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Roei, N.

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The politics of arrival: Israeli borderscapes and the boundaries of artistic space in Emi Sfard's *Invasive Species*

Noa Roei

Department of Literary and Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT
This article explores ecologically-inflected conceptions of home and belonging through a detailed study of *Invasive Species* (2017), an immersive media installation by emerging artist Emi Sfard. The installation comprises two interactive video works created with the help of 3D computer programs that can be updated in real time. Both works relate in different ways to Israeli landscape imaginaries, and examine the hidden relations between human and non-human "border crossers" that contribute to the way in which the national contours of the state of Israel are sustained, on material, aesthetic and conceptual levels. As I will argue, the installation's critical edge resides in part in its refusal to remain within the picture plane, implicating spectators in the depicted images through gaming technologies, and so interspersing questions of national boundaries with those of the borders of the gallery space

KEYWORDS
Borders; Landscapes; Zionism; eco-imaginaries; immersion; Israeli art

> There is no such thing as a non-aesthetic figuration of the border.
> —Rosello and Wolfe

Introduction: on boundary work and immersive experiences

Borders and boundaries are typically defined as demarcation lines. Whether geo-political, ecological, or cultural, whether real or imagined, once set they are perceived as anonymous entities, superseding the individual (Boer 2006, 3). Recent scholarship, however, asks that we rethink the boundary and its derivatives (borders, frontiers, and so on) less as entities, and more as functions: moving attention away from the "what and where" of the boundary to the "how and why" of its construction and maintenance. Addressing the boundary as an entity conceals the "boundary work" involved in its production (ibid, 4,6). This is true also in the case of natural phenomena (rivers, mountains, forests), that are mobilized in discourse as means for naturalizing—taking for granted—certain borders and border effects (Rosello and Saunders 2017, 29–30). Thinking of the boundary as a function, instead of as an entity, is not to say that borders are not real, in the sense that they have concrete effects in the world; but it does ask that more attention will be given to the economic, political, cultural and sensory practices through which borders are established and experienced (Rosello and Wolfe 2017, 8). "Boundaries cannot be wished away", writes Inge Boer, "but will serve their ordering purposes better … if we accept their existence but take them as uncertain; not lines, but spaces, not rigid but open to negotiation. The resulting uncertain territories are the ground we stand on, together" (Boer 2006, 13). Such an approach understands borders as ever-changing zones of transformation. It also offers a more active role to those that cross borders and to those that dwell at the border zones, in the design of the spaces that they traverse and inhabit: in the words of Mireille Rosello and Timothy Saunders, "when border-crossing actors (people, goods and ideas) travel, they traverse an inherently shifting and unstable terrain that their journey alters and thereby helps to form" (Rosello and Saunders 2017, 26).

Taking my cue from this dialogic approach to the boundary, in what follows I discuss the installation *Invasive Species* by Emi Sfard, and the way it tackles the relations between border-crossers and the spaces through which they travel. The installation was presented at the Haifa University Art Gallery in 2017 as part of the MFA graduate exhibition *Tactical Truths* (curator Maayan Amir). It comprises two separate video works, each displaying a landscape view (Figure 1). The presented vistas comment on the key role that landscape has played in drawing the boundaries of the state of Israel, and in generating a specifically-Israeli sense of belonging. These topics have been addressed in a variety of academic studies on Zionist arboreal iconography and historiography, and to that extent *Invasive Species* does not offer new insight or information.[1] But *Invasive Species* is an art

CONTACT Noa Roei n.roei@uva.nl Department of Literary and Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, Spuistraat 134, 1012 VB Amsterdam, the Netherlands

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Figure 1. Emi Sfard, 2017. *Invasive Species*, installation view. *Tactical Truths* MFA graduate exhibition (curator Maayan Amir), Haifa University art gallery, May 25—June 11. Courtesy of the artist.

work, not an academic text; and as such it is more open, evocative and contemplative in nature. Its contribution to thinking about borders and boundaries resides not in a straightforward analysis but in the aesthetic and sensory experience that it offers. As I will show, the work's interactive and immersive nature, and its ability to implicate the viewer in the image through gaming technologies, gives it a specific critical edge, and allows it to inform one's relation to national boundaries (addressed representationally and semiotically) through a destabilization of one's experience of the contours of the gallery space (addressed performatively and experientially).

Immersion in the arts—the act of eliminating the boundaries between the viewer's space and the illusory space of the artwork—has a long history, dating back to antique Roman murals (Grau 2003, 25). In contemporary contexts, it is associated with the possibilities afforded by digital media technologies (Dogramaci and Liptay 2016, 1, 7). One notion that is prevalent within the study of "pictures that physically and emotionally involve the viewer" is the idea of a loss of critical distance (Grau 2003, 13; Dogramaci and Liptay 2016, 9). In a recent volume on immersion in the visual arts, Burcu Dogramaci and Fabienne Liptay challenge this understanding, and argue instead that "[p]ictures call upon our sense of responsibility and power of judgment at precisely the point at which we completely immerse ourselves in them and risk getting in touch with the object of our intellectual contemplation" (ibid.). An artwork, they remind us, is by definition understood and structured as a space of illusion, that is safely disconnected from the space of the viewer's actuality through physical and conceptual bounds. The frame "excludes all that surrounds it, and thus also the viewer as well, from the work of art, and thereby helps to place it at that distance from which alone it is aesthetically enjoyable" (Simmel 1994, 11); from this perspective, immersion as a method that "unframes images" (Sloterdijk 2011) can be understood as a disruption of aesthetic illusion, in its "crossing of the boundaries of familiar visual experiences" (Dogramaci and Liptay 2016, 8).[2]

