

NATALIA GUTKOWSKI. STRUGGLING FOR TIME: ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND AGRARIAN RESISTANCE IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE. STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2024. 336 P. ISBN: 9781503636828

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Natalia Gutkowski's *Struggling for time* advances a compelling shift from the spatial focus of settler colonial studies to the temporal frameworks through which agrarian governance operates in Israel/Palestine. Israel is placed first in the book to refer to, in the words of the author, the '1948 borders of the Israeli state or historic mandatory Palestine excluding Gaza and the West Bank' (2024: 1). Drawing upon interviews with state planners in different ministries (notably the Ministries of Agriculture and Interior), conservation ecologists and Palestinian agronomists in the 1948 state of Israel, the book argues that the Israeli state 'settles time' as much as it occupies land, calibrating durations from bureaucratic rhythms to the lifetime of olive trees. The concept of a 'time grab', justified in the name of past heritage or agrarian future, anchors the analysis.

Methodologically, the book is a state-system ethnography within Israel's 1948 borders, built upon multi-sited fieldwork (2012-2015) that sits atop roughly fifteen years of engagement with local agrarian environments. The author's positionality as an Ashkenazi Jewish Israeli is discussed albeit not sufficiently given its inherent complexities. The book was written before the beginning of the genocide in Gaza and daily Israeli attacks in the West Bank. As the author argues, most of the discussions on Palestinian agriculture had so far been based in the Occupied Territories, hence the need to give voice to Palestinians within the state of Israel. These voices are however mostly felt through few encounters with Palestinian farmers (mostly highly educated, relatively wealthy, men) and Palestinians working inside 'the state'. The author's positionality does however allow for unique granular access to the Israeli ministries and the workings of state bureaucracies. Gutkowski does explicitly state that this is not a study of Palestinian agriculture per se, but of how power and control operate in the settler-colonial encounter through agrarian governance. That clarity effectively frames some of the book's strengths and limits from the start.

The first chapter, 'Draining the swamp', centres on Sahl al-Battuf (the Beit Netofa Plain), an endangered wetland whose fate exemplifies the notion of 'green grabs'. In 2012, the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture announced a new 'sustainable agriculture' program that Palestinians in that area had to implement. The author powerfully shows the irony behind Israeli agricultural policies that historically drained these same wetlands, considered to be a relic of 'non modern' Palestinian agriculture that today state ecologists suddenly champion as heritage landscape that should be preserved. In both cases, the policies are at the expense of Palestinians, displaced under the rationale of either 'modernisation' or 'conservation'. While

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in the former case displacement was executed using police or military confrontation, in the latter, time is the mechanism of power as Palestinians face procedural delays and stagnation, ultimately abandoning their farming livelihood. The chapter effectively shows how conservation and planning bureaucracies depoliticise resource allocation in their discourses while still dispossessing Palestinians of their land and allocating resources, such as water, to favour neighbouring Israeli Jewish farms.

The second chapter, 'Returning to the seventh year', tracks the institutionalisation of *shmita*, the biblically mandated sabbatical year for the land every seven years, into a modern regime of agricultural governance. Here, scripture becomes policy: *shmita* is mobilised to perform Jewish indigeneity through agricultural time, while the state must heavily spend to manage the resulting economic challenges of a legally imposed fallow year every seven years (temporary land sales, certification schemes, off-ground container cultivation). Gutkowski juxtaposes the state's energetic accommodation of *shmita* with its neglect of Muslim inheritance law that fragments Palestinian holdings, underscoring selective temporal legality. The chapter also further complicates the familiar axiom that settler colonialism is 'a struggle of land over labour', by showing how labour opportunities for Palestinians are inherently dependent upon Jewish religious calendars. Palestinian producers often fare best in *shmita* years becoming practically entangled with such institutionalised time.

Chapter three, 'Cultivating time in an olive tree', powerfully reveals how time control reaches the olive groves. The development of the Barnea olive cultivar, adapted to irrigation and with juvenility reduced from decades to a few years, shapes the life of olives to fit industrial agriculture. In 2016, Palestinians still owned most olive groves inside Israel, yet Jewish industrial plantations now produce far more oil per hectare, overtaking Palestinian production in quantity and access to markets. Meanwhile, Palestinian terraced groves are reframed as 'biblical' scenery for tourism. Gutkowski adds nuance by refusing a simple modern/traditional binary by showing how some Palestinian agronomists also advocate for such techniques of olive 'modernisation'. Industrial time and its focus on short-term efficiency takes over knowledge, skills and olive varieties that had been carefully crafted by Palestinians over centuries. The chapter deftly links short-term efficiency to long-term ecological loss while complexifying the notions of a single Palestinian versus Israeli agriculture.

The final chapter, 'Freeing time like a Palestinian agronomist', turns inward to Palestinian agronomists employed by the state. It highlights how professionalism and 'neutrality' in bureaucratic interactions, can be a survival strategy for Palestinians to protect careers and families. Resistance, Gutkowski suggests, often occurs in the 'margins': in the after-hours or the retirement projects where people reallocate their time. The chapter's provocation is that free time is political time. This chapter is, in my opinion, the weakest in terms of structure and argument. Framing 'neutrality' and free time as 'resistance' remains unconvincing.

More generally, making 'time' the master analytical framework sometimes risks overreach. Most, if not all, of the workings of power and legality could be glossed within a 'temporal structure'; the book is hence strongest where it shows the specific instruments through which temporal power holds: religious calendars, agrarian imaginaries, waiting time, agricultural production cycles, or the appeal to biblical or future time in policies. For a book on agriculture, that ends with the very vast question of how to democratise food production under climate change, the focus on time sometimes comes at the expense of the agrarian aspect of *agrarian* governance. Who lies behind terms used by the author such as 'agriculturalists' for instance? Potential comparisons with agricultural developments in neighbouring countries could for example have clarified what is settler-specific and what is agro-industrial more broadly.

None of these reservations blunt the book's importance. In an era when 'sustainable futures' are invoked to justify decisions worldwide, the book effectively shows the many paradoxes behind Israel's supposed commitment to 'sustainable agriculture' and 'conservation', a hypocrisy made even more intolerable since 2023. This book is hence an extremely well-documented, ethnographic and historical account of how the politics of time has long shaped agriculture and mediated the dispossession of Palestinians in Israel/Palestine.

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