

Rethinking the Green Line: "Dwelling" in the Mediterranean Environment in Contemporary Israeli and Palestinian Poetry

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Abstract

Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Israeli national identity has been constructed on the basis of national narratives that have excluded the Mediterranean environment. Similarly, an ethno-symbolic, construction of identity has antagonised Israel from both the Mediterranean environment and its neighbours, especially the Palestinians. However, despite the weight of their different cultural and historical trajectories, a number of contemporary Israeli poets have featured elements of the Mediterranean flora in ways that suggest an ecological convergence with fellow Palestinian poets. This ecological affinity can be seen in the writers' depiction of humanised elements of the Mediterranean flora, which project a sort of continuity or interrelatedness between human and nature, aligned with the fellaheen's ecologically sustainable adaptation to the Mediterranean natural cycles, and away from subject-object constructions of identity that lead to the perpetuation of conflict and environmental degradation in the Middle East.

In this essay I propose to adopt a phenomenological approach to the humanised imagery of the poetry in question based on developments in cognitive and embodiment theories, which conceive body, language and the environment as interconnected. In line with Tim Ingold's conception of dwelling perspective, which sees the organism-person as unfolding in active engagement with the environment, I pursue an integrated and holistic approach to the writers' cognitive and sensory engagement with the ecological dynamics of Mediterranean geography. Israeli and Palestinian poetry can be seen as making an important contribution to the creation of alternative constructions of identity in the Middle East based on the ecological dynamics of that which, for centuries, has united the Mediterranean basin beyond cultural and religious differences: the Mediterranean environment.

Keywords: Poetry, Mediterranean, Middle East, embodiment, identity

Resumen

Desde la creación del estado de Israel en 1948, su identidad nacional se ha construido en base a narrativas nacionales de las cuales el entorno mediterráneo ha sido excluido en favor de una concepción identitaria etno-simbólica que ha alienado a Israel tanto de la cultura mediterránea como de sus vecinos en la zona, en especial de los palestinos. Sin embargo, algunos poetas contemporáneos israelíes sí que han incluido el mediterráneo como parte de su imaginario poético, y lo hacen desde perspectivas que podrían alinearles con tendencias similares en la poesía palestina, a pesar del peso de sus diferentes trayectorias histórico-culturales. Podríamos decir que esta afinidad ecológica compartida se manifiesta principalmente en la presencia de una naturaleza mediterránea humanizada que proyecta una continuidad o interrelación entre los humanos y la naturaleza. Asimismo, esta visión ecológica coincide con las prácticas agrícolas sostenibles de uno de los ocupantes ancestrales de esas tierras, el fellaheen, cuya integración sostenible al duro entorno mediterráneo de Oriente Medio se contraponen a construcciones identitarias basadas en el dualismo sujeto-objeto, que tienden a perpetuar el conflicto y la degradación ambiental en Oriente Medio.

En este ensayo propongo un acercamiento fenomenológico a las imágenes de naturaleza humanizada presentes en ambas tradiciones poéticas. Este acercamiento está basado en los avances que se han producido en el campo de las teorías cognitivas y las teorías del cuerpo, que coinciden en concebir cuerpo, lengua y mundo desde una perspectiva integradora. En línea con la perspectiva del "habitar" desarrollada por el antropólogo Tim Ingold, la cual concibe al individuo-organismo en proceso de interacción activa con el entorno, propongo aportar un análisis holístico e integrador de la relación cognitiva y sensorial de la poesía en cuestión con las dinámicas ecológicas mediterráneas que emergen en las imágenes de naturaleza humanizada. De este modo, la poesía Palestina e Israelí puede contribuir a la creación de una construcción alternativa de la identidad basada en las dinámicas ecológicas de lo que, durante siglos, ha unido al Mediterráneo más allá de sus diferencias culturales o religiosas: la naturaleza mediterránea.

Palabras clave: Poesía, Mediterráneo, Oriente Medio, teorías del cuerpo, identidad

