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# Gendering Palestinian Dispossession: Evaluating Land Loss in the West Bank

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**Abstract:** Despite increasing attention to Palestinian territorial dispossession, there is inadequate attention paid to how this dispossession is gendered in its legitimising discourses and practices. Inattention to gender results in a failure to understand the power relations at play in the processes through which Palestinians are dispossessed of their land, the discourses that serve to support that dispossession and the impacts of that dispossession. This article examines the roles of Israeli hegemonic militarised masculinity as deployed in discourses and practices of “security” as well as idealised Zionist femininity and idealised Zionist masculinity as deployed in discourses and practices of “God-given Righteousness”. It finds that both are effective means of dispossessing Palestinians of their land, and that in settlements in the West Bank, the hegemonic militarised masculinity is often subsumed under idealised Zionist femininity and masculinity when it comes to settlement expansion and the violent dispossession of Palestinian land.

**Keywords:** land dispossession, Palestine, feminist security studies, resistance

Land has always been at the core of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. While many analyses have focused on the role of identity, temporality, nationalism or religion, the centrality of land and territory has been highlighted much more in recent years (Falah 2003; Parsons and Salter 2008; Weizman 2007; Yiftachel 2010). Territorial control, land dispossession and land use are implicated in nearly every interaction between the non-bounded territories of “Israel” and “Palestine”.<sup>1</sup> In particular, land dispossession is increasingly being seen as the most substantial barrier to peace as the territory for a potential future Palestinian state is shrunken and fragmented by settlements, the separation barrier, settler-only roads, closed military zones, nature reserves and military posts (Falah 2003; Parsons and Salter 2008; Weizman 2007).

However, while there has been increasing attention to territorial dispossession, there is inadequate attention paid to how this dispossession is gendered in its legitimising discourses, its practices, and its impacts. Inattention to gender results in a failure to understand the power relations at play in the processes through which Palestinians are dispossessed of their land, the discourses that serve to support that dispossession and the impacts of that dispossession. Paying attention to gendered power relations is essential to understanding land dispossession, and therefore to realising the potential for peace. A gendered analysis starts from the assumption that world politics is “fueled by informal and official presumptions about femininity and masculinity” (Enloe 2004:194). This paper deploys a gendered analysis of land

dispossession from the perspective of feminist security studies to assess how land dispossession functions through discourse and practice and how presumptions about masculinities and femininities fuel these discourses and practices.

Since the Oslo Accords institutionalised the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, the territory available for a potential Palestinian state has been isolated in a series of “islands” surrounded on all sides by territory “used by Israel for settlement construction, military outposts, closed military zones, nature reserves and roads connecting this territory to Israel (Bimkom 2008:12; Parsons and Salter 2008). Weizman (2007:6) expertly points out how dispossession and territorial division in the occupied Palestinian territories is ever-fluctuating in a way that the territory of most sovereign states is not:

The frontiers of the Occupied Territories are not rigid and fixed at all; rather, they are elastic and in constrain transformation. The linear border, a cartographic imaginary inherited from the military and political spatiality of the nation state has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms —“separation walls”, “barriers”, “blockades”, “closures”, “road blocks”, “checkpoints”, “sterile areas”, “special security zones”, “closed military areas”, and “killing zones”— that shrink and expand the territory at will.

All of these forms of closure and exclusion, along with the settlements themselves, rely on dispossessing Palestinians of land. Land is both the target of occupation, as well as the means by which the occupation functions. Land dispossession is both the means of making borders shift and the result of those shifting borders. Palestinian land is acquired through the shifting of the border as well as through the justification used to shift the border.

Gendered power relations are apparent at every level of the process of land dispossession, such as in the way Israeli territorial expansion relies upon the militarised masculinity of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) as well as on the discourses of motherhood and the future of the Jewish people, all of which are discursively contrasted with the assumed “irrational and unpredictably violent” Palestinian masculinity. Discourses that legitimise land dispossession are highly gendered. Discourses legitimising dispossession alternate between language that portrays Israel as a victim in need of protection, and as a “Just Warrior” who is honourably protecting Israeli security (Elshtain 1987). The cultural and political power of masculinities and femininities exerts a high degree of influence over individual and collective behaviour, reifying norms and values and entrenching power imbalances (Blanchard 2014; Eichler 2014; Enloe 2000). This is also illustrated by Cockburn’s (2009:108) claim that:

We can see that the hierarchical and complementary gender relations of a patriarchal order, in which men and masculinity are authoritative, combative and prone to coercion, while women and femininity are submissive, supportive and nurturing, are particularly fitted to the needs of militarist and nationalist societies and cultures.

The use of (gendered) physical violence to displace Palestinians is supported by laws and administrative measures that force Palestinians out of “formal” political spaces and into the realm of the private. Since Palestinians are marginalised through occupation and their status as “stateless” it becomes possible for Israeli laws, administrative measures, and practices to exclude threats to Palestinians from

the public realm. Having the threats one faces excluded from the public realm means there is no space for political action to reduce or address those threats. At the same time, threats to Israelis are framed within the realm of the “high” politics of security, and are therefore “exceptional” (Buzan et al. 1998). This view of “securitised” threats claims that once an issue is securitised, it is granted primacy over other issues. As demonstrated by Hansen (2000) the securitisation of some threats over others represents gendered divisions of public/private.

This paper brings gender, land dispossession and security together in a way that gives due weight to their linkages and dependencies. Examining land dispossession without thinking about gendered power divisions results in an incomplete understanding of how dispossession functions, and examining the impact of land dispossession from “siloes” perspectives of just food, economics, physical security or identity will fail to illustrate how all of these issues are implicitly connected. Gender is the missing element from existing discussions of land dispossession in Israel/Palestine, and an approach rooted in Feminist Security Studies will allow a much fuller understanding of how gendered power imbalances determine the legitimising discourses and processes of land dispossession. The next section outlines the conceptual framework of the paper. Following this, two sections examine and analyse two “logics” of Palestinian dispossession. The first set of discourses and practices dispossess Palestinians through a logic of “security” and the second through a logic of “God-given righteousness”. The final section examines the gendered impacts of dispossession for Palestinians, and what a gendered analysis of dispossession can tell us about the sites of territorial contestation. In contrast to the expectation that discourses of “security” subsume other discourse of dispossession, this paper argues that in the context of settlement expansion in the West Bank, at times, the discourses of “God-given righteousness” dominate the discourses of “security”.

