FROM SIEGE TO SOIL

Food Sovereignty and the Politics of Survival in Palestine and the Global South

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“He who feeds you, controls you.”
Thomas Sankara (1983)[1]

Food sovereignty transcends agricultural practice; it represents resistance against colonialism, capitalism, and environmental exploitation. It is a fundamental political struggle, fought not only for sustenance but for autonomy, dignity, and the reclamation of stolen lands. As Thomas Sankara’s words remind us, food sovereignty is not merely about access to food, but about power; the power to control one’s future and resist subjugation. This article explores food sovereignty as a decolonial strategy, focusing on its role in Palestinian resistance against Israeli settler colonialism, its historical parallels with Latin American and African struggles against land dispossession, and its connections to indigenous movements. Drawing upon insights from scholars and activists, the article highlights how food sovereignty is central to liberation movements. Employing a comparative approach, it analyses settler colonialism, monoculture, greenwashing, and grassroots resistance, while integrating academic and activist perspectives.

Introduction: Food Sovereignty as Decolonial Resistance

> If the colonized subject could only realize that by accepting the colonizer’s language, culture, and values, he is accepting his own subjugation, he would understand that the first step toward liberation is a return to his own heritage.[2]
>
> —Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

Food sovereignty, defined as the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems, serves as a political and ecological tool for self-determination. Unlike food security, which focuses on food access without addressing systemic injustices, food sovereignty challenges colonial power structures. It asserts that control over food systems must remain in the hands of those who cultivate the land, rather than corporations, settler states, or foreign aid organisations that use food as a weapon of dependency.[3]

In Palestine, indigenous food ways have been systematically disrupted through land confiscation, monoculture, and settler-colonial expansion. The Israeli state’s use of agriculture as a weapon of control echoes European colonial policies in Latin America and Africa, where indigenous communities were displaced for cash crop economies. Just as European colonisers uprooted the traditional food systems of indigenous Latin Americans and Africans to impose sugarcane, cotton, and coffee plantations for imperial wealth, Zionist expansion has sought to erase Palestinian agricultural heritage through the systematic destruction of olive groves, water theft, and restrictions on local farming practices.[4]

This article examines food sovereignty as a means of decolonisation by analysing Palestinian agricultural resistance, Latin American agrarian movements, and African struggles for land autonomy. It traces how colonialism has used food production as a method of control, how indigenous peoples have resisted through agroecology and self-sustaining agricultural models, and how reclaiming food sovereignty remains at the heart of anti-colonial struggles worldwide.

1 Thomas Sankara, Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983–1987, ed. Ernest Harsch (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988), 72.

2 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 14.

3 Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty. Declaration of Nyéléni. Sélingué, Mali: Nyéléni Forum, 2007, 1. Accessed 1 December 2025. https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf.

4 Eyal Weizman, Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation (London: Verso, 2007), 184–192; Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 388–390; Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 33–45; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory 2024 (New York: United Nations, 2023), 30–34.

Historical Continuity of Colonial Tactics

For over five centuries, colonial powers have employed consistent strategies to dominate indigenous populations, primarily through the control of land and food systems. From the 16th century onwards, European colonisers-imposed monoculture plantations in Africa, the Americas, and Asia, disrupting traditional, diverse agricultural practices. This shift not only served economic interests but also functioned as a means to control and suppress indigenous populations by undermining their self-sufficiency and cultural practices. The replacement of diverse cropping systems with single cash crops made colonised regions dependent on colonial markets and vulnerable to food insecurity.

