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## Stateless but Rooted: Resistance, land and landscape in the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights

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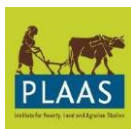
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# Stateless but Rooted: Resistance, land and landscape in the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights

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## 1. The vantage of the Golan Heights: The emancipatory potential of rural resistance

At an altitude of 1200 metres, the Golan Heights connect Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The rural and mountainous landscape is verdant and fertile, internationally renowned for the excellent quality of its apples, cherries and vines. It has a rich supply of freshwater and recently discovered reserves of oil and gas. But the Golan Heights is also a place of occupation, protracted conflict, and resistance. Occupied by Israel since the 1967 war, the Golan Heights were illegally and unilaterally annexed to Israel in 1981. The Israeli occupation displaced, forcefully transferred and affected a total Syrian population of 126,879, destroying 340 villages and farms. Today, only five Syrian villages remain in the Golan Heights, with a population of 24,505.<sup>1</sup> The remaining Syrian population has repeatedly denied 'offers' of Israeli citizenship and are internationally recognised as *stateless*,<sup>2</sup> they have no passports but 'travel documents' and, in these documents, nationality is 'undefined.'

Although prior to the occupation the Golan Heights were home to a multi-ethnic and multi-religious mixture of Syrians (Mara'i and Halabi 1992), most of the stateless Syrians living there today belong to the Druze faith. Dispersed in the Levant, the Druze are an esoteric, endogamous, and non-proselytising religious community (Kastrinou, 2016). With historical roots dating to the 11th century Ismaili branch of Shia Islam, they are estimated to be a million people worldwide, mainly in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Their strong religious adherence, however, does not translate into transnational uniformity in their political affiliations. On the contrary, the Druze are valorised as nationalists within their respective nation-states: for example, as leaders of the nationalist Syrian revolt against the French Mandate in 1925, as the only Arabs 'to be trusted' and to serve in the Israeli army, and as the 'kingmakers' in the confessional politics of Lebanon. Yet, at a time where the war in Syria is reinforcing religious and sectarian identities across the Middle East, the stateless Syrian Druze of the Golan Heights find themselves between their identities as Syrian and as Druze. As al-Nusra dominated rebel forces control the Syrian borderland, and as Israeli intervention in both Syria and in the Golan is becoming increasingly aggressive, the future of the native stateless Syrian Druze of the Occupied Golan Heights (hereinafter, SDOGH) looks increasingly uncertain.

Whilst the Israeli occupation has involved wholesale dispossession of Syrians from their land, including forced evictions and ethnic cleansing (Gordon and Ram 2016), as well as settlement programmes and acquisition of resources (such as freshwater and common land pastures), Israel has also used a very particular idea of the land, and the Golan landscape as part of its appropriation of the Golan Heights. That landscape idea represents the Golan Heights as Israel's amazing 'wild west,' a land of remarkable natural beauty, steeped in history, in need of protection and home to Israel's only ski resort. Currently, the Golan Heights is home to 22,204 Israelis in 34 settlements. Moreover, Israel has used sectarian propaganda in order to weaken the national resistance movement among the occupied Syrians. As the stateless Syrians are predominantly members of the Druze religious community, Israel has continuously 'played the sectarian card': to impose a particularist sectarian

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<sup>1</sup> For the most up-to-date compilation of affected villages, people and farms, see map by Brik, N. (2017). 'Map of Syrian villages and farms destroyed by Israel, and the Israeli settlements built in their place, in the Occupied Syrian Golan', URL: <http://golan-marsad.org/wp-content/uploads/Map-english-24.1-2.compressed.pdf> (Accessed 18/1/2018); also see: Murphy & Gannon 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The international legal definition of a stateless person employed by the UN is the following: "a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law".

identity as a way of obliterating Syrian and Arab nationalism in amongst the occupied population. While this strategy had been relatively successful among the Israeli Druze population (Firro 1999; Kananeh 2008), it has backfired in relation to the SDOGH, who continue to defy Israeli occupation and the sectarianisation of their identity. Could the struggle against Israeli occupation within this rural vantage on the Middle East offer new insights into the emancipatory potential of agrarian and land-based political movements?

With recourse to history and ethnography, we address the above question by exploring how and why the SDOGH stayed and resisted the occupation and subsequently chose to remain stateless. By way of explanation, we argue for a unique combination of 1) historical circumstance, 2) an economic-political-religious-cultural value in and attachment to the land, and 3) the simultaneous condition of being stateless and territorially rooted. These three factors help us understand how the SDOGH do not fit the current mould of a rural populace that is easily swayed by authoritarian populism. Neither do they fit the mould of 'statelessness' as a 'condition of infinite danger' (Walzer 1983, cited in Neocleous 2003: 109). This understanding allows us to see why the SDOGH, on the contrary, have an emancipatory positioning vis-a-vis the states of both Israel and Syria. Throughout the paper we illustrate how the SDOGH are able to mobilise a counter-hegemonic narrative by virtue of the legitimacy their intimate relation to the land affords them.

Firstly, we provide a brief note on research methodology. Secondly, we set out the theoretical premises of our paper, namely that sectarian identity politics in the Middle East can and should be looked at through the lens of the current conjuncture of authoritarian populism. This allows us to pay special attention to the local context of the Syrian war and the emboldening of right wing politics in Israel, but also to interrogate sectarian propaganda as part of a global authoritarian narrative structure. Thirdly, we provide an in-depth analysis of the material and ideational struggles over land and landscape in the Golan Heights. We conclude by discussing how both attachment to the land as well as the condition of statelessness have afforded the native Syrians a vantage point to resist and emancipate and what lessons this may offer for rural political struggles in the Middle East and beyond.

## 2. Methodology and ethics

The views and arguments expressed in this paper result from the collaboration and synergies between Salman Fakher Al-Deen, who is a local activist and researcher who has dedicated his life to the cause of Golan resistance, and two academics, a political anthropologist and a rural geographer. Maria Kastrinou is a political anthropologist who has conducted extended fieldwork with Druze and stateless Syrians in Syria since 2008 (Kastrinou 2012; Kastrinou 2016), and more recently, in 2015, in the occupied Golan Heights. Steven Emery, is a rural geographer who has worked extensively on the prospects and politics of agricultural cooperation within the context of Food Sovereignty and struggles for autonomy, as well as the politics of landscape (Stock et al., 2014; Emery, 2015; Emery and Carrithers, 2016; Emery et al., 2017). This work is based primarily upon 10 interviews conducted by and with Salman Fakher Al-Deen, and funded through the *Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative* small grants scheme. The selection of interviewees was made by Salman, following discussions and deliberations regarding the aims and desired outcomes of the project. In this way, our sampling was not 'random' but relied on Salman's intimate local knowledge. Like in all ethnographies, this method inevitably carries along the subjectivist bias of its researchers, however, it is far more embedded and nuanced to local sensitivities and relevant frames of reference than more formal methods. Most of the Syrians in the occupied villages own some land, but there is huge variety from individual gardens (1-2 dunums),<sup>3</sup> to larger agricultural holdings (30 dunums). For the purposes of this research topic, most of our interviewees (6) were active farmers and members of agricultural cooperatives, some of whom had been partially dispossessed by the occupation. Only two of our interviewees had no family land, whilst two interviewees had smaller pieces of family land that were used for subsistence and recreation. All

