

Underneath the Pine Grove - An introduction to the collective investigation 'Invasive Species?' / Avital Barak

My parents had what they called “their place”: a pine grove encircled by ploughed fields and vineyards, with fruit orchards further along the dirt track. The little grove lay forty minutes east of Tel Aviv, in the direction of the Jerusalem hills, on the road to Beit Shemesh. It forms part of the Eshtaol Forest, an area of around 12,000 dunams of planted pine forest. My parents would drive there for picnics, to escape the pull of city life, packing the dog, some cheeses and fruit, and within an hour they would be in the stillness of the countryside.

On Israeli maps, “their place” is marked as Mitzpe Harel, located along the Burma Road, which links the lowlands to Jerusalem. Before 1948, the Palestinian village of [Bayt Jiz](#) stood here. Its inhabitants were expelled or fled when the Israeli army captured the village in May of that year. Today, all that remains are the schoolhouse, which is now a lookout over the valley, and two ruined homes.

To uncover what happened here seventy-seven years ago, and what lies beneath the planted pines, one must learn to read the faint traces in the landscape. Follow the path up to the schoolhouse and locate, within a longer account of ‘Jerusalem’s capture’, the name of the village whose children once studied there. Inside the grove, there is no sign, no marker of the past. Only when you continue along the dirt road and reach the fruit-laden orchards and prickly pear hedges does the presence of the destroyed Palestinian life rise to the surface.

Having a picnic in a pine forest was a standard thing in my childhood. My parents loved nature, and we used to go on day trips and picnics in the countless pine forests spread across Israel at weekends and during the holidays. We celebrated most of our birthdays outdoors. In winter, we would go mushroom picking. We especially liked the *Suillus granulatus*, known in Hebrew as the 'Oranit', a mushroom that grows under pine trees - Oren in Hebrew. It was only at university that I realised those pine forests were the product of a political and ideological project. The childhood adventures I had in the forest faded when I realised what was hiding beneath them.

I was supposed to know that those forests were man-made. There isn't a Jewish Israeli child who hasn't planted a little tree on Tu B'Shvat, a holiday dedicated to nature and planting trees. As kids, we were always looking forward to the annual school trip to a different place for the tree-planting ceremony. While picnicking with the family, you could find many stone plaques dedicating this or that forest to Jewish donors from around the world, all of which were named "Yaar KaKal", meaning "Forest of the Jewish National Fund" (JNF). But none of this information changed the fact that we grew up in a place full of forests.

Although there is one species of pine tree native to Palestine — the Jerusalem pine, which apparently originates in Syria — pine forests are foreign to the landscape of the region. The afforestation of Palestine began in the 1920s under the British Mandate and became an Israeli national mission after 1948 (Braverman 2009). Afforestation is a well-known colonial practice, employed by different colonial powers for various reasons, primarily economic, but also to control populations and shape the landscape to suit their needs (Rajan 2006). The afforestation mission of the Zionist movement, and later the State of Israel, had a dual purpose: to erase evidence of Palestinian life before the Nakba (the catastrophe of 1948 in Arabic) and the establishment of the State of Israel, and to create a landscape familiar to Eastern European Jews who found themselves in the climate of the Middle East.

In the words of scholar Iru Braverman:

Pine trees construct a distinctly Eastern European landscape. The pines therefore, mediate between what the ex-European eye longs for and what is visible to it. Indeed, Jewish Ashkenazi' immigrants to Palestine could not hope for a better treescape to remind them of their lost European homeland. [...]

Although it was intended to work toward negating the image of the exilic European Jew, the reconstitution of the Jewish homeland in Palestine and the project of putting down roots in this new place through the Zionist afforestation project nonetheless reaffirms the old European identity precisely by its linking one homeland to another. This is established through the visual treescaping of Israel with monocultural pine forests, as though it were Europe. During the period of exile, the real land was Europe and the imagined land was Zion; now the real homeland is Israel, whereas the lost home in Europe has become an object of nostalgia (Braverman 2009:89).

