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## Animal Frontiers: A Tale of Three Zoos in Israel/Palestine

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*Cultural Critique, Number 85, Fall 2013, pp. 122-162*

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## **Animal Frontiers: A Tale of Three Zoos in Israel/Palestine**

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# ANIMAL FRONTIERS

## A TALE OF THREE ZOOS IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

*Irus Braverman*

הם מצאו גוויה	<i>They found a body</i>
מה זה היה	<i>What was it</i>
מה זה היה	<i>What was it</i>
מי אשם ברצח הצביה?	<i>Who is responsible for the murder of the gazelle?</i>

—*Chava Alberstein, "The Gazelle"* (translated from Hebrew by author)

**T**hursday, June 23, 2011. I am finally making my way to the Qalqilya Zoo. Carefully following the instructions I jotted down the night before, I promise myself that my next research site will not be situated across conflicted borders. My cell phone rings; it is my mother. Although she has been living in Israel since 1959, she has never set foot in the place I am headed to. "Don't you care about your children?" she pleads with me. I explain that it took almost a month to organize this trip and that I am not traveling through the border alone, but with an acclaimed Israeli veterinarian who knows his way around the West Bank. I hope I sound more confident than I really am.

Fifty minutes after leaving Jerusalem, I am at the border. Although I have arrived on time, no one is waiting for me. I sigh, reflecting back on the efforts it took to coordinate this visit. My study of Israeli-Palestinian zoos began at Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo, officially known as the Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Jerusalem. It was fairly easy to track down the zoo's central staff; and for the most part, they responded quite readily to my request to interview them. During May and June 2011, I interviewed a number of personnel from Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo and from the other major zoo in Israel: Ramat Gan's Safari,

officially known as the Zoological Center of Tel Aviv–Ramat Gan. Although the interviewees mentioned the unique relationship between the Biblical and the Qalqilya Zoos, initially they were unable to provide me with meaningful contact information for the latter zoo. Eventually, I managed to speak with the veterinarian of the Qalqilya Zoo, who invited me for a visit. It then took a couple of weeks to figure out how to physically reach the zoo, located in what Israel defines as Area “A” of the occupied West Bank and legally inaccessible to Israelis. Just before giving up on the visit, I found out that in a few days’ time the Safari Zoo’s former veterinarian, Dr. Motke Levison, would be transporting an animal from Ramat Gan’s Safari, at the center of Israel, to the Qalqilya Zoo, on the western edge of the West Bank. I decided to join the ride, and now I am waiting to meet him at the border.

I wait for a little while longer and then call Levison. He is in the parking lot, he says, transferring the animal from the Safari’s keeper. I rush to witness the transaction that has made my visit to the Qalqilya Zoo possible. When I arrive at the parking lot, Levison is signing paperwork. The animal—a member of the raccoon family known as a coati—is already in the rear of the car, and I am invited in, too. Escorted by an Israeli veterinarian and a caged coati, my journey across the Israel–West Bank border and into human–animal frontiers thus begins.

If I thought it was difficult to arrange a visit to the Qalqilya Zoo, visiting the Gaza Zoo was truly impossible. It was difficult to determine whether a zoo in Gaza even exists. I found bits and pieces of information on the Internet, but how to trace the actual people? None of my interviewees at the Israeli or Qalqilya Zoos had any associations with the Gaza Zoo, only forty-eight miles away. As it happened, I was invited to present my work at the French Cultural Center in Jerusalem and met several people with connections to the French Consulate in Gaza. Two months later, a consulate official sent me a cell phone number for the founder of Gaza’s zoo, veterinarian Dr. Saud Shawa. I was pleasantly surprised when the number worked. Under present circumstances and given my identity as a Jewish Israeli, it was impossible for me to visit the zoo. However, my telephone conversations with Shawa, our subsequent e-mail correspondences, and various newspaper articles provided sufficient information about this zoo for the purposes of this project.



Figure 1. A map of the Israel/Palestine zoos discussed in this article. Compiled by author.

Situated within forty-eight miles of each other at the heart of Israel/Palestine, three zoos—Jerusalem, Qalqilya, and Gaza—tell different, as well as similar, stories about both human and nonhuman survival across conflicted borders and boundaries. These stories provide a fresh perspective on the relationship between the humans that inhabit this space—Israelis and Palestinians—while at the same time affording a glimpse into the human–animal relations performed through this cohabitation.

The Persian fallow deer at Jerusalem’s Biblical Zoo fuses this zoo’s mission of biblical revival with an upbeat one about animal conservation. At the same time, the zoo stresses that its uniqueness lies not only in its special animals but also in the diversity of its patrons, mainly the ultraorthodox Jews and the Palestinian minorities of Jerusalem. Accordingly, the zoo presents multiculturalism as its central attraction, romanticizing the copresence of Jews and Palestinians in this shared physical space. But while zoo animals are common objects of the gaze by the two central minority groups that visit the zoo, it is difficult not to notice that otherwise, these groups refrain from contact.

Only thirty miles away, on the other side of the Israeli–West Bank border, the Qalqilya Zoo embodies a second model of Israeli–Palestinian relationship. Rather than copresence in a shared physical space, however, this model relies on a spatial separation between Israelis and Palestinians, who are at the same time linked by professional and scientific acts of giving, receiving, and mutually caring for zoo animals. The Israeli and Palestinian experts who work at these zoos share the belief that no matter what one thinks about the human conflict, one must take care that the animals do not become its victims. While humans must abide by national definitions and borders, animals are thus elevated to an existence beyond borders. Qalqilya Zoo’s veterinarian Sami Khader expresses this notion by saying: “We do not care if we are enemies in war. . . . We work only for one thing: to save these animals” (interview). Such a mutual adoption of conservation goals therefore provides the Israeli and Palestinian zoo professionals an escape from the everyday grind of war into a cosmopolitan realm of animal-focused cooperation. In this realm, the animals are portrayed as innocent bystanders, caught in a crossfire that has nothing to do with their simple world. This article explores how conditions of war—and the long

curfews and closures of the Second Intifada in particular<sup>1</sup>—have challenged this shared understanding.

Finally, across the Israel–Gaza border, Gaza Zoo’s lioness, Sabrina, tells a story of bloody conflict and war. Here, copresence is out of the question. Instead, separation and estrangement characterize the Israeli–Palestinian relationship. Indeed, although the Gaza Zoo is in the same geographical region as the two other zoos studied here, they are separated from each other to such an extent that their personnel do not know much about each other. Instead of acting as the benevolent occupier handing down animals as a reward for good behavior, as in the case of the Qalqilya Zoo, Israel has prohibited any animal transportation in and out of Gaza. Most of the Gaza Zoo animals are thus illegal aliens: smuggled from Egypt through underground tunnels in spite of the Israeli prohibitions. The only encounter between the Biblical and Gaza Zoos occurs within the paradigm of enemy soldiers at war.

Together, these stories about the three zoos, situated across conflicted borders in a divided landscape, provide insight into the different modalities of biopolitical existence—or conviviality (Hinchliffe and Whatmore)—in this region. They also explicate the utility of conservation narratives for fur washing—akin to the pink washing identified with LGBT politics in Israel/Palestine (Schulman)—a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing aggression toward Palestinians behind an image of modernity. Through the work of Israeli zoos and other conservation organizations in furthering their benevolent missions, aspects of Palestinian life that formally lie beyond the purview of the Israeli nation-state can come under its informal control. In this state of emergency, both sides seem to find it easier to care for impoverished and innocent animals than to care for the humans on the other side.

