

## ANTISEMITISM IN THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

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Antisemitism has emerged gradually within the international environmental movement, becoming widely visible to many following Greta Thunberg's public statements. However, this phenomenon did not arise overnight.



*William Holman Hunt: Scapegoat, 1854, Wikipedia*

The relationship between environmental protection and human rights is well established: the right to a clean environment is a fundamental human right. Moreover, pollution and the overexploitation of natural resources disproportionately burden poorer and otherwise disadvantaged populations. For this reason, justice has rightly become one of the central demands of the green movement.

But how did a movement committed to the love of nature and equal access to a healthy environment turn upside down when it comes to Israel? Environmentalism has been able to align with virtually every political ideology, and green causes often bring together people with very different political convictions in the service of the common good. This makes it all the more important to recognise the antisemitic current that has taken shape within the international environmental movement, one that assigns one-sided and biased responsibility to Israel.

Hungarian media also reported that shortly before the second anniversary of the 7/10 terrorist attack, Thunberg illustrated alleged Israeli atrocities against Palestinians with a photograph taken from Hamas propaganda material depicting Evyatar David, an Israeli hostage deliberately starved to emaciation. When this was pointed out to her, the image was **erased without explanation**.

Activists have no shortage of sources from which to draw their anti-Israel arguments. In international environmental forums the most extreme claims are voiced, published, and circulated in professional newsletters without any rebuttal or nuance.

Below, I present several examples—by no means isolated or unique—that illustrate the situation.

### **1. Israel Is Wrong Even When It Does Good**

Published in 2023 in connection with the Dubai climate negotiations, the book [Dismantling Green Colonialism](#) by Hamza Hamouchene and Katie Sandwell examines issues related to the green (and often just greenwashed) energy transition in the Arab region. One chapter, written by Manal Shqair and titled *Arab–Israeli Eco-Normalisation: Greenwashing Colonisation in Palestine and the Golan*, analyses the Prosperity environmental project.

This project would generate solar energy in Jordan for the Israeli market, while Israel would, in return, supply Jordan—severely affected by water scarcity—with 200 million cubic metres of desalinated drinking water annually. The agreement would simultaneously serve strategic, economic, climate, energy, and water-security objectives. The Prosperity Project seeks to strengthen the peace process while addressing Jordan's water crisis and Israel's green energy transition.



*Za'atri refugee camp, Jordan, 2013. U.S. Department of State, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

According to the author, however, this mutually beneficial project constitutes “normalisation”, which merely conceals what she describes as a “violent assault” on Palestinians. Normalisation—that is, the normalisation of relations—is portrayed as an evil process to be actively obstructed, even though several million Palestinian Arabs live in Jordan. Israel is wrong even when it does good.

Jordan’s water scarcity is attributed almost entirely to Israeli water-management decisions. The burden caused by the arrival of 1.5 million Syrian refugees is downplayed, while outdated infrastructure, pricing schemes that incentivise waste, and inefficient, poorly regulated agricultural water use—through which roughly half of the water is lost to leakage, seepage, or evaporation—are not mentioned at all. Nor is the pollution of Jordanian water resources by untreated wastewater. Responsibility for all problems rests solely with Israel.

## **2. Even the Gas Pipeline Is Zionist**

Gastivists, an international activist network founded in 2017, campaigns against the expansion of fossil gas and for a just, equitable, and green energy transition. While these objectives are commendable, the details raise significant concerns.

Several Gastivist publications address the EastMed gas pipeline, which would connect Cypriot and Israeli offshore gas fields to Greece and Italy. These publications share a common portrayal of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The comic book [Peace Is Fossil Free](#), for example, raises questions about the project through the stories of people living along the pipeline’s route.

We encounter Manal, the Palestinian protagonist, at a checkpoint near a wall in the West Bank. There is no reference to the primary reason for the wall’s existence—the Second Intifada—thus positioning Israel as morally inferior. “In Palestine, it’s impossible to separate the environmental issue from the political one”, Manal asserts.

By contrast, the Jewish character’s story is unrelated to the pipeline and instead focuses on her personal journey towards anti-Zionism. “I had to question my identity. I changed.” concludes Ya’ara.

Although the comic format would offer an excellent opportunity to present nuanced perspectives and complex situations in an accessible way, the authors do not take advantage of this potential. Instead, they produce propaganda saturated with emotional manipulation and characterised by the omission of essential historical and political context.



*Wind turbines on the Golán: Gastivist considers these turbines a neocolonialist project. (Heritage Conservation, via Wikimedia Commons)*

Interestingly, Gastivist describes itself as a transfeminist organization (a branch of feminism that also embraces the cause of transgender people). In Ya'ara's story, an injured Palestinian woman is not provided medical care by men because she is a woman. The transfeminist comic leaves this episode without critical reflection.

### **3. Israel Omnipotent**

The article [Environmental Nakba: The Palestinian Environment under Israeli Colonisation](#), published in 2020, was co-authored by Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, a well-known figure in postcolonial ecology. Qumsiyeh takes the most significant environmental problems—water, land use, biodiversity loss—and simply places them into the Palestinian political narrative, thereby framing environmental degradation as a deliberate strategic tool of Israel.

