

**Sustaining Resistance, Cultivating Liberation:**

The Enduring Bond of

*Rooted-Resistance-Companionship* between Palestinians and Olive Trees

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*I offer this thesis as a solidarity branch for the Palestinian cause and the more-than-human worlds of  
Palestine from the river to the sea.*

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on olive trees and Palestinians' relationality by asking, "*What role do olive trees play in Palestinian sumud?*" *Sumud* is rooted in Palestinian culture and describes steadfastness and resilience in the face of occupation (Meari 2014; Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014). Throughout this thesis, I critically engage with Donna Haraway's (2003) companion species concept and expand it to the *rooted-resistance-companionship* to comprehensively understand the relationality between Palestinians and olive trees in their context of *sumud* practices under the Zionist settler colonial regime. The concept of *rooted-resistance-companionship* emphasizes the interconnection through which Palestinians and olive trees engage in an anticolonial praxis. Through this concept, I posit a posthuman feminist (Braidotti 2022) glance and present a cultural analysis by embarking on a journey tracing the trajectory of olive trees, from their initial existence in the soil to their subsequent re-presentation in literary and visual artworks. I focus on Mahmoud Darwish's *poem Earth Pressing against Us* (2003), prose *Absent Presence* (2010), and photographer Steve Sabella's *Till the End* (2004) visual artwork. My primary interest lies in examining Israel's Zionist terraforming strategies and how the olive tree's journey epitomizes *rooted-resistance-companionship* and elucidates how olive trees and Palestinians mutually share a colonial wound stemming from the ongoing Nakba.

# Table of Contents

## **Acknowledgments 5**

## **Preface 6**

## **Introduction 12**

*To Be an Olive Tree in Palestine 12*

*Posthuman Feminism and Kincentric Ecology 15*

*Companionship Species Revisited 17*

*The Rooted-Resistance-Companionship 22*

*Guiding Concepts 23*

*Sumud and the Nakba Wound 28*

*Resilience in The Wound 30*

*Weaponizing Nature: Enrooting Settler Belonging 32*

*“Turning the Naqab Green” 33*

*Politics of Soil 35*

*Politics of Dead 37*

*Palestinian Agriculture and Politics of Olive Oil Trade 39*

*Methodology: Writing with an Olive 41*

## **Chapter 2: The Olive Tree and Mahmoud Darwish: Rooted-Resistance Companions 47**

*Mahmoud Darwish: Body in Motion with Palestine 50*

*Becoming-tree, being-with 51*

*Absent Presence of and with Olive Trees: “The Poem Is Incomplete” 56*

*Deepening Wound, Strengthening Resurgence 59*

*Smell: A Bridge to Home 62*

## **Chapter 3: Timeless Cycle of Life: Self-Recognition in Rooted-resistance-companionship “Till the End” 68**

*Olive Tree and Stone Companionship in Palestine 72*

*Zionist Terraforming and Indigenous Stones 73*

*Till(ing) the End 75*

*The Art and the Artist Intertwined: Sabella and Roots 78*

*Spectator as a Political Witness 83*

## **Conclusion 88**

## **From the River to beyond-the-sea: Transnational and Transspecies Solidarity 88**

## **Epilogue 95**

## **Bibliography 97**

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## Preface

Thanks to my father, I am a feminist.

When people ask me what kind of a feminist I am, I do not have a straightaway answer. I grew up in a very protective and loving family in Turkey. My father was a well-read man and affiliated with the Turkish nationalist party. My mother was a housewife who met my father at a young age and devoted her life first to him, then to her three daughters. My father always wanted his daughters to read and learn about the world but never let them have an experience of this world. *It is dangerous out there; you have what you need in this house.* Although he was a strict nationalist, he bought me books from “the other side.” I read books from leftist authors from Turkey, and in our discussions, he was giving me looks seeking confirmation for glorifying Turkishness. He did not realize that he was creating his own Frankenstein. I find myself repeatedly standing against protective love and care, which is restrictive and conditional (father), nations and borders (confined in the house with family), surveillance, control, and punishment (mother), and the exclusion of certain groups of people (father).

Sixteen years after my beloved father’s death, I am now in Spain, and a giant olive tree welcomes me in front of my hotel. I sat beside it and tried to remember the source of my admiration for olive trees and how they travel through space and time. Growing up in the Mediterranean region (or the Middle East, depending on your perspective), it is not surprising to see olive trees around you, but what might be impossible for many is to notice them. Their evergreen leaves dance with the wind; their trunks are shaped with the force of the wind, and once you notice, they tell you that they can bend but would not break.

I spent my early twenties chanting and marching on the streets with unceasing anger. I learned that one does not belong to a place but to people. My roots were surrounding people,

extending from my body. When my father died, AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, The Justice and Development Party) was still in power. 2008 was an important year as AKP presented itself as a diverse party. It mobilized a discourse of diversity to gain support from various groups. In 2008, AKP opened ways towards Kurdish Openings/ The Kurdish Initiative to build peace with PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*). The Kurdish Openings was aimed at a comprehensive policy approach to resolving the ongoing domination, discrimination, and murder of the Kurdish population. The goal was to make peace with the Kurdish population, stop PKK's attacks, and end a more than thirty-year-long war. In a country where speaking Kurdish is considered an act of terrorism, having a Kurdish national television station (TRT Kurdi) was a revolutionary moment. Erdogan's national agenda was not limited to Kurds. 2008 was also the year AKP did not show any rejection or authoritarianism towards LGBT pride marches. I remember being hopeful those days. Nevertheless, 2013 was the year the masks fell off.

It was in late May 2013, and tension was in the air. The political climate affects the everyday life in Turkey. You cannot miss the agenda. I had a Palestinian friend from Amman who had visited me every summer since we met. In May 2013, I greeted him in Taksim Square, "the center" of Istanbul. While walking by Gezi Park, we saw people lying on the grass, reading books, playing songs, dancing, and simply occupying the park. There was a water cannon in the corner. I remember being so anxious and walking fast, and my friend, Yousef, held my arm and asked me what was going on at the park. I told him Erdogan claimed that they would rebuild *Topçu Kışlası* (The Taksim Military Barracks) as a way to pay tribute to Ottoman roots. The project included vast urbanization of the city; a shopping center, an opera house, and a mosque accompanied the barracks' reconstruction. Gezi Park was "the last green area" left after AKP's hungry for concrete city projects. After briefly telling the story to Yousef, I said, "It is not only about trees." The following day Yousef called

me, screaming that the police shot tear gas at his hotel, and he was going to the historical area, Sultanahmet. He said he was running away with the other tourists and we would see each other if I could meet him in Sultanahmet. I never saw him again because I had joined the protests.

That summer, I learned that police are not allowed to shoot tear gas right toward you. They have to shoot it toward the ground, which should bounce back into the air. I remember walking towards the police barricade, and a tear gas can flew next to my head. A woman jumped on me, and we crawled under a bench, squeezing lemon in each other's eyes and tried not to breathe. We then hid behind a trash can and pushed it towards the side street, protecting our bodies from any possible attack from the police. Our bodies ran or fast walked or slid sideways, moving the trash can slowly, steadily. We did not share a word. We looked at each other's eyes, blinked, and pushed the can. The more you try to breathe, the more the gas hurts your chest, your heartbeat goes faster, and you lose your sense of sight and balance. We tried to push every building's door to find shelter, a group of young men ran towards us, and we found a safe spot to regulate our breaths. The woman, Asli, and I hugged each other and said goodbye. I never saw her again, but I knew we were in *this* together.

Gezi Park protests started with protecting the trees in Istanbul. It spread all over the major cities of Turkey and has become one of the most crucial uprising moments in Turkish history. The trees of Gezi Park were not only a metaphor that we have used towards bringing change, but they were also an inspiration to people who stood tall against the AKP government. From sharing my childhood secrets to inspiring me through my journey of belongingness in the Netherlands, my journey has been accompanied by trees and their presence.



Starting in 2015, attacks on LGBT pride marches started. Furthermore, the government slowly started to suffocate its citizens. Not all of them. In 2021, the same government, which has signed the Istanbul Convention in Ankara, left the convention arguing that the convention encourages same-sex marriages and disrupts family values. Feminists in Turkey know how to survive and be resilient, despite the ongoing oppression. We continuously chant on the streets: “*Gelsin baba, gelsin koca, gelsin devlet, gelsin cop, inadina isyan, inadina isyan, inadina ozgurluk!*” It simply translates as: “Let the father, let the husband, let the state, let the baton come, rebellion out of spite, rebellion out of spite, freedom out of spite!” (my translation). This feminist chant demonstrates the heteronormative, patriarchal, exclusionary regime that predates the AKP government and extends to this date thanks to transgenerational feminist activism.

My first transnational solidarity action beyond the borders of Turkey happened in 2010. Gaza was under attack, and I joined people who collected humanitarian help to deliver Gaza through the Mediterranean Sea. We were utterly ignorant, thinking nothing would happen to the flotilla since we sent humanitarian aid to people under siege. Israeli naval forces attacked Mavi Marmara (Gaza Flotilla) and killed Turkish activists. The attack caused a global outcry. Diplomatic ties were strengthened after Israel agreed to pay compensation to Turkey. However, the anger never stopped among activists.

My feminist stance does not come from solely suffering but a wave of anger. I feel the urge to borrow bell hooks’ words to situate my academic self. She describes the theory as a liberatory practice: “I came to theory because I was hurting— the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend what was happening around me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away” (hooks, 1994, 59). I expand hooks’ hurt to anger and see the way I use theory as a practice to express my anger toward injustice. The theory has been a tool for me to weave my academic and

political life. The same fire kept burning, which deepened my roots in the new country, and acted as a shield and a weapon when I felt unjust applied to more-than-me worlds.

I was drawn to the posthuman theory as it offered me to situate myself within multispecies collaboration against the destructive forces and structures in life. However, the more I read from Indigenous scholars, especially from Palestine, I became aware that what posthuman theory promises were already existing in grounded realities. That is why I started my project with posthuman theory, but the project has evolved towards anticolonial cultural analysis enmeshed with posthuman thinking. That also has shown me the interconnectedness of theories and standpoints. More importantly, reading more and more Indigenous scholars has helped me notice the limits of Donna Haraway's concept of companionship. This project pays tribute to all the feminist, Indigenous, posthuman, decolonial, and anti-colonial scholars I have gained knowledge and perspective. They have showed me the limitlessness of human cruelty and the resilience of *things*.

Before starting this project, I observed that olive trees were in motion. It was fascinating to see them in the Netherlands, where they are not indigenous. Of course, there is a reason for this; olives and olive oil have been used for various reasons besides dietary. They are beneficial for health, medicine, and cosmetics. Additionally, their evergreen branches allow us to see a green landscape and maybe a glimpse of life in the Netherlands on its dark, rainy days. Perhaps, they are reminders that summer will become back eventually, resembling the regenerative cycle of life.



*Figure 1. My olive companion in writing-with Palestine. Photo taken in June 2023.*

and I picked one from the branch.

During my writing journey, I kept the olive on my desk, and within a week, it sucked all the air, and its skin became hard and created a map. My fingertip follows the bumps on the olive; I trace, trace, trace the route, and it leads me back to the beginning of the pit. Writing this thesis about Palestine, with-Palestine, I am continuously reminded of the stoniness of the olive, its skin, and the routes circling back to its origin. It guides me toward understanding the resistance, resilience, and resurgence of olive trees and Palestinians in the face of Zionist settler colonial violence.

In April, I was walking in Amsterdam with a friend, and we saw an olive tree standing tall in the busy Amsterdam street. At first, I thought it was a fake tree, but looking at it closely, I noticed the shining black olives were alive. There were olives in the soil, my friend gave me one,

# Introduction

## To Be an Olive Tree in Palestine

In 1974 Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said, “Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand! I repeat, do not let the olive branch fall from my hand!” (Strategic Research Institute, 2023). Arafat said these words in his first international appearance at the United Nations conference. He was wearing a *kufia* (keffiyeh), a headscarf that the Bedouin farmers use to protect their heads from sandstorms, wind, and the sun while caring for the olive grove. The rectangle black and white scarf, composed of the fishnet and olive leaves pattern, became the symbol of Palestinian resistance after Arafat adopted it (Shirazi-Mahajan 1993, 57). In the speech, an olive branch is held by a Palestinian instead of a dove and is brought to the international setting. Arafat’s speech underscores the Palestinians’ and olive branches’ agency and persistence in liberation. Holding an olive branch represents Palestinian indigeneity, their right to sovereignty, their struggle, and their aspirations. His speech is a call for action for the international political actors towards acknowledging Palestinians’ human rights and the liberation of the land.

What role do olive trees play in Palestine’s liberation, and how and why is Arafat’s speech and appearance with the olive tree stitched *kufia* still relevant today? As ancient trees in Palestine, olive trees are not only metaphors but have become a significant companion in Palestinian liberation. In this thesis, I trace the journey of the olive trees of Palestine and argue that even though they remain in the soil, they are in motion. From the soil to the cultural and political artifacts, olive trees travel in time and space. I analyze cultural artifacts

that re-presents<sup>1</sup> the enduring companionship between the olive tree and the Palestinians in their anticolonial existence.

Arafat's words hold relevance to present times as he draws attention to the olive branch as a significant symbol of struggle and aspirations. In the same speech, referring to the Zionists, Arafat states, "Their terrorism fed on hatred, and this hatred was even directed against the olive tree in my country, which has been a proud symbol and which reminded them of the indigenous inhabitants of the land, a living reminder that the land is Palestinian" (Wikipedia, n.d.). Palestine is still under attack by the Israeli settler colonial state. In May 2021, Amnesty International recognized Israel as an apartheid.<sup>2</sup> Historian Patrick Wolfe describes settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event (Wolfe 2006, 388). Wolfe's description is a crucial definition of settler colonialism as it exposes the Zionist project's violence as ongoing and multi-dimensional. Zionism wipes out the population and creates epistemologies to maintain its sovereignty. The olive groves decimation (Abufarfa 2008) and cultural appropriation (Abunimah 2012; Masalha 2012) are forms of Zionist violence in Palestine.

This thesis focuses on olive trees and Palestinians' relationality by asking, "*What role do olive trees play in Palestinian sumud?*" *Sumud* is rooted in Palestinian culture and describes steadfastness and resilience in the face of occupation (Meari 2014; Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014). Throughout this thesis, I expand Donna Haraway's (2003) companion

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I use re-presentation for two reasons. First, is to show inexhaustible presence of olive trees and Palestinians companionship in the face of Zionist violence. Second, is to step back as a researcher and give them the space to present themselves. According to postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak, representation functions in two ways. Representation (Vertretung) consists of hierarchy and speaking on behalf of someone, whereas re-presentation (Darstellung) aims for a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of marginalized groups, which involves actively engaging with their perspectives and allowing them to express their own agency and subjectivity. Thus, throughout this thesis, I use re-presentation to unmute the olive trees' presence and highlight their companionship with Palestinians. For more information can be found at Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? *Die Philosophin* 14 (27):42-58.

<sup>2</sup> In May 2021, after Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood's forced eviction, Palestine received international attention. Soon after Israel's attacks on Gaza, Amnesty International, a non-profit human rights organization, recognized Israel as an apartheid state. For more information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>

species concept by developing the *rooted-resistance-companionship* to comprehensively understand the relationality between Palestinians and olive trees in their context of *sumud* practices. The concept of *rooted-resistance-companionship* emphasizes the interconnection through which Palestinians and olive trees engage in an anticolonial praxis. I embark on a journey tracing the trajectory of olive trees, from their initial existence in the soil to their subsequent representation in literary and visual artworks, specifically, Mahmoud Darwish's *Earth Pressing against Us* (2003) and *Absent Presence* (2010) and photographer Steve Sabella's *Till the End* (2004) visual artwork. My primary interest lies in examining how the olive tree's journey epitomizes *rooted-resistance-companionship* and elucidating how olive trees and Palestinians mutually share a colonial wound stemming from the ongoing Nakba.

In what follows, I introduce the concepts I use to trace Israel's settler colonial practices and highlight the resistance of olive trees and Palestinians. First, I focus on terraforming, which Amitav Ghosh (2021) describes as the relationship between colonizers and the land. Second, I focus on how colonialism causes a wound on humans and the land (Mignolo 2011; Ferdinand 2021) and how Palestinians and olive trees share this wound. In the context of Palestine, the establishment of the Israeli state has caused the Nakba wound (Masalha 2012; Mitvak 2009; Sa'di 2007), and Palestinians are still forced to live in that wound (Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al. 2022). I intend first to describe terraforming and the Nakba wound to contextualize Palestine's current reality. I then focus on the limitations of posthumanism and aim to expand it by including the context of settler colonialism as an axis of analysis. I aim to stay with posthumanism and work to expand posthuman feminism by bringing it into conversation with Palestinian liberation practices. I develop the *rooted-resistance-companionship* by engaging in Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2003). I focus on why her concept of companionship falls short in its ability to comprehend the companionship between olive trees

and Palestinians. In order to do so, I offer a genealogy of Israel's practices of land capturing and destroying olive trees as a way of terraforming strategy; thus, I focus on the discourse and practice of "turning desert green," Zionist planting pine trees project, and the building of the Apartheid Wall. In response to the Israeli land theft, I examine the Palestinian *sumud*, an anticolonial praxis inspired by the steadfastness of olive trees. Before delving into the material reality of olive trees and Palestinians' relationality, I present kinship in posthuman and Indigenous schools of thought and revisit *Companion Species Manifesto* to highlight its shortcomings in comprehensively acknowledging Indigenous knowledge, praxis, and existence.

### **Posthuman Feminism and Kincentric Ecology**

Posthumanism critically engages with human centrism, perceiving humans as superior and exclusive entities (Braidotti 2011; Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015). It aims to destabilize human-centrism and offers a way of living and understanding the world through multispecies collaboration. It embraces the nature-culture dimensions as a collaboration of relations to the more-than-human-worlds. Posthuman feminism continuously makes people question what is human and who counts as human (Braidotti 2013; 2022). Such questions open up discussions of inequality and move towards destabilizing authoritative, hierarchical positions.

Moreover, posthumanism advocates recognizing species equality and interdependence between humans and more-than-human worlds (Braidotti 2022, 11). I affirm posthuman theory and am aware of the criticisms towards posthumanism, which tends to erase and appropriate Indigenous knowledge and repeat Eurocentrism (Sundberg 2014; Todd 2014). Therefore, I start from posthuman theory, and my intervention fills the gap in posthuman theory's limited and lacking vision of recognizing the reality of humans and more-than-

human worlds in settler colonial contexts. In this thesis, I expand the posthuman perspective by including the relationality between olive trees and Palestinians in their liberation journey.