This is not the place to trace the full history of the Zionist movement or its development into a distinctive form of settler colonialism (Zreik 2016). However, for orientation, I will outline some background. The Zionist movement emerged in late nineteenth-century Europe, shaped both by Jewish nationalist aspirations in response to antisemitism and by the wider context of European colonial expansion. Founded by Theodor Herzl at the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, it sought to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine — then part of the Ottoman Empire — through immigration, land acquisition and settlement. It's a national project centred on Palestine because of the Jewish people's biblical and historical ties to the region. Although the Roman expulsions in the first century dispersed much of the Jewish population, a continuous, if small, Jewish presence remained in Palestine. In practice, Zionist activity entailed creating a settler presence, displacing

segments of the indigenous Palestinian Arab population, and constructing exclusive political, economic and agricultural institutions. Supported by imperial powers, particularly Britain after the 1917 Balfour Declaration,¹ the movement operated within colonial frameworks.² These processes culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the mass displacement of Palestinians that followed.

My parents were born in Israel. Their parents immigrated to Palestine from Eastern Europe before and after the Second World War. My grandparents were Zionists even before they immigrated to Palestine, but history played a significant role in their decision to go there. My maternal grandmother was born in Ukraine, but when she was only one year old, her father was murdered in a pogrom, and she and her mother fled to Moldova and later to Romania. As refugees, they only had *laissez-passer* and did not receive citizenship or any kind of civic status. In 1935, she and her mother joined her aunt in Palestine, becoming citizens for the first time when the new State of Israel was founded in 1948. My maternal grandfather was born in Chernovitch when it was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He grew up in a German-speaking family, even though his mother was actually from Poland. During the economic crisis of the 1920s, the family moved to Bucharest, Romania, where he grew up. In 1939, he decided to infiltrate Palestine by sea. He joined the illegal immigrant ship *Tiger Hill*, the last to arrive in Palestine before the outbreak of the Second World War. He later enlisted in the British Army and returned to Europe to fight against the Germans. By 1948, he had become a high-ranking officer in the Israeli army and played an active role in the 48 war.

My paternal grandparents are Holocaust survivors. My grandfather was born in a small town near the Polish city of Łódź, and my grandmother was born in a town that shifted from the Russian Empire to Poland after the First World War and is now part of Belarus. They met during the war, escaped the ghetto together, and spent most of the war in the woods as partisans. In 1947, they managed to enter Palestine illegally and found refuge there with my grandmother's sisters, who had immigrated to Palestine during the 1930s. Some years ago, a renowned historian told my aunt that

¹ The 1917 Balfour Declaration was a statement issued by the British government expressing support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. Incorporated into the League of Nations Mandate, it provided an international and legal framework that facilitated Zionist settlement while disregarding the political rights of the Indigenous Arab population.

² A substantial body of scholarship has analysed Zionism as a colonial or settler-colonial project. Foundational works such as Rodinson (1973) and Sayegh (1965) first articulated the structural similarities between Zionist settlement and other colonial enterprises. Later studies (Said 1979; Khalidi 1984; Khalidi 2006, 2020; Abu El-Haj 2001) historicized Zionism within the imperial context of the British Mandate and the broader dynamics of European settler colonialism. Contemporary settler-colonial theory (Wolfe 2006; Veracini 2010) further situates Zionism as a paradigmatic example of a formation that seeks territorial replacement through demographic engineering, spatial reorganisation, and the elimination or displacement of the native population.

my paternal grandfather's lineage traces back to Portugal. However, after more than five hundred years, it is impossible to verify this.

I was born in Jerusalem in the late 1970s and grew up in a town near Tel Aviv. Although none of my grandparents were born in Israel, my brothers and I grew up feeling that we were from there. We were the perfect 'sabres', a Zionist term for the new generations born in the '(new) homeland'. The same sabar (prickly pear cactus) is also a symbol of Palestinian steadfastness. I still feel that I'm from there, even more now, when I live in Portugal. Even though I know that I'm part of the settler society, I was still born there, and my parents were born there. The light, the smell, the heat - they are all burned into my body and soul. The Hebrew language is the only language in which I feel at home.

This very long and personal introduction is my point of departure when I think about invasive species. And then there are all those questions: what does 'invasive species' even mean? How long does a species need to be present before it can be considered local? Or is it a question of behaviour? For ecologists, the critical issue is how a species takes over a place's biosystem rather than where it came from. Using this category as a metaphor for people is extremely dangerous, yet this metaphor has become very common.

