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INTERMEZZO I

Loss and Recomposition Part I

Olive Trees and People

The intimacy between people and environments is always rooted somewhere. We are always talking about specific relations that, though open-ended and ever-changing, manage to give rise to identifiable forms. This is most clearly seen in the way in which certain features of the world become symbolic for wider practices that, despite their evolution, maintain a kind of identity through time, allowing for both change and continuity. In a Southern European context, there is hardly a more potent symbol of this relational identity than the olive tree.

Considered in terms of its nature, *Olea europaea* is not a tree at all, but a hardy shrub. Where it grows 'naturally' is beside the point, as its history of human use is so long and profound as to make that question all but irrelevant. The image that most people are familiar with, of a magnificent gnarly tree, is entirely a product of its interaction with its human neighbors. Without constant and iterative interaction, the olive tree as a tree is an impossibility. But even to call the olive plant *a* tree is misleading. The domesticated olive is grafted on to wild stock, so in any particular case we are always already talking about a double composition. This is before we consider the common phenomena of these plants growing into each other, or splitting into (what seems to humans to be) different organisms.

Grafting the olive plant on to wild stock (*olea oleaster*) results in a constructed being whose life connects with an unknown number of different participants. Each year, the base grows shoots that, if left alone, develop into tall and tough stems that reach into the light. Similarly,

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the grafted part develops shoots that also strive to fill the sun-laden openings of the canopy. Left to its own devices, then, the domestic-wild hybrid develops as a thick network of shoots that fan out in all directions, producing a mass of vegetation, a tangled mess of tall and impenetrable branches without any clear preference for the 'wild' or the 'domestic'.

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The very existence of the olive plant as a hybrid already points towards the absurdity of letting it develop on its own terms. *Olea* has, since antiquity, been meant as an interactive partner, and the basis of the interaction, its fundamental structure, is ruled by the behavior of the plant assemblage when left to its own devices. It is only by understanding this behavior that people can intervene in a way that creates novel and productive assemblages. In other words, it is only by paying close attention that people and olive trees can mutually determine.

Pruning is the primary act through which the relationship between people and *olea europaea* is enacted. There are many possible descriptions of the act of pruning, which is deceptively simple: selectively cutting branches. People may prune for the tree's health, or for a good harvest, or for reasons of beauty or respecting tradition. People have pruned according to the dominant technology of harvest, creating forks in the trunk in order to lay the head of the ladder when that method was dominant. Similarly, people may prune in order to favor the growth of low external branches, especially if they harvest the fruits by hand. Pruning may be done in order to corral the tree into shapes fit for the harvesting machines of monocultures. No matter what reason any particular person may give, the act of pruning is generative of both a particular kind of plant, and a particular kind of human.

That act of olive-human generation is contingent because it cannot be overdetermined by what one actor does. The tree will always express itself in ways that surprise the person interacting with it. And the person may change their behavior accordingly, but the tree will never fit a particular mould flawlessly. No matter how hard one may try to control the tree's shape once and for all—the plantation being the ultimate example of this—repeated pruning will be necessary, precisely because the plant has a mind of its own.

Pruning is always an invitation from one actor (the person) to another (the tree) to continue acting, but the tree also encourages pruning at particular times of year and dissuades it at others. When a branch is cut, this act entails expectations about how the tree will respond. The selection of those responses becomes the basis for future acts of pruning, in a reiterative process that, over decades and centuries, leaves its mark in the tree's shape, the soil, and on human generations.

In order to prune well, one must first and foremost pay attention to the plant itself. Not only is every plant different, but there are general rules of well-being that apply to olive trees and that the human partner must respect. In other words, there is such a thing as being an olive plant, and that specific form of being comes with its own requirements and preferences. The human partner must pay close attention to these preferences in order to enter the relationship in a generative, as opposed to destructive, way.

The preferences of the olive plant have to do with light (sun), moisture (wind), the presence of varied vegetation, cycles of vegetative hibernation (when to cut), the presence of disease (insects, fungi, bacteria) as well as of other animals. As a rule, the olive is a sun-lover. When contemplating a plant, it is obvious that the healthiest parts are those high up, where the leaves are basked in constant and powerful sunshine. Light is but one ingredient, because the plant also likes to keep itself dry. This also contributes to the health of higher leaves, which benefit from the drying effects of the breeze. Sun and a relative absence of humidity contribute to a reduction in pests that attack the plant, damaging its tissues. But what is seen above ground is merely half of the plant; the rest is buried in the soil, a medium completely different from the airy, sunlit atmosphere. The olive plant literally partakes in two distinct and completely different domains, and the careful observer will look at the ground as much as the canopy when caring for an olive tree.

