

# Mónica Vargas Collazos of GRAIN on Israeli state-backed agribusiness colonialism in Africa

فقط ملوك فلسطين  
من كتب الطير يركب  
النسم انه ارسل كتاب  
الاحتياج الى الجزائر واكوب  
الشوب الاسمي البريطاني في  
النيل

ba تقدّم الحكومة في  
الانطراحات

ازهـر

عَمَّا مِنْ حِلَالٍ أَكَلَ الْكَثِيرُ  
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نشرت المنشتر غاريان الانكليزية كذا بتقويم من ١٠٠٠، كورنيل  
دائم فيه كاهنة عن عرب فلسطين وقضبهم وحفل على الصحف الانكليزية  
وأقتحما بالاعتداء على العرب وقول إن العرب لا يرثون هذه الأولي  
التي يقدّمها الصهيونيون إلى الأداء وهي مصادرون من استمرار اضطهاد  
اليهود، نظر المنشتر غاريان الانكليزية، قصصهم.





This is a conversation with Mónica Vargas Collazos who works with GRAIN, an international organization supporting grassroots progressive peasant movements and local farmers. GRAIN does work informed by an opposition to the corporatization of agriculture and is an organization that rejects neo-colonial land grabbing.

GRAIN's work is also informed by an analysis of the interconnections between the military industrial complex and territorial occupation, as expressed through colonial agriculture and beyond. These are all global issues of our time and on these fronts GRAIN is doing some key social movement aligned research work, visit [grain.org](http://grain.org) to get more info.

In this conversation, I discuss with Monica a specific report, released in fall of 2022, looking at Israeli state backed agribusiness companies operating throughout the global south. This report identifies that even when these Israeli business ventures are not openly state backed, the companies are most often embedded into Israeli state driven neo-colonial strategy that takes place on a global level.

Essentially this report identifies the ways that the military industrial complex, as a framework of asserting and building power, is embodied in specific contexts of Israeli state backed agribusinesses. This is a specific illustration of how neo-colonial Israeli power is asserted through agribusiness projects and pushed on Global South governments, particularly in sub saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia.

I wanted to do an interview with Mónica on this report and work on a zine to popularize the content because it identifies, in a broad scope, a set of different examples that can help to articulate the ways that Israeli agribusiness projects, most often fueled by state-backed companies, represent a new form of colonialism today. This report is a key study on this front.

The issues at play are multilayered and are addressed meaningfully in this conversation with Mónica. Thank you for engaging with this interview and picking up this zine.

– Stefan Christoff. Sept. 2025, Montréal.

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**MÓNICA:** GRAIN describes ourselves as a small non-profit international organization that is working to support small farmers and social movements in the struggles toward biodiverse food systems and of course food sovereignty. I have been working with GRAIN for a year now and I am part of the global team. So what we do as the global team is to support, through research, work at different regional levels in the world. Our teams, at the regional level, are in Latin America, in Asia and in Africa.

**STEFAN:** Thank you for highlighting this and sharing some context on GRAIN, so you have these hubs globally and you have been working very hard with others at GRAIN on a report that highlights Israeli agribusiness companies working globally, but also particularly in Africa. I think that people would be surprised to understand this situation, so to start, can you, at a very basic level, explain this report and how it relates more broadly to the work of GRAIN?

**MÓNICA:** Sure. So GRAIN has been monitoring Israeli agribusiness companies for over a decade now. And our concern has grown over time. Basically these companies are supporting the expansion of corporate industrial agriculture. These companies are also a part of the Israeli state's agro-diplomacy, meaning that these companies carry a specific diplomatic agenda of the Israeli state and military.

The companies that we have been monitoring have a global international presence, but most of them are relatively unknown, so we wanted to shine a spotlight onto those companies and their operations in the Global South and particularly to expose the negative impacts they can have on communities.