Stemming from the relationality with more-than-human-worlds, the concept of kinship with more-than-human worlds is highly discussed by scholars concerning Indigenous knowledge (Krawec 2022; Salmon 2000; Simpson 2017; Tynan 2021) and posthuman theory and ecology (Braidotti 2013; de la Bellacasa 2017; Ferdinand 2019; Haraway 2003; Tsing 2015). From an Indigenous studies point of view, Anishinaabe writer Patty Krawec describes kinship with nature and one another as a form of relationship which humans have forgotten and need to remember. For her, to be kin, one should always listen to the other, including the land (Krawec 2022, 148). Rarámuri scholar Enrique Salmon who focuses on ancestral ecological knowledge, states, “Indigenous people see themselves and nature as a part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins” (Salmon 2000, 1330). This acknowledgment opens ways to perceive more-than-human worlds as kin and active agents.

The kin encompasses the natural entities in the ecosystem. Krawec’s suggestion of remembering kinship with more-than-human worlds is in line with Enrique Salmon’s “kincentric ecology” and Braidotti’s “zoecentricism” (Braidotti 2013, 60). These approaches destabilize the centrality of humans and place humans in the relationality realm with more-than-human worlds (Salmon 2000, 1331). Therefore, the importance of our co-existence is not highlighted in the centrality of our bodies but rather in how our bodies relate to one another and more-than-human worlds. Zoecentricism and kincentric ecology are a lens that guides through understanding the understanding of relationality between Palestinian and the olive tree body.

Donna Haraway (2003; 2016) focuses “naturecultures,” linearity between nature and culture through the relationality of human and nonhuman bodies extensively. Her insistence



origins from posthuman thinking, in which she asks people to shift their perspectives away from human exceptionalist views. Haraway's arguments of kinship depart from the concept of humans' biological relatedness and genealogy. She advocates for kinship to be more fluid and inclusive based on mutual dependent relationality (Haraway 2003, 16). Human-centric relationality dissolves and disseminates toward other species we share on the planet.

### ***Companionship Species Revisited***

Haraway focuses on kinship more deeply in her book *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and traces the companionship of commodified and domesticated dogs, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and dogs. According to Haraway, dogs have become an integral part of human social life, contributing to our understanding of what it means to be human (Haraway 2003, 38). Bringing the idea of multispecies companionship to the context of Palestine reveals the limitations of Haraway's proposition. Although the discourse of planetary companionship can inspire the understanding of diverse relationalities with more-than-human worlds, Haraway's concept of companionship does not fully address the harsh reality of living under constant violence. Neither does it account for the forms of anticolonial praxis emerging from such multispecies companionship.

There are three problematic aspects in Haraway's manifesto that merit scrutiny. Firstly, while she traces the historical dynamics between white settlers and dogs in Canada, Australia, and the United States, she neglects to acknowledge the existence and agency of Indigenous communities. Although she acknowledges white settlers' existence, she mentions "Indigenous" only two times in her book. She focuses on how dogs have been traded and domesticated for settler colonies. However, her point of view does not elaborate on ways of resistance or forms of existence of dogs with their "previous" companions. For instance, mentioning settler context, she gives the information that German collies are called "German" "because German settlers lived in an area of Australia where these dogs were

common” (Haraway 2003, 98). While Haraway attempts to sketch naturecultures with companion species, she fails to demonstrate whose companions were, for instance, the dogs mentioned before the German settlers’ appropriation. She mentions different dog breeds but neglects to mention Indigenous communities and fails to recognize the reciprocal relationship between “unmentioned” Indigenous communities and dogs. Accordingly, she fails to emphasize the lived realities of individuals existing under the oppressive conditions of settler colonialism and overlooks the profound implications of the relationality between Indigenous peoples and dogs within this context.

Secondly, her writings show the interconnectedness between humans and more-than-human worlds; however, her understanding of settler colonialism is limited to a timeline. She writes about the United States and Canada’s settler trajectory as a history, not a current reality. Accordingly, she fails to acknowledge settler colonialism as a structure (Wolfe 2006, 388) and focuses on it as a historical event. By the end of the book, Haraway writes:

If I tell the story of the Gold Rush and the Civil War, then maybe I can remember the other stories about the dogs and their people—stories about immigration, indigenous worlds, work, hope, love, play, and the possibility of co-habitation through reconsidering sovereignty and ecological developmental naturecultures. (Haraway 2003, 82)

The interconnectedness of humans and dogs may expose the reality of settlers’ brutalism, which encompasses domesticating the animals and commodification. However, Haraway does not offer an aspect of resistance against settler colonialism. Instead, she suggests the adaptation of dogs to new territories and new families, societies, and roles. Following the history of breeding dogs, using them as shepherds, and creating new dog species may reveal humans’ exploitative habits. However, the way Haraway traces the dogs’ journey misleads the reader towards the perception that the settlers settled in the territory, dogs and their human companions suffered “in the past,” and we should follow our dog companions to understand what is to be a human, and how humans can cause damage to more-than-human worlds.

Additionally, Haraway does not offer a context or elaborate on what are the Indigenous worlds she mentions. She instead situates herself in a network of people from the “past,” her dogs in the middle as a transmitter of the “past” and Indigenous people in “the past.” She disregards the ongoing presence of settler colonial violence and framing history as a relic of the past.

Thirdly, by primarily focusing on her personal relationship with her dogs, tracing their breed history, Haraway inadvertently perpetuates Eurocentrism by neglecting to name the Indigenous communities and centering herself (as a white settler) and the dog (as an Indigenous species). Thus, her understanding of relationality is confined to the legacy of settlers and the Indigenous dogs’ inherited suffering. In her exploration of companionship, she adopts a colonial approach akin to “colonial care” (Hunter 2021) and “privileged irresponsibility” (Tronto 1993). It is a form of colonial care because she extends care to the dogs, who inherit the historical trauma as a form of white savior complex (Straubhaar 2015). Her aspect is a form of privileged irresponsibility because she makes Indigenous communities absent and neglects to call for accountability of those who cause(d) inequality. Haraway’s failure to acknowledge Indigenous communities and their entanglements with dogs, her separation of dogs’ histories from the communities, and her portrayal of settler colonialism as a bygone event perpetuate a Eurocentric perspective because she sketches the history as an event by white settlers and dogs in the past.

Haraway feels responsible for caring for the unfortunate ones who have suffered because of the exploitative humans in history. She does not recognize what can be done other than hoping for a great future. Companionship can happen, apparently, between a settler and an Indigenous dog. Still, Haraway does not specify what a new generation of settlers could do to change the structures except to touch her dog’s hair and remember the past. Moreover, she

does not say anything about the current situation of her dogs, except them facilitating as a reminder of the past and naturecultures.

Haraway concludes her book with these words:

In my own personal-historical natureculture, I know in my flesh that the largely middle-class, white people of Pyr and Aussie land have an as yet unarticulated responsibility to participate in re-imagining grasslands ecologies and ways of life that were blasted in significant part by the very ranching practices that required the work of these dogs. Through their dogs, people like me are tied to indigenous sovereignty rights, ranching economic and ecological survival, radical reform of the meat-industrial complex, racial justice, the consequences of war and migration, and the institutions of technoculture. (...) When I stroke my landmate Susan CaudilPs sensuous Great Pyrenees, Willem, I also touch relocated Canadian gray wolves, upscale Slovakian bears, and international restoration ecology, as well as dog shows and multi-national pastoral economies. (...) Inhabiting that legacy without the pose of innocence, we might hope for the Creative grace of play. (Haraway 2003, 98)

In this quote above, Haraway does not specify her connection to the Indigenous rights except recognizing her intertwined situatedness. Her account does not refer to the ongoing settler colonial violence. Instead, it sketches the “history” of humanity as if the history belongs to the past. She does not specify what “indigenous sovereignty rights” are or engage with the accountability of settler colonies. She, again, fails to recognize who are the Indigenous people the dogs were connected to.

“The creative grace of play,” she mentions in the last line, displays a form of a romantic companionship between the white settler and mixed breed dog whose dog ancestors have suffered because of humans. Haraway does not elaborate on this graceful play, its meaning, and how it is possible. Her text suggests that settler colonialism in the US and Canada has happened “in the past,” the white-settlers and the new generation of white-settlers entangled in this history, and knowing this history goes through living with mix bred dogs. Understanding dogs’ inherited history would allow humans to realize their exploitative, violent praxis. However, Haraway’s work does not suggest what is to be done except “hoping” for the creative grace of play. She “hopes” for grace and leaves the reader

questioning the meaning of the “Creative grace of play” as if there is an unaccountable external force that shapes the world of naturecultures. Thus, not addressing the accountability of white settlers, and refuging in hope for the future, can only be interpreted as a decision, a conscious rejection.

Her conscious decision of rejection extends to her recent writings. Haraway published her manifesto in 2003 and mentioned that the companionship concept is a work in progress (Haraway 2003, 3). Since 2003, Haraway did not write about settler colonial contexts by including Indigenous scholarship and the co-existence of humans and more-than-humans in resistance. On the contrary, in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), her companionship and kinship discourse, especially with her suggestion, "Stop making babies, make kin," has evolved towards exclusionary white eugenics praxis (Mattheis 2022)<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, Haraway's companionship manifesto, which neglects the existence of indigenous communities, and creates hierarchical white saviorism towards dogs, situating settler colonialism as a historical event, cannot shed light on understanding the possibilities of resistance under the settler occupation.

In light of the reasons mentioned above, I feel compelled to interject into the companionship discourse initiated by Haraway. I aim to contribute an expanded and nuanced perspective to companionship, particularly within the framework of ongoing settler colonialism. If posthumanism strives for multispecies equality and affirmation of differences among cultures and people, in that case, I interfere with the posthuman discourse by acknowledging the already existing nature-culture relationality and Indigenous praxis and knowledge of Palestine. Looking at Palestine by recognizing Palestinians' indigeneity and

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<sup>3</sup> Haraway's slogan, which refers to the growing population on the planet and renders her ecological concerns, has received critiques of perpetuating colonialist eugenics praxis from feminist scholars. In *Debating Population in and Beyond Feminist Political Ecology*, Fenner and Harcourt (2023) reflect on the extensive interview conducted with feminist researchers.

praxis, acknowledging the settler colonialism's presence would emerge the resistance practices, forms of being-withs, a relationality devoid of hierarchical saviorism and doings besides hoping for the "creative grace of play."

### ***The Rooted-Resistance-Companionship***

Through the lens of *rooted-resistance-companionship*, *sumud* extends as a reciprocal relationality. The bond between olive trees and Palestinians is reshaped by settler colonial violence, where their co-existence has become a form of political resistance, resilience, and resurgence against the apartheid regime. My argument does not suggest that the companionship of Palestinians and olive trees began with the colonial force; instead, it emphasizes the affect of such force in shaping their relationality. The companionship between olive trees and Palestinians is not formed in biological relatedness or genealogy; instead, their relationality is based on the shared history of nurture in pre-Nakba, struggle, and resilience in the ongoing Nakba. Therefore, I formulate their companionship as a *rooted-resistance-companionship*, as a testament to the resilience and agency of both olive trees and Palestinians who share the site of struggle against oppression.

Olive trees and Palestinians have a symbiotic relationship, where the trees provide food, medicine, oil, source of livelihood for Palestinians, while the Palestinians, in return, care, protect, and fight for the olive trees by keeping them rooted throughout generations. This thesis will show that Israel's terraforming strategies aim to disrupt this deep-rooted co-existence. Accordingly, the *rooted-resistance-companionship* represents the collective struggle for justice, dignity, and self-determination in the face of the ongoing colonial violence.

To fully grasp the companionship between olive trees and Palestinians, examining their relationship within the framework of Zionist settler colonial violence is crucial. Because

olive trees and Palestinians' relationality depicts a co-existence in the face of settler colonialism. The companionship in the context of Palestine exceeds the idea of inter-relationality devoid of an extensive understanding of the political context of occupation. The olive tree and Palestinians' relationship is rooted in the Indigenous land of Palestine. Their relationality is resistant because it undermines and aims to overthrow ongoing Zionist settler colonialism. The relationality in the face of ongoing Zionism is a form of companionship because it is a mutually nourishing and reciprocal relation that both resists Zionist settler colonialism and insists on a temporality that predates the established Zionist state.

I will now introduce the guiding concepts of terraforming, Nakba wound, and *sumud* as they pave the way for a better understanding of what I call *rooted-resistance-companionship*. Followingly, I start presenting the genealogy of Israel's settler colonial practices of terraforming and focus on Palestinians and olive trees' co-existence in resistance.

## **Guiding Concepts**

Nature has always been the target for colonizers as it offers a territory to be conquered. The logic of conquest, which Amitav Ghosh explains, materializes itself first through the occupation of nature with which Indigenous people have been in a close relationship (Gosh 2021, 68). The occupation of the land allows colonizers to shape it. Ghosh conceptualizes changing the land as "terraforming" (Ghosh 2021, 63). Capturing nature opens not only ways to gain new resources from nature but also a way to control the Indigenous people.

Conquering a land cuts Indigenous people's connection to it, thus, leaving them weakened and dependent on the colonizers. Accordingly, in the context of colonization and resurgence<sup>4</sup>, nature plays a crucial role. Nature becomes a territory where colonizers perform extraction,

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow the concept of resurgence from Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson (2017), who addresses Indigenous radical resurgence practices in the context of Canada. While delving into the concept of resurgence is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge Simpson's perspective on resurgence as a means of accessing ancestral wisdom and fostering connection. This understanding plays a significant role in comprehending the decolonial and anticolonial companionship between Palestinians and olive trees.

displacement, and dispossession; it also becomes a place to posit resurgence and re-connection.

In the context of settler colonialism, colonizers become settlers in the territory of Indigenous people. To settle, they replace people and terraform the land. Terraforming the land aims to change flora and fauna and affect more-than-human worlds. Patrick Wolfe describes settler colonialism as eliminating the Indigenous people and replacing them with another population imported by the colonizers (Wolfe 1999, 27). The establishment of Israel fits in the description of settler-colonialism as it was reinforced by the Zionist project of indigenizing the Jewish population at the expense of Palestinians and appropriating the land (Masalha 2012, 21). In 1948, ninety percent of the Palestinian population was expelled in order Jewish population in Europe to settle in their “Promised Land” (Masalha 2012, 3).

In 1914, Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann wrote: “There is a country which happens to be called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exist the Jewish people, and it has no country” (quoted in Braverman 2009a, 34). Weizmann’s words exemplify the Zionist perspective of seeing Palestine without its Indigenous people. Zionism is a distinguished, focused ideology directed against Palestinians and produced the state of Israel in 1948. As a violent ideology and praxis, Zionism advocates erasing Palestinians’ existence and recreating the Jewish population as natives by enforcing control and ownership over the land, occupying and oppressing Palestine and Palestinians (Masalha 2012, 60; Pappé 2015, 51). Edward Said, a central figure in postcolonial studies, brought Palestine to the center of discussions. He describes the Zionist project in three steps. The first method is to acquire the Palestinian land physically; the second one is dispossessing the people, and the third method is the force of maintaining Israel as a state. The third method is crucial in understanding Zionism as an ongoing project because to preserve its sovereignty, Israel must keep showing its power to the rest of the world (Said 1979, 37). Nakba, the Palestinian



“catastrophe,” is not an event that only happened in the past; it is instead an ongoing process of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015, 34). Israel's project of indigenizing the Jewish society and de-indigenizing the Palestinians was established with the withdrawal and support of British occupiers (1916-1948) and has not stopped. The indigenization of the Jewish community is performed through the discourse of “promised land,” which goes hand in hand with erasing and appropriating, capitalizing on the Palestinian people, nature, and culture.

The decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo (2011) argues that Western colonialism has caused a deep and lasting “colonial wound” for the Global South. Colonization is not a historical event but a continuing process of domination and violence that aims to subjugate humans and the land. Land theft, turning it into resources, exploiting human and nonhuman labor, imposing Western universalism, and erasing Indigenous knowledge and practice are forms of colonial violence (Mignolo 2011, 49). Colonial violence causes economic inequality and epistemic domination. Consequently, the colonial wounds are physical but also psychological and collective, reconfiguring the identities of colonized subjects and the land. The environmental philosopher Malcom Ferdinand (2022) conceptualizes the idea of wound or woundedness as a double fracture. Ferdinand argues that the double fracture caused a cut between humans and nature and opened the way for colonization. It ended up conquering the land and splitting people based on their races, sexes, and gender. Moreover, the fracture caused a perception of nature as a source of exploitation, an inert and inanimate being (Ferdinand 2022, 8).

Palestinian historian Nur Masalha describes the Nakba as a turning point in the history of Palestine, as over five hundred villages were destroyed and disappeared from international maps and dictionaries (Masalha 2012, 3). In *Memory from Below*, Michael Milshtein describes Nakba as an open wound (Milshtein 2009, 72). Understanding this open

wound as a place for change and subversion is critical in understanding Palestinians and olive trees' companionship in the face of ongoing settler colonial erasure. In *Voices of the Nakba*, Ismail Shammout, who was eighteen years old in 1948, shares his memory of the Nakba:

On the last day, which was 13 July 1948, we felt a rumbling of people walking outside. There were so many people walking. We were scared! We peered through the window and saw the streets filled with people. Moments later, our door was knocked on with rifle butts—Israeli soldiers. We opened the door, and they said, 'Out. All out. All out.' Where, out? 'All out,' they made us go out. We left our homes and joined the torrential river of people walking towards a large square called Sahat al-Nawa'ir in Lydda. (...) We kept on walking until there were no more Jews around, and we felt like it was a safe area, an Arab area. We kept walking until we arrived on the outskirts of a town called Ni'lin. The people of Ni'lin rushed to our aid with whatever they could; whoever had an animal gave a ride, and whoever had some bread or a jar of water saved whoever they could save. We slept on the ground under an olive tree, with the sky as our blanket, as they say. (interview excerpt shared in Jayyusi 2021, 246-8)

Finding a refuge under an olive tree, Shammout's first-person account of events succinctly expresses the collective experience of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had to flee their homeland. Despite the ongoing violence, sharing the traumatic memories, and the acts of remembering work both as a decolonial and anticolonial praxis (Tabar and Desai 2017; Dana and Jarbawi 2017); it is decolonial because Palestinians continuously share their memories of pre-1948, signifying their indigeneity. It is anticolonial because sharing their transgenerational belongingness to the land and exposing the ongoing Zionist violence work as a resistance in forms of standing against colonial practices. Standing together against the ethnic cleansing of people and Zionist appropriation of the land, olive trees, and Palestinians share the Nakba wound and turn it into a narration and co-existence territory.