Even before I moved to Portugal, I became preoccupied with this subject. I was exposed to several perspectives that seemed almost opposite to one another. The ecological perspective labels invasive species as a real threat to biodiversity and attempts to find ways to eradicate them. In contrast, the cultural and postcolonial perspectives turn the gaze back to the initial invaders who caused this chain of events affecting people and nature. Both perspectives share an element of movement, which lies at the heart of other issues that concern me: questions of invasion, expansion, borders, mobility and free movement. These issues underpin my academic interests and my torn identity. My political activism and curatorial work have both been motivated and directly affected by these questions. Upon moving to Portugal, the category of 'invasive species' became a productive premise and critical paradigm. It has enabled me to familiarise myself with my new home — its past and present, nature, and social, political and cultural life — and has also given me the opportunity to question the category itself. As a new immigrant who currently feels like a (very privileged) political exile, I have shifted from the native–settler dynamic to the immigrant–gentrification dynamic. It is a fascinating, though troubling, shift to experience.

I was fortunate enough to be able to explore these mounting questions in the way that I believe is the best way to learn: alongside other people. The opportunity to conduct a 'collective

investigation' into invasive species in Portugal provided the perfect setting for me to engage deeply with the subject. In March 2025, we launched a new collective investigation in Air 351 in Cascais. Below are some reflections on the journey. First, however, a few words on the method itself.

A group of artists, researchers, and activists meets every few weeks to explore a shared concept. They bring their own knowledge and practices, exchange perspectives, and encounter new people and ways of thinking. There is no fixed goal and no required outcome; the only responsibility is to be present and engaged. These are the basic principles of the **Collective Investigation** method and the starting point of each shared journey.

Over the past ten years, I have co-developed this method through my work at the Institution for Public Presence at the Centre for Digital Art in Holon, part of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. The method is grounded in transdisciplinary thinking and in the belief that collective knowledge is produced through talking and walking together in public spaces. It aims to destabilise categories, amplify multiple voices and narratives, and disrupt established orders.

I have co-led research groups on a wide range of topics, each composed of different constellations of participants—sometimes only artists, at other times practitioners from diverse fields. Through these collaborations, the Collective Investigation method took shape. It combines spatial research, a detective mindset, and artistic practices in a group process focused on a concept or site with multiple layers and forms of existence. At its core is a nomadic movement: a journey across physical, online, or conceptual spaces that is not oriented toward a predefined destination. The inquiry unfolds through associative connections and “leapfrogging,” characteristic of artistic research, and through the encounter of different forms of professional knowledge and action. These movements—sometimes arbitrary, sometimes guided by agreed-upon rules—generate new and unexpected meanings.

The method's flexible principles emerge from practice. Each project adds another layer to our understanding of how it functions. While the specific composition of each group is crucial to how the research develops, several recurring characteristics can be identified: spatial thinking, liminality, collective ownership, collective navigation, and hospitality. These elements shape not only the subjects we investigate, but also the way the group itself operates.

For the 'Invasive Species?' collective investigation, we invited ten artists working across different media with diverse practices and areas of expertise. However, they all had some previous connection to the subject or framework we proposed: Lucía Andújar, Marta Angelozzi, Alexandra do Carmo, Márcio Carvalho, Ellie Ga, Léna Lewis-King, Jacki Ochs, Vanja Smiljanić, Takashi Sugimoto and Giovanni Tusa. Together, we crafted our research project to address the many questions we had

about invasive species. However, since none of us are experts on the subject, we invited three guests to offer introductions from three different perspectives.

Marta Macedo took us back to the Portuguese colonial past and to the intersection of colonial practices, labour structures and ecology by sharing her research on the past and present plantations of São Tomé. Her research examines the plantation system of São Tomé as a key site where colonial science, technology, labour, and ecology converged. She shows how, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, São Tomé became a model plantation regime in the Portuguese empire, driven by cocoa monoculture, coercive and racialised labour systems, and an extensive techno-scientific apparatus that sought to control both people and landscapes. Her work traces how agronomy, plant pathology, engineering, and imperial bureaucracy shaped the island's environment, transforming its forests into a highly managed plantation ecology and linking São Tomé to wider Atlantic and African plantation networks. Through this lens, she situates São Tomé within the "Plantationocene," highlighting the enduring ecological and social legacies of plantation capitalism long after the end of formal empire.

