

**Settler Violence and Erasing Indigeneity: A Contemporary and Archival Media Analysis of
Settler Colonialism, Ecological Violence, and Environmental Apartheid in Palestine**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous populations around the world are exposed to ecological violence as a method of social control. One of the most visible instances of such dynamics is the colonization of Palestine. In 1948, the Israeli parliament oversaw a significant and disruptive population displacement—commonly known as the *Nakba* catastrophe—that displaced nearly one million Palestinians, destroyed more than 400 towns, facilitated Israeli acquisition of over 4 million acres of land, and caused countless casualties of Palestinians (IMEU 2023; Khalidi 2020; Clarno 2017; Pappé 2006). These actions were taken to establish the state of Israel (Clarno 2017; Khalidi 2020; Pappé 2006). The remaining Palestinians who were not forcibly removed were placed under Israeli military rule (Clarno 2017). One of the ways in which Palestinians, who have deep historical ties to the land as Indigenous people, express their culture and resistance against settler colonial processes is through their agricultural practices (Sasa 2023; U.N. Conference on Trade and Development 2015). Agriculture, particularly the cultivation of olive trees, has played a crucial role in the maintenance of Palestinian livelihood and well-being for thousands of years (Haddad and Tahhan 2021). Moreover, olive trees carry significant symbolic meanings and value, as Palestinian people, like the trees they have so long cultivated, are deeply rooted and connected to their land.

This article assesses how the discursive framings of ecological violence in mainstream Israeli media outlets normalize settler colonial processes and maintain social control over Indigenous groups. In this study, I focus on the particular case of Palestinian olive trees in the West Bank. Specifically, I conduct a qualitative content analysis of 75 news and media articles

on olive tree discourse from three mainstream Israeli media outlets between the years 2014 and 2023. Additionally, my analysis is informed by Pellow's (2017) Critical Environmental Justice framework. Taking a Critical Environmental Justice approach to examine the role of media in imposing and sustaining settler colonial logic furthers our understanding of the weaponization of the environment to carry out ecological violence towards Indigenous populations. The central question guiding this study is: How does Israeli mainstream media facilitate or normalize ecological violence towards Palestinian people, specifically related to the olive tree discourse?

Settler violence against Indigenous populations like Palestinians can lead to environmental injustices, social instability, death, and socio-ecological disruption across spatial and temporal scales. Yet, research has not explored how the discourse in the region concerning olive trees is used as a method to erase Palestinian culture and tradition and exploit the environment. My study bridges this gap and demonstrates that Israeli-based media, in the form of newspaper articles, systematically enacts and normalizes ecological violence through their discourse on olive trees by legitimizing settler violence in Palestine and erasing Palestinian indigeneity. Specifically, mainstream Israeli media overlooks the ecological harm caused by the destruction of olive trees, minimizes the suffering of Palestinians, and absolves perpetrators of violence to legitimize settler violence. Furthermore, by failing to acknowledge the significant economic, cultural, and symbolic connections between Indigenous Palestinian people and olive trees, media narratives erase Palestinian indigeneity.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Indigenous People and the Environment

Martínez Cobo (1987) defines Indigenous peoples as those “having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that have developed on their territories [Indigenous peoples] are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories” (see also Kauanui 2018). Indigenous communities share a deep and sacred connection with the environment, and scholars have descriptively documented this relationship in the literature. For example, Dunbar-Ortiz (2018) details how Indigenous populations create sacred relationships with agriculture based on corn, and Norgaard and Fenelon (2021) describe how Indigenous ecologies are used to manage the environment and create embodied knowledge between humans and non-humans. Similarly, Whyte (2018) highlights the interdependence of Anishinaabe peoples, their traditions, and the environment to explain the connection between settler colonialism and environmental injustices.

While there is a growing body of literature that explores Indigenous communities’ relationships with the land, not much is documented about Palestinian’s sacred relationship with the land in Western academic spaces. Some Palestinian scholars like Sasa (2023) are beginning to fill this gap. For example, Sasa (2023) explores how Israel uses “green colonialism” to remove and erase Indigenous Palestinian populations. In her work, she recenters Palestinian ways of knowing and caring for the environment by focusing on “*wna* (collaboration), *sumud* (steadfastness), and *a’wda* (return), in addition to the Islamic concept of *tawhid* (unity)” (Sasa 2023). Still, there remains a critical gap in understanding the role that the media plays in erasing Indigenous connections to the land. Though Sasa and others have begun to elaborate a

Palestinian indigeneity, it remains to be discussed how the disruption of these lifeways is facilitated. My work explores one dimension of such disruptions. Specifically, I focus on Palestinian peoples' connections to the land and adopt a critical approach to understand how media discourse on olive trees in Palestine enacts and normalizes ecological violence towards Palestinian people.

Settler Colonialism, Ecological Violence, and Environment Apartheid

Colonization is a form of social control that has been utilized by historic empires, such as the British, Spanish, French, and the United States, to displace and exploit Indigenous populations (Bosworth and Flavin 2007). It is a structural process that is manifested by institutions and people to maintain an atmosphere in which colonizers enforce racial and cultural dominance over those who are colonized (Bosworth and Flavin 2007). Additionally, colonialism utilizes “conquest and genocide” to form states, further capitalist interests, and creation of settlements (Liboiron 2021). Settler colonialism, on the other hand, is a component of the larger narrative of colonialism that lends its focus to race, land, and the state (Clarno 2017). It is characterized by continuous attempts to displace Indigenous communities and seize their land to create and “expand a society dominated by settlers” (Clarno 2017). The structural and systemic nature of settler colonialism enables the dominating group to defend the ongoing discrimination and injustice against certain groups of people (Bosworth and Flavin 2007). In particular, settler colonial projects seek the “elimination of the native” through methods of displacement, annexation, and the creation of settlements (Wolfe 2006; Clarno 2017).

In the paragraphs below, I will discuss existing research on settler colonialism and the environment, particularly focusing on how settler colonial processes disrupt the relationships between Indigenous peoples and their ancestral lands. Additionally, I will explore recent studies

that analyze these dynamics within the specific context of Israel and Palestine. By establishing these connections, we can gain deeper insights into the dynamics of settler colonialism, ecological violence, and Indigenous peoples.