Introduction. Mediterranean nature as reconnection

The Mediterranean has been the cradle of many cultures, civilisations, and religions, forged through centuries of conflict, trade, and cultural exchange. But what most unites this diversity of peoples and customs is the Mediterranean climate, and its flora and fauna. However, little attention has been paid to the potential role of Mediterranean nature in the creation of avenues of dialogue and cooperation that move beyond static and polarising national narratives based in subject-object dynamics underpinning models of identity constructions in the Mediterranean. The Middle East conflict is a good example of this. Depictions of Mediterranean nature in the Middle East conflict are more a reflection of the political tensions and geopolitical battles in the region than of the real experiences and aspirations of its people, and both Israeli and Palestinian poetry testify to this imbalance. One of the most interesting aspects of this poetry is the particular relationship to the Mediterranean landscape expressed in Israeli and Palestinian poems. In Israeli culture and poetry, depictions of the Mediterranean culture and environment have oscillated between biblical nostalgia for the "Land of the Fathers," and overt political claims to rootedness in the land, all underpinned by subject-object identity constructions that perpetuate the "otherness" of the Mediterranean environment and its Arab neighbours, contributing to their subjugation. Conversely, in Palestinian poetry, the Mediterranean appears mostly as a symbol of struggle for resistance to cultural and physical genocide. But there are contemporary voices in both poetic traditions that seem to call for an alternative relationship with both the geography and nature of the Middle East and their antagonistic "other." In many of these poems, olive trees and other elements of the Mediterranean ecology appear as humanised in the manner of pre-industrial modes of occupancy. This shared conceptualisation of the land as humanised might form the basis of a poetic dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian poets, based on the ecological dynamics of the Mediterranean represented by the fellaheen.

This essay proposes an embodied approach to metaphors of humanised Mediterranean nature in some Palestinian and Israeli writers. In particular, I will focus on metaphors as examples of conceptual blending, which is the capacity that allows humans to think symbolically, so as to provide an integrated and holistic approach to the writers’ shared yet distinctive cognitive and sensory engagement and sense of oneness with the ecological dynamics of Mediterranean geography. Examining humanised nature through the lenses of conceptual blending is a form of phenomenological analysis which allows us to read the poems on the basis of embodied experience, explaining the writer’s cognitive and sensory engagement with the Mediterranean flora in the Middle East. By reading the poems as if we were physically “dwelling” in the physical geography projected in them, it is possible for readers to feel more attuned to the “sustainable” (Seligman 33) ecological dynamics of the fellaheen, and their sense of oneness with the Mediterranean environment. In this way, applying Blending Theory to the poems might open up a space of interaction and engagement between the reader’s and the writer’s shared conceptualisations of humanised nature, which might become a basis for future dialogue and cooperation in a region long-plagued by violence and misunderstanding. In other words, the process of meaning-making enacted in conceptual blending has a crucial role to play in the creation of a more empowering discourse leading to alternative definitions of identity closer to the ecological dynamics of the Mediterranean.

Mediterranean identity in Israel and Palestine

After the Oslo Accords in the mid 90’s, the possibility of revival of an Israeli connection to the Mediterranean began to be discussed in the Israeli Forum for Mediterranean Culture in 1996. A new cultural affinity began to be constructed in this meeting as part of an attempt to promote an agenda based on peace and dialogue, and seemingly offering an alternative to the old national myths of Zionism. But as Gil Z. Hochberg argues in his article, “‘The Mediterranean Option’: On the Politics of Regional Affiliation in Current Israeli Cultural Imagination,” this supposed rediscovered vocation for the Mediterranean hid an ideological agenda. In fact, the discourse promoting such values only reclaimed a Mediterranean culture that embraced Rome and Greece as symbols of western civilisation, against a hostile Arab world that was considered foreign to this Mediterranean culture (n.p.). Thus, as Hochberg claims, “[i]n the name of cultural pluralism, Mediterraneanism seeks to become a new authoritative standard for evaluating Israeli culture and identity, and this, most significantly, in direct opposition to anything Middle Eastern” (n.p.).

Such polarising conceptions of identity in Israel are underpinned by subject-object binaries, which are, according to Robyn C. Walker, “a serious impediment to our ability to value the natural world and to pursue social justice” (Walker 2). In the context of Israeli identity formation, the “other” (Arabs and the Mediterranean environment) has been represented through the abstracting lenses of categories of domination, whereby that oppositional “other” becomes an antagonistic entity disconnected from a

national narrative constructed to privilege and legitimise the aspirations of a group, class or ethnicity, in this case Israeli citizens.

Since the Renaissance, there has been a tendency to regard nature as a lifeless, standardised object, and society as an aggregate of atomised "selves" pursuing their own self-interests (Mathews 24). This model leads to anxiety and conflict as it strives for power-ridden relations instead of communicative ones. The Middle East conflict is a good example: Israel can be described now as a society formed by a complex identity tissue, and deeply involved in the military occupation of the West Bank. Similarly, the increasing deterioration of its environment is caused mainly by unfettered urban sprawl and its need of high amounts of water in the heart of an extremely dry geographical area.

These perceptions of identity stand in sharp contrast to the pre-industrial Palestinian sense of attachment to place, which seems more attuned to the ecological dynamics of the Middle Eastern Mediterranean geography. But how can the ecological dynamics of the Mediterranean be defined? First of all, the Middle Eastern Mediterranean terrain here is a dry land of pitiless water scarcity where farmers, agricultural workers, and shepherds have traditionally fought to survive adapting to its rough environment and cultivating wheat, olives, vine, oranges, apricots and fig trees, lentils, barley, and peas (among other crops). In other words, the Mediterranean climate has crucially shaped the harvest and lives of its people, and the Eastern Mediterranean is no exception.