Then we shifted our gaze from the colonies and the past to Portugal and the present day, but kept our focus on the connection between labour, exploitation, ecology and capitalism. We invited Rui Costa Lopes to speak to us about current immigration data and how Portuguese people experience extensive immigration to Portugal. We also discussed how the invasion metaphor is abused and manipulated for political gain by various political forces, ranging from the centre-right to the extreme-right. Unsurprisingly, his findings reveal a significant discrepancy between perception and reality: the public tends to exaggerate the extent of immigration and expresses largely ambivalent or negative views, creating an environment in which political figures can more easily exploit and distort the rhetoric of 'invasion'.

After exploring questions of invasive species indirectly or through the various ways it has been used as a metaphor, we had the great opportunity to learn about the subject from a biological and ecological point of view from a leading expert. Elizabete Marchante, a member of the [Invasoras.pt](https://www.invasoras.pt) project, introduced us to the different classifications of biological species and the factors that determine whether they are considered invasive.

In short, invasive species in Portugal are a small but ecologically significant subset of the country's biosphere. Of the approximately 670 exotic plant species recorded in mainland Portugal, around 8% exhibit invasive behaviour, spreading aggressively, outcompeting native species and altering ecosystems in the process. Portuguese botanists distinguish between three types of species:

indigenous, which occur naturally in the territory; foreign, which originate outside Portugal but may not establish stable populations; and exotic, which are introduced — intentionally or accidentally — by human action. However, only a fraction of exotic species become invasive, a category reserved for those capable of forming self-sustaining populations and causing ecological or economic harm. These species are identified using scientific risk-assessment protocols and the official national list of invasive species defined by Portuguese law.

Now we were ready to begin our series of expeditions, starting at the unrecognised gardens along the highway from Lisbon to Sintra and continuing to the Botanical Garden of Belém. We then moved on to the Anjos neighbourhood in Lisbon, up the Tagus River, then downstream to Barreiro, finishing at Guincho Beach and the surrounding dunes. Along the way, we met people who shared their knowledge and experience with us. We discovered unknown corners and followed the footsteps of a silenced past.



Six expeditions

1

IC19 Highway

Although the first meeting led by one of the members of the *Invasive Species?* research group formally took place indoors at the AIR 351 centre, Alexandra do Carmo's presentation effectively transported the group into the clandestine allotment gardens that line the IC19 highway between Lisbon and Sintra. Her contribution functioned as a conceptual journey into this landscape, setting the tone for the group's later visit to the Botanical Garden in Belém. Drawing on *The Green Studio at*

IC19—a video installation she developed several years earlier—Alexandra introduced themes that would become central to the research group’s inquiry: occupation, displacement, ecological entanglement, and the politics of “invasion.”

She presented the three film documents that make up the project, each rooted in her long-term engagement with the gardeners who cultivate occupied land along the highway. The first video, *The Green Studio at IC19*, uses an allegorical restaging of Courbet’s *Atelier du Peintre* within the gardens to explore artistic mobility and the shifting boundaries between studio and field. The second, *Occupy*, examines the legal precariousities of land occupation and the municipal and police interventions that repeatedly destroy these cultivated plots. The third, *Colonial Bean*, focuses on Portugal’s post-colonial condition through oral histories from migrants from Cabo Verde, Angola, and São Tomé e Príncipe, revealing how cultivation, memory, and survival intersect with the legacies of colonial war and plantation economies.

Across the presentation, Alexandra emphasised how her fieldwork blurred distinctions between natural and social ecologies: the gardeners’ stories—of crops transported across oceans, of plants considered “invasive,” of land seized or defended—exposed the intimate connections between ecology, colonial history, and contemporary migration. This ethical and methodological dimension of her practice, particularly the relationships formed with the gardeners and the challenges of working in shared, vulnerable spaces, grounded the research group’s broader exploration of how the concept of “invasion” operates across botanical, social, and political registers.

2

Belem botanical garden

The first tour we took outside of Air 351 was of the [Belém Botanical Garden](#), led by Márcio Carvalho and Vanja Smiljanić. Marcio invited researcher David Plácido and artist Paulo Guimarães to guide us through the history of the gardens. Together, we discovered the traces of its horrific past and brought its Demons to the surface.