I use data from laws and administrative measures, maps, speeches from politicians, advertisements for real estate in settlements, court decisions, and reports from human rights organisations. I also use data from narrative interviews and participant observation conducted in the West Bank in 2011/2012. The data drawn from human rights organisations, such as B’Tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) and Bimkom (Planners for Planning Rights) reflect the degree to which Israeli human rights organisations are essential to researching and documenting the constantly changing reality on the ground in the Occupied Territories.<sup>2</sup> I analyse the data using the method of discourse analysis drawn from critical and feminist security studies. Discourse analysis in critical security studies can and should engage with the interactions between words and things (Aradau et al. 2015). In the context of land dispossession, this calls for examining how the material elements of land dispossession function in conjunction with what is said about dispossession. This method of analysis supports the aim of the article by uncovering and destabilising the discourses and practices that support and encourage Palestinian dispossession.

## Conceptual Framework

As a field, feminist security studies encompasses a variety of approaches and areas of focus (Sjoberg 2009; Tickner 2001; Wibben 2011). Furthermore, there are

numerous examples of how a feminist approach to security can be applied to empirical field work (MacKenzie 2009; McLeod 2015; Parashar 2014; Ryan; 2015; Shepherd 2008; Stern 2006). For the purpose of this analysis of the gendered dimensions of land dispossession in the West Bank, my conceptual framework is informed by the debates between feminist security work influenced by postmodernism, human security and postcolonialism. This framework is characterised by three key issues/questions: the consideration of security beyond the state, the centralisation of how masculinity and femininity function, and problematising the public/private binary in security discourses.

First, as clearly elucidated by other feminist scholars, a feminist approach broadens the security framework by asking “what counts as security?” Rather than assume that “security” is a matter of high politics related to the state, a feminist approach to security “begins at the margins of social and political life” (Sjoberg 2009:197). A feminist approach argues that the exclusion of these otherwise “marginal” threats from a traditional definition of security represents a gendered exclusion because it relegates to the private realm many issues that compromise the security of people (Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006; Sjoberg 2009). Further, it is a gendered exclusion insofar as the state is frequently the cause of the threats experienced by those at the margins (Sjoberg 2009; Stern 2006).

The feminist approach to security is not the only approach that asks the question of “what counts as security” as a similar question drives the human security approach (Burgess and Owen 2004). However, the admirable expansion of the security agenda within the human security approach often fails to engage with how gender as a set of power relations impacts the security of individuals and groups (Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006; Sjoberg 2009). In the context of land dispossession in the West Bank, “what counts” as security includes physical violence in a number of forms (for example, violence from the Israeli state, violence from settlers, domestic violence, Palestinian factions targeting collaborators) as well as economic security, and security in relation to one’s collective identity(s).

Second, a gendered security analysis of Palestinian land dispossession must centralise attention to the power relations between different iterations of “masculinity” and “femininity” (Perez and Sasson-Levy 2015). Some masculinities are privileged over others, giving them greater political and social power. In the case of Israel, existing analyses assert that the hegemonic masculinity is a militarised masculinity (Klein 1999; Perez and Sasson-Levy 2015; Sharoni 1998). This masculinity interacts with idealised femininity as well as other versions of masculinity on unequal terms. One way to unpack these power relations is through the following questions: Who speaks security? How do security processes function to create gendered subjects? The answers to these questions are context-specific and structurally dependent because gendered power relations are not static, but rather in a constant state of flux, spatially, temporally and culturally. Gender is clearly not the only source of power imbalance; in the West Bank gender intersects with race and in the context of a colonial occupation, where “us/them” and “self/other” binaries are key to how discourses and practices of dispossession function (Said 1980).

The third, related starting point comes from the feminist security practice of problematising “internal/external” and “public/private” binaries. Such a

problematisation involves interrogating whose security “matters” and who is inside/outside of discourses and practices of security. For example, feminist scholars argue that traditional security studies relegates the threats of violence faced by women in their own homes to the “outside” of security studies, whereas the security of the state is “inside”—however, such a binary division fails to recognise the connections between “private” violence and state security (Sjoberg 2009). Binaries of inside/outside and public/private are gendered in their categorisations of people, groups and interests. Furthermore, as reflective of gendered power relations, these binaries represent relations of dominance and non-dominance (Hoogensen and Stuvøy 2006). Those who exercise dominance in security discourses and practices exercise control over whose security matters and who is included inside practices of security (Ryan 2015). Belonging and exclusion in the context of land dispossession in the West Bank is determined not only through gendered power relations, and in particular through the local Israeli hegemonic militarised masculinity, but also through the colonial nature of the occupation.

The case of belonging and exclusion in the West Bank is particularly interesting because territorial sovereignty is so highly contested. The binary divisions of inside/outside are not based on typical boundaries of state territorial sovereignty, but instead inside/outside is based on identity (Brown 2012; Parsons and Salter 2008; Yiftachel 2010; Yiftachel and Ghanem 2004). In the context of the West Bank, rather than acting as the means of determining what is inside and what is outside the state, territory is the “object” granted to those whose identity is “inside” and withheld or taken from those whose identity is “outside”.

In the context of land dispossession in the West Bank, gendered power relations help to justify land dispossession and subsequent Palestinian insecurity in the name of “Israeli security” and “righteous settlement”. Discourses of dispossession frame Jewish inhabitants as legitimate, set up practices that support Jewish settlement of land, and processes that prevent Palestinian inhabitation and expansion. This occurs in spheres from planning offices to the Knesset to demolition sites. However, I argue, it is in part the gendered nature of land dispossession that makes these practices possible because gendered discourses and practices have such pervasive resonance with deeply held perceptions of values and norms.

### **“Security” Discourses and Processes of Dispossession**

The discourses that support dispossession of Palestinians and the actual practices of dispossession are mutually re-enforcing, and as such, they should be analysed together to determine how they support each other. Within the discourse of security, the presence of the military and settlements in the West Bank are framed as essential for the security of greater Israel. Therefore, security discourses and settlements become self-reinforcing because expanded settlements use discourses of security to further expand their municipal boundaries, as well as settler-only roads and security barriers. Physical barriers in turn re-enforce and legitimise the security discourses by constructing a visual representation of “imminent threat” (Weizman 2007).<sup>3</sup> These discourses are highly gendered, portraying the Israeli security apparatus as well as settlers as “Just Warriors” who are protecting the security of wider Israel. Elshain

(1987) explains the “Just Warrior” as the idealised, militarised masculinity, wherein masculinity is associated with the protection of “women and children” and as the guardians of the nation. The “Just Warrior” masculinity therefore becomes the masculinity against which all “other” masculinities are judged, and is constructed in conjunction with and direct contrast to the “Beautiful Soul”—or idealised femininity in need of protection.

