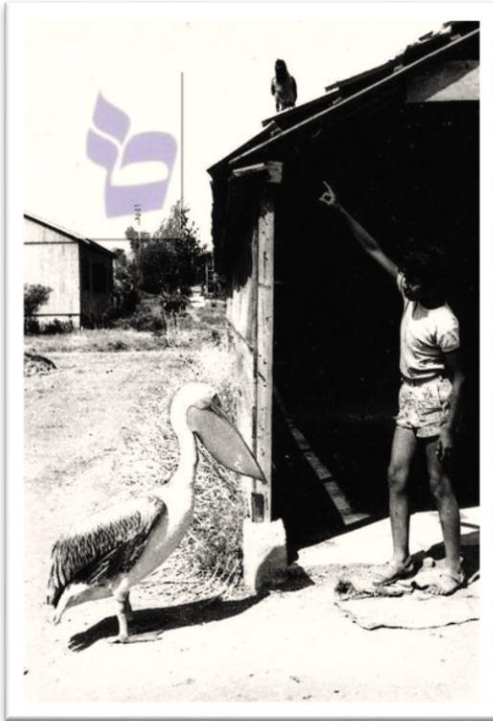


Image 10. (Top) Peli, the famous pelican in Hulata School. On the book cover (Photo: Peter Meirom)

Image 11. (Bottom, left) Gershoni presenting a carp to the children (unknown photographer; Credit HA)

Image 12. At the school lab. (unknown photographer; Credit Hulata Archive)²⁸

²⁸ The local Archive of Hulata is still unorganized, items aren't numbered and much of what I have found was through digging in boxes given to me by the archivist then, Roni Ganon (now replaced by younger members of the Kibbutz who are trying to digitize it). Many photos and document have no numbers or clear credit to their writers or photographers, in such cases I could only mention as a reference Hulata Archive (HA).

The Ghawarane

Over the years, the residents of Hulata developed a more complex, different way to describe the local Bedouins. Although they mentioned that as children they were sometimes afraid of the “Arab children,” even though they were invited to visit them, they were also able to tell me about an “area with magical aquatic vegetation and wildlife” inhabited by “resilient working people” and also “primitive, poor, carrying malaria, but knowledgeable and interesting people”. They could tell me that the local Ghawarane were famous for their art of weaving plants and mentioned 7 or 6 different products. They knew they used the papyrus as fuel and referred to them as having economic value to the people of Hulata when they arrived. Israeli mainstream scientists and geographers were blind to all of this, seeing only an infertile wild place, waiting to be salvaged and redeemed by human culture, which would realize it to its full potential (Gorney 2011). Famous historian Karmon describes the local Bedouin as “degenerate Bedouins under bondage” and summarized, “They did not find a way of existence except in the accursed swamp (ibid, p. 66)... the Gawarna, weak in body and in spirit, helpless against the forces of nature...they lack the knowledge and the power as well as the means to conquer nature and subdue it. This task was left for Jewish settlers” (p. 79).

Environmental education in Hulata often used the Bedouin’s knowledge and educators hired them as guides to the swamp, but, often in descriptions of the journeys to the swamp, Hulata are mentioned as those eventually taking over, though they compared themselves to the Bedouins as knowing the fishing area, not deterred by bad weather, and not even by Malaria. Despite these descriptions Hulata did not see the Ghawarane as an ethnic cultural or political threat but as “part of life in the lake” , similarly to the lake wildlife, that deserved compassion, and many photos in the multiple archive of the Zionist settlement expose moments of gathering meeting, and fishing side by side. Many in Hulata’s founding group also spoke Arabic and in that they have also differed from others in the Jewish settlement. Hulata adults and children described mutual “haflas” (festive meals) they held with the Ghawarane and also how they helped them with Malaria treatment (Cohen, 2001, 30-31).



Image 13. (Top): Reed huts woven by the Ghawarane .1920. KKL Archive.



Image 14. (Bottom): Reed huts followed by Hulata. (Photo: Zultan Kluger The Zionist Archive).

The children of the lake



Image 15. Hulata Children in the Lake, 1955 (Photo by Peter Meirom) .

The children of the lake are the first children of Kibbutz Hulata and the products of Mussa's school. When I first met them they were in the 50s and their 60s most of them parents to two or three kids. The Children of the Lake were born in the early days of Hulata or arrived in Hulata as infants, and grew up in the Hulata of the lake days, growing up on its shore as children and teenagers. They attended Hulata's lake school, and were around the age of 18 when the lake was drained, just before they had begun their lives as adults. The Children of the Lake were easier to talk to and, unlike the adults, some held roles in the community that required to engage with past days. When I interviewed Amnon Levin, he was curator and director of the Tel-Chay Historical Museum at the "Council for Historical Sites Preservation." Roni Ganon was the archivist of Hulata, struggling every day to maintain the kibbutz's disorganized, underfunded archive. Racheli Schwartz, who joined Hulata later in her life, was a documentary filmmaker, who directed several films about her own environment, especially the Kibbutz. The one that she was working on when we met dealt with the way privatization was experienced in the Kibbutz though with some reference to the glorious lake days.²⁹ There are many more graduates whom I did not meet.

Contrary to the Lake Generation, the Children of the Lake" were also more sober about the past. While the lake generation group consistently refused to reflect on the past, and, if anything, they focused on the great glorious times in the lake, the Children of the Lake were willing to discuss not only the lake, but also the outcomes and the implications of the lake drainage for the Hulata community. Another common characteristic that drew

²⁹ Naturally there are many more graduates I did not meet but in 2021 Hulata Archive have digitizes and made a short documentary on the historic Hulata school in which some of the other graduates speak.

my attention while walking with the “children of the lake” in and around Hulata was their comprehensive knowledge of everything in regard to the lake, its environment, and Hulata. They can be best described as the most detailed local guides one can imagine. They simply knew everything in depth – the people, the history, the place, the landscape, the animals and birds, and how everything was conceived and developed; they remembered the lake and the lake period vividly, in great detail. They were without doubt, deeply- rooted and educated lake children, the successful outcome of Mussa Gershoni’s vision and plan as an educator. Roni Ganon and Amnon Levin, two Children of the Lake, described themselves as the products of Mussa’s school:

“Under the influence of Mussa (the school teacher), we were working with the fishermen. Eating, studying, celebrating, swimming, at the lake and knowing every spot around it. Even on our holidays and on weekends we were spending every minute in the lake. One Saturday, when I was injured the other children were going like every other Saturday to the lake and I couldn’t walk, so they brought a donkey so I could join. Because there was no such thing as missing out on lake time”. (Roni Ganon)

“Even today, we still know how to find a nest of Chimria (a type of bird) within a bush; we still know how to cause a dragonfly to lay eggs in our hands, we can tell according to the smell what is going on in the fields.” (Amnon Levin)



Image 16. Top: Hulata children helping to pull sardines from fishing nets in the winter

Image 17. Bottom, left: Independent fishing day, Nahshonim class assignment for Bar Mitzva year 1953.

Image 18. Bottom, right: helping with fishing in the lake. (Source: HA, unknown photographer).

The knowledge of Amnon and Roni, Arnon, Ehud and the rest of the children, was the closest to the saturated knowledge of the Bedouin communities who lived by the lake, an intimate knowledge of the kind that was completely absent in other settlements in the valley or among visitors and professionals who came to visit the lake. They also mastered more academic knowledge acquired through years of training and researching with naturalist scientists and experts. Several of Israel future naturalists lived in Hulata, and as Moshe Gershoni, Shmuel Gluzman, and Azriel Zigler were documenting, taking photos writing and collecting species, or inviting painters to paint the lake and its species and their nature room, the children were watching, imitating the adults or becoming themselves part of the lakes documented landscape appearing in photos, books, and writings.

They consciously, but also unconsciously, used many terms that I was hearing for the first time, and which required explanation. Gradually, I realized they all fluently spoke an idiosyncratic local language-- a "lake language". It was not professional jargon of the rangers from the National Park Authority solely, which I knew, and which included mainly Hebrew names for nature phenomena. It was a language that included a blend of terms in Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew: words taken from the Ghawarane Bedouins; professional academic words in Latin; words, phrases and jokes from the fishing world; many words that refer to the different hours of the day, names of fish, birds, mammals, plants, insects, variants of soil, fishing techniques, climate endemic phenomena, names of places that no longer exist and more. They used words and terms that no one has ever bothered, even today, translating into Hebrew. But some of these words do have parallel Hebrew words, and yet, the people of Hulata chose to use their own words for them:

"We knew the whole professional language of the Bedouin fishermen. "Garef" is a sweeping net. Awada, Sharkia (local Arabic names for storms) Musht and Ogar (Musht is the common Israeli-German name for a fish called in Hebrew Amnun), which is not the regular but a special tilapia-- a huge endemic kind that existed only here, much bigger than the northern species that you can find in other water sources. There was also Sfamnun (cat fish) which we called here Barbut like the Bedouins and is a non-kosher fish. But we lived on it and made meatballs out of its meat, and during independence war we ate and fed the entire country with Barbutim --we prepared a special dish and even sold it. Oh! Actually, I am dying for one right now. I wouldn't mind to have one Hmm.... delicious!" (Roni Ganon, 2003).

The plenitude of words and the existence of a distinctive language, as I found in diaries letters, school notebooks, and in the language the Children of the Lake" used, in which they expressed themselves about the place, was part of what constituted a cohesive collective identity in Hulata. It is, no doubt, clear evidence of the intimate familiarity with the lake and of a local, rich culture and tradition that sees itself as modern. It includes an everyday language, but also ceremonial language and professional terminology; moreover, it distinguishes the people of Hulata from other communities around the lake, especially Yesud HaMaa'la. Yesud HaMaa'la did not aspire to or spoke the language of the lake. And few knew how to speak Arabic. The language of Hulata was also not the native language of the Ghawaraneh, who used a more instrumental language without the scientific additions of Hulata, nor professional fishing jargon. Whether the development of this language reveals a sense of *displacement* that was healed with the act of naming, the sense of *lack of fit* between the colonizer's language and the place which propels the construction of a new language (Carter, 1997, p.391), it was differentiating them from others in the Jewish settlement in the valley. However, at the time of my interviews, the language of the Hulata people had become a "frozen" language, just like their knowledge of the lake. It is a

language that is useless outside Hulata, and even within Hulata its usage is becoming increasingly rare. It is helpful for the purpose of describing the past, but it has not developed since the lake period, and it was not replaced with any other, new, alternative language.

Similarly, perhaps to the people of Hulata, there were several other figures who, like Hulata, engaged more closely with the lake and held detailed understanding of it, even if it was less sentimental about the drainage. Historian Edna Gorney followed Nathan Shalem, a geographer who was excluded within the Israeli academy and learned about the region through ethnographic journeys during the lake days, and who, prior to the drainage, similarly produced a counter narrative about the lake and the Ghawarane (Gorney, 2011, page). Gideon Mar the physician of the valley and expert on malaria expressed along with Shalem a concern that “soon all that would be lost.” In the years prior to the final drainage Hulata rushed to publish as much as possible about the lake, trying to convince publishing houses to cooperate with them with limited success, they also held tours in the lake and served as tour guides to all that it had to offer, for college students, and for people who were documenting the Ghawarane, the lake, and its rich environment in films. The people of Hulata now provided the base camp and local guidance. This was however the only time prior to the drainage, in which they expressed their position and exposed their community’s lake life even if implicitly.

Drainage: engineering an ecology of Green Lines

“Gone are the Arab villages...and with them the water Buffalos...gone are the many narrow and twisted irrigation channels. In their place there are straight channels and between them, broad fields where one can see tractors and agricultural machines all year round. (Karmon, 1956, The Northern Hula Valley, p. 95)



Image 19. KKL certificate for donations to the Hula reclamation project from 1951, presenting on the right, an abstract new future map of the valley after the drainage, with straight lines replacing the twisted natural waterscape of Lake Hula (in the middle of the photo).

In 1945 DDT was brought to the region. According to Tzvi Salitrnik, the founder and the director of the Antimalarial Department at the Ministry of Health, from 1949, Malaria, which for a long time was perceived as the main reason for the drainage, had been completely subdued throughout the entire valley (Salitrnik, 1988). But in 1948, following the foundation of the State of Israel and the war of Independence, geo-political and territorial conditions in the valley had changed, and the drainage was thought over, planned (even during the final stages of the war) and re-envisioned, with new goals.

Yet these goals were not publicized and the official and publicly declared goals of the project were based on past explanations that worked as well with the Zionist imperative of land redemption through agriculture and development: preventing malaria, acquiring additional arable lands, stabilizing lands, paving new roads, adding significant amount of potable water to the Jordan river³⁰, and using lake soil (peat) for energy production (Livne, 1994; Avnimelech 1994 and according to residents account). These goals were established gradually, one at a time, by KKL, during the drainage period, which lasted eight years. KKL was no longer needed as an agency acquiring lands for the Zionist settlement, or for the Zionist Government. Despite the fact that during the British mandate it was reluctant to execute the drainage, it now served as KKL's new purpose. (reference Durani 70++). The Government believed KKL would be best to recruit support for the project overseas.

Each one of the declared goals of the drainage, like Malaria prevention, proved eventually to be groundless and was refuted during various stages of the process, but nevertheless, the government kept it as an important and exciting goal in the propaganda supporting the drainage, and the drainage continued; until the lake completely disappeared in 1957.

Lake Hula's drainage project was far from a local Zionist/Israeli event. The drainage planning and execution processes continued past and new connections and relationships that the Zionist leadership, now in governance, adopted from, and weaved with, the western world. It was presented and advertised by KKL as a western modernization project, which distinguished sharply between the degenerated nature of the ill and unproductive valley and the swamps, and its promising potential future as "modern" and transformed by the most advanced technology. The legitimacy and planning of the drainage was shaped by continuing scientific explorations by experts. The work of U.S. technical experts who brought with them values gained from the American experience of settling the West appeared to be the one which was substantiated and eventually validated. Money was supplied by Jewish philanthropy for which the propaganda was translated and spread in English.

³⁰ It was believed that the water would stream straight through the Jordan River without being halted in the lake and evaporating. Eventually it was a mistake since the lake functioned as a filter and after it was drained the polluted water streamed straight to the water reservoirs-the Kinneret.



Image 20. Photo of KKL propaganda showing on the map the expected control of the valley by the iconic straight green lines and declaring in both English and Hebrew the drainage expected results.

In the month of December 1948, during the final stages of the war, a special committee was formed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Industry to prepare the final plans for drainage of the Hula. The committee was appointed to decide, first, the extent to which the drainage would be helpful for agricultural needs and could support the possibility of cultivating the land with modern devices. Second, the committee was summoned to determine in what way the drainage should enable the use and the extraction of peat treasures, if at all. Malaria eradication, which was a main goal in the government propaganda, was completely absent in these discussions, as well as in those of the Ministry of Health. The committee was technical and professional and was composed by four water engineers and three government representative³¹. Eventually the committee rejected the British engineers' company, Palmer and Tritton's, plan to leave the swamplands with high underground water which did not allow for modern land cultivation and irrigation by tractors. Unlike Palmer and Tritton, they aspired to maximize the amount of land use and therefore advocated for a complete drainage. They invited alternative plans from engineers Kovlanov and Verber, who emphasized and requested the use of mechanically intensive agriculture and a plan that would allow the extraction of peat commercially.

The committee held eighteen different meetings to study methods of peat extraction and utilization of papyrus; and invited experts and scientist from abroad to survey and study

³¹ Their names: Prod Breuar from the Technion, Engineer Blass from the Ministry of Agriculture, engineer Brechiyahu from the KKL, Engineer Kovlanov from the Jewish Agency and, Dr. Cohen and Dr. Rot from the Ministry of Agriculture and Dr. Karmon from the ministry of agriculture.

the area for that purpose. In 1945, tests verified what was known from previous research in the valley, that the peat (goal number two in the declared drainage plan) was not suitable for agricultural use, and must be enriched and processed. The committee also directed to leave the peat within the water rather than fully expose and dry it, which indicated they were highly aware of the potential problem the dried peat was expected to create. Tests also showed that the soil of the lake was rich with limestone, poor with organic materials, which meant that it was expected the land would not qualify for agriculture, as the propaganda proposed, but perhaps only for fish pools “where fishing is more under control than in a natural lake.” (Brecht, 1952. p.13-15). Not one single meeting was dedicated to raising questions or re-discussing the importance of the lake and the swamp as natural assets, or the consequences of the drainage for the Arab tribes and Jewish settlements by the lake. The committee’s main focus was the complete transformation of the lake environment for maximal industrial and agricultural use. In June 1949 the committee advertised its conclusions, and a smaller technical committee of engineers was appointed to plan the drainage of the swamp and the lake in detail and to come up with a cautious management of the peat, prone to burn and start fires. (Livne 1988).

In August 1949, after KKL had agreed to purchase the concession from the Hachsharat Hayishuv company that was now owned by the government and had become the official executor and contractor of the project, it was declared that “the purchase of the Hula concession, the drainage of the lake and its healing would be a prestige chapter in the history of the practical work of KKL for the state in its first decade, and an opportunity to mark KKL’s celebration of its 50th jubilee.”

The work began in 1951, with diggers and under what was described as armed friction at the Syrian border. The Israeli government presented the state as conducting a constructive and healing project beneficial for the entire region, including the neighboring Syrian settlements despite Syria bullying its effort (Livne, 1988. p 90, 195; Braslevski, 1960.p 326). But as Arye Shalev’s (1989) study shows, the image of a beneficial healer seeking the good of the entire region was a disguise for security and territorial considerations.

The plan included three stages and two main operations. In the first, the Jordan river south of the lake would be deepened and expanded, to enable and accelerate water flow through the basalt plug, so the lake water level would be lowered. Small diggers could not handle the tough basalt and, after they were replaced several times, a diamond driller and underwater explosives were put into use. In 1953, the first phase shrank the lake surface by 5000 dunams. Hulata was left detached and separated from the lake without drinking water and its fishing harbor.

The second stage took place within the northern swamp area and included digging two peripheral-side canals to replace the Jordan river and channel the water after their convergence at the lake center in one southern canal. Here again the operation required heavy innovative technology. That in retrospect and after speaking with Hulata seem almost violent in its determinence to eradicate the lake. That constantly posed challenges

to the plan to exterminate it. Digging underwater was impossible with the available machinery. KKL had to sign an agreement with the American company, CAC (Construction Aggregates Corporation) which brought two huge floating diggers. The diggers worked floating on rhapsodies and since that they required a high level of water, a special dam was built at the end of the lake for that purpose, which kept the water level at the lake stable until the end of the drainage work. The diggers worked between 1953-1955 to deepen the western canal first and then the eastern. During that time they have become the symbol of the drainage and a sign of Zionist technological greatness. People from all over the country ordered tours to watch the “floating digger” and films were produced to commemorate its work (SSA). The final and third stage included digging smaller secondary canals that would divert the stream to the eastern and western new canals and eventually into the new deeper Jordan riverbed.

The work proceeded and was shaped and paced by the geopolitical friction with Syria. Three demilitarized zones were set in place after the war of which only the central one was meant to be developed under the drainage project. The area stretched from the north to the southern part of the lake on both sides of the Jordan river. Most lands were Jewish lands (almost 14,000 dunams) some (about 6000 dunams) belonged to the Arab residents of the villages “Karad el Bakara” and “Karad al Ename” (which means raising cattle and raising sheep). The rest was government lands. During the war the residents fled into Syrian territories, the Israeli IDF took over Kaarad el Ename and ruined all its buildings. The Syrian military took over Karad el Bakara. As part of the armistice between Israel and Syria it was agreed that Karad el Bakara would be allowed to return to their village with some of the residents of Karad el ename. Both tribes were allowed to work their lands under the UN supervision. The eastern part of the Jordan river and the swamp were a demilitarized zone in which the UN prohibited drainage work. The concern was exposure of land would allow for Syrian villagers and their herds to access the area and provoke more friction. None of these villages are mentioned or visible in maps of studies, describing the geopolitical changes in the region and in no map there is a note about the armistice agreement after the war. Although the southern outlet of the lake where drainage work was planned show presence of Arab lands but it is known that part of the friction was caused by the work performed under the drainage project on Arab lands without the permission of the owners (Duani, 2014).

Historian Benny Morris (1988) claim, based on information gathered from the Israel Intelligent Services, that the Hula Ghawaraneh residents escaped their villages and were followed by other villages in the region when Tzefad, the regional capital of the region, surrendered to Israel powers, in May 1948 and out of fear they would become victims of the friction between the militaries. Noy (1990) mentions they were marked as potential hostile factor given their proximity to the borderland and fear they would assist Syrian powers. Most of them conformed with the muktar who was instructed by Yigal Alon to and the IDF to vacate their villages and were promised they would be allowed to return, after the Jewish settlement would be conquers, few refused to leave and stayed. at the end of the war they were transferred by the Israeli military to regions “less sensitive from security perspective” regions and some who promised loyalty and collaboration with the military were allowed to stay. Lands that were deserted were passed to Jewish settlements,

and all building were destroyed to prevent the Ghawaraneh return (Karmon, 1990.p.65).for a certain time villagers have tried to intrude the region to cut reed or work their land , the military was instructed to prevent these intrusions. Several residents of Hulata with whom I spoke told me much more about friction with Syria and the pressure on villagers who were approved to work the land by the UN security council, and even some claims by left wing Knesset members that the ruination of the villages were needless, but the geopolitical conflict and violation of the UN security council by Israel as well as the erasure of the villages were kept away from the public eye. Ben Gurion repeatedly defined the Hula development as Israel's way to conduct an uninterrupted proper life, and since the villagers were seen as threat and hostile factor for the desirable everyday conduct, their ruination was justified. Greening the Hula was a project of territorial ethnic cleansing and the ecological transformation of the valley was perceived as a security much needed act. According to Ben -Gurion in a speech he carried (1951) in favor of the KKL as executor of the drainage:

"As long as strangers ruled (the country) we were not responsible for the neglect and the wilderness; now when we are the owners of the land we are prosecuted, and the prosecution is urgent— independence is impossible, security is unachievable when the land stands in its desolation" ... and the most shocking sight you will see once you come to the blessed Hula valley, with its abundance of golden water... and here the vast water pool has turned given the neglect of its occupiers into an imprecation of swamp and fever.. and fertile land... to place of sickness and disease ... (Ben Gurion, 1985. P. 70-71)

Land redemption, ownership and the Conquest of "the Desert"

In parallel to these events and with the rise of KKL as the land management authority, KKL took the promotion of the drainage as its most central mission. The drainage was represented as part of an overall Zionist project, the "conquest of the desert," which was also the name given to an international exhibition that was held in 1951 in Jerusalem. The government saw the exhibition as an opportunity to be seen world-wide as a giving nation rather than as an appealing one. KKL presented the drainage as a war on nature which cannot be used and victory as the turning of the area into a developed and settled region, from an industrial and agricultural perspective. Beyond the 1951 exhibition, KKL invested in film productions, future (imagined) map productions, and ceremonies at the different milestones of the project. Visits were organized for journalists and the broader public, and many were directed at funders. None addressed any controversial dimension of the drainage or the landscape as an asset with biological, ecological, cultural, or educational value.