This situation readily evokes the concept “ecological imperialism”: the strategic imposition of Western environmental ideals on developing countries. According to Paul Dreissen, the ideological environmental movement “imposes the views of mostly wealthy, comfortable Americans and Europeans on mostly poor, desperate Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans. . . . It prevents needy nations from using the very technologies that developed countries employed to become rich, comfortable, and free of disease” (Dreissen, i; see also Guha 2000; 2006). Martinez-Alier calls this “antihuman environmentalism” or “green neoliberalism” (for a very different definition of this term as a consequence

of nonhuman rather than human conduct, see Crosby). Whereas its operations across the contested political borders occur largely through education and disciplining rather than through brute force, the modern zoo nonetheless promotes a view of nature and conservation that is considerably Western. Indeed, the modern zoo is a bourgeois institution that operates under the common premise of a nature–human split (Davis; Wirtz; Nixon, 188–97). Conversely, this article will draw on “a more pluralistic approach that recognize[s] both the long history of colonial and postcolonial arrogance and the hidden histories of cosmopolitanism through which it proceeds” (Lorimer, 501; see also Adams and Mulligan) to expose the ways in which the traditional distinctions between human and nonhuman life (and death) manifest in the liminal space of the frontier.

## **JERUSALEM’S BIBLICAL ZOO**

Yet another endangered Persian fallow deer lies dead beside the train tracks, raising the death toll to seventy. How could this animal be so dumb so as to get hit by what is surely the slowest train in the world, a train that furthermore runs between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv only ten times a day? Could it be that the enormous efforts to reintroduce this biblical animal to the Holy Land have reached such an unimpressive dead end? And why even bother resurrecting the fallow deer from extinction in the first place? Ironically, the success of this momentous reintroduction now hinges upon the speed of a train and on legal struggles over the right to euthanize feral dogs. To tell the story of the Persian fallow deer, however, one must begin with the inception of Jerusalem’s Biblical Zoo.

### **A Brief History**

The Biblical Zoo was established in 1940 by the late Professor Aharon Shulov as a small children’s zoo in the middle of an ultraorthodox neighborhood (figure 2). Its prominent mission was to feature “animals from the Land of Israel, with special emphasis on those species mentioned in the Bible” (Jerusalem’s Biblical Zoo, 2009a). The zoo relocated several times, finally settling in its current site near the southwestern Jerusalem neighborhood of Malkha in 1993.<sup>2</sup> Originally, the





Figure 2. Ultraorthodox Jews observing fowl with tiger in background, at the old Biblical Zoo, circa 1951. Photograph by Trostler. Courtesy of Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo.

zoo was designed not only to hold biblical animals but also to reenact animal scenes from the Bible. “It was the idea to focus on biblical animals, biblical zoological life, [and] biblical stories,” the zoo’s director Shai Doron tells me in an interview. The phrase “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,” for example, was performed to the letter. “Of course, the wolf ate the lamb, eventually,” the zoo’s general curator Shmulik Yedvab adds in my interview with him. “These scenes were part of the deal at that time,” Yedvab says. “The old time,” he clarifies when noticing the look on my face.

The zoo’s biblical mission has evolved since the “old time” and is currently infused with a strong conservationist conviction. “You can call them biblical animals,” says Yedvab, “but in fact they are local animals,” he explains. “In America they protect the gorillas of Africa. Here, we are still trying to protect wolves and vultures and leopards and other endangered animals from Israel. Still alive, and still native” (interview). “We don’t need to send our zoologists, our keepers, and our researchers and visitors way back to the rainforest in Brazil,” says the zoo’s director along these lines. “We tell them: ‘go ten miles from here to try to preserve the habitat used by the fallow deer’” (Doron, interview). Such a focus on the region’s native, or indigenous, species attempts to forge a link between the national mission to resurrect

animals from biblical themes and landscapes and the global mission to save endangered species and their ecosystems. Whereas conservation has been defined by some as an attempt “to render the present eternal” (Hinchliffe, 88; Braverman 2012a, 171), in this case it is also an attempt to eternalize the past. This course of events exemplifies that ecology is “neither under written by nor always clearly distinct from cultures,” thereby supporting political ecologists’ refusal to see nature as a fixed, apolitical entity (Hinchliffe, 89).

Along these lines, the zoo’s director invokes the symbol of Noah’s Ark and applies it to the contemporary conservation performed by his zoo, thereby conflating the biblical with the cosmopolitan animal. He says: “We decided to keep the story of Noah’s Ark. Noah’s Ark is the best icon for wildlife conservation. Noah was the first vet ever, the first animal keeper ever. . . . He was the first conservationist ever” (Doron, interview). Noah is also a quintessentially biblical story. The bodies of zoo animals thus serve as a bridge across the temporal void between the two archetypes of Hebrew nationhood: the ancient Israelites and their modern Zionist descendants. By doing so, these animals also construct a symbolic continuity between the divine role of Noah and the implied similarly divine role of Israeli conservationists (Braverman 2009, 82; Zerubavel, 33).

A few other, perhaps less public, features of the Biblical Zoo flow from its unique location in the Holy Land. For example, zoos in Israel greatly benefit from the Jewish practice of tithing. According to Jewish law, 10 percent of the fruits of the Land of Israel must be set aside as a donation to the priestly *Cohen* tribe that traditionally took care of the Jewish Temple and its animals. In a technical maneuver, every several years Israeli zoos sell all of their animals to a *Cohen* (priest). As animals of the *Cohen*, zoo animals are fed top quality fruits and vegetables without pay (figure 3). The tithing practice thus establishes both symbolic and legal ties between the zoo, the Jewish Temple, and the Zionist nation.

### **The Persian Fallow Deer**

The Persian fallow deer (figure 4) is the ultimate embodiment of the zoo’s fusion of biblical and conservation missions. According to the zoo’s director, in “one of the most ambitious and prestigious projects



Figure 3. Elephant feasting on tithe, Ramat Gan's Safari. Photograph by author, June 16, 2011.



Figure 4. Persian fallow deer at the Biblical Wildlife Reserve in Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo. Photograph by Yaara Forest Tamari, 2013. Courtesy of Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo.

in the world, the Israeli authorities together with the Biblical Zoo succeeded to bring [this animal] back to Israel, to breed it in captivity, to find locations that can accommodate it again, and to release [it] back to the wild" (Doron, interview). Apparently, deer are one of several animal species that existed in this region during biblical times, went locally extinct, and are now being "reintroduced" to the landscape by the State of Israel. The deer therefore represent the state of the Jewish people, whose return (in Hebrew, "ascent") to the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) signifies their reentry into history (Gregory, 79).

The reintroduction of endangered animals from captivity "back" into the wild has been a trendy enterprise for zoos worldwide. Highlighting the connections between *in situ* (in the wild) and *ex situ* (in captivity), reintroductions bolster and legitimize the survival of zoos in this era of conservation (Braverman 2012a, 64). At the Biblical Zoo, the notion of resurrecting the biblical landscape through the release of ostensibly biblical species into contemporary ecosystems is a distinctly religious and nationalist take on the reintroductions practiced by zoos worldwide.

The fallow deer's entanglement with Zionism has been quite remarkable. In the 1960s, Israeli general Avraham Yoffe assembled a panel of experts to determine which modern-day animals correspond to those mentioned in the Bible, with the goal of reintroducing them to the contemporary Israeli landscape. The Persian fallow deer (*Dama mesopotamica*) is mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy as one of the hoofed animals the Hebrews were allowed to eat. It once ranged throughout the Middle East, including Israel and Palestine, but by 1875 remained only in Iran. By the turn of the twentieth century, this deer was believed to be extinct, until the discovery of two small populations in Iran in 1956 (Rabiei and Saltz). Around that time, conservationists captured two foals and a stag and sent them to the Opel Zoo in Germany; they also captured six more deer for breeding in Iran.

Apparently, this still was not enough. As the uncertain future of Iran after the Islamic revolution was perceived by Israel as a threat to the continued survival of the fallow deer, Israel orchestrated a sensitive military operation to rescue the deer at the eleventh hour. The *Wall Street Journal* reported:

As Iran was hurtling toward Islamic revolution in 1978, [an Israeli zoologist landed at Tehran's Airport,] carrying a blow-dart gun disguised as

a cane and secret orders from General Yoffe. His mission: to capture four Persian fallow deer and deliver them to Israel before the Shah's government collapsed. . . . The deer were loaded onto the last El Al flight out of Tehran, packed between mountains of carpets and valuables that fleeing Iranian Jews and Israelis were taking with them. (Levinson)

In the name of conservation, Israel smuggled critically endangered animals from Iran. Such a state of emergency whereby (international) law is no longer operable was used to justify Israel's frontier mission, which transgressed national boundaries. Here, conservation justified an outside and seemingly apolitical intervention in what is traditionally considered the state's exclusive prerogative: the control and management of its wildlife.