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<sup>3</sup> One dunum is equal to 0.1 Hectare.

our interviewees had first-hand memories of the war and subsequent occupation, and their ages ranged from 50-80 years. They were residents of Majdal Shams (9) and Buqata (1). Ethnographic insights from fieldwork conducted on both sides of the Syrian border, dating between 2008 and 2015 (including more than 30 interviews conducted over a period of one month in Majdal Shams in November 2015), have been indispensable in contextualising, embedding and analysing the interview material within historical, cultural and socio-political context. Working through local contacts for the conduct of the interviews has meant that issues of intersubjectivity have affected both who the interview participants were and the interview itself. To delineate social and political contexts and relationships, extensive exchanges between the two academics and Salman have taken place. The Golan Heights has been the ‘forgotten occupation (Wingfield 2013), and in this direction, all the voices are important.

Lastly, as academics it is imperative to respect the wishes of our interlocutors upon whose time, trust and rapport our research is based. In this direction, we will not be referring to the stateless Syrians in the Golan Heights simply as ‘Druze,’ because this is part of the politicised sectarian propaganda that we will critically interrogate; but also because most of our interlocutors choose to self-identify as native Syrians. In respecting their wishes, and for reasons of political correctness, clarity and consistency we will refer to them as the native Syrians of the Occupied Golan Heights (SOGH). However, when talking specifically about the religious group, and cultural history we will furnish the acronym with a ‘D’ - SDOGH.

### **3. Authoritarian populism and its connection to sectarianism in the Middle East**

From Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, to Latin America and South Africa, Scoones et al. (2017) invite us to rethink the current conjuncture in global politics through the lens of authoritarian populism. Research on authoritarian populism (hereinafter AP) aims toward a new synthesis capable of analysing complex and often contradictory phenomena associated with an apparent rise of diverse forms of authoritarianism (Arendt 1973) and populism (Laclau 2005), and/or authoritarian rhetoric even within, but not exclusively in, so-called ‘social democratic’ late capitalist contexts (Scoones et al., 2017: 2). We take AP as both politics and strategy: as a politics, AP calls into force different but unitary and exclusionist imaginaries of ‘a people,’ evoking and erecting exclusionary boundaries through binary opposites of Us and Others. As a strategy, it is a form of demagogy, associated with ‘moral panics’, and as such it is a way of understanding the hegemonic project of forming, assembling and rallying the ‘masses’. Historically, the term comes from an attempt to understand Thatcherite Britain, and carries with it the political struggles and debates for an appropriate response within British labour and the left (Hall 1980, 1985; Hall & Jacques 1983; cf. Jessop et al 1984). Indeed, Hall (1985) himself had cautioned against the generalizability of AP beyond that specific historical conjuncture. However, following Scoones et al., AP can offer an interesting frame to work out how state hegemonic projects (Hall 1986) reach and are resisted by rural populations. Moreover, this is a valuable comparative project precisely because this is a time of global capitalist hegemony, characterised by perpetual and deepening economic recession, brutal imperialist wars, and the decline of labour movements across the world. This framework, then, allows for the global juxtaposition and exploration of diverse forms of exploitation, resistance as well as emancipation.

To what extent is AP useful in understanding the current conjuncture in the Middle East, especially in interrogating the reach of state hegemony upon rural populations? We are drawn to both the explanatory as well as the comparative potential of this project — the latter especially important in combating the exceptionalist and Orientalist analyses that imbue regional studies of/in/on the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> In this section, we delineate how we use AP in ways that are instrumental in understanding rural resistance in the Golan Heights. These ways, sketched here, are the connections of AP with (1) sectarianism; and (2) the emancipatory potential of rural resistance.

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<sup>4</sup> See the following for some recent examples of ap analysis in relation to the Middle East (Ansari 2014), and about Muslims (Bari 2016).

As a politics, AP is intrinsically interconnected with the hegemonic project of making and using exclusionary identity boundaries. Sectarianism, then, could be considered as a variant of AP, since it serves to create and manipulate political identities on the basis of sub-political and/or religious identities. Following Makdisi (2000) and Kastrinou (2016), we understand sectarianism to be both a discourse and a practice. In this paper, we specifically explore the instrumentalist use of sectarianism as a political hegemonic project through the associated discourses it produces. In this direction, we are not taking for granted ‘sectarianism’ as the ‘natural’ way of ME politics (Van Dam 2011), but aim to focus on the *political uses and manipulations of sectarianism as a discourse, and as a hegemonic project, from above*.

Specifically, connecting sectarianism to AP, we wish to interrogate how the SOGH have managed to retain their rootedness in the land, and also to eschew the enveloping authoritarian and populist rhetorics of sectarianism from both Israel and Syria. Towards this goal, the following sections outline the political and historical contexts for sectarianism-cum-authoritarianism in the region.

### ***3.1 Between Syria’s imperial sectarianism and Israel’s Druze particularism***

As nation-states erode, frontiers shift, and new populist religious politics rupture the normative dictatorial grasp of entrenched regimes and fragile Middle Eastern states, the Druze, like other religious minorities, find themselves paradoxically situated between the promise of authoritarian protection and the threat of majoritarian marginalisation, or even extinction. Specifically, the war in Syria has eroded the previously cosmopolitan state narrative that manipulated a de-politicised form of cultural heterogeneity in order to establish itself as the guarantor of harmony and social peace. Kastrinou calls this form of sectarianism ‘imperial sectarianism,’ because the state uses an imperial rather than ‘nationalist’ ideology that emphasises state-sanctioned difference rather than national homogeneity (Kastrinou 2018). The war has led, to a great extent however, towards a new sectarianisation of political identities (Hinnebusch 2016), ushered in new forms of populist struggle (Proudfoot 2017), and marked a new era of proxy conflict in the imperialist ‘struggle for Syria.’

At a local level, the Druze in Syria have found themselves in a difficult position, between battle grounds of regime and opposition forces (Kastrinou 2018). The Druze generally have attempted to remain as neutral as possible in the conflict often juggling a social peace with neighbours alongside ensuring regime protection. Yet, the increasing sectarianisation of the conflict and of the political discourses used in the 7-year war has affected the Druze, as it has the entire Syrian population. For the Druze neighbourhood Jaramana, in Damascus, this has meant that especially since 2013 the voices of political opposition and neutrality have progressively been muted, or imposed over the power of an alliance between sectarian and nationalist (the social nationalist party) militia; as a result what used to be a very liberal and multicultural Damascene suburb has become more sectarian, and more Druze. This is crucial: that sectarianism — in this format — has been a result, and not the cause, of the Syrian war. Moreover, the increase of both sectarian as well as social nationalist politics speaks directly to the affinity of sectarianism, fascism and authoritarian populism.