In one of the propaganda movies (1961) produced by KKL and named "the Happy Valley," the Hula valley is described as "becoming happy" after finally being drained from its swamps. Dan, who plays a settler from Yesud HaMaa'la described the drainage from his point of view in the movie. He poses questions and is given answers by an authoritative invisible voice, explaining to him the blessings of the drainage project and the war over nature. The entire film is focused on images of diggers. There is not a single photo shoot of nature (except of an Anopheles mosquito). After the drainage work, the valley is presented as cultivated agricultural fields where there once used to be swamp. The movie ends with an image of Dan, who sails in a boat within the nature reserve. He closes his eyes as he sails, leans back and hears voices of animals and birds. He is disturbed all of a sudden by the feeling the swamp is still around him. But his thoughts are interrupted by the

authoritative voice which reassures him that luckily there are no swamps left and what is left is only beauty. Dan is then seen outside the nature reserve, climbing up into his tractor in the field, and the voice concludes the movie declaring, “The curse of nature is removed and paved the road to the bliss of man’s labor.”³²

The very last event that marked the end of the drainage project was organized again by the KKL in a way that guaranteed that the drainage would be watched by a large and targeted audience that had been invited. This final event was the last stage of the drainage, which was supposed to completely empty what was left of the lake and the swamp. The ceremony was covered in Israeli media as a great celebration. Hulata is not mentioned in the ceremony but one journalist, who was covering the event mentioned Hulata in a side note. He noticed they were hurting over the disappearance of the lake where they work and where their children played. He wrote, “The children of its games, the fishermen of Hulata stood there with their silenced rage. Their hearts bursting at the sight of their beloved lake being sent to the gallows, their hands short of salvation.” (Meiri, 1957.)

“A death for the homeland”: the drainage of a community

The Hula Project caused the drainage of 60,000 dunams and, besides the nature reserve that spreads over 3200 dunams, nothing was left of the previous socio-environmental landscape. The valley was completely transformed. This was a dramatic change for the settlement that was adjacent to the lake. The drainage was performed in stages. First by digging drainage canals with floating diggers that required a high and stable water level to be able to properly operate. The southern part of the lake was sealed in 1956 by a dam built especially for that purpose and over the 6.5 years of the drainage preparation work, the residents of Hulata could still use the lake in which they kept fishing, teaching, and exploring. As one of them told me, “They did not want to believe this moment will arrive and could not even imagine it” (Levin, 2002). In October 1957 the dam was opened and the lake was emptied at once. So the transformation was dramatic and sudden for the Jewish lake residents.

National records of the process of the drainage and later the nature reserves do not mention the position of local residents from Hulata. The public common perception of the way the drainage was received has been that no one has objected, except for the naturalists, who publicly advocated a nature reserve. But over the years with the change of generations in Hulata, and particularly when the generation of fishermen was replaced by the “children of the lake”, people started to describe the drainage as “a great unbearable crisis.” Mussa Gershoni (2003) was open about his feeling in a way that did not characterize his generation:

“I was *desiccated with the lake. I died with it*. I was grumpy and not as I used to be with the kids. But I could not resist. In Hulata, everyone was busy in fishing as long as we could and I did not want Golda or Ben-Gurion to think that I am interested in birds or in my own will more than in Zionism. I was afraid to be seen as a traitor. I did not know how to act in school. During the drainage work I took the kids to the lake as usual and later on, to follow the changes around the lake. At the day of the final drain we could hardly move the people and the kids from the lake. Everyone stood there and cried.”

Mussa Gershoni was the educator, the life and the soul of the Hulata School for 20 years (1947-1967). And the school, according to Hulata residents, was the heart, the soul,

³² “The Happy Valley”, 1961. Steven Spielberg Archive at the Hebrew University.

and the center of life in the kibbutz. Five years after the school was founded, two other teachers joined him, Shimon Gluzman and Tamar Borer, continuing his educational creed. After the drainage, Mussa became a member of the “Central Kibbutzim Educational Committee” until 1969, when too many changes that he could not support occurred in the kibbutzim educational system. In 1970, the educational changes he objected to were exercised, the Hulata School was closed, and Hulata children moved to the regional kibbutzim school, 25 minutes’ drive from Hulata. “From that time on”, Mussa told me in a belittled voice, “I worked as finance manager for the factory, nothing like the school”.

The “children of the lake” --Amnon Levin, Roni Ganon , Arnon Gluzman, Ehud Gershoni, and others described, in short films made by the local archive, the drainage as a personal, economic, social, and emotional devastation that completely and forever changed Hulata. In our conversations they refer to it in terms of personal pain, in terms of a tremendous loss, which the lake generation chose to repress and fight against. They manifested, however, understanding and empathy with the lake generation, using themselves as their speakers, trying to explain their difficulty to resist the government:

“The adults could not resist and so instead they chose to ignore. When we (the children) tried to organize and protest, we encountered silence and refusal to cooperate. They did not try to stop us but were certainly unable to help. They had double loyalty-- to the lake, and to the state. (Amnon Levin)

“Mussa and the rest of the adults knew that they are on the one hand deeply rooted in this place but on the other they were Zionists and when there was a confrontation between the Zionists and the *native* from Hulata it was not simple. So they just drew away from us, from everything. It was all about Zionism then, nobody cared about Hulata, the Ghawarane for sure, or some rare species. But nobody could predict that all that would become extinct on such a scale”. (Amnon Levin)

“When they just started talking about the drainage I was in 6th grade. I remember that we wrote Golda Meir (the Israeli Minister of Labor at that time) a petition claiming that we shall not agree that the lake be taken from us. She did come to talk to the people here and so we had a chance to see her as well. We took her to the raft on the lake. Mussa did not want to attend. We have been told that the Kibbutz is a pioneers Kibbutz and that we need to support the state. You see, it was impossible to protest then...” (Roni Ganon)

“When the government started talking about the drainage in 1950, nothing happened here. Later on, when the drainage continued, Hulata started to build houses on the opposite side of the lake getting closer to where agricultural fields were. People started to talk about becoming farmers. I remember it was really hard. People did not want to move to agriculture especially the fishermen but there was no option of resisting a government decision. It was impossible to resist Ben Gurion (the Prime minister) and Golda at those days. It was totally unacceptable, especially in the Kibbutz. “(Roni Ganon)

The actual day of the drainage is not documented in Hulata. There are photos taken by KKL of the drainage and the dam being lifted. But these are the official photos the state spread after the event and in public media. The people of Hulata are nowhere to be found in these photos and I did not find much about that day in memoirs. From that point on, the lake landscape was represented by outsiders’ external perspective. In her work Gorney (2011) covered the writing of Karmon, a geographer from the Hebrew University, which describes the landscape with sense of wonder and pride, addressing the disappearance of the Arab settlement that, like the lake, was a sign of neglect and degeneration. He as others in Israel, completely ignored the Jewish settlement.

In Hulata the tone was far from celebratory, some people preferred not to watch the event at all, to act as if it never happened, and others prevented the children from watching

it:

“I was in high school when the final stage of the drainage took place. In the 10th or perhaps 11th grade. You know, it happened all at once, they lifted the last dam and that was it. The lake streamed to the Jordan River. I remember that we were one-hour drive from there, at the school, but nobody called us to come and watch. Till this day, it is a black hole in my biography. For years I have felt that I did not act as a man as I was not there” (Amnon Levin)

For Levin, manliness and resilience is entangled with the helpless lake, the lake has reversed the Zionist ethos –betrayal was leaving the lake on its own, and it is described almost like the Zionist sin of deserting a land. Being “weak in spirit”, or “the unheroic Jewish conduct” (Boyarin, 1997) meant leaving the lake to the power of the Zionists. The definitions of the nature of Zionism and Zionist natures are redefined and calibrated. Lake drainage is interpreted in Hulata almost as the Counter-Zionist act of leaving and deserting the land which is compared to a woman that is saved by the pioneer act. After the drainage, Hulata as a community entered a social economic crisis. The adults felt responsible for destroying the kibbutz and being unable to fight the drainage, and some claim that the reason for the crisis the kibbutz went through during the years of privatization years, was rooted in this history.

“The drainage has cut off our main source of income which also brought us much dignity and respect in Israel and within the kibbutzim movement. The fishing industry has changed during the lake period, from an inferior industry to a well-respected and unique one. After the desiccation we lost all that and were back in our fields, where we always struggled with agriculture. For years to come Hulata’s agriculture was behind. “(Amnon Levin)

“I don’t remember exactly what the drainage did to the Kibbutz. At least not immediately after. I can only say the Kibbutz has unrecognizably changed. I guess we could not be fishermen’s society for ever. But it was tough, as it hurt families even if working every day till late at night was unbearable. However even today I don’t want to go to the Hula nature reserve. For me it is a ridiculous puddle”. (Roni Ganon)

“Hulata people have arrived to conquer the wilderness but instead they found themselves conquered. There was a sharp conflict between the Zionist ethos and the personal pain. The adults (i.e., the lake generation) could at most talk about a nature reserve as of someone who died for his homeland. This is what the desiccation of Lake Hula meant for us- a Death for the homeland” (Amnon Levin).

The children of the lake all pointed out, in various ways, the split between Hulata’s ethos and the Zionist government’s. Until the drainage took place, Hulata was compatible with the Zionist ethos. Hulata people were the ideal type of Zionist pioneers, projecting themselves outwards as extremely successful in becoming “natives” and well-rooted in one of the most challenging landscapes, withstanding all kinds of difficulties: hostile Arab neighbors (Syria), hostile-wild nature (swamps, mosquitoes, weather), bourgeois temptation (Yesud HaMaa’la), etc. Along with the lake, its vegetation, and its fish, a new society emerged that was tightly attached to the lake and depended on it in many senses. Hulata had achieved all that not by defeating the lake and displacing Ghawaraneh life and marks on the swamp, but by slowly and over time remaking the lake social ecology, connecting it to regional markets, global science, the local and national education systems. By slowly interacting with biophysical conditions and local guidance of the Ghawaraneh, Hulata had become a unique scientific frontier, evoking scientists interest worldwide, by acquiring locals’s unique skills and knowledge. But for the people of Hulata, the climax of these processes was exactly what caused them to regress into just another run-of-the-mill kibbutz: people who lost their special mission, their source of life, their pride, their gender

identity, their culture, and their public space, even their leadership (the fishermen). While all these years they had been a distinctive community, now they were much more as one of them dared to phrase it “just like Ghawaraneh, who had lost their place and just like Yesud HaMaa’la , who knew nothing about the lake despite living nearby”. If, until the drainage, Hulata had been identical to and synonymous with its Zionist mission, now, the only thing that unified the people of Hulata was their memory of the lake, and the pain of not fighting for it. These memories and narratives were quite different from the one supported and spread by the Zionist state and therefore they became internal and unrepresented publicly. Khawalde and Rabinowitz (2002) mention how Bedouins, who to some extent fought for their lands by trying to return after each displacement each time the military took those lands, have been commemorating the legacy of their place each year. They claim they were hard to interview since they did not wish to be identified with a landless class which in the Palestinians’ fellahin society, where they now resided, was an important marker of status. As one Hulata community member told me, “Hulata did not even have someone to take the blame. It was our state who erased our legacy.” They felt guilty and responsible for their loss, and after the drainage was declared as a national and international ecological disaster the regret was even worse, “After the drainage the adults perceived their silence during the drainage as a betrayal,” Amnon said; and so, “There was hardly even a reason to celebrate or commemorate local traditions or memories.” The “lake generation” preferred forgetting and refused to talk about the lake at all. “It was a taboo. For years, we were not allowed to speak about it, either with parents, at home, or in school. Who wants to establish a community or a national legacy on the foundation of a horrible failure that he is identified with”? (Schwartz, 2003).

“Ridiculous puddle”: Hula conservation by Hulata

Despite knowing perhaps more than any other group about the lake and its natural assets, Hulata members did not take part in the creation of the nature reserve which did not challenge the drainage itself. The idea of commemorating the Hula arrived from Kibbutz Dan in the valley that was located a far from the lake³³. They were engaged in advocating for the reserve and became the home for Beit Osishkin, the natural history museum.

In 1955, two years before the final drainage, Mussa Gershoni released, for the first time a clear statement about the nature reserve, understanding that the reserve would never be able to recover or preserve the world he knew, “This reserve on its own would be left as a dull and only relic to rich diversified primordial landscape that was and no longer is.” He addresses the lake resources –the peat and the sweet water and calls the lake landscape precious but refrains from calling out loud for a larger nature reserve or against the drainage, “New patches of land would be discovered and perhaps even energetic treasures, and plenty of water that flooded the swamp will no longer be a victim of evaporation and waste, but a rare landscape of precious corner would disappear from the map of our country and our world” (Gershoni, 2003).

The people of Hulata planned to publish a thick book about the lake, that would manifest their rich knowledge and expertise. They invited the painter Aryeh Hatzor to paint animals, birds, and plants of the Hula that would decorate the book. Hatzor stayed in Hulata between 1953-1957 for that purpose. While there is a completed draft of the book in the

³³ <http://www.kdan.co.il>

kibbutz archive, it was never published and printed. After the drainage was completed, it seemed that Hulata no longer saw the point of publishing it. Gluzman, Mussa, and Zeligman, the editors, mention at the introduction to the book that its goal is to commemorate a place that was doomed to die, and that the book is a grave for a corner that would soon be drastically transformed³⁴. The bulk of the book was observations by Hulata members of the everyday wildlife in the lake. In 1987, the paintings were published as a book without the texts and the title was changed to “birds of the Hula.” It included explanations about water birds but Hulata was not part of it.

“The Singing of a Dying Lake” Mopel and the Jubilee Concert 1987.

The story of Professor Moshe Morad (Mopel) can be considered a turning point within the context of Hulata and the lake over the years. It is also valuable as evidence of what the lake and its drainage used to be in Hulata.

Mopel, an immigrant from Germany with a rich musical education, belonged to the lake generation. He lost his family in the Holocaust when he was working as a fisherman in Hulata. Like the rest of these group members, he remembered the lake, vividly and it was an influential period in his life. He taught the children music, near the lake and orchestrated many of the kibbutz’s celebrations. He left Hulata after the drainage, as he felt Hulata was not the same anymore and went to the United States to study as a doctoral student, after graduating from the Academy of Music in Israel. This was an act atypical of the lake generation group and he was criticized by them. But he might also be remembered as the one who helped Hulata overcome the lake trauma, at least in the formal (ceremonial) sense, and therefore, to publicly return some of its pride.



Image 21. Moshe Morad singing with Hulata children near the lake. 1950. Credit: Hulata Archive

Mopel died two years prior to my research and his family was living in Florida. I have written about Mopel based on what I heard him say in a documentary film made in Hulata in 1986-7, and based on conversations I had with other people in Hulata who were involved in the film, and with the filmmaker of this documentary. In the documentary, he tells how he had chosen a house in the U.S. that had a little creek, in order to feel close to some kind of a water source.

³⁴ See the book of the Hula, Hulata Archive.

In September 1986, when Kibbutz Hulata was preparing itself to celebrate its first jubilee, Mopel, who was then living in Miami, reached out to Hulata and suggested he would donate to the celebration a special composition, a cantata, in which he tells the story of Lake Hula, Hulata, and the drainage, and which he named “The Singing of the Dying Lake.” Hulata members had some reservations. They felt uncomfortable giving a central voice to someone who had “deserted” Hulata, especially at the jubilee celebrations; but at a Kibbutz assembly, that was gathered especially for this purpose, they decided to listen to the music and allowed Mopel to perform one piece of the cantata (“Mopel”HA). By the end of the evening, they had decided to devote a separate evening to the composition, not within the official jubilee celebrations but a year later. As one of Hulata members told me, “the composition overpowered the assembly; people were both stunned and heart-broken by the extent to which Mopel had succeeded in reconstructing and imitating our feelings and memories of the lake - the sounds, the sights, and certain moments of it. It was ours” (Amnon, speaking in HA interview).

From that evening on, for the next six months, all musicians in Hulata were recruited, and adapted the cantata into a community-composition, according to Mopel’s instructions. After a few weeks, as the documentary reveals, something was changing in Hulata. During a period of three months, almost every evening, women, men, and children, workers from the fields and from the Kibbutz Garage, with their dirty work uniforms were seen marching, holding musical scores and heavy instruments, to the kibbutz’s common court to rehearse. Everyone in the movie seemed very serious about the concert. The founding generation of people, who could not participate as singers, were seen sitting (in the film) and listening to the rehearsals. Some of them were crying and wiping tears. One of the founders says to the camera, “For me this is closing a circle.” One of the members told me when we watched this scene, “It was unbelievable. The toughest guys, the fishermen who refused to be involved in all that were standing there every evening, wiping tears.” (Schwartz. 2003)

The cantata itself, a five-hour composition, documents the microcosms of Lake Hula as Hulata members knew it, in detail, throughout the year, day and night. It included pieces that described moments of awakening, morning dew, and different groups of morning birds, moments of storm, and post-storm moments. It described the lake at night, the experience of nocturnal fishing and it ends with a dirge about the lake that no longer exists, including lines written for Peter Meirom’s photo album by Yedidia Peles.

In December 1987, the concert took place. It was performed by 100 members of Hulata (out of a total of 280 at the time) in front of a 300-person audience. For five hours, a local audience composed of children, relatives, friends, former members of Hulata, elderly members, and youth, were sitting silently listening to the concert, watching Mopel adamantly conduct it. Describing this evening in summer 2002, people of Hulata whom I interviewed, told me, “People in Hulata felt relief after that evening.”

For the outsider, this is not an easy composition to listen to and follow. One cannot interpret the sounds and the “fishermen calling,” the mixture of harmonies and dissonance which this composition is made of. For a moment it seemed as if the people of Hulata were conducting a secret ceremony murmuring a secret whispering that no one but them could figure out. Hulata members insisted that each sound and each moment of the composition had a meaning for them, that each chapter implied a scene, a visual and vivid memory that was transformed into sounds and tunes. Mopel’s cantata is the epitome of what was left in

Hulata's memory of the lake. But it is not only the memory of the lake and the cantata but rather the common performance, the collaboration, the reappearance of a public space, of a common denominator, and the reappearance of common pride, that were meaningful and important to the people of Hulata.

As the people of Hulata told me, the concert was a one-time event in Hulata that reminded the people of former days of cohesiveness and collaboration. Amnon, a second-generation man said, "the concert was a reconciliation with the past. People who for twenty years did not say a word started talking again in public spheres about the drainage." A fisherman says to the camera during final rehearsal "this takes me back to what was then. To the voices and the colors of the lake and provides me with legitimacy to say we lost something which we couldn't let ourselves cry for . Today I cry the tears of then and today a close a circle" (Schwartz 1993) A fisher women in the documentary follow him and say "this circle will never be closed. We will die with this pain".

The concert was a turning point, in which the silence and the refusal of the lake generation to refer to the lake was broken. It was later performed on public radio like in the days of the fishing holiday. Yet it was a moment from the past. The Hulata community returned to the time of the lake and to a time when fishermen were the leaders of any significant event. I found this event similar in many aspects to Mussa and to the second-generation descriptions of celebration and sunrise-ceremonies at the lake. Physically, the lake was not there; but it was there in many other aspects: everything happened just as it used to, an inter-generational moment, the fishermen's songs and calls, the lake spieces and storms, for a time the leadership of the community (the fishermen as represented by Mopel) was back to its role. The people of Hulata whom I talked to confirmed my assumption that only the past, the lake, and a former fisherman, could have reunited the community; yet it is worth noting that, although a fisherman, it was still an outsider who managed to organize this reunion. It is not too imaginary to interpret the "singing of the dying lake" as a one-time ceremony or a commemoration, as an act of mourning after twenty-five years of repression.

A post- lake generation –The grand children of the lake

The present Hulata community is composed of many young people who did not know the historic lake. Some of them are the children of members who joined Hulata more recently. There are also, new families who rent houses in Hulata and live there with the status of residents to differentiate them from the status of children of kibbutz members (Called in Hebrew "continuing sons"). the grandchildren of the "lake generation."

If the lake generation, at the age of eighteen, had to carve for itself a new life in a new place, after immigrating from Europe, and the Children of the Lake, at that very same age, had to overcome the desiccation and the community crisis that followed, the post-lake generation, at about the same age, confronted the kibbutz's dismantling, the privatization process, and, in a sense, the gradual disappearance of the kibbutz's social cohesiveness. Hulata today is a privatized Kibbutz in which many services, originally free; now go for a certain fee. This leads to people who need to take care of themselves individually in order to secure their financial future. Hulata was one of the first kibbutzim to enter the privatization process since that process started³⁵. Financially and socially, Hulata was not

³⁵ According to data of the central committee of the kibbutzim database.

strong enough to endure the economic crisis of the Kibbutzim movement in the way other Kibbutzim have experienced it (a rather slow and well-calculated process). In Hulata the privatization process was fast and relatively uncalculated. For the post-lake children, it meant they would need to build themselves an economic future, with hardly any help (since most of their parents do not own anything and cannot support them). They would need to adjust to and create new norms, to find or initiate new public spaces, and to decide whether they want to do all these in Hulata³⁶.

Gal is one of the post-lake members. He is 26-year-old, Racheli's son, and has never left Hulata, but is conducting a double life-- in Tel Aviv and in Hulata. At the moment he has no intention of leaving Hulata, he has some "plans for the place," but also keeps his "options" in Tel-Aviv. He inherited his mother's love for filmmaking and works as a part-time producer in the firm his mother works with. We met at a coffee shop in Tel Aviv. He arrived, just like his mother, by one train and two buses; but he stays every time he comes for three days at some friends' apartment (from Hula Valley). He keeps a motorcycle in Hulata since it is much harder to be independent without a car there. He wanted to meet with me since he heard that I am interested in the lake and he "needed to say something about that." It was a surprise, since the adults told me the "young forgot the lake." And when I was trying to understand what the lake represented for the post-lake generation I did not find many things. I found pale remnants everywhere in the kibbutz. I talked with parents and teachers from the regional school and found out that in junior high school, the kids are taken to the nature reserve and later they can choose to conduct a science project there, if they like. Looking at these research projects I hardly found anything about Hulata, it was mostly ecology reports. I did see one word in one of the introductions that identified the student as the grandson of a former fisherman, but nothing else. I saw many projects that referred to water quality or soil components. But in general, the lake was no longer part of the educational system.

At the kibbutz archive I found that during the 70s, the lake was still part of every event but not in the way it had been. It was always part of the "entertainment" of the evening appearing as a repetitive motive for stand-up parts and "nonsense" shows that members organized. Amnon and Racheli told me that it was the generation that did not know the lake that started renewing lake traditions. For a certain period, they tried to commemorate the lake and mentioned it in every holiday:

"I remember how around 1976 I became a member of the cultural-affairs committee and they tried to have the holidays in the fishing pools. When that did not work, they renewed the "fishing day" celebration at the same historical date it used to be (*when the kibbutz first sold its fishing produce*). They prepared a meal based on fish, and fishing songs were intertwined into many holidays' texts. They even asked the fishermen to do the "blessing" part. There was also a couple of comedians, Mori and Avni, which had a totally hallucinated act about two fishermen who go out at midnight to flood the lake. It was sometimes in the 90s that we discussed the kibbutz Holidays and someone said "enough of the lake". Since then, there was nothing ". (Racheli Schwartz)

³⁶ The above mentioned data base also show which services are still free in different kibbutzim.



Image 22. A celebration of the kibbutz 50th anniversary, 1986. Credit: Hulata Archive

The idea to continue fishing in pools was meant to try to maintain the fishing expertise and culture of Hulata but it was never really profitable. (Schwartz, Interview, 2003) But I found that some grandchildren of the fishermen were still interested in the kibbutz connection to the lake, albeit in new ways. Gal, as I mentioned, wanted to talk about the lake and he showed up in the Coffee Shop carrying a notebook with the sticker “Fishing in Hulata” “No to the Hula- Project.” I learned that when not in Tel-Aviv producing films, and in fact most of the time, Gal is working in Hulata fishing pools. When I asked him about his generation and the lake he said:

“You see, nobody teaches the young about the lake period but you just live that all the time, it is in your blood if you are in Hulata, when I am working in the pools or even in the fields; the lands are dry-- lake- lands with billions of dry water- snails and all kinds of lake stuff. You can see it in each step that you make. It is a cemetery to the lake and one cannot avoid it. In fact, where I work at the pools there is a sign for one of the fishermen who died, the fishing pools are dedicated to him. You know that we also have some privileges at the nature reserve. We have free admittance and we have historic privileges of fishing permits but we never use it. Our fishing pools are much more valuable than the reserve even if it is not a park. We have bird watching positions which are million times better than the one at the reserve. There are few guys from the fishermen parliament who want to establish another nature reserve in Hulata fishing pools”.

