

Olive Oil and the Tastes of Palestine

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Abstract

The study looks at the heterogeneity of olive production in Palestine and challenges the idea of one single taste that can be attributed to Palestinian oil. Using an ethnographic method and years of research as the backdrop, this article asks, “What is the taste of the homeland and how might it have changed?” Along the way, the question transforms and wonders, “Can we taste the homeland in an oil not made in Palestine.” Taking two distinct foodways for olive oil, this article tours the sensual landscape of tastes that constitute home for many Palestinians.

Keywords:

Palestine; olive oil; anthropology of food; Mediterranean; taste of the homeland; political ecology; EVOO.

فش حدا بحكي عن زيتة عكر (مثل شعبي)

“No one calls their [own] oil rancid.”

– a popular saying

“Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth.”

– Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*¹

While conducting a tasting session in Vienna, my memory was jolted to childhood harvests of familial groves in Birzeit. The scent of the oil took me to

the old half-automatic mill, the “green” taste and color of the oil reminded me of just-pressed oil – still slightly warm. I was convinced that the oil I was tasting was not just a Palestinian oil, but one from the highlands of the West Bank. In short, I tasted and smelled the homeland. Although I knew that most likely this couldn’t be, the taste tugged at my memories in powerful and undeniable ways. After filling in the sensory analysis sheet with all the information, I moved to the online platform to check the results. I was shocked when it was listed as a Spanish oil.²

The Arbequina variety – as this olive cultivar and its oil are named – is considered one of the best in the world, both because of its yield and the quality of the oil. The flavor profile associated with it is “smooth olive oil with fruity fragrances, a vibrant green color, and a delicate and pleasant flavor.”³ It is reputed to have medium fruity taste with low levels of bitterness and spiciness. Yet the oil is considered “unstable”: it has a short lifespan (shelf life).⁴ Arbequina trees are adaptable, produce abundantly in hot dry climates and endure cold weather and draught well.⁵ It is hardier than other varieties and resists diseases such as tuberculosis, maculation or spotting of the leaves, and verticillium, a fungus, which can affect it only slightly. It thrives in most average, slightly alkaline, well-drained soils. The Arbequina is famed for being grown first and most extensively in the Catalonia region, originally in the village of Arbeca.⁶ The Duke of Medinaceli, who is credited with first growing Arbequina trees in the palace of Arbeca, built upon an Arab fortress conquered in the mid-twelfth century, brought the saplings home with him from Palestine in the eighteenth century.⁷

This sensual experience took me not just home but to the other side of the Mediterranean. It also led me to ask, what is the taste of the homeland? Olive oil is often understood as “the taste of the homeland” for Palestinians.⁸ Mired in the loss of home and homeland created by the Nakba, food and the flora and fauna which constitute its raw forms enable intergenerational transmission through organoleptic processes.⁹ Yet Palestinian nationalism’s centering of Jerusalem and peasant culture might have homogenized “Palestinianness” from one region at the expense of other areas of Palestine. Some Palestinian intellectuals have expressed a certain unease with this homogenization: for example, Salim Tamari’s metaphor of the “mountain against the sea” or Mahmoud Darwish’s “Palestine of the orange and Palestine of the olive” speak volumes.¹⁰ Taking our cue from there, what follows is an intentional shift away from homogeneity and hegemony entailed in state-building and an attempt to show the variety, richness, and colorfulness embedded within the multiple ways of experiencing Palestinian olive oil.

This paper uses political ecology and traces the circulation of Palestinian oils to see how various oils are produced and why they are consumed. Studying food illuminates political-economic value creation, symbolic value creation, and food-centered memory.¹¹ Combining the study of food and the senses opens up analysis not just to distinction but also to components of ritual for the instantiation of social or cosmological value.¹² Food studies as a field has also shed light on changes in agriculture upon commodification created through colonial history or globalization.¹³ The economic and the symbolic, the sensual and the intangible, the material and the

ritual, meet within the study of food more generally and, as we will see, in the study of olive oil to Palestinians. In this paper, I make three arguments: First, land confiscation and fragmentation and population increases threaten the circulation of Palestinian oils. Second, no single oil can be called “the taste of the homeland.” Finally, extra virgin olive oils (EVOO) are reshaping production methods. As a result, the variations that in the past distinguished different kinds of olive oils within Palestine, as well as variations of Palestinians’ tastes and preferences, are steadily being homogenized by local and global forces.

This article is divided into four parts. The first introduces olive trees, oils, and their relations to land and people in Palestine. Then we will look at types of oils that circulated, investigating exported oils, locally consumed oils, and changing food trends. Third, the “taste of home” will be thrown into question to distill and document local preferences. Finally, we will zoom out to look at Palestine of the Mediterranean, allowing the reader to see multiple landscapes, social relations, and olive oil tastes. This study draws from two years of field work, archival research, oral histories, and interviews with specialists and sector representatives, academics, and researchers.¹⁴ Data gathering for this paper was impacted by the Zionist reaction to the 7 October attack of Tufan al-Aqsa (al-Aqsa Flood). Road closures and increased settler attacks not only impacted my ability to travel as a researcher, but had considerable impact on this year’s olive harvest, where people press their olives, and the circulation of new oil in the local market and for export. In this period, Ramallah, Birzeit, and surrounding towns and villages whose access does not require crossing checkpoints or settler roads became that which was “accessible,” a much narrower scope than I hoped. Despite the resulting diminished color and additional information, however, the main arguments of this paper have not been impacted.

Home, the Trees, and the Oils

Palestine remains under settler-colonial rule, which structures the lives of Palestinians to a large extent. Settlers and their army routinely show their cruelty by uprooting olive trees. Much attention has rightly been given to the fact that between 1967 and 2011 an estimated eight hundred thousand olive trees were destroyed.¹⁵ Alas, less attention has gone into how many olive trees Palestinians have planted.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip are home to thirteen million olive trees – two and a half million wild olives and the remaining fruit bearing.¹⁶ The oil from those same trees circulates among inhabitants of historic Palestine and the diaspora, allies, and ethical consumers who –through consumption – connect with the people and land of Palestine and the struggle for liberation. Here, we come to the relevance of the quote from Marx with which this article begins. Marx analyzes the co-constitutive nature of production and consumption, where objects are specific objects produced to create consumption but simultaneously shaped by consumption while produced. Employing the dialectics of production and consumption enables us to understand not just olive oil, but who produces it, who consumes it, how it circulates, where it circulates, and

why. This method also allows us to see the undercurrents of change in agriculture, trade, culture, and taste flowing through Palestinian society.

