

# From the River to the Sea

## *Israel, Palestine, and Queer/Feminist Ecologies*

MITCH GOLDSMITH

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In this paper, I set out to critique Israeli oppression of Palestinians in three parts. Firstly, I examine Zionist tropes surrounding the creation of Israel. It is often remarked that Israel was created from nothing: uninhabited land not used to its full potential, land that was wasted and that could, with Jewish ingenuity, be turned into an Oasis in the middle of desert: *a land without a people for a people without a land* (Shapira 41). In these tropes, Palestinians, if they are even acknowledged, are understood as backwards, stupid or primitive, unable (and undeserving) to develop the land and the local resources. This first portion of the critique will specifically examine the afforestation initiatives of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in Israel, and the ways these JNF efforts promote these types of Zionist myths and tropes.<sup>1</sup> As Irus Braverman has thoughtfully documented in *Planted Flags: Trees, Land and Law in Israel/ Palestine*, the JNF and the Israeli government have sought to construct pine forests, reminiscent of European landscapes, atop stolen and destroyed Palestinian villages, in an effort to conceal Palestinian existence and remake not only the Israeli environment but also its cultural memory. As Braverman notes, “the pine is synonymous with the Zionist

project of afforesting the ‘desolate’ land of Israel, and the olive [tree] has become emblematic of the Palestinian struggle against Israel’s occupation and for national independence” (10). Israeli environmental policy, including their afforestation efforts with the JNF, attempts to craft an Israeli narrative that erases Palestinians from the land completely.

Secondly, I demonstrate how these tropes suggest the supposed superiority of Israeli Jews—namely their ability and intellect, which is portrayed as having allowed them to accomplish what Palestinians could not. The tropes, moreover, reveal a set of ideological underpinnings about the innate “nature” of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Aspects of Israeli society construct sociological projec-

tions of the Israeli Jew as “naturally” superior to others, particularly Arabs and Palestinians who are seen as “naturally” inferior, closer to nature and even animal-like. For this portion of my critique, I will draw heavily from both Mera Weiss’ *The Chosen Body* and Jasbir K. Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages*. By placing these texts in dialogue, I will highlight the ways in which Israeli society crafts projections of the Israeli body in juxtaposition with sociological constructions of nature and the Arab body. An embodied Israeli identity is established and reaffirmed through a manipulation and mastery of the land. The possession and mastery of the land re-inscribes a dominant Israeli embodiment while the dispossession of land creates an emas-

culated and disempowered Palestinian/ Arab body. These constructions serve to naturalize the asymmetrical power imbalance between Israelis and Palestinians.

Finally, Israeli constructions of “nature” and “human nature,” in reference to both themselves and Palestinians, colour Israeli environmental policy. The final portion of my critique focuses on destructive Israeli environmental policies within the occupied territories. Because Israel largely controls the flow of goods, materials, and other capital within the occupied territories, it also has the ability to make the import and export of resources between Palestinian communities and other nations virtually non-existent.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true in Gaza, where the borders and waterways remain under an illegal and disastrous blockade.<sup>3</sup> Both urban and rural communities in Palestine suffer, with large cities (particularly in Gaza) quickly moving towards the brink of ecological disaster. These devastating processes of environmental degradation are tantamount to processes of ethnic cleansing and raise serious questions about the use of land, landscapes and nature in occupation and violent conflict.

Israeli destruction of farmland, including olive groves, and the havoc Israel has wrought on Palestinian communi-

ties through disastrous environmental policies will be examined and put into dialogue with recent NGO reports on the ecological impacts of occupation on Palestine. I will specifically draw from Amnesty International's 2009 report *Troubled Waters—Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water*, the United Nations 2012 report *Gaza 2020: A Liveable Place?* and the 2013 United Nations Human Rights Council report on the effects of Israeli settlements on Palestinian life. These policies of "maldevelopment," or what Vandana Shiva calls neo-colonial "development projects [which] appropriate [or destroy] the natural resource base for the production of sustenance and survival," further superimpose "the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as a uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures and genders" (3–5).

To conclude my analysis, I will turn to Palestinian civil society's call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israeli and international institutions complicit in the occupation and other acts of violence against Palestinian communities.<sup>4</sup> It is my hope that this paper can act in furtherance of this call, representing one voice amongst many in support of this nonviolent social, political and economic movement to effect change in the region. In my attempt to craft linkages amongst what at times appears to be divergent theories and movements, I hope to unite ecofeminist, queer, environmental, and anti-racist politics in a way that is both meaningful and responsive to the complexities of each movement's unique cultural context.

