

Nature Reserves in The Occupied Golan

-The environment in the service of land control policy-

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Introduction:

The June War of 1967 ended, with Israel taking control of an area of **1,260** square kilometers of the Syrian Golan Heights. About 60 square kilometers were returned to Syrian sovereignty in 1974 (**Beger Gidon**). Today, Israel controls **96%** of the area it still occupies (**1,200** square kilometers), which its ownership belonged to the Syrian state and the residents of hundreds of villages that the occupation forced demolished and expelled their residents outside the borders of its control. The remaining area (4%), still under the ownership of the five Syrian villages (Majdal Shams, Buqaatha, Masaada, Ain Qinya, and Ghajar), which were not affected by displacement and destruction. All these villages are located in the north of the Golan.

Israel defines the territory under its control as "State land". Part of these lands have been placed at the disposal of the army and are used as training fields and for the establishment of military out posts. The largest part of the occupied lands was allocated to serve the settlement project (establishing settlements and developing the settlers' economic structure), another part was identified as nature reserves or national parks.

1.0 - Nature reserves and national parks in the Golan

Since the establishment of the State of Israel until today (2021), Israel have been identified and approved **537**¹ areas as nature reserves and national parks (see: sources in Tables No. 1 and No. 2). Forty-three (**43**) nature reserves, and eight (**8**) national parks are located in the occupied Golan, with an area of approximately **370,000** dunams. The largest one is the "Yahudiya-Nature Reserve" in the southern Golan, which extend over an area of about **99,000** dunams, and the "Hermon -Nature Reserve" in the northern Golan with an area of more than **78,000** dunams. If we compare the area of the occupied Golan (**1,200** square km) and the number of the nature reserves and national parks in it, with the area of Israel before 1967 (**20,770** square km) and the number of nature reserves and national parks therein, the density of nature reserves in the Golan is double (**0.04**) of what It is inside Israel (**0.02**), while the area of the Golan is **5.78%** of the area of Israel in 1948.

Nature reserves and national parks cover approximately **25%**² of the area of Israel, while the percentage in the occupied Golan reaches approximately **34%** of its area.

¹ It includes 36 national parks established by the occupation authorities in Area C in the West Bank

² <https://emekshaveh.org/ar/non-jewish-heritage-sites/>

Table-Nr. 1: Nature Reserves in the occupied Golan (2021)				
	Name	Area size (Dunam)	Arabic Name of the Site	Location on the Map
1	Ortal	1,043	Al Bajja	18
2	Ofik	15	Ain Akoub	39
3	Akho Hospiya	1,413	Abu Khet/ Tal Al-Thahab	31
4	Akhelov Hahuran	5,200	Ain Hadid/ Rasm Hudhud	30
5	Khushniya	1,589	Khushniya	23
6	Tanuriya	445	Tanuriya	26
7	Bet Zida	9,977	Al Butayha	35
8	Brikhat Baron	303	Bab Al-Hawa	16
9	Brikhat Sindyana	566	Al-Sindyana	20
10	Brikhat Faraj	25.7	Faraj	28
11	Gamla	8,382	Gamla	25
12	Hahermon	78,270	Jabal Al-Sheikh	1
13	Har Avital	5,036	Tal Abu Nida	17
14	Har Hermonit	1,855	Tal Shekhah	9
15	Har Shifon	804	Tal Abu Khanzir	19
16	Kursi	431	Al-Kursi	37
17	Hamat Gader	188	Al-Himma	42
18	Yahudiya	98,952	Al-Yahudiya/ Al-Yaarubiya	24
19	Yaar Odem	42,448	Hursh Masaada	3
20	Shefakh Dalyut	76.0	Majrasah	34
21	Moradut Hagolan (1)	31,161	It extends over the Golan slopes to Hula plain.	15
22	Mseel Ghasaniya	2,784	Mseel Al-Ghasaniya	21
23	Maayanot Banias	663	Manbaa Banias	4
24	Nov	763	Nab	32
25	Maayanot Nukhayla	3,685	Al-Nukhayla/ Ain Al-Bared	7
26	Nahal El Aal	3,400	Wadi Al-Dufayla	33
27	Nahal Hamdal/Ain Gonen	1,913	Wadi Hamdi/ Ain Urfiya	13
28	Nahal Hermon	2,132	Nahir Banias	5
29	Nahal Mizar	27,790	Wadi Masoud/ Wadi Al-Yaqusa	40
30	Nahal Sa'ar	4,729	Nahir Sa'ar	2
31	Nahal Oravim	1,917	Wadi Al-Nisrah/ Wadi Ghrabah	12
32	Shamir-Nahal Rahum (1)		Wadi Al-Mgharah/ Wadi Al-Zaytun	10
33	Nahal Shukh/Ain Natura	1,319	Wadi Al-Fajir/ Ain Al-Tina	14
34	Nahal Snir	271	Nahir Al-Hassbani	8
35	Susita	18,388	Susita	38
36	A'amrit (1)	1,913	Khirbet Al-A'amara	6
37	Ayunot Uravim	1,121	Yanabea' Sumaqa	11
38	Ayunot Fham	513	Uyun Fham	27
39	Park Hayarden (1)	2,144	It extends on both banks of the Jordan River from the Banat Ya'qub Bridge to Tal Al-Awar.	36
40	Rekhes Bashanit	11,298	Al-Ghasaniya	22
41	Tal Fares	1,530	Tal Al-Faras	29
42	Nahal Yarmuk (1)		Nahir Al-Yarmuk	41
43	Brikhut Horef Hagolan	A group of twenty-five winter ponds, spread throughout the Golan, and extending over an area of 568 dunums.		