Previous research on settler colonialism and the environment demonstrates how environmental injustices are created as a result of colonizing Indigenous lands (Bacon 2019; Pellow 2017; Dunbar-Ortiz 2018). For example, Pellow (2017) explains the role of the state in creating a myriad of environmental injustices for “humans and nonhumans,” specifically in the case of Israel creating and maintaining control over Palestinian ecosystems (Pellow 2017). Hamouchene (2023) and Sasha (2023) have also examined how green colonialism manifests in the Arab region and Palestine, respectively. Other researchers like Murphy and Schroering (2020) and Hernandez (2022) each explore the impact of racialization and colonization on the modern ecological crisis on a global scale, and in the case of Latin America.

Settler colonialism is used as a method to disrupt the continuous relationships between Indigenous peoples and their lands by weakening and eroding self-determining communities (Whyte 2018). The act of disrupting the intricate relationships Indigenous peoples maintain with the environment is a form of “colonial ecological violence” (Bacon 2019). Similarly, Whyte (2018) describes settler colonialism as a process of “ecological domination, committing environmental injustice against Indigenous peoples and other groups.” The goals of settler colonialism are not only to spread imperialism, but to dispossess Indigenous people of their native land and resources (Bacon 2019). The appropriation of these lands, thus, disrupts the relationships that Indigenous communities have with the environment, while also causing harm to the environment itself (Bacon 2019; Whyte 2018).

In addition to understanding settler colonialism as a fundamental and necessary tool to perpetuate ecological violence, scholars have also introduced the concept of “environmental apartheid” to examine the implications of destroying the relationships and traditions Indigenous communities have with their ancestral lands. Environmental apartheid refers to the “use of the rural environment to deliberately marginalize racially defined groups, as well as the subsequent consequences of that marginalization” (Stull, Bell, and Newadi 2016). Within the context of South Africa, Stull, Bell, and Newadi (2016) assert that even though the apartheid has legally ended, it is still ingrained into the environment; Black South Africans experience the environmental consequences of apartheid in several aspects of their lives, including their health. Research on environmental apartheid is limited, and there is an even larger gap in the literature on environmental apartheid in the context of Palestine. This gap warrants attention given that the IMEU (2022) describes Israel’s ecological violence on Indigenous Palestinian land as environmental apartheid, that is, “systematic exploitation of the environment in Palestine/Israel and the discriminatory system by which Palestinians are dispossessed of their land, water, and other natural resources while being disproportionately impacted by ecological damage caused by Israel.” In particular, the militarized occupation of Palestine has led to the creation of a separation barrier that takes up “10% of the West Bank and carv[es] up Palestinian communities; cutting off farmers from their lands; and harming local ecosystems” (IMEU 2022). The creation of separation barriers, such as the one in the West Bank, physically separate Indigenous communities from their lands. This barrier not only restricts movement, but it prevents Indigenous farmers from agricultural practices that are essential to their livelihoods and an important part of their identity. Moreover, the confiscation of land deprives Palestinian peoples of their rights by stealing their property and severing their historical and cultural ties to the land.

Additionally, the construction of the wall can harm local ecosystems of non-humans that are also Indigenous to the land (IMEU 2022).

Scholars like Pellow (2017) have critically examined the environmental injustices endured by Palestinians due to Israeli settler colonialism and occupation. However, there is an urgent need to critically examine Israel's environmental apartheid and ecological violence towards Palestinian people to better understand the ways in which settler colonial activity and ecological violence is both enacted and maintained by the media. Dispossessing Indigenous peoples, who often serve as stewards of the land, from their ancestral territories disrupts traditional methods of caring for and nurturing the land (Hernandez 2022). Moreover, when Indigenous communities are displaced, the ecosystems they once nurtured are left vulnerable to exploitation and degradation. My study aims to illuminate settler colonial processes that weaponize the environment by using Pellow's (2017) Critical Environmental Justice framework. Specifically, I examine how Israeli media employs discursive framings around olive trees, which are a feature of Palestinian indigeneity, to enact and normalize ecological violence.

Indigeneity and Indigeneity Erasure

Kauanui (2018) describes indigeneity as a “counterpart analytic to settler colonialism.” Indigeneity, a “political identity that in and of itself opposes settler colonialism,” and is often dismissed by settler colonial states (Nabulsi 2023). Scholars have increasingly explored the mechanisms in which Indigenous erasure occurs. For instance, Rocha Beardall (2022) explains that settler colonialism and white supremacy work in tandem in higher education to pursue the erasure of Indigenous populations. Specifically, she uses a case study of the University of Chicago at Urbana-Champaign's continued use and refusal to abandon a “racist” mascot to explain how anti-Indigenous racism normalizes the erasure of Indigenous people in higher

education. Outside of the U.S. context, Hernandez (2022) describes how Western science, including educational institutions invalidate the indigeneity of Zapotec and Maya Cho'rti peoples in Latin America by erasing Indigenous science. Additionally, Bacon (2019) adopts an environmental sociology perspective to discuss the ways in which Indigenous populations in the United States have been exposed to several elimination attempts such as sterilization, massacres, and government assimilation programs, while Dunbar-Ortiz (2018) details the genocidal campaign against Indigenous peoples in what is now recognized as the United States.