Throughout this analysis, I will draw heavily from ecofeminist theory, which offers a unique approach to critique the occupation and Israel's asymmetrical relationship to Palestine. As Rosemary Putnam Tong explains, "ecofeminism strives to show the connections among all forms of human oppression" as well as "human being's attempts to dominate the nonhuman world" (246). Ecofeminists articulate "the view that there exists a direct link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature" (Putnam Tong

251). More recently, ecofeminists have expanded this theory to include an intersectional analysis of the oppression of other marginalized persons, such as queer people, people of colour, and colonized persons. Ecofeminists argue that patriarchy seeks to construct women, people of colour, queer people, and others as non-normative, inferior, or closer to nature, animalizing them in such a way as to prevent them from having a culture, intellect, or even a physical embodiment. This, in turn, both blocks access to and establishes the importance of the dominant white/heterosexual/male norm. For example, in her essay *Towards a Queer Ecofeminism*, Greta Gaard argues that "[f]rom a queer ecofeminist perspective . . . it becomes clear that liberating women requires liberating nature, the erotic, and queers.

## Ecofeminists argue that patriarchy seeks to construct women, people of colour, queer people, and others as non-normative, inferior, or closer to nature.

The conceptual connections among the oppressions of women, nature, and queers makes this need particularly clear" (29). Gaard understands these patriarchal constructions of difference as an attempt to naturalize oppression and violence against marginalized persons.<sup>5</sup>

Gaard's queer intervention into ecofeminism and environmental studies marks an early blending of queer affectivity in ecofeminist and environmental analysis. A queer/ed perspective on natures and environments offers an important way to better understand the use of "the natural" through tropes of land and people's relations to land, particularly in the context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. As Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson remark in their tremendously important collection *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, queer ecologies function as means of "probing and challenging

the biopolitical knots through which both historical and current relations of sexualities and environments meet and inform one another" (5). Queer theorists interested in ecologies and environments have found particular interest in "the naturalization of particular sexual behaviours . . . historical and contemporary formations of natural spaces . . . related to sexuality" and "a variety of literary, philosophical, and pedagogical projects that insist on highlighting, subverting, and transforming heteronormative nature relations" (6). A queered ecofeminist standpoint will better allow us to understand the ways in which sexuality functions in the context of occupation, how Zionist tropes about Palestinians and Arabs works to mark them as queer, deviant, and different. Attention to queer ecologies in

the context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, coupled with an ecofeminist theoretical framework, will allow for a richer analysis than either theory could provide alone.

For example, from a queer/ed ecofeminist perspective we can observe that institutions and people in power craft archetypes of the dispossessed that re-inscribe the latter's supposed proximity to nature, recasting them as animal-like and holding their inferiority as "innate" or "in their nature."<sup>6</sup> These dynamics often function in the colonial or post-colonial context, where the West is thought to be *the* location of culture and the Global South is thus identified as closer to nature, primitive or retrograde. As Huggan and Tiffin explain in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, such post-colonial relations of power as expressed through relations to the land manifest

themselves in various forms of ecological imperialism, biocolonialism, and discursive and material environmental racism, codifying relations of power in ways intimately connected to understandings of land and the natural (3–4). It is important to place attention on the many ways in which theorists and activists have been addressing the social, cultural and political ramifications of environmental policy without collapsing these divergent theories into a single, monolithic ideology. Queer ecologies and ecofeminism complement one another and better allow us to understand the ways in which Israel uses nature and landscapes to further its oppression of Palestinians. We can do this while still understanding queer ecologies and ecofeminism as theoretical movements with unique contexts, histories, and discursive practices.

### I

In *The Chosen Body*, Meira Weiss argues: “The Zionist revolution that aimed to create a new people for a new land had a unique bodily aspect. . . . For early Zionist thinkers . . . returning to Israel and working the land would restore the health of Jewish bodies. The Zionist revolution involved a ‘return’ to Zion, to nature, and to the body” (1). For early Zionist thinkers and Israeli settlers, “Zionism was to be ‘Judaism with muscles’” (1). This new totemic projection of the strong and powerful embodied Jew was constructed in opposition to the image of the weak, hyper-intellectual, and emasculated diasporic Jew in need of “the heroism of his forefathers in the land of Zion” (1). It is Weiss’ contention that these early Zionist projections of the ideal Jew, and the ideal Jewish body, became internalized in contemporary Israeli culture in what she calls the phenomenon of “the chosen body” or the “idealization of health, power and perfection” (4).

This construct encapsulates a “masculine, Jewish Ashkenazi, perfect and wholesome” embodiment, as an “ideal type by which concrete Israeli bodies are screened and molded from their birth to their death” (4–5). Weiss explains that the chosen body is often

crafted in the image of the Israeli “pioneer” or the “sabrah” (tough, authentic Israeli-born Israeli), and both embodiments are characterized with a type of mastery and domination over the land (5). For as Weiss argues, “the conquering of land and labor during the first *aliyot* (waves of immigration to Palestine),” as well as Israeli independence and successive military conflicts, “were all used to shape, justify, and sustain the construction of the Israeli body” (6). The supposed superiority of the chosen body becomes re-inscribed through Israeli manipulation of the natural environment. Therefore, for the Israeli pioneer and *sabrah*, conquering of the land and of the Palestinian people also meant conquering the image of a previously dispossessed and emasculated Jew. The act of taking Palestinian land re-inscribed a heterosexualized androcentric Jewish identity. By identifying oneself through a cactus native to Israel/Palestine, namely the sabra, one is able to recast a supposed naturalness of the Israeli settler colonialist presence in the region.