(1) Only part of the Nature Reserve is located inside the occupied Golan.

Sources:

https://inature.info/wiki/%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA_%D7%98%D7%91%D7%A2

[/https://www.parks.org.il/map](https://www.parks.org.il/map)

https://www.gov.il/he/departments/general/nature_reserves_2

<https://mavat.moin.gov.il/mavatps/forms/sv3.aspx?tid=3>

Table No. 2: National Parks in the Golan (2021)

	Name	Area size (Dunam)	Arabic Name of the Site	Location on the Map
1	Har Bental	13.6	Tal Al-A'aram	C
2	Hof Kursi	42.4	Shatt Al-Kursi	E
3	Hamat Gader	317.4	Al-Himma	H
4	Kursi	179.6	Al-Kursi	F
5	Mivzar Namrod	195	Qala'at Al-Namrod	A
6	Maayanot Banias	252	Manbaa Banias	B
7	Susita	1,690	Susita	G
8	Gan Reuvin	242	Ain Al-Sanaber	D

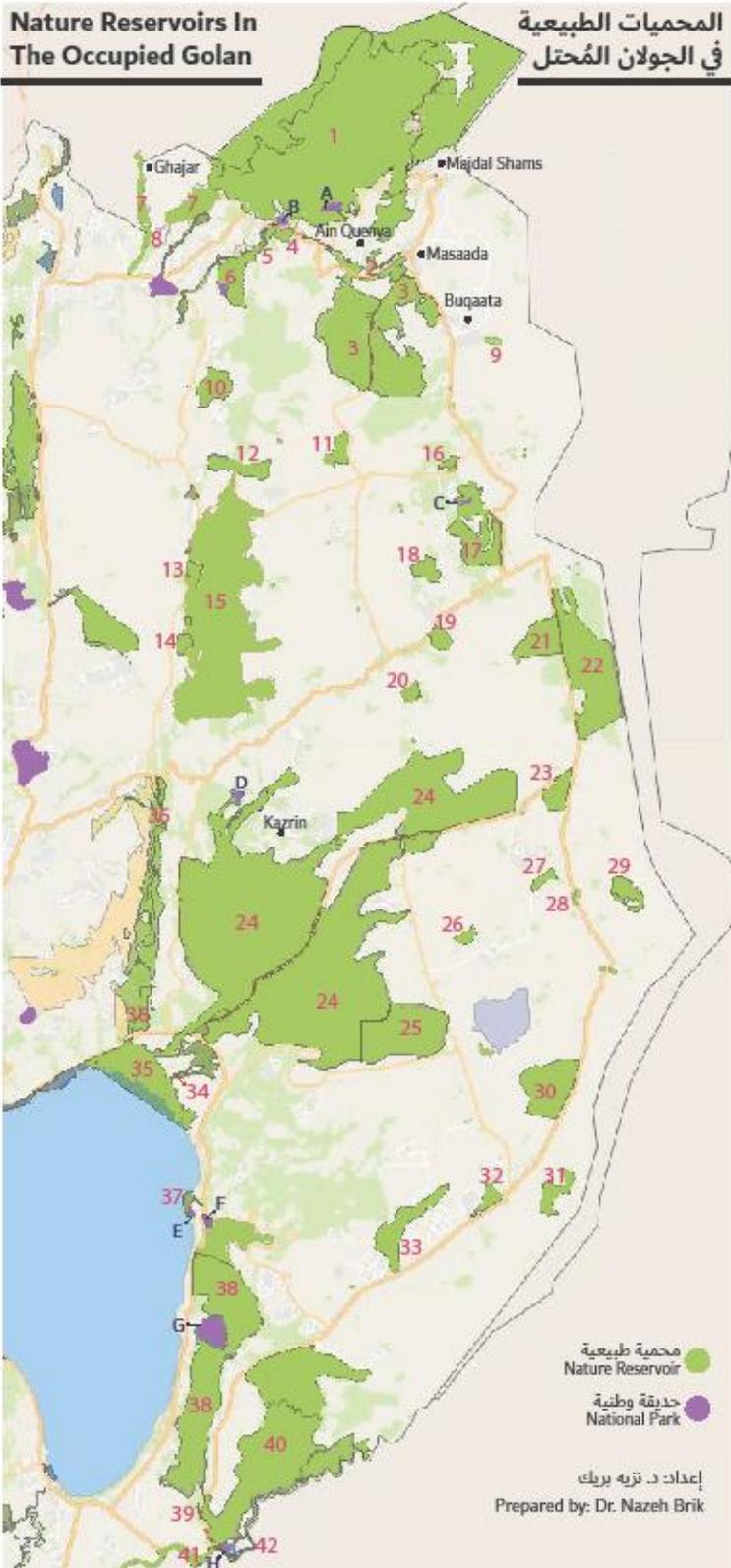
Sources:

https://inature.info/wiki/%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA_%D7%98%D7%91%D7%A2

https://www.gov.il/he/departments/general/nature_reserves_2

<https://mavat.moin.gov.il/mavatps/forms/sv3.aspx?tid=3>

Map of the spread of nature reserves in the Golan



2.0 - The hidden goals of creating nature reserves

It is inevitable to examine the Israel's practices in the occupied territories, through the historical context, relating to Zionist ideology, which is based on a colonial concept through a colonial-settling program aimed at creating a space controlled by the Jewish race. Ensuring such control is coupled with the Jewish human presence and formation of Ethnicity majority population.

In Israel, the process of planning and organizing cannot be separated from the political, national and economic context, so that planning is another tool used for used by the occupier to control Arab space as an alternative or complement to military control.

Usually, certain areas are classified as nature reserves, with the aim of curbing the accelerating destruction that humans practice on the environment due to their consumer lifestyle. Therefore, nature reserves play a role in creating a minimum balance between the components of the plant and animal environment (flora and fauna) and humans. But in Israel, nature reserves and national parks play another role, hidden between the lines of the environmental concept, where everything relates to land must have a political function, or be employed to achieve political goals that serve the Zionist project. Among the most important of these goals:

2.1- Expropriation of land from the Arab population (Palestinians and Golanees), who live within its district control, serving the Zionist project to Judaize the land.