The national identity of Palestinians, influenced by the Nakba, is distinct from many other nation-state identities as it does not originate from a top-down approach but instead emerges from collective experiences (Litvak 2009, 1). This grassroots resistance and resurgence contrast with Zionist narratives, which rely on an enforced Hebrew Man rhetoric and the reinvention of Jewish indigeneity. The Nakba serves as an eternal present (Sa'di

2002, 177) whereby Palestinian identity is continuously re-emerging from the soil, as it is intimately connected to the woundedness of the land and the olive trees. As such, the identity is formed from the bottom up; the wound becomes an actant territorial resurgence space in the face of settler colonialism. Accordingly, the ongoing violence shapes their co-belongingness, moving them towards the constant reclamation and reshaping their identity as a form of resistance toward the liberation of humans and more-than-human beings.

The relationship between the olive tree and the Israeli state indicates the altered relationship between olive trees and the Palestinian people. Historically, Palestinians and olive trees shared a deep sense of belonging to the land and each other. However, with the arrival of Zionist settlers, their relationship was reshaped and transformed into a corpo-affective ontology of colonial woundedness. This new dynamic represents a shift from a harmonious and symbiotic relationship to one marked by settler colonial violence and oppression. Once a place of gathering and sharing joy with families, transgenerational heritage, and connection, the olive tree now also serves as a site of struggle for the Palestinian people as they fight for their right to exist on their land. The altered relationality between the olive trees and the Palestinians reflects the broader political and social changes that have taken place in Palestine and beyond, highlighting the ongoing struggle for autonomy and sovereignty in the face of settler colonial violence.

Olive trees can demonstrate a way out of the anthropocentric desire to heal from a wound. Despite being wounded, dislocated from the soil, or losing their branches, olive trees thrive and give life. Their resilience embodies the wound rather than seeking to escape it. This resilience is mirrored in the Palestinian identity of “*sumud*,” which emphasizes the importance of keeping the Palestinian identity alive and thriving despite oppression (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 90). Both olive trees and Palestinians share the commonality of

utilizing their wounds as a place of resistance and resurgence. As such, the wound becomes an active site of resistance for both, re-presenting a space of resistance and power.

### ***Sumud* and the Nakba Wound**

*“Sumud is planting a tree, nourishing it, trimming, harvesting; it is an art of living.”*

*Zoughabi Zoughabi*

(Quoted in Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 91)

Woundedness is not a state of desperation or surrendering to the perpetrator but a place of resurgence. To be alive under the settler-occupation can be perceived as one form of resistance in the face of ongoing ethnic cleansing. Inspired by the resilience of olive trees, in 1978, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) suggested *sumud* as remaining steadfast and resilient in Palestine against settler colonial occupation (Marie et al. 2018, 29). *Sumud* has become a unique Palestinian national concept that translates to “steadfastness” against violence and injustice, maintaining a sense of self, and protecting the land (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 86). It is a form of everyday activism distinguished from heroic narratives that underline physical battles (Khalili 2007, 11). *Sumud* symbolizes the constant re-creation of Palestinian identity despite the ongoing ethnic cleansing.

In the 1970s, *sumud* was dominantly associated with being inside Palestine, especially in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza (Rijke and van Teeffelen, 86). It can be performed through demographic resistance, increasing the Palestinian population, less dependence on the Israeli economy, and initiating small cooperatives. On the other hand, a farmer replanting an olive tree or someone rebuilding their demolished house is a way of *sumud* as well. Anthropologist Lena Meari, whose work focuses on Palestinians’ hunger strikes in prisons, defines *sumud* as a refusal to surrender (Meari 2014, 550). She asserts that steadfastness is a constant act of revolutionary becoming (Meari 2014, 549). The

revolutionary aspect of such selfhood is refusing to recognize the colonial powers and not surrendering to the oppression. Meari defines *sumud* as a form of becoming because it is never fixed or completed (Meari 2014, 555). Revolutionary becoming is always a practice, a relational being; it is a constant reorganization of the revolutionary self in the face of colonial power structures.

Moreover, the practice of *sumud* involves affective relationality with the comrades (not sharing information about them during interrogations) and social and political relations that involve the ongoing anticolonial struggle. Meari elaborates on *sumud* as a constellation of revolutionary becoming, encompassing the self and the others (Meari 2014, 55). The self and the other continuously affect one another and materialize one's potentiality of revolutionary becoming. Consequently, *sumud* is the force of life, not surrendering, not giving up, and always staying in relation with others.

The director of the cultural NGO *al-Ruwad* Abdel Fatah Abu Srouf describes *sumud* as enjoying life despite the siege and continuously reclaiming his identity (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 90). Although *sumud* was coined to be resilient and stay in the land, like many other concepts, it traveled and reshaped throughout time. A Palestinian interviewee Zaoughabi Zaoughabi describes *sumud* as someone connected to the land and Palestinian identity at home or the diaspora. The most important thing to him is to keep the Palestinian identity alive (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 91). Such preservation involves keeping the identity, memories, and customs continuous across generations.

Consequently, *sumud* is an embodied agency of everyday actions that constantly remind the settlers that they cannot erase, deny, delete, and subordinate Palestinians. In the same interview, Zoughabi Zoughabi says, "*sumud* is planting a tree, nourishing it, trimming, harvesting; it is an art of living" (Rijke and van Teeffelen 2014, 91). He describes

Palestinians' and olive trees' rootedness to one another and the land. The olive trees are closely related to Palestinian belongingness to the land, economic independence, and indigeneity (Abufarha 2008, 345), thus Palestinians' historical rootedness, self-expression, and resistance. Olive trees represent home to the ones in exile; they transfer the transnational and transgenerational knowledge of indigeneity. Zionists may uproot olive trees, but uprooting does not end their lives. Instead, olive trees partake in revolutionary becoming as they regrow and multiply.

### **Resilience in The Wound**

*“At present, the land is poor and neglected. The Holy Land is a wilderness. But there are oases—our Jewish settlements!”* (Theodor Herzl quoted in Braverman 2009, 336).

Since the Oslo Accords, as a method of terraforming, more than 400 000 olive trees have been uprooted by the Zionist settlers (Braverman 2009b, 24). Moreover, thousands of olive trees were destroyed in 2002 to build the Apartheid Wall. The Apartheid Wall separates the Palestinians from their groves, thus cutting their bond to the land (Braverman 2009b; Meneley 2011). According to the settlers' laws, the olive groves not cultivated within four years are automatically given to the state (Braverman 2009b, 259). To cultivate their groves, Palestinians need to have permission from Israeli authorities to have access to the groves. The approval to access may take more than four years, encapsulating the paradoxical bureaucratic brutality Palestinians face. Above all, the entry permit does not only prevent Palestinians from tending the groves, but it also interrupts their connection to the land. Consequently, uprooting olive trees and preventing access to the olive groves cause uprooting/ interruption of the Palestinian relational identity (Braverman 2009b, 238).

The uprooting of olive trees by Israeli forces in Palestine has been common. Still, it is essential to understand that this action does not erase the existence of Palestinians or the

trees. Instead, it merely delays their growth and production. It should be noted that uprooting an olive tree does not always result in death; rather, it postpones its productivity. When the bulldozer rips the roots from the soil, some roots remain intact and capable of regrowth. Furthermore, even if an entire tree is carried away, a single seed on the ground can result in a new tree in approximately seven years. Olive trees are inherently resilient and possess an innate ability to revive themselves.

Olive trees have female and male flowers. Thus, they are self-fertile. Self-fertilization might sound like an independent process. However, olive trees, too, live in an interconnected ecosystem. To produce fruit, they need their planetary companions, such as water, the sun, and pollinators like bees, butterflies, and humans. One of the reasons for seeing olive trees planted in groups is because of human intervention in nature. In *Unruly Edges*, Anna Tsing discusses plantations as a European expansion engine. The plantations initiated and supported the states' wealth, cutting the love for the plants and the possibilities of connecting people. (Tsing 2012, 148). Once the olive trees are planted in groups, it increases the yield of the fruit. So, human intervention causes or instead activates cross-pollination to have more fruit and expedite the production process. Tsing might be right; we live in a fast-producing agricultural world. However, in the case of Palestine, love for the tree is not missing, and re-plantation, more plantation, structured plantation of the olive tree is not directly a part of the European logic of machinery, but it is instead an anti-colonial response to the Zionist settler colonial state. Zionists may uproot olive trees, but uprooting does not end their lives. Instead, olive trees partake in revolutionary becoming as they regrow and multiply.

Considering the relationality between the olive tree and a farmer, Lena Jayyusi sketches an image of a man lamenting for the olive tree while the military forces destroy them to build the separation wall. She describes the farmer's and olive tree's bonds as a part of the life cycle rather than a symbol (Jayyusi 2007, 123). Regarding Palestinians and olive

trees' relational being, Lena Jayyusi discusses olive trees' importance in Palestinian culture as "metonymically as life itself" (Jayyusi 2007, 123). The mutually beneficial relationality, which encompasses nurturing one another, functions as a corporeal bond that constitutes life.

### **Weaponizing Nature: Enrooting Settler Belonging**

The Zionist project does not only uproot olive trees to interrupt and delay Palestinians' living. The project also aims to indigenize the Jewish population in Palestine (Masalha 2012, 21). As a form of indigenizing the Jewish population, Zionists perform the settler colonial practice of "destroying to replace" (Wolfe 2006, 388). The settlers' replacement logic is an ecopolitical manner that includes more-than-human worlds. Zionists displace Palestinians and plant pine trees to reshape flora and fauna and create belongingness for the Jewish population (Braverman 2009a, 346). The pine tree is a fast-growing tree that can take over the soil and spread quickly. It can grow tall, create shade over olive trees, and interrupt sunlight. It changes the fauna and flora and functions as a tool to recreate Jewish belonging. In contrast to olive trees' presence signifying Palestinians' indigeneity, Zionists started to plant pine trees to replace "the void of Jewish body" in Holy Land (Braverman 2009a, 327).

Legal scholar Irus Braverman describes pine trees as wild and fast-growing trees that symbolize the European landscape. It can be seen as a project of modernizing the Holy Land, making it seem like a European city, and giving a home feeling to the Jewish population who migrated from Europe. Braverman elaborates on the fast-growing of pine trees and says the tree gives the impression that "as if it was always there" (Braverman 2009a, 343). The phrase "as if always there" succinctly explains the Zionist project of indigenizing the Jewish population by shadowing the presence of olive trees and Palestinians. Moreover, Braverman argues that Zionism resembles the colonial mechanism of seeing the land empty and untamed and that, unlike other colonizers, Zionists focused on afforestation instead of deforestation (Braverman 2009a, 341). However, the logic of conquest functions as deforestation and



afforestation simultaneously in Palestine. Zionists destroy olive trees to claim the land. As a one-time deputy-major of East Jerusalem said, “I myself made the desert bloom by uprooting the ancient olive trees of al-Bassa to clear the ground for a banana grove” (quoted in Wolfe 2006, 88). The terraforming strategies are not limited to cutting the olive trees and disrupting the livelihoods. Zionists also change flora and fauna in the Naqab desert and interfere with ways of indigenous living.

### **“Turning the Naqab Green”**

Soil is a place where Israel starts its terraforming practices. The settlers impose their political, urban, and economic forms of living on Bedouins in Naqab, harming the community and their environment. Bedouins are semi-nomadic Arab tribes in desert regions such as the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and Mesopotamia. Claiming they are nomads, the Israeli state does not recognize Bedouins’ indigeneity to the land. As a form of terraforming and displacing the indigenous population, in 2022, Israeli forces started bulldozing the Naqab desert (Middle East Monitor 2022). Bedouin is in the south of Palestine. It is where Indigenous Bedouin people live, and the place has been a target for top-down urbanization since the 1960s (Nasasra 2017, 7-37)—the urbanization plan aimed to de-Arabize the Bedouin to modernize the territory. Naqab is mostly desert; the government forced Bedouins to move to towns claiming that the land was empty and not functional. Bedouin people have their way of tribal living; however, with the urbanization plans, Israel performs another colonial violence.

The government claimed Bedouins were not living to the standards of modern life, and their living places were not in good shape. To claim the land, they came up with an urbanization plan. Despite the urbanization plans, Bedouins did not give up on their land and resisted the government and kept building houses from wood and cement, and this resistance made Israeli officials listen to the Bedouin sheiks’ conditions which were their sovereignty in

the territory. (Nasasra 2017, 214). The Bedouins in the Naqab use wells, digging a hole into the ground to access water; they protect their cemeteries existing before the Nakba, and they have their indigenous knowledge and praxis which fall out of the Zionist understanding of living (Nasasra 2017, 19). According to Nasasra, Bedouins live within an Islamic community, consisting of their desert dialect, marriage norms, and intermarriage practices that do not conform to Zionist thinking. Although all the Palestinians are Indigenous to the land, Israel classifies Bedouins as an “ethnic minority” to detach them from the rest of the Palestinians (Nasasra 2017, 20). This detachment causes the hierarchy between Palestinians living in towns and Bedouins living in the desert, putting Bedouin people into the lower ranking as a “more uncivilized” population. Through attacks on the lands of Bedouin people, the discriminatory discourse of “uncivilized” seek to displace Bedouin people and compel their relocation to towns, all to Zionists assert ownership and terraform the land.

The Naqab has always been a target for Zionist settlement, and turning the desert green is a part of the expansion of the settler’s territory. Along with urbanization plans, afforestation is an extension of colonial logic that contradicts the ecological order of nature (Braverman 2009, 341). “Turning the desert green” causes the death of desert plants, which are integral to the ecosystem. For instance, cacti in Palestine are companions of olive trees and Palestinians in their steadfastness. They provide shelter for desert animals, stabilize the soil through their roots, and absorb and store water as part of the water cycle. This invasion of a colonial logic of urbanization leads to the death of the soil and the Indigenous culture's relationship to it. Colonialism does not bring modernity and progress to the Naqab desert. Instead, it results in the displacement of the Indigenous people and the death of desert plants, and the loss of Indigenous culture. Consequently, settler colonialism attacks nature and disrupts the ecological belonging of humans and more-than-human entities.

## Politics of Soil

*“The soil you depend on depends on those who depends on you.”*

(Maria Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 199).

For Palestinians and olive trees, root, rootedness, and belongingness are fundamental relational forces against the settler colonial regime. The soil in Palestine is the place where resistance and occupation reside. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said traces the white occidentals narrating Orientals as lazy people with no history (Said 1978, 262). Benefiting from the doctrines of Orientalism, Zionist discourse sketches Palestinians as lazy Arabs who do not do anything for their trees and “sit under the tree all day” (Braverman 2009a, 243). As Michael Sfar, a Jewish Israeli lawyer, states in the interview with Braverman, such discourse contributes to the misunderstanding of Palestinian relationality to the land (Braverman 2009a, 243). However, a close look at the soil, a world humans fail to recognize in everyday life, would destabilize such misrepresentation.

After building the Apartheid Wall in 2002, the settler state divided the zones in the West Bank as friction and timetable zones (Braverman 2009, 257). Israeli Army “promised” to protect the olive groves for the Palestinians because the settlers constantly attacked the groves. However, this protection came with more surveillance. Friction zones defined the “precarious olive trees” against the settlers’ attacks and put them under the control and protection of the Israeli Army. The timetable was implemented to decide when Palestinians can enter and tend olive trees. Palestinians do not know when they can cultivate or prune the olive trees, they must ask for permission, and the permit for access to the groves is arbitrary. Thus, the Israeli Army does not listen to the land's timing; instead, it implements its settler colonial logic of surveillance and control, interrupting Palestinians' continuous relationality with olive trees.

The living soil is a composition of living and non-living entities, which have interactions in the dark, not visible to the human eye. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa calls the living soil the “multispecies community (de la Bellacasa 2017, 189). Earthworms, algae, fungi, and plants live harmoniously in this multispecies world. They do not only feed each other, but they also create what humans call lively soil. The multispecies realm of the soil affects each other and determines how humans nurture and repair soil’s life; such interdependent life connections are examples of how humans and more-than-human webs are affective to one another. Every living organism has its temporality of life. The movements of the earthworm, the texture of the fungi, the visit and the pace of the pollinator, the direction and the strength of the wind, the angle of the sun rays, the amount of the water, and human engagement with the soil collectively shape the cycle of the soil ecosystem.

Close attention to the harmony of nature can shift one’s perspectives from a human-centric view and broaden the understanding of temporality. Such a shift can destabilize the conventional understanding of the temporal nature of living organisms, leading to a more nuanced comprehension of the dynamic interplay between the various factors influencing an ecosystem’s growth. Ecological growth is not a linear process; it consists of the cooperation of multispecies’ temporality. This growth incorporates living and nonliving organisms, including dead bodies, which contribute to the overall dynamics of the soil’s ecosystem. By acknowledging the importance of these diverse agencies, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the temporal nature of living organisms and their interactions within a broader ecological framework.

Consequently, as de la Bellacasa states, what might seem slow or backward might have a different meaning in another context (de la Bellacasa 2017, 209). A farmer whose name was not shared in Braverman’s article says, “You don’t give anything, and it gives you everything in return (Braverman 2009b, 242). The farmer is speaking not from a human-

centric position but instead acknowledging the prosperity and generosity of the olive tree. His relationality to the olive tree consists of love and appreciation. Another farmer, Nabil, says that he sees olive trees as part of his family, his children (Braverman 2009, 242). The farmers' statements reveal the Palestinians' relationality to the olive trees, which is not possessive, but rather a symbiosis, a mutually beneficial living of interspecies. Living close to the land, and the olive trees, following the calendar of the harvest season, and waiting for the pollinators, earthworms, and roots to do their job, Palestinians do not exemplify being lazy; instead, they represent how to live in harmony with the order of the nature.

### **Politics of Dead**

In *Esiah's Film*, Palestinian seed conservationist, artist, and researcher Vivien Sansour shares her journey of seed collecting, making, and sharing food with people to bring seed heritage back from companies to communities. Sansour is the founder of the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library, in which she collects Indigenous seeds such as heirloom wheat to revive the Palestinian economy and introduce Palestinian indigeneity to the rest of the world. In the documentary, she pays tribute to her friend Esiah Levy, a Jamaican entrepreneur who inspired Sansour to start collecting seeds. She reflects that when working with plants, one realizes that death is not the end but a new beginning, as it represents a continuous process of regeneration. "when you work with plants, you understand that death is an illusion. It is a constant state of transformation. His death was hardly an end; it was the beginning of something." As Sansour states, once a person gets closer to the soil, one realizes that death is not an ending but a transition. Her stance aligns with what immanence philosophy suggests, that death is not an end but a transition (Braidotti 2013, 137). The dead body becomes compost and merges into the soil, with the roots and the critters nurturing the soil, thus continuing to live in another form than a 'human' body.

