Green Warriors, Within the Green Line:

The Impact of Environmental Activism on Environmental Policymaking in Israel

by

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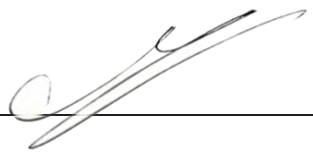
Signature: 

Abstract

This paper will discuss the evolution of the environmental movement in Israel and how it has taken shape in recent years. It seeks to understand the extent of the influence that the environmental activist movement in Israel has on national and local policymaking, either through protests, lobbying, or outright participation in the political process. In so doing, it posits the following question: has the current generation of environmental activism in Israel been successful in either rallying enough public and political support to influence policymaking with regards to socio-environmental issues? This paper contends that this success has only been partial, an outcome that can be attributed to several factors—these include the waning of the political left; the lack of interest by right-wing coalitions, which have dominated the Israeli political scene for the last two decades; and, most importantly, the lack of willingness on part of the Israeli environmental movement to make a complete shift toward an environmental sustainability model that incorporates social justice and human rights. Using discourse analysis as the research model, this paper follows an interpretivist approach to analyzing the various methods and contexts within which the environmental movement organizations (EMOs) operate. In doing so, it attempts to evaluate the outcome of those concerted efforts that are intended to lobby or influence policymakers to implement environmental or sustainability-related policies.

Keywords: environmentalism; public policy; environmental justice; activism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On a January morning in 2010, a group of environmental activists from the Hebrew University's Giv'at Ram campus (where the university's STEM faculties are housed) set out for a cleaning campaign in Lifta (also called *Ein Neftuah* in Hebrew), a deserted and depopulated Palestinian village tucked into a hillside on the western edge of Jerusalem. These activists, members of the environmental organization *Megama Yeruka* (מגמה ירוקה or Green Course), were accompanied by superintendents from the Nature and Parks Authority as part of a monthly campaign to clean the area of human litter and to raise public awareness regarding the state of affairs in the Lifta natural reserve. According to *Megama Yeruka's* coordinator for this project, the efforts made to clean the area were intended to "cause the public to treat natural reservations with the respect they deserve, in Lifta and across the rest of Israel." For their part, the Nature and Parks Authority commented that their mission was to keep the area well-maintained so that "development around the reservation are done with more consideration for natural values, landscape and heritage." [1] In framing the upkeep of this natural area in West Jerusalem within a preservationist and apolitical framework, the *Megama Yeruka* activists made sure to maintain a safe distance from the historical context of the area and the municipal policies that target it. After all, environmentalism in Israel is still viewed, at least by political parties, largely as something separate from politics (Fürst, 2018).

Compared to the previous generation of Israeli environmental activists who were more adamant about creating national parks and maintaining natural ecologies in a restricted

[1] Grantz, Nati. 2010. "Megama Yeruka Maintains the Neglected Natural Pearl in the Heart of Jerusalem," *Tashtiot*, January 18, 2010. http://www.tashtiot.co.il/2010/01/18/%D7%9E%D7%92%D7%9E%D7%94-%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A7%D7%94-%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%AA%D7%90/

sense, the current generation of Israeli environmental activists draw inspiration from a globalized movement of activism that emphasizes social and environmental values, at the heart of which lay "sustainability and environmental justice values" (Fürst, 2018; Rabinowitz, 2002). Nonetheless, environmental activism in its current form has been unable to garner enough political and social power to turn the environmental issue in Israel into a major agenda at the policymaking level. Indeed, the rhetoric used by groups such as *Megama Yeruka* or *Adam Teva ve Din* (also known as the Israeli Union of Environmental Defense) echoes that of the ecological Zionist movement which spearheaded environmental projects that involved "creating green lungs for the country or protecting the rural aesthetic of a place" (McKee, 2018; see also Cohen, 1993). In this sense, the current environmentalist discourse appears to oscillate between an outdated mode of environmentalist that is perceived as apolitical and separate from territorialized politics, and a more contemporary type of engagement that is more politically-engaged and espouses environmental justice as one of its core values (Orenstein & Silverman, 2013).

1.2 Research Aim

This paper will attempt to understand the dialectics of power that seem so elusive in the contemporary Israeli environmental discourse—it seeks to understand the extent of influence or overall effect that the current generation of environmental activism has (has had) on policymaking in Israel. Pitted against a range of empirical data culled from various sources, including parliamentary debates, this discourse will be analyzed so as to allow the reader to understand why the Israeli environmental activist movement, despite its numerous successes over the years, has not become entrenched enough on the national political scene. This can be attributed to two factors: the lack of willingness of major political players to adopt environmental concerns as key demands; the inability of the environmental movement to

galvanize civil society to create a direct link between environmental, social and political values (Fürst, 2018). In other words, the environmental movement has been unable to turn environmental concerns into a salient issue on the Israeli political scene, a fact that has been detrimental in its ability to bring its weight to bear in relation to environmental policymaking on the national level.

1.3 How to Evaluate Influence on Policymaking

In order to evaluate the level of influence these groups have on policymaking at the national level, discourse analysis will be employed with a specific focus on the dialectical relationship between the minimalist understanding of environmentalist and the broader, more holistic view of environmentalism that encompasses environmental and social justice. This is an interpretivist exercise that can shed light on the causal mechanism that underlies the relationship between the environmental movement in Israel and the political establishment at the decision-making level. Moreover, it can help us to understand the contextual factors that have led to the transformation of the environmentalist movement. Thus, the paper will follow an interpretivist approach in order to form a coherent diachronic, retrospective analysis of the movement's influence level on policymaking.

It follows that the influence of the environmentalist activist groups on policymakers will be earmarked as the independent variable while the outcome of governmental policies that address environmental issues will be the dependent variable. In order to evaluate the impact of activism, more attention must be paid to contextual specificity since any difference might be detrimental to the validity of measurement (Adcock & Collier, 2001). This is especially true when considering the context of activism within the Green Line compared with activism conducted in the West Bank or in Bedouin communities in the Negev. Can the

differences in context affect our overall evaluation of the impact of the movement's activism? Adcock and Collier reference Verba's (1967) assessment that the analysis may vary across different contexts, but it might be also be analytically equivalent, particularly in the "domain of interest group politics," which is what this paper will attempt to analyze. They conclude by saying that "a productive step toward establishing equivalence among diverse contexts" can then be taken (535).

1.4 Research Design and Methodology

As part of the research design, the aforementioned variables will be conceptualized and systematized in order to validate whether a particular variable gives the intended results or not. Before that can be done, we need to disentangle each of the concepts, describe them, explain them, and understand them before to attempting to offer a solution in case the results are unsatisfactory. This can be done through a descriptive and interpretive process.

Following this process, the paper will check if the rise in the level of environmental activism in the last two decades correlates with an increased participatory level of environmental activists in the political process. In addition, it will check if there has been a substantial increase in environmental legislative proposals (or reversals, thereof) during the same time period. In checking this data against the contention that the environmental activist movement has been unable to bring the environmental issue to a salient point, it will then be possible to understand the level at which the environmental activist movement is operating, and how the dominant discourse has hampered many of its efforts.

1.5 Main Hypothesis

The main hypothesis put forward by this paper is that the environmental activist movement in Israel has not been successful in substantially influencing or lobbying policymakers to push for major environmental policies. While the movement has definitely had some successes in the past, it has been unable to cause a major paradigmatic shift on the Israeli political scene viz-à-viz environmental issues or to bring values of environmental sustainability into the public space. This hypothesis will be checked against the public discourse that has surrounded the environmental activist movement, including data and reports published by the Knesset's Center for Research and Knowledge. But it should be highlighted that this data will only be used in a descriptive and interpretive sense, since the main approach in the paper will be through an analysis of the discourse that pervades the environmental activist scene in Israel. In short, the paper will attempt to check if the environmental movement has had a major influence on public policymaking in recent years or not.