With the beginning of the occupation, according to Israeli data sources, the residents of the four villages (Majdal Shams, Buqaatha, Masa'ada, and Ain Qinya) owned approximately **96,000** dunums, of which about **27,000** dunams were arable, and the rest (**69,000**) dunams were pasture lands owned by the residents of those villages³. The same Israeli sources talk, in another paper, about **74,000** dunums of pasture lands that belonged to the four previously mentioned villages before occupation, and then decreased in 1969 to **38,000** dunams, as a result of confiscation⁴. Based on these data, it can be said that before occupation, the four villages, owned more than **100,000** dunums of agricultural and pasture land. As for the village of Ghajar, before the occupation, it owned about **5,000** dunams, and today it owns about **2,000** dunams, as the bulk of its lands were confiscated for the benefit of the Senir settlement located inside the occupied Golan.

Officially, today the area of land of the five villages is approximately **58,000** dunams, but in practice it is only **47,000** dunams, as approximately **11 thousand** dunams were deducted in favor of the nature reserves surrounding these villages (see Table 3). This means that, since the occupation, the Israeli authorities have confiscated approximately **56%** of the lands of the Syrian population in the occupied Golan, for

³ Druze agriculture in the Golan Heights (Hebrew).

<https://www.archives.gov.il/catalogue/group/1?kw=%D7%9B%D7%A4%D7%A8%20%D7%92%D7%92%D7%A8%20%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%AA%20%D7%94%D7%92%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%9F&page=1>

⁴ Damage of goats in the Golan Heights (Hebrew).

<https://www.archives.gov.il/catalogue/group/1?kw=%D7%9B%D7%A4%D7%A8%20%D7%92%D7%92%D7%A8%20%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%AA%20%D7%94%D7%92%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%9F&page=1>

the benefit of the army, settlements, and nature reserves. It is worth noting that there is an Israeli army camp inside the urban lands of Majdal Shams.