From these four deer founders, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority started a captive breeding program in northern Israel. The Biblical Zoo joined the fallow deer conservation effort in 1997, when the first individuals were brought to the zoo's Biblical Wildlife Reserve (see figure 4). Today, the Biblical Zoo holds the largest captive herd of Persian fallow deer in the world (Braverman 2012b; Jerusalem Biblical Zoo 2009b). Yedvab explains that "all the existing deer populations in the world started with 2.4 [two females–four males]. That's all we [had], and that is what we worked with. Now there are more than 300 deer in captivity in Israel and 250 in Europe" (interview). Although captive breeding has been successful, some geneticists caution that Israel's population is extremely inbred, being 95 percent genetically similar (Rabiei and Saltz).<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the fallow deer's reintroduction is the crowning achievement of an ambitious program that has also "returned" biblical onagers, oryxes, and ostriches to Israel's wild.

In Israel, fallow deer have been reintroduced into two locations: the Carmel mountains in northern Israel and the Jerusalem foothills. In the second location, the Biblical Zoo and its collaborating agencies ran into two unexpected obstacles. First was the train. This is ironic, as "the trains are this great green solution to switch from public cars and buses to public transportation with no pollution" (Doron, interview; see also Werner, interview). The specific train, Doron tells me, runs at a "very slow speed ten times a day." Despite this, "the fallow deer somehow found a way to get trapped on the tracks and die. We had more than 60 percent mortality [rates]," Doron laments during our interview.<sup>4</sup>

A second obstacle to successful deer reintroduction has been feral dogs. Abandoned by Israeli families, domestic dogs have been forming large feral packs that “finish the deer just like that” (Doron, interview). “Dogs are not part of the wildlife here,” Doron complains. “It is something that *we*, human beings, brought into the wild. And now we must ask for permits from the government to shoot the[m]?! That’s not fair game.” “For the fallow deer—freedom means death,” he concludes. Doron’s approach exemplifies the ecological bias of Israeli conservationists that is founded “on the pre-Darwinian view that humanity is separate from nature, and also on the Romantic view that what is nature is especially valuable” (Warren, 434). Indeed, Israeli conservationists privilege the fallow deer, whose existence in this habitat does not occur in the present but “occurred naturally in the past” (a category that is classified by Warren more generally as “formerly native” [431]), over the “species introduced by humans, either deliberately or unintentionally” (classified by Warren as “alien” [431]).

The clashes between the “feral” animals’ right to life and that of “wild” animals reached a dramatic peak when the Biblical Zoo declared a freeze on any future reintroduction of fallow deer. “We told the Ministry of Environment: ‘until you give us a solution to the problem of feral dogs, [we will have] no more fallow deer in the wild’” (Doron, interview). The strategy worked. According to Yedvab, in January 2013 six female deer were released after approval to shoot feral dogs inside the nature reserves (e-mail communication, April 2013).<sup>5</sup> This example highlights how “[n]ature is forever being made and remade in speech and text, not least when science and the state collaborate to alter the fate of highlighted species” (Greenough, 201).

The deer–dog conflict demonstrates the immense power of the wild–domestic distinction that “configures much work on human–nonhuman relations” and, in particular, the aversion of conservationists toward anything domesticated (Lorimer, 494; Braverman 2012a, 51–70; Cassidy and Mullin). In this account, “stasis is favored over process” (Hinchliffe, 89). The conservationists’ sheltering of the deer population may also be seen as “a form of smothering, and, in being insensitive to difference, is a form of incuriosity and therefore cruelty.” Indeed, fixing the coordinates of other species could be viewed as yet another kind of insensitivity (95).

Although seemingly disconnected, the train and the feral dogs are actually powerfully linked through the core Zionist scheme of progress. Alongside their biblical focus, Zionists have often highlighted the importance of modernity and expedited this region's industrialization and urbanization (Braverman 2009). By settling the frontier, reclaiming the wilderness, and "making the desert bloom,"<sup>6</sup> Zionism ironically allowed for both the regeneration of the fallow deer and also for its numerous casualties on the train tracks and from feral dogs. "What we created here is a miracle," says zoo director Doron about the establishment of the State of Israel, "but one thing that we didn't do was to preserve wildlife" (interview). He explains, further, that even as little as a hundred years ago, "if you walked around Israel you could meet cheetah, leopards, fallow deer, red deer, crocodile, griffon vultures, [and] Egyptian vultures." The role of Israel's zoos, Doron implies, is to promote the Zionist cause by *perfecting* the miracle of Jewish re-existence in the Land of Israel so that the human miracle extends from civilization to nature. The wild thus serves to attest to human-national accomplishments.

### Coexistence?

With almost a million visitors in 2012, Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo is one of the top tourist destinations in Israel. Despite its explicitly Jewish mission, the zoo also attracts a large Palestinian audience, mostly residents of East Jerusalem. In fact, the zoo is the central place where ultraorthodox Jews and Palestinian residents spend leisure time, side-by-side, in this divided city. "Forget the *biblical* zoo," explains the zoo's director. "The zoo appeals. [There is] something in animals, something in wildlife, that appeals to everyone, that isn't controversial" (Doron, interview). The former mayor of Jerusalem Ehud Olmert once stated, similarly, that the zoo "epitomizes the dream of Jerusalem. It is a place where children and adults of different religions and nationalities walk side by side; it is a place that connects us to our past and our history and a place that builds for the future with its innovative educational and environmental outreach programs" (Biblical Zoo brochure). The Biblical Zoo is framed as a cosmopolitan space where Jerusalemites can mingle and be exposed to unfamiliar ideas and values, bringing to mind Iris Young's "differentiated citizenship" concept, which

maintains that a central principle of multicultural space is the legitimacy—rather than the exclusion—of social difference (Tsfadia and Yacobi, 84).

Even though on paper the zoo welcomes everybody, it especially accommodates Jewish visitors. The story of the zoo's dilemma concerning the peccary illustrates its heightened sensitivity toward ultra-orthodox visitors. "The peccary is an animal that looks like a pig, eats like a pig, behaves like a pig, smells like a pig, but it is totally not a pig," Doron tells me. The zoo faced a dilemma: Should it exhibit this animal and risk uproar by its ultraorthodox visitors, who consider the pig to be "tref" —unclean and unfit for consumption? The director consulted with a famous Rabbi, who instructed him: "Do yourself a favor: put a sign nearby, very clear, in red letters, "This is not a pig." Doron informs me proudly that "this is the first ever sign in the zoo world [designating what an animal] is *not*. . . . In this case, we put an additional sign in Yiddish, just in case, for the ultra-ultra Orthodox who [only] read Yiddish. So this is the story of running a zoo in Jerusalem" (interview; see also figure 5).



Figure 5. Sign "Das is nisht a hazir" posted in front of peccary exhibit at Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo. Photograph by author, June 14, 2011.



The zoo's concern for its Jewish ultraorthodox audience has also resulted in special accommodations for Sabbath observers. On this day, "the ticket booths are closed, but there are gentiles that sell tickets in the parking lot. [They] can be Thai, Italian, and Arabs. [But not] Jews" (Doron, interview). This way, Jews are not made to violate the restrictions on laboring during the Sabbath. In another example, the zoo has erased all mentions of natural evolution from its signs. This, to accommodate the ultraorthodox Jewish belief that God created the world in seven days, as instructed in the Bible. According to Doron,

One of our signs included the phrase "40 million years ago." Every week we would find that someone sabotaged the sign. . . . After numerous fixings we decided on a rewrite—a compromise, if you will—and since then the sign reads "A long time ago . . ." The sign has remained untouched ever since. I live happily with this compromise, and I am proud of it. So we don't mention evolution at the zoo—what's the big deal? There are so many important things that we must do with our visitors—and Darwin is just not one of them. (interview)

As for the Palestinians, tens of thousands visit the zoo annually, composing one third of the zoo's visitors (Doron, interview). This is highly unusual: although Jerusalem's Palestinian residents are technically allowed entry to the city's various cultural sites, in practice cultural and economic segregation split this city. Yet despite their high attendance, the zoo seems to cater less to the Palestinian visitors than it does to its Jewish audience: by its very mission, this is a biblical zoo designed to establish the connection of Jews to the Land of Israel.