These “Just Warriors”—in the case of Israel represented by the IDF—are framed in contrast to the “irrational” violence of Palestinians. Israeli discourses are rife with the association of “Palestinian” with “terrorism and violence” (Puar 2011). One example among many comes from the official English-language website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The FAQ section of the website is dominated by this narrative, where in response to the question “Why do Palestinians claim they have suffered more casualties than Israel?” the MFA responds: “There were fewer Israeli casualties due to the fact that Israeli civilians—in contrast to Palestinians who deliberately chose to initiate confrontations with the IDF—do not willingly involve themselves in violence” (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002). There is no attempt to explain or understand Palestinian violence; rather, it is framed as the result of the “commitment of Palestinians to terrorism”. In this light, a continued, if not expanded, Israeli presence in the West Bank is discursively framed as essential for guarding the whole of Israel.

Such discourses appear in party platforms such as those of HaBayit HaYehudi, in speeches such as those of Netanyahu to the US Congress, in think-tanks such as the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, and in the regional councils that govern settlements such as the Binyamin Regional Council (Benyamin Regional Council 2014; Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs 2014). Further, the implied association between “Palestinian” and “terrorist” is inherently gendered insofar as it implicates Palestinian motherhood in “teaching” children to be violent, while at the same time framing Palestinian masculinity as ruthless.<sup>4</sup> The Just Warrior of the Israeli Militarised Masculinity purposes a juxtaposition with the “terrorist” Palestinian masculinity insofar as the IDF frames itself as “the most moral army in the world” and the framing of IDF soldiers describes them as steadfastly dedicated to protecting Israel and Israelis, but ultimately reluctant and reticent in their use of violence (Merom 1999; Sasson-Levy 2002, 2008).

When discourses portray continued Israeli settlement in the West Bank as necessary for the security of greater Israel, they rely on gendered relations of protection. Such discourses support the practices of Palestinian dispossession through framing the settlers and the IDF soldiers stationed near settlements as noble, virtuous and self-sacrificing. Such discourses rely on the hegemonic militarised masculinity that pervades Israeli society (Klein 1999; Sharoni 1998). Analyses of masculinity in Israel conclude that the framing of Israel as existing in a perpetual state of crisis, siege and threat results in a unique variant of hegemonic militarised masculinity (Klein 1999; Perez and Sasson-Levy 2015; Sharoni 1998). Practices of mandatory conscription compound and reinforce social and political practices that favour soldiers and former soldiers in employment and as politicians. As such, service in the IDF and more specifically, the role one had in the IDF determines one’s access to political, economic and social capital after service. The idealised militarised masculinity

in Israel—the Just Warrior—protects not only the Jewish people, but the Jewish homeland. The Just Warrior is intrinsic to state expansion because it is he who serves in the Occupied Territories, protecting settlements (and settlers), facilitating settlement expansion, and policing the “violent, unpredictable” Palestinians.

These discourses go beyond referring to settlers and IDF soldiers as protecting Israel, to claim that it is the land of the West Bank itself that is protecting the heavily populated areas around Tel Aviv. The land of the West Bank is framed as essential for Israeli security through referencing “defensible borders”, “topography” and “territorial depth” (Dayan 2014:38). Figure 1 illustrates this. Control of the West Bank is framed as a necessary response to the possibility of Palestinian violence. The map used by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs aims to illustrate why a potential future Palestinian state should not entail “giving” territorial sovereignty to Palestinians. Instead, the center claims, Israel should maintain sovereignty or at least partial control over the strategically important areas in the West Bank, namely, the Jordan Valley and the mountain ridges. For added discursive value, the map is titled “Hamastan”—insinuating that the control of the territory by Palestinians will be synonymous with control by Hamas, and will produce a state of terror (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs 2014:39).

In his 2011 speech to the US Congress, Prime Minister Netanyahu also relied on the discourse of defensible borders when he stated “Israel will not return to the indefensible lines of 1967” (Netanyahu 2011). In the same speech, he asserted, as other previous Israeli Prime Ministers have, that a continued Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley is “vital” for Israeli security. These are gendered discourses in that they insist that it is the control and protection of territory that will keep Israel safe from certain, but “irrational” or “unpredictable” violence. They rely on militarised masculinity and narratives that portray the land of the West Bank itself and continued settlement and military presence there as a form of the “Just Warrior”.

The processes of securitising land results in Palestinian dispossession. Between 1967 and 1979 processes of dispossession for the purpose of Israeli settlement relied upon the issuance of military orders for the seizure of land based on “security need”. Military orders established military outposts as well as settlements throughout the West Bank (Bimkom 2008:25). These military orders seized land for settlements by explaining that the settlements served a function of security—thereby illustrating an example of a “state of exception” that follows a securitising speech act (Buzan et al. 1998). However, the 1979 decision in the Elon Mareh case in Israeli High Court of Justice determined that this was illegal.<sup>5</sup> Through asserting that the Elon Mareh settlement fulfilled a civilian rather than a security function, the decision halted the use of direct military expropriation orders for the establishment of settlements whose primary function was civilian (Bimkom 2008).

Rather than halt the expropriation of Palestinian land for settlements, the Elon Mareh decision changed the processes of dispossession. Military orders are still used to seize land, they are just used differently. The issuance of orders designating “Closed Military Zones” and “Closed Firing Zones” serves to “close” areas of land to Palestinians before settlements are established there, or before existing settlements are expanded. This occurs frequently in the Jordan Valley, where most of the land is in Area C. The Jordan Valley represents over a quarter of the total land

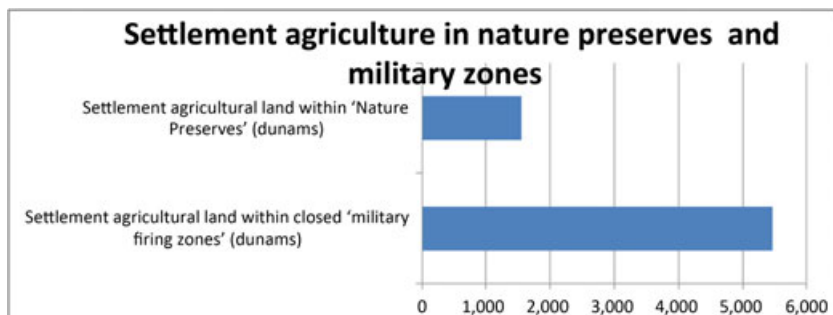




**Figure 1:** Map depicting “security threat” from the West Bank. Reproduced with the permission of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

in the West Bank, however effectively over 85% of it is “off-limits” to Palestinians. Palestinians are barred from land that is designated military land, nature reserves, closed firing zones or settlement boundary areas. Many of these designations overlap in the Jordan Valley, so land may simultaneously be a “closed military firing zone” and a municipal settlement area (B’Tselem 2012, 2013).

