

How the production of „Israeli“ dates is harming Palestinians

The dispossession of Palestinians in the Jordan Valley (November 2016)

1. Introduction: Definition of the Jordan Valley

The term "**Jordan Valley**" applies to the **lower course of the Jordan River** from where it exits the **Sea of Galilee in the north of Israel** to the end of its course at the shores of the **Dead Sea**. This section is 120 km long and 15 km wide. In a broader sense, the term "**Jordan Valley**" may also include **the Dead Sea basin** and the area south of the Dead Sea covering the **Wadi Arabah or Arava valley** in the south of Israel and eastern part of the **Naqab (Negev) desert**, ending at **Aqaba/Eilat**, 155 km farther south. Over most of its length, the Jordan Valley forms the border between **Jordan** to the east and Israel and the occupied **West Bank** to the west.¹

The Jordan Valley is located **partly in Israel in the frontiers of 1948** (in the Galilee in the North and in the Naqab (Negev) in the south and **partly in the West Bank, which is occupied by Israel since 1967** (the Jordan Valley represents approximately 30% of the area of the occupied West Bank). It has a very dry and hot climate that renders it particularly suitable for the cultivation of **dates**. Dates were cultivated in the Jordan Valley long before Zionist settlers started to immigrate after 1917 (Balfour Declaration).



Topographic map of Israel/Palästina

2. The process of dispossession of Palestinians in the Jordan Valley

A **process of dispossession of Palestinians** started with the **Jewish settlements** established under the **British colonial mandate** (1917-1948) and was carried out in complicity with the British authorities. In this process, the "Jewish National Fund" JNF took possession of large swaths of Palestinian land to lease out to Jewish settlers. The results of this process are the following:

- **In Israel itself** (Galilee in the North, Naqab in the South), the dispossession process was started by Jewish settlers arriving in the 30ies of the 19th century and accelerated after the Nakba ("catastrophe") of 1948, as Israel expelled approximately 800'000 Palestinians from their homeland: **In Israel, dates are now produced on soil that is property of the JNF and is leased out only to Jewish individuals and organizations.**
- While in the central part of **Galilee** they still constitute a (small) majority of the population (for instance in the region around Nazareth), the Palestinians (a great part of them Bedouins) dwelling in the **south-eastern part of the Jordan Valley** - adjacent to what is now the

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Valley_\(Middle_East\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Valley_(Middle_East))

occupied part of the Jordan Valley in the West Bank - around the city of Baisan (Beit Shean) were fully eliminated in a process that must be defined as **"systematic land grabbing"**: All Palestinian villages were taken in 1948/1949, emptied of their population and demolished, so this part of the Jordan Valley (and therefore the production of dates in this region) is now fully in Jewish hands.

- In the southern part of the Jordan Valley, called **Arava** (south of the West Bank), the situation is similar: **Arava** is part of the **Naqab or Negev desert** where Bedouins were dwelling before the Nakba of 1948, grazing their cattle and cultivating wheat and other cereals. In the Nakba, the Bedouins population was reduced drastically from 90'000 to 10'000. However, due to high birth rates, the Naqab Bedouin population grew again, and for a couple of years Israel has now been engaged in a process of **"Judaization of the Negev"**. Nearly 60'000 Bedouins could be forced to leave their villages and be moved to zones where Israel wants to concentrate them.
- In present day Israel, **Palestinians have no chance to get access to agricultural land** or to start any agricultural production since the land belongs either to the JNF or to the state. These administrations attribute the land mostly to Kibbutzim or Moshavim, which have their roots in Zionist ideology and generally are not open for non-Jewish citizens of Israel.
- **In the occupied part of the Jordan Valley**, a similar process of dispossession is carried out at high speed. It is well known today that many of the dates produced in "Israel" and exported as **"Israeli dates"** are grown and packaged in the occupied Jordan Valley. It has been widely denounced that in the part of the valley occupied since 1967, **Israel has, in violation of international law, allocated 86% of the land to Israeli settlements** and that the living conditions for Palestinians are particularly tough in this region. Most fertile land is in Jewish hands and access to water is hampered for Palestinians. **The settlements of the Jordan Valley produce 60% of the dates sold in Israel and 40% of the exported dates.**

The current discrimination of the Palestinian population in the occupied Jordan Valley is the continuation of a process of systematic dispossession of Palestinians that has gone on for more than 80 years now.