The territory comprising Israel and the West Bank today had been occupied and shaped for centuries primarily by a population of Arab farmers, Bedouin tribes, and some Jewish communities. The life of the Palestinian people was shaped by a harsh environment, particularly in the hill country. As Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal claim, "[a]bout half the land has been entirely uncultivable, while large portions of the other half have been rocky, sandy, or swampy, with a low and unstable amount of rainfall" (4). In these harsh environmental conditions, the Palestinian fellaheen managed to subsist by farming the cultivable land "of the rich alluvial plains" which "gave a much higher yield" (Sayigh 21). The main agricultural products that resulted from farming the richest land were rain-fed cereals, grains, olive oil, soap, sesame, and citrus fruits (Sayigh 22), which supplied a network of cities like Nablus and Hebron with products to trade with the rest of Palestine (Farsoun and Aruri 23). Agricultural workers played an important role in the Palestinian economy and their worldviews need to be taken into consideration; the fellaheen's centuries-old knowledge of the land contributed to maintaining a balanced relationship to the Palestinian ecosystem and a viable social and economic organisation. In this hard agricultural environment, the village and its families provided Palestinian farmers with a strong, stable social network of solidarity and also "fitted Palestine's system of agricultural production and land tenure, both of which call for a year-round, medium sized labour force" (Sayigh 17). Thus, the village was a nuclear constituent of the Palestinian worldview, which encompassed a range of values and attitudes to fellow villagers and the land: respect for elders, solidarity, generosity, hospitality to strangers and a "profound love of all fertility, natural or human, evident in

a hundred small sayings of everyday life" (Sayigh 18). The olive tree occupies a prominent place in the fellaheen's worldview as it constituted (and constitutes) a very important source of income for many Palestinian families and communities for whom "[a]gricultural productivity [...] was a function of the natural fertility of the soil, the available labor, and the ecological context of the region" (Seligman 32). It is possible to suggest that centuries old Palestinian worldviews reveal a deep knowledge and adaptation to the difficult environment in Israel and Palestine,¹ which is now suffering environmental decay due, in part, to "[f]ertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, mechanization, fossil energy, and other adjuncts of the industrial revolution" that "were introduced on a large scale into Palestinian agriculture in the twentieth century" (Seligman 35-36).

Poetry, Mediterranean ecology and reconnection

The evolution of Israeli poetry since the birth of the nation testifies to the paradoxical and controversial relation of Israelis to the Mediterranean environment. As Shlomo Elbaz suggests, the Mediterranean ecosystems on which Israel was physically settled are almost non-existent in the early Israeli poetry written after independence precisely because the eastern side of the Mediterranean was still constructed as part of the Arab world, enemy of civilisation and enemy of the western values proudly upheld by Israeli pioneers (n.p.). In other words, the scope of the concept "Mediterranean" was restricted to ancient Rome and Greece, which were also constructed in western colonial discourse as the cradles of western civilisation:

Thus the new East-Mediterranean environment, vibrant with light, with warmth and fragrance—a total change of scenery for the natives of East European mists and snows — is ignored, eclipsed, at best beheld distractedly by the new Israelis. The lyrical poems written during the first three decades following independence are often steeped in a sort of melancholic setting and autumnal atmosphere totally out of place in a Mediterranean context. The theme of falling leaves is over-exploited (deciduous trees are rather rare in these Levantine surroundings) at the expense of the perennial olive and palm trees. When the immediate surroundings are evoked, it is often through Biblical references. When, in rare cases, the actual physical landscape is mentioned, it is especially the Zionised landscape, rehabilitated, tamed and "modernized." (Elbaz n.p.)

Contrasting with the early poetic attempts at coming to terms with the new Israeli nation, recent Israeli poetry shows a markedly different attitude to both to the Mediterranean environment and to the Palestinian "other," as seen in various poetry anthologies such as *With an Iron Pen: Twenty Years of Hebrew Protest Poetry* or *Modern Poetry in Translation* (Series 3). If the former exposes a number of Israeli poets openly concerned with the conflict and with how it affects not only Israel but also Palestinians,

¹ It is not my intention to portray an idealised and excessively romanticised vision of the fellaheen in Palestine. The life of the fellaheen agricultural worker was harsh in a merciless environment to which village life provided nonetheless some sense of stability, rooting and solidarity. And evidence of the fellaheen's sustainable agricultural methods is abundant; see Gibson, "Landscape Ecology and Ancient Agricultural Field Systems in Palestine" and Altieri, Anderson, and Merrick "Peasant Agriculture and the Conservation of Crop and Wild Plant Resources."