Nature and culture meet in olive oil production. In a sense, there is a *techne* and techno science to production, especially when looking at artisanal EVOO production.¹⁷ However, as we will see below, most of the oil produced in Palestine is locally circulated and consumed. It does not adhere to – and often contradicts – both the *techne* and the techno science of extra virgin olive oil. A mixture of geography and artisanal skills of producers gives value to local oils. Therefore, we can broadly discern two distinct foodways for Palestinian oil: EVOO and oils produced according to local taste standards. Both foodways will be discussed in this paper.

Olive culture in Palestine dates back at least to the early Bronze Age, but the modern expansion of oleo-culture started around the time of the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸ By the 1930s Palestine was home to an estimated six million olive trees; and while Nablus and the highlands of Jerusalem accounted for a large number of olive trees, so did the Galilee, coastal plains, and foothills.¹⁹ British aid to the post-Nakba West Bank, through schemes employing refugees to build terraces, enabled the extension of olive agriculture.²⁰ The 1967 war brought about more shocks to Palestinian society and reduced the vigor of the agriculture sector.²¹ A shift in gender dynamics occurred as men went to work in the Israeli construction sector, leaving women to take on traditionally male agricultural work.²² The 1970s also saw the expansion of volunteer work committees, often with links to the Palestine Liberation Organization, which between 1978 and 1988 succeeded in planting an estimated two millions olive trees as a means of land defense.²³ The 1970s and 1980s expansion led to significant changes in the landscape of the southern West Bank, which prior to these campaigns had considerably fewer olive trees. Finally, since 2008 the Palestinian Authority has overseen the Greening Palestine Initiative, which distributes 350,000 trees yearly, 150,000 of which are olive trees.²⁴ As the land under Palestinian control shrinks and olive trees increase, we can see that the native population resists elimination through land defense mediated by oleo-culture, slowing and stopping the settler project in hundreds of locales.

Olive trees are planted on half of all agricultural land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and generate income for one hundred thousand families.²⁵ The nature of agriculture is family based: family ownership makes up 99.7 percent of agricultural holdings, while corporate and cooperative ownership is 0.3 percent. Palestinian society is considered a youthful society with 53 percent of the population under eighteen, yet 81.5 percent of agricultural holdings are owned by those over forty years old.²⁶ Meanwhile, land confiscation and growing populations are leading to rapidly shrinking holdings, disincentivizing investment in agriculture and gradually decreasing employment in the sector. Generational inheritance rights combined with a relatively high birthrate also lead to continual division of land and its parcellation, making plots smaller and reducing oil production to that sufficient for household consumption with little surplus. Making matters worse, on average the amount of oil each tree produces is decreasing.²⁷

West Bank oleo-culture is extensive, mostly rain-fed (known as *ba'li* agriculture), and averages fourteen trees per dunum. Oleo-culture in the Gaza Strip is intensive, irrigated, and averages forty trees per dunum, making Gaza the second largest oil producer by region. Only Jenin outproduces Gaza: it averages a quarter of all olive groves, a quarter of all the oil presses, and a quarter of national production in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Around 75 percent of oil is produced in the north of the West Bank, with sizable production also in Tulkarm, Nablus, and Tubas. Ramallah is the only other governorate that competes in volume of production with the north of the West Bank and Gaza. The average yearly production of olive oil in the West Bank and Gaza Strip this decade is estimated at twenty-two thousand tons.²⁸

Palestinian trees and oils seem to have some specificity to them. Olive trees in Palestine average 25 percent oil content, which is relatively high in comparison to other countries.²⁹ One account claimed that Palestinian olive trees produced up to five times more than their French counterparts.³⁰ Chemical analysis of Palestinian oils by olive cultivars shows that all the main types grown can produce oils with acidity below 0.8 percent, the limit required for chemical designation of extra virgin oil.³¹

Producing quality olive oil requires embracing seemingly contradicting concepts, specifically stress and care. The best oils are the ones produced while the tree is under stress, and the stress of the Palestinian landscape creates a unique taste profile.³² Spiciness is the taste produced by the *ba'li* nature of Palestinian oleo-culture. When describing this spiciness, my interlocutors said it is a “burn in the mouth and throat.” Organoleptic descriptors in English differentiate between spiciness, which is felt in the mouth and tongue, and pungency, which is felt in the throat. Pungency is one of the most valued attributes of EVOO, while spiciness seems secondary. When discussing in Arabic with Palestinian consumers, they viewed spiciness as the most prized attribute.³³

When oil is made and stored according to EVOO standards, its spiciness rises gradually upward in the back of the taster’s throat in an “elevator” style.³⁴ Produced by local methods, spiciness can jolt the taster’s throat suddenly and intensely, and can be described as “sharp.” The intensity of spiciness depends on limited water and humidity, with *ba'li* olives in the hills of the West Bank and those along the dry fringes of the Naqab in the south of the West Bank producing oil with the most intense spiciness. Irrigated and plains olives have spiciness, but the taste is less intense and more in sync with other taste attributes of the oil, giving a more harmonious flavor. The spicy tasting, *ba'li* natured, smallholding-centric Palestinian oil is one of the most expensive oils in the world. Specialists attribute the price to labor shortages, which increase cost. Yet exporters cited strong taste as the reason at least a portion of consumers pay the additional cost.

Care impacts polyphenol rates in an oil. Polyphenols are antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds in the oil that make it a health food craze. Palestinian oil is relatively low in polyphenols. While polyphenols in olive oil range from 50 to 1000 units per liter, polyphenols in Palestinian oils average 280 to 300 units per liter. Care

of the trees can raise polyphenol levels. A Japan International Cooperation Agency project succeeded in raising the polyphenol rate of oil in Palestine to 350 units per liter. Polyphenol levels in oil from continually-cared-for groves in Tulkarm reached 548 units per liter in 2022.³⁵

The contradictions of stress and care likely account for another contradiction, the infamous instability of the oil and durability of the trees. Palestinian oils are seen as unstable, quick to oxidize and deteriorate if not stored properly. They are best kept in the dark, raised off the floor, and in stainless steel containers. When exposed to light and air, the oil is quick to oxidize. If stored in humid conditions or in the standard plastic “tanks” (often called yellow tanks) the oil will develop a taste defect. The trees themselves – whether *rumi* or *nabali* cultivars – are drought and disease resistant, can live and thrive in poor soils, and are essential for biodiversity.³⁶ Where most olive trees live an average of six hundred years, the Galilee alone has an estimated two hundred thousand millenarian olive trees. No clear statistics exist for millenarian olives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but many cases of thousand-year-old trees exist, including those of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, al-Sayyid al-Badawi in al-Walaja, Bethlehem, and Tal Rumayda in Hebron, and with at least a handful of such old trees in hundreds of villages.