This new identity, created to alter the natural landscape of Israel/Palestine, codified the supposed divine right of Israelis to the land and the local natural resources. As Irus Braverman explains, “labor and the transformation of nature through labor in particular was central to the development of the new *halutz ivri* (Hebrew Pioneer): a Jewish farmer who cultivates the land and lives off the fruits of his or her labor” (76). For early Zionists, a (Western) European Jewish farmer was almost unheard of. European Jews’ preoccupation with urban life and intellectual pursuits was thought to have removed them from an embodied reclamation of Jewish power and collective identity. For early Zionist thinkers, “through the performance of planting, the ‘rootless cosmopolitan’ Jew from the cities of Europe would be transformed into a physical laborer who experiences an intimate connection to the Land” (Braverman 77). It was argued, “the labor involved in the act of planting thus heals and *naturalizes* the Jew while at the same time normalizing him or her into a new national identity”

(Braverman 77, my emphasis). This new embodied projection of the productive, powerful, self-actualized Israeli Jew, or the “chosen body,” is then set apart against the Israeli/American/Western projection of the Arab body as retrograde, inferior, emasculated/queered, and more closely aligned to nature. While the Palestinian/Arab is seen as more closely aligned with nature, thought of as primitive, and removed from shared cultural mores, the Israeli/Jewish body is thought to dominate nature, the land, and others tied so closely to it in these supremacist projections.

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir K. Puar argues “Muslim masculinity is simultaneously pathologically excessive yet repressive, perverse yet homophobic, virile yet emasculated, monstrous yet flaccid” (xxv). For Puar, processes of Western biopolitics reimagine and recreate Arab bodies through a racialized queer paradigm. As part of a larger process of carving out space in Western society for certain assimilated queer bodies, the Arab “sexually exceptional subject is produced against queerness, as a process intertwined with racialization, that calls into nominalization abject populations peripheral to the project of living, expendable as human waste and shunted to the spaces of deferred death” (Puar xxvii, author’s emphasis). Through a limited sanctioning of normative queer embodiment, what Puar calls “homonationalism,” other queer/ed identities (in this case the Arab body) become set apart, feared, and reviled just as more normative queer bodies were in the years and decades prior. Under homonational regimes, non-Westernized Arab bodies become understood as retrograde, death driven, perverse, unclean, and so on. These sexed/raced Palestinian/Arab male bodies are now more closely associated with death and perversion due, in part, to a Western hyper-fascination with terrorism, jihad, suicide bombing, and Arab sexuality. This has occurred as the connection of more normative queer bodies with death (where AIDS equals perversion and death) fades from public memory.

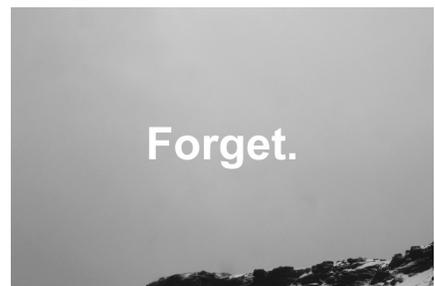
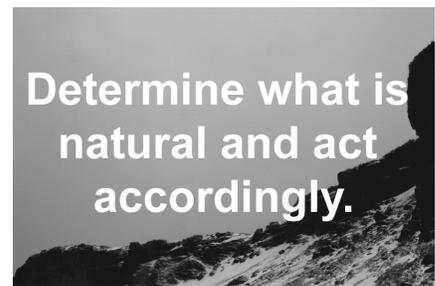
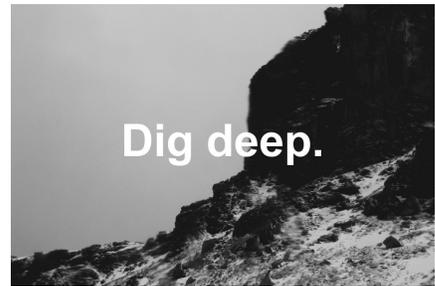
Puar explains that Western probar-

# Ways To Change The Body/Land

JAIMES MAYHEW

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Inspired by eco-queer and eco-feminist notions of power and ecology, as well as my own experience as a transgender person from a family of geologists and ecologists, *Ways To Change The Body/Land* is a series of photos taken out of a car window in southern Iceland with instructions that suggest small ways one could change the social, political, cultural, physical, or ecological contexts of a body or landscape: the body/land. These instructions are abstract, inciting a call to action but not assigning the power that is needed to follow through. This leaves room for questions—if one wanted to change a body/land by assessing value, what kind of value should be assessed? Would taking out a life insurance policy assess value? Would estimating available resources assess value? All of these works seek to acknowledge the constant flux of a body/land in a perpetual state of becoming. Although I do not believe that landscapes and bodies are qualitatively the same, I believe that we assign meaning to both in similar ways.