I was not sure what exactly the fishermen parliament was. Gal explained it was not that group of old men I have met in the kibbutz but the revival of their tradition:

“It is a past tradition, the folklore of people who work in fishing. We meet there regularly, we always have some alcohol and coffee just like the fishermen used to have in the past. They used to drink to warm-up. There are all kinds of private jokes and stories and it is there that we talk about everything that nobody openly talks about in Hulata. After work we stay for a “lake

coffee” and sometimes we even maintain habits from the past like pouring the first vodka into the water because it brings good luck with the fishing.....”

So, apparently, for a certain time, 50 years after the drainage, there used to be two fishermen’s clubs in Hulata: the first of 85- year -old men and, the second of 25-28- year-old men. They drink the same drinks, they sometimes tell the same jokes, and they cherish the historic fishing culture of Hulata. I am still not sure if the second club is an attempt to hold the glorious past for another moment or a new burgeoning tradition. It could be both. However, the two clubs have very different visions of the place. This is why Gal wanted to talk to me. He wanted me to hear a different voice of Hulata:

“The desiccation was obviously a severe ecological mistake. A stupidity. Look how there is hardly any agriculture where the lake used to be and it has such a potential. We can do there all kind of cool things. If the people of Hulata knew just a little bit, how to stand for their voice we could have made all kinds of profits of the lake today. To develop tourism, to be the owners of the nature reserve, lots of things....”

Mori and Avni, the two comedians of Hulata, were not hallucinating after all. In 1994, as I wrote at the beginning of the first chapter, the JNF unveiled a new Hula project in which it re-flooded part of the historic lake areas. The project was meant to correct ecological damage done in the 50s, the toxication of the Kinneret water caused by the nitric compounds that were no longer filtered by the lake vegetation and freely flooded to the Jordan river. Some claimed that the flooding could mean the return of some of the species, and could give back some life to the dry useless soil. So far, the project has been defined as a “success,” some of the birds are back, and hundreds of crane made the re-flooded mini-lake and the field around it their seasonal home. the landscape is recovering to the satisfaction of the entrepreneurs, and everything is successfully predicted, measured and controlled.

But the decision to flood the valley again was controversial as much as the former historic project. Typical of these times, resisting voices were loud and clear. The green movement demanded a “closed nature reserve with no park and no presence of humans” (Rinat , 1998) the JNF wanted another recreational park, “Yesud HaMaa’la” farmers asked in one of the newspapers, “Why bother flooding it again after we got rid of it?”, (ibid) and other local agricultural kibbutzim were suing the JNF claiming compensation for the agricultural land they have already lost and were about to lose after the reflooding. Hulata’s voice was absent in this debate. “People are going through hard times now,” Roni told me. This is exactly what worried Gal. He wanted Hulata to be heard, to insist, to be compensated as they deserve. He was intending to fight since he believed the place “has a chance.” But he admitted that he was an exception; at that moment, most of his classmates were wishing for themselves a “life outside Hulata,” if possible.

Zionist natures: Green Lines and Green Settlements

Swamps in general, and the Hula in particular, were perceived as perhaps the wildest and most untamed examples of nature in Palestine prior to settlement in the desert. The Zionist settlement, and later on the state, have reshaped swamplands and altered them, changing soil properties, altering species composition and density, displacing communities, managing varied landscapes in transformative ways with dams, bridges, canals, and pipes. But from the perspective and the memories of Hulata, nothing in the landscape seemed ill, out of control, desolated, or in need of radical transformation. The

Zionist mission with which Hulata arrived in Hula was challenged and reshaped radically by the web of lived social ecological relations. Everyday life in the lake gave way to experiences that provoke the Zionist vision where the lake is conceived of as the opposite of culture, as an ecology detached from human life, subjected to rescue by modern transformation. These relations were established in an ongoing interaction with the lake on which these people relied for their livelihood, with the Bedouin neighbors, who also relied on the lake, and with the British mandate changing plans for the valley; all that, within a constantly changing geopolitical context that shaped boundaries, types of ownership and the value of land in the region.

It would be wrong however to see Hulata as consciously offering an alternative vision to the Zionist settlement in valleys. Hulata was a small attempt at a larger project -- to recreate Jews in their new homeland through transforming Jewish nature, and creating an agricultural system. The vision was Jewish-Zionist, and ecological. The practice was of imperial science: exploration, journeys, classifications, ordering of findings, acclimation of species, and establishment of scientific and educational institutions. All that took place, in addition to both romantic and rational adoption of native practices, and a search for local knowledge and guidance. The cultural and ecological productions in Hulata were tightly linked to the goal of nation building and the production of a certain economy based on husbanding the natural world. But developing a grounded perspective and experience of the lake, contrasted unexpectedly with national abstract views of the lake, and, for Hulata, the lake has not been a threat or all-powerful nature, but rather a social ecology that has been shaped slowly and gently by its various inhabitants over years, altering its material and symbolic meanings. It seems that others who knew the lake, traveled in its water, and wrote about it from outside Zionist institutions, like Gideon Mer, or Natan Shalem, developed a different understanding of the lake as well. These alternative visions of the lake and particularly those of Hulata, breaks and cracks the notion of a healthy Zionist Nature and what exactly that might mean. As it was part and parcel of the Zionist settlement project, Hulata posed an alternative to what Zionist nature and Zionist redemption through nature might mean and look like in practice. Hulata shed new light on the erasures of the Lake socio-natures or bio cultures from the history of the lake as they undermined the continual reproduction of Anglo European and then Zionist mythologies of Middle Eastern nature and swamps. Illuminating the multiple symbolic and material relationship between Hulata, the Ghawaraneh, and the non-human inhabitant of the lake, creates difficulties to the Hula story that is built on the binary of nature-culture, that serves as a qualifying umbrella and reason for the drainage, and erasures of everything that was in its way.

It also shows how conservation and environmental practice are not opposed to the Zionist project but rather often have a role in sustaining it. Hulata, on the one hand, reveals the power that Zionist environmentalism (ecological understanding and management and environmental education) held in sustaining and qualifying the Zionist project, and the role environmentalism played in constituting Zionist subjectivities. But Hulata also points to the potential rise of more complicated environmental subjectivities, which form a space I called here “green settlement.” The type of environmental subjectivity that emerges in green settlement is a type of self-management that compromises the complicated experiences of being green and being Zionist. Hulata did not fit with neither of the dualistic framework that gained political momentum at the time of the drainage—neither the one held by Zionist developers, nor those held by conservationists.

As the vision and struggle over the Hula as a social ecology was overlooked, and remained unheard of, it was there. The drainage was contested even if only internally. Hulata was a Green Settlement, living the contradictions of “Zionist Nature” and the erasures Green Lines entail. Their understanding and experiences of the lake at the time, were a threat to the politics of drainage and could have opened the possibility of less coercive conservation and development strategies, as well as more a tolerant approach to local cultures since they are guided by local experience and expertise rather than by the rule of external experts.

The Hula Drainage project has drawn critique over the years but it was particularly its “non-human” nature that was lamented. The people of Hulata, despite being significant re-makers of the lake, are mostly overlooked or, in the few instances they are mentioned, they are generalized as being supportive of the Zionist position. Looking at the drainage from the stories of the people who lived by the lake undermines not only the binary romantic view of untamed nature confronted by technology; not only the notion that modernity cannot be local; but also sheds new light on how this world view serves to legitimate the eradication of anything social that may threaten the eco-hegemonic story.

The story of Lake Hula may seem like a history that is over. My argument in these two chapters has been that, in many ways, it is very much alive. In 1994, the mini lake Hula created by KKL re-flooding of the lake soil was opened to the public. The need to re-flood was a consequence of the drainage. The dry peat in what used to be the lake ground, turned into light dust and without the lake and its vegetation serving as a filter and a sink, allowed for a transfer of organic materials, nitrogen compounds, and pesticides, by water and wind, into the Kinneret – the main water resource of Israel. For a time, the water drunk by residents of Israel were Hula water. Agricultural processes in this area were never profitable, to the point that agriculture almost came to a stop. Keeping a certain level of water in the historic lake seemed to diminish or prevent the peat from being carried southward, and the drainage from agricultural zones to remain in the valley. Re-flooding increased the area available for vegetation and animals, and unintentional re-wilding process brought past and new species to the valley. Jewish residents from the surrounding area were invited to participate as “stakeholders” in the planning though not to the degree they would have appreciated and expected. The re-flooded area became also shrine to KKL and its ideology and deeds in the valley. A recent book published by KKL summarizing the drainage of the Hula to the re-flooded mini lake and the ecological and social controversies over the Hula is titled “Mini Lake Hula – A *Natural* Creation” (Duani, 2019) despite telling a history of human conflict and intervention.

Lake Hula’s past is not dead, not only in terms of the ways it is still being reproduced and reshaped, but also in terms of its legacy, its logic, and the rational visions that guided the way nature was managed. In earlier discussions over the need to re-flood the lake, the VC of the NPA at the time claimed that “since there is a fast sinking of the soils and a rise in water levels anyhow in the area, we should let nature do its thing until we have again a natural system that can be used for fishing and tourism and nature conservation.”³⁷ This reflects the NPA’s Malthusian approach and lack of understanding that the Hula was never really “nature doing its thing” but a produced social ecology. This logic of conservation along with the Zionist rationalities of Jewish productive nature shape

³⁷ Dan Peri, in Land and Nature special forum on the Hula.

another type of Green Settlement, and Green Line social ecologies, as I will show in the second part of the dissertation. Israeli environmentalism that emerged from the Hula valley at the moment of the drainage, developed in the Lake Hula laboratory, as a form of scientific expertise, a form of settlement rooted in local knowledge, and as loyal but also an alternative to Zionist project of Jewish settlement, and agriculture.

Part II: From Swamps to Deserts: The New Nature Guardians

“During all the time that Israel lived on its land [...] we find a picture of unceasing activity [...], our ancestors engaged in constructing wells and giant ponds [...], fashioned terraces on the hills and planted them with corn and orchards. They dug ditches and laid pipes, thus widening the areas under cultivation. [...]. When the land was conquered by desert tribes, camel drivers, and shepherds, the desert once more pushed back the cultivated land. Settlement shrank and the wasteland expanded; for the Bedouin made his livelihood mainly in wild growth and not in cultivated plants.”

Yizhak Ben Zvi, Israel's prime minister, *The Conquest of the Desert: An International Exhibition*, Jerusalem 1953, p. 5-7, [English Section].

Israel's Negev desert and the swamps met as an icon of desolation that would soon be repaired and altered by settlement and agriculture at the international exhibition “the conquest of the desert” in Jerusalem 1953. Similar to the way the swamps were constructed and treated, the Zionist relationship with the desert adhered to British Mandate institutions, logics, and ways of thinking. Deserts, like swamps, were characterized as negative and backwards worldwide (Ogden, 2011). Western imperial powers followed by colonial experts, carried out many hydrological and agronomic programs to restore drylands to their productivity in different parts of the world (Grove 1996, Davis 2011, 2016, Weitzman, 2015). These attempts were motivated by the same long-standing and primarily Anglo-European view of swamps as wastelands and ruined forests, which saw deserts as worthless, overgrazed landscapes defined by what they lacked. These views gave rise to programs and policies that have often damaged dryland environments and marginalized large numbers of indigenous peoples, many of whom had been using the land sustainably. At the beginning of the 20th century, French, Spanish and Italians, all employed artificial irrigation methods in Northern African countries, to push the agricultural belt beyond the desert. These “Expert” knowledges, technologies, and discourses dominated and held power in different forms, often, while overlooking “indigenous” practices that treated the desert in more sustainable ways (Davis, 2007, 2016; Mitchell 2002).

In Palestine during the British Mandate and later on for the Zionist movement, and the state of Israel, the desert, despite evoking biblical imaginaries, symbolized a desolation which must be transformed and bloom (Zerubavel 2008, 2009, 2018, Tal, 2002, 2006, 2008a). However, the conquest of the desert or of the Negev/Naqab was not merely an issue of territorial expansion and development, but rather an environmental-climatic task and mission. The Negev/Naqab micro climate was expected to be physically transformed through artificial irrigation, new industrialized types of seeds and intensive cultivation technologies (Tal, 2008a). The settlement of the desert was conceived of as a force of nature in charge, that would turn the desert green and eventually shift the aridity line marking 200mm annual rainfall further southward (Weitzman, 2015. Zerubavel, 2018). Albeit within different ecological conditions, the same environmental thinking that characterized the swamp drainage in the north, was transferred, as of the end of the 1930s to the south. Agriculture, settlement, and irrigation technologies were considered ways to achieve it. David Ben-Gurion, who saw the Hula swamp as the most horrible piece of neglected land that must be turned into an agricultural land, intended to establish miraculous agricultural settlements and a hub of science in the Negev/Naqab which would push the desert southward, and retrieve its glorious Roman and Byzantine agricultural past. Agricultural, environmental history and archeological surveys were conducted and become

salient domains to assisted the State's mission. Environmental historian Alon Tal (2002) described how this transferred and shifted the focus of the settlement project from north to south even earlier in the 1930s, as a result of British Mandate limits on Jewish settlement expansion in the north. He described the British willingness to allow Jewish agricultural settlements in the south as "disingenuous" since there was no water there (Tal 2002, 205-206). Eventually through complicated water engineering projects devised by the same engineers as for the Hula valley, Zionist settlement was able to channel water to the Negev/Naqab and the arid zone could be utilized for agriculture. In 1964 the construction of the Israel water carrier, which provided 100 million cubic water from the Jordan valley (south of the Hula valley) to Negev/Naqab settlements, was completed. This was celebrated in a similar way as for the Hula drainage and described as "pinnacle of Zionist ingenuity opening up a barren region for settlement and making the desert bloom" (ibid 207). Whereas in the past Bedouins only worked the land along valleys and riverbeds, it was now possible to work the land on a wider topography at the bottom of the hills as well. The extension of the desert line beyond the arid zone had immense ecological implications. However, like the Hula Valley, conservation and preservation efforts were not oppositional or counter to development and settlement. Nourished by similar environmental imaginations and notions of Nature and culture, and attaching values of good and bad to landscape and to human and non-human creatures, they supported a similar social and ethnic vision which in practice very broadly aimed at returning ecology to its biblical (Jewish) times.

The following chapters examine the endurance and the reworking of these Zionist environmental legacies in the present, as they articulate with changes in Israel's development policies and economy in the 1990s and with global environmental and free market ideas. Taken together, these chapters describe how struggles over new and old expert knowledge about settlements, development and desert ecology, though bolstered this time by free market ideology, constitute new environmental subjectivities – "new nature guardians" – and produce new social ecologies of Green Lines that are also precarious social ecologies, of class and ethnic conflict, violence, and crime.

Chapter 3 looks into the emergence of the solitary farms project, a privatized form of settlement project promoting the return of desert-traditional agriculture, through accumulation and enclosures of private land for agro-tourism, that draws its legitimacy from the combined power of ethnic territorial anxieties, free market mechanisms, and the Zionist environmental discourse of "healthy productive nature" led by key figures of the environmental movement in Israel, from the school of the Hula Valley. Chapter 4 concludes with Bedouin responses to what they experience as an exclusively Jewish endeavor that shapes entitlements to land, by setting in place their own Green Line which they call the "Tent Land" or "Tent Road". These chapters show how Zionist development and conservation work together, and are supported by and supportive of social ecologies of Green Lines characterized by uneven entitlement to land and land-based rights, and often produce exclusion and violence. They also shed light on the dangerous ways in which Malthusian anxieties and market-based logics of private eco-responsibility produce extreme climate inequality and precarious social ecologies in which resilience, adaptation, mobility, and vulnerability take on new meanings.

Methodologically, I support these arguments and perspectives through textual records, interviews, and ethnographic and archival fieldwork. For the third chapter I analyzed State land policy and courts reports, attended hearings, community meetings and discussions in the Knesset during the farm legalization process in 2010. I visited the farms several times and conducted 50 interviews with solitary farmers during the year of their legalization, as well as with scientists, state representative, the regional council, members and regional representatives of green and social justice NGOs, who are supportive or resentful of the farms. The fourth concluding chapter, is based on time I spent in gatherings dealing with Bedouin legalization conducted by the Bedouins themselves or by the Negev's different regional municipalities, participated in Bedouin events, watched and participated in their tourist and agricultural initiatives, and devoted many days to interviewing and talking to Bedouin families, particularly in two communities in the Negev highlands.

Chapter 3

Green Lines in the Desert: The New Rule of an old Expertise

The return of agriculture and the Solitary Farms/Wine Route Project

“When we first stood on the hill overlooking the (riverbed) it was desolate and unexplored, and it was barely possible to discern tracks of other visitors. We began to imagine the place and how it would look in the future. You know, there is a lot of potential in places that have nothing...we have so many plans for this place. We planted the vineyard, taking care to preserve the ancient terraces, and utilize the 2000-year old ancient irrigation system. We’ve just installed an experimental solar technology here.” .."Look at this oasis... at all the birds we brought here. Those who objecting to us what do they want? just an arid area deteriorating rapidly because of over excessive grazing?"

(H, a solitary farmer in the Negev highlands, May 2010)



Image 23, 24. Tourist Map of “the Wine Route” (left) 2009. and the “Tent Road” (right) 2012. Produced by the Regional council of the Negev Highlands, 2010.

The two maps above, were both issued between 2009-2012 to advertise new eco- and agro- tourism projects by the Regional Council of the Negev Highlands and the local municipality of the Jewish town of Mitzpe Ramon, a development town bordering the Regional Council of the Negev Highlands on the south.¹

The two maps show a segment of Highway 40, the highway running from Beer Sheva to Eilat through the Negev Highlands and the Ramon Crater. On the left, the first map (2009) presents the "Negev Wine Route" along Highway 40³⁸ which is the name the Solitary Farms project (privately owned single family farms along the Negev highways) was given retroactively to legitimize and legalize it by rebranding the Negev region for tourism. The second map, on the right, entitled, "the Tents Road", in Hebrew, was issued in 2012 to support heritage tourism of the Bedouin villages based on a Bedouin initiative in collaboration with supportive Jewish neighbors. The Wine Route and the Tent Road, two development projects, attempt, at least officially, to bring agro- or eco-tourism to Highway 40, and are also two related manifestations of different social -environmental relationships. As such, they are product of and productive of environmental and ethnic struggles. They both physically mark and form two Green Lines in the Negev landscape.

As explained in the introduction, by the term "Green Lines" I follow what Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre meant by the "social production of space" (1991). The Green Lines formed by the two projects are State discursive formations as much as they are historical and material. They are both real and imagined. Materially, they change the landscape and the bio-physical environment of the Negev Highlands by forming lines of vegetation in the landscape and remaking its nature physically and visually by returning agriculture to the region, and in particular to its historic valleys. In so doing they also transform, the Negev ecology by admitting new species, whether invasive or native, new topography, and human activity. In the Negev/Naqab, depending on the crop - olives or vineyards, and the seasonal growth - they punctuate the desert with different shades of green.

Given that both maps represent tourist initiatives on Highway 40 and since the area they cover is almost identical, why then, aren't the Negev highlands – an area still vying³⁹ for touristic identity and recognition – represented on one map? Why is one map available in both English and Hebrew and the other in Hebrew alone? Where are development towns⁴⁰ on these maps?

In addition to the material production of a new desert social-ecology (and "nature"), Green Lines are considered, particularly in the desert (although only by some groups) as an "improved nature" and "good ecology". Similarly, to the transformed swamplands, they are the product of historical, geopolitical, and environmental imaginations (Davis, 2016) reworking together ideas of settlement, and regimes of eco-management, into an imagery of an agricultural desert settled by "good" (Jewish) guardians, rather than Bedouins (or

³⁸ Some along highway 58 and 200 as well.

³⁹ Negev Jewish populations was on stagnation until the mid-1990s and interest in Negev tourism was renewed only around 2005.

⁴⁰ Urban industrial towns, founded in the 50s as working class towns for immigrants.

Arabs). They also set in place and solidify differences and new social boundaries between Jews and Bedouins.

I argued in the Introduction that “Green Lines” as “modern” social ecologies are exclusive and segregating but also that as a concept they are unifying analytically, not only in the sense that they capture in unity rather than contrast, ecology and society or development and conservation; but also because they illuminate the unifying elements between the management of swampland (the KKL’s vision of Green Lines that re-produced the Hula valley as agriculture and displaced the lake and its Arab inhabitants), the Negev/Naqab Green Line, and the 1967 Green Line.

The Swamplands’ Green Lines were meant to clearly establish Israel’s geopolitical borders and cleanse the borderlands nearby the swamp of its disruptive inhabitants through the transformation of the Hula swamplands into a landscape that fit with the broader agricultural markets of the 1950s. The Negev/Naqab Green Line is a complex of ecological and settlement practices that used to be borderlands and are now *within* the boundaries of Israel, though they are referred to and conceptualized as ungovernable “open spaces”. The 1967 Green Line, is different since its goal was to eventually disappear and expand States’ territories, but it has been formed and solidified, not only through a militarized regime and legalization, physical national borders and check points, but also (and similarly to the “Negev Green Line”) through the constitution of radically different social ecology, once one crosses to the Palestinian side⁴¹. Despite the different spatiality and legal status of the 1967 Green Line and the “Green Lines” of the Negev/Naqab they both use, albeit differently an eco-management of aridity (or its production), to produce friction, difference, and ethnic separation. Green Lines are therefore spaces of ecological struggle but also a type of regime, supported by this struggle; and a space of emerging new environmental subjectivities. More importantly, therefore, by articulating settlement processes (development) and types of eco-management (conservation through greening and displacement), the Green Lines shed light on the ways in which power ecology and development play into the entire Zionist settlement project. They are surprisingly similar, therefore, to each other despite the different state formations in which they are situated. This is important given critical scholarship that explains unequal access to land and the construction of Jewish space in the Negev too crudely – as an ethnic project (Yiftachel, 1997, 2000; Tzfadia, 2006) and in later work as an ethnic-capitalist project (Yiftachel, 2010, 2019; Tzfadia & Yacobi, 2011). Thinking through the workings of “Green Line” complicates understandings of ethnic relationships and boundaries in the Negev, and captures the complicated ways through which they are formed, and demonstrates the production of a (abstract) highly divided Negev space in two key ways. First, it includes much more than “Bedouins and Jews”, but also many non-human creatures, and objects; and second, it focuses on how the multiple realms are connected, and responsive to and co-constitutive of each other.

In order to see the relationship between the Negev/Naqab Green Lines and the 1967 Green Line, despite the institutional separation of the two regional maps one must refrain from seeing the “Tent Road” Bedouin settlements and the “Wine Route” Jewish

⁴¹ The more accurate way to describe this would be dispossession through desertification see more on the Green Line as an eco-regime in Lavi-Neeman and Shiloach, 2022

settlements as separated entities, but rather as one process. The Tent Road and the Wine Route lines are analytically (and of course materially) connected social ecologies. They are the result of several articulated processes in the Negev that together form an ecological or environmental regime. There is an analytical value in looking at their formation, not simply comparatively—since there are striking obvious material (social, economic, physical) differences between "the lines" – but relationally (Hart 2018) – considering how they each produce, shape, and reshape each other socially and materially and solidify Zionist settlement as a project of ecological management rooted in colonial legacies⁴².