While the Syrian state practiced imperial sectarianism in order to accommodate a sanctioned and sanctified degree of religious pluralism, Israel has used outright sectarianism to ‘divide and sub-divide’ Arab Palestinians, through the propagation of ‘Druze particularism’, meaning the construction of cultural, religious, social, and even genetic difference between the Druze and other Arabs in Palestine (Firro 2005, 2001, 1999). The myth of the Jew-Druze blood covenant, in which Jethro/Shu’ayb, who is considered one of the Druze prophets, married his daughter Zipporah to Moses, has been used as early as 1948 to produce and instrumentalise a political affinity between the Jewish state and the Druze in Palestine (Firro, 2005: 227; Aboultaif, 2015: 538). State propaganda of this ‘natural’ affinity is expressed in many examples: (1) education: to reinforce Druze separateness from Muslims and other Palestinian Arabs, the state had, by 1977, created a completely separate Druze education curriculum (Firro 1999), teaching Druze religion (as separate to Islam), Druze folklore, as well as ‘Israeli-Druze consciousness’ (Firro 2001: 50; Firro 1999; Tarabieh 1995); (2) religion: where shrine pilgrimage and religious ‘holy’ days have been re-invented anew through Israeli state funding and propaganda, a practice which historian Kais Firro aptly describes as ‘Druze neoparticularism’ (Firro 2001); (3)



military: Israeli Druze serve mandatory conscription, unlike other Israeli Arabs that are exempt (Hajjar 2000; Kanaaneh 2008); and (4) academic knowledge and public opinion: Israeli writers and academics, often with a close relation to state apparatus, have produced a substantial body of knowledge on ‘the Druze’ which serves to essentialise and exoticise them (see Firro 1999, 2001). This is nowhere more evident than in the fascination of that body of literature with ‘*taqiyya*’, which translates as ‘dissimulation’ and is a theological concept derived from Shia Islam, that permits adherents to the faith to disguise their beliefs when the preservation of the community is at stake (Makarem 1974 ). For Israeli scholars and state officials, *taqiyya* is used to explain and to construct the Druze as deferential to power, or, even to explain (away) the denial of the SDOGH to accept Israeli citizenship (Firro 2001: 48).

The populist appeal of the right-wing coalition headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the war in Syria, the ‘threat’ of Iran, as well as the election of Trump in the USA - who recently proclaimed Jerusalem as the capital of Israel - have emboldened the AP rhetoric of the Israeli government, and dangerously increased its security and military responses (Eichner 2018). Israel has increased its military presence in the Golan Heights, often using the occupied territory as a military base for its interventions in Syria. Using the pretext of ‘humanitarian’ interventions, Israel has been operating on the contested border regions and plans are underway for a ‘safe zone’ (Samaha 2018). Moreover, the continued occupation of the Golan Heights has been galvanised by the Israeli government in order to push forth further normalisation and to propagate the agenda of AP and nationalism to its own citizens -- especially to the secular middle classes. Finally, AP is particularly prevalent in rural Israel and especially among settler communities. To understand this (and our subsequent analysis of the contestation over landscape narratives in the Golan), we must make explicit the centrality of nationalism to AP (Scoones et al., 2017; Gusterson, 2017). There is a significant body of literature which has aptly demonstrated the importance of rural landscapes to nationalist discourses and agendas (Gramsci, 1973, cited in Pratt, 1996, p. 76; Lowenthal, 1991; Zimmer, 1998; Sorlin, 1999; Edensor, 2002; Nogue and Vicente, 2004). More specifically, the role of rural landscapes/peasant production in propagating alternative nationalisms is also prominent in works on Israel and its occupied territories (Swedenburg, 1990; Cohen & Kliot, 1992; Ram, 2014; Handel et al., 2015). The argument we will later develop, however, is that the rural position of the SOGH renders them resistant to, rather than susceptible to, nationalist discourses of rurality and AP.

Having laid out the political contexts in both Syria and Israel, we hope that it becomes clear that the SDOGH differ from both the Israeli Druze and their compatriots in Syria. On one hand, they have fiercely rejected Israeli citizenship as well as the Israeli propaganda of Druze particularism. Indeed, when Israel unilaterally annexed Golan in contravention of international law in December 1981, the SDOGH responded with a successful six-month strike that strengthened their resolve to deny Israeli citizenship and to remain stateless, and has since sustained political non-sectarian resistance (Kennedy 1984; section 4.4 below). On the other hand, the sectarianisation of identities as a result of the current war in Syria has not made them more Druze and less Syrian. While political opinion on the Syrian war and its future is divided, the SDOGH have remained steadfast in their assertion of Syrian-ness (Phillips 2015). Opposition to AP and sectarianism among the SDOGH, therefore, challenges three main assumptions: (1) the Israeli historiographical propaganda that portrays the Druze as deferential; (2) the assumption that rural populations are more susceptible to sectarianism, nationalism and AP; and (3) the assumption that stateless peoples are inherently weak, landless and uprooted (Neocleous 2003: 102-118; Soguk 1999). Why are the SDOGH so different to other Druze populations in Israel and Syria, and how could they have manage to resist AP from both sides of the border? Searching for an answer, we examine the political economy of resistance through a grounded understanding of land - to which we now turn.

#### **4. The politics of land**

This Section situates local perceptions and practices within the larger context of regional historical population changes and dynamics, as well as within a Druze-specific ethno-religious cultural context.

For land and landscape — their political economy as well as their ideational/ideological place among local communities — are dialectically related to historical changes and imbued with dynamic and hence changing cultural, ethno-religious meanings. We explore the politicization of, and contestation over, the Golan land and landscape by both the Israeli government and the SOGH through the specific examples of agriculture and tourism. The Section thus considers the material and ideational part played by land in the opposing efforts of Israel and the SOGH, respectively, to control, discipline and normalize on the one hand, and to resist, defy and emancipate on the other. Despite the brutal, sustained and systematic efforts of the Israeli government to appropriate the land, it is the steadfastness of the native population in their determination to retain their connection to the land that, in part, helps us understand why this rural population stayed after the 1967 war, and how they have managed to resist as well as to maintain their connection to the land.