Importantly, the settler colonial dynamics of the Palestinian region are rather widely recognized. Both the United Nations (2022) and Amnesty International (2022), for instance, recognize Israel as an apartheid state. Apartheid as defined by Amnesty International (2022) is “an institutionalized regime of oppression and domination by one racial group over another.” The ongoing actions of settler colonialism have dispossessed Palestinians of their land and created an apartheid regime that employs legal frameworks to further subjugation of the Palestinian people; in many cases the rules that emerge from these frameworks do not apply to Israeli settlers in the same ways (Bseiso and Whittal 2021). Indigeneity and apartheid occur simultaneously, where apartheid is employed to control Indigenous populations (Amara and Hawari 2019). As a result, Indigenous populations resist apartheid regimes by asserting and preserving their indigeneity. Nabulsi (2023) describes Palestinian indigeneity “(*aslaniya falastiniya*)” as the “embodiment of Palestinian land.” Since the *Nakba* that resulted in the creation of Israel, Palestinian people collectively have been fighting erasure (Pappé 2006; Khalidi 2020; Nabulsi 2023; Sasa 2023; Gould 2023). The liberation of Palestine calls for the liberation of all Palestinians, not just those who are members of Indigenous tribes (Amara and Hawari 2019). For the Palestinian people, fighting against erasure is essential to preserving their identity, culture, sovereignty, and rights to

their ancestral lands. The dangers of being erased are multifaceted, extending beyond the loss of community, land, and resources to encompass the erasure of embodied knowledge and the disruption of relationships between Indigenous peoples and their land. Recognition is essential in this context. Without recognition, Indigenous communities face exploitation, cultural assimilation, and death, thus perpetuating a cycle of ecological violence that harms both people and the land they inhabit.

There is an emerging body of research by scholars who focus on Palestinian indigeneity and sovereignty (Sasa 2023; Naublsi 2023; Amara and Hawari 2019; Barakat 2018b; Salamanca et al. 2012). Palestinian indigeneity, as a concept, did not need to be articulated before the Israeli occupation and settler colonial incursions into Palestine and the West Bank (Amara and Hawari 2019); today, it represents Palestinian people's ongoing struggle for freedom. Olive trees are an integral part of Palestinian indigeneity (Darzah 2023; Haddad and Tahhan 2021). Specifically, olive trees represent a deep-rooted connection between Palestinians and their ancestors, and have become a symbol of resistance against Israel's settler regime (Darzah 2023; Haddad and Tahhan 2021). Yet, research has not investigated how Israeli-based media controls the discourse of Palestinians with respect to olive trees—a critical manifestation of Palestinian indigeneity (Darzah 2023). This line of inquiry is especially important because it illuminates tactics used in settler states, like Israel, to establish and normalize ecological violence towards Palestinian people as a mechanism to deepen social control of the Indigenous population and erase indigeneity.

The critical dearth of literature on Palestinian indigeneity can be seen as a product of erasure and the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism. Thus, it is important to look at how Israeli settlers use tools and mechanisms that directly attack and erase Palestinian indigeneity to expand

settler colonialism, such as through media and censorship. Additionally, settler colonialism can disrupt Indigenous peoples relationship with the land, including land appropriation, resource exploitation, and environmental degradation (Pellow 2017; Hernandez 2022). My qualitative study fills these gaps by exploring how media framings impose settler colonial logic and processes in Indigenous spaces, particularly, Indigenous ecology in Palestine.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Critical Environmental Justice, as proposed by Pellow (2017), extends beyond conventional theories of environmental justice. While traditional perspectives on environmental justice concentrate primarily on equitable policy implementation (Bullard 2000; Taylor 2014; Pulido and De Lara 2018), Critical Environmental Justice addresses various dimensions of inequality and oppression beyond race and class distinctions and incorporates multi-scalar analyses (Pellow 2017). Specifically, the framework consists of four pillars to push past the monolithic focus on policy implementation: 1) focus on intersectionality across multiple dimensions of oppression; 2) recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental issues across geographical, political, and social scales; 3) center on the role of state powers in reinforcing social inequalities; and 4) emphasis on how marginalized human and non-human communities are seen as expendable (Pellow 2017).

Employing a Critical Environmental Justice framework in this study provides a valuable lens to explore how Israeli mainstream media facilitates or normalizes ecological violence towards Palestinian people, specifically related to the olive tree discourse. As discussed above, the framework emphasizes the need to explore environmental issues within their broader social, political, and historical contexts. Such an approach is especially necessary to shed light on the intricate relationships between Palestinian peoples, their land, and the environment, given the historical and ongoing forces of displacement, colonization, and struggles for self-sovereignty. Additionally, when exploring how ecological violence is normalized, it is essential to consider the asymmetrical power imbalances that are inherent in the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestine as they have significant implications for land rights, resource access, and

environmental degradation in Palestinian communities. Moreover, implementing this framework recenters the experiences and knowledge of Palestinian communities by emphasizing their connection to their ancestral lands. Thus, the critical and intersectional lens of the Critical Environmental Justice framework allows the unique opportunity to illuminate how media narratives can normalize ecological violence. Such a lens contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in the olive tree discourse in Palestine and its broader implications for Palestinian environmental justice and Palestinian indigeneity.

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND METHODS

This study utilizes qualitative content analysis to explore how Israeli mainstream media outlets facilitate and normalize ecological violence towards Palestinian people, specifically in the olive trees discourse. To perform this analysis, I draw from news and media articles published by three mainstream Israeli media outlets: *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Times of Israel*, and *Haaretz*.

There is an emerging body of literature on discourse and media representation of Palestinians. However, most of this research has focused on the criminalization of Palestinians (Naber 2017; Tartir 2017; Barakat 2018a). Existing research has not shown how the discourse in the Palestinian region concerning olive trees is used as a method to invoke and sustain ecological violence towards Indigenous populations. Qualitative content analysis of news and media articles can, thus, help establish trends in the discourse on olive trees and patterns that these Israeli media outlets have utilized to establish social control through environmental injustices. Moreover, this line of inquiry is both significant and timely. Settler violence against Palestinian agriculture, specifically olive trees, routinely peaks during the harvest season and continues to challenge those living in the West Bank (International Committee of the Red Cross 2021).

Data Sources

I draw my sample from three mainstream Israeli news outlets: *The Jerusalem Post*, and *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*. According to a report by the Jewish Federation (n.d.), *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*, are among the seven top Israeli news sources available in English. Given that these outlets are among some of the most popular news sources in Israel, looking at media narratives shaped by these outlets offers critical insights into how settler colonial logic is perpetuated through media representations of ecological elements, such

as olive trees in Palestine. Olive trees are a critical manifestation of Palestinian indigeneity (Darzah 2023). Thus, analyzing articles related to olive tree discourse from prominent Israeli news outlets allows for the unique opportunity to uncover how narratives about olive trees are constructed, as well as understand the implications of these narratives on Palestinian identity and land rights, such as normalizing ecological violence.