1.6 Case Studies

Lastly, two main case studies will be presented and analyzed in order to gain a deeper, from-the-ground perspective on how the environmental activist movement operates and, in some cases, fails to attain its objectives. This is not to say that the movement has failed to secure a few victories over the years; on the contrary level, there have been a number of successes in which environmental activist were able to change or even reverse policies that would have caused grave damage to the environment, especially on the local level. However, the two case studies will case light on why the environmental activist movement in Israel has been unable to garner considerable political and public influence on the national level to push for or change public policies on environmental issues. Furthermore, they will highlight how the

environmental movement, in contrast to other environmental movements in Western democracies, has been unable to form its own Green party that could compete against or form coalitions with other mainstream parties. These assertions, however, will be made toward the end of the analytical part of this paper.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Much research has been conducted on the impact that New Social Movements (NSM), including environmental social groups, make on decisionmakers—the most notable works in this regard have been carried out by Christopher Rootes and H.N. Van der Heijden. Before a closer look at the Israeli environmental activist scene can be taken, it is imperative to define what the environmental activist movement is in its general sense, and how it has morphed into the global social movement we know today. Although there is no standard definition of the movement, it is deemed to be one of the most important social movements of the twentieth century. It is seen as comprehensive and encompassing of various issues, including environmental awareness, social justice, and "the development of a global civil society" (Rootes, 2007). This opinion is shared by Van der Heijden wherein he claims that the global environmental movement has led to a "change in public values and attitudes and to a revitalization of civil society" (Van der Heijden, 2006; Wapner, 2002).

2.1 Definitions

Rootes identifies an environmental movement as "a loose, non-institutionalized network of informal interactions that may include, as well as individuals and groups who have no organizational affiliations, organizations of varying degrees of formality, that are engaged in collective action motivated by shared identity or concern about environmental issues" (2007). This leads us to surmise that environmental social movements are abstract social constructs that rely on networks and linkages between the various members or components of such groups. This is how their identity is constructed, which is a very Weberian typology. But what is the hallmark of the environmentalist movement? Is collective action by such individuals, groups or organizations characterized by active protesting? Rootes disagrees with Doherty

(2002) that the action of protesting separates the more institutionalized environmentalist groups from the grass-roots one, this putting them outside of the "green" movement. Instead, he proposes that environmentalist movements should be defined more broadly, and that collective action should include different types of action. He also disagrees with Bosso (2000) that the environmental movement has morphed into an interest group—he contends that these two terms, i.e. interest group community and environmental social movement, can co-exist and be one and the same. This is because the movement has shifted from an overtly visible protestation to "lobbying" and "constructive engagement" with governments or corporations, such as engaging in Coasian negotiations to reduce pollution or externalities created by a corporation's actions.

However, environmentalist movements are also characterized by the values they espouse; there are ethical and social dimensions to environmental activism at the heart of which lay environmental sustainability and justice (Fürst, 2018). Such a definition differs from the narrower conception of environmentalist protectionism that defined the previous generation of conservationists, who did not demand broad social change to avert danger to the ecological environment. Instead, they employed ordinary political lobbying and strategies that cooperated with bureaucracies to protect wildlife reservations (Rootes, 2007). In addition, they were overtly "focused on preservation of wildlife and habitats and was represented by economic elite and middle-class interest in aesthetics, hiking, hunting, and other forms of nature recreation" (Orenstein & Silverman, 2013; Carter, 2007). In contrast, the new environmentalist movement, which was spearheaded by the New Left or the New Social Movement in the United States in the 1960s, saw the protection of nature as inseparable from social issues (Gottlieb, 1993). Another facet of the environmentalist movement that developed in the 1980s was environmental justice, which saw existing social

structures as the cause for environmental degradation. To solve this, fundamental social change and empowerment of local communities are in order (Rootes, 2007). Later in this paper, it will be demonstrated how this strand of environmental activism in Israel attempted to address environmental concerns by empowering local Bedouin and Palestinian communities whose lands and environment were encroached upon by Israeli settlers in the West Bank and the Negev (see McKee, 2018). Within this vein, it can be seen that the current generation of environmental activists differ from the older conservationist generation in that they are part of a wider global movement that emphasizes environmental values and calls for change through various means, including protests and the galvanization of civil society (Fürst, 2018).

The continued industrialization in Europe and North America had already raised concerns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries regarding the relationship between human public health and the health of ecological systems. Only with the advent of further scientific advances in the mid-20th century, and the development of ecology as a separate discipline, that the modern environmental movements came into being. However, this reformist environmentalism was still part of the political oligarchy that saw planning and policy reform as necessary to curb unintended consequences of urban industrialization (Rootes, 2007). The new wave of environmental activism, sometimes referred to as the Fourth Wave, or deep ecology, was the most radical development amongst those groups. For instance, they prioritized defending ecological systems over human concerns, which is one of the reasons why they were unable to garner any political power or legitimacy within political circles and, thus, were unable to rally support to affect change (Rootes, 2007; Fürst, 2018). Another offshoot of this movement, and which is more relevant to the Israeli environmental activist scene than the previous one, is the environmental justice movement that sprang up in the

1980s and which saw existing social structures as some of the major causes for the deterioration of environmental systems. In order to solve this, fundamental social change and empowerment of local communities are necessary (Gutkowski, Grosglik, and Shani, 2017; see also Rootes, 2007). This ties to several strands of Israeli environmentalism, including groups that saw the empowerment of Bedouin and Palestinian communities as crucial to this endeavor (see McKee, 2018), while viewing environmental issues as "a symptom of more fundamental societal problems of poverty, economic and social inequality, and the loss of communal identity," the solutions to which lay in "democracy, nonviolence, [and] sustainability" (Orenstein & Silverman, 2013).

In Israel, the amalgamation of disparate groups from within the national, religious, ethnic, economic-class, and gender levels to confront any external threats to their environment is seen in a positive light, as this partly showcases, at least in the eyes of the activists themselves, that the environmental arena can be apolitical. This opens up the space for alliances between such groups, which can be either political or communal (Gutkowski et al, 2017). Nonetheless, this perception overlooks the fact that many of these groups have political grievances that extend beyond the "apolitical;" many of the threatened communities in the Jordan Valley, for example, are threatened by the Israeli government and settler groups' policies in the region. McKee (2018) observes that the efforts by Israeli environmental activist groups to frame support for these communities within "environmental" and "social justice" frames do not take into account the limits that "ethno-national and religious conflict that threatens people's claims to place" can impose on environmental activism. Despite these groups' efforts to move beyond the social and political rifts that exist between Palestinian and Israeli communities, they have yet to bridge the chasm between their version of environmental activism and social justice (McKee, 2018; Fürst, 2018).

The dilemma that characterizes this relationship between what is considered environmental activism and what is thought of as social justice campaigning gave rise to what has been called "the environmental-social paradigm" (Gutkowski et al, 2017). This paradigm attempts to explain the political, economic and security concerns that intertwine with and sometimes obstruct environmental activist efforts. This tension is one of the reasons for the irrelevance of environmentalism in Israeli politics, especially that there are no clearly-defined environmentalist parties on the Israeli political scene (Fürst, 2018). For example, the wildfires of 2016 forced many in the environmental activist scene to reflect on the history of Israel's management of open spaces and mass forestation following the founding of the state in 1948. The ecological system that was maintained by the Palestinian peasantry though terrace agriculture and grazing was replaced by a state-backed conservationist policy of tree-planting and a prohibition on grazing in what were considered national parks, a policy that stemmed from a collective anxiety, as De-Shalit calls it, to develop Palestinian landscape without regard for natural preservation (De-Shalit, 1995; Orenstein & Silverman, 2013). From a social-environmentalist perspective, the uprooting of the old ecological system not only visited injustice on local communities, but it also paved the way toward a drastic change in the local ecology that has political, social and economic repercussions for future generations (Gutkowski et al, 2017).

