

# Mixed reaction in Jordan over amendment to expand king's power

Author:

Sun, 2021-11-28 00:44

AMMAN: Jordan's Parliament has been presented with 30 constitutional changes that aim to reform electoral law while also increasing the powers of the king within the executive branch.

MP Salah Armouti, former head of the Jordanian bar, and Mamdouh Abadi, former Amman mayor and deputy prime minister, were among those who voiced criticism against what they described as "unnecessary amendments."

Among the changes is the "constitutionalizing of the National Security Council with wide-ranging political and security powers."

The new council, headed by the king, will include the prime minister, army chief, directors of the security forces, foreign and interior ministers, as well as two other members that the king will appoint.

The concern is that the council will "create a new body that will be parallel to that of the executive and legislative branches of government."

Jordan's monarch will also be able to appoint and fire the chief justice, head of the Sharia court, the general mufti, the head of the Royal Hashemite Court and advisers, adding to existing control over the chief of the army, head of the gendarmerie and head of the intelligence service.

In the past, all these appointments were made based on the recommendations of the prime minister.

Samar Mhareb, director of Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, told Arab News that there is "no justification" for the amendments.

"These amendments will deepen the lack of trust with government and will propel the palace into the unilateral decision-making process on the account of sovereign bodies that are supposed to carry out issues of national accountability," said Mhareb.

The message behind these amendments is that the elected bodies are not able to take such important decisions, he added.

"As civil society activists, we reject these amendments, which reflect a paternalistic attitude in terms of who can decide on important security and foreign relations issues."

However, Haytham Ereifej, a lawyer and a political activist, told Arab News that he welcomed the constitutional amendments, which he said have "a single goal."

He added: "The goal is to prepare for the creation of elected governments while issues of security and foreign affairs stay clearly in the hands of the king.

"The elected prime minister will have local powers in areas of economics, health and education, as well as in other areas," said Ereifej.

He believes that the amendment "sends messages of comfort and reassures the public that we are moving closer and closer to an elected government which will change the way that Jordan is run."

Saad Hattar, a former BBC reporter and an investigative journalism trainer, told Arab News that the amendments are "not needed" and "will weaken democratic reform efforts.

"By ceding powers from the government to the palace, the amendments will put the king in a vulnerable position, because on the one hand he is immune from criticism, but now that his appointments will not require recommendations from the government, it will be difficult to uphold his immunity if things don't turn out well," Hattar said.

Etaf Roudan, manager of Radio Al-Balad and a member of the MENA region WAN/IFRA gender committee, told Arab News that the amendments "have not been available for discussions among the public.

"Some argue that these amendments came because of the weakness of the government, but it is important to remember that the decision to appoint and remove prime ministers is in the hands of the king."

Ahmad Awad, the founder and director of the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, told Arab News that those behind these amendment "did not consider the dangers on the operations of the government and the effects that they will have on the king as a unifying symbol of the country."

Awad said: "I think this will trap the king into administrative issues even though according to the constitution, he is not accountable. I believe that the king should stay above reproach by means of upholding the current constitutional checks and balances."

The Jordanian government responded to critics through Minister of Political Affairs Musa Maaytah.

The minister said that the constitutional amendments will create a national security council "that will help coordinate between the military and civilian institutions of the country."

Responding to a question in parliament on Tuesday, Maaytah said: "The recent challenges such as armed conflicts, wars, terrorist acts and drugs are all issues that affect the national security of the country and this is what caused the push to come up with this idea and to constitutionalize it."



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## [Iraqi family of English Channel shipwreck victim mourn her death](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2021-11-27 20:36

SORAN, Iraq: In a simple house in northeast Iraq, the parents of Maryam Nuri Hama Amin mourn the loss of their beloved daughter who drowned trying to reach her fiancée in Britain.

"She wanted a better life," her father Nuri Hama Amin said, still reeling

from shock, just days after his daughter vanished into the freezing waters of the Channel between France and England. "But she ended up in the sea."

Maryam – "Baran" to her family, a name meaning "rain" in Kurdish – was one of at least 27 migrants who died Wednesday when their inflatable boat sank off the French port of Calais.

The shipwreck was the deadliest disaster since at least 2018 when migrants began using boats en masse to cross the Channel to England.

"We have no information on the smugglers," said her father, speaking from the family home in Soran, a town in Iraq's autonomous region of Kurdistan, some 3,700 kilometers (2,300 miles) away from where his daughter died.