He assumes as a given that before 1948, the local population practised sustainable land use. In reality, the population doubled around the turn of the twentieth century, which inevitably entailed increased use of natural resources such as water and land. Population growth was a general phenomenon throughout the Ottoman Empire, driven by increased political stability, improved public health, and better nutrition.



*Jewish and arab farmers in Palestine*

*Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection / Underwood & Underwood, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

*Elmendorf, Dwight Lathrop, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

Elsewhere, Qumsiyeh criticises—understandably, from a biologist’s perspective—the Israeli practice of cutting down roadside trees. However, he fails to mention that in the decade preceding the article, the number of terrorist attacks in the West Bank ranged annually between 50 and 1,200, many of which occurred along roads. He does not acknowledge the connection between environmental damage and the unresolved conflict or the collapse of the Oslo peace process.

Despite these conclusions, Qumsiyeh is among the somewhat moderate authors. In other writings, he criticises Palestinian corruption and correctly identifies the market economy as a driver of natural resource overexploitation—yet even here, responsibility is ultimately assigned to Israel.

#### **4. Internal Division for Palestinians — Political Responsibility for Israel**

The United Nations Environment Programme’s widely cited [State of the Environment and Outlook Report for the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (2020) is the most comprehensive analysis of environmental problems in the area, examining biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and waste management.

Although it is the most measured of the publications reviewed here, it nonetheless identifies Israeli occupation as the central cause of environmental problems, without mentioning terrorism. In the 186-page report, the word “terrorism” does not appear; “intifada” is only used as a time reference, and “violent attack” is mentioned once. Corruption is likewise absent, even though Arab countries average 34 out of 100 on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, compared with Hungary’s 41 and Israel’s 64.

The report omits all environmental problems for which Israel cannot be blamed: the months-long burning of car tyres in Gaza in 2018, open waste burning, illegal dumping, the lack of enforcement measures, and the neglect or deliberate destruction of Gaza's water infrastructure.



*Reminiscing about the days of tyre burning, Image by Hosny Salah from Pixabay*

While the text provides multiple examples of negotiations and agreements in which Israel complied and environmental progress was achieved, the failures and negligence of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas are framed as constraints—“capacity shortages”, “institutional overlap”, “internal division”—rather than as matters of political responsibility, portraying them as almost incapable of any action.

### **5. Even Tree Planting Is Oppression**

This Israeli environmental issue has also been featured in the Hungarian media, notably through the interpretations of [Jonathan Cook](#) and outlets such as MÉRCE, though [a broader academic literature](#) exists beyond Cook's work. The central claim of this literature is that the primary purpose of tree planting in Israel is displacement and ethnic cleansing, allegedly evidenced by the choice of species (pine) and planting methods (dense monocultures). Trees are said to conceal the traces of the Nakba, while pine needles are described as “toxic”, preventing Palestinian return.



*Forest near Jerusalem, Dror Feitelson via the PikiWiki - Israel free image collection project*

These accounts omit the fact that throughout the twentieth century, afforestation with conifers was a widespread forestry practice aimed at stabilising sand, reducing wind erosion, and building soil—practices observable not only on the Hungarian Great Plain but also across North Africa.

Globally, forestry has favoured fast-growing species and monocultures. This is not an Israeli peculiarity. Since the 1990s, driven by climate change and ecological considerations, forestry practices worldwide have gradually shifted towards greater species diversity, reduced fire risk, and the preservation of native habitats.

The inflammatory language, speculation about Israeli intentions, selective citing of forestry methods, ignoring of palaeoecological research, and omission of the importance of anti-desertification measures represent a textbook case of manipulation.

### **Ereased Without Explanation**

Immersing ourselves in this segment of environmental literature can quickly create the impression that Jews are omnipotent orchestrators of events. While the texts occasionally contain conclusions that contradict this narrative, these passages are weakly developed and fail to counterbalance the overall depiction of Israel as a malicious force behind global problems such as resource overuse, pollution, water scarcity, and poorly planned afforestation.

Many criticisms are, of course, legitimate and worthy of discussion. Not all anti-Israel activism is antisemitic. However, conspiracy theories, double standards, historically rooted stereotypes, exaggerations, and the portrayal of Zionism as a form of collective original sin clearly are.

Environmental problems are always complex and require thorough examination of their drivers. No analysis can be complete without considering terrorism, Palestinian governance and corruption, rejectionist political strategies towards negotiation and peace, or the effectiveness and actual use of the annual USD 2–6 billion in development aid.

Narratives in which Israel *appropriates, colonises, commits ecocide, wages imperialist war, occupies, enforces water apartheid, exploits, dominates, oppresses, and subjugates* erase information from the professional discourse just as Thunberg erased the hostage's photograph on 6 October—without explanation.

Environmentalism serves the common good and is particularly well-suited to creating mutually beneficial outcomes. Those who instrumentalise it for antisemitic purposes undermine peace between people and people as well as between people and nature.

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