Unlike the dryness of the air, the soil needs to contain a level of moisture that allows the plant to remain hydrated throughout the year. This is no easy feat, and the olive tree is very tolerant of dry conditions, though this does not mean that it prefers them, or that there isn't a significant cost to prolonged drought. One of the ways to maintain moisture in the soil is to encourage a rich community of species that provides literal cover to the ground, thus reducing evaporation. Life,

as Lovelock, Margulis, and lately Latour have pointed out, is good at creating the conditions of its own reproduction, and in this regard the relationship between a rich plant community and the soil is instructive. Varied ground vegetation, combined with olive and other fruiting trees, can maintain the humidity of the soil much better than a vegetation-free monoculture (Calabrese et al. 2015, Selosse 2021).

In the middle of Puglia, Southern Italy, the process of soil creation has been instrumental to human life for a long time. In the limestone hills known as the Murgia, the terrain made it very difficult for big landowners to enclose the land, as they had done elsewhere (most notably in the plains both North and South of the Murgia, where soil was more plentiful and easily accessible). Partly because of the difficult terrain, which made soil scarce and complicated to access, peasant families gained rights to their own plots of land relatively early on in history (starting in the eighteenth century; Galt 1986, 1991). But what they gained rights to was more often than not a rocky land that was difficult to cultivate because of the scarcity of soil.[1] However, over generations of labor, rocks were removed from the land and fashioned into farmhouses and low-lying walls, themselves instrumental in keeping soil within designated areas.[2] Through practices of crop rotation, vineyard tending (the dominant plant throughout the nineteenth century), tree plantation (most notably olives, but also almonds, figs, pomegranates, and cherries), and the rearing of animals, soil was created where little existed before.[3] If there is an olive culture to speak of today in this region, it is because of a history of soil generation that hovers over the present.

Inasmuch as there is a relationship to the land in this particular region, it exists because of the inheritance of soil as much as trees. But many of the techniques used in the past for soil creation (especially the use of manure from domestic animals) are threatened today, largely because of

1 The process of land acquisition by peasant families happened through the institution of emphyteusis, which gave peasants heritable land rights in exchange for labor. "Emphyteusis is a type of perpetual lease in which, in exchange for an annual rent, the tenant retains rights to the land and can pass them on to his heirs" (Galt 1986, 442). By the early-nineteenth century, some towns—like Locorotondo—had two-thirds of their residents living in the surrounding countryside, a highly unusual situation in the history of Southern Italy. See Galt 1991.

2 The walls enclosing lands in the Murgia have been shown to not only reduce erosion (during heavy rains), but also to keep moisture within the soil for longer. They also offer valuable habitat to countless insects and reptiles.

3 Also see discussion of people *as* soil in Chapter 5.

the same forces that have imposed monocultures elsewhere. There are pockets of resistance that continue to generate soils and care for those already there, through practices that look towards ancestral traditions while inventing new ways of interaction. This is not a Netherlands-like situation of land *reclamation*, parceled out in neat plots that are equivalent in their abstractness. This is a region of mosaic landscapes and micro-climates, every little spot impossible to understand outside of a history of generative interaction, and outside of a familiarity with *that* spot.

The existence of soil provides the possibility for an olive culture to exist. The intergenerational act of soil creation has literally made a living out of stone. This kind of ingenuity was occasioned by necessity, and the land is pockmarked with evidence of creative uses that go back over ten thousand years. The olive tree has been an indispensable partner in the transformation of local conditions of existence. It is as if Margulis and Lovelock's insight that life generates its own conditions is here consciously pursued, in a partnership that is often expressed through material relations that affect all participants.

Because of the highly complex assemblage that nurtures the health of an olive tree, the act of pruning is highly ritualized; it is sacred. In Vale D'Itria, itself a microregion of the Murgia, the *potatore* is not just anybody. Seasoned olive farmers will not touch their trees for pruning purposes, instead deferring to the authority and the knowledge of a *potatore*. An expert pruner may start by looking at the soil, paying attention to the myriad relationships that are generative of the plant, before examining the canopy in order to read the signs that the plant is producing. In any case, interventions on a particular plant are not made for immediate results: it is always a future, imagined tree, that informs actions in the present. In this way there is a deferential relationship to time, the present being thinned out to the moment of intervention, allowing instead the life history of the plant to directly influence its future existence.