"Their promises turned out to be lies."

Maryam, in her twenties, was desperate to join her fiancée Karzan, also from Iraqi Kurdistan, but who had settled in Britain.

Karzan was on the phone with her as she set out onto the dangerous waters from France – and was the one who called the family in Iraq to tell them she died, her cousin Kafan Omar said.

Shortly before she set left France, her father had spoken to her for hours on the phone.

"She was very happy, she was relaxed," he said. "She was in a hotel in France, we spoke until eight in the morning."

Since the shipwreck, the bodies of the passengers have been held in a morgue in France. Officially, nothing has been released about the identities and nationalities of the 17 men, seven women and three minors.

But at Maryam's home, around 100 relatives gathered to offer their condolences for her death.

On Saturday, dozens of men, many dressed in traditional Kurdish clothes, sat reciting a prayer.

Close by, under the shelter of a large tent, women in black robes sat in mourning. Maryam's mother was too grief-stricken to speak.

In the house, Maryam's room is tidy, as if she had just left it.

Above the bed, two photos show Maryam and her fiancée at their engagement. A picture shows the young woman in a traditional dress decorated with embroidery, with a tiara over an elaborate hairstyle.

A bouquet of white roses lies on her bed.

Her cousin, Kafan Omar, said she had left home nearly a month before.

"She got a work visa and went to Italy, and then to France," he said. "We had tried many times to send her to Britain to join her fiancée, but without success."

Maryam was just one of thousands of young hopefuls from the region who have left home in recent months.

Thousands of migrants – many Kurds from Iraq – have been stuck on the border with Belarus in a bid to cross into Poland and the European Union. Some have returned on repatriation flights, battered by their freezing ordeal.

Many of those Iraqis say they have spent their savings, sold valuables and even taken loans to escape economic hardship in Iraq and start a new life.

Kermaj Ezzat, a close relative of the family, said young people in Iraqi Kurdistan were mainly leaving because of the region's "instability." He denounced the policies blocking their travel.

"These countries have closed their borders to young people who dream of a better future," he said.

Maryam's father gave a message to others wanting to head west.



"I call on young people not to emigrate and to endure the difficulties here, rather than sacrifice their lives to reach Europe," he pleaded.







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UK PM asks France to take back Channel-crossing migrants

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## [UAE adopts widespread legislative reform via 40 new laws and changes](#)

Sat, 2021-11-27 22:23

ABU DHABI: The UAE approved a wide-ranging reform of its legal system, with more than 40 laws included among the draft of new laws and legislative amendments, according to an official announcement on Saturday.

The proposed reforms come during the UAE's "Year of the 50th" and are intended to keep pace with its developmental aspirations, Emirates News Agency (WAM) said.

“The amendments aim to develop the legislative structure in various sectors, including investment, trade and industry, as well as commercial company, regulation and protection of industrial property, copyright, trademarks, commercial register, electronic transactions, trust services, factoring, and residency, in addition to laws related to society and personal security including as the Crime and Punishment Law, the Online Security Law, and a laws regulating the production, sale and use of narcotics and psychotropic substances,” the report said.

The new legislative changes were drawn up through the efforts of teams comprising 540 specialists and experts from 50 federal and local authorities.



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# Arab coalition carries out airstrikes on Yemeni capital

Author:

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Sat, 2021-11-27 03:49

RIYADH: The Arab coalition carried out strikes on targets in Yemen's capital Sanaa, Al Ekhbariya reported on Saturday.

Recently, the coalition has been striking Houthi militia assets in the city in an effort to degrade the Iran-backed group's capabilities to launch attacks toward Saudi Arabia.

The coalition warned civilians from crowding around the targeted areas.

– *More to follow.*



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## How olive trees came to symbolize



# Palestinian national identity

Sat, 2021-11-27 00:32

AMMAN: Few things encapsulate the Palestinian identity quite like the humble olive tree. It roots an entire nation to a land and livelihood lost to occupation, while serving as a potent symbol of resistance against the territorial encroachment of illegal settlements.

In the balmy Mediterranean climate of the Levant, olive trees have for centuries provided a steady source of income from the sale of their fruit and the silky, golden oil derived from it.