Immersion takes place within *Invasive Species* through various complementary techniques, including the possibility to virtually wander through a hyper-realistic rendition of a forest, the synchronization of a represented landscape with real-time weather forecasts, and the synchronization of the entrance of visitors into the gallery space with changes that take place within the picture plane. Straddling questions regarding the boundaries of artistic space with images, narratives and sounds that address the contours of national arboreal imaginaries, the work maps out a complex web of relations between various (human and non-human) bodies that, in their (often unaware) interactions and interconnections, demarcate the spaces to which they belong. The ensuing "intersubjective narrative that unfolds between the subject and the surfaces it traverses" (Bourriaud 2009, 55) is mobilized specifically through a focus on the moment of arrival: that moment, framed as invasion in the installation's title, is addressed in the work in ways that further complicate one's idea of frontiers and their transgression. In its play with acts of border-crossing and immersion, the work brings into view a vast spectrum of sensory, conceptual, material and ideological boundaries that shape and are shaped by practices, experience and knowledge, and encourages viewers to reflect on their position vis-a-vis images and imaginaries.[3]

True to its nature as an artistic project, the meaning of *Invasive Species* is not foreclosed. My reading will focus on the way in which the spectator's position in relation to what she is looking at is methodically destabilized in this work, sometimes in

contradictory ways. Seeing as the visual language employed in the installation rests heavily on signs and symbols from Zionist and Israeli culture and heritage, as well as the fact that its Hebrew-speaking audio is left untranslated, my reading is based on the understanding that the installation is aimed at a local public that is implicated—immersed, if you will—in the ideological, geographical and aesthetic landscapes that the work comments on.

Tales of the forest

Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness, one of the two video works that comprise the installation, is a hyperreal rendition of a life-size forest projected on an entire wall within the gallery space. Gallery visitors are encouraged to wander through the virtual forest with the help of an operating button.[4] The forest itself should be familiar to local audience: it is based on pine trees, bushes, cacti, thorns and stone ruins from the Ben-Shemen forest, the largest forest in central Israel, and the first and largest afforestation initiative in the history of the State of Israel.[5] The size of the projected image turns the interactive practice of navigating the space of the forest into an immersive experience, "replacing the separation between viewer and image with sensory, full-body experiences of artworks" (Dogramaci and Liptay 2016, 2–3). The work further unsettles the distinction between material and representational space by means of having the image respond in real time to weather reports from its spatial referent: information concerning levels of wind, clouds, rain, and time of day in the material Ben-Shemen forest is synchronized with and simulated in the screened view. At the same time, the work's set up does not allow for a full immersive experience. Its projection on a single wall within the gallery, and the lack of virtual reality technical aid such as a helmets or electronic visors, maintain to an extent the traditional spatial distinction between viewers and images within gallery space.

Both through pictorial means and through digital synchronization, then, the work indexes a specific patch of local landscape, while at the same time accentuating its symbolic and allegorical nature. For even as the digital forest is recognizable as representing a typical sample of local landscape, it explicitly does not simulate a true-to-life experience. Replicates of natural flora are revealed upon scrutiny to be based on identical cloned elements. Next to these, official Memorial Day flyers featuring the Red Everlasting flower are almost too explicitly planted throughout the forest grounds, flapping in the wind (Figure 2).[6] What is more, as soon as one starts to wander in the forest, one reaches its edges—and can navigate further in all directions, what would be considered an error within a computer game mechanics (Figures 3–4). Navigating up, a bird's eye view reveals the forest to be a small square of earth floating in virtual space. Navigating in other directions, a sideways view and a view from below disclose the grounds to be made of a flat surface, without depth, and the forest to be rootless, drifting in mid-air. Not a straightforward documentary simulation of material space, then, the depicted forest exposes its essence as pixelled illusion, less indexical (as in a photograph) and more illusory (as in a painting), a figment of the artist's imagination, pregnant with symbolism.

The forest—and more specifically, Israel's pine tree forest—is a charged and saturated icon within Israeli collective cultural consciousness. Carol Bardenstein suggests that this has to do with the stigmatization of Jewish rootlessness in different ways at different historical periods, as well as with the need to assert a legitimate connection of Jewish newcomers to

Figure 2. Emi Sfard, 2017. *Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness.* Screen capture: virtual forest with stone ruins and memorial day flyers. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 3. Emi Sfard, 2017. *Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness*. Screen capture: virtual forest, side view. Courtesy of the artist.