The Tropical Botanical Garden in Belém was created in 1906 as a *Colonial Garden*, a place where Portugal collected, studied, and displayed plants from its overseas territories. For decades, it served as a living catalogue of the empire’s botanical wealth, with palms, spices, and tropical crops arranged according to regions of Angola, Mozambique, Goa, Cape Verde and beyond. But the garden

also became the setting for one of the darkest episodes in its history: the 1940 *Exposição do Mundo Português*. During this vast imperial spectacle, the Estado Novo constructed “native villages” inside and around the garden and brought hundreds of people from the colonies to live there for almost six months. Under constant public scrutiny, they were displayed as ethnographic specimens—eating, working, giving birth, and in some cases dying within the exhibition grounds. What was presented as a celebration of empire was, in reality, a human zoo, where colonial subjects were staged for the entertainment of the metropolitan public and to reinforce the racial and political ideology of the regime.

Today, as you stroll along the manicured paths of the garden, it is almost impossible to imagine that only 85 years ago, it was people who were displayed here. The past is quiet, but like any trauma, what is repressed eventually surfaces. African busts are scattered in the corners of the garden, with no context or explanation, and their silent presence abruptly exposes the place’s violent history.

Overwhelmed by our turbulent encounter with the past, we sat in a circle on the grass. Vanja then took us on a somatic imaginative healing journey to faraway places. When we returned, our bodies and minds were aligned, and we were able to process our experiences. The practice unfolded as a collective movement across shifting timelines, inviting us to arrive in a speculative present. Beginning with gentle movement and a period of attentive listening to the garden’s soundscape, it gradually led into a shared imagining phase. Each participant was invited to summon an imaginary “sampling tool,” which was then given form through drawing. The invented tools created a mediation between the abstract experience of the meditation and the physical presence in the space of the botanical garden, with its silenced past and pastoral present.



Anjos Neighbourhood

Our third expedition took place in the Anjos neighbourhood in Lisbon. It was planned and led by Lucía Andújar and Marta Angelozzi and was divided into two parts: first, a walk from the Igreja dos Anjos to the site where the community kitchen of the Anjos encampment had been located; and second, a visit to [Roundabout](#), an experimental art space in the neighbourhood founded nearly fifteen years ago by Marta, Lucía, and other artists. There, we further discussed Lucia's involvement with the immigrant community and explored Marta's practice of collaborative drawing.

In the winter of 2023–2024, a group of migrants—primarily from Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, and other West African countries—established an encampment beside the Igreja dos Anjos in central Lisbon, after months of being left without shelter, legal status, or access to basic services. What began as a makeshift settlement quickly evolved into a form of collective resistance, most visibly through the creation of the [Cozinha Migrante dos Anjos](#), a self-organised communal kitchen sustained by migrants, neighbourhood residents, and activist networks. While the kitchen provided daily meals, it also became a space of solidarity, cultural exchange, and political visibility. As many residents faced the rejection of their humanitarian residency applications and the threat of expulsion, the encampment exposed the failures of Portugal's migration and housing policies and articulated a broader demand for recognition, protection, and the right to remain. Far from being a passive site of vulnerability, Anjos emerged as a locus of community-making and struggle, where survival and political agency converged in public space.

The Cozinha Migrante dos Anjos was hosted at [Disgraça](#), a horizontal collective that runs an anti-authoritarian social centre in Penha de França. As well as providing a physical space for the kitchen, Disgraça also functioned as a vital refuge and source of support, facilitating the development of lasting networks of relationships, care and solidarity. There, we met Tidiane and Samba, two members of the Migrantes dos Anjos group, who showed us around and told us about their ongoing involvement with Disgraça, including Portuguese language classes and collaborative work projects. Samba, a professional tailor, introduced us to his work and his brand, [SambaBa](#), which he established with Lucia's support.



At Roundabout, we took part in a collaborative drawing session led by Marta. This offered us a hands-on introduction to her work and the relational thinking that underpins it. The drawing unfolded as a collective action, exploring the notions of connection, interdependence and the idea of understanding relationships as spaces between beings and species. Rather than focusing on individual authorship, the exercise emphasised shared processes, vulnerability and negotiating proximity. Each participant worked while sharing tools—such as screwdrivers or etching tools—with the person next to them, holding one tool in each hand. By scratching the surface of the paper, participants enacted both constraint and cooperation before collectively revealing the marks with charcoal. The experience invited us to inhabit discomfort, to attend to one another’s rhythms and limits, and to consider how collective practices might help us reflect on how relationships are cultivated, sustained, and regulated—both among humans and in relation to the more-than-human world.