The Jerusalem Post, originally founded and known as *The Palestine Post* until 1950, claims that it “is known for its centrist stance, and its writers and columnists hold views that span the entire political spectrum” (The Jerusalem Post n.d.). Additionally, *The Jerusalem Post* claims to be the “oldest and largest English-language daily newspaper in Israel and the most-read English news website in Israel and the Jewish world” (The Jerusalem Post n.d.).

The Times of Israel was founded in 2012 in Jerusalem and claims to have “no partisan political affiliation.” Specifically, *The Times of Israel* note that they “seek to present the news fair-mindedly” and “offer a wide range of analysis and opinion pieces” (The Times of Israel n.d.). The newspaper was “established by veteran UK-born, Israeli journalist David Horovitz and his US-based capital partner Seth Klarman. Horovitz is the founding editor, responsible for the site’s editorial content” (The Times of Israel n.d.).

Haaretz, founded by a “group of Zionist immigrants, mainly from Russia” in 1919, claims that it has a “broadly liberal outlook both on domestic issues and on international affairs” (Haaretz n.d.). Additionally, *Haaretz* claims that they are known best for their “Op-ed page, where its senior columnists—among them some of Israel’s leading commentators and analysts—reflect on current events” (Haaretz n.d.). The newspaper also describes their influence as playing “an important role in the shaping of public opinion” as their work is “read with care in government and decision-making circles” (Haaretz n.d.).

Data Collection

I analyze a random selection of 75 news and media articles published by the specified media outlets—*The Jerusalem Post*, *The Times of Israel*, and *Haaretz*—between the years 2014 and 2023. 25 news and media articles were randomly drawn from each media outlet using *Nexis Uni*, an academic search engine containing “news, business, and legal sources” (NexisLexis n.d.). Search terms included iterations of the following: olive tree, olive trees, Palestinians, and Palestine. The relevant articles were extracted by applying the following inclusion criteria: articles in English language; focus on olive tree discourse and Palestinian people; and published between the years 2014 and 2023. All articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Data Analysis

A content analysis is the critical analysis of any media such as text or visual materials (Gordon 2020). In conducting a qualitative content analysis, I analyzed and coded a random selection of news and media articles and reports between the years 2014 and 2023 until data saturation was achieved. For data analysis, I used Dedoose, a mixed-methods data analysis software. Specifically, I used Pellow’s (2017) Critical Environmental Justice framework to deductively code for themes that fall within its four pillars: 1) overlapping dimensions of difference; 2) multiscalar frameworks; 3) role of state power; and 4) racial and socioeconomic indispensability. These four pillars were used to inform and guide my analysis and coding process as described in **Appendix A, Table 1**. The use of the Critical Justice Framework is particularly helpful. The framework’s critical and multiscalar focus lends an important vantage point from which to understand the weaponization of the environment by media to carry out ecological violence towards Indigenous populations.

Settler colonialism can extend its control into various institutions, such as news media, that disseminate knowledge and history (Cox et al. 2022). Previous studies examining media narratives and coverage on Israel's occupation of Palestine find that the suffering and grievances of the Palestinian people are not "adequately represented or framed as such in the media" (Fahmy and Eakin 2014). Downplaying Palestinian people's suffering and/or selectively framing Indigenous environmental features can not only perpetuate ecological violence, but also normalize it. Thus, media narratives serve as an important lens through which we can analyze how settler colonial efforts are perpetuated, including ecological violence.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The results of my qualitative content analysis, which examined 75 news articles across *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*, reveal the complicity of mainstream Israeli media in facilitating or normalizing ecological violence towards Palestinian people, particularly concerning the olive tree discourse. I argue that this normalization occurs through two primary strategies: 1) legitimization of settler violence and 2) erasure of Palestinian indigeneity. Mainstream media narratives legitimize settler violence by failing to characterize the destruction of olive trees as ecological harm, minimizing Palestinian suffering, and absolving perpetrators of violence (i.e., settlers). Concurrently, media articles erase Palestinian indigeneity by constructing narratives that undermine and ignore Indigenous histories and ways of knowing in Palestine, specifically related to the significant ancestral connections between Palestinian people and olive trees. Together, the strategies of legitimizing settler violence and erasing Palestinian indigeneity are used to disrupt and displace the ancestral and embodied connections between Palestinian people and their land. This normalization process not only perpetuates environmental degradation, but also facilitates systemic injustice, reinforcing the cycle of violence and dispossession experienced by Indigenous Palestinian communities. By examining the interconnectedness of legitimizing settler violence and erasing Palestinian indigeneity, it becomes evident how mainstream media actively contributes to the normalization of ecological violence in Palestine.

Legitimizing Settler Violence in Palestine

Settler violence extends beyond Israel's occupation of Palestine; it includes settlers' physical and psychological actions of breaking olive tree branches, throwing stones, and

restricting and policing Indigenous peoples' presence and existence on their own land. The media plays a significant role in legitimizing this violence by de-centering Palestinian lives and their connection to their land and environment, thus normalizing ecological violence. Media outlets legitimize settler violence by: 1) failing to characterize the destruction of olive trees as environmental harm 2) minimizing the suffering of Palestinians; and 3) absolving perpetrators of violence in their articles.

Failing to Characterize Destruction of Olive Trees as Environmental Harm

News articles across *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel* further normalized ecological violence against the Palestinian people by failing to recognize how the destruction of olive trees is environmental harm. Olive trees are deeply intertwined with Palestinian identity; they serve as symbols of resilience, connection to the land, and the Palestinian struggle for freedom and sovereignty. Importantly, the destruction of olive trees is often carried out as part of the Israeli settler colonialism and occupation, which is aimed at displacing Palestinians, seizing Palestinian land, and erasing the presence and connection of Palestinians to the land (Sasa 2023). The failure to recognize the destruction of olive trees as an attack on Palestinian identity and heritage, therefore, contributes to the normalization of ecological violence and perpetuates narratives that prioritize Israeli settler colonial interests and perspectives.

