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British Environmental Orientalism and the Palestinian Goat, 1917–1948

Abstract

British colonial understanding of arid Mediterranean environments was characterised by the idea of degradation: these environments were seen as an aberration from the 'norm' of the lush and fertile British forests and grasslands. The struggle against desertification was central to British efforts to model the people and environments of their colonies according to their own ideals. The goat played an important role in the British understanding of arid landscapes as degraded, desertified and generally 'lacking', as it became the ultimate symbol for destruction. Nomadic goat-herding, a practice with hundreds of years of history, was singled out as the most destructive form of land use. Connected to the negative image of the goat was the stereotypical image of its owner: nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles were deemed not only unproductive but outright reckless. Sedentarisation of the nomad was one of the main goals of British colonisers as a form of population control and maintenance of colonial power. This article examines the British colonial belief in Ruined Landscape Theory as applied to arid Mediterranean environments and tries to uncover the goat's role in British environmental orientalism, focusing on Palestine during the British Mandate period, ca. 1917–1948.

Keywords: British Empire, Palestine, nomadism, environmental orientalism, Zionism.

1. Introduction

In 1907, a British hydraulic engineer offered the following analysis in a report on Cyprus: 'The goat is a greater curse to the Island than the locust. The locust destroys the vegetation for a single season; the goat destroys the vegetation permanently; (…) If the goats can be removed before it is too late vegetation will again clothe the hills, bind the soil and equalise the flow of the water'.[1] Four decades later, this assessment was discussed during a conference on land use, held in Cyprus in 1946, which was attended by British colonial officials, amongst them the director of Palestine's Department of Forestry, G.N. Sale. The assessment aptly summarises the perception British colonial administrators still held towards the goat in the Mediterranean region, including in mandatory Palestine (ca. 1917–1948): the goat was seen as a curse for the environment. It was considered to be a destructive animal whose grazing patterns had to be curtailed in order to bring the allegedly degraded land back to its former state of fertility, to prevent soil erosion and thus to be able to start improving the land for its inhabitants, old and new.

1 Weston Library (WL), Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Conference Cyprus (1946).

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This article unpacks the assumptions inherent in the engineer's statement above, which exemplify British colonial thinking about the Palestinian goat and its environmental impact. British perceptions of the Palestinian landscape were highly influenced by Ruined Landscape Theory, a declensionist narrative,[2] which is explained in more detail below. It is crucial to understand the colonial origins of this narrative, as well as how it enabled colonial powers to enforce policies that shaped the environment and people's way of life. The article shows that in the case of Mandate Palestine, many of the beliefs inherent in Ruined Landscape Theory were adopted by the British administrators. The research is based on primary sources from British and Israeli archives.

In accordance with Ruined Landscape Theory, the British administrators singled out goat-herding, a practice with hundreds of years of history, as the one agricultural practice that had brought disaster in its wake by erasing vegetation and thereby making way for soil erosion, dune formation and other forms of land degradation. Connected to the negative image of the goat was the stereotypical image of its owner: nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles were deemed not only unproductive but outright reckless. Sedentarisation of the nomad was an important goal of British colonisers in their quest for population control and maintenance of colonial power.

Contrary to these assumptions, scientists have shown that goats' grazing habits are well adjusted to the Mediterranean vegetation and that the browsing of goats is an efficient measure against wildfires.[3] Moreover, goats provide the poorer sectors of the population with dairy and act as leaders of flocks for nomadic people.[4] Scholarship has also shown that most prejudices against nomadic ways of life are unfounded. If done responsibly, nomadic pastoralism is 'efficient and sustainable' in certain environments, including much of the Mediterranean region.[5] Importantly, in the Eastern Mediterranean context, pastoral nomadism was a way of limiting the exposure to malaria,[6] a coping strategy for diversifying amidst a volatile climate,[7] and a means to make use of resources which would otherwise be neglected.[8]

The negative British attitude towards the Palestinian environment is described here as environmental orientalism, a term developed by a group of scholars around geographer Diana Davis and historian Edmund Burke who question Ruined Landscape Theory and related declensionist narratives.[9] Despite these pioneering studies, the perception of Mediterranean and other arid lands as being degraded is still persistent in recent scholarship and policy making.[10] This article follows the critique of Ruined

2 Carolyn Merchant defines the term declensionist as 'A narrative structure, or plot that portrays environmental history as a downward spiral' (Merchant 2002, 206).
3 Grove, Rackham 2001, 45 and Duffy 2019, xix.
4 Duffy 2019, 48.
5 Ibid., xix.
6 Gratien 2017, 586.
7 Broich 2013, 265.
8 Falah 1991, 291.
9 See Davis, Burke III, 2011.
10 Davis, Burke III 2011, 13.