Palestinians' rootedness is evident in the places where their dead rest. It is a political and resistance act to be a dead body and to bury the dead body in Palestine. In 2021, in Occupied East Jerusalem, the Israeli state demolished the Palestinian cemetery, surrounded by olive trees, to build a biblical theme park (Jundi 2021). The video of a mother crying over her child's tomb was shared rapidly on social media and has caused an outrage. Such violence over the soil, which people find sacred, does not only expose Zionists' brutality but also reveals how Palestinians' dead bodies evoke anxiety for the settler-colonial state. The cemeteries represent and constantly remind the settlers of the existence of the Palestinians (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 50). In *Criminality in Spaces of Death*, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian examines the Israeli state violence on dead Palestinian bodies. According to Shalhoub-Kevorkian, the Palestinians' dead bodies become the state's property, and the state determines where and when to bury them; the dead bodies are buried in 'public' land (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 40). Shalhoub-Kevorkian describes the settlers' aim as dehumanizing the Palestinians, do not respect their dead, do not allow them to honor their dead within the frame of settler anxiety of control. The dead bodies represent that the Palestinians are rooted in the land and do not abandon their land (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 41). Evoking such anxiety, the dead bodies do not become inanimate objects, they facilitate being active agents in the soil, and with their presence, they actively resist the settler colonial regime.

## **Palestinian Agriculture and Politics of Olive Oil Trade**

*This is very expensive oil. Expensive because a farmer risked being shot by an Israeli settler to pick his olives. Expensive because the farmer may have been kept from his land by the Separation Wall. Expensive because of what we had to go through to export it.*

(Palestinian olive oil producer, 2006 quoted in Meneley 2011, 275).

For Palestinians, agriculture is not only a source of income; it also resembles embodied relationship to the land and belonging (Abufarha 2008; Meneley 2011; Zu'bi 1984). In 2002 Rabbis for Human Rights delivered a petition to Israel's Supreme Court of Justice on behalf of Palestinian farmers (Braverman 2009b, 256). This petition gave the farmers the right to access their farms under the control of Israeli military forces. Certain areas in West Bank were assigned as "Economic Zones" to initiate Palestinian farming (Braverman 2009, 239). The system of surveillance of Palestinians in the West Bank points out the close monitoring performances of the Israeli Army. This system strips families from their food sovereignty. As Israel controls what is to be produced and traded, it prevents land reclamation. By designating the areas of farming, land ownership of the farmers is denied and turns the farmers into the workers of Israel. As Israel controls what Palestinians (can) produce and forces them to grow wheat, vegetables, barley, and forces, it deprives the economic and agricultural strength of the nation (Al-Shabaka 2012). Moreover, Israel stands between Palestine and the rest of the world as it controls and blocks Palestinian farmers' economic sovereignty.

Zionist settler authorities control the land and uproot the olive trees to disrupt the transgenerational Palestinian belongingness and control the trade emerging from the Palestinian small-scale farmers. Since the Belfour Declaration erased Palestine from the world map, Palestinians must use the Israeli ports in Haifa or Ashdod (Meneley 2018, 78). The cultivating of the fruit to produce olive oil is done under the surveillance of the settlers. Consequently, Palestinians must go through a catastrophic bureaucracy to present their

economic independency and claim their existence outside of the apartheid. Through oppressive and limiting Zionist bureaucracy, Palestinian farmers build a bridge between international consumers and produce “solidarity oil” (Meneley 2021, 78), thus continuously overcoming the Zionist obstacles.

Although olive trees are in the mountains and valleys embraced with rocky soil, they are in motion and not in one place. They extend to the cultural artifacts, heritage, and political identity showing their and Palestinians’ resilience. For instance, as a form of transmitting transgenerational and transspecies knowledge and thus resistance, Badd Giacaman Museum in West Bank has an olive crushing machine dating back to the nineteenth century. Visitors of this museum get informed about Palestinians’ indigeneity and learn about the olives, olive trees, olive oil, and their relational enmeshment with their resistance companions. Situating such a machine in a historical, touristic, and cultural site in Palestine highlights the indigeneity and companionship of the olive tree and the Palestinians in opposition to the settling colonial project.

Like humans, trees hold memories, too (Knopp 1999, 329). They embody cuts as wounds, the rings in their trunks tell us how old they are, they resurgence from the cut, and some give fruits. They are home to the birds; they share their roots with critters in the soil. Trees are humans’ kins in nature, giving oxygen and fruits, providing shadows, and turning into the papers we write our stories and let others read. Humans’ relationship with trees is reciprocal. Palestinian context is an example of how to live with and for the olive trees in mutual care and dependency in the place of woundedness.

In contrast to Zionists' terraforming, reclaiming the land as a decolonial praxis has been common in Palestine. The “Arab For the Protection of Nature” non-profit organization works to protect the natural resources in Arab countries and contributes to the rehabilitation



and resilience of the land (APN, n.d.). Their Million Tree Campaign is a counter act towards Israel's deliberate uprooting, burning, and stealing of olive trees from Palestine. According to their records, more than three million trees have been uprooted since 2000. The initiative has worked on replanting more than two million trees for the cause of re-rooting Palestinians and olive trees.

Moreover, the initiative is active on various social media platforms, spreading awareness and encouraging international witnesses to contribute to transnational solidarity with Palestine. This action succinctly demonstrates that the roots of olive trees can stretch toward international territories and inspire solidarity action. This anti-colonial praxis works as a *rooted-resistance-companionship* in material reality, as they continuously stand against Zionists and keep strengthening the roots of Palestine.

The fact that olive trees have been living for centuries demonstrates that they adapt to the environment. They can survive in challenging temperatures like minus and high. They reproduce from seed, which means a drop of olive on the ground leaves the promise of the rebirth of another olive tree. This is a poetic way of saying to the settlers that they may delay the growth, but they cannot delete the rootedness of the olive tree and their Palestinian kin. Their rootedness to one another and the land destabilizes the understanding of nature and culture as separate entities. Their co-existence in the land and the diaspora shows their roots are in motion.

### **Methodology: Writing with an Olive**

This thesis is one of many attempts to show my solidarity with Palestine and expose the ongoing brutal violence of Israel. Not to over cross the boundaries of my subjecthood as a witness and not to fetishize the suffering, I focus on the power of endurance and resilient relationality of Palestinians and olive trees. Although this thesis exposes Israel's apartheid

regime and its ongoing violence, it aims to focus on the indestructible relationality between Palestinians and olive trees, which predates the state of Israel.

I am inspired by Anna Tsing's (2015) and Amitav Ghosh's (2021) works on following the journey of mushrooms and nutmeg. Tsing follows the mushrooms and exposes the capitalist exploitation of species and the mushroom's resilience. She reveals capitalism's ecological and social consequences as enmeshment of the *nature-culture* continuum. She examines how capitalism creates ruins by exploiting natural resources and destroying ecosystems. Accordingly, she highlights the interconnectedness between marginalized communities, migrant laborers, and mushrooms who navigate precarious livelihoods in the capitalist system (Tsing 2015, 152). In the capitalist system that aims to deprive humans and nonhumans, Tsing shows how Indigenous peoples find ways to survive and create alternative modes of existence.

In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Amitav Ghosh focuses on the nutmeg in Banda Islands in Indonesia and traces the Dutch colonizer's terraforming strategies. He highlights the Bandanese people's relationship to the nutmeg by analyzing the oral history (songs) and poetry written for the nutmeg tree. Tracing the nutmeg from Indonesia to the rest of the world, Ghosh exposes the logic of conquest, extraction, and the consequences of seeing nature as an inert object. He finishes the book by mentioning the climate crisis and reminding human-nature relationality is co-dependent and intertwined.

Inspired by both scholars' approaches, in this thesis, I trace the material reality of being an olive tree in Palestine and the journey of the olive tree toward literary and visual arts. Tsing physically followed the mushrooms and traveled from the United States to Japan and China, focusing on the networks involved in the global mushroom trade. Amitav Ghosh was inspired to write *The Nutmeg's Curse* after his summer visit to Indonesia and visited

Maluku for his research (Ghosh 2021, 259). While writing this thesis, I did not travel but focused on the reappearance and travel of the olive trees in literature and visual art from my desk. However, an olive accompanied my writing process, which I picked from a tree in a busy Amsterdam street. I watched it sucking the air and becoming a stone for over a week. The olive showed me the passing of time beyond human perception; its wrinkles on its surface remind me of the remarks of time, resembling a map recircling an endless route and cycle of time. The olive stays on my desk as a reminder of its endurance and existence, representing Palestine's earthly resistance, resilience, and resurgence. Focusing on an olive for the cause of Palestine comes with its enmeshed indigeneity with its companion Palestinians.

My solidarity starts with writing with Palestine and the relational care approach towards the othered, objectified, and commodified entity, olive trees. I show my solidarity with great awareness of the politics of citation (Ahmed 2017, 8) and put effort into using Palestinian scholarship in this thesis. I read *Voices of Nakba* (2021), a collection of interviews with Palestinians and written essays on experiences, to fully grasp Nakba's lived experiences.

My stance does not come from the shared suffering but shared anger towards the colonial, oppressive power structures. I offer a posthuman feminist lens, encompassing justice toward humans and more than human worlds. I did not necessarily choose to focus on women or gender-specific aspects of anticolonial practices; I instead offer a feminist perspective to the ongoing freedom struggle in and of Palestine with the relational being-with, fighting-with of Palestinians, and olive trees against settler colonial violence. Bringing Palestine to the academic discussions, especially to the Western academia, contributes to the theory and practice of transnational solidarity with Palestine. In this thesis, I expand companionship discourse to present inclusive posthuman writing. On decolonizing methodologies, Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith says:

Decolonization does not mean a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. It is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. Decolonizing methodologies has to do more than critique colonialism. It has to open up possibilities for understanding and knowing the world differently and offering different solutions to problems caused by colonialism. (Linda Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 41)

Following Smith's words, I aim to affirm posthuman feminism's offerings and critique them without departing from them. At the same time, I am aware of Palestinians' decolonial, anti-colonial existence.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of ongoing Zionist terraforming land acquisition strategies, which are happening by uprooting olive trees. As a result of the logic of conquest, I focused on Nakba as a colonial wound. I highlighted Palestinian resistance *sumud* as a resilient form of existence that underlines olive trees and Palestinians belonging to one another and the land. I focused on olive trees and Palestinians' companionship in the face of settler colonial violence. I critiqued Donna Haraway's companion species' shortcomings in understanding olive trees and Palestinians' relationality under settler occupation. I argued that the *rooted-resistance-companionship* could comprehensively contextualize Palestinians' and olive trees' companionship. Including olive trees as active agents in resistance allows me to expose relationality as a site of being. The expansion of Haraway's concept emphasizes the companionship under the settler colonial context; it underlines the indigeneity of the olive trees and Palestinians' ongoing anti-colonial struggle.

In Chapter Two, I focus on the role of olive trees in the insistence on *sumud* in exile through an analysis of Mahmoud Darwish's poem *Earth is Pressing against Us* (2003) and his prose *Absent Presence* (2010). By focusing on the role of the olive trees in Darwish's works, the analysis reveals the reclamation of Palestinian identity in exile and their enduring belongingness to the land. *Earth is Pressing against Us* succinctly demonstrates Darwish's relation to his homeland as becoming-tree. In *Absent Presence*, Darwish follows his life from

his childhood in Palestine to his adult years in exile. I trace Darwish's recollection of memories of his physical wounds and senses, and I make a connection to the Nakba wound. Focusing on two different forms of writing, poem and prose, allows me to trace Darwish's writing trajectory extensively. The interplay between poem and prose reveals Darwish's artistic skills and demonstrates the existence of olive trees as metaphors and metonyms of Palestine.

In Chapter Three, I examine the role of olive trees in visual arts by focusing on Palestinian photographer Steve Sabella's artwork *Till the End* (2004). The analysis focuses on Palestinian – olive tree relationality through artwork in the form of *rooted-resistance-companionship*. I analyze *Till the End*, a Jerusalem stone that depicts the photograph of olive trees by focusing on the material reality of stones and olive trees in Palestine. A photo emulsion of olive trees on a stone collected from Jerusalem highlights the timelessness and presence of olive trees and Palestinians' ongoing Nakba wound. I offer a visual analysis of the artwork and reveal the resurgence of olive trees and Palestinians' belongingness to the land and one another. As a form of *rooted-resistance-companionship* I focus on Sabella's self-recognition as a Palestinian in exile and how he uses art as a political tool of expression. This chapter contends the Zionist attacks towards multispecies; stones, Palestinians, and olive trees, and highlights olive trees, Palestinians, and stone's shared indigeneity. It reveals the importance of self-recognition, art as a political tool of expression, and political witnessing of the spectator. The analysis brings the reality of Nakba as an ongoing struggle, diaspora, and Palestine in motion.

In the concluding chapter, I examine the Bil'in demonstrations, where Palestinians and international activists chained themselves to the olive trees. I give an example of transnational solidarity with a brief description of Donia Mili's documentary *Uprooted* to offer a perspective towards standing against the Zionist state. I aim to expand transnational

solidarity towards transspecies solidarity by including the concept of *rooted-resistance-companionship* in discussing precariousness and nature's vitality.

## Chapter 2: The Olive Tree and Mahmoud Darwish: Rooted-Resistance Companions

*“The tall tree used to walk with us as a tree, not a concept”* (Darwish 2010, 19).

In the previous chapter, I traced the olive tree's journey in Palestine's material reality. I focused on Israel's terraforming strategies, such as “Turning the Naqab Green,” building the Apartheid Wall, and the indigenization of Zionist settlers by planting pine trees. I argued that Palestinians and olive trees share the colonial Nakba wound, and *sumud* has become a strategy emerging in the wound. The subversive power of steadfastness continuously re-presents the Palestinian indigeneity, existence, and identity; simultaneously, it evokes Israel's anxiety about keeping the land. I introduced *rooted-resistance-companionship* as an extension of the posthuman companion species concept and posited an anticolonial lens to include more-than-human relations. I proposed this concept to recognize olive trees' and Palestinians' reciprocal *sumud* practices.

In this chapter, I analyze Mahmoud Darwish's *Earth Presses against Us* (2003) poem, and his latest book, *Absent Presence* (2010), focusing on the relationship between exile and olive trees. I analyze the poem focusing on olive trees and situate Mahmoud Darwish in his becoming-tree subject position concerning his conceptualizing Palestine and its resurgence. Mahmoud Darwish has written-with olive trees extensively. The reason for choosing *Earth Presses against Us* is to examine how Darwish sketches Palestine from his exilic position and highlights Palestinians' indigeneity by including more-than-human worlds as actants. *Absent Presence* is a collection of prose essays. Darwish recollects his memories from childhood to his death. The reason for choosing this book to analyze is to extensively examine Darwish's connection to the land and the olive trees' role. Focusing on his prose and poem allows me to trace how Darwish perceives and writes-with olive trees as metaphors and metonyms in their companionship.

This chapter constitutes three sections. First, I analyze the poem *Earth Presses against Us* to situate Mahmoud Darwish in his becoming-tree subject position to show how his exilic body and olive trees in Palestine become extensions of one another. Second, I analyze *Absent Presence* to unpack Darwish's literary and political trajectory to highlight his shared woundedness with more-than-human worlds. Through Darwish's introspective recollection of tracing the scars on his body, the analysis unveils his being-with olive trees in the Nakba wound and reflection of his wounded masculinity. Furthermore, I focus on the role of senses and memory and what role writing plays in *sumud*. The olive trees accompany Darwish's recollection journey; thus, my focus reveals Darwish and olive trees in their rooted resistance-companionship and resurgence practices.

Mahmoud Darwish is a well-known Palestinian poet who has lived in exile. His political poetry focuses on the Palestinian cause (Hamdi 2017; Mattawa 2014), how to reconstruct his identity in exile (Even-Nur 2020), his complex love relationship with his Israeli lover Rita (Cohen-Mor 2019), and his relation with his 'beloved' land. Darwish's gender binary aspect and criticism of his masculinity have been extensively discussed (Amireh 2003). Much of the work focuses on Darwish's identity as a man in exile, a man yearning for his beloved homeland, and a nationalist man with his political contribution to PLO. However, these discussions limit Darwish to a human-centric realm and place Palestine as an inert, static place. The scholarship concerning Darwish's works positions the land as a place to be liberated by humans as if it does not have a story or agency. Positioning the Palestinian man as an active human, liberating the passive and often feminized land perpetuates a binary opposition between nature and culture. Thus, such a perspective overlooks their interrelation in the liberation struggle.

As shown in my previous chapter, olive trees are (also) actants in resilience strategies as they are continuously reborn. In this chapter, I focus on how Darwish portrays the land as



an active being and olive trees as his *rooted-resistance-companions* in his exilic journey. The recollection of his memories reveals that his relationality with Palestine evokes his senses. The more-than-human worlds of Palestine become affective actants in his remembering and writing. My intervention expands the understanding of Palestine's renowned author's writings by focusing on the relationality between Darwish and more-than-human worlds. I argue that Darwish was not a man using the earthy matters of Palestine as only metaphors to reclaim his identity and recollect his memory. The land is an active, living thing, a metonym in his writings. Darwish was writing-with and for the more-than-human worlds of Palestine.

The reason for choosing Darwish's writings is not predicated on the belief that he is the "definitive voice of Palestine" (Even-Nur 2020, 3; Hamdi 2017, 23). The fact that Darwish is celebrated as a national poet among Palestinians and his funeral gathered a massive crowd of mourners in 2008 underscores the importance of his work. However, Darwish was not alone in his quest. My contribution aims to accentuate the relationality between Darwish and his rooted resistance companions, olive trees, to revisit Darwish's male-human centrality in his (literary) journey. Darwish re-presents a relationality of an intersection of *being with* and *living with* Palestine that includes more-than-human worlds. His recollection of memories presents a relational worlding intertwined with multispecies collaboration. Consequently, by employing a posthuman perspective to Darwish's writings and highlighting the relationality between Darwish and olive trees, I present a communal aspect that encompasses human interlocutors in the perpetual struggle and more-than-human worlds subjected to colonial violence.