*GRAIN stands in solidarity with the Palestinian movement and others resisting colonization around the world. We are shocked by the strengthening of the Israeli apartheid system since we published the report in 2022, and by the impunity with which genocide is happening.*

It is good to remember that Israel presents and actually markets itself globally as a 'start up' nation, with high tech companies playing a central role in those Israeli state claims. These companies claim to have answers to major questions like creating equitable access to food and issues like climate change. I am not sure how this claim is made with a straight face, but anyhow they repeat this claim when promoting things like the type of drip irrigation systems that are used in Israel, as well as other high tech agricultural projects. None of the Israeli corporate claims on these points have been statistically proven of course.

Also, it is important to note that these companies from Israel are deeply linked to the local system of apartheid in Israel and Palestine. Some of these Israeli companies are active in the illegally occupied territories in Palestine and also in the Golan territories, for example, which is well documented by the organization Who Profits. The case of Netafim for example is an important one, but there are other companies that are less known and really have been developed in the context of the apartheid system embodied by the Israeli state.

What we have noted is that these companies are developing large scale agricultural projects in the Global South in particular, projects that these companies label as turnkey projects. There are particular projects in Africa that fit the model detailed in our report. Critically these projects work to generate debt for Global South national budgets and are often linked to the Israeli arms and military ("security") sector. Also it must be noted that there are many allegations of corruption around these projects, multimillion dollar projects. This is all concerning to GRAIN of course and we have been working to uncover this.

I am not talking about projects in the far past, but projects that were launched after 2010 and that work into the present. It is important that we expose these projects and also work with the communities impacted, to alert them about the global forces that fuel the injustice tied to these Israeli corporate practices, as these projects are increasingly common and there are more coming, particularly due to the lack of accountability for the Israeli state in the face of genocide in Gaza today.

**STEFAN:** Thank you for outlining this, so just to understand more clearly the details of how this plays out. When you are talking about Israeli agribusiness, can we speak about a specific region addressed in the report, Sub-Saharan Africa. I realize that this type of dynamic involving Israeli agribusiness companies is also happening in other parts of the world, but maybe focusing on a specific region and some concrete examples can better help us understand the specifics of what is happening.

**MÓNICA:** Yes, this report doesn't only look at Sub-Saharan Africa, there are also case studies from Asia and Latin America, but yes of course let us detail the projects in Africa.

Let me talk about the turnkey project model, which is really at the core of these Israeli companies and their discourse. In this model you have the involvement of the financial sector and companies who build projects together to offer together a lot of 'services,' in both agriculture and in the financing of those agricultural projects.

So you have these Israeli actors going together in a pool, on the financial and agricultural sides, to both lobby for and front these turnkey projects. The projects that are promoted in the Global South, from GRAIN's vantage point, are in most cases white elephants, essentially money making Israeli state backed financial scams that are labeled as development.

The turnkey projects represent this model and when analyzing them you can see a pattern.

These Israeli companies make the claim that they can deliver a top-down design, while also funding them and developing the facilities with their partners.

These projects can be large greenhouse systems, or large-scale livestock barns, or a dairy farm. These are multimillion dollar projects that touch on some key challenges that governments do face, but instead of addressing them, these Israeli companies are scamming local governments and communities in Africa.



The idea is often presented by the Israeli side in a positive way, that the company does the set-up and financing, then handing it over to either local governance systems, or to a local company. But usually the founding Israeli companies are making major profits, while corruptly cutting off parts of the allocated projects budgets and only stay around for a couple of years, at most, after the start up is launched. The Israeli companies quickly leave either broken projects, or do not take the time to share information, or to pass on the knowledge involved in the set-up to local communities. It is a violent colonial model.

Also many of these companies are connected to both Israeli politicians, also to former Israeli military officers and can also have links to the Israeli secret services, Mossad, which benefits from gathering information on Global South state infrastructures.

These links are important, according to the Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), the Mossad's role in Africa has been really essential in helping Israeli business ventures on the continent. This is also above and beyond the role that the Mossad has played in both offering protection to African politicians and also doing training for African national security services. These are key points to consider. So for this model of turnkey Israeli

projects, they usually start with a meeting between Israeli company officials, also including sometimes Israeli government officials, or embassy staff, alongside local politicians in the local country. These are usually local country contexts where we are talking about lands with very rich natural resources that the Israeli companies are trying to access.