Landscape Theory and uses Mandate Palestine to show how deeply entrenched this theory was within the British administration. The question in what state the Palestinian environment actually was at the beginning of the British Mandate period has not yet satisfactorily been answered.[11] Therefore, this article prioritises the British discourse rather than "material realities". The argument is two-fold: the article shows that the British Mandate administration perceived the Palestinian environment through the lens of Ruined Landscape Theory and that, in this context, the goat became the stand-in for the local nomadic Arab population that was seen as the ultimate destroyer of the landscape.

Important work on the Palestinian goat has already been done by Tamar Novick in her PhD dissertation *Milk & Honey: Technologies of Plenty in the Making of a Holy Land, 1880–1960* (2014). In her chapter on the Palestinian goat, Novick describes the process by which the goat became singled out by first the British and then the Israeli rulers as 'the enemy of nature'.[12] She recounts the methods by which the British tried to control the goat (by recording, counting, measuring, and classifying) and the mixed results of these efforts. Her chapter also discusses the *Plant Protection Law* of 1950, better known as the *Black Goat Law*. With this law, Israeli authorities tried to eliminate the herding goat from the landscape while replacing it with other animals (sheep, cows) or providing "other means of compensation", again resulting in mixed outcomes.[13] British and Israeli rules against goats and restrictions on grazing elicited protests from Arab peasants in the form of petitions, which give valuable insight into the value of the goats for peasants themselves.[14]

Importantly, Novick also discusses the process by which two different types of goats came to be seen as symbols for their respective owners. She argues that the white house goat, predominantly owned by Jews, was seen as the "good" kind of goat; while the black herding goat, predominantly owned by Arab peasants, was seen as the "bad" kind.[15] That the goat ultimately came to signify Palestinian peasants was remarkable, according to Novick, as the goat had a long tradition of symbolizing diaspora Jews.[16]

This article draws on Novick's pioneering work but diverges from it in several aspects. First, I focus on the British Mandate period and do not consider the time after 1948, which excludes later legislation on grazing, including the *Black Goat Law* of 1950. I am also more interested in British rhetoric than actual practice, because the tropes of Ruined Landscape Theory can be traced throughout the British and other colonial empires. I thus see the Palestinian goat as one example of the afore-noted in-

11 Regarding deforestation, see Liphschitz and Biger 2004; on the effects of the Little Ice Age, see Tabak 2008; on malaria and landscape change, see Sufian 2008. On Environmental History of Israel more general, see Tal 2012.
12 Novick 2014, 143.
13 Novick 2014, 168.
14 Ibid., 173–80.
15 Ibid., 180–6.
16 Ibid., 144, 188.

fluential declensionist narrative. Due to Novick's and my difference in emphasis, I argue, we also reach different conclusions as to whom the goat represented: while Novick makes the comparison between the white Jewish house goat versus the black Arab peasant goat, I make the comparison between the settled and the nomadic goat.

2. Ruined Landscape Theory and the Declensionist Narrative

The two environmental narratives informing this article are Ruined Landscape Theory as developed by Rackham and Grove[17] and the French-Algerian degradation narrative as developed by Davis.[18] Both narratives are declensionist narratives, meaning that they understand the environments in question as having consistently deteriorated and being in danger of further deterioration in the future. Ruined Landscape Theory focuses on Mediterranean environments, while the French-Algerian narrative focuses on arid North African and Middle Eastern environments. Geographically, mandatory Palestine is covered by both narratives while not discussed at length in either one. As the narratives overlap to a large extent, they have both been informing my analysis. I chose to use the term Ruined Landscape Theory to describe British attitudes towards Palestine in order to distinguish it from declensionist narratives in other contexts.

What is discussed here as a theory was not understood as such by the British themselves. At the time of British ruled Palestine, the beliefs inherent to these narratives reflected the contemporary state of science developed in an imperial context.[19] Ruined Landscape Theory assumes that there has been a golden age of the Mediterranean environment in ancient times and that, ever since then, various man-made processes have added to its steady decline. The declensionist narrative as developed by Diana Davis has a different geographical focus, but its key points overlap with Ruined Landscape Theory: while, for example, Algeria was seen as the 'granary of Rome' of the ancient world, declensionist attitudes cast 19th century Algeria as a shadow of its former self.[20] Today, these narratives still influence the ways in which the (Western) public and institutional programs, such as the United Nations, understand arid landscapes, despite scientific consensus that these narratives are partly built on environmental myths and misunderstandings.[21]

Importantly, both narratives build on a Western-centric misconception of foreign environments and a failure to understand arid landscapes as simply *different* from European ones, rather than degraded. For example, Ruined Landscape Theory reveals a limited perception of what constitutes a forest. As stated in Rackham and Grove's work, 'a landscape which an Arab describes as 'wooded' may not seem wooded to a Finn'.[22] Similarly, the French-Algerian narrative was constructed in a French Enlight-