### **Mahmoud Darwish: Body in Motion with Palestine**

Mahmoud Darwish was born in upper Galilee in Acre in the village called al-Birweh in 1942. When he was six, his family was expelled from their village and moved to southern Lebanon (Tahrir 2016, 2). A year later, the family returned to their village and discovered a kibbutz had been built over it (Cohen-Mor 2019, 1). When they returned, they were not given citizenship because of their absence during the establishment of the Israeli state. The family had to wait for Israeli authorities to issue them residence permits. Thus, they lived in their homeland without an ID card for three years as illegal residents. Israeli law assigned Darwish as a “present-absentee” (Even-Nur 2020, 2; Tahrir 2016, 2). In 1973 Darwish joined Palestine Liberation Organization and served as a member of the executive committee (Shaheen 2010, viii). However, after the Oslo Accords in 1993, he resigned from his position, believing that the ‘two-state solution’ was not beneficial for Palestine.

In an interview conducted by Helit Yeshurun, Darwish says his task was to criticize the process, and he was against the idea of dividing the land into several pieces. He says, “I wanted the land to be divided between two peoples, not to have one part here and another part there, closed off in ghettos” (Yeshurun 2012, 64). Israeli authorities repeatedly imprisoned Darwish because of his poetry (Hamdi 2017, 2). He left Palestine but never left the cause for Palestine’s liberation. Throughout his exilic life, he lived in Moscow, Beirut, Cairo, Tunisia, Damascus, and Paris and died in Texas in 2008. He continuously fought for the liberation of Palestine through his writings (Mukattash 2016, 91). His writings have shown that nothing could have uprooted him from the land. Even though he was physically absent in Palestine, he asserted his presence through poetry.

In *Absent Presence*, Darwish traces his memories from Palestine, and his recollection of memories reveals his relationship with the land. His relationality encapsulates the Indigenous cosmologies of being-with the land. Darwish explains his relationship with the

earth as a place where he was born and would return (Yeshurun 2012, 50). In an interview, he says, “Since the earth was taken from me and I was exiled from it, it has turned into the source and address of my spirit and my dreams” (Yeshurun 2012, 50). Darwish perceives the earth as Palestine. He does not distinguish the homeland and nature from his human body. For instance, in *With the Fog so Dense on the Bridge*, he writes, “I’ll hear the pulse of my blood in the pebbles/ and the veins of the place” (Darwish 2009, 64). Referring to the pebbles surrounding olive trees, Darwish lets the reader know that he perceives the nature-earth-Palestine as one entity that runs through his veins. His identity is shaped by exile by force and the close relationship between his body and land. Darwish’s relationality to Palestine as perceiving the land as earth can be understood with Mohawk and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watt’s concept of place-thought. Watts describes place-thought as the Indigenous understanding that thinking, thought, embodiment, and place are intertwined. It is “(...) based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (quoted in Zaytoun 2022, 30). Accordingly, place-thought inspires, educates, and reminds the human subject of their intertwined existence. In what follows, I analyze Darwish’s poem *Earth is Pressing against Us* to highlight his becoming-tree in the context of his perception of earth-Palestine, and the role of the memory and the senses in Darwish’s recollection of memories of Palestine.

### **Becoming-tree, being-with**

Keeping the memory alive and documenting what happened in 1948 and what is happening in the present moment is a form of decolonial and anticolonial insistence. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang state, settler colonialism aims to destroy everything to make Indigenous disappear from the land (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). Thus, writing-with Palestine is an active decolonization and a counter-action towards the Zionist settler colonial state. Ahmad Sa’di argues that Palestinians, especially the generation who experienced Nakba in 1948, witnessed

the cultural appropriation of Israelis, such as the appropriation of hummus, falafel, and zaatar that are presented as Israeli in order for them to construct authenticity and indigeneity to the land (Sa'di 2002,184). In the face of Zionists' continuous attempts to terraform the landscape, remembering the pre-Nakba has become an act of resistance for Palestinians (Sa'di 2002, 11). Israelis changing the streets' names into Hebrew caused estrangement among Palestinians (Sa'di 2002, 11). The ones who stayed in Palestine slowly witnessed the changing landscape, while those in exile who returned witnessed a wholly changed place. Ahmad Sa'di argues that the Nakba shapes Palestinian collective memory because it drastically changed society, governance, everyday life, and the landscape (Sa'di 2002, 191). The generation who have directly experienced the Nakba transferred their knowledge and experience to the next generations; thus, remembering and active memory transference has become crucial to keeping Palestinian identity and land alive (Masalha 2012, 107). In the face of constant attempts of erasure, the memory has become a place of resurgence, embodying political and collective dimensions that evolve across time and space.

In the place of woundedness, recording memories with his corporeal bond of living with his rooted- resistance-companions, Darwish mentions olive trees continuously as the metonymy of life and belongingness. Instead of using olive trees as a metaphor to point out embodied steadfastness, he acknowledges the olive tree as an actant in their joint struggle in the face of settler colonial violence. Darwish is becoming a tree in this journey to insist on his indigeneity and rootedness and use imagination and writing as tools to reclaim his identity.

In *The Earth is Presses Against Us*, Darwish writes:

Earth is pressing against us, trapping us in the final passage.

To pass through, we pull off our limbs.

Earth is squeezing us. If only we were its wheat, we might die and yet live.

If only it were our mother so that she might temper us with mercy.

If only we were pictures of rocks held in our dreams like mirrors.  
We glimpse faces in their final battle for the soul, of those who will be killed  
by the last living among us. We mourn their children's feast.  
We saw the faces of those who would throw our children out of the windows  
of this last space. A star to burnish our mirrors.  
Where should we go after the last border?  
Where should birds fly after the last sky?  
Where should plants sleep after the last breath of air?  
We write our names with crimson mist!  
We end the hymn with our flesh.  
Here we will die. Here, in the final passage.  
Here or there, our blood will plant olive trees. (Darwish 2003, 9)

Darwish highlights the reality of living in occupied territories and focuses on Gaza Strip, especially by mentioning “the final passage.” He criticizes the oppressive forces that restrict and encroach upon the lives of Palestinians, symbolized by the earth closing in. The question “Where should birds fly after the last sky?” implies the endlessness of the cosmos and signifies freedom and hope at the edge of the border, close to the sea. The last sky encapsulates the longing for a brighter future, emphasizing the belief that Palestinians will continue to exist, persist, and thrive regardless of the challenges they face. “Where should we go after the last border” line insists on staying in the homeland, meaning there is no other place for Palestinians but Palestine.

The pressure of the earth causes suffocation to the plants, leaving them with no air to breathe. Darwish says that if the air is taken away, they will become air and write their names in the mist. Crimson, hymn, flesh, and blood connote nationalist feelings of willingness to die for the land. Darwish claims that even if the earth takes their air away and presses them into the narrow passage, they would insist on staying in the land and die for it with the belief and reliance on olive trees’ resurgence.

Despite the continuous pressure, Darwish claims a rebirth in the soil by becoming-tree. He shifts boundaries between human and more-than-human worlds, challenging traditional conceptions of human subjectivity. He employs vivid imagery to depict the entangled relationship between humanity and the Earth. The poem highlights the sense of intimacy and interdependence, blurring the boundaries between human and non-human bodies. This blurring aligns with criticism of human centrism and acknowledges the agency and significance of more-than-human actors. By portraying Earth as a dynamic force pressing humans, Darwish invites readers to perceive the Earth as an active participant in human experience. This challenges the notion of human exceptionalism and implies a more symbiotic relationship with nature. The poem suggests that humans are not separate from nature but are intricately woven into their fabric. Darwish's use of imagery in the poem evokes a sense of embodiment and materiality. The Earth is depicted as a physical entity that exerts pressure on human bodies, emphasizing the corporeal aspect of existence. Consequently, the earth's pressing represents the Zionist forces, leaving the reader to acknowledge and recognize the brutality.

Darwish makes two critical points out of the desperation engendered by the Zionist world order. First, he wants to be reborn in the soil like wheat, Palestine's indigenous plant. He wants to come back again and again, persistently to Palestinian soil. Second, Darwish embraces the regenerative force of nature. He lets the reader know that, unlike the colonial Zionist doctrines, the land and nature are intertwined; thus, his connection to the land is his embrace of the vitality of nature. Becoming- olive tree precedes Zionist narratives and praxis of indigenizing Jewish population. Moreover, Darwish destabilizes the hierarchical perception of nature and culture division by inviting the olive tree as an actant to give a vital, affective response to the brutality of settler colonialism. He points out the corporeal bond

with the olive tree, which is a *rooted-resistance-companion*, suggesting that it will stay alive and constantly give birth to Palestinian indigeneity, as it has always done.

Wishing to be a nonhuman (wheat), he points at the brutality of the human-centric world order, which divides humans into categories. He wishes not to be a part of that humanity. Here, he acknowledges the regenerative force of nature, namely, the olive trees, relying on their indigeneity and ancient belongingness. Performing *sumud* and being embodied by the olive tree, he points to the olive tree/ the land as indicative of Palestinian indigeneity. Darwish situates himself with nature as one of nature's entities and claims to revive again. Darwish does not limit his thinking to his own human body. Instead, he expands the limits of the body, be it the bones or the skin, to the body and roots of the tree. In the concluding lines, the intertwining of his being with the olive tree is encapsulated as he states, "Here we will die/ Here, in the final passage/ Here or there, our blood will plant olive trees." This emphasizes his positionality as a human body, not at the center of importance but rather interconnected with the land and the olive trees.

Darwish posits that the human and nonhuman body is in constant motion. The pressing of the earth continues so do the resilience and rebirth. He uses the imagination as a site of resilience and positions humans and more-than-human worlds in constant relation to each other. The olive tree in *The Earth is Pressing against Us* consolidates the agential realism that Karen Barad writes about. Agential realism proposes no dichotomy between being an observer and observing; instead, it suggests a co-constitution of the world through the interplay of humans and more-than-human worlds (Barad 2007, 26). According to Barad, every matter in the world has the capacity to make change.

Consequently, the agency is distributed to the matters of the earth, including humans, to affect one another continually. Blurring the distinction between the observer and observed

and arguing that nothing is passive or static, one can recognize the vitality of the olive tree as an actant rather than a silent witness of the human world. The poem's final line affirms the olive tree's resolute existence within its surroundings; the tree actively influences Darwish, inspiring him to embody steadfastness and instill its transformative power of renewal and growth. In what follows, I analyze the chapters from *Absent Presence* concerning the wound and Darwish's forms of a resurgence with his rooted-resistance-companions olive trees.

### **Absent Presence of and with Olive Trees: "The Poem Is Incomplete"**

Allow me to gather you and your name, as a passer-by picks olives, hidden in gravel,  
that pickers have forgotten. We will go together, you and I, on two paths:

You, to another life, which language has promised you, as a receiver who may be  
saved from the fall of a shooting star onto the earth;

And I, to an appointment, which I have put off more than once, with Death, and which  
I made in a glass of red wine in one of the poems. (Darwish 2010, 3)

The passage above is from the opening of *Absent Presence*. Darwish starts addressing his younger self, telling him that the self will split into two. The language has promised Darwish a life saved from the shooting star (Israel) on Earth (Palestine). Referring to Israel's flag, Darwish draws the image of a shooting star on Earth, which he perceives as Palestine. The language has saved him and offered him survival in exile through writing. The person he refers to as "I" is the one who is about to die. Addressing his younger self, Darwish tells the reader that he would survive through writing. What, then, does his recollection of memories in exile and his homeland consist of in the context of *sumud*? What role does the land play in *Absent Presence* with its more-than-human worlds? What role do olive trees play in the survival that writing has promised? In this section, I examine how Darwish continuously presents becoming-tree in reflecting on exile and remembering Palestine.

In the second chapter of *Absent Presence*, Darwish recollects his memories of the scars he had on his body. The first scar happened when he was a child when he cut his knee



with a knife. With the curiosity of a cat, he cuts his knee and carries this experience of this self-cut on his body throughout his life. The second scar happens when he falls from a horse, and the third one is in the olive grove when he cuts his finger. These three scars represent Darwish's embodied personal and political memories before and after Nakba. Revisiting these bodily wounds through writing manifests his belongingness to Palestine and resistance in exile.

His cut knee would show Darwish that a "scar is a memory which never ceases to work." (Darwish 2010, 9). This experience teaches him that the scars are equal to the memories, and memory, instead of being fixed storage, memory has become a political action supporting Darwish in exile. Consequently, the memory of the first cut scar can be specified as a personal memory that would guide him throughout his life in the colonial wound. The second scar on his eyebrow happens when he falls from a horse. He says this scar becomes only visible to a woman who "is experienced in interrogating the heart of a man" (Darwish 2010, 11).

The second scar, which happens after falling from the horse, represents the collective/political memory that emerges from the personal memory. Ayalet Even-Nur analyzes Darwish's *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* poem and argues that Darwish uses horses in his writings as a form of positing masculinity, sexuality, and power (Even-Nur 2020, 2). In the poem, the child asks his father why he left the horse alone when they had to flee, and the father replies that the horse would accompany the house. According to Even-Nur, in pre-Islamic and classical Arabic literature, horses are metaphors for masculinity, sexuality, and power. Horses were the symbols to highlight the wars in the mountains, pointing out pride and survival. Even-Nur argues that having a horse nearby symbolized resistance against the occupation, evoking a force that the house was protected by the inhabitants who were not/could not be displaced. Literary scholar Amal Amireh (2003)

asserts that Israel does not only deny Palestinians their homeland but also denies them narrating their stories. Consequently, telling the story of Palestine becomes a revolutionary act in the face of Zionist violence.

Amireh argues that Palestinian writers were directly involved in telling national stories by becoming actively involved in national movements and becoming a spokesperson or using their artistic creativity to serve liberation (Amireh 2003, 749). As nationalism is dominantly a patriarchal realm, as already stated by gender and postcolonial scholar Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), men are seen as the protector and saviors of the country. At the same time, women are the reproducers of the nation by giving birth to children and culturally and symbolically representing the nation. Amireh argues that Darwish uses the land as a feminine entity and hovers his masculinity over it to metaphorize Palestine as female. Consequently, the Palestinian male becomes the defender, the groom of the land (Amireh 2003, 750).

Moreover, Amireh argues that one of the driving factors of male-dominant nationalism is the feeling of loss. She focuses on the military loss encompassing the Israeli land theft in 1948 and the loss of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967 that played a role in Palestinian masculinity as an effect of humiliation (Amireh 2003, 750). The feeling of losing the masculinity features of defending and grooming the land resulted in humiliation. Her argument conforms to what Darwish felt when he fell from the horse, meaning that he felt humiliated and powerless over the loss of the land. This wound, caused by the military invasion and Zionist land theft, wounded Darwish's masculinity. It might be one of the reasons why Darwish has constantly written for Palestine because he has lost his lover and was not strong enough to protect it.

The third scar, which happens while cutting an apple for a girl, reveals the *rooted-resistance-companionship*. This scar occurs in the olive groves, signifying that olive trees and

Darwish have shared the land pre-Nakba. When he cuts his finger while cutting an apple to share with the girl, he puts his finger on the soil to stop bleeding. The olive trees share his blood when he cleans his injury “with a handful of earth mixed with dry grass.” Here, Darwish shows the reader that he is being-with the land. Sharing his blood with the soil shows how the land is a metonym of life and living and an active form of living-with. Therefore, Darwish does not only use the land as a metaphor to highlight his (wounded) masculinity and to sketch the land as feminine. Instead, he demonstrates their co-existence in an enmeshed reality.

Concluding his remarks on his scars, he asks why he was hurting himself whenever he felt absent in someone else’s presence: “Was it to get attention, or to get used to the pain...” (Darwish 12). Here Darwish refers to his situation as a present-absentee, someone who has become a refugee in his homeland. The scar becomes an affective, embodied mentor to him to constantly regenerate the memory, which extends to Darwish’s political identity. Consequently, the memory becomes a counter-weapon in resistance, which is transferred through generations. The wound becomes his body; the wound is carried within him, shredding his identity into layers, and becomes a journey of a lifetime. This journey starts in Palestine and extends to exile. The soil of Palestine remains an extension of his life and literature. Darwish shows that the woundedness is not a state of desperation or surrendering to the perpetrator but a place of resurgence.

### **Deepening Wound, Strengthening Resurgence**

Darwish’s wounded masculinity follows him in exile. Referring to his fall from the horse, he says, “You did not know that you had fallen, but the horse returning without its little rider indicated to your people the place of your escapade” (Darwish 11). With escapade, Darwish hints at his exiled identity, which he continuously questions because he fled Palestine. The guilt of leaving Palestine and the settler colonial violence haunts him in Lebanon, and he

talks to his reflection in the mirror. In chapter nine, he asks, “Have you moved away so as to move away?” (Darwish 2010, 52). However, Darwish escapes answering this question by stating that “the climate is not suitable to put salt on the wound or to explain the ambiguity” (Darwish 2010, 52). Leaving Palestine is not easily described; thus, he defines his leaving as an ambiguous state.

In *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said (2004) describes exile as an unhealable terrible experience. Despite the heroic and romantic literature, exile is a sad situation, and one cannot overcome the sorrow of estrangement. He then adds, “The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.” (Said 2000, 201). Similarly, colonial violence haunts Darwish, separating him between hope and regret. He remembers the loss of the land and the hope for liberation simultaneously. Darwish finds himself in the liminality of being dead and alive. He states, “You confirm that you are alive, or you are a dead man whose soul is alive, part of your remains, not of your life” (Darwish 2010, 54). From this liminal space, Darwish blurs the binaries of reality and imagination, dead and alive, taking the reader on a journey into his internal conflicts. However, he does not stay pessimistic and concludes the chapter by saying, “the poem is incomplete” (Darwish 2010, 56). Here Darwish states that writing poetry is a way of resistance, and the journey toward liberation is incomplete. He lets the reader follow him through his insecurities and faith, demonstrating how resistance is not a linear journey and a way of keeping the faith of liberation alive. Remembering and mentioning olive trees continuously work as a form of reviving in the exile and contributes to his form of becoming-tree.

Lena Meari describes *sumud* as a form of becoming continuously being reshaped through time and place with Zionist violence (Meari 2014, 551). Focusing on the role of imagination in *sumud*, Meari says imprisoned Palestinians use imagination to practice not giving up. Ibrahim El-Ra’ii, an imprisoned Palestinian, asks, “Have you ever interrogated a

table? I am a table now. Go interrogate a table. If it talks back to you, come to me, and you'll find that I have become a mountain" (quoted in Meari 2014, 548). Consequently, more-than-human worlds and the imagination shape the sumud practices concerning their conditions (interrogation), space (prison), and time (continuously). Like El-Ra'ii, Darwish uses imagination and writing with more-than-human worlds in his journey of resistance. In chapter sixteen, he recalls returning to Gaza years later. He asks himself:

Why did you leave the horse alone? What can a poet do, faced with history's harrow, but guard the tree of the old ways and the spring of water, both visible and invisible; defend the language from the pallidly away from figurative specificity; free it from the voice victims who demand their share of tomorrow's memory, on the very land where the struggle is turning to what is more distant than force of arms: force of words (Darwish 2010, 96).