To this day, between 80,000 and 100,000 families in the Palestinian territories rely on olives and their oil as primary or secondary sources of income. The industry accounts for about 70 percent of local fruit production and contributes about 14 percent to the local economy.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that these hardy trees feature so prominently in Palestinian art and literature, even in the far-flung diaspora, as symbols of rootedness in an age of displacement, self-sufficiency in times of hardship, and peace in periods of war.



Olive trees provide Palestinians with a vital part of their diet, but have also become a symbol of hope and unity. (Supplied)

“It represents the steadfastness of the Palestinian people, who are able to live under difficult circumstances,” Sliman Mansour, a Palestinian painter in Jerusalem whose art has long focused on the theme of land, told Arab News.

“In the same way that the trees can survive and have deep roots in their land so, too, do the Palestinian people.”

Mahmoud Darwish, the celebrated Palestinian poet who died in 2008, sprinkled his works with references to olives. In his 1964 poetry collection “Leaves of the Olive Tree,” he wrote: “Olive is an evergreen tree; Olive will stay evergreen; Like a shield for the universe.”

Such is the economic and symbolic power of the olive tree in Palestinian national life that the rural communities that have tended these crops for generations are routinely targeted by illegal settlers attempting to denude families of their land and living.

Since the olive harvest began on Oct. 12 this year, observers in the West Bank have reported Israeli settlers attacking Palestinian villages on an almost daily basis, beating farmers, spraying crops with chemicals and uprooting olive trees by the hundreds.

## **FASTFACTS**

**\* The land around the Sea of Galilee was once the world's most important olive region.**

**\* The area was the site of the earliest olive cultivation, dating back to 5,000 B.C.**

**\* Southern Spain and southeastern Italy are now the biggest olive-oil-producing regions.**

Such violence and vandalism is nothing new. The International Committee of the Red Cross said more than 9,300 trees were destroyed in the West Bank between Aug. 2020 and Aug. 2021 alone, compounding the already damaging effects of climate change.

"For years, the ICRC has observed a seasonal peak in violence by Israeli settlers residing in certain settlements and outposts in the West Bank toward Palestinian farmers and their property in the period leading up to the olive-harvest season, as well as during the harvest season itself in October and November," Els Debuf, head of the ICRC's mission in Jerusalem, said recently.

"Farmers also experience acts of harassment and violence that aim at preventing a successful harvest, not to mention the destruction of farming equipment, or the uprooting and burning of olive trees."

According to independent observers appointed by the UN, the violence attributed to Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank has worsened in recent months amid "an atmosphere of impunity."

In response to these attacks, Palestinian farmers have been forced to plant about 10,000 new olive trees in the West Bank each year to prevent the region's 5,000-year-old industry from dying out.





The humble plant continues to have a special place in the hearts of the Palestinian people and their quest for statehood. (Supplied)

Nabil Anani, a celebrated Palestinian painter, ceramicist and sculptor, believes the olive tree is a powerful national symbol that must be protected at all costs.

“For me it is both a national and artistic symbol; it reflects the nature and beauty of Palestine,” Anani, who is considered one of the founders of contemporary Palestinian art, told Arab News. “Our traditions, culture, poems and songs are often centered around the tree.”

To the west of Ramallah, the administrative heart of the Palestine government, Anani said the hillsides bristle with olive trees as far as the eye can see.

“They cover entire mountains and it is one of the most pleasant views that anyone can observe,” he added.

## INNUMBERS

- \* 48% – Proportion of agricultural land in the West Bank and Gaza devoted to olive trees.
- \* 70% – Share of total fruit production in Palestine provided by olives
- \* 14% – Contribution of olives to the Palestinian economy.
- \* 93% – Proportion of the olive harvest used to make olive oil.

The late Fadwa Touqan, one of the most respected female poets in Palestinian literature, saw olive trees as symbols of unity with nature and of hope for the renewal and rebirth of Palestine.