Even when articles recognized settler violence against Palestinians and their land, it was done in reductive ways that ultimately normalize such violence. For example, the article, "We Must Fight Palestinian Terrorism without Rewarding Jewish Terrorism," published by *The Jerusalem Post* in 2018 is representative of this theme. Specifically, the article reduces Palestinian resistance as terrorism and argues that it is important to fight such terrorism,

however, without rewarding extremist Jewish terrorism. The author reflects on their own experience, as a non-Palestinian, with extremist settlers in this statement:

They threw stones at us and spat on me. Eventually the security forces told the farmers to leave their own land. In 2010, Palestinian land around Havat Gilad went up in flames, after some government action against the outpost. Some 250 olive trees were burned. An eyewitness saw Israelis setting the fires.

In this instance of recognizing settler violence, there is no mention of the vital significance of olive trees, as well as no mention of how burning these trees and forcibly removing Palestinians from their land disrupts Palestinian people's sacred relationship with land. As a result, the gravity of such acts of settler violence in this case are severely diminished. Additionally, the discussion on settler violence here actively ignores the lens of environmental harm, primarily through burning of trees, thereby normalizing ecological violence. Thus, by centering the themes of terrorism—instead of the significant relationship between environment, land, and settler violence and subsequent implications—the article legitimizes settler violence and normalizes ecological violence.

In addition to legitimizing settler violence, subjectivity in reporting on what constitutes environmental harm can normalize ecological violence as seen in “PA premier calls ‘**Israeli occupation**’ Biggest Threat to Palestinian Environment” published by *The Times of Israel* in 2021 where the article describes what the PA premier shared at an international climate conference in Glasgow:

*The Palestinian premier further **claimed** that Israeli policies were ‘**systematically destroying**’ the traditional Palestinian environment.’ If one looks at the map of modern Palestine, one sees how the environment is being systematically destroyed. Since 1967, Israel has uprooted about 2.5 million trees, including about 800,000 olive trees.’ (emphasis added)*

As evident in the example above, with the use of quotes around “Israeli occupation” and “systematically destroying,” the article casts doubt on Palestinian claims of environmental harm

and injustice through their language and tone in reporting. For instance, the title of the article places “Israeli occupation” in quotes, which can imply sarcasm, doubt, or suggestiveness similar to “so-called” or “alleged” (Ellis 2024; Hey 2023). The use of quotes introduces supposed subjectivity, implying that “Israeli occupation” may not be credible and that the occupation might not be a real threat to Palestinian environment. Similarly, the article reduces the Palestinian premier’s analysis on the role of Israeli policies in degrading the environment as “claims,” while also introducing subjectivity by placing “systematically degrading” in quotes. Ecological violence, particularly harming olive trees, is an act of settler violence (see, e.g., Sasa 2023; Tahhan 2021). By de-centering Palestinian lives and their connection to the environment, especially through olive trees, and by failing to recognize acts that disrupt this sacred connection as environmental harm and thus, settler violence, the media continues to legitimize settler violence and normalize ecological violence.

As demonstrated by the examples above, when settler violence against Palestinians becomes normalized, legitimized, or is ignored by the media, it disrupts and erases the historical and ancestral connection of Palestinians to their land. Thus, legitimizing settler violence ignores the systemic injustices facing Palestinians and normalizes ecological violence against Indigenous Palestinian communities.

Minimizing the Suffering of Palestinians

In my sample, the suffering endured by Palestinians was often minimized in media narratives, particularly in the context of the olive tree discourse. The narratives constructed by the media routinely overlooked the human toll of ecological violence against Palestinian communities, failing to adequately convey the emotional, physical, and economic hardships faced by individuals and families affected by the destruction of olive trees and other forms of

environmental degradation. Obscuring the impact of the destruction of olive trees on Indigenous Palestinian communities, thus, contributes to the normalization of ecological violence.

For example, the minimization of Palestinian suffering as a way to normalize ecological violence can be seen in “Area C: Squeezed from all Sides” published by *The Jerusalem Post* in 2019. The article primarily focuses on the “Area C” in the West Bank. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory (2011), Area C makes up approximately 60% of the West Bank, “where Israel retains extensive control, including over security, planning and zoning.” The article discusses how Palestinians are making a “mockery” of Israelis, and that it is Palestinians who are annexing Israeli territory. Failing to acknowledge that the Israeli parliament displaced nearly 1 million Palestinians to establish the state of Israel, which included confiscating more than 4 million acres from the Indigenous Palestinians (IMEU 2023; Khalidi 2020; Clarno 2017; Pappé 2006), while centering the “mockery” of Israelis, minimizes and to an extent, erases the suffering of Palestinians. Specifically related to the olive tree discourse, the article refers to olive trees only once:

But no one ever hears about the countless olive trees, cherry trees, and grapevines planted by Israelis that are uprooted on a regular basis.

The statement above obscures and minimizes the suffering of Palestinians by focusing solely on “Israeli olive trees” that are uprooted. Focusing on the lack of attention given to tree uprooting incidents involving Israelis de-centers Palestinian perspectives and experiences. Moreover, this narrow focus on the uprooting of Israeli olive trees overlooks the broader ecological violence inflicted upon Indigenous Palestinian communities. Olive trees hold profound cultural, historical, and economic significance for Palestinians, serving as symbols of resilience and connection to the land (Darzah 2023). Thus, the destruction of olive trees not only devastates Palestinian livelihoods, but also disrupts local ecosystems and exacerbates

environmental degradation in the region. By failing to acknowledge the ecological impact of such violence, the statement perpetuates a narrative that diminishes the continued suffering experienced by Palestinians.