Then an Israeli company, like Netafim, will propose a multimillion dollar project to be equipped with the latest Israeli agricultural technologies, as well as corporate security features. These Israeli companies then usually offer to handle everything, including getting the loans, often from the European Union (EU), to construct the farms, or the greenhouses, for the project. It is true that the agricultural element is important, but the real point to underline here is the financing model, which is both corrupt and colonial.

So what happens here is that you have companies proposing to create opportunities for governments in the Global South, who are having challenges to access financing, to accessing loans, so the companies propose to get those loans for the projects. So then you also have Israeli banks, European banks and most importantly the European export credit agencies, all involved. This is key because the Israeli

companies, for example Netafim, Green 2000, or Tahal, also have offices in Europe, usually embodied by subsidiaries, which are owned by European registered companies, this allows them to play with the Israeli / European double corporate identity.

This often leads to these Israeli corporate projects getting support from European public funds, because an EU based export credit agency lifts up such ventures with public financing. This model is common in The Netherlands, which supports a lot of Israeli companies through this model, particularly through the examples I just gave: Netafim, Green 2000 and Tahal.

Also you have European banks that enter into these turnkey projects in the Global South for the same reasons. So what often happens is that eventually the project will be built, but then it can quickly collapse due to there being no long term planning. On this point, we have found cases for example in Angola, which has really been a ground zero for this type of model, for these types of Israeli projects.

What we have seen there, in Angola, is that these projects are often presented in relation to framing territorial control, as seen in the Israeli context through their work on land occupation projects called Moshav. This is a territorial based agricultural project, occupying Palestinian land, through a model of territorial control implemented through agricultural mechanisms. Today this Moshav model is being presented globally by Israeli companies as a 'smart village.'

For example in Azerbaijan, Israeli companies are involved in developing 'smart villages' and these villages are a way to impose vertical projects on local rural populations in Azerbaijan. This drives a corporate land grabbing model that removes access to agricultural territories for local populations. Removing their access to common lands.

In some cases, like the one we have seen in Aldeia Nova, Angola, located in the province of Cuanza Norte, it involves over 9000 hectares. In this case you have both the participation of Mitrelli company and LR Group (company), two Israeli companies. The local populations involved in working for those companies and voicing demands around labour rights.

In the case of Aldeia Nova, Angola, there are many issues around corruption. The state put national resources, through oil, as a guarantee backstop for the Israeli companies, without the Angolan government consulting the population at all.

This is a territorial based project, occupying Palestinian land through a model of territorial control implemented through agricultural mechanisms. Today this Moshav model is being presented globally by Israeli companies as a 'smart village.'

his project ended up creating a major debt infrastructure, which is now owed by the Israeli companies. That is being paid back through Angola oil profits. This was all to build ineffective white elephant agricultural projects that have never really worked and in fact have only worked to exploit local communities and territory in Angola. This model equals profits for Israeli companies in the end. This leaves a context where the local government has to pay debts to the Israeli companies, for projects that didn't yield meaningful results, in the form of oil resources that were supposed to be a national resource for the people of Angola.

This framework that we have seen in Angola is a model of activity that we have seen globally for these Israeli companies, operating in multiple contexts and countries.

What is also key to underline is that there is very little information disclosed on these projects, but when you remove the curtains and do some research, like we did at GRAIN, we can see that many of the Israeli agribusiness projects are in fact failing.

At the same time these agricultural projects are also often developed in countries that are key to the Israeli arms trade. For example Vietnam, India, or Azerbaijan, are all countries where we see Israeli state interests entering the room through these white elephant agribusiness projects, which can also then work to open the door for Israeli arms and weapons companies to secure local deals and also integrate with local governments and security agencies.

So these are big Israeli diplomatic moves in southern countries where you can see the agribusiness project model taking hold, without real results. But to understand the context you need to imagine delegations with businessmen from those Israeli companies, agribusiness, finance and military companies, all traveling together who are all making deals at the same time, with local governments.