The rules which exclude Palestinians from closed military zones and nature reserves do not apply to Israeli settlers. As illustrated by Figure 2, over 6000 dunams



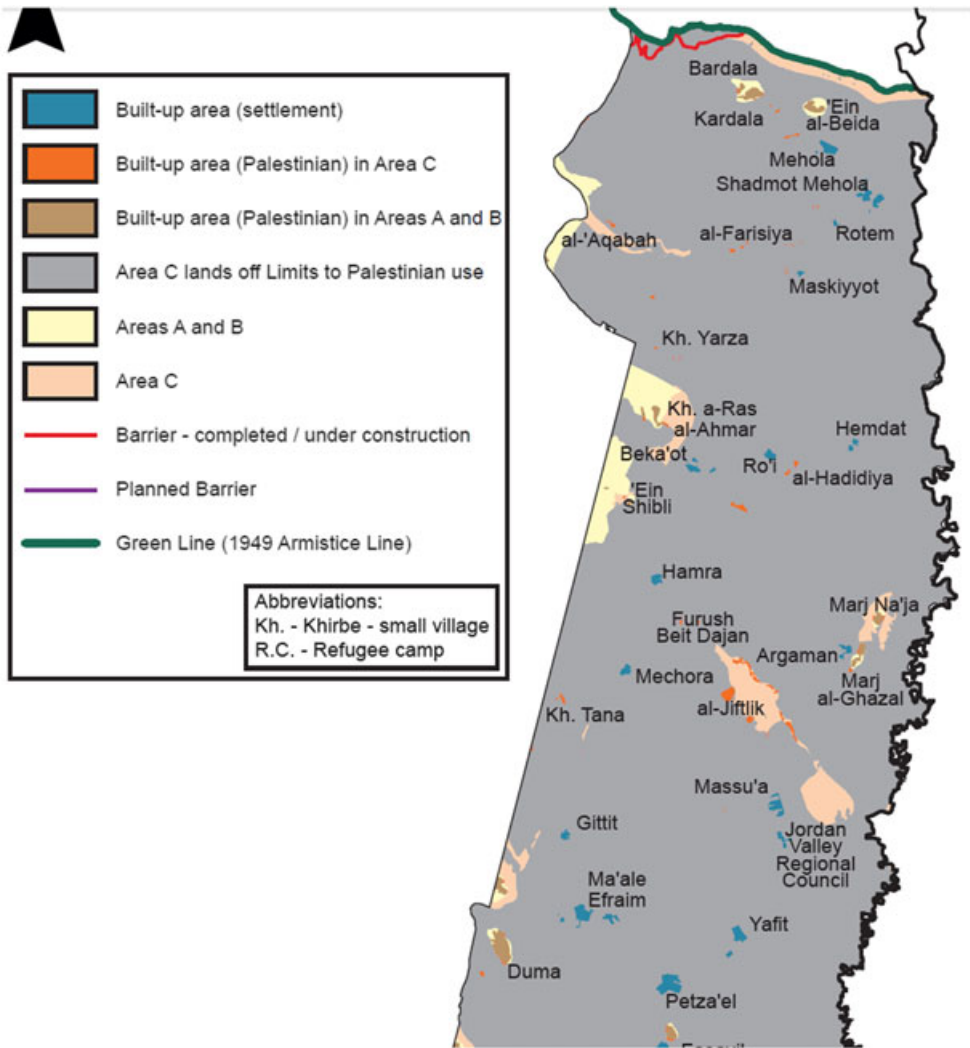
**Figure 2:** Author's graph; data from Kerem Navot (2013). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

of land used for settlement agriculture in the Jordan Valley is land designated as “closed” to Palestinians because it is inside a “military firing zone”.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the degree to which the Jordan Valley (north and south, respectively) is “closed” to Palestinians. The matrix of settlements and their municipal boundaries, settlement agriculture, military firing zones, military bases and nature preserves surround Palestinian population centres, making it impossible for these communities to make use of adjacent land for agriculture or to facilitate natural population growth. Only one of the 20 Palestinian inhabited areas in the Jordan Valley has had a Master Plan approved, allowing their inhabitants to file for building permits (Bimkom 2008; B'Tselem 2013:60). If Palestinians in the other 19 communities need to construct anything, from a livestock pen, to a water cistern to a school, they must do so illegally, thereby risking demolition. From 2009 to 2011, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition documented the demolition of 531 Palestinian structures in the Jordan Valley, resulting in the displacement of 703 people (ICAHN 2011; Meade 2011).

Hegemonic militarised masculinity is evident throughout these processes in the Jordan Valley. The use of military orders that determine “closed” areas for Palestinians function to consolidate territorial control and the surveillance and control over the Palestinian population through the “logic” of security. The use of physical and legal barriers to dispossess Palestinians of their land relies on the idea that land dispossession can protect “peace-loving” Israelis from the “irrational” violence of Palestinians. Here it is the land itself that is securitised—through framing its transfer to Israeli military control as necessary for the security of greater Israel as well as the adjacent settlements.

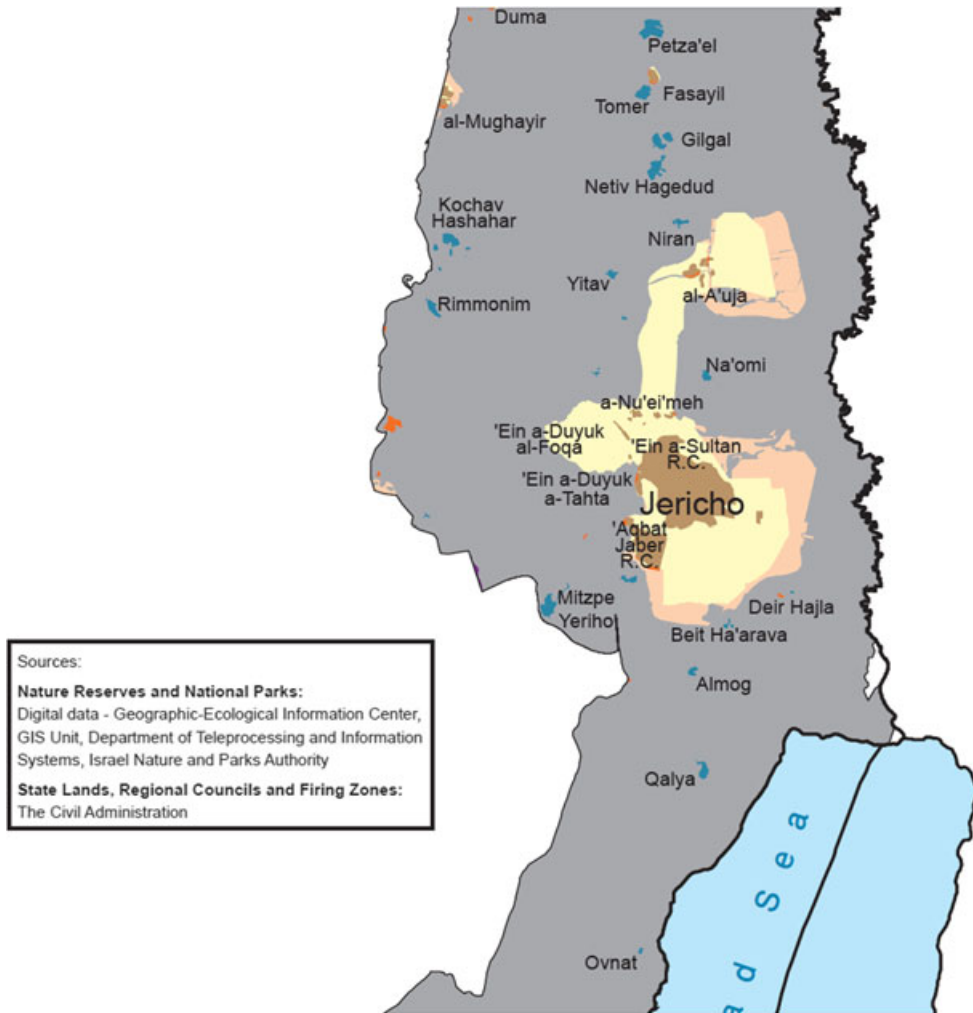
The municipal boundaries of settlements are also closed to Palestinians. A series of tunnels and “settler-only” roads often connect these settlements to Israel. According to B'Tselem, as of 2014 there “were 65.12 kilometres of roads in the West Bank that Israel had classified for the sole, or practically sole, use of Israelis” (B'Tselem 2014). Not only are Palestinians prevented from using these roads, but Palestinians are prevented from crossing some of these roads in a vehicle (B'Tselem 2014; Parsons and Salter 2008). Discourses of security that rely upon Israel's hegemonic militarised masculinity explain the building of these roads. Through framing the roads as another form of protection against the “irrationality” of Palestinian violence, their construction is justified, even if it means dispossessing Palestinians of their land or of access to their land.