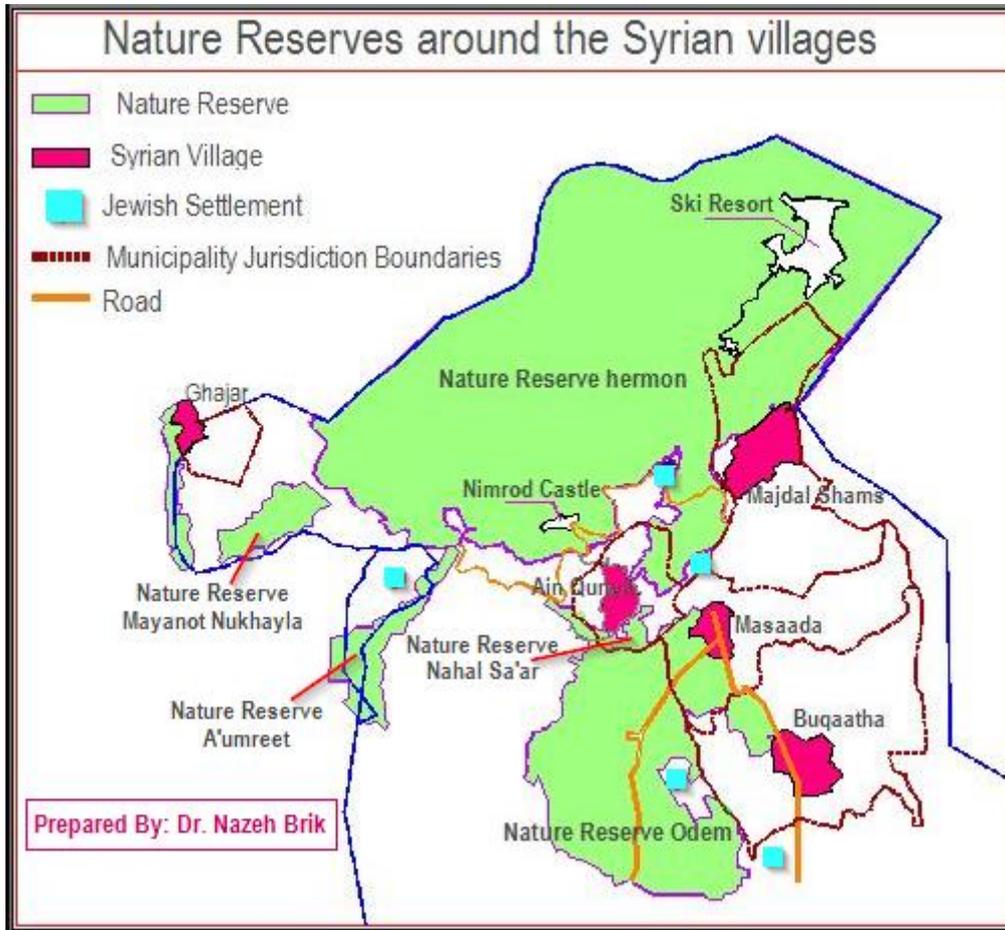


Table No. 3

Area of the administrative boundaries of the Syrian villages in the Golan

Village Name	Population (10/2021)	Administrative boundaries (Dunam)	Confiscated area in favor of Nature reserves (Dunam)
Majdal-Shams	11,655	17,548	5,759
Buqaatha	6,842	19,540	1,124
Masa'ada	4,208	12,506	2,318
Ain Qunya	2,786	5,650	1,680
Ghajar	2,476	2,800	170
Total	27,967	58,044	11,051

Population Sources:

https://data.gov.il/dataset/residents_in_israel_by_communities_and_age_groups

Other data sources:

<http://maale-hermon.complot.co.il/generalinfo/Documents/%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%95%D7%AA%20%D7%90%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%94.pdf>

2.2 - Exclusion of the Arab population from benefiting the land, both urban and economic.

Although part of the nature reserves in the northern Golan are located within the administrative borders of the five Syrian villages, the occupation authorities, represented by the Nature and Parks Protection Authority, took decisions of exclusion measures without the participation of the municipal councils of these villages and despite their opposition.

Israel practices the method of "**planning from above**", which is authoritarian and central planning, as its relatedness to the Arab citizen can be placed within the framework of the concept of "dictation". Thus, the planning and formation of space is carried out without the Arab citizen having the possibility of actual influence in drawing this reality and take advantage of it **(Brik, N.)**

Part of the lands confiscated by the occupation authorities for the benefit of nature reserves, was a reserve space for the urban expansion of these villages. With the adoption of these reserves, this reserve space part was robbed, despite the fact that all Arab villages in the occupied Golan suffer from a severe shortage of urban spaces. This shortage resulted in very negative effects on the social and psychological life of the residents, in addition to the economic aspect, as this situation led to an imaginary rise in Land prices allocated for urban expansion.

The other aspect is to preventing the Arab population from establishing economic interests within the nature reserves, while the settlers are allowed to do so. An example of this is the ski resort in Jabal al-Sheikh, which locates within the "Hermon Protectorate", the second largest reserve in the occupied Golan, where the laws and procedures of nature reserves are not applied since it's already given ownership to a settlement called "Neveh Ativ".

Before occupation, the agricultural sector and the livestock sector constituted the most important sources of livelihood in the life of the Golan population. The number of livestock (goats, cows, sheep) in 1973 in the five villages reached **20,820**⁵ head of livestock. Today, the number of livestock does not exceed a few hundred, and this is due to the confiscation of grazing lands for the benefit of nature reserves, and for the purposes of the military activities of the occupation army. In addition, there is a group of wild plants that formed an important part of the culture of the Golani cuisine, and by establishing these reserves, the inhabitants were deprived of the living benefit from a large part of these plants.

⁵ Druze agriculture in the Golan Heights (Hebrew).