the latter opens the geography of Palestine to a new horizon of intercultural dialogue in a land that has witnessed the birth of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and the intercultural and economic exchanges of peoples and cultures from all over the Mediterranean. These two poetic compilations perhaps might exemplify a "poetic" turn to a new horizon of peace and coexistence in Palestine as they are inspired by principles that are antagonistic to industrial models of environmental exploitation, to ruthless competition for land, and cultural erasure of the other. A number of new Israeli poets oppose empathy, understanding, and a far less ideological "re-orientation" of the Mediterranean landscape, as Elbaz suggests:

Reoriented (or re-Oriented), Israel could discover its true vocation as a nation simultaneously Mediterranean and modern. The Israel of tomorrow, finally at one with its environment and with its neighbors, will be able to ponder the virtues of the Mediterranean, instead of a cultural identity saturated with myth, ideology, and memories of other places to the point of abstraction. (n.p.)

In this context, a long tradition of dialogue exists in both Israeli and Palestinian poetry. One only has to read the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, Dan Almagor, Yehuda Amichai, Ghassan Kanafani, David Grossman, or Samih Al-Qassem to realise that there is a deep yearning to communicate and meet the "other" through poetry. But what is missing in accounts of Palestinian and Israeli poetry is precisely the presence of the Mediterranean environment. During my research, I came across a number of Israeli and Palestinian poems with references to elements of the Mediterranean landscape like pine trees, olive trees, and its inhabitants, the Palestinian farmer or fellaheen. I noticed in these images a shared alignment of the poet with the ecological dynamics of the Mediterranean environment in the Middle East, and a non-exclusivist, non-chauvinist sense of oneness with the land. The highly spatialised imagery of these poems invited me to evoke its cognitive and sensory information as if I were physically roaming the land with the writers. Thus, I began to consider whether the Mediterranean imagery in these poems might, in fact, constitute a literary path towards a culture of reconciliation, inspired by that which has ancestrally united Mediterranean peoples: its natural environment.

This is a far cry from the abstract symbolism of subject-object dichotomy prevalent in many theories of identity.² As described in phenomenology and in recent developments in cultural geography, anthropology, and neurophenomenology (Tilley 1994; Rodaway 1994; Ingold 2007; Thompson n. p.), our identities are threaded and interwoven with the world, rather than projected onto a passive, external reality. The human body makes sense of the world immersed and wholly embodied and coupled with it (Thompson n. p.). In the words of Ingold, this means that "the self exists, or rather

² For further reading on identity theory that focuses on the experience of place I suggest Yi-Fu Tuan *Space and Place*, and Doreen Massey *For Space*. Further reading focusing on subject-object constructions can be found in Mark Leary and June Price Tangney *Handbook of Self and Identity* and in Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke "The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory."

becomes, in the unfolding of those very relations that are set up by virtue of a being's positioning in the world, reaching out into the environment" (103).

The environmental ethics of the Palestinian fellaheen, as it emerges in the poems appears to be aligned with previous theoretical frameworks that conceive of mind, body, and world as interrelated. In this sense, Sharif Elmusa's poem "In Balance" shows a humanised grapevine that "speaks no grapes" because, according to the fellaheen, "[S]he must be in mourning / over his death, he planted her" (Elmusa n. p.). As contemporary literature on anthropology and cognition confirm, conceiving of land as a humanised sentient entity is the result of a long process of interaction with the environment. The beautiful image of a mourning grapevine can thus be seen as the product of the fellaheen's daily embodied interaction with the environment just as "[t]raditional agricultural systems have emerged over centuries of cultural and biological evolution through the accumulation of the experiences of indigenous farmers interacting with the environment without access to external inputs" (Seligman 38). A similar image can be found in Lea Goldberg's poem "The tree sings to the river," where Mediterranean flora is also projected as kin: "My brother, the river, who is forever lost, / New each day and different and one, / My brother the stream between his two shores / Who flows as I do between spring and fall" ("Jewish Heritage Online Magazine" n.p.). Here, poet and nature fuse in the cycle of time, in an endless process of becoming.

Interestingly, a similar imagery can be found in Dvora Amir's "Under the sun," where the poet seems to fuse with the Mediterranean environment of Crete. In the first stanza, the poet seems to enact a criticism of W. H. Auden for finding the inspiration to write his poem "Icarus" by merely looking at Brueghel's painting from a "framed museum gaze," which alienates the poet from appreciating the sensory experience emanating from Brueghel's artistic creation: "He did not expose his pupils to the direct glow of light [...] to the odour of sage" (Poetry International Web n. p.). Perhaps as a reaction to cold and objectivists conceptions of art, the writer feels the need to become one with the Mediterranean landscape, its natural cycles and its flora and fauna: "and like the peasant I continued to plow / and like the very elegant boat I embarked further on my way / and like the olive I stood / and like the small river I flowed" (Poetry International Web n.p.). As in Elmusa's poem, Amir's imagery invites readers to submerge themselves in the landscape, smell, touch, and taste the Mediterranean but, more interestingly, the poet appears in our mind as having acquired the features of the olive, the river or the ploughing peasant, and these natural elements acquire in turn humanised features.