#### **4.1 Land expropriation and restrictions**

Although the SDOGH escaped, or were spared, the worst of the forced evictions and dispossessions inflicted by the Israeli army on other members of the indigenous population, they were and have been subject to significant expropriations of land, human rights violations and discrimination by the legislative apparatus of the Israeli state (Halabi, 1992; Murphy & Gannon, 2008; O Cuinn, 2011; Hanlon, 2012; Keary, 2013). Whilst the majority of the SDOGH with title retained their private holdings (see Section 4.2), the community, as a whole, was deprived of access to and use of the common grazing lands that surrounded the settlements:

Whilst the Syrian government respected the ownership of each village's common land, Israel considers all land that is not under private ownership to be 'state land' [Thiab]

There are no more cows and goats among the Syrians, only a few animals to remember! What parts of the common are still cultivated have all turned into little farms and there is a specific Israeli agri-environmental law which restricts grazing on the common land [Salman]

We have no licenced grazing lands so we are very limited in the cattle, sheep and goats we can keep. The real cow sheds are in the Israeli settlements - so they exploit all the Golan land, if not for army training and minefields then for large-scale cattle farming [Salih]

The Israeli state thus refused to accept community ownership of common grazing lands that had hitherto been respected by the Syrian government and subsequently introduced legal restrictions on grazing practices through environmental designations and laws. Davis (1983) reports that agricultural production was flourishing in the Golan in the period leading up to the 1967 invasion. Syrian statistics show it was supporting 37,000 head of cattle, 1-2 million sheep and goats and 2.7 million fruit trees. Moreover, 64% of the population was employed in farming and fishing. Molony et al. (2009, p57) argue that the vast reduction in livestock-keeping following the occupation was not only an indirect consequence of the appropriation of land but an intentional policy designed to deprive the SOGH of their local private economies. They draw on the testimony of Mufeed Al Wili, who suggests that not only land but livestock too were confiscated:

I think the prevention of this [grazing] wasn't an accident. Something was planned by the authorities. It was a target. [The production of] meat and milk is flourishing in the settlements. They put tens of thousands of cows in the forests there. They close it here and they open it there.

The main reason for this [decrease in grazing] is the confiscation of land around the village of Bqa'atha for the settlers ... The places we used to graze our flocks became agricultural fields for the settlers. What we have left is only the forest of Mas'ada... the nature reservation authority in Israel declared that the presence of the sheep and goats in the forest is harmful. They tried to stop this economic activity in different ways ... by confiscating the flocks and selling them for the benefit of the State of Israel. They did this three times. (Mufeed Al Wili, in Molony et al., 2009, pp. 61-63).



Whilst these various mechanisms vastly reduced the SOGH access to common lands, direct appropriations by the military also affected individual private holdings in drastic manner:

My father was born in 1925 and his family have owned and worked the land since that time. Before the occupation I had 63 Dunums, but 18 Dunums is now a closed military zone while another 15 Dunums are minefields. That leaves me with just 30 Dunums, which I continue to farm. (Ghali)

As Yiftachel and Segal (1998: 501) point out, the military and environmental appropriations serve the same general purpose of emphasizing the Israeli state as the absolute power holder in the control of lands. The propagation of a conservationist rhetoric, however, is tied to a ‘constructed’ Israeli-Jewish value in the preservation of nature and serves to mask the nationalist ideology from which the material consequences of the environmental designations are clearly derived.

The quote above reflects a wider view from our respondents that there had been significant advances in agricultural techniques and production following, and on account of, the occupation. However, restrictions on farmers’ access to international markets for their produce, and their inability to compete with heavily subsidised and supported Israeli settler farms on better and larger holdings, meant that earning a living solely from farming has become increasingly unviable for the SOGH. By rejecting Israeli citizenship since 1982 the SOGH have suffered further restrictions and discrimination on agricultural practices vis-a-vis settler Israeli farmers.

We have had to adapt our farming based purely on our abilities and experiences. We have received no support for agricultural development whilst the settlers receive scientific expertise, equipment, infrastructure, financial aid and irrigation. The settlers have more than double the area of agricultural land as us, receive a larger quota of water and pay less for it. (Yusef)

In forty years of occupation we have been prevented from reclaiming land and developing our own water collection and irrigation systems. Meanwhile Israel took control of Ram Lake, the largest water body in the Golan and stopped us from using it. If we had access to Ram Lake we would be in a far better position now. The settlers get triple the quota of water and pay half as much as we do. This hugely affects the amount and type of production we can engage in and means we cannot compete - you can not compare the two situations. (Ahmad)

In the following sections we examine the historical, economic, geographical, cultural and religious specificities that help us to - at least partially - understand why, despite this incredible imposed adversity, the SDOGH remained with their land during and subsequent to the 1967 war.

#### ***4.2 Sanctity in the mountains? Historical, economic and geographical contexts***

Economic, historical and geographical circumstances became materially important influences on the SDOGH’s decision to stay in the Golan following the 1967 and 1973 wars. Until that moment, the majority of land in the Golan Heights was farmed under tenancy arrangements or involved pastoralism on state-owned common lands (*musha’*) (Abu-Husayn 2015: 4; Owen 2002: 258; Wingfeld 2013). In contrast to both Bedouin and other Syrian newcomers to the area, the majority of the Druze population in the Golan Heights were private owners of agricultural land, as a result of their labour investment in terracing and improving mountainous state-lands following their arrival from Lebanon in 1860 (Firro, 1990, p.159). The Druze villages of the Golan thus had something very economically tangible to lose by fleeing to Syria as a result of the occupation.

Second, is the strong (but not unproblematic) association between Druze communities and a sense of sanctity provided by the mountains in which they typically dwell. Most of the literature that explores the connections of the Druze to their land, explains this as directly linked to their historical experience of being a persecuted religious minority, and the topographic sanctity of their mountainous lands (Khuri, 2004). Like many other religious groups in the region, the remoteness of their mountainous

dwellings impacted on how they could be governed and, in some cases, their distance from urban centres afforded them a degree of autonomy and safety.

If the SDOGH had believed that their mountainous villages afforded them a certain degree of protection, then this view could have been supported by the fact that the Druze settlements in the Golan avoided the frontline battles fought during the Six Day War. However, such a perception would have been quickly upturned when they bore witness to the Israeli military's ability to track down and drive out their Syrian neighbours who had fled to the Druze mountains during and subsequent to the conflict:

A lot of people came to hide in Majdal Shams because it was far in the mountains. .... Everyday, the Israelis came and started shouting at them. After two weeks the Israelis told the people who were hiding that they could return safely to their own villages. As the people came out of hiding the Israeli soldiers began to shoot at them to frighten them and make them run away to other parts of Syria. The people had been tricked by the Israelis into thinking it was safe to come out of hiding and return to their villages (Taiseer Maray in Murphy & Gannon, 2008, p.26)

Such witnessing of the selective targeting by the military of particular religious groups would then lend support to the theories that the Druze had been intentionally permitted to remain in order to support Israeli sectarian identity politics:

The village residents stayed for a number of reasons: the memory of the 1925 revolution, the fact that Mount Hermon did not witness any acts of war. We later found out, however, that the Israeli government had an interest in keeping the Druze as a protected minority to propagate divisions between Arabs in other parts of their occupied territory. (Said)

For most of our interlocutors, the collective memory of the Syrian Revolt in 1925, was what shaped the decision to stay with their homes and land. During the Syrian Revolt against the French Mandate, the Druze villages of the GH sided with Pasha Atrash's forces against the colonial forces, and as a repercussion the French colonial forces punished the village of Majdal Shams by emptying it and then destroying it. The colonial French forces, before Israel, were the first to use the techniques of ethnic cleansing and collective punishment in these lands. This incident remains deeply inscribed in the collective memory of the indigenous population, on par with the uprootedness experienced by the Palestinians who were forced to leave their land in 1948. Both of these instances are deeply ingrained examples of the uprootedness that follows if people abandon their houses and fields during war. Almost *all* of the people we interviewed mentioned the historical memory of uprootedness as one of the main reasons that they decided to stay put. They also stressed that they could not necessarily conceive of anywhere else that would guarantee them a greater degree of protection, and an assumption that the occupation would be short-lived.