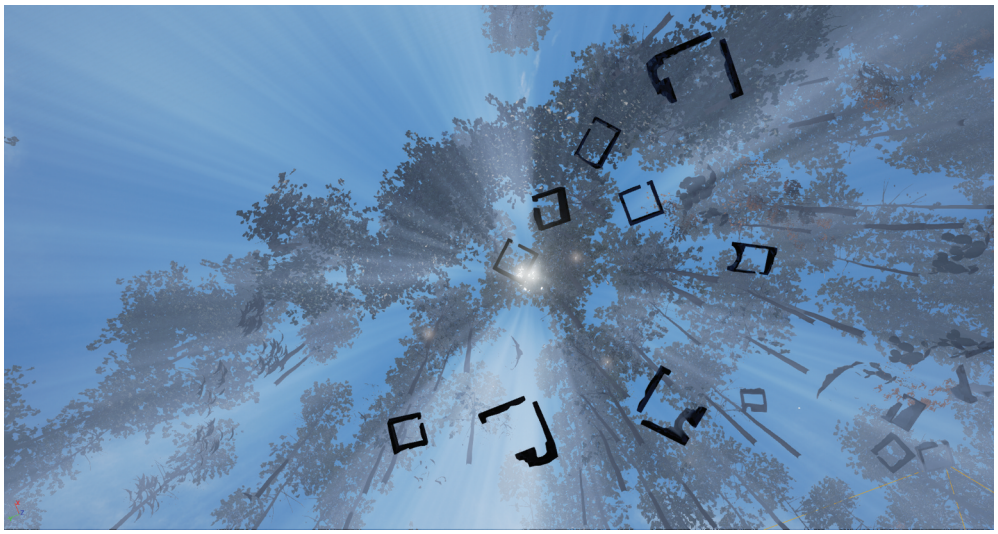

Figure 4. Emi Sfard, 2017. *Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness*. Screen capture: virtual forest, view from below. Courtesy of the artist.

Palestine in the early 20th century (Bardenstein 1998, 3). Trees function as emblems of birth and belonging in many national contexts (Malkki 1992, 27–30), and the Zionist movement too has from its inception in the late 19th century deployed the forest as a symbol of national renewal, accompanied by material afforestation projects run by the Jewish National Fund (JNF-KKL), an executive body established in 1901 to strengthen Jewish presence in Palestine by raising money for the purchase of land (Bardenstein 1998, 158–9; Braverman 2009, 318; Long 2009, 65; Zerubavel 1996, 75).[7]

The JNF forests were planted, then, with the most practical aim of securing ownership of land, and, at a later stage, fortifying state sovereignty (Long 2009, 63; Braverman 2009, 347).[8] In addition, they also had a major role in shaping national subjectivity and a sense of belonging for the emerging Jewish population. Following Joanna Long, "the material production of landscape is simultaneously the production of 'subjective meaning, feeling and fantasy' particularly in the context of building a national subjectivity" (Long 2009, 62; see also Rose and Dorrian 2003, 13–19). Afforestation efforts in pre-state Israel, and their mediations abroad, were a central strategy to "win the hearts and souls" of Jewish diaspora, providing an emotional sustenance by the idea of the homeland they promoted (Long 2009, 67). After the creation of the state of Israel, JNF tree planting ceremonies were integrated into the celebration of *Tu Bishvat*, a Jewish holiday that has gained importance as a national affair, coinciding with the inauguration of the Israeli Parliament in 1949 (ibid, 70–71; Bardenstein 1999, 160–1; Braverman 2009, 331–2; Zerubavel 1996, 62). Through institutionalized practices of tree planting, the body of the Jewish Israeli

citizen was—and still is—intimately connected with the local landscape to which she belongs and which she helps to shape. At the same time, diasporic donations to afforestation projects by subjects sympathetic to the Zionist cause, as well as trees planted in memory of well-known figures or of lives lost in war and battle, widened the scope of the bodies that are symbolically affiliated with the land, and strengthened the link between the people that are absent from it and the trees that are there in their stead (Bardenstein 1999, 162–4, 1998, 6–8; Long 2009, 71–2; Zerubavel 1996, 62–3).[9]

For the Palestinian national narrative, however, cacti plants, orchard trees and stone rubble found in JNF forests puncture Israeli narratives of spatial belonging, referencing the lingering ghostly presence of Palestinian national ethos within these spaces, and pointing to the forest's function as camouflaging past Palestinian dwelling. Forest elements that testify to the land's previous use as Palestinian abodes are decontextualized within Israeli spatial narratives, remaining hidden in plain sight by a complex web of signification (Bardenstein 1998; 9–11, 1999, 157). Various studies point to the fact that JNF forests have often been planted on top of lands used previously for grazing by the local population, as well as on ruins of depopulated Palestinian villages, putting those histories of land-use under erasure as part of the creation of a new national ethos.[10] In line with Rosello and Saunders' critique of the way nature is used to discursively naturalize national borders (Rosello and Saunders 2017), we can see how such reshaping of the landscape brings with it the "erasure of Palestine as an Arab space and the naturalization of Israeli presence" (Boast 2012, 47). To this day, tree planting is "used by Israel and Jewish settlers as a visible marker of ownership over land as well as by Palestinians who [wish] to prevent further confiscation of lands by Israeli authorities" (Zerubavel 1996, 83–84).[11]