Still in the context of education at the zoo, Doron explains that "the Palestinians in Jerusalem are dealing with survival, so they are not focused on conservation. . . . Their motivation to come to the zoo is different from my motivation. But I really believe [that], slowly slowly, step by step . . . we can raise their awareness" (Doron, interview). Although most North American zoos also frame their mission as "raising visitor awareness" (Braverman 2012a), the outreach at the Biblical Zoo is unique both in its target audiences—ultraorthodox and Palestinian minorities who are often in conflict, both with each other and with the hegemonic national narrative (many ultraorthodox Jews are either non- or anti-Zionist)—and in the strong paternalistic and ideological elements that determine its educational agenda.

The zoo's model of coexistence is therefore limited: while the two large minority groups in Jerusalem, ultraorthodox Jews and Palestinians, are indeed copresent in this space, in practice they begrudgingly tolerate each other's presence so that they may look at the animals. This ostensible copresence thus becomes simply another form of segregation, a more sophisticated and covert variation of the frontier paradigm. Furthermore, the content of the zoo's exhibits hardly reflects coexistence: the zoo's focus on biblical animals and many of its exhibit and educational choices are explicitly tailored for a Jewish audience. Despite this, wild animals seemingly attract, or "captivate," the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem no less than its Jews. The "poverty" of the animals' captivity (Heidegger 2008, 206) in this context stands in a stark but complementary contrast to the captivation of those who view them (Lorimer, 498; Rothfels).

At the end of the day, what does the Biblical Zoo represent? Unintentionally, perhaps, the zoo's director offers his response when he reflects on the broader political situation in Israel. In his words, "[T]he IDF [Israel Defense Forces] used to give students who behave[d] well a permit to visit the zoo" (Doron, interview). This practice enraged the director, who believes that it infringes on the separation between civil and military societies. "It's [not right] for the IDF to use the zoo as a gift to [Palestinian] students who behave nice[ly]. Army is power. Army is for battle, [and] this totally goes against education and awareness. [But] I guess that's [the meaning of] occupation" (interview). What enraged the director, then, is not the occupation itself, but the erosion of the boundaries between spaces of war and spaces of recreation. The occupation, according to the director, happens elsewhere and by someone else. It should not be confused with the multicultural education and awareness promoted at his zoo. This narrative goes to support what James Ferguson refers to as the "etatization" process, by which the state's involvement and even expansion is concealed behind the seemingly separate engagement of civil society (Ferguson, 272).

Moreover, Doron portrays the coexistence practiced at his zoo as a strategy of resistance to the occupation. In a state of walls and checkpoints, he claims, there are no such barriers between humans as they stride along the zoo's pathways and view its animal enclosures. Indeed, such apparent coexistence—with the animals as the sole subjects of confinement behind cages and walls—distances the Israeli occupation

and makes it feel irrelevant to the everyday lives of Jerusalemite residents, who can thus observe animal (and perhaps also human) captivity from a safe distance. However, through this distancing practice, the Biblical Zoo in fact becomes deeply entangled in Israel's occupation. Effectively, the zoo helps "to realize an intrinsically Jewish space, continuously substantiating the land's own identity and purpose as having been and *needing to be* the Jewish national home" (El-Haj, 18, emphasis in original).

## QALQILYA ZOO

Patrons of the Qalqilya Zoo will find the giraffe exhibit empty. Nowadays, the giraffe stands motionless in the zoo's museum, stuffed and preserved by a taxidermist, confronting each viewer with the corporeality of its life and death. How did this giraffe come to live in Qalqilya? How did it die? Why does the zoo mount and display it? And what can the somber story of the giraffe's death at the height of the Second Intifada—the popular Palestinian uprising of 2004—teach us about the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and between humans and nonhumans across war-ridden divides?

### A Brief History

Situated in the Palestinian farming city of Qalqilya on the western edge of the West Bank, the Qalqilya Zoo is the only zoo in the West Bank (Khater, interview). Considered the foremost tourist attraction in Qalqilya, there are about 60 species and 170 animals at this zoo, which also houses a natural history museum, a children's amusement park, and a restaurant. Since 2005, the Israeli–West Bank Separation Barrier encircles Qalqilya from all but one narrow entrance, with the Israeli military controlling the movement in and out of the city (Gordon; Weizman). Despite this, the zoo's officials claim that it hosts over 400,000 visitors per year (Khater, interview).<sup>7</sup>

The zoo was the brainchild of a former Qalqilya mayor who subsequently came to be poorly regarded by many Palestinians after they suspected him of being a "collaborator" with Israel. When it finally opened in 1986, the zoo was referred to not only as a symbol of

Palestinian–Israeli coexistence but also as “a jewel in the crown of Palestinian national institutions” (Glover). An Israeli team was consulted throughout the process and still actively assists the zoo in its everyday operations. Dr. Motke Levison, formerly Ramat Gan’s Safari Zoo’s veterinarian, has been a close advisor of the Qalqilya Zoo from the start.

Most of the animals in the zoo’s collection are “hand-me-downs” from Israeli zoos. “The first giraffe that I brought here was from the Biblical Zoo,” Levison tells me during our short drive through the contested border and to the zoo. He continues,

I was walking with [Jerusalem’s] former zoo director around his old zoo and [I suggested that] “maybe you shouldn’t move this giraffe to the new zoo but to Qalqilya.” This giraffe was really funny. It was low in the back and tall in the front, because its legs hadn’t developed. He got it from the Copenhagen Zoo because it wasn’t so appropriate for them. (Levison, interview)

Clearly, Israeli zoos have been selective with their donations to the Palestinians, making the Qalqilya Zoo seem more like a shelter for unwanted zoo animals than a conservation institution. Some Israeli zoos have insisted, moreover, that the Qalqilya Zoo pay for these unwanted animals (Terkel, interview).<sup>8</sup>

Other factors also weigh into the decision by Israeli zoos whether or not to donate their animals to the Palestinians. “Before we joined EAZA [the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria] we just gave them the animals,” the Biblical Zoo’s director tells me. However, “today we give them very few animals; and every time we do, we go through a process where their keeper comes to us, learns how to work with the animals, then they go back, plan the exhibit, come back to us, [we] approve the exhibits—and [only] then do we send them the animals” (Doron, interview).

Recently, the Qalqilya Zoo requested a giraffe from the Biblical Zoo. At the time, the latter had more giraffes than they could handle, but were unable to transfer the animals to Europe because of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. The zoo’s veterinarian Nili Avni-Magen explains that although Qalqilya would have been the easiest solution for this giraffe surplus, “we decided not to send them because they weren’t there yet: the giraffes [would be] in a very small yard near the edge of the zoo with a school nearby with a lot of noise and a lot of

kids. . . . We gave them the advice of what to change so that they [could] build a nice exhibit for the giraffes, but not [the way] it looks now" (interview).

The Biblical Zoo's application of their own standards of animal care to the Qalqilya Zoo thus circumscribes its willingness to supply animals to the Palestinian zoo. Through this application of animal care standards, Israeli zoos enforce a developmental scheme on their Palestinian counterparts, in a form of colonialism that introduces the kind of order now found lacking (Mitchell, xv). Richard Grove describes this kind of ordering as a postcolonial narrative of ecological development. In the name of nature conservation and through the working of nongovernmental entities, peripheries that cannot be under the explicit control of the nation-state can nonetheless come under the indirect control of its postcolonial ecological legacies (Grove; Randeria, 13). In this context, conservation is synonymous with a neocolonial set of discourses and practices (Shochat, 106; Said, 348; Escobar), performed as part of the "etatization" of power: "a mode of power that relies on state institutions, but exceeds them" (Ferguson, 273).