**Figure 3:** Map of areas in Northern Jordan Valley “open” to Palestinians. Reproduced with the permission of B’Tselem (source: B’Tselem 2008). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Beyond the “closure” of municipal settlement boundaries to Palestinians, according to B’Tselem, 12 West Bank settlements are surrounded by “Special Security Areas” (SSAs) and an additional 15 settlements have plans to establish SSAs.<sup>6</sup> These areas more than double the size of these settlements from 800 acres to 1925 acres, and “[m]ore than half of this ring land is under private Palestinian ownership” (B’Tselem 2008:7). The designation of this land as a “Special Security Area” has clear discursive and ideological value. The securitisation of this land makes it nearly impossible for Palestinians to contest.

Palestinians killed 31 Israeli settlers in settlements between 2002 and 2004, and it is to these deaths that discourses of “security” referred when creating the SSAs (B’Tselem 2008). The army and settlers’ organisations argue that a ring of empty land around settlements will establish a “warning zone” and therefore allow more



**Figure 4:** Map of areas in Southern Jordan Valley “open” to Palestinians. Reproduced with the permission of B’Tselem (source: B’Tselem 2008). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

time to detect Palestinians who may try to harm settlers. A three-step process of military orders created the areas, reflecting the use of hegemonic militarised masculinity wherein the land itself serves the function of “protecting” settlers from “irrational” Palestinians. To gain access to farmland lost to these “Special Security Areas”, farmers must meet three conditions: “1) Civil Administration recognition of ownership of land; 2) Obtaining a set date and time for entry as dictated by the Civil Administration; and 3) Consent of the settlers for the farmer to enter the land” (B’Tselem 2008:47). The burden of proving that one is a farmer, not a “terrorist”, is upon individual Palestinian land owners, and ultimately, individual settlers make the final decision. This removes the outcome of the process from the state security apparatus. Instead of controlling the processes of security for the settlements, the Israeli state relinquishes its control to the settlers.

Despite the claims of the military that the SSAs are necessary to create “warning zones” settlers are not prevented from entering or using the land in the SSA

(B'Tselem 2008:57). In fact, Palestinians and human rights groups have documented the extensive use of land in the SSAs by settlers for agriculture, recreation and in at least three instances, habitation. Such use clearly defeats the stated purpose of the SSA as “empty” land. Instead, land taken through orders to establish an SSA becomes land that is open to settlers and closed to its Palestinian owners. This demonstrates an interesting dynamic, wherein the “security” discourse of the army is subsumed by the religious Zionist discourse of “righteous” Jewish settlement of the whole of Eretz Yisrael (Greater Israel). I explore this discourse and its associated processes of dispossession in the following section.

## **“God-Given Righteousness” Discourses and Processes of Dispossession**

Discourses and processes of security function in conjunction but also at times in implicit competition with discourses of righteousness that frame the Jewish “right” to land as God-given (Mendelsohn 2014). Whereas the security discourses rely on gendered notions of the “Just Warrior”, discourses of the Jewish God-given right to the whole of Eretz Yisrael, which legitimise settlement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (and, to a lesser degree, Gaza), often rely on gendered notions of motherhood and belonging.

The Women in Green, a women’s settler organisation, illustrates this perfectly. The Women in Green demand that Israel declare sovereignty over the West Bank, and they relate this demand to their God-given right to the land. Their campaigns focus on their roles as “mothers of the nation”. A 2014 campaign named “Mothers Say Yes to Sovereignty” called upon women settlers to hold a vigil outside the residence of the Israeli Prime Minister. The poster advertising the vigil states:

There is a realistic, Zionist option, which is the application of Israeli sovereignty over Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley. The application of sovereignty is the only ethical option, because this Land is ours ... The application of sovereignty will fill the existing vacuum, and will put an end to the futile and dangerous hopes for a Palestinian state on the soil of the Land of Israel (Women in Green 2014).

In particular, the Women in Green call upon mothers because, “[a]s mothers, we have a responsibility for future generations” (2014). Such discourses are clearly gendered, framing women’s engagement in politics as motivated by their role as mothers.

There is variance in the discourses in support of the “righteous” Jewish settlement of land in “Yesha” (Judea, Samaria and Gaza). Not all settlers or settlers’ organisations call for the annexation of the West Bank in the way that Women in Green does. However, for those who do cite ideology as a reason to move to or stay in West Bank settlements, they find support from a number of political parties in the Knesset who also cite Jewish God-given right to live anywhere in Eretz Yisrael. This is true not only of far-right parties, but also a number of centrist-right parties.

According to the Likud party platform, settlements represent the:

... realization of Zionist values. Settlement of the land is a clear expression of the unassailable right of the Jewish People to the land of Israel and constitutes an important asset in the defense of the vital interests of the State of Israel. The Likud will continue to strengthen and develop these communities and will prevent their uprooting (Likud 2009).