Sfard's *Invasive Species* joins a long list of literary and artistic endeavors that attempt to excavate the JNF forest's symbolic and ideological dimensions.[12] The experience of interpellation that is generated by the material forest's charged underlying connotations, whether for the hegemonic Israeli national subject or for the non-hegemonic Palestinian one, is reiterated in the virtual forest's invocation of an intimate sense of belonging. The trees' ideological significance for the Jewish national body outlined above are activated, as does the competing narrative of the space as belonging to Palestinian heritage and national body, denoted by depicted stone ruins and cacti plants. Within the work, these simultaneous, conflicting cultural histories cannot pass unnoticed (as they so often do in its material counterpart), due the work's double-tongued title that foregrounds the forest's sociopolitical dimension as its central matter of concern. *Invasive Species* literally references the ecological consequences of JNF mono-cultural pine planting strategy,[13] but builds on the affective affiliation of man and tree for its second, politically-inflected layer of signification, marking the Zionist project as an invasive one. On the other hand, *Conquest the Wilderness* cites a common proverb that reiterates a contradictory (Zionist, Western) reading of Palestine as barren, neglected space and the ensuing need to "make the desert bloom".[14] Through this conflictual framing, the work precludes an impartial experience of touring the virtual forest space and accentuates the land's contours, and one's experience of its mediation, as malleable, steeped a-priori in political struggle, shaped and re-shaped by those that cross its path (Boer 2006, 13). As I will now proceed to show, the work's composite deployment of the aesthetics of immersion further destabilizes the spectator's position in relation to the projected space, and makes tangible on a sensory level the entanglements of lived space and its mediation.

Scapes of immersion

So far, I have analyzed the work mostly in semiotic terms, mapping the way it mobilizes signs and symbols embedded in the JNF forest in order to unpack the latter's material, affective and ideological construction and maintenance of (and resistance to) the contours of the national border. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the work addresses the border as a dialogic and intersubjective space of negotiation not only through what it represents, but also through the rupture it stages with regards to the boundaries of artistic space, activating its critique of borders as inherently shifting and unstable terrains (Rosello and Saunders 2017, 26) through a play with the spectator's sense of location. This is done by crossing through the image frame, in ways that destabilize the (physical and conceptual) distance between the imagined space of the artwork and the space outside of it.

Within *Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness*, two distinct immersive techniques are mobilized. Both moves "question the boundaries of familiar visual experience" (Dogramaci and Liptay 2016, 8) but in different ways and to different effects . The first technique involves the video's interactive and immersive invitation to the viewer to become a wanderer, to tour the grounds of the image and create her own spatial narrative within the virtual matrix. The second involves the real-time synchronization and simulation of weather conditions from the material Ben-Shemen forest whose elements were captured, cloned and allegorized in the 3D image.

The first type of immersion, inviting spectators to plunge into the depicted scenery, is the more familiar one in terms of interactive, immersive art. It makes permeable the cut between the work and the world, without doing away with it completely: once "inside" the image, spectators-turned-protagonists are conceptually removed from lived reality. Regardless of the immersive experience that this move engenders, the conceptual, structural boundaries that keep aesthetic illusions in place are not challenged. On the contrary: the critical potential involved in experiencing the allegorical forest, and the work's ability to make tangible the ideological undercurrents of its material counterpart, rest in part on an affirmation of the distinction and dialogue between represented space and lived reality.

The second immersive move, the work's real-time meteorological synchronization with its material counterpart, offers a more radical and disruptive immersive experience. It expands the space of representation so that the latter engulfs the material body of the spectator, and the entire gallery space, within its frame. Immersion itself is thus addressed not as an act but as a *condition*, irrespective of actions taken or not taken by spectators: viewers that accept the work's invitation to plunge into the space of the fictional image remain embedded in lived reality's meteorological conditions; viewers that decide to look at the projected forest from a safe distance, are nevertheless surrounded by it. It is in this way that the modernist white cube gallery space, and the boundaries it traditionally sets in place between aesthetic and socio-political subject positions, are put under pressure, and exposed as ever-changing zones of transformation that depend on constant, if unconscious, boundary work of various agents and institutions, including the discourse of and on art.[15] In his study of the essence of the work of art, for example, Georg Simmel distinguishes between boundaries of natural entities, that are "simply the site of continuing exosmosis and endosmosis with everything external," and the boundaries of the work of art that are "absolute ending which exercises indifference towards and defence against the exterior and a unifying integration with respect to the interior" (Simmel 1994, 11). Sfard's installation refuses precisely such an understanding of artworks, and art spaces, as cordoned off from one's actuality.