<https://www.archives.gov.il/catalogue/group/1?kw=%D7%98%D7%A4%D7%A8%20%D7%92%D7%92%D7%A8%20%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%9E%D7%AA%20%D7%94%D7%92%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%9F&page=1>

Table No. 4: Land Use of the Syrian villages in the occupied Golan				
Village Name	Agricultural land (Dunam)	Industrial Zone (Dunam)	Urban Zone (Dunam)	Population density (Person per Dunam)
Majdal-Shams	5,483	734	2,306	5.05
Buqa'atha	12,365	145	1,800	3.80
Masa'ada	4,668	128	1,372	3.07
Ain Qunya	2,899	34	1,037	2.68
Ghajar	2,120	51	459 (1)	5.39
Total	27,535 (3)	1,092	6,750 (2)	Average: 3.99
<p>(1) Out of a total of 459 dunams, 260 dunams are located inside Lebanese territory. (2) Excluding the area that located within the Lebanese borders (260 dunams). (3) According to the data of the Israeli Water Authority (Mekorot), there are only 20,000 dunams of agricultural use. According to the author, this is due to the minefields that cover some agricultural areas.</p> <p>Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - http://maale-hermon.complot.co.il/generalinfo/Documents/%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%95%D7%AA%20%D7%90%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%94.pdf - https://wold.mekorot.co.il/Heb/newsite/WaterManagementandSupply/Supplyofwatertoremoteregions/Pages/TheGolanHeightsAgriculturalMasterPlan.aspx 				