Blending Theory explains this mental process as a four-stage model through which the mind elaborates the information perceived through the sensorimotor apparatus in order to make sense of and give meaning to the world. Thus, Blending Theory is crucial in determining how Israeli and Palestinian poets express their sense of oneness with the environment from an embodied perspective. A poem that projects a similar humanised image of the Mediterranean flora is Agi Mishol's "Olive Tree." This poem explores the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of an olive tree

ignored in an urban context where passers-by seem to be too hurried to pay attention to the "twisted story / that rises from its trunk" (Bal-Maor n. p.). Passers-by seem as well unable to "fathom their roots groping / in foreign soil / clutching mother earth" (Bal-Maor n. p.), as if the olive tree stubbornly tried to claim its presence in a foreign context after being transplanted as part of a government program to relocate old olive trees beyond the Green Line. According to Yael Bar Maor, "[t]hese ancient relocated trees are commonly found in newly made instant landscapes of roundabouts or novo-rich villagardens" (5), but in this beautiful image, the verbs "groping" and "clutching" seem to project in our minds a half-humanised olive tree where hands and boughs seem undistinguishable from each other,³ as if nature refused to give up her ancestral, agricultural connection to the Middle East Mediterranean landscape.

What we have observed in this characterisation of Israeli and Palestinian poetry is a sort of animism,⁴ in which culturally meaningful elements of the Mediterranean flora appear as extensions of the human body and human bodies also appear half "naturalised." In other words, in these poems, nature is not an external object to be depicted or aestheticized. The poet presents an empathic bond with the non-human world (Brown n. p.) in which nature and humans appear as parts of an inextricable whole. In this projection of extended humanised nature, both human and nature appear in a continually unfolding story, as part of the writer's engagement with the environment. To summarise, the animistic (or anthropomorphic) images emerging in the poems depict a sort of continuity or interrelatedness between human and nature which is aligned with the fellaheen's ecologically sustainable adaptation to the Mediterranean natural cycles. The relevance of this process is evident: in fact, the imagery emerging in the poems might form the basis of a more empowering collective discourse that uses the features of the Mediterranean flora in Israeli and Palestinian poetry to create sustainable paths for development between humans and nature in the Middle East. In order, however, to retrieve these characteristics it is necessary to create a phenomenological method of reading that allows readers to identify the conceptual and sensory information that determines the reader's interaction with the writer's animistic perspectives and sense of oneness with the land.⁵

³ For reasons of space I am unable to include more examples of Mediterranean nature in Israeli and Palestinian poetry. But if the reader is interested in further reading, I recommend Yair Mazor's anthology of Hebrew poetry titled *Pain, Pining and Pine Trees*. Also, the poetry of Zelda Shneurson, which is pervaded with images of Mediterranean nature, might be of interest to the reader. Similarly, poets Nathalie Handal and Mahmoud Darwish also exemplify this trend from the Palestinian perspective.

⁴ It could also be regarded as "anthropomorphism." However, treating it as animism seems more appropriate because this highlights the notion of interconnectedness, with its blurring of the distinction between the physical and non-physical world.

⁵ It is true that Israeli poets do not generally hold "indigenous" views as such, exactly like those of the fellaheen. But one of the aims of this essay is to create bridges out of differences and draw attention to undiscovered affinities between Israelis and Palestinians through the Mediterranean landscape.