Elsewhere I have explored the way more traditional, non-interactive forms of landscape imagery in art engender reflection on the act of viewing through an inclusion of the beholder's lived space as one of the dimensions of the space of representation (Roei 2017).[16] The first level of immersion addressed above parallels that analysis; the second problematizes the very boundaries that set the two spaces apart in the first place. What could be the result of such disruptive immersion to the critical mediation of political landscapes, and to a more dialogic understanding of borders and boundaries? One possible outcome is a taming of the critical artwork's illusion of "revolt through revelation," a reminder to the spectator that she is still deeply embedded in ideological space even as she is made aware of that space's methods of interpellation. Stronger still, the work's aesthetics of structural immersion implicates the viewers in the images that they are supposedly looking at from the safe distance of aesthetic contemplation, by destabilizing their position vis-à-vis the work on the one hand, and the world outside the gallery on the other. It pushes to extreme the interrelation between the representation of space and the space of representation in order to expose, through negation, the boundary work inherent to aesthetic contemplation, that allows gallery visitors to attend to images and visual narratives as (materially, morally and politically) distinct from lived experience in the first place. To bring this point home, let me move on to the second video work within the installation that complements this move and makes it more coherent.

Space invaders

Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine, the second video work within the installation, is presented on a flat screen in smaller dimensions. In a style reminiscent of 3D modelling computer graphics from the early 2000s, it displays an idealized oasis with palm trees, water springs and stone dwellings (Figure 5). Within the space of a few minutes the oasis withers and erodes until it becomes a desolate, if magnificent, ruined abode. In slow, dreamy pace, more and more beetles roam the land, more dried palm leaves tumble down, the river dries up and the dwellings become ruins. Throughout the visual narrative of ruination, the scene's background remains static: in stark opposition to *Conquest the Wilderness*, the sun here never moves, the skies never change their color. The image retains is pictorial nature as well as a sense of romantic beauty, even if now in more gothic form (Figure 6).[17]

While the legibility of *Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness* is engendered through references to the organic space of the JNF forest, that of *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine* is based on preposterous reworking of early Zionist pictorial iconography.[18] Specifically, overt references in composition and title to Ze'ev Raban's celebrated poster "Come to Palestine" from 1929, are hard to miss (Figure 7). Raban's by-now iconic poster, commissioned by the Society for the Promotion of Travel in the Holy Land, offers an Orientalist picturesque view of the Sea of Galilee in a style associated with the Bezalel school of Arts and Crafts.[19] Emblematic of

Figure 5. Emi Sfard, 2017. *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine*. Screen capture: opening scene. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 6. Emi Sfard, 2017. *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine*. Screen capture: the ruin. Courtesy of the artist.

early Zionist ideology and aesthetics, this poster and others like it have come to denote a specific time frame within Israeli visual historiography where artistic production was engaged in the promotion of a national ideal (Guez 2017; Manor 2001). Specifically, scenic representations of the landscape as pastoral Arcadia came with national values of legitimating contemporary Jewish dwelling by referencing biblical links to the soil (Long 2009, 62; Guez 2017).[20] Sfard's video work breathes life into Raban's utopic scenario, only to bring it to a dystopic end.

The beetles depicted in the moving image are presented as the cause of the palms' withering in an accompanying audio track, available through adjacent headphones. The track is a truncated version of a television news reportage from 2014 on the palm weevil beetle, that nests in palm trunks and eventually destroys them, causing a worldwide epidemic (Mosko).[21] Crucially, the computer-generated beetles that roam the space of the image are linked not only to their real-life counterparts, but also to the gallery audience: through interactive gaming technology, *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine* is programmed to add a virtual weevil beetle to the pictured oasis with every visitor that enters the gallery space.

There are many conceptual parallels between *Welcome to Palestine* and *Conquest the Wilderness*, the first and most obvious one being both works' engagement with Zionist arboreal iconography and its lingering legacy within contemporary notions of belonging for the Jewish-Israeli subject. The focus shifts here from the pines to date palms and their mobilization with regards to ethno-national narratives. If the pine tree's deployment in afforestation initiatives has made of it an emblem of Jewish national revival, the palm tree's synchronous implementation in advertising endeavors such as Raban's poster functioned as a generator of nostalgia and legitimacy. Yet Sfard's withering palms point more forcefully than the drifting pine forest to a persistent

Figure 7. Zeev Raban, 1929. *Come to Palestine*, poster for the Society for the Promotion of Travel in the Holy Land. Lithography. Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel. Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Elie Posner. Courtesy of the Israel Museum and the Raban family.

anxiety for the possibility of uprooting within Jewish-Israeli national consciousness (Bardenstein 1998, 3). In almost slapstick version, the accompanying audio track leaves no room for doubt with regards to the role that trees play within the national imaginary. Stitching together segments from the reportage that present the palm trees in nationalistic tones, the audio opens with the recognizable baritone voice of news anchor Danny Kushmaro, in the following words:

> They have infiltrated Israel one by one in recent years, penetrated here, one by one, and today they are threatening to crush our trees! A little beetle called the palm weevil eats our palms on the inside, knocking them down one by one, entire orchards have already become extinct, urban gardens and boulevards are in danger. The local authorities on a state of alert, I present to you, the battle for the palm trees (Mosko 00:03-00:27).