Eduardo Galeano, in The Open Veins of Latin America, Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent highlights how the Spanish and Portuguese invaders systematically replaced indigenous poly-cultural farming with vast sugarcane and coffee plantations, transforming self-sufficient agricultural societies into labour-exploiting economies serving European markets. The forced introduction of monoculture led to soil exhaustion, economic dependency, and the violent dispossession of indigenous peoples from their lands. This agricultural transformation was not just about producing goods for export—it was a mechanism of control, as food systems were increasingly removed from the hands of local communities and placed under the jurisdiction of colonial powers. As Galeano writes, “The colonial system was built on hunger: the hunger of the enslaved, the hunger of the dispossessed, the hunger of a continent that fed the wealth of Europe.”[5]

A similar logic operated in Palestine. Shukri Arraf shows how British Mandate policies restructured Palestinian agriculture to serve imperial markets, prioritising citrus (especially Jaffa oranges) for export to Europe at the expense of subsistence crops and community food systems. This shift mirrored the plantation transformations imposed in Latin America, where Indigenous food production was dismantled to supply European demand. The British colonial project in Palestine, like its counterparts across the Global South, reconfigured agricultural labour and land use to secure political control through economic dependency.[6]

The British Mandate not only promoted export-oriented monoculture but also facilitated the systematic transfer of land from Palestinian farmers to Zionist settler-colonial projects.[7] The role of land registries and legal frameworks during the Mandate period mirrored colonial tactics used in Latin America, where Spanish land reforms erased indigenous communal landholding traditions in favour of privatised, European-controlled estates.[8] The establishment of large Jewish settlements, backed by British policies, laid the groundwork for the systematic fragmentation of Palestinian agricultural landscapes; a process that continues under Israeli occupation today.

The replacement of diverse agricultural systems with colonial cash crops was a fundamental tool of subjugation. In Africa, British and French colonial administrations introduced cotton plantations, coffee estates, and peanut farms, replacing indigenous farming systems and rendering local populations reliant on European markets.[9] This destruction of indigenous self-sufficiency ensured colonial dominance over food production and economic stability, a pattern that has persisted into the present era with multinational agribusinesses continuing the legacy of extractive agricultural economies.

5 Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 33–45. (These pages cover colonial agricultural restructuring, sugar and coffee plantations, and hunger as a colonial tool).

6 Shukri Arraf, The Land, the People, and the Effort (Jerusalem: Arab Studies Society, 1987), 112–28. (These pages document British Mandate agricultural restructuring, citrus export orientation, and the diversion of Palestinian agriculture toward imperial markets).

7 Rashid Khalidi, The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 23–41. (These pages detail British land laws, Mandate land registries, and the facilitation of Zionist land acquisition and settlement expansion).

8 Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 57–69. (These pages discuss the destruction of Indigenous communal land systems and the imposition of European-controlled estates).

9 Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 44–59. (These pages explain the forced introduction of colonial cash-crop regimes and the resulting economic dependency).

The same strategies of control are visible in contemporary Palestine, where Israeli occupation forces manipulate agricultural policies to further fragment Palestinian land and food sovereignty. The destruction of Palestinian olive groves, the restriction of access to fertile land, and the monopolisation of water resources all serve as modern manifestations of colonial agricultural strategies.[10] As Shukri Arraf notes, the control of land and food production is not just an economic act but a deeply political one, aimed at severing the connection between indigenous people and their land.[11] This agricultural repression mirrors broader colonial practices, where ecological domination is used to fracture cultural continuity and impose structural dependency. By drawing these connections (between Latin America, Africa, and Palestine) it becomes evident that food sovereignty is not simply a struggle over agriculture but a broader battle for autonomy, cultural preservation, and resistance against colonial erasure. As history demonstrates, the manipulation of food systems remains one of the most insidious and effective tools of colonial oppression—one that indigenous communities across the world continue to resist through the reclamation of land, the revival of traditional agricultural practices, and the assertion of food sovereignty as a fundamental human right.

Monoculture, Environmental Manipulation, and Food as a Weapon

> The land does not belong to us; we belong to the land. —Indigenous proverb

Monoculture farming has long been a central mechanism of colonial conquest; an imperialist tool designed to erase indigenous agricultural knowledge and replace it with extractive economies. In Palestine, the illegal Israeli occupation has systematically replaced agricultural biodiversity with monoculture farming, mirroring the devastation wrought in Latin America and Africa through centuries of colonial extraction. The aim is not merely economic but deeply political: to sever indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, fragment their relationship with nature, and impose dependency on external systems of control.