Alongside Israel's arguably genuine care for the nonhuman Palestinian animals, there is also an element of care in the Israeli zoo's neocolonial approach toward human Palestinians. Avni-Magen says,

We want to help them. The people you see [o]n the streets when you go there, they need the best quality of life they can get with all the *circumstances* they have to go through. They cannot go to visit us. So we, as a zoo, can [give them] a place to go for fun, for spending [a] nice time, and for education, to learn about animals. (interview, emphasis added)

Avni-Magen further clarifies that this kind of help extends beyond political affiliations. "We can't solve the occupation," she says. "We are part of the conflict on a daily basis. And we feel happy when we have the chance, [as part of] a daily routine . . . to put everything aside and do our piece" (interview). The zoo's director adds, from his perspective, that the Qalqilya Zoo "takes people off the streets [and into] a respectful space" (Doron, interview). Israel's idea of manufacturing a zoo in Qalqilya thus fits quite well with the civilizing mission practiced by developed countries toward their less-developed counterparts (Davis; Koenigsberger).

Figure 6. Qalqilya Zoo Director Saed Khater (left) accepts the coati from Israeli veterinarian Levison (right). Photograph by author, June 23, 2011.



This model of Israeli–Palestinian cooperation revolves around and reinforces the roles of Israeli zoos as active agents and of Palestinians as passive recipients of care. The Israelis have the animals, the professional means, and the education; they create and enforce the proper conservation standards, controlling the meaning of care for captive animals. Israeli zoos give, take, and educate. At the same time, as Avni-Magen’s words illustrate, the occupation is perceived by the Israeli zoo experts as “circumstances” to be worked around, as an outside process that they have no control over.

As limited as it may seem, even this form of cooperation was not always possible. “During the First and Second Intifadas there were some issues,” Levison tells me. “They [the Israeli administration] said ‘this is not the time for animals.’ I understood this. So we didn’t transport animals then” (interview). To overcome the spatial restrictions of the Intifadas, the vets from each side of the conflict—Levison in Israel and Khader in the occupied territories—used to communicate regularly by phone. Khader says, “Sometimes, we [would] make a joke. I

[would] ask him, 'Are you still alive?' And he would answer, 'Yeah, good, you?' And I [would] say, 'Yeah. I'm still alive.' It was the men, between us, how we'd start talking" (interview). Bare life—here in an allegedly egalitarian expression—has become the mode of communication between the men on the warring sides, this was "how [they'd] start talking" (Khader, interview).

Khader further explains that during periods of intensified conflict, Levison "cannot come to me. I cannot go to him." "Before the Intifada," he adds, "we had an Israeli here for a meeting and he forgot his bag. His bag was in my house for one and a half years." "It was not easy to come to the zoo," Khader says, "because in front of the zoo there were two tanks. So we closed the zoo and we used only one gate in the back. There was a curfew. Even that wasn't allowed." When I ask Khader how the animals survived the long curfew, he responds:

They [needed] ten kilograms of meat, so we gave four—[so that] they won't die but will survive. For the monkeys, there [were] no vegetables but there [were] plants and leaves. So we cut plants . . . to give to the monkeys. You have to think—you know, when you are in a dangerous area and there is nothing you can do—you have to think how you can help these animals. (interview)

Despite his status as Qalqilya Zoo's most adamant Israeli ally, Motke Levison insists in our interview that the Palestinians "don't really care about the animals." To illustrate his point, Levison describes how the former director of the Qalqilya Zoo lost his hand to a camel bite and how his son, a Palestinian police officer, then shot the camel in the head in retaliation. "They are not very modern, nor are they very educated," Levison interprets this act. The treatment of animals as worthy of retaliation is thus perceived by Levison as a marker of the Palestinians' uncivilized nature. The retaliator's status as both a police officer and the zoo director's son only increases the national significance of this story and the intimate (here, literally) interconnections between zoo and government in this region.

"It's like their shirts," Levison further contemplates on our drive back across the border. "Dr. Sami asked for a green shirt like [ours]. But no one listened to him. Instead, they [decided on] yellow and blue. So I asked him: if you add yellow and blue, what do you get? He didn't know. No one there knows (laughs)." To Levison, the natives constantly

demonstrate their ignorance and their dire lack of education. And in this context, not only do the Palestinian zoo people lack real care for their animals (and are thus less human than the civilized Israelis), they have also not acquired the basic scientific knowledge that would enable them to see the green beyond the primary colors.

“Still,” Levison continues, “the zoo is important . . . to give people there some sort of place to entertain themselves. [In the past], if you entered an Arab town you’d see only men walking hand in hand with other men or walking with a book, reading on the street. There weren’t any cafés. There was practically nothing” (interview). Levison’s “practically nothing” narrative is a variation on the colonial *terra nullius* motif—translated in this region into the classic Zionist trope of “a land without a people for a people without a land” (Bisharat, 489; Braverman 2009, 87; Gregory, 79; Muir; Shamir, 236). At the same time, Levison goes out of his way to demonstrate that he cares about the natives and their children, who seemingly cannot care for themselves. In this context, Israel’s caring manifests in the desire to educate the Palestinians about the proper relationship to wildlife and to civilize them so that they become “real” men—namely, men who do not walk hand in hand on the streets. Through seeing animals in captivity, Levison believes, the (wild) natives may be able to briefly escape their own national and social captivity. By behaving like civilized men, the Palestinians can thus move beyond their impoverished existence that resembles so much the *weltarm*—or “world poor” (Heidegger 2008)—state of their captive animals. Derek Gregory writes along these lines that “the Zionist dream of uniting the diaspora in a Jewish state was by its nature a colonial project” (Gregory, 78; see also Shafir).

Qalqilya Zoo’s veterinarian, Dr. Sami Khader, is aware of the arrogance of his human colleagues on the other side of the border. He speaks casually about their attitude toward his zoo. According to Khader, the Israeli motto is “If you are good and we love you—not *like* you, but *love* you—[we] will give you everything” (interview). This situation again demonstrates both Israel’s total control and the Palestinians’ absolute dependence. While one hand takes (Israel’s infliction of closures and restrictions—namely, the creation of captivity), the other hand gives (animals, care, and advice on how to survive in captivity). But what happens if the zoo isn’t good, so to speak? The story of the zoo’s giraffes provides just such a scenario.



## Giraffes and Resistance

During the Second Intifada of 2004, the Qalqilya Zoo experienced frequent closures. For eighteen months, an Israeli tank was situated immediately outside the zoo's gate, aiming at the school that lay just behind the giraffe enclosure. Brownie, a male giraffe purchased from South Africa, died after running into a pole while trying to escape the sound of Israeli gunfire. Ruti, his pregnant partner who was traumatized by his death, miscarried her baby and died ten days later. Amelia Thomas, a British journalist, narrates this event:

Brownie died on the floor of his shelter as the hot night fell silent in a break between ammunition rounds. The next morning, Sami [Khader] found Ruti standing close behind her mate. He gazed up at her face. She seemed to be crying. . . . He was irritated. "Our people are dying every day," he snapped at one keeper, who stood weeping in front of the fence. "Do you cry for them like you cry for this animal?" (Thomas, 25)

Khader came up with a creative solution to the deaths of the zoo animals so that the zoo could continue entertaining and educating zoo visitors in lieu of the live exhibits. With knowledge of taxidermy that he obtained in Saudi Arabia, he decided to mount some of the animals, including Brownie, his unborn calf, the zebras, a monkey, wildcats, and snakes (Glover). "In the last four years, the animals gradually began disappearing from their cages and showing up in the [natural history] museum as exhibits," Khader reflects in our interview, referring to the animals that died during the Israeli raids. Despite his scientific involvement in their mounting, Khader never visits the mounted animals in the natural history museum; he says he cannot bear to see his former charges as dead displays (Laban). Nonetheless, his display of afterlife is Khader's small act of resistance to Israel's infliction of death on the bare life of human and nonhuman animals in the occupied territories.