EVOA

At the next meeting, we reconvened in Air 351 to discuss biodiversity from scientific and philosophical perspectives. The meeting comprised two distinct yet interrelated sections. The first section was led by Jacki Ochs, who invited writer and editor Bruce Stutz to reflect on scientific approaches to invasive species and biodiversity management. Drawing on case studies from Portugal, the presentation examined specific ecological interventions and their ethical implications. One such intervention involved controlling *Acacia longifolia* along the Portuguese coastline using biological control methods, specifically the introduction of a non-native gall wasp to disrupt the plant's reproductive cycle. Although this intervention was presented as a carefully monitored and measured risk, it raised questions about the long-term consequences of introducing one non-native species to counter another.

Further examples focused on the management of invasive species at [EVOA](#) (Espaço de Visitação e Observação de Aves) in the Tagus estuary, where human intervention—through sediment control, water management, and habitat design—has reshaped ecological conditions for bird populations. Particular attention was given to the Egyptian Goose, an introduced species whose aggressive behaviour disrupts native bird nesting and defence strategies. Scientific responses, ranging from habitat modification to population control and the controversial prospect of euthanasia, highlighted the difficult value judgements embedded in conservation practice. Throughout this section, questions of *intrinsic value*, human responsibility, and the shifting cultural perceptions of invasive species remained central. The presentation concluded with the introduction of panarchy theory, a systems-based model for understanding ecological resilience, disturbance, and adaptive cycles across natural and social systems.

The second part of the meeting was led by Giovanbattista Tusa, who responded critically to the scientific frameworks presented by Jacki and Bruce by offering a philosophical rethinking of biodiversity grounded in his work *Terra Cosmica: Traces of Georealism*. Rather than approaching biodiversity as a problem of management, control, or optimisation, Giovanni reframed it as a question of relational world-making. Drawing on the concepts of *mundus* and *immundus*, he argued that ecological catastrophe is not only a material crisis but a collapse of worldliness itself—the loss of the capacity to sustain meaningful relations with others, human and non-human alike.

Tusa emphasised that the world is never neutral or shared, but is always 'the space of others': a volatile, negotiated arena shaped by political relations, power and exposure. From this perspective, alienation does not arise from separation, but from a deficit of relational capacity. This leads to instrumentalisation and impotence. Therefore, biodiversity cannot be reduced to species counts or ecological balance alone; it is an expression of fragile and contested interdependencies across time, space and generations. In the context of environmental catastrophe, finitude becomes an ethics of association and implication, where worlds can no longer be separated and no one can claim ownership of the space they inhabit.

Together, the two parts of the meeting articulated a productive tension between scientific intervention and philosophical reflection. While the first foregrounded practical strategies for managing ecological disturbance and resilience, the second questioned the underlying assumptions of control, ownership, and mastery, inviting the group members to consider biodiversity as a shared, unstable condition that demands new forms of relational responsibility.

5

Barreiro

Our fifth expedition took place in Barreiro, along the southern bank of the Tejo River, where we were introduced to the complex entanglements between invasive species management, industrial pollution, and precarious labour. The visit was organised and led by Ellie Ga and Léna Lewis-King, who invited marine biologist Paula Chainho from the Centro de Ciências do Mar e do Ambiente at the Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa to guide us on a walk along the riverbank. Paula introduced us to Projeto [NIPOGES](#), which investigates non-indigenous species in Portuguese estuaries, and explained how the Manila clam (*Ruditapes philippinarum*), known locally as *amêijoa-japonesa*, was introduced in the 1980s to mitigate industrial pollution and to support commercial harvesting. Highly adaptable and fast-reproducing, the species quickly spread beyond control and is now classified as invasive, having significantly altered the estuarine ecosystem and affected native biodiversity.

Despite its ecological impact, the Manila clam has become a resource of high socio-economic importance, creating a situation in which eradication is neither feasible nor desirable. Marine biologists are therefore faced with the challenge of managing a species that is simultaneously harmful and indispensable. Sustainable harvesting has emerged as one of the few

available strategies to limit population growth while minimising ecological damage, even as the species underpins local livelihoods and feeds into national and global markets. This uneasy balance revealed how scientific management must continually negotiate between environmental protection, economic dependency, and historical responsibility for past industrial interventions in the river system.