In Palestine, olive trees, central to cultural heritage and resistance, have been methodically uprooted by Israeli settlers and military forces. Over 800,000 olive trees have been destroyed since 1967, a deliberate act of agricultural erasure meant to dispossess Palestinian farmers and dismantle their means of self-sufficiency.[12] This destruction is not random; it follows the logic of settler-colonialism, in which land is not only stolen but restructured to eliminate its former caretakers.[13] Similarly, in Latin America, the imposition of sugarcane monoculture devastated indigenous agricultural diversity. Brazil's Atlantic rainforest was cleared to accommodate European sugar mills, leading to both long-term ecological collapse and the forced labour of enslaved peoples to sustain this exploitative system.[14] Today, multinational agribusinesses continue this colonial trajectory, expanding soy and palm oil plantations while displacing indigenous land stewards.[15]

10 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory 2024 (New York: United Nations, 2023), 30–34.
(These pages document destruction of olive trees, restricted land access, and water monopolisation).
Eyal Weizman, Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation (London: Verso, 2007), 184–92.

11 Shukri Arraf, The Land, the People, and the Effort (Jerusalem: Arab Studies Society, 1987), 55–63.
(These pages explicitly address control of land and agricultural production as political instruments to weaken Indigenous presence).

12 Applied Research Institute–Jerusalem (ARIJ), The Humanitarian Impact of the Israeli Occupation: Agricultural and Land-Based Violations (Bethlehem: ARIJ, 2015), 22–27; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory 2024 (New York: United Nations, 2023), 30–34.

13 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 392–96.

14 Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 53–62. (These pages provide a detailed account of sugarcane plantations, Atlantic rainforest destruction, and coerced labour systems).

15 Philip McMichael, Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2013), 98–112.

> Greenwashing in Palestine: The Jewish National Fund and Ecological Colonialism
> "They make a desert and call it peace."
> —Tacitus[16]

One of the most insidious forms of colonialism in Palestine is the practice of greenwashing—the attempt to mask settler-colonial expansion under the guise of environmentalism. The Jewish National Fund (JNF), established in 1901, has played a central role in this deception. Through so-called reforestation projects, the JNF has sought to erase the natural Palestinian landscape, planting non-native pine forests over the ruins of depopulated Palestinian villages. This strategy is not about conservation; it is about conquest. The aim is to erase the memory of Palestinian land stewardship and replace it with a settler narrative that claims to have 'redeemed' a barren desert.[17]

This mirrors the 'greening' projects in apartheid South Africa, where forests were planted to justify land expropriation from Black communities, transforming vast tracts of indigenous land into state-controlled reserves that excluded those who had tended them for generations.[18] In both cases, colonial powers weaponised nature, turning it into a mechanism of displacement and ecological imperialism by constructing an environmental facade over violent dispossession.

As Eyal Weizman demonstrates, Israeli military industries are deeply intertwined with environmental infrastructure projects, particularly in water and land management. The same companies that manufacture military surveillance technologies are also involved in the development of water pipelines and irrigation systems, often using conservationist rhetoric to obscure their role in the colonial control of resources.[19] The construction of national parks, nature reserves, and renewable energy projects frequently serves as a front for further land expropriation, echoing the colonial projects of European empires in Algeria, Kenya, and Brazil, where 'environmental protection' was used as a tool to mask territorial control.[20]

A striking comparison can be made with the British colonial administration in Kenya, which expelled indigenous Maasai and Kikuyu communities from fertile lands under the pretext of wildlife conservation, only to later allocate those lands to white settler plantations and private hunting reserves.[21] Similarly, in Latin America, multinational corporations working alongside state actors have displaced indigenous Amazonians under the guise of 'sustainable' agribusiness expansion, even as these projects exacerbate deforestation and soil degradation.[22] The logic of colonial environmentalism remains the same: the imposition of a foreign ecological vision that prioritises capitalist extraction while excluding the very people who have historically preserved and cultivated the land.