The minimization of Palestinian suffering is also evident in the article titled “Promised, Occupied? See for Yourself,” published by *The Times of Israel* in 2017. This article describes the author’s visit to the West Bank, which centers their own perspective as a non-Palestinian, and not those of the Palestinians. The article describes how anxious the author felt traveling through Palestinian villages, worried that they may be attacked—hinting at underlying racist tropes of terrorism often associated with Palestinians (Barakat 2018a). The only mention of olive trees in this article is in the following statement:

*There is a **terrible phenomena** of uprooting olive trees of Palestinians (but also of Israelis); but that is incidental and condemned by the mainstream leaders and rabbis. (emphasis added)*

By framing the uprooting of olive trees as a “terrible phenomena” that is merely incidental, the statement downplays the severity and significance of the ecological violence perpetrated. Referring to the uprooting of Palestinian olive trees as something that is not severe can desensitize readers to the gravity of the situation, making it easier to overlook or dismiss the ecological and social impacts of such acts. This is especially critical in the context of Palestinian olive trees because there is a significant ancestral and economic connection between olive trees and Palestinian people, as discussed previously. Moreover, while acknowledging that both Palestinians and Israelis are impacted by the uprooting of olive trees, the framing used in the article suggests that the impact of such destruction on both communities is equivalent. In doing so, the article obscures the asymmetrical nature of power dynamics between Israelis and Palestinians as a result of settler colonialism, and overlooks the systemic oppression faced by Palestinians.

Absolving Perpetrators of Violence

Even though several articles from my sample acknowledged settler violence against the Palestinian people and their communities, and sometimes included interviews with Palestinians who have experienced violence at the hands of settlers, the normalization of ecological violence was still prevalent. In discussing settler violence, a majority of articles often centered the security concerns of Israelis or referred to the acts of violence in a passive tone. In doing so, the media absolved the actor (i.e., settler) of their violent actions.

The legitimization of settler violence can be seen in articles across *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*. For example, the article, “It’s Not an Ideology, It’s Simply How It Is” published by *Haaretz* in 2022 states:

*Ahmad Zahi Bani-Shamsa was the first fatality in the West Bank village of Beita, in its confrontation with the settlement of Evyatar under the watch of the outgoing government. He was killed before he got to celebrate his 16th birthday, **after being shot in the head from behind. He was shot** while trying to hang up a Palestinian flag on an olive tree. He died the next day, on the fifth day of the ‘government of change.’ So far, demonstrations in Beita against Evyata have led to seven deaths. (emphasis added)*

The statement quoted above absolves settlers and occupation forces from their involvement in attacking and killing Palestinians. When discussing the murder of a Palestinian child, the article uses passive language and notably omits any mention of who bears responsibility for the incident. This is a particularly striking example of disrupting Indigenous connections with the environment considering the context that a child was murdered while hanging a Palestinian flag on an olive tree—an act that carries profound symbolism for Palestinians and their connection to the land. Failing to acknowledge the perpetrators’ responsibility both ignores settler violence committed against Palestinians and legitimizes the acceptability of such violence against Palestinians. As a result, historical and ancestral connections of Indigenous Palestinian people with the environment are overlooked and

disrupted, thereby normalizing ecological violence. It is critical to note that the omission of responsibility for the violence against Palestinians itself contributes to a broader societal acceptance and normalization of settler violence, which includes harming olive trees. Failing to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, therefore, also downplays and ignores the gravity and consequences of ecological violence.

Similarly, in “While Hebron Gets the press, Jenin and Tulkarem are the Sleeping Giants Israel should be Worried About,” published by *The Times of Israel* in 2016, the author writes:

*This year’s [olive] harvest period, as with 2015, will come on the heels of already high tensions, after a number of attacks and attempted attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem, which can both serve as a source of inspiration for **future Palestinian attacks and a justification for Jewish Israelis to hassle and assault Palestinians.*** (emphasis added)

The statement quoted above associates Palestinians with violence and aggression, while portraying Israelis as victims who have “*justification to hassle and assault Palestinians.*” In centering the security of Israelis, such language not only legitimizes settler violence against Palestinians, but also *justifies* settler violence against them. In other words, perpetrators of violence (i.e., settlers) are absolved of their violent acts because violence is made to be “justified” against Palestinian people. Moreover, framing Palestinian resistance as “attacks” overlooks root causes of Palestinian resistance such as settler colonialism, occupation, and dispossession. Importantly, the article has no mention of Palestinian connection to ancestral lands, and fails to acknowledge the significance of the olive harvest to Palestinian culture, heritage, and livelihoods. The statement above is but one example of how the media can reinforce a narrative that marginalizes and dehumanizes Palestinians, while legitimizing violence against them. This portrayal justifies violence against Palestinians and perpetuates the normalization of aggression towards them. As discussed previously, the general acceptance and legitimization of settler violence can extend to normalization of ecological violence, for example,

the destruction of olive trees. The legitimization of settler violence, especially towards disrupting connections between the environment and Palestinian people, thus contributes to normalization of ecological violence.

Erasing Palestinian Indigeneity

At its core, the concept of indigeneity centers Indigenous ways of knowing, including resistance to erasure (Amara and Hawari 2019). Indigeneity can manifest in many ways; for example, indigeneity includes embodiment of ecological knowledge through connection to and living on ancestral land (Nabulsi 2023; Hernandez 2022), as well as the social construction of feelings of belonging prior to colonial invasions (Martínez Cabo 1987; Kauanui 2018). Across the 75 articles published by *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*, media narratives frequently omitted Palestinian indigeneity by overlooking the historical context of Palestine's colonization and the sacred connection of Palestinian people to olive trees. Consequently, these articles constructed a narrative that blatantly disregards Indigenous histories and ways of knowing, effectively erasing Palestinian indigeneity. This erasure contributes to the normalization of ecological violence by disregarding Indigenous peoples' profound connection to the land, facilitating dispossession, and normalizing settler colonialism on their ancestral lands.