The saga of the stuffed giraffe does not end here, however. Borrowed by the Austrian artist Peter Friedl, the stuffed giraffe was displayed in a European art exhibition. A story published in the *New York Times* reported on "a stuffed giraffe as war victim, and a symbol of our time," suggesting that the giraffe is "a casualty of an Israeli army attack on the militant organization Hamas" (Valentin). The giraffe display at the exhibition resulted in the banning of Israeli art from this event.

The Israelis were enraged: while the Palestinians are allowed to exhibit live Israeli animals in a show of collaboration between the nations, how dare they manipulate the death of these animals so as to portray Israel as a nation that does not care for wild animals? Israeli zoos perceived this as a betrayal of their trust by the Qalqilya Zoo. “The [Israelis] were angry because this made the Israelis look bad,” Levison explains. Collectively, the Israeli zoos decided to cease all support for the Qalqilya Zoo, including an immediate termination of all animal transfers.

This situation lasted for some time, says Levison, who eventually orchestrated a *sulha* (a traditional forgiveness event) between the zoos. As the *sulha* approached, the Palestinian zoo officials were carefully instructed by the Israeli vet to blame their politicians for using the giraffe to advance ideological agendas and to distance their zoo from this matter. Levison explains on our way back from the zoo that he “convinced [the Palestinians] and prepared them. They [argued] that they are not the ones who initiated this, but the politicians. They sat together and things got better. But anytime soon something else can explode” (interview). Nowadays, the giraffe is back in the zoo’s natural history museum, along with a small plaque commemorating its death (figure 7).

For his part, and despite his central role in the reconciliation process, Levison still strongly believes that the Palestinians fabricated the giraffe story. “I know what the giraffe really died from,” he tells me in a lowered voice as we approach the border back to Israel, “because I was there in the autopsy. But let them make up their stories.” In typical colonial fashion, the Israeli veterinarian implies that whereas the Israelis are the masters of scientific knowledge, the Palestinians are only really good at storytelling.

Although perhaps less explicit than the display of the dead giraffe as a victim of Israeli aggression, other forms of everyday resistance to Israel’s colonial stance are also evident at this zoo. For example, the Palestinians have attempted to bypass Israel’s control over their zoo animals by independently joining the European zoo association. Khader explains:

Three or four years [ago], I start[ed] to talk to other zoos in the world. . . . There are important animals I can’t get from here, and animals that aren’t available in Israel [that] I want to get from outside. So the first thing [is] to be a member in these organizations, so [that] I can get the animals



Figure 7. Stuffed giraffe exhibit at the Qalqilya Zoo. Photograph by author, June 23, 2011.

I want. [Second], it's important for me to be famous in the world. . . .  
 Nobody know[s] my country, so I want to send [a] message to the world  
 that we are here. (Khader, interview)

Ironically, even this effort “to send a message to the world that we are here” is currently being negotiated by the Israeli zoos, which have brokered the visit by the European zoos’ inspector and escorted him through this visit. By helping the Palestinians, the Israelis yet again reinforce the Palestinians’ disadvantaged state. This approach calls to mind Edward Said’s paraphrasing of Karl Marx’s statement, “[I]n Western eyes, the Orient cannot represent itself; it must be represented” (Said, x, 335). The Palestinians cannot escape their colonial entanglement with the Israeli occupier. Timothy Mitchell’s contemplation about colonialism in Egypt is illustrative in the Israeli–Palestinian context as well. According to Mitchell, “[C]olonial subjects and their modes of resistance are formed within the organisational terrain of the colonial state rather than some wholly exterior social space” (xi).

Qalqilya Zoo’s attempt to develop its own conservation identity is another form of resistance to Israel’s colonial control over conservation

and care. Khader uses the term “Palestinian wildlife” to suggest that his zoo is starting “to protect animals in the area, *our area*” (interview). He further explains that “most people only know about [how] Palestinians destroy their wildlife. I [am] trying to change this thing. We do care about our wildlife.” Khader goes on to say:

I give lectures to students in schools about wildlife, *our wildlife*, how we protect this wildlife, how to care about our animals, even in the city. . . . From my lectures I [send] a message to [both] the Palestinian people and the Israeli people: We are [also] here; we are here, and we do our work, as you do yours. I don’t ask you to care about my wildlife. I can care about it. (interview)

Caring about one’s wildlife thus represents civilization, progress, and power; it is a cause for national pride. Such a notion of care as a technology of power resonates with Michel Foucault’s explorations of pastoral power in his recently translated lectures *Security, Territory, Population*. There, Foucault traces the genealogy of pastoral power—the power of care—from its Judeo-Christian foundations, coining the term “the great battle of pastorship” to allude to the historical conflicts between caregivers over who cares better for their flock (Foucault 2009, 149). The battle of pastorship has taken different forms in various time-spaces. In the North American context, it has manifested in animal rights versus pro-zoo struggles over who may rightfully speak for the animals (Braverman 2012a, 20–23). In the occupied West Bank, the battle manifests in strictly patriotic terms: through caring for their animals, the Palestinians assert their independent national identity; the Israelis, in turn, reassert their power through their insistence on donating animals, advice, and access.

## GAZA ZOO

Sabrina is a lioness, the pride of the Gaza Zoo and a symbol of perseverance for its people. She was born in an Egyptian circus, sold, smuggled into Gaza, kidnapped by bandits for amusement and profit, and rescued by a revolution. Nearly killed in the Second Intifada, Sabrina survived to give birth to her first cubs shortly after. Sabrina’s story is not only the story of Gazan captive animals, but also the story of Gaza’s

captive human population. “This is our life under Israeli occupation,” says the founder of the Gaza Zoo. “Even the animals are being killed” (Shawa, interview).

## **A Brief History**

The Gaza Zoo was built in 2003. It started out as a small enclosure with a few birds and sick animals. In 2005, when it received funding from a French development agency, the zoo grew to host over one hundred animals. “There were lions, foxes, wolves, also deer and camels and many other birds of the Palestinian environment,” the founder and longtime director of the zoo, veterinarian Dr. Saud Shawa, tells me in an interview, clearly aware of the trend in conservation to emphasize local species. Then, he continues, came the war of 2005, during which the Israeli army destroyed the zoo with bombs, tanks, and direct gunfire. Toward the end of 2008, a second war erupted in Gaza. This time, the zoo was seized and turned into an Israeli military base. For twenty-three days, the animals were cut off from food and water. Most of them starved to death. “It was my dream to establish a zoo for the children of Palestine,” says Shawa, “to make a place for our children to get off the streets and the violence of the Israeli occupation. Now my dream has been broken and destroyed.” Today, the zoo contains approximately ten animals, including “two wolves, one deer, one crocodile, [and] one monkey” (interview). Then there are, of course, the zoo’s two lions.

## **Sabrina the Lioness**

The zoo has always taken pride in its lions. Bought by the Gaza Zoo for \$13,000 from a circus in Cairo in 2005, three-month-old cubs Sabrina and Sakher were smuggled across the Egyptian–Gazan border in long underground tunnels to circumvent the official Israeli closure of Gaza. Sabrina and Sakher were hand-reared by Shawa. Just before the welcoming ceremony, local thieves attacked the zoo and kidnapped Sabrina. She was held captive by one of Gaza’s largest clans, which took over the streets after Israel’s withdrawal, and displayed at a Gaza photography studio for fifty cents per photo (figure 8). When the Hamas party was elected two years later, the clan members were executed.



Figure 8. Sabrina with Gazan captors, August 7, 2007. Courtesy of Dr. Saud Shawa.

Sabrina, who had “lost four teeth, [her] claws and part of [her] tail,” was rescued by the Hamas fighters, who claimed her return to the zoo in July 2007 as part of their victory (Urquhart).

During the second war, a missile apparently tore a hole through the main fence of the lions’ enclosure. They managed to slip through it and ate some of the other escaped animals before seeking shelter in the administration building. Shortly after she was rescued from the rubble and re-caged (figure 9), Sabrina gave birth. “The Israelis can come and they can shoot us and send their missiles to kill us and they make us bleed. But some of us will survive, and we will be ready for them with our claws,” the zoo’s director at the time was quoted as saying in the *Times* (Frenkel), his use of the plural tense eroding human–nonhuman boundaries.