In Palestine, the JNF's afforestation efforts are designed not only to erase Palestinian villages but also to reinforce a settler narrative of 'making the desert bloom'—a mythological trope used to justify Israel's expansionist policies. This mirrors Zionist

16 Tacitus, The Annals, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (London: Macmillan, 1876), Book 15, Chapter 44. Tacitus was a Roman senator and historian of the first century CE, known for his critical and insightful accounts of the Roman Empire.

17 Eyal Weizman, Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation (London: Verso, 2007), 20–31, 70–83. (Details JNF forestry, pine monoculture, and the political purpose of covering destroyed Palestinian villages).
Ilan Pappé, The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 225–33. (Documents JNF's role in planting European pines over depopulated Palestinian villages after 1948).

18 Jane Carruthers, The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995), 117–34. (Discusses how colonial and apartheid authorities used conservation and afforestation to justify eviction of Indigenous communities).

19 Eyal Weizman, The Least of All Possible Evils (London: Verso, 2011), 145–58. (These pages examine how military industries, humanitarian optics, environmental rhetoric, and infrastructure projects—pipelines, water systems—integrate into a single colonial apparatus).

20 Diana K. Davis, Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 71–88.
Philip W. Porter and Kevin M. Campbell, in The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment, ed. Melissa Leach and James Fairhead (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), 98–112.

21 David Anderson, Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire
(New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 52–63. (Documents displacement of Kikuyu/Maasai for settler estates and "game reserves").

22 Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the Amazon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 95.

propaganda from the early 20th century that framed Palestine as an empty, barren wasteland, despite its rich agricultural history and the thriving Palestinian farming communities that had been exporting citrus, wheat, and olives for centuries.[23] Just as European colonial projects sought to rewrite history by erasing indigenous land relationships, Israeli greenwashing projects today attempt to overwrite Palestinian existence through an ecological lens that prioritises settler claims over historical realities.[24]

Movements and Agroecological Resistance

> If the present order is incapable of giving us land, bread, and freedom, we must take it ourselves.
> —Emiliano Zapata[25]

These words by Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary leader of the Mexican peasant movement, continue to resonate across decolonial struggles today. In contexts like Palestine, where land and livelihood are systematically denied through occupation and ecological erasure, Zapata's call underscores the imperative of reclaiming food sovereignty as a political act. Just as the Zapatistas challenged the hacienda system and neoliberal reforms in Mexico, Palestinian farmers resist settler-colonial agribusiness through seed saving, community farming, and indigenous ecological practices that affirm collective rights to land and life, as do the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil has reclaimed fundamental forms of resistance against neoliberal and colonial systems.[26] These transnational struggles highlight how food sovereignty serves as both a practical and symbolic challenge to global capitalist and settler-colonial domination.

Despite systematic suppression, indigenous communities continue to resist through agroecology. In Palestine, farmers and grassroots movements have reclaimed land by refusing to conform to settler-imposed agricultural models, embodying a decolonial praxis that seeks to reconnect people with their ancestral soil. As Fanon argued, true decolonisation is not simply about political independence but about reclaiming the material conditions that sustain life, including land and agriculture.[27]

The Palestinian Agroecological Forum, Om Sleiman Farm, the Heirloom Seed Library, Manjala Agricultural and Cultural Initiative, Sakiya, and initiatives such as the Palestinian Farmers Union, the Palestinian Permaculture Association, and the Rural Women's Cooperative in the Jordan Valley are more than agricultural projects; they represent vibrant forms of active resistance and decolonial praxis, reclaiming food sovereignty in the face of settler-colonial dispossession. These initiatives work to revive indigenous crop varieties such as za'tar[28] and 'aqoub,[29] as well as heirloom wheat and traditional legumes, which have historically sustained Palestinian communities and now serve as cultural symbols of defiance against the Israeli agribusiness complex. By rejecting Israeli agribusiness models that promote dependency on imported seeds, chemical inputs, and industrial farming, these initiatives preserve not only traditional agricultural knowledge but also foster independent and resilient food systems rooted in community autonomy. They challenge the imposed neoliberal structure of food production that turns farmers into

23 Ilan Pappé, The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 225–33. (JNF planting pines over destroyed villages; early Zionist propaganda about "desert").