2.3 - Erase the identity of the place and its historical memory.

Since its establishment, based on settlement projects, Israel has deliberately erased the identity of the place and its historical memory through the complete destruction of its population and urban identity, its culture and history, and the removal of all physical evidence of this identity. As for non-material evidence, such as the Arabic names for geographical locations and places, the occupation authorities destroy them through Replacing the Arabic names with Hebrew names, because the Arabic names will keep the memory of future generations aware of the ethnic cleansing and urban destruction that the occupying power practiced against the indigenous people of the Golan (see Tables No.1 and No.2).

2.4 - Concealing the features of ethnic cleansing and urban destruction.

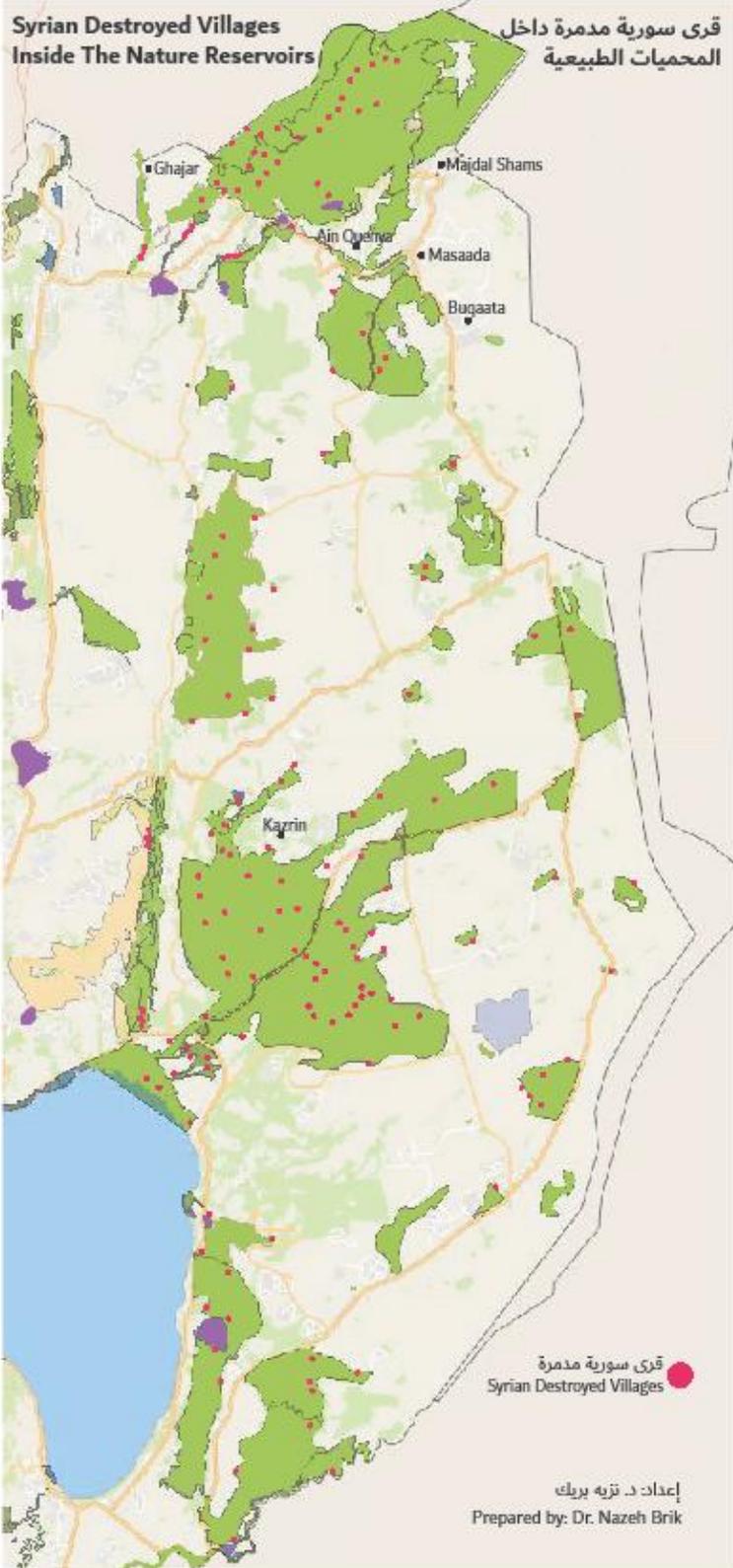
At the international level, Israel seeks to market itself as a "green country" that gives the environment a great place in its development policy. It has established 537 nature reserves and national parks to date, which is a very large number for its area. Just as Israel raises the slogan "the only democratic country in the Middle East", it is doing hard to market itself as "the only country in the Middle East that cares about the environment".