In what follows I look at environmentalist legacies, namely, ecological visions, discourses, and practices that shape the contradictory and uneven ways (Smith, 1984) in which these Green Lines are produced and the social spaces the "uneven desert social ecologies" produced by them.



Image25. "Green Lines in the Negev/Naqab" Avdat Vineyard Farm , of the "Wine Route" ,2010 (photo from the farm online private archive) and forming Green Lines of olives in Bedouin Village of the "Tent Road" (photo by author).

This chapter focus on the emergence and the formation of the Solitary Farm project as a "Green Line" social ecology. I first trace the way in which desert environmental history work as a terrain of struggle through which desert traditions and expertise are appropriated and reclaimed, and the solitary farm legitimized and are justified (while negating Local Bedouins forms of agro and eco-tourism). I then move to explain how the vision of the farm emerge and gain more traction amidst broader political-economic changes in Israel of the late 90s. In particular, I focus on changes in the realms of planning and settlement policies and the limits and barriers they meet in the desert. Third, I look into the ways the highly individualized privatized farms (" privately green") become a regional legalized state project, and a form of market inspired eco management, and finally I explain how

⁴² A landscape of productive Green Lines was also the ultimate goal the KKL hoped to achieve when Lake Hula drainage project was finalized. Its aesthetics symbolized a new ecology and climate in the transformed valley of 1958. The Negev/Naqab Green Line aesthetics, ecology, and practices are different, but the coproduction of the two Green Lines of the Negev/Naqab, reveal similar dynamics, logics, and practices.

environmental history and colonial environmental legacies, are reworked into market/climate logics, and produce a highly exclusionary social ecology.

Terrains of struggle: environmental(ist) history, and violent social ecologies

“Wherever he goes he brings with him ruin violence and neglect. To call him son of the desert is a misnomer. Half of the desert owes its existence to him, and many fertile plains from which he has driven its useful and industrious inhabitants, became in his hand like the south country (the Negev/Naqab), a parched and barren wilderness... farm systems were left unattended and allowed to fall into a state of decay....the life giving floods now became a destructive force...there stood the ancient towns, still called by their ancient names but not a living things was to be seen.”

Edward Palmer cited in Even Haari, “The Awakening Desert” (2012. p.147)

“Violence is inherent to political space, not only as an expression of (political) will to power, but due to a permanent reign of terror separating that which seeks to be unified ... and fusing together ... that which is differentiated.” —Henri Lefebvre, “The Worldwide and the Planetary” 1973. (in Lefebvre, 2009. P.203)

In October 2009, when I started my very first months of fieldwork in the Negev/Naqab, the Avdat National Park located on Highway 40 in the middle of the Negev/Naqab highlands, which was declared a UN World Heritage Site, was attacked overnight and severely damaged. The site staff described and documented hundreds of valuable archeological artifacts, thought to be approximately 2000 years old, which were demolished or seriously damaged. The site of the ancient church was heavily damaged as well; pillars were smashed and the walls covered in graffiti.

Avdat is an archeological site under the auspices of the National Nature and Park Authority (hereafter NPA). It includes impressive remains of one of the famed ancient Nabatean/Byzantine cities, along one of the incense routes where costly perfumes and spices were brought out of Arabia across the Negev/Naqab and then to Mediterranean ports.⁴³ Avdat is considered important evidence of an agricultural center in the Negev/Naqab and its residents. Other Nabatean/Byzantine cities are famous for the development of an irrigation system that serviced the urban centers along that road. The ancient city is surrounded by ancient terraces and inside the city many ancient wine presses reveal the commercial scale of wine production. The site symbolizes a time in which Negev/Naqab settlement flourished, engaged in the production and consumption of luxury goods, and Negev/Naqab lands were productive.

⁴³ The city was destroyed by marauding Arab tribes in the second half of the first century. The last Nabataean king Rabbel (70-106) rebuilt Avdat and in 106 the Roman Empire conquered the region



Image 26. Graffiti Sprayed in Avdat Ancient Cathedral, October 2009.. Photo: Orit Botnick, NPA.



Image 27. Left: Pillars Smashed in the Ancient Avdat Cathedral, October 2009. Photo: Orit Botnick, NPA.

Image 28. Right: Damages to the Nana Vineyard near the town of “Mitzpe Ramon”, October 2009 (photo by Author).

Police investigators immediately suspected that the attack may have been carried out by members of a nearby Bedouin tribe angered by the recent demolition of illegally built Bedouin-owned structures, perhaps a no less violent act, though carried out

systematically by State law and special enforcement units⁴⁴. And indeed, 23 illegal Bedouin structures in a nearby unrecognized village were destroyed the Sunday before the violence in Avdat. Several newspapers explained the Bedouins' act as a way of targeting state property (Kurriel & Edelson, 2009) and the alleged Bedouin perpetrators were described as "vandals with a heart of stone, incapable of appreciating these treasures" (ibid, Naor, 2009). These accusations echoed earlier depictions of Bedouins as "uncultured" and the cause of ruination, as indicated by the comments at the start of this chapter quoting the British governor of the Sinai. The destruction of the ancient city positioned the Bedouins of the Negev/Naqab yet again within a binary against the civilized State with no attention to the State's demolition the days before. Later on, it was reported that the fence around a nearby vineyard had been destroyed and the water system damaged, which left water spraying over the fields for hours and destroying roughly 1.7 acres of newly planted vines. The water pipe leading to the area was damaged, and several tourists in the area reported that cars parked in nature reserve parking lots had been broken into and vandalized.

The destruction in Avdat marked a new form of violence in the Negev/Naqab highlands. Incidents in vineyards, the theft of agricultural tools, and damage to visitors' property in parking lots in parks and near nature reserves have become markers of the Negev/Naqab during the previous decade. They are typically described as arbitrary Bedouin vandalism, as part of their "mentality" and the Negev/Naqab as a whole was portrayed as the "wild south", an ungovernable space, and the home to crime and insecurity⁴⁵.

Four months later, during my first visit to the solitary farm of Orlia, at that time a farm of a small grove of Aragan trees and several camels, I was forced to stop recording and take notes by hand. When we sat outside and talked over tea on the top of the hill where the farm is situated overlooking Highway 40 and Bedouin villages, multiple helicopters circulated above our heads making our conversation difficult to follow. The Orlia farm owners were not disturbed by the noise or the spectators and A., one of the owners, even waved at one of the helicopters while explaining to me that these police helicopters were providing security for a demolition taking place in the same adjacent Bedouin settlement. O., the other owner, herself an extremely calm mother of 5, assured me that this was not a rare sight in the area. She said that the police had already informed them about "the intervention " so they could be ready as well. When I asked, 'ready for what?', O smiled and explained that every time house demolitions take place, some damage is expected to the farms. "Usually we are warned by the officers to stay around and to avoid leaving property unattended but it isn't serious. A pipe here or a fence there" she says.⁴⁶ At the time of my visit, the Orlia farm was one of 20 farms in the Negev Highlands considered "illegal settlements" just like the structures demolished in the Bedouin village below. Y., the owner of Orlia, used to work for the NPA prior to becoming a farmer, and

⁴⁴ Numbers of house demolitions are on the rise. According to the Negev coexistence forum, from 2017 to 2023 there were 15,000 demolitions in Negev/Naqab Bedouin villages; 2845 were demolished in 2022 alone out of which 771 were structures used as homes

⁴⁵ A Google search for "wild south" in Hebrew returned no less than 500 TV broadcasts with this title, depicting incidents in the Negev of wild driving, grazing, illegal building and violence.

⁴⁶ Interview with G&S, February 2010

O. worked in Avdat for several years as the site guide⁴⁷. When we met, they had moved on to “continue a desert life” as the owners of the farm that focused on “reviving local legacies” (camels) and unique “desert-friendly groves” (Aragan trees) in addition to a fancy B&B. As desert residents, both Y. and O. thought it was important and mentioned doing something that “fits with the local environment and its heritage” as their goal, and that they had dedicated time to learning about Aragan trees.

Although damage to farms has been normalized, and was tolerated by the few Jewish settlers as the inevitable price to pay, even temporarily, the choice of Avdat as a target for violence was new. Damaging Avdat required much more effort and planning than arbitrary damage to agricultural equipment, or petty theft. The town of Avdat is guarded, fenced, and gated. The ancient remains are at the top of a steep hill, and the church itself is nestled in the heart of the ancient city. The National Park night guard, usually a Bedouin hired to work for the NPA, had to be convinced to cooperate, a tractor had to be driven up the mountain where the main site is situated, be tied to the ancient church's pillars and drag them along a challenging topographical terrain. Thus, the violence in Avdat, rather than being arbitrary, should be considered seriously, as site-specific, and rooted in social relationships and local histories (Watts and Peluso 2001; Coronil and Skurski, 2006). Avdat may be the “political space fusing together that which is differentiated” (Lefebvre, 2009. p. 203-204.



Image 29. Orlia camels and Aragan farm overlooking Highway 40 and the unrecognized Bedouin village prior to the demolitions, February 2010 (Photo by author).

At the time of our meeting, Orlia like the rest of the Negev Wine Route Farms was still an illegal settlement whose status was contested in court and in the Knesset. But

⁴⁷ By the time this chapter was written O. had left the farm to become a regional NPA ranger, but Y. stayed and became the regional council coordinator for Bedouin settlement planning.

sanctions and the way encounters with the police were experienced in the case of Jewish illegal settlements were different from what took place in the Bedouin villages nearby. In Orlia, as in other farms, special units (the Green Patrol together with a special armed police unit)⁴⁸ or demolitions, were not carried out. Sanctions were limited to eviction warnings after NGO's appeals to the courts and local municipalities and State ministries provided the farmers with support.

The violence in Avdat coincided with the beginning of the legitimization and the retroactive legalization process in the Knesset of the still unapproved, and hence illegal 25 "solitary farms" (including Orlia). Avdat was the heart and the inspiration for the Jewish farms project. It was the eventually the basis for their retroactive legalization and the formation of a Negev highlands Green Line (later dubbed the Wine Route farms) in which environmental transformation, in the form of producing good green desert ecology and subjects through settlement, agriculture, and conservation, served together as the legitimizing rationale for the process (and the de-legitimization of the Bedouins in terms of their entitlement and access to lands).

Changes in settlement planning and policies: The late 1990s and the southern Negev ecology as barrier.

The first solitary farms emerged during the 90s when agro tourism, local food production, traditional environmental knowledge, and green development received attention worldwide and began influencing development trends in Israel within rural areas particularly in the north and in the south. The 1990s were also the culmination of changes in settlement trends and policies in Israel that has begun in the late 1970s and 1980s. Most broadly, over that decade significant changes reshaped the rural sector throughout Israel but the ways these larger processes took place across different regions was different. In the south, given its particular social, spatial, and ecological conditions, they took a unique direction. Overall in Israel, the agricultural-collective settlements (moshavim and kibbutzim) were in decline, and hardly received any support from the State; on the other hand, community based settlements, based on private property and diverse types of employment outside the settlements (rather than in agriculture concentrated in them) were on the rise. The transition to community settlements was accompanied by changes in planning policies. Community based settlement required services and commercial centers nearby. Previous limits on land use (restricting them exclusively for agriculture), were modified or removed, and lands designated for agriculture were now authorized for diverse income producing uses. Other changes had to do with "unsettled lands". Lands within kibbutzim and moshavim were now open for "community expansion"; i.e., neighborhoods for outside residents who bought land and membership in existing agricultural settlements to have a better quality of life that turned the communal lands into real estate assets for the kibbutzim and moshavim. From a geographic perspective, community settlements in regions and places that previously relied on agriculture were established and planned mainly in areas that were not too far from urban metropolises and centers of employments and services including around Jerusalem, or in the western Galilee for instance. In the Negev, where there are few services and centers of employment, it was harder to recruit

⁴⁸ See introduction- footnote on the role of the Green Patrol.

groups of settlers to join community expansions in kibbutzim or moshavim. There was a need from the government perspective, which saw the Negev/Naqab as threatened by takeovers of land by Bedouins, to find other settlement practices that would better suit the geopolitical and economic needs of the Negev and if possible, a method that would enable maximal holding of land in Jewish hands for future settlement.

One way in which the State put this goal into practice in the south was to support and assist collective agreements of kibbutzim of the south, while in the rest of the country the State had withdrawn its support for collective agreements and agriculture. Hence despite the fact that southern kibbutzim were often struggling economically, which in the north and the center of the country led to their privatization or closure as collectives, in the south, even financially struggling kibbutzim were supported (De-Malaach 2012, 2015). The second way was using KKL afforestation projects to capture lands (Ben Refael & Topel 2009; Shalev 2004). This practice was offered since the end of the 1990s, was encouraged by the NPA and the KKL, and was supported by ecological arguments regarding land stabilization that researchers later refuted as wrong (Rotem, Bouskila, and Rothschild, 2014). It was and still is very much visible in Beer Sheba vicinity, where a green belt surrounding the city outskirts was planted to block spread of Bedouin settlement⁴⁹ as an emergency step, given the state failure to settle more Bedouin in urban townships build for them (Leket 2009)⁵⁰. The third way was the promotion of solitary settlers. The ministry of infrastructure, the KKL, the Jewish agency (JA), the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Tourism, all supported the idea, as did Knesset members and government officials among whom Ariel Sharon – who was prime minister at the time, and a solitary farmer himself in northern Negev/Naqab stood out⁵¹. In 2000 he described the way he perceived solitary settlements:

“In the Negev/Naqab we are facing a very difficult problem. About 50,000 acres of state land are not in our hands but in Bedouins hands; and I, as a Negev/Naqab resident see this problem daily. For reasons of weakness and perhaps blindness to the subject, we do nothing against this and the result is: all urbanization of Bedouins has stopped. Bedouins take over new areas and “bite” the state land reserve. No one does anything significant about that....Unfortunately today already we can’t expand Beer Sheeba and the result is that while we handle a justified, in my opinion, struggle over Beth El or the grave of the patriarchs (Footnote –these are in the west bank) We are losing the Negev/Naqab, the last land reserve we have, and the way to protect the Negev/Naqab is possible in two ways: the first is solitary settlers and the other giving lands for custody” (Sharon, 2000).

Sharon’s words implicitly expressed the challenge and limits posed by the southern Negev ecology to traditional ways in which the State has implemented policies throughout Israel

⁴⁹ See Israel Master Regional Plan “TAMAM “34/14/4

⁵⁰ Towards the end of the 60s 7 towns were planned and build in the Negev/Naqab for Bedouins, to which the state intended to move them permanently so lands in the Negev will be vacant for Jewish settlment, only about half of the Bedouin population has moved into the towns (the rest composed the “unrecognized villages”) the towns are considered social and economic failure. (Yiftachel 2003).

⁵¹ Sharon himself owned “shikmim farm” a 3800 dunam in the northern Negev .The farm has been an illegal settlment purchased in 19when Sharon was the General of the southern command. With assistance of Jews American business men. It has been linked over the years with several illegal affairs in regard to its location, terms of lease and more and was never legalized. See for instance Shtrackman Rotem, “The Mansion” Haaretz, 28.12.4004.

and in the south to make sure that no Palestinian or Bedouin settlement is possible. The comparison to the struggle over land in the West Bank is striking given that the Negev is threatened by Israeli (albeit Bedouin) citizens. The methods for capturing unsettled land abstractly called “open spaces” by allocating land for cattle grazing (in the north), forestation, and kibbutzim and moshavim community expansions or agriculture, was not possible in the more arid and less developed southern zones of the Negev highlands, 30 min drive south of Beer Sheva. This left plots of land that were not declared military training zones or nature reserves available to solitary farmers who could purchase large amount of land and take responsibility (privately) for them.

Regional changes –

Sharon’s statements fell on fertile grounds. Already in 1991, in response to pressures of development towns⁵² the Negev Development Authority (hereafter NDA) has been approved and was founded in the Knesset in a legislative act. Its goal was to promote social and economic development and to increase the Negev/Naqab’s capacity to absorb immigrants arriving to Israel from Eastern Europe.

Within the Negev Highlands Regional Council – the regional government authority, which represent the rural sector and rural settlements of the region and is in charge of 22% of the land in Israel, ideas of agro-tourism were already brought up by first farmers to the head of the regional council- Shmulik Rifman, since the late 90s as a form of potential economic development and as a way of increasing Negev settlement where the arid ecology had not permitted mass agriculture or forests.

Some of these individuals had previously served in environmental institutions in the Negev/Naqab, and were socially established in the Negev highlands and had begun to look for plots of lands for independent farms several years earlier. The NDA law, provided a window of opportunity, and despite their lack of experience in agriculture, and the fact that small scale agriculture had failed to be profitable in the Negev/Naqab climate up to then, they thought tourist traffic on Highway 40 to Eilat may provide an additional source of income, if they sell wine and cheese along the ancient Nabatean routes. Thus, despite violating “Tama 35”, Israel’s master plan which prohibited new settlements in what was abstractly titled “open spaces” (Shani, 2011; Tal, 2008b; Orenstein and Hamburg, 2009) in general and in the Negev/Naqab in particular (Algazi, 2010), and only allowing expansions

⁵² Development towns are urban townships founded in the 50s in peripheral and borderzones for new immigrants in order to spread the population of Israel into the Negev and the Galil (in the north), further establish these regions economically, and increased security through settlement. They aren’t included within the regional council that represent the rural sector and have local municipalities of their own. Most of the towns have failed socially and economically to provide regional development and employments to their residents. The Negev highlands is bordering two developments towns-- Dimona on the north east, and Yeroham and a home to Mistpe Ramon (then 5000 people) within the heart of the Negev highlands on Highway 40. All towns have failed for years to promote industry or tourism (in the case of the Negev) or to grow and relied heavily on welfare. In the 90s after Israel transition to partial neoliberal economy and the withdrawal of the state from many services, the NDA was meant to compensate also for this withdrawal.

of existing settlements, several residents managed to obtain land plots of about 80-100 dunams per farm in average without a public tender, by individually working with local regional and state offices.

As of the early 2000 and with the added benefits of Sharon's policy, these individual initiatives began to receive support from the Negev Highlands regional council, and the government. There was never a broad public call for applicants, but rather encouragement in the form of sporadic informal announcements, one even on a radio talk show. The screening process for candidates and applicants was improvised and inconsistent for different applicants. The head of the agricultural R&D center of the Negev/Naqab highlands to this day, Ya'ankale Moskowitch, previously a farmer in the Negev moshav Kadesh Barnea, was initially in charge of choosing applicants. In January 2010, I sat in his spacious newly built office, overlooking orchards of experimental olive groves as he tried to explain to me how he handled the surprisingly overwhelming interest in the farms and how farmers were selected or confirmed:

"It was up to the trust I felt in their willingness to invest in agriculture and tourism. I know many of them from the past. Some are excellent people who know what living in the desert can mean, so there was no need to interview them. And most of them seemed like they could." "Those who can't ..." he said decisively addressing my question about a farm that gave up agriculture quite early... "I am sorry I wasted the land on them." 53

The regional R&D is dedicated to promoting agriculture in the Negev desert and works closely with and as part of the regional council as well as with researchers, the Ministry of Agriculture, and agro-tech companies. Although the farm concept and vision had not yet been approved by any official planning authority at the time of my visit, the R&D and the regional council expressed confidence about the farms and relied on Ariel Sharon, the prime minister, and himself a mythical solitary farmer in the northern Negev and a close friend of Rifman the council head⁵⁴. In 2000 after Sharon has spoken in the Knesset encouraging the Negev settlers, solitary farms were publicly promoted as an informal policy, even though still an illegal State vision.

For a whole decade, given that some farms started as early as the mid-1990s, farms were established illegally, based on the oral commitments of Ariel Sharon and the head of the regional council Shmuel Rifman. With mostly private capital they managed to enlist inconsistent support and assistance from different authorities, so that in some cases the KKL and the JA helped pave dirt roads, some funds were provided for fences by the military, and the Ministry of Agriculture provided limited guidance for agriculture.

⁵³ Interview with Moskowitch, January, 2010. By "those who can't" he referred to a farm which neglected agriculture after only one season, but over the years became one of the more successful touristic sites among the farms even though there isn't any agriculture or farming in it to this day.

⁵⁴ See footnotes 12 above in regard to Ariel Sharon. In addition in 1999 State Comptroller Eliezer Goldberg overviewed the policies of state institutions that encouraged the farms and criticized them for not being discussed in Ministers Committee for Settlement Policy, for the lack of public tender, for illegal building and lack of approval from state planning committees. He also mentioned the significant involvement of Ariel Sharon, then the minister of Infrastructure and the connection of the illegal settlers to grids and services without having permits. Sharon replied he acted "to prevent takeovers of foreigners over land." (Chromchenko, May 2003).

Initially, most farms started establishing themselves on plots of lands that were designated for agriculture. The project was framed in this way to fit with development goals and land policies and to allow for the plots to be large enough⁵⁵). From 1998 to 2003, 8 farms were established and as of 2006, there were 13 more. The farmers were authorized to start cultivating and build a structure for a night guard but the land was not approved for residential use. But many of them started building houses, hosting units and tents for tourism, renovated national archeological sites that were within their plots, built fences to deter Bedouin livestock, connected to water and electricity grid without permits, and some expanded their plots beyond the designated area, and brought their families to live with them.



Image 30. Maayan Haneurim (“the Spring of Youth”) farm. Started with no agriculture created an artificial sweet water lake for visitors. Farm owners arrived at the farms with Helicopters from Tel Aviv. (photos retrieved from website in 2010. As there was no permission to take photos)

Objections to the solitary farms project were expressed by government and civic organizations as soon as the idea emerged, and in 2006 Adala, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights, Bimkom, the Planners for Human rights, and the Society for the Protection of the Nature (SPNI), the organization that initially attracted many prospective solitary farmers to the Negev challenged them on legal and ecological grounds. Legally, given that there was no public tender, the farms had infringed the tender law. Environmental organizations and activists expressed concern about the possible damage caused by farm fencing, lights, roads, and agriculture to the highly sensitive (from an ecological perspective) lands bordering areas designated for conservation and nature reserves. Several organizations for social and distributional justice such as Adala and Bimkom claimed that the farms were ethnically and socially unjust (Yiftachel, 2006).

In 2008, the farms project, that was not of much interest to public media in Israel, made headlines as several farmers received eviction orders for illegal building. Thirteen farmers were instructed by the Attorney General to vacate the lands and return them to their original condition. The farmers argued that the State had turned against them. Many of them were too suspicious and refused to talk to me or for the interview to be recorded. A. and H., two of the first farmers, published an op. ed. in Walla, an online news website with the title “how lonely it is to be a solitary farmer”. “The State of Israel is against H and O”. They wanted “the State has decided to dismantle Jewish settlements in the Negev” as

⁵⁵ Lands for grazing and animal farms were significantly larger than for vineyards and agriculture. And reached up to 200-300 dunams.

the headline and H. added “the Attorney General is against the State of Israel.” (Yizrael,2008). Y. and H., along with other farmers, prominent environmental educators in the Negev and past employees of the Negev NPA and SPNI, claimed they had received permits from different authorities. Each mentioned several different ones --ministry of agriculture, the archeological authority, the military or the Israel Land administration (hereafter ILA). They have also argued that it was well known to all that agriculture cannot provide the material basis for the farms and that the farms vision is based on both agriculture and tourism (therefore it entails on site residency). They also claimed their impact was far less destructive than other “development project characteristic of peripheral zones such as trash disposal facilities and military training zones”⁵⁶ and that given their incredible past as environmentalists, their love for the desert and the environmental nature of their projects, claims from green organizations were based on jealousy and personal motives. (Rinat, 2009; Yizrael, 2008).

“We wanted to have a quiet life” –Solitary farming, Environmental Freedoms and Zionism as an “added benefit”.