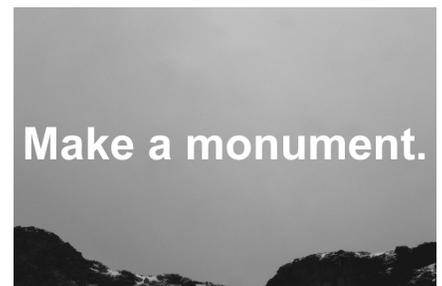
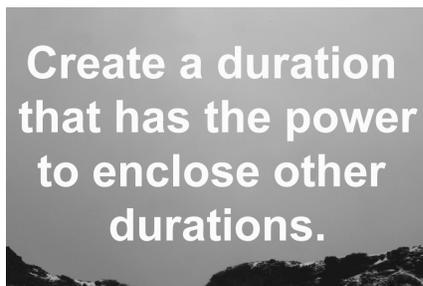
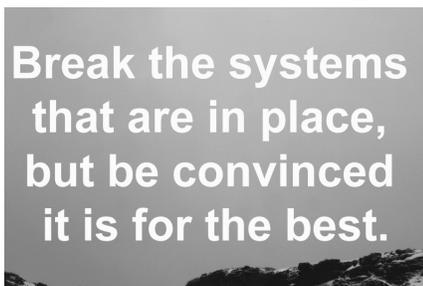
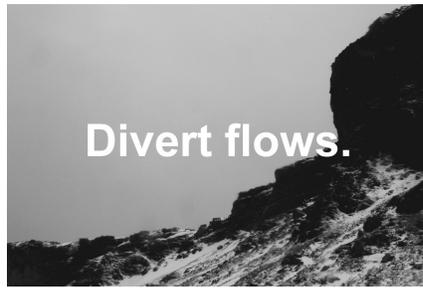
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jections of “Islamic sexual repression that plagues human rights, liberal queer and feminist discourses” become intertwined with the “Orientalist wet dreams of lascivious excesses of pedophilia, sodomy, and perverse sexuality” (14). Furthermore, Raz Yosef argues in *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema*, “Israeli heterosexual masculinity and its seemingly unified collectivity cannot imagine itself apart from the conception of externalized, sexualized ethnic and

racial ‘others’ on whom it was founded and which it produced” (1). Yosef continues, “Zionist phallic masculinity is constituted through the force of exclusion of the queer, the (homo)eroticized Mizrahi [Arab Jews] and the Palestinian male ‘others’” (1). Israeli body narratives have excised understandings of the weak, emasculated (homoerotic?), disempowered, and disposed diasporic Jew and placed these attributions onto their constructions of the Palestinian/Arab body.<sup>7</sup> Yosef explains that

these hyper-masculine constructions of Israeli Jewish embodiment become “structured by Orientalist perspectives about the East [or the Global South], especially that of Eastern bodies, associated with lack of hygiene, plagues, disease, and sexual perversity. By assigning the Eastern population as objects of death and degeneration, Zionism created internal biologized enemies against which the Zionist society must defend itself” (3).

In these Western projections, Arab



societies, and particularly Arab sexuality and masculinity, are understood as closer to nature, their behaviour animal-like and lacking the cultural sensitivity of their Western counterparts. These projections bleed into Israeli animalizing discourse around Palestinian “natures” even as they underpin early Zionist and contemporary Israeli narratives about the founding of Israel. In the latter, early Zionists are thought to have found a backwards people unable to care for themselves, the land, or the nat-

ural resources of Israel/Palestine. If the Palestinian people are acknowledged at all, Israeli myths about the founding of Israel construct a Palestinian embodiment that, although close to nature, is unable to properly *master* nature and nature’s resources.

II

Zionist narratives about the Jewish settlement of Israel often either deny the existence of a Palestinian people or characterize pre-1948 Palestine as a

backwards land ruined by backwards people. As an example of the former, during the 2013 Israeli Independence Day celebrations, the president of Israel, Shimon Peres, denied the existence of a Palestine people while championing Israeli mastery over the “barren and disappointing land”:

I remember how it all began. The whole state of Israel is a millimeter of the whole Middle East. A statistical error,

ren and disappointing land, swamps in the north, desert in the south, two lakes, one dead and an overrated river. No natural resource apart from malaria. There was nothing here. And we now have the best agriculture in the world? This is a miracle: a land built by people. (Pappe, "Israeli Denial")

In her study of Jewish responses to malaria in pre-1948 Palestine, Sandra Sufi-an explains, "the modern drive in Israeli society to rule over nature is commonly conveyed in the stories about malaria and swamp drainage in Israel/Zionist history" (4). However, similar narra-

wash Arab villages looked like brigands. Naked children played in dirty alleys.