Convinced that the poet's role is guarding the language, Darwish brings the poem's incompleteness here again. He posits his masculinity as a poet who protects the tree (land) and signifies his relation to the land as the groomer—Darwish's grooming functions as a defender of the language and narrative of Palestine. Lena Jayyusi defines the continuity of the Nakba as an "unfinished past" (Jayyusi 2007, 118). The unfinished past and incompleteness of the poem conform to the resistance and resilience toward liberation in a continuous manner. Consequently, the politicized collective memory plays a role in the resistance and the struggle for self-determination.

Once the olive tree is uprooted, the roots in the soil revive. If a branch is chopped off, the olive tree does not stop giving its fruit; it produces life. Just like its companion, Darwish's woundedness becomes a place of resurgence, in which he keeps reviving the Palestinian identity in exile. He uses the memory of his rooted-resistance companions and his writings to demonstrate his existence. From exile, throughout his travels from one city to another, he reminds the reader that he carries Palestine in his displacement and is rooted in Palestine. He lets the reader know that he embodies his wounded land by saying to himself, "a land when

you were there, as you love it now when it is within you. It was a given thing, a tree, a rock; it became the tokens of spirit and thought, a live coal in language, air and earth and water, and it turned into a poem” (Darwish 2010, 85). Forced displacement and the denial of the right to return fluctuate Darwish between two places, Palestine and exile. He is in Palestine and not there at the same time. Using memory and imagination as a bridge, Darwish flows in two places. He assures the reader that he is not alone in his journey; he embodies that the land, the tree, and the stone of Palestine are infused in his spirit, driving his force of imagination and writing.

### **Smell: A Bridge to Home**

Darwish reflects on the transformative power of writing and questions his subjectivity by tracing his memories from Palestine, mainly through invoking the sense of smell. Darwish addresses himself, his fellow Palestinians in the diaspora, and those yearning for Palestine before the Nakba. He writes about the loneliness of exile and how it forces one to decide whether their country is merely a suitcase to carry along (Darwish 2010, 60). By the end of chapter ten, Darwish transforms his misery into power by invoking the smell of his hometown. He collects the memories of the smell of each city he has lived in. For instance, the smell of salty sea and spices belongs to Acre, Moscow smells of vodka and snow, Ginger and mango are from Cairo, and Beirut smells of sun, sea, and smoke (Darwish 2010, 60).

Tracing all the smells from each city, Darwish concludes that the smell of places is equivalent to longing, and all these smells lead him to the “smell of the first place” Palestine (Darwish 2010, 61). In exile, while having a cup of coffee with someone, the aroma of the coffee evokes his feelings of belongingness. The sense of smell takes control over his body, and he says, “The aroma of the coffee has doors which lead to another journey; to friendship, or love, or loss without pain. Coffee goes from being a metaphor to being something tangible (Darwish 2010, 58-59). The smell of the coffee becomes a geographical space and leads

Darwish to “the first place,” his homeland, and initiates the questions of his belongingness. It becomes sensorial and distorts his spatial and temporal positionality. He starts questioning his position in exile. He says he does not belong in exile and adds:

But you draw yourself apart because you are a countryman by origin, to the trees that are reflected in the water of the river, to the dove, which is a creature both of the land and of the air, and you stand long by a lily of the valley growing alone outside the garden bed. (Darwish 2010, 59)

Here Darwish summarizes his existence in exile but also being rooted in Palestine at the same time. He draws himself apart from those surrounding himself in exile because he is not one of them but a countryman. He is rooted in the land of trees, firmly standing against the flowing waters of the river. Referring to his exilic position of being away from the land and his belongingness to it, he mentions the dove as its ability to fly and live on the land. He elaborates on his exilic experience of flourishing as a growing lily outside the “garden bed:” of Palestine. Refuging into the words or creating a world out of words, he concludes by thanking exile for helping him “make yourself out of yourself” (Darwish 2010, 62). Darwish underscores his profound understanding of the role of writing in shaping identity and the influence of memory and sensory experience in exile.

Furthermore, after remembering Palestine through the aroma of the coffee, he concludes his sensorial journey by opening a corridor to another discourse: memory. He states that memory is one’s museum (Darwish 2010, 61). In this museum, he encounters the season of autumn, which invokes the memory of olive trees. He highlights the changing season from a hot summer and the ripeness of fruits. He emphasizes the significance of autumn, addressing the collective to “take care of it as befits a poet who has perfected the art of squeezing himself into an image: How I love the autumn” (Darwish 2010, 57). The statement, “You do not know whether you inhabit the autumn or autumn inhabits you,” captures the essence of Darwish’s embodiment of the land. Darwish embraces his identity as

the olive tree in Palestine rather than using it as a metaphor for his lament. The autumn season in Palestine is significant as it marks the harvest season and a time for family gatherings (Simaan 2017, 514). The ripe olives falling from the trees are collected to produce olive oil, and Darwish describes this season as one of “cosmic exertion, from a war which seems endless” (Darwish 2010, 57). He uses the season as a moment to give his words to the world, just as the olive tree is ready to drop its fruits. Autumn is a joint moment of post-summer and the enmeshment of winter and spring, where Darwish sprouts and transforms. Darwish situates himself in autumn as Nakba is a continuum of an eternal present until Palestine is free, by telling himself to “Let autumn be your personal eternity” (Darwish 59). The autumn, resembling the homeland, coincides with the season of olive cultivation. It is juxtaposed with Darwish’s settler-colonial wound, where he emphasizes the power of writing in exile. He leverages his pain and suffering as a catalyst for transformation. Flowing between exile and homeland, through evoked senses, Darwish focuses on the power of words and states, “Words are a country” (Darwish 61).

Becoming-tree in exile comes with acknowledging the surroundings and more-than-human worlds’ collaboration. Darwish’s creative writing is surrounded by Indigenous cosmologies, being-with the more-than-human worlds, especially with butterflies. For Darwish, more-than-human worlds are not metaphors but affective factors, evoking his senses. In this regard, butterflies play a role as pollinators in his imagination. Pollinators, taking pollen from olive trees and fertilizing them, contribute to biodiverse communication and play a crucial role in the cycle of resurgence. While recalling his memories and using writing as a way of resurgence, Darwish keeps mentioning butterflies. The butterflies activate his senses, driving the force of imagination and healing. Darwish visits Gaza years later, and he says, “The butterflies flutter low on the coast road. The butterflies are scattered thoughts, sensations flying in the air” (Darwish 2012, 106). Furthermore, talking about himself, he



says, “He sees that the fluttering wings of the butterfly, in the fan of color, are the best cure for suffering” (Darwish 2010, 119). Accordingly, for Darwish, imagination and writing become a cure for suffering, a way of living with the wound.

*Absent Presence* is crucial in understanding Mahmoud Darwish’s political and literary trajectory. The narrator’s directing his words to his younger self from childhood to his death gives an understanding of Darwish’s personal and Palestine’s political history. Darwish weaves his presence in the world of Zionist imposition of his absence. The narrator addresses “you” and “I” simultaneously, oscillating between intimacy and distance from the reader. The boundaries between the first and second-person pronouns become indistinct at times, revealing instances where the narrator engages in a dialogue with both himself and the collective consciousness. Darwish adeptly manipulates the addressee’s identity, positioning the reader and himself within a dynamic motion of special-temporal framework. In chapter four, he addresses his child self: “Do not look upon yourself in what they write about you. Do not investigate the Canaanite in you to establish that you exist. Rather, seize this reality, this name of yours, and learn how to write your proof. For you are you, not your ghost, the one who was driven away that night.” (Darwish 2010, 22).

In this excerpt, Darwish addresses his younger self and comrades in *sumud*, who persevere in keeping the Palestinian identity alive. One of the dehumanizing and continuous Zionist discourses is referring to Palestinians as ghosts to argue that they do not exist. For instance, Israeli politician Yoram Hazony describes Palestinians as ‘phantom people’ and ‘ghosts’ to justify Palestinians’ displacement and dispossession and undermine the legitimacy of Palestinian claims to their ancestral homeland (Hazony 2000, 112). Thus, Darwish refers to the metaphor of ghosts which has become a sticky identity label for Palestinians. He encourages the addressee to resist the Zionist narrative that seeks to define and erase them and boldly urges them to embrace their identity without hesitation. By evoking the image of

ghosts, Darwish critiques the Zionist ideology that seeks to deny the very existence of Palestinians. He thus reminds the reader that they are not spectral apparitions but real people who have been forcibly displaced from their homeland. To counter the colonizers' narrative, Darwish recommends that the addressee/reader/Palestinians remain steadfast in their identity and roots, continuing to reappear in the face of Zionist epistemological violence. Through his words, he emphasizes the gravity of the forced displacement experienced by the Palestinian people. Highlighting the forced displacement, he states, "Your little name, and all our names, are ready to set sail for random destinations in the chaos of creation" (Darwish 2010, 21). Darwish asserts that the Nakba was not only a pivotal moment in establishing the Israeli state but also a chaotic event that resulted in the displacement of Palestinians. However, Darwish's statement does not simply convey this fact but invites the reader to experience the emotional impact of the Nakba.

Through his writings, Darwish emphasizes that the violent creation of Israel sought to erase the Palestinian identity. However, he also reminds the reader that the connection between the Palestinian people and their land is deeply rooted and inseparable. Darwish's words invite the reader to feel the pain and trauma of the Palestinian experience as they face the violent forces of colonization. As he eloquently states, "But what is deep-rooted is that your name is the name of the land" (Darwish 2010, 22), indicating the profound bond between the Palestinian body and the land, implying the firm roots of the (olive)tree. This bond remains unbreakable even in the face of displacement and violence.

Darwish's writings transcend time and space and offer a decolonial praxis that enables the reader to deconstruct and unlearn the dominant Zionist discourses. By presenting a counter-narrative opposing Zionism, his writings allow the reader to comprehend that the Palestinian struggle is not restricted to human bodies but encompasses their rooted-resistance-companions. His becoming-tree highlights his being-with olive tree, being with the

land in exile, and his ability to connect his personal experiences to the broader social, political, and ecological contexts of his homeland as his use of autumn as an embodiment of his growth and transformation. Darwish's words fall on the paper like olives falling from an uprooted tree and regenerating a rebirth. His words become his way of reviving the self in exile as proof of belongingness to Palestine. Darwish spent his childhood years in Palestine, his father was a farmer, and he lived in a village surrounded by olive orchards. Throughout his life, olive trees accompanied his journey in exile, reminding him of his belongingness and giving him hope of resurgence.

Darwish knew that his *rooted-resistance companions* would continuously reappear in his absence. They would guide him back home; even the "home" is erased from the maps. That is why longing for the rain of the South; he says: "If it rained on us tonight, the darkness would melt, and we would see our steps and the road, and the scent of the rain would lead us to the trees which have grown up in our absence, whose high branches have entered the rooms" (Darwish 2010, 28). Now, residing in Al Rabweh in Ramallah, olive trees surround his graveyard, and his rooted-resistance-companions embrace his once-existence in this world. The trees continue to flourish through their branches, nurtured by his remains, keeping his spirit alive in the timeless cycle of life.

### Chapter 3: Timeless Cycle of Life: Self-Recognition in *Rooted-resistance-companionship*

#### *“Till the End”*

In the previous chapter, I analyzed Mahmoud Darwish’s *rooted-resistance-companionship* with olive trees and the role of senses and memory in his reclamation of Palestinian identity. I demonstrated how Darwish is continuously becoming-tree in remembering Palestine and how the literary realm has offered him a survival space. In this chapter, I analyze the artwork of Steve Sabella, a Palestinian photographer who lives in exile. In particular, I focus on *Till the End*- a photo emulsion of an olive grove on a Jerusalem rock. The work was published in Danna Masad and Nora Lester Murad’s (2019) larger poem-photo book, *Rest in My Shade*. The book presents sixteen artworks created by Palestinian artists and one long poem recited by an ancient olive tree. The artworks vary from photography, painting, and sculpture. They represent the symbiotic relationship between Palestinians and the land.

The *Rest in My Shade* poem starts with the olive tree telling its life on the earth, beginning with a sprout from an olive pit. It suggests there was a life, a tree family, before its birth. The olive pit gives the poet tree life, and throughout the ancient route, its planetary companions, birds, moon, rain, and almond blossoms accompany its journey. The olive tree recollects its memories with Palestinian families and how it provided oil and fruit and received love and joy in return. The relationality of reciprocal care is interrupted by the invasion of colonizers, and the olive tree laments losing its companions and hopes that Palestinians would rest in its shade in peace again. The poem ends with a decolonial stance, demanding the reunion of human and more-than-human worlds and the Palestinians’ right to return. The concluding line, “My story is your story too,” reminds the reader that colonial violence affects both human and non-human worlds (Murat and Masad 2019, 48). The facing of more-than-human worlds to the violence of colonialism is not isolated from the human

experience of suffering. It serves as a manifestation of their interconnectedness and the reciprocal resistance against the colonial structure. By ending the poem with a call for recognition, the olive tree underscores the responsibility of all individuals to address the violence and work towards a more just future.



Figure 2. Steve Sabella, *Till the End*, 27 cm x 14 cm x 6 cm, photo emulsion on Jerusalem stone, 2004. Photograph of the artwork is published in *Rest in My Shade* (Murad and Masad 2019, 11-12).

A triangle-shaped stone with an image of olive trees etched onto its surface is placed prominently in the book's center, and its three-dimensional appearance creates a sense of tangibility. The photograph captures the rough, natural surface of the stone in vivid detail, and its placement against a smooth white background creates a striking contrast that draws the viewer's eye. The white background highlights the shadow around the stone, which gives the impression that the stone has been uprooted from the earth and placed on a surface. However, the surface here is not visible; the stone seems to be floating in the white air. *Till the End* is placed in the middle of the book, and the line "turn after turn" accompanies the artwork.

Photography and visual arts theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay describes photographs as more than a mere print of an object on paper. According to her, photography tells an event's story, requiring the reconstruction of its meaning by the spectator (Azoulay 2008, 14). In *Till the End*, there are two photographs. First, the photograph of the olive trees in the groves.

Second, the photograph of the artwork itself in the photo-poem book. The photograph of photography works like a *mise en abyme*, upfronts the continuous re-presentation of endurance and indigeneity of more-than-human worlds of Palestine. The photograph of the olive trees, the stone, the photographer, the background, and the spectator become actants. These actants create an assemblage and act on telling the story of a *rooted-resistance-companionship* in the face of Zionist settler colonization.

The photograph of olive trees represents the enduring Indigenous steadfastness of the trees; similar to the trees, the stone represents endurance and belongingness, and their composition underscores their symbiotic relationship. The photograph of the olive trees and the stone solidifies their co-existence. The photographer Steve Sabella becomes a part of the narration and exemplifies being in rooted-resistance-companionship with olive trees as a Palestinian in the diaspora. The olive trees' background and the stone's background underscore the narrative of their existence under the Zionist settler occupation, bringing Palestine's political context and grounded material reality to the forefront. These readings, of course, are a part of me as a spectator who becomes a political witness by examining *Till the End* and making meaning. In this chapter, I analyze the olive trees, stone, background, photographer, and the spectator as actants concerning making meaning of what it is to be in the soil and diaspora of Palestine and being a witness of this reality.

The photograph of the olive trees is taken from below, which makes the olive trees seem taller to the spectators' eyes. The spectator can change the angle by rotating the book. Once the spectator sees this artwork in a museum covered with preservation glass, the spectator can move around the stone. The spectator can look at the olive trees from different angles, but in any case, the olive trees stand tall on the stone. Each looking angle would highlight that olive trees are standing tall. What, then, does looking from different angles reveal about standing tall? No matter the perspective or angle from which they are observed,

the olive trees maintain their upright structure and manifest their steadfastness against the Zionist violence threats.

Olive trees' photographs on the stone are printed in blue, contrasting with the stone's dusty white, gray, and brown surface. The red colors over the olive tree branches give them imagery of burnt and highlight its closeness to the soil. The red stains on the branches connote the fire, perhaps, reminding the viewer of the settlers' attack on olive trees to prevent the livelihood of Palestinians. The red also suggests the once-living organisms of the limestone, denoting its indigeneity. The focus on the title "Till the End" and its relation to the artwork unfolds a story beyond what is immediately visible. The rough surface of the stone, the soil on its corners, and the stone's natural colors highlight its untouched, unpolished nature.

What do olive and stone tell when they stand entangled together in the context of Palestine? The presence of olive trees imprinted on a rock rather than a paper emphasizes their enduring co-existence. Within the ensuing discussion, I contextualize the symbiotic relationship between stone and olive trees, illustrating the reason for this conscious choice of medium. The Jerusalem stone becomes an actant, preserves the photograph of the trees, and delivers their solid existence more profoundly than presenting photography on paper. In what follows, I discuss the olive trees and stone's companionship in historic Palestine, how Zionists attack and weaponize stones against Palestinians, and why the stone of Palestine is political. The focus on violence directed towards stones reflects their planetary companion olive trees' steadfastness and the resilience of multispecies in the face of colonial violence. The contextual background of stones in historic Palestine explains why the stone in *Till the End* plays a crucial role in presenting the olive trees. Moreover, it gives a sense of understanding the co-existence of the more-than-human worlds in the face of ongoing settler colonial violence and Israel's terraforming strategies.

## **Olive Tree and Stone Companionship in Palestine**

The planetary companions know how to complement each other. The companionship of the stone and the olive tree starts from the soil. Pebbles surround the soil of olive trees in Palestine, and the olive trees' roots are protected and nurtured by the support of the stones. The rocks function as filters in cultivating the soil. They protect the soil from the over-exposure of sunlight and prevent it from overflowing with heavy rains. The stones retain heat during the day and release it at night, creating a microclimate conducive to olive tree growth. In Palestine, where water is scarce, stone terraces are used to support the growth of olive trees. The terraces also prevent soil erosion and help conserve water by retaining moisture.

Furthermore, the stone terraces also serve as a form of land ownership and inheritance for Palestinian families, as the construction of these terraces and the planting of olive trees are passed down through generations (Abufarha 2008, 355). Olive trees, in turn, become rooted-resistance-companions of Palestinians, providing them a source of income and sustenance. The olive oil produced from these trees is a staple of Palestinian cuisine and is sold for export. Thus, the relationship between stone and olive trees in Palestine is symbiotic. Each element supports and sustains the other, creating a sustainable and resilient ecosystem that has endured for centuries.

