

EXHIBIT 5

EMPTYING THE JAWLAN, CONSTRUCTING THE APARTHEID



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In September 2016, Israeli occupation forces raided the Syrian village of Majdal Shams and carried out, before our eyes in the Syrian native community, the order of demolishing the house of Bassam and Dalia Jamil Ibrahim. Under the pretext of “construction without a building permit,” the heavy bulldozers declared an intention to further demolish dozens of homes belonging to Syrians in the five Syrian villages not ethnically cleansed during the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Golan (Jawlan in Arabic). Today, the remaining Syrian population of the Jawlan is approximately 25,000 who live in five villages and only ‘control’ five percent of the land.

The Israeli colonial developments and operations of recent years in the occupied Syrian lands, alongside massive Israeli interventions in different locations within the region and non-stop efforts to change the Jawlan’s demographic and geographic-scapes through practices of Judaization and Israelization, have exposed the various mechanisms by which the State of Israel has maintained ‘state-owned’ lands for national purposes, frequently at the expense of those who are excluded from the national ethos.

This approach and line of policies in land planning is not unique to the occupied Jawlan and its Syrian population for it is commonly recognized and known, both regionally and internationally, in regards to Palestinian lands throughout historic Palestine. The Palestinian ownership of land and their rights over land is often prevented by the intervention of public and quasi-public bodies, such as the Israeli Army (by establishing closed, militaristic and firing zones), The Jewish National Fund (JNF), the Jewish Agency, and others.

Recent reports show that a new planning project, submitted in 2013 and led by the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority (NPA), is to be implemented in the northern parts of the occupied Jawlan, in order to take over thousands of Syrian-owned dunums and build an Israeli “natural reserve.” This so called ‘Hermon Nature Reserve’ is to be located around Mount Hermon [Jabal al-Sheikh] and its surrounding areas, covering lands in the north and west of the occupied lands of the Jawlan. However, Jabal al-Sheikh itself has been exploited by Israel and is considered one of Israel’s most important strategic military bases with areas overlooking Syria and Lebanon. With large assistance from The Jewish Agency for Israel, the first lift was installed at the mountain cluster in 1971 and the ski resort opened to skiers that December, years before the Israeli annexation of the Jawlan, although the area was still governed by the military occupation system as part of the Israeli Military Governorate. The resort is operated and held by 32 settler families, with no property rights, in the land of Neve Ativ, a settlement founded in 1972 and built on the land of the destroyed Syrian village of Jubata ez-Zeit.



Birket Ram (Lake Ram). / Photos by Nabih Awidat (1) Ayman Abu Jabal (2&3) & Marwa Tarabyeh

The Jawlan was a thriving, if not wholly agricultural, land with a diverse population of 153,000 living in 163 villages and 108 “farms” (large agricultural domains often established in Ottoman times). Some 70 percent of the Jawlan was seized by Israel during the June 1967 war. The part that fell under Israeli occupation encompassed 139 villages and 61 farms, with a population of 130,000 people. Since Israel began its occupation of the Jawlan, it has deliberately carried out numerous actions that violate a number of basic international law regulations and negatively impact the native Syrian population there. The forcible transfer of Syrian civilians and the destruction of property have led, since 1967, to the mass depopulation of Syrian citizens from the occupied land. Israeli-Jewish settlers, have gradually replaced the Syrian population, and continue to move in waves to the area to settle in Syrian lands, which Israel claims to be vacant or empty.

These policies of forced displacement and the confiscation of land did not stop in 1967. In the early 1980s, prior to Israel’s purported annexation of the Jawlan in 1981, Israel began efforts to force Israeli citizenship and identification upon the remaining native Syrian population. However, the vast majority of the Syrian population refused to renounce their Syrian nationality. In addition, the ongoing drilling for oil in the southern Jawlan by Afek, an Israeli subsidiary of the American firm Genie Energy (which was granted permission to operate by the Israeli authorities), recent home demolitions in Majdal Shams, the previously mentioned Israeli plan to build one more natural reserve, increasing numbers of new settlers (1,000 settlers annually according to official statistics) mainly of European Jewish descent, and the different declarations by Israeli politicians regarding the future of the Jawlan, are all parts of one system, or more accurately, one structure, that of settler colonialism. Such a controlling system and mechanism needs to fully destroy the space in order to replace it. **Even though Israel ended up destroying thousands of houses and many of the towns and villages in the Jawlan, its settler policies and colonial practices ultimately remained intact due to the fact that some villages there were not completely depopulated: Majdal Shams, Mas’ade Ein Qiniyye, Buq’ata and Ghajar.** Thus, the process of elimination over the lands of the “annexed” Jawlan has not yet come to its ‘pure’ end — which means zero natives. Hence, and according to the Israeli

settler logic, there is still an essential need for a constant spatial [re]production in the Jawlan.