24 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–400.

25 Emiliano Zapata, quoted in John Womack, Zapata and the Mexican Revolution (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 377.

26 John Womack Jr., Zapata and the Mexican Revolution (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 45–58. (Covers Zapata's land doctrine, communal autonomy, and peasant resistance).

27 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 27–39.

28 Za'tar (Thymbra spicata or Origanum syriacum) is a wild Levantine thyme central to Palestinian culinary and medicinal traditions. Harvested seasonally and frequently dried and blended with sesame and sumac, it forms an essential part of indigenous foodways. Israeli "environmental protection" laws restrict its foraging, effectively criminalising traditional Palestinian harvesting practices and disrupting cultural continuity.

29 'Aqoub (Gundelia tournefortii) is a wild spring thistle widely consumed across Palestine and the Levant, valued for its culinary and medicinal uses. Gathered according to long-standing indigenous ecological knowledge, it has been designated a "protected species" by Israeli authorities, resulting in fines and arrests for Palestinian harvesters and transforming a cultural food practice into a criminalised act.

passive consumers of externally controlled resources and assert sovereignty over seeds, water, and land.

Beyond these, initiatives such as the Palestinian Permaculture Association actively promote agroecological education and training, empowering small-scale farmers to adopt sustainable practices that prioritise ecological balance, community autonomy, and social justice. The Rural Women's Cooperative in the Jordan Valley organises women farmers around the cultivation of traditional crops such as date palms[30] and figs,[31] securing control over land, labour, and subsistence under conditions of settler-colonial dispossession. Another significant project, the Yatta Seed Bank, works to collect, preserve, and protect seeds from Palestinian villages facing demolition orders and land confiscation, highlighting the inseparable relationship between seed sovereignty and territorial rights. Together, these diverse agroecological movements embody a broader decolonial praxis that challenges settler-colonial domination by reclaiming land, biodiversity, and cultural identity within frameworks of food sovereignty.

These efforts resonate strongly with movements in Latin America, where Indigenous communities resist corporate agribusiness and reclaim their food systems through agroecology. As scholars of agroecology argue, ecological farming has emerged as a global mode of political resistance as much as a scientific practice.[3] In Chiapas, the Zapatista movement employs agroecology not merely as an agricultural method but as an assertion of autonomy and a rejection of neoliberal food regimes.[32] In Brazil, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) has mobilised millions to occupy unused land and establish collectively managed agroecological settlements, directly challenging capitalist agriculture and strengthening food sovereignty through sustainable, community-based production. In Burkina Faso, revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara articulated a radically anti-colonial agricultural vision, insisting that liberation requires breaking dependency on imported food and external aid. His declaration that "we must produce what we consume, and consume what we produce"[33] remains a foundational statement of food sovereignty.

This philosophy continues to inspire Palestinian agricultural movements, where farmers assert their right to cultivate despite military restrictions, land confiscation, and settler violence. Yet the struggle remains unfinished: ongoing occupation, ecological constraints, and resource theft demand expanded support for Palestinian agroecological initiatives. These projects show that agroecology is not merely a question of sustenance; it is a profound political claim, reaffirming the enduring connection between land, culture, and resistance.