When the human companions enter the picture, the olive tree and the stone companionship have evolved. The millstone displayed in the Al-Bad museum in Bethlehem, dating back to the eighteenth century, shows the historical companionship of the stone and olive trees. The millstone was used to produce olive oil. The olives were placed under the stone, and a stick attached to the stone was tied to a donkey. As the donkey walks, the cylinder slowly crushes the olives and leaves a paste behind. Palestinians then squeeze the paste and turn it into oil. The collaboration between Palestinians, millstones, olives, and the



donkey does not only show Palestinians' companionship with more-than-human worlds. The historical stone displayed in the Al-Bad museum continuously re-presents Palestinians' belongingness to the land. The stone demonstrates the endurance and presence of Palestinians' existence. Such existence materializes in the historical companionship of Palestinians, the olive tree, and the stone. Thus, despite the ongoing Zionist attempts to deny the existence and indigeneity of Palestinians, the relational existence of the hundred years old stone becomes an actant of resistance. Stone, Palestinian, and olive tree companionship does not stay only in Palestinian territory. The companionship spread towards the visual culture in reclaiming the co-existence and indigeneity.

### **Zionist Terraforming and Indigenous Stones**

Stones in Palestine have cultural, political, and economic importance. They represent indigeneity, deity, memorial for the dead (Graesser 1972), cultural heritage, and creative architectural wealth of Palestinian culture (Salem 2021). Palestinians use dusty, white, gray, brown, and yellowish limestone for decorative and construction purposes. Limestone is a composition of the remaining once-living marine organisms, such as corals and mollusks. The significance of gravestones lies in their role as enduring memorials to the martyrs, serving to uphold the collective memory of the Palestinian people. Burying a loved one carries political weight, as burial and funeral arrangements are subject to Israeli control. Inscribing a name onto a stone, a material renowned for its durability, not only ensures the Palestinians' historical existence in the future but also by reminding us of the indigeneity and existence of Palestinians, it generates anxiety for Israel (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 44).

Israel's deep-seated anxiety over the loss of land and control is palpable in the construction of the Apartheid Wall. Israel has deployed stone as a tool of oppression and segregation, exemplified by the construction of the Apartheid Wall in 2002. Zionists built the wall to create a sense of security and exclusion of Palestinians and used stones as weapons

against olive trees. Building a stone wall destroyed thousands of olive trees, interrupting the Palestinians' connection to their olive tree companions and the social and geographic landscape (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2006; Weizman 2007). Framing the Apartheid Wall as a “security fence,” Israel separates Palestinians from Jerusalem, limiting their mobility and forcing them to go through checkpoints, thus, demonstrating control over the Palestinian body and psyche (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2006, 1103). Israel’s anxiety extends toward controlling Palestinian life in every corner and damaging the landscape by interrupting the indigeneity of the stone.

Limestone, a fundamental component of the Palestinian economy, has been subject to Israeli occupation and control by limiting its trade (Salem 2021, 28080). In the aftermath of Israel’s establishment, the state pursued a policy of indigenization for the Jewish population, which involved continuing the British colonizers’ terraforming strategies. Among these strategies was keeping the Holy Land authentic and modern (Weizman 2007, 25). Zionists purchased limestone from Palestinians, which left a distinctive white dust on the hand, imparting a sense of historic preservation to Jerusalem. However, after the British ceded control of the land to the Zionists, the settlers were forced to purchase limestone from Palestinian workers to maintain the historical authenticity. As the cost of the stone rose, the Zionists ceased purchasing it from Palestinians, opting instead to construct buildings from cheaper, weaker concrete and clad them in limestone, undermining the Palestinian stone economy and further eroding the indigeneity of the landscape (Weizman 2007, 27). This decision ultimately transformed Jerusalem into a “modernized” city of concrete, with grave consequences for the Palestinian economy.

The stones and the olive trees share the colonial wound as Zionists constantly attack them to indigenize the Jewish population. Zionists use house demolitions in Jerusalem for urban planning (Khalili 2010; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; Welchman 1993). House

demolition, forced eviction, ethnic cleansing of Palestinians to replace them with the Jewish population, and claiming the houses of Palestinians are some of the ways Zionists attack. Stones and olive trees share similar attacks by Zionists. In *Return to Half-Ruins*, Lila Abu-Lughod describes house demolition as evidence of the continuum of Nakba, stating that house demolitions in 1948 still happen today (Abu-Lughod 2007,103). What is seen as a past event is a settler colonial structure (Wolfe 2006, 388). The past extends to the present in Palestine. Such past-present continuum exposes the brutal violence of Zionists, the painful destruction of the present, and the enduring resilience of the olive trees together, demonstrating the unbreakable bond between the regenerative force of life and resilience.

### **Till(ing) the End**

The stone and the olive trees depicted in *Till the End* portrays mutual care for one another in tilling, opening the way toward liberation. The repetitive action next to the artwork, “turn after turn,” specifies their rooted existence before, after, and beyond occupation. The title, “Till the End,” encompasses dual connotations. Firstly, the term “till” can denote “until the end,” implying a sense of the endless cycle of endurance until an outcome is reached: freedom. Considering ‘till’ as a signifier of temporality about the more-than-human worlds is a reminder that time is a modern human construct (Bennett 2010; Cohen 2015; Morton 2013). “Till the End” resembles the inexhaustible resilience of *rooted- resistance-companionship*, and determination toward the liberation of the land and people. It suggests the co-presence of the stone and the olive tree till eternity. Till the end of time, or till the end of the occupation, indigenous matters of Palestine remain together. Alternatively, it can allude to the act of tilling the land, preparing it for cultivation.

Consequently, the title may signify the enduring struggle against Zionist occupation, maintaining resistance until its eventual cessation. Additionally, it may symbolize cultivating the soil to create space for planting freedom. In this context, the stone’s composition of the

olive trees' image represents their symbiotic relationship, affirming their unity and facilitating the olive tree's growth by providing a nurturing environment akin to pebbles. Together, they pave the path toward the end of the occupation and keep caring for one another. More importantly, the title can encapsulate both interpretations, emphasizing the Palestinians' indigenous connection to the land, the continuous violence perpetrated by Zionists, and the enduring resilience embodied in the companionship of the olive tree, stone, and the Palestinians.

Considering temporality, Timothy Morton (2013) underscores the extensive temporal aspect of rocks, which have existed for millions of years and will persist in highlighting that the human-centric understanding of time is constrained and intertwined with non-human beings that contest our conventional ideas of existence and persistence. The temporality of the stones enhances our understanding of human-centric perspectives. Looking at the stone collected from Jerusalem destabilizes the sense of time as a linear matter. *Till the End* shows that the stone holds an enduring memory of colonial violence and presence; looking at it, the spectator is confronted with historic Palestine and ongoing house demolitions. The olive trees and the stone companionship remind the spectator of earthly matters' endurance and their presence in the face of violence. Hence, a glance at *Till the End* reveals not only the past; it exposes the past and the present as a continuity.

Time is presented as pre-Nakba and ongoing Nakba on the Jerusalem stone. The absence of humans is present with their rooted-resistance companion olive trees, a position to demonstrate how they are metonyms of life in Palestine. Standing still, they continuously represent Palestinians' existence and remain steadfast until their human companions return. Their steadfastness is tested by red, connoting the settlers' attacks, burning trees, and the invisible matter, wind. The invisible matter, wind, becomes tangible, evoking senses and attention on the branches. The direction of the wind guides the eyes to notice the vibration on

the stone. Time, an ongoing, continuous matter, shows itself on the branches of the olive trees. Blue olive trees' branches move towards the right of the stone, portraying the windy atmosphere of the landscape. The wind, water, sun, stones, and organisms in the soil collaborate to grow olive trees. The wind functions as a matter in shaping the stones and the olive trees. It is a companion of olive trees as they contribute to their pollination. However, wind also functions as a testing matter of the strength of the olive trees. The wind tests olive trees' trunks and branches; they remain evergreen, and their trunks shape by the direction of the wind. Olive trees almost say that neither natural causes nor human intervention brings an end to their existence.

Jerusalem Stone brings its ancient history and belongingness to the present, encompassing forced displacement and settler colonial violence. More importantly, it highlights the indigeneity, resilience, and belongingness of Palestinians and more-than-human worlds in the face of ongoing displacement and dispossession. The movement of the branches tells the continuity of the wind/time and the endurance of the olive trees. The wind can be seen as a force to move the olive trees or test their endurance which also resembles the Zionists' attacks on the olives. The enduring texture and surface of the stone are opposed to the movement of the wind. Endurance, duration, steadfastness, and the continuity of force let the spectator notice the companionship of the enduring matters of Palestine, stones, and olive trees.

The stone looks like it is floating in the space. It resembles the displacement of people and more-than-human worlds. Sabella, living in exile, the Jerusalem stone brought back from its land, shows the collective experience of humans and non-humans in the diasporic journey. The artist and the stone become companions in telling the story of being uprooted from the land and share the narrative of forced displacement and indigeneity. The floating stone in white space also suggests that memory is not fixed like storage; it is instead a motion, a

journey in time and space. The memory functions as a space, a dynamic process of interaction between the colonial wound, the Palestinian artist, and the stone, which is also in exile. The space in the background becomes an integral part of the event itself. Thus, it is an active participant in unfolding events. Blurring the understanding of ‘here’ and ‘there,’ the diasporic body of stone and the Palestinian human body, which share a space, show that time and matter act together towards demonstrating resilience and resurgence.

### **The Art and the Artist Intertwined: Sabella and Roots**

*Till the End* depicts a blueprint of olive trees on a stone that Sabella collected from Jerusalem. Stopping time by photography and printing the photograph of olive trees on one of the most enduring earthy matter, stone, Sabella presents the spectator with the composition of Palestine’s multispecies. In an interview, he says art helps him to “stitch his wounds” and make the wounds stable (The Electronic Intifada 2017). He says he collected the stones from destroyed houses in Jerusalem and imprints photographs on the stone pieces, immortalizing the image of Palestine.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes, “(...) if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job” (Said 1979, 21). Overcoming the Zionist representations, Steve Sabella presents an artwork that re-represents Palestine and Palestinian relationality. In this artwork, depicting the stone and olive trees, the representation of their relationality becomes a territory of self-expression that embraces the rooted resistance companion. Born in Old Jerusalem and living in Berlin, the photographer uses art as a territory of expression and portrays an example of self-representation of the Orient. In an interview, Sabella blurs the understanding of belongingness and claims that he uprooted himself and chose to plant his roots in the air (Sabella quoted in Palestine Square 2015). His statement portrays an example of a reclamation of identity, overflowing it from the boundaries of the nation-state ideology. Reclaiming the Palestinian identity from the Zionist

epistemologies as a form of *sumud* practice, Sabella immortalizes the image of Palestine through the photography of standing olive trees and counters Zionist misrepresentations that seek to portray it as an uncared-for and empty land.

Sabella states that when he was living in Jerusalem, he felt alienated and was already in exile, and he uprooted himself and chose to plant his roots in the air (The Electronic Intifada 2017). The alienation is caused by living under the settler colonial regime, leaving him detached from where he should have felt he belonged. Sabella says everyone should feel free and adds that “Palestinians do not need the United Nations, the European Union, or Israel to declare they are free (Sabella quoted in Palestine Square 2015). His statement aligns with what Indigenous scholar of political theory Glen Coulthard discusses as self-recognition. Focusing on the settler colonial context in Canada, Coulthard argues that Indigenous peoples have resurgent practices encompassing self-determination, which is permanent and ongoing, and they do not conform to the colonial structures (Coulthard 2014, 23). He stands against the idea of recognition as a liberal practice, which reinforces colonial power dynamics, gives the colonizer power to recognize the rights and existence of colonized subjects, and maintains the status quo of settler colonialism. Accordingly, remembering Wolfe’s statement that settler colonialism is a structure, such recognition practices are involved within the structure that benefits the settlers. Expanding Fanon’s arguments on recognizing colonized subjects through Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, Coulthard argues that recognition is not a transitional but a permanent practice and that the Indigenous people should not seek recognition from the colonizers (Coulthard 2014, 144). Since the colonizer and the colonized are never equal, they cannot reciprocally recognize each other. Coulthard advocates for self-determination and the resurgence of Indigenous political practices grounded in land-based relationships. This resurgence extends beyond the settler colonial structures. Agreeing with Fanon, Coulthard

asserts that the colonized should first see themselves as free and dignified (Coulthard 2014, 43).

*Sumud* challenges the Zionist structures and signifies the determination to live despite the ongoing violence. As Nur, a woman from *Sumud* Story House, a Palestinian NGO for community education in the occupied West Bank, mentioned in *To Exist to Resist*, “This [enjoying life] is something they don’t want. They want us to be dead, not to enjoy life (Rijke and Van Teeffelen 2014, 92). Therefore, denying the colonizer’s desires and pursuing their aspirations demonstrates a crucial role in the resurgence and self-determination of the Palestinian community. In this regard, Sabella’s insistence on self-recognition of himself as a free Palestinian shows his independence, and his art continuously contributes to the community’s ongoing resurgence practices. Such self-recognition and self-determination free from the settler colonial structures are re-enacted on the surface of the Jerusalem stone, embracing the olive trees.

Sabella says that through art, he managed to unlock his imagination, and his imagination helped him to see that there are infinite realities of the self. He adds, “If you manage to liberate the mind, the liberation of the land is a matter of time. It is an individual journey that one inspires the other” (The Electronic Intifada 2017). The self-recognition of an exiled body comes from the subversive power of the imagination. Sabella describes *sumud* as the state of mind and practice that starts from one’s body and expands to the collective. The imagination of the mind becomes a bodily embodied action that turns into a crucial emergence point for the transformation. Art becomes a vessel to transfer his liberated mind to the other and serves as a tool to connect individuals. Edward Said (2005) describes exiles as people cut off from their roots, lands, and pasts. This cut encourages the exiles to repair their broken lives by choosing to see themselves as a part of a victorious ideology or a restored people (Said 2000, 205). Sabella confirms Said’s statement of restored people and victorious



ideology by claiming self-recognition of freedom, consequently mending his wounds by proposing a creative and critical perspective through his art.

Moreover, Said argues that exiles know the violent structures of borders as borders play the role of confinement and exclusion; thus, exiles cross and break the borders of thought and practice (Said 2000, 212). Aligning with Said's argument, Sabella says he has uprooted himself, his roots are in flow, and he is free (The Electronic Intifada 2017). His roots transcend the boundaries of the borders and flow through the artistic practices, demonstrating his existence. Accordingly, exiles become intellectuals, artists who use their exilic subjectivity as a source of creativity to demonstrate the subversive power, narratives, and forms of knowledge. Therefore, using art as a territory of expression, Sabella turns the pain into power by expressing his self-recognition, liberating himself from the bounds of settler colonial structures, reclaiming his identity in flow, and demonstrating the co-existing resilience of land and himself.

Sabella and the stone share the experience of uprootedness. Despite the ongoing Zionist attacks, the stone becomes a space for Sabella to demonstrate his rooted resistance companions, olive trees. The Jerusalem stone floating in the air exemplifies Sabella's uprootedness. However, the stone not only shows an example of Zionist house demolition but also becomes an actant in re-presenting its freedom. It shifts the negative connotations of uprootedness to reclaim its indigeneity and turns it into a place of expression to demonstrate Palestine's self-recognition and resilient serene landscape. Sabella says one should wake up and say that they are free, that freedom is a state of mind. Regarding the existence of stone, being becomes a state of freedom. Being in the diaspora, and in motion, traveling in museums, and being presented in the photo book, do not exemplify the defeat; instead, it shows the ongoing resilience and existence as a way of resistance.

The words accompanying *Till the End*, “turn after turn,” written next to the floating Jerusalem stone, imply that the violence towards the earthly matters of Palestine is repetitive. In contrast to the repetitive violence, which seems endless, the stone and olive tree till a way to the ending of the occupation together. What remains after the “turn after turn” is the earthly matters and their deep-rooted relationality to their human companions. The companionship between Sabella, Jerusalem stone, and the olive tree shows resilience and strength. The resilience and the strength of the olive tree, stone, and Palestinians share the Nakba wound as a place to narrate their story. This counter-narration against the Zionist discourses functions as a subversive form of power. The enduring duration of the stone, the ancient rootedness of the Jerusalem stone, and the olive tree bring the matter, time, and space together to demonstrate the indigeneity of Palestinians, the Jerusalem stone, and the olive trees.

The stone becomes an actant by showing the serene landscape of Palestine. It brings the absence (destroyed home) and presence (olive trees) together. The photograph of both absence and presence becomes immortal and in motion. Holding the presence and the absence together, the artwork blurs the distinction of past and present, absence and presence, and bring the pre-Nakba and continuous existence of olive trees and stones of Palestine. Such assemblage signifies the rootedness of matters to time and place. One cannot pin a period to the image of olive trees printed on the stone. Thus the artwork does not shed light on the past or the present; it does both simultaneously.

The constellation of the olive trees’ photograph, stone picked up from a ruined house in Jerusalem, and the olive trees in Palestine create a constellation. This constellation represents Palestinians, olive trees, and the stone’s rooted resistance companionship beyond time and space. Stone and olive tree companionship implies that the endurance and resilience of Palestine will continue until the land’s and people’s liberation. Such a message is sent through the most enduring earthly matter stone and the olive tree, exemplifying the

steadfastness of the Palestinians and more-than-human worlds in the ongoing struggle for Palestine's liberation.

By imprinting images of olive trees onto the stone, the photograph signifies the enduring nature of their co-existence. The stone's journey represents the displacement of people from Palestine and the destruction of their living spaces. However, rather than being reduced to mere remnants of construction or destruction, the stone becomes a space of artistic and political expression. As it travels from Jerusalem to Sabella's studio in Berlin, this territory of expression serves as crucial evidence that challenges Zionist narratives and counters persistent efforts to deny the existence of Palestinians and Palestine. The photograph placed in *Rest in My Shade* photo book becomes a visual testimony to a Palestinian co-existence with olive trees, their existence before and after the Zionist invasion.

### **Spectator as a Political Witness**

The photography might show "what was there," but that does not suggest that it is removed from its social context. The photograph includes the perspective of the photographer, the object of the photography, the social context, and the spectator. This assemblage, the plurality of co-existence of the photography, opens the way to many interpretations and readings that do not have a final determined result. According to Azoulay, the spectators' job is to reconstruct the meaning of what is before, after, and during the photograph (Azoulay 2008, 282). Interpretation makes a viewer a spectator by making meaning, the meaning is continuous, and it comes with the interpretation of the spectators (Azoulay 2008, 150). Within the social context, photography becomes intertwined with a network of assemblages, where the actions of taking photographs, the human gaze (both the photographer and the spectators), and the elusive concept of "definite meaning" evade each other's control (Azoulay 2008, 140).