Figure 1. An olive tree in Birzeit, February 2019. Photo by author.

There is no single taste for Palestine's oil. There are several tastes and a plethora of flavors in different oils. Locally, people differentiate between oils in several ways, as we will see below. The majority of Palestinian oil is produced by the standard of local tastes. The following section looks at production and consumption of Palestinian olive oil through its circulation. In it, we will see exported oils, tastes of locally circulated oils, and waning and burgeoning trends in the world of Palestinian olive oil.

Palestinian Oils in the World

The West Bank and Gaza Strip produce 0.2 percent of global olive oil output, with only about five thousand to seven thousand tons exported each year. Oil export is divided into three categories: *amanat* to the Gulf; gifts sent to Jordan; and formal export (with the United States and the EU as the main destinations). *Amanat* are considered gifts sent from Palestine to relatives working in the Gulf and hence are untaxed. *Amanat* make up the majority of oil exports from Palestine, an average of three thousand to five thousand tons yearly. The largest recipient of *amanat* is Saudi Arabia, followed by the United Arab Emirates, and then Kuwait. Qatar imports as well, but there is no direct market to Bahrain (only transit). An *amanat* market has opened in the last two years in Oman. The *amanat* market used to consist only of direct receipt of oil between relatives, yet with the passing of time it has developed into a broader market. *Amanat* are now shipped by no less than sixteen companies in the West Bank and are received by shops owned by Palestinians in the Gulf who bottle and sell to the Palestinian diaspora in their area through social networks. It seems this market is enhanced by a tightly knit diaspora community. Generational changes do not seem to have diminished the desire for the tastes of home, but only transformed the distribution from direct to commercial networks of Palestinians. Palestinian oil is the most expensive oil in the market, even though in quality it is similar to Jordanian and Syrian oils.

Gifts to Jordan are similar to *amanat* in that they are also untaxed. Yet Jordan's olive oil self-sufficiency programs ended Palestinian oil's once dominant position "across the bridge." Today, a mere seven hundred to one thousand tons are sent as gifts to Jordan, and this number is shrinking. This is dependent in large part on the amount of oil allowed entry into the kingdom. The number of tanks allowed entry per person has fluctuated: initially four, it then dropped to one, was raised to two after political lobbying, and then came to a complete stop during the COVID-19 closure of the bridge. The period for entry of West Bank oil has also been subject to decreasing time intervals. The Jordanian olive oil industry seems to have developed a strong lobby; with Jordan now home to over seventeen million olive trees, it seems the days of Palestinian olive oil supremacy in Jordan are over. The trickling out of the remainder of this market is a matter of time.

Borders hardly change ecosystems and only recently succeeded in stopping the flow of people. The non-Mediterranean Mediterranean country of Jordan is home

to several cultivars of olive also found on the western bank of the river. In addition to a shared border, history, and culture, the kingdom shares at least five micro-ecosystems with historic Palestine. The century or so of modern colonialism in the region might enable writers of school textbooks to overlook shared history, but to assume that a “taste of the homeland” cannot be produced from a tree just across the river might be a bit of a stretch in the history of the Levant.³⁷

The final form of export is that of EVOO quality and either organic or fairtrade certified. The main markets are the United States, the EU, and Japan, but inroads have been made in Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Australia, New Zealand, and Chile. Formal export, an official told me, “was two thousand tons yearly a decade ago and remains two thousand tons today.” Donor funds poured into the sector seem not to have changed the volume of export, but they did diversify exporters, creating a situation of competitive saturation. While the volume has remained the same, the number of companies exporting olive oil has increased from four to forty. The top four exporters are the oldest and their structure can be called “social enterprises”; their purpose is to support farmers, whereas the new exporters are predominantly private enterprises.

The “corporate structure” of the four main exporters is worthy of further examination. The two largest exporters are al-Reef and Canaan. Al-Reef is a non-profit corporation that was spun off as an independent entity from the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee. PARC set up al-Reef to assist farmers in the marketing and sale of agricultural products. Al-Reef is the largest exporter to the European market. Canaan comprises more than one legal entity, with Canaan Palestine and Canaan Fairtrade serving two different functions for the same organization. The farmers that export through Canaan are organized to produce and mill together and Canaan offers services to member-farmers for development of farming practices and production. Canaan is the largest exporter, by a margin, to the U.S. market and its oils are found in large chains like Whole Foods. Both act as “producer synergies” or cooperative marketing societies. That non-cooperative entities are set up speaks more about the limitations placed on cooperative organization by the Palestinian Authority than anything else.

Indeed, nearly any Palestinian exporter that is able to produce oil at the quality and quantity required to export to the United States, the EU, or Japan, functions as a kind of social enterprise. Hence, the oldest and most established exporters are tied to organizations, whether NGOs or church-affiliated, that prioritize sustaining livelihoods of producers. The manner or form of “beyond profit” logic differs from place to place, though. Those certifying fairtrade aim to ensure the farmer-producers receive better prices.³⁸ Other exporters represented by agricultural organizations and church affiliates will use half-automated bottling and labeling machines to ensure local community members or university students receive income through seasonal packaging work, creating jobs in the community.

Sometimes the borders around Palestine seem so impenetrable that we forget that on the other side is a vicious market. This seems to happen often in the

olive oil industry, where exporters to the EU continue to face hurdles. Initially, importing olive oil into the EU required a chemical test for acidity levels. Once most exporters managed to incorporate lab testing into their document preparation, a taste test certification requirement arose. Since the Palestinian National Tasting Panel is in its infancy, and expanding its membership is a difficult process of recognized organoleptic training through the International Olive Council, many exporters submit and pay for a certified taste test from either Jordanian or Israeli panels.³⁹ Yet always one step ahead in its attempt to privilege its producers, the EU has already moved to require peroxide rate testing, which measures the degree of oxidation. Exporters are aware that these shifting goalposts are indirect means of protecting European producers from competition.⁴⁰

Importers, meanwhile, have various motivations for importing Palestinian olive oil. According to specialists, Palestinian oils stand on their own in the United States and compete based strictly on merit. While the quality of Palestinian oils is unquestionable, I am not sure the claim holds. The oils exported to the United States are fairtrade certified, hence already catering to the community of ethical consumers. In addition to ethical consumers, there is solidarity purchase. Many of the online retailers in the United States who stock Palestinian olive oil have, for example, from as early as December 2023 started listing that year's oil stock as sold out. Quality taste surely has impact, but in this case, we can see that solidarity purchase also plays a part.