Over the distant horizon loomed the deforested hills of Judea. The bare slopes and the bleak, rocky alleys showed some traces of present or former cultivation.

"If this land is our land," remarked Fredrich sadly, "it has declined like our people."

## In these Western projections, Arab societies, and particularly Arab sexuality and masculinity, are understood as closer to nature.

tives, this time acknowledging an Indigenous Palestinian population, can be found in Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland*, published in 1902. The particular passage that follows, from the Zionist leader's famous Orientalist utopian novel, uniquely illuminates this Israeli archetype and links an understanding of Palestinian inferiority with their inability to master the land. For this reason, I have included an extended excerpt:

Jaffa made a very unpleasant impression. The town was in a state of extreme decay . . . the alleys were dirty, neglected, full of vile odors.

Everywhere misery in bright Oriental rags. Poor Turks, dirty Arabs, timid Jews lounged about—indolent, beggarly, hopeless . . .

The landscape through which they passed was a picture of desolation. The low-lands were mostly sand and swamp, the lean fields look as if burnt over. The inhabitants of the black-

"Yes, it's pretty bad," agreed Kingscourt. "But much could be done here with afforestation, if half a million young giant cedars were planted—they shoot up like asparagus. This country needs nothing but water and shade to have a great future"

"And who is to bring water and shade here?"

"The Jews!" (qtd. in Braverman 83–84)

Seemingly inspired by Herzl's Jewish utopia, the Jewish National Fund, a wing of the World Zionist Organization, began a massive pine planting and afforestation initiative shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel. Nur Masalha explains, "in the post-Nakba period [after the creation of Israel] the Jewish National Fund planted hundreds of thousands of European trees, intended to conceal newly destroyed Palestinian villages" (120). JNF Zionist tree planting almost exclusively focused on the non-native pine tree. As Masalha

continues, "this has been an ecologically very destructive policy pursued largely for political purposes to wipe out the ancient landscape and render the newly acquired areas Jewish European" (121). Today, dozens of Israeli pine forests sit atop destroyed Palestinian villages, concealing a Palestinian history of existence. Elsewhere, historic Palestinian villages, long since purged, are now home to Israeli communities. These communities and their surrounding pine forests sit atop a land whose landscape has been altered through this "naturalizing" effect. Yet, similar to the Israeli constructions of "the chosen body," these pine trees become embodied Jewish trees, an occupying force whose roots run deep.

Of these pine afforestation initiatives, Braverman writes: "unlike so many colonial afforestation projects of the twentieth century, the significance of the Zionist afforestation project lies not in the economic role of the forest trees, but rather in the heightened significance of trees as symbolic, physical and imaginary connections to (and disconnection from) land that are exercised through these trees" (Braverman 6–7). The prevalence of JNF pine trees in Israel "naturalize [a] Jewish Presence" as they come to symbolize a Jewish connection and mastery of the land (Braverman 7). In the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Israeli pine trees themselves become occupiers, operationalized as a front for the Israeli government to conceal Palestinian existence and to seize current Palestinian land, razing homes and whole communities. But, complicating these embodiments, Israeli pine trees also symbolically represent Israeli bodies, through processes of memorialization, commemoration, and celebratory tree planting.

During her interview with a high-ranking JNF officer, Braverman recounts, "trees . . . are used to physically capture, occupy, and control land" (17). Israeli practices of capturing, occupying and controlling landscapes—most prominently demonstrated in the uprooting of olive trees during the expansion of the physical occupation of Palestinian land—coupled with an

Israeli policy of collective punishment against Palestinians, a retributive measure to punish Palestinians for the political instability of the area. Irus Braverman notes, “since its inception, and increasingly in the last two decades, the State of Israel has been uprooting large numbers of Palestinian olive trees” (129). She continues that while Israel denies these practices are punitive or acts of retribution, as those practices would then be considered illegal under international law, Israel nonetheless admits such practices make room for more Israeli military infrastructure. One example is the Separation Wall, which snakes through the occupied West Bank, Israeli checkpoints and security towers, and buffer zones between Israel and Palestine.

To complicate the matter, Braverman explains that for many Israelis, the planting of pine trees and pine forests symbolically and referentially comes to symbolize another type of Jewish presence, a spectral presence of Jews killed in the Holocaust, in violent conflicts in the region, or as remembrances of Jewish folk heroes in the Israeli psyche. Through processes of tree naming, memorializing, and commemoration, Israeli pine trees “not only represent the dead but they also transform the memory of the dead through revival: the human body, in other words, is incarnated in the body of the tree” (Braverman 70). These practices further naturalize a Jewish presence in Israel/Palestine and serves to depoliticize, or at least to remove, JNF’s afforestation projects from political debate because of the seemingly solemn ritual of tree planting as memorialization.