Psychogeography in practice

The sentient, humanized environments projected in Elmusa's and in Amir's poems can be read as multi-sensory, relational, open-ended, dynamic creative processes of engagement with the environment, challenging the subject-object dichotomy prevalent in Israeli-Palestinian contemporary cultural relations. Pursuing this task involves the promotion of a reading experience "as if threshold is crossed and readers can project their minds into the other world, find their way around there, and fill out the rich detail between the words of the text on the basis of real life experience and knowledge" (Stockwell 41). Cognitive poetician Reuven Tsur (285) claims that the process of locating oneself in space and time during reading favours the eliciting of the more diffuse and perceptual aspects of the text. More specifically, Tsur suggests that writers tend to "generate the unique, diffuse character of emotions" by evoking "in the reader's imagination a landscape in which orientation takes place," (285) which echoes T.S. Eliot's notion of the objective correlative, or the use of symbolism to provide access to emotion. One of the characteristics of the poetry in question is, precisely, the tendency to evoke humanized Mediterranean environments loaded with sensory detail. In this sense, Tsur's description of reading styles as consisting fundamentally in a rapid or delayed categorisation (288) seems especially appropriate in the context of the poems. A reading style in favour of rapid categorisation will scan the text to "pack" the sensory information into a verbal label. On the contrary, delayed categorisation in the reading of certain poems involves spending time with the diffuse, emotional atmosphere generated by the landscape. From an ecocritical perspective, it is thus possible to propose a way of reading that attunes "formative processes of the mind and formative processes in nature" (Betty and Theodore Roszak 224) to reconcile us with the Deep Form that, in the words of Betty and Theodore Roszak (226), "reveals the web of vital relationships embedded in all things [...]," and "that all things and creatures on Earth share a common destiny" (226). The following extracts from Elmusa's poem "In Balance" invite readers to maximise the diffuse conceptual and sensory information of the Mediterranean environment provided in the poem, revealing the intimate relationship between the fellaheen and the Middle Eastern Mediterranean geography:

marvel at how the sun baked your face
black, simple, tenacious,
and how from the good earth,
the earth you made good,
your heart grew tender
as the hands rough. (n.p.)⁶

As readers traverse the space of the poem, their empathic relation with the writer's literary geography begins to build up as their mind recreates the imagery of the different mental spaces on which such imagery is founded. Mental spaces can be defined as

⁶ This book of poems was kindly placed at the author's disposal by Sharif Elmusa previous to its publication, hence the absence of page numbers.

relational frameworks through which readers understand textual reference on the basis of embodied experience (Stockwell 96). Let us suppose that our hypothetical reader has a modestly good knowledge of the geography and history of Palestine and Israel. The piece is replete with references to the Middle East geography that constitute two basic mental spaces: a geographical space and a domain space (Stockwell 96). In turn, the concept of deixis refers to the expressions that help readers understand how the poem's rich context can be recreated as they find orientation in the text, playing a fundamental role in the construction of mental spaces (Stockwell 45). Geographical mental spaces are deictically framed by the geographical references to the physical environment, such as the rough earth, and the latter by the references to the farmer's body, such as his rough heart and hands. As readers engage in a delayed-categorisation type of reading that allows all this semi-consciously perceived information to sink in, they submerge themselves in the mental spaces of the poem, slowly performing each of the stages of the process of conceptual blending. Conceptual blends emerge from the blending of two or more mental spaces from different domains. In other words, conceptual blends encode the writer's cultural understanding of place because they are the result of bodily engagement with the environment. The proponents of Blending Theory explain conceptual blends assuming a four-space model which consists of a cross-space mapping, a generic space, a blend and a resulting emergent structure (Fauconnier 149). Thus, Blending Theory accounts for the conceptual blend in Elmusa's poem as follows:

1. Input Space 1: - the earth
 - earth is organic, biological
2. Input Space 2: - the peasant's body
 - bodies are organic, biological
 - the Palestinian fellaheen employs his body to
 interact with the land
3. Generic Space: - body and earth share growing capacity
 - both share capacity to be fertile
4. Blended Space: - the Palestinian fellaheen is rooted in the land; his
 body is rough like earth and tender like vegetables.
 The earth is gentle and good and offers produce.

As we can observe, the farmer and the Mediterranean environment can be seen as forming a non-hierarchical relation, as "co-existing entities" (Iovino 54), which seems to echo Ingold's notion of the dwelling perspective. In the words of Ingold, this notion refers to "the organism-person's position in the world characterised by the understanding that both the awareness of the world and the activity in the world are rooted in the immediate engagement with this world" (5). In this sense, it is possible to assume that continuous habitation of landscape leads to the formation of certain conceptualisations derived from such a relationship, in the form of "gestalts that have emerged directly from interaction with and in our environment" (Lakoff and Johnson 230). For instance, we can assume that the farmer makes the earth good by ploughing it

and this goodness is somehow acquired by the earth. Similarly, the fellaheen grows "tender" and "rough" from the earth through a process of active engagement in which the fellaheen and the land shape each other. Thus, these qualities must be ascribed primarily to the earth although these "earth" features are acquired as well by the farmer as his heart "grows" from the very same earth. So both earth and body have inherited each other's qualities, constructing a blend with which the reader's mind interacts. As I mentioned in the previous section, it is in the blended space that readers perform the image of an agricultural worker and the earth as one. This mental image inherits and combines elements of both the farmer's body and the earth, but it is neither one nor the other. And it is in this space that humanisation of the environment is also performed as readers have a better understanding of the farmer's interrelationship with the land of Palestine.