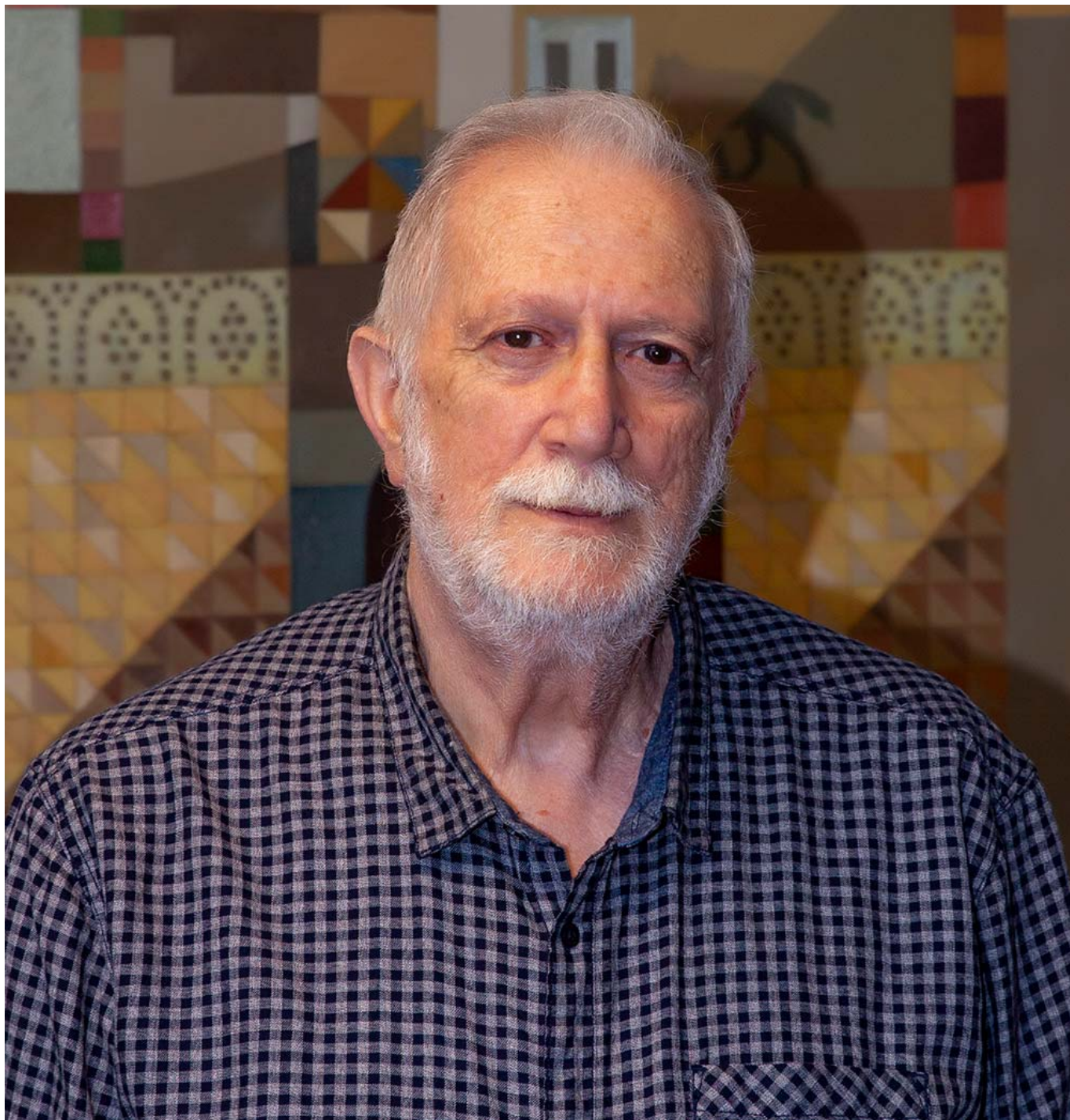
In a 1993 poem, she wrote: "The roots of the olive tree are from my soil and they are always fresh; Its lights are emitted from my heart and it is inspired; Until my creator filled my nerve, root and body; So, he got up while shaking its leaves due to maturity created within him."

More than just a source of income and artistic inspiration, however, olives also form a vital part of the Palestinian diet and culinary culture. Pickled olives feature in breakfasts, lunches and dinners, providing significant nutritional health benefits.

Olive oil, meanwhile, is used in scores of recipes, the most popular of which is zaatar w zeit: fluffy flatbread dipped in oil and then dabbed liberally in a thyme-based powder that includes sesame seeds and spices.

Beyond the dinner table, olive oil historically has had many other uses: As a source of fuel in oil lamps, a natural treatment for dry hair, nails and skin, and even as an insecticide.





Sliman Mansour, a Palestinian painter in Jerusalem whose art has long focused on the theme of land. (Supplied)

It is not only the fruit and its oil that the olive tree contributes to the cultural and economic life of Palestine. Olive pits, the hard stones in the center of the fruit, have long been repurposed to make strings of prayer beads used by Muslims and Christians alike.