All this is happening with basically no consultation with the local populations impacted. That's why this report by GRAIN is called Farms, arms and Israel's agro-diplomacy, because in that title we can see the connection between arms and agriculture.

**STEFAN:** When we work to conceptualize a lot of what you have shared, Monica, if we think about land and territory, as well as the implantation mechanisms, that are fueled through these corporate projects, we can see Israeli companies inherently securing Indigenous territorial resources, like the example of oil resources from Angola.

Can you frame some of the details that you have shared in the examples from around the world? How can we better conceptualize these Israeli companies, as linked to the Israeli state, as illustrating a neocolonial relationship to resources and land?



**MÓNICA:** What is important to underline here is that we see the same model occurring in Palestine. The Israeli state expansion into Palestine has taken place through a process of land grabbing, since the Nakba and specifically through the displacement of small farmers in Palestine within a broader context of militarized colonial repression.

This model of colonial state expansion imposed through violence, is clear in Palestine, but it is also present in other Global South contexts like Angola, as we illustrate in this report. Through these examples we can make a direct connection to the same colonial logic that is being imposed on the territory of Palestine.

On this point, it is also important to consider this question. What is the difference between these examples and large-scale corporate agricultural projects pushed by Cargill, or other large agriculturally focused companies?

I would say that such big companies, like ICL Group Ltd, a big Israeli fertilizer company, or ADAMA Agricultural Solutions Ltd. which is an Israeli agrochemical company, are global agricultural companies, operating among the bigger corporate western players. There are similar neocolonial structural impacts on the land at play, which is related to these smaller companies that I highlighted, but there are key differences.

The big difference is that these smaller companies are directly folded into the diplomatic strategy of the Israeli state, which of course supports the bigger Israeli companies also, but these smaller companies are more woven into the underground financial dealings of Israeli diplomats and military officials.

These smaller companies also often fly below the radar, which allows for space off-market money transfers from the Global South governments to Israeli state connected business ventures.

Also these companies can be useful in selling this idea that the smaller, more agile, Israeli state 'start up' companies can work in 'modern' ways to bring development and agricultural projects that are impactful in regards to mitigating the impacts of climate change on these countries. But there are basically zero checks and balances on this.

It is important here to underline the role these companies play at an international level to raise financing for a global economic Israeli financial chain that drives the occupation of Palestine and now the genocide in Gaza.

**STEFAN:** Thank you so much for underlining these points. So you addressed many issues inherent to these Israeli projects, people can visit GRAIN.org to access the full report and get into all the details.

So when we are talking about projects failing, say for example we are talking about a major farming project, a series of greenhouses in Angola, or vast agricultural initiatives in different places, the fact that these projects fail have serious local impacts.

I think that it is important to underline the negative impacts on local communities in the Global South that are being violated by Israeli state backed projects, all taking place with little local consultations with the impacted communities.

These Israeli projects consume national budget lines and natural resources, while Israeli officials and corporate types make a lot of cash. Also in the end these projects often fold and aren't sustainable, while in the aftermath there is no accountability for the Israeli companies who were involved, while local communities are impacted (financially and environmentally) by broken initiatives.





Mónica: Yes. I can give some examples so that we can size these types of projects, I can highlight for example. The "Quiminha Integrated Agricultural and Regional Development Project" in Angola that was developed by the Tahal group in Angola, this Israeli company is owned by the Dutch group Kardan N.V.

This project started in 2011 and Tahal group was contracted to "develop" over 5000 hectares and the cost was between 200-370 million dollars, a lot for such a project. The company, Tahal, eventually dropped out and today there are still many issues around corruption and mismanagement that we have researched, specifically there are issues with unpaid workers who are still demanding compensation.