### III

Israeli policies of maldevelopment, which adversely affect ecological diversity in the occupied Palestinian territories, threaten the lives and futurity of Palestinian communities. Israeli pine forest monocultures harm the land, as related infrastructure reroutes water and other natural resources away from the occupied territories and into Israel, and involves the targeting and damaging of Palestinian infrastructure (like

greenhouses and water systems) during military attacks. Overall, these processes seek to reanimate understandings of Israel’s technocratic mastery over the

1,000 Gazans and injured over 5,000 more—Amnesty International notes that a “lack of access to adequate, safe, and clean water has been a longstanding

## Orientalist projections of Palestinian/Arab “nature” are used as a scapegoat to conceal racist environmental policies.

environment. By seizing land, water, and other natural resources from the occupied Palestinian territories, Zionists and their apologists further blame the victim by framing the ecological crises in Palestine as the result of Palestinians’ “natural” stupidity, corruption, and general backwardness. These Orientalist projections of Palestinian/Arab “nature” are used as a scapegoat by Israel to conceal their racist environmental policies.

In 2005, the pine tree was included in the list of wild tree species native to Israel even though “preservationists define the same pine as a major threat to the biodiversity of the local ecology, and even as an invasive species” (Braverman 43). In Israel, these pine trees are an invasive species whose “pine needles kill most of what grows underneath them” (Braverman 116), damaging the soil and land around these trees and within JNF forests. These massive pine monocultures not only remake the Israeli natural landscape, but also further damage the natural biodiversity of Israel. The manipulation of nature and natural resources for the “benefit” of Israeli society is part of a larger structure of domination that dually dispossesses Palestinians from their natural environment and their ability to plant and harvest crops, to fish, to move freely on their land, and to provide enough food and water for their families.

In the 2009 report *Troubled Waters: Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water*—published shortly after Israel’s “Operation Cast Lead” in late 2008 and early 2009 in which Israel killed over

problem for the Palestinian population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. . . . [T]he problem arises principally because of Israeli water policies and practices which discriminate against the Palestinian population” (“Troubled Waters” 4). The report documents Israeli per capita water use as four times that of Palestine, with Palestinian per capita water use dramatically under the World Health Organization’s recognized necessity level of 100 litres per day (Palestinians only use 70 litres) (“Troubled Waters” 4). The report continues that rural Palestinians are more likely to lack clean drinking water and, because of Israel’s restrictions on movement and the blockade of Gaza which disallows the majority of new infrastructure building within the Strip, water cannot be moved from urban areas to more remote regions. Furthermore, for those who do have access to water, poor water purification and sewage systems leave the water dangerously contaminated.

Reflecting on Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, Amnesty International observes that “Israeli settlers [living in illegal settlements in the West Bank] face no such [water] challenges—as indicated by their intensive-irrigation farms, lush gardens and swimming pools” (“Troubled Waters” 5). While Israel manipulates the natural environment in such a way as to support an oasis of luxurious settler compounds in the West Bank, Palestinian resources are rerouted away from Palestinians in need, instead going to serve Israeli excess. As the report continues, during the decades of occupation, “Israel has

over-exploited Palestinian water resources, neglected the water and sanitation infrastructure in the [occupied Palestinian territories, (OPT)], and used the OPT as a dumping ground for its waste—causing damage to the groundwater resources and the environment” (“Troubled Waters” 5). In what can only be described as the crushing power of an Apartheid regime committed to the collective punishment of their targeted minority population, Amnesty International contends that:

Scores of wells, rainwater harvesting cisterns and roof water tanks have been destroyed or damaged by Israeli forces during their military opera-

as early as 2016, with the damage irreversible by 2020” (“Gaza 2020” 11). The 2013 United Nations Human Rights Council investigation into the effects of illegal Israeli Settlements on Palestinian life also corroborate the findings of these inquiries.

Documenting the effects that Israel’s “Operation Cast Lead” had on Gazan infrastructure, the United Nations *Gaza 2020* report finds, “6,268 homes were destroyed or severely damaged; 186 greenhouses were destroyed; 931 impact craters in roads and fields were counted; universities faced US\$25 million in damages; 35,750 cattle, sheep and goats, and more than one million chicken and other birds were killed; and 17% of the cultivated area was de-

waters risk being harassed, shot at, or killed and their boats damaged or sunk by Israeli soldiers.