HaBayit HaYehudi represents a more far-right view of settlement expansion:

Today is the yarzeit for Rachel the Matriarch; we are here at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. She is the one about whom it was written "and the sons shall return to their borders". To return means to be here, to build here, to build up the land of Israel and bring the Torah and homes to all the tribes of Israel. It is a time that there will be full construction, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the Negev and Galilee, without any limitations from any gentile or anyone else, like we learned from previous generations (Ariel 2014).

This statement by Uri Ariel, who served as the Minister for Housing and Construction at the time, represents the assertion of the "right" of Jews to build in the whole of Eretz Yisrael, including the West Bank. It relies on the "God-given" right to full construction, thereby denying the Palestinian pre-condition for negotiations—a freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank.

During his tenure as Minister for Housing and Construction, Uri Ariel earned the nickname "Minister for Settlements", reflecting not only the view of HaByait HaYehudi that the whole of Area C should be annexed by Israel, but also his own personal agenda related to his relationship with Amana, a private development firm that builds and sells houses in settlements throughout the West Bank, including in illegal outposts (Levison 2013).<sup>7</sup> After the 2015 election, Ariel's term as "Minister of Housing" was not renewed. However, his influence over the announcement of tenders for construction continues because of his role as the president of the Settlement Council, a semi-governmental body located within the World Zionist Conference, but partially funded by the government. The government doubled the budget for the settlement division in 2015, with the bulk of the budget designated for the "Judea and Samaria" region (Lis 2015).

These are gendered discourses inasmuch as they rely upon two gendered themes that help explain or justify settlement construction. The first emerges the most strongly upon examination of discourses such as those used by the Women in Green. Here, explanation for settlement construction relies not only on reference to the historical Jewish presence in Israel, but also to the future of a Jewish presence in the West Bank. This future necessarily relies on women's roles as "reproducers" of the nation, and their responsibility for increasing the population of settlers by having children, who ideally will be settlers themselves. Feige (2013:110) argues that the concept of "home" for settlers reflects the idea of state expansion, as well as a "peaceful and homely" space. This reflects the idealised Zionist femininity, wherein women's roles as "homemakers" also further state expansion.

Women's roles in the idealised Zionist femininity reflect norms of reproduction, one element of which is in terms of biological reproduction of sons who are willing to die for Israel (Lahav 2010). Sharoni (1998) discusses the idealised Zionist femininity, concluding that it relies on narratives of women as mothers who are willing to sacrifice their sons for the nation, but who are fundamentally passive and in need of protection. In relation to the idealised Zionist femininity of settlers, according to Feige (2013) there is also an element of sacrifice embedded in settler femininity, wherein women are seen to sacrifice the "ease" of living within Israel's official borders for the security and political challenges of the settlements. Settler women thereby play a role in expanding the state territorially, as well as demographically.

A second gendered theme emerges, reflective of idealised Zionist masculinity characterised by independence, self-sufficiency, sacrifice, and exhibiting physical strength in a “hostile” environment (Klein 1999; Sharoni 1998). This is particularly true for the construction of the idealised Zionist masculinity of settlers. Through their assertiveness in land acquisition they are active in “reclaiming” and expanding the territory of the state (Feige 2013). This idealised Zionist masculinity at times challenges the Israeli hegemonic militarised masculinity, as shown by the ways settlers increasingly treat the Israeli government and the IDF with hostility when settlement projects are not supported and encouraged by the government or in rare cases where the government evacuates illegal settlement outposts.

In relation to Palestinian dispossession, the most interesting aspect of these discourses is that they are often deployed *after* the processes of actual displacement. Rather than serve as a means to allow for future action, settlers, politicians and settler organisations use discourses of “righteous Jewish habitation in Yesha” to retroactively explain why pieces of land or springs were taken or occupied by settlers. A common theme emerges amongst these discourses, that the settlers are creating “facts on the ground” through settlement expansion and land appropriation and the creation of new “outposts”.

This displays a particular assumption of settlers and their organisations, that the Israeli government will be reluctant to expel settlers from “Yesha” if the settlers can drastically increase their numbers and the share of the West Bank that they control. It is assertive about creating a “different reality” in the West Bank by bringing more land under Zionist control, and therefore reflects the assertiveness central to the idealised Zionist masculinity. The processes of creating “facts on the ground” vary. The most obvious relates to the creation of illegal settlement outposts, constructed without planning permission or formal approval. There are about 100 such outposts as of 2015, some of which exist on “state land” and some of which are on private Palestinian land (B’Tselem 2015).

Palestinian dispossession also occurs when settlers enlarge existing settlements through various tactics. The case of the SSAs mentioned in the previous section illustrates this. B’Tselem found that in several cases, such in the settlement of Dolev, the area of the SSAs included land that settlements had already “annexed” with various barriers and patrol roads (B’Tselem 2008:23). Furthermore, other settlements, such as Susiya, established expanded de facto perimeters without official permission from the army or Civil Administration (B’Tselem 2008:23). Palestinian land dispossession resulting from such settler-driven processes does not reflect the official “security” discourse of the state, but instead the Zionist “God-given righteousness” discourse, and in particular, reflects traits of the idealised Zionist masculinity and femininity—assertiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, sacrifice, exhibiting physical strength in a “hostile” environment and biological and national reproduction.

The creation of “facts on the ground” also results in the uprooting of Palestinian agriculture and its replacement with settlement agriculture. Such tactics are also used to seize water resources, in particular, Palestinian springs. Settlers “develop” the springs by adding benches or constructing pools, and placing signs or placards with Jewish names for the spring, and reference to Jewish biblical history. Tourists visiting “Judea and Samaria” are encouraged by the relevant regional councils to

visit these “historical Jewish springs”—at the same time, the Palestinian owners of the springs are prevented from using them by the IDF, the settlers or a combination of the two (Benyamin Regional Council 2014; B’Tselem 2008; Leuenberger and Schnell 2010).

The naming practices of springs also reflect the naming practices of the settlements themselves. Settlements are given names with particular relevance to Jewish history in the area. Such naming practices allow settlers to use discourses of righteousness to explain why they have taken control over land. They also rely upon gendered relations of power which support both the idealised Zionist masculinity of self-reliance and hard work, and the idealised Zionist femininity of reproduction. Zionist femininity uses historical narratives of Jewish presence on the land as the foundation for a future Jewish presence on the land, wherein that future relies on simultaneously increasing “Jewish” space *and* Jewish bodies. Amana’s advertisement campaign in the United States, where individuals are encouraged to invest in property in the West Bank (Yesha), which Amana will rent out to families, is one representation of such a logic. The advertisement depicts a modern settler family on one side, and a historical Jewish family on the other, and reads:

Amana, the YESHA settlement organization, invites you to walk in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu. Support Israel, buy a home in Yesha, Israel! Come learn how you can own a house and provide growth of the Zionist dream in Jewish communities (Amana 2007).