### Animal–Human Zoos

Dr. Saud Shawa points to the similarities between the current condition of zoo animals and that of the humans in Gaza. “We are the only people in this world that are living under such total occupation,” he laments in our telephone interview. Under the occupation, Shawa continues, “Israel sees us as being equal to our animals, and sometimes



Figure 9. Sabrina and Sakher immediately after the war, February 9, 2009. Courtesy of Dr. Saud Shawa.

they even value us less than our animals.” To illustrate this point, Shawa tells me about his brother’s 4,000 citrus trees. “He tied his dog to one of the trees,” Shawa describes. “The Israeli bulldozer destroyed all 3,999 trees, but left this one tree with the dog tied to it untouched.” “They are very loving people, the Israelis,” Shawa continues wryly. “I wonder why they had to kill all of our zoo animals, though—maybe they thought they were fighters?” (interview).

From Shawa’s perspective, then, the Israelis see the Gazan zoo animals as totemic displacements (Freud, 129; DiCenso) of Gaza’s human population. And because it seems legitimate to use brute force over humans, Israel’s use of force over these animals is rendered legitimate. According to Shawa, in other words, the animals acquire human identity to justify acts of aggression against them. Once they are humanized—and outlawed as such (Agamben)—their bodies are valued less than those of unpoliticized animals. Similar to their human counterparts, then, under certain conditions Palestinian zoo animals become a national threat.<sup>9</sup>

While the above interpretation might explain why the Israelis bombed the Gazan zoo animals, it does not explain why the Israeli

soldiers saved the one dog tied to the tree. Elsewhere, I explore the totemic displacement of olive and pine trees with the Palestinian and Jewish people and the ensuing tree wars in Israel/Palestine, manifesting in massive (pine) planting projects by the Jewish National Fund, alongside massive (olive) tree uprooting projects by radical Jewish settlers and by the State of Israel (Braverman 2009, 178; Comaroff and Comaroff, 627–51). The real and symbolic meaning of trees plays an important role also when interpreting the event narrated by Shawa: because trees are the Palestinians' central source of livelihood in the state of occupation, their uprooting is also an uprooting of the Palestinian people. The dog's salvation thus suggests that depoliticized nonhuman animals are prioritized above politicized humans in this context. Israel's humanity is established, yet again, through its civilized treatment of certain nonhuman (but not human) animals.

Another story serves to illustrate the intricate relations between Gaza's human and animal populations. "Two or three years ago one of the keepers decided that since we have no zebras he will make one by painting a white donkey with stripes," Shawa tells me. The episode was picked up by international news wires, which reported that the zoo's

only two zebras died of hunger earlier this year when they were neglected during the war in Gaza. The popular animals were too expensive to replace, so the keepers decided to design a pair of donkeys with black and white patterns instead. Ahmad Barghouti says a professional painter used French-manufactured hair coloring to make the donkeys look like zebras. ("Gaza Zookeepers Draw Crowds with Zany 'Zebras'")

In Israel, this event became a source of implied ridicule toward the Palestinian people, who were portrayed as unable to tell a zebra from a donkey. Shawa says in response: "Of course the people knew it was a joke, and they loved it" (interview). In this distortion of the traditional zoo exhibit, the Palestinians creatively protested their insular conditions, comically relaying their resistance to the Israeli occupation. "Because [the Israelis] are preventing us from importing a real zebra, we created our false zebra," explains Shawa along these lines. Whereas colonial projects traditionally prescribe new means of manufacturing the experience of the real (Mitchell, ix), here the colonized subjects have taken an active stance by creating their own version of the real,



thereby contesting Israel's hegemonic assertions of truth. As it happens, the struggle between humans over what is true occurs "on the backs" of animals and through their suffering. Indeed, alongside the human politics in Israel/Palestine, one must take seriously human-animal politics, and in this context the colonized Palestinians' relationship to other animals, here manifest in the manipulation of a donkey.

While Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo presents itself as a symbol of physical coexistence with Palestinians that occurs almost in spite of the strong Jewish control over the animals' representation, and the Qalqilya Zoo advances a virtual Israeli-Palestinian collaboration through the mutual care for animals, at the Gaza Zoo coexistence and collaboration are not even flickering thoughts. "We don't have any connection with the Gazan people," admits Biblical Zoo's veterinarian Dr. Avni-Magen. "Unlike [the] West Bank, [where] we can visit—if we go [to Gaza], it's like a completely different country. The West Bank—still we've got connections, at least professional connections" (interview).

During the war, the Israeli military contemplated a rescue mission. The plan was for Israeli soldiers to enter the Gaza Zoo accompanied by a few Israeli zoo scientists to save the animals from the devastating war conditions. "[We] had some ideas," Avni-Magen says. "We could go and anesthetize them—it was dangerous, [there were] lions, leopards—and [then] bring them to Israel and to Qalqilya. The animals were so hungry and didn't get food. . . . [O]ur soldier [saw them in] such terrible condition . . . and [said] 'we have to help them.' But it was too dangerous to start" (interview).

The fluidity and interchangeability between the categories of animal and human in this space are striking. "We are living in the biggest prison in the world," Shawa tells me in our interview. The zoo, then, becomes a microcosm that illustrates the captive situation of Gaza's human population. "I don't know what happened to the animals," Avni-Magen concludes. "Nobody does." But while Israel cares about the animals and even plans their rescue, it seems to care less about the humans in Gaza. The animals are thus elevated into a cosmopolitan status that personifies "the very universalism of a Western particular—that of 'wildlife' and its need to be protected" (Jalais, 25), whereas no such protections are afforded to the noncosmopolitan human inhabitants of this place.

## CONCLUSION

The stories of the three zoos—in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza—offer an original lens through which to explore the intense relationship between Israelis and Palestinians. Each zoo provides a different account of this relationship: cold copresence, conditional cooperation, and hostile disregard, respectively. Taken together, they demonstrate that the interaction between Israelis and Palestinians around the care of animals enables forms of cooperation that would ordinarily be impossible. And yet, they also show that humane treatment of animals does not guarantee a similar relationship toward humans. Structures of power and real and symbolic domination do not come to a halt at the gates of the zoological park.

Although situated less than fifty miles from each other, the zoos explored here seem worlds apart. This article has exposed the differences and similarities between the zoos by focusing on three animals, one for each zoo. Through these animal stories, the article has not only analyzed aspects of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through the lens of animal studies, but also offered disturbing glimpses into the human–animal relations involved.

The story of the Biblical Zoo's fallow deer relays the Zionist desire for indigeneity and to forge a legitimizing bridge to biblical times alongside a commitment to progress and urbanization. Nonetheless, the Biblical Zoo presents itself as a multicultural public space amid a torn and conflicted city, a place where ultraorthodox Jews and Palestinians can exist—enjoy themselves even—side by side. The animals, it is implied, facilitate such coexistence. Presented as neutral subjects of a universal human gaze, the animality of the zoo animals becomes a vehicle for emphasizing the shared humanity of Jerusalem's diverse zoogoers, a humanity that supposedly transcends their differences.

However, as the deer example has shown, the animals are far from being neutral and apolitical. Coexistence, moreover, is simply a neoliberal facade for obscuring deeply ingrained discriminations. At the end of the day, the Jerusalem Zoo is a *Jewish* zoo (if only for its strong support by Jewish American philanthropy). It is also a *Western* zoo in that it furthers certain ideals of conservation and care that are part of the colonial worldview. It is only within these paradigms that Jerusalem's

minorities are encouraged to visit the zoo and become educated, indeed disciplined, into its particular ideologies.

The giraffe of Qalqilya's Zoo provides yet another rich opportunity for excavating the different layers of Israeli–Palestinian bioexistence in this region. Most of the animals at the Qalqilya Zoo are “hand-me-downs” from Israel. Although often paying full price for such animal gifts, their transportation from and by Israel is preconditioned on compliance, exemplifying Israel's absolute control not only over the number and type of animals displayed at the Qalqilya Zoo, but also over the animals' everyday management. In the name of conservation, care, and collaboration, and through the not-for-profit, scientific enterprise of zoo work—the Israeli gaze penetrates beyond the reach of the traditional nation-state.