17 As developed in Grove, Rackham 2001.
18 As developed in Davis 2007.
19 Duffy 2019, 33–54.
20 Davis 2007, 2.
21 Davis 2016, 145; and Selcer 2018, 97–132.
22 Grove, Rackham 2001, 18.

enment context. French scientists and intellectuals drew on classical sources including Herodotus and Ptolemy, contrasting the landscapes they encountered in the 18th and 19th century with the one described in those ancient sources.[23] Another important point of reference were the writings of the influential Arab historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406). Translations of his work became popular among French thinkers and important for solidifying the narrative of environmental degradation; however, the nuance and detail of Khaldun's original work was lost in the process as he was misinterpreted and quoted selectively.[24]

These theories about the environment had colonial roots and were developed in colonial settings, which is best explained in Diana Davis' pioneering *Granary of Rome*, using the example of the French colonial experience in North Africa, particularly Algeria. According to Davis, the evolution of the declensionist narrative alongside French colonial practices shows that this narrative of decline and degradation was used opportunistically by the French in their environmental policies for Algeria. The narrative served three main goals: 'the appropriation of land and resources; social control (including the provision of labour); and the transformation of subsistence production into commodity production'.[25] Davis shows how the French colonial state used an environmental narrative that it had built on cultural bias, misconceptions about the unfamiliar environment and agricultural practices, as well as outright racial stereotyping, for its own (settler) colonial goals. In this way, the environment could be used to legitimise the colonialists' practices and further the settler colonists' goal of shaping the land according to their own imaginations and practical needs.

In the following, this article explores the British Mandate power's adherence to the core beliefs of Ruined Landscape Theory. First, it shows the pervasiveness of this theory in British colonial thought. Second, it explores which role the goat played in the British colonial imagination of the Palestinian landscape, illustrating how, ultimately, the goat became a stand-in for its nomadic Arab owner in British rhetoric and thought.

3. Ruined Landscape Theory in British Thought in Palestine and Beyond

Ruined Landscape Theory was deeply entrenched in the administration of the British Mandate for Palestine. Its main advocate was the Palestinian Forestry Department under its first Conservator of Forests and department head Gilbert N. Sale, who managed forestry in Palestine continuously from the Department's establishment in 1936 until his transfer to Trinidad in 1946. Before 1936, the Forest Service had been incorporated within the Palestinian Agricultural Department. Sale's decade of service had a strong impact on British thought as most of the work concerning forestry and related issues (such as soil conservation) bore the mark of this one leading forester who was

23 Duffy 2019, 44–5.
24 Duffy 2019, 35–7, 51; Davis 2007, 3.
25 Davis 2007, 166.

clearly a subscriber to Ruined Landscape Theory. The article's focus on Sale reflects the available archival sources that present him as the main proponent of Ruined Landscape Theory during most of the British presence in Palestine. However, he should not be understood as the sole advocate of Ruined Landscape Theory, considering that he was supported by, at least, the other officials at the Department of Forestry and the Soil Conservation Board, which he established in 1940. The absence of criticism or debate regarding Sale's views is striking, indicating a general acquiescence of the British administration. In one of the few cases in which Sale's practices were challenged, the matter was taken up immediately by the Soil Conservation Board and the proposal at hand, which suggested opening State Domains to grazing, was strongly rejected.[26] In the following, it is illustrated how Ruined Landscape Theory was discussed on different administrative levels within the Mandate, but also in a broader British imperial context and beyond the British sphere of influence.

Reports summarising the Forestry Department's work give a valuable glimpse into the thinking that underlay the Department's activities and informed its policies.[27] The Forestry Reports for the years 1936–1939 and 1939–1945 show the foresters' frustration with the stagnation of their work due to the severe lack of funding for the department, its lack of qualified personnel and the political context that make extensive afforestation or soil conservation schemes impossible to carry out. Within this context, the Great Revolt of 1936-1939 and the difficulty of land settlement are the most important factors. It becomes clear that most aspects discussed were plans to be carried out in the future. At the same time, the reports show a striking persistence of tropes and themes inherent to Ruined Landscape Theory.[28]

The administration's adherence to the narrative of environmental degradation is the main theme running through the reports. They obsessively repeat the core notions of Ruined Landscape Theory, such as claiming that the current environment of Palestine is a degraded version of a former, more fertile past. In the 1936-1939 Report, it is argued that

> [t]he state of the hills is unsatisfactory, as most of the surface is eroded, and probably less than 1% is agricultural land in good condition. The hills were undoubtedly once covered with soil and forest, they should be highly productive, and at present are an artificial desert, due to overgrazing.[29]

Grazing is singled out as the one factor that mostly contributed to the degradation of the land and its loss of productivity. In the 1939–1945 Report, grazing is still seen as a 'formidable problem' that 'faces forest authorities in many parts of the Empire, but is especially acute in Palestine'.[30] The Department's staff saw grazing, particularly by