3. Production and export of dates as part of ethnic cleansing

Production, marketing and export of dates are in the hand of a few powerful Israeli companies such as **Hadiklaim, Mehadrin** and others that own land in both 1948 Israel (Galilee and Naqab) and in the occupied West Bank. They adopt strategies that are supporting Israel's policies of discrimination against Palestinians. They protest noisily against the obligation to label products produced in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) even if in some cases they tend to shift more towards a policy that seems to make some concessions in response to the condemnation of the occupation. This strategy includes exporting dates produced and packed in "1948 Israel" to

countries where the occupation is a public concern (like Switzerland for example) while sending products from the occupied territories to other countries where the public is less conscious of the problem (for instance eastern countries). But as a whole, they consider the Jordan Valley as being part of “Eretz Israel” (Greater Israel) in agreement with the Zionist agenda of dispossession and disfranchisement of Palestinians within a “Jewish state”.

4. Israeli exporters, complicit with discriminations and apartheid

Both **Hadiklaim** and **Mehadrin** own plantations in both 1948 Israel and the OPT, which all have one common characteristic: The land belongs to the JNF, the owners of all facilities - producers, packers, exporters - are Jewish. Palestinians are only to be found as cheap labor working there - in conditions where basic labor rights are systematically violated.

Hadiklaim is a „cooperative of cooperatives“ of Israeli date producers. This is, the producers themselves are organized in approximately 100 groups (Kibbutzim or Moshavim) similar to cooperatives – and of which only Jews can be members.² The dates are produced in the Jordan River from the Galilee to the Arava/Naqab region over the occupied West Bank. According to our sources, Hadiklaim produces dates in several locations in the Jordan Valley. It owns **ten packaging facilities**, of which **four are in the West Bank: “Tomer”, “Zorganica”, “Beit Ha’arava” and “Neot Hakkar”**. The largest packaging capacity seems to be in these West Bank packaging houses, particularly in **Tomer** – in several cases, dates were identified as having been packaged in Tomer and the reason given was that there was not enough personnel in other packaging houses.

Mehadrin is another large exporting company for dates. According to our information, they own an **extensive plantation in Gilgal in the West Bank** and a Packaging house in En Yahar in the southern Jordan Valley.

5. The production of dates in the occupied Jordan Valley

As mentioned above, a high percentage of “Israel’s” agricultural exports originates from the occupied West Bank, in particular from the Jordan Valley: The organization **Who profits** explains:

*“The agricultural production in the occupied Jordan valley and Dead Sea area includes dates, olives, citrus, figs, pomegranates, guavas, melons, watermelons, grapes, grapevines, peppers, cucumbers, onions, herbs, cherry tomatoes, eggplants, organic melons, sweet potatoes, onions and flowers. Most of the produce is designated for export (...) **Herbs** for export are primarily grown in the occupied Jordan Valley: 80% of the herbs are exported to Europe, mainly France, **Switzerland**, the Netherlands, Sweden and Scandinavia.” (...). **Dates export** from Israel to the European and North American markets has grown in 16% in 2011. **40% of the dates grown in Israel in 2011 were exported** with a profit of 265 million USD to the export companies. Most of the date groves in Israel are located along the Great Rift Valley in the occupied part of the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea area: Israel manufactures over 50% of the worlds' Medjool dates, 51% of which are grown in the occupied Jordan Valley.”³*

² <http://mondoweiss.net/2010/10/the-hallowed-israeli-kibbutz-of-my-childhood-no-palestinians-accepted/>

³ *Who profits*: “Made in Israel”: Agricultural Export from Occupied Territories

http://www.whoprofits.org/sites/default/files/agricultural_export_flash_report_0.pdf