Nowhere is this struggle more visible than in Gaza, where agriculture and food have been weaponised as a tool of genocide. The Israeli blockade has deliberately restricted access to seeds, fertilisers, and water, ensuring that Palestinians remain dependent on external food aid and systematically starving them as a tool of control and domination.[34] This is not a natural famine or accidental scarcity, Palestinians are not starving; they are being starved through a calculated siege designed to inflict maximum suffering and submission.[35] Recent reports indicate that acute malnutrition has risen sharply in Gaza since late 2023, with UN agencies warning of "imminent famine conditions" affecting the entire population.[36] The destruction of farms, wells, and irrigation infrastructure, alongside the militarisation of humanitarian aid distribution, often controlled by US and Israeli-backed actors, turns food aid sites into "death traps," where Palestinians have been killed while seeking life-saving assistance.[37]

This engineered starvation is a continuation of settler-colonial tactics, deploying food as a weapon to sever Palestinians'

30 Date palms (Phoenix dactylifera): long-cultivated fruit trees central to Levantine agriculture, producing clusters of edible sweet dates.

31 Figs (Ficus carica): a traditional Mediterranean fruit with soft pulp and edible seeds, historically grown in Palestinian terraced agriculture.

32 Steve Gliessman, Agroecology: The Ecology of Sustainable Food Systems, 3rd ed. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2015), 213–231.

33 Thomas Sankara, Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983–87, ed. Ernest Harsch (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988), 154.

34 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Gaza Strip: Humanitarian Access Snapshot, updated regularly 2024–2025. Accessed 8 December 2025. https://www.ochaopt.org.

35 Human Rights Watch, Israel: Starvation as a Weapon of War in Gaza, December 2023. Accessed 8 December 2025. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-weapon-war-gaza.

36 World Food Programme (WFP), Gaza: Emergency Food Security Assessment, 2024–2025. Accessed 8 December 2025. https://www.wfp.org.

37 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Gaza Situation Report, issues published 2024–2025 documenting attacks on aid convoys and distribution sites. Accessed 8 December 2025. https://www.ochaopt.org.

connection to their land and weaken their capacity for resistance. It echoes Frantz Fanon's analysis that colonial violence works not only through direct physical destruction but also through the systematic dismantling of the material conditions that sustain life, targeting both the body and its social world.[38] The infrastructure of domination is reinforced by multinational corporations, such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft, whose cloud services and surveillance technologies support Israeli military targeting systems, illustrating how contemporary capitalism is entangled with the machinery of settler-colonial war.[39]

Yet, despite these brutal conditions, resistance persists. During the 2023–2025 genocide, Gazan farmers continued to plant crops under bombardment, asserting their right to life and land through agriculture itself. As one farmer told Al Jazeera after returning to his devastated fields: "They destroyed everything, but we will plant again."[40] This insistence transforms agroecology into a radical act of decolonial defiance, reclaiming food sovereignty and challenging the colonial order that seeks to extinguish Palestinian existence. It resonates with historical and transnational struggles, from Irish peasants starved under British imperial rule to Indigenous communities in Brazil resisting agribusiness, where food systems become terrains of liberation rather than instruments of domination.[41]

Through reclaiming land, seeds, and agricultural knowledge, Palestinians join Latin American and African movements in refusing the imposed conditions of dispossession and dependency. Agroecology emerges not merely as a method of cultivation but as a political praxis that binds land, culture, and resistance against ongoing settler colonialism and imperialism. The Zapatista movement in Mexico and Indigenous farmers in Bolivia model similar forms of agroecological autonomy, rejecting capitalist food regimes and resisting genetically modified seeds.

38 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 27–40.

39 Amnesty International, Automated Apartheid: How Israel Uses AI-Driven Targeting and Surveillance in Gaza, 2024. Accessed 9 December 2025. https://www.amnesty.org.

40 Al Jazeera, "Gaza Farmers Return to Destroyed Fields Determined to Replant," 8 January 2024. Accessed 9 December 2025. https://www.aljazeera.com

41 Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 15–38.