26 ISA, 20/23 – מ, Letter from Mason to District Commissioners (1946).
27 For another account of the connections between forestry and goats, see Novick 2014, 146–54.
28 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Forestry Report 1936–1939 and Forestry Report 1939–1945.
29 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Forestry Report 1936–1939.
30 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Forestry Report 1939–1945.

goats, as the main cause for destruction, claiming that '[a]ll other forms of damage fade into insignificance beside the destruction caused by grazing'.[31] Other forms of land use that can lead to soil erosion, such as cutting and uprooting of trees and other vegetation, are mentioned briefly but not attributed great importance. Longer-term climatic shifts, as well as social developments leading to changes in land use practices, are not considered either.

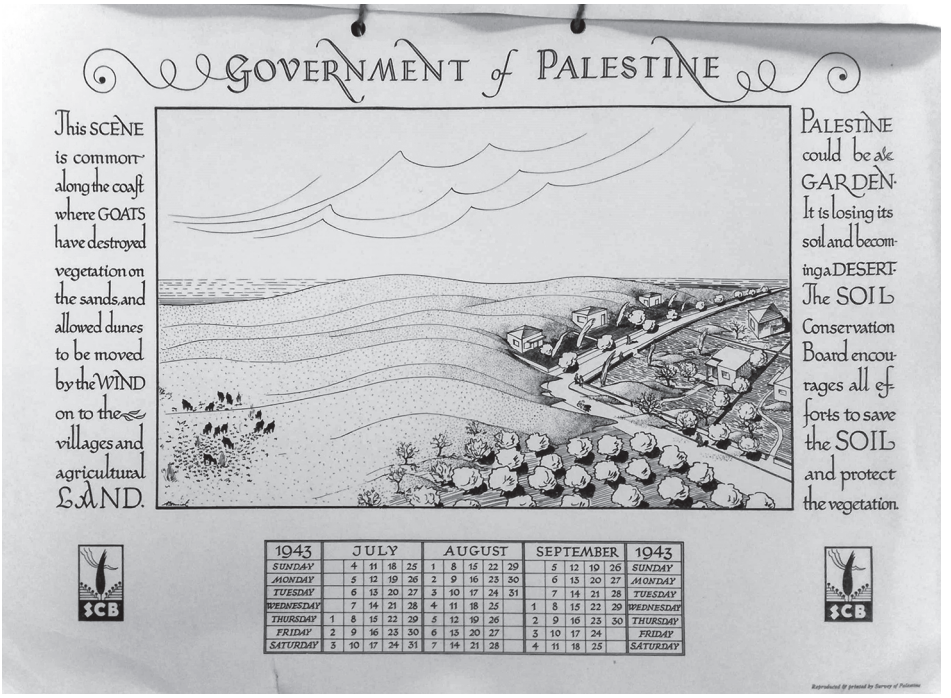
Other documents further reveal British administrators' emphasis on the destructive potential of goat grazing. In 1940, the above-mentioned Forestry Department's director Sale established the Soil Conservation Board that was tasked with the protection of the Palestinian soil. A calendar published by the Board in 1943 shows that the Board's main narrative followed the logic of Ruined Landscape Theory. The drawings of the calendar sheets depict the stark contrast between the "wild" desert landscape and the highly orderly and engineered landscapes the British saw as desirable: terraced hills, straight rows of fruit trees forming (mostly citrus) orchards, and clearly demarked agricultural fields. As a contrast, flocks of goats symbolise the advance of the desert and the degradation of the land's fertility due to overgrazing (see Figure 1).[32]

From the Forestry Department and its adjacent institutions, such as the Soil Conservation Board, the British administration's adherence to Ruined Landscape Theory reached a broader audience in Palestine and the colonies. In 1942, for example, Sale gave a lecture to the Palestine Economic Society, during which he described a Palestine of the past that had been covered with lush pine and oak forests and that is inherently a 'natural garden' in need to be 'restored to its original condition'.[33] In Sale's view, the main culprit for the environmental destruction of the land is the goat, which he calls the 'main agent in the execution of the curses' that have befallen Palestine throughout the centuries.[34] His lecture portrays the belief that overgrazing is the single most important factor contributing to soil erosion, which then complicates all other efforts of the British to "redeem" the land – afforestation, terracing of the hillsides, draining of swamps. At the same time, belief in Ruined Landscape Theory surfaced in British colonial attitudes towards other arid Mediterranean environments as well. For example, the above-mentioned conference of British colonial personnel in Cyprus in 1946, discussing "Land Use in a Mediterranean Environment" brought together British officials from Cyprus and Palestine who held a similar aversion against goat grazing. The discussions during the conference show the connections and continuities of personnel and ideologies within the British Empire.[35]

British colonial administrators were not the only ones adhering to declensionist narratives, however.[36] In 1940, American soil scientist Walter Clay Lowdermilk trav-

31 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Forestry Report 1936–1939.
32 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Calendar April-June and July–Sept. 1943.
33 Central Zionist Archives (CZA), S90\675, Lecture by Sale (1942).
34 CZA, S90\675, Lecture by Sale (1942).
35 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Conference Cyprus (1946).
36 For an American example of how declensionist thinking shaped the environment and deeply impacted pastoralists, see Weisiger 2011.