Within this short note alone, the beetle is presented as a mortal enemy, not only of nature, but of Israeli society and culture at large, the consequences of its entry into Israeli landscape portrayed as absolute destruction. Militaristic metaphors, as well as those conjuring a - doom's day scenario, abound. Most telling is the choice to open the piece with the word infiltration, a loaded term in the context of contemporary Israeli cultural politics, employed originally within Israeli law to bar Palestinian right of return, and mobilized more recently by Israeli media and government organizations to mark undocumented immigrants from African origin in threatening terms.[22] Infiltration, here, marks the boundary between border crossers who are welcome, and border crossers that are apprehended through the threat of invasion, at the same time as it blurs the boundaries between human and non-human forms of travel.[23]

Note that the weevil's infiltration in the above quote is twofold: into the land ("they have infiltrated Israel, one by one . . . "), and into the palm trees, with devastating consequences. This double layer of meaning allows for a superimposition of national and environmental concerns that reaches its peak later on in the reportage. The cacophonic picture that emerges juggles biblical and national references next

to misogynic stereotypes and military metaphors.[24] While somewhat softened by the field reporter's mocking intonation, the account nevertheless exposes a nationalistic sensibility at the core of what is, on the face of it, a report on an environmental issue. Of course, the weevil beetle does destroy palm trees in ways that are not open to interpretation. But *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine* focuses rather on the way in which nature, once more, is mobilized to naturalize political discourse (Rosello and Saunders 2017, 29–30). The work's pictorial aesthetics complicates and complements this move by offering an emphatically artistic rendition of the narrative of destruction. Especially when compared to the adjacent hyper-realist style of the pine forest, the choice to embed the story of the beetle within pictorial traditions of early 20th century national imaginaries further stresses the active role of (visual) representation in nature's framing and legibility.[25]

In many respects, then, the two video works that comprise *Invasive Species* inform and enrich each other through comparisons, distinctions, and negations. This is all the more true in relation to the works' diverse deployment of strategies of immersion. In both videos, the boundaries between the space of the image, the gallery, and the outside world are put under pressure. Yet, if *Invasive Species: Conquest the Wilderness* expands the borders of the artwork beyond the space of the gallery by virtue of its connection to weather forecast systems, *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine* implodes the gallery space upon itself by confounding the act of crossing the threshold of the gallery room with that of entering the image plane.

As mentioned above, the appearance of each virtual beetle on screen corresponds to, and is dependent on, the entrance of each visitor to the gallery space. The alignment of man and insect is crucial for the work's meaning: it interrupts (but does not cancel out) the association of man with tree, at work in both videos, and central to national arboreal narratives. Subsequently, it supports the video's double-tongued title, that, as is the case with *Conquest the Wilderness*, offers a contradictory framing to the figure of the border crosser. The video's subtitle, *Welcome to Palestine*, reinforces the spectator's symbolic role as a welcomed invitee, embedded in her very role as audience, and strengthened through the palimpsestic position she shares with both the original addressees of Raban's poster (be they early 20th century diasporic Jewry or Christian sympathizers), and with the audience of Mosko's doom's day scenario. The gallery visitor's temporal alignment with the weevil beetle, conflictingly and simultaneously, suggests an affiliation with the work's main title, framing the spectator herself as an invader of space that causes by proxy the image's ruination.

Crucially, the spectator of *Welcome to Palestine* cannot choose whether to interact with the imaged scene. Rather, one's involvement with and effect on the image is structurally predetermined. In this sense, the spectator's symbolic entry into the image in *Welcome to Palestine* is conceptually distinct from the corresponding move in *Conquest the Wilderness*: the choice whether to plunge (or not) into the imaged space of the forest can be equated more precisely with the choice to listen (or not) to the oasis' audio track. This is a matter of degree of involvement in the presented scenario, but not of kind: this form of immersion plays with, but does not undo, the separation of work and world. Contrarily, the way in which the spectator's entrance into the gallery space initiates a chain of simulated events in the pictured oasis is *structural*. It is not based on softening the boundaries between different planes of perception, but on their absolute consolidation. This immersive strategy is all the more disruptive due to the fact that it does not necessitate a "plunging into" a virtual world: on the contrary, the spectator's influence on the animated scene comes about through her movement in lived, not simulated, space.

"An immersive engagement," argues Robin Curtis, "should … not be conceived of as the insertion of the subject onto a three-dimensional realistic stage, just like a doll is positioned within a dollhouse. Instead, we need to consider a broader range of experiences that describe our multifaceted engagement with the world around us in both aesthetic and everyday settings" (Curtis 2016, 51). This is the way in which *Invasive Species* implicates its spectators, pointing to their a-priori state of immersion in the ideologically-laden images that they are looking at from their discrete position, as gallery visitors, media consumers, or national subjects. Rather than excluding real-world points of reference, as is traditionally understood to be necessary for the production of an immersive experience (Curtis 2016, 45), *Invasive Species: Welcome to Palestine* mobilizes acts of arrival and immersion to highlight the spatial and temporal elements of the viewer's experience, and so facilitates "a heightened corporeal engagement with the world, its objects, and its forms" (ibid, 51, 56). Disrupting an aesthetic illusion that allows one to locate oneself outside an unfolding narrative, and, at the same time, disallowing a comfortable and stable positionality with regards to that narrative (due to the spectators' contradictory subject position vis-à-vis the figures of the tree and the beetle), the work adheres to an understanding of borders and boundaries as unstable terrains, and underscores the body of the spectator as a border crossing entity, that is inherently involved in the shaping of the material, imaginary, affective and conceptual spaces through which she travels.