We never expected that some day the Golan would be under a Zionist occupation ... At first, we thought the invasion would last a couple of days or months and that we would soon be back to our Syrian homeland. ... We prefer to die than to leave our land. We were also with the Palestinians when they got displaced; we heard their stories of missing home, so we decided to hold on and stay under all circumstances. A great credit also has to go to the Druze religious elders who went out into the street and insisted that everyone should not leave their homes, that we should stay. (Saida)

Despite these various material reasons which help us understand why the Druze remained in the Golan, and despite the distancing from religion among many of the politicised SOGH, the important role played by the Druze shaykhs in organising a collective decision to remain following the occupation is testament to the continued importance of a culturally specific relationship between the Druze and the land, to which we turn next.

### 4.3 Druze-land relations: honour, work and reincarnation

This section explores a complex of cultural repertoires that interweave the Druze to their land through the three interconnected concepts of honour, work, and reincarnation. The intimate interconnection between land as a prerequisite to the autonomy in defending honour and religion is apparent in Khuri's discussion of land and identity among the Druze: 'Land (*ard*), honour (*'ird*) and religion (*din*), in this order of significance, constitute a sacred trinity among the Druze'(2004: 55). Khuri, moreover, provides a powerful local proverb: 'he who has no land cannot protect his honour and he who has no honour has no religion' (*Ibid.*) This proverb emphasizes the centrality of land for the continuation of the Druze community, connecting the complex cultural category of honour (*'ird*) - referring to the protections of close female relations - to land, which itself then becomes engendered in the rich social milieu of protection, kinship, solidarity and shame (Kastrinou 2016; Khuri 2004).

This connectivity to the land, furthermore, manifests itself in normative values and expectations in human-land relations. Like elsewhere in Arab societies, among the SDOGH, selling one's land is considered shameful, effeminate, and is, according to our informants, very rare.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is socially embarrassing to be seen as, or labelled as 'lazy' (*kazoul*) (a value in the work ethic found among many agricultural communities, see Emery, 2014; Davidson, 2009). To be properly, and agriculturally, engaged with the land is to be valorised as a hard worker (*sayal*). In the Golan Heights, farmers are bestowed with pride when 'he only changed out of his work clothes to go to his daughter's wedding!' Or, 'blessed be he who dies whilst working the land!'

More widely, connectivity to the land is further sanctified through the purity of associated financial transactions: 'Only the money that comes directly from the land is *halal* to them,' mentioned Sami, who went on to explain how very religious, pious families or individuals (usually shaykhs) consider money derived from doing business to be 'dirty' (*wasih*) and prohibited (*haram*). This contrasts with money derived directly from personal work in the land, and usually such families in the Golan have a small portion of land for household subsistence, as well as land with apples or cherries for selling at the market. Here, connectivity to land is *embodied*, whilst the dangers of potential contamination are of grave religious significance. 'Dirty' money is understood as money derived from waged labour, and is used for keeping their house (bills, maintenance, etc.), whereas 'clean' money from one's own produce is used to buy foodstuffs the family cannot produce for itself. The embodiment of Druzeness itself, then, is inextricably linked to accessing, consuming and returning to the land.

Moreover, religious ideas of reincarnation, as well as spiritual markers, such as shrines (*maqamat*) and places of prayer (*khalwat*), bind the Druze to their land. In a fascinating study about Druze places of worship and pilgrimage in Syria, Fartacek (2012) demonstrates that the local concept of '*baraka*' (blessing) is manifested through an explicit and unmediated connection between land and the divine (also see Fartacek and Nigst, forthcoming). This idea is supported in Druze theosophy, and in particular through the Druze belief in reincarnation (*taqamuş*) (Bennett 2006). Sharing many aspects of other egalitarian reincarnation discourses (Kastrinou and Layton 2016), the Druze believe that all human souls were created at once, human souls only reincarnate into human bodies, and, particularly, Druze souls only reincarnate into Druze bodies. *Taqamuş* is understood as the cyclical expression of immaterial souls through corporeal bodies: 'just as a meaning makes sense only when expressed through its word, so must the human soul be expressed in a human body' (Makarem 2005: 5). The relation between land and the divine is similar to the relation between Druze bodies and souls: in the same way that Druze souls are given permanence in bodies, land is the place where the divine manifests itself, and indeed where the Druze community is given permanence. In fieldwork and interviews, belief in reincarnation was very widespread, with only two of our interlocutors openly rejecting it. Moreover, what was remarkable was that even interlocutors who self-subscribed as 'secularist' or 'Communists' believed in reincarnation: 'I believe in the unity of the universe... Everything comes and goes back to earth' (Ahmad).

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<sup>5</sup> Similar attitudes and practices are described for the Druze in Lebanon by Khuri (20014: 53-56).

Reincarnation, moreover, provides a discourse through which a generalised eternal interconnection between people and land, as well as land and autonomy, can be made. Kastrinou & Layton (2016) show that reincarnation can be analysed as a *politics of time*. This is partly because of the uniqueness of Druze-to-Druze reincarnation, namely that Druze souls reincarnate only into Druze bodies, continuously, hence, embodying and recycling an ordinary community and kinship. However, they locate the apparent structural entropy as a contemporary discourse that is used by the Druze, as well as other groups that find themselves in structural disadvantage within modern nation states:

“Reincarnation is a discourse which lays a political and a geographic claim to time, in a similar fashion that nationhood implies, in the Westphalian sense, a claim over sovereign boundaries and frontiers. For [...] the Druze, material boundaries are of course important metaphysically as well as practically. Yet, their legitimacy (in search of a better word) collapses geography, whilst their time is place. Empires rise and fall. Nations wax and wane. Frontiers change hands. But, and here is the powerful potential of the discourse of reincarnation as a political claim to eternity, theirs is an autochthonous reckoning, a sovereignty of time.” (Kastrinou and Layton 2016: 166)

Reincarnation provides a narrative rootedness to the land that is not contingent upon the realisation of nationalist territorial claims. This observation helps to understand why the Druze in particular have felt less threatened, and in some ways emboldened, by their stateless condition: regardless of whether they have found themselves a minority group within or without a State, their claim to space through time has remained a consistent political strategy and source of reassurance. Moreover, Druze ideas about the sacredness of land also directly relate to the perceived autonomy that land-work provides (Aboultaif 2015; Kastrinou 2016; Khuri 2004). In the following Section we turn to look at how this cultural value in *autonomy through continued industrious engagement with the land* helps us to understand the role and importance of farming continuity as an act of resistance in itself.