Figure 1. Calendar sheet for July-September 1943, published by the Soil Conservation Board in Palestine. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Medit. s. 23 (4h).



elled through Palestine, making his own observations regarding its potential in terms of soil conservation and general land improvement. Lowdermilk was already well-known in soil conservation circles and, true to his time, another proponent of Ruined Landscape Theory. In 1944, he published his book *Palestine. Land of Promise* in which he discusses his experiences in Palestine as well as his impressions of the people and the land. The book is highly prejudiced in favour of the Zionist project and was subsequently used by American Zionists to legitimise large-scale Jewish settlement in Palestine.[37] The book's main goal was to advertise Lowdermilk's idea of building a large-scale irrigation project, which was modelled on the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States. In *Land of Promise*, Lowdermilk delivers a textbook rendition of Ruined Landscape Theory, comparing Palestine's allegedly golden past to a degraded present and – importantly – a promising future. Goats feature in Lowdermilk's description as the 'black-eared locusts' of the Near East;[38] the comparison of goats and sheep with

37 Miller 2003, 59–63; Mané 2011, 72.
38 The National Library Israel, 76 B 2771.

locusts being quite widespread in both British and American soil conservationist circles from the mid-late 19th century onwards.[39]

These examples show how deeply engrained and widespread the ideas of Ruined Landscape Theory were at the time of British rule over Palestine. These ideas were internally reproduced within the responsible departments of the Palestine administration, but also shared with stakeholders and the interested public in broader mandatory Palestine. British colonial officials shared their ideas across different spaces of their empire as well, thereby reinforcing their beliefs and trying to streamline their proposed solutions. In all this, the only noteworthy opposition to the 'vilification' of the goat by British administrators came from veterinary officials who emphasized the usefulness of the goat for poor peasants.[40]

One practical purpose the demonisation of grazing by goats (and other livestock to a lesser degree) served was the control of land use. British actions in Palestine were severely hampered by the question of land ownership.[41] The land that could best be controlled by the British administrators was land classified as State Domain. Since 1941, for example, grazing was excluded from State Domains under the Cultivators (Protection) Ordinance. Assigning more lands as State Domain on the grounds that grazing had to be reduced and controlled for the greater good of the population, thus also brought more land under direct control of the British administrators.[42] Apart from this example, the immediate consequences of Ruined Landscape Theory on mandatory Palestine were limited as the Forest Department was notoriously underfunded and understaffed, and many proposed projects did not come to fruition at all.[43]

As discussed, however, the perspectives developed during the British Mandate period did have influence on practical outcomes in subsequent years. Moreover, outsiders' contributions, such as the one by the American Lowdermilk, helped to strengthen and normalise this narrative. Such contributions were influential. Lowdermilk, for example, returned to the region after the creation of Israel to continue his research and push forward his irrigation plans. Today, he is known as the 'spiritual father' of Israel's National Water Carrier which has its own troubled history and politics.[44] Moreover, Lowdermilk was involved in the establishment of UNESCO's Arid Zone Program, which carried some of his convictions about environmental degradation well into the second half of the 20th century.[45]

39 See the British hydraulic engineer's statement above. For the American context, see for example Weisiger 2011, 143.
40 Novick 2014, 161–4. "Vilification" is her terminology.
41 See, for example, Bunton 1999 and Nadan 2003.
42 ISA, 20/23 – מ, Grazing and grazing practices in Palestine since Ottoman times.
43 For a more detailed discussion of the ways the British government tried to curtail goat grazing in mandatory Palestine, and later consequences, including the *Black Goat Law* of 1950, see Novick 2014, 156-61, 165-72.
44 Mané 2011, 73; Miller 2003, 75. Regarding the contentious issue of water in Israel/Palestine see for example Braverman 2020, 527–51; and Alatout 2009, 363–94.
45 Selcer 2018, 97.