Conclusion

All borders include aesthetic elements—all borders are aesthetic constructs—in the sense that borders function partly by being made available to the senses (Rosello and Wolfe 2017, 8). Works of art, specifically, have the potential to investigate border aesthetics, to insert "difference into our ideologically fixed versions of reality, partly by delimiting art from the everyday, partly by deforming experience" (Schimanski and Wolfe 2013, 241). Yet, more often than not, works of art themselves are understood primarily through bordering practices that situate them in an alternate, contemplative, and disinterested space from which they may spell out their critique. If indeed meaning is organized and regulated at the edges or boundaries of categories (Boer 2006, 9), then Sfard's installation can be understood as an attempt to expose the networks of meaning created by and through national, institutional, and aesthetic practices of demarcation that are often considered in isolation. The work's play with the boundaries that define artistic space together with its extensive examination of the visual semiotics of Zionism, mandates a simultaneous and co-constitutive socio-political and aesthetic interpretation. Questions that are opened up with regard to the spectator's position vis-à-vis the installation inform and enrich the work's commentary on the position of the national subject with regards to ideologically-laden narratives and imaginaries of Israel/Palestine.[26]

All spaces are marked by *Invasive Species* as dialogically structured, and as devoid of a lasting form or stronghold. From different perspectives, one might be foreign or local; welcomed or feared; natural or cultural; engaged or detached. Staging the motion of arrival in contradictory terms, from multiple temporalities, positionalities, and contexts, *Invasive Species* makes clear the need—neither to ignore demarcation lines, nor to safeguard them nor celebrate their transgression—but to shift our focus to the way that, once denaturalized, those lines can turn into insightful spaces of self-inquiry, that shape and form our experience at the same time as they are shaped and formed by it (Rosello and Saunders 2017, 26; Boer 2006, 13).

Notes

1. A non-comprehensive list of academic studies from a variety of disciplines that attend specifically to the matter of trees in this context includes (Bardenstein 1998, 1999; Boast 2012; Boullata 1989; Braverman 2009; Cohen 1993; Long 2009; Zerubavel 1996).
2. See also Kolesch, Schütz, and Nikoleit (2019) for a comprehensive analysis of different spectator positionalities within artistic immersive experiences.
3. Throughout the text, I employ the term ideology to denote a typical form of political thought or a system of ideas that functions to map political and social worlds. This is in distinction from alternative ways of interpreting the term as denoting a form of false consciousness. See Freeden (2006).
4. Screen captures from the work, as well as one rendition of a virtual tour through forest grounds, are available on the artist website at https://www.emisfard.com/conquestthewilderness.
5. Elements from the forest were photographed and translated into a 3D image using *Blender* open source creation suit (https://www.blender.org/) and *Unreal Engine*'s Maya animation rigging set (https://docs.unrealengine.com/en-US/Engine/Content/Tools/MayaRiggingTool /index.html). For more on the Ben-Shemen forest see *KKL/JNF* official site, http://www.kkl-jnf.org/tourism-and-recreation/forests-and-parks/ben-shemen-forest.aspx.
6. The flyer that is replicated in the installation is available for download from the Ministry of Defense official website at http://izkorimages.blob.core.windows.net/documents/damhamacabim.pdf. The Red Everlasting flower that features on the flyer is also known as "Blood of the Maccabees," and functions as an iconic symbol for Remembrance Day, in corresponding fashion to the significance of poppy imagery in memorial traditions of Commonwealth countries.
7. According to Irus Braverman the JNF is "the most powerful single organized entity to have shaped the modern Israeli/Palestinian landscape" in its planting of over 240 million trees in the area (most of them Pine trees) since its establishment, with the result of the tree becoming almost synonymous with the organization within Israeli context (Braverman 2009, 318, 342–3). For a historical survey of the organization's formation and development, see Lehn (1974).
8. Such political use of the land by frontier societies is by no means limited to the Israeli context, see for example Sluyter (2002). Much of the JNF's success in securing land through afforestation initiatives is owed to existing laws from previous colonial powers in the area, the Ottoman empire and British mandate. Yael Zerubavel warns not to read all modern afforestation projects in Israel as belonging only to the Zionist establishment (Zerubavel 1996, 90).
9. See also Azaryahu and Golan's study of the constitution of "homelandscapes" in Israeli geography and geographical discourse (2004).
10. Many of these studies have already been mentioned above, including (Braverman 2009; Zerubavel 1996; Bardenstein 1998, 1999; Boast 2012; Long 2009). A list of destroyed Palestinian villages on which JNF sites were erected is available at the *Zochrot* project website at https://zochrot.org/en/article/52241.
11. For a case in point, see Cohen's (1993) detailed study of the politics of planting around the Jerusalem area. See also Kershner (2010) for the way in which JNF afforestation projects take part in a contemporary and ongoing struggle over the lands of the Bedouin village El-Araqib.

