

It must be asked: What is Justice?

Through our explorations, we've landed on this for now:
Truth and righteousness, enacted and embodied.

This volume is a collection of ideas from a broad community of writers, thinkers, researchers, artists, curators, healers, dreamers, strivers, doers, and those committed to nurturing life outside the destructive paradigms and extractive systems of the settlers, invaders, and oppressors. We all live in relation to these systems and we all find our path in expressing and creating something more life-affirming.



Land / Your are on Stolen Land

Maternal Exhumations

Dima Srouji

The Palestinian women must have been good excavators to pinpoint the small fragments, their careful eyes grazing the soil as their heads swiped right to left closely reading the ground. Their thick fingers familiar with the soil between their knuckles were like fingerling potatoes reentering the ground they were harvested from. Hundreds of them were hired by western institutions like Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, and the Palestine Exploration Fund a hundred years ago. As the women inhabited the fields, like an array of Palestinian goddesses, the American and English men, the archaeologists and the funders would stand at the top of the hill looking down at them while they dug with their hands.

Some of the excavators were already mothers, who understood how to nurture for their community and for the earth, but others were young enough to know how to receive the love without knowing how to give it yet. You could tell in archival images that the children carrying rocks on their heads had a stunned look on their faces. This must have been a difficult exercise in learning patience, care, and how to mourn. There are layers of intergenerational memories embedded in the ground beneath them, in each of those archaeological sites. There are layers of care, centuries of nurturing the ground, feeding it and feeding from it. In one excavation

season, the strata of meaning, memory, and embedded knowledge were exposed by order from American and British universities, and displaced both physically to museums elsewhere, and emotionally to a fragmented metaphysical space that we are still, as Palestinians today, working towards restitching.

What the colonial practices of archaeological excavation don't reveal in their archives immediately, is not only the labor that was required to move the earth one basket at a time in order to find what those with power assumed was valuable to acquire, there are layers of invisible labor that must be unraveled to understand the weight of the work.

First, these women, and their families, were the landowners of the land that they were directed to clear to prepare for excavations. They were the farmers who sowed the land, planted it with apricot trees, olive groves, and wheat fields for centuries. They were the women that sat in the monuments, in the Roman forum and amphitheater, threshing the wheat after the harvest season while singing songs that continue to ring in our ears. They were the women that used the harvested straw to weave the baskets that were then used to carry the rubble from the excavation sites to the archaeologists' storage boxes. They were the women that extracted glass and ceramic goddesses from layers below,

of Astarte and other Canaanite deities, that we still think of when we think of repelling the evil eye, and pray for fertility and love. They were the ones that pulled from the soil the perfume vessels and rose water sprinklers that we still use in ceremonies of cleansing today. Their labor was much heavier than simply having a careful eye and sifting through soil.

The land under our feet has stories that resonate with those who nurture it, and as soon as the fragments and spirits are exposed unauthorized, it is an exhumation of all of our bodies. Each particle of sand and soil, each speck of dust, has been through the hands of the Palestinians. Our bodies are extensions of the land. Moving towards Palestinian liberation is not a liberation of our people alone, it is the liberation of the land along with the people. It is the restitution of every particle that has been displaced, and reparation for every tree that was cut, every basket that was woven, every woman that carried a rock.