4. British Othering of Nomadic Land Use in Palestine

British administrators held orientalist beliefs about the Arabs of Palestine, which have been discussed, for example, in Jacob Norris' *Land of Progress*.[46] In the common usage of the term "orientalism", romantic and paternalistic attitudes towards the perceived Other are two sides of the same coin. Some British officials romanticised the nomads of the Middle East – and their camels – as the only authentic inhabitant of arid environments.[47] The same holds true for the Palestinian environment, which was often stylised as the land supposedly "flowing with milk and honey". These romanticising attitudes towards the land and its people, however, were only an undercurrent to the more paternalistic or condescending attitudes inherent in Ruined Landscape Theory. One such paternalistic narrative about the Arabs in Palestine targeted their "bad stewardship" of the environment. For example, Sale claimed that when he saw 'villagers carrying on this system [of keeping goats] which they have inherited from their ancestors since the time of Abraham', he realised that 'they do not know how much they need our help to break the vicious circle'.[48]

The British administration's adoption of Ruined Landscape Theory attitudes towards goats correlates with its attitudes towards the land use practices of nomadic Arab communities. Like the French in Algeria, the British administrators in Palestine appear consistently prejudiced against nomadic land use practices. These were seen as backwards, inefficient, irrational, unproductive and generally opposed to modernisation and the progress that the colonial powers were supposed to bring to the places under their rule. In the colonial imaginary of a hierarchy of civilisations, nomadic ways of life ranked lower than settled forms of agriculture.[49] There was also considerable ethical judgement that nomads were immoral because they preferred to live "outside of civilisation", and a misunderstanding of nomadic production systems that were seen as irrational and inefficient because they were (supposedly) not based on private property.[50]

Such negative attitudes towards nomadic ways of life were widespread in Europe and North America during the 19th to mid-20th century, resulting in a 'forest centric mood', which was juxtaposed to pastoralism.[51] As a result, the goal of modernising the local population encountered in mandatory Palestine and other places could only be attained after the population was sedentarised. The view of settled and nomadic communities as being separate from each other was widespread at the time and has been reproduced in scholarly literature until the 1970s, when a more nuanced understanding of a 'close interplay' between nomadic and settled societies emerged.[52]

46 Norris 2013, 63-98.
47 Fletcher 2015, 218–9; for 'camel orientalism' see Gilad 2021, 138–9.
48 CZA, S90\675, Lecture by Sale (1942).
49 Duffy 2019, 35, 48, 49; Deringil 2003, 317-318; Davis 2007, 65–6; Fletcher 2015, 37.
50 Davis 2007, 65–6.
51 Davis 2007, 62.
52 Fletcher, 2015, 8, 55.

In British Palestine's context, in which intensive agricultural practices were introduced and the population increased quickly in a short period of time, the belief that extensive nomadic livestock herding was inefficient and wasteful makes sense. Considered in isolation, however, it disregards that in the absence of highly scientific ways of land use, nomadic people had made sustainable use of arid lands for centuries. A more nuanced view of land use dynamics is demonstrated in a 1946 bulletin published by the Soil Conservation Board. The bulletin suggests that many of the factors that contribute to the "degradation" of the Palestinian environment are due to the increased pressure on the land caused by immigration.[53] This type of nuance is important but only rarely noted in the texts produced by the British Mandate administration.

During the British Mandate period, the nomadic and semi-nomadic population of Palestine was estimated to consist of 65,000–100,000 Bedouin[54] of the southern Negev (Naqab) and a highly fluctuating number of nomads of the northern Galilee, at their height estimated to count 17,500 people in 1945.[55] The southern Bedouin had been inhabiting the Negev for centuries. Under the Ottoman Empire, they remained relatively undisturbed in their way of life as the Ottomans focused their influence on urban centres. In time, however, the Ottomans realised the strategic importance of the Negev and increasingly introduced policies aimed at the sedentarisation of the Bedouin, such as the founding of Beersheba in 1900, albeit with mixed success.[56] The sedentarisation policies of the British during the Mandate years were thus built on a longer history of tensions between the nomadic people of Palestine and their rulers.

The discourse of planned sedentarisation of the nomadic Arabs of Palestine revolved around the language of modernisation, progress, and economic development. Nomads were considered as standing outside of civilisation and as needing to be brought into the fold. Colonial powers also had more self-serving goals in mind when striving for increased sedentarisation: Moving populations and their animals were difficult to tax and control, and nomadism was contrary to the type of intensive agricultural production colonial economies were based on. As Davis shows in her work, these obstacles to the French colonial project in Algeria were among the main reasons for the development and institutionalisation of the declensionist narrative there.[57] As so often happened in colonial settings, European colonisers tried to mould local people and their way of life into what was perceived as productive in Europe instead of adopting local approaches potentially better suited to the local circumstances.

53 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Bulletin No.2 (1946).
54 Nasasra 2015, 262.
55 Falah 1991, 95.
56 Nasasra 2015, 262–7.
57 Davis 2007, 54.