Nonetheless, the aforementioned paradigm forces environmental activist groups and their political backers to confront a sticking issue that is interlaced into much of the social-political discourse surrounding environmental issues, and that is the security issue. The importation of intellectual paradigms that deal with the environmental crisis from the West (mostly in the 1980s and 1990s) forced many environmental activists to come to terms with

the effects that the Zionist ethos of progress and development had brought on the local ecology (De Shalit, 1995). Efforts to raise awareness regarding impacts on the environment due to industrial or military activity can be derailed due to the centrality of the security agenda in Israeli politics (Bar-Tal, Karmi, 2012). As a result, most policymakers do not look favorably on environmental activists, whom they think of as being naïve (Fürst, 2018). More precisely, the geo-political Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominates the public discourse in Israel, which prevents the environmental issue from taking center-stage or being taken seriously by either politicians or wide sectors of society. This also connects to the fact that many Fourth Wave Israeli environmentalists engage in environmental justice, during which they sometimes assist local Bedouin and Palestinian communities, which draws the ire of part of the Israeli public (McKee, 2018; see also Fürst, 2018).

Ironically, Fürst contends that "environmental groups have more social and cultural acceptance [in Israel] since environmental issues are applaudable and trendy, especially since they lack a massive political and electoral power" (Fürst, 2018, p. 145). While this might seem plausible in the sense that environmental issues should be acceptable across the board, the aforementioned perception connects more to the old Zionist conservationist elite who tended "to separate environmental quality concerns from questions of sovereignty and territory, despite the importance of territorialized power to such issues." In turn, the Palestinians hold a negative view of such tendencies because they "euphemize violence and domination" by removing the Palestinians' agency from airing their grievances over land confiscations or the unequal distribution of resources within their local environment (McKee, 2018; p. 453). Due to this unequal relationship between the Israeli state and those affected populations, Israeli environmental activists are sometimes viewed either as abetting the Palestinians by some elements within the Israeli public, or as turning a blind eye to Israeli

discriminatory policies toward the Palestinians (Orenstein and Silverman, 2013). Fürst contends that the environmental movement in Israel finds itself in a precarious position as activists attempt to engage policymakers, whom they view as cynical, utilitarian, and short-sighted, while they, in turn, have a more harmonious social approach that forces them to have dialogues with various actors in different fields, and have a long-term vision for the future (Fürst, 2018).

Even though there are differences in tactics, radicalism, and engagement with different types of governments and stakeholders, Rootes (2017) contends that the behavior of environmental movement organizations (heretofore referred to as EMOs) is also shaped by the constraints of the prevailing political systems, regardless of their values or the tactics they employ. This has also been the case with the Israeli environmental movement as it navigates the centralized Israeli political system while taking into account the interests of new emerging political players and their perceptions of environmental issues (Gutkowski et al, 2017). The accumulated knowledge that the environmental movement in Israel has garnered in recent years has allowed it to engage more increasingly with policymakers and politicians from across the political spectrum. Far from being apolitical groups, Israeli EMOs have been successful in terms of their political effectiveness at the local than at the national level. Fürst (2017) attributes this phenomenon to the fact that the environmental protection portfolio in successive Israeli governments has been the least desirable among right-wing coalition partners. Furthermore, the absence of green party with any significant electoral power has also hampered environmentalist efforts to tap into the national political scene and assert its values in a more visible fashion (see Fürst, pp. 146-7). This state of affairs where EMOs were able to tap into the public space more on the local than the national level is connected to what Eisinger has termed as the *political opportunity structure* (POS), which he defined as "the

degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power and to manipulate the political system" (Eisinger, 1973). Through their ability to access the political scene on the local level, especially in municipal governments, EMOs have been able to push various environmental laws and initiatives that "are prominent in Israel's long-term national development plan" (Orenstein & Silverman, 2013).

2.2 Access to the Political System

Nonetheless, Van der Heijden posits that social movements, including EMOs, also gain access into the political system through the output phase of public policymaking. While Eisinger considers POS to be the capacity to which social groups can enter the political system and manipulate it or influence its decision-making from the inside, Van der Heijden understands it to be the "sum total of political input and output structures" (Van der Heijden, 2006). This can be seen in the attempts of some Israeli politicians to use environmentally-aware slogans in order to mobilize their parties or constituents to adopt environmental policies, especially during inter-party rivalry in the Knesset (Fürst, 2018). For example, Fürst cites an incident in 2007 when Benjamin Netanyahu, widely known by the Israeli public by his childhood nickname "Bibi," and whose right-wing party Likud does not lean toward environmental initiatives, referred to the need to "ween off" Arab oil by adopting alternative sources of energy while he was on the campaign trail. In response, Ophir Pines of the left-wing party Labor berated his fellow party members for allowing Bibi to flank them from the left by appearing "greener" while Labor members were caught "sleep-walking" (Fürst, 2018).

The above-mentioned example can explain how EMOs can temporarily gain more leverage when "changes in opportunity structures [are] salient." In other words, EMOs can gain influence or the capacity to exact change when a sudden opportunity in the political

system arises, and not due to the institutional nature of the political system (Van der Heijden, 2006). If someone like Benjamin Netanyahu suddenly changes course on environmental issues to suit his interests, EMOs can sense an opportunity to push for change in regards to alternative energy sources or be included in governmental discussions on similar issues, even if temporarily.

Sidney Tarrow (1994) posits that social movements aim to access the national state as it is "increasingly the framework for contention." In this sense, the national state became the arena against which claims could be made and where "competing groups could fight out their disputes more or less peacefully" (Tarrow, 1994; p. 90). Van der Heijden summarizes Tarrow's points on how social movements can suddenly gain the capacity to exact change within the framework of the national state. In essence, such a capacity can emerge when "changes in opportunity structures [are] salient: the opening up of access to participation; shifts in ruling alignments; the availability of influential allies; and cleavages within and among elites" (Van der Heijden, 2006; See: Tarrow, 1994). Compared to Northern European countries where Green parties were able to gain a salient within national and Trans-European politics, EMOs in Israel have been unable to gain a foothold since "they lack massive political and electoral power" (Fürst, 2018).

2.3 Political Responsibility

Whereas established politicians consider themselves beholden to both their constituents and the general public, especially since they can be held accountable in cases of failure or mismanagement, EMOs and environmental activists usually lack any official standing or responsibility. This makes it easier for them as they are bodies that demand change only, and are not accountable. This is also partially a result of the inability, or lack of desire thereof, to

create a national Green party, which has so far kept many Israeli EMOs as communal or marginal bodies only (Fürst, 2018). An example of this attitude is the refusal of the major Israeli environmental organizations to oppose the construction of the Separation Wall in 2002, which wreaked havoc across swaths of Palestinian agricultural lands in the West Bank (Sadeh, 2010; Gutkowski, 2017).

The refusal of these EMOs to oppose the construction of the Separation Fence is emblematic of their efforts to ostensibly appear "apolitical" while, in effect, condoning the government's harsh measures in the West Bank as part of what Vivienne Jabri calls hegemonic "interpretative schemes" that support a structure of signification within Israeli society, which, in turn, supports the structure of domination represented by the Israeli state and its military (Trottier, 2007; see Jabri, 1996). Therefore, the EMOs' consensus not to interfere with the construction of the Separation Wall was reached not only as part of the hegemonic discourse within Israeli society to support physical separation with the Palestinians despite the catastrophic costs to both the natural environment and the local Palestinian rural communities, but also due to their problematic internalization of the concept of the environment as "attachment to a given sovereign space," i.e. the state, as opposed to sustainability, which "aims to establish a long-term, [cross-border] balance between man and the environment," and which maintains environmental justice as part of its main tenets (Sadeh, 2010).