In contrast to the Biblical Zoo's aspirations for coexistence *within* borders, Qalqilya's giraffe embodies Israeli–Palestinian collaboration *across* such human borders established under the occupation, as well as across human–nonhuman divides. One might wonder why the Israeli zoos were so enraged by the giraffe's exhibit at the European exhibition: as nonprofit institutions, why would zoos see themselves responsible for the Israeli military's suppression of the Intifada? Although Israeli zoos present themselves as existing beyond national politics, this incident shows that they are not only colonial institutions, but that they very much still operate within a nationalistic paradigm. The Qalqilya Zoo, according to Israel, must provide an escape from rebellion-ridden streets, an island of calm and distraction for Palestinian children; it certainly should not foster resistance, nor should it exhibit Israel as an oppressor. Yet the Palestinians have managed to transpose the giraffe into a symbol of resistance and a demonstration of Israel's colonial practices. The instrumental plans of Israel's development apparatus have thus failed. “But ‘failure’ here does not mean doing nothing; it means doing something else, and that something else always has its own logic” (Ferguson, 276). Somehow, this logic always ends up reinforcing the dominant paradigm.

If both the deer and the giraffe are embodiments of Israel's sincere aspirations for (or cynical facades of) coexistence among and beyond borders and frontiers, no such pretenses are attached to Gaza's lioness, Sabrina. Acquired despite Israel's strict prohibition on practices of normality in this space, Sabrina is an exemplar of bare life (Agamben).

The radical interplays between life and death represented in Sabrina's story illustrate that the Palestinian people of Gaza live in a state of exemption, worlds away from any hint of human cooperation.

The number of animals displayed by the three zoos is also telling: Jerusalem Zoo displays 1,700 animals, the Qalqilya Zoo, 170; and in Gaza there are approximately ten animals. Although certain Israeli zoo personnel have explained this quantitative disparity by the Palestinian people's lack of interest in nature and animals, I suggest that it is an expression of Israel's tight control over these sites. Like many other daily routines that seem far removed from the national arena, the decision whether animals would be displayed here—and if so, which animals, and how many—remains in the hands of the Israeli occupier, with its power to care, embargo, blockade, save, and kill.

Israel also dictates the moralistic undertones of the animal stories performed in this region. The implied Israeli logic is that one may kill an animal when it is a symbol of Palestinian pride and resilience, like killing an enemy soldier or destroying an enemy statue. The humanization of the giraffe and other animals thus justifies their killing as enemies. However, per this logic, killing a belligerent camel is wrong. Moreover, according to this logic, it is morally justifiable to bomb a zoo from the air, but one must spare a Palestinian dog tied to a tree and try to plan military "rescue" incursions to save those zoo animals that survived the bombings. Not unlike conservation more generally, the human hand that destroys is the same hand that then saves through an endless dialogue with itself that recognizes no other. Finally, reintroducing the nearly extinct biblical fallow deer and exhibiting them to visitors to raise their awareness about animal conservation is a valuable educational enterprise, but exhibiting painted-over donkeys in the place of zebras is ludicrous. Colonialism, nationalism, and the "great battles of pastorship" help explain the contradictions embodied in such messages.

Alongside the myriad differences between the three zoos, the most significant commonality between them is that they are all tightly controlled by Israel. Instead of a simple story of state control, however, the control of zoo animals and practices is a form of colonial ecology: an indirect penetration and expansion of the state through non-governmental means and in the name of conservation. But whereas the zoo animals are often perceived as innocent bystanders caught in

the human crossfire, they are also acutely political entities. This political state of the animals presents an interesting variation on Michel Foucault's definition of human politics. "For millennia," Foucault writes, "man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question" (Foucault 1990, 143). In this story, it is the animal that crosses the lines by having the additional capacity for political existence.

Sabrina has had a painful life and faces an uncertain future. Her story and those of the fallow deer and the stuffed giraffe raise questions about why we lament the tragedies that befall zoo animals in war-torn regions even while children remain war's daily victims. Indeed, the international news is filled with stories about zoos in war. During the Iraq War, the Baghdad Zoo became a battleground and was looted for its valuable exotic animals, while others escaped or starved (Russell). South African conservationist Lawrence Anthony rushed to lead a mission to save the animals (Anthony and Spence), followed by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), WildAid, and longer-term assistance from the North Carolina Zoo and American Association of Zoos and Aquariums (Mayell 2003a; 2003b). Similar stories of zoo battlegrounds, looting, and international assistance emerged from the NATO invasion of Afghanistan and the Kabul Zoo (Danielson; "Kabul's Lion King"), which featured an embattled lion, Marjan, reminiscent of Gaza's Sabrina. Much like Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo, the Kabul Zoo offers an oasis of peace and calm (Perry). Even the rebellion in Libya has produced zoo stories, as zookeepers struggled to shield and care for animals in the Tripoli Zoo ("War's Forgotten") and rebels discovered Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's personal zoo, mysteriously emptied of its animals (Hauslohner).

As in the myriad journalistic depictions of zoos in war zones, the three zoo stories presented here illuminate the neglected aspects of war, those things that are left behind when humans focus on saving everything else worth saving. This, precisely, is why zoo stories in war zones strike such a deep chord and demand our attention. They embody the human condition—the capacity to be human.

They may also offer some insight into why some people fret about animal life while human life is regularly debased. Writing in 1949,

Martin Heidegger equated the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers with agribusiness, asking if those who “perished” in the concentration camps can even be said to be dead (qtd. in Feldman, 118). “Are they dying [*Sterben Soe*]?” he repeatedly asks. The concentration camps’ fatalities are “horribly un-dead [*grausig ungestorben*]” (Heidegger 2000, 79, 56). According to Heidegger, the capacity to die is a mark of humanity: “The mortals are human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes” (1971, 178). At the Israeli–Palestinian frontier, the zoo animal dies, while it is man who perishes.

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## Notes

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1. The Intifadas are the popular uprisings that broke out in Gaza and the West Bank in 1987 and then again in 2004.

2. At that time, the official name of the zoo changed to the Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Jerusalem, although most Jerusalemites still refer to it as the Biblical Zoo.

3. The zoo’s general curator, Shmulik Yedvab, responds: “As a zoologist, I know that genetics are not everything. Genetic diversity is very important, but nature cannot be categorized and defined [like that]” (interview). For further discussion of the importance of genetics in the management of zoo and wild animals (see Braverman 2012a and Friese 2010, respectively).

4. According to Yedvab, of the eighty-five reintroduced deer, seventy have already died (e-mail communication, September 14, 2011). He estimates that ten to

fifteen deer have survived, three of which are still monitored (e-mail communication, Dec. 31, 2012).

5. The general curator at Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo states that "thus far 3 of them are surviving and the other 3 probably died due to train hits. . . . We are also planning another release for this weekend (3 males and 3 females)" (e-mail communication, April 2, 2013).

6. The Zionist idea of nature is not simply one of originality and authenticity; it also involves a sense that only artifice—human labor—can bring out nature's true essence. The notion that nature can and should be improved by humans was emphasized by Theodor Herzl, commonly considered the father of modern political Zionism (Eisenzweig, 282). This Zionist idea of nature corresponds with the "Janus-faced colonial policy toward nature which expounded simultaneously the virtues of conservation and extraction of maximum commercial profit" (Randeria, 18).

7. Less ambitious sources estimate 3,000 annual visitors (Laban).

8. However, at the Biblical Zoo "we have a policy of 'no-sell, no-buy'" (Yedvab, interview).

9. In "Naturing the Nation," Jean and John Comaroff explore similar forms of totemic displacement through assigning invasiveness to certain plants (Comaroff and Comaroff). This form of projection, the Comaroffs say, legitimizes the emergence of new forms of postcolonial discrimination enacted through the natural landscape. *Planted Flags* similarly explores the totemic displacement of olive and pine trees with the Palestinian and Jewish people (Braverman 2009, 178).

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