As for the leaves and branches of the trees, they are trimmed during the harvest season to be used as feed for sheep and goats, while the broad canopy of the olive grove provides animals and their shepherds with welcome shade from the relentless afternoon sun.

The wood of felled trees has also been widely used in the carving of religious icons as far back as the 16th century, and as a source of firewood



before the modern profusion of gas. In fact, the glassmakers of Hebron, who are famed for their stained glass, continue to use charcoal derived from olive trees to fire their kilns.

While the quantifiably beneficial uses of the olive tree are many, perhaps what is even more valuable to Palestinians is the inspiration it has provided to poets, painters and prophets down the ages, not to mention the special place it continues to occupy in their culture and quest for statehood.

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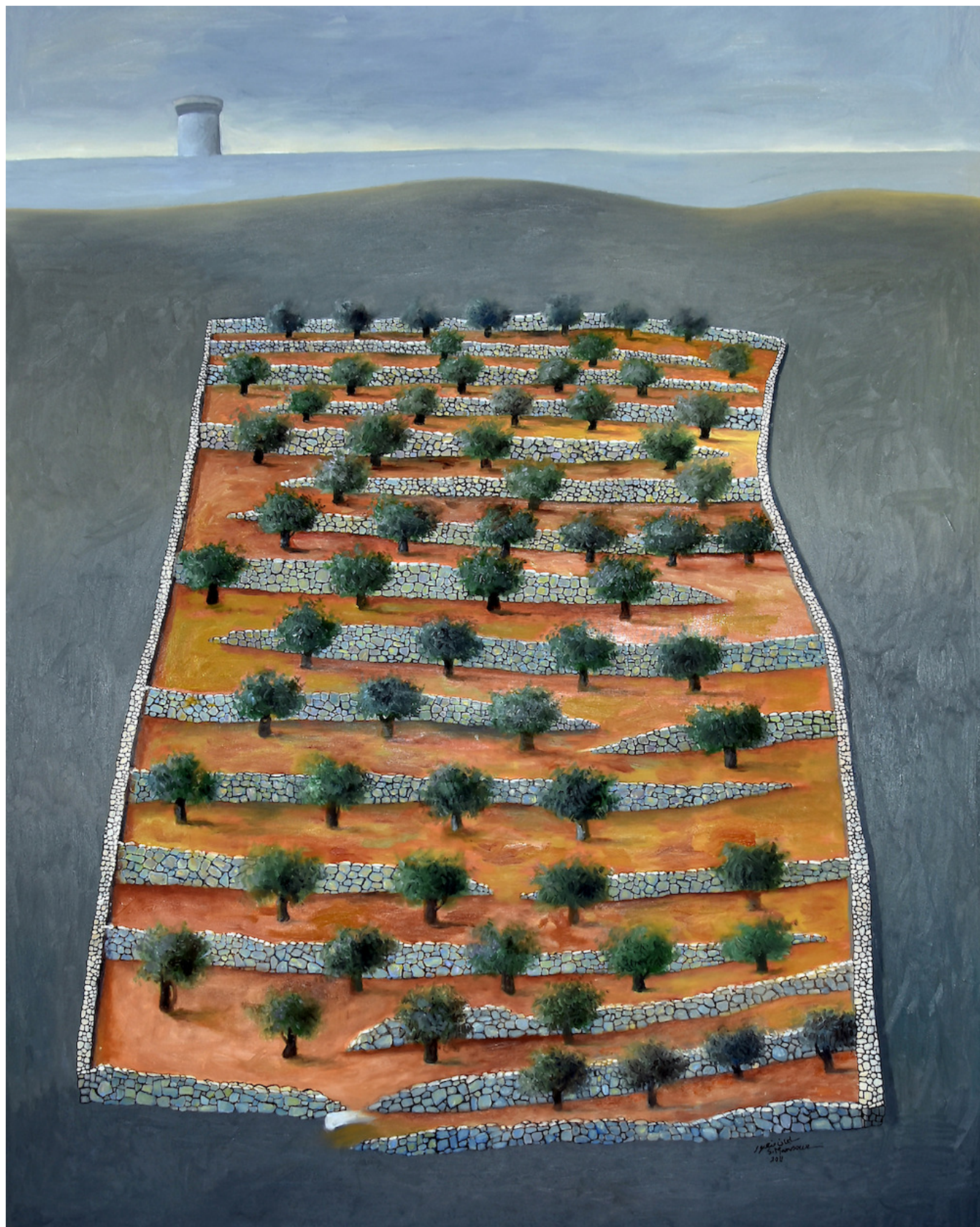