2.4 Politicization

In her research paper on the above-mentioned subject, Shachar Sadeh concludes that the EMOs' decision not to stand against the construction of the Separation Wall out of fear that "environmental questions would be dwarfed by the 'core questions'" (i.e., those that deal

with Palestinian human rights) inevitably demonstrates what they had hitherto attempted to "blur in public: the separation between man ("the political") and the environment" (p. 206). In other words, the major Israeli EMOs have not fully internalized the doctrine of sustainability with environmental justice at its heart; such a state of affairs leaves them stranded at the local level and unable to put to practice the sustainability that they preach, particularly in their interaction with the Israeli political system and its shifting realities.

Alatout (2006), on his part, provides a different perspective on the seemingly equivocal self-positioning of Israeli EMOs vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue. His analysis finds that Israeli EMOs emphasize a deconstructed view of quality of life that is distinct and somewhat unrelated to territoriality or power politics, which he calls a "Foucaultian conception of bio-power" (Alatout, 2006). At the same time, Palestinian environmental NGOs view their conditions through a "Weberian understanding of sovereign power and politics of dispossession" that, in turn, disrupts their population's quality of life (Alatout, 2006). The author concludes by saying that the discrepancy between the two environmental movements is a direct result of the power relations between the populations. In other words, a population under occupation has a different environmental priority under the current circumstances.

In the next part, a short survey of the methodology in this paper will be conducted before an exposition of case studies can be attempted. To augment the main argument, data from parliamentary debates and public discourse will be coded and patterns established. Since this paper is an exercise in discourse analysis, interpretations from these patterns, as well as the discourse that runs through these texts, will be drawn, adding to our overall understanding of the subject.

Chapter 3: Research Design, Conceptualizations, and Systematizations

For the purposes of this paper, it will be necessary to identify the research design according to which the analysis and evaluation of the influence of environmental activist movement has on policymaking can be conducted. In order to do so, three main elements of the methodology implemented in this paper will be elucidated and explained first, which are as follows: the research design, conceptualizations (including definitions), and the systematization of said concepts.

3.1 Research Design- Case Studies

Environmental activism in Israel has been an active force in Israeli society since before the founding of the state in 1948. However, the defining characters of the movement have shifted significantly over the years, including the influence it exerts on the policymaking process, particularly in regards to environmental affairs. As explained hitherto, the gist of this research paper is to explore the level of environmental activism in Israel and the level of influence actors active in that sphere have on policymaking that affects environmental issues and local communities within the Green Line (i.e., Israel-proper). In order to conduct this research, a typological illustration must be demonstrated in order to justify the choice of the research design.

Since this research paper will include case studies that showcase the main thrust of the argument, it will be necessary to identify the type of case studies to be used. The two case studies that will be utilized in this paper, namely Nitzanim and the Separation Wall, are a mix of illustrative and theoretical cases. According to George and Bennett (2005), illustrative

cases are usually “atheoretical” and are utilized to illustrate or describe a certain situation. This means that such cases cannot be used to induce a theory out of them (see Thomas, 2011). Meanwhile, theoretical cases are those that can help the researcher formulate a theory that explains or tests a certain theory by assessing its “validity and scope conditions” (George and Bennett, 2005). We shall label these cases in a subsequent chapter.

At the same time, the case studies used in this research paper can also be described as typical. According to Thomas (2011), typical cases are those that meet most of the characteristics of the situation or setting that the researcher aims to discuss. While this might sound like a reductive categorization, typical cases can be beneficial in fleshing out the theoretical assumptions put forward in a research paper. The case studies can also be described as retrospective as they involve the collection of data relating to a past phenomenon. For example, we can look back on past interactions between environmental activists and either authorities or local communities and understand how these activists attempted to influence or change a certain governmental policy. In addition, they are also diachronic because the phenomenon they represent is studied over a period of time. These events or case studies must be considered within their “historical integrity” so they are not distorted for the sake of proving a certain argument (Thomas, 2011). Finally, the use of case studies in this paper can be seen as both multiple and sequential—they are sequential because they did not happen in parallel, but in succession. In this sense, we aim to study the phenomenon over a given period of time.

3.2 Descriptive Approach

This paper will be based on a discourse analytical framework that emphasizes thick description while, at the same time, engaging in discourse analysis in order to bolster the main argument. The choice for a mainly qualitative approach to the topic stems from my wish to explicate the power dynamics that dominate the environmental activist scene in Israel. In so doing, a more critical approach to the subject could be conducted that is not detached or isolated from immediate historical or contextual perspectives. This framework relies on what W.B. Thompson refers to as the critical theory tradition typically associated with the Frankfurt School as well as Tribe (1972), who "saw a direct linkage between policy analysis and politics" (Thompson, 2001; p. 64).

This is not to imply that this paper will be a merely political analysis of the environmental activist movement. Rather, it aims to analyze its influence on public policymaking through a discourse analysis that takes political, historical, and public discourse contexts into consideration. In addition, a thick description of the case studies and their contexts should be seen as an attempt to understand underlying causes, implications, and explications. For Geertz (1973), this interpretivist method was the watershed that set the interpretivist approach from positivism. According to Eyre (1985), thick description is a useful deconstructive tool of analysis that can help the researcher to elicit epistemological issues out of a given text. Besides, political or public discourse of salient issues such as the environment are not set in stone; rather, they are constructed cultural devices that "challenge the validity of an external referent" (Eyre, 1985; p. 49).

3.3 Conceptualizations and Systematization

In order to measure the validity of the main argument in this paper, it is necessary to conceptualize the two main concepts in this paper. Conceptualizations and systematizations, in general, help to validate whether observations harvested during an analysis match the ideas that our concepts seek to reflect. This is called measurement validity, and any observations collected during the analysis "are interpreted and given meaning in relation to the systematized concept" (Adcock and Collier, 2001). Based on these definitions, the main concepts in this paper will be conceptualized as follows:

1- *Environmental activism:* this is the fundamental concept (also the independent variable) that underlies the research paper. In essence, this concept deals with the level of participation of environmental activists, EMOs, and academics through various activities, including lobbying, protesting, engaging in public discourse, and political participation in the Knesset.[2]

   a. *Systematized conceptualization:* environmental activism can be broadly defined as a social movement that encompasses a range of individuals, civil society organizations, and activist groups who are engaged in collective action in order to enforce or induce public policies on environmental issues or challenges.

   b. *Measurement and validation:* how can this concept be operationalized? Since it is a collective action conducted in the public sphere, it is possible to capture observations through the various facets detected during the discourse analysis. In order to validate those observations, participation in

[2] The Knesset is Israel's unicameral parliament with a total of 120 mandates/seats.

protests in either Israel proper or in the West Bank can be measured. Since the paper is interpretivist and uses discourse analysis, only observations collected through textual interpretations will be utilized. This is not to say that empirical data from various sources will not be used; however, any empirical data will be used to reinforce the validation offered through the discourse analysis.

a. *Systematized concept:* Influence on policymaking can be defined as the outcome of social or political behavior of a certain group that results in the adoption of public policies that serve the group's interests. This type of behavior can take different forms, including lobbying, protesting, media exposure, academic activism, and direct political participation.
b. *Measurement and validation:* the influence exerted by EMOs can be measured through several indicators, including environmental protection initiatives pushed by affiliated parties or politicians, or the frequency of debates in the Knesset surrounding environmental issues. Do these discussions or issues correlate with the introduction of environmentally-aligned politicians into the political system?

In conclusion, environmental activism in Israel is a complex subject to illustrate while the behavior of EMOs and their influence on policymaking can be tricky to measure. However, the two systematized concepts explained above are useful for understanding how the environmental movement in Israel has transformed over the years. Moreover, they can explain the influence the movement has had over society, in general, and on policymaking, in particular.