Linking the future of Israel to its historical past through encouraging Americans to buy property in Yesha relies on the Zionist femininity and motherhood identified in the context of the Women in Green movement.

A further element of the idealised Zionist femininity of reproduction relies upon discourses of “peacefulness” and “morality as mothers” which is continually contrasted with “violent” Palestinian motherhood. However, it is intrinsically problematic to take at face value that Jewish mothers raise their children to “love peace” while Palestinian mothers raise their children to “rejoice in violence” (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002, 2009; Ryan 2015:109). Such discourses are destabilised when one examines settler violence as a means of dispossessing Palestinians of their land.

Human rights organisations such as B’Tselem and Breaking the Silence have documented the widespread occurrence of settler violence. The extraordinary prevalence of settler violence is often concentrated in several areas of the West Bank. Hebron city and the South Hebron Hills are sites of frequent settler violence against Palestinians and IDF soldiers. Violence is also prevalent in the Ramallah and Nablus districts of the West Bank. Through testimonies, IDF soldiers have demonstrated their encounters with settlers, making it clear that they felt powerless to stop settlers who were using violence against Palestinians. They note the disparity in treatment of Palestinian stone throwers, who are frequently arrested, interrogated and imprisoned, and the treatment of Jewish settler stone-throwers, who rarely receive more than chastisement from IDF soldiers. Testimonies from Breaking the Silence show how soldiers struggle with their assignment to protect settlers when the settlers are attacking Palestinians.



Settler violence against Palestinians demonstrates a tactic used to intimidate Palestinian landowners, and exert de facto physical control over Palestinian land, such as when settlers occupy Palestinian fields during planting and harvest times. As such, these tactics demonstrate actualisation of the settler's "righteous" claim to all of Eretz Yisrael. However, the tactics also challenge settlers' claims of "peace-teaching motherhood". Breaking the Silence testimonies from IDF soldiers reported that adults often accompany settler children who throw stones at Palestinians or destroy the property of Palestinians, and the adults encourage them to act violently. The following testimony from a soldier in the Nahal Brigade stationed in Hebron who recalls such incidents:

This very cute kid who'd regularly visit our post decided that he didn't like Palestinians walking beneath his house, so he took a brick and threw it at this girl's head. Kids there do whatever they want. No one does anything about it. No one cares. Afterward, his parents just praised him. The parents there encourage their children to behave like that. There were many cases like that, 11-, 12-year-old Jewish kids beat up Palestinians and their parents come along to help them, there's a thousand and one stories (Breaking the Silence 2012:308–309).

Testimonies like this challenge the claim of idealised Zionist femininity that Jewish settlers as peace-loving, who employ violence only as a means of self-protection. Instead, this testimony shows soldiers' observation that settlers actively encourage their children to use violence. It illustrates the fallacy of the claim that there is stark binary division between Jewish and Palestinian mothers. Given the reliance of Palestinian land dispossession on the discourses which frame Jewish settlers as acting with justice and righteousness, troubling the idealised Zionist femininity is particularly important.

## **Gendering Palestinian Dispossession**

Both the security discourses and the righteousness discourses frame Palestinians as the aggressors and/or invaders who threaten the security and rights of Israelis. The "Just Warrior" and "idealised Zionist mother" narratives are used to contrast with narratives of Palestinians as irrationally violent, militant, and teaching their children to hate. These discourses support the dispossession of Palestinians. Upon examination of the impacts of dispossession it becomes clear that land dispossession severely compromises Palestinian security in gendered ways.

Dispossession is most visually obvious with the demolition of Palestinian homes, agricultural structures, schools and mosques. Since the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Israel has demolished 48,488 structures. Most demolitions occur because of the lack of a proper permit (Bimkom 2008; B'Tselem 2008; Weizman 2007). After 1967, Military Order 418 abolished local planning councils for Palestinians and gave the Civil Administration full control over planning and zoning for Palestinians. The Civil Administration systematically denies building permits for Palestinians, forcing Palestinians to make the impossible choice of suffering from insufficient housing, or building without a permit and potentially facing demolition. According to data provided by the Civil Administration, of the 1650 building

permits submitted by Palestinians in 2009–2012, only 2.3% were approved (B'Tselem 2013:19). During the same period, B'Tselem reports that the Israeli Army demolished 927 Palestinian homes (B'Tselem 2015).

House demolitions are highly gendered. The gendered division of labour within Palestinian society leaves the responsibility for the day-to-day upkeep of the house with women. Social norms frame the “private” realm of the home as the domain of women, and women exercise a great deal of decision-making power and control in the home. The home therefore represents a source of security for Palestinian women. In a study conducted with women who lost their homes to demolition or who were living under a pending demolition order, the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling documented these gendered impacts. The testimonies reflect psychological trauma, economic hardship, and challenges in meeting the daily needs of the family while living under a demolition order, and during and after the demolition occurs. Women discussed their frustration with their powerlessness to help their traumatised children, the difficulties and lack of privacy in post-demolition life when they move into overcrowded conditions with their in-laws, their fears for their family’s economic future, and their inability to mentally cope when living under a demolition order (WCLAC 2010). Women’s roles as caregivers for the family and the centrality of the home in carrying out this role amplify these impacts.<sup>8</sup>

Gendered roles also amplify the impacts of house demolition for men. House demolition challenges the social norms of the male “provider and protector” of the family. Demolition can take place any time after the issuance of demolition orders, and families frequently get no notice of when the demolition will occur. ICAHD reports that in interviews with men whose houses are under a demolition order, some respondents reported having quit their jobs so as to increase the likelihood that they will be home when the demolition takes place (ICAHD 2013). Even if they are home, men are powerless to prevent the demolition once the army, Civil Administration, and bulldozers arrive, thereby challenging the men’s ability to uphold the social norms of masculinity. The financial burden of demolition impacts the whole family, but it will have particular impacts on men’s ability to fulfil their perceived role as the “provider” for the family.

Economic hardship is not limited to cases of house demolition, but occurs throughout other processes of Palestinian dispossession. This is particularly the case in the agricultural villages in Area C. Dispossession does not have to involve the formal loss of ownership if farmers are prevented or restrained from accessing their land in practice. B'Tselem documented that access was granted to farmers for only a few days a year, ostensibly to “harvest” crops such as olives or fruit. However, this does not reflect the reality of farming; land will not be productive if it does not get frequent attention and care. As a result, farmers lose their crops and thereby their incomes. In an interview with a farming family in the village of Nabi Saleh, one woman expressed nostalgia for the productivity of her family’s land, and their economic reliance on that productivity. As a result of the de facto annexation of the land by the nearby settlement, she expressed that “the only farming we do now is on the Facebook ‘Farmville’ game” (Interview 15, “Wafaa” Nabi Saleh 2012). In the context of Palestinian dispossession, Palestinian discourses about their

insecurities help to re-humanise Palestinians, and de-stabilise the Israeli discourses of “security” through refuting their framing of Palestinians as predominately violent and irrational.