What we have seen in this disturbing example in Angola, is that the accommodations that were originally built for the agricultural workers on the project, are now inhabited by local elites who use them as vacation homes. So in this project we can see a clear example of the ways that a top down project in Angola, fronted by an Israeli company, has not benefited local communities. So

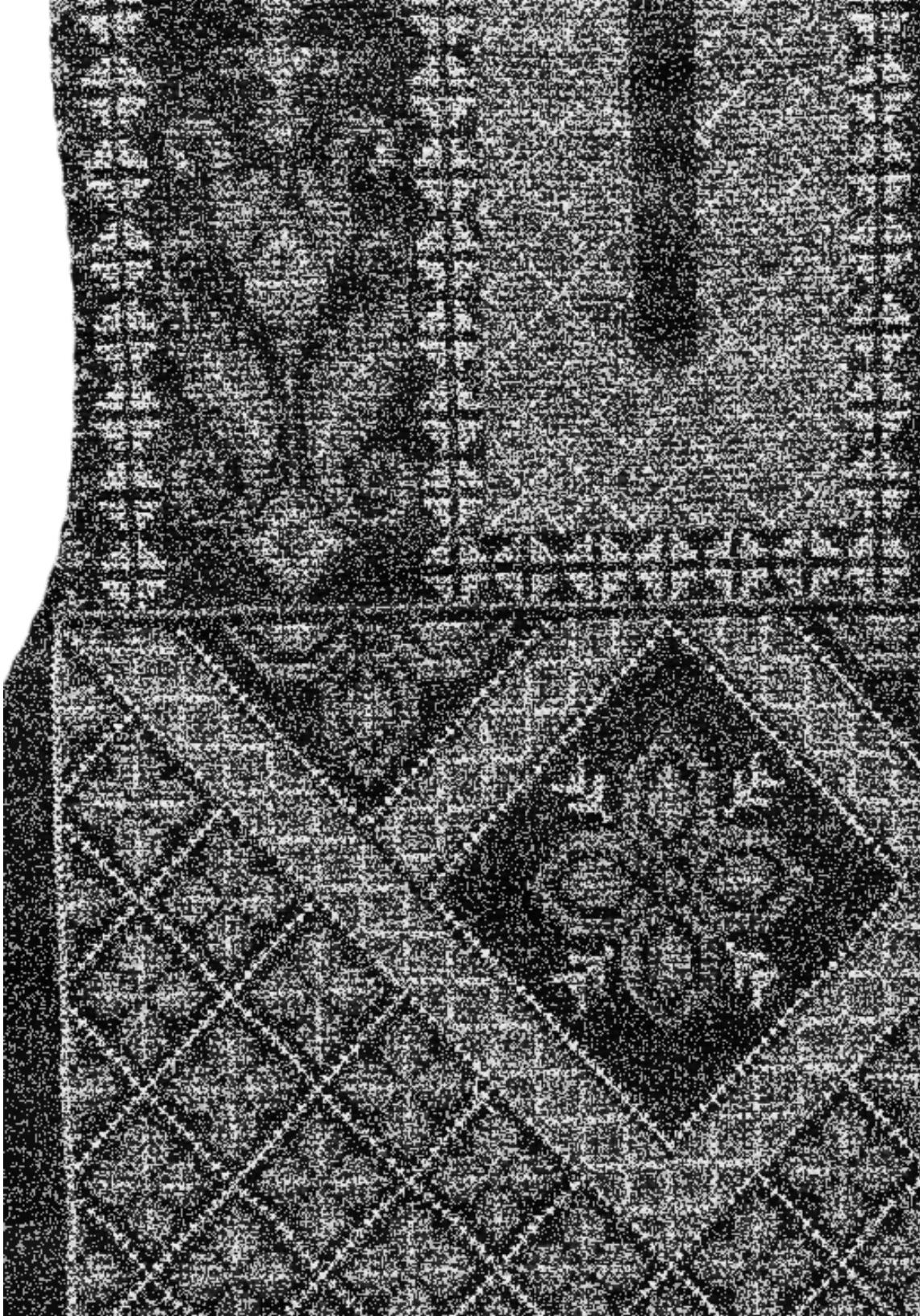
In Nigeria for example there is a case of the LR group, as well as the Mitrelli group, both companies that were founded by former Israeli military officials. I will highlight one case, the Adama farm, which is run by a subsidiary of the Mitrelli Group.