Chapter 4: Public Discourse in Israel- Equity and Environmental Justice

As has been noted in the literature review so far and, to a lesser extent, in the introduction to this paper, the public discourse in Israel regarding environmentalism has oscillated in recent years between those narratives that are reminiscent of the preservationist generation and those of a more politically-minded and activist generation of environmental activists. The latter, some of whom are academicians, believe that the "inclusion of environmental issues in the political discourse, being cross-border in nature, could contribute to building trust and advancing a culture of peace" (Ozacky-Lazar & Sadeh, 2009). Framing environmental discourse in this way serves to envision the environment as a bridge that could connect between Israelis and Palestinians in the territories (Gutkowski et al., 2017).

4.1 Cooperation Over Resources?

While for some this might sound like an academic exercise in framing perspectives, the realization that cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian communities in the environmental dimension is echoed by Israeli settler councils as well. In a collection of articles published by the Association of Towns for the Environment in Judea and Samaria in 2012, Chaim Gvirtzman goes into length to explain why the Israeli state, despite its "undisputed" historical claim to the mountain aquifers in the West Bank, the Israeli settlements have to cooperate with the Palestinians on water usage and environmental issues due to their interconnectedness as well as the strategic interest for Israel to maintain the status quo (Gvirtzman, 2012; p. 74).

Closer to home, the public discourse regarding environmental equity also extends to Israel's minority or marginalized communities. For Israeli Arabs, the issue of environmental justice, or lack of it thereof, started after the founding of the state in 1948 with the profound

social upheaval that accompanied the Palestinian "Nakba" and the subsequent displacement and expulsions (Manna', 2013). According to Tal (2002), the very existence of Jewish-oriented institutions such as the Jewish Agency or the Jewish National Fund, which naturally prefer to serve the Jewish population, "guarantees unequal results." For instance, the allocation of water resources among Israeli Arab farmers was disproportionate compared to the overall allocation for agriculture—they received only 2 percent even though their crop share was 10 percent in 1974-1975.[3] Tal goes on to reiterate some of the achievements that the Israeli state had within the Arab sector, such as providing every Arab village with running water and electricity by the end of the 1960s.

4.2 Land Allocation and Inequity

Notwithstanding those achievements, as well as cultural caveats that illuminate the differences between Arab and Jewish communities, Tal fails to mention the glaring difference that tips the balance in the Jewish sector's favor: land allocation. At the end of the War of 1948, the State of Israel expropriated approximately 239 square kilometers of privately owned agricultural land belonging to "present absentees," i.e., internally-displaced refugees with Israeli citizenship. Although the Land Acquisition Law of 1953 was intended to grant present-absentee Israeli citizens the right to receive compensation for land lost during the war, only 71 kilometers of land was returned to its owners (Sandberg, 2022). At the moment, Arab ownership of total land in Israel rests at 3.5 percent of the total area of private land in Israel, even though Israeli Arabs constitute almost 20.7 percent of the total population.[4] Sandberg acknowledges that this has been a consistent source of claims of inequality between

[3] Tal cited those numbers from Lustick. See Lustick, Ian. 1980. *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 167.
[4] See Kedar and Yiftachel. 2006. "Land Regime and Social Relations" in Swiss Human Rights Book, ed. Hernando de Soto and Francis Cheneval (Zurich: Ruffer and Rub) 1:127, pp. 136-137.

the Arab minority and the Jewish state; however, he counteracts this assertion with language that dispels any sort of discrimination by the state in the distribution of resources or the expropriation of resources from the original Arab inhabitants (Sandberg, 2022, p. 154).

4.3 Language Matters

The language used by Sandberg to explain the reasonings behind the unequal distribution of natural resources, such as water or proper sewage systems, paints the Israeli state in benevolent colors while ignoring the fact that the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel has long been treated as lying outside of the "consociational" social order (Smooha, 1980). While this might reflect the socio-political stance that the Jewish state takes vis-à-vis its Palestinian-Arab/Israeli-Arab minority, it cannot be denied that the allocation of resources reflects this lack of equality. According to Tal (2002), "even the most passionate Zionist patriot would agree that Israeli Arabs do not enjoy all the privileges of the Jewish majority" (p. 332). This inequality is also reflected in the environmental sphere, especially in waste disposal, sewage drainage, and public transportation.

According to a study conducted by the Knesset's Center for Knowledge and Research in 2016, the percentage of Arab communities inside Israel who were connected to the main sewage infrastructure stood at 76 percent, while the majority of those communities had sewage connectivity at 60 percent and above (Spector Ben-Ari, 2016). The situation with many of these communities had not changed since 1996 when the State Comptroller reported "with some dismay in 1996 that 80 percent of Arab village had untreated sewage that was not contained by pipes, flowing in the streets or in open spaces" (Tal, 2002, p. 336). Due to this lack of sewage infrastructure, which is still a common issue in Israeli Arab communities,

contamination of water sources and aquifers is common and could lead to contagions (Spector Ben-Ari, 2016).

4.4 The Saliency of Environmental Justice Activism

The salient question in regards to environmental and resource inequity is: have Israeli EMOs been instrumental in leveling the playing field? Have they engaged in advocacy or activism in order to secure some environmental justice for the Arab Israeli minority in terms of resource allocation, pollution, and waste management? The issue of environmental justice goes deeper than a simple disproportionate distribution of wealth and resources—it also harkens back to the idea of power relations between different communities, in particular between the majority ethnic group and the minority community. In essence, it can be seen as the result of the hegemonic relationship that the dominant group has over the mechanisms of power in the state, which can be referred to as distributional justice (Fisch, 2004). Since this is the current status quo in Israel from the socio-political perspective, there have been calls for a change in how inequality and distributional injustice can be addressed. Schwartz (2009), for instance, advocates a new environmentalist approach in which the human element and the natural are intertwined. In this "place-based paradigm," the human population would combine public health concerns with natural preservation so that nature would become part of daily life rather than being isolated or removed from human habitat (Orenstein & Silverman, 2017). Since Jewish and Arab populations, especially in the Galilee, are sometimes concentrated in close proximity to each other, environmental impacts cause public health harm to both communities. Within this paradigm, there is a convergence of interests since both social justice and environmental groups increasingly share common worldviews when considering the drivers of environmental problems within their vicinity (see Orenstein & Silverman, 2017, p. 364).

4.5 Activism of their Own

The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI) is an example of an EMO that came about as a result of a convergence of the interests of Israeli Arab and Jewish environmental activists from the academic world. While the main focus of the association lies in the "field of environmental and social justice," it has also combined language and discourse that addresses public health as part of its repertoire in both research and public discussions.[5] For example, a research paper published in 2013 emphasizes the environmental price that marginalized or minority communities pay as a result of public policies that, intentionally or unintentionally, bring environmental hazards to their doorstep, including quarries and waste disposal sites (Levi, 2013). According to data collected by the Galilee Society, a center for public health studies, 54 percent of civilians who live in close proximity to quarries are Arab citizens. It also found that all the communities affected by these quarries in the Galilee are of low socio-economic status (both Jewish and Arab), although the location of quarries is usually dictated by the geography or geological deposits in a certain area, and not as a result of certain public policies (Levi, 2013; p. 6). Nonetheless, other data collected by the Galilee Society clearly shows that a high percentage of Arab households suffer disproportionately from fumes (as a result of waste burning) and dust from unpaved roads. Even in Haifa, far removed from the Negev desert, 91.9 percent suffered from dust due to unpaved roads.[6]

4.6 Public Health Framing

The framing of the environmental justice issues in Israeli Arab communities within a public health framework has brought some successes in recent years. For instance, a new committee

[5] See the association's website at http://www.aeji.org.il/en/background.
[6] The Galilee Society. May, 2011. "The Palestinians in Israel: Third Socio-Economic Survey 2010," p. 291.