In fact, areas of the occupied Jordan Valley are currently being progressively annexed by Israel and declared as closed military zones, nature protection areas or used for the expansion of settlements and their agricultural production. This process is realized through several policies aimed at the indigenous population, some of which amount to violations of Human Rights as the brochure “Ripe for abuse, Palestinian Child Labor in Israeli Agricultural settlements in the West Bank” by Human Rights Watch (HRW)⁴ describes in detail:

- **Demolition of houses and shelters:** In [Area C](#) of the West Bank, Israel is continuously demolishing the homes of Palestinians.
- **Confiscation of land:** Land is being confiscated and declared state land, often in conjunction with house demolitions.
- **Demolition of Palestinian schools**
- **Refusal to hand out permits:** Palestinian are denied permits when they want to build infrastructures /for example water installments such as wells, reservoirs and pipelines) take land into cultivation, use water for irrigation etc.
- **Transfer of the regional administration** (incl. zoning and planning) to settler councils.
- Other measures severely restricting Palestinian agriculture in the Jordan Valley.
- **Harassments by settlers and the army.**
- **Use of child labor (one of the worst infringements of the conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO))⁵**
- **Systematic infringements of ILO conventions and standards: Including dire working conditions, wages and working hours, lack of working contracts, health an safety infringements, etc.**

As a result, the Palestinian population of the Jordan Valley has decreased from about 250'000 to only 80,000 people, controlled and harassed by about 15'000 to 20'000 Israeli settlers living in 37 settlements as well as by the Israeli army.

In the whole occupied West Bank, research by the Israeli organization Kerem Navot details how Israel is using agriculture as a means for wholesale theft of Palestinian land. Since 1997, agriculture in illegal Israeli settlements has increased in area by 35 per cent, while cultivated Palestinian agricultural land has dropped by one third.⁶

4 Palestine remembered: <http://www.palestineremembered.com/index.html>

5 Human Rights Watch: „Ripe for Abuse: Palestinian Child Labor in Israeli Agricultural Settlements in the West Bank” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/04/13/ripe-abuse/palestinian-child-labor-israeli-agricultural-settlements-west-bank>

6 <http://972mag.com/resource-how-agriculture-is-used-to-take-over-west-bank-land/84993/>

6. The global complicity must be unveiled⁷

The illegal occupation of the West Bank since 1967 has become a concern in large parts of the European public. This is why many consumers refuse to buy Israeli products or products from settlements. However, the attention of the public – including the media – has been concentrated on the issue of illegal settlements in the occupied territories but there is still **a lack of understanding that the occupation is part of a much wider process of dispossession and disfranchisement at the expense of the Palestinian population throughout Israel/Palestine.**

Conclusion of this survey

The production of **dates in both the occupied Jordan Valley and 1948 Israel is part of an process of ethnic cleansing, discriminating Palestinians and causing severe damage to the Palestinian population.** As long as this situation is not radically changed, consumers should avoid products like dates in conformity with ethical consumer behavior. Retailers should refrain from selling such products

While **fundamental Human rights infringements can be detected easily now in the occupied Jordan Valley** (see for instance reports from Human Rights Watch (HRW)), these violations are **part of a larger process of dispossession of Palestinians carried out in Palestine since the British colonial rule.**

In 1948 Israel, the dispossession has been completed in the years after the Nakba - the establishment of the state of Israel on Palestinian land - so the properties of Palestinian have been transferred to Jewish owners.

Due to the property of the land by the JNF, the use of most of the land in Israel is reserved to Jews and access of Palestinians is severely restricted, while in the West Bank swaths of agricultural land are confiscated on a daily basis by Israeli authorities in a ongoing process.

Refusing to buy Israeli dates should be maintained as long as no proof is given that discrimination of Palestinians stopped, that Palestinian have access to land rights and agricultural land in both 1948 Israel and the occupied territories.

⁷ Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/de/news/2016/01/19/israel-unternehmen-sollen-siedlungsaktivitaeten-beenden>

7. Sources on Palestinian agriculture, the history of land grabbing and the process of dispossession of Palestinians in historic Palestine during the British mandate period (1917-1948) as well as during and after the Nakba of 1948

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