Rodney Hirsch’s farm is located on the sand dunes between Kibbutz Revivim and the huge and widely spread-out Bedouin village of Bir Hadag that borders on the nature reserves of Holot Makman (the Makman sand dunes). The farm is a tourist site offering a B&B in African-style huts that he planned and built on his own, and a communal Bedouin tent for those preferring a cheaper option. Hirsch’s farm is unique in that no fence or gate marks the entrance to the farm, only a handmade wooden sign from which a road climbs a sandy hill and ends in an area occupied by a 4-wheel drive and several huge friendly dogs. On the top of the hill the roughly 10-12 mud units that make up the farm come into view, dotted in between the natural vegetation of acacia trees and desert bushes.

The Makman farm was built with extreme patience over years with Rodney’s own capital and by hand. It is also unique in terms of its adherence to strict environmental ecological standards. The farm is solar based, off grid and almost all waste including water and fuel is locally treated. Fuel is produced locally. Rain water is collected. Every structure in the farm is built from locally collected materials. Hirsch is one of the earliest farmers, and also one of only two farms that has been legalized independently and early on. Nothing in the way he described the project is somehow connected to the territorial narratives of Sharon’s government, or the concept of the luxurious wine route. Nothing in what he says is even sympathetic towards the national narrative with regards to Bedouin spread, and no other farm is mentioned in our conversation. Hirsh refuses to be identified with other farms or other farmers’ practices, and indeed he does things in his own way. In a detailed conversation that lasted over 3 hours, as we were sitting in the main structure that serves as the family home and the B&B dining hall, he told me the story he tells repeatedly and consistently to all the farm visitors about how, with sense of power, entitlement, and determinacy, as well as financial savvy and careful calculations he made sure he could realize his plan.

⁵⁶ Interview , E, February 2010.

His initial motivation was not Zionist, and was to find a way that would enable him to live a life that differed diametrically from the one Israel could offer him as he understood it:

“I wanted to live in Africa. My wife didn’t. She said the children had to live in Israel. I did not think it was a good idea, Israel has many conflicts and issues. I wanted to have nice life. How can I have nice life in Israel? So I decided to build a place inspired by my trips to Africa. What did I like in Africa? First the pace is nice, everything is slow, no one is in a rush. And second, people build with local materials.... no one imports building materials from China and assembles them. They (the Africans) are connected to the land. For a Western person when you look at it you think it’s exotic. When you go to Yeroham next time⁵⁷ ask yourself if it’s exotic... I am not sure....⁵⁸”

Hirsch environmental practice and conduct is understood first and foremost as pursuing his own “life quality” and also as economically frugal:

“One of our guests worked in the finance ministry and I had breakfast with him. He told me that in Israel for every 17 shekels you make you save 1 shekel (because of taxes etc). So I understood it’s easier to save one shekel than to earn 17. Based on this concept I planned the farm. We don’t spend money on outsourcing it is all safe made, rain water is collected, gardening is just local acacia trees, all systems are saving systems we make everything, even our on patrol.”

His story of the farm establishment and legality is a story of determination, understanding that bureaucracy in the south can be “flexible”, and also self- confidence in the belief that with determination and self-accountability everything is possible:

“So, I asked the land authority where can I find a plot of land in Israel, build a house and live quite life? And they said to me – you must cover the coordinates of the land you wish to purchase and we will tell you if it is available or not. I thought ok I’ll go for a walk see a nice place get the coordinates, go to this office and ask them if it is available. They said no (for the first location), so I went for another walk and at the end I understood it would not work. That I’ll just be walking around. I understood that I don’t know how to do it, and I decided to go and study a profession that would help me, so I studies landscape architecture, a profession that gave me two tools that helped me - how to make a plan ..how to take an idea that you have in your head and put it on paper so it’s real. The other tool, helped me learn the laws of the bureaucracy, so it becomes a language I understand.”

Hirsch emphasizes that the only place where he could pursue his plan was in the south where seemingly much land is still available. He made no mention of the fact that land is solely available to block the spread of the Bedouin:

“For six years we have searched for land up north. The original idea was to find a place that is green with running water; maybe a stream (he laughs). But everything was expensive and bureaucracy was complicated. In 1999 we came down south and I started searching here. Eventually I drew a plan with 5 different locations I thought were potentially possible. I came with the map to the local council and asked the head of the council if he could direct me. I showed him the different spots and he said, “these spots are not relevant”. But this one spot I specifically studied, and I knew it was possible and I said to him “this spot is available, and if it is, will you support me? “; and he said to me “every day, 300 people are coming to my office and wasting my time” and I said “ok I’m here. If the spot is available will you support me?” He said yes. Then I said, if so, then in writing not in talking.” And he wrote me a letter with one sentence “the local council will support you” but it was good enough. after

⁵⁷ Yeroham is a nearby development town 20-25 min drive from the farm that was built for northern African and Indian Jewish immigrants (lumped together as Mizrahi) in the 1950s who were taken without their consent to live in the desert. The state provided the immigrants with public housing and the town remained an industrial, poor locality symbolic of the iconic public housing of the 1950s.

⁵⁸ Interview with R&T, May 2010. The interview was conducted in English, so I bring it in its original words, without correcting the language.

6 years I went back to his office with the coordinates and the letter. And later they (the land authority) said to me yes “it’s available but you need a letter from the local council that they support you” and I had the letter. At that point there were 6 more years of bureaucracy so everything would be legal. In Israel working legally is not the common way, the common way is working illegally. So when I came back to the council and told him look it is available! he said to me go put a caravan on the land and start developing. I asked, “what about building permits so it is legal”? he said “Don’t worry I support you” this was dangerous sentence... I said thank you and started a 6 years of more bureaucracy. I said to myself this is a long term project and I want to sleep well at night. I don’t anyone wanting something from me later on. In 2006 we signed the contract and started building. My concept was from Africa so I wanted to build with local materials.”



Image 31. The Makman sand dunes farm- main structure, 2018 (photo taken by author).

Until eviction notices were served on some of the solitary farms, it was hard to refer to the solitary farmers as a unified project or even as a group. The farms were initiated and treated individually, with different agreements and contracts. The farmers also saw themselves the way Hirsch did, as individuals rather than as a group, or a State-run regional project. Each farmer mentioned different motivations, with different a starting point in terms of capital, past experience, and dreams. Because the bureaucracy was vague, each farmer maneuvered and negotiated with government offices and permits independently and in different ways. Unlike Hirsch, many of them took the council and Sharon’s oral promises seriously and counted on them.

Hirsch’s story is thus different and unlike any of the other farmers’ stories. This is not because the other farmers’ stories have much in common or are somehow similar: they are not. His insistence on being established legally rather than counting on oral promises from State authorities eventually helped him make his legal status different. However,

despite the different stories and Hirsch's view of himself as unique and doing things his own way, there is much that unifies him with other farmers and explains why they often end up in court.

All the farmers have a clear understanding of what makes a good desert, good ecology and a good life, although their views can differ considerably from each other and do not necessarily jibe with the ways green organizations and NPA policies define a good desert or conservation. Hirsch had an African imaginary and relied less on perceived local environmental histories. Orlia based themselves on Moroccan desert dwellings, and others explained their vision as replicating wine- and cheese- producing French farms in Provence, or as the "Tuscany of the desert"⁵⁹ and several were trying to recreate the Byzantine biblical desert as it existed thousands of years ago. What all the farmers saw as good ecology is "exotic" as Hirsch pointed out, and far (in terms of space or time) from what they saw as currently local. Whether European (Italian, or French) African, Moroccan or something else, they all tried to reproduce the local through environmental imaginaries of these other places or deserts.

Most farmers perceived and presented themselves as avid environmentalists rather than avid Zionists or as participating in a State project. In their explanations and stories, they emphasized how they benefitted from engaging with the environment, with the desert, but very importantly how all this was achieved independently without any State assistance, with great determination, patience and self-sufficiency. E. and H. repeatedly declared: "we are not asking for anything, no state budget, no benefits, nothing". Z from a vineyards and horses farm explained to me:

"I did all the work here, I had to check the land does not belong to Bedouin who bought it in the Mandate period, I went to the minister of agriculture, to the ILA and to the council (Regional council) I had to make sure I do not harm archeological artifacts when I plant and that I do not harm the Ashkelon-Eilat oil pipe line when I lay down a pipe. Then when I ascended to the land, I received court order. The lawyer cost me additional 20 dunams in which I could plant".⁶⁰

I an Y., from a wine- producing farm were forced to leave the farm several days after their arrival when they were handed eviction notices. I had to arrange my visit to their guarded farm near Avdat, via mutual friend and waited outside several long minutes to be admitted after I was identified, I was asked to drive carefully between the vineyards to the tasting room, where we meet, so I don't harm the vineyards. Y is extremely careful about the ways his farm is handled, and before we talked, he wanted to make sure I understand how sensitive and vulnerable the vineyards are.

I&Y mentioned how they invested their own capital and resources in the initial research and study of the area: "Y flew over it in an ultralight to find the right topography for the farm" I., his wife, who is a physician in Yeroham and in the Bedouin town Segev Shalom told me. In my conversation with them they emphasized how all the services are self-installed "even the Bedouins where I work as a physician, have a phone line. We had to install it, and pay for ours." The fact that Segev Shalom is a legal town was not

⁵⁹ See more on this vision at the end of the chapter about Avdat.

⁶⁰ Interview, I&Y.L May2010.

mentioned, and their comments on the Bedouins illustrated the extent to which the denial of Bedouins' rights as citizens has been normalized.

These farmers all share a sense of individuality, entrepreneurship and independence. Their motivation is first and foremost to fulfill their own dream, but they chose the Negev to pursue a life of freedom, and entrepreneurship because they assumed that bureaucracy would be lighter. Indeed the arbitrariness with which the farmers gained access to land, the different ways in which each of them communicated and negotiated personally by tapping previous connections with State authorities and the resulting differences in legal status does not characterize them at first glance as representing a project in any sense, and certainly not as an organized national one, or one shaped by a Zionist ideology complicit with State territorial policies. To some degree they portrayed themselves as victims of the State.

G., originally the owner of an Argentinian meat restaurant in central Israel, is the owner of what started as a cheese-producing goat farm and now offers two fancy B&Bs and several capsule style accommodations. He told me when we talked about his motivation to struggle state bureaucracies "Zionism is just an added benefit" ... "First, there is the farm, ironically we just wanted to move to a place where the bureaucracy seemed the least burdensome to make this dream work." M., an Israeli vineyard owner who moved to the Negev highlands from an agricultural moshav in the region told me:

"This all started in childhood. It was my dream to be a farmer and build something from scratch. We lived on a kibbutz and then a moshav. We did the intensive agriculture thing. But we did not find ourselves, so we tried applying to the authorities to find a farm but the conditions were not ripe. My wife is Dutch. She dreamt of having a farm in southern France and then she met K. (a cheese producing farmer nearby) and discovered that it is actually possible to try and make it happen here."

Farmers who moved to the region with their cowsheds told me they had escaped from their moshav up north, where they had constant conflicts with neighbors over the stench, and felt it would be much easier to raise dairy cows without the neighbors' stressors. Owners of a farm that started as olive groves farm and now offers glamping in tepees told me that their project resonated with State goals, but that they mostly wanted to be freed from the real estate bubble of the center:

"To be honest I did not want to come to the desert. I'm originally from a town in the north. Yellow isn't my thing. I prefer green. But what can you do?.. We were young and we were looking for a house. To me it was clear that I was heading for the ocean. After we saw the prices, if we went from Nahariya to Gaza, it was just impossible. So we toured the country, we took all sorts of trips. We like taking the tent, sleeping in all sorts of places. And then we saw the Negev/Naqab with the "plastic bag farms" of the Bedouins. We realized there is quite a situation here in the State, with the Bedouins and that this entire farms project is actually a very important settlement project to preserve our lands, so we don't wake up in 100 years and say, 'oops we had a Negev/Naqab on the map didn't we?' and it was also taken from us, so we said ok, it would help us achieve our own personal goals too."

The farmers also fiercely dismissed claims that they were there as soldiers of the State to fight the expansion of Bedouin settlements. Y. from the Daat (Wisdom) fenced vineyard farm told me he was just a "simple farmer". "I have many good Bedouin friends, when they need help with their health insurance red tape they come to us." E. who is part of the Desert Rescue Unit added: "when a Bedouin girl disappears in the middle of the night, they call us, not the police, and not the SPNI". Z said: "They come for water at the farm: I give them what Mekorot (the national water carrier) does not".

Erez, the owner of Rota farm, could be mistaken for a Bedouin. His dark skin tone and bare feet and dress code could be Bedouin. He prepares two glasses of black Turkish coffee for us and smokes heavily as we speak. His farm has piles of unused sinks, pipes, and building materials scattered helter-skelter. At one point in our conversation he says “I am happy to talk about anything, just not politics. I have nothing against Bedouins; I am a kind of a Bedouin myself”.

In one farmhouse near Mitzpe Ramon that specializes in organic orchards, I did not find the owners but a rather bunch of Bedouin children from the Ramak family who live nearby, sitting in the living room watching tv and eating ice cream. One of them slapped the other and shouted, “Go get him.” The owner then returned with the child and later told me that after a year of problems they now let this family use some water for their goats for free and occupy the family home when they are away. Several farmers commented that the Bedouins are their only reliable seasonal labor force particularly for the olive harvest and seasonal projects. Several farmers even suggested that the same settlement model of agro-tourism or farms could be possible future solution for the Bedouins and regretted how the State treats these “citizens of the state”.

Other farmers were angry at the State’s failure to protect them from Bedouin thefts and crime. They have found different ways to cope with petty theft and crime. They showed me the fences and ditches they have built to deter Bedouins from entering their property. Others have tried to use friends and connections in the police and the military to threaten Bedouins. A farmer from a farm near Mitzpe Ramon told me he was forced to call on his friends from an army unit and that it only took one appearance for the Bedouins to leave. E., followed by others, have called to position volunteer members of the “new guardian”⁶¹ organization which ironically serves as the guardians of the state-farmers.

Several farmers have established friendly relationships of trust and collaboration over time after a great deal of friction. However, what still stands out in their stories is the absence of the State and their need to “deal” with everything on their own, at times replacing State leadership. This is similar to stories I heard from my grandparents about living in their kibbutz prior to the founding of the State, and stories I heard in Hulata about the 1930s. A conversation with Hirsch at his farm after I related the substance of a visit I had paid to a neighboring Bedouin from Bir Hadaj at his farm was particularly astounding when I asked whether his relationship with the Bedouins had always been that friendly:

” I understood over time, I had this thought all of a sudden, that I am the new guy on the block, that I must learn the local codes if I want to have a quiet life and then I stopped trying getting back at them. I won’t live a nice quiet life like I wanted to if a Bedouin kid who came to steal gets killed by a grenade I hid to teach him a lesson (referring to a story in which he concealed a grenade but changed his mind in the middle of the night). In the last three years I have learned the Bedouin code. I learned them by going there, sitting in their tents, talking to them. At that time, they were stealing all the times, every day. They would come at night and take whatever they wanted, but I did not retaliate. I

⁶¹ The New Guardian is a volunteers based NGO founded in the northern valleys of Israel to provide farmers (initially cattle growers) with armed defense against agricultural theft where the police proved incompetent. The Guardian was founded by Yoel Zilberman a farmer from the north and On Rifam (the son of the Negev head of regional council) and was named after the ‘mythic’ Alexander Zeid, a member of the second Zionist Aliyah who dedicated himself during the 1930s to the conquest of labor and founded a mounted guard organization who was murdered during the Arab revolt in 1938. See Lavi-Neeman, 2017 (unpublished).

learned the codes, and around 2009, there was an incident when a religious woman who was driving here on the road was stopped and stabbed by Bedouins. Then men from her settlement came out to the road and the Bedouins came out as well, and they were fighting, and the police were called and was a big thing. But after a while the Bedouins decided that they needed to hold a “sulcha” (a Bedouin peace ceremony) and they came to me and said, “come sit with us on our side of the table” and I said why me? I never dress nicely I am not anyone’s representative, but they said, “but you understand our codes and can translate them for the others.”

Becoming a project

Unlike Hirsch, roughly 20 out of the 25 farms served with eviction notices in 2008 were forced to organize as a group, and start a public campaign to fight their eviction in court and attract more public attention. They documented their struggle in the public media and private archives, formed alliances with the agricultural sector and eventually with right-wing NGOs dedicated to fighting for Jewish sovereignty over the land⁶². Although they tried to stay out of politics and not be Zionist or state agents to fight the Bedouins, they established relationships with right-wing Knesset members. They also joined up with the local municipality which officially named the project “the Wine Route Farms Project” and presented it as a regional initiative that is promoted, to this day, to rebrand Negev tourism and agriculture as a high-end and high-quality environment. Tourism has thus replaced the State’s traditional role in protecting agricultural lands through a high consumption-based model.

In October 2009, at the time of the violent incidents in Avdat and nearby Bedouin villages, after two years of court eviction notices, the Negev farmers managed to persuade several right-wing Knesset members (including Israel Hasson of Kadima and Robert Illatuv from Israel Beytenu) to promote a specially tailored law that would provide a mechanism to retroactively legalize the farms through an amendment to the NDA (Negev Development Authority) law. The State, represented by Hasson and Illatuv and several other Knesset members used the media and the debates to present the farmers not only as Zionist pioneers of Negev/Naqab settlement and the law as a public service to Jewish interests by supporting a continuous band of Jewish settlement, protecting the land from Bedouin land grabs and uncontrolled expansion, but also as promoting the “peripheral” economic development of the Negev/Naqab via tourism.

But tourism as such was also attacked as well by the leaders of the farmers’ movement, some of whom perceived themselves as avid environmentalists, who were opposed to green organization which they saw as opportunistic and merely a way of accruing capital. They not only objected to further building and development on the farms in the desert’s sensitive ecological lands but also questioned the farms’ disavowal of Israel’s national planning guidelines and the fencing off of highly valued and sensitive public lands, on an unprecedented scale, within the Negev nature reserves.

The NPA and the SPNI recruited scientists from Negev desert academic institutions (themselves previous employees of the environmental movement in Israel) to conduct an initial study to evaluate the “impact of lights, fencing, and agriculture on nearby nature reserves and ecological corridors”. The study was designed to identify changes in

⁶² Regavim, the movement for the protection of national lands, that explicitly targets Bedouins and works to advertise the Negev as the ungovernable region of the wild south was the key partner.

biodiversity around the farms. It showed that the new “Green Line” formed by the farms from the northern Negev highlands to the south was attracting new invasive species that were now embedded along and around the green belt of the farms. The findings characterized the Green Line of the farms from an ecological perspective as working like a “green wall” or a “green barrier” since, from a biodiversity standpoint, it created two disconnected desert ecologies, East and West of the farms, and separated them, thus curtailing the movement of local species (Groener, Orenstein, and Tal 2012).

Environmental conservation, Zionist development and Avdat as “good ecology”

The response of green organizations to private tourism initiatives on the farms positioned the farmers within a binary in which State development and Zionism clashed with conservation and opposed each other. The farmers’ response to the green organizations’ critique of their farms (and their former environmentalist allies) was virulent, and created a rupture between farmers who used to be green organization workers and activists, and current day green activist and organizations. The farmers viewed the green objections as extreme biocentrism, a narrow old-fashioned take on conservation and the criticism as personal and based on jealousy and their own secret desires to have a farm. Despite framing themselves off-record as self-made entrepreneurs and desert lovers rather than Zionist, the farmers positioned the green conservationist organizations within the historical environmental binary legacy in which settlers are Zionist and developers, and green conservationists opposing state development are anti-Zionist, similar to the ways they were presented in the Hula era. In their campaign, initiated by the head of the regional council Rifman, they handed out a bumper sticker in which Ben Gurion’s famous apocryphal saying about the Negev (“In the Negev will be tested the capacity of the people of Israel for science and research”) was re-phrased to : “In the Negev the people of Israel will be tested despite the Society for the Protection of Nature.” This new interpretation of Ben Gurion’s vision into overcoming green organizations’ effort to sabotage them, situated the farmers as Zionist despite their declared reluctance to be seen as such. It also set the farmers against the SPNI which since the Lake Hula days have been accused in popular framings of development projects as the Zionist enemy but in fact have been disciples of Zionist environmentalism, as will be shown in the last chapter.

A Zionist reporter from the development town of Yeroham and a supporter of Negev development published an article entitled “The Sacred Desolation” with the subtitle “if the settlers of solitary farms protecting State lands are highly ecologically aware, why is the SPNI trying to dismantle them?” In the article the SPNI is described as damaging the desert ecology by promoting a conservation of desolation. This is further corroborated by the KKL’s description of the farmers as pioneers “pulling the desert away from stagnation” and another bumper sticker issued by the farmers targeted Meni Mazuz who was then the state comptroller declaring “Meni Mazuz we are here and we will not move.” The bumper sticker had the shape of the flag of Israel.

In a 2003 article in Haaretz, Rifman admitted that yuppie tourism was one of the main goals of the project, but a secondary one. The main one was the enclosure of the land to impede Bedouin settlement. “The Zionism of 2003 is the Jewish settlement of the Negev and the Galilee”. He also expressed concerns that the Bedouins would become members of the regional council and encouraged the farmers to present the SPNI as anti-Zionist by

wrongly describing them as “super radical thinking that Jewish settlement is only between Gedera and Hadera (two central cities north and south of Tel Aviv”... “ why don’t they protect the “open spaces” ? They are elitist leftists who would rather sit in Tel Aviv and leave the Negev empty for weekend hikes.” (Chremchenko, 2003). In so doing, he cast farmers who had previously worked for the SPNI as right -wing settlers.

Environmental conservation, Zionist development and Avdat as “good ecology”

To become legal and green, tourism had to be reinterpreted and provide the Negev something with more than “economic opportunities.” Accordingly, it is perceived as having high moral values which would attract high quality people, and produce a healthier environment. Avdat was selected for this task to provide a new context (and a new vision of conservation) for the farms project that would replace the image of the Negev/Naqab as a Bedouin, ungovernable wild south, with a harsh and uncertain future climate. Avdat connected the desert to global environmental trends and to global markets trends, as well as to regions that are seen as more cultural and less arid. Although providing a global context for the farm conservation vision may help overcome green objections it does not mean refraining from Zionism, given that the type of good ecology Avdat and the farms promote is Western, Jewish and devoid of Bedouins particularly given the Zionist environmental legacy and expertise it represents⁶³.

In response to the green organizations but also against State narrations of the farms as merely supporting Negev security and territories, the farmers, particularly from the founding group described their project first and foremost as benefitting the desert ecology, and themselves as the real desert guardians and experts. Out of at least 25 farmer families, half were connected somehow to environmental institutions in the Negev at some point. Others were farmers who had served in combat units and only a handful were residents of neighboring development towns. As the owners of Orlia exemplified, the farms settlement project was enmeshed for them and supported by what they saw as an ecological ethos.

Assisted by local authorities and researchers, the farmers have employed a Zionist environmental imagination in which good ecology is supported and pursued by “locally suitable, and deeply historical forms” of tourist agriculture and settlement. These two geopolitical (State declared) and environmental (farmer declared) imaginations are not contrasting or different. They share the same understanding of the nature of the desert and its residents (Jews and Bedouin), understanding of its appropriate management, and environmental history underpins them both.