for "environmental and distributive justice in the Arab sector" was formed at the Knesset in 2020[7]. Another report published by the Ministry of Environmental Protection in June 2022 announced a plan to spend around 550 million NIS on environmental projects in Arab communities. Announced by Tamar Sandberg, the Minister of Environmental Protection on behalf of the left-wing party Meretz, the plan aims to "reduce the gap" between Arab and Jewish communities by the year 2026, particularly with regard to waste management.[8] Since the Arab communities have been neglected for many years, and their local councils are weak and under-funded, there arose many "pirate" or private waste disposal sites where waste is burned, creating toxic fumes that affect both Jewish and Arab communities (Levi, 2013). While the 2022 report by the Ministry lays the blame at the feet of the local Arab councils, the research paper by Shiri Spector Ben-Ari found that the "main obstacles to proper disposal of waste are economic difficulties suffered by local councils in general, and local Arab authorities in particular" Spector Ben-Ari, 2016). Adding to this complexity is the lack of healthy environments or public health initiatives for "unrecognized" Bedouin villages in the Negev. Since they do not have elected or representative local councils, which can only be formed at the behest of the government, their right to a safe, healthy environment has been violated by successive governments, especially with regards to basic infrastructure such as waste disposal or paved roads (Porschner, 2006).[9]

[7] Knesset Protocol No. 121, December 7, 2020. *Committee of the Interior and Environmental Protection.*
[8] *Infospot*, June 14, 2022. See: https://infospot.co.il/n/Improving_the_environment_in_Arab_localities
[9] Porschner, Ra'nan. "Not a Town, Unrecognized, Unhealthy" in *The Environmental Justice Report 2006: Health, Environment, and Society*, pp. 35-39. Committee for Environmental Justice. See https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/images/yarok/svivati-E-zedek.pdf (Hebrew).

4.7 Tamar Sandberg, the Politician-Activist

Although Tamar Sandberg, who is a self-styled environmental activist in her own right,[10] and who had specifically asked for the environmental protection portfolio when she joined the Center-Right government in July 2022, was able to push various environmental initiatives to bring the environmental justice scale back to equilibrium, the changes on the ground have yet to be seen, such as the issues of waste disposal (80% of Israel's solid waste is still disposed of through burial); however, Sandberg's tenure as minister was short (July, 2021 – July 2022), but it represents a political opportunity structure whereby EMOs and civil society members were able to push for far-reaching plans to combat climate change, such as the 2021 law to curb single-use plastics (SUP), which brought SUP usage down to 34% by early 2023,[11] or a nation-wide plan to curb the effects of climate change, including in marginalized communities, with the support of three major EMOs.[12] While these were seen as successes by some in the environmental scene, others see this law as "toothless" and that EMOs should cease "fighting over symbolic objectives in the form of a 'climate law'" (Ofer, 2022). The criticism here is clear: EMOs should focus on lobbying the government to combat local sources of pollution first before thinking on a more global scale.

So far, the public discourse in Israel with regards to environmental justice oscillates around the question of the disproportionate distribution of resources and the allocation of tools to combat the effects of pollution and climate change. Marginalized and minority communities, such as the Arab-Israeli communities, shoulder a higher share of the

[10] Ashkenazi, Shani. 2022. "Accomplishments, Unfulfilled Tasks, and Obstructed Initiatives: Summary of Tamar Sandberg's Candidacy at the Ministry of Environmental Protection." *Globus*. July, 2022. See: https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001418866 (Hebrew. Accessed May 31, 2023).
[11] Teitelbaum, Shlomo and Ashkenazi, Shani. 2023. "Tax on SUPs Reduced Consumption by 34%." *Calcalist*. January, 2023. URL: https://www.calcalist.co.il/shopping/article/sjy00v4pcj (Hebrew. Accessed: May 31, 2023).
[12] Ministry of Environmental Protection. "History! Climate Law has Passed its First Reading at the Knesset." June, 2022. URL: https://www.gov.il/he/departments/news/climate-law (Hebrew).

environmental burden as successive Israeli governments had neglected or unfunded them. It seems that in this regard, Israeli EMOs, despite some concerted, mostly-academic efforts, have been only partially successful in bringing their weight to bear on the environmental justice issue.

Chapter 5: Case Studies

In this chapter, two well-known case studies will be examined in order to shed light on the behavior of Israeli EMOs and their attempts to influence or steer Israeli public policymaking. Both of these cases, on the one hand, illustrate the saliency of the ethnic/national dimension within the Israeli environmental activist scene in spite of their repeated declarations of environmental justice values. On the other hand, the phenomenon of political opportunity structures raises its head again: when EMOs find a willing political actor to work with, they race to enlist that actor regardless of their political affiliations. The two cases that will be presented here are, first, the environmental struggle to save Nitzanim beach, and, second, the struggle against the Separation Wall that separates parts of the West Bank from Israel proper.

5.1 The Green Effort to Save the Dunes of Nitzanim

The Nitzanim beach, considered one of the last open sand-dune on Israel's coastline, became the focal point of an environmental effort to prevent the development of a tourist village in the area (Maariv, 2011).[13] Previously considered as a temporary site as a caravan encampment for evacuees from the Gush Katif settlement block in the Gaza Strip as part of

[13] *Maariv*. May, 2011. "Joining the Struggle: Erdan Against the Tourist Village at Nitzanim." URL: https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/243/065.html (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).

the Disengagement Plan of 2005,[14] the area was again the center of attention when a plan to create a tourist area was initially approved by the Israel Lands Administration after a tender was won by developers.[15] As part of their efforts against the development of the beach and the loss of the natural landscape, the EMOs found an unlikely ally in Gilad Erdan, the Minister of Environmental Protection at the time and previously the Minister of Internal Security. Erdan used some of the language that EMOs usually tout, such as when he voiced his objection against the plan to create the tourist village, saying that it was "development that went against environmental planning principles," or the term "grave impact" in regard to the endangered dunes. As part of his efforts to resolve this issue, Erdan met with the head of the ILA and members of the Ashdod local council.[16] It should be noted that Erdan and the EMOs, in particular the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), had also fought to preserve Palmachim beach just north of Ashdod (Nitzanim lies just to the south of the city).

In this particular case, the EMOs and the stakeholders, especially the local residents whose interests lay in preserving the beach and the natural locale, were able to successfully lobby the government to reverse the approval for the tourist village in that location, despite the fact that the developers had paid around 8 million NIS at a government auction in order to develop the area.[17] Moshe Perlmutter of the Society for the Protection of Nature (SPNI) uses

[14] Tal, Dalia and Lavi, Tzvi. *Globus*. 2023. "The Tractors Clambered Over Nitzan to Prepare the Area as a Temporary Encampment for Gush Katif Evacuees." URL: https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=917100 (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).
[15] Yacovson, Michael. May 2011. *Ynet*. "Good Evening, Nitzanim, We Have Decided to Build a Huge Project on the Beach." URL: https://xnet.ynet.co.il/architecture/articles/0,14710,L-3082853,00.html (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).
[16] *Maariv*. May, 2011. "Joining the Efforts, Erdan Goes Against the Tourist Village At Nitzanim." URL: https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/243/065.html (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).
[17] Rinat, Zafrir. May, 2011. *Haaretz*. "Erdan Goes Out to Protest the Creation of a Big Tourist Village at Nitzanim Beach." URL: https://www.haaretz.co.il/science/2011-05-23/ty-article/0000017f-dbcc-d3ff-a7ff-fbecab4e0000. (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).

discourse emblematic of the older generation of environmental activists, such as "the reservation of Nitzanim has a broad biological diversity," and that it is important ecologically. He goes on to say that the original plan could still go on, but it should be closer to the city and in accordance or the national planning policies. This is the type of discourse that sees nature as something removed from and to be kept away from human habitats (Fürst, 2018). Several Knesset and national planning committee hearings later, the plan to build the tourist village was scrapped and the Nitzanim dunes were declared a natural reservation.[18] The fight over Nitzanim is not over yet—it has come to the attention of the coalition of EMOs who are active in coastline environmental protectionism that a new plan to build a private golf course/hotel complex on public land just south of the Nitzanim natural reservation. The EMOs have sent a full complaint to the national planning committee, known by its Hebrew acronym as the Volchof (Adam, Teva ve Din, 2023),[19] but it is still unclear if the dunes are under threat again.