The various reasons for importing into the East Asian market are noteworthy, especially since these locations historically produced little olive oil and have low consumption. In South Korea, cooperatives and consumer societies import Palestinian oils produced by Palestinian cooperatives and sell them in their stores. The cooperative connection here shows a form of solidarity purchase by retailers not necessarily only because Palestinian oil is Palestinian, but out of cooperative-to-cooperative solidarity and seemingly divorced from the aesthetic of taste seen elsewhere. The newer markets of Indonesia and Malaysia seem to be growing out of Muslim solidarity with Palestine. Finally, bottled olive oil is also sold in the Gulf (led by Kuwait); it is more expensive than the Italian and Spanish oils sold there, but sells well for both taste qualities *and* solidarity.

As different export destinations shrink while others grow, we also see where and why Palestinian oils circulate. To an extent, it becomes possible to better understand the various consumer rationales for buying these oils, and the various forms of solidarity present in some of the purchases. We also see the role of some exporting bodies in supporting farmers, developing production, and job-creation. Consumers of Palestinian oils, regardless of the rationale for purchase, receive a taste of Palestine.

Tastes of Home

Most olive oil produced in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, roughly sixteen thousand tons, is consumed locally. Based on specialist information, about thirteen thousand

tons are consumed in the West Bank, and three thousand tons in the Gaza Strip. These numbers do not account for West Bank oils sold to Jerusalemites or inside the Green Line. No trade statistics exist for such exchanges as people sell through informal networks to relatives and friends inside. Local production standards are a unique foodway different from EVOO standards. Understanding taste preference in the West Bank is essential for understanding both consumption and production patterns. Considering the scale of local consumption and the importance of the olive sector on peoples' income, local taste preference is understudied.

In looking into this understudied area, the first thing we notice is that there is no authoritative "taste," but multiple ways people value their oils. This section looks at different forms of taste: what I term "town designations," northern/southern oils, and the subtly shifting tastes in West Bank olive-culture. Yet as the popular saying goes, "no one calls their (own) oil rancid." Quite the opposite: the small farm nature and peasant background of olive oil producers often lead to claims that their oil is the best. This is hardly unheard of when labor is not alienated from its means of production.⁴¹

Town designations can be seen somewhat as a local understanding of the concept of terroir. It is the valuing of an oil because it originated from places renowned for their oil production. These assessments do not seem to be based on any type of chemical or lab testing. There is no clear standard or guide, and it is the bane of authorities on EVOO. When prompted, an oil producer will list the villages or towns that produce good quality oils: the names usually listed are Bayt Jala, two or three other places in different districts, and then the speaker's hometown.

Mill owners and operators tend to be more "regional" in their assessments as opposed to naming single towns. Mill owners interviewed would usually list the same three or four village names but, when arriving to their specific area of operation, would also list a group of villages in their region. The mill owners interviewed in the north of Ramallah listed many (but not all) of the nearby villages as producing high quality oils. Those northwest, for example, list the olive oils of Birzeit, Abu Qash, Surda, al-Mazra'a al-Qibliyya, Abu Shkhaydam, Kubar, Burham, and 'Atara. Press owners in the northeast listed eastern villages like Silwad, Dayr Jarir, Ramun, Taybeh, and Yabrud as producers of high-quality oils. Presses in the Bani Zayd region list the oils of Dayr Ghassana, Bayt Rima, 'Abbud, Dayr Abu Mish'al, and al-Nabi Salih as the best. The northeast and northwest considered the Bani Zayd oils as too light, and the Bani Zayd area considered the northwest and northeast as too heavy. As olive press owners informed me in interviews, this assessment impacts which oils are stored together for sale. Oil from unknown or "lower quality" areas are placed together, while those deemed high quality are stored alone. Mill owners will sell the oils from the areas they privilege at higher prices, setting them aside for sale to return customers, exporters, and bulk purchasers. It is important to note that the origins of oils are not the only characteristics mill owners will look for when assessing an oil. Here, their artisanal skill is central because they assess the quality of the oil as it comes out of their machinery. And they do not like sharing how they

can tell, since their ability to assess oils is also the trick of their trade. Ultimately, assessing oil and town reputation does translate into circulation and sale, giving it economic importance.

Related to, but not synonymous with, town designation is the division of West Bank oils into northern or southern oils. Northern oils, epitomized by the Jenin governorate, are seen as light oils. Southern oils, epitomized by Bayt Jala and Hebron, are seen as heavy oils. People from the north of the West Bank generally prefer light oils and people from the south prefer heavier oils. Both northern and southern oil consumers claim their oils are “spicy.” The “north-south” divide is not uniform or determinative: Nablus and Tubas are northern governorates, yet their oil is considered heavier oil. Likewise, “southern” oil is a label applied not just to Hebron and Bethlehem, but to Ramallah and Salfit, both of which are central governorates yet nonetheless produce, value, and consume heavier oils. Although this differentiation has softened and decreased in recent years, the north-south differentiation deserves a more detailed analysis and further research, if only for the connoisseur’s delight.

Climatic, environmental, and ecological factors play a role in the taste of the oil. But human factors are no less important. The mixture of nature and culture here produce very different local oils. These oils are rarely made to EVOO standards, but the people who produce and consume it consider it their own. There is value in understanding local preferences, if for no other reason than because it is a culture that doesn’t seem to have been registered previously. Building on both the town designation and the north-south taste preference, we can to some extent distill the sought-out qualities and how one might choose to use particular oils.

The closest we can come to a rule of thumb on the matter of oil tastes is that the stronger the taste of the oil, the better its ability to flavor a food; the lighter the oil, the better its ability to blend and accentuate the flavors of food. In this sense, heavy oils stand on their own as a flavor, suited for being dipped by bread alone or with the addition of salt in the oil. Lighter oils suit complex mixtures to enable amplitude, to be used for example in an Arabic salad composed not just of cucumber and tomatoes but also onion, dried mint, lemon, and salt. Both oils work alongside *za’tar* and, depending on if you like your oil to spice your hummus or *ful* plate or would rather it be blended, the *daqqa* (a mix of spices and seeds) topping it.

Yet “northern and southern” divisions are misleading. Historic Palestine has at least six microregions, making each group of villages unique ecologically and topographically, and creates an agriculture that requires opportunism in utilizing the local niche.⁴² These microregions and the local niches produce different tasting oils. But even in this typology, what is missing far outweighs what is listed, and the descriptions below are merely illustrations.