The United National Human Rights Council’s (UNHRC) 2013 report corroborates many of the findings from the UN officers in Palestine and Amnesty International. Additionally, the 2013 UNHRC reports hearing “numerous testimonies on violent attacks by [Israeli] settlers [on Palestinians in the West Bank], including physical assaults on the person, the use of knives, axes, clubs and other improvised weapons, as well as shootings and throwing Molotov cocktails. The testimonies also recounted the psychological impact of the intimidation from armed settlers trespassing on Palestinian land, at Palestinian water springs or in the midst of Palestinian neighbourhoods in Hebron and East Jerusalem” (UNHRC 12). The report also documents “the impact of violence and intimidation on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinian farmers: preventing Palestinians from accessing their land close to settlements through violence and intimidation; burning, uprooting and attacking Palestinian crops; settlers taking over the land and planting their own crops; fencing off and constructing on Palestinian agricultural lands” (UNHRC 12). The Council also heard testimony from Palestinian communities who witnessed settlers tampering with or destroying their water systems in an effort to force the Palestinian communities to leave the area in search of water. The UNHRC documented that oftentimes, when Palestinians protested the violence and harassment from Israeli settlers, they were met with more violence by Israeli soldiers seeking to suppress Palestinian assembly and political organizing (UNHRC 16).

#### IV

A broad understanding of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination—a movement that calls for an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the siege on Gaza and further demands Israel’s respect of Palestinian human rights—is reaching a critical mass in the West. Students, scholars,

## Activists and academics have sought to effect change *with* Palestinians through scholarship, activism, and campaigning.

tions, as well as many [kilometres] of water mains and other facilities and irrigation networks. Water mains and sewage conduits have been routinely crushed by tanks and armoured vehicles during Israeli military incursions into Palestinian towns and refugee camps in both the West Bank and Gaza, and residents’ water tanks have often been shot at and damaged by soldiers. While some of the damage has been incidental, much of the destruction by the Israeli army has resulted from deliberate, direct or indiscriminate attacks, in violation of international humanitarian law. (“Troubled Waters” 63)

Similar findings have been reported by the United Nations in their *Gaza 2020* report, which notes that because of the strain placed on Gaza’s aquifer, “the aquifer could become unusable

stroyed” (“Gaza 2020” 4). Additionally, the report finds that “water and sanitation infrastructure suffered almost US\$6 million in damages” (“Gaza 2020” 4).

Because of Israeli military restrictions on the movements of Palestinians within Gaza and the occupied territories, farming and cultivating their land, or fishing in internationally recognized Palestinian waters, can be difficult or even deadly for Palestinians (Frykberg). Thirty-five percent of Gaza’s agricultural land is located in what Israel calls the “buffer zone” between the two countries, meaning it cannot be cultivated (“Gaza 2020” 6). If Palestinians disobey these orders, they risk being assaulted, arrested, or killed by Israeli soldiers, and Israeli bulldozers and other military machinery will almost certainly destroy their crops and land. Palestinians attempting to fish in waters that are internationally recognized as their own face similar barriers, with 85 percent of their maritime areas restricted (“Gaza 2020” 6). Gazans entering these

and progressive activists are at the forefront of thoughtful and engaged activism in solidarity with Palestinians, particularly in their call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israeli and international institutions which further Palestinian oppression. As Palestinians, and the activists in solidarity with them, continue their liberatory struggle, it is important that we consider the myriad ways in which environments, landscapes, and natures are used, crafted, and recreated as a means to promote or abridge Palestinian rights.

In 2011, postcolonial feminist scholar and activist Chandra Mohanty, along with Indigenous and women of colour activists, artists, and scholars from the United States toured the West Bank in a solidarity delegation to bear witness to Israeli aggression and State terror in their continued occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and other systemic abuses. The delegation likened what they observed to Apartheid.<sup>8</sup> Coming from diverse backgrounds, some growing up in the Jim Crow South, others on United States Native American reservations, and in Apartheid South Africa, the delegation sought to reaffirm its support for an end to the occupation and to craft linkages between the continuing oppression of Palestinians and other contemporary and historical social justice struggles. Similarly, the following year, a queer delegation went to Palestine to speak with Palestinians about the occupation and the ways in which Israeli aggression against Palestinians intersects with global systems of power, including but not limited to systems of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and colonialism. Upon their return to the United States, both delegations called on the American people—particularly academics and scholars—to endorse the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination and the global BDS movement which aims, non-violently, to pressure the Israeli government to end the occupation of the West Bank, the siege on Gaza, and the broader suppression of Palestinian rights.

For decades, activists and academics have sought to effect change *with*

Palestinians through scholarship, activism, and campaigning. Since the Palestinian call for a global BDS movement in 2005, feminist and queer activists and academics have been particularly active in speaking out against the occupation and other abuses perpetrated by Israel.<sup>9</sup> However, the ecofeminist implications of the occupation and Israeli aggression, including the ideologies of land and embodiment that frame current environmental policy in Israel and the occupied territories, have been under-examined. It is my hope that this analysis will, in part, provide a response to the call for critical academic engagement with Israel and Palestine by providing an ecofeminist analysis and critique of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In this way, it will further the call for solidarity issued by women's and queer groups and provide a new resource for activists and feminists abroad to understand the occupation in a more nuanced and ecologically minded way.