5.2 The Separation Wall and the EMOs

The construction of the Separation Wall, also called the "Apartheid Wall" by most Palestinians and other opponents of its construction (Cohen, 2006; Halper, 2006), began in June 2002 and was intended to "fulfill only security functions for the citizens of Israel" (Rabinowitz, 2001; Falke, 2013). From the start, the construction of this "security barrier" was met with much consternation on the part of the Palestinian population, especially those in villages whose lands were seized, expropriated, or separated in order to construct the barrier,

[18] Society for the Protection of Nature. February, 2023. See: https://www.teva.org.il/23469 (Hebrew).
[19] *Adam Teva ve Din*. May, 2023. See: https://adamteva.org.il/news_and_updates/%d7%a0%d7%90%d7%91%d7%a7%d7%99%d7%9d-%d7%91%d7%aa%d7%9b%d7%a0%d7%99%d7%aa-%d7%94%d7%a8%d7%a1%d7%a0%d7%99%d7%aa-%d7%9c%d7%91%d7%a0%d7%99%d7%99%d7%aa-%d7%9e%d7%9c%d7%95%d7%9f-%d7%95%d7%a4%d7%90%d7%a8/ (Hebrew)

as well as on the part of Israeli peace and environmental activists who saw the barrier as an obstacle to reach a lasting peace, in addition to considering its construction destructive to the environment, the local ecology, and the lives of the local Palestinian communities (Tal et al., 2011). In particular, many Israeli environmental activists saw that the construction of the wall "threatened to become an ecological barrier that could cause fragmentation between habitats and a grave, long-term damage to wild species in Israel" (Tal et al., 2011). Surveys conducted at the time of the construction showed high rates of approval among the Israeli population at 57 percent (Yaar & Hermann, 2003).

Nevertheless, most of the mainstream environmental activist groups in Israel decided not to engage in the activities against the construction of the wall (Sadeh, 2010). Other leftist organizations, dubbed anarchists and radicals by the Israeli media, founded a "coalition against the wall" that encompassed several peace and environmental activists.[20] However, the major EMOs refused to participate in this movement for various reasons: first, the general consensus at the time was for constructing the wall, which stood at 57 percent; second, Israeli EMOs usually have a positive approval rate among the general Israeli public and any perception that they might be going against the consensus could have endangered their standing in Israeli society (Fürst, 2018). Third, Israeli EMOs, especially the Society for the Protection of Nature, despite their outward endorsement of environmental justice, trace their roots to the Zionist ethos of developing the land and reinforcing the Jewish claim to the land. Fourth, Sadeh (2010) posits that there is a profound fear among EMOs of politicization and the possible loss of cooperation with future governments or stakeholders due to their perceived support for Palestinian rights (Tal, 2011).

[20] Shargai, Tuli. December, 2003. *Walla!* "Who is Fighting Against the Separation Wall?" URL: https://news.walla.co.il/item/484422 (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).

Surprisingly, new partners for the fight against the separation wall have appeared on the scene: Israeli settlers from the Gush Etzion settlement block. In 2006, residents of Kibbutz Kfar Etzion filed a petition with the Supreme Court in opposition to the construction of the separation wall on part of a national reservation in the area. The petitioners, the Kfar Etzion Field School, argued that the wall would "utterly destroy the reservation and its forest, which has been preserved since the Ottoman period."[21] The IDF's original plan was to circumvent the reservation in a "thumb" form, but it was altered in order to straighten the wall's route and to uproot the forest so it would not be used as cover for attacks against IDF personnel. This plan, the petitioners argued, would cause unnecessary damage to their Palestinian neighbors and would exacerbate the security threats against the residents of the Gush Etzion settlement block. In addition, the petitioners have invoked the need to conserve the ancient agricultural terraces in the area (mostly maintained by Palestinian farmers and considered a UNESCO world heritage site[22]) and preserve the unique highland landscape from the destructive effects of the wall construction.

In explaining their decision to go the Supreme Court, the head of the Gush Etzion council, Shaul Goldstein, explained that "when you persuade, things are heard and you can reach goals even without protesting."[23] What he does not mention is that the Gush Etzion residents, as part of the larger 500,000-strong settlement population in the West Bank, have had listening ears in the mostly-right-wing governments since they started protesting the wall

[21] *Maariv.* June, 2006. "First Environmental Petition Against the Separation Barrier." URL: https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART1/435/477.html (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).
[22] UNESCO. "Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir." URL: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1492/.
[23] *Arutz 7*. March, 2006. "Partial Win for Gush Etzion's Struggle." URL: https://www.inn.co.il/news/141358 (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).

in 2005.[24] Other influential government agencies joined the petition as well in a rather unexpected turn of events, including the Nature and Parks Authority.[25] Due to their considerable political clout, these organizations, including the settler groups, were able to dissuade the government and the IDF to postpone their plans in the area and even re-draw the route of the wall, although the final plan has not been announced yet.[26]

[24] See the Kfar Etzion Field School's website at https://www.k-etzion.co.il/%D7%92%D7%93%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%93%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%9C-%D7%A8%D7%A4%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%A%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%91%D7%A7 (Hebrew).
[25] Hason, Nir. December, 2012. *Haaretz*. URL: https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2012-12-12/ty-article/0000017f-f958-d884-a17f-fdddb3060000 (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).
[26] Greenwood, Hanan. May, 2023. *Yisrael Hayom*. URL: https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/local/article/14095140 (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).

Chapter 6: Discussion

Understanding the influence Israeli EMOs exert on the political sphere and how this influence is translated into public policies can be done through both cultural and socio-ethnic perspectives. This is not to say that the EMOs operate through a solely ethnic dimension within which non-Jews cannot operate. On the contrary, Palestinian-Arab participation in EMOs, such as the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), has been significant over the years (Tal, 2002). However, social movements like the environmental activist movement in Israel are based in the culture and the norms in which they had formed. In this sense, EMOs partake in "norms, beliefs, symbols, identities, stories and the like that produce solidarity, motivate participants, and maintain collective action" (Williams, 2007). Therefore, the reluctance of Israeli EMOs, who are predominantly Jewish, to campaign for environmental justice for Israeli-Arab or Palestinian communities can be understood through the latter perspective. Tal brings the example of Azariah Alon, a former SPNI General Secretary, who was reluctant to hire an Arab teacher to work for SPNI. Yossi Leshem, who also worked at SPNI, recalled Alon explaining that "SPNI teaches more than a love for nature, but also a connection to the country. [He] couldn't understand how an Arab could teach Jewish youth love for the land of Israel" (Tal, 2002; pp. 341-342).