First, Bayt Jala oil is distinct in its heaviness. This is related to the production process itself where the olives are picked as late as December and stored in piles called *chomer* for prolonged periods. The piling up of olive fruit leads to the release of heat, discharging the olive-water from the fruit and fermenting them. An

organoleptic test would show unacceptable levels of mustiness and fustiness, while chemical tests would show high peroxide levels. Yet this oil is the most sought out in Palestine. Where some oils sell for as low as sixteen shekels per liter, Bayt Jala has sold for as high as one hundred shekels per liter.⁴³ That price is the selling price for Bayt Jala oils pressed without the *chomer* method used as well. Specialists try to point to the religious importance of Bayt Jala as the reason for its price, while I have heard economists explain the price by pointing out the proximity of Bayt Jala to Jerusalem and the Green Line, which makes Bayt Jala accessible to Palestinians on the other side of the wall who have higher income levels. I do not believe the flavor of a Bayt Jala oil should be so quickly dismissed; rather, this is a unique oil produced by a method rarely used elsewhere. Those militant in their super-food health regimen might prefer a different oil – to each their own.

The only region in the West Bank that can ascertain a single cultivar is Hebron, where the Improved Nabali (or *nabali muhassan*) variant was grown en masse as part of the land defense programs throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This variant was selected due to its quick rooting nature, but it struggles at times because it requires irrigation – unlike most local cultivars which thrive in *ba'li* conditions. Yet the ever-inventive cultivators have resorted where possible to growing their trees in a type of soil called *huwwar* or spreading *huwwar* around their trees in winter to ensure water preservation in the soil.⁴⁴ The oils produced in Hebron, especially those bordering the Naqab to the south, produce an oil famed for its sharp and intense spiciness. These oils are not astringent and come off as greasy at times. They pair particularly well with dairy foods. This oil is at its best alongside Nabulsi cheese or using the oil to fry the cheese. It also pairs well as a topping for sour cream or labneh. Unfortunately, Hebron oils are hard to come by since the district only produces an average of one thousand tons in good years; Hebron is required to import oil from other districts for its needs.

Finally, in the central highlands (including both eastern and western areas of northern Jerusalem and the Ramallah district at elevations between 550 and 900 meters above sea level) the oils have a marked “green” taste. Green taste is locally associated with freshly milled oils and it is also present – albeit in an incomplete form – as an aroma when entering an olive mill. This green taste is also influenced by overtones of bitterness and spiciness in various proportions, depending on if the oil is from the eastern end or the western end of the highlands (bordering the Jordan valley or the Mediterranean, respectively). These oils go great with a fellahiyya variation of the Arabic salad, particularly pairing well with tomatoes. The spiciness can lose its distinction if mixed with hot peppers or other spicy foods. That does not necessarily mean it should be avoided, rather drowning out the spiciness extenuates the green and bitter flavors. Meals that are famed as harvest meals are the best for highland oils. These include the “national” dish *musakhan*, but also green dishes that center around black lilies (*Arum palaestinum*), known locally as *luf*. Usually, lily leaves are rubbed down with salt and then washed so that they do not numb the tongue. Then the leaves are chopped and added on top of onions frying in fresh

oil. Another meal, called *bahthula* is made by rolling flour, water, and oil until pea-sized pieces form, which are then added into the *luf* mix to be fried in the oil, lily leaves, and onions. Sweets like *hilba* (fenugreek seeds) and *maltuta* (a “peasant’s treat” made from freshly pressed olive oil, flour, sugar, sesame, and anise or fennel) are harvest treats and taste best when the oil is fresh.

Waning and Burgeoning Forms and Tastes

Having looked at different taste preferences, we understand better which flavors people want in their oils. Yet changes have occurred in the palates of Palestinians in the West Bank. These changes have pushed some forms of oil production to near disappearance and encouraged the development of new forms.

Two handmade forms of olive oil are hard to come by today. They are known as *zayt tfah* and *zayt badudiya*. Maissoun Sharkawi informs us that these two types of oil were traditionally made in September.⁴⁵ *Zayt tfah* is made by grinding the olives into a paste and pouring warm water over it. The paste is then squeezed by hand and left.

The oil eventually separates and rises to the top of the bowl where it can be collected. Sharkawi cites this practice in al-Zawiya, Salfit. I could not find anyone who produces this oil in the Ramallah area. *Zayt badudiya* is made by roasting olives “until they are completely reduced in size as a result of water evaporating from the fruit; then they are struck with a stone. The obtained paste is put into a tissue and then twisted to exert pressure and extract the oil.”⁴⁶ One producer was found in Dayr Dibwan. An interlocuter who is familiar with *badudiya* oil stated that it takes a *shawwal* (fifty-kilogram bag) of olives to make a bottle, and a bottle is worth more than a sixteen-kilo tank of olive oil produced by typical methods. Hence, as Sharkawi points out, this oil is much more expensive



Figure 2. Birzeit oil emerging from an olive press at the Kubar mill, October 2019. Photo by author.

than oil produced in mills. Unfortunately, the timing and checkpoints did not allow for a sampling of *badudiya* oil.

Another waning taste is for stone-pressed oils. Oil industry specialists seemed generally not well informed on the status of stone presses (known colloquially as *ma'asir hajjar*). Stone presses and traditional presses (*al-badd*) are not synonymous. The category of stone presses includes older (half-automatic) presses, but also new state-of-the-art mills that incorporate stainless steel machinery which moves traditional limestone crushing stones over olive fruit to create the paste and a distinct taste. The potential of these presses seems to have been largely missed.

Stone pressed oils are not easy to find locally, although it seems that some producers will press using stone. As one stone mill owner informed me, some producers will mill most of their harvested olives using modern mills yet press oil for their family's consumption in a stone press. How many people continue to do this is uncertain, but considering the number of stone presses that have closed in the last few years this phenomenon may not continue much longer. The 2023–24 agricultural year seems to have been particularly hard on stone mills, as many of the people who stone-press could not reach the presses due to road closures. In the Ramallah area, there are known stone presses in Ramallah, Dayr Abu Mish'al, and 'Abbud. None of them opened in 2023.⁴⁷ Likewise, the 'Asira Shamaliyya (Nablus) stone press did not open in the 2023–24 agricultural year, while the Jinsafut press (Qalqilya) closed in 2021. The only stone presses open this past year – to the best of my knowledge – were the stone presses of Bazariya (Jenin) and Burka (Nablus), both of which seem to cater to local farmers as well as export.