5. The Goat as Symbolic Substitute for its Nomadic Arab Owner

British documents from the Mandate period obsessively discuss the role of goat grazing as destructive for the landscape but are careful never to mention either Jewish or Arab lifestyles and agricultural practices directly. The attribution of more responsible settled agricultural practices to the Jewish immigrants and non-nomadic Arabs, on the one hand, and supposedly destructive nomadic ways of life to Arab nomads, on the other, was implicit, yet apparent. The absence of any direct references was a result of the tense political context in Palestine at the time, which Sale and other British officials were working within. It seems that the administration sought to find a way to communicate their beliefs without accusing a specific part of the population outright.

In this context, the British administration's rhetoric about the goat and stereotypes about its owner intermingled to such a degree that the animal came to function as a symbol for the human. This apparent conflation between human and animal becomes clearer in British environmental discourse that distinguished between two parts of the Arab population: the villagers and farmers versus the nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists. While the administration considered both parts of the population to be ignorant about the importance of soil conservation and afforestation,[58] "modern" forms of agriculture, and the efficient use of land for cultivation,[59] the nomadic population was singled out as particularly and historically reckless in their use of the land. In 1946, for example, the Soil Conservation Board published a history of land degradation in Palestine which identified 'a Bedouin invasion' in 796 that 'devastated' the environment.[60] Other factors, such as wars, the change of political systems and the religion of the ruling elites are mentioned in passing, but the advance of nomadism is seen as the main factor for landscape change.

British environmental orientalism directed at the Arabs of Palestine thus came in different gradations: settled Arabs, the villager and farmer, were seen as inferior, ignorant, and harmful; yet their way of life was painted as relatable and, significantly, corrigible. For the British colonial foresters and soil conservationists, the settled Arab was a subject susceptible to the remedial force of modernisation. The nomadic Arab, on the other hand, was entirely foreign; his way of life needed to be eliminated before any type of progress could occur.[61] While the settled Arab was "*an*-other", the nomadic Arab was, in the full sense of Edward Said's terminology, "*the* Other".[62]

Resulting from these perceptions, British administrators underscored the differences between the settled and the nomadic Arab, including how the nomads were negatively influencing the villagers' ability to earn a proper livelihood. In the Soil Conservation Board's Bulletin, the author claimed that '[i]n some [Arabic] villages the people are

58 TNA, CO 733/492/3, Fixation Scheme (1945).
59 Nadan 2003, 320–54.
60 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Bulletin No.2 (1946).
61 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Bulletin No.2 (1946).
62 Said 1979. As mentioned above, see Novick 2014 for a different assessment of whom the goat came to represent under British and early Israeli rule (180–6).

becoming hostile to the goat, especially where orchards and vineyards are being planted'.[63] Still, the author laments, 'while there is opposition to Bedouins grazing' this 'appear[s] to be the exception rather than the rule'.[64] Encouraging resistance among the settled Arab population against their nomadic neighbours, then, would have been useful for the plans to eliminate the presence of the free-roaming goat from the land, thus also effectively eliminating nomadic lifestyles.

Corresponding with the distinction between settled and nomadic Arab, British officials made a distinction between the "tethered" and the "wandering" goat in their hierarchy of blame. The above-mentioned conflation of the goat with its owner is most striking in these statements that are full of allusions and orientalist imagery, laden with deeper racialized and politicised meanings. In his speech to the Palestine Economic Society, Sale claimed that '[w]hereas the wandering goat is an agent of destruction, the tethered goat, fed by hand, is a valuable citizen. (…) while the miserable black wanderer yields one cup of milk, the dainty white animal produces four cupfuls of the same size'.[65] It is in statements like this that the thinly veiled racial undertones of the British colonial discourse towards the nomads become overt. Neither the nomadic goat nor its owner were considered "valuable citizens".

In 1946, the above statement about the black versus white goat made its way into a bulletin by the Soil Conservation Board with only slightly adjusted wording.[66] In the same year, Sale took part in the conference on land use in Cyprus. The attendants generally agreed to the tethered goat being more valuable and preferable over the wandering goat. After a somewhat constructive discussion among the Cypriot British officials, Sale added another statement that shows his deeply ingrained aversion against the nomads of Palestine. He claimed that 'free range grazing was the prime obstacle to all soil conservation methods' and that '[t]he shepherd aided the goats in their work, his aim being to remove as much vegetation as possible in the shortest time'.[67] Sale thus saw the owner of the wandering goat, the nomadic Arab, as a purposeful saboteur of British soil conservation and afforestation works and, by extension, an enemy to the environment and to the society that stands to gain from its proper management.

In sum, the stereotypical and orientalist language British officials used to describe the ostensible environmental damages of goat grazing was a way to cover negative attitudes towards the nomadic population with a "rational" argument of saving the land from overexploitation. The distinction British officials made between settled and nomadic Arabs might have, in their view, reinforced the idea that what had to be countered was not an objectionable race or a despised and misunderstood culture, but rather an environmentally harmful way of life. By depoliticising their language and using the goat as a stand-in for its owner, British administrators tried to avoid increased resistance from the Arab population of Palestine towards their rule and policies.