Ignoring Indigenous Palestinian's connection to olive trees is evident in an article titled "Terrorism, Not Terror" published by *The Jerusalem Post* in 2015. The article itself focuses on the theme of terrorism, specifically, in regard to Palestinians as the instigators. The sole mention of olive trees in the article is found in the statement below:

*When those who express their love for the Torah and the Land of Israel by destroying **other people's olive trees**, under a supposedly halachic rationale, we must realize that the scourge of terrorism is indeed on the brink of terrorizing our society. (emphasis added)*

While this statement acknowledges the destruction of olive trees, it fails to recognize their significance to Palestinian identity. This is evident in the article solely referring to olive trees as “other people’s” trees without mentioning Palestinians. Such framing of olive trees overlooks the profound connection Palestinians have to their land, and the symbolic importance of olive trees in Palestinian culture. Additionally, the omission of any context regarding the occupation further obscures the systematic dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous Palestinians from their ancestral lands. The selective focus on terrorism itself detracts from the broader ecological and cultural implications of uprooting olive trees. Moreover, the destruction of olive trees not only physically harms the environment through soil degradation and disrupting ecosystems (see, e.g., Hedroug 2023; Isaac and Gasteyer 1995), but also erases the indigeneity of the Palestinian people by disconnecting them from their land and identity. Solely mentioning olive trees in passing and omitting any acknowledgment of their centrality to Palestinian identity contributes to the normalization of ecological violence because such framings perpetuate a narrative that overlooks the environmental and cultural devastation inflicted upon Palestinian communities.

The failure to report on the relationship between Palestinians and olive trees is also clear in “A Campaign of Destruction, Courtesy of Israel’s High Court” published by *Haaretz* in 2022. The article describes the mass expulsion and destruction of Palestinian communities, while also considering the role of the militarized occupation of Palestine. However, there is little to no mention of the destruction of olive trees. The sole mention of olive trees is found in the following statement:

Safa Najar, a 68-year-old widow, mother of nine and grandmother of multitudes, lives here. Seven families live in the village, two of which saw their dwellings and sheep pen demolished last Wednesday. Here too there was a demolition operation last December, so no new order was needed for the latest destruction. Najar now sleeps beneath the open

sky, but also has a cave for the winter. The grove of young olive trees in the valley nearby belongs to her and her sons.

Here, the article is describing the destruction of Al-Mirkez, a Palestinian village.

Strikingly, the statement above overlooks the vital connection between Palestinians and olive trees, failing to recognize how the expulsion and removal of Palestinians from their ancestral lands disrupt this bond, consequently affecting both the environment and the Indigenous communities. The article neglects to elaborate on the profound implications of such disruptions on the longstanding agricultural traditions and the intergenerational knowledge passed down among Indigenous Palestinians. This omission is particularly concerning as it undermines the Palestinians' ability to maintain sustainable livelihoods and preserve their cultural heritage, thus contributing to erasure of Palestinian indigeneity. Moreover, while it is essential to focus on the human impact of the destruction, giving minimal attention to the environmental consequences of destroying, for example, olive groves can normalize ecological violence. Destroying olive groves can lead to soil erosion and the disruption of local ecosystems (see, e.g., Hedroug 2023; Isaac and Gasteyer 1995). As a result, overlooking the grave consequences of harming olive groves on the environment itself diminishes the significant ecological implications and normalizes ecological violence. Additionally, failure to explicitly acknowledge the ecological value and ancestral history of Indigenous Palestinians caring for olive trees, as well as the broader implications of olive tree destruction on the local environment, both erases Palestinian indigeneity and normalizes ecological violence.

The erasure of Palestinian indigeneity as a strategy to normalize ecological violence is also seen in “Area C: Squeezed from all Sides” published by *The Jerusalem Post* in 2019. As discussed previously, the article largely ignores the settler colonial context behind the creation of

Israel, which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their ancestral land. The only time olive trees are discussed in the article is present below:

Some Jewish delinquent uproots a single Palestinian olive tree and it is front-page news throughout Israel, and thanks to certain organizations, throughout the world as well.

By presenting the uprooting of olive trees as an isolated incident perpetrated by “some delinquents” without any discussion on the significant ancestral and cultural connections between Palestinian people and olive trees, the statement above effectively erases Palestinian indigeneity. As explained previously, Palestinian indigeneity can manifest in multiple ways, including through embodied connections with the land, specifically olive trees (citation). As a result, overlooking the connections between olive trees and Indigenous people in Palestine, while undermining the significance of uprooting olive trees, contributes to erasure of their indigeneity. Minimizing the destruction of critical Indigenous environmental features, such as olive trees, in turn, normalizes ecological violence against Palestinians. Normalization of ecological violence is achieved here by downplaying the systemic nature of violence and dispossession faced by Palestinians, which has ecological consequences (IMEU 2022; Hedroug 2023), reinforcing a narrative that portrays such acts as aberrations rather than part of a broader pattern of oppression and colonization. Moreover, the focus on the sensationalization of such patterns fails to recognize how Palestinians are connected to olive trees. The article’s omission of any historical context and the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians from their ancestral lands perpetuate this form of ecological violence by severing the relationships Palestinians have with their land.

The erasure of Palestinian indigeneity used as a mechanism to normalize ecological violence can also be seen in “As Gaza War Wages On, Israeli Settlers Attack Palestinians and Create a New Reality in the West Bank,” published by *Haaretz* in 2023. The article describes the aftermath of October 7th in the West Bank, specifically in regard to increased settler violence

and against Palestinians. The following statement describes how this violence has affected Palestinians' olive trees:

The anarchy in the area is illustrated by an announcement issued by the leaders of the Hebron settlement last week, in which they invited the community to join an olive harvest event in Palestinian-owned olive groves. 'We are pleased to invite the community to harvest olives in Tel Hebron,' the statement said. The event, it was noted, 'is intended for all ages, youth and adults.' Although illegal, the olive harvest was guarded by soldiers stationed in the Hebron area.

Erasure of Palestinian indigeneity is evident here in how the article emphasizes “invit[ing] the community” to partake in activities that are sacred to Palestinians, such as olive harvesting. Additionally, this erasure of Palestinian indigeneity is further emphasized by media framings that portrays the settler leaders as “benevolent hosts” inviting the Indigenous community to partake in olive harvest on their own land. There is no acknowledgement of how settler activities like these displace the Palestinian people and dispossess them of their ancestral lands (see, e.g., Sasa 2023). Significantly, settlers are not the Indigenous stewards of the land; Palestinians have cared for olive trees centuries before settlers colonized Palestine. Disrupting the ways in which these trees are cared for, thus, normalizes ecological violence as the traditional agricultural practices of the Indigenous Palestinians are disrupted and prevented from being employed. The focus on the presence of soldiers guarding the event is also worth noting. In this context, the militarization and occupation of Indigenous land itself also perpetuates the erasure of Palestinian indigeneity by enforcing and legitimizing settler control over Palestinian land and resources, as well as normalizes settler and ecological violence. The ongoing presence of military forces in Palestine has physically disrupted the environment through the creation of separation barriers and checkpoints, divided Indigenous communities, and disrupted agricultural practices crucial to Palestinian livelihood (IMEU 2022).