An interlocutor relaying the introduction of modern presses in the 1990s informed me, “When we first used them, the elderly told us the oil was burned and ended up tasteless, that we should sell it to the soap factories in Nablus.” The “traditional” press created more acidic oils (due to friction during the stone press and base and lack of cooling systems) and was much more bitter (due to the presence of small amounts of olive leaves among the fruit pressed). It is unclear how much the stone pressed of today resembles that “traditional” oil. Regardless, oil and stones are things that have become synonymous with Palestine, and these stone pressed oils deserve a taste.

Finally, olive mill owners play a central role in the supply chain and changes in the industry that have an immediate impact on oil production. As mills are competing for the most efficient and state-of-the-art milling production lines, along with the latest machinery they are also importing the methods from Spain and Italy – methods and tools that were developed specifically for extra virgin oils. Long gone are the days of olive paste spread on baskets for hydraulic pressing. Now most mills operate decanter centrifuges to release oil and olive-water from the pulp. Mill owners pay very close attention to the temperature throughout the processes of crushing, malaxation, extraction, and separation. Some even refuse to raise the temperature of the process when harvesters explicitly request it, citing quality of the harvesters' oil and the oils of the harvesters after him, who would be impacted by the residual temperature of the machinery. Many mill owners also pay close attention to the acidity and peroxide rates of oils.

These observations indicate that mill owners are adhering to EVOO best practices. They did not necessarily cite EVOO as the reason or aim, but rather cited machine producer technical specialists' guidance on method. In a sense there is a process of hybridity, where machinery developed to produce EVOO products and terms developed as indicators of quality required by EVOO (like attention to temperature, low acidity rates, low peroxide) are used to explain the mill operator's preference of one region's oils compared to another region's oils. In assessing the direction the Palestinian oil industry is headed, and based on the interviews I conducted with specialists, I believe this hybridity is just one step on the road to greater EVOO hegemony over Palestinian oils.

While some oil traditions wane, new trends are in their infancy. The first of the new trends relates to the phenomenon of bottled oil sold in the local market. Tank storage and sale are still predominant but the presence of oil bottled locally is a testament to shifting currents in Palestinian society. These bottled oils usually sport top-of-the-line marketing and packaging, like al-Ard's Palestinian embroidery patterns and Arabic calligraphy or Saleh Khalaf's unique "for home or the diaspora" packaging. Al-Ard exports these bottled oils while it seems Saleh Khalaf's oils are designed with the intention of both local consumption and as gifts to relatives and friends abroad.

The rise of bottled oils seems tied to the shift in retail stores in the West Bank. The rise of larger grocery shops facilitates the circulation of bottled oils. These shops take two forms: chain stores like Bravo, Shini, and Mashhadawi, which offer wide aisles, shopping carts, and often include parking garages, catering to those with cars and disposable income that define the middle class; and lower-middle-class friendly wholesalers like Sudani, Tarifi, and others. Yet the consumers of these bottled oils are not only urbanites without rural roots or relatives. Many of the recently urbanized have come to cities – mostly Ramallah – but also have ever shrinking plots in their home villages. Since production is intermittent, based on harvesting every other year, these consumers will buy a bottle of oil or two should they run out before it is time to harvest again. Yet this market is in its infancy, and the same shops that sell these oils sell imported Italian and Spanish oils at a lower price, simultaneously enabling and threatening this new form. Bottled oils are produced in virgin and extra virgin standards. Saleh Khalaf oils are sourced from the Ramallah and Birzeit areas, while al-Ard oils are sourced from the Nablus, Tulkarm, Ramallah, and Jenin. Yet these companies stress that the selection of their sources is based on organoleptic and chemical testing, which is to say EVOO standards.

A second budding trend, albeit niche and smaller in scale, is olive oil packaged for single use. Packaged by Nazazeh company in 'Arraba, Jenin, these elongated seven-gram packages look much like ketchup or mayonnaise packages distributed in fast food restaurants. Sold for one shekel per packet in local stores, this oil seems to have been conceived as an accessory to bread-dipped breakfast on-the-go (hummus, ful, or labneh). While not much marketing seems to have gone into it, from what shop owners have relayed it seems to be quite popular with university students, manual laborers, and taxi drivers.

The shifts in production associated with adoptions of advanced milling methods and new packaging forms is thus suited for an increasingly urbanized demographic. Having inspected several forms of taste, we have a sense of the tastes circulating in Palestinian oils from the first three sections of this article. While we see how there is no one single taste of the homeland, it is worthwhile to ask the provocative question: Can we taste the homeland in an oil not made in Palestine?

The Taste of Jerusalem in Catalonia

Throughout this study, I have highlighted the circulation of Palestinian oils and their forms. Consequently, this work has so far remained predominately framed in the bounded field site of the nation-state. Yet nature, environment, and biological species cannot be contained within human fields of this sort. I was reminded of this lesson in the tasting session that I described at the outset.

Upon returning to Palestine and harvesting the family groves, I decided to compare the Arbequina I had sampled with freshly pressed home(land)-made oil. The Arbequina was an extra virgin, it was smoother and better rounded. The local oil was sharper in its spiciness and stronger in its bitterness. The green flavor seems to be what I registered with familiarity the first time I consumed the Arbequina. Therein is the paradox: many oils have green taste, yet it is the spiciness that is supposed to differentiate a Palestinian oil. But it was the green taste that returned me to my adolescence in the olive presses.

A few weeks later, online forums for importers of Spanish oils were noting interesting information. The Spanish harvest was negatively impacted by a heatwave that struck the Iberian Peninsula. One of the outcomes of this heatwave was that the Arbequina produced sharp spicy notes. And in two coincidences of time and space, sharp-tasting Palestinian olive oil can be tasted in Catalonia.

As this example shows, the taste of home can be complicated in places where interconnectedness stretches back so far. Interconnection entails both *back and forth* connections. Hence, it is important to point out that Palestine was not only the place where olive cultivars come from but was also a recipient of numerous “foreign” breeds. Ali Nusouh al-Tahir lists several such imported cultivars: al-Barouni from Tunisia planted in the coastal village of Susa, Talmisani from Algeria for oil, and Italian Santa Katrina and Grossissima di Sardegna for table olives.⁴⁸ Al-Tahir attributes some role to churches and missionaries in importing recent olive breeds (specifically French and Italian cultivars), while also noting the introduction of new cultivars through the agriculture research stations established by Mandate authorities in 1933, located in ‘Askar village near Nablus and al-Farradiyya near Safad.⁴⁹ Yet not all cultivars’ origins were covered or are known, understandably so considering the trade, travel, war, and colonization that characterizes the history of the Mediterranean.