Pruning reunites death and life, as it is through cutting (eliminating from the flow of life-giving lymph) that the conditions for new life are generated. Not just any cutting will do; it has to be clean, sharp, precise, and respectful. The tools used for this operation have to be carefully sharpened and inspected in order to minimize the damage that is always a risk. In many different kinds of trees (oaks for example) in

Europe, longevity is a feature of this kind of interaction with humans (see Rackham 2020). Pruning greatly increases the lifetime of these trees. It appears that, from the point of view of the tree, pruning is an act of rejuvenation. The *potatore* has to navigate the narrow margin between regeneration and decay by performing her craft with care and patience. The result is not only younger and healthier trees, paradoxically marching forwards and backwards in time, but also the bequeathal of an inheritance that obliges future generations to pay attention too.[4]

In the modern world, many characterize the act of pruning as based entirely on the economy of yield. In other words, one prunes in order to have fruit. In fact, pruning decreases yield in the year immediately following the intervention. It does, overall, increase yield, but good pruning is not about this exclusively, nor even primarily. One prunes for olives, but also for one's children, for the beauty of the land, for the health of the soil,[5] to heat oneself during winter, to make great food,[6] for the longevity and beauty of the tree, out of a sense of duty for a land etched with mutual genealogies. Given pruning's central role in the relationship with the olive tree, it is impossible to explain it with instrumental reasoning; it resists, escapes, and overflows mere reasons, pointing towards the rich tapestry of reciprocity that can be articulated around it.

* * *

The community of plants that grow in the olive grove forms an integral part of the health of the soil, which is also dependent on a rich invertebrate and vertebrate community that helps the olive tree flourish. Before the advent of industrial modernity, there wasn't really an olive grove to speak of, because olive trees were planted far away from each other such that many different cultures could be accommodated between

4 The figure of the potatore is an inherited idea as much as a contemporary practice. Becoming an expert pruner is hard, and increasingly harder under monocultural conditions and purely aesthetic pruning (for example, for tourist consumption of landscapes). The potatore is rare, and careful pruning a practice apt for renovation.

5 The thin branches and foliage that result from pruning are excellent organic material that, in time, can become new soil.

6 Certain branches (of particular thickness) cut during pruning are considered to be excellent fuel for the ovens that dot the region. This use of olive wood in cooking is most famously displayed in the region of Naples, where the best Neapolitan pizza has to be cooked in an oven fired with olive wood.

them. Another reason for this distance was as a barrier to disease transmission, a social distancing for olive trees *avant la lettre*. In Puglia, the oldest olive trees are always found far apart from each other, often in what resemble haphazard formations, certainly not following the idea of a grid (suggested, in many ways, by the advent of mechanization; it is first and foremost the machine that finds the grid useful). This way of planting was also a result of individuals paying attention to the tree over generations and noticing that an iterative relationship with human beings allowed it to grow to impressive sizes. Trees were planted far apart such that, when they reached their slow maturity, they would still allow a varied plant community to grow between them, helping them stay healthy.

This is why even today, when this kind of olive culture has been relegated to memory, one says that olive trees are planted for one's grandchildren. This expression is itself a fertile, ghostly presence in the cemetery of practices produced by industrialization. It is repeated as a trope, but it can easily turn from a cliché into the memory of its original impetus: the ancestral knowledge that indeed obliged one to plant for their grandchildren.[7]

The act of generation that the human-olive relationship embodies is inscribed within a particular time, that is to say, it both takes time and generates new temporalities, new lifetimes, for those involved (including those that are bequeathed their role in generative processes). In the relationship between people and olive trees, it is the person that needs to adapt to the time of the tree. This is a feature of paying attention: the relationship between a being that can live for millennia and one that can at best span a century is necessarily tilted in favor of the longer timeframe. Or rather, this is the case inasmuch as the potential life span of the tree is part of the multi-generational human-olive relationship.