#### **4.4 Resistance and Autonomy**

We as a people have a saying that the child and the land and the spirit are one and the same. We do not want to leave and be scattered ... When you die your blood should be in your land. This is what we believe. (Izzat al-Ayoub, in Abu Fakhr, 2000, pp. 15-16)

Autonomy, among the Druze, is one of the highest forms of piety because those who are able to sustain themselves from their own work in the land have a greater degree of independence from worldly, selfish-driven profit. It is not surprising that in the most religiously important retreat among the Druze, the *khalwa* of Bayada in Lebanon, the resident shaykhs there lead very humble, selfless and independent lives as they only consume what they themselves can produce from the land (Khuri 2004: 45). In the case of the GH, this religious orthopraxy of land autonomy has gained the additional political layer of resisting dependence upon Israeli occupation and economy. This ethic of resistance through the land was expressed by many of our respondents:

There is nothing politically important like the importance of the land. If there is no land there is no homeland and without a homeland there is no belonging, and without belonging we have no identity! (Salman)

Our home is the most sacred thing to us, we did not leave our land to find home, we wish that the homeland [Syria] comes back to us, so we resist the occupation... Your land is your honour, your home, you have to defend it. For me, homeland is the mother of man, the big house which protects everyone ... we have not once said that we are Israelis, we are Syrian Arabs under occupation and we want our homeland to be a secular democratic state. (Saida)

Our connection with mother earth is so deep and strong, we can't leave our homeland ... The principle is to keep our land, our homeland and Arabism (Ghali)







“Firstly, they [IDF] blockaded the villages: Masada alone, Buq'ata alone, alMajdal alone... During the period of the siege it was forbidden to go out, forbidden to see your neighbour, is forbidden to stand on the window! The strike was difficult! The [Israeli] soldiers distributed identities to people, but people threw them! ... Then, delegations came from the Arabs in Palestine, in solidarity with us and this was a sweet life... there was interaction with the people of Palestine, Arab members of the Knesset, even Jewish members of the Knesset, who were against this decision [the annexation]. We always had guests, who brought material and moral and financial aid. But then Israel stopped people entering our area, and then Israel cut off the milk for the kids, so they brought milk, and food... We made a committee responsible for the distribution [of food], to fulfil the needs of everyone in the village. People with shops [contributed], those who had cows was distributing milk for children. But what did they [IDF] do, they burned the wheat that feed the cows, so that they do not produce more milk! When something like that happened, people went to give him [the affected farmer] wheat, which they had in their homes, or run during the night to extinguish the fire... You feel unity at that time, that all people are one fist... If you come to my house I do not care that I do not have meat to cook, six months like this... no beef to cook, and there is no open shop. But we store in our house the supply of food, so can eat food from home one full year without the need to buy something from out, and more, I cook and I do not need to buy something from abroad, this is something sweet. Ah, the strike. We were happy.”

The strike finished, somewhat abruptly, when Israel invaded Lebanon in July 1982. Its main achievement was that the SDOGH were not forced to get Israeli citizenship, but rather Israeli ‘residency,’ while their nationality is ‘undefined’. As a Druze protester put it: ‘Israel can do whatever it wants to us: they can confiscate out land. They can kill us. But they cannot tell us who we are. They cannot change our identity’ (Kennedy 1984: 53). Although it has not spared the SOGH from human rights violations, the strike of 1982 continues to inform political resistance as well as economic cooperation among Syrian farmers and relative autonomy.

In the following Section we turn to consider the struggle for land between Israel and the SOGH in not only material but ideational terms. In particular, we explore the claims made by Israel for a legitimate presence in the land through the propagation of a particular landscape idea. In keeping with the argument developed in the preceding Sections, we argue that despite such efforts, it is the SOGH who are most legitimately able to register their claims to the land. This is on account of their claim to space through time (reincarnation discourse) and their capacity (unlike the Israelis who must necessarily conceal certain traces in the land) to draw on the landscape’s entire symbolic repertoire.

#### 4.5 Contesting the landscape idea: agriculture and tourism

A deep, symbolic and cultural connection to the land among agriculturalists has been reported widely in different contexts to explain why farming, farm work and the rural landscapes they produce are not considered only as material economic activities and artefacts but at the heart of the maintenance and reproduction of identities (e.g. Cohen 1985, Emery, 2014, Ingold 1984). This is also very much associated with the conveyance of a perceived/claimed right to the landscape on account of an historic and/or continued relationship between a particular community/nation and the land it works (Egoz et al., 2011). It is on these terms that we can understand the nature of the conflict between the Israeli government/settlers and the SOGH as much an issue of symbolism, ideas and identities as it is an issue of resource allocation. Moreover, in this context, the Golan landscape is not just a multifariously interpreted curiosity, but an ideological battleground over competing nationalist claims.

It is not surprising, therefore, that establishing a working and agricultural connectivity between Israelis and the land (whilst simultaneously depriving or severely limiting the ability of others to maintain such connections) has been central to the Israeli government (and Zionist aspirations) in their quest for establishing legitimate claims to the land. Egoz (2011) argues that land, and farming landscapes in particular, became symbolically central to Zionism’s efforts to promote the creation of a homeland by inventing a stereotype of ‘*the New Jew*’ as attached and rooted to territory as opposed to the traditional stereotype of the ‘*exilic wandering Jew* that has no roots’ (p. 167, italics in original). This need to establish a ‘settlement myth’ through the ideological loading of the landscape (Kellerman, 1996) has

been explored in relation to Israeli agricultural settlements by Handel et al. (2015). The point of these myths, they point out, is to ‘normalise’ the Israeli control of the territories and are primarily aimed at the secular Israeli citizen, as opposed to the occupied communities or the international community (see also Long, 2008; Ram, 2014, 2015; Gordon and Ram, 2016). Handel et al. show how the Israeli wine industry (mis)uses the concept of *terroir* to manufacture an association between land, soil, weather, people and rooted connectivity in the so-called ‘Wine Country’ of the Golan Heights. As the authors’ explain, despite the fact that it makes no sense to use the concept of *terroir* on a number of grounds in this context, it has proved extremely successful in appealing to middle class and secular Israelis who associate a privileged taste, and marker of their social standing, with a product that is marketed as a unique combination of the people and the lands that produced it. Long (2008), meanwhile, shows how diasporic tree-planting in occupied Palestine (promoted by the Jewish National Fund) serves a similar function of creating a physical, and deep connectivity or rootedness to the land. This is part of a Zionist quest for redemption through the land, that can only be achieved through cultivation. More specifically in the Golan Heights, Molony et al. (2009, p.50) have reported that settler communities have taken to importing and planting mature trees on their new farmsteads to give the impression of longevity and permanent rootedness to the landscape.