In this case the Rivers State governor in Nigeria, Rotimi Amaechi, contracted LR subsidiary Mitrelli to develop a \$140m, 5,000-hectare industrial farm, a huge farm. The submitted costs, \$140m, with 70% being covered by the local government and 30% by LR group, but 3 years after the project was launched there were serious allegations in the Nigerian media that project funds originally delegated to the Adama farm were actually used in the campaign for Muhammadu Buhari's election.

Today we don't really have a clear picture from Nigeria as to where the project is at and the LR group is not providing updates or responding about this.

This is an example of how funds for such top down projects, like the one in Rivers State, Nigeria, developed without the active participation of local communities, create new pathways for corruption by the local elites within the impacted country. This is actually a key point that is inherent to this model, as it empowers elites locally while also financing Israeli state backed corporate forces.

Since the report was published, we have continued monitoring those companies, and saw recent cases, like an agropole built by Mitrelli



Group in Senegal, or the agreement between the government of Madagascar and LR Group, to build an agropole and grow Chinese hybrid rice in that country, that in all of these cases, local organizations and civil society are openly opposing the project.

**STEFAN:** Thank you for breaking this down. Now for the last point, within social movements internationally, within global left movements, there is a lot of attention toward the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In Latin America there have been some really interesting shifts within regional governments over recent years, in Bolivia and also Brazil, this is important to underline. The fact that in some cases governments have started to cut relations with Israeli arms companies, is important, but still there are a lot of details that need to be communicated so that people can both understand the process. This is why I appreciate the detail in the report that you worked on.

For this report by GRAIN, it is specific in regards to developing an understanding of the ways that Israeli companies are particularly involved in neo-colonial practices internationally. So please share any ideas on the ways that the details in this report can be useful to developing a better understanding of Israeli state operations. Internationally there is a lot more awareness about the movement to boycott and sanction the Israeli state, but given the fact that until now the awareness of this push is often very generalized, this report offers some very tangible and specific examples, which I think is important.

**MÓNICA:** What is key to underline about this report is that it can hopefully be a useful tool for social movement forces which are confronting Israeli apartheid.

This report addresses companies that are really less known, while the BDS movement has correctly addressed companies like Netafim for example, this report gets into the specific mechanisms and also addresses companies that are less known.

In the report we detailed farmer movement voices and also local activists in the Global South who are facing these Israeli companies directly and which are important to communicate with. In the case of Netafim for example, the drones that they use for agricultural projects were developed in the context of military actions by the Israeli military to bomb Palestinian people in Gaza for example.

In highlighting specific companies, Israeli companies, which have a lower profile, like LR group, the Mitrelli group.

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Tahal and also Green 2000, which we highlight in the report, in this we are saying that the Israeli state has many tools to build power and recruit finances around the world, like through Israeli backed faux agricultural projects.

So today we can better understand the way that Israeli corporate diplomacy works and also how it is linked to the military by getting into such details. This report is a tool also to alert local communities about what is fully connected to such Israeli projects in regards to the military industrial complex and finance capital linked to the Israeli state.

For us it is very critical to expose these details, because to build a solidarity movement with Palestine it is important for us to connect with experiences of colonialism, in these cases within impacted communities in the Global South, who have experienced the colonial violence in the past and today are facing a manifestation of it through these Israeli driven projects. Having this key information clarified can be a tool in developing and solidifying solidarity movements with Palestine, in building solidarity across borders, through understanding the tangible experiences that people have been facing within other countries.

Of course there is a natural sympathy for Palestine across the south, but this type of report and the information included within it can offer specifics in terms of understanding why Israeli companies today, globally, particularly working in agriculture, are part of the colonial Israeli force that is also impacting other parts of the world.

Building international solidarity is important and to do that we need specific information to build our movement across borders, particularly in the current context of genocide.