The landscape and the ecology of the Mediterranean create similarity between locations hundreds of miles apart and diversity in the next town over.⁵⁰ The history of the Mediterranean shows that olives trees were traded and planted in distant

places, whether introduced to new Mediterranean shores by trading polities like the Phoenicians or Italian city states, or through trade colonies like those of Carthage in Spain or Greek city-states in Italy and Egypt, whether planted in the age of empires like those of the Romans, Umayyads, and Ottomans, or by individuals like the Duke of Medinaceli, just taking some saplings home while returning from pilgrimage.⁵¹ This diversity showed itself in Palestine's own repertoire of olive cultivars and the tastes they produce. The interconnected history of the Mediterranean, its peoples, and species here shows us that tastes can be produced far from home, revealing that the "taste of the homeland" is an unstable category.

Conclusion

Palestinian olive oil circulates in many ways, and tracing these circulations enables a view of the nexus of consumption and production. We have seen how different oils are valued locally, among the diaspora, and internationally by their consumers, how changing tastes have led to gradually fading methods of oil production and new burgeoning ones, and how some tastes of home aren't produced at home at all but are tied to home through a shared heritage. In terms of changes in the "taste of the homeland" there are two patterns. First, land holdings continue to shrink, which will inevitably lead to a situation where it becomes no longer viable for many households to produce oil for their own needs. Should population growth, land fragmentation, and land confiscation continue at this pace, oil will need to be imported into Palestine. As we saw above, export relies heavily on the efforts of social enterprises, and export standards and certification require larger scales of operation. The local increase in aggregate demand that colonial land confiscation, land fragmentation, and increased population would lead to will influence export first. Later generations of diaspora might be denied the tastes of the homeland.

Second, EVOO standards are making inroads into the palates of Palestinians. Whether from production standards or from market available oils, the consumption of EVOO is growing, if only slowly for now. A tipping point might eventually be reached in its favor. In this sense, the techné science of a global taste regimen is slowly infiltrating local artisanal skill and transforming it at the levels of both production and consumption. As this paper has shown, taste is hardly the only factor influencing production and consumption but is just one among many other factors. Here we see Palestinian oil producers trapped between the colonial hammer and the anvil of global capitalism.

Yet, if this article has striven for anything it is to push back on homogenizing views of what constitutes a "good oil" and where and how we can experience the tastes of the homeland. Rather, there is no ideal type and there are numerous ways to make, eat, and enjoy the different olive oils that flavor our ties to Palestine. The Proustian moment described at the outset of this paper is about tasting home. It is what most people who want Palestinian oils wish to receive: taste that stirs memory of the scents, smells, and tastes of their homes. Maybe the significance isn't in spiciness, greenness,

bitterness, or pungency but in deeper yearnings. Especially since where tastes take us is *return*. What yearning could have more resonance for a Palestinian?

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Endnotes

- 1 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* [1857, published in German, 1939–41], Notebook M, Notebooks I–VII, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1973), online at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/index.htm (accessed 27 August 2024).
- 2 International Olive Council, *World Catalog of Olive Varieties* (Madrid: L. R. Cuellar, 2000).
- 3 Olive Oils from Spain, “What Is Arbequina Extra Virgin Olive Oil?” 30 June 2021, online at www.oliveoilsfromspain.org/olive-oil-news/what-is-arbequina-extra-virgin-olive-oil/ (accessed 27 August 2024).
- 4 “The History of Arbequina Extra Virgin Olive Oil,” 41 Olive, January 2024, online at 41olive.com/blogs/news/the-history-of-arbequina-extra-virgin-olive-oil (accessed 27 August 2024).
- 5 International Olive Council, *World Catalog of Olive Varieties*.
- 6 Olive Oils from Spain, “What Is Arbequina Extra Virgin Olive Oil?”
- 7 “Positive Attributes and Food Pairing,” Escuela Superior del Aceite de Oliva (Olive Oil School of Spain), 2023. This is one of the training videos available through a paid course, online at www.esao.es (accessed 30 August 2024).
- 8 See: Lila Sharif, “Savory Politics: Land, Memory, and the Ecological Occupation of Palestine” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2014), online at escholarship.org/uc/item/485943qz (accessed 27 August 2024); and Anne Meneley, “A Tale of Two Itineraries: The Production, Consumption and Circulation of Tuscan and Palestinian Olive Oil,” Program in Agrarian Studies (New Haven, CT: McMillan-Yale, 2009), online at agrarianstudies.macmillan.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/colloqpapers/18meneley.pdf (accessed 27 August 2024). The use of “taste” here is worth further investigation: the Arabic version is literally “smell” of the homeland (*rihat al-balad*).
- 9 See Sharif, “Savory Politics”; and Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, “The Politics of Taste and Smell: Palestinian Rites of Return,” in *The Politics of Food*, ed. M. E. Lien and Brigitte Nerlich (New York: Berg, 2004), 256.
- 10 Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
- 11 Sidney W. Mintz, and Christine M. Du Bois, “The Anthropology of Food and Eating,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2002): 99–119, online at doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.032702.131011; Jon D. Holtzman, “Food and Memory,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 361–78, online at doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123220.
- 12 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1984]); and David E. Sutton, “Food and the Senses,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010): 209–23, online at doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104957.
- 13 See: Susanne Freidberg, *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Paige West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986); and Lynne Phillips, “Food and Globalization,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 37–57, online at doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123214.
- 14 The segments pertaining to the olive oil sector

in particular included interviews with the Olive Oil Unit in the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Agriculture, the Palestinian Olive Council, Palestinian Standards Institute, agricultural NGOs, exporting bodies and companies, mill owners, and district agronomists. Agricultural statistical data was gathered from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and oil trade statistics were kindly shared by Pal-Trade.