This is not to say that the contemporary Israeli EMOs are collectively an ethno-nationalist social movement that "make[s] claims for territorial sovereignty" (Olzak, 2007). Indeed, sometimes these EMOs make coalitions or alliances with other groups from across the "national, religious, ethnic, class and communal divides in order to combat an external threat" (Gutkowski at al., 2017). The case study on the separation wall gives us a good example of three groups who were able to bridge the gap and come together to thwart the

construction of a barrier that would have brought damage to their communities. Even though the Israeli settlers of Gush Etzion are not always on good relations with their Palestinian neighbors, the case of Battir and the common cause they agreed over points to a coalition of convenience (Orenstein & Silverman, 2013). The Kfar Etzion Field School went so far as to emphasize the legality of the Rhodes Agreement of 1949 between the State of Israel and the Palestinian village of Battir in which the nascent Israeli state had agreed to allow the villagers to work their fields across the Jerusalem-Jaffa Ottoman tracks in exchange for non-belligerence.[27] The cooperation between the settlers and the villagers of Battir, as well as the Nature and Parks Authority, can also be indicative of a shift toward a "place-based paradigm" where the protection of the natural landscape is intertwined with public health and communal concerns (Schwartz, 2009; Orenstein & Silverman, 2013).

How can this phenomenon be understood in terms of the influence these groups have on policymaking? While the major EMOs had decided not to campaign against the separation wall in 2002 due to political reasons, other political and environmental actors came into the fore, such as the settler community of Gush Etzion. This points to the ambivalence and reluctance by some Israeli EMOs when it comes to territoriality and political issues, particularly in relation to the Palestinians or Israeli-Arabs (Sadeh, 2010). Considering that the settlers of Gush Etzion enjoy a much higher political clout with the Israeli political establishment than the Palestinians ever could, it stands to reason that their petitions and voice in the Knesset are heard more loudly. The settlers had no qualms to address the issue of the separation wall in their area through both ideological and environmental frames, whereas

[27] See the Kfar Etzion Field School's website at https://www.k-etzion.co.il/%D7%92%D7%93%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%93%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%9C-%D7%A8%D7%A4%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%A%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%90%D7%91%D7%A7 (Hebrew).

the environmental activist movement has a general tendency to "sidestep questions of property rights and sovereignty" whole focusing on quality of life, the environment, and public health (Alatout, 2006). Questions of territoriality are seen as derivative and secondary to quality of life, such as water pollution and air quality since both populations share the same territory (with some exclusions) and resources. In this sense, the EMOs did not detect a political opportunity structure through which they could exact change (Van der Heijden, 2006). It could be argued that the EMOs found themselves in a dilemma, unable to choose their course of action within a discursive field in which their interests were not "self-evident or clear," or where ideologies "mask" the framing process within which the issue of the separation wall was being seen (Snow, 2007).

Therefore, in the case of the separation wall, it can be seen that Israeli EMOs had failed to live up to their ideals of environmental justice and sustainability when they decided not to campaign against the erection of the wall (Tal, 2011; Sadeh, 2010). It can be argued, however, that the EMOs understand that their influence can affect public policymaking if a political opportunity structure exists through which the groups can "gain access to power and to manipulate the political system" (Eisinger, 1973). Since the circumstances surrounding the anti-wall campaign against wall did not allow for such access to the political system, the EMOs fell back on their preservationist mode. In this case, they failed to exert their influence in order to sway the policymaking process to align with their stated goals. That being said, it has been argued that Israeli EMOs are becoming more grounded in an "environmental discourse that creates a close and unbreakable bond between the environment and society," within which human rights discourse and ecological protectionism are intertwined (Sadeh, 2010).

As for the Nitzanim case, this is seen as a clear-cut case for many of the EMOs that took part in the campaign. According to Orli Ronen, the former head of the Heshel Center for Sustainability, the Nitzanim case was "within the consensus; it was within the Green Line, and so they clambered up the barricades" (Sadeh, 2010). Even when they previously campaigned against the re-settlement of the Gush Katif evacuees from the Gaza Strip in the Nitzanim area, there was no question of opposing this plan since the rate of approval for the Gaza Disengagement plan was high among the Israeli public, at almost 65 percent.[28]

The Nitzanim case is also demonstrative of the political opportunity structure where the EMOs, who usually are viewed positively by the Israeli public (Fürst, 2018), were able to find a political partner who was willing to find solutions and support their efforts, namely Gilad Erdan. While Erdan is a right-wing politician from the Likud party, and who would later become the Minister of Internal Security, the EMOs took advantage of this political opening and lobbied the government and local councils to support their efforts to cancel the development plans for Nitzanim beach. Since this was a localized environmental struggle, it fits Fürst's model wherein EMOs are far more effective locally than they are at the national level (Fürst, 2018). It follows that the "political limitations of environmentalists' alliances and environmentalist representation to achieve locally specific goals" are less at the local level than they are at the national level (Doane, 2007). Even though Erdan was a minister at the national level, his portfolio is the least sought after by many politicians who enter government coalitions (Fürst, 2018). There is a growing trend among environmentalists within the last decade, however, of attempts to form broader connections with different stakeholders in society as part of what has been dubbed the "cooperative orientation"

[28] *Walla!* February, 2005. "Huge Survey: Large Support for Disengagement." URL: https://news.walla.co.il/item/676791 (Hebrew. Last accessed: May 31, 2023).

(Greenspan, 2015). According to Greenspan, this is a shift from a civil society-based orientation toward a more cooperative and perhaps politicized form of activism where the environmental activist movement is able to exert more influence on the policymaking scene.

In short, the environmental activist groups were able to exert more influence or pressure on public policymaking when security concerns do not figure within the operating framework. This is true in the case of Nitzanim beach. However, the issue become more complicated when security issues are involved, such as the separation wall. Therefore, there seems to be a correlation between the rise of EMOs' influence on public policymaking and localized, low-security struggles. At the same time, the higher the security concern or involvement with Palestinian/Israeli Arab localities, the less the EMOs' influence is on policymaking. This connects to Fürst's argument that the security issue (i.e. the geo-political Israeli-Palestinian conflict) dominates the public discourse in Israel, which prevents the environmental issue from taking center stage or being taken seriously when security issues are involved (Fürst, 2018; Gutkowski, 2017).

Conclusion

The Israeli environmental movement has to be understood according to the contextual framework within which it operates. The influence they exert on the political system is contingent on the social and political circumstances through which they must navigate in order to achieve any meaningful environmental goals. At the same time, it should be understood that the environmental movement is a direct product of the Zionist effort to settle the land while contributing to "Israel nation building and Palestinian erasure" (McKee, 2018). It follows that frames are seen through prisms of identity politics that could hamper efforts to reach as wide an audience as possible or to hold cross-community cooperation in both Israel proper and the West Bank. Furthermore, the centrality of the political issue in the Israeli political scene hampers the efforts of the Israeli environmental movement from affecting change in areas where sustainability and environmental justice are needed the most.

The two cases that were illustrated in this paper suggest that the influence of the Israeli environmental movement is stronger when the issues at stake have low political or security-related connotations. In the Nitzanim case, for example, Israeli EMOs, local residents, and political actors joined a struggle where the public support for this issue was high and where there were no human rights issue to contend with. With the separation wall, this was an entirely different scenario where the major EMOs failed to join a coalition one of whose goals was environmental justice.

Recently, a new political party has emerged on the political scene that calls it itself the Green Party that promises "a new green deal for Israel." Led by Stav Shapir, the party's manifesto promises to work on various environmental issues, including "green taxation" to

reduce pollution, green energy, green transportation, and changing consumption habits.[29] This development is laudable, considering that this might be the first time that a green party might enter the political arena in Israel; however, there is no mention of environmental justice, sustainability, or human rights in their manifesto.

One of the issues that hamper the Israeli environmental movement is the fact that many in the Israeli political system, as well as among the Israeli public, still view environmental issues through an apolitical framework centered around ecology, pollution, and public health. In order for the environmental movement to succeed, it must be able to bridge the gap between environmentalism and social values, thereby re-conceptualizing the environmental issue as a tool to galvanize civil society (Fürst, 2018). In so doing, the Israeli environmental movement could finally be able to be seen as a socio-political force that can exert influence on issues that involve sustainability, environmental justice, and human rights.

[29] See the party's manifesto on their website at: https://www.hayeruka.org.il/

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