Sensory engagement with the land is also crucial to understanding the fellaheen's connection to the land. As they work in consonance with the land, the physical qualities acquire human significance. For instance, the tenderness of the earth's produce (vegetables, etc.) is primarily a touch experience. The fellaheen had a highly developed sense of touch as it was crucial to work on the land, harvest, and assess the quality of the produce. Fellaheen thus used their hands to render the earth good. The fellaheen daily and hard physical interaction with the land allowed goodness to emerge.

The poem continues with a beautiful image of Mediterranean nature (a grapevine), which is unable to "speak" grapes, in what might be a metaphor of Palestinians' feelings under military occupation by the Israeli army:

Father, the grapevine in Uncle's garden
speaks no grapes.
She must be in mourning
over his death, he planted her. (Elmusa n. p.)

As readers submerge in the domain of mental spaces of the family (deictically framed by the words "father" and "uncle") with a delayed-categorisation reading, they are able to recreate the rich context of the garden and grapevine, with their smell and touch sensations, which open the way to the blend:

1. Input Space 1: - body
- produces communication
2. Input Space 2: - grapevine
- produces grapes
3. Generic Space: - body and grapevine share different forms of fertility
4. Blended Space: - the body has boughs, the grapevine produces words and feelings.

In this blend, we can see the grapevine is perceived as having inherited human capacity to communicate, yet it still is a grapevine. On the other hand, the image projected in the reader's mind also shows a human body that has acquired the features of a grapevine. This blended image allows readers to imagine a grapevine that is

suffering, and in the blended space readers perform the image according to their own experience. In this way, the grapevine can be perceived as “kin,” as an inextricable part of the fellaheen’s social life, and the fellaheen is in turn seen as part of nature’s cycle of fertility.

Dvora Amir’s “Under the Sun” takes us to the island of Crete, another sensuous and evocative space in Mediterranean geography. As readers cross the space of the poem with a delayed-categorisation type of reading, they may wish to focus on a particular, suggestive image. The image of the poet “standing” like an olive tree is interesting from an ecocritical perspective:

and like the peasant I continued to plow
and like the very elegant boat I embarked further on my way
and like the olive I stood
and like the small river I flowed. (Poetry International Web n. p.)

Continuing in the same geographical mental space deictically marked by expressions like “river” and “olive” and the domain space of the peasant ploughing the land, the image of the olive which I focus on here is shocking by its bareness. It is as if the poet fuses with the olive in a perennial fashion:

1. Input Space 1: - body
- upright, it has arms
2. Input Space 2: - olive
- upright, it has boughs
3. Generic Space: - body and olive share extremities
4. Blended Space: - the body has boughs, the olive has arms

In this conceptual blend, the poet and the olive fuse, inheriting each other’s features, becoming each other, yet not fully. The austerity of the image reinforces the sense of timeless, ancestral connection to the Mediterranean landscape evoked in the poem. At this stage, readers can perform this blended image in their minds exploring all its possible shapes and forms according to their own life experience. In this way, the reader can understand Amir’s intimate feeling of connection with the Mediterranean landscape.

The conceptual blending and the sensory information emerging in Amir’s imagery can be seen as instances of what neurophenomenologist Evan Thompson refers to as “affect,” that is, a “‘bridge’ between the pre-personal and the personal, and the self and other” that functions “prior to consciousness” but that “emerges in bodily feelings, emotions, and moods” (Thompson n.p.). It can emerge equally in the empathic creative process of the writer’s evocation of a sense of oneness with the olive and the Mediterranean environment.

Conclusion. New horizons in Mediterranean ecocriticism

The method of reading proposed in this essay suggests potential lines of development for ecocriticism. First of all, the essay offers a more precise account of how Mediterranean landscapes in poetry can be read "as if a threshold is crossed and readers can project their minds into the other world, find their way around there, and fill out the rich detail between the words of the text on the basis of real life experience and knowledge" (Stockwell 41). From a different theoretical perspective, Stockwell's words seem to echo Terry Gifford's anxiety for a material world from which we have become "strangely alienated" (173), as a result of the "intellectual awareness of nature" which "seems to prevent them [the school of cultural studies] from communicating a direct experience of nature from any perspective whatsoever" (175). As one of the objects of study of ecocriticism is the analysis of representations of nature in literature, it does not make much sense that such representations be dominated by a language of conceptual abstraction without a precise account of how nature is physically experienced and projected in the text. It is important for ecocriticism (including Mediterranean) to propose ways of reading literature that help readers recreate the conceptual and sensory information emanating from the text as readers submerge in the literary space of the other. In this sense, Tsur's definition of delayed categorisation type of reading literature is crucial to help reader's evoke how the Mediterranean landscapes projected in the text actually smell, touch, and feel, and how they are conceptualised, how the poets make sense of Mediterranean environment with their minds and bodies. As nature is primarily accessed through our direct, embodied experience, ecocriticism must strive to capture the embodied experience of the literary texts through which nature is culturally assimilated. In this sense, this essay might open an avenue for a cognitive turn in ecocriticism.