Whilst the manufactured idea of *terroir* and tree-planting can make physical claims to the future rootedness to a territory, they lack historical legitimacy. Writing about the Druze in Israel, Yiftachel and Segal (1998, p. 502) argue that the spiritual and intimate connectivity between the indigenous community and the land is regarded as highly threatening to the settler society, which is still in the process of nation-building. For the Druze, ‘the land is the same as that which their ancestors cultivated, lived on, and where they were ultimately buried. [This] gives indigenous populations a strong sense of belonging and a true sense of history. It is as if the indigenous minority *possesses the past in a specific place*’ (ibid. our emphasis). How, then, can the Israeli government and the Zionist movement link agricultural connectivity to the land with a long historical pedigree in its settlement myths and normalisation efforts? To answer this question we look at the example of the Jacob Sheep, which have been proposed to be ‘re-introduced’ to the Golan Heights as the living embodiment of Israel’s historic claims to the holy land. We have already seen how the opportunities for the SOGH to graze livestock have been virtually extinguished by the appropriation by Israel of communal grazing lands as state lands, the imposition of limitations on grazing through conservation law and the direct confiscation of livestock. This also serves a wider process of disassociating the indigenous community with the land via their stock. The historical legitimacy of a relationship between stock, people, and place has been explored by anthropologists through recourse to the ‘genetic metaphor’ (Gray, 1998, Emery, 2010). This suggests that just as livestock are bred to be suited to live in particular environments, so too are the herders and farmers who tend them. This metaphor is powerfully expressed in the case of the Jacob Sheep.

The story (as it is framed) begins in Canada with the happenstantial acquisition of four Jacob sheep by Israeli ex-pat Gil and South African Jenna Lewinsky and is reported in *The Times of Israel* (Melanie Lidman) in December 2015. The newspaper article reports how the couple became fascinated by the history of the breed and their connectivity to Judaism and the Middle East. Moreover, they became motivated by a desire to repatriate the sheep to their land of origin: the Nation of Israel, and specifically the Golan Heights. The sheep are described as one of the oldest ‘heritage breeds’ in the world and are linked to Judaism through the book of Genesis, in which Jacob (after whom the breed is named) is recorded as having tended a flock of sheep with ‘spots and speckles’. The Lewinskys thus describe the sheep as ‘biblical’ and Jewish with a story that parallels that of the Jewish people:

“What drew us to the Jacob sheep is that the story parallels the story of the Jewish people,” explained Jenna Lewinsky ... “Jews have been wandering for 2,000 years, and the sheep have a similar story, from Canaan to Canada today. It’s a full journey.”

The couple lament the fact that whilst the ‘exilic’ Jews have returned to their homeland, the Jacob sheep have not. It is clear from the narrative of the story, however, that the sheep are to be used as much as a justification for the ‘return’ of a Jewish population to the land and occupied territories of

Israel, as the nation and the people are to be used as a justification for the ‘return’ of the sheep. The friends of the Jacob sheep website (<http://friendsofthejacobsheep.weebly.com/>), for instance, lists its aims as:

1. To conserve the ancient heirloom (unaltered) sheep flock and bring them back to their land and nation of origin: The state of Israel
2. To re-establish a Jewish national flock in the land and nation of their origin

The reason that the sheep can perform this function so well, is because of the historical legitimacy they give to the Jewish people and the claimed territories of Israel:

The Lewinskys point out that sheep have always been intricately woven into the history of Judaism, from the wool used for ritual garments like the tallit to the sacrificial paschal lamb. “Moses was a shepherd. He saw the burning bush when he was running after sheep,” said Gil Lewinsky. “Attending to livestock is a core profession of our people, and an important part of our roots.”

Hence the sheep, through their association with the Jewish people, and their association with the lands and occupied territories of Israel provide a legitimacy for a Jewish presence. But it is a legitimacy that can only be upheld if the Jewish people and their sheep can be reunited on ‘their lands’. This mutuality of the Jacob sheep and the Jewish people, and their associated right to the land, is extended through a potent use of the genetic metaphor. The article reports that the Lewinskys specifically wish to establish a heritage farm in the Golan Heights because there ‘the mineral rich soils mean they won’t have to provide supplemental minerals like farmers do in other parts of the world’. This could be interpreted as evidence of the Sheep’s, and by extension their Jewish shepherds’, right to the Golan landscape through the concept of being ‘bred to’ the land (Gray, 1998). And if the link between the sheep’s genetic right and the Jewish people’s genetic right to dwell in the Golan was not explicit enough, the article also reports that the sheep share a ‘uniquely Jewish’ genetic disorder: Tay-Sachs disease, which affects Ashkenazi Jews. This powerful narrative thus asserts that the Sheep and the Jewish people are genetically bound to one another and to the land to which they lay claim.

The effectiveness of this nationalist rhetoric is evidenced by the fact that the Lewinskys were able to overcome insurmountable legal and bureaucratic hurdles to successfully transport a flock of Jacob Sheep to Israel in January 2017. This was on account of high level support for the ‘beautiful story’ by the Israeli Embassy in Canada and a crowd-sourcing campaign which raised a significant amount of money to cover the transportation costs and taxes (which in themselves amounted to \$80,000). Now in Israel, the friends of the Jacob Sheep website contains links to the many news publications covering their story and a new campaign to name newly born lambs. The Lewinskys are also campaigning for the Jacob sheep to be recognised as the national animal of Israel and to be afforded special conservation status.

Whilst this ideational work, through agricultural connectivity to the land, continues to gain momentum, the Israeli government’s aspiration to populate the Golan Heights with settler farmers has fallen short of target. Where the Israeli government have been hugely successful, both ideationally and materially, however, is in their claim to the Golan Heights as an Israeli tourist destination. This idea of touristic consumption through recreation appeals particularly to the secular, middle class Israeli population, at whom much of the nationalist rhetoric and claims to Israeli rights to the Golan are aimed. Indeed, it is this fact, argue Handel et al., (2015, p. 1360), which explains why the secular Israeli citizen has more readily accepted Israel’s claim to the Golan than to the occupied Palestinian territories (Gordon and Ram [2016] also point out that this is facilitated by the more ‘complete’ level of ethnic cleansing in the Golan Heights). Whilst the Palestinian territories have religiously important sites, there is little that is attractive to the secular Israeli to encourage physical engagement with the landscape.