In fact, the expulsion of the indigenous population constitutes only one aspect of the clearing of the space, as the other aspect constitutes the goal of erasing and obliterating any physical evidence of the existence of the indigenous population which is done through the reconfiguration of the place, in addition to replacing the

human component of the space by expelling the indigenous people and settling newcomers instead. Thus, the nature reserves in the Zionist colonial thought became one of the tools to reconfigure the place.

Israel practices through the nature reserves the process of "**Greenwashing**" of its crimes in Palestine and the Golan ⁶. Most of the nature reserves have been established on the ruins of Palestinian and Syrian villages. In the Golan the nature reserves hide the landmarks of **145** Syrian villages out of a total of **341** cities and villages that the occupation authorities destroyed and expelled their residents during and after the war (see map).

⁶ **Sasa Ghada**, 2017: Israel- Greenwashing Colonialism and Apartheid, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



summary:

As mentioned previously, planning in Israel is used as a powerful tool to subjugate and control the Arab population living within its sphere of control (the Palestinians - within the Green Line, the West Bank - and the Syrians in the Golan). Furthermore, the Israelis practice extra planning to achieve political goals, to conceal the link between planning and the Zionist political project.

One of the features of this planning system is that it is based on:

- A nominated undemocratic authority.
- Exclusion of the Arab population representatives from all institutions related to construction and development decision making processes.
- Subjecting the Arab sector to the process of "planning from above", which means that they cannot participate in the planning process.
- Depriving the Arab population of establishing new residential areas, while the expansion of Jewish settlements is on a larger scale, not to mention the government announcement in its meeting held in the Golan about plans to build new settlements.
- Spatial narrowing of Arab residential areas. Reducing development opportunities for the Arab communities.
- Applying double standards in the planning, building and development process towards the Arab community compared to Jewish community.

Land distribution policy as an important material condition for the development process, and the planning policy applied, plays a major role in shaping the living conditions of the individual and the group. Poor planning or planning based on the principle of marginalization and deliberate exclusion affects the fundamental values and rights of the individual and the group as a whole: the human right to comfortable housing, his right to infrastructure, equitable distribution of resources, etc.

Sources:

- 1- https://www.gov.il/he/departments/general/nature_reserves_2
- 2- <https://inature.info/wiki/%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%98%D7%91%D7%A2>
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