Israeli homonationalist discourses about nature, land, and landscapes underpin unjust power relations between the Israeli State and Palestinian communities. And while Israeli aggression continues to intensify, activists in the West have made significant gains in response to Palestinian civil society's call for solidarity and support of BDS. In 2013, the Association for Asian American Studies,<sup>10</sup> the American Studies Association, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association all endorsed academic boycotts of Israel.<sup>11</sup> The first Homonational and PinkWashing conference was held in April 2013 at the City University of New York hosted by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, and the burgeoning "Open Hillel" movement in the US has seen Jewish college students challenging restrictions on speech regarding Israel, the occupation, and other related issues. Whether through "Open Hillel" initiatives, campaigns championing BDS, and queer students of colour and Indigenous students challenging pinkwashing and other attempts to make the oppression of Palestinians more palatable, the movement has continued to attract attention and gain momentum, with

robust debates on Israeli policy and Palestinian self-determination growing at universities across North America.

With these gains in mind, it is imperative that critiques of the oppression of Palestinians by Israel consider ecofeminist and queer ecological perspectives for a fuller and more complete understanding of the conflict.

## Notes

1. I use the term "Zionist" in the broadest sense possible and recognize its muddled and confusing taxonomy. As Sarah Schulman writes in *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, "In the common parlance of people who support human rights for Palestine, 'Zionist' is a weird buzzword. It means 'people who are pro-Israel' . . . [Rather than understanding all Jews or Jews with a connection to Israel as Zionists] for me, 'Zionists' are a subset of people who support Israel" (140–141).
2. Economic effects of Israeli policy become even more stark when one looks at Israel's cultivation of exportable consumables from their illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and their purposeful hindering of Palestinian export of goods from Gaza and elsewhere. For example, see the ongoing campaigns against SodaStream, a product sold widely in the West, made in an illegal Israeli settlement in the West Bank.
3. Human rights organizations the world over have called the Israeli siege on Gaza illegal, immoral, and disastrous for Palestinians living in Gaza. For more see, Nebehay's "U.N. experts say Israel's blockade of Gaza illegal" published via *Reuters*.
4. When writing about the many ways the Israeli State functions in relation to Palestine, language gets tricky, jumbled, and unclear. I recognize that in this paper I sometimes use the term "occupation" and the phrase "occupation of Palestine" as a catch all for both the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Israel's siege on Gaza, as well as Israel's discrimination of Palestinian peoples inside Israel and broader Israeli policies of disenfranchisement and oppression. This is a limitation on my part as a writer and a scholar and I hope my reliance on the term occupation does not flatten or oversimplify the totality of the Palestinian lived experience.
5. Interestingly, Gaard explains that queer folks fit into this patriarchal paradigm in a unique way, as they are often thought of as "against nature" or "unnatural."
6. See Surasky's "Out of answers on how to confront BDS, StandWithUs comic book portrays Palestinians (and allies) as vermin, reminiscent of Nazi propaganda" on the site *Monodoweiss*.
7. Borrowing from Western/Israeli totemic projections of Israeli and Palestinian embodiment, I use their constructions as a means of critique. I understand that not all Israelis are Jews and not all Palestinians are Arab or Muslim etc. These non-normative Israeli and Palestinian bodies become further marginalized in Western/Israeli projections of the Israeli Jewish chosen body and the Palestinian Arab queered, emasculated body.
8. See Talpade Mohanty et al., "Justice for Palestine: A Call to Action from Indigenous and Women of Color Feminists." I was privileged in 2013 to attend a graduate seminar with Professor Chandra Talpade Mohanty at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Professor Mohanty spoke movingly about her 2011 solidarity tour of Palestine. Not long after, I was able to meet Professor Sarah Schulman in Toronto where she too spoke about her queer solidarity delegation to Palestine shortly after Mohanty's. These women's moving experi-

ences allowed me to re-examine my relationship to the neo-liberal academy and the possibility of creating liberationist scholarship that could challenge Western institutions which too often obfuscate our relationships to global systems of power and oppression, like the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

9. For example, in her book *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, Sarah Schulman writes, “the [BDS] boycott’s global participants include a significant number of LGBT people: Palestinians, Israelis, and Internationals who approach boycott from a queer politic” (126).

10. See Barrows-Friedman, Nora, “BDS Roundup: US scholars group unanimously passes boycott of Israeli institutions” on the site *Electronic Intifada*.  
11. See Abunimah, Ali. “Major Indigenous studies group endorses Israel boycott” at *Electronic Intifada*.

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