The visit also foregrounded the human cost embedded within these ecological dynamics. Much of the clam harvesting economy operates through informal and exploitative networks that rely on migrant labour, often under dangerous conditions and with limited legal protection. Many harvesters—originating from Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, and Eastern European countries—live in precarious housing in areas such as Samouco and Alcochete, frequently tied to middlemen through debt incurred during migration, access to tools, and accommodation.

In preparation for the meeting, Ellie and Léna proposed a set of questions arising from these realities, which formed the backdrop to our visit: how can artistic engagement with contexts of exploitation and vulnerability be achieved without reproducing an extractive gaze? Is it possible to create work about harvesting, or only alongside it? How do categories such as invasive species, pollution and value change when viewed through the lens of lived experiences of displacement and precarity? These questions continue to reverberate as we reflect on the outcome of our collective investigation.



6

Cresmina dunes and Gincho beach

Our sixth expedition and our last meeting was to the [Cresmina dunes](#) and Gincho beach, led by Takasi Sugimoto. He invited us to switch roles, so that instead of learning about invasive species, we could experience what it means to be one. In preparation for the meeting, he sent the group a beautiful description of the ecosystem that we would be part of for a few hours.

In the Cresmina dune, we are the invasive species.

The Cascais environment created a corridor where people and pets can walk on the Cresmina dune.

The dune is highly unique and characteristic: parabolic dune, temporary ponds, and native species. The objective of the corridor is to prevent damage to the newly planted native plants on the dune caused by human footsteps. However, in the Cresmina, the ground itself is constantly changing. A southwesterly wind blows constantly over the dune, so the ground is always shapeshifting. The corridor is the figure: the straight, artificial lines drawn on the ground/dune. Our choreography is therefore limited to this strictly functional territory, the corridor, in this vast, beautiful west end of the Eurasian continent, "where the land ends and the sea begins" (Luís Vaz de Camões). As I walk through the corridor, I feel observed by the plants. As I move through the limited space, my gaze elevates from the land to the horizon, and my attention shifts from the land to the sky. I feel the wind on my face and body. Sand blows and moves. There are no military drones flying, only seagulls and clouds. The wind has no boundaries. Then, I feel released.

The Cresmina Dunes are a protected coastal dune system located between Guincho and Cresmina beaches, within the Sintra–Cascais Natural Park. The area is characterised by mobile and semi-fixed dunes formed by prevailing north-westerly winds, with vegetation adapted to sandy, saline, and highly exposed conditions. The dunes play an important role in coastal protection, helping to stabilise sand movement and reduce erosion, and are managed through conservation measures that include controlled access and the preservation of native plant species.

First, we strolled along Guincho Beach, then we lay on the sand. Some of us meditated while others took a light nap. We absorbed the sounds of the waves and the sensation of the wind and sand. Then we started walking towards the dunes and entered the designated corridor. Our movement was restricted so that we wouldn't harm the life of the dunes' inhabitants. The element

of movement with which I began our collective investigation reappeared in its most embodied form at our final meeting. The layers of knowledge we collected during our ten-meeting journey came to a minor conclusion with our encounter with the ocean, the dunes and the vibrant nature.



I have not yet reached a conclusion to offer on this category of invasive species, nor do I have a settled understanding of my thoughts or position on the concept. I do believe that the use of the adjective 'invasive' is always manipulative, whether it is used to describe human mobility and presence or 'scientifically' to describe the behaviour of plants and animals. Scientists borrow the concept of invasion and apply it as if it were neutral, based on their preconceptions of what constitutes appropriate behaviour and who has the right to exist. I'm not taking sides — I don't know how we should react when one species takes over an ecosystem or a specific habitat. However, the first step in questioning this category is recognising this movement in both directions.

Writing this text has enabled me to reflect on the group's journey. I have become increasingly aware of how each session led to the next, unintentionally guiding us towards a substantial inquiry.

Without a predetermined plan, the investigation evolved through encounters, sites and questions — some of which were present from the outset and some of which emerged along the way. As the person who initiated the investigation by proposing a 'kinetic perspective' — attentive to movement

and dynamic relations — I recognise this same quality in the journey itself. The result was an alternative map, not held together by a single narrative or point of view, but by movement: a kinetic logic that lends coherence to the different stages without fixing their meaning.

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