Upon analysis of the dynamics and power relations at play in gendered discourses and processes of Palestinian dispossession, a substantial finding emerges. From a perspective of securitisation theory, one might expect to see the dominance of “security” discourses and practices in the dispossession of Palestinians. Claims to the “state of exception” granted to issues of “security” would support this (Buzan et al. 1998).<sup>9</sup> Under such logic, the near permanency of “threat” to the state of Israel would ensure that any issue framed under the logic of security would take precedence. As a result, practices and processes related to “security” would take primacy over all else.

This would arguably be re-enforced by the gendered nature of such a “state of exception” wherein the hegemonic militarised masculinity is granted primacy, reflecting the “natural” place of militarised masculinity at the centre of the public realm. Such a claim would find support in existing analyses of gendered Israeli identity, wherein IDF soldiers are framed as the epitome of what it means to be “Israeli” (Klein 1999; Sharoni 1998).

While this may be the case from time to time in relation to Palestinian dispossession, what this paper shows is that when it comes to the question of Palestinian dispossession in relation to settlements, gendered discourses of Israeli “God-given righteousness” often supersede discourses and practices of security. In other words, discourses and practices of “God-given righteousness” trumps the discourses of security (the hegemonic militarised masculinity of the Army). These “God-given righteousness” discourses represent the idealised Zionist femininity (characterised by claims of Godliness, peacefulness, and motherhood as birthing the future of Israel) and idealised Zionist masculinity (characterised by fulfilment of prophecy, independence and self-sufficiency).

This has important implications for understanding how territorial dispossession functions. The non-dominance of the hegemonic militarised masculinity illustrates that in the context of Palestinian dispossession in the West Bank, and in contrast to much of the discourse of the official Israeli state security apparatus, the logic of “security” is not as powerful as the logic of “God-given righteousness”. The “God-given righteousness” discourse and practice is still highly gendered, but it is important to note the degree to which the idealised femininity of Zionist settlers, and the associated practices of reproduction and homemaking, drive the “God-given righteousness” discourses and practices of Palestinian dispossession. This reveals an important insight about the relationships between the hegemonic militarised masculinity of the “Just Warrior” and the “Settler Woman” in the context of Palestinian dispossession.

This can be seen in relation to issues such as the SSAs, where settlers enter and use land designated as a “warning zone” or in the processes by which settlements are expanded first by settlers themselves before seeking the retroactive “blessing” by the army. It can also be seen in claims made by soldiers that settlers dictate the terms of army coordination with the settlements (Breaking the Silence 2012). It can be seen when examining the status of land designation in Area C, wherein land

designated as “closed firing zones” is open for settlement agriculture. Soldiers stationed in the South Hebron Hills give testimonies that illustrate that their mandate is to ignore settlers attacking Palestinians, thereby challenging the discourses which frame IDF soldiers as indispensable to Israeli security.

This is not to claim that all Israeli discourses and practices of security are subordinate to discourses and practices of “God-given righteousness”—clearly some issues and practices correlate with what securitisation theory says about the “exceptional” nature of security subsuming everything else, as well as the gendered analyses which claim that the hegemonic militarised masculinity of the IDF determines gendered norms. However, it is also clear that this hegemonic militarised masculinity and the “primacy” of security can be subservient to idealised Zionist femininity and masculinity in relation to Palestinian dispossession. This illustrates the extraordinary status given to the discourses of “God-given righteousness” of Israeli settlement on Palestinian land in the West Bank. These discourses and practices are employed not only by settlers, but also by politicians who are leading the government.

Internationally recognised territorial sovereignty does not dictate the question of where “Israel” begins and ends, instead, a constantly evolving process of increasing the share of land controlled by settlers in the West Bank changes Israel’s territorial boundaries. This paper has shown that a gendered analysis of dispossession gives a more nuanced understanding to this constantly evolving process. A gendered analysis allows us to see how discourses and practices rely on the salience of masculinities and femininities, and how these can be in tension with one another. Continued Palestinian dispossession presents a formidable barrier to peace, and a more nuanced understanding of the gendered relations of power supporting dispossession is essential to de-stabilising the dominant claim that such dispossession is essential for Israel’s security.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The territories of Israel and Palestine are “non-bounded” because neither conforms to the generally accepted territorial boundaries of a state. Palestine’s non-state status is increasingly further compromised by the constantly shifting boundaries of Israel, whose territorial expansion within the West Bank and East Jerusalem is seen by some as an expansion of the Israeli state, and by others as illegal.

<sup>2</sup> It also represents an ideological commitment on the part of the author to tacitly support these organisations, which face persistent threats from the Israeli government and activists on the far right.

<sup>3</sup> “Threat” is visualised by architecture that makes it seem as though threat is imminent or omnipresent.

<sup>4</sup> Discussions of Palestinian violence frequently resort to the role of “incitement” wherein Palestinian social and family structures are “blamed” for a Palestinian “culture of violence”. In some instances, Palestinian motherhood is blamed in particular, such as with reference to mothers who “rejoice” after their children die while participating in demonstrations or committing violence against Israelis. In other cases the link to motherhood is implicit—if mothers are the primary caregivers and teachers of their children, it is they who are responsible for fostering “a culture of violence”.

<sup>5</sup> The High Court of Justice heard the Elon Moreh case in 1979. The verdict challenged the right of settlers and the Israeli government to seize Palestinian land under the guise of “security” if the land seized was for the construction of settlements (Weizman 2007:106).

<sup>6</sup> SSAs are found in Adora, Hermesh, Carmel Tzur, Mevo Dotan, Ma'ale Levona, Nahali'el, Ateret, Einav, Pene Hever, Kiryat Arba, Shavey Shomeron, and Telem.

<sup>7</sup> He has also served as the Secretary General of Amana (Levison 2013).

<sup>8</sup> This division of labour and power in the Palestinian home is clearly gendered rather than naturalised. However, in practice, this is a deeply embedded division of labour. Therefore, there are differential impacts of house demolition on men and women. It is not within the scope of this paper to deconstruct and critically analyse the division of labour within Palestinian homes in relation to how land disposition functions, though this may be an area for future research.

<sup>9</sup> According to Buzan et al. (1998:29) the state of exception represents the degree to which issues that have been "securitised" can be dealt with "beyond the realm of normal politics" and in ways that would not otherwise be acceptable.

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