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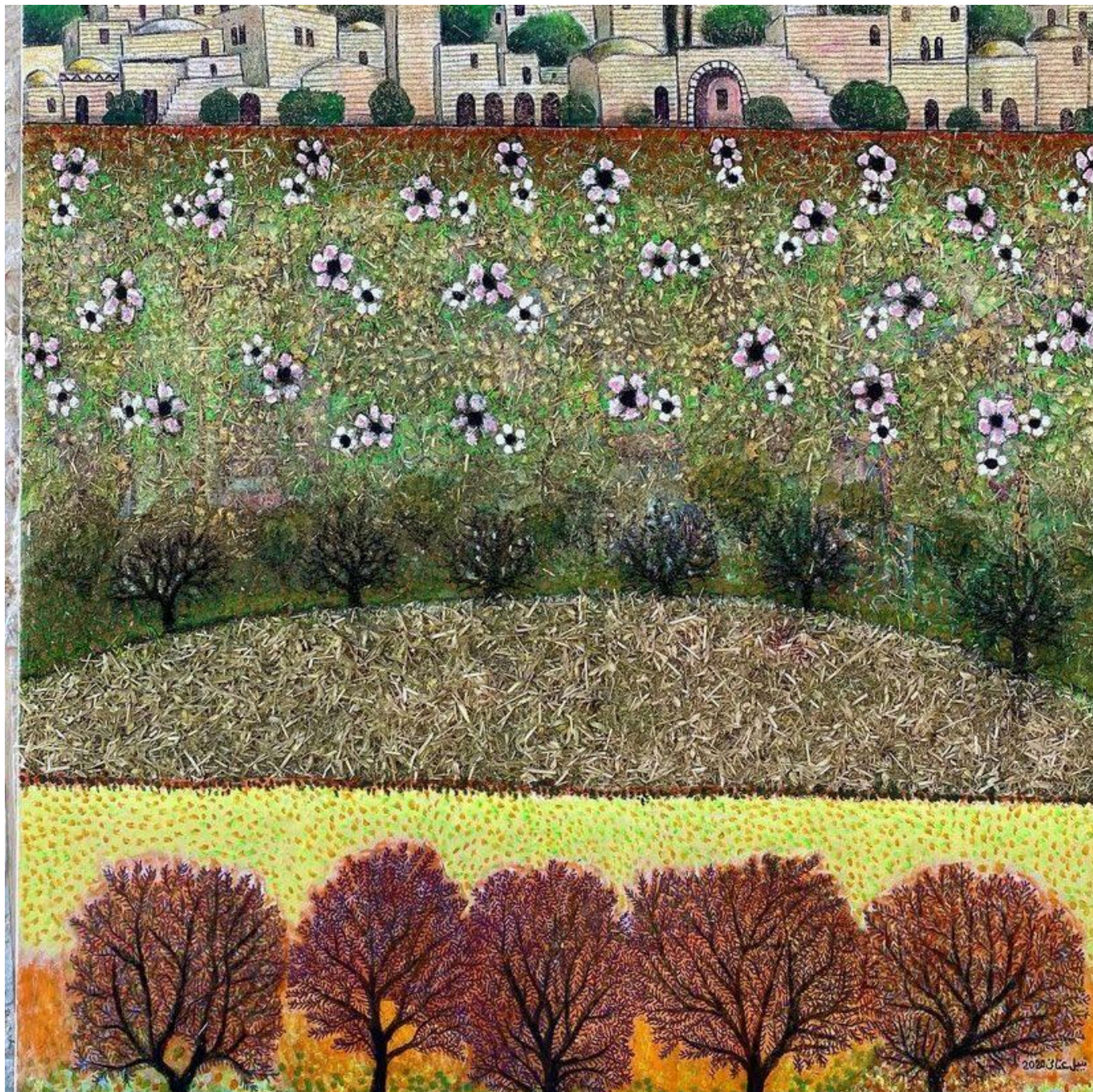












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Jouf, the olive oil capital of Saudi Arabia 18m olive, palm trees planted in Jouf in line with Saudi Green Initiative