The Jerusalem stone holding photographs of olive trees acts towards freedom and resistance against the Zionist project. It evokes the spectator's senses and invites them to witness the uprooted but remain together and resilient Palestinians and the more-than-human worlds of Palestine. The floating Jerusalem stone in the space with a shadow around it makes the image tangible and invites the spectator almost to attempt to grab it. The smooth surface of the page confronts the spectator's distance from the stone's rough surface. Consequently, it creates an oppositional distance between the ongoing violence, resilience, and the spectator's distance as a witness. It makes the spectator realize that they are distanced from history and everyday reality; the safe distance is portrayed by the smooth texture of the page, contrasting with the rough surface of the experienced stone.

The distance created by the sense of touch is contrasted with the act of seeing, enabling the spectator to attempt to touch the stone. Thus, the touch and the vision bounce the spectator into the spaces of being close and distanced simultaneously. Therefore, the artwork invites the spectator to become witnesses of the ongoing violence and the narrative of the stone, as well as reminding that they are distant and their voyeurism is accompanied by intense discomfort. By evoking discomfort, *Till the End* invites the spectator to engage critically with the artwork.

Art historian Claire Bishop argues that art should be political and invite the spectator to engage critically with its content and context (Bishop 2004, 64). Here I follow the argument that art should be political, and any artwork has the potential to be political if it disrupts the prevailing order and challenges the dominant narratives (Bishop 2004; Ranciere 2015), evoke the readers'/spectators' feelings, and invite them to critically engage with what they are presented. The invitation comes with the artwork's affective power over the spectator that it should cause discomfort and challenge the status quo. In this regard, *Till the End* conforms to philosopher Jacques Ranciere's concept of dissensus, as it destabilizes the

spectators' understanding of time as a linear construct and invites the spectators to closeness and distance simultaneously.

The “dissensus” refers to disrupting the existing consensus and opening up new possibilities for political thought and action (Ranciere 2015, 2). Ranciere describes dissensus action as “putting two worlds in one and the same world” (Ranciere 2015, 69); by presenting the Zionists' attacks on olive trees and the resilience of the olive trees, *Till the End* presents dissensus against the consensus of Zionist discourses. Political art participates in the production of new meanings and subjectivities. It disrupts the status quo and opens up possibilities for political transformation and the redistribution of power. Sabella, then, becomes entangled with his artwork by being a political subject performing his capacity for ‘staging dissensus’ (Ranciere 2015, 69). Through its ability to challenge and reshape the world's understanding, political art can contribute to the broader project of political emancipation.

*Till the End* does not only tell the story of olive trees and Palestinians' companionship. Playing with the spectators' senses invites spectators to engage with their positionality. Andre Lepecki, a dance, performance, and politics scholar, argues that once the spectator witnesses a performance, he or she receives a task by embodying the experience to transmit that experience later on to a new audience (Lepecki 2016, 173). Thus, the spectator becomes a storyteller, like an ear and a mouth. So, he or she has a responsibility to make a testimony after he or she is encountered with the performance. Similar to Lepecki's direction, Sabella invites the spectator to become a witness to the *rooted- resistance- companionship* of the olive trees and Palestinians and opens a way towards critical thinking and awareness. This critical thinking invites the spectator to the artwork, leaving them a responsibility to unlearn Zionist discourses, become active spectators in disseminating the knowledge and information, and be aware of the material reality of Palestine.

The inseparable belongingness of the earthly materials and Palestinians are presented enmeshed to re-present the ongoing Nakba as a colonial wound, nature, and culture continuum of anti-colonial existence. In this chapter, I analyzed Palestinian photographer Steve Sabella's *Till the End* and highlighted the *rooted- resistance- companionship* between olive trees and Palestinians. I started focusing on the contextual material reality of olive trees and stones and how they co-exist in Palestine. I followed Sabella's self-recognition, and as a way of reclamation of identity, I highlighted the importance of self-recognition and self-determination in the settler colonial contexts. I argued that as companions, the artwork encompassing olive trees and the Palestinian artist is entangled in showing the assemblage of time, space, and matter as flowing entities. *Till the End* destabilizes the understanding of time as a linear matter and space as a fixed entity. It transcends time and space and manifests the olive trees' journey as rooted-resistance-companions of Palestinians. It brings the past, present, and future upfront, solidifying the undeniable co-existence of Palestinians and their companions.

Moreover, as the rough Jerusalem stone, printed on a smooth page, evokes the spectator's senses, I argued that it invites the spectator to become a political witness of the ongoing resilience. Consequently, *Till the End* makes the political reality of Palestine affective, leaving responsibility for the spectator to become a mouth for their voyeuristic experience. In the next chapter, I will follow this responsibility of what *Till the End* does to its spectator as my starting point for a call for transnational and transspecies solidarity.

Despite attempts to indigenize the Jewish population in Jerusalem and enrooting their belongingness by uprooting Palestinians, *Till the End* unites olive trees and the stone together, sketching the belongingness and rootedness of olive trees and Jerusalem together in the map. The olive trees standing tall together in an orchard, and the stone picked up from Jerusalem, emphasize the inherited indigeneity and interconnectedness of Palestinians who inhabit the

homes and nurture the thriving olive trees. Olive trees in the orchard and the Palestinians' Jerusalem house create co-existence imagery stretching from the orchards to the residential area. This assemblage signifies their co-belongingness of their shared spatial and temporal connection, signifying the inherent bond between Palestinians and olive trees, both to the land and one another. It underscores their enmeshed existence as *rooted-resistance-companions* in the face of ongoing violence. It is a testament to their co-existence *from the river to the sea*.

## Conclusion

### **From the River to beyond-the-sea: Transnational and Transspecies Solidarity**

In this thesis, I traced the terraforming strategies of Israel to expose the structure of the indigenization of the Jewish population and the de-indigenization of Palestinians. I started with the argument that olive trees are rooted in Palestine but are in motion. This thesis addressed the multilayeredness of the *rooted-resistance-companionship* by looking at the prose and poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, Steve Sabella's visual art *Till the End*. It traced the Zionist project and forms of Palestinian *sumud*. The *rooted-resistance-companionship* emerges as a reaction to the ongoing Zionist violence. It is an extension of the Indigenous companionship of olive trees and Palestinians, which has turned into resistance companionship in the face of ongoing Zionist violence.

In the first chapter, I focused on the Zionists' attacks on olive trees and Palestinians and olive trees' relationality, their *rooted-resistance-companionship*. I explored soil as a complex web of multispecies. I explored the pollination process and examined the role of earthworms in highlighting how Palestinians perceive time and challenging the Zionist discourse of laziness. The focus on the soil reveals the political dimension of being rooted in the context of Zionist settler colonialism. It demonstrates that even the deceased bodies are not spared from Zionist violence and possess the agency to disrupt the settlers' colonization praxis. Focusing on soil has also shown the importance of soil in terraforming for the Zionist settler project, and the role of the non-indigenous pine trees has highlighted Zionist violence toward the soil's fauna and flora.

In the second chapter, I focused on Mahmoud Darwish's becoming-tree in exile and how the senses play a role in claiming belongingness to the land. In the third chapter, I focused on the artwork *Till the End* and examined the role of photography as a medium, the



artist, and stone and olive trees' indigeneity. I finished the chapter by exploring the political role of the spectator. In this concluding chapter, as my political witness responsibility, I expand the politics of witnessing/ spectatorship and offer a discourse analysis on transnational and transspecies solidarity towards Palestine. Remembering the words of Audre Lorde, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" (Lorde 1981, 10), I expand her argument to the transspecies and transnational solidarity and insist on bringing Palestine and its more-than-human worlds to the center of discussions.

In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Amitav Ghosh traces the resurgence of the Bandanese people through their oral history. He focuses on the songs and stories that people have told throughout generations. The stories reveal the Bandanese people's indigeneity to the land and their perception of the nutmeg as their relatives. By the end of the book, Ghosh explores the climate crisis that has been affecting everyone on Earth, adding, "Storytelling needs to be at the core of a global politics of vitality" (Ghosh 2022, 240). Ghosh mentions politics of vitality as a form of nature's regenerative force of life, and he suggests that focusing on nature would allow us to empathize with one another. He adds:

I do not need to be Bandanese to understand what Gunung Api means to the islanders, just as I do not need to be Greek to be moved by the Iliad. It is empathy that makes it possible for humans to understand each other's stories: this is why storytelling needs to be at the core of global politics of vitality. (Ghosh 2002, 240)

Ghosh gives an example of protests in the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) as a form of politics of vitality. The DAPL protests started in 2015. The pipeline's proposed route passed near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, raising concerns among the local Sioux tribe and other Indigenous groups. The protests at Standing Rock brought attention to Indigenous rights, environmental concerns, and the relationship between the state, corporations, and Indigenous people. Ghosh states that the protests became a magnet to international activists,

and one of the activists says, “After a while, it didn’t matter what race or color you were. You were there to protect each other” (quoted in Ghosh 2022 239). Ghosh emphasizes the activist’s words and proposes empathy through our relationality with nature.

Through her journey of following mushrooms, Anna Tsing describes empathy as recognizing precariousness. Following the trace of mushrooms, Tsing argues that humans and more-than-human worlds share precariousness (Tsing 2015, 29). According to Tsing, precariousness is a state of being and acknowledging the vulnerability of the collective. She states that we depend on each other to survive (Tsing 2015, 29). Focusing on the difference among multispecies, she argues that the collaboration between humans and non-humans needs working across our differences, which leads to contamination. The contamination reveals that we all die if we do not collaborate (Tsing 2015, 28). Accordingly, solidarity between species and nations is a collaboration that emerges in ecological assemblages. Followingly, Tsing suggests that “assemblages do not just gather lifeways, they make them” (Tsing 2015, 23).

The involvement of international activists in the protests of DAPL destabilizes the nationalists’ discourses of romanticizing the relationship between the soil and the blood. Such examples bring the idea of transnational and transspecies solidarity that people do not have to share the same blood and land to stand against the exploitation, extraction, and dispossession of the land and people. Ghosh argues that non-Indigenous people were drawn to the protests of Standing Rock because of the importance of the land (Ghosh 2022, 239). The enmeshed land with the Indigenous community brings people together to protest against settler colonial violence.

Similar to Ghosh’s arguments that the landscape has the force of vitality to unite people, Bil’in demonstrations in Palestine function as such an example. The Bil’in

demonstrations are a long-standing protest in the village of Bil'in, located in the West Bank (Btselem 2013). The protests began in 2005 and continued for several years, drawing international attention. The residents of the village and international activists organized weekly demonstrations against the construction of the Apartheid Wall. Activists chained themselves around the trunks of olive trees. The chain around the body and the tree becomes an active agent which connects the tree to the human body. This act sketches the Palestinian body as an extension of the land. The chain reveals the connection of the body to the olive tree, which signifies solid belongingness to the land. The involvement of international and Israeli activists highlights the assemblage of transnational solidarity and destabilizes the understanding of the "us and them" dichotomy. The olive trees function as a binding matter and show the possibilities of coming together. The assemblage of Palestinians, olive trees, and international activists bring together the possibility of radical change in the present in the face of Zionist violence.

In the guerrilla documentary *Uprooted*, directed by Tunisian American filmmaker Donia Mili, we see raw footage from Palestine (AlQaq 2012). Mili starts the documentary with her voice asking, "I had to come to understand how Palestinians were holding their own in the face of the fourth largest military and nuclear power in the world?" She follows Palestinians' and international activists' protests, exposing the Israeli army's violence of shooting tear gas into the olive groves, arresting activists, and house demolitions. During the uprooting of an olive tree, an elderly woman starts hugging the tree and shouts, "This is my land!" The old woman says, "He wants us to leave; we will not leave. We worked hard to get them [olive trees] like that. No Palestinian will leave; they have roots in the land." After the woman's statement, Donia Mili finds an answer to her question of how Palestinians hold their own.

This documentary shows the reality of Palestine from an eye of a non-Palestinian. It exemplifies the possibility of transnational solidarity. Her and the other international activists'

passports may function as a shield in the face of the Israeli soldier. However, being on the land and standing with the Palestinians bring the risk of losing a life. American activist Rachel Corrie, who has become a known figure in transnational solidarity, was run over by the Israeli bulldozer, and justice for her death has still not prevailed. Even though a camera recorded her death, the judge decided it was an accident (Sherwood 2012). In the face of the brutal Zionist regime, whoever uses their body as a weapon for guarding the land and stands with Palestine becomes a target of killing and exclusion. This is one of the reasons why the world should unite with anger toward decolonizing Israel from its Zionist doctrines and praxis.

As a form of Indigenous co-resistance, *rooted-resistance-companionship* fills the gap Haraway's companionship discourse does not address. It pays attention to ways in which being-with in resistance in the face of Zionist settler occupation. Olive trees' roots existed and sprouted in Palestine for centuries, signifying the material existence of Palestinian bodies. Despite the burnings, uprooting, and cuttings, olive trees show settlers they cannot delete their existence, only delay. Olive trees' persistence in living and not giving up resonates with the Palestinians' insistence on liberation. Their co-living, co-becoming in and out of the soil of Palestine, has inspired me to develop the concept of *rooted-resistance-companionship*. A clear focus on the roots, which extend toward Palestinian bodies, from their bodies to their words in literature and visual art, has shown me that olive trees are in motion. The insistence on co-living continuously shows resilience against Zionist violence and highlights the regenerative force of nature. The Palestinians' close relationship with nature destabilizes Zionist narratives and praxis, consistently highlighting their rootedness in the land. Palestinians' collective presence enmeshed with olive trees is an everlasting resistance against violence, representing an inexhaustible struggle for decolonization and anti-colonial existence.

As Zionist settler colonialism aims to disrupt Palestinians' livelihood and connection and terraform the land as a way of appropriation, the *rooted-resistance-companionship* has shown how olive trees and Palestinians keep thriving in the colonial wound. A resilient olive tree can thrive in harsh climates. The harsh environment for olive trees is the hot temperature and the settler colonial violence. From its roots to its geographical and political situatedness, a close look at it has shown that it also needs multi-species collaborators.

Although an olive tree can self-pollinate, it needs pollinators such as butterflies and planetary companions such as water, sun, and wind. Hence, it is not a coincidence that in the second chapter, I traced butterflies in Darwish's writings, and in the third chapter, I paid attention to the stone's material importance in Palestine. My focus has shown that Zionist settler colonial violence threatens multispecies collaboration. Therefore, it was inevitable to discuss the roles of the butterflies, stones, wind, and Palestinians throughout the development of this concept. The concept of *rooted-resistance-companionship* has shown the belongingness of Palestinians with their Indigenous earthly co-species in the land where they thrive and resist Zionist settler colonization. It has shown that there are various kinships on this planet, and the affect of external forces continuously reshapes them, and without collaboration, kins cannot thrive.

Olive tree and the Palestinian relationality, the kinship that has evolved into *rooted-resistance-companionship*, has the potential to show the rest of the world a form of resilient worlding under the settler occupation. This Indigenous relationality, an assemblage, opens ways for recognition of a politics of vitality. If, as Amitav Ghosh suggests, recognizing nature's vitality would initiate empathy and unite us all, in that case, this thesis has provided a testament that the relationality between a Palestinian and an olive tree is vital, unbreakable, and persistent.

This thesis did not focus on the gender, race, and age aspects of *rooted-resistance-companionship* between Palestinians and olive trees. Further research has the potential to deepen this concept by looking at the close relationship between the olive tree, children, and (elderly) women. This concept has the potential to extend its relevance to encompass other forms of resistance against Zionist appropriation and violence inflicted upon the land, such as the targeted destruction of *zataar* and heirloom seeds. Moreover, *rooted-resistance-companionship* between humans and olive trees can be traced in other geopolitical spaces, such as Kurdistan and Syria. The travel of this concept beyond Palestine would expose the similarities between ongoing (settler) colonialism and terraforming strategies.

The cartography of the olive trees' journey from the soil to the Palestinian arts has demonstrated the enduring existence and imagination of liberation. The collaboration between the olive trees and Palestinians shows ways to decolonize the structures and myths, such as that they did not exist or did not belong to the land. The continuous appearance of olive trees in the soil in Palestine and their transgenerational relation to the Palestinian families keep on showing that they exist and their existence is intertwined. The resilience of *rooted-resistance-companions* continuously stays together in the extreme climates of apartheid. Such relationality between humans and more-than-human worlds, stemming from precariousness and empathy, reveals that we are on this planet together, although we are different. Concluding with the words of the poet olive tree of the *Rest in My Shade* book, this is our story, too. The pressing question now is, which side are we on?

## Epilogue

In the preface, I shared my situatedness and feminist activist journey in Turkey and my relationality to the trees during the Gezi Park protests. May 2023 is the tenth anniversary of the Gezi Park protests, and I remember the lives we lost and those that have lost their freedom. The result of the recent elections in Turkey left me devastated and frustrated. For another five years, people and the more-than-human worlds in Turkey will keep living under the same regime. However, my life in Turkey and my feminist comrades have taught me not to be hopeless. I kept looking at the trees around me and whispered: *They will keep pouring concrete over you, but that will only strengthen your roots. We fall seven times and get up eight times. That is the cycle of life.*

Writing about olive trees in Palestine strengthened many ways of my admiration for the regenerative force of nature. It strengthened showing solidarity towards the colonized, oppressed, marginalized, and occupied people and land. I am a human who dedicates her life to the praxis of solidarity. After moving to the Netherlands, I kept seeking the joint point between ‘you’ and ‘me’ to find out what could bind us against the destructive structures. While writing this thesis, I had the fear and self-criticism of whether I repeat and state the obvious. However, when I talked about my thesis to a scholar, he commented with watery eyes: “Ever since I was born, Palestinians have been under siege, and I find it so sad.” Frustrated, I replied, “No one needs your sadness.” The anxiety within me disappeared, and after our short meeting, I knew I was on the right track and that we should not stop talking, writing about, and standing with Palestine.

People say empathy and sympathy would play a role in ‘understanding’ the others’ suffering. Recently, I saw a picture from a performance art at Spring 2023 festival in Utrecht; the artist asks spectators to join him on the stage and handcuffs them on their knees, making

them wait in that uncomfortable position for minutes. The idea was to encourage the presumably white audience to understand the suffering of imprisoned people in Belarus. I kept asking myself why we needed to be in others' shoes to understand the suffering. Why are not the words of marginalized, oppressed, tortured, and colonized people enough for the rest of the world to understand them? Why is the image of an olive tree with its roots dangling in the air not enough to bind people in anger towards the destructive (settler) colonial violence directed at humans and more-than-human worlds?



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