12. Israeli art and literature is satiated with projects that attend to the significance of space and its mediation within the national imaginary. Specifically, with regards to JNF forest imagery, A. B. Yehoshua's short story "Facing the Forests" from 1968 has become an iconic comparative reference point for literary works that either preceded or followed it (Zerubavel 1996; Boast 2012). "Facing the Forest" is also the title of an article by art historian Kamal Boullata (1989) that chronicles the way local space is addressed in the visual arts by Israeli and Palestinian artists. Recent critical projects that attend to forest symbolism within Israeli cultural imaginaries include the oeuvre of Arianne Littman, especially the project *Forbidden Forest* from the late 1990's (see https://ariane-littman.com/1997/05/the-mobile-forests-1992-2002/?setslidercat=white-land) and Dor Guez' comprehensive exhibition *The Nation's Groves* from 2010 (see https://www.dorguez.com/copy-of-100-steps-to-the-mediterran-1). See Bardenstein (Bardenstein 1999, 149–157) for arboreal representations within Palestinian national narratives.
13. For more on JNF mono-cultural planting practices, see (Braverman 2009, 343–4).
14. See (Zerubavel 2009, 33–44) for a detailed study of the proverb in relation to the Zionist ethos; and (Boer 2002, 155–172) for a study of the way deserts symbolize emptiness only when addressed through external focalization.
15. See (O'Doherty 1999) for a detailed study of the cultural politics of the gallery space and the disembodied subject position of the viewer within it.
16. See also (Mitchell 2002 and van Alphen 2005) for detailed explorations of landscape imagery and spectatorial practices.
17. Screen captures from the video work, as well as one rendition of a virtual decay of the oasis accompanied by the audio track, are available on the artist website at https://www.emisfard.com/wellcometopalestine.
18. "Preposterous history" is a term coined by Mieke Bal in order to analyze the way visual quotations function within artistic discourse. In short, the term designates the way in which a newer work's references to previous creations does not only base its legibility and authority on existing lineages of knowledge and established predecessors, but can also change the way in which previous works are perceived and appreciated in the present (Bal 1999, 1–15).
19. The poster was on display at the Israel Museum permanent exhibition until 2015, marking its iconic status within Israeli visual culture. "Palestine" in Raban's work refers to mandatory Palestine. The Zionist movement at the time adopted this label in its own publications, but argued successfully for the addition of the acronym EY (ע"י) to Hebrew mentions of the mandate's name in official documents.
20. Manor (2003) offers an alternative interpretation of pre-state Jewish artists' presentation of oriental Arcadia as forms that do not identify with the Zionist movement as they do not necessarily evoke a biblical past. Raban's poster challenges this reading in its explicit quotation from the Song of Songs. See Guez (2017) for a detailed study of the poster in the context of early 20th century representations of the Zionist ethos. See also Manor (2001).
21. The reportage was presented in *Ulpan Shishi*, Israel's flagship weekend television news program, and is available online at https://mobile.mako.co.il/news-channel2/Friday-Newscast/Article-1da0b312a0e0441004.htm.
22. The term's original use within Israeli Law, in the "Prevention of Infiltration Law" from 1948, mentions the fear of terrorism as the central reason for strictly barring 1948 Palestinian refugees and internally displaced from returning to their lands (Handelzalts 2012).
23. As a side note, and somewhat in parallel to the way that the contours of Pine tree forests are intrinsically related to human mobility, a segment of the news reportage that is not reproduced in the installation's audio track reveals that the weevil beetle arrived to the Middle East through human import of palm shoots.
24. A non-comprehensive collection of statements by the field reporter Yigal Mosko includes the following somewhat burlesque declarations: "This war is about the land's image, no less. At the forefront is just a handful of heroes. Defeat is not an option …Who is the enemy that destroys such mighty trees? … Who will save us from evil? … The larvae eat the tree and the little nymphomaniac continues with the feast, filling up with fresh eggs and then dashes to the next tree … In the Land of Israel there have always been Palm trees. It is of the seven species, and an everlasting contender for the National Tree title … The varieties of edible dates were smuggled 70 years ago from Iraq and Iran, in a heroic Zionist operation worthy of its own film … we became a global date superpower … The Palm weevil, a worldwide plague. At least you can't blame her for anti-Semitism … It also drops trees on the cars of the gentiles" (Mosko 2014; transcription and translation mine).
25. Within the context, see Zerubavel (1996) for a study of the way forest fires play a part in national imaginaries through literature; and Bardenstein (Bardenstein 1998, 10–11) and Braverman (Braverman 2009, 355–360) for a more general outline of the damage to trees and forests in relation to Israeli-Palestinian struggles over land ownership.
26. In this sense, the work fits within Jill Bennett's conception of practical aesthetics: the aesthetic means through which art may open up a sense-based and affective process of apprehending the emotions, sentiments and passions of public life (Bennett 2012).

Notes on contributor

Noa Roei is Assistant Professor at the Department of Literary and Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam and a research fellow at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA). For the academic year 2019–20 she was a Marie Curie research fellow at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS). Her book, Civic Aesthetics: Militarism, Israeli Art, and Visual Culture (Bloomsbury, 2017) addresses the multifaceted representations of militarism in contemporary Israeli art. Current research focuses on the politics of spectatorship in contemporary art from the Middle East.

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ORCID

Noa Roei http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0387-2421

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