It must be noted nevertheless that, as Greg Garrard rightly claims, poems are not environments (Garrard, "Consilience" n.p.). But the essay shows that poems can be read and bodily experienced as environments, as spaces of dwelling and active engagement. Interestingly, both Ingold and Garrard seem to share a similar interest in environments as sites of performance and engagement rather than objective backgrounds to action. If to Garrard dwelling means "the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 108), Ingold's conception of dwelling refers to the organism-person "in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings" (Ingold 5). How does the poem analysis relate to both notions of dwelling? This essay shows some notions in cognitive linguistics and poetics might be useful in bringing the reading of nature poetry closer to the experience of physically journeying and engaging with the environment. By providing readers with the tools to maximise the cognitive and sensory information evoked in the poem, readers can experience the Mediterranean environments as if they were literally recreating the cognitive and sensory experience of the poems, as if they were dwelling and actively engaging with the landscapes of memory and ancestry of the

fellaheen. Likewise, by recreating the cognitive process whereby conceptual blends are produced, readers are allowed to understand the cognitive processes through which the writers make sense of their embodied experience of nature. In this way, readers are allowed to cross the mental space of the human and non-human other as if dwelling in their embodied experience, and creating a fruitful, non-hierarchical interactive co-operation between, reader, text, and environment.

From this perspective, the essay can be seen as addressing recent ecocritical perspectives that call for an eco-humanist shift in ecocriticism, one which goes "a step further in its ethical consideration of the human" (Iovino 54). The analysis of humanised Mediterranean environments in Elmusa and Amir's poems show how both writer and environment stand in a non-hierarchical relation as they almost literally fuse and become one with the non-human other, in this case the Mediterranean flora of the Middle East. This can be observed in the last stage of the process of conceptual blending seen for instance in Elmusa's poem, whereby the farmer and the land are conceptualised as being indistinguishable parts of each other. If, as the proponents of cognitive linguistics suggest, "[w]e understand our experience directly when we see it as being structured coherently in terms of gestalts that have emerged directly from interaction with and in our environment" (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors* 230), it is possible to conceive the imagery of sentient nature emerging in the poems as examples of dualisms that represent "co-presence and interdependence" (Iovino 54) in which the different "other" (the Mediterranean environment) appears as an agentic and integral part of the natural process, not as mere background to be aestheticized. As mentioned in the poem analysis, it is in the blended space where elements of all the inputs are combined, producing a new element that is neither of them yet contains elements of them. This perceptual process through which Elmusa and Amir make sense of the world precisely depends on their embodied engagement, co-presence and interdependence with the Mediterranean environment. From this perspective, the poem analysis proposed in this essay supports Iovino's claim that "being human is a dynamic process, a continuous biological and conceptual evolution" (58), which might be considered as a potential contribution to open a humanist route for ecocriticism, considering especially the role of the Mediterranean environment in the creation of frameworks of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Whether one- or two-state solutions are proposed as peace settlements to the ongoing conflict, it is clear that any viable solution depends inevitably on a sensible management of the Mediterranean environment that for centuries has nurtured its population. In his book *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*, Palestinian lawyer and writer Raja' Shehadeh describes the progressive environmental deterioration of the Palestinian landscape through 25 years of walking and careful observation. Mortified by the wildly sprawling concrete of Israeli settlements, fences, checkpoints, and environmental decay, the hills of the land that once witnessed some of the most important events for Muslims, Christians, and Jews seem now condemned to the relentless economic commodification of this ancient and tortured part of the Mediterranean landscape. Since 1948, one peace plan after another has continuously

rendered the West Bank as an abstract map of zones A, B, and C, whilst the lives of Palestinians have been filtered through dehumanising gaze of gun sights used (Gregory 142). Similarly, cultural identity in Israel is constructed around the abstraction of Jewish ethno-national and religious paradigms that render nature as ideological and mythical construct, and the Palestinian other as disembodied entities. As we have seen, this essay proposes a phenomenological method of reading that opens a textual space where Israeli and Palestinian others physically embrace each other as fully embodied human beings, actively engaging with the sentient Mediterranean environments projected in the poetry because, after all, "a culture divorced from the biological foundations of life is simply not sustainable" (Roszak and Roszak 223). The humanised Mediterranean environments traversed with the proposed method of reading should be considered by an Israeli and Palestinian readership (and beyond) as spaces and places to share their experiences, as opportunities to rethink the segregating political and military green line into lines of engagement, cooperation and mutual understanding, as alternatives to fear, hatred, and violence.

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