Modernity has questioned and attempted to transform most of the fundamental aspects of the human-olive relationship based on mutual beneficence and careful attention. The project of developing an olive industry, through successive and ongoing pressure, has meant the radical severance of the ability to pay attention to trees. This has resulted in a landscape of olive monoculture; in Puglia, the oldest specimens are

7 I am indebted for much of this discussion to Nuccio Chialá, who continues to generously share memories and stubbornly resist their programmatic erasure.

now often engulfed by a sea of smaller trees, all pruned and 'managed' for maximum yield. Because the olive plant cannot be considered in isolation, plucked from the rich milieu that expresses it, the modern olive industry has also radically simplified the soil and the plant communities that nurture it. Instead of rich entanglements of varied species, including humans, we now have desertified monocultures of struggling trees, managed by humans (who, it turns out, are not very good at being managers in this sense).

The modern move towards monoculture has gone hand in hand with the adoration of so-called 'monumental' trees (Puglia has a registry of thousands of them). The word 'monumental' already ossifies them into sterile monuments to the past, works of art celebrating idealized fictions that only really work to support an increasingly untenable status quo. The monumental olive trees of Puglia have become fetishized in tandem with the expansion of modern development. This is familiar, as the radical simplification of ecological processes that is instrumental to modern development has always given rise to a romantic imagination elevating the past to the role of some impossible model. This works to naturalize development, by acknowledging (but crucially misplacing) its often tragic consequences.

The acceleration of modernity causes the greatest rupture in the relationship between people and olives, as people are no longer able to pay attention to trees on their own temporal terms. An excellent example of this is the outbreak (started in 2013) of *Xylella fastidiosa*, a bacterial pathogen, in olive groves in Southern Puglia. Coming in the wake of modern development that had left soils and plants radically weakened, *Xylella* has killed millions of trees in just a few years. The often-abstract acceleration of modern times in this case takes a physical form and a measurable pace, with plants that have stood for centuries dying in a matter of mere years, the tree equivalent of a generalized heart attack. A relationship spanning millennia was brought to an abrupt halt.

Or was it? The modernist response to the literal sickening of the relationship between people and olives has been to accelerate further! Research into *Xylella* has entailed looking for cures that enable the overall model of development to continue. This has precedents elsewhere: the grapevines of California have been struggling with the bacterium for decades, and research there has also focused massively on eliminating

everything that harbors the pathogen, in the interest of a land-culture geared exclusively towards wine production, at all costs.[8] Similarly, 'ecological' research in Southern Puglia has brought about a radical reduction of ecological complexity, which in its turn has reduced the complexity of an already impoverished land.

Besides attempting to control the pathogen directly, research has also focused on finding (and increasingly, making) varieties that are resistant to the bacterium. Two have been identified, one of which seems to fit the project of modernity perfectly. The Favolosa variety (FS-17) is supposed to grow fast, produce incredible amounts of fruit in 'high density' plantations, and be resistant to disease. The variety was created in Central Italy towards the end of the twentieth century, a period coinciding with the aggressive expansion of industrialized agriculture. It is marketed as a miracle plant (hence the name Favolosa), and one especially suited to mechanization. Industrial plantations of this variety look more like grapevines without the terraces: neat lines of low trees along which a specialized machine can proceed and suck the olives into giant containers.

Even though specifically bred for mechanization and industrialization, Favolosa still resists its fate. It is pruned in order to continuously fit the machines designed to take the place of people, but eventually, after mere decades, the proportion of wood to young branches (where the olives grow) no longer makes economic sense. In other words, the tree tries to grow and, constantly impeded from doing so, rebels against its imprisonment through the very constitution of its body. The result is the rooting out of the 'old' plantation and the beginning of another.

Imported into Southern Puglia after *Xylella*, Favolosa seemingly accomplished the final annihilation of genealogically based olive-people relationships. It appeared to deliver olive culture from the death throes caused by an epidemic (officially conceived of as a mere accident of fate). In fact, it entrenched the project of modern simplification further, which is what may ultimately extinguish olive culture, replacing it with a carefully annotated map of "monumental olive trees" one may visit, if they survive *Xylella*.

8 In the Californian case, the management of *Xylella* has been successful in the sense that it permits the wine industry to endure, through programmatic interventions to control the pathogen in perpetuity.

In the case of Favolosa, what has for centuries given olive trees their characteristic allure—their thick, twisted trunks—becomes an impediment to efficient production. This variety is the result of the relationship between machines and laboratory science, as opposed to olive growers and the land. When someone chooses to plant Favolosa in order to replace older trees killed by *Xylella*, they are moving even further away from a history of soil generation and care, and towards a fantasy of mechanical domination that can only end in tragedy.