- 15 There are no accurate statistics yet to account for the agricultural devastation caused by the Israeli army and settlers in the Gaza Strip and West Bank since 7 October 2023. See Omar Qassis, "Agriculture and Food in the West Bank after October 7, 2023," *Culture, Agriculture, Food, and Environment* 46, no. 1 (2024): 48–52, online at doi.org/10.1111/cuag.12318.
- 16 The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture gives this number. A lower number is given by the Central Bureau of Statistics. Most sources cite the PCBS number since it is the official statistical organ of the state. Yet agronomists, NGO employees, and specialists all cited the Ministry of Agriculture numbers as more likely to be accurate since many "fellahin" mislead PCBS employees and underreport their holdings and production. The reason given for underreporting is the fear of future taxes being applied (to encourage agriculture, there are currently no such taxes).
- 17 See: Deborah Heath and Anne Meneley, "Techne, Technoscience, and the Circulation of Comestible Commodities: An Introduction," *American Anthropologist* (New Series) 109, no. 4 (2007): 593–602; Meneley, "A Tale of Two Itineraries"; Anne Meneley, "Blood, Sweat, and Tears in a Bottle of Palestinian Extra-Virgin Olive Oil," *Food, Culture, and Society* 14, no. 2 (2011): 275–92; Anne Meneley, "Discourses of Distinction in Contemporary Palestinian Extra-Virgin Olive Oil Production," *Food and Foodways* 22, nos. 1–2 (2014): 48–64, online at doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2014.892738; Dalia Hashweh, "Drizzling Social and Ecological Sustainability on Solidarity Economies: Fairtrade Olive Oil Production in Palestine" (MSc Thesis, Central European University, 2018).
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- 22 Salim Tamari, "Building Other People's Homes: The Palestinian Peasant's Household and Work in Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11, no. 1 (1981): 31–66.
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- 24 It is not exactly clear how many of these trees are planted and how many survive after planting. Despite the lack of clarity on these success rates, this program is enabling the farmers it reaches to plant trees and protect their lands.
- 25 UNCTAD, "The Besieged Palestinian Agricultural Sector" (New York and Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2015), UNCTAD/GDS/APP/2015/1.
- 26 PCBS, "Agricultural Census 2021: Final Results – Palestine" (Ramallah, Palestine: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, 2023), 42.
- 27 Production on the level of individual trees is not measured officially anywhere to the best

- of my knowledge. Based on oral histories in Birzeit, per tree production has dropped over the decades since the 1960s, from around fifty kilograms of oil to less than twenty kilograms of oil per mature Rumi tree.
- 28 Averages are needed because olive trees are alternate bearing. Good years are called *massi* and bad years *shalatuni*. Good years have higher fruit production, but bad years have higher oil content, hence higher press rates; the averages depend on olive cultivar, ecological and meteorological conditions, and human care.
 - 29 This rate was provided by both the Palestinian Olive Council and the Ministry of Agriculture's Olive Oil Unit.
 - 30 Mort Rosenblum, *Olives: The Life and Lore of a Noble Fruit* (New York: Absolute Press, 1997). It is safe to assume that the difference is not so stark in recent decades, owing to drops in productivity of Palestinian trees due to decreasing care, the uprooting of olive trees, global warming, and area restrictions.
 - 31 See: Ramiz Ebiad and Hassan Abu-Qaoud, "Morphological and Biochemical Characterization of Three Olive 'Olea europaea L.' Cultivars in Palestine," *Jordan Journal of Agricultural Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2014), online at archives.ju.edu.jo/index.php/jjas/article/view/6064 (accessed 28 August 2024); and Enrico Maria Lodolini, Serena Polverigiani, Saed Ali, Mohammed Mutawea, Mayyada Qutub, Taysir Arabasi, Fabio Pierini, Mohammed Abed, and Davide Neri, "Oil Characteristics of Four Palestinian Olive Varieties," *Journal of Oleo Science* 66, no. 5 (2017): 435–41, online at doi.org/10.5650/jos.ess16184.
 - 32 Ecological stress should not be confused with the stressors created by colonial policy. For clarification on those impacts see: Meneley, "Blood, Sweat, and Tears." For a better understanding of the Zionist policy of "wilding" agricultural lands see: Saad Amira, "The Slow Violence of Israeli Settler-Colonialism and the Political Ecology of Ethnic Cleansing in the West Bank," *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 4 (2021): 512–32, online at doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2021.2007747.
 - 33 For the purposes of this paper, I use spiciness in the way described by my interlocuters, a burn in the mouth *and* throat.
 - 34 The "elevator rise" of Palestinian EVOO was pointed out to me in an interview with Taghrid Shehadeh, head of Palestinian National Team for Testing and the head of the Palestinian Standards Institute's Olive Oil Lab, 17 December 2023.
 - 35 Information gathered in an interview with the head of the Palestinian Olive Council, Fayyad Fayyad.
 - 36 See: Sumiyah Farhat-Nassir, *Palestinian Olives and Its Problems* (Ramallah: Birzeit University Press, 1980); Natalia Gutkowski, "Timely Cultivation: Sustainable Agriculture Policy, Temporality and the Palestinian-Arab Citizens of Israel" (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2017); and Simon Awad and Omar Attum, "The Biodiversity Value of Olive Groves in Palestine," *Jordan Journal of Natural History* 4 (December 2017): 29–36.
 - 37 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005).
 - 38 Hashweh, "Drizzling Social and Ecological Sustainability."
 - 39 In one case, some of the International Olive Council trainers were rejected entry by the Israelis at the border due to their Arab nationality. In solidarity, their colleagues refused to enter. In another case the planned panel of trainers was forced to cancel their visit due to the 2021 "Sword of Jerusalem" uprising in Gaza.
 - 40 In a loophole, Palestinian oil is regularly denied entry to the United Kingdom due to the presence of a compound called delta 7-stigmastanol, which in Palestinian oils is naturally slightly above the permitted 0.5 percent, due to the large pit size in the olive fruit. Despite several objections and clarifications from the Palestinian government sources, many Palestinians have not been able to consistently export oil to the UK as a result.
 - 41 To see how coffee producers in Papua New Guinea viewed their production, see: Paige West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
 - 42 Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Wiley, 2000).
 - 43 The price per liter I give is for the reader's ease. Local measurements are in fifteen to sixteen kilogram "tanks" of oil. Some oils sell for as low as 250 shekels per tank and Bayt

- Jala has reached as high as 1,600 shekels per tank.
- 44 Known locally as *turab al-huwwar*, this is a type of soil that preserves water in the cold and releases it during the heat, acting as a moisture preserver in the soil and nourishing tree roots.
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- 46 Sharkawi, "Introducing Olive Culture," 55.
- 47 In a phone conversation with the owner of the 'Abbud stone press, he cited the difficulty of his customers in reaching 'Abbud due to the closure of the entrance of the village by the army as the reason he did not open his press this year. The Dayr Abu Mish'al stone press was closed in 2022 as well as 2023.
- 48 Al-Tahir, *Shajarat al-zaytun*, 387–96.
- 49 Al-Tahir, *Shajarat al-zaytun*, 373.
- 50 Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea*.
- 51 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).