For the farmers, and the regional council of the Negev Highlands who supported the farms, Avdat became the drumbeat and the inspiration of this project. Specifically, the

⁶³ The ways farmers are associated with the project was criticized by activists and planners from Bimokom: “There is a clear portrait of the potential farmer: Jew, usually Ashkenazi but not ultra -orthodox who have been immersed in Israel. This is less than 20% of the population, it is the group that since the beginning of Zionism have worked on upgrading its status; today this is done through land manipulation.”(Tzfadia in Chremchenko, 2003). Rifman utilized this criticism himself when he described the farmers as “the salt of the earth”, saying “this (the farm project) isn’t suitable for new immigrants or the orthodox.”

environmental legacy it represents and the type of Negev ecology that was (controversially) presented as its positive and direct result, qualified the farms project in terms of both development and conservation. Its reconstructed environmental history and its legacy was supported by national science, media, the State and the environmentalists who hoped to become solitary farmers themselves. The “good ecology of the Negev” it represented was interpreted in terms of settlement, hard work, and as the opposite of Bedouin settlement and practices. The legislative process included Jews and excluded Bedouin efforts for recognition on similar grounds.

Edenic, biblical, and Zionist desert—where conservation and development converge

Deserted archeological sites of the Negev/Naqab like Avdat strengthened and inspired the self-perception of Zionist settlements as a theological or biblical climate with the transformational power to remake the desert bloom (Novick, 2021;2023; Gottesman, Novick, Ginat, Hasson, & Cohen, 2021). Zionist settlements in the Negev/Naqab drew their inspiration and justification from depictions of the climate of the Negev/Naqab as an agricultural area that was left abandoned in late antiquity⁶⁴. The old cities that were founded by the Nabataeans in the second century BCE were later conquered by the Romans and then expanded by the Byzantines into independent agricultural settlements. They were deserted from the 7th to the 10th century during the Arab conquest, leaving thousands of agricultural terraces, flour mills, wine and oil presses, and other agricultural structures in the valleys around them (Langgut, D., Tepper, Y., Benzaquen, M., Erickson-Gini, T., & Bar-Oz, G. 2021). Avdat, like these other cities, was a site of historical and ecological success and captured the British and then the Zionist imagination and development ambitions. The ancient agricultural terraces, the wine pressers and flour producing structures, were the antithesis to what they saw as desertification and decline that followed, in the Arab era and the question of the cities’ success given the region arid climate and their later decline triggered surveys that revealed their remains.

Researchers remain divided as to why they were abandoned. The determinists blame processes of global climate change in which the arid zone shifted north (Issar & Zohar, 2007). Others put forward a more political historical-ideological explanation that determination and hard work shaped their productivity and success (Avni, G., 1994; Avni, Y., Porat, N., Plakht, J. and Avni, G., 2006. Avni, Y., Avni, G. & Porat, N., 2019). Zionist ideologies adopted the social-cultural explanation because it helped promote the claim that the Negev/Naqab thrived as a result of hard work under climatic conditions similar to the present.

In 1959, an experimental research station was founded below the Avdat historical site by Prof. Michael Evenari with the support of Hebrew University and the government. To this day the site is still a university research station. Evenari was a German-born and educated botanist who also served as the Vice President of the Hebrew University. Along with other Israeli scientists who studied potential types of farming in Palestine/Israel he moved to a house built for him at the station and tried to restore the systems of old terraces

⁶⁴ “Left abandoned is convenient way to reiterate the narrative of “empty land”. Archeologist approve that life in the region continued albeit in different ways. Machrab (Muslims praying niche) are visible within Avdat’s and Shivta’s cathedrals. See next paragraph for a more accurate explanation of this popular narrative.

and dams and a method of capturing runoff water to small reservoir and terraces. Evenari and his team were able to show they could restore 400 mm of water out of the annual 100 cm of rainfall. Their first successful wheat and barley crop was used to support their argument that the climate was not necessarily more humid in previous eras but rather was the result of hard work on the agricultural settlement and investment in frontier settlements that made desert bloom. Given that the Negev/Naqab towns were deserted after the Arab conquest, the scientists identified this neglect with individuals they lumped together as “Arabs”. Bedouins, who were evidently still present in the Negev after the Byzantines were left, remained unexplored and overlooked and sources such as Palmer’s quote above were used to strengthen this claim. However, despite the strong and consistent rejection of the climate explanation on the part of scientists, the cultural explanation as presented by Palmer and Evenari continued to be put forward, although it has been challenged by more recent studies (Ibid 2006; Langgut, D., Tepper, Y., Benzaquen, M., Erickson-Gini, T. & Bar-Oz, G., 2021.)

Some researchers have cited the Negev’s agricultural decline in wine production whereas others have referred to the geopolitical decisions of empires to divest from their investment and centers for different market-related reasons. Research haven’t supported yet the claim that the Negev lands were not worked for agricultural purpose by Bedouins. Rather, research and the Negev/Naqab landscape has shown that over the years Bedouins, like the ancient desert farmers, learned to build dams and terraces to control runoff water and collect it to water their fields in the valleys. Hence many see Avdat as the Bedouins’ own environmental legacy. They thus may have been the only ones to preserve agricultural knowledge of the desert and develop old and new infrastructures. In the 1950s, according to Evenari’s diary on “The Awakening Desert” some were hired to help the research station and were described as more helpful and knowledgeable in working the land than the Jewish work force that was assembled (Weitzsman, 2015.p.26).

This nevertheless did not alter the Zionist conviction that continued to cite Palmer, the British orientalist who described the Bedouins in the Negev/Naqab in 1869 as "bringing desolation and violence" (Palmer in Even Ari 1971 p. 287). Avdat, as Jewish site of exploration and development, linked older views of the Bedouin as harmful to the desert with the present. The Evenari farm still serves today as a university research station for desert agriculture. The Evenari house was sold as a solitary farm to a dentist, who, in December 2015, expressed no interest in the house beyond utilizing it as a business and sold it eventually to entrepreneurs⁶⁵.

The history of Avdat has been appropriated by the Jewish State’s narrative and scientific research in a way similar to views of Bedouin incompetence in the Hula valley. Farmers and supporters of the farms project quickly adopted these legacies that presented farming as a symbol of civilization and resistance to Arab barbarism that justified State violence against the Bedouins.

In 2009, the attack on Avdat took place in the immediate aftermath of evacuations and demolitions in adjacent Bedouin villages – one of many that occurs each time Bedouins are caught building a new structure or sheep shed. The unusual choice of Avdat may have been rooted in what Avdat represented in terms of the evacuation of the solitary farm

⁶⁵ Interview with O, December 2015.

project which was on the table at that time for another vote in the Knesset through a retroactive legislation process

Several months after the violence, in a wine- producing farm hundreds of meters south of Avdat, a wine grower I visited in May 2010 told me about Michael Evenari's celebratory tone when he discovered that the agricultural sites in the area were Israelite. He explained how this inspired Jews in the 1990s to come up with a settlement and development project based on the same imagery:

"We did not come here just like that. History brought us to the Negev/Naqab. Think for a moment about the past. Look around you. You probably know what used to be here. Farms from King David's times. Before the Nabateans and after, Byzantine farms, a very large settlement. Do you know Evenari's book about the Negev/Naqab? Aerial photos were taken and apparently, this entire region was populated with farms! Big, small, in each corner here, there are archeological remains. There are very ancient terraces here in each wadi (riverbed) until the late Arab period in which... well I don't know who was here during these centuries but it was not settled. Maybe they used (this area), maybe they grew something, but they did not settle here, there were not any structures. Except these. So we have Halutza, a center from the Roman era, there was a hippodrome there so this is big... and then you have the area of Ruheiba where tens of thousands of people lived. It seems... that all along the riverbeds there were thousands of farms, the estimate is that several hundred thousand people made a living from the route ... from tourists, let's call them traders. Traders who travelled ... to the Mediterranean and passed by and someone had to give them something to eat, a place to sleep, a tourism of the past. So, we are kind of new tourist site."

In a TV broadcast on Channel 2, a farmer from the Mitzpe Ramon area who was struggling to legalize his farm was interviewed by reporter Roni Daniel. Daniel described the region as a future fancy cheese and wine site if the region is only given a chance to engage in cultural renaissance and development. Another farmer explained on the show that: "We have been given the opportunity to work 3000 year old terraces from the days of King Solomon." The farmers' project was further connected to ancient times by the archeologist Igal Israel who described the ancient wine industry as the camera panned across Avdat and the current-day farms in the background thus drawing a visual connection between the two:

"People here grew grapes, and produced wine which served, I'd say, the entire Mediterranean. It is simple, there was an immense export here. We were Bordeaux, we were Tuscany, we were the Napa Valley. We were a huge wine empire. I'd say maybe we even taught the others how to make wine"⁶⁶

The violence in Avdat was therefore an attack on a symbol of what justified new Jewish settlement projects in the Negev/Naqab which at the same time resisted recognizing existing Bedouins settlements. Avdat was recruited by experts and farmers to position the farm as a direct lineage of King David's time during which people of the region – hard working entrepreneurs – made a living from agriculture and tourism. In this narrative, there was a hiatus during the Arab conquest (although archeologists debate its scale and nature) in which agriculture continued but not settlement activity. Today's solitary farmers represent a return to a time in which the Negev/Naqab was Western (Tuscany and Napa are the point of reference). This fancy cultural heritage and tourism is seen as a higher value from a spiritual, ecological, and cultural perspective. Many of the farmers connected their everyday lives and the names of their farms, to the ancient settlements. Y. told me

⁶⁶ <http://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/education/Article-6e2756e17237c31004.htm>

about his collaboration with archeologists, to explore the past, and warned that returning the Negev/Naqab to Bedouin hands would cause the region to decline to its state of ruin during the Arab conquest.

Initial Bedouins responses

On a sunny March day at 10:00 am during one of the debates on the farm project in the Knesset economy committee led by Knesset member Hasson, many people had already gathered in the lobby outside the room where the economy committee was discussing the farms' legal status. Within the crowd of the lawyers' black and white tailored suits, Knesset members, journalists and NGO invited representatives, the Negev residents including farmers, Negev public officials, and several Bedouins stood out: the farmers in loose buttoned checkered shirts and dusty work shoes, and slacks; women in cotton and linen dresses worn over long wide legs pants and clogs, and the Bedouin men's delegation in traditional galabias and white kafias.

However, meeting the people I had interviewed several months previously on their Negev farms in the formal setting of the Knesset was entirely different. The different groups kept to themselves, despite knowing each other: the Bedouins with their representative activists, the NGO's and their lawyers, journalists and research students. Y, the owner of Orliya, who was serving as the head organizer of the farmers with whom I had kept in constant contact throughout the entire year and who was the one to remind me about the Knesset debate nodded to me from afar as though he were keeping a safe distance and limiting his exchanges to his fellow farmers; other farmers nodded from afar as well.

The other noticeable group from the Negev was the small Bedouin delegation, led by Ibrahim Abu Kaf, the head of the "council of unrecognized Bedouin villages" and NGO that was founded as a representative body for all the unrecognized Bedouin villages that could not belong or were not represented by any local formal municipality. Abu Kaf was accompanied by two other Bedouin residents I did not know then. I looked at the three men, who were much older at least in appearance than any other person entering the room. But in some ways bore striking similarities to the Negev farmers. Just like the farmers they ignored the formal setting by wearing white galabias over sarwals and the traditional Bedouin kafias and keeping to themselves. The Negev people as a group remarkably and consciously manifested their difference from the formal urban institutional setting as tough they were forced to negotiate with it but weren't part of. But it was noticeable that Bedouins were fewer than the farmers and did not speak or interfere in the meeting. They were consulting from time to time with NGOs activists. It seems like they needed translation of the order of things or of things said during the meetings.

During discussions over the future of the farms in the Knesset, the Bedouins and the Palestinians representative pointed out that the contracts the farmers signed with the State were very similar to those signed by unrecognized Bedouin villages in terms of their planning status. Bedouins supporters in Knesset discussion made an effort to be included under the same legislative umbrella as the farmers. The tensions in the lobby were apparently due to the farmers' fear this would completely sabotage their efforts. Off the record, however, the farmers did not want to sabotage the Bedouins either. The Bedouins who attended the meeting were represented by the only Bedouin Knesset member Taleb a Sana (a lawyer from Lakia, a half recognized Bedouin village) and Palestinian Knesset

member Hana Swaid (from Hadash, previously the communist party that took a position against the farms). An expert from the Bimkom organization (planners for human rights) suggested looking into traditional agriculture practices as an overall framework for the law, rather than discussing the solitary farmers' problem. Taleb al Sana suggested offering the Bedouins a form of living that is not urban, but these efforts were rejected and avoided time and again, with different justifications. Hasson reiterated that the farm problem is simple and urgent and the Bedouin problem is complicated. Others dismissed the appeal by saying that Bedouins had been offered many solutions and had refused to accept them. At some point Taleb al Sana turned to Robert Illatuv and said:

"In the Negev/Naqab there are more than 120 different Jewish settlements including kibbutzim, agricultural settlements, community settlements, and development towns.... For the Bedouins who make up 30% of the Negev/Naqab population there is not one legal settlement to this day, only 7 settlements of the same kind-- urban enforced townships! There is nothing for people who are in agriculture or tourism! Let's get together to find a solution to this problem and end the division between you and us".⁶⁷

Taleb al Sana expressed a desire for one Green Line in which different forms of agro-tourism would be established to promote Negev/Naqab development and equality. Over more than eight months the law was discussed time and again before it was brought to a vote. Swaid and al Sana tried, after the debate in March 2010, to change the way the law was worded to allow for the Bedouins to reopen the debate on the violation of their civil rights. Eventually amendment 4 was expanded to include environmental protection and passed.

Nevertheless, the Bedouin situation has not changed legally or materially. The new amendment is important for a better understanding of the violence in Avdat and the way environmental management language deprives Bedouins' entitlements and excludes them from the land. What enabled farm legalization – namely, environmental improvement by private entrepreneurs, and the connection to the land described by so many of the farmers – worked against the Bedouins. Bedouins' desire, as expressed by Al Sana, to work in agriculture and tourism, the same desire as that expressed by the solitary farmers, was seen as a threat in their case. Environmental legacies (and the narrative presented via the history of Avdat) have shaped possibilities for Arabs and Jews in different and uneven ways- by encouraging Jewish conservation visions and denying all civil rights related to land (including water, energy, roads, sewage) for the Bedouins.

The law addressed the herding contracts between the farmers and the state and added multiple elements and expansions. Now farmers can live on the land, or have residence for the "holder of the real estate" to promote agriculture and tourism. This constituted a reframing of the previous version of the law in a way that planning regulations were bypassed and was also designed to define land rights and leasing for generations to come regardless of planning procedures. It was eventually framed as designed to protect the environment and distinguish the farmers from Bedouins:

⁶⁷ Knesset member Taleb al Sana to Knesset member Robert Illatuv, Knesset Economic Committee. March 2010.

“The Negev development authority act voted in the Knesset on July 12, 2010 authorizes the Negev development authority to set down rules and norms to recognize the farms and let them use the Negev land for agricultural and tourist purposes including building permits for residency of the farm owners. As for existing farms, the law defines a series of measures that will allow for the continuity of settlement on the land and retroactively recognize the farms. Regularizing the status of the farms corresponds to the government’s official policy as formulated in the government secretary’s statement on July 15, 2007 with regard to the appointment of an interministerial committee which was set up to formalize the status of existing solitary farmers and which recommended a procedure to the government for the establishment and development of more solitary farms in the Negev and the Gallilee”⁶⁸

Attached below to the amendment for the NDA law, July 2010, there is an explanation for its reason that manifest well how settlement for territorial purpose entail and operated through ecological reason - “ the integration of agricultural and touristic development plays an important role in battling desertification while maintaining ecological balance and environmental protection.....”

Privately Green: The Entrepreneurial Desert and the New Nature Guardians

The Negev farmers deployed environmental discourses, legacies, and practices that have been at the heart of Zionist development and environmental ethos since the Hula days, as their propaganda and as their mission. These legacies are based on reclaiming and interpreting the environmental history of the Negev in ways that connect Jews with the West and with ancient times when the Negev was productive (had agriculture). But rather than simply recycling these settlements and this environmental-agro ethos, the Green Line formed by the farm project has given new meanings and new life to these legacies by articulating them into present market logics and forms of private development while authorizing the State to renege on its responsibilities to marginalized regions and communities.

Avdat enables the farmers who were reluctant to being depicted as state soldiers to become the new nature guardians rather than the state guardians by connecting them to a biblical past and a better climate. Zionism is now based on understandings of progress, dead land, desolation, modernity and agriculture. It involves global ecology, fighting desertification, but also the global economy supported by free market values which in the pre-State Zionist period were valued as well, such as entrepreneurship, self-help, scientific expertise, self-realization (or redemption) and sufficiency. As Hirsch told me on one of my visits where I found him rebuilding his roof: “I have built this roof myself 5 times,” and continued “success is about learning from failures.”

These values work well with the loose bureaucracy or “flexible planning” that characterized pre-state Zionist settlement, but also settler colonial projects in general (including settlements beyond the Green Line) and the Negev desert today.

The farmers, perhaps not in words but in practice, overlook and dismiss the Bedouins’ settlement history and their agricultural legacies and methods, despite the fact that they can provide better guidance on the ecological improvement of this arid zone. They

⁶⁸ The Negev Development Authority Law, correction #4 -2010 registered in the Knesset 12/7/2010

see their mission as reviving the Green Line of Nabataean farms that can create a greener cooler desert “on their own”, and “from scratch” as self-made entrepreneurs with private capital and as solitary actors, rather than in a community type of settlement or support. For that purpose, they have explored technologies and created partnerships with scientists who now view the farms as new sites where nature in the Negev/Naqab can be saved or reproduced as green.⁶⁹

The Green Lines of the Wine Route can thus be seen as a form of State eco-management, a regime that uses external experts, numbers, investors, maps and experiments to try to better the land, put limits on pastoralist and hiker traffic, organizes local and new species, and justifies the private enclosure of lands and even some national archeological sites. These lines have also engendered a new type of environmental subjects: the nature guardians that replace the State guardians. Today, State funds and support for the historical public green institution of the Negev, as well as Negev development and security are less needed because they are provided through the privatization of lands as well as private environmental management.

I. and Y., the owners of the tightly-fenced wine farm they named “Daat” (Wisdom) to promote the farm as “a place of self-learning” described the Negev/Naqab as an area that has been deteriorating since the Moslem era. Above and beyond their own personal motivations, they aim to “revive the Green Line of Nabatean farms that extended along what today is Highway 40”. To do so, they told me that they “do research and invite experts, consult with international wine specialists, and experts from the Ministry of Agriculture to explore Nabatean methods of utilizing water to *improve* the desert that was not only settled but cooler by 10 degrees some say”. The return of agricultural productivity to the desert entails mapping areas, calculations, and science to improve soil management and wine quality, but it may lead to the deterioration of other forms of life. This is what justifies closing off these farms’ (public) lands to outsiders. If this is a conservation vision, it is not very different in practical terms from what the farmers criticized as the green organization’s bio-centric and anti-human conservation practices. This environmental reform is taking place through private rather than State enclosures (what Dempsey (2016) described as conservation by accumulation). As a territorial project, this process is taking place through a privatized environmental reform, (accumulation by conservation) and the Green Lines reproduce the Negev as a frontier social ecology (Watts, M.J., 2012; Weizman, 2007). The farmers are not only Zionists who green the desert, or the exclusive heirs of ancient wisdom or the representatives of new globally renewed ecologies. Rather, they work to produce

⁶⁹ There are scientific debates over how this will support or harm the desert ecology and services in desert ecologies. The famers’ intentions may be good and perhaps for some may not even be merely a material interest. Many farmers are also motivated by the liberal rationale of improvement. Together with their fellow bureaucrats they can be seen as what Tania Li (2007) called “trustees” –new types of experts seeking the proper, right and optimal management of people and things. However, development for Li remains colonial and as Dempsey showed (2016, p.7) benevolent actors seeking neutral improvement are still deeply embedded in colonial circuitry and power relations and that liberal ideals are often tied up with material interests.

capital for some, utilizing the lack of order and authority (Moore, 2015, p.107; Barreta & Markoff, 2006) to create climate precarity, crime and violence for others⁷⁰.

E. and H., both of whom were farmers and key environmental education figures in the Negev and some of the most successful farmers today attest to this process in the opening quotes of this chapter, but also on their own website and in private conversations. The couple went to the Negev in the early 1980s from the north to work in environmental education at the Sde Boker field school and the Mitzpe Ramon NPA Educational center. On their farm online archive they explain that-

“After years of wandering around the local trails, canyons, ancient farms and orchards, studying geology, botany, zoology and archeology, and absorbing other desert legacies in Australia, Morocco and the Sinai they realized the importance of authentic legacies. They fell in love with the Negev. Their experience and the knowledge that shaped their life are the data base for their everyday lives on the farm, and since they were living in the Negev (working for environmental institutions) the vision to *return the Negev to its glory and restore an ancient farm* was born...”⁷¹

In the conversation we had at the farm, E. and H. told me how they did not want to live on a kibbutz or moshav and initially tried to start a new settlement. On their online website they describe their “ascendance [aliyah] to the land” (a Zionist term from the 19th and early 20th century for starting a settlement): “During the Sukkot holiday in 1998 we have ascended to the land: bare desert. Not a tree nor bush welcomed us and only the ancient terraces were silent witness to the bustling life which existed here in the past.”⁷²

Bare desert corresponds to the European/Zionist development ethos that endows a positive value to the science, technology and Green Lines the farm has brought: Solar energy, recycled wastewater, and fighting global warming are the new meanings and markers of this new progress. But bare desert is also an erasure of social life that the Bedouin residents have maintained in this region for hundreds of years, and is an erasure and negation of a natural and social landscape for future possibilities rather than the reworking of all of them for shared co-existence.

E. and H. are no longer involved in desert environmental education. Instead, they now offer the public a desert encounter in new ways that replace the ways the State used to fund and provide education. The farm website under the heading of “keeping ecology in mind” lists ecological tours at the farms as “part of the ideology of the Wine Route Project”. The tour includes a presentation of the farm’s ecological lifestyle as well as traditional agriculture and wine tasting. The Zionist hiking culture in which physical effort was connected to the consolidation of national identity (Arieli, 1993) has been replaced by new moral behavior that connects hedonism with self-medication and healing, luxurious B&Bs (children are not allowed on the farm), and wine and cheese consumption. The protection of some archeological sites and their preservation is now under the responsibility and care of individuals. E. and H. are proud that the farm incorporates ancient stone paintings of desert animals. Desert value is shaped by the price the farmers place on it, and the screening

⁷⁰ In the concluding chapter, I discuss how desert Bedouins’ illegality and lack of infrastructure have produced a new realm of illegality such as renewable energy, illegal cannabis markets and others.

⁷¹ <https://www.carmeyavdat.com/about-us>

⁷² *ibid*

of tourists (who can pay and who are allowed to enter). Public institutions of environmental education are out, and no longer available. The Green Lines are tourist sites that have replaced the Zionist desert legacies with high consumption rooted in the environmental imagination of the upper classes.⁷³ On the one hand the farmers offer an encounter and experience in the desert that draws on the traditional Zionist connection with nature to promote eco-practices and sustainable conduct. But there is an essential difference between the ways in which these sensibilities to the desert were structured previously by the State and the ways nature is now identified with privacy.

Whereas previously State institutions were responsible for producing knowledge about the desert that was passed on to the public, school children and soldiers, it is now produced and disseminated by individuals with different motivations and agendas. The means through which farmers garner support and make connections with audiences of their choice are also means through which their environmental legacy and the environmental experience they offer, serve to accumulate wealth. This is how these new sites have not only become green lungs in the previously barren desert, but also sites of knowledge production and representation of the desert that replace former State institutions. Through the farmers, the role of the State in the Negev is no longer to guard nature, promote safety, or prevent crime or to protect or guarantee access to services or infrastructure. The State provides a platform for settlers to act privately and promote connections to desert through private agro-tourism. In rare cases the farms are open to group visits, but mostly they provide private experiences of their own narratives and stories.

The farm project Green Line forms a detached space and material, social and ecological boundaries. These are drawn not only between Bedouins and Jews and between different non-humans species but also between different classes. It presents the Negev/Naqab as a place that can more easily be part of the type of national collective Zionist narrative that attracts investors.