As the examples above aptly demonstrate, mainstream Israeli media articles blatantly overlook the historical context of Palestine's colonization and the sacred connection of Palestinian people to olive trees, thereby erasing Palestinian indigeneity. The erasure of Palestinian indigeneity in Israeli-based news articles facilitates and normalizes ecological violence against the Indigenous Palestinian people by obscuring the systemic dispossession of land and resources, which is fundamental to settler colonialism. Such erasure legitimizes the ongoing exploitation of Palestinian land and resources, perpetuating a cycle of ecological harm and violence against Indigenous communities.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article explores how mainstream Israeli media outlets use discursive strategies to normalize and maintain settler colonial processes and control of Indigenous populations, such as ecological violence. Specifically, I focus on the discourse around olive trees, which have significant economic, cultural, and symbolic connections to Palestinians in the West Bank. My qualitative content analysis of 75 articles published across *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel* between the years 2014 and 2023 demonstrates that publications across these outlets 1) legitimize settler violence in Palestine and 2) erase Palestinian indigeneity. I argue that using these strategies, mainstream Israeli media outlets enact and normalize ecological violence. Specifically, media narratives legitimize settler violence by failing to characterize the destruction of olive trees as ecological harm, minimizing the suffering of Palestinians, and absolving perpetrators of settler violence. Concurrently, the articles' erase Palestinian indigeneity by undermining Indigenous Palestinians connections to their ancestral lands. Together, legitimizing settler violence and erasing Palestinian indigeneity disrupt and displace the ancestral and embodied connections between Indigenous Palestinians and their land, thereby enacting and normalizing ecological violence in Palestine.

My study offers critical insights on how Israeli-controlled media normalizes ecological violence against Palestinians over a nine-year period (from 2014 to 2023). Additional work is needed to better understand how mainstream Israeli media has historically normalized its transformation of Indigenous Palestinian environmental features over a larger period of time (for e.g., starting at the *Nakba*). It is important to note, however, that accessing archival data on Palestine is challenging. For instance, although *Haaretz* was founded in 1919, articles made

available from this news outlet began in 2021. The lack of accessible archival data is also a feature of Indigenous erasure; Israel consistently engages in censorship and scholasticide to erase Palestinians' cultural heritage across generations (Desai 2024; Saber 2024). In light of the active forces of settler colonialism at play, future work should also pursue in-depth interviews or oral histories with Indigenous knowledge keepers and cultivators to better understand the process and implications of Israel's environmental apartheid and ecological violence in Palestine.

Additionally, while this study focuses on the particular role of media in perpetuating ecological violence against Palestinian people—which is an understudied line of inquiry—more work is needed to examine other mechanisms and mediums used to normalize ecological violence and weaponize the environment itself.

My findings support and contribute to the growing research on the origin and perpetuation of ecological violence against Indigenous communities (Bacon 2019; Whyte 2018; Hernandez 2022; Sasa 2023). In particular, my findings demonstrate how the media operates in favor of settler colonial efforts to enact and normalize ecological violence towards Palestinian people, particularly through the olive tree discourse. Olive trees are a critical manifestation of Palestinian indigeneity (Darzah 2023). Thus, such an analysis illuminates how media can strategically support the settler colonial initiatives of a settler state through discursive presentation of ecological violence in news articles that ignores, normalizes, or legitimizes such activity. Ecological violence has historically been employed as a tool in settler colonial efforts to displace, erase, and control Indigenous peoples. Consequently, it is imperative to understand the factors contributing to the normalization of such activity.

Importantly, this study fills a critical gap in the literature on environmental apartheid in Palestine. My results uncover the ways in which media discourse is used to exploit and

expropriate the environment. Particularly, I highlight the case of mainstream Israeli media outlets, who use discursive framings of ecological violence to legitimize the systematic dispossession of Indigenous Palestinians from their ancestral lands, while Indigenous Palestinians are disproportionately impacted by ecological damage at the hands of the state (IMEU 2023). This study also expands the use of Pellow's (2017) Critical Environmental Justice framework to focus on Israel's environmental apartheid and ecological violence towards Palestinian people. Such a lens furthers our understanding of how the media weaponizes the environment to legitimize and sustain ecological violence towards Indigenous populations, like the Palestinians.

APPENDIX A
CODEBOOK

Table 1. Codebook for data analysis

Code	Description	
Legitimizing Settler Violence in Palestine	Environmental Harm	Refers to mentions of acts that would fall under environmental destruction, such as destroying or harming olive trees (burning, uprooting, vandalizing).
	Settler Violence	Refers to mentions of settlers attacking Palestinians and/or their ancestral lands (i.e., throwing stones, killing, vandalizing).
	Tone	Refers to how subjectivity is framed (i.e., quotation marks used to convey sarcasm).
	Minimizing suffering	Refers to narrative reducing the severity and impact of the hardships, injustices, and violence experienced by Palestinian people (i.e., dismissing Palestinian experiences/grievances).
	Dehumanization	Refers to portrayal of Palestinians in a manner that diminishes their humanity, dignity, and worth (i.e., characterizing Palestinians as terrorists, suicide bombers, barbaric, etc.).
Erasing Palestinian Indigeneity	Colonialism	Refers to mentions of Israeli occupation, land confiscation, and settlement expansion, or reporting from this perspective.
	Propaganda	Refers to sharing information that is biased or misleading to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.
	Military/Occupation	Refers to Israel's control of Palestinian territory through their military and separation barriers (i.e. presence of IDF, checkpoints, etc.).

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