The modernist answer to the plight of olive trees in Puglia is a dead end, leading to further ruin. Instead, there are other ways of rethinking olive culture along lines that reconvene both the past and scientific knowledge. But the point is that the Ecocene calls for reinvention. This is precisely the meaning of thinking ecologically, that is to say, of basing one's thought and actions in the fact of change, as opposed to the certainty of permanence. Even secular olive trees can die, and we are now required to reinvent practices that ritualize without fetishizing, produce without stripping everything away, and build dynamic genealogies that can sustain the very idea of a future. We must live through tragedy, and that requires the courage of not knowing what a future generative relationship will look like.

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Despite the accelerated modernization of olive culture in Puglia, not every mode of relation has been severed, and not everything has been forgotten. Stengers' cemetery of practices is visible and alive, in the form of ghosts, through different uses of language and now-marginal practices. It is also alive in the bodies of olive trees themselves, etched as they are by generations of pruning and caring.

Every olive tree of a certain age is what it is because of past practices, and how it continues its life will be decided in partnership with current and future humans. This imbrication of olives and people means that past practices are etched on to the body of the tree, but often in ways that are not easily discerned. In other words, past practices are logically necessary to suppose, but opaque, because one can only guess at what happened in a past that is made present through the body of the tree. This both makes it easy to invent traditions that are in fact self-serving, quickly assimilated into modern development, and enable

the renovation and reinvention of practices that decidedly break with modernity. It is easy to delude oneself that one's actions are beneficial to the tree, especially in the context of a modernity that has to some extent sickened all minds. The discovery of pasts etched within trees also allows us to rediscover habits of mind that help us to step outside of our own bodies and narrow interests.

The olive tree in Puglia is in many respects similar to the cow for the Maasai, described by David Western (2020) as a common denominator, that which *everyone* has as a connection to the land and to each other.[9] That kind of *de facto* connection has survived alongside, or perhaps despite, the industrialization of olive culture. It also points to a ghost that takes the form of caring; even the owner of tens of thousands of trees grown in high-density plantations may repeat the mantra that an olive tree is planted for one's grandchildren. This kind of cognitive dissonance is easy to fault, but the point is that the presence of olive trees *themselves* ensures the transmission of a phantasm with very specific, but mysterious, forms.

As in all other areas of human intercourse with the multiplicity of worlds, olive culture is living through a phase of decomposition and experimentation. The death and destruction wrought by *Xylella* is but the most visible trace of this process of decomposition which is in fact much better placed within the context of the dawning Ecocene. The crucial point is an ability to discern what to take up from an opaque past that is nonetheless physically present through the bodies of the trees, and how to invent ways of living together that are regenerative. Signs of this process of renovation are discernable in many different locations,

9 This reality is beautifully expressed by Fabio Gatti (2019) in his wonderful work on the subject: "More than the olive tree alone, what is also extremely important in Apulia is the result of its cultivation: olive oil. This is not the place for describing the richness of properties of olive oil, which some people consider comparable to a medicine, as well as describing in detail the art of olive oil making. What matters here is to stress how important olive oil is in Apulian culture: every year, thousands of people gather in the countryside for collecting olives and bringing them to the oil mill. Not all of them are actual farmers, people who make a living out of olive farming and olive oil production. Many of them, including me, just make the olive oil they need for family consumption, from pieces of land belonging to the family and inherited over the years. It is a feast: at the end of the harvest it is very common to see families and friends gathering around a meal and tasting the first, rigorously raw, olive oil of the season. It is a ritual which keeps the memory of the family alive, a collective act of remembrance" (2019, 13).

usually at small scales that are not a fault but a feature of successful recomposition.

Pruning, it should be no surprise, is yet again a good lens for observing this process of recomposition at work. What, in this most crucial of acts, is to be recuperated, and what will be invented? In this regard, there are some partial answers from often surprising sources. For example, agronomical research (no stranger to modern development, of course) has borne proposals for pruning techniques that strive to respect the physiognomy of the plant (Proietti et al. 2008). What these techniques recuperate from the past is the attention paid to the context of a particular tree, and they therefore end up agreeing with 'traditional' practices as to, for example, the extent of pruning (traditionally—no more than would allow a bird to fly through the canopy; scientifically—no more than 30% of the overall volume of the canopy). At the same time, these techniques are marketed as increasing yield, which is a dangerous way of promoting something that could be much better characterized in terms of a meaningfulness of connection with the land.