The novel “the Hill” by Asaf Gavron begins with the following paragraph:

“what did Atniel Assis ask for? Grow some Arugula and cherry tomatoes for his wife rache’s salad? To milk a goat? He found a hill with a small field, and put a container there, and got a generator. He founded an NGO. Then an Access axis was opened, and on a winter night five trailers were placed near the farm. The Brigadir General arrived, spirits were heated and the civil administration said that there was no permission to place the trailers but there was also no permission to take them down. This is how the outpost Ma’ale Hermesh III was founded.” (Gavron, 2013,p.1).

The Hill is a novel written about one year in the life of a settler in the occupied Samaria Mountains. It takes place in a spontaneous outpost founded by Atniel, a sheriff settler who is capable of everything and who wishes to expand his land for organic growth he sells (unmarked) in Tel Aviv luxurious stores. The new outpost, draws water pipes, pave an improvised road, It is in part on Palestinian lands and in part on a nature reserve. It was never confirmed by the authorities but was never evicted, it was formed out of itself. The

⁷³ This might be the reason why the wine route map conceals the presence of development towns and emphasizes tourism as Jewish and rural.

book play and weave the two fantasies or caricatures of settlers in Israeli imagination as national Mitzvah disciples and as irrational outlaws.

Beyond fiction, recent (non-fiction) academic scholarship analyzed an emerging discourse in the West Bank settlements in recent years, which shifts the emphasis from biblical history, ideology, and security—to tourism, vineries, organic food and terroir. It points to usage of sophisticated wine language that enables the normalization of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank in a paradoxical way, emphasizing their location and blurring it at the same time (Groszlik, R., Handel, A. and Monterescu, D., 2021.; Handel, Ariel, Galit Rand, and Marco Allegra, 2015). I argue that “neoliberal environmentality” work in both cases to blur an ethnic territorial project.

The Green Lines within the Negev are similar to the 1967 Green Line that marks the boundaries between the occupied territories and Israel. They are spaces in which individualistic dreams of settlers vying for reasonably priced space, for freedoms, receive incentives for securing state internal and external boundaries, spaces in which planning laws are twisted and molded at the expense of the human and the physical environment. Apparently they do not only draw inspiration from the Green Line but have recently inspired its recantations in the form of organic and luxurious produce.

In these “open spaces” which Algazi astutely redefined as “open for colonization” farmers and settlers fulfill a dream they cannot realize in other territorial and settlement framework and regions, but in return, their freedom is limited –they liberate the state by taking over many services provided by the state in the past—security of the road, and main highways, prioritizing Negev/Naqab development, maintain environmental institution natural and archeological assets. These couldn’t be considered as private rather than state project even if the state is only present to deposits them.

Green Lines provide meaningful and practical space in which the relationship between Zionism as ethno territorial project and as a development project is weaved and performed through dreams of green cultivated desert (or swampland). The tensions and contradictions this raises are smoothed in the case of the farms through its Neoliberal Mentality (Lemke 2001): values such as self-reliance sufficiency and self-entrepreneurship that were central to the Zionist settlement prior to the state, grant the farm project new fame in a moment and a region where the state is blamed as neglectful helpless lacking authority and characterized by disorder. The environmentalism of the settlers become a Zionist settlement ethos rather than a movement of full liberation of individuals.

From a state perspective, Green Line repair the impression of a state negligent of pioneers that may scare away potential investors and force the government to attend more to the lack of governance in the Negev land. From a Bedouin perspective, contradictions aren’t smoothed and climate isn’t improved by the farms’ Green Line. Rather they experience this Green Line as further displacement, intensified climate experiences by denial or limits on seasonal mobilities, as well as access to energy and water.

Chapter 4

The “Tent Road”, alongside the “Wine Route”

Bedouins’ Green Line

“We are like air in the desert. no plastic, no trucks, no roads, no computers. We are light like a hair, we have never put a sign in the desert.” (S, Wadi Archica May 2017)

"In the desert, there is a law—the little you have the richest you are"

“...in the desert you don’t need much... Bedouins need one plate not plates ...no plants no factory.. one tray can feed 10 people we don’t have dishes... we are satisfied by very little.....When you go grazing you don't even use a plate, to make your bread you just spread the dough on a wide rock," (S, Wadi Aricha, 2015)

“Our animals had only positive effects on the desert, the black goat, now extinguished, used to be our supermarket and gave us everything- a home (today we need to ruin nature to build a house but we took the goat’s hair and we were weaving to have a winter tent, we used the meat to eat, the milk to drink, to make cheese and also dried it so it remains as an extra food. Milk is our medicine. Animals of the desert eat medicinal plants so their milk is medicinal.... And, there is also our soul who kept us well in the desert. Our soul used to be our other medicine. It used to be healthy and it is now sick. Excuse me for saying this... (S, talking to a group visiting his tent, 2018).

The above words are part of speeches given time and again by Salman Saidan, to various groups of visitors over the years at his hosting tent in Wadi Aricha (Aricha Valley or in Arabic Wadi Rayer which means the hidden valley). The Bedouin settlement of Aricha Valley is a landscape of tin huts, plastic tents, improvised fences, and, what may seem to outsider visitors like piles of junk between which goats, camels, donkeys, children, and women roam and play. Aricha Valley has no electrical grid, no real garbage facilities, or sewage infrastructures. Water is supplied through water tanks, plastic containers, and pipes that form an improvised grid of plastic pipes along the valley's slopes running for several km between tents, huts, and plots⁷⁴.

First-time visitors to the village often comment on the landscape, describing it as a hazardous dumpster, asking about the neglect, or why it is so unruly or chaotic. These popular depictions and impressions are typical interpretations and perceptions of the current Bedouin lifestyle in the Negev/Naqab and have become markers of Bedouin environments and bodies. Often, they are attached to moral evaluations of the Bedouins or interpreted as culturally inherent behavior. They resonate with the Zionist past (and present) environmental narrative of the desert as wasteland, barren, degraded landscape by grazing. They present Bedouins as degrading the environment, or as simply “out of place” (McKee, 2015). In the context of the regions’ ongoing ethnic strife over land, these

⁷⁴ The Bedouins of Aricha also pull improvised pipes of water from the main road (highway 40) where the main pipe of the Israel water carrier passes. Initially, the government created holes in the pipe so Bedouins, in need of water for sheep (which the government replaced for black goats) would be attracted to stay close to the highway, rather than deeper in the desert. Since 2020 the Bedouins have been charged for the water they draw from the pipe, by a private company, a price for home consuming, much higher than the price paid by Jewish farmers despite the lack of a grid or choice for alternative sources of water.

ecological and environmental observations carry considerable social and political weight. They reinforce depictions by popular media of the Negev/Naqab/Naqab as the “wild south” (see chapter 3) and often justify the need to improve and repair both Bedouins and their landscapes, as well as the desert, whether by negating the Bedouins' entitlements to the land, dislocating them through demolitions and evictions, or by redeveloping their settlements and ways of life.

Interpretations of what disturbs a landscape and degrades the environment have been contested in the past two decades in critical waste scholarship as well as in studies of grazing and pastoralism in anthropology, geography, and ecology. Waste scholars describe waste as an imaginative resource or as a political critique (Gidwani, 2013; Moore, 2012; Dillon, 2014). McKee (2015) showed how Bedouin residents of the Negev/Naqab often internalize external “trash talk” and suggested juxtaposing the “trash talk” of Jewish and Bedouin settlements in the Negev/Naqab through the framework of political dwelling to emphasize the realms of power and the historical processes operating to delegitimize Bedouin settlements.

Grazing has been considered as degrading and causing desertification since the British Mandate. And since the 1920s and the 1930s goats and their herders were framed as a threat to the state⁷⁵. Zionist policies in the 1950s legalized the “Plant Protection Laws” under which black goats were outlawed and significant limits on grazing areas were posed particularly on Palestinian livestock⁷⁶. However, in the past two decades and particularly since the big fires on Carmel Mountain in Israel in 2010, research has re-evaluated grazing and many studies showed the multiple contributions of goats to both natural forests and more recently the desert (Perevolotski, A., 1997; Stavi, I., Perevolotsky, A. and Avni, Y., 2010). Serious efforts are made by different nature management authorities such as KKL and Ministry of Agriculture and the NPA to return grazing particularly of goats and very recently of camels⁷⁷ which evokes interest among forestry scholars, as well as soil scientists and land management authorities such as the KKL and the NPA.⁷⁸

Aricha Valley is located about 5 km north of Mitzpe Ramon, in Israel's Negev/Naqab Highlands between several solitary farms. The village is nestled, west and off Highway 40 in the wadi (in Arabic-- dry riverbed) of the Aricha stream. About 32 different families live within this community--200 people approximately. They are all part

⁷⁵ See Jarvis, Governor of Sinai in the “Palestine Post” lumping together “the goat, the camel and the Arab are the destroyers of the desert” (11.10. 1934)

⁷⁶ The law was titled “Plant Protection Law (Goat harms)” and was received on 10.8.1950 (See Novick 2021).

⁷⁷ Camels are still outlawed in Israel and have only recently been rediscovered as extremely picky eaters and resilient to climate change which evokes new interest in them. See the next part of this chapter.

⁷⁸ In fact, the science behind the extermination of goats was contested already in 1978 by Prof. Michael Even-Haa'ri the pioneer Botanist from the Hebrew University who ran the experimental agricultural station in Nabatean Avdat. In a letter to the government copied also as a letter to the editorial system of the Jerusalem Post he adamantly refuted claims related to harm caused by both Bedouins and their flocks, Criticizing the Green Patrol for enforcing them. (15.6.1978).

of the Sarahin group of the Azzama tribe. Sarahin are proud of their reputation as generous hosts.

The Bedouin tribes who presently live in the Negev/Naqab highlands – are the southmost point of Bedouin presence in Israel and the most traditional communities left in Israel. They had been living in this arid environment for at least 150 years before the establishment of the State of Israel (Kressel, 2003a; 2003b; Yahel et al., 2012). As semi-nomadic Bedouin shepherds, they used to seasonally migrate within their pasturelands, according to pasture availability (Meir & Tzoar, 1996). During these times, Bedouins lived within a system of inter-clan and inter-tribal arrangements regarding control, ownership, and management of territorial and ecological resources (Meir, 2009).

Aricha Valley was created as a “temporary settlement” in the late 1970s, following the peace agreement of Israel-Egypt, the withdrawal of the Israeli military from the Sinai Peninsula to the Negev/Naqab desert, and the declaration of most of the Negev/Naqab Highlands area as nature reserves and military zones. Four clans (extended families--Al-Abis, Sidan, Krinig, and Ratimat connected also by marriage relations) were brought here together to settle in this valley at the edge of the nature reserve/military training zone, a legally enclosed area where grazing and residing are prohibited by the State. By this transfer, they were made a community. Before being settled here some of the families would arrive at Wadi Aricha once a year from the southern area where they resided, for the harvest season and stayed until the winter.

Unrecognized Bedouin villages, such as Aricha are still considered even after 40 years on the land, “temporary”. The government has planned to settle the Bedouins in designated urban settlements. They are not represented by any local municipality and are not provided with basic services such as sewage or electricity (Gottlieb et al., 2011) or any civic rights that connect them to the place. Health and education services exist only in nearby towns. In addition, unrecognized Bedouin villages, Aricha included, are deprived of their rangelands and livelihood due to proximity to nature reserves and military zones. This challenges Bedouins' traditional lifestyle and livelihood and subjects them to rapid socio-economic decline and socio-cultural transition and disruption. Negev/Naqab Bedouin communities are currently the weakest socioeconomic group in Israeli society with the highest underemployment rates (Rudnitzky, 2011)⁷⁹. House and crop demolitions are the government's main (violent) means to stop the spatial spread and development of Bedouin communities.

The place of Bedouins within Zionist environmental legacy is precarious, and their continuous presence on the Negev/Naqab challenges Zionist environmental discourses. In Zionist thinking (and earlier in the Mandate period) the Negev/Naqab can stay wild and “natural” as long as Bedouins are more natural than social and fit the binary in which Jewish is modern and Bedouin in need of modernization. As long as “Green Lines” offered modernizing through Jewish industrial mass agriculture, Zionist common sense was that the erasure of “nature” as well as local cultures are part of modernizing. Once agro-tourism was realized as having better chances in the Negev/Naqab and small farms based on

⁷⁹ See for up-to-date data on the Negev/Naqab co-existence forum <https://www.dukium.org/reports-and-position-papers/>

Nabataean/Byzantine models and small-scale local farming were promoted, agricultural settlement in the Negev/Naqab undermined modernization narratives. In other words, once the Green Line reason of the Hula and the northern Negev/Naqab proved useless in the more arid zones of the Negev/Naqab and reformed into the solitary farms Wine Route, Bedouins began using the same Nabatean/Byzantine history as their own, particularly following the farm retroactive legalization and the refusal to include Bedouins under the same legislative umbrella, and the renewed interest in local tourism and agriculture. They have enlisted the Zionist environmental discourse of desert-suited agricultural research and emphasized generations of desert expertise and ecological belonging, hoping to eventually establish their entitlement to land. Salman's description above of Bedouins as "light as a feather" (implicitly opposing Bedouins to the farms who erect fences and signs on the main roads) is a repeated self-representation to position Bedouins with romanticizing and ecological balance (that is now also contested in scientific ecological theory).

Salman studied as a kid in the town of Mitzpe Ramon in a Jewish school. According to his story, his parents insisted and at the time there was no Bedouin school near the Ramon Crater. Unlike many Bedouins of his generation who cannot speak or write in Hebrew or English, he is fluent in three languages. He can be seen as what Gramsci described as an "organic intellectual". Given his saturated life in Jewish communities and his education, he is not only highly aware of the difference in possibilities given to Jews and Bedouins, but he is also extremely charismatic, a gifted speaker, and fluent in Hebrew, and conversational English. This has allowed him to be a successful entrepreneur of Bedouin tourism and for several years he has been holding a tourist hospitality tent and offered camel tours near the Dead Sea. He continued his tourist business individually in Aricha Valley since the emergence of the solitary farms, around 2005, and the renewed interest in the desert. Being fluent in Hebrew and English made him more than capable of dealing with state bureaucracies and officers and with Jewish neighbors who worked in tourism. He became a dominant figure as a speaker and as a leader of Bedouin's struggles, and new partnerships in the Negev/Naqab highland; always in a constructivist, peaceful way.

In 2012, after many years in which Salman was in the business of tourism on his own, he led a group of residents in Aricha Valley to initiate the transformation of their settlement into an ecological village and Bedouin Heritage Centre (BHC). Tourism entrepreneurs from nearby Jewish communities who were sympathetic to the Bedouin conditions, and potential partners, joined the initiative and tourists began visiting Aricha Valley. In the next two years, three more communities and several families of the Negev/Naqab highland joined the initiative⁸⁰ and despite the lack of change in material and legal circumstances nor infrastructure and roads, they formed an alternative to the Wine Route— which they called the Tent Road.

The Tent Road is an alternative tourist initiative, political space, and social ecology, in many ways. First, it has been based, since its inception, on partnerships with Jewish neighbours. Salman made sure to share dreams and produce a vision with Jewish partners

⁸⁰ The community of Avdat/Abde, Nahal Hava/el-Afdai, Ramat Tziporim/Sahel el Bager as well as the El Ramack family near Mitzpe Ramon, Magdalene and Suleiman from the Divshon Plain, and several families from the Village Bir Hadaj.

and with the Municipality of Mitzpe Ramon and the Regional Council. Second, the Tent Road contests the exclusion of the Bedouins from development in the form of eco and agro-tourism. The Tent Road provides visitors an opportunity to participate and join Bedouins in their everyday tasks, joining Bedouin shepherds, grinding wheat to flour, sleeping in a tent, and more. It also poses an alternative to the high-class rebranding of Negev/Naqab tourism of the Wine Route, suggesting a more informal, interactive, affordable, and popular option for Negev/Naqab visitors whoever they are. According to Salman and Ron, his first Jewish partner, the idea of bringing tourists to meet Bedouins and to host small groups in the family's home was a new alternative vision, "a tourism that speaks *with* the Bedouin family, and not about the Bedouin"⁸¹. Salman was hoping that tourism would come and open new possibilities for Bedouins' employment⁸² and that he would finally be able to persuade the communities to clean the villages so that they would "finally run properly".

In the following, I briefly interrogate the "Tent Road" as an alternative Green Line in which Bedouin villages can be seen as "Green Settlements". I suggest that the Tent Road is a possible new unpredictable space in which the contradictions of the solitary farm project are managed and new spaces of agency and power are generated. I first lay out the types of social ecological and political spaces produced by the Tent Road partnerships. I then focus on their renewed environmental subjectivities, and the additional ways in which Bedouins, following their failure to be included in the NDA amendment law, have tried to respond to the state beyond establishing themselves as popular tourist site offering food and accommodation.



Image 32. A's compound in Wadi Aricha January 2022 (photo by the author).

⁸¹Interview with Ron, Salman's partner from Mitzpe Ramon, 2012.

⁸² Unemployment led Bedouin men to work in the service economy in low-paying jobs which they often see as humiliating and also as non-masculine. In an interview conducted in Aricha in 2010 a Bedouin expressed despair about his employment opportunities:



Image 33. Improvised pipes and water containers at Salmans' well-maintained compound (Left) December 2019; and "Green Lines" formed by wheat and olives in a Bedouin Village (right), November 2018 (Photos by the author).

This short chapter is the product of 5 years of still ongoing ethnographic work with Bedouin Shepherd communities in the Negev highland and the West Bank more broadly. My work included so far 30 interviews and many more informal conversations with camel herders, camel and pastoralism scholars, veterinary services, activists, activist scientists, law makers, NPA, and green patrol officers. The work required also attending regional council meetings, trips to the field to remote grazing zones during grazing camp (I'zbe) seasons, and long stays in Bedouin Villages in different seasons, during which energy production, shepherd lifestyle, desert life, and water availability were experienced differently. In future work, I plan to elaborate more fully on this research.

New dessert assemblages

Following the Tent Road, and Bedouin visions of intimate encounters between visitors and Bedouin lives and families, and the many initiatives that focused on forming connections and positive encounters with Jewish adjacent communities, the communities of the Negev/Naqab Highlands gained local allies and supporters. Many outsiders, through the mediation of desert eco-touristic entrepreneurs, particularly from the town of the Mitzpe Ramon, expressed increasing interest in learning more about them. University students, from Israel, and worldwide, started coming for seminars about the Bedouin lifestyle and expertise, groups arrived to experience what solitary farms could not offer – cheap accommodation in Bedouin tents without the luxuries of showers and the comfort of B&B, and the regional councils followed, gradually accepting their presence in the Negev/Naqab spaces and recognizing the value of their tourism.

The launching event of the Tent Road was a two-weekend gathering of Bedouins from the four communities of the Negev/Naqab Highlands, together with Jewish partners from Mitzpe Ramon. The gathering was dedicated to re-teaching the younger generations of the villages, skills, crafts, and knowledge that has been lost for many of them. Salman envisioned people hiking between the villages, staying for the night, and learning one tradition at each of the villages' traditional ways of making coffee, traditional ways of weaving, milking goats, and making cheese. Given the many years during which Bedouins

no longer needed these skills and the lack of true local experts, particularly for the craft of weaving, Salman brought women from the Azazme tribe in Jordan who are his relatives to help the communities relearn.

Olives, rather than vineyards

Later on, Salman with the Bedouins of Aricha Valley organized a "dessert orchard mini course", that later turned into "the olive grove project". These weekends brought together Jews and Bedouins to teach each other what they knew of traditional growth in the desert and to work to develop orchards. The course which stretched over 4 weekends and took place in the village included renovating terraces and water canals in Wadi Aricha with the help of a Mitzpe Ramon-based local archaeologist and hydrologist. The goal was to renew the dying olive groves of the village, which required solving a much more serious problem –the lack of water. While olive plants could tolerate the salty soil of the desert, they do need a water supply to grow⁸³.

The Olive Grove project, aimed therefore to increase water efficiency and encouraged the use of non-conventional water supplies for the olive groves by combining traditional methods and Bedouin labor with more cutting-edge solutions and knowledge brought by the local hydrologist to achieve long-term soil improvement. The project was therefore rooted in studies performed in Avdat and the many parts of the valleys in the Zin basin, where remnants of ancient agriculture systems dating back about 1,400 years, showed that with the same amounts of precipitation as today (80-100 mm per year), and similarly high evaporation levels, the ancient farmers relied on their main source of water --runoff water which they learned to harvest from the hillside slopes and from floods in the valleys.

While the "Green Line" of the solitary farms was provided water by the National Water Carrier of Israel that supplies water from the Sea of Galilee, spanning a distance of over 80 miles, and bearing high costs, for the unrecognized Bedouins this was not a possible option. Most of them do not receive an allocation of water at all and certainly not for agriculture at the reduced price their approved Jewish neighbours receive.⁸⁴. Initially, this high price is what led most of the Bedouin farmers to minimize the irrigation of their groves, supplying just enough water to keep the olive trees alive. When we first arrived in Aricha Valley, the olives were there, on old broken 2000 years old terraces, but the trees seemed lifeless and had stopped producing crops. Additionally, the lack of maintenance of the ancient terraces led to soil erosion in the olive groves, as well as on the dirt roads in the village, further impeding the cultivation and transportation in and around the village.

⁸³ According to the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture, to run a profitable olive grove, a modern farm needs to produce 200-250 kg of olive oil per square kilometer. For this amount of oil, an olive grove in the Negev/Naqab Highlands requires 500-600 cubic meters (m3) of water per 1,000 square meters per year, which is equivalent to 500-600 mm of rain. The investment in irrigation in solitary farms can reach up to 50% of the farm's expenses and makes farming in the Zin basin unprofitable.

⁸⁴ currently piped water at the price of 9-10 ILS/m3

Fodder for sedentarized goats

Fodder was another issue that resulted from enforced sedentarization and state limits on Bedouin traffic. The adjacency of the Bedouin villages to nature reserves, in what is considered an environmentally fragile area, extremely low in water resources, put many limits on Bedouin herding and ignited many conflicts between shepherds from the village and NPA officers, especially with regards to overgrazing around the village.

Raising goats was the main livelihood of the Bedouin in the Negev/Naqab Highlands, until about 40 years ago. As Salman indicates in the opening citations to this chapter goats were like their “supermarkets”. With the geopolitical changes in the region, in particular, the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in the late 1970s, and the transformation of the majority of the Negev/Naqab region into military training zones or nature reserves, the Bedouins of the Negev/Naqab region had to discontinue their nomadic way of life and were sedentarized in settlements. According to villagers from Aricha Valley under the plant protection law, the state tried to confiscate Bedouins' goats and replace them with sheep that suited more sedentarized lifestyle and ensured Bedouin proximity to water resources that the sheep required several times a day. The semi-nomadic traditional lifestyle, which was pivotally based on grazing in this arid land, was halted and with it, the practice of grazing herds was reduced.

To this day, most of the Bedouins' families still own small herds. Traditionally, the flock belongs to the Bedouin woman, the matriarch of the family. Despite their small size, the herds still provide food security, contribute to the self-sufficiency of the women, and offer the women some independence and sociability with other women while grazing out. But in recent years, with increasing enforcement on Bedouin traffic, this traditional livelihood is at risk of termination. The threat stems from a combination of circumstances. Moving into permanent settlements causes overgrazing in the areas around the village. Some years of droughts have caused a significant decline in the quantity of vegetation in some areas in the Negev/Naqab desert. Limiting Bedouin seasonal mobilization put greater pressure on the soil grazed. The lack of pasture keeps the goats from gaining sufficient weight and therefore their market price is very low. Given the lack of natural pasture Bedouins have begun purchasing hay to sustain the goats. As a result of the lack of grazing lands, the Bedouins are pushed to let the herds graze in the nature reserves and within military training zones, which leads to constant tension and friction with the authorities.



