

Scarecrows

Jumana Manna

My parents and extended family regularly forage wild plants for food and medicine, like many Palestinians and Syrians before them.

A multitude of edible plants grow throughout the hilly landscape of historic Palestine and the occupied Golan Heights. Sustenance practices like seasonal foraging predate the rhythms of agricultural cultivation and the state imposition of commercial and sovereign interests. In 1977, Israel's then Minister of Agriculture, Ariel Sharon declared *za'atar* (Arabic for thyme or *Majorana syriaca*) a protected species, resulting in a de facto criminalization of those who collect it in the wild. Nearly three decades later, *'akoub* (*Gundelia tournefortii*), a thistle-like plant largely unknown to Israelis but essential to northern Palestinian cuisine, was also added to the list of protected plants. These listings effectively placed a total ban on the tradition of collecting edible vegetation, making it punishable by fines and up to three years in prison.

For the Palestinians and Syrians in the Golan, these preservation laws constitute a thin ecological veil for racist legislation designed to further alienate them from their lands. Lands that, in many cases, have been expropriated by the Israeli state and are administered as Israeli settlements, nature reserves, military training areas, and other forms of "state land."

In line with colonial logic, the state has endowed itself with the expertise and the moral high ground over the purported destructive tendencies of the Arabs, opting to criminalize foraging rather than settle for less oppressive measures. In this contested landscape, the continued collection of *'akoub* and *za'atar* in the wild, despite and in spite of the ban, becomes an act of anti-colonial resistance and a bid to hold on to memory and know-how that is fast eroding.

These photographs were taken while shooting a film about foraging in Palestine, a film that is still in its early phases but that is ultimately concerned with questions of what is made extinct and what gets to live on; about who gets to decide the fate of these foraging traditions and the options that remain for those who don't.



The hills of the occupied Golan Heights facing the Sea of Galilee are filled with many edible wild plants, as well as land mines. Since its occupation in 1967, Israel has left much of the Golan uncleared of mines. The yellow flowering plant most prominently visible in this image, *kalech* (*Ferula scorodosma*), from the mustard seed family, is plentiful in this area, as is the much sought-after 'akoub. The *kalech* buds,

though edible before they flower, become poisonous once blooming. My late grandmother claimed that this bud could cause dizziness if not cooked thoroughly. Goats know not to eat the flower, but sheep frequently ingest them, causing problems for shepherds and their flocks.



Zeidan on a foraging trip in the Upper Galilee with his six dogs, Dun-dun, Ma'mouleh, Kharoubeh, Fada'r, Kishko, and Khash-khasheh.



An Israeli Nature and Parks Authority vehicle on one of their routine lookouts for illegal activities.



A sack full of foraged 'akoub in the Golan Heights. This quantity can take up to two hours for one person to collect. Once the thorns are cleaned, it will make a meal for a small family.



Olive tree trunk near a patch of wild za'atar. Outskirts of Jerusalem.



'Akoub foraging in the Upper Galilee and Golan Heights. The plant is clipped at its base, slightly below soil-level, and the thorny leaves stripped away to reach the edible heart.



A forager's leftovers:
thorny 'akoub leaves.



The Palestinian village of Suba was destroyed in July 1948 by the Palmach (the Jewish paramilitary force during the British Mandate of Palestine, later assimilated into the Israel Defense Forces) and established soon after as what is now known as Tzova, a kibbutz on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The undeveloped areas, including parts of the old village, are filled with many kinds of edible

plants and fruit trees, making Suba a regular foraging spot for my parents.



Fertility idols on display in the contested *Finds Gone Astray* exhibition, Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Featuring a selection of ancient regional artifacts confiscated from “illegal looters” in the West Bank by Israeli authorities, the exhibition reproduces a longstanding narrative that Jewish-Israelis protect the land and its past, while Arabs destroy it.



Alien-faced scarecrow at the entrance of the Abu Jabal family’s apple tree groves, Golan Heights.



My mother sorting her foraged food. Including *khubeizeh* (mallow, *Malva parviflora*); *shomar* (fennel, *Foeniculum vulgare*); *za'atar*, (wild za'atar, *Majorana syriaca*); 'elt, or *hindbeh* (dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*); *hummeid* (bitter dock, *Rumex obtusifolius*); *loof* (black calla, *Arum palaestinum*); and *wara' zquqiah* or *Tutu* (ivy-leaved cyclamen, *Cyclamen hederifolium*).