In Africa, Thomas Sankara's revolutionary government placed food sovereignty at the centre of political transformation, rejecting foreign aid dependency and revitalising local agriculture through land redistribution and collective farming. His declaration ("He who feeds you controls you") remains one of the clearest critiques of colonial and neoliberal food systems and a rallying call for Indigenous sovereignty worldwide.[42]

Cultivating Resistance, Sowing Liberation

We start by saving our seeds. We start by cultivating with our hands. We start by connecting with our sisters and brothers facing the same oppression of colonisation and capitalism. For one plant's death, another must be planted for life. The battle for food sovereignty is not just about sustenance, it is about resistance, dignity, and decolonisation. From Al Falujeh in Gaza[43] to Chiapas to Burkina Faso, Indigenous peoples have always reclaimed their right to land, refusing to let colonial forces dictate their food systems. They resist through their hands, their seeds, and their solidarities with other oppressed peoples. The future of resistance lies in these connections: the refusal to cede the soil, the rejection of colonial agriculture, and the steadfast belief that food sovereignty is an act of liberation.

Frantz Fanon reminds us that true decolonisation is not a mere transfer of power but a complete overturning of the colonial system, one that severs the economic and ideological chains imposed by the oppressor.[44] This remains true in contemporary settler-colonial contexts, where food sovereignty has become

42 Thomas Sankara, Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983–87, ed. Ernest Harsch (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988), 154.

43 Al Falujeh (Al-Falujah) was a Palestinian village in the Gaza district depopulated during the 1948 Nakba. Located near present-day Kiryat Gat, it was historically known for fertile farmland, wheat cultivation, olive groves, and subsistence agriculture. Its inhabitants—many of whom became refugees in Gaza—maintained strong agricultural traditions central to Palestinian food culture and communal life, making Al Falujeh a symbol of agrarian dispossession under settler-colonial expansion. Sources: Walid Khalidi, All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948 (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 102–06; Salman Abu Sitta, The Atlas of Palestine 1917–1966 (London: Palestine Land Society, 2010), 194–95.

44 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1–52.

one of the most vital battlegrounds. Food has long been understood by colonial and capitalist systems as an instrument of domination: control over food is control over life itself. As Al-Haq documented in 2024, the destruction of agricultural lands, systematic theft of water resources, and bombardment of Gaza's farmland demonstrate how food is weaponised as a tool of war and subjugation.[45] Similarly, during the Bengal Famine of 1943, British colonial policies diverted food and shipping capacity toward the imperial war effort, exacerbating scarcity and allowing millions of Bengalis to perish.[46]

Conclusion: Seeds Against Empire: Food Sovereignty as Decolonial Horizon

Colonial powers have always understood that famine is not merely a by-product of war but a weapon in its own right. From the deliberate destruction of Palestinian farmlands to the British, engineered Bengal Famine, food has been mobilised to dismantle Indigenous resistance and entrench domination. The ongoing starvation in Gaza, where Israeli forces have repeatedly targeted bakeries, farms, water pipelines, and humanitarian aid routes, follows this historical pattern of engineered deprivation.47 The same tactic was deployed against the Irish during the Great Famine, when British landlords continued exporting grain and livestock while the population starved.[48] In Africa today, neo-colonial land grabs, marketed as "development" or "agricultural modernisation," continue to dispossess Indigenous farmers, replacing subsistence cultivation with export-oriented monoculture controlled by multinational corporations.[49]

Israel's complicity in land theft and resource extraction extends beyond Palestine. Through commercial alliances and settler-colonial expansion, Israeli and Israeli-linked companies have participated in exploitative extractive industries across the African continent, particularly in the mining sector. Investigations have repeatedly linked Israeli firms and brokers to illicit diamond and mineral networks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Angola, and the Central African Republic—economies whose natural wealth is plundered at the expense of local populations.[50] These networks are not external to Israel's military-industrial economy; they are part of the same architecture that finances colonial expansion, fuels arms industries, and entrenches global systems of subjugation.