Image 34. Bedouin Children restoring terraces, April 2012. (photo by the author)

The olive grove project emerged out of conversations that were forged between Bedouins and neighbours from Mitzpe Ramon. It was quickly turned into a "half-scientific" project as people from Mitzpe Ramon explained it. Jewish researchers have volunteered to test the humidity and quality of the soil in the restored terraces, in order to consider growing fodder by Bedouins which may compensate for the lack of grazing areas. The suggestion to measure and calculate as well as the very idea to grow, initially deterred the Bedouins who believe grazing, rather than growing fodder, is healthier for goats. Second, the land available for agriculture is usually very saline and therefore requires the development of appropriate practices. Lack of water sources requires systems for using and enhancing local and recycled water resources. Bedouins were concerned about further responses from NPA officers and from ecologists who would become suspicious of invasive species given the proximity to nature reserves. Given the Bedouin's reluctance, the project focused first, on the rehabilitation of the ancient agricultural system around the olive groves--terraces across the riverbed and trenches on the slopes--in ways that would maximize water harvesting from the slopes and floods in the valley. All that was carried mostly by the residents of the village with some encouragement from residents of Mitzpe Ramon. The Bedouins were also convinced to try methods of soil-improving structure and fertilization by combining pasture cultivation and grazing under the olive trees, mainly to reduce grazing pressure around the village and to mitigate conflicts with the NPA rangers. Some of the residents of Mitzpe Ramon who were involved in the project were scientists from the Arava and Dead Sea Science Centre in Mitzpe Ramon, an institution, of the Ministry of Science, now underfunded, but that was originally founded to bring science to Israel's peripheral communities. With Bedouin's approval, the scientist submitted also a small grant to help fund, follow, and accompany the project.

Based on regional alliances mostly with residents of the Mitzpe Ramon town, a place vying in itself for development and employment for tourist entrepreneurs, the Tent

Road has become not only an alternative tourist option but a collaborative social space, which blurs the boundaries between Bedouins and Jews, it has also formed an alternative social ecology, that works to meet desert limits, and give rise to new type of desert “expertise”. This new Bedouin expertise is a complex one, composed of reclaimed old Bedouin expertise, rooted in years of desert experience, and by new specializations and experiences that are enforced on Bedouins by the state of Israel. It is an expertise that is deployed to *contest* the state neoliberal reason (unlike the Wine Route expertise that tried to move the farmers from disputed terrains of ethnic politics) and to manage its contradictions and to prefigures alternative rationalities (Newman, p.87 in Higgins and Lerner, 2017).

Reclaimed water, and expertise: renewable subjectivities & calculations without numbers

Two years after the olive grove project, Salman, was concerned that without solving water issues, tourism would be limited, and some visitors would be deterred from coming. He called me one day to ask what I knew about off-grid solutions for wastewater treatment, we specifically talked about facilities for domestic toilets and small-scale gardens since the institute where I work provided similar solutions in the occupied territories, and Salman was eager to install some of them (mainly bio-gas and wastewater treatment facility). The facility will treat wastewater from toilets that he has already built to accommodate tourists. Tests would be developed along with him to check and optimize the quality and quantity of the water channelled to olives and herbs growing in his garden. Within several months, a solar wastewater system was installed, and Salman invited professionals periodically to help check the system and teach him, to measure the presence and levels of coliforms in the water.



Image 35. Salman learning to test the water quality and how to operate the newly installed system of wastewater treatment, September 2009 (photo by the author).

When we came several weeks after the installation to check how he was doing, he said he did not use the bio-gas and dropped measuring the water. The plants around the compound looked greener than ever but the water specialist we brought warned us to not use herbs that are watered by them without checking the water. Salman said his wife was

intimidated by the bio-gas system and is too busy for it, and that he does not need all the hassle with the measurement. He said, "I smell, and I see, I don't need the numbers." Salman is a fierce opponent of technologies that would corrupt the Bedouin lifestyle, he often blames them as the reason for what he calls "overall social disease not progress", but he was right, although neither of us could smell or see anything. The test showed a slightly higher level of coliforms than expected.

Interestingly, in other communities as well, Bedouins were ambivalent and cautious about technologies though they were willing to introduce them to stay where they are and who they are: to keep their camels, they were willing to install chips that will allow them to trace camels with GPS, but expressed concerns about the health and the quality of milk of camels carrying them.

Even more striking was the way they handled the solar panel systems. 65% of the Bedouins in the unrecognized villages and 17% in recognized villages use today's solar systems as their main energy resource. Given the lack of infrastructure in the villages, Bedouins took it upon themselves to replace the use of generators and to independently acquire and install PV systems. The systems that are installed are off-grid and self-funded. Their price varies but they are overall cheap in terms of costs and maintenance, and the Bedouins say they save money and time for them in comparison to other off-grid methods such as generators based on diesel. There is no shortage of sun in the desert and solar panels do not require bringing fuel and there isn't as much noise or smell as in diesel generators. Salman once described to me how the village returned to its quietness since the installment of the PV panels. He described how in the evenings the entire village used to sound like a gigantic machine. The PV systems also operate for a longer time, as long as there is sun and the batteries function.

So like the water solutions, having solar energy changed Bedouin's lives in many senses. Particularly given that Bedouins could no longer change their location seasonally and choose the right spots, this time for their tents (rather than their flocks) in winter and summer. They have become more vulnerable and exposed to the harsh winters and summers in the Negev Highland. Women made many comments about the recent extremely cold winter, even though men tend to dismiss the experiences saying for Bedouins climate isn't a problem, though they did point to the valleys where their homes are placed, as problematic and atypical for Bedouin villages.

But more than PV systems as alleviating their lives, the Bedouins described them as ways through which they challenge the state's attempt to keep them temporary. I once went to visit Nagib who resides in a village that is nestled between huge state solar panels fields, (now part of the Negev/Naqab landscape) but has no connection to electricity, he told me while raising his hands to the sky:

"You know God has sent us solar energy. Because our lands are taken and now turned into solar fields, the sun is only god's nature, and he gives it to us since we are captured time and again by diesel prices. We are surrounded by solar fields. But god gives us the blessing sun."

He later explained that having solar panels (or energy) enabled the Bedouins to expand the boundaries of their citizenships, keep contact with the outside world, and participate in wider social circles, (through tourism education media) – but he also indicates that having energy means they can stay on the land in their rural communities and avoid urbanization and state planning.

"Particularly for women. Having almost unlimited electricity extends the day, so women who have a very busy long day, can now do homework or watch television later at night. We can charge computers and cellphones ..also tourists want to have that, so it helps with tourism as well... and we can be on Facebook. You know, my wife now watches Turkish telenovela in the evenings, and now she is pregnant, and she makes demands, asking me for all sorts of things all of a sudden because she learned from the Turkish ladies that when you are pregnant you deserve that... but anyhow, most important we can now do all that but also stay where we are we don't need to move to Be'er Sheva for all that."

The PV systems in the unrecognized villages differ greatly from each other. They are not regulated in any way and there is no standard to their operation. Since they form some kind of a black or informal market, I was trying to understand what and how energy needs are met through PV, and how they know how to operate them responsibly. I learned, that "men find the right system" (in terms of price) and install them with a Bedouin who "knows how to do it". Some install second-hand purchased panels and others new. Every family has its system, needs, and price range, and every family chooses to install the panels differently, according to its compounds' organization. Once the systems are installed and as long as there are no problems in their operation, the everyday use is under the women's responsibility. Women manage the house and its energy. I sat down with several women from Nagib's village and one of them explained to me how she organizes the day's tasks, and what appliances she uses:

"There are all sorts of refrigerators and washing machines. I go to a store in Segev Shalom, they have the right ones (she means- that do not burden the system), I first look into how much electricity (she meant kilowatt) I can have, Also I look at the sky. I check cloudy days and plan accordingly. I always first start with laundry and only if I have time the butter churn."

While men gained what they see as respected employment in the form of tourism by installing PV panels, Bedouin women are the main beneficiaries of the panels, as they do almost all housework. They now no longer need to do their laundry by hand and can store food and medicines in refrigerators, and have cool water in the harsh summers. They also handle the system with extreme caution. They don't know the exact kilowatt or the daily capacity of their systems, but they know exactly what appliances they can buy (nothing to heat up with no electric kettles or oven or heaters and the simplest washing machine), how "consuming" is each appliance, on the system, on which days they can use what (days in which tourist arrive, or winter days are different), and in what order. They are highly aware of their consumption. They calculate, albeit again without numbers and plan, all day, every day, in a way no Jewish resident, in Israel is required to.

So, on the one hand, solar panels add to the messy aesthetics, of the unrecognized villages of the "Tent Road". They are often mentioned in descriptions of the desert villages as an example of wastelands or as another proof of the ungovernable "nature" of the Bedouins. On the other, hand they not only modernize Bedouins but also turn Bedouins into environmental experts.

But Bedouins' stories show how the challenges of living in radical uncertainties of energy precarity, degraded pastures, and climate extremities articulated with state exclusion and pressures – create a new sense of homo economicus – a new expert, a decision maker and highly disciplined environmental subject managing unpredicted and uncertain life. So, on the one hand, Bedouin's new expertise that emerged in the Tent Road can be generative, but on the other hand, the self-initiated market of solar panels and water treatments, can be seen as a form of --environmental governmentality in which environmental self-management, Bedouin “responsibilization” is required (Watts, 2016; Higgins and Larner, 2017). Also, as environmental discourses in the Negev centers around building resilience in what may become a hot spot in the future, Bedouins desert resilience (their seasonal mobilities mainly) is destabilized by the state.



Image 36. Self-installed solar panels in different compounds in the village of Wadi' el Ana'am.

February 2021, (photo by author).

Partial recognition

In 2015 the Negev Highlands Regional Council⁸⁵ requested the state to recognize and include in its jurisdiction the 4 villages of the Tent Road. According to Rifman who historically expressed his desire to see a Negev empty of Bedouins, he "realized this should be pushed for and done through the council at regional level as the state would never find time to prioritize it." He also said, after several meetings with residents of the Negev highlands settlements that he expected many objections though "not at home" (he meant in the Negev). The state responded that it intends to create a new settlement for the villages similar to Beersheba suburbs, to which they will move. Rifman answered in a letter to the Minister of Agriculture Uri Ariel that he has no intention to vacate the villages and that they require a plan that suits their needs rather than yet another uprooting. Rifman added that "in recent years the regional council works in partnerships with several villages mainly on turning the Bedouin villages into touristic sites, and that today tourism is already a main important income for Bedouins families in addition to agriculture. A new map for the "Tent Road Project" was issued in 2017 combining all Bedouin hosts (in red) including Magdalene's remote tent on the eastern cliff and all Wine Route farms (in green) farm on one map.

⁸⁵ This is the local municipality which in rural areas in Israel is called a regional council as it serves several rural settlements rather than a small city or a town

In the state ethnic struggle over lands, the status of Bedouins as a threat to the national territorial control, to the national identity, and to development, is understood to a great extent through environmental and ecological meanings. Bedouins are historically portrayed as a threat to the Negev ecology, to its ecological health, and more recently as slums threatening the Negev modernity which may deter investors and undermine the Negev containment in the collective state identity. The emergence of off-grid slum-villages is on the one hand the cause of this threat and on the other, the result of the effort to keep Bedouins as detached as possible from their lands through the prevention of infrastructure and employment tied to land and place. The Negev has been historically a hub of environmentalism and is now considered an environmental and scientific “frontier” of experiments and programs of sustainability and climate resilience through mass production of alternative solar energy, green building, agriculture in drylands, ecotourism, and agro-tourism. In the light of all that, the state production of slums is a move that *contradicts* environmentalism and sustainability and Judaizes them through what I have called Green Lines. The Tent Road challenge this process. Bedouins of the Tent Road undermine, the Judaization of environmentalism through the formation of a no less and even more sustainable agro-touristic project. They destabilize the sterile social ecology of the Negev/Naqab Green Line by joining it with their own version of Green Line, composed of spaces for public Jewish and Bedouin engagements, and partnership with local scientists, exchanging with Bedouins as experts and partners. They improve at least partly what was seen as slums and remake themselves into new environmental experts, and possible guardians of the desert.

The tent road has become a popular site and yielded many more collaborative experiments. Bedouins have been experimenting with several types of local desert seeds of wheat, which they brought from Sinai as they are no longer available in the region using their cross boundary connections. In the past two winters, they have managed to raise a significant amount of high-quality wheat without irrigation which drew the interest of agroecologists from Israel, Morocco, and Sweden. Residents from the region come to the villages to hear herbalists or get goat milk for medical purposes. Women and men, residents of the region, have established courses in Arabic taught by Bedouin women (for women) and men (for men) while focusing each week on Bedouin traditions. In the past two years, with the assistance of human rights lawyer Michael Sefard and partners from the Mitzpe Ramon community and Science Center the Bedouins have also challenged, in court, the NPA and the state for blaming Bedouin camel’s in tress passing and entering nature reserve. The NPA argued camels are destructive to desert vegetation and risking rewilding project. Camel owners were heavily fined and their camels confiscated. While the Bedouins took responsibility for tress passing (albeit claiming they have no option to avoid them given that their villages are bordering nature reserves), they contested the argument that camels are harmful to nature and claimed the NPA does not know much about the ways camel graze in the desert. In 2021, the court ordered the NPA to allocate funds and conduct a thorough research of the grazing patterns of camels before suing Bedouins for damage caused by the camels⁸⁷. Following the trial, a group composed of behavioral

⁸⁷ The trial in which I was summoned as defense expert witness, was very much about the ecology and the botany of drylands, and rewilding projects in the Negev and entailed many testimonies of researchers and scientists from desert research institutions.

zoologist, botanist, geomorphologist, archeologist, and lawyers went out with the guidance of Bedouins to tour the Negev/Naqab in order to trace and explore past and present grazing zones of camels and to evaluate the ways they recover or develop after different time periods of grazing. The group was formed to eventually persuade Nature authorities to legalize camel grazing in the desert. The Bedouin Negev Highlands communities reclaimed therefore their status as knowledgeable and valuable desert experts and recruited increasing support, interest, and trust in what they had to offer for nature management in the desert.

The state, however, despite the growing alliances between Bedouins and Jews and the Negev highlands, still refuses to accept the Regional Council's vision for Bedouin settlements. And the Green Patrol's occasional demolitions and confiscations continue and even worsen. In October 2017, all Bedouins were invited to meet with regional council members and with planning authority representatives in the Ben-Gurion University campus in Sde-Boker. In the meeting, that took place at the Ben-Gurion Auditorium, a compromised version of the state and the council's ideas were presented to the Bedouins. The state has agreed to recognize the Bedouin Village Abde, near Avdat, under the condition that the rest of the Bedouin villages would move into Abde and their villages will remain agro-touristic/heritage sites to which they will be able to come and work daily. I was sitting next to Salman, listening to speakers who spoke one after the other, presenting maps and sketches from the stage on which a huge sculpture of David Ben-Gurion was overlooking the audience. Salman was quiet in that meeting, he told me later on a side conversation that he had already spoke several times with the current head of the Regional Council and explained that the state program is unsuitable for the Bedouins⁸⁸:

“This isn't going to happen they can't step over our culture and change in one-day customs of hundred years, these mistakes have been made already in the past and they were destructive, as far as I am concerned the state is out. We can only work with the council where they now listen to us. We want to live in peace, we want to take care of our education. The state does not understand the needs of the Bedouins who live in the Negev highlands, particularly them. Cleaning, and trash was never taken care of, we took care of ourselves the villages will collaborate with the right move but no one will move to another village. This could get messy.”

Salem Waj, is a leading figure from the village Abde. He owns camels and a thriving small tourist compound, some of the most incredible wheat growers are old community members in his village, his daughter is a gifted student who is about to graduate from high school in the village Bir hadaj. Salem stood up, after one and half hours during which he was listening, and in a calm voice explain the planners why the state plan would fail:

“The residents of the Naqab highlands are mostly illiterate. They cannot manage a modern settlement they live traditionally, but their lifestyle also does not require much. We can rely only on agriculture and tourism and make do, and we must invest in education. Once our kids are ready for modern life there won't be a need for the new settlement, they will fit into the existing modern settlement or return to their old ones and change them. This plan would lead to friction between the communities and to further crime. Bedouin tourism and agriculture are organic; it can't be done in this way. Bedouins won't just move into their neighbors' lands. And Bedouins wish to stay traditional this doesn't necessarily mean we don't want to be modern.”

⁸⁸ Transcribed from recording of the meeting

These Bedouins' statements were never addressed. Even though 70% of Jewish residents of the regional council supported, according to the council's survey, the Bedouins' desire and the council's original plans to let Bedouins stay where they are, the state refused to collaborate. The word modernization was mentioned time and again by Jews and Bedouins who were trying to redefine it. State representatives rejected also statements of planners that Bedouins must be in meetings where these plans are formed. Bedouin added that when the council makes plans behind their back with the state they harm the fragile trust, built in recent years. One Bedouin described how during one week in which the council was discussing plans for tourist initiatives with them, the state Green Patrol came over and threw away plenty of food prepared for visitors, claiming the village isn't a touristic-approved facility.

Farmers of the Wine Route who attended the meeting remained silent. At the end of the meeting, Salman stood up and asked: "what is the difference between farmers and Bedouins in this regional council? This isn't personal, I like the farmers but the entire thinking behind the farm's legalization was that they can't have tourism when they can't live in the farms, why would you now claim the opposite for the Bedouins? Where in any other place in this world do you have something as special as Bedouin tourism?." Yoni from Orlia farm stood up at the end and said:

"You guys up there must restart, go learn and listen to the Bedouins. I have lived here for over 20 years, I now live in the solitary farm overlooking a Bedouins village, they have will, they are perhaps different than us, but we need to start from scratch with them, while listening to them. 25 years ago there were no planning definitions for solitary farms. Now there are, and it's time that we dare to find some new definitions for Bedouin rural settlements. It's about time that they won't pay double than us for the same gallon of water, it is about time their kids will have paved roads to school. It sounds to me like the state is the one stuck in the past, not the Bedouins."

Conclusions: Green Lines and New Guardians

The Hula Valley swamps and the Negev Highlands desert have both long been significant hubs and Meccas of environmental activity and iconic landscapes and ecologies in Israel's Zionist environmental (and environmentalist) history. It seems to me therefore, that the power of ecological and environmental thinking and activity in shaping the social-nature of both these regions must be seriously considered. In conclusion, let me step back to reflect on the overarching argument of this dissertation.

When I first started my research, I wanted to engage with the Negev/Naqab solitary farms. Over time, I have realized that to delve deeply into the Negev dynamics I must first look at Negev/Naqab processes as always shaping the life of both Jews and Arabs and second, to understand the place of environmentalists in it. I understood that there is work I must do to comprehend the rationalities, dreams, visions, and the practices that serve as the basis of current Negev development and conservation paths; that much of it is rooted in the laboratory of the Hula swamplands of the 1950s and the 1960s, where "Zionist nature" as a type of material and symbolic project of redemption, moral conduct, and environmental management was conceived, significantly shaping the role environmentalism and

environmental understanding play in sustaining the Zionist settlement and development project.

The Green Lines formed out of what used to be the Hula swamplands with its unique entangled wildlife & communities and its convoluted water-scapes, are now fields of peanuts, corn carrots, onion, and garlic. Between them, two water-scapes are left from what used to be Lake Hula. In recent years, cranes re-wilded themselves in those re-flooded fields challenging again the valley, and definitions of nature and stirring up tensions between farmers, naturalists, and state land and nature management authorities.

In the same year in which the little lake Hula was re-flooded in the valley, 50 years after the historical drainage, the government and the Regional Council of the Negev highland had begun to push for the return of agriculture to the more arid parts of Negev/Naqab, after many years in which water arriving from the Hula valley to the Negev had not significantly changed Negev highland agriculture. But if the water coming from the northern valleys, through the Israeli water carrier had not transformed Negev highland agriculture – at least on the scale that had been expected – ideas, visions, people, and environmental and scientific practices and experiences, traveled from the northern valleys to the Negev highland and played a key role in transforming the Negev/Naqab social ecology. In the second part of this dissertation, I have examined efforts to transform the Negev's nature and its inhabitants through greening. This time greening entailed forms of agriculture that correspond with more current global ecological trends (local methods, local growth and produce) and environmentalists albeit not all of them were part and parcel of the greening processes. I have also shown how, as in the case of Hula, these transformations remain heavily contested not by heavy soil (peat) or birds (cranes) as in the case of Lake Hula, but rather by Green Settlements – alignments of Bedouins and Jews that form the Tent Road. The Tent Road challenged the Wine Route becoming part of the same Green Line with its political social and physical openness. To these day, its settlements, unlike almost all the farms, are unmonitored, uncontrolled by electric fences, unguarded by dogs, weapons, and gates and unsterilized by pesticides or market standards. The Tent Road reforms the Negev/Naqab Green Line by blurring boundaries rather than solidifying them.

I chose to think relationally about "struggled-over landscapes" through what I call Green Lines, and Green Settlements. I choose the term (almost a Zionist "keyword"), to describe a type of social ecology that isn't identical in its multiple geographical locations and historical appearances, but that illuminate's environmental legacies as articulating other struggles and processes, pertaining and reshaping Arab, Jewish human and non-human lives.

My inspiration was Swyngedouw's recent writing about social ecologies (2018) within what he calls the Anthropo-obScene. For many years, I have worked in collaboration with ecologists in the Negev, trying to explain to them the difference between thinking about "the social" in the ecology in terms of "impact", and thinking about social ecologies as spaces capturing and articulating relationships between humans and non-human, as forms of lives that are co-productive and rooted in power relationships, and as the product of particular forms of environmental governance and nature administration. I think about social ecologies through previous writing in critical geography about spaces as processual and dynamic (Lefebvre, 1991; Smith, 1984; Massey, 1994, 2009; Hart, 2006, 2018). I think

though that particularly now, (although perhaps in deserts, as exceptional ecologies, "on edge", always) in a time of a planetary crisis and in a world in which neoliberalism (that is in any sense tied with ecological thought) writ large, the worlds I have explored here as well, should be seen as multiplicity of produced uneven interconnected social ecologies. Choosing to think of social ecologies--these relational assemblages of people and things, human and non-humans, organized through contested political economic orders and understanding of nature, is also a political choice. Social ecologies for me express and manifest how incomplete all hegemonic (or eco-hegemonic) projects are. Both the Hula valley of these days and the Negev developing Green Line (now composed of two interactive Green Lines) are illuminative cases.

At the expense of losing some of the rich details that comprise and keep calibrating each of the social ecologies I explored here (something I am committed to doing as post-dissertation work), I decided to think here about Green Lines, as a type of Zionist reason, and social ecologies emerging in different instances in the history of Israel (and Palestine) and particularly at its social and geographical margins. These social ecologies are different, but they entail a radical transformation of what is grasped as an unruly wasteland in terms of its ecology, culture, and governance, and therefore they are a frontier process (Moore, 2015) but one that is open for challenge (Markoff, 2006).⁸⁹ I think that despite the immense difference in time and in their materiality, it is important to look at them in unity to grasp some of the processes that shape them, enable them, and ways to perhaps contest and alter them.

⁸⁹ I am recently studying their continuous reproductions as frontiers in these sense, drawing to great extent on Markoff, who studied among other things Bedouins, and cattle growers. In this work I look at illegal cattle growers in the West Bank as well as at Bedouin illegal cannabis growth within the Negev Green Line. See also Watts, 2012, and Weizmann 2007 for conceptualizations of Frontiers as social ecologies.

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