**Overview**

The current use of starvation as a tool of genocide builds upon and reinforces historical and ongoing Israeli policy and practice that results in the death and suffering of Palestinians. The state of Israel has long relied upon limiting Palestinian access to food, foodways, agriculture, and the means of agricultural production (namely land, seed, and water) as a tool of settler colonialism. The genocide that began in October 2023 is a continuation of what is both formally and informally instituted in Israeli law and society, across the state of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) that strives to achieve the following four objectives:

1. To dispossess Palestinians of their traditional land and agrarian livelihoods through enclosures, land theft, and overuse of water/dispossession of water rights;
2. To prohibit Palestinians from accessing traditional foodways and from self-determination in food;
3. To terrorize Palestinians and Palestinian communities through destruction of agriculture and arboriculture, dismantling Palestinian attempts to produce traditional foods and live off the land;
4. To erase the history of Palestinian agriculture and, in part through the practice of hasbara[[1]](#footnote-1) (translated to “explanation” or “propaganda”), to create narratives that “nativize” Israelis and produce them as “indigenous” to the land (see Wolfe 2006).

The starvation of 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli settler regime[[2]](#footnote-2) is both an extension of the what is outlined above, and a manifestation of the ongoing turn of Israeli settler-colonial logics from displacement and elimination to a logic of genocide (Wolfe 2006: 387). Highlighting the ongoing “slow violence”[[3]](#footnote-3) of occupation and the Zionist regime that predates the current genocidal campaign is important because it “reveals how structural conditions, including the laws that putatively govern those conditions, produce death and suffering” for Palestinians (Miller 2023).

It is important to recognize the historical and political context of the use of starvation by Israel as a tool of genocide so as not to mistake this current iteration of genocide and starvation as unique to the ruling party or to individuals in power, but as integral to how Zionism operates as a violent occupying force that aims to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from their land by any means necessary. This historical context is also key to enacting policies and local or international practices to contest ongoing genocide and to lay the groundwork for Palestinian food sovereignty in the future.

**Disruptions in the right to food**

Here I will list examples of how the above objectives are carried out through both legal and more informal mechanisms, and how policy and practice might contest these ongoing barriers to a right to food for Palestinians.

* A 1977 Israeli law prohibits the foraging of za’atar and akkoub, plants that are central to traditional Palestinian foodways, arguing that these plants are endangered and need to be protected. This law worked to create enclosures around food resources for Palestinian people, who have been displaced and dispossessed from their rightful land over decades of occupation, oppression and apartheid across historic Palestine. It also opened up market potential for Israelis and settlers in the occupied territories to produce za’atar, akkoub, and other edible herbs (*qaḍb*) such as parsley and sell them to Palestinians. This has the effect of increasing Palestinian dependence on Israeli agriculture, which is often located on the most fertile land and depletes or over utilize water resources.
* There are few legal mechanisms in place to protect Palestinian peasant agricultural producers or markets from Israeli industrial production systems. Mono-cropping water intensive crops (e.g. bananas and watermelons) depletes water resources and involves the heavy chemical fertilizer/pesticide application, which is antithetical to traditional Palestinian farming methods. A 2010 ban on settlement agricultural products is not enforced. The Israeli military has supported disregard for this legislation, protecting the transfer of “overflow” (Israeli) watermelons into the oPt. These less expensive watermelons undercut Palestinian farmers’ ability to sell their products. They are also hybrid varietals that have all but replaced the indigenous climate adapted and disease resistant varietals grown by Palestinians.
* Israeli settlers have burned down or uprooted hundreds of thousands of Palestinian olive trees and routinely set agricultural fields on fire. Some of the trees that have been burned are reported to be the oldest trees on earth, several of them up to 900 years old. In many instances where settlers enact violence against Palestinians, they are accompanied by or protected by the Israeli military forces. When olive trees or agricultural fields are burning, the Israeli military often prevents Palestinian farmers from accessing their land to stop the fires. Olive trees have also been destroyed in the building of the separation wall between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Patrick Wolfe writes how the former deputy-mayor of West Jerusalem recalled his youth, saying, “I myself ‘made the desert bloom’ by uprooting the ancient olive trees of al-Bassa to clear the ground for a banana grove, as required by the ‘planned farming’ principles of my kibbutz” (Wolfe 2006.) Olive trees are a sacred part of Palestinian culture and livelihoods, and destroying this source of food and economic security contributes to a lack of food security among Palestinians, and represents a crucial avenue for Israeli control over access to food for Palestinians, access that can be taken away.
* Invasive wild boar (feral pigs) have been unleashed into villages in the West Bank, leaving Palestinians vulnerable to the incredible destructiveness of these animals. Palestinians do not have access to the technology or resources to collar and tag (track) or cull these animals, and Israeli settlers who are widely assumed to be the pathway of introduction of wild boar to the region are largely protected from the widespread destruction to agriculture because of the walls and fences built around the settlements. Invasive species, whether it is feral pigs, pine trees, or other flora and fauna introduced onto Palestinian land by the Israeli state and settlers represent a political project of deplacing Palestinian people and agricultural practices in order to redefine what is “native” or “indigenous” to this land through a largescale reimagination of landscape.
* Agricultural land theft in the oPt continues to displace farmers and pastoralists from their land. A significant percentage of settler occupied land in the West Bank is now controlled by Israeli sheep herders who gradually claim Palestinian land, using violence and the backing of the Israeli military to refuse Palestinians access to their land.

The disappearance of traditional food and crop varietals of such as the jadu’I watermelon, restrictions on foraging za’atar, and the lack of protection that Palestinian growers have in the face of industrial and intensive Israeli agricultural production place severe restrictions on the possibility of Palestinian food sovereignty. The forced dependence of Palestinians on Israeli markets and foodstuffs creates precarity and food insecurity for Palestinians across the occupied territories (both the West Bank and Gaza). The theft of land and ongoing displacement of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship from their traditional farmland denies them access to the means of (food) production that would support greater self-determination in food.

**International policy and practice needs to oversee the enforcement of market protections for Palestinian farmers and the return of land to Palestinians in the occupied territories. Furthermore, water resources need to be equitably shared, and controls places on Israeli production systems to reduce reliance on chemical inputs, hybrid seeds, and invasive species that undercut and damage indigenous Palestinian access to traditional foodways.**

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1. “Hasbara links information warfare to the strategic efforts of the state to bolster the unity of the home front; ensure the support of allies; disrupt efforts to organize hostile coalitions; determine the way issues are defined by the media, the intelligentsia, and social networks; establish the parameters of politically correct discourse; delegitimize both critics and their arguments; and shape the common understanding and interpretation of the results of international negotiations” (Freeman, 2012.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Israeli genocide and starvation of Gazans began its most recent iteration on October 8, 2023, but has been implemented by the Israeli regime to varying degrees in Gaza since the siege and blockade began in 2006 with limitations and control over calories allowed in to the Gaza Strip as well as control over water supply and lack of access for Gazans to clean drinking water or self-determination in food. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Miller (2023), Amira (2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)