Immediately after, if not before, the war in 1967 it seems the Israeli government had already earmarked the Golan Heights as a future tourist destination. Ram (2015) reports that archaeologists and planners were dispatched to the Golan Heights to identify abandoned villages which should be retained on account of their “archaeological, historical, and touristic values” (ISA, 1967; 1968, in Ram, 2015, p. 27). Ram’s more sustained contribution to the study of the development of tourism in the Golan Heights, however, relates to his examination of the normalisation of the Golan landscape through spatial mimicry. Ram (2014) argues that tourism in the Golan Heights, and specifically the development of the Mount Hermon ski resort, is part of a domestication strategy aimed at secular Israelis. The development, in physical appearance as well as in marketing, mimics a European Alpine ski resort intended to render the militarily important mountain a site of passive fun and entertainment. Moreover, representations of the resort mobilise a discourse of whiteness which, argues Ram (2014), serves to set the snow-capped mountain apart from its Middle Eastern setting and the users of the mountain apart from their Arab co-habitants. The success of the resort, and of tourism more generally in the Golan, was seen by our respondents to marginalise and discriminate against the indigenous population on account of their exclusion from the ability to benefit economically from the tourist industry and, perhaps more importantly, because they felt the development excluded them from accessing ‘their’ sacredly important mountain:

There are no services in Golan that make our lives much easier. It is hard to develop industrially and we are prevented from benefiting from tourism. For example Mount Hermon is close to Majdal Shams but all the economic benefits from the tourist trade go to Israelis! People from Majdal Shams can’t visit their Mount Hermon without having to pay money to enter, whilst the Israelis profit hugely, especially during the ski season (Thiab)

Despite the success of the tourist enterprise, Ram (2014, 2015) also argues that the normalisation process never entirely succeeds as the military history and evidence of the Golan as a space of exception remains all too present in the contemporary landscape. These cracks are also exploited by the Arab Centre for Human Rights in the Golan Heights (Al-Marsad), which has launched its own ‘alternative tourism’ service (see also Aviv, 2011 on alternative Jewish tourism in the West Bank). With this service Al-Marsad aim to challenge the Israeli tourist narrative which seeks to ‘normalise the occupation’ and cover up ‘the injustices committed against the native Syrian population’. Instead, the alternative tourist experience gives the ‘local Syrian population a voice to speak about their experiences under the occupation’ and shows ‘the beauty of the Golan through a human rights lens’. Activities offered include touring indigenous towns, destroyed villages and Israeli settlements alongside more conventional and recreational touristic activities such as hiking, kayaking and swimming in hot natural springs. What Al-Marsad is able to do then, is to appropriate the development and portrayal of the Golan (by Israel) as a tourist destination (founded on its natural beauty and outdoor activities) whilst simultaneously bringing to the fore the very human rights violations and indigenous struggles that the conventional Israeli tourism tries to hide. The indigenous Syrians are able to consolidate their political narrative around the landscapes’ entire symbolic repertoire, whilst the Israelis are necessarily more limited, and thus have to be more creative, in their quest for legitimacy and ideological claims to the land.

This Section has demonstrated that whilst the Israeli government clearly has significant power and authority over the land as a material resource, the idea of the land, of the landscape and the quest for legitimacy through rootedness, is far more contested and contestable. Moreover, we might say that in order to earn a living from the land under the constraints of occupation the indigenous Syrians have to work that land far harder than their Israeli counterparts on settler farms. In contrast, however, we might further observe that the Israeli’s have to work the *idea* of the land far harder than do the indigenous Syrians. Despite the Israeli government’s efforts to erase evidence of Syrian inhabitation from the Golan landscape that landscape, in all its variety, remains an historically and symbolically rich resource upon which the indigenous population builds its political claims. As Emery and Carrithers (2016) suggest, through their agricultural, cultural and historical proximity to the land, the rural indigenous population is more readily able to convert a politics of experience into a legitimate politics of representation. It is this, combined with a small but strong foothold of continued private



ownership, that makes the Stateless condition of the indigenous Syrian population so interesting when considering rural emancipation more widely; it somehow renders them rooted but out-of-reach.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion: Stateless but rooted

Unlike their Israeli counterparts, the SDOGH have not pursued minority protection through deference to state power and conscription to the Jewish-Druze covenant as might have been assumed. And unlike the majority of their Syrian counterparts, the SDOGH have not closed religious ranks and emphasised their Druzeness in response to the Syrian War. Instead, they have resisted the deployment of sectarian identity politics by the Israeli and Syrian regimes to breed fear and garner consent. In this paper we explain this emancipatory political positioning on account of: a specific historical and economic context; a specific and strong cultural and spiritual connectivity to the land, and; a unique condition of statelessness. But what makes their stateless condition unique? Conventionally, statelessness is associated with displaced populations who find themselves uprooted and *lacking* the protection of any state (Soguk 1999; Walzer 1983). However, the possibility of statelessness lies at the heart of modern state formation, as Neocleous provocatively shows through the history of how bandits and pirates became the first stateless people (2003: 100-103). Lacking the loyalty to belong to, as well as lacking of need for protection from, the newly-found territorial sovereignty of the state, transformed bandits and pirates from reliable mercenaries to threatening adversaries: statelessness, thus, became 'inherently dangerous to the state' (Neocleous 2003: 109).

The uniqueness of the SOGH resistance relates to their condition of statelessness, a condition that nevertheless does not imply 'landless' - as is usually the case with other stateless people. The fact that the native population has remain both 'rooted,' in terms of maintaining and even enhancing its connection with the land, as well as outside of the ('protection') of both the Syrian and the Israeli states, has, thus created a unique situation in relation to the political economy of its resistance. Despite Israeli expropriations of land, the majority of the indigenous population remain propertied and they have fiercely resisted Israeli efforts to deprive them of their land and their autonomy-through-the-land. Indeed, the right to keep producing food from the land is dialectically related to a religious value in honour and autonomy. Moreover, reincarnation and the discursive mobilisation of the symbolic landscape, provides a powerful and legitimising political claim to the land. This claim, furthermore, is not contingent upon the patronage of a state; it recognises the precariousness of the state form and transcends spatial territorial claims through a 'sovereignty of time.' It is the strength of this assurance that the SOGH hold in the land that helps us understand how they have managed to maintain an emancipatory political positioning vis-a-vis both Israeli and Syrian populist strategies. Rather, then, than their remote topographical vantage in the mountains of the Golan Heights affording them security, it is precisely their stateless yet rooted (ad)vantage that allows them to remain politically aloof from the excesses of authoritarian populism.

Whilst rural areas and landscapes are often mobilised ideologically in nationalist discourses, we have set out an argument in this paper that it does not necessarily follow that those who dwell in rural locations are particularly susceptible to such discourses. On the contrary, since such portrayals of the rural are most often set apart from ideas of the urban they work better on visitors to, and gazers upon such landscapes who achieve some sense of national self-realisation and a re-authenticated sense of returning to one's roots (Edensor, 2002, p. 40). The SOGH, on the other hand, have no such unfulfilled longings and it is their very proximity and intimacy to the rural landscape that allows them to demystify ideological appropriations and pursue, despite the Occupation, their own emancipatory political agendas.

Back in Damascus in 2009, a student from the occupied Golan Heights had told this joke: the Syrian *moukhabarat* (secret security) put two people in prison: one is a pimp, the other a revolutionary. So, the pimp complains to the revolutionary that his body is not free to enjoy sex. And the revolutionary says 'my mind has never been more free than now in prison!' So, there we are: the free man in jail, and the Syrian Druze in the Golan Heights; stifled by occupation, stateless, yet rooted and defiant.



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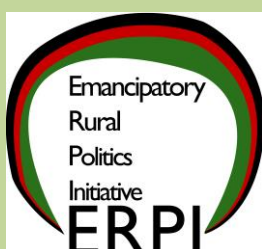
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