And yet, resistance persists. Across Africa, movements are reclaiming food sovereignty as a strategy for self-determination. In Burkina Faso, agroecological initiatives inspired by Thomas Sankara's revolutionary policies are restoring soil fertility, rebuilding local seed systems, and reducing dependence on imports. In Kenya, Indigenous land defenders continue to fight for the return of farmland stolen under British colonial rule, resisting multinational agribusinesses that seek to expand industrial monocultures.[51] In South Africa, small-scale farmers are revitalising Indigenous crops, including sorghum, millet, and amaranth, to counteract the ecological devastation caused by plantation agriculture. These movements are not merely reclaiming land; they are reclaiming the future.

The struggle for food sovereignty is, at its core, a struggle against slow and spectacular forms of death, a battle between those who plant life and those who cultivate destruction. This is not a theoretical claim but a lived reality for communities on the frontlines of settler-colonial violence. Indigenous farmers in Brazil, despite violent land grabs, continue to cultivate and protect sacred lands, knowing that every seed planted is an act of resistance. Their struggle echoes across borders and resonates deeply with Palestinian farmers who continue cultivating under siege, refusing erasure even as orchards, wells, and greenhouses are repeatedly destroyed.

45 Al-Haq, Starvation as a Weapon of War: Israel's Deliberate Impediment of Aid and Destruction of Food Systems in Gaza (Ramallah: Al-Haq, 2024). Accessed 9 December 2025. https://www.alhaq.org.

46 Madhusree Mukerjee, Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 147–210.

47 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Gaza Situation Report, 2024–2025; Human Rights Watch, Israel: Starvation as a Weapon of War, 2023.

48 Christine Kinealy, This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845–52 (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994).

49 Saskia Sassen, Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

50 Global Witness, Undermined: How Corruption, Mismanagement and Political Influence Is Destroying the DRC's Mining Sector, 2023; United Nations Security Council, "Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic," 2019.

51 David Anderson, Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

Food sovereignty is more than survival. It is revolution. It is the declaration that Indigenous, colonised, poor, and oppressed peoples will not be erased; that land will not be privatised; that seeds will not be patented; and that no colonial occupations or capitalist systems, will dictate the future of those who cultivate the earth. The act of planting despite devastation, of reclaiming land despite displacement, of refusing to let colonialism define the boundaries of life.

This is not romanticisation. The truth is far more dystopian. In Gaza, farmers are not simply resisting occupation, they are surviving an orchestrated genocide. The destruction of agricultural lands, the targeting of wells, and the use of starvation as a military weapon are not incidental, they are strategic acts of extermination.52 Grassroots movements alone cannot counter the scale of devastation imposed on them. The crisis demands more than localised resistance; it demands a global political awakening.

To save our seeds is to take a political stand grounded in justice. The struggle for food sovereignty cannot be reduced to farming practices alone; it must be understood as a global confrontation with extraction, exploitation, and systemic violence. It requires a radical rethinking of consumption, production, and complicity.

Ask: What is the price of the tomato I eat today?

Not in money, but in its ecological and political cost.

Is my mobile phone stained with the blood of Congolese miners?

These are difficult questions, but they are the questions that orient us toward survival, and toward resistance.

They are also the questions the wider international community can no longer avoid. Climate justice cannot be claimed, while importing goods produced through land theft, monoculture, and forced displacement. It cannot offer development aid while sustaining the same corporate architectures that extract the Global South's minerals, water, seeds, and labour.

This requires dismantling structures that enable contemporary forms of colonial domination, from Gaza to Congo to the Amazon. To confront these realities is uncomfortable, but comfort has never been the ground on which liberation grows. The work begins in the soil, by recognising the cost of what we consume, the violence embedded in global supply chains, and the colonial economies that still shape our daily lives.

To ask these questions is to refuse complicity.

To answer them honestly is to choose resistance.

52 Al-Haq, Starvation as a Weapon of War: Israel's Deliberate Impediment of Aid and Destruction of Food Systems in Gaza (Ramallah: Al-Haq, 2024).