The “Big Juba Forest” hides the last vestiges of the pre-Naksa Syrian village Skek.

The Zionist project has always started from the idea of “the [imagined] empty land,” which awaited the Jewish man to rescue, cultivate and protect it, and Israel has always worked to achieve this truly imagined idea in the Jawlan (as in Palestine) since their colonization in 1948 and 1967. It is also a well-known fact that land planning in Israel is invested and exploited by state Government services, through the work of the planning authorities inter alia, as a means of achieving a political agenda based on Jewish ownership of the land. Moreover, this policy is openly proclaimed and its legitimacy is publicly recognized, such as the Judaization of Galilee, maintaining the demographic targets of a Jewish majority in Jerusalem, and other projects and schemes. Within the frameworks of such policies, open spaces, which are an essential component of any plan, are frequently enlisted to further national-political goals. Not only that, but the preservation of nature and the protection of forests and natural spaces

often serve the authorities as a means of seizing land and Judaizing the landscape. In the Jawlan as well, immediately after the occupation the "Israeli Nature Reserve Authority" took a central role and prepared a list of forcibly displaced Syrian villages for conversion into "nature reserves" which was then submitted to "the Israeli Land Authority." In this way, the 'Big Juba forest,' for example, that is today branded by Israel as "one of the best parks and nature attractions in Golan Heights" still hides the last vestiges of the pre-Naksa Syrian village Skek. The Syrian village of Dabbourah as well, has been replaced with Devora Waterfalls and park, the Syrian Jalibina village and its stream were transformed into The Jilaboun Stream, the Syrian Al-A'l village transformed to Nahal El-AI, and the list goes on.



Ruins of the Syrian village, Skek, destroyed by Israeli Army during the Naksa.

Within such historical context of "preserving" abandoned villages, in which the Israeli Land and Nature Authorities have taken leading roles since 1967 in the occupied Jawlan, the recent plan of establishing the Hermon Nature Reserve alongside other similar 'national' parks in the region, resonates the modification of Palestinian lands since 1950 by Jewish National Fund (JNF). **The ruins, a legal and cultural witness of the crime that funded the**

State of Israel, thus, had to be demolished and hidden. The Israeli efforts of replacing and reproducing the space and its natives in the occupied Jawlan are taking place not only on the physical level of the land, but also on the conceptual and symbolic levels of space, time and identity; therefore, they need to be reviewed and analyzed as they necessarily influence one another. The establishment of such "national" parks as well as the building of new Jewish settlements in the occupied Jawlan are not just acts of seizing the Syrian land and putting the remaining native Arab population under geographic segregated enclaves. They are also acts of eliminating Syrian memories, past and present, by giving voice and shape to the claimed Jewish history and its exclusiveness in the Jawlan. When the ruins of the Syrian town Fiq become Afik (an Israeli settlement), Qisrin becomes Katzrin (in Hebrew), and En al-Ziwan becomes Ein Zivan, the whole landscape becomes a Jewish one, and thus, the Syrian Arab Jawlan transforms into what once was imagined as Ha-Golan. Several touristic plans, which have been implemented in the occupied Jawlan by Israeli public and quasi-public bodies, have not only wiped Arabic names and language off the signage and replaced them with foreign ones (mainly Hebrew and English), but also rejected any connection between the native space and its geography with the native Arab Syrian population and their long rooted histories, constantly erasing symbols and signs of a national or Arab history or relation. These practices in the field of "tourism" are led by the same settler policies of the Israeli naming committee that was given the task, after the establishment of Israel, of erasing thousands of Arab place names, including those of hills, valleys and springs, and creating Hebrew names.

Every Syrian village or town, as well as their ruins in the Jawlan, have their own frames of reference which tell their stories and past. For me, the names, languages, and shapes of these built environments and Israeli settlements provide concrete evidence of these types of changes and colonial transformations. Ibn Khaldoun, the great Arab philosopher and jurist wrote 500 years ago that the history of nations and states is the history of their cities. Similarly, the history of the contemporary Jawlan is certainly a history forged by the debris of its cities. And to understand the practices that led and continue to lead the Zionist regime to construct its imagined emptiness of the

Jawlan, we need to understand its colonial modes of encountering and attempting to control a variety of forces, both human and nonhuman.