In other respects, what is billed as traditional goes against the physiognomy of the tree, and is instead rooted in an inheritance of form, rather than substance. For example, many in the past used to lower the height of their trees by severing the topmost branches of the canopy (all of them) to the desired height. This operation was convenient because more olives grew closer to the ground, where they could more easily be accessed, but it is inimical to the needs of the tree. Olive tree health is to a great extent determined by the relationship between the top of the canopy and the roots, which are in constant communication as to environmental conditions and physiological needs. Indiscriminately cutting the guiding parts of the crown is like blindfolding the tree, which now has fewer senses to use in dealing with its environment. Despite this, many still practice this form of beheading, precisely because of its traditional credentials.

The Ecocene is greatly complicating the meaning of tradition in other ways, too. One of the key ways in which traditional practices have been passed on is through the association of certain activities with certain calendar dates, usually marked by religious ceremonies. Some activities, such as harvesting, cannot be accomplished in one day, and are therefore given a range, passed on through aphorisms such as "you

shall not harvest before Saint Stephen's Day". These kinds of injunctions or prohibitions continue to exist, for everything from pruning, to harvesting, to planting particular crops. However, their usefulness is continuously diminishing under conditions of heightened ecological change. The reason as to why Saint Stephen's Day was a good indication of the appropriateness of a certain activity was precisely the regularity of the patterns that dominated the Holocene. Within that routine, human activities enjoyed a wide margin of error.

That margin of error is continuously being narrowed by the Ecocene. Every environment is currently changing in ways that make old calendar injunctions less and less applicable. This heightens the need for reinvention, and for fastidiousness. The question of what is to be recuperated and renovated has become more urgent, and also requires us to observe current conditions much more carefully. It is increasingly likely that the pruning schedule of two centuries ago is no longer applicable today. The best guide as to the new conditions remain the olive trees themselves, which have no dogmatic allegiance to particular ways of acting. A renewed relationship with them can guide both partners through the narrowing conditions of the Ecocene.

Between the supposedly new and the traditional, individual olive growers are left to discern for themselves, or through small collectives, what it may mean to care for a plant currently threatened by so many different factors. Notably, the traditional area of politics—institutions of the state at all levels—has shown itself incapable of anything other than piggybacking on whatever the 'economic' imperative may be. In the case of *Xylella*, for example, the Italian political apparatus, from national to regional and communal levels, has not managed to devise a varied methodology of engagement with the territory that would empower individual care. It has been blind to things like soil or plant health, pinning all of its hopes (and research money) on finding miracle cures and planting extensive monocultures of *Xylella*-resistant varieties.

Of course, an olive grove that is appropriately cared for may still die from *Xylella*. To say that trees grown under certain conditions cannot succumb to *Xylella* paradoxically reproduces the consequentialist, resource-focused logic of modern development. If you do enough of x, then you are insured against fate and its potential ills. But the possibility of living with tragedy is precisely what needs to be recuperated in the

Ecocene. What happens when the trees that I did care for, in every minute regard, die? Decomposition is not a process that one can choose to sidestep because one has followed the correct procedure. No, it is a process that invades and forces readjustments and reinventions, based first and foremost on the lucidity of loss. In other words, if we abandon the consequentialist logic of—practice *x*: insurance against disaster—how do we relate to the land? Is there anything left when the illusion of hope is refused? Are there other bases, besides development, hopefulness, and technical fixes for structural problems, that can sustain a livable, joyful future?

One possible answer lies within the history of soil creation that is part and parcel of human relationships with olive trees in the Murgia. That history has slowly mutated, under the influence of modern development, to one of soil destruction, weakening every single participant in the complex network of relationships that literally takes root within healthy soils. Restoring practices of soil creation cannot guarantee, in the short term, any particular results. In other words, it is not the case that any particular farmer can simply create rich soils in order to obviate the threat of, for example, *Xylella*. But it is the case that, as more and more farmers reinvent practices of soil enhancement, they are also bequeathing to future generations the very possibility of thriving. It may be that future generations would, in certain regions, have tragically lost the inheritance of olive trees. But inasmuch as restoration of the very basis of life can become a fundamental concern, they are sure to receive the conditions for reinventing practices on their own terms.