63 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Bulletin No.2 (1946).
64 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Bulletin No.2 (1946).
65 CZA, S90\675, Lecture by Sale (1942).
66 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Bulletin No.2 (1946).
67 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Conference Cyprus (1946).

5. Conclusion

The adherence of British colonial foresters and soil conservationists, under the leadership of Conservator of Forests G.N. Sale, was based on the genuine belief in Ruined Landscape Theory and the harmfulness of nomadic practices, coupled with the expedience of demonising grazing for practical British interests, such as the control over more land. There is remarkable continuity between the declensionist narrative as developed in French Algeria and the one adhered to by British administrators in Palestine. This continuity is even more interesting considering the geographical and temporal differences between the two settings in question: French Algeria in the mid-19th and British Palestine in the early to mid-20th century. The most important difference, however, was the political context of these two locales. While the French pursued a settler colonial endeavour in Algeria, the British were installed in Palestine by the League of Nations as temporal custodians of an area that was deemed unable to govern itself.

Contrary to the French Algerian case, Ruined Landscape Theory did not have many immediate implications for the nomads of Palestine during the British Mandate period. The British administrators themselves recognised that their forestry policies were 'largely defensive', aimed at taking care of the status quo rather than undertaking ambitious conservation and afforestation efforts.[68] Moreover, by 1936, when the Forestry Department was established as an independent body and most uncertainties about land tenure had been resolved, the political situation in Palestine made grand environmental schemes impossible. The British forestry policies in Palestine were thus 'more remarkable for their ambition than their achievements'.[69] Some of the measures introduced to curtail grazing were contained in the Cultivators (Protection) Ordinance (1941), the Bedouin Control Ordinance (1942) and the Shepherds (Licensing) Ordinance (1946). Neither of these, however, limited grazing to the extent British officials were hoping for.[70]

Still, Ruined Landscape Theory spread far and wide and was persistent in British colonial thought as the connections to Cyprus show: The quote with which this article started reflected Ruined Landscape Theory in a British official's remarks in Cyprus in 1907. Four decades later, at the conference on land use, the same ideas were still held among British officials working in the Mediterranean region. These inter- and intra-imperial connections had policy relevance as well: The first Woods and Forest Ordinance of Palestine, which was declared in 1920, drew from influences of forest policies in Cyprus and India under British rule, and the Ottoman Empire's forestry regulations as introduced by the French.[71] However, as the short discussion about the American soil scientist Lowdermilk has shown, Ruined Landscape Theory was not just a part of European colonial thought. Studying the genealogy of Ruined Land-

68 WL, Sale MSS. Medit. s. 23, Forestry 1923–1948.
69 El-Eini 1999, 72.
70 Ibid., 118–23; ISA, 22/10 – מ, Declaration of grazing control.
71 Ibid., 79.

scape Theory globally will be necessary to uncover the interconnectedness of empires and the spread of ideologies, and could contribute to demystifying the core aspects of Ruined Landscape Theory that are still engrained in policy makers' beliefs today.

Zooming out onto Israel's treatment of its nomadic population from the establishment of the state in 1948 until today demonstrates the persistence of anti-nomadic attitudes. Israel's attempts at sedentarising the nomads of the Negev in so-called "recognized" villages shows a lack of understanding and an unwillingness to deal with ways of life that are foreign to the ruling elite and potentially disruptive of its state-building project. This has real effects on people's lives. The nomads of the Negev have long faced racial and political discrimination and the ca. 100,000 nomads remaining in Israel are among the poorest communities living in the country today.[72] Tracing the colonial legacies of Ruined Landscape Theory and the persistence of this narrative from the end of the Mandate until today is a subject for a future study. Moreover, studying the influence Ruined Landscape Theory has on Israeli officials might give valuable insights into Israeli settlement policies and environmental policies more generally, for example with regards to fire management and grazing practices.

A related consequence of declensionist thinking was the emphasis on afforestation efforts by British and Jewish actors during but especially after the Mandate period. Forests and trees were used by governmental and non-governmental actors, such as the Jewish National Fund, to fight the perceived desertification of the land, but also to, among other things, demarcate borders, make land claims, infuse the landscape with cultural meaning, and memorialise and commemorate the Jewish Israeli narrative while concealing the Arab Palestinian one.[73] The intertwined stories around afforestation, soil degradation, and goat herding show the importance of discussing the environment in the British Palestinian, as well as other colonial contexts.

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72 On the situation of the Bedouin in Israel today see, for example, Nasasra 2012, 81–107; Amara, Abu-Saad, Yiftachel 2012.

73 See, for example, Amir and Rechtman 2006; Benvenisti 2000; Braverman 2009; Cohen